The Rhetoric of Covid-19 Pandemics: Insights from The Indonesian Government's Public Media Statements

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ABSTRACT

In response to the Covid-19 outbreak, the Indonesian government must take anticipatory steps to fight against global infections increasingly unsettling the public. Many media have highlighted the government's way of dealing with the pandemics, such as providing the latest news and information related to Covid-19. In this light, this study aims to identify the rhetorical appeals used in Indonesian government statements in times of Covid-19 pandemics and describe how those rhetorical appeals used by Indonesian government public addresses from The Jakarta Post online edition from March until December 2020. This study is expected to look at how texts and practices during the pandemic and its panic were in line with the Indonesian government to support their case. The result of this study can be used as a reference for the lecturers who want to help their students understand texts and their practices in online media. In addition, this study is expected to add new content to the study of rhetoric and discourse analysis and how the language of the pandemic is represented in the media.

INTRODUCTION

On March 2, 2020, the government announced the first two cases of positive Covid-19 patients in Indonesia (Setiawaty et al., 2020). Covid-19, also called Corona Virus, is a virus pandemic infecting the human body by entering healthy cells. There, the virus duplicates itself multiple times and spreads throughout the body. It was first detected in China in early December 2019 (Niu & Xu, 2020). The government is required to take anticipatory steps to fight against viral infections that are increasingly disturbing (Roziqin, Mas'udi, & Sihidi, 2021). Calming people down amid lockdown insistence and the panic situation certainly requires specific rhetorical skills and communication (Askim & Bergström, 2021).

Government and its policies, as argued by Bell, Hindmoor, and Mools (2010) is all about persuasion. Murphy-Gregory (2018) further informed that governments shed considerable light on persuasion by promoting their policy contexts and rationales. In this light, research about persuasion and rhetoric on the political realm are rich. For example, presidential candidates' rhetorical studies are commonly oriented to explore 'how public language and public arguments influence the exercise of presidential powers' (Windt, 1986). While doing so, the government might adopt rhetorical models to address various audiences (Teten, 2007). The government

applies a popular political appeal through public comments by using rhetorical idiosyncratic abilities on the media, such as television, radio, and newspapers, in order to satisfy expectations and achieve the objectives.

Newspapers, in contrast to other media like radio and television, are not only an inexpensive source of new information but also a rich repository of linguistic records (Shahnaz & Imtiaz, 2014). The composition of a newspaper contains various structures, such as straight news, advertisements, opinions, headlines, the leads, the bodies, and the tails. The current development of digital media, which is utilized to convey messages, always takes place in a particular context for general public consumption (Fletcher & Park, 2017). Hence, media is one of the utmost central consigns where rhetorical examination takes place because oratory and image are phenomena that formulates media function (Carroll, 2010).

Unpacking the messages contained in government public statements in the newspaper is captivating. It might also be helpful to consider rhetorical studies as a sort of critical reading (Selzer, 2013). Rhetorical refers to the science of speech or the art of using language effectively (Fleming, 1998). Rhetorical techniques are linguistic implements that engage particular forms of sentence constructions, resonances, or configurations of implication to arouse particular responses from the audience. According to Selzer (2013), there is no commonly uniformed definition and explanation of rhetorical analysis.

