Discursive Construction of Health Narratives: Post Covid-19 Discourse in Selected East African Newspapers

Nancy C. Langat, Jacinta Ndambuki, Florence Mwithi
Laikipia University, Kenya

Abstract
This study investigated how post-COVID-19 pandemic narratives were constructed in selected Kenyan and Tanzanian online newspapers. This is a part of a PhD ongoing work whose specific objective are: to examine the linguistic strategies used by reporters to describe COVID-19 pandemic and Covid-19 vaccines in the *Daily Nation* and *The Citizen* newspapers; to investigate the commonalities and differences in the underlying cognitive schemas reflected in the linguistic strategies employed by reporters in the *Daily Nation* and *The Citizen* newspapers to depict COVID-19 pandemic and COVID-19 vaccines; and to compare how the linguistic strategies used in the *Daily Nation* and *The Citizen* newspapers influenced the public attitudes and perceptions towards COVID-19 pandemic and COVID-19 vaccines. This paper addresses the third objective of the wider study. Data is drawn from two mainstream East African newspapers, namely The *Daily Nation* and *The Citizen*. A corpus of 38 news articles published between March 2022 and March 2023 is analysed using corpus linguistics as a methodology. The study uses appraisal theory as a framework. The analysis uncovers prevalent themes and linguistic patterns that shape public understanding of and responses to COVID-19. The findings indicate that post-COVID-19 discourse is marked by a dual focus on the lingering impacts of the pandemic and the resilience of communities. The study further reveals that the media play a crucial role in framing health narratives, often balancing between alarming reports and stories of hope and recovery.

Keywords: Corpus, discourse, framing, health, media

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced global health discourse, fundamentally reshaping how societies perceive and engage with health issues. In the post-pandemic era, health discussions have evolved to reflect both the virus's lasting impacts and communities' resilience. It is apparent that most of the existing studies rely on news data released in the initial stages of the pandemic, yet a lot happened in media reports on the pandemic in 2022 and 2023 (Lei, 2025), the period of this study. Media representations are intertwined with questions of power and ideology. This is because the process of giving meaning to events suggests that reality can be defined in multiple ways (Croteau & Hoynes, 2014). Various discursive strategies embed power and ideology within language, including framing, legitimization, and exclusion. Van Dijk (2006) defines ideologies as cognitive belief systems. In other words, ideologies involve mental objects such as ideas, thoughts, beliefs, judgements, and values. He further defines ideologies as socio-cognitive, implying that members of social groups, such as news makers and their audience in this study, share (or contest) them. They are therefore socially shared interpretive frameworks that allow group members to understand and make sense of social reality, everyday practices, and relations to other groups. van Dijk (2006) further asserts that media power is symbolic and persuasive because it can, to some extent, control readers' or viewers' minds. This study sought to establish the post-COVID-19 interpretive

frameworks that shaped public understanding and responses to the pandemic among Kenyan and Tanzanian news readers.

The media is expected to report objectively to inform the public accurately. However, media framing often reflects the judgements of message creators. Entman (2007) argues that journalists select certain aspects of perceived reality, making them more salient in communicating text. This approach promotes specific problem definition, moral evaluations, causal interpretations, and recommendations for the events described. According to van Dijk (2006), language use plays a crucial role in framing through syntactical structures. For example, in the sentence 'COVID-19 has killed many people', the emphasis is on the pandemic, whereas 'Many people have been killed by the pandemic' highlights the lives lost. The passive voice makes this possible by de-emphasising agency.

Langat (2023) conducted a study examining how The Daily Nation constructed the ecosystem health metaphor in its COVID-19 coverage during the early months of the pandemic. By framing the environment as a body and pollution as a disease, the study used Schema Theory and corpus linguistics to explore how containment measures, such as lockdowns and sanitizers, were metaphorically linked to environmental health, drawing parallels between climate change and pandemic responses. Building on this metaphorical foundation, the current study shifts focus to post-pandemic narratives in *The Daily Nation* and *The Citizen*, analysing how linguistic strategies shaped public attitudes towards COVID-19 and vaccines. The current research employed Appraisal Theory to investigate evaluative language and emotional framing, revealing a dual narrative of lingering impact and community resilience. The two studies, Langat (2023) and the current study, highlight the evolving role of media in constructing health discourse—from metaphorical representations of ecological vulnerability to strategic framing of public perception and recovery.

