

SNSs and Deliberative Governance in a Polarised Society

The Role of WhatsApp groups in Kenyan Counties

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Abbreviations

CA	: Communications Authority of Kenya
CDF	: Constituency Development Fund
CKRC	: Constitution of Kenya Review Commission
CRECO	: Constitution and Reform Education Consortium
DFID	: Department for International Development
DFRD	: District Focus for Rural Development
KANU	: Kenya African National Union
KADU	: Kenya African Democratic Union
KNBS	: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
KNCHR	: Kenya National Commission on Human Rights
LASDAP	: Local Authorities Service Delivery Action Plan
NCIC	: National Cohesion and Integration Commission
ODM	: Orange Democratic Movement
PNU	: Party of National Unity
SMSs	: Short Message Services
SNS	: Social Networking Sites
SUPKEM	: Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims
UNDP	: United Nations Development Program
WFGD	: WhatsApp-based Focus Group Discussions

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Abstract

Kenya has experienced polarisation that has sometimes resulted in conflict. As a remedy, the Kenyan constitution, reviewed in 2010, and other legislation prescribes deliberative governance as one of the solutions to polarisation in sub-national Kenyan counties. The legislation mandates counties to use the mainstream and social media platforms for deliberative governance to promote national cohesion and integration. This study examines the growing use of WhatsApp groups for such deliberations. It is based on the proposition that the outcomes of deliberative governance and its impact on polarisation depends on the quality of deliberation and, in particular, on the platform's (WhatsApp's), structure and norms. The deliberative norms analysed here are based on the Habermasian model of tolerance, inclusivity, diversity, incivility, and heterogeneity of viewpoints, whilst the deliberative structure examines WhatsApp group's affordances and composition. Based on these propositions, this study empirically explores the impact of deliberative governance on polarisation in WhatsApp group platforms in four Kenyan counties. Guided by a critical realism paradigm, the study uses an original mixed-methods approach involving a quantitative (online survey) and qualitative (WhatsApp-based focus group discussion).

The study revealed that the socio-demographic profile of WhatsApp groups participants is predominantly young males with high educational attainment, similar to other SNSs participatory platforms. The research also suggests that achieving deliberative norms such as civility, tolerance, and inclusivity is challenging in WhatsApp groups. Therefore, the quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups falls short of the Habermasian deliberative ideals, and this has worsened because WhatsApp has enhanced the sharing of stereotypes, misinformation, and conflict frames which have aggravated polarisation. Consequently, deliberations in WhatsApp groups have further augmented polarisation around county governance issues. Regarding the deliberative structure, the study proposes that the platform's affordance, the composition of participants, the information sources, and the discussion topics in WhatsApp groups affect the quality of deliberations and polarisation. Additionally, this study makes a significant contribution by using a fresh, integrated methodological approach based on WhatsApp's affordances for data collection and analysis.

Chapter One

Deliberative Governance in a Polarised Context

1.1 Aim of the Study

This research study aims to empirically explore the impact of WhatsApp groups on polarisation and deliberative governance in four Kenyan counties. The Kenyan constitution, together with other legislation such as the County Government Act, 2012, mandates the use of all media for deliberative governance at the county level to achieve two things: to promote citizen awareness on devolution and good governance, and to promote peaceful co-existence and national cohesion. The constitution prescribes deliberative governance as one of the solutions to polarisation in Kenya. The assumption is that deliberative governance via social networking sites (SNSs) will support the convergence of key stakeholders to deliberate on divisive county governance issues. However, the challenge with polarisation in Kenya is that it is deep-rooted, pervasive, and historical. It remains unclear whether deliberative governance will succeed where various legislative and administrative initiatives have been implemented and failed since independence (*see Chapter Three, pp. 96-102*). The difference between previous initiatives and the current process is that the constitution now anchors deliberative governance in law. The current legislation spells out the deliberative governance structures, specifies the modalities of engagement, and mandates the allocation of facilitation resources by the counties.

Unlike previous initiatives, the current legislation recognises the role of the media in deliberative governance and polarisation and makes two critical assumptions based on a positive media effects paradigm. First, it assumes that media represent a public sphere and prescribes a top-down approach to deliberative governance using both mainstream and SNS media platforms. It also assumes that media platforms will support an appropriate deliberation environment characterised by tolerance, civility, diversity, and inclusivity. These characteristics mirror Habermasian deliberative norms in the public sphere. In contrast, studies have indicated that SNS platforms are incapable of meeting Habermasian deliberative norms.

Instead, they have been found to provoke irrational discussion defined by incivility and intolerance. Further, they are not necessarily inclusive because of the existing digital divide in Kenya. However, no study has linked Habermasian deliberative norms and polarisation in the Kenyan context. This is despite the role of SNSs in instigating polarisation and fuelling the 2007/8 post-election violence in Kenya (*see Chapter Three, pp. 132-134*). Therefore, it is doubtful that SNS platforms will support quality deliberative governance and ameliorate the problems of polarisation as envisaged in the current legislation. Furthermore, existing studies have linked SNS users with tendencies that encourage polarisation through practices such as selective exposure and forming enclave echo chambers (Bright, 2018; Garrett, 2009; Garrett et al., 2013; Kim, 2015, 2015; Messing & Westwood, 2014; Stroud, 2010, 2018; Weeks et al., 2017; Wicks et al., 2014).

The past two decades have seen the emergence of various SNS platforms with unique features across the globe. With more than 12 million users in Kenya, WhatsApp has novel interactive affordances and dynamics that can influence group polarisation (*see Chapter Four, pp. 139*). It is the most widely used SNS platform in Kenya and has instigated spontaneous bottom-up networks to engage in deliberative governance. It has revolutionised social networking, discursive interactions, and political mobilisation in Kenya. The majority of Kenyan county governments, citizens, and civil society groups currently use WhatsApp for interactive engagement through the formation of groups and networks. As a deliberation platform, WhatsApp can be understood in terms of its deliberative structure and its ability to support group norms. This study is based on the proposition that the outcomes of deliberative governance and its impact on polarisation will depend on the quality of deliberation and the platform's deliberative structure. The WhatsApp group deliberation structure consists of its socio-demographic composition, recruitment method, group size, and group ties (*see Figure 1.1*). The quality of deliberations (operationalised as deliberative norms) are derived from

Habermasian deliberative ideals and include: diversity, inclusivity, tolerance, civility, moderation, and heterogeneity of viewpoints (Habermas, 1996, 2003, 2005). How participants interact in view of the WhatsApp group's deliberative structure and the deliberative norms is likely to affect polarisation. Another proposition is that the recruitment method used in the formation of WhatsApp groups can influence the quality of deliberations on WhatsApp. The quality of deliberations can be determined by Habermasian deliberative ideals (Kibet & Ward, 2018; Mychelle et al., 2016; Kurowski, 2016; Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017; Rastogi & Hendler, 2016; Omanga, 2019a).

Based on the above propositions, this study sought to answer a number of research questions. The first was to understand the socio-demographic profile of WhatsApp groups in Kenya. Using a quantitative approach based on an online survey, the study looked at the age, gender, and level of education of participants in WhatsApp groups. The study also established whether and how WhatsApp group deliberative structures and norms, as earlier elaborated, influence group polarisation. Answering this research question involved the use of a mixed method design using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A quantitative method was used to establish whether there is a variance in the quality of deliberation based on WhatsApp group formation. Through an entirely qualitative approach, the study sought to establish whether deliberative governance on WhatsApp groups influences polarisation. Answering these research questions was guided by a critical realism paradigm.

1.2 Justification for this Research Study

Various existing studies have examined the quality of deliberations based on Habermasian deliberative ideals in diverse contexts across the globe. However, very few have examined how the quality of deliberations affects group polarisation especially in polarised contexts like Kenya. While few research studies have examined the use of WhatsApp groups in Kenya, none

has specifically examined their impact on polarisation and deliberative governance processes. Further, existing studies on deliberation have a biased focus on other SNS platforms like Facebook and Twitter. This research is based on normative deliberative governance ideals as stipulated in the Kenyan constitution and other legislative frameworks. These ideals stipulate a top-down engagement framework where county government creates strategies, initiates interaction, and establishes mechanisms to deliberate on governance issues. Considering its unique affordances and WhatsApp usage, a spontaneous bottom-up approach is an emergent reality in the contemporary deliberative governance framework. The impact of such a spontaneous bottom-up approach on the quality of deliberations and on polarisation remains unexplored in the Kenyan context. While various studies on polarisation exists, this study empirically tests the applicability of constitutional assumptions in Kenyan counties. The study links various concepts related to deliberative governance, deliberative norms and ideals, media theories, and group polarisation with results that have theoretical and practical implications. Linking these concepts in this study has resulted in empirical evidence that can contribute to decisions on governance policy in the future. This study used a novel method of online focus group discussion based entirely on the WhatsApp platform (*see Chapter Five, pp. 176,177*). Based on WhatsApp's securitised end-to-end encryption, this study research proposes the use of WhatsApp-based focus group discussions for collecting data among vulnerable population groups (Dahir, 2017; Kibet & Ward, 2018; Muendo, 2017; Mutahi & Kimari, 2017; Dotson, 2016; Okeowo, 2019; Omanga, 2019a; Waterson, 2018).

1.3 Background and Context of the Study

1.3.1 Polarisation and Constitutional Change in Kenya

Since independence, Kenya has been characterised by partisan politics and fragmented ethnic identities. The causes of such fragmentation include among others: segregationist colonial

policies, divisive post-independence politics, and contested resource distribution. Following Kenya's independence, the political elite entrenched exclusionary 'divide and rule' tactics used by colonialists. They deployed divisive ethnic and political rhetoric as a form of mobilisation due to a general lack of a cohesive and comprehensive party ideology. The political elite used state resources to heighten polarisation, paralyse governance institutions and entrench state capture. These factors peaked during periodic general elections resulting in controversial, contentious, and extremely polarised electioneering processes (Ahluwalia, 2013; Holmquist & Oendo, 2001; Kagwanja & Southall, 2009; Kelsall, 1996; Speich, 2009).

One relevant example is the post-election violence of 2007/8 which started with a heated political discourse and campaigns and ended in significant bloodshed (more than 1,000 people were killed). From this election, it became increasingly apparent that online and offline discussion heightens the state of ethnic polarisation. It also hardens attitudinal views and ideological positions that can result into catastrophic violence in the society. It was also evident that polarisation in Kenya is deeply-rooted in unresolved historical and socio-political grievances that had divided the society into cleavages. Such cleavages are what politicians used to drive emotionally charged political processes. Polarisation in this study is conceptualised in terms of divergent attitudes, opinions, and views within the context of deliberative governance.

The focus of the study is on group polarisation which is defined as follows:

Group polarisation describes a phenomenon where members of a deliberating group move toward a more extreme position in the direction the members' pre-deliberation tendency (Vicario et al., 2016, p. 23).

According to Sunstein:

Group polarisation arises when members of a deliberating group move toward a more extreme point in whatever direction is indicated by the members' predeliberation tendency... group polarisation is the conventional consequence of group deliberation (Sunstein, 2008a, p.4).

He further notes that there are two principles that underlie the concept of group polarisation.

The first relates to the issue of social influences on the group's behaviour. In effect, polarisation

can result in socio-political fragmentation with an implicit and implied conception of ‘us versus them’ factions in a group context. The ‘us versus them’ faction reflects a form of *binary thinking* where participants favour their side during deliberations. This characteristic of polarisation in Kenya drives the politics and governance process into zero-sum contests where perceived losers and winners cannot co-exist on issues (Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2012; Omulo & Williams, 2018).

Following the unprecedented magnitude of the 2007/8 violence in Kenya, a long-term solution through constitutional amendment and restructuring was explored. The Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC) recommended the devolution of power and decentralisation of decision making as one of the remedial actions to resolve polarisation. Devolution was instituted in the constitutional review process to address grievances related to the ethnic and regional exclusion in state management. Decentralisation was intended to streamline political administration and enhance equitable resource governance. According to CKRC, it was not enough to institute devolution and decentralisation; instituting an all-inclusive governance structure required a strategic participatory process. Citizens across all regions in Kenya were required to contribute their views in the management of state resources via a deliberative governance process. Consequently, deliberative governance was enshrined in Kenya’s 2010 constitutional law and other subsequent legislation (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009; Khadiagala, 2017; Kimani; Bosire; & Likaka, 2013).

1.3.2 Deliberative Governance Architecture in the Kenyan Context

Deliberative governance is a process that converges various institutions, groups, agencies, activists, and individual citizens to deliberate on a governance policy issue (Hendriks, 2009). Deliberative governance is derived from the concept of deliberations which is also advocated by Habermas. According to Fearon (1998, p.63):

Deliberation refers either to a particular sort of discussion—one that involves the careful and serious weighing of reasons for and against some proposition—or to an interior process by which an individual weighs reasons for and against courses of action.

Based on the above definitions, this study operationalises deliberative governance as a contestation of governance discourses in the public sphere via sustained interactive digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups. The Kenyan constitution prescribes deliberative governance as a solution to socio-political polarisation as earlier noted. Based on the CKRC recommendations, Kenya's 2010 constitutional structure re-organises state power into two levels: national and county governments. It also redefines the use of state power by different political and administrative actors along multiple structural and accountability lines. It combines the lateral, horizontal and vertical dimensions of power and authority. Part of the administrative powers, resource allocation roles, and policy-making responsibilities of the national government were decentralised to the county governments. Citizens' input via deliberative governance was decentralised, entrenched, and formalised in the participatory and decision-making structures at the county government level. Deliberative governance is an engagement approach that strengthens citizens' roles and input in governance through their direct, institutionalised deliberation in public policy choices (Cornell & D'Arcy, 2014; Kramon & Posner, 2011; Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2012; Kanyinga, 2014; Nizam & Muriu, 2015; World Bank, 2015).

The objects and principles of devolved government under Article 174¹ of the Kenyan constitution grants powers of self-governance to the people. It legitimises citizen participation in the exercise of powers of the state towards better governance. Article 174 further recognises and entrenches citizens' powers to initiate and manage their development agenda. Therefore, Article 174 of the constitution establishes a framework of deliberative governance by defining the roles and responsibilities of different institutions and actors. Subsequent legislation

¹ The Constitution of Kenya, 2010 is the latest version of Kenya's supreme law that was promulgated on 27 August 2010.

including the Public Finance Management Act (Government of Kenya, 2012b), the County Government Act (Government of Kenya, 2012a), and the Urban Areas and Cities Act (Government of Kenya, 2011) have all incorporated public participation and deliberative governance in its core processes.

The County Governments Act (2012),² in subsection 91, giving effect to Article 174 of the constitution, identifies modalities for deliberative governance. This Act obligates the county government to facilitate structures for citizen mobilisation and engagement using: ‘media platforms and information communication technology-based platforms’. Article 94 of the county government Act, 2012 states that the county government shall use the media to: (1) ‘create awareness and promote deliberations on devolution and governance, (2) promote deliberations among citizens for purposes of peace and national cohesion, (3) undertake deliberations and advocacy on core development issues such as agriculture, education, health, security, economics, sustainable environment among others’ (*see Chapter Three, pp. 106*).

The County Governments Act, 2012 assumes that the media is a public sphere where meaningful deliberations can occur. Article 94 prescribes the use of deliberative governance to promote national cohesion and social integration. Article 94 is predicated on various theoretical assumptions that form the basis of this study. These assumptions are rooted in a positive media effects paradigm and challenge various fundamental arguments. The legislation prescribes a top-down approach to deliberative governance and fails to consider that deliberative governance requires a bipartisan approach. The success of such an approach depends on the supply- and demand-side factors. The supply-side represented by the county governments should ensure functional deliberation structures. The demand-side means that citizens should be interested, knowledgeable, and have the efficacy needed for deliberations (Ghai, 2008; Halakhe, 2013; Memoli, 2011; Munyua, 2016; Lavallo et al., 2011).

² The County Governments Act, 2012 is an Act of Parliament that gives effect to Chapter Eleven of the Kenyan Constitution. It defines the powers, functions and responsibilities of the County Governments.

Quality deliberative governance is based on idealised conditions including a consistent supply of reliable information to ensure better discourse and consensus among competing interests. Ideally, participants in a deliberative governance process should share their expertise and knowledge generously. Participants should treat other participants and their perspectives equally and base their collective decisions on all contributions. Quality deliberative governance requires a platform that will guarantee the diversity and inclusivity of all stakeholders. The platform should support open, tolerant, and civil discussion with well-moderated information sharing structures. The only platforms that can guarantee such conditions in deliberations are micro deliberative structures such as county government assemblies and citizen juries. This is problematic because Article 94 of the County Governments Act, 2012 envisaged deliberative governance in macro deliberative structures/public spheres such as social media, and civil societies (Erman, 2013; Fischer, 2006; He, 2018; Hendriks, 2006, 2009; Hoareau, 2012; Park, Kim, & Rosenbloom, 2017a).

Another assumption considers the media as a net positive contributor to the process of national cohesion and social integration. In contrast, studies have established a twin impact of the media in Kenya's socio-political landscape (*see Chapter Four, pp. 126*). Evidence has implicated the media in ideological polarisation, propagating hate speech, and mobilising communities towards the 2007/8 post-election violence. On the other hand, SNSs facilitate the identifying and mapping of violence hotspots during periods of elections using *ushahidi*.³ SNS platforms also quicken action towards relief efforts in catastrophe stricken areas (Banjac et al., 2016; Halakhe, 2013; Simiyu, 2014; Kanyinga, 2014; Masika, 2015). However, the scope of this study is limited to deliberations (on SNSs) as online public spheres. The uniqueness of SNSs lies specifically in their ubiquitous, interactive and networking affordances. SNSs drive extensive networking between users and allow them to articulate and establish interactions

³ Ushahidi is a platform empowering citizens to map out, expose and discuss issues like corruption and human rights violations.

between other users while sharing content within the network (Eke, 2014; Ellison & Boyd, 2007; Livingstone, 2014; Fenton et al., 2011). The scope of this study is further limited to WhatsApp, which is currently the leading SNS platform in Kenya.

1.3.3 WhatsApp Adoption and Use in Kenya

WhatsApp has emerged as the most popular SNS in Kenya. As earlier stated, it currently has more users than Facebook (7 million), Twitter (2.2 million) and Instagram (3 million) as in the first quarter of 2018 (Communications Authority, 2019). WhatsApp was developed with an intention to replace carrier-billed text messaging via an SMS platform and was envisaged to be a charge-free and advert-free interactive platform. The enhanced features and affordances of WhatsApp allow users to send and receive video, images and audio messages using enhanced integrated location mapping features. It allows users to construct and share a profile within a bounded system, establish and engage with their connections within the network. WhatsApp has consequently revolutionised social networking, discursive interactions, and deliberative governance in Kenya. It has significantly impacted on people's identity formation, ideological expression, as well as political mobilisation (*see Chapter Four, pp. 150-156*). Moreover, it is cheaper and more user friendly than text messaging and maintains a unique hyper proximity with users. Furthermore, its end-to-end encryption⁴ significantly enhances the perception of user privacy. This study argues that WhatsApp groups can be considered as public spheres within the Kenyan context. This is based on the understanding of the public sphere as a social space where diverse opinions are expressed, county governance problems are discussed, and collective solutions are developed interactively (*see Chapter Four, pp. 156-157*) (Kibet & Ward, 2018; Mychelle et al., 2016; Kurowski, 2016; Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017; Rastogi & Hender, 2016; Omanga, 2019a).

⁴ End-to-end encryption is basically a digitally secure method of communication where people at both ends are the only who can access the messages.

