

**THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF COVID-19 IN SELECTED WHATSAPP
GROUPS IN KENYA: SOCIOLINGUISTIC, CULTURAL AND POLITICAL
REALITIES**

MANYASI ANNE NAMAKAVULI

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for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English and Linguistics of
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DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION

Declaration

This research thesis is my original work and has not been presented in this university or any other for the award of a degree.

Signature:



Date: 3rd November, 2025

Anne Manyasi

Registration No: AD13/15542/19

Recommendation

This thesis has been submitted for review with our approval as university supervisors.

Signature:



Date: 3rd November, 2025

Dr Josephine Khaemba, PhD

Department of Literature, Languages and Linguistics

Egerton University

Signature:



Date: 3rd November, 2025

Prof Catherine Kitetu, PhD

Department of Literature, Languages and Linguistics

Egerton University

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God whose grace has been sufficient in my life. In addition, this work is dedicated to all the teachers who have taught me since I first went to school and all the students I have taught. I also dedicate it to my supervisors Dr Josephine Khaemba and Prof Catherine Kitetu, my family: Moses, Aaron and Ian, and all my friends. Mungu awabariki. *Wele amubite chikhabi*

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ABSTRACT

This research critically investigated how Kenyans constructed meanings around COVID-19 through discourse in WhatsApp group chats, with particular attention to the linguistic, ideological and evaluative dimensions present in the selected online exchanges. Anchored in Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Appraisal Framework (Martin & White, 2005), the study explores how participants in the selected Kenyan WhatsApp groups employed language to convey emotions, critique governance and present collective and individual identities during the pandemic. Adopting a qualitative CDA approach, the research analyzed WhatsApp chats from five purposively sampled WhatsApp groups drawn from different social and professional backgrounds. The corpus consisted of 61 chat threads collected between March 2020 and March 2021. Data analysis was guided by Fairclough's three-dimensional model: textual, discursive and social practices, used alongside the Appraisal categories of Affect, Judgement and Graduation. The findings reveal three dominant discursive patterns in Kenyan WhatsApp group chats on COVID-19: a discourse of distrust and political critique, marked by deep scepticism toward leadership and institutional integrity; a discourse of economic struggle and social distress, reflecting frustration and disappointment with state-imposed restrictions; and a discourse of solidarity, hope, and resolve, demonstrating humour, irony and sarcasm as forms of social coping. The study further shows that linguistic choices such as medical, military and religious vocabulary, as well as everyday social register, shaped communication within Kenya's socio-political context. Overall, the research illustrates how WhatsApp provided a virtual space for citizens to share experiences and articulate views on the government's handling of COVID-19. It underscores the connection between what people say, how they feel, what they believe, and ultimately how they act. This research contributes to scholarship in digital discourse studies and critical linguistics in Africa since it offers theoretical and methodological perspectives on how social media platforms such as WhatsApp contribute to communication in times of national crises. It recommends that policymakers harness social media for transparent crisis communication, while scholars extend linguistic inquiry to multimodal and cross-cultural digital contexts.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Language, as a form of social behaviour, responds to social events and situations. It reflects social realities, individual and collective emotions and evaluative judgements about events and actors. The COVID-19 pandemic, which constituted a major global health and communication crisis, provided a context in which language became central to how individuals and groups represented the crisis, expressed emotions and constructed social meanings. In Kenya, as elsewhere in the world, the pandemic elicited varied linguistic responses ranging from the use of rhetorical devices like humour, irony and sarcasm as a coping mechanism, to the use of moral or religious framing as a reassurance response, use of Kiswahili-English code-mixing to create solidarity and shared identity, use of skeptical language to resist government directives and use of forwarded messages to construct authority. The responses circulated across social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter. These digital exchanges demonstrate that language in online settings functions both as a means of coping and as a medium through which ideological positions are articulated.

The spread of the internet has changed the way people communicate by enabling new digital spaces and networked forms of interaction (Jucker & Dürscheid, 2012). The gradual shift from traditional mass media to interactive digital platforms has given rise to new communicative forms and user-generated content (Nardo et al., 2020). This development has made digital interaction an increasingly visible part of contemporary social life (Albrecht et al., 2019). Users now participate in communication through texts, emojis, images and short videos, where actions such as *liking*, *sharing* and *commenting* are key aspects of meaning-making (Maly, 2018).

According to Kelly (2014), social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok and WhatsApp serve as important spaces for information exchange and public deliberation. They function as digital discourse communities in which participants share perspectives and negotiate meanings around social issues. Within these communities, language use tends to mirror wider socio-political and cultural orientations. Consequently, this research argues that linguistic analyses of online interactions reveal how members of a society interpret, evaluate and respond to major events. This study looked at how the WhatsApp platform was

used for information exchange and interpretation of COVID-19 in selected WhatsApp groups in Kenya.

COVID-19 was first reported in Kenya on 12 March 2020. Such a pandemic was bound to elicit reactions from Kenyans. According to Asmara (2020), government containment measures such as curfews, school closures, lockdowns and restrictions on social gatherings generated extensive public discussion. Although these measures aimed to prevent the spread of the virus, they also disrupted livelihoods and provoked frustration, uncertainty and mistrust among citizens. WhatsApp groups, in particular, became spaces where Kenyans discussed these developments, shared experiences and expressed opinions (Seufert et al., 2022). Through these discussions, individuals reflected on governance, public health and everyday survival, often combining humour, critique, and creativity in their expressions (Costa et al., 2022). The WhatsApp platform, therefore, provided an alternative avenue for civic expression, complementing but also contesting official narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya.

According to Delam and Eidi (2020), the WhatsApp platform provided channels through which individuals and groups could exchange updates, clarify emerging health information, and maintain social contact when there was restriction of movement brought about by the pandemic. At the same time, it also allowed the spread of misinformation and rumours, highlighting challenges in verifying information within informal online networks (Delam & Eidi, 2020). The mixed role of WhatsApp, both as a tool for community support and a space for discursive contestation, makes it a significant focus for linguistic analysis as done in this study that looks at the discursive construction of COVID-19 in selected WhatsApp group chats in Kenya.

This study draws its perspective from many studies in digital communication. For instance, Baron (1984) who studied Computer-Mediated Communication. The researcher looked at how computer-mediated communication acts as a force in language change by examining how the medium influences both what can be expressed and how it is expressed, particularly in contrast to speech and traditional writing. She goes ahead to argue that CMC shows hybrid features such as blending spoken and written registers and that elements such as longer response times, high frequency of direct argumentation, reduced register shifts and a focus on message content over speaker persona are characteristic of early computer-based interaction. From Baron's

(1984) work, one understands how digital platforms have an influence on language especially digital language.

Related perspectives can be found in studies done by Crystal (2011), who looks at Internet Linguistics, Keyboard-to-Screen Communication done by Jucker and Dürscheid (2012), and Computer-Mediated Discourse carried out by Herring and Androutsopoulos (2015). All the above viewpoints show how digital discourse makes use of features of both speech and writing while remaining sensitive to social context and identity performance. In spite of the great insights from these studies, many of them focused on Western contexts. Similar studies in Africa and particularly in Kenya are limited. The present study extends their work by looking at language use on the interactive social media platform, WhatsApp, during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya

Although there are studies on COVID-19 in Kenya, many of them differ from this study given that they have given their attention to areas such as public health communication, how the media framed the pandemic and how misinformation was spread. Not much has been done in terms of how language use by Kenyan Citizens in social media forums influenced or was influenced by the pandemic. The absence of such studies that would present the sociolinguistic, cultural and political mapping of how Kenyans responded to COVID-19 present a knowledge gap that informed the present study.

This study, therefore, undertakes a critical discourse analysis and an appraisal analysis of selected WhatsApp group chats on COVID-19 in Kenya. The examination is done using Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Framework. By looking at language through both Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Appraisal Framework, this study was able to analyse how the sampled Kenyan WhatsApp groups thought, felt and negotiated their space during COVID-19. CDA helped in the understanding of how everyday language carries traces of power in terms of how people position themselves, challenge authority or quietly accept the ideas that surround them. The Appraisal framework then added the emotional layer by showing how WhatsApp group members expressed fear, hope, anger, distrust, sarcasm or humour and how they judged the government of Kenya during COVID-19. By analysing WhatsApp discussions in selected WhatsApp groups during the pandemic, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body

of work on digital discourse by offering insights into how linguistic practices shape and reflect social meanings in moments of national crises.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although social media platforms such as WhatsApp became central to public discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya, there has been limited linguistic examination of how users constructed, contested and negotiated meanings surrounding the crisis. Since language is central to communication, the language forms and patterns employed by individuals and social groups can index the social-cultural and social-political realities of a crisis. Existing research has mainly focused on public health communication, media framing and misinformation while overlooking the ideological, evaluative and interpersonal dimensions of everyday digital interactions. Consequently, little is known about how language use in WhatsApp group chats reflected citizens' attitudes, social relations and perceptions of government action during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study addresses this gap by applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis and the Appraisal Framework to investigate the linguistic and discursive strategies through which Kenyans represented COVID-19, expressed emotions and constructed social meanings in WhatsApp group chats.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study on the discursive construction of COVID-19 in WhatsApp groups in Kenya was guided by one general objective and three specific objectives.

1.3.1 General Objective

The overall objective of the study was to analyse how selected WhatsApp group chats in Kenya linguistically and discursively constructed COVID-19 through their lexical choices, attitudes, emotions, evaluations and what they reveal about underlying social relations and ideological positions of the Kenyan citizens towards the government in times of a national crisis.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To assess the lexical choices used in selected WhatsApp group chats in Kenya to construct meanings and represent COVID-19.

- ii. To establish how attitudes, emotions, and evaluations toward the government of Kenya's response to COVID-19 are expressed in selected WhatsApp group chats.
- iii. To describe how discursive practices in selected WhatsApp group chats in Kenya reflect underlying social relations, ideological positions and perceptions of government responses during COVID-19.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What lexical choices did WhatsApp users in Kenya employ to construct meanings and represent COVID-19 in selected group chats?
- ii. How were attitudes, emotions and evaluations toward the Government of Kenya's response to COVID-19 expressed in selected WhatsApp group chats?
- iii. In what ways did the discursive practices in selected WhatsApp group chats in Kenya reflect underlying social relations, ideological positions and perceptions of government responses during COVID-19?

1.5 Justification for the Study

This study of language use on WhatsApp at a time of a national health crisis is justified on several academic and practical grounds. When the disease started spreading, there were reactionary discussions about it in many parts of the world. These kinds of discussions could be seen on digital platforms especially social media. People all over the world were interested in knowing more about the disease and finding ways of preventing it or managing it should they be infected. When it was apparent that the disease was in Kenya, information about it would be shared on WhatsApp. Because of its accessibility and ease of usage, WhatsApp group chats were used to share experiences as well as people's feelings and evaluations on how the government was managing COVID-19. Because of the available linguistic data on the platform, the study set out to investigate how and why WhatsApp group members used language in a certain way and the kind of meanings that came out from the language used in relation to COVID-19 management in the country. Analysing the lexical and discursive features of these group chats was therefore vital in understanding how language was used to construct and mediate public perceptions of the pandemic.

Secondly, digital communication still needs to be studied especially in Kenya considering how fast it is evolving. Many social media studies have studied platforms such as Facebook and

Twitter because of the ease of access to data. WhatsApp requires more ethical considerations for one to acquire personal and group data which makes it less popular. For that reason, this study fills this gap by looking at the kind of language that was chosen to discuss COVID-19, the kinds of evaluations and attitudes expressed about the pandemic in the country and the ideologies embedded in the group chats about the relationship between the Kenyan citizens and the government.

The third justification is that language on social media often has political messages and standpoints. People use language either to support or resist the government in place. The attitudes and evaluations made are tied to the political perceptions of the language users. From the language choices in the WhatsApp group chats, the study was able to establish how members expressed approval, disapproval or resistance toward government directives during the pandemic. The analysis showed that there is a relationship between language, power and the government in moments of national crises

To conclude, the study is of value both from a theoretical and practical point of view. In terms of theory, the present study adds to the knowledge expressed in Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework and the Appraisal Framework by Martin and White (2005). This is because data from this study is drawn from a digital platform therefore providing an extension to discourses that were studied before the emergence of social media platforms like WhatsApp. The findings of the study will be of use to different institutions such as the public health sector and other government agencies that deal with digital communication. This is because they provide information on the linguistic and discursive construction of a national crisis on social media which will be of use in managing future national crises.

1.6 Assumptions, Scope and Limitations

Since one's choice of language can show what someone is going through, what someone believes in, how someone is feeling and how someone wants to influence their audience, this study assumed that the language used in WhatsApp group chats during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya reflected such. What people wrote revealed their judgements of the government and the disease in general. What was said also indicated whether people were taking the containment measures put in place by the government seriously or not. The manner in which language was used to talk about COVID-19 in WhatsApp group chats had deeper

meanings embedded in terms of what they believed about the government and its ability to handle such a crisis. The language contained long seated issues that exist between the government and the citizens. The COVID-19 pandemic was just a trigger that exposed the strained relationship. The last assumption of this study is that the Appraisal Framework and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis were ideal both as theories and tools for analyzing data.

In terms of scope, this study obtained its data from the WhatsApp platform in Kenya. The data was sampled from five WhatsApp groups. The groups comprised of medics, neighbours, former university classmates, investment partners and a group of secondary school teachers. Our data was collected from March 2020 and March 2021. This period was chosen because it contains data from the beginning of the pandemic to periods when infections were high in the country. In our analysis, we focused on the kind of words chosen to talk about the pandemic in WhatsApp group chats and their implied messages, the feelings that are conveyed through the word choices and the societal beliefs and relations embedded in the language used.

The study was limited by its reliance on textual data from WhatsApp, which may not have fully captured the multimodal nature of online communication such as emojis, images and voice notes. Ethical considerations also restricted the scope to publicly shared or voluntarily provided messages, excluding private or sensitive content. Additionally, while the findings provided insights into Kenyan online discourse, they may not be generalized to all digital platforms or to offline communication contexts.

1.7 Definition of Terms

Crisis situation: Times when the country is going through a crisis.

Crisis: An event that has led to an unstable and dangerous situation affecting a community or the whole country, COVID-19 in this study.

Digital ethnography/netnography/virtual ethnography: The method of doing ethnographic research in digital space, the WhatsApp platform in this study.

Discourse: In this study, discourse means language in use in WhatsApp group chats.

Discursive construction: Practices and meanings that come into existence through a collective act of language, WhatsApp language in group chats in this study.

Ethnography: A form of qualitative research involving data collection within the socio-cultural context of a study.

Ideology: Shared meanings about crises in Kenya, and about crises in general, which are in the form of ideas and beliefs. These beliefs and ideas are embedded in language as used on the WhatsApp platform in this study.

Language use in crisis situations: Discourse produced by people affected by a social crisis as they respond to news about the crisis by posting comments and responding to posted comments on the internet, WhatsApp in this study.

Social media platform: Communication platforms in which participants have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data. The sites allow the participants to publicly articulate views that can be viewed and traversed by others.

Pandemic: COVID-19 in this study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature relevant to the discursive construction of COVID-19 with a particular focus on the use of WhatsApp discourse in Kenya. We examine how language has been used to construct meaning, negotiate identities and reproduce or challenge long held beliefs in Kenya in times of crises. The review highlights international and national studies that have explored crisis discourse, social media communication and digital language. We also identify the gaps that this study seeks to fill. This chapter also discusses the theoretical frameworks that support this study-Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Appraisal Framework by Martin and White (2005), which together provide the analytical tools for exploring how linguistic and discursive choices on WhatsApp shaped public perceptions and beliefs during the pandemic. The chapter is organized in the following sections: use of discourse to construct meaning, language practices in digital and social media contexts, how discourse constructs health and crisis, studies on COVID-19 discourses, sociolinguistic dimensions of WhatsApp discourse and how cultural beliefs and political power construct COVID-19 discourse. Our last section presents the theoretical framework.

2.2 Use of Discourse to Construct Meaning

Many people use language as a means of transmitting information and also as a form of social action that constructs and also reproduces social realities. In the virtual environments such as WhatsApp, language is used to represent certain meanings. Language also reflects existing power relations and affects how people collectively understand events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Using Fairclough's (1992, 2015) framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), we consider discourse to be both socially constitutive and socially conditioned. This is because discourse constructs the social world and shapes it at the same time. This section looks at language as social action, the discursive construction of social reality, and the interplay of meaning, ideology and representation in online discourse. We also identify the research gaps that relate to the discursive construction of COVID-19 in WhatsApp groups in Kenya.

2.2.1 Language as Social Action

Language is a form of social practice through which users act upon and change their world. For instance, speech act theorists such as Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) emphasize that utterances perform actions such as promising, warning, accusing and persuading. According to Austin (1962), utterances do not just describe states of affairs. This performative nature of language is held forth in critical and sociolinguistic approaches, where linguistic choices are perceived as strategic acts that not only produce but also reflect and reproduce social relations (Fairclough, 2010).

In WhatsApp communication, everyday linguistic habits such as forwarding messages, issuing moral advice, or sharing memes comprise social actions that contribute to meaning-making. A message asking people to comply with COVID-19 health protocols, for example, performs a moral and political act by positioning the speaker as a responsible citizen and others as potential deviants. van Dijk (2008) posits that such discursive acts operate within social cognition. van Dijk (2008) examined how discourse operates as a mechanism through which power and ideology are constructed, maintained and resisted in society. He argues that control over discourse often translates to control over public knowledge and belief systems, enabling dominant groups to shape social realities. Through his socio-cognitive model, van Dijk links linguistic structures to broader social and mental processes, showing that discourse influences cognition as much as it reflects it. His work highlights how textual and contextual choices subtly reproduce inequality and how counter-discourses can challenge dominant narratives. This perspective informs our study by framing WhatsApp interactions as sites where citizens negotiated meaning, authority, and resistance during the COVID-19 crisis in Kenya. This means that language use is linked to the beliefs and ideologies that people share. Therefore, WhatsApp interactions, during COVID-19 for this study, can be interpreted as social performances where linguistic choices validate responsibility, distrust, resistance and solidarity.

2.2.2 The use of Language in the Construction of Social Reality

Critical discourse theory and constructionism posit that reality is socially constructed through discourse. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), what societies consider to be real is many times a production of certain people that has been shared and believed by others. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue that what we believe to be true is not just influenced by our own

thoughts but also by the thoughts of the people we interact with in our day-to-day endeavours. They propose that people hold certain truths basing on the truths that are held by the society from which they come from. Every conversation that one has affects what one ends up believing as true or not. That being the case, language is a great factor in determining what people believe to be real or not. Language plays a central role in this process by transmitting and legitimizing collective knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Their theory of social constructionism tells us how beliefs, norms and institutions gain legitimacy through habitual use and social acceptance. This framework is relevant to the present study as it explains how participants in Kenyan WhatsApp groups used language to define, interpret, and negotiate the meaning of COVID-19 within their social, cultural and political contexts.

Another scholar, Fairclough (1992; 2015) develops the above point of view by arguing that discourse constructs social identities, relationships and systems of knowledge. Fairclough (1992) is of the argument that language does not just reflect structures of a given society but also shows the kind of power relations that are there and the beliefs that are held and acted upon. There is a three-dimensional framework that Fairclough uses in his Critical Discourse Analysis. The framework looks at texts at the levels of linguistic features, discursive practices, and social practices. According to Fairclough (1992), everyday communication carries ideological meanings that can reinforce or challenge social hierarchies. His work emphasizes the connection between textual choices and institutional, cultural, and political contexts, highlighting how discourse participates in social change. This framework underpins our study by providing a lens with which we analysed how Kenyan WhatsApp group members shared experiences and feelings, constructed meaning and challenged and critiqued authority during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Fairclough (2015), people, whether individually or in groups, make use of language to talk about what they regard as the truth and what they consider to be morally acceptable in their society.

Language played a key role in determining what people believed to be true or not during the COVID-19 pandemic. By using certain linguistic choices such as medical register, social register, military vocabulary and religious register, humour, irony and satire, WhatsApp group members framed the pandemic to mirror their social, cultural and political realities. According to Wodak (2021), this kind of framings are ideological acts that delineate the boundaries of acceptable thought and action. In the WhatsApp context of the data used in this study, linguistic expressions like “Kenya belongs to the Almighty God and “The money is what makes them

give us all this propaganda” show how communities co-constructed meaning through cultural and political lens. By so doing, they transformed the global pandemic into a locally intelligible experience. The pandemic was seen as a Kenyan problem and not just an international one.

2.2.3 Discourse in the Formation of Meaning, Ideology and Representation

Meaning in discourse is not found in words but rather comes out in people’s interactions and the beliefs that they hold. Hall (1997) argues that meaning is actively constructed through representation rather than simply reflecting reality. He emphasizes that language, images, and symbols are very important tools through which people form knowledge about themselves and others. Hall (1977) talks about the concepts of encoding and decoding by stating that media and cultural texts carry intended meanings yet audiences interpret them in different ways. His work also talks about the role of beliefs that people hold in shaping perceptions and maintaining power relations within a given society. This perspective informs our study by framing WhatsApp group chats as sites where participants created certain meanings, expressed evaluations, and constructed social and cultural realities during the COVID-19 pandemic. In more specific terms, ideology functions via discourse by making certain interpretations seem natural and interpreting power relations as obvious knowledge (Fairclough, 2010; Thompson, 2013). Thompson (2013) looks into the role of media in shaping social life, arguing that communication technologies act as bridges in determining how knowledge, cultural meanings, and social relationships are constructed and spread in a given society. According to Thompson, media plays a key role in the transmission of information from one place to another. The information spread by the media affects not just what people believe but also what they end up doing. Thompson (2013) also asserts that the relationship between media, power and ideology cannot be ignored showing that media can not only create good relationships in a society but can also ruin the same relationships. This is the point of view that our study takes because WhatsApp is a digital platform where members create and consume information both from individuals and institutions. The study analyses the kind of language that was used to talk about COVID-19 in Kenya in selected groups, how members expressed their feelings and how they judged the government from the way it managed the pandemic.

Therefore, the discourse around COVID-19 in Kenya and internationally is embedded with meanings of how people experienced and understood the pandemic. While some people saw it as a purely medical problem, others saw it as a moral or religious issue or both. Some people

interpreted the pandemic as a political problem by criticizing decisions made by their governments and government officials in the attempts to contain its spread. All these narratives tell us that language is a social power and had an effect on what people believed and how they responded to the pandemic. For example, when government communication constructs non-compliance to COVID-19 restrictions as criminal, or when citizens label government officials as corrupt, each discourse presents a different belief systems and assumptions. According to Machin and Mayr (2012), the kind of words one decides to use and the manner in which they are used shows what they believe and how they are likely going to act. The author argues that words hold power.

The way meaning is made in WhatsApp discourse is made complex because of the presence of multimodal features such emojis, images, memes, and voice notes which complement textual expression. These features allow WhatsApp users to encrypt meanings in humour, irony or sarcasm. For example, “corona ni ya wazungu” (corona is for white people) is an illustration of how ideology becomes rooted in the discourse of a given community, shaping perceptions of risk, difference, and belonging. Therefore, discourse in WhatsApp group chats not only functions as a mirror of the Kenyan society but also constructs social ideology.

2.2.4 Section Summary and Research Gaps

When discourse is looked at as a language and a social practice, it plays a constitutive role in shaping how individuals perceive and respond to crises. When we look at WhatsApp communication in Kenya within WhatsApp groups, members often use language as an agency for action. They also use it to construct their social realities and ideological negotiation. Using Fairclough’s (1992, 2015) CDA framework, this study looked at discourse as key to the construction of meaning, identity, and power in the digital mediation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although there exists a considerable body of research that has looked at discourse and meaning-making in traditional media and institutional communication, there exists several gaps in understanding how such processes unfold within informal digital spaces like WhatsApp. This is especially so in Africa and Kenya in particular. For instance, there is limited attention that has been given to informal digital discourse such as WhatsApp group chats. Most of the CDA literature (Fairclough, 2010; van Dijk, 2008; Wodak, 2021) gives attention to institutional texts

such as news, political speeches, and policy documents. There are not so many studies that have focused on ordinary peer-to-peer communication on platforms such as WhatsApp, where citizens construct and circulate meaning.

In addition, many studies have not looked at African sociolinguistic environments. A number of studies on digital discourse are largely Eurocentric in the sense that they often overlook how multilingualism, oral traditions, and communal epistemologies shape meaning in African settings (Banda, 2018; Ndlovu, 2021). Kenya is a multilingual country where code-switching, the use of religious register and rhetorical devices such as humour and sarcasm play pivotal roles in constructing shared interpretations of global phenomena. However, these remain underexplored in critical linguistic scholarship.

Researchers such as Chiluba and Adegoke (2020) have explored areas like misinformation and political discourse online. On the contrary, few studies have analysed how ideology works through vernacular and culturally embedded discourses in WhatsApp groups. The subtle ways in which local moralities, faith, and political allegiances shape meaning require deeper critical attention. Another gap in this study is insufficiency in the integration of CDA approaches. WhatsApp is multimodal in nature. Its usage allows for a combination of text, image, emoji, and audio. This kind of multimodality has not been adequately theorized within existing CDA frameworks. This limits the understanding of how meaning and ideology are constructed not just linguistically, but through multiple semiotic resources (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

By addressing the above-mentioned research gaps, the present study contributes to the growing body of research on digital discourse by putting into context the discursive construction of meaning within Kenya's sociolinguistic, cultural, and political realities. The study demonstrates how ordinary communicative practices in WhatsApp groups functioned as critical grounds for meaning-making, ideological negotiation, and social action during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3 Language Practices in Digital and Social Media Contexts

Language use on digital platforms represents a noticeable transformation in how people construct and share meaning. When people use language online, they have a number of forms that they can make use such as text, emoji, images, voice notes, hyperlinks, and memes which

produce multiple meanings (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Kress, 2010). Androutsopoulos (2015) carried out research on how people online features are used for communication. He studied the manner in which people use language online and how it reveals their identity and influences their relationship with other online users. By focusing on how multilingual and hybrid linguistic practices are represented in online spaces, the study showed the kind of meanings people conveyed and the kind of identities they formed. The cultural beliefs and practices of the research show the shifts and the variations that exist in the language used on digital media. Androutsopoulos (2015) makes use of sociolinguistics, digital ethnography, and interactional pragmatics as theories. It is stressed in the study that online communication should be analysed as a social practice where linguistic choices are looked at together with the identities that people want to present, how people want to be viewed by society and the roles they want to play in their society. He looks at different languages as used and explores why people use different languages when communicating online. The key concepts of the study include: why people use different languages and different forms of communication online, creative and context-sensitive use of language in social media, including code-switching, transliteration, and mixing registers, how people use language online to create certain identities, how people use language to form or belong to certain online communities and how users adapt language resources to navigate social norms, humour, and cultural references. By use of digital ethnography and qualitative discourse analysis, the study covers social media posts, comments and interactions on Facebook. Androutsopoulos (2015) emphasizes analysis of both textual forms and interactional practices for one to get a good understanding. The study found out that social media encourages language users to use different forms of language to communicate and also communicate in different languages at their disposal. It is also argued that people's linguistic behaviour online is not so much different from their behaviour offline. Another finding was that people tend to become creative in language use when communicating online. Also, the study found out that people form communities online and also express their cultural affiliations from what they say on digital media. Lastly, the scholar argues that online communication needs to be interpreted both from small to large linguistic communities.

Androutsopoulos' (2015) study is relevant to this study of WhatsApp discourse on COVID-19 in Kenya as it provides a framework for analysing creative expression and identifying negotiation in online group interactions. His work helps explain how participants use language to express emotions, align with social groups and participate in digital meaning-making during the pandemic.

According to Crystal (2011), online discourse sits at the intersection of speech and writing. Crystal (2011) examines how the internet and digital communication technologies shape language use, highlighting the ways in which online environments influence linguistic norms, creativity and evolution. The study focuses on language variation, innovation and adaptation in digital contexts such as emails, chat rooms, social media and instant messaging platforms. Crystal (2011) investigates how these online interactions reflect broader social, cultural, and technological changes. The study by Crystal (2011) draws on sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, emphasizing the interplay between language, technology and society. The scholar treats online communication as a dynamic social practice where users creatively manipulate language to achieve specific communicative purposes. He also explores the impact of technology on orthography, syntax and pragmatics, situating linguistic change within social and cultural contexts. The key concepts of his study are: online registers, language economy; and creativity and play online. Crystal (2011) employs a descriptive and analytical approach, combining examples from real online interactions with theoretical discussions. His analysis emphasizes both micro-level linguistic features (vocabulary, syntax, punctuation) and macro-level social functions (identity, community, social norms). His findings were as follows: digital communication encourages linguistic innovation, blending formal and informal registers; online language practices are central to identity construction, social negotiation, and group cohesion; technology both constrains and enables new forms of expression, shaping how meaning is produced and shared; understanding online discourse requires attention to context, purpose, and social interaction, not just language form. Crystal (2011) is relevant to this study of WhatsApp discourse on COVID-19 in Kenya as it provides a framework for examining online language creativity, identity construction and communicative strategies. His work supports the analysis of lexical innovations, emotive expressions and social interaction patterns in WhatsApp group chat communication during COVID-19.

Crystal (2011) argues that internet discourse is a form of language marked by spontaneity, abbreviation and stylistic experimentation. According to the scholar, this informal register allows for immediate and intimate online interactions. This supports the social functions of WhatsApp, where conversations imitate oral exchanges within familiar networks. On the contrary, Page et al. (2014) posit that such informality should not be equated with lack of structure. This is on the premises that digital discourse is governed by its own norms of coherence, turn-taking, and politeness, often supported by the affordances of the platform. In

WhatsApp data used in this study, the code switching between English and Kiswahili contributes to a localized style of digital interaction, one that blends global communicative practices with local sociolinguistic realities.

Since digital discourse is also intertextual, it means that there is constant reworking of existing texts across media and contexts. According to Fairclough (1992), intertextuality is the process by which new texts incorporate or echo prior discourses, thereby connecting micro-level interactions to broader socio-political narratives. In WhatsApp discourse, users often circulate screenshots, news headlines, memes and religious verses, weaving together multiple discourses ranging from medical, political, moral and humorous discourses into a single communicative event. This kind of high degree of intertextuality changes WhatsApp from a simple chat tool into a complex discursive space where meaning is collaboratively produced, contested and recontextualized. WhatsApp, as a discursive site, offers a unique environment for the production and negotiation of discourse. It combines the immediacy of oral communication with the persistence of written text, creating what Jones (2020) calls a “quasi-synchronous” form of discourse. On the WhatsApp platform, messages are not only produced but also read almost instantaneously, yet they remain retrievable, allowing participants to revisit and reinterpret previous exchanges. Pragmatically, this duality influences how users perform politeness, manage face, and assert authority within online communities (Herring, 2013).

From the data obtained in this study, WhatsApp served not only as a medium of conversation but also as a site of discourse production, where sociolinguistic and ideological dynamics were played out in the COVID-19 group chats. Because of its affordances, WhatsApp is an avenue for collective dialogue and the construction of shared knowledge. According to Tagg and Seargeant (2017), WhatsApp groups often mirror offline social structures and also offer opportunities for new power configurations. This is especially when marginalized voices find expression in digital conversations. In Kenyan WhatsApp groups, linguistic hybridity, humour, and religious lexicon often index social hierarchies and moral worldviews, reflecting how local discourse practices are recontextualized in global digital networks (Ntarangwi, 2020; Wekesa & Abwao, 2021).

Worth noting is the fact that communication on WhatsApp is shaped by the platform’s technological affordances. According to Hutchby (2001), WhatsApp has features that either constrain or enable certain forms of expression. For example, when using the platform, one

can easily forward messages received from other WhatsApp users. This affordability encourages the speedy circulation of texts, which contributes to the viral spread of information and misinformation. Hutchby (2001) investigated how communication technologies, such as telephones and the internet mediate social interaction. The study focuses on how technology shapes conversational structures, interactional norms, and the ways people negotiate meaning in mediated contexts. Hutchby (2001) aimed to show that technology is not just a neutral conduit for communication but actively influences how people talk, respond and manage social relationships. The study draws on conversation analysis (CA) and sociolinguistics, situating technology as a contextual and interactional factor in communication. Hutchby (2001) emphasizes that the medium affects conversational turn-taking, repair mechanisms and the overall management of dialogue, highlighting the interplay between technological affordances and human agency. The key concepts of the study are on how technology changes the structure and flow of conversation, shaping how participants coordinate talk; how mediated environments influence how people take conversational turns and resolve misunderstandings; how features of communication technologies such as delays and text-based cues create new possibilities and constraints for interaction and how interaction remains socially constructed. Participants adapt their communicative practices to the technological context.

Hutchby (2001) employs conversation analytic methods, examining recorded telephone calls, internet chats and online interactions. The study analyses both micro-level linguistic features and interactional patterns, linking them to the specific technological medium used. The following are the major findings of the study: technology actively shapes conversational practices, influencing how meaning is produced and negotiated; mediated communication preserves social norms but also introduces new interactional possibilities such as delayed responses or multimodal cues; understanding technology-mediated discourse requires attention to both linguistic detail and contextual affordances.

Hutchby (2001) is relevant to the present study of WhatsApp discourse on COVID-19 in Kenya as it provides a framework for analysing how digital communication technologies shape conversational patterns, turn-taking and meaning-making. His work relates with how WhatsApp members adapted language use to the features of the WhatsApp platform, negotiated social relationships, expressed evaluation and constructed shared understandings during the pandemic. During the COVID-19 pandemic, this affordance played a crucial role in shaping public discourse as ordinary users became active agents in producing and disseminating

pandemic narratives. This study argues that WhatsApp is not a neutral communicative channel but is rather an active agent in meaning-making, mediating how truth, fear and authority are negotiated through language (Fairclough, 1995; Jones et al, 2015; Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

A number of studies in online communities and identity performance highlight the ways in which digital spaces enable the construction and performance of identities by its users. Researchers such as Barton and Lee (2013) and Georgakopoulou (2017) argue that identity online is not fixed but performed through linguistic choices, interactional styles and participation practices. These kinds of performances are in form of dialogues and possible since they are shaped by the kind of audience and the social affordances of the medium. In WhatsApp, identity work is visible in how users show their affiliation or distance themselves from others through linguistic choices such as code-switching, humour and use of emotive expressions.

In spite of the presence of a number of studies, research on African digital spaces remains relatively limited compared to Western contexts. While global studies such (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Jones, 2020) provide frameworks for understanding online discourse, not many studies have looked into how these dynamics manifest in African sociocultural settings where language, religion and politics are deeply interweaved. The current study fills this gap by exploring how Kenyans in selected WhatsApp groups draw on local linguistic resources that include medical register, social register, military vocabulary, religious register, humour, irony and sarcasm to construct communal identities and respond to crisis discourse. In this sense, identity in WhatsApp interactions is not just self-expression but is rather a form of discursive negotiation of belonging and belief within Kenya's socio-political realities.

In spite of extensive scholarly work on digital discourse, a number of gaps can still be cited. For instance, a lot of the existing research on social media communication has focused on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, leaving WhatsApp underexplored because of its private and encrypted nature (Sergeant & Tagg, 2019). In addition, there is limited research in sociolinguistics that looks into how multilingual practices and cultural scripts shape meaning-making in African contexts, with Kenya in particular. To sum up, limited attention has been paid to how digital discourse interacts with political and moral ideologies, particularly during health crises such as COVID-19.

The current study, therefore, fills these gaps by critically analysing the discursive construction of COVID-19 in selected WhatsApp groups in Kenya. Using Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, the study places WhatsApp not only as a medium of communication but also as a discursive arena where users co-construct social realities, mobilize cultural beliefs and challenge or reproduce political narratives. By so doing, digital discourse becomes a lens through which broader sociolinguistic, cultural and ideological processes can be understood.

2.4 How Discourse Constructs Health and Crisis

Health crises have historically generated intense discursive activity as societies struggle to make sense of invisible threats, assign moral and political responsibility, and construct collective responses. The study of language and epidemics highlights how linguistic and discursive choices are never neutral. This is because they shape perceptions of risk, blame and resilience. In digital contexts such as WhatsApp, this discursive work becomes even more pronounced as ordinary citizens become active participants in producing, circulating and contesting pandemic narratives. Literature in this section is organized in the following sub-sections: how discourse constructs crisis, how words make epidemics: from the AIDS crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic, media discourse on pandemics, how language and metaphor shape the framing of disease and how moral, religious and political discourses shape health communication.

2.4.1 How Discourse Constructs Crisis

Crisis-related linguistic studies reveal that language plays a central role in framing events, shaping ideologies, and influencing public perception. However, much of this research has been conducted in Western contexts, leaving African crisis discourse relatively underexplored. Klimava (2016) investigated the role of language in the construction of ideological stances in newspapers from different countries representing the Ukraine political crisis that took place between 2013 and 2014. Drawing from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Klimava (2016) examined articles from *The New York Times*, *Deutsche Welle*, *The Moscow Times*, and *Russia Today*. The study focused on three key events: the annexation of Crimea, the Malaysian airplane crash and the sanctions introduced by the West against Russia. The study revealed that political and economic power groups significantly influenced political decisions which were also shaped by national economic interests. The news texts functioned as legitimizing

mechanisms for political actions, demonstrating how discourse can sustain power relations and ideological dominance. The findings affirm the centrality of language in constructing ideological positions and shaping global perceptions of crises.

Similarly, Silberstein (2002) demonstrated how post-9/11 media rhetoric in the United States transformed an act of terror into an act of war through deliberate lexical and discursive framing. The study revealed an intricate interaction between media representation, discourse choices, and political decision-making in times of crisis. Such research underscores the ideological potency of discourse during crises but largely reflects Euro-American socio-political environments, thereby highlighting a geographic and contextual gap that studies from the Global South can address.

More recent digital studies, such as Evolvi's (2019) analysis of Brexit-related tweets, extend this understanding to online communication platforms. Evolvi (2019) analysed 2,005 tweets sent after the 2016 British referendum on the European Union, showing how Twitter served as a space for the articulation of identities and ideological polarization. The tweets displayed antagonistic tones through sarcasm, anger and fear aimed at belittling minority groups. This study illustrated how social media fosters ideological echo chambers where users engage primarily with like-minded individuals. Although these findings reveal the intricate relationship between discourse, power, and digital crisis communication, they privilege Western communicative practices with limited attention on how crisis discourse unfolds within African socio-linguistic contexts.

The examination of crisis communication holds particular importance in Africa where states have encountered numerous socio-political and health crises. Fletcher (2021) examined linguistic tactics used in Rwandan media during the commemoration of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, revealing how language mediates collective memory and national identity reconstruction. Similarly, Finn et al. (2016) analysed Kenyan newspaper coverage of drought-related crises, showing that linguistic framing influences how the public perceives and responds to environmental emergencies. These studies demonstrate that language is not merely a vehicle for information transmission but a tool for shaping collective understanding, public emotion, and policy perception.

The African continent has also been the site of significant research on political discourse and conflict communication. Aminu (2024) examined linguistic constructions in political discourse during the Nigerian general elections, showing how rhetorical and discursive strategies construct and negotiate political identities. Likewise, Ebim (2020) analysed linguistic patterns in media coverage of the Boko Haram insurgency, illustrating how discourse frames issues of security and terrorism. Collectively, these studies underscore that African crisis discourse often intersects with themes of governance, identity, and power. However, they largely focus on elite or institutional voices, overlooking the discourse of ordinary citizens. This omission creates a critical gap that the present study addresses by analysing WhatsApp comments among Kenyan citizens during COVID-19, where everyday speakers acted as agents of meaning-making.

Within the domain of public health communication, linguistic studies in Africa have illuminated how discourse mediates crisis management and public perception. Tesseur (2019) examined language use during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa and emphasized the importance of culturally appropriate communication. The study showed that linguistic choices directly affected the effectiveness of health messaging and public trust. Similarly, Chilwa and Ajiboye (2016) employed CDA and the Appraisal Framework from Systemic Functional Linguistics to analyse evaluative comments on news reports about the 2013 Navy Yard shooting in Washington, D.C. and the Westgate Mall attack in Nairobi. Their findings revealed that online language was ideologically charged and emotionally expressive, marked by flaming, labelling and rhetorical devices such as exaggeration, metaphor and irony. These features reflected negative evaluations of perceived social enemies and conveyed collective emotions of anger, fear and frustration, illustrating how digital discourse becomes a vehicle for both resistance and identity construction.

Extending this line of inquiry, Chilwa (2019) examined online discourses surrounding the Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNL) in Mali, revealing how social media narratives sustained ideological conflict and challenged peace processes. Despite ceasefire agreements, online discourse continued to project conflictive narratives, demonstrating that digital language use can escalate crises. While these studies establish that social media language both reflects and amplifies crisis dynamics, they rarely examine how ordinary citizens in non-Western contexts employ digital communication to negotiate meaning during public health emergencies.

In Kenya, crisis studies have been predominantly conducted within psychology, sociology, and communication studies, with minimal attention from linguistics. One notable linguistic study is Barasa (2014), who examined discursive strategies in Kenya's 2008 post-election consultation discourse between the late President Mwai Kibaki and the late Prime Minister Raila Odinga. Her analysis revealed the complex linguistic strategies used by both leaders to negotiate political power, ideological positions, and national unity. The findings showed that both actors used rational arguments grounded in legal and constitutional references as well as language encoding optimism and political tolerance. Despite its contributions, Barasa's study focused on elite political discourse rather than citizen-level communication. The current study, therefore, builds on her work by shifting analytical attention from leadership to grassroots discourse, exploring how ordinary Kenyans constructed, contested, and reinterpreted COVID-19 realities through WhatsApp group chats. In doing so, it expands the boundaries of crisis discourse analysis by integrating citizen-generated digital discourse into critical linguistic scholarship.

2.4.2 How Words Make Epidemics: from the AIDS Crisis to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The relationship between language and health crises has long been recognized as a key area of sociolinguistic and discourse research. Early studies on the HIV/AIDS epidemic revealed how stigmatizing and moralizing discourses were encoded in public communication often framing the disease in terms of deviance, punishment or irresponsibility. For instance, a study by Treichler (1999) examined how the AIDS epidemic was discursively constructed through language, media, science and public policy. The scholar argued that AIDS was not only a biomedical condition but also a "semantic epidemic" or a crisis of meaning. Her research explored how cultural narratives, metaphors and institutional discourses shaped public understanding of the disease, often reinforcing stigma and social inequality. Treichler (1999) analysed a wide range of discursive sites ranging from medical reports, government communications, media coverage, activist publications and popular culture. Through these, she showed that the epidemic was a site of struggle over truth, morality, sexuality and power. Her findings demonstrated that language is not merely descriptive but constitutive of social reality.

Treichler's (1999) study employed critical discourse analysis and cultural theory, combining feminist theory, semiotics, and science studies. The research was primarily qualitative and interpretive, focusing on how AIDS-related language in different contexts produced meanings

and social effects. Her analysis drew on textual analysis of medical journals and CDC reports, rhetorical analysis of metaphors and narratives in mainstream media; discourse analysis of activist and feminist writings; and examination of policy documents and public health messaging. This multi-genre approach allowed her to trace the interplay between knowledge production and ideology, particularly how Western societies constructed AIDS as both a biomedical and moral problem. Her study found out that AIDS was a linguistic and cultural construct: she argued that AIDS was not only an epidemic of disease but also an epidemic of signification. This is because the language used to describe AIDS which included terms like “plague,” “innocent victims,” or “risk groups” encoded moral judgments and shaped public perception. The study also reports that dominant discourses often blamed or marginalized certain groups, especially gay men, sex workers and Africans by turning medical discussions into moral commentaries. News coverage sensationalized AIDS, framing it through fear, contagion and moral decay rather than science and care. In addition, scientific and governmental institutions monopolized the “truth” about AIDS, marginalizing experiential and community-based knowledges such as voices of activists, patients and marginalized communities. Also, activist groups such as ACT UP used discourse strategically by reframing AIDS as a political issue of human rights, thereby contesting state and media narratives.