Barasa et al. (2020) examined the use of interactive meaning in social media coverage of COVID-19 containment measures. The study employed Critical Discourse Analysis and Multi-Modality theories. The findings indicated that COVID-19 media discourse affects family relationships. The interactive meaning of measures constructed through language devices such as satire revealed a lack of trust between spouses. This was manifested through the use of language to satirize some behaviours such as a spouse having saved their spouse's phone number under the name *COVID.* The study findings portrayed the media's promotion of a contemptuous attitude towards the laid-down COVID-19 containment measures. Using Appraisal Theory by Martin & White (2005), this study sought to identify the Attitude resources used in the Daily Nation and The Citizen newspapers to convey COVID-19 news.

El-Elimat et al. (2021) examined COVID-19 vaccine acceptability and attitudes toward them among the Jordanian public. Jordan ranked among the lowest countries in COVID-19 vaccine acceptance. 36.3 percent refused to be vaccinated, while 26.3 percent were not sure. Vaccine safety and cost contributed to their refusal. The study highlighted the media's role in shaping uptake and public attitudes toward COVID-19 vaccines. Fariza and Zulcafi (2020), in a corpus analysis of COVID-19 in Malaysian online newspapers, found that the verb and noun collocations such as vaccine rollout, herd immunity, and pandemic response co-occurred most often with the node-word COVID-19. The collocates reflected anxiety, fear, and uncertainty that most people in Malaysia experienced. The current study borrows heavily from this study's methodology and data analysis. However, the present study focuses on how news articles construct public perceptions of COVID-19 in Kenya and Tanzania.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Appraisal theory as advanced by Martin and White (2005). Appraisal theory is a systemic Functional Linguistic approach that analyses the language styles speakers and writers use within a text to reveal positive or negative assessments, attitudes, and positions.

Appraisal theory has three domains: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. This study focused on the Attitude domain to highlight news makers' stance on COVID-19 during the post-COVID era.

Attitude involves language expressions in texts that position the addressee to take a negative or positive point of view of the situation, action, process, or entity being described. The sub-systems of the Attitudinal domain of Appraisal theory are described below, followed by a diagrammatic representation of the sub-systems used to analyse the data in this study. The Attitude domain is categorized into three aspects: Affect, judgement, and appreciation. These are explained below.

1) **Affect** refers to the expressions of people's emotions and feelings. The audience can be described as happy or sad, confident or anxious, interested or bored as they interact with the text. Affect is also divided into three categories, namely:
    i. un/happiness,
    ii. dis/satisfaction and
    iii. in/security.
2) **Judgement** is a resource for expressing norms, that is, what is right or wrong, ethical, or responsible. Judgement is divided into Judgement related to social esteem and Judgement related to social sanction.
    i. Social esteem deals with normality (unusual people), capacity (someone's ability), and tenacity (a person who is determined).
    ii. Social sanction is related to veracity (an honest person) and propriety (means a person has morality).
3) **Appreciation** is the evaluation of text, process, or phenomenon. The system is formed around three aspects, namely:
    i. **Reaction** describes the emotional influence of discourse. Reaction has two aspects: impact (the degree of attractiveness of the text) and quality (how much influence the text or process has on feelings).
    ii. **Composition** is discourse-oriented, describing the complexity and details of objects. It has two aspects: balance (whether the text or process is commensurate) and Complexity (whether the text or process is too complicated to understand).
    iii. **Social valuation** refers to judging whether the text or process is important and valuable when looking at the text or process by social standards.

