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The Covid-19 pandemic in Ghana: exploring the discourse strategies in president Nana Addo's speeches

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Communication during a crisis can affect crisis management and health outcomes. Only a few studies in Africa have examined political leaders' speeches on Covid-19 pandemic preventive and restrictive lockdown measures. The purpose of this study is to examine the discourse strategies employed in President Nana Addo's speeches delivered to Ghanaians on the measures taken to combat the coronavirus. The first ten speeches of Nana Addo since the inception of Covid-19 were selected, coded, and examined using content thematic analysis. The analysis of these speeches identified five main themes to capture the discourse strategies which President Nana Addo used. The strategies captured in the thematic analysis included framing Covid-19 as a war, encouraging nationalism and patriotism, showing appreciation and gratitude, threatening sanctions, and using religious values. These strategies were reinforced by using religious, moralizing, and national identity legitimization discourses to justify measures the government had put in place to minimize the impact of Covid-19 and improve healthcare response. Also, the historical, social, and political contexts of Ghana and elsewhere were invoked in Nana Addo's speeches to legitimize the government's response to Covid-19. In conclusion, we highlight the implications of these strategies on crisis communication and management.

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Introduction

The coronavirus disease, which emerged in 2019 (Covid-19), and was declared a global pandemic in March 2020 by the World Health Organization [WHO], had significant impacts on the health, economics, politics, geopolitics, international transportation, education, and social lives of citizens around the world (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2021; Bonotti and Zech, 2021; WHO, 2021). To contain and prevent mass infections, governments implemented different measures and protocols, including lockdowns and border closures, physical distancing, wearing of face masks, regular hand washing, use of hand sanitizers, and effective contact tracing and isolation of infected persons (Mugari and Obioha, 2021; WHO, 2020a; Zamparini et al., 2020). These measures were based on global standards but differed by country depending on the specific circumstances, historical contexts, and political leadership. The different approaches to addressing the pandemic were also reflected in how political leaders framed and presented messages about preventive measures (Bonotti and Zech, 2021; Dada et al., 2021; Wodak, 2021).

One country-specific feature that became apparent during this pandemic was vaccine hesitancy (Burnett, 2022; Cossard et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2022). By mid-2021, different vaccine candidates were available for use; however, despite their effectiveness in reducing death rates, severe illnesses, and mass hospitalizations, many people around the globe were reluctant to be vaccinated (Mugari and Obioha, 2021). Ghana had particularly high vaccine hesitancy and low acceptance trends among the citizenry due to low trust in the vaccines, and concerns over safety fueled by the lack of confidence in the political leadership, poor communication, and misinformation (Amo-Adjei et al., 2022; Quakyi et al., 2021).

Miscommunication during a pandemic is not unusual, “as with any crisis, the production, and control of storylines and framing [are] shot through with power and knowledge struggles” (Dodds et al., 2020:294). The assertion is that information dissemination, knowledge production, and medical breakthroughs during pandemics are often replete with competition over knowledge (Dodds et al., 2020). Therefore, crisis communication scholars emphasize the importance of governments’ communication and ability to garner public attention (Simons, 2020:41), since “transparent communication enhances trust and the likelihood that people will engage in behaviors that reduce the potential for the virus to spread” (Harwood, 2020:128). Similarly, Dada et al. (2021) found that statements made by politicians strongly impacted citizens’ adherence to Covid-19 preventive measures. Dodds et al. (2020:292) stated that “responding to pandemics is always a political act” because decisions around border controls, quarantine measures, public information management, and citizens’ attitudes are always politically motivated. Also, Kim and Kreps (2020) maintained that ineffective government communication could lead to a great deal of public confusion and misunderstanding during a pandemic, resulting in disastrous health and social outcomes for the general population. When political leaders fail to communicate effectively in response to local, national, and global public health threats, society becomes chaotic and anarchical, since a shortage of reliable information and recommendations on meaningful engagement with the crisis leads to experiences of fear and instability (Kim and Kreps, 2020:399–400). The latter scenario caused a serious Covid-19 crisis in the US.

Framing of political messages during a crisis (e.g., political, economic, social, etc.) has a significant impact on crisis management (Wodak, 2021:18). A few studies in Africa have examined political leaders’ speeches on Covid-19 pandemic preventive and restrictive lockdown measures (e.g., Berrocal et al., 2021). In

Ghana, different studies have explored various Covid-19-related topics, including the impact of Covid-19 on education (Adarkwah, 2020), Covid-19 management decision-making (Kutor et al., 2021), government policy response to the pandemic (Antwi-Boasiako et al., 2021), and blame apportioning (Owusu et al. (2022)). However, little is known about the discourse strategies that the Ghanaian political leadership employed in the Covid-19 pandemic speeches apprising Ghanaians on measures taken to minimize the national impacts of the virus (Henaku et al., forthcoming, September 2023, being the exception).

Theoretical background

In this paper, we engage with the concepts of context (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016), crisis communication theory as espoused in Simons (2020) and Wodak (2021), and framing (Entman, 1993).

