

**LANGUAGE USE IN IDENTITY CREATION AMONG FACEBOOK
COMMUNITIES**

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**A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Master of Arts Degree in English Language and Linguistics of Egerton
University**


EGERTON UNIVERSITY

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DECLARATION AND RECOMMENDATION

Declaration

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

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DEDICATION

To my dear husband Dr Duke Oeba, my sons Alixon and James, my daughter Ashleigh, my father John, my mother Lydia and to men who, despite societal pressures, diligently support their wives in improving their quality of life.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the role of social media language and identity formation dynamics within *Facebook* communities. Beyond being a mere communication conduit, the language activated social users' perception, shapes their social integration, and constructs the overall identity of the community. This study sought to describe the identity constructing linguistic identity strategies and the opportunities afforded by language to sustain the social communities on *Facebook*. In addition, the study aimed to describe the social language patterns that *Facebook* community's exhibit. This study hinges on the social identity theory of Tajfel and Turner and the Multimodal discourse analysis by Kress and van Leeuwen. From the social identity theory, social categorization, identification and comparison processes by members of the *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals (LCKM) Facebook* community to form social constructs and Identity was analyzed. While the discourse analysis focused on the integration of various communication modes to form meaning. This study analyzed a purposive sample of thirty posts and thirty comments by participants in a *Facebook* Group called LCKM, a community of practice centered around cooking. Participants discussed other issues like politics, marriage, weight loss, and education, along with the cooking and recipes. Data were captured through qualitative content analysis, where the researchers purposively selected thirty posts and thirty comments from the group's *Facebook* page. The author used thematic content analysis to respond to the research objectives, organizing and analyzing the data based on the broader themes positioned around SIT and MDA. The findings indicated that *Facebook* users employed language to construct and signify social identities. Users culturally identified themselves by displaying various meals and concluding their posts by challenging other members to name the meals in their native language. Married users employed personal storytelling and linguistic devices, especially emojis, to express and discuss marriage and politically related issues. The posts and comments language promoted sharing and sustained a supportive community around the *Facebook* group. The combined linguistic and semiotic content generated by LCKM members served to validate and articulate the existing gendered social norms that structure domestic and culinary expectations. Therefore, this study holds significant sociolinguistic implications for digital communication studies, broader processes of identity creation and community building.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DP	Digital platforms
EUREC	Egerton University Ethics Review Committee
LCKM	Let's Cook Kenyan Meals
MDA	Multimodal Discourse Analysis
MM	Main stream media
NACOSTI	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SM	Social media

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Language use has always played a crucial role in creating identity in society. Through language, individuals connect with their cultural heritage and community practices. Traditional languages, dialects, and even specific linguistic styles can signify membership in a particular cultural group (Geng et al., 2014). For example, speaking a native language or a regional dialect can reinforce one's sense of belonging to a specific ethnic or cultural group. Trepte (2013) alludes that language is the key marker that allow people to categorize themselves into social groups.

The use of language translates to group membership and social status hindering social interactions (Edwards, 2009). For instance, the use of formal and informal language shows respect and conformity. Whereas, the use of uncommon words, usually jargon and slang shows those people are part of a certain social or professional group. Ideally, individuals learn to use language through socialization processes when they interact with people and the language used around them. Parents, peers, and educational institutions contribute to language development and, by extension, to identity formation. The language norms and values one is exposed to during formative years can significantly impact one's sense of self and social identity.

According to Zhao et al. (2008), social media is an avenue through which language is used in this era of globalization leading to identity creation. Odawo (2020) argues that advancements in ICT have contributed to significant changes in the presentation of information. Today, the globalization of information has been enabled with remarkable ease through Digital Platforms (hereafter referred to as DP), which connect people or groups of people from various parts of the world. Many people are embracing these platforms due to the ability to access vast amounts of information anywhere as soon as it emerges. Alsulami (2019) state that nowadays mainstream media (MM) have recognized the influence of social media (SM) in the globalization of knowledge, and as a result, they have increasingly involved them in gathering, verifying, and disseminating information, marketing themselves, and promoting their companies so as to continue being trusted and respected by the public. Therefore, social media emerge as an important pillar of the journalism profession in the contemporary generation and as a forum through which individuals and communities interact and create identity.

Community formation has become popular in these social media platforms where people with shared interests come together and form a group where they share their interests, experiences, problems, career, religious, economic, political issues among others. These social media platforms are characterized by various groups which attract people with shared social, educational, political and religious interests. People use these platforms to express themselves, build social capital, and manage their reputation. The language that members of these communities use help in creating identity which makes them feel a part of the group, language also makes them keep staying in the groups thus keeping the groups intact even after so many years.

Polletta and Redman (2020) posits that before the proliferation of social media, identity construction was largely confined to face-to-face interactions and was influenced by physical, social, and cultural contexts. However, the rise of the fourth industrial revolution has given birth to wide use social media platforms. These platforms provide alternate areas where individuals can express their identities, allowing for more fluid and dynamic interactions. Also, social media has greatly influenced the ways in which individuals interact, communicate, and construct their identities (Georgalou, 2017). Further, social media brings users from all over the world together into one community; it also allows for the localization of content. There is enhanced engagement and interaction between users and the local communities, businesses, and events. Social media users are heavily dependent on slang and jargon language. This enhances the development of these languages at an accelerated rate. The use of these forms of language is to allow users to relate with their online audiences. In addition, cultural identities are preserved through the use of local dialects and vernacular speech among culturally rich communities (Reyes, 2004).

Social media platforms allow interconnection of world communities through real – time communication (Zhao et al., 2008). This immediacy has made it easier to collaborate on projects, stay updated with current events and maintain relationships. The availability of instant communication has greatly improved various sectors like trade, education, medicine among others. For instance, a seller can market and sell their products to a buyer who is kilometers away from them. Language plays a major role in facilitating this transaction where people use language to market their products and services. Users often curate their posts to reflect a certain image or identity, choosing what to share and how to present it. This curation is a form of self-representation that helps shape their online identity. Users' choices about their profile pictures, bios, and the content they share contribute to their online persona and

identity. As such, the digital age has transformed traditional notions of communication and identity.

Quantitatively and qualitatively, the most used social media platforms are, in order, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, LinkedIn, TikTok, and Facebook. Within social media platforms, communities have utilized variation in the use of language to establish their identities (Coupland, 2007). Users digital shorthand has resulted in the widespread use of abbreviations, acronyms, and emoticons. Furthermore, more users have adopted hashtags to initiate and sustain conversations. Notably, the imposition of word limits on social media platforms has resulted in the rampant disregard of formal constructs of grammar, in favor of conversational text that lacks punctuation.

The social dialect of language in the digital realm, represents a social identity and facilitates community membership (Zhao et al., 2008). *Facebook* is a market leader as one of the most popular among online platforms (Burke & Kraut, 2016). *Facebook* is a social media platform that allows users to connect with friends, family, and communities online. It was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and is now owned by Meta Platforms.

Language practices show belonging, solidarity and shared values within *Facebook* communities. The norms of a particular audience shape the type of linguistic style users adopt. For instance, language use reflects group identities in fan communities, activist groups, or professional networks on *Facebook*. There is a pattern where members often adopt common terminologies, in-group jargon, or linguistic strategies. This enhances social interactions between the online communities. Ideally, *Facebook* has a wide network of communities in which there is navigation between multiple social roles and identities by users. The user professional backgrounds, shared interests and cultural ties bring them together to form like-minded communities. Language serves as a means for expressing affiliation and differentiation within the communities. For example, users might adjust their language style when engaging with close friends compared to when interacting in professional networks. This flexibility in language use is essential for creating multiple identities on the platform (Coupland, 2007).

Facebook communities entail divergent communities that include local and global social groups (Coupland, 2007). There is use of language as a key element in defining group membership and collective identity within the communities. There is development of unique linguistic repertoires such as jargon, slang, and in-group references in the communities. This solidifies the identity of the community by cultivating a sense of belonging thus distinguishing the group from others (Highfield & Leaver, 2016). There is examination of

how collective identities are created and maintained through language. This is possible due to the fact that interactive activities in the communities create an enabling environment to do so (Gervasio & Karuri, 2019). Users join various communities on *Facebook*, and their language use reflects and reinforces their membership in these groups.

In the past there have been studies that explored various aspects of language use and identity creation of individuals. However, there has been little emphasis on how these individuals negotiate their online identities in communities on social media (Taber, 2023). Scholarly evidence portrays that social media users meticulously curate their profiles and posts to reveal the desired image (Geng et al., 2014). This curation involves linguistic choices that reflect personal and group identities. Further, other studies have explored how language use enhances community building on *Facebook* (Geng et al., 2014). The use of language and in-group jokes fosters a sense of group cohesiveness and identity (Lemus, 2018). The use of multiple languages on Facebook can give rise to a host of identities including, but not limited to, cultural, personal, social, ideological, and professional identities. Nevertheless, the intricate relation of language and identity construction, especially across different cultural environments and demographic groups, has been little studied. Hence, this research seeks to analyze the relationship between language and the construction of identity in Facebook communities.

Members of Facebook communities formulate identity through dynamic processes based on Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Taber, 2023). Members first assign themselves as part of the group (Social Categorization). The group then enables them to develop a sense of belonging. They subsequently adopt the group's norms and values (Social Identification) and form an emotional attachment, alignment, and consolidation of personal identity to the group. Groups also seek to attain positive distinctiveness by accentuating certain qualities, esteem boosting members. Emphasizing unique features, such as the supportive culture and authentic Kenyan cuisine, helps groups attain positive distinctiveness. Identity formation, beyond Social Identity Theory, incorporates self-presentation through posting (aiming for a specific audience/perceived identity), shared narratives, styles of language and communication patterns, collective and coordinated actions, supportive and collaborative activities, and explicit rules concerning which actions and behaviors determine belonging to the group.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Given its extensive and varied audience, Facebook is an important online space to the world. Particularly, language is instrumental in how members of social media communities interact and forge identities. Social media is being increasingly acknowledged as a global identity space. However, the use of language in the construction of identities and the articulation of such identities through language as a medium on closed communities in Facebook, such as LCKM, is still under-investigated. The identity impact of social media in general has mostly been researched. Consequently, only a handful of investigations have focused on the role of language in identity construction and identity sustaining in these communities that exist on the internet. The multifaceted and flexible challenges posed by the use of language on Facebook only compound these issues. The use of social media changes within communities, and the language practices of users change with social media. Consequently, the opportunity to examine the role of language in the construction, maintenance, and regulation of social and community identities on Facebook is vastly unexploited. It is on this basis that the current research analyzes the identity construction process on Facebook communities such as LCKM, predicated on users' accounts of language activities.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This subsection highlights the overall and specific objectives of the study.

1.3.1 Overall Objective

This study explored and analyzed how language use contributes to creating identities among *Facebook* communities.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

- i. To establish the linguistic strategies used by *Facebook* communities to create their identities.
- ii. To explore how language use facilitates maintenance of *Facebook* communities.
- iii. To examine how language use by *Facebook* communities reflects social norms.

1.4 Research Questions

- i. What are the linguistic strategies used by *Facebook* communities to negotiate their identities?
- ii. How does language use facilitate maintenance of *Facebook* communities?
- iii. How does language use by *Facebook* communities reflect social norms?

1.5 Justification of the Study

According to studies conducted, social media has become a central platform for communication and social interaction, linguistic strategies that shape *Facebook* communities' identities, facilitate their maintenance, and reflect their social norms in *Facebook* communities has not been given much attention. Therefore, this study sets out to examine how social media users employ linguistic strategies that shape Facebook communities' identities, facilitates their maintenance, and reflects their social norms. The study focused on unique aspect of the language employed by social media users to create identity that makes them fit into specific groups and feel part of them. This study helps in understanding how social identities like religion, ethnic background, education, and gender, among others, do not obstruct the use of language in building social ties.

Exploring the construction of identities on Facebook groups and the use of language is significant for many reasons. First, it helps understand the construction of identities in the digital era, that is, how social media platforms shape personal and group identities in real and virtual communities. Second, it helps understand the language and communication theories in social and digital contexts.

The study explores the various ways people communicate using different styles and tries to advance the work on digital communication and digital identity by showing the uses of language for shaping identity on social media.

1.6 Scope and Limitation

The study focused on the *Facebook* group, *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals*, which has been around for five years. This group was purposively selected for the study because its dynamic nature within the Facebook community juxtaposes people with various and diverse socio-economic, age, gender, education, and cultural backgrounds. This provided a way to examine the use of specific language tailored to the needs of the group. The three months duration ensured that the data collected reflected the use of language to construct identity. The study focused on and covered the group's Facebook page, including real time and historical posts

and comments, as well as the cross-sectional time posts. The study sought to analyze the language components of tone, word choice, and other linguistic strategies to understand how cultural, personal, gender, ideological, and professional as well as social identities are constructed.

There was a potential limitation of the study which involves group dynamics and participation bias, where some group members contribute more to the posts, which could lead to the overrepresentation of certain language use patterns or social identities. By spreading the data collection sessions over the three months, the researcher was able to avoid the problem of over-representing the more active members and take variations in activity into account by sampling different days and times.

1.7 Operational Definition of Terms

Algorithmic influence: The impact algorithms have on the content and information people receive, especially on social media, search engines, and news sites.

Curated profiles: Refer to the selected and organized presentation of information that people, and even organizations, share on social media, professional networking sites, or other digital platforms.

Facebook communities: Refer to spaces and pages on *Facebook* that allow users with the same interests, values, or beliefs to share and communicate with each other

Identity is the traits, beliefs, qualities, and expressions that define and distinguish someone or something from other people, groups, or things. These include personality, values, and culture, along with physical appearance and social perception.

Identity creation: This is the activity of people shaping, presenting, and changing their social identity in response to different social situations or interactions

Interactive features: Refer to parts of digital platforms, apps, or websites that allow users to engage and have some control over the content.

Linguistic strategies: This refers to the specific methods and approaches people use to achieve certain goals and purposes within communication and the management of language in specific situations.

Online persona: This is the identity or image someone portrays about themselves or creates about themselves on the internet.

Timeline: This is a sequential arrangement of a user's activities including their posts and interactions on a particular platform

Slang: This is the use of relaxed and informal language, usually more playful and trendy language within specific groups or subcultures. These words and phrases are typically absent in more formal and standard language, and are certain to a specific context, place, or time.

Socialization processes: These are the ways people learn and take on various values, norms, behaviors, and social skills of a given culture and society.

Self-representation: This refers to the manner in which people present or show themselves to other people, whether it is intentional or unintentional.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The chapter presents a discussion on advert and development of social media and online communities, presenting the creation of *Facebook* page and online communities. It also presents the linguistic strategies which were used by other people to develop identities within online communities, how language use reflects existing social norms and the role of language in maintenance of social media communities. It also provided a relationship between sociolinguistic theories and digital communication on *Facebook* which is a popular social media platform that allows users to connect with friends, family, and communities online. The chapter also discusses theoretical framework which is the foundation of this research.

2.2 Social Media

Social media can be defined as an interactive digital technology which enables sharing, creation and exchanging of user generated content such as videos, photos, ideas and text among networks and virtual communities (Carr & Hayes, 2015).

Social media platform is a notable vibrant space whereby people perform and construct their identities (Polletta & Redman, 2020). The platform provides fertile ground for exploration, formation of group belonging and presentation of social role despite being a social interaction platform. Using of language in this platform acts as a powerful tool for construction and expression of identity. According to Georgalou (2017) such platforms such as *WhatsApp X, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn* enable users to culture their online personas through presentation of particular online personas by selectively having particular aspects of their lives on the platforms. People will choose the kinds of posts, photos and comments that they want to share which lead to creation of a particular identity that aligns with what they want their audience to know about them. It is notable that users conscious manages the kind of impressions that is made by others by since they are able to control what they are posting to the audience. For instance, *LinkedIn* is mostly utilized for construction of a professional identity while *Instagram* normally presents the lifestyle or aesthetics of a person. With this kind of flexibility, it can result to creation of multiple, context specific identities (Geng et. al., 2014).

A person's identity is normally catered by different social media platform (Georgalou, 2017). In platforms like *LinkedIn* an individual may present their professional attainment

while in X platform the same person can take part in political discussions while on Instagram they can share individual interests and hobbies. The identities within these platforms may be different which enables an individual to explore different facets of themselves. Social media can sometimes result to different social spheres for instance family, work and friends into the same audience. This presents a challenge to an individual since they are needed to create identity constrictions as the individual have to navigate the expectations of the different groups at the same time.

2.3 Identity Creation

Identity can be defined as a social performance that is enacted through stylish choices in language (Coupland, 2007). It is interactional, context sensitive and fluid which enables a person to signal belonging or distinction across social situations. According to De Fina et al. (2011) identity is a discursive constructed, flexible and impacted by context and interaction. Identity is something that an individual that is mainly shaped and reshaped through communication not just something that an individual has.

According to Georgalou (2017), identity creation is an interactive, discursive, and multimodal process, where users construct and negotiate who they are through everyday language use, digital practices, and social interaction within the platform's affordances. Swann et al. (2009) on the hand, defines identity creation as an ongoing process through which individuals define, express, and negotiate who they are.

Identity discourse is normally influenced by advert of the internet. Early views usually noted the possibility of multiplicity and anonymity in online identity suggesting that people could experiment with different selves without offline constraints (Kraut et al. (2004). However, with the evolution of Web 2.0 and social media platforms such as *Facebook*, the emphasis has changed towards more persistent, public, and authentic self-presentation (Sebastião, 2013).

It is worth noting that creation of identity within online communities involves collaborative and ongoing process (Kraut et al., 2004). Researchers have assessed how social links form and persist within the digital spaces whereby they have shown that online interaction cultivated genuine community and social support. Notably Facebook groups offer structured environment whereby people come together around shared identities, interest or goals (Ellison et al., 2007).

The usage of language and communication norms, which comprises of specific vocabulary and tone are essential (Georgalou, 2017). This calls for adherence to the linguistic

styles signals belonging and reinforces the group's unique personality. Identity can also be performed through collective action and mutual support given that members assist, advice, and celebrate together. This solidifies the group's identity as a valuable resource (Ellison et al., 2007).

2.4 Facebook Page and Online Communities

The creation of identity can be influenced by communication especially on Facebook which can take place through profile construction whereby a user can fill out profiles that has information like their birthdays, names, work history, education and interests. The collected data can contribute to the beginning of an individual creating an online identity (Geng et al., 2014). Similarly, an individual may also select particular image that will represent themselves visually which influences the interaction with other people.

Polletta and Redman (2020) argues that there are times that users can express themselves through regularly updating their daily activities, feelings, and thoughts which will enable them to be express their different personalities and values. The sharing of videos, articles and other media shows the viewpoints and interests of the user which assists in shaping their identity within their network. Notably the emotional state and ability to solve problem can be noted through the narratives told through the user updating status while there others who depict their emotional state by sharing the experiences which relates to business, work, family and politics. This helps to develop narratives of who they are.

Lievrouw (2009) argued that the friends one has on *Facebook* can significantly impact their identity. Being part of various friend groups can reflect and reinforce different aspects of one's identity. Likes, comments, and shares from friends provide social feedback, influencing how users perceive themselves and are perceived by others. *Facebook's* privacy settings allow users to control who sees their content, enabling them to present different aspects of their identity to different audiences for example, family vs. colleagues. Also, users may selectively share content with specific groups to curate their identity more precisely (Gervasio & Karuri, 2019).

Notably algorithm driven news can impact content users which normally shapes the interests and identity as it continuous to expose them to particular types of information (Highfield and Leaver, 2016). There are studies which have been done that examines different aspects of language use and identity creation of individuals but minimal focus has been given on how these individuals create their identities in groups on social media (Taber, 2023). Shared language and in-jokes within groups contributes to group identity and cohesion

(Geng et al., 2014). Similarly, research on multilingual users shows how the choice of choice on *Facebook* can create and reflect multiple identities (Lemus, 2018). However, gaps remain in understanding the shades light on how language is used in identity creation, particularly in different cultural contexts and among different demographic groups.

2.5 Linguistic Strategies on Social Media

Linguistic strategies can be deliberate methods or techniques that speakers and writers use in delivering a particular meaning, attain specific communicative goals, and influence their audience (Das, 2012). According to Androutsopoulos (2021), linguistic strategies comprises of the use of emojis, visual elements and other forms of communication apart from verbal language. Social media platforms, particularly *Facebook*, have become crucial sites for constructing identity. User's uses different linguistic strategies when they are presenting their views, engage with others, and participate in communities.

2.5.1 Nomination

Nomination, also known as labeling or naming entails a fundamental linguistic strategy that can be used to categorize social actors, construct identities, and frame discourse. It is mostly used in political discourse, media representation, branding and online communities, shaping how people and groups perceive themselves and others (Krämer & Otto, 2024).

