

# Variants, Vaccines, Vigilance: Rhetorical Construction of United Nations Post-COVID-19 Digital News

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## ABSTRACT

The world's collective fight against COVID-19 has been critical to ensuring good health and well-being. Central to meeting this goal is successful vaccination programs, which have been scientifically proven to control the spread of the virus and prevent millions of deaths worldwide. However, cases of emergent variants along with waning vaccine effectiveness prompt continued public vigilance, thus necessitating consistent effective and persuasive science and health communication. Employing Aristotle's rhetoric, this qualitative study examines nine (9) post-COVID-19 news stories published digitally by the United Nations (UN). Through rhetorical analysis, it outlines how persuasive strategies *ethos* (credibility), *pathos* (emotional appeal), and *logos* (logic) are reflected in textual, visual, and digital constructions of news stories. Results indicate *ethos* is reflected through textual and visual referencing of science and figures of authority on COVID-19 research and prevention; *pathos* is evidenced by humanized language and imagery; and *logos* is manifested in evidence-based and action-stimulating discourse and photography. Digital and multimedia elements intended to emphasize authority, increase trust, and foster engagement likewise enhance persuasion. These efforts for scientific, inclusive digital storytelling prove consistent with the UN's 2030 agenda of securing sustainable development with persuasive communication and transformative action in Southeast Asia and beyond.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 vaccination, digital rhetoric, science and health communication, SDGs

## INTRODUCTION

Since 2019, the public communication of scientific information on COVID-19 has contributed to the subsequent containment of this historic global outbreak. Successful vaccination programs, for instance, have been reported to prevent an estimated 14.4 million deaths worldwide in its first year of implementation alone (National Library of Medicine 2022). However, cases of emergent variants along with waning vaccine effectiveness prompt continued public vigilance (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 2024). This scenario merits an investigation of strategies that ensure consistent and effective health communication, which, in this context, heavily draws on scientific knowledge. Dempster (2020, 1) describes science communication as a process that uses “suitable dialogue, expertise, activities and channels to generate one or more of the following outcomes: awareness, interest, understanding, opinions and enjoyment of science”. While highly informative in nature, science communication, in part, involves persuasion. As Nielsen (2012, 7) writes, “(a)mong other things, scientific practice is, to varying degrees, aimed at persuasion.” Mass media is described by Dempster (2020) as instrumental in making scientific information accessible both to general and targeted audiences, being agents of persuasive discourse. As such, focus should be given to the rhetorical construction of their production and messaging.

Covering information on variants, response initiatives, and emerging pandemic research, the UN’s reportage of COVID-19 has been instrumental in ensuring public health and safety. This article investigates how the UN constructs post-pandemic digital news stories amidst threats of decreasing vaccine efficacy and a continuing call for sustainable development. It sheds light on how rhetorical choices concerning textual, visual, and digital elements effect persuasion. Investigating the persuasive capacity of the UN’s newswriting proves valuable in informing its ongoing Asia regional and global health response and post-pandemic agenda for sustainability. Employing Aristotle’s core modes of persuasion (*ethos*, *pathos*, *logos*), this qualitative study seeks to answer the question of how the UN’s digital storytelling of post COVID-19 news constructs ideas concerning credibility, emotion, and logic. As such, this article examines the textual construction of UN’s post COVID-19 digital news via formal elements of visuals and text, while also identifying the use of core rhetorical elements used in the UN’s post COVID-19 digital news.

