

Twitter Diary and COVID-19 Survival: The Case of @acielumumba

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Abstract

This article examines the Twitter diary of Lumumba William Gerald Mutumanje, popularly known as Ace Lumumba in Zimbabwe, which chronicles his experiences of being COVID-19 positive, his recuperation and survival from the contagion. I argue that the Twitter diary attempts to create a resilient and survivor identity for Lumumba and at the same time underscores the fact that everyone is vulnerable and susceptible to the virus. The diary further complicates our understanding of a text and how meaning is generated given that meaning is no longer localised to the immediate (con)text as inferences have to be drawn from and made to other (con)texts. Twitter largely relies on intertextuality and the reader (prod-user/prod-suser) needs to demonstrate an awareness of intertextuality if (s)he is to have a holistic appreciation of Twitter texts. Lumumba's Twitter diary also extends debates on the role of social media and infodemics in health advocacy and community education, especially in times of COVID-19.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel bestudeer die Twitter-dagboekinskrywings van Lumumba William Gerald Mutumanje, beter bekend as Ace Lumumba in Zimbabwe, waarin hy sy ervarings opteken rakende COVID-19-positief wees, sy herstel en sy oorlewing van die siekte. Ek voer aan dat die Twitter-dagboek poog om 'n lewenskragtige oorlewende-identiteit vir Lumumba te skep. Dit onderstreep ook die feit dat almal weerloos en vatbaar vir die virus is. Verder kompliseer die dagboek ons begrip van 'n teks, en hoe betekenis geskep word gegewe dat betekenis nie meer gelokaliseer is tot die onmiddellike (kon)teks nie, aangesien gevolgtrekkings gemaak moet word op grond van ander (kon)tekste. Twitter



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steun grootliks op intertekstualiteit en die leser (prod-gebruiker/prod-verbruiker) moet 'n bewustheid van intertekstualiteit demonstreer om 'n holistiese begrip van Twitter-tekste te kan hê. Lumumba se Twitter-dagboek dien ook as uitbreiding van debatte oor die rol van sosiale media en infodemia in aanbevelings oor gesondheid en gemeenskapsopvoeding—veral in die tyd van COVID-19.

Keywords: Twitter; COVID-19; text, diary; identity; narrativisation

Introduction

This article examines Lumumba William Gerald Mutumanje's (@acielumumba) Twitter diary of his recovery and survival from COVID-19. By Twitter diary I refer to the use of the social media platform Twitter to document one's day-to-day experiences, especially in crisis times, at regular intervals in the same way people make entries in a journal. I suspect that one of the reasons for the reliance on a "diary" is to get a sense of being on top of a situation during personal crises. However, this Twitter diary is different from the traditional diary as it is an open diary. Smith and Watson (2001) define a diary as a form of periodic life writing that records dailiness in accounts and observations of emotional responses. Smith and Watson (2001) further argue that a diary is a fragmented and revisionary text. The immediacy of the genre derives from the diarist's lack of foreknowledge about outcomes of the plot of his life, which creates a "series of surprises to writer and reader alike" (Smith and Watson 2001, 21). Lumumba's diary chronicles his experiences of being COVID-19 positive and his recuperation and survival from the virus. I argue that Lumumba's Twitter diary attempts to create a resilient and survivor identity and at the same time underscores the fact that everyone is vulnerable and susceptible to the virus. It also highlights the tensions between personal narratives and national/global politics as Lumumba underscores the centrality of Chinese medicine and Chinese indigenous knowledge systems in the fight against COVID-19. The diary also complicates our understanding of a text and how meaning is generated given that meaning is a "transitive phenomenon" (Bennett 1983, 8) and is not localised to the immediate (con)text as inferences have to be drawn from other (con)texts. Twitter largely relies on intertextuality and the reader (prod-user/prod-user) needs to demonstrate an awareness of intertextuality if (s)he is to have a holistic appreciation of Twitter texts. Furthermore, Twitter, as Lumumba's diary highlights, has also resulted in the birth of the digital dialogic-heteroglossic text. The key features of this text are a heightened intertextual relationship between texts demanding a contrapuntal reading of texts, a close symbiotic relationship between the writer and reader and also between reader and reader. I also argue that Lumumba's Twitter diary extends debates on the role of social media and the risk of infodemics in health advocacy and community education, especially in times of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Social Media (Twitter) and Text in a Time of COVID-19

