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Article: **Discourse of Socio-Political Crisis and the Pandemic:
A Linguistic Analysis of Jordanian Arabic Editorial
Cartoons on Covid-19**


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Discourse of Socio-Political Crisis and the Pandemic: A Linguistic Analysis of Jordanian Arabic Editorial Cartoons on Covid-19

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has affected the lifeways of people all over the world. Hence, this study is mainly concerned with the discourse related to COVID-19. It investigated the way cartoonists represented this pandemic in Arabic and whether such a representation reflects the contemporary attitudes and values of the society. For this purpose, 150 cartoons were selected from Alghad, an online Jordanian daily in Arabic, published between the years 2020-2021. Data was analysed through a multimodal analysis. The study revealed ten themes related to COVID-19 and used by Arabic cartoonists including the quarantine and the lockdown, economic devastation, political discourse, social relationship discourse, wishes and occasions, greetings for medical staff, travel and tourism, work and education, health awareness, and dissatisfied citizens. Our study was in agreement with the results of Joubert and Wasserman (2020). They stated that editorial cartoons are important not only because they disseminate information during a public health pandemic but also because they are considered a great source of data to measure public perceptions and sentiments.

Keywords: cartoons, economic devastation, health awareness, political discourse, quarantine, social discourse

Introduction

Due to the pandemic, discourses around COVID-19 have gained interest of academic researchers all over the world. Most studies largely investigate the discourses surrounding the pandemic from different linguistic perspectives (Tan et al., [2020](#)). For this reason, there are an increasing number of studies being conducted on the COVID-19 discourse from different linguistic frameworks and perspectives (Luporini, [2021](#); Oyeboode et al., [2020](#); Al Afnan, [2020](#); Haddad & Montero-Martinez, [2020](#); Katermina & Yachenko, [2020](#); Simatupang & Supri, [2020](#); Ahmed & Islam, [2020](#)). Luporini ([2021](#)), for example, investigated the way the virus and the actions taken against it are framed in the headlines and subheadings of news articles published in *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) and *China Daily* (CD). For this purpose, he examined how nominalizations, metaphors, and evaluative language were used in general. One of its findings showed that there are similarities in the metaphorical conceptualization of the virus, however, its framing varies from article to article. Oyeboode et al. ([2020](#)), on the

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other hand, investigated COVID-19 related comments gathered from six social media platforms using Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques. They conducted a thematic analysis of the comments and categorised them into themes. They identified 20 positive themes and 34 negative themes, out of which 17 were related to sociopolitics, education, and economics.

The Arab world has significantly suffered due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It has become the topic of discussion on many social media platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. Scholars can identify rising concerns and themes related to COVID-19 by examining these discussions and conversations. Many studies have been carried out to study the themes and messages of Arabic texts pertaining to COVID-19 (Hamawi et al., [2020](#), Al-Ghamdi and Albawardi, [2020](#)), Alsudias & Rayson, [2020](#), Alqurashi et al., [2020](#), and Haouari et al., [2020](#)). For example, Hamawi et al. ([2020](#)) investigated Arabic content on Twitter to find out which topics related to COVID-19 were most discussed among Arabic users. This examination revealed that reports and news, topics related to preventing the spread of the virus through quarantine and curfew, prayers and supplications, and prevention measures, in general, were the main topic of discussion in Arabic countries. Olimat ([2020](#)) analysed the use of euphemism and dysphemism, from a sociolinguistic perspective, in the Jordanian society for dealing with Covid-19. Two hundred participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire including demographic information and open-ended and closed-ended questions. The findings revealed that the participants utilised different euphemistic techniques in daily COVID-19 conversations including abbreviation, medical terms, shift from Arabic into English, and metaphor. On the other hand, Alkhawaldeh ([2021](#)) analysed the most used linguistic techniques utilized by the Jordanian government to persuade the public about the importance of adhering to Covid-19 related policies, namely self-hygiene, wearing face masks, and social distancing. He claimed that the Jordanian government regularly uses several linguistic techniques to persuade the masses, such as religious quotations, metaphors, and repetitions.