Three factors largely explain the potential of WhatsApp to influence deliberative governance as a public sphere in Kenya: first is the rapid spread of mobile phones and smartphone technology; second, an investment in affordable mobile broadband services coupled with the penetration of fast, accessible, and affordable Internet at the household level; lastly, the social networking culture and WhatsApp group formation patterns among Kenyans. For instance, click-to-join⁵ public WhatsApp groups established to interact on various issues, including politics, governance, and sports are now commonplace in Kenya. This further explains the extensive use and reach of WhatsApp as a deliberation platform.

However, these advantages also bring downsides. WhatsApp has been linked to the spread of fake news, conspiracy theories, and stereotypes, and misinformation in Kenya (*see Chapter Four, pp. 132-134*). The ubiquity of WhatsApp groups allows the sharing of politically mundane content in very rapid and unrestricted ways. WhatsApp forwarding affordances make it difficult to trace or track the origin of inflammatory content due to the end-to-end encryption. Its forwarding affordances also mean that misinformed content can be forwarded to many unsuspecting users without their consent. Therefore, it is a paradox for Kenya's legislation to prescribe the use of SNS platforms such as WhatsApp to help create a cohesive and integrated society. This paradox is rooted in a powerful media effects paradigm that has been the subject of scholarly research for more than half a century (Dahir, 2017; Dahir, 2017; Waterson, 2018; Mutahi & Kimari, 2017; Muendo, 2017).

1.4 SNSs, Group Polarisation and Deliberative Governance

Deliberative governance is derived from the concept of deliberative democracy. It is arguably a utopian concept rooted in democratic idealism. It seeks to promote civil discourse amongst governance stakeholders in the public sphere. The public sphere is an engagement platform

⁵ Click-to-join WhatsApp groups are those where users can join the group via links that are often published in other online spaces.

that facilitates the convergence of citizens for interactive civil discourse (Habermas, 1989). Deliberations in the public sphere, according to Habermas, should accommodate the diversity and inclusivity of participants impacted by decision-making processes; be marked by tolerance and civility in deliberation; encourage constructive dialogue and rational argumentation; be moderated to allow the careful consideration of opposing ideas (Habermas, 1996, 2003, 2005). The wide adoption and use of SNS platforms across the globe have received wide scholarly attention in terms of its ability to revitalise and transform the public sphere.

SNSs are conceptualised as an online public sphere facilitating the convergence of diverse people and groups in the public sphere. The convergence of diverse people and groups in an online platform can be problematic and chaotic. Some scholars have examined the extent to which online digital spaces meet the Habermasian ideals of deliberation. The studies found a lack of rational deliberations, incivility, challenges in acknowledging and appreciating other users' perspectives, a lack of inclusivity, improper facilitation of deliberations, and exclusive participation structures. However, very few of these studies have gone beyond this to explore the impact of the Habermasian deliberative ideals on group polarisation on online platforms. The few existing studies are based on the US and other Western contexts (Benson, 2019; Chambers, 2003; Corus & Ozanne, 2012; Davidson & Elstub, 2014; Öberg & Svensson, 2012; Ofunja et al., 2018; Park et al., 2017a).

Studies linking SNSs and polarisation argue that deliberation on such platforms exposes participants to dissimilar viewpoints which encourages them to reconsider their existing biases. Exposure to discordant content is expected to enhance tolerance and appreciation of diversity which can contribute positively to depolarisation. When exposed to diverse viewpoints, groups may be motivated to uphold their existing beliefs through motivated reasoning. Motivated reasoning is where participants look out for evidence that supports their position. Participants can experience confirmation bias and emerge from deliberation with more polarised ideologies

and attitudes than before. Other studies note that SNS participants tend to gravitate towards ideologically homogeneous participants who re-enforce their own opinions. This contributes to enclave deliberations which has been associated with selective exposure, echo chambers, or filter bubbles (*see Chapter Four, pp. 69-76*). Research suggests that information selectivity is platform-dependent where SNS platforms create optimum affordances to enhance a high choice media environment (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2007; Bright, 2018; Garrett, 2009; Garrett et al., 2013; Kim, 2015; Messing & Westwood, 2014; Stroud, 2010, 2018; Weeks et al., 2017; Wicks et al., 2014).

Selective exposure, echo chambers, and enclave deliberations are detrimental to the process of deliberative governance. They increase partisan factions, binary thinking and encourage the practice of social comparison which are all associated with group polarisation. Social comparison occurs when the group takes certain positions because participants want to be perceived favourably by other group participants. Further, echo chambers enhance enclave deliberations which increase the ideological distance between the in-group and the out-group. In-group is where the group's participants favour those with similar viewpoints and positions and disagree with out-group regardless of the facts (*see Chapter Four, pp. 45*).

For instance, participants in echo chambers amplify their partisan views with other like-minded participants. The views that are shared within such enclave platforms are homogeneous, limited and can result in groupthink. Groupthink is characterised by typically unchallenged, biased and low-quality decision. It happens when the desire for group harmony and ideological conformity shapes the group's position. Therefore, SNSs can stoke negative emotions bordering on apathy, scepticism, and cynicism in relation to deliberative governance. Polarisation can also result from the design of technical systems using algorithms and filter bubbles (Mccoy et al., 2018; Prior, 2013; Kim, 2015; Somer & Mccoy, 2018; Stroud, 2010; Swol, 2009; Wojcieszak, 2011).

The contrary perspective is that SNS platforms enhance the chances of incidental exposure which negates the influence of selective exposure and polarisation. This is because participants do not necessarily filter counter-attitudinal content that contradicts their existing views and positions. Individuals will rarely eliminate their interaction with diverse contacts in SNSs as an opportunity cost of other gratifications such as entertainment and socialisation. Individuals typically ignore ideas and opinions that contradict their beliefs but rarely block or unfriend sources of such content. Further, participants with sophisticated political experience consume diverse content to either challenge or reinforce their existing knowledge and beliefs.

The assumption that echo chambers result from the extremely passive role of participants in relation to information choice is problematic. It simplifies the complex socio-psychological dynamics involved in information consumption in digital environments. In addition, SNS platforms ultimately create weak ties which have been associated with exposure to heterogeneous content. The above arguments indicate that SNS usage patterns and behaviours are complex and intricate and contextually determined (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2007; Stroud, 2018; Lee, 2016; Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014; Garrett et al., 2013; Kahne & Bowyer, 2018; Messing & Westwood, 2014; Weeks et al., 2017).

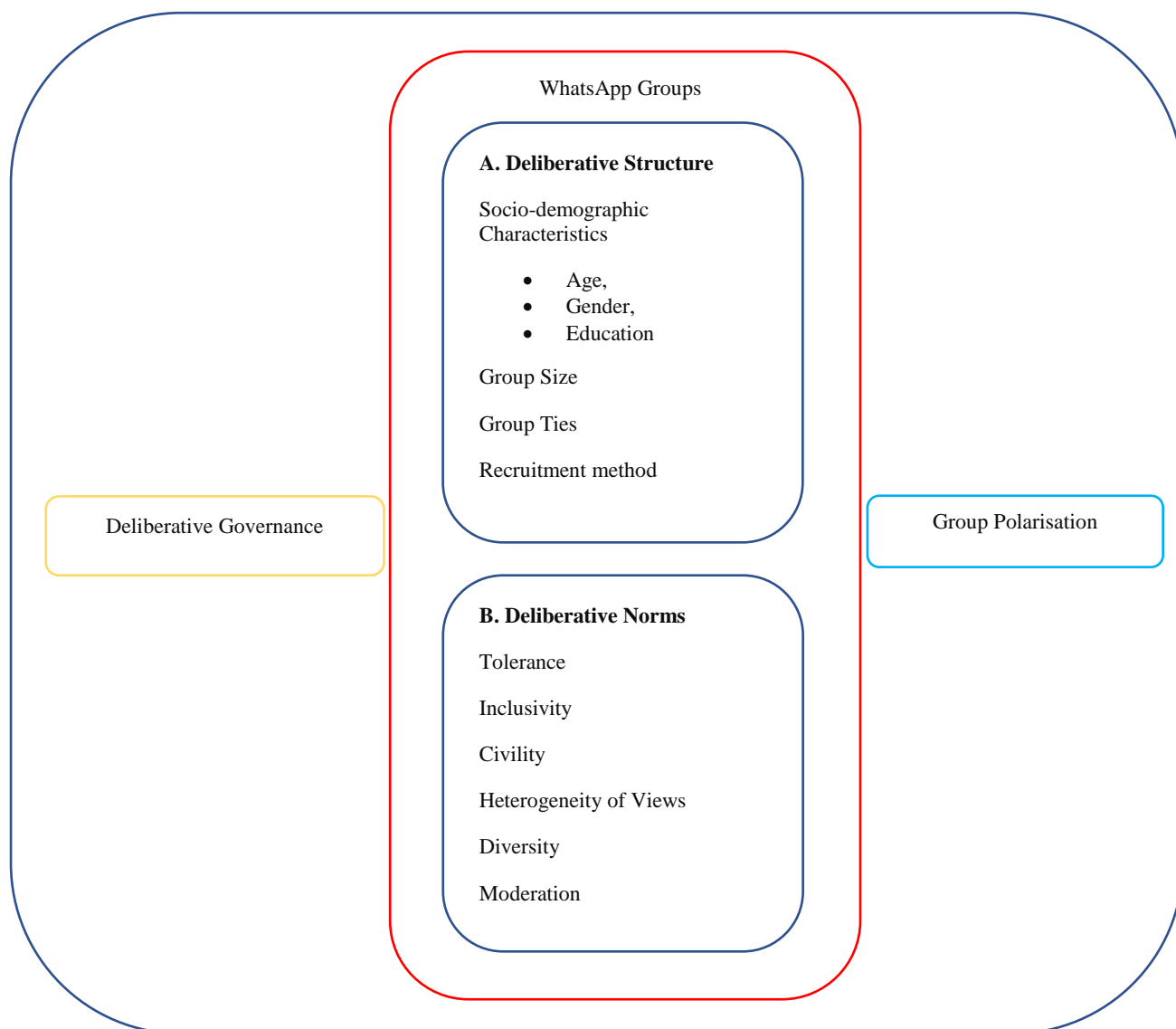
Similarly, polarisation has negative effects on deliberative governance. Polarisation increases the ideological distance among individuals or between groups. Polarisation significantly reduces the possibilities of ideological convergence or consensus in deliberations. The lack of consensus due to polarisation can stall or stop deliberative governance and degenerate into actual conflict in extremely polarised situations. Polarisation can effectively decrease group collaboration, participation interest, and trust in deliberative governance processes. In polarised environments, political elites and groups are more incentivised to exercise partiality and pursue a partisan agenda in governance. Governance institutions are severely weakened in a polarised context and this inclines participants to engage in clientelist

practices. Polarised contexts make it difficult for governance institutions to engineer inclusive policy processes necessary for reform. Polarisation heightens the tension around deliberative governance and increases uncertainty and this can become a vicious circle (Lebas, 2018; Mccarty et al., 2019; Beam et al., 2018; McCoy et al., 2018; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Wojcieszak, 2011; Stroud, 2010; Semaan, 2019).

1.5 Research Proposition

Considering the above arguments on the relationship between deliberative governance and polarisation in the public sphere, this study makes the following propositions. The first is that the link between deliberative governance and polarisation in the public sphere can be explained by its deliberative structure and deliberative norms (*see Figure 1.1*). Deliberative structures, according to this study, consist of key features, structural organisation, and composition of the deliberative platform. They consist of structural factors such as: socio-demographic composition, recruitment method, group size, and group ties (*see Figure 1.1*). Deliberative norms are informal deliberative guidelines of behaviour and an agreed code of conduct that ensures orderliness in group discussions for better outcomes. Deliberative norms are also used to define the quality of deliberations in this study. Deliberative norms are derived from the Habermasian deliberative ideals and include: diversity, inclusivity, tolerance, civility, moderation, and heterogeneity of viewpoints (Habermas, 1996, 2003, 2005) (*see Figure 1.1*). The connection between the deliberative structures and deliberative norms is likely to influence whether and how deliberations influence group polarisation. For instance, smaller groups, with close ties are likely to be less diverse and inclusive. This implies that they have a higher chance of enclave deliberations resulting in echo chambers. However, there is no empirical evidence to establish such a relationship because no study has explored the combination of these two concepts in the polarised Kenyan context.

Figure 1.1: Deliberative Governance, WhatsApp Group Structure, Norms and Polarisation



(Source: Author, 2020)

The second proposition is that inherently polarised societies like Kenya are likely to translate into equally polarised online public spheres. Therefore, the solution to polarisation is likely to depend on the quality of deliberation in online public spheres. The quality of deliberation can be established using Habermasian deliberative ideals or what this study considered to be deliberative norms (*see Figure 1.1*). The adoption of deliberative norms is likely to be influenced by the group’s composition such as its size, ties, and the socio-demographic

characteristics profile as well. No study has examined if and how the recruitment method to WhatsApp groups can influence the quality of deliberations. This study argues that recruitment of participants to WhatsApp groups can happen through self-selection or random selection (*see Chapter Two, p. 58*).

The last proposition is that SNS platforms as online public spheres have significant differences based on their affordances and adoption within a particular context. Platforms such as WhatsApp have introduced novel interactive dynamics that can influence group polarisation (*see Chapter Four, pp. 137-139*). For instance, WhatsApp has an end-to-end encryption that can provide a safe haven for making inflammatory comments which can embolden the expression of extreme views. Further, the socio-demographic composition of WhatsApp groups and its influence on polarisation remains unexplored in the Kenyan context. This study makes the proposition that the design, affordance, and composition of WhatsApp groups together with the topic under deliberation are potentially polarising factors that need to be explored in the context of group polarisation.

1.6 Research Questions

In light of the above discussion, this study aims to establish the influence of WhatsApp groups on polarisation and deliberative governance in Kenyan counties.

- i. What is the socio-demographic profile of WhatsApp groups in Kenya?*

This research question seeks to understand the socio-demographic composition of WhatsApp in terms of the age, gender, and level of education of participants in the groups. The findings from this research question are also used in the second research question below.

ii. *Do the WhatsApp group's deliberative structures and norms influence polarisation?*

The second research question seeks to understand if and how WhatsApp group deliberative structures and norms influence group polarisation. The deliberative structures and norms are elaborated in the section above (*see Figure 1.1*). The research question is answered in two ways. Firstly, it uses quantitative methods to establish if any association exists between WhatsApp group deliberative structures and norms and group polarisation. It uses the Kruskal-Wallis H test, the Pearson Chi square, and the Cramer's V analysis. The second uses qualitative methods through WhatsApp-based focus group discussion where deliberative structures and norms are discussed in relation to their effect on group polarisation. The respondents' feedback is classified into themes and compared to seven pointers of group polarisation. They are: binary thinking, motivated reasoning, in-group and out-group identities, confirmatory bias, partisanship, social comparison, and groupthink (*see Chapter Four, pp. 179*).

iii. *Is there a variance in the quality of deliberation based on WhatsApp group formation?*

This research question used the Cramer's V analysis to examine if the way the WhatsApp group is formed influences the quality of deliberations. The quality of deliberations is based on Habermasian deliberative ideals and includes: diversity, inclusivity, tolerance, civility, moderation, and heterogeneity of viewpoints (Habermas, 1996, 2003, 2005) (*see Figure 1.1*). The formation of WhatsApp groups was classified into two based on formality and recruitment method. Formality was further classified into two where top-down WhatsApp groups are those formed by the county government, county officials, their affiliates and representatives, and bottom-up are those formed by citizens on their own initiative and volition to discuss governance issues. The recruitment method was also classified into two. Self-selection is where the WhatsApp group is formed through addition by a friend, colleague, or participants who

know each other while random selection is where participants join the group through a click-to-join link.

iv. *Has the quality of deliberation in WhatsApp groups influenced group polarisation?*

This final question uses qualitative research methods to establish whether and how the quality of deliberation in WhatsApp groups has influenced polarisation on governance issues in Kenyan counties. This research question used WhatsApp-based focus group discussions followed by identifying thematic patterns within the responses and linking them to key pointers of group polarisation.

1.7 Overview of Chapters

To answer the questions outlined above, this thesis is organised into eight chapters. The first chapter is the introduction chapter and establishes the aims and justification of the study. The second chapter is the literature review chapter and lays out a conceptual framework for the study. The first section of the chapter provides a conceptual definition of polarisation and deliberative governance. Deliberative governance is a prescriptive solution to polarisation in Kenya. However, the outcomes of a deliberative governance process depend on the quality of deliberations. This study proposes that the quality of deliberations is affected by two factors that characterise the deliberative platforms. The two factors are the deliberative structure and deliberative norms. While the deliberative structure depends on the composition and affordances of the platform, the deliberative norms are defined by the Habermasian deliberative ideals. The chapter concludes with the understanding that the deliberative structure and the deliberative norms can influence polarisation depending on the interactive dynamics within the group. These dynamics are not only platform dependent but also contextually determined. This explains why some platforms can easily enhance selective exposure and the formation of echo

chambers. The chapter concludes by looking at the suitability of SNSs as a public sphere and its role in deliberative governance.

Chapter three is a contextual chapter and examines the background, history, challenges of polarisation and deliberative governance in Kenya. The chapter underscores that the history of polarisation in Kenya starts with understanding the ethnopolitical context of the post-colonial state. Polarisation is partly a result of the mismanagement of Kenyan structural diversity which consists of loosely integrated multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-racial communities. However, various legislative and administrative initiatives have been implemented to manage structural diversity in Kenya without success. Most of these initiatives have failed. This is what led to the constitutional review process and its proposition to entrench deliberative governance as one way of managing Kenya's structural diversity. One of the clauses enshrined in the Kenyan constitutional framework is that the county government should use the media to promote national cohesion and integration. While the impact of devolution on polarisation is well documented, the impact of deliberative governance on polarisation is unexplored in the Kenyan context. This is especially the case for emergent media platforms.

Chapter four examines the SNSs landscape in Kenya, focusing on its adoption, affordances, and use. The role of SNSs is connected with its constitutional mandate requiring media use to promote depolarisation through deliberative governance. Therefore, the role of SNSs platforms is explored in relations to deliberative governance and polarisation in Kenya. SNSs in Kenya has been used to spread hate speech, inflammatory content, incivil content, and stereotypes which have increased polarisation in Kenya. They have been used to incite people to violence and enhance intolerance. In contrast, SNSs have also been strategic in finding solutions to issues of polarisation and conflict management in Kenya. A good example is '*Ushahidi*' which is a platform empowering citizen to map out, expose and discuss issues

like polarisation, hate speech, corruption, violent outbreaks, and human rights violation. However, WhatsApp, with its wide usage across the country, remains unexplored in terms of its impact on deliberative governance and polarisation.

The fifth chapter is the methods chapter. The chapter discusses the research paradigm, epistemological stance, research methodology and the research design. This study is guided by a critical realism paradigm which argues that the choice of methods should be dictated by the nature of the research problem. Critical realism offers a flexible approach allowing the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods or techniques. This flexibility, as noted in the study, defines various aspects of the research, including the research design, target population, sampling design, data collection methods and instruments. The research design, which in critical realism adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods, also shapes the data collection, data processing and data analysis strategies in this study. With a tabular demonstration, sampling is discussed as well of how each objective will be realised. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical framework that guided this study.

Chapter six reports and discusses the study findings relating to two research questions. The first sought to establish the socio-demographic profiles on WhatsApp group participants in Kenyan counties. The findings indicate that WhatsApp group participants are predominantly male, aged between 18 and 44 years with relatively high academic qualifications. These findings mirror the demographic profiles of participants in other SNS platforms in Kenya. The second research question examined the influence of WhatsApp deliberative structures and norms on group polarisation. The study found that WhatsApp groups with diverse participants and heterogeneous viewpoints are more likely to be polarised. Civil and well moderated WhatsApp groups deliberations are less likely to be polarised. The effects size analysis found a significant association between polarisation and the level of education, group ties, group size, moderation, tolerance, heterogeneity of viewpoints, diversity of participants, and civility.

