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COVID-19 Advertorials Accentuating Fright and Xenophobia in Ecosystem: An Eco-linguistic Approach to SFL

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Abstract

The present study explores manipulation of language of COVID-19 advertorials to achieve specific goal of fear and xenophobia among people through ecolinguistic study of five advertorials published on COVID-19 on five global websites. To the best of author's knowledge, few researches have been conducted on advertorials of different websites in this COVID-19 language context. The purpose of this research is to investigate and apply Halliday's (1970) three semantic meta-functions proposed in Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL) on corona advertorials from ecolinguistic perspective. Collection of five corona advertorials was gathered as data from five different websites. Only one corona advertorial from each website was built. Ecolinguistic analysis of Halliday's three meta-function was adopted as analytical framework to analyse elements of fear and xenophobia in the language of COVID-19 advertorials. Present research employed qualitative, descriptive method containing observation. Results revealed that 3 meta-functions of ecolinguistic SFL can be used in shedding light on use of language in these advertorials to sustain and invigorate a global narrative of fright and xenophobia. Findings showed that language of COVID-19 advertorials accentuates elements of fright and xenophobia in ecosystem. Results of current study will deliver a guideline of didactic inferences for future researchers in the field.

Keywords: advertorial; ecolinguistic analysis; fright; SFL; meta-functions; xenophobia

1. Introduction

In 21st century, the COVID-19 pandemic is an ongoing disease triggered by an acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARSCoV-2), first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. Almost a century ago, in 1918 an influenza pandemic killed almost 50 million people and this pandemic even today reminds the world that the greatest hazards often stay in the mundane (Horby, 2018). Coronavirus outbreak has touched nearly every corner of the globe and still grasping its paws where it can never be imagined. Many people are suffering from this virus and ratio of died people is increasing day by day creating a situation of fear and xenophobia globally and ecologically which has affected the perception of everyone about the survival of ecosystem. Even the lives of laymen are badly affected due to this pandemic as the transmission of this infection has threatened the senses of the people (Robson, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO) has announced its new name as COVID-19. "Co" stands for corona, "Vi" stands for virus and "D" symbolizes disease while "19" stands for the year "2019".

The role of mass media in shaping the experience of the world is very powerful (Prima, 2014). Newspapers, televisions even the websites are replete with corona virus news. Footsteps of modern technologies and the zeitgeist record accentuate a media influence. This phenomenon has changed the mindset of peoples as individuals. Unfortunately, social media is not providing consolation for misrepresentation, de-humanization, and xenophobia (Robson, 2020). It is just raising up the fear and xenophobia among the people. According to Shurafa, Darwish and Zaghouani (2020), President Donald Trump's recent resentful attacks on china over the outbreak of COVID-19 has given rise to the risk of xenophobia and fright among the two nations as he holds China responsible for producing the virus to its virology lab in Wuhan which is considered to be the epicentre of the outbreak. This dehumanizing perspective creates a disconcerting, incorrigible place for the people to live. At this stage, COVID-19 advertorials can play a vital role in diminishing this fright and xenophobia (through linguistic features because the language of advertorials can stimulate the masses toward positivity of thoughts). But unfortunately, there is a lack of this aspect as they are accentuating the COVID-19 pandemic to worsen the situation to destroy peace in ecology. With the linguistic choices, media outlets jointly contribute to an international narrative of xenophobia (Robson, 2020). Zizek (2020) accounts social media and doubts the validity of the news with the note that people should not have blind faith in rumors spreading on social media, because these rumors can cause fear among the people.

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Ecolinguistics deals with the relationship between language and ecology and its unambiguous concern is to reveal the interface of ecology and language. Critical crack for ecolinguistics appeared with Michael Halliday's paper "New Ways of Meaning: The Challenge to Applied Linguistics", has delivered at the 9th World Conference of Applied Linguistics in 1990 (Dash, 2019). Michael Halliday unbolted the conduit for linguistics to maintain the ecology in which language befalls. Hence, the role of ecology should be to govern the world view. The swelling menace of extermination to ecosystems, the planet earth, and languages are indispensable topics from ecolinguistic perspective. Wu (2018) has supported that the indispensable purpose of language ecology is to analyse the text dealing with ecological issues. This language develops as well as provides possible solution of ecological problems. It unfolds the choice of vocabulary and the ways to change the desert into oasis and oasis into deserts. Since 1970s, the ecolinguistic analysis is exposing the hidden ideology, negative significances of language use and endorsing awareness the harmonious discourse (Permadi, 2013).

