

**نشر ثقافة الخوف: الإستراتيجيات المعلوماتية والتلاعب  
المنصات الإخبارية على الإنترنت حول أزمة جائحة كوفيد-١٩**

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**Spreading the Fear: The Informational and Manipulative  
Strategies of Online News on COVID-19 Pandemic Crisis**

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**المستخلص**

تتناول هذه المقالة التنظير والتلاعب من قبل المنصات الإخبارية على الإنترنت. يركز هذا البحث على كيفية لجوء المقالات الإخبارية خصوصاً كوفيد-19 (ONAs) إلى استخدام استراتيجيات متغيرة بشكل فعال عن طريق تكوين منظور لغوياً عند النظر إلى الأحداث بزمن كورونا، و توثيق مصادر المعلومات. الهدف من البحث هو دراسة الآليات المعرفية والاستراتيجيات التواصلية المتأصلة في الخطاب العربي الموجه أثناء الزمة جائحة كوفيد-19 العالمية. تقدم الدراسة تحليلاً دلاليًا معرفياً لشبكة الاستراتيجيات البراغماتية للخطاب الإعلامي والنظام التنظيمي للمنظور. أدت تحليلات البيانات إلى استنتاج مفادها أنه من خلال المنظور الموضوعي واستراتيجيات التعبير لذاتي أثناء عملية التواصل، ينظم مؤلف رسائل الخبر على المنصات الافتراضية النصوص عن قصد بطريقة تترك تأثيراً على المرسل إليهم. لقد أظهرت التحليلات أن مواقع المنصات الإخبارية الافتراضية قد قدمت كمية هائلة من المعلومات أدت إلى التلاعب في تصور القراء للوباء.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** المنظور ، الاستراتيجيات البراغماتية ، كوفيد-19، الأخبار على الإنترنت

**Abstract**

This article addresses perspectivization and manipulation of the online news platforms. It focuses on how COVID-19 related online news articles (ONAs) were instrumentally conditioned and linguistically perspectivized, resorting to variable strategies of self-(re)presentation and Information Sourcing/Accrediting. The research objective is to study the cognitive mechanisms and communicative strategies inherent in manipulative verbalization in Arab ONA discourse during the crisis during the COVID-19 global pandemic. The study offers a cognitive semantic analysis of the pragmatic network of strategies of the media discourse and perspectivization regulatory system. The data analyses led to the conclusion that with the strategically objectivized and subjectivized perspective during the process of communication, the author of ONA messages intentionally organizes the texts in such a way to leave an impact on the addressees. They have shown that mass media ONA websites have offered a massive amount of information yet may manipulate their perception of the pandemic .

**Keywords:** Perspectivization, pragmatic strategies, COVID-19, Online news.

## **1. Introduction**

The importance of mass media in human life cannot be underestimated. Every second, readers are bombarded with a considerable amount of information from various sources that replicate it. Online News Articles Websites (ONAWs) are emerging outside the typical news media, allowing hardly copyright abiding institutional and amateur news editorials. Free access to information creates the illusion of freedom of choice; in fact, it dissolves individuality, subordinates it to the so-called public opinion, which forms, directs, and controls the thoughts of society, adjusting individual consciousness (Bucy, 2004). News authors are looking for the most effective ways to present information, trying to get ahead of everyone and be the first to publish the news, albeit not often reliable, but very bright, without forgetting to offer their own interpretation of current events (Gladwell, 2000). The saturation with information inevitably leads to a particular psychological vulnerability.

Expected psychological consequences of outbreaks of any mass disease include anxiety and panic, depression, anger, confusion, and uncertainty. News content may make this even worse. Studies based on the results of previous epidemics show that information about SARS often presented in the media, the internet and social networks are based on sensations and threats, and not on exact scientific facts, for example, about the symptoms of a viral infection and methods for its prevention (Gladwell, 2000; Scheufele, 1999; Washer, 2004 ). The line of conduct of an individual or group facing risks and crises such as the COVID-19 outbreak can be imposed by the worldview constructed by institutions and possibly other individuals.

A crisis event differs from others in that its interpretation can be very different among people and institutions, and the causes and consequences are also ambiguous. In the modern Internet space, the information perspective is formed non-linearly. Since numerous network resources of online media, and specifically, news feeds, simultaneously participate in its creation. So that it is sufficient for the correct interpretation of the situation (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), ONA plays a crucial role in how information about the COVID-19 outbreak will be perceived and what effect it will have on people on a global scale.

Due to the current situation in the international arena, the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has become one of the most discussed topics in the media, as publications that address COVID-19 pandemic global

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outbreak. For the imposed quarantine and social distancing, the ONAW has become the source of information on topics like (COVID-19 waves; death rates; infection; imposed quarantine, conspiracies theory) which attract the attention of quarantine-isolated readers.

ONAW played a remarkable role in disseminating information during the "Stay at Home" global measure against the outbreak of COVID-19. It is assumed that communicated messages might adopt various communication strategies supposedly set forth to raise awareness but laterally may promote anxiety, arouse panic, and spread fear, based on individuals, organizations, institutions motives, and ideologies. Anxiety is a sensation of unclear sense of an impending or anticipated threat/danger (Horney 1992; Witte, 1992). Anxious experiences are inflicted by the expectation of impending danger and a sense of uncertainty.