These statistically significant associations were further confirmed or refuted by the respondent's feedback from the focus group discussions.

Similar to chapter six, chapter seven answers two research questions of this study. The first looks at whether there is a variance in the quality of deliberation based on WhatsApp group formation. The second looks at whether deliberative governance in WhatsApp groups influences polarisation. The study found a variance in the quality of deliberations between top-down, and bottom-up WhatsApp groups. The findings suggest that top-down WhatsApp groups are more inclusive and have well-moderated deliberations than bottom-up. In contrast, bottom-up WhatsApp groups had more tolerance, diversity, civility, and heterogeneity of viewpoints compared to top-down WhatsApp groups. WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection were found to be more tolerant, well-moderated, and civil. Those formed through random selection were more inclusive, had more heterogeneous viewpoints, were more diverse, and more polarised. The impact of WhatsApp group deliberation on polarisation was found to generally fall into two categories. Pessimistic perspectives reflect on how deliberations in WhatsApp have heightened fake news, conspiracy theories, conflict frames, and worsened polarisation. Contrary, the optimistic perspectives relate to how WhatsApp group deliberations have enhanced consensus, moderated opinions, and lessened polarisation.

The conclusion chapter provides a nuanced overview of the study with a summary of the literature review in relation to the study findings. The chapter also details the limitations of the study, the theoretical and practical implications of the study. The recommendations for future research on polarisation and practical applications for deliberative governance are also detailed in this chapter.

Chapter Two

Polarisation and Deliberative Governance

2.0 Introduction

As discussed in the introductory chapter, there are two core concepts in this study; deliberative governance and polarisation. Conceptualising polarisation is context-dependent which means that there are different forms of polarisation in various studies including: attitudinal, ideological, affective, perceptual, and group polarisation. Group polarisation, which is the focus of this study, encompasses most, if not all, other outlined forms of polarisation. Further, group polarisation is also likely to manifest seven key indicators of polarisation including: binary thinking, motivated reasoning, in-group and out-group identities, confirmatory bias, partisanship, social comparison, and groupthink.

One prescribed solution to apparent rising levels of polarisation is enhancing deliberations in governance contexts (Mccoy et al., 2018). However, the link between deliberations and polarisation is shaped by two factors; deliberative structure and deliberative norms. For instance, SNSs as a deliberative structure (socio-demographic composition, group size, group ties) have certain features that render the realisation of effective deliberative governance and depolarisation quite challenging. Different scholars have studied these challenges in the context of theories such as selective exposure and echo chambers (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Garrett, 2009; Messing & Westwood, 2014). Habermas argues for ideal situations where adopting specific deliberative norms within appropriate deliberative structures can achieve civility, moderation, tolerance, rationality, and inclusivity in discussions (Habermas, 2005). This chapter, therefore, examines the dynamics related to deliberative structures and deliberative norms in SNSs deliberation and how they influence polarisation.

2.1 Conceptual Understanding of Polarisation

Scholars are increasingly concerned about the negative impact of ideological or populist rhetoric expressed on digital platforms such as SNSs (Beaufort, 2018; Guerra et al., 2013; Herne et al., 2019a; Lebas, 2018; Montalvo & Reynal-querol, 2016; Schmitt, 2016; Stroud, 2010). These concerns have translated into different perspectives regarding the nature, triggers, actors, consequences, and types of polarisation. There are various forms of polarisation including: attitudinal, ideological, affective, perceptual, and group polarisation among others (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Guerra et al., 2013; Hare & Poole, 2014; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Kaylor, 2019; McCoy, & Firat, 2018; Lebas, 2018; Levendusky et al., 2016; Prior, 2013; Robison, Mullinix et al., 2016; Tucker et al., 2018). All these forms of polarisation are interconnected and influence one another.

2.1.1 Attitudinal Polarisation

First, attitude polarisation is a phenomenon where participants' attitudes strengthen and become aligned to more extreme positions in deliberative contexts (Paicheler, 1979). Attitude polarisation also occurs when an individual's beliefs become evaluated and questioned in light of new information while retaining their initial beliefs (Himmelroos & Christensen, 2018). It is an individual-level phenomenon meaning it is first manifested at the individual level before being reflected at the group level. Studies show that when participants are given an opportunity to think about a subject/object, their attitudes toward that subject/object are tentatively formed, and this becomes the basis of their attitudinal polarisation. That is, attitudes that are initially favourable become more favourable, whereas the unfavourable ones become more unfavourable (Himmelroos & Christensen, 2018; Paicheler, 2012). Categorization in in-group and out-group can elicit an increase in intragroup similarity in the form of group conformity

and intergroup difference based on differentiation (Knippenberg & De Vries, 1990). When the in-group have more extreme opinions than the out-group, this can result in attitude polarisation.

2.1.2 Ideological Polarisation

Ideological polarisation is often conceptualised as the ideological divergence of attitudes to a greater extremity after engagement with diverse content (Beam et al., 2018; Guerra, et al., 2013; Hong & Kim, 2016; Kim, 2015; Mccoy et al., 2018; Prior, 2013; Stroud, 2010). Garcia et al., (2015), on the other hand, conceptualises ideological polarisation as the divergence of socio-political attitudes towards seemingly unbridgeable ideological opposites and extremes. The conceptualisation of polarisation in contexts like the United States is prominently based on the ideological dichotomy between the two major political parties, Democrats as liberals and Republicans as conservatives (Mccoy et al., 2018). Based on such distinct ideological dichotomy and how it shapes positions on key issues (Bimber & Copeland, 2013), polarisation is sometimes misconstrued simply as disagreements in group discussion settings.

Conceptualising polarisation is sometimes context-dependent (Lee, 2016; Prior, 2013). In some contexts, it is the outcome of a profound and enduring socio-cultural struggle between contending progressive and conservative forces in governance (Mccoy et al., 2018). In contexts like the U.S., polarisation consists of a formidable alignment of ideology, ethnicity, and religion (Garcia et al., 2015; Guerra, et al., 2013; Lee, et al., 2018; Wojcieszak, et al., 2016). However, in countries like Kenya, ethnicity, regionalism, and resource distribution are often at the root of polarisation (Kasara, 2013).

A key feature of the ideological dichotomy (in-group and out-group) that exists in polarised contexts is that the otherwise normal multiplicity of differences in a group (i.e. religion and ethnicity) increasingly crystallise along partisan dimensions (Garcia et al., 2015). This means that any cross-cutting ideological differences between group members become

further reinforced and entrenched towards more profound polarisation. Consequently, the groups increasingly describe and perceive politics and governance issues in terms of ‘us versus them’ (Mccoy et al., 2018). The pernicious and often unintended consequences of ideological polarisation especially in politics and governance is that it makes consensus, interaction, compromise, and tolerance increasingly tenuous and costly for groups in opposite factions (Stroud, 2010). Ideological polarisation can enhance the practice of confirmation bias, where SNSs users allocate unequal attention, weights, and significance to information that supports their position (Stroud, 2018).

Therefore, ideological polarisation is differentiated from accepted forms of boundary and identity formation by three features: First, ideological polarisation is manifest when a high degree of salience is attached to specific issues defined by one’s ideology (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2007). Secondly, it reflects preference or attitudinal divergence between groups from either side of the stated ideological boundary (Swigger, 2013). Lastly, there is a significantly high and clear partisan identification between opposing group factions (Prior et al., 2011). The focus of polarisation encompasses the extent to which individuals and groups harbour partisan views and consider other factions as the disliked out-group (Esteban & Ray, 2007; Lee, et al., 2014; Muste, 2014). This is another basis of the ‘us versus them’ or in-group versus out-group attitudes that is common in ideologically polarised groups.

2.1.3 Perceived Polarisation

Perceived polarisation defines how individuals and groups perceive the ideological and attitudinal differences between factions in view of their aspirations, values, and goals. Studies on perceived polarisation capture the estimated difference between the ideological and attitudinal positions of social groups on different issues (Enders & Armaly, 2019; Yang et al., 2016). Further, perceived polarisation occurs when participants compare ‘my’ position or ‘my’

group's position to 'their' position and conclude that an unbridgeable chasm exists between their ideological positions (Guerra et al., 2013; Kim, 2015). Studies show that the perception of polarisation between candidates, factions, and parties is growing across the globe on various issues ranging from immigration to climate change (Klar, et al., 2018; Mccoy et al., 2018; Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016). The dangers of perceptual polarisation are not clearly known but are thought to be key drivers of actual polarisation in individual and group contexts (Park et al., 2019). Perceptual polarisation has given rise to what some scholars consider as affective polarisation (Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016).

2.1.4 Affective Polarisation

Affective polarisation refers to the extent to which citizens feel more negatively toward other political parties than toward their own (Iyengar et al., 2019). Affective polarisation is again common in the US and other western democracies like the UK where strong party affiliations exist between Democrats and Republicans, Labour and Conservatives (Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016). Affective polarisation has various effects on politics and governance. Studies show that it likely reduces the efficacy of government, increase existing homophily amongst social groups, and alter socio-political decisions (Klar et al., 2018; Luttig, 2017; Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016). Citizens' affective evaluations may polarise further in response to ideological differences between political candidates. This increases the stakes associated with the choice between political candidates and citizens who tend to use motivated reasoning to support their preferred candidate. Affective polarisation is also rooted in binary perceptions and thinking. Reducing complex political and governance issues or choices to a binary set of alternatives is part of human nature. However, it drives polarisation due to an effort to simplify complex issues into dualistic categories (Atlee, 2019; Wood & Petriglieri, 2005).

2.1.5 Group Polarisation

Group polarisation is a phenomenon where members of a deliberating group move toward a more extreme position in the direction the members' pre-deliberation tendency (Vicario, et al., 2016). Group polarisation leads to changing attitudes among participants within the group. It occurs due to several mechanisms pertaining to confirmation bias, affect heuristics, motivated reasoning, and social comparison (Sunstein, 2008b; Swol, 2009). Pre-existing views are likely to be bolstered in like-minded groups because participants tend to value arguments supporting their own previously held position (Sunstein, 2008b, 2008a). This means, group polarisation can lead to groupthink, which is when a group makes bad decisions because some of its members do not want to express opinions or suggest new ideas that some in the group may disagree with (Vicario et al., 2016). Groupthink can encourage overestimation of the group's moral justness and power (Karpowitz et al., 2009), having an illusion of unanimous views and opinion among group members (Leydet, 2019), and ignoring evidence or views that contradict the group's views (Karpowitz et al., 2009; Lindell et al., 2017).

In sum, polarisation in scholarly contexts can be understood through divergent individual, group, and societal level perspectives. It is also a cognitive concept as reflected by attitudinal polarisation, perceptual polarisation, and as affective polarisation. The focus of this study is on group polarisation because it encompasses three interconnected dimensions related to: (1) the attitudinal divergence which reflects the extent to which group attitudes and ideologies reflect contrasting positions; (2) ideological polarisation which defines the link between issue positions taken by groups and their actions in polarised contexts, (3) and affective/identity-based polarisation which is the systematic differences between the sub-populations in a group (Goldthwaite et al., 2013; Mukherjee et al., 2013; Ponder & Haridakis, 2015a; Prior, 2013; Stroud, 2010).

2.2 Conceptual Understanding of Deliberative Governance

Deliberative governance is the contestation of governance discourses in the public sphere and is often seen as a solution to problems created by the various forms of polarisation outlined above. Discursive legitimacy in deliberation is achieved when a collective decision is reflected through the constellation of discourses occurring in the public sphere (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2008). Deliberative governance institutionalises a culture of deliberation among multiple stakeholders (Park et al., 2017). As a critical component of a governance framework in politics, it seeks to build consensus, minimise conflict, enhance the legitimacy of decisions, and decision-makers. Deliberative governance is a process that converges various institutions, groups, agencies, activists, and individual citizens to deliberate on a governance policy issue (Hendriks, 2009). Convergence occurs through sustained interactive digital platforms, collaborative dialogue spaces, county council forums, media, and community centre forums. Deliberative governance is derived from the concept of deliberation which Habermas defines as the interchange of rational, critical arguments among a group of participants, triggered by a common or public problem. The main focus of deliberations is to find a solution acceptable to all who have a stake in the issue (Habermas, 1989). Deliberation is defined:

Deliberation refers either to a particular sort of discussion—one that involves the careful and serious weighing of reasons for and against some proposition—or to an interior process by which an individual weighs reasons for and against courses of action (Fearon, 1998).

Although different scholars conceptualise deliberative governance in varied ways, two common ideas and characteristics cut across their understanding of this concept. That interactions in deliberation spaces are characterised by a set of communicative behaviours that promote thorough and in-depth group discussion (Baogang, 2018; Fischer, 2006; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; He, 2018; Hendriks, 2009; Hoareau, 2012; Tang, 2015). That participants will receive, weigh carefully, and understand the reasons for and against some the underlying

propositions presented by others (Fischer, 2006; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; Hendriks, 2009; Hoareau, 2012; Tang, 2015).

The concept of deliberative governance originates from the ideas of the nineteenth-century thinker John Stuart Mill's 'government by collective discussion' (McLaverty & Halpin, 2008; Roberts, 2004). More recently, Jurgen Habermas has built on Mill's deliberation concept, proposing the idea of a public sphere (Habermas, 2005; Susen, 2018). According to Habermas, democratic governance legitimacy is derived essentially from two practices: a formalised and institutionalised deliberative process involving the aggregative citizen's decisions, and informal processes of collective opinion-formation through mainstream and digital media platforms (Habermas, 2005). Formalised, institutionalised deliberative process requires proper administrative structures and participatory mechanisms for it to be realised. However, both formal and informal deliberative processes depend on the groups capacity to achieve specific norms including: inclusivity, symmetry, rationality, moderation, equality, and civility (Hendriks, 2009).

Considering the above components deliberative norms, Barnes et al., (2006) proposed the concept of discursive representation. Discursive representation occurs when deliberative governance in any context reflect diverse groups, diverse discourses, accommodative norms and broader inclusive parameters. Discursive representation also prioritises the appreciation of all different proposals and ideas in a deliberative governance context. Deliberation consists not in mere articulation and expression of self-interest, but in rationalising the views of others too (Fischer, 2006). Achieving inclusive and rationalised discussions requires more structured deliberative platforms and processes for deliberative governance (He, 2018).

Deliberative governance happens in structured deliberative platforms such as consensus conferences and citizens' juries (Searing et al., 2007). The rise of digital technology has, however, facilitated spontaneous, deliberative, bottom-up platforms and networks in online

contexts (Tang, 2015). Deliberative governance via digital spaces has, therefore, redefined critical intermediary spaces between governance actors (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2011; Erman, 2013; He, 2018; Park et al., 2017a). It has also modified and readjusted the spatial boundaries between the state and its citizens (Lim & Oh, 2016). Further, it has created a cross-boundary negotiated governance process involving different actors and inter-government agencies (Fischer, 2012). Despite enhancing digital divides in some contexts (Brundidge et al., 2014), digital spaces have created comparatively more interactive and dynamic platforms where governance stakeholders deliberate on shared issues (Cornwall, 2002). As a deliberative space, it also accounts for a significant level of radical self-help activities outside state mechanisms.

Over the past decade, national and local governments across the globe have experimented with varied designs of deliberative governance (Baogang, 2018; Erman, 2013; Hendriks, 2009; Hoareau, 2012; Park et al., 2017). This trend is driven by declining trust in governance institutions, and the desire to achieve greater accountability and transparency (He, 2018; Tang, 2015). Increased awareness through civic education and resource availability has also motivated meaningful user involvement in policy decisions that affect them (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003). The problems of representative democracy occasioned by periodic rigging of elections account for the widespread adoption of deliberative governance. Sceptics of representative democracy have argued that voting is a product of rigged, aggregated and often pre-determined political preferences (Amnå, 2006; Norris & Kennedy, 2004; Tormey, 2014). This, according to Nabatchi & Amsler (2014), is significantly inferior to the formation of collective and rationalised decisions through deliberation governance.

Furthermore, governance elites are increasingly appreciating the benefits of policy deliberation and debate by citizens. The recent reforms in the public management agenda have emphasised the strategic place of deliberative governance (Dryzek & Niemeyer, 2011). Specifically, the focus of contemporary public management reforms is largely centred on

citizen involvement and contribution. In some sub-Saharan countries, the push for deliberative governance emanates from international development organisations as a pre-condition for financial and other forms of aid (Rasmussen, 2014). However, the demands for deliberative governance as a critical attachment to aid has sometimes resulted in the superficial manufacture of consensus and legitimacy through tokenism (*see Chapter Four, pp. 109,139*).

Nonetheless, deliberative governance extends citizen involvement in governance beyond the input of experts and bureaucrats (Fischer, 2006, 2012; Gustafson & Hertting, 2016). Various reasons exist to justify inclusivity in deliberative governance and including strategic access to a wider base of knowledge and resources from citizens. It also includes the desire to mould an inclusive strategy by encouraging stakeholder cooperation and ensure efficient implementation of governance policies. Deliberative governance neutralizes coercive forms of power, such as strategic manipulation and covert forms of domination (Habermas, 2005). Coercive forms of power, according to Parvin (2018), tends to stifle well-reasoned debates. Coercive power is grossly inadequate to neutralise inequality in the distribution of power amongst policy actors (Fung, 2006). Therefore, deliberative governance represents a shift from a technocratic policy-making process to a more inclusive and negotiated (Aulich, 2009). Deliberative governance can reconfigure the nature, scope and extent of cooperation of formal governance institutions (Lavalle et al., 2011). Indeed, according to some commentators, deliberation via digital technology has created a more structured and extensive citizen input in the exercise of state power than previously seen (Patsias et al., 2013).