Ecolinguistic approach to SFL focuses on the treatment of people with others and how people treat the larger ecological system that life depends on. The present study aims to expose that discourse of COVID-19 advertorials is accentuating fear and xenophobia among the masses. For example;

Ecolinguistics analyses language to reveal the stories we live by, judges those stories according to an Eco Sophy, resists stories which oppose the Eco Sophy, and contributes to the search for new stories to live by (Stibbe, 2015, p. 183).

The language of COVID-19 advertorials is a perfect exposure of these aspects. In this regard, ecolinguistics can play a vital role in the reinvention of a peaceful society along with solutions to ecological problems by unveiling and challenging destructive stories we live by (Stibbe, 2015).

From ecolinguistic perspective, the theory of systemic functional linguistics (SFL)/systemic functional grammar (SFG) has been developed by Professor M.A.K. Halliday during 1960s (Almurashi, 2016). Ecolinguistics analyses discourses which have an impact on the way humans interact with each other, other species and the ecology. Halliday (1990) starts off the discipline of ecolinguistics by investigating aspects of grammar which contribute to construe reality in a certain way that is harmful for our health Species.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) and SFL have a common link of interest between language and ecology. CDA uses SFL as a tool to analyse texts and discourses mainly due to its focus on language use and social functions. The SFL approach has developed a descriptive and interpretive framework in which language is observed as a meaning-making resource (Salama, 2014). The SFL approach had its roots in language and ecology proposed by an anthropologist Malinowski (1923). The term "systemic" views language as a network of systems for making meaning while the term "functional" is concerned with the contextualized and practical uses of language SFG or SFL. Thus, SFG is concerned primarily with the choices of language to speakers/writers (Ali, 2019). These choices produce concrete forms of a language (Jihan, 2019). According to Halliday "function" is the ultimate asset of language and its functional basis is semantically grasped in ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings. Ecolinguistic SFL theory is applied on the COVID-19 advertorials to find the role or function of language. The following diagram explains three meta-functions of Halliday (1970).

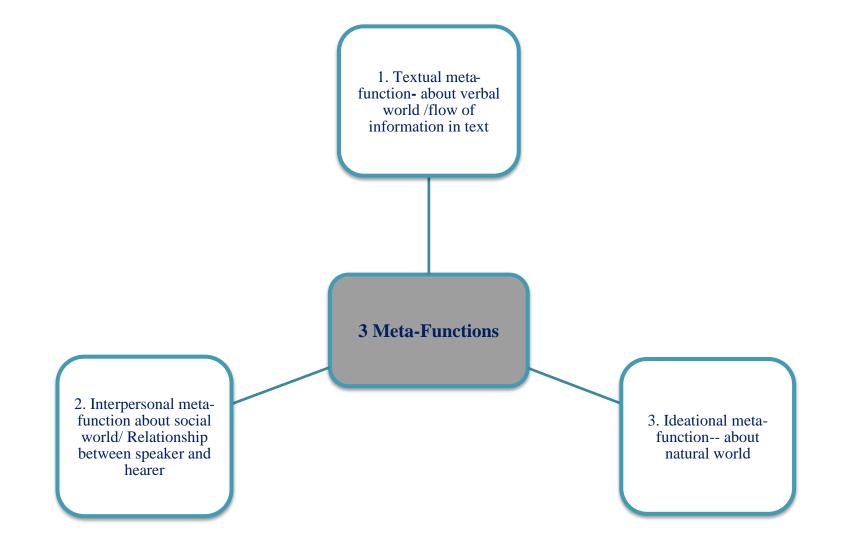


Figure 1: Meta-functions of Language (Halliday, 1970)

There are many studies (Golan, 2014; Natalia, 2016; Oliver & Molina, 2019; Zhou, 2012) on advertorials but there is a lack of ecolinguistic approach to SFL on COVID-19 advertorials published internationally. The present study strives to fill the gap and has developed a representative corpus of five COVID-19 advertorials to be utilized in this research.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

Keeping in mind the above-mentioned background, this research strives:

- to determine COVID-19 advertorials as a source of spreading fright and xenophobia among people.
- to define Halliday's 3-Meta functions to unveil semantic meaning of COVID-19 advertorials.
- to analyse influential language of COVID-19 advertorials through application of SFL approach.

