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<https://doi.org/10.24833/2687-0126-2023-5-3-76-92>

STRATEGIES OF (DE)LEGITIMATION OF COVID-19 VACCINES IN TANZANIAN POLITICAL SPEECHES

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic sparked worldwide efforts to combat the health crisis, including vaccine development and distribution. However, varying political responses to vaccination policies complicated public discourse and influenced vaccine acceptance. This research paper employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to compare (de)legitimation strategies used in Tanzanian political speeches by two presidents: late President Magufuli and current President Samia Suluhu Hassan. The study focuses on their approaches to legitimizing or delegitimizing COVID-19 vaccines in 2021. Two speeches were purposefully selected based on their relevance to vaccination decisions. President Magufuli employed strategies such as discrediting experts, discrediting others, denial, conspiracy theories, and making accusations to delegitimize vaccines. In contrast, President Samia justified vaccine acceptance using strategies such as authorization, moral evaluation, emotional appeals, and rationalization. These differences in approach can be attributed to their respective ideologies. President Magufuli, a populist leader, displayed scepticism towards Western medicine and promoted local solutions, while President Samia presented herself as a pragmatic leader who prioritizes scientific solutions and international cooperation in addressing health crises. The findings shed light on the complexities of public health communication and vaccine acceptance in Tanzania.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis (CDA), legitimation strategy, delegitimation strategy, COVID-19 vaccine, political discourse, public health communication.

How to cite this article: Selenya, J.J. (2023). Strategies of (De)Legitimation of COVID-19 Vaccines in Tanzanian Political Speeches. *Professional Discourse & Communication*, 5(3), pp. 76–92. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2687-0126-2023-5-3-76-92>

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper compares the discursive strategies employed in Tanzanian political speeches by two Presidents, the late President Magufuli and the current President Samia Suluhu Hassan, to either legitimize or delegitimize COVID-19 vaccines. The analysis focuses on the year 2021, aiming to examine and contrast the legitimation and delegitimation strategies used by each president to communicate two opposing sides regarding vaccines.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 resulted in a global health crisis. The pandemic prompted significant efforts to overcome the crisis. One of the efforts was the development and distribution of vaccines. However, the response from political leaders varied, with some embracing and endorsing the use of vaccines through their language and rhetoric, while others expressed opposition and scepticism towards vaccines. This divergence in political stances towards vaccines added complexity to the public discourse surrounding vaccination campaigns and had implications for public health communication and vaccine acceptance.

In Tanzania, the government responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in the early months of 2020 by implementing a number of measures recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). These measures included closing schools and universities, suspending sports events and gatherings, and providing awareness campaigns about handwashing, hand sanitisers, and mask-wearing. The government also issued guidelines on the number of passengers allowed in commuter buses and implemented COVID-19 testing for people travelling abroad or arriving from foreign countries. There were no strict lockdowns or restrictions on movement, and places of worship remained open. People were advised to wear masks and maintain social distancing.

In May 2020, the government stopped reporting COVID-19 data and refused to share information about the number of cases. This occurred after the government closed the national health laboratory following allegations that false positives had been reported on samples of papaya and goat, which had been secretly presented and tested. In June 2020, the president announced that Tanzania was free from COVID-19. Schools were reopened and life returned to normal, with the president suggesting prayer and local herbs as a solution to the pandemic.

The Tanzanian government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was then very controversial. President John Magufuli was a vocal critic of the COVID-19 vaccine. He made a number of public statements denying the existence of COVID-19 and the effectiveness of the vaccine and discouraging people from getting vaccinated. The president employed several strategies to delegitimize COVID-19 vaccines.

Following the death of President Magufuli in 2021, significant changes were implemented in Tanzania's COVID-19 management approach. Firstly, the government acknowledged the presence of COVID-19 and participated in the COVAX program to obtain vaccines. Secondly, they began publicly reporting case numbers and promoting the use of masks and adherence to social distancing measures. These shifts in the government's COVID-19 response illustrate the influence of a single leader, while also indicating the influence of other factors determined by the state's structure [Patterson, 2022]. Thirdly, the government launched a campaign to raise awareness about the importance of getting vaccinated. President Samia Suluhu Hassan took the lead by publicly receiving the vaccine. However, convincing the public was not easy, as they had been persuaded by the previous regime that vaccines are dangerous.

The study on the delegitimation of COVID-19 vaccines in Tanzania is a matter of concern as it highlights the controversy surrounding the crisis management and communication of the Tanzanian government. This is evident in the contrasting responses to COVID-19 during the Magufuli era and the new government under President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

COVID-19 is a political phenomenon, as Al-mwzaiji [2021] noted keeping COVID-19 away from politics would be problematic since the virus itself is not political but the response to the crisis is political. According to Wilkinson & Leach [2014] diseases and the corresponding responses to them are inherently political and carry significant political consequences. Just as other diseases like Ebola had been politicised, Abbas [2020] observed that COVID-19 were also highly politicized in the media. Recuero & Soares [2022] observed that Brazilian politicians, including

President Jair Bolsonaro, used social media platforms to spread disinformation through rationalization and denunciation against the COVID-19 vaccine. They also observed that the political frame played an important role in spreading disinformation. Studies have shown that the media plays a role in the politicization of the pandemic. For instance, a study conducted by Abbas [2020] revealed that The New York Times from the United States and the Global Times from China politicized the pandemic in order to promote the interests and ideologies of their respective countries.