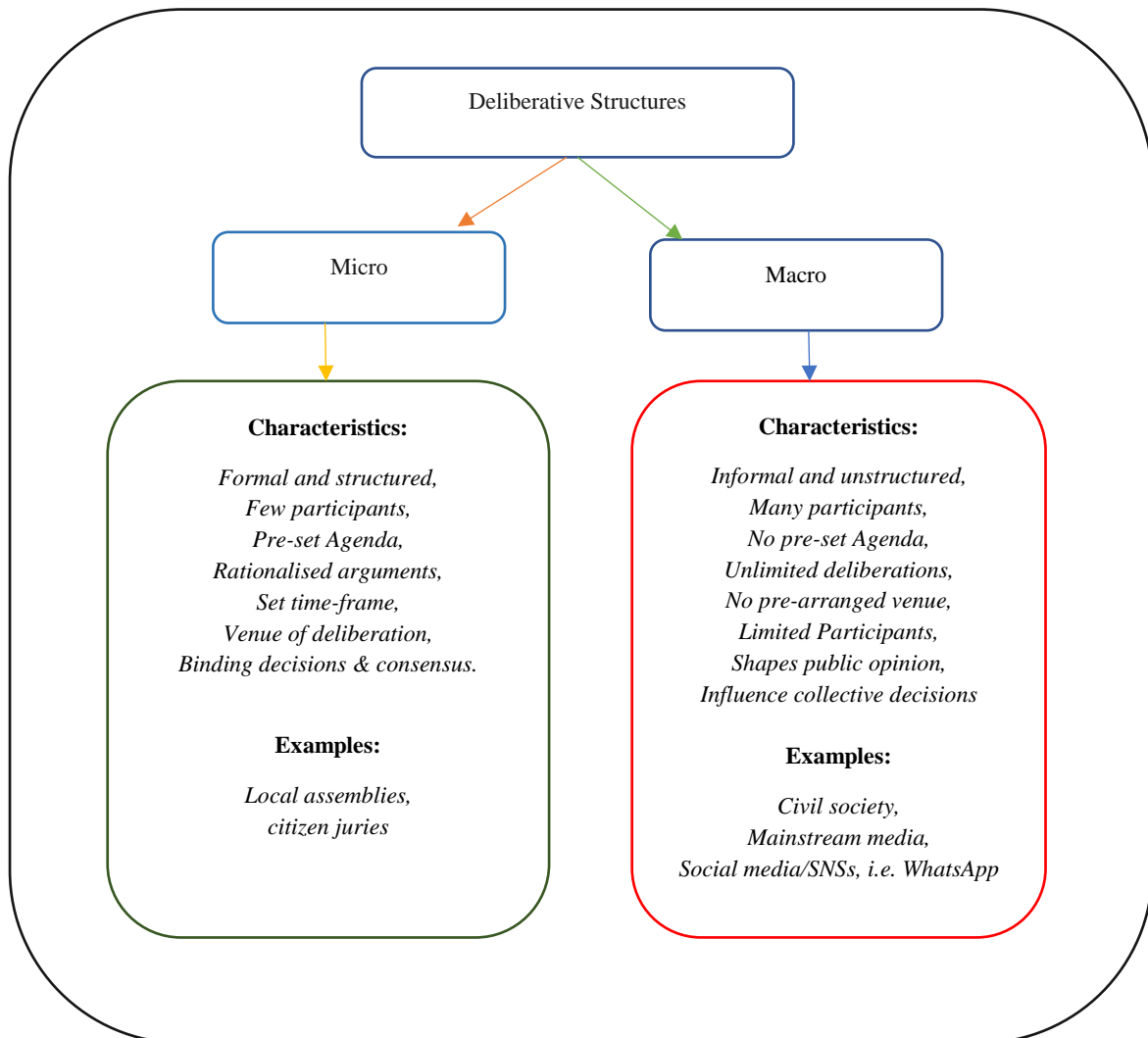
2.3 Deliberative Structures and Group Polarisation

The link between group polarisation and deliberative governance can be explained in the context of two concepts: deliberative structures and deliberative norms (*see Fig 1.1*). Deliberation in the context of governance can be structured into micro and macro elements,

where both are defined by the scale, scope and composition of deliberation (Hendriks, 2006). Both micro and macro deliberations structures reflect idealistic characteristics that rarely reflect practical deliberations. In micro deliberation, the discussion is more structured and happens in formal forums (*see Fig 2.1*). Participants in a micro deliberation group are relatively free, knowledgeable, and consider each other as co-equals (Hendriks, 2006). This form of deliberation ideally involves a pre-set discussion agenda, encourages rationalised arguments, and aims to achieve collectively settled outcomes (Chappell, 2010; Hendriks, 2006). Ideally, the key emphasis in micro deliberation is the impartiality of group participants and their willingness to engage with each other. The assumption that participants in micro deliberation are committed, motivated, and willing to achieve consensus in view of the collective good is problematic. Micro-level deliberation is argued to shift opinions, increase knowledge, and enhance civic participatory interests (Chappell, 2010; Hendriks, 2006; Lafont, 2015).

Micro deliberation mostly occurs within the confines of conventional governance decision-making institutions such as local assemblies or citizen juries (Moscrop & Warren, 2016; Wojcieszak, 2011). Micro deliberation forums range from small to medium groups in general (Hendriks, 2006). The time frame, venue of deliberation, number of participants, and expected outcomes are often well-defined in such structures. Based on the highly defined micro deliberation structure, it is possible to use moderators, impose rules, achieve consensus, and record the contents of the discussion (Chappell, 2010; Lafont, 2015). Micro deliberative forums allow participants to meet and engage face-to-face. Further, participants get to know each other much better (Lafont, 2015; McLaverty & Halpin, 2008). The norms of deliberations such as civility and respect are usually easier to enforce in micro deliberation forums.

Figure 2.1: Deliberative Structure; Dichotomy and Characteristics



(Source: Author, 2020)

In micro deliberation structures, discussions can result in a binding decision or sometimes recommendation that other relevant organisation can accept, ignore or reject (Lafont, 2015). It details the decision-making procedures and the point at which deliberation should be abandoned in place of voting. As a form of deliberation structure, its adoption of voting to establish decisions negates the idea of collective consensus. Regarding the issues of inclusivity, a specific group affected by the deliberation decision are much easier to define (Chappell, 2010). Therefore, it is also easier to ensure the inclusion of all relevant individuals and groups.

When the issue under deliberation is well defined, coordinated, and structured, it is easier to ensure all relevant viewpoints are represented (Stockemer, 2014). Micro deliberation is relatively infrequent; therefore, few issues can be subjected to extensive and detailed deliberation.

Macro deliberation, on the other hand, entails a broader scale and scope of deliberation that mostly happens in informal contexts, otherwise known as public spheres (Hendriks, 2006). According to Hendriks (2006), macro deliberations happen in what he terms as ‘wild’ spaces in society where engagement is spontaneous and unconstrained. The focus is on unstructured forms of deliberation in groups via civil society, social movements, social media, and conventional social networks (Hendriks, 2006) (*see Fig 2.1*). Macro deliberation occurs within mutually overlapping and interlocking networks and associations of individuals (Bekkers et al., 2011). Based on its informal approach and orientation, macro deliberation is not necessarily focused on the generation of consensus or binding decisions (Hendriks, 2006). It is more concerned with the impact of deliberation and influencing outcome in formal deliberative governance processes. Its aim is to mobilise deliberation in the public sphere with the hope of eventually influencing collective decisions through petitions to formal institutions, either directly or indirectly (Hendriks, 2006). Macro deliberation structures are not unified but consist of multiple, over-lapping public spheres. Therefore, the majority of participants belong to more than one discursive group (Gimmler, 2001; Rasmussen, 2007, 2014).

Comparing the characteristics of both structures, it is evident that macro deliberation is more focused on influencing opinion formation in a group context. Micro deliberation, on the other hand, is mainly oriented towards decision-making (Chappell, 2010; Hendriks, 2006; Karpowitz et al., 2009). The formal nature and composition of micro deliberation structures shape how group perceive and handle polarising issues (*see Fig 2.1*). The rules and procedures guiding deliberation mean participants in both types of deliberative structures handle

controversial and potentially polarising issues differently (Roberts, 2004). For instance, county assemblies in Kenya have house rules that determine how arguments are presented, how long participants speak, and the language and rules of decorum expected. Such forums are often moderated or chaired to ensure appropriate engagement between participants according to the assembly rules. The realisation of rational, reciprocal, and tolerant deliberations is higher in micro deliberation structures (Friberg-Fernros & Schaffer, 2014; Hendriks, 2006; Lafont, 2015). The potential for polarisation, however, still exists in micro deliberation structures. The difference is in the way heterogeneous positions and opinions are handled and how it affects the resolution of partisan positions. In both contexts, the quality of deliberation has a direct impact on the legitimacy of deliberative outcomes (Hendriks, 2006).

Macro deliberation, in contrast, can foster social learning, generate group consensus, and undercut polarisation (Abelson et al., 2003; Beauvais & Baechtiger, 2016; Grönlund, 2013; Roberts, 2004). This depends on the various factors, including the nature of ties in such groups and the level of commitment to deliberation objectives. Macro deliberation can help groups overcome deep divisions in society and still facilitate democratisation (Bekkers et al., 2011; Chappell, 2010; Stockemer, 2014). Notably, macro deliberative processes in the broader public sphere are more concerned with inclusivity in deliberation about general governance outcomes (Moscrop & Warren, 2016), and much less with increasing the quality of deliberation. Micro deliberative structures make it possible to effectively evaluate relevant information, interrogate issues deeply, listen to, and challenge competing views (Chappell, 2010; Hendriks, 2006). The more the participants in deliberation, the less feasible it is to have equal opportunities to ask questions, receive answers, explain views, and jointly discuss and agree on them.

The difference between micro and macro deliberation and its influence on polarisation also depends on how heterogeneity is configured and handled. First, micro-level deliberation can inadvertently generate homogeneous groups (Chappell, 2010; Hendriks, 2006). The ideas

and perspectives that thrive within such context can escape reasonable criticism based on other points of view (Lafont, 2015). Therefore, such groups may end up with very narrow or extreme viewpoints compared to macro-level deliberation. In terms of structural composition, macro deliberation structures consist of more diverse participants with diverse opinions compared to micro deliberation structures (Searing et al., 2007). Therefore, partisan polarisation is most likely to occur in homogeneous contexts as a result of confirmation biases and the conformity to group norms. Secondly, in micro deliberations structures, it is easier to manage discussions using specific deliberative norms and to ensure engagement happens within bounds of agreed norms (Chappell, 2010). Contrary, macro deliberation structures have more participants, more diversity, and more opinions to contend with. Active facilitation and moderation can play a critical role in shaping the conditions for deliberation by ensuring that diverse voices are heard.

Macro deliberation might reflect a more inclusive appearance of legitimacy, but it has its shortcomings. The misconception that such structures will broaden the scale of deliberation within the public sphere due to its open and unrestricted engagement is problematic (Hendriks, 2006). Macro deliberation can easily degenerate into factions of incivil, adversarial interest group and encourage polarisation (Filatova et al., 2019). Macro deliberation structures like media enhance inclusivity, shapes the belief, preferences, and opinion formation in governance discourse (Chappell, 2010; Hendriks, 2006; Scheufele et al., 2006). They enhance more expanded public dialogue based on exchanging heterogeneous views among groups aimed at persuading others. Informal dialogues in macro deliberation spaces influence the general governance agenda (Bingham et al., 2010; Wojcieszak, 2011). The following section examines the features that define both micro and macro deliberative structures and how they influence polarisation.

2.3.1 Group Size, Group Ties and Polarisation

Macro deliberation structures have comparatively more participants and tend to have a greater exposure impact for heterogeneous information which affects polarisation (Dylko, 2017). There is a positive correlation between the group size and consensus in deliberations. It is much easier for smaller groups to achieve consensus because they can easily maintain multiple dynamic interactions with each other (Hipp, 2016), they have a more personalised connection, and closer interactive channels within the group (Chan, 2016). Contrary, participants in larger groups deliberate extensively due to the comparatively larger pool of participants and arguments (Eveland & Hively, 2009). Large groups, such as common in macro deliberation structures, can influence a group's attitude relating to how they exchange, interact with, and synthesise heterogeneous opinions (Gerth et al., 2009). In contrast, a small group can easily create polarised echo chambers consisting of customised deliberations where each member feels comfortable with homogeneous content (Baxter et al., 2011). Whereas large groups are positively associated with more enhanced deliberation resources and social support (Ellison & Boyd, 2010), discussions can turn progressively unmanageable.

Extensive traffic of conversation flows in large groups can result in context collapse (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018; Marwick, 2014). Context collapse means an infinite number of online participants and audiences which can translate to a more chaotic discussions process (Sunstein, 2008b, 2008a). In this context, deliberations can prove difficult to moderate, and this increases proportionate to group size (Killworth et al., 2001). A group's social diversity is enhanced by the creation of large groups with a diverse number of partially incompatible 'social spheres' due to diverse group members (Binder et al., 2016, p.23). Interactions in small groups are more intimate and participants are likely to embrace and become responsive to the group's agreed norms of deliberations (Binder et al., 2012; Klapper, et al., 2016). In contrast, large groups result in weak ties with a greater chance of encountering diverse viewpoints that can intensify

intolerance (Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011); Erisen & Erisen, 2012). Large groups increase the volume and sources of information that participants are exposed to and this raises the chances of incidental exposure to heterogeneous content (Allcott & Gentzkow, (2017).

Studies have also established a link between group size and diversity of unknown contacts, otherwise known as ‘friends’ (Hwang et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2016). Diverse friends increase exposure to heterogeneous content in deliberations. However, this is dependent on the criteria of recruiting such friends which is sometimes based on ideological homogeneity (see the section below). As earlier noted, smaller groups are more likely to form enclaves where deliberations results in echo chambers. Fragmentation of participants into ideological in-groups and out-groups is more common in large compared to smaller groups (Ruppel et al., 2015). Participants in small groups are more likely to hold strongly entrenched partisan opinions because of group homogeneity (Conroy et al., 2012; Jeong et al., 2016).

The group size (Bojanowski & Corten, (2014), the structure of the group (Conroy et al., 2012; Jeong et al., 2016), and the demographic composition of the groups affect the nature of ties in a group (Pattie & Johnston, 2016). Deliberations occur more frequently and openly among groups with close and intimate ties (Park, 2014). This is because close group ties are usually characterised by attributes such as trust, intimacy, respect, and mutual concern for one another (Bekkers et al., 2011; Valenzuela, 2013). Various studies have found that groups with close ties have a number of characteristics: frequent deliberations; emotional intimacy and intensity; enhanced reciprocity. Further, they are homophilous in nature, meaning they are likely to share similar demographic, cultural, or attitudinal characteristics (Haythornthwaite, 2011; Hill & Dunbar, 2003; Rademacher & Wang, 2014). Ideally, the closer the ties in a group, the more homophilous the group, and the more polarised they can be. It is easier to achieve echo chambers in smaller groups.

Conversely, weak ties involve infrequent interaction (Haythornthwaite, 2011), lower levels of emotional intimacy and intensity between participants (Rademacher & Wang, 2014), and of course, lower feelings of reciprocity. Nevertheless, weak group ties allow wider access to participation resources, unlike in close ties (McLeod & Sotirovic (2001). Apart from increasing their chances of encountering relevant, timely information, participants in weak ties also have a higher chance of encountering heterogeneous opinions (Kim & Chen, 2016). This occurs when deliberative opportunities are designed and structured around groups defined by heterogeneous attributes (Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010). Research suggests that large groups create a situation where participants with diverse views, different standpoints, develop interest and feel comfortable sharing their political opinions and views (Hutchens et al., 2016); Eveland & Hively, 2009).

The combined effect of the group size and the nature of social ties shape the group's interactive culture, adoption of norms, and enforcement of deliberative group norms (Mutz & Martin, 2001). Due to the intimacy of close group ties, compliance with the deliberative norms such as civility towards other participants is likely to be higher than in groups with weak ties. In contrast, deliberative norms such as inclusivity are likely to be higher in groups with weak ties because the larger the group, the higher the likelihood that diverse participants will be attracted to participate in deliberations. There are conflicting views on whether participants in SNSs deliberations will be more tolerant of their online 'friends' as opposed to strangers (Mukherjee et al., 2013; Winter & Rathnayake, 2017). The strength of social ties in SNSs and the structure of information networks provided by online platforms shape the flow of governance discourse (Loader & Mercea, (2011).

2.3.2 Formal, Informal Deliberative Structures and Polarisation

Legitimacy in governance is established via both formal and informal deliberative processes (Habermas, 2005). In general, macro deliberation platforms like SNSs are considered informal platforms. Both formal and informal governance processes should be complementary, whereby informal deliberations can identify governance issues outside the domain of formal deliberation structures (Rossini & Stromer-Galley, 2019). Depending on the context, formal and informal deliberation structures can either be independent or interdependent. Interdependence occurs when informal deliberation in the public sphere is eventually channelled into legal, formal, and institutionalised deliberations structures.

This is how deliberations in macro deliberation (informal) structures can result in a legally binding decision-making procedures (Rossini & Stromer-Galley, 2019). SNSs platform initiatives sponsored by state governments, political institutions, or legislative bodies are considered formal platforms of citizen deliberation. Such platforms can integrate a plethora of engagement methods for effective deliberations that have been used in governance decision-making forums through digital consultation and voting (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). Effectiveness of formal deliberation forums is generally established in terms of whether they have real influence in governance decision-making. When informal deliberations are linked to governance institutions, it drives citizens' perceptions of credibility, efficacy and deliberative value (Barisione, 2012).

SNSs deliberative spaces that have a clear connection to governing institutions are considered as strategic and legitimate deliberation spaces by participants (Tang, 2015). Participants feel empowered and efficacious when governance institutions establish, recognise or sponsor an informal forum of deliberation (Mbuyisa, 2014). Participants who engage in formal SNSs deliberation platforms are likely to believe that their deliberation efforts will impact on governance decision-making; resulting in higher efficacy. Informal SNSs

deliberation platforms with clear governance agendas tend to attract more interested, knowledgeable, and already engaged participants. This leads to the often-criticised self-selection bias and prevents inclusivity and diversity of deliberations (Bohn et al., 2014; Hong & Kim, 2016; Karnowski et al., 2017). This is reflected in the profile of participants who discuss politics, who according to various studies are predominantly white, male, well educated, and are high-income earners (Brodie, et al., 2009; Henn & Foard, 2014; Tanczer, 2016; Tanner et al., 2013; Thelwall, 2008).

Contemporary research is generally focused on formal discussion environments sponsored by political institutions. Research into informal discussion spaces are typically conducted through surveys that inquire about people's behaviour and perceptions about their everyday interactions and investigated its effects (Hendriks, 2006; Livingstone & Thumim, 2003; Mcclurg, 2003). The growing attention to informal governance deliberation spaces is due to the pervasive nature of SNSs platforms. Research on informal SNSs deliberation spaces using varied methodological approaches suggest several desirable outcomes despite the lack of clear structures and intent (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Hendriks, 2006; Lim & Oh, 2016). Informal SNSs platforms have been found to widen people's access to different governance perspectives compared to formal platforms (Rossini & Stromer-Galley, 2019). Such informal groups facilitate the connection among participants with weak social ties, often being more diverse than one's close affiliates.

2.3.4 Socio-demographic Characteristics and Polarisation

Socio-demographic profiles of micro and macro deliberative structures are likely to differ. The methods of recruiting participants in both deliberative structures determine their socio-demographic composition (see the section below). The socio-demographic composition of a deliberative platform is critical because ideal deliberation in governance is where the

participant's argument and reasoning occur among diverse but equals participants (Abelson et al., 2003; Clark et al., 2015). This is based on the expectation that rationality and reason as opposed to the existing distribution of resources and power in the group will decide the outcome of deliberations. However, the Habermasian deliberative ideals which emphasise rational discourse have been faulted as being susceptible to privileges and inequalities that may arise from socio-demographic differences (Jeziarska, 2019a, 2019b; Magsino, 2017; Ofunja et al., 2018). As some social demographic groups dominate deliberations, their perspectives are likely to define the group's priorities in terms of what and how some issues are discussed.

One explanation for dominant groups during deliberations is the resource theory which accounts for the imbalance in resources such as civic skills, knowledge, time, and access to digital technology (Brodie et al., 2009; Innes & Booher, 2004; Mahloulou, 2013). The recruitment of participants through random selection is likely to succeed among high-resourced individuals. The resource theory is closely associated with the individual's socio-economic status (Xenos et al., 2014). Socio-economic status is connected to an individual's resources because their social position is likely to shape one's opportunity, motivation, and ability to engage in deliberative governance (Chan, 2017). Gender, age, and the level of education are indicators of socio-economic status and result from the (dis)advantages in resource endowment. In addition, the dynamics related to the people's age, gender and level of education have been found to influence polarisation (Sunstein, 2008b, 2008a). The differences in the composition of SNSs are influenced by a combination of the socio-structural dynamics defined by both genders (Clark et al., 2015). Based on socialisation dynamic and the interests in specific gendered issues, women and men are likely to experience differences in polarisation.

