

Framing Resistance: Lexical Strategies in Kenya's Twitter Hashtag Activism against Police Brutality

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Abstract

This study examines the lexical strategies used in Kenya's anti-police brutality hashtag activism. Using a case study design, 496 tweets were purposively sampled from the #JusticeForKianjokomaBrothers campaign. Data were collected through Mecodify and analysed using corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, which combines systematic computational identification of lexical patterns with an interpretive study of their ideological functions. The findings show that nomination and categorisation humanise the victims through personal names and kinship terms, while the police are collectivised, framing brutality as systemic. Action verbs articulate agency, urgency and resistance, helping sustain the protest's momentum. Evaluative lexis portrays actors and events in ways that heighten empathy for the victims and outrage against the police. Pronoun use constructs collective identity and reinforces adversarial relations, clarifying accountability boundaries. Collectively, these strategies legitimise the protests and frame resistance against systemic injustices. This study contributes to hashtag activism scholarship by demonstrating how lexical choices function as ideological tools in digitally mediated protest discourse from Kenya.

Key terms: Corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, hashtag activism, lexical strategies, police brutality, Twitter.

INTRODUCTION

The increased use of digital platforms for communication has redefined how citizens organise, deliberate and protest social injustices. Twitter (currently X) has emerged as a prominent site for group advocacy through the hashtag affordance. The platform's techno-discursive design, particularly the 280-character limit, constrains how linguistic elements are used. This constraint compels users to choose lexical items that carry significant communicative weight in framing the events, articulating demands and mobilising the public. Given that language reflects socio-cultural conditions, examining the lexical strategies in Twitter's hashtag activism discourse can offer insights into how digital platforms mediate expressions of resistance in Kenya's protest discourse. In this study, lexical strategies are conceptualised as deliberate, patterned use of words through which users construct meaning and project ideological positions within the protest discourse. Understanding how such strategies function within Twitter's spatial limits is critical for grasping how digital protest discourse is produced.

Hashtag activism is a form of digital protest that clusters large numbers of ideologically laden tweets under viral hashtags to convey a collective social and political stand (Altahmazi, 2020; Yang, 2016). Globally, hashtag campaigns have provided an avenue for ordinary citizens to amplify grievances, mobilise collective action and challenge dominant power structures. Social injustices such as police brutality have been amplified through hashtags including #BlackLivesMatter, #ICantBreathe and #EndSARS. Whereas these studies highlight the discursive strategies in digital police brutality protests, they have largely focused on Western and Nigerian contexts, leaving other African digital contexts comparatively underexplored.

Within this broader landscape, the Kenyans on Twitter (KOT) community is among the most vibrant online publics in Africa, known for sustained issue-based hashtag activism and its ability to shape national debates (Munuku et al., 2017; Nyabola, 2018; Okoth, 2020). The KOT use the platform for political communication and activism, offering users an unmonitored space to hold the state accountable, contest power and mobilise the public. Despite the

community's rich tradition in hashtag activism, systematic linguistic analysis of Kenyan digital protest discourse remains limited.

One prominent instance of hashtag activism against police brutality in Kenya is the #JusticeForKianjokomaBrothers campaign. This hashtag emerged in August 2021 after the deaths of two brothers, Benson Njiru Ndwiga (22) and Emmanuel Marura Ndwiga (19), while in police custody. The police claimed the two jumped from a moving police vehicle, but the post-mortem reports indicated the deaths resulted from multiple injuries caused by blunt force trauma. The deaths triggered public outrage, and the KOT mobilised through the hashtag to demand accountability, reframing the brothers' deaths as evidence of systemic state violence. The campaign provides a rich case for examining how lexical strategies frame injustice and resistance within Kenya's digital protest discourse.

This research employs corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis (CDA) to investigate lexical strategies in the #JusticeForKianjokomaBrothers campaign in Kenya. The analysis focuses on the ideological work performed by nouns, verbs, pronouns and adjectives in this hashtag activism campaign. This study contributes to digital activism research in three ways. First, it extends CDA analyses of hashtag activism to an African context, where struggles over state violence and public resistance unfold under distinctive socio-political conditions. Second, it foregrounds the role of lexical strategies in digital protests, offering a perspective that complements existing research, which often centres on hashtags, interactivity, or protest framing in Western and racialised contexts. Third, it demonstrates how ordinary Twitter users deploy language to frame police brutality within the spatial constraints of the platform. In doing so, this study situates Kenyan digital activism within global protest discourse scholarship and offers insights on how micro-level patterns contribute to macro-level ideological framing in digital protests.