Social media platforms, of which Twitter is one, are conducive for the production and transmission of instantaneous responses to texts and have revolutionised the way we understand and approach texts. Commenting on the power of social media, Fenton (2012) notes that social media presents a certain form of publicly private monitorial endeavour as there are several instances where a wave of Twittering has caused an issue to go viral and forced mainstream news media, corporate business or the political powers that be to rethink it. Fenton (2012) further notes that Twitter's greatest strength is its ability to provide a snapshot of what anyone is discussing, anywhere in the world, right at the time of asking. Thus, social media expands our horizons and broadens our understandings by offering a multitude of sites for debate among persons with varied opinions and beliefs. Ogola (2019) views social media as a heteroglossic discursive space that is participatory in nature. This participation, as Fenton (2012) cautions, is neither straightforward interactivity nor simple participation in a network, but participation in a communicative act for a complex range of purposes that may be personal or public, social, political or cultural, or any or all of these at once. Nonetheless, social media usage is highly uneven amongst participants and much content is dominated by a small percentage of people.

Social media is also a site for the promulgation of alternative and divergent views as it enables otherwise repressed voices to be heard (Venn et al. 2007). Nyabola (2018) documents the ways in which digital platforms and new media in Kenya have offered people more control over their personal and national narratives and enabled them to reclaim space abandoned by traditional media and to force shifts in structures of power. In such circumstances, social media, especially Twitter, becomes critical in the emergence of counter/alternative narratives. However, it should be noted that Twitter itself can also censor and restrict people who harbour "divergent" views and whose conduct does not resonate with its rules. The permanent suspension of Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump) on 8 January 2021 for inciting violence exemplifies this. In addition, Nigeria's President Muhammadu Buhari had his post deleted by Twitter for supposedly violating its rules on abusive language. This "interference" from Twitter triggered a reaction from the Nigerian government, which proceeded to ban the use of Twitter in the country (Nwaubani 2021).

Twitter allows instantaneous responses to texts, provided one is online. This instantaneity is revolutionising the way we think about texts and how meaning is generated. Given that Twitter is a digital social media text, I argue that the instantaneous responses that govern the interactions and relationships of Twitter texts have given birth to the digital dialogic-heteroglossic text whose key features are a heightened intertextual relationship between texts demanding a contrapuntal reading of texts, and a symbiotic relationship between the writer and reader and reader and reader. The dialogues and conversations that are generated on Twitter attest to both the open-endedness of dialogues and conversations and the inherent incompleteness of narratives. This open-

endedness and incompleteness underscore how meaning-making is a “transitive phenomenon” (Bennett 1983, 8) and demands that readers be aware of the citations, references and plagiarisms that constitute Twitter texts. A lack of this awareness can seriously impact our understanding of Twitter texts.

Observations show that social media has made a huge contribution to health advocacy, education and communication. The instantaneous transmission of messages makes social media a critical platform for the transmission of information during a crisis (Heverin and Zack 2012). Social media platforms, such as Twitter, have proved to be vital sources for COVID-19-related information as the government and public health organisations use social media to access their target audience. A good example is that of Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Health and Child Care which uses its Twitter account (@MoHCCZim) to communicate vital information and updates on COVID-19. Employing Twitter to communicate vital information and updates on COVID-19 affords the general public an opportunity to actively participate in critical dialogues with the Ministry of Health and Child Care and not just be passive consumers of information. Thus, the use of Twitter by the Zimbabwean government to communicate and engage in dialogue with netizens attests to the importance of social media platforms in enhancing crisis communication in the event of a pandemic outbreak (Nduka, Igwe-Omoke, and Ogugua 2014). Twitter diaries on health conditions in times of contagion also become important sources of information and advocacy. However, social media can be abused to spread conspiracy theories, disinformation and misinformation concerning COVID-19. The World Health Organization (WHO) considers this disinformation and misinformation an infodemic and it is indeed possible for infodemics to dominate pandemics.