Studies suggest that Women's networks are likely to be homophilous, consisting mainly of close ties (Karpowitz et al., 2016a; Baldassarri et al., 2016). Women tend to interact more with those with whom they have a direct relationship in SNSs (Herring, 2015), and this

increases their chances of forming in-group or exercising social comparison. Men, however, interact more with those who share their affiliations on politics and are more inclined to form enclave deliberation groups within such networks (Herne et al., 2019a). Both genders are more predisposed to practice motivated reasoning on the issues they have interests in (Han & Federico, 2018). The propensity for motivated reasoning is connected with studies showing that the perception of expertise is a strong predictor of participation in SNSs deliberations (Leighley & Vedlitz, 2017; McClurg, 2003; Vecchione & Caprara, 2009). Men, compared to women, are perceived to have more expertise and knowledge in political and governance issues (Halberstam & Knight, 2016). Seemingly, such expertise can translate to extreme positions, motivated reasoning or confirmation biases during group deliberations. Women tend to have smaller, apolitical, and agreeable networks that host less political and governance discussions (Lindell et al., 2017). Studies suggest that gender differences in SNSs deliberations also have to do with supposed personality characteristics. For instance, men tend to score higher in assertiveness, aggressiveness, and openness to new ideas in relations to political discussions in offline and online platforms. In contrast, women tend to score higher on agreeableness, anxiety, extraversion, and openness on personal views (Gurel et al., 2014; Clark et al., 2015; Farinosi & Taipale, 2018). The traits on which women score higher, especially agreeableness and extraversion, predict a higher affinity to social comparison and group polarisation.

Research suggests that women are also more susceptible to social influence while men are more willing to take social risks, fight, and brook disagreement (Clark et al., 2015). These structural, social, and gendered differences are likely to draw both genders into binary thinking and factions in deliberations. The ‘us versus them’ faction between genders reflects a form of binary thinking where participants favour their side in deliberations and can result in group polarisation. Personality differences concerning the level of agreeableness suggest that women may be particularly sensitive to disagreement (Aktas et al., 2014). Therefore, women are

perceived to experience a more significant suppressing effect from disagreements during deliberations, which affects their level of polarisation.

Regarding age, differing priorities across different age groups have been found to influence political polarisation (Bright, 2018; Herne et al., 2019b; Spohr, 2017). Studies in the US suggest that age has an impact on ideological polarisation and party affiliation, both of which are independent of generational factors (Barberá, 2014; Boxell et al., 2017; Hare & Poole, 2014; Robison & Mullinix, 2016; Scala & Johnson, 2017). Longitudinal studies in the US show that older age groups who are less likely to use social media are more polarised than younger age groups (Boxell et al., 2017). Their study further notes that polarisation has grown the most among older Americans that are the least likely to use the internet or social media (Boxell et al., 2017). While socio-demographic characteristics such as age, ethnicity, and gender significantly influence the chances of being in an echo chamber (Barbera, 2019; Hong & Kim, 2016; Lee et al., 2018), political interest has the most influence (Lee et al., 2014; Marozzo & Bessi, 2018). Those with a keen interest in politics and governance are most likely to be influencers who others turn to for news and information even in SNSs platforms. Compared with the less politically inclined, such participants are media junkies who consume politics and governance across various platforms (Prasetya & Murata, 2020). Based on this diverse consumption, they are less likely to be in an echo chamber. However, the association between age and polarisation remains one of the least studied areas in contexts outside the US and other western countries.

Studies on the association between education and polarisation are mixed. Highly educated participants have been found to use motivated reasoning strategies more compared to the less educated (Drummond & Fischhoff, 2017). Educated people are able to seek, interpret, evaluate, and even connect information that supports their prior beliefs and positions (Drummond & Fischhoff, 2017); this is a form of confirmation bias. Furthermore, when

educated people are more confident in their positions and beliefs related to their knowledge domains, they are more likely to adopt extreme positions (Robison & Mullinix, 2016). This happens regardless of their actual subject-matter knowledge. Studies in the US suggest that highly educated conservatives become more conservative, while highly educated liberals have increasingly become more liberal (Ballew et al., 2020; Matakos et al., 2017; Scala & Johnson, 2017). This form of polarisation shaped by the participant's level of education heightens their dogmatism around certain issues.

Educated conservatives and liberals are more likely to adopt binary positions in deliberations (Hare & Poole, 2014). Studies that have looked into this phenomenon have found that the level of education is likely to shape views and positions on socio-political issues and dynamics during deliberations (Tomkins et al., 2018). This means that the level of education is likely to shape people's attitudes and positions on moral, cultural and political issues related to immigration, abortion, and climate change. Pew Research studies have also confirmed a wide gap between the views and positions held by educated and uneducated Americans on various issues, including climate change and immigration (Jurkowitz et al., 2020). Highly educated people are more predisposed to ideologically consistent views compared to the less educated on political issues (Ballew et al., 2020).

Other studies have also found that the highly educated are more likely to consume counter-attitudinal content across various media platforms (Stroud et al., 2015). Less educated people are supposedly likely to be gullible and flexible on the views and positions they hold on politics (Scala & Johnson, 2017). Just like age, very few studies linking education and polarisation exist outside the context of the US and western countries. Studies have also indicated the connection between sophisticated discussions, cognitive complexity, and interaction skills often instilled in formal education systems (Herne et al., 2018). Cognitive

complexity, according to Herne et al., (2018), defines how the group receives, perceives, distinguishes, and integrates different dimensions of an issue under deliberation.

2.4 Deliberative Norms and Group Polarisation

The second concept linking deliberative governance and polarisation is a group's deliberative norms (*see Figure 1.1*). With growing polarisation in attitudes, ideologies and perceptions in public discourse, scholars have looked into possible solutions to polarising debates in SNSs platforms (Freelon, 2015). Deliberative norms are informal deliberative guidelines of behaviour and agreed code of conduct that ensures orderliness in group discussions for better outcomes (Habermas, 2005). The basic forms of group deliberative norms include: careful consideration of information, appreciation of diverse opinions-though not necessarily agreeing with such opinions, the use of courteous language (Dalton, 2008; Stroud, 2015; Baumgartner, 2018). Deliberative norms are intrinsically linked to idealised deliberative environments that can influence polarisation (Habermas, 2005). It is on the basis of pragmatic deliberative norms that Habermas argued for deliberative ideals in discussion within the public sphere (see the section below). Being idealistic, the Habermasian deliberative norms have been used to gauge the quality of deliberations in various studies (Abdel-Monem et al., 2010; Elwyn et al., 2009; Himmelroos, 2017; Höskuldsdóttir, 2020; King, 2005; Steenbergen et al., 2003; Ugarriza & Nussio, 2016; De Vries et al., 2012).

Group deliberative norms can affect polarisation in various ways. It can determine the possibilities of achieving convergent views and consensual values by influencing group opinion dynamics. Opinion dynamics describes the process, actors, and platforms that shape opinions formation through group interaction (Dong et al., 2018). Opinion dynamics determines if the group achieves specific opinions through a rational and inclusive process. It is difficult to achieve wide consensus in all issues under deliberations. Therefore, a more

flexible and reasonable approach based on shared logic has been used to achieve what is known as soft consensus (Dong et al., 2018; Herrera-Viedma et al., 2017). Soft consensus refers to a possibility of partial agreements among participants on specific issues where participants agree to disagree and respect each other's logic, positions and reasoning (Dong et al., 2018; Herrera-Viedma et al., 2017). This has been found to negatively influence polarisation (Brundidge et al., 2014; Dong et al., 2018). Achieving soft consensus may not necessarily prevent participants from becoming affectively polarised. It can calm potentially damaging contentions and conflict on polarising issues. Further, it does not necessarily eliminate the possibility of perceived polarisation (Dong et al., 2018; Herrera-Viedma et al., 2017).

Deliberative norms determine group behaviour and whether their interaction meets the criteria of established deliberation principles of equality, civility, and egalitarian reciprocity (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Hoffman et al., 2013; De Zúñiga et al., 2018). Group norms shape how participants receive, interpret and respond to information and their subsequent positions (Sunstein, 2008b, 2008a). Due to the asynchronous nature of most SNSs platforms, they are likely to support a more reflexive, rationalised approach to argumentative conversations in line with deliberative norms. Scholars argue that enforcing deliberative norms in SNSs platforms is challenging because they are largely impersonal and de-individuate participants. This encourages incivil discourse, and group-based stereotyping (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Knoll et al., 2018; Kruse et al., 2018a). A further important consideration that is likely to affect the enforcement of deliberative norms is the identifiability versus anonymity dichotomy based on the platform's affordance. Anonymity and identifiability are more likely to result in incivility and encourage non-compliance to deliberation norms (Seo et al., 2014). Both are likely to encourage disinhibition effects during deliberations, where the loosening of social restrictions and other group norms enhance intolerance and further polarisation.

Group deliberative norms regulate social status within the group (Connelly, 2006; Dalton, 2008; Holdo, 2019; Waterloo et al., 2018). However, deliberative norms are often subject to a variety of individual biases which interfere with the systematic and rational analysis of the information (Holdo, 2019). This translates to participants within the group perceiving their positions, opinions, and themselves as superior or victors. Ideally, groups should engage in discussions with open minds and should be willing and ready to influence and be influenced by the deliberations. Those who effectively persuade others should not appear as victors while those who are persuaded as losers. Rather, groups should be responsive to the dialogic exchange where arguments, as opposed to individuals, win. This is difficult to achieve where rhetoric appeals to passions rather than to reason (Reykowski, 2006).

Other studies further suggest that using deliberation rules and enforcing deliberative norms such as equality of discussion, reciprocity, inclusion, reflection, reasoned justifications, respect, and diversity can alleviate opinion polarisation even in like-minded groups (Freelon, 2015; Jennstål & Öberg, 2019; Stroud et al., 2015; Waterloo et al., 2018). The contrary opinion is that an individual's predispositions shape opinion formation even when deliberative norms are in place (Freelon, 2015). Hence, if deliberative norms are to ameliorate the state of polarisation, three components tend to be critical: Firstly, discussions should involve the use of logical arguments as opposed to coercion and power; secondly, such reasoned discussions are directed at solving divisive issues in an inclusive context; thirdly, that those participating are tolerant and accommodative of divergent opinions, and perspectives shared by others (Barisione, 2012; Halpern, 2017; Lafont, 2015; Moscrop & Warren, 2016; Wiklund, 2012).

Studies analysing the enforcement of specific deliberative norms in formal and informal contexts have found varied results (Dalton, 2008; Freelon, 2015; Stroud et al., 2015). Some note that it produces amicable discussion results, including building issue consensus and promoting learning (Holdo, 2019). When enforcement of group deliberative norms is done

effectively, it is likely to entrench a positive attitude in a polarised context (Erman, 2013), while increasing resistance and sensibility to manipulation through what Arceneaux & Johnson, (2007) referred to as ‘elite framing’. Further, group deliberative norms can reinforce desirable depolarising habits by recognising and revealing the place of shared values and diverse identities among participants (Xenos, 2014).

Well enforced deliberative norms can encourage analytical and communication skills necessary for political reasoning in group contexts (Chambers, 2003). Analytical skills are critical in deconstructing, potentially polarising content in group deliberations (Lee et al., 2013). It helps to understand and differentiate truth from error and facts from fallacy. In large group contexts, it has been found to enhance the feeling of collective efficacy, especially when norms like civility are jointly agreed and enforced (Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003). However, contextual characteristics such as the group’s motivation to deliberate on a particular subject, and the perceived potential to achieve a common ground influence the appreciation for deliberative norms. It is not uncommon for deliberative norms to be considered restrictive and inhibitory, especially when consensus on its enforcement is not achieved amicably.

Scholars have argued for the need to break specific deliberative norms in order to raise critical issues while also defending important values towards depolarisation (Mccoy et al., 2018). Violations of basic deliberative norms in some contexts are only justified to the extent that it is proportional to the level of systemic deficiency, meaning, it should not aggravate the prevailing polarised situation (Muste, 2014). Deliberative norms should engender activeness, inclusivity, and openness when personal judgements and experiences are overtly presented in the public spheres (Dahlberg, 2010). This, according to Dahlberg (2010), would encourage understanding and mutual respect between groups towards de-polarisation. Dahlberg overlooks a situation where deliberative norms are unclear, where no enforcement authority is available,

and the relative strength between protagonists is balanced. In such a case, diverse viewpoints and interests are likely to be transformed into polarised arguments or protracted conflicts.

In this study, the Habermasian normative ideals inform the link between deliberative norms and polarisation. Habermas identified specific essential ideals for a holistic deliberation framework within the public sphere. Public spheres, according to Habermas and Cohen, should be characterised by a specific set of deliberative norms. Those characteristics include *inclusivity* and *diversity* of deliberation participants; *openness* where individuals are free to express their opinions without economic, institutional or political coercion; *rationality*, meaning that participants will deliberate while exercising utmost logic and reason; reciprocity, where participants are expected to appreciate others needs and interests just as their own. Various scholars have further added to the list of norms including: *tolerance*, *mutual respect* (Effing, Hillegersberg, & Huibers, 2011; Enjolras, Steen-johnsen, & Wollebæk, 2012; Keating & Melis, 2017); *content heterogeneity* (Brundidge, 2010); *positive argumentative quality* (Lee, 2012), *information reflexivity* (Dennis & Chadwick, 2016; Knoll et al., 2018; Kushin et al., 2015), and *civility* (Ji, 2017). These ideals are further explained in the section below.

2.4.1 Tolerance and Polarisation

Tolerance is a ‘virtue in our dealings with citizens who are different or are of a different origin’ (Habermas, 2003, p. 3). Other researchers consider tolerance as the willingness to respect the liberties and rights of others whose views, opinions and practice differ from one’s own (Gibson & Bingham, 2018; Thomassen, 2006). Political tolerance is the willingness to allow disliked and discordant opinions, preferences, and views to be expressed publicly by others (Harell, 2010; Mukherjee et al., 2013; Winter & Rathnayake, 2017). According to Thomassen, (2017, pg 440), ‘there is no tolerance without intolerance’. This is tenable because in some cases, intolerance is what makes tolerance possible. Habermas considered the issue of tolerance in

deliberations as a paradox (Habermas, 2003). The paradox relates to arbitrariness and paternalism of tolerance in a deliberation context (Habermas, 2003). Arbitrariness, because the decision to exercise tolerance depends on the rationality of another party. Similarly, tolerance depends on the goodwill of the tolerating party (Habermas, 2003). Paternalism, because tolerance must circumscribe a range of accepted behaviour which the majority must accept and adopt (Habermas, 2003). Paternalism and arbitrariness help to draw a line between what can and cannot be tolerated in a deliberative context. Efforts to ground tolerance as a deliberative norm is dependent on the symmetrical relations between the tolerating and the tolerated parties in an online context (Habermas, 2003). The solution to this paradox, according to Habermas, is to rationalise tolerance as beneficial to both partisan parties (Habermas, 2003). However, partisan issues will always dim the prospects of tolerance especially if strongly attached to the discussant's identity or cherished ideologies.

Other studies have examined dogmatism because it affects the extent to which individual and groups are willing to tolerate and respond to heterogeneous views (Gibson & Bingham, 2018; Harell, 2010; Mukherjee et al., 2013; Ramírez & Verkuyten, 2011; Winter & Rathnayake, 2017). The rationale for tolerance as a deliberative norm depends more on the characteristics of the group relations than on the nature of the topic under deliberation (Johnson & Bichard, 2010). The influence of group characteristics means that the paradox of tolerance in group deliberation can be understood in two contexts; the decision to exercise tolerance is not an arbitrary but a rational decision. Studies show that rationality is an individual-level attribute that is heavily influenced by the topic of discussion (Gibson & Bingham, 2018). The contrary perspective is that the decision to be tolerant is significantly weakened by various group dynamics such as the relationship between the group members (Bode et al., 2014). The relationship between the tolerated and the tolerating is not hierarchical but is instead based on symmetrical dialogical relations between participants in group contexts (Thomassen, 2006).

This means that while deliberations in a group context can enhance tolerance, it will depend on the power relations dynamics among the group members.

The exercise of respect and tolerance in a group contexts thrives in situations where more egalitarian relationships exist between group members (Adelman et al., 2019). In-group members who hold a strong religious, cultural, political, and ideological conviction are less likely to tolerate or approve of practices and beliefs of the out-group who subscribe to contrary views (Halvorsen, 2003; Ramírez & Verkuyten, 2011; Verkuyten et al., 2019). However, there are instances where people tolerate beliefs and positions that they would ordinarily disapprove of. For instance, individuals who understand and believe in democratic principles and norms are more likely to tolerate those with divergent views (Harell, 2010). Studies in the US context tend to associate conservativeness with discrimination and intolerance, while liberalism is linked with tolerance and open-mindedness (Gibson & Bingham, 2018). However, such a dichotomous understanding of tolerance based on ideological positions is not necessarily applicable in other socio-political contexts.

Research on SNSs and tolerance indicate that the diversity of the group can affect the exercise of tolerance in deliberations because such groups expand an individual's ability to connect with heterogeneous groups of participants (Barberá, 2014; Ramírez & Verkuyten, 2011; Winter & Rathnayake, 2017). Those who frequently interact in groups with different religious, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds in digital platforms are more likely to be politically tolerant (Hampton, Shin, & Lu, 2017; Kruse et al., 2018b; Mukherjee et al., 2013). Despite the diverse compositions of SNSs platforms, tolerance remains a major challenge, and some studies have found that SNSs are highly intolerant spaces (Barberá, 2014; Ramírez & Verkuyten, 2011; Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010). Intolerant individuals and groups tend to interact less frequently with those of diverse perspectives and backgrounds, and this can drive selective exposure, confirmation bias and the adoption of extreme partisanship. Exposure to

heterogeneous views has been found to increase people's cognitive skills which enhances their propensity for tolerance (Gibson & Bingham, 2018). Increased cognitive skills have been linked to decreased tendencies to adopt extreme positions in group deliberations (Ballew et al., 2020; Lambert et al., 2015). However, tolerance is not just about possessing cognitive skills but also the ability to differentiate positions, interests, and perspectives in group deliberations (Mukherjee et al., 2013). These factors in a deliberative governance context influence how governance ideologies and controversies are framed. Tolerance in deliberations does not solely seek to change the in-groups' evaluation of the out-group, but also to ensure healthy disagreements without deepening the partisan positions.

2.4.2 Structural Diversity and Polarisation

Research has shown that structurally diverse societies are more likely to be politically polarised (Hoerner & Hobolt, 2019; Scala & Johnson, 2017; Shoup, 2018; Testa, 2012; Turner & Smaldino, 2018). Often, failure to manage structural diversity in any society can result in citizen disgruntlement, partisanship and polarisation (Mccoy et al., 2018; Montalvo & Reynal-querol, 2016; Stroud, 2010). Structurally diverse groups and societies are likely to result in heterogeneous SNSs networks (Enjolras et al., 2012). Diverse networks of people tend to have weak social ties that enhance access to divergent information (Shoup, 2018). In contrast, weak social ties are likely to experience less selective exposure, groupthink effects, and echo chambers (Bright, 2018; Garrett, 2009; Matuszewski & Szabó, 2019; Semaan et al., 2018a, 2018b; Tornberg, 2018; Weeks et al., 2017). Deliberations in diverse contexts are critical for cross-cutting exposure of ideas across ideological lines (Testa, 2012). This minimises the possibilities of selective exposure in group deliberations, where participants opt to seek reinforcement within homogenous groups (Singer et al., 2019).