Most studies on government rhetoric and persuasive messages revolved mostly around political discourse and election campaigns of certain politicians, presidential candidates and the likes (see for instance Akmal, Habiburrahim, Muluk, & Ravi, 2020; Firmonasari & Syabana, 2020; Gunawan, 2013). Yet there is a dearth of research on the current rhetorical analysis of the Covid-19 dealings to reveal how the governments tackle public confusion and muddle in the media. Thus, there are previous studies conducted about government officials' rhetoric of Covid-19 pandemics handlings by former researchers. In a global context, research completed by Çağlayan (2021) examines the discourse features of remarks made by the Minister of Health in Turkey relating to Covid-19. The outcomes point out that rhetorical components are extensively existent in media reports. Furthermore, Ihlen, Toledano, and Just (2021) has done comparable studies. They discuss communicative approaches that health communicators in Norway, New Zealand and Denmark employ to upsurge vaccination rates. Likewise, in a more localized context in Indonesia, Ahmad (2021) analyzes the types and advancements of rhetorical leadership models implemented by president Jokowi before and after locking down policy from the official president Jokowi Facebook posts. His findings suggest that local government leaders can resolve public misunderstanding on pandemics confusion by using Aristotelian rhetorical leadership models. Moreover, Asif, Zhiyong and Arif (2020) investigated rhetorical situations in social media in the pandemic era. He analytically scrutinizes the use of digital rhetoric in social media conversation regarding Covid-19 from pedagogical perspectives to Facebook and Twitter users. The findings of his study warn that the role of rhetorical arguments follows the role of social networks, in which it can raise the level of public awareness.

In line with the previous studies above, this study is also concerned with analyzing rhetoric in communication. However, most rhetorical analysis provided earlier focused very much on the use of the Aristotelian rhetorical model performed by the President and the Ministry of Health. It also pays great attention to how social media users explore rhetorical situations from Bitzer's (1986) framework in digital conversation in social media. This has created a gap in rhetorical study on the use of Aristotelian models in government media statements, especially those publicly stated by the Covid-19 government spokespersons. Thus, it is essential to analyze their spoken discourse of the Indonesian government's statements through their spokesperson in responding

to the questions related to the situations during the Covid-19 pandemics. The questions to be answered are: "What are rhetorical devices used in Indonesian government's statements through their spokespersons regarding Covid-19?" and "How does Indonesian government use ethos, pathos, and logos via their spokespersons' statements in the media?". This study, thus specifically attempted to arrive at some interpretations from Indonesian government public media through their spokespersons in the Jakarta Post newspaper by using the rhetorical devices of Aristoteles's Trichotomy of rhetoric: Logos, Pathos and Ethos.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rhetoric is classical theories of persuasion. Crusius (2010) specified that rhetoric was long invented around 2,500 years ago in ancient Greek and assigned as the art of public speaking. First definition of rhetoric was derived from Aristotle's statement that declared "the function of rhetoric is to discover the available means of persuasion" (Herrick, 2005). The available means of persuasion consists of three kinds of Appeal: Logos, Pathos and Ethos. Throughout the evolution of rhetoric as an applied field of study, rhetoric is defined as an academic review into the scenery of persuasion (Teo, 2014). In the first periods of rhetoric evolution, the critical word of rhetoric was "persuasion", and its emphasis was upon the speaker's intention. Then, the rhetoric is also defined as "identification", the orator quests to recognize themself with the students or narrators as the idea receivers (Burke, 1951).

Rhetoric is commonly divided into two conceptions: discourse and persuasion (Keith & Lundberg, 2008, p. 4). Furthermore, they explain that speech can take spoken or written text to interchange symbols or values in a specific circumstance. Rhetoric is also regarded as an indispensable drive of language itself, a drive with a thoroughly convincing and continuously instinctive speech. Whenever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric; equally, wherever there is rhetoric, there is a meaning (Burke, 1969). Furthermore, Burke also acknowledged rhetoric in extensive scope. It includes spoken and written discourse and contemporary formulas of discourse such as advertising, community politeness, teaching, romance, and works of art.

Rhetoric is not a discipline with a specific body of knowledge, as biology is, but rather the study and rehearsal of determining content and meaning (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002). A text's rhetoric consists of carefully chosen ideas and sometimes extravagant words to capture and influence readers and listeners (Covino & Jolliffe, 1995). The study of available means of persuasion includes a detailed examination of how language is used in written or spoken form to influence people to approve or disapprove others (Teo, 2014). Persuasion is used to establish significance and meaning in life and more specialized areas such as government, scholarship, math, and money matters. Studying rhetoric teaches us that all texts, including financial reports, result from a conscious appeal by knowledgeable agents (Young, 2003). The process of persuasion in speech can be produced orally and in written form. Both writer and speaker will attempt to evoke the audiences by inserting these elements of persuasion into the speech.

