WHO ACHIEVED COVID-19 SUCCESS?
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE COMMUNICATION STYLES, RHETORIC
AND CRISIS RESPONSE OF THREE PRIME MINISTERS AND WHAT WE CAN
LEARN FROM THE LEADERSHIP OF AUSTRALIA, CANADA AND NEW ZEALAND

by

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A Major Research Project presented to Ryerson University

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Who achieved COVID-19 Success? A comparative analysis of the communication styles, rhetoric, and crisis response of three prime ministers and what we can learn from the leadership of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand

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Abstract

The coronavirus crisis of 2020/21 has been the largest global crisis in living memory. By summer 2021, nearly 200,000,000 cases of COVID-19 had been reported worldwide and more than 4,000,000 people died (John Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Centre, 2021). The governments of Australia and New Zealand, led by Prime Ministers Scott Morrison and Jacinda Ardern, implemented an early pandemic response that clearly communicated what the situation was and why it was crucial to act immediately, leading to a significantly reduced number of deaths and cases. In contrast, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was delayed in his initial response. His messaging was largely focused on offering financial support and incentives as opposed to adding context to the situation. This study aims to offer a preliminary understanding of the communication strategies and tactics that were used by the Australian and New Zealand government leaders to drastically reduce the number of COVID-19 case counts and deaths in their countries.

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Dedication

This paper was inspired by POLS 419 “Political Communications,” a fourth- year seminar class at Queen’s University and taught by Dr. Jonathan Rose, to whom I wish to attribute this paper.

I would also like to recognize the more than 4.3 million individuals and their families worldwide who have lost their lives as a result of COVID-19, including the 26, 673 Canadians, 967 Australians and 26 New Zealanders (COVID-19 Dashboard, John Hopkins University, 2021).

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Introduction

When a new virus began to circulate around the globe in early 2020, it appeared to take everyone, including scientists, government leaders and health care practitioners, by surprise. Yet medical scientists have been sounding alarm bells on the likelihood of a global pandemic for more than twenty years. For example, the virus caused by H5N1, more commonly known as bird flu, caught scientists' attention when it was first discovered in 2006, and it was observed that a potential outbreak of this virus could become "an efficient human-to-human transmitter" (Bruine de bruin et al., 2006). At this time in 2006, scientists predicted that there was a 10% chance of an influenza pandemic occurring within the next 18 months. As many as 50% were predicting that a pandemic was three and a half years away while 90% of scientists estimated that the next pandemic was fifteen years away (Bruine de bruin et al., 2006). When asked about the actual likelihood of a pandemic in his TED talk, epidemiologist and co-author of the aforementioned study Larry Brilliant answered that "90% [of the world's top epidemiologists] said they thought that there'd be a pandemic within your children or grandchildren's lifetime" (Brilliant, 2006).

Since the emergence of bird flu in 2006, and SARS before that, it became clear to epidemiologists that the world was at risk of a global pandemic. However, the lack of pandemic preparedness in the United States was becoming well established. In 2007, Pulitzer winner Laurie Garrett gave a TED talk following the emergence of bird flu in the United States. "Nobody knows who's in charge," she says after summing up various pandemic exercise drills. "Nobody knows the chain of command," (Garret, 2007). The need for a national pandemic preparedness plan was starting to be recognized, but what that might specifically look like had yet to be conceived.

One year later in 2008, author Barbara Reynolds, MA, from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) wrote "among potential crises facing the United States today,

the one most likely to directly involve the greatest number of persons is a major infectious respiratory disease outbreak such as a pandemic influenza,” (Reynolds & Quinn, 2008, p. 13).

Perhaps the most famous warning of a global pandemic came in 2015, when Microsoft founder Bill Gates delivered his TED talk: “today the greatest risk of global catastrophe looks like this,” he says as he points to a microscopic image of a virus. “Not missiles, but microbes. We are not ready for the next epidemic” (Gates, 2015).

Less than five years after the Gates TED Talk, news of a new virus reached the World Health Organization (WHO), delivered by media statement by the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in The People’s Republic of China on December 31, 2019, warning of a “cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown causes” in the City of Wuhan (WHO, 2021). On January 9, 2020, China declared that the new outbreak was caused by a novel coronavirus; on January 15, the first accounts of the virus appearing outside of China were being reported and by January 30, the WHO had “declared the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern” (WHO, 2021).

The purpose of this Major Research Project is to offer a comparative analysis of pandemic response effectiveness by three world leaders to determine a) how strategic communications can help contain and mitigate the spread of a coronavirus; and b) what lessons countries and political leaders can learn to better prepare themselves should another public health or similar crisis arise at some point in the future. The leaders chosen for this research project will include Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand; Scott Morrison, Prime Minister of Australia; and Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada. It will seek to determine what role government communications played in national public health initiatives against the novel coronavirus SARS-COV-2, more popularly known as COVID-19, and how, despite scientists’ early warnings, some countries defeated the new coronavirus early on while others have had considerably more problems with their emergency

management, as determined by COVID-19 case counts and deaths since the beginning of the pandemic up until the time of this writing. As of June 30, 2021, there have been a total of 181, 521,067 confirmed cases of COVID-19 globally, including 3,937,437 reported deaths (WHO, 2021). Table 1 shows the numbers in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand effective June 30, 2021:

Table 1 - *Number of COVID-19 cases and deaths per country – June 30, 2021*

Country	Cases	Case rate	Deaths	Death rate
Australia	30, 562	0.12%	910	0.0035%
Canada	1, 414, 134	3.7%	26,238	0.7%
New Zealand	2, 386	0.05%	26	0.0006%

As demonstrated above, the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Australia and New Zealand are significantly lower than in Canada after more than one year of the virus first appearing. While lower numbers may also be attributed to factors such as geography, climate, and demographics, this study will show that the government of Scott Morrison in Australia and the government of Jacinda Ardern in New Zealand were able to successfully communicate the importance of drastic policy changes to reduce the number of infections in their countries.

This study draws on research from the fields of crisis communication, health communication and the study of public leadership to establish a framework to determine whether the prime ministers' public addresses successfully implemented effective and persuasive crisis communication management. Additionally, it will draw on research in the study of rhetoric to further make conclusions about the persuasiveness of the prime ministers' public statements to their respective national audiences.

Background

COVID-19 in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand

This study was conducted to address why some countries achieved greater, relative success in obliterating COVID-19 from their respective jurisdictions, while others struggled to contain the virus. According to data from its public health website, Canada reached its peak on January 4, 2021, when it reported nearly 10,000 new cases on that day¹ (Government of Canada, 2021). At the same time, the median number of new reported daily cases in Australia during that first week of January was 24 with a total active case count of 279 (Australian Government, Department of Health, 2021) while New Zealand was relatively COVID-free in January, until detecting “the first case of COVID-19 in the community for more than two months” on January 24, 2021 (AFP staff, CTV News, 2021).

One obvious point of contention here is that Canada’s January peak occurred in the middle of winter, while it was summer in the southern hemisphere. To address this argument, it is necessary to recognize that Canada also experienced a significant drop in daily case counts in summer 2020, reporting only 251 new cases on June 27, 2020 (Government of Canada, 2021). That same week, Australia was reporting an average of 30 new cases each day with a total of 7,641 confirmed cases at that point (Australian Government, Department of Health). On June 8, 2020, New Zealand became the first country to declare themselves to be COVID-19 free, with Prime Minister Ardern declaring in a public address that “today is day 26 of alert level 2 and day 17 without any new cases of COVID-19 in the country” (MinHealthNZ, 2020), although there was a brief uptick in new cases that (New Zealand) winter (Canadian summer) but never surpassing 25 new cases a day (Ministry of Health New Zealand, 2021). Despite seasonal differences, the data clearly indicates that Canada lagged

¹ Up until June 30, 2021 as the COVID-19 pandemic remains ongoing as of the time of this writing.

behind its southern hemisphere counterparts in containing and mitigating the virus. More geographic and demographic differences between these three countries will be addressed in the following section.