According to Highfield and Leaver (2016), hashtags and tags are the major nomination strategy used in social media communities to foster connections and build communities. They allow users to participate in ongoing conversations and signal shared interests. Social media users typically create identity by using hashtags and tags, where one will choose a group they would want to be part of a conversation. According to Petroni (2019), hashtags do more than help people find conversations about blocking; they can serve other purposes within discussions about blocking. For example, they show the type of speech act that they are part of. That is, whether it is a warning, advice, commands, requests, challenges among others (Krämer & Otto, 2024). Targeted hashtags don't just help people find discussions about blocking, they actually shape those discussions in two ways: Who's involved: They direct the conversation towards specific users or groups (Petroni, 2019) which therefore keeps the discussion focused within a particular community or draw in certain people. For example, some *Facebook* users may tag the people they want to get the

information that they have shared, others will use ‘#share until it reaches the ministry of health’ meaning that the shared post is intended for the ministry of health but before then other people are made aware and they keep sharing until it gets to the target.

Deeper analysis where the hashtags encourage further explanation and critique of the situation might involve people discussing the act of blocking itself, its effects, or the reasons behind it. For example, one may start an argument about some ill in the society or some injustice that has been committed like gender based violence ‘#father from hell’ which can spark discussion as to why the father in question is labeled ‘father from hell.’ Hashtags also act like a starting point for understanding complex disagreements online (Krämer & Otto, 2024).

By following relevant hashtags like #Boycott This Brand, researchers can trace the arguments and positions of different sides in a controversy. Hashtags can be essential in unlocking a map of the online debate. This is because of the way hashtags are created since for matters for online debates. Particular hashtags linked to blocking which can attract people with opposing viewpoints and create focused discussions. Despite that, people continue using generic hashtags like "#blocked" even if they do not get a large audience. The reason for using generic hashtags can be to stress a particular aspect for instance shouting a word instead of speaking in a normal way. Likewise the usage can also be as a result of participating in a shared online ritual, a way to publicly document a blocking event within the "genre" of online blocking announcements (Krämer & Otto, 2024).

The presented studies focused on the general overview of the use of hashtag in social media and they left the gap on how Facebook users can use hashtag in creating and maintaining online identities within particular communities. The current study will be focusing on hashtags can be used as identity markers within a *Facebook* community *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals*.

2.5.2 Perspectivation Strategies

Perspectivation can be a pervasive aspect of language use, showing the inherent subjectivity of human communication (Bouvier & Machin, 2020). Perspectivation has a key role in influencing attitudes and in shaping audience perceptions. In bringing out perspectives, code switching and code mixing, in addition to stylistic variation has an essential role.

2.5.2.1 Code Switching and Code Mixing

Das (2012) defined code switching as alternating between two or more languages or dialects within a conversation, often used to convey social meanings or fulfill specific communicative needs. It is typically seen at the sentence or clause level. On the other hand, Edwards (2009), argues that code mixing refers to blending elements from different languages within a single sentence or utterance, creating hybrid forms that reflect linguistic flexibility and creativity it often occurs at the word or phrase level. Nyongesa et al. (2023), argued that in order to show belonging to a certain group, people use code mixing where they blend Kiswahili, English and local languages to pass specific information. Code switching often reflects a conscious choice to use different languages for specific purposes or to address different audiences while code mixing reflects a more spontaneous and less conscious use of language (Androutsopoulos, 2021).

According to Reyes (2004), code-switching and code-mixing are powerful tools for creating and expressing identity. They allow speakers to signal their affiliation with different cultural, ethnic, or social groups. This is particularly evident on social media, where users switch codes to align with various communities. It is notable that switching languages can signal cultural heritage and group affiliation which enables people to develop and express their cultural identities (Edwards, 2009). Code switching has been seen as an important component in creating group cultural identity whereby, at some point an individual is forced to switch to a native language in order to attain a sense of belonging. When it comes to social media platforms, it can be noted that people can use code switching when they are posting a message that they want to reach a specific audience. There are other instances whereby others can utilize code switching to comment on online posts. Pérez-Sabater and Moffo (2019) argues that code-switching on *Facebook* can assist in building and maintaining identity among *Facebook* users. It is notable through the process of switching between languages; users can engage with different audiences, cultivate a sense of belonging, and strengthen relationships.

While researchers have focused on how individuals create identity in social media through code switching and code mixing, there remains a gap on how these people use code switching and code mixing to create their identities in groups. Unlike the posts one makes in their timeline, which their friends can view, group posts can be viewed by all the group members. Considering the dynamic nature of the groups, this research intends to investigate how code switching and code mixing are used as a linguistic strategy to creating group identity in *Facebook* community *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals*.

2.5.2.2 Stylistic Variation

As pointed out by Coupland (2007), individuals employ different stylistic variations based on how they adjust their speech or written communication based on scope, audience, or purposes for which communication is intended. These variations aid in the construction and signaling of an individual's identity, which is prominent in the social construction and the flexible environments offered by social media channels. In an effort to extend the boundaries of what constitutes social and communicative style, Coupland requests that we abandon the notion of style as solely personal or individual. He further explains that the styles people employ and the social practices they rely on for their communication are, to a large extent, functions of the social environment in which they find themselves. Using social media as an example, different social contexts incorporate varying communicative and stylistic practices in order to serve and establish different and specific social identities. Coupland exemplifies how personal identity is articulated through the variation of social styles and contexts, thereby illustrating the performative character of social styles. In this sense, the performative aspects of social style are concerned with the particular identities that speakers strive to achieve and announce. The notion of identity is endlessly fluid and flexible and can even be reformulated at the speech act level.

On the other hand, as highlighted by Petroni (2019), stylistic variation refers to the different ways one is able to change language to mean something different, serve different functions, or achieve different communicative targets. He further argued that stylistic variation is influenced by three key factors: context, purpose, and audience. Each context in which language is used will determine how best to select words and stylistic elements for successful communication. For example, in communication on LinkedIn as opposed to *Facebook*, users will choose more formal language on LinkedIn, whereas the communication on *Facebook* is informal. The overall purpose of communication will, in turn, determine the language one will employ.

As Androutsopoulos (2021) stated, online users can change their styles in communicative ways to form an identity and interact in online communities in different ways. Some of these consist of an informal discourse, which includes contractions, and the use of slang and personal stories, which fosters a sense of familiarity, connection, and belonging to a group. It helps a user to self-authenticate and claim rapport with others (Androutsopoulos, 2021). Informal language can also be playful, as it humorously, and sarcastically, communicates a casual message. It lightens the interaction (Coupland, 2007). Historically, the informal and casual character of a user's discourse was a defining trait of

social media. However, the increasing use of formal language in social media according to users' identity projections (e.g. Professional Identity) has gained force. Many professionals cross social networking sites to establish their credibility as a professional. The professional discourse frames a user's social media as a projection of expertise, competence, and trustworthiness. Research posits that complex sentence structures, academic vocabulary, and grammar are signs of improved professionalism (Petroni, 2019).

Group affiliation and in-group identity can be demonstrated in the use of community specific slang and informal language. The use of certain slang and informal language can mark boundaries, defining who belongs and who does not. Consider a group of gamers, who use 'noob' to refer to newbies or 'GG' to refer to a good game, these terms may not be recognized or understood by people outside. This distinction and use of specific language creates boundaries with in-group members and out-group members. The language used by the gamers serves to create and maintain cohesion within the group and a sense of belonging (Le Page, 2017).

While much has been documented in the research of these authors about stylistic variation and identity construction, the impact of these aspects on identity construction in Facebook communities has not been documented to the same degree. The review does not address the subtleties of Facebook stylistic variation and does not address the construction and negotiation of identity in specific communities. Instead, the review attends to the more general aspects of social media language utilization. Hence, this study aims to understand how one *Facebook* community, Let's Cook Kenyan Meals, adapts the linguistic strategy of stylistic variation.

2.5.3 Argumentation Strategies

Lievrouw (2009) states that argumentative strategies involve the use of language in presenting, sustaining, and defending a viewpoint and persuading an audience about a claim. Arguing is more than just presenting a counterpoint, it involves employing certain linguistic tools that organizes your reasoning in a clear, logical, and convincing order, but.... Most contexts where argumentation is found include narratives, creative language play, and discursive positioning. Wodak (2013) contends that social practices and power relations are central to argumentative strategies. These perspectives focus on the ways in which arguments are crafted in particular communicative situations and how they seek to establish, uphold, or contest social order, relations, and ideologies. Here, strategies can include framing a problem,

legitimizing a certain point of view while undermining the opposing one through specific linguistic techniques.

2.5.3.1 Narratives

Narratives encompass the stories, accounts, and personal experiences users convey through posts, status updates, photos, and other content. These narratives are a subset of the self-expression's users deliberately, and often unconsciously, self-construct in order to shape and showcase their identity in a given online social setting (Lievrrouw, 2015). On social media platforms, and particularly Facebook, narratives are important to the creation of identity. Users post self-told stories about themselves or others, and in some instances, they solicit feedback from their audience regarding the narrated accounts. As observed by Georgakopoulou (2017), narratives aid in the articulation and transfer of experiences and feelings, thereby creating interpersonal ties and a communal bond. Users often tell stories which audiences deeply resonate with, fostering a collective identity and unity. For social media users, narratives are a powerful means of articulating and exposing challenges they encounter in their life and the coping strategies they employed to overcome those challenges.

Stories that center on personal challenges that someone has surmounted or goals that are attained function as powerful motivators and as a source of inspiration. Narratives shift attention to self-presentation and assist in the development of personal branding and social media authentication. Social media users construct narratives in order to cultivate and sustain a personal brand.

Every social media user builds an identity and a specific image to project, indicating what and who they wish to be. Individuals communicate their identity and achievements to an audience through social media narratives (Bamberg, 2004). Some users outline their achievements and the challenges that they had to go through to get to where they are. Narrative structures help users to advertise themselves as genuine and adherent, as well as establish links to their followers. Personal stories that include challenges and achievements help to establish trust and social engagement (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Narratives are foremost social awareness tools. Most social issues are garnered through social media narratives and users post inclusive social and contemporary issues to get user feedback. Users share their experiences, and more stories that expose inequality amplify calls to action and propose social change. Social media users post and share stories that structure and frame political issues. Mobilizing narratives incorporate strong emotive elements that drive people and communities to take action.

Polletta and Redman (2020) noted that social media campaigns tell stories as a way to invoke collective action and effect social change. As for platforms X and Instagram, they support the real-time sharing of micro-narratives, short episodic stories. These micro-narratives partake in an ongoing, dynamic narrative that users construct throughout their life.

Users of Facebook also share stories, as noted by Page et al. (2013), via the *Facebook* stories feature, where, and subsequently, their peers view and respond. Participants in this storytelling interaction Social media depicts the social challenges that users endure and, by so doing, strengthen their identity. Social media provides a unique space for users to share their personal story, while the comments section encourages an empathic synergy designed to problem solve issues popular, for example, interpersonal conflicts regarding marriage and employment. Social media storytelling incorporates a variety of modalities as it merges text, pictures, video, and more. This review looks at the social media and the impacts of using multiple modalities for storytelling and the theory and methods that support it.

Highfield and Leaver (2016) addressed how various platforms exploit the integration of text and images to tell stories. Captions contextualize images and text, whereas images enhance the text's emotional appeal and drive. Social media platforms orient diverse narrative constructions and sharing due to distinct social norms and affordances associated with each platform. For instance, Instagram and Facebook Stories allow for the crafting of ephemeral narratives, while YouTube offers the opportunity for extended narrative construction (Van Dijck, & Poell, 2013).

These researchers concentrated on the narrative construction by individuals for identity formation on social media, through mechanisms such as status updates, profile curation, and memory sharing. However, the study of the narratives that individuals employ to shape identity within the social media online communities to which they belong has not been widely researched. Hence, this study is designed to analyze the use of narrative as an argumentation technique for identity construction within the *Facebook* community LCKM.

2.5.3.2 Language Play and Creativity

Gervasio and Karuri (2019) suggest that Language Play and Creativity is yet another argumentation strategy *Facebook* communities adopt in the construction of their identities. Creativity in the use of language is not restricted to the construction of text that is to be read or appreciated. In fact, social media users significantly enhance the quality of their posts in the attempt to capture the attention of their audience. The playful manipulation of language is meant to entertain or simply explore the different possibilities a given language offers. This

may involve the inventive alteration of words, sounds, and even structures. Creativity, however, is the use of language to come up with new expressions, articulate different ideas, or think in original ways (Graham, 2019).

Shifman (2014) argues that audience attention is captured using language play and creativity making content more engaging and easier to remember. Humorous and witty posts receive more Likes, Shares, and Comments. Users on social media find long posts unappealing, thus, creatively using language in a multimodal approach makes users read the posts and respond to the posts in a multimodal approach. Dynel (2009) suggests that the enjoyment audiences experience from the use of creative language fosters positive emotions. This, in turn, increases the user's popularity and social media influence. Influencers on social media use creative language to captivate audiences, employing strategies such as code switching, code mixing, hashtags, emojis, and memes, enhancing the appeal of their posts to wide audiences.

Androutsopoulos (2021) notes that social media users utilize language play and creativity to develop a unique personal brand. Distinctive linguistic styles can separate individuals and increase the recognizability of their content.

Influencers on the internet create and express their identities through distinctive styles of language, and this uniqueness helps them stand out from others while also being able to capture a considerable audience. Being perceived as authentic and relatable helps in establishing trust relationships with clients, whereby users of social media modify language to align with the audience's expectations. Audience social media behavior determines the range of appropriate playfulness through social situations (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Creativity in the use of language promotes participation and the encouragement of interaction to provide feedback. It can enhance conversations and reinforce social connections in online communities (Zhao et al., 2008). The playful and creative use of language fosters the transgression of social and linguistic norms, empowering users to escape the status quo and provide a counter voice as the dominant discourse. Flouting grammatical norms, as well as sarcasm and satire, exemplify playful critique. The creative use of language provides a means of social and political discourse through sophisticated humor and other creative means of addressing considerable issues (Papacharissi & Blasiola, 2015).

The use of flexible and creative forms of language and other shared communicative practices contribute to the construction of group identity and group solidarity within particular communities. Jokes, memes, and other creative communicative practices may serve as markers of belonging to some particular online communities (Krämer & Otto, 2024).

Memes exemplify the phenomenon of language play and creativity on social media (Shifman 2014). They utilize humor and satire, enhancing their shareability and potential virality. Additionally, the information contained in memes is more readily accessible to the majority of people, as most people tend to lose interest in lengthy textual explanations. Even in situations where people are required to respond verbally, they often use memes, emojis, and other forms of non-verbal communication.

Although the researchers mentioned have identified the general contours of playful language, social creativity, and the implications of social media interactions, the literature fails to examine how these factors pertain to identity construction in Facebook groups. The review concentrates on the general characteristics of social media language, leaving unexamined the specific and subtle ways *Facebook* users manipulate and manage language while constructing their social and personal identities in particular communities. Hence, this study investigates the language play and creativity exhibited in the Facebook group, Let's Cook Kenyan Meals. Other groups might also develop particular lexicons, jargon, or memes that serve the identity of the group.

2.5.3.3 Discursive Positioning

According to Petroni (2019), the focus of discursive positioning is the study of the use of language to construct identities, relationships, and hierarchies within a form of communication. It is a question of how we situate ourselves and others around a conversation or a text. Identity presentation is a subject of discursive construction (Bamberg, 2004). It may take the form of the construction of a particular discursive subject or role, such as expert, novice, or activist, constrained by the situational context and audience. Along with identity positioning, the discourse participants may assign roles or identities to others. In doing so, they may include, exclude, or marginalize people. While speaking, people assign roles and identities (e.g. leader, follower, caring, and aggressive) and ascribe social configurations (e.g. friend and enemy). This is a mechanism of controlling and shaping a perception of an individual in discourse. Positioning people discursively allows the speaker to include participants in the conversation as legitimate interlocutors, exclude and dismiss others, and assign marginal roles.

Forming a position, especially the first or the last, gives the opportunity to respond to the social implications. This includes possibilities of shifting the power position belonging to a group. By the discourse, the signal of submission or dominance is given. This, followed by the intended discourse, is the provision to negotiate the social order (De Fina et al., 2006).

The ability to communicate in a particular way can generate either closeness or distance to a particular individual or group. For instance, whether one is seen as an ally or adversary will likely impact the cohesion and relational dynamics of a group. As noted by De Fina et al. (2011), the framing of an issue, event, or experience can be understood in relation to discursively positioning a subject. In particular, the positioning of an issue involves the accentuation of certain features of the issue and the silencing of others. Social media is a context within which social interactions can improve the social interaction frame of a social support system, which positively impacts a person's psychological wellbeing. Social support, and particularly a sense of support from close friends, fosters the belief that one's friends will be available during a crisis, and this support is critical to psychological wellbeing. Strong, perceived social support is correlated to happiness, good health and longevity.

According to Thoits (2011), perceived support is passive and stems from received support over time. Seen in this light, everyday interactions, no matter how trivial, unnoticeable, or routine, are significant in building support. While the theory does not define how trivial an interaction can be to still offer support, in the online context, subtle signs of support may be 'likes', 'pokes' or other gestures that fall under the umbrella of non-text interactions.

The distinction between strong and weak social ties is included in social support literature. Strong ties provide intensive, empathetic support, while weak ties may not offer much in the way of support, but they can provide different opportunities and ideas (De Fina et al., 2011). Caring, nurturing, and tangible assistance is expected and more likely to be given in closer, more multiplex, and denser relationships. Even stronger interconnected relationships bring expectations of reciprocity in support. This acknowledgment highlights the emotional and concrete assistance social networks provide.

According to Thoits (2011), everyday support given by strong ties fuels positive feelings as it reinforces the recipient's significance and sustains their self-worth. Therefore, this means that when strong ties communicate online more, emotional well-being is more likely to improve than when weak ties communicate online. This assertion is confirmed by empirical research.

According to Valkenburg and Peter (2007), teens who use Instant Messenger to chat with strong social ties enjoy greater life satisfaction compared to ones who converse with strangers. Bessière et al. (2008) demonstrated that adults experience emotional encouragement and a decline in depressive symptoms when they interact with strong social ties online, benefits which are absent in conversations with weak social ties. Moreover,

strong social ties on *Facebook* are linked to greater perceived social support and lower stress (Burke & Kraut, 2013). One of the main functions of language is to enable individuals to locate the self and others in a social arrangement with respect to wider societal ideals and structures, including the political, cultural, or moral, and allow themselves to be classified with, or distanced from, particular ideological constructs (Wodak, 2013).

The available literature has appropriately addressed the components of discursive positioning, social support, and their relationship with well-being, it, however, does not specifically focus on how these aspects shape identity within communities on *Facebook*. The review has an overall focus on the general aspects of social media language, and it has not thoroughly examined the intricacies of discursive positioning and how Facebook users construct and negotiate their identities within particular communities. It is, therefore, the aim of the current study to investigate how discursive positioning as an argumentation strategy works to construct and sustain an identity within communities on *Facebook*.

2.5.4 Identity Markers

Petroni (2019) explains that identity markers encompass the characteristics, traits, or tags that people utilize to define themselves, as well as the traits that others use to identify people in society. Identity markers form a core constituent to personal identity (how we perceive ourselves) and social identity (how we interact with groups and how groups perceive us).

Identity markers indicate the social group, age, race, or profession a person belongs to. The use of slang or jargon associated with a certain group can indicate that the user belongs to that group (Coupland, 2007). Identity markers assist social media users in aligning with a certain group. For instance, the older generations use formal language, while the younger people default to informal speech and pictures. The use of figurative language is more typical of the older people in society. As such, the use of specific linguistic markers in a certain context helps to establish and strengthen social bonds within communities (Petroni, 2019). The expression of personal identity in language can be manifested through a person's distinctive linguistic styles and choices. This encompasses vocabulary, emojis, hashtags, and specific constructions that define a person's style (Turner & Onorato, 2014). The coherence of identity markers demonstrates authenticity and relatability, thereby building trust with the audience (Marwick & Boyd, 2011).

Edwards (2009) stated that identity markers are crucial in the establishment of power and social roles. The use of politeness strategies, honorifics, and the degree of formality can all serve to rank and define social relations.

The way one uses language signals an alignment or misalignment with certain ideologies, beliefs, or social groups, allowing users to identify and navigate social networks (Wodak, 2013). For example, some people may prefer to associate with others who share their interests while feeling uncomfortable in the company of those who do not. A heritage of using a particular language, inclusive of dialectical and culturally specific references, can indicate segregating ethno linguistic identities. Androutsopoulos (2021) notes the use of culturally laden symbols and references in language on social media helps assert and maintain one's cultural identity and aids users in reconnecting with their heritage.

Gervasio and Karuri (2019) maintain that social media's specific discursive practices function in the distinct marking of social identity. Users communicate their cultural heritage, social affiliations, and ideologies through language choice, use of dialects, and emojis. These elements of composition not only function to establish social orders but help consolidate one's digital identity. Moreover, language can create a sense of solidarity and belonging among users with similar identities, thereby offering the opportunity for the construction and socializing of a unique self.

