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Techno-affective Elections and (Il)legitimate Power: WhatsApp Voice in Kenya's Electoral Deliberations

A Thesis submitted to Faculty of Humanities University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment for the award of Doctor of Philosophy.

By

Wefwafwa Job Allan

Reg. 2275021



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Abstract

This thesis is about the concept of WhatsApp voice and its use in African electoral contexts. It devised a three-pillar framework comprising techno-pessimism, techno-optimism, and techno-pragmatism, and triangulated it with the qualitative network analysis. It used the case of Bungoma County to generalise African use of digital technologies in electioneering deliberations. The study sought to determine how and why the use of WhatsApp voice enabled and/or limited people's deliberations during the 2017 elections; with view to project how 2022 elections might pan out. Its significance was to explore the people's unique WhatsApp use; to popularise the less emphasized techno-pragmatic perception; so as to add knowledge in the field where social media is rapidly changing the digital media landscpate; and to predict how the 2022 elections may pan out. The study was guided by the question: What factors inform WhatsApp pessimistic, optimistic, and/or pragmatic perceptions during electoral deliberations? Debate on power, perception, and techno-affect threaded the work, advancing the discussion towards addressing philosophical considerations. It engaged the concept of illegitimate and legitimate power created through "mere" voting and deliberative voting; that does not change and/or change the power balance between the people and representatives; and how WhatsApp use perpetrates illegitimate and/or legitimate power by enabling affective and/or deliberative politics. The coalesced Kenyan media milestones assess how it has gained and lost credibility over time; with view to place the WhatsApp voice within historical contexts. The study's findings reveal how the people's unique cultural interaction with WhatsApp technology intertwines with the dominant social actors' influence, shaping how and why the platform is perceived as techno-pessimistic, techno-optimistic and/or techno-pragmatic. The study's prediction about the 2022 elections came to pass, with measure of accuracy.
Keywords: Social Media/WhatsApp, Techno-Affect, Elections, Kenya.

Acronyms

ACCORD: African Centre Constructive Resolution of Disputes

BAKE: Bloggers Association of Kenya

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

GIF: Graphics Interchange Format

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisations

Parastatals: Government owned companies/firms

UK: United Kingdom

US: United States of America

USAID: The United States Agency for International Development

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.



Candidate: Wefwafwa Job Allan

26th DAY OF October 2022



Supervisor: Dr Bob Wekesa

26th DAY OF October 2022

For Elsie, Daniela, and in memory of my late mother Nabisino.

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* * *

Sections of chapters two and three of this thesis appear as a Journal Article in *Africa In Fact*, Issue No 58 (2021). The article appears under the title, *Globalised Desires.* A version of the article appears as a book chapter in the book entitled *Africa Policy under the Biden Administration* (2022). The book chapter is titled "Emotionalised Politics and Worldwide Desires: The US-Africa Semblance in Social Media (Mis)use". I am grateful to Nono Ndlovu and the four anonymous peer reviewers of the journal article and book chapter. Your rich comments shaped my thesis.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 The thesis

This thesis sought to analyse how and why the practice and concept of WhatsApp voice is used in electoral deliberations in Kenya. As we shall in the sub-sections of this chapter, the thesis conceptualises WhatsApp voice as the texting component, the video clips, audio clips and the voice notes used to participate in electoral deliberations (Jamie et al, 2019). The concept of perception refers to people's formed opinions and experiences (Silvia et al., 2015). It is explored further in the literature review section and applied throughout the thesis. Kenyan electoral processes refer to the activities and deliberations around elections, the period within three months to the polling day, and immediately after polls before the presidential winner is sworn in. It involves political party nomination of the candidates to contest in the countrywide elections at the levels of county assembly, National Assembly, women county representative, senate, gubernatorial and presidency (The Election Act, 2011). Article 196 of Kenya's 2010 Constitution allows those who win the party tickets to campaign for three months. The campaigns enable them to sell their agendas to the public prior to the countrywide elections. Article 140 (2) of Kenya's 2010 Constitution stipulates that the winner of the presidential elections is sworn in on the 14th day after the date of the declaration of the result of the presidential election, if no petition has been filed. If a petition is filed, then the swearing-in would take place on the seventh day following the date on which the court of law renders a decision declaring the election to be valid. This legal requirement informed the study's time frame mentioned above, since we can only approximate the election petition period. During the three months' campaign time and before the presidential swearing in, WhatsApp among other social media is used for communication by the people, politicians, the electoral body, and other stakeholders. For instance, the people use WhatsApp voice to participate

by commenting on the processes; deliberating the issues around the processes in groups; mobilising for public rallies in support of preferred candidates; among others (Diepeveen, 2021). As a result, the WhatsApp voice has become a dominant platform and channel for people's participation in Kenyan electoral processes.

This thesis assumes an Afrocentric approach to the study of WhatsApp voice in African electoral politics. It conceptualises Afrocentricity as the attempt to deliberately adopt the African cultural perspectives where necessary, away from the popular Eurocentric viewpoint (Babbie, 2010). As we shall see in the reviewed literarture, and other sections to come, this is pursuant to the spirit of decoloniality, which acknowledges diversity in culture, ideas, social practices, histories, identities, and beliefs as part of a myriad of means of knowledge production (Ndlovu--Gatsheni, 2022). As we shall see in the work, the thesis adapted the perception theory (Anonymous, 2016) into a three-pillar frame devised as techno-pessimism, techno-optimism, and techno-pragmatism, for leverage with the qualitative network analysis. The theory explains the process of selecting, organising, and interpreting information. The three-pillar framework shall be explained in a couple of paragraphs to come. As we shall see throughout the work, the study also utilised the digital technological determinism theory which argues that people adopt technology based on their culture (McLuhan, 1994). It allowed for understanding the way technology is culturally adapted in Bungoma County to solve electoral problems. The thesis analysed how and why Bungoma County people's use of WhatsApp voice to challenge electoral injustice during 2017 elections was perceived as optimistic/emancipating and/or pessimistic/emasculationg; and if there is a midway ground, say the pragmatic. The first two perceptions/pillars immediately above – optimistic/emancipating and pessimistic/emasculating, were conceptualised to serve three purposes: First, as we shall see throughout the thesis, they set up parameters from where the possible midway ground/pragmatic

perception of the WhatsApp voice could emerge. Second, they do not simply represent two camps that have always co-existed in media, but positions that have lost and gained credibility and analytical potential over time. Third, the concept of pessimism/emasculation is not just a neat opposite of optimism/emancipation, rather, it is metaphorically deployed in the analysis of the exploitative masculinity in the empirical chapters of the thesis. As we shall see, the study was cautious about the use of the two perceptions – optimism/emancipation and emasculation/pessimism, because they constitute two forms of 'participation' which could be conceptually problematic; not only because they suggest instrumental absoluteness, but also because such positions ignore the complex textures of political engagements that take place in WhatsApp/social media spaces. As seen above, the thesis subsequently conceptualised the three forms of 'participation' as techno-optimism/emancipation, techno-pessimism/emasculation, and techno-pragmatism/midway ground. Thus, it analysed how the WhatsApp voice's advancement and/or limitation of the people's electoral gains informed their perception of the voice as either techno-optimistic and/or techno-pessimistic; and then devised the emerging midway point as techno-pragmatic. It went on to project how the 2022 elections in Kenya might pan out. As we shall see in the thesis, the projection came to pass with a measure of accuracy, although details of the discussion are beyond the scope of the study. The thesis conceptualises techno-optimists as the WhatsApp users with a positive outlook about WhatsApp deployment in African electoral politics (Omanga, 2019), while the techno-pessimists are those with a negative outlook (Barassi, 2016). It conceptualised the techno-pragmatists as the users with a practical/realistic outlook about WhatsApp deployment in African electoral politics (Srinivasan et al., 2019). As we shall see in the rationale of the study in this section, among the study's major contributions to knowledge include: first, it explored the uniqueness with which the people of Bungoma County use WhatsApp for

electoral deliberations. Second, it devised the techno-pragmatic perception with view to popularise it because it is the least emphasized of the three. In this thesis, "WhatsApp techno-optimism" is used interchangeably with the term WhatsApp emancipation, while "WhatsApp techno-pessimism" is used interchangeably with the term WhatsApp emasculation. Techno-pragmatism is used interchangeably with midway ground. Thus, "techno-affective elections/politics" means the use of technology/WhatsApp voice to recycle emotions into electoral deliberations as new voices render old ones inaudible (Mbembe, 2017).

As we shall see in the sub-section on Bungoma County profile, the study tapped into the County people's social uniqueness and cultural richness; to inform its attempt on Afrocentric approach. It also coalesced the Kenyan media milestones, examining how it has lost and gained credibility during its quest for democratisation; with view to analyse the WhatsApp voice within a proper historical/developmental context. Thus, the study questioned how and why the WhatsApp voice simultaneously emancipated and/or emasculated the people, resulting in techno-pragmatic perception; and how these perceptions enabled and/or deprived the citizenry of participation. As we shall see in the thesis, the analysis sections drew from the framework's constructs of similarity/differences to juxtapose techno-pessimism with techno-optimism, which established a split from where techno-pragmatism emerged. In-depth interviews were conducted, and the responses used to test the theory in the study besides generating new knowledge. As we shall see in the literature review section, scholars argue that in practice, social media such as WhatsApp has been harnessed into hegemonic regimes to support status quo in the same measure as it has enabled citizenry deliberations on public interest issues. For instance, globally, during the recent Black Lives Matter protests and the run-up to the US 2020 elections, social media was perceived as serving both the black people attacked as well as the white elitist attackers (see Wekesa, 2020).

Beyond the celebratory narratives with which social media adoption is routinely discussed in the African continent, the new media technologies have an inherent capacity to also exclude, neuter or appropriate "popular" voices (Ogola, 2019 p. 124). It is at this point that the intersectionality/midway ground/techno-pragmatism emerges. Although popular in literature and other related fields, the perception has not been used much in the media studies scholarship (Wekesa, 2020). Yet, in real-world situations, the impact of the social media/WhatsApp voice is simultaneously techno-optimistic and techno-pessimistic. For example, as we shall see in the analysis chapters, the dominant Bukusu tribe in Bungoma County simultaneously use WhatsApp voice to campaign for their favourite political candidates, and to oppress the minority tribes and opponent candidates during electoral deliberations. Therefore, techno-pragmatism represents the real-world situation of the WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation.

1.1.1.0 Background and Context: Political and Media Profiles

1.1.1.1 Political Profile of Kenya

i) Geographical positioning and Population

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral politics was carried out in Bungoma County, Western Kenya. Kenya is a country located along the Eastern coast of Africa, astride the equator line and longitude 38 degrees to the East (Geology.com, 2020). The country's coastal region is on the southeast along the Indian Ocean. To the east lies Somalia, to the north lies Ethiopia, to the northwest lies South Sudan while Uganda is directly to the west. Lake Victoria, the largest naturally occurring lake in the world marks Kenya's southwestern border while Tanzania lies to the south. Kenya's geography undulates between Mount Kenya in the central region which forms the second highest point on the continent, and the low-lying Great Rift Valley which provides natural and conducive condition for training in long distance running. Much of the north-eastern Kenya is a flat with bush-covered plains. The remainder of the country encompasses pristine beaches, scenic highlands, and the lake regions.

The Kenya's population was estimated to be 52.3million as of July 2020 (KNBS, 2019). The country's population consists of 99% people of African descent. According to Government of Kenya (GoK, 2013), they consist of Bantus, Nilotic and Cushitic origins. They are sub-divided into about 44 ethnic groups, of which the Bantu-speakers include Luhyas (who occupy the geographical region the study will be carried out), Kikuyus, Kambas, Kisiis among others (GoK, 2013, p. 7). Nilotic speakers include Luo, Kalenjins, Masais, Samburus, Turkanas among others. The Cushitic speakers are predominantly Somali people to the north-eastern. A small number of persons of South Asian and European descent live in the urban interior, while those of Arabs origin live along the coastal strip. Nearly 70% of Kenya's population is in rural settlements.

The official languages of Kenya are Swahili and English, although many other indigenous languages are also spoken. Over 80% of the population is Christian. The second majority are Muslim while Hindu form among the minority religions. There are isolated groups which espouse indigenous African faiths (GoK, 2013, p. 7)

ii) Central Government

According to the first schedule of Kenya's 2010 constitution, the country is a democratic republic with a two-tier government, national and county. There are 47 semi-autonomous county governments, with powers circumscribed to those of the national government. They have the constitutional provision to appoint urban boards and operate within the respective principal laws under the County Governments Act 2012 and the Urban Areas and Cities Act 2011. According to Parliamentary report (2020), the most recent County Assembly elections took place in 2017 where 35.0% (787/2,130) of members were women, of which 3.7% (84) were directly elected and 703 appointed from political party lists to ensure the minimum 1/3 gender rule is observed. The 47 county governments are responsible for collecting taxes, user fees and charges. In return, Article 203(2) of the 2010 constitution guarantees the allocation of not less than 15% of revenue raised nationally to county governments. In addition, Article 110 stipulates that the county governments receive revenue called Local Authorities Transfer Fund (LATF) from central government, as a block grant. Under the constitution's fourth schedule, the county governments are assigned 14 functions, including agriculture, county health, transport services, trade and tourism development, county planning, among others.

According to the 2010 constitution, the first-tier government- the national one, consists of a bicameral parliament which comprises of two houses: a national assembly (known as Bunge) and a senate. Article 138 prescribes that the head of state is the president, who is directly elected by

universal adult suffrage for a maximum of two five-year terms. For a candidate to be declared winner/president, they must secure a majority of 50% of the votes plus one vote (popularly known as 50+1 rule). He or she must also at least garner 25% of the vote in at least 24 out of the 47 counties. The president may or may not be a member of parliament. Article 102 states that of the 350 members of the national assembly, 290 are directly elected from single-member constituencies to serve a five-year term. The remaining members include: 47 women representatives, each elected from one of the 47 counties; 12 members nominated by political parties based on party strengths, to represent special interests such as youths, people with disabilities and workers. Article 106 specifies that the house speaker should be a non-member elected by the members. The senate comprises of 68 members. A member is elected from each of the 47 counties. 16 women members are nominated by political parties based on party strength. Then two special interest male and female members are nominated: one must represent the youths and another, people with disabilities. In the 2017 elections, 21.8% (76/349) of the national parliament members and 30.9% (21/68) of senators were women (Parliamentary report, 2020).

iii) County Government

Article 176(1) of the 2010 constitution stipulates that the County government consists of a county assembly and a county executive. Article 177(1) prescribes that the county assembly should consist of: a member elected by voters from each local constituency called ward; a number of special seats nominated by political parties to ensure that no more than two-thirds of the assembly comprises one gender; members of marginalised groups including people with disabilities and youth, nominated by political parties; and a speaker. The county executive comprises the county governor, deputy county governor and members appointed by the county governor with the approval of the county assembly. The decentralisation of county government functions and service

provision to urban and non-urban sub-counties are provided for in the constitution and two principal Acts - the County Governments Act 2012 and the Urban Areas and Cities Act 2011. Under these powers there are currently one city (Kisumu), two municipalities (Nakuru and Eldoret) and 103 towns. Nairobi and Mombasa Counties have separate metropolitan powers. There are 47 counties each comprising an assembly and an executive. The members of the county assemblies (MCA) are directly elected from single member constituencies earlier referred to as Ward. There are a number of special seat members to ensure that no more than two-thirds of the membership of the assembly is the same gender. There can also be provision for special seats for marginalised groups including persons with disabilities and youth. Article 177(1b) stipulates that each assembly appoints a speaker from among persons who are not members of the assembly. Once elected, the speaker becomes an ex-official of the assembly. The speaker presides over the functions of the county assembly; and in her/his absence, another member of the assembly presides.

1.1.1.2 Bungoma County Political Profile

i) Population and Ethnic Composition

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral politics took place in Bungoma County, one of the Kenya's 47 counties. The County is the fifth most populated, after Nairobi County, Nakuru County, Kiambu County and Kakamega County, respectively (Republic of Kenya, 2013 p. 188; KBNS, 2019). The County has a population of about 1,670,570 people and occupies an area of about 2207 square kilometres (KNBS, 2019 p. 7). Nearly 75% of the population is under age 30 years (KNBS 2019). According to Kenya Population and Housing Census-KPHC, (2019), Bungoma County shares her border with neighbouring country Uganda on the West, Trans Nzoia County in the North, Elgeyo Marakwet County in the East, Uasin Gishu County and Nandi County in the Southeast, Kakamega County in the South, and Busia County in the Southeast. In accordance

with Article 89 (2) of the 2010 constitution of Kenya, the County has nine constituencies, each represented by one Member of the National Assembly at a time; popularly called Member of Parliament-MP. As we shall see in the next sub-section, the constituencies and sub-counties are nearly similar, with some sharing names due to historical and cultural reasons. They include: Bungoma South Sub- County (Kanduyi Constituency), Bumula Sub- County (Bumula Constituency), Bungoma West Sub- County (Kabuchai Constituency), Cheptais Sub- County (Sirisia Constituency), Kimilili Sub- County (Kimilili Constituency), Mt Elgon Sub- County (Mt Elgon Constituency) Bungoma North Sub-County (Tongaren Constituency) Bungoma Central Sub- County (Webuye East Constituency) Bungoma West Sub- County (Webuye West Constituency). The predominant ethnic tribe in the County is Luhya of Bukusu speaking dialect, from the larger Bantu people (KNBS 2019). Other Luhya occupants include those speaking the Tachoni dialect. The non-Luhya tribes occupying the County include Teso and Sabaot speakers, from the larger Nilotic people (County Government of Bungoma, 2020). The Sabaot speakers are found on the slopes of Mt Elgon, while the Teso speakers are found down the slopes along the County's Eastern border with Uganda, (County Government of Bungoma, 2020). As we shall see in the analysis of the findings, there are networked relations with the tribes in Uganda and neighboring counties to provide 'electoral support' to their fellow tribesmen. The Bukusu's sister tribe in Uganda is called the Gishus; with whom they have long standing cultural and political relations (Wefwafwa 2014). There have been allegations of illegal voters from the Gishu people, who cross the Kenya-Uganda border to register as voters to 'help' vote their kinships in power, or retain it (Personal Communication, 2020). The Sabaots also have a network with the neighbouring Kalenjin sub-tribes with whom they associate culturally and politically (Wefwafwa, 2014).

ii) County Politics

E. Nandemu, (personal communication, 23rd February 2021) suggested in an interview that since the introduction of county governments in 2010, the politics of ethnic majority/minority representation in Bungoma County government played out in both the 2013 and 2017 gubernatorial elections held. In both the elections, the winning Bukusu gubernatorial candidates picked their deputies from the non-Bukusu tribes. As we shall see in the findings, the detailed analysis of the ethnic politics in the County as well as in the sub-counties inform how and why the WhatsApp is used during electoral deliberations. The Bungoma County Government Board Code of Conduct-BCGBCC, (2020) prescribes tribal/dialect/clan representation during job hiring at the County, sub-counties, constituencies, and wards. As earlier mentioned, the terms sub-county and constituency have a near similar meaning. A subcounty means a geographical entity administered by central government to offer administrative functions (KPNHC, 2019); while a constituency is a geographical entity with an MP to politically represent the people in the national assembly in accordance with Article, 89 Section 9-11 of the 2010 constitution of Kenya. Therefore, a subcounty is headed by an administrator appointed by national government based on professional qualifications to oversee the social and economic development (KPNHC, 2019); while a constituency is the sub-county in the political sense, whereby it is headed by the MP, who is elected by the people. According to Article, 97 (1&2) of the 2010 constitution of Kenya, the MP is the political head 'overseeing' the social and economic development. As a result, the sub-county names and constituency names of the same geographical locations differ in some cases. Some counties also have more sub-counties than constituencies, or vice-versa.

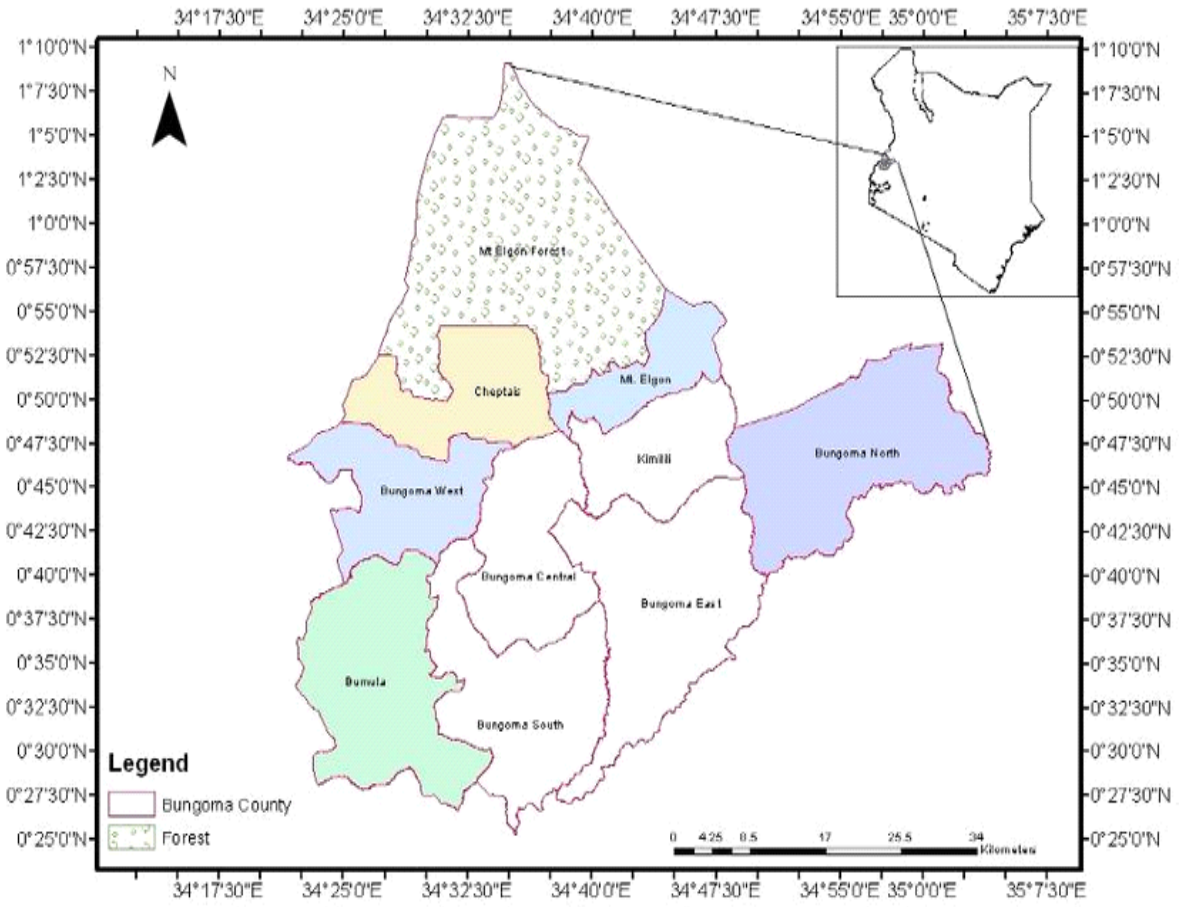

Fig 1: Source, Wabwoba, 2018: Showing the geographical boundaries of the Sub-counties/Constituencies in Bungoma County

iii) County Economic Marginalisation

The study on WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation established that for decades, Bungoma County has been in opposition politics from where it has suffered marginalisation from subsequent governments (see KNBS 2019; KPHC, 2019). According to the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights – KNCHR (2017), it is perceived that the small pockets of the County such as Mt. Elgon Constituency which was in the government then benefited more. This is arguably among the root causes of suspicion within the constituency's neighboring tribes. The forms of marginalisation suffered includes unfair distribution of national resources, which induced economic lack among the people (see KNCHR, 2017; KPHC, 2019). This facilitated the perpetration of electoral injustice such as vote buying, which enabled unpopular candidates with support from subsequent central governments to emerge as electoral winners (KNCHR, 2017; Lynch et al., 2019). As of 2022, the county is prone to election-related violence because of the perceived continued electoral injustice; and/or past unresolved electoral injustices (KNCHR, 2017).

The economic infrastructures such as regional sugar production companies, a paper production company, coffee processing plants, milk processing plants, among others, have closed down at different times in the recent past (Wambwoba, 2018). As we shall see in the analysis of findings, the agenda to revive the economic infrastructure comes up during electoral processes deliberations and fizzles out immediately after elections. The predominant economic activities in the County include banana farming at (45%), maize farming (20%), horticulture (10%), trade (10%), dairy production (5%), sweet potatoes (5%) and sugar cane at (3%) (Wabwoba, 2018 p. 3). Although most households depend on farming, some shift from subsistence to business farming to raise income. Youth unemployment stands at 60% (Eckert et al. 2019 p. 6).

A substantial number of youths migrate from Bungoma County to urban cities such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Eldoret, among others to pursue job opportunities and education. 77% of the youths from villages where crop and livestock farming are the primary economic activity are very interested in taking up the work, if it can generate income (Eckert et al., 2019 p. 7). According to the National Council for Population and Development - NCPD (2017 p. 19), the youth unemployment has pushed the majority of them to take up informal jobs in public transport sector, where they use bicycles and tricycles popularly known as *bodaboda* and *Tuktuk*, respectively to offer short distance transport services to people. They are poorly paid, harassed by County authorities, face insecurity challenges, among others. As we shall see in the analysis chapters of this thesis, the *bodaboda* and *Tuktuk* people are used by the political class to generate content used for WhatsApp electoral process deliberations.

1.1.1.3 Media Profile in Kenya

i) Pre-Independence Media as the Father of Kenya's Techno-affective Politics

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations positions this sub-section as among those where the media lost more credibility than it gained. In the pre-independent Kenya, similar to many African nations, the media was founded in mid 1890s. A few individuals including the colonialists, missionaries and immigrants, founded, owned and controlled it (Burnell & Randall, 2008). The colonialists and missionaries were largely from Europe while the immigrants came from Asia to provide supervisory labour. At the time, the only media that existed in Kenya and Africa at large included the printing press. For example, the 'Taveta Chronicle', was first published in Kenya by the church missionary society in 1895 (Ochilo, 1993). A few years later, the 'Leader' and the 'Uganda mail', were established in East Africa in 1899 by colonialists (Burnell & Randall, 2008 p. 3). The media served three main interests: to maintaining an unequal status quo through

the legitimisation of the rights of the colonial masters and their subordinates in Kenya; to provide news and information; and to provide a platform for social communication within the few individuals (Burnell & Randall, 2008; Ochilo, 1993). Arguably, these pioneer mass media functions were viewed as techno-optimistic and/or techno-pessimistic, depending on the people' political divide. For instance, the status quo press pleased the white people thus techno-optimistic; and angered the majority local Kenyans thus techno-pessimistic. This led the local Kenyans who had acquired Western education to establish and own printing press, to counter the colonial inequalities (Mamdani, 1996). Arguably, the introduction of the printing press in politics enabled for techno-affective politics, similar to the one witnessed across all the media platforms during Kenyan electoral politics. As we shall see in sevel sections of this thesis, the various media that emerged after the printing press, including the radio, TV, and now social media such as WhatsApp, have been culturally adopted in the society to enhance the techno-affective politics (see McLuhan, 1994). The local Kenyan people's ownership of the printing press sought to secure their platform for the techno-affective politics, which enabled them to attain self-independence from the colonialists (Mamdani, 1996). Among the printing press the local Kenyans owned included 'Tangazo' which was launched in 1921, 'Muigwithania' whose first publication emerged in 1928, 'Luo's Magazine in 1937 and 'Sauti ya Mwafrika' whose launch was in 1945 (Wanyande, 1995 p. 55). As expected, the space provided by the local Kenyan-owned press angered the colonialists; prompting them to ban it in 1952 (Ochilo, 1993). The Kenyan editorial teams had to work from their hiding places to avoid arbitrary arrests by the governmet. Throughout the rest of colonial rule up to 1963, the colonial masters tightened their control over local Kenyans' media in various ways; including regular revision of the legislation to enhance stricter measures, banning them at any time (Oriare & Mshindi, 2008).

ii) Post-independence Media and the Same 'Techno' Script

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation positioned this sub-section as one in which the media could gain most credibility, due to the attainment of political independence from colonial rule. However, there was little in the way of decolonisation of the media sector after Kenya attained political independence (Oriare, 2011). In fact, as Kajirwa, (2008) and Wanyande (1995) argue, immediately after Kenya attained independence, the country's new African government expressed discomfort with the freedom of the press provided by the colonial constitution. Therefore, it was not surprising when the African government embarked on amending legislation to muzzle the mass media and curtail freedom of expression, just like the colonial rulers (Wanyande, 1995). The revision of the legislation was achieved through reverting to one-party system of governance, which enabled for ease of mobilising legislators to enact laws on the curtailment of freedom of the media (Ochilo, 1993). As a result, the government controlled the media using three methods: first, it served the media with public notices on threats of action in the courts of law, including the application of sedition and defamation laws such as libel and slander (Ochilo, 1993). This is because the one-party rule had legislated stringent media laws (Ochilo, 1993). At the same time, the state also instituted laws that reinforced its control of the privately-owned media (Wanyande, 1995). The second method was for the government to ban media platforms that were deemed too critical of its regime (Wanyande, 1995 p. 57). In this context, the government argued that it was only exercising its powers as provided in the legal framework. The third method was the government's intimidation of private media owners, leading to submission to government directions about the news stories to publish (Oriare et al., 2010). The news stories critical of the government were not allowed (Ochilo, 1993). For example, the *Kenya Times* newspaper which was first published on April 5, 1983 (Wanyande, 1995), avoided publishing

stories that would elicit state's anger (Oriare et al., 2010). As we shall see in the discussions in this thesis, social media has only amplified, and remediated techno-affective politics established by the printing press. The new techno-pessimistic and techno-optimistic players adopt the new media technologies under different circumstances, to advance the same old techno-affective politics. For example, the post-independence political players adopted Kenya's first TV stations, radio stations, cellphones, and now social media, into politics to advance the same old techno-affective politics.

Among the privately owned post-independence mass media that braved the hostile government environment, included 'Beyond Magazine', 'Financial Review', 'Development Agenda', 'Nairobi Law Monthly', among others, which were legally banned by the state authority in 1989/1990, for opposing the repressive one-party regime (Ochilo, 1993; Wanyande, 1995 p. 56). According to the Media Council of Kenya- MCK, (2020) the 'Nairobi Law Monthly' has survived the oppressive government regimes through the years; and to date, it is still visible on streets of Nairobi under the same name. Between 1988 and 1990, the state had banned about 20 publications (Oriare, 2008; Wanyande, 1995). The publications that remained critical of the government stayed alive to the fact that the government was angry with them and could instigate a ban at any time (Wanyande, 1995). The study on techno-pessimism/techno-optimism used this rich literature on techno-affective politics to analyse WhatsApp use in electoral politics.

iii) Post-independence State Media and Political Communication

This sub-section ironically epitomised the periof of increased credibility of the media; where government's patriotic call to the people, mostly in the rural areas increased credibility. It laid the foundation for people's techno-optimic perception of the media. This was largely because there were no alternative media to counter government's position/information. The Kenyan state-owned media ran/runs under the ministry of information and broadcasting, headed by a presidential

appointee to serve the government interests (Widner, 1992). The media platforms included the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) – radio and TV established in 1928 and 1962, respectively; and the Kenya News Agency (KNA), founded in 1963 (Ochilo, 1993). The latter is the print section of the government, with branches countrywide. Together with KBC, they formed the government's early communication organs (Widner, 1992; Ochilo, 1993). The government exercised control through the daily management of the above-named three platforms mainly by influencing their editorial policies (Wanyande, 1995). Although the government control increased the credibility of the media in the rural Kenya, the urban population was skeptical of the government media. The government's suppression of the freedom of expression in the media posed challenges to Kenyans willing to participate in media public interest issues, including electoral politics, public policies, institutional development, among others (Wanyande, 1995). This laid the foundation for people's techno-pessimistic perception of the media. Many people remained passive actors on electoral politics and other issues of national interest in the 1970s and 1980s, making it easier for the government to contain criticism and consolidate its political power (Oriare et al., 2010). Until 1992, private media lacked the infrastructure for countrywide reach, and as afore said, partially remained under government control (Ochilo, 1993). Therefore, the government media was the dominant political communication organ in the whole country.

a) Vernacular Radio and the Redefinition of 'Illiteracy'

In this study about WhatsApp use in electoral deliberation, vernacular radio epitomized theincrease in media credibility. Many people, urban and rural, could freely and genuinely take part in electoral debates. As we shall see in the reviewed literature, the 1990s liberalisation of the media marked a turning point in the sector. According to Kenya Information and Communications - KIC Act, (2012), liberalisation means the freeing of the airwaves in accordance with market demand rather

than government decisions. It enabled for coming up with policy frameworks to safeguard the media space to facilitate proper media operations. It also allowed for the acquisition of the Information and Communication Technology – ICT equipment to improve and/or the establishment new mass media in the country (Oriare et al., 2010). Notably, the Frequency Modulated (FM) radio equipment enabled for quality sound programmes aired in vernacular languages (Mitullah et al., 2015). The FM radio stations opened the deep rural Kenya for participation in electoral and other public interest issues through radio debates (Oriare, 2010). Arguably, the vernacular radio changed the concept of '(il)literacy' as previously held, among the Kenyan people, during the colonial and post-independence media (see Fraser & Estrada, 2001; Gagliardone, 2015). First, the radio reached and served among others, many people who could not read and write (Oriare, 2010). This enhanced inclusivity during mainstream media electoral deliberations (Oriare et al., 2010). Second, the mother tongues, the indigenous songs, the riddles, proverbs, tongue twisters, among others, used during the vernacular radio broadcasts enhanced people's understanding and analysis of electoral issues (E. Nandemu, Personal Communication, February 23, 2021). The radio messages were conveyed using imagery and sounds that are familiar to the people, different from the colonial printing press and the post-independent media prior to the liberalisation (Gagliardone, 2015). For example, during a radio interview, M Kalasinga, (personal communication, February 24, 2021) analogised corruption as "a slaughterhouse full of meat". He then went on to question if a dog raised at the slaughterhouse could be domesticated in a rural Bungoma homestead. The analogy was efficient at conveying electoral messages to the people, asking them to analyse the past records of the politicians vying for various electoral positions in the County during electoral processes. The analogy created understanding and

appropriate analysis of the electoral issues. It also enhanced humor that triggered interest in many people to take part in the electoral deliberations.

By 2002, the vernacular radio had been fully deployed into Kenyan electoral politics, arguably with tremendous results (Oriare, 2011). In part, it contributed towards the election of opposition leader Mwai Kibaki as President in 2002 (Oriare et al., 2010). However, the impact of radio in Kenyan politics was more popularised in 2007 during the 2007/8 Post-Election Violence (PEV), when it was alleged to have been used to incite people into political related violence (Wefwafwa, 2015). Radio was used to spread messages in coded language for incitement (Oriare, 2011; Wefwafwa, 2015). The BBC Media Action (2018) report helps us to compare radio and social media's facilitation of techno-affective politics in Kenya. For instance, techno-pessimists argue that radio messages are more harmful than incitement in social media because almost all Kenyans can access the radio, since it only requires a handset (BBC Media Action, 2018). They say this is unlike the social media, whose access requires an internet enabled cellphone and data bundles, which many rural folks cannot afford. However, the techno-optimists argue that development messages sent through radio far outweigh any incitement messages (Oriare, 2011); and therefore, it should not be directly compared with social media. As we shall see in the analysis section in this thesis, the techno-pragmatists argue that the impact of media messages depends on the users' intentions, among other cultural factors. Further, we shall see that the messages cannot be analysed in isolation because of cross-messaging. For instance, many messages originating from radio get to social media platforms and vice-versa, with different intentions and impacts.

b) SMS, Ushahidi Platform, and the Techno-Affect

The study on WhatsApp voice established that the SMS era presented both the gain and loss of media credibility in an equal measure. As we shall see, the personalised messages meant for

efficiency was mis/used to invade privacy and fuel insecurity. The liberalisation of the media also led to the introduction of the short message texts (SMS) during the 2002 national election campaigns, targeting cellphone users (KNCHR, 2017). The messages were crafted for personalised appeal, arguably to create the impression that the texts were personal information (KNCHR, 2017). The Commission report argues that this is because cellphone numbers are ideally personal information, perceived not accessible by the public for political campaigns. In fact, Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa- CIPESA (2019), ethical concerns arose about how the political class acquired the people's personal cellphone numbers. It was alleged that the contacts were acquired from the local companies that have people's personal data, including communication organisations, stores/supermarkets (CIPESA, 2019; KNCHR, 2017). In the subsequent elections, especially in 2017, the people's contacts were allegedly sold to politicians by WhatsApp group administrators (CIPESA, 2019). Fahamu, a network for social justice, documented that the SMS component was also used by aggrieved Kenyans to mobilise friends and supporters to attack opponents after the disputed 2007 presidential elections (Fahamu, 2021). The aggrieved people felt that their votes had been 'stolen', and in retaliation, mobilised the attacks on opponents perceived sympathetic to the vote 'thieves' - the incumbents.

Amidst the 2007/8 PEV, a new platform called Ushahidi emerged to provide space for those under attack, and those witnessing attacks to share it in real-time to facilitate emergency police response (Ushahidi, 2021). Thus, the adoption of the SMS and Ushahidi platforms into the Kenyan electoral politics were as a result of "the cultural adaptation of technology" (see McLuhan, 1994) to meet the people's techno-affective needs during the electoral period. For instance, whereas the political class adopted the SMS for affective campaigns, the people adopted it for affective mobilisation towards retaliatory attacks, while the media adopted it to update broadcasts about the attacks, to

increase viewership due to the sensationalised content (Oriare, 2010). However, the government, as was before the liberalisation, seeks to control the media in order to monopolise the use of affective politics to its electoral advantage (Oriare 2011; Wanyande 1995). For instance, the Uhuru Kenyatta government (2013-2022) publicly disparaged the media in 2017/18 by referring to newspaper as "only useful at the butchery for wrapping meat" (KNCHR, 2017). The Kibaki government stormed into Kenya's leading media houses to interfere with operations in 2005 due to perceived negative coverage about his family (Mitullah et al., 2015). According to Article19, (2018 p. 15), a media freedom organisation, the Uhuru government ordered the media not to cover a public rally for the leader of the opposition in 2017, arguing it would incite the public to violence.

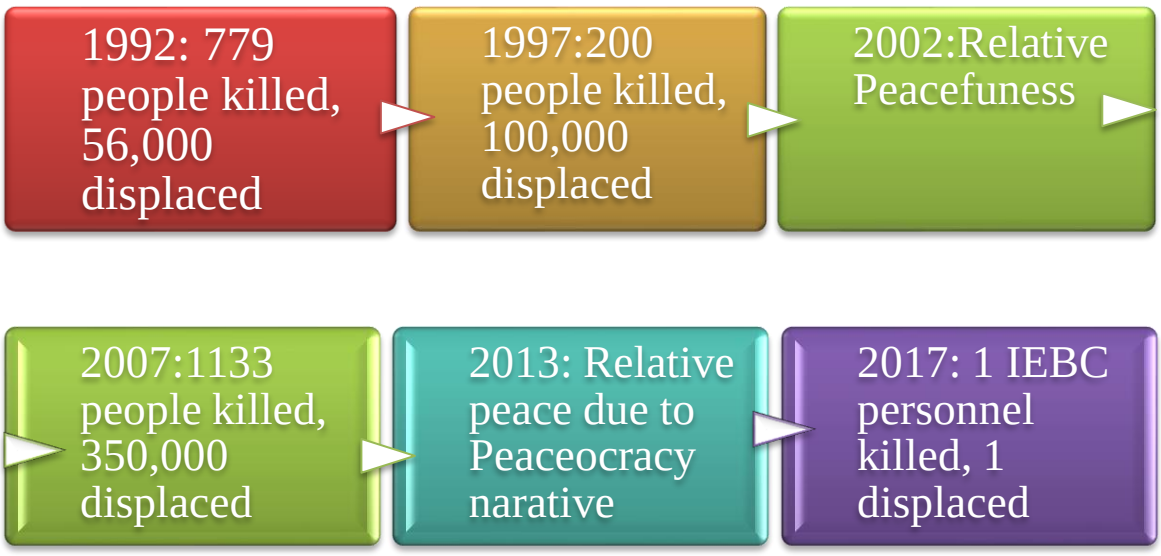

Figure 2: History of Electoral Violence in Kenya (generated by author based on data from Commission of Inquiry into 2007/8 Post-Election Violence report, KNCHR, 2017 and Centre for Human Rights Policy Studies - CHRIPS, 2020).

c) Media Constraints and the Emergence of Social Media Powerful Individuals/Influencers

The study on WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations in Bungoma County established that private media operates on a delicate balance – between increasing ratings through techno-affective political reporting, and the possible government clampdown (Oriare et al., 2010). As a result, the media houses face journalism-related challenges stemming from financial constraints. For instance, they are unable to hire competent journalists, leading to overreliance on interns, untrained and less experienced journalists (MCK, 2020). On the other hand, the commercial pressures lead some private media houses to hire celebrity figures with less or no journalism skills, in attempt to increase ratings (MCK, 2020). These lower the journalistic standards, resulting to techno-pessimistic perception of the people towards media. It also results in defamation cases where the media houses are forced to pay fines in damages as was the case with Royal Media Services in 2018 (Kenya Law, 2018). Arguably, the commercial and government pressures have resulted in private media's inability to fully articulate public interest issues including the electoral processes. As a result, a brand of citizen journalism where individuals with powerful online presence such as Robert Alai, Denis Itumbi, Boniface Mwangi, and Cyprian Nyakundi, Ahmed Nassir, Mutahi Ngunyi, Makau Mutua, among others has emerged, amassing massive following, larger than some media houses (Ogola, 2015). This is due to the people's techno-optimistic perception about the influencers on matters public interest. Budzinski and Gaenssle, (2018) discuss the concept of social media influencers as content creation and one's own personality wrapped together as a brand for sale. They argue that the advertisers are now opting to work with social media influencers instead of the traditional media. Their massive following attracts the political class seeking to reach voters, especially during the electoral campaign period (BBC, 2021).

1.1.1.4 Bungoma County Media Profile

i) Pre-independence Media

The study about WhatsApp use in Bungoma County tapped into the people's political uniqueness and cultural richness, to analyse how and why the WhatsApp voice was perceived as techno-pessimistic and/or techno-optimistic during Kenya's 2017 electoral processes deliberations. This sub-section analyses the media profile in the County as the research site. As a far-flung County in Western Kenya, about 400 kilometres from Nairobi, Bungoma County did not have any of the pioneer privately owned mass media discussed in the previous sub-sections (Wanyande, 2015). Like in many other parts of Africa, the private mass media business was considered less profitable in the County because most people could not read or write (Ochilo, 1993). The press served the urban people considered able to read the newspapers (Wanyande, 2015). Therefore, prior to the establishment of the government-owned media, KBC and KNA earlier discussed, Bungoma people's predominant mass media was the indigenous one, including oral literature, riddles, tongue twisters, dances, and songs (Namulundah, 2011). Among others, the pre-colonial media was the most credible, inclusive, and non-profiteering due to its indigenous values, which the people could readily relate with. Afrocentric scholars argue the capitalists killed it to enhance exploitation and oppression of the people's informational need. The only trace of the pre-colonial media left in Bungoma County is the use of the indigenous languages. From the 1970s to the 1990s, a KBC radio channel aired a one-hour Luhya language programme on culture and development every day (Ochilo, 1993). This was not enough to address the people's needs. Also, the programme lacked the flexibility the people desired. The people preferred or were used to listening to oral tales at the fireplaces in the evenings, and so would have loved the programme to be aired in the evening. As a result, the three o'clock KBC radio programme was not convenient. However, the programme was well received by the people because they take pride in embracing their cultural values and

indigenous way of life (Wefwafwa, 2014). They are former subjects of the *Wanga Kingdom* in Western Kenya, and a host to some of the Kingdom's cultural centres; from where they draw cultural inspiration (Wefwafwa, 2014). As we shall see in the next section and thesis at large, the people blend many of the indigenous ways with their present-day life to meet their communicative needs. Although the kingdom became ceremonial after Kenya attained political independence in 1963, it is the only one of its kind that existed during the country's pre-colonial period (Wefwafwa, 2014). Other communities in Kenyan had different forms of indigenous leadership including councils of elders, chiefs, among others.

ii) Rapidly Changing Media Landscape

The study about WhatsApp use in Bungoma County established that the media landscape has changed drastically due to the media liberalisation discussed in the previous sections. The large population size of Bungoma County has attracted private media organisations willing to invest in mass media (KPHC, 2019). The local people residing in the numerous fast-urbanising areas in the county, including Chwele, Lugulu, Webuye, Kimilili and Kibabii, also invest in various mass media. For instance, they run small-scale media services such as video games and video show rooms, licensed movie shops, computer bureaus that offer internet services, typing, printing, among others (see County Government of Bungoma, 2020; KPHC, 2019). These internet-based services allow for fusion of the Bukusu culture and Western culture in various interesting ways. For example, 'live commentators' translate the Western movies into Bukusu dialect using figurative language mentioned in the previous sections. This enhances understanding and contextualisation to the Bukusu audiences, who may not understand English and/or Western culture (E. Namdemu personal communication, January 30, 2021). However, it is not possible to establish the actual number of these forms of media entreprises in the County. A few of them have

been in the business for over five years. The businesses are targeted for closure by security authorities in the County due to allegations from sections of the public, that the premises are used as hiding places for criminals (see County Government of Bungoma, 2020). According to the Communication Authority of Kenya-CA (2021), the number of the mainstream media operating in Bungoma County is also at the all-time high. It is also not possible to establish the exact number, especially of the radio stations because of the County's proximity with Uganda, where signals from the unregulated FM radio frequencies are received from across the border (E. Nandemu Personal Communication January 30, 2021). The Communication Authority of Kenya (2016) attributes this to ICT-skilled unscrupulous individuals who manipulate the communication equipment to expand spectrum. Another reason is attributable to section 27 (2) of the KIC Act, (2012) which stipulates that the media organsations may agree to share broadcasting equipment such as masts, boosters, among others. As a result, this enables broadcast media to be on and off-air, depending on the agreements made on equipment use.

The predominant mass media in Bungoma County are mostly owned by organisations based in Nairobi and other major cities, such as the earlier mentioned Royal Media Services, Daily Nation, Standard, among others. The Nairobi-based media companies' broadcast stations such as Citizen TV, NTV, KTN TV, among others are also among the most popular in the county. Radio is the most popular mass medium in the county, with over 98% of the population having access to it (BBC Media Action, 2018 Gagliardone, 2015). The leading vernacular FM radio stations include West FM, Nyota FM, Radio Mambo, Mulembe FM, Muumbo FM, Biikap Koreet FM, and Mukwano FM (E. Nandemu personal communication February 2, 2021). As earlier mentioned, the vernacular radio redefined the concept of (il)literacy in Bungoma County, enabling the people who cannot read and write to take part in public electoral deliberations. It is a common joke among

Kenyans that rural Bungoma people have great loyalty to radio, through where they enjoy sending greetings to loved ones with a characteristic Luhya accent, amidst live-radio public deliberations.

iii) Media Infrastructure in Bungoma County

The study on WhatsApp techno-pessimistic and techno-optimistic conceptions established that the internet availability in the county is constant and strong. This is attributable to the 1990s fiber cable infrastructural layout across the country during liberalisation (KIC, 2012). As a result, Bungoma County has 2G, 3G, 4G and 5G internet coverage, aimed at enabling people's economic activities; with the aim to open up economic potential in the rural areas (CA, 2020; Standard, 2016). By 2016, the county was leading countrywide with a 2G internet coverage penetration of 97.2%, and 3G internet coverage penetration of 95.2% (Standard, 2016). The internet availability enables the people to engage in vibrant social media electoral deliberations across the county (CA, 2020). As we shall see in the analysis section, the deliberations are culturally inclined and techno-affective, often seeking to exclude perceived political opponents. Despite the vibrancy of social media as well as mainstream media, Bungoma County Government does not have a ministry of communication (County Government of Bungoma, 2020). This is emasculating, because, according to Article 23 of the KIC Act, (2012) the function of regulating the mass media was retained at the national level. Section (2) of the Act stipulates that the interests of the Telecommunication investors, as well as the infrastructure – mainly laid out during liberalisation – are managed and maintained by the national government. Bungoma had a communication department in the office of the Governor, responsible for the county government's communicative needs (County Government of Bungoma, 2020). This limits the communicative needs of the people, hhence techno-pessimism. Other big communication infrastructures in the county include the KNA and KBC equipment, offices managed and maintained by the central government. Under

the Kenya Corporation Act (2012), private individuals, county governments, among others, may access the equipment for use with permission. Section 2 (h) of the Act allows for the Corporation to offer internship positions to media students countrywide. As a result, the infrastructures are used to offer quality internship training to students from the Bungoma's numerous middle-level colleges offering media-related courses.

iv) Structure of WhatsApp Groups in Bungoma County

As we shall see in the sub-sections to come, the study's choice to research on WhatsApp was based on its ability to bring together limited number of people for electoral deliberstions, which is considered more secure than the open social media. The study established that there are vibrant WhatsApp groups in the County operating at many levels, including at international, national, regional, county, constituency, ward, clan, and family. The study was concerned with county, constituency and ward level groups since electoral processes deliberations mostly take place at these three levels. The study discovered that a member could belong to all the three group levels at the same time. For instance, an individual could join ward level groups, and then join the constituency level groups; and again, join the County level groups to update himself or herself on the ward, constituency, and county development news. The study also established that some members take part in the WhatsApp electoral deliberations while outside Bungoma County, say in other cities within and outside Kenya, from where they engage in gainful employment and other economic activities. However, as we shall see in the analysis chapters, due to the majority people's cultural/tribal inclinations in the county, they are reluctant to admit the minority tribes in the groups; prompting infiltration into the groups through misrepresentation to access information on political plans. This implies that the WhatsApp voice is considered as among the most important sources of information during electoral deliberations.

1.1.1.5 WhatsApp Use and Popularity

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations discovered that the voice emancipates and/or emasculates the users in many dimensions including socially, economically, politically, among others. This study's interest was to establish how the emancipation and/or emasculation inform the Bungoma County people's perception of the voice as techno-optimistic and/or techno-pessimistic; and how these enable for the emergence of the techno-pragmatic perception, as the midpoint position. The WhatsApp groups sampled included Western Union (county level group), County Viewpoint (county level group), Bumula Constituency Forum (constituency level group in the south of Bungoma County), Bwake-Luuya Citizens (ward level group in central Bungoma County) Mbakalo Forum (ward level group in the north of Bungoma County). The popularity of WhatsApp in Bungoma, Kenya and on the continent at large may be attributed to its existence as a mobile phone application (app). It was founded in 2009 by Americans Brian Acton and Jan Koum; to enable users post their status on phones to allow those in their phonebooks know they are available (Saner, 2016 p. 3). Koum named the App WhatsApp to sound like "What's Up", then with just a texting component. Its adoption of 2.0 web enabled for real-time exchange of images and video clips, which steadily increased the number of its active users. The App allows for internet-enabled sending of unlimited texts, images, video clips and sound; to individuals, or groups set up from mobile phone contact list. The size of the texts, images, video clips and sounds are however still limited. Users can "block" others from communicating with them. The real-time component also enabled for WhatsApp group formation; with emphasis on the ease of entry and exit in groups through a link or a tab. By 2013, WhatsApp claimed 400 million active users a month, up from 250,000 in 2010. Today, it has close to 2 billion users, the biggest in the world (SIMElab, 2019 p. 2), with over 100 billion messages sent per day. According to Devdicourse

(2021), a development discourse platform, WhatsApp's recent decision to increase users' privacy received criticism from governments globally; arguing they need access to its information to apprehend criminals in society. An even more recent decision by the management to access users' information has also received criticism from non-government entities about security concerns (Devdicourse, 2021). The common problem, however, may be the App's two blue ticks, which tell the message sender if the recipient has read and ignored them; or the recipient's knowledge that the sender knows they read and ignored their message. Nonetheless, WhatsApp has been used to mobilise people during strikes, campaigns, disease outbreaks, among others. For instance, across Kenya, almost all the workers' unions including teachers' unions, industrial workers' unions, among others, belong to WhatsApp groups from where they mobilise members for action whenever need arise (Standard, 2020). People sharing political administrative entities such as Wards, constituencies, counties, among others form WhatsApp groups to deliberate on development projects within their localities. The recent COVID-19 outbreak occasioned massive mobilisation through WhatsApp, to create awareness about the pandemic.

1.1.1.6 WhatsApp Voice

The thesis concepulatises WhatsApp voice as the ways through which WhatsApp users and informers use to engage in electoral deliberation. The people who use the platform are categorised into two types called the users/people and the informers. The users/people are the ordinary citizenry who use the WhatsApp platform for electoral deliberations. As we shall see in the thesis, the informers are the users who collect information from the grassroots and send it to the people abroad, to enable them to share it in the WhatsApp groups as their own. We shall explore why the informers engage in this information networks in the sections to come. The study concepualises voice the texting component, the video clips, audio clips and the voice notes (Jamie et al, 2019 p.

5), used to participate in electoral processes deliberations. The conceptualisation of the phrase WhatsApp voice was inspired by the view that the Bungoma County people are predominantly oral narrative society. Therefore, metaphorically, the concept "WhatsApp voice" implies the oral narrative spirit exhibited on the WhatsApp platform during the people's electoral deliberations. The study stayed awake to the fact that besides the metaphorical point of view, there is uncontestable scholarly reference to all forms of text as voice (see Barassi, 2016; Curran et al., 2016). As we shall see in the literature review section, concept of voice shall be pursued further, as well as applied in the other sections to come in the thesis. Thus, the concept's centrality in the study enabled it to run throughout all the chapters of the thesis.

1.1.1.7 Conclusion to Background and Context

The background and context of the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation coalesces the media historical developments in Kenya, highlighting among others, the losses and gains made during the industry's pursuit for democratisation. As seen in the sub-sections, Kenya experiences decades-long techno-affective electoral deliberations, allegations of electoral malpractice and election related violence (CHRIPS, 2020 p. 2-3). The electoral related violence peaks every election year with no uniform casualities as shown in the figure above; with ections of citizenry alleging that they are excluded from electoral deliberations; to facilitate the electoral malpractice (KNCHR, 2017 p. 27). From the discussions above, questions emerge about the availability and use of platforms for people's participation in the election deliberations. More especially, the study's research site, Bungoma County, is the fifth most populous in Kenya and host to the third most vibrant WhatsApp groups after Nairobi and Nakuru counties respectively. The vibrancy can be attributed to the good infrastructure and people's culture discussed. Overall, Kenyans are among the highest networked communities in Africa (Internet World, 2020 p. 2); which allows massive

(mis)use of the social media by both the government and the people. During the 2013 and 2017 elections, the incumbent, the opposition parties, the use of social media and ICT in general rose to an all-time high in the country, leading to historical electoral milestones such as election results nullification in 2017. This motivated the study to analyse how and why the people's use of WhatsApp voice informs their perception of the voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic during electoral deliberations. Overall, beyond the conceptual perspective, we can use a historical lens to theoretically argue that the pre-independence media in Kenya laid the foundation for the techno-pessimistic and techno-optimistic perceptions we see today, while the post-independence media only remediates/relays the perceptions.