To persuade the audiences, the writer or speaker tries to acquire changes from the idea receivers by proposing details for choosing between opposing points of view, given that the receivers have a case for why they must change their minds or actions (Koller, 2005). The rational avowal that works this purpose is named rhetorical proof to create the text or speech being persuasive (Keith & Lundberg, 2008). This means of persuasion or rhetorical evidence originated from Aristotle's rhetoric consisting of logos, pathos, and ethos. These attestations will produce the practice of persuasion in the way of balanced (logos), emotive (pathos) and personal ethics (ethos).

Logos (Logical Appeal)

Logos is used when one attempts to persuade the idea receivers over fact or logical verifications (Demirdöğen, 2010). Logos or rational persuasion is the utmost "academic" of the three explanations because it sometimes provides statistical facts (Higgins & Walker, 2012, p. 198). Logos as the rhetorical evidence, which is employed here, is adjusted in informal logic. Informal logic means the reason is non-formal in the subsequent regards. It does not reckon on the primary critical tool of formal logic such as syllogism and mathematical calculations, yet that does not mean the reason is non-formal in the sense it renounces orientation to principles or standards of argumentation in everyday discourse (Blair & Johnson, 2000). Aristotle basically described two methods of delivering reason or arguments: enthymeme and example. Everyone who aims to persuade and convince the hearers through the proof obviously utilizes both enthymeme and example in his speech; since it is likely there is no other way (Aristotle, Book 1, translated in Bartlett & Collins, 2011, p. 8).

Pathos (Emotional Appeal)

Pathos is a tool to tie the writer's idea in messages to the idea receivers or readers (Neblo, Esterling, Lazer, & Minozzi, 2012). According to Minozzi, Esterling, Lazer, and Neblo (2013, p. 21) pathos functions as an appeal to connect the speaker's message to the audience. When the speaker manages to prove his word through his action, he purposely stimulates the audiences' hearts and minds. This attempt is identified by stimulating stories or declarations, metaphors, images and metaphorical semantic, powerful words, phrases, images, and details that come from subjective reporting, which all provoke an emotional response (Higgins & Walker, 2012). As emotional appeals, pathos can be an effective tool to deal with people's feelings. It can be both powerful and motivating to address someone's purpose. Pathos also becomes a bridge for people to understand each other and builds the empathy to feel what other people suffer. Another point is that pathos may become dramatized social action to stand for oppressed people (Crusius, 2010).

Ethos (Ethical Appeal)

Ethos denotes the anticipated charisma of the writer or speaker by showing their trustworthiness and honesty (Hartelius & Browning, 2008). When the idea receivers are persuaded with the speaker's well traits, including integrity, respectable morals, understanding, and dependability, they would potentially believe as valid as the speaker says. In the context of governmental reports, this rhetorical evidence tries to obtain trustworthiness, positioning, and portrayal of the group (Beason, 1991). The report emerges with their integrities and virtuous characters implicitly to acquire the audience's acceptability and trustworthiness. There are three types of ethos as proposed by Aristotle: credibility, virtuous character, and goodwill (Griffin, 2006).

METHOD

Research Design

This paper will employ the descriptive qualitative method. Edley and Litosseliti (2010) state qualitative research examined the structures and patterns. Likewise, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) state that qualitative research uses the data which is in the form of words rather than numbers. The descriptive qualitative method will be used in this study due to the relevant argument from Schreier (2014) that states a research method for idiosyncratic explanation of the content of text data over the methodical arrangement of coding and categorizing themes or patterns.

Materials of Analysis

This paper used a rhetoric and discourse analysis approach which focuses on text analysis in the newspaper. The data source is from Jakarta Post issued during the period between July 2020 and December 2020. This study analyzes the statements from Achmad Wirianto and Wiku Adisasmito, serving as the representative spokesperson of the Indonesian government for Covid-19 case. This study follows the technique of persuasion in identifying the types of rhetorical devices of ethos, pathos, and logos.