Androutsopoulos (2014a) analyzed the ways social media enables users to perform and negotiate identities via language. Individuals and communities use language, including code-switching and vernacular use, to signal cultural belonging and membership, as well as the social, national, ethnic, and individual dimensions of their identities. The ways people speak or what languages, dialects, or particular linguistic features people use can all indicate the groups and communities people belong to. Androutsopoulos (2014a) explains that identities are dynamic, defined and redefined through social practices, including the use of language. Therefore, identity is something that people do and perform, and language is one of the central vehicles of this performance. He contends that contexts of multilingualism make language choice an important marker of identity, as defined through culture and positionality in particular interactions. Moreover, language mixing and switching encapsulate different identity dimensions. In addition, Androutsopoulos (2014a) analyzes the construction and representation of identities in mediated contexts, particularly in digital communication. New opportunities for identity expression come with the advent of the digital arena. Language is key in how individuals choose to perform and engage with others. Digital communities are normed and anchored to cultural signposts via the circulation of hashtags and memes. In the

social and digital worlds, hashtags and memes are tools for social categorization, idea expression, and conversation participation (Gervasio & Karuri, 2019). Some hashtags and memes offer shorthand expressions to explain social and cultural phenomena. Sharing certain hashtags and memes signals the acceptance of the ideals and culture of a particular digital sub community, a factor presupposing social and cultural relevance. Community hashtags and memes encapsulate ideas and cultural elements integrated into the primary socialization of members. In a digitally mediated environment, the exchange of these items can strengthen perforated boundaries and collective identity. A social movement hashtag and a meme anchored in a popular culture artifact are some of the elements that can deepen social ties (Coupland, 2007).

Although these studies analyze identity markers in relation to group membership and personal identity, they do not specifically address how these markers assist in identity formation within *Facebook* communities. The review focused on the general aspects of language on social media and did not investigate in detail how *Facebook* users employed identity markers and constructed their social identities and sustained them in particular communities. For this reason, this research aimed to explore the way users within the *Facebook* group Let's Cook Kenyan Meals use language to negotiate their identities, how they articulate their individual identity in relation to the identity of the community, and whether this causes any tensions.

2.6 The Role of Language in Maintaining Social Media Communities

As indicated by Georgakopoulou (2017), the maintenance of communities in social media platforms consist of an ongoing, proactive effort related to the management, support, and encouragement of online communities. This is to foster the desired connectivity and relationships along with meeting certain objectives. It involves more than just the act of content posting as it reflects the need to develop a positive thriving atmosphere for the attendees of the community.

According to Burke and Kraut (2016), the use of language is fundamentally important in the establishment as well as the continuation of social media communities. Social media communities, of course, can be created based on shared commonalities such as interests, education, purpose and goals. The development of community specific norms and social conventions is the extent. The norms may cover the use of specific words, verbal style, and tone. Furthermore, these norms aid and finish the process of interaction to be a sense of collective identity and membership. Communities on *Facebook* use specific terminologies and slangs to communicate. As an illustration, a person may post a picture of a dish and ask

‘who is boarding’ to mean ‘who is interested in eating it?’ The community style and tone serve to define and reinforce the identity of group members (Georgalou, 2017).

Across these groups, influencers and group leaders manage the posts and the type of language used in each discussion. Consequently, members who deviate from the established linguistic norms may receive a warning or face expulsion as punishment. Georgakopoulou (2017) states that informal conversations and casual relationships linked to phatic communication tend to enable the building and maintenance of social bonds. Such exchanges build a sense of camaraderie and support. Social systems of commenting, liking, and sharing construct engagement and interaction. The flow of language in these systems reinforces and strengthens participation.

Social media’s capacity to support informal collective learning on various topics such as cooking, driving, or car maintenance facilitates the sharing of knowledge and the construction of new informal learning communities. Educational materials are also shared in these social systems, thus complementing the formal education these learners acquire (Burke & Kraut, 2016). Community identity is negotiated and constructed through the use of specific language and community slang, as well as acronyms and in-group jargon. These systems of language use serve as markers to reinforce and reiterate the identity of the community.

These linguistic practices signal community membership while excluding potential outsiders. It also aids in the construction of narrative where the group members possess a set of identified and related narratives that help in reinforcing their bond in that when a group member recites a particular story, the others are able to identify with it (Polletta & Redman, 2020).

Lemus (2018) explained that language is a tool for motivating and mobilizing community members, whether it is through calls to action, messages of inspiration, or community challenges. On social media, users employ particular language strategies to motivate others to adopt a particular belief, purchase a product, or affiliate with a particular political party. Debates centered on the issue of ‘#Black Lives Matter’ are examples of such debates that provoke strong responses from the black community because of the racial injustices that are perpetrated against them. Direct appeals can be used to make calls to action that are persuasive and uncomplicated. For example, ‘Join the fight against climate change by signing the petition today!’ is a direct appeal that is likely to reach a larger audience (Polletta & Redman, 2020).

2.6 The Role of Language in Maintaining Social Media Communities

According to Georgakopoulou (2017), maintenance of social media communities is an ongoing process that involves actively managing and nurturing online communities to foster engagement, build relationships, and achieve specific goals. It's more than just posting content; it's about creating a thriving and supportive environment for community members

Burke and Kraut (2016) argued that language plays a crucial role in creating and maintaining social media communities. These communities are formed based on various factors like shared interest, education, goals among other issues. Language helps establish community-specific norms and conventions, such as preferred terminology, style, and tone. These norms guide member interactions and contribute to a sense of shared identity and belonging. *Facebook* communities utilize language in terms of terminologies specific to the communities. For example, one posts a meal and asks 'who is boarding' which is another way of asking if one is interested in the food. The tone and style used in these communities are specific to the group giving the members a specific identity (Georgalou, 2017).

In these groups, the group administrators and the influencers use language to moderate the kind of posts made in the groups. That is why when one decides to use language outside the required standards they are removed from the group as a form of punishment or sometimes they are warned against using such language in the given forum. Georgakopoulou (2017) posits that informal conversations and casual interactions, often referred to as phatic communication, help build and maintain social bonds among community members. These exchanges create a sense of camaraderie and mutual support. Features such as comments, likes, and shares enable ongoing interaction and engagement. Language used in these interactions strengthens social ties and encourages active participation.

Language helps in facilitating knowledge sharing and collective learning in social media platforms to share knowledge on particular issues like cooking, driving, car maintenance, among other issues. Through the information shared online, people are able to learn not only essential skills but also formal education where learning materials are shared in the groups (Burke & Kraut, 2016). Language helps in constructing and negotiating community identity through shared language slang, acronyms, and in-group jargon which helps to construct and reinforce community identity. These linguistic practices signal membership and differentiate the community from outsiders. It also helps in narrative construction where the group members have some specific narratives that are related and help them in strengthening the bond between them in that when a member shares a specific story the others are able to identify with it (Polletta & Redman, 2020).

Lemus (2018) argued that language is used to motivate and mobilize community members, whether through calls to action, inspirational messages, or communal challenges. In social media platforms, people use specific language to influence others to embrace a certain ideology, buy a given product or identify with a certain political party. For example, through online debates like ‘#black lives matter’ which can spark divergent reactions from people especially blacks because they feel the need to fight racial injustices committed against the blacks. Calls to action like direct appeals where one can use clear and compelling language to make specific requests or suggestions. For example, ‘Join us in the fight against climate change sign the petition today!’ appeal to a larger population (Polletta & Redman, 2020).

2.6.1 The Role of Language in Fostering Engagement and Participation

Kreijns et al. (2003) have articulated the view that the transition from passive consumption to active contribution is necessary to achieve social interaction on *Facebook*. They also define engagement as a psychological phenomenon characterized by sustained attention along with cognitive or emotional involvement and participation as behavioral manifestation in the forms of posting, commenting, or sharing. The use of language assists in the engagement and participation process by fostering emotional and cognitive willingness as well as extended a rhetorical invitation to participate.

By using pronominal markers like first-person plural pronouns (‘we,’ ‘us,’ ‘our’), a unified in-group is linguistically constructed. This type of language provides a sense of shared identity and a mutual goal. This feeling of appreciation psychologically reinforces the individual’s connection to the group's purpose (Ellison et al., 2007).

Cassell and Tversky (2005) argue that the act of participation in online communities is not an innate quality but rather is a behavior that is reinforced through the use of certain positive, validating language. This validation serves as an important form of social capital and reward for members as it directly acknowledges, summarizes, and builds on their communicative contributions. Social reinforcement is provided when important members or moderators use phrases like ‘well said’. This linguistic reinforcement is a strategic means of encouragement that establishes a feedback loop to sustain the user’s participation in the system and motivate them to continue producing quality contributions over an extended period. Kreijns et al. (2003) posited that the failure to provide recognition constitutes a threat to the maintenance of the community. When a user is not acknowledged, it can psychologically signal that their contributions are worthless and, as a result, they may

withdraw their participation. This withdrawal can lead to inactivity in the community and, in extreme cases, a complete exit from the community.

Georgalou (2017) posited that the survival of a social community is enhanced by a linguistic ecology that repeatedly broadcasts the welcome and worth of member contributions. This is realized through the deliberate employment of dialogic rhetoric as a maintenance tool that perpetually opens new avenues for entry. This form of rhetoric systemically invites a wide range of member contributions so that the community can counteract the closing of channels of communications. One of the fundamental rhetorical techniques of social discourse is the use of open-ended divergent questions, for example, asking a member their opinion on a particular issue. This discourse community rhetorical strategy serves the linguistic function of signifying that a community is interactive and integrative, and that continual participation discourse is encouraged. This community discourse practice is effective in addressing the need described by Kreijns et al. (2003) concerning the social and relational dimensions of online interaction. In this regard, community discourse invitations can be structured on the participation task cognitively, as well as the interaction relationally.

2.6.2 The Role of Language in Conflict Management

Kreijns et al. (2003) pointed to the importance of the tone and framing of language in the moderator's role in the repair and maintenance of a community when a conflict arises. Moderators employ mitigation language through hedging, softening, and empathic expressions to resolve confrontations without aggressive escalation or immediate punitive action such as a ban. The achievement of conflict resolution through language, in a manner that positively reinforces the established norms of community interaction, shows the scope and power of language in social order maintenance. By embodying the principle that disagreement can and should be defended constructively without personal attacks, moderators show that the community operates predictively and provides psychological safety. This clarity maintains high community user comfort and retention, as documented in the trust literature (Georgalou, 2017).

Polletta and Redman (2020) stated social media communities and platforms themselves must lay out rules on the use of language. *Facebook*, X (Twitter), and Instagram have rules on hate speech, harassment, and discriminatory language, and have rules on the use of other forms of speech that outline the dos and don'ts of community behavior. Standards are fundamental in forming an atmosphere of free expression and protection from

verbal and emotional assault or marginalization. Social media communities must motivate users to use language and enhanced and promote civility. Language is the determinant of inclusion and exclusion of people by identity, including race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Communities must avoid language that discriminatory language and marginalizes the expressions and identities of diverse communities. Communities must include expressions and identities and use language rooted in diversity.

The *Facebook* platform creates communities, providing safe spaces for members to exchange information and offers support. This form of targeted communicative interaction has reported improved wellness outcomes. Burke and Kraut (2016) found that interaction, specially composed and direct communication, is superior to passive consumption of *Facebook* posts. This is particularly true when the communicative bonds are strong. Within supportive *Facebook* communities, members share experiences and provide emotionally supportive advice, often using empathetic and validating language. This form of bidirectional communication is relationally invested and signals the existence of strong social ties within the community. It is not the case that superficial.

Yes, the cited material identifies the broad use of language, identifies the social norms, and describes their utilization within social media. Unfortunately, it does not narrow down on how this use of language and social norms to form and define the identity of *Facebook* communities. This research is then concerned with the use of language to define the boundaries of social media groups and the specific characteristics of language that sustain the groups. This creates cohesion and limits the friction between members.

2.7 Language Use in Reflecting Existing Social Norms

Language on social media as described in Tang and Chan (2020) is intertwined with social norms. From a social interactions perspective, Andreoutsopoulos (2014b) defines norms as the implicit expectations that a community or society has regarding social behavior. Norms specify acceptable behavior in a given context or situation and provide moral and social guidance (Kuang & Bicchieri, 2024). Although norms are context dependent, social norms are universal in that they provide structure and predictability around social behavior. Research has shown that social media is an effective tool for illustrating norms that underpin social interactions, such as salutations, styles of dress, and conversational practices. However, it is social media and associated practices, as Highfield and Leaver (2016) argue, that for a significant period of time has been used to disrupt social norms, particularly in

styles of dress, where it is common to wear and photograph attire for an audience for public display that is inconsistent with the predominant social norms.

Androutsopoulos (2014b) studied the self-presentation and relational maintenance strategies Facebook users employed through the use of language. The *Facebook* interactions users engage with such as status updates and comments are governed by social policies and norms of interaction. Research demonstrated users of *Facebook* socialize the language of their profile and the picture as a means of conveying their ideal self or the self they aspire in comparison to the actual self they possess. Selective disclosure was and continues to be used as a means of identity construction. The *Facebook* profile has become a means of constructing an identity and as a space of curation where positive attributes of the self and the life are presented. Achievements and positive attributes are heavily amplified and showcased (Zhao et al., 2008).

Zhao et al. (2008) further stated that the norms around public sharing and celebration of social achievements along with the life event sharing practices *Facebook* users engage in, suggesting that the social and cultural norms around sharing and celebration in public are internalised by users. The social accolades users receive through the feedback of their social network such as likes and positive comments, provide an affirmation of their social status and self-worth. The feedback received on the users' posts worked as a means of providing social validation, affirming the self-esteem of the users (Burke & Kraut, 2016). Other research illustrated the sharing of important life events that users posted on social network sites solicited emotionally supportive feedback which enhanced a sense of community and connectedness.

Individuals sometimes share difficult challenges with other people in their social networks for emotional support. Moreover, there has been a shift in mourning practices, sharing and memorializing the dead on social media accounts and receiving emotional and instrumental support (Valkenburg, & Peter, 2007).

According to the social needs theory, people are social beings and social relationships offer a calming effect in stressful situations (Burke & Kraut, 2016). Given the fundamental psychological drive to belong, social contact is anticipated to enhance an individual's well-being. The greatest satisfaction is garnered in relationships when there is contact with emotionally strong ties. The need for belonging goes beyond contact and touch to include care and concern for the individual. Given the theory, we expect an overall measure of an individual's *Facebook* interactions with stronger ties to better predict well-being rather than interactions with weaker social ties. The theory leaves communication, absence of

interaction, and the effort made in ties in the weak social networks unexplained (Burke & Kraut, 2016).

These investigations have concentrated on how people communicate on *Facebook* and exhibit their perfect selves according to social norms and expectations. Nonetheless, research has yet to delve more deeply into the intersections of this type of idealized presentation with other identity facets, such as cultural, gender, or sub-cultural. There is a need to understand how people from all different social communities use language to navigate the 'real' vs. 'ideal' identities dichotomy, and whether some subgroups tend to resist or, on the contrary, assimilate to prevailing norms differently. This study set out to understand how members of Facebook communities employ language to resolve tensions of idealized self-presentation versus reality, especially in relation to different cultural or social contexts.

2.7.1 Language and Social Norms

The vernacular of social media communication is colloquial and conversational and is made up of abbreviations and slang. This casual communicative trend is a wider societal inclination, with most social media users adopting even more informal registers. Users of social media switch and mix codes, and communicate in multimodal fashions through the use of emoticons, memes, and hashtags targeting specific audiences. The use of emoticons and memes, mascots, and gesture codes is typical of social media audiences. There are ways in which social media communicators maintain a more formal register with respect to the communication-setting switch, such as with LinkedIn, which is more professional (Highfield & Leaver, 2016).

Gender norms are social phenomena observed in the interaction and communication of social media in the literature (Herring & Kapidzic 2015). Words of affirmation are more likely to come from women, and men are more likely to display competition. With respect to social media, women and men use language in a polite and supportive manner and in a more assertive and competitive manner, respectively. These communication styles reinforce informal societal expectations regarding gender and the articulation of communication. The performative enactment of language-aided role stereotypes is salient with the use of 'strong' and 'competitive' to describe men, and 'weak' and 'emotional' to describe women.

Non-binary individuals might experience difficulties finding suitable pronouns or self-descriptors and the continual prevalence of gendered language might impact how individuals understand and CRs each of their own gender identity and responsibilities

(Herring & Kapidzic, 2015). Much of the work prepared still describes how individuals use gendered language to form self-identity, whereas far less work is done to describe how individuals use this language to form identity within groups, especially for people who use the internet in ways that specifically focus on gendered social divisions. The linguistic resources and mechanisms that are identified for group formation and group perpetuation within the socio-technical system of the internet need to be explored, as well as the ways in which gendered language undergirds group cohesion, solidarity, and social identity.

Research has demonstrated that users adapted their politeness strategies to conversations held through social media platforms and incorporated politeness strategies to avoid face threats (e.g., emojis to soften criticisms). As hedges showed humility, face threats were avoided. De Fina et al. (2006) noted that online communication might offer players anonymity which can influence their communication and expression. Unrestricted communication may use anonymity social control: social norms disappear when people use avatars that block their faces (Tang & Chan, 2020). Norms can disappear when aggressiveness and social control are absent. Online aggressiveness expressed through trolling and flaming can be absent in f2f communication. Different online communities develop their own norms regarding what is acceptable. In some communities, the use of aggressiveness may be encouraged as social control may be absent. In other communities, social control may be asserted through the use of aggressiveness, and norms may be enacted that frown upon the use of aggressiveness in communication.

Social media is a reflection of culture and its various norms. Cultures differ in how they use and interpret language. For example, in collectivist societies, there is a focus on group harmony and the use of polite language, while in individualistic cultures, there is a preference for bluntness and self-expression. Major social networking sites like Facebook and X exemplify how language practices are regulated culturally in a locality, while also developing site-specific language norms. Tang and Chan (2020) explored how culture and social media interplay, focusing on the finals of global cultural practices and the more personal social identities. Social media is like cultural practices and norms, it facilitates the rapid circulation of ideas and values globally, and when social and geographical barriers are crossed, it more profoundly influences local cultures.

Different cultures can influence and blend with one another in regard to trends in fashion, music, and language, as seen with the use of Instagram, TikTok, and X. As noted by Dynel in 2009, users of social media sites can construct their identity online, and choose the cultural markers and identity features they wish to accentuate. This not only affects personal

self-perception, but also influences how users think and behave socially around others. Although social media can result in cultural homogenization by overshadowing and marginalizing less dominant local traditions, it may also facilitate cultural diversification by empowering cultural minorities and other marginal subgroups. This shows how social media can simultaneously perform multiple, and often, contradictory functions.

The studies that have been done in this area seem to explore every facet of how language functions in social media and other digital platforms as reflective of social customs, yet little research exists on how individuals negotiate social customs in group settings. This is particularly interesting in online social media groups because they are by nature, dynamic systems with members drawn from disparate social, religious, economic, and educational strata.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

The current study focuses on Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). One of the aspects of SIT that fully corresponds to the study's objectives is the 'language of group construction'. On the other hand, MDA describes how meaning is made through the integration of different modes of communication. Social Identity Theory (SIT) was created by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1960s and early 1970s, a period in social psychology often referred to as a 'crisis'.

Collaborator John Turner, formed SIT in an attempt to account for certain uniformities in group behavior. In order for an individual to comprehend a behavior, the formation of a group and the societal structure that surrounds it need to be analyzed as well. The theory outlines the ways in which individuals derive a sense of worth and an identity through their social group affiliations. Social identity is that part of the self-concept derived from the groups to which an individual belongs (Ciepiela, 2012). The theory emphasizes that groups have a collective responsibility which shapes an individual's behavior, attitude, and perception of the self and others. Social networks can encompass one's family, nationality, religion, sports, and even one's occupation. Individuals generally affiliate with groups that they perceive as positive and reputable. On social media, individuals associate and identify with groups that align with their values and social needs (Hogg, 2016).

Social Identity Theory (SIT) was first proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, with Tajfel's pioneering research focusing on the "minimal groups" experiments. These experiments showed the extent to which individuals show in-group favoritism despite the arbitrary differentiation of groups. The initial explanation for the burgeoning theory was

directed at intergroup discrimination and prejudice. During the 1980s, John Turner expanded the theory with the self-categorization theory (SCT) by focusing on the multiple levels of abstraction at which individuals are capable of self-categorizing (i.e., personal identity vs. group identity). Within a social context, there exists the phenomenon of depersonalization, where individuals view themselves primarily as members of a group, rather than as distinct individuals. This, in turn, fosters a stronger group identity. During the 1990s and 2000s, SIT became a dominant approach in the study of intergroup relations and conflicts within the context of political rivalries, ethnic tensions, and nationalism. Notably, scholars such as Rupert Brown and Dominic Abrams applied the theory to foundational aspects of prejudice and social change (Ciepiela, 2012).

Between the 2000s and the 2010s, SIT was applied within the field of organizational psychology, where researchers examined how the different social groups comprising organizational departments and teams affected employee performance, collaboration, and the dynamics of leadership. SIT remains relevant in explaining the emergence of political movements and collective action. It elucidated the reasons behind people's solidarity with social and political causes and the influence of collective identity on political action. From the 2010s to the 2020s, researchers shifted their focus to the ways individuals perform their identities and form group identities in the virtual world. Identity construction on social media platforms such as *Facebook*, WhatsApp and X exemplifies how individuals manage various group memberships in different social contexts, including combinations of private friendships, professional circles, and interest organizations (Halldorson, 2009).