We noticed that there is a lack of research on caricatures or cartoons concerning the discourse of COVID-19, particularly, in the Arabic context. Hence, this study fills the gap in the literature on caricatures. Caricatures or cartoons, according to Stockl ([2004](#)), are social artifacts that are created in response to a social phenomenon and “guided by socially determined intentions”. In this regard, Al-Momani et al. ([2017](#)) stated that caricatures or editorial cartoons are considered a textual form of media discourses such as magazines, newspapers. Greenberg ([2002](#)) also endorsed this notion and stated that cartoons may be effectively used to reflect the experiences of the mass. They may also be used to reflect contemporary cultural values and attitudes (Giarelli & Tulman, [2003](#)). During periods of hardship, cartoonists may encourage solidarity and offer mental health support to readers using editorial cartoons (The Economist, [2020](#)). Scholars confirmed that editorial cartoons are not only used to comment on contemporary events but are also used to express frustration, criticism and concern, question those in power, and encourage readers to take action against injustice, usually with a comical slant (Panneerselvan, [2020](#); Knieper, [2007](#); Kleeman, [2006](#)). Joubert and Wasserman ([2020](#)) asserted that editorial cartoons are important not only because they disseminate information during a public health pandemic but also because they are considered a great source of data that be used to measure public perceptions and sentiments.

Aazam et al. ([2020](#)) explored the way political cartoons portray this pandemic. They collected data from *The Dawn* newspaper, the oldest English newspaper in Pakistan. Their analysis revealed that the virus is explicitly and implicitly portrayed as the ‘devil’, who is the cause of the economic crisis as well as mental illness and fear. The findings also revealed that these political cartoons are used to criticize government officials for their failure to work out a policy to control the spread of this virus. However, the current study differs from the

previous study in the number of cartoons it analyses. Furthermore, Joubert and Wasserman (2020) investigated the way South African editorial cartoonists depicted coronavirus during the first months of the pandemic. They deduced that the cartoonist primarily employed anthropomorphism as a tool to aid their visual discourse about the virus. In this study, they revealed the way cartoons reflect the cultural and socio-economic context of the country. They also found that editorial cartoons are seen as metaphorical expressions of broader fears and anxieties. The virus, for instance, is shown performing an activity, such as running or walking, usually in a threatening manner. Additionally, the facial expressions of the virus are always evil-looking and are exacerbated by “*pointy teeth, dripping with slime*”.

Objectives and Research Questions

This study aimed to fill the gap existing due to the lack of study on cartoons related to COVID-19 in the context of the Arab world. Hence, the objectives of this study are:

1. To explore how Arab cartoons are portrayed in the discourse of COVID-19.
2. To investigate how the portrayal of these cartoons reflects Arab society.

The research questions of this study are:

1. How the Arab cartoons are portrayed in relation to COVID-19 discourse?
2. Are these portrayals of Covid-19 reflecting phenomenal issues faced by the Arab society?

Significance of the Study

This study is novel since it contributes to the literature on COVID-19 with respect to cartoons and caricatures, specifically created in the Arab World. It is also significant for scholars who have investigated the discourses related to COVID-19 from a linguistic perspective since cartoons are considered as a genre of linguistics that combines both textual and non-textual messages. Hence, this study aimed to overview Arab socio-political views by examining Arab cartoons or caricatures related to COVID-19.

Methodology

Data Collection

The corpus of this study are cartoons related to COVID-19. The data is selected from *Alghad*, an online Jordanian daily in Arabic published between the years 2020 to 2021. This newspaper was chosen because it primarily focuses on publishing cartoons, whereas other Arabic newspapers occasionally publish cartoons. This study selected and analysed 150 cartoons.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted a mediated discourse analysis (Norris & Jones, 2005; Scollon, 2001) which aims to examine how different semiotic tool are utilised to create different meanings. Multimodal discourse analysis is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies where analysing language is analysed along with other semiotic resources, such as sounds, actions, colours, images, and gestures to deduce the collective meaning (Hussein, 2019, p. 451). Scholars argue that images can be analysed similar to words analysis utilising theories of language analysis (Ademilokun & Olateju, 2015), such as systemic functional (SF) multimodal approaches (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). Most studies that utilised multimodal discourse analysis primarily analysed words or texts. There are only a few studies that took into account

and interpreted both the textual and non-textual language, such as used in cartoons and caricatures (Luca, [2020](#), p. 74).