The rest of this paper is organised as follows. It first reviews work on lexical features in Twitter discourse in general, followed by studies on hashtag activism discourse. Next, it outlines the methodological approach, including corpus construction and analytical

procedures. This leads to the presentation of findings and a discussion on how the lexical patterns reflect ideologies in Kenya's anti-police brutality hashtag activism discourse. The paper concludes by suggesting directions for future work.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on language use in digital platforms has highlighted Twitter as a space where linguistic creativity intersects with social and political communication. Early studies documented the range of linguistic features on Twitter. Hu et al. (2013) compared tweets with SMS and online chats, revealing that tweets have a higher lexical density. Since lexical density functions as an index for quantifying information load in discourse (Johansson, 2008), this implies tweets have a higher proportion of content words (nouns, verbs and adjectives). This finding aligns with Jالبuena (2012), who identifies verbs as the predominant lexical category in tweets, followed by nouns, adjectives and adverbs. Hu et al. (2013) further highlight pronoun use as a distinctive feature of the platform, noting a higher frequency of the first and third-person pronoun forms compared to other digital genres. These findings shed light on the structural patterns of tweets, providing insights into how lexical items are generally used on Twitter. However, given that the studies analysed a wide array of tweets covering diverse topics, they did not account for the purpose-driven and context-specific nature of communication.

Scholarly attention on hashtag activism as a distinct genre has significantly grown, with research examining discursive strategies such as framing, legitimation and collective identity construction. Linguistic studies, particularly those grounded in CDA approaches, show how protestors use language to contest ideologies and mobilise publics. D'Ambrosio (2019) analysed the #BlackLivesMatter tweets, showing how lexical resources express emotions, evaluations and judgements of police violence. Analysing tweets from the same movement, Nartey (2021) identified the communicative functions of nouns, verbs and adjectives. Nartey's study demonstrates that nouns individualise victims and collectivise perpetrators, verbs articulate urgency, and adjectives evoke emotions and mobilise publics. These insights underscore the role of lexical choices in

shaping narratives of injustice. Nevertheless, these studies centre on discourses emerging from racialised contexts in the United States of America, raising questions about whether similar patterns hold in other non-racialised socio-political environments. Methodologically, although both studies use CDA, their reliance on qualitative analysis limits the identification of recurring lexical patterns. The current study offers a different approach by integrating computational corpus techniques with CDA to reveal the patterned ideological work.

Protest discourse research has also demonstrated that pronouns play a central role in constructing group identity, framing adversarial relationships and personalising messages. First-person singular pronoun is typically linked to introspection or personal involvement with the subject, whereas the plural form signals a sense of collectivism (Aboh, 2024; Nartey, 2021; Walker & Kaye, 2022). By contrast, the third-person pronoun delineates adversarial groups, especially between protestors and authorities (Aboh, 2024; Hanafy, 2021; Nartey, 2021). Second-person pronoun addresses audiences directly, personalising appeals and positioning them as active participants in the protest (Hanafy, 2021; Nartey, 2021). These studies position pronouns as ideological tools that are central to constructing protest narratives. However, most evidence comes from movements such as #BlackLivesMatter and #EndSARS, leaving it unclear whether similar patterns hold in Kenyan digital activism.

The literature surveyed demonstrates that lexical choices are central to shaping how injustices are narrated and solidarity mobilised in Twitter's protest discourse. However, studies examining the deployment of lexical strategies in Kenyan protest narratives remain limited. Since linguistic choices are shaped by socio-cultural conditions, examining how the KOT construct narratives of injustice and resistance can offer important comparative insights into how lexical resources are deployed in non-racialised contexts in Africa. This study, therefore, investigates how nouns, verbs, pronouns and adjectives are deployed in the #JusticeForKianjokomaBrothers campaign, highlighting the role of the lexis in framing resistance and solidarity within the Kenyan context.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative hashtag-based case study design, focusing on the #JusticeForKianjokomaBrothers anti-police brutality campaign. The case study design facilitated an in-depth examination of how language is mobilised within a specific socio-political event. On Twitter, hashtag campaigns are short-lived but intense, producing large volumes of thematically coherent tweets that capture a collective stance. Analysing them as a case ensured that the lexical strategies identified were directly tied to a shared discourse of police brutality rather than dispersed across unrelated topics. This coherence allowed for a systematic interpretation of how the lexical choices functioned as ideological resources in this distinct case of digital activism, which in turn strengthened the validity of the findings.