The analysis of SIT concentrated on three main pillars: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison.

2.8.1 Social Categorization

Social categorization refers to the mental process by which individuals streamline social complexities by partitioning individuals into groups based on attributes, including race, gender, age, and profession (McGarty, 2018). From the social identity theory perspective, a social identity of a person as a component of their self-concept includes attributes of social groups and social categories of which the individual is a part (Halldorson, 2009). This identity is formed by the realization of group membership, and the value and emotional importance attached to it. This cognitive operation simplifies the social information and intricacies by reducing it to a binary figure. This streamlining process facilitates social navigation. In *Facebook* groups, individuals consider and describe identity as belonging to a

group based on the principle of community. Members exhibit community identification through shared language and other symbols of membership that indicate social integration.

Distinctive terms, phrases, and references defining a group's identity can be valuable resources (Bouvier & Machin, 2020). Facilitating new members of a group different between in-group members and out-group members is fundamental to social-psychological theory (SIT). This distinction is needed to process the next phase of SIT- social comparison and social identification. The process of self and other- categorization provides a basis for social comparison, thus enabling the in-group members to compare and evaluate the out-group members in the social evaluation process. The positive self- evaluation of the in-group members encourages the in-group members to construct a robust social identity. This is also the basis of social categorization theory for social phenomenon. Hence, social categorization is even more important to understanding the divisions of social media groups. These groups form around identifiable characteristics such as age, ethnicity, and even social educational opportunities as well as more to create an identity (Bessière et. al, 2008). While some such as gender and ethnicity create a more static identity, with others such as education and profession helping shaped fluid a person's identity by allowing Ga change group associations. For maintaining social cohesion of *Facebook* communities, social categorization works in an aligning manner. The communities are bound by specific identities and characteristics which create a sense of belonging.

Social and professional networks that people work with and are a part of span across several identifiers and remain active even after several years. Their shared hobbies and passion fosters a sense of belonging, which may be attributed to inactive groups. Social categorization along with theory and research is invaluable when it comes to the formation and sustenance of communities on social media. By identifying the self and others, people build a collective unit which is a prerequisite for integration. Facilitation through language is fundamental in community formation. Members of *Facebook* social groups will demonstrate belonging and group integration with specific discourse markers, identifiers, and community focused entries that are borders. Use of this social language increases the chances of identification with the ingroup and exclusion from the out group. This assumption supports the second objective, as social categorization remains a key pillar in the sustainment of communities on *Facebook*.

2.8.2 Social Identification

Social identification involves individuals assimilating and adopting the identity of a group, including its norms, values, and behaviors. Social identification is more than simply understanding your group membership. It encapsulates the emotional bond you attach and foster to the group. According to Hogg (2016), with strong social identification, individuals derive a sense of belonging, pride, and self-worth from membership. Social membership is a significant factor to self-image, and self-esteem is reinforced through association with successful social groups. The social group identification with higher status improves the self-worth of the individual. Social identification can also lead to in-group favoritism, as detailed by Trepte (2013). The emotional bias to your in-group's success decreases your objectivity regarding out-groups. Discrimination can also be a feature of social identification. The emotional alignment of language and online behaviors of the 'Let Cook Kenyan Meals' group is aligned and offered as group identity.

Hogg (2016) emphasizes the emotional component of identification to a group, which is valuable in understanding the frameworks of *Facebook* communities and the extant social strategies used to define and negotiate identities through language. Members of *Facebook* communities use particular linguistic strategies such as slang, jargon, and code-switching to indicate and affirm their belonging to the community. Social identification theory posits that individuals gain and sustain pride and self-worth from their identification. *Facebook* communities consolidating group identities may expand or preserve particular linguistic practices to distinguish themselves from others. Specific community members' use of greetings, hashtags, humor, and memes, or other inside jokes fosters an emotional bond that differentiates and identifies them as members of the group, reinforcing their collective identity. This principle will help delineate the identity construction practices employed by Facebook communities.

2.8.3. Social Comparison

Social identity and positive social identity is framed as social comparison. Out-group comparisons and in-group analysis helps potential emotional bias within social categorization. Emotional bias and social in-group identification can influence identification bias. Emotional bias can influence comparison patterns. Social identification bias can impact social identification and social categorization. Stets and Burke (2014) explain how social comparison fits within social identification theory. After sorting and categorizing social in-groups and out-groups, an individual can determine positive evaluations and comparison

levels. An individual can determine their social worth based on out-group comparison value and characteristics. From self-worth, an individual can determine group self-esteem and group memberships. An individual can differ social identification patterns based on comparison direction. An individual can boost self-esteem based on in-group associations within downward comparison. Social improvement can also identify self-comparison in in-groups. Self-comparison in out-groups offers an individual critiques based on social identification and social integration. Out-group and in-group comparisons can influence group value and promote in-group favoritism. An individual can self-identify with social in-group comparison. Social identification patterns based on comparison characteristics can influence comparison integration and evaluation. An individual can feel a sense of group value based on in-group comparison. Social identification patterns can influence identification bias. Emotional bias can influence comparison patterns. Social identification bias can impact social identification and social categorization. Stets and Burke (2014) explain how social comparison fits within social identification theory. After sorting and categorizing social in-groups and out-groups, an individual can determine positive evaluations and comparison levels. An individual can determine their social worth based on out-group comparison value and characteristics. From self-worth, an individual can determine group self-esteem and group memberships. An individual can differ social identification patterns based on comparison direction. An individual can boost self-esteem based on in-group associations within downward comparison.

Social improvement can also identify self-comparison in in-groups. Self-comparison in out-groups offers an individual critiques based on social identification and social integration. Out-group and in-group comparisons can influence group value and promote in-group favoritism. An individual can self-identify with social in-group comparison. Social identification patterns based on comparison characteristics can influence comparison integration and evaluation. An individual can feel a sense of group value based on in-group comparison. Social identification patterns based on comparison characteristics can influence comparison integration and evaluation. An individual can feel a sense of group value based on in-group comparison. Social identification patterns based on comparison characteristics can influence comparison integration and evaluation. Increased solidarity within a group can lead to a desire to protect the favorable image of the group.

Social comparisons can be biased. The strengths of an out-group might be understated or the weaknesses exaggerated in a way that enhances the image of the in-group. Such comparisons can lead to the formation of stereotypes and prejudices. Social identity theory

can explain how the members of the *Facebook* group strengthen their sense of belonging and pride. The Let's Cook Kenyan Meals group, for example, elevates the value of their ingroup by using group-constituting language and emphasizing community bonds in contrast to other groups. Other language that implies group exclusivity can further boost group pride and cohesion (Hogg, 2016).

Stets et al. (2014) and Hogg (2016) recognize the efficacy of social comparison theory in examining the use of social norms and language ascribed to social comparison phenomena within *Facebook* communities. Social comparison can be downward (in-group comparisons to out-group) and upward (in-group comparisons to superordinate groups) *Facebook* communities frequently employ these comparisons during conversations, comments, and posts, establishing social norms as communities conceptualize their position concerning other groups.

Hogg (2016) framed his analysis of social comparison based on Social Identity Theory (SIT) which posited that the members' desire to protect the group's position. Positive social identity is suggested in the absence of hostile or critical language and conflict cross inhibition that internally critiques the group. Research on the contextual discourse *Facebook* communities use to frame group discussions, language in the moderation of debates, and the promotion of incentivized cohesion can illuminate the social norms underlying the group order. In addition, social comparison can produce discourse that accentuates the group's exclusivity. Facebook group members are likely to possess group-specific linguistic strategies that include colloquialisms restricting access to outsider members of the group and lapidary expressions that affirm the group's exclusivity. This principle will inform objective three, which aims to demonstrate the social norms of language use within *Facebook* communities.

2.9 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) involves the study of communication that includes diverse expressions like Kress and Bezemer (2023) noted. MDA explores the interrelation of these forms and meaning construction for any given discourse and context, including media, advertising, education, and everyday communication. At the core of MDA is the study of texts and the interrelationships of different communicative forms like images, films, videos, sounds, and written discourse. MDA also examines the design of multimodal texts and the construction of meaning. The semiotic resources of color, framing, focus, and positioning of elements are also leveraged while creating meaning (O'Hallaron, 2011).

As indicated by Kress and Bezemer (2023), MDA recognized that communication is more than just spoken or written language and consists of multiple semiotic constituents. MDA tried to understand the ways individuals and communities constitute, negotiate, and construe meaning by studying the complex interrelations and integrations of these resources. A significant part of the multimodal discourse analysis emanated from Halliday's social semiotic theory of language which considers language to be one of the many semiotic instruments (gestures, images, music, etc.) people use to articulate and signify meaning. MDA is the theory that focuses on the analysis of complex texts that integrate and use different modes of communication, for instance, images with verbal or written language. It is based on three fundamental principles: the ways in which representation and symbol construction appreciation, the initiation and perpetuation of communicative interaction, and the meaning construction from the ensemble of modes. In simple terms, MDA is an approach that explains the interaction and integration of various communication forms to achieve a particular meaning (Kress & Van Leeuwen 2020).

The theory discussed in this study is the use of multimodal elements in Facebook communities for information dissemination. Kress and van Leeuwen (2020) in their work on MDA stated that various other forms, such as, images, colors, music, typeface, and other forms, work like oral and written text. These elements work with language as active participants in the construction of messages that explain and add detail.

The principal advocates for MDA theory have provided a vast amount of literature on the development of MDA theory. MDA emerged as a successor to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which emerged from Critical Language Analysis. MDA theory is described as the interdisciplinary approach to the study of communication. While CDA is mainly a language-focused analysis, the MDA approach shifts the study focus to the interplay of various other forms of communicative signals which CDA often ignores. The foundational idea of “modes of signification” which is core to the MDA theory was first introduced by De Saussure who studied language and culture, embedding his analysis on the sign.

Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) was developed to account for the gaps of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which, in turn, developed from Critical Language Awareness and Critical Language Analysis. While CDA analyzes the role of language within social power, it ignores other communicative forms, which is why Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) came up with MDA to analyze complex multimodal texts, including the pictures and emojis. Iedema (2003) argues that elements other than language, including images, color, and typography, communicate meaning. This theory incorporates and builds on Halliday's

Systemic Functional Grammar, Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) including ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions (reconceptualized by Kress and Van Leeuwen as representational, interactional, and compositional meaning). It developed a means of exploring visual and other modes that draw attention to and organize information (new/given, ideal/real) and meaning-making in culturally defined ways, using the collective elements of the lens. The key components of MDA theory can be summarized as follows:

2.9.1 Representation and Communication

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) explanation of representation and communication describes how meaning-makers employ sign resources to both portray and communicate their understanding of the world. This explanation emphasizes the decisions made as well as the social consequences of those decisions. Thus, any system of meaning construction (a signification mode) must depict some human experience of the world. In this regard, the signification modes described in this study represented real-world objects, and the relationships that existed between them, regardless of how those objects and relationships were illustrated. This tenet was relevant to the study as it illustrated how *Facebook* communities used text and images to engage and persuade users to pay attention to the communities' posts.

According to Kress (2010), the foundation of representation and communication is social semiotics, which understands signs as products of social and cultural constructs. MDA differs from traditional linguistics which predominantly focuses on verbal language, as it embraces the visual, aural, gestural, spatial and linguistic modes of meaning construction, each with its unique affordances and semiotic potentials. For example, while language is better at expressing temporality and abstract ideas, an image can express spatial relationships much better (Jewitt, 2013). People in *Facebook* communities exchange data using a combination of pictures and emojis with written text.

In describing the process of representation, Jewitt (2013) considers the meaning-maker's conscious and unconscious choices, which is what this study aims to explore in the case of *Facebook*, understanding the conscious and unconscious decisions the platform makes in their attempts to claim visibility and construct an identity. Kress (2010) pointed out that, at its core, designating communication is a constituent of a process where individuals choose and arrange semiotic resources. Such choices are dictated, and at times constrained, by the chooser's interests and the communicative situation, the resources of a given medium, and the semiotic affordances of the available modalities. The selected modalities and the

particular arrangements of the resources make them the means through which particular aspects of the world (participants, processes, and circumstances) are constructed and rendered for representation for an audience.

Representations do more than mirror reality; they shape it, as Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) explain.

Audiences apprehend people, objects, and events through different perceptions based on the representation's meaning, which varies depending on the selection and articulation of the modes used. In visual communications, for instance, the choice of a particular perspective, frame, color, and gaze determine to a large degree how the people and objects presented are understood, and how the viewer is positioned toward them. This principle is crucial for understanding the meaning associated with particular people, objects, and actions in visual communications. In the case of an image, there is understanding what it depicts, but also how the image elements interact to produce certain meanings about the particular social reality. In community identity scenarios, the visual elements of food, emojis and emoticons represent identity, and are therefore not neutral. Together, the language of captions, comments, or text, serves to articulate and solidify meaning in collaboration with visuals (Jewitt, 2013). Hence, this principle is relevant in addressing the first objective of this study, which aims to determine the identity construction strategies employed by *Facebook* communities through text.

2.9.2 The Meaning of the Complex Text

Complex texts comprise a heterogeneous collection of meaning-making components. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) call these components “modes of signification.” The meaning-making elements of a text can include images, colors, sounds, and even music along with language. The theory also takes into account specific elements of composition and portrayal, such as the representation of characters and the visual aspects of the text (e.g., the use of different camera angles, proximity, and the prominence of various components). All these aspects can shape the meaning of a text to a significant degree, especially in the case of multimodal texts. The emphasis of this theory is the integration and orchestration of the various semiotic components to produce an integrated message in a multimodal text. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) elaborate this idea through the textual metafunction of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which aimed to unite language to form cohesive texts (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). This study employed the tenet's principles of information value, salience, and framing.

This involves exploring how the arrangement (left vs. right, top vs. bottom, center vs. margin), prominence (size, color, emphasis), and the relationship of proximity or distance between graphic and verbal elements function to attract attention and organize the overall message in *Facebook* communities.

The principles of this study have been correctly applied on the objective three of this study that was aimed at understanding language use and social norms in *Facebook* communities, considering the espoused principles for the complex interactions in *Facebook* posts and comments. It uses the information value principle to construct meaning considering the position of elements in the hierarchy of the spatial arrangement; that is, what is presented at the top is aspirational and what is presented at the bottom is more grounded. The left-and right-placed elements provide and context, whereas the right-placed elements provide new information. The study also uses salience to study the importance and the range of the different communication modes- information, images and emojis and how they are made to stand out. Finally, framing is applied to study how the modes of communication that are connected or separated affect the perception of individuation or differentiation. Broadly, this meaning and the impact of the elements in the communication is the emphasis on the analytical tools of the tenet (Jewitt, 2013).

2.9.3 Creating and Maintaining Interaction

Kress and van Leeuwen (2020) explained that Creating and Maintaining Interaction, or Interactional meaning, is the Turning Moving Symbol of Communication Kress & Van Leeuwen2020 inspired by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013)'s interpersonal meta-function in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), this principle investigates how attitudes, social distance, power asymmetries, and invitations are signaled through various semiotic resources (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020). It focuses on the social actions that texts perform in relation to their addressees, and through which they articulate social actions and engage with their audiences. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) discuss several important techniques in which multimodal, and in particular visual, texts focused on the construction and management of interactional meaning with their audience. These are the gaze, in which direct visual contact ('demand') calls for engagement and absence of gaze (offer) positions the audience as an observer, and social distance which is determined by framing – close-ups promote intimacy, medium shots social connection and long shots distance. The angle of interaction also determines engagement: frontal positions foster inclusion, oblique positions foster exclusion and vertical angles (high, eye-level, low) indicate difference and power. Finally, modality

refers to the relation of control the audience and the text creators with visual and verbal elements and means by which they affect the audience's perception of the claim's veracity or credibility (Machin, 2016).

This principle was important for the second objective of the study focused on how language use aids in the maintenance of communities on Facebook. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) articulated how the visual components of communication are coupled with interaction processes that are achieved and sustained between the sender and receiver of a visual message. This study sought to apply this idea in assessing the interaction between a certain class of posts and the comments on them, as well as the modes of signification that symbolize the represented ideas. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) explained that a visual image comprises two participant categories. The study intended to understand the relationship between these participants, which are the photographer, the audience and the image encapsulated people, places, and things. Focused on the interactive elements of meaning and visual forms of communication, the study sought to determine how signification modes influence *Facebook* users.

The interaction conceptualized in this framework suggested that the social positioning of the viewer and the visual determines the meaning generated and the use of the visual communication. Thus, it was imperative to integrate this principle in the study's multimodal analysis of the signifiatory modes and the exploration of the effects on the audience.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology which is used to meet the research objectives. It comprises of the research design, study location, study population, sample size and sampling methods, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design

The researcher adopted a qualitative research design. Qualitative research design focuses on exploring and comprehending the intricacies of human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena by utilizing non-numerical data. This approach seeks to show the meanings, motivations, and cultural contexts related to a specific topic (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2024). A phenomenological approach was utilized to capture the lived experiences of users. Qualitative research design was useful to the study as it provided a systematic approach used to explore and understand the experiences, meanings, and perspectives of individuals or groups in a natural setting.

3.3 Location of the Study

This is library research that drew data online. The study was carried out within selected public *Facebook* group called *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals* which has a strong community presence and active user engagement.

3.4 Population of the Study

The study looked at *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals* a *Facebook* group. This attracted people from all over the Kenya who have interest in cooking. Five hundred posts and comments published between January 1 2025 to March 1 2025 were used as the sampling frame.

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The study focused on thirty posts and thirty comments by the participants which were purposively sampled from the *Facebook* group known as *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals*. Purposive sampling was used for this research as it focused on posts based on particular

characteristics or qualities that were central to the research (Dornyei, 2007). Posts and comments sampled were those that brought out linguistic strategies, how language is used to maintain social media communities, and how language is used to reflect social norms in *Facebook* communities. Thirty posts and comments provided enough data to meet the requirements of this research. A sample of thirty posts and thirty comments was purposively selected to provide a manageable yet representative subset, capturing key themes, such as linguistic strategy and Facebook community maintenance within the larger dataset of five hundred. The *Facebook* group was chosen based on its relevance to the research topic. It is an interest-based group that is dynamic in nature since it consists of people from all walks of life brought together by their interest in cooking. Other than cooking the people in the group are brought together by other emerging issues like politics, education, medicine, and weight gain and weight loss among others.

3.6 Data Collection Tools and Instruments

Data was collected using CrowdTangle, a Meta-owned analytics tool designed for accessing and analyzing public *Facebook* content. The tool was important in retrieving of posts and thirty comments systematically including comments from LCKM online community. The study focused on thirty posts and thirty comments, purposively sampled from a *Facebook* group called LCKM, a platform that brings together people from different backgrounds to share their cooking experiences. CrowdTangle facilitated the identification, extraction, and organization of relevant textual data for qualitative analysis, traceability, ensuring authenticity, and compliance with ethical standards for social media research.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher traced and downloaded thirty posts that have been in the group for the past three months as well as the people's reaction to those posts through comments. The focus was on posts that are geared towards identity creation and the dynamic nature of the posts. The post and comments were sampled based on the language use and the linguistic strategies used in the posts. The researcher used participant observation to observe discussions, comments, and interact with other members while observing language use, social interactions, and identity expressions as well as took note of recurring themes, types of language used, and other specific language practices that contributed to identity creation.

Thirty posts and thirty comments were selected from the communities *Facebook* page using crowd tangle analytic tool then sorted and labeled post one to thirty and accompanying comment one to thirty. The posts and comments were then arranged in line with the objectives, post one to fifteen were set aside to establish the linguistic strategies used by *Facebook* communities to create identity.

3.8 Data Analysis and Presentation

For this research, we used content analysis which is a qualitative technique. It entails understanding a body of text by discerning patterns, inter meanings and themes. Albert and Csizér (2022), content analysis is about coding text within a document, sorting it, and identifying relationships. This technique was ideal in this case, as it enabled a close study of the use of language and the construction of identities in Facebook interactions. Content analysis was research technique chosen for this study as it allowed detailed study of language. Identity formations and use of language is crucial in Facebook interactions especially to the given population. The analysis was done to guarantee its accuracy and consistency.

(a) Data preparation,

We organized and secured the data I had collected for the comments, posts and the sample visual materials from the Let's Cook Kenyan Meals Facebook community. Anonymity was maintained by reference coding each data set for traceability during the analysis.

In order to tell the Facebook community's posts and comments data set, I had to read and reread the data and focus on how and in what way the group participants or members communicated. This was to ensure that I understand the data and its context. This was crucial in the analysis as it helped shape preliminary ideas in the data analysis.

(b) Development of Coding Categories:

The primary framework and objectives of the research helped me define the first set of codes. Although, in the process, I identified more codes in the data that helped define different aspects of the emerging ideas of identity and culture.

(c) Manual Coding:

We appreciated the close reading of the data, so we coded it manually. Each post and comment was dissected, and the relevant portions that captured the main ideas or themes were tagged with codes.

(d) Grouping and Theme Development:

In the next stage, we consolidated the coded data around major themes. The objectives of the research were focused on community member's use of language, imagery, and social interaction to construct and negotiate identity.

