

# The Language of Fear in Media: A Case of COVID-19 Pandemic Outbreak in Five Compounds of Lusaka City, Zambia

Lufeyo Chitondo and Martin Mutabazi Mugisha  
Rockview University,  
Lusaka, Zambia

**Abstract:-** One of the main role of media is to inform the public, to educate, to offer opportunities of expression to the oppressed ones, to entertain and many other positive things such as being used in resolving conflicts among communities, that is, when media is well used by media professionals but media does not only bring the positive to their audiences but can also affect them negatively as media can plant certain kind of feelings in the mind and heart of the audience and one of the ways that the media use to draw people's attention is *fear*. Media take recourse to fear because they know that it works and helps in capturing people's mind, hence draw in the audience. Thus, the purpose of the study was to explore some of the indirect linguistic and non-linguistic techniques that media uses to increase and generate fear about the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The study employed a mixed paradigm and descriptive survey design that sampled five compounds in Lusaka (Woodlands, Kabulonga, Kalingalinga, Bauleni and Mandevu). Political party officials, Journalists, Community Health workers, teachers and members of the community were the respondents. Data was obtained from respondents by means of interviews, questionnaires and observation schedules. Frequency, percentages, tables, graphs and pie-charts were used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data obtained. Data was then analyzed by the use of software MS Access and MS Excel. The findings revealed that media plants certain kind of feelings in the mind and heart of the audience and take recourse to fear by capturing people's minds.

**Keyword:-** Covid-19 pandemic, decision making, effects, fear, language.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Media, in all their forms are among organizations that depend on people's attention. Without the audience to watch, read, or listen to their news stories, there is no media, whether news media or social media. Media cannot survive without people's attention, which is the audience. Therefore, that is why, people in media do all their best to attract the audience.

As it was mentioned earlier, one of the main roles of media is to inform the public, to educate, to offer opportunities of expression to the oppressed ones, to entertain and many other positive things such as being used in resolving conflicts among communities. This only happens when media is well used by media professionals.

However, it has been observed that media does not only bring the positive to their audiences but can also affect them negatively. (Yusuf et al 2015.).

Experience and media research show that media can plant certain kind of feelings in the mind and heart of the audience. One of the ways that the media use to draw people's attention is *fear*. Media take recourse to fear because they know that it works and helps in capturing people's mind, hence draw in the audience. As research in media show, the process of manipulating the consciousness and behavior of the audience consists in active invasion into the language sphere (Bell 1973). The purpose is to influence the reasoning, feelings, and will of the audience and then be able to regulate its perception of the social and political phenomena. The research of media manipulation is connected with studying of means and methods of ideological verbal and nonverbal influence. One of the ways to achieve it is to create or activate fear or worries in the mind of their audience and they can do so just within seconds.

Fear has become one of the current problems of human societies. As many researches indicate, in the modern era (20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries), for example, fear phenomena is considered in cross-disciplinary aspect with the attraction of practices in various areas of scientific knowledge: in linguistics, literary criticism, psychology, psychiatry, physiology, sociology, political science, philosophy, religious studies (Carnegie 2017).

This collective fear is referred to as '*sociophobia*.' Mass media are known to have the tradition to gear up negative emotions in minds of the audience, generate and implant various phobias (fears) that is reflected in lexical and grammatical structures, stylistic receptions, but also as many argue, media can implant fear in contexts, implications, the intertexts and hypertexts Tarde (1969).

### A. Statement of the Problem

The main role of media is to inform the public, to educate, to offer opportunities of expression to the oppressed ones, to entertain and many other positive things such as being used in resolving conflicts among communities. However, it has been observed that media does not only bring the positive to their audiences but can also affect them negatively and can plant certain kind of feelings in the mind and heart of the audience as well as instill fear in the general populace.

### B. Purpose of study

The purpose of this study was to explore some of the indirect linguistic and non-linguistic techniques that media uses to increase and generate fear about the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in five compounds of Lusaka City, Zambia.

### C. Objectives

- To investigate whether the COVID-19 news coverage has generated fear in people and assess the types of fear people experience amid COVID 19 in the five compounds of Lusaka.
- To explore how media generates and increases perception of fear amid COVID 19 pandemic in the five compounds of Lusaka.
- To establish the effects of generated and increased perception of fear on people's livelihood amid COVID 19 pandemic in the five compounds of Lusaka city.

### D. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Frank Freud's theory of the culture of fear which has been popularized by the American sociologist Barry Glasco (Glasco 2019) which brings out the concept that people may incite fear in the general public to achieve political or workplace goals through emotional bias. According to Glasco, human beings are unreasonably afraid of social phenomena such as, disease, death, drugs, injections, and (Google 2021) defines fear-mongering as a form of manipulation which causes fear by using exaggerated rumours of impending danger and fear mongering can make people anxious about wrong things and consequently make wrong decisions.