2. Literature Review

Several research studies have inspected the ecolinguistic analysis of advertorials in different socio-cultural settings. In this regard, an important study was conducted by Qoriah (2018) which analyzed the HIV AIDS slogans by applying systemic functional approach. The study concluded that many officialdoms were using slogans to advertise information, including HIV AIDS case. Findings showed that HIV AIDS slogans contained 50 percent material process, 38 percent relational process, 6 percent mental process, 6 percent verbal process of Halliday's systemic functional approach. This research is in line with the study in hand because both of the studies have tried to highlight the information on a disease as represented in the media through SFL approach and its effects on ecology.

Duan (2007) presented a case study on representation of SARS in two newspapers' discourse – The China Daily and the South China Morning Post. Transitivity systems of systemic functional grammar was adopted in this research. The results revealed that the two newspapers' word patterns had statistically significant differences. The findings of the study indicated that the China Daily seems to treat the SARS epidemic from a national struggle standpoint while the South China Morning Post seems to treat the human health and its safety from broader perspective.

In his seminal work, Trew (2018) investigated the news reports of the English national daily press containing the same events. He illustrated the linguistic expression giving rise to the ideological process and the ideological conflict, predominantly in the news discourse. The findings of the study suggested that responses to the event were more diverse than the headlines suggest. The results indicated that the divergent treatment of two newspapers on the Carnival event is the most sharp and clear due to their different political niche and rotation.

In another noteworthy research, Fowler (1991) analyzed the salmonella-in-eggs affair as press hysteria. The results showed that the great egg scare was neither a medical phenomenon nor an epidemic. The fear was constructed through the discourse of newspapers and television. Research findings highlighted that role of media (in relation to the salmonella affair) was astoundingly multifaceted.

Another germane example is Makoni's (2012) analysis of Zimbabwean pamphlets through SFL. The data of the pamphlets consisted of methods of contraception and family planning for the manifestation of language, ideology, and power in them. The results showed that text and images contained an ideological assumption. Findings of the research demonstrated that women were at-risk, in need of protection, intervention, and reproductive regulation.

Isti'anah (2019) explored the language in the websites of tourism to attract the tourists using Stibbe's theory (2015) on ecolinguistics and Halliday's SFL theory (1970) on function of language as well as Martin and White's theory (2005) on language evaluation. The researcher took sample data of highlighted destinations from the official website of Indonesian government. The results of the research indicated that the beauty of Raja Ampat is highlighted by the choice of lexicon items to gain the attention of tourists. The findings of the study showed that the government is using fauna as a source of attraction in Raja Ampat through the use of language.

Another noteworthy study in this connection is the research work of Ali (2019) on an article "Climate Change at Egypt by Ali Masria". He analysed the article to show how climate issues in Egypt are conveyed through SFL theory. He concluded that climate change is a danger to the whole world. The findings of the article revealed that this climate change has negative impacts especially on agriculture and industries. Therefore, the study of ecolinguistics has become essential in order to protect the ecology.

Tian (2020) investigated the role of genre in the production of text structures by applying SFL theory. He analyzed that this theory was deficient in highlighting the role of text structure in identity construction. Data was taken from public communication of Peking University and Tsinghua University. Findings of the study revealed the deficiency of this theory in importance of text structure in this genre of public communication by presidents. The results showed that generic structure of the texts played a vital role in the identity construction of a university.

After discussing the past research, this present study will fill obvious gaps left by the others because none other has worked on COVID-19 advertorials from the point of view of fear and xenophobia by applying 3-meta functions (1970) proposed in SFL theory.

2.1 Research Question

The present study will challenge several questions to answer that were not discussed by previous studies regarding COVID-19 situation in 21^{st} century. The major research question that will stimulate the present study is:

A. COVID-19 advertorials are spreading elements of fear and xenophobia among the masses of the world.

There is also a sub -question to be answered during this research process:

B. Choice of linguistic features of COVID-19 advertorials in the pandemic is the cause of disturbance in the ecology of the world.