The study had several limitations. First, it had a temporal focus. This is because the analysis primarily reflects early and mid-phase AIDS discourse (1980s-1990s) and therefore does not account for later biomedical or digital transformations. The study was also Western-centric since most of its data was drawn from the U.S. and Western media and health institutions. The global South, especially Africa, received less in-depth treatment. Another limitation of the study is with regard to its use of non-empirical sampling, which means that the findings reflect deep reading and theoretical synthesis rather than systematic sampling or quantitative discourse analysis.

The fact that Treichler’s (1999) study focuses on U.S. discourse leaves room for studies of how African and other non-Western societies construct epidemics through local cultural and linguistic frameworks such as COVID-19 discourse in Kenya. In addition, since her work predates social media, there is a need to explore how epidemics are constructed in digital spaces like WhatsApp, Twitter, and Facebook, hence this study on the discursive construction of COVID-19 on WhatsApp in selected groups in Kenya. Treichler’s (1999) work laid the foundation for understanding disease as a discursive formation, a concept directly relevant to

the present study. Her insight that epidemics are “epidemics of meaning” supports this study’s use of Fairclough’s CDA and the Appraisal Framework, which similarly examine how linguistic choices encode ideology, power and emotion. This study extends Treichler’s paradigm into digital African contexts, addressing one of her key research gaps.

A related study was carried out by Washer’s (2010), which explored how social, cultural and media discourses shape public understanding of infectious disease outbreaks such as SARS, avian flu, BSE (mad cow disease), and HIV/AIDS. The central argument of the study is that infectious diseases are not only biological events but also socially constructed phenomena whose meanings are mediated through media, politics and public communication. The study investigated how fear, blame and risk are communicated, how public trust in science and government evolves during crises; and how moral and cultural values inform responses to disease. Washer sought to understand the interaction between science, media and society in constructing “emerging infections” as public threats. Using a qualitative sociological approach, the analysis focused on how media and political language framed diseases as threats, identified “risky” others, and reinforced or undermined public trust in science and authority. The study found out that media amplified risk by dramatizing outbreaks. The media created a sense of imminent catastrophe that did not always correspond to scientific risk levels. In terms of moral and cultural framing, the study found out that diseases were often moralized since they were linked to notions of purity, danger and deviance. For instance, HIV/AIDS was initially constructed as a moral crisis tied to sexuality, while BSE reflected anxieties about food safety and industrial modernity. Additionally, there were discourses of blame and othering in relation to diseases. Infectious diseases were commonly associated with “outsiders” or foreign nations, reinforcing xenophobic and nationalistic sentiments. The study also reported that the way governments and experts communicated uncertainty affected public confidence. Transparency and empathy were key determinants of credibility. Washer also highlighted that the 21st-century world’s interconnectedness both facilitates disease spread and accelerates the global circulation of fear narratives. Lastly, the scholar’s findings established that in spite of scientific progress, epidemic narratives continued to rely on war metaphors (“fighting disease,” “defeating the enemy”) and moral binaries (“innocent victims” vs. “guilty carriers”).

The study had several limitations. For instance, it focused on western contexts. The study primarily analysed media and institutional discourses in the UK and other Western societies, giving limited attention to African or Asian public discourses. Additionally, the study was

media-centered. Although rich in textual analysis, the study did not include first-hand ethnographic or audience data to see how publics interpret these messages. The study also focused on diseases before 2010 (pre-social media era), therefore not accounting for how digital platforms such as WhatsApp reconfigure health communication. Washer also used sociological rather than linguistic CDA tools, which means that detailed textual features of discourse were not systematically explored. The limitations of the study present several research gaps that the present study fills. This study looks at how social media, WhatsApp in particular, mediate the construction of disease narratives by ordinary Kenyan citizens

Washer's (2010) work provides a critical foundation for understanding disease as a discursively constructed social phenomenon, a perspective that aligns closely with the CDA approach in this study. His analysis of media framing and moralization informs the interpretation of how Kenyan WhatsApp users employ humour, irony, sarcasm, military register, religious metaphors and social register to negotiate the COVID-19 crisis. The present study advances his work by shifting focus from mainstream media to everyday digital discourse and offering a localized and participatory view of how people co-construct meaning around a health crisis.

These historical precedents reveal a continuity in the discursive construction of epidemics, proving that disease is rarely framed as a purely biomedical event but rather as a social and moral crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic reproduced and, in some contexts, amplified these discursive tendencies. The present study argues that such language does not merely describe events. Language plays an active role in constructing social meaning of a pandemic such as COVID-19. This performative dimension of discourse underscores Fairclough's (2010) argument that language is a site of social struggle where competing interpretations of reality are negotiated.

In more recent studies, A study by Ouma et al. (2023) looked at how COVID-19 crisis communication influenced public perception of the Kenyan government communication strategy. The study was carried out in Kibera Sub-County. The scholars examined government speeches and public perception in Kibera. More specifically, the scholars examined how the Kenyan government's COVID-19 crisis communication, particularly daily speeches, influenced public perception in one ward in Kibera sub-county, Nairobi. It used a quantitative survey design targeting primary adults in Lindi ward of Kibera. A purposive sample of 123 respondents was used. Data was obtained using questionnaires. The study found out that about

90.5% of respondents agreed with statements regarding government speeches. Only 1% of the sample disagreed, while 8.5% was neutral. The study concluded that public perception of the government's communication strategy was generally favourable. The study was however limited to Lindi ward and only focused on one communication channel -speeches.

Another study by Nasimiyu et al. (2022) assessed levels of knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) toward COVID-19 and willingness to accept COVID-19 vaccination among adult residents in two Kenyan settings: an urban informal settlement (Kibera, Nairobi County) and a rural community (Asembo, Siaya County). The study aimed to identify differences between contexts (urban informal vs rural) and factors associated with KAP and vaccine acceptability to inform targeted public-health messaging and vaccination strategies. The study used a cross-sectional survey that was carried out between 21st April 2021 and 5th May 2021. This was shortly after Kenya's national vaccine rollout. Adult residents were enrolled in established population-based infectious disease surveillance (PBIDS) cohorts in Kibera (an informal urban settlement) and Asembo (rural western Kenya). Participants were randomly selected from these cohorts. Data was collected using structured questionnaires adapted from previously used KAP instruments. The data captured socio-demographics, sources of COVID-19 information, knowledge items, attitudes and practices toward prevention measures; and vaccine awareness and acceptability. The researchers used descriptive statistics and multivariable regression to identify factors associated with KAP scores and vaccine acceptance. In their findings, the authors report generally high COVID-19 knowledge among adult respondents in both sites by May 2021. In addition, the study reports positive attitudes toward mitigation by respondents from both sites. With regard to vaccine awareness and acceptability, results differed by site. Awareness was lower in Kibera in comparison to Asembo. Similarly, vaccine acceptability was lower in Kibera when compared to Asembo. The key reasons for hesitancy in both groups included safety concerns, insufficient information to decide and lack of belief in vaccine. The study concluded that lower vaccine acceptability in the informal settlement (Kibera) was as a result of contextual barriers such as young population profile, informal employment, limited access to preventive resources and information gaps. Such a demographic required targeted messaging.

Though the study contributes to COVID-19 communication, it has a number of limitations. For instance, the findings are from a particular informal settlement and a specific rural community. That being the case, they may not generalize to all urban or rural Kenyan populations. Another

limitation has to do with self-report bias: Responses in the study are self-reported and may be affected by social desirability. In addition, since the study used a cross-sectional design, the snapshot design limited causal inference and could not capture changing attitudes over time. Additionally, the study was a survey and survey data identifies patterns but does not unpack the discursive, cultural or narrative processes through which concerns and mistrust form hence the need for qualitative discourse work such as WhatsApp data. It is also possible that attitudes and acceptance likely shifted as vaccines rolled out. Longitudinal or repeated-cross-sectional studies would clarify trends and the impact of information campaigns. The current study uses data collected in a period of twelve months. Also, the study documents sources of information but does not analyse how specific channels such as WhatsApp shape vaccine perceptions. This is an important area for CDA and sociolinguistic analysis. While Nasimiyu et al. (2022) provides robust, population-based evidence about vaccine acceptability and information gaps, their quantitative findings justify deeper qualitative and discourse-level inquiry into why residents in places like Kibera expressed greater hesitancy. This is exactly the gap that this study fills. By collecting data on the WhatsApp platform and using CDA and the Appraisal Framework for analysis, this study looks into how language shaped and was shaped by COVID-19.

2.4.3 Media Discourse on Pandemics

Media plays a central role in shaping public understanding of health crises. Through lexical choices, narrative framing, and visual imagery, media discourse constructs both the nature of the threat and the appropriate societal response. Studies of pandemic coverage have shown how metaphors of war, fear and national unity dominate representations, reinforcing hierarchical structures of authority and control. For instance, Wahl-Jorgensen (2020) examined how emotions were communicated and circulated in global media coverage of COVID-19. The study sought to understand how journalism, as a pivotal institution of public discourse, framed the pandemic not only as a medical and political event but also as an emotional and moral experience. The key argument is that emotion is a crucial element of crisis communication and it shapes what becomes newsworthy, how risk and vulnerability are framed; and how solidarity and blame are shared across social groups.

Wahl-Jorgensen's (2020) study employed a qualitative discourse and content analysis of early COVID-19 news coverage from international English-language outlets, including BBC, *The*

Guardian and *The New York Times*. The scholar carried out an analysis of how journalists used metaphors, emotional language and narrative framing to construct COVID-19 as a global crisis. The data comprised of news and opinion pieces from January to March 2020, the early months of the pandemic. Texts were coded for emotional tone such as fear, empathy and solidarity; sources of emotional appeal such as victims, health workers and leaders; and discursive strategies such as metaphor, personalization and dramatization. The analysis drew on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and affective discourse theory to show how emotions mediated the relationship between citizens and institutions. The study found out that emotion is a structuring principle of news. Emotional expression, especially fear, compassion, and hope shaped the organization of COVID-19 news stories. Rather than treating emotions as inessential, journalists actively used them to give meaning to an uncertain and evolving crisis. The study also found out that fear and uncertainty were used as narrative frames. Early pandemic coverage amplified feelings of anxiety by emphasizing contagion, death tolls and governmental failure. Alongside fear, media also circulated emotional narratives of resilience. For instance, they celebrated healthcare workers, community action and national unity. The findings also revealed that emotions were moralized in the sense that the discourse of “solidarity” and “responsibility” often carried moral undertones, defining good citizens as those who obeyed restrictions and supported collective action. Governments and media organizations used emotional appeals to reinforce their authority, portraying themselves as protectors and moral guides.

Whereas Wahl-Jorgensen’s (2020) study offers valuable insight into how institutional journalism constructs emotion in the context of COVID-19, several critical gaps remain. To begin with, her work is majorly grounded in Western news media. In addition, the study overlooks how emotions circulate in non-institutional and participatory digital spaces such as WhatsApp and Facebook, where ordinary people co-create and contest pandemic meanings. The study also calls for more attention to cross-cultural emotion work especially how affective expressions such as fear, faith, and hope are linguistically and culturally mediated in non-Western societies characterized by strong communal and religious orientations. Again, Wahl-Jorgensen’s (2020) focuses on macro-discursive discourse which leaves room for micro-level linguistic analysis through frameworks such as the Appraisal Framework. This is what is done in this study that analysed COVID-19 WhatsApp group chats in selected WhatsApp groups in Kenya. Such an analysis reveals the evaluative nuances of everyday emotional expression. Also, the scholar’s emphasis on solidarity further distances other emotional modes such as irony, humour, and resistance. These emotions that she leaves out often function as subtle forms

of critique and coping within public discourse. Finally, the study exclusively focuses on institutional journalism. This leaves room for studies on how user-generated communication contributes to shaping and negotiating emotional narratives during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.4.4 How Language and Metaphor Shape the Framing of Disease

Pandemics are majorly discursively constructed by the lexical and metaphorical choices of language users. According to a study done by Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) metaphors are not just a rhetorical device but are key in human thinking. The scholars' main argument is that people understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another. They refer to this process as conceptual metaphor. For example, the use of metaphors such as "we need to fight this devil" in relation to COVID-19 in the current study reveal how abstract concepts are structured through familiar, embodied experiences. The study thus positions metaphor as a cognitive and cultural tool that shapes how individuals perceive reality, make decisions, and construct social meanings.

In their study, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) carried out a conceptual and linguistic analysis, systematically examining everyday language to uncover underlying conceptual metaphors that organize thought. Using qualitative analysis of naturally occurring expressions in English, they identified recurring patterns where physical, spatial, and social experiences are mapped onto abstract domains. This approach, grounded in Cognitive Linguistics, was revolutionary because it changed the attention of linguistic scholars from seeing language as a neutral medium to seeing language as an active constructor of social and psychological reality. The study established that metaphors are pervasive and culturally specific. This is because metaphors reflect the values, ideologies and worldviews of a given society. For example, metaphors related to conflict frame events using military terms. Such terms influence the manner in which societies marshal resources and assign blame. In addition, moral interpretations of a disease are evoked when metaphors of sin or divine punishment are used. According to the study, people use metaphors to not only describe a disease, but to also prescribe how it should be felt, fought, and comprehended.

As much as the study by Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) provides valuable foundational insights, it also has a number of limitations. First, the study's focus on English metaphors within Western

context leaves non-Western and multilingual realities underexplored. Second, the study has no empirical validation that would have been obtained through discourse data. This absence limits its applicability to lived communicative contexts such as digital media. The present study extends theirs by examining how metaphors operate as a discursive resource for power, ideology and identity construction.

Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) conceptual framework provides an important perspective in the analysis of data in the present study. This is because the WhatsApp data contains metaphorical and lexical strategies that were used to construct COVID-19. For instance, metaphors of war such as "the enemy has invaded Kenya" and religion such as "God will heal our land," show how WhatsApp users in the selected groups drew from culturally resonant concepts to make sense of the COVID-19 pandemic. By combining Fairclough's CDA and the Appraisal Framework, this study extends Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) theory to a digital, multilingual, and participatory setting. This study shows how metaphors not only structure thought but also perform social actions such as expressing fear, faith and resistance within Kenya's sociocultural and political realities.

2.4.5 How Moral, Religious and Political Discourses Shape Health Communication

Health discourse usually goes beyond the biomedical sphere into moral and spiritual domains. During a health crisis, people draw on their culture and their beliefs to make sense of suffering, assign responsibility, and stay hopeful. Briggs and Hallin (2016) posit that health communication is always culturally shaped since it reflects local understandings of morality, purity, and divine agency. In Kenya, just as in other African communities, the interpretation of disease often combines science and religion. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke, WhatsApp conversations would make frequent references to God, prayer as well as prophecy. Such references as illustrated in the data of the present study which shows how faith influences the construction of meaning around health and uncertainty.

Political significance is also embedded in the moral and religious framing of disease. In a study carried out by Mbembe (2020), the scholar uses the COVID-19 pandemic as a lens to explore the politics of life, death, inequality and community. Mbembe talks of breath in biological and metaphorical terms. He argues that though breathing is a fundamental human right, it is unequally distributed under global capitalist and racial orders. For the scholar, the pandemic

does not just reveal a health crisis but rather brings out a broader crisis of power, community and the biosphere. The researcher states that the challenge is not simply to fight a virus, but to reclaim common life and shared breath. The study is both philosophical and discursive since it is not empirical. The researcher uses a critical-theoretical, essayistic approach in his analysis. He draws on historical, political, racial and ecological analysis to interpret cultural and metaphorical dimensions of “breath,” “community,” and “life”. His methodology is, therefore, a critical reflection that combines philosophy, history, and cultural critique. In his findings, the researcher frames breathing not just as physiology but also as an existential condition and common property that cannot be monopolised. He argues that the pandemic increased how some populations are structurally deprived of the ability to breathe freely as a result of race, class, environment and labour conditions. He also posits that COVID-19 reveals a shift in power since citizens had to negotiate the legitimacy of state measures, health systems and their own corporeal vulnerability.

Being a theoretical essay as opposed to an empirical study, the study had a number of limitations. To begin with, it lacks empirical data, which makes it purely conceptual and interpretive. Secondly, the scope of the study is general since it argues from a global perspective and fails to provide any specific analysis of localized contexts like Kenyan WhatsApp groups in the present study. Thirdly, the fact that the study is philosophical limits accessibility for applied discourse analysis scholars focusing on everyday interactions. Lastly, the study does not extensively look into how social media, peer-to-peer chats, or vernacular discourse operate in health crises.

This thesis fills the above-mentioned gaps. For instance, whereas Mbembe (2020) addresses global structural power and metaphor; this study zooms into everyday discourse in Kenyan WhatsApp groups and examines how individuals negotiate meaning using concrete linguistic and metaphorical data. Again, while Mbembe’s (2020) essay is global and philosophical, this research is situated in Kenya, a specific postcolonial, multilingual, digital context. This provides empirical grounding to issues of breath, power and community in African settings. The present study focuses on WhatsApp group chat as a site of meaning-making, whereas Mbembe references the digital but does not explore vernacular interactions. By combining Critical Discourse Analysis and the Appraisal Framework, the present study systematically unpacks how metaphors, lexical choices, evaluations and stances function in health-crisis talk. This is a methodological extension of Mbembe’s (2020) conceptual terrain. Lastly, the present

study examines how moral, religious, and political framings interweave in discourse. This is an area Mbembe (2020) gestures to but does not empirically document in everyday communications.

Often, health discourse goes beyond the biomedical domain to enter moral and spiritual registers. During crises, people draw on culturally embedded epistemologies to explain suffering, assign blame and seek hope. As Briggs and Hallin (2016) argue, medical communication is always culturally mediated, reflecting local notions of purity, morality and divine intervention. In Kenya, as in many African societies, the moralization of disease is intertwined with religious beliefs, producing a hybrid discourse that merges science and faith. WhatsApp conversations during COVID-19 frequently invoked God's will, prayer, and prophetic warnings, reflecting the enduring role of religion in meaning-making.

2.5 Studies on COVID-19 Discourses

When COVID-19 broke out, it came along with both online and offline discursive practices globally. There was need for both global and local news briefs as different institutions and countries worked on containing the pandemic. On social media platforms such as WhatsApp, linguistic creativity as evident in the data in this study was common. New language forms emerged and pre-existing linguistic items acquired extended meanings. The linguistic choices were made in an attempt by users to grasp the sociocultural meanings of the pandemic. This section covers studies on COVID-19 discourses beginning with global scholarly discourses, African studies on COVID-19 and lastly Kenyan discourses on COVID-19. Specific focus is given to the language of fear, blame, humour, misinformation and the role of WhatsApp as a crisis-communication platform.

2.5.1 Global Studies on Language use during COVID-19

From a global perspective, COVID-19 discourses put emphasis on how language influenced public experiences of the pandemic. Scholarly work covers common themes such as fear, risk, and solidarity. Such themes were often shaped by metaphorical and ideological framing. For example, Charteris-Black (2021) carried out a study on how language, especially metaphors and metonymies, framed the COVID-19 pandemic in public and media discourse. The scholar looked at how public behaviour and policy during the crisis were shaped by metaphorical and symbolic language. His main argument is that metaphors such as "war," "zombie apocalypse,"

“force of nature,” and containment-frames such as, “bubble,” “pod,” and “petri dish” did more than describe the pandemic. He says that such terms had an influence on how individuals felt, responded and perceived their agency (Charteris-Black, 2021).

Charteris-Black (2021) used a mixed method approach where he combined corpus analysis with experimental survey methods. In corpus analysis, he interrogated a corpus of public and media texts discussing COVID-19. The corpus consisted of newspaper coverage, official statements and broadcast media. This was done to identify repeated metaphor and metonym frames. In his experimental survey methods, the scholar looked at how particular metaphorical framings influenced reasoning and behaviour. He based his work on the moral foundation’s theory. Charteris-Black used theoretical integration and drew on cognitive linguistics (metaphor theory), social psychology (moral foundations) and rhetorical/critical discourse perspectives to connect the use of metaphor to ideological and emotional effects. His findings reveal that the war metaphor (e.g., “frontline,” “fight,” “enemy virus”) dominated pandemic discourse. The use of the war metaphor invoked urgency, sacrifice and collectivism. According to the researcher, this frame triggered moral intuitions around care/harm and loyalty/betrayal. Similarly, the fire and force of nature metaphor such as “virus like wildfire,” “natural disaster” reinforced catastrophe and lack of control which helped in the reduction of perceived agency. In addition, containment metaphors such as “bubble,” “pod” and “cocoon” framed isolation and distancing in measurable terms. The metaphors stressed on what is outside the container rather than empowering those inside it. Charteris-Black posits that such frames reduced people’s sense of agency (e.g., “we are trapped,” “we are containers”) as opposed to emphasizing active coping. The study concluded that metaphorical framing is not neutral because it carries moral weight. Metaphorical frames influence how people interpret risk, compliance, responsibility and disapproval.

In spite of the study providing a comprehensive coverage of metaphor analysis, its roots are largely in Western media and public discourse, especially UK/English contexts. The cultural diversity of non-Western, multilingual societies is, therefore, not given priority. In addition, the study’s focus is mainly on media and official texts. This means that peer-to-peer informal discourse, such as WhatsApp discourse, is not looked into. Also, the study is strong in metaphor identification and theoretical reflection, but less strong in micro-linguistic details of everyday informal communication or a deep qualitative ethnographic account of how individuals interpret and resist metaphors. While experimental survey methods are mentioned,

the empirical results of behaviour change tied to metaphors are less detailed than the metaphor mapping itself.

The current study addresses the cultural and context gap by focusing on Kenyan WhatsApp group discourse, giving attention to multilingual, cultural everyday meaning-making in an African context. Additionally, whereas Charteris-Black's (2021) work looks at broad metaphor frames, this study uses the Appraisal Framework and CDA to examine evaluative and attitudinal choices in WhatsApp group chats. This study and Charteris-Black's (2021) study align with Fairclough's (2010) critique of how power operates discursively.

In East Asian contexts, Park et al. (2021) conducted a study which looked into how public discourse on COVID-19 was expressed on Twitter in four Asian countries (Iran, Vietnam, South Korea and India). This was done during the early stages of COVID-19 (January 2020–March 2020). The focus of their study was on risk communication patterns, topic evolution, and how public attention aligned or failed to align with official epidemic phases. Data used in their study was obtained from Twitter. The scholars collected tweets from each of the four countries using COVID-19 related keywords. This was done both in local languages and in English. They analysed the data using Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques and topic modelling to identify topic-phases. This was followed with a qualitative evaluation of topic meanings. Their findings state that official epidemic phases announced by governments did not always match public attention cycles as seen in tweet counts. According to their study, topic diversity decreased when tweet volumes peaked. This suggested that conversation becomes focused on fewer issues during heightened crisis periods. Misinformation, hate speech, political commentary and information sharing are the key topics identified in the study. There were unique patterns in the counties used in the study. Their study was pivotal in the identification of emerging misinformation and attention peaks. Such findings are helpful in managing risk communication.

As valuable as the study by Park et al. (2021) is, several gaps remain that are filled by this study. For instance, their study analysed Twitter in Asian countries. The present study focuses on WhatsApp group chats in Kenya, which is a less-studied platform and context. WhatsApp groups are informal peer-to-peer rather than public broadcast as seen on Twitter. In addition, while the four countries studied (South Korea, Iran, Vietnam, India) offer regional insight, they are not Kenya. This study adds a Kenyan cultural, linguistic and socio-political lens. More so,

Park et al. (2021) used topic modelling/NLP to trace topics over time. They did not give attention to fine-grained linguistic features such as metaphor, appraisal and ideology in everyday discourse. This study uses the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Appraisal Framework to dig into how language constructs meaning, attitude and ideology in WhatsApp group chats.

While global research has effectively mapped the dominant narrative frames, it has often privileged institutional and elite voices such as government speeches, press briefings and mainstream media over every day digital conversations. Leaving out grassroots communicative spaces like WhatsApp limits our understanding of how ordinary citizens worked out uncertainty, shared knowledge and reinterpreted official narratives during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.5.2 African and Kenyan Studies on COVID-19 Discourse

Many discourse studies have been carried out in Africa and in Kenya on COVID-19. These studies have offered valuable insights into the cultural and political dimensions of pandemic communication. For instance, a study by Oyeboade and Unuabonah (2021) examined how internet memes circulated in Nigerian WhatsApp networks during the early stages of COVID-19 pandemic and established that they were used as a form of political protest. The scholars were interested in the themes, ideological positions and representations embedded in those memes. They specifically wanted to know how people used memes to voice grievances about governance, corruption, insecurity and social welfare during COVID-19. With a corpus of 40 purposively sampled internet memes that were being shared in Nigerian WhatsApp spaces during the pandemic, the researchers used the Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse their data. The authors read each meme as a multimodal text (image + caption + intertextual reference) while paying attention to visual semiotics, linguistic choices, metaphor and ideological positioning. They analysed their data qualitatively. Their findings revealed that memes functioned as political protest tools. They were not just humorous expressions because they were used to critique corruption, government deceit, poor healthcare and social amenities as well as food insecurity. The multimodal nature of memes enabled users to amplify satire and compress complex grievances into shareable items that circulated rapidly on WhatsApp. Memes re-framed official pandemic narratives as performative or hypocritical, thereby creating an oppositional public discourse that blended humour, anger and moral condemnation.

Though the study offers good insights, it has a number of limitations. For instance, its data type is narrow. The study only looks at memes and avoids broader WhatsApp chats. The present study addresses this gap by carrying out a critical discourse analysis on WhatsApp group chats. Also, the study is situated in Nigeria. The findings, therefore, reflect Nigerian political culture and may not generalise across African settings. The current study extends their study by looking at WhatsApp discourse in Kenya.

In Kenya, Mweri (2021) looked at linguistic changes that came about during COVID-19. The researcher focused on new words and expressions (neologisms) that entered Kenyan English and Kiswahili usage during the early months of COVID-19. According to the study, speakers coined, borrowed, or repurposed lexical items to name pandemic phenomena and to talk about everyday practices. The study made use of the descriptive qualitative research design. Data was sourced from media reports, social media posts and public discourse samples in English and Kiswahili between 2020 and 2021. The study's analytical focus comprised of identification and classification of word-formation processes and short discussions of socio-cultural motivations for particular coinages. The method therefore emphasises qualitative typology over quantitative frequency analysis. In the findings, Mweri (2021) identifies common processes producing COVID-related vocabulary which are: blending, acronyms, borrowing from English to Kiswahili and semantic shifts of existing words. The study argues that social practices, global media narratives and local humour contributed to lexical innovation. Neologisms served pragmatic functions such as naming new realities, expressing attitudes and indexing group identity.

Mweri's (2021) study leaves a number of gaps that are filled by this study. First, the study is descriptive and not interactional. The study catalogues words and formation processes but does not analyse how the same words function in interactional contexts. Second, the study is limited in methodological transparency. This is because it does not report a systematic corpus size, sampling procedures or coding schema for selecting examples. That being the case, reproducibility and claims about prevalence are limited. Third, the analytic scope of the study is narrow. There is little micro-level analysis linking neologisms to ideology, stance or emotional work which is better captured by appraisal and CDA approaches. The current study fills these gaps by using CDA and the Appraisal Framework to study interactions in WhatsApp group chats. This study looks at how those words are used in conversational interaction, who

uses them, in what sequential contexts and with what stance. This provides the interactional grounding that categorizing words alone cannot deliver. In addition, while Mweri (2021) provides word formation processes, this study uses the Appraisal Framework to analyse the emotional and evaluative work of neologisms (Affect, Judgment, Appreciation) and how they participate in alignment, persuasion or resistance in WhatsApp groups. The combination of CDA with appraisal allows this study to link lexical choices to broader ideological positions such as distrust of state, religious framing and conspiratorial thought. This moves the study from word-formation to social meaning and power relations.

In spite of emerging bodies of work in COVID-19 discourses, much of the existing African literature remains descriptive rather than analytical. Few studies engage critically with discourse theories such as Fairclough's (2015) CDA or van Dijk's (2008) socio-cognitive model to unpack how power, ideology, and identity are linguistically encoded. In addition, there is limited attention given to multilingual WhatsApp communication yet WhatsApp serves as a primary channel of social interaction and crisis communication in Kenya. This analytical gap motivated this study's focus on how WhatsApp users discursively constructed COVID-19 not only as a public health issue but also as a sociocultural event.

2.5.3 How Fear, Blame, Humour and Misinformation Shaped COVID-19 Discourse

Fear, blame, humour and misinformation were common discursive practices all over the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. The discourse of fear, for instance, was expressed through language that was emotionally charged. Many times, this was reinforced by numbers, death imagery and warnings. As Lupton (2022) argues, fear served both as a regulatory tool and a moral resource. Fear justified control while urging collective care. In her study, Lupton (2022) provides a broad theorisation of COVID-19 as a social and cultural phenomenon as opposed to it being a purely biomedical one. Her study explores how "COVID societies" have emerged: how risk, contagion, inequality, stigma, fear, blame and power were discursively constructed in the COVID-19 era. The study links macro-level issues (political economy, biopolitics, risk society) with micro-level everyday lived experiences (contagion, mobility, bodies). Her methodology is largely conceptual and synthetic rather than a single fieldwork project. Lupton draws on existing sociological and cultural theory and applies them to the COVID-19 context. Her findings indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic was a site where existing inequalities of race, class and gender were magnified and made visible, especially through discourses of risk,

vulnerability and blame. Although Lupton's work is rich, several gaps remain that are filled by this study. For instance, Lupton's study broadly theorises pandemic societies but does not provide detailed micro-analysis of peer-to-peer chat interactions, especially in private and social media spaces like WhatsApp. This study of WhatsApp group chats in Kenya provides this granular empirical detail. In addition, much of her empirical examples are drawn from Western or Anglo-centric contexts. This study focuses on Kenya which and provides culturally specific insight from East Africa, including multilingual, religious and informal communication registers.

Blame discourse, on the other hand, allocated responsibility to different actors. For instance, foreign nations, governments or specific groups were blamed for COVID-19. Internationally, this manifested in labels like "Chinese virus" as presented in a study by Wicke and Bolognesi, (2020). Their study looked at how COVID-19 was framed metaphorically on Twitter. They explored the kind of figurative metaphors used such as "war", "storm", "monster" and "tsunami." They also looked at how these metaphors aligned with different topics of discussion. The topics included treatment, lockdowns and social distancing. The authors compiled a large corpus of tweets posted between March and April 2020 with COVID-19 related hashtags. They used topic modelling to identify topical clusters in the tweets. Thereafter, the authors identified and compared the frequency of five framing-categories: one literal frame and four figurative frames. They then analysed the data by establishing which metaphoric frames were used for which topics. Their findings indicate that the "war" frame was the most frequently used figurative frame.

They also found out that people used humour to cope during COVID-19 and also to resist government directives. Humour functioned as a coping mechanism and form of resistance. According to scholars such as Dynel (2021), COVID-19 humour, especially memes and parodic texts, made it possible for people to express their emotions and criticize authority. In Kenya, humorous expressions like "coronababy" or "coronaphobia" re-framed fear through linguistic play, embodying what Mbembe (2020) calls "the politics of laughter" in African publics.

Another key discursive theme in COVID-19 discourse is misinformation. Scholarly works of Chigona (2022) and Cinelli et al. (2020) show that social media accelerated the spread of unverified information. However, users also developed informal fact-checking and moral reasoning practices. The study by Cinelli et al. (2020) explored how information about

COVID-19 was spreading on social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, Gab). The researchers set out to quantify how quickly content, including misinformation, circulated, compared patterns across platforms, and sought to understand the dynamics of the “infodemic” in the early months of the pandemic. Their data comprised of large volumes of posts from their sampled platforms. They analysed their data using applied epidemic modelling and information diffusion. The study found out that the spread of information on social media about COVID-19 exhibited patterns similar to epidemic spread. The spread was networked, rapid and exponential in some cases. The study also found out that misinformation and low-credibility information spread almost as fast as more reliable information. The study came to the conclusion that “infodemic” was a serious parallel to the pandemic. Therefore, the mechanisms of digital information flow pose a challenge to public health communication.

Cinelli et al. (2020) focuses on public social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, Gab). However, this study focuses on WhatsApp group chats, a semi-private, peer-to-peer environment, which is less studied in this context. In addition, while their dataset is global but heavily orientated to Western platforms, the present study locates discourse in Kenya. Our sampled discourse is multilingual, culturally specific with locally embedded metaphors, moral and religious framings.

Jointly, the above discursive patterns demonstrate that COVID-19 discourse was not uniform: it was communicative, it blended fear with faith, it was sceptical, humorous and embedded with misinformation with moral reasoning.

2.6 Sociolinguistic Dimensions of WhatsApp Discourse

In this section, the study focuses on how language use on the WhatsApp platform reflects, negotiates and redefines social identities, relationships and power dynamics. Being a mobile-mediated platform, WhatsApp has influenced everyday linguistic practices. WhatsApp has enabled hybrid forms of interaction. For instance, one can use WhatsApp for written communication, spoken communication, private communication, public communication, local communication as well as global communication (Herring, 2013; Tagg & Seargeant, 2014). According to Androutsopoulos (2015), the application’s affordances which include multimodality, immediacy, group-based interaction and the use of emojis and memes avail a

discursive environment where users perform identities, enact social relations and construct meaning in contextually nuanced ways.

Kenya's linguistic environment is characterized by diversity and cultural hybridity. WhatsApp discourse is, therefore, a fertile ground for exploring the interplay between language, culture and social positioning (Ndlovu, 2017; Nyang'au, 2020). The subsections covered here look into key sociolinguistic aspects that characterize WhatsApp communication which are: code-switching and multilingualism; humour and creativity; and identity performance.

2.6.1 Constructing Meaning through Code-Switching and Multilingual Communication

Blommaert (2010) posits that code-switching, the alternation between two or more languages or varieties within a single interaction, has long been a defining feature of multilingual communication. The switching of codes is significant in WhatsApp group chats. With Kenya being a multilingual country, many WhatsApp users seamlessly shift between English, Kiswahili and indigenous languages. This is done not just for efficiency in communication but also as a resource for identity marking, solidarity building and contextual framing (Banda, 2018; Dorleijn & Nortier, 2009).

Code-switching on WhatsApp in Kenya is often done to signify intimate relationships among members. It also signifies shared cultural knowledge and creates in-group cohesion among participants (Nyang'au, 2020). Apart from English and Kiswahili, Kenyans are fond of using Sheng. According to Githiora, (2018) the use of Sheng, a dynamic urban youth code mixing English, Kiswahili, and vernacular elements, works as a linguistic symbol of modernity, humour and belonging. Code-switching also represents power and social hierarchies according to a critical discourse analysis. This is because it allows users to navigate between the symbolic authority of English and the emotional expressiveness of local tongues (Blommaert, 2010). Therefore, multilingualism in WhatsApp chats is not only a reflection of linguistic diversity but also a discursive strategy for negotiating identity and social relationships in the digital world.

2.6.2 Humour, Irony and Creativity in Digital Talk

Humour and irony are key elements in sociolinguistics, especially in WhatsApp group chats. During the COVID-19 pandemic, WhatsApp users made use of playful language, memes, puns and ironic remarks to construct the pandemic and deal with emotions such as fear, express

dissent and foster solidarity (Chiluwa, 2020; Dynel, 2016). People use humour in digital communication for a number of reasons. While some use it for entertainment, others use it for critique and reinforcement of group relationships (Baym, 2015; Shifman, 2014).

The use of humour in WhatsApp group chats in Kenta usually comes as a form of linguistic creativity. For instance, Kenyans on WhatsApp rephrased popular sayings and used local idioms to mock government responses during COVID-19. Some WhatsApp users also come up with humorous neologisms not only to entertain other members, but to also encode collective commentary on socio-political conditions (Nyang'au, 2020). A study by Chiluwa and Ifukor (2015) investigated how the social media campaign hashtag #BringBackOurGirls that was created in response to the abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok, Nigeria was discursively constructed on Twitter and Facebook. The two scholars investigated how users evaluated social actors such as the governments, parents, terrorists and took stances in the digital activism context. Their study argues that irony functioned as a subtle discursive resource to challenge authority or expose contradictions in official narratives on digital platforms. From a sociolinguistic point of view, such humorous discourse exemplifies Bakhtin's (1981) notion of carnivalesque resistance. This is a situation where humour becomes a means of dissolving dominant discourses while maintaining social cohesion within online communities.

2.6.3 Identity and Group Belonging in Online Chats

When people interact on WhatsApp, they are bound to establish relationships. That being the case, language plays a main role in constructing and performing social identities. Sociolinguistic studies of digital discourse give emphasis to identity in online spaces. It is argued that identity is not a fixed attribute but is rather a dynamic and interactional accomplishment (Androutsopoulos, 2015; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In online interactions, participants continuously negotiate their identities through the lexical choices that they make, their tone, emoji use and participation patterns (Tagg et al., 2017).

Kenyans communicate differently in different WhatsApp groups. People's identity in different WhatsApp groups is often in alignment with community affiliations such as ethnicity, religion, or professional background. Shared experiences, humour and political opinions also shape identity (Ndlovu, 2017). For example, using an ethnic language like Kikuyu may show solidarity within a culturally homogeneous group. In the same way, code-switching between

English and Kiswahili or Sheng can show that the participants value inclusivity and are from a cosmopolitan region (Banda, 2018). Therefore, digital discourse enables the performance of multiple overlapping identities.

To reinforce group belongings, WhatsApp users engage in language related rituals such as group prayers and group specific linguistic choices. Such expressions foster emotional intimacy and shared purpose (Tagg & Seargeant, 2014). In this manner, WhatsApp discourse functions as a microcosm of Kenyan sociolinguistic life. This is because language use on WhatsApp mirrors and alters communal bonds in response to broader social realities such as COVID-19.

2.7 Exploring How Cultural Beliefs and Political Power Construct COVID-19 Discourse

COVID-19 was discursively constructed within the cultural and political realm. According to Fairclough (1995), language is shaped and shapes social structures, ideologies, and power relations. Kenya as a country generally interprets events with religious and cultural lens. Politics also occupy a noticeable space in public discourses in Kenya. In such a society, the COVID-19 discourse reflects collective beliefs, anxieties, and contestations. Citizens negotiated meanings around health, governance and social morality about COVID-19 using social media platforms like WhatsApp. This section presents literature on how cultural beliefs shape representation of disease, how religion and morality shape representation of disease, how public communication and ideology during COVID-19 shaped discourses; and how the public expresses distrust and resistance through discourse.

2.7.1 How Cultural Beliefs Shape Representations of Disease

Culture cannot be divorced from how a disease is understood, talked about and responded to. Anthropologists and sociolinguists have studied the relationship between disease and culture over the years. Their general argument is that disease, especially epidemic and pandemics, are not only biomedical phenomena but also cultural texts interpreted through local beliefs (Douglas, 1992; Nichter, 2008).

Nichter (2008) explored how cultural perceptions, social representations and biopolitical factors shape global health interventions, disease understanding and public health outcomes. According to the scholar, local beliefs about the body, illness, risk, treatment and health systems cannot simply be treated as “barriers” to health programmes since they are an integral part to

how disease and health are experienced and managed. Drawing on multiple ethnographic case studies from developing countries (Africa, Asia, Latin America), the researcher compiled illustrative examples of how local beliefs, health-system practices, public health messaging and local medicine interact. The study found out that local disease representations determine if and how people seek help or follow laid down intervention measures. The scholar argues that people tend to reinterpret public health messages locally. The meaning of health campaigns, effectiveness of drugs, side-effects of drugs and intervention measures are usually interpreted using cultural lens. The study concludes that disease is hardly just a biological issue because it is interweaved with other societal issues such as economics, power and inequality.

The study is not without limitations. By being synthetic and drawing on case studies, the conclusions of the study was not only descriptive but also broad. Again, the study is not based on digital communication media. The present study addresses several of the gaps that Nichter's (2008) study. This study focuses specifically on digital discourse, WhatsApp discourse in particular, which is a peer-to-peer context as opposed to formal public health messaging. In addition, this study uses the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Appraisal Framework. The two theories make it possible for micro-linguistic examination of how language constructs meaning in health crisis discourse, an aspect not well developed in Nichter's (2008) study. The discursive construction of COVID-19 in WhatsApp group chats reflects these kinds of understanding. WhatsApp users interpreted the pandemic using common beliefs held in the country. For instance, COVID-19 was interpreted as an opportunity for corruption to thrive.

In addition, the fact that WhatsApp is informal and interactive makes it possible for users to recontextualize official and expert discourse in ways that makes sense to them. According to Ndlovu (2017), digital orality in African settings facilitates the blending of traditional communicative patterns with new technological modes. This means that communities make sense of uncertainties using their predominant cultural beliefs. Thus, cultural beliefs in digital COVID-19 discourse serve not merely as residues of pre-modern thinking but as dynamic interpretive resources that enable communities to make sense of uncertainty.

2.7.2 How Religion and Morality Shape Representation of Disease Discourse

When there are problems in society, religion usually takes the centre stage. In Africa, religion is used to interpret events by a majority of people. In this relation, COVID-19 was interpreted

using religious lens in many communities. This was evident in the WhatsApp discourse used in this study where WhatsApp group posts contained Bible verses, prayer and prophecies.

In a study carried out by Kgatle and Segalo (2021), the researchers argue that psychological and theological dimensions are important in moments of grieving. The qualitative study adopted a psycho-theological framework and an Afrocentric perspective in carrying out their quantitative study. The study draws on theological and psychological theory to analyse its data. The study found out that COVID-19 restrictions disrupted communal and ritual dimensions of African grieving, which altered the sense of closure for those who lost loved ones. The authors argued that health responses to the pandemic should have incorporated not just biomedical interventions but also the spiritual and communal needs of mourners in African contexts. The study had a number of limitations. For instance, it was a theoretical study with no linguistic-based analysis. In addition, it does not specifically analyse how lexical, metaphorical or evaluative language is used in digital peer networks in the pandemic context. This study fills these gaps by examining WhatsApp discourse in Kenya on COVID-19. With the use of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Appraisal Framework, the present study systematically analyses how people talk about disease and death.

According to Meyer (2015), religious language not only offers hope but also prescribes moral behaviour. Religion shapes social order through spiritual narratives. In addition, religious framings can reproduce social hierarchies and ideological control. Fairclough (2003) posits that discourse usually carries power relations which implies that moralizing narratives about divine punishment can legitimize inequality or deflect political accountability in times of a national crisis such as COVID-19.

2.7.3 Political Communication and Ideology Discourses During COVID-19

There was a lot of politics around the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Wodak (2021), many governments in the world make use of discursive strategies to legitimize their responses, construct authority and manage public fear during crises such as COVID-19. Wodak examined how strategies of fear, exclusion, scapegoating and the normalization of previously taboo rhetoric, far-right populist and extremist discourses had moved from the fringes into the mainstream of political and public discourse. She examines how fear is used as a political tool, how discourses of threat and otherness are constructed and how these discourses gain

acceptance in society. Using the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the researcher analyses a variety of genres ranging from speeches, media texts, posters, social media posts, slogans, to official discourse. Her study focuses on intertextuality, historical continuities, rhetorical devices and the micro-politics of everyday discourse. Her study found out that far-right discourse uses fear of “the Other” as a tool of mobilization. According to the scholar, the narratives are embedded in nationalistic, xenophobic, gendered and racialised logics. The study also posits that the social media posts, memes, slogans, cartoons and informal talk carry the same ideological load as speeches. Therefore, fear is not only about the disease or body but also about identity, regulation, power, belonging and “us vs them”. Discourses of fear help justify control, exclusion, surveillance, regulation and crisis measures.