The present work examines the strategic construction of self-(re)presentation perspective of the Online News Article (ONAs) authors' when the writers of the news articles reported information on the "COVID-19 pandemic outbreak". It seeks to explain the question of how do they accredit their information sourcing to let the audience believe that the story is reliable and trustworthy. The focus of this study is the strategic perspectivization of the ONA discourse on COVID-19, which targeted the people of the Arab states in general and in Iraq in particular. It underlines the communicative strategies of the informative versus manipulative functions of online mass communication targeting the public mind.

In the ONA, "news article/report" is defined as follows: the informational message about events that have occurred recently or are currently taking place, representing political, social, or economic interest for the addressee with their freshness, promptly distributed in the form perceived by the addressee, mainly through the media, influencing the addressee (Van Dijk, 1988). In modern society, there are certain expectations regarding the degree of reliability of ONA messages in general that people habitually perceive the broadcast news report as a priori reliable. ONA, however, may have a significantly manipulative potential, often in non-bonafide mode or intentionally deceptive mode, targeting the public consciousness.

In short, anxiety, fear and panic can be verbally induced in genres such as propaganda, rumors as well as online news (Morgan, 2018). The

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present study suggests, ONA may utilize negative manipulative strategies, twisting the recipients' perception and assessment of the crisis, framing their line of conduct. The COVID-19 related online news article (COVID-ONA), as a dynamic Institutional mass information discourse, remains out of sight due to its recency

The communicative space on the Internet is increasingly called CMC (computer-mediated communication (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). What we call "Online News Articles" occupies a special place in the genre classification of CMC discourse, the specificity of which significantly changes the organization of the discursive practice of knowledge formation. ONA is not written for thoughtful reading; a reader can easily navigate from one ONAW to another (Uotila, 2011). In order to achieve the maximum effect, each ONA message, like any message, must have a clear form (superstructure), a set of distinct categories and rules or strategies that determine the order of these categories.

In the news report, "the supporting fact unfolds into a narrative - a verbal representation of the event (Washer, 2004). The information posted in online news publications is understood as a stream of news reports reflecting the result of a special kind of interpretation" (Hermann & Chomsky, 1988). the formation of news perspective on a crisis event in online sources remain insufficiently studied. A crisis event differs from others because its interpretation can be very different for the conflicting parties, and the causes and consequences are also ambiguous.

The ONA genre is intended to create particular worldviews on the pandemic: the author's intention could be informative or manipulative. The information about the virus, shortlisting any preventive measures, narratives on the heroics in saving life/avoiding death, the search for accomplices and other countermeasures, and the actions of government agencies to neutralize the pandemic could be all informative.

Naive readers may perceive and create situational models of the world, based on news releases from hand-held devices such as mobiles, tabs, and laptops. Fake or unsourced details disseminated by the ONA messages may create a frightening worldview of the world. Therefore, for a linguist, the most critical question is not what and why the media discourse authors speak and write about the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, constructing a certain worldview of "the pandemic," or creating a frightening and intimidating mental image, but how they do it? The

linguistic and functional features of ONAs on the topic of "COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, (COVID-ONAs) will be approached in this article.

This research describes how the circulated COVID-ONAs leave an impact (informative or manipulative) and what processes, mechanics, and strategies are really at work? This study was to identify the discursive cognitive processes and pragmatic strategies that could justify language use, especially the perspectivization by ONA feeds on the crisis event. It is necessary to consider a set of messages that appear on the ONA feeds to identify the characteristics of their verbal reconstruction of perspective and determine the volume, accuracy, and credibility of their information sources during the crisis event. This research lies within the scope of what is known as Cyber-pragmatics (Kramsch, 2002). The results of this study will be beneficial to raise the critical awareness of citizens who are hit by the hoax storm of COVID-19 every day.

ONA appeals to perceptions of an imaginary recipient and the collective knowledge. The key functional feature of ONA feeds discourse is the impact (informative, constructive, manipulative), they exert on the recipient (Morgan, 2018). What kind of communicative strategies are at work to achieve such an end? What cognitive processes underlie such strategies? Moreover, what theoretical notion can well interpret such a complex communicative scene? Certain assumptions arise regarding the quality of the disseminated messages and other linguistic and psychosocial factors.

The communicative strategy to achieve contact with the readers, the ONA texts authorship selects a perspective subject (perspective information source) and organizes the narrated content (a narrative perspective), based on given agenda, motives, preferences and ideologies (individuals, organizational, institutional). Therefore, ONA texts authorship resorts to a set of communicative strategies and cognitive mechanisms (Severi, 2016).

During the COVID-19 crisis, the communication process underlying ONA messages may assume misinforming roles by providing unreliable, misleading or faulty information. Such roles build on the amount of information, information source, and modality of judgements (Lin, Spence, Sellnow & Lachlan, 2016). They can induce adverse cognitive outcomes such as anxiety, fear, and panic as well as critical behavioral responses.

### **1.1. The significance of the study**

The significance of posing the topic is since the mass Internet audience finds itself in a situation where the possibility of an unhealthy understanding of the event. Therefore, the number and quality of news report significantly create lateral crises. It is necessary to determine how the information perspective of the event in the online space of online media could influence the knowledge reliability about the event and the reasons behind such formation. The novelty of this study resides in the qualitative approach to a recently emerging sub-genre of journalism, COVID-ONA: the language of online media articles during the global hardships of COVID-19 pandemic crisis. A new discourse sub-genre is a unique phenomenon: each new genre is determined by its own set of characteristics and communication capabilities. The sub-genre is an unconditionally mediated and globally distributed form of discourse: written texts of news articles editorials, on cyberspace by ONAWs.