Data Analysis

During the analysis, first, the message or the theme of the illustration was identified. Afterwards, the illustration underwent a detailed analysis. The detailed analysis is conducted on fifty out of the 150 selected cartoons. In general, following the framework of Al-Ghamdi and Albawardi ([2020](#)), this study methodology involved four steps: identifying the relatability of the text, categorising messages or themes, identifying the multimodalities, and identifying social contexts. This study aimed to associate digitally mediated COVID-19 discourse on social media with the social practices it directly performs. Additionally, the data was analysed by the researchers to ensure the validity and inter-coder reliability of the data. According to Tinsley and Weiss ([2000](#)), the inter-coder agreement is essential because it measures "the extent to which the different judges tend to assign exactly the same rating to each object".

Results and Discussion

Ten themes are categorised from the analysis. Each theme is separately discussed with an illustration as shown in the following sections:

The Quarantine and the Lockdown

The cartoons categorized under this theme illustrated people performing a variety of activities during the quarantine and the lockdown. These activities were mainly eating, playing, or sleeping. In Figure 1, for example, the man and his son are sleeping, while their leftovers are scattered everywhere. Even the cats, a mother and her kitten, in the framed photo are sleeping. In Figure 2, an obese man is watching the television. On the wall behind the sofa, there is a photo of the obese man titled "*before coronavirus*". In this photo, the man is still slim. The photo and the obese man are juxtaposed together. Here, the cartoonist sheds light on the issue of obesity, which has become worse during the pandemic. Figure 1 also depicts the same message. Similarly, Figure 3, titled "*how to spend your Corona vacation*", explicitly showcases the day-to-day activities during the pandemic. The man is shown to be in a deep sleep, while his food is placed above the sofa. He is sleeping on the sofa on which both a tissue box and hand sanitizer is placed. The brand name of the tissue box is "*Der Balk*" which means take care; whereas, the brand name of the hand sanitiser is written in both English and Arabic. The former states "*Hi Corona*", while the latter can be translated to "*with Corona flavour*". Coronavirus has been illustrated in green on the hand sanitizer. The man is lying his head on a coronavirus shaped pillow, another one of which is lying on the ground. This cartoon aimed to warn people to take the pandemic seriously, since many people are still treating it as a joke.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Other illustrations depicted how people were expected to look or behaviour after the end of the lockdown. Figure 4, for example, titled “the end of the lockdown”, portrayed coronavirus as an egg. In the illustration, an individual is hatching out of the egg as if he is a small bird. This individual has long hair and a beard, he is also wearing an inner shirt. He is holding a cigarette, and his cup of coffee is falling. He looks astonished as if he is surprised by the world around him. In a like manner, in Figure 5, titled “getting out of the quarantine”, a man with a face mask is hatching out of a literal egg. The man is illustrated like a chick and is chirping helplessly. This man is named “Al-muwaten” which means a citizen. The chick-like man is shown to be crying and looks pitiful. Both Figure 4 and 5 depict how people would feel after the lockdown was over. It also displays how the quarantine has affected the masses mentally.



Figure 4

Figure 5

Economic Devastation

From the analysis, it was deduced that the illustrations categorized under the theme of economic devastation were mainly concerned about issues stemming from economic instability caused by the pandemic, such as poverty and unemployment. For example, the cartoon in Figure 6 anthropomorphizes “*coronavirus*” and “*poverty*” who are choking a man trapped between them. On the other hand, in Figure 7, titled “*critical cases*”, two figures are lying on their respective beds. The left bed is labelled “*Corona patients*”, while the right bed is labelled “*economy*”. This comparison highlights how COVID-19 has affected the people and the global economy.