Wodak’s (2021) study underscores the importance of fear, blame, othering and ideological framing in crisis discourse. This framework is applied in the current study to analyse how COVID-19 is discussed in WhatsApp groups in Kenya. Her focus on micro-discourse aligns with the focus of this study that looks at WhatsApp group interactions. Whereas Wodak (2021) focuses largely on far-right populist politics in Western and European contexts, there is less emphasis on health-crisis discourse and on African, multilingual peer-to-peer digital communication. This study fills in this gap by exploring how fear, blame, moralising, and ideological positioning play out in Kenyan WhatsApp groups during COVID-19. In addition, Wodak’s (2021) method addresses macro-genres (speeches and media) more than private peer interactions and vernacular chat medium, this study fills the gap by examining how everyday users co-construct discourse, use code-switching, humour, metaphors and religious framing in WhatsApp group chats. Also, her work emphasises fear as a political tool gives less emphasis on humour, irony, creativity and resistance in health-crisis talk. This study brings in how WhatsApp users use humour and irony and lexical creativity to negotiate COVID-19.

2.7.4 How the Public Express Distrust and Resistance through Discourse

Public trust is earned and not given. Whether the public trusts or fails to trust individuals and institutions has an effect in crisis communication. According to Lupton and Lewis (2021), pandemics escalate questions of legitimacy, transparency and authority. The scholars conducted an empirical study that explored how everyday people in Australia sought, trusted and used information about COVID-19. The researchers conducted in-depth semi-structured

telephone interviews with 40 Australian adults. The data were analysed thematically, creating case-studies of each participant's information practices, with focus on trust, ambiguity, affect (fear/anxiety) and adaptation to changing information. From the interviews, participants reported uncertainty and fear as central to their information behaviour. The uncertainty and fear were as a result of the rapidly changing advice, contradictions in media and official sources, and personal risk perceptions which influenced how they filtered, adapted and acted on information.

Many of the participants reported to have relied on multiple overlapping sources of information on COVID-19. They, therefore, engaged in what Lupton and Lewis (2021) call "information triangulation" to resolve ambiguity or mistrust. Trust shifted over time. The study emphasised that information behaviour is deeply social, relational and contextual. How one learnt about COVID-19 was shaped by professional role, social networks, media access and also cultural attitudes. Lupton and Lewis (2021) establish that information behaviour, media use and social experience are critical for understanding discourse. However, there are several gaps that this study of WhatsApp-group discourse in Kenya addresses. First, the interview study is based in Australia. This study brings in a Kenyan multilingual informal peer-to-peer communication context, which is under-represented. Second, Lupton and Lewis (2021) focus on media and interviews. This work centres on WhatsApp group chats, a private and semi-private digital forum. Third, while Lupton and Lewis (2021) highlight information behaviour and social practice, the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Appraisal Framework in this study enables a micro-analytic focus on lexical choices, metaphor, stance, evaluation and ideological positioning. This is a deeper layer of discursive practice. According to Chilwa and Ifukor (2015), citizens challenge and resist authority using rhetorical devices such as humour, irony and sarcasm. When people question the credibility of official statistics, mock contradictory policies or circulate alternative narratives based on common knowledge, it is a covert form of resistance.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This research applies Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) alongside the Appraisal Framework (AF) by Martin and White (2005) to examine how language constructs and negotiates power, ideology and emotion in Kenyan WhatsApp conversations about COVID-19. CDA, grounded in critical social theory and linguistics, views discourse as a form of social

practice that both shapes and is shaped by social relations (Fairclough, 1992; Kitetu, 2019). Rather than treating language as neutral, it highlights how everyday communication reproduces or challenges systems of authority and belief. The Appraisal Framework (Martin & White, 2005) complements this perspective by offering fine-grained analytical tools for exploring how participants convey evaluation, emotion and stance at the level of lexis and grammar. By combining CDA's broader socio-critical orientation with AF's linguistic precision, this study captures both the structural and interpersonal dimensions of meaning in digital discourse.

2.8.1 Historical Development of CDA

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) took shape toward the end of the twentieth century as a cross-disciplinary approach uniting linguistics, sociology, and communication studies in the study of how language interacts with power and ideology. Earlier linguistic traditions, particularly Halliday's (1978) Systemic Functional Linguistics, had already positioned language as a socially meaningful system, yet CDA advanced this foundation by foregrounding how discourse operates within relations of dominance and inequality. What distinguishes CDA from more descriptive forms of discourse analysis is its explicit concern with the ways language use contributes to the production, maintenance or contestation of social order (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 1996).

During the early 1990s, the field consolidated through the work of scholars such as Norman Fairclough, van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak, who each proposed distinct but overlapping models for analysing discourse as a social process. Fairclough's (1989, 1992) influential texts, introduced a three-dimensional model linking textual features with discursive and social practices. van Dijk (1993) extended this project by examining how ideological assumptions are internalized and enacted through cognitive processes. Around the same time, Wodak's (2001) Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) brought historical context to the forefront, showing how discourse, both draws from and reshapes institutional memory across time.

In this study, the historical trajectory of CDA marks a decisive movement from linguistics as a descriptive science toward linguistics as a mode of critical inquiry. This transformation made it possible to study how everyday communication reproduces systems of privilege or provides resources for resistance. In postcolonial settings, this critical orientation is particularly valuable for interrogating how discourse interacts with issues of governance, identity and inequality

(Blommaert, 2005). Within the Kenyan context, CDA enables a close reading of WhatsApp exchanges not merely as informal communication but as sites where citizens negotiate authority, morality and trust during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through these lenses, the study explores how seemingly casual digital talk mirrors broader ideological struggles within Kenya's social fabric.

2.8.2 Critical Discourse Studies

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) integrates insights from linguistics and social theory to examine the relationship between language, power, and ideology (Kitetu, 2019). According to Kitetu (2009), CDA investigates how discursive events, social practices and grammatical features interact while also revealing social and cultural processes that participants themselves may not always recognize. Foundational scholars such as Foucault (1971), Chilton and Schaffner (1997), Fairclough and Wodak (1997), van Dijk (2001), Fairclough (2001), and Wodak (2001) all emphasize that discourse both reflects and shapes ideology. Essentially, CDA treats language as a medium through which social institutions maintain, challenge or reproduce relations of power and dominance. Rooted in poststructuralist theory and critical linguistics, CDA focuses on how communication contributes to the construction of social identities, relationships, knowledge and authority (Fairclough, 2001).

From an analytical perspective, CDA's value lies in its ability to uncover the ideologies embedded within everyday communication. Fairclough (2001) notes that the "critical" aspect of CDA involves examining how language practices either reinforce or challenge social inequalities. This approach allows analysts to consider how linguistic choices are implicated in sustaining dominant power structures. In the context of this study, CDA provides a framework for understanding WhatsApp exchanges during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya as more than casual conversation; rather, these interactions represent sites where power and ideology are actively negotiated.

Ideologies, as interpreted through CDA, are not abstract principles but concrete systems of beliefs expressed through language (Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 2001). They emerge through lexical choices, metaphors, pronouns, evaluative language and narrative constructions, influencing how people interpret the social world. For example, political ideologies shape discourse about governance and policy (Fairclough, 2001), while gender and racial ideologies

influence the representation and positioning of different groups (van Dijk, 2001; 2011). Economic and environmental ideologies also manifest in language, informing discussions around wealth distribution and sustainability (Fairclough, 2001). Additionally, media ideologies, shaped by institutional priorities, affect how information is framed and received, subtly guiding public perception (Fairclough, 2001). Together, these studies confirm that ideology is enacted through recurring linguistic patterns, shaping social interactions, cultural norms and power relations.

In this study, linguistic expressions in Kenyan WhatsApp group chats were examined for their links to power and ideology. Fairclough (1995) distinguishes between structures, such as linguistic or semiotic features, and events which are social actions like political decisions or health directives that motivate language use. Over time, these ideological constructs become normalized, appearing as common sense, a process Gramsci (1971) describes as hegemony. Ideologies are thus better understood through their social effects than their objective truth, as their influence lies in shaping action and perception.

The rise of social media platforms like WhatsApp has amplified the circulation of ideologically charged discourse. The COVID-19 pandemic created a context in which competing actors such as governments, religious authorities, the media and citizens contested definitions of truth, responsibility and morality. WhatsApp became a space where users not only consumed but also actively produced discourse, reinforcing, questioning or resisting dominant narratives about the crisis. CDA provides the tools to explore how these everyday communicative acts reflect and challenge broader structures of power.

For this study, CDA is crucial in uncovering the hidden ideological assumptions that shape crisis discourse. Fairclough (2001) asserts that analysing linguistic choices, framing devices and rhetorical strategies can reveal how perceptions of reality and social relationships are influenced. In Kenyan WhatsApp chats, users' discussions of the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate how ordinary interactions construct understandings of state authority, civic responsibility and public trust. By situating these conversations within Kenya's sociocultural context, CDA enables a nuanced analysis of how digital discourse can either reinforce or contest dominant ideologies underpinning governance and crisis management.

In conclusion, CDA allows WhatsApp to be viewed as a site of discursive negotiation where language becomes a tool for enacting, challenging and reshaping social realities. Its critical focus aligns directly with the aims of this study: to examine how Kenyan users employed WhatsApp discourse not only to describe the pandemic but also to interpret, critique and reconstruct the social and political realities surrounding COVID-19.

2.8.3 Core Assumptions of CDA: Language, Power, and Ideology

Critical Discourse Analysis is built on three main ideas: language as social practice, discourse as a space where power operates, and ideology as a system of beliefs embedded in communication to maintain social relationships (Fairclough, 2010; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Unlike approaches that treat language as neutral or purely descriptive, CDA emphasizes that what people say and write both reflects and shapes the society they live in.

2.8.3.1 Language as Social Practice

CDA sees language not just as a set of rules or vocabulary but as a form of action in society (Fairclough, 1992). Every time someone speaks, writes or posts online, they are performing roles, negotiating relationships and positioning themselves within social hierarchies. Fairclough (2003) argues that language both constructs and is constructed by social reality. In Kenyan WhatsApp groups during COVID-19, even casual expressions in the form of jokes, prayers, or teasing performed important social functions. They signalled membership in a group, expressed fear or hope and sometimes questioned official messages about health and governance. Treating these exchanges as social practice allows this study to explore how users collectively make sense of truth, authority and morality.

2.8.3.2 Discourse as a Site of Power

Discourse is also a key arena where power is exercised and negotiated (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008). Power does not only come from formal institutions; it circulates through everyday interactions that determine who is heard and which ideas are seen as legitimate. On WhatsApp, power can appear subtly through sarcasm, humour, moral judgments or the way messages are framed. Users might challenge government advice, mock leaders or share alternative explanations for COVID-19. This shows that small digital interactions can carry meaningful social and political weight. CDA helps uncover these dynamics, revealing how ordinary talk can both reinforce and resist authority.

2.8.3.3 Ideology as Meaning in the Service of Power

Ideology, from a CDA perspective, refers to shared beliefs and values embedded in discourse that support certain power relations (Fairclough, 2003; Thompson, 1990). Ideologies appear through choices in words, metaphors, pronouns and evaluations, subtly shaping how people interpret society (van Dijk, 1998). During the pandemic, governments, religious leaders, the media and citizens all competed to define what counted as truth or responsible action. WhatsApp users' jokes, doubts or critical comments were not just casual remarks for they reflected underlying views on governance, science and morality. By analysing these interactions, this study explores how ideology circulates in everyday digital communication, influencing emotions, beliefs and social attitudes.

2.8.4 Critical Reflections and Relevance to the Study

CDA has faced criticism over potential subjectivity, researcher bias, and methodological consistency (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). While the interpretive nature of CDA can introduce the analyst's perspective, its strength lies in reflexivity rather than pretending to be neutral. Fairclough (2015) notes that CDA aims to uncover the social and ideological work of language, not to remain detached. In the context of Kenyan WhatsApp groups, this approach assumes that ordinary conversations are politically and socially significant. Messages exchanged during COVID-19 reveal tensions between authority and citizen agency, expressions of belief and doubt; and forms of compliance or resistance. Using CDA in this study allows for a rich understanding of how everyday digital interactions participate in constructing social and political meaning.

2.8.5 Research Gap and Analytical Implication

While CDA has been widely applied to media, political speeches, and institutional texts, its application to vernacular digital discourse in African contexts remains limited. Few studies have explored how ordinary users in informal digital environments employ language to negotiate power and ideology during crises. This study therefore extends CDA into the domain of WhatsApp interaction, focusing on how Kenyan users discursively constructed COVID-19 realities and positioned themselves vis-à-vis state authority. By grounding analysis in Fairclough's dialectical-relational model, the study aims to reveal how macro-level ideologies are enacted through micro-level linguistic choices, bridging the gap between structure and agency in digital communication.

2.8.6 Fairclough's Approach to CDA

This research employs Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its theoretical and analytical framework since the theory offers a comprehensive approach for exploring the intersections of language, power and ideology in social interaction. According to Fairclough (1992; 1995), discourse should be understood not only as written or spoken text but also as a social practice, highlighting how language both mirrors and reinforces wider social structures. Given that WhatsApp comments on COVID-19 in Kenya constitute a space where citizens expressed, negotiated and resisted dominant narratives about COVID-19, Fairclough's three-dimensional model comprising textual analysis, discourse practice, and social practice enabled a comprehensive examination of how such meanings were linguistically and ideologically constructed. Fairclough schematizes his approach using a commonplace diagram in the CDA literature, Fairclough's three boxes (1995), where he relates his three interrelated dimensions of discourse to three interrelated processes of analysis as shown in Figure 2.1

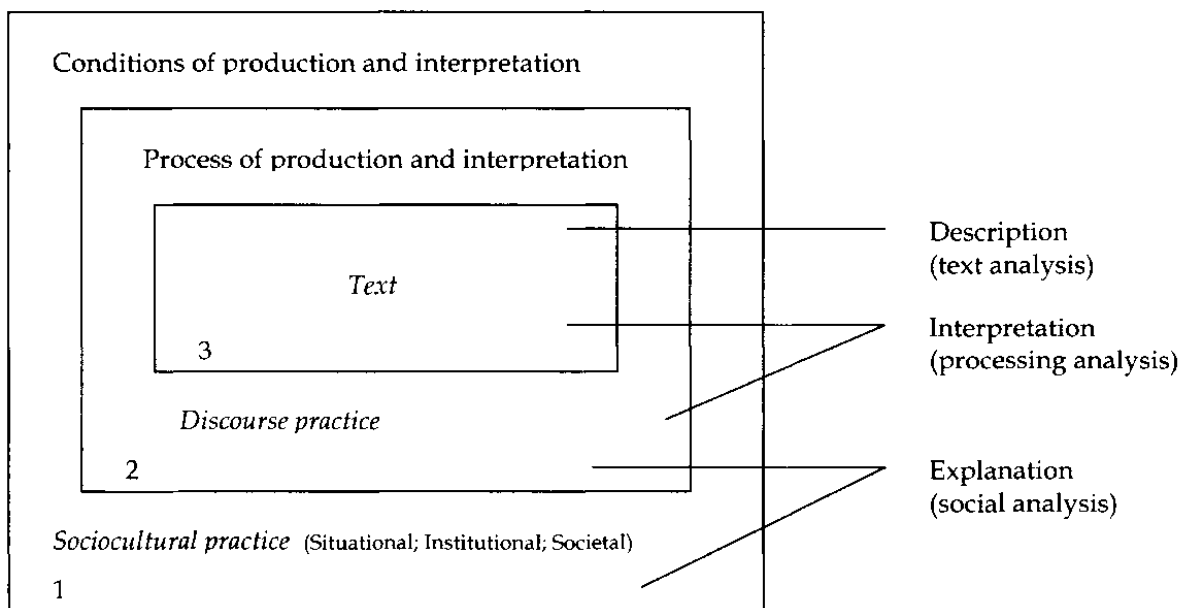


Figure 2.1: Fairclough's Dimensions of Discourse and Discourse Analysis.

Through its three-dimensional model of textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice, Fairclough's CDA enabled this study to explore how linguistic choices were used to represent social actors and events; how these meanings were produced, circulated, and interpreted within selected WhatsApp group chats; and how broader ideological positions and power relations were reproduced or resisted. The schematization captures the socially and discursively embedded nature of WhatsApp group chats. Besides, it allows differing foci for analysis

(Locke, 2004). This kind of analysis unearths the implicit and explicit messages and beliefs held by Kenyans as expressed through the group chats on COVID-19.

In addition, CDA, and particularly Fairclough's model, is increasingly applied to digital communication because online platforms are key spaces where public opinion, resistance, and identity are negotiated linguistically. Since WhatsApp functions as a modern platform for public communication, Fairclough's CDA provides a useful framework for analyzing how participants in WhatsApp groups used language to express social meanings, challenge dominant narratives and create alternative perspectives on COVID-19.

CDA is consistent with this study's critical approach, as the research seeks to reveal attitudes, ideologies and representations in WhatsApp discussions about COVID-19, objectives that correspond to the central aims of CDA. Fairclough's critical perspective complements this study by providing a framework to examine how language functions as a means of social critique. It enabled an exploration of the ideological work performed by discourse in shaping perceptions of governance, responsibility and crisis management during COVID-19.

Fairclough's theory also puts emphasis on interdiscursivity and recontextualization. The mixing of discourses from different social domains was useful for understanding how WhatsApp users drew on political, economic and cultural discourses to make sense of COVID-19. The notion of interdiscursivity was particularly relevant because WhatsApp comments often recontextualize official government discourses, fusing them with popular, humorous or resistance discourses. Fairclough's framework provided tools to trace these interdiscursive connections and their ideological effects.

2.8.7 The Appraisal Framework (AF)

The Appraisal Framework (AF) developed from the tradition of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), pioneered by Halliday (1978, 1994). SFL views language as a resource for creating meaning across three meta functions namely: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Building on the interpersonal meta function, Martin and White (2005) introduced the Appraisal Framework as a systematic model for analyzing how speakers and writers express attitudes, emotions and evaluations. The framework extends earlier analyses of modality, evaluation, and stance (Hunston & Thompson, 2000), providing a structured approach to understanding how

discourse enacts social relationships and positions participants. The AF moves beyond describing linguistic content to exploring how language conveys feelings, judgments and evaluations regarding people, events or phenomena. Martin and Rose (2003) emphasize that appraisal resources allow speakers to establish solidarity or distance, endorse or challenge perspectives and construct social identities through language. In digital spaces such as WhatsApp, the framework is particularly useful for capturing immediate, interactive and emotionally charged exchanges.

2.8.7.1 Core Components of the Appraisal Framework

The Appraisal Framework comprises three interrelated subsystems: Attitude, Engagement and Graduation, each addressing a distinct aspect of evaluative meaning (Martin & White, 2005). The Attitude subsystem captures the expression of emotional, moral and aesthetic evaluations. It also has three subsystems namely: Affect, Judgement and Appreciation. Affect represents emotions such as fear, joy, or anger while Judgment evaluates human behavior regarding morality, competence and propriety. Appreciation assesses objects, events, or processes in terms of value, quality or significance. In WhatsApp discussions about COVID-19, statements expressing worry about the pandemic, critiquing government responses or evaluating the effectiveness of public health campaigns illustrate how participants position themselves emotionally and ethically in discourse. Engagement concerns how speakers manage alternative voices and perspectives within a conversation. Participants may acknowledge, contest, align with or distance themselves from other viewpoints (White, 2012). On platforms like WhatsApp, this involves disclaimers, endorsements or attributions, highlighting the polyphonic nature of online discourse where authority is negotiated and multiple voices intersect. Graduation addresses the scaling or intensity of evaluative meaning (Hood & Martin, 2007). Users may amplify emotions or downplay them, sharpen or soften categorical boundaries and use humor, exaggeration or irony to manage interpersonal distance or emphasize particular evaluations.

2.8.7.2 Relevance to the Study

The Appraisal Framework provides a precise method for analyzing how emotional and evaluative language contributes to meaning-making in digital discourse. While Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines macro-level power and ideological structures, the AF complements it by revealing the interpersonal and affective dimensions of discourse. In the context of Kenyan WhatsApp conversations on COVID-19, the AF enables the study to examine how users express fear, humor, criticism or solidarity, and how these expressions

reflect underlying social, cultural and ideological orientations. By focusing on AF, this study foregrounds the emotional texture of peer-to-peer interactions, offering insight into how informal digital communication negotiates identity, alignment and resistance.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The design was considered appropriate because the study aimed to examine how Kenyan WhatsApp users discursively constructed and negotiated meanings surrounding COVID-19. Qualitative research emphasizes the interpretation and understanding of social phenomena as they naturally occur, rather than producing numerical data or seeking generalizability (Creswell, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This approach allows for an exploration of how language functions within specific contexts to construct social realities, identities and ideological positions.

The qualitative design was particularly suitable because the data consisted of naturally occurring WhatsApp group chats which are inherently discursive and context-dependent. An interpretive approach enabled the study to uncover the social meanings, attitudes and ideologies embedded in participants' linguistic choices. Through these lenses, the research examined not only what was communicated but also how it was articulated, revealing participants' perceptions of government action, public health policies and social relations during the pandemic.

Within the qualitative paradigm, the study adopted a Critical Discourse Analytic design, drawing on Fairclough's (1992, 1995) three-dimensional model. This model facilitates in-depth analysis of the relationship between text, discourse practice and social practice. CDA conceptualizes discourse as both socially influenced and socially influential; it is shaped by existing social structures while simultaneously reproducing, challenging, or transforming them. In this study, CDA provided a framework for understanding how WhatsApp users represented government interventions, assigned responsibility and expressed support or resistance. It also enabled the identification of underlying ideological positions and power relations embedded in these digital interactions.

The CDA design was complemented by the Appraisal Framework (Martin & White, 2005), which offered micro-linguistic tools for analyzing evaluative meaning. Rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the Appraisal Framework focuses on how language conveys emotions, judgments, and evaluations. This framework was particularly relevant because

WhatsApp discourse during COVID-19 was highly emotive, evaluative and politically charged. By combining CDA with the Appraisal Framework, the study bridged macro-level socio-critical analysis with micro-level linguistic interpretation. The Appraisal Framework allowed the identification and classification of linguistic expressions of Affect and Judgment, while CDA situated these expressions within the broader socio-political and ideological landscape of Kenya's pandemic response.

Overall, the study employed what may be described as a Critical Qualitative Research Design, integrating interpretive inquiry with a focus on social critique. This design enabled the researcher to examine how ordinary citizens used digital discourse to challenge authority, articulate discontent and construct alternative narratives of governance and crisis management. The approach aligns with the study's theoretical stance, which treats language as a site of power negotiation, identity formation and ideological contestation.

Thus, the qualitative CDA design, reinforced by the Appraisal Framework, provided a coherent methodological foundation for exploring how linguistic resources were mobilized in WhatsApp interactions to express emotion, judgment and ideological stance. This design permitted a nuanced interpretation of both linguistic form and social meaning, fulfilling the study's objective of conducting a critical linguistic investigation into the discursive construction of COVID-19 in Kenyan WhatsApp group chats.

3.2 Population and Area of Study

This study focused on WhatsApp as a contemporary site of social interaction and examined data from five distinct WhatsApp groups. The dataset comprised naturally occurring conversations generated during the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 and March 2021, providing the crisis context for the research. Messages were retrieved from archived WhatsApp databases, systematically coded, and analysed in accordance with ethical and linguistic research protocols. The selected groups represented diverse communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), spanning multiple social, professional, and geographic contexts within Kenya. These included a group of medical professionals (doctors, nurses, and hospital staff) who were frontline workers during the pandemic; a group of 55 former university classmates from Kenyatta University (1998–2002) engaging in social and political discussions across Kenya and the diaspora; a neighbourhood welfare group of 296 members residing in Rongai

Constituency, Nakuru County; an investment group of 18 long-term friends involved in land acquisition and business ventures; and a professional workgroup comprising 598 secondary school teachers.

The selection of these groups followed purposive and theoretically informed criteria. The researcher aimed to include groups reflecting a wide range of sociocultural contexts and interactional purposes through which discussions of COVID-19 naturally emerged. This strategy ensured a heterogeneous yet thematically coherent dataset, capturing discourse from professional, communal, and civic dimensions of the Kenyan society. While the researcher was a member of some of the groups, additional data were accessed through ethical collaboration with group administrators and consenting participants. In cases where direct membership was not possible, voluntary data sharing and proxy participation were employed to achieve representation across diverse discursive spaces. Participants were informed about the study's objectives and permissions were obtained prior to data collection. These procedures safeguarded anonymity and confidentiality in line with standard ethical practices for digital ethnography and discourse analysis.

Membership across the groups varied from 18 to 598 participants, including both active and passive members. Active participants regularly contributed posts, comments or reactions, whereas passive members observed discussions without direct engagement. This variation aligns with Lave and Wenger's (1991) conception of communities of practice, where members engage at different levels of intensity and expertise.

Functionally, WhatsApp groups are designed to facilitate communication among individuals sharing professional, social, or geographical interests. Beyond these purposes, the groups in this study functioned as virtual public spheres (Habermas, 1989), where members discussed not only pandemic-related issues but also topics such as national politics, religion, education, the economy and daily life. These interactions provided a rich context for examining how digital discourse operates as a site of meaning-making, identity negotiation and ideological construction during a national crisis.

In summary, the study's population and area of focus offered a socio-linguistical diverse and contextually rich dataset for analysing the discursive construction of COVID-19 in Kenyan WhatsApp communication. By situating these interactions within distinct yet interconnected

communities of practice, the study captured how ordinary Kenyans across social strata used language to interpret, critique and respond to government directives during the pandemic.

3.3 Sampling Design and Sample Size

The study utilized a purposive sampling strategy to select the WhatsApp groups from which data were collected. Purposive sampling was deemed appropriate because it enables the deliberate selection of information-rich cases that provide detailed insights into the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2015). In this research, purposive sampling facilitated the identification of WhatsApp groups that were active during the COVID-19 pandemic and whose discussions reflected public engagement with government directives, health interventions and socio-political debates surrounding the pandemic in Kenya.

A total of five WhatsApp groups and 61 conversation threads were selected for analysis. The focus on five groups was guided by qualitative research principles, which prioritize depth and contextual richness over numerical representation (Silverman, 2020). Qualitative inquiry, particularly within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), aims not to generalize statistically but to gain an in-depth understanding of how meaning, ideology and power are constructed through language (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Fairclough, 1992). Selecting five groups allowed for detailed textual, discursive and social analysis while maintaining manageability. The groups represented a cross-section of social domains in which COVID-19 discourse emerged, including community-based groups, professional networks, and social interest circles. This diversity ensured that the dataset captured a wide range of evaluative and ideological positions regarding the pandemic and government responses. Specifically, 19 threads were obtained from the medical professional group, 27 from former university classmates, 25 from neighbours, 20 from the investment group, and 24 from the professional workgroup.

Limiting the sample to five groups and 61 threads was also guided by the principle of data saturation, defined as the point where additional data no longer yield new insights or patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Guest et al, 2006). Preliminary analysis indicated that themes, evaluative strategies and ideological orientations recurred across the five groups, suggesting saturation had been reached. Including additional groups would likely have produced repetitive data without significantly enhancing theoretical or interpretive value. Moreover, the Critical

Discourse Analytic approach requires intensive, multi-level interpretation at textual, discursive, and social dimensions (Fairclough, 1995). A larger sample could have compromised the depth and rigor of analysis necessary for CDA and the Appraisal Framework. By focusing on five groups, the study was able to systematically examine how linguistic resources, particularly those related to affect, judgment, and evaluation, were used to express attitudes toward government policies, health authorities and the broader socio-economic context during the pandemic.

The selection of five groups was also informed by ethical and practical considerations. Limiting the dataset ensured that privacy, confidentiality and informed consent protocols could be fully implemented in accordance with ethical standards for online research (Buchanan, 2012). Participant identities were anonymized, permissions were obtained from group administrators where necessary and only publicly accessible or consented conversations were included in the analysis.

In summary, the purposive selection of five WhatsApp groups was methodologically rigorous, theoretically grounded and ethically responsible. This approach provided sufficient and contextually rich data for meaningful linguistic and ideological analysis, enabling an in-depth examination of how Kenyans constructed COVID-19 discourse and expressed evaluative stances in digital communication. By integrating Fairclough's CDA with the Appraisal Framework, the study ensured that both macro-level and micro-level linguistic phenomena were captured effectively.

3.4 Data Collection Methods and Research Instruments

The study adopted a critical qualitative research design guided by Fairclough's (1992, 2001) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This design was appropriate as it enabled an in-depth exploration of how language in WhatsApp group interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic reflected underlying ideologies, power relations and social meanings. Data were collected through digital ethnography, archival retrieval and document analysis which was complemented by participant observation and reflexive field notes to provide contextual understanding of interactions.

Digital ethnography and archival retrieval served as the primary methods for collecting data, allowing the researcher to observe, gather and interpret authentic interactions within selected WhatsApp groups. This approach, as noted by Pink et al. (2016), provides a framework for studying online communities within their natural communicative environments. Archived WhatsApp conversations were obtained from consenting group administrators and members. The data were captured through exported chat logs, screenshots, and text files, covering conversations from March 2020 to March 2021, a period encompassing the most significant COVID-19-related discourse in Kenya. These conversations represented naturally occurring data, reflecting genuine social interaction rather than researcher-stimulated responses.

To maintain ethical standards, only COVID-19-relevant discussions were extracted, with all personal identifiers such as names, phone numbers, and images anonymized prior to analysis. Informed consent was obtained in accordance with digital research ethics guidelines (British Association for Applied Linguistics [BAAL], 2021).

Document analysis complemented the ethnographic data by situating WhatsApp discourse within broader public communication contexts. Government policy documents, press releases, health advisories, and official COVID-19 statements were reviewed to establish intertextual connections between institutional discourse and citizen responses on WhatsApp. This triangulation enabled a deeper understanding of how official narratives were received, reinterpreted, or contested in everyday digital interactions.

Participant observation, limited to groups where the researcher held membership, allowed for a nuanced comprehension of conversational dynamics. Reflexive field notes documented contextual elements such as tone, interaction patterns, humour and instances of ideological negotiation. These notes functioned as meta-data to enrich interpretation during the analytical process.

The researcher used several instruments to ensure data credibility, authenticity and triangulation. First, she used the WhatsApp Chat Archive Template which systematically organizes messages by date, group, topic, and participant role. Secondly, she used a manually constructed Coding and Thematic Matrix to categorize linguistic and discursive features according to Fairclough's three-dimensional model. Thirdly, she used a reflexive journal that she maintained throughout data collection to document observations, reflections and

methodological decisions. This is supported by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Lastly, she used a document analysis guide to ensure consistent examination of government and media texts for recurring discursive and ideological patterns.

All data were stored in encrypted digital folders with restricted access. Triangulation was applied by comparing findings across WhatsApp groups and corroborating them with official communications and media narratives. Member checking was conducted with select consenting participants to validate interpretations of key excerpts. Thick description and reflexive transparency were maintained throughout to ensure dependability and confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis integrated Fairclough's CDA model with the Appraisal Framework, grounded in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). This combination offered a dual lens to investigate both the macro-level ideological and micro-level evaluative and affective dimensions of WhatsApp discourse in Kenya during COVID-19. The process was interpretive, iterative, and contextually grounded, aiming at revealing how ordinary users expressed emotions, evaluated government actions and positioned themselves ideologically during the pandemic.

3.5.1 Analytical Orientation

CDA, as proposed by Fairclough (1992; 1995), conceptualizes language as social practice shaped by and shaping power relations. The framework was applied to examine how WhatsApp users constructed COVID-19 realities, expressed attitudes toward government measures and reproduced or challenged official narratives.

The Appraisal Framework (Martin & White, 2005) provided a fine-grained linguistic tool for analysing evaluation, attitude and stance, complementing CDA. It focused on participants' emotional and moral positioning in relation to events, policies, and social actors. Together, CDA offered the macro-analytical perspective while the Appraisal Framework enabled detailed micro-level textual interpretation.

3.5.2 Stages of Data Analysis

The first stage involved data preparation. WhatsApp messages were transcribed, cleaned, and organized into a textual corpus. Messages were coded by group (A–E), date, and thematic relevance. Incomplete, duplicated or off-topic messages were excluded.

The second stage was thematic categorization. This entailed identifying recurring topics such as government accountability, economic hardship, corruption, enforcement of curfews and public mistrust (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These themes informed deeper critical-linguistic analysis using CDA and the Appraisal Framework.

The third stage applied Fairclough's three-dimensional model: textual analysis (examining vocabulary, grammar, metaphors, and rhetorical devices), discursive practice (analysing message production, circulation, and interactional patterns), and social practice (situating discourse within Kenya's socio-political and cultural context). This enabled movement from micro-level linguistic patterns to macro-level social meanings.

The fourth stage applied the Appraisal Framework, analysing Affect, Judgement, and Graduation (Martin & White, 2005). Affect examined emotional responses such as fear, hope, or anger; Judgement focused on moral evaluations of social actors; Graduation considered intensity or mitigation of meaning.

The fifth stage involved integration and interpretation, synthesizing CDA and Appraisal findings to understand how participants constructed COVID-19 discourse, expressed trust or mistrust and negotiated compliance or resistance. Excerpts supported every interpretation to ensure claims were evidence-based.

Triangulation and reflexivity were used to enhance credibility. Comparisons across groups and themes were made to verify consistency while the researcher acknowledged their positionality as a Kenyan citizen interpreting culturally embedded discourse (Finlay, 2002).

The combined CDA and Appraisal approach enabled a comprehensive exploration of both content and form, revealing how language functioned as a tool for social critique, ideological positioning and emotional expression during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards. Permission to conduct research was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Informed consent was secured from all participants where the purpose, data collection methods and potential applications of contributions were clearly explained. Personal identifiers were removed to protect privacy, and access to data was restricted to authorized personnel. Participant autonomy was respected and no harm or discomfort was imposed. For groups where the researcher was not a member, permissions were sought from administrators or participants before data analysis. Overall, ethical considerations ensured the protection of participants' rights while enabling responsible and transparent inquiry into language use in selected WhatsApp group chats during the pandemic.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the findings of the study on the discursive construction of COVID-19 in selected WhatsApp group chats in Kenya. The data is drawn from five purposively selected WhatsApp group chats that were active during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya. From the 115 threads that were collected, 61 were used in data analysis. The analysis examines how language was used as a social practice to create meanings, convey identities and articulate ideological positions regarding the health crisis in Kenya. This chapter purposely explores how WhatsApp users engaged in discursive actions that reflected fundamental attitudes, feelings, and evaluations toward the government of Kenya's policies and intervention measures. These WhatsApp interactions provide an insight into citizens' perceptions, fears and collective responses to both the pandemic and the state agencies.

The analysis, guided by Fairclough's (1992; 1995) model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), seeks to interrogate the relationship between language, power and ideology as evidenced in everyday digital discourse. Fairclough's three-dimensional framework comprising of textual analysis, discursive practice and social practice forms the analytical basis for identifying how lexical choices, rhetorical strategies and intertextual references were deployed to represent COVID-19 and related socio-political realities. This was aptly complemented by the Appraisal Framework of Martin and White (2005).

This chapter is organised around the three research objectives that guided the study. To begin with, it examines the lexical choices and linguistic resources used to construct meanings and represent COVID-19. Next, it explores how attitudes, emotions, and evaluations toward the government's response were expressed through WhatsApp communication. Lastly, this chapter presents the results and discussions on how discursive practices in WhatsApp interactions reflect broader social relations, ideological alignments and perceptions of government responses during the pandemic.

4.2 Lexical Choices Used in Selected WhatsApp Group Chats in Kenya to Construct Meaning and Represent COVID-19

This study intended to figure out how Kenyans talked about the COVID-19 in their WhatsApp chats and analyze the lexical choices used. The pandemic introduced many social, cultural, and linguistic changes that reshaped people's daily interactions and communicative manners. Many times, when something major happens, communities often create new words and phrases and modify existing ones to capture emerging phenomena and to make sense of the new changes. The COVID-19 crisis presented Kenyans a perfect moment to invent new vocabulary and extend the meaning of existing words to capture the real lived experience of going through a global pandemic. As one researcher (Mwari, 2021) points out, language is dynamic and therefore it constantly shifts and adapts to our new realities.

Over the pandemic period, many Kenyans used WhatsApp as one of the most popular modes of communication. The government instituted many measures such as lockdowns, quarantines, and social distancing. This limited physical contact, forcing people to rely on digital platforms to connect socially, share information and just check on each other. Oluwayeni (2022) notes that social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook played a central role in passing information and forming strong emotional connections during the pandemic crisis. Kantar (2020) equally observes that WhatsApp experienced a 40% rise in usage worldwide, the highest increase among social media platforms during COVID-19. This is a clear indication of its value as an avenue for communication and discussions during COVID-19 in Kenya.

Data used in this study has demonstrated that the COVID-19 discourse in Kenyan WhatsApp groups featured an increase of distinctive use of words that reflected the users' attempts to make sense of, explain and cope with the pandemic. The data indicated that WhatsApp group members made use of medical registers, social registers, militarized metaphors and religious register to construct meaning and represent COVID-19. The linguistic choices of new and existing words was employed to describe the symptoms, transmission, preventive methods and treatment of COVID-19. In addition, Kenyans used these new linguistic innovations to communicate broader social and political worries related to the pandemic.

Many words used were often given new interpretations to convey new meanings grounded in local sociocultural realities. For instance, many words chosen from the field of health science

such as “quarantine,” “lockdown,” and “social distancing” were turned into local idioms and everyday fun-making. Military expressions such as “fighting the virus,” “frontline soldiers,” and “battling COVID” were used to call for collective fight against the disease. Likewise, religious expressions such as “God’s punishment,” “divine protection,” and prayer as a cure showed how some Kenyans saw the pandemic as both a medical and spiritual problem. These words not only served referential functions but also performed evaluative and ideological work by framing COVID-19 as both a health and moral crisis.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), these lexical choices functioned as expressions of ideological struggle where ordinary Kenyans expressed resistance, fear and critique of authority through everyday choice of words. Moreover, through the Appraisal Framework, the use of evaluative language expressing affect, judgement, and appreciation illustrated how emotions, attitudes and values were linguistically encoded in these chats. Thus, the lexical choices in the WhatsApp group chats were not just descriptive but constitutive since they show the way Kenyans understood, experienced and contested the pandemic within their local communities. This section is organized in the following sub-sections: medical register in the construction of COVID-19, social register: lexical creativity, everyday coping and evaluative stances; military vocabulary and the construction of COVID-19 as war; and religious language in WhatsApp COVID-19 discourse.

4.2.1 Medical Register in the Construction of COVID-19

The WhatsApp data demonstrates that many Kenyans using WhatsApp frequently adopted a medical register; a specialized set of words, expressions, and metaphors typically associated with the health and biomedical fields, in their framing of COVID-19. This use of technical language served not only for informational purposes but also social, ideological and affective functions. The medical register is discussed in the following categories: descriptive and diagnostic lexicon, militarization of medical discourse, religious and ethical evaluations embedded in medical talk, framing of knowledge and expertise, contesting medical knowledge and institutional credibility; and constructing uncertainty and fear through medical semantics.

4.2.1.1 Descriptive and Diagnostic Lexicon

Across the data, participants employed biomedical terminology such as “virus,” “patient zero,” “PPE (Personal Protective Equipment),” “quarantine,” “contact tracing,” and “symptomatic”

to frame their understanding of COVID-19. For instance, in Excerpt 1, the utterance “Ensure you have your PPE on all the time” foregrounds medical professionalism and responsibility.

Excerpt 1

E1WU1: Corona virus was obviously coming to Kenya. Anything from China easily gets to Kenya. We are compromised in the health sector. Sad to say but we are ill-prepared

E1WU2: Love them or hate them. the Chinese interventions in Wuhan count for something. We can never match up. I foresee massive deaths in our land.

E1WU1: Ensure you have your PPE on all the time. We can't help the masses if we get infected.

(WGA)

Similarly, “patient zero” (Excerpt 2) below invokes a scientific framework for tracking contagion, anchoring the discourse in epidemiological logic. Epidemiological logic is the analytical framework used to explain disease patterns and guide public health decisions based on evidence from populations. Patient zero, on the other hand, refers to the first identified person in an outbreak of a disease. This is the individual who is initially discovered to be infected and is believed to be the starting point of the chain of transmission that researchers can trace. When the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Kenya, the term “patient zero”, previously an uncommon word became a household term in WhatsApp group chats.

Excerpt 2

E2WU1: Good morning team. Today patient Zero has been confirmed. Guys, I hope the government will provide adequate PPEs for use. Advise your friends and family to observe social distancing and to wear masks. I know measures will be put in place to ensure that anyone who comes in contact with patient zero is quarantined to prevent the spread of the disease

E2WU2: A total lockdown needed to have been instituted when the 1st case was confirmed in Wuhan China. This would have avoided spread to other parts of the world. As front-line workers, the buck stops with us. Let us educate people on how this will be contained. The war ahead of us is immense.

E2WU3: Just wondering...how many other patient zeros are out there? To me this sounds like PR

E2WU1: Who can tell. We just need to take precautions

E2WU3: True. A real health crisis is looming. Lazima tuwe tayari liwe liwalo

Translation

E2WU3: True A real health crisis is looming. We must be ready for whatever comes

(WGA)

Looking at these word choices in excerpt 1 and 2 from a CDA perspective, it is clear that they are not just neutral choices. They actually do two things at once: they reinforce the authority of scientific language while also brutally exposing how weak and unprepared Kenya's health system was during the pandemic. For instance, “We are compromised in the health sector. Sad to say but we are ill-prepared” (Excerpt 1) juxtaposes between medical precision and brutal institutional critique illustrating how speakers negotiate their identities as both informed professionals and citizens who are really disappointed. The discourse positions the health sector as powerful since it has the knowledge of the virus but also weak especially due to poor management and lack of necessary resources.

Within the Appraisal Framework, these words express citizens reservations (evaluations of institutional capacity) and Appreciation (evaluation of the system's adequacy). The words “ill-prepared” communicate a negative appreciation, showing discontent with the government's readiness. In addition, the expression “massive deaths in our land” from excerpt 1 encodes Affect-specifically fear and anxiety, possibly revealing deep emotional fears of potential consequences of the pandemic due to poor governance.

4.2.1.2 Militarization of Medical Discourse

The data analysed revealed that WhatsApp users in the sampled groups used the military metaphor to describe the pandemic, especially by framing it as a war. The disease, COVID-19, was metaphorically equated to a war. For instance, “The war ahead of us is immense” (Excerpt 2) depicts health workers as “frontline soldiers.” This militarization presented COVID-19 as an external enemy to be fought by all Kenyans, reinforcing collective responsibility and urgency.

From Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional CDA model, this militarized register is used discursively to align a person's experiences with institutional accounts of sacrifice and heroism.