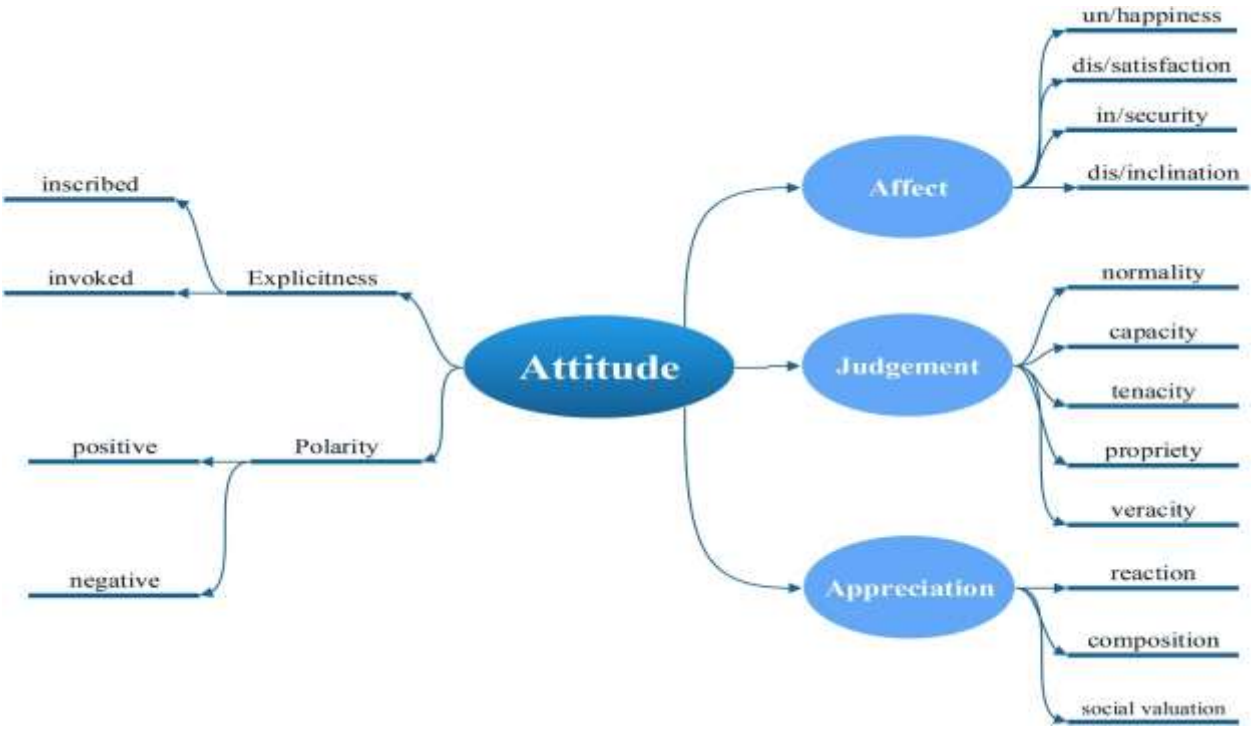


Fig. 1: Overview of the Attitude Domain in the Appraisal Theory Framework
(Martin & Whites, 2005)

Methodology

The study used corpus linguistics a collect data. According to Ngula (2018), Corpus linguistics is a method of examining language use in large corpora using a computer. A corpus refers to an electronic compilation of naturally occurring texts (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). Corpus analysis is possible through the use of corpus linguistics software analytic tools. This study used AntConc computer software. AntConc is a free, downloadable software that is user-friendly, especially for beginners in corpus linguistics (Gomide, 2020).

Data collection began with compiling a corpus of online newspapers accessed from the official Nation Media House and The Citizen websites. The search was limited to articles discussing 'COVID-19'. A Random sample of 21 articles was selected from 637 identified on the Citizen website and 17 from 544 on the Daily Nation website. The articles were downloaded and uploaded into AntConc Computer software for analysis to form two sets of corpora for comparison. The collocates, words that frequently appear with the search word, were identified in each corpus using the AntConc' KWIC (Key Word in Context) and Collocate tools. The search word in each corpus was 'pandemic'(tables 1 and 2). The collocates *the*, *COVID-19,* and *of* occur in both corpora and were selected for contextual analysis. Their contexts are examined with the File View tool and are represented in Tables 3 to 8 below

Data Presentation

Table 1 below shows the results and collocates of the search word *pandemic* from The *Citizen* news articles, while Table 2 shows the results from the *Daily Nation* news articles.