## RHETORIC IN UN-BASED COVID-19 HEALTH COMMUNICATIONS

The United Nations (UN) has stressed universal health as integral to ending poverty and reducing global inequalities (United Nations Development Programme 2024). It recognizes good health and well-being as a fundamental human right, an indicator of progress, and a prime catalyst for sustainable development (UN 2018). Securing this goal has been doubly challenging since 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has claimed over seven million lives worldwide (Worldometer 2024). In Southeast Asia, for instance, the UN and WHO’s leadership in science and health communication spurred multi-level knowledge sharing, resource coordination, and policy implementation, which helped define regional and national response. Singapore, for instance, in part through its participation in multilateral initiatives by the UN through the World Health Organization (WHO), bolstered its COVID-19 response through prompt diagnosis, monitoring, and vaccination (Civil Service College Singapore 2021). Moreover, Salvador et al. (2024) write that WHO-

led post-pandemic initiatives amplified through digital resources, enable the establishment of “lasting infrastructure and systems” across Southeast Asia, which concern capacities to mitigate far-reaching impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and potential public health crises.

As mentioned earlier, science communication is meant to inform but also to persuade. This intersection between rhetoric and science and health communication is not new (Taylor and Glowacki 2022). Tackling the pandemic has largely meant governments focusing on effective health communication, given that its cure and management hinges on scientific knowledge. How health communication is presented via news stories involves rhetoric, or the use of spoken, written, and visual language for persuasive purposes. As Nielsen (2012, 7) highlights, “studies of the rhetoric of science have placed persuasion in a much more central position when it comes to communication of scientific knowledge”. Public health messages and policies, along with global response have been primarily shared, amplified, monitored, and evaluated through various forms of media reportage. Laughey (2007) identifies how various forms and genres of media structure messages following their set of rules, codes, and values that construct meaning.

Classical rhetoric invites focus on the construction and delivery of speech and text, but Eyman (2015) notes how contemporary rhetoric has come to include persuasion using images, video, and other media formats. Aristotle’s core rhetorical modes of *ethos* (credibility), *pathos* (emotionality), and *logos* (logic) make it important to science and health communication in that they allow messages to offer reasoned argument and foster credibility, which shapes attitudes and action (West and Turner 2021). These persuasive appeals prove powerful, albeit reconfigured, within digital spaces due to the affordances of contemporary communication technologies. According to Aristotle, persuasion is driven by leveraging three rhetorical strategies—*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks 2023). Manifestations of these rhetorical strategies abound in media messages, specifically in news stories. Accordingly, *ethos*, or appeals to credibility, is established by referencing expertise (expert knowledge or figures of authority on a subject matter) and demonstrating good will and character (embodying honesty and integrity). *Pathos*, or appeals to emotion, is reflected by driving audiences to a specific frame of mind using vivid language and imagery that evoke feelings and influence behaviors and action. *Logos*, or appeals to reason, is demonstrated by offering proof-based arguments, typically in the form of facts, data, and logical storytelling. As such, these three elements are interrelated and equally important in persuasive communication.

### SCIENCE AND HEALTH COMMUNICATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Science and health communication has helped the world tackle the COVID-19 virus and navigate the post-pandemic landscape. While the same is true for Southeast Asia, the task has proven arduous given the region’s diverse cultural and governmental contexts. Sakamoto (2023) identified the lack of global solidarity as the greatest failure of the COVID-19 pandemic response in Asia. This led to prioritization of national responses over international coordination attempts and inequitable vaccine distribution, which ultimately prolonged the pandemic. Research highlighted that science communication, specifically science writing in Asia, was challenging due to significant language and cultural barriers necessitating multiple approaches to literacy (Estella 2020). However, effective

communications were pivotal to delivering disease risk information and enhancing public trust in governmental efforts (Amul et al. 2022). In cases where publics perceived risk to human life, citizens resorted to news consumption for guidance on taking recommended action. Estella (2020) noted a significant and expected increase in news consumption and audience engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. As people consulted with news media for information to protect themselves, it ultimately had an integral role in shaping public opinion and subsequently influencing policy action (Fox 2021). Considering this, news media became critical to public health and policy information in this setting (Mach et al. 2021).