1.1.2.0 The Emergence of ICTs, User Interface, and Space

Since the thesis in the study analysed how and why WhatsApp voice is perceived as techno-pessimistic and/or techno-optimistic by people in Bungoma County, it is necessary to explore the notion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and its impact on national, regional, and global democratisation. The idea gained publicity through the globalisation literature in the early 1990s (Feenberg, 2013; Mithun et al., 2016), even though the technological processes started to emerge at the end of the 1970s (Barassi, 2016 p. 6). The United Nations on Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2021) refers to globalisation as the worldwide economic liberalisation, developing a worldwide financial system and a transnational production system which is based on a homogenised worldwide law of value. A commonly accepted definition of globalisation includes not only economic, but also political, cultural, social, and technological interactions across the world (ACCORD, 2008). Hemalatha (2013) questions the concept of globalised justice through globalised democracy and governance, in the society where human values vary from place to pace. However, according to DW Trust (2011), the ICT enabled digital

technologies help publicise the human rights violation, across the globe, leading to creation of awareness about atrocities being committed anywhere in the world. On the other hand, the USAID (2021) observes that the biggest hindrances to the global democracy and governance are the bureaucratisation that chokes off ICT's innovations and flexibility; the high degree of externality in the design and implementation of the aid programmes; and a consequent low degree of local ownership of assistance (Carothers, 2009 p.4). As we shall see in the literature review, different scholars argue that the growth of ICT to enable for the support of globalisation is due to its relationship/intertwinement with the emergence of new capitalist modes of production and consumption (Barassi, 2016 p. 6; Curran et al. 2016 p. 65; Schiller, 2000). This led to the emergence of more disembedded institutions and a networked economy that has strongly relied on new information, facilitated by ICTs. However, according to Curran et al. (2016 p. 65), when Tim Berners-Lee created the World Wide Web (WWW) in 1989, he was committed to values of public welfare and imagined the web as an 'universal medium' for sharing information. However, as we shall see in the literature review section, Bernners-Lee's creation of the WWW, like many other technological inventions, was diverted by commercialists and culturalists into a medium that is now primarily defined by commercial interest (see McLuhan, 1994; Feenberg, 2013; Curran et al., 2016). The commercialisation of WWW allowed for strengthening of corporate control over content and enhanced new practices of corporate surveillance and exploitation (Schiller, 2000). Notably, since the invention of the internet was founded for commercial purposes, it followed that the WWW could not pursue humanitarian interests, contrary to the internet- a forerunner upon which it was built (Curran et al., 2016). According to Cert (2021), the involvement of the US Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in the invention of the internet in the 1970s inevitably intensified its deployment in surveillance, on the pretext of securitisation.

The WWW technology under web 2.0 enabled for user-interface, upon which the concept of social media is built (Curran et al, 2016). User-interface means the ability of the platform to facilitate real time exchange of information. For example, unlike emails, social media allows for users to comment on a specific post in response. This has greatly improved online experiences and aroused personal interest among citizenry users. It has also enhanced the realisation that social media is powerful and influential. Castells (2008) argues that the digital public sphere, which emerged from the renowned Habermas public sphere, expands the public space, thereby allowing for more inclusivity hence increased participation by the people. As a result, some African countries including Kenya are investing in the internet infrastructure to enable for: citizenry participation in public interest issues, offering of government services, among others (Wamuyu, 2020). For example, the Kenya's increased social media use, and the subsequent success in its deployment into political communication is attributable to the country's high internet penetration at 87%, making it the highest on the continent (World Internet Stats, 2020 p. 1). Globally, the average social media use increased from 40% in 2015/2016 to 53% in 2020, with Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya, and South Africa leading on the Continent (Wamuyu, 2020 p. 20; World Internet Stats, 2020 p. 2). For example, in 2015, Kenyan digital activists shared the news about the alleged grabbing of the Lang'ata primary school playground by a prominent politician in government (Standard, 2016), leading to the repossession of the land to the school.

Today, the citizenry users of the internet such as the activists "wrestle" with governments for fair share of the social media use, so as to exert their influence on public interest matters. As a result, digital activism has arisen and is being nurtured in the society to check the excesses of governments, resist institutionalised oppression, emancipate the people, among others. For example, in April 2021, Kenyan citizenry visited the International Monetary Fund (IMF) social

media page to express their displeasure, viciously attacking the Kenyan government for alleged uncontrolled borrowing of funds for government expenditure amidst corruption. Although this did not immediately impact on the country's borrowing trend, the citizenry voice was affectively heard, including in the European countries where the Kenyan government often borrows from. Another example of the rising digital activism in Kenya was in 2021 when the citizenry used social media to express their displeasure, by lashing out at the president and opposition leader, for attempting to amend the country's constitution, allegedly in favour of their election bid in the 2022. Even as the Kenyan Court of Appeal ruled against the attempt, the people's views had already been affectively expressed. The third example was in 2017, as aforementioned, the people used social media to collect evidence of presidential election malpractice, which was compiled by legal teams, and presented in the Supreme Court, leading to the first ever election results nullification in the country. As we shall see in the section of analysis, the magnitude of the deployment of social media in the 2017 elections elicited fear, especially from the techno-pessimists, who argued it would fuel the violence. Although the people's use of the social media for political accountability has not resulted in positive impact across all the areas it was deployed, it provides valuable space for citizenry expression about how their country should be run. As we shall see in the section on analysis in the thesis, social media has become a new site for ideological struggle between citizenry and governments seeking to shape public perception (see Althusser, 1971 p. 7). According to the Star Newspaper, (2020) there were allegations that the Kenyan government hired a UK based firm called Cambridge Analytica to use social media microtargeting to manipulate the 2017 elections. Arguably, the social media potentiality to influence people makes governments to seek to regulate and/or monopolise the platform's use. It is against this background that this study sought to explore

how WhatsApp voice is conceived as techno-pessimistic, techno-optimistic and/or techno-pragmatic by the people during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County.

1.1.3.0 Social Media Political Engagements and Statistics

This sub-section of the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations explores the general social media used by citizenry across the globe. In the sub-section, we shall juxtapose techno-pessimistic view with the techno-optimistic views, due to the oppositional nature in which the two technos occur in society. The most popular social media platforms include WhatsApp, Facebook, You Tube, Instagram, Twitter, among others (Pew, 2021). They have been used globally to bring political changes in countries hitherto regarded as dictatorships (Pew, 2018). The strategies adopted by the people to spread/share messages within the social media users keep improving. For instance, it has improved from the pioneer broad-based targeting to now micro-targeting (see Sinha & Fung, 2017). The study conceptualises microtargeting as the successful creation of personalised messages, the correct estimate of messages' impact in regard to sub-groups, and the direct delivery of the messages to individuals (Pew, 2021; The Star, 2020). Through the improvements, the social media impact has been felt across the globe including: the Iranian protest against the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2009, the Red Shirt uprising in Thailand in 2010, the "Umbrella Movement" in Hong Kong in 2014, Arab spring in the Arab world in 2010/11, marginalised groups such as black people in the US, women, LGBTQ+, among others (Pew, 2018 p. 3). In Africa social media has been used to successfully agitate for political change in many countries including Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco in 2010; as well as the 'Y'en a Marre' youth protestation in Senegal in 2011 (Curran, et al, 2016, p.65).

The average internet penetration in Africa stands at 39.3%. Although considered a milestone, this is way below the world's 58.8% average (Internet World Stats, 2020). As a result, the techno-pessimists opine that the social media excludes the people who wish to take part in digital debates (Barassi, 2016). However, the techno-optimists argue that the internet penetration is not reflective of people's use of the internet. For instance, whereas Kenya has the highest internet penetration on the continent at 87.2%, which translates to about 46.9 million users; Nigeria has 61.2% internet penetration which translates to about 126.08 million users (Internet World Stats, 2020). We can transpose these statistics onto the less populated Western countries, to argue that Africa has higher numbers of internet users than estimated. For example, in 2020, Estonia with a population of about 1.5 million had internet penetration of about 89.1%, which is higher than any African country. However, this only translates to 1.3 million users compared to Nigeria's 126.08 or Kenya's 46.9. The techno-optimists prefer to use the statistics that based on the number of internet users and not internet penetration. The leading African countries in terms of internet usage by March 2020 include: Nigeria at 126.08 million people out of about 206 million; Egypt at 49.2 million users out of a population of 102 million people which translates to internet penetration rate of 48.1%; Kenya with 46.9 million users out of a population of 53.7 million people; South Africa with 32.63 million users out of 59.3 million people which translates to internet penetration rate of 55.0%; Algeria with 25.43 million users out of a population of 43.9 million people which translates to internet penetration rate of 58.0%; Morocco with 23.7 million users out of a population of 36.7 million people which translates to internet penetration rate of 64.3% (Internet World Stats, 2020). The figures illustrate that internet usage in some African countries is above the world's average; therefore, its impact on the people's lives needs to be (re)established.

In Kenya's techno-political context, social media use is gaining more techno- optimism than in the rest of the countries in the region. Social Media Lab Africa - SIMElab, 2019, an African centre for research in big data and social media analytics, documents WhatsApp as the most used social media in Kenya at 88.6%, Facebook at 88.5%, YouTube at 51.2%, Instagram at 39.0%, Twitter at 27.9%, Yahoo at 18.6%, LinkedIn at 9.3% and Snapchat at 9.0% (p. 3). As we shall see in the analysis section, there is a network linkage between WhatsApp and other social media as well as the traditional media such as TV and radio. The messages 'jump' from one platform to another, eliciting different deliberations. Kenyans use social media for online citizenship, political debates, news acquisition, resource mobilisation, entertainment and staying in touch with others. The traditional media lacks sufficient capacity to effectively enable the people to actualise the uses above. For example, as we shall see in the sections on the analysis in this thesis, the structure of traditional media does not allow for user-generated content. This means the people cannot generate the content that they wish to consume (SIMELab, 2019). Urban users predominantly access social media by mobile phones and laptops, while most rural inhabitants use mobile phones and cyber cafés. By the end of 2020, there're were over 46.9 million internet subscribers in Kenya (CA, 2021; Internet World Stats, 2020). The majority of users are ages between 21 and 35 years, spending an average of three hours on the platform daily (Wamuyu, 2020). More than 66% of this age group participate in public debates using the platforms, often through WhatsApp groups (p. 20). People aged above 46 years least use social media, only visiting the platform for "interesting" "viral" news (SIMElab, 2019, p. 13). Viral news refers to the "spreadability" of news made popular through rapid sharing among individuals via internet, based on the perception that the news is interesting (Papacharissi, 2016 p. 28). Techno-optimists regard social media activists and other influencers as credible public figures (Budzinski & Gaenssle, 2018). The public figures include

the aforementioned Robert Alai, Denis Itumbi, Bonface Mwangi, and Cyprian Nyakundi, Ahmed Nassir, Mutahi Ngunyi, Makau Mutua, among others, who have large online following that trust them for information (Wamuyu, 2020 p. 21; SIMElab, 2019, p. 11). The techno-optimistic users believe the public figures help to keep the government in check, by highlighting to people the vices in government (Diepeveen, 2021). Besides contributing to the nullification of the presidential election in 2017, there are incidences where corruption cases in the central and county governments have been brought into public limelight through social media, and public accountability demanded. For example, in Bungoma County, a fraudulent tendering process popularly known as the "non-carcinogenic wheelbarrows" was unearthed through social media. In the fraud, the cost of wheelbarrows purchased by the county government had been super-inflated, raising the price of a single wheelbarrow to over ten times higher than the market price. The country's justice system took over the case for prosecution. Such revelation of corruption scandals through social media in the county informed this study's quest to establish how and why the people's use of the WhatsApp voice inform their conception of the voice as techno-pessimistic and/or techno-optimistic during electoral deliberations.

1.1.4.0 Social Media Deployment in Kenyan Politics

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations established that the success of social media in addressing electoral injustice in Kenya remained contested until during the 2017 elections, where it was deployed into election monitoring with landmark success (Lynch et al. 2019). This is despite the aforementioned emergence of political influence of powerful individuals in social media in Kenya (Bosch et al, 2020). Prior to the 2017 elections, in 2013, there were massive allegations by opposition parties and civil society that the incumbent government used the electoral technology to commit electoral malpractice during the 2013 presidential elections

(KNCHR, 2017). The opposition parties' plea for transparency by the electoral body, under the hash tag #OpenTheServers did not yield to their demands (KNCHR, 2017). According to the Kenya Law (2013 p. 6), the Supreme Court upheld the 2013 presidential elections citing 'lack of sufficient evidence of malpractice' in the petition filed by opposition parties and civil society. There was electoral malpractice during Kenya's 2013 and 2017 elections, whereby the Kenyan government used ghost social media accounts to influence electoral deliberations, employed Artificial Intelligence (AI) for online presence, and had undue surveillance on the opposition parties among others (CIPESA, 2019 p. 35). However, in 2017, the opposition parties and civil society used social media to complement their election monitoring strategies. As aforesaid, this enabled them to collect evidence of malpractices, which in part resulted in the successful 2017 presidential electoral results petition, leading to the result nullification by the country's Supreme Court for the first time in Kenyan history (KNCHR, 2017 p. 28). The field monitors collected and uploaded perceived evidence of electoral malpractices onto the KNCHR Elections Monitoring Portal (KEMP) for verification, documentation, and timely appropriate intervention (KNCHR, 2017 p. 28). The evidence was then sorted, organised and corroborated into the 2017 presidential election petition. Prior to the 2017 election nullification, there had been no successful judicial redress to presidential electoral malpractices in favour of the opposition candidate(s) in the country, despite the re-introduction of multiparty politics in 1992, which was hoped to transform the political landscape (Wanyande, 1995). More so, the citizenry had fruitlessly engagement in election related violence every election year in protest to the malpractices (Lynch et al, 2019).

Using Gill & Pratt's (2008 p. 7) analysis that ICTs enable for 'factories without walls', we can argue that the success of social media use in Kenyan politics is attributable to its 'deterritorialisation'. This makes the users unbound by geographical borders, thus not easily

locatable by governments that that seek to punish or control people's use of the technology. Related to the above, many African governments are actively engaged in using the social media space, to counter the citizenry's electoral gains; to enable for perpetuation of dominance through the spreading its ideologies, in what Althusser (1971) calls ideological struggle between govenment and the people. For example, the Kenya's Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) uses its social media handle to communicate to the people about the country's electoral processes. Logically, the government, through the IEBC handle seeks to ideologically influence the people about electoral issues. However, the people use the platform's feedback loop to satirise, and lash out at the government, about its perceived involvement in electoral malpractice, corruption, among other forms of electoral injustices (Ogola, 2019). As we shall see in a separate section of this introductory chapter, many African governments become angry about citizenry criticism and suspend or close social media. According to Deutsche Welle-DW News, (2020), this was the case with Uganda and Tanzania during recent elections. The study about the use of WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations based on such Afrocentric contexts, to analyse how and why the use informs the people's conception of the voice as techno-pessimistic, techno-optimistic and/or techno-pragmatic.

Similar to the traditional media, social media faces censorship threats, suspension and total closedown from governments, and the ownership (Gill & Pratt, 2008). According to the International Centre for Not-For Profit Law- ICNL, (2021), the Nigerian president banned Twitter after his tweet threatening to use violence against the separatist south rebels was pulled down. In this context, we can see that the governments and social media ownership are the biggest threats to social media freedom of expression. However, the government-deprived freedom is the most debated in public spaces. Gill and Pratt (2008) contend that the bigger threat ought to be the social

media ownership because, unlike government, we cannot hold them accountable, say by voting them out. For instance, Nigerians may vote out their president but not the CEO of Twitter. As we shall see in the section on the review of literature, there is a delicate balance about the debates on the social media regulation. Whereas techno-pessimists argue that unregulated social media brings with it, among others, undesirable foreign influence in society (Feenberg, 2013); the techno-optimists maintain that that attempts to regulate social media may be a precursor for dictatorship (Mithun et al., 2016). Therefore, the people should be left to culturally adopt the social media in their societies (Verbeek, 2012). According to Pew, (2018) Asian and African governments are the most intolerant to the social media freedom. In Zimbabwe, the authoritarian government arbitrarily shuts down the internet to control the people's political activities (Mare, 2020). This makes the telecommunication industry unprofitable. In Tanzania, social media was shut down during the 2020 general elections, with the government citing national security issues (DW, 2020). The government argued that the social media would be used by individuals and opposition election losers to incite the people into violence, to discredit the government's win. The neighboring country Uganda's leading privately owned newspaper *Daily Monitor* reported in 2021, that in 2016 and 2021, the government shut down the social media during general elections, arguing that "ill-intentioned people" may use it to spread hate messages and cause violence. The 2021 social media shutdown delt a blow to the leading opposition party, whose main strategy was to use social media during the 2021 election campaigns (The Conversation, 2021). Prior to the shutdown, the party used social media to highlight to the public the many the electoral injustices perpetrated by the incumbent government during electoral campaigns.

1.1.4.1 Social Media Control in Kenya

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations established that in 2021 Kenya's internet freedom continued to shrink fast (BAKE, 2021). For example, despite the robust protections for freedom of expression enshrined in Articles 33 and 34 of the Kenyan 2010 constitution, the country's Parliament passed some of the most repressive media legislation in 2013 (BAKE, 2021). According to Ifree, (2021) a platform that champions for online freedom, Twitter removed 100 Kenyan accounts in the recent past following misinformation. As we shall see in this thesis, the concept of misinformation is subjective and ideologically inclined (Wasserman, 2017). As a result, the online citizens including social media users are at a crossroads. On the one hand, the Kenyan government has been progressive about digital migration, arguing it would unlock the great potential in local content production, and create job opportunities. On the other hand, the state and social media ownership control the online space by using repressive legislation to silence deliberations that are critical of government, or ideologically not inclined towards the ownership rules (BAKE, 2021; Wasserman, 2017). For example, the KIC Act 2013/19 created a Communication and Multimedia Appeals Tribunal which falls under state-controlled Communication Authority of Kenya- CA. During the creation, there was no representation of the online communities. This contradicts Article 10 of the Kenyan constitution, which allows for public participation while establishing tribunals. The KIC Act 2013/19 established tribunal was given power to impose hefty fines on media houses and journalists, recommend de-registration of journalists and make any order on freedom of expression (Ifree, 2021).

KNCHR (2017) documents that in Kenya, there are constant threats to suspend social media accounts belonging to the influential people who are critical of government especially during electoral campaigns. According to Article19, (2018), there are deliberate government attempts to shrink the freedom of the media, including in the social media sector in Kenya. Social media

activists with large following including popular bloggers face arbitrary government arrests, detentions, and suspension of their social media accounts (CIPESA, 2019 p. 36). For example, social media activists such as Boniface Mwangi went public a few years ago about the threats he faces, including harassment of his family (Standard, 2019). Overall, despite the social media vibrancy on the continent, and in Kenya, there are frequent government attempts to impose draconian legislations and to shut down infrastructures that support it. The governments argue that the social media threatens citizenry's peaceful coexistence through spreading of incitement messages, especially during elections.

1.2 Problem Statement

The study sought to address the question: What factors inform WhatsApp optimistic, pessimistic, and/or pragmatic perceptions during electoral deliberations?

There is an increasing split between the techno-optimism and techno-pessimism conceptions about WhatsApp use in Kenyan electoral process deliberations. Whereas techno-optimists view it as a cultural adaptation that expands the electoral deliberation space, techno-pessimists view it as a disruptive technology that enhances techno-affective politics, fueling electoral related violence emanating from vote rigging allegations. Some Kenyans allege that dominant social actors manipulate electoral outcomes by positioning meaning in the electoral deliberations to their exclusion (KNCHR, 2017). For instance, the actors, including politicians, citizenry individuals and groupings, hold bureaucratic electoral deliberations from spaces that are inaccessible by sections of the ordinary people. The deliberations are then assigned meaning as public participation, even as access by sections of the public is limited due to logistical challenges. Yet, Article 196 (1a&b) of the Kenyan constitution envisages citizen participation as "conducting business in an open manner …in public… and by facilitating public participation". The argument

is that exclusion of the public fosters the manipulation of elections (KNCHR, 2017 p. 27). As a result, the sections of aggrieved citizenry resist the dominance/electoral injustice by organising what Benjamin (1968) calls "divine violence," to disrupt the dominant social actors' regime, which, the state instills through imposing the law preserving violence. The dominant social actors' interest in the electoral processes is linked to their commercial capital in the country. Thus, they have no goodwill to redress the electoral injustice because it endangers their economic interests. The cycle of violent struggles recurs every election year as the traditional media fail to avail platforms to address citizenry concerns due to fear of government reproach. This results into loss of thousands of lives, destruction of property worth millions of dollars, and massive displacement. The social media/WhatsApp voice has been deployed into the struggles, whereby it was used in the 2017 presidential elections to monitor, detect, and publicly share witnessed electoral malpractices. This boosted the social media's techno-optimistic conception hitherto overshadowed by techno-pessimism. The thesis in this study explores the uniqueness of the forms of political instrumentalisation of WhatsApp by Bungoma county people, and how this leads to an emergence of a midway position between the two splits above.

1.3 Research Design

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations adopted research design that lays out the academic journey involved, explaining the step-by-step decisions made during the research. First, upon reading through the literature on Afrocentrism combined with digital technologies, and their link to political communication, the study noticed a knowledge gap. There are two dominant perceptions in the area - the techno-pessimist and the techno-optimist, mostly with Eurocentric approaches. This study attempts to fill the gap by devising a third perception, called the techno-pragmatism within an Afrocentric perspective. The study remained aware about sections of

scholars' argument that there is usually no knowledge gap, but rather the researchers' limitation to knowledge (Ridley, 2012). In this case, we can argue that the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation attempts to contribute to scholarship by offering the techno-pragmatic perception with the Afrocentric point of view. As we shall se in the chapters to come, besides providing the philosophical anchor for the study, the attempt to adopt the Afrocentric approach allowed for the focus on contextualised cultural notions that inform how and why the people of Bungoma County perceive the use of WhatsApp technology. The approach also enabled for realistic and holistic analysis of how WhatsApp voice enables and/or deprives the people's electoral deliberations from the historical, socio-economic, and contemporary points of view.

In the second step, the study sought to establish networks with like-minded scholars, within and outside Africa. The study benefited from four main workshops: two Pan-African and two global themed. The two Pan-African workshops included one held in Ghana in June 2019, and another in Dares Salam in December 2019. The global themed workshops were held in Tartu City, Estonia in July 2019, and in Nairobi in January 2021. The Pan-African workshops were a week-long each and involved group discussions, peer reviewing of each other's work; presentations; academic writing skills; and feedback as well as consultation sessions from the facilitators. The workshops addressed Afrocentric research proposal development; literature reviewing, methodological challenges; and the networking during PhD studies. The global themed workshops lasted two weeks each. They addressed digital technology and its deployment in electoral politics to enhance democratisation. Through the workshops, the study gained knowledge about the techno-optimistic/techno-pessimistic conceptions across the world, in Africa, in Kenya; and the applied the knowledge while working on the study in Bungoma County. The global themed workshops offered the study the globalised views about Afrocentricity. The views from global themed

workshops enabled the study to embrace the Afrocentric approach with full knowledge that it was neither an affront to Eurocentricity, nor a limitation to decoloniality. Rather, it provided the rare skeptical prismatic view with which Europe and the rest of the globe wished to view the social media use in Africa. Overall, the four workshops also familiarised the study with trends and issues in digital technology and Afrocentric peace building/electoral notions; and enabled for the development of the proposal into a scholarly document. The networking assisted in sharing relevant reading materials, exchanging ideas, as well as venting off the frustrations related to the PhD journey through sharing experiences. The new perspectives informed the study to adopt a contextualised approach to how the WhatsApp voice enables and/or deprives the people's electoral deliberations in Bungoma County, yet with a global view to enhance global readership/understanding.

The third step was to attain a holistic liberatory and critical view of how Bungoma people conceive the use WhatsApp as techno-pessimistic and techno-optimistic in electoral deliberations. The study first established a workable and dependable understanding of the WhatsApp phenomenon in the Bungoma County, in Kenya and on the African continent. This was through reviewing related literature; in which the predominant notion that social media/WhatsApp is transforming African electoral playground for the better was criticised (Barassi, 2016). In the critique, scholars are divided about whether the social media has only managed to shift the African electoral injustice from the physical to digital platforms rather than eliminate them (Curran, et al., 2016; Srinivasan et al., 2019). The researcher published two book chapters and a journal article based on the critical review of the literature.

In the fourth step, as we shall see in the chapters on the findings, the study dichotomised and analysed elements such as techno-pessimism/emasculation and techno-optimism/emancipation in

a simultaneous way, to best bring out how they enable and/or deprive public space to the people of Bungoma County. This is because the analysis remained cognisant of the elements' duality in occurrence; in that a single element may simultaneously emancipate and emasculate the people. For example, WhatsApp users may use the voice to hold their leaders accountable; even as the leaders use it too, to vindicate themselves from the people's accusations/allegations. The elements were also multidimensional in nature and existed in the environment that is controlled by among others, the visible and invisible dominant social actors.

In the fifth step, throughout the conceptualisation process, the study clearly defined the concepts and variables: including the opposing actors, the electoral issues deliberated, as well as the WhatsApp technology which constituted the independent variable. This allowed for contextualisation of the study in a historical and cultural perspective of the Bungoma County people. As a result, this enabled for the deployment of an Afrocentric methodological frame that defined how the WhatsApp voice is conceived as techno-pessimistic and/or techno-optimistic by the people of Bungoma; within their historical, cultural, and economic realities. It is this connection within the County people's holistic lived experiences, with the concepts and variables under inquiry that brought the meaning to the study (Babbie, 2010 p 11).

The sixth step sought to deal with the issue dominant social actors and meaning making. The study ensured that the terms and definitions used on the people of Bungoma County who formed the study's participants interviewed were those preferred by themselves. Dominant social actors such as government, groups and individuals did not impose meaning to the less dominant participants during the fieldwork. For example, as we shall see in the methodological section, the participants' cultural norms, social class, political persuasion, among others, played out during face-to-face interviews. They explicitly and implicitly gave their preferred terms and/or definitions they wished

to associate with during the fieldwork. This wholesomely constituted the meaning making process. For example, there was a case during the field interviews, where the less dominant participants who had experienced electoral injustice for many years from the dominant actors, wanted to know how important their views were to the study topic before they may be interviewed. As such, the study's guide drawn from the Afrocentric methodological conceptualisation was used to affirm the importance of the participants. The guide had culturally adherent definitions, as well as non-oppressive and liberatory in dimension, to the people under study (Asante, 2007 p. 41).

The seventh step involved understanding the people's way of life and adapting to work within their schedules. As we shall see in the methodological section in this thesis, the fieldwork was postponed twice in honour of the people's cultural-economic way of life. The study was aware that the people's spirituality had massive influence on the way they live, and that it spills into all their life spheres (Mazama, 2003 p. 17). Where the research schedule coincided with the people's ritualistic activities such as circumcision and the new year's first crop planting season, the study was halted to give the participants time off for their events. Having grown up in the County, the researcher had reliable contacts at the grassroot level, and this made it possible for the study to acquire detailed grassroot information, work with the people, and understand intuition as a valid source of information with ease. The methods chosen related to Bungoma County people's perceptions as well as their grounding. This epistemologically placed the people as self-willed agents and not objects of investigation (Babbie, 2010, p. 11).

The nineth step involved researcher's self-orientation within the methods used. The study's research methods included field interviews, content analysis, and observation. The researcher oriented himself to these methods to combine with personal advantage as a Bungoma born researcher, so as to tap into the functions of these methods. This gave him, and the participants the

psychological locus needed for the study (Babbie, 2010 p. 10). The fact the people could relate with one of their own (researcher), speak the same language, understand the same rituals and symbols, and share some beliefs; helped to ground the methods into people's way of life. The methods ensured the study addresses how the Bungoma County people use WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations, holistically and multidimensionally. The study took a conscious and deliberate approach, to systematically inquire into the Bungoma County people' WhatsApp voice perceptions from their own standpoint, away from the much-used Eurocentric stance.

The tenth step involved the operationalisation of the study. The researcher bore in mind that the research site was largely an oral narrative society; and with a possibility that some of my participants could not read and write. The researcher used semi-structured face-to-face interviews to enable the people to narrate their lived experiences in a way that is familiar to them. The researcher covertly observed the participants to ensure that they are not threatened, feel intruded upon, or disrupted in any way. This allowed the tools to measure how and why the people conceived the WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations, with precision set using the dimensions rooted in their culture, history, and reality (Mazama, 2003 p.13).

The eleventh step was about providing theoretical (theory-building) knowledge. The study ensured originality during analysis of the data collected. The researcher took photographs and collected maps some of which are annexed in this thesis. The researcher recorded voices of the participants as they narrated their lived experiences; to allow for better interpretation. While handling the data, the study minimised all forms of data manipulation while converting it into statistics, since such would lead to loss of the Afrocentric nuances therein. The data was interpreted from an African cultural point of views and conclusions. The study also used constructs that reflect the history, culture, socio-economic ideas, and experiences of the people of Bungoma County.

The last step was the writing of the thesis. The researcher was keen with language because it played a critical role towards understanding the findings. The researcher fully immersed himself into the research to write as the person who understands the lived realities of the people; but without compromising objectivity. In any case, as aforesaid, Afrocentricity seeks to imply that: "the language used in a text could portray Africans either as objects or as subjects. To make African objects and not subjects, the person who create the text must have some understanding of the nature of the African reality (Asante, 2007 p. 43). The study is in line with the Asante's (2007) assertion because the researcher was born at the sight of the research. As a result, the researcher subconsciously and consciously achieved the Afrocentric operationalisation by getting rid of negative language that negates Bungoma County people as being agents within the domain of Afrocentric people's history and cultural values.

1.4 Rationale and Justification

The study's interest was about WhatsApp voice and the people's perception of it as techno-pessimistic and/or techno-optimistic; and the emergence of the techno-pragmatism in Bungoma County during electoral deliberation. The study juxtaposed techno-pessimistic perception with techno-optimistic perception, leading to the emergence of the techno-pragmatic conception. The later perception is the study's contribution, through increasing/popularising knowledge in media scholarship and democratisation within the African context. Beckler, (2012 p. 13) identifies two primary functions of social media including WhatsApp as: to "offer a platform for citizen deliberation; and to serve as a watchdog over society on a peer-production model". The study attempts to fill the gap occasioned by the thin literature in the social science field; mostly applauding social media/WhatsApp voice as providing for public space hitherto deprived in the African electoral processes and democralisation in general (Barassi, 2016 p. 7). As earlier

mentioned, the study is aware about sections of scholars' view that there is usually no knowledge gap, but rather the researchers' limitation to knowledge. With this in mind, we can put it that the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations attempts to contribute the techno-pragmatic conception hitherto less emphasised. This is especially because the knowledge about techno-pragmatism is less explored in media studies/social media (Wekesa, 2020). As we shall see in the chapter on conceptual and theoretical framework, some of the frameworks adopted for the study, include Afrocentricity, three-pillar technos namely optimistic, pessimistic, and pragmatic, juxtaposition of the techno-pessimism and the techno-optimism, the threading of techno-affect strand, among others. The frames are aimed at establishing more knowledge about the WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations within the African electoral politics.

Second, social media including the WhatsApp voice is rapidly affecting spaces, bringing many communicative changes across the globe. Thus, there is need to carry out studies to update the field about the latest of the communicative changes. For instance, WhatsApp's ability to bring together people in relatively large but defined groups allow for meaningful deliberations (SIMELab, 2019); while Facebook's ability to link up large amorphous groups enables the people to hold the leaderships accountable by spreading messages about corruption and other social vices to all corners of the society. The two social media complement each other enabling for implication of the leaders in ways never anticipated in society. Omanga (2019) attributes WhatsApp's ease of use and popularity to cultural and technological factors. Jamie et al. (2019) indirectly attributes its increased use to its potentiality to manipulate the public especially through misinformation and disinformation. As we shall see in the analysis chapters of this thesis, these concepts are political and ideologically inclined (Curran et al, 2016; Wasserman,2017). As a result, the impact of misinformation and disinformation on the WhatsApp users remains contested; with scholars

arguing that the concepts are over emphasized; because all news either misinform or disinform depending on the ideological leanings of the media houses (Curran 2016; Wasserman 2017). The monopoly of ideologies and opinions about news, which was enjoyed by the traditional media houses have been disrupted by the social media, prompting the thinking that traditional media does not disinform and misinform. The efficacy of fact checking is hindered by financial constraints associated with setting up a new department or hiring more editors to check the facts (Cheruiyot, & Ferrer-Conill, 2018 p. 967). These perspectives about news media, more so social media need to be constantly studied for updates.

Thirdly, the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations uncovers practices that collectively demonstrate hegemonic practices within social media groups and between social media groups and the governments. For instance, we shall understand how and why the people collectively use social media to counter the hegemony from dominant social actors in society, including individuals, groups, political classes, County governments, and central governments, among others. Through study we shall also understand how and why the dominant social actors use social media to advance hegemonic practices. The use of social media/WhatsApp voice by both the citizenry and the dominant social actors can be philosophically located in Foucault's "dynamic normalisation" (Foucault, 1977, p. 26f). He argues that governments use surveillance technology such as observatory towers on the citizenry to make them "think and act" in fear of the watching government who would punish them if they break the laws; thereby creating conformity even where government may not be watching. If read inversely, this concept would reveal that citizenry participation in electoral deliberations using the social media would create conformity to the dominant social actors; making them to "think and act" in fear of the "watching" citizenry, who may punish them by resisting their dominance, voting them out of power, among others.

Forth, the study about WhatsApp use in electoral deliberations shall generate information about hegemony and counterhegemony which shall inform the democracy and governance area. For example, the NGOs, the newly devolved governments in Kenya including the Bungoma County, the National government, the globe, among other interested bodies, shall be informed about democracy and governance. The study can also be generalised in other African countries, the global south, among others, especially those with regional governments. However, the generalisation is limited to particular social media technologies. For example, the study about WhatsApp may only be used to generalise WhatsApp use in electoral deliberations across the continent, and not Instagram.

Fifth, Bungoma being the fifth most populous county in Kenya after Nairobi, Kakamega, Kiambu and Nakuru respectively (Republic of Kenya, 2013 p. 188), its citizenry deserves to be understudied, to enhance knowledge creation about available platforms for meaningful participation in electoral deliberation. The recent devolution of governance in the country has made it even more urgent to study individual counties, to evaluate how they are utilising the social media potentiality. The study is also necessary for identifying the teething problems associated with devolution, as a new concept in Kenyan governance; whose results can be generalised in Kenya, Africa, and globally.

Sixth, the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations shall predict how the Kenya's 2022 elections may pan out. The predictive research shall generate knowledge to help the relevant bodies to have an idea about what to anticipate during electoral campaigns, so that they may plan appropriately. As a result, they shall be in position to mitigate any severe consequences such as election related violence which is common feature in the Kenya electoral politics.

Lastly, in relation to the above discussed benefits, this study allows for taking stock of WhatsApp voice as a networking site. The study is situated to provide theoretical (theory-building) knowledge opportunity. The WhatsApp voice's social networking feature allowed for the use of qualitative network Analysis method; providing for analysis of how and why the Bungoma County networked community uses the voice in electoral deliberation. The choice of Bungoma County as the research site was due to its vibrant WhatsApp groups, the large population size, and the people's cultural way of life, which informed the study's Afrocentric approach. This rationale and justification enabled for the analysis of how and why Bungoma County people's use of WhatsApp voice to challenge electoral injustice during 2017 elections was conceived as either techno-optimistic and/or techno-pessimistic; and how this leads to the emergence of the techno-pragmatic conception. The study also went on to predict how the 2022 elections might pan out.

1.5 Key Research Question:

What factors inform WhatsApp pessimistic, optimistic, and/or pragmatic perceptions during electoral deliberations?

1.5.1 Specific Research Questions:

Using the case of Bungoma County, the questions included:

- How and why is the use of WhatsApp voice conceived as techno-pessimistic?
- How and why is the use of WhatsApp voice conceived as techno-optimistic?
- Is there a midway position between the split say techno-pragmatic?
- How might the use of WhatsApp voice pan out in Kenya's 2022 electoral processes deliberations?

1.5.2 Potential Assumption:

The factors that inform people's conception of the WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic and/or techno-pessimistic depend on users' experiences during electoral deliberations.

1.6. Scope and Assumptions

The study focus was limited to how and why the people conceive the WhatsApp voice in Bungoma County during electoral deliberations. The study took about four years. The study's samples were drawn from WhatsApp groups earlier listed in a previous sub-section about 'WhatsApp Use and Popularity'. The WhatsApp groups sampled identify with, and engage in Bungoma County's electoral deliberations, as a microcosm of social media used in African electoral deliberations. Additionally, the study included the group members' use of WhatsApp voice to engage in electoral deliberations on other media platforms such as TV, radio as well as with other individuals outside the groups. Although the study is expressly about text and literal voice, when conducting the interviews, the researcher also paid attention to participants' bodily and linguistic cues such prosody and facial expressions, which could communicate contrary to the voice articulations. The study assumes that although unbound by physical boundaries, the WhatsApp groups can be studied within specified geographical borders. The study also assumes that there are no pseudo accounts in the WhatsApp groups sampled. This is despite some participants' revelation that they use fake usernames in the groups. Conscious effort was made to establish and interrogate the forms of misrepresentation/pseudo accounts. The study assumed that the forms of misrepresentation revealed were in fact forms of resistance to dominance, which fell with the study's frame of analysis. During the analysis, the researcher was mindful not to be drawn into limitations and assumptions occasioned by his own personal experiences with the WhatsApp groups; as well as his personal views since he grew up in the research site.

1.7 Thesis Layout

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. The structure is generally laid out based on the key notions around technological determinism, digital media, and voice participation. It also follows the research questions set out about WhatsApp voice's emasculation and emancipation.

Chapter One is the Introduction introduces the thesis, highlights the research site's geographical, social, and political settings of the study area, Background and Context-consisting of the media history in Kenya, Problem Statement, Design, Rationale and Justification, Key Research Question, Specific Research Questions, Research Assumption, as well as the Scope and Assumptions.

Chapter Two reviews the literature that is thematically derived from the study's research questions. Among the theories reviewed include Digital Capitalism, Media Liberalisation Technological Determinism, Voice as a participation perspective in general and in African context, Philosophical view of power, Techno-affect, among others.

Chapter Three, the Theoretical Framework, outlines the efficacy of the theories reviewed and how they are linked with the study's objectives. The chapter focuses on the efficacy of an Afrocentric approach to the study of digital media; highlighting how WhatsApp use is conceived as techno-pessimistic and/or techno-optimistic by the people during electoral deliberation.

Chapter Four on Methodology highlights the systematic and empirical methods which constitute the process employed during the study. The chapter consists of research design; research Methods; Ethnography; Phenomenology; Covert Participant Observation and the Anticipated Challenges; Sampling and Sampling Techniques; Data collection; Data Analysis and Presentation; Validity and Reliability; and Ethical Consideration. Overall, interviews, observations and content analysis were triangulated to enhance reliability and validity of the study's findings.

Chapter Five on Techno-pessimism/Emancipation covers digital capitalism (Schiller, 2000), African public sphere (Ekeh 1975), rational consensus (Wiredu, 1997) and technological determinism (McLuhan, 1964). It provides the theoretical anchoring for the analysis of the theme of techno-pessimism/emasculation. Philosophical views on Techno-Affect/emotions are provided by Lippmann, (1922), Papacharissi, (2016), among others. The philosophical views on electoral power are provided by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) among others. Anecdotal evidence that supports the main theme was used to complement the main one. Information from observation notes and sampled WhatsApp voice were used for in/validation.

Chapter Six on Techno-optimism/Emancipation identifies and analyses techno-optimism/emancipation as the outstanding theme/narrative as narrated by the people during the interviews about how WhatsApp voice is conceived as techno-optimistic/emancipative by users. The analysis used African public sphere (Ekeh, 1975), technological determinism (McLuhan, 1994), digital capitalism (Schiller, 2000) and rational consensus (Wiredu, 1997) among others. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) provided philosophical view of electoral power in the analysis. The other narratives and anecdotal evidence that support the main theme were used to complement the main one. Information from observation notes and sampled WhatsApp voice were used for in/validation.

Chapter Seven, Techno-pragmatism, is the study's devised contribution into the study area. It strikes the middle ground between the techno-optimism and the techno-pessimism. The chapter sought to champion and popularise a realistic view of WhatsApp deployment in African electoral deliberations. It analytically argues that the impact of WhatsApp in society depends on how the people use it.

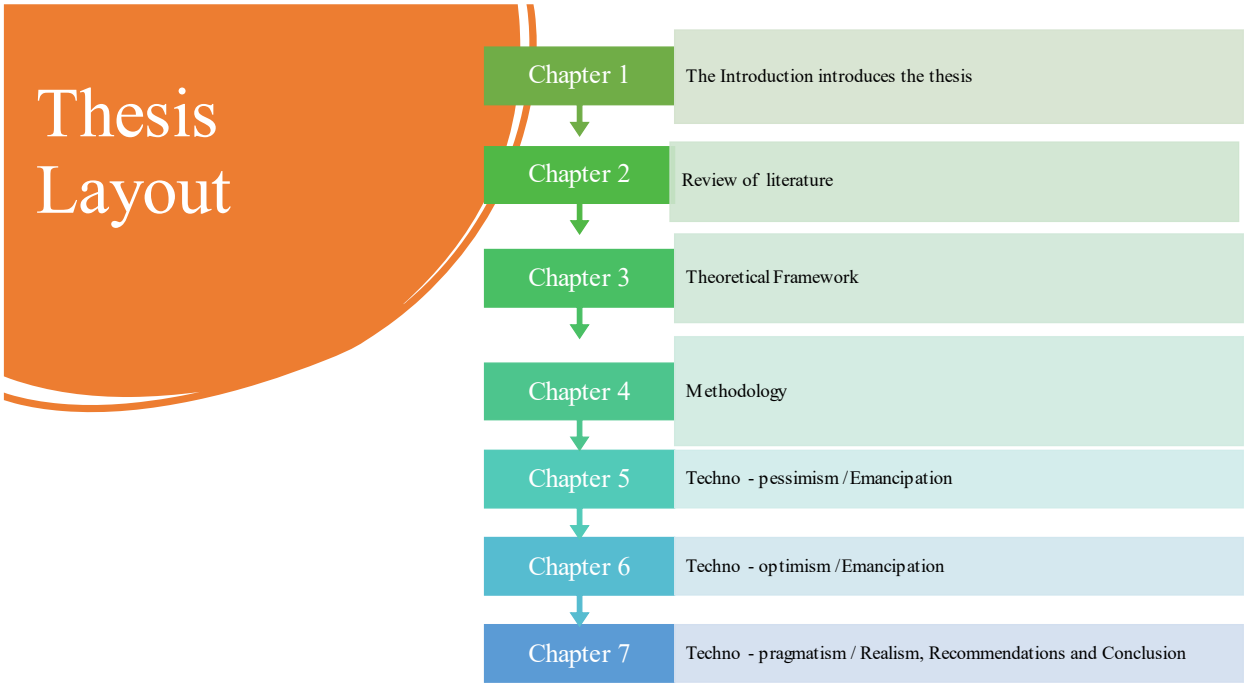

Fig 3: Showing chapter layout of the thesis

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This literature review speaks to the deployment of digital technologies in the African electioneering politics. The discussions were guided by the study's frames in which the constructs of similarities/differences (Coren, 1990) allowed for the juxtaposition of techno-pessimism and techno-optimism based on their oppositional occurrence in society, to enable for the emergence of the techno-pragmatism. The frames utilised the construct of proximity (Coren, 1980) to enable the review to particularise the otherwise universalised notions to Kenya/Africa. By juxtaposing the two technos mentioned above, the discussions subtly represent positions of the media loss and gain of credibility. The notions include digital capitalism (Schiller 2000), neo-Marxist thoughts on technology (Feenberg 2013), and technological determinism (McLuhan 1994). The scholars' views, contentions, and illustrations about internet technologies and their linkage to political economy are reviewed, with compelling contrasts to the colonial and post-colonial media in Kenya. The contrasts are aimed to highlight how and why the media has gained and lost credibility, while in pursuit of democratisation, amidst competing and conflicting interests. Balanced and informed views on voice as a participation perspective are offered by and built on Ekeh (1975), Couldry (2010), Wiredu (1997), Arnstein's (1969), Carpentier, (2016). The universal philosophical views on power drawn on Laclau and Mouffe (1985); on techno-affect by Papacharissi, (2015) Goffman, (1959) Lippmann (1922); and on participation by Foucault (1977) are particularised to Kenya, and later generalised to Africa and the world. Further Africanised contexts within the political economic theorisation, are offered by Jamie et al. (2019), Wiredu (1997) Mbembe (2001/2017), Oriare et al, (2010), Omanga, (2019), Ochilo, (1993), Wanyende (2015), among others.

2.1 Digital Capitalism & Autonomous Marxists Views

The main research question for the study about WhatsApp voice use in electoral deliberations was: What factors inform WhatsApp pessimistic, optimistic, and/or pragmatic perceptions during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County? The study conceptualises digital capitalism in Marxian terms (Fuchs, 2009). It views digital capitalism in the broad ontological, epistemological, and axiological terms; whereby the relationships between WhatsApp technology and capitalism can be evaluated. In this sense, digital capitalism is an economic mode embedded in the antagonistic capitalist society… 'whose antagonistic tendencies can be dialectically and realistically' identified within relations, to potentially enable the competing forces/groups to exploit and oppress the society (Fuchs, 2009 p. 74-75). We can particularise Fuchs (2009) views to the Kenyan central government, county governments, the Bukusu tribe, the dominant clans, among other social groupings in Bungoma County, from where we can argue that they constitute the forces that used masculinity/force to exploit and oppress the less dominant in society. From the history of the colonial and post-colonial media in Kenya, the ruling "elites" used the media to suppress and oppress the people to maintain political and economic power, in what Burnell and Randall, (2008) and Ochilo, (1993) call, maintaining an unequal status quo through the legitimisation of the rights of the colonial masters and their subordinates. As we shall see in the chapters to come, we can contrast the colonial exploitation and oppression with the metaphorical WhatsApp voice emasculation conceptualised in this thesis. The concept of digital capitalism was advanced by Schiller (2000) in attempt to explore the connection between the extension of new computer and satellite technologies and the emergence of new capitalist modes of production and consumption. He argues that capitalist modes are based on politics of dispossession of personal data, corporate surveillance, and exploitation of immaterial labour; similar to Kenya's Huduma

number, a recently introduced biometric tool for government surveillance on the people (see Foucault, 1977).

Using the metaphorically borrowed term 'serial callers', Brisset-Foucault, (2018) analyses the radio call-in sessions in Uganda whereby she juxtaposes the pros and cons of digital technology. From the analysis, we can see that whereas the people innovatively come up with ways to communicate their needs, the political class infiltrates the innovations corrupting them to their advantage. As we shall see in the sub-sections of this chapter and beyond, such political class constitutes what this study terms, the commercialist/capitalists. They own the capitalists' modes, which are supported by computer and satellite technologies. The modes have enabled for among others, the shrinking of geographical space, in what is popularly called, globalisation. From the techno-optimistic point of view, space and time are no longer considered as direct constraints for the organisation of human experience (Barassi, 2016). As demonstrated by Brisset-Foucault, (2018), the political class in Uganda pay the serial callers to talk well of them in radio stations during the call-in sessions, regardless of whether the callers have physically been to their constituencies or know them well enough. Thus, callers who have never been to a member of parliament's constituency are paid to talk well about the many 'development projects' in the constituency. This is despite the techno-optimists' argument that the technologies, collectively called Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), have more positive than negative impact in society (Barassi, 2016). The optimists universalise that ICT has enabled the emergence of a globally networked economy; away from the "saturated" national markets of the 1970s (Barassi, 2016 p.5). More so, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the ICT technologies facilitated the Kenyan people, and the rest of the world to continue working remotely, keeping physical distance to minimise infections. People held virtual meetings, conducted global businesses, and carried out

the regular workplace tasks from their homes. This is despite the new challenges that arose from the new working environment, including physical isolation from colleagues, the possibility of invasion of privacy, among others.

The globally networked economies were first criticised by techno-pessimists constituting the autonomous Marxists, who partially detarched from strict Marsism, so as to critically re-read Marx. Feenberg, (2013) pessimistically argues that the technologies are not neutral but embody specific values, shaped, and used by those in power to maintain their social, economic, political, and ideological positions. The study particularises the above argument using the aforementioned Kenyan influencers such as Alai, Itumbi, Ngunyi, among others, who have shaped social media into a political communication tool that earns them immense social power (mis)used during electoral campaigns. The Kenyan government has also shaped, among others, the aforesaid Huduma number for ideological purposes, to facilitate dominance. This (mis)use of the present-day media, including the WhatsApp voice directly compares with the colonial whites and "elite" Africans (mis)use of the early media in Kenya to maintain political and economic power. Foucault (1977) demonstrated the trajectory of power embedded in artefacts of Bentham's circular prison, Panopticon, arguing it is ideologically used to govern society. As aforesaid, it creates conformity and makes people think and act in a certain way for fear of punishment. Metaphorically, Foucault's (1977) power trajectory informed Kenya's media migration from analogue to digital broadcasting, creating a digital citizenry. The migration enhanced government surveillance of the media (CA, 2021), whereby the government now has ease of access to the digital records of all aired content from the media organisations. As a result, the media feels the government is watching, and exercises self-restraint, 'killing' government criticism. This is similar to the early independent media in Kenya, where the governments of the day intimidated the private media that was

perceived too critical of government programmes (Oriare et al., 2010). More so colonial media might have aimed at creating a literate society and then 'capturing' it via say propaganda, surveillance, among others to facilitate dominance.

A section of the autonomous Marxists counters their own argument, - taking a techno-optimistic point of view by drawing from Foucault's (1978) reflection that, "[w]here there is power, there is resistance". They argue that the citizenry can also (mis)use technology as a way of resisting exploitative and oppressive technological power relations (Mithun et al., 2016 p. 95). The reflection can be particularised to Kenya's 2017 elections, where Kenyans (mis)used social media by collecting evidence of electoral malpractice which was later used to hold the government accountable for electoral injustice. Globally, as was the case with #blacklivesmatter in the US, and during Kenya's 2017 and 2022 electoral deliberations, the social media technologies have been (mis)used by individuals and social movements to demand social justice, as a form of resistance to the status quo (Bosch et al., 2020). We can draw from the previous chapter, to argue that the pioneer private media in Kenya, critical of the governments of the day, shaped the media technology for (mis)use, to resist dominance. Mbembe (2017) assumes a techno-pessimistic stance on technological (mis)use, decreeing that, abdication of the fight for social justice to technology is fundamentally undemocratic. He argues that it robs the people of sobriety through facilitation of the politics of affect.

Post phenomenologists such as Verbeek (2012), Ihde, (2009), Lazzarato (2004), Negri, (2008b), among others refute the neo-Marxists, by arguing that adaptive and culturally influenced people interact with technologies; and find new uses to solve existing problems. The study particularises the post phenomenological string of thought, to the development of M-Pesa money transfer in Kenya and Ushahidi platform. The money transfer and Ushahidi platform are phenomena that was

never envisaged by the dominant social actors, including those who first designed the mobile phones. The post phenomenologists techno-optimistically believe that technology arrives in society as a phenomenon, and causes phenomenological societal changes, without the influence of the dominant actors, including those who made it. If the societal change brought about by the technology is negative, then the people would not adapt it, and it would die out - not be culturally accepted. We can attribute this thought to the Orange Telecommunication Service provider, among others in Kenya, who came up to compete the M-pesa services, but later died out from the Kenyan market. This implies that the technology phenomenologically takes place without human interference. However, Mouffe (2019) questions the post-phenomenological stance for depicting social problems as solvable by such simplistic singular logic. As we shall see in the analysis chapters, Mouffe's (2019) views implicitly reflect the techno-pragmatism stance- a middle ground between the techno-optimism and techno-pessimism.

Curran et al (2016) call for greater reflection on what role we should assign to the internet technologies. They assume a techno-pessimistic stance to argue that despite the initial hope society had in the ICTs, including its ability to transform the economies and global tolerance, not all has been achieved. For instance, when Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web (WWW), his intentions were humanitarian. A particularisation can be made that the capitalists, including the political class in Uganda and across Africa "hijacked" the project leading to deprivation of the humanitarian intent, as evidenced in the aforesaid Brisset-Foucault's (2018) analysis of Uganda's serial callers and street parliament. In the Kenya, social media influencers, among others, (mis)use the WWW technology for surveillance of the citizens by dominant social actors, for unwarranted online marketing, for online fraudster activities, for cyberbullying, among others. McLuhan's (1994) concept of technological determinism offers that the techno-pessimism/techno-optimism

divide portrayed by the WWW technology use in societies, is attributable to the cultural adaption of the technology in society. The society with many vices would adopt the WWW technology to perpetrate evil, while the society with good morals would adopt it to perpetrate the good.

Techno-optimistic scholars such as Omanga (2019) argue that the WWW technology has been used to enhance good governance in Kenya, where the people use social media including WhatsApp to boost security and hold leadership accountable. Scholars such as Oriare (2008), Wanyande (1995), Ochilo (1993), had earlier alluded to Omanga's techno-optimistic views about the use of ICT technology to improve the lives of people in Kenya. They argued that the impact of liberalisation has improved the Kenyan media landscape since its inception in the 1990s. According to Kenya Information and Communications - KIC Act (2012), liberalisation meant the freeing of the airwaves in accordance with market demand rather than government decisions. It allowed for the acquisition of ICT technologies by media entrepreneurs, which, in turn, allowed for quality broadcasting equipment (Oriare, 2008). The liberalisation decolonised the industry leading to increased investment in the media sector, which enabled the people to have variety of news sources to listen to, away from the predominant government owned media (Oriare, 2008). Arguably, the onset of media liberalisation facilitated for the attainment of multiparty democracy in Kenya in 1992 (Oriare et al, 2010). The most notable transformation in the Kenyan media landscape was the mushrooming of community-based radio stations that swept across the country, enabling more rural people to take part in electoral debates through FM radio (Mitullah et al, 2015; Mulupi, 2012; Oriare et al., 2010). Liberalisation also allowed for development of policy frameworks to safeguard the space for public expression from government interference (Mitullah et al., 2015). Therefore, the study about WhatsApp voice anchors on the knowledge about digital capitalism, to analyse the people's techno-pessimistic and/or techno-optimistic perceptions of

WhatsApp during electoral deliberations; with view to explore how the techno-pragmatism emerge from between the two.