Lumumba the Resilient COVID-19 Fighter and Survivor: Narrating Pain and Trauma

Lumumba William Gerald Mutumanje, using the Twitter account name @acielumumba, is a Zimbabwean businessman and Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) aligned politician cum social media celebrity, with 79 900 followers, who diarised his experiences while afflicted by COVID-19 on Twitter. The diary is about his recovery and survival and is an attempt at creating a resilient and survivor identity. This resilient and survivor identity resonates with Sharp and Boonzaier’s (1994) ideas on identity and performance. They argue that identities are “role played” and a highly self-conscious statement of who we are that is formulated through dialogue and modified according to context. Furthermore, narratives by their nature are always incomplete and to rely on a particular and singular version of events is to miss the nuances that govern the politics of narrativisation. Thus, the valorisation of Chinese medicine we have in the diary, for example, needs to be juxtaposed with other (con)texts for a holistic appreciation of what Lumumba seeks to achieve. This idea of juxtaposing and paralleling (con)texts resonates with Terdiman’s (1985, 36) view that no discourse is ever a monologue, nor could it ever be analysed intrinsically as

“everything that constitutes it always presupposes a horizon of competing, contrary utterances against which it asserts its own energies.”

Furthermore, Swann and Bosson (2008) argue that identities rely on feedback and nourishment, which are the processes through which people work to constitute and develop their identities for their continual performance, as the survival of people’s identities rests in both their own hands and those of others. Swann and Bosson (2008) argue that people who enjoy a steady supply of nourishment for their identities from others will retain those identities while those who repeatedly fail to receive such nourishment will ultimately relinquish them. The views are significant considering that Twitter and the identities its users create thrive on feedback through responses, likes and retweets.

Lumumba’s Twitter diary is a narrativisation of his infection and recovery from COVID-19. The diary starts on 14 July 2021 and ends on 17 July 2021. Brodtkin (2007, 50) sees the ability to narrate one’s own life story as an essential part of becoming what she calls a “political actor” and further notes that “to create a narrative is to exercise personal agency, to act upon society. [...] Being an interpreter of events makes the narrator an active agent in constructing the world.” Furthermore, the telling of stories often leads to exponential results as others are encouraged to speak out when they would have otherwise remained silent. Reed and Hill (2010) argue that at the level of community-based health practice, narrative is increasingly viewed as an effective tool for motivating and supporting health behaviour change. Similarly, Hinyard and Kreuter (2007, 785) argue that when audience members become immersed in a narrative, “they are less likely to counter-argue against its key message, and when they connect to characters in the narrative, these characters may have greater influence on the audience members’ attitudes and beliefs.”

A Literary Survey of Lumumba’s COVID-19 Diary (@acielumumba)

Lumumba’s COVID-19 diary is made up of six important tweets (14 July, 15 July, 15 July, 16 July, 17 July and 28 July 2021). These tweets have generated responses underscoring the intertextual and dialogic nature of Twitter texts and the “transitive” nature of meaning. Furthermore, the responses underscore how the Twitter diary, unlike the conventional diary, relies on nourishment and feedback. I read the tweets as a narrative attempting to construct a resilient and survivor identity for Lumumba. However, it is critical to observe that some of the tweets engage in an infodemic, though this may have been done inadvertently.

Disclosure and Resilience in the Face of COVID-19: Analysing the 14 July 2021 Text

The following is the 14 July 2021 tweet that marks the start of Lumumba’s diary:

(I tested POSITIVE! It’s not ok to not share it.)

Dear Friends, Earlier today I tested positive for COVID-19. A few members of my team have also tested positive. 1. Get vaccinated 2. The virus doesn't move, people move. Stay at home! If we have been in contact in the last 14days please isolate & get tested.

The tweet generated 47 responses, and was shared 50 times and loved 310 times. An analysis of the significance of the responses will suffice. The responses include the following: @blessingsmakoni “Get well soon bro. We pray the Lord Jesus Christ heal and restore you and team completely. Thanks for being responsible and sharing”; @SakhileBuhlung1 “Get well soon”; @zanupf_patriots “Get well soon Acie”; @gariedee “The Lord will walk with you through this. It shall pass”; @elvismusandu “You will be well boss. Stay positive mdhara”; @Vasinameno “Get well soon. [...] We shall pray for you as well.” The above responses fully illustrate how identities rely on feedback and nourishment. Furthermore, this idea of nourishment and feedback also underscores a key difference between the conventional diary and a Twitter diary. The conventional diary has no space for feedback while the Twitter diary has space for instantaneous nourishment and feedback.