Southeast Asian countries had varying degrees of public health preparedness. Even those with relatively advanced medical technologies and robust healthcare systems were vulnerable to the pandemic's disruptive effects (Sakamoto 2023). As such, the pandemic response of Southeast Asian countries was uneven despite how well resourced or limited the healthcare systems of each nation happened to be. Well known examples include that of Singapore, which generally maintained high political legitimacy and leveraged its strong digital infrastructure. Singapore's advanced digital infrastructures enabled frameworks for crisis communications described as culturally sensitive and extensively data and technologically driven (i.e., mobile apps for contact tracing and real-time updates). Similarly, Vietnam facilitated a proactive, centralized response that fostered public trust. Vietnam's prompt implementation of public awareness campaigns launched in both traditional and innovative formats helped counter misinformation and encouraged preventive behaviors. In contrast, the Philippines' national security approach entailed police and military involvement which was heavily criticized as inappropriate. Aside from launching health campaigns, the Philippines likewise implemented the *Bayanihan* law, which entailed weekly public reports from its President regarding the country's state of COVID-19 response.

Amul et al. (2022) also highlights Southeast Asian countries' geographical proximity with China also resulted in their immediate exposure to the grave impacts of COVID-19. Considering the previous examples, the region's pandemic response was disproportionate, and influenced by factors of leadership, public risk communications, health system preparedness, economic support, social protection, global health diplomacy, and technology divides (Amul et al. 2022). This scenario emphasizes the UN via the WHO as a symbol of solidarity offering guidance on COVID-19 prevention and management. Against this regional context, this research places emphasis on the UN's newswriting as an authoritative source of science and health information on COVID-19. Through rhetorical analysis, this study investigates the UN's post-pandemic communications concerning global public health, ensuing sustainability efforts, policy understanding, and transformative action. The analysis emphasizes how the UN offers multidisciplinary guidance on infectious-disease crisis management including insight into how public health and other sustainability-focused concerns were framed. Given that the UN's global initiatives and frameworks for scaffolding a regional response in Southeast Asia and beyond, an examination of the rhetoric in the UN's messaging was conducted considering sustainable development goals. The next section discusses the analytical approach in this study which identifies the key rhetorical elements investigated in the select digital texts featured.

## METHODOLOGY

This qualitative, explanatory study examines the UN's rhetorical strategies in its post COVID-19 digital news. The researcher selected nine (9) post COVID-19 digital news stories published from August 2023 to January 2024 in the UN official website's news section, global perspectives stories. This duration marks the period following WHO's pronouncement in May 2023 that COVID-19 is no longer a global health emergency (United Nations 2023). Purposive sampling proved appropriate in this context, given that it concerns itself with the identification and selection of new stories that exemplify features aligned with the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas et al. 2016, 1). The nine stories analyzed centered on post-COVID-19 themes or bore some important connection with the topic. Using rhetorical analysis (Margolis and Pauwels 2011; Berger 2014), the textual, visual, and digital constructions of the UN's post-COVID-19 digital news were examined focusing on their use of Aristotle's *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*. Informed by Berger (2014), Indarti (2018), and Liu (2023), the textual construction of the digital news stories was described in terms of expert referencing (*ethos*), emotive language (*pathos*), and the rhetorical structure (*logos*). Visual and digital construction was analyzed in terms of markers of credibility, interactivity, and visual reasoning in multimodal/digital elements. Peters (2008) stresses the importance of science in the generation of expert knowledge—the creation of special knowledge via the scientific method which aids in developing scientific theories, technologies, and informed opinion that guide decision-making and behavior. Health authorities are normally named and given space for attribution in the news stories. Importance is indicated by placement in the story (i.e. if names of agencies/organizations, individuals are placed in the headline, lead, and/or body); or if they are referenced for direct or indirect quotes (Liu, 2023). Another means of stressing an expert's importance to a story—or at least how the media intends its readers to think—is the number of times they are cited.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The design of UN's website features standard elements of trust signals expressing *ethos*: color scheme, typefaces, placement organizational logo, and a hierarchical presentation of information constitute enhanced trustworthiness. Authority is specifically expressed in their use of expert photography and pairing of a serif font for its headlines with non-serif fonts for the news body. Adobe (2024) writes how serif fonts carry an institutional feel to them, writing "(s)erif fonts can look authoritative, professional, and suggest the weight of history or experience." Meanwhile, sans serif, modernist fonts are likewise associated with simplicity and contemporary authority. Expressing clear hierarchy through consistent use of font styles, pairings, sizes, and weights guide readers through navigating content and accordingly lead them to items of emphasis. This aligns with Molek-Kozakowska (2020, 79) who writes that such typography does not only aim to establish orderliness or clarity, but also signifies legitimacy. Moreover, use of in-text hyperlinks leading to related data or stories help expand readers' understanding of news topics, thus increasing their perceived credibility (Borah 2014). Moving beyond matters of form toward content, Tables 1-3 detail how UN's digital news narratives are rhetorically constructed. This in part includes the recognition of multiple stakeholders such as scientists, and other experts on tackling the health crisis.