Deliberations in contexts of diversity provoke internal reflection, which may lead to the realisation of common ground among those holding diverse perspectives (Habermas, 2004); thus lessening the effects of motivated reasoning. However, groups traditionally marginalised in governance discourse including racial and ethnic minorities, women, and marginalised religious groups are less likely to participate in very diverse deliberative forums where they continue to experience minority status (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Flache & Macy, 2011; Mccarty et al., 2019; Miguel & Gugerty, 2005; Wojcieszak, 2011). When they participate, they are likely to exercise confirmatory bias on the issues they feel passionate about. Non-participation of minorities and marginalised groups is fuelled by polarising factors such as social pressure, pre-conceived negative expectations, economic constraints, lack of trust in the process, and other institutional obstacles (Abdel-Monem et al., 2010; Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Flache & Macy, 2011; Mccarty et al., 2019; Miguel & Gugerty, 2005; Wojcieszak, 2011). With the emergence of SNSs platforms, some scholars hoped that these platforms would be the panacea for the challenges of diversity and inclusivity faced in deliberative governance (Abdel-Monem et al., 2010; Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2012; Unzueta et al., 2012). Diversity in SNSs platforms is also expected to realise moderate, non-extreme views on politics and governance (Hampton & Lee, 2011). Although deliberation can have diverse participants, the nature of partisan polarisation in the group interaction can mar the outcomes of the deliberative process.

Further, marginalised or underrepresented group members may not freely participate in deliberation when the group composition is imbalanced (Arriagada, et al., 2012). When marginalised or underrepresented groups are cowed into silence, the majority are likely to exercise groupthink (Shoup, 2018). Such groups are prone to form in-group factions when they feel underrepresented or outnumbered in a deliberation context. Research shows that people of colour tend to participate less in deliberations when the group is numerically dominated by Whites and vice versa (Abdel-Monem et al., 2010). Further, unconscious judgments and

partisan assumptions in diverse SNSs platforms can enhance social prejudices and alienate or antagonise participants (Hoerner & Hobolt, 2019). In diverse groups, the attitude and behaviour of partisan sides can be antagonised by partisan interpretation of the content, triggering divergent and more polarised reactions. Deliberations in a diverse context may reflect the polarity of expectation involving strong emotions which are sometimes aggravated by power hierarchies in the group (Barberá, 2014; Herne et al., 2019a; Singer et al., 2019).

Studies also suggest that deliberation is sometimes biased against minorities, non-white, and women because it is premised on conventional forms of engagement that disadvantage such groups (Flache & Macy, 2011a; Hamlett & Cobb, 2006; Lee et al., 2019; Mccarty et al., 2019; Smith, 2014). Deliberation, according to the Habermasian ideals, emphasises rationalised, analytic, and inferential styles of engagement (Habermas, 2003; Habermas, 2004). These ideals can disadvantage majority of people with lower socio-economic characteristics such as minority and marginalised groups. In such a context, it is not guaranteed that deliberation will achieve an inclusive policy discourse. As a governance process, deliberation requires an analytic and inferential approach to contested issues in order to ameliorate partisan polarisation (Ofunja et al., 2018). The analytic approach requires deliberators to identify issues of divergence then seek areas of commonality (Habermas, 2003). Heterogeneous SNSs groups are likely to experience difficulties compared to homogenous ones in achieving consensus or solution to polarising governance problems (Abdel-Monem et al., 2010; Harell, 2010). Heterogeneous SNSs groups are occur due to explicit coercion, domination, and exclusion in deliberations (Dahlberg, 2005; Habermas, 2005; Jezierska, 2019).

Diversity and polarisation in SNSs deliberations can be influenced by the methods of recruiting participants. This study considers two types of recruiting participants: self-selection and random selection. Self-selection derived from the concept of sampling in statistics is where people or groups with same ideologies add one another to SNSs deliberative groups (Nabatchi

& Amsler, 2014). Self-selected groups are likely to have homogeneous deliberators which are likely to undermine deliberation ideals such as inclusivity. Further, they are likely to form echo chambers that lead to group polarisation (Garrett, 2009; Szab & Matuszewski, 2019). Random selection, on the other hand, is where participants join the SNSs deliberative function through public click-to-join links. Whereas random selection can enhance the diversity of participants, it can also encourage exclusivity where few people dominate deliberations (see the section below). Studies show that random selection is the more appropriate way to promote cognitive diversity and diverse composition of deliberating platforms (Leydet, 2019). Cognitive diversity relates to a diverse way of perceiving, interpreting and solving political and governance issues (Beauvais & Baechtiger, 2016; Brinker et al., 2015). Cognitive diversity ensures participants are exposed to diverse opinions, views, and counterarguments.

2.4.3 Inclusivity and Polarisation

Deliberative governance derives its legitimacy mainly in the ability of deliberators to participate based on equal and inclusive terms (Habermas, 2003). Whereas diversity deals with the structural composition of deliberative structures, inclusivity assesses the impact of such diversity in terms of the equality of participant's voice (Abdullah, Karpowitz, & Raphael, 2016b). Deliberative structures can be diverse and yet remain less inclusive in terms of views and perspectives, as is common in homogeneous groups and SNSs platforms. What constitutes inclusivity in a deliberative context varies based on different scholarly perspectives. Some consider inclusivity to consist of fairness, representativeness of voice, and treating discussants equally; all of which define the quality of deliberations (Abdullah et al., 2016b; Goode & Woodward, 2017). Participants are marginalised in deliberation if they have fewer chances of introducing discussion topics, being heard, making contributions, presenting their suggestions or criticising issues and proposals (Habermas, 2003). According to Habermasian ideals,

inclusivity should happen regardless of the existing power hierarchy, influence, status, and positions outside of the deliberative forum (Habermas, 2005). This proposition by Habermas downplays the critical factors that affect the quality of deliberations with regards to incivility.

Deliberations are inclusive to the extent that they are open and accessible to those affected by a governance decision (Schneiderhan & Khan, 2008). However, including people in a process does not guarantee the equality of voice. Inclusion, in practice, is very complex and does not merely entail opening the doors of the deliberative forum to those affected by specific decisions. Guaranteeing the voices of those within the processes is at the core of an inclusive deliberative processes even in online contexts. Realising inclusivity is often affected by various factors that reflect the social, political, and cultural dynamics in society (Goode & Woodward, 2017). As earlier noted, minority voices in the society are likely to be excluded or under-represented in deliberative platforms. Gender dynamics affect inclusivity in deliberative governance, where women are likely to be disadvantaged because they tend to engage less compared to men (Holdo, 2019; Turnhout et al., 2010). Other dynamics that contribute to the lack of inclusivity in deliberative governance include a lack of opportunity to contribute due to digital illiteracy in the case of online platforms (Shah et al., 2005; Speer, 2012a).

When a few voices dominate deliberations, the forum becomes an echo chamber where groupthink is likely to be realised. In such a context, the collective opinion of other group participants becomes the information reference point for other undecided participants. This potentially leads to a herding effect that some scholars have referred to as information cascades (Wang et al., 2018). Further, subject matter experts can dominate deliberations meaning that balancing the voices of ordinary citizens, those of experts, and other governing elites can be a challenge especially in SNSs platforms (Davidson & Elstubb, 2014). People of higher socio-economic status tend to participate in deliberation at higher rates even when random selection

is used to recruit participants (Cassells et al., 2018; Souza, 2001). They also dominate deliberations when mixed with those of a lower socio-economic status (Dahlgren, 2005).

The method of recruiting participants to a deliberative platform is very critical in achieving inclusivity (Schenck-Hamlin, 2015). Random selection, compared to self-selection, is strategically open and linked to higher perceptions of inclusivity and legitimacy in deliberative governance. This is particularly important in contexts where structural diversity and inequality of voice or perceptions of exclusion instigate polarisation (Schneiderhan & Khan, 2008). Self-selection is likely to produce more homogeneous groups that reflect, rather than resolve, privileges of such social inequalities (Souza, 2001; Vecchione & Caprara, 2009; Zhang et al., 2019). Exclusivity instigated through self-selection can reinforce enduring hierarchies based on the participants education, income, race, and gender (Souza, 2001; Vecchione & Caprara, 2009; Zhang et al., 2019). This suggests that ensuring inclusivity in deliberative governance structures requires a review of the engagement formats, recruitment of participants, and deliberative structural design. Inclusivity in macro deliberation structures is largely influenced by asymmetries in power, positions, knowledge, and access to information among participants (Esau et al., 2020; Herne et al., 2019b; Wampler, 2012).

Inclusivity in deliberations is challenging to achieve when diverse background inequalities are bracketed, set aside, or neutralised in deliberations (Siu, 2017). The threat of group polarisation is further exacerbated when either of the opposite sides perceives that their voices are excluded or underrepresented (Siu, 2017). Inequalities in group deliberation can be inevitable and constant, especially when created by the circumstances and conditions outside the deliberation context (Habermas, 2005). Therefore, the role of moderators is to ensure that diverse voices, views, and positions in deliberation are heard and taken into account. The diversity and inclusivity of voices can facilitate opinion evolution. Opinion evolution describes the process of forming new opinions and views among a group of interactive participants (Dong

et al., 2018, 2018; Zhao et al., 2018). Opinion evolution occurs when discussants take into account alternative views to shape and decide on their own opinions. This occurs through a repeated process of inclusive deliberations (Dong et al., 2018, 2018; Zhao et al., 2018).

2.4.4 Civility/Incivility and Polarisation

Research has indicated that online incivility is rampant across various SNSs platforms, making them very hostile environment for users (Antoci et al., 2016; Filatova et al., 2019; Papacharissi, 2004; Stroud et al., 2015). The definition of incivility is one of the most debated concepts in communications and linguistic research. The majority of studies have conceptualised civility based on the guiding norms of etiquette and politeness in interactive environments (Papacharissi, 2004). Civility, defined as politeness ignores the democratic merit of robust and heated deliberations that often characterises the public sphere. Further, focusing on civility as an etiquette severely restricts open deliberations by making it tepid, reserved, and less spontaneous (Papacharissi, 2004). Another challenge is that civility is largely defined by the western standards of politeness which is sometimes not applicable in other contexts. Regardless of how civility is conceptualised, contention and incivility in digital platforms can erode critical values of deliberative governance (Druckman et al., 2019; Kim & Park, 2019; Lee et al., 2019).

Whereas Habermas is deeply concerned with protecting citizens ability to solve governance problems through rational deliberations (Habermas, 2005), he believes that democracy is best realised when the public sphere is left open, conflictual, and anarchic (Habermas, 2003). According to Habermas, too much emphasis on civility in deliberation and the realisation of moderated opinions is unwarranted in the public sphere (Habermas, 1991). Focusing on civility at the expense of open deliberations risks limiting the capacity of the public sphere to establish and achieve legitimate aims of democracy (Habermas, 1991). According to him, defining the agenda in the public sphere require confrontational, and contested discussion

tactics that can be misconstrued as incivility (Habermas, 1991). However, the challenge with incivility especially in SNSs platforms is that it creates a potentially hostile environment for participants.

Incivility significantly reduces the possibility of compromise and thereby enhances the chances of group polarisation and intergroup hostility. Incivility is common in various media platforms that lack gatekeeping structures (Price et al., 2002). However, studies show that SNSs discussion tends to be characterised by incivility, offensive, and hostile engagement more than mainstream media (Antoci et al., 2016; Kim & Kim, 2019; Lee et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2019). Incivility in online discussions involves the use of demeaning words which demonstrates disrespect or insult targeted at opposing groups (Antoci et al., 2016; Maia & Rezende, 2016; Papacharissi, 2004; Stroud et al., 2015). Research on the effects of incivility on group interactions suggests that people will often respond to incivility with even stronger and negative emotions (Druckman et al., 2019; Kim & Park, 2019). Specifically, negative emotions are more severe when incivility is targeted at the group's social identity such as their religion or ethnicity (Druckman et al., 2019). The concept of social identity provides a useful explanation on the impact of incivility in digital platforms on group's attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours (Kim & Kim, 2019; Lee et al., 2019).

The social identity concept argues that incivility in group polarisation can accentuate perceptions of polarity and chasm between groups by enhancing the salience of group identity (Kim & Kim, 2019; Lee et al., 2019). Empirical findings further reveal that SNSs deliberations characterised by incivility contributes to the perceptions of partisanship and 'us versus them' dichotomy (Antoci et al., 2016; Druckman et al., 2019). Therefore, negative social identity cues coupled with partisanship can affect the quality of deliberations. Incivility in online deliberations can exaggerate the perceptual bias where the partisan mentality heightens out-group hostility and in-group favouritism (Filatova et al., 2019). Increased salience of group

identity resulting from incivility affects the recipients' perception of polarity among partisan groups (Sigelman & Kugler, 2003; Wright et al., 2017). Incivility can also enhance motivated reasoning, and confirmation bias where messages that conform to perceived in-group thinking are readily accepted and those of out-groups are continuously doubted, thus deepening negative attitudes between partisan groups (Antoci et al., 2016; Filatova et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2019).

Civility, when expressing disagreement, can lessen the chances of binary thinking in deliberations (Filatova et al., 2019). It can also help people to consider the validity of claims, arguments and interests of others, thus reducing chances of confirmation bias. Incivility in SNSs emphasizing antagonism between two partisan groups may erode their expectation about achieving consensus through deliberation. Incivility has been partly linked to the practice of selective exposure in contexts of political discussions (Messing & Westwood, 2014). This happens because people tend to avoid comments that are riddled with incivility. In contrast, exposure to civil but heterogeneous views has been found to ameliorate conflict by lessening the chances of negative labelling of opposing factions (Stroud et al., 2015). Incivility in SNSs platforms can drive people to exercise defensive motivation and thus reinforce their prior attitude. This makes sense in light of research suggesting a plausible link between incivility and perceptual polarisation, especially during political discussions (Kim & Kim, 2019; Robison et al., 2016).

Research has established the link between incivility and the disinhibition effect where individuals feel disconnected from their real identities (Antoci et al., 2016). In the absence of social cues and other constraints inherent to face-to-face interaction, individuals tend to express their opinions and views harshly without worrying about the effects of their actions (Suler 2004). In SNSs platforms, chat messages are often depersonalized meaning that they are likely to invite stronger or more uninhibited responses characterised by incivility. Further, deliberations in SNSs platforms entails significant anonymity, diminished self-awareness, and

reduced self-regulation (Maia & Rezende, 2016; Papacharissi, 2004). This is worsened because participants in SNSs platforms become less self-aware and feel submerged in the group context. This is what some scholars refer to as deindividuation, and has been found to create a conducive environment for disinhibition and incivility (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Nelimarkka, et al., 2018a, 2018b). Unlike in face-to-face interactions contexts, SNS users are less likely to be concerned about offending others in their discussions. Furthermore, studies show that impulsive and assertive interactive behaviours that are less considerate of the recipients' feelings are more common in SNSs platforms (Friedkin, 2017; Stroud et al., 2015).

2.4.5 Moderation of Deliberations and Polarisation

Habermas argues that underlying deliberative norms of mutual forbearance and moderation require protection to ensure politics does not descend into further polarisation and civil war (Habermas, 1996). However, he seems to contradict himself though when he worries that a public sphere guided by excessive regard for the norms of deliberation (i.e. moderation) and rational debate can lose its essential function (Habermas, 1996). He noted that protest, confrontation, and incivility are all critical components of deliberative politics in the public sphere and are difficult to moderate without affecting aspects of deliberations (Habermas, 1996). Nonetheless, designers of deliberative governance agree on the role and place of moderation in both offline and online contexts (Blatz & Mercier, 2018; Lindell et al., 2017; McDevitt, 2003; Perrault & Zhang, 2019). Another perspective that is often ignored is that moderation of deliberations is shaped by the nature of the deliberative structure. Micro deliberative structures are easier to moderate compared to macro deliberative ones (Hendriks, 2006). In fact, the mechanism of enforcing moderated discussions in most SNSs platforms is lacking or tedious to implement and realise.

Moderation can improve the quality of deliberation by managing group disagreements, keeping group discussions focused, and ensuring civility and tolerance in deliberations (Barberá, 2014; Blatz & Mercier, 2018; Zhang et al., 2013). Research shows that group polarisation reflects a dynamic psychological process, where the group's opinions move to extreme polarity based on intolerance and incivil discourse (Blatz & Mercier, 2018; Lindell et al., 2017; Perrault & Zhang, 2019). Sunstein, (2008), noted that this could be reduced by achieving moderated opinions through well-structured and moderated deliberations in groups. However, few studies have examined whether there is an association between moderated deliberation and adoption of moderated opinions in SNSs contexts. Scholars advocate for some degree of moderation in SNSs deliberations to avoid flame wars and trolling in polarised debates (Barberá, 2014; Blatz & Mercier, 2018; Matakos et al., 2017). Moderation also increases the perceptions of equality among low-status socio-economic groups which positively impacts on their confidence to participate in deliberations (Matakos et al., 2017). Moderation in the context of diversity can help achieve exposure to discordant views and improvement of arguments without polarised antagonism in the SNSs groups. Importantly, the influence of moderators can turn everyday political talk into rigorous deliberative outcomes, which explains the link between moderated discussions and the quality of deliberations.

The contrary perspective is that the use of moderation in SNSs deliberation negatively affects the perception of 'free and open discussions' (McDevitt, 2003). The perception of free, open and unmoderated discussions can be detrimental because it can encourage people to react with incivil and inappropriate comments, and this creates a false perception of active discussion (Matakos et al., 2017; Wojcieszak, 2011). Similarly, moderators can have a negative effect by using their privileged position to exert undue influence on the participants and on the outcome of deliberation. With existing power dynamics in the group context, it is possible that moderators will lean towards those already privileged in terms of participation. Studies show

that participants who joined and engaged in less moderated SNSs platforms held a positive perception of the legitimacy of policy outcomes after deliberations (Blatz & Mercier, 2018; Lindell et al., 2017). Further, those who joined less moderated deliberation platforms considered the claims by other participants as more valid compared to those who joined highly moderation platforms (Perrault & Zhang, 2019; Shen et al., 2018). Perceived biases in moderation can have a negative effect such as heightening the level of suspicion among participants towards the deliberation process. In polarised contexts, biased moderation can encourage self-censorship with the potential to exclude marginalised or underrepresented participants. This can affect inclusivity, increase the adoption of extreme positions, and lower the quality of deliberations (Perrault & Zhang, 2019).

Having considered the positive and negative effects of moderation above, Habermas linked moderation to rationality in deliberations (Habermas, 1991). Rationality, according to Habermas, includes: fronting well-reasoned arguments, expressing well-justified positions, and the willingness to aid others understanding through explanation (Arriagada et al., 2012). Deliberation in the public sphere is designed to generate intrinsically cogent, cohesive, and solid arguments in an environment of civility and tolerance. Habermas (2003) emphasises the place of rationality and scrutiny of ideas to redeem and repudiate various claims to validity. He further argues that participants in deliberation must use a logical-semantic rule of argument (He, 2018). Habermas (2005) further noted the place of moderate expression and rational thinking as the key aim of deliberation. Habermas argument is valid because deliberations as a process should yield better understanding because it happens in a platform where the validity of problematic claims in politics and society are tested. However, this is based on the argument that the goal of deliberation is to reach a rationally motivated agreement among participants. Very few studies link moderated discussions with rationalised deliberations as advocated by Habermas (Habermas, 2005). Instead, they tend to show that moderators who make non-

neutral, and semi-scripted interventions during offline deliberation contexts had two effects: they were successful at facilitating a more moderated group opinion, but were less successful in reinforcing the position supported by a majority in the group (Blatz & Mercier, 2018; Lindell et al., 2017; McDevitt, 2003; Shen et al., 2018). The possible benefits of moderators such as equality, civility, and tolerance can be offset by their disproportionate and overt influence, which can affect the quality of deliberations.

2.4.6 Heterogeneous Viewpoints and Polarisation

Another deliberative norm that can influence the quality of deliberations and polarisation is exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints. Such exposure, and its impact on polarisation, is the basis of selective exposure, filter bubbles, and echo chamber theories, (see the section below), (Bail et al., 2018; Bright, 2018; Dubois & Blank, 2018; Garrett, 2009; Szab & Matuszewski, 2019). Arguably, regular exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints subsequently moderates and possibly alters a group's position on critical governance matters. It is likely to stir up critical debate and quality deliberations under the right context and circumstances. However, exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints in certain contexts is more likely to discourage deliberations because of increased attitudinal ambivalence and abrasiveness (Nir, 2011).