Our use of context follows from the work of Reisigl and Wodak (2016) and Reisigl (2017) who envision context as the social, political, historical, and cognitive dimensions of discourse. The context is constitutive of (a) immediate, language-internal co-text and co-discourse, (b) intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres, and discourses, (c) social and institutional frames of discourse situations, and (d) meso- and macro-level (broader and specific sociopolitical and historical) factors of the discourse phenomenon (Reisigl 2017:53).

We apply a crisis communication lens to examine how Ghanaian historical, political, and social contexts shaped President Nana Addo’s Covid-19 speeches. Covid-19 impacted every aspect of humanity and constituted a severe global crisis; hence, the need arises to explore Nana Addo’s speeches through the lens of crisis communication to understand how discourses around this crisis were framed and presented to Ghanaians.

Crisis communication by governments and health authorities aims to persuade people to observe restrictive measures through the legitimization (justification) of certain discourse used with the objective of appealing to authority and argumentation of rationality (Wodak, 2021:1). Crisis communication can have a positive impact on crisis management through open and honest interactions (European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control [ECDC] 2020). As such, crisis communication is significant in crisis management, and, as Simons (2020) argued, a society’s values during a crisis determine how crisis communication unfolds. Such values could focus on security, safety, political leadership, and economic status, or emphasize solidarity (Simons, 2020).

Connected to crisis communication is risk communication, which the WHO (2020b: para. 1) defines as the “real-time exchange of information, advice, and opinions between experts or officials and people who face a threat (hazard) to their survival, health or economic or social well-being.” It was crucial in reducing confusion, countering misinformation, and dispelling misunderstandings to build trust in response to a pandemic, to increase compliance with health advice (WHO, 2021:30). Since Covid-19 was declared a pandemic, it ignited “fear, panic, insecurity, and powerlessness” across the globe (Wodak, 2021:2) that needed to be managed by governments and health experts. However, for risk communication to be effective, there must be trust between experts, people in authority, and those whose lives are affected (WHO, 2020b).

Crisis communication has been employed as a theoretical framework in research on crises, such as economic, financial, and natural disasters (Sellnow and Seeger, 2021; Zamponi and Bosi, 2016) to understand these events in order to manage them better. Berrocal et al. (2021) argued that crises are discursively

constructed occurrences whose management depends on understanding sociocultural and political character of the event's location. Communicating the crisis associated with such events requires knowledge of the sociopolitical context, as in the case of Covid-19.

When managing a crisis, how communication is framed is very important, as framing entails selection and saliency (ECDPC, 2020). Framing means selecting aspects of perceived reality and making them more prominent in discourse, aiming to highlight a problem, and providing an interpretation or a moral evaluation (Entman, 1993). Entman observed that framing is encapsulated in text because "text contains frames, which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences" (Entman 1993:52) which reinforce facts, beliefs, and judgments. Following the above definition, we consider framing in this paper to be discursive strategies employed in communication to achieve a specific purpose. In President Nana Addo's speeches, pieces of information about Covid-19 could have been emphasized to make such information noticeable, meaningful, and memorable to listeners.

Lastly, some textual analytic techniques of the discourse-historical approach (DHA) of critical discourse studies (CDS) were employed in this paper. Scholars of DHA believe that crisis management and communication are socially constructed through the interaction of leaders and the public as an audience (Wodak, 2021), whereby legitimation strategies are employed to justify actions, choices, and policies (Harvey and Koteyko, 2013:139). As language use (or communication) is an important force in re/shaping social practices (Boyd and Monacelli, 2010), DHA of CDS prioritizes attending to text-internal and external features (co-text, intertextual, extralinguistic, and the broader socio-political and historical contexts) when analyzing and interpreting discourses (Boyd and Monacelli, 2010; Wodak, 2015).

The Ghanaian context

Ghana's approach to fighting the pandemic aimed to achieve five main objectives, as emphasized in Speech #10, to (i) limit and stop the importation of the virus, (ii) contain its spread, (iii) provide adequate care for the sick, (iv) limit the impact of the virus on social and economic life, and (v) inspire the expansion of the country's domestic capacity and deepen self-reliance in the fight against the virus (The Presidency, 2020). The country's enhanced response to the Covid-19 pandemic started on Wednesday, March 12, 2020, when President Nana Addo first addressed the nation concerning the new set of measures that were put in place to curtail the importation of the virus to Ghana. By the time the second speech was delivered on March 15, 2020, six cases were confirmed in Ghana among international travelers, and an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Coronavirus Response was formed. All public gatherings, including conferences, festivals, political rallies, and religious activities, among others, were suspended for four weeks. Only private burials, a social event that typically draws large crowds in Ghana, were allowed and limited to only 25 people at a time (in Speech #2, delivered March 15, 2020). Also, educational institutions were indefinitely closed, and other global measures, such as social distancing, the use of face masks, hand washing, and the use of hand sanitizers were encouraged. When the confirmed cases reached 137 cases later in the same month, all borders were closed, and mandatory quarantine and testing of all incoming international travelers were imposed. A three-week partial lockdown was announced for the Greater Accra and Kumasi Metropolitan Areas from March 30 to April 13, 2020, and several social interventions (e.g., free meals

and water) were provided to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the lives of the citizens.