News Story	Publication Date	Experts, Representatives, Organizations Referenced	Scientific Evidence Referenced
<b>COVID-19: WHO tracking EG.5 'variant of interest'</b>  Link to Article 1: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1139617">https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1139617</a>	August 09, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>World Health Organization (WHO)</b> as leading health agency on COVID-19 research and prevention; responsible for endorsing sustainable response recommendations and urging Governments to continue offering vaccination against the disease</li> <li>- <b>Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus</b> as representative of WHO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data of EG.5 among variants of interest</li> <li>- data on variant detection</li> <li>- data on risk evaluation</li> <li>- data on new reported cases of infection, hospitalization, recovery, and/or death</li> <li>- emerging data on genetic sequences and vaccine effectiveness</li> </ul>
<b>With COVID-19 'here to stay', new tools essential to continue fight: Tedros</b>  Link to Article 2: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1140182">https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1140182</a>	August 29, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>World Health Organization (WHO)</b> as leading health agency on COVID-19 research and prevention;</li> <li>- <b>Technology Access Pool (C-TAP)</b> private vaccine manufacturer <b>Medigen Vaccine Biologics Corp</b>, the <b>Spanish National Research Council</b>, and the <b>University of Chile</b> to improve access to COVID-19 technology, knowledge and clinical data;</li> <li>- <b>Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus</b> as WHO representative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on new reported cases of infection, hospitalization, recovery, and/or death</li> <li>- data on vaccination rates</li> <li>- information on vaccine prototypes and licensing details</li> </ul>
<b>Refusal to waive IP rights for COVID-19 vaccines violates human rights: Experts</b>  Link to Article 3: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1140262">https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/08/1140262</a>	August 31, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)</b> as UN Human Rights Treaty body responsible for ensuring equal access to COVID-19 vaccines, relevant medicines and other necessary equipment and supplies;</li> <li>- <b>Chairperson Verene Shepherd as CERD representative;</b></li> <li>- <b>WHO</b> as source of COVID-19 data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on new reported cases of infection, hospitalization, recovery, and/or death</li> <li>- data on vaccination rates</li> <li>- data on negative impacts towards vulnerable groups</li> <li>- data on pandemic preparedness treaty</li> </ul>
<b>Updated guidelines on COVID-19 revise</b>	November 10, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>WHO</b> as responsible for updating guidelines on COVID-</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on new baseline risk estimates</li> </ul>