(e) Interpretation of Findings:

To explain the analyzed data, we used text narratives and excerpts of quotes drawn from the group posts and comments to illustrate the descriptions. This, we believe, highlighted the explanations relative to the language and the social and cultural factors that were contextually relevant to the Let's Cook Kenyan Meals *Facebook* community.

As part of the research on the dishes different members of the group posted, pictures were analyzed using MDA. MDA helped understand the role various attributes like color, arrangement, and structure played in the visualization of the identity and the sense of belonging to a community. The combination of the text and the image evaluation provided a clear picture of the different ways community members showcased their identities in online spaces.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

According to Dornyei (2007), balance in research ethics involves the equitable treatment of participants and the honesty of the investigation and the resulting conclusions. It is an ongoing concern that starts with the research idea and continues even after the final report is published.

In this study, the researcher ensured the confidentiality of the participants and the data collected by numbering the posts and comments from one to thirty, and using pseudonyms, thus, avoiding the attribution of comments to their authors.

The researcher got approval from EUREC and NACOSTI after sending a formal request. The collected data was anonymized to protect the feelings of the participants. Data sources were properly cited to prevent plagiarism. The data collected from the Facebook post and comments, journals, other books and online sites were only used for the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises three sections where the first section gives the linguistic strategies on social media, the second section deals with the role of language in maintaining social media communities and the third section deals with language use in reflecting existing social norms.

4.2 Linguistic Strategies on Social Media

In *Facebook* communities, users create identity through interplay of language and other semiotic modes; they use various linguistic strategies to present their persona and to portray the image that they want others to see (Georgalou, 2017). Linguistic strategies as presented by Pérez-Sabater and Moffo (2019), refer to the conscious or unconscious ways individuals and groups employ language including code switching and code mixing, using emojis and emoticons, stylistic variations, narrative construction, discursive positioning among others to achieve specific social, communicative, and identity-related goals within the unique environment of social media. This study unearthed various linguistic strategies used by *Facebook* communities to create identity. *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals* (LCKM) members used nomination strategies like hashtags, perspectivation strategies like code switching and code mixing and stylistic variation. Argumentation strategies like narratives, language play and creativity, discursive positioning, and identity markers were also used.

4.2.1 Nomination Strategies

Nomination, encompassing labeling and naming, is a crucial and active linguistic strategy through which identities are constructed, social actors are categorized, and discourse is framed. Nomination is widely employed in media representation, political discourse, online communities and branding actively shaping perceptions individuals and groups hold about themselves and others (Krämer & Otto, 2024).

Hashtags and tags, according to Highfield and Leaver (2016) are identified as major nomination strategies used by social media communities to build communities. Further hashtags act as crucial tools for users to categorize their content and for others to discover information and communities around shared interests. This nomination process allows members of the community with common interests to find each other (Highfield & Leaver, 2016).

Post one

#My fermentation journey

The last time I fermented beetroots, I grated them.....

I went back to the drawing board for my love of beetroots...This time I nailed it 🍷

The post #’my fermentation journey helps the author to create an identity of a committed member of the group who despite facing challenges in fermenting beetroots, works hard and finally achieves desired results. By framing the post as part of an ongoing journey, the hashtag emphasizes the value of learning and experimentation, making the specific content about fermenting beetroots relatable. Furthermore, the hashtag acts as an organizational tool, linking the post to a broader community discussion on fermentation and signaling an inclusive, educational approach to shared culinary knowledge. This argument is supported by Krämer and Otto (2024), who argue that hashtags do more than help people find conversations about blocking; they can serve other purposes within discussions about blocking. They show the type of speech act that they are part of. For example, the above post belongs to assertive speech act category which is seen through phrases like ‘this time I nailed it meaning that the author is so sure of the outcome.

Highfield and Leaver (2016) argue that users often incorporate hashtags that reflect their identities, interests or affiliations, signaling their belonging to certain communities. This act of nomination through hashtags helps build and project individual and collective identities. For example, in this post ‘#My Fermentation Journey’ gives the author a platform to share fermentation experiences in LCKM, attracting the attention of other members who have interest in fermentation therefore creating a culinary identity in fermentation. McGarty (2018) supported the argument that the hashtag ‘#MyFermentation Journey’ acts as a powerful social categorization tool which classifies the author and anyone who uses or engages with it into a specific, interest-based sub-group within the larger LCKM community ‘fermentation enthusiasts,

The post was followed by this comment.

Comment one

#Watu wa BENEFITS: Fermented foods help in increasing your gut bacteria variety, very key for proper digestion and absorption of nutrients.

This comment strategically employs the Swahili hashtag ‘#WatuWaBENEFITS’ (People of Benefits) to establish a distinct in-group identity within LCKM, uniting members with a shared interest in the health advantages of food, particularly fermented items.

Functioning as a linguistic marker, this hashtag distinguishes this ‘benefits-oriented’ community. Furthermore, the comment reinforces this identity by sharing nutritional knowledge about fermented foods, positioning the subgroup as a source of reliable health information and advocates for healthy living, thereby sparking further discussion and solidifying their identity as a community of learners.

The author has used code switching ‘#WatuWaBENEFITS’ to create an identity that is distinctly Kenyan where users switch between English Kiswahili and local languages during communication as supported by (Ogechi, 2019). ‘Watu’ is the plural showing that the author is set to address a large audience of people who believe in knowing the benefit of something before trying it. Further ‘watu’ acts as a form of identification by declaring that they belong to a category that values the benefits of something before trying it (Hogg, 2016).

Post two

Utamu wa simsim ni nini? Procedure Step by step #snacks #snacktime



Figure 1: Left roasted sesame seeds, right a pot and a plate of sesame seeds

Utamu wa simsim ni nini? Procedure Step by step #snacks #snacktime as shown in Figure 1 uses hashtags to build identity in the LCKM by defining and celebrating specific aspects of Kenyan culinary culture and language (#UtamuWaSimsim), creating a shared vocabulary for the type of content being shared (#snacks, #snacktime), increasing visibility and facilitating topic-based discussions, and fostering a sense of belonging and shared

experience among members, both Kenyan and non-Kenyan. This post further aligns with Kress and Bezemer (2023), who argue that meaning making, is multimodal; in the above post the author presents a pictorial illustration on how to make simsim step by step thus positioning them as knowledgeable in preparing simsim, creating a Kenyan culinary culture. The multimodal approach in presenting the recipe for preparing simsim is also meant to make all members to see the procedure of preparing simsim, this approach positions the community as not only meant to showcase food but a space where people can learn how to prepare various foods.

The post was followed by this comment

Comment two

#Learnt from you. Had little simsim.



Figure 2: Roasted sesame seeds

#learnt from you as shown in figure two shows that one of the members benefitted from the knowledge shared within the community. It highlights the collaborative nature of LCKM, where members learn from each other's posts and experiences. This reinforces the identity of the group as a valuable resource for culinary knowledge and skill development related to Kenyan foods.

Jewitt (2013) emphasizes that digital environments and practices are inherently multimodal, involving the integrated use of various semiotic resources such as images, sound, layout, movement, and interaction. In the above post, we can conclude that the author creates identity through the visual mode which is a plate of simsim that is neatly presented and

framing of the shot is close up, the color is golden brown. The presentation positions the author as having learnt an important skill of preparing simsim therefore promoting the identity of the group as a valuable resource for culinary knowledge. The linguistic mode that is the hashtag presents a text "#learntfromyou" nominates a topic of discussion which is learning how to prepare simsim. Lexical choice of the words 'learnt' (past tense of learn) and 'from you' indicating a source of knowledge as from the author of the original post # utamu wa simsim ni nini. Other members seeing that one of them actually benefitted from the post #utamu wa simsim ni nini procedure step by step is a way of drawing their attention as argued by Krämer & Otto (2024) that a hashtag might be used for emphasis making them feel that they are part of the community thus creating a group identity.

4.2.2 Perspectivation Strategies

Based on Bouvier and Machin's (2020) work, perspectivation is a fundamental and unavoidable aspect of language use, especially within the dynamic and often subjective environment of social media. The study further argues that the words members use as well as the symbols denote their view point on the agenda of the discussion.

4.2.2.1 Code mixing and Code Switching

According to Reyes (2004), code switching and code mixing play an important role in creating meaning and identity. In LCKM members employ this linguistic strategy to create a cultural identity as well as identity that is unique for the members of the community.

Post three

Wakuu, please advise..kati ya cooker ya Von na ya Ramtons, ni Gani poa? Am stuck sijui nibuy Gani

The post creates a unique identity in the group through the use of code mixing and code switching. These linguistic strategies enable members to build a friendly tone that presents the group as a space where members navigate their cultural identity shared by other members who are able to use the conversational style.

Reyes (2004) argues that code-switching other than being a linguistic phenomenon is also a social practice that members use to express their feelings. This argument aligns with the above post where the author uses code switching strategically to position themselves as a member of the group genuinely seeking guidance from the rest of the members on the best cookers in the market. The use of the phrase 'wakuu please advise' wakuu interpreted as

bosses is used to show that the author acknowledges that the members of the community are knowledgeable in terms of kitchenware. Please advice is an acknowledgement of dependability of members in giving genuine guidance on key issues that affect other members of the community.

By using the Swahili term ‘wakuu’ (interpreted as bosses or respected experts) within an otherwise English request, the author immediately signals an awareness of and adherence to an informal social categorization within the LCKM community. This linguistic choice categorizes the community members themselves as a knowledgeable in-group, implicitly distinguishing them from outsiders or less informed individuals (McGarty, 2018).

Comment three

Good cookers to recommend, Bosch, Siemens, Electrolux, Frigidaire, Bompani, Elba and Smeg..these brands will give you service mpaka ushangae

The comment shows both code-switching and code mixing used in multilingual communities and *Facebook* communities like LCKM, a blend of languages helps create a shared identity among members. For example; the comment utilizes English and Swahili, using English to talk about brands and Kiswahili for the phrase ‘mpaka ushangae’ which means (until you’re amazed). The use of Kiswahili phrase adds a sense of familiarity that other community members can relate with creating a cultural identity. According to Halldorson (2009), employing code-switching and code mixing by the author demonstrates social identification with the linguistic strategies and the essence of culture in LCKM community. The decision to use ‘mpaka ushangae’ an expressive Kiswahili phrase shows the author's understanding of the group's informal, culturally oriented communication style.

Further, the comment uses English words with Swahili syntax, combining the two languages in a way that reflects local linguistic habits. For example, "will give you service mpaka ushangae" mixes English with Swahili, creating a unique hybrid language that mirrors everyday Kenyan speech patterns and connects with a bilingual audience. This mixing according to Reyes (2004), helps build a sense of belonging and shared understanding among community members who appreciate this informal, expressive style.

Post four

Ladies what do you do with your pesa ya chama? Kwani hii pesa iko na Nini, my wife ate chama Jana na Leo ameingia na utensils from Kamukunji nikashangaa kwani anafungua duka..Imagine, she owns 16 hotpots, 696 spoons, 234 forks, 356 plates, 58 knives not to mention 9 pancakes among others... Ukiingia kitchen yetu utadhania uko kwa malimali shop.

The author of this post employs code-switching and code-mixing, in humorously expressing his concerns about his wife's use of "pesa ya chama" (merry-go-round money) to engage the predominantly Kenyan audience in a relatable discussion about women's finances. His argument is that women invest a lot of their financial resources in kitchen ware even when it is not deemed necessary. The post shows that LCKM is a platform where people can share intimate family issues without the fear of being condemned. From the comment section the author is not alone but can easily relate with other members with similar challenges fostering communication through code switching and code mixing.

The informal, conversational tone established by mixing English and Swahili, directly addressing ladies, and using Kiswahili phrases like ate 'chama,' 'Kamukunji,' and 'malimali shop' echoes with shared cultural knowledge and everyday experiences, creating a local Kenyan identity into the narrative. This language transition, bringing out multilingual Kenyan conversations as Reyes (2004) suggests, turn-taking and engagement enhances the authenticity of the shared cultural context and invites communal humor around familiar practices.

Comment four

She is still young....I used to buy the same way coz my Mama taught me not to borrow utensils from neighbors in case I have visitors. Eti Mama ni kujipanga. Now I have a load of utensils some dating over 30yrs but quality. A part of me doesn't regret buying coz I can't find the same quality in shops currently and I am able to pass over some to my children but I feel my kitchen is over cluttered. Let her do what pleases her for now but encourage her to go for quality over quantity like opting for a quality kitchen electrical appliance over utensils....

The mix of English and Kiswahili in this comment creates a shared identity that is unique to Kenyan audience. The comment is a response defending the lady that the husband in post four feels that she wastes money in buying excess utensils; she argues that it is a common practice among young wives; this argument makes the husband to learn that he is not the only one worried about women buying a lot of utensils. Trepte (2013), supports that the comment reframes a husband's isolated problem into a shared group experience, which is a key function of SIT, which is achieved through social categorization, which recasts his concern as a 'common practice among young wives' and places him in a new, implied in-group, it allows for social identification, as he gains a sense of camaraderie and validation from learning that others share his struggle. Finally, this process fosters positive distinctiveness by turning the shared challenge into a basis for in-group solidarity and a unique, relatable identity for both the husbands and the wives.

The mix of English and Swahili in this comment builds a shared identity that is unique to a Kenyan audience. By mixing the languages, the speaker connects to the community in a way that feels both casual and culturally specific, reinforcing values that community members can relate. The Kiswahili phrase adds nostalgia and familiarity, evoking a sense of intergenerational knowledge that ties back to the values many members may have learned from their own parents or guardians. The blend of language reflects both personal and collective identity, making this comment feel part of a larger Kenyan narrative as supported by Ogechi (2019), who argues that common linguistic practices of code switching and code mixing in Kenya are not random but strategic ways of negotiating multiple identities. Additionally, by using this informal, mixed-language style, the speaker establishes a conversational tone that feels supportive and friendly. This tone aligns with the communal spirit of LCKM, where members frequently share not only cooking tips but also life advice and cultural insights, building an identity around shared experiences and heritage

Post five

What is the science behind the spoon making porridge in a cup more dilute? After kuramba kijiko then ukoroge uji nayo inakuwa majimaji.

This post employs code-switching, transitioning from English (the science behind) to Swahili phrases like ‘kuramba kijiko’ and ‘ukoroge uji nayo inakuwa majimaji,’ to blend an analytical tone with culturally specific humor and relatability concerning a common Kenyan experience. This code switching making use of Kiswahili terms for everyday actions, creates a Kenyan flavor and bring to mind shared memories, while the interaction between the two languages shows a mix of curiosity and humor that enhances a collective identity around uniquely Kenyan ways of talking about food, traditions, and daily occurrences.

Based on Bouvier and Machin's (2020) work, on understanding discourse in the context of social media, the results of this study show that each linguistic choice, from the specific words selected to the grammatical structures employed, reflects a particular opinion on the topic under discussion. This construction of perspective is not neutral; it plays a crucial role in how audiences interpret messages and in shaping their attitudes and beliefs. The question is an earnest request for information from trusted members whom she feels part of.

Comment five

The spoon has remnants of saliva containing the enzyme salivary amylase or ptyalin that begins to digest your porridge into maltose. Maltose is a soluble disaccharide which presents as the watery porridge. Habari ndio hiyo

The above comment in line with Reyes (2004) who posits that, code-switching and code-mixing are important tools for creating identity by allowing people to signal their affiliation with different cultural, ethnic, or social groups; is both educational and relatable; creating a shared identity within the group by mixing scientific terminology with Kiswahili. The author uses English to explain the scientific reasoning behind the phenomenon, using technical terms like 'enzyme,' 'salivary amylase,' 'maltose,' and 'disaccharide.' By employing English for the scientific explanation, the author shows authority and clarity, giving strength to the information.

Formal, English-based explanation builds an educational tone, offering members a fresh perspective on a common experience. However, the author switches to Swahili at the end with the phrase "habari ndio hiyo," which can be translated to 'that is the story' the phrase makes the serious explanation laughable, making the scientific argument lighter and aligning it with the informal, community-driven spirit of the group. The switch to Kiswahili here acts as a way of concluding the explanation in a friendly tone, enhancing shared cultural identity. McGarty (2018), supports this argument where author's use of a formal, English-based explanation initially creates a social categorization of expert. However, the next switch to the informal Kiswahili phrase "habari ndio hiyo" is an act re-categorization, linguistically shifting the author's identity from that of a distant academic to that relatable member, breaking down the social barrier and positioning everyone on a more equal footing within the community.

Post six

I come from a community that calls eggs 'amagena' or simply,stones. Honestly, I don't understand the relationship. How could one person just stand, stare at a hen drop some stuff and label it stones and decide that that was food? What were they staring at in the first place? Didn't we all sing 'funga duka Moi anapita kadush'? But I forgive that ancestor of mine by making curry out of stones and further annoying wheat haters by making some dry pan toast for a lazy Sunday.

How do you call eggs in your language?

In this post code switching has been used to create a cultural identity where the author of the post has given the name of eggs in his community (anagena). The author wonders why eggs in their mother tongue can be interpreted as stones and goes further to challenge the other members of the group to give the names of eggs in their native languages. This sparks a debate where the other members give the names of eggs in their community bringing out their cultural inclination. This argument is in line with Das's (2012) argument that speakers

consciously and unconsciously choose to switch between languages to achieve specific communicative effects, rather than simply doing so out of habit or lack of proficiency in one language.

The post includes the phrase "funga duka Moi anapita kadush," which recalls a well-known Kenyan school chant. This code mixing of Swahili and slang evokes memories of a shared childhood experience, common among many Kenyans who grew up during the late president Moi's era. This places the author within a generation that understands these cultural references, fostering a nostalgic connection among readers who can relate. The humorous mix of English and Kiswahili also develops a playful, conversational tone that shows Kenyan cultural experience, creating a relaxed, a funny feeling common among the members of the group.

The multimodal interplay of a typical breakfast alongside the book title 'bound to last' as shown in Figure 3 helps the author to create humorous reflection of a typical breakfast in a Kenyan setting. Grounded the ekegusii unique term for eggs (amagena) and Kenyan cultural reference (funga duka) the author uses humor to question the logic behind calling a delicious breakfast 'stones'. The act of preparing the breakfast visually links food to cultural identity, and the concluding direct question serves as an invitation for cross-cultural linguistic exchange, therefore encouraging other members to share the names of eggs in their mother tongue eventually creating a cultural identity.

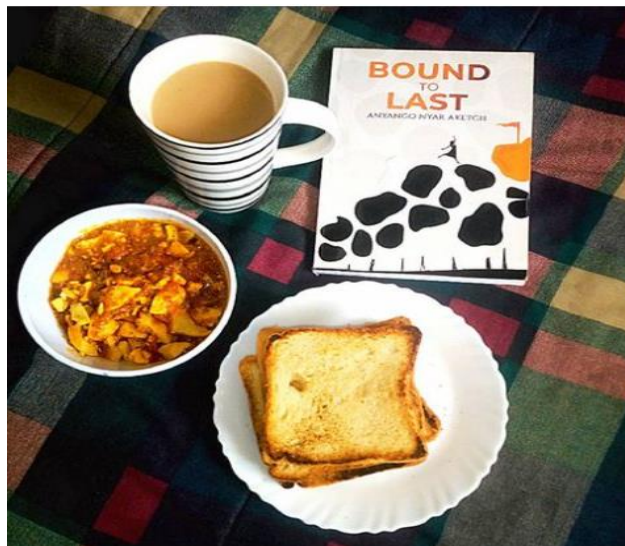


Figure 3: Scrambled eggs, toast, a cup of tea and a book with a title bound to last

The multimodal presentation in figure3 is meant to express the author's anger towards his ancestors calling eggs stones when the author sees them as delicious. The book bound to last is put alongside the delicious breakfast deliberately to show that eggs which the author's

ancestors according to him so demeaned as to call stones are the kind of breakfast that is bound to last supported by Jewitt (2013) who argues meaning is created through the strategic interplay of different communication modes.

Comment six

Singular: Erikina

Plural :Amakina .

sounds almost same. I think our ancestors were full of In Kinyala one of many Luhya's dialects.

Singular: Eriiki/ Eribuyu

Plural: Amaki/Amabuyu

Talking of stones.

sheeet. 😂😂😂

The author uses code-switching and code-mixing between Kinyala, English, and Sheng to create a shared sense of identity through humor and friendly tones, appreciating Kenya's linguistic diversity. The inclusion of Luhya words for 'stones' as well as playful English phrases like 'I think our ancestors were full of sheeet' creates a funny culturally friendly tone enhancing an inclusive space where members can share and laugh about different dialects and customs. This friendly, code-mixed style creates LCKM's identity as a community that allows members to create different identities and engage with culture in a playful but respectful manner.

The multimodal usage of the laughing emojis in line with Jewitt (2013) who argues that each of the modes used in communication contributes to the overall message, and their combination brings out how meaning is interpreted. Therefore the emojis are meant to make the otherwise harsh ending of the comment to seem lighter by the use of humor.


4.2.2.2 Stylistic Variation

According to Coupland (2007), stylistic variation is the way language changes depending on the audience, context and purpose of communication. Furthermore, style is dynamic resource through which individuals actively construct, and perform social identities. The research offers a framework for understanding how people use language variation not

only to reflect pre-existing identities, but also create identity and reflect who they are and how they mingle with others in given social contexts. In LCKM, members utilize different linguistic strategies to establish identity, express emotions, build relationships, and engage with their audience.