The dataset was drawn from tweets posted under the hashtag #JusticeForKianjokomaBrothers. Tweets were collected using Mecodify, a third-party open-source software that integrates with Twitter's application programming interface. Purposive sampling was used to curate a manageable and contextually relevant corpus. The sample tweets were restricted to those posted between 5th and 15th August 2021, a period when the hashtag was most active. No retweets were harvested to avoid bias towards popular content.

To maintain data accuracy, the automated retrieval process was supplemented with manual preprocessing to eliminate duplicate content, quoted tweets, unrelated tweets and those from institutional accounts. This multilayered filtering ensured the corpus consisted of original tweets with thematically relevant content and foreground communication from individual KOT users. A final dataset of 496 tweets was compiled into a text corpus.

Because this study focuses on lexical strategies, particularly nouns, verbs, pronouns and adjectives, the corpus was further processed to remove non-lexical elements such as metadata, hyperlinks, hashtags, mentions and emojis. While these items carry meaning within Twitter discourse, they are not lexical items in the linguistic sense and therefore fall outside the scope of the present study. These are interactive or paralinguistic resources, and their exclusion ensured

that the analysis and computational procedures, such as the part-of-speech (POS) tagging and concordances, focused on lexical elements relevant to the research objectives. Additionally, all non-English words were translated into English because the POS tagger model could only process English tweets.

The study applied corpus-assisted CDA, which combines computational corpus techniques with qualitative discourse analysis to examine language use in socio-political contexts (Baker, 2023). This approach facilitated the systematic identification of lexical patterns in the Kenyan protest discourse, while allowing for interpretation of their ideological functions. Recurring lexical features in the dataset were identified through corpus linguistics methods such as POS tagging, keyword-in-context (KWIC) extraction and concordance analysis. This minimised reliance on isolated examples. These patterns were then subjected to CDA interpretation guided by Fairclough's (1992, 2003) model, which treats language as a form of social practice that reflects and challenges power relations. Fairclough conceptualises discourse in three dimensions: as text, discursive practice and social practice. These dimensions guided the analysis of lexical strategies at the textual level, situated them within Twitter's platform affordances at the discursive practice level and linked them to broader ideological and institutional struggles at the social practice level. The two levels of analysis were iterative; corpus results informed the qualitative interpretive readings, and emerging themes guided further corpus queries. This analytical framework integrated quantitative patterns with qualitative depth, providing a structured way of linking the micro-level language choices with the broader social contexts and ideological structures.

The first step in the analysis entailed tokenising the text corpus. The English Twitter POS tagger software (Derczynski et al., 2013), which reads into English tweets, was used to assign the parts of speech. Frequency counts were then generated to identify the most recurrent lexical items within the four categories under study. The second step involved generating collocations, word clusters and KIWC concordance lines using AntConc (Anthony, 2023), a corpus analysis software. These listings provided evidence on how lexical items were deployed in context, while the collocations highlighted the ideological framings.

Lastly, qualitative CDA interpretation was done to link the lexical items to their wider discursive and social functions. These procedures facilitated the identification of systematic lexical patterns and the interpretation of their ideological significance in the construction of protest narratives.

The data collection and analysis adhered to social media research ethical guidelines. The researchers obtained an academic licence from Twitter Corporation; hence, the data was legally and ethically collected. In compliance with Twitter's developer data usage policies, only publicly available tweets were utilised in the study. To preserve anonymity, the focus was on analysing discourse rather than individual tweeters and the findings were presented in aggregated trends to report on lexical patterns and not individual user contributions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis begins by outlining the distribution of the word classes in the dataset, followed by a detailed discussion of the four lexical strategies identified. They include nomination and categorisation, action verbs, evaluative lexis and pronoun use. Each strategy is examined through dominant patterns and a qualitative interpretation of how these patterns construct protest discourse.