<b>risk of hospitalization</b>  Link to Article 4: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143452">https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143452</a>		19 treatment, with revised recommendations for non-severe cases	- data on new antiviral, VV116, for COVID-19 patients
<b>COVID-19: WHO designates JN.1 'variant of interest' amid sharp rise in global spread</b>  Link to Article 5: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1145012">https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1145012</a>	December 20, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>WHO</b> as responsible for research on and prevention of JN.1 and other respiratory illnesses; <b>ACT-Accelerator partnership</b> (launched by WHO and partners) as enabler of fast, coordinated, and successful global efforts in developing tools to fight a disease</li> <li>- <b>UNICEF</b> as among chief organizations ensuring vaccine delivery and administration worldwide;</li> <li>- <b>Executive Director Catherine Russell</b> as representative of UNICEF</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on JN.1 among variants of interest</li> <li>- data on variant detection and risk evaluation</li> <li>- data on other respiratory diseases</li> <li>- data on vaccination rates, prompting COVID-19 vaccinations shift to regular immunization programs</li> </ul>
<b>'Act on the lessons of COVID-19', Guterres says on Epidemic Preparedness Day</b>  Link to Article 6: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1145107">https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/12/1145107</a>	December 27, 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>WHO</b> as responsible for coordinated efforts towards managing aftereffects of the pandemic;</li> <li>- <b>UN Secretary-General António Guterres</b> as voice articulating lessons from COVID-19, which should be acted on in case of future pandemics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on COVID-19 deaths and other negative effects</li> <li>- data on joint efforts towards fighting the pandemic</li> </ul>
<b>World News in Brief: Gaza relief 'an impossible mission', COVID spreading fast again, food prices fall</b>  Link to Article 7: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1145327">https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1145327</a>	January 05, 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>WHO</b> as responsible for monitoring and managing infections and diseases in Gaza</li> <li>- <b>Emergency Relief Coordinator Martin Griffiths</b> as UN representative</li> <li>- <b>WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier</b> as source of information on additional COVID-19 cases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on pressing issues in Gaza (health, hunger, poverty, security)</li> <li>- data on JN.1 and other infectious diseases threatening Gaza</li> <li>- data on food price inflation</li> </ul>

		- <b>FAO</b> as source of updates on Food Price Index	
<b>World News in Brief: COVID risk still high, massive Congo flood displacement, concern over Sri Lanka drugs crackdown</b>  Link to Article 8: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1145482">https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1145482</a>	January 12, 2024	- <b>WHO</b> as responsible for securing emergency response and urgent aid (humanitarian assistance) in the Republic of Congo; - <b>Dr Maria Van Kerhove</b> as UN-WHO focal person - <b>UN Human Rights Office</b> as responsible for initiating more humane means of tackling illegal drug abuse in Sri Lanka; - <b>UN Spokesperson Liz Throssell and High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk</b> as voices urging for review of ongoing anti-drug efforts so as to remain sensitive to human rights	- data on deaths per month due to COVID-19 - data on steep rise in hospitalizations and intensive care unit admissions - data on tackling drug abuse in Sri Lanka - data on heavy-handed law enforcement approach to tackling illegal drugs in Sri Lanka
<b>Europe: 1.4 million lives saved thanks to COVID-19 vaccines</b>  Link to Article 9: <a href="https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1145582">https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1145582</a>	January 16, 2024	- <b>WHO</b> as responsible for ensuring continued research on COVID-19 variants, vaccines, and preventive measures; - <b>Dr. Hans Kluge</b> as WHO representative	- data on inoculation rates and number of lives saved in Europe - data on COVID-19 deaths - data on the importance of vaccines

**Table 1. Salient appeals to credibility (*ethos*) in the textual construction of digital news stories.**

**Source: author.**

The data highlights the UN's multifaceted approach in constructing news stories supportive of global inclusivity, human rights, and equity. This allows the organization to share ongoing initiatives in improving healthcare systems and economic recovery, amplifying the value of multilevel cooperation. The UN references its representatives and partners, along with science and science experts as figures of authority. Scientists are viewed as authorities representative of symbolic capital, or the prestige and reputation individuals build over time with expertise and achievement (Ihlen 2018). Direct and indirect quotes from experts and various stakeholders are likewise employed. This recognizes scientists' role as knowledge brokers in today's knowledge ecology. Cvitanovic (2017) defines knowledge brokers as agents that facilitate interaction to bridge the gap between science and decision-making. Such a characteristic invites space for various stakeholders to distinguish decision options, assess expected outcomes, and take coordinated action. The UN's



referencing of experts proves consistent with its claims of a multisectoral, cross-country approach to addressing the pandemic. UN news articles references data generated by its own experts or partners. While this speaks of the rigor of research and response the organization has undertaken, this opens an opportunity to foster research verifiability which improves persuasion. The use of multiple sources adds to the veracity of information presented in this setting. Discussed in earlier in this article, the added use of emotive language in newswriting promotes a sense of shared experience, making science and health information much more relatable and compelling. Detailed in Table 2 is UN's use of pathos in its digital news.