### E. Significance of the study

This study highlights in a general way the main role of media of informing the public, educating, offering opportunities of expression to the oppressed ones, entertaining and many other positive things such as being used in resolving conflicts among communities as well as well as bring out how media language affects the public negatively. It is hoped that the findings in this article would contribute to the knowledge gap amongst all the stake holders interested in media education in Zambia on use of language in media coverages and reporting as well as help media training institutions to modify the training curriculum and system and make it more relevant and responsive to national needs.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Corona Virus

Corona viruses (COV) are a large family of viruses that cause illness ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases which cause respiratory tract infections that can range from mild to lethal and first known infections from SARS-CoV-2 were discovered in Wuhan, China though the original source of viral transmission to humans remains unclear, as does whether the virus became pathogenic before or after the spillover event. However, Covid-19 is caused by infection with the severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) virus strain. Covid 19 spreads more easily in crowded places, close-contact settings especially

where people have conversations very near each other and in confined and enclosed spaces with poor ventilation (Patel and Gernigan 2019).

Corona virus has affected people's lives and the economies of all the countries as most countries have had to impose restrictions and lockdowns in a bid to avert the pandemic. In the same vein, Ministries in charge of Health have come up with measures to curb the disease with the help of World Health Organisation (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention 2020). In Zambia for example, the Ministry of Health gives daily updates on status of the pandemic, encourages citizens to get vaccinated and to follow the golden rules of sanitizing or washing hands with soap and keeping unwashed hands away from the face, masking up in public settings, physical or social distancing, avoiding overcrowding, quarantining, ventilation of indoor spaces, covering coughs and sneezes (Ryan 2021).

Despite updates and information on Coronavirus from the Ministry of Health, there is spread of misinformation amplified on social media and other digital platforms which is proving to be as much a threat not only to Zambia but global public health as the virus itself. Instead of social media creating opportunities to keep people safe, informed and connected unfortunately, it enables as well as amplifying the current infodemic that continues to undermine not only the Zambian but the global response and thereby jeopardizing measures to control the pandemic (Bell 1973).

### B. The power of Fear

Fear or panic mean painful agitation in the presence or anticipation of danger and fear is the most general term and it implies anxiety and is usually loss of courage (Carnegie 2017). Fear can interrupt processes in the brain that allow human beings to regulate emotions, read non-verbal cues and other information presented to human body, reflect before acting and act ethically and this therefore, impacts the thinking and decision making in negative ways leaving humans susceptible to intense emotions and impulsive reactions.

The human experience of fear begins in the amygdala which is the part of the brain that processes many of human being's emotions and fear is powerful because it causes stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline to be released, it increases blood pressure and heart rate and the person starts breathing fast and the blood flow changes (Jiang 2016). The common fear triggers social interaction or rejection, death and dying while the types of fear are fear of success and failure, poverty, criticism, sickness, losing loved ones, old age, death sickness and death.

### C. The role of media

The word media is a plural form of the Latin word 'medium' meaning 'middle ground or intermediate' and its usage as a word describes newspapers, radio and other sources of information likely derived from the term 'mass media' which was a technical term used in the advertising industry from the 1920's on (Althaus 2003). In addition, the term 'medium', the singular form of media is defined as one

of the means or channels of general communication, information or entertainment in society (Bell 1973). Generally, there are three types of news media, ie print media, broadcast media and the internet but in general, media refers to television, radio, newspaper, internet and other forms of communication and it includes physical and online newspapers and magazines, billboards and the telephone.

The media play an important role in society as a source of information, as a 'watchdog' or scrutinizer but media is free to select the stories they consider important or interesting. The media educates individuals as people get to know regarding health problems, environmental protection and in a short period of time citizens get the latest information through television, radio programmes or the internet. The most important function of the media is to disseminate news to the masses concerning vital occurrences or important information and the media greatly influences society as it permeates people's lives by creating their own criteria and opinions and in this way, the media moves the masses by creating different social movements (Anden-Papadopolous 2008).

#### D. How media generate and increase fear

Throughout history humankind have been affected by infectious disease outbreaks. Media, news media in particular play a key role in informing the public, yet common criticisms suggest that they may aggravate the impact of outbreaks by intensifying fears and increasing risk perceptions. This article is devoted to explore some of the indirect linguistic and non-linguistic techniques that media used to increase and generate fear about the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. It also tries to find the answer about why media use a language that generates fear (Althaus 2003). It will briefly analyze the role that the generated fear played in the decision-making concerning the fight against this pandemic.