Legitimation is a concept in critical discourse analysis (CDA) that refers to the ways in which texts and discourses construct and justify social practices [Fairclough, 2001; van Dijk, 2006, 2009]. It is a way of using language to construct and represent reality in a way that serves the interests of certain social actors [van Leeuwen, 2007]. Legitimation involves presenting an act, process, or ideology in a way that gives the impression of legitimacy, thereby making it acceptable and considered normal by individuals [Wang, 2020]. In this sense, legitimation strategies are techniques used in communication to make something seem more believable or trustworthy and normal.

According to van Leeuwen [2007], legitimation can be viewed as beneficial by helping to establish common ground and shared values among different social actors, and thus facilitate cooperation and coordination. Von Billerbeck [2020] also contends that legitimation can help to enhance the credibility and authority of social actors who use it, and thus increase their influence and impact. It can also be used to mobilize support and consent for social practices that are beneficial for society or certain groups within it.

However, it is important to acknowledge that legitimation discourse can have a devastating impact. It can be used to manipulate and mislead the audience by presenting biased or distorted views of reality, and thus serve the interests of powerful or dominant groups [Von Billerbeck, 2020]. It can also suppress or marginalize alternative or dissenting voices that challenge the status quo or propose different solutions [Reyes, 2011]. Furthermore, legitimation discourse may entrench or reproduce inefficient or ineffective practices that are resistant to change or improvement [Reyes, 2011].

Researchers in language and communication examine this concept by analysing the strategies that assist actors in achieving legitimation goals. Several studies have offered insights into how politicians employ legitimation strategies to legitimize specific actions, processes, policies, or ideologies. Rojo & van Dijk [1997] analyzed the speech of the Spanish Secretary of the Interior, Mayor Oreja, during the summer of 1996, in which he used legitimation strategies to justify the forceful expulsion of a group of African “illegal” migrants from Melilla, the Spanish enclave in Morocco. In their research, Pansardi & Battegazzorre [2018] examined the speeches of two Presidents of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso and Jean-Claude Juncker, to investigate how they employed specific discursive legitimation strategies in an effort to reaffirm and regain legitimacy for EU decisions and the process of integration. Abuelwafa [2021] conducted a study to explore the legitimation strategies that President Donald Trump used in his address to his supporters, in which he denounced the American election and described it as the worst theft in American history.

Recently, several studies have investigated the legitimation strategies employed by governments to justify the implementation of strict measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Wodak [2022] examined the strategies used by various European governments to legitimize measures like lockdowns and movement restrictions. Another study by Wang [2022] analyzed the legitimation strategies employed in the speeches of Donald Trump (USA) and Xi Jinping (China)

to justify specific actions taken against the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, a recent study by Caliendo [2022] explored the employment of legitimization discursive strategies on Twitter to validate the Brexit project based on Britain's success in COVID-19 vaccine development.

While studies on COVID-19 vaccine discourse have predominantly focused on misinformation and disinformation spread on social media [Puri et al., 2020; Savoia et al., 2022; Monaci & Persico, 2023] limited attention has been given to examining the (de)legitimation strategies employed in political speeches concerning COVID. Therefore, the current study aims to examine the discursive strategies employed in Tanzanian political speeches by two Presidents, the late President Magufuli and the current President Samia Suluhu Hassan, to either legitimize or delegitimize COVID-19 vaccines.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. What discursive strategies were employed in Tanzanian political speeches by two Presidents, the late President Magufuli and the current President Samia Suluhu Hassan, to either legitimize or delegitimize COVID-19 vaccines?
- ii. How do the discursive strategies used by each president differ or resemble in their approach to legitimize or delegitimize COVID-19 vaccines?

This study employed Van Leeuwen's [2007] and Reyes's [2011] frameworks of legitimization strategies as the main theoretical tools for the analysis. The study also employs other categories of delegitimation from other studies which are not covered in the two frameworks.

Van Leeuwen's [2007] framework proposes the following four categories of legitimization strategies. (1) Authorization is referred to as a type of legitimization strategy that social actors use to justify their actions or policy, which involves referring to the authority of tradition, law, or persons who have been granted some kind of authority. (2) Moral evaluation is legitimization through reference to moral values, such as good, bad, right, and wrong. (3) Rationalization is legitimization through reference to cognitive validity, social knowledge, and other rational arguments. (4) Mythopoesis is legitimization through narratives and stories that build upon legitimate and non-legitimate actions.

Based on van Leeuwen's legitimization strategies, Reyes [2011] developed a new set of legitimization strategies, which are: (1) emotions: using fear, anger, pity or other emotions to persuade the audience to accept a course of action or a point of view; (2) hypothetical future: projecting a possible or desirable scenario in the future that depends on the acceptance or rejection of a current practice; (3) rationality: appealing to logic, facts, evidence or common sense to support a claim or an argument; (4) voices of expertise: invoking the authority or credibility of experts, institutions, traditions or laws to legitimize a practice or a position; (5) altruism: presenting a practice or a position as motivated by selfless concern for the welfare of others, especially those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged.

The categories of delegitimizing strategies that did not fit into the two frameworks include accusations, conspiracy theories, negative other-presentation, and problem denial. These strategies were adopted from Wodak [2022] and Chepurnaya [2021].