2.2. Technological Determinism and the Kenyan media Landscape

The concept of technological determinism explains how WhatsApp voice is perceived as techno-optimistic and/or techno-pessimistic during electoral deliberations in Kenya. The concept was first theorised by sociologist Veblen (1857-1929), to explain that a society's technology determines the development of its social structure and cultural values (Carey, 1967). Later in the 1960s, McLuhan (1994), under the influence of Innis (1894-1952), popularised the concept in his 'medium theory' (Carey, 1967). The theory romanticises the idea that channels are a dominant force that must be understood, so as to know how the media influence society and culture. As seen in the reasons for the choosing to study WhatsApp over other platforms, McLuhan's (1994) infamous metaphorical statement "the medium is the message" holds that different channels differ not only in terms of content but also in regard to how they awaken and alter thoughts and senses. The concept focuses on characteristics of the medium rather than what it conveys, or how information is received. In the concept, the medium is not simply the newspaper, radio, television, or internet. Rather, it is the symbolic environment of any communicative act. He posits that, media, other than the content it transmits, influences individuals and society. McLuhan (1994) argues that people adapt to their environment through a certain balance of the senses, and that a primary medium of age brings out a particular sense of ratio, thereby affecting perception.

We can illustrate how the "sense of ration" affect perception, by making various particularisations about the notion to Kenya. First, the various media milestones such as pre-colonial media, colonial media, post-colonial media, independent media, all awaked the people's senses in varying rations. As we shall see in the paragraphs to come in this section, the people's (mis)use of the media

depends on how it awakens their senses. Second, the various social media such as twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, among others, awaken different senses to the different Kenyan users within techno-pessimistic/techno-optimistic contexts (Aldardasawi, 2017). For instance, the Facebook is an open user platform that awakens a sense of amorphous mass anonymity among the Kenyan users; while the WhatsApp is a closed user platform and awakens a sense of social cohesion and closely knit Kenyan small group membership of less than 256 people. Therefore, the users choose the social media that best awaken their senses in accordance with their communicative needs (Aldardasawi, 2017 p.64). Arguably, the volatile politics of Kenya makes the people use WhatsApp more than the rest of the social media, because they feel safer sharing their political information within the closed user platform (SIMELab, 2019). Twitter's limited number of characters per post enables users to believe people shall only post the gist of information, saving them unnecessary reads. On the other hand, the Facebook's amorphous mass anonymity enables the Kenyan users to spread political information to all corners of society to fight for electoral justice (Wamuyu, 2020). The anonymity allows for the Kenyan people to feel safer because they cannot be easily tracked for retaliatory attacks by the dominant social actors. The study however remained cognisant to the fact that the social media messages could be cross posted on various platforms. For instance, screenshots of the WhatsApp group electoral deliberations may be shared on Facebook, Twitter, among other platforms, causing different debates and emotions. In this case, the shared screenshots are not easily traceable to the original message composers, which is presumed to offer safely to the users.

The cross-posting enables the social media messages to reach the mainstream media. We can use McLuhan's (1994) response to critics about his book prophesy, to explain how the mainstream media is reinventing itself to complement, instead of competing social media. In the prophesy,

McLuhan (1994) argued that technology would kill the book publishing industry. However, the critics argued that McLuhan's 1994 prophesy was false, because the technological advancement in the printing press enables for more book printing than ever before. In his response, McLuhan acknowledged that more books were being printed than ever before; and that his prophesy meant that the book printing culture, where one book was printed at a time would die (McLuhan, 1994, p. 82). In the prophesy, McLuhan had envisioned the hi-tech printing press that would disrupt/kill the existing print culture. McLuhan's (1994) critics presumed that his book prophesy was a techno-pessimistic view, even though it was techno-optimistic.

If conflated onto the Kenyan media landscape, the McLuhan's (1994), book prophesy, can be metaphorically applied in two ways. First, is that we can analogise it with the liberalisation of the early media discussed in the previous chapter, whereby the later also led to the death of the government media monopoly, leading to better quality content from emergent private media. This does not obverlook the fact there are certain sectors of government media such as e-citizen, which remain active to date. Second, the culture of the traditional media, as was the book culture, is being abandoned because of the ICT advancement. The ICT technologies in Kenya have enabled the traditional media such as *NTV, KTN, Classic 105 FM*, among others, to reinvent themselves so as to awaken the audiences' senses in a balanced ratio, in the way social media/WhatsApp technology does. Particularly, almost all the TV stations, radio stations, and newspapers have adopted such technologies as the social media handles, and the cross-platform broadcasting – which enables content from social media to be aired in the traditional media. The traditional media have WhatsApp numbers to allow for WhatsApp communication with the audiences; the traditional media houses can join the various WhatsApp groups in the society to directly obtain content created through the people's electoral deliberations, among others. Therefore, the culture, the roles

and the processes of the traditional media have died, as prophesied by McLuhan (1994). Arguably, the death of the traditional media culture has expanded space for inclusivity during electoral deliberations (McLuhan, 1994 p. 5). This is because, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Kenyan people who were marginalised by previous governments, and the government-adherent mainstream media, now have space to participate in electoral deliberations.

In McLuhanian conception, the adoption of social media into traditional media enables the later to awaken people's senses comparable to the former, thereby expanding the space on platforms, to include criticism to governments. In their techno-optimistic stance, Curran et al. (2016) explore how the social media/WhatsApp and the traditional complement each other to provide the space for the people. Curran et al.'s (2016) complementarity role of the media can be particularised to Kenya by how online multi-national giants such as Coca-Cola run multi-billion-dollar businesses advertise in the Kenyan traditional media; how Kenyan government agencies aspiring for greater surveillance such as Huduma Number are criticised by security experts during traditional media interviews; and how today's Kenyan public is happy to produce Internet's user-generated content that is aired in the traditional media. Curran and colleagues argue that the complementarity between social media and the traditional media has increased their ability to awaken people's senses. It has also expanded space since the multiple platforms allow for inclusion of the perceived marginalised groups seeking social justice. Such include political movements, black people in the US, women, and LGBTQ+.

We can pessimistically conflate McLuhan's (1994) concept of sense awakening with the traditional media, to argue that the complementarity between the social media and traditional media (re)awakens the sense of surveillance/shutdown by governments (see Ochilo 1993; Wanyande, 1995). The governments such as the aforenamed Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, among

others, revise their media laws to become stricter, to deny people the space provided by the complementarity. The governments are angry about the expanding space for the people's deliberations because they are used to criticise governments (Oriare, 2010). Therefore, the tightening of control over social media and mainstream media is aimed at regulating the deliberations. In 2017, the Kenyan government ordered the mainstream media not to cover the leader of opposition's political activities, because the messages criticised the government (Standard, 2018). This is even as the government argued the messages at the rally would incite the people. The study about WhatsApp voice established that the platform's ability to awaken different senses in users inform their techno-optimism and/or techno-pessimism conceptions during electoral deliberations.

2.3.0 Perception and WhatsApp Use

The study on WhatsApp use in electoral deliberations acknowledges that different authors conceptualise perception in different ways. Some view it as the process of selecting, organising, and interpreting information (Anonymous, 2016). Others such as proponents and critics of the selective exposure theories of communication, refer to perception as one's personal opinions and experiences (Silvia et al., 2015). This study conceptualises perception as the way WhatsApp users view the platform. It traces the origin of perception to Plato's assertion that knowledge is nothing else but recollecting already acquired contents. He also repeats the assertion in his infamous dialogue on the allegory of the cave (Plato 2016; Zamosc, 2017). Although there are many theories of perception, the study chose to work with the theorisation of Anonymous (2016) because it is nuanced with other perception perspectives from other authors, including Coren, (1980). Also, the study was interested in the conceptualisation of perception rather than how it has been applied in communication. Thus, the communication perception theories such as agenda setting, framing,

representation, among others, were not given prominence in the thesis. According to Anonymous (2016), the process of perception includes a selection of stimuli that pass through perceptual filters, which are organised into our existing structures and patterns. In this study we shall loosely equate filters to how the WhatsApp use advances and/or limits the users' electoral deliberations. For instance, the filters are interpreted based on one's previous experiences with the WhatsApp voice (Coren, 1980). As already seen in the previous sections, when WhatsApp use limits the people's electoral deliberations, it is perceived as techno-pessimistic. When it advances their electoral deliberations then it is perceived as techno-optimistic. And when it simultaneously advances and/or limits the electoral deliberation, it is perceived as techno-pragmatic. We can see that, although perception is largely a cognitive and psychological process, it affects our communication (Silvia, et al., 2015). Logically, we respond differently to different information that we perceive favorable (optimistic) than we do to the information we find unfavorable (pessimistic) (Coren, 1980). Drawing from the previous chapter, we can see that the people were more pessimistic about the colonial media (see Ochilo, 1993; Wanyande, 1995); then they developed a short-lived optimism about the post-independence media (Oriare et al., 2010); and as we shall see in the empirical chapters, today people simultaneously assume pessimism and/or optimism depending on the issues the media is articulating. This means among others, that their decisions depend on the societal factors surrounding them (see see Fiske & Taylor, 1991). For instance, we take in information through all five of our senses; however, the world around us includes so many other stimuli that makes it impossible for our brains to process and make sense of it all (Anonymous, 2016). As we shall see in people's narrations, the information that comes in through our senses is influenced by various factors such as gender, tribe, pervious experience, (societal) expectations, among others. These influencing factors inform our perception process (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

The first step of the perception process is the selection of the information (Coren, 1980). This means picking particular incoming sensory information upon which we focus our attention on. We select the information we pay attention to, based on the degree to which we are attracted to the information within a particular context. We can particularise this to WhatsApp use in Kenya whereby, as we shall see from people's narrations, the users only pay attention to electoral information that interest them. The second step of the perception process is organisation (Anonymous, 2016). Here, as we shall see in people's narrations, the WhatsApp users organise their electoral chats through sorting and categorising them based on the instinctive/sensual and learned cognitive patterns. There are three ways users utilise to categorise their electoral chats: proximity, similarity, and difference (Coren, 1980). By proximity we mean that WhatsApp users tend to think that electoral chats/messages about issues physically close them affect them/belong to them. By similarity, we mean that the WhatsApp users tend to think they belong to WhatsApp groups with electoral chats/messages that share similar opinions as theirs. And by difference, we mean that the users tend to think that they do not belong to the WhatsApp groups with electoral chats/messages that have differing opinions from theirs. As we shall see in the people's narrations in the chapters to come, the WhatsApp users form/organise their WhatsApp groups based on their similarities, differences, and proximity to each other. The third process of perception is interpretation of the information (Anonymous, 2016). Interpretation means assigning meaning to our WhatsApp experiences using mental structures known as schemata. A schema is also known as a frame of reference (Anonymous, 2016). It is like a database of stored, related information that we use to interpret new WhatsApp experiences. This loosely translates to how we view or understand our world within the context of WhatsApp use (see Palaganas et al. 2017). As we shall see in people's narrations in the empirical chapters of this thesis, the people interpret their

WhatsApp chats/messages based on their previous experiences; shaped by our gender, tribe, (societal) expectations, among others.

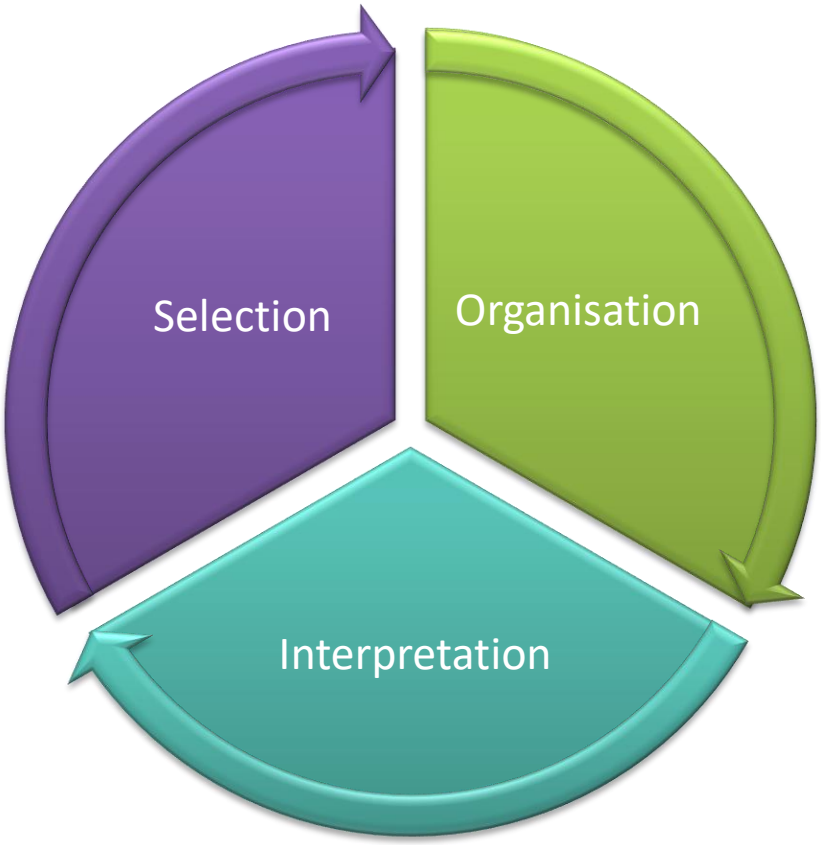

Fig 4: Source: Author: Showing the process of perception

2.3.1 Perception and (De)coloniality

The concept of (de)coloniality has its origin in the Latin Americas, where the colonised people coined it to refer to the logic, metaphysics, ontology, and matrix of power created by the massive processes and aftermath of colonisation and settler-colonialism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2022; William & Mary, 2022). Decoloniality is a way for the colonised people to re-learn the knowledge that had been pushed aside, forgotten, buried, or discredited by the forces of modernity, settler-colonialism, and racial capitalism. It is the ways to detach and unlearn from the imperialist-colonising movement that is still alive today, the civilising and conquering forms of European renaissance and modernity, which happens because we ares all the result and the embodiment of European thought gone universal (Carvalhaes, 2019). Decoloniality is a necessary sub-section in this thesis because the WhatsApp users' perceptions are shape/informed by the past coloniality. Thus, the study cautiously attempted to understand people's use of the platform within their terms, away from the colonial point of view.

Decoloniality seeks to disentangle colonised people from the traps/snares of the colonial matrix of power to change their perception (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2022 p. 37). It reveals "the dark side of modernity" and how it is built "on the backs" other people, whom modernity racialises, erases, and/or objectifies. Unlike Asante's Africanisation of decoloniality which narrows it down, schloars conceptualise it more broadly, as a method and paradigm of restoration and reparation that depends on context, historical conditions, and geography (Carvalhaes, 2019; William & Mary, 2022). Thus, as we study the WhatsApp use through the decoloniality lens, we aspire to explore people's perception in a way that restores, elevates, renews, rediscovers, and acknowledges the multiplicity of lives, culture, and knowledge of indigenous people. We attempt to sidestep the colonial perception, its logic, and the seeming "naturalness" of racial capitalism; and consider differences

in ideas, social practices, histories, identities, and beliefs as part of a myriad of means of "production of knowledge".

2.4. Techno-Affect, 'Lefting' and Hegemony in Electoral Politics

This sub-section of the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral politics explores how techno-optimism and/or techno-pessimism perceptions affectively inform the people's decisions to leave WhatsApp groups, and/or advance hegemonic ideologies, during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. This lays ground for the techno-pragmatic perceptions to be discussed in this thesis. As seen in the previous chapter, we can trace the affect back to the colonial media, which was used to perpetuate affective politics to keep minority elite whites in power (Oriare et al., 2010). The sub-section juxtaposes affect from the techno-optimisms/techno-pessimism perspectives as perceived by the WhatsApp users. To begin with, Papacharissi, (2016) assumes a techno-optimistic stance to argue that emotions make people overcome fear and unite to address the racial and other forms of social injustice in society. She contends that social media enables for the use of emotions by "evoking affective reactions" as the people stand up for justice (p. 17). The affect, though universal, can be particularised to Kenya during the 2007, 2013 and 2017 elections, where perceived election malpractices resulted in public protests and violence. Mbembe (2017) supports Papacharissi's (2016) stance, arguing that the social media makes the people to operate on psychic bonds rather than material structures, which makes it difficult for their voices to be ignored in society. Castells (2008), though not explicitly constraining his logic to the political sphere, comes out techno-optimistic, offering that the advantage of the internet is that it allows for the forging of weak egalitarian ties with strangers, in classless pattern of interaction. This allows for the coming together of large numbers of people to demand for accountability, justice, among other tenets of a democratic society. He observes that social media has become the material support of a new type

of political participation that is based on horizontal networks, political autonomy, and leaderless organisation.

The leaderless organisations in which the people are bound with egalitarian ties lower the quality of public discourse by empowering amateurs with the same legitimacy as traditional leaders, professionals, and experts, by making everyone likely to contribute to public debates (Castells, 2008). In his techno-pessimist point of view, Castells (2008) points out that the congested digital public sphere makes it difficult for people to clearly recognize the contributors of quality debates. Within the Kenyan social media space, some people's posts and comments are personal, lack objectivity, are overly emotive, misinform and disinform, among others. Particularly, some regard the opposition leader Raila Odinga as 'uncircumcised' thus unfit for presidency, while others regard Uhuru Kenyatta as a murderer and thief who is unfit for presidency (Lynch et al, 2019). In attempt to rationalise the emotions techno-affective politics, Wasserman, (2017) discusses disinformation and misinformation as ideological inclinations. He argues that all media are ideologically inclined and thus misinform and disinform. The digital public sphere has only taken it a notch higher than the traditional media. Wasserman (2017) opines that the concept of fake news is therefore politicised and over emphasized to 'vilify' the digital public sphere.

Mbembe (2017) draws from Comaroff (2012) to argue that digital public sphere/social media has facilitated a new form of politics he called "politics of the affect", which involves recycling emotions into politics as new voices render old ones inaudible. The people use social media to actualise affective politics at the expense of logic. It preoccupies them with more emotions and less sobriety during electoral deliberations. The politics of affect is further compounded by African people's belief that "politics, governance, and public debates are rooted in a world of invisible powers - of witches, spirits, and demons" (Comaroff, 2012 p. 13). We can localise the African

people's belief to Kenyan deputy president William Ruto's attendance of many church services to insinuate to his political supporters that he is spiritually pure. In his political rallies, he refers to the opposition leader Odinga as a 'witchdoctor'. In the Kenyan context, this insinuates spiritual impurity. Ruto's aim is to win more supporters based on his self-proclaimed spiritual purity, and discredit Odinga as an unworthy opponent in the forthcoming 2022 elections.

The use of social media to convey the people's emotions is not a new phenomenon in media. Though universal, we can assess the technological "power" of social media to evoke emotions through Lippmann's (1922) "pseudo-environment". Lippmann (1922) assumed a techno-optimistic point of view to demonstrate the power by juxtaposing a blend of the world outside and one's mental picture. He used print journalism to evoke people's/readers' emotions through the construction of biased mental images of lives of others as they read about them. Live television coverage also amplifies people's ability to emotionally tune into events physically removed from them, by enabling them to feel like they are there due to the sense of immediacy conveyed. WhatsApp and other social media technologies therefore amplify and remediate that very tradition of storytelling. It uses algorithms that prioritise emotive content; by driving them viral at the expense of rational and facts-based political dialogues, thereby compounding the phenomenon (SIMELab, 2019). Borrowing from Goffman's (1959) idea of the performance, as "the presentation of self in everyday life", we can argue that the WhatsApp technology amplifies and remediates the African people's violence (Mbembe 2001) enabling for the affective electoral politics. In this case, the social media/WhatsApp provides the best platform for the African/Kenyan people's emotive and dramatic self-expression during electoral period, similar to their real-life.

In their real life, the Bungoma County WhatsApp users engage in affective electoral deliberations that lead to political differences that end up with some members developing irreconcilable

psychological imbalances (see Busia, 1967; Umar & Idris, 2018). Consequently, they leave the groups in what is popularly called 'lefting'. The term 'lefting' was colloquially coined after the WhatsApp notification phrase, '…left the group…,' which pops up to notify the rest of the members after someone exits the group (Saner, 2016). In the real life of traditional African people, a person who develops irreconcilable differences with the rest of the villagers would leave, in what Busia (1967 p. 24) calls 'voting with the feet'. The term voting with the feet emanates from the fact that those leaving the village would form or join another, whose administrative rules they agree with. This loosely equates to change of administration since villages form the basic unit of administration in Africa (Busia, 1967). Thus, the village metaphorically illustrates how the social media platform provides the people of Bungoma County with virtual (re)living of their real traditional life during electoral politics. Arguably, as earlier mentioned, the WhatsApp platform's ease of exit contributes to its popularity among African users (SimeLab, 2019). The users argue that the ease of exit saves them the psychological pain associated with sticking with the people they no longer wish to associate with (see Rajesh & Priya, 2020). On the flip side, the WhatsApp group administrators have the powers to remove any individuals whom the rest of the group members no longer wish to deliberate with. The admins can also transfer their powers to (an)other member(s) before the exit the groups. These aspects of the WhatsApp media can be analogised with the pioneer media in Kenya. Although in both cases there is affect, and both audiences choose whether to consume the information or not, the WhatsApp users/audience have more choices since they choose who provides the information, when the information is provided, whether to co-produce the information or not, with whom to co-produce the information, among others. We can analolise the WhatsApp admins' transfer of power to members, to the colonialists' transfer of media ownership power to the black Africans. As we shall see in the analysis chapters of this

thesis, Bungoma County WhatsApp groups exercise the WhatsApp power of 'lefting' and/or 'removing' of the unwanted users, during electoral deliberations.

The 'lefting' and 'removing' of people in WhatsApp groups, coupled with capitalism exploitation create social and cultural tensions; similar to the colonial, independence, and post-colonial media earlier discussed in chapter one. We can assume a techno-pessimistic stance to argue that, although the platform avails unprecedented possibilities for engagement, creativity, and cooperation (Gill & Pratt, 2008), the fact that the social media is owned and controlled by the dominant social actors, implies there are power and hegemony relations within the platform. Gill and Pratt's, (2008) argument can be localised to Bungoma County, whereby, as we shall see in the analysis chapters, the majority Bukusu tribe seek to ideologically impose their electoral views on the minority tribes within the County. Gramsci (1978) conceptualises hegemony as the point where objectivity and power meet. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) build on Gramsci (1978), outlining particularities of hegemony as primacy of politics, contingency, and antagonism. The Kenyan dominant social actors, such as the government, the Bukusu people imbed these particularities into social media technologies including the WhatsApp voice; from where affect is remediated into electoral deliberations resulting into people's pessimistic, optimistic, and pragmatic perceptions of the plaforms, as the actors advance their hegemonic ideologies.

According to Wiredu (1997), most African people resist power and hegemonic relations through violence. Mbembe (2001 p. 9) describes Africa as "chaotic, volatile and full of surprises". Matolino (2016 p. 41) argues that indigenous Africans engaged in brutal differences that led to wars and deaths. For example, the power structure between the lineage head called *Mutaka* and the chief *Ssabataka* in the traditional Baganda society of the present-day Uganda was majorly characterised by tensions and ritual murders, which led to relationships by necessity rather than by

will. Consensus was thus crucially about "restoration of goodwill" and "suspension of further recrimination". This suggests that the consensus meetings were eventually sought and reached as the starting points to restore the goodwill that would have been lost during human interactions or wars. It was therefore inevitable to find ways that are agreeable and acceptable to all parties. These African features combined with the capitalism exploitation fuel the social and cultural tensions in Kenya. As a result, the Kenyan political engagements become volatile and unpredictable (Lynch et al., 2019). Besides the virtual violence occasioned by the "lefting" and "removing" in Bungoma County WhatsApp groups discussed in the paragraphs above, we shall also see in the analysis chapters that, the social media/WhatsApp enables the people in Bungoma County to (re)live their affective and volatile indigenous life virtually.

We can particularise Laclau and Mouffe (1985) notion of reality and meaning to Kenya, to argue that political violence is among the Kenyan people's antagonistic methods used to create their reality and meaning, in attempt to resist hegemony. Reality and meaning are viewed as unfixed, fluid, and contingent; constantly being negotiated through the particularities (Laclau & Mouffe,1985). As a result, the social media is the newly found ideological site for both the dominant social actors' and the people, to extend their struggle for dominance and resistance, respectively (see Althusser, 1971). The dominant actors position the meaning within the social media enabled electoral deliberations to their advantage; while the people read/interpret the dominant actor's meaning in a resistant/oppositional way (Hall, 1980). As we shall see in the analysis chapters of this thesis, Bungoma County Government officials and other dominant individuals hire many *bodaboda* riders to attend their political rallies, from where they create and distribute WhatsApp content, to imply that they have huge following. Although the *bodaboda* riders/public are happy with the perceived peer-produced internet user-generated content, they

argue that they participate for pay, and their political stance is never influenced by the content (see Scott, 1990). We can regard this as a new form of electoral malpractice in the Kenyan politics.

In his criticism to Gramsci (1978), Scott (1990) argues that the infra-politics of the poor are vast; including subtle tactics and ambiguous engagements used to resist domination. These include insincere flattering, feigned stupidity, hostile gossip, malicious rumours, magical spells, anonymous threats, folktales, gestures, jokes, grumbling, arson, among others. We can localise Scott's (1990) infra-politics, to the relationship between the political class and the *bodaboda* riders in Bungoma County, whereby as we shall see in the analytical chapters, they insincerely flatter the political class, through peer production of WhatsApp content. We shall also see that some Kikuyus, a minority tribe in Bungoma County, use fake WhatsApp usernames in the groups, stay silent during the WhatsApp group deliberations, among others, to counter the majority Bukusu hegemony. These infra-politics can be subtly traced in the early development of the media in Kenya. The *Kenya Times* newspaper avoided publishing stories that would elicit state's anger (Oriare et al., 2010). Its editorial team also worked from hiding; and kept changing offices to avoid government arrests. Other publications such as 'Tangazo', 'Muigwithania', 'Luo's Magazine, and 'Sauti ya Mwafrika' braved the government threats to ban them (Wanyande, 1995 p. 55). From the above, we see that over time, the infra-politics have shifted from the media houses to the audiences. This is attributable to the fact that the (WhatsApp) audiences now (co)produce content. These complexities inform how the people of Bungoma County perceive WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic and/or techno-pessimistic amidst affective and hegemonic electoral deliberations.

2.5.0 Voice as a Participation Perspective

Since this study is about WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics, this sub-section explores voice in its textual and literal perspective. The sub-section builds up from the previous chapter's understanding that Africa/Kenya is a predominantly oral narrative society (Wefwafwa, 2014). The sub-section draws examples from the social media/WhatsApp to illustrate how and why the voice enables and/disables the people's participation. It borrows from the frames' concepts of similarity/differences (Coren, 1980), to juxtapose the enabling/techno-optimism views with the limiting/techno-pessimistic ones. Ideally, the concept of voice as a participation perspective opens up spaces for citizenry participation without mediation. It enables the people to channel their concerns during decision-making processes. However, we must acknowledge that the machine assisted voice participation, such as the social media, have mediators called group administrators. As we shall see in the empirical chapters, they act as gate keepers to the people's voices (Budzinski & Gaenssle, 2018). According to Menocal (2014), the people's political voice has both intrinsic and instrumental value. In principle, voice allows the people to pursue their goals and aspirations; and seek redress when an injustice is perceived. The voice enables for open and non-discriminatory processes for citizenry to have a say without fear, and to speak up against perceived wrongs. Voice is also a fundamental freedom that is integral to one's wellbeing and quality of life. This study adopts Couldry (2010) conceptualisation of voice as a participation perspective in electoral politics. He argues that voice is an "active quasi-agential process that includes giving an account of oneself and what affects one's life" (p. 26). Voice can confront both the voiding accountability in politics and the social inequality brought about when people "are muted in many circumstances in life" (p. 27). Couldry (2010) observes that "there is something very consequential about talk that emphasizes reaction by the people, away from the traditional production-text-audience approach (p. 27).

However, voice can only be consequential when the people know that their voice matters (Couldry, 2010). In his pessimistic point of view, Couldry (2010) argues that voice is the only value that can truly challenge neoliberal politics; but having voice is not enough, people need to know their voice matters. With such understanding, citizenry need not simply call for "more voices", whether on the streets or in the media; but, more importantly, know that their voice matters. We can particularise Couldry (2010) concept of voice to Kenya by arguing that the Kenyan people knew that their voices matter when their evidence of election manipulation, collected through social media, was used in court to nullify the 2017 presidential elections in the country. As seen in the 2022 elections, the Kenyan people are no longer interested in the number protestors in the streets, rather, they are interested in consolidating their voice into tangible evidence that can be tabled in court as evidence to electoral injustice (KNCHR, 2017). Couldry (2010) contends that voice challenges neoliberal politics by breaking open the contradictions in neoliberal thought; and shows how the mainstream media not only fails to provide the means for people to give an account of themselves, but also reinforces neoliberal values. As we shall see in the analytical chapters of this thesis, the contention can be particularised to Kenya whereby the mainstream media is unable to provide sufficient space for electoral deliberation because it is owned and controlled by the government and other dominant social actors. The mainstream media's inability to provide the space runs through the history of Kenyan media, dating back to the colonial media, from where dominant social actors control(led) the access and use of the media, to perpetuate their political and economic dominance (Wanyende, 1995).

According to Busia (1967) the space for people's electoral deliberation was killed by the colonialists to justify imposition of colonialism. As seen in the introduction section, this can be justified by the fact that the pre-colonial mass media was inclusive and indigenous, consisting of

the oral literature, riddles, tongue twisters, dances, and songs (Namulundah, 2011). In his optimistic view, Ake (1993) argues that people's space for expression was essential in the indigenous Africa. "All" the different indigenous forms of governance that existed on the continent: despotic, incorporative, and federal had mechanisms to restore the goodwill lost between political entities, communities, clans, and individuals (Ake, 1993 p. 239). The mechanisms emphasized the provision of public space for: the political entities to rebuild relations and trust with others; citizenry to voice their opinions about governance; and aggrieved members to personally express their grievances for redress (Ake, 1993 p. 239). The despotic *Oyo* Empire found in the present-day Nigeria, the incorporative *Mali* Empire after which the present-day country Mali is named, and the federal *Asante* Kingdom of the present-day Ghana clearly separated state from society and preserved the public space. *Yoruba* and *Igbo* kingdoms found in the present-day Nigeria had state authorities monitored through informed and critical discourse by men and women; with "laid down principles of checks and balances as well as the recognition of, and respect for rights and freedoms" (Vansina, 1962b, p. 327). In ancient Egypt, men and women leaders including Cleopatra the marveled Pharaoh played pivotal role to enhance voice through institutional and individual artistic works in public spaces as evidenced in museums today (Vansina, 1962b). We can argue that the 2010 Kenyan constitution borrowed the good African practice of guaranteeing women participation in the political affairs of the country through stipulating a one third gender rule. The rule requires all public constituted entities such as parliament, public committees, among others to consist of at least one third of either gender.

From the above one thirds gender rule in the Kenyan constitution, we can see that voice is both a process and value. Couldry (2010) argues voice is a process when giving an account of one's life and its conditions; and it is a value, when it is the act of knowing that the voice matters and

choosing to regard it as worth. He argues that, through directly examining voice as a participatory perspective, we can understand whether and how voice is valued. This can happen in two major contexts: First, we can explore the role of traditional and digital media and communication technologies, and second, we can uncover the implications for the voices being heard in society. For example, in Kenya, the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), a government instigated programme, allegedly for uniting Kenyans, was rejected by the court as unconstitutional. The people's public opinions in the social media also rejects the initiative. However, the government insists, through the Attorney general, that it will appeal the ruling in supreme court, to allow for the implementation of the programme. From an optimistic point of view, this shows that the people are involved in the processes, through social media public opinions and court processes. From the pessimistic point of view, this shows that the people's voices are less valued by the Kenyan government.

The Kenyan government's less valuation of the people's voice contrasts Wiredu (1997) optimistic views about voice. In his notion about the rational consensus among the traditional *Akan* community political entity in Ghana, he argues the presence and value of "citizenry" voice in the indigenous Africa was central. He argues that the decisions are arrived at through citizenry voices on the issues at hand in the way of rational negotiations, dialogue, conversations, and exchange of ideas that seek to address "the initial bones of contention" (p. 304). This is with a view to arriving at a consensus in which all parties are party to the decision made. Although he recognises the difficulties involved before reaching consensus, the fact that in indigenous Africa, no single group was permanently placed in a position of being a minority, made the decision-making process workable. This is because even when the minority felt as losers in the decision-making process of the day, they knew they would find themselves as the majority in the next decision-making process, and their preferences and desires would be favoured. The notion consolidates voice into what

Wiewdu (1997 p. 310) proposes as "super consensus" democracy which sidesteps the weaknesses of the Western democracy.

Wiredu (1997) "super consensus" democracy is used to cast pessimistic views about Western democracy for emphasising loyalty to the party at the expense of the people represented; and the "winner takes it all" approach (p. 310). He argues that the minority voices suffering the brunt of marginalisation and unable to muster majority votes to effect their preferences remain poor and unrepresented. Couldry (2010) argues that poverty, among other factors constrain the voices in society. The other factors include inequality, low awareness of rights, government resistance, information asymmetry, and unequal power dynamics at local level (Couldry, 2010 p. 28). Power hierarchies may mean that the socially excluded groups have less of a say than others (Howard, 2004). Spaces for making voices heard are political spaces that can be open to local capture (cf. Althusser, 1971; MacGregor, 2010). For example, as we shall see in the analysis chapters of thesis, WhatsApp has the potential for providing people's space. However, it is also among the spaces which the central government, county governments and other dominant social actors in Bungoma County seek to influence, to assert their hegemonic ideologies. The people with less power due to poverty, societal inequalities, among others, remain vulnerable to the dominant actors' manipulations.

Tacchi, (2012 p. 5), techno-pragmatically argues that voice can be viewed in terms of poverty; where "voice poverty" is understood as the inability of people to influence the decisions that affect their lives, and the right to participate in that decision making. Appadurai (2004, p. 63) argued that "one of the poor people's 'gravest lacks' is 'the lack of resources with which to give 'voice'". This is about the poor people being able to express themselves to influence political debates around wealth and welfare; so that their own welfare is given due attention. For example, as we shall see

in the analysis chapters, many people of Bungoma County travel long distances to charge their cellphones before they can take part in WhatsApp electoral deliberations. Others charge their phones in public spaces such as churches, restaurants, while they are engaged in other activities. Some lack the financial resources to buy sufficient data bundles. For instance, the cultural norms in some tribes in Bungoma County do not allow women to own property. Therefore, the women willing to voice their electoral concerns through WhatsApp depend on men to decide on when the data bundles are bought and used. Busia (1967) attributes the women's present social status to the colonial disruption of the indigenous African institutions. Before the colonialism the African women were recognised as equal societal members with rights to own and use property (Vansina, 1962b).

Afrocentric scholars agree that women voice became de-emphasised as a form of representation in the societies after it was misunderstood and misinterpreted as intimidating, by the colonialists (Busia, 1967 p. 9; Wiredu 1997; Matolino, 2016). As we shall see in the empirical chapters, this elevation of masculinity informed the study's conceptualisation of WhatsApp limitations as emasculating. Busia (1967) argues that indigenous Africa had basic political units called village assemblies, from where the citizenry voiced their concerns about governance and personal grievances, regardless of gender and social status. Occasionally, aggrieved members who felt their grievances were not well addressed formed "counter-publics", from where emerging "counter-discourses" culminated into the citizenry deserting the village to form another, as a way of "resisting social injustice" (see Fraser, 1994, p. 131). Arguably, this feature of the African people enables them to embrace social media/WhatsApp. For example, the members of Bungoma County WhatsApp groups who feel aggrieved exit the groups, to form their own.

However, Mbembe (2001) differs with Busia, (1967) above, and discusses some African pre-colonial political entities as predatory; meaning they were run based on greed and self-seeking interests. His pessimistic stance explains in part why some African kingdoms, empires and federal states sold off their citizenry as slaves during slave trade. However, he fails to account as to whether, the predatory entities were as a result of the external influence such as trans-Atlantic and Arab trade. His work is honest, with simultaneous perspectives and thought-provoking argumentation, describing Africa as chaotic, volatile, and full of surprises. However, if (re)read in a contemporary way, his pessimistic description of Africa can turn optimistic. The description can be indicative of the presence of the space for public expression. His notion on freedom can be universalised to explain why many nations across the globe with the most "progressive" constitutions that allow for public space, display Mbembe's (2001) description of Africa- chaotic, volatile, and full of surprises. The US and some European countries are discernibly intolerant to people and ideas, with renewed energy to explicit rejection of conventional notions of reason, in what some scholars associate with the rise of nationalism. Be it as it may, Mbembe (2001) cautions that the peculiar historicity of African political entities is "rooted in the multiplicity of times, trajectories and rationalities that, although particular and sometimes local", cannot be conceptualised globally (2001, p. 9).

2.5.1 African Public Sphere

This sub-section of the study about WhatsApp use in electoral deliberation analyses Ekeh's, (1975) Afrocentric concept of the public sphere. Osaghae (2006 p. 237) uses Ekeh (1975) concept of an African public sphere, consisting of the "primordial" public, such as the "rural and kinships" and ethnic associations, to question Western scholars' conceptualisation of public space. He contends that the Western public sphere only focuses on "formal" organisations with capacity to change the

state, excluding the "primordial" public from their analysis, yet it is the "equivalent of civil society" in Africa. In his conceptualisation of the African public sphere, Ekeh (1975) identifies two public realms in post-colonial Africa, including: primordial and civic publics. The primordial publics largely consist of ethnic groupings and kinships; while civil publics include those in the civil service structure such as civil servants, military, and police. He argues that the two publics have different types of moral linkages to the private realm: in a way different from the Western conception. He attributes the emergence of the two publics to Africa's politico-historical and sociological factors; including the European originated bourgeois colonial administrators; and the African bourgeois class born out of the colonial experience, respectively. The ordinary "nonbourgeois" African was never involved. As we shall see in the analysis chapters, the Kenyan context of the primordial publics shall consist of the tribal relations within the Bukusu, Sabaot, and Kikuyu people. The civic publics shall consist of the relations within middle class people, the County government officials, among others

Based on the primordial and civic publics, Ekeh (1975) conceptualises a peculiarly African public space characterised by the two publics. He argues that African conceptions of citizenship acquired a variety of meanings, depending on whether it is perceived in terms of the primordial public or the civic public. Most Africans originate from ethnic groups thus are primordial publics. They are moral and obliged to "voluntary" contribute to ethnic associations in exchange for intangible rewards such as of social identity or psychological security. As we shall see in the analysis chapters, the minority Kikuyu people in Bungoma County seek ethnic relations with Kikuyu majority counties such as Nyandarua, Murang'a, Kiambu, among others. On the other hand, the civic public is different; it is amoral and over-emphasises economic/material value. For example, as we shall see in the analysis chapters, the tender applicants, the educated people working in

Bungoma County, central government workers in Bungoma County, among others emphasize on economic/material value during electoral campaigns. According to Ekeh, (1975) "all" Africans seek material gain from the civic publics, who only give under compulsion. He argues that an African can be both a primordial and civic public at the same time; and this brings dialectical tensions and confrontations between the two publics, thereby constituting the uniqueness of modern Africa. For example, as we shall see in the chapters on analysis, the middle-class people in Mt. Elgon Constituency make tribal and clan political alliances to attain/retain power, which result in dialectical tensions, making the Constituency the most insecure in Bungoma County.

According to Ekeh (1975 p. 108), the unwritten law of the dialectics is that "it is legitimate to rob the civic public in order to strengthen the primordial public". This is because people perceive that the civic public steal from the public institutions thus is more economically endowed. In the contemporary Africa, the primordial publics would assume activism role on matters concerning the welfare of their ethnic associations. We can localise Ekeh's, (1975) notion, to Kenya, to help locate such groupings as the Luhya Elders, Kikuyu elders, the Njurinjeke, Nijikenda elders, among others, whose aim is to champion for the interests of certain tribes during electoral campaigns. As we shall see in the analysis chapters, the primordial publics would also become the opposition party and "effectively" check the government formed by those who are not of their ethnic association. In Bungoma County, the gubernatorial candidates usually pick their running mates from different tribes/ethnic dialects to weaken the opposition that would be automatically formed to check their government. Noteworthy though, the most obvious reason for pick running mates from different tribes/dialects is to bring on board the electoral votes to enable for winning. The study about the WhatsApp voice in Bungoma County electoral politics, explored how voice is perceived as pessimistic and/or optimistic during electoral deliberations.

2.6 Electoral Participation and (Il)legitimate Power

This sub-section of the study about WhatsApp techno-pessimism and techno-optimism perceptions deals with the concept of participation. Based on the previous chapter, the concept of participation is largely lacking in the early media, whose audience neither fully used the media to participate in the electoral deliberations of the day, nor co-produced content as it is with the WhatsApp voice. To bring out the concept of participation within the WhatsApp context, we shall juxtapose the ideas about techno-pessimism with those about techno-optimism, as participation perspectives in the Kenyan electoral politics. Scholars agree there is no consensus in the conceptualisation of participation due to the plurality in its approach. They work with the general agreement that participation is usually about the people's involvement in development initiatives, decisions, and resources which affect their lives (Arnstein's 1969 p. 1; BBC Media Action, 2016 p. 3). The concept of media participation therefore refers to the availing of public platforms by the media, for the people to influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions, and resources which affect their lives (BBC Media Action, 2016). Accountability is enhanced through participation when the people play an active role in making demands; and when leaders are expected to respond to those demands with satisfactory answers and actions. The concept of digital media participation refers to the linkage of like-minded cross-cutting perspectives, mediated by Social Networking Sites (SNS) which individuals use to stay connected online. The (SNS) mediating role in the people's participation has gained prominence globally, because they avail bigger platforms than the traditional media; by decentralising the nature of participation with the promise of empowerment (p. 7). The SNS found in Bungoma County include the WhatsApp platforms such as County Viewpoint, Western Elites Association, Western Union, among others.

Thus, we can particularise Arnstein's (1969) and BBC Media Action's (2016) concept of participation to Kenyan people's electoral deliberations through SNS.

Arnstein's (1969) classical concept of participation identifies three levels of people's participation as: non-participation, tokenistic participation, and citizen power participation. The first two levels of participation are pessimistic. The lowliest is the non-participation level, where the citizens are prone to manipulation and therapeutic treatment that do not meet the threshold of meaningful participation. We can conflate these levels of participation to Kenya, whereby during the 2013 presidential election campaigns, Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate manipulated their supporters by arguing that they had been sent by 'God' to save the country from bad leadership. As we shall see in the analysis chapters in this thesis, the supporters' participation was limited to casting their votes, and praying for the Presidency to allegedly save it from the 'ungodly' opposition (cf. Christian Truth Center, 2021; Lynch et al. 2019). This is because the supporters' faith did not allow for questioning the 'God sent' president, even if he did not deliver in office. The next level is the tokenistic participation, which involves less participation characterised by mere "placation, information and consultation" (Arnstein, 1969 p. 217). According to the Center for Multiparty Democracy in Kenya - CMD-K (2015), party members including the officials of political parties participate in the party matters only to the extent that the party leaders want them to. They are merely placed for public appearances so that the parties are not seen to belong to individuals. For instance, when the former secretary general to Orange Democratic Movement (ODM), Ababu Namwamba lost the party leader's favour in 2016, he was 'kicked out' of his party position without following established procedures. This thesis adopts the meaning in the highest level of participation called citizen power. This level takes an optimistic form of participation, enabling the people to negotiate and engage in trade-offs with traditional power holders. At this

level, the people can share the control over development initiatives, decisions as well as the resources. Power can be delegated to them; and they can have partnership in the development initiatives.

Carpentier (2016) criticises Arnstein's concept for focusing on power and losing out on complexities enhanced by discursive and material struggles. He borrows from Laclau and Mouffe (1985) to conceptualise political participation as the involvement of the citizenry into politics within structured institutional, legal, and cultural logics. These complexities affect participation both optimistically and pessimistically. We can particularise Carpentier's (2016) conception to the Kenyan church, which has culturally inculcated into some people that, a presidential candidate's spiritual 'purity' is a better quality for leadership than their ability to deliver services to the people. In using Carpentier (2016) words, we can pessimistically argue that the Kenyan church has institutionalised spiritual 'purity' as among the top cultural logics to consider when electing the president. The institutionalisation of cultural logics that emphasize on a candidate's fitness to serve the people would be the optimistic participation. Carpentier (2016) argues that different democratic models allow for different balances between the people's participation and representation. He conceptualises political representation as the formal delegation of power, where specific actors are authorised to sign, act, speak and hold the power on behalf of the others. In democratic models where the political role of the people to participate in the election process is reduced and societal decision-making centralised, the balance shifts towards representation. As explained in the previous paragraph, this is the case with Kenya. In democratic models such as radical democracy, which emphasises the people's participation beyond "mere" election of representatives, societal decision-making is decentralised, and the balance shifts towards participation.

The rationale for the people's participation is to correct power imbalance in society; referred to as illegitimate or unjust power (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). It arises when political leaders acquire a privileged position in society, because the people delegate to them the decision-making powers, in the form of political representation. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) call it the "constitutive role that both rationalism and empiricism attribute to human individuals" (p. 115). The power imbalance is corrected through elections, which is a participatory process that increases the power position of the people. By particularising Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) concept to Kenya, we realise that every after five years, the political leadership seek new mandate to lead the people, by asking for their votes during election campaigns. However, although the elections are a small fraction of the larger concept of participation, they are made complex by the many social actors or "humans" brought on board (p.116). These social actors have a multitude of relationships and antagonistic struggles amongst themselves. It is therefore important to analyse the material positions, identities and roles of the social actors involved in the process of correcting the power imbalance. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985) this is because material positions are part of a discursive-material knot; and they are knotted together with the meaning-giving structures of identities. If transposed into the African electoral context, during the process of seeking the mandate to lead the people, the social actors with more access to money/resources would use it to influence the voters into abandoning their democratic choice of whom to vote for and vote in favour of those who give them money. This is popularly called vote buying (Jamie et al., 2019. As we shall see in the analytical chapters of this thesis, politicians in Kenya give out money and other tokens to the electorate during campaigns to influence their voting.

According to the National Endowment for Democracy- NED (2017), election manipulation is a global practice, but its extent varies across cultures and geographical regions. There are three major

categories of election malpractice, including: those taking place in regions considered democratic such Australia, United States; those in "counterfeit democracies" such as Kenya, Ukraine, Russia; and those taking place in closed authoritarianisms such as China (NED 2017). Democracy experts agree that there are six strategies used across the globe to practice electoral malpractice in order to guarantee victory. These include: "gerrymandering, vote buying, repression, hacking the electoral system, stuffing the ballot boxes, and playing the International Community" (ACCORD, 2008; NED, 2017). Another newly emerging form of electoral manipulation is the use of "sharp power". It is common in authoritative countries such as Russia, where public perception at home is influenced; while at the same time taking advantage of the democratic space outside home to exert influence in the international community (NED, 2017 p. 6). Arguably, the sharp power is a hybrid of soft and hard power, used according to convenience. According to the African Center for Strategic Studies - ACSS (2021), the election manipulations usually begin earlier, prior to the Election Day; where the "acceptable" strategies used include gerrymandering, limited vote buying; or tactics such as delayed documentation of people who attain voting age, and media manipulation. Social media microtargeting messages is one of the forms of election manipulation that begin early. As we shall see in chapter about WhatsApp techno-pessimistic conceptions, the allegations that Uhuru Kenyatta hired Cambridge Analytica to manipulate the 2017 elections through social media to influence online deliberations during campaigns. Other popular strategies include violence and force, as witnessed in the Uganda's January 2021 presidential elections (ACSS, 2021, p. 3).

The electoral manipulation strategies are overlapping in nature and their illegality/legality is contestable. The contestability forms the main asset for the strategies' success. For instance, it is not clear who decides what is (il)legitimate in an electoral contest. According to Laclau & Mouffe (1985), (il)legitimate questions are asked by whoever feels oppressed without justification in a

particular relationship they are in. Legitimacy varies from one culture to another and is not fixed. Rather, it constantly changes with the framings in the relationships. For example, from a pessimistic/optimistic conception, during the 2013 and 2017 presidential elections in Kenya, the incumbent candidate Uhuru Kenyatta deployed heavy police officers in opposition leader Raila odinga's strongholds, before and on the polling day to offer "security" to the voters. Odinga complained that Uhuru aimed at intimidating his supporters from voting. This was regarded as illegitimate; and documented as among the evidence used in court as proof of electoral malpractice (KNCHR, 2017). During the 2007 elections where Odinga was perceived to be in the lead over the then incumbent Kibaki, he did not complain about the police deployment, hence it was regarded as legitimate. According to the Carter Centre, (2018 p. 26-27), the question of legitimacy gets complex when the opposition parties, just like the incumbent, are involved in the election manipulation. In this case, the only "illegitimacy" of the incumbent is a larger scale of manipulation compared to the opposition parties. By that, the incumbent lacks the moral ground to question the opposition's election manipulation, which creates the perception that the opposition parties do not engage in election manipulations. Yet, during the party nominations as well as national elections, the largest opposition party in Kenya ODM, among others, manipulate elections in favour of their preferred civic, parliamentary, gubernatorial candidates (Standard, 2008). The study about WhatsApp voice explored how participation and (il)legitimacy considerations inform people's conception about WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic, techno-optimistic and/or techno-pragmatic during electoral deliberations.



Fig 5: Photo by Author, facilitated by West Media: Showing the (il)legitimate Police presence at a polling station in Kabuchai Constituency during a bye election in February 2021.

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter, the review of literature drew from the frames' concepts of similarities/differences to juxtapose techno-optimism and techno-pessimism to attain five things: First, to argue from Marxist point of view that, the digital technologies including the WhatsApp are linked to capitalist mode of production, and are embedded with values shaped for exploitation and oppression of the people; who also interact with the same technologies to find ways of resisting the exploitation and oppression. Second, to argue from the McLuhanian point of view that, communicative technologies including the WhatsApp have different abilities of awakening the senses of the users; in that the social media/WhatsApp awakens the senses of the users in the most balanced ration, thereby popularising the platforms during electoral deliberations. Third, the review scans through the media milestones in Kenya, assessing how it has lost and gained

credibility over time, in pursuit of the expansion of the democratic space; with the social media/WhatsApp in the forefront at enabling for the inclusivity, that was killed by colonialists. Fourth, the review reveals the trail of affective, created during the colonial media, perpetrated during post-colonial media, and perfected during the social media/WhatsApp era. Fifth, the review locates the concept of voice participation back to the indigenous Africa, before it was 'killed' by colonialism; identifying the forms of participation, and how representation emerges, leading to the imbalance of power in society, and how the people's vote enables for the restoration of the power balance, to attain social power equilibrium.

Chapter Three: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

3.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the conceptual and the theoretical framework used in the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation in Bungoma County. The study attempts to adapt the perception theory into a three-pillar frame, popular in the literature field, to analyse social media phenomena. As we shall see in a couple of paragraphs, the theoretical and conceptual framework falls within the general human communication. The framework was inspired by the interrelatedness of the disciplines in humanities and social sciences. The study remained aware about the inherent criticism occasioned by the borrowing of many conceptual frames and debates into the discussions, making it difficult to determine precisely where this work is theoretically rooted. Such criticism is expected when one attempts to theorise a new phenomenon. This study's framework explores how concepts and theories outside the media studies could be laced with bits of Afrocentrism to guide the research (see Grant & Osanloo, 2014). The choice was guided by whether the concepts and theories were organic and whether they agreed with the methodological plan. The study assessed the framework's constructs to establish their suitability for the qualitative research by looking at how the specific concepts and theoretical principles selected addressed research question. The question was: What factors inform WhatsApp techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic, and/or techno-pragmatic perceptions during electoral deliberation? By asking this, the section established theoretical gaps, as the thin literature about techno-pragmatic perceptions in media studies. The study sought to fill the theoretical gap by contributing through investigating how the Bungoma people perceive the use of WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic and techno-optimistic, and the emergence of techno-pragmatism during electoral deliberation. The section subtly appreciates the interrelationships within the three pillar perceptions, which shall become

apparent in the empirical chapters to come. The techno-affective thread in the study allowed for the correlation within the research question, the research problem, justification, and the importance attached to the study.

3.1 Conceptual framework

This sub-section summarises how the study conceptualised its framework to best explain the natural progression of how the people of Bungoma County perceive WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations. According to Ravitch and Carl (2020), a conceptual framework is a structure which the researcher believes can best explain the natural progression of the phenomenon to be studied. The study's conceptual framework draws perception concepts. As seen in the previous section, perception process includes the selection, which is based on what arouses our attention; organisation which is based on proximity, similarity, and differences; and interpretation which is based on our schema (see Anonymous, 2016; Coren, 1980). These concepts and constructs enabled for the explanation of the perceptions of Bungoma County people within the three pillars namely: Techno-optimism, techno-pessimism, and techno-pragmatism. Thus, the perception concepts and constructs have been coalesced to explain how and why the WhatsApp users perceive the platform as techno-pessimistic, techno-optimistic and/or techno-pragmatic. As we shall practically see in the chapters/sections to come, people's perceptions about the platform are interrelated, whereby the latter emerges between the former two. Media studies being a new discipline, there is need for theoretical exploration, to find the most suitable theories. More so, there is still no consensus on how best to theorise the study of social media. This study, therefore, attempts something new with a genuine intellectual interest to push the conceptual and methodological boundaries in the study of social media. The research remained aware that it is also precisely because of attempting something new that it would encounter significant weaknesses. The most outstanding being that

the notion of techno-optimism, techno-pessimism, and techno-pragmatism are broad categories that do not in themselves constitute theories. And that the study risk losing the focused lens with which to examine the subject of WhatsApp voice and electoral deliberations.