Our aim in this study is to examine the discursive strategies that were employed in President Nana Addo's speeches that addressed the government's measures taken to reduce the effects of the disease. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of the discourse of crisis communication and management, including the ongoing fight against Covid-19. Specifically, we shall (1) identify and discuss discourse strategies in the president's speeches around the above Covid-19 preventive measures and protocols presented to the citizenry and (2) analyze the motivation for such discourse strategies in the speeches. Moreover, since vaccination is the major way of managing the Covid-19 crisis, we will reflect on vaccine hesitancy in Ghana by noting a few implications of our findings on vaccine hesitancy. This study will also contribute to understanding how governments communicate and deliver messages targeted at national and global crisis and disaster management.

The questions we explore in this study are: (a) What discourse strategies did the president employ in his Covid-19 speeches to make the audience more receptive to the measures employed in the fight against the spread of the virus in Ghana? and (b) What motivated the use of such discursive approaches in the communicated messages, taking into consideration specific Ghanaian and global contexts? In answering these questions, we will highlight the underlying discourse legitimations (Wodak, 2021) used to justify government policies and Covid-19 measures and protocols.

Methodology

Data for this paper come from transcripts of ten coronavirus update speeches delivered by the president of Ghana, Nana Akufo Addo (The Presidency, 2020). The first ten speeches are selected for the analysis since they signify the critical early periods of the pandemic in Ghana, starting with a partial lockdown of the Great Accra and Kumasi Metropolitan Areas and ending with the gradual reopening of the country (March 11–May 31, 2020). During this period, the President's addresses were delivered as follows: March 11th, 15th, 21st, 27th, April 5th, 9th, 19th, 26th, and May 10th and 31st.

Transcripts of the first ten speeches were copied into Microsoft Word™ documents, allowing content (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008) and thematic analyses (Braun and Clarke, 2006:87) to be undertaken. Firstly, the transcripts were read thoroughly to understand each text/transcript and to note initial ideas relevant to our research questions. Following this phase, inductive data coding was performed to identify the various topics addressed in most of the speeches (Elliott, 2018; Nowell et al., 2017). The initial codes included *infection rates, confirmed cases, safety protocols, frontline fighters, contact tracing, personal protective equipment (PPEs), restrictions, inter-party dialogues, emergency policies/bills, international donations, financial assistance, pandemic costs, partial lockdown, and transportation*. These coding schemes led to categories (codes with a common idea) such as *virus preventive measures, government support systems, citizens' responsibility, essential services and providers, infection statistics, international solidarity, and motivations*. Many of these categories provided general information about the pandemic, which helped us to understand some discourses employed to encourage the observance of the pandemic measures.

A preliminary analysis demonstrated that some metaphors drawn for other contexts were highly frequent and reflected in our data as well, such as "leading a war," "dreading death" (Wodak, 2021), "emotional appeal," and "financial relief" (Dada et al., 2021). Using these codes from the literature as a guide, we

re-coded the transcripts for emerging themes and categories based on the specificities of the Ghanaian context. Thus, based on the transcripts and our knowledge of the Ghanaian context, we created codes and themes (e.g., the enemy, defeating the virus, love for the country, making a sacrifice, and others). Keywords and phrases from our initial coding were used in the content analysis to build the themes reported in this article. For instance, words such as *battle*, *war*, *fight*, *defeat virus*, and *enemy*, among others, were mostly used when talking about the virus and the need to initiate resistance and contain its spread. These and similar expressions were then searched using the ‘find function’ in Microsoft™ Word in all ten transcripts to determine their frequencies. A theme of “*Framing Covid-19 as a war*” was then created to reflect/capture this perception. For our initial code, “*personal responsibilities*,” we noted that *patriotic acts*, *stay home*, and *make a sacrifice* were often used to reflect citizens’ responsibility; hence, the theme of “*encouraging nationalism and patriotism*” was developed to reflect what Ghanaians were being asked to do. These content and thematic analytic approaches were undertaken to develop the rest of the themes reported in this paper. As Elo and Kyngäs (2008:108) maintained, the aim of content analysis is “to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon, and the outcome of the analysis is to [identify] concepts or categories describing the phenomenon.”

Following the above content and thematic analyses, we created frequency tables for the keywords upon which themes were constructed (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008), such that content categories in President Nana Addo’s speeches were identified through content analysis and organized into patterns that reflected different discourse strategies, also referred to as framing strategies in other studies (Simons, 2020; Wodak, 2021). Based on our experiences with Covid-19 protocols and lockdown measures in the Ghanaian context and political climate, we analyzed and interpreted the themes while paying attention to some DHA textual analysis techniques.