This study will apply these frameworks to analyze how the political actors used various (de) legitimization strategies in their speeches to either legitimize or delegitimize COVID-19 vaccinations. The study will contribute to the existing literature on political discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis by providing a comprehensive analysis of (de)legitimation strategies in the context of a global health crisis.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This qualitative study used critical discourse analysis (CDA) to investigate the legitimation and delegitimation strategies employed by two Tanzanian presidents, the late President John Pombe Magufuli and the current President Samia Suluhu Hassan, to either justify or discredit COVID-19 vaccines.

The study analyzed two speeches from the two Presidents. The speeches were purposefully selected based on their exclusive focus on the theme of COVID-19 vaccines. President Magufuli's speech was delivered on January 27, 2021, in his hometown of Chato. It was downloaded from the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation YouTube channel, which is available to the public at [Youtube, 27 January, 2021]. President Samia Suluhu Hassan's speech was delivered during the inauguration of the national COVID-19 vaccination campaign in Dar es Salaam on July 28, 2021. It was downloaded from the Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation YouTube channel, which is available to the public at [Youtube, 28 July, 2021].

The selection of these two speeches as empirical material for the research was based on their thematic relevance to this study, as they exclusively focused on the issue of COVID-19 vaccines, which makes them pertinent and valuable sources of data. Additionally, as these speeches were delivered by two Tanzanian Presidents who played significant roles in public health decision-making during the pandemic, they carry added significance for the research. Also, the selection of these two speeches was deemed satisfactory for the purpose of this study, as they were delivered with the intent to explain important decisions and persuade citizens to accept these decisions made by their respective presidents. Within these speeches, both presidents aimed to justify the reasons behind their decisions regarding COVID-19 vaccines to the Tanzanian population.

The Kiswahili audiovisual speeches were transcribed into text and translated into English, with confirmation of transcription accuracy achieved by listening to the audio-visual speeches. Subsequently, the speech texts underwent a thorough reading to unveil the strategies employed by the two presidents in either delegitimizing or legitimizing COVID-19 vaccines.

After the reading of the transcribed speeches, manual coding was carried out. The findings were then coded according to the categories developed within CDA frameworks of legitimation strategies. The strategies developed by van Leeuwen [2007] and Reyes [2011] served as the basis for the analysis of the speech texts. However, some other categories that were not supported in the two models were also categorized based on the analysis of other CDA studies by Wodak [2022] and Chepnanya [2021].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings highlight that the two presidents, representing opposing sides, employed distinct strategies to either legitimize or delegitimize the vaccines. President Magufuli utilized strategies such as personal authority, discrediting expert authority, making accusations, promoting conspiracy theories, presenting a negative portrayal of others, and denying the problem to undermine the effectiveness and safety of COVID-19 vaccines. Conversely, the current president of Tanzania, Samia Suluhu Hassan, employed strategies including expert and institutional authority, personal authority, moral evaluation through analogy, evoking emotions, and rationalization to justify her stance of accepting the vaccines and encouraging citizens to get vaccinated. The data are presented below.

3.1 Discursive strategies of delegitimation by the late President John Pombe Magufuli

The late President Magufuli utilized various discursive strategies to undermine the legitimacy of COVID-19 vaccines, minimizing the severity of the pandemic and casting doubt on the efficacy of the vaccines. The subsequent strategies were identified:

3.1.1. Delegitimation through authorization

The late President John Magufuli appealed to the personal and impersonal authority to delegitimize COVID-19 vaccines. In the following examples, the late Magufuli applied personal authority to discredit vaccines:

- (1) *“Niiombe wizara ya afya isiwee inakimbialia mambo ya machanjo chanjo bila yenyewe kujiridhisha”* / “I request the Ministry of Health not to rush into vaccinations without satisfying themselves.”

In (1), Magufuli used the personal pronoun “I” and the verb “request” expressing modality to create a sense of authority. The use of the personal pronoun “I” highlights Magufuli’s position as president, and the use of the verb “request” implies that Magufuli is making a polite request, but one that should be taken seriously or which should be followed by the ministry strictly.

In another example, Magufuli used personal authority to discredit the vaccine as not being important or beneficial:

- (2) *“Kwahiyo, niiombe sana wizara ya afya siyo kila chanjo ni ya maana kwa taifa letu. Siyo kila chanjo inafaida kwetu”* / “I strongly request the Ministry of Health that not every vaccine is important for our nation. Not every vaccine is beneficial to us.”

In (2), Magufuli again used the personal pronoun “I” to create a sense of authority. He also used the word “strongly” to emphasize his point. This suggests that Magufuli is not only making a request but that he is also issuing a warning.

The president also used impersonal authority to persuade his audience by invoking their religious beliefs. He said:

- (3) *“Naomba tuendelee kusimama na kumuomba Mungu wetu, tuendeleo kumtanguliza Mungu wetu...”* / I urge that we continue to stand and pray to our God, continue to put our God first...”

In (3), he implied that prayer was more reliable than vaccines in protecting Tanzania from COVID-19. This is an example of impersonal authority, as Magufuli is appealing to a higher power rather than his own personal experience or knowledge.

The president also pretended to respect expert authority by telling the Ministry of Health to verify the vaccines before accepting them. He said;

- (4) *“Niiombe wizara ya afya isiwee inakimbialia mambo ya machanjo chanjo bila yenyewe kujiridhisha”* / “I request the Ministry of Health not to rush into vaccinations without satisfying themselves”.
- (5) *“...huku tukichukuwa taaadhari za kiafya kaadiri tutakavyokuwa tukiambiwa na wataalamu wetu”* / “...while taking health precautions as we will be told by our experts.”