Figure 6



Figure 7

The illustration given in Figure 8 shows a Corona shell that has split into two: one half is labelled “*crisis*”, while the other half is labelled “*Corona*”. Inside the “*crisis*” half of the shell stands a man labelled “*landlord*”, while a man labelled “*the tenant*” stands in the other half. The owner is saying “*give me [the rent]*” and the tenant is replying, “*I do not have [the money to pay the rent]*”. Both the tenant and the owner are shouting at each other while wearing face masks. The tenant’s pockets are out of his trousers to show his poor financial status that prevents him from paying the rent. Conversely, the illustration in Figure 9, titled “*Corona increases the child labour internationally*”, highlights another issue associated with the economic crisis, namely child labour. In the illustration, the child appears to be crying and is being squeezed between two objects, namely coronavirus and a cog, which represents child labour. Hence, this figure showcases how children are a victim of the economic crisis as well as the pandemic.

Similarly, Figure 10 depicts coronavirus as an insect that feeds on “*the salary*” due to excessive consumption during the pandemic. In the same vein of thought, Figure 11 depicts a man with a face mask over his eyes. This cartoon is captioned “*an increase of price as Ramadan approaches*”. Even though the man’s eyes are covered, he wears a sad facial expression. This indicates that he is worried and confused about his financial situation.



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

The theme of unemployment is also clearly illustrated in Figure 12. In this figure, a man is sleeping in the dark and is labelled “*unemployed man*”. This man is shouting at his wife who is serving him food. The man’s angry statement can be translated as “*for the sake of God, wake me up after Corona epidemic ends!!*” On the other hand, Figure 13 is titled “*the current situation of markets and shopping centers.*” In this figure, the seller is hawking three items, namely “*kamamat*”, “*muakimat*”, and “*khosomat*” (face masks, hand sanitizers, and discounts). Here, the cartoonist plays with language to instil humour. When the man repeats the name of the items, each time he ends with letters (-*mat*), pronounced with long vowel /a/. “*Mat*” means (dead) in Arabic, metaphorically describing the devastation of the current economy. On the slogan behind the seller, the word “*free*” is written, which indicates that the seller will get no profits after selling these items.



Figure 12



Figure 13

Political Discourse

The cartoons categorized under this theme aim to draw the viewers' attention towards the political crisis in the country. For example, in Figure 14 a huge red evil-looking animal wearing a facemask is labelled "corruption". Two men are walking towards a sign labelled 2021, both of them are staring at the animal. The man wearing a Santa's suit is saying "it seems he will continue with us to the next year, and the next, and the next, etc...same like the Corona, and what is after, and what is after". Here, this animal signifies the government or the political regime of the country. In Figure 15, a huge fabric banner of a face mask says "No for muzzle voices. Your candidate: Folan Alfolani." Two men are pointing at this banner. One of them is saying, "this candidate wants to destroy us with Corona!" Here, the candidate encourages the people to express their opinions freely. "Corona" metaphorically stands for the political regime and the candidate. The name of the candidate is "Folan Alfolani" which in the local dialect refers to "unknown person". It is believed that the cartoonist tried to avoid dropping the name of the political candidate to avoid political conflict. Hence, these cartoons showcase how COVID-19 discourse has invaded the political discourse.



Figure 14



Figure 15

From the analysis, it was deduced that the cartoonist primarily showcased the pandemic as a political matter. For example, in Figure 16, "coronavirus" is anthropomorphized as a person who is colluding with a person labelled "conspiracy theory". "Coronavirus" greets the "conspiracy theory" saying "welcome my partner". Both of them have evil facial expressions. The term conspiracy theory has a negative connotation and it is an expression for a situation or an event that invokes a conspiracy by powerful groups, often political in

motivation. Similarly, in Figure 17, a patient asks the doctor’s opinion regarding Corona by saying, “Doctor, in your opinion, when is this Corona epidemic going to end?” To this, the doctor answers, “How can I know? I do not understand politics!”. Hence, the cartoonist believes that discourses surround COVID-19 are controlled by political figures.