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis will be discourse analysis focusing on analyzing the rhetorical devices following West and Turner, (2017). To gain the findings, this research analyzes using the following steps: 1. Reading and understanding the whole text in the Jakarta Post issued between July 2020 and December 2020. 2. Checking the translation of the whole text in the Jakarta Post issued between July 2020 and December 2020. 3. Finding the statements that are indicated rhetorical analysis in the form of words, phrases, or sentences based on the areas of rhetorical analysis by reading newspapers. 4. Sorting them into the different types of rhetorical analysis. 5. Determining the referents of the rhetorical analysis. 6. Interpreting the data. 7. Making a conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis showed three primary findings were discussed: ethos, pathos, and logos. It also displayed how governments use rhetoric appeals through newspapers. In the newspaper, rhetorical analysis was actively used by Covid-19 spokesperson to define issues and offer a solution for the health procedures Indonesian society took (logos). Ingratiation, organizational management, and trustworthiness exemplification were implied to establish governments' character as credible, responsible, and reliable (ethos). Meanwhile, the government must acknowledge the needs of the audience and arouse their emotions and actions (pathos). The following sections carried the findings of rhetorical analysis by Indonesian government statements during Covid-19 in the newspaper.

Ethos

To assess ethos in the selected texts, it needs the subgroups of ethos which are credibility, reference and expectations. For credibility, Mills, Durepos, and Wiebe (2010) mentioned that credibility refers to the extent to which an account is believable and appropriate. Meanwhile, Rosenthal (1967) stated that reference is an advertisement or deliberate personal mention prepared to influence audiences by appealing to authority and credibility.

Credibility

"A group of scientists from the Indonesian Young Scientists Forum has called on the Jokowi administration to impose a partial lockdown on certain areas to prevent sustained community transmission before the Idul Fitri exodus, during which millions of Muslims travel to their hometowns to celebrate the religious festivity" (The Jakarta Post, March 18, 2020).

WHO recommends performing one test per 1,000 population per week, meaning with a population of around 260 million people, Indonesia needs to conduct 267,700 tests per week. (The Jakarta Post issued on August 26, 2020)

Based on the excerpts, the bolded words are considered as an authority. Achmad Wirianto has mentioned a young scientist forum imposing a partial lockdown on certain areas to prevent the virus. Consequently, whichever data produced by the young scientist forum and WHO can be considered as credible sources. This finding further discusses how credibility is built upon contextual situations or in other words, when attempting to explicate one's credibility and reinforce ethos, the rhetorician should not focus only on the theme of public address, but also the message design towards the audience (Xu, Margolin, and Niederdeppe, 2021).

Expectations

"We hope those manufacturers will distribute 5 to 10 million pieces of protective equipment at the end of April and we have also asked manufacturers to expedite their production as the spread of Covid-19 is [accelerating] in Indonesia" (The Jakarta Post, April 4, 2020).

The 'high-priority' provinces are expected to be able to keep the situation under control by cooperating with local authorities, including the National Police and the Indonesian Military (The Jakarta Post, September 16, 2020).

Based on the excerpts above, it is a fact that the statements from Achmad Yurianto and Wiku Adisasmito contain the expectations about increasing manufacturing that can help the reduction of Covid-19 cases. He hopes that the protective equipment distribution can help reduce the spread of Covid-19 cases. In the other statements, the government reminds society to stay patient and apply the health regulations to reduce the number of covid 19 cases. Those statements contain the expectation of reducing the spreading of the virus. According to Schilb (2007) audience expectation can be met with such rhetorical statements although the fact identifies paramount challenges to make it happen due to its complicated nature. In communication and rhetoric, it is advised that the spokesperson or the rhetorician relate to people's different expectations and beliefs. This is an equally applicable strategy for communication amidst uncertainties and hesitation shrouding in the news.