Government and demographics

The countries of Australia, Canada and New Zealand were chosen for this study because of their vastly different outcomes in pandemic management, as the numbers clearly indicate. Further, they were identified because of their use of English as the dominant spoken language and finally, because of their similar parliamentary structures: each of these countries are governed by a prime minister, who serves as the head of government and each formally recognizes the British Monarch, currently Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, as its Head of State, who is represented by an appointed Governor General (Parliament of Australia, Parliament of New Zealand and Parliament of Canada, 2021). As of September 30, 2020, the population of Australia was 25,693,059 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021) while the population of Canada at the time of this writing was 38, 318, 481 (Statistics Canada, 2021). As the smallest of these three countries, the population of New Zealand as of the 2018 census was just 4,699,755, however Auckland, that country's largest city, has a population of 1,500,000 (Stats New Zealand, 2019), which to put in comparative terms is slightly larger than that of Calgary, Canada (1, 340, 000) but smaller than Montreal, Canada, (1,780,000) (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Climate

Notable differences in average temperatures and climate also exist between these three countries. The east and southern coasts of Australia, which include the cities of Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, experienced an average summer temperature of 27°C to 30°C in January 2021 with places reaching highs of 39°C to 45°C further inland (Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology, 2021). Winter temperatures in June 2020 saw

temperatures as low as 12°C along the southern coast, rising to as high as 30°C in the northern part of the country (Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology, 2021).

Temperatures in New Zealand in January 2021 were more temperate, with temperatures in eastern New Zealand averaging from 26°C to 28°C, with the hottest temperature being recorded at 39.3°C. New Zealand's winter temperature in June 2020 was a high of 23°C and a low of -12.3°C (NIWA, 2021).

Temperatures in Canada can vary depending on region, but generally the country experiences “short summers of up to three months” and “long, frigid winters” (weather-atlas, 2021). Summer temperatures can reach up to 37.8°C and drop as low as -40°C in the winter (2021). In 2020, the maximum recorded temperature in Toronto, Canada was 35.5°C while the recorded low temperature was -20.6°C (Toronto Weather Stats, 2021).

While many studies have shown that weather conditions are “one of the top predictors of many respiratory viral infectious diseases such as seasonal influenza and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) coronavirus,” (Sahoo et al, 2020, p. 1061), there is little agreement among scholars on “the potential for temperature and humidity to control COVID-19 dynamics or whether tropical-humid climates suppress transmissibility” (2020, p.1061). While some may point to differences in climate and temperature between Canada and its southern counterparts, Sahoo et al. (2020) use data presented in myriad studies to conclude that “weather effect is minimal to slow down the transmission of COVID-19 and that the early phase outbreak, which began in countries in a colder climate, may have been a mere coincidence” (p.1063).

Therefore, this study attempts to show that despite being smaller countries demographically with considerably warmer climates than Canada, the Governments of Australia and New Zealand were able to achieve success in controlling and mitigating the novel coronavirus largely due to effective and persuasive communication strategies and by

using communications to justify the need for what some may consider to be extreme policy measures.

Literature Review

The literature review characterizes effective and persuasive forms of crisis communication, government communications, and the rhetoric of effective speech making, which includes written verbiage and visual communication as it pertains to government communications.

Crisis Communications

A crisis can often be defined as “a sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organization’s operations and poses both a financial and a reputational threat” (Coombs 2007 p. 164). On a more macro level, a crisis “is a serious threat to the basic structures or fundamental values and norms of the social system which, under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances, necessitates making critical decisions” (Deitchman, 2013 p. 535). A crisis must involve clear information that addresses what the situation is and what is being done to protect the people who may be at risk or harm (Coombs, 2007). According to Coombs (2007), the number one priority in any crisis situation should be the safety and protection of its stakeholders from physical or psychological damage, which must take precedence over the reputation of the organization. In the case of a global pandemic, the organization at risk of experiencing reputational damage is the government leading the pandemic response, while the stakeholders at risk of experiencing physical or psychological harm are that country’s citizens. “Effective crisis management,” according to Boin et al. (2013), “begins with a shared recognition that a threat has emerged which requires immediate attention” (p. 82). Early response, then, is critical in employing an effective crisis communication strategy. It is equally important that leaders “arrive at a collective understanding of the nature, characteristics, consequences, and potential scope and effects of an evolving threat” in order for them “to make informed decisions” (p. 82).

Building trust between a government and its people is necessary in ensuring compliance, and this can only be done through the clear and transparent dissemination of information (Brownson & Burke, 2020). A number of frameworks have been offered as a way to guide professional communicators in achieving the desired level of trust between governments and the citizens which they represent. As Reynolds and Quinn (2008) make clear: “In a crisis, the ability of response officials to communicate in a way that connects with those listening may mean the difference between life and death for some people as they choose whether to follow the guidance” (p. 13). Crucially, building trust and establishing credibility with audiences are of the utmost importance in managing a crisis situation, as people will be more inclined to follow advice and policies directed by people whom they trust than those that arouse suspicion. In order to establish trust and credibility with their stakeholders, leaders will have to publicly demonstrate empathy, caring, competence, expertise, honesty, openness, dedication and commitment, as these are “essential elements of persuasive communications” (Reynolds & Quinn, 2008, p. 13). Leaders can work to espouse trust and achieve credibility through careful consideration of their visual appearance, including wardrobe choice, body language and facial expressions (Koppensteiner et al, 2015) and through their chosen words, voice intonations and pitch (Nagel et al, 2012). If implemented successfully, leaders will be able to communicate the “urgency of disaster communication” and “provide information to allow an individual, stakeholder or an entire community to make the best possible decisions about their well-being within nearly impossible time constraints and help people ultimately to accept the imperfect nature of choices during the crisis” (Reynolds & Quinn, 2008, p. 14).

Lee and Li (2020) agree that employing strategic communications during a public health crisis is important “for organizations to build quality relationships with publics and influence their behaviours in a way that is desired by organizations” and that “transparency is regarded

as a key element in contemporary strategic communications” (p. 2). Ultimately, effective communications can “guide the public, the news media, healthcare providers and other groups in responding appropriately to outbreak situations and complying with public health recommendations” (Reynolds & Quinn 2008, p. 14). Reynolds demonstrates how effective communications can be achieved by introducing seven “key risk communication concepts,” summarized below (Reynolds & Quinn, 2008):

- 1) People need information about what is known and unknown, as well as guidance on decision making.
- 2) Coordination of messaging between all levels of government is essential in avoiding any confusion. Failure to do so may undermine trust or raise fear or anxiety in the population.
- 3) Guide community members on how to protect themselves and their family.
- 4) Information provided should be technically correct.
- 5) Information should minimize speculation, state strengths and limitations of the current data and avoid over-reassurance of the public.
- 6) Must train healthcare workers and health educators to work in media relations.
- 7) Timely and transparent dissemination of accurate, science-based information about pandemic influenza and the progress of the response can build public trust and confidence.

Ultimately, the accuracy, timeliness and transparency of information, coupled with the consistency of messaging and the credibility of the speaker (usually determined by education, job title and years of experience) will effectively guide the public towards proper decision making that is in the best interest of the collective and overall public safety.