3. Material and Method

The present research was qualitative which analyzed the language of advertorials on COVID-19 through SFL Model (1960) which generated three meta-functions (1970) i.e., ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions. This research involved close observation in collection of evidences. The pictorial evidences with linguistic features were downloaded and observed. The sample was drawn by using the simple random sampling method. The sample of this present study was a collection of five COVID-19 advertorials selected through different web links i.e.:

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/

- https://www.cdc.gov/
- https://www.scot.nhs.uk:/
- https://www.fas.scot/
- https://www.indiatimes.com/

These five websites are high rating websites globally, and have been a constant source of authentic information around the globe during this pandemic. Only one corona advertorial from each web link was sought and collected as sample for the current research. The research was conducted by applying the descriptive method. Not the whole paragraphs were considered in the present research to apply three meta-functions (1970). Rather those short-listed sentences which contained elements of fear and xenophobia, were selected. Deep observation was used as a technique tool to extract such sentences from the whole texts and then were analyzed through SFL approach. Owing to the limitations of the present study, only short text COVID-19 advertorials were selected for analysis and then further only a few sentences were picked up to analyze semantically because too lengthy advertorials would perhaps make this present research too lengthy.

4. Results

Result of data are based on qualitative analysis. Qualitative analysis has been discussed below:

4.1 Qualitative Analysis

A) Themes in the COVID-19 Advertorials

Themes of all the COVID-19 advertorials revolve around the pandemic outbreak of novel corona virus and how it can infect the human ecology with possible dangers. All the COVID-19 advertorials deal with this same theme. A glimpse (on the texts of advertorials) expresses the language and its appearance on process, participant and circumstantial function. All the sentences depict dominancy of the fright of corona virus leading to xenophobia. While understanding the *ideational, interpersonal,* and *textual* functions of language, an analysis on semantic ground is required which is discussed below:

4.1.1 Ideational meta-function

Ecolinguistic SFL relies on language function than on the language structure (Salama, 2014). In an ideational meta-function, language is used to organize, understand and to express perceptions of the world through relational process (e.g., contract, Adv.04), material process (e.g. stay Adv.02), and mental process (e.g. enters Adv.01). It relates the cognitive realities of the content with language and gives the precise meaning and message of writer and reader (Duan, 2007).

4.1.2 Relational Processes

In relational process, participant may be a thing or person. This process identifies participant, characteristic feature, interest and physical appearance (Duan, 2007). The description of COVID-19 through the lexical choices e.g., "kill" (Adv. 01), "sick" (Adv. 02), "do not leave" (Adv. 03), "contract" (Adv. 04), "deadly" (Adv. 05) hypes the image of fright and xenophobia. The descriptions are frightening and showing the dominance of the virus over human life. Neither idiomatic nor euphemistic expression is used in all COVID-19 advertorials which exemplifies the text as a direct representation of fright and xenophobia among the people around the world. For example:

"Severe pneumonia can kill people..." (Adv. 01)

"Diseases can make anyone sick ..." (Adv. 02)

"Do not leave the house for 7 days at all." (Adv. 03)

"It is likely that most people will contract corona virus." (Adv. 04)

"The deadly virus outbreak..." (Adv. 05)

The fact has become evident with horrible descriptions that appear in ecological system about the deadly spread of corona virus. The use of the language here serves the purpose of fright and xenophobia. All the physical descriptions of the corona virus in above sentences introduce the fear of corona virus disease.

4.1.2 Material Processes

This meta-function deals with the actor (subject), the process (verb) and the goal (object) and occasionally the beneficiary recipient (Duan, 2007). It defines "action" in a sentence through verb. In the sentence, "most victim die from complications." the actor is "victim" while "die" is the process", and "Complications" is the goal.

"Stay home when you are sick". (Adv. 02)

In the above sentence "you" is absent but it is imagined inwardly present and plays the role of actor whereas "stay" is process and "home" is goal.

"Everyone else in your household must not leave the house for 14 days." (Adv. 03)

"Everyone" is actor, while "must not leave" is process; and "house" is beneficiary recipient, while "household" is goal; and "14 days" is circumstance.

4.1.3 Mental process

Mental process deals with feeling, thinking, and perceiving situation (Lashari & Bughio, 2014). Speakers of the COVID-19 advertorials reveal the ideas of fright of COVID-19 directly and freely using language, e.g., "Stay, sick" (Adv. 02), "leave, 14 days" (Adv. 03). There are many verbs telling about the dreadful results of COVID-19 virus such as, attack, spread, transmitted, enter, find, bursts, infected, die, kill, drown, avoid, stay, cover, leave, contract and grapple.

All of these words chosen from the five COVID-19 advertorials (Adv. 01 to Adv. 05) highlight the danger being infused in the discourse of COVID-19 advertorials to create panic among the masses which is destroying the ecological tranquility in the ecosystem which we depend on. Here is another example:

"It enters human through the nose". (Adv.01)

In mental process "It" is senser. "Enters" is process, while "human" is phenomenon, and "through nose" is circumstance. Use of such phrases in advertorials has led the masses to be scary about their ecosystems.