Results

We present the results of our findings and interpretive analysis in this section. The results are presented in themes and supported by quoted text to illustrate the various discourse strategies in President Nana Addo’s Covid-19 speeches. We extracted five themes from the data, including (a) framing Covid-19 as a war, (b) encouraging nationalism and patriotism, (c) showing appreciation and gratitude, (d) threatening sanctions, and (e) appealing to religious values. These themes are presented and interpreted in this section, with discussion in the following section.

Framing Covid-19 as war. Expressions that framed the pandemic as war included *enemy*, *combat*, *fight*, *survival*, *defeat*, and *battle*, as shown in Table 1. The most frequently used expressions were *fight*, *contain*, *protect life*, *defeat virus*, and *death*.

War-related expressions were used across different speeches. In Speech #4, Nana Addo stated that “*the enemy is the virus* and not each other,” and that “it is vital that we protect the lives of our frontline health workers, who are risking their lives every day to *battle this virus*” (Speech #5). Furthermore, in Speech #9, Nana Addo urges all Ghanaians to be united with the collective spirit of winning the battle, as he said, “*We are fighting a common enemy*, and it is imperative that we do not allow religious, ethnic, or political differences to get in the way of [our] victory”.

By framing Covid-19 as a global war against humanity, a position was created for the government’s restrictive policies, measures, and protocols intended to safeguard the country and its citizens. Also, a discourse of abnormality was used as a cognitive mediation to prepare the minds of Ghanaians to see Covid-19 as a

Table 1 Frequency of keywords/phrases depicting Covid-19 as a war.

Keyword/phrase	Frequency in all ten speeches
fight virus	30
contain virus	21
protect people/life	20
defeat virus	17
die/died/death	16
battle	12
combat virus	9
our safety/safeguard	7
halt virus spread	5
prevent virus	5
our survival	4
the enemy	4

long war and to accept the pandemic measures, as Nana Addo stated, “Fellow Ghanaians, these are not ordinary times (Speech #2).”

With this discourse of abnormality and having declared war on the pandemic, the President established the grounds for two demands he made of the citizens in Speech #4, where he imposed lockdown restrictions on the people of the Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi areas, as quoted below.

For the next two weeks, I urge all of you, especially residents in the affected areas of Greater Accra and Greater Kumasi to be reminded every day that the frontline of the fight against the coronavirus is your front door. If you cross it, you and your family will likely be infected. So please, stay at home.

With this statement, the President was asking every citizen to take part in the fight against the pandemic by taking the right position on the battlefield. That right position was their home. The front door was the battle line dividing the two territories: a safe territory where the people would stay protected from the enemy and a dangerous territory where the enemy could attack and cause harm to the people.

In the second statement during the same speech, the President asked the citizens to accept losses in their livelihoods in the fight against an enemy who was after their lives.

... I assure you that we know what to do to bring back our economy to life, what we do not know is how to bring people back to life. We will therefore protect people’s lives, then their livelihoods.

According to the President, the ongoing war could cause loss of either lives or livelihoods, but the lives were more important, as they were irreplaceable.

Nana Addo further emphasized, “We have a unique situation in our country, and we must take it into account in dealing with the disease” (Speech #4). “We [must] adopt a whole-of-Ghana approach” (Speech #1). Thus, the meso- and macro-contextual knowledge, histories, and values of Ghana were used to justify the measures. They were also meant to encourage Ghanaians collectively to observe the measures in the fight against the virus and to give a sense of hope of victory over the virus.

Despite multiple representations of Covid-19 with metaphors related to battlefield (as shown above), the word *war* appeared only once in Speech #8 in the extract below:

the truth is that this will be a long war, broken up into several battles [and] the doctors and scientists tell us that the virus is transmitted from human contact ... that is why each one of us must adhere strictly to these directives.

Table 2 Keywords and phrases illustrating the fight against Covid-19 as a national agenda.

Key expressions	Frequency in all ten speeches
Ghanaians rise to the occasion	21
make sacrifice	13
un/patriotic	12
be united	7
freedom	6
proud as Ghanaian	5
love for country	4
look out for each other	4
courage of Ghanaians	3

In the above quote, scientific authority and expert knowledge become intertextual and interdiscursive approaches referenced to moralize adherence to preventive measures. Framing Covid-19 as a war on humanity and the Ghanaian population conveyed the message that strict measures needed to be put in place to combat, fight, and defeat the virus to save lives while protecting people and the sovereignty of the Ghanaian state.

Encouraging nationalism and patriotism. Nana Addo employed discourses of nationalism and patriotism to appeal to the citizens’ sense of belonging and loyalty to the state; hence, the need to adhere to the protocols and measures meant to contain and control the spread of the virus. A summary of our content analysis of key expressions evoking patriotism, nationalism, and solidarity is provided in Table 2. Other important expressions that entailed patriotism and solidarity included the *courage of being Ghanaian and we look out for each other*.

As Table 2 shows, a discourse strategy of appeal to nationalism and patriotism, in expressions such as *making sacrifices, performing acts of un/patriotism, and Ghanaians rising to the occasion*, was used to motivate nationalism spirit in Ghanaians. By emphasizing a sense of patriotism and nationalism in the Ghanaian people, Nana Addo sought to encourage the populace to support the government’s fight against the virus. The President’s call to Ghanaians to follow the pandemic norms, regulations, and protocols by the Ministry of Health and global public health experts was not a mere personal choice. Rather, observing these measures constituted acts of patriotism that citizens needed to perform to protect the nation.