As we shall see in this chapter and beyond, where the pillars seemed too broad to provide the needed focus, the Afrocentric view of perception (see Ekeh, 1975; Mbembe, 2001) stepped in and provided the narrow lens to enhance specification. The concepts and constructs about perception also provided for a narrow lens for examining WhatsApp use in electoral politics, thereby narrowing the presumed three-pillars' broad categorisation. Particularly, as we shall see in the analysis chapters/sections, the frames allowed for the explanation about how the people perceive the use of various WhatsApp groups at the ward, constituency, and county levels as pessimistic, optimistic and/or pragmatic. The construct of proximity was utilised during the analysis of ward level WhatsApp groups because the members are geographically near each other. The constructs of similarly and differences were utilised during analysis of county level WhatsApp groups due to the tribal similarities/differences. The concept of interpretation allowed for explanation about how the people perceive their interrelations within the groups as pessimistic, optimistic, and/or pragmatic; based on the constructs such as who was born in Bungoma County (proximity), who is more *Bukusu* than others, (similarity/differences). The concept of organisation was utilised to categorise the WhatsApp users into two main camps including: ordinary people and the 'elites' consisting of the middle-class people, the central government and the County government. The categorisation enabled the study to utilise the concept of selection (Anonymous, 2016), to assume that the 'elite' individual actors in Bungoma County voluntarily aspire to join the dominant social actors in advancing hegemony ideologies. Therefore, as we shall see in the chapters to come, the study did not pursue the 'elite' actors' liberation beyond the extent they were willing to exercise

it; because such is outside the study's liberatory dimension (Asante 2007 p. 41) - to free the African people. The study opted to emphasize the lower social status people's perceptions (Anonymous, 2016) about WhatsApp voice, amidst the dominant social actors' exploitative and oppressive relations (cf. Brunotti, 2019; Budzinski & Gaenssle, 2018). The three-pillar perceptions and Afrocentrism conceptualisation enabled the study to inquire how and why the people perceive the WhatsApp voice as emancipative/techno-optimistic and/or emasculative/techno-pessimistic, and how the techno-pragmatic conception emerges.

Did the Three-Pillar Perception and Afrocentrism Frame Link Variables, Concepts and Theories?

The conceptual framework provided the linkage within variables, concepts, theories used in the study, as well as within the pillars themselves. For instance, the frame allowed for establishing the mutual suspicion and un/just relations within the various WhatsApp users including dominant social actors in Bungoma County, the dominant social actors outside Bungoma County, the citizenry residing in Bungoma County, as well as those outside Bungoma County. Butler-Kisber, (2018 p.13) perceives that a conceptual frame links with the concepts, the empirical research, and the important theories used in promoting and systemising the knowledge adopted in a study. In the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation, the frame allowed for establishing how the concepts/variables such as the government dominant actors, WhatsApp users, the electoral issues deliberated, affected the independent variables such as WhatsApp space/platform/technology.

As a result, perceptions within the three-pillar framework enabled for establishing individual WhatsApp group interrelations with each other through shared membership (cf. Goffman, 1959; Wiredu, 1997). For example, there is people's perceived simultaneous belonging to the County WhatsApp groups, constituency WhatsApp groups and the ward WhatsApp groups. The belonging

is informed by the people's interpretation (Anonymous, 2016) of the WhatsApp voice as either techno-pessimistic, optimistic, and/or techno-pragmatic, depending on the electoral issues deliberated. The framework also allowed for the examination of how Bungoma County people select (Coren, 1980) the WhatsApp groups they wish to join, and organise (Anonymous, 2016) their (inter)relations with the non-member individuals and entities such as radio stations and TV stations. As we shall see in the analysis chapters, there is perceived techno-optimism in sharing screenshots of WhatsApp group chats, because it allows the messages to reach/be published by the traditional media-TV, radio, newspaper, among others, reaching wider audience and eliciting different electoral deliberations and emotions (see Budzinski & Gaenssle, 2018). The WhatsApp group members who organise (Anonymous, 2016) themselves to belong to more than one group could also post same messages across the various groups they belong; in what Hine (2019) refers to as the members' creation of informational relationships between and within WhatsApp groups. These complex WhatsApp group relations and interrelations, as well as the perceptions therein could be analysed using the conceptual frame.

Did the Three-Pillar Perception and Afrocentrism Assist about Unmeasurable variables?

The study drew from constructs named proximity, similarity, and differences (Coren, 1980) to understand in empirical terms, how and why Bungoma people's (inter)relationships affect their use of WhatsApp voice; and its subsequent perceptions as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic during electoral deliberations (see Gephart, 2018 p. 35). As we shall see in empirical chapters, the people who are geographically near each other tend to have less gendered intimidation during WhatsApp group electoral deliberations, except for Mt Elgon Constituency. The constructs shall also be ulitised to explain the peculiarity of Mt Elgon Constituency. The constructs enabled the study to form an empirical inquiry that was informed by the literature review

discussed in the previous chapter; linking it to the methodology section, where the study developed a methodological plan containing the 'how and why' questions. The questions allowed the study to answer the how and why section of the main research question; including 'how and why' the people perceive WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic, and techno pragmatic. The three-pillar perceptions and Afrocentrism frame also enabled the researcher to remain aware about the reality that some concepts and variables such as the spirituality of the people under study could largely affect findings even though they could not be put in measurable terms (see Mazama, 2003 p. 17). For instance, as earlier mentioned in the research design in sub-section 1.3 of this thesis, the fieldwork for this research was postponed twice because the study was awareness about the people's perception that their circumcision ceremonies and their new year's crop planting ceremonies, would not allow them to participate in my face-to-face interviews. The pessimistic perception of the three-pillar conceptual frame complemented by the Afrocentrism allowed for a contextualised approach to the study, which in turn revealed these interrelationships within the variables.

Through the three-pillar perceptions conceptual framework, the study laid down the information network relationships as shown in figure below:

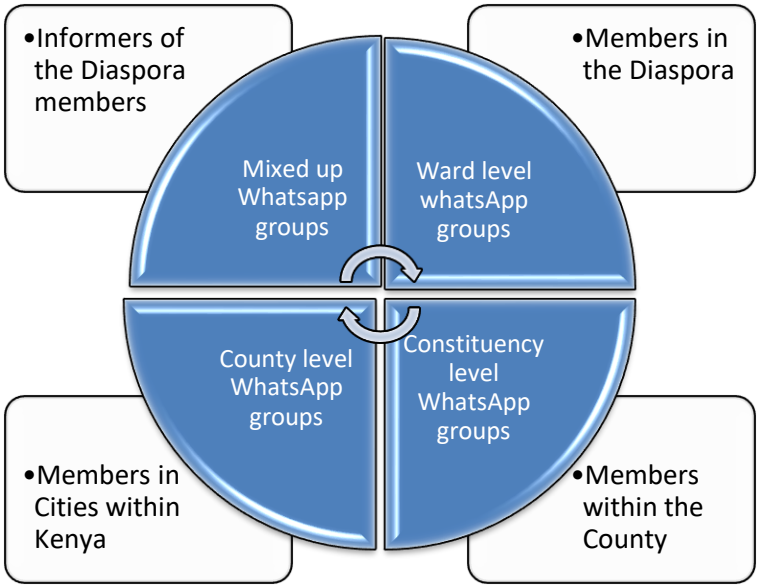

Fig. 6: The study's conceptual frame: Showing the WhatsApp group levels, compositions and interrelations in Bungoma County.

As we can see from the figure above, the perceptions within the three-pillar framework enabled for the presentation of a cohesive way of looking at how WhatsApp users relate with/perceive each other as individuals and as groups, during the electoral deliberations. The presentation allowed for the study's clarity about the analysis of the perceptions within relationships, concepts, and variables. The clear analysis also enabled the study to put together a logical structure, allowing for a visual display of the ward level, constituency level, and County level WhatsApp groups, all because such concepts and constructs of perceptions, including selection, organisation, interpretation, proximity, similarity, and differences. The frame also enabled the study to establish group compositions and the linkages/perceptions that exist within and without the group members as demonstrated above (see Miles & Huberman 1994). As a result, the study was able to assess how the techno-pessimistic conceptions; the techno-optimistic conceptions; and techno-pragmatic perceptions interrelate (Grant & Osanloo, 2014 p. 21). Establishing relations allowed for ascertaining how the three perceptions affect each other. For instance, as we shall see in the chapters/sections to come, the perception of techno-pragmatism emerges due to the intersectionality between the perceptions of techno-optimism and techno-pessimism. More practically put, as we shall see in the analysis of the findings, the (inter)relationships within and between the perceptions in WhatsApp groups in Mt. Elgon constituency leads to in/security in the area. In turn, the perceived in/security informs how and why the WhatsApp group members use the platform. Ultimately, perceived WhatsApp group (inter)relations inform how and why the people use the WhatsApp voice, and how they perceive it as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic, and/or techno-pragmatic.

The three-pillar perceptions frame and Afrocentrism also guided the study through step-by-step actions of inquiry into the people's perceptions of the WhatsApp voice during electoral

deliberation, within the Bungoma County context. The frame guided the inquiry through clearly specifying and defining the concepts including: the motivations for joining WhatsApp groups, 'lefting' and 'removing' of some members, criterion for admission into the groups, WhatsApp members outside Kenya and their information network relations, the motivations for the relations, among others (cf. Akeh, 1975; Budzinski & Gaenssle, 2018). As we shall see in the chapters/sections to come, the frame puts together various variables and concepts to create the coherence in the whole thesis. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.18) opine that a conceptual framework can be in "graphical or in a narrative form, showing the key variables or constructs to be studied and the presumed relationships between them." This study assumed a blend of both graphical and narration.

Finally, the three-pillar perceptions and Afrocentrism helped link the conceptual constructs for triangulation and covering for weaknesses in the study (Urquhart, 2019 p. 91). As seen in the previous chapter, the triangulated concepts built up theories on digital capitalism and Marxist view of technology, among others; thereby increasing the reliability and validity of the study. The three-pillar perceptions and Afrocentrism frame also helped clarify the main research question of the study: What factors inform WhatsApp techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic perceptions during electoral deliberation? This was achieved through the identification of the three technos/pillars, and the use of 'how and why' questions seeking to address the main question. As the result, the study achieved a detailed conceptual understanding within the localised/Afrocentric view, a clearly stated research question and an operationalisable methodological plan.

3.2.0 Theoretical Framework

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations adopted the 'blueprint' that builds an inquiry into how and why the use of WhatsApp voice is perceived as enabling/techno-optimistic, depriving/techno-pessimistic and/or practical/techno-pragmatic; by the people in Bungoma County during electoral deliberations (see Grant & Osanloo, 2014 p. 13). A blueprint is a laid out theoretical plan to guide the study (p. 13). The main theories reviewed include digital capitalism, political economy-dovetailed in the digital capitalism, neo-Marxism, technological determinism, power, tecno-affect, participation, among others. The theoretical framework allowed for juxtaposition of the study's Afrocentric views with the normative views about digital media deployment into African electoral deliberations. As seen in the previous chapter on the review of literature, these views were triangulated in the form of the theoretical constructs, assumptions of the proponents, among others, thereby cushioning against each other's weaknesses (Akintoye, 2015 p. 6).

As a result, the sub-section provided basis upon which the study triangulated the definitions of the research philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically (Ravitch & Carl, 2020 p. 11). The definitions allowed for simultaneous contextualisation and "globalisation"/generalisation of the formal theories discussed in the previous chapter; to enable for investigation of WhatsApp voice in African electoral politics. Therefore, this sub-section provided the guidance that positions the study in a 'scholarly and academic fashion' (Ravitch & Carl, 2020 p. 13). The sub-section linked the literature reviewed to the research problem stated in sub-section 1.2 of chapter one in this thesis. This was done by questioning how and why the WhatsApp voice practically enabled and/or deprived citizenry deliberations; how this advances and/or limits people's electoral gains; and how these subsequently informed the people conception of WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic. Thus, the

framework guided the study's choice of research design and data analysis plan. As we shall see in the chapters to come, the framework, aided in finding an appropriate research approach, analytical tools, and procedures for questioning (Akintoye, 2015 p. 7). This in turn allowed for contextualised, meaningful, and generalisable research findings about the WhatsApp voice in Bungoma County's electoral processes deliberations.

3.2.1 Techno-optimistic Perception

This sub-section of the study about WhatsApp voice in African electoral deliberation answers the section of the main research question concerned about the techno-optimistic perceptions of the voice. The sub-section is associated with the media's gain of credibility, while on its democratisation quest. As demonstrated in the reviewed literature, the study engages this sub-section while aware about the criticism that social media is a new platform for same old public sphere (Castells, 2008). Therefore, to holistically understand how the WhatsApp voice provides the Bungoma County people with public space to resist electoral dominance, the study juxtaposed the interrogation of the theory on digital capitalism with Autonomous Marxists' views on technology. This mitigated the theoretical weakness associated with either of the two schools of thought. More so, the juxtaposition allowed for the emergence of the theory about the techno-pragmatic perception, hitherto less emphasized. In essence, the study drew from both the optimistic digital capitalists' school of thought and the pessimistic Autonomous Marxists' school of thought, to critically inquire into WhatsApp voice; with view to enable for emergence of the techno-pragmatic thought in Bungoma County. The study also triangulated the literature on power with the literature on participation (Arnstein 1969; Carpentier, 2016; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). This was to inform the study's perspectives about how to analyse the Bungoma people's understanding of participation and power. For instance, whereas power is often thought to reside with the dominant

social actors (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), the literature on participation illustrates that power can reside with the people, through meaningful elections (Carpentier, 2016; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Therefore, the triangulation informed the study's analysis of participation and power, enabling for cushioning of the weaknesses of the two theorisations, during the study about WhatsApp voice and electoral deliberations in Bungoma County.

Besides digital capitalism (Shiller, 2000) and neo-Marxism (Mithun, et al., 2016) the study explored theory on the media liberalisation in Kenya (Oriare, et al. 2010). The constructs and concepts around liberalisation provided the study with contextualised historical knowledge about Kenya's space for electoral deliberations. The knowledge informed the study during the analysis of how the people conceive the space provided by WhatsApp voice in Bungoma County. To understand the WhatsApp space from a global/general perspective, the study explored literature about the creation of the WWW to provide foundational understanding of the WhatsApp voice. The understanding enabled the study to explore the concept of WhatsApp voice commercialisation in juxtaposition with humanitarianisation perspectives conceived by Berners-Lee (Curran et al. 2016). The understanding enabled the study to interrogate how and why the people's use of the voice informed their techno-pessimistic, techno-optimistic and/or techno-pragmatic perception.

Did the Frame Provide for Development of the Golden Stand in the Thesis?

The theoretical framework enabled the study to use the theory on techno-affect to develop a practical theoretical strand in the thesis. The frame allowed for the techno-affective strand to run through the thesis from the introduction chapter to the analysis chapters; thereby linking the sections and sub-sections into one coherent document. For instance, the study used theory on techno-affect to consider the emotional aspects of the participants during field interviews/data

collection and during data analysis. As we shall see in the chapters to come, besides informing the data anlayis, the theory allowed for careful handling of participants' emotional aspects to ensure they elicit good responses. As a result, the theory allowed for the threading of thesis with the theme of techno-affective electoral deliberations, which is characteristic of Kenya's volatile electoral politics. The study also drew from the theory on techno-affect to explore how the theory on technological determinism could be applied in the WhatsApp voice within an Afrocentric context. For instance, the literature on techno-affect can be used to interpret the African people's natural emotions; whereby they have culturally adopted the WhatsApp voice to advance their real-world affective politics onto the virtual platforms. In McLuhan's (1994) words, we can argue that the African/Kenyan people have culturally adopted the WhatsApp voice to advance techno-affective politics because the voice awakens their sense of techno-affect. More so, as seen in the section about the review of literature, drawing from the techno-affect to explore technological determinism enabled for cushioning against the weaknesses of both theories in the study.

3.2.2 Techno-pessimistic Perception

This sub-section of the study about WhatsApp voice in African electoral deliberation deals with the section of the main research question concerned about the techno-pessimistic perception of the voice. It is associated with the media's loss of credibility in its quest for democratisation. It explored the theoretical framework from a techno-pessimistic point of view. It is the reverse version of the previous sub-section; written in juxtaposition to the tecno-optimistic perception. It is through the spirit of the constructs of similarity/difference (Coren, 1980) in the perception theory, that the two technos have been contrasted. To begin with, the frame allowed for the triangulation of digital capitalism with Autonomous Marxism, which provided a theoretical understanding about how WhatsApp voice in Bungoma County is shaped and used by dominant

social actors to exploit and oppress the less dominant actors (Curran et al., 2016). The understanding enabled the study to stay awake to the reality that WhatsApp voice is (mis)used during the Bungoma County electoral deliberations. More so, Mbembe's (2017) techno-pessimistic stance that, abdication of the fight for social justice to technology is fundamentally undemocratic, enabled the study to stay awake to the reality that WhatsApp voice robs the Bungoma County people of sobriety through facilitation of the politics of affect, during electoral deliberation. The theory on McLuhan's (1994) concept of the awakening of senses was conflated with the surveillance/shutdown by the governments; with the aim of finding a suitable theoretical ground to enable for analysing how and why the social media/WhatsApp voice is (mis)used by the county government, central government, and other dominant social actors in Bungoma County, to oppress and exploit citizenry (Ochilo 1993; Wanyande, 1995).

Does the Frame Assist in Understanding People's Electoral Participation in Bungoma County?

The theory on participation sought to emphasize how WhatsApp voice is not an ideal participation perspective. For instance, as seen in the section on reviewed literature, the voice is almost always mediated; the people seeking to be heard often lack resources to access voice; and the African governments do not always recognize people's voices. The theory on participation also analysed the forms of participation (Arnstein, 1969), to allow for the illustration of the techno-pessimistic levels of participation called non-participation. The theory informed the analysis of the people's electoral participation in Bungoma County. The theory about discursive material and how they are knotted with meaning (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) enabled for bringing out the concept of 'vote buying' which is rampant in Bungoma County electoral politics and in Africa at large (ACCORD, 2008). The theory on types of election rigging (ACCORD, 2008; NED, 2017) brings out the realistic contexts in Bungoma County within which the study on WhatsApp voice was conducted.

As we shall see in the chapters on analysis, the theory allowed for the study's understanding about the dynamic relations between poor voters and the dominant social actors who directly and indirectly seek to buy poor people's votes, as a way of ascending to political power. Ascending to political power through vote buying results in unjust power which Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 117) call "illegitimate power". The concept of illegitimate and legitimate power was central in informing the study's analysis because it is the sole indicator about whether an election has corrected the power imbalance in society (Laclau & Mouffe 1985).

3.2.3 Techno-pragmatic Perception

This sub-section of the study about WhatsApp voice in African electoral deliberation deals with the practical conception that emerged as the middle ground between the techno-optimistic and techno-pessimistic conceptions. The sub-section established that the techno-pragmatistic views in the reviewed literature were mostly theorised by the same authors who attempted to review their initial techno-pessimistic and/or techno-optimistic stances. Often, the views were in response to criticism about their extremes and/or simplistic logics about technology/WhatsApp voice (Carpentier 2016; Mouffe, 2019; Verbeek, 2012). For instance, as seen in the literature reviewed, post phenomenologists criticise the neo-Marxists arguing people culturally interact with technologies leading to new uses. This informed the study about how the Bungoma County people's culture shape the WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations. Mouffe's, (2019) criticism of the post phenomenological school of thought, that it is simplistic and linear logic that is not practical in society, informed the study about the in/visible interventions/ dominant social actors in society who influence how the people use the WhatsApp voice. These critical perspectives from the scholars informed the study about the contexts within which WhatsApp

voice in Bungoma County may be conceptualised as techno-pragmatic during electoral deliberations.

The theory on WWW and the un/intended consequences (Curran et al., 2016), informed the study about consequences of technology in society. Through Curran and colleagues' arguments, the study was informed about the need to ask ourselves how in/appropriately we use technologies, rather than how inappropriate they are. The argument enabled for the emergence of a clear spit between techno-pessimism and techno-optimism, hence the development of the techno-pragmatism. The middle ground stance assumed by the techno-pragmatism about technological conception in society, enabled the study to pursue and to generate more knowledge on WhatsApp voice in African electoral politics.

The theory on 'poverty' and how it affects the WhatsApp voice participation provided logic as to why the voice should not be conceived in terms of pessimism and optimism (Tacchi, 2015). The theory enabled for the unearthing of the relations between WhatsApp voice and the economic lack that is entrenched within the Bungoma County people, due the historical economic marginalisation hitherto discussed in the revied literature. As we shall see in the analysis chapters, the theory informed the study about how and why the people conceive the WhatsApp voice in terms of economic resources such as electricity, data bundles, quality internet enabled phones, among others. The viewing of WhatsApp voice in terms of poverty informed the study about the Bungoma County people's cultural factors that affect how they use the voice. This enabled the study to understand the WhatsApp voice in techno-pragmatic terms- beyond the techno-pessimistic and techno-optimistic conceptions.

The theory that compares (Mbembe's 2001 p. 9) the description of Africa as 'chaotic, volatile, and full of surprises', with the Western world's protests associated with neo-nationalism, was aimed at drawing practical parallels between Bungoma County/Africa and the Western world. This enabled the study to acquire a multifaceted understanding of the concept of WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations. The holistic understanding of the concept of WhatsApp voice enabled for detailed analysis of the voice in Bungoma County's electoral politics.

3.2.4 Afrocentric Perspectives

The study about WhatsApp voice in African electoral deliberations was inspired by Afrocentric thoughts, as an Africanised version of decoloniality. The study attempts to steps away from the Eurocentric view of the WhatsApp electoral deliberation space, to allow for Afrocentric perceptions (see Coren, 1980). To achieve this, the sub-section acknowledges the use of literature from Kenya, Africa as well as non-Afrocentric scholars, whose work can be particularised to Africa. With the abundance of cautious not to confine Afrocentricity to scholarship, the frame enabled the study to anchor its research contextualisation, operationalisation, and analysis of the findings around Afrocentric scholars such as Ekeh, (1975) who provided Africanised insights about public space; Wiredu (1997) concept of super consensus democracy in 'African Traditional Polities' provided for Africanised understanding of democracy; Matolino (2016) criticism of Wiredu (1997) provided detailed understanding of the presence of violence in African democracy; Eze and Metz (2015) criticism of Wiredu (1997) provided for alternative thoughts about African democracy. Other Afrocentric scholars used to develop the framework include Asante's (2007) 'Afrocentric Manifesto'; Mbembe's (2001) the concept of the African predatory states in the 'Post Colony'; Mazama's (2003) 'Afrocentric paradigm'; Busia's (1967) concept of public space in 'Africa in search of democracy'; Osaghae's (2006) perspectives on Ekeh's public space; Ake's

(1993) perspectives on African democracy in 'the unique case of African democracy', among others. As we shall see in the chapters about the analysis of the findings, tribal and clan-based politics among other factors influence how and why WhatsApp voice is used in Bungoma County during electoral deliberations. The Afrocentric views from the constructs and concepts above provided basis for the analysis of these tribal and clan relations.

The attempt to Africanise the theoretical framework spoke to the specific local contexts in the study, which informed the research about the languages, riddles, analogies, among other figurative communication used in the WhatsApp groups during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. For example, the theoretical frame enabled the study to understand relationship between clans/tribes/ethnicity and dominance by social actors, the Bungoma County people, and the WhatsApp voice, within local contexts. The Afrocentric views also enabled for understanding about how the WhatsApp voice is perceived as techno-optimistic and/or techno-pessimistic; thereby allowing for the emergence of the techno-pragmatic perception. For example, the study was informed about the African practices which Bungoma County people subconsciously invoke into their WhatsApp voice deliberations (see Ekeh, 1975; Goffman, 1959). As seen in the review of the literature, the invocation includes the people's 'lefting' from WhatsApp groups, which is understood within the African context, away from the Eurocentric viewpoint (see Busia, 1967 p.24)

How did the Frame Allow for Afrocentric Views from Non-Afrocentric Scholars?

More Afrocentric perspectives were engaged through the theory on Technological Determinism (McLuhan, 1994). The theoretical frame allowed for the study to contextualise the the non-Afrcocentric theory to serve Afrocentric needs of the research. It enabled the stud to analyse the

people's cultural engagement with the WhatsApp voice; enabling for the observation of how the people's culture influenced the use of WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations. As we shall see in the sections to come, the contextualised observation allowed for the discovery of the forms of power relations, exclusions, domination, resistance, among others in Bungoma County electoral deliberations. As earlier mentioned, the theory on technological determinism was triangulated with the theory on Digital Capitalism (Shiller, 2000) and Autonomous Marxists' (Mithun, et al. 2016) views on technology; to enhance its validity in answering the research main question: What factors inform WhatsApp techno-optimistic and/or techno-pessimistic perceptions during electoral deliberation? For example, as we shall see in the analysis chapters, the people culturally interacted with WhatsApp voice to find ways of resisting electoral dominance; as it shaped their economic activities, with some of their cultural values getting eroded in the process (see McLuhan, 1994; Mithun, et al. 2016; Shiller, 2000).

The triangulation of the Afrocentric theory with Eurocentric theory allowed the study to draw parallels between local and global contests. For example, whereas the theory on power and techno-affect by Eurocentric scholars such as Lippmann (1922), Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Papacharissi, (2016), among others, discussed in the literature review provided the philosophical grounding for the study, Mbembe (2017), drew from Comaroff, (2012) to provide local contexts of the same techno-affect. As a result, the study holistically understood the aspect of techno-affect; and stayed alive to how emotive the issue was in electoral politics; including the social actors' power struggles, control, meaning making, among other dynamics discussed in the previous sections of this thesis (see Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The Afrocentric theoretical philosophical prism provides the study with a proper standpoint for viewing the intriguing and multifaceted perspectives associated with using the WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County.

They range from culture, negative ethnicity, economic lack, in/security, among others cited in this study in the analysis chapters to come. These perspectives actively but invisibly play role in shaping how and why the WhatsApp voice is conceived as techno-optimistic, techno-optimistic and/or techno-pragmatic by the people of Bungoma County.

3.3 Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter, the adoption of perception theory within the three-pillar framework was based on the need to juxtapose the two pillars/perceptions, to create a relationship from where the third would emerge. The study utilised the construct of proximity to enable for attempt to adopt Afrocentric approach where necessary, in pursuit of contextualised analysis. Since there is no one perfect framework for a thesis, although certain frames are more popular (Grant & Osanloo, 2014 p. 14), the study settled for this framework with full knowledge about how its strengths and weaknesses would interplay to enable for internalisation of the study's problem, purpose, significance, and research questions (see Asante, 2007 p. 42). Therefore, the choice of the framework reflected the Afrocentrity which the study envisaged as a guide. The study sought to understand how and why the WhatsApp voice enabled and/or deprived the people of Bungoma County the electoral space; and how this informs their perception of the voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic. It was guided by the research question: What factors inform WhatsApp pessimistic, optimistic and/or pragmatic perceptions during electoral deliberations? The perceptions would shed light on how the people's unique use of the WhatsApp voice inform their perception on whether it advances and/or limits the electoral gains, in Bungoma County, Kenya, and Africa at large. As Asante, (2007) posits, any study using Afrocentric approaches must be geared towards liberating the people of on the continent and placing Africa in her rightful context.

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.0. Introduction

This Chapter is guided by the concepts of the study's framework, whereby it informed the selection of the preferable methods and methodologies to be used, organiation of the fieldwork activities to be undertaken, and the correct interpretation of the data gotten (see Anonymous, 2016). The Chapter begins with a review of the systematic and empirical process employed during the research period. It discusses the research Methods, Ethnography, Phenomenology, Sampling and Sampling Techniques, Covert Participant Observation, Anticipated Challenges, Data collection, Data Analysis and Presentation, Validity and Reliability, and the Ethical Considerations. As we shall see in the Chapter, the methodology is theoretically guided by the framework, whereby the theorisation from Ekeh, (1975), Mbembe, (2001), Busia, (1967), Wefwafwa 2014, among others, informed the interpretation and analysis of the respondents' unique behaviours. The analysis was triangulated and aligned with the literature review, interviews, observations, and content analysis to enhance reliability and validity of the findings.

4.1.1 Qualitative Network Analysis

The study employed qualitative network analysis as the methodology. The study conceptualises qualitative network analysis method as an innovative method of gathering discursive forms of data on maintaining complex local and transnational social networks in the everyday electoral life of individual and group actors in Bungoma County (Ahrens, 2018). The method was adopted into WhatsApp studies just about a decade ago (Varanasi & Dell, 2021). The qualitative network analysis is an enhancement of the social network analysis (Ahrens, 2018), which allowed for three levels of collecting data. First, it allowed for collecting details about the meaning individual and group actors attached to their network ties and the network as a whole. Second, it allowed for the

collection of data on electoral deliberations not available through quantitative analysis. And third, the method allowed for the insider view on the relationship between informal and formal electoral deliberations within the WhatsApp groups (Ahrens, 2018). As a result, the qualitative network analysis effectively allowed the study to focus on the perceived (see Anonymous, 2016; Coren, 1980) electoral relations between and among the Bungoma County people, as well as with the dominant social actors, their interests, and their mutual relations (Hine, 2019).

Besides analysing how the WhatsApp voice is used for participation in electoral deliberations, the study analysed how the people interpret (Anonymous, 2016)/respond and negotiate the impact of both citizenry dominant social actors' and government actors' exclusionary practices. Being a relatively new methodology in the qualitative digital media studies, the qualitative network analysis is work in progress; and is well suited to this study as it is positioned as a theoretical (theory-building) study rather than an expressly methodological (theory-testing) study.

4.1.2 Data Collection Methods

i) Face-to-Face Interviews

This sub-section explains how face-to-face qualitative interviews for the study on WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics were conducted. The in-depth interviews took place with two categories of participants: The WhatsApp citizenry users from Bungoma County and the WhatsApp group administrators in the various WhatsApp groups selected. The study selected interviewing as the principal method for data collection because it is generally considered as one of the most effective methods for the study of opinions, attitudes, and experiences (Yin, 2014). The interviews were "semi structured/semi standardised" in nature to allow me to adapt the research instrument to the level of comprehension and articulacy of my participants, and to stay

cognizant of the fact that in responding to a question, the participants often also provide answers to questions the researcher would be asking later (Fielding, 2012, p. 124).

Based on reviewed literature and consultations with field contacts as well as key informants, the researcher established an open and relaxed environment while conducting interviews because of the cultural norms that play out in the County's public space all the time. The study bore in mind that citizenry participants were likely to (mis)interpret (Anonymous, 2016) some of my interview questions and feel offended or uncomfortable (Wykes, 2018 p. 11), with certain sections of the interviews if they went against their cultural beliefs (see Mbembe, 2001). In this case, the relaxed environment would minimise on the unintended offense, and provide friendly atmosphere for clarifications and apologies. The researcher also used research assistants from within the research site to harness from proximity (see Coren, 1980), and advised them against insensitive questions about culture, which would either elicit anger in the participants due to perceived cultural insensitivity, which may make them reluctant to respond to some interview questions, or to take part in the interviews. The interview questions were mainly seeking to understand the people's circumstances and experiences by first obtaining their background, and then probing for detailed information on how they participate in WhatsApp group deliberations using the WhatsApp voice; the challenges and opportunities offered by the deliberations; their interpretation (Anonymous, 2016)/understanding of Kenyan electoral process; the support systems they rely on for the WhatsApp group deliberations; and their experience with dominant social actors' electoral exclusionism. These questions led to the logical conclusions guided by the three-pillar perception frame; about whether the participants perceived the WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic.

The researcher was interested in the participants' voice as organised (see Anonymous, 2016) within the WhatsApp groups sampled, to other individuals outside the sampled groups, to other groups not sampled in the study; and how these inform their perception of WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic. The participants' voice outside the sampled groups included deliberations with relatives, friends, and acquaintances; as well as the various media such as TV stations and radio stations, newspapers, among others. The participants' voice outside the sampled groups provided them the opportunity to narrate their holistic experiences (van der Hoorn, 2019 p. 13), if they were within the electoral context. It also enabled the researcher to observe the participants in a holistic way. As we shall see in the analysis of the findings, the participants' interactions/organisations (see Anonymous, 2016) outside the sampled WhatsApp groups (in)formed/shaped the way they used their WhatsApp groups for electoral deliberations. For instance, Mt. Elgon Constituency participants' secretive interactions/organisations with others outside the sampled groups (they keep their political opponents and neighboring tribes guessing about their next political moves), shaped the way they use WhatsApp for electoral deliberations.

Before setting out for the interviews, the researcher prepared follow-up questions which guided the participants whenever need arose. The follow-up questions were formulated to correspond to the concepts derived from the conceptual and theoretical framework. For instance, the questioning utilised the frame' construct of similarities/differences; enabling the questions to be derived from the juxtaposition of techno-optimistic/digital capitalism, and techno-pessimistic/neo-Marxism; leading to the emergence of the techno-pragmatic perception. In order to meet many diverse people with varying techno- perceptions, the frame enabled the researcher to utilise his proximity (Coren, 1980) to the site, since he was born there. He identified and visited many informal places such as

the open-air informal gatherings, at the *bodaboda* and *tuk-tuk* waiting bays, at the bus stops, with taxi drives, at the marketplaces, at recreational places, at local universities' public lecture days, at the "jobless corners" - where people temporarily unemployed gather to pass time discussing current affairs. The proximity (Coren, 1980) enabled the researcher to mingle with ease, and converse with the respondents, extracting information. These conversations were aimed at providing the study with an understanding of the people's perceptions about WhatsApp voice as a participation perspective in electoral process deliberations. The conversations, together with the researcher's observations, were collected as field notes, and used as anecdotal evidence throughout my thesis writing to support the patterns and ideas identified.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and the participants' cultural activities, the study experienced associated delays with the fieldwork. The researcher postponed the fieldwork activities which had been scheduled for August 2020. This was after consultations with the study's field contacts, whom due to their proximity (see Coren, 1980) to the research site advised against proceeding with the fieldwork in August 2020. They argued that the majority tribe of the people of Bungoma County - *Bukusus,* reserve the period between August 1st and December 31st of every even year (years divisible by the number two) exclusively for male children circumcision. The circumcision ceremonies are accompanied with related cultural rites, to transit boy children into adulthood. The people would interpret (see Anonymous, 2016) my research as disrespectful/inconveniencing to their culture (see also Wefwafwa, 2014). The cultural and spiritual event took place in the year 2020, despite COVID-19 situation and government authority's disapproval. The researcher was also advised that the months between March and April every year are for subsistence crop planting among the communities. The exercise is also spiritual and synchronised with the rainfall patterns to an extent that if the researcher was to carry out interviews, beyond March 2021, it would

jeopardise/mimimise participants' response rate. Therefore, the best period to proceed for fieldwork was between January and March 2021. During the fieldwork, the researcher observed the COVID 19 restrictions. The face-to face-interviews were used on the participants available in Bungoma County and telephone interviews, on the participants in the major cities outside the County. The researcher used WhatsApp voice call for the participants who were in cities outside Kenya.

ii) Ethnography/Digital Ethnography

The study about WhatsApp voice in Afrocentric electoral deliberations employed the traditional ethnographic methodological approach blended with digital/virtual ethnography. The two are not different from each other, except that the latter is an online form (Hine, 2019). They both focus on "the perspectives and understandings of subjects," actions and beliefs that facilitate the definition of potential interventions that reflect and respect local knowledge (Malewska-Szałygin, 2017 p. 138). The digital/ethnographic approach provided rich, holistic insights into citizenry views and experiences through in-depth face to face interviews and the collection of detailed observations through well prepared observation schedules. The ethnographic approach allowed for deductive research (Urquhart, 2019 p. 93); guided by the three-pilar perception frame of the techno-optimism, techno-pessimism, and techno-pragmatism. The theoretical frame guided the study by drawing from the digital capitalism, and neo-Marxism, among other theoretical work discussed in chapter two. This in turn allowed for inductive insights and findings which were used to generate new questions. The approach enabled the researcher to 'get inside' the lives of Bungoma Country citizenry in order to investigate and understand how and why they have adopted WhatsApp voice as a participation perspective in electoral deliberations to challenge the perceived electoral injustice; and how the adoption has informed their conception of the platform as techno-optimistic,

techno-pessimistic, and techno-pragmatic. The researcher spent three months in the field collecting the data; because ethnographic studies require long time to study the participants' patterns and behaviour as well as the forms of exclusionism (Urquhart, 2019).

While presenting the citizenry personal narratives/interviews, the researcher conceptualised them as important actors in the electoral processes. This was critical because it set forth the way the participants perceived/interpreted (see Anonymous, 2016) and negotiated the dominant social actors' exclusionism/electoral injustice, which is the phenomenon under study. Noteworthy too, the researcher acknowledged that, the conceptualisation was significantly different from the one attributed to the participants by the dominant social actors. As we shall see in the analysis of the findings, the dominant social actors' deeds and historical trail show that they perceive/interpret the people as less important actors in the electoral deliberations.

iii) Covert Participant Observation Method

To effectively study WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics with Bungoma County as the focus, the researcher employed covert participant observation method. Spradley (2019) describes the method as having been shaped into a scientific tool and method of data collection. It serves a formulated research purpose; it has been systematically planned and recorded; and has been subjected to checks and control on validity and reliability (Creswell, 2015 p. 7). In this study, the researcher was guided by the three-pillar perception frame to develop a checklist, which in turn guided the study in identifying the visible characteristics in the social and political lives of the citizenry participants. The focus was put on how the people's use of WhatsApp voice to participation in electoral deliberation informed their conception of the platform as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic. The researcher was keen to observe the availability of meaningful space for participation in electoral deliberations through WhatsApp

voice; how the people are emancipated (techno-optimistic) and/or emasculated (techno-pessimistic) by/about WhatsApp voice; the forms of organisational (Anonymous, 2016)/exclusionary/electoral injustice practices used during WhatsApp voice participation; and the general social setup of the community. As we shall see in the chapters about the findings of the study, the latter is important to the study because it captures some vital information that may not be orally expressed by the participants during the face-to-face interviews.

4.1.3 Challenges experienced

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation established that although social media studies in Kenya are barely a decade old, Bungoma County has been a site for academic and policy research. Some participants were quick to say they had been interviewed "way too many times" and some had no interest in being interviewed.

The researcher had anticipated demands for payment to take part in the study and indeed, some participants openly asked for money. The researcher engaged them to build a relationship that obliged them to take part voluntarily. The researcher portrayed the participants as important and resilient to the dominant social actors' exclusionism/electoral injustice; and this created or at least raised a sense of ownership of the study. Since the study focused on qualitative data, it did not seek to generalise the accounts presented during interviews as reflective of all the people's experiences.

Lastly, in documenting and analysing the experiences of the people, the researcher acknowledged the intersections of gender, class, level of education, age, tribe, and other structural determinants that are important to understanding people's experiences within contexts (Shakespear, 2019). Relational and comparative aspects of a power analysis, such as the one the researcher discovered

between the grassroots informer-participants and the participants outside Kenya are not pursued in the study, beyond the extent to which they were narrated by the participants.

4.2 Philosophical Underpinning of the Methodology

This sub-section of the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation within Bungoma County addressed the philosophical underpinning of the method used. The study's epistemological position was interpretivist, as a feature for qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). Here, emphasis was put on interpreting the context in which the people contest for public space and meaningful inclusion in the electoral deliberations; and how these inform their perception of the space as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic, and/or techno-pragmatics. The interpretivist position allowed for emphasis on the process; where the study employed ethnography and hermeneutical phenomenological approaches to collect, analyse, interpret, and describe data; on how and why the citizenry use WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations; and how the use inform their conception of the platform as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic, and/or techno-pragmatics.

Given that the study took place in a predominantly oral narrative society in Bungoma County, and that the study itself was about voice, the researcher internalised the interview questions and asked them to the participants in a minimally semi-structured manner. This was to enhance more (oral) responses, familiar with the African/Bungoma County people (see Wefwafwa 2014). The researcher also held many informal conversations during the field work, to allow for the informal environment which the people are accustomed to, in what Coren (1980) discusses proximity. These are among the Afrocentric approaches the method utilised. The approaches allowed for identification, collection, and interpretation of valuable data within appropriate/Afrocentric prismatic view. For instance, as we shall see in the analytical chapters, some participants orally used figurative languages; metaphorically referring to people as dogs, chickens, and other

indigenous animals commonly found in Bungoma County. The study established that these were not insults, but rather localised emphasis on people's mannerisms. As a Bungoma born person, the researcher was familiar with the cultural norms and coded language used in the County (see Ekeh, 1975). The familiarity with the people was used to increase response rate through effective communication and proper interpretation of the language codes. As we shall see in the data collection sub-sections, the researcher was keen not to overfamiliarise self with the site/Afrocentric stance to an extent of misinterpreting data.

4.3.0 Paradigmatic Stance

The inquiry into the study about WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics took a constructivist stance. Constructivism is premised on the idea that reality is socially constructed; therefore, truth is relative and dependent on an individual's perspective (Maxwell, 2013 p. 4). The study's frame guided the research by enabling the people to (de)construct truth about WhatsApp voice around the three pillars: techno-optimism, techno-pessimism and/or techno-pragmatism. Although this paradigm recognises the importance of human subjectivity in the creation of meaning; it does not directly reject some notion of objectivity (Yin, 2014). In the study, the researcher sought to understand how and why WhatsApp users conceived the WhatsApp voice as techno-optimism, techno-pessimism and/or techno-pragmatism, during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. The researcher investigated how the WhatsApp voice is used by the people to resist the dominant social actors' oppression and exploitation during electoral deliberation, with the aim of deconstructing the WhatsApp voice from the citizenry point of view. The constructivist stance allowed for the understanding of citizenry WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation context, amidst the dominant social actors' exclusionary practices. At the same time, the stance enabled close interaction between the participants and the researcher. Through personal

narratives, the citizenry participants described their conceptions about WhatsApp voice as used in the 2017 electoral deliberation, within the context of exclusion/electoral injustice. The WhatsApp group administrators' narratives were sought to in/validate the citizenry user narratives. Analysis of WhatsApp texts- including images and literal voice, constituted the participatory voice under study. Samples drawn from selected WhatsApp groups in Bungoma County informed the study, allowing for holistic understanding of the people's conception of WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic/emancipative, techno-pessimistic/emasculative and/or techno-pragmatic/realistic.

4.3.1 Phenomenology

The study on WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics with Bungoma County as the focus, takes a phenomenological approach. The researcher attempted to study the Bungoma County people's "experiences in everyday life situations and relations, particularly as it is experienced" by the people who live it (Holroyd, 2001 p. 1). In this study the phenomenological approach helped describe and reveal how the people's WhatsApp voice is used to participate in election processes amidst forms of exclusionism. The approach allowed for the description of people's lived experiences using WhatsApp voice for electoral deliberation, amidst the dominant social actors' exclusionary practices; and how these informed their conception of the voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic, and/or techno-pragmatic. In line with the above, Spiers and Smith (2019) contend that both ethnographic and phenomenological approaches emphasize on the insider perspective. Therefore, the approaches considered the fact that the people's lived experience is multidimensional. A number of different aspects such as sensorial, corporeal, political, ethical, relational, among others, occurred simultaneously to the people, and influenced the meaning derived from and assigned to their experience (Holroyd, 2001 p. 2). As a result, the

three-pillar frame provided for three different meanings conceived by the people about the WhatsApp voice, based on their experiences.

4.4.0 Data Collection Process

The data collection for the study about WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics was undertaken in three stages. A step-by-step procedure was established and followed during the fieldwork. First, the researcher joined the five selected WhatsApp groups from Bungoma County. As demonstrated in the previous chapter about conceptual frame, the groups were organised (see Anonymous, 2016)/networked; and information was shared within the groups as well as individuals. While in the groups, the researcher retrieved the viral WhatsApp voice messages on electoral process, and observation of the WhatsApp group electoral deliberations about Bungoma County. Joining the selected WhatsApp groups as a covert participant observer enabled the researcher to understand how and why the people used the WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations; to identify observable forms of electoral injustice deliberated in the groups; and to understand how these inform the people's conception of WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic, techno-optimistic, and techno-pragmatic. The researcher also acquired the information about how to interpret peculiar behaviours among the people under study (see Scott, 1990). These involved subtle but decisive gestures/actions informed by the participants' cultural practices; expressed through emojis, GFIs, textual symbols such as exclamation marks, dots, among others. As we shall see in the analysis chapters, these observations informed the re/scheduling of interview questions and interview dates with the participants. The researcher continuously filled the observation schedules and took standardised notes about the group deliberations, which were later transcribed into meaningful information and used to in/validate the participants' responses gotten from the in-depth interviews.

The second stage entailed thorough literature review (Heyes, 2018) to inform the methodological decisions made. The researcher sought to methodologically understand how the theory on WhatsApp voice as a participation perspective, electoral in/justice, political power, among others explored in chapter two, affected how the data would be collected. As a result, the three-pillar frame guided the study by providing for the categorisation of the data collected alongside the theoretical categories. For instance, data collected could be categorised as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic, and/or techno-pragmatic.

The third stage entailed fieldwork in Bungoma County, Kenya. This stage is more detailed due to the many activities undertaken. The researcher obtained a one-year research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). This is a mandatory requirement to conduct research in Kenya. He then proceeded to fieldwork where he contacted participants identified and selected through their activeness on WhatsApp group participation. The selection was also based on what others say about the participants during WhatsApp electoral deliberations. The networked relations within the participants through the WhatsApp groups enabled for the researcher to know what the people thought about others' ability to deliberate on electoral issues.

Were the Interviews Schedules Flexible?

The researcher created rapport and scheduled face-to-face interviews with questions about how and why the people conceived WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic, and/or techno-pragmatic. The frame enabled the study to ask questions and collect responses in accordance with where they fall within the three-pillars perceptions. The study was aware that some of the participants may not be physically readily available in Bungoma County for the interviews, even though they actively deliberated about electoral issues about the County. This is

because they could use the WhatsApp to participate in deliberations while they are not physically located within the County (Hine, 2019). Therefore, the researcher had to make a methodological decision that incorporated a level of 'flexibility' into the study's work plan (Gaudet & Robert, 2018 p. 41). He travelled in accordance with the participants schedules and met them at their convenient venues. Among the cities travelled include Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Eldoret, and Kisumu.

A new challenge emerged whereby the researcher noticed that the most active members in the groups resided outside Kenya. The researcher became suspicious after a few telephone interviews with the members residing outside Kenya; about how and why they were very informed about the grassroots information deliberated in the wards, constituencies, and County WhatsApp groups. As we shall see in the chapters on the analysis of the findings, the researcher discovered a network of informers, who feed the people outside Kenya with information. The study's schedule was quickly reorganised, to incorporate snowballing sampling technique (Bindah, 2019). As we shall see in the analysis of the finding chapters, the snowballing technique enabled the study to find the information rich grassroots informers within short time.

Keeping the interview schedules flexible enabled the study to secure as many interviews as possible with participants. It allowed for meetings whenever the participants had errands to run near the researcher's location. Often, the participants gave the researcher a short notice about their availability, and he would reschedule his day's activities to meet them at their convenient time and venue. The research adapted to any new developments if they did not jeopardise study's objectives (Abarbanell, 2019 p. 749). There are cases where the participants suggested that the researcher ferry them from their constituency to another location for the interviews due to security reasons (see Mbembe, 2001, Mbembe, 2017). Other participants requested meetings at places/venues that

required the researcher to first acquire permissions from the area/local administration or security, he agreed to their requests and conducted the interviews. The participants' agency about why they felt insecure in their locations was respected. The researcher was aware that ferrying the participants to another physical location would in fact deny him the opportunity to observe the participants from their 'natural environment' (Spradley, 2019 p. 22). It was also an unforeseen cost to be incurred. He however went ahead and agreed to the participant's requests to increase the response rate.

How did Researcher's Familiarity with Site Assist/Hinder the Process?

The researcher's familiarity with the research site's tribal and political dynamics helped him to secure and successfully conduct the in-depth interviews. However, it must be acknowledged that his familiarity with WhatsApp group trends in the County, which was thought to enable the study to maneuver and access to the best key informants and respondents for interviews did not yield. In any case, the researcher's familiarity with the WhatsApp groups obstructed him from identifying the grassroots information rich sources/informers in time (van der Hoorn, 2019). The researcher realised that the 'full immersion approach' taken during participant observation process led to making many assumptions about WhatsApp group membership (Spradley, 2019 p. 23). The researcher changed the technique, whereby he started observing more and participating less (Gold, 1958, p. 221-222). It was through the technique that the study learnt about the aforementioned grassroots informers, whom the snowballing technique was used to bring them on board. Baker, (2006 p. 173) refers to the study's latter technique of observing more and participating less is called 'observer-as-participant'. It enables the researcher to detach himself emotionally from the people under study. This allowed for accurate and objective recording, evaluating, and analysing data about how and why the people conceive WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic

and/or techno-pragmatic (Takyi, 2015). While using the technique, the researcher maintained brief contact with the participants, and spent more time analysing the trends of deliberations in the WhatsApp groups and the few initial interview responses obtained from the participants. The researcher only contacted the participants to schedule interviews and meet for specific interviews after which he left to go and reflect on participants' overall responses. However, the researcher socialised with the participants while attending public meetings and mingling with them over tea breaks during public functions. Observably, the County, more than any other in the country has cultivated the culture of taking tea at all the times.

Where, When and How was the Fieldwork Conducted?

The researcher conducted the interviews with participants across the nine constituencies of Bungoma County for a period of three months. The research schedules were organised to enable for conducting the interviews in one constituency at ago. There are circumstances where the researcher could move back and forth in neighboring constituencies depending on the participants' availability and requests. The participants trusted the researcher leading to cordial relationships which had originated from the selected WhatsApp group chats. The rapport created with members in the WhatsApp groups was maintained during fieldwork/interviews (Heyes, 2018). This helped to reduce suspicion and tensions occasioned by the volatile nature of Kenya politics. While conducting the interviews the researcher also observed the participants' daily lives. The observations were recorded in the observation schedule, and later used to complement the observations made in the WhatsApp groups. The whole set of observations were then used to interpret the participants' interview responses (Wykes, 2018). For instance, some participants avoided direct eye contact with the researcher during the interviews. Others' body language showed discomfort and communicated contrary to what they said. As we shall see in the analysis

of the findings, the researcher bore in mind all these while interpreting what the participants meant. The researcher also observed participant's 'holistic environmental world' (van der Hoorn, 2019 p. 13), and then corroborated it with their responses for an all-inclusive interpretation.

The study extended the observation to County planned events and meetings; whereby the researcher attended functions such as public project launches, burials of dignified members of the society, visits by the central government public officials, among others (see Mbembe 2001). Information was gathered through observation and then used to complement and inform how the participants' responses were interpreted. The study scheduled the fieldwork while aware that the Kenyan election period is in a year's time. Although the study's initial wish was to conduct the fieldwork during electoral campaigns in 2022, it was realised that doing it a year earlier gave the study the advantage of getting people in their sober and reflective "mode", than they would be during the 2022 electoral period mode. Besides, historically Kenya's general electioneering period is usually characterised by tensions, suspicion, and violence. These would be detrimental to the fieldwork if conducted amidst the heat of the political campaigns. The study would not have secured full information from the participants during interviews due to suspicion, tensions as well as the general excitement in the air.

Who were the Participants/Respondents and Why?

The study was interested in participants who were at least 18 years of age during the 2017 elections. The reasoning in favour of this strategy of inquiry was that since the legal voting ages in Kenya and Bungoma County is 18 years of age, the lived experiences of the people below 18 years were not legally binding. However, the responses from participants who claimed to have been 18 years but did not have required documentation for voting were included in the analysis. The study considered/interpreted their lack of documentation as a form of differentiation (see Coren,

1980)/exclusionary practice/electoral injustice from the dominant social actors. The study acknowledged that this category of participants has some 2017 electoral lived experiences that are not readily observable (See Mazama, 2003). As we shall see from the analysis in the sections of the chapter on "Emasculation/Techno-pessimism", this form of exclusion was used by the central government. The issuance of electoral documentation in the perceived oppositional wards and constituencies within Bungoma County was deliberately delayed, to keep the number of registered voters low (see Ekeh, 1975). The County government social actors aligned themselves to benefit from the form of exclusion and acted as accomplices to the central government. Another category of participants which the study discovered but did not include in the analysis were those who were above 18 years of age and had documentation required for voting but did not turn up to vote in the 2017 elections. Although their abstinence from voting was a form of "protest voting" in itself (see Busia, 1967); in that they did not have faith in the electoral system, the study decided that their failure to vote denied them the opportunity to fully experience the 2017 electoral experience the study sought.

Upon completion of the fieldwork, the researcher took a break to reflect and analyse the data. He travelled to South Africa for six months of a series of workshops and conferences; from where he got an opportunity to reflect and analyse the data collected. He also interacted with South African voters about how they use social media/WhatsApp voice for electoral process deliberations. Since this is not a comparative study, the information gotten was used for personal learning purposes. It was not analysed to fit into this study.

4.5.0 Sampling Techniques/Selection of Respondents

The study about WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics bore in mind that data collection is crucial in research as the data was meant to contribute to a better

understanding of a theoretical framework (Miles, et al. 2019 p. 101). In line with the frame's construct of similarity/differences (Coren, 1980) which is biased towards particular objects, the study employed non-probability sampling techniques specifically referred to as purposive/judgmental sampling to identify respondents for the study. The organised/networked people through the WhatsApp groups enabled the researcher to deliberately select the participants due to the qualities they possessed/portrayed in the groups (Maxwell, 2013). The non-random sampling techniques did not need underlying theories, or a set number of participants. The techniques allowed for decision about what needed to be known (the researcher decided/selected what needed to be known through the covert participant observation). The non-random techniques also allowed for setting out to find people who were able and willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Heyes, 2018). The researcher selected the participants from the WhatsApp groups he had joined. He observed the group members take part in the electoral deliberations; and based the selection on their ability to communicate their lived experiences in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner; about how and why they perceived WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic during electoral deliberation. The researcher also observed what the WhatsApp group members said about the participants chosen. This informed the reseracher about the participants' ability to participate in the interviews. The participants' availability to participate was also considered. The researcher was cautious not to just pick participants because of their similar (see Coren, 1980) views to the study's stance.

While joining the groups, the researcher introduced himself to the group administrators, and notified them about his study and its objective. The researcher avoided introducing himself directly to the group members because he wanted to maintain "covertness" even after the members had been notified about the study (Takyi, 2015 p. 865). Therefore, the group administrators were

requested to introduce the researcher. The administrators also informed the group members (through a chat) about the study objective. The group administrators did not reveal the researcher's phone contact or name to the group members. The study viewed this as a reasonable level of covertness needed to observe the group members during electoral deliberations. The respective administrators reminded members every morning about the researcher's presence and objective in the groups - through reposting the same chat every morning. As we shall see in the ethical consideration sections, the study stayed aware about the possibility that virtual ethnographic approaches could lead to invasion of privacy, consent issues, anonymity (Langer & Beckman, 2005; Sugiura et al. 2017).

After three months, the members were notified about the end of the study. The administrators and members however chose to retain the researcher in the group since he qualified to be a member (see Ekeh, 1975). The qualification for membership only required one to confirm that s/he comes from Bungoma County and can speak the predominant ethnic languages including *Lubukusu*. During the three months of the researcher's observation in the group, he identified and selected the information-rich voice participants who were proficient and well-informed about WhatsApp voice and its use in electoral deliberations. When the time for face-to-face in-depth interviews came, the researcher organised for the interviews with the selected participants and properly tapped into their knowledge/information/experiences. The researcher also identified viral WhatsApp voices (texts, images, voices) from the WhatsApp groups and analysed them. As we shall see in the chapters on the analysis of the findings, the social media network analysis method enabled for the analysis of the people's networked relations within WhatsApp groups; and how this, together with the WhatsApp voice, informed their conception of the voice as emancipative/techno-optimistic, emasculative/techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic.