The text announces to the world that Lumumba tested positive for COVID-19. The title of the tweet, “I tested POSITIVE! It’s not ok to not share it,” underscores the alarmist tone that pervades the text as the reader’s attention is captivated by the capital letters used in the word “POSITIVE” and the exclamation mark that accompanies the word. This alarmist tone highlights the dangers and risks associated with COVID-19 and seek to elicit sympathy from the readership. This alarmist tone is predicated on the realisation, as Giordano (2020) notes, that the world we inhabit is very complex and failure to exercise responsibility can result in its destruction. However, it is the dangers and risks associated with the virus that trigger the desire to fight for survival in Lumumba. This desire is at the centre of his attempt to create a resilient and survivor identity for himself. The salutation “Dear Friends” complicates this tweet as it is indicative of Lumumba targeting an external audience, assumedly his Twitter followers, contrary to the conventional diary, which is deeply personal and confidential. The word “Friends” further reinforces the tone of familiarity and concern as these are the characteristics of friendship. The assumption here is that since the message is addressed to his followers, they are inherently his “friends” and therefore they should naturally be concerned about his welfare. This is a narrative strategy Lumumba employs to capture the attention of his readers and have his message believable on account of the established tones and relationship of friendship. Moreover, the narrator mentions that his team members also tested positive for the virus. This underscores Lumumba’s sense of social responsibility as he is not only interested in his individual welfare but also that of his company. This resonates with Giordano (2020) who argues that we need to exercise great responsibility as human beings as we have multiple levels and layers that connect us to each other and these connections are fragile and need to be guarded jealously. Lumumba’s sense of responsibility not only reinforces his resilient and survivor identity but also creates a pro-worker-centred identity for Lumumba the

businessman. This identity gets feedback and is nourished by @blessingsmakoni who thanks Lumumba for “being responsible and sharing.”

The text also reflects the instructions on how to act when one tests positive for the virus. The credibility and seriousness of the instructions and advice are reinforced by the writer’s proximity to those in the team who tested positive as he is part of the team. However, the number and names of team members who tested positive are not given, and this leaves the mind to imagine a large number due to the alarmist tone of the post. This is strategic, as Lumumba wants to create the impression that COVID-19 is real and people should get vaccinated. This impression is reinforced by the fact that Lumumba and his team were all tested and vaccinated. Getting tested and vaccinated is a commonsensical thing and therefore a sign of social responsibility. Most countries and the World Health Organization have been advocating that people isolate and quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic as a means of slowing down the pandemic. This is in sync with Kucharski (2020) and Giordano (2020) who note that sacrifices of our daily activities and compliance with contagion control measures are needed as humanity confronts epidemics such as COVID-19. There is also a gesture of collective or multiple suffering captured in the phrase “a few members of my team.” However, @KGorogodo exploits the situation to market his business as he tells Lumumba to “Give us a call chief, for all disinfection services. We can help. Catch us on Facebook too.” @KGorogodo’s response underscores the importance of Twitter to business marketing and illustrates how some people can exploit the personal and intimate private life of someone for commercial purposes, just as countries such as America accuse China of having created the virus as a strategy to financially and politically cripple other states in its pursuit of global hegemony. Lumumba numbers the instructions to follow and this is strategic as it creates a didactic tone. The message becomes instructive and Lumumba assumes a posture of authority. This patronising tendency, however, is deflected by the responses of his readers who are clearly aware of COVID-19 and its effects and even suggest some medication for Lumumba. The response of @ZimMech exemplifies this: “Isolate yourself and take home remedies, you will recover. [...] Eat healthy meals to boost your immune system.” It should also be noted that Lumumba’s instructional text also has the injunction “Stay at home!” with an exclamation mark, reflecting the anxiety and fear associated with contagion, as noted by Giordano (2020), which compels people to stay at home in fear of infection and death, and underscores the need for humanity to follow the measures implemented to contain the spread of the pandemic.