Glen et al. (2021) echo Reynold and Quinn’s’ “key communication concepts” by emphasizing the essential role that leaders occupy in times of crisis. This includes working to

understand the problem and then adapting to it, followed by a need for decisive and hierarchical leadership that can strategically plan and implement solutions to restore their jurisdiction to normalcy (Glen et al., 2021). Citing Boin (2005), Glen et al (2021) lists five ‘core tasks’ which should be implemented by leaders during a crisis situation: sensemaking, decision making, meaning making, crisis termination and learning. Leaders’ abilities to recognize that a crisis exists, accurately determine “what is happening in real time” (2021, p. 83) and then to make “critical choices and [coordinate] the response network in the face of uncertainty and political risks” (2021, p. 84) is “essential in how they later managed (or mismanaged) it” (2021, p. 85). The challenge, according to Glen et al (2021), is that it is difficult to communicate “a persuasive narrative in a context of overwhelming amounts of information and uncertainty” (p. 85) and to do so while also maintaining trust and credibility.

One of the main differences between crisis communication during a pandemic and an organizational crisis are that pandemics are often a lengthy and ongoing process, rather than coming to an end within a matter of days or weeks (Jong, 2021). Jong affirms the need for clear communications so the public knows what to do to help reduce transmission, however no guidelines or dedicated framework on crisis management currently exists (2021). In order to counter this gap in the research, Jong proposes a five “domain” guideline of his own. To summarize, a strong strategic plan must first make sense of the difficult situation and answer the question “what is going on?” as it “is a crucial task to understand public needs, define communication goals and enable practitioners to feel better prepared for the road that lies ahead” (Jong, 2021, p. 5). Secondly, it is the role of public leaders to communicate the broader impact of a crisis to citizens, media and stakeholders, preferably with “a convincing storyline to strategically prepare the public to participate in measures for prevention and containment” (Jong, 2021, p.5). Showing empathy with workers should be an important part of this strategy, and as Jong indicates, “messaging should respond to the emotional needs of

the threatened people, as statements by political leaders can have a direct influence on public emotions” (2021).

Writing in the years following the H1N1 outbreak of 2009, Abraham (2017) recognized the need for more research into how communication professionals can better understand how communications can be used to build trust. According to Abraham, communication needs change during a pandemic, as it shifts from communicating to what people need to do to reduce transmission in the early stages, such as hand washing and social distancing, to then reassuring people of the necessity and safety of vaccinations (2017). The initial emergency response will then shift again into a more long-term communications plan that emphasizes basic health promotion (2017).

Government Communications

As demonstrated above, an effective crisis communication strategy depends on the organization’s ability to communicate clearly and transparently to its stakeholders. As Charteris-Black (2011) writes, “language is the lifeblood of politics...politics is about building trust” (p.4). Governments are responsible for delivering communications to its constituents during a public health crisis. More specifically, it is the government leader who has the responsibility to act quickly and decisively. Referencing Howlett (2009), Glenn (2014) summarizes government communications as “an information or knowledge-based resource that is provided or withheld from societal actors in order to influence and direct policy actions” (p.5). In instances such as a pandemic, it can be seen as “necessary and acceptable for governments to advocate proposals to educate and engage citizens in policy development” (2014, p. 9) such as to encourage handwashing or social distancing, but there must be a balance between providing information and delivering propaganda (2014). How this may be achieved is an ongoing debate that has only been intensified by “the advent of political marketing, the 24/7 media cycle and the information and technology revolution”

(2014, p. 9). Persuading audiences on the effectiveness of new policy measures while justifying their need can be further complicated by “citizens’ low trust in government...which has a negative impact on government performance and capacity” (Alon-Barkat, 2019, p. 77). To counter this, Alon-Barkat (2019) cites studies which suggests that symbolic elements, such as “agencies’ names and brand logos, figures, images, and celebrity endorsements” that are “entangled in government communications...may cause citizens to view government organizations more favourably and trust them,” due to a “psychological mechanism of transfer of affect or ‘evaluative conditioning’” (p. 78).

Beyond political marketing and advertising, it is equally if not more important that politicians remember that their outward appearance and non-verbal behaviour contribute to the way that they are judged, as “non-verbal and salient cues are assumed to be processed efficiently and easily remembered and for this reason they can dominate over verbal information” (Koppensteiner et al., 2015, p. 21). According to Koppensteiner et al (2015), non-verbal behaviours can include body gestures, variations in intonation and eye contact. The more of these a politician demonstrates, the more charisma he or she is assumed to have (p. 21). Further, Koppensteiner et al. (2015) confirm that “static visual cues,” such as “clothing styles, physiognomic features and facial expressions...contribute to overall impressions of a person” (p.27). Finally, it was shown that audiences perceived speakers “who produced expansive vertical movements (i.e., mostly up and down movements of the hands)” to be more extraverted while “speakers who showed less such vertical movements and a greater overall variation in motion amplitudes tended to be judged as agreeable” (2015, p.27).

In a similar study on audiences’ judgment of political candidates, Nagel et al. “investigates the role of verbal, visual and vocal communication in the process of political impression formation” (2012, p. 833). According to Nagel et al, 55% of impression formation

is based on visual cues, 38% on vocal cues, and only 7% on the verbally transmitted content of a message (2012). These findings are similar to Koppensteiner's argument that non-verbal communications, which here is referred to as visual communications, forms the majority of political impression formation. A speaker's gaze, smile and gestures "seem to be especially important in impression formation and persuasion" (Nagel et al, 2012, p. 835). Specifically, one's gaze can communicate empathy, closeness or trustworthiness, but can also communicate more negative sentiments, such as dominance, or otherwise reduce sympathy (2012). Smiles on the other hand are generally regarded as being positive and can evoke feelings of sympathy and trust (2012). Speakers who smile are often perceived as being more persuasive than speakers who do not smile (2012). Finally, gestures communicate self-assurance and dominance, and speakers who use gestures are perceived to be more persuasive than their counterparts who do not use gestures. In terms of vocal communication, Nagel et al determines that speakers with a lower pitch voice are generally perceived as being more credible than those who speak with a higher pitch (2012).

The rhetorical strategy, which is incorporated into the verbally transmitted content of the message, will be discussed in the next section.

Language, speeches, and rhetoric

In her book on political speech-making, Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1988) writes "among the components that eloquent speeches have in common is the existence of a memorable statement that capsulizes the speech and serves as the hook on which we hang to memory" (p. 90). These "short memorable and quotable phrases," also known as "sound bites" are effective because "they encapsulate arguments by compressing a large idea into a small number of words" (Charteris-Black, 2011, p. 9). They are therefore "highly efficient" in popularizing or summarizing a political speech by the media, thereby gaining the "viral effect" (p.9). Repetition, then, is one of the most commonly used rhetorical tactics in political

speeches, and speeches are often titled after that memorable phrase (Jamieson, 1988). Further, persuasive arguments constructed around a crisis must consider the ethos (credibility of character), the pathos (appeal to emotions) and the logos (appeal to reason) (Lim, 2019). For television audiences, “dress and gesture are important...and eye and mouth movements are important in television because of close-up frames (Charteris-Black, 2011, p. 3-4). Therefore, a politician must “know how to use a particular medium for maximum effect” (p. 4).

Referring back to Nagel et al (2012), the logos includes the presentation of numbers, historical facts and, as this author would argue, projected facts. Emotional appeals on the other hand have been proven to enhance the persuasiveness of a message (2012), while “appealing to logos yielded [a] more positive attitude, higher perceptions of credibility of and trust in the organization than appealing to pathos when crisis involvement was high” (Lim, 2019, p. 165). Lim (2019) also shows that governments “must communicate with confidence and without ambivalence” (p.159), highlighting assertiveness as a means of evaluating crisis response messages. For Lim (2019), four criteria to be met in crises response messaging are promptness, assertiveness, reliability and transparency (PART).