According to Tian et al. (2017), emojis in *Facebook* communication contribute to expressing emotions beyond what textual language alone can convey. The research discusses how emojis give a visual and readily interpretable ways for users to communicate their emotional feelings, argument, and attitudes towards content. Furthermore, it explores how different emojis match up with specific sentiment categories and how they can modify the feeling expressed in accompanying text. Ultimately, Tian et al.'s work emphasizes the important role of emojis in advancing the emotional factor of online interactions on *Facebook*.

Post seven

Someone help  My hands itch after washing ndüma arrowroot

The post makes use of social semiotic resources like the emoji and the text ‘someone help’ to advance the assertion that LCKM is a platform that members use to air the challenges they face as they cook. The text positions the author as a member seeking help to stop the itching after peeling arrowroots. The crying emoji is used to express the pain the author feels each time she peels arrowroots. The emoji as argued by MDA is sufficient in bringing out the weight of the burden of peeling arrowroots.

Comment seven

That’s me ...the vumilia  Next time before you peel, apply cooking oil on hands first or use some plastic gloves

The emoji makes the otherwise difficult situation one that can be handled and should not stress the author of the original post who complained of discomfort after peeling arrow roots. This comment can be grounded in Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020), MDA tenet of creating and maintaining interaction which talks of how semiotic choices create relationships between communicators and their audience. The emoji shown above is an important non-verbal element. It signifies interaction and modifies the tone of the verbal advice. The emoji reduces the possibility of impact of the word ‘vumilia’ meaning withstanding pain. The multimodal use of an emoji brings out the members moment of fun, placing both the commenter and the recipient within a forum where humor is valued and used for mutual

benefit. Therefore, fostering a space where people share their problems without the fear of being laughed at or judged.

Post eight

We call it Dek in Our language. Very delicious 😊😊😊

The post makes use of smiling emojis and the phrase ‘very delicious’ to establish a relaxed tone typical of LCKM interaction to encourage other members of the community to share the names used to refer to the vegetables presented in Figure 4. The smiling emojis bring out warmth and happiness, making communication enjoyable, the author creates an identity of one who is familiar with the style of communication in the group where the author members are supposed to understand the reason why he decided to use the smiling emoji. The declarative phrase calls for participation and brings out cultural identity of those who understand the value of ‘Dek.’ On the other hand the image of Dek seeks to strengthen the community’s culinary identity, the simple presentation using a plastic plates and avoiding other ingredients like tomatoes makes it look less appealing as shown by the following comment.

Jewitt (2013) supports the results of this study in his argument that communication goes beyond the use of words, the picture of Dek as shown in figure 4 presents a Kenyan food that is identifiable by the members of the community bringing out cultural identity. The text in our language is meant to make the other members of the community to share the name of the vegetable in their mother tongue which brings out social categorization argued by SIT. Therefore; creating subgroups within the larger *Let’s Cook Kenyan Meals*. The simple presentation as seen in figure 4 can be interpreted as a means of bringing out cultural identity in the sense that the food should not contain modern spices to retain originality.



Figure 4: A plate of ugali and vegetables

Comment eight

Respect dek and do a nice presentation please 🤔🤔

The author of this comment seeks to create a cultural identity by elevating the cultural significance of 'Dek' according to her Dek's importance goes beyond just a meal to a symbol of shared identity. Therefore, she uses words like 'respect' to show that the presentation of Dek demeans the cultural significance of this vegetable. The comment positions the author as a member of the group that attaches importance to food depending on how it is presented. Kress and Bezemer (2023) on the other hand argue that MDA seeks to lay bare how individuals and communities interpret meaning therefore the use of a plastic plate and lack of ingredients can to other people depict the originality and uniqueness of 'Dek.'

The emojis that follow the text soften a serious request making it playful and not a warning which is typical of communication in Facebook communities where members interact in a friendly manner respecting the opinion of others. In the context of the above post a laughing emoji does not literally signify amusement instead it conveys warmth, playfulness, and a shared understanding within the group.

Post nine

Hii mbuzi recipe prepared this way i can assure you utalamba vidole! Very mouthwatering and always enjoy with an accompaniment of your choice 🤔🤔🤔



Figure 5: To the right raw meat in a pot and left fried meat

The author seeks to create a culinary identity through the use of pictures therefore supporting the assertion that Facebook members use both text and other semiotic resources to create identity. On the other hand most of the research around online communication centered on the text as a major contributor to identity creation (Ciepiela, 2012). The post utilizes both text and other semiotic resources as shown in figure 5 which juxtaposes cooked and raw meat to depict that cooking is a process. The author also uses code switching aligning the post to Kenyan culinary identity therefore encouraging other members to share their thoughts on the meal.

Comment nine

Delicious 😋😋😋

The author of this comment uses text and a licking face emoji to create identity within the group by expressing a shared appreciation for Kenyan food. The licking face emoji 😋 is a common linguistic strategy of denoting deliciousness. Further the emoji signals a shared positive review of the dish, this blend of emojis and text strengthens the argument that the members of this community appreciate Kenyan meals even as it is depicted from the name of the community. In *Facebook* communities like LCKM, the emoji is used to show that the author acknowledges that the food is delicious without necessarily using words the emoji acts as a fast way of informal communication. Apart from the shared acronyms they also use the general online acronyms like LOL, OMG, IMO which contributes to a sense of shared online culture. This can create a feeling of connection among group members who are familiar with these digital communication norms. Acronyms help in identity creation by building a sense of belonging. Using and understanding acronyms fosters a sense of belonging within the community.

Carney-Nedelman (2020), posits the use and understanding of group-specific acronyms serve as a key marker distinguishing members from outsiders. Knowing and appropriately using these abbreviations signals that an individual is ‘in the know’ and has been socialized into the group's specific linguistic practices.

Post ten

Hello LCKM family...i need your help so on sunday i will be having visitors about 10 of them..sasa me sina idea on what to cook for them ju sijawai kuwa na wageni before.. nisaidieni na ideas of what to cook.

In the above post the author uses the abbreviation LCKM which in full means *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals*. The use of abbreviation provides the author with an opportunity to

position herself as a dedicated member of the community. Abbreviations, as supported by Carney-Nedelman (2020), allows members to position themselves as part of a comprehensive community. LCKM abbreviation creates an 'in-group' identity. It signifies membership and familiarity with *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals*.

SIT Stets and Burke (2014) argue that specific abbreviation like LCKM depict positive uniqueness of the community. When the members of the community have specific shorthand abbreviation that is set aside for only members to navigate gives the members an identity of insiders. Other people who are not a part of the community may not be in a position to understand the intrigues of the usage of such abbreviations. The abbreviations serve as a critical linguistic strategy that sets the LCKM community aside from other online platforms, fostering a sense of pride and unique identity among its members.

Comment ten

Which tribe coz Taita hills they can have Pilau ama Kimanga, watu wa Mrima Mukimo n stew, Lake side pple Sima n Samaki, Goliath's pple Sima n Kuku kienyeji, Kisiis pple Matoke, Rift valley Maziwa, Costerians Pilau, Biriani n snacks like viazi karai, bhajia mkate was sinia na Mitai..

The above comment utilizes abbreviations which enable the author to position herself as a happy member of the community. The use of abbreviations also show that LCKM is a community that offers its members an opportunity not only to showcase their cooking styles but also to seek help on food options when faced with tough choices. The author acknowledges the various Kenyan cultures where the author gives the various meals that the member asking for help should prepare bearing in mind the origin of the guests. This is supported by Carney-Nedelman (2020), who argued that common use of acronyms can strengthen collective identity among group members.

Post eleven

OMG Leaving food on a plate when it was self-service says much about you

The author of this post uses the acronym 'OMG' which in full means oh my God which is a largely known by most online participants, expressing shock or surprise to show understanding of the bigger online communication. The use of this acronym creates a shared digital identity and cohesion between the group members and other online participants who may not be members of this particular group. The author addresses a serious social issue of people serving themselves excess food during celebration and leaving the food on the table. She wonders why one should serve excess food that ends up as waste. The use of the

acronym is meant to lighten a serious matter therefore making the post far from a direct attack on people's character (Carney-Nedelman 2020).

Comment eleven

True but it can also be a sign that the food was not delicious LOL

The comment makes use of the acronym 'LOL' brings out a common understanding of online humor and makes the participants to take part in the discussion without feeling 'judged' because of the friendly atmosphere created by the acronym. The results of this study showed that the use of abbreviations not only create a sense of camaraderie and shared enjoyment but also used to discuss serious issues like leaving food on a plate when it was self-service. Carney-Nedelman (2020) supports the study by arguing that acronyms facilitate socialization by engaging members in serious talks without any conflicts. The author differs with the post but in a friendly manner where she argues that leaving the food on the table may not necessarily mean that someone served excess food as it can also mean that the food was not delicious.

4.2.3 Argumentation Strategies

According to Lievrouw (2009), argumentation is defined as the way that language is utilized to support, differ, present, and argue a point of an issue in order to convince an audience to agree with one's argument. It includes using specific language styles and techniques to make people agree with your point of view.

4.2.3.1 Narratives

Narratives can be defined as small stories through which people share their experiences about life challenges in family, marriage, religious life among other issues (Trepte, 2013). Through narratives members of LCKM create various identities ranging from learners seeking guidance on various cooking methods to newly married couples seeking guidance on marital issues. Polletta and Redman (2020) suggests that the social and cultural context in which a story is encountered shapes its impact.

Post twelve

"Admin please approve, not food related, my husband didn't want to have a third child. His reason was financial. When the pregnancy came and I told him, he said, "You know my stand. We can't afford it." I understood him but I felt that was the most selfish thing to say. I wanted a third child. My reason was emotional. I had two girls already so I needed a boy to balance it off. "The girls need a macho man behind them, don't you think so?" Against

his wishes, I went ahead to give birth to a beautiful boy. I thanked God for granting my wishes. My husband didn't like the idea but once the child was delivered, he embraced him and named him after himself. Now, I'm the one regretting. Three children look like a crowd and they are too much work than I anticipated. The first is five years old, the second is three and now the third who was a year-old weeks ago.

My husband was right about our finances. We can't save. Our joint account has collapsed because we don't have much to save. In a month, all three can go to the hospital with different sicknesses. That aside, I'm the one suffering to take care of them all by myself. My husband's work takes him away for a long period. Even when he's home, he's too tired to help.....

I came here to rant while carrying the third child behind me at 3am when I should be sleeping. Tomorrow, I will be tired even before I get to work. When is this going to be over? I don't know but I pray for a financial breakthrough so we can hire a hand around here to help. This is more than we can carry.”

The author of the post seeks to create a sense of belonging through the narrative. She starts by acknowledging that the story she is sharing is not food related but can benefit other women who undermine their husbands by refusing to take advice. The narrative creates a sense of understanding by asking the administrator to approve the post therefore positioning the author as a person who respects the rules of the group. The narrative in as much as it is not related to cooking provides a platform through which other members can discuss issues to do with parenthood and the problems they encounter. Other issues like how many children should a couple have and whether it is necessary to agree on the number of children can also be discussed. The author's honesty in disclosing a sensitive family matter shows that LKCM is a platform where members can seek emotional support without fear of being judged.

The initial 'admin please approve' demonstrates the author's social identification with the community's established rules and order (Trepte, 2013). By showing respect for these norms, the author signals their commitment to being a legitimate, contributing member, thus solidifying their belonging. When other group members 'relate to the poster's struggles,' this fosters powerful social identification. Their ability to connect with the narrative, despite it not being about cooking, indicates a deeper emotional resonance and recognition of shared human experiences that transcend the group's primary focus. This shared empathy strengthens the sense of 'us' within the community, reinforcing members' self-concept as part of a group that understands and supports one another.

Comment twelve.

My sister sometimes we women tend to have a know-it-all attitude when it comes to child bearing issues. My husband wanted us to have three children, I insisted on a fourth one because I wanted another girl we argued for days and when he remained firm I decided to have another one by lying to him that family planning had failed. As fate will have it I had twins both of them boys, it has not been an easy journey at some point I even fell into depression until I saw a counselor that advised to stop seeing my kids as a punishment for disobeying their father.

The author creates identity through shared values and advice. The comment is structured in such a way that the author of the original post is made to feel safe. The author further uses words like ‘ my sister’ to bring out the identity of the group as a supportive forum that is more of a family where one should feel free to share issues that bedevil them. By sharing her own experience, the author opens up a room for more members to share their views on the matter. Georgakopoulou (2017)’s study supports the results of this study by arguing that community interaction just as offline interactions utilize narratives to support its members and to help them create a sense of belonging.

Hogg (2016) argues that social categorization which an important tenet of SIT happens when members use phrases like the one in the comment ‘ my sister’ this phrase categorizes the author of this comment as that of the post into a small sub-group of women facing challenges in parenting and economic struggles.

Post thirteen

Hello LCKM family my post is not food related but I need your advice. I once dated a man that got me pregnant, when I told him about the child he refused to take responsibility. I am now engaged to get married to another man who has agreed to take care of my daughter and I. last week my baby daddy appeared from nowhere and he is asking me for a second chance what is your opinion guys....help a sister

This post, while deviating from the group's primary focus on cooking, utilizes narrative construction to engage the LCKM community and create a sense of shared identity through storytelling and advice-seeking. The author’s vulnerability and plea for advice ("help a sister") create an emotional connection with the audience. This elicits empathy and encourages group members to share their own experiences and perspectives.

By addressing the group as ‘LCKM family,’ as argued in post eight, the author frames the community as a supportive and caring network which establishes a sense of shared identity and encourages members to see themselves as part of a community. As discussed in comment eight Georgakopoulou (2017), supports these results by arguing that narratives help

individuals to create identity in social media communities as the author of the above post assumes an identity of a member who needs help from other members in making a decision.

Comment thirteen

I was in a similar situation sometime back and I can tell you for free don't fall for that trap. A man capable of rejecting his flesh and blood will do it over and over again. He is back because he feels your life is about to change and not because he cares! Gal move on don't be deceived.

This comment, responding to the original post about the baby daddy's reappearance, utilizes narrative construction to strengthen the (LCKM) community's identity by sharing a personal anecdote and delivering advice with a strong, cautionary tone. The comment shows how narrative construction can be used to bring out empathy and shared experience (Georgakopoulou, 2017).

The comment reflects values of self-respect, caution, and protection from emotional harm. It reinforces the LCKM community's role as a space where members offer practical and empathetic advice. The phrase "Gal move on don't be deceived" creates a sense of camaraderie and support, particularly among female members of the group. It reinforces the idea of the LCKM community as a supportive "family" because the ladies are free to share and lay bare their inner and top secrets to members because they feel safe; that their secrets will not find their way to unwanted audience; nor are they afraid of being ridiculed by their peer for their turbulence marriages/ relationships.

4.2.3.2 Language Play and Creativity

Language play and creativity is another argumentation strategy used by *Facebook* communities to create identity. Shifman (2014), defines language play and creativity as the dynamic and innovative ways in which humans use language to express themselves, build connections, solve problems, and create new meanings and forms. It encompasses both the everyday, often unconscious, creativity in constructing novel sentences and the more deliberate, artistic manipulation of language for specific effects.

Post fourteen

Babygal leo amepika beef stew Vi-natural..who's Boarding aje na accompaniment 😊😊😊😊

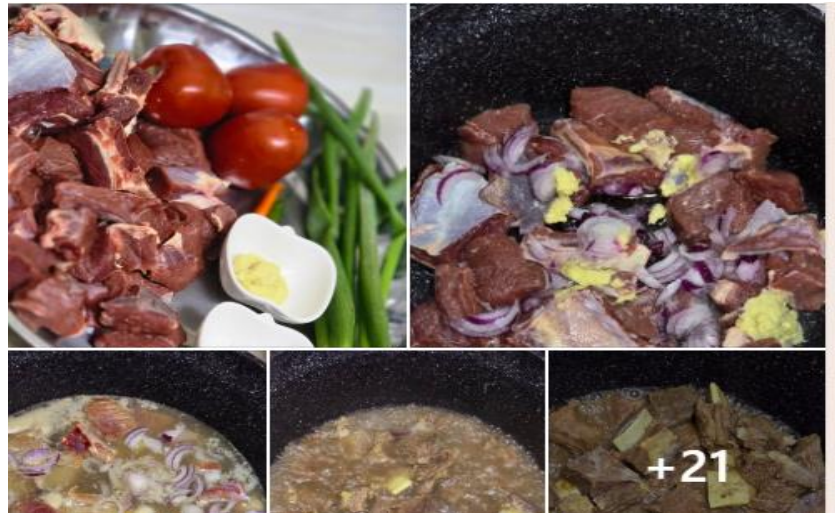


Figure 6: Raw meat accompanied by ingredients like tomato, pepper and salt

The post depicts how members of LCKM can create a distinct identity that other members can relate with. She achieves this through the use of language in a playful manner making other members to develop interest in the post. The use of code switching and code mixing gives the post a feeling of Kenyan culinary identity. In line with Jewitt (2013)'s argument the use of the licking emoji heightens the element of deliciousness therefore encouraging members to give views on how they perceive the food.

The repeated use of the 😊 emoji emphasizes the deliciousness and invites interaction, which heightens the community's focus which is cooking Kenyan meals. The emojis dwell on the objective which is to make members continually share their cooking tips. Furthermore, the carefully presented image in figure six showcasing the cooking process with bright lighting and visible ingredients, acts as a visual enhancer of the author's credibility and the meal's appeal (Jewitt, 2013).

Comment fourteen

Mautamz 😊

Word play is used in this comment, in the word 'mautamz' which is a creative mix of mautamu in Kiswahili and z which is an English phoneme. The author plays around with the word to create a cultural identity that positions her as a member of the group that understands the communication style of the group. An emoji has also been used as a social semiotic resource that enhances communication and encourages participation. LCKM community as a platform makes use of simple communication styles that allow members to easily internalize the message being passed across (Reyes, 2004)

Post fifteen

Babygal Alikuwa apike beef and stir fry veges..but nikajiita kamukutano why waste 2 cooking pots na mimi ndio Queen of Sambaratisha...ilibidi nicheze ka mimi...hii tukule na nini 😊😊😊



Figure 7: Left chopped meat, onions, tomato and other ingredients in saucers
Right chopped meat mixed with other ingredients in a pot

The author uses language play and creativity to create an identity of a resource person in the group. The use of playful terms like baby gal makes the author a friendly member of the group who can be approached for guidance on the cooking methods. It also heightens the group's identity as a platform where members share skills in a relaxed manner without the fear of being criticized by other members (Reyes, 2004).

The author uses both pictures and text to create an identity of a knowledgeable cook. The food is presented in an appealing manner showing the cooking process. The positioning of the camera the lighting and color depict a process that should be followed to achieve perfect results. The multimodal presentation seen in Figure 7 heightens use of language play and creativity by demonstrating how a seemingly simple cooking post can foster identity creation within LCKM by centering on the shared cultural practice of Kenyan cuisine, utilizing Swahili and visuals familiar to this context, and negotiating tradition with modern efficiency as seen in the 'Queen of Sambaratisha' persona. The post also encourages individual expression through potential recipe variations and builds community through shared humor and the concluding question that invites interaction and reflects everyday cooking experiences, ultimately solidifying a collective identity rooted in a passion for Kenyan food.

Comment fifteen

On point.. 🙌🙌🙌



Figure 8: Cartoon bird

The comment makes use of a cartoon bird picture as seen in figure 8 to show eagerness to consume the food. The text ‘on point’ heightens the readiness to consume the food therefore creating a sense of shared fun and camaraderie within the group. The text and the image show that LCKM is a community that values playful communication as a way through which members create relationships and build trust as supported by Graham (2019), who reiterates that images serve as a way to express attitudes, emotions, and social interactions could be lost in textual communication. The pictures stand in for non-verbal communication like gestures and facial expressions.

4.2.3.3 Discursive Positioning

Discursive Positioning, according to Georgalou (2017), is an act where people place themselves and others within a conversation or text through the words they use. Individuals use discursive positioning to present their identities in *Facebook* communities.

Post sixteen

Niliwaambia this is the to make the best out of every hapana kua boring all the time follow the recipe and make something different utawachwa kama hujui hizi vitu 🤔🤔

These are the ingredients I used

Waru 30

Cooking oil 30

Dhania 5

Garlic 5

Total 70k

God your daughter is grateful 🙏

This post presents the author as someone who has experience in cooking. The starting phrase ‘niliwaambia’ shows that she believes in her ability to cook therefore creating the identity of an expert in cooking. The playful manner in which she presents the ingredients is a typical way in which community members use to create a friendly atmosphere that encourages other members to take part in the sharing of recipe. The praying emoji that comes after the text that talks about being grateful to God for providing her with food. Through the use of emoji and the subsequent text the author creates a religious identity that of one who believes in the existence of a supreme being that provides for her needs. Georgalou (2017) who argues that discursive positioning is a crucial component of identity creation. *Facebook* community members use this linguistic strategy to project themselves in such a way that they create the desired identity through the words they use and the symbols.