## **2. Foundations of the Theoretical Framework:**

### **2.1. World view**

According to the theory of knowledge representation, language is designed to reflect and interpret the process and results of cognition of the world and the language itself (Boldyrev, 2016; Nolan & Diedrichsen, 2019).

Language is “biologically, socially and ecologically conditioned behavior whose functions are determined both by the context of the situation and language use (Margoliash & Nusbaum, 2009). Language use is a physical self-representation underlying which a set of cognitive processes of consciousness knowledge selection and organization of the semantic content it carries, such as *objectivization*, *subjectivization*, and *intersubjectivization* (Nakamura, 2012). The semantic content of an ONA article, ultimately, seeks the readers to form a world view (model) of the event it talks about. The nature of such a model is highly rich, dynamic and variable.

Foucault describes discourse as social speech practice (Salgado Llopis, 2010). According to Grice (1989), the intention implies the speaker’s conscious will to communicate something. The subject’s intention that is mediated by a statement reflects certain subjective meanings and the subsequent success. The identification of the subject’s intentions by the listener correlate with the prevailing conventions regarding the meaning of certain expressions: an author’s object is realized by a group of intentional acts, whose success reside in abiding

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by maxims of quality, quantity, manner at the time of this speech act (Searle, 1969).

The author's style of representing the discourse object is determined by ways of organizing the worldviews of reality. According to the communicative-pragmatic models of language and underpinnings of cognitive linguistic approaches, discourse is often interpreted as an activity of representation of its subject's worldviews of reality. The standpoint of activity includes knowledge structures, i.e., frames, scripts, scripts, schemes, mental models, etc. Such knowledge structures assume a point of reference, as a trajectory point for organizing the semantic content (perspectivization). Initially, they require a "perspective subject" or information/modality source (Langacker, 1986).

The cognitive mechanism of objectivization aims at organizing a text to represent an objective knowledge about a fragment of reality. Building a perspective presupposes the choice of an object of perspectivization - an object, event, or situation in question, an angle (focal characteristics of an object), placing an object in a given system coordinate, choosing cognitive mechanisms for the dynamic realization of the perspective (Ibid). Interpretation is a mental operation aimed at obtaining new knowledge, invoking a subjective role of assigning broadly evaluative and modal concepts and linguistic categories and other schemes of language interpretation. The human subject is an integral part of the world view: he conceptualizes and categorizes, based on the available amount of background knowledge via language. A given world view on reality reflects the modality of information judgement, objectivized, subjectivized or intersubjectivized, as perspectivized by its subject.

Describing the objects of the situation model also includes the choice of a particular perspective that allows the subject of discourse to distance himself from the described event or reference. The objectivity of which is created not only by the process of modeling relations between objects but also by objectified symmetric information-sourcing relations (Nakamura, 2012).

Intersubjectivization is a manifestation of the verbal behavior of participants in communication (Rumsey, 2003) and a reflection of participation in the narrative where ONA becomes the joint activity of reflection. Based on the analysis of the material, it becomes possible to identify the specifics of the perspectivization mechanism in the ONA

narrative and single out a set of strategies to create objectivized, subjectivized, and intersubjectivized world view.

**2.2. Perspectivization as Conceptual Organization**

All cognitive processes are subject to compulsory perspectivization: perception, conceptualization, organization, and simulation of the situation and dressing it in a linguistic form. In this work, we are particularly interested in the cognitive schemes for interpreting the world, including the cognitive mechanisms of the perspective formation of the world and the organization of news text/discourse. Perspectivization refers to "certain schemes of information processing, replenishment, and modification of knowledge structures. According to cognitive linguistics, perspective is considered primarily as a cognitive mechanism, underlying a conscious construction of an event, using various lexical and grammatical means. The construction takes place as follows: the speaker selects an object for his speech, single out an angle to approach it (i.e., selects the properties of the object of speech on which the speaker's attention will be focused), place the object in a coordinate system (i.e., fix the context parameters), and select the point of view and the distance (Dancygier & Sweetser 2012)

Speaking about the subject perspective, we do not mean a specific subject. However, his position did not exist before speaking: it arises here and now, that is, immediately at the moment of communication. Subjectivization is evidenced by accrediting the source of information to self. Schematically, the perspective can be depicted as an axis on which the subject areas are connected, corresponding to the different roles of the subject. In any utterance, a combination of subjective spheres occurs the subject of the basic model (the subject of action, quality, state), the subject-causation (the subject of influence), the subject of consciousness (the one who owns the thought), the subject of speech-production and the subject of speech perception. This combination of subjective roles (or subjective spheres) is called the model of the subjective perspective representation verbalized by the statement (Lee, Katz & Hancock, 2021). For instance, the first-person narration allows the reader to see the situation through the eyes of the narrator, making them empathize with him. The third person forms instances of subjective perspective reflect a mechanism of perspective shift where the mechanism of objectification replaces the Subjectivization.

Buhler (1990) primarily understands the subject perspective as the relationship between the sender of the message and the sign. The perspectivization is directly related to discourse. Habermas singles out a complex perspective structure of the communication process where the perspective of the observer is at the top. According to Habermas, the position of the observer corresponds to the symmetrically related position of the author and the reader - the perspectives of the speaker and listener (1990, p. 159). The communicative perspectives highlighted by Habermas correspond to three fundamental attitudes: objectifying, norm-conformative and expressive, and three modes of language application: cognitive, interactive, and expressive.