References

(1) "Wiku Adisasmito, head of expert staff for the Covid-19 task force, said on Monday said that the parameter used to determine that the curve was flattening was the change in the weekly number of new cases from the 10 provinces with the highest number of Covid-19 cases in the country" (The Jakarta Post, May 11, 2020).

According to the excerpt above from Wiku Adisasmito, new Covid-19 cases have rapidly increased. As a person having a background in the medical field acting as government spokesperson, his public statement means that he is a dependable reference and expert for this matter for the general audience. Similarly, the reliability of the person, institution and professional background might be enhanced through this type of public statement by accentuating the role and support of an expert set-up as part of point of reference (Kjeldsen, Ihlen, Just, and Larrson, 2022).

Logos

Bolatito (2012) mentioned logos or logic is an appeal which accommodates the audience's cognitive skills. To measure logos, it looks at its clarity, conciseness, and arrangement. Logos necessitates audiences to depend on

their rationale grounded on details, statistics and numbers to develop a judgment (Al-Momani, 2014). Clarity means the message is clear enough to understand especially through numbers and statistics. As for conciseness, a message is short but understandable. Lastly, the arrangement is crucial to detect logos in the text.

Clarity

"In the past week, Indonesia has recorded an average of 1,103 new cases from an average of 7,684 people tested daily, representing a 14 percent positivity rate on average. Indonesia has tested 1.2 per 1,000 people, one of the lowest rates in the world." (The Jakarta Post, June 17, 2020)

Papua has reported 1,755 new cases, which is the cumulative total of positive cases logged since Nov. 19 until today. (The Jakarta Post, December 3, 2020).

Based on the excerpt, the results stated are from the study by Our World in Data cited by Achmad Wirianto. The number of new cases is 1.2 per 1,000 people in Indonesia. Precise, argumentative, and succinct information can only be delivered by someone with strong medical background in epidemiological issues (Ihlen et al., 2021). The spokesperson for Covid-19, Wiku Adisasmito has a strong academic background as professor in public health from a well-known University of Indonesia. His extensive knowledge on both theoretical and practical issues in public health can be best represented in the above statements, whereby simple yet accurate statistics of new cases, people vaccinated, and percentage of positivity rate ensured the audience that Indonesia needed more Covid-19 vaccine testing equipment.

Pathos

Pathos evokes the emotional reaction from the people. Furthermore, feelings and emotions have an important role in finding pathos in a certain document. Tone, emphasis and engagement are the subcategories in pathos and narrative communication (Phelan, 2014). Tone reaches the people by using sounds or voice to express an attitude toward the subject matter (Gorrell, 1984). Meanwhile, emphasis persuades the message with concentration and repetition (Vickers, 1994). Do, Toda, Neubig, Sakti, & Nakamura (2016) mentioned that engagement in pathos means the emotions conjured which is triggered by something that has some inter-relation with the readers.

Emphasis

"The more layers the masks have, the better the ability to filter such particles. A good cloth mask is made of triple-layered cotton because of its ability to filter the virus particles. The more layers the masks have, the better the ability to filter such particles" (The Jakarta Post, September 16, 2020).

We strongly urge everyone to avoid going to public places during the holiday. Please stay at home; there will be other holidays in the future" (The Jakarta Post, October 28, 2020).

Based on the statement, the government repeatedly asks the citizens to follow the health procedures and avoid public places to prevent the spread of the virus. The government spokesperson places emphasis on health procedures to wear face masks and to stay at home during big holidays to avoid human contacts during

traveling. The emphasis can only be made using credible spokespersons to create institutional trust and to manage emotions during crises by means of competence, expertise, knowledge, objectivity, fairness, and consistency (Roy, Newman, Ellenberger, & Pyman, 2019). On the other hand, such statements can psychologically expose the audience to emotional appeals, such as having the fear and anxiety to celebrate holidays and to go outside of their houses without wearing triple-layered cotton face masks (Jerit, 2004).