News Story	Emotive Language Used on COVID-19 (and Related Issues)	Emotive Language Used in Expressing Effects/Solutions
Article 1	COVID-19 and variants of interest (in this case, EG.5) are described to <b>still pose danger</b> and <b>threat</b> , can <b>cause sudden deaths</b> , <b>"continue to kill and continue to change"</b> and <b>require being tracked</b> .	WHO is described as <b>continuing to assess the risk of COVID-19 to global public health as high</b> ; <b>published recommendations</b> for <b>updating</b> national response; <b>urge continued collaborative surveillance</b> to ensure health and safety.
Article 2	COVID-19 is described as <b>'here to stay'</b> ; therefore, <b>the world will continue to need tools to prevent it, test for it, and treat it</b> .	WHO is described as body <b>initiating expanded partnership</b> to <b>ensure improved access to COVID-19 technology, knowledge and clinical data</b> , <b>stressing the fight against the virus must continue</b> .
Article 3	COVID-19 is described to <b>remain a serious public health issue with negative impacts that are falling disproportionately</b> on vulnerable groups; a <b>direct trigger stressing the link between racial discrimination as a structural social determinant and the right to health</b> .	UN Rights Experts are described to <b>call on States in the Global North to forgo IP rights on COVID-19 vaccines and treatments in the name of human rights</b> ; <b>urged States to incorporate a mechanism committed to suspending IP rights in a health crisis</b> .
Article 4	COVID-19 treatment guidelines are described as <b>in need of updating given new baseline risk estimates</b> .	WHO is described as the organization authorized to <b>update guidelines on COVID-19 treatment</b> , with revised recommendations for non-severe cases of the disease; <b>suggests medicines</b> to be administered.
Article 5	COVID-19 and variants of interest (in this case, JN.1) are described to cause <b>sharp rise in global spread</b> ; <b>could increase the burden of respiratory infections in many countries</b> .	WHO is described as body <b>advising people to take measures to prevent infection</b> ; acknowledges efforts of partners as <b>ensuring an "equitable response to the pandemic, helping protect futures of millions of children in vulnerable communities."</b>

<b>Article 6</b>	COVID-19 is described to have <b>affected hundreds of millions of lives, caused millions of deaths, and inflicted devastating impacts on humanity; “economic damage inflicted endures”</b> ; left <b>billions of people overwhelmingly unprotected in developing countries.</b>	WHO is described to <b>urge publics to prepare and act on lessons of COVID-19; foster global cooperation; enhance equity; “improve surveillance of viruses, strengthen health systems, make the promise of Universal Health Coverage a reality”</b> ; prepare and build a <b>fairer, healthier world for all.</b>
<b>Article 7</b>	COVID-19 is described to be <b>spreading fast again; infectious diseases are spreading in overcrowded shelters in Gaza, which has become a place of death and despair.</b>	Effect of inhumane conditions in Gaza predicts <b>famine around the corner; COVID-19 infections rising fast and under-reported.</b>
<b>Article 8</b>	COVID-19 risk is described as <b>still high; actual threats of the pandemic could be higher than what is actually reported; while deaths are reported to have decreased, it could be that actual deaths are simply not being recorded.</b> This, along with issues on drug use, entail a rise in humanitarian needs.	WHO and its partners are described as <b>committed to supporting initiatives to ramp up emergency response to save lives and ensure access to critical basic services.</b>
<b>Article 9</b>	COVID-19 rates in Europe are described to <b>remain elevated but are decreasing, owing largely to COVID-19 vaccines; flu rates are still rising; the pandemic has left health systems under strain and with the unpredictable nature of the COVID-19 virus, continued monitoring and vigilance are needed.</b>	WHO is described as <b>offering irrefutable proof of the power of inoculations; leading monitoring efforts</b> towards saving lives.