In (4), the president appeared to invoke expert authority by advising the Ministry of Health to conduct a thorough investigation before accepting vaccines. Furthermore, in (5), he advised the audience to take necessary precautions based on the guidance provided by experts.

However, this was very manipulative, considering his prior declaration that COVID-19 did not exist in Tanzania and his denial of the pandemic itself. Magufuli pretended that he referred to expert authority, but he contradicted the advice of the experts. For example, Mtani & Ngohengo

[2023] documented that he had even dismissed the deputy minister, a medical doctor, who opposed the government's endorsement of local remedies like steam therapy, which Magufuli championed. The deputy minister had cautioned the public that inhaling steam therapy, purported to cure COVID-19, was both ineffective and hazardous to their health.

3.1.2. *Delegitimation through accusations*

The CDA analysis revealed that President Magufuli employed various strategies to delegitimize the vaccine. One of these strategies involved making accusations to undermine the safety and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines. According to Chepurnaya [2021], accusation as a delegitimation strategy is a way of undermining the credibility of a person, group or institution by blaming them for wrongdoing, which might be true or false.

Magufuli, specifically accused certain Tanzanians who had travelled abroad and received vaccinations of bringing back a new and unusual variant of the coronavirus. However, he did not explicitly name these individuals:

- (6) *“Wapo baadhi ya watanzania hata wameondoka ndani ya nchi na kukimbilia maeneo mengine na kwenda kuchanjwa na walipochanjwa huko wametuletea korona ambayo ni ya ajabu ajabu”* / “There are some Tanzanians who have even left the country and fled to other places to be vaccinated, and when they were vaccinated there, they brought us the corona which is very strange”.

In datum (6), the late president suggests that the vaccines obtained by Tanzanian citizens abroad have complicated the coronavirus, implying that those who received the vaccines are now infected and have introduced the new variant to Tanzania. Through associating the new variant with the vaccines, Magufuli sought to legitimize his opposition to COVID-19 vaccines. These findings align with a study by Chepurnaya [2021], which found that former US President Donald Trump also employed accusation as a means to delegitimize the severity of the pandemic in the US. Trump accused the media and the Democratic Party of providing negative and misleading reports on the COVID-19 situation in the country.

3.1.3. *Delegitimation through conspiracy theories*

A conspiracy theory is a narrative that explains an event or situation by claiming that it is the result of a secret and often evil plot by powerful groups, and that rejects the official or mainstream account as false or deceptive [Harambam, 2021]. Giry & Gürpınar [2020] contend that conspiracy theories serve the purpose of reinforcing the prevailing and established values within a specific group, simultaneously casting outsiders in a negative light. Conspiracy theories are based on speculation and conjecture, rather than evidence, and thus can be used to manipulate people's opinions and beliefs.

President Magufuli employed conspiracy theory to discredit the COVID-19 vaccines. In his words:

- (7) *“Ipo nchi fulani ilichanjwa watoto wake wa kike wenye umri wa miaka 14 wanaambiwa ni kwa ajili ya kuzuia kansa ya kizazi imekuja kugundulika ile chanjo ni yakuzuia wasizae. Kwahiyo niombe sana wizara ya afya siyo kila chanjo ni ya maana kwa taifa letu”* / “There is a country where 14-year-old girls were vaccinated, they were told it was to prevent cervical cancer, but it was discovered later that the vaccine is to prevent them from having children. So, I strongly request the Ministry of Health that not every vaccine is important for our nation”.

This conspiracy theory challenges the legitimacy of the vaccines and the authorities or organizations that promote them by accusing them of deception, manipulation and hidden agendas. According to the late President, vaccines are purportedly wielded as weapons by imperialist powers, particularly the white people, to colonize or exploit the abundant resources of Tanzania as well as the entire African continent. In (7), he provided an example of a country, which he did not explicitly mention, where 14-year-old girls were inoculated to prevent cervical cancer. However, it was later discovered that the vaccine aimed to hinder the girls from bearing children. According to his theory, the cervical cancer vaccine was a plot to control the African population. Consequently, he argued that Tanzanian citizens, especially the Ministry of Health, should remain vigilant regarding external vaccines.

3.1.4. *Delegitimation through negative other-presentation*

The president also employed negative other-presentation accompanied by the fallacy of hasty generalization to delegitimize and discredit COVID-19 vaccines. This is a rhetorical strategy that involves portraying an out-group or “other” in a negative light in order to make the in-group or “us” look better. He says:

- (8) *“Msije mkafikiria mnependwa sana. Taifa ili ni Tajiri afrika ni Tajiri kila mmoja anaitamani. Tuwe waangalifu”* / “Don’t think you are loved too much. This nation is rich, Africa is rich, everyone desires it. Let’s be careful”.
- (9) *“Simameni imara Chanjo hazifai, kama wazungu waangukuwa na uwezo wa kuleta chanjo hata chanjo ya ukimwi ingekuwa imeshaletwa, hata chanjo ya kifua kikua ingekuwa kifua kingekuwa kimeondoka, hata cha maleria ingekuwa imeshapatina, hata chanjo ya kensa ingekuwa imeshapatikana”* / “Stand firm, vaccines are not effective. If the whites had the ability to introduce vaccines, even the AIDS vaccine would have been brought, even the tuberculosis vaccine would have been in place, even the malaria vaccine would have been available, even the cancer vaccine would have been obtained”.