There is also an overriding tone of concern based on the selfless attitude of the narrator who confesses that he may have infected others. The writer is open and sincere about his condition as he openly tells those he has been in contact with to isolate and get tested. This highlights his boldness—perhaps a boldness that is necessary when dealing with the pandemic. The writer also plays around with the imagery of movement to highlight how the virus is spread and there is an oblique indictment of people whose reluctance to lead sedentary lives is the root cause of the spread of the virus. Giordano (2020, 3) argues that COVID-19 has resulted in the suspension of daily activities and routines, “a

pause in the usual rhythm of our lives.” This sacrifice is necessary if humanity is to slow down the virus and ultimately defeat it.

COVID-19 and Chinese Medicine and Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Analysing the 15 July 2021 Text

Today was day 1 of treatment. I am under the best medical & family care possible. Thank you to all of you for checking on me. My Chinese friends have sent me teas to clear the chest. My doctors put me on a drip to balance my bodyout. Can't see people esp my son & that sucks. @cleanurzw disinfected the office & home. Ivermectin works!

The above second entry in Lumumba's diary generated 30 responses. The tweet, which describes matters about the management of the COVID-19 condition, shows the writer in a seeming state of ease because he is getting the best medical attention. The responses continue to communicate hope and encouragement. @maumwe tells Lumumba to “Stay strong Acie you can beat this” and @BeckyDube also tells him to “Stay strong bro.” I argue that these responses assist Lumumba to “stay strong” and thus nourish the resilient and survivor identity Lumumba constructs. @nyaraichionjiza even provides her own cocktail of medication for Lumumba to complement the medication he is receiving: “Try also to cut onion and put it under your feet wopfeka ma socks [wear socks], and kwaunoisa musoro [where you put your head]. Thyme tea Oregano tea Chamomile tea Green tea. You can mix all these teas and put ginger, lemon and a pinch of Cayenne pepper. Drink it hot. Remember to do breathing exercises too.” This underscores the fact that social media readers are not passive recipients of messages but “prod-users” and “prod-sumers” of messages, and highlights our common fate as global citizens and the need to be safe in a contagion. As Giordano (2020, 13) notes, beating COVID-19 requires “incredible strength ... incredible sacrifices ... incredible patience.”

The narrator also makes reference to the Chinese in the tweet. We are told that “[his] Chinese friends have sent [him] teas to clear the chest.” Chinese medical and herbal knowledge is projected as superior and beneficial. What is amusing about the tweet is that the narrator sees the Chinese who sent him “teas to clear the chest” as his “friends.” This idea of seeing the Chinese as his “friends” disrupts the global rumour/suspicion of China as the source of the virus (Giordano 2020) and rather projects Chinese people as fellow victims of the virus. The narrator seems infatuated with Chinese medicine and indigenous knowledge systems. This infatuation is also reflected in the 16 July 2021 post that projects the Chinese as having “all the good stuff.” It is important to note that there is a serious conflation of the personal and the political in the tweet. Lumumba is a ZANU PF activist and mentioning the Chinese in this tweet betrays and exposes Lumumba as engaging in a public relations stunt for ZANU PF and the Chinese. This reference also underscores how the personal feeds into the national and political. The Zimbabwean government depicts Zimbabwe-China relations as premised on the trope of “an all-weather friend.” Musanga (2017, 82) notes that this is not surprising given that ZANU PF's “Look East” narrative is supposed to register a “radical shift and re-drawing of Zimbabwe's diplomatic, political and economic relations with Europe and

North America and is lauded by the state controlled media and various ZANU PF politicians.” However, this “friendship” between Zimbabwe and China is very complex, as Chisi (2013) argues, and ordinary Zimbabweans view such friendship with scepticism, just as globally the Chinese are accused of having started the COVID-19 pandemic after a leak from a Chinese virologist laboratory in Wuhan in 2019.

Pre-Existing Conditions and COVID-19: Analysing the 15 July 2021 Text

7/8 years ago I was diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. I have tried hard to maintain a healthy lifestyle including spending a year on a plant based diet & have never been on insulin. This afternoon I learnt diabetes is a pre-existing condition which is the arch-nemesis of Covid recovery. My friends I implore you to not take Covid lightly. Gasping for air inside your own chest is the most fear consuming sensation I have never experienced!