For Shulman (2020), writing precisely and efficiently justifies the use of jargon in public communications, however leaders and speech makers may forgo the use of large, complicated words in favour of metaphors. When it comes to writing science communications, which includes writing about public health and safety, it is important that the information conveyed “is in the most precise and efficient way possible” (Shulman et al, 2020, p.1). A metaphor, as Charteris-Black (2011) writes, “is an effective rhetorical means for persuading because metaphors work by transferring what is already known to understand things that are less well known,” such as complicated or non-sensical situations that are generally beyond human comprehension (p.18). Metaphors “provide a frame through which

words from a literal source domain are used to interpret a lesser known, abstract target domain” (p. 18). Jargon, then, is often avoided in public communications due to the challenges audiences can have in dissecting the material. Metaphors on the other hand are a popular alternative to jargon as they are an effective means of persuasion (2011), but jargon may continue to be the most precise and accurate way to communicate (Shulman, 2020). Shulman et al (2020) argues that despite the “disengaging effect on audiences” that jargon may have, the use of jargon in public communications can be a critical tool for crisis communicators “to convey factual, precise information that will also engage the general public” (p.6), which is especially useful during a time of crisis (2020).

In order to help mitigate panic during a crisis such as a pandemic, St. Amant (2021) suggests that technical writers should help audiences rewrite their script to avoid the “cognitive disconnect” that many are experiencing (p. 127). According to St. Amant (2021), it is easier for people to do complex things in familiar spaces, and that many of the activities that people are accustomed to engaging in are reflected by “an underlying cognitive model, a subconscious script that guides behaviour” (2021, p. 127). Such a script includes the following “standard components: scene, entry conditions, sequence, roles and props.” (2021, p. 128-129). As St. Amant explains (2021), “if any element is missing or does not meet our expectations, it derails our script, shifting us from autopilot to aware-of-everything mode” (p.129). By recognizing whether a script has changed, how it has changed and whether a new script may be needed, crisis communicators can help to maintain calm during a crisis (2021).

Methodology

The focus of this study's research is on the early stages of pandemic response, beginning with the first public address by each prime minister, and ending in March, 2020. These early public addresses were chosen because they would ultimately set the tone of the messaging, policy implementation and public attitudes towards the pandemic in the months to come.

To begin, a YouTube search was conducted with key words "[prime minister's name]" and "March 2020," which revealed a list of the relevant content. As this study is focusing exclusively on political speeches and media interviews, all content that included snapshots or sound bites by the media were disqualified immediately. A second key word search which included "[prime minister's name]" and "February 2020" was conducted, which revealed earlier public addresses by Prime Ministers Ardern and Morrison, but not Prime Minister Trudeau. Only content where COVID-19 was directly referenced were included in the study. A list of dates and YouTube links was drawn up, which in total includes nine public addresses made by Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau between March 11 and March 25, 2020; seven public addresses made by New Zealand Prime Minister Ardern between February 23 and March 25, 2020, which also includes two television interviews and one Facebook Live video; and six public addresses by Prime Minister Morrison between February 27 and March 29, 2020, for a total of 23 public speeches or appearances where the prime minister addressed the nation on COVID-19. These speeches were then transcribed and formatted for the purpose of coding and analysing data.

Next, a close analysis of each public address was conducted and organized into a spreadsheet, where the date the speech was made appears across the top and where various rhetorical tropes were listed from top to bottom. These tropes were further divided into the categories of visual, vocal and verbal communication as discussed in the studies by Nagel et

al (2012) and by Koppensteiner (2015) to gauge whether or not the leader's overall messaging can be regarded as potentially effective in his or her overall crisis response.

Specifically, the analysis was broken down as follows:

- a) Visual: facial features, dress, television frame, location, semantics, gaze, smile, gestures/body language
- b) Vocal: Tone, pitch, intensity
- c) Verbal: Logos, emotional appeals, repetition, metaphors

Detailed notes were made about the visual elements of the presentation, including how the prime minister was shot on camera, where the prime minister was speaking from as well as any symbolic elements that appeared in the frame and the overall appearance and mannerisms of the prime minister as he or she was speaking. The scripts were analysed with particular attention to determine the types of language and rhetorical devices that were used, and the overall tone of the messaging. The vocal elements of the study, including the speaker's pitch, pacing and tone of voice were scrutinized less as those elements are beyond the scope of this project.

Further, referring to the studies by Reynolds and Quinn (2008), Glen et al (2021) and Jong (2021), close attention was made to the overall content and delivery of the messaging to determine how well the overall problem was identified and communicated, whether the prime minister was able to accurately determine "what is happening in real time" (Glen, 2021 p. 83) and how well each prime minister was able to communicate the answer to "what is going on?" (Jong, 2021, p. 5). Finally, the analysis identifies areas where the prime ministers attempt to show empathy with their respected audiences.

To gain clarity on the words and messaging that was used, a Voyant Tools search was conducted to determine which words and phrases appeared most often in the speaker's script, which also allowed the researcher to identify any trends of words or phrases that appeared

throughout the overall timeline of February and March 2020. Further, each of the prime ministers' responses to journalists' questions were included in the corpus as appropriate. The questions were omitted, as were any responses given by a secondary participant. For simplicity purposes, Justin Trudeau's French script was eliminated from the Voyant Tools corpus. Finally, notes were made of the transcripts' most frequent words and how many times each word or phrase appeared in each transcript.

Limitations

The dates listed below reflect when the public address was posted to YouTube, which may not be the true date the remarks were given. Prime Minister Trudeau alternates between speaking French and English, and while the time stamp includes the remarks in its entirety, only the English version was analysed for the purpose of this study. The list of public addresses on the coronavirus may not be exhaustive and the prime ministers may have spoken publicly on the matter on a date that was not captured by the study. Further, while brief mention was made on each country's geography, climate and demographics, the overall historical context of each country, public trust and reliability of government institutions as well as overall public opinion and public sentiment towards each prime minister, were not considered. Finally, the prime ministers' pre-existing reputations in their countries according to polling data were also not included.

Findings

Table 2 shows the dates on which each prime minister addressed the nation, as well as the total length of the press conference or interview.

Table 2 - *Prime ministers' public addresses to the nation, Feb – March 2020*

Jacinda Ardern, NZ	Scott Morrison, Australia	Justin Trudeau, Canada
February 23 Morning show interview 9:10	February 27 Morning show interview 6:30	March 11 Press conference 35:56
March 16 Press conference 34:30	February 27 Press conference 8:56	March 13 Press conference 23:33
March 19 Press conference 10:55	March 17 Press conference 29:07	March 16 Press conference 24:52
March 20 Direct address to the nation 8:31	March 22 Press conference 30:00	March 17 Press conference 21:03
March 23 Press conference 50:55	March 24 Press conference 49:20	March 18 Press conference 30:43
March 23 Morning show interview 9:25	March 29 Press conference 29:30	March 19 Press conference 20:47
March 25 Facebook Live video from home 2:10		March 20 Press conference 22:11
		March 23 Press conference 24:43
		March 25 Press conference 27:52

The following section will break down the three prime ministers' public addresses from March 2020 even further. Their styles and tactics will be analysed in this section separately and will be further discussed in a comparative framework in the Discussion portion of the paper.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

Visual Presentation

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's first appearance on the coronavirus was on March 11, 2020, at a joint press conference. Trudeau stands at a podium with three key cabinet ministers and Canada's chief medical officer. Seven Canadian flags adorn the background. He reads from a prepared statement for just over seven minutes then takes questions from the media for another twenty minutes.