It also reveals the relationship between political, medical, and moral discourses where fighting a disease is seen both as a patriotic and moral duty. Through the Appraisal Framework, these militarized metaphorical expressions realize Judgement of Tenacity where commitment and courage is appreciated and Affect of Insecurity where fear is seen as a serious challenge. The metaphors therefore play two critical roles: they motivate collective resilience and at the same time appreciating how vulnerable human beings are.

4.2.1.3 Religious and Ethical Evaluations Embedded in Medical Talk

Though much of the register is biomedical, the data also show that some WhatsApp users blended religious expressions with medical discourse. By using Phrases such as “God have mercy on us” (Excerpt 3, 5), the discourse reveals an evaluative intersection where the moral and the medical co-exist. Indeed, the shift from clinical discussion to invoking divine intervention reveals the perceived limitations of science and the human reliance on faith for reassurance.

Excerpt 3

E3 WUI: Hey, Good afternoon everyone, I think this wall is invaded by corona. Mtu anawezaleft?

E3 WU2: It looks like corona maneno, are here. Watu wakae quarantine

E3WU1: This is scary. Schools have been closed indefinitely

E3WU2: Haki China batunyalile

E3WU1: Jehova have mercy on us.

Translation

E3WUI: Good afternoon, this wall is invaded by corona. Can someone leave?

E3WU2: It looks like corona-related issues are here. People should stay in quarantine

E3WU1: This is scary. Schools have been closed indefinitely

E3WU2: China has truly messed us up

E3WU1: Jehova have mercy on us.

(WGC)

Excerpt 5

E5WU1: Suspected Corona death in Matatu!

E5WU2: God have mercy!

E5WU1: Sasa huyo si amepea watu wengi? Contact tracing itafanywaje?

E5WU3: Suspected means anaezakuwa alikufa kifo ingine. People used to die before

Translation

E5WU1: Suspected Corona death in a public van!

E5 WU2: God have mercy!

E5 WU1: That one must have infected many people? How will contact tracing be conducted?

E5WU3: Suspected means the person could have died from something else. People used to die before

(WGB)

From a CDA viewpoint, this hybridization of discourse indicates a localized recontextualization of global biomedical narratives within Kenyan moral-religious frameworks. It highlights how citizens appropriate scientific language while simultaneously re-inscribing it with spiritual and communal meanings. By appealing to God to intervene, this discourse transforms COVID-19 from a clear medical crisis into a spiritual one. These invocations of divine intervention reveal Affect (fear, helplessness, hope) as well as Judgement (moral evaluation of human vulnerability). The users use such language to express solidarity and shared emotional experience, depicting the affective economy of crisis communication in digital spaces.

4.2.1.4 Framing of Knowledge and Expertise

In excerpt 2, the expression “As front-line workers, the buck stops with us” is a powerful statement that constructs a discourse of professional responsibility and expertise. The speaker is asserting that they are the experts and must take full responsibility. This is in line with Fairclough’s view of discursive positioning, where speakers claim agency and responsibility through linguistic expressions. The use of inclusive pronouns (we, us) is very important. It calls for collective identity and moral bond among healthcare workers, reinforcing a sense of duty even though they are failed by health institutions. The Appraisal Framework identifies this as Judgement of Capacity. This happens when one evaluates oneself and peers as capable actors. When the same professionals say, “We must be ready for whatever comes” it brings out incredible resilience and determination of health professionals in Kenya in the face of serious uncertainty. It's a statement of inner resolve and a refusal to be defeated by the crisis

4.2.1.5 Contesting Medical Knowledge and Institutional Credibility

In Excerpt 2, it is evident that some WhatsApp group members questioned official information on COVID-19 in the country from their choice of language. For instance, in the statement “Just wondering...how many other patient zeros are out there? To me this sounds like PR,” the term PR (Public Relations) implies doubt toward government communication. This projects official communication by government agencies as meant to manipulate the citizens rather than make clear certain issues.

Through a CDA lens, this scepticism demonstrates a power struggle between institutional discourse and ordinary citizen discourse. The speaker reclaims professional expertise by contesting official truth claims, an important act in critical discourse practice. Through the Appraisal Framework, this statement conveys Judgement of Veracity, casting doubt on the government’s level of sincerity. It also expresses Affect of Distrust which reveals emotional disillusionment with institutional credibility.

4.2.1.6 Constructing Uncertainty and Fear through Medical Semantics

By using expressions such as “It will spread like wildfire” (Excerpt 1) and “A real health crisis is looming” (Excerpt 2), the speakers rely on medical metaphors to sensationalise fear. This figurative language creates meaning beyond the medical vocabulary into affective territory, expressing emotional contagion comparable to the biological one.

These metaphors, in CDA terms, make discussion on crisis natural, shaping a common perception of inevitability and helplessness. The metaphors also serve to discipline public behaviour by projecting fear as a regulatory emotion. Within the Appraisal Framework, these expressions fall under Affect: Insecurity and Fear, and Graduation: Force, amplifying the perceived gravity of the pandemic.

4.2.1.7 Overview of Medical Register in the Construction of COVID-19

The sample excerpts in our data reveal that medical terminology, what Halliday (1978) refers to as “a register of field-specific discourse,” was central in the construction of COVID-19 meaning within Kenyan WhatsApp groups. Participants adopted, recontextualized, and domesticated technical medical lexicon such as “patient zero,” “PPE,” “quarantine,” “lockdown” and “contact tracing,” into everyday talk. The deployment of medical register signalled both epistemic authority and social anxiety. Through Fairclough’s CDA, this register

demonstrates the intersection between knowledge, power, and identity within pandemic discourse, while the Appraisal Framework exposes how speakers used attitudinal language to express emotion, judgment, and appreciation.

According to Fairclough (1992; 1995), CDA views discourse as a social practice through which ideological meanings are produced and reproduced. In this case, medical register functions ideologically to legitimize certain voices (especially health workers) and marginalize others by foregrounding scientific rationality. At the same time, Martin and White’s (2005) Appraisal Framework helps unearth how linguistic resources enact relational meaning through three systems: Affect, Judgement and Appreciation. Both the CDA and the Appraisal Framework provide a layered interpretation of how medical discourse in WhatsApp messages reflects both the knowledge hierarchy (experts vs. laypersons) and emotional stance toward an unfolding crisis.

It is clear that by integrating medical register into their everyday WhatsApp discourse, ordinary Kenyans used language to navigate the COVID-19 crisis. Through CDA, the language of medicine is seen as both a resource of power and a medium of expressing social fears and worries. In addition, the Appraisal analysis shows how evaluation and emotion shape meaning-making, allowing participants to convey their moral and affective stance within the pandemic narrative. Table 4.1 provides a summary of the analysis of medical register used in this discussion.

Table 4.1: Key Lexical Items, Discursive Functions and Attitudinal Values in the Medical Register

| No. | Lexical Item / Phrase | Excerpt Source | Discursive Function (CDA) | Attitudinal Value (Appraisal Framework) |
|-----|-------------------------------------|----------------|---|--|
| 1 | PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) | 1, 2 | Establishes professional identity and legitimizes expert discourse; symbolizes preparedness and responsibility in health communication. | Judgement (Capacity) – Evaluation of institutional and personal adequacy in health response. |
| 2 | Patient Zero | 2 | Constructs medical causality and origin; | Appreciation (Significance) – Signals |

| | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|------|---|---|
| | | | introduces diagnostic narrative based on global epidemiological framing. | seriousness of crisis; Affect (Anxiety) over unknown spread. |
| 3 | Quarantine / Lockdown | 2, 3 | Represents state control and biosecurity; reflects interdiscursivity between medical and political registers. | Affect (Fear, Isolation) – Emotional response to restricted freedom; Judgement (Security measures). |
| 4 | Health Crisis | 2 | Frames situation as national emergency; dramatizes the scale of the pandemic. | Appreciation (Negative Valuation) – Evaluates situation as grave; Affect (Alarm). |
| 5 | Contact Tracing | 5 | Enacts surveillance discourse; indexes biomedical rationality and systemic control. | Judgement (Competence) – Questions institutional efficiency; Affect (Concern) over exposure. |
| 6 | Suspected Corona Death | 5 | Illustrates diagnostic uncertainty and contested medical authority. | Judgement (Credibility) – Skepticism toward official reports; Affect (Doubt). |
| 7 | Social Distancing | 4 | Highlights the penetration of technical jargon into everyday talk; symbolizes public health compliance discourse. | Judgement (Institutional Capacity) – Evaluates feasibility; Affect (Frustration) about overcrowded schools. |
| 8 | Health Sector | 1 | Signifies structural critique; connects medical preparedness to governance. | Judgement (Negative – Inefficiency) – Evaluative stance toward systemic inadequacy. |
| 9 | Infected / Virus Spread | 1, 3 | Constructs biological threat and urgency; legitimizes preventive discourse. | Affect (Fear, Vulnerability) – Expresses emotional reaction to contagion. |

| | | | | |
|----|-------------------------|---|--|---|
| 10 | Jehova have mercy on us | 3 | Merges religious and medical registers; appeals to divine authority amidst scientific uncertainty. | Affect (Desperation, Faith) – Emotional coping and spiritual appraisal of the crisis. |
|----|-------------------------|---|--|---|

The table above demonstrates how words and phrases with a medical background were used as both linguistic and ideological tools, helping WhatsApp users to convey meaning, express evaluation, and create a shared understanding of the world during the pandemic. Using CDA lens, these items show existence of power dynamics between expert and everyday discourses. From an Appraisal perspective, these lexicon items foreground affective and judgmental responses that humanize technical vocabulary within digital public spaces.

4-2.2 Social Register: Lexical Creativity, Everyday Coping and Evaluative Stances

This section dives into the unique language that developed in Kenyan WhatsApp group chats during COVID-19 with the key intention of helping members cope with COVID-19. It includes: playful and fun coinages such as “coronaphobia,” “coronabae,” “covidiot,” and “coronalusional.”; pragmatic innovations with creative expressions like “park and chill” and temporality jokes that had funny ways of naming days like “Blursday” and “Whensday.” These lexical items were not just for fun. They performed social functions such as managing anxiety, creating in-group humour, questioning authority, and negotiating compliance. We used CDA to understand what these words say about social relations, power and embedded ideologies. We also used Appraisal Framework to trace emotions and evaluations that speakers and audiences expressed in their WhatsApp group chats.

From our data, four connected themes emerged, reflecting the multifaceted ways in which Kenyans used WhatsApp chats to understand the COVID-19 pandemic. These are: humour, play and linguistic creativity as coping mechanisms; public health compliance versus scepticism, everyday adaptation and crisis routines; and political evaluation and ridicule of officials. Each of these themes is scrutinized through the lens of Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover the deep connections between language, power, and ideology and then through the Appraisal Framework, to pinpoint the emotional and judgemental dimensions of the participants’ conversations

4.2.2.1 Humour, Play and Linguistic Creativity as Coping Mechanisms

During the pandemic in Kenya, many people experienced fear, uncertainty and faced many restrictions that were imposed by the government. To cope with this, WhatsApp users in the sampled groups turned to humour and word play as key coping mechanisms. Through creative word formations, playful banter and satirical expressions, participants transformed anxiety into laughter, lessening the weight of the difficult times and maintaining social connection. Humour became both a psychological buffer and a linguistic strategy for resilience. This helped users to navigate the crisis with creativity and optimism. Within this digital space, language functioned not only as a communicative tool but also as a therapeutic resource enabling collective healing, solidarity, and subtle critique of the new normal.

In excerpt 6, creative WhatsApp users coined playful words such as “coronaphobia,” “coronabae,” and “coronababy,” while in Excerpt 10, they extend this creativity with “Whensday,” “Blursday,” and “coronalusional.” These witty creations funnily blend pandemic language with everyday idioms, turning a serious global crisis into local humour that everyone could comfortably relate with.

Excerpt 6

E6 WU1: Wasee mi naye Rona naogopa! Niko na coronaphobia but coronabae ni lazima

E6WU2: Coronabae kidokidogo utajikuta na coronababy boss

E6WU1: Sina shida kaka.

Translation

E6WU1: People, I have corona phobia but I must have a corona girlfriend!

E6WU2: Corona girlfriend then in no time you find yourself with a corona baby

E6WU1: I don't have a problem with that my brother.

(WGD)

Excerpt 10

E10WU1: I lost count of the days of the week. When is today?

E10WU2: I have no idea. I am equally blurred. Could it be Wednesday or Whensday?

E10WU1: If you are blurred, it must be Blursday?

E10WU3: You guys must be coronalusional right now

(WGE)

The excerpts above demonstrate that creative use of language in global pandemic vocabulary is localised into intimate humour. Through CDA, this creative wordplay becomes a recontextualization (Fairclough, 1992) of institutional COVID-19 discourse into a form of community-level language empowerment.

Participants used language creatively to transform fear into fun, performing what Dynel (2020) calls “humour as coping,” using laughter to reduce anxiety and reinforce group solidarity. For example, the funny term “coronabae” reframes a serious infection risk into romantic banter, mitigating threat through emotional appeal. The Appraisal analysis reveals a strong sense of Affect (light-hearted amusement) and Appreciation (of creativity and resilience). The humorous tone down-scales Graduation, making the pandemic less scary while inviting users to share a laughter in the midst of fighting a serious health crisis. This word play emphasizes how humour becomes a useful language tool of resilience, reaffirming common identity during a crisis (Chiluwa & Ajiboye, 2020).

4.2.2.2 Compliance versus Scepticism: Negotiating Precautionary Behaviour

During the COVID-19 pandemic, WhatsApp group chats in Kenya became critical sites for negotiating the meaning and legitimacy of government directives. Users engaged in conversations that reflected both compliance with and doubts toward government and scientific directives such as mask-wearing, social distancing and sanitization. These conversations reveal an ongoing ideological debate between science and faith, in addition to cultural beliefs. As these participants discussed whether to obey authority by “sanitizing and wearing a mask” or to “just pray,” they presented competing moral and epistemic positions that shaped their course of actions, beliefs and survival. This dynamic interaction illustrates how digital conversations mediates not only public health communication but also deeper questions of trust, authority and the importance of science and religion in everyday Kenyan life.

Excerpt 7 illustrates the above assertion appropriately. The WhatsApp group members strike an ideological conflict between biomedical rationality and religious faith. One participant admonishes others when he says, “Some of you are covidiot... sanitize and wear a mask... Take precaution... Do not become part of statistics.” Another one counters by simply saying: “Are you sure those masks are helpful? Just pray.”

Excerpt 7

E7WU1: Some of you are covidiot. This thing is with us whether you like it or not. Mimi hapa wacha ni quarantine and chill, sanny ni lazima na mask pia. Take precaution wasee usikue part of statistics

E7WU2: Acha hizo.uke sure hizo masks zinasaidia? Omba tu Mungu.

Translation

E7WU1: Some of you are covidiot. This thing is with us whether you like it or not. Let me quarantine and chill, I must sanitize and wear a mask. Take precaution people, do not become part of statistics

E7WU2: Stop that. Are you sure those masks are helpful? Just pray.

(WGC)

The tension between science and faith in Kenyan digital discourse is further encapsulated in the exchange above. CDA exposes the competing epistemologies: the first speaker strongly advocates for biomedical guidelines and moralises public health compliance while the second appeals for divine protection, questioning human control. The label “covidiot” functions as moral regulation, positioning the speaker within the authoritative voice of health institutions. The counter utterance, “Just pray,” symbolically expresses resistance to secular reasoning, asserting an alternative worldview grounded in spirituality.

Through Fairclough’s (1995) notion of interdiscursivity, a key feature of conversations, this conversation brings together medical science and religious faith discourses within the same communicative space. The Appraisal Framework shows that the first speaker’s use of imperatives (“sanitize,” “wear a mask”) makes the speaker sound like a health professional, showing high Graduation and Judgment, therefore, enforcing what should be “correct” behaviour. The second speaker, however, changes the tone with the religious response and gives a different perspective. This reflects Kenya’s complex public sphere where biomedical knowledge and faith-based ideologies coexist (Chigona, 2022). WhatsApp thus becomes a tiny snapshot of larger ideological negotiation, showing how citizens juggle between conflicting authorities in times of crisis.

4.2.2.3 Everyday Adaptation and Social Practice Under Restriction

The Kenyan government imposed tough measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 that included curfews, closure of entertainment joints and restrictions on social gatherings. However, ordinary citizens devised creative ways as means of maintaining social connections and normal life. WhatsApp conversations captured these shifts clearly, documenting how people reconfigured usual routines and recreated spaces to maintain social connections. They used humorous remarks like “park and chill” as alternatives to banned bars. Data analysed succinctly captured how they came up with inventive strategies for sustaining livelihoods and adjusting to the new normal. These conversations reflect a strong willingness to survive in the face of disruption, revealing how digital talk became a mirror of lived experiences under difficult times. Within the broader framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), such linguistic expressions shed light on how social actors negotiated changing power relations and normalized new behaviour, while the Appraisal Framework highlights the positive Affect and Appreciation attached to local inventiveness and pragmatic survival.

In Excerpt 8, humour and real-life realities converge when users discuss how they adjusted their social life under lockdown. “Sale of alcohol in eateries banned... no more Kagwe special... people discovered ‘park and chill’... necessity is the mother of invention.” This conversational pattern depicts restriction as opportunity; a form of resistance masked in wit. Instead of citizens adhering to government guidelines, they just adjust and find new ways to live normally. CDA interprets this as discursive adaptation, where citizens reconfigure official policy into an expression of everyday imagination. The term “Kagwe special” sarcastically celebrates the then Health Cabinet Secretary Mutahi Kagwe, transforming official regulation into a cultural meme.

Excerpt 8

E8WU1: Sale of alcohol in eateries banned. Restaurants close at 7:00 PM. Licences to be Withdrawn.No more Kagwe special

E8WU2: I don't see any difference between 7 and eight PM. Kwani walikosa kazi ya kufanya?

E8WU3: Watu waligundua something better than Kagwe special. Form siku hizi ni park and Chill

E8WU2: Hebu tuchanue.

E8WU3: Simple. Mnaingia kwa gari, Mnaenda tao. Mnanunua mzinga kwa wines and spirit. You drive to a good location, park and drink and socialize in the car

E8WU2: Enyewe necessity is the mother of invention. I have seen people selling stuff from the boots of their cars along the highway. Wakenya si mko creative

Translation

E8WU1: Sale of alcohol in eateries banned. Restaurants close at 7:00 PM. Licences to be withdrawn. No more Kagwe special

E8 WU2: I don't see any difference between 7 and eight PM. Is it that they didn't have any work to do?

WU3: People discovered something better than Kagwe special. Nowadays, the new thing is park and Chill

E8WU2: Tell us about it.

E8WU3: Simple. You board a vehicle. You go to town. You buy alcohol in large quantities from a wines and spirit shop. You drive to a good location, park and drink and socialize in the car

E8WU2: Truly, necessity is the mother of invention. I have seen people selling stuff from the boots of their cars along the highway. Aren't you Kenyans creative!

(WGD)

Through this recontextualization, speakers reclaim agency by praising their adaptability. When one user says, “Necessity is the mother of invention”, it is a celebration of local resourcefulness. The use of casual tone subtly suggests the users’ disapproval of government logic as one user jokes, “I don’t see any difference between 7 and 8 PM.” Such statements exemplify Fairclough’s (2003) idea of how discourse participants “resist and reshape regulatory discourses” to fit everyday life experiences.

The application of Appraisal analysis identifies Appreciation (praise for creativity) and Judgment (mild critique of policy coherence). The exchanges open diverse perspectives and possibilities as users collaboratively share alternatives constructing a collective narrative of endurance. This reflects how digital spaces serve as platforms of real-life knowledge exchange, turning state restrictions into socially negotiated adaptations (Ndiso, 2021).

4.2.2.4 Political Evaluation and Ridicule of Officials

In the wake of the pandemic, political discourse became a prominent feature of everyday WhatsApp interactions as citizens evaluated and mocked government officials tasked with managing the crisis. Users employed a variety of linguistic features such as humour, irony, and metaphorical play. By using these features, users expressed great frustrations with the political class and institutional inefficiency. People like the then Health Cabinet Secretary Mutahi Kagwe were both praised and ridiculed. It was common for WhatsApp users to use comments such as “He must be coronalusalional” and “Corona has baptized him with fire.” This transformed powerful individuals into objects of popular critique. This digital satire served as a powerful form of political participation, enabling citizens to use informal communicative spaces such as WhatsApp groups to question credibility and performance of those in leadership positions. Using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) lens, such ridicule disrupts dominant power narratives by recontextualising official communication into subversive local expression. In this case, the Appraisal Framework reveals how affective stances, ridicule, irritation, and moral judgment, operate as linguistic resources through which the public negotiates trust, legitimacy, and accountability in moments of crisis.

Political critique emerges vividly in Excerpt 9, where participants ridicule the health minister: “From how Kagwe is over-talking, he must be coronalusalional... Corona has baptized him with fire... He should walk the talk.” To discredit the cabinet secretary who is official authority here, a WhatsApp user creatively coined the term “coronalusalional” which incorporates political and medical language. CDA interprets this as discursive resistance (Wodak, 2021) where citizens symbolically reverse the hierarchy of expertise by using the same biomedical vocabulary that legitimised state authority to mock it.

Excerpt 9

E9 WUI: From how Kagwe is over-talking, he must be coronalusalional

E9 WU2: Corona has baptized him with fire. He is trying to talk the talk

E9 WUI: He should walk the talk

E9WU2: It won't be long before he is let down by the very government, he is trying too hard to impress

(WGE)

The usage of the metaphorical statement “Corona has baptized him with fire” presents the minister as performative, suggesting that he has failed in his political duties and lacks moral standing. This is in line with Fairclough’s (1992) concept of ideological struggle, where everyday language becomes a medium for calling out institutional legitimacy. The ridicule transforms political critique into a collective act of dissent, consistent with Chilwa and Ajiboye’s (2020) findings that humour in African digital spaces often functions as political commentary.

An Appraisal analysis of how users criticised politicians reveals strong Judgment (negative evaluation of leadership), Affect (derisive amusement), and high Graduation (intensified emotional charge through metaphor). The stance is contractive, closing off debate and solidifying a shared oppositional identity among chat members. Ordinary citizens used irony and satire to recast political power relations, and humour to hold leaders accountable for their actions and express deep disillusionment with how the government was being run during COVID-19.

4.2.2.5 Synthesis and Implications of the Social Register

Across the conversations (Excerpts 6–10), Kenyan WhatsApp discourse showed a fascinating mix of registers incorporating the medical, religious, political, and humour—a true hybrid. Playful and creative terms like “coronababy,” and “Whensday” reasserted social bonding through humour; debates over things like “sanitize... Just pray” reveal an ideological clash. People would openly discuss whether to follow strict medical advice or just rely on faith in God. Narratives about adaptation like “no more Kagwe special,” and “park and chill” were meant to celebrate community resilience while coinages such as “coronalusional” expressed civic critique.

Through Fairclough’s (2003) lens, these micro-discourses index macro-social processes: the negotiation of authority, faith, and agency. In the Appraisal analysis, it is demonstrated that participants used affective and evaluative forms of communication to align, challenge or reframe central dominant narratives on COVID-19. WhatsApp thus functioned as a digital public sphere where ordinary Kenyans used language to navigate the crisis. Table 4.2 summarizes the results and discussion in this section.

Table 4.2: Summary Table of Social Register in Sampled WhatsApp group Chats

| Lexical Item / Phrase | Discursive Function (CDA) | Attitudinal Value (Appraisal) |
|---|---|---|
| <i>coronaphobia / coronabae / coronababy</i> | Humour & lexical play; coping; identity performance | Affect: fear → downscaled by humour; Appreciation: creativity |
| <i>Covidiots</i> | Social policing; stigmatization of non-compliance | Judgment: negative (irresponsibility); Affect: scorn/concern |
| <i>quarantine and chill / sanitize & mask (imperatives)</i> | Peer-to-peer public-health guidance; enactment of community norms | Affect: protective concern; Engagement: directive, contractive |
| <i>park and chill / selling from car boots</i> | Pragmatic adaptation; economic survival strategies | Appreciation: praise for ingenuity; Judgment: mild critique of policy logic |
| <i>coronalusional / baptized him with fire</i> | Political ridicule; delegitimation of official discourse | Judgment: negative (incompetence, performativity); Affect: derision |
| <i>Whensday / Blursday</i> | Temporal humour; collective disorientation coping | Affect: bemusement; Appreciation: playful solidarity |

4.2.3 Military Vocabulary and the Construction of COVID-19 as War

A striking feature that emerged from the analysis of the WhatsApp conversations is the frequent use of military vocabulary and war metaphors to describe the COVID-19 pandemic. Expressions such as “we must win this war,” “the enemy has invaded,” “weapon,” “fight,” and “frontline workers” were common in many of the WhatsApp conversations. The use of military associated language reflects a broader social tendency to frame the pandemic as a form of warfare: a battle to be fought, a crisis requiring soldiers, and a test of national strength and moral fortitude. These linguistic choices, from a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, function as meaning-making resources that shape how participants conceptualised the COVID-19 pandemic, to how they positioned themselves in relation to it, and finally how they evaluated government and society responses. Excerpt 11 illustrates this:

Excerpt 11

E11WU1: My brothers and sisters, let's follow the measures given by the government.

We must win this war. No other option.

E11WU2: No weapon formed against us shall prosper, in Jesus' name

E11WU3: Amen and Amen

(WGE)

From this Excerpt, we can conclude that the statement “We must win this war” exemplifies how ordinary citizens drew on warlike metaphors to present the pandemic as a collective battle that demanded for unity, discipline, and sacrifice. The war metaphor functions as a call to legitimise stringent public health measures and to call for collective responsibility. When one respondent adds, “No weapon formed against us shall prosper,” the conversation adopts a religious dimension, incorporating faith and military register. Therefore, the pandemic is recontextualised as both a physical and moral conflict to be won through faith and abiding by government regulations. This linguistic fusion, according to Fairclough’s three-dimensional model, represents a form of interdiscursivity, where military and religious discourses interconnect to present COVID-19 as a sacred struggle for survival where faith and personal commitment are paramount. An Appraisal analysis reveals strong Affect (fear and determination) and Judgement (valorisation of collective resilience). The high Graduation (“must win”) begs for urgency and moral responsibility, while the Engagement pattern is contractive, closing down any alternative interpretations and compelling common behaviour.

Excerpt 12

E12WU1: Saaaaaaaasa, tutapigana na korona ama wezi wa pesa ya korona?

E12 WU2: Zote. We lose if we don't fight both. This is a great war eye sei

E12WU1: The enemy has invaded a corrupt country

E12WU3: If you go to any hospital now, you will feel sorry for yourself. There is barely any service. People are dying kwa corridors

E12WU1: This is a viral war. World war 3, Kenya can never win when the government is the enemy

Translation

E12WU1: Now, will we fight Corona or people stealing money meant for Corona?

E12 WU2: Both. We lose if we don't fight both. This is a great war I say

E12WU1: The enemy has invaded a corrupt country

E12WU3: If you go to any hospital now, you will feel sorry for yourself. There is barely any service. People are dying in corridors

E12WU1: This is a viral war. World war 3, Kenya can never win when the government is the enemy

(WGD)

In Excerpt 12 above, the military discourse takes a distinctly political turn. One user's question "Tutapigana na korona ama wezi wa pesa ya korona?" (Shall we fight the virus or the thieves stealing COVID-19 funds?) extends the metaphor beyond health into the political domain. The pandemic now becomes both a biological threat and a moral and political battle where citizens criticize perceived corruption among leaders and poor response to the crisis. From the response "We lose if we don't fight both", the user reconfigures the nation's enemies to be the virus and corrupt elites. Both the political class and pandemic are considered as the enemies of the people and treated as co-conspirators in this crisis. This exchange, while looking at it through CDA lens, illustrates how discourse participants extend a new meaning. The government's own war rhetoric indicts the state itself. At the level of social practice, the use of militarised vocabulary justifies criticism of political leadership and exposes deep-rooted mistrust of authority by its own citizens. We see heightened Judgement when we analyse the exchange using the Appraisal Framework. Moreover, there is negative evaluation of government morality and competence and intense Affect which is characterized by anger, fear, and resentment. This Engagement here vacillates between dialogic expansion (multiple perspectives) and contraction as speakers have a pattern of shared cynicism.

Excerpt 13

E13WU1: Dunia inaisha I dare to say

E13WU2: This virus is worse than a nuclear war

E13WU1: Si imeangusha wazungu!

E13WU2: Mi niliona video Fulani nikashtuka

Translation

E13WU1: The world is ending I dare to say

E13WU2: This virus is worse than a nuclear war

E13WU1: Indeed. Hasn't it killed whites!

E13WU2: I saw a certain video and got shocked

(WGE)

In excerpt 13, there is a sensational use of hyperbolic metaphors. They loudly amplify the pandemic's perceived magnitude when users make proclamations such as "This virus is worse than a nuclear war" and "The world is ending." Such comparisons create catastrophic imagery in the mind of other WhatsApp users to express existential anxiety. The war metaphor, from a CDA perspective, becomes a crucial conversational resource for amplifying fear in the society and legitimising harsh government directives. At the same time, the war metaphors produce a sense of helplessness in the face of the crisis. When users use this hyperbole, they also construct COVID-19 both as a medical emergency and as an apocalyptic event to cause as much panic as possible. This excerpt, within the Appraisal system, demonstrates intense Affect seen through fear, despair and Appreciation captured through negative valuation of the situation's magnitude. Since speakers present their statements as uncontested facts, the language here comes out as monoglossic. Graduation is maximised through superlatives such as "worse than nuclear war." These choices reinforce the perception of uncontrollable global catastrophe, while the mention of "wazungu" (white people) being affected hints at a subtext of inverted racial power, suggesting symbolic retribution against the global North.

Excerpt 14

E14WU1: Hii kitu haiezikuwa iliundwa na Chna. In fact, it could be a war against China. Kuna watu waliunda wakaipeleka China. China is currently the most affected.

Wangetaka Kuua watu nayo si wangepeleka mahali kwingine

E14WU2: story ni ati uliwalipukia by mistake. They were making it watumie kama weapon but ikawageukia. It is a case of an experiment gone wrong

E14WU1: Story ni nyingi. The truth could be somewhere in between. This is not the only virus. Tumekuwa na nyingine nyingi in the past. I hope hii pia itakuwa managed. Ebola was also scary but haishtui siku hizi

E14WU1: Hata measles iliua watu wengi before dawa ipatikane. Suluhisho ni dawa ipatikane

E14 WU2: Shida noi kabla hiyo dawa itufikie, tutakuwa wahenga

E14WU1: Some people must die. It is nature's way of balancing manenoz.

E14WU3: A lot of evidence points towards this thing being a genetic bomb against the Chinese, some people are not happy with how quickly they are coming us. It is an economic war. Corona is a bioweapon

Translation

E14 WU1: This thing couldn't have been manufactured in China. In fact, it could be a war against China. There must be some people that took it to China. China is currently the most affected. Had they wanted to kill people with it, they would have taken it to some other place

E14WU2: The story is that they ended up having it by mistake. They were making it with the intention of using it as a weapon but it worked against them. It is a case of an experiment gone wrong

E14WU1: There are so many stories. The truth could be somewhere in between. This is not the only virus. We have had so many others in the past. I hope this one will also be managed.

Ebola was also scary but it is not scary nowadays

E14WU1: Measles also killed so many people before a drug for it was found. The solution is for a drug to be found

E14WU2: The problem is that before that drug is discovered, we would have passed on

E14 WU1: Some people must die. It is nature's way of balancing things

E14 WU3: A lot of evidence points towards this thing being a genetic bomb against the Chinese. Some people are not happy with how quickly they are coming us. It is an economic war. Corona is a bioweapon

(WGD)

Excerpt 14 above deepens the militarised framing through conspiracy and bioweapon discourse. Phrases such as “Corona is a bioweapon,” “a genetic bomb against the Chinese,” and “an experiment gone wrong” show how scientific uncertainty was discursively filled with political narratives of intentionality. This shift at the textual level, transforms a natural phenomenon into a human-engineered weapon, transferring agency from nature to imagined geopolitical actors. Here, Fairclough’s concept of recontextualization aptly applies. Scientific and biomedical terms like genetic, weapon, experiment are rearticulated in everyday speech to construct a moral drama of global conflict and deception. In this case, uncertainty is turned into blame while explanation becomes accusation. When we use the Appraisal Framework for analysis, this excerpt reveals strong Judgement through moral condemnation of the imagined perpetrators. Affect is captured through suspicion, anger and resentment. There is limited Engagement which is seen when there is little openness to alternative perspectives. The high Graduation marked in use of absolutes and categorical assertions contributes to the discourse’s

persuasive power. By using conspiratorial war metaphors, from the social point of view, users reflect widespread distrust of institutions and global power structures. The metaphors ultimately serve to make sense of chaos while at the time risk reinforcing xenophobia and scientific scepticism.

Excerpt 15

E15WUI: Neighbours, things are getting worse

E15WU2: If God is on our side, who can be against us? Surrender your heart to God and turn to Him in prayer and give up your sins-even those you do in secret. Then you won't be ashamed; you will be confident and fearless. Your troubles will go away like water beneath a bridge, and your darkest night will be brighter than noon

(WGE)

Excerpt 15 reveals how religious discourse once again interweaves with military language. For example, one participant says, “If God is on our side, who can be against us?” This user reimagines the battle as a spiritual warfare. The user advocates to his intended audience to use prayer, repentance, and faith in God as weapons. Moral purity is set as the condition for victory. This excerpt, from a CDA point of view, exemplifies how some citizens moralised the pandemic construing the disease both as a biomedical and a spiritual retribution that demanded moral correction. The Appraisal analysis reveals a positive Affect marked through hope and reassurance and strong Judgement noted through moral exhortation and self-discipline. Engagement is contractive. Faith statements are presented as ultimate truth and leaves neither space for discussion nor contestation. Graduation is high, with confident modality- “you will be confident and fearless”-underscoring emotional certainty. This mixture of faith and military register legitimises endurance and solidarity. However, this can also divert focus from structural policy discussions by locating agency solely in divine intervention.

Across these excerpts, we can deduce that the military vocabulary plays different functions discursively. Besides mobilising collective action, it constructs moral hierarchies, and finally assigns blame. These texts, in Fairclough’s terms, enact and reproduce broader social practices of legitimisation, moralisation, and politicisation of crisis. When COVID-19 is framed as a war, speakers transform preventive behaviour into patriotic duty and resistance into betrayal. However, the same metaphors that are meant to unify can also divide. The use of expressions such as “enemy”, “foreign nations”, or “sinners”, in the discourse risks reinforcing social fragmentation and distrust. The war frame, from the Appraisal perspective, sustains high levels

of Affect in fear, anger, hope and recurrent Judgement is seen through competence, morality, and solidarity. The Engagement patterns oscillate between polyphonic debate and monologic certainty. Lastly, Graduation remains consistently high, intensifying emotional resonance.

In conclusion, the militarisation of COVID-19 conversations in WhatsApp group chats in Kenya illustrates how ordinary citizens used common metaphors of war to make sense of uncertainty, express political discontent, and reaffirm moral order. These metaphors cannot be said to be neutral. They were deeply ideological, serving both as tools of empowerment and exclusion. We see, through Fairclough’s CDA, how discourse practices both reproduce and contest power struggles between citizens and those in authority. The Appraisal Framework highlights the evaluative textures through which these meanings are emotionally and morally negotiated. The result is a complex linguistic landscape where fear, faith, and politics intersect. This reveals how language itself became a battlefield in the struggle to construct, understand, and survive the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 4.3 summarizes the results and discussion of military vocabulary used in this section.

Table 4.3: Military Vocabulary in WhatsApp COVID-19 Discourse.

| Excerpt | Speaker | Utterance / Comment | Interpretation (Military Vocabulary) | Discursive Function |
|---------|---------|--|--|---|
| 11 | WU1 | My brothers and sisters, let us follow the measures given by the government. We must win this war. | The phrase 'win this war' frames COVID-19 as a battlefield situation, invoking unity and discipline typical of military discourse. | Encourages collective responsibility and patriotic compliance; positions citizens as 'soldiers' in a national struggle. |
| 11 | WU2 | No weapon formed against us shall | The word 'weapon' reinforces the | Expresses hope and resilience through |

| | | | | |
|----|-----|--|--|---|
| | | prosper, in Jesus' name. | military metaphor while blending it with religious warfare imagery. | spiritual militarization; merges faith and national struggle. |
| 11 | WU3 | Amen and Amen. | Repetition affirms solidarity and shared faith among the 'troops.' | Strengthens communal resolve and cohesion. |
| 12 | WU1 | Saaaaaaaasa, tutapigana na korona ama wezi wa pesa ya korona? (So, are we fighting corona or the thieves of corona funds?) | The verb 'tutapigana' (we will fight) sustains the military tone but redirects the enemy from the virus to corruption. | Shifts blame, satirizes leadership, and exposes social frustration using the same war metaphor. |

The data in Table 4.3 reveal that the use of military vocabulary in WhatsApp discussions about COVID-19 in Kenya served to present the pandemic as a national war that demanded discipline, unity, and obedience from the citizens. In general, we can say that the use of militarized register functioned as a site of ideological negotiation between following rules and resisting authority.

4.2.4 Religious Language in WhatsApp COVID-19 Discourse

From the analysis of the WhatsApp chats, religious language played an important role in framing the COVID-19 pandemic. It is clear that it was not just a biomedical crisis, but also a profound moral and spiritual trial. An analysis of Excerpts 16–20 reveals that religious language became one of the most critical discursive resources through which Kenyans on

WhatsApp made sense of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants viewed the pandemic not just as a biomedical crisis but also a divine message; a moral test and a call for people to repent. Fairclough's (1992, 2001) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) shows how such faith-oriented discourses were linguistically constructed and ideologically sustained in everyday digital interaction. The Appraisal Framework by Martin and White (2005) clarifies the evaluative stance and emotional investment present these in utterances.

From a CDA textual level, one can see a consistent invocation of religious expressions, scriptural allusions and intercessory statements. For instance, in excerpt 16, the statement "God is in control; let us repent and seek His face before it's too late" reflects the user's textual borrowing from biblical texts such as 2 Chronicles 7:14, which emphasizes repentance as the pathway to divine healing.

Excerpt 16

E16WU1: Word of the day

Psalm 91:1–6 (NIV)

"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the MostHigh will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness..."

E16WU2: Amen

E16WU3: Amen

E16WU4: Amen

E16WU5: Fear is not our portion

E16WU6: God is in control; let us repent and seek His face before it's too late

E16WU7: Philippians 4:6-7 also reminds us not to be anxious about anything, but in very situation, in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God

E16WU8: Amen

E16WU3: Amen

E16WU9: Thanks for the encouragement sister

(WGA)

The declarative "Fear is not our portion" in excerpt 16 directly echoes Isaiah 53:5. These intertextualities transform a global medical discourse into a spiritual narrative that places COVID-19 within a divine order. In excerpt 17. The expression "We serve a miracle working God. He is a healer" attributes the healing form COVID-19 to spiritual forces. From such

examples, we can argue that the speakers attribute the cause and remedy to COVID-19 to a supernatural being rather than scientific forces. Fairclough's notion of recontextualization is particularly useful here because the medical and governmental discourses are reinterpreted through faith-based frameworks thus producing a hybrid register that merges health communication with theology.

Excerpt 17

E17WU1: We serve a miracle working God. He is a healer. He has told us in his word that he will heal us. In the book of Exodus 15: 26, He tells us that He is the Lord who heals us. May those that are sick believe in his promises and receive healing in the name of Jesus.

E17WU2: Amen

E17WU3: Amen

E17WU4: Thanks brethren for sharing the word

E17WU5: Bwana apewe sifa

Translation

E17WU5: Praise be to God

(WGB)

From a CDA discursive practice, WhatsApp groups act as digital congregations in which members perform religious identity and solidarity through ritualized affirmation. For instance, in excerpt 17, when E17WU1 gives a Biblical verse, it is followed by responses of "Amen" The same is seen in excerpt 16. This call-and-response pattern reproduces the participatory rhythm of church liturgy. It demonstrates how traditional worship practices are transposed into digital communication. The repetition of "Amen" operates as both affective alignment and dialogic closure. It not only expresses agreement but also forecloses debate, establishing a shared moral and epistemic position grounded in faith. In this way religious discourse becomes a mechanism for managing uncertainty, reaffirming communal belonging and substituting the absence of physical congregation during lockdown.

These exchanges, from a social practice angle, are a reflection of the centrality of religion in Kenyan sociocultural life, where faith provides interpretive resources for understanding crisis (Gathogo, 2020; Mbiti, 1999). WhatsApp messages in Excerpts 19 and 20 equally show that users often interpreted COVID-19 as divine punishment or even prophecy. In excerpt 19,

E19WU1 shares a biblical verse that Alludes to COVID-19 being a punishment from God that calls for repentance. “2Chronicles 7:13-14 -When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” The above biblical verse rearticulates global fears into local theological explanation which reinforces an ideology of moral accountability and divine sovereignty. From such utterances, one can say that faith discourse legitimizes suffering as purposeful and redemptive thereby inviting believers to view repentance as both a moral and national duty. In doing so, religious language contributes to what Fairclough (2003) calls the “naturalisation of ideology” where such users embed specific belief systems as common sense within social consciousness.

Excerpt 19

E19WU1: Verse of the day

2Chronicles 7:13-14 -When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

E19WU2: May God heal our land Kenya

E19WU3: Kenya belongs to the Almighty God

E19WU4: Kenya is healed in Jesus' name

(WGE)

Excerpt 20

E20 WU1: Verse of the Day

Revelations 6:7-8-When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, 'Come!' I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague.

E20WU2: May God have mercy on us

E20 WU3: We pray for mercy, mercy, mercy

E20 WU1: He is a merciful God

(WGD)

When we apply the Appraisal Framework on excerpt 20, we see the evaluative dynamics within this discourse. Affect, under the category of Attitude, is marked by emotional reassurance and hope when a user utters, “He is a merciful God”. This expression is clearly soothing collective fear. Judgment surfaces in the moral evaluation of society’s behaviour as seen in, “May God have mercy on us.” This is meant to condemn perceived moral failure while reinforcing divine justice. Appreciation appears in positive evaluations of divine power clearly seen in this example, “He is a merciful God.” The Graduation subsystem is realized through intensification and repetition. The expressions like “We pray for mercy, mercy, mercy.” The repetition of “mercy” amplifies urgency and emotional force which evoke the rhetorical style of charismatic preaching.