In datums (8) & (9), the strategy creates two groups (the white “others” vs. African “us”). The late President Magufuli questions the competence and intentions of “white people” and external entities to produce effective vaccines. His speech suggests that if they were truly capable and benevolent, they would have already produced effective vaccines for AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and cancer. He fears that they produce vaccines for malicious purposes against Africans. This strategy creates doubt and scepticism by presenting an extreme and unrealistic scenario, implying that the vaccines being introduced may not be trustworthy or beneficial. This is a negative stereotype that is based on the assumption that the whites are only interested in exploiting Africans and Tanzanians. The COVID-19 pandemic was not just a problem for Tanzania or Africa. It was a global issue, and the vaccines were not the sole responsibility of any one country or region. The results of this study are consistent with the findings of [Chepurnaya, 2021], who observed that former US President Trump made accusations against the media by labelling them as “bad reporters”. The study also noted that Trump accused Democrats of being “partisan” and “self-serving”.

The strategy was realized also through the “fallacy of hasty generalization”. President Magufuli assumes that if “the whites” (European countries and the USA) had the ability to produce COVID-19 vaccines, all major diseases would have been eradicated and numerous vaccines would have been available. This generalization is made without considering the complexities and challenges involved in vaccine development, distribution, and eradication of diseases. It oversimplifies the situation and draws a sweeping conclusion without substantial evidence or a comprehensive

understanding of the situation. This reveals a flawed logic. The late President Magufuli's claims presuppose that the imperialists (whites) intentionally created COVID-19 and vaccines as part of a plot to exploit African and Tanzanian resources. President Magufuli's argument also ignores the fact that many diseases have been eradicated or controlled, thanks to the work of scientists and public health officials from all over the world.

While it is not wrong to be sceptical about vaccines, using irrelevant arguments and accusations to support that scepticism can be harmful. This can lead to citizens distrusting the health systems that are working to protect them.

3.1.5. Delegitimation through problem denial

The late President Magufuli also employed problem denial to discredit the COVID-19 vaccines. Wodak [2021, p. 84] contends that "this strategy consists of rejecting or minimizing the existence or severity of a social issue, combined with a counter-attack on the accusers or critics, and accompanied by a negative representation of the out-group".

(10) *"Tumeweza kukaa mwaka mzima na kitu Tanzania tukiwa hatuna korona, hata hapa hakuna aliyevaa barakoa. Mungu wetu yupo mbele ya shetani na shetani atashindwa na atalegea katika magonjwa mbalimbali"* / "We have been able to spend a whole year in Tanzania without a corona, even here no one is wearing a mask. Our God is in front of the devil and the devil will be defeated and he will weaken in various diseases".

In example (10), Magufuli claimed that Tanzania was free of coronavirus thanks to God's intervention, and accused foreign powers of intentionally causing harm to Tanzanians through the pandemic and the vaccines. He also portrayed the vaccine manufacturers as untrustworthy and suggested that Tanzanians should rely on God instead. However, this claim that Tanzania was free from COVID-19 contradicted reports from the World Health Organization [WHO, 2021], which indicated positive cases among Tanzanians travelling abroad, emphasizing the need for proactive measures.

This approach of problem denial employed by Magufuli aimed to undermine the legitimacy and effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines by dismissing their importance, discrediting the motives of foreign powers, and promoting alternative solutions. The pandemic was a global phenomenon which required the collaboration of all global leaders. However, Magufuli chose not to collaborate with the world in tackling the pandemic but appealed to nationalistic sentiments, urging Tanzanians to be cautious and sceptical of foreign influences.

3.2. Discursive strategies of legitimation by President Samia Suluhu Hassan

Unlike the late Magufuli, President Samia Suluhu Hassan legitimized the vaccine through strategies such as authorization, moral authority, rationalization and authorization through emotion.

3.2.1. Legitimation through authorization

President Samia Suluhu Hassan extensively employed the strategy of authority legitimation to validate the decision of her government regarding COVID-19 vaccination. The findings reveal that she employed multiple means of authorization, such as relying on expert opinions, institutional credibility, conformity, and personal authority, in order to establish the legitimacy of COVID-19 vaccines.

3.2.1.a. Authorization through credibility of experts and institutions

President Samia Suluhu Hassan used institutions, such as the Ministry of Health, a special committee, and the African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to legitimize her decision. This was to strengthen the legitimacy of her decision. Van Leeuwen [2007] referred to this kind of legitimation as institutional positioning. For example, President Hassan said:

- (11) *“Nishukuru sana wizara ya Afya na wizara ya mambo ya nje kwa jitihada zinazofanywa kwa Pamoja / “I am very grateful to the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their joint efforts”.*
- (12) *“Nishukuru pia kamati ambayo nimeiunda kufatilia” / “I also express my gratitude to the committee that I have established to monitor this. Yesterday, we also placed our order, and we will see how we proceed and how we can receive them”.*
- (13) *“Jana nilikuwa na mazungumzo na mkurugenzi mkuu wa kituo cha udhibiti magonjwa Afrika na akanieleza jinsi umoja wa Afrika tulivyojipanga kukabiliana na jambo hili” / “Yesterday, I had a conversation with the Director-General of the African CDC, and he explained to me how the African Union is prepared to tackle this issue”.*

The President mentioned her consultation with the Director-General, which established a direct link to an expert in the field. This lent credibility to her statements, as it showed that she was speaking from a position of knowledge and authority.