Figure 16



Figure 17

In some editorial drawings, the cartoonist draws the attention of the reader towards political issues. For example, in Figure 18, the caption declares that “Israel is the most dangerous virus.” The cartoonist has illustrated the virus with Stars of David, it is also coloured blue, representing the Israeli flag. This Israeli virus is surrounded by smaller coronaviruses, who are scared of the Israeli virus. In Figure 19, Trumps face is superimposed on the coronavirus, which is grievously stating “I am coronavirus and I declare my infection of Trump”. This editorial cartoon was published after Trump tested positive for COVID-19. It can be deduced from the photo that Trump is seen as a big threat and is more dangerous than the virus itself. Due to US interference in the Middle East and their support of Israel, Arabs see Trump or the US in general as a threat.

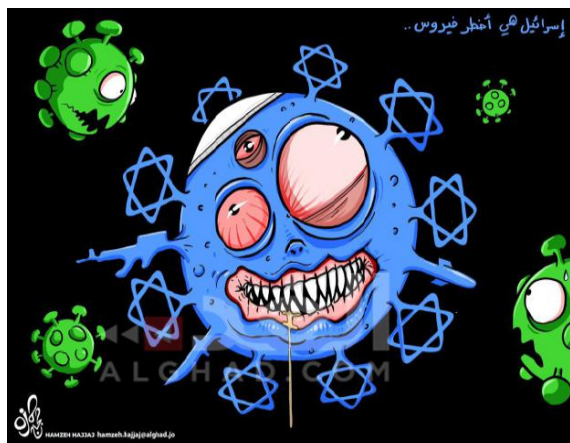


Figure 18



Figure 19

Social Relationship Discourse

This theme has 6 subcategories, namely domestic violence, rumours, traditional gender roles, restrictions regarding family and social gathering, mother-in-law issue, and finances needed for marriage. Each category is explained as follows:

Domestic Violence: In Figure 20, a man wearing a mask over his eyes is reading a newspaper. His hand is over the mask, which indicates that he is exasperated about what he just read. The

heading of the newspaper is “domestic violence crimes”. In her study, Abuhammad (2020) asserts that violence is still a significant social problem in Jordan society during the COVID-19 pandemic. The incidence of domestic violence notably increased by 40% during the pandemic. Figure 21 depicts the same theme and shows a quarrel between a man and his wife. The woman along with her child is shouting at a man, who is presumed to be the woman’s husband. Even the plant in the pot seems to be angry. The man who is smoking and holding a gun is saying “I am willing to hand over my gun. I am telling you, the quarantine with family is getting scary and there may be a war for a trivial reason”. Hence, this figure depicts how the quarantine has affected families living in close quarters. Each family member seems to be fed up with the other.



Figure 20



Figure 21

Rumours

In Figure 22, under the caption “Rumours in the time of crises”, an angry man is covering his ears, while looking at three social media logos: Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter. The logos seem to be wearing facemasks to indicate that the most discussed topic in these platforms is coronavirus. To add humour to the illustration, the cartoonist has added dislike buttons that seem to be holding sanitizers. Here, the cartoonist is advising people to not listen to rumours. In this regard, Islam et al. (2020) state that misinformation fuelled by rumours can have serious implications on the community if prioritized over evidence-based guidelines.



