

## **A critical discourse analysis of the operation of power and ideology in Covid-19 vaccine Twitter commentary**

### **Abstract**

Since its emergence in early 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has drastically altered the lives of people across the world. Whilst the effects of the pandemic have currently subsided, the most prominent preventative measure for minimizing severe infection in those most vulnerable to the disease included the recent scientific developments of Covid-19 vaccines. A multitude of discourses that promote the use of vaccines exist alongside discourses that challenge the efficacy of vaccines. The aim of this research report was to provide a greater comprehension of the existing discourses and ideologies of Covid-19 vaccine acceptance and reluctance in South Africa as revealed by Twitter commentaries. Naturally occurring data generated between February 2021 and February 2022 was collected from Twitter in the form of Tweets authored by South African influencers, and comments constructed by Twitter users in response to influencer content. This report utilised Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis which consisted of three phases that began with a textual analysis, followed by a processing analysis, and concluded with a social analysis. Vaccine hesitant discourses functioned as the foundations of cultural, religious, familial, and political ideologies – which broadly constructed a reality in which the Covid-19 vaccine was deemed as risky and potentially lethal. The primary discourses that shed light on the ideologies underpinning Covid-19 vaccine acceptance included medical-scientific and biological discourses. These discourses were deemed to be functions of the ideology of evidence-based medicine and the educational institutional state apparatus. The functioning of these ideologies constructed a reality in which scientific institutions and knowledge were deemed as trustworthy and the Covid-19 vaccine was constructed as life-saving intervention. This research contributes to the literature on vaccine discourses in the era of social media and Covid-19. This report's findings may provide opportunities for productive communication and intervention with the occurrence of similar divisive phenomena in South African digital spaces.

### **Keywords**

Covid-19; critical discourse analysis; social media; South Africa; Twitter; vaccines