This tweet, which generated five responses, focuses on underlying conditions to amplify their impact on COVID-19 victims. The tone of the text seems to be pleading for sympathy as the narrator notes that “7/8 years ago [he was] diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes.” The responses underscore the sympathy and assist in the constitution of Lumumba’s survivor identity. @kudatigere1 tells Lumumba to “Get well soon Ace” while @James Kuwanda thanks “him for sharing.” @KautaTakona also tells him, “Sorry hako it will soon be over” and @babatim2004 tells him to “Get well soon bro.” The identity position in this tweet becomes complex as we get to know that Lumumba has an underlying condition. The reference to diabetes underscores the heightened risk the narrator faces as COVID-19 thrives on pre-existing conditions in individuals. The hard-hitting impact of COVID-19 is emphasised again in this text and the tone is both pleading and warning as the idea of fear is once again highlighted and reinforced. The dreadful symptoms of COVID-19 are also highlighted from the perspective of personal experiences. However, the narrator continues to encourage and exhort people to stay safe.

Resilience and Surviving COVID-19: Analysing the 16 July 2021 Text

The night time, the night time! A Stay away from cold water, even bathing stay away. It’s the pits. Meditation is key. When suffering from shortness of breath, medicate. The diabetes got me to High Dependency Unit. If you have Chinese friends get them to hook u up, they have all the good stuff. The headaches didn’t show up today, it was the shortness of breath. I wanna write the people keeping me going, but Ndouraya vamwe neBP! [but I will cause unnecessary stress resulting from Blood Pressure (BP)!]

This tweet generated three responses. The repetition of “night time” combined with an exclamation mark accentuates the tone of agony of COVID-19 sufferers. The image of the night is conjured as a terrifying and confounding experience and the tone is one of anguish and desperation. The narrator also repeats the phrase “stay away” and this makes vivid the departure from normal life comforts arising as a result of the pandemic

conditions. It is important to note that COVID-19 has radically transformed the individual and social lives of most people. This resonates with Giordano's (2020, 6) view that COVID-19 "is an infection of our relations," reconfiguring our identities in a significant way, and has resulted in a pause in the usual rhythm of our lives. Furthermore, the virus has also radically changed people's values and beliefs of what is normal. This alienation and agony are symbolised by the invocation of a "pit," which underscores the immobilising and alienating effects of COVID-19 suffered by the writer and humanity in general.

The phrase "Meditation is key" used in the tweet is also suggestive of the therapeutic power of meditation in crisis moments. The virus is portrayed as an experience that makes one contemplate, reflect and project. Disease reconnects one with oneself. The post is economic in speech as the narrator does not elaborate on the nature and substance of the meditation, leaving the reader to fill in the gaps. This helps the reader to identify with the narrated experience as each reader is given the room to fill in the gap with what they would meditate upon during a life-threatening illness. The sense of unease and discomfort is allayed by the need to meditate. However, this meditation is sharply contrasted with the practical strategies that must be embraced when one is afflicted with COVID-19. Scholarship on contagions such as those produced by Giordano (2020) and Kucharski (2020) underscore the need for people to exercise responsibility and vaccinate for the general good of society. Giordano (2020, 17) argues that vaccines have the mathematical power of making "Susceptibles morph into Recovered without going through the illness. Vaccines matter to us because they protect us from the virus, but they matter even more to infectious disease specialists because they spare us from the epidemic." Kucharski (2020, 26) also argues that pandemics can be slowed or finally ended if health agencies "can move people out of this group [the Susceptible group] deliberately, by vaccinating them." We are therefore told by the writer that "when suffering from shortness of breath, medicate." Here, emphasis is on practical ways to manage COVID-19. The narrator also makes reference to the Chinese in the post: "If you have Chinese friends get them to hook u up, they have all the good stuff." Chinese medicine is recruited and deployed as the perfect solution, thus adding indirectly to the contempt for African indigenous knowledge systems. Furthermore, the idea of seeing the Chinese as having "all the good stuff" romanticises Chinese medicine and their vaccine and at the same time reflects the sense of confusion and conflict defining humanity's search for solutions on how to survive the pandemic.