Comment sixteen

Copy that! madam hatutaki kuachwa

The use of the text copy that and other words like ‘ madam’ is specific discourse used by members of the disciplined force who are perceived as a category of people that obey without questions. Therefore the author places herself as a member of the group that obeys without questions. The second part of the comment switches to Kiswahili and talks about not wanting to be left probably by their men, thus creating an identity of one who believes that partners need to be taken care of by giving them delicious food so that they don’t leave heightening gender roles and food preparation. The results of this study can be supported by (2006), who argues that discursive positioning plays a major role in framing arguments, experiences and events in a particular way that helps other members of the group to interpret and understand them in a particular manner.

4.2.4 Identity Markers

According to Coupland (2007) identity markers are defined as distinct language manipulation and images that are unique to a particular community that show belonging and ability for people to identify themselves as a part of the community.

Post seventeen

Hi guys... please I need to know if this food should be eaten by one trying keto diet?

It's an omelette, some spinach and a 1/3 avocado.

I'm new to this so any help will be appreciated

The author uses pictures as shown in Figure 9, and words to inquire from the members if the meal is keto friendly. The picture acts as an appropriate identity marker as it helps the author to create an identity of a learner in the group who is trying to seek validation of the food presented. By doing so she frames the group as a resourceful forum that not only teaches people how to prepare Kenyan meals but also the correct diet choices. The platform is seen as a safe place for members to seek help without fear of being looked down upon. While the text describes the eggs as an ‘omelette,’ instead of fried eggs which contradicts the image shared the text shows that the author is looking for the opinion of other members regarding keto diet (Zhao, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008). The words I am beginner makes the other members to offer their candid advice to the author because she opens up on having little knowledge about the keto diet.

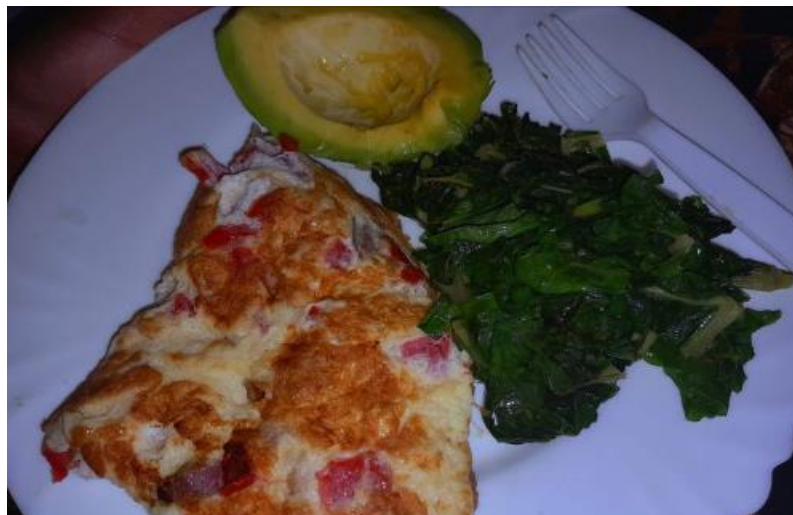


Figure 9: Fried eggs and spinach

Comment seventeen

Mwili mpya tutapewa mbinguni. Let me eat my chapati in peace

The comment utilizes the language of religion to playfully respond to an otherwise suggestion of strict diet as a way of trying to lose weight. The latest online sensation about people losing weight and having flat tummies through keto diet has created panic among most people leading to discourse around dietary choices and weight loss and gain. Therefore, the author uses identity markers to position herself as one belonging to a group that is not worried about the physical appearance (Coupland, 2007).

4.3 The Role of Language in Maintaining Facebook Communities

Language plays a crucial role in maintaining Facebook communities. According to Howard (2009), maintaining Facebook communities entails actively nurturing the digital

space to ensure it remains vibrant, engaging and aligned with its purpose. It goes beyond posting content; it includes nurturing the member's dreams, aspirations and emotional wellbeing. Howard (2009) argues that the members of a particular community maintain the communities by active engagement and interaction, content strategy and curation, community management and moderation, fostering a sense of belonging and identity among other things. LCKM is a community that has been in existence for over ten years. Research shows that the language used in the group plays a major role in keeping the members together and whenever conflicts arise they are easily solved by using language (Georgakopoulou, 2017).

4.3.1 The Role of Language in Fostering Engagement and Participation

Facebook communities like LCKM use language to foster communication and participation in issues raised in the community. Language that asks questions, invites opinions, or calls for input encourages active participation, as argued by Georgakopoulou (2017), that maintenance of social media communities is an ongoing process that involves actively managing and nurturing online communities to foster engagement, build relationships, and achieve specific goals.

Post eighteen

Hii mbuzi recipe prepared this way i can assure you utalamba vidole! Very mouthwatering and always enjoy with an accompaniment of your choice 🍴🍴🍴



Figure 10: To the right raw meat in a pot and left fried meat

The post uses pictures and text to bring out to foster communication and participation between the members of LCKM. The appetizing presentation of the meat triggers the other

members of the group to try and learn how the author cooked the meat. Through the comment section some authors will ask for the recipe and as the author responds participation is enhanced. Kress & Bezemer (2023) explain that communication goes beyond the use of words it also uses different pictures. The meal presented in figure 10 acts as a channel through which other members engage with the author and other member of the community. The text utilizes Kiswahili phrases to encourage members to participate in the discussion (Lemus, 2018).

Comment Eighteen

Yummy..zambaza recipe please 😊😊😊

The comment "Yummy..." is a quick, heartfelt response that instantly agrees with the original post's claim ("Very mouthwatering"). Using this simple, expressive word shows real enjoyment and a shared excitement about the food. Positive feedback like this is important in online communities because it makes the original poster feel appreciated, which in turn encourages continued content creation and participation. This emotional resonance draws other members into a shared space of culinary delight, making the discussion more inviting and vibrant.

The explicit request for the "zambaza recipe" is where the core of the comment's engagement lies. This is a direct call to action, demanding a response from the original poster or other knowledgeable community members. The request instantly transforms a passive consumption of content into an active, reciprocal interaction as it brings about active participation from others and demonstrates the commenter's keen, possibly specialized, interest in the community's culinary focus as supported by Preece (2001) who identifies purpose and trust as key factors for success. The community's core purpose of the comment "zambaza recipe please" is to share culinary knowledge. The user demonstrates trust in the community's ability to provide a useful response, by making the request, which reinforces the group's function as a valuable source of information and strengthens its overall identity.

The licking emojis at the end of the comment, as argued by Kress & van Leeuwen (2020), denote how different semiotic resources are organized and integrated to form a coherent whole, ultimately creating the complete message or meaning of a multi modal text. The author of the comment therefore uses the emojis to bring out their eagerness to try the recipe, therefore encouraging other members to take part in the conversation thus fostering engagement.

Post Nineteen

If you were to eat one meal for the rest of your life, what would it be?

This post leverages its directness, open-endedness, and relatable content, by fostering engagement and participation in LCKM. The interrogative sentence structure, ‘what would it be?’ Functions as an explicit and direct linguistic prompt, demanding a response from every reader (Georgakopoulou, 2017). Burke and Kraut (2016) argue that a clear call to action immediately lowers the barrier to participation, as members understand precisely what kind of contribution is expected, making it easy to engage. The direct address to "you" makes the question universally personal and highly relatable. Everyone eats, and most people have a strong preference for certain foods. This linguistic personalization indulges into individual experiences and tastes, leading to accessibility of the question to all members regardless of their cooking expertise. It creates a sense of personal investment in the response, encouraging self-disclosure and authentic participation, supported by Preece (2001), who identifies how the design of a platform and the communication style within it can bring about encouragement or discouragement in participation. The post's direct, open-ended question ‘What would it be?’ is a prime example of a linguistic cue that actively prompts participation. It's a low-effort way to get a lot of people to respond, as it doesn't require specialized knowledge, only a personal opinion. This design lowers the barrier to entry for conversation.

Comment nineteen

Ugali all the way

"Ugali all the way" is a commented phrase that illustrates how language fosters engagement and participation through its cultural specificity, emphatic expression, and ability to build social cohesion which is achieved through code switching (Reyes, 2004). The direct mention of "Ugali" immediately delves into the shared cultural and culinary identity of the LCKM community, which is focused on Kenyan meals. This term is instantly recognizable among the members and it carries a deep cultural significance, which leads to a sense of implicit understanding and belonging. The commenter's authentic membership and appreciation for the community's core theme is signaled by the linguistic choice, hence validating the space for all who share this cultural reference. This immediate recognition fosters social identification, as members feel a stronger connection to those who share and express pride in common cultural elements (Hogg, 2016).

Post twenty

Hello. I am 37 weeks pregnant. From the time I was in high school 10 years ago I was always 47kgs. When I got pregnant I was 47 kgs. 1st to the end second trimester I gained 6kgs to weigh 53kg which seems reasonable in 6 months. BUT, from the beginning of 3rd

trimester I have moved from 53 to 66. I feel like that's alot of weight for such a period of time. What do I do to stop this weight gain and yet I don't overfeed. I'm scared by the time I deliver I will be 100. Wale wa motherhood is beautiful and I shouldn't worry about weight this is not your post. How many kgs did you gain? Will I lose it all? This is a photo of tumbukiza I made 2 weeks ago.



Figure 11: A plate of boiled meat mixed with potatoes and spinach

The author of this post establishes an in-group identity among those who understand the complexities of pregnancy and body image by using the phrase ‘Wale wa motherhood is beautiful...’, which distinguishes them from those offering simplistic platitudes. The inclusion of a photo of ‘Tumbukiza’, as seen in figure eleven, reinforces the author's connection to the group's culinary focus and allows for a discussion bridging food and health, despite bringing up personal concerns, while the unappetizing presentation of the meal challenges the notion that her dietary choices are leading to weight gain. Furthermore, the author promotes engagement and participation through asking questions like ‘how many kgs did you gain?’ ‘Will I lose it all?’ These questions prompt a discussion around weight gain during pregnancy

and encourage other members to share their experiences concerning weight gain during pregnancy.

Comment twenty

Hi

Speaking as a gyna

More grace to you ♥

We expect a normal healthy weight gain of

A)10-15kg for a normal bmi woman

B)15-20 if below bmi

C)6-10 if above bmi

So even with 47, what was your bmi?

Maximum weight gain in pregnancy starts at 27 weeks to 40weeks

We barely should gain any weight before that

From 37 where you are- we have a max of 2-3 kg left. So no. You won't reach a 100.

That said- the first three months exclusively breastfeeding should help you lose like 10-15kg so gear up for that.

I think you've done well so far.

This comment derived from a self-identified gynecologist exemplifies the integration of expert discourse into informal interaction by establishing authority with the phrase "Speaking as a gyna" and using medical terminology like "BMI" and "exclusively breastfeeding, within the LCKM community. The comment embraces a direct and informative tone as Burke & Kraut (2016) proposes, providing specific data and explanations while offering reassurance to the author regarding weight gain during pregnancy. By grounding the discussion in evidence-based medical expertise, the gynecologist advances a balanced perspective and counters potential misinformation, effectively demonstrating how professional authority can be combined with empathetic support within a community setting to encourage constructive dialogue.

Non-judgmental language used like 'more grace to you' I think you have done well so far' stimulates participation by making other member to feel free to share their views concerning weight gain during pregnancy. The author provides accurate medical facts in calm, reassuring tone, normalizing pregnancy weight gain. By stating "speaking as a gynae," the commenter establishes both professional and community identity. This builds trust, reduces anxiety, and makes the advice more acceptable, as people are more open to guidance

from those they see as part of their in-group. According to Trepte, (2013) a strong social identification means you derive a sense of belonging, pride, and even self-worth from being part of the group, therefore the author views the poster as a sister who needs understanding and empathy not criticism and thus uses their position as a gynecologist to give reassurance that weight gain during pregnancy is normal.

Post twenty one

Wueh Pancakes is not for the faint hearted...am done with it..khai ...ata hakuna haja niwaonyeshe the outcome

The author of the above post openly admits to a cooking failure, the poster normalizes the challenges of cooking which can help to reduce the pressure to present a perfect image and encourage a more relaxed and supportive approach to cooking. The poster's honest expression of frustration (am done with it) creates a space for vulnerability and open communication which encourages other group members to share their own cooking experiences, both successes and failures. The author further uses humorous tone of the post which helps to relieve stress and create a positive atmosphere within the group. This tone can promote engagement and participation by fostering a sense of lightness and fun. The author strengthens group identity by readily accepting the cooking challenges and opening a forum for other members to share their experiences (Tang & Chan, 2020).

Comment twenty one

Those things will lower your self-esteem buana...me I gave up long time ago...

The author of this comment responds to the above post by normalizing self-acceptance where the phrase 'me I gave up long time ago' can be interpreted as a form of self-acceptance. It suggests that the speaker has learned to let go of unrealistic expectations and embrace her imperfections. Shared failure can be seen as an in-group bonding where the author of the comment expresses frustration in a light humorous tone which brings out shared struggle creating a sense of in-group identity. Stets and Burke (2014) notes that while SIT often focuses on positive distinctiveness against out-groups, it also explains how social comparison within an in-group can strengthen bonds. When one member expresses a struggle for example 'Pancakes are not for the faint-hearted' others who have faced similar struggles can relate. By validating that struggle 'Those things will lower your self-esteem buana...me I gave up long time ago...' the commenter effectively says, 'You're not alone; this is a common in-group experience.' This fosters in-group solidarity and mutual understanding.

The author encourages participation by using language which counters the often curated and flawless images seen across social media. It fosters an environment where it's acceptable

to show vulnerabilities and failures, which is crucial for members' participation. It reduces the pressure for perfection, allowing members to feel more authentic and less anxious about performance, contributing to a more psychologically safe space which in turn makes the *Facebook* communities to thrive.

Post twenty two

Mwili mpya tulisema ni sayuni.our today's breakfast



Figure 12: A plate carrying a glass of juice, mandazi, and boiled corn

The visual elements of the post encourage participation in LCKM, from the results of this study issues weight gain and weight loss dominated the discussions in LCKM. Blended juice and boiled corn are perceived to healthy choices though the current online sensation condemns it as a high sugar diet that causes weight gain. Two mandazis represent cultural authenticity and realistic enjoyment. This visual balance prevents the post from seeming preachy, which could estrange members. It suggests a sustainable approach to healthy eating that includes local favorites. This visual honesty encourages members to share their own "imperfect" but real healthy eating journeys, bringing about a more inclusive and less judgmental linguistic environment. The accompanying text promotes a positive and collective outlook on health. The motto "Mwili mpya tulisema ni sayuni" (A new body, we said, is in Zion) uses inclusive language like "tulisema" (we said) to frame the health goal as a shared community aspiration, fostering solidarity rather than making a demand. Similarly, the pronoun "our" in "our today's breakfast" strengthens this communal spirit, inviting members to view their individual health efforts as part of a collective journey.

As Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) suggest, for any form of communication to be meaningful, it must be able to show or describe aspects of the world that people experience. This means that the different ways we make meaning, like language or images, must be capable of representing real-world objects and their connections independently of the communication system itself. In the above post for example; the visual representation of a white plate carrying a glass of juice, mandazis and boiled corn followed by the text mwili mpya tulisema ni sayuni makes the communication meaningful since these are everyday diet choices that people have to make. The use of "tulisema" (we said) and "our" in the text directly communicates a shared, collective identity and purpose with the LCKM community members. It's an inclusive, bonding form of communication.

Comment twenty two

It is mwili mpya tutapewa mbinguni until you start battling lifestyle diseases. All the same your food is yummy.

This comment reflects the nuanced and often ironic tone of *Facebook* communities where the author juxtapositions a serious advice in a lighthearted manner. The comment abruptly shifts from a theological concept ("mwili mpya tutapewa mbinguni" - we will be given a new body in heaven) to the stark reality of lifestyle diseases. This kind of juxtaposition, often employing a degree of irony or dark humor, is a common feature of *Facebook* communication. It acknowledges a serious issue (health) while using a somewhat detached or even fatalistic tone. This comment fosters a culture of honest expression as presented Tang and Chan (2020) by utilizing the willingness to touch upon a potentially sensitive topic like lifestyle diseases, even with a touch of gallows humor, can contribute to a community identity that encourages open and honest expression, even about difficult realities. It signals that members can share a range of thoughts and feelings, not just purely positive ones.

The comment shows how *Facebook* communities promote participation and engagement by fostering realistic discourse and constructive feedback while maintaining supportive engagement. The author uses a humorous but pointed out textual reference to challenge the assertion of 'mwili mpya tutapewa mbinguni' by adding until you start battling lifestyle diseases. This language promotes a realistic and honest dialogue about health. The direct yet non-confrontational language encourages members to discuss the practical challenges of wellness fostering a more authentic and less performative space. Ciepiela (2012) emphasizes how group norms and shared social identity influence communication patterns within LCKM. Members, driven by the desire for a positive social identity and group cohesion, tend to adhere to communication styles that are perceived as appropriate and beneficial.

The comment provides direct, truthful observation about potential health implications "until you start battling lifestyle diseases" in a critical yet non-judgmental way. Crucially, it balances this with affirmation and encouragement "All the same your food is yummy", softening the critique and validating the original poster's effort. This approach exemplifies engagement, fostering a culture of mutual learning and growth that's essential for long-term community maintenance. As Tajfel and Turner's SIT explains people seek to maintain a positive social identity within their in-groups. The comment balances critique with affirmation, modeling healthy language that protects self-worth and aligns with group norms. This fosters a supportive environment where members feel safe to learn share, and grow key for sustaining long-term community engagement.

4.3.2 The Role of Language in Conflict Management

The ability of a *Facebook* community's continued existence and vibrancy relies on proper management of conflict, therefore language plays a key role in managing conflict thus maintaining the smooth running of the community. Fundamental strategy involves using mitigation language and de-escalation rhetoric. This includes affective framing where moderators use softening phrases like acknowledging a user's 'enthusiasm' before correction (Georgalou, 2017) to validate the person while redirecting the disruptive behavior. Furthermore, replacing blunt commands with hedged directives like Perhaps we should redirect... preserves the participants' dignity, reducing aggressive pushback and enabling a smoother, more successful de-escalation of the dispute.

Post Twenty three

Wacha nikasirishe murima kidogo 😊welcome lunch 😊



Figure 13: Ugali Fish avocado and kales

The pictorial presentation of fish and avocados seen in Figure13 followed by the text ‘wacha nikasirishe...’ enhances collective identity achieved by the cultural humour and Kenyan diverse food choices unique to different regions. The playful teasing of ‘murima’ folks establishes camaraderie and acknowledges regional food diversity, while ‘welcome lunch’ and the accompanying visuals of lakeside staples like fish, ugali, avocado, and vegetables ground the post in shared cultural dishes. The timing of the post which was at a time when the former deputy president of Kenya was undergoing impeachment and the words used in this post being the words he used when referring to the people from central shows emotional maturity of the members of this community. The author uses the words playfully addressing the people from central but the people react in a friendly manner without bringing out their political anger. By using the word ‘nikasirishe’ which means annoy coupled with a sarcastic and grinning emoji the author seeks to lighten the political mood of the members. By inviting playful interaction and showcasing traditional cuisine, the post reinforces the community's shared identity as a space that values both humor and the rich diversity of Kenyan food culture. The pictorial presentation of ugali fish avocado and kales as shown on figure10 is portrayed in such a manner that though the plate is appealing, by presenting the fish heads the author sends a message of tough economic times when Kenyans are forced minimize waste therefore consuming the entire fish including the head. This argument is supported by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) who claim in MDA theory that elements such as images color music typography and other visual modes are similar to language they can simultaneously fulfill the meaning making process as language does.

Comment twenty three

Nyinyi watu sometimes hubehave as if sisi watu wa murima hukula shit...msiguze murima priss

The author of this comment though affected by the post ‘wacha nikasirishe murima kidogo’ uses harsh language to defend their murima identity but is careful not to spark a conflict between the lakeside and central members. The playful use of the word ‘priss’ is used to resolve the conflict that is created by the comment. While the author uses offensive language at the beginning of the comment ‘hukula shit’ and divisive language of ‘us vs them’ which goes against the group culture of Kenyans Cooking Kenyan Meals the last statement of the comment msiguze murima priss acts as a way of resolving the conflict earlier created.

Post twenty four

Hey family,

I hope you're all well. I've noticed that our discussions have recently gotten a bit heated, especially on yesterday's post about the most appropriate candidate for 2027 presidential bid. I know we are free to discuss other issues but let's not deviate from the principles of the group. This group was created for kindness, learning, and celebrating our different ways of cooking. ❤️❤️❤️

This post by LCKM group administrator successfully uses language and visuals to manage conflict and re-establish group cohesion. The conflict, caused by political discussion, created a temporary split into political sub-groups, threatening the LCKM identity. To repair this, the administrator uses pronominal inclusion ‘family,’ ‘our discussions’ to remind members of their shared, primary identity as LCKM cooks, overriding the political differences and fostering trust for de-escalation (Kreijns et al., 2003). Further, the administrator reinforces the group's mission statement focusing on ‘kindness, learning, and celebrating our different ways of cooking’ which clarifies the violated boundaries. This linguistic move holds members accountable through linguistic redirection, managing the inappropriate political topic without resorting to personal attacks, which is essential for long-term retention.