Figure 1 - *Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addresses Canadians at a press conference on March 11, 2020*

He continues to hold daily press conferences with the media following this initial address, eight of which will be analysed for the purpose of this study, occurring between March 13 and March 25. Each time he appears alone outside his home in Ottawa at a podium in front of the media. His solo appearances reinforce the message of self-isolation to those who have come into close contact with someone who tested positive for the coronavirus. He presents himself formally, wearing a suit and tie but without any Canadian flags or symbols, beyond a maple leaf engraved in the podium. The camera zooms in on him straight on; he is positioned in the centre of the frame from the chest up. There is very little movement or body language,

beyond Trudeau's move to turn to the next page. Each press conference is visually consistent: same backdrop, same podium, and same style of dress.

Figure 2 - *Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks from his home in Ottawa on March 13, 2020*

Vocal Presentation

Prime Minister Trudeau speaks slowly and calmly from his written script, providing occasional glances up to the camera. He begins with “good morning” and alternates his speech between English and French. Trudeau’s intonation is generally consistent throughout his speeches, although he does add emphasis on key points, for example, his direct instruction “if you’re abroad, it’s time for you to come home” (cpac, 2020) on March 16.

Verbal Presentation

The following table demonstrates key words that were spoken multiple times at press conferences throughout the March 11 to March 25 period. The corpus does not include French translations and does not include questions posed by journalists.

Table 3 - Most common words used by Prime Minister Trudeau, March 11 – March 25, 2020

Key Word	March 11	March 13	March 16	March 17
We	61	70	50	46
Our	30	22	30	32
Canadians, Canadian, Canada	24, 5, 13	30, 1, 8	21, 7, 13	26, 2, 10
Government	9	5	5	4
Support	12	7	7	5
Health	19	23	18	8
Measures	2	10	21	19
Safe	12	14	13	7
Virus	19	6	3	3
COVID	7	4	4	3

Key Word	March 18	March 19	March 20	March 23	March 25
We	50	35	40	44	55
Our	28	11	14	17	15
Canadians, Canadian, Canada	14, 7, 14	26, 0, 4	13, 5, 9	12, 4, 9	11, 2, 16
Government	10	4	5	5	4
Support	15	11	4	6	5
Health	5	4	4	5	2
Measures	16	7	4	7	4

Safe	2	4	4	7	9
Virus	2	2	1	4	2
COVID	11	5	3	4	4

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern

Visual Presentation

New Zealand Prime Minister Ardern was arguably the most diverse leader in terms of her communication presentations. As demonstrated previously, Ardern's initial address to her country was in a one-on-one media interview on breakfast television on February 23. She appears via webcam from Auckland in a separate frame from her interviewer, wearing a black floral blouse, turtleneck, and dangling earrings. The tone is casual and light-hearted; the prime minister opens with a big smile and continues to answer questions with enthusiasm, as demonstrated by her constant hand motions and high energy.

Figure 3 - *New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern appears on a morning show interview on February 23, 2020*

Jacinda Ardern's first official press conference on COVID-19 took place on March 16. The prime minister appears inside at a podium. Four New Zealand flags and a sign language

interpreter appear behind her. She wears a black blazer over a high-neck shirt and dangling earrings. This location becomes the consistent setting for her press conferences to follow.

Figure 4 – *Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern addresses New Zealanders at a press conference on March 16, 2020*

She appears here again on March 19 and March 23, each time with a sign language interpreter. On March 23, she appears socially distanced from her finance minister, who is standing at a separate podium next to her. On March 20, Ardern makes a direct appeal to her country. She is seated inside at a desk in a black office chair with New Zealand symbols in the background. These include two New Zealand flags and wood carving that depicts Maori imagery. The camera is positioned straight on. Ardern looks directly into the camera and makes eye contact the entire time. Although seated, Ardern frequently nods or shakes her head as appropriate and makes active movements with her eyebrows. Hand gestures are used, particularly in the moments when she is discussing the new alert level policy. While the messaging is firm and direct, Ardern offers a reassuring smile at two separate points.

Figure 5 – *Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern speaks directly to the nation on March 23, 2020*

Finally, on March 25, Jacinda Ardern “jumps online” from her mobile phone and delivers a personal address to her country over Facebook Live from her house, as “we all prepare to hunker down for a few weeks” (The guardian, 2020). It is this informal address to her country that sets her apart from her counterparts. Ardern is dressed casually, wearing a green sweatshirt and she makes a point in telling people that “it can be a messy business putting toddlers to bed” (2020). Here, she is connecting to people not as their prime minister, but as a human being and as a mum, who is subject to the same rules and self-isolation policies as everyone else. She reminds her audience “not to be disheartened” when they see the number of cases going up, as it can “take a number of days” from someone having initial contact with the virus, to catching it themselves, to becoming symptomatic and then testing positive (2020). As this paper will continue to demonstrate, Ardern is most successful at communicating openly and transparently with her audience. She provides context to the situation and informs people what they can expect before the events transpire. Therefore,

Ardern's communication style can be described as being primarily proactive, rather than reactive.

Vocal Presentation

As mentioned previously, Prime Minister Ardern uses different platforms to communicate with her audiences: the mainstream media, government-led press conferences, and personal updates using social media. While she tends to speak from a pre-written script during her organized press conferences, Ardern's speech pattern is more candid during her media interviews and Facebook Live video. A conversational speech pattern, as opposed to speaking scripted remarks, coupled with direct eye contact allows her to connect with audiences on a more personal level, which in turn makes her more relatable and therefore enhances her ability to build trust and credibility with her audiences.

Verbal Presentation

The table below demonstrates key words that were repeated throughout Ardern's press conferences on the following dates. Most notably, she holds a joint press conference with the finance minister on March 23. The prime minister speaks for the first fifteen minutes then passes it over to Minister Grant Hopkins. Both are available to take questions from the media. Finally, the press conference concludes with updates by the education minister. The structure of this press conference is advantageous because it allows the media access to the prime minister and two key members of cabinet at the same time. For the purpose of this study, only Prime Minister Ardern's speeches and responses are included in the corpus.

The television interviews and the Facebook Live video are not included in this sample.

Table 4 - Most common words used by Prime Minister Ardern, March 16 – March 23, 2020

Key Word	March 16	March 19	March 20	March 21	March 23
We	122	37	37	54	153

Our	33	17	8	9	35
You	63	6	6	20	39
COVID-19	29	9	9	10	10
People	25	6	6	7	15
Health	19	3	5	1	8
Cases	4	7	7	4	15
Essential	2	1	3	3	20
Virus	3	5	0	1	9
Need	9	5	14	9	11

Prime Minister Scott Morrison

Visual Presentation

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison first appeared to the public with coronavirus messaging in a press conference on February 27, 2020. He appears outside government buildings in Canberra next to two cabinet ministers, although the camera is zoomed in so only the prime minister appears in the frame. He establishes credibility by being formally dressed in a suit and tie, and he wears a pin of the Australian flag on his left suit collar. The purpose of the press conference was to reassure Australians that “my priority is to keep Australians safe” and to announce that the government “initiated the implementation of the coronavirus emergency response plan” (Sky New Australia, 2020).

Figure 6 - Prime Minister Scott Morrison addresses Australians at a press conference on February 27, 2020

This press conference was then followed by a television interview from his backyard in Sydney the next morning, where more context to the coronavirus situation was provided. In each of his press conferences to follow, he is accompanied by Doctor Brendan Murphy, Australia's Chief Medical Officer, who is present to offer professional advice and available to answer questions posed by the media.

Figure 7 - Prime Minister Morrison appears next to Dr Murphy at a press conference on March 29, 2020

Vocal Presentation

The prime minister speaks quickly and with confidence each time he appears in front of the cameras. He joins his sentences together with conjunctions and does not pause between words or thoughts. This pattern of speech is consistent throughout his later press conferences in March 2020.