Table 1: Collocates of the Search Word *Pandemic* in The *Citizen* News Articles

Collocate	Rank	FreqLR	FreqL	FreqR
the	1	121	96	25
covid	2	37	36	1
battled	3	17	16	1
how	4	21	19	2
they	5	20	19	1
staying	6	16	0	16
of	7	34	21	13
healthy	8	15	0	15
lessons	9	13	12	1
in	10	29	5	24

Table 1 shows that the definite article *the* is the strongest collocate of the pandemic (121 occurrences, 96 to the left and 25 to the right), followed by covid (37, almost all to the left). This reflects the dominant pattern *the COVID-19 pandemic* in which the pandemic is presented as a specific, identifiable event. The lexical collocates are more informative: *battled, how,* and *they* occur almost exclusively to the left, pointing to a narrative of struggle and agency (how they struggled). *Staying a*nd *healthy* occur to the right, pointing to a forward-looking discourse of health maintenance. *Lessons* add a reflective frame.

Table 2: Collocates of the Search Word *Pandemic* from the *Daily Nation* News Articles

Collocate	Rank	FreqL	FreqR
the	1	26	23
of	2	4	5
covid	3	7	7
as	4	6	5
lifestyle	5	2	1
in	6	6	4
months	7	2	2
to	8	5	2
div	9	8	0
with	10	3	0

In Table 2, the leading collocates are again grammatical: *the* (49) occurrences across both sides, *of* (9) and *covid* (14). Frequencies are much lower than in *The Citizen*, and there are fewer lexical collocates with clear evaluative meaning. *Lifestyle* and *months* are the only content words, hinting at a framing of the pandemic as a period that changed daily life.

Table 3: A File View of the Collocate '*COVID-19*' in *The Citizen* News Articles

Article	Left Context	KWIC	Right Context
Finance meeting to discuss Covid-19 recovery. The Citizen.mhtml	the global economy is recovering from the effects of the	Covid-19	pandemic experienced since the beginning of 2020, and digital technologies
How they battled Covid pandemic. The Citizen.mhtml	worldwide, and more deaths than we can count the	Covid-19	pandemic impacted our planet on a large scale since
Africa should invest in mental health. The Citizen.mhtml	advocates must take advantage of crisis situations such as the	Covid-19	pandemic to promote a long-term agenda for mental
The mad man in the African market. The Citizen.mhtml	mental distress and illness, loss of income during the	Covid-19	pandemic, general financial difficulties, death of family members, dome
Mental health Who doctors the doctors. The Citizen.mhtml	up with social media feeds during the height of the	Covid-19	pandemic, the posts and videos of health workers narrating
Children and screens Making it safely through the holidays. The Citizen.mhtml	more time watching screens as a result of the	Covid-19	pandemic

The lines in Table 3 show that the *COVID-19* pandemic usually occurred after the pandemic, across topics including *economic recovery, mental health*, screen time, and *lockdown*. The pandemic is represented as a large-scale disruption (*impacting our planet on a large scale and as a lasting condition requiring recovery from the effects beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, promoting a long-term agenda*). The mental-health lines link the pandemic to distress, income loss, and strain on health workers.

Table 4: A File View of the Collocate 'the' in *The Citizen* News Articles

Article	Left Context	KWIC	Right Context
Tanzania cautions on new Covid-19 strain. The Citizen.mhtml	total of 26,261 Covid-19 cases and 730 deaths since the outbreak of	the	pandemic in March last year
Mental health: Who are the doctors. The Citizen.mhtml	the mental health of health care workers, noting that	the	pandemic had exacerbated health workers existing demands
How they battled the COVID pandemic. The Citizen.mhtml	where the natural demand to socialise is rather high and	the	pandemic had many in isolation
How they battled the COVID pandemic. The Citizen.mhtml	Federico also believes that we are going forward out of	the	pandemic and he hopes that we will come back
Mental health Who doctors the doctors. The Citizen.mhtml	Even though	the	pandemic brought intensified mental agony, the reality
Tanzania now to release. Covid -19 data Citizen.mhtml	part of the government efforts in fighting	the	pandemic by raising awareness and vaccination

In Table 4, three patterns stand out. First, the pandemic is a burden: *strain, exacerbated health workers, intensified mental agony,* all carrying negative Affect. Second, the response is expressed through combat vocabulary: *fight the pandemic*, *fighting the pandemic.* Third, language of recovery and endings appears: *going forward out of the pandemic* and *he hopes that we will come back*, which expresses hope and capability.