On the other hand, any act(s) by individuals or institutions that discouraged the observance of the Covid-19 regulations were downgraded as “deceiving the public” or “causing fear and panic.” Such actions were branded as “not just irresponsible, careless, and illegal, but they were selfish, despicable, and unpatriotic,” as highlighted in Speech #7:

... there continues to be the deliberate dissemination of fake news, disinformation, and outright lies by some unpatriotic citizens about the spread of the virus since its outbreak in the country. These acts are being orchestrated by those who hope to benefit by seeking to sow the seeds of panic and confusion amongst the populace at this time of national crisis. I have an unequivocal message for those involved in these despicable acts – put an immediate stop to it or be held accountable for your actions.

Nana Addo solicited solidarity, an important element of patriotism, among the citizens during this battle. He did so through the spirit of collectivism depicted using plural voice (i.e., the personal pronoun *we* and verbs expressing collective action or intent), as marked below.

Table 3 Keywords/phrases illustrating appreciation and gratitude to Ghanaians.

Keywords/phrases	Frequency in all ten speeches
I thank you	22
I/we appreciate	8
I/we are grateful	5
I say ayekoo (Ayekoo is a Ga (native language of Ghana) word which means well done or congratulation.)	4

We are one people, we are Ghanaians, and we stand together in joy and in times of trouble. We are a people with an exceptional history, and we are the proud promoters of the Black Star of Africa. We have all gone down together, we should all rise together. This too shall pass!! (Speech #9).

The President called the entire Ghanaian population to defend the country by speaking in a plural voice and expressing collective action or intent – *stand together, go down together, rise together*.

Again, the historical context of Ghana (i.e., colonialism and imperialism) was invoked to invite Ghanaians to rise to the occasion as the founding fathers of Ghana did and to embrace nationalism in the quest to save the country.

Over the course of our history as a people, we have had to overcome several trials and tribulations: slavery, imperialism, colonialism, tyranny, and dictatorship, and we have overcome them all so that, with the help of the Almighty, we are, today, building a free, independent State, a State that, despite the urgency of the crisis, is governed by democratic institutions, and respect for fundamental human rights, especially freedom of speech. (Speech #9).

The coronavirus was directly compared to *slavery, imperialism, and colonialism* to explicate its threat to the sovereignty of Ghana and fundamental human rights. Referencing the historical context of Ghana was strategically used to energize the citizens and justify whatever approach the government was using to win the battle against the virus.

Showing appreciation and gratitude. Another discursive strategy in the speeches was the discourse of appreciation and gratitude to Ghanaians and all frontline fighters. The appreciation expressions in Nana Ado’s speeches and their frequencies are summarized in Table 3.

The discourses of appreciation were meant to acknowledge the citizens’ support for government policies and measures and to incite a sense of honor in them for observing the difficult restrictions imposed, as noted in the following speeches.

Tonight, I say thank you to each and every one of you law-abiding citizens. (Speech #5).

Let me express my gratitude to all of you for bearing with the government, all health workers, and members of our security services, throughout this period. (Speech # 7).

The show of appreciation was sometimes directed to a specific section of the population for their dedication to duty and selflessness, especially the frontline healthcare workers, the security services, and other government agencies. These actors became heroes of the crisis, as noted here.

I thank all our healthcare workers, the men and women of our security services, and members of the media, for the

work they are doing in helping to combat the spread of the virus. (Speech #7).

Let me, once again, thank the healthcare workers ... for their heroic contribution to the fight against the pandemic. They will be long remembered in our history. (Speech #9).

By thanking and expressing gratitude to the citizens and the frontline fighters, Nana Addo positioned himself to make further requests and appeals, as in Speech #5.

So, fellow Ghanaians, I will continue, passionately, to appeal to you to observe prescribed social distancing and good personal hygiene to contain community spread.

Threatening sanctions. The fourth discursive strategy to enhance citizens' observance of the Covid-19 measures and protocols was discourses of sanctions and legal threats. The content analysis identified the following expressions, 'enforce laws' or 'laws are in force,' 'arrest,' 'sanctions will apply,' and 'be dealt with,' as constituents of the above theme. The contexts in which these expressions occurred signaled that punitive measures were threatened. Table 4 presents the result of the content thematic analysis.

Law enforcement, police arrest, and dealing with lawbreakers were some expressions proposing that Ghanaians and institutions refusing to observe the lockdown measures and policies would face sanctions. This message was clearly articulated in Speeches #5 and #9 in "Remember that the law enforcement agencies are going to increase their enforcement of the stay-at-home directive" (Speech #5) and "If you fall foul of the law, you will face its full rigours" (Speech #9). Also, in Speech # 10, institutions were particularly reminded of their responsibilities towards promoting the Covid-19 measures and that failure to do so could have consequences.