As it is discussed in the introduction of this article, media needs people attention to exist and fear is one of the techniques they use to capture people's attention. Media professionals know that when fear increases it causes panic or horror. Such fear is capable of imposing behavior stereotypes, including speech behavior (flight, catalepsy, verbal and nonverbal protective aggression). As research indicates, modern media discourse actively generates motions of fear for manipulation of consciousness of the audience, that is to say the audience's behavior. Zheltukhina (2008). This line with the findings of this article.

One of the focuses of this article was to uncover ways that media used to create and increase fear in COVID-19 reporting. The findings indicated that media used three tactics to create fear perceptions in the audience. These are the *manner*, in which news reports were being presented, *media linguistic choices (both lexical, semantic)* and the way media portrayed the *visual items* (figures, pictures and videos) in a metaphoric manner that is capable to arise strong in the audience's mind. These three technics influenced people's interpretation of the events, which in

turn influenced their behavior, actions and attitudes. Grabe (2003, et al.).

*The way media have decided to present news related to COVID-19* had an impact on how the information was processed by the audience. Media have only focused on the *negative side* linked to the pandemic. For example, most of the news reports contained information on how world health systems are fragile, and how they had failed to control the diseases. In addition to that Reports on how hospital did not have the capacity to take care of the contaminated ones such as the lack of ventilators and how the scientist was far to find the cure or vaccine and the way world economy and man's life in general would suffer increased the audience's fear perceptions (Bell 1973).

The increased fear-provoking news resulted in panic on the part of the common person, the scientist and the politician who did not know what to do by then. Demoralized and struck by fear, they became media regular customers to consume their news. Moreover, media choice of expressions for both their news and program titles, served to increase fear that the audience had already. For example, themes like *"Parents died of Coronavirus one week apart"*, *"Couple married for 44 years died one week apart"* and *"A Heat Disagreement...to use unproved medicines"* by CNN could easily activate fear. CNN was not the only international media to have used this kind of language, but other international media did. They even used more fear-generating expressions. *Media language can change the way people view things*, which in turn helps them control people's reasoning and regulate their action (Anderson 2003)

Expressions or linguistic styles like those mentioned above by CNN can easily generate worries. This can be so especially to a listener who is a parent or child having natural strong feelings to his or her family members. Couples listening to such kind of news are worried especially those advanced in age, since it was believed that they were the potential victims of the pandemic. Finally, a listener who depends on public health policies voted by government instruments will lose balance upon hearing that those responsible for their health are just disagreeing than coming up with solutions to control the situation. It becomes critical those are already affected as empirical evidence from the health domain shows. This evidence indicates that emotional news may aggravate risk perceptions, negative effects on the hearer's health. Grabe (2000, et al.) and Zillman (2006).

The second way that generated fear was (is) *they manner in which images related to COVID-19 were portrayed in media*. International media in particular, did not only create fear but increased it. The first kind of images used to increase fear perceptions were (are) the *figures about the victims* (Anden-Papadopolous 2008). These figures were displayed in a way that could make the audience think that in just a few days no man would be living on this planet. New cases were instantly reported, displayed on the top of the screen to allow a quick and clear view followed by a metaphoric language (such as *the*

*pandemic the word has ever experienced since..., new cases..., active cases..., recorded deaths.)* and hardly the number of those recovering was given.

Another kind of images that increased fear are *pictures and videos*. Media presented these images to the audience in a negative angle. Only images of hospitals lacking materials, or crowded with sick people were shown. Worse, enough were the images of people failing to breathe because they were no ventilators to sustain them. To increase the severity, news items contain images with sounds of ambulances to portray the state of emergency. These were the main images that people could view. News media had hardly shown pictures or images of those who have recovered. Gibson, R. (1994, et al.).

This kind of news reporting, did not only cause the media audience to lose hope, but it created and increased fear in people each time they turned in to watch, read, or listen to the news. The world became terrified and lost control, which contributed to all sorts of measures and policies that were being put in place (American Behavioral Scientist 2003). The question that rises is to know, who really benefited (benefits) from the exaggerated fear that the enveloped the whole world just in a matter of few days or hours?

It is usual for humans, in such situations, to conclude that the one who caused the calamity is the one to have benefited. However, in the case of COVID-19, no one is in the position to point a finger at another person as being at the root of it, simply because its origins have remained a matter of debates among the so-called experts and scientists. Nevertheless, that does not mean that no one takes advantage and benefit himself as human experience can indicate (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention 2020).

The focus of this article is on the media. Therefore, how did (do) the media benefit from the fear they generate or increase? It was mentioned earlier that media depends on people's attention in order for them to keep existing. Therefore, fear made people stay close to their TV, radio posts, newspapers, and smart phones waiting for new updates not because they like watching, listening or reading news but moved by, the media audience wants to know how worse things are getting and take possible precautions to avoid the threat. Simply put, fear makes them regular media audience and that is very important for the media (Gordon 2020).