Table 5: A File View of the Collocate 'of' in *The Citizen* News Articles

Article	Left Context	KWIC	Right Context
Finance meeting to discuss Covid-19 recovery. The Citizen.mhtml	situation where the global economy is recovering from the effects	of	the Covid-19 pandemic experienced since the beginning of 2020, and
Mental health Who doctors the doctors. The Citizen.mhtml	who kept up with social media feeds during the height	of	the Covid-19 pandemic, the posts and videos of health
Children and screens. Making it safely through the holidays. The Citizen.mhtml	are spending more time watching screens as a result	of	the Covid-19 pandemic
How they battled Covid pandemic. The Citizen.mhtml	Federico also believes that we are going forward out	of	the pandemic and he hopes that we will come
Mental health Who doctors the doctors. The Citizen.mhtml	also saw medical pra ctitioners see and feel the brunt	of	the pandemic harder than anyone else on the
How they battled Covid pandemic. The Citizen.mhtml	List Many university students worldwide felt the brunt	of	the pandemic harsher. These thirteen explain how their respec
Lessons From The Pandemic Staying Healthy In 2022. The Citizen.mhtml	termine you wellbeing, both physical and mental. In the wake	of	the global pandemic, most, if not all of us

The lines for *of* in Table 5 are informative for the nouns that come before it. *Effects of*, *result of* and *brunt of* present the pandemic as a source of consequences. *The height of the pandemic* treats the crisis as a peak attached to health workers and students. *In the wake of* frames the pandemic as past.

Table 6: A File View of the Collocate *'the'* in the *Daily Nation* News Articles

Article	Left Context	KWIC	Right Context
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19? Daily Nation.mhtml	much less used, hand sanitiser. This changed as soon as	the	pandemic arrived on our shores. Personal hygiene became a
In the US, children return to school, but so do the guns. _Daily Nation.mhtml	schools may be even more likely in 2021 than before	the	pandemic because of a number of exacerbated risk
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19? Daily Nation.mhtml	But as	the	pandemic continued to pummel humanity, with no end in
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19? Daily Nation.mhtml	before. I prefer to spend my time indoors like in	the=	pandemic days. With WhatsApp, I am able to stay
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19? Daily Nation.mhtml	Githinji Gitahi, the CEO of Amref, the end of	the	pandemic emergency is the beginning of a bigger challenge
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19? Daily Nation.mhtml	and life	The	pandemic has had both upsides and downsides, majorly
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19? Daily Nation.mhtml	wide-ranging lifestyle changes and choices. Three months into	the	pandemic in June 20 20, about 85 percent of consumers reported having
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19? Daily Nation.mhtml	Wrapper Farhan Yusuf, a global health professional, says	the	pandemic should serve as the motivation to boost healthcare
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19? Daily Nation.mhtml	increased their alcohol intake. Even some non-drinkers before	the	pandemic started drinking to cope with anxiety and

The lines in Table 6 position the pandemic mainly in relation to time and change. *Before pandemic*, *three months into the pandemic, as soon as the pandemic arrived* and *the end of the pandemic emergency* use the pandemic as a dividing point in everyday life. The verbs 'arrived on the shores' and 'continue to pummel humanity' portray the pandemic as an invading force with agency. The human actors are backgrounded, but the sense of threat is intensified. Some lines acknowledge ambivalence (both upsides and downsides), and one evaluates it positively (as motivation) to boost healthcare. The prevailing tone is lifestyle disruption and coping.

Table 7: A File View of the Collocate 'of' in *Daily Nation* News Articles

Article	Left Context	KWIC	Right Context
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19 Daily Nation.mhtml	Dr Githinji Gitahi, the CEO of Amref the end	of	the pandemic emergency is the beginning of a bigger
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19. Daily Nation.mhtml	years to be known, the socioeconomic and psychological upheavals	of	the pandemic triggered immediate changes how people
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19. Daily Nation.mhtml	were eating healthier than they usually do as a result	of	the pandemic, said researchers
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19. Daily Nation.mhtml	cases of communicable diseases were recorded in the months	of	the pandemic
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19. Daily Nation.mhtml	the end of the pandemic emergency is the beginning	of	a bigger challenge
In US, children return to school but so do the guns _Daily Nation.mhtml	be even more likely in 2021 than before the pandemic because	of	a number of exacerbated risk factors for violence,
Has the time come to say bye to Covid-19 Daily Nation.mhtml	choices. Three months into the pandemic in June 2020, about 85 percent	of	consumers reported having changed their food habits, among them