... let me state that regulatory agencies will undertake random checks to ensure conformity with these rules, and the security services will be tasked to enforce them. Should any institution fail to adhere to these directives, its activity will be immediately prohibited, and relevant sanctions applied. (Speech #10).

The expressions in Table 4 had low frequencies, possibly attributed to two reasons. First, the relevant legislation backing the Covid-19 restrictions and protocols was non-existent during the first few weeks of the outbreak in Ghana. Thus, these sanctions were not mentioned in the first three speeches. Second, exacting punitive measures was not the preferred approach to fighting the pandemic. While relevant laws were in place to prosecute people, it was politically not in the interest of the Government to show hostility to citizens in a year when the President was seeking re-election in December 2020. The government was more focused on presenting themselves as leaders who cared for and empathized with people in their time of

distress. Issuing these threats was only a part of the President's responsibility to create awareness about the existence of these laws; however, in reality, very few prosecutions took place.

Even when the security services had used brutal force on the citizens, such incidents were captured in the President's speech using downtoners, as noted in Speech #5.

In the very few instances where members of our security agencies have employed the use of excessive force against the citizenry, in enforcing the restrictions on movement, steps [have been taken] to investigate such incidents, ... those found culpable, will be duly sanctioned. Thus far, the alleged wrongdoers have been withdrawn from the ongoing exercise.

Nonetheless, the threat of sanctions constituted one discursive frame that was communicated to regulate public behavior in managing the Covid-19 crisis.

Appealing to religious values. Religion, religious events, and prophetic admonishing were referenced in the Covid-19 messages to propel action and passion toward encouraging preventive behaviors among Ghanaians. A content analysis on expressions such as *Muslims, Christians, faith in God, Easter, Ramadan, and prayers*, among others, produced the results in Table 5.

Throughout all ten speeches, religious values and morals were a significant discourse approach to delivering Covid-19 messages to Ghanaians, as shown in Table 5. Seeking refuge and protection from God against the virus was crucial; hence, a National Day of Prayer and Fasting was declared in Speech #3, as quoted.

I urge all of us also to seek the face of the Almighty. So, on Wednesday 25 March 2020, I appeal to all Ghanaians Christians, and Muslims to observe a national day of fasting and prayer. Let us pray to God to protect our nation and save us from this pandemic. I thank the men and women of God who prayed with me on Thursday and with the vice president on Friday for their intervention.

As a discourse legitimation approach, religious texts and quotations were used to encourage people to stay at home during religious events and festivities. This approach emphasized an appeal to religious morals and values with the hope that followers of specific religious faiths would observe the Covid-19 rules, as noted.

Fellow Ghanaians, just as the Christian Celebration of Easter was severely affected by the virus, resulting in the cancellation of the usual activities associated with Easter, the Holy Month of Ramadan has not been spared either. It is my understanding that in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, Sallallahu Allayhi Wa'Salam, anytime there was heavy rain, he admonished the faithful, through the Azan, to stay in their houses and pray, rather than going to the mosques. (Speech #8).

Table 4 Words and expressions proposing sanctions for violating Covid-19 measures.

Key expressions	Frequency in all ten speeches
laws are in force/enforced	9
you will be dealt with	5
police arrest	5
flout regulations	3
sanctions will apply	2

Table 5 Religious words and phrases used in the President's Covid-19 speeches.

Key expressions	Frequency in all ten speeches
Allah/God/grace of God	21
Religion/religious,	19
Muslim/mosque/Islam	17
Christian/church/Christianity	14
pray/prayer/worship/fasting	11
Easter/Ramadan	6
Prophet/Jesus Christ	5

With the above authoritative scholarly text, and by juxtaposing the impact of Covid-19 on Easter, an appeal to the moral consciousness of all Muslims in Ghana was made during Ramadan. Earlier in Speech #5, Christians were admonished to let the example of Jesus Christ's passion and sacrifice for humanity on Palm Sunday guide their festive activities and behaviors.

Discussion

This study examined the discourse strategies and motivations for their use in President Nana Addo's Covid-19 speeches presented to Ghanaians on preventive measures to reduce transmission. The concepts of context, crisis communication theory, and framing guided the analysis and interpretation of the findings. These discursive strategies are discussed in this section as political crisis communication and management approaches concerning the Covid-19 pandemic in Ghana.

First, our study found that Covid-19 was framed as a war that needed to be fought and won. Using a discourse of war to communicate the outcome of a pandemic not only allows global and national leaders to define these events as crises but also offers political leaders strategic positions to impose drastic measures and implement critical policies, as we saw in the case of Covid-19 worldwide. The war discourse about Covid-19 was distinctively present in Speech #4, during which the President imposed lockdown restrictions. To contain the effects of the virus, messages of moral legitimization, fear, and death were communicated to justify the crisis management measures. Such messages fulfilled the primary crisis communication function of coordinating efforts, public warning and notification about impending dangers and outcomes (Sellnow & Seeger, 2021). Furthermore, using military terminology and metaphors (with several mentions of the military, security forces, and the Chief of Defense Staff) depicted Covid-19 as a national security threat, an unwanted enemy forcing its entry into the national space (Berrocal et al., 2021). As Molnar et al. (2020) argued, imagery of real-world warfare is evoked by using war and military discourses to highlight the threat's reality. Framing Covid-19 as war became a global discourse in political speeches worldwide (Dada et al., 2021; Dong et al., 2020; Simons, 2020; Wodak, 2021). It occurred in Covid-19 banner messages in China (Dong et al., 2020), in previous pandemic crisis communication about the Avian flu, foot and mouth disease (FMD), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and Ebola (Harvey and Koteyko, 2013; Nerlich and Halliday, 2007; Omoleke et al., 2016; Zinken et al., 2008).