4.2 The Interpersonal Meta-function

Halliday (1973) has expressed that the interpersonal meaning establishes a relationship between text and reader which is about the roles of Addresser and Audience, Mood and Modality making the text closer to real by using questions-answers, imperatives and specific key words to attract the reader etc. (Lashari & Bughio, 2014). In the following sentences, the purpose of the writer is to convey the information regarding corona outbreak as well as fright and xenophobia among people living in the ecolinguistic environment. For Examples:

"Corona virus attacks cells in respiratory system". (Adv. 01)

"There are simple things you can do to help keep yourself and others healthy". (Adv. 02)

"Got symptoms-even mild ones?" (Adv. 03)

"Do you have a plan for COVID-19?" (Adv. 04)

"with every passing hour, the world continues to grapple with the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic". (Adv. 05)

Modality ranges between the extreme positive and the extreme negative. It has also expressed the speaker's judgment objectively towards the topic (Lashari & Bughio, 2014). However, if the language is observed in above sentences, it can be judged easily that the language of these advertorials is replete with elements of fright, e.g., "attacks" (Adv. 01), "help" (Adv. 02), "symptoms" (Adv. 03), "plan" (Adv. 04), "uncertainty" (Adv. 05) which leads to xenophobia globally contain extreme negative and pessimistic expressions and the language used in these COVID-19 advertorials is not objective (cf. examples mentioned above).

In all the above-mentioned sentences written in advertorials on COVID-19, the readers are addressed as second person *you*. A straight relationship is inculcated through the contribution of perspective between the participants, i.e., the writer and the reader, in the text. Thereby, the readers are made to believe, by showing the emotional signals that the text describes the condition of *you*, which is used to tell the readers about fright of corona virus. The readers are made to evaluate the action or events in the text as directly relevant to their situation as well as are made to play a role as the participants of in the text. Further, the imperative mood is picked by the speaker for giving commands and the readers are put in a situation to obey orders, (cf. examples mentioned above). The elements of fright and xenophobia are accentuated with the use of imperatives and the interrogative sentences. No solace is felt by the reader with these sentences. Oscillation between fright and xenophobia is infused in the minds.

4.3 Textual meta-function

All the statements of the COVID-19 advertorials are related to the writer and they involve the participants as well. The feelings of the readers are expressed by the author of the advertorials as a narrator (Lashari & Bughio, 2014). The chain of particular events is linked through sentences. The sponsor, like observer, describes the fear of corona virus, the events and clues are left for the reader to think. Through the details, they change the state of mind of the readers about the fear and xenophobia of the novel virus. Therefore, in all advertorials there is a flow of information which is linked together. Consider for example: "novel corona virus first spread to human from an animal-thought to be a snake -at the South China seafood wholesale market." (Adv. 01). In this sentence, there is coherence between three phrases. Virus is linked to animal which is present in a market of China. Let's look at another example: "Some people who have travelled to places where many people have gotten sick with COVID 19 may be monitored by health officials to protect their

health and the health of other people in the community" (Adv. 02). In this sentence, the coherence of sentence is located when people get sick if they travel which is further linked with, of course, the health officials. Therefore, there is coherence in the use of language here. This coherence is the trait of all COVID-19 advertorials. There is a chain of fright running among the sentences.

4. Discussion

The findings of COVID-19 advertorials were analyzed by three processes i.e., mental process, relational process and material process. In the interpersonal function, it is found that COVID-19 advertorials directly interact with the readers and the only participant, *you*, expresses that the advertorials are straightforwardly spreading the xenophobic emotions among the masses. In the textual metafunction, it is observed that the readers are expected to have clearer understanding of the text because there are cohesive links in COVID-19 advertorials. In an ideational meta-function, the profound information of the pandemic is found with the mental process and circumstantial feature in these COVID-19 advertorials which has generated fear (e.g., "find" Adv. 01, "seek" Adv. 02, "assume" Adv. 04, "grapple" Adv. 05) among the masses. It is through these three meta-functions of the text, as expressed by Halliday (1970), which dispose how the language of COVID-19 advertorials accentuates the elements of fright and xenophobia in the whole world. Resultantly, people are in panic and indecisive what to do, whom to meet, whom to hug, whom to touch and whom to avoid, to protect their ecosystem?