To sum up this section, we can say that the religious discourse in excerpts 16–20 performs both affective and ideological functions. From the Affective dimension, this discourse provides emotional anchorage amid fear and disruption which replaces anxiety with faith-based assurance. When we look at it ideologically, it constructs a moral framework that interprets the pandemic as both a divine discipline and an opportunity for spiritual renewal. WhatsApp at the end becomes both a communication platform and a site of theological negotiation where lay believers recontextualize scripture to interpret a global crisis in terms that resonate with their culture. These findings strongly align with Fairclough’s argument that discourse simultaneously constructs reality and reproduces social relations such as faith, morality and national identity. Kenyan WhatsApp users, through shared religious language, reconstituted community and affirmed divine sovereignty besides asserting moral coherence in the face of COVID-19. Biblical intertextuality, evaluative language and communal affirmation intertwined to produce meaning and hope. This reaffirms that even in mediated spaces, religion remains a vital force in shaping public consciousness and discursive resilience. Table 4.4 summarizes religious register discussed in this study:

Table 4.4: Religious Register in WhatsApp COVID-19 Discourse

| Excerpt | Representative Utterance(s) | Interpretation (Religious Register) | Fairclough’s CDA Dimensions | Appraisal Framework Categories |
|---------|--|-------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| 16 | <i>Psalm 91:1–6... You will not fear the terror of</i> | Religion constructs COVID-19 as a | Textual: Intertextual borrowing from scripture. | Affect: Reassurance, courage over |

| | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|--|
| | <i>night... Amen... Fear is not our portion.</i> | divine test; faith offers emotional refuge. | Discursive practice: Reproduction of sermon-like discourse in digital form. Social practice: Reinforces faith-based resilience in crisis. | fear. Engagement: Repetition of “Amen” closes dialogue. Graduation: Intensification through collective affirmation. |
| 17 | <i>We serve a miracle-working God... He will heal us... Praise be to God.</i> | Portrays God as healer; faith as remedy for disease. | Textual: Declarative and testimonial style. Discursive practice: Testimony genre promoting hope. Social practice: Reinforces religious solution over medical rationality. | Appreciation: Positive valuation of God’s healing power. Affect: Hope and trust. Graduation: Emphasis through repetition and exclamations. |
| 18 | <i>Only Jesus can save... Call on men of God to intercede.</i> | Constructs salvation and healing as mediated through faith leaders. | Textual: Religious imperative verbs (“call,” “believe”). Discursive practice: Invocation of pastoral authority. Social practice: Reinforces spiritual hierarchy. | Judgment: Positive evaluation of faith leaders’ role. Engagement: Directive stance limiting alternative solutions. Affect: Faith as |

| | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|---------------------|
| | | | | emotional security. |
| 19 | <i>If my people... will humble themselves... I will heal their land.</i> | Interprets pandemic as divine punishment demanding repentance. | Textual: Conditional structure foregrounding moral causality. Discursive practice: Recontextualization of Old Testament covenant language. Social practice: Promotes moral accountability and national repentance. | |

4.2.5 Summary of Lexical Choices Used in Selected WhatsApp Group Chats in Kenya to Construct Meaning and Represent COVID-19

In a nutshell, the lexical choices employed in the selected WhatsApp group chats in Kenya reveal how language functioned as a powerful tool for Kenyans to make sense of the pandemic and their new social life during the COVID-19 crisis. The creative and context-specific use of various linguistic terms, the use of medical terms, the use of military metaphors and the use of religious register illustrate how participants localized global discourses. This is especially seen where users employed rhetorical devices such as humour and metaphor to negotiate fear, uncertainty and encourage solidarity. These lexical choices projected the speakers' attitudes and emotions and reflected the broader socio-cultural interpretations of the pandemic. These linguistic patterns ultimately underscore the dynamic nature of digital discourse. They show how ordinary users, through everyday lexical practices, contributed to shaping collective understandings and representations of COVID-19 within the Kenyan social cultural and political context.

4.3 How WhatsApp Group Chats on COVID-19 Reveal Attitudes, Emotions and Evaluations toward the Government of Kenya's Response to COVID-19

The analysis of selected WhatsApp group chats on COVID-19 in Kenya reveals the writers' attitudes, emotions and evaluations of members toward the government of Kenya's response to the pandemic. We used the principles of Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough (1992) and the Appraisal Framework by Martin and White (2005) to explore how ordinary Kenyan citizens in selected WhatsApp groups used language to express their attitudes, emotions, and evaluations. The WhatsApp conversations reveal three main and overlapping discourses: distrust and critique; economic and social frustration; and solidarity and resilience.

The discourse of distrust and critique was seen in comments that challenge the government's credibility which revealed perceptions of corruption, hypocrisy, and inefficiency in implementing COVID-19 containment measures. Participants creatively used irony, satire, and rhetorical questioning to delegitimize official narratives and reframe the state as self-serving rather than protective.

The discourse of economic and social frustration, on the other hand, captures how the public was disillusioned with the socioeconomic hardships that were made worse by lockdowns and curfews imposed by the government. We also see use of lexical choices expressing hunger, job loss, and inequality that brought out widespread discontent with policies that seemed detached from citizens' everyday realities. These utterances foreground emotion-laden evaluations of suffering, neglect and exclusion which essentially links language to lived experience.

The discourse of solidarity and resilience, by contrast, illustrates moments of communal hope, faith, and people being there for each other. Even though citizens were going through hard times, they relied on religious reassurance, collective endurance and moral appeals to unity to cope with the pandemic. This positive evaluative stance highlights the social fabric of care and interdependence that was there during the pandemic crisis in Kenya.

Ultimately, these intertwined discourses demonstrate how WhatsApp served as a digital public sphere where Kenyan citizens articulated their feelings of resistance, empathy and hope through everyday linguistic creativity. The interplay of appraisal resources, that is Affect, Judgment and Appreciation, reveals that citizens did not just receive government communication passively.

They also were active meaning-makers who contested, negotiated and reimagined the COVID-19 narrative at their positions.

4.3.1 Discourse of Distrust and Critique of Governance

Much of the data analysed shows that the government of Kenya was on the receiving end for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. WhatsApp exchanges reveal a prevailing discourse of distrust and critique directed at the Government. The government is seen as deceptive, self-serving, and incompetent, while citizens position themselves as critical observers who reject state narratives. Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model shows how scepticism is linguistically and ideologically produced in the data. The Appraisal Framework provides insights into the evaluative stance, emotions and judgments encoded in the language. The discourse is covered in four subsections namely: discourse questioning government credibility, discourse ridiculing state performances, exposure of moral and administrative failure and finally discourse contesting religious deflection.

4.3.1.1 Discourse Questioning Government Credibility

Our data shows that participants used irony, sarcasm and rhetorical questioning to express scepticism toward official information. Citizens used these devices to expose perceived inconsistencies, corruption and incompetence in state communication and response. With use of Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis framework, we examine how linguistic choices such as ridicule, parody and evaluative stance were used to resist dominant narratives and create alternative meanings around governance, transparency and accountability. In this way, we see how WhatsApp becomes a digital site of discursive contestation where citizens negotiate power relations and voice distrust in state authority under the guise of everyday online interaction.

Excerpt 21

E21WU1: I don't know if this virus exists. What I know is that there is money put aside for it. The money is what makes them give us all this propaganda.

E21WU2: huu upuzi wa covid peleka mbali saaaaaaana. Hamuwezi tuuzia er ati zero social distancing ugonjwa wenye hauko....

Translation

E21WU2: This stupidity of covid should be taken very far away You can't instil fear in us by talking of social distancing for a disease that does not exist....

(WGB)

In Excerpt 21 above, E21WU1 asserts, “I don’t know if this virus exists. What I know is that there is money put aside for it. The money is what makes them give us all this propaganda.” This utterance foregrounds distrust through the juxtaposition of knowledge (“money put aside”) against ignorance (“I don’t know if this virus exists”). The lexical choice “propaganda” positions the government as manipulative and dishonest. Textually, this exemplifies interdiscursive borrowing from political discourse into everyday talk, reflecting Fairclough’s textual dimension where evaluative lexis encodes ideological stance. Through the Appraisal Framework, E21WU1 expresses Judgment (negative) by insinuating that the government is morally suspect and motivated by greed rather than care. E21WU2’s response, “This stupidity of covid should be taken very far away... You can’t instil fear in us...” amplifies Affect (anger and defiance) and rejects official health messaging as deceitful fearmongering.

4.3.1.2 Ridiculing State Performances

WhatsApp users in in the sampled data in Kenya employed humour, satire, and parody to ridicule government actions and performances during the COVID-19 pandemic. When we apply Fairclough’s (1992, 1995) notion of discourse as a form of social practice, we see how ridicule came out as a powerful linguistic resource for contesting authority and expressing dissent. Participants are seen to use witty remarks, exaggerations and ironic commentary to transform official speeches and government directives into objects of mockery thereby subverting institutional power and exposing perceived hypocrisy or ineptitude in leadership. The use of humorous critique evidently does not just entertain, but also serves as a subtle form of political resistance. These language devices were a means through which citizens reasserted their agency, questioned performative governance and articulated collective frustration in the face of the crisis. This is clearly exemplified in the excerpts below:

Excerpt 23

E23WU1: Sasa huyu Brenda wamemtoa wapi?

E23WU2: Vile anajiconfuse it is like they did not do a proper rehearsal .

E23WU1: Hata hajui ni how many days alikuwa quarantine....mara 22, mara 23...

E23WU2: SHE IS A FAKE

Translation

E23WU1: Now where did they get this Brenda?

E23WU2: From the way she is confusing herself it is like they did not do a proper rehearsal.

E23WU1: She does not even know for how many days she was in quarantine....at one point 22, another point 23...

E23WU2: SHE IS A FAKE

(WGC)

Excerpt 24

E24WU 1: Sasa hii project ya sirkali haijui kama ilikuwa Mbagathi ama KNH

E24WU2: Halafu huyu brayo anaingilia wapi kwa hii story? Kwani walikosa mtu wa kutumia?

Translation

E24WU 1: Now this government project does not know whether it was ar Mbagathi or KNH

E24WU2: Then how did this Brian get into this story? Did they lack someone else to use?

(WGD)

Excerpt 25

E25WU1: Hii drama inanifurahisha sana. Haki Unye. His advisors walimfaiil

E25WU2: You can't be sure. Inaezakua true story

E25WUI: No way. there are too many loose ends

Translation

E25WU1: This drama is so intriguing. Really Uhuru. His advisors have failed him

E25WU2: You can't be sure. It could be a true story

E25WUI: No way. there are too many loose ends

(WGE)

Excerpts 23–25 centre on Brenda and Brian, the government’s publicized COVID-19 survivors, who were meant to symbolize recovery success. Instead, users mock their incoherence: “From the way she is confusing herself it is like they did not do a proper rehearsal.” The lexeme “rehearsal” implies that the event was scripted, delegitimizing the authenticity of government communication. In the CDA analysis, the discursive practice dimension is evident since the public recontextualizes an official health narrative into a performative “drama.” Through the

Appraisal lens, speakers employ Appreciation (negative) and Graduation through sarcasm and exaggeration: “This drama is so intriguing. Really Uhuru. His advisors have failed him.” The ironic tone indexes Judgment (incompetence) and Affect (amusement blended with derision). By recoding official efforts into entertainment, citizens undermine institutional authority and convert state power into a site of ridicule.

4.3.1.3 Exposure of Moral and Administrative Failure

Through critical comments, sarcastic remarks, and moral appeals, participants in the sampled WhatsApp group chats highlighted issues of corruption, misuse of COVID-19 funds, double standards in enforcement of health regulations, and general incompetence among leaders. We see that these linguistic acts of exposure function as mechanisms of social accountability that allow citizens to voice dissatisfaction in a context where formal channels of critique are often constrained. It is also apparent that the ridicule and condemnation embedded in these exchanges reveal a high level of disillusionment with political leadership which in this case makes WhatsApp a digital arena for civic discourse and moral judgment. This is exemplified in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 27

E27WU1: prayers against corruption should also be held simultaneously.

E27WU2: It should be time for National Repentance of Sin.

E27WU3: Mr President, this would be a good time for you to announce a stimulus package funded by you and your deputy to aid Kenyans in these hard times you have instituted, as you copy without strategy, what other organized societies are doing as they implement Agenda21, in which we have nothing to gain but everything to lose. Majority of Kenyans are in rural areas, what's the rationale in shutting down services in the rural communities? Monkey see monkey do tactics, and prayers will not help us. You can't sell your citizens up the river then tell them to pray for better days, it's hypocritical because you attended Event201 at the World Economic Forum in Washington DC or sent your emissaries.

E27WU1: It's quite humbling to note that the Coronavirus crisis has forced a real national prayer day. This time a few elites and politicians aren't able to meet in a high-end hotel to pretend to be praying for the nation. But I also think repentance should be key part of prayers on Saturday. We have allowed greed (a capital offense and among the seven God hates most) to rule us. No need to elaborate on the effects of greed: murders, corruption, lying,Lord have mercy.

E27WU4: Kenyans pray all the time, what they need is water.

E27WU5: Clean WATER .

E27WU4: WATER WATER WATER is what Kenyans need.

E27WU5: For drinking then we can wash our hands

E27WU1: I prayed for water and God told me the government of Kenya was given money to provide water to Kenyans.

E27WU6: The Kenyan government needs to provide clean drinking water to everyone living in kenya first. Then they can tell people to wash their hands.

E27WU1: How do you tell someone who cannot access water that they need to wash their hands? Someone who can't access clean drinking water?

E27WU2: Most of Nairobi taps are dry. Most parts of Kenya have no clean drinking water.

E27WU1: The Kenyan government officials stole the money allocated to provision of water and now they are shamelessly telling Kenyans to wash their hands with IMAGINARY WATER!

E27WU2: The Kenyan government has no soul or no ounce of humanity and should be completely dismantled.

E27WU3: Ha ha ha like really? I'm all for prayers etc but if Uhuru thinks this is the solution, he is dumber than I thought.

E27WU1: We need action not prayers. Keep people in their homes and not on the streets. Prayers are not a solution for now. Smart choices like washing hands and keeping away from others are better choices. We Kenyans are intoxicated with prayers.

E27WU2: Prayers is a Deflection. We should just have prayed for Covid 19 to stay out of Kenya, if prayers work. Preach the practical things that people need to do to avoid spreading the virus. Pray after that.

E27WU2: If you believe in imaginary beings maybe this was an answer to a prayer for better hospitals since now all politicians get to stay in Kenyan hospitals. This should serve as motivation to fix the damn hospitals and not look to foreign countries for answers. Any Kenya thinking out there thinking that they have a president and functioning government is purely insane and retard. President Uhuru is incompetent, drunk and 100% out of touch with reality. How is prayer going to help? It's a colonized old mind, unscientific and moronic! How about the government encourage its citizens to follow the medical and isolation procedures! Pray after corona is gone!

(WGC)

In Excerpt 27 above, the critique intensifies, extending from incompetence to moral indictment. The statement “The Kenyan government officials stole the money allocated to provision of water and now they are shamelessly telling Kenyans to wash their hands with imaginary water!” foregrounds corruption and hypocrisy. The use capitalization by E27WU4 “WATER WATER WATER” and the implied metaphor emphasize outrage and disbelief. This, at the discursive level, represents a counter-narrative that delegitimizes government public health discourse by highlighting material deprivation. The Appraisal analysis shows that this utterance blends Judgment (dishonesty and inhumanity) and Affect (anger and indignation). This ideally reveals an emotionally charged stance rooted in moral evaluation.

Participant’s E27WU2 utterance, “Any Kenyan thinking that they have a president and functioning government is purely insane and retard. President Uhuru is incompetent, drunk and out of touch with reality” demonstrates Graduation seen as force through intensified negative epithets. This direct attack on leadership signifies discursive disillusionment where the government is constructed as entirely detached from the ordinary citizens’ suffering. Fairclough’s social practice dimension is clearly seen in this context where such discourse mirrors broader Kenyan socio-political frustrations where corruption and elitism are normalized and contested through public ridicule.

4.3.1.4 Contesting Religious Deflection

We see a recurring theme of resistance in Excerpt 27. Participants in this thread are up in arms resisting the government’s call for national prayers. Comments such as “We need action not prayers... Prayers are a deflection.” and “How is prayer going to help? It’s a colonized old mind, unscientific and moronic.” project citizens’ frustration with religious posturing instead of practical interventions. The expressions “not prayers,” “should,” “can’t” express assertive rejection and moral evaluation when seen from a linguistic point of view. From the Appraisal lens, the discourse encodes Judgment of capacity and propriety thereby depicting leaders as irrational, escapist and hypocritical. Affect is realized through sarcasm and exasperation, while Graduation intensifies emotional tone via the sarcastic repetition of “WATER WATER WATER” by E27WU4. Fairclough’s interdiscursivity is evident as the religious and political registers intersect, ultimately producing ideological tension between faith-based rhetoric and calls for rational governance.

In general, the discourse of distrust and critique in Kenyan WhatsApp comments reveals a common trend of everyday resistance against the government and its agencies. When citizens use humour, irony, and moral outrage, they reframe government communication as a fraudulent spectacle thereby exposing the dissonance between political performance and lived reality. From a CDA angle, this discourse disrupts the hegemonic authority of official narratives and reasserts citizens’ epistemic agency of the right to interpret, question and critique. When looked at it from the Appraisal standpoint, these utterances are seen as heavily evaluative and dominated by negative Judgment seen in incompetence, corruption and hypocrisy. There is also strong Affect seen as anger and frustration which is occasionally tempered with sarcastic Appreciation through mock admiration of the “drama”. The convergence of these evaluative resources reveals how digital discourse functions as a moral arena where citizens construct and convey their disillusionment with their government during crisis. Table 4.5 is a summary of the discourse of distrust and critique that has been discussed here.

Table 4.5: CDA and Appraisal Analysis of the Discourse of Distrust and Critique

| Excerpt | Key Expressions | CDA Focus (Fairclough) | Appraisal Framework (Attitude/Engagement/Graduation) | Interpretation |
|---------|--|--|---|---|
| 21 | “There is money put aside for it”; “propaganda” | Ideational meaning – corruption metaphor | Judgment (propriety); Engagement (denial) | Constructs government as deceitful and exploitative |
| 23 | “She is a fake”; “did not do a proper rehearsal” | Intertextuality; delegitimation of authority | Judgment (capacity); Graduation (force) | Discredits official narratives as staged and inauthentic |
| 24–26 | “Government is always right!” (ironic); “They have | Discursive struggle; irony as resistance | Engagement (irony); Judgment (veracity); Affect (anger) | Expresses deep-seated mistrust and collective frustration |

| | | | | |
|----|--|--|--|---|
| | always taken us for fools” | | | |
| 27 | “Prayers will not help us”; “We need action not prayers”; “Government has no soul” | Recontextualisation of religious discourse | Judgment (propriety, capacity); Graduation (amplified intensity) | Positions government as hypocritical and morally bankrupt |

Overall, the discourse of distrust and critique functions as a site of ideological struggle where ordinary citizens contest dominant meanings imposed by political elites. As a result, WhatsApp becomes a linguistic space for ordinary citizens counter-narration to expose the contradictions of governance during crisis. Through evaluative language, speakers not only express emotional disaffection but also construct a collective moral stance that challenges state legitimacy. To make sense of this, the discourse performs both resistance and social critique thus reaffirming CDA’s view of language as a form of social action and the Appraisal Framework’s insight into how emotion and evaluation encode ideology.

4.3.2 Discourse of Economic Hardship and Social Frustration

From most of the chats we analysed, financial challenges and social frustrations were the main discourses. The WhatsApp space provided ordinary Kenyans with a platform to articulate their real-life experiences of deprivation, anger and moral fatigue during COVID-19. Many participants employed humour, lamentation, irony and moral reasoning to express their frustrations with the government’s lack of efficiency, inequality and the erosion of social justice. Fairclough’s (1992, 2003) argues that these kinds of conversations represent a dynamic interplay between textual features, discursive practice and wider social practice where linguistic choices reproduce and challenge socio-political realities. Martin and White’s (2005) Appraisal framework posits that the participants’ language choices reveal evaluative positioning

expressing attitudes, judgments and emotions that align or distance them from social actors and institutions. This section divided in the following subthemes: disillusionment with governance, state violence and everyday vulnerability, humour as a coping strategy, corruption and moral decay; inequality and class divide and lastly a synthesis of the subthemes.

4.3.2.1 Disillusionment with Governance

The data shows that the citizens are disillusioned with the political leadership and governance as evidenced in Excerpt 28. E28WU1 laments, “Jana ulifanya jamaa wangu wa piki alimwe nyahunyo. Am on shutdown sitarudi tao hadi BBI ikuwe chama,” while E28WU2 responds, “Achana na politicians. We are their guinea pigs.” This dialogue reveals both anger and fatigue which presents citizens as victims of political manipulation. By using the metaphor “guinea pigs”, E28WU2 captures feelings of exploitation, suggesting that citizens are experimented upon by the political elite. The statement “I am on shutdown” conveys symbolic resistance, a personal withdrawal from political participation as a form of protest. When we look at this through CDA lens, we see how this exchange recontextualizes political discourse into personal suffering. This exposes how state power and political corruption translate into everyday distress. Within the Appraisal framework, the expressions are laden with Affect such as resentment and fatigue while judgment is seen through moral condemnation of politicians. This essentially demonstrates how emotion becomes a form of ideological critique.

Excerpt 28

E28WU1: jana ulifanya jamaa wangu wa piki alimwe nyahunyo . am on shutdown sitarudi tao hadi BBI ikuwe chama

E28WU2: Achana na politicians. We are their guinea pigs

Translation

E28WU1: Yesterday, you made my motorcycle man be whipped. I am on shutdown and I won't go back to town until BBI is turned into a political party.

E28WU2: Let politicians be. We are their guinea pigs

(WGD)

4.3.2.2 State Violence and Everyday Vulnerability

The data in Excerpt 30 heightens a sense of insecurity and powerlessness. Participant E30U1 observes, “I pity our forces... they are in the streets with AK47. We are still back as far as 1945... woe unto us third world. Why have so many guns around us in the name of fighting a

virus?” E30WU2 then adds, “Corona is exterminating us, ikifika ni curfew kuna stray bullets... we are the victims.” It is very clear here that the militarization of pandemic control is represented as old-fashioned and oppressive. The juxtaposition of a health crisis with militarized imagery of “AK47,” “stray bullets” emphasizes the contradictions of state response who turn a public health emergency into a symbol of coercion. Fairclough’s (2001) view of discourse as social practice explains this well. He says that language not only reflects but also constructs citizens’ experience of the state as an agent of fear rather than protection. That is what is perceived in the rhetorical question “Why have so many guns around us in the name of fighting a virus?” where the user questions the moral legitimacy of government action. The discourse, in Appraisal terms, is saturated with Affect of fear and pity. Judgment of disapproval of state conduct is also present and this reveals citizens’ perception of the government as failing both ethically and administratively.

Excerpt 30

WU1: I pity our forces....they are in the streets with AK47. We are still back as far as 1945...ole wetu third world. Why have so many guns around us in the name of fighting a virus?

WU2: Men tulikosea Mungu wapi?Corona inatuangamiza, ikifika ni curfew kuna stray bullets we are the victims Hebu kaeni kwa nyumba

WU1: Ukweli. Let us pray hizo stray zisikuje mpaka kwa nyumba

Translation

E30WU1: I pity our forces. They are in the streets with AK47. We are still back as far as 1945...woe unto us third world. Why have so many guns around us in the name of fighting a virus?

E30WU2: Men, what wrong did we commit to God? Corona is exterminating us and then when it is curfew time, there are stray bullets and we are the victims Kindly stay at home

E30WU1: True. Let us pray so that stray bullets do not come all the way to the house.

(WGD)

4.3.2.3 Humour as a Coping Strategy

Despite widespread frustration, humour surfaces as a significant linguistic resource, providing psychological relief and symbolic resistance. Excerpt 31 captures this when a participant remarks, “More virus on Monday and Tuesday... the marijuana taken by our leaders is too much... I desire to be a Ugandan for two months.” The exaggerated statement that the virus

behaves differently on certain days parodies the arbitrariness of curfew regulations, exposing their illogical nature. Humour here becomes a form of discursive subversion. It mocks power and reclaims agency. As Fairclough (1995) notes, linguistic creativity often operates as a mode of resistance, enabling speakers to invert dominant discourses and ridicule authority. The participant's desire "to be a Ugandan" also invokes intertextual irony, referencing neighbouring leadership as comparatively more rational. Within the Appraisal system, humour functions as softened Affect expressing anger, mockery, and disapproval in a socially acceptable way. It thus transforms collective frustration into solidarity and endurance, sustaining communal morale in the face of hardship.

Excerpt 31

E31WU1: More virus on Monday n Tuesday.....aki....bangi ya viongozi ni too much...natamani kuwa muganda for two months

E31WU2: Colleagues the devil is a liar. Imagine i am coughing but am told reggae is totally shattered

Translation

E31WU1: More virus on Monday and Tuesday.....I tell you....the marijuana taken by our leaders is too much...I desire to be a Ugandan for two months

E31WU2: Colleagues the devil is a liar. Imagine I am coughing but am told reggae is totally.

(WGB)

4.3.2.4 Corruption and Moral Decay

From the discourse of economic hardship, we also see deep-rooted corruption and moral erosion. Excerpt 32 illustrates this when E32WU1 says "And everyone was released with 500. That is a total of 73,500 collected bribe... The bribe is 5k for not wearing a mask." The participant links the pandemic to everyday corruption showing how state officers exploit a health crisis for personal gain. The participant applies mathematical precision in the statement listing specific figures to ironically mimic bureaucratic accounting. This emphasizes how corruption has become normalized and routinized in the eyes of the ordinary citizens. A CDA perspective reflects how economic systems and moral orders intertwine. Bribery is simultaneously condemned and accepted as part of survival. The user's tone of resignation suggests fatigue rather than outrage recognizing that corruption has been institutionalized. Appraisal analysis reveals the dominance of judgment values, particularly of social sanction of ethics as participants evaluate actions as corrupt, unjust and immoral. The pandemic context

amplifies this moral dimension which transforms economic critique into a commentary on the erosion of public virtue.

Excerpt 32

E32WU1: And everyone was released with 500. That is a total of 73, 500 collected bribe.

E32WU2: the media should report correctly that 147 failed to provide bribes to buy their freedom Give the figures of those who secured their freedom and name their price

E32WU3: Hongo 5k bila mask

Translation

WU3: The bribe is 5 thousand Kenyan shillings for not wearing a mask

(WGA)

4.3.2.5 Inequality and Class Divide

Social inequality and class resentment feature prominently in Excerpt 33, where one participant laments, “A matatu carrying passengers from Ruiru to Roysambu were all robbed... we are harassed by police and we are also harassed by fellow poor people,” while another adds, “The very rich are moving around with big cars and ventilators in the boot.” These statements juxtapose the suffering of the poor with the perceived comfort of the rich, using exaggeration to dramatize class disparity. The repetition of “harassed” underscores the pervasiveness of vulnerability oppression from both the state and fellow citizens within the same socioeconomic bracket. The hyperbolic image of “ventilators in the boot” symbolically represents the privilege of the elite, who have access to resources that guarantee survival. Through Fairclough’s (2003) concept of recontextualisation, these utterances reveal how economic inequality is interpreted through a moral and emotional lens, connecting class privilege with ethical failure. Appraisal analysis highlights affect (envy, despair), judgment (condemnation of greed), and engagement (collective solidarity). The collective “we” constructs a shared identity of the oppressed, fostering a moral boundary between the powerless many and the powerful few.

Excerpt 33

E33WU1: Hi Kenyans, those of us who are using public transport please be careful. A matatu carrying passengers from Ruiru to Roysambu were all robbed. They all fell asleep and found themselves somewhere in Kasarani with nothing cos they were drugged with the sanitizers that they were to use before boarding

E33WU2: Si maskini Kenya tuna shida. Tunaangaishwa na polisi na tunaangaishwa na maskini wenzetu

E33WU3: Mabwenyenye wanatembea na magari kubwa na ventilators kwa boot

E33WU1: Africa ni Mungu atatulinda. I thought masks are not reusable... waaa...masks chafu naona hii town,heri ukae bila

Translation

E33WU1: Hi Kenyans, those of us who are using public transport please be careful. A matatu carrying passengers from Ruiru to Roysambu were all robbed. They all fell asleep and found themselves somewhere in Kasarani with nothing because they were drugged with the sanitizers that they were to use before boarding

E33WU2: we the poor in Kenya have a lot of trouble. We are harassed by police and we are also harassed by fellow poor people

E33WU3: the very rich are moving around with big cars and ventilators in the boot

WU1: in Africa, it is only God that will take care of us.. I thought masks are not reusable... gosh...the dirty masks I am seeing in this town I would rather stay without

(WGB)

4.3.2.6 Synthesis of the Subthemes in the Discourse of Economic Hardship and Social Frustration

Across all subthemes, disillusionment with governance; state violence; humour as a coping strategy, corruption and moral decay; and inequality, a consistent ideological thread emerges: the construction of the Kenyan government as morally compromised and socially disconnected from the people it governs. The WhatsApp discourse becomes a site for negotiating agency, blame and moral order. Through Fairclough's three-dimensional model, these texts can be seen as both products of social structure and tools of social critique. At the textual level, participants employ irony, exaggeration, and metaphor to articulate pain and resistance. At the discursive practice level, WhatsApp serves as a participatory digital public sphere (Habermas, 1989), where ordinary voices gain semiotic power. At the social practice level, the discourse reflects Kenya's broader struggle with corruption, inequality and disillusionment in governance. Within the Appraisal framework, Affect and Judgment combine to express a deeply moralized critique of leadership, framing the government not merely as inefficient but as ethically bankrupt.

Ultimately, the discourse of economic hardship and social frustration transcends complaint; it becomes a moral and political act of witnessing. Through shared suffering and humour, participants construct a counter-hegemonic narrative that questions state authority, exposes structural injustice, and affirms communal resilience. These findings reinforce the argument

that digital discourse, even in informal spaces like WhatsApp group chats, operates as a crucial arena for civic engagement and linguistic resistance during crises.

4.3.3 Discourse of Solidarity, Hope and Resolve

The data present a powerful articulation of collective resolve, moral responsibility and shared identity among Kenyan WhatsApp group members during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the interplay of critique, encouragement, and faith, participants discursively constructed a sense of national solidarity and moral endurance in the face of crisis. From a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) perspective, this discourse represents a social practice that recontextualizes both government and citizen agency, balancing criticism with unity. The use of inclusive pronouns such as “let us”, “we”, and “our” throughout the excerpts reflects Fairclough’s (1992) textual level of analysis, where linguistic forms construct collective subject positions. The repetition of such forms, especially in exhortative utterances like “let us do what we are being told to do” (Excerpt 40) and “let us forward relevant precautionary measures” (Excerpt 42), marks an ideological orientation toward cooperation, mutual care, and national responsibility. The excerpts are exemplified below:

Excerpt 40

E40WU1: Brethren, let us do what we are being told to do. God works through doctors and through medicine. Our God is a God of Order. Let us abide by the laws of the land and persist in prayer

E40WU2: Amen Reverend

E40WU3: Glory to the Almighty God

E40WU4: Trust and obey

E40 WU5: Amen.

E40WU6: Well said Reverend

(WGC)

Excerpt 42

E42WU 1: What we feared most is now here with us

E42WU2: We need to inculcate the habit of wearing masks, social distancing, handwashing ourselves then share with our colleagues, friends and relatives. When it comes from us, people will take it seriously

E42WU2: Very true. Avoid crowds as well and don't touch unnecessary surfaces

E42WU3: Sanitize! Sanitize! Sanitize! And every time you are to be in contact with a corona patient, use PPE's

E42WU4: Let us forward relevant precautionary measures to as many WhatsApp groups as possible, though right now we are all strangers to this thing.

E42WU1: Knowing the nature of pandemics, this will get worse before it gets better, so let's take care of us first. No one will take care of the rest if we get exposed

E42WU3: The government should ensure we have protective gear. Let's hope for the best

E42WU5: Trust the Kenyan government like you would trust to draw blood from a stone

E42WU1: Ni Mung utu atatuhurumia

Translation

E42WU1: What we feared most is now here with us

E42WU2: We need to inculcate the habit of wearing masks, social distancing, handwashing ourselves then share with our colleagues, friends and relatives. When it comes from us, people will take it seriously

WhatsApp User 2: Very true. Avoid crowds as well and don't touch unnecessary surfaces

E42WU3: Sanitize! Sanitize! Sanitize! And every time you are to be in contact with a corona patient, use PPE's

E42WU4: Let us forward relevant precautionary measures to as many WhatsApp groups as possible, though right now we are all strangers to this thing.

E42WU1: Knowing the nature of pandemics, this will get worse before it gets better, so let's take care of us first. No one will take care of the rest if we get exposed

E42WU3: The government should ensure we have protective gear. Let's hope for the best

E42WU5: Trust the Kenyan government like you would trust to draw blood from a stone

E42WU1: Only God can have mercy on us

(WGA)

In Excerpt 34, the conversation surrounding the Kilifi Deputy Governor shows how anger and criticism of leadership evolve into a shared moral stance. While the users condemn irresponsibility in governance, their dialogue also enacts moral unity through evaluative language such as “He should be taken to prison” and “Apelekwe jela aponee huko.” Using the Appraisal Framework, this reflects strong Judgment (ethical evaluation) of social behaviour. The moralizing tone signals not only frustration but also a communal desire for accountability, affirming that ethical responsibility is a collective expectation. The interaction thus performs

solidarity through shared moral outrage. This is what Martin and White (2005) call “alignment of voices” in the negotiation of social values.

Excerpt 34

E34WU1: Could it be the Kilifi DG has wrecked the entire leadership of our beloved nation...the people he met and the meetings he attended....

E34WU2: He should be taken to prison

E34WU3: Ati lawyer wake anasema hawezi enda prison on basis of his health. Why cant they make prison condusive for all? Kwani wakenya wengine ndo hawana health challenges?

E34WU4: Lawyers can be funny. Ati anasema there is no evidence that the DG has infected anyone. Sasa evidence hapa mtu anatoa wapi na virus haionekani?

E34WU1: I hear he has been forcefully quarantined

E34WU2: Apelekwe jela aponee huko

Translation

E34WU1: Could it be the Kilifi DG has wrecked the entire leadership of our beloved nation...the people he met and the meetings he attended....

E34WU2: He should be taken to prison

E34WU3: I hear his lawyer says he can't go to prison on basis of his health. Why can't they make prison conducive for all? Is it that other Kenyans do not have health challenges?

E34WU4: Lawyers can be funny. I hear he said that there is no evidence that the DG has infected anyone. Now, where does one get evidence for a virus that cannot be seen?

E34WU1: I hear he has been forcefully quarantined

E34WU2: he should be taken to prison to recover from there.

(WGA)

Similarly, Excerpt 35 employs evaluative and metaphorical expressions such as “Shamba la Wanyama” (“Animal Farm”) to express both satire and collective disapproval of corruption and negligence. The literary reference positions participants within an educated, socially aware discourse community capable of critique through symbolic language. In CDA terms, such intertextuality illustrates Fairclough’s discursive practice dimension, where social meanings are drawn from wider ideological and cultural repertoires. The exchange constructs solidarity not merely through agreement but through the shared performance of moral discernment and social commentary.

Excerpt 36

E36WU1: let us get it that we will never be equal to people in power. If Uhuru decides to go to Germany tomorrow, trust me he will go. So let us accept this fact and move on even locally our leaders have been moving between constituencies and Nairobi despite the cessation. These are leaders we can't compete with. Let us not compare the incomparable

E36WU2: Kuna Wakenya na wenye Kenya. Wakenya wakae nyumbani wa quarantine wenye Kenya watembe Kenya wakifanya biashara zao

E36WU3: Kama una pesa enda kwa PC utapewa permit utembe. Pesa mbele

Translation

E36WU1: let us get it that we will never be equal to people in power. If Uhuru decides to go to Germany tomorrow, trust me he will go. So let us accept this fact and move on even locally our leaders have been moving between constituencies and Nairobi despite the cessation. These are leaders we can't compete with. Let us not compare the incomparable

E36WU2: there are Kenyans and those who own Kenya. Kenyans should stay at home and quarantine. Those who own Kenya should move around and go on with their businesses.

E36WU3: if you have money, go to the provincial commissioner and you will be given a permit to move around. Money first.

(WGB)

In Excerpt 36 above, the contrastive statements “there are Kenyans and those who own Kenya” and “if you have money... you will be given a permit” articulate economic and class-based disillusionment. Yet, despite its cynical tone, this discourse paradoxically reinforces solidarity among the marginalized by invoking a collective “we” against an unjust system. This is a classic example of CDA’s social practice dimension, where language becomes a medium of ideological resistance. The evaluative stance is predominantly Affect and Judgment, showing emotional frustration coupled with moral critique.

Excerpt 37

E37WU1: Hi Kenyans, those of us who are using public transport please be careful. A matatu carrying passengers from Ruiru to Roysambu were all robbed. They all fell asleep and found themselves somewhere in Kasarani with nothing cos they were drugged with the sanitizers that they were to use before boarding

E37WU2: Si maskini Kenya tuna shida. Tunaangaishwa na polisi na tunaangaishwa na maskini wenzetu

E37WU3: Mabwenyenye wanatembea na magari kubwa na ventilators kwa boot

E37WU1: Africa ni Mungu atatulinda. I thought masks are not reusable... waaa...masks chafu naona hii town,heri ukae bila

(WGC)

Excerpt 37 further underscores shared vulnerability and mutual empathy through expressions of suffering and irony: “Si maskini Kenya tuna shida. Tunaangaishwa na polisi na tunaangaishwa na maskini wenzetu” (“We poor Kenyans are suffering - both from police and from our fellow poor”). This self-reflexive lament is not merely an expression of despair but also a linguistic act of solidarity, foregrounding collective suffering. The move from personal frustration to communal endurance represents a rearticulation of hope through shared experience. The Appraisal resources of Affect (expressing emotion) and Engagement (inviting response) sustain the dialogic sense of belonging among participants.

A shift toward overt encouragement and hope is evident in Excerpts 38–41, where users commend the government and express optimism. Statements like “Kenya is far ahead in fighting coronavirus” and “God bless you” invoke both national pride and faith, fusing civic and religious registers. The Appraisal category of Appreciation (evaluating processes and performances) is at play, signalling a positive attitudinal stance toward leadership and medical personnel. Within Fairclough’s CDA, such texts exemplify recontextualization of institutional discourse since citizens echo official narratives while infusing them with emotional and moral resonance. This demonstrates how lay discourses participate in shaping hegemony through consensual support.

Excerpt 38

E38WU1: This shows that Kenya is far ahead in fighting corona virus in Africa. Kudos to our Kenyan doctors and the government. God bless you.

E38WU2: I am fully behind the president despite losing my job because of the pandemic, he is trying to listen from experts in the health sector and that is a good gesture

E38WU3: I am of the 62% who are satisfied with the government’s response. I think the president has offered great leadership throughout this crisis

(WGD)

Excerpt 39

E39WU1: (forwarded many times) Nawaomba. Tafadhalini. Tuwache kuhazana kwa matanga na wengine bado tunaenda harusi na tunajua shida tuko nayo, Hata kama mnapenda chakula, mytaifuata mpaka mkufe nayo kwa mdomo?Tufungue maskio tusikie haya maneno. Msipuuze tu. Na watu wa bar na hoteli, chungu wananchi, wakikufa mtatoa wapi wateja?Walimu na wazazi hakikisha Watoto wamevaa masks na kama hamna mtuambue tuone vile tutawasaidia

E39WU2: Si chef wenyu ana matusi

E39WU1: Tushamzoea. He should have been a comedian

Translation

E39WU1: (forwarded many times) I urge you. Please people. Let us stop crowding in funerals. Some of us still going to weddings even with these problems. Even if you love food. will you look for it until you die with food in your mouth? Open your ears and hear these words. Do not ignore. And people with bars and restaurants, take care of citizens. If they die, where will you get clients? Teachers and parents, ensure children wear masks and if you don't have them let us know so that we see how we can help you

E39WU2: Isn't your chief abusive?

E39WU1: We are used to him. He should have been a comedian

(WGA)

Excerpt 40

E40WU1: Brethren, let us do what we are being told to do. God works through doctors and through medicine. Our God is a God of Order. Let us abide by the laws of the land and persist in prayer

E40WU2: Amen Reverend

E40WU3: Glory to the Almighty God

E40WU4: Trust and obey

E40WU5: Amen.

E40WU6: Well said Reverend

(WGC)

Excerpt 41

E41WU1: it's very encouraging to see that the numbers are going down! The government is doing a great job in enforcing the preventive measures.

E41WU2: Yes, let's continue observing social distance, wearing masks in public places and washing our hands

E41WU3: Clearly if we continue putting into action the given directives, we will beat this thing

(WGE)

Excerpt 40 explicitly intertwines faith and obedience: “God works through doctors and through medicine. Our God is a God of order. Let us abide by the laws of the land.” The integration of religious and civic lexicons constructs a moral framework of compliance grounded in spirituality. This discourse legitimizes government measures not by political authority but by divine sanction, reflecting Fairclough’s (2001) view of discourse as a means of reproducing power through ideological naturalization. Through the Appraisal lenses of Judgment (moral evaluation) and Appreciation (positive valuation of divine and human order), the exchange enacts hope and collective resolve within a faith-based worldview.

Finally, Excerpt 42 exemplifies dialogic collaboration and mutual encouragement: “We need to inculcate the habit of wearing masks... Let’s hope for the best.” Despite occasional cynicism, such as “Trust the Kenyan government like you would trust to draw blood from a stone,” the dominant discourse remains constructive. The alternation between scepticism and faith constructs what Fairclough (2010) terms “negotiated interdiscursivity” - a blending of critique and hope. Through the Appraisal categories of Engagement and Graduation, users intensify emotional appeal (“Sanitize! Sanitize! Sanitize!”) and modulate collective determination. The recurrent invocation of divine help (“It is only God who will pity us”) situates hope within both human effort and spiritual dependence.

Excerpt 42

E42WU 1: What we feared most is now here with us

E42WU2: We need to inculcate the habit of wearing masks, social distancing, handwashing ourselves then share with our colleagues, friends and relatives. When it comes from us, people will take it seriously

WhatsApp User 2: Very true. Avoid crowds as well and don't touch unnecessary surfaces
E42WU 3: Sanitize! Sanitize! Sanitize! And every time you are to be in contact with a corona patient, use PPE's
E42WU 4: Let us forward relevant precautionary measures to as many WhatsApp groups as possible, though right now we are all strangers to this thing.
E42WU 1: Knowing the nature of pandemics, this will get worse before it gets better, so let's take care of us first. No one will take care of the rest if we get exposed
E42WU 3: The government should ensure we have protective gear. Let's hope for the best
E42WU 5: Trust the Kenyan government like you would trust to draw blood from a stone
E42WU 1: Ni Mung utu atatuhurumia

Translation

E42WU 1: What we feared most is now here with us
E42WU2: We need to inculcate the habit of wearing masks, social distancing, handwashing ourselves then share with our colleagues, friends and relatives. When it comes from us, people will take it seriously
E42WU2: Very true. Avoid crowds as well and don't touch unnecessary surfaces
E42WU 3: Sanitize! Sanitize! Sanitize! And every time you are to be in contact with a corona patient, use PPE's
E42WU 4: Let us forward relevant precautionary measures to as many WhatsApp groups as possible, though right now we are all strangers to this thing.
E42WU 1: Knowing the nature of pandemics, this will get worse before it gets better, so let's take care of us first. No one will take care of the rest if we get exposed
E42WU 3: The government should ensure we have protective gear. Let's hope for the best
E42WU 5: Trust the Kenyan government like you would trust to draw blood from a stone
E42WU 1: It is only God that will pity us.