**Table 2. Salient appeals to emotion (*pathos*) in the textual construction of digital news stories.**

**Source: author.**

As shown in Table 2, UN's rhetoric of COVID-19 and related issues are framed negatively in the news stories. Research highlights how negative news tend to capture readers' attention more powerfully than positive news stories do. Liebrecht, Hustinx, and Van Mulken (2019) call this the "negativity bias," which, they say, can be explained through cognitive psychological research suggesting the power of negative phraseology. The UN's digital storytelling is structured with narratives that typically conclude by citing solutions or calls to action made through the use of aspirational identities or states. Ending narratives in a positive note is strategic in the case of the UN's storytelling in that it helps inspire hope among readers, fostering a sense of optimism and resilience in the face of (re)emerging threats and challenges. The news stories are likewise accompanied by banner photos reflective of expertise and dedication, further evoking relatability. Specific rhetorical structures and use of rhetorical devices in UN's digital news are detailed in the next table.

News Story	Rhetorical Structure	Logical Proofs	Rhetorical Devices
<b>Article 1</b>	Problem-solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data of EG.5 among variants of interest</li> <li>- data on variant detection</li> <li>- data on risk evaluation</li> <li>- data on new reported cases of infection, hospitalization, recovery, and/or death</li> <li>- emerging data on genetic sequences and vaccine effectiveness</li> </ul>	quotation, definition, comparison/ contrast, amplification
<b>Article 2</b>	Problem-solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on new reported cases of infection, hospitalization, recovery, and/or death</li> <li>- data on vaccination rates</li> <li>- information on vaccine prototypes and licensing details</li> </ul>	quotation, amplification
<b>Article 3</b>	Problem-solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on new reported cases of infection, hospitalization, recovery, and/or death</li> <li>- data on vaccination rates</li> <li>- data on negative impacts towards vulnerable groups</li> <li>- data on pandemic preparedness treaty</li> </ul>	quotation, comparison/contrast amplification
<b>Article 4</b>	Problem-solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on new baseline risk estimates</li> <li>- data on new antiviral, VV116, for COVID-19 patients</li> </ul>	quotation, comparison/contrast, amplification
<b>Article 5</b>	Cause-Effect; Problem-solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on JN.1 among variants of interest</li> <li>- data on variant detection and risk evaluation</li> <li>- data on other respiratory diseases</li> <li>- data on vaccination rates, prompting COVID-19 vaccinations shift to regular immunization programs</li> </ul>	quotation, definition, amplification
<b>Article 6</b>	Problem-solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on COVID-19 deaths and other negative effects</li> <li>- data on joint efforts towards fighting the pandemic</li> </ul>	quotation, comparison/contrast, amplification
<b>Article 7</b>	Cause-effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on pressing issues in Gaza (health, hunger, poverty, security)</li> <li>- data on JN.1 and other infectious diseases threatening Gaza</li> <li>- data on food price inflation</li> </ul>	quotation, amplification, irony/contrast
<b>Article 8</b>	Problem-solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on deaths per month due to COVID-19</li> <li>- data on steep rise in hospitalizations and intensive care unit admissions</li> <li>- data on tackling drug abuse in Sri Lanka; heavy-handed law enforcement approaches to tackling illegal drugs in Sri Lanka</li> </ul>	quotation, comparison/contrast, amplification

Article 9	Problem-solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- data on inoculation rates and number of lives saved in Europe</li> <li>- data on COVID-19 deaths</li> <li>- data on the importance of vaccines</li> </ul>	quotation, amplification, metaphor, alliteration
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**Table 3. Salient appeals to logic (*logos*) in the textual construction of digital news stories. Source: author.**