The lines in Table 7 place the pandemic in time and stage. *The end of the pandemic emergency*, *the months of the pandemic*, and *three months into the pandemic*…. The pandemic is treated as a measurable period with ending and the ending is not presented as a relief. The end of the pandemic emergency is the beginning of bigger challenges uses *of* twice to turn closure into a new threat. The pandemic is also linked to its effects through noun phrases such as *socio-economic and psychological upheavals of the pandemic.* Other*s* are positive such as *eating healthier as a result of the pandemic* and *the fall in communicable diseases in the months of the pandemic.*

Table 8: File View of the Collocate *COVID-19* in the *Daily Nation* News Articles

Article	Left Context	KWIC	Right Context
Africa must gird itself for post-Covid health gaps, populism and instability. Daily Nation.mhtml	Kenya/ Africa,	Covid-19,	pandemic, Mutahi Kagwe
Conflict, climate change and Covid-19: Three Cs that are triumvirate of SGBV Daily Nation.mhtml	community, which they said was made worse by the	Covid-19	pandemic
Our journalists' mental health needs addressing Daily Nation.mhtml	competitive and financially troubled industry and, most importantly, the	Covid-19	pandemic have put media workers under unprecedented strain.

The lines in Table 8 emphasise the aggravating factor of COVID-19. Media workers have faced *unprecedented strain*; the pandemic also added to the existing problem of climate change, and health gaps emerged in the post-COVID-19 period.

Data Analysis

The data is analysed qualitatively using the Attitude domain of Appraisal theory (Matin & white, 2005). Excerpts drawn from the concordance lines of *the of* and *COVID-19* (Tables 3-8) and from their wider article contexts were read and coded for Affect, Judgement and Appreciation and marked positive (+) or negative (-) according to the stance they implicitly or explicitly evoke. The two newspapers were analysed separately and then compared.

Distribution of Attitude Resources of COVID-19 in *The Citizen* News Articles

This section analyses each sub-category of Attitude resources on COVID-19 in The Citizen news articles. The excerpts below highlight the lexical terms that convey the emotional effect of the reporting, either explicitly or implicitly. Each excerpt further illustrates the attitude represented.

1. Affect of *The Citizen* Report on COVID-19

Excerpt 1. Even though the pandemic brought intensified mental agony (Affect: unhappiness), the reality is that doctors still go through gruelling experiences every day (Affect: insecurity)

Excerpt 2. During the pandemic, we saw nurses and medics post and share videos of how **challenging** (Affect: dissatisfaction) it was to work during that period and how isolated (Affect: unhappiness) they were as they cared for patients.

Excerpt 3a. Many university students worldwide felt the brunt of the pandemic (Affect: insecurity).

Excerpt 3b. This is an age where the natural demand to socialize is rather high and the pandemic had many in isolation (Affect: insecurity).

Excerpt 4. Even though people feared the pandemic (Affect: insecurity), the government eventually acknowledged its presence, (Affect: satisfaction), there were no extreme measures such as lockdowns (affect: satisfaction).

Excerpts 1 and 2 foreground the emotional burden on doctors and nurses through their own shared accounts. Excerpts 3a and 3b locate insecurity in university students at a stage in life when the need to socialise is high. Excerpt 4 is a mixed case: feared conveys insecurity, but the government's acknowledgment of the virus and absence of lockdowns are coded as satisfaction, introducing relief into an otherwise negative picture.

2. Judgement of The *Citizen* Report on COVID-19

Excerpt 5. Fedinco also believes that we are going forward out of the pandemic and he hopes that we will come back to a normal life without forgetting what happened (+ Judgement-social esteem-tenacity).

Judgement is rare. It appears only in excerpt 6, where the speaker portrays people as determined and able to endure. This is a stance that may encode the forward–looking, just like the collocates discussed in Table 1.

3. Appreciation of *The Citizen* Report on COVID-19

Excerpt 6. For those of us who kept up with social media feeds during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the posts and videos of health workers narrating how gruesome their work environment was, or how taxing it has been for them mentally, the question on our minds should have been: whom do they turn to unpack all these stresses?

Excerpt 7: In the case of Tanzania, should there be a mandatory wellness programme for medical practitioners? (- Appreciation-Reaction -quality)

Excerpt 8. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, which is part of the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), recently sought comment in the Federal Register about supporting the mental health of health-care workers and noting that the pandemic had exacerbated health workers' stress (-Appreciation-Reaction- Impact).