(WGA)

In sum, Excerpts 34–42 portray a discourse of solidarity, hope and resolve that oscillates between critique and cooperation. While citizens expose moral failures and inequalities, they simultaneously build a linguistic community of mutual encouragement and resilience. Through Fairclough's three-dimensional model, this discourse operates as a textual manifestation of collective identity, a discursive practice of moral and civic alignment and a social practice that reconstructs national belonging in crisis. The Appraisal Framework

complements this by revealing how Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation resources are mobilized to express shared emotions, ethical stances and evaluations. Together, these frameworks illuminate how WhatsApp users linguistically negotiated faith, critique and endurance, constructing hope as both a social and moral discourse in Kenya’s pandemic response. The discourse of solidarity, hope and resolve is summarized in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Discourse of Solidarity, Hope and Resolve – CDA and Appraisal Analysis

| Excerpt | Key Linguistic Items / Expressions | CDA Interpretation (Fairclough) | Appraisal Resources (Martin & White 2005) | Discursive Implication |
|---------|--|--|---|---|
| 34 | “ <i>He should be taken to prison</i> ”; “ <i>Apelekwe jela aponee huko</i> ” | Textual level: moral condemnation of irresponsible leadership; Discursive practice: shared ethical stance reinforcing collective morality | Judgment (social sanction) – condemns wrongdoing; Engagement – alignment of moral voices | Constructs unity through collective moral outrage and demand for accountability |
| 35 | “ <i>Shamba la Wanyama (Animal Farm)</i> ” | Intertextual reference (discursive practice) invoking satire to critique corruption; challenges authority via cultural literacy | Appreciation – negative valuation of government; Judgment – ethical evaluation | Builds solidarity through shared cultural critique and irony |
| 36 | “ <i>There are Kenyans and</i> | Social practice: exposes class | Affect – frustration; | Reinforces communal |

| | | | | |
|----|--|--|---|---|
| | <i>those who own Kenya”</i> | inequality; discourse of resistance among marginalized voices | Judgment – social condemnation | identity among the disempowered; promotes ideological resistance |
| 37 | <i>“Si maskini Kenya tuna shida”</i> (“We poor Kenyans are suffering”) | Textual realization of collective suffering; solidarity in hardship | Affect – empathy, shared pain; Engagement – inclusive alignment | Creates emotional bonding and shared endurance narrative |
| 38 | <i>“Kenya is far ahead... God bless you”</i> | Recontextualization of institutional discourse into popular optimism; alignment with state narrative | Appreciation – positive evaluation of leadership; Affect – pride, hope | Expresses civic faith and national pride; promotes cooperative identity |
| 39 | <i>“Let us stop crowding in funerals...”</i> | Textual: exhortative language urging collective discipline; Discursive practice: moral guidance within citizen discourse | Judgment – ethical advice; Engagement – inclusive appeal (“let us”); Graduation – intensified warning | Enacts civic responsibility and communal care |
| 40 | <i>“God works through doctors</i> | Interdiscursive fusion of religious and | Judgment – moral virtue; Appreciation – | Faith-based justification for |

| | | | | |
|----|---|--|---|---|
| | <i>and through medicine”</i> | civic discourses; legitimizes obedience as divine order | respect for divine/human order | compliance; moralizes hope |
| 41 | <i>“The government is doing a great job... if we continue... we will beat this thing”</i> | Textual optimism; citizen alignment with official health discourse | Appreciation – positive evaluation; Graduation – intensification of hope | Builds collective resolve and shared confidence in progress |
| 42 | <i>“Sanitize! Sanitize! Sanitize!”; “It is only God that will pity us”</i> | Negotiated interdiscursivity of critique and faith; CDA shows coexistence of skepticism and hope | Engagement – dialogic expansion; Affect – anxiety tempered by faith; Graduation – repetition for emphasis | Blends critique, humour and faith to sustain resilience and collective agency |

4.4 How Discursive Practices in WhatsApp Group Chats Reflect Underlying Social Relations, Ideological Positions and Perceptions of the Government Responses During COVID-19

In a context where access to traditional media is often mediated by political and economic interests, WhatsApp emerged as a participatory space for the articulation of everyday experiences, frustrations, and hopes during COVID-19 in Kenya. The informal yet highly interactive nature of WhatsApp group chats enabled ordinary Kenyans to deliberate on public matters, exchange knowledge, and critique official narratives in ways that were simultaneously personal, political and performative. This objective explores how these discursive practices

reflect the underlying social relations, ideological positions and perceptions of government responses during the pandemic.

Drawing on Fairclough's (1992; 1995; 2001) conception of discourse as a form of social practice, the analysis situates WhatsApp communication within the broader socio-political fabric of Kenyan society. Through this lens, language is not merely a reflection of social reality but an active force in the construction and contestation of power. The conversations analysed here reveal how linguistic choices, ranging from irony, metaphor, and humour to intertextual borrowing and code-switching, function as tools for negotiating authority, legitimacy and identity in the face of crisis. WhatsApp thus operates as a microcosm of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989), where ordinary speakers engage in informal deliberations that challenge dominant institutional discourses and create alternative spaces of meaning-making.

Within the Kenyan pandemic context, these online exchanges expose tensions between citizens and the state, between local epistemologies and global biomedical knowledge, and between material deprivation and moral endurance. The interactions demonstrate how social relations such as class and faith are linguistically enacted and ideologically contested through everyday talk. Fairclough's (2003) emphasis on the dialectical relationship between discourse and social structure provides an interpretive framework for understanding how micro-level textual practices on WhatsApp reflect macro-level power relations and ideological struggles.

The excerpts under this section exemplify these dynamics by foregrounding three dominant discursive patterns: the discourse of distrust and institutional scepticism, the discourse of socioeconomic negotiation and self-reliance, and the discourse of cultural and moral reasoning. Each of these discourses reveals how participants use language to reinterpret official communication, question government credibility, and construct communal forms of resilience. Through humour, complaint, and pragmatic reasoning, citizens transform WhatsApp from a space of casual interaction into one of civic reflection and ideological contestation.

By combining Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with insights from the Appraisal Framework (Martin & White, 2005), the ensuing discussion examines not only the textual features of these WhatsApp exchanges but also the processes of meaning production, circulation and consumption that shape public perception of the state's handling of the pandemic. The analysis seeks to show that digital discourse, even in its most informal

manifestations, is deeply political, revealing how ordinary language practices reproduce, resist, or redefine power and ideology in the lived realities of Kenyan society during COVID-19. The following ideological stances emerged in the data: trust and institutional distrust, resistance and political opposition; denial, conspiracy, and alternative explanations; and moralising and religious framing.

4.4.1: Trust and Institutional Distrust

The data contains discourses that express either trust or, more frequently, distrust in state institutions, government actors and official sources of information. Participants in the WhatsApp conversations repeatedly questioned the credibility, morality and integrity of those in authority. Their comments revealed a deep-seated scepticism toward the state's ability to manage the pandemic transparently and equitably. Such expressions of distrust functioned as both social critique and resistance to institutional narratives about COVID-19.

A number of excerpts illustrate this tendency. For instance, one WhatsApp group member lamented, "If the police are openly taking bribes ... who are we to report" (Excerpt 44), highlighting perceptions of impunity within law enforcement.

Excerpt 44

E44WU1: Call the toll-free number 1196 to report any non-compliance of the COVID-19 rules

E44WU2: It is the politicians that are shamelessly holding public rallies. What is the use of reporting a fellow citizen when the leadership doesn't care? I can never waste my time

E44WU3: Let them make use of those toll-free numbers themselves

E44 WU4: if the police are openly taking bribes from makangas without masks, who are we To report. Waache kutubeba ufala

E44WU5: I will call them when I am bored and report the whole country

E44WU6: Hizo rally za viongozi za hustlers na bbi hawaoni bado wanataka tuwapigie simu

E44WU7: If I call, will I be paid?

E44WU8; kesi za covid billionaires wamemaliza?

E44WU9: To call kitu ipi na Mimi binafsi najua hakuna corona for Ever

Translation

E44WU1: Call the toll-free number 1196 to report any non-compliance of the COVID-19

rules

E44 WU2: It is the politicians that are shamelessly holding public rallies. What is the use of reporting a fellow citizen when the leadership doesn't care? I can never waste my time

E44WU3: Let them make use of those toll-free numbers themselves

E44WU; if the police are openly taking bribes from matatu conductors without masks, who are we to report. Let them stop taking us for fools.

E44WU5: I will call them when I am bored and report the whole country

E44WU6: Don't they see those rallies our leaders are holding about hustlers and BBI. They still want to call them?

E44WU7: If I call, will I be paid?

E44WU8; Did they finish handling cases about covid billionaires?E44WU9: Why would I call when I personally know there is no corona forever?

(WGB)

Another comment, "This government should be taken back to the Hague" (Excerpt 54), metaphorically invoked international justice as a corrective for domestic governance failures.

Excerpt 54

E54WU1: They are managing the pandemic military- style. Harassing citizens will not help

E54 WU2: Watu ni wagumu. Saa ingine ni force tu hufanya kazi

E54WU1: Sikatai but they are using unnecessary force. Si lazima polisi waue watu ati juu ya curfew

E54WU3: Government directives are punitive ndio maana watu wanarebel

E54 WU1: Kwanza kulazimisha watu kulipia quarantine na bei zingine hapo wazimu

E54WU3: Hi serikali inafaa irudishwe Hague

Translation

WU1: They are managing the pandemic military- style. Harassing citizens will not help

WU2: People can be difficult. There are times when only force works

WU1: I don't refute that, but they are using unnecessary force. It is not a must that the police kill people just in the name of enforcing curfew

WU3: Government directives are punitive and that is why people are rebelling

WU1: Especially forcing people to pay for quarantine exorbitantly.

WU3: This government should be taken back to the Hague

(WGD)

Similarly, “I am tired of the stealing... KEMSA saga” (Excerpt 60) alluded to a widely publicised scandal involving the misappropriation of COVID-19 funds, reinforcing the sense of betrayal and disillusionment among citizens.

Excerpt 60

E60WU1: Mbona sijaona tender ads za Covid?

E60WU2: Huwa unasoma gazeti?

E60 WU3: Hata ukaaply hauzipewa. Zina wenyewe

E60WU1: Hizo watu hula kickback hata before zitangazwe

E60WU3: Inaitwa Kenya

E60 WU4: Wangukuwa na utu tu wanunulie madaktari PPEs

E60WU1: It is so sad kuona doctors on strike ati juu hawana PPEs

E60WU1: Mpaka wanapewa fake masks za China

E60WU2: Mimi nimechoshwa na wizi Kenya. Kwanza story ya KEMSA WUI:Mbona sijaona tender ads za Covid?

E60WU2: Huwa unasoma gazeti?

E60WU3: Hata ukaaply hauzipewa. Zina wenyewe

E60WU1: Hizo watu hula kickback hata before zitangazwe

E60WU3: Inaitwa Kenya

E60W2: Gava inajua kujitafutia job sana. I think hata hii korona waliunda for business purposes

E60 WU4: Wangukuwa na utu tu wanunulie madaktari PPEs

E60WU1: It is so sad kuona doctors on strike ati juu hawana PPEs

E60WU1: Mpaka wanapewa fake masks za China

E60WU2: Mimi nimechoshwa na wizi Kenya. Kwanza story ya KEMSA

Translation

E60WU1: Why haven't I seen tender advertisements for Covid?

E60WU2: Do you read newspapers?

E60WU3: Even if you applied, they are already taken. They have owners

E60WU1: With such, people take kickback way before they are announced

E60 WU3: This is Kenya

E60 WU2: Government officers have a tendency of creating cash minting opportunities for themselves. I think they also created this corona situation

E60WU4: I wish they were humane and buy our doctors PPEs

E60WU1: It is so sad seeing doctors on strike because they are not provided with PPEs

E60WU1: To an extent they are provided with fake masks from China

E60WU2: Personally, I am tired of stealing of public resources in Kenya. Especially the KEMSA saga

(WGD)

From a Faircloughian perspective, the textual analysis reveals frequent use of evaluative lexical items such as “stealing,” “bribes,” and “fake masks,” which construct moral judgments against public officials. Metaphors of corruption serve to represent moral decay as social distance, while rhetorical questions like “Who are we to report?” delegitimise state authority and frame compliance as futile. At the discursive practice level, these messages exhibit significant intertextuality, referencing current and historical corruption scandals such as the KEMSA case. The sharing and forwarding of such messages reflect a participatory digital culture in which users not only consume but also reproduce and amplify claims through evaluative commentary and moral framing. At the social practice level, the discourse mirrors a broader political culture characterised by endemic distrust in governance and neoliberal critiques of state mismanagement, particularly in procurement and privatisation. Through these online exchanges, participants simultaneously draw upon and perpetuate social narratives in which corruption is perceived as the principal explanation for policy inefficiency and state failure.

From an appraisal framework, the discourse demonstrates strong attitudinal positioning, particularly through negative judgements of officials’ propriety (e.g., “thieving,” “kickbacks”). In terms of engagement, the discourse is distinctly heteroglossic, contrasting “they” (the government and police) with “we” (citizens), thereby constructing a dichotomy between the oppressed and the oppressors. Graduation is realised through intensifiers and hyperbolic metaphors, as in “This government should be taken back to the Hague,” which heightens emotional force and moral condemnation.

In sum, distrust in institutional actors functions discursively as a form of resistance. By framing public officials as corrupt and self-serving, these WhatsApp users delegitimise government communication and question the rationale for compliance with public-health directives. Thus, institutional distrust emerges as both a linguistic and ideological resource through which

citizens articulate political critique and social disillusionment during the COVID-19 crisis. The data analysis is summarized in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: CDA and Appraisal Analysis of Trust and Institutional Distrust

| CDA Category | Description | Illustrative Data (Excerpts) | Interpretation / Analytical Comment |
|-----------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Theme | Trust and Institutional Distrust | — | The discourse expresses citizens' scepticism toward the integrity and competence of state institutions and officials during the COVID-19 crisis. |
| Definition | Discourses that convey mistrust in government institutions, police, and official COVID-19 communication channels. | — | Indicates a breakdown in legitimacy and moral authority of the state, shaping citizens' perceptions and reactions to public directives. |
| Sample Excerpts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “If the police are openly taking bribes ... who are we to report.” (Excerpt 44) • “This government should be taken back to the Hague.” (Excerpt 54) • “I am tired of the | — | These utterances construct government actors as corrupt and morally bankrupt, eroding public confidence. |

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| | stealing... KEMSA saga.” (Excerpt 60) | | |
| Textual Analysis (Fairclough: Text Level) | Use of evaluative and affective lexical items such as “stealing,” “bribes,” and “fake masks”; metaphors of corruption; rhetorical questions that challenge legitimacy. | “Who are we to report?” | Lexical and rhetorical choices serve to morally condemn officials and construct the government as untrustworthy. |
| Discursive Practice (Fairclough: Production, Distribution, Consumption) | Intertextual references to public scandals (e.g., KEMSA); frequent forwarding of political commentary; blending of official and popular discourses. | “KEMSA saga” references circulated news and memes. | Participants reproduce and amplify corruption narratives, transforming private chats into spaces of political discourse. |
| Social Practice (Fairclough: Ideological Context) | Reflects widespread political distrust, neoliberal critique of privatisation, and belief that corruption explains policy failures. | — | The discourse reproduces societal ideologies of distrust and moral cynicism toward governance systems. |
| Appraisal Analysis: Attitude | Judgement: negative moral evaluation of | “Thieving,” “kickbacks” | Demonstrates citizens’ ethical condemnation and |

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| | government and police. | | anger at perceived injustices. |
| Appraisal Analysis: Engagement | Heteroglossic stance distinguishing “they” (government) vs. “we” (citizens). | “They are stealing our money.” | Constructs a clear social boundary and collective opposition to authority. |
| Appraisal Analysis: Graduation | Intensification through categorical and hyperbolic expressions. | “This government should be taken back to the Hague.” | Increases emotional force, heightening the sense of outrage and moral urgency. |
| Overall Interpretation | Distrust operates as a discursive form of resistance that undermines official authority and frames compliance as futile. | — | Citizens use moral discourse to contest state legitimacy and assert civic agency through digital dialogue. |

4.4.2 Resistance and Political Opposition

This theme captures discourses through which participants construct and legitimize resistance to state control, particularly in relation to COVID-19 restrictions and enforcement mechanisms. Within the WhatsApp group chats, some members positioned themselves as politically conscious citizens who viewed certain government actions as excessive, coercive or hypocritical. Their discursive strategies ranged from humour and irony to direct moral critique, thereby framing non-compliance not as irresponsibility but as a justified response to perceived authoritarianism.

Participants employed overtly resistant language to question and ridicule state directives. For instance, one user remarked, “Let them implement curfew on themselves. I wish we would

have protests” (Excerpt 55), a statement that transforms personal frustration into a collective aspiration for political action.

Excerpt 55

E55WU1: This thing is a hoax

E55 WU2: Kama kawa, kuna watu wanataka kukulia

E55WU3: Bila aibu wanatuletea haka kamsichana kanaitwa Brenda. I hope kamelipwa vizuri

E55WU2: Blacks don't get coronavirus

E55 WU1: Ukiskia kahoma wewe kunywa changaa

E55WU2: Ama kandimu hivi, kaginger hivi...

E55WU1: Lakini kama wanalipa poa mtu kusema ana korona mi naingia box. Uchumi ni mbaya

E55WU3: Curfew wajipee wenyewe. I wish tungeandamana tukatae hii upuzi.

E55WU1: Wakenya ni waoga.

E55WU4: Iko siku lakini for now, resist style yako

Translation

E55WU1: This thing is a hoax

E55 WU2: As usual. There are people that want to benefit from it

E55WU3: Without shame, they bring us some small girl called Brenda. I hope she has been

well paid

E55WU2: Blacks don't get coronavirus

E55WU1: if you feel like you are catching a flu, take the local brew called changaa

E55WU2: or some lemon, some ginger...

E55WU1: But if they are paying well for someone to say they have Corona, then I am willing To say so. The economy is not doing well

E55 WU3: Let them implement curfew on themselves. I wish we would have protests and reject this nonsense.

E55WU1: Kenyans are fearful.

E55 WU4: One day, but for now, resist in your own style

(WGC)

Another observed, “They are managing the pandemic military-style” (Excerpt 54), invoking militarized imagery to critique the heavy-handed enforcement of health regulations. These utterances exemplify how linguistic choices such as the use of imperatives, modal verbs expressing desire (“I wish”), and evaluative terms (“military-style,” “harassing”) signal both disapproval and defiance.

Excerpt 54

E54WU1: They are managing the pandemic military- style. Harassing citizens will not help

E54 WU2: Watu ni wagumu. Saa ingine ni force tu hufanya kazi

E54 WU1: Sikatai but they are using unnecessary force. Si lazima polisi waue watu ati juu ya curfew

E54WU3: Government directives are punitive ndio maana watu wanarebel

E54 WU1: Kwanza kulazimisha watu kulipia quarantine na bei zingine hapo wazimu

E54 WU3: Hi serikali inafaa irudishwe Hague

Translation

E54WU1: They are managing the pandemic military- style. Harassing citizens will not help

E54WU2: People can be difficult. There are times when only force works

E54WU1: I don't refute that, but they are using unnecessary force. It is not a must that the police kill people just in the name of enforcing curfew

E54WU3: Government directives are punitive and that is why people are rebelling

E54WU1: Especially forcing people to pay for quarantine exorbitantly.

E54WU3: This government should be taken back to the Hague

From Fairclough’s text level, resistance is articulated through performative language that foregrounds agency. Imperatives and modality express both frustration and imagined alternatives, while metaphors of militarization reframe the government’s pandemic management as an encroachment on civil liberties. At the discursive practice level, group members collectively negotiate and legitimize disobedience. Humour and sarcasm, which are common features of digital discourse, soften the subversive tone while normalizing dissent as socially acceptable. The act of sharing and forwarding such comments embeds resistance within communal practice, turning everyday digital interactions into micro-arenas of political debate.

At the social practice level, these expressions resonate with Kenya’s broader political culture, where state authority is frequently contested and citizens habitually interpret government

interventions through lenses of mistrust and political rivalry. COVID-19, in this sense, becomes more than a health crisis; it becomes a stage upon which longstanding grievances about governance, accountability, and civil rights are reenacted.

From an appraisal perspective, the discourse reflects a strong affective charge. Attitude is marked by anger, resentment, and moral judgement toward perceived punitive governance. Engagement often involves dialogic contraction, with speakers asserting their stance as self-evident (e.g., “Curfew wajipee wenyewe”—literally, “Let them give themselves the curfew”), while occasionally acknowledging alternative voices through humour or hedging. Graduation manifests in the use of intensified and scalar terms (“military-style,” “unnecessary force”), which heighten emotional force and moral outrage.

Overall, resistance discourse reconstructs social relations by repositioning citizens as morally autonomous actors confronting an overbearing state. It operates as both critique and reclamation of agency, illustrating how digital platforms become spaces where political opposition is linguistically enacted and socially reproduced. Table 4.8 summarizes the analysis of the discourse of resistance and political opposition.

Table 4.8: CDA and Appraisal Analysis of Resistance and Political Opposition

| CDA Category | Description | Illustrative Data (Excerpts) | Interpretation / Analytical Comment |
|--------------|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Theme | Resistance and Political Opposition | — | Citizens express defiance toward restrictive government measures, framing non-compliance as political and moral resistance. |
| Definition | Discursive acts of resisting state orders, framed both humorously and | — | Reveals a collective stance against perceived authoritarian |

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| | seriously as civil disobedience. | | control and erosion of civil freedoms. |
| Sample Excerpts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Let them implement curfew on themselves. I wish we would have protests.” (Ex. 55) • “They are managing the pandemic military-style.” (Ex. 54) | — | Demonstrates the transformation of frustration into political critique through humour and evaluative language. |
| Textual Analysis (Fairclough: Text Level) | Use of imperatives and modal verbs expressing desire for action; metaphors of militarisation (“military-style,” “harassing”). | “I wish we would have protests.” | Lexical and syntactic patterns foreground desire for collective action and resistance against coercive state power. |
| Discursive Practice (Fairclough: Production, Distribution, Consumption) | Group members negotiate resistance and normalise non-compliance through humour, irony, and forwarding of dissenting messages. | Joking references to “curfew wajipee wenyewe.” | Humour functions as a legitimising device, allowing opposition to circulate within socially acceptable bounds. |
| Social Practice (Fairclough: Ideological Context) | Reflects a politicised environment where state directives are viewed as | — | Digital resistance re-enacts broader struggles over governance, |

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| | instruments of control rather than protection. | | accountability, and civic autonomy. |
| Appraisal Analysis: Attitude | Anger and moral judgement toward punitive enforcement and political hypocrisy. | “They are managing the pandemic military-style.” | Encodes frustration and condemnation of state behaviour. |
| Appraisal Analysis: Engagement | Dialogic contraction—asserting resistance as obvious, with minimal acknowledgment of alternative stances. | “Curfew wajipee wenyewe.” | Constructs moral certainty and collective solidarity against authority. |
| Appraisal Analysis: Graduation | Intensifiers and scalar terms heighten emotional and moral force. | “Unnecessary force,” “military-style.” | Amplifies opposition through exaggerated and emotionally charged language. |
| Overall Interpretation | Resistance discourse redefines social relations by positioning citizens as morally autonomous actors opposing an overbearing state. | — | Language becomes an act of political agency and collective identity construction. |

4.4.2 Denial, Conspiracy and Alternative Explanations

The data in this study exhibits the discursive construction of denial, conspiracy and alternative explanations surrounding COVID-19 within the sampled WhatsApp group chats. Participants

articulate narratives that question the existence or seriousness of the virus, reject biomedical knowledge, and promote locally grounded or faith-based alternatives. These expressions are both epistemic and ideological. They challenge dominant narratives while reflecting deeply rooted cultural and political attitudes toward science, governance and the West. Denialist discourses often appeared as categorical statements such as “This thing is a hoax” or “Blacks don’t get coronavirus” (Excerpt 55).

Excerpt 55

E55WU1: This thing is a hoax

E55WU2: Kama kawa, kuna watu wanataka kukulia

E55WU3: Bila aibu wanatuletea haka kamsichana kanaitwa Brenda. I hope kamelipwa vizuri

E55WU2: Blacks don’t get coronavirus

E55WU1: Ukiskia kahoma wewe kunywa changaa

E55WU2: Ama kandimu hivi, kaginger hivi...

E55WU1: Lakini kama wanalipa poa mtu kusema ana korona mi naingia box. Uchumi ni mbaya

E55WU3: Curfew wajipee wenyewe. I wish tungeandamana tukatae hii upuzi.

E55WU1: Wakenya ni waoga.

E55 WU4: Iko siku lakini for now, resist style yako

Translation

E55WU1: This thing is a hoax

E55WU2: As usual. There are people that want to benefit from it

WU3: Without shame, they bring us some small girl called Brenda. I hope she has been well Paid

E55WU2: Blacks don’t get coronavirus

E55WU1: if you feel like you are catching a flu, take the local brew called changaa

E55WU2: or some lemon, some ginger...

E55WU1: But if they are paying well for someone to say they have Corona, then I am willing to say so. The economy is not doing well

E55WU3: Let them implement curfew on themselves. I wish we would have protests and reject this nonsense.

E55 WU1: Kenyans are fearful.

E55WU4: One day, but for now, resist in your own style

(WGC)

Such utterances draw on binary oppositions (truth/falsehood, us/them, Africa/West) that simplify complex realities and assert epistemic certainty. Similarly, statements like “Vaccine is bad... will be tested on us” (Excerpt 50) evoke postcolonial anxieties about medical exploitation, while “Drink lemon, garlic and ginger — western drugs are a waste” (Excerpt 51) reflects reliance on traditional or folk remedies as markers of authenticity and resistance to external control.

Excerpt 50

E50WU1: Hiyo vaccine ni mbaya. Utashindwa kulima shamba

E50WU2: Wanaume sikizeni msiseme hamukuambiwa

E50WU3: Vaccines nyingi hupinguza nguvu za kiume

E50WU1: hata mama wananyonyesha wasikubali, Zinapunguza maziwa

E50 WU2: Mi kwanza nahofia mama wana mimba. These vaccines have not been fully tested. They want to test them on us

Translation

E50WU1: That vaccine is bad. You will be unable to plough land

E50 WU2: Men should listen to this and not say they were not told

E50WU3: Many vaccines reduce a man's sexual ability

E50 WU1: Even lactating mothers should not accept to be vaccinated. They reduce milk production

E50WU2: My biggest worry is pregnant women. These vaccines have not been fully tested. They want to test them on us

(WGE)

Excerpt 51

E51WU1: Ukitaka kupona corona, kunywa ndimu, saumu na tangawizi. Hizi dawa za kizungi ni kuharibu tu pesa

E51WU2: No wonder hakuna ndimu soko. Nimetembea soko mzima leo na sikupata ndimu hata moja

E51 WU1: Kuna watu walichanuka mapema wakanunua wakaweka stock. Keep searching utapata. Buy enough for your entire family

E51WU2: Kwanza ni vizuri kama mnaezasteam wote kwa nyumba asubuhi na jioni. Again. ukiweka tu garlic mahali kwa nyumba huwa inaabsorb all bacteria and viruses kutoka kwa

hewa

Translation

E51WU1: If you want to get cured of corona, drink a mixture of lemon, garlic and ginger. These western drugs are a waste of money

E51WU2: No wonder there are no lemons in the market. I have walked around the entire market today and couldn't find even a single lemon

E51WU1: There are people who were smart early on that bought them in large quantities and kept them as stock. Keep searching and you will find some. Buy enough for your entire family

E51WU2: In fact, it is good if family members can steam them in the morning and evening. Again, if one places garlic somewhere in the house, it is known to absorb all kinds of bacteria and viruses from the air.

(WGE)

At Fairclough's textual level, these discourses employ absolute modality and evaluative lexis that construct certainty and distrust simultaneously. Expressions like "I know there is no corona" eliminate epistemic doubt, while conspiratorial bundles ("test on us", "fake vaccine") signal suspicion and defiance. Through repetition and circulation, such claims gain persuasive authority within the group. At the discursive practice level, the dissemination of such ideas through forwarded lists, voice notes, and screenshots reflects how alternative epistemologies are reproduced in digital spaces. WhatsApp's affordances of anonymity, intimacy and rapid forwarding facilitate the spread of "folk knowledge," blending personal belief, hearsay, and religious or cultural explanations. Group members actively contribute to these epistemic networks, often reinforcing each other's claims through moral validation and testimonial authority. At the social practice level, these discourses mirror global and local patterns of medical mistrust, particularly in contexts marked by colonial legacies and socio-economic vulnerability. The conspiratorial and denialist language expresses not only ignorance but also historical skepticism toward Western interventions and elite institutions. In Kenya, as elsewhere in Africa, such narratives function as counter-discourses that reclaim interpretive authority from state and scientific elites.

From an appraisal perspective, the discourse reveals strong attitudinal and engagement patterns. Attitude is characterized by negative judgement toward scientific and governmental actors, alongside affective confidence in local remedies. Engagement often oscillates between monoglossic assertions ("There is no corona") and heteroglossic attributions ("They want to

test the vaccine on us”), reflecting both certainty and relational distancing. Graduation appears through intensifiers and absolutes (“forever”, “no corona”), which heighten the force of belief and denial.

Overall, denial and conspiracy discourses serve multiple functions: they offer psychological coping in the face of uncertainty, reaffirm collective identity and legitimate alternative epistemologies. By privileging local and moral authority over institutional science, these discourses transform health communication into a field of ideological struggle and identity negotiation. Table 4.9 summarizes the discourse of denial, conspiracy and alternative explanations.

Table 4.9: Analysis of Denial, Conspiracy, and Alternative Explanations

| CDA Category | Description | Illustrative Data (Excerpts) | Interpretation / Analytical Comment |
|-----------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| Theme | Denial, Conspiracy, and Alternative Explanations | — | Participants deny or reinterpret the pandemic through local and conspiratorial discourses. |
| Definition | Discourses that deny COVID-19’s severity, attribute it to conspiracies, or propose folk remedies. | — | Expresses epistemic resistance to biomedical and governmental authority. |
| Sample Excerpts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “This thing is a hoax.” / “Blacks don’t get coronavirus.” (Ex. 55) • “Vaccine is bad... will be tested on | — | Shows categorical denial and assertion of local epistemic authority. |

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| | us.” (Ex. 50) • “Drink lemon, garlic and ginger — western drugs are a waste.” (Ex. 51) | | |
| Textual Analysis (Fairclough: Text Level) | Binary oppositions (real/hoax); conspiratorial lexis (“fake,” “test on us”); absolute modality expressing certainty. | “This thing is a hoax.” | Lexical and modal resources construct epistemic certainty and rejection of official truth. |
| Discursive Practice (Fairclough: Production, Distribution, Consumption) | Circulation of forwarded lists, rumours, and folk wisdom; participants legitimise beliefs through repetition and shared testimony. | “They want to test them on us.” | Digital networks reproduce alternative epistemologies through everyday communication. |
| Social Practice (Fairclough: Ideological Context) | Reflects postcolonial medical mistrust, cultural self-reliance, and socio-economic vulnerability. | — | Denial functions as resistance to perceived epistemic domination by Western science and elites. |
| Appraisal Analysis: Attitude | Negative judgement of biomedical interventions; affective | “Western drugs are a waste.” | Evaluative stance encodes distrust in formal science and valorisation of local knowledge. |

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| | confidence in folk remedies. | | |
| Appraisal Analysis: Engagement | Monoglossic certainty and heteroglossic attribution (quoting unnamed sources). | “They want to test it on us.” | Projects both epistemic closure and moral suspicion. |
| Appraisal Analysis: Graduation | Intensifiers and absolutes strengthen categorical denial (“forever,” “no corona”). | “I know there is no corona.” | Emphasises conviction and emotional certainty in denialist discourse. |
| Overall Interpretation | Conspiracy and denial discourses act as coping mechanisms and identity work, legitimising alternative ways of knowing. | — | Language mediates psychological reassurance and symbolic resistance to dominant knowledge systems. |

4.4.3: Practical Coping and Lay Health Advice

This theme encapsulates the everyday pragmatic ways through which participants in the WhatsApp conversations navigated the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than focusing on abstract political debates or conspiratorial explanations, WhatsApp group members engaged in the exchange of practical community-based solutions aimed at managing the crisis. These ranged from advice on making homemade masks to the endorsement of natural or locally available remedies. Such discourses foreground agency, mutual support and adaptive resilience, particularly within socio-economic contexts marked by scarcity and uncertainty.

At the textual level, the discourse of practical coping is realised through imperatives and procedural structures that resemble instructional or advisory speech genres. Utterances such as “Just take an old piece of cloth... sew your own mask” (Excerpt 46) or “Steam the house, garlic absorbs viruses” (Excerpt 51) demonstrate procedural knowledge expressed in accessible, conversational language. The use of low-modality expressions, statements that suggest possibility rather than certainty, indicates a cautious but hopeful stance. The tone is not authoritative but communal, reflecting the ethos of shared experimentation and improvisation. Lexical items associated with care, prevention, and resourcefulness (“take”, “use”, “boil”, “cover”) position speakers as contributors to collective well-being rather than passive recipients of expert advice.

At the level of discursive practice, these exchanges reveal the dynamic processes of knowledge co-construction and community self-help that characterise digital interactions during crises. Within the WhatsApp groups, participants share, modify and reinforce each other’s advice, often blending biomedical terminology (e.g., “steam”, “virus”, “sanitize”) with local and herbal practices. This hybridisation of registers illustrates the fluid boundaries between scientific and local epistemologies. The discursive act of “forwarding” or commenting with gratitude (e.g., “Thanks for sharing”) helps establish the legitimacy of lay expertise. Thus, the group becomes a participatory forum where members negotiate credibility and enact solidarity through the circulation of useful information.

From a social practice perspective, these discourses illuminate the ways in which ordinary citizens exercise agency and creativity under structural constraints. In the context of limited access to official resources or healthcare, the adoption of home remedies and improvisational practices serves as both a survival strategy and a moral statement about self-reliance. Practical coping discourse symbolises resilience, demonstrating that even in conditions of systemic inadequacy, communities can mobilise collective intelligence to protect themselves. The linguistic emphasis on doing, sharing and helping reaffirms social bonds, positioning care as a communal responsibility rather than an individual burden.

From an Appraisal framework perspective, the language of this theme is imbued with positive Affect and relational warmth. The frequent use of supportive responses (“Thanks for sharing”, “That works”, “Let me try”) expresses appreciation and solidarity. Engagement is marked by dialogic expansion where participants invite others to contribute or affirm advice, creating an

open and cooperative discursive environment. Graduation operates through calibrated evaluations such as “equally effective” or “might help”, which hedge claims without dismissing their value. These linguistic strategies allow participants to balance optimism with caution, reinforcing social cohesion while managing epistemic uncertainty.

Overall, the discourse of practical coping and lay health advice represents a form of grassroots resilience that complements and occasionally substitutes for institutional health communication. It reframes pandemic experience as a space of collective ingenuity rather than helplessness, where meaning-making and problem-solving are collaboratively achieved. In this sense, the WhatsApp exchanges become both sites of knowledge production and acts of social repair, rebuilding trust, solidarity, and hope in the midst of crisis. This is summarized in the Table 4.10.

Table 4.10: CDA and Appraisal Analysis of Practical Coping and Lay Health Advice

| Analytical Dimension | Description / Observations | Illustrative Examples | Interpretive Comments |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| TEXTUAL ANALYSIS (Fairclough, 1989) | | | |
| Lexical Choices | Use of verbs denoting action, care, and improvisation (“take”, “use”, “boil”, “cover”, “sew”) | “Just take an old piece of cloth... sew your own mask.” | Emphasizes practical agency and resourcefulness in everyday coping. |
| Grammatical Structures | Frequent use of imperatives and procedural sequences resembling instructions or advice. | “Steam the house, garlic absorbs viruses.” | Creates a participatory and instructional tone, aligning with peer-to-peer guidance. |
| Modality | Low-modality expressions suggesting possibility and experimentation rather than certainty. | “It might help if you...”; “You can try steaming.” | Indicates cautious optimism and awareness of uncertainty. |

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| Tone and Register | Conversational, informal, inclusive. | Use of accessible, non-technical vocabulary. | Reinforces communal identity and equality among participants. |
| Semantic Fields | Lexical fields of health, care, and domestic improvisation. | “Remedy”, “sanitize”, “virus”, “boil water.” | Blends biomedical and folk discourses, showing hybrid epistemologies. |
| Intertextuality | References to both scientific and traditional knowledge systems. | “Steam with eucalyptus, it’s good for the virus.” | Reflects hybridity of registers and the co-existence of lay and expert discourses. |
| Discursive Strategies | Advice-giving, sharing, thanking, and endorsing information. | “Thanks for sharing”, “Let me try that.” | Constructs collective responsibility and relational harmony. |
| DISCURSIVE PRACTICE | | | |
| Production and Distribution | Circulation of messages through WhatsApp; frequent forwarding and commenting. | “Forwarded many times.” | Shows participatory digital knowledge exchange and peer validation. |
| Consumption and Recontextualisation | Users modify and adapt advice to fit local realities. | “If no mask, use a handkerchief.” | Reflects localisation of global health discourses and creativity in scarcity. |
| Interdiscursivity | Integration of biomedical, folk, and moral registers. | Use of words like “virus” alongside “garlic” and “steam.” | Reveals blending of institutional and vernacular knowledge systems. |
| Legitimation | Credibility built through collective endorsement rather | “That works”, “I’ve tried it.” | Lay expertise gains authority through |

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| | than institutional authority. | | repetition and peer affirmation. |
| SOCIAL PRACTICE | | | |
| Ideological Implications | Promotes self-reliance, community care, and resilience under structural constraints. | “We can manage ourselves.” | Challenges dependence on state or formal medical systems. |
| Social Relations | Reinforces solidarity and mutual support. | Use of inclusive pronouns (“we”, “us”). | Language performs social bonding and moral obligation to care. |
| Power Relations | Shifts epistemic authority from experts to community members. | Non-expert participants giving advice. | Democratizes health knowledge and resists hierarchical expertise. |
| Societal Context | Arises in conditions of limited access to healthcare and material resources. | “Use what you have.” | Reflects adaptive resilience in socio-economic scarcity. |
| APPRAISAL FRAMEWORK (Martin & White, 2005) | | | |
| Affect | Expressions of gratitude, encouragement, and reassurance. | “Thanks for sharing”, “That works.” | Builds emotional warmth and social cohesion. |
| Judgement | Positive moral evaluation of helpfulness and responsibility. | “You’re doing the right thing.” | Affirms moral worth of mutual care and self-help. |

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| Appreciation | Evaluations of efficacy and value of shared practices. | “That’s equally effective”, “It really helps.” | Values local knowledge as meaningful and practical. |
| Engagement | Dialogic expansion—inviting contributions and open exchange. | “Let me try”, “Anyone else tried this?” | Fosters inclusivity and participatory discourse. |
| Graduation | Moderate intensity and hedging (“might help”, “equally effective”). | “It could work.” | Manages epistemic uncertainty while maintaining optimism. |

4.4.4: Moralising and Religious Framing

The theme of moralising and religious framing captures the pervasive influence of faith-based interpretations within the WhatsApp discourses on COVID-19. Participants frequently invoked religious language, moral judgement, and eschatological imagery to make sense of the pandemic. Expressions such as “Turn to God... COVID is a sign of end time” and “Only prayers... Only God can help us” (Excerpt 56) exemplify how users positioned the crisis within a theological and moral order rather than a purely biomedical or political framework. Religion thus becomes both a source of comfort and a discursive resource for explaining uncertainty, suffering, and social disorder.

Excerpt 56

E56WU1: if indeed what we are being told are preventive measures are actually true, why do we have new infections daily? We need to turn to God, covid is just a sign of end time.

Nothing else!

E56WU2: True brother! Nothing works only prayers

E56WU3: Let us pray for this country

E56WU4: Is there Covid in the first place?

E56WU1: Is there? Is there not? That is the question.....

E56WU4: This could be one of those fake China products that Kenya and the rest of the world just bought

E56WU1: A good chance is that it is real but no one really knows how to go about it

E56WU3: Ni maombi tu

E56W5: Sisi ni Mung tuu atatusaidia regardless

Translation

E56WU1: If indeed what we are being told are preventive measures are actually true, why do we have new infections daily? We need to turn to God, covid is just a sign of end time. Nothing else!

E56WU 2: True brother! Nothing works only prayers

E56WU3: Let us pray for this country

E56WU 4: Is there Covid in the first place?

E56WU1: Is there? Is there not? That is the question.....

E56WU4: This could be one of those fake china products that Kenya and the rest of the world just bought

E56WU1: A good chance is that it is real but no one really knows how to go about it

E56WU3: Only prayers

E56WU5: Only God can help us regardless

(WGB)

At the textual level, the discourse is characterised by a religious lexicon and metaphorical language that draw upon familiar biblical imagery and apocalyptic motifs. Words and phrases such as “God”, “prayer”, “end time”, and “divine testing” reflect a worldview where disease is moralised as either punishment, prophecy, or a test of faith. The syntax often features imperatives (“Turn to God”, “Let us pray”), which function as calls to moral action and collective repentance. The repeated use of absolutizing expressions such as “Only God can help us” reflects a high-modality stance, conveying certainty, conviction, and emotional intensity. Such linguistic choices mark a shift from empirical reasoning to faith-based epistemologies, where religious discourse provides both explanation and remedy.

From the perspective of discursive practice, these religious utterances reveal the communicative dynamics of digital faith communities. Within the WhatsApp environment, participants enact collective prayer rituals, share scripture, and offer moral encouragement, thereby transforming the chat space into a virtual congregation. This form of religious interaction situates authority not in formal clergy but within peer-based participation, where each member can lead or affirm faith statements. Religious authority thus coexists and

occasionally competes with scientific and governmental voices, producing a dialogic tension between belief and evidence. Forwarded prayers, devotional messages, and moral admonitions also demonstrate the ways in which religious discourse circulates as cultural capital for it is easily shared, emotionally resonant and socially binding.

At the level of social practice, the religious framing of the pandemic reflects broader socio-cultural patterns in the Kenyan society, where faith remains a key lens through which crises are interpreted. In moments of national anxiety and institutional mistrust, religious discourse serves to restore moral order and reaffirm collective identity. It provides believers with a vocabulary of hope and endurance, transforming fear into faith and helplessness into divine submission. At the same time, however, the moralisation of disease can produce exclusionary effects such as stigmatizing non-believers, framing illness as moral failure, or delegitimising scientific and state-led interventions. Thus, religious discourse functions ambivalently as both a source of resilience and a mechanism of ideological closure that can limit alternative responses to crisis.

Applying the Appraisal framework, the moralising and religious language demonstrates a distinct configuration of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. The dominant Attitude type is Affect and Value, as participants express comfort, reverence, and moral conviction. The frequent use of inclusive pronouns (“Let us pray for this country”, “We must trust God”) creates a sense of unity and shared purpose, signalling a communal emotional stance. In terms of Engagement, the discourse is monoglossic and authoritative, presupposing a shared religious worldview and leaving little room for dissent. Graduation is realised through intensifiers and absolutes (“only”, “surely”, “definitely”) that heighten the force of faith statements and amplify moral certainty. These evaluative choices collectively construct a tone of spiritual urgency and moral elevation, positioning religion as the ultimate frame of meaning and legitimacy.