The study utilised some common WhatsApp functionalities during the researcher's presence in the various WhatsApp groups joined, as well as during the three-month fieldwork period. The functionalities included the real-time responses to particular posts/comments; sticker animations that brought humour besides communicating; an arrow on posts indicating whether a post/comment is original or has been reposted from other WhatsApp groups/individuals; WhatsApp status of the selected participants, which enabled the researcher to know about their thoughts on particular electoral issues; among others. The study utilised the frame's concept of interpretation (Anonymous, 2016) to allow for the obtaining of information associated with the functionalities- which was not readily available from the participants. For instance, although the observations from WhatsApp groups showed that the participants mostly forwarded messages to the groups, interview responses indicated that the participants mostly posted their original thoughts in the WhatsApp groups. Therefore, the information gotten through the WhatsApp functionalities was used to in/validate participants' interview responses and the researcher's recorded observations.

4.5.1 Snowballing Technique/Approach

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation discovered a section of participants whom the study had not envisaged due to their silent nature in the WhatsApp groups. The study adopted the snowballing technique because of its ability to scale down on time and provide the researcher with the opportunity to communicate better with the participants, as they are acquaintances of earlier/first/initial participant(s), who was linked to the researcher (Bindah, 2019). Besides time, the selection of the method was also guided by the frame's construct of proximity, which was explained within the Afrocentric perspective in the section on framework. It enabled the participants to narrate their closely networked experiences about WhatsApp use in

electoral deliberation (see Ekeh, 1975; Wefwafwa, 2014), and how they perceived the platform as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic. As we shall see in the chapters analysing the findings, the snowballing technique was used to identify suitable information rich participants who were not selected initially due to the weaknesses of the adopted participant selection criteria. The snowballing technique was therefore complementary to purposive sampling used to select participants from the WhatsApp groups. This allowed for obtaining suitable participants with whom the researcher conducted the face-to-face interviews and observations, discussed in the sub-sections above. The face-to-face interviews and observation methods complemented each other and allowed the study to interrogate into how and why the people conceived the WhatsApp voice as emancipative/techno-optimistic, emasculative/techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic/realistic during electoral deliberations

4.6 Personal Reflexivity

As part of the study's journey about WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics with Bungoma County as the focus, the researcher kept a journal during the fieldwork period whereby he recorded the happenings of each day. He made it a habit to record occurrences, both during intense phases of the fieldwork as well as the quieter periods. The researcher based on the informal interactions with the County folks to record the study's observations and thoughts on all aspects that could yield important contextual information. The information was used to complement the data analysis process. The study stayed awake to the fact that personal reflections based on observations made during fieldwork were critical to the emergence of concepts in ethnographic research that was being conducted (Pauluzzo, 2020). This is because observations can offset some of the conscious or unconscious biases reflected in participants' responses. While the study acknowledges that the researcher's reflections and perceptions were deeply influenced

by gender, culture, and class (Marshall & Rossman, 1999 p. 21), these varying perspectives from the participants and the researcher yielded a rich combination of data for the analysis that followed. The researcher's rule of thumb was to write field notes the soonest possible. The interview recordings were transcribed in the evenings of the same day they were conducted. The participant responses were also corroborated with the researcher's recorded observations on the evening of the interview days. The study bore in mind that the participants had own reflexivity as well during the interviews. In fact, the researcher worked with the belief that the County people have a richer reflexivity than him; about how they conceived the WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic, techno-optimistic and/or techno-pragmatic, during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. Therefore, the study encouraged them to activate and/or widen their own reflexivity throughout fieldwork. Palaganas et al. (2017 p. 426) narrate their anthropological journeys of learning as field researchers, where they identify changes brought about to themselves because of the research process; and how these changes affected the research process. They argue it was:

> "…it is a journey of discovering how we, as researchers, shaped and how we were shaped by the research process and outputs…" (p. 426).

Thus, the researcher took up the role to facilitate this reflexive process during his interactions with the people of Bungoma County. The study encouraged each participant to consider the meanings of their own lived experiences and observations as aspects of their realities. The study was aware that the researcher's interactions with the participants would form a core characteristic of the qualitative research that was being conducted. Therefore, the researcher concurrently recorded his own observations alongside the interviews. The participants' reflexivity became complementary to the researcher's. Thus, the participant observations in the study encompassed each participant's reflexivity and their willingness to share and develop this aspect. This allowed for deeper reflection

and in/validation about how WhatsApp voice enables and/or deprives the people's deliberations; and how this informed their conception of the voice as techno-pessimistic, techno-optimistic, and/or techno-pragmatic, during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County.

4.7.0 Data Analysis

The study about WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics adopted Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to analyse the data. This perspective allowed the study to investigate in detail how and why participants make sense of their personal and social world (Smith & Eatough, 2006 p. 1). It enabled the study to make meaning of how and why participants conceive WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic, during electoral processes deliberation. Through the social media Network Analysis method, the IPA allowed the study to analyse how and why the participants perceive and make sense of their lived experience, amidst the exclusionary practices within their social media networks/WhatsApp groups, as they use WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations.

The study employed Smith & Eatough (2006) two stage process analysis where, the participants tried to make sense of their world, while the researcher tried to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world (p. 2). To enable this, the study identified and coded the various framed themes from WhatsApp voice participation and from the exclusionism. He then compared the themes to the participants' personal experiences amidst the exclusionism. The study allowed the participants to make sense of voice participation amidst the exclusionism. It then went on to study their narrations to make meaning of their lived experiences. The study thematically looked for WhatsApp voice participation and exclusionism in the events the participants described. The study identified phrases that indicated voice participation as emancipating/techno-optimistic, emasculating/techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic. These were representative of reaction

towards dominant social actors' exclusionism. The study also analysed the composition of the narratives looking at what forms of contextualisation the participants offered, the ordering of events, what they emphasised in the personal narratives by way of repetition or stress placed on words, what important information pertaining to events was absent, where self and retrospective reflection were apparent and the general body language that accompanied the narrations. These allowed the study to account for the narration as part of the response to exclusion/electoral injustice in addition to the actions contained within the narratives. As we shall see in the analysis of the findings, the study also established whether, how and why the WhatsApp voice provides for tangible counterhegemonic public space to the people of Bungoma County during electoral deliberations. It went further to project how the people might conceive the WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic; during the Kenya's 2022 electoral processes deliberations.

4.7.1 Method of Analysing and Interpreting Interviews

The study used thematic analysis approach. It utilised the frame's concept of interpretation (Anonymous, 2016). The interpretation bore in mind the cultural contexts (see Ekeh, 1975; Mbembe, 2001; Busia, 1967). Using the starting themes of "emancipation/techno-optimism" and "emasculation/techno-pessimism", the researcher analytically coded in full, the extracts from the audio transcripts. The study was manually done to retain as much of the qualitative values as possible. Immediately the researcher embarked on the manual coding process, many additional themes began to emerge from the data. The study adopted a hierarchical method of coding to allow for relationships between codes to be established and worked with (Kelle, 2000 p. 287-289). The researcher realised the core themes of "emancipation/techno-optimism" and "emasculation/techno-pessimism" were soon respectively positioned under the much larger

analytical umbrella themes of “exclusionism/electoral injustice”, “culture”, “Tribe/ethnicity”, “Networked information relations”, “Economic lack/poverty” “gender” “in/security”, “Multiple WhatsApp group belonging”, among others. The illustration of the coding for the larger analytical umbrella themes has been presented in the figure below.

Core theme of Emasculation/techno-pessimism	
	Analytical umbrella themes:
	Culture
	Tribalism/negative ethnicity
	Networked information relations
	Exclusionism/electoral injustice
	Economic lack/poverty
	Insecurity
	Gendered intimidation

Fig. 7 above: Showing an example of umbrella themes derived from the core theme of emasculation/techno-pessimism.

Core theme of emancipation/techno-optimism	
	Analytical umbrella themes:
	Culture
	Positive Ethnicity
	Multiple WhatsApp group belonging
	Networked information relations
	Multiple WhatsApp group belonging
	Networked economy
	Security
	Gender Equality

Fig. 8 above: Showing an example of umbrella themes derived from the core theme of emancipation/techno-optimism.

The researcher coded the themes in more than one location to establish existing relationships. For instance, under the core theme of emasculation/techno-pessimism came the analytical theme of negative ethnicity. The analytical theme of negative ethnicity then resulted into the sub-theme of exclusion/seclusion. Under the same core theme of emasculation also came the analytical theme of economic lack. The theme of economic lack then resulted into two sub-themes: Lack of self-confidence and lack of data bundles. The diagram below graphically illustrates how the core theme of emasculation/techno-pessimism gave rise to sub-themes related to it.

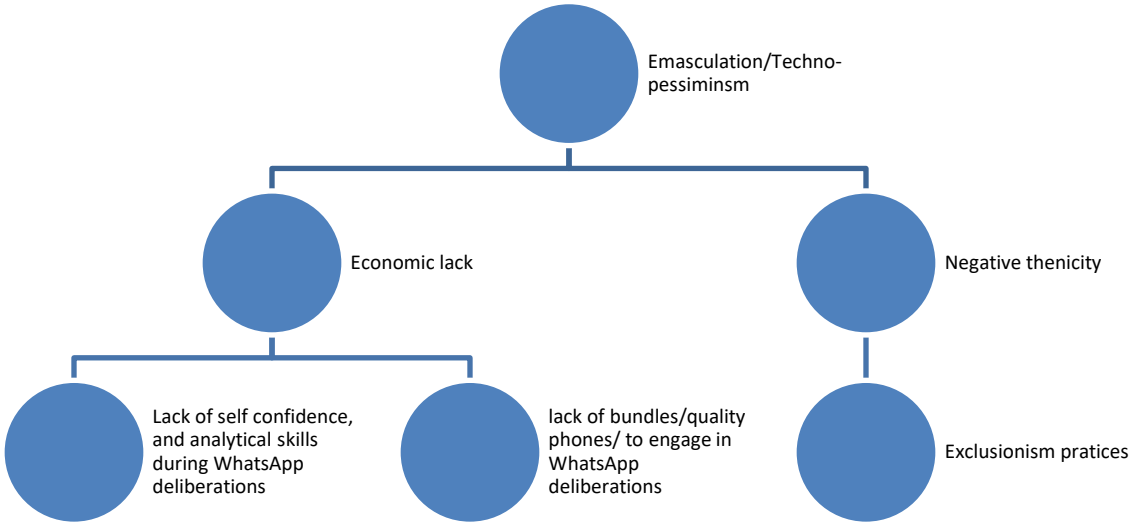

Fig. 9: Showing the core theme of emasculation/techno-pessimism and its related themes and sub-themes

As mentioned above, the study made emasculation/techno-pessimism an own core theme as it is a core concept. The study then coded the analytical themes and sub-themes attributed to it. They included: economic lack, negative ethnicity, insecurity, gendered intimidation, among others. Negative ethnicity predominantly turned out to be an important concept, which the study wished to derive for further demonstration about how the coding process was done. To start off the demonstration, we need to understand that the study noted that most of the people interviewed talked about how the majoritarian tribes in Bungoma County do not wish to belong to same WhatsApp groups with the minority tribes. Even within the various tribes, there were dominant clans seeking to dominate/marginalise others. As a result, some tribes, and clans exclude and even track and physically attack the minorities perceived to be political enemies. At this point, we can see a sub-theme of exclusionism coming up. Therefore, we can trace the relationship from the core theme of emasculation/techno-pessimism to the analytical theme of negative ethnicity, and finally to the sub-theme of exclusionism.

To balance out the demonstration, the study wished to demonstrate how the other core theme of emancipation/techno-optimism related with its analytical themes and sub-themes. As we shall see in the chapters about analysis of the findings, under the core theme of emasculation came the analytical theme of belonging to many WhatsApp groups. Belonging to many WhatsApp groups, resulted into two sub-themes including WhatsApp group administrators' clarification/verification of information, and the access to space for electoral deliberation. Under the same core theme of emasculation/techno-optimism also came the theme of WhatsApp ease of use. The theme of ease of use resulted into the sub-theme of classless engagements with egalitarian ties. We can graphically present the information above thus:

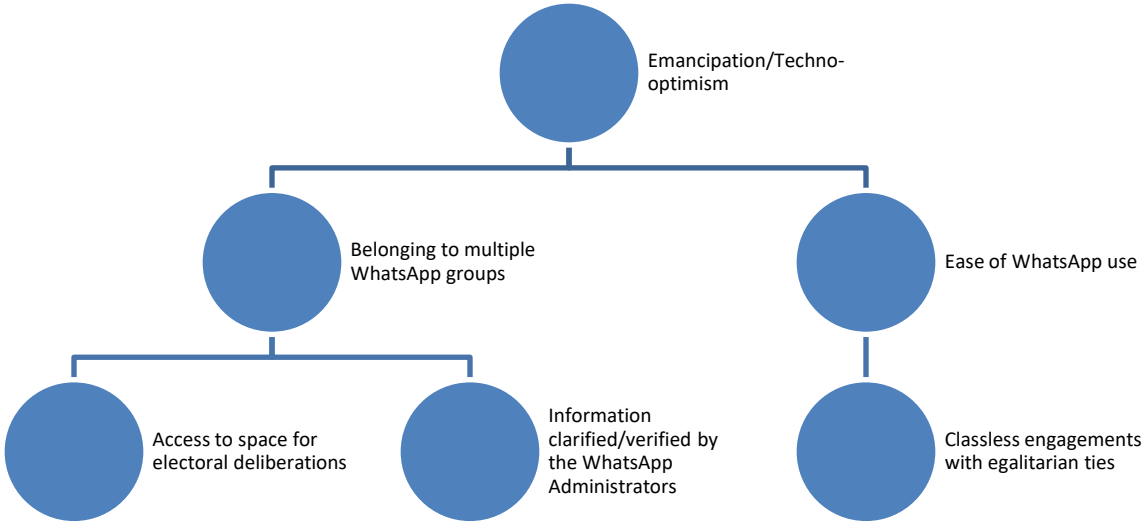

Fig. 10: Showing the core theme of emancipation/techno-optimistic and its related analytical themes and sub-themes

4.7.2 Coding Process

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations used face-to-face interviews to collect the data. After coding the first interview transcript, the study immediately realised that it could run into a danger that, each new code created could be biased and overly sympathetic towards the data of the first narrative. To ensure that balance was established in the coding of the themes and sub-themes, and to aid with analysis and interpretation in the process, a coding schema was formulated. The schema introduced some robustness to the coding process to avoid possible compromise. The schema ensured that different contexts of interviews followed each other in the coding chronology. This was to allow the codes to respond to slightly different intonations in meaning in accordance with the context of what was narrated, and who was narrating it. Basically, the researcher "toggled" between participants' statuses to ensure parity of analysis. This was done during the transcription of the all the 10 interviews from the WhatsApp Group Administrator-participants, and 51 interviews from WhatsApp User-participants.

The method of coding allowed for the themes/sub-themes to have a strong identity of what they basically meant. It also informed the hierarchical family most suited to it. The method encouraged that each time a sub-theme was attributed to a current code, or a new code created, the researcher was forced to go back through the texts to establish what previous sub-themes would also be suited to that code. Again, the study reviewed the previous entries to analytically compare similarities and/or differences with the new sub-themes coded to the same theme. Grounded Theorists term this strategy as "constant comparison" (Taylor & Gibbs, 2008 p. 62). It ensures that all dimensions of the codes fit well where they belong (Mihas, & Odum Institute, 2019).

After analysing the entire text mass, the researcher interrogated each theme further in relation to the sub-themes coded to that category (Lehane, 2019). This was to verify that each sub-theme fits

well under the themes in which they are placed. The study then began the formal interpretation phase, as discussed in the analysis chapters below.

4.7.3 Writing Style and Data Presentation

The study about WhatsApp voice deployment in African electoral deliberation used a mixture of virtual and physical inductive ethnography approach (Heyes, 2018). As a result, the writing style adopted for compiling the findings was both firs person and third person. Kuper, (1996 p. 15) discusses that, 'in relation to writing style, the author does not need to refer to themself in the first person', though amidst a discussion where the reflexivity becomes apparent, it is considered appropriate to do so. This study found it appropriate to write the thesis in third person, however, first person is also used to enhance reflectiveness where necessary. The study employed the "theory laden" while writing the chapters on analysis of the findings; where the coded core themes including emasculation and emancipation created a framework with an interesting "discursive tension besides dialogic pedagogy" (Freire, 1972 p. 78). The study was guided by the assumption that the themes existed in their original objective purity, outside participants as if the themes were "things" (Freire, 1972 p. 78). Therefore, the data collected during fieldwork directed the study to unearth the representative themes that were then interpreted to build the research outcomes (Powermaker, 1966 p. 285 - 306). As study embarked on writing the thesis, it stayed alive to the fact that in so doing, it was interpreting and relaying in text, the ethnographic truth about how and why the people of Bungoma County conceived the WhatsApp voice as emasculative/techno-pessimistic, emancipative/techno-optimistic and/or techno-pragmatic, during the 2017 electoral deliberations (Clifford, 1998 p. 25).

The study bore in mind the transient notion of truth in qualitative ethnographic research (Abarbanell, 2020). The study's three-pillar framework was used to categorise the truth during

data analysis. The true fell within the techno-optimism pillar, the techno-pessimism pillar and/or techno-pragmatism pillar. As a result, the differing truth about the people's conception of WhatsApp voice, as well as the researcher's truth were all represented in the chapters about analysis of the findings. The truth by the participants was not treated as less truthful when it contradicted the researcher's analysis (Takyi, 2015 p.867). In fact, right from the field interviews through to the writing of the findings, the researcher included all the participants' responses about how their lived experiences informed their WhatsApp voice conception: - as techno-optimism, techno-pessimism and/or techno-pragmatism, during Bungoma County electoral deliberations.

Since the participants were not required to reveal their identities during the interviews, the references to them have been made anonymous and given pseudonyms. The specific constituencies/sub-counties from where the participant responses were drawn are however revealed. When discretions have been made in an actual quote by the participants, the editing and inclusion of text are highlighted using parenthesis []. The texts in these parentheses intend to also indicate where a quote has been edited to make the context clearer, concise or both.

4.8 Validity and Reliability

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations established that, in "Stranger and Friend", Powermaker, (1966) uses the Epilogue to reflexively argue that the results of researchers who came after 1930s are in terms of "probabilities" observed during the relationship between an anthropologist and the informant (p. 296). As such, this study's first line of in/validation of the emerging themes was the informal method of using the researcher's personal prior knowledge about the County to in/validate the participants' responses. Informally, the researcher considered his personal prior knowledge to reflect on the accuracy of the participants' assertions given during the interviews. The social networking analysis method enabled the study to conduct interviews

within the networks of the WhatsApp group members in Bungoma County; from where the researcher evaluated whether certain information was according to his understanding of the situation. The fact that the researcher was born and raised in the research site was helpful. However, the study emphasized that the researcher's opinion did not necessarily overrule the assertion by the participants (Abarbanell, 2020). This is because this research is about how the people of Bungoma County feel, recall and articulate their lived experiences about how and why they use WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations; and how this informs their conception of the voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic. Therefore, the participants' assertions did not necessarily need the historical facts for validation (Boyce, 2000 p. 319).

The researcher also employed three other criteria to ensure he builds a coherent justification for the emerging themes during the study about WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics with Bungoma County as the focus. These included: triangulation, phronesis and thick/rich description (Creswell, 2015 p. 7). Triangulation involved the use of multiple analytical tools, multiple methods of data-collection and multiple theories or paradigms. The study made use of multiple methods of data collection including literature review, interviews, and observation. The study also drew on several theoretical approaches as aforesaid in chapter two. As we shall see in the analysis of the findings, various starting themes such as emasculation/techno-pessimism, emancipation/techno-optimism have been used to start off the analysis. Soon after starting the coding process, many additional themes and sub-themes began to emerge from the data, and then the study adopted a hierarchical method of coding demonstrated in sub-section 4.6.1; to allow for relationships between codes to be established and worked with (Kelle, 2000, p. 287-289).

The second criterion employed was phronesis. The task of phronetic social science is to "clarify and deliberate about the problems and risks we face and to outline how things may be done differently, without expectation of 'ultimate answers' or even 'a single version of what the questions are"' (Flyvbjerg, 2004 p. 284). Pursuant to the spirit of phronesis, "the people's participation" was taken as an explicit normative orientation for the thesis. The researcher spent three months collecting data, which he used to develop an in-depth understanding of the people of Bungoma County; how and why they use WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations; and how these inform their conception of the voice as techno-pessimistic, techno-optimistic, and/or techno-pragmatic. The study ensured that the obvious errors that occur in transcription of interviews and field notes were minimised (van der Hoorn, 2019 p. 23).

Thick/rich description is another procedure the study employed to ensure the credibility of research findings. Essentially, the study achieved this by not just describing a particular behaviour, but also the social context of that behaviour; so that the behaviour attains a meaning that can also be understood and interpreted by an outsider. Theoretically this is consistent with the idea that meaning is systemically constituted (Malik et al. 2020). Thus, the researcher aimed at making sense of the social and electoral contexts within which exclusionist electoral deliberations are constituted; how the WhatsApp voice is used as a form of citizenry resistance to the exclusionism besides as a participation perspective; and how these inform the people's conception of the voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic, and/or techno-pragmatic. The thick/rich description allowed for in/validation during the coding of responses obtained from the interviews with the Bungoma County people, about how WhatsApp voice enabled and/or deprived their electoral deliberations.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

During the study on WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics with Bungoma County as the focus, the researcher endeavoured to uphold the moral philosophy that strives to answer Immanuel Kant's age-old questions about duty, honour, integrity, virtue, justice, and good life (Mogra 2017). The forms of professional misconduct avoided include: "plagiarism, fabrication and falsification of information, faulty data-gathering procedures, poor data storage and retention, biased data analysis, misinterpretations, exaggerations, misleading authorship, involuntary participant participation, uninformed respondent consent, anonymity and confidentiality of respondents responses" (Drugge, 2016 p.271)

Ethically, the study on how and why Bungoma County people conceive WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic, techno-pessimistic and/or techno-pragmatic during electoral deliberation was vetted by the University of The Witwatersrand Ethics Committee and given clearance as ethically sound. As suggested by the method used by the study- qualitative network analysis, the researcher was aware of the sensitivity about how the people networked with each other to obtain information; and the electoral social injustice perpetrated in the process. Therefore, the study upheld utmost ethical orientation. During the physical fieldwork, the study had a standby psychology professional to offer counseling services to participants who would in any way be traumatised after granting me interviews. The researcher kept the physical addresses of the participants in the cases of telephone interviews, so that if they are traumatised, a counselor from the near stations would visit them to offer counseling services. Various other ethical issues were addressed throughout the phases of conducting this study including pre-field, actual data collection and report writing. The study was conscious about participants' vulnerability to the dominant social actors due to a number of factors, which calls for specific ethical considerations when carrying out research. During the pre-test exercise of the data tool- face-to-face interview schedule and the observation schedule,

elements of the research instruments which were unclear or that could be misunderstood by the participants were identified and rectified. In anticipation that some participants would be singled out for victimisation, due to their opinions, the researcher ensured that the main objective of the study was well explained in writing and verbally to the participants including how the findings would be utilised. The study also ensured that the participants are informed about all data collection tools and activities. During the physical interviews, the participants who asked to be relocated to more secure premises for interviews were relocated to premises they felt secure to be interviewed from.

The study was aware that some academics claim that traditional ethical principles are sufficient and applicable to online research (Sugiura et al. 2017) The study also stayed aware about the view that social media poses new challenges that compel researchers to reconsider concerns of consent, privacy, and anonymity (Langer & Beckman, 2005). Therefore, in all cases, the researcher ensured he sought the participants' consent before engaging in online observations. This was to guard against invasion of the participants' privacy. As earlier mentioned, effort was made to constantly remind the WhatsApp group members in the various groups the researcher joined, about his presence in the groups. The online members selected as participants for the study's interviews were granted anonymity, because that was the standard practice for the study during the face-to-face interviews.

During the online interaction with participants, conscious effort was made to ensure that the researcher's identity/presence and objective are made known to the WhatsApp group members of the groups joined. While collecting the data, the researcher asked the participants open-ended questions, to safeguard against contributing to potential invasion of privacy or vulnerability (Langer & Beckman, 2005). The participants were advised about voluntary participation, so that

those who did not feel comfortable needed not to take part in the study. Although the study was expressly about WhatsApp voice, when conducting the interviews, the study stayed attentive to bodily and linguistic cues such body language, facial expressions, and gestures, which could communicate contrary to the voice articulations.

Finally, the study ensured confidentiality of the participants' responses; and guaranteed them anonymity in the final report. The participants' wishes, rights and interests were respected when determining what information should be included in the thesis findings. At all times, the study acknowledged all works referred to, whether academic or non-academic by rightfully citing the authors. The publication of the research about WhatsApp voice and its applicability in the Kenyan electoral politics with Bungoma County as the focus will be availed online, and in libraries as hard copies.

Chapter Five: Emasculation/Techno-pessimistic Perception

5.0 Introduction

This chapter highlights the techno-pessimistic function of WhatsApp use in electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. The study conceptualised this chapter as the epitome of Kenyan media's loss of credibility. It also acknowledged that the techno-pessimistic perception goes against the popular narrative in Africa, that social media is transforming electoral politics in Africa. As a result, it utilised the frame's construct of similarity/difference; to allow for writing in opposition to media's gains/techno-optimism/popular narrative, in what the study earlier referred to as juxtaposition. It is written in consultation with the historically rich introductory chapter of this thesis, where we painted a bag of mixed fortunes about the media milestones, in which, we observed that away from the oppressive and exploitative colonial and post-colonial media, the ICT and social media are "transforming" the electoral politics by availing space for democratisation to take root. As we shall see in this empirical chapter, we can draw from factors that influence perception (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) to illustrate how negative ethnicity, "retrogressive" culture, insecurity, economic deprivation among other sub-themes discussed, inform the people's use of WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations; and how the use has led to media's loss of credibility, by way of people perceiving the voice as limiting/techno-pessimistic. Although the researcher anticipated that age and social media influencers (Ogola, 2015) would be major factors in informing how the people mis/use the WhatsApp voice, it turned out that cultural values and gendered intimidation were the major factors. The influencers' role is largely lacking at the local level politics even as it plays significant role at the national level.

The study's Key research question was:

What factors inform WhatsApp pessimistic, optimistic, and/or pragmatic perceptions during electoral deliberations?

The specific question the chapter sought to answer is:

How and why is the use of WhatsApp voice conceived as techno-pessimistic?

Analysis of the data collected during fieldwork about the study on how WhatsApp is used in electoral deliberations in Bungoma County resulted in a total of 88 mentions that the platform limits/ is techno-pessimistic to the users. This was the second highest in the study after techno-optimism/enabling which had 121 mentions. The total mentions were therefore 209. The participants articulated some of the ways in which WhatsApp use limited their electoral deliberations in the 2017 elections in Kenya. As we shall see from the table of summary of participants' response below, these mentions informed the people's perception of WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic during electoral deliberations.

The participants narrated how the WhatsApp voice limited their space for participation in the electoral deliberations during the 2017 elections. As we shall see in the analysis, some themes and sub-themes were mentioned as limiting in one way and enabling in another. For example, the people's culture/ethnicity was both limiting/emasculating and enabling/emancipating; in that some people deliberated on WhatsApp in their vernacular languages thereby enhancing inclusivity to those who could not speak in English; but at the same time sidelining the members who could not speak the particular ethnic language used in the groups. In such cases where a theme or sub-theme is both emasculation and emancipating, it is discussed in the different contexts and in the separate chapters. More so, such themes/sub-themes informed the techno-pragmatic perception in the thesis. Interestingly, although emasculation and emancipation are two neatly opposing concepts, suggesting instrumental absoluteness of the WhatsApp voice, and ignoring the complex textures

of political engagements that take place in between, it is exactly from between the two that the perception of the midground position emerges. We can loosely analogise this with the Kenyan media milestones, in which emergence of social media was as a result of the failure of the colonial and post-colonial media to serve the people's needs. The table below summarises the themes and subthemes identified as emasculating/limiting factors that inform the people's mis/use and perception of WhatsApp as techno-pessimistic:

Thematic area of the reference	**Number of participants in the Constituency referring to it**	**Number of references in the Data mass**	**Leading Constituency or sub-country**
Culture	Majority	15	Mt. Elgon
Ethnicity	Majority	11	Mt Elgon
Economic lack	Majority	24	Webuye East
			Webuye West,
			Kanduyi,
			Bumula
Gendered Intimidation	Majority	10	Mt. Elgon
Insecurity/Affect	Majority	19	Mt. Elgon
			Kanduyi
			Bumula
Networked information relations	Majority	9	Bumula,
			Kanduyi
Total		**88**	

Table 1: Showing thematic areas associated with WhatsApp emasculation and its prevalence in the constituencies.

5.1.0 Culture/Ethnicity and WhatsApp Use

During the study on how WhatsApp is used in Bungoma County in electoral deliberations, the people's narratives reveal that culture/ethnicity highly inform how and why the people in WhatsApp groups exclude others/minorities. As seen in the introductory chapter, the culture/ethnic factor was politically motivated and intertwined with economic factors to form a tool for exploitation and oppression (KNCHR, 2017). Consequently, drawing from the frame's constructs of similarity/differences (Coren, 1980), we shall see that culture/ethnicity is used to exclude the minority people during electoral deliberation. The exclusion leads to the minority people's perception that WhatsApp voice is techno-pessimistic. Although the theme of culture and ethnicity are separated in the table above, this sub-section analyses them in combination to enhance coherence and to reflect their interwovenness in Bungoma County during electoral deliberations. We can further analyse culture/ethnicity by reflecting on Tacchi's, (2012) concept of viewing WhatsApp voice in terms of poverty. As we shall see in the narrations from the people of Bungoma County, culture and ethnicity are most used in Mt Elgon Constituency and Kanduyi Constituency respectively, to marginalise/prevent the minorities and women from property ownership. This in turn affects how they use WhatsApp voice; since they lack the resources to buy quality phones, data bundles, pay electricity bills, among other requirements that would enable them to access the voice for electoral deliberation.

As we shall see in sub-sections of this chapter, WhatsApp voice enables for the majority Sabaots in Mt Elgon Constituency and majority Bukusus in Kanduyi Constituency to marginalise others along cultural and ethnic lines. The introductory chapter of this thesis also foregrounded the historical basis upon which marginalisation is justified by the people, largely patriarchy and retrogressive beliefs. For instance, the Sabaots use their cultural practices to prevent women and

other minority groups such as oppositional inclined clans and tribes from owning cattle, land, and other property. Since they associate politics with gender, clannism and tribal inclinations (cf. Ekeh, 1975; Fiske & Taylor, 1991), they use WhatsApp political deliberations for exclusion. These exclusions are never based on age differences. Rather, they are largely based on women and the minority tribes/clans. For instance, the people hold their WhatsApp electoral deliberations secretively, and in mother tongue to exclude the non Sabaot tribes. This is directly opposite to what we explored in the introduction chapter, where indigenous languages were thought to enhance inclusivity, sense of belonging and national unity by (Oriare et al., 2010; Wanyande, 1995). As we shall see in the sub-sections to come, the Sabaot people also directly and indirectly deny women the chance to participate in the deliberations, similar to the colonial marginalisation of women during the colonial media in Kenya. The causative agents for these are contrasted in the reviewed literature by Mbembe (2001) and Busia, (1967). In Kanduyi Constituency, where the Bukusu tribe form a majority, the women and other minority tribes such as kikuyus are culturally perceived as immigrants and marginalised using the cultural and ethnic logics (see Ekeh, 1975) to frustrate their efforts to own property. As we shall see in the discussions in this chapter, the minorities are viewed in terms of ancestral strangers (Comaroff, 2012), who are unwelcome because of their competition on the available economic resources in the constituencies and County at large (KNCHR, 2017). Arguably, logic of unwelcome strangers can be traced back to colonial media where the elite Africans/Kenyans mobilised their private media ethnic audiences against the colonialists, perceived as the unwelcome strangers. To date, these cultural and ethnic logics play out in physical life and on WhatsApp groups (see Goffman, 1959), from where they inform the minority people's perception of the WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic.

The WhatsApp voice enables the majority tribes to use the cultural and ethnic logics to prevent the perceived "other" (see Coren 1980) minorities from accessing the voice through joining WhatsApp groups. This is because, first: the WhatsApp voice allows the majoritarian people to view it as a communicative resource which the County people struggle to control and use (Tacchi, 2012 p. 6); and second, because the WhatsApp voice enables the majority people to deliberate ethnic secretive information involving resource allocation (Ekeh, 1975), which they do not want the minority people to know about. The platform's ability to facilitate marginalisation inform minority people's perception of it as techno-pessimistic. For instance, as we shall see in the people's narrations, whenever the Bukusu majority people suspect that some of the non-Bukusu people might assume Bukusu usernames and infiltrate the groups, without the administrators' suspicion (see Scoff, 1990), the members would hold electoral deliberations using the Bukusu dialect to exclude the infiltrators. The switching to use Bukusu dialect is informed by the perception that only those who speak the Bukusu dialect, are Bukusu enough to belong to the group (see Anonymous, 2016). The members who would not contribute to the deliberations would be perceived not to understand the language and would be suspected to be non-Bukusu. Further investigation is done to them to establish whether they are Bukusus. This is comparable to what was dubbed *msako* during the colonial and post-colonial media. In the *msako* colonialists and later elite African governments denied citizenry the access to media, by way of banning some private media such as Sauti ya Mwafrika, Tangazo and later Kenya Times and Nairobi Law Monthly, among others (Wanyande, 1995). The perception of the Bukusu majoritarian would be that those not contributing during the deliberations do not understand the Bukusu dialect. If found to be non-Bukusu, such members would be removed from the groups. For instance, Namisi and Njeri (not their real names) narrate that:

Namisi narrates:

"These people [non-Bukusu/minority tribes] need to know that we do not go to their ancestral homes to influence their county politics… Therefore, *mababuu zetu hawawatambui hapa* (our ancestors do not recognize them here in Bungoma County). *Tumewasoma tangu kitambo… hawaezi pigia mtu sio wao kura…* (we have observed them for a long time, and we know they can never vote for anyone who is not of their tribe in this County. Last elections *kule kimilili walikua wamewapea space, karibu wapitishe British kuwa MCA, but tukamnyima* last minute. (We do not want to be like the people of Kimilili Constituency who in 2017 left a non-Bukusu contestant unchecked and as a result, he was almost elected as a ward representative, we realised it at the last minute and overturned the plan.")

Njeri narrates that:

"I was born and brought up in Bungoma County, but whenever election nears, all my Bukusu friends avoid me. They remove me from social media group. The people believe I am a political traitor who would be paid by their political opponents to offer information about their strategies discussed on social media. They also believe that since I am a not a Bukusu, I would not vote for Bukusu candidates, or to the Bukusu's preferred presidential candidate. *Na mimi niulize…* [she pauses] *si kupiga kura ni haki ya mtu? Sasa mbona niambiwe kupigia sijui ati wabukusu peke yao…* [sneers in disgust] (Let me ask you… [she pauses] isn't voting a personal choice? So why should I be forced to vote for a Bukusu candidate? [sneers in disgust]. Anyway, I am used to being told to go and vote from my ancestral land in Central Kenya. Often, the suspicions are not just in the social media groups, even our neighbors stop visiting us during electoral period. When they remove us from groups and they do not talk to us, we remain behind the County's political news all the time. This is dangerous because in case it gets violent when we are not updated, we are

found unawares, and we may be killed. First, we have to escape the tribalists then escape the police… [She paused] *unajua hata polisi hawatujui, so mkikutana anakuona ka tribalist mwingine* [giggles]. (You know we have to escape the police even if we are being pursued for attack by the tribalists…because they [police] don't know us and might just arrest us). We also can't post political stories online because we do not know who is watching."

5.1.1 Imminent Consensus and WhatsApp Emasculation

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations, established that the voice enables for tensions and confrontations (Ekeh, 1975) among the Bungoma County people. Namisi's and Njeri's narrations above, affirm that the WhatsApp groups in the County are characterised by tensions and confrontations during electoral deliberations. Chronologically, in the introductory chapter, we saw a trail of tensions and confrontations running through the pre-independence media, colonial media and the post-colonial media, including the social media. The fact that the WhatsApp voice enables for the tensions and confrontations informs people's perception of the voice as techno-pessimistic. We can situate these tensions and confrontations in Matolino's (2016) reiteration that, African dissenting view was the starting point to arrive at Wiredu's (1997 p. 310) "immanent consensus"; which was an observable social practice in all indigenous African adult relations. Matolino's (2016 p. 41) argument that Africans engaged in brutal differences (Coren, 1980) that led to wars and death after which peace was arrived at is visible in Bungoma County WhatsApp electoral deliberations. Despite the brutal fights in the narrative above, the Bungoma County people arrive at "imminent consensus" (Wiredu, 1997 p. 310) after elections; and live together (Coren, 1980) in the County until the next general elections. In his analysis of the Kenya's 2013 post-election violence, Lynch et al, (2019 p. 1) concurs with Matolino, (2016); arguing that the "peace narrative" that was advanced in the run up to the 2013 elections was deliberately created

out of the 2007 post-election violence. The narrative was promoted by the dominant social actors/government to emphasize peace after the election related violence.

As seen in the historical contexts in introductory chapter of this thesis, we can argue that the WhatsApp voice provides a platform from where the majority people transfer physical marginalisation to virtual marginalisation of the minorities in Bungoma County, based historical differences (see Coren, 1980). The voice achieves this by enabling the majority people to track down the minorities for both physical and virtual attacks (Goffman, 1959). As a result, the minorties perceive the WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic. On the other hand, the majority people believe marginalisation is a way resolving their historical injustices (KNCHR, 2017). We can philosophically locate the attacks narrated by Njeri above in Matolino, (2016) echo that attacks are meant to bring lasting peace, as earlier discussed in the reviewed literature. The Afrocentric marginalisation and attacks of the minorities (Matolino, 2016), be it on WhatsApp groups, or physically are aimed at stopping them from being used as accomplices. The marginalisations and attacks are philosophically aimed at creating consensus rather than discord. For example, as aforesaid in Kenya, the peace narrative advanced by the dominant social actors/government after the 2007 PEV was achieved through the "illegitimisation" of anti-government protests over electoral manipulations, and the justification of the excessive use of state apparatus including the police, military, and court system (see Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Therefore, logically, dominant social actors/government used violence to attain peace; just as the majority people of Bungoma County use violence to attain peace. The minority people find themselves at the receiving end, whereby the WhatsApp voice limit their space, and provides the majority Bukusu tribe with more space for marginalisation and attack.

The WhatsApp voice enables the majority people to retaliate on the minority people, perceived sympathetic to the oppressors; as a way of addressing their grievances/resisting dominance (see KNCHR, 2017). As seen in Namisi's narration, the people perceive minority groups as sympathetic to dominant social actors/government; and that since the government oppresses the people, they can also oppress the minorities in retaliation since they are not in proximity (Coren, 1980) with the government to oppress it. The use of the WhatsApp voice by the people to attack the minorities so as to get to government attention informs the minority perception of the voice as techno-pessimistic. As seen in the introductory section of this thesis, the governments of the day committed injustice to the people, who are still aggrieved. The WhatsApp voice provides space for the people's retaliation, through attacks. As a result, the attacked people perceive the platform as techno-pessimistic. As seen in the introduction section as well as the reviewed literature, scholars identify the tools governments use to oppress the people as the police, military, courts as among the state apparatus (Althusser, 1971 p. 121). We can use Wiredu's (1997) concept of Afrocentric democracy to argue that the above-named tools were used throughout the media milestones discussed, climaxing in the 1990s, where the people whose ideologies differed with those of the government of the day were oppressed. In his analysis, Wiredu (1997) argued that Western democracy replaced indigenous African democracy in which oppression was minimal. Busia (1967) argues that the destroying of the indigenous Africa basic political units resulted to lack of suitable forms of political arbitration on the continent. This explains why the aggrieved Bungoma County people resort to WhatsApp voice to address their grievances by marginalising and attacking minorities with the hope that they may receive the attention of the government, to get to listen to their grievances.

The WhatsApp voice enables the majority Bukusu people in Bungoma County to stifle the minority voices from being heard during the County's electoral deliberations. The narrations from Namisi and Njeri can be analysed using Busia (1967) notion that in indigenous Africa, the oppressed or aggrieved people walked away from oppressive relations to form new ones. Analogically, as seen in the colonial history of the media in Africa/Kenya, the educated Africans walked out of colonial media to start their own (Mamdani, 1996). However, we can argue that the African elite governments in Kenya in 1990s destroyed the space for the oppressed to walk away, in what they called patriotism and national unity. Comparatively, the WhatsApp provides for the voices of the excluded to be stifled from within the excluders. This informs the perception that the voice is techno-pessimistic. From the aforesaid African philosophical point of view, the adoption of WhatsApp voice in Bungoma County electoral deliberations required that the minorities walk away to go and form their own groups. This explains why, from the narrations in these empirical sections of this thesis, the majority people seek to remove the minorities from the groups based on their differences (see Coren, 1980); ostensibly to allow them to go and form their own groups from where they would be the majority. Then, these minorities would do their own will, as it was the case in the indigenous Africa (Busia, 1967). However, the fact that the Western democracy allocate resources for the people based on their geographical location (see KNCHR, 2017), dictates that the marginalised minorities may not walk away after all, because they are bound to share the resources with within the boundaries. As we shall see in the discussions in this chapter, resource allocation, among other social dynamics largely inform why the minority people remain in the WhatsApp groups during WhatsApp electoral deliberation in Bungoma County. This is despite the available option of leaving the WhatsApp groups to form new ones.

5.1.2 Infra-politics of the Minority

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation established that the voice enables for people's misrepresentation during electoral deliberations. As we shall see in the narrations from Wairimu in the next couple of paragraphs, the minority ethnic speakers in Kanduyi Constituency acquire multiple ghost accounts with names that suggest they share ancestral origin with the majoritarian ethnic Bukusu speakers. This is usually to enable the minority speakers to infiltrate the WhatsApp groups, and stay unnoticed, to allow them to acquire political information about possible impending physical attacks discussed on the platform by the majoritarian groups. The minority infiltration of the groups contrasts the frame's constructs of similarity/differences (Coren, 1980), in which those who differ are expected not to belong together. The WhatsApp voice's ability to enable the majority people to plan and attack the minority people informs the perceived techno-pessimistic stance. We can draw from Scott (1990) conception of infra-politics of the poor, to explain the minorities' misrepresentations. The minority people misrepresent themselves as a way of resisting the majoritarian people's dominance. Wairimu narrated that in Bungoma County, the WhatsApp deliberations easily translate/degenerate into physical attacks (see also Diepeveen, 2021). Therefore, they need to be in the majoritarian groups to stay informed about the discussions, just in case of impending attacks. The attacks are informed by the majority people's perception that the minorities own comparatively more economic resources in Bungoma County, yet they are the minorities (KNCHR 2017; KPHC, 2019).

As seen in Namisi's narration, the WhatsApp voice enables the majoritarian people to create the perception that the minority people form part of the government sympathisers who were rewarded (Ekeh, 1975) during the 1990s oppressive government regimes. The perception enables for the marginalisation of the minorities. As we shall see in the discussions in this chapter, this is attributed to the past governments' attempt to marginalise political dissent through economic deprivation to

the people; and allocation of resources to reward their sympathisers (KNCHR, 2017). We can analogise the majoritarian claim above to the elites discussed in the introductory chapter, who took over political power from the colonial governments and used the media to maintain their social and political positions. In this chapter, the complexity of the matter is that these minorities may not own economic resources in their ancestral counties, from where they form the majority. This makes them to rather embrace the WhatsApp minority status in Bungoma County than seek majoritarianism in the counties they only boast of psychological majority with no economic resources held. Noteworthy too, besides the WhatsApp enabled rumous, the majority people in Bungoma County do not have tangible evidence to prove that the minority people owning economic resources in the County acquired it as rewards for sympathising with the previous repressive governments.

In attempt to stay in Bungoma County WhatsApp groups as a minority during the 2017 electoral deliberations, Wairimu (not her real name) whose ancestral origin is Nyandarua County in Central Kenya had four sim cards with different WhatsApp usernames. The usernames included: *Jumbe, Soteri, Tindi and Tolomet.* The usernames suggest that she comes from Bungoma County. She said she simply copied the usernames from the majoritarian WhatsApp groups which she was last removed. She narrates that:

"I use these WhatsApp usernames because I need to masquerade as a (majoritarian) Bukusu person without suspicion. This way I will stay informed about the politics of the County. But most important, *nijue kama kuna msako inakuja nijipange* (to keep me aware about impending politically motivated physical attacks so that I may escape in time). These names [WhatsApp usernames] keep me unsuspected in the groups, even though I do not know what they mean. I am just there to follow conversations [deliberations]. I do not contribute freely to the debates for fear

that it may lead to suspicion and then they would remove me from the groups. All I want to know is what they are discussing. Although they think we want to know about their political plans so that we my use it against them… I do not know how [pauses reflectively]. We often join these majoritarian [WhatsApp] groups when elections are approaching. So, they think we have been sent by political opponents to spy on them. Yet, that is e time political attacks are common, and so we must be in the groups to stay informed. We also join the groups at the time because the WhatsApp group admins are desperate to admit people whose usernames suggest they come from certain geographical regions. They assume that the new commers would share the group's political persuasion, increase the numbers which is bargaining power by the admins...[chuckles], or maybe bring new arguments [perspectives] in the WhatsApp debates. When we find WhatsApp groups with easy admissions, we quickly call our friends to join the groups before the admission rules become stringent. By the time they start scrutinising for admissions, *sisi tutakua ndani* (we shall have entered the groups). Over time, *wenye* groups (the Bukusu majority in the group) notice our presence. They can ask or say something in their vernacular language and direct it to any of us to answer. In that case we quickly looked for interpreters. But relying on interpreters is cumbersome and slow. So, we do not answer the questions directed on us in the group. *Hopo ndoi inakuanga mwisho wa lami* [bursts into laughter] (They remove us from the groups). Wait, [she quickly reflects] I once randomly picked an interpreter, and she ended up betraying me during interpretation. First, she could not keep pace with the debates because she was often engaged in some other activities whenever I needed her interpretation services. Later she betrayed me to the group admins after she asked for some money which I did not have. *Tuseme tu nilijipata kwa baridi tena* (I was removed from the group)" [she giggled].

5.1.3 Autonomous Marxist View and WhatsApp Use

In the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations, both the majority and minority people have shaped the WhatsApp voice for (mis)use (Feenberg, 2013) during electoral deliberations. This can be paralleled with Kenya's 1990s governments, which shaped the media to allow for the punishing of critics along culture/ethnicity lines (KNCHR, 2017). As seen in Wairimu's narration above, the people use the voice to undermine electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. We can analyse Wairimu's narrative above by reflecting on the Autonomous Marxists' re-reading of Marx. In Marxian wording we see that both the majoritarian Bukusu and the minority Kikuyus in Bungoma County have shaped the WhatsApp technology for (mis)use in electoral deliberations to maintain their social and political positions. Feenberg, (2013) argues that technologies are not neutral but embody specific values used by dominant groups to perpetuate ideologies. Thus, the WhatsApp voice has enabled the Bukusu people to perpetuate their dominance during electoral deliberations based on similarities/differences (Coren, 1980) in tribe. As earlier said, the autonomous Marxists drew from Foucault (1978) reflection that, "[w]here there is power, there is resistance"; to argue that (mis)use of technology is a form of resistance to technological power relations, thus a reactive force (Mithun et al., 2016 p. 95). We can trace these technological power relations back in the history of the media in Kenya, whereby the colonialists and later the African "elites" and citizenry shaped the colonial, post-colonial and the post-independence media, to maintain/resist power (Mamdani, 1996; Ochilo 1993; Oriare et al. 2010; Wanyande, 1995). Therefore, the minority Kikuyu people in Bungoma County have reactively shaped how they (mis)use WhatsApp technology, by faking usernames during electoral deliberations to maintain their social positions/resist exclusionist Bukusu power relations. The above analysis can both be limiting and enabling depending on the point of view of the reader. As a result, there is a divided majority/minorities people's perception about WhatsApp voice as

techno-pessimistic. As we shall see in the final chapter of this thesis, such simultaneously limiting and enabling perspectives constitute what the study devised as the techno-pragmatic perception of the WhatsApp voice. Whereas the people of Bungoma County have embraced the WhatsApp technology in their electoral deliberations, it has reduced/removed the human relations that hitherto existed between the majoritarian and minoritarian tribes, where they could meet and iron out their differences (see Coren, 1980) thus minimising exclusionism. Due to the use of WhatsApp voice, the majoritarian people find it easier to marginalise the minorities by simply pressing the computer/cell phone tabs. This has replaced the old days where they would be required to select (see Anonymous, 2016) words carefully, or find it difficult to tell the minorities off in their faces that they should leave the County, during face-to-face deliberations. In fact, it is the difficulty associated with telling the minorities off their faces that has enabled them to settle in Bungoma County for decades, embracing minority status. The introduction of WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation eased the minority exclusion process.

The WhatsApp voice enables for the politics of affect which robs the people of the sobriety needed to interpret (see Anonymous, 2016) issues during electoral debates. As seen in Namisi's, Njeri's, and Wairimu's narrations, there is a common thread of techno-affective use of WhatsApp voice in their electoral deliberations. The affective engagements inform the people affected to perceive the WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. We can locate the techno-affect in Foucault's (1978) conception of surveillance and punishment, although he generally reserves the word "technology" in his analyses. Mbembe (2017) decries that abdication of the fight for social justice including electoral deliberations, to technology is fundamentally undemocratic. As seen throughout the historical milestones of Kenyan media in the introductory chapter, the media was used by those in power to suppress dissent through

perpetration of affect (Ochilo, 1993; Oriare et al. 2010). Besides removing the human relations in the electoral deliberations as demonstrated above, the WhatsApp voice robs Bungoma County people of the sobriety needed, through facilitation of the politics of affect (Mbembe, 2017). As we shall see in the discussion on techno-affective politics in this chapter, WhatsApp voice has enabled for the re-ignition of the emotive deliberations about Bungoma County's economic deprivation, which were denied platforms by the mainstream media in Kenya during the 1990s and early 2000s (KNCHR, 2017). These deliberations coupled with the people's emotive culture (Mbembe, 2001) have resulted into more physical violence than ever witnessed in the history of Bungoma County and Kenya at large. This is because the WhatsApp platform provides a majoritarian "gathering point" from where the minorities are excluded based on tribes/clans (see Fiske & Taylor, 1991), hence the lack of dissenting voices (Papacharissi, 2016 p. 17).

According to Wairimu's narration above, the lack of dissenting voice enables the majoritarian people to execute their virtual will in physical terms with ease. This means the majority people would easily carry out physical attacks on the minority people based on the deliberations held through the WhatsApp voice. Part of the evidence adduced to ICC during the 2007 PEV prosecutions indicated that media was used to mobilise and coordinate the attacks (KNCHR 2017; Ushahidi 2021). More so, there is a correlation between physical attacks and social media/WhatsApp mediated deliberative battles amidst tribal groupings in Kenya (Fahamu, 2021; KNCHR, 2017; Ushahidi, 2021). Currently, there is no documentation of the emotional violence caused by the virtual attacks during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County and Kenya due to the challenges associated with quantifying emotions (KNCHR, 2017). We can interpret (Anonymous, 2016) the above in practical terms that, although the highest recorded election related violence in Bungoma County and Kenya was in 2007 as illustrated in chapter one of this

thesis, the highest emotional violence was arguably during the 2013 and 2017 elections, when both the incumbent and opposition parties deployed the highest level of social media and ICT technologies into their electoral campaigns. This is ironical, owing to fact that 2013 and 2017 elections in Kenya were cited as the relatively peaceful periods that allegedly provided for stability (Lynch et al., 2019 p. 1).

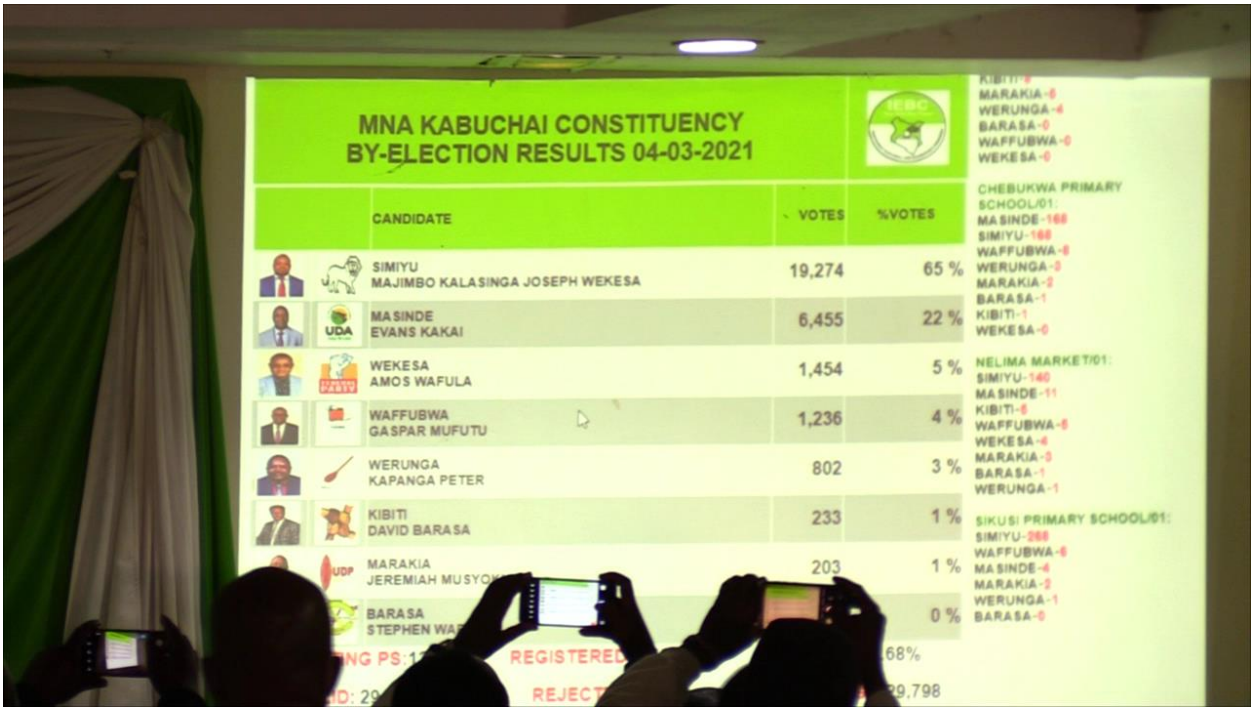

Fig 11: Photo by Author facilitated by West Media: High level deployment of social media and ICT technology in Kenyan elections.