It seems possible to speak about the effect of the reconciliation of two perspectives (the reader and the author), which is realized through the activation of making contact: communication domination/Cooperation, the mechanism of intersubjectivization. The mechanism of intersubjectivization is dynamic; that is, the author may resort to reconstructing perspectives in the process of establishing contact. The strategy to establish contact is very obvious in the field of online interaction with texts and visual special effects especially in the genre under study. In polymodal texts, the intersubjectivization mechanism is determined by the context of communication, in which the narrator and event reality interact with the reader (Lippo, 2021).

The cognitive linguists understand perspectivization as a cognitive mechanism and discursive act, deliberately performed for constructing a point of contact: the event is constructed by participants to establish contact with their partners. It emphasizes individual elements of the frame, regardless of their significance, and thus makes it possible to activate any parts in the mind of their partner to become connected (Suleiman, & O'Connell, 2008). This is associated with the subject's ability to share an individual perspective based on the organization of the profiled content for interpreting the conceptualized situation relative to the general background, (Langacker, 1990; 2008; Talmy, 1988; 2000). Langacker and Talmy proposed to decipher perspectivization as conceptual systems in terms of figure - background or profile - base - domain. According to Langacker (1987, § 5.1) an expression acquires its meaning by imposing a profile on a basis. The author uses the example of the concepts "radius" and "circle" to demonstrate that it is only possible to understand the meaning of radius (PROFILE) from a prior

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understanding of the concept of circle (BASE/DOMAIN). In this sense, the two concepts are intimately associated and their relationship is represented in a conceptual structure. The profile refers to the concept symbolized by the word. The base to that knowledge or conceptual structure that is presupposed from the profile and is evoked in order to understand a certain expression. Furthermore, a base generally includes a wide variety of conceptual profiles, taking the first example, the base CIRCLE encompasses not only RADIUS, but also CIRCUMFERENCE, DIAMETER, CENTER, etc. It is important to point out that in cognitive grammar the verb to profile (profiling) is used to refer to the selection process of a certain aspect (profile) within a base (within the conceptual structure that contains it). Thus, for example, EYE outlines a substructure of the base structure FACE.

The need to study the cognitive structures that underlie the representation of crisis reality in various types of texts necessitate approaching the ways their narrative, information and linguistic expressions actualize the events. At the sentence level, linguists distinguished four types of semantic predicates: action, process, state, property. Each typical predicate specifies by its valence a role perspective: 1) the number of semantic roles that fall into the perspective; 2) a central role brought to the fore; 3) the semantic content of roles, e.g., agent, patience, etc., (Fillmore, 1968).

Choosing one of the communicative roles, the participant in the communication process has a dual system of perspectives, so the author of the discourse is not only the subject of speaking, producing the text of the message, but also merging the whole process of generating the utterance with the norm-forming attitude of the reader. Zeman (2017) identifies the following components of perspective: the one that sets the perspective (**Perspective carrier**), the object in perspective (**perspective object**), the relationship between the bearer of perspective and the object in perspective, one's perspective (**perspective Owner**), when another person acts as an object, and perspective of another (**Foreign perspective**).

It should be distinguished whether telling a story or the circulating facts are communicated from one's perspective or another. A change in perspective in a text is a common pragmatic strategy in ONA discourse. Of course, there are various kinds of realizations of the subjects in the narrative of ONA discourse.

### 2.3. Perspectivization as Communicative Strategy

The pragmatic approach in linguistics marked the return to communicative and interpersonal relationships, personal interests, motives, goals, and preferences of language users as a strategist and tactician. Exploring the control possibilities of the language, let us take a closer look at the key strategies of language manipulation that the authors of ONA often use.

The term "strategy", a military term, has become a pragmalinguistic research subject (van Dijk, Wittgenstein, Gordon, G. P. Grice, Lakoff, Levinson, Leach, C. W. Morris). The strategy embodies the communicant's behavior plan in a given communicative situation. Psychological approaches link the term "strategy" to the intended impact, then it can be viewed as the transfer of meanings from an addresser to his addressee within the framework of social or communicative interaction. To a cognitive approach, a strategy is the core of a regulatory system that allows constructing a situational model that correlates with communicative goals and represented by a specific linguistic content (Zhu & Meyers-Levy, 2007). Such understanding appeals to a fundamental component of an individual's experience via a subjective perspective.

The external communication space can be strategically organized into more or less cooperative or confrontational. According to Habermas, the strategies that organize the outer space of discourse and the inner space of utterance fall into two primary groups: one for actions coordination and another for the orientation towards cooperation (1990, p. 198). It is about organizing interactive interaction with the recipient, establishing contact with the external environment of the statement. The inner space organization allows the distribution of messages along the "objectivity-subjectivity" scale. The two scales justify perspective shifts for updating or switching situational models in the minds of communication participants.

### 3. Methodological Foundations

Cyberspace has dissolved the boundaries by allowing free association and access to others, without ties or ethical commitments in communication (Wilson, 2003; Burger, 2014). Cyberspace represents a sphere of information seeding and leeching, where discourses of opposites are intertwined. Like any other media discourse, with the consistent struggle for power and competition, ONA discourse is

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characterized by a mediated struggle for increased institutionalized, informative, manipulative impacts and higher Web Visit metrics.