The second way in which media (news media in particular) benefits from the increased fear is through adverts. Since the audience (drawn in by fear) is always present, the media houses are sure that adverts will be viewed or heard. During situations like these, media receive more adverts and the price to advertise the products or services increases (the manufacturer or the service provider is also aware that the audience will certainly be there to see or hear about their products and services).

Apart from the media, it was (is) obvious that in the case of COVID-19, businesses such as network providers and other communication enterprises have benefit as

evidences on the ground indicate. Another category of business that has benefited includes Manufacturers (including medicine manufacturers: Pharmacies) and suppliers of products needed in the fight against the pandemic such as hand sanitizers, hand wash soaps, COVID-19 testing instruments, ventilators, so on.

#### *E. Non-verbal and verbal elements: indicators of fear in decision-making about COVID-19 prevention measures decision*

Shortly after the outbreak of the, many nations across the globe, advised by health scientists and organizations have taken recourse to the physical distancing strategy, which resulted in the social distancing rules. This measure was taken to avoid or minimize the spread of the COVID-19 as it is to other contagious diseases.

The question that comes to mind is to know whether *the social distancing measure* was based on scientific reasoning in the first place, or was it, at some point, influenced by fear that the humanity was facing, which in turn resulted in strange decisions and laws by governments trying to control and solve the problem. By analyzing all the circumstances (verbal and non-verbal clues communication clues) that surrounded the social distancing law, it is evident that it was not only a proof-based one, but that at a very considerable point, man took that measure influenced by fear. Taking a close look at two main factors can help in understanding why I strongly affirm that fear played an important role in this regard (Ryan 2021).

#### a) Analyzing the situation in the countries where the social distancing was fully applied:

In some lands, the Social Distancing policy was religiously observed. Governments took necessary measures to ensure that everyone stays indoors, which could minimize physical contact. It was followed by the lockdown of all activities, wearing masks and handwashing practice. It was, therefore, expected that the calamity befalling man, would be under control, and ovoid new COVID-19 cases. However, the results were opposite. The number of those being contaminated kept growing considerably. Which reduced the Social Distancing policy to nothing, proving that it was not a scientifically based- measure in the first place but that man's fear contributed to its implementation. This was observed through these decision makers' communicative features. Chris Roberts. (2016).

#### b) The second factor is to understand what fear itself is and how it can influence man's actions, reactions; perspectives and the way he views the world around him:

Fear is associated with anxiety. It is described in simple terms as the fact of constantly feel worried and in most instances without knowing why. Through history, the threat of harm is the main source of fear. This threat can be real or an imagined one. Whether real or imagined, the threat of harm to human can be physical, and emotional. It can be a threat to one's social status and personality, loss of material things, or linked to social interactions such as being rejected(isolated) by others, and worse enough is the threat of death (Jiang 2016). In addition to these, comes the

inability to discern or identify the exact source of that threat, that is to say its origins, and it makes things grow from bad to worse. This is what happened exactly when COVID-19 invaded human society.

Since both the great nations and great figures were not spared, Man was ore terrified and could sense death coming his way. In countries where it (COVID-19) was killing thousands of people, it was a real threat that they needed to fight (Louis, Kaur and Cheong 2021). On the other hand, in the lands where it was not present, it was an imagined one. Left without choice, and out of fear, Man tried every kind of strategies he has ever known to contain the threat.

Not knowing the exact origin of the horrible thing, its exact cure or prevention, caused humans, especially, world leaders and scientists to panic. Most of their decisions reflected less scientific reasoning but fear. Signs indicating how a person moved by fear behaves, acts and reacts to his environment that have been discussed by different Linguists, psychologists and even experts in human communication, help us understand well how fear works. Hanna Judith L. (1987) and Celine, K. (2017, et al.).

Some verbal and non-verbal realization of fear:

The following fear-indicating signs were discerned in the way different scientists and political leader communicated to the mass through media. To assess the truthiness of this analysis, readers are encouraged to play audio-visual items from different international media.