5.1.4 Oversimplification of Social Relations

In this sub-section, we can borrow from the frame's construct of difference (Coren, 1980), to illustrate how the WhatsApp voice enables the majority people to remove the minority people from the groups with ease, based on perceived ethnic differences. As we have seen in Wairimu's narration, there are complex minority/majority relations that involve ancestry, economic wealth, emotions, among others. The WhatsApp voice simplistically overlooks these and allows for the ease of minority people's removal from groups; thereby increasing marginalisation. This informs the minority people's perception of the voice as pessimistic. Mouffe's (2019) questions the depiction of social problems as solvable by simplistic singular logic. We can relate the removal of the minority from groups with the colonial and post-colonial media in Kenya where literacy was designed to remove/exclude indigenous people from mainstream media consumption, leading to coming up of indigenous language oral media including radio. Thus, from Wairimu's narration, we can argue that the WhatsApp voice oversimplifies social relations, in ways that are unsustainableunrealistic. Laclau and Mouffe (1985) conceive people's social problems in terms of power and oppressive relationships, which the people seek to liberate themselves from. This was the case demonstrated in the introductory chapter about Bungoma county people. Thus, the Bungoma County electoral deliberations fall within Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) description of social problems above - complex. We can further make the case of Bungoma County Afrocentric by using Wiredu's, (1997 p. 310) concept of "super consensus" democracy. Unlike Laclau and Mouffe, (1985), Wiredu's (1997) Afrocentric approach argues that the relationship between the majority and minority in indigenous Africa was that even when the minority felt as losers in the decision-making process of the day, they knew they would find themselves as the majority in the next decision-making process, and their preferences and desires would be favoured. This

deemphasizes the differences making people identify with more similarities in their relationships (see Coren, 1980). We can transpose this onto the WhatsApp voice in Bungoma County electoral deliberations to mean that, the voice has enabled for intolerance/differences, where the majority people/whose desires are favoured, are intolerant/indifferent to the minority people.

We can pursue further, the idea that the WhatsApp oversimplifies relations by drawing from Wairimu's narration. She argues that the minority people in Bungoma County are willing to stay as minorities in the majoritarian WhatsApp groups. At face value, the WhatsApp voice implies that the relationships in the WhatsApp groups are unjust. As such, the voice is perceived as techno-pessimistic. However, upon analysis from the Afrocentric point of view, we can see that the complexities and perceived injustice provide for the "binding glue" between the majority and minority groups in Bungoma County during electoral deliberation (Wiredu, 1997 p. 310). In the analysis of the colonial, post-colonial and post-independent media, we see the white colonialists in power marginalising the black people. However, when the black people obtain the power, at independence, they too marginalised fellow blacks along ethnic and clan lines. In Wiredu's (1997) analysis, these oppressive relationships keep society intact despite the differences/injustice, because the people not in power hope that their turn will come, and they shall do their will. In another form of social complexity, the minority Kikuyu people of Bungoma County simultaneously pride themselves as a majority people in other Counties within Kenya. As aforesaid, this enables them to make a physical minoritarian in Bungoma County and a psychological majoritarian in other counties within Kenya. As a result, they stay contented as a minority in Bungoma County knowing they form a majority elsewhere. For example, Wairimu's ancestral origin is in Nyandarua County in central Kenya where her ethnic tribe forms a majority. Therefore, she simultaneously holds a minority status on the Bungoma County WhatsApp groups,

and a majority status in Nyandarua County WhatsApp groups. This makes her so comfortable with her minority status in Bungoma County that she is not willing to fight with agility for space during WhatsApp electoral deliberations. As earlier mentioned, the physical minority status comes with economic resource ownership in Bungoma County, while the psychological majority status does not assure the people of any economic resource ownership. As a result, the Wairimu opts to stay on Bungoma WhatsApp groups from where she can follow deliberations to find out how her economic resources may be affected; than join the majority WhatsApp groups in Nyandarua County, from where she neither possesses economic resources nor reside. These relational complexities that bind the minority and majority people are oversimplified by the WhatsApp voice, through the ease of removal of members from groups.

Further, the WhatsApp voice oversimplifies the complex relations within clans, social classes among others, which allows for minority people's marginalisation. From Wairimu's' narration, we can see that the WhatsApp voice does not allow for the envisioning of such minority/majority complexities as clannism and other social stratifications at play in society. For instance, if Wairimu goes back to Nyandarua County, as she is told by majority people in Bungoma County WhatsApp groups, she would be subjected to clan and social class politics, among others. These may be worse than the treatment she gets from her minority status in Bungoma County, both on WhatsApp groups and in real life. Therefore, she is not willing to subject herself to such new stratifications, by physically joining the majority status outside of the Bungoma County. More so, the conditionality set on the Bungoma County WhatsApp groups is that if she leaves the County and the WhatsApp groups, she would have to forego the benefits she gets for being among the minority groups in Bungoma County. For instance, if Wairimu left Bungoma to reside in Nyandarua, she would be dispossessed of her property in Bungoma County. If she abandons her minority status in

a Bungoma County WhatsApp group to join Nyandarua County WhatsApp groups, she would not get information about impending attacks in Bungoma, where she resides. All she would get from the Nyandarua County WhatsApp group is the psychological majoritarian feeling. The WhatsApp voice is perceived as techno-pessimistic due to its failure to envision the complexities of the social relations in Bungoma County. In this thesis the study conceptualised the phrase, "simultaneous majority and minority status" to describe people such as Wairimu, who prefer to simultaneously holds a majority and minority social status in Bungoma County and other counties.



Fig 12: Photo by Author facilitated by West Media: A section of enthusiastic voters in Bungoma County attending a political rally, with a youthful voter culturally interacting with technology. The undated photo was taken before COVID-19 restrictions.

5.1.5 The Simultaneous Majority/Minority Status

In the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation, we can use the previous explanation about WhatsApp voice's failure understand the social relation complexities, and how it enables for perceived unjust relations, to explain the concept of "simultaneous majority/minority status in Bungoma County. As seen in Wairimu's narration, the people belong to various counties at the same time. The narration from Lagat (not his real name) in the next couple of paragraphs, shows that the majority Bukusu people also form a minority in Mt Elon Constituency; from where they are not willing to leave for neighboring constituencies, where they could form a majority. Therefore, the concept of simultaneous majority and minority status argues that the kind of unjust relations portrayed in the WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations is simplistic and loses out on the relational complexities that inform people's decisions to stay as minorities. The concept informs people's perception of the voice as techno-pessimistic. We can borrow from Wiredu (1997) "super consensus" democracy, to complement the concept of simultaneous majority and minority status; by expounding on the Sabaot/Bukusu people relations. The Sabaot people are the majority in the Constituency even though they form a minority in Bungoma County. On the other hand, a section of the Bukusu people who are settled in Mt Elgon Constituency form a minority there, even though they simultaneously form a majority in Bungoma County as a whole. In this case, both the Sabaot and Bukusu tribes have a simultaneous majority and minority status within Bungoma County. The minority Bukusu tribe in Mt Elgon Constituency do not contemplate relocating to join majority Bukusus in neighboring constituencies such as Kimilili, Kabuchai and Siririsa; even though Mt Elgon Constituency has the highest level of insecurity, gendered intimidation, cultural and ethnic discriminations, among others. As earlier mentioned in this chapter, the economic resource allocation and possession, clannism, among other social

stratification inform the people's choice of stay. This logic is oversimplified by the WhatsApp voice whereby it portrays the exclusionism as too unjust even as the excluded people wish to stay in the relationships.

The WhatsApp voice enables the majority people to deprive the minority people of the communicative space during electoral deliberations. According to Lagat's narration below, during electoral deliberations the Mt Elgon Constituency people emphasize on resource ownership and deprivation of minorities, who are perceived as intruding political "enemies". As a result, the people seek to deprive the minority "enemies" of the WhatsApp voice to deny them a political voice. We can draw on Appadurai (2004, p. 63) conception that WhatsApp is a "valuable communicative resource" to argue that the majoritarian people seek to keep the minority "enemy" uninformed about their political moves, to enable them to allocate themselves more resources. As we can see in Lagat's narration below, the WhatsApp voice is used by the majority Sabaots within the Mt. Elgon Constituency to employ brutal tactics (see Matolino, 2016, p. 41) during political engagements with the minority Bukusus. In the next paragraph, Lagat narrated how he was tracked from WhatsApp groups in the Constituency and physically identified for punishment/retaliation, years after he had posted information that was critical of the Mt Elgon Constituency incumbents. He is a 26-year-old university graduate engineer from the Constituency. He narrates that:

"While at University a few years ago [as a student], I belonged to many WhatsApp groups from my Constituency. I used to criticise corruption and follow up on cases of corruption in the Constituency while at university outside the Constituency. People on the ground could feed me with information about the cases of corruption and then I could post them in the various groups. [Here] we deliberate in vernacular language. My friends at university used to laugh at me but there is nothing I could do to change it. The reasons for speaking in vernacular are: First the people do

not speak good English or Swahili because they stayed home looking after cattle instead of going to school. We value cattle a lot [chuckles]. Second, the people use vernacular to ensure in case there are infiltrators from other tribes in the groups, they would not understand what the discussions are about. […he gets back to his story], at some point I started receiving threats on my phone about my WhatsApp group posts on corruption. It was very chilling because they [killers] had just killed a friend who openly criticised the incumbent in the County. It is public knowledge that the killers use parables such as '*tutakujia kichwa yako na 100k peke yake nanii…*' (The killers brag that they are paid 100k/USD 1000 after the killing a critic to the incumbent). I reported to the police and a few arrests of junior people in the Constituency were made but with no successful prosecutions. I had to exit some WhatsApp groups. I also toned down on my criticism of the incumbents in other WhatsApp groups. After completing university education, I raised money through selling some of my cattle. I then hired some construction equipment in readiness to apply for tenders to construct roads and public infrastructures in the Constituency. However, the incumbents denied me the tenders because I had been vocal against corruption on the various WhatsApp groups while at university [years earlier]. As we speak, they award the tenders to their relatives and friends, who steal public funds and share with them [incumbent]. Even on WhatsApp groups, these relatives and friends would be seen defending the corruption cases in the constituency, …perhaps to win more tenders [chuckles]. ...*Ungajua shida kubwa na hii jama,* (The problem with these guys) I am not from their [incumbents'] clans. So, they think I used to criticise them on WhatsApp groups because they are not from my clan. By the way, *ata ile Bukusu yote uko chini haijapewa tender yoyote* (even the non Sabaot speakers such as Bukusu minorities in the Constituency do not get any tenders because of incumbent's influence). Anyway, I am now jobless,

and I cannot win any tenders because of my WhatsApp group deliberations" [He laughs in a mockery tone].

5.1.6 Primordial and Civic Publics Vs. Majority and Minority Status

How do the Two Concepts above Lead to WhatsApp Voice Emasculation?

In the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation, we can see from Lagat's narration that the WhatsApp voice enabled for the exposing of the whistle blowers resulting into the incumbents' punishment through exclusionism practices. Thus, this (mis)use of the WhatsApp voice to attempt to check the incumbents, informs the people's perception of the voice as techno-pessimistic. The incumbents' punishment of the whistle blowers can be situated in Ekeh's (1975) concept of African public sphere in which he explains the two African publics and the associated reward system. As seen in the introductory chapter, similar to Ekeh, (1975) the prior governments in Kenya used tokens/rewards to reward followers. We can transpose Ekeh's (1975) two publics onto Lagat's narration, to argue that he was a civic public whose reward would have been the jobs tenders, contracts, and other Constituency economic benefits. However, his use of the WhatsApp voice to criticise the incumbent exposed him as undeserving of the rewards, and instead he was punished. Since the African people can simultaneously belong to the primordial and civic public, we can also argue that the incumbents expected Lagat to assume the primordial public mode and show support for them on the WhatsApp groups, so as to be awarded contracts, tenders, jobs, among others mentioned (Ekeh, 1975 p. 108). The incumbents punished Lagat for using his WhatsApp voice to criticise them, because his criticism of the incumbent is based on the Western democracy practiced in Kenya, and not primordial/civic public conceptions. However, the Western democracy practiced in Kenya emphasizes on the formal structures such as the civil society and

the official opposition to check the incumbents. Lagat's exposure for punishment is because the incumbents do not recognise him as a formal watchdog.

The WhatsApp voice enables for the people to offer intangible rewards to the incumbents in exchange for monetary rewards. From Lagat's narration we see that he faces economic exclusionism practices because he did not use WhatsApp voice to give the incumbents the intangible rewards inform of praises during WhatsApp group deliberations, as the best performing in the public offices they hold (Ekeh 1975). The incumbents and civic publics in Mt Elgon Constituency are amoral and over-emphasises economic/material gain as a form of payment, in exchange for intangible rewards expected of Lagat. From his narration, the incumbents also expected him to campaign for them, and ultimately vote for them during elections, despite their poor performance in the offices. These were to be in exchange for the monetary rewards such as the jobs and contracts aforementioned.

How Similar are the Primordial/Civic Publics and Majority/Minority Status?

The constructs of similarity/differences in study's framework inspires this sub-section (see Coren, 1980). Although the frame's constructs assume that similar things go together and different ones do not, the assumption is contrasted in this sub-section. For instance, the WhatsApp voice allows for the cycle of exclusionism within the society, in real-life and in WhatsApp groups yet the excluders and the excluded coexist in the same space. Uniquely, as seen in Lagat's narration, even if the excluded people became incumbents through the next elections, they would need to reward their primordial publics economically/materially in exchange for the needed aforementioned intangible rewards to enable them to stay in power (Ekeh, 1975). The WhatsApp's ability to virtually enable this informs the people's perception of the WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic. We can draw from Britain's media relations with Kenya, in which the latter established her BBC

African headquarters in Nairobi despite the acrimonious colonial history between the two. In Ekeh's (1975) conception, the idea of similarity/difference brings the dialectical tensions and confrontations within the African people, constituteing the unique use of the media including the WhatsApp voice. From Lagat's narration, and the colonial ties between Kenya and her coloniser Britain, we can argue that, even if the excluded/removed WhatsApp group members took over as the new WhatsApp administrators in the various groups, they would seek to exclude/remove others perceived as opponents for political gain. Therefore, perceptibly, the relative stability that holds the Mt. Elgon Constituency people together resides in Wiredu's (1997) aforesaid "super consensus" democracy, in which the people believe that they will not be permanently placed in a position of being a minority. The stability that exists amidst the unwritten law of the dialectical tensions and confrontations in real-life and on the WhatsApp groups is, "it is legitimate for the incumbents and/or civic publics to be robbed in order to strengthen the clans/tribesmen or primordial publics" (Ekeh, 975 p. 108). This means that the incumbents must always reward the people with money in exchange for WhatsApp group campaigns, praises, among other intangible rewards. This study established a lingering similarity between Ekeh's (1975) simultaneous belonging to both primordial and civic publics; and the devised "simultaneous majority and minority status" earlier discussed. Both concepts lead to tensions and confrontations between social groupings in real life and on WhatsApp groups; thereby distinctly creating a unique Afrocentric use of the WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations.

5.2.0 Insecurity/Techno-affective Politics and WhatsApp Voice

The concept of insecurity/techno-affect is a distinct characteristic of the Kenyan media. As demonstrated in the introduction chapter, affect runs through the history of the media (Oriare et al. 2010; Wanyande, 1995). Similar to the fore runners - newspaper, radio, TV, among others, the

WhatsApp voice facilitates affective politics which fuels insecurity. In fact, the affective politics and insecurity were mentioned as the second leading factor that informs the people's perception of WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic during electoral deliberations. As seen in Njeris' earlier narration, insecurity/techno-affect shapes how and why the people use WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations. We can conflate Njeri's narration with Matolino's (2016) discussion that Afrocentric scholars agree that violence was a highly observable feature in the indigenous Africa. More so, we can philosophically locate insecurity/techno-affect in the Bungoma County in Mbembe's (2001 p. 9) description of the indigenous Africa as "chaotic, volatile and full of surprises". He draws from Comaroff, (2012) to argue that most Africans are naturally emotive and dramatic; and that the social media/WhatsApp re-mediates the violence into what is presently called "politics of the affect" (Mbembe, 2017). Njeri's narrative about insecurity/techno-affect implies that the WhatsApp voice actualises the affective politics which exists naturally within the Bungoma County people. Therefore, the social media/WhatsApp has enabled the people to transpose their real-life situations into the virtual platforms; in what Goffman, (1959 p. 1) calls the relaying of the people's real life performative actions.

Going by Namisi's earlier narration that:

'…Therefore, *mababuu zetu hawawatambui hapa* (our ancestors do not recognize them [minority people] here in Bungoma County) …'

We can see that the WhatsApp voice also enables for the compounding of the politics of affect; by allowing for the people's belief that "politics, governance, and public debates are rooted in a world of invisible powers - of witches, spirits, and demons" Comaroff, (2012 p. 13). As a result, the WhatsApp voice electoral deliberations lack logic; and makes the minority vulnerable to marginalisation based on irrational considerations. The minority people affected perceive the voice

as techno-pessimistic. As aforementioned in chapter three of this thesis while discussing the study's fieldwork experiences, although it is difficult to quantify the spirituality of the people of Bungoma County, it tremendously informs how and why the people use WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations. Therefore, WhatsApp voice, provides an intersectionality of the people's spiritually and politics of affect during electoral deliberations; constituting the fuel that keeps the people's emotions raging and logic waning.

If we read Mbembe's (2001 p. 9) description of indigenous Africa as "chaotic, volatile and full of surprises" in a contemporary way; we can interpret the insecurity/techno-affect that allows for WhatsApp voice emancipation as the presence of space for public expression. Comparatively, many nations across the globe with the most "progressive" constitutions allow for public space displayed in Mbembe's (2001) description - chaotic, volatile, and full of surprises. Like Bungoma County WhatsApp voice enabled affective deliberations, the citizenry across the globe is discernibly intolerant to others, with renewed energy to explicit rejection of conventional notions of reason, in what some scholars associate with the rise of nationalism. Therefore, the tensions and confrontations witnessed in Bungoma County WhatsApp electoral deliberations, can be attributed to the presence of public space, as it was in indigenous Africa. This is the space that was hitherto killed (Busia 1967) to justify colonialism; and later withdrawn in the 1990s by Kenya's repressive governments (KNCHR, 2017), as discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis. The emasculating/techno-pessimistic perspective of WhatsApp voice in this case lies in its lack of structures to provide security to the minority people, even as it attempts to provide them with the needed public space.

5.2.1 State Apparatus and the Complexities in WhatsApp Voice

The WhatsApp voice allows for violence during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. As seen in Namisi and Njeri's narrations, there are physical and virtual forms of violence meted on people by both governments and individuals based on perceived differences. Although Mbembe (2001, p. 9) cautions against direct comparison of global parallels with African contexts, we can loosely compare the Bungoma County insecurity/techno-affective use of WhatsApp voice, with the developed world. For instance, through Namisi and Njeri's narrations we can identify two distinct forms of violence describe in Benjamins' (1968) concept of violence. First there is the violence by the majority Bukusu people seeking to deny public space to the minority people in the County as seen in Namisi's narration in the previous paragraphs; in what Benjamins (1968) calls law making violence. The second form is the violence caused by the central government's state apparatus, in what Benjamins (1968) calls law preserving violence. This is used by the incumbents to deny public space to the people perceived to be sympathetic to the political opposition persuasion. As we shall see in the full narration of Kiberenge in the sub-sections of this chapter, he narrates that,

"…but since the Mill closed, we have no means of livelihood. My electricity was disconnected because of unpaid bills, I have to pay 20 bob [USD 0.2] to charge my phone at the barber's shop [most barber shops in the area add up as phone charging centres to diversify their income], I need bundles to get online for electoral deliberations. *Wewe unajua ile ya five bob? Hiyo ndo size yangu*. (Do you know there are bundles sold at five shillings [0.05 USD]? I buy and use that one) …"

The narration above indicates that people's access to WhatsApp voice for deliberation is hindered due to limited economic resources. The two forms of violence combine creating complex power relations on WhatsApp voice, aimed at disallowing people's space for electoral deliberations. The minorities are disallowed by the majority, who are in turn disallowed by the government/dominant

social actors. The study observed that in Bungoma County, the minorities who feel policed by the majority groups would censor themselves while using WhatsApp voice for electoral deliberations (Scoff, 1990). The majority people are economically deprived by the government to disallow them from taking part in WhatsApp electoral deliberations. The above scenario is similar to the new rise of nationalism in the developed nations across the world, perceived to have public space. The failure of WhatsApp voice to protect the minorities and citizenry from the dominant social actors informs the former's conception of the voice as techno-pessimistic.

How Do Surveillance and Relational Complexities take place?

We can draw from the frame's concept of interpretation (Anoymous, 2016) to explain how the WhatsApp voice enables the dominant social actors to unduly watch over the people. This means the actors influence how and why some people interpret information on WhatsApp groups. As seen in Njeri's narration, both the government, groups and individuals watch over the people's activities on WhatsApp groups to control them. This is explicitly similar to the colonial and post-colonial Kenyan media in which governments surveilled private media, with threats to ban, and/or tightening media laws. We can echo Benjamin, (1968) concept of state apparatus; to explain how the dominant social actors'/government' surveillance and violence on people affectively shape how they use the WhatsApp voice. The police in Bungoma County watch over sections of the public perceived to be anti-incumbents; on pretext of keeping law and order. As seen from Njeri's earlier narration, there are layers of individuals and government apparatus watching over how WhatsApp is used during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. The excerpt from her narration says:

"… first, we have to escape the tribalists then escape the police… [she paused] *unajua hata polisi hawatujui, so mkikutana anakuona ka tribalist mwingine* [giggles]. (You know we have to escape

the police even if we are being pursued for physical attack by the tribalists…because they [police] don't know us and might just arrest us. We also can't post political stories online because we do not know who is watching."

From the excerpt above, we can see that the WhatsApp voice allows for complex relations and surveillance in the groups during electoral deliberations. For instance, the minority people are aware that they are being watched; and therefore, stay silent in the WhatsApp groups during deliberations to avoid attacks and removal from the groups by the majoritarian people. On the other hand, the majoritarian people are aware that the government is watching them as they watch the minority people. As a result, they vent off their heightened tensions in WhatsApp groups by virtually and physically attacking perceived government sympathisers. They feel the state apparatus infringes on their public space- used for policing the minority groups and critiquing government. The state apparatus who feels the incumbent is under threat due to the majoritarian people's chaos occasioned by attacking the minorities, may start the physical violence on pretext of protecting the incumbency. Either way, the minority groups suffer more casualty in cases of physical violence breakout. These relational complexities during WhatsApp use put the minorities at the bottom of the 'food chain'; thereby informing their conception of the WhatsApp space as techno-pessimistic.

To this end, we can logically argue that the WhatsApp voice historically inherited the facilitation of the affective politics from the traditional media and perfected it. The dominant social actors/governments and majoritarian people are enabled to track the minority people physically and virtually for attack. These attacks and deaths inform the minority people's perception of the WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic during Bungoma County deliberations. However, even as the minority attacked get hurt or die, the philosophical motivation of the majoritarian attackers is

not to hurt or kill them (Matolino, 2016). Rather, it is to emotively ask them to go back to where they form their majority groupings. The Bungoma County majoritarian physical attackers perceive that the minority people's simultaneous majority and minority status, poses tensions and confrontations about resource allocation and ownership. As we shall see in the section on economic deprivation in this chapter, resource allocation and ownership are emotive issues to the people in the County because of the previous central governments' marginalisation of the Bukusu majority people (KNCHR, 2017). Arguably, the use of WhatsApp voice to deliberate about economic deprivation has increased tension and confrontation; with the voice enabling for the recruitment of deliberators with agility to attack and sometimes kill the minority people (Castells, 2008, p. 79).

5.2.2 Names and Ancestry and WhatsApp Use

This sub-section leans on the frame's concept of interpretation and the construct of similarity/ difference (Anonymous, 2016; Coren, 1980) to illustrate how the WhatsApp voice allows for the exclusion of the minorities from electoral deliberations, based on names and ancestry. The majoritarian people's interpretation (Anonymous, 2016) of names and ancestry is based on ethnicity. There is consensus that those with different (Coren, 1980) ancestry/names should be excluded. According to Njeri's earlier narration, the minority people can only infiltrate and stay unnoticed in the majoritarian WhatsApp groups, so as to follow the electoral deliberations. They are excluded from the groups by the majoritarian groups because of the perception that since they are from a different ancestral origin, they are likely to have a different political persuasion. As a result, they would be used to spy for the political opponents of the majoritarian groups. This exclusionary ability of the WhatsApp voice informs people's perception of the voice as techno-pessimistic. As seen in the introduction chapter, the exclusionism can be traced back from the colonial media in Kenya, whereby it existed along racial, economic, intellectual, lingual lines,

among others. We can draw from Ekeh's (1975) concept of economic/material rewards to analyse the majoritarian people's accusation of the minority people, that they seek political information from the WhatsApp groups to take it to political opponents in return for rewards. The majoritarian people's exclusion of the minority is perceived as attempts to stop them from obtaining political information to sell it to the opponents. As seen in Njeri's narration, the majoritarian people carry out "impromptu searches" within their WhatsApp groups to remove any members suspected not to come from their majoritarian ethnic tribes. The impromptu searches could be triggered by a majoritarian member who suspects that (a) particular username(s) should be investigated to establish their ancestral origin; or (b) the accent of the content in a member's post is not convincingly Bukusu enough to avoid suspicion. The political persuasion of the content in the WhatsApp post made would be immaterial during the deliberations. For instance, if a minority member's post is in favour of the majoritarian political persuasion to the group, the argument would be that the suspected minority member is masquerading as part of the minoritarian's persuasion to acquire information to take to the political opponents for monetary rewards. These constant impromptu searches and removal from the WhatsApp groups based on names and ancestry shape how and why the minority group members use WhatsApp voice in the electoral deliberation.

How is WhatsApp Voice Used to select Bukusu Candidature?

The study about WhatsApp voice and electoral deliberations established that the voice enables for a grueling criterion among the majoritarian members, used to ascertain "fitness" to run for public office in Bungoma County. The influencers have no significant role to play. If anything, they may fall victims themselves, whereby they may be subjected to the scrutiny to establish if they are Bukusu enough to be influencers of the Bukusu people. When confirmed "authentic" majoritarian

members of the WhatsApp group seek election into political offices, a renewed and rededicated effort is made by the rest of the group members to ascertain that the "most authentic" majoritarian member from the contestants gets the WhatsApp group members' endorsement. The "most authentic majoritarian member" here means the person who can be "most" linked to the Bukusu ancestral origin. We can use the quotation from Namisi's earlier narration to demonstrate this, she says:

"… We do not want to be like the people of Kimilili Constituency who in 2017 left a non-Bukusu contestant unchecked and as a result, he was almost elected as a ward representative, we realised it at the last minute and overturned the plan…"

From the excerpt above, we can see that electoral deliberations among members degenerate into tracing each other's preferred candidate's ancestral bloodline; ostensibly to establish who is "more" Bukusu than the other. Such deliberations obviously inform the perceived less/non-Bukusu candidates to conceive the WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. We can draw from Comaroff's (2012) assertion about most African people's belief that "politics, governance, and public debates are rooted in a world of invisible powers, to analyse this majoritarian Bukusu people's WhatsApp selection process for the people to run for office. Through observation of the WhatsApp chats, the study established that the deliberations get so personalised that some members present such arguments as, the political candidates whose mothers were pregnant with them at the time they got married to Bukusu men, are not Bukusu enough to run for political offices on the land. That is if the pregnancy was sired by non-Bukusu men. In this case, the reference to the pregnancy would be the cases where women marry while a month, two, three or so pregnant; to Bukusu men who are not responsible for the pregnancy. This is a common practice among the Bukusu young women, who opt to marry a different man from

the one who impregnated them, with or without disclosing it, for various reasons (see Namulundah, 2011). The child born out of such a marriage is adopted and socialised into Bukusu culture. However, s/he is not entitled to run for public office in Bungoma County, without humiliating WhatsApp deliberations reminding him or her about how less Bukusu s/he is. The majoritarian Bukusu arguments here reside in the belief that the Bukusu ancestral spirits would not be pleased if the people elected a non-Bukusu leader to office (see Comaroff, 2012 p. 13).

How is WhatsApp Voice Used to determine Bloodlines?

The WhatsApp voice allows for discrimination within the majoritarian Bukusu people along perceived bloodlines. The Bukusu society is purely patriarchal, and the allegation that a political candidate is a non-Bukusu would change the entire course of the electoral deliberations. The study observed that a member who is rejected from running for a political office would not be removed from the WhatsApp groups. But their political fortunes would not rise. As seen in Namisi's narration, the information about the candidates' less Bukusu social status would be used against them across the WhatsApp groups, as long as they wish to run for a political office. Conversely, when a Bukusu man sires a child with a woman from non-Bukusu tribes, the child is accorded full rights to run for public offices without being subjected to any humiliating deliberations about their mother's non-Bukusu ancestral origin. These real-life "birthright" dynamics are purely spiritual, (Comaroff, 2012); and are never subjected to 'empiricism' such as DNA tests (Mazama, 2003 p. 17). However, the "birthright" diminuendos play out on WhatsApp groups in Bungoma County influencing the voting patterns more than any other issues in the society. As a result, they shape the people's unique use of the WhatsApp voice for electoral deliberation; as well as their conception of voice as techno-pessimistic.

The WhatsApp voice allows for an undemocratic measure of the political candidates' abilities in Bungoma County. According to Namisi's earlier narration, it is a golden rule in real-life and within the WhatsApp groups in Bungoma County that unless the non-Bukusu people are deputising a Bukusu candidate, they should not be elected to positions of leadership in the County. Such deliberations enabled by the WhatsApp voice inform some people's perception of the voice as techno-pessimistic. The study observed that the WhatsApp groups' "measure of Bukusuness" in a political aspirant is less about how fluent the people are at speaking the Bukusu dialect, and more about their ancestral bloodline. This perceived ancestral bloodlines by the people deeply inform their electoral decisions at the expense of logic (Comaroff 2012; Mbembe, 2001). We can directly compare the Bungoma people's involvement of ancestral bloodline in electoral deliberations with the US presidential elections deliberations; even as Mbembe, (2001) cautions against globalising Afrocentric particularities. In 2008 when Barack Obama ran for presidency, his ancestral bloodline was largely traced to Kenya. This largely informed big electoral debates in tabloids and on television as well as social media, revolving around his unfitness for office due to his place of birth, rather than his personal abilities. The debates loosely compare with the Bungoma County WhatsApp groups, whose information networked relations enable the group members to avail information about candidates' ancestral bloodlines within a short period of time.

5.3.0 Gendered Intimidation and WhatsApp Use

In this sub-section we shall metaphorically interpret the concept of emasculation as aforesaid. The study makes sense of how WhatsApp voice enables masculinity/ high level of gendered intimidation within WhatsApp groups during electoral deliberations. The gendered intimidation was among the most mentioned emasculative factor enabled by the WhatsApp voice. As we shall see in the narrations from Nasombi, Siminyu, Chebet, among others, the people use the WhatsApp

voice to intimidate opponents along gender lines. From Nasombi's, Siminyu's narrations below, we learn that both men and women are affected by gendered intimidation, although women from constituencies with less schools, security, among other social amenities are more affected. The gendered intimidation cuts across all the WhatsApp groups in Bungoma County; ranging from the ward, constituency, and County level groups. We can analogised the gendered intimidation with colonial and post-colonial media in Kenya, where those in power intimidated the less powerful, with women as the most affected. We can draw from scholars such as Busia (1967), to argue that the high level of gendered intimidation in WhatsApp groups is attributable to external societal factors including colonisation, which broke down the African social structures, resulting in women being regarded as less economically productive and therefore intimidated out of the public spaces. However, as seen in the reviewed literature, other scholars such as Mbembe (2001) argue that gendered intimidation has internal origin because there were some indigenous African societies with strongly held gender oppressive cultural values. Whether the origin of gendered intimidation was external or internal, the study established that there were few cases of gendered intimidation within the WhatsApp groups at the ward level, and more at the County level. Since the County level WhatsApp groups consist of more people who do not know each other physically, we can argue that the people's motivation for gendered intimidation is the unlikelihood that they would not be physically "identified" by those they intimidate along gender lines. Paradoxically, whereas masculinity is expected to be visible and domineering, this metaphorical one on the WhatsApp groups is timid, only thriving under the people's inability to physically identify the perpetrators/intimidators.

Most of the gendered intimidation on the WhatsApp voice take place in Mt Elgon Constituency, Kanduyi Constituency, Bumula Constituency, Webuye East Constituency and Webuye West

Constituency and Kimilili Constituency, respectively. As we shall see in Chebet's narration in the next sub-section, the forms of gendered intimidation in Mt Elgon Constituency are more culturally inclined, as previously mentioned. The intimidation inform people's perception of the voice as techno-pessimistic. The study observed that the rest of the constituencies are comparatively semi-urban with a more cosmopolitan population composition; meaning the people are relatively less inclined to "retrogressive" cultural practices that enable for gendered intimidation. As we shall see in Siminyu's narration, most WhatsApp group members know each other virtually although they have never met physically. However, the case of Mt Elgon Constituency is unique in that the members in the WhatsApp groups may know each other well and are likely to have physically met, yet the gendered intimidation remains high. This contradicts both the deduction in the previous paragraph about the motivations for gendered intimidation, and the metaphorical timid masculinity aforesaid. This latter form of metaphorical masculinity assumes traditional one that emphasizes patriarchy. It manifests in real-life and on WhatsApp groups in almost a similar way, because Mt Elgon Constituency has a relatively smaller geographical size, and almost all the people know each other, and constantly use vernacular language during electoral deliberations. In Bungoma County, the use of vernacular languages symbolically means the people are well acquainted with each other. We can regard the Mt Elgon Constituency's unique form of WhatsApp gendered intimidation as the Afrocentric version, and the Kanduyi Constituency form as the Westernised version. As we shall see in the sub-sections herein, both the forms of gendered intimidation affect how the people use WhatsApp voice to participate in electoral deliberations.

How does the Voice Limit People Along Sexual Relationships?

As we shall see in Chebet's narration in the next sub-section, the Mt Elgon people's culture regard women as lowly in the society; and this contributes to denying them admission into the WhatsApp

groups. Although the study attributed this form of gendered intimidation to internal factors in the previous sub-sections, we can draw from Vansina's, (1962b, p. 327) discussion that many African societies had "laid down principles of checks and balances as well as the recognition of, and respect for rights and freedoms' of women", to argue that the social place of the women in Mt. Elgon Constituency was destroyed by colonialists (Busia 1962). The study noticed that the society was simultaneously influenced by both external and internal factors, in a way that we cannot wholly attribute existing phenomena to either external or internal factors. In the Constituency, the women who are in sexual relationships or married to men from the political-opponent clans or minority tribes are often the most suspected to be political traitors. This, coupled with the majoritarian Sabaot people's belief that when a woman marries, she becomes the first child of her husband, puts the women way far below men on the social ladder. As a result, during WhatsApp electoral deliberations, the members would seek to know whether and where a woman is married before they may consider her contributions to the group. The de-emphazisation of the women voices on the WhatsApp platform in the Constituency constitutes the masculine intimidation that discourages the women from taking part in electoral deliberations. More so, as we shall see in the section on economic resource deprivation and WhatsApp voice, Chebet's narration reveals that the men are the culturally appointed custodians of the economic resources, and therefore would dictate how and why women engage in WhatsApp electoral deliberations. These oppressive and exploitative social position of the women in Mt Elgon Constituency creates the gendered intimidation that inform their conception of the WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic during electoral deliberations. The metaphorical emasculation of the WhatsApp shows up in the two different forms identified but play the same role on the WhatsApp groups- intimidate women along gender lines. According to Chebet, men exhibit raw masculinity and subtle masculinity to women during

WhatsApp use, to an extend that the women get so used to it that they consider it normal in the Mt Elgon Constituency.

The ways through which gendered intimidation take place in Bungoma County range from subtle humour to open threats. Most cases of the gendered intimidation among the women are along body shaming, while for the men, it is along exaggerated personal sexual inabilities. For example, Nasombi (not her real name) a livestock husbandry expert in Kanduyi Constituency narrated that:

"I stopped active engagement in WhatsApp groups in Bungoma County because it degenerated into personalised attacks. During the 2017 election period, a debate started about whether the sitting governor deserved to be re-elected. It was a basic fact check about his score card in his five years in office. I was actively involved in the arguments [deliberations] with members about the economic impact of establishing a chicken slaughterhouse in Chwele, where the people culturally find fun in slaughtering the chickens by themselves. *Si vifaranga zikianguliwa home early in the year tunasemanga jogoo zikiwa tutazikula Christmas? Mbona hatusemangi tutanunua kuku imechinjwa for Christmas.* (We all know when a hen hutches her eggs into chicks early in the year, we expect that the cockerels would be reared in anticipation for slaughter on Christmas day of that year. We do not plan to buy slaughtered chickens, do we?). Then suddenly, a guy came from nowhere and replied to my post, 'We shall start taking you serious the day your ass will grow bigger than the size of a cockerel'. At first, I did not feel anything, I thought it was a childish thing to say amidst such an important debate. So, I ignored it. After a while, I noticed that some group members were cheering up the person for posting such a non-issue. Some thanked him for showing me my rightful position in the group. Since that day, I have never actively taken part in the arguments [deliberations]. I only read posts. I did not leave the group because it is informative about political news."

Siminyu, (not his real name) from Bumula Constituency narrated that:

"I was innocently defending my preferred political candidate in a WhatsApp group, where I was actively engaged in an argument. Then some lady whose candidate was an opponent to mine started hurling insults at me. The group members cheered on. I asked the admin to stop her, but he did not. I realised I was appearing as a loser in the argument. So, I started insulting her back, because that was the only way we could balance out. Then she said […he pauses with a chuckle] *'wewe ni mjinga mpaka hata sperms zako hazijui ku swim'*. (You are so foolish that your sperms lack the instincts to swim and cause fertilisation to a woman). Well, I hanged on in the argument, but I felt so abused [intimidated] that I did not want to ever face her again [deliberate in the group]. I did not leave the group because my political candidate needed the group members' votes, but I tread carefully not to cross the path of that lady."

From Nasombi's and Siminyu's narrations above, we learn that the WhatsApp voice allows for intimidation along gender lines during electoral deliberations. We can analyse the narratives above by contrasting them with Vansina's, (1962b) discussion on indigenous freedom in a way earlier demonstrated; where scholars such as Busia, (1967) and Wiredu (1997) argued that the indigenous freedom was destroyed by colonialism. If we analyse the narrators above together with Chebet's narration in the next sub-section, we can establish that the motivating factor for gendered intimidation in Bungoma County's WhatsApp groups are both external and internal. For instance, in Kanduyi Constituency where there is relatively better education facilities, security, life opportunities, and less inclination to "retrogressive" cultural practices, we can interpret the gendered intimidation as freedom of expression; which tends to be fifty-fifty between men and women. This is because the men and women have relatively equal opportunities to stand up for themselves; due to educational facilities, among others, which enable for both genders to empower

themselves. We must also note that equalising life opportunities such as education only balance out the gendered intimidation but does not eliminate it from the WhatsApp groups electoral deliberations. This is unlike, in Mt Elgon Constituency where, as we shall see in Chebet's narration in the next sub-section, the internal factors including the inclination to retrogressive cultural practices, have not provided for the equalising opportunities in the people's lives; thereby placing the woman lower on the social ladder. This makes her vulnerable to gendered intimidation during WhatsApp deliberations. These internal/Afrocentric and external/Western motivated gendered intimidation inform the people's conception of WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic during electoral deliberations. Noteworthy too, the metaphorical emasculation in this paragraph has been used refers to both the men and women. Therefore, the concept masculinity or emasculation refers to the gendered intimidation by both men and women during electoral deliberation.

5.3.1 Gendered Intimidation and the Economics of WhatsApp Use

This sub-section of the study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation begins with a narration from a female participant from Mt Elgon Constituency called Chebet (not her real name). She is a sociologist by profession, and she narrates that:

"I take part in WhatsApp discussions [deliberations] for fun. I know no one takes me seriously. I belong to many WhatsApp groups in Mt Elgon Constituency. [She pauses], I am well educated. but the people in my community do not recognise my contribution in the society because I am female. As a sociologist, I can explain why some WhatsApp relations exist in the forms they do; and why my community uses it the way they do during electoral deliberations. However, the people would rather listen to a male person who has not gone to school than to me. They always dismiss me by telling me to get married. [she reflects], imagine, I am not entitled to any property at home. It all belongs to my brothers, some very younger than me, [she pauses] I am 26. And they are not

educated. Here people don't value education. I went to school because it was free during Kibaki's reign; and my brothers used to do most of the framework, so the family didn't need my help much. But you see the schooling has not entitled me to any family property management…[pauses] because I am female. So, when I need to buy some personal effects, I have to either ask them [brothers] or my parents for money. My brothers and dad keep all the family proceeds from the sale of our dairy products and crop harvesting. The men here [in Mt Elgon Constituency] are not educated, but my family insists that I should not marry from outside our tribe. And even if I married, the man shall have to decide whether I work or not, and when to give me money for personal upkeep in case he decides I should not work. So next time you might not find me on WhatsApp to ask me these questions… because some man shall have decided I should not work. And I shall not have data bundles to discuss [deliberate] electoral issues here [in Mt Elgon Constituency]. Anyway, I have decided to wait until an educated man from our community comes by [she chuckles amidst frustration in her face]."

We can analyse Chebet's narration about how the cultural rights allocate all economic resources to the men, through Tacchi's, (2012) conceptualisation of WhatsApp voice in terms of poverty. We can see that the women's access to the WhatsApp voice in Mt Elgon Constituency is emasculated by masculinity, which emphasizes male ownership of the economic resources. The emasculation disallows the women from owning resources to enable them to undertake their own electoral wishes during WhatsApp deliberations. We can parallel this with the colonial and post-colonial media in Kenya, where the working environment demonstrated in the introduction chapter was so hostile that the women stayed away. As a result, they w did not take part in the economic activities leading to dependence on their male counterparts. Take for instance, in Mt Elgon Counstituency, if a man avails data bundles for his wife, he would determine whether she has

bundles to takes part in electoral deliberations or not. He is also likely to sway her political persuasion in a way she would not have chosen if she had her own resources to acquire data bundles (see Couldry, 2010 p. 27). During WhatsApp group deliberations, the women would be cautious not to offend the people who may influence her husband into refusing to facilitate her with data bundles. In fact, to employ another logic, the fact that the resources are in the hands of men as narrated by Chebet above, means that they determine whether the girl child goes to school and for how long, hence the study's conception of emasculation as metaphorical. The unschooled girl child would lack the needed knowledge and analytical skills to engage in WhatsApp electoral deliberations, while the semi-schooled one would not have sufficient skills for the same. As we can see in Chebet's narration, this is despite the fact that the girl child's WhatsApp voice is ignored by the men who remind her to marry if she wishes to be taken seriously. These forms of emasculation, occurring as either subtle and/or explicit gendered intimidation along economic lines inform the women's perception of WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic.



Fig. 13: Photo by Author facilitated by West media: women amongst the voters queuing to cast their votes in a by-election in Bungoma County, Kabuchai Constituency in February 2021.

How Does Childbearing Choices Limit Women's Deliberations?

When the men are the resource custodians in Bungoma County, the women may lack the freedom to make personal choices including when to have children; yet in many ways, childbearing directly affect the women participation in electoral politics, be it during WhatsApp electoral deliberations or the actual physical voting. During fieldwork it was observed that, the Kenyan electoral system gives preference to pregnant women and those with infants during voter registration and on the voting day. We can use Vansina's (1962b p. 327) discussion that the women in indigenous Africa were accorded "respect and freedoms", to explain why the women were ushered into voting booths without queueing for hours as the rest of the voters. There have been cases in Bungoma County and Kenya at large, where some women have borrowed babies to go with them for voting (Reuters, 2017), to avoid queueing. Therefore, the childbearing cycle is particularly important for the Kenyan women in ways the men should not be the singular decision makers about when they should have babies. Chebet remains unmarried because of the cultural norms requiring her to marry within her tribe. Besides denying her the chance to marry whoever she wishes to, the cultural practices would obviously deny her the chance to synchronise her childbearing cycle with the electoral period to her benefit. This further informed the study's conceptualisation of the limitations as metaphorical emasculation, due to the patriarchal overtones. The synchronisation is also important because during pregnancy the hormonal changes in women bodies may affect their ability to effectively engage in WhatsApp electoral deliberations. This, coupled with the time required to nurse newborns would not allow for meaningful WhatsApp electoral deliberations thus emasculation to the women who deliver babies at the peak of electoral deliberations; should the husbands wish so.



Fig. 14. Source: Reuters 2017: Kenyan Women allegedly with borrowed babies to jump queue for voting during the 2017 national elections.

As we shall see in the sections to come in this thesis, the WhatsApp voice contributes to the denial of women space for electoral deliberations during mobilisation for physical rallies. As narrated by Wafula, the WhatsApp voice is often used to mobilise people into physical political rallies. As a result, we can argue that when the WhatsApp voice political mobilisation translates to the physical rallies, the volatile Kenyan politics becomes extremely masculine and would not allow for heavily pregnant women to present themselves to the WhatsApp-mobilised crowds for the electoral deliberations. Therefore, to deny women the right to decide when to get pregnant constitutes the metaphorical emasculation, which in turn influences how and why they use WhatsApp in electoral deliberations. The women would not effectively use the WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations, since they cannot use it for mobilisation of the crowds when pregnant. As seen in the previous chapters, affect runs deep in the Kenyan media, shaping how the people use it during electoral deliberations.

5.4.0 Economic Resource Deprivation and WhatsApp Use

Drawing from the concept of organisation in the study's framework, we shall see that in this the study, the dominant social actors (re)organise (Anonymous, 2016) economic resources to punish political dissidents and reward the loyalists. This affects the efficacy of the WhatsApp voice. There are unresolved economic issues in Bungoma County, leading to the people's economic resource deprivation. As seen in the introductory chapter, the subsequent governments employed tactics to economically deprive the people perceived as critics. This was to ensure they do not access public space to express their critical opinions about government. Economic deprivation was the fourth most mentioned as a WhatsApp voice techno-pessimistic factor. As we shall see in the narrations by Kiberenge and Wafula in this sub-section, their lack of resources to buy data bundles needed for WhatsApp voice electoral deliberations, is proof of the voice's ineffectiveness. The

WhatsApp voice is not accessible by those who do not have sufficient resources to buy data bundles. We can conflate the WhatsApp voice infectiveness with the KNCHR (2017) and the KPHC, (2019) to offer a historical analysis of the economic resource deprivation of the 1990s in Bungoma County; in which the central governments of the 1990s and early 2000s deliberately plundered the economic structures in the County to create deprivation among the people at the onset of the re-introduction of multiparty politics. The study observed that this created economic dependency among the people to tame the vibrant oppositional politics in the County, which subsequently curtailed the people's freedom of expression in the media. The Economic deprivation was achieved through central government's direct interference with Bungoma County economic structures through borrowing and failing to return large sums of funds from the large economic production firms such as parastatals in the County (KNCHR, 2017).

The borrowing was occasioned by the incumbents' need to reward their primordial publics (Ekeh, 1975), in exchange for political support in the County. The plundering enabled the central government to adopt tokenistic political participation of the people (Arnstein's 1969 p. 227) in the County's electoral politics. The study observed that this was coupled with delayed issuance of required voting documentation to people who attained the voting age in the County; to minimise on the voter numbers in wards and constituencies perceived to have oppositional political persuasive stance (see ACSS, 2021). The dominant social actors from Bungoma County who were used as accomplices in the electoral injustice aligned themselves to benefit politically and economically; through the rewards, such as access to the media, getting (se)elected to political offices through the electoral manipulations, and (mis)managing the funds used by the central government to distribute tokens/ little money to the dependent people in the County (KNCHR, 2017). Since the actors still possess the economic resources, they are in position to own and control

the social media/WhatsApp voice, thereby subtly determining how the people use it. The study regards this as emasculation of the people's electoral deliberations. This leads to the people's perception of the WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic.



Fig. 15: Photo courtesy of internet, (2021) showing the dilapidated Webuye Paper Mill in Webuye town, Webuye West constituency, Bungoma County.

How Do Material Struggles Limit Electoral Participation?

To date, the WhatsApp voice is inaccessible for electoral deliberations by the economically deprived people. The people lack facilitative resources needed for effective deliberation, which emasculates the efficacy of the voice. We can use Tacchi's (2012) conceptualisation of the social media/WhatsApp voice in terms of poverty, to argue that Bungoma County people were economically deprived to disallow them from participating in electoral deliberations. Carpentier (2016) conceptualises political participation as the involvement of the citizenry into politics within structured institutional, legal, and cultural logics. He criticises Arnstein's (1969) arguing that political participation involves complexities enhanced by discursive and material struggles, beyond just power. These complexities remain unaddressed in Bungoma County making the political participation through WhatsApp voice emasculated/unfacilitated. As we shall see from Kiberenge's narration in the next paragraph, the most emasculated/affected constituencies include Webuye East, Webuye west, Kanduyi and Bumula. This is because the constituencies were hosts to the County's largest economic infrastructures that were plundered, including the Webuye Pan Paper Mill, Kitinda Dairy in Kanduyi, coffee processing firm at Lukhome/Kibingei, among others (GoK, 1984). Through the analysis of Kiberenge's narration, we can see that the advent of social media/WhatsApp voice in electoral politics in the County attempts reinvent the vibrant politics of the 1990s and 2000s; whereby the people re-ignite the deliberations about the economic and political injustice perpetrated by the central government. However, the WhatsApp voice is infective at enabling access for the people, whose economic resource deprivation remained unaddressed.

For example, Kiberenge (not his real name) from Webuye East Constituency narrates that:

"Webuye town used to be a business hub because of the Webuye Pan paper Mill. The workers could live here renting our houses, buying food stuff, and educating their children in our schools. But since the Mill closed, we have no means of livelihood. My electricity was disconnected because of unpaid bills, I have to pay 20 bob [USD 0.2] to charge my phone at the barber's shop [most barber shops in the area add up as phone charging centres to diversify their income], I need bundles to get online for electoral deliberations. *Wewe unajua ile ya five bob? Hiyo ndo size yangu*. (Do you know there are bundles sold at five shillings [0.05 USD]? I buy and use that one). In fact, nowadays, every politician asks for the WhatsApp groups in the constituency so that they may share their political information; especially about where and when the physical rallies would be held. Since I cannot be on WhatsApp all the time, I miss out on the information about the dates and venues of the physical rallies. I cannot even follow the electoral deliberations within the groups to their conclusion because I run out of bundles."

Wafula, (not his real name) a resident of Webuye West Constituency narrates that:

"When I turned 18, I realised that all the politics in my constituency revolved around Webuye Pan Paper Mill's closure. I did not understand the politics [issues] surrounding it but my father who used to work there lost his job and all my siblings dropped out of school due to lack of school fees. I remember trying to join social media using some old phone in 2017. I wanted to understand the politics around the closure of the Mill, but the phone was a China one [poor quality]. It could go off at any time. *Unakumbuka vile governor alikuja hapa na gang yake time ya campaigns ... Wakasema wataifungua, but wapi?* (The then incumbent governor visited the Mill's premises during gubernatorial campaigns and promised to re-open it, but to date, it has not been re-opened). I lacked bundles to follow up the story…[sighs]. I could not keep tabs with news. More so, when my father lost his job at the mill, we moved to a mud house without electricity, so I cannot charge

my phone either. Luckily, I had a *mulika mwizi* (a basic phone with no internet component), so when this [internet enabled] one goes off, I use the other to stay in touch about political news by calling friends for updates [chuckles]."

The narrations above from Kiberenge and Wafula from Bungoma County can be situated within Mbembe's (2001) discussion that some African pre-colonial political entities were predatory; run based on greed and self-seeking interests. The Bungoma County dominant social actors' plunder of economic resource structures demonstrate the creed and selfishness. We can also borrow from Mbembe's (2001) critics who attribute the creed and selfishness to external factors/colonialism, to analogise the Bungoma people's economic deprivation of the 1990s with the slaves sold during indigenous Africa's slave trade period; whereby they both lived in aggression due to social disorientation occasioned by the dominant social actors. The Kenyan history of the media milestones also offer a comparison, whereby the successive African governments revised the media laws to make them stricter, to deter the contrary public opinions from fellow black people. We see that the Bungoma County WhatsApp users attempt to transfer their 1990s aggression onto the WhatsApp voice with the hope to redress their past economic and political injustices. This is made possible by the WhatsApp voice's ability to allow for the techno-affective politics; that is oiled by the people's social and cultural tensions (Goffman 1959; Mithun et al. 2016). As a result, the voice is perceived as techno-pessimistic during electoral deliberations. Although the voice remediates the people's real-life situations, allowing for amplified agitation for justice, it also robs them of logic and rationale (see Goffman 1959; Mbembe, 2017). The lack of logic and rationale emasculates/denies them the good intentions of seeking redress to the economic injustices.

5.4.1 (Il)legitimate/Mere Elections and WhatsApp Use

The study utilised the frame's concept of interpretation to establish that the economic and political injustices committed against the people in Bungoma County in the 1990s made them lose confidence in the electoral processes of the day. The people interpret electoral process as unfairly manipulative, with a predetermined outcome. We can borrow Laclau's and Mouffe's (1985) words, to argue that the 1990s economic marginalisation of Bungoma County people altered their rationale for participation in elections. Although elections are supposed to correct the power imbalance in society, in what Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 116) refer to as 'illegitimate power', the narrations by Kiberenge and Wafula illustrate that "mere" elections cannot correct the power imbalance induced in Bungoma County in the 1990s. The strive by the people to take part in WhatsApp voice electoral deliberation, shows that they are aware about the need for the power imbalance to be corrected in the County through meaningful elections (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Such meaningful elections are the type that offers a participatory opportunity for the people to increase their power position, against the dominant social actors (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). By manipulating the electoral processes in the 1990s through tokenistic political participation, the dominant social actors altered the "material positions and identities" of the people (Arnstein, 1969; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985 p. 116). Therefore, in order to have meaningful elections, that would correct the power imbalance in the County, the people must first be materially positioned/economically empowered. As long as the WhatsApp voice does not restore the people's material positions and identities; over and above the affective electoral engagements it enables, it remains perceived as techno-pessimistic.