When participants are exposed to heterogeneous views and opinions in groups context, their awareness of diverse interests and opinions may lower the degree of perceived group homophily (Hampton, 2017). Diverse participants are likely to enhance the exposure to heterogeneous views and perspectives in SNSs deliberations (Mukherjee et al., (2013). Diversity essentially means more information, opinions and perspectives encountered in a group deliberation (Bright, 2018). Optimists argue that exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints encourages participants to examine issues more critically and to seek more alternatives through scrutiny (Wicks et al., 2014). However, this argument ignores the influence of pre-existing

attitudes and inflexible positions that individuals have despite exposure to diverse content. Nonetheless, different viewpoints are likely to aid comprehension and appreciation of the diversity of issues in deliberation (Lee, 2012).

Depending on factors like personality, social environment, and the topic of deliberations, scholars have found that heterogeneous groups are motivated to reflect more extensively on their views in anticipation of engagement (Bimber & Copeland, 2013; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). The motivation for inclusivity yields a rationale for more tolerance and less polarisation (Hsu, et al., 2013). When participants consistently encounter homogeneous information supporting their own perspectives, their tolerance levels are lowered (Kim, Hsu, et al, (2013). This dip in the level of intolerance contributes to a more polarised society, (Lee et al., 2018). As earlier noted, intolerance is not the only consequence because awareness of glaring differences in opinions, positions and affiliations during deliberations can aggravate levels of anxiety and polarisation in political discourse (Mutz & Martin, 2001). It can create apprehension, avoidance, and detachments by conflict-averse individuals (Mukherjee et al., 2013). Participants who fear to be ostracized can refrain from expressing heterogeneous content or shun group deliberations altogether (Jahng, 2018). Fear of self-expression means they retreat into a spiral of silence (Chen, 2018; Sohn, 2019).

Despite initial optimism that digital platforms will enhance access and consumption of more heterogeneous content according to Ponder & Haridakis, (2015b), this may not be the case based on studies on selective exposure and echo chambers. This situation is a result of a phenomenon called social network homophily (Bail et al., 2018). Social network homophily means the nature of ties and network size influences the tone of deliberations through disproportionate exposure to homogeneous content (Halberstam & Knight, 2016; Koiranen et al., 2019; Medaglia & Zhu, 2017). Exposures to heterogeneous views can amplify pre-existing political and governance predilections, which affects the quality of deliberations (Lee et al.,

2014). Groups are consequently driven towards extreme positions in the direction of their original positions (Pattie & Johnston, 2016).

Homophily is also dangerous in the sense that minority groups are likely to be exposed to less information compared to majority groups. The effects of such a phenomenon are broad and could undermine the efficacy of governance institutions through a reduced contestation of ideas in deliberations (Halberstam & Knight, 2016). Biased information processing is a reality in some deliberation platforms where exposure of homogeneous information occurs (Mutz & Martin, 2001). Biased information processing distorts an individual's conception of others and the world view in general. A link, therefore, exists between biased information processing, homogeneous content, and polarisation (Mccoy et al., 2018). Homogeneous content is also linked to the concept of confirmation bias (Prior, 2013) Different coping mechanisms exist where participants avoid disagreement and perceive polarisation to reduce psychological discomfort (Binder, et al., 2016; Nir, 2011).

Participants in homogenous deliberation groups are likely to form extremely polarised attitudes (Erisen & Erisen, 2012; Jahng, 2018). This happens due to the influence of the most extreme members of the group. As Jahng (2018) notes, social sanctions and pressures to adapt to group's norms and viewpoints is very high in homogeneous groups and leads to polarisation. In such groups, concordant content is highly persuasive because it is relatable and requires less cognitive efforts to understand. Palatability is also linked to pre-existing positions within participants memories when recalling and processing such content (Lee et al., 2014).

Yet, some research studies suggest that SNSs also allow individuals to establish broad, low-density, and characteristically weak networks (Everett & Borgatti, 2014). Such networks allow incremental exposure to new controversial information. SNSs could transform the shape and nature of communities from a small close-knit to large social networks (Park, 2014; Tanczer, 2016). As earlier noted, the lack of face to face encounters and disinhibition effects

means that social restraints are deliberately ignored, and participants can make bolder and brazen remarks (Guerra et al., 2013; Hampton et al., 2017). SNSs may blur or eliminate constraints and costs associated with various structural deliberation barriers (Rojas, 2009).

2.5 Critiquing Habermasian Deliberative Ideals/Norms

Critically, the Habermasian normative ideals assume that citizens' deliberations influence governance institutions through rational and critical conversations (Lilleker & Koc-Michalska, 2016). Studies that have explored the Habermasian ideals consider deliberations as a unifying pillar in fragmented societies (Dahlberg, 2005; Dallmayr, 2009; Jezierska, 2019b; Ofunja et al., 2018; Susen, 2018). Through deliberations, citizens develop a shared understanding while being able to construct identities to mediate conflict which, in turn, builds stronger governance institutions (Lafont, 2015). Such studies further indicate that deliberations enhance informed decisions through the clarification of contested opinions and divisive perspectives on governance issues (Hutchens et al., 2019). Further, deliberations are likely to promote efficacy, knowledge, offline engagement and mobilisation, all of which are considered good for democracy (Barnes, 2002; Barnes et al., 2006; Myers, 2018). In the past few decades, research has focused on how the emergent digital platforms have influenced these positive contributions of deliberations with arguments for a transformed public sphere (Çela, 2015; Goldfarb, 2018; Iosifidis, 2011; Kruse et al., 2018a).

One critical dimension in some empirical studies is whether such digital platforms have enhanced deliberations based on the Habermasian ideals of a democratic public sphere (Effing et al., 2011; De Graaf et al., 2010). These studies found that online deliberations are often characterised by rude or uncivil political discourse. McLaverty & Halpin, (2008), for example, regarded online deliberations as a clutter of incoherent voices that harms deliberative discourse in the public sphere. Deliberations in such platforms have been found to lack rational, inclusive,

and respectful exchange of arguments that are driven by the common good of those involved instead of personal gains (Rossini & Stromer-Galley, 2019). Moreover, the framing of important issues in SNSs deliberations was found to be problematic and incompatible with Habermasian ideals because they impede reflexive, accommodative and inclusive deliberations (Barisione, 2012). The quality of deliberations in digital platforms is affected by incomplete and underdeveloped argumentation (McDermott, 2018).

The above shortcoming of Habermasian ideals is partly attributed to specific SNSs affordance and features (Iosifidis, 2011). Researchers have questioned the quality, framing and handling of deliberations in SNSs platforms (Çela, 2015; Harper, 2017; Iosifidis, 2011; Kruse et al., 2018a). These studies suggest that deliberations in SNSs based on the Habermasian ideals remain unrealised and are just what they are; ideals. For instance, deliberation on critical, contested, and emotive issues are rarely held to high standards of rationality (Shah et al., 2007). Rationalised deliberations on divisive issues such as immigration and climate change are hampered by an unwillingness to engage with those who hold ideologically opposed perspectives (Druckman & Nelson, 2003). According to Rothschild et al., (2019), discussions in SNSs platforms are sometimes marred by negative stereotypes which can exacerbate partisan polarisation. Negative stereotypes in deliberations can contribute to group polarisation, especially when it reflects cues in one's political and social environment (Rothschild et al., 2019; Tanczer, 2016).

Even though the normative stance and Habermasian idealism pervade contemporary research about SNSs deliberations, some scholars disagree with these tenets (Erman, 2013; Gimmler, 2001; Jezierska, 2019b; Susen, 2018). They suggest that the Habermasian normative ideals reflect an unrealistic expectation in contemporary deliberative contexts (Belair-gagnon & Agur, 2014; Rasmussen, 2014). The difficulty being with the definition of what constitutes rational and respectful deliberation. The focus on normative ideals of deliberation ignores other

substantive issues and benefits of informal deliberations in the public sphere. For instance, the focus of diversity and heterogeneity of viewpoints based on the Habermasian deliberative ideals ignores a critical aspect of deliberations. The assumption that deliberation in heterogeneous platforms is inherently good compared to deliberation in homogeneous contexts is faulty. This is because deliberation within homogeneous groups have been found to generate better activism, mobilisation, and participation in offline activism (Dahlberg, 2010; Kruse et al., 2018b; Nyabuga, 2014).

Empirical studies on SNSs deliberations have inordinately stretched the concept, and results of Habermasian normative ideals (Kruse et al., 2018b; Mercier & Landemore, 2019; Ofunja et al., 2018). For instance, there is no consensus on what constitutes the basic minimum conditions that are essential or necessary for effective deliberation to occur. This makes comparative research and meta-analyses studies on this areas exceptionally challenging (Flecha et al. (2018). The expectation that SNSs deliberations will reflect rational discourse is also entirely incompatible with three factors: the nature and history of polarising issues, structural diversities of most societies, and the SNSs affordances (Çela, 2015; Gimmler, 2001; Harper, 2017; Iosifidis, 2011). The nature and history of polarising issues mean that such issues are likely to remain contested and polarising regardless of the platform of discussion. It also means that diverse societies are more likely to experience a divergence on issues that drive irrational discussions even in an environment where the Habermasian deliberative norms are enforced. Considering the above two arguments, SNSs platforms and its unique affordances are less likely to provide the necessary solutions to polarising issues because people shape the use of such digital platforms (Beauvais & Baechtiger, 2016; Medaglia & Zhu, 2017; Shmargad & Klar, 2019).

The contrary view is that SNSs platforms should not be considered inadequate, or irrelevant simply because they fall short of normative standards of Habermasian ideals. The

most recent studies have called for the updating of Habermasian tenets to include other critical and contemporary aspects of SNSs deliberations (Filatova et al., 2019; Jezierska, 2019; Ofunja et al., 2018; Susen, 2018). Such studies have noted the place of networking, creativity and shared experiences as components of the public sphere that need to be emphasised in deliberation (Kruse et al., 2018b). SNSs affordances contribute to effective and expansive networking in a way that has transformed the public sphere. Some attributes excluded from the Habermasian ideals include the contribution of SNSs to building social capital and facilitating resource mobilisation for deliberative governance (Dunbar, et al., 2015; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Furthermore, the Habermasian ideals fails to take into account the fact that SNSs are dynamic platforms. They can be heterogeneous or homogeneous, informal or formal, asynchronous or synchronous (Bode et al., 2014; Cho & Keum, 2016; Drennan et al., 2017; Opong et al., 2018). All these dynamics and affordances inherent in SNSs platforms can affect the enforcement of deliberative norms.

The arguments in favour of holistic approaches, as opposed to narrow normative Habermasian idealism, has also challenged concerns related to deliberative norms (Gustafsson, 2012). Desirable deliberative norms among participants in such platforms are not inherently occurring behaviours. These norms need to be taught, incentivised, and supported through civic education (Gladarev & Lonkila, 2012). Inculcating deliberative norms is important because the Habermasian normative ideals is incongruent with the socio-political and cultural practices of most democratic and contemporary societies. A holistic approach encouraging the adoption of deliberative norms based on the context of discussion, and the unique affordances of specific digital public sphere may be very beneficial in enhancing the quality of deliberations (Hardy & Scheufele, 2005; Mutahi & Kimari, 2017). Such an approach should be more interpretive, open, and should have a contingent explanatory power to include dynamics unique to polarised contexts (Loader & Mercea, 2011a, 2011b; Espinoza et al., 2008). Such an approach should

also recognize the influence of social inequality, diversity, and cultural difference in a deliberative context. The Habermasian deliberative ideals tend to privilege particular rationalised deliberations that are characteristic of formal deliberative structures (Bernhagen & Schmitt, 2014; Druckman & Nelson, 2003; Wojcieszak, 2011).

2.6 Selective Exposure, Echo Chambers, and Group Polarisation

Considering the concept of heterogeneous viewpoints discussed above, there is a growing concern that ideologically motivated selectivity in exposure to content is underpinned by SNSs platforms (Messing & Westwood, 2014). Participants and groups are increasingly taking partisan positions to SNSs where they filter content based on their perceived ideological congruence (Stroud, 2018). Various theories have emerged to explain this pattern where SNSs consumption is based on divergent ideological orientations. This section therefore examines two key theories; selective exposure and echo chambers, in context of deliberations in the public sphere and polarisation.

2.6.1 Selective Exposure and SNSs in Polarised Contexts

The link between selective exposure and group polarisation is well established (Garrett et al., 2013; Kim & Kim, 2017; Messing & Westwood, 2014; Stroud, 2010; Wicks, Wicks, & Morimoto, 2014). This association is based on the reception, control, and interpretation of concordant and discordant information (Bright, 2018; Halvorsen, 2003; Kim, 2015). Scholars have noted that participants in groups are more likely to consume concordant as opposed to discordant content due to a variety of possible media choices (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Hong & Kim, 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Sturgis et al., 2014). The choices of concordant content crystallise participants opinions towards their original perspectives and inclinations through what is referred to as reinforcement effects (Lee & Xenos, 2019). Consuming concordant information is also linked to the concept of cognitive dissonance where individuals avoid conflicting

information, beliefs, and views due to mental discomfort (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Rossini & Stromer-Galley, 2019; Stroud, 2010; Weeks et al., 2017).

Cognitive dissonance suggests that people proactively select information sources consistent with their existing ideological predisposition to reduce mental discomfort and restore cognitive balance (Kim, 2015; Messing & Westwood, 2014; Stroud, 2010; Weeks et al., 2017; Wicks et al., 2014). This selection is significantly based on what participants feel or think is personally important to them. Selective exposure is often associated with narrow scopes of deliberation and discourse shaped by the group ideologies (Conroy et al., 2012). Various factors broaden or constrain the opportunity for exposure to divergent viewpoints in SNSs deliberation (Feezell et al., 2012). Selective exposure to homogeneous viewpoints is particularly common among groups who value their group identity (Vesnic-alujevic, 2012). Most polarised societies tend to be characterised by deeply fractionalised identity politics among heterogeneous groups (Esteban & Ray, 2007).

However, SNSs facilitate the integration of homogeneous participants who can avoid cross-ideological interactions (Hoffman et al., 2013). SNSs platforms provide greater opportunity for individuals to cater for their choices and preferences (Hutchings et al., 2008). Homogeneous SNSs networks are likely to experience minimal exposure to ideological diversity and can become more polarised (Min, 2010). In SNSs platforms, selective exposure occurs because content is often presented sequentially as opposed to simultaneously. Some studies have alluded that selective exposure is also likely to reduce the quality of deliberations in SNSs platforms (Kim et al., 2015; Robertson et al., 2013). Such studies have linked heterogeneity of viewpoints to the quality of deliberations. The chances of practicing selective exposure is platform-dependent (Conroy et al., 2012; Hyun & Kim, 2015). Swickert et al., (2002) ranked various media platforms based on their tendency to promote selective exposure, and found that SNSs users enhance opportunities for selective exposure compared to

mainstream media. This happens for two reasons: SNSs enables exposure to a much wider variety of information sources and content which enlarge the pool of content to choose from. SNSs allows the users to exercise greater control of information through the use of various features and affordances (Binder et al., 2016; Eveland & Hively, 2009; Kim et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2014; Merkel & Weiffen, 2012).

Whereas participants tend to seek information consistent with their pre-existing ideological perspectives, they do not necessarily sacrifice their existing contacts or sources information of discordant (Binder et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2015; Kim, Hsu et al., 2013). Cross-sharing of content between SNSs platforms and other digital technology platforms facilitate inadvertent exposure to diverse perspectives (Bimber & Copeland, 2013). Users of Facebook are more likely to share their content on WhatsApp groups and this enhances inadvertent exposure. The other assumption related to SNSs and selective exposure is that political orientation dictates the user's SNSs connections. However, the use of SNSs leads to the gratification of diverse needs, including entertaining, socialising, information seeking, and self-status seeking (Lee et al., 2014). The opportunity costs of entertainment gratification are higher than the exposure to discordant content. SNSs users will rarely shun their interaction with dissimilar others in SNSs platforms as an opportunity cost of entertainment. Further, SNSs users typically ignore opinions that contradict their beliefs but rarely block or unfriend sources of such content (Xenos et al., 2014).

Selective exposure is not a common practice cross-cutting a broad socio-demographic spectrum (Brundidge, 2010; Lee et al., 2018). For instance, individuals with sophisticated political experience consume diverse content to either challenge or reinforce their existing knowledge and beliefs (Kahne et al., 2012; Miller & Krosnick, 2000). In contrast, those who are most active in politics tend to display content selection which reflects their high level of polarisation (Binder et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2015; Kim, Hsu, et al., 2013). Although selective

exposure can discourage constructive deliberations, avoiding discordant content can produce other serious significant downsides that can affect the quality of deliberations (Kenski & Stroud, 2017; Ponder & Haridakis, 2015b, 2015a). Selective exposure is likely to limit the chances of issue-based consensus. This is because exposure to divergent opinions means participants are more likely to encounter and appreciate others' legitimate rationales in relation to their own. Hence, they are also more likely to analyse and review their explanations (Kahne et al., 2012). Selective exposure, by contrast, is most likely to facilitate enclave deliberation leading to further fragmentation and polarisation.

The link between selective exposure and the quality of deliberations is based on the argument that individuals are likely to achieve information selections based on their understanding and judgments about the quality of content. The argument is that individuals will generally prefer high-quality information over that which they consider as low quality. Therefore, individuals are likely to believe that concordant information is more credible and acceptable because of its higher quality (Garrett et al., 2013). Selective exposure is also linked to the quality of deliberations because strongly held views and positions are likely to motivate greater content selection and exposure than weaker ones. Selective exposure when coupled with selective avoidance can worsen the quality of deliberations (Stroud, 2018). This happens because individuals do not avoid contradictory positions and views with the same vigour and intensity with which they seek confirmatory views (Stroud, 2018).

2.6.2 Echo-chambers and SNSs in Polarised Contexts

Echo chambers occur when participants with the same perceptions, interests and views interact primarily within the spheres of their group (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Esteve & Valle, 2018; Garrett, 2009; Rao et al., 2016; Szab & Matuszewski, 2019; Tornberg, 2018; Vaccari et al., 2016). Aided by SNSs algorithms, groups are increasingly choosing to interact in comfortable,

homogeneous spaces which are known as enclaves (Osatuyi, 2013). In enclave deliberations, participants choose to be exposed to content that is in-line with their pre-existing views (Hong & Kim, 2016) while actively avoiding incongruent opinions (Weeks et al., 2017). Such behaviour firmly reinforces existing beliefs and viewpoints and can affect the quality of deliberations (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Sunstein, 2009). Echo chambers have been strongly linked to SNSs platforms because they can strengthen networking among fringe groups of people who share an ideology but are dispersed geographically (Tornberg, 2018).

SNSs can facilitate the formation of echo chambers through algorithmic filter bubbles which are technologically viable in most SNSs (Abdullah et al., 2016a; Bársony et al., 2019; Grönlund et al., 2017; Karpowitz et al., 2009; Maija, 2015). Algorithmic filtering personalises SNSs content using sophisticated search engines (Szab & Matuszewski, 2019). Algorithms provide SNSs users with content based on their previous online behaviour. The lack of cross-cutting interactions is potentially dangerous in deliberative governance contexts. Nonetheless, the tendency to associate and engage with like-minded participants is a common cross-cultural phenomenon even in conventional offline groups (Colleoni et al., 2014; Esteve & Valle, 2018; Tornberg, 2018). Therefore, SNSs platforms enhance rather than instigate the convergence of those with homogeneous characteristics in echo chambers.