The march for power, money, and media appeal to the problem of this research because ONAs exhibit states, institutional, and individual's self-presentation and perspectivized word views on events and crises (see Lwin, Lu, Sheldenkar & Schulz, 2018). The ONA writer often behaves as if he gives the reader the freedom to choose different points of view. The different forms of narrative reveal the world, make it comprehensible and organically schematized by some form of information agendas: the narrative and self-presentation are causally related. The established relationships instrumentally generate some schematic knowledge in communication via a regulatory system, i.e.,

- **Perspectivization:** The author's "PERSPECTIVIZATION" stands for the author's choices of a particular position concerning what he is saying. The perspective is expressed explicitly in language or remains implicit (the latter of interest to us is most characteristic of the ONA, as the analysis shows).

In the perspective system, the modes that reflect the intentional state of the participants in communication are determined by perspective formation strategy. The direction of the modes reflects the perspective-taking upheld by the speaker, and in our study - the strategic program (information-sourcing) of the ONA messages. The regulatory system is subject to the following factors:

- **Modality:** Modality is an OBJECTIVIZED, SUBJECTIVIZED, AND INTERSUBJECTIVIZED schematic knowledge, constrained by necessity, probability, or emotionality.
- **Information Sourcing:** mechanisms of INFORMATION ACCREDITING
- **Contact:** communication DOMINATION/COOPERATION

different linguistic forms can describe the same denotative situation, based on the knowledge and intentions of the speaker; scene and frame are related through "perspective". The most relevant topics to this work are the ways the human mind uses to generate the knowledge, the mechanisms to structure the conceptual contents, and the linguistic units to verbalize such content, and causally relate them to the acquired motives.

The cognitive approach to analysing language as representation and operation of knowledge seems to be a feasible option. Accordingly, the

cognitive-discursive paradigm's modern theoretical and methodological principles allow answering this research question on COVID-ONA at various levels of its functioning.

### 3.1. Data

The study was conducted based on a material that was limited thematically to a news article on COVID-19 spreading worldwide between October and December 2019 to March 2021: Texts were discursively analyzed, highlighting the manipulation tactics. The research has derived and compiled data based on search queries using keywords (e.g., "كورونا" Corona; "كورونا فايروس" Coronavirus; "كوفيد" Covid; "كوفيد 19" Covid 19; "كوفيد-19" COVID-19). The COVID-ONA corpus involved (146 units) texts of electronic news reports/articles and (3754 units) text-comments to them. The data was collected between December 2019 and April 2021 from Al-Nahrain, a leading Arabic-language electronic journal and online inter-media news platform, since 2000, <https://www.nahrain.com/index.php>.

### 3.2. Analysis

This methodological setting is essential for our work in at least two aspects: firstly, the cognitive interpretation of the strategy and, secondly, the strategic behavior of the author. Both allow us to assume that universal information organization and modeling mechanisms, including perspectivization, underlie the communicative acts. Perspectivization is viewed as a strategic system and changing perspectives as the authors' course of action.

#### 3.2.1. Nominated Source of perspective

The subjective perspective is defined as a manifestation of the verbal behavior of participants in communication, where the ONA narrative becomes a joint activity of reflection. The personal pronoun "we" as in (1) implies plurality; however, it is impossible to determine precisely how many persons are meant, other than the speaker. The plurality represented in the pronoun "we" means a participant in the act of communication shares the same judgment (modality) with many others and possibly with the readers.

ما نريد أن نوصله من رسالة أن العلم يقول أن الفيروس عندما ينتقل من الحيوان ، تتأقلم الفيروسات وتتطور بشكل يتلائم مع جسم ... إلى الإنسان يموت بسرعة ، ، واغلب هذه الفيروسات هي من عائلة الفايروسات التاجية... الإنسان، 1

What **we want** to convey from the message is that science says that when the virus is transmitted from animal to human, it dries

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quickly, ..., viruses adapt and evolve in a way that suits the human body, ... .

The perspective in 2 represents an untainted third person, an officially sourced institutional daily report of COVID-19 *in situ* data, fully-accredited to the Iraqi Ministry of Health (MOH). From the ONAW bootstrapped an objectivized official perspective, the worldview on COVID-19 is statistically constructed based on data from the official Statistical Dashboard of the highest health institution in Iraq. The content of the bootstrapped perspective of the MOH Dashboard itself assumes strategically profiled order. Unlike the statistics Dashboards of WHO or Statista, where the profiled figures order is (COVID-19 Cases, Deaths and Recoveries), the MOH dashboard is highly subjectivized and purposefully profiled as (COVID-19 Recoveries, Cases, Vaccinations, and Deaths). The official author selected "Total Recoveries" as the focus (figure/profile) of the verbalized message, "the most important information that its recipients need to know first, followed by "Total 2. 2. Cases" and the "Death cases" as (background/base).



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Such profiled perspectivation of COVID-19 cases might have led to the people's underestimation of COVID-19 pandemic risk and violation of quarantine or social distancing.

With unsourced perspective with tainted scientific objectivization, some ONAs pass hoax, fake news and unauthenticated information as in

تجربة علمية تراقب عدد ساعات استقرار فيروس كورونا خارج الجسم القضاء عليه ب  
١٥ ثانية<sup>١</sup>

A scientific experiment that monitors the number of hours of stability of the Coronavirus outside the body, 15 seconds in aerosols and on surfaces are enough to eliminate it.

The worldview that the message form of the virus, claiming that 15 second in aerosols and on surfaces is enough to eliminate it is scientifically unverified information. On the contrary, the accredited authorities, such as the US National Institutes of Health, has confirmed the opposite, stating that:

The virus that causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is **stable for several hours to days in aerosols and on surfaces, according to a new study from the National Institutes of Health.**<sup>2</sup>

In ONA, copying rival ONAWs has become increasingly customary. This is a form of a third-person perspective bootstrapping, fully accredited. However, in (4) the perspective change from first-person authorship to foreign perspective authorship (report copying) is postponed to the end as a DOMAIN to Iraq as the PROFILE and affected countries as a BASE in Langacker's terminology.