- *Lexical and semantic words conveying feelings of fear:* by critically analyzing the linguistic choice of different scientists, leaders and media professionals, it was evident that most of their linguistic input contained lexemes such disparate, victim, end, collapse, in danger, for the firs, not assured, under control, etc. these terms are often used when a person is uncertain or terrified. They indicate fear of material loss, fear of life itself and fear of death. Dijk (2001)
- *Vocal expressions of fear:* It is also natural to note changes in someone's vocalization. However, it becomes so strange if the speaker is facing a serious trouble and is terrified by it. You can note a change in the way a familiar speaker articulates and produces sounds. For example, the person's voice comes out with a higher pitch and tone. There is a change in his or her usual vocabulary, a frequent use of expressions that covey a need for help, a simultaneous use of the present and future tenses in the same utterance to expresses the same idea. In the case of COVID-19, a change was noted in the way these familiar speakers to us, articulated and produced Language sounds. There was a clear change in their choice of vocabulary, pitch and tone.(Sternglenz, and Weylin2004).
- *Facial expressions of fear:* While it is natural for humans to express themselves by using facial expressions, these expressions can change when the communicator has fear in him. For example, under threat, while speaking, the person's eyebrows are straighter and horizontal; the upper lip lifted higher, the eyes become tensed and stretched. Facial expression of different leaders, scientists and other experts who intervened to discuss issues regarding the

COVID-19 on international media presented similar signs (Motley and Mark1993).

- *Sensation of fear:* not the speaker can alone feel strange feelings caused by fear, but his observant listeners can also sense that the speaker is afraid of something. This can be observed through his or her body such as, feeling cold and shortness of breath, the tightening of muscles in the hands and legs, and sweating. Finally, the speaker develops a sudden sense of humility different from his or her usual one.
- *Change of behavior and attitudes indicate fear.* Humans are known to change their behavior and attitudes under certain circumstances, this can include even their linguistic behavior. One of the things that can cause Man to change his behavior is fear. This was also observed through all the measures that were taken in order to face the COVID-19. The tradition of making many strange rules is common among political leaders, company managers, and others in the position of responsibility especially when they are facing trouble (Patel and Jernigan 2019).
- *The Doubt of the surrounding.* An increased doubt of the surrounding is another indicator of strange fear. Out of fear, Man started doubting everything and everyone around him. The doubt of one's surroundings pushed nations to close their borders, and other associated measures without fundamental evidences that these measures would help in controlling the pandemic and led to the blame of others by associating them with the calamity whether within or outside their communities.

Fear can generate two different kinds of reactions. It can cause someone to *mobilize himself or demobilize* (freeze). When a person is threatened, he can mobilize himself, meaning that he tries to act and confront the threat. He often does so without being conscious of the actions he is taking. Under this condition, his acts can save him or put him into serious danger. Because of panic he cannot reason, he just acts (Gordon 2020). This attitude can be likened to a person trying to cross a high way. Imagine that a car is speedily coming his way. Out of fear, he unconsciously jumps and escapes the danger. He is safe though he cannot explain how he did so. On the other hand, he can unconsciously jump and hit the car. In this case, his act of fear puts him into serious danger that can even result in death.

Fear can also cause a person to freeze. This means he fails to take any action. Think again about the man crossing the high way, rather than taking any action, because of fear, he decides to sit or stand waiting to die. He is uncertain of what to do.

Human society today can fittingly be compared to that person facing a serious danger while crossing the road. Failing to know the exact origin and cure of the COVID-19, the world has acted out of fear. In some parts of the world, they have unconsciously mobilized themselves to face the threat. They have acted in some sense, such as by taking all the chain of measures and rules that were discussed earlier. Their acts brought some sort of solution, but led them into other serious dangers (Louis, Kaur and Cheong 2021). On the other hand, some nations were like the freezing man.

They were uncertain of what measure to adopt. This led to confusion and increased fear. Such attitude is even dangerous.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Research design

The research design was descriptive survey with both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection in order to attain the comprehensive results (Armstrong, 1968). Qualitative methods was appropriate to this investigation as it produced detailed data from a small group of participants, while exploring feelings, impressions and judgments. On the other hand, quantitative method made the use of questionnaires, surveys and experiment to gather data that is revised and tabulated in numbers, which allows the data to be characterized by use of statistical analysis Martyn, (2008).

#### B. Population, Sample and Sampling procedure

The population for the study was purposefully drawn from the five compounds of Lusaka city- two low density areas (Woodlands and Kabulonga) and three high density areas (Kalingalinga, Bauleni and Mandevu). Simple random procedure was used to select Political party officials (20), Journalists (20), Community Health Workers (20) and teachers (20) while the snow ball sampling procedure was used to select members of the public (20). The sample size comprised of 100 respondents. Also, the primary data was complimented by the secondary data which was derived from government policy documents, ministerial reports and relevant literature on language use in the media. Phone interview, non-participant observation such as news reports on international channels and the collection of materials, for example, audio-visual recordings, social media posts, and so on were used in collecting needed data in order to assess the problem using a qualitative approach.