The reference to "shortness of breath" is a tactile image, which evokes the fear of death. That it is stated just after the reference to Chinese medicine as the perfect solution can be read as saying that the Chinese are our potential saviours if we embrace them. This can be read as a political and economic foreign policy position, subverting the status quo of the Western pharmaceutical industrial complex. Thus, the reference can be read as a subtle counternarrative to Western hegemony. Still, African medical self-reliance is contemptuously frowned upon indirectly in this tweet. The responses to the tweet illustrate the dialogic and heteroglossic nature of Twitter messaging. @ngubangwe tells

Lumumba, “Get well Chief, what exactly must the Chinese guys hook one with?” This tweet is answered by another reader, @maumwe, who tells @ngubangwe that the Chinese assist with the “[t]eas that help clear chest.” @maumwe’s response underscores that Twitter messaging requires one to demonstrate an awareness of these “other texts” that are equally important in the meaning-making process. It is important to note that it is not Lumumba who responds but another reader. Thus, we end up having a text within a text, the replication thereof reminding us of the virality evident in the times of contagion, and reflecting both the complexity of Twitter texts and by extension of health messaging in the times of a pandemic.

Mocking African Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Fight against COVID-19: Analysing the 17 July 2021 Text

I’m awake about 5/6 hours a day. Night time is the devil. I’m finding the Chinese teas are helping a lot. Kunatira kungopisana kumeso kuya, hameno [Steaming is just burning each other’s face, who knows]. Death does cross your mind a little, it’s the normal “ko ndikafa?” [What if I die?] Tried reading, slept, tried TV, slept, I obviously can’t try zvimwe zvacho but I’m sure ndorara futi [I obviously cannot try the other remedies but I’m sure will sleep again].

This tweet explores how victims of COVID-19 contend with the pandemic. An obsession with imminent death is mentioned and this is not surprising given the unrelenting nature of the virus that has left a number of people dead in its wake. It is critical to note that COVID-19 should be understood in the context of other pandemics in terms of its destructive effects. Phillips (2012) notes that millions have lost their lives due to pandemics such as HIV/AIDS. The text also highlights the challenges one has to confront in dealing with the pandemic as we are told that the narrator is “awake 5/6 hours a day.” The night is also compared to the devil and this image dovetails with the difficulties experienced when one suffers from the virus. The narrator also tells us that he feels drowsy, which amplifies the level of difficulties associated with convalescing. This is captured in the writer’s inability to partake in an activity without falling asleep. The text also continues to explore the narrator’s infatuation with Chinese medicines and herbal teas. I am, however, interested in the responses to the tweet, as they encourage Lumumba to stay positive and encourage readers to share their experiences of COVID-19 and care for someone with the virus. @murandaasina shares his experiences; he tells Lumumba that “I also tested positive but I have mild conditions. Only back pain and minor chest pain especially night.” This tweet serves the purpose of encouraging and strengthening Lumumba as he is not alone in the fight against COVID-19. In addition, Lumumba’s disclosure, which is an act of “responsibility and sharing,” results in @murandaasina’s disclosure of his status as a way of encouraging Lumumba to fight and survive COVID-19. @BarbaraGoddard7 also offers encouragement to Lumumba as she is nursing her COVID-19-positive husband. @BarbaraGoddard7 tells Lumumba that “[t]his 3rd wave is like a tsunami. It’s a first mover. I’m praying you get well soon. It’s visiting my house at the moment too. Hubby started showing symptoms on Monday, tested on Tuesday with Antigen. Negative. Tested Friday with PCR It was positive.”

The 28 July 2021 Text and Infodemics

I am so grateful this COVID is not targeting children instead.