The premise of the echo chamber concept, however, has been questioned by various scholars. One of its foundational tenets is the assumption that SNSs users play an extremely passive role in relation to information choice (Dubois & Blank, 2018). This passivity makes them vulnerable to the manipulative effects of algorithms. This oversimplifies the complex socio-psychological dynamics involved in information consumption in digital environments. SNSs can foster diversity and heterogeneity and at the same time, engender political uniformity and homogeneity (Rao et al., 2016). One cannot avoid contact with extremely incongruent content and still maintain objective perspectives or beliefs (Garrett, 2017). SNSs users are more

likely to read content shared by their friends even though incongruent with their political ideologies (Tornberg, 2018). This means that online social networks ultimately lead to the formation of weak ties which have been associated with exposure to heterogeneous content and goes against the idea of echo chambers (Barberá et al, 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that weak ties are inversely associated with echo chambers and vice versa. Despite the existence of ideological homogeneity in SNSs, the overall outcome of such platforms is the inadvertent exposure to heterogeneous content (Vaccari et al., 2016).

Whereas people can exercise selective exposure to congruent content, this represents a small proportion of the aggregate online activities and general exposure (Colleoni et al., 2014). SNSs usage patterns and behaviours are complex and intricate and contextually determined (Koiranen et al., 2019). Moreover, measuring exposure to divergent ideas on one platform does not necessarily explain usage patterns on other platforms because of different affordances. Participants who regularly use political microblogs and blogs to access their content are the most likely to expose themselves to partisan echo chambers than those who use SNSs platforms (Szab & Matuszewski, 2019). Media diets and choices matter when determining echo chamber deliberations (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Matuszewski, 2019). Groups in echo-chambers are likely to consider their choices and perspectives as reasonable, adaptable, and mainstream (Pattie & Johnston, 2016). Consequently, they often find those holding alternative perspectives to be extreme zealots and wayward (Pattie & Johnston, 2016). Studies show that people do not mind accessing alternative perspectives as long as they are assured their congruent beliefs are well represented and supported (Evans, Fu, & Evans, 2018; Kahne et al., 2012). In the context of group deliberations, individuals deliberately access heterogeneous and discordant content to build on arguments against their opponents.

The echo chamber effects are likely to lower the quality of deliberations when the homogeneity of the deliberation group significantly restricts the size of the argument pool

(Kahne et al., 2012). This is likely to enhance the circulation of the same views, thus leading to groupthink and polarisation. Individuals are more likely to share similar perspectives within the group to obtain the approval of other group members (Vicario et al., 2016). Some studies have also linked the echo chambers effect with factors that lower the quality of deliberations such as disinformation, misinformation, and stereotypes in SNSs platforms (Tornberg, 2018). When individuals exist in echo chambers, they are likely to experience network polarisation, where they are densely connected with each other within a group than they are with those outside their network (Dubois & Blank, 2018). Disinformation and misinformation are received with higher credibility among those in an echo chamber, especially when it is congruent with existing beliefs and group ideology (Kahne et al., 2012). This has various implications for the Habermasian deliberative ideals such as tolerance and diversity for the out-group. In polarised contexts, the homogeneity of information in echo chambers is likely to shape the formation of interpretive frames on contested issues or enhance collective identities that can negate consensus (Barbera, 2019).

2.7 SNSs and Deliberative Governance in the Public Sphere

The suitability of SNSs as a public sphere and its role in deliberative governance has been widely studied. SNSs enhances the co-creation and sharing of content (Li & Chan, 2017) which increase information reflection and elaboration in deliberation contexts (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009). Co-creation and sharing of content also support the Habermasian ideals of rationality and evidence-based deliberations (Habermas, 2005). Rational arguments help participants make sense of complex governance information (Cho et al., 2009; Robertson et al., 2013; Wojcieszak et al., 2015). SNSs can encourage an enriched cross-network and interactive model (Zúñiga, (2013). They can facilitate a two-way symmetrical deliberation model between the governed and the governors in macro deliberative structures (Baogang, 2018; Ganuza &

Francés, 2012; Park et al., 2017a; Rosenbloom et al., 2017b). Fruitful deliberations in SNSs also depends on the level of trust and confidence between stakeholders, which has been found to be minimal in groups with weak ties (Kushin, et al., (2015).

Deliberative governance requires information to be relevant, reliable, credible and sensitive to participants needs (Winter & Rathnayake, 2017). Instant dissemination of fake news and misinformation has drastically reduced the reliability and credibility of information in SNSs platforms (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Therefore, SNS information is treated with scepticism in macro deliberative structures. Regardless, fake news does not diminish the role of SNSs in enhancing connections with a large number of contacts (Tornberg, 2018). Further, SNSs can promote malicious misinformation and the spread of conspiracy theories in deliberative contexts (Barbera, 2019; Borges-tiago et al., 2018). The spread of fake news and conspiracy theories depends on the multiple channels afforded by SNSs platforms for a wider reach and larger effect (Lee et al., 2014). Despite the negative effects stated above, SNSs promote the construction and growth of group identities that can be important in establishing enclave spaces for deliberations (Arriagada et al., 2012). Enclave deliberations mean that disclosure of sensitive information can occur in an indirect, non-invasive manner in such SNSs platforms (Weir et al., 2011). Furthermore, deliberations in enclave spaces can happen without attracting the surveillance strategies of over-zealous state machinery.

Tanner et al, (2013) found the contribution of SNSs deliberations to be user-dependent. This is compounded by technologies' ability to improve access to specific, timely and relevant information on a particular subject. The frequency and ease of accessing information via SNSs can significantly reduce the costs, inconvenience, and time associated with deliberations (Kenski & Stroud, 2017). However, this type of cost reduction argument is uni-dimensional and ignores the initial cost of buying smartphones and Internet connectivity (Aktas et al., (2014); thus, underplaying the true costs of information access. The accessibility of digital

technologies challenges the Habermasian normative ideals of inclusivity, as SNSs platforms further empower those with pre-existing advantages of access (Head, 2007, Kahne & Bowyer, 2018; Lim, 2009). SNSs deliberations can correct conflicting viewpoints (Robertson et al., 2013). Sometimes, the confluence of conflicting opinions leaves users more confused and in a dilemma (Ellison et al., 2007). The deliberation on governance issues demands a relatively deep level of cognitive involvement which some SNSs users may not readily possess. Encountering discordant views and opinions creates an information filtering mechanism where users ignore discordant information. Information filtering is a subjective process that is dependent on selective exposure and confirmation bias (Gustafsson, 2012; Park, 2015; Theocharis & Lowe, 2016). Information filtered through trusted others does not always have a positive influence in a deliberative context (Ljepava et al., 2013).

SNSs are significantly instrumental in facilitating fluid and sustained participation in deliberative governance (Arriagada et al., 2012). They extend deliberations beyond actual physical forums and help to overcome geographical barriers that limit reach and accessibility (Kim et al., 2015). Whilst SNSs has significantly lowered engagement costs; this has not necessarily translated to higher participation in deliberations (García-cabot et al., 2016; Robertson et al., 2013; Stein et al., 2008). SNSs deliberations enable governance activists to coordinate deliberations more effectively (Newton, 2016). Deliberative governance is further enhanced by SNSs capacity to transmit both visual, image, and textual discussion (Winter & Rathnayake, 2017).

2.8 Conclusion

Deliberation governance is the contestation of governance discourses in the public sphere. The Kenyan constitution considers deliberative governance as a prescriptive solution to polarisation in Kenya. However, the outcomes of a deliberative governance process depend on the

platform's structure and the quality of deliberations. The deliberative structure can be classified as either micro and macro. In micro deliberative structures, the discussion is more structured and happens in informal forums, involve small to medium groups, and aim to achieve consensus and decision making. In contrast, macro deliberative structures entail a broader scale and scope of deliberation that mostly happens in informal contexts, otherwise known as public spheres. Discussions are informal, involve many participants and aimed to shape public opinions. Whether in micro or macro deliberative structures, deliberations in both platforms can affect polarisation. For instance, scholars have established a positive correlation between the group size and consensus in deliberations (Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011).

The quality of deliberations is also defined by adherence to a group's deliberative norms. Deliberative norms are informal guidelines of behaviour and the agreed code of conduct that ensures orderliness in group discussions for better outcomes. Deliberative norms are derived from the Habermasian deliberative ideals and include diversity, inclusivity, tolerance, civility, moderation, and heterogeneity of viewpoints (Habermas, 1996, 2003, 2005). Various scholars have established that deliberation in SNSs platforms falls short of the Habermasian deliberative ideals. Indeed, deliberations in SNSs platforms have often been characterised by incivility, intolerance, disinformation, and partisan discussions. For instance, incivility significantly reduces the possibility of compromise and thereby enhance the chances of group polarisation and intergroup hostility. Regular exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints subsequently moderates and possibly alters a group's position on critical governance matters. Exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints and its impact on polarisation is the basis of selective exposure and echo chamber theories.

However, some studies focusing on specific SNSs platforms argue that the Habermasian normative ideals reflect an unrealistic expectation in contemporary deliberative contexts. Their negative perspective is based on the expectations that citizens will be rational,

reciprocate, and respectful with heterogeneous others is problematic and unrealistic in already polarised contexts. Further, the expectation that deliberations in SNSs platforms will reflect moderated opinions and rational discourse is also entirely incompatible with three factors: the nature and history of polarising issues, structural diversities of most societies, and the SNSs affordances. Existing research on the Habermasian ideals fails to take into account the fact that SNSs are dynamic platforms. They can be heterogeneous or homogeneous, informal or formal, and asynchronous or synchronous. The above SNSs features are compounded by the context of deliberations and the nature of group formation especially in online platforms. Group formation and polarisation can be understood through divergent individual, group, and societal level perspectives. Therefore, group polarisation is a cognitive concept reflected by attitudinal polarisation, perceptual polarisation, and as affective polarisation.

Group polarisation is a phenomenon where members of a deliberating group move toward a more extreme point in the direction of the members' pre-deliberation positions. Based on existing research, the chapter established seven key indicators of polarisation: *binary thinking*, where group participants favour an 'us versus them' position in WhatsApp deliberations; *motivated reasoning*, where group participants only appreciate evidence that supports their position during deliberations; *in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination*, where the in-group's participants favour those with similar viewpoints and positions and disagree with out-group regardless of the facts; *confirmatory bias*, disagreeing with other participants for oppositional reasons despite existing basic facts and evidence; *partisanship*, an inclination to staunchly support and favour a group's viewpoint and opinion over alternatives; *social comparison*, group participants compare and take certain positions because they want to be perceived favourably by other group members; and *groupthink*, where the desire for group harmony and conformity shapes the group's position during deliberations.

Chapter Three

Polarisation and Deliberative Governance in Kenya

3.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the history, evolution, and challenges of polarisation and deliberative governance in Kenya. A brief history and background of polarisation in Kenya indicate that colonial administrative tactics, such as divide and rule, exacerbated the level of ethnic polarisation that existed before. After the British left, post-colonial Kenya's political elite continued to tackle the challenges of polarisation through initiatives that aimed to manage the structural diversity of the fragile nation. Structural diversity in Kenya includes: ethnic, religious, ideological, regional, and socio-demographic differences that are part of a complex socio-cultural composition of Kenyan peoples. This chapter focuses on the legislative and administrative initiatives that were used to tackle polarisation right from independence. However, the majority of these initiatives failed for various reasons including: low funding, bad politicking, and resource mismanagement. Ultimately, the issues that had caused decades of social discontent, political antagonism, and deep polarisation since independence flared up just after the 2007/8 general election. The result was post-election violence (more than 1000 people died) that caused the nation to seek lasting solutions through a constitutional review process. The result was the promulgation of a new constitution in 2010 which prescribed devolution of power and deliberative governance via media platforms as key solutions to depolarisation. The chapter analyses this constitutional plan and how far it has made an impact on polarisation via deliberation and devolution especially at the county level. The specific focus of the chapter is on the 2010 constitutional clauses and the County Government legislative Acts of 2012 that highlight the role of the media, both mainstream and social media, to ameliorate the state of polarisation in Kenya.

3.1 Background and History of Polarisation in Kenya

The history of polarisation in Kenya starts with an understanding of the ethno-political context of the post-colonial African state. The Berlin Conference of 1884⁶ resulted in the creation of indiscriminate state boundaries that artificially unified diverse, non-cohesive, ethnic communities and cultures within singular state boundaries (Craven, 2015). This happened despite the complex socio-ethnic composition, political makeup (Gustafson, 1995), varied cultural beliefs and minimal potential for cohesion and co-existence (Mukhongo, 2015). The catastrophic result of this process meant that already highly polarised communities had to work in predefined political spaces, making it difficult to achieve the elusive concept of a united nation-state (Branch & Cheeseman, 2006; Kiarie, 2004). The Berlin Conference paved the way for European powers like Britain to divide, explore, conquer and manage territories without a good understanding of the socio-cultural, political and economic dynamics of the native communities.

Most studies that have explored the origin of polarisation and conflicts in Kenya have employed grievance-based models, which emphasise political, social, and economic deprivation or discrimination as the main sources (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009; Ogude, 2002; Snow & Taylor, 2015; Whitaker & Giersch, 2009). Often ignored are the differences in the style of colonial administration enforced by imperial nations and its effects on structural diversity and post-colonial conflicts. Colonial policies, like the ‘divide and rule’ policy⁷ as enforced by the British in Kenya, had already further influenced the conceptual understanding of heterogeneity and polarisation of ethno-political identities (Branch & Cheeseman, 2006). Effectively, Makinda (1996) notes that the divide and rule policy slowed down the establishment of a national liberation movement towards Kenya’s independence. Also, the

⁶ The Berlin Conference happened between the years 1884–1885. It is also called the scramble and partition of Africa because the major European powers divided and formalised the claims over African territory.

⁷ Divide and rule is a policy of maintaining control over one's subjects or opponents by promoting dissent between them, and ensuring they do not unite in opposition.

colonial administrative structure was designed to minimise inter-ethnic collaborations and ensure reduced inter-ethnic interaction (Boone, 2012; Steeves, 2011). Kenya, therefore, approached independence with communities characterised by fractured political inclinations and fragmented social-ethnic identities (Snow & Taylor, 2015).

During independence, socio-political polarisation resulted in the formation of two main political parties (KANU and KADU) with different ideological principles (Steeves, 2011). One of the key points of divergence between the two parties was around the devolution of powers and decentralisation of decision making (Boone, 2012). Specifically, the issue revolved around whether to abolish or retain the colonial centralist state structures to support national unity. KADU propagated the *Majimbo*⁸ system which emphasised de-centralisation and devolution (Anderson, 2005; Gerhart, 1994; Kanyinga, 2014). It further advocated the recognition of regional diversities to promote a feeling of inclusion in the young fledgling post-independent Kenya. KANU, on the other hand, argued for a unified, centralised nation-state (Anderson, 2005; Gerhart, 1994; Kanyinga, 2014). After winning the first post-independence general elections, KANU's practices and administrative structure enhanced existing regional cleavages (Anderson, 2005). Furthermore, KANU's approach to resource governance and politically instigated policies exacerbated ethnic exclusion (Ajulu, 2010). Essentially, the political elite enriched their ethnic communities and oppressed political opponents (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017).

The centralised system of government, aggravated by the personalisation and misuse of presidential powers, orchestrated state plunder and low resource governance (Anderson, 2005; Cottrel-ghai et al., 2013; Lynch, 2014; Mutahi & Kimari, 2017). It also enhanced a culture of impunity where political elites sabotaged efforts towards transparency and accountability. Such actions further deepened socio-ethnic polarisation. Centralisation strengthened the misconception that presidential powers constituted the singular way communities could access

⁸ *Majimbo* is a swahili word that refers to the process of political decentralisation and devolution of power.

state resources and other state-afforded benefits (Lynch, 2014). Right from independence, Kenya's political elite have consistently exploited exclusionary ethnic tactics. They have also occasionally deployed divisive political rhetoric leading to violent displacement of people to reshape electoral geography. This has occurred especially around elections campaign periods (1992, 1997, 2007/8) (Berg-Schlosser, 2017; Khadiagala, 2017; Long et al., 2013). Mueller (2008) notes that the ideological perception that some ethnic communities are consistently dominant in politics and benefit from resource distribution has threatened Kenya's social fabric since independence.

Meanwhile, marginalised communities in Kenya continue to confront acute poverty, and widespread inequalities since independence (Kanyinga, 2014). Perennially, most of such communities have experienced a resurgence of ethno-nationalism ahead of every election cycle, hoping their own political elites will ascend to power (Whitaker & Giersch, 2009). Kenya's political elite are fragmented and have resorted to populism, propaganda, and manipulation of genuine economic grievances (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009). They have also used enduring historical injustices and disaffection to fuel discontent and win the vote of the lower demographics within their ethnic communities (Kanyinga, 2014). A number of legislative and administrative initiatives have been implemented to try and remedy polarisation in Kenya since independence (see the section below). Following the failure of these remedial initiatives, a rationale for recognising, accommodating and appreciating socio-political differences and ethnic diversity was much needed. It was considered a panacea for dealing with underlying social grievances, ethnic polarisation, and political tensions driving conflict (Ghai, 2008). The Constitution of Kenya Review Commission (CKRC) reported a widespread feeling of marginalisation and victimisation among various ethnic communities (Carrier & Kochore, 2014), which was attributed to political affiliation and unjust deprivation of resources due to low governance structures (Muriu, 2014).

One of the principal objectives of the 2010 constitution was to recognise and appreciate Kenyan diversity by devolving and decentralising government services (Carrier & Kochore, 2014; Cornell & D'Arcy, 2014; Ghai, 2008). The 2010 constitution sought to substantially remodel the structure of government and thereby reduce the concentration of power and resources in the executive presidency. The aim was to distribute the patronage power by the executive presidency and end the all-or-nothing contexts for national leadership that had contributed to violent elections in the past. Since the adoption of the constitution in 2010, two general elections have been held under the administrative structures, constitutional institutions and a devolved system.

Despite the constitutional dispensation, polarised factions and uncompromising political blocs have emerged yet again. These factions have resulted from a political, resource, and ideological contestation (Nizam & Muriu, 2015). Like before, the political factions were structured as temporary political outfits having a form of unity but disguising their real intention to merely achieve electoral victory (Carrier & Kochore, 2014). In both elections (2013 and 2017), however, there has been tensions but no violence. Following the irregularities and annulment of election results by the Supreme Court in 2017, wider disenchantment and divides were also witnessed (Carrier & Kochore, 2014). Considering its prescription as part of the solutions to polarisation in Kenya, it is interesting to note that various reports blamed SNSs for exacerbating and intensifying polarisation in a way that undermined electoral integrity (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017).

3.2 Structural Diversity and Polarisation in Kenya

As noted in the section above, polarisation has been a constant feature of Kenya's governance and political architecture, whereby regional, ideological, ethnic, and other forms of identity strongly influence responses to social, economic, and political issues. Evidently, one of

Kenya's challenges to achieving depolarisation can be explained through the failure to manage structural diversity over the past few decades. The level of polarisation in Kenyan society is influenced by the constantly changing dynamics of ethnic, religious, regional, and ideological diversity. This section examines how the interplay between the country's structural diversity, identity politics, and low governance have impeded efforts towards national cohesion and integration.

3.2.1. Structural Diversity of Kenyan Society

Kenyan society consists of loosely integrated multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-racial communities (Kiarie, 2004). The structural diversity of Kenyan society can be argued to consist of: ethnic, religious, socio-demographic, regional, and ideological forms of diversity