Comment twenty four

Well said @ admin. We should remain focused on our main goal even as we debate other issues that ail us. Yaani hii group ni muhimu sana....grace to everyone 🙏🙏

The author seeks to address conflict in the group by using language that is acceptable by the members without injuring the ego of the members. The member's comment, using

‘Well said @ admin’ and the inclusive pronoun ‘we,’ actively endorses the functional hierarchy and the legitimacy of the rule enforcement. This move is crucial for repair maintenance as it ensures the wider community views the moderator's intervention as just and necessary. Furthermore, the member explicitly re-centers the community by affirming, ‘Yaani hii group ni muhimu sana’ (This group is very important), which elevates the LCKM's superordinate identity above the temporary political split. This linguistic valuation provides a rationale for self-censorship, signaling that the group's survival is more valuable than individual political debate.

The author diligently resolves the conflict by using the praying emoji to show their emotional intelligence in handling crisis whenever it arises in the group. Code-Switching ‘Yaani hii group ni muhimu sana’ creates a conversational tone that enhances social presence and builds trust, contrasting with the formal nature of the rules being affirmed. This is paired with the linguistic acknowledgment ‘grace to everyone’ and the 🙏 emoji, which function as powerful semiotic cues for affective closure.

4.4 Language Use in Reflecting Existing Social Norms

According to Kuang and Bicchieri (2024), social norms are the unwritten rules that guide our daily communication and behavior. The rules differ from one community to the other where other communities adopt strict rules and regulations while others have relaxed norms. Language plays a key role in promoting these social norms because majority of the norms are fulfilled through language. Language does not just transmit these norms; it actively constructs and reinforces them through the consistent use of specific vocabulary, narratives, and communicative practices within a community.

Post twenty five

How do you deal with a man who is used to serve himself..... I cook I look at the quality not quantity sometimes I feel like he is an embarrassment to me.

The author of this post uses language to bring social norms especially those around gender. The issue of who should prepare food is raised where the author feels like her husband is an embarrassment because he takes part in cooking which according to her is a sole responsibility of women. She acknowledges that the man is a good husband because he provides for the family which again reflects a social norm around the gender that is tasked with providing for the family. In the traditional Kenyan setting a man is expected to go out and look for resources for the family whereas a woman is expected to manage the household chores including cooking. In *Facebook* communities like LCKM members still value this

social norms while a few challenge it because of the change brought out by issues like a scenario where both parties are supposed to work.

Comment twenty five

What would a man be doing in the kitchen? I expect my man akae angoje nimpe chakula atleast that is what my mother taught me..... ouse..maybe you should check the amount of food you give him as they say the way to a man's heart is through the stomach



The author uses phrases like ‘what would a man be doing in the kitchen’ to reinforce social norms around gender roles that expect men to stay away from the kitchen. In most traditional Kenyan communities men are not expected in the kitchen instead they are expected to go out and look for food. Therefore, Facebook communities are seen as important platforms where language is used to support the existing social norms. The author creates an identity of one who still believes in the traditional gender roles that require a man to stay away from the kitchen. She further talks of her expectations of her man through code switching to Kiswahili she says her man should sit and wait to be served. The use of code switching in the argument grounds the post in a community culture of LCKM where members navigate through English and Kiswahili to create an identity that other members of the group can relate. The phrase ‘my mother taught me,’ allows the author to talk of intergenerational tradition sparking from what she was taught by her mother who in this case is seen as an authority in matters gender roles.

The author uses a multimodal approach by including a laughing emoji which signals that while the comment touches on potentially sensitive traditional norms, it's delivered with lightheartedness and possibly self-awareness or a touch of irony as argued by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) that visual forms of communication utilize resources that both create and maintain interaction between the producer and the viewer of a visual image.

Post twenty six

Watu wa murima hii iko sawa ama tufungulie horse pipe 😂😂😂😂

Beef wetfry 😂😂😂

Recipe step by step 😂😂😂

#fyp 🍴 #food #yum



Figure 14: Cooked meat and ingredients like onions, tomatoes and cucumber

The author uses humor to show the diverse regional identity. LCKM community members create a friendly atmosphere that celebrates Kenyan culture by acknowledging the uniqueness of each tribe. Food is used as a marker of identity because different regions in Kenya are identified by different foods. For example, people from the lakeside are identified with fish while those from central cherish potatoes which are grown there. This post as argued by Bouvier and Machin (2020) that social categorization which is a major tenet of SIT facilitates members in recognizing the group that they belong to for example the author refers to the people of central Kenya as *watu wa murima* bringing out the component of ‘us vs them.’ The visual presentation of the food heightens Kress and Van Leeuwen (2020) argument that communication goes beyond the use of words. The food presented in figure fourteen is meant to promote the cultural background of the author as one belonging to a community that values the importance of delicious meals. According to the author food that has a lot of soup may not be delicious.

Comment twenty six

Gathufu pliz 🤔🤔🤔

The author of this comment positions herself as a proud member of the central community. She does not shy away from openly declaring that the food can only be enjoyed

if it has more 'Gathufu.' The use of the kikuyu word 'Gathufu' classifies the author into an in-group within the larger LCKM community fostering social categorization argued by SIT. The openness with which she responds to the initial post which other people could have seen as provocative shows how LCKM platform can be used in reflecting existing social norms of the Kikuyu community and the community that the author of the post comes from. The community plays a key role in allowing people to celebrate their heritage without fear of discrimination. It fosters a sense of unity and belonging.

Post twenty seven

I don't think wheat is responsible for making people overweight or obese. I think the ingredients we add to the wheat is

This LCKM post reflects evolving social norms around health and diet by challenging the common demonization of wheat and aligning with a "balanced diet" discourse that emphasizes overall lifestyle and ingredient choices over blaming specific food groups for weight gain, thereby addressing the public concern of being "overweight or obese" while promoting a more inclusive and less stigmatizing tone. By using the phrase "I don't think," the author challenges expert narratives, resonating with an anti-diet-culture sentiment and empowering community members to engage in collective knowledge-building based on lived experiences, as evidenced by the ensuing comments debating the role of wheat and sharing personal dietary adjustments, thus reinforcing a participatory culture where food knowledge is communal and experiential.

Comment twenty seven

Which ingredients??? For example chapo, you add warm water and a bit of oil and salt. Those three will make you fat???...Mandazi we add sugar and water, Mahamri, coconut milk and cardemom...In those three things wheat is plenty compared to the ingredients added.

The post takes part in reflecting the existing social norms in online communities by using language to argue an issue that has caused a lot of commotion among the people. Currently obesity and lifestyle diseases have taken centre stage in online discourse. People have turned to a notion that a section of foods cause obesity and wheat is classified as number one enemy of weight loss. The author decides to discredit this argument by posing that it is the ingredients used in preparing wheat products that are responsible for obesity. She uses triple question marks to show the seriousness of her argument therefore encouraging response from other members of the community. The author creates the identity of a curious member of the community seeking clarification on whether wheat actually causes obesity.

Post twenty eight

Hizi matunda zi ugrow kwenyu ama nikuletee. Na mnaziitanga na kikwenu feeling festive.

In LCKM members use text and pictures to argue out various issues. For example in the post above the author seeks to create a linguistic identity by asking members to give the names of the fruit shown in figure 15 in their mother tongue. This approach reflects the existing social norms because the members of the community value their linguistic diversity. Kenya as multilingual country has forty six tribes that speak their local languages in addition to English and Kiswahili. The post utilizes code switching to in line with Das (2012)'s article that examines the use of code switching in communication as a means through which speakers emphasize certain points for example the name of the fruit in different members mother tongue.



Figure 15: A collection of a fruit

Comment twenty eight

Nguyu in kikuyu

The comment reflects existing social norms where the author gives the name of the fruit in Kikuyu enhancing Kenya's multilingual culture. LCKM users always give prominence to their diverse cultural backgrounds which make members to share their rich culture with other members without fear of being looked down upon. Language plays a key role in either uniting or dividing people. The results of this study show that the language used in LCKM fosters participation and creates a sense of belonging. The members of the group though from different cultural background navigate their day to day interaction while respecting each other's origin.

Post twenty nine

*There's this day my father cooked chapos for us buana za maziwa. Three of us. Mathe was on a safari. I think he miscalculated. We ended up with Chapo za wiki mzima na nusu. But that was not it for me. It was awesome watching him knead the flour especially back then when men were not associated with the kitchen. In fact, you should taste his Ugali. Buana huyo mzee...Sasa leo nimeambia Mama **** na **** wakaote jua. Ni moshi imewarudisha mbio wakifikiria nyumba inaungua Lakini si the end justifies the means? Ni ukweli I am my father's son sihitaji DNA*



Figure 16: A plate of sausages, a cup of tea, folk and a knife

In LCKM members use language and pictures to talk about issues around gender roles. For example in the above post the author humorously presents poorly cooked sausages and adds a text that he carries the father's DNA that makes him unable to cook. He remembers a time that their father tried to cook and messed up everything. He presents the father as a poor cook who is unable to approximate the number of chapatis appropriate for the family.

Comment twenty nine

There is a time tulikua tunatoka safari na cubs na big guy wanted to surprise us. Tulipata mchele imepikwa na the biggest sufuria kwa nyumba. Tuliikula mpaka tunaitia watoto wa majirani wakuje kutusaidia. Men should just sit back and relax.

This comment in response to the above post reflects existing social norms surrounding gender roles and domestic responsibilities, particularly the traditional view of the kitchen as a female domain. The story begins with ‘big guy wanted to surprise us,’ setting up a scenario where a man is stepping outside his expected role. The outcome, ‘Tulipata mchele imepikwa na the biggest sufuria kwa nyumba. Tuliikula mpaka tunaitia watoto wa majirani wakujee kutusaidia’ (We found rice cooked in the biggest pot in the house. We ate it until we called the neighbors' kids to come help us), uses hyperbole and humor to exaggerate the scale of the "failure." This narrative directly mirrors the original post's anecdote about the father's overcooked chapatis, collectively reinforcing the widespread social norm that men are generally inept or prone to comical mishaps when performing traditionally female domestic tasks like cooking. The exaggerated scale of the rice cooked by the ‘big guy’ plays into the stereotype of men being out of their element in the kitchen.

The concluding statement, ‘Men should just sit back’ is a direct, prescriptive declaration of the traditional social norm concerning male and female roles within the household. It explicitly states that a man's place is not in the kitchen but in a position of leisure and being served. This sentiment firmly roots the comment in a traditional patriarchal framework where domestic labor, especially cooking, is women's responsibility, and men are expected to be the recipients of that labor. The word "just" further simplifies and normalizes this expectation, presenting it as a straightforward and agreeable arrangement. According to Trepte, (2013) this comment reflects social categorization within the community: it divides individuals into "men" (who sit back and relax and are served) and, by implicit contrast, "women" (who are responsible for "domestic labor" and "cooking"). This categorization establishes distinct in-groups and out-groups based purely on gender roles within the household, delineating who performs which tasks.

Post thirty

*If there's another thing besides chapos that made me envy my father ni hutu tunyama. Mathe would always spare a few pieces for him before pouring Ndakaini Dam into the sufuria. I even wished I could marry at 12 to enjoy such privileges buana. Alikuwa anaweka a few ones kwa kasahani, hand over to Mzee who was comfortably seated watching the T.V. He would then give us each a piece, ama anasema tuekewe zetu pia. Hawa wamama sijui walikuwa aje. Now I'm here bored pretending to be busy alafu naskia, "Baba **** kulaga hii kabla chakula iive. Naskia kupigia mathe nimwambie Miaka Iliyoliwa na Nzige Bwana amenirudishia...*

This LCKM post reflects traditional patriarchal social norms prevalent in some Kenyan households by recounting the preferential treatment the author's father received with meat during childhood, where the mother ("Mathe") consistently prioritized his portion before serving the rest of the family a seemingly larger quantity. The author's childhood envy and desire for similar "privileges" through early marriage reveal how these power dynamics and traditional gender roles, positioning the father as privileged and the mother as the prioritizing caregiver, were observed and internalized, shaping their early understanding of marital expectations.



Figure 17: Fried meat in a white plate and a spoon

This study is supported by Kress and Bezemer (2023), where the image of glistening, flavorful and indulgent, fried meat on a simple white plate held by a hand as seen in figure seventeen, creates an immediate sense of personal connection and anticipation. This visual is powerfully coupled with a nostalgic text recalling childhood envy for the father's privileged enjoyment of this 'small meat' (hutu tunyama) alongside 'chapos.' Memories of the mother (Mathe) thoughtfully setting aside portions for him before preparing large meals (humorously described), and the speaker's childhood wish for similar privileges (buana), highlight familial love and tradition. The recollection of the father (Mzee) sharing these treats with the children from his 'kasahani' further emphasizes a loving and sharing family dynamic, prompting the speaker's appreciative reflection on their mother (Hawa wamama sijui walikuwa aje)

Comment thirty

Your mum ni mjanja and your dad is equally wise! She begins with giving the head of the house the best (respect) and the head reciprocates further by sharing that best with the rest of the house (love).

The comment centered around family setting where the father is given special treatment. The author in response to the above post looks at it as an act of respect on the part of the mother and love on the part of the father. The comment reflects social norms around family setup where the mother is expected to show respect to the head of the family by giving him special treatment which the father shares with the children. The results are supported by Kuang and Bicchieri (2024) who argues that how people decide to look at language used to discuss social norms is influenced by given context. For example, the author of this comment does not see the preferential treatment of the posters father as a bad thing instead he looks at it as a normal social phenomenon where the man of the house is given the first priority which he later shares with the members of the family.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This section presents summary of key research findings, conclusions and recommendation of the study. The first section highlights key research findings from various posts and comments on *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals (LCKM) Facebook* community in creating identity. The second part of this chapter highlights conclusions based of key research findings. Finally, the last section presents recommendations of this study for practical applications and future studies.

5.2 Summary

Language use and identity creation in the light of Tajfel and Turner's SIT and Kress and Theo's MDA revealed several underlying conceptual understandings.

The central goal of this research was to investigate language use in identity creation among *Facebook* communities. In particular the research set out to look into the linguistic strategies used by *Facebook* communities to create their identities, language use in facilitating maintenance of *Facebook* communities and language use by *Facebook* communities in reflecting social norms. Focusing on the first objective, the results of this study showed that *Facebook* communities utilize linguistic strategies like code switching and code mixing, emojis, hastags, narratives, and discursive positioning to create individual and collective identities. Various issues apart from food were discussed in the community's *Facebook* page including, marriage, finance, health, weight gain and weight loss among others.

In the light of the second objective, results of this study showed that the language that members of the community used played a key role in maintaining of the community. The language used in the posts and the comments fostered inclusivity, encouraged knowledge sharing, and encouraged a supportive environment. For example, in one of the posts a member wanted to know what to eat to regenerate the nerves and the advice that was given was meant to make the member feel part of the group. Using images and texts enhances user's interactions and strengthen identity creation among *Facebook* users. For instance, images of indigenous foods accompanied with texts written in indigenous language promotes cultural identity.

5.3 Conclusions

This study unearthed various linguistic strategies used by *Facebook* communities to create identity. Linguistic strategies presented in this work are the conscious or unconscious ways members of *Let's Cook Kenyan Meals* employ language including code switching and code mixing, using emojis and emoticons, stylistic variations, narrative construction, discursive positioning to achieve specific social, communicative, and identity-related goals within the unique environment of social media: The findings of this study showed that LCKM members used nomination strategies like hashtags, perspectivation strategies like code switching and code mixing and stylistic variation to create identity among members of the group. The LCKM community members create identity through interplay of language and other semiotic modes in their persona and to portray the images or texts that they want others to see or read. Further, members of LCKM used argumentation strategies like narratives, language support creativity, discursive positioning, and identity markers to create identities.

The study illustrates how language plays a key role in fostering inclusivity or promote exclusivity among *Facebook* users. The impact of language in promoting inclusivity depends on various digital communications strategies used by members of *Facebook* communities. To promote inclusivity and a sense of belonging, members of the LCKM used texts and images that is understood by majority of the group members. Therefore, this study shows that language is a powerful tool that can be used to promote inclusivity among members of *Facebook* community.

5.4 Recommendation for *Facebook* Users and Digital Marketers

This study has revealed that the language used in identity creation by individual or group of persons in *Facebook* communities has practical implications on online marketers. The way posts and comments are presented in various *Facebook* communities' influences the buyer's decision making. For instance, a post presented with info graphics or is coloured can attract *Facebook* user or influence a potential buyer to seek more information about the posted product or service. Therefore, it is essential for members of *Facebook* community users to customize their posts to ensure maximum and sustainable impact to their audience.

Marketers should utilize and adopt the commonly used linguistic and semiotic norms in *Facebook* community to reach large audience. To enhance trust and maximize visibility, there should be a change in digital marketing strategies. For example, digital marketers can use indigenous language used by *Facebook* community users to reach most of the targeted

audience. Furthermore, given the research finding that the interplay of visuals and language reinforces social norms campaigns must be designed with cultural sensitivity, using inclusive language and visuals. Brands should also leverage conflict management principles when handling public feedback, applying mitigation language to demonstrate empathy and preserve the relational integrity necessary for long-term consumer trust and transparency.

5.5 Recommendations for Further Research

This research sought to enrich the existing knowledge base within the field of sociolinguistics by examining how language use in social media communities can contribute to identity creation. However, there are many possibilities for further research as follows;

- i. Investigation on how language use and identity creation vary across different types of Kenyan *Facebook* communities.
- ii. Investigate the specific role of Sheng and other hybrid languages in identity creation among younger demographics within Kenyan *Facebook* communities.
- iii. Examine how specific linguistic choices, including the use of indigenous languages or slang, impact feelings of inclusivity and potential exclusion within diverse Kenyan *Facebook* communities.
- iv. Explore the impact of indigenous languages used in *Facebook* posts in promoting inclusivity or exclusivity in various *Facebook* communities.

Investigate how machine learning models used in *Facebook* posts affects the outcome of a linguistic pattern and their impact on identity formations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Abstract of the Published Paper

The Role of Language in Facilitating Identity Maintenance in Facebook Communities

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Date Published: ABSTRACT

19 September 2025





Keywords:

*Identity,
Identity-
maintenance,
Facebook-
communities,
linguistic-strategies,
Multimodal-
elements.*

The study explored the role of language in the processes of identity maintenance in Facebook communities. Drawing upon the theoretical foundations of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA), this research investigated how members employ linguistic and multimodal resources to maintain interaction on Facebook communities and maintain shared group identities. The study focused on "Let's Cook Kenyan Meals" (henceforth LCKM) Facebook community united by a shared passion for Kenyan cuisine. Through a qualitative content analysis of 5 purposively sampled posts and their associated comments, augmented by participant observation, the study identified key linguistic strategies and multimodal elements used by the community members to keep the group going. The findings show that language plays a crucial role in maintaining identity among the members of this community. The use of linguistic strategies like code switching between English and Kiswahili helps members to create an in-group identity and cultural identity that boosts interaction and makes them remain together. Other than code switching, other strategies like the use of emojis, emoticons and pictures of various foods were used. The findings of this study offer empirical support for theories of online identity as actively maintained through specific linguistic and multimodal strategies like code-switching, thereby establishing online communities as important sites for sociolinguistic research. It also shows that digital platforms like Facebook are powerful tools for cultural preservation and expression, as they enable communities to use specific language and imagery to celebrate their shared heritage in a globalised world, which aligns with SDG 11 target 11.4. (Protect the world's cultural and natural heritage).



Appendix II: NACOSIT Research License

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The National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, hereafter referred to as the Commission, was established under the Science, Technology and Innovation Act 2013 (Revised 2014) herein after referred to as the Act. The objective of the Commission shall be to regulate and assure quality in the science, technology and innovation sector and advise the Government in matters related thereto.

CONDITIONS OF THE RESEARCH LICENSE

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Appendix III: Ethical Clearance

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**EGERTON UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND ETHICS REVIEW
COMMITTEE**

EU/RE/DIR/009

Approval No. *EUISERC/APP/425/2025*

9th May 2025

Nina Mokeira Gichaba,
Address: 145-20107
Telephone: 0791195929
E-mail: ninaateyh@gmail

Dear Nina,

**RE: ETHICAL APPROVAL: LANGUAGE USE IN IDENTITY CREATION AMONG
FACEBOOK COMMUNITIES**

This is to inform you that the *Egerton University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee* has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your application approval number is *EUISERC/APP/425/2025*. The approval period is *9th May 2025 – 10th May 2026*

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements;

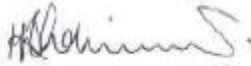
- i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used.
- ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by *Egerton University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee*.
- iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to *Egerton University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee* within 72 hours of notification
- iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affect safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to *Egerton University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee* within 72 hours.
- v. Clearance for Material Transfer of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to the expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.

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- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to *Egerton University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee*.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) <https://oris.nacosti.go.ke> and also obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Kennedy N. Ondimu PhD

CHAIRMAN, EUISERC

KNO/BK/