Verbal Presentation

The table below offers a summary of key words spoken by Morrison during five early press conferences. Any words spoken by Doctor Murphy and the media were not included in this sample. The media interview from February 27 is also not included.

Table 5 - *Most common words used by Prime Minister Morrison, February 27 – March 29, 2020*

Key Word	February 27	March 17	March 22	March 24	March 29
Australia,	11, 3	15, 12	5, 4	9, 14	6, 5
Australians					
Advice	10	16	18	11	13
Coronavirus,	7, 6	2, 8	2, 9	5, 7	5, 3
virus					
Health	7	29	14	14	8
Measures	3	20	10	9	8
Need	5	13	9	28	23
People		27	15	42	26
Want	8	8	19	12	8
We	21	60	56	104	118

Discussion

The credibility of politicians, and therefore their ability to espouse trust with their audiences, is contingent on their ability to communicate vocally, visually, and verbally with their respected audiences (Nagel et al, 2012). The following Discussion will outline the vocal, visual and verbal rhetorical tactics of the three prime ministers in a comparative framework.

Vocal Response

According to Nagel et al. (2012), 38% of an audience member's overall impression of a politician or political candidate comes from that person's ability to communicate vocally. This can be determined by a speaker's pitch, intensity and speech rate. The pitch "indicates whether a voice is perceived as being high or low...intensity describes the speaker's volume," and the speech rate is measured by the number of syllables per second, where "a speech rate slightly above the average (4.4 – 5.9 syllables per second) leads to a more favourable impression" (2012, p. 835). Generally, politicians who speak with lower pitches "are often perceived as more credible" (p.835) and "studies show that both high and low intensity can increase persuasiveness" (p.835). To put this in perspective, both prime ministers Morrison and Trudeau are male and therefore speak at a lower pitch than Prime Minister Ardern. However, it is also clear that after listening to their presentations, Prime Ministers Ardern and Morrison speak at a faster rate and at a louder volume than Prime Minister Trudeau, which according to this study, may have increased their level of persuasiveness.

Visual Response

Of the three communication tactics cited by Nagel et al (2012), the tactic that offers audiences the greatest insight into a politician's character is that politician's ability to communicate non-verbally, as "55% of impression formation is based on visual cues" (p.833). For Koppensteiner (2015), this includes the "static visual cues" (2015) an audience

receives, which includes “clothing styles, physiognomic features and facial expressions” (p.27). Therefore, in order to build trust and establish credibility with audiences, it is crucial that politicians present themselves in a credible and trustworthy manner, which includes paying attention to their choice of clothing and their overall outward appearance, as well as the movements and expressions made on their face. Most notably, Prime Ministers Morrison and Trudeau appeared consistently in front of the camera formally dressed in a suit and tie, while Prime Minister Ardern, appeared conservatively dressed wearing high-neck tops, blazers, and the occasional pieces of jewellery. Eye contact is also a key non-verbal cue, according to Koppensteiner (2015). While all three leaders spoke from a prepared script, it can be seen that Prime Ministers Ardern and Morrison were more successful at making eye contact with the journalists in the room than Prime Minister Trudeau, who is often shown with his head down with only occasional glances up to the camera.

Furthermore, Alon-Barkat (2019) cites the importance of using symbolic elements, images, or brand logos to further the speaker’s goal of establishing trust with audiences. The use of semantics may be seen most readily in Prime Minister Ardern’s direct appeal to the nation on March 20, 2020. She appears seated, facing the camera straight on with two New Zealand flags immediately off to the side, bordering the frame. In the background, one can see a wood carving that depicts Maori imagery and a vintage photograph of a male figure, presumably someone from New Zealand’s political history. Indeed, the use of national flags are used consistently throughout the leaders’ press conferences, with as many as seven Canadian flags in Trudeau’s initial press conference on March 11. Prime Minister Morrison consistently wears a pin of the Australian flag over his heart. One can also view national symbols carved into the respected podiums that each leader speaks from.

Verbal Response

Timing and transparency

Scholars of crisis communications have observed the importance of providing an early response to audience and stakeholders, and more importantly, answering the question “what is going on?” (Jong, 2021) to ultimately make sense of the situation (Glen et al 2021). Crucially, both prime ministers Jacinda Ardern and Scott Morrison were addressing the coronavirus as early as February 2020 in media interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to discuss the coronavirus and the steps their governments were taking to prepare for the emerging crisis. The interview came following the Government of Australia’s decision to enact the Emergency Response Plan, which Morrison announced in a press conference the day before. Morrison uses transparency to establish trust with his audience early on:

...the actions that the Australian government have taken and that included getting out well ahead of the World Health Organization at Doctor Murphy's very insightful advice... The advice that we've received today is very similar to that. And that is that based on the expert medical advice we have received there is every indication that the world will soon enter a pandemic phase of the coronavirus. And as a result we've agreed today and initiated the implementation of the coronavirus emergency response plan (2020).

At this time, Australia was reporting 15 cases that came directly from Wuhan, as well as another eight that came from the Diamond Princess cruise ship. Morrison reassured Australians that “all 15 of those cases have now been cleared” and “there are no other cases here in Australia, and there has been no community transmission” (9 News Australia, 2020). Over a two-day period in February 2020, Prime Minister Morrison appears to Australians twice: first in a press conference which he followed up by appearing in a televised interview with members of the media. He offers full transparency by speaking directly on the

coronavirus, declaring it to be “certainly more mild than SARS and MERS” and that it’s “highly transmissible and it moves very very rapidly particularly those who are more vulnerable, particularly the elderly and that’s where we’ve seen a lot of the fatalities” (9 News Australia, 2020). According to crisis communication best practices, he is successful in answering the question “what is going on?” and why it’s important for the government to take immediate action.

Three days before Morrison addressed Australians, New Zealand’s prime minister appeared on breakfast television in an interview to justify her government’s policy measures on border control and self-isolation measures, despite there being “no confirmed cases of coronavirus in New Zealand” (1 NEWS, 2020). While Ardern offers no details on what becoming infected with coronavirus might mean in terms of symptoms, she discusses her country’s “pandemic planning” and stresses the need to “plan and prepare,” the word “plan” appearing three times and “prepare” appearing five times in less than one minute of speech.

While casual in tone, the interviews gave viewers an opportunity to hear from their federal leaders what the situation was and what their government was doing to prepare. Most importantly, both leaders offered a clear view of the situation in their respected countries, using health-reported statistics (logos) to support their policy decisions (Lim, 2019).

On March 17, Morrison gave Australians more context on the actual implications of the virus, which justifies his government’s decisions to take decisive action:

Now as you've heard me say many times and you've heard Doctor Murphy say on many occasions, for most people, those of us who are blessed with good health and are in good condition, then this is a mild condition. For the more vulnerable, for the elderly for those who upper have had other health challenges, this is a far more serious condition for them and so it is important that we who are healthy, those of us

who will contract this and have experienced a mild illness, that we do what we can to limit the spread to ensure that those who are more vulnerable are not affected. If we slow the spread then we do save lives. And that is very much the strategy that governments of Australia are following as we move through this crisis (9 News, Australia).

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's first press conference to the media came two weeks after Ardern and Morrison's first televised appearances in February on March 11, following reports of 93 cases of coronavirus in the country and one death (cpac, 2020). Not only was this a delayed response considering the case count at this time, but his remarks failed to clearly define the situation. Rather, Trudeau chooses to focus instead on what his government had already done and was continuing to do in terms of enacting government policy and legislation. Phrases such as "we are working very closely with...", "we took additional steps last week" and "we've also put in place" (2020) demonstrate a reactive response to a crisis that was already taking its toll in Canada. Although this messaging is certainly necessary and builds trust with Canadians, he offers no further context of the current situation beyond his opening line "over the past few weeks we've seen COVID-19 spread around the globe" (2020). He provides no information on coronavirus symptoms, nor any reassurance that for most people it will be experienced as a mild illness. There is also no sense of urgency on what it may mean for people who get seriously ill and why it's so important to maintain social or physical distancing, although he does acknowledge the importance of "washing your hands more often with soap and water" and "coughing into your elbow" (2020). As Trudeau takes questions from journalists, he emphasises that:

what is extremely important right now is every Canadian does their part to arrest the spread of this virus to slow the infection curve that we're seeing elsewhere around the

world. We know that by keeping the slower pace for the spread of the virus we will avoid overburdening our healthcare systems and prevent more people from getting the illness (2020).