Excerpt 9. Chris says the pandemic did help him learn new skills. He developed competent digital skills which improved his use of numerical tools and knows how to communicate with others remotely now (+Appreciation-impact).

Excerpt 10. For Jiwon, some elements brought by pandemic are now anchored in societies and are here to stay. According to her, we will continue to use remote online tools daily for daily and professional life (+ Appreciation-Reaction-impact).

Excerpts 6 and 7 evaluate the pandemic's effects on health workers negatively through the use of the adjectives like *gruesome, taxing* and *mandatory.* Excerpts 9 evaluate the pandemic's legacy positively: *acquired digital skills and remote skills that are here to stay.* The negative Affect in *The Citizen* centres on frontline workers (excerpt 8). The positive judgement and Appreciation centre on resilience, skills and adaptation. Evaluations are anchored on named individuals such as Fedinco in excerpt 5 and their experiences.

Distribution of Attitude Resources on COVID-19 in the *Daily Nation*

This section analyses each sub-category of Attitude resources on COVID-19 in *Daily Nation* news articles.

1. Affect of the *Daily Nation* Report on COVID-19.
Excerpt 11. Online harassment and bullying are linked to a myriad of mental health issues, which are being heightened by the pandemic (Affect: insecurity).

Excerpt 12a. With more time spent at home and anxiety caused by uncertainty, some people increased their alcohol intake (Affect: unhappiness)

Excerpt 12b. Even some non-drinkers before the pandemic started drinking to cope with anxiety and to fill the surplus time they suddenly had (Affect: unhappiness)

Excerpt 13. Pandemic takes mental –health toll on US youngsters (Affect: unhappiness)

Excerpt 14. I have developed social anxiety that I did not have before (Affect: insecurity).

Excerpt 15. Community –based mental health body supports health workers fight –stress at workplace (Affect: satisfaction)

Affect is the main resource in the *Daily Nation's* excerpts and is mostly negative. Excerpts 11 and 14 present mental health problems as insecurity, and excerpts 2a, 2b, and 3 convey unhappiness through increased alcohol use, coping with anxiety, and the toll on young people. The only positive Affect is excerpt 5, where a community-based body supporting health workers elicits satisfaction.

2. Judgement of the *Daily Nation* Report on COVID-19.
Excerpt 16. The initiative reaches out to individual leaders in a bid to have them commit in making SGBV prevention a top priority in rebuilding efforts post covid-19 pandemic (+Judgement).
Judgement is found in only one excerpt; it expresses positive evaluation of the conduct of leaders.

3. Appreciation of the *Daily Nation* Report on COVID-19.
Excerpt 17. Despite that, in 2022 the continent will have to adjust to the hard realities of accelerating climate change and a divided and chaotic post –covid (-Appreciation -valuation).

Excerpt 18. A higher percentage of people surveyed said they were eating healthier than they usually do as a result of the pandemic (+ Appreciation- Impact).

Excerpt 19. Biblically speaking, if 2020 and 2021 are the years the locusts ate, 2022 is the year of renewal and restoration. In 2021, Africa and the world turned the tide against the COVID-19 pandemic (+ Appreciation- valuation).

Excerpt 20. The end of the pandemic emergency is the beginning of a bigger challenge (Affect: insecurity).

Excerpt 21. Farhan Yusuf, a global professional, says the pandemic should serve to boost healthcare systems in the world (+ Appreciation-Impact).

Excerpt 22. The pandemic has had both upside and downsides**,** majorly in human health, with massive shifts in behaviour, attitudes, the economy, travel, recreation, work, medicine, and virtually every area of human life (- Appreciation- Impact).

Excerpt 23. I have never quite been able to shake hands since the pandemic. I find it unhealthy and almost inappropriate (- Appreciation- quality).

Excerpt 24. In particular, fewer cases of communicable diseases were recorded in the midst of the pandemic by 50 percent (+Appreciation-Impact).

Excerpt 25. I prefer to spent my time indoors like in the pandemic days (- evaluation).

Excerpt 26. But as the pandemic continued to overwhelm humanity, with no end in sight for the crisis (Affect: insecurity).