جاء العراق في المرتبة الثانية ضمن قائمة أكثر الدول تضرراً بجائحة فيروس كورونا المستجد في المنطقة من حيث عدد الوفيات، بوصول عدد إجمالي الإصابات إلى ٦٢٧ ألفاً و٤١٦، والوفيات إلى ١٣ ألفاً و١١١ عراقياً، مسجلاً نسبة ٢.٠٩ في المائة<sup>٣</sup> وفيات من بين مرضى كوفيد - ١٩، بحسب رسم بياني لوكالة "فرانس برس

Iraq ranked second among the list of the most affected countries by the coronavirus pandemic in the region in terms of the number of deaths. The total number of infections cases reached 627,416, and deaths to 13,111 Iraqis, recording 2.09 percent of deaths among COVID-19 patients. According to a graphic by Agence France-Presse (AFP)

**Eyewitnesses Perspective: Testimonies of Participants and Observers**

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## Spreading the Fear: The Informational..... (647)

References to the testimonies of participants and eyewitnesses of the events are a fairly common fraud strategy (Greenspan et al., 2014) used to influence the audience for manipulation purposes. The manipulators offer transmitted information on behalf of anonymous people, the supposedly eyewitnesses about these events in advance, passing the testimonies off as their own. The testimonies of the participants in the events give the text credibility and reasoning. Readers are more likely to trust the information emanating from an eyewitness than the constructed opinions of an expert or journalist. It seems to them that these are eligible to express their own independent opinions. For example, anchored in the general belief, "seeing is believing," there is a tendency to give "a visual representation" of an event through the eyewitness direct perception or participant of the event higher reliability and credibility.

5.a	فيما وصف شاهد عيان الوضع لـ موقع الحرة As an eyewitness described the situation for the Al-Hurra site
5.b	شاهد عيان يرصد الوضع من داخل بؤر انتشار كورونا في إيطاليا An eyewitness monitors the situation from within the Corona hotspot in Italy.

In 5.a, the eyewitness describes his personal experience which makes it obviously credible, whereas the eyewitness in 5. b cannot be credible for he continuously monitors the center of virus foci. For the sake of argument, it is reasonable to ask how come with the current preventive immobility in Italy? No one knows! The information source seems somewhat doubtful.

The term "Eyewitnesses" is used ostensibly for the purpose of activating the conspiracy effect scenario, along some falsified information. This often achieves negative and undesirable societal consequences on the audience (van der Linden, 2015). The conspiracy affects, at the unconscious level, , cause individuals to heat up feelings and emotions and conscious censorship to source credibility fades away. They become negatively dominated the *ostrich symptoms*.

### 3.2.2. Concealment Foreign Perspective

Making sure that information is conveyed clearly and accurately to non-English-speaking readers is an ethical necessity primarily in translation practices and journalism mainstream conduct. By default, the concealment or blocking of information is not a professional conduct in news-telling business. Instrumentally, however, some topics (especially negative ones) are deliberately not covered in the media. However, this foreign perspective bootstrapping is very subjectivized, as it represents a

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deliberate concealment of information. This embodies one of the instances of "lost in translation" consequences.

In examples 5 and 5 below, the information concealment strategy is an apparent attempt the writer of this news article quotes South China Morning Post news report on the preventive measure in Portuguese but keeps silent on the good side of the story

وضع رئيس البرتغال تحت الحجر ١٤ يوما للاشتباه بإصابته بفيروس كورونا  
5 - The Portuguese president has been under observation for 14 days on **suspicion of having coronavirus**

رئيس البرتغال مارسيلو ريبيلو دي سوزا تحت المراقبة لـ ١٤ يوما للتأكد من خلوه من فيروس كورونا

6- Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Souza, is **under ongoing check** for 14 days to ensure he is free of the Coronavirus.

The into-Arabic-translated version reports that the Portuguese president, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa has been put once under quarantine and second under ongoing check. The Portuguese president, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, in both assume the accusative mandatory role.

Coronavirus: Portugal's president self-isolates amid outbreak

President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, 71, has cancelled all public activities.

The office of Portugal's 71-year-old president said Sunday that he has cancelled all public activities and will stay at home amid the coronavirus outbreak.

President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa recently received a group of students from a school which has since been closed following the detection of a student with COVID-19. It added that the infected student wasn't included in the group that visited the presidential palace.

His office said that he decided to self-isolate "to provide an example of taking preventive measures while continuing to work at home."

However, after closely checking the original text in (7): the message text is "he decided to self-isolate" to provide an example of taking preventive measures while continuing to work at home.", where "he" referring back to the antecedent "The Portuguese president, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa" assume a nominative case, implying a self-oriented preventive measures taken by the president himself.

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However, no mention on being suspect of coronavirus case as the Arabic version plainly states "للاشتباه بإصابته بفيروس كورونا" / "on suspicion of being infected with the Coronavirus," "self-isolates amid outbreak" and "has cancelled all public activities."

Infidel translation is one way to achieve this end. In example no. (8), quoting the Daily Mail, information was forged via translation:

بالتفاصيل.. دراسة صينية: كورونا انقسم الى سلالتين ومن شفي قد يصاب مجدداً<sup>4</sup>

8- In details ... Chinese study: Corona split into two strains, and who was cured may be infected again.