It is not clear, however, why “arrest(ing) the spread of this virus” is so important. Trudeau uses the pronoun “we” to confirm that he and his government know that it is important to slow the spread of the virus, but nowhere does he ensure that Canadians know this too.

This contrasts greatly with Ardern and Morrison’s proactive approach of getting out their messaging ahead of the virus and ensuring that their citizens understand the situation directly from the top leader.

Repetition

The use of repetitive language is a key rhetorical tactic that can help to instill messaging into memory, according to Jamieson (1988). Ideally, an orator will include “a memorable statement that capsulizes the speech,” usually a short lexical phrase that is repeated not just in one speech, but across a series of speeches (1988, p.90). Nowhere is this tactic more effective than in Jacinda Ardern’s strategic communication plan, as repetition forms a dominant component of her messaging. Her decision “to prioritize New Zealand’s health by requiring everyone coming into our country...to self-isolate for 14 days” was evidence of her government taking “decisive action” to “go hard and go early” (2020), the latter phrase becoming the hallmark of the New Zealand government’s approach. The phrase “go hard and go early” was also repeated in the press conferences on March 20 and on March 21. Finally, Ardern ended her press conferences on March 23 by repeating the final message “be kind” and that “we will get through this together, but only if we stick together. So please be strong and be kind” (RNZ, 2020).

Repetition of key words and phrases was also a key component of Prime Minister Trudeau’s tactics, although of a notably different tone and primarily reactive in nature, as

opposed to Ardern's firm proactive approach. His first press conference on March 11 is centred around government response, saying early on that "we have taken a whole-of-government approach to limit the spread of COVID-19 and keep Canadians safe" (cpac, 2020). In fact, Trudeau uses variations of the pronoun "we," including "we," "we've" and "we're" nearly 100 times over the course of the half hour press conference to demonstrate his government's response to the emerging situation. The phrase "our government" appears eight times (cpac, 2020).

On March 16, Trudeau used the repeated phrase "I know you're worried" to evoke empathy with his audiences. The word "worried" was used again on March 25 in the sentence "if you're worried about making ends meet, we're putting more money in your pocket." This rhetoric echoes remarks made in the earlier March 11 press conference, where he repeated the term "worried" four times:

Canada has been fortunate so far. We have not seen a drastic spike in the number of cases reported but I know that people across the country are worried. Worried about their health. Worried about their aging parents. Worried about the kind of impact this virus could have on their job on their business (cpac, 2020).

While there may be no "memorable statements" in Trudeau's remarks as Jamieson describes (1988, p. 90), there are some statements which appeal to audiences' emotions or logical reasoning. For example, phrases such as "our government is here for you," "we will make sure you have everything you need" and "Canada is here for you" appear in multiple press conferences. The term "Team Canada," which appears in his speech on March 13, demonstrates a unified, wholistic approach in the government's response plan.

Perhaps the most widely repeated phrase throughout Morrison's speeches was "this is a critical time," the word critical appearing in his press conferences appearing five times on

March 17 and twice March 22. The phrase “keep Australians safe” was said twice during the first press conference on February 27.

Metaphor

A metaphor, as Charteris-Black describes, “is an effective rhetorical means for persuading” as they “provide a frame through which words from a literal source domain are used to interpret a lesser known, abstract target domain” (2011, p. 18). If the coronavirus was “the war” that was being fought, as the media were framing it, then “slowing the transmission of COVID-19 and focusing on the health of New Zealanders is our best possible weapon” (Political Hub International, 2020). Similarly, on March 22 Morrison declared that “our biggest weapon in fighting this virus” in Australia is “keeping the healthy distance, healthy physical distance between individuals” (9 News Australia, 2020). While Trudeau made no mention of “war” or “weapons” specifically during the time period analyzed, he recognized that the emergence of COVID-19 was a “critical time” and that Canada planned to mobilize industry “to fight COVID-19,” and to “deal with this crisis” as he said in his remarks on March 20 (cpac, 2020).

Further, Charteris-Black explains that the “conflict metaphor,” which here includes words such as “battle,” “weapon” and “fight” as used by these national leaders:

[The conflict metaphor] is very effective as it creates an automatic set of oppositions within a very familiar model – that of survival...in conflicts there is an enemy, a territory that is fought for, allies, and an ultimate purpose of victory. Through interacting with semantic relations of contrast, conflict metaphors are effective in constructing national identities, heightening the political spectacle and clarifying political decisions... (2011, p.322).

On March 13, Trudeau repeated that his government “won’t be closing the door to any possible measures” when asked about new policy considerations and on March 16 he used

the metaphor “that window is closing” when speaking about the time left to slow the spread of the virus. The “window” metaphor was also used by Ardern on March 23, in both a press conference and another morning show interview:

There are some countries where the window of opportunity, it was too late. We have a window of opportunity and so that's why I don't want New Zealanders to feel afraid. This is an illness that the vast majority of people, who if they did experience it, would be fine and have mild to moderate symptoms. It's just there are too many vulnerable people who would need hospital care...(1 News, 2020).

Two things are happening in this quote. First, the “window of opportunity” represents the time to act, which includes closing borders and enforcing social distancing and self-isolation practices, particularly to those (locals) entering New Zealand from abroad. A few seconds after the above quote, she offers a comparative approach by providing an update on the current situation and comparing it to somewhere else: “we currently have 102 cases, but so did Italy once” (2020) a country where the “window” was obviously closed. Secondly, she provides some insight into the virus itself in order to mitigate fear, by informing New Zealanders that most people who become infected with coronavirus would experience “mild to moderate symptoms” (2020). Therefore, it became crucial that New Zealand work to flatten the curve, or otherwise “reduce(ing) the tidal wave (of cases) into small, manageable waves,” as Ardern first put it in her press conference on March 16, a metaphor she repeated on March 20 and March 21.

Establishing empathy

A critical element of crisis communication is the ability for public leaders to demonstrate empathy with their stakeholders and “should respond to the emotional needs of the threatened people” (Jong, 2021, p.5). Indeed, “empathy as a value stems from the fundamental understanding that human beings are reliant on connections with others...in

times of crisis, there is a fundamental social need to connect with other individuals” (Dolamore et al., 2020, p. 5). Building a positive connection with others includes building a positive relationship with those governing. As Dolamore et al. (2020) puts it, “people want to *feel* a response as much as they want to *see* a response” (p.4).

A number of different tactics were employed by the three government leaders to accomplish this. Perhaps the most prevalent was drawing on national unity and direct appeals to Australians, Canadians or New Zealanders. The general pronouns of “we,” “you,” “your” and “our” were also among the most used words by the prime ministers in each political address. A strong example of this was demonstrated by Prime Minister Morrison on February 27, in one of his earliest public appearances on the pandemic and therefore before any essential services were shut down:

You can do all of these things because Australia has acted quickly. Australia has got ahead of this at this point in time. But to stay ahead of it we need to now elevate our response to this next phase...I'm glad we're in Australia. And I'm glad we're in Australia where we're able to have these types of responses. We have the financial stability to address this, and we have one of if not the best health system in the world to deal with the great challenge that can come with a global pandemic (9 News Australia, 2020).