The president also used the voice of the expert or the authority through the voices of experts from the medical field.

- (14) *“Kwahiyo mimi sioni hatari iliyopo na baada ya wanasayansi kujiridhisha, na zimekuja nchini na wanasayansi wetu nchini wamejiridhisha mimi nipo tayari kuchanja sasa hivi” / “So, I don’t see any danger, after the scientists have confirmed it, and they have come to our country, and our own scientists have confirmed it, I am ready to get vaccinated now”.*

In (14), the President mentioned that the vaccines had been approved by international experts and experts from Tanzania; thus, she is ready to be vaccinated. This is an effective strategy because it suggests that the vaccines are safe and effective, as they have been vetted by qualified professionals.

3.2.1.b. Legitimation through the authority of conformity

President Samia also employed the authority of conformity legitimation strategy to persuade citizens to accept the vaccine. Authority of conformity is a kind of legitimation strategy that uses the logic – do this ‘because that’s what everybody else does’, or ‘because that’s what most people do’ [van Leeuwen, 2007, p.97]. This strategy appeals to people’s desire to conform to the norms of their group. President Samia argued that most countries in Africa and around the world are vaccinating their citizens and that Tanzania should do the same. She says:

- (15) *“...tunanua chanjo hizi hizi Jonson and Jonson ambazo zianzalishwa Afrika kusini na ndizo hizo hizo wanazopiga Marekani na kwingine. Uzalishaji unafanyika Afrika kusini wengine duniani wanazitumia” / “...we buy these Jonson and Jonson vaccines that are produced in South Africa and are the same ones they use in the United States and elsewhere. Production takes place in South Africa, others in the world use them”.*

Through appealing to people’s desire to conform, President Samia hoped to increase the number of people who would get vaccinated.

- (16) “*Toka nimeanza kuzungumza jambo hili la chanjo kama alivyosema Waziri kunawengi wanalikataa lakini wengi sana wanalikubali. Na nina meseji nyingi sana zinazouliza mama lini mama lini mama lini tunaanza?*” / “Since I started talking about this vaccination issue, as the Minister said, there are many people who reject it, but there are also very many (a great number of) people who accept it. I have received numerous messages asking; when are we starting, mama? When are we starting, mama?”.

Van Leeuwen [2007] suggested that the conformity legitimation strategy could be achieved through the use of high-frequency modality. This means using words and phrases that suggest that something is common or widespread. It is a persuasive strategy that can be used to make an argument seem more credible by appealing to audiences’ sense of what is common or widespread. President Samia effectively employed this strategy in example (16) by normalizing the acceptance of COVID-19 vaccines. She used the phrase “*wengi wanapinga* (many people are opposing)” but “*wengi sana wanakubali* (very many people are supporting)” to persuade the Tanzanians to accept the vaccines. Her argument here means that people should accept the vaccine since those who are supporting it outnumber those who are opposing the vaccine. She also said that she had received “a lot of messages” from many people who wanted to know when the vaccine would be available. The President used repetition in example (16) to insist that she had received messages from a lot of people enquiring about vaccines. She says, “Mama lini? Mama lini? Mama lini tunaanza? (Mama when? Mama when? Mama, when are we starting?)”. Repetition was used here to create a sense of urgency or importance. The president emphasizes that many people are supporting the vaccine and that many people are asking about when they can get vaccinated, which makes the vaccination seem like the norm. This is a powerful way to persuade people to do something, as they are more likely to conform to the norms of their group.

President Suluhu also employed the credibility of the African Union (AU) by emphasizing its efforts to purchase vaccines and distribute them to African countries. She positioned this as a collective effort that transcends national boundaries. She says:

- (17) “*Kwahiyo umoja wa afrika kwa umoja wetu tumetengeza fungu la fedha tunanua chanjo nchi za kiafrika zinanunua kwa Umoja wa Afrika*” / “The African Union has been working to procure vaccines and sell them to African countries, and yesterday they asked Tanzania to place our order through the AU”.

She did this to demonstrate that the vaccines are not solely for Tanzania but for the benefit of all African nations. This aims to counter the claims made by her predecessor, John Magufuli, that the vaccine is part of an imperialist plan to harm Africans. Magufuli had refused to acquire COVID-19 vaccines for Tanzania, claiming that they were unsafe and ineffective. He also alleged that the vaccines were part of a Western plot to control Africa (see example (8) in 3.1.4.).

Thus, President Samia had a task to take out this notion deeply rooted in the minds of the many Tanzanians who viewed Magufuli as a Pan African patriotic. In the same line, President Suluhu further informs the audience that the vaccine has been produced in South Africa and is being used by other countries worldwide. This serves to reassure Tanzanians indirectly, assuring them that the vaccine is safe as it is produced by fellow Africans. She mentions that through the African Union, Tanzania is purchasing the same Johnson & Johnson vaccines that are produced in South Africa, emphasizing the reliability and safety of these vaccines. The information about the vaccine being produced in South Africa and being used by other countries around the world is likely to reassure Tanzanians that the vaccine is safe and effective.