In the sampling of compounds and institutions, the study adopted the stratified cluster random sampling technique. Sampling was done on the basis of low and high density compounds and then institutions were clustered zone by zone. Five zones were purposively selected based on the basis of being low or high density. The sampling was done at three levels: Sampling zones, compounds and institutions- level 1, Sampling Political party officials, Journalists, Community health workers and teachers-level 2, Sampling members of the community-level 3.

#### C. Data Analysis

In this research, data was analyzed qualitatively as in-depth interviews, questionnaires and observation schedules were used as data collection instruments. Thematic approach was used, where data analysis started with the categorization of themes from the structured interviews, questionnaires. Kombo and Tromp (2006). Charts and graphs were used to analyze data. The data gathered was analyzed according to the themes of the study and per the order of the research objectives. Data generated from the interview guide was analyzed manually and also, a combination of software MS Access, SPSS and MS Excel was used to analyze data. Analysis was mainly descriptive, that is, mean, median,

mode, range, and standard deviation. Related statistics were applied where possible. Statistical testing took the form of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), correlation and regression both simple and multiple, (Buetow, 2010:123-125).

#### D. Ethical Issues

The researcher avoided pressuring respondents to take part in the research. Alternatively, permission consents, assents were obtained from respondents involved in the research and the research topic was strategically selected to ensure that there was no harm whatsoever to the research respondents. In this research, the researcher was fully conscious of the need to abide by the ethical rule of respecting the privacy of individuals taking part in the research. In the same way, all the respondents of the research were to remain unidentified to the public as all their valuable views, opinions and perceptions were only known by the researcher for use only in the research and participant's identities will forever remain hidden.

The Researcher got permission from Party Secretary Generals to interview political party officials, from Media houses to interview Journalists, from District Health Officer to interview community health workers, from Head teachers to interview teachers and the Town Clerk to administer interview schedules to members of the community. The names of respondents would remain anonymous for the sake of confidentiality, Bryman (2001) and Diener and Crandall (2008).

### IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### A. How media generates and increases perception of fear in society amid COVID 19 pandemic

According to study results, 100 % from all the participants categories indicated that media, news media especially generated and increased perceptions of fear in the minds of their audience through the manner they presented the news, their choice of linguistic forms (lexical and semantic) and the way audio-visual items were portrayed was at 30%. The frequent use of lexical and semantic terms such as sudden, collapse, terrible, uncertain, failure, dangerous, death, victim, loss, etc. was at 50% and frequent language pictures (metaphors and metonymy) provoked fear-emotions at 20%.

From the study, media language is the way in which the meaning of a media text is conveyed to the audience and media discourse is important both for what it reveals about a society and for what it contributes to the character of society. How the language is delivered and how its context is used are important factors in the way meaning is generated for the audience and even verbal language including body language such as gestures and actions count a lot media language (Anderson 2003). The choice, that is selection, combination and exclusion of elements of media language influences meaning in media products to create narratives, to portray aspects of reality, to construct points of view and to represent the world in ways that convey messages and values.

Further, the findings indicated that media used certain tactics to create fear perceptions in the audience during

COVID-19 pandemic. These are the *manner*, in which news reports were being presented using media linguistic choices both lexical and semantic and the way media portrayed the visual items such as figures, pictures and videos) in a metaphoric manner that is capable to arise strong in the audience’s mind thereby influencing people’s interpretation of the events, which in turn influenced their behavior, actions and attitudes. (Bell 1973). Also, media have only focused on the negative side linked to the pandemic such as how world health systems are fragile, and how they had failed to control the diseases and how hospitals did not have the capacity to take care of the contaminated ones such as the lack of ventilators and how the scientist was far to find the cure or vaccine and the way world economy and man’s life in general would suffer increased the audience’s fear perceptions. Other ways that generated fear was the manner in which images related to COVID-19 were portrayed in media and the kind of images that increased

fear are pictures and videos of hospitals lacking materials, or crowded with sick people or of people failing to breathe because they were no ventilators to sustain them (American Behavioral Scientist 2003).

*B. Types of fear generated by media in society amid COVID-19 pandemic*

Regarding types of fear generated by media in society amid COVID-19 pandemic, there were many fears brought but the most significant survey results as illustrated in Table 1 below, showed that opinions from respondents scored highly on fear of sickness as a result of being vaccinated (64.8%), followed by fear of death as a result of being vaccinated at 60.5%, fear of losing loved ones due to vaccine (61.3%), fear of pain from the injection at 50.9% and the least was fear of not being sure of efficacy of vaccine at 50.1%.