Laclau and Mouffe (1985) expound that, material positions are part of a discursive-material knot; and they are knotted together with the meaning-giving structures of identities. We can localise this phrase to the narrations by Kiberenge and Wafula about electoral deliberations; and argue that the

dominant the social actors with more access to money/resources use it to influence the voters. The actors infiltrate the WhatsApp groups to spread their ideology, and also pay the voters so that they may abandon their democratic choice of whom to vote for in Bungoma County. The (mis)use of WhatsApp leads to the techno-pessimistic perceptions during electoral deliberations in the County. The actors' ultimate intention is to use their material positions/resources/money to influence the voters on WhatsApp groups and those physically located elsewhere to vote in their favour. This is popularly called vote buying (ACCORD 2008). It is the single most successful of the strategies used for election manipulation in Africa (NED, 2017). However, through the same WhatsApp voice, some vibrant groups in Bungoma County people now seek economic justice; to enable them to restore their hitherto lost material positions and social identities (cf. KNCHR, 2017; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985 p. 116). Though, their techno-affective approach to electoral deliberation, enabled by the WhatsApp voice, manifest as insecurity in the County. This is because the people use the WhatsApp voice to exclude the minority groups, perceived to have benefited from the economic injustice meted on them in the 1990s. As a result, the minority people are excluded from using the voice. As we can see, the WhatsApp voice enables and disables the people's pursuit for their lost material positions, identities, and deliberations.

More techno-pessimistic perceptions about the WhatsApp voice reside in the fact that the dominant social actors own and control the WhatsApp technology (Papacharissi, 2016). This implies limtation because they determine how the Bungoma County people use the voice. For instance, from Kiberenge's narration we realise that he can only afford data bundles that last him a few minutes online during the electoral deliberations. This has been shaped by the dominant social actors keep Kiberenge and others out of the electoral deliberations. Although the people may perceive that the use of WhatsApp voice to call the dominant social actors to account shows they

are in control, the fact that the dominant social actors own/control the infrastructure that enables the voice, is a technological power imbalance in itself. We can contrast this with the colonial and post-colonial media in Kenya, where the white colonialists and later the "elite" black leadership were clearly known to own and control the media. With the WhatsApp voice, the ownership and control are concealed, making the people to feel falsely empowered and free to undertake their will. As discussed in chapter three of this thesis, the Bungoma County people add/include the incumbents' contacts into the WhatsApp groups, perceptibly to enable them to participate in the electoral deliberations. They are unaware that the incumbents own the WhatsApp technology, and control how the people use it. As we shall expound in the next chapter of this thesis, the WhatsApp voice enables the dominant social actors to stay observant in the groups, making some people to feel watched; and unable to fully participate in electoral deliberations, due to their relations with the actors. Therefore, we can conceive the WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic or emasculative because it subtly provides space to the dominant social actors, to impede the people's participation in electoral deliberations in Bungoma County.

How Does Language Inform Techno-pessimistic perception?

The WhatsApp voice enables the Bungoma County people to deliberate in English language. Yet, From Wafula's narration above, the plundered economic infrastructure did not allow for him and other children to attend school due to lack of tuition fees. As a result, they cannot express themselves effectively in English. More so, they lack the basic analytical skills required for taking part in WhatsApp electoral deliberations. As we shall see from the narrations by Wafula and Kiberenge in the next sub-section, the children develop inferiority complex in their adult life; and form informational network relations from where they depend on those who can speak English to articulate their views in the WhatsApp groups. The language use can be traced back to the early

media development, where it enabled the media to lose and gain meaning over time. At all the times ranging from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period, language was used to inclusion and exclusion, depending on convenience. As earlier discussed, the indigenous languages are used to exclude the minorities during WhatsApp electoral deliberations; whereby the majoritarian Sabaot people in Mt. Elgon Constituency, and the Bukusu people of the larger Bungoma County use vernacular languages during the WhatsApp electoral deliberations to effectively exclude the minorities. The study's attempted Afrocentric approach is cognisant about the possible contradiction paused in discussion on use of English language, and the Westernised education system in Kenya. However, the fact that English is the official language in Kenya, means that, the majority of Kenya people can take part in electoral deliberations using the English language.

5.5.0 Information Network Relations and WhatsApp Voice

This sub-section uses the framework's concepts of selection, organisation, and interpretation to analyse how the WhatsApp users, who are also called informers, select the groups they wish to belong, organise their activities in the groups, and interpret their relations with the rest of the members (Anonymous, 2016). The study established the existence of networks of information relations within the WhatsApp groups, at the ward, constituency, and County levels. As we shall in the next couple of paragraphs, the relations within and outside the groups are techno-pessimistic because they limit the people's freedom of expression during electoral deliberations. Wafula's narration above, about his lack of education occasioned by his family economic constraints explains the reasons for the existence of these informational network relations within WhatsApp groups. An excerpt from his above narration says:

"…I did not understand the politics [issues] surrounding it but my father who used to work there lost his job and all my siblings dropped out of school due to lack of school fees… I wanted to

understand the politics around the closure of the Mill, but the phone was a China one [poor quality]. It could go off at any time…"

From the excerpt, we learn that the WhatsApp voice presents challenges to users with less self-expressive and analytical skills. As a result, the WhatsApp users enter information network relations as grassroot informers, who gather information and send it to their friends abroad, believed to have better access and use of the voice, due to their better education. The people abroad post the information in the Bungoma WhatsApp groups, masquerading as the sources. We can use Ekeh, (1975) concept of reward system in the African publics to analyse why these information relationships exist. First, as seen in Lagat's narration, we can argue that the grassroots informers fear reprisal attacks from opponent supporters if the information is attributed to them as the rightful sources. Second, the grassroots informers hope that those abroad would consider them for reward after using their information to gain popularity through the WhatsApp group posts. Third, the people abroad also hope for reward from the people in terms of being regarded as credible informers. Such reward from the people would be to be voted for when they decide to come back home and run for electoral offices. As earlier mentioned, the information relations between the grassroot informers and people abroad emanates from the inferiority complex created due to early school dropout in the cases of Webuye East and Webuye West Constituencies. On the other hand, through the analysis of to Wafula's narration, we learn that the grassroot informers from Bumula, Kanduyi and the rest of the constituencies in Bungoma County feel proud linking up with friends working abroad. Their motivation is that they would be considered for jobs, contracts, tenders, and monetary rewards when the electoral bids for the people abroad succeed (see Ekeh, 1975).

Another narration by the same Wafula (not his real name) of the previous, from Webuye West Constituency say that:

"I give [send] my information to a guy in USA to post it in our constituency WhatsApp groups. This is because people argue too much and ask many questions relating to the post. Some questions have no answers, but they [group members] insist on being answered. I normally see some difficult questions people ask, so I avoid posting because I cannot answer such questions. *Kuna siku mtu alipost news ya watoto wa shule kulipiwa ile bursary na governor, alafu watu wakaanza kuuliza ati during Lusaka's time what were the bursary figures. Sasa hio nitaipata wapi…na hayuko kwa ofisi...* [Pauses] *si yeye alihama na files zake, akaenda kuwa speaker uko, ama?* I saw someone post about the incumbent governor's bursary allocations, then the members started asking for the previous governors record on bursaries for comparison. Where would I find such information during an argument on WhatsApp? [pauses]. The previous governor must have moved with his documents, right? Where would I find him to ask for the documents?"

Kiberenge (not his real name) from Webuye East narrates that:

"I do not like being wordy, I take photos of the developments and any new events I come across in the [Bungoma] County but most especially in the constituency. I use my phone camera, so it costs me nothing. I then send to a friend abroad…I even don't know the exact country. He asks me questions about the photos and then he writes a WhatsApp post out of it. When questions emerge in the groups he posts, he gets back to me, and I answer those I can. *Nadhani huwa ana imagine the possible questions watu wanaeza uliza alafu ananiuliza ndo akae na majibu*. (I think he asks me the questions he anticipates group members to ask when he post the photos. Sometimes I answer him all the questions other times I have no answers. When I don't have the answers, I refer him to the other people I would have seen at the [grassroots] events… hoping they have the answers. *Hata asipopata majibu yote, bado huwa tu anapost hizo photos, na akisema hajui majibu na watu wananyamaza. Mtu mwingine akipost kitu na aulizwa maswali na aseme hajui majibu*

atachangamukiwa hapo mpaka ashangae. (Even if he does not find all the answers to his queries about the photos, he still posts them to the WhatsApp groups. When people ask him questions, he says he has not found the answers, and people are okay with that. But there are other members whose posts in the groups elicit many questions too, and if they do not have the answers, they are forced to delete their posts because they can't answer questions about it. Members respect the people abroad more".

How does WhatsApp Voice Limit Information Networks?

As seen in the narrations by Wafula and Kiberenge above, although the people feel as if they are directly participating in the electoral deliberations through the WhatsApp voice, they are only represented by the people abroad. This is because the decisions about whether/when to post their stories/information, and the angle taken in the stories are made by the people abroad. Therefore, the WhatsApp voice, does not adequately enable Wafula and Kiberenge to directly express their opinions during electoral deliberations. It limits them. We can theoretically locate the WhatsApp voice participation in the BBC Media Action (2016, p. 3), which argues that people can participate through the SNS. Using Laclau and Mouffe, (1985 p. 115) concept of participation, we can logically argue that Wafula and Kiberenge wish to use the WhatsApp voice to directly address their electoral issues beyond the "mere" elections in Bungoma County. However, the voice does not allow for direct participation; thereby emasculating/hindering the people from the meaningful participation (Carpentier, 2016). Instead of affording the direct participation/meaningful electoral deliberations to the people, by eliminating the information network relations, the WhatsApp voice conforms to the network relational complexities; thereby emasculating the people with inferiority complexes by shaping how and why they use the voice. From this perspective, we can draw from Wiredu's, (1997) concept of consensus democracy, in which he advocates for all-inclusive

Afrocentric democracy; to argue that the WhatsApp voice fails to adopt the inclusivity envisioned in the consensus democracy. The voice conforms with the Western democracy which is premised on representation and winner takes it all approach. As such, the voice emasculates Wafula and Kiberenge by not addressing their inferiority complex; and rather enabling them to seek representation from those abroad; who take all the credit for the(ir) grassroot information posted on the various WhatsApp groups. Logically, this leads to the conception of the WhatsApp voice as techno-pessimistic during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County.

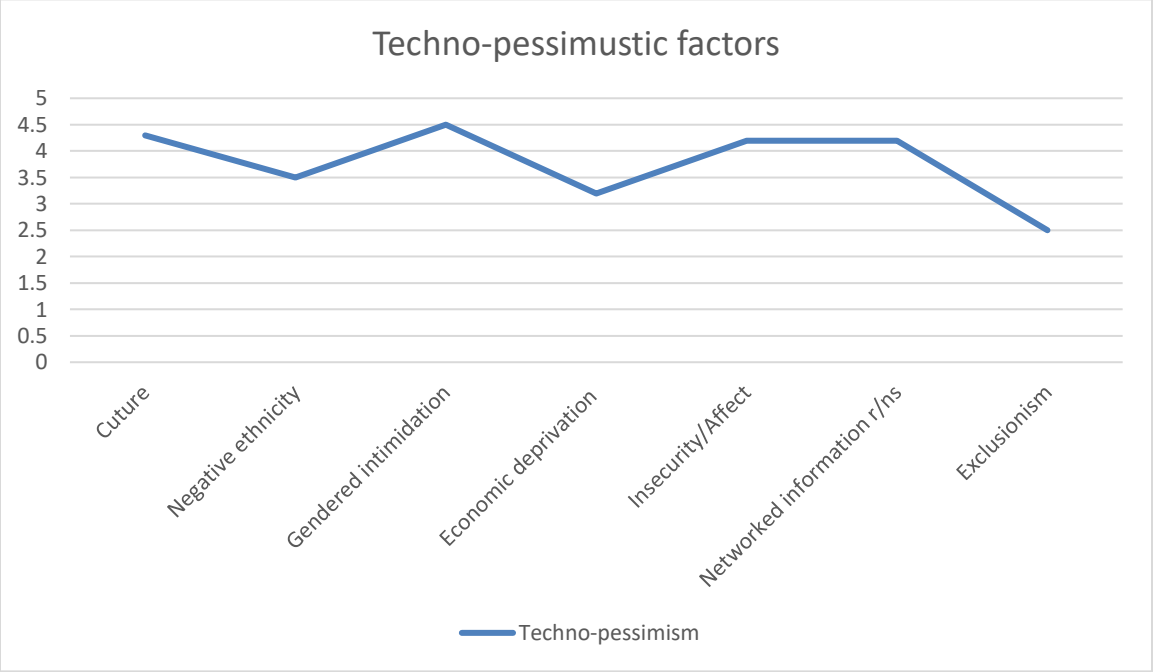

Fig 16: Showing the graphical presentation techno-pessimistic factors discussed in the chapter.

5.6 Conclusion

In conclusion to the chapter on the WhatsApp voice, the study analysed the major factors responsible for people's perception of the voice as techno-pessimistic. The analysis adapted Fiske and Taylor's, (1991) approach to explore how culture and ethnicity, insecurity/techno-affect, gendered intimidation, economic resource deprivation, information network relations and exclusionism/electoral injustice inform the pessimistic perception. The chapter adapted the perception theory onto one of the three techno pillars - the techno-pessimistic one, for utilisation it in the discussions. The chapter also paralleled the WhatsApp unique use with the coalesced media milestones discussed in the interdiction chapter, to offer a proper historical context within which to assess the WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations. Whereas some factors were discussed as stand-alone entities, others such as exclusionism were interwoven throughout the chapter due to their cross-cutting occurrence in the society. The factors were discussed under sub-sections, such as Afrocentric perspectives of democracy, Infra-politics of the poor, Autonomous Marxism, post phenomenological views, simultaneous majority and minority status, techno-affective politics, the concept of state apparatus, names and ancestral bloodlines, illegitimate power, and illegitimate elections, among others.

Chapter Six: Emancipation/Techno-optimistic Conceptions

6.0 Introduction

This chapter about the study on WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation, deals with the more popular narrative about how the voice is perceptively transforming the electoral politics across the continent. It borrows from the frame's construct about the analysis of factors influencing perception (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). The chapter also draws from the introductory chapter to analogise some major milestones with the WhatsApp gains and/or losses for proper contextualisation. The chapter illustrates how the enabling factors inform people's perception of the WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic. The factors include WhatsApp administrators' role, Media entrepreneurship, (Re)living virtual lives, Accountability, Remembrance/memorability of candidates to vote for, Networked economies, Ease of WhatsApp use, among other sub-themes.

The chapter answers part of the key research question: What factors inform WhatsApp pessimistic, optimistic, and/or pragmatic perceptions during electoral deliberations?

The specific research question the chapter answers is: How and why is the use of WhatsApp voice perceived as techno-optimistic?

The chapter is written in juxtaposition with the previous chapter on "Emasculation/Techno-pessimistic perception of WhatsApp voice"; chiefly because of the oppositional perceptions/meanings in the two core themes. However, as earlier said, the two are not absolute instrumentalists due to the midground position we shall see in the next chapter.

6.1.0 WhatsApp Administrators Role and WhatsApp Use

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations established that WhatsApp administrators avail and clarify electoral information to the people in the groups, enabling for

informed electoral deliberations. Besides their watchdog role to avoid slander and infighting, administrators update members with information, and clarify issues by articulating them in a way that all the group members understand. We can contrast this with the history of traditional media development in Kenya (Ochilo, 1993; Oriare et al., 2010), where the media was elitist, only serving the perceived literate people in society. We can draw parallels in Budzinski's and Gaenssle's (2018) assertion that WhatsApp administrators are social media version of gatekeepers of the people's voices, with Nyukuri's (not his real name) narration below, where he argues that he enables people's voices by clarifying information. Unlike in the traditional media, these WhatsApp gatekeepers are closer to people, simplifying and clarifying information in ways never witnessed in the media industry before. An excerpt from his narration about clarifying information says:

"… I step in [members' WhatsApp deliberations] to restore order or correct the wrongful information. Sometimes I am called upon to clarify information gotten from other [WhatsApp] groups in the County, or just break it down for the group members to understand. Other times I am called upon to give opinion about the electoral issues in the County…"

Through analogising the traditional media and WhatsApp use, we learn that although the administrators are the social media/WhatsApp version of the traditional media's gatekeepers, they are not as rigid, and government influenced as the traditional media. This enables the WhatsApp voice to provide for efficacy during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. As we shall see in Nyukuri's full narration in the next paragraph, he argued that the WhatsApp voice is effective in electoral deliberations because there can be no ghost accounts in the WhatsApp groups. This is despite Wairimu's narration in the previous chapter, showing that she uses fake usernames to gain admission into WhatsApp groups with tribal aligned admission criteria. The meaning of ghost accounts is subject to debate due to the relative newness of the concept in the study of digital media

(Wamuyu, 2020). We can loosely equate the misrepresentations in the WhatsApp voice to the traditional media's FM radio call-in sessions, discussed in the reviewed literature, which are mis/used to advance personal agendas, in what Brisset-Foucault, (2018) sensationally calls, serial callers. However, Nyukuri and his group members interviewed in Bungoma County agree that the WhatsApp voice is less prone to misrepresentations because of the limited membership in the WhatsApp groups.

Related to the above, the members are skeptical about the WhatsApp administrators' verification of information as misinformative and/or disinformative. They perceive the verification as partisan. As earlier mentioned in the introduction chapter, the concepts misinformation and disinformation are ideological and highly contested (Wasserman, 2017). Therefore, the members perceive Nyukuri's information verification services as misinforming/disinforming depending on their ideological point of view. This can be attributed to whether Nyukuri trains the members about the authenticity of the information verification process. The members argued that instead of entirely relying on Nyukuri's information verification, they reach out for comments from the newsmakers/political leaders about the information seeking verification. We can conflate the skeptics about Nyukuri's information verification with the narrative nature of the Bungoma society (Wefwafwa, 2014); to explain why they reach out for political leaders' face-to-face comments, instead of solely relying on Nyukuri's verifications. That said, the members agree that WhatsApp administrators steer the WhatsApp voice into providing a convenient space for electoral deliberations about issues that affect the people. This is especially because the people no longer need to go to townhalls prone to violence to access electoral deliberations. The convenience informs Bungoma County people's perception of the voice as techno-optimistic.

How Does WhatsApp Avail Safe Space for Deliberations?

As narrated by Nyukuri in the next paragraph, during the 2017 volatile political campaigns in Kenya, WhatsApp provided a platform for people to deliberate on electoral issues from the comfort of their living rooms. This enhanced inclusivity, since the people felt secure enough to participate in electoral deliberation, allowing for the advancement of electoral gains and the general expansion of democratic space. Mores so, the Kenyan media has perpetrated affective politics since colonial times (Ochilo, 1993; Wanyande, 1995), making the people to shy away from electoral deliberations due to the dangers involved. The WhatsApp has decreased the dangers and expanded the democratic space, thereby aligning with Asante's, (2007 p. 41) call to "liberate" the people on the continent and place Africa in her rightful context. The people of Bungoma County no longer fear about the physical violence that engulfed town halls and field rallies prior to the inception of the WhatsApp use in electoral deliberations. The transport costs incurred to get to physical venues for political rallies was cut down; the injuries associated with the crowds jostling during physical rallies were eliminated; the vices such as pick-pocketing among other risks are no longer a bother to the people. The pregnant women and those with infants can now participate in electoral deliberations in Bungoma County (Reuters, 2017). As previously narrated by Kiberenge from Webeye East Constituency, the ease of communication through WhatsApp groups enabled the people and the political candidates to keep in touch with each other, briefing each other about whether and when they will be attending anticipated physical rallies. This is different from the past where the electorates waited for hours for their preferred candidates to show up at rallies, without relevant updates about the candidates' arrival. These electoral gains brought about by the WhatsApp voice in the in Bungoma County inform the people's conception of the voice as techno-optimistic.

Nyukuri narrates that:

"As the group administrator, I monitor everything that goes on in the group 24/7. I need to know if things go wrong in the group so that I may step in to correct in time. I do not comment on the ongoings in the groups unless things are going wrong…say people are engages in insults, slander, personality attacks, or when I am called to clarify some misinformation/disinformation in the group…[pauses] yeah such. I step in to restore order or correct the wrongful information. Sometimes I am called upon to clarify some information gotten from other [WhatsApp] groups in the County, or just break it down for the people in the group to understand. Other times I am called upon to give opinion on the issues in the County. The WhatsApp platform allows the people to engage in electoral issue with substantiated information. The photos posted by the people must be captioned. In 2017, we offered training to the people to enable them to take part in election monitoring. I personally worked with IEBC [Kenya's electoral body] to ensure electoral information reached the people as needed. If we don't attend to their [people's] informational needs, they will move to other groups where they are served better. There are many groups that come up, some duplicating the roles of others, some stealing members' contacts to start own groups. The WhatsApp voice strengthens people's electoral deliberations. So many administrators want more membership as a bargaining power with the IEBC, political class, among others, during electoral deliberations. You see… [he pauses] people can deliberate at the comfort of their living rooms instead of going to townhalls prone to violence. The problem with our people is that they were used to WhatsApp as socialisation medium. Now we are reorientating them to use it [WhatsApp voice] for electoral issues. However, information clutter makes the WhatsApp inefficient because there is too much information around. The information overload overwhelms the people at times. My secret as the administrator is to post rarely, and articulate issues well. This way people will always want to follow up what I say."

6.1.1 Media Entrepreneurship and WhatsApp Use

We can conflate Nyukuri's narration above with Gill and Pratt's (2008) view that the WhatsApp voice avails unprecedented possibilities for engagement, creativity, and cooperation; to argue that the voice has enabled young people in Bungoma County to develop their political communication careers. As a result, the WhatsApp voice's expansion of youth careers in political communication informs their perception of the voice as techno-optimistic in the County. For instance, as explored in the introduction section, the internet enables the 'live commentators' who translate the Western movies into Bukusu dialect using figurative language, to enhance understanding and contextualisation to the Bukusu audiences, who may not understand English and/or Western culture (E. Namdemu personal communication, January 30, 2021). In the case of the WhatsApp voice, the administrators in the various groups are creative young people who demonstrate their political communication skills during electoral deliberations. The platform enables them to advance their professions in communication field besides earning a decent livelihood. We can loosely compare the WhatsApp entrepreneurial youths with the elite Africans who, after attaining their education abroad, came back and set up private independent media in protest to the colonial mis/managed media (Mamdani, 1996). Whereas they used the media to largely pursue political and later economic independence, the Kenyan youth are using WhatsApp voice to largely pursue economic before they engage in electoral independence/democracy. The youths have become popular in society, as communicators, mobilisers, influencers, among others. Besides opening their democratic space for better opportunities to facilitate electoral deliberations, and generally contribute towards democratisation in Bungoma County, they are economically empowered. Having begun as WhatsApp group administrators, some youths now work as County communication officers, from where they have attained bigger platforms to champion for electoral

deliberations, and this comes with more economic rewards. As we shall see in the sub-sections to come in this thesis, the WhatsApp voice has an intersectionality/linkage with the traditional media, from where the two converge to share audiences. This provides the young political communicators with even bigger platforms for conducting the electoral deliberations and attracting advertising revenues. More so, Bungoma County people have a traditional attachment to radio (see Oriare, 2010), due to narrative nature of the African society which has enabled for ease of adoption of the radio medium (Mazama, 2003).

Masua, (not her real name) in her late 20s, is a trained journalist with no media job. She works at a restaurant in Kanduyi Constituency. She narrates that:

"I always visit WhatsApp groups for humour at night after a long day's work. WhatsApp works best for me because most viral memes are used as status updates by the people whose contacts exist in my phonebook. Whether the messages conveyed in the memes are fake is not my concern because the WhatsApp messages do not sway my political stance. The political messages in the memes do not bother me. I visit WhatsApp groups to check out if there is any interesting information. Whether fake [mis/disinformative], political, or whatsoever. It turns out that the most interesting information is often the Fake [mis/disinformative] one [she chuckles]. I do not make any effort to establish if it is fake or not because I do not have time and even resources to do that. Look, the guys who develop Fake [mis/disinformative] news are really smart and all they want is to use the lies to get some public attention and pay...right? [she pauses], And the politicians we want to elect are doing the same- using lies to get public attention and get the jobs. So, if we say the Fake[mis/disinformative] news creator is wrong in society, but the politician is right, are we not having double standards? The energy we spend fighting Fake [mis/disinformative] news could be used to do something more important… like creating more jobs in the County".

From Masua's narration above, it is evident that there is the presence of social media entrepreneurs in Bungoma County who produce and disseminate videos, massively captioning photographs, and memes to please people. The availing of entrepreneurial opportunities to youths informs the Kenyan people's perception that the WhatsApp voice is techno-optimistic. We can use Ekeh's (1975) concept of rewards, and McLuhan' 1994 concept of sense awakening, to explain why the media entrepreneurs produce the memes, and why Masua loves these memes. According to the study's observations, the aim of the memes is that they may go viral until they are noticed by politicians in the County who, in turn may offer the (memes) creators/producers a job, contract or some money (see Ekeh, 1975). The memes are laced with subtle humor to make them irresistible, in what McLuhan (1994) calls awakening senses in the people such as Masua. The memes bring humour, in the otherwise volatile Kenyan politics that is filled with tensions and conflicts (see Lynch et al 2019; Mbembe, 2001). This gives a psychological relief to the people experiencing heightened political tensions during electoral deliberations. The study also drew from Wefwafwa's (2021) conceptualisation that the WhatsApp humourous memes psychologically equipped the African people to enable them cope with tensions and desperation brought about by COVID-19; to argue that the memes reduce tensions during electoral deliberations in Kenyan.



Fig. 17: Photo courtesy of Internet, 2016: Kenyan opposition leader during anti-electoral body (IEBC) protests, captioned for humour, arguably to catch the attention of the incumbent, for reward.

How has WhatsApp Gained and Lost credibility?

From Nyukuri's narration above, the inception of the WhatsApp voice into electoral deliberations in Bungoma County simultaneously limited and enabled for the people to participate in election monitoring, which reduced electoral manipulations. Nyukuri narrated that the WhatsApp administrators continuously alerted the group members about the 2017 electoral campaigns and perceived electoral malpractices, to enable them to rush to the polling centres to avert it. However, the many forms of WhatsApp mis/use such as fake news and deep fakes erodes the people's faith in the technology. Although the KNCHR, (2017) claimed that deployment of the social media into electoral deliberations contributed to the Kenya's 2017 election result nullification, there are many other incidences where the voice has been used to fuel tensions in the already volatile electoral environment. We can invoke Busia's (1967) assertion that indigenous Africa upheld the people's voices regardless of their social status and gender, to explain the success and failures of the social media/WhatsApp use by Bungoma County people and Kenyans at large. First, the people's "equal" social status enabled them to collect the perceived evidence of election malpractice witnessed, leading to the historic election result nullification in 2017. However, the very WhatsApp voice used to collect the evidence is also used to fuel volatile politics. We can argue that the indigenous social institutions used to uphold peace were destroyed by colonialists, thereby depriving Kenyans of the mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution. According to Nyukuri's narration, social activist groups were invited into the groups to train members on how to use the platform to monitor the subsequent (by)elections; thus, the WhatsApp voice has played a central role in shaping the electoral deliberations and processes in Bungoma County and Kenya at large. However, the very WhatsApp is used by the dominant social actors, youths among others in amoral way for personal gains, thereby eroding the people's faith in the technology. That said, the use of the WhatsApp

voice to empower the ordinary citizenry into officials to monitor election processes in the County was a big milestone, that informed the people's perception of the voice as techno-optimistic during electoral deliberations.

The study about WhatsApp voice established that the youths become unavailable for hire as goons during electoral campaigns because they find gainful employment in using the WhatsApp voice in Bungoma County. The youths who would be hired by the dominant social actors as goons to cause election related violence can now earn a living by creating memes for pay. According to Nyukuri's narration, some administrators earn a living through selling their group members as audiences to the political class during electoral period. These forms of averting insecurity through employment by the WhatsApp voice are regarded as informal and undocumented, due to the relative newness of the area of study. We can reflect on Mbembe's (2001) description of Africa as violent, to argue that the fact that the youths hitherto hired as goons to accomplish the dominant social actors' organised violence are now preoccupied with the creation of memes that defuses political tensions, means the WhatsApp voice is killing two birds with the same stone. The voice creates jobs as well as reduce physical violence during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. We can use Barassi's (2016 p. 5) observation that WhatsApp voice, among other new media technologies have enabled for the emergence of a new networked economy; to justify the youths' jobs created by the WhatsApp voice. As narrated by Masua, the entrepreneurial youths including the WhatsApp administrators' ultimate vision is to have as many members as possible; to enable them to attract the dominant social actors who would pay them for bringing large numbers of people together, for electoral campaigns. Although the autonomous Marxists critisise the networked economies, arguing that they embody values, shaped, and used by those in power to maintain their ideological positions, the economies have empowered the youths far more that than the "1970s saturated

national economies" (cf. Barassi, 2016 p. 5; Feenberg, 2013). In this sense, this sub-section recognises how the WhatsApp voice has simultaneously gained and lost credibility in Bungoma County's electoral deliberations. The enabling perspectives of the WhatsApp voice informs the people's perception of the voice as techno-optimistic during electoral deliberations.

6.2.0 (Re)living Virtual Real-Life and WhatsApp Use

From Masua's previous narration, we can deduce that the WhatsApp voice allows for only 256 memberships alluding to closed family- small enough to bring personalised satisfaction to members and big enough for diversity of views during electoral deliberations. We can compare this aspect to the Kenyan/African pioneer media/newspapers, which targeted a few literate people, mostly written in vernacular (Ochilo, 1993). Both the WhatsApp and the pioneer newspaper have limited audience by design. According to the study's observation, the limited membership gives the voice the illusion of accountability and trustworthy; allowing for meaningful deliberations, because the people lower their guts and become "trusting" to co-deliberators. The same can be said about the pioneer newspaper, which, besides having as small literate group of African readers, it was largely illegal and thus had to be distributed to trusted people. We can localise Goffman's (1959) concept of life performance, to the pioneer newspaper and WhatsApp groups, to argue that the people of Bungoma County re/live(d) their communal life on the platforms. The WhatsApp groups act as the people's virtual families, clans, tribes among others, from where trust, sense of belonging, among others are nurtured. And the same can be said of the pioneer newspaper readership. This explains Lagat's earlier narration, in which we see that the WhatsApp groupings in Bungoma County tend to take clan/tribal inclinations. Unlike the pioneer newspaper, lowering the people's guts due to trusting people perceived to be close makes one vulnerable to misinformation and disinformation. As aforesaid, the WhatsApp administrators help to verify

news, through quick fact checking. This is despite the people's skeptism about the news verification.

We can use the previous narrations by Wairimu and Nasombi that people visit WhatsApp for different reasons, to argue that the WhatsApp administrators' biggest challenge is not to verify the news for the people, but to establish their satisfaction/intentions in the group. For instance, except through their exit from the group, the silent members' satisfaction/intentions cannot be established. The administrators may verify all the news, even as members' intentions may not be to get the verified news, but rather to spy for their preferred political candidates. Others may want to follow conversations to get information about their personal security. Therefore, the complexity that comes with the simplicity of the defined social grouping of less than 256 members is far more perplexing than it appears. Wekesa (2020) opines that the WhatsApp voice is peculiar in that it is both an open and closed social media group. It is open because the membership is open for everyone's admission; and closed because unlike other social media, WhatsApp membership has limited admission. That notwithstanding, these complexities excite the people based on their intentions, making them to perceive the WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic.

How Does WhatsApp Actualise People's Real-life Virtually?

Perpetual's (not his real name) narration below can help substantiate the above paragraph even further. The media entrepreneur from Kabuchai Constituency narrated that:

"I am in over 100 WhatsApp groups in the County. Some are elitist groups with lecturers, popular media personalities, lawyers name them all… [pauses]. They all use big English to discuss big ideas on the groups, citing philosophical books. However, when we meet up for a cup of tea, they use simple language to discuss the same ordinary stuff [things] that the lower-class people discuss. For example, they want the non-Bukusu people to leave Bungoma County, they want industries

revived through government funding without the assessment of their economic viability, they want their own clansmen to vie for particular political seats in the County, among others. These are the very things the ordinary people discuss in the WhatsApp groups. But the elites want to discuss in private, away from the WhatsApp platform… [he pauses]. You see, I noticed their discussions on WhatsApp are kind of show off. They want to impress rather than share their true stances. I think they are in some kind of bondage [he laughs out loudly]. *Sisi tuna uhuru wa kusema kwa group, hao hawana. Wanajifanya ati ju wamesoma sana watu watawaona kama raia wakisema maneno kama yetu. Sasa wanakuja kusemea uku nje lakini kwa group in kizungu mingi tu wanasema lakini hio sio ukweli iko kwa roho yao* (see, the low-class people such as me have the freedom to say anything we want on the WhatsApp groups. For them [the higher social status people], they do not want to speak out certain things on WhatsApp groups because they feel they will appear like us, [the low social status people]. Now they come to share their true positions out here [during face-to-face interactions], away from the WhatsApp group deliberations. Their true position about the [electoral] issues they shun away on WhatsApp is just like ours. But… [he reflects] the way I see this thing [WhatsApp voice] affects us too. When you chat [text] too much you forget to speak fluently. There are people who really impress on WhatsApp but when you meet them in real life, they cannot express themselves as the do online. So, we are not as free as we think."

We can directly contrast the narration above with Kiplong's, (not his real name) narration below, to get varying points of view about WhatsApp use in Bungoma County. He is a government administrator in Mt Elgon Constituency, who views himself as a higher social status person. He narrates that:

"I find it difficult to use the WhatsApp voice for electoral deliberations because even when I give my own opinions the people in the group think I am giving the government position on the issues.

I once endorsed my preferred MCA candidate [ward representative candidate] and the people started accusing me that I have been sent by the government to lay ground so that the election may be rigged in favour of my preferred candidate. I could not deliberate any further because the accusations were becoming more and more serious. You see, … [he sighs] now my civic rights are lost just like that. I cannot exercise them. Still, I would easily face hostility on the ground while serving the people as the government administrator, because some would perceive me to be partisan. Because of that, I avoid using social media for electoral deliberations. But I know it provides a good opportunity for the grassroots people to deliberate on issues. I am in several groups in my ward and constituency, where I observe the deliberations therein. People from the wards use WhatsApp [voice] a lot… even those who haven't been to school. *Sida yao huwa ni stima. Hakuna stima mahali wanaishi sasa lazima watacharge tu simu wakati wanaenda sokoni, mbali kidogo na kwenye wanaishi. Sasa si hiyo wakati hawako mtandaoni wanakosa mijadala mingi*? (The people's major hinderance to using the WhatsApp [voice] is the lack of electricity at their residences. When their phone batteries run flat, they must walk some distance to a nearby market for charging. In the process they lose out on some important electoral deliberations. Or they may be reluctant to take part in as many deliberations as they would have wished to. This is because they want to save their phone batteries charge for the preferred electoral deliberations). Some charge from public spaces, in vehicles, in church…everywhere they see an electric socket".

From the two narratives above, we can see that the WhatsApp technology enables the lower social status people to actualise their real-life electoral performances on the virtual platform (see Goffman, 1959). Through the reflection on Ekeh's (1975) concept of the primordial and as civic publics in Africa, we can argue that the higher social status people are able to virtually live their double/dual lives, as narrated by Perpetual. The WhatsApp voice also allows for many of the lower

social status people to openly live their primordial life, “freely expressing themselves”. The lower social class people who choose to pretend to support the higher social status people’s political stances, ostensibly to make money out of it are also enabled to achieve their will through WhatsApp voice. The study remained aware that the WhatsApp voice denies the high social status people the space to live their primordial life; due to the belief that the dominant social actors are watching them and would reward them if they portrayed themselves as civic publics. As seen in Perpetua’s narration, these high social status people present logical arguments on WhatsApp groups to identify themselves as the civic publics, while in their real-life they share stances with the low social status people. Since it is their voluntary decision to aspire to join/enable the dominant social actors in advancing hegemony ideologies, the study assumes that such, is beyond its liberatory dimension, to free the African people (see Asante 2007 p. 41). From the narrations above, we learn that both the low social status people and high social status people conceive the WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic because it enables the people to participate in electoral deliberations; to the extent they wish to be liberated.

6.2.1 Accountability and WhatsApp Use

The WhatsApp voice enables the people of Bungoma County to collect and share evidence of secretive social evils including electoral malpractice (SIMELab 2019). If inversely read, Foucault’s, (1977, p. 26f) reflection that surveillance technology creates conformity to the people, making them to “think and act” in fear of punishment by the “watching” government; can be used to argue that the people use the WhatsApp voice to surveil the dominant social actors. As a result, the people make the actors to think and act in conformity, shying off the electoral malpractice; for fear that the people would catch them and voting them out as punishment. We can contrast the aspect of accountability with the opaqueness that engulfed the early government media as

discussed in the introductory chapter. The audience was largely passive, with the media houses deciding what the people should be informed about (Oriare et al, 2010). Today, the WhatsApp voice enables for inclusivity of many people at all levels; as aforesaid, some co-produce content, and those who cannot read and write can participate through the visual and audio components of the voice. The inclusivity enables the people to be all over, surveilling the dominant social actors. That said, the study stayed aware about Mbembe's (2017) caution that the abdication of liberal fights to the technology is fundamentally undemocratic. For instance, the Bungoma County people's narrative feature may not be best utilised during WhatsApp voice electoral deliberations because the voice emphasizes on the literal texting component. Better still, as we can see from Masua's previous narration, the fact that the media entrepreneurs abandon their moral values in pursuit of financial gain is detrimental to the nurturing of the WhatsApp space for electoral deliberations. As such, the WhatsApp voice's ability to morally inform Bungoma County households is questionable.

How does WhatsApp Hold the Powerful Accountable?

Masua narrated further that:

"People make political choices after they talk to friends and family at individual level. Face to face communication matters a lot. If a Member of County Assembly Aspirant (MCA) visits our home and asks us to vote a certain presidential candidate, we would do so. Of course, the visit would be accompanied with some money and other goodies including food stuffs. We vote based on face-to-face interactions, not aspirants' development plans shared on WhatsApp groups. From my experience, the plans are only used for selling the candidates to the electorates. It is never used for holding the candidates accountable in future. *Unakumbuka joke ya Kiraitu Murungi ile time ya Kibaki*... [she recalls], *Alisema, we said in the first 100 days we shall have accomplished sijiu nini*

nini…, then boom, akarudi kusema sikusema 100 days on a continuous count. Kwa mwezi tunaeza count hata one day towards the 100. (Remember the joke the then minister Kiraitu Murungi said during Kibaki presidency... [she recalls]. They had promised to deliver many of their promises within their first 100 days in office, however when they failed, the minister joked that they did not mean the 100 days would be counted continuously. They could count one day in a month towards the 100 days). Such political rhetoric makes us very skeptical about their plans. Remember Uhuru's campaign agenda that he would deliver sports stadia and a 24-hour economy in Kenya? Where are they? [she giggled]. Such are the reasons that make us go for face-to-face talks with the political aspirants. When the MCA is done visiting us, we do not follow him [or her] to the next-door neighbour to know the promises he [or she] makes there. This makes the idea of collective accountability very difficult. So now… [she chuckles] won't you be bad to try to hold a politician accountable over things you saw on WhatsApp? To my understanding, the platform is only important at holding politicians accountable for misconduct, not their electoral promises. I mean the misconducts such as corruption, sexual scandals…yes such."

From Masua's narration above, we realise that the WhatsApp voice is used to hold the political class accountable, albeit with limitation to personal misconduct. This contradicts the colonial and most post-colonial media in Kenya, where those in power largely and sometimes wholly, used the media as an instrument of coercion (see Althusser, 1971). As a result, in the colonial and post-colonial time, the media's credibility was eroded. We can demonstrate how the media has gained credibility by conflating Masua's narrative with Mbembe's (2017) view that WhatsApp voice creates psychic bonding that make the people put aside their differences and champion for societal causes, including holding those in power accountable. Paracharissi (2016) agrees that social media/WhatsApp enables people to fearlessly unite and demand for accountability from the

dominant social actors. However, the extent with which the WhatsApp voice is used to hold the powerful to account in Bungoma County, can be understood through the analysis of Mbembe's, (2001 p. 9) description of Africa as "…chaotic and full of surprises". The people's electoral deliberations are not organised in the way an electoral aspirant can be held accountable for promises not delivered. For instance, the chaos and surprises can be occasioned by natural circumstances such as bad weather in the case of promises about road infrastructural. Others can be occasioned by PEV as was the case with Kenya during the 2007 elections (Fahamu, 2021; Ushahidi, 2021). Even more recent, the Kenyan government attributed COVID-19 pandemic to its the failure to fulfil the promises in their manifestos. Therefore, as narrated by Masua, the electoral manifestos/plans shared through the WhatsApp voice are used to keeps the names of the political candidates afloat in the public; essentially to enable voters to easily recognise them on the ballot papers on the voting day. As we shall see in the detailed analysis of the sections to come, keeping the names of the candidates afloat enables the undecided voters to vote for them based on the familiarity emanating from the numerous WhatsApp group posts.

6.2.2 Resisting Dominance and WhatsApp Use

This sub-section draws from the frame's construct of similarity/difference (Coren, 1980) to draw parallels with the study's finding that WhatsApp enables the people to stay informed without being compelled to reveal their truthful political persuasions to the group members. The construct of the frame assumes that similar things belong together, and different ones don't. Yet, different people, with different ideologies belong to the same WhatsApp groups, albeit under misrepresentation. The misrepresentation enables them to escape the aggressive campaigns targeting to influence those with differing political persuasions and those undecideds. It also minimises chances of people getting attacked (both online and physically) during the volatile Kenyan electoral

deliberations, where opponents are often viewed as enemies. This informs the people's conception of the voice as optimistic. We can localise Scott's (1990) concept of the infra-politics of the poor, to explain how the WhatsApp voice enables the perceived opponents/enemies to avoid/escape attacks in Bungoma County WhatsApp groups. As seen in Wairimu's previous narration, the WhatsApp voice enables the minority people perceived as political traitors/opponents, to pretend to share the majoritarian political persuasion; by assuming fake usernames to avoid being noticed, among others. As we shall also see in the narration by some *bodaboda* people, who belong to the lower social status, they pose as supporters of the candidates supported by the higher social status people in Bungoma County. This is meant to undermining the higher social status people's hegemonic ideologies, and to resist dominance from within. These insincere flattering by the minorities and lower social status people inform how they use the WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. The study remained aware that the insincerity results into tensions and suspicions; in what Ekeh (1975 p. 108) theorises that the two social classes try to simultaneous belong to both the "primordial public and civic public". These tensions and suspicions, further enable the group members not to share their truthful opinions about their preferred political candidates. In Ekeh's (1975) wording, the two social classes have different reward expectations; in that whereas the higher social status people want to be noticed by dominant social actors as capable of forming good secretariates/administrators when the actors win elections, the minority groups spy for the actors, who are their preferred candidates.

6.3.0 Ease of WhatsApp Use and the Social Class Relations

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations established that the ease of use of WhatsApp platform in Bungoma County during electoral deliberation emancipates the people. As we shall see in Waswa's narration in the next paragraph, even the least educated users said they

found the WhatsApp voice easy to use. From Kiplong's narration above, we can learn that even the most culturally attached people with less or no education, from Mt Elgon Constituency use the WhatsApp voice for electoral deliberations; without seeking help about how to use. This is despite the hinderances such as the lack of electricity to enable the people to charge their phone batteries without having to travel to the distant markets, lack of data bundles, and lack of quality phones, that would allow them to follow WhatsApp group deliberations to conclusions. This aspect directly contrasts the earlier media in Kenya where only literate people could read newspapers. However, radio, the most used medium is also among the easy to use; and as discussed in the introductory chapter, it has redefined the meaning of public debates in Kenya, in ways similar to WhatsApp voice (Mitullah et al., 2015; Oriare, 2010). As a result, people perceive the WhatsApp platform as techno-optimistic due to the ease of use. We can inversely read Tacchi's (2012) conceptualisation of the WhatsApp voice in terms of poverty, to explore how the people of Bungoma County have devised ways to enable themselves to keep connected to the WhatsApp voice. For instance, the study observed that many WhatsApp users in the County use public electricity power sockets to charge their phones whenever they have errands to run in the public spaces. According to Kiplong's narration, there is an unwritten rule in the County that any electricity sockets visible at the entertainment halls, churches, members club premises, public vehicles, among other public spaces can be used by the people to charge their cell phones. The study also observed that the *bodaboda* and *Tuktuks* people have improvised their bikes to enable them to charge their phone batteries using the motorbike's battery charging system. This allows them to follow and participate in the electoral deliberations on the various WhatsApp groups in the County on regular basis; while at the public waiting bays from where they pick up short distance travelers. The ease of use of the

WhatsApp voice, and the skills for improvisation, inform the people's conception of the voice as techno-optimistic during electoral deliberations.

Waswa (not his real name) has been a *Bodaboda* rider in Bungoma County for the past 13 years. He narrates that:

"Often, we follow the conversations on various WhatsApp groups in the County because it is easy to follow. The level of the English language used by the people is relatively easy to understand. More so, there are many stories told through photographs during WhatsApp deliberations. So, we follow the conversations with ease. When someone we know posts something on a group, we alert each other via text messages so that our members can come online and support the person we know. If someone posts something bad [we do not like] we still mobilise our people to come online and argue against it [the unpopular post]. The politicians reach out for us to help mobilise the people for rallies, and they pay us. We make convoys and hoot around the public places with banners as we shout the slogans of the political candidates who hire us. We blow the whistles to ensure everyone is so disrupted that they must look out for what is happening [he laughs]. The photos of our convoys [motorbikes] and the curious public onlookers are taken and posted on the various WhatsApp groups. This creates the attention needed by the politicians, both in the WhatsApp groups and in the physical world. We even mobilise our people to go and start off deliberations in the [WhatsApp] groups in support of a particular candidate as long as they pay us. We have organised ourselves into groups of 50 to 100 members. So, if half of us are online, that is a huge a presence to allow for support of a candidate. We do not care much about the candidate's manifestos because often they are MCAs aspirants, who are not from our wards. Why should we care about their agenda when they are not about our wards? I only support them in public for pay. *Mi natoka sio ward, nikiitwa na MCA wa namasanda ama Musikoma ward, nitashughulika na*

agenda yake inisaidie na nini? Si bora aanguse kakitu na sisi tuchangamshe crowd yake… [he chuckles] (I come from Sio Ward, what business do I have with the agenda for an aspirant from Namasanda or Musikoma Wards? Once the aspirant pays us, we make the crowd lively and that marks the end of the business). Our Motorbike association's leader finds out from the politicians about the schedules for their rallies, then informs us about the dates we shall be required to mobilise the public. Sometimes the politicians call our leaders and notify them about the need to mobilise for the rally, then our leaders notify us. So, we do a physical mobilisation and then post on the various WhatsApp groups. If the politician wants us to comment about the posts in the groups, then that would be upon some additional pay, over and above the physical mobilisation payment."

6.3.1 Inclusivity and WhatsApp Use

The study about WhatsApp voice and electoral deliberation explored how the voice enables for the inclusivity of the *bodaboda* people during electoral deliberations; through allowing for content co-production, with the dominant social actors. As narrated by Waswa above, the *bodaboda* people are called upon for online mobilisation of the people, from where WhatsApp content is created and disseminated. Although from Waswa's narration we learn that the *bodaboda* people's participation is based on the pretense, which does not reflect their true stance, the fact that the people are enabled to pretend to engage in the content production is better than the earlier days before the inception of the WhatsApp/social media. We can interpret the pretense using Scott (1990), in which he refers to it as the poor people's way of resisting dominance. As earlier mentioned, there are many ways the poor people use to resist dominance, including insincere flattering, feigned stupidity, hostile gossip, among others. We can also borrow from (Ekeh 1975) to put it that, the WhatsApp voice enables the *bodaboda* people/primordial publics to offer the intangible rewards/mobilise for the dominant social actors' rallies, in exchange for the monetary

rewards during electoral deliberations. The *bodaboda* people could not get to this level of participation before the inception of WhatsApp/social media. Therefore, although this may come out as a simplistic logic, the fact that the *bodaboda* riders can participate in the WhatsApp "mainstream" content creation during electoral deliberation, means that they are busy/unavailable to be hired to cause election related violence as was the case in the earlier days. We can locate the *bodaboda* youth engagement in the electoral content co-production in McLuhan's (1994 p. 5) projection that "there would be a time when it would become impossible to isolate the youths and minorities from the popular culture". As such, the WhatsApp technology has made it impossible to isolate the youthful *bodaboda* people, from the Bungoma County electoral deliberations. Other minority groups are included in the deliberations too, albeit not effectively, as discussed in the previous chapter. These previously excluded people now conceive the WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic during electoral deliberations because it enables for their inclusivity.

How are Forgetful/Undecided Voters Emancipated on Voting Day?

The WhatsApp voice enables for the people to remember the political aspirants' names and images because they are posted across many WhatsApp groups. The people, especially the undecided voters remember the images and names on the voting day, due to the numerous times they have seen them on the WhatsApp groups. We can use Mbembe's (2001) view of the African continent as dramatic, to describe how the WhatsApp content is produced in Bungoma county, to ensure it imprints memorable account in the voters' mind; to enable for remembrance of the candidates on the voting day. The content is created through deliberately stage-managed dramatic events, in which humour, sarcasm, ridiculing of political opponents, regurgitative oratorical speeches, among other theatrics are adopted. The stage-managed events are usually performed in public spaces, such as along busy roads, marketplaces, taxi parks among other places that would capture the public

attention. The duration of the performative events ranges from a few minutes of fleeting "convoys" of *bodabodas'* motorbikes along the busy highways; to hours of performances in the open spaces where the public spectatorship is invited. The performances often turn out to be easily and involuntarily executed due to the African people's dramatic nature (see Mbembe, 2001). The drama is ostensibly aimed at arousing curiosity among the people and creating memorability to enable them to remember the names and/or images of the political aspirants on the voting day and vote for them. The WhatsApp voice's ability to transpose the above-described performative actions of the people's lived experiences onto the virtual platform, enables the people to remember and vote for the political aspirants they want. The transposition of real-life performances onto virtual platforms also creates a sense of "ownership" of the WhatsApp electoral deliberations by the people in Bungoma County, hence informing their perception of the voice as techno-optimistic.

6.3.2 The McLuhanian View of WhatsApp Use

The study on WhatsApp use in electoral deliberations established that the WhatsApp voice has shaped the Bungoma County people's culture to align it with their communicative needs during electoral deliberations. For instance, as narrated by Waswa, the WhatsApp voice has altered the away the *bodaboda* riders and MCA aspirants in Bungoma County hold electoral deliberations, in a way the traditional media such as radio stations, TV station, newspaper outlets, among others, could not. We can invoke McLuhan's (1994) infamous metaphorical statement that "the medium is the message", to argue that the WhatsApp voice does not only convey electoral content to Bungoma County people, rather, it has the characteristics that enable for the awakening of the various senses of the people, to culturally align/adapt to the voice. For instance, as narrated by Waswa, we can put it that, WhatsApp voice awakens the senses of the *bodaboda* riders and MCA aspirants, in a way that culturally adhere to the medium. Therefore, chiefly, it is the characteristics

of WhatsApp voice that shape how the *bodaboda* riders and the MCA aspirants use it in electoral deliberations. The study remained cognizant of the contradiction this point poses, about the view that the WhatsApp voice only conveys the Bungoma County people's real-life performances and does not shape it (Gofman 1959). More so, the people are predominantly narrative, as opposed to the WhatsApp voice emphasis on the literal textual component. That notwithstanding, the WhatsApp voice is conceived as techno-optimistic by the people of Bungoma County due its characteristic awakening of the needed senses for electoral deliberations.

The WhatsApp voice allows the people of Bungoma County to adapt to their environment through the correct balance of the senses. In using McLuhan's (1994 p. 55) wording, the WhatsApp voice is the primary medium that brings out the particular sense of ratio, that affect the people's perception in the most balance way. For example, if the *bodaboda* riders and MCA aspirants were to use the radio medium to mobilise for the political rallies, the medium would not bring out the sense of the colours in the mobilisation. Therefore, the people's sense of ratio would not be balanced because they would be asking such questions as, what colours did the mobilisers clad? Again, the newspaper would not bring out the sense of sound while television may not bring out the sense of proximity due to multiple gatekeeping. On the other hand, the WhatsApp voice has all the characteristics lacking in the traditional media, which enables it to arouse the correct balance of senses in the people of Bungoma County.

How is the Traditional Media Emancipated in Bungoma County?

The WhatsApp voice has enabled the traditional media to reinvent itself in Bungoma County, thereby enabling complementarity instead of competition, during electoral deliberations. We can conflate McLuhan (1994) with the Kenyan media milestones, as demonstrated in chapter one, to

illustrate how the media has lost and re/gained credibility over time (see Mamdani, 1996; Ochilo, 1993; Oriare et al 2010; Wanyande, 1995). We shall begin by localising McLuhan's (1994, p. 82) "death of the book" prophecy to explain how the traditional media has re/gained credibility through the WhatsApp voice. Through the WhatsApp voice, the traditional media has reinvented itself, attaining the credibility that was hitherto lost over a period of time. In his prophecy, McLuhan, (1994) argued that the culture of producing one book at a go would "die" due to technological/printing press advancement. Analogically, we can regard the traditional media as the book, and argue that the traditional news production processes have "died" because of the advancement of ICT. The traditional media have had to reinvent themselves to match WhatsApp in awakening the people's senses in a correct balance (McLuhan, 1994). As a result, the traditional media have abandoned the culture of bureaucratic gatekeeping and the differentiated workers' roles. They have adopted ICT to enable for ownership of social media handles, production of multiple news editions, airing of live broadcasts, conducting of live phone-in interactive sessions, among other reinventions (McLuhan 1994 p. 36). One may argue that in Bungoma County, traditional media have re/gained credibility to the people due to the adoption of the WhatsApp voice's model of news production and reception. For instance, similar to Waswa's news production model seen in his narration, a single traditional media news reporter now sources the news, writes it, takes the accompanying graphics/photographs, edits the whole package, and then disseminates/distributes the complete news product to the audience – vias the traditional media's social media handle. The audience then give feedback to the reporter (see also McLuhan, 1994 p. 35). Logically, WhatsApp voice has pushed the traditional media into adopting the WhatsApp features that enable for complementarity in Bungoma County electoral deliberations. This informs the perception of the voice as techno-optimistic in the County.

Emphatically, the similarity in the models of content production and reception between WhatsApp voice and traditional media enhances credibility for the latter because the information is subject to verification through the ease of sharing on the social media platforms. This is beside allowing for bigger platforms during electoral deliberations. The study shows that the WhatsApp content now reaches the traditional media platforms, thereby expanding the electoral deliberation space and credibility. For example, in Bungoma County, social media handles owned by the traditional media select some of the content in WhatsApp groups and post it on their accounts. Even more credibility is enhanced when the people rely on the traditional media to discern/verify news from the WhatsApp platform, perceived to be fake. In the study, it was observed that some traditional media houses in the County run parts of WhatsApp content on their platforms during regular programming, perhaps to appeal/access the massive audiences on WhatsApp. These traditional media reinventions not only complement WhatsApp but also increase their credibility. For instance, people who do not have smartphones (hence cannot take part in the WhatsApp group deliberations) would access the gist of the deliberations through the traditional media to enable them stay informed about electoral deliberations. The information gotten traditional media is perceived not to be fake.