Engagement

(1) "Globally, everything has stopped. Projects have been delayed; workplaces closed, and schools shut down. The world seems to have ground to a halt because of the novel coronavirus. However, students continue their education through online learning and via video calls with their teachers, especially in big cities such as Jakarta. The model is currently the best alternative as keeping schools open poses a safety risk for students" (The Jakarta Post, July 21, 2020).

Further, students' engagement in education during pandemics is highlighted in the above excerpt. Online learning is temporarily viewed as the safest solution for students to continue their education and at the same time engaged in with their fellow classmates and teachers. The spokesperson's statement addressed some hesitancy over the effectiveness of video calls and online learning compared to conventional learning methods, where face to face classroom meetings is believed to allow fluent and lively interactional learning for students. The engagement strategy, in the account of Perkin (2010) is imperative to explain the importance, benefits, limitations and potential drawbacks of an approach, and in this context, in the field of education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the government spokespersons for Covid-19 cases employed all three rhetorical appeals of logos, ethos and pathos and the most frequently appeared rhetorical appeal in the Jakarta Post newspaper article was ethos, followed by logos and pathos. Sohal and Kaur (2019) revealed that ethos is persuasive in nature and that was the reason for ethos to be consistently found in most speeches and public statements. They also informed that the relationship between message characteristics and viewer responses can be best revealed through the use of ethos. This creates the sense of ethos as science for a public audience on pandemics rhetoric (Aaslund, 2021). On the other hand, pathos can arouse audience emotional appeal where the logic of argument was clouded by strong conviction from the spokesperson that staying at home is salient to avoid the rapid spread of the virus in the form of war against Covid-19 that strikes fear and persistent anxiety (Aaslund, 2021). Bjørkdahl, Kjeldsen, Villadsen, and Vigsø (2021), in addition, remind that the general success of rhetoric in the form of pathos does not resemble successful pandemics dealings.

This study has demonstrated the use of Aristotelian rhetorical appeals of logos, pathos, and ethos by the Indonesian government spokespersons in 2020. It is expected that this study can benefit students, lectures, linguists, rhetorician and future researchers to disclose how the Indonesian government spokespersons use rhetorical appeals through credibility, expectations, references (ethos), emphasis and engagement (pathos) and clarity (logos) to convince the Indonesian citizens to stay at home, use online learning platform and wear thick face masks to reduce the spread of the Covid-19. For students, this study hopefully provides a deeper understanding of rhetorical devices theory and its application in practical media coverage and reports on one

of the deadliest virus pandemics the human being has ever experienced. Furthermore, English teachers can use this study as an actual textual analysis material from the English language daily newspapers in applied linguistics, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis classrooms. In addition, this research can be a reference for future research, especially on rhetorical analysis in English newspapers. Its major contribution lies on the initial findings attesting to the old yet surprising fact that logos or logic does not always appeal for audience attention, but rather the emotional arousal is somewhat still effective to raise public awareness on the danger of going for public places during the pandemics time. This is further proof that the way people think and expect is unrelated as it is very much influenced by the public sentiment they read in the newspapers. Emotion is stronger than argument and like many other repeated examples, has been crucial for the final decision-making calls.

This study certainly has its flaws. As once can see, this paper did not provide a very detailed analysis of each logos, pathos, and ethos examples due to its limited timespan. Therefore, this is very far from portraying the real contextual development of the entire reality and thus cannot be used as the over generalization approach to the similar studies. There are still many unresolved analyses that need to be done by future researchers that remained missing in this study. For example, some other possibilities to expand the length of newspaper publication from March 2020 where the virus outbreak was first identified until the government eventually declared that the pandemics has become the endemic and imposed a more relaxing policies, especially to boost economic activities following the massive testing first, second and booster vaccination in 2022 are considered sufficient. Additionally, a more detailed inquiry on Aristotelian rhetorical appeal can be used to compare public statements made by the pro and cons of vaccination policy or on the idiosyncratic styles of government officials such as president, government spokesperson, and member of parliaments, public figures and normal citizens in responding to the Covid-19 outbreak across Indonesia.

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