In summary, the moralising and religious framing of COVID-19 discourse in WhatsApp conversations demonstrates how linguistic and symbolic resources of faith are mobilised to negotiate fear, uncertainty, and loss. Through prayer, moral exhortation, and divine interpretation, participants reconstitute the pandemic as a spiritual rather than medical problem. This reframing allows for psychological coping and communal solidarity but also highlights the complex interplay between religion, power, and knowledge in digital public spheres. In the broader CDA sense, such discourse underscores the hegemonic role of religion as a meaning-

making institution, revealing how spiritual registers can both comfort and constrain in times of social crisis. This is summarized in the Table 4.11

Table 4.11: CDA and Appraisal Analysis of Moralizing and Religious Framing

| Analytical Dimension | Description / Observations | Illustrative Examples | Interpretive Comments |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| TEXTUAL ANALYSIS (Fairclough, 1989) | | | |
| Lexical Choices | Use of religious and moral lexicon— ‘God’, ‘pray’, ‘end time’, ‘divine testing’. | “Turn to God... COVID is a sign of end time.” | Frames pandemic within moral and theological discourse rather than biomedical logic. |
| Metaphor and Imagery | Biblical and apocalyptic metaphors (‘end time’, ‘divine punishment’, ‘test of faith’). | “God is testing the world.” | Provides interpretive resources that spiritualise crisis experience. |
| Syntax and Modality | Use of imperatives (‘Turn to God’, ‘Let us pray’) and high-modality assertions (‘Only God can help’). | “Only God can help us.” | Signals conviction, certainty, and moral urgency. |
| Tone and Register | Solemn, devotional, and exhortative tone; sermon-like register. | Frequent invocations of faith and prayer. | Creates an atmosphere of piety and collective repentance. |
| Intertextuality | References to scripture, sermons, and moral teachings embedded in casual chat language. | “As the Bible says, we must repent.” | Blends formal religious discourse with everyday digital communication. |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Discursive Strategies | Use of moral appeals, eschatological warnings, and communal prayer. | “Let us repent before it’s too late.” | Constructs moral order and frames pandemic as spiritual warfare. |
| DISCURSIVE PRACTICE | | | |
| Production and Circulation | Religious messages and prayers shared and forwarded widely in WhatsApp groups. | Forwarded devotional messages, shared prayers. | Demonstrates participatory digital faith practices and collective moral engagement. |
| Consumption and Recontextualisation | Participants interpret pandemic through personal and collective faith. | “We must pray harder.” | Recontextualises global crisis discourse within local religious traditions. |
| Interdiscursivity | Fusion of religious, moral, and crisis registers. | Faith-based explanations alongside government and media messages. | Reveals negotiation between faith, science, and governance discourses. |
| Authority Construction | Religious authority dispersed among peers; moral legitimacy established through shared belief. | “Amen”, “Let’s trust God together.” | Collective affirmation replaces formal clerical hierarchy. |
| SOCIAL PRACTICE | | | |
| Cultural Ideology | Religion as dominant interpretive framework in Kenyan socio-cultural context. | “This is God’s punishment for our sins.” | Reflects persistence of faith-based explanations in public life. |

| | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------|--|
| Moral Order | Disease framed as moral test or divine retribution. | “God is cleansing the world.” | Reinforces moral causality and collective responsibility. |
| Power and Knowledge | Tension between religious authority and scientific expertise. | “Doctors cannot help—only God.” | Shows contestation of epistemic authority between belief and science. |
| Social Function | Faith discourse fosters hope, solidarity, and moral renewal. | “Let us pray for this country.” | Religion functions as both psychological coping mechanism and moral compass. |
| APPRAISAL FRAMEWORK (Martin & White, 2005) | | | |
| Affect | Expressions of reverence, hope, and spiritual comfort. | “God will see us through.” | Constructs emotional solidarity and divine assurance. |
| Judgement | Moral evaluation of behaviour and faithfulness. | “We must repent our sins.” | Positions pandemic as consequence of moral failure. |
| Appreciation | Positive valuation of faith-based actions and beliefs. | “Prayer works.” | Reinforces efficacy and moral virtue of religious practice. |
| Engagement | Monoglossic stance—assumes shared belief and excludes alternative viewpoints. | “Surely, only God can help us.” | Limits dialogic space; asserts moral and spiritual certainty. |
| Graduation | Use of intensifiers and absolutes to amplify conviction. | “Only”, “surely”, “definitely.” | Heightens emotional and moral force of discourse. |

| | | | |
|--------------------|--|---|--|
| Overall Evaluation | Religious framing constructs spiritual legitimacy, collective hope, and moral coherence. | — | Reframes the pandemic as divine event, merging faith, morality, and crisis response. |
|--------------------|--|---|--|

4.5 Overall Interpretation of Findings

Across the dataset, the discourse of distrust and critique emerged as particularly prominent. Participants frequently questioned the credibility of government agencies, often mocking the containment strategies put in place by the government using ironic, sarcastic and humorous linguistic constructions. Political leaders were ridiculed many times as WhatsApp group members used playful metaphors to highlight perceived greed, self-interest and hypocrisy. In Excerpt 53, for example, a user remarks, “They love us so much they want us to die indoors,” using irony to delegitimize official lockdown measures and expose the gap between government rhetoric and lived reality. Such utterances resonate with Fairclough’s (1995) notion of resistance discourse, in which marginalized voices mobilize everyday language to challenge institutional power and reshape the social meanings of authority.

The Appraisal Framework further reveals the evaluative force underlying these expressions. Many users employed strong negative Judgement to question government morality, while their Affect conveyed anger, disappointment, and deep disillusionment. These sentiments indicate a profound break in the trust normally expected between citizens and their leaders. In this sense, WhatsApp group chats functioned as an accessible public arena where ordinary Kenyans could articulate dissent, express moral outrage and collectively navigate their frustrations.

Equally salient was the discourse of economic and social frustration, which captured the heavy burdens imposed by lockdowns, curfews, and quarantine measures. Users lamented what they perceived as widespread corruption, inequitable resource distribution, and the widening gap between the powerful and the vulnerable. References to forced quarantine and the rise of new “tenderpreneurs” during the pandemic revealed a growing awareness of structural injustice. From a linguistic perspective, these expressions foreground social appraisal: speakers assessed not only individual behaviour but also the fairness and legitimacy of institutions. Through this

discourse, citizens positioned themselves as victims of systemic inequality and state neglect, using language to make sense of the hardships they endured.

Alongside critique and frustration, however, a counter current of solidarity and resilience also surfaced. Despite the overwhelming challenges, many users turned to religious and communal expressions to restore hope and reaffirm social unity. Biblical references, prayers, and invocations of divine protection such as the declaration in Excerpt 19 that “Kenya is healed in Jesus’ name” served as moral anchors and expressions of collective endurance. From a CDA perspective, these moments exemplify interdiscursivity, blending religious and political language to negotiate meaning in times of crisis. Through the lens of Appraisal, they reflect positive Affect in the form of hope and faith, and instances of Appreciation grounded in gratitude and reverence. Together, these expressions reveal a deep emotional solidarity that helped sustain communities through the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.6 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been demonstrated that conversations in Kenyan WhatsApp groups during the COVID-19 pandemic offer a window into how ordinary citizens perceived, interpreted, and responded to the crisis. The linguistic choices, evaluations, and expressions of attitude embedded in these exchanges illuminate the social, economic, cultural, and political climate that shaped everyday experiences of the pandemic. Drawing on both Critical Discourse Analysis and Appraisal Theory, the analysis shows that WhatsApp discourse functioned as far more than casual talk; it became a space where users articulated personal and collective anxieties, negotiated meanings, evaluated state actions, and documented the emotional strains of living through an unprecedented public health emergency.

The data further reveals a pervasive sense of mistrust toward government authorities. Participants often voiced frustration with what they perceived as inconsistent or unfair management of the pandemic, particularly the double standards that appeared to favour political elites. Such sentiments point to deeper tensions in citizen–state relations and highlight a broader crisis of public trust. Yet, alongside these critiques, the conversations also show the resilience and resourcefulness of Kenyan communities. Many users drew on faith as a coping mechanism, exchanged words of encouragement, and shared practical strategies for navigating the uncertainties of daily life.

Overall, the findings suggest that Kenyan WhatsApp group chats employed distinctive lexical and evaluative resources to frame the pandemic experience. These digital interactions not only captured public feelings toward the disease and the government's response but also reflected the cultural logics, humour, solidarity, and expressive norms that shape Kenyan communication in moments of crisis. WhatsApp thus emerges as a key discursive site where collective sense-making unfolded, revealing how language mediates both social critique and communal support in times of national upheaval.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the findings presented in Chapter Four in relation to the study's objectives, theoretical framework, and existing literature. The aim of this discussion is to interpret how the acknowledged discursive practices in WhatsApp group chats echo fundamental social relations, ideological positions, and ordinary citizens' discernments of the government of Kenya response to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The analysis is based on Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Martin and White's Appraisal Framework, which together shed light on how linguistic choices construct, challenge, and convey power, identity, and emotion in everyday digital communication.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

This study set out to examine how Kenyans used WhatsApp as a discursive space for constructing, negotiating, and contesting meanings of COVID-19. Through Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis and Martin & White's Appraisal Framework, a number of themes emerged across the dataset. A discourse of distrust and critique emerged as one of the most salient features across the data. Participants recurrently employed irony, sarcasm, and rhetorical questions to express scepticism toward government communication and policies. The chats revealed a collective perception that official measures were politically motivated and economically exploitative. Such linguistic constructions expose a widening gap between the government and its citizenry, since state discourse on protection was interpreted by citizens as a discourse of control and oppression. Fairclough's CDA framework helps to illuminate how this oppositional stance represents a struggle over meaning and legitimacy: citizens resisted the government's dominant narrative by creating a counter-discourse that delegitimized state authority. Within the Appraisal Framework, this pattern was realised through negative judgment of government morality and competence, as participants evaluated leaders as corrupt, selfish, and insincere.

The discourse of economic and social frustration reflected widespread dissatisfaction with the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 containment measures. Participants expressed anger and despair over job losses, high costs of masks, and the perceived prioritization of elite interests

over citizens' survival. Through emotive and metaphorical expressions, users foregrounded economic suffering as a direct consequence of poor governance. Fairclough's (1992) notion of discourse as a social practice is evident here, as economic frustration intertwined with class and power inequalities to reveal structural injustices. The evaluative language within these exchanges showed intense affect (fear, anger, and disappointment) and negative appreciation of government performance, highlighting how citizens lived experiences shaped their discursive construction of the pandemic as both a health and governance crisis.

The discourse of solidarity and resilience was also evident. Despite deep mistrust and frustration, participants frequently employed religious, humorous and communal registers to reaffirm hope and collective endurance. Expressions of faith such as scriptural quotations and invocations of divine protection functioned as discursive resources for emotional coping and moral positioning. Similarly, humour and satire served as mechanisms for maintaining social cohesion amid uncertainty, allowing participants to critique authority while reinforcing shared identity. Through the Appraisal lens, these utterances displayed positive Affect and Appreciation, while in CDA terms, they represent acts of recontextualization, reworking official and religious discourses to restore agency and communal stability in the face of institutional failure.

Overall, the findings reveal that WhatsApp groups functioned as micro-public spaces where ordinary Kenyans debated, reinterpreted, and resisted dominant narratives about the pandemic. The conversations blurred the boundaries between the personal and the political, transforming digital discourse into a site of ideological struggle. Power was negotiated not through formal political action, but through everyday linguistic practices.

5.3 Conclusion of Findings

From the analysis of WhatsApp group interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya, it is clear that the discourse on WhatsApp was critical for meaning-making, emotional expression and ideological contention. The findings reveal that ordinary citizens employed language creatively and critically to construct social realities, evaluate government performance while conveying collective identities. The three specific objectives of the study thus form the basis of the conclusions.

5.3.1 Lexical Choices in the Construction of Meaning and Representation of COVID-19

The first objective sought to assess the lexical choices used in WhatsApp group chats to construct meanings and represent COVID-19. The analysis demonstrates that participants drew from a rich repertoire of linguistic resources: medical, religious, military, and social registers to make sense of the pandemic and its implications. Terms such as “enemy,” “battle,” and “war” framed COVID-19 as a combative struggle, echoing the government’s own militarized rhetoric, while simultaneously positioning citizens as both victims and warriors in the crisis. Religious vocabulary such as “faith,” “prayer,” “healing,” “mercy” recontextualized the pandemic within a moral and spiritual frame, portraying it as both divine trial and a call for repentance.

Lexical creativity and code-switching between English, Kiswahili, and Sheng reinforced inclusivity and shared identity, creating a discursive space that was not only global but also local. Through Fairclough’s lens, these lexical patterns reflect the interdiscursive nature of public talk, where citizens hybridized institutional, religious, and everyday registers to reinterpret dominant narratives. Within the Appraisal Framework, lexical items served as carriers of attitude and appreciation, constructing emotional resonance and social alignment. Therefore, lexical choices were not merely linguistic, but ideological since they constructed COVID-19 as a moral, political, and existential phenomenon deeply embedded in Kenyan social realities.

5.3.2 Expression of Attitudes, Emotions, and Evaluations toward Government Response

The second objective focused on how attitudes, emotions, and evaluations toward the Government of Kenya’s response were expressed through WhatsApp discourse. The findings show that participants used evaluative language to articulate strong judgments about the government’s integrity, capacity and moral standing. Sarcasm, irony and humour became rhetorical devices through which citizens questioned official credibility and condemned corruption scandals such as the “COVID millionaires.” Expressions of frustration, fear and anger revealed deep-seated distrust, while occasional tones of hope and prayer signalled a simultaneous yearning for moral redemption and divine intervention.

Through the Appraisal lens, participants deployed a range of evaluative strategies such as negative Judgment (of politicians’ dishonesty), negative Appreciation (of policy failures), and affective expressions (of anger, fear, or disappointment) to express ideological resistance.

Fairclough's CDA framework further reveals that these evaluations were not isolated opinions but collective acts of resistance against institutional power. The WhatsApp platform thus became a counter-public space where citizens discursively redefined truth, accountability, and justice outside mainstream media control. This evaluative discourse positions the public not as passive recipients of government policy but as active interpreters, critics, and moral commentators.

5.3.3 Discursive Practices and the Reflection of Social Relations and Ideological Positions

The last objective aimed to describe how discursive practices reflected underlying social relations, ideological positions and perceptions of government responses. The data reveal that interactions within WhatsApp groups was a reflection of the broader socio-political dynamics characterized by mistrust in leadership, widening socioeconomic inequality and the resilience of societal morals. The combination of humour, satire and religious intertextuality functioned as symbolic acts of resistance. This allows citizens to challenge those in power while preserving social order.

Fairclough's notion of discourse as social practice is evident in how participants' communicative behaviour such as turn-taking, code-mixing, quoting scripture, and invoking cultural metaphors which constructed social hierarchies and identities. Religious discourse, for example, revealed that religion offers comfort and reaffirmed moral order, placing God above the state. The use of collective words and phrases such as "we," "our country," and "together" revealed solidarity in opposition to the supposed individualism of political leaders. The Appraisal Framework helps capture these interpersonal changing aspects, showing how speakers affiliated or disaffiliated with others' evaluations to build moral harmony.

In essence, the WhatsApp discourse reflected a society working out its identity in the middle of a crisis, oscillating between struggle and faith, critique and hope, despair and solidarity. This reiterated that digital communication is a platform where power, ideology and emotion interconnect to create public consciousness.

5.3.4: Overall Synthesis

From the three objectives, it is evident that the linguistic choices on WhatsApp were not just random or purely personal. They were charged tools calling for social action. Kenyan citizens were able to redefine the meaning of the pandemic and assess governance from a moral perspective. They also built social relations based on both critique and community through their discourse practices. Fairclough's CDA demonstrates how these interactions mediated power relations and ideological conflicts. The Appraisal Framework uncovers the emotional and evaluative elements behind them. Overall, the findings highlight that WhatsApp communication during the COVID-19 pandemic reflected Kenya's broader socio-political discourse. This was the space where ordinary voices helped reshape public opinion, reaffirm moral order and envision alternative futures amid uncertainty.

5.4 Recommendations

This section presents recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, inclusivity, and ethical grounding of public communication in Kenya, particularly in times of crisis. This is derived from the findings and interpretations discussed in the preceding chapters. The recommendations are informed by both the observed insights drawn from the analysis of WhatsApp discourse and the theoretical perspectives of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Appraisal Framework. The study has six recommendations discussed under the following subheadings: policy and practice recommendations, recommendations aimed at promoting digital literacy and responsible online discourse, enhancing inclusivity and linguistic sensitivity, strengthening collaboration between government, media and academia, recommendations addressing emotional and socioeconomic dimensions of crisis communication and lastly, theoretical and methodological recommendations.

5.4.1 Policy and Practice Recommendations

The findings call for deliberate efforts to improve public communication approaches in Kenya. The study established that much of the public's doubt and resistance originated from perceived lack of transparency and appropriate responsiveness in government communication. Consequently, government institutions should be more receptive and adopt participatory communication models that appreciate citizens as partners in decision-making and not passive recipients of directives. This can be realized through verified and interactive digital platforms

where information is shared in real time and citizens' concerns are acknowledged and addressed. The government officers should also be trained in crisis communication ethics and digital discourse management to ensure messages communicated are sensitive and are meant to build trust in the eyes of the public.

5.4.2 Promoting Digital Literacy and Responsible Online Discourse

From the study, it is clear that there is a strong presence of misinformation, satire, and rumour, pointing that citizen have limited access to verified information. The government, media institutions, and education stakeholders should devote more resources in digital literacy programs that empower users to evaluate online content, detect ideological bias, and engage responsibly in public discourse. Similarly, learners in schools should be exposed to critical digital discourse awareness. Moreover, the general community should be provided with education on digital literacy so as to create awareness on ethical online behaviour. This will in turn reduce the spread of misinformation during crises.

5.4.3 Enhancing Inclusivity and Linguistic Sensitivity

The data revealed that most WhatsApp users relied heavily on multilingualism and cultural expressions to construct meaning. Therefore, official communication ought to reflect this diversity. To enhance message clarity and foster inclusivity, government communication agencies should also vary the language of communication and incorporate Kiswahili and local idioms. Moreover, public officers should acknowledge and respect the linguistic resources of citizens which will make communication effective and bridge the social gap between leaders and the ordinary Kenyan citizens.

5.4.4 Strengthening Collaboration Between Government, Media, and Academia

The study's findings emphasize the need for collaboration among stakeholders in disseminating the right information. Government agencies should work closely with mainstream media, intellectuals, and civil society organizations to track and analyse digital discourse patterns in order to detect public sentiment and misinformation. This collaboration should not be geared towards controlling discourse but understanding and engaging it. This will affirm digital spaces such as WhatsApp as legitimate platforms for civic participation. Collaboration among these entities ensures continuous dialogue between policymakers and citizens which eventually fosters accountability and mutual understanding.

5.4.5 Addressing Emotional and Socioeconomic Dimensions of Crisis Communication

The data analysed from the selected WhatsApp discourses revealed a sense of serious financial hardships and emotional exhaustion. This demands that if there is recurrence of similar future crisis, communication strategies should go beyond information dissemination. It should be empathetic, employing psychologically supportive messages that acknowledge ordinary citizens' hardships. The information should give hope, affirm collective responsibility, and offer moral support to reinforce solidarity and resilience. Finally, the official messaging should also include mental health and social welfare information within frameworks to make citizens feel seen, heard, and supported during crises.

5.4.6 Theoretical and Methodological Recommendations

The study affirmed the usefulness of combining Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with the Appraisal Framework in unpacking both affective and ideological scopes of digital texts. Future research should aim to integrate multifaceted discourse analysis to include a variety of communication items such as images, emojis, and memes, which play a pivotal role in making sense of how people construe and understand different life events and experiences within WhatsApp communication. Further studies could also adopt comparative or longitudinal approaches to examine how digital discourse evolves across different crises or political eras.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Transcription Conventions

Character Format

Italics WhatsApp Group chats

Transcription Codes

WG WhatsApp group

WU WhatsApp User

E (with number)-Excerpt with the category allocated

Appendix 2: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Analytic Checklist

Overview

This analytic checklist guided the systematic examination of WhatsApp messages according to Fairclough's (1992, 1995, 2001) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

The model views discourse as a social practice operating simultaneously at three levels:

1. **Textual Practice** (analysis of linguistic and semiotic features);
2. **Discursive Practice** (analysis of the processes of text production, distribution, and interpretation); and
3. **Social Practice** (analysis of the wider socio-cultural and ideological context).

Each level is operationalized through the categories and guiding questions outlined below.

A. Textual Practice (Description)

Focus: *What linguistic features characterize the text? What meanings and values do they encode?*

| Category | Analytic Questions | Indicators / Features to Observe |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Lexical Choices and Vocabulary | What kinds of words are used? Are there ideological or evaluative terms? | Word repetition, emotive adjectives, political or religious terminology, slang or code-switching. |
| Transitivity and Agency | Who is represented as acting or being acted upon? | Active/passive voice, naming vs omission, verbs of action or perception. |
| Modality | How are degrees of certainty, obligation, or authority expressed? | Use of modals (must, should, may), hedges (maybe, I think), or intensifiers (really, truly). |
| Nomination and Categorization | How are social actors labelled or grouped? | Labels for groups (e.g., "we," "they," "leaders," "poor"), inclusion/exclusion strategies. |

| Category | Analytic Questions | Indicators / Features to Observe |
|---|---|---|
| Evaluation and Appraisal | What attitudes or emotions are expressed toward entities or events? | Positive/negative evaluations, affective markers (e.g., anger, pride, frustration), laughter markers or emojis. |
| Intertextuality | Does the text draw from or refer to other texts or discourses? | Use of biblical verses, political slogans, proverbs, or popular sayings. |
| Metaphor and Figurative Language | Are metaphors or analogies used to frame meaning? | War metaphors (“fight corona”), animal metaphors, irony, sarcasm, humour. |
| Cohesion and Structure | How is the message organized? | Use of repetition, conjunctions, ellipsis, and adjacency pairs typical of WhatsApp exchanges. |

B. Discursive Practice (Interpretation)

Focus: *How is meaning produced, shared, and reinterpreted within the communicative event?*

| Category | Analytic Questions | Indicators / Features to Observe |
|--|--|--|
| Production Context | Who produces the message and under what conditions? | Participant roles (citizen, government critic, religious adherent), informal digital setting. |
| Circulation and Intertextuality | How do messages reference or transform other texts (e.g., government directives, media posts)? | Quoting, parodying, or recontextualizing official statements. |
| Interpretation and Reception | How do participants interpret, challenge, or affirm meanings? | Agreement tokens (“true,” “exactly”), counter-arguments, sarcasm, uptake through laughter or emojis. |

| Category | Analytic Questions | Indicators / Features to Observe |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Dialogicality / Heteroglossia | What range of voices or perspectives coexist in the exchange? | Multiple viewpoints, overlapping turns, contestation of meaning, blending of serious and humorous tones. |
| Recontextualization | How are institutional discourses appropriated into everyday talk? | Transformation of government directives into jokes, advice, or protest. |
| Identity Construction | How do participants position themselves and others? | Pronoun use (“we,” “they”), alignment with/against authority, creation of in-group solidarity. |
| Medium-specific Features | How does the WhatsApp platform shape meaning-making? | Use of emojis, GIFs, screenshots, short message sequences, turn-taking, informal orthography. |

C. Social Practice (Explanation)

Focus: How does the discourse relate to broader social, cultural, and ideological structures?

| Category | Analytic Questions | Indicators / Features to Observe |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
| Ideological Positioning | What dominant or resistant ideologies are reflected? | Pro/anti-government stance, moral reasoning, neoliberal individualism, postcolonial critique. |
| Power Relations | How are power, authority, and resistance enacted? | Discursive opposition to government or elites, critique of corruption, citizen self-representation as victims or agents. |
| Social Inequality and Class | How does the discourse reflect or challenge inequality? | References to poverty, marginalization, or elite privilege. |
| Cultural and Religious Values | How are faith, morality, or traditional beliefs mobilized? | Appeals to God, moral evaluations of leadership, divine causality explanations. |

| Category | Analytic Questions | Indicators / Features to Observe |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Gender and Social Identity | Are gender roles or expectations embedded in the discourse? | Remarks on masculinity, motherhood, or women's roles in crisis narratives. |
| Postcolonial Consciousness | How do participants construct Kenya's position in global relations? | Suspicion of "Western" medicine, local vs global epistemologies. |
| Digital Citizenship | How do citizens use WhatsApp to exercise voice and critique authority? | Collective mobilisation, informal deliberation, humour as resistance. |

D. Analytical Integration

In practice, the analysis of each excerpt involved:

1. **Descriptive coding** (textual features);
2. **Interpretive coding** (discursive interaction);
3. **Explanatory coding** (social and ideological significance).

Findings were triangulated with secondary literature and contextual socio-political information to ensure validity and depth of interpretation.

Appendix 3: Coding Framework

Purpose

This coding framework guided the systematic analysis of WhatsApp excerpts related to COVID-19 discourse in Kenya.

It integrates **Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model of CDA** (textual, discursive, and social practice levels) with the **Appraisal Framework** (Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation) to identify linguistic, evaluative, and ideological patterns within the data.

1. Coding Structure

Each excerpt was coded using **three analytical layers**:

| Level | Analytical Focus | Code Prefix Example |
|----------------------------|--|---------------------|
| Textual Practice | Linguistic and semiotic features (vocabulary, grammar, metaphor, transitivity, modality) | T1, T2, T3... |
| Discursive Practice | Processes of meaning production, interaction, intertextuality, recontextualization | D1, D2, D3... |
| Social Practice | Ideological, cultural, and socio-political meanings | S1, S2, S3... |
| Appraisal Framework | Attitude, Engagement, Graduation (evaluative meaning) | A1, A2, A3... |

2. Coding Matrix

| CDA Category | Operational Definition | Coding Questions | Example Code | Illustrative Data Example (Excerpt) |
|-----------------------|---|---|--------------|--|
| Lexical Choice | Selection of words carrying ideological or evaluative meaning | What vocabulary is used to represent COVID-19, government, or citizens? | T1 | “They love the pandemic... made billions with this scam” → lexicalization of corruption. |

| CDA Category | Operational Definition | Coding Questions | Example Code | Illustrative Data Example (Excerpt) |
|---|---|--|---------------------|---|
| Metaphor | Figurative expressions used to conceptualize events | How is COVID-19 or governance represented metaphorically? | T2 | “Corona has baptized him with fire” (Excerpt 9) – religious metaphor for crisis and leadership test. |
| Transitivity and Agency | Representation of actors as doers or victims | Who acts? Who is acted upon? | T3 | “We are harassed by police” – citizens as victims, police as aggressors. |
| Modality | Degree of certainty or obligation expressed | What modals show authority or doubt? | T4 | “We must win this war” (Excerpt 11) – strong deontic modality. |
| Intertextuality | Incorporation of external discourses (biblical, political, media) | What other voices or discourses are referenced? | T5 | “No weapon formed against us shall prosper” – biblical intertext. |
| Humour and Irony | Playful or sarcastic expressions with critical undertones | How is humour used to critique authority or manage fear? | T6 | “Cough like an educated person” – humour masking critique of social conduct. |
| Code-switching / Multilingualism | Use of multiple languages for emphasis or identity | How do speakers shift between English, Swahili, and Sheng? | T7 | “Men tulikosea Mungu wapi?” – Kiswahili–English blend indexing identity and emotion. |
| Recontextualization | Transformation of official | How are government | D1 | “He says corona will end soon... maybe |

| CDA Category | Operational Definition | Coding Questions | Example Code | Illustrative Data Example (Excerpt) |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---------------------|---|
| Dialogicality (Heteroglossia) | discourse into everyday talk Presence of multiple voices or viewpoints | messages appropriated or mocked? How do users engage with, resist, or support others' views? | D2 | after election” – political recontextualization. “Just pray” vs “sanitize and wear a mask” – competing epistemologies (Excerpt 7). |
| Identity Construction | How speakers represent themselves and others | How do linguistic choices construct in-groups or out-groups? | D3 | “We are their guinea pigs” – citizens as exploited group. |
| Solidarity and Alignment | Expressions of shared emotion or belief | What markers of unity or belonging appear? | D4 | “Amen and Amen” – ritual affirmation of shared faith. |
| Ideological Stance | Underlying belief system reflected in discourse | What ideology is sustained or challenged? | S1 | Neoliberal individualism (“Sew your own mask”) or anti-corruption stance. |
| Resistance / Counter-discourse | Opposition to dominant or official narrative | How is authority contested through language? | S2 | “Let them stop taking us for fools” – anti-state resistance. |
| Socioeconomic Critique | Evaluation of inequality or hardship | How is economic struggle represented? | S3 | “Masks are expensive...we have to reuse” – economic frustration. |
| Religious Ideology | Moral or faith-based interpretation of crisis | How is religion used to explain or mitigate crisis? | S4 | “May God heal our land” – moral framing of pandemic. |

| CDA Category | Operational Definition | Coding Questions | Example Code | Illustrative Data Example (Excerpt) |
|-------------------------------|--|--|--------------|--|
| Postcolonial Discourse | Attitudes toward Western authority or global power | How do users talk about Western science, aid, or medicine? | S5 | “They want to test vaccines on us” – colonial suspicion discourse. |
| Attitude (Appraisal) | Emotional, ethical, or aesthetic evaluation | What feelings or judgments are expressed? | A1 | “He is trying too hard to impress” – negative judgment (Excerpt 9). |
| Engagement (Appraisal) | Degree of dialogic openness or contraction | How open is the text to alternative voices? | A2 | “Just pray” (expands discourse) vs “sanitize and wear a mask” (contracts). |
| Graduation (Appraisal) | Strength or scaling of attitude | How is emotional intensity modulated? | A3 | “Mercy, mercy, mercy!” – high force intensification. |

3. Coding Process

1. **Familiarization:** Reading and re-reading all WhatsApp excerpts to identify recurring lexical and thematic patterns.
2. **Initial Coding:** Applying open codes guided by the above matrix (using NVivo or manual annotation).
3. **Axial Coding:** Grouping related codes under broader thematic categories (e.g., *Economic Hardship, Religious Meaning, Resistance to Authority*).
4. **Interpretive Coding:** Linking textual and discursive patterns to ideological and social contexts (Fairclough’s explanatory level).
5. **Appraisal Integration:** Tagging evaluative language (Affect, Judgment, Appreciation) to capture stance and emotion.
6. **Synthesis:** Triangulating CDA and Appraisal findings to develop themes presented in Chapter Four

4. Example of Coding Application

| Excerpt Segment | Applied Codes | Interpretive Notes |
|---|--|---|
| “They love the pandemic for they have made billions with this scam” | T1 (Lexicalization of greed); S1 (Corruption ideology); A1 (Negative judgment) | The speaker frames government as profiteering from crisis, constructing a moral binary between corrupt elites and suffering citizens. |
| “Just take an old piece of cloth and sew your own mask” | T1 (Lexical pragmatism); S3 (Economic adaptation); A2 (Pragmatic advice) | Expresses resilience and self-reliance while implicitly critiquing government failure. |
| “No weapon formed against us shall prosper” | T5 (Intertextuality); S4 (Religious ideology); A3 (High force faith assertion) | Religious register provides emotional relief and moral framing of pandemic as spiritual warfare. |
| “Cough like an educated person” | T6 (Humour); D3 (Identity); S2 (Resistance); A1 (Mocking tone) | Uses humour to critique public ignorance while affirming classed identity (educated vs uneducated). |

5. Thematic Linkage of Codes to Analysis Chapters

| Emergent Theme | Dominant CDA/Appraisal Codes | Relevant Excerpts |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Humour and Coping | T6, D3, A1–A3 | 6–10 |
| Compliance vs. Scepticism | D2, S1, S4 | 7, 9 |
| Political Ridicule | T2, S1, S2, A1 | 9–11 |
| Economic Hardship | S3, T1, D1 | 28–33 |
| Religious Meaning | S4, T5, A3 | 16–20 |
| Distrust of Government | S1, D1, D2 | 43–52 |

6. Reliability and Validity Procedures

- **Inter-coder reliability:** Codes were cross-checked with a peer researcher for consistency.
- **Reflexivity memoing:** Analytical decisions documented to ensure transparency.

- **Contextual triangulation:** Findings interpreted alongside policy documents, media reports, and academic literature on Kenyan digital discourse

Appendix 4: Participant Consent Form

Digital Consent Form (WhatsApp Version)

Study Title:

The Discursive Construction of COVID-19 in selected WhatsApp groups in Kenya:
Sociolinguistic, Cultural and Political realities

Researcher:

[Your Full Name]

PhD Candidate, Department of Linguistics, Egerton University

 [Email Address] |  [Phone Number]

Purpose of the Study

This doctoral research aims to explore how Kenyan WhatsApp users constructed and communicated meanings about COVID-19 through digital group interactions. The study investigates how individuals expressed opinions, attitudes, and evaluations concerning the government's response to the pandemic. Employing Fairclough's (1992) Critical Discourse Analysis framework, the research seeks to uncover how everyday linguistic practices on WhatsApp reflect broader social, ideological, and cultural meanings during times of public crisis.

Participation and Data Use

By agreeing to participate, you authorize the researcher to include anonymized excerpts of COVID-19-related WhatsApp messages from this group for analysis and academic publication.

Participation entails the following:

- Only messages directly related to COVID-19 discussions will be included in the study.
- All personal identifiers—including names, phone numbers, and profile details—will be removed or replaced with pseudonyms.
- Some excerpts may be paraphrased for clarity or conciseness, while maintaining the original intent and meaning.

- Data will be securely stored on password-protected devices and will be used exclusively for academic purposes (PhD thesis, journal articles, and conference presentations).

Confidentiality and Data Protection

Confidentiality will be strictly maintained throughout the study:

- No participant names, group identifiers, or contact details will appear in any thesis, publication, or presentation.
- Screenshots and exported chats will be anonymized and securely archived.
- Only the researcher and supervisory team will have access to the anonymized data.
- All research materials will be permanently deleted five years after study completion, in accordance with [University Name]’s data management policy.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to decline or withdraw at any point without penalty. You may:

- Request removal of your data before analysis begins.
- Ask questions or seek clarification about the study at any time.
- Decline participation without any negative consequences.

Your decision to participate or not will not affect your relationship with the researcher, the university, or any affiliated institution.

Risks and Benefits

There are **no known risks** associated with participating in this study.

The research may contribute to a better understanding of how language use on social media platforms shapes public discourse, emotions, and ideologies during national crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic

Ethical Approval

This research has been reviewed and approved by the **[University Name] Ethical Review Committee**.

Approval Reference Number: [Insert Reference Number]

Consent Statement

If you agree to participate, please respond to the researcher's WhatsApp message with one of the following statements:

I CONSENT – I have read and understood the information provided above. I voluntarily agree that my anonymized WhatsApp messages related to COVID-19 may be included in this academic study.

I DO NOT CONSENT – I prefer not to have my messages included in this study

Contact Information

Researcher:

[Full Name]

PhD Candidate, Department of Literature Languages and Linguistics, Egerton University

Email: [Email Address] | Phone: [Phone Number]

Principal Supervisor:

[Supervisor's Full Name]


Department of Literature Languages and Linguistics, Egerton University


Email: [Supervisor's Email Address]

Ethics Office:

Egerton University Research Ethics Office


Appendix 5: Research Permit


REPUBLIC OF KENYA


NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

RefNo: 974564 Date of Issue: 28/September/2024


RESEARCH LICENSE




This is to Certify that Ms. ANNE NAMAKAVULI MANYASI of Egerton University, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Nakuru on the topic: THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF COVID-19 IN WHATSAPP COMMENTS IN KENYA for the period ending : 28/September/2025.

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See overleaf for conditions

Appendix 6: Sample WhatsApp Extracts used in the analysis

Excerpt 1

E1WU1: Corona virus was obviously coming to Kenya. Anything from China easily gets to Kenya. We are compromised in the health sector. Sad to say but we are ill-prepared

E1WU2: Love them or hate them. the Chinese interventions in Wuhan count for something. We can never match up. I foresee massive deaths in our land.

E1WU1: Ensure you have your PPE on all the time. We can't help the masses if we get infected.

(WGA)

Excerpt 2

E2WU1: Good morning team. Today patient Zero has been confirmed. Guys, I hope the government will provide adequate PPEs for use. Advise your friends and family to observe social distancing and to wear masks. I know measures will be put in place to ensure that anyone who comes in contact with patient zero is quarantined to prevent the spread of the disease

E2WU2: A total lockdown needed to have been instituted when the 1st case was confirmed in Wuhan China. This would have avoided spread to other parts of the world. As front-line workers, the buck stops with us. Let us educate people on how this will be contained. The war ahead of us is immense.

E2WU3: Just wondering.....how many other patient zeros are out there? To me this sounds like PR

E2WU1: Who can tell. We just need to take precautions

E2WU3: True. A real health crisis is looming. Lazima tuwe tayari liwe liwalo

Translation

E2 WU3: True A real health crisis is looming. We must be ready for whatever comes

(WGA)

Excerpt 3

E3WU1: Hey,Good afternoon everyone, I think this wall is invaded by corona. Mtu anawezaleft?

E3 WU2: It looks like corona maneno are here. Watu wakae quarantine

E3WU1: This is scary. Schools have been closed indefinitely

E3WU2: Haki China batunyalile

E3 WU1: Jehova have mercy on us.

Translation

E3WU1: Good afternoon, this wall is invaded by corona. Can someone leave?

E3WU2: It looks like corona-related issues are here. People should stay in quarantine

E3WU1: This is scary. Schools have been closed indefinitely

E3WU2: China has truly messed us up

E3WU1: Jehova have mercy on us.

(WGC)

Excerpt 4

WU1: Ningependa mtoto wangu arudi shule but the big question is how will social distancing be observed in such an overpopulated school?

WU2: Only candidates are resuming for now if you watch news. Social distancing inaweza in all schools

WU1: Na wengine wakirudi?

WU2: Who knows, Corona may be no more

Translation

WU1: I would have loved that my child goes back to school but the big question is how will social distancing be observed in such an overpopulated school?

WU2: Only candidates are resuming for now if you watch news. Social distancing is possible in all schools

WU1: What happens when the rest resume?

WU2: Who knows, Corona may be no more

Excerpt 5

WU1: Suspected Corona death in Matatu!

WU2: God have mercy!

WU1: Sasa huyo si amepa watu wengi? Contact tracing itafanywaje?

WU3: Suspected means anaezakuwa alikufa kifo ingine. People used to die before

Translation

WU1: Suspected Corona death in a public van!

WU2: God have mercy!

WU1: That one must have infected many people? How will contact tracing be conducted?

WU3: Suspected means the person could have died from something else. People used to die before

Excerpt 6

E6 WU1: Wasee mi naye Rona naogopa! Niko na coronaphobia but coronabae ni lazima

E6WU2: Coronabae kidokidogo utajikuta na coronababy boss

E6WU1: Sina shida kaka.

Translation

E6WU1: People, I have corona phobia but I must have a corona girlfriend!

E6WU2: Corona girlfriend then in no time you find yourself with a corona baby

E6WU1: I don't have a problem with that my brother.

(WGD)

Excerpt 7

E7WU1: Some of you are covidiot. This thing is with us whether you like it or not. Mimi hapa wacha ni quarantine and chill, sanny ni lazima na mask pia. Take precaution wasee usikue part of statistics

E7WU2: Acha hizo.uko sure hizo masks zinasaidia? Omba tu Mungu.

Translation

E7WU1: Some of you are covidiot. This thing is with us whether you like it or not. Let me quarantine and chill, I must sanitize and wear a mask. Take precaution people, do not become part of statistics

E7WU2: Stop that. Are you sure those masks are helpful? Just pray.

(WGC)

Excerpt 8

E8WU1: Sale of alcohol in eateries banned. Restaurants close at 7:00 PM. Licences to be Withdrawn.No more Kagwe special

E8WU2: I don't see any difference between 7 and eight PM. Kwani walikosa kazi ya kufanya?

E8WU3: Watu waligundua something better than Kagwe special. Form siku hizi ni park and Chill

E8WU2: Hebu tuchanue.

E8WU3: Simple. Mnaingia kwa gari, Mnaenda tao. Mnanunua mzinga kwa wines and spirit.You drive to a good location, park and drink and socialize in the car

E8WU2: Enyewe necessity is the mother of invention. I have seen people selling stuff from the boots of their cars along the highway. Wakenya si mko creative

Translation

E8WU1: Sale of alcohol in eateries banned. Restaurants close at 7:00 PM. Licences to be withdrawn. No more Kagwe special

E8 WU2: I don't see any difference between 7 and eight PM. Is it that they didn't have any work to do?

WU3: People discovered something better than Kagwe special. Nowadays, the new thing is park and Chill

E8WU2: Tell us about it.

E8WU3: Simple. You board a vehicle. You go to town. You buy alcohol in large quantities from a wines and spirit shop. You drive to a good location, park and drink and socialize in the car

E8WU2: Truly, necessity is the mother of invention. I have seen people selling stuff from the boots of their cars along the highway. Aren't you Kenyans creative!

(WGD)

Excerpt 9

E9 WUI: From how Kagwe is over-talking, he must be coronalusalional

E9 WU2: Corona has baptized him with fire. He is trying to talk the talk

E9 WUI: He should walk the talk

E9WU2: It won't be long before he is let down by the very government, he is trying too hard to impress

(WGE)

Excerpt 10

E10WUI: I lost count of the days of the week. When is today?

E10WU2: I have no idea. I am equally blurred. Could it be Wednesday or Whensday?

E10WU1: If you are blurred, it must be Blursday?

E10WU3: You guys must be coronalusalional right now

(WGE)

Excerpt 11

E11WUI: My brothers and sisters, let's follow the measures given by the government.

We must win this war. No other option.

E11WU2: No weapon formed against us shall prosper, in Jesus' name

E11WU3: Amen and Amen

(WGE)

Excerpt 12

E12WU1: Saaaaaaaasa, tutapigana na korona ama wezi wa pesa ya korona?

E12 WU2: Zote. We lose if we don't fight both. This is a great war eye sei

E12WU1: The enemy has invaded a corrupt country

E12WU3: If you go to any hospital now, you will feel sorry for yourself. There is barely any service. People are dying kwa corridors

E12WU1: This is a viral war. World war 3, Kenya can never win when the government is the enemy

Translation

E12WU1: Now, will we fight Corona or people stealing money meant for Corona?

E12 WU2: Both. We lose if we don't fight both. This is a great war I say

E12WU1: The enemy has invaded a corrupt country

E12WU3: If you go to any hospital now, you will feel sorry for yourself. There is barely any service. People are dying in corridors

E12WU1: This is a viral war. World war 3, Kenya can never win when the government is the enemy

(WGD)

Excerpt 13

E13WU1: Dunia inaisha I dare to say

E13WU2: This virus is worse than a nuclear war

E13WU1: Si imeangusha wazungu!

E13WU2: Mi niliona video Fulani nikashtuka

Translation

E13WU1: The world is ending I dare to say

E13WU2: This virus is worse than a nuclear war

E13WU1: Indeed. Hasn't it killed whites!

E13WU2: I saw a certain video and got shocked

(WGE)

Excerpt 14

E14WU1: Hii kitu haiezikuwa iliundwa na Chna. In fact, it could be a war against China. Kuna watu waliunda wakaipeleka China. China is currently the most affected. Wangetaka Kuua watu nayo si wangepeleka mahali kwingine

E14WU2: story ni ati uliwalipukia by mistake. They were making it watumie kama weapon but ikawageukia. It is a case of an experiment gone wrong

E14WU1: Story ni nyingi. The truth could be somewhere in between. This is not the only virus. Tumekuwa na nyingine nyingi in the past. I hope hii pia itakuwa managed. Ebola was also scary but haishtui siku hizi

E14WU1: Hata measles iliua watu wengi before dawa ipatikane. Suluhisho ni dawa ipatikane

E14 WU2: Shida noi kabla hiyo dawa itufikie, tutakuwa wahenga

E14WU1: Some people must die. It is nature's way of balancing maneno.