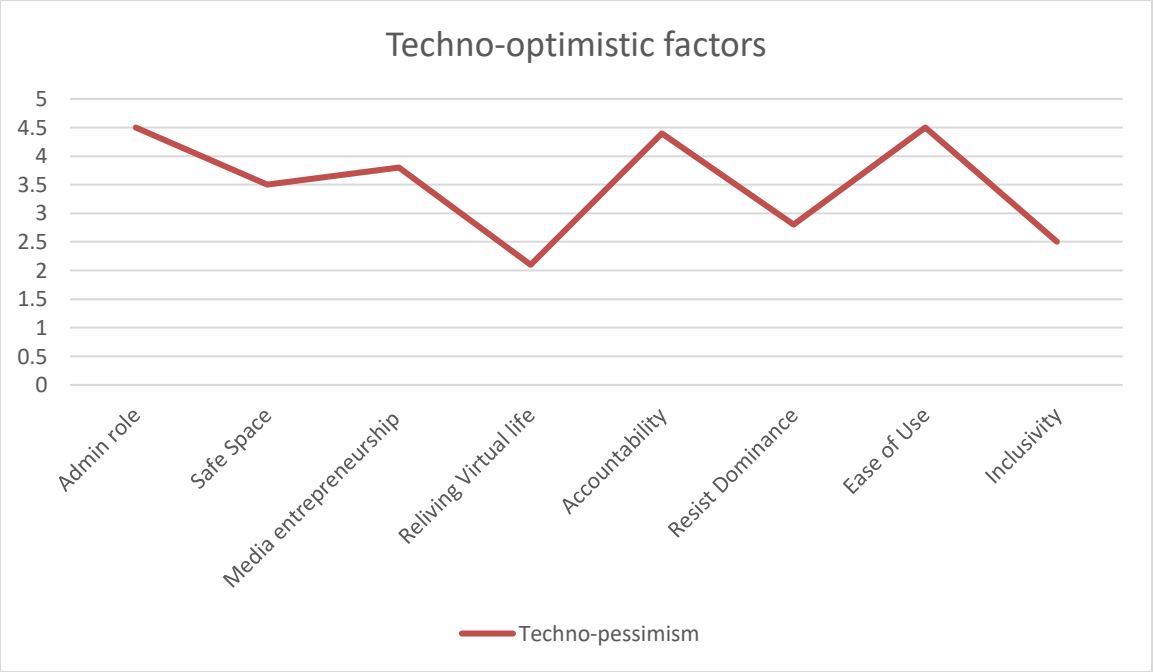

Fig 18: Showing the graphical presentation of the techno-optimistic factors.

6.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, study utilised the frame's constructs and concepts adapted onto the second pillar - techno-optimism, to explore enabling factors that allow the WhatsApp voice to emancipate the people's deliberations. While drawing from the Kenyan media milestones earlier discussed, the chapter analogises the traditional media with WhatsApp voice to establish in historical contexts, how the later has gained and lost credibility along the way, as it enables and limits people's electoral deliberations. First, the young people's creativity that often overlooks moral values, usually in pursuit of economic gain, is largely responsible for the WhatsApp voice's gain and loss of credibility; because it avails job opportunities but also deprive the youths of moral values. Second, the dominant social actors subtly determine how and why the people use the WhatsApp voice using reward system; even as the voice enable the people to hold the actors accountable. We can note from the above that the emancipative perspective of WhatsApp voice often works concurrently with the emasculative perspective during electoral deliberations. However, the concurrence goes unnoticed; making the people to lower their gut against the emasculative effect. This concurrence informs the next chapter of this thesis called techno-pragmatism. It argues for the practical/realistic view of WhatsApp voice in Bungoma County.

Chapter Seven: Practical/Techno-pragmatism Perception and Conclusion

7.0 Introduction

This chapter on the study of WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations assumes the midway point between the techno-pessimism and techno-optimism perceptions earlier discussed. The chapter is written in contrast with the frame's constructs of similarity/differences, which emphasize that similar things belong together while different ones do not (Coren, 1980) In this chapter, we shall realise that similarities and differences sometimes occur simultaneously, giving room for both the similar and the different to belong together. The similarities and differences in this chapter shall be the techno-pessimistic perceptions and the techno-optimistic perceptions, respectively. The Chapter demonstrates how the two occur simultaneously as the people use the WhatsApp voice for electoral deliberations. In the chapter, we shall also draw parallels from the Kenyan media milestones explored in the introductory section, to give the historical context to the techno-pragmatic stance. The Chapter constitutes one of the study's two contributions into the field of the social science; whereby it devices and popularises the techno-pragmatic perception of the WhatsApp use, hitherto less emphasized by scholars. It answers the research question:

Is there a midway position between the pessimism-optimism split?

The chapter discusses points of intersectionality between techno-pessimistic and techno-optimistic perceptions by highlighting and demonstrating the midway points from the two previous chapters. As aforesaid, these midway points presumably emerge amidst the simultaneous occurrence of the techno-pessimism and techno-optimism. The study considers the chapter as the real-world/practical perception of the WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations. The concept techno-

pragmatism is used in this chapter to imply the practicability of the WhatsApp use during electoral deliberations on Bungoma County.

As seen in many of the narrators in the previous chapters, their limiting perceptions of the WhatsApp voice could also be simultaneously discussed as enabling, due to their co-occurrence. Drawing from Mouffe's (2019) logic that societal problems are never linear and simplistic, we can argue that the Bungoma County electoral deliberation problems are too complex to simply fall within the people's limiting/emasculative and/or enabling/emancipative perceptions. More so, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) opine that the kind of societal problems involving power and oppressive relationships, which the people seek to liberate themselves from are never linear and simplistic. This thinking trajectory can be localised, to logically enable the study to categorise the Bungoma County electoral deliberations as "not linear and simple"; since they involve power relations which the people seek to liberate themselves from. As such, a WhatsApp voice enabling perception could also be simultaneously discussed as a limiting perception, during electoral deliberations. As we shall see in this chapter, this kind of WhatsApp voice perceptions are discussed on a case-by-case basis to bring out the techno-pragmatic contexts.

7.1 Majority/Minority Relations and WhatsApp Use

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations established that the Bungoma County people's adaption and cultural interaction with WhatsApp voice result into techno-pragmatic perceptions. As seen in the excerpt below from Wairimu's narration in the previous chapters, the WhatsApp voice simultaneously enable and limit both the majority and minority people's deliberations in Bungoma County. The people attempt to use the WhatsApp voice to dominate and/or resist dominance during electoral deliberations. The excerpt says:

"… I use these WhatsApp usernames because I need to masquerade as a (majoritarian) Bukusu person without suspicion. This way I will stay informed about the politics of the County. But most important, *nijue kama kuna msako inakuja nijipange* (to keep me aware about impending politically motivated physical attacks so that I may escape in time). These names [WhatsApp usernames] keep me unsuspected in the groups, even though I do not know what they mean… By the time they start scrutinising for admissions, *sisi tutakua ndani* (we shall have entered the groups). Over time, *wenye* groups (the Bukusu majority in the group) notice our presence. They can ask or say something in their vernacular language and direct it to any of us to answer. In that case we quickly looked for interpreters. But relying on interpreters is cumbersome and slow. So, we do not answer the questions directed on us in the group. *Hopo ndoi inakuanga mwisho wa lami* [bursts into laughter] (They remove us from the groups) …"

As seen from Wairimu's excerpt above, the majoritarian people's form of dominance includes the use of mother tongue language on WhatsApp groups, while the minorities' form of resistance using the WhatsApp voice includes the acquisition and use of multiple fake WhatsApp usernames. These new ways of using the WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations inform why the people's perceptions flip flop between techno-pessimism and techno-optimism, depending on whether they are a majority or minority in the County. More so, we can see that, whereas the use of fake usernames is ethically limiting/emasculative, the minority people in Bungoma County consider it enabling/emancipative during electoral deliberation; because it enables them to access majoritarian WhatsApp groups to "eavesdrop" the deliberations. On the other hand, whereas the use of mother tongue in the WhatsApp groups may be considered limiting because it excludes some people/tribes, the majoritarian people consider it enabling in that it allows for the inclusion of the people who do not understand the English language used across most WhatsApp groups in the

County. This leads us to the midway point of the WhatsApp voice perceptions, which assumes the practical perspective, away from the enabling/limiting or emancipation/emasculation perceptions. Theoretically, we can anchor the explanation above on the post phenomenological thoughts; in which Verbeek's (2012) refutes the neo-Marxists' pessimistic stance on WhatsApp voice; arguing that technology/WhatsApp voice should not be blamed when the majoritarian and minoritarian people (mis)use it. He contends that the people's interaction with the technology, leads to the emergence of new uses which were never envisaged by the inventers. We can also draw from the history of Kenyan media, in the introductory section, to argue that the pre-independence media, colonial media, and the post-independence media all had comparatively different uses based on how the people interacted with the media technologies (see Mamdani, 1996; Ochilo, 1993; Oriare et al 2010; Wanyande, 1995). The study devised the midway point between pessimism and optimism because it represents the people's realistic/practical point of view about how they use the voice.

How are the Majority/Minority Voices Techno-Pragmatic?

We can further pursue the WhatsApp voice's ability to simultaneously emancipate/emasculate the people to dominate/resist dominance; by analysing an excerpt from Njeri's narration from the previous chapters. She says that:

"… You know we have to escape the police even if we are being pursued for attack by the tribalists…because they [police] don't know us and might just arrest us). We also can't post political stories online because we do not know who is watching…"

From Njeri's excerpt above, we see that both the people and the government are simultaneously enabled by the WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations. The majority people use the voice

to dominate minorities and to critique government; the minority people use the voice to resist majoritarian people by listening to their deliberations to know about the plans against them; while the government uses the voice to watch over the people on pretext of keeping law and order. We can borrow from Althusser's (1971) assertion that the media/WhatsApp voice is among the dominant social actors' newly found site for ideological struggle; to argue that the government struggles to control the social media through the infrastructural ownership and regulation to enable it to spread its ideologies to Njeri and the majoritarian people, on pretext of keeping law and order. On the other hand, the majoritarian people struggle to control the social media through forming the WhatsApp/social media groups that exclude Njeri and other minorities, through the use of mother tongue during electoral deliberations, among others. The minority people struggle to come up with tricks/infra-politics to resist the dominance from both the majority people and governments. Although the study's frame contrasts the whole chapter at the macro level, we can apply it at the micro level here, to argue that the WhatsApp users' differences, similarities and even the nearness to each other/proximity (see Coren, 1980), inform the dominance/resistance witnessed therein, which in turn inform the people's perception of the voice as either pessimistic or optimistic. Logically, these layers of surveillance, dominance, and resistance, that are based on social differences, similarities and proximities cannot simply fit in the emancipation/emasculation perceptions of the WhatsApp voice. This, the study found it needful to perceive the midway point/techno-pragmatism.

How is the Vibrant Majoritarian Voice Techno-pragmatic?

From the previous chapters, we can see that the WhatsApp voice simultaneously enable the majoritarian people's attempts to "resuscitate" their past vibrant political participation that was stiffed by the past oppressive governments, and to marginalise the minorities in Bungoma County.

This is another point of intersection at which the voice co-currently emancipates and emasculates the people's deliberations. We can use excerpts from Namisi's previous narration to bring out the emasculation; and Wairimu's narration above can bring out the emancipation; from where we can theoretically explain the emancipation/emasculation intersectionality.

Namisi says:

"… "These people [non-Bukusu/minority tribes] need to know that we do not go to their ancestral homes to influence their county politics… Therefore, *mababuu zetu hawawatambui hapa* (our ancestors do not recognize them here in Bungoma County) … (We do not want to be like the people of Kimilili Constituency who in 2017 left a non-Bukusu contestant unchecked and as a result, he was almost elected as a ward representative, we realised it at the last minute and overturned the plan.") …"

From Namisi's excerpts above, we can see the WhatsApp voice as co-currently enabling the majority people to exercise their electoral rights; and prevents the minorities from exercising their electoral rights. We can analogise this with role of the media during colonial and post-colonial eras, where colonialists used it for oppression while educated black people used it for liberation. After political independence, the ruling class of black people used it to perpetuate their positions while those not in power used it to liberate themselves from government oppression (Mamdani, 1996). This demostrates for the emergence of another midway point, which can be theoretically located in the call for greater reflection by Curran et al. (2016). They argue that the role we should assign to internet technologies such as the WhatsApp voice need to be re/evaluated; to enable the analysis of the WhatsApp voice to be situated within specific cultural, economic, and political contexts. This would enable for understanding of the contexts within which the WhatsApp voice works. It would also inform about the motivation for the dominant social actors such as

governments, groups, and individuals from seeking to dominate others. If localised to Bungoma County the Curran et al. (2016) reflection above would inform the study's techno-pragmatic perception of the WhatsApp voice. The perception would enable for a more realistic measure of the voice in Bungoma County, within a context that is reflective of the real-world situation.

Where is Techno-pragmatism in Incumbents'/People's Use of WhatsApp Voice?

From Lagat's narration in the previous chapters, we can locate the emergence of the WhatsApp voice techno-pragmatism in Bungoma County electoral deliberations. The excerpt below from his narration says that:

"…at some point I started receiving threats on my phone about my WhatsApp group posts on corruption. It was very chilling because they [killers] had just killed a friend who openly criticised the incumbent…"

From Lagat's excerpt above, we can see that the WhatsApp voice emancipate the people of Bungoma County by enabling for criticism of the incumbent, with the hope to transform the leadership for the better. However, at the same time, the political leadership also uses the very WhatsApp voice to identify and punish/murder the critics. This contrasts in part with the explored Kenyan media milestones (Ochilo, 1993), in that, during pre-independence and post-independence period, only the government owned and utilised the media to suppress critics. Today, there are more private media ownership and more liberal use by the citizenry to criticise the leadership, albeit in limited ways (Omanga, 2015). This does not ignore the private media established by black people during colonial period and immediately after independence, such as Sauti ya mwafrika, Luo's Magazine, 'Muigwithania', Nairobi law monthly, among others. They were critical of the government and provided space in their own ways. However, arguably, if this study was to be

caried out in the earlier days, it would have been difficult to bring out the techno-pragmatic perception being pursued here, since government was largely the monopoly user of the media, and the citizenry were passive recipients of the information (Oriare et al, 2010). Today, we can clearly see the citizenry, dominant actors, and government struggle to use the WhatsApp voice for dominance/resistance, leading to an intersectionality from where the midway point emerges. Curran et al. (2016) argue that we should see technology in term of how the people use it, and not how good or bad it is. Thus, we can localise Curran et al (2016) to Bungoma County, to argue that we should view the WhatsApp voice in terms of how Lagat uses it to check government/incumbents; and how the government/incumbent uses it to silence him, rather than how good or bad the voice is in Bungoma County. This is because the two perceptions-good/bad (enabling/limiting) assume extreme positions which are not practical in the society. Therefore, the midway position provides for a practical assessment of the voice; in which, whereas Lagat is enabled to criticise the government/incumbent, he is simultaneously limited in that the voice is used to track him down for punishment by the actors he critisises. At this point, we can see that Mbembe's (2017) caution about the abdication of technology to the fight for social justice as undemocratic in itself is a practical reality, since the WhatsApp voice is used undemocratically by the incumbents in Bungoma County. Papacharissi (2016) agrees with Mbembe's (2017) caution, adding that technology/WhatsApp voice emotionalises electoral deliberations, uniting people with psychic bonds thereby robbing them of the sobriety needed for deliberations. The lack of sobriety is visible in dominant social actors' quest to silence/murder the people/critics for expressing themselves.

7.2 Dominant Social Actors/Government and WhatsApp Use

The techno-pragmatic perception of the WhatsApp voice in Bungoma County electoral deliberations can be seen in Kiberenge's narrations; in which we see that the government economically deprived him to limit his ability to buy data bundles to enable him to access the WhatsApp voice for deliberations. An excerpt from his narration says:

"… Do you know there are bundles sold at five shillings [0.05 USD]? I buy and use that one. ... Since I cannot be on WhatsApp all the time, I miss out on the information about the dates and venues of the physical rallies. I cannot even follow the electoral deliberations within the groups to their conclusion because I run out of bundles."

From the excerpt above, we can see that the WhatsApp voice enables Kiberenge to engage in electoral deliberations albeit for a short time. This is despite the voice's ability to enable government to limit his electoral deliberations. We can invoke Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) notion that material positions are knotted together with the meaning-giving structures of identities; to theoretically pinpoint Kiberenge's economic deprivation by the government; to limit his ability to use the WhatsApp voice to deliberate on electoral issues in Bungoma County. Nonetheless, the WhatsApp voice enables Kiberenge to resist the government's domination/economic deprivation; through acquiring the little data bundles to enable him to somewhat follow the most important electoral deliberations in the County. Arguably, this enables him to share the perceived electoral malpractices that he may witness in his County/constituency/ward. This ability of WhatsApp voice to simultaneously emancipate/emasculate Kiberenge and government, who are entangled in an antagonistic relationship, can be best conceived in techno-pragmatic terms; to allow for contextual analysis.

Further, as mentioned in the previous sub-sections, the dominant social actors own and control the WhatsApp technology, which is simultaneously perceived to emancipate the people into resisting

the dominance. This constitutes another of the midway point between emasculation and emancipation, which the study assumes allows for the emergence of the techno-pragmatic conception about the use of WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations. An excerpt from Nyukuri's narration in the previous chapters says that:

"…In 2017, we offered training to the people to enable them to take part in election monitoring. I personally worked with IEBC [Kenya's electoral body] to ensure electoral information reached the people as needed…"

From the except above, we can see that the dominant social actors (IEBC) work with the WhatsApp groups; purportedly to enable the people to monitor the electoral malpractice committed by the very dominant actor. For instance, during the 2017 elections in Kenya, there were allegations that a leading mobile service provider based in the country was engaged in electoral malpractice in favour of the incumbent (KNHRC, 2017). This resulted into calls from the opposition parties for the people to boycott the services offered by the mobile service provider- ostensibly internet and voice calls. We can analyse the above scenario by particularising Carpentier's (2016) concept of people's participation to Kenya/Bungoma County, in which he draws from Arneistain (1969) to argue that participation involves many complexities enhanced by discursive and material struggles. In the case of Bungoma County, this means the people's participation is compromised through election manipulation using money to buy votes (ACCORD, 2008). Although the people are seen to participate in electoral deliberations through the WhatsApp voice, the electoral decisions are made by the dominant actors with the aid of the very WhatsApp voice. This results in the voice's simultaneous emancipation and emasculation of the people during electoral deliberations. Both the dominant social actors and the people use the WhatsApp voice for electoral deliberations, even as the people are aware about the(ir) oppressive relationships with the actors. In other words, we can

also draw from the previous chapters' discussions about the post phenomenologist views on technology, to argue that the capitalist-minded dominant social actors (mis)use the WhatsApp voice, seeking to advance their hegemonic ideologies; while the people (mis)use the voice to call the actors for public accountability. More so, Nyukuri's role as a WhatsApp administrator loosely equates to the editor in the mainstream media. Therefore, in the traditional sense, he is the gatekeeper who filters the people's WhatsApp voices during electoral deliberations. The fact that the WhatsApp voice emancipates him to undertake his administrative role, within the context of his oppressive relationship with the WhatsApp group members, implies a midway point; from where the techno-pragmatic conception emerges.

7.3 Information Network Relations and WhatsApp Use

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations established that the voice simultaneously enables and limits deliberations of the people in informational network relations in Bungoma County WhatsApp groups. As seen from the study's frame, we can borrow the concept of selection (Anonymous, 2016) to explain how the people select/choose the those they wish to partner/form information networks with, based on their similarities and their proximity with each other (1980). We can see this in the excerpts from the narration by Wafula and Kiberenge that:

Wafula:

"…I give [send] my information to a guy in USA to post it in our constituency WhatsApp groups. This is because people argue too much and ask many questions relating to the post. Some questions have no answers, but they [group members] insist on being answered. I normally see some difficult questions people ask, so I avoid posting because I cannot answer such questions…"

Kiberenge:

"…I use my phone camera, so it costs me nothing. I then send to a friend abroad…I even don't know the exact country. He asks me questions about the photos and then he writes a WhatsApp post out of it. When questions emerge in the groups he posts, he gets back to me, and I answer those I can…"

From the excerpts above by Wafula and Kiberenge, we can see that the people in Bungoma County gather grassroot political information from their County, constituencies, and wards, and then send it to the people abroad or out of the County; with whom they look up to as their spokespersons. The people believe that those abroad can "effectively" deliberate on their behalf in the WhatsApp groups; because as earlier mentioned, they can articulate and analyse issues better because they are more educated; and have better access to internet services. As we can see, the WhatsApp voice simultaneously emancipate and emasculate the people in the informational networks. For instance, the voice emancipates Wafula and Kiberenge by enabling for their own-sourced information to be posted on the WhatsApp groups; because they have no sufficient articulacy, analytical skills, and data bundles to do so by themselves. Based on the analyses in the previous sections and sub-sections, we can argue that they also avoid the risk of being identified and attacked by political opponents, since the information posted on the WhatsApp groups does not reveal them as the sources. However, they are emasculated because their information/voices are only represented on WhatsApp platform by the people abroad. The WhatsApp voice does not enable them to directly represent themselves. Therefore, logically, they are not directly participating in the electoral deliberations, as required. Their form of representation can be theoretically located in Carpentier's (2016) conceptualisation of political representation as the formal delegation of power; whereby we can reason that the informational power of Wafula and Kiberenge is delegated to the people abroad. More so, from the(ir) full narrations in the previous chapters, we can see that the extent of

the power delegation is determined by the people abroad. They determine what to include in the WhatsApp voice, the angle to take, when to post, and above all, they masquerade as the owners of the WhatsApp posts. This simultaneous emancipating and emasculating ability of the WhatsApp voice within the Bungoma County informational relations constitutes the study's techno-pragmatic conception of the voice.

How is Bodaboda's Participation Techno-pragmatic?

Related to the above, we realise from the discussions in the previous chapters of this thesis that the WhatsApp voice enables the *bodaboda* people to co-produce content with the dominant social actors. This simultaneously emancipate and emasculate the people. As we can see from the excerpt in Waswa's narration in the previous chapters, the WhatsApp voice has enabled him to participate in electoral deliberations in ways that were hitherto not possible before the inception of the WhatsApp voice into electoral deliberations. However, the analysis indicates that the WhatsApp voice emasculates Waswa in the same measure it emancipates him, because his participation is "tokenistic" (see Arnestein, 1969 p. 217). The excerpt from his narration says:

"…The politicians reach out for us to help mobilise the people for rallies, and they pay us. We make convoys and hoot around the public places with banners as we shout the slogans of the political candidates who hire us. We blow the whistles to ensure everyone is so disrupted that they must look out for what is happening [he laughs]. The photos of our convoys [motorbikes] and the curious public onlookers are taken and posted on the various WhatsApp groups. This creates the attention needed by the politicians, both in the WhatsApp groups and in the physical world. We even mobilise our people to go and start off deliberations in the [WhatsApp] groups in support of a particular candidate as long as they pay us…"

From Waswa's excerpt above, we can see that the WhatsApp voice enables youthful people of Bungoma County to engage with the dominant social actors in electoral content creation to influence the electoral deliberations on the WhatsApp groups. However, the fact that the youths are paid little money to participate in the creation of content to enable the actors to attain huge electoral powers to make policy's that affect the people's lives, means their participation is of a lower level which cannot change the societal power imbalance. If localised, Arnstein (1969) classification of participation can be used to classify the *bodaboda* people's level of participation as tokenistic participation. The level of participation is among the lowliest, also called the non-participation levels; because the *bodaboda* people are prone to manipulation and therapeutic treatment that do not amount to the threshold of meaningful participation. Therefore, we can argue that the WhatsApp voice does not allow for meaningful participation of the *bodaboda* people in electoral deliberations in Bungoma County; even as the people themselves believe that they actively participate, and that they are in control of the electoral deliberations. The study conceives this intersectionality between emancipation and emasculation as the techno- pragmatic perception of the WhatsApp voice.

7.4 People's Oral Abilities and WhatsApp Use

The study about WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberation established that the most utilised WhatsApp component during electoral deliberations in Bungoma County is texting. Although it encourages issue-based deliberations due to its traditional reflective mode, over time, it limits people's abilities. It makes some people to lose their oral abilities and other interpersonal skills due to disuse. This is detrimental in the traditionally oral society (Wefwafwa, 2014) whose interactive communication is based on oral skills. More so, as seen in the previous chapters, the people need these oratorical skills for TV and radio deliberations. In fact, as seen in the previous

sections, radio is the most popular medium in Bungoma County due to its oral component. It is founded on the people's precolonial media which was oral (Namulundah, 2011). The people who lose their oratorical skills also stand disadvantaged during radio and TV deliberations. An excerpt from Perpetua's narration in the previous chapters says that:

"…But… [he reflects] the way I see, this thing [WhatsApp voice] affects us too. When you chat [text] too much you forget to speak fluently. There are people who really impress on WhatsApp [voice] but when you meet them in real life, they cannot express themselves as they do online. So, we are not as free as we think."

From the excerpt above, we learn that although some of the Bungoma County people are celebrated from behind their phone tabs, for actively using the WhatsApp voice texting component during electoral deliberations, they tend to lose their oral skills. Therefore, the WhatsApp voice simultaneously enable and limit them during electoral deliberations. This form of WhatsApp emancipation/emasculation can be explained through Mbembe's (2017) caution about the abdication of technology/WhatsApp voice to the fight against social injustice. We can argue that if left to offer the space for the electoral deliberations in Bungoma County, the technology/WhatsApp voice would render some vital human communicative functions such as the oral skills irrelevant in the society. As a result, the measure of WhatsApp voice's impact in the society need not to be in terms of emancipation and emasculation, but rather in practical terms. Thus, the techno-pragmatic perception.

On a separate note, the discussions in the previous chapters indicated that the WhatsApp voice expands the public space to accommodate more people including amateur debaters; thereby lowering the quality of debates. According to the excerpts from the narrations by Nasombi, Siminyu and Masua in the previous chapters, the Bungoma County WhatsApp voice deliberations

consist of personalised attacks, uniformed stances, among others. These lower the quality of electoral deliberations.

Nasombi says:

"… I stopped active engagement in WhatsApp groups in Bungoma County because it degenerated into personalised attacks. During the 2017 election period, a debate started about whether the sitting governor deserved to be re-elected…. Then suddenly, a guy came from nowhere and replied to my post, 'We shall start taking you serious the day your ass will grow bigger than the size of a cockerel'. At first, I did not feel anything, I thought it was a childish thing to say amidst such an important debate. So, I ignored it. After a while, I noticed that some group members were cheering up the person for posting such a non-issue…."

Siminyu says:

"… "I was innocently defending my preferred political candidate in a WhatsApp group, where I was actively engaged in an argument. Then some lady whose candidate was an opponent to mine started hurling insults at me. The group members cheered on…."

Masua says:

"…I always visit WhatsApp groups for humour at night after a long day's work. WhatsApp works best for me because most viral memes are used as status updates by the people whose contacts exist in my phonebook. Whether the messages conveyed in the memes are fake is not my concern because the WhatsApp messages do not sway my political stance. The political messages in the memes do not bother me…"

From the excerpts above by Nasombi, Siminyu and Masua we see that the Bungoma County WhatsApp voice electoral deliberations face challenges with maintaining quality debates. This alludes to Castells', (2008) views that the amateurs now share public space with professionals and other experienced traditional custodians of knowledge, making it difficult for the people to recognise the serious deliberators. We can loosely parallel this with illiteracy during the colonial and post-colonial media (Ochilo, 1993), where the media efficacy and reach were low. For instance, from Nasombi's whole narration, we can see that her professional knowledge/analytical skills are watered down by the amateur debaters who hurl insults at her during electoral deliberations. We can use Nasombi's thinking trajectory, that she no longer engages in electoral deliberations, to argue that Masua's reason for not concerning herself with the electoral deliberations is that the people would not take her journalism professional views serious. As we can see in the excerpt from her narration above, she is more interested in the WhatsApp voice's humour than the deliberations. This further demonstrates how the WhatsApp voice simultaneously enables and limits the people of Bungoma County; leading to the emergence of the techno-pragmatic perception, to realistically assess the voice's impact on the Bungoma County electoral deliberations.

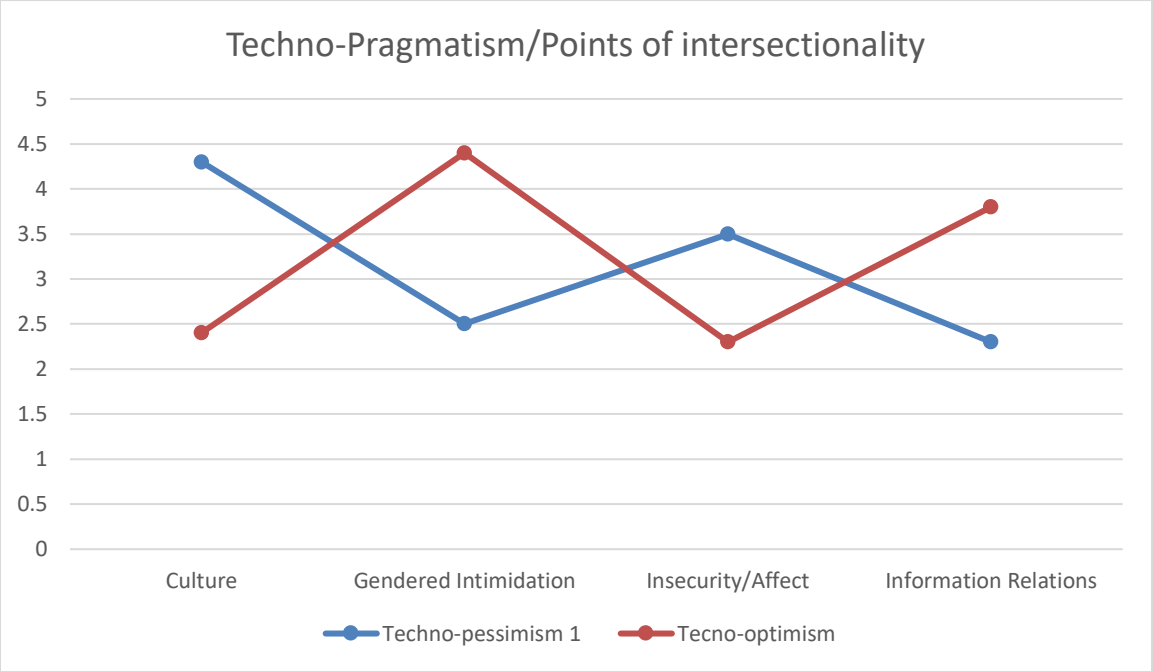

Fig 19: Showing the graphical presentation of the techno-pragmatism as points of intersectionality between techno-pessimism and techno-optimism.

7.5 Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter, we can see there are points of intersection between the factors enabling and those limiting the WhatsApp use. Arguably, this chapter is the equilibrium point, between WhatsApp gains, and the WhatsApp loses in terms of enabling and/or limiting the electoral deliberations in Bungoma. The frame's constructs allowed for the demonstration that pessimism ans optimism can simultaneously occur even though their occurance is oppositional to each other. We can draw a practical explanation for this, by arguing that the WhatsApp voice enables the people to feel comfortable about their participatory space; and hence, either relent on their quest to expand the space for electoral deliberations; or (mis)use it to dominate or resist dominance. This can be attributed to such cases as the *bodaboda* people, whose involvement in content creation enables them to feel so comfortable that they do not pursue expansion of the space in Bungoma County during electoral deliberations. It may also apply to the assumedly amateurish group members who unnecessarily dwell on non-issue deliberations, including infights, body shaming among others previously mentioned. That said, the WhatsApp voice has enabled the people to achieve and enjoy freedom to electoral deliberation; never witnessed before the inception of the voice into electoral deliberations. The chapter aimed at highlighting examples of the WhatsApp voice abilities and limitations, and not to exhaust them. Rather it was to allow for demonstration of the points of intersectionality that enable for the emergence of the techno-pragmatic perception. The chapter presumes that the techno-pragmatic perception of the WhatsApp voice is the more practical way of assessing the gains and losses of the voice in the electoral deliberations in Bungoma County.

7.6 Thesis Conclusion

The study about WhatsApp use in electoral deliberations was guided by the key research question: What factors inform WhatsApp pessimistic, optimistic, and/or pragmatic perceptions during electoral deliberations? The specific research questions were: Using the case of Bungoma County, how and why is the use of WhatsApp voice conceived as techno-pessimistic? How and why is the use of WhatsApp voice perceived as techno-optimistic? Is there a midway position between the split? And how might the use of WhatsApp voice pan out in Kenya's 2022 electoral processes deliberations? The study's potential hypothesis was: the factors that inform people's perception of the WhatsApp voice as techno-optimistic and/or techno-pessimistic depend on users' experiences during electoral deliberations.

In the key findings, we see that the study attempted to coalesce the various historical and developmental stages of the Kenyan media, dubbed milestones, with the view to historically contextualise how the WhatsApp voice has enabled and limited the electoral deliberations in Bungoma County. The study's frames allowed for utilisation of the concepts and constructs to select and categorise the various media milestones, including the pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial, independent, the present-day's post-independent media – the WhatsApp voice; to contextualise the uniqueness with which the people use WhatsApp voice. In its process of enabling and limiting the electoral deliberations, the WhatsApp voice, like its predecessors, has displayed an overarching techno-affect, deployed to facilitate affective politics, giving the Kenyan elections an all-time volatile characteristic.

The findings were summerised based on each of the specific research questions asked. The first question was, *how is the WhatsApp voice perceived as techno-pessimistic?* The study established that WhatsApp voice advances the techno-pessimistic perception, through the five main factors analysed in the first of empirical chapters. The factors include culture and ethnicity,

insecurity/techno-affect, gendered intimidation, economic resource deprivation, information network relations and exclusionism/electoral injustice. Among the outstanding arguments included, how the people's use of WhatsApp voice projected masculinity. The concept of emasculation was metaphorically conceived; allowing the thesis to draw from the respondents' narratives during the face-to-face interviews to argue that unlike in the pre-colonial media where only men intimidated/emasculated others, the WhatsApp voice allows for gendered intimidation/emasculation that is perpetrated by men and women, almost in equal measures. The study also analysed how the WhatsApp voice fits in the media's lost and gained credibility, since the colonial times to date, as it navigates and reinvent itself in the ever changing social and technological environment. The discussions advanced philosophical views about WhatsApp Usernames, users' ancestral bloodlines, il/legitimate elections, and il/legitimate power. The section revealed the uniqueness with which the people of Bungoma County use WhatsApp voice, and why they perceive it as techno-pessimistic. Arguably, the phrase "new media with the same old debates", sums up the thesis.

The study's second research question was, *how and why is the use of WhatsApp voice perceived as techno-optimistic?* The study identified the factors as the WhatsApp administrators' role, young media entrepreneurs, emerging networked economies, ease of WhatsApp use, and the accountability and inclusivity enhanced by WhatsApp technology. The gist of the argument herein is how the citizenry resist the dominant social actors who subtly seek to determine how and why they use the WhatsApp voice. In the process of pursuing the optimistic stance of the WhatsApp use, the study demonstrated how the techno-optimistic perspective of WhatsApp voice occurs simultaneously with the techno-pessimistic perspective, resulting in the intersectionality between the two, from where the techno-pragmatism emerges.Contextually, the pragmatic stance could not

be clearly established during colonial and post-colonial media in Kenya, largely because the media served the interests of the elite ruling class, with citizenry as passive receivers of the information.

The analysis of this emergent techno-pragmatic perception of WhatsApp voice in Bungoma County was guided by the research question, *is there a midway position between the split say?* Here, the study logically demonstrated the nexus of the intersectionality. The section illustrated how the WhatsApp voice emancipation enables the people to feel comfortable about their participatory space; and hence, either relent on their quest to expand the space for electoral deliberations; or (mis)use it to dominate or resist dominance, resulting to emasculation. Practically, the interview with Waswa, a *bodaboda* rider, illustratated that his involvement in WhatsApp electoral content creation enables him to feel so comfortable that he does not pursue for the expansion of his electoral space. Instead, he uses the space to dominate and/or exclude others within Bungoma County during electoral deliberations. This simultaneous ability and limitation of Waswa's electoral deliberations leads to the intersectionality the study called techno-pragmatic perception. The section presumes that the techno-pragmatic perception of the WhatsApp voice is the more practical way of assessing the gains and losses of the voice in Bungoma County.

The last research question that guided the study was, *how might the use of WhatsApp voice pan out in Kenya's 2022 electoral processes deliberations?* The study's prediction about the 2022 elections in Kenya came to pass during the August 2022 elections. There was more use of the WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations by both the dominant social actors and the people; with the former subtly shaping how the people use the voice; and the latter implicitly and explicitly resisting the shaping. Since the scope of the study was only limited to prediction, this idea was not pursued any futher.

7.6.0 Study's Contribution to the Field

The study has two major contributions to knowledge in the field. First, it demonstrates contextualised knowledge about the uniqueness with which the people of Bungoma County use WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations. Second, the study devises and popularises the techno-pragmatic perception which is less emphasized in media studies.

7.6.2 Limitations of the study

The study's limitations include its inability to be fully generalised across the African continent and global south at large. This is because some countries on the continent use different social media such as Telegram for political engagements. These may not have similarities with WhatsApp voice in terms of the deployment in electoral deliberations.

Arguably, another limitation is that the study focused on a limited number of people of Bungoma County, Kenya, and how the perceive the WhatsApp voice during electoral deliberations. The study's sample was therefore drawn from the limited community within Bungoma County, which, some scholars may argue, is not large enough for generalisation on the African continent and global south.

Another limitation of the study is that it attempted to research WhatsApp from within physical boundaries, even though the people using the WhatsApp technology were not bound by specified geographical borders. As a result, there may have been some contexts and perspectives which the study missed out due to the emphasis on the geographical boundaries.

The next limitation is that while the study assumed that there were no pseudo accounts in the WhatsApp groups sampled, and that the presence of the pseudo accounts would be interpreted as

a form of minority people's resistance to the majority people and other dominant social actors, there may be more perspectives the study missed out.

Lastly, the fact that the researcher was born and raised in Bungoma County posed a limitation whereby he may have overlooked certain important aspects during the research, due to his own personal experiences and views about the WhatsApp groups, and users.

7.6.3 Further research

The study proposes further inquiry in the techno-pragmatic perception as theory-building towards the WhatsApp voice. The fact that the concept of techno-pragmatism was tested during the Kenya's 2022 elections, when the use of the WhatsApp voice for electoral deliberations was rife in Bungoma County is not enough for theory building.

Related to the above, the study recommends further inquiry about the people's unique use of the WhatsApp voice, whereby they simultaneously belong to the majority and minority status in the WhatsApp groups. The uniqueness can be further studied from outside the minority/majority status, and detarched form the historical contexts discussed in the thesis, and the theorisation by (Ekeh, 1975).

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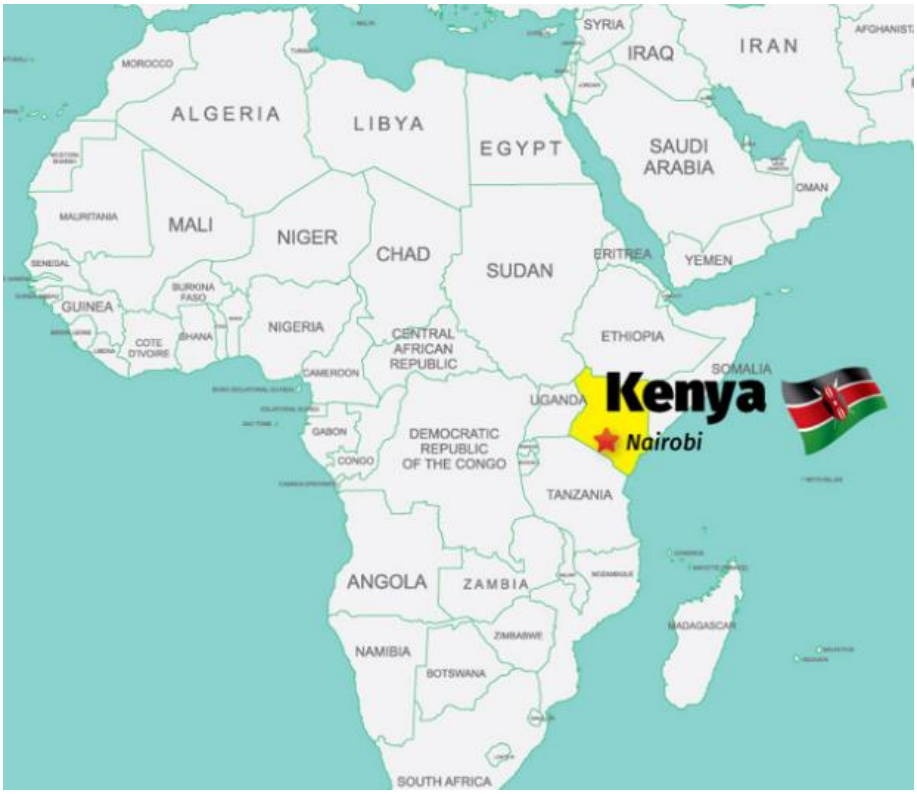
ANNEXTURE

Appendix 1



Source: Internet 2022. Showing the geographical location of Kenya on the African Continent

Appendix 2



Source: Geology.com, 2020: Showing the geographical location of Kenya.

Appendix 3



Source: Mapsofworld.com, 2020: Showing the 47 Counties in Kenya

Appendix 4

Phase one May- July 2021		
Sub County	**Number of Interviews**	**Dates**
Bumula	9	12th & 13th January 2021
Bungoma South	12	17th ,18th & 19th January 2021
Bungoma Central	6	23rd & 24th January 2021
Bungoma East	6	28th & 29th January 2021
Bungoma West	6	3rd & 4th February 2021
Bungoma North	6	8th & 9th February 2021
Kimilili	6	13th & 14th February 2021
Cheptais	5	18th & 19th February 2021
Mt Elgon	5	22nd & 23rd February 2021
Total no. of Interviews	**61**	

Table 1 Showing Phase One Activities

Phase two	
Activity	**Dates**
Full transcription of interview responses	March 1st to April 31st 2021
Travel to SA for analysis and reflectivity.	May 1st ,2021-November 31st 2022

Table 2: Showing Phase Two Activities

Phase three	
Activity	**Date**
Travel to Kenya for Follow up interviews	December 1st, 2021- January 12th, 2022
Total period for all the Phases	**12 months**

Table 3: Showing Phase Three Activities

Appendix 5

Field challenge and opportunity

One challenge that came up during fieldwork is that the some of the most influential discussants on the WhatsApp groups could not be available for face-to-face interviews. This is because they are either in other cities in Kenya outside Bungoma County, or they are in the Diaspora; from where they rely on informers from the grassroots to feed them with information from the wards, constituencies, and the County. The study established that their influence may be because they have more resources to acquire data bundles and quality phones to stay connected more than the rest of the members in the groups. Compared to the locally available participants with whom I conducted face to face interviews.

The participants staying in major cities in Kenya and in the Diaspora are keen not to readily reveal their geographical locations to the WhatsApp group members at the ward, constituency or even County level. This is because the members from major cities and Diaspora believe they would lose their influence in the groups when the people learn that they are not on the ground to experience the electoral injustice and socio-economic development realities firsthand. More so, the people would question why they should listen to the Diaspora members who are not allowed to vote for any seats except the presidential elections. The Diaspora WhatsApp group members are not legible to vote in the ward representative elections, national assembly representative elections, senate representative elections (senator and women representative seats) and the gubernatorial elections. Yet, these local elections form the fulcrum of County electoral politics. This is for the obvious reason that, the people want to elect the local leaders with whom they have proximity and accessibly; the leaders who would listen to them and change their lives because of their shared geographical environment, economic activities, and cultural history among others. Kenya allows

a limited number of Kenyans out of the County to vote in the presidential elections from their embassies. Due to logistical challenges, in 2017 this only took place in major countries such as USA. In 2017, the diaspora vote was associated with allegations of rigging in favour of the incumbent.

Appendix 6

Real-world Insecurity

The social environment in the sub-county/constituency was so tensed that the participants argued that guaranteeing the anonymity was not enough for their security. They requested to be ferried from Mt. Elgon constituency to a neighbouring Kimilili Constituency for face-to-face interviews. That is not a long distance, but the poor road network is big challenge. The predominant means of transport is the motorbikes, but donkeys come in handy where the bikes cannot access. The moment it rains the muddy roads become impassable and people spend the night wherever they are. At times huge trees fall across the road blocking it.

Some members requested not to be recorded because even after moving them to another location, they still felt insecure, arguing recording would attract unnecessary attraction. I jotted down short notes from the interviews. The participants who sought not to be recorded were more information rich. They narrated harrowing experiences with political opponents within the same tribe. The secretive nature of the Sabaot people has helped conceal many electoral injustices; and the use of WhatsApp groups has been shaped to perpetuate the injustice. Among the participants were government administrators in the Constituency working with security agents. However, they were as worried as the rest of the participants about their security.

Appendix 7

Participant Information Sheet- WhatsApp Administrators

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Wefwafwa and I am a PhD student in Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating WhatsApp voice use in electoral debates, under the supervision of Dr. Bob Wekesa. The aim of this research project is to find out how and why people in Bungoma County use WhatsApp voice in electoral debates.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. This activity involves answering questions about how and why the people in your WhatsApp group use the platform for electoral debates, and it takes about 10 minutes. With your permission, I would like to record the interview using a sound recorder. If you do not wish to be recorded, I will take short notes during the interview.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from the participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the interview. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information. The information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a false name to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time. If you need some support or counseling services following the interview, these are available free of charge next to Christ the King Bungoma Catholic Church. The name of the counselor is Collins Gaunya and the contact details for the counseling service are +254722996036. If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data collected from this research project will be stored in digital form with all identifying features removed and will be kept for two years. With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Wefwafwa Job Allan

Researcher: Wefwafwa Job Allan, 2275021@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr. Bob Wekesa, bob.wekesa@wits.ac.za, 27(0) 117174795

Appendix 8



Participant Information Sheet for WhatsApp Users

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Wefwafwa and I am a PhD student in Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating WhatsApp voice use in electoral debates, under the supervision of Dr. Bob Wekesa. The aim of this research project is to find out how and why people in Bungoma County use WhatsApp voice in electoral debates.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. This activity involves answering questions about how and why you use WhatsApp platform, and it takes about 10 minutes. With your permission, I would like to record the interview using a sound recorder. If you do not wish to be recorded, I will take short notes during the interview.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the interview. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information. The information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a false name to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time. If you need some support or counseling services following the interview, these are available free of charge next to Christ the King Bungoma Catholic Church. The name of the counselor is Collins Gaunya and the contact details for the counseling service are +254722996036. If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. The data collected from this research project will be stored in digital form with all identifying features removed and will be kept for two years. With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers.

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely, Wefwafwa Job Allan

Researcher: Wefwafwa Job Allan, 2275021@students.wits.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr. Bob Wekesa, bob.wekesa@wits.ac.za, 27(0) 117174795

Appendix 9



CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO RECORDING OF PARTICIPANTS

Title of project: Techno-affective Elections and (Il)legitimate Power: WhatsApp Voice in Kenya's Electoral Deliberations

Name of researcher: Wefwafwa Job Allan

I, ……., agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous:

YES NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in his research report:

YES NO

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded and keep for two (2) years after publication of the research findings:

YES NO

I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained.

YES NO

…… (signature)

…… (name of participant)

…… (date)

Appendix 10

Observation Schedule for the study on WhatsApp Use in Electoral deliberation in Bungoma County

Between January 2021 and March 2021

By Wefwafwa Job Allan, lead researcher

Date	Observations within WhatsApp groups	Observations in the Field
	Does WhatsApp provide sufficient space for people's electoral deliberations?	What are the observable differences between people's real-life deliberations the WhatsApp enabled deliberations?
	Who decides the topics deliberated by the people on the WhatsApp platform on the daily basis?	Do dominant social actors visibly structure/shape electoral deliberations for the people?
	In what ways does the WhatsApp platform emasculate the people during electoral deliberations?	What are the real-life challenges people encounter when accessing WhatsApp platform for deliberations?
	In what ways does the WhatsApp platform emancipate the people during electoral deliberations?	How do the people attempt to navigate/overcome the challenges?
	How is the WhatsApp membership constituted: Who decides who becomes a group member?	Do the people seek help about how to use the WhatsApp platform for electoral deliberations?
	What is the motivation for the WhatsApp administrators to create the WhatsApp groups?	What factors motivate the people to join or exit particular groups in Bungoma County?
	In what ways do the WhatsApp administrators emancipate the people during electoral deliberations?	Are there real-life deliberations/actions are inspired/emanate from the WhatsApp electoral deliberations?

Appendix 11

Interview Guide for WhatsApp Users

Hello participant,

I am a PhD Student at University of the Witwatersrand South Africa. I obtained your contacts from the Bungoma Country WhatsApp group. I am carrying out research on how people in Bungoma County use WhatsApp voice in electoral process deliberations. I would like to ask some questions concerning the research. Your responses will be treated with confidentiality. The research is for the purpose of evaluating the WhatsApp use in Kenya elections; to inform future policy formulation. The Findings will be published. Kindly help me answer these questions. The interview should take less than10 minutes. Thank you.

QUESTION 1

PERSONAL INFORMATION

i. What is your name? (Optional)

ii. How old are you?

iii. What is your occupation?

iv. Sex?

FEMALE

MALE

v. Can I use the same contact to reach you in case I need some clarifications on the responses you give?

QUESTION 2

GENERAL INFORMATION

i. How did you start using WhatsApp voice in electoral deliberations?

THROUGH A COLLEAGUE/FRIEND'S REFERAL

THROUGH A RELATIVE

THROUGH SELF DISCOVERY

OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)

ii. Did you use WhatsApp voice in the 2017 electoral deliberations?

YES

NO

iii. How often

DAILY

BIWEEKLY

WEEKLY

iv. Does WhatsApp voice provide space for deliberation on electoral issues?

YES

NO

v. How sufficient is the space provided?

NO SUFFICENT

SUFFICIENT

I DO NOT KNOW

vi. Does the space provided weaken/impede your ability to participate in the electoral deliberations in any way?

YES

NO

QUESTION 3

i. How did WhatsApp voice enable you to participate in the 2017 electoral deliberations?

ii. Did you find any support from anywhere to enable you participate in the deliberations?

QUESTION 4

i. How did WhatsApp voice weaken/impede you from participating in in the 2017 electoral deliberations?

ii. Did you seek any support from anywhere to alleviate the impediment?

QUESTION 5

i. Why did you use WhatsApp voice in the 2017 electoral deliberations?

ii. Are you satisfied with the way you used the voice in the 2017 electoral deliberations? Explain

QUESTION 6

i. Were your concerns adhered to/ taken serious by those whose audience you sought during the 2017 electoral deliberations?

ii. How did you establish whether or not your concerns were adhered to?

QUESTION 7

i. Did the use of WhatsApp voice provide a better space for electoral deliberation in the 2017 elections?

ii. How were you taking part in electoral deliberations before you started using WhatsApp voice?

I appreciate the time you took for this interview. The information you gave will be handled with confidentiality.

Appendix 12

WhatsApp Administrators' Guide

Hello administrator,

I am a PhD Student at University of the Witwatersrand South Africa. I obtained your contacts from the Bungoma Country WhatsApp group. I am carrying out research on how Bungoma County People use WhatsApp voice in electoral process deliberations. I would like to ask some questions concerning the research. Your responses will be treated with confidentiality. The research is for the purpose of evaluating the WhatsApp use in Kenya elections; to inform future policy formulation. The Findings will be published. Kindly help me answer these questions. The interview should take less than10 minutes.

Thank you.

QUESTION 1

PERSONAL INFORMATION

i. What is your name? (Optional)

ii. How old are you?

iii. What is your occupation?

iv. Sex?

FEMALE

MALE

v. Can I use the same contact to reach you in case I need some clarifications on the responses you give?

QUESTION 2

GENERAL INFORMATION

i. How did you become a WhatsApp administrator?

THROUGH A COLLEAGUE/FRIEND'S REFERAL

THROUGH A RELATIVE

THROUGH SELF DISCOVERY

OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)

ii. Were you a WhatsApp administrator during the 2017 elections?

YES

NO

iii. How much time do you put in the administration role?

ALL THE TIME

DAY TIME

HOURS (Please Specify)

iv. Does WhatsApp voice provide space for members' deliberation on electoral issues?

YES

NO

v. How sufficient is the space provided to the group members?

NO SUFFICENT

SUFFICIENT

I DO NOT KNOW

vi. Does the space provided weaken/impede members' ability to participate in the electoral deliberations in any way?

YES

NO

QUESTION 3

iii. How did WhatsApp voice enable members to participate in the 2017 electoral deliberations?

iv. Did the members find any support from anywhere/including you, to enable them participate in the deliberations?

QUESTION 4

iii. How did WhatsApp voice weaken/impede member from participating in in the 2017 electoral deliberations?

iv. Did members seek any support from you or anywhere to alleviate the impediment?

QUESTION 5

iii. Why did the members use WhatsApp voice in the 2017 electoral deliberations?

iv. Were they satisfied with the way they used the voice in the 2017 electoral deliberations? How did you know?

QUESTION 6

iii. Were the members' concerns adhered to/ taken serious by those whose audience they sought during the 2017 electoral deliberations?

iv. How did they establish whether or not their concerns were adhered to?

QUESTION 7

vii. Did the use of WhatsApp voice provide a better space for electoral deliberation in the 2017 elections?

viii. How were the members taking part in electoral deliberations before joining the group to use WhatsApp voice?

I appreciate the time you took for this interview. The information you gave will be handled with confidentiality.

Appendix 13



Photo by Author: Bumula Sub- County, Bungoma County in February 2021. A man transporting fodder for his livestock

Appendix 14



Photo by Author: A section of interviewees from Kimilili Sub-County in Feb 2021, Bungoma County, interacting shortly after the interviews. They requested not to be kept anonymous since they didn't see any security threats associated with their interviews.

Appendix 15



Photo by Author facilitated by West Media: A section of voters queuing to cast their votes during the Kabuchai by-election in February 2021, Bungoma County.

Appendix 16



Photo by Author facilitated by West Media: A section of voters during the Kabuchai by election in February 2021, Bungoma County.

Appendix 17



Photo by Author facilitated by West Media: A section of voters and IEBC electoral officials conducting elections during the Kabuchai by election in February 2021, Bungoma County.