The UN's news stories analyzed generally follow a problem-solution rhetorical structure. Such solutions-based approach to newswriting places a sharp focus on strategies that have proven successful in managing significant social issues. This dominant rhetorical structure of analyzed news stories is strongly reflective of *logos* as it follows a systematic approach to presenting COVID-19's multipronged, far-reaching impacts, along with specific UN-led solutions. Reasoned arguments are further strengthened by citing data on COVID-19. Table 3 highlights rhetorical devices consistently utilized in the news stories are quotation and amplification. Quotations, direct and indirect, are attributed to referenced experts, authorities, and other key stakeholders on COVID-19 research, prevention, and recovery. The repetition of key words and ideas amplify the pandemic's perceived impacts, making arguments more memorable and compelling. This is observable in how ensuing effects of COVID-19 are repeated in the stories challenging readers to not be complacent despite the virus being declared as no longer an international health crisis. The same approach is used in emphasizing solutions, such as the need for continued sustainable and coordinated action among nations worldwide. Amplification is likewise observed by using strong, visual language to drive stronger attention to key ideas and evoke stronger emotion towards a problem or solution. This also includes the use of metaphors (i.e. *COVID-19 is a ticking time bomb facing our health and care workforce*) and personification (i.e. *virus continues to change and continues to kill; famine is around the corner*). Moreover, definition is used to explain in rich detail terms that may be new, unfamiliar or highly scientific, like emerging variants (EG.5, JN.1) or highly scientific terms and technologies (i.e., genome sequencing/editing). Comparison/Contrast and Irony are also used in highlighting the pandemic's disproportionate impacts and the iterative nature of a post-pandemic world, prompting the need for continued vigilance. Such devices, along with action-stimulating images, strengthen arguments supportive of a narrative of inclusion and action.

## CONCLUSION

Drawing on Aristotle's rhetorical modes of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, this qualitative study investigated nine (9) post COVID-19 news stories digitally published by the UN. This study examined the textual construction of UN's post-COVID-19 digital news via formal elements of visuals and text, in addition to identifying the use of core rhetorical elements used in the UN's post COVID-19 digital news. Visually, the UN's digital news stories reflect *ethos* by presenting science, science experts, medical practitioners, and WHO representative/s as subjects in its banner photos. In terms of establishing *pathos* and *logos*, subjects in the banner photos depict expertise and dedication to their practice or cause and are captured in action-stimulating shots/angles. The UN leveraged multimedia/digital elements to enhance its storytelling, offering the consistent presentation of clearly ordered information and design appeals well to users' information processing and logic. The news webpages' use of emotive imagery, along with color scheme choice

and interactive features, enhance empathy and connection. Meanwhile, UN's consistent branding and visual identity (evident in its consistent use of logo, formal choice on typeface, professional layout, and hierarchical presentation of evidence-based information) constitute enhanced trustworthiness and credibility.

The data revealed that at a textual level, *ethos* was established by referencing science, science experts, medical practitioners, WHO representatives, and other key stakeholders, stressing the organization's legitimacy in multisectoral pandemic response. *Pathos* was achieved with emotive language pertaining to identified issues and solutions in the narratives. Finally, *logos* was manifested by an evidence-based, problem-solution structure to newswriting, along with the use of rhetorical devices intended to amplify key messages. However, the analysis of UN's digital news revealed a reasonably lesser use of emotionality and a higher degree of logical appeals and authoritative signaling. Findings of the study also capture the multitiered nature of rhetoric in science and health communication via digital environments. It identifies how scientific messages relayed digitally draw on elements of images and texts. The study foregrounds the value of consistency, textual, and visual order in science communication but further emphasizes the role of appeals to logic and authority. Ensuring global health and well-being towards sustainable development gives credence to communicating scientific solutions amplified through core modes of persuasion through digital elements. Such approaches can help achieve the UN's goal of public participation related to public health matters.

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