Type of fear media generates	Percentage	
	Yes	No
Fear of sickness	64.8%	35.2%
Fear of death	60.5%	35.5%
Fear of losing loved ones	61.3%	38.7%
Fear of pain of injection	50.9%	49.1%
Fear of not being sure of efficacy of vaccine	50.1%	49.9%

Table 1: Distribution of types of fear media generates

Fear can be sensational where one person can alone feel strange feelings caused by fear, but his observant listeners can also sense that the speaker is afraid of something or change of behavior and attitudes can also indicate fear as humans are known to change their behavior and attitudes under certain circumstances such as facing the COVID-19 or doubting information surrounding the efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccines. From the study, fear can generate two different kinds of reactions where someone can mobilize himself or herself meaning that he or she tries to act and confront the threat or demobilize, that is, freeze meaning he or she fails to take any action (Gordon 2020).

The study found that all the respondents alluded to fear of sickness, fear of death, fear losing loved ones, fear of pain of the injection and fear of not being sure of the efficacy of the vaccine to be injected in their bodies. Today many Zambians spread misinformation which is amplified

on social media and other digital platforms which is proving to be a threat not only to Zambian but global public health as the virus itself (Carnegie 2017). The misinformation such the virus and vaccine is meant to reduce population of the world especially that of the blacks increases fear on the masses. Others align COVID-19 vaccine to religious connotations of new world order of the mark of the beast.

*C. The effects of fear on people’s livelihood amidst COVID 19 pandemic.*

On the negative effects of fear on people’s livelihood amidst COVID-19 pandemic, the study found that fear weakens the immunity system and causes gastrointestinal problems such as ulcers and irritable bowel syndrome was at 60%, causes cardiovascular diseases was at 25%, decreases fertility was at 10% and that fear can lead to accelerated ageing and even premature death was at 5% as illustrated in Table 2 below.

Effects of fear causes on people	Percentage
Gastrointestinal problems	60
Cardiovascular diseases	25
Decreased fertility	10
Ageing and premature death	5

Table 2: Distribution of effects of fear on people’s livelihood

Fear can interrupt processes in the brain that allow human beings to regulate emotions, read non-verbal cues and other information presented to human body, reflect before acting and act ethically and this therefore, impacts the thinking and decision making in negative ways leaving humans susceptible to intense emotions and impulsive reactions (Gorden 2020). On the negative effects of fear on people’s lives amidst COVID-19 pandemic, the study found that fear

or worrying affects the body and when worrying becomes excessive, it leads to feelings of high anxiety and even cause physical illnesses as fear weakens a person’s immune system and causes cardiovascular disease which affects the heart or blood vessels which increases risk of blood clots and fear also causes gastrointestinal problems such as ulcers and irritable bowel syndrome as well as decreasing fertility

in both males and males (Jiang 2016). In addition, fear can lead to accelerated ageing and even premature death.

## V. CONCLUSION

This article has shed light on how fear about the COVID-19 was perceived by media audience. Through this study, it was therefore assessed that, though humans naturally have fear of infectious diseases, media often aggravate the severity of the situation. This in turn enables the media to plant certain kind of feelings in the audience through language and other non-linguistic forms of human communication. In the case of the COVID-19, media created and increased fear perceptions through the way news reports were presented (negative aspect of the events), the linguistic choice (indirect language with lexical and semantic forms to convey ideas of severity, picture language) and the way audio-visual items such as figures about the victims, images (videos) of the victims and ambulances. All these contributed in generating and increasing fear. since media depends on people's attention, this fear served as a way to draw the audience in, which is benefic to the media and affiliated sectors, such the business world. Through this analysis, the role of such fear in the decision-making regarding the measures to prevent the pandemic was evident as human communication signs of fear that were discussed indicate.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

- All media houses should aim at educating the public on COVID-19 pandemic.
- News editors of all media houses should try to reduce fear by editing verbal and non-verbal elements carrying feelings of fear in news items.
- News editors should ensure that censure as well as avoid fear provoking news on COVID-19 which result in panic among citizens.
- All media house should try as much as possible to build a positive image related to COVID-19 pandemic.
- The Ministry of Health should continue encouraging citizens to follow the golden rules as well as to get vaccinated against COVID-19.
- The Ministry of Health should partner with Zambia News and Information Service (ZANIS) and other partners to go out in communities sensitizing people using public address systems, drama and films on the advantages of following golden rules and vaccinations against COVID-19.
- The Ministry of Information should form a team of experts and media practitioners to react and dispel rumors on social media and other digital platforms which spread misinformation on COVID-19.
- The Ministry of Health should form teams on all health facilities to sensitize as well as offer counselling services to members of the public on COVID-19 and the negative effects of fear.

## REFERENCES

[1.] Acker, M. (2019). *Speak with no fear*, Advantage Publishing Group Aday, S., Slivington, M. and Herbert, M. (2000). *Embedding the truth: a cross-*

*cultural analysis of objectivity and TV coverage of the Iraq war*, Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, 10(1):3-21.