3.2.1.c. Legitimation through personal authority

The president also employed the personal authority legitimation strategy to persuade the public to accept the vaccine. Personal authority is a way of justifying an action, policy or regime by referring to the authority of a person, such as a leader, a role model, a parent or a teacher [Brunkert & Soest, 2023]. She says:

- (18) “...*ni rais wa jamuhuri ya muungano wa Tanzania na Amiri jeshi mkuu wa majeshi ya nchi hii* / I am the President of the United Republic of Tanzania and the Commander-in-Chief of the country’s armed forces.”
- (19) “...*nisengejitoa mwenyewe nikajipeleka kwenye kifo, nikajipeleka kwenye hatari nikijua kwamba ninamajukumu yote haya yananitegemea* / I would not have given myself to death, I wouldn’t have taken myself to danger knowing that I have all these responsibilities that depend on me.”

President Samia Suluhu Hassan strategically employed personal authority as a means of legitimizing her stance on the vaccine, aiming to convince the citizens to embrace it. By highlighting her various personal roles, including being a mother, grandmother, wife, and president, she emphasizes her credibility. She firmly asserts that, given her roles as a mother, grandmother, and commander-in-chief, she would never jeopardize her own well-being or life by endorsing the vaccine. Consequently, she urges Tanzanians to place their trust in her and actively seek vaccination.

Van Dijk [2006] views appealing to personal authority as problematic because it can make people more vulnerable to manipulation. When someone emphasizes their position, power, authority, or moral superiority, it can make the listener more likely to believe them, even if they are not providing any evidence to support their claims [Hansson & Page, 2022]. This is because people are often more likely to trust those whom they perceive as being in a position of authority. This type of argumentation, which is based on emphasizing one’s own qualities, is known as ‘argumentum ad verecundiam’ [Wodak, 2021]. It is considered to be a fallacy if it is used to avoid rational debate. This is because it does not address the merits of the argument but instead appeals to the listener’s emotions or prejudices.

3.2.2 Moral evaluation through analogy

President Samia Suluhu used analogy to legitimize vaccines. Analogy is a form of moral evaluation that compares one situation or event with another one that has a positive value. The president made an analogy between the COVID vaccine and the vaccinations she had in the 1960s when she was in primary school:

- (20) “*Inanikumbusha miaka ya 60 wakati tuko shule msingi tulichanjwa chanjo na niseme kwenye mwili wangu nadhani ninachanjo kama 6 hivi au 5 ya leo ya 6 ...mimi kwenye mwili wangu zimo na nimekuwa nikiishi nazo na zimenipa uzima wa kutosha mpaka leo nimefika hapa* / It reminds me of the 60s when we were in primary school and we were vaccinated and I think I have about 6 vaccinations or 5 of today’s 6 ... I have them in my body and I have been living with them, and they have provided me with sufficient health to reach where I am today.”
- (21) “*Toka tumezaliwa tunachanjwa BCG sijui chanjo gani ile. Ukizaliwa tu uanchanjwa. Mbali ya nyingine unazo chanjwa njiani njiani, mbali ukisafiri uanachanjwa yellow fever tumechanja, si chanjo zile? Tumechanja* / Since we were born, we have been vaccinated with the BCG vaccine and I don’t know which other vaccines. As soon as we are born, we

are vaccinated. Along the way, there are other vaccines we receive. When we travel, we get vaccinated against yellow fever. We have been vaccinated, right? So, I don't see any danger."

In datum (20) and (21), the analogy implies that taking the COVID-19 vaccine is similar to following previous accepted practices. The President mentioned the long-term benefits that the past vaccinations gave her, one of which is good health, and suggested that the COVID-19 vaccine would have similar benefits and not the negative effects propagated by her predecessor. President Suluhu's argument carries greater credibility and persuasiveness due to her ability to draw from her personal experience as a recipient of vaccines during her childhood. She attests those vaccines are safe and effective from her first-hand experience as a person who has received many vaccines.

3.2.3 Legitimation through emotions

President Samia Suluhu Hassan made use of emotional appeal to legitimize COVID-19 vaccines. She says:

(22) *"Kwa wale ambao koo zao hazijaguswa hawajapata madhara ya maradhi haya wanaweza kusema wanavyotaka lakini nenda leo Moshi, nenda Arusha, nenda Kagera hata Dar es salaam uonane na zile koo ambazo wameshaguswa na haya maradhi wanamaneno ya kukuambia, na kama wangeweza wote wangekuwa hapa kutaka kuchanja kuepukana na ile hasara waliyo ipata / For those whose families have not been affected and have not experienced the consequences of this disease, they can say whatever they want. But go to Moshi today, go to Arusha, go to Kagera, even Dar es Salaam, and meet those families who have been affected by this disease. They have stories to tell you, and if they could, they would all be here wanting to get vaccinated to avoid the losses they have suffered."*

In datum (22), she appeals to the audience's fear of the loss of loved ones by talking about the families who have been affected by the disease. She said if they could, they would all be there wanting to get vaccinated to avoid the losses they have suffered. She also appealed to empathy by saying that these families have stories to tell. This appeal to empathy might be effective because it makes the audience feel connected to the families who have been affected by the disease. The president aimed to make the Tanzanians accept the vaccines.