5. Conclusion

The aim of the research was to analyse the COVID-19 advertorials, to sustain and invigorate a global narrative of fright and xenophobia, through meta-functions of the text in its ecolinguistic environment. The research findings have shown that in the field of ecolinguistics, the SFL approach can be used to analyse hidden meaning in the language of COVID-19 advertorials. The use of demagogic and desensitizing language of COVID-19 advertorials is being utilized to fuel fear and xenophobia. The texts are a perfect example to strip individuals of the whole world for the purpose of rendering them strangers to one another in their ecology. It is observed that the overall tone of all the COVID-19 advertorials was alarming as it comprised negative language of fear and xenophobia. Regarding limitations of this study, the several issues need to be noted, e.g., the smallness of the data. The study proved to be interesting and could be more expanded by including more COVID-19 advertorials from other reliable websites. Furthermore, in a few years, if COVID-19 advertorials or its consequences continue to spread, steering a diachronic research of the language of COVID19 advertorials would be extremely interesting. Further research, concerning larger text illustrations may challenge the findings of this present study in future.

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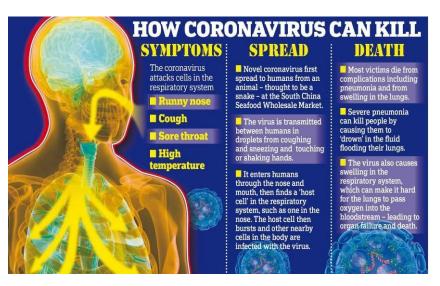
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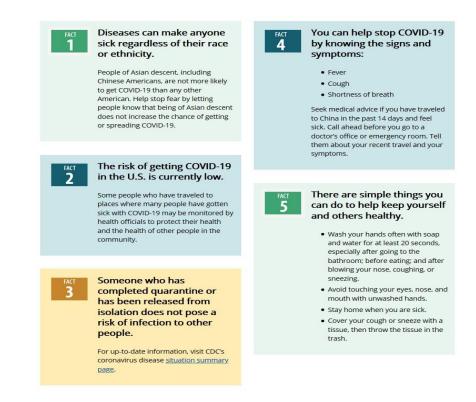
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Appendix

Advertorial 1: Daily Mail



Advertorial 2: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)



Advertorial 3: Scotland's Health on the Web





Do not go out even to buy food or essentials. Stay at home to exercise.

nhsinform.scot/coronavirus

STAY HOME > PROTECT THE NHS > SAVE LIVES

Advertorial 4: Farm Advisory Service

National Advice Hub T: 0300 323 0161 E: advice@fas.scot W: www.fas.scot	X	plan	ning	
Do you have a plan for	RSABI Use this templ	ergency Plan ate to prepare valuable inform thers in the event that you bec	ation that	
Covid-19?	Keep it somewhere it's easily found.			
00010-101	Farm Name		i	
It is not an over-reaction to suggest	Full Address inc. Postcode			
that every single business needs to prepare for at least a short-	Normal Contacts (Name & Numbers)			
term labour challenge created by coronavirus. It is likely that most people will contract coronavirus and whilst for most it will be a mild illness from which they will recover fully and quickly, this still	Emergency Contacts: 1. 2. 3.	Name	Number	
creates a huge challenge for the farming industry as employees or contractors have to self-	Emergency contact for everyone:	RSABI (Scottish Agriculture Charity)	0300 111 4166	
isolate for 7 or 14 days if they	Vet:			
or someone in their household I displays symptoms. Nobody can	Feed Rep:			
say with certainty who will have	Market:			
a mild illness and who might find	Accountant/Bookkeeper:		i	
themselves confined to a bed, either in hospital or at home.	Contractor:			
Farmers often carry on regardless	Enterprises - Yes/No	Beel	Sheep	
of illness because stock still need	Approx Number	Dairy	Poutry	
to be fed and work done. However		Pigs/Goats/Other	Arable/Cropping	
you cannot assume that you will be physically able to do this and	When are you calving / lambing?			
It is absolutely vital therefore that you have a plan in place so that in the event that you become too ill to work as normal, or lose critical staff, the important jobs can still be done – beasts fed, cows milked, crop picked.	Other key information, e.g: Do you have stock at seasonal grazing if so where, how many, contact details for landbrd Where else do you have stock – an asolation facility, other steaking, ou writering? Where a the medicine cabine?			
To get you started we've included a template on the right that has	 Where do normal tambing/calving staff come from? Contect details? 		;	

Advertorial 5: India Times



Advertorial: A solution for Corona, innovation from Namma Bengaluru