Appreciation is evenly balanced. Positive evaluations include a renewal frame (excerpt 19), healthier eating (excerpt 18), fewer communicable diseases (excerpt 24), and the pandemic as motivation to strengthen health systems (excerpt 21). Negative evaluations include a divided and chaotic post-COVID world (excerpt 17), the upsides and downsides across every area of life (excerpt 22), reluctance to shake hands (excerpt 23), and a preference for indoor life (excerpt 25). Evaluations therefore move between recovery and lasting change at the societal or health-system level. Negative Affect in the Daily Nation concerns the broader population. Appreciation is balanced, and Judgement is directed at leadership.

Results and Discussion

The collocate and concordance evidence (Tables 1 to 8) and the coded excerpts point to a shared picture with different emphases. In both newspapers the strongest collocates of pandemic are *the* (121 in the Citizen,49 in the *Daily Nation*), covid (37 and 14) and *of* (34 and 9) which together produce the pattern *the covid-19 pandemic* and present the pandemic as a specific, named event. Noun phrases with *of* then give that event shape.

Across the coded 28 excerpts, negative evaluation outweighs positive in both papers at 6 out of 10 (60%) in *The Citizen* and 11 of 17 (65%) in the *Daily Nation*. So the papers differ less in tone than in what they bring to the foreground. In *The Citizen*, the foreground is the people who carried the burden. The phrase the brunt of (Table 5) is matched by Affect excerpts on doctors facing intensified mental agony (excerpt 1), nurses who were isolated (excerpt 2), students left insecure by the loss of social contact (excerpts 3a and 3b), and the collocate *battled* (17 occurrences, 16 of them to the left) frames these experiences as a struggle. *The Citizen* then turns to recovery. The collocates *staying* (16), *healthy* (15), and *lessons* (13) look forward and reflect just like in the concordance line *going forward out of the pandemic* (Table 5) is coded as tenacity when it means determination (excerpt 5).

Excerpts 8 and 9 add *competent digital skills and remote tools that are here to stay*, so that the pandemic is remembered for what it left behind as well as what it took. In the *Daily Nation*, society is foregrounded. The strain falls on the mental health toll on US youngsters (excerpt 13), on people drinking to cope with anxiety (excerpt 12b), and on those who report social anxiety (excerpt 14), and it is set against a crisis with no end in sight (excerpt 7). Its recovery language is also collective: the year of renewal and restoration (excerpt 11), healthier eating as a result of the pandemic (Table 7, excerpt 18), and fewer communicable diseases (excerpt 15).

Positive evaluations appear in 3 of 10 excerpts in *The Citizen* and 6 of 17 in the *Daily Nation,* again suggesting the difference lies in emphasis rather than balance. The Citizen anchors its evaluation in named people (Federica, Chris, Jiwon) and raises institutional care for health workers as the answer (mandatory wellness program, excerpt 7). The *Daily Nation*

anchors them in society and calls on leaders to commit to preventing sexual and gender-based violence (excerpt 8) and on health systems to be strengthened (excerpt 21).

Grammar reinforces the framing. In both papers, the pandemic is framed as the agent and people as the recipients: *it arrived on our shores and continued to pummel humanity* (Table 6), and its *brunt falls on workers and students* (Table 5). According to van Dijk (2006), this backgrounding of human agency heightens insecurity because the threat acts while people endure.

Conclusion

The study examined how post-COVID-19 health narratives were constructed in the Daily Nation and The Citizen through the collocates of the pandemic and the Attitude domain of Appraisal Theory. Both newspapers frame the pandemic as an event with a beginning, a peak, and an aftermath. They rely on negative Affect expressed through unhappiness and insecurity. In addition, they present the pandemic as something to be survived and learned from, but they differ in who is placed at the centre of the story: individuals for *The Citizen* and institutions for the *Daily Nation.* Further, they differ in emphasis. *The Citizen* foregrounds individual experiences, particularly those of health workers and students, hence balancing hardships with appraisals of personal adaptation, new skills, and continued recovery. The *Daily Nation* places more emphasis on societal strain, prolonged threat, and the responsibilities of leaders and health systems. The two newspapers show how post-pandemic health narratives do more than report recovery. They position readers to read the same crisis as either a personal ordeal to survive or a collective problem still to be solved.

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