Part-of-Speech Distribution

Results from the POS tagger provided a foundation for understanding the lexical landscape within the #JusticeForKianjokomaBrothers protest discourse. Table 1 summarises the frequency of the primary word classes in the corpus.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Parts of Speech in the #JusticeForKianjokomaBrothers Dataset

Part of Speech	Tag	Description with examples	Frequency
Nouns	NN	Noun, singular or mass (brother, police, justice)	1024
	NNS	Noun, plural (brothers, officers, protestors)	439
	NNP	Proper noun singular (Emmanuel, Benson, Embu)	720
	NNPS	Proper noun, plural (Africans)	5
Verbs	VB	Verb, base form (remember, kill, forget)	399
	VBD	Verb, past tense (were, arrested, died)	161
	VBG	Verb, gerund or present participle (demanding, killing)	163
	VBN	Verb, past participle (seen, forgotten, lost)	189
	VBP	Verb, non-3 rd person singular present	304
	VBZ	Verb, 3 rd person singular present	207
	MD	Modal verbs (will, can, should)	163
Pronouns	PRP	Personal pronouns (I, we, you)	467
	PRP	Possessive pronoun (her, our, your)	171
	WP	Wh- pronoun (who, what, whose)	56
Prepositions	IN	Preposition (for, in, after)	709
Adverbs	RB	Adverb (allegedly, brutally, sadly)	326
	RBR	Adverb, comparative (more)	4
	RBS	Adverb, superlative (most)	2
Adjectives	JJ	Adjective (rogue, young, innocent)	411
	JJR	Adjective comparative (longer, stronger, better)	10
	JJS	Adjective superlative (hottest, saddest, least)	7
Conjunctions	CC	Coordination conjunctions (but, and)	213

The POS analysis showed nouns were the dominant lexical items, followed by verbs, adjectives and adverbs. The predominance of singular and proper nouns indicates that the tweets are focused on

naming individuals, places, objects and abstract concepts. This suggests that this protest discourse is highly contextualised and personalised. Verbs appeared primarily in their base forms, reflecting a

tendency towards timelessness or imperative expressions. The adjectives and adverbs mostly occurred in unmarked forms, signalling a preference for straightforward rather than comparative or superlative emphasis. These lexical patterns reflecting singular nouns, base-form verbs and simple modifiers suggest a preference for direct syntax, which is consistent with Twitter's brevity. In the grammatical category, prepositions and pronouns were the most frequent, emphasising the contextualisation and relational positioning of Twitter discourse. Conjunctions were the least used, further supporting the reliance on short, standalone statements. The

corpus showed a lexical density of 57 per cent, suggesting that, despite the character limit constraints, the tweets were informationally rich.

Based on the patterns observed from the POS frequency distribution, the analysis narrowed down to nouns, verbs, adjectives and pronouns, as these were the items that carried the most communicative weight in the protest discourse. To guide the qualitative analysis, a keyword analysis was conducted to extract the top 50 content words. The word frequency list in Table 2 gives a general idea of the main lexical items in each word class in the corpus.

Table 2: Top 50 Key Content Words in the #JusticeForKianjokoma Dataset

Nouns	Verbs	Pronouns	Adjectives
Justice	Forget	We	Young
Police	Demand	You	Heartbreaking
Brothers	Killed	Our	First
Emmanuel	Rest	They	Many
Kenya	Want	Their	Bad
Benson	Arrested	Your	Quiet
Family	Killing	Us	Rogue
Pain	Stop	Them	
Embu	Need	Her	
People	Know		
Curfew	Won		
Brutality	Let		
Lives	Lost		
Sons	Murdered		
Youth			
Boys			
Mother			
Parent			
Accountability			
Action			
Answers			

Representative words from each part of speech were further examined using KWIC to trace their usage within the tweets. In some cases, collocation analysis was done to explore the co-occurrence patterns and uncover semantic relationships. This corpus-assisted CDA approach allowed the analysis to identify the connotations, values and representations embedded in the lexical choices. The discussion that follows is organised around the four main lexical strategies.