I consider this tweet as the last entry in the diary. The text portrays the writer's sense of relief over the reality that the virus does not target children. This heightens our sympathy and at the same time projects Lumumba as an individual who loves children and wishes that no harm befall them. There is a sense in which Lumumba seems to be suggesting that COVID-19 is brutal in its effects and therefore children cannot bear or withstand the level of pain associated with the virus. The destructive effects of pandemics such as HIV/AIDS are underscored in autobiographical narratives of HIV-positive individuals such as Shaba (2006) and Westerhof (2005). However, as the responses will show, this is a misunderstanding of the virus as children are also susceptible to the contagion. Therefore, Lumumba's text is factually incorrect or partially incorrect as some variants of the virus are infecting children. This text provokes reactions; it generated 16 tweets, 39 retweets and 274 likes. However, it is important to note that some of the responses expose the ignorance exhibited in the tweet. For example, ELNino@langan_tr kindly informs Lumumba that "[her] daughter is currently battling the disease." Another interesting response is from @DuwayneGoddard in which the writer simply tells Lumumba that "[t]here is a variant that is" and proceeds to attach a *New York Times* article by Richard C. Paddock and Muktitu Suhartono titled "No Longer 'Hidden Victims', Children Are Dying as Virus Surges in Indonesia." @DuwayneGoddard shows that people need to have updated information about COVID-19 as the disease continues to mutate and play havoc with scientists obsessed with developing a vaccine. Thus, Lumumba's tweet suggests that he is not really informed about the pandemic, which is true about many people's knowledge of other pandemics as pointed out by Phillips (2012) with regard to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and this can create unnecessary dependency in people and might end up exposing children to the virus in the misguided belief that they are immune to it.

The responses testify to the fact that Twitter provides a platform for instant engagement and dialogue with the writer as readers are not simply passive consumers of what writers write. This engagement is not only between the writer and the readers but more interestingly the engagement and dialogue can be between readers. Thus, it is possible to have conversations within conversations. This is exemplified by @Kazola10731409 who responds that "[i]n case marohwa nayo hama [in case you get afflicted my friend] get in touch I have the solution yabatsira a lot of pple [that has helped a lot of people]." It is critical to note that @Kazola10731409 responds to @acielumumba, but his response triggers one by @cemronkuah who tells him to "[j]ust post your solution it can help others in the future." What is interesting about these conversations is that they spiral into another strand of conversations between other characters not directly related to the original post. @The_Real_Kudzie responds to @cemronkuah by telling him "[h]apana solution apa kunyepa, zvataingoita izvozvo ndiyo solution yacho," which translates to "there is no solution here and it's a lie, the solution is in what we have been doing all along." This dialogue spirals beyond the confines of the initial dialogue as

@cemronkuah responds to @The_Real_Kudzie by telling him that “[t]rue medical solution is always the best ... was suffering from COVID 19 for the past 10 days now fit because of azithromycin, paracet, vitamin, zinc and drinking lemon.” @The_Real_Kudzie responds: “But that’s what a lot of people have been doing wani it’s not a secret. That’s the solution since Donald Trump.” As a result, @cemronkuah replies “[m]edical solution was never a secret (paracet azithro vit etc).” The conversation gets more and more complex as @The_Real_Kudzie informs @cemronkuah “[t]hat’s true Bro but they didn’t want people to know that because they wanted to vaccinate them.” @cemronkuah contests this narrative of seeing vaccines as inherently sinister when he responds that “[f]rom my view vaccine is better than having the diseases and taking the formula. Covid can left [sic] you damaged for real.” @cemronkuah’s view resonates with Kucharski’s (2020, 26) argument that during an epidemic, “people naturally move out of the susceptible group as they become infected. But for many infections, health agencies can move people out of this group deliberately, by vaccinating them.”

Conclusion

This article examined the Twitter diary of Lumumba Mutumanje’s (@acielumumba) recovery and survival from COVID-19. The diary chronicles his experiences of being COVID-19 positive and his recuperation and survival of the virus. I argued that in his diary Lumumba attempted to create a fighter and survivor identity and this resonates with other identities created by HIV/AIDS activists such as Tendayi Westerhof (2005) and Lutanga Shaba (2006). This identity is predicated on disclosure and the sharing of experiences and resonates with much of the scholarship on COVID-19 focusing on the need to practise social distancing and self-quarantine. Thus, Lumumba’s diary is an effective tool for motivating and supporting health behaviour change. I also argued that the diary complicates our understanding of a text and how meaning is generated given that in the digital information age we now live in, meaning is no longer localised to the immediate (con)text, as inferences have to be made from other (con)texts. Lastly, it was argued that Lumumba’s Twitter diary also extends debates on the role of social media in health advocacy and community education, especially in times of COVID-19. Social media celebrities are using their influence and traction to transmit important health messages and engage in health advocacy. However, there is a little caveat as social media celebrities need to verify their messages because they can unintentionally transmit falsehoods and create as well as fuel infodemics, as is the case with the 28 July 2021 tweet about children not getting COVID-19.

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