- [2.] Akdeniz, Y., Walker, C. and Wall, C. (2000). *The Internet, Law and Society*, London: Longman.
- [3.] Althaus, S. (2003). 'When news norms collide, follow the lead: new evidence for press independence,' *Political Communication*, 20(\$): 381-414.
- [4.] *American Behavioral Scientist* (2003). Special issue on media bias, 46(12).
- [5.] Anden-Papadopolous, K. (2008). 'The Abu-Ghraib torture photographs: news frames, visual culture and the power of images,' *Journalism*, 9 (1):5-30.
- [6.] Anderson, A. (2003). 'Environmental activism and the newsmen in S. Cottle (ed.), *News, Public Relation and Power*, pp. 117-32. London: Sage.
- [7.] Anderson, R., Heesterbeek, H., Klinkenberg, D. and Hollingsworth, T. (2020). How will country-based mitigation measures influence the course of the COVID-19 epidemic? *The Lancet*, 395 (10228), 931-934, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0144-6736\(20\)30567-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0144-6736(20)30567-5).
- [8.] Bell, D. (1973). *The Language of News Media*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Carnegie, D. (2017). *How to stop worrying and start living*. London: Simon and Schuster.
- [9.] Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2020). COVID-19 72-hour Response Plan Checklist. Atlanta: CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/global-covid-19/index.html>.
- [10.] Chris Roberts. (2016). *Detecting Deceit via Analysis of Verbal and Nonverbal Behavior*.
- [11.] Finnegan, A., Lander, W. and McKenna, H. (2016). The Challenges and Psychological impact of delivering nursing care within a war zone. *Nursing Outlook*, 64(5), 450-458.
- [12.] Gibson, R., & Zillmann, D. (1994). Exaggerated versus representative exemplification in news reports: Perception of issues and personal consequences. *Communication Research*, 21, 603–624. doi:10.1177/009365094021005003 [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar].
- [13.] Gordon, J. (2020). *The Garden: A spiritual Fable about ways to overcome fear, anxiety and stress*.
- [14.] Grabe, M. E., Zhou, S., Lang, A., & Bolls, P. D. (2000). Packaging television news: The effects of tabloid on information processing and evaluative responses. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 44, 581–598. doi:10.1207/s15506878jobem4404\_4 [Taylor & Francis Online], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]
- [15.] Grabe, M. E., Lang, A., & Zhao, X. (2003). News content and form: Implications for memory and audience evaluations. *Communication Research*, 30, 387–413. doi:10.1177/0093650203253368 [Crossref], [Web of Science ®], [Google Scholar]
- [16.] Hanna Judith L. (1987) *A Theory of Nonverbal Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- [17.] Harrison, M. (2013). *How Commerce has spread diseases*. London: New Harvens.

- [18.] Jiang, J. (2016). Rejection proof. Washington D.C: Randon House Inc.
- [19.] Louis, D.G.J., Kaur, S. and Cheong, H.F. (2021). Covid-19 and Psychology in Malaysia, Psychosocial effects, coping and resilience. Kuala Lumpur: Routledge.
- [20.] Motley&Mark.T. (1993). Facial Affect and Verbal context in conversation.Google.com.
- [21.] Patel, A. and Jernigan, D.B. (2019). Initial Public Health Response and Interim Clinical Guidance for 2019 Novel Coronavirus outbreak-United States, December 3, 2019- February 4, 2020 MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020; 69:140-146.
- [22.] Pease B; Pease A. (2009) the Definitive Book of Body Language. New York.
- [23.] Sternglenz, R.Weylin. (2004) Reading Nonverbal Cues to Emotions.Google.com.
- [24.] Tarde, G. 1969. On Communication and Social Influence. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0226789713.
- [25.] Yusuf, I, Yahaya, S., & Qabli, S. (2015). Role of media in portraying Ebola in and outside Africa. *Journal of Tropical Diseases*, 3(152), 1–2. doi:10.4172/2329-891X.1000152 [Crossref], [Google Scholar]
- [26.] Zheltukhina, M.R. 2008. Formation of the languages picture of the world by means of influence on languages consciousness. In: *Oriental Languages and Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. ISBN 9781847189196.

### AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES



Lufeyo Chitondo specializes in Language Education and Research and is currently lecturing Language Education at Rockview University in the Languages and Literacy Department.



Martin Mutabazi Mugisha specializes in Applied Linguistics, he is interested in African Classic Humanities, world education systems and the contribution of humanities to the society and is teaching at Rockview University.

**Citations:**Lufeyo Chitondoand Martin Mutabazi Mugisha “The Language of fear in media: A case of COVID- 19 pandemic outbreak in fivecompounds of Lusaka City, Zambia”

### Copyright