Nomination and Categorisation: Naming Social Actors and Abstract Ideals

This lexical strategy relies on nouns as resources for naming and categorising social actors and other ideals. The keyword analysis identified *justice*, *police*, *brothers*, *Emmanuel*, *Kenya*, *Benson*, *family*, *pain*, *Embu* and *brutality* among the most frequent nouns. These words represent social actors and reference key issues, places and relationships. The most prominent noun is *justice*, which functions as the main clarion call

of the campaign. The noun is used to frame the protest around accountability, systemic reform and moral duty. In the corpus, justice carries multiple meanings which include references to procedural investigations, legal punishment, systemic change or solidarity with the affected family. This semantic flexibility accommodates the diverse expectations of protestors within the campaign, making the term an effective mobilising resource within the discourse.

The victims were identified through the proper nouns *Emmanuel* and *Benson*, often accompanied by kinship terms such as *brothers*, *family*, *sons* and *children*. This pattern serves to humanise the victims by foregrounding their individuality and familial ties rather than letting them be reduced to statistics of police brutality. By repeatedly invoking their names, tweeters construct the victims as identifiable and relatable individuals, countering the dehumanising effect of namelessness. The kinship framing reinforces their vulnerability and emphasises the pain inflicted on families and communities. Unlike in the #BlackLivesMatter movement, where victims are individualised to foreground their race (D'Ambrosio,

2019), the KOT draw on kinship and social ties to evoke a culturally grounded discourse of communal mourning. This framing transforms the deaths from a private tragedy into a shared social loss, representing a localised strategy of resistance.

In contrast, reference to the perpetrators is primarily collectivised, with the noun *police* anchoring the discourse around state violence. The use of the group noun *police* as a dominant label for the agents of violence indicates that the discourse frames the brutality as evidence of systemic institutional failure rather than the actions of rogue individuals. This collectivisation pattern delegitimises the police by portraying them as a faceless entity linked to violence and impunity. The contrast produces a binary opposition in which the victims are positioned as deserving empathy and the police are framed as perpetrators of systemic injustices. The KWIC analysis reinforces this view, showing that *police* frequently co-occurred with actions such as *brutalising*, *killing* and *lying* as shown in Figure 1.

Postmortem results show that	Police	brutalizing residents and killing 4 of them within a span
	police	are lying on the death of, Benson Njiru and
One shot dead as	police	disperse angry residents in Kianjokoma Town Embu Viewer discretion @
	Police	have shot another youth in Kianjokoma for holding a
Kenya	police	kill more people than gangsters every year.
	police	#JusticeForKianjokomaBrothers @IG_

Figure 1: Selected KWIC Analysis of the Word 'Police'

This co-occurrence transforms the meaning of *police* from law enforcers to perpetrators of harm. Additionally, a collocation analysis revealed that the phrase *police brutality* occurred more frequently than *police officers*. While *officer* is a neutral descriptor, *brutality* is an emotionally charged term that conveys outrage and delegitimises the institution. The KOT use this portrayal of police to frame the demand for justice as a structural issue that requires accountability at the institutional level. These associations shape how the audience perceives the police and are consistent with findings from #EndSARS (Aboh, 2024) and other

studies on negative lexical framings of police (D'Ambrosio, 2019).

Through nomination and categorisation, the protest is framed as a struggle between vulnerable individuals and an institution abstracted into a monolithic oppressor, thereby legitimising resistance and strengthening calls for solidarity. The strategy performs representational and ideological work as defined in Fairclough's (1992) model. The lexical patterns textualise unequal power relations by naming state authorities as oppressive while affirming the victims' moral legitimacy through humanised reference.