Employing the discourse of patriotism and nationalism during a crisis and global pandemic has been a means of moralizing and a sense of citizenship legitimization strategy. Invoking the spirit of nationalism among the citizens to manage the pandemic was reinforced through country-specific historical, political, and social contexts. By using discourses of nationalism and patriotism, a sense of solidarity and in-group construction was built to respond to the crisis (Berrocal et al., 2021). Furthermore, in Nana Addo's speech, nationalism was framed through a unified force and solidarity by using plural voice and inclusiveness through the text-internal feature of first-person plural pronominals and adjectives. Moreover, Ghana's political history was consistently referred to, and Ghanaian values of love for one another and religiosity were all clearly messaged. This approach excited psychological power metaphorically in the citizens to act, as reported in other jurisdictions in crisis management (Dong et al., 2020; Harvey and Koteyko, 2013; Wodak, 2021). Reasoning and thinking are believed to be associated with communication; hence, crisis communication must persuade minds, actions, and behaviors to limit crisis events' effects (Sellnow & Seeger, 2021).

In many other countries, employing discourses of patriotism and nationalism supported national identity politics (e.g., Sweden (Wodak, 2021)) in the fight against the virus. Countries construct their identities by invoking their cultural knowledge and historical context as current and past social and political events are brought to the forefront. In China, "family values and patriotic sensations" were often talked about by Chinese politicians to catch the people's attention (Dong et al., 2020:7). Similarly, in Serbia, the country's ability to withstand typhoid, economic sanctions, and bombing in World War I was referenced by Serbia's leaders to ignite nationalism and patriotic feelings in the citizen to fight Covid-19 (Milutinović, 2021:1320). Despite the discourses of nationalism as a mobilizing force against the virus, Bieber (2022) reported instances of authoritarian, racialized, and exclusionary discourses in some countries that placed the blame for the virus spread on immigrants and specific racial groupings, who were portrayed as a danger to the nationalism ethos the pandemic has reinforced.

Showing appreciation and appealing to citizens, heroization of frontline healthcare workers and security agencies was another discursive strategy implemented by political leaders to manage the Covid-19 pandemic, as reported in other studies (Milutinović, 2021; Wodak, 2021). Wodak (2021) reported that the leaders in Germany and New Zealand engaged in dialogic framing and mutual trust with their citizens. For instance, it is reported that Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany often thanked the government, regional governors, and the citizens for their efforts in saving the elderly population and the country at large (Wodak, 2021). President Nana Addo employed similar strategies to encourage Ghanaians to observe the Covid-19 protocols. Hero discourses were employed with reference to frontline healthcare workers and security services to encourage positive behaviors. However, Mohammed et al. (2021) argued that hero discourse was not a neutral expression of appreciation because it normalized the exposure to risk among frontline workers, enforced notions of model citizenships, and preserved existing power relations, thereby limiting the frontline health and other workers' ability to demand better conditions of services.

Furthermore, our study found that Nana Addo's government used fewer discourses of sanctions than discourses of war and appeals to patriotism and nationalism in Ghana. A similar finding has been reported by Owusu et al. (2022), who explored how the Covid-19 blame game was apportioned in Ghana. Nana Addo's government was blamed for its relaxed approach to enforcing Covid-19 protocols (e.g., ongoing political campaigns and voter registration exercises), which was reflected in some Ghanaians accused of failing to observe social distancing guidelines (Owusu et al., 2022). We believe that not issuing sanctions could have been influenced by the political history and events in Ghana at the time, unlike in some countries in Europe, such as Hungary, where journalists and citizens could be punished by the Hungarian government for reporting inaccurate information or violating quarantine regulations respectively (Picheta and Halasz, 2020; Wodak, 2021:17). However, in Ghana, Nana Addo could not employ severe sanctions without jeopardizing his political aspirations in the pending December 2020 general elections. Moreover, although "effective warning systems are critical to protecting health and well-being of the public" during a crisis, employing brutal force and sanctions can be detrimental to effective crisis management (Sellnow and Seeger, 2021:39). Using force to communicate pandemic measures and to engage citizens in behavioral change in Nigeria affected the relationship between the Nigerian police and the populace (Aborisade, 2021). President Nana Addo thus employed fewer discourses of sanction in his speeches. Where reports of police brutalities of the citizens were referenced, downtoners were used to present those incidents as less damaging.