Figure 22

Traditional Gender Roles

Traditionally in a patriarchal society, women are responsible for house chores. During the pandemic, when the whole family is at home, the house chores have doubled, which has overburdened the women in all households. An example of this theme can be seen in Figure 23, where an angry woman is asking her husband, “come help me to prepare the breakfast instead of being quarantined!!” The husband is sitting alone on the balcony, he is also

smoking a cigarette and is looking at his phone. Similarly, in Figure 24, under the caption “Return to lockdown”, an angry man is ordering his wife and saying “prepare for me the equipments of lockdown please!”. The wife is shown to have already completed the order. The message of this cartoon seems to be directed at the men who are being advised to help around the house, rather than ordering their wife to do all the work. The man’s sandals are shaped like the virus to indicate that this cartoon was created during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 23



Figure 24

Restriction Regarding Family and Social Gathering

Due to the quarantine, families cannot meet or visit each other like before. For example, in Figure 25, under the caption “Family gathering in Ramadan!”, a woman seems to be breaking her fast with her relatives using online media. This cartoon illustrates the problems caused by social distancing.



Figure 25

Mother-in-Law Issue

The stereotype of the evil mother-in-law is prevalent in the Middle East. Most of the time, they are shown demanding and interfering. Editorial cartoons have used this stereotype to talk about the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in Figure 26, a man is welcoming his mother-in-law by saying “Welcome my mother-in-law. Welcome but open a safe App before you enter”. The safe app does not exist in reality, but it is mentioned as a sense of humour to indicate annoyance from the visit of the mother-in-law. The man seems to be satisfied with social distancing policy of the Covid-19 which limit his mother-in-law’s visit.



Figure 26

Finances Needed for Marriage

The cartoonists have also highlighted the issue of finances needed for marriage. For example, in Figure 27, a man seems to be saying “my uncle, I come to talk to you about the marriage topic, wedding, gold, dowry... you know... What was before Corona is not like after!” The girl’s father and the girl seem to be disgruntled by the man’s demands, especially the girl who seems to be in shock. According to the Arab culture, the man has to provide payment (Mehr), in gold or as dowry, to his bride at the time of the wedding. However, due to unemployment and poverty in society, some men are unable to pay the *Mehr*. These cartoons seem to be raising awareness about an important issue which many men are facing during the pandemic.



Figure 27

Wishes and Occasions

Coronavirus has an impact on yearly celebratory occasions, such as New Year, Ramadan, and Eid. Cartoonists also used sanitizers and masks to illustrate New Year wishes, such as that given in Figure 28. Similarly, Figure 29 depicts a valentine wish, where a teddy bear wearing a mask is giving himself an injection. In the same manner, the Ramadan wish in Figure 30 is titled “May you be well every year! Blessed Ramadan.” In this figure, the crescent moon, a symbol of Ramadan, is wearing a face mask and seems wary of the illustrated coronavirus. The virus is anthropomorphized and is wearing a black cloth on the eyes just like a robber. It

seems to be stealing a piece of *qatayef*, an iconic Arab dessert served during the holy month of Ramadan. The visual metaphor in this illustration portrays how coronavirus has stolen happiness and the spirit of Ramadan. In the same vein of thought, Figure 31 shows a man giving his mother a gift, which says “a gift for Mother’s Day”. The gift includes essential items needed during the pandemic, such as hand sanitiser, face masks, and vitamin C tablets. This editorial cartoon seems to be raising awareness about the necessities needed during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 28



Figure 29



Figure 30
Greetings for Medical Staff



Figure 31

Cartoons categorized under this theme are primarily used by cartoonists to acknowledge the efforts of the medical staff who are always on the frontlines. In Figure 32, for example, titled “greetings to all medical staff”, a masked heart is illustrated to appreciate and offer respect to all medical staff working during the pandemic. Similarly, in Figure 33, a medical doctor is using his body to protect his country against COVID-19 while the virus is trying to attack Jordan (illustrated as Jordan’s map). The doctor’s suit is tagged as “the medical Jordanian staff”. In the same manner, in Figure 34, titled “May Allah/God bless the martyrs of the white soldiers”, lab coats are illustrated with wings and halos. These lab coats symbolize the medical staff who lost their lives during the pandemic. They are recognised as “martyrs” due to their role in protecting the country.