Action Verbs: Expressing Agency, Urgency and Resistance

This lexical strategy is central to articulating action, agency and urgency in the protest discourse. The most frequent verbs in the dataset are *forget*, *demand*,

killed, *want*, *arrested*, *stop*, *need*, *murdered*, *need* and *ensure*. The repeated use of *forget*, serves as a rallying call for solidarity. A KWIC analysis showed that the verb often appears in negated forms, as illustrated in Figure 2.

to solve this loss with a TRANSFER. WE WILL NOT	FORGET...
silent. Accountability in this country is a hoax! Do not	forget.
Good morning... We will let's not	forget,
We won't sleep in peace, we won't	forget
We will never	forget.
We cannot	forget
Do not ever	forget.
today in Kenga. R.I.P comrade. We shall never	forget. #
timeline, we continue to demand for Justice!!! We shall not	forget. #

Figure 2: Selected KWIC Analysis of the Verb 'Forget'

These formulations go beyond a commitment to memory, enacting defiance against erasure and emphasising a sustained resistance. Choosing to use the form '*not forget*' instead of '*remember*' implicitly communicates an active resistance against silencing, thereby amplifying the protestors' commitment to continue mobilising until justice is served.

Another notable verb is *demand*, along with semantically related items such as *want*, *need* and *ensure*. A KWIC analysis showed the verb typically collocates with *we* as the subject and *justice* (and other related nouns) as the object. This shows that the verb is used to express action as well as foreground the agency of the protestors by positioning them as active subjects in the struggle for justice. In some instances, additional contextual details intensify the demands, rendering them urgent, emotive and non-negotiable. For example, when paired with accounts of brutality, the verb conveys moral urgency and lends legitimacy to the protest claims. This mobilises collective action, which helps sustain the protest's momentum. These verbs realise the discourse-as-action dimension (Fairclough, 1992), where linguistic forms become acts of resistance that recontextualise state violence as a civic and moral struggle.

Evaluative Lexis: Portraying Actors and Events

This strategy uses adjectives as a resource for framing actors and events, infusing the protest discourse with affective and evaluative meaning. Some of the most frequent adjectives include *young*, *notorious*, *rogue*,

painful, *heartbreaking*, *first*, *many*, *quiet*, and *bad*. Since adjectives derive their meanings from the nouns they qualify, a KWIC analysis was conducted to identify their contextual functions.

The victims were frequently described using positive or sympathetic adjectives such as *young*, *innocent*, *bright* and *promising*. In the discourse, the adjective *young* is particularly salient when describing the victims, emphasising their vulnerability, innocence, and lost potential. It also extends the impact of the loss beyond the individuals, implying that the entire community suffered because of the premature deaths. These descriptors position the brothers as symbols of unfulfilled potential. Such adjectival framing amplifies the injustice of their deaths, thereby justifying the protests. In contrast, the perpetrators are consistently described using negative adjectives such as *bad*, *rogue* and *notorious*. These descriptors frame the police as deviant actors who go against their mandate to protect. This evaluative asymmetry consolidates empathy for the victims and outrage against the perpetrators, serving as a strategy to frame resistance.

Adjectives also evaluate the events described in the discourse using terms such as *painful*, *heartbreaking* and *tragic*. These evaluations frame the deaths and other linked events as happenings that elicit negative emotions, presenting them as intolerable and unacceptable. When such lexis occurs alongside first-person plural pronouns such as *we are heartbroken*, the affective stance becomes collectivised, converting

personal grief into shared pain. Such patterning of evaluation constructs solidarity as emotional and ideological, bringing out the moral and social weight of the killings.

The integration of the emotional and moral evaluations reinforces the ideological framing of the protests through shaping the audience perceptions, legitimising the protests and mobilising solidarity. The evaluative lexis reconstitutes the moral order by defining which actors and events violate community values. Through this social critique, the discourse enacts Fairclough's third dimension of discourse as social practice.

Pronoun Use: Constructing Solidarity and Opposition

This lexical strategy constructs solidarity, audience engagement and adversarial positioning within the protest discourse. Pronouns emerged as salient lexical items in the corpus, with *we* ranking as the most frequent word overall. Their prominence emphasises the centrality of pronouns in structuring protest discourse on Twitter. This is consistent with earlier observations about their extensive use in digital communication (Hanafy, 2021; Hu et al., 2013). The analysis reveals three distinct patterns: the use of first-person plural pronouns to create solidarity, second-person pronouns to directly engage audiences and third-person pronouns to delineate adversarial groups.