3.2.4. Legitimation through rationalization

The president employed a rationalization legitimation strategy to justify the decision to accept the vaccines. In her words:

(23) *"Kwahiyo umoja wa afrika kwa umoja wetu tumetengeza fungu la fedha tunanua chanjo nchi za kiafrika zinanunua kwa Umoja wa Afrika. Kwahiyo jana nasi tumeweza kuweka oda yetu tutaona jinsi tunavyo kwenda na jinsi tunavyoweza kuzipokea / So, the African Union has set aside a fund for us to buy vaccines, and African countries are purchasing them through the African Union. Yesterday, we also placed our order, and we will see how the process goes and how we can receive them."*

In (23), the President presented a logical and organized plan for acquiring and distributing vaccines. She explained how the African Union is facilitating the process, which appeals to the audience's sense of reason and logic. The President explained these procedures to justify the safety and efficiency of the vaccines.

3.3. Comparative analysis of the strategies employed by the late President Magufuli and President Samia Suluhu Hassan

The two presidents appear to represent two opposing sides. The late President Magufuli seemed to delegitimize the credibility of the vaccines, while President Samia Suluhu represents the other side by supporting the vaccines and COVID-19 measures. In terms of the strategies employed by the two presidents, President Magufuli relied more on personal authority, whereas President Samia Suluhu Hassan relied more on the credibility of experts and institutions.

The late President Magufuli also relied on conspiracy theories and accusations to discredit the efficiency and safety of the vaccines. He accused foreigners of plotting to exploit African natural resources through depopulation. He emphasized nationalism and advocated for domestic solutions to the problem of COVID-19. For example, he stated: "I strongly request the Ministry of Health that not every vaccine is important for our nation. Not every vaccine is beneficial to us. Tanzanians must be alert; Tanzanians must be careful. We will be subjected to strange experiments that will cause serious consequences."

In this statement, the president emphasizes that vaccines brought from outside the country are not safe and are intended to experiment on Tanzanians, potentially resulting in serious consequences. He offers an internal solution, which is to pray to God. He says: "I ask that we continue to stand and pray to our God, continue to put our God first..."

On the other hand, President Samia Suluhu Hassan employed institutional and expert authority. She also used moral evaluation through analogy to legitimize the vaccines. Additionally, she employed emotions to legitimize the vaccines and emphasized that the vaccine and COVID-19 pandemic can be eradicated by relying on scientific procedures. She also acknowledged international cooperation in the fight against the pandemic. She did not emphasize nationalism in fighting the pandemic.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the speeches by the two Tanzanian presidents, the late John Pombe Magufuli and the current Samia Suluhu Hassan, reveals two opposing ideologies. Magufuli used discursive strategies of delegitimation to undermine the credibility of COVID-19 vaccines. He embraced nationalism by suggesting that Tanzania could "beat" the pandemic on its own, without the help of foreign countries. He also promoted unproven treatments such as traditional remedies and prayers to God.

In contrast, President Samia Suluhu Hassan employed strategies of legitimation to justify her endorsement of vaccines. She embraced the guidance provided by medical professionals and emphasized the importance of international cooperation in addressing the pandemic. She has also rolled out a nationwide vaccination campaign and urged Tanzanians to get vaccinated.

The two presidents' different approaches to COVID-19 vaccines reflect their distinct ideologies. Magufuli exhibited the characteristics of a populist leader who often appealed to nationalism and discredited foreigners. President Samia Suluhu Hassan, on the other hand, exemplified a more pragmatic leader who was willing to collaborate with the international community and leverage medical expertise to address the pandemic.

The divergence between the two Tanzanian presidents' speeches is also evident in the way they used language. Magufuli's speeches were often inflammatory and full of conspiracy theories. He used strong language to attack his critics and to promote his own agenda. In contrast, President Samia Suluhu Hassan's speech was more measured and fact-based. She avoided inflammatory language and focused on providing accurate information about the pandemic.

The two presidents' different approaches to COVID-19 vaccines have had a significant impact on the course of the pandemic in Tanzania. Magufuli's denial of the virus and his promotion of unproven treatments led to a high number of deaths and a slow vaccination rate. In contrast, President Samia Suluhu Hassan's embrace of science and her commitment to vaccination have helped to raise the number of COVID-19 vaccine responses in Tanzania. According to the report released on 20 April 2023 by WHO Tanzania has emerged as the best-performing country among African countries where the rate of vaccination stands at 51% of the total population as of April 2023 while in 2022 the rate was less than 2.3% [WHO, 2023]. WHO Tanzania country representative points out that the success is credited to the heightened political commitment at national, regional and district levels [WHO, 2023].

The strategies employed in the two presidents' speeches show the importance of leadership and communication during a crisis. The way in which a leader leverages communication can have a real impact on the outcome of a crisis. The way the COVID-19 vaccine was communicated by the two Tanzanian presidents with different ideologies and approaches has had a profound impact on the course of the pandemic in Tanzania.

The study investigated the (de)legitimation strategies employed in communicating COVID-19 vaccines in Tanzania. However, it was limited to analyzing only two speeches delivered by the Tanzanian presidents. Future research could explore the strategies utilized by other government leaders, such as Ministers of Health and other officials, to compare their approaches under different administrations. Additionally, a comparative analysis could be conducted, comparing the speeches with those of other African and global leaders, to gain further insights into the legitimation and delegitimization of COVID-19 vaccines.

Conflict of interest

The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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Received: June 4, 2023.

Accepted: August 3, 2023.