Figure 32



Figure 34

Figure 33

Travel and Tourism

Like other countries, the Jordanian government also imposed travel restrictions after the COVID-19 outbreak. The government suspended flights from Iran and China to limit the spread of the virus. In Figure 35, titled “*Tourism and travel!!*”, coronavirus is shown to be chained to a plane, which is preventing it from flying. Conversely, Figure 36 depicts an airport. The caption of this cartoon states, “*Waiting for arrival to Jordan!*”. In this illustration, two men are holding signs, the first sign is labelled “*Mr Robert Bochicun*”, while the second is labelled “*Mr and Mrs Corona*”. The man who is holding the second sign has an angry facial expression and is looking at Mr Corona who is walking in front of him. Mr Corona is illustrated as a black shade to indicate that this virus is hidden and has high transmissibility. The cartoonist added humor into the illustration by portraying Mr Corona’s head in the shape of the virus.



Figure 35



Figure 36

Work and Education

As a response to the pandemic, educational institutions have been requested to find alternatives to traditional learning methods to prevent the spread of the virus. As a response, many education systems have adopted remote teaching despite the closure of schools. Conversely, some workplaces have also adopted and implemented mandatory or voluntary work-from-home-policies. For this reason, many individuals are dealing with various challenges by working from home. Figure 37, for example, titled “*Work-from-home!*”, depicts a man working online. The worker’s room below the table is a mess, since the food and garbage is spread everywhere. Even his daughter is tied up and taped up outside the frame of the screen. This is done so she does not make noise during the meeting. Similarly, in Figure 38, the cartoonist uses humour to highlight the shortcomings of online learning.

This illustration is captioned “Distance education!”. In this illustration, the man has put his picture in front of the camera so he appears to be attentive during the class, but in reality, he is sleeping in his bed. Figure (39) also depicts the same theme by comparing online and on-site learning. The right side captioned “Distance learning” depicts a man holding his laptop. He seems to be saying, “I do not understand!” Similarly, the left side captioned “proximate learning” depicts the same man. He seems to be holding a book and saying, “I do not also understand”. Hence, the cartoon depicts how learning and the education system has suffered during the pandemic.



Figure 37



Figure 38



Figure 39

Health Awareness

In the cartoons categorized under this category, the cartoonists are trying to spread awareness about health and safety precautions and guidelines imposed by the ministry of health.

Compliance with the safety and health guidelines

The cartoons under this category mainly highlight the importance of wearing a face mask, social distancing, and hygiene. For example, Figure 40, titled “keychain”, depicts a face mask inserted into a keychain along with other keys. Here, the cartoonist is emphasizing the importance of wearing a face mask. Furthermore, in Figure 41, titled “Snow in our country!”, a snowman is advising two men to wear gloves and face masks and is saying, “face-masks and gloves please guys....” The snowman appears to be wearing gloves and a face mask as well. Similarly, Figure 42, titled “Return to schools during Corona!!”, depicts a classroom setting, where a teacher is writing, “What is the basic element of life?”, on the board, while a student is giving a response by saying, “teacher... teacher... Hygiene.”



Figure 40



Figure 41



Figure 42

Social Advice

The cartoons categorized under this theme provide social advice regarding social etiquettes. For example, in Figure 43, one man is angrily shouting at the other man, “My brother, why whenever you talk with me you remove your face-mask?!!! Please wear your face-mask, and talk to me like people!!!”. Here, the man is advising the other man about social etiquettes during pandemic, since it is considered impolite to remove one’s face mask in close quarters.



Figure 43

Theme of Fear

The cartoons categorized under this theme seem to highlight how the pandemic has instilled fear in everyone. For example, in Figure 44, a man is saying “I said Maakarouna..! How you

heard it Corona?!” *Maakarouna* means pasta in Arabic. Due to assonance between *Maakarouna* and Corona, the seller thought that the person inquired about Corona. This not only scared the seller but also startled the people around him, who seem to be running around in panic and fear.