The first-person plural pronoun *we* along with its variants (*our*, *us*), presents the protestors as a unified community demanding justice and constructs a strong sense of collective identity. This collective identity often co-occurs with evaluative and nominative expressions, for example, *we demand justice for our brothers*. In such patterning, the pronouns transform individual voices into collective agents, amplifying a collective struggle against institutional violence. This also shows that pronouns function synergistically with nouns and adjectives to articulate resistance. Such usage resonates with findings from other hashtag activism studies (Aboh, 2024; Hanafy, 2021; Walker & Kaye, 2022).

The second-person pronoun *you*, serves as a direct engagement strategy. In some cases, it addresses fellow citizens, appealing to their emotions through rhetorical questions or moral imperatives. These

personalised appeals encourage the audience to perceive the protest as an individual responsibility. Such usage transforms passive readers into potential participants, positioning them as responsible actors in the struggle, a crucial mechanism for mobilisation in hashtag activism. In other instances, the pronoun is directed at the police and other state authorities. This dual orientation illustrates the flexibility of the pronoun in constructing both mobilising appeals and confrontational stances. This strategic use of *you* personalises discourse and creates emotional immediacy, helping draw recipients into the narrative as active participants, as also noted by Hanafy (2021).

Third-person pronouns construct social categorisation in the discourse by reinforcing divisions between the social actors. The binary of *us* versus *them* delineates the protestors as the ingroup and the police and government officials as the outgroup. This division creates a discursive boundary that reinforces an adversarial framing of state-citizen relations. Such antagonistic framing portrays the police as a separate and hostile entity, distancing them from ordinary citizens. Similar patterns have been observed in the #EndSARS movement (Aboh, 2024).

In this protest discourse, the shifting between the first, second and third-person forms functions as a strategy to mobilise support, sustain collective unity and directly confront adversaries. Through inclusive and exclusive pronouns, the tweets redistribute symbolic power by defining who speaks and who is accountable to the collective. Such usage linguistically reconfigures power relations between citizens and the state, redefining moral legitimacy within the digital space.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study examined the lexical strategies employed in the #JusticeForKianjokomaBrothers campaign, showing how language operates as an ideological tool for framing protest discourse on Kenyan Twitter. The analysis reveals that the corpus is informationally dense, with nouns and verbs dominating while conjunctions remain sparse. This pattern signals a tendency towards concise expressions that are well-suited to Twitter's design constraints.

The analysis demonstrates that the KOT employ several lexical strategies to construct meaning and mobilise resistance. Nomination and categorisation through nouns construct the identity of the key social actors. The victims are humanised through personal names, kinship terms and place references, which foreground their individuality and social belonging. On the other hand, police are collectivised as a faceless institution associated with violence. This contrast reinforces a binary opposition between the victims as vulnerable individuals and the police as a monolithic oppressor. Action verbs convey agency, articulate urgency and resistance. The verbs frame activism as ongoing and uncompromising, thus sustaining the momentum of the protests.

Evaluative lexis enriches the discourse by positively portraying the victims while casting the police and events surrounding the brutality negatively. This evaluation amplifies empathy for victims and outrage against the police, helping to frame resistance. Pronouns construct a collective identity, foster solidarity, and establish an ingroup-outgroup distinction. This pronoun use helps mobilise participants while positioning the state as an external threat. By embedding resistance in ordinary language choices, the lexical strategies frame the protests as a legitimate, collective and moral struggle for justice against systemic state violence.

The findings show that lexical patterns observed in other global activism movements recur in the Kenyan campaign. However, these patterns are reshaped by local socio-cultural conditions, particularly kinship and community ties, memories of state violence and strained police-citizen relations. This shows that the Kenyan protest discourse recontextualises global frames of resistance within local socio-cultural values. This recontextualisation reaffirms CDA's claim that discourse is historically and culturally situated. By demonstrating that lexical patterns framing resistance are both transnational and context specific, the study bridges global and local understandings of digital protests.

Recommendations: Beyond describing lexical strategies, the study affirms the adaptability of corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis for investigating short-form digital discourses such as tweets. Integrating quantitative corpus evidence with qualitative interpretation operationalises Fairclough's three-dimensional model in a data-intensive and platform-sensitive manner. Future research could extend this approach to other protest campaigns, compare across platforms or investigate the interaction of lexical, interactive and visual resources. Such work would deepen understanding of how digital protest communication performs ideological functions through diverse semiotic resources and in different socio-political contexts.

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