Generating an emotional response from audiences may not always be indicative of positive emotions, as demonstrated in this quote from March 17 when Morrison was clearly trying to evoke feelings of guilt and shame in Australians in order to enforce compliance and respect for the new policies:

It's been one of the most disappointing things I've seen in Australian behavior in response to this crisis. That is not who we are as a people, it is not necessary, it is not something that people should be doing (9 News Australia, 2020).

Prime Minister Trudeau also successfully employed tactics of national unity, for example: “No matter what our next steps look like you can rest assured that we will take them together, with premiers and mayors, with doctors and families and neighbors -because that is what Canadians do. In difficult times we pull together, and we look after each other” (cpac, March 16, 2020), and on March 17 when he firmly stated “Canada, let’s work together. I know we can do this.” (cpac, March 17, 2020).

Another popular tactic that was used throughout Trudeau’s communications to employ empathy was the use of narrative. An example of this tactic appears in his address on March 18:

Working together is how we'll get through this. As families, as a community as a country. Like many of you over the past few days I've seen stories of people doing just that: of people donating money to food banks to help those in need, of friends setting up online groups to chat, of retired nurses and doctors stepping up to help, of young people giving a hand to elderly neighbours by dropping off some extra groceries at their door. I have to tell you it gives me a lot of hope (cpac, YouTube, 2020).

Ardern offered New Zealanders a similar message on March 23:

I have one final message: be kind. I know people will want to act as enforcers. And I understand that. People are afraid and they're anxious. But we - we will play the role of enforcer. What we need from you, our community, is you to support others. Call home tonight and check on your neighbors. Start a phone tree with your street. Plan how you'll keep in touch with one another. We will get through this together, but only if we stick together. So please be strong and be kind.

In both instances, the leaders are using the inclusive language of “we” and “you” to employ the messaging of togetherness. Trudeau is using narrative to build up national unity while

Ardern is appealing directly to people's emotions to not only encourage compliance, but to remind people to help each other out. Both are effective ways of building trust with audiences, and therefore forming a persuasive argument.

Logical reasoning

The use of numbers, data and facts also contributes to the making of a persuasive argument (Nagel et al, 2012). In the context of COVID-19, the logos generally consists of the reported number of cases in each jurisdiction, as well as the number of deaths. Trudeau opened his remarks on March 11 by stating the fact: "Over the past few weeks we've seen COVID-19 spread around the globe. Here in Canada, 93 cases have been reported and on Monday one person died" (cpac, 2020). This was, however, the only time in March 2020 where Trudeau updated the country on current number of cases and deaths, although he did announce on March 16 that the country "had conducted over 25,000 tests" (cpac, 2020). A second update on testing was provided on March 19: "Doctor Tam said that officials have now tested more than 50,000 Canadians since the beginning of the outbreak. 25,000 of those were done just in the last week alone" (2020). While rhetoric that includes updates of daily cases and deaths may persuade audiences that the government's actions are working and to continue what they're doing or otherwise more needs to be done and it is beneficial to follow medical advice, updating the public on the amount of testing being done does not present the urgency of the situation. Rather, it merely implies that the government is being proactive in their attempts to trace the virus.

Logos played a major role in Morrison's rhetoric, as he frequently used both specific and general language in his public remarks, as demonstrated by this quote from the press conference on March 29:

I said earlier this week when the parliament met that 2020 was going to be one of the most difficult in the lives of all of Australians. And this week has demonstrated that.

A tough week. Hundreds of thousands of people have left the labour force, left the workforce. Thousands upon thousands of businesses have had to shut their doors. 16 people in total now have lost their lives, including two today. This is a very difficult time (9 News Australia, 2020).

A few sentences later, he provides an update on the rate of infection in Australia:

This time last week the rate of daily increase was up around 25 to 30%. Today's rate of increase, it actually has fallen to 9%. But there are no guarantees about how that goes forward. We need to continue to do the things that we've committed ourselves to do to save lives and save livelihoods (2020).

On March 23, Prime Minister Ardern used logical reasoning by offering a comparative approach to demonstrate a possible worst-case scenario if New Zealand didn't take action early:

We currently have 102 cases, but so did Italy once. Today 36 new cases were announced. If community transmission takes off in New Zealand the number of cases will double every five days. If that happens unchecked our health system will be inundated, and tens of thousands of New Zealanders will die.

The use of facts, numbers and hard data has been shown to achieve a greater sense of credibility when used in the creation of a persuasive argument. If the goal is to persuade people to stay home as much as possible, then a useful tactic is to demonstrate through science what happens when people disobey the rules or, alternatively, what happens when people comply. The best way for leaders to demonstrate the state of a public health crisis is to communicate the number of people who tested positive for the virus and who has died. Higher numbers may espouse fear and panic in a population, and therefore convince people to stay home, while lower numbers will, if communicated effectively, demonstrate that policies are working. While reporting case counts and deaths was never the duty of prime

ministers, it can certainly be considered an effective tactic in the formation of a persuasive argument. Prime Ministers Ardern and Morrison used this to their advantage more than once; Prime Minister Trudeau on the other hand did not personally update Canadians on the status of COVID-19 in the country.

Conclusion

This pilot study has analysed studies in crisis communication, political communication and government leadership, as well as in effective speech making and use of rhetoric to determine the effectiveness of national leadership during the global public health crisis of COVID-19 in its earliest stages in February and March 2020. It found that despite their smaller demographics, the countries of Australia and New Zealand successfully employed crisis communication tactics and the use of persuasive language to shift their population's attitudes and behaviours to comply with hard policy decisions. Most notably, their national leaders responded early to the crisis by acknowledging that a new virus was spreading across the world and posed a threat to their people. They invoked policy decisions early and used persuasive tactics, including repetition of messaging, metaphors, statistics and data and by appealing to people's emotions, to make their arguments. As government leaders, they led their countries through the largest shift in public life since the Second World War. They employed top-down consistent messaging to achieve this. Further, they used different communication platforms, such as media interviews, press conferences, and for Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, a direct appeal to the nation and a personalized Facebook Live video, to empathize with and communicate with her citizens. As a result, both Australia and New Zealand experienced vastly different outcomes of the coronavirus than Canada, as demonstrated by the total number of cases and deaths in each country.

Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau was arguably delayed in his response to the coronavirus crisis, as he did not appear in front of Canadians until March 11, after the country experienced its first death. His press conferences, although regular and consistent, offered Canadians reassurance that their government would be there for them as different policies and economic packages were introduced almost daily, however these were primarily in response to what had already happened, rather than attempts at getting ahead of the virus.

Further, Trudeau neglected to give Canadians context of the situation, thereby missing the critical opportunity to answer the question “what is happening?” His failure to invoke a national strategy, including a national communications strategy, meant that Canadians were receiving mixed messaging from different sources, including different levels of government. This further weakens the overall crisis response, where a coordination of messaging between different levels of government is crucial in avoiding confusion, as per number two in Reynold and Quinn’s (2008) key communication concepts. Finally, as was demonstrated through the works of Koppensteiner et al. (2015) and Nager et al. (2012), Trudeau’s credibility was likely diminished by his infrequent eye contact, minimal body movement or gestures and slow rate of speaking.

Although the current COVID-19 crisis has not yet dissipated, it is necessary to learn from the leadership response of 2020 in order to prepare for a future public health or similar crisis. This study’s findings demonstrate the critical effect of early response timing, and that even a delay of just one or two weeks can make a significant difference in the overall response. Secondly, it shows that proactive messaging, such as employed by the prime ministers of Australia and New Zealand, can help citizens make sense of a new or non sensical situation, and prepare them for what is to come.

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