**Original text:** The coronavirus has mutated into at least two separate strains since the outbreak began in December, according to Chinese scientists.

In this way, the perception of reality can be distorted, and the recipient's attitude by the concealment of information, resonating the misleading information, therefore, may escalate anxiety, fear and panic. concealment of information is another form of cognitive noise that distorts the perception of risk

### 3.2.3. Impersonated Accredited Perspective

For greater persuasiveness, impersonating an official accredited perspective when linked to hardly anonymous institution, high-rank department. The sender knows that their readers are unlikely to check the credibility of such an impersonated perspective. By making a verbalized profile on a basis for officially accredited worldview, it is assumed that it acquires a higher degree of trust: the source status is primed as a PROFILE (profile/figure) at the expense of his identity as (base/background), e.g., البرلمان/the Parliament in the headline in (9).

البرلمان يصدر توضيحاً بعد أنباء إصابة ١٠ من أعضائه بكورونا<sup>٥</sup>

**The Parliament** issues clarification after news that 10 of its members were infected with Corona.

Metonymy is a typical device for versatility and manipulative potential. It is a process that is schematically represented as "X is part of Y and X is used instead of Y" based on contiguity: The choice of "Parliament member" instead of the "actual speaker's name" is a motivated choice and implicit nomination of the perspective subject (information source). The metonymic modeling, using a collective reference, leads to the diffusion of responsibility for the subject perspective (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003: 63). So, the Parliament - instead of the speaker's name - is not just the substitution of one referent/name for

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another, but structural priming of a holistic conceptual knowledge structure, the Parliament house, and all of the events and activities associated with the government business. The metonymical expression semantically saturates the constructed worldview, making it more "voluminous". The manipulative effect is responsible for twisting the audience interpretive modeling and modality, consequently inducing anxiety judgements. Similar cases are the use of health official/ مسئول الصحة /مستول حكومي/ government official, بوزارة الصحة, etc.

### 3.2.4. Opaque-Sourced Information

It would not be difficult to argue that language use is a *joint activity* where contact strategies coordinate interactants' efforts. Information can come from a transparent source or an opaquely identified source. ONAs' messages, abiding by the Code of Professional Ethics and Code of Conduct, are expected to fully disclose information, allowing the readers to form a proper judgment of the weight to be given to a particular statement by giving them transparent information sourcing. To a greater or lesser extent, such news publications introduce a systematic approach of reporting elements and international corporate reporting standards. News publishers who resort to opaque conduct are characterized by a low level of information source disclosure, leaving readers with significant cognitive noise.

A perspective subject represented by an indefinite nominative should be considered as referentially opaque: perspective with an indefinite subject, verbalized by using indefinite pronoun. In traditional grammar, indefinite pronouns express categorical meaning, implying indefiniteness/ indeterminacy and uncertainty. Often, an allegedly informed source whose name and identity are anonymous, leading to the illusion of reality. In example (10), thanks to a domain category, an indefinite reference, i.e., "a medical source", where the perspective subject of the situational model remains referentially opaque. With the anonymous source of information and no verification possibility to confirm its identity or reliability, the content doesn't help activating negative modalities, such as uncertainty, fear and anxiety due to risks.

أفاد مصدر طبي، الثلاثاء، بتسجيل أول إصابة بفيروس كورونا في محافظة كربلاء<sup>١</sup>

0 - A **medical source stated**, on Tuesday, that it recorded the first infection with the Coronavirus in Karbala Governorate

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Although, the perspective subject, مصدر/source is lexically modified by the word “medical” to make it ostensibly reliable, the referent remains an anonymous source. The parameter of trust is not fully met as the perspective subject in (11) seems unverifiable for the author, himself, not to mention the targeted readers.

وكانت وسائل إعلام محلية قد أفادت بأن متظاهرين كانوا اغلقوا طريقاً يؤدي إلى معبر حدودي في محافظة ديالى شرق العراق خوفاً من انتشار فيروس كورونا<sup>٧</sup>

- 1- **Local media had reported** that demonstrators had blocked a road leading to a border crossing in Diyala province, in eastern Iraq, for fear of spreading the Coronavirus.

Another perspective formation with an indefinite nominative allows to completely eliminate any mention of an explicit perspective subject as a source. Attention is focused on action, the words of an unknown source. For example, in (12), initially, with the help of an ambiguous personal sentence: *According to informed sources*, the information source is modified, using detailing strategy,

حسب مصدر مطلع، الاحد، كشف عن قيام مكتب رئيس مجلس الوزراء العراقي بإجراءات خاصة لموظفين بالمكتب بشأن فيروس كورونا

- 2- **According to a well-informed source** revealed, on Sunday, the office of the Iraqi Prime Minister had made special procedures for employees of the office regarding the Coronavirus

### 3.2.5. Forged Authority Perspective of Information

ONAs go off-road with the desire to covertly influence the readers, due to low-level censorship, bypassing various modality representations (pro-government, independent and opposition) through verbally distorted information to the public. Such formulations are intended to change the recipient's attitude to events. Such self-representations, using verbally distorted information, diffuse inflicted responsibility for the forged information content and unverified perspective subject; however, they are typical for negative manipulation.