Figure 44

During the analysis, it was observed that the cartoonists often anthropomorphized coronavirus by giving it human characteristics. According to (Byrne, Grace and Hanley, 2009), anthropomorphism attributes human characteristics and abilities, whether physical or mental, to non-living objects and animals to convey a specific message. In this regard, Joubert and Wasserman (2020) state that “In the case of the coronavirus, thinking of the virus as human-like, gives us a way to grasp these unseen entities and, even if this grasp is just an illusion, it provides us with some sense of confidence and control”. Philp (2020), on the other hand, asserts that portraying the coronavirus as a ‘devious adversary’ or ‘clever genius’ that is actively ‘plotting against us’ may help people fight back against ‘a common enemy’. This could also encourage people to comply with hygiene protocols, such as regularly using hand sanitisers and wearing face masks.

Generally, the virus is drawn to have exaggerated spikey stalks surrounding its body and an evil-looking facial expression. For example, in Figure 45, the man is trying to push the virus away using a face mask. In another example, in Figure 46, titled “*the second wave of Corona*”, the man is trying to close the hole to prevent the entrance of the virus. The men in Figures 45 and 46 are wearing face masks and gloves to fight this enemy. In both cases, the coronavirus has an evil expression and is trying to harm the people who are fighting against it.



Figure 45



Figure 46

Some artists used humour to lessen the fear among the masses. For example, in Figure 47, titled “Stay home”, the sign on the door says “Mahjoub apologises for not welcoming you”. To this, the virus seems to be saying, “what comes next” Here, the cartoonist is trying to show that the coronavirus is upset because it is not allowed to enter the home due to quarantine. If the residents did not comply with precautionary measures, the virus could have entered. In Figure 48, titled “World Health Organization: coronavirus may stay forever!”, the virus is comfortably lying on the sofa and is holding a sign that says “Stay home!”. It can be argued that drawing this virus as endearing might be a way to mitigate public fears.



Figure 47



Figure 48

Dissatisfied Citizens

In some illustrations, the cartoonists have tried to depict how COVID-19 has affected other major discourses, such as global warming. For example, in Figure 49, a man seems to be struggling with keeping his face mask on due to high temperature. The figure is titled “Two hits in the head”. Behind the man, a coronavirus is illustrated and is labelled “46 cases of Corona”. Besides the virus, the sun is illustrated and is labelled “46 degree of temperature”. Similarly, in Figure 50, titled “winter and face-masks”, one man is complaining about wearing the face-mask in winter saying “wool hats and shemagh, a traditional Arabian headdress, beside the face-masks... Wallahi (I swear to God) no one sees others in this winter!”.



Figure 49



Figure 50

Conclusion

This research explored how Arabic editorial cartoonists communicate their messages regarding COVID-19. For this purpose, 150 cartoons were selected from *Alghad*, an online Jordanian daily in Arabic, published in the year 2020-2021. Data was analysed through a multimodal analysis. The cartoons were categorized under ten themes related to COVID-19, namely the quarantine and the lockdown, economic devastation, political discourse, social relationship discourse, wishes and occasions, greetings for medical staff, travel and tourism, work and education, health awareness, and dissatisfied citizens. Each theme was explained and discussed in detail in separate sections.

It is revealed that COVID-19 is a significant threat to the country and is also a source of anxiety among the masses. Furthermore, our findings were in agreement with Joubert and Wasserman's (2020) opinion, who stated that editorial cartoons are important not only because they disseminate information during a public health pandemic, but also because they are considered a great source of data that can be used to measure public perceptions and sentiments regarding political, social, economic, educational, and health-related matters. Our findings are also in agreement with Giarelli and Tulman (2003), who stated that cartoons reflect contemporary cultural values and attitudes. Much like Aazam et al., (2020), our analysis also found that cartoonists use editorial cartoons to criticize government officials who are not making wise decisions to control the spread of the virus. Hence, this research found that Jordanian Arab cartoonists often use editorial cartoons to portray social, political, economic, and cultural issues caused by COVID-19. Future researchers can extend this study by comparing Jordanian editorial cartoons about the pandemic with editorial cartoons from other countries.

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