Another crucial discourse strategy that surfaced in our study was religious framing. Religion has often been used as a tool to foster solidarity (or not) during crises. Therefore, by using religious moral discourses through intertextual and recontextualization approaches, religious texts, quotations, and events were referenced. President Nana Addo targeted adherents of various religions in Ghana by invoking their moral obligation to protect themselves and the nation against the havoc of the pandemic. The relevance of religious beliefs, values, and institutions in natural disaster management and coping (Sohrabizadeh et al., 2018) and in managing the Covid-19 pandemic (Barmania and Reiss, 2021) has been noted in earlier research. For instance, Wodak (2021) reported that religious discourses and strict rules were combined to manage the Covid-19 pandemic crisis in Greece.

Implications for crisis management. In times of economic, political, health, and other natural crises, appealing to the citizens' sense of national identity and patriotism holds the potential to rally the populace to act in supportive ways toward the government's course of action. History has taught us that during severe natural disasters, citizens take pride in their national identity and will often act in solidarity and for the interests of their country (Bol et al., 2021; Esaiasson et al., 2021). Therefore, governments and political leaders can garner support in managing crises by appealing to citizens' sense of national identity, belonging, and patriotism. In addition, using nationalism and patriotism discourse can help fight against Covid-19 vaccine hesitancy.

Furthermore, describing Covid-19 in terms of war-related metaphors potentially empowers leaders to impose undemocratic means of winning the battle or inciting fear, as reported in other studies (Molnar et al., 2020; Wodak, 2021). To reduce vaccine hesitancy, as a critical approach to managing the Covid-19 crisis, discourses of sanction must be balanced with the nationalism and patriotism framing such that the effects of the crisis and the importance of showing patriotism are emphasized more than threats of sanction. Moreover, discourses of fear, death, and militarization of the fight against the virus were used by other political leaders (Simons, 2020; Wodak, 2021). Such discourse strategies could be used to encourage vaccine uptake among citizens. For instance, Dada et al. (2021:7) found that political "leaders often balanced the use of paternalism and responsibility within a speech" and that "collectively, paternalism and responsibility were important tools of emotional rhetoric used by all leaders to motivate their citizens to adhere" to the pandemic restrictions.

Ensuring balance in the use of force and citizen responsibility is supported by strong global voices against mandatory vaccinations (Burnett, 2022). Especially in the Ghanaian context, individuals have gone to court to contest the mandatory vaccination measures that were being proposed. Citizens in several other countries, such as the United States of America, have had mass demonstrations against mandatory Covid-19 vaccination (Burnett, 2022). In countries where early mandatory vaccinations seem to work, the implementation was indirect and tied to public access to certain spaces. Even with that, citizens spoke against such measures (Burnett, 2022). For instance, in Canada, students and faculty were required to be vaccinated to access a few university campus facilities. Nonetheless, some level of resistance is expected as segments of the population can always employ human rights normative arguments against any form of restrictions on personal freedoms, no matter how minimal that is. This situation explains why 'anti-masks,' 'anti-social distancing,' and 'anti-vaccine' labels were profound during the pandemic's peak (Cossard et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Our aim in this paper was to identify and analyze discourse strategies in Nana Addo's speeches delivered to Ghanaians on updates about the government's preparedness and measures put in place to combat the coronavirus. Ten speeches by the president were analyzed through content thematic analysis, and five discourse strategies were identified as discursive constructions meant to appeal to the citizens for action. These strategies included framing Covid-19 as war and using a discourse of nationalism and patriotism to encourage patriotic behaviors. Appreciating and showing gratitude was another strategy to acknowledge frontline health workers, the security services, and the public for their support, patriotism, and adherence to the Covid-19 measures. Proposing sanctions and punitive measures for disobeying the policies and protocols put in place to prevent the spread of the virus was another approach. Lastly, expressing hope and faith in God and Allah and invoking religious moral principles to guide behavior served as another rhetoric. These discourse strategies are interpreted with reference to the concept of content, crisis communication theory, and framing as crucial discourse analytic concepts. Some implications for crisis management are offered, especially on Covid-19 vaccine hesitancy in Ghana.

This paper is limited by leaving out the analysis of the video and audio of the pandemic speeches broadcast. Future research could consider the intonation of the speeches and non-linguistic features (postures, facial expressions, gestures) and analyze more speeches by the president to identify their communicative strategies. Furthermore, code-switching from Ashanti Twi to English, which occurred in some of the speeches, could be examined to explore their communicative intent. Lastly, media reports and discussions may also contain unique discursive strategies as the Covid-19 pandemic messages are framed.

Data availability

All relevant data are reported in the manuscript. The speeches are freely available online and can be freely accessed. The corresponding author is willing to share the data transcripts.

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Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study. AK and PMP conceived the topic. AK performed material preparation, data collection, and analysis. FH, VM and PMP supervised the writing process, reviewed, and edited the analysis, language, and grammar, and added significant professional content. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was not required as the study did not involve human participants.

Informed Consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by any of the authors.

Additional information

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