Here, sourcing the perspective of the news report narrative becomes a means of de-sourcing, especially when a generic reference is made to unnamed experts. Experts are specialists in the field, who give a professional opinion on a given issue. Therefore, their perspective in ONA provides an independent opinion to the addressee. More often, however, the name of the expert is not disclosed and the token itself is used in the plural, خبراء/experts, متخصصون/professionals, علماء/scientists, باحثون/researchers, etc. When the necessary measure of certainty is

missing, a deficit of information sourcing arises, leading to something close to rumours.

People can be influenced by a huge assortment of information from online news that distorts their perception of reality. People prefer to abandon reality and live in their own submission to unverified subjective judgments because they believe that they avoid the threat in this way: they develop an ostrich symptom "see, the ostrich effect" (Karlsson, Loewenstein & Seppi. 2009; Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch 2013). This Forged Authority Perspective acts as a trigger to uncertainty, anxiety, fear, and panic in the mind of individuals, for they form ill-formed risk perceptions of events. In other words, they fall under the negative dominance of an opaquely referenced perspective being embedded in a given ONA.

The certainty of the ontological existence requires hermeneutic levels, leading to the compensation and comprehension of the integrity of the referents. For instance, in (13), "Iraqi experts have suggested that Baghdad's oil exports will be affected by the expansion of the Corona virus's outbreak in China and abroad," who are these خبراء عراقيون / Iraqi experts? Do they exist at all? Nobody knows. The detaining strategy to overstate the competency (expertise) is used to increase the status of the message source, to create the appearance of reliability of the information. In the comments of experts, as a rule, fear, warning, anxiety, the emotional background is created around the event: as experts predict.

رجح خبراء عراقيون تأثر صادرات بغداد من النفط إلى بكين، مع اتساع بؤرة انتشار فيروس كورونا المستجد في الصين وخارجه<sup>1</sup>

3- **Iraqi experts** have suggested that Baghdad's oil exports will be affected by the expansion of the Corona virus's outbreak in China and abroad.

As a persuasive strategy, experts accumulated knowledge and experience is supposed to assume higher accuracy reliability and virtually achieve higher credibility to persuade the readers of a constructed perception of the event. This makes these "وتحدث عن تفاصيل وأرقام مرعبة" / **terrifying details and numbers** really terrifying. With the presence of a seemingly chaotic layer of referential ontological traces, the readers will not be able to challenge the forged competency or prove the otherwise as in (14).

نشرت وكالة بريطانية تحقيقاً سلط الضوء على الواقع الصحي في العراق وتحدث عن تفاصيل وأرقام مرعبة

- 4- A British agency published an investigation that highlighted the health situation in Iraq and spoke of **terrifying details and numbers**.

Mostly, if I can say, checking such information is not a likely option. The reader has to rely on unknown sources whose names are not communicated. ONA messages have become a manipulative means of anxiety, fear and panic arousal rather than an awareness promotion. It is about how we should feel rather than how we should act. Sourcing the news piece also becomes a means of de-sourcing information when reference is opaquely disclosed.

#### 4. Conclusion

The conducted discursive analyses of the collected data from online mass media news platforms demonstrated that news authorship might resort to two manipulative strategies and cognitive mechanism of perspectivization, to construct the perception of the readers of threat and risk realities and events such as the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. It is concluded that the negative mode of manipulation arouses adverse cognitive COVID-19 outcomes such as anxiety, fear and panic by failing to meet the professional criteria of news, i.e., objectivity, credibility and reliability of information sourcing.

The study found that the conceptual organization of the ONA narrative is activated by the cognitive mechanisms of perspectivization, which are interrelated and interdependent and can be involved simultaneously. Cognitive mechanisms, being tools of the interpretive process of operating with knowledge, provide the structure and content of the narrative.

ONA discourse strategies can be ordered according to the scale of "**objectivity-subjectivity**," of conveying the meaning. The scale of objective-subjective ONA information relates to the individual's organization of the inner space of the statement, the semantic space of the message, the strategies are:

- **a strategy of detailing**, the essence of which is to give the recipient new knowledge, new ideas about the subject of speech, to inform about a particular position on the covered issue;
- **a strategy of controlling a topic**,
- **information and interpretation strategy** present information, accompanied by its interpretation;
- **a strategy of assessment and truth abiding/evading**.

- *the strategy of logical persuasion* is focused on convincing the recipient to agree with the chosen speaking opinion, to accept his point of view;

- *a strategy of appealing to feelings*.

They are based on the principle of highlighting specific characteristics of informative and manipulative conceptual content. The study of the perspectivization mechanism as a defining vector for constructing meanings on the scale of the entire ONA narrative corresponds to the modern trend of analysing the pragmatic aspects of communication- namely, perspective multiplicity, perspective shifts, linguistic and stylistic fuzziness, redundancy, evasiveness, and lack of integrity. This led manipulative effects that are responsible for twisting the readers' crisis interpretive modeling and healthy worldviews construction, consequently induces fear, anxiety and panic during the time of COVID-19.

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2 <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/new-coronavirus-stable-hours-surfaces>

3 <http://www.non14.net/133462>

4 <https://yesiraq.com/بالتفاصيل.. دراسة صينية: كورونا انقسم الى سلالتين ومن شفي قد يصاب مجدداً>

5 <https://www.nasnews.com/البرلمان يصدر توضيحاً بعد أنباء إصابة ١٠ من أعضائه بكورونا>

6 <https://www.alsumaria.tv/news/مصدر طبي، الثلاثاء، بتسجيل أول إصابة بفيروس كورونا في محافظة كربلاء>

7 <https://www.dw.com/ar/.../a-52654079>

8 <https://www.alhurra.com/a/.../532735.html>

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