E14WU3: A lot of evidence points towards this thing being a genetic bomb against the Chinese, some people are not happy with how quickly they are coming us. It is an economic war. Corona is a bioweapon

Translation

E14 WU1: This thing couldn't have been manufactured in China. In fact, it could be a war against China. There must be some people that took it to China. China is currently the most affected. Had they wanted to kill people with it, they would have taken it to some other place

E14WU2: The story is that they ended up having it by mistake. They were making it with the intention of using it as a weapon but it worked against them. It is a case of an experiment gone wrong

E14WU1: There are so many stories. The truth could be somewhere in between. This is not the only virus. We have had so many others in the past. I hope this one will also be managed.

Ebola was also scary but it is not scary nowadays

E14WU1: Measles also killed so many people before a drug for it was found. The solution is for a drug to be found

E14WU2: The problem is that before that drug is discovered, we would have passed on

E14 WU1: Some people must die. It is nature's way of balancing things

E14 WU3: A lot of evidence points towards this thing being a genetic bomb against the Chinese. Some people are not happy with how quickly they are coming us. It is an economic war. Corona is a bioweapon (WGD)

Excerpt 15

E15WU1: Neighbours, things are getting worse

E15WU2: If God is on our side, who can be against us? Surrender your heart to God and turn to Him in prayer and give up your sins-even those you do in secret. Then you won't be ashamed; you will be confident and fearless. Your troubles will go away like water beneath a bridge, and your darkest night will be brighter than noon

(WGE)

Excerpt 16

E16WU1: Word of the day

Psalm 91:1–6 (NIV)

"Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness..."

E16WU2: Amen

E16WU3: Amen

E16WU4: Amen

E16WU5: Fear is not our portion

E16WU6: God is in control; let us repent and seek His face before it's too late

E16WU7: Philippians 4:6-7 also reminds us not to be anxious about anything, but in every situation, in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God

E16WU8: Amen

E16WU3: Amen

E16WU9: Thanks for the encouragement sister

(WGA)

Excerpt 17

E17WU1: We serve a miracle working God. He is a healer. He has told us in his word that he will heal us. In the book of Exodus 15: 26, He tells us that He is the Lord who heals us. May those that are sick believe in his promises and receive healing in the name of Jesus.

E17WU2: Amen

E17WU3: Amen

E17WU4: Thanks brethren for sharing the word

E17WU5: Bwana apewe sifa

Translation

E17WU5: Praise be to God

(WGB)

Excerpt 18

WU1: Only Jesus can save

WU2: Halleluyah

WU1: Though in lockdown, call on Jesus, call on men of God to intercede for you when sick. The scripture in the book of James chapter 5 and verses 6 to 7 encourages us brethren to do so

Excerpt 19

E19WU1: Verse of the day

2Chronicles 7:13-14 -When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

E19WU2: May God heal our land Kenya

E19WU3: Kenya belongs to the Almighty God

E19WU4: Kenya is healed in Jesus' name

Excerpt 20

E20 WU1: Verse of the Day

Revelations 6:7-8-When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, 'Come!' I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague.

E20WU2: May God have mercy on us

E20 WU3: We pray for mercy, mercy, mercy

E20 WU1: He is a merciful God

Excerpt 21

E21WU1: I don't know if this virus exists. What I know is that there is money put aside for it. The money is what makes them give us all this propaganda.

E21WU2: huu upuzi wa covid peleka mbali saaaaaaana. Hamuwezi tuuzia er ati zero social distancing ugonjwa wenye hauko....

Translation

E21WU2: This stupidity of covid should be taken very far away You can't instil fear in us by talking of social distancing for a disease that does not exist....

(WGB)

Excerpt 22

WU1: Mimi narela kwangu bila stress. Nimeambia majirani nashuku niko na korona so hawanisumbui. Gava hapa imenisaidia

WU2: *Woooooooi.Acha kucheza na ugonjwa,. Haujaona video za China? They are dying like flies*

WU1: *Mimi sinunui uoga*

Translation

WU1: *I am relaxing here with no stress. I have told my neighbours that I suspect I could be infected with the Corona and for that reason they are not disturbing me. The government has helped me in this case.*

WU2: *Woooooooi.Stop joking around with a disease. Haven't you seen videos from China? They are dying like flies*

WU1: *I am not buying into fear*

Excerpt 23

WU1: *Sasa huyu Brenda wamemtoa wapi?*

WU2: *Vile anajiconfuse it is like they did not do a proper rehearsal .*

WU1: *Hata hajui ni how many days alikuwa quarantine....mara 22, mara 23...*

WU2: *SHE IS A FAKE*

Translation

WU1: *Now where did they get this Brenda?*

WU2: *From the way she is confusing herself it is like they did not do a proper rehearsal.*

WU1: *She does not even know for how many days she was in quarantine.....at one point 22, another point 23...*

WU2: *SHE IS A FAKE*

Excerpt 24

WU 1: *Sasa hii project ya sirkali haijui kama ilikuwa Mbagathi ama KNH*

WU2: *Halafu huyu brayo anaingilia wapi kwa hii story? Kwani walikosa mtu wa kutumia?*

Translation

WU 1: *Now this government project does not know whether it was ar Mbagathi or KNH*

WU2: *Then how did this Brian get into this story? Did they lack someone else to use?*

Excerpt 25

WU1: *Hii drama inanifurahisha sana. Haki Unye. His advisors walimfaiil*

WU2: *You can't be sure. Inaezakua true story*

WU1: *No way. there are too many loose ends*

Translation

WU1: *This drama is so intriguing. Really Uhuru. His advisors have failed him*

WU2: *You can't be sure. It could be a true story*

WUI: No way. there are too many loose ends

Excerpt 26

WUI: Now who is telling the truth btw Kagwe na Brenda?

WU2: Kagwe of course. The government is always right!

WU3: They didn't have time to rehearse

WU1: They have always taken us for fools and indeed we are fools.

WU4: Haki nyinyi. That is a minor error....tofauti ni miezi tu which one can forget

WU3: Such errors should not be made on national television.

Translation

WUI: Now who is telling the truth between Kagwe and Brenda?

WU2: Kagwe of course. The government is always right!

WU3: They didn't have time to rehearse

WU1: They have always taken us for fools and indeed we are fools.

WU4: You people. That is a minor error.... the difference is just months which one can forget

WU3: Such errors should not be made on national television.

Excerpt 27

WU1: prayers against corruption should also be held simultaneously.

WU2: It should be time for National Repentance of Sin.

WU3: Mr President, this would be a good time for you to announce a stimulus package funded by you and your deputy to aid Kenyans in these hard times you have instituted, as you copy without strategy, what other organized societies are doing as they implement Agenda21, in which we have nothing to gain but everything to lose. Majority of Kenyans are in rural areas, what's the rationale in shutting down services in the rural communities? Monkey see monkey do tactics, and prayers will not help us. You can't sell your citizens up the river then tell them to pray for better days, it's hypocritical because you attended Event201 at the World Economic Forum in Washington DC or sent your emissaries.

WU1: It's quite humbling to note that the Coronavirus crisis has forced a real national prayer day. This time a few elites and politicians aren't able to meet in a high-end hotel to pretend to be praying for the nation. But I also think repentance should be key part of prayers on Saturday. We have allowed greed (a capital offense and among the seven God hates most) to rule us. No need to elaborate on the effects of greed: murders, corruption, lying,Lord have mercy.

WU4: Kenyans pray all the time, what they need is water.

WU5: Clean WATER .

WU4: WATER WATER WATER is what Kenyans need.

WU5: *For drinking then we can wash our hands*

WU1: *I prayed for water and God told me the government of Kenya was given money to provide water to Kenyans.*

WU6: *The Kenyan government needs to provide clean drinking water to everyone living in Kenya first. Then they can tell people to wash their hands.*

WU1: *How do you tell someone who cannot access water that they need to wash their hands? Someone who can't access clean drinking water?*

WU2: *Most of Nairobi taps are dry. Most parts of Kenya have no clean drinking water.*

WU1: *The Kenyan government officials stole the money allocated to provision of water and now they are shamelessly telling Kenyans to wash their hands with IMAGINARY WATER!*

WU2: *The Kenyan government has no soul or no ounce of humanity and should be completely dismantled.*

WU 3: *Ha ha ha like really? I'm all for prayers etc but if Uhuru thinks this is the solution, he is dumber than I thought.*

WU1: *We need action not prayers. Keep people in their homes and not on the streets. Prayers are not a solution for now. Smart choices like washing hands and keeping away from others are better choices. We Kenyans are intoxicated with prayers.*

WU2: *Prayers is a Deflection. We should just have prayed for Covid 19 to stay out of Kenya, if prayers work. Preach the practical things that people need to do to avoid spreading the virus. Pray after that.*

WU2: *If you believe in imaginary beings maybe this was an answer to a prayer for better hospitals since now all politicians get to stay in Kenyan hospitals. This should serve as motivation to fix the damn hospitals and not look to foreign countries for answers. Any Kenya thinking out there thinking that they have a president and functioning government is purely insane and retard. President Uhuru is incompetent, drunk and 100% out of touch with reality. How is prayer going to help? It's a colonized old mind, unscientific and moronic! How about the government encourage its citizens to follow the medical and isolation procedures! Pray after corona is gone!*

Excerpt 28

WU1: *jana ulifanya jamaa wangu wa piki alimwe nyahunyo . am on shutdown sitarudi tao hadi BBI ikuwe chama*

WU2: *Achana na politicians. We are their genie pigs*

Translation

WU1: *Yesterday, you made my motorcycle man be whipped. I am on shutdown and I*

won't go back to town until BBI is turned into a political party

WU2: *Let politicians be. We are their guinea pigs*

Excerpt 29

WU1: *We are unhappy with how the government is applying double standard with regard to social gathering. They should stop gassing people and open the churches. We are more obedient than the political class that is meeting whenever they want*

WU2: *They love the pandemic for they have made billions with this scam. They will try to make it look like it will last so that they continue to make more money for themselves.*

WU3: *I pick some issues with this statement. CS says he read about it and he knew for sure it would come to Kenya all the way from China. Now, how sure is he that it is not going to come to me who is in Kenya? Shouldn't I just prepare for my hitting time?*

W4: *Yesterday Jubilee practiced social distancing in their meeting???*

WI: *He knew it was coming...*

WU5: *But Kenyans cried that they close borders and airports but they kept on bringing in foreigners. And the results are tens of deaths, thousands infected.... I mean, if the govt took earlier measures without considering the amount of money that will be lost as a result of barring entries into Kenya, there would, at least be minimal cases.... foreign money blinded them*

WU6: *He is planning on more lock down days.... look at that facial expression.*

WU7: *This government has so many stupid greedy officers. They know corona will come but decided to import planeloads of sick Chinese citizens instead of locking them out. Anyway, they wanted to share our billions and borrow more.*

Excerpt 30

WU1: *I pity our forces....they are in the streets with AK47. We are still back as far as 1945...ole wetu third world. Why have so many guns around us in the name of fighting a virus?*

WU2: *Men tulikosea Mungu wapi?Corona inatuangamiza, ikifika ni curfew kuna stray bullets we are the victims Hebu kaeni kwa nyumba*

WU1: *Ukweli. Let us pray hizo stray zisikuje mpaka kwa nyumba*

Translation

WU1: *I pity our forces....they are in the streets with AK47. We are still back as far as 1945...we went into us third world. Why have so many guns around us in the name of fighting a virus?*

WU2: *Men, what wrong did we commit to God? Corona is exterminating us and then when it is curfew time, there are stray bullets and we are the victims Kindly stay at home*

WU1: *True. Let us pray so that stray bullets do not come all the way to the house.*

Excerpt 31

WU1: More virus on Monday n Tuesday.....aki....bangi ya viongozi ni too much...natamani kuwa muganda for two months

WU2: Colleagues the devil is a liar. Imagine i am coughing but am told reggae is totally shattered

Translation

WU1: More virus on Monday and Tuesday.....I tell you....the marijuana taken by our leaders is too much...I desire to be a Ugandan for two months

WU2: Colleagues the devil is a liar. Imagine I am coughing but am told reggae is totally shattered

Excerpt 32

WU1: And everyone was released with 500. That is a total of 73, 500 collected bribe.

WU2: the media should report correctly that 147 failed to provide bribes to buy their freedom Give the figures of those who secured their freedom and name their price

WU3: Hongo 5k bila mask

Translation

WU3: The bribe is 5 thousand Kenyan shillings for not wearing a mask

Excerpt 33

WU1: Hi Kenyans, those of us who are using public transport please be careful. A matatu carrying passengers from Ruiru to Roysambu were all robbed. They all fell asleep and found themselves somewhere in Kasarani with nothing cos they were drugged with the sanitizers that they were to use before boarding

WU2: Si maskini Kenya tuna shida. Tunaangaishwa na polisi na tunaangaishwa na maskini wenzetu

WU3: Mabwenyenye wanatembea na magari kubwa na ventilators kwa boot

WU1: Africa ni Mungu atatulinda. I thought masks are not reusable... waaa...masks chafu naona hii town,heri ukae bila

Translation

WU1: Hi Kenyans, those of us who are using public transport please be careful. A matatu carrying passengers from Ruiru to Roysambu were all robbed. They all fell asleep and found themselves somewhere in Kasarani with nothing because they were drugged with the sanitizers that they were to use before boarding

WU2: we the poor in Kenya have a lot of trouble. We are harassed by police and we are also harassed by fellow poor people

WU3: the very rich are moving around with big cars and ventilators in the boot

*WU1: in Africa, it is only God that will take care of us.. I thought masks are not reusable...
gosh...the dirty masks I am seeing in this town I would rather stay without*

Excerpt 34

WU1: Could it be the Kilifi DG has wrecked the entire leadership of our beloved nation...the people he met and the meetings he attended....

WU2: He should be taken to prison

WU3: Ati lawyer wake anasema hawezi enda prison on basis of his health. Why cant they make prison condusive for all? Kwani wakenya wengine ndo hawana health challenges?

WU4: Lawyers can be funny. Ati anasema there is no evidence that the DG has infected anyone. Sasa evidence hapa mtu anatoa wapi na virus haionekani?

WU1:I hear he has been forcefully quarantined

WU2: Apelekwe jela aponee huko

Translation

WU1: Could it be the Kilifi DG has wrecked the entire leadership of our beloved nation...the people he met and the meetings he attended....

WU2: He should be taken to prison

WU3: I hear his lawyer says he can't go to prison on basis of his health. Why can't they make prison conducive for all? Is it that other Keyans do not have health challenges?

WU4: Lawyers can be funny. I hear he said that there is no evidence that the DG has infected anyone. Now, where does one get evidence for a virus that cannot be seen?

WU1: I hear he has been forcefully quarantined

WU2: he should be taken to prison to recover from there.

Excerpt 35

WU1: Tell your people in Nakuru to be extra careful. Some people at KITI really messed up with the most recent case reported in Nakuru, the quarantined guy's family bribed his way out of KITI. He had tested negative before, his mum, a retired nurse, took the guy home then to a relative's place in Barnabas, exposing herself and the family at Barnabas, then when the guy developed symptoms, the mother decided to do rounds around town, Kilifi deputy governor style, visiting former colleagues at a public hospital in free area, and other public places, now the son is confirmed positive, the case was among those reported yesterday. She and everyone she met are to be isolated at KITI, everyone she met and their family are potentially exposed, things are thick. Worst still, they suspect her visit to former colleagues and the clinic for a blood sugar test were deliberate so she must have exposed a much larger response

WU2: *Shamba la Wanyama*

WU3: *she could be a government agent sent to kill us all*

Translation

WU2: *Animal Farm*

Excerpt 36

WU1: *let us get it that we will never be equal to people in power. If Uhuru decides to go to Germany tomorrow, trust me he will go. So let us accept this fact and move on even locally our leaders have been moving between constituencies and Nairobi despite the cessation. These are leaders we can't compete with. Let us not compare the incomparable*

WU2: *Kuna Wakenya na wenye Kenya. Wakenya wakae nyumbani wa quarantine wenye Kenya watembe Kenya wakifanya biashara zao*

WU3: *Kama una pesa enda kwa PC utapewa permit utembe. Pesa mbele*

Translation

WU1: *let us get it that we will never be equal to people in power. If Uhuru decides to go to Germany tomorrow, trust me he will go. So let us accept this fact and move on even locally our leaders have been moving between constituencies and Nairobi despite the cessation. These are leaders we can't compete with. Let us not compare the incomparable*

WU2: *there are Kenyans and those who own Kenya. Kenyans should stay at home and quarantine. Those who own Kenya should move around and go on with their businesses.*

WU3: *if you have money, go to the provincial commissioner and you will be given a permit to move around. Money first.*

Excerpt 37

WU1: *Hi Kenyans, those of us who are using public transport please be careful. A matatu carrying passengers from Ruiru to Roysambu were all robbed. They all fell asleep and found themselves somewhere in Kasarani with nothing cos they were drugged with the sanitizers that they were to use before boarding*

WU2: *Si maskini Kenya tuna shida. Tunaangaishwa na polisi na tunaangaishwa na maskini wenzetu*

WU3: *Mabwenyenye wanatembea na magari kubwa na ventilators kwa boot*

WU1: *Africa ni Mungu atatulinda. I thought masks are not reusable... waaa...masks chafu naona hii town,heri ukae bila*

Excerpt 38

WU1: *This shows that Kenya is far ahead in fighting corona virus in Africa. Kudos to our Kenyan doctors and the government. God bless you.*

WU2: *I am fully behind the president despite losing my job because of the pandemic, he is trying to listen from experts in the health sector and that is a good gesture*

WU3: *I am of the 62% who are satisfied with the government's response. I think the president has offered great leadership throughout this crisis*

Excerpt 39

WU1: *(forwarded many times) Nawaomba. Tafadhalini. Tuwache kuhazana kwa matanga na wengine bado tunaenda harusi na tunajua shida tuko nayo, Hata kama mnapenda chakula, mytaifuata mpaka mkufe nayo kwa mdomo?Tufungue maskio tusikie haya maneno. Msipuuze tu. Na watu wa bar na hoteli, chungu wananchi, wakikufa mtatoa wapi wateja?Walimu na wazazi hakikisha Watoto wamevaa masks na kama hamna mtuambue tuone vile tutawasaidia*

WU2: *Si chef wenyu ana matusi*

WU1: *Tushamzoea. He should have been a comedian*

Translation

WU1: *(forwarded many times) I urge you. Please people. Let us stop crowding in funerals. Some of us still going to weddings even with these problems. Even if you love food, will you look for it until you die with food in your mouth? Open your ears and hear these words. Do not ignore. And people with bars and restaurants, take care of citizens. If they die, where will you get clients? Teachers and parents, ensure children wear masks and if you don't have them let us know so that we see how we can help you*

WU2: *Isn't your chief abusive?*

WU1: *We are used to him. He should have been a comedian*

Excerpt 40

E40WU1: *Brethren, let us do what we are being told to do. God works through doctors and through medicine. Our God is a God of Order. Let us abide by the laws of the land and persist in prayer*

E40WU2: *Amen Reverend*

E40WU3: *Glory to the Almighty God*

E40WU4: *Trust and obey*

E40 WU5: *Amen.*

E40WU6: *Well said Reverend*

Excerpt 41

WU1: *it's very encouraging to see that the numbers are going down! The government is doing a great job in enforcing the preventive measures.*

WU2: Yes, let's continue observing social distance, wearing masks in public places and washing our hands

WU3: Clearly if we continue putting into action the given directives, we will beat this thing

Excerpt 42

WU 1: What we feared most is now here with us

WU2: We need to inculcate the habit of wearing masks, social distancing, handwashing ourselves then share with our colleagues, friends and relatives. When it comes from us, people will take it seriously

WhatsApp User 2: Very true. Avoid crowds as well and don't touch unnecessary surfaces

WU 3: Sanitize! Sanitize! Sanitize! And every time you are to be in contact with a corona patient, use PPE's

WU 4: Let us forward relevant precautionary measures to as many WhatsApp groups as possible, though right now we are all strangers to this thing.

WU 1: Knowing the nature of pandemics, this will get worse before it gets better, so let's take care of us first. No one will take care of the rest if we get exposed

WU 3: The government should ensure we have protective gear. Let's hope for the best

WU 5: Trust the Kenyan government like you would trust to draw blood from a stone

WU 1: Ni Mung utu atatuhurumia

Translation

WU 1: What we feared most is now here with us

WU2: We need to inculcate the habit of wearing masks, social distancing, handwashing ourselves then share with our colleagues, friends and relatives. When it comes from us, people will take it seriously

WhatsApp User 2: Very true. Avoid crowds as well and don't touch unnecessary surfaces

WU 3: Sanitize! Sanitize! Sanitize! And every time you are to be in contact with a corona patient, use PPE's

WU 4: Let us forward relevant precautionary measures to as many WhatsApp groups as possible, though right now we are all strangers to this thing.

WU 1: Knowing the nature of pandemics, this will get worse before it gets better, so let's take care of us first. No one will take care of the rest if we get exposed

WU 3: The government should ensure we have protective gear. Let's hope for the best

WU 5: Trust the Kenyan government like you would trust to draw blood from a stone

WU 1: It is only God that will pity us

Excerpt 43 WU1: *The Ministry of Health - Kenya has provided these hotline numbers for members of the public to call in case they develop symptoms consistent with COVID-19, in addition to seeking urgent medical attention. Use the following numbers if you need any help in relation to Corona:*

+254 800721316,

+254 732353535,

+254 729471414,

**719#*

WU2: *Thanks for sharing*

WU3: *719 is the national hotline*

WU4: *You will be lucky if that goes through. It may behave just like Safaricom customer care.*

Excerpt 44

E44WU1: *Call the toll-free number 1196 to report any non-compliance of the COVID-19 rules*

E44WU2: *It is the politicians that are shamelessly holding public rallies. What is the use of reporting a fellow citizen when the leadership doesn't care? I can never waste my time*

E44WU3: *Let them make use of those toll-free numbers themselves*

E44 WU4: *if the police are openly taking bribes from makangas without masks, who are we to report. Waache kutubeba ufala*

E44WU5: *I will call them when I am bored and report the whole country*

E44WU6: *Hizo rally za viongozi za hustlers na bbi hawaoni bado wanataka tuwapigie simu*

E44WU7: *If I call, will I be paid?*

E44WU8: *kesi za covid billionaires wamemaliza?*

E44WU9: *To call kitu ipi na Mimi binafsi najua hakuna corona for Ever*

Translation

E44WU1: *Call the toll-free number 1196 to report any non-compliance of the COVID-19 rules*

E44 WU2: *It is the politicians that are shamelessly holding public rallies. What is the use of reporting a fellow citizen when the leadership doesn't care? I can never waste my time*

E44WU3: *Let them make use of those toll-free numbers themselves*

E44WU; *if the police are openly taking bribes from matatu conductors without masks, who are we to report. Let them stop taking us for fools.*

E44WU5: *I will call them when I am bored and report the whole country*

E44WU6: *Don't they see those rallies our leaders are holding about hustlers and BBI. They*

still want to call them?

E44WU7: If I call, will I be paid?

E44WU8; Did they finish handling cases about covid billionaires?E44WU9: Why would I call when I personally know there is no corona forever?

Excerpt 45

WU1: All CSs, PSs to scale down all in-person engagements. Engage through virtual means where possible

-all state and public officers aged above 58 years, or who are immune-compromised, to work remotely, with the exception of those serving the Nation in critical sectors.

-All basic education classes to resume in-person learning in January 2021

-MPs urged to engage CDF boards to augment existing interventions geared towards the re-opening of schools. Focus on additional hand-washing points, provision of face masks and general sanitisation in schools

-all political gatherings and rallies are suspended for a period of sixty days effective immediately. Anyone wishing to do so meetings to do so in city halls;to limit attendance to 1/3 sitting capacity of hall

Ministry of interior to constitute a special enforcement unit for covid protocols

-Curfew extended to January 3rd 2021

-Curfew hours 10:00 PM to 4:00 AM

-All hotels, restaurants, , bars, eateries operators to do all that is necessary to ensure enhanced compliance with COVID-19 protocols

-Directives governing religious gatherings remain unchanged

-county governments to maintain isolation facilities

-where there is an upsurge of covid-19 cases in a specific county, the national government will consult with the county to find localized lockdowns

-County Governments to enhance and to structure all public health

-No mask, no service. Bila barakoa, hakuna huduma

WU2: Thanks for sharing

WU3: I hope the government will provide masks for students, especially the reusable ones

Excerpt 46

WU1: Aki masks are so expensive how will those of us who cannot afford survive?

WU 2: Just take an old piece of cloth, clean it, and sew your own mask they are equally effective and are also reusable!

WhatsApp User 3: By the way surgical spirit is a cheap and effective substitute for hand sanitizer

WU2: Thanks for sharing

Excerpt 47

WU1: mumesikia ati sahi kukohoa kohoa ni hatia?

WU2: Wakwende huko. Kukohoa is a natural action

WU2: kuturushai mate yako sio poa bana

WU2: Sasa mtu atazuia kikohozi aje. Hiyo story haimake sense

WU3: Hawana ubaya, Kohoa kama msomi. Inaitwa elbow sneeze

Translation

WU1: I hear coughing carelessly is a crime now?

WU2: Let them go away, coughing is a natural action

WU2: Throwing your saliva to us is not a good thing sir

WU2: How will someone prevent themselves from coughing now. The story does not make sense

WU3: They have no ill intentions., Cough like an educated person. It is called elbow Sneeze

Excerpt 48

WU1: Distance ya social distance ni distance gani?

WU2: I KM away

WU1: sisi kwisha

WU2: Vile tabia za wakenya ni kusukumana kwa laini. Hiyo 1 metre ni story

WU1: Na kusalimiana kwa mkono. Itakuwa muda kabla tuache

Translation

WU1: What distance does one need to keep to ensure there is social distance?

WU2: I KM away

WU1: We are done

WU2: The way Kenyans are in the habit of pushing at each other when queuing. Staying 1 metre away won't happen

WU1: And shaking hands. It will be a while before we stop that.

Excerpt 49

WU 1: Three dead and counting. Ni kama haikuwa jokes after all

WU 2: Sasa watu wa Nairobi wakae huko.

WU 3: Dunia inaisha

WU 4: Haiishi. This is not the first pandemic. Read about previous ones. Just take precautions and you will be safe

WU 5: China mara hii has outdone itself. Ni hao tu utaskia wanauza dawa ya corona in no time

Translation

WU 1: Three dead and counting. Looks like they were not jokes after all

WU 2: now people from Nairobi should just stay there.

WU 3: The world is coming to an end

WU 4: it is not coming to an end. This is not the first pandemic. Read about previous ones. Just take precautions and you will be safe

WU 5: China has this time outdone itself. They are the same people you will hear are selling drugs for corona in no time

Excerpt 50

WU1: Hiyo vaccine ni mbaya. Utashindwa kulima shamba

WU2: Wanaume sikizeni msiseme hamukuambiwa

WU3: Vaccines nyingi hupinguza nguvu za kiume

WU1: hata mama wananyonyesha wasikubali, Zinapunguza maziwa

WU: Mi kwanza nahofia mama wana mimba. These vaccines have not been fully tested. They want to test them on us

Translation

WU1: That vaccine is bad. You will be unable to plough land

WU2: Men should listen to this and not say they were not told

WU3: Many vaccines reduce a man's sexual ability

WU1: Even lactating mothers should not accept to be vaccinated. They reduce milk production

WU: My biggest worry is pregnant women. These vaccines have not been fully tested. They want to test them on us

Excerpt 51

E51WU1: Ukitaka kupona corona, kunywa ndimu, saumu na tangawizi. Hizi dawa za kizungu ni kuharibu tu pesa

E51WU2: No wonder hakuna ndimu soko. Nimetembea soko mzima leo na sikupata ndimu hata moja

E51 WU1: Kuna watu walichanuka mapema wakanunua wakaweka stock. Keep searching utapata. Buy enough for your entire family

E51WU2: Kwanza ni vizuri kama mnaezasteam wote kwa nyumba asubuhi na jioni. Again. ukiweka tu garlic mahali kwa nyumba huwa inaabsorb all bacteria and viruses

Translation

E51WU1: If you want to get cured of corona, drink a mixture of lemon, garlic and ginger. These western drugs are a waste of money

E51WU2: No wonder there are no lemons in the market. I have walked around the entire market today and couldn't find even a single lemon

E51WU1: There are people who were smart early on that bought them in large quantities and kept them as stock. Keep searching and you will find some. Buy enough for your entire family

E51WU2: In fact, it is good if family members can steam them in the morning and evening. Again, if one places garlic somewhere in the house, it is known to absorb all kinds of bacteria and viruses from the air.

Excerpt 52

WU1: Kanisa zinafunguliwa but hakuna wazee na Watoto. Vijana sasa wasongeshe injili

WU2: Vijana hawana kazi si wafungue kanisa sasa. This is a great opportunity

WU3: Shida ni ati ni wazee ndio hutoa fungu la kumi

WU1: Hizo fifty bob hao huweka kwa bahasha si fungu. Fungu ni wamama.

Translation

WU1: Churches have opened but not for children and the elderly. The youth should now spread the gospel.

WU2: The unemployed youth should now open churches. This is a great opportunity

WU3: the problem is that it is the elderly that pay tithe.

WU1: Those fifty shillings that they put in envelopes cannot be tithe. Tithe is given by women

Excerpt 53

WU1: Sasa wanaongea mambo ya lockdown ndio tukule hewa? Hawa viongozi yenyewe ni wazuri. Wanatujali. Wanatupenda mpaka wanataka tukufie kwa nyumba tuzikane Hawataki tukufie uko nje kama madogi.

WU2: They have ensured that kuna social distance kati yet una pesa

WU1: Halafu hivi karibuni tutaskia wako na vaccine inaitwa corruption wanatumia

WU3: Tenderpreneurs wako lockdown?

WU4: Halafu tunapewa Curfew ni kama Korona inakuwanga tu masaa Fulani

WU1: Ukiskiza hao watu utakufa. Cheza kama wewe. Tumia akili ujue kuishi

Translation

WU1: *They are now taking about lockdown so that we feed on air? These leaders are indeed very good. They care about us. They love us to the extent that they want us to die from the house and not out there. They don't want us to die like dogs.*

WU2: *They have ensured that there is social distance between us and money*

WU1: *We are soon going to hear of a vaccine in the name of corruption. They will be using it by themselves.*

WU3: *Are tenderpreneurs on lockdown?*

WU4: *and then we are put on Curfew as though Corona is only there during certain hours*

WU1: *If You listen to them you will end up dead. Just be you. Use your brain and know how to survive*

Excerpt 54

WU1: *They are managing the pandemic military- style. Harassing citizens will not help*

WU2: *Watu ni wagumu. Saa ingine ni force tu hufanya kazi*

WU1: *Sikatai but they are using unnecessary force. Si lazima polisi waue watu ati juu ya curfew*

WU3: *Government directives are punitive ndio maana watu wanarebel*

WU1: *Kwanza kulazimisha watu kulipia quarantine na bei zingine hapo wazimu*

WU3: *Hi serikali inafaa irudishwe Hague*

Translation

WU1: *They are managing the pandemic military- style. Harassing citizens will not help*

WU2: *People can be difficult. There are times when only force works*

WU1: *I don't refute that, but they are using unnecessary force. It is not a must that the police kill people just in the name of enforcing curfew*

WU3: *Government directives are punitive and that is why people are rebelling*

WU1: *Especially forcing people to pay for quarantine exorbitantly.*

WU3: *This government should be taken back to the Hague*

Excerpt 55

WU1: *This thing is a hoax*

WU2: *Kama kawa, kuna watu wanataka kukulia*

WU3: *Bila aibu wanatuletea haka kamsichana kanaitwa Brenda. I hope kamelipwa vizuri*

WU2: *Blanks don't get coronavirus*

WU1: *Ukiskia kahoma wewe kunywa changaa*

WU2: *Ama kandimu hivi, kaginger hivi...*

WU1: *Lakini kama wanalipa poa mtu kusema ana korona mi naingia box. Uchumi ni mbaya*

WU3: *Curfew wajipee wenyewe. I wish tungeandamana tukatae hii upuzi.*

WU1: *Wakenya ni waoga.*

WU4: *Iko siku lakini for now, resist style yako*

Translation

WU1: *This thing is a hoax*

WU2: *As usual. There are people that want to benefit from it*

WU3: *Without shame, they bring us some small girl called Brenda. I hope she has been well paid*

WU2: *Blacks don't get coronavirus*

WU1: *if you feel like you are catching a flu, take the local brew called changaa*

WU2: *or some lemon, some ginger...*

WU1: *But if they are paying well for someone to say they have Corona, then I am willing to say so. The economy is not doing well*

WU3: *Let them implement curfew on themselves. I wish we would have protests and reject this nonsense.*

WU1: *Kenyans are fearful.*

WU4: *One day, but for now, resist in your own style*

Excerpt 56

WU1: *if indeed what we are being told are preventive measures are actually true, why do we have new infections daily? We need to turn to God, covid is just a sign of end time. Nothing else!*

WU 2: *True brother! Nothing works only prayers*

WU3: *Let us pray for this country*

WU 4: *Is there Covid in the first place?*

WU1: *Is there? Is there not? That is the question.....*

WU4: *This could be one of those fake China products that Kenya and the rest of the world just bought*

WU1: *A good chance is that it is real but no one really knows how to go about it*

WU3: *Ni maombi tu*

W5: *Sisi ni Mung tuu atatusaidia regardless*

Translation

WU1: If indeed what we are being told are preventive measures are actually true, why do we have new infections daily? We need to turn to God, covid is just a sign of end time. Nothing else!

WU 2: True brother! Nothing works only prayers

WU3: Let us pray for this country

WU 4: Is there Covid in the first place?

WU1: Is there? Is there not? That is the question.....

WU4: This could be one of those fake china products that Kenya and the rest of the world just bought

WU1: A good chance is that it is real but no one really knows how to go about it

WU3: Only prayers

W5: Only God can help us regardless

Excerpt 57

WU1: Unaju ahata siku hizi mitumba nyingi ni za China?

WU2: Cha kushangaza ni ati serikali bado inaingiza hizo mitushi ikisema kuna korona

WU: Inaogopa kukataa juu imejaza mademi ya China. Ikiataa bas Kenya inakuwa ya China

WU1: Deni ni ni mbaya. It makes you a slave

WU2: Tungekuwa tunafanya referendum kabla wachukue madeni. Afadhali tungekaa tu maskini kushinda kujaza madeni ya pesa haijawai kutusaidia

WU1: Imagine unalipia pesa mtu alinunulia side chick nyumba, gari mpaka akazaliwa mtoto

WU2: Tafadhali usinikasirisha. Acha tu niendeleo kuamini zilijenga mabarabara

WU1: Pole basi. Zilijenga SGR

Translation

WU1: Do you know that many second-hand clothes are from China?

WU2: The surprising thing is that the government is still accepting those second-hand clothes yet claim that there is Corona

WU: It fears rejecting them because it has a lot of debt from China. If it refuses, Kenya will belong to China

WU1: Debt is bad. It makes you a slave

WU2: We should have been having a referendum before the government takes debt. It would have netter to remain poor than accrue a lot of debt that has never helped us

WU1: Imagine you are paying for a debt that someone used to pay for a house for a woman

he is having an affair with, bought her a car and even ended up having a baby with her
WU2: Please don't make me angry. Let me just continue believing that the debt was used to construct roads

WU1: I am sorry then. The money was used to build SGR

Excerpt 58

WU1: Watu wa ODM wanatuchosha. Pesa za serikali huwafanya was ahau they are supposed to be in opposition

WU2: Huyu Bensoni Musungu ni obvious fake news

WU3: Serikali nayo imezidi na uongo za korona

WU1: Hizi drama za recovery rates ni PR ndio wapewe pesa ana donors

WU4: Wanataka pia tununue their fake medical products zimeletwa na their covidbillionnaires.

WU: Wacheze tu game yao lakini waachane na sisi

Translation

WU1: People in ODM are tiring us. Money from the government makes them forget that they are supposed to be in opposition

WU2: This person by the name Bensoni Musungu is an obvious case of fake news

WU3: The government is going too far with its lies about Corona

WU1: The drama about recovery rates is just PR so that they get money from donors

WU4: They also want us to use their fake medical products that have been brought by them covid billionnaires.

WU1: Let them play their tricks but leave us alone

Excerpt 59

WU1: I am sure hawa watu wanapewa fat cheques in the name of allowances wakikaa in those fake commitees to create fake news

WU2: Wanatudanganya na story za recovery na chini ya maji wanakuka pesa yetu

WU3: Ndio Corona iko but it aint as bad as they are making it. Many of the said positive cases ni negative. Wanadanganya ndio wapate pesa. Hao pia si wajinga.

WU4: Kwanza vile waafrika tunapenda free things. This is a grant opportunity for us. Tungekuwa na good leaders tungekua tu tunaendelea na Maisha. This was a great chance ya sisi kuproove to the world that tuko na superior genes

Translation

WU1: I am sure these people are being given fat cheques in the name of allowances when they sit in those fake committees to create fake news

WU2: *Wanatudanganya na story za recovery na chini ya maji wanakuka pesa yetu*

WU3: *Ndio Corona iko but it aint as bad as they are making it. Many of the said positive cases ni negative. Wanadanganya ndio wapate pesa. Hao pia si wajinga.*

WU4: *Kwanza vile waafrika tunapenda free things. This is a grant opportunity for us Tungekuwa na good leaders tungekua tu tunaendelea na Maisha. This was a great chance ya sisi kuproove to the world that tuko na superior genes*

Excerpt 60

WU1: *Mbona sijaona tender ads za Covid?*

WU2: *Huwa unasoma gazeti?*

WU3: *Hata ukaaply hauzipewa. Zina wenyewe*

WU1: *Hizo watu hula kickback hata before zitangazwe*

WU3: *Inaitwa Kenya*

WU4: *Wangukuwa na utu tu wanunulie madaktari PPEs*

WU1: *It is so sad kuona doctors on strike ati juu hawana PPEs*

WU1: *Mpaka wanapewa fake masks za China*

WU2: *Mimi nimechoshwa na wizi Kenya. Kwanza story ya KEMSA* WU1: *Mbona sijaona tender ads za Covid*

WU2: *Huwa unasoma gazeti?*

WU3: *Hata ukaaply hauzipewa. Zina wenyewe*

WU1: *Hizo watu hula kickback hata before zitangazwe*

WU3: *Inaitwa Kenya*

W2: *Gava inajua kujitafutia job sana. I think hata hii korona waliunda for business Purposes*

WU4: *Wangukuwa na utu tu wanunulie madaktari PPEs*

WU1: *It is so sad kuona doctors on strike ati juu hawana PPEs*

WU1: *Mpaka wanapewa fake masks za China*

WU2: *Mimi nimechoshwa na wizi Kenya. Kwanza story ya KEMSA*

Translation

WU1: *Why haven't I seen tender advertisements for Covid?*

WU2: *Do you read newspapers?*

WU3: *Even if you applied, they are already taken. They have owners*

WU1: *With such, people take kickback way before they are announced*

WU3: *This is Kenya*

WU2: *Government officers have a tendency of creating cash minting opportunities for*

themselves. I think they also created this corona situation

WU4: I wish they were humane and buy our doctors PPEs

WU1: It is so sad seeing doctors on strike because they are not provided with PPEs

WU1: To an extent they are provided with fake masks from China

WU2: Personally, I am tired of stealing of public resources in Kenya. Especially the KEMSA saga

Excerpt 61

WUI (Forwarded many times)

Source: University of Hamburge data

The number of deaths in the world in the first two months of 2020

- *2360: corona virus*
- *69602: common cold*
- *140 584: malaria*
- *153 696: suicide*
- *193 479: road accidents*
- *240 950 HIV loss*
- *358 471 alcohol*
- *716 498: smoking*
- *1 177 141: cancer*

Then you think corona is dangerous or is the purpose of the media campaign to settle the trade war between China and America or to reduce financial markets for mergers and acquisitions or to sell US Treasury bonds to cover the fiscal deficit in them or is it a panic created by Pharma companies to sell their products like sanitizers, masks, medicine, etc. Do not panic and don't forward rumours

WU2: if you do contract corona virus, there is no cause for alarm because 81% of cases are mild, 14% moderate and only 5% of the cases are critical, which means that if you do get the virus, you are most likely to recover from it. Again, looking at the ages of those who are dying from the virus, the death rate for people under 50 years of age is only 0.2%

WU1: We should just be allowed to go on with our business

Appendix 7: Editon Publication Abstract

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JLL

How WhatsApp Comments on COVID-19 Reflect the Writers' Attitude on the Government of Kenya's Response to COVID-19

Authors

Anne Manyasi ⁽¹⁾; Josephine Khaemba ⁽²⁾; Catherine Kitetu ⁽³⁾

Main author's email: anne.manyasi@gmail.com

(1,2,3) Egerton University, Kenya.

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Abstract

This paper examined public attitudes expressed through WhatsApp comments in Kenya during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on the government's handling of the crisis. Data was drawn from WhatsApp archives of five groups, including medics, former university classmates, neighbours, investment partners, and workmates, over twelve months (March 2020–March 2021). The study applied Critical Discourse Analysis, using Norman Fairclough's ideas and the Appraisal Framework as theoretical frameworks. A qualitative approach was employed, with data thematically coded and subjected to content and critical discourse analysis to reveal writers' attitudes toward the Kenyan government's pandemic response. Findings revealed widespread distrust in the government's ability to manage the crisis, with criticism of inefficiency, corruption, and economic hardship, alongside occasional support and compliance. Writers used discursive devices such as sarcasm, irony, blaming, labelling, humour, and exaggeration to navigate tensions between public health measures and governance failures. The findings contribute to scholarly literature on new media discourse, particularly Kenyan WhatsApp discourse, an understudied platform in discourse analysis.

Key terms: Appraisal framework, attitude, COVID-19, critical discourse analysis, WhatsApp comments.

Appendix 8: EANSO Publication Abstract

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Original Article

The Use of WhatsApp Comments as a Means of Responding to Government Directives on COVID-19: Evidence from Kenya

Anne Manyasi^{1*}, Dr. Josephine Khaemba, PhD¹ & Prof. Catherine Kitetu, PhD¹

¹ Egerton University, P. O. Box 536-20115, Egerton-Njoro, Kenya.

* Author for Correspondence ORCID ID; <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1208-6028>; Email: anne.manyasi@gmail.com

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Keywords:

COVID-19,
WhatsApp,
Pandemic,
New Media,
Discourse Analysis.

This paper examines how Kenyans in WhatsApp groups used the platform as a means of responding to government directives on COVID-19. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of information about the pandemic and how it was managed was exchanged on the WhatsApp platform in Kenya. The study from which this paper stems set out to investigate the way in which WhatsApp comments were used to convey public perceptions on the COVID-19 government directives in the country. The study used five WhatsApp groups comprising medics, former university classmates, neighbours, investment partners, and a group of workmates. The Critical Discourse Analysis theory, and specifically the ideas of Norman Fairclough, and the Appraisal Framework were used as theoretical frameworks. The study employed the qualitative research approach, which allowed an in-depth analysis of WhatsApp texts that had been sampled purposively. Data was obtained from WhatsApp archives over a period of 12 months to capture various phases of the pandemic. The data were coded thematically in accordance with the research objective and then subjected to content analysis, which was augmented with a critical discourse analysis to determine how the COVID-19 directives were framed in the selected groups. The study found that WhatsApp comments not only disseminated government directives but were also used as a form of agency to discredit government directives. Through irony, sarcasm and religious rhetoric, some WhatsApp writers reinterpreted, resisted or rejected government directives. The findings add to scholarly literature on new media discourse in general, Kenyan new media discourse in particular, and on WhatsApp discourse, an increasingly common but little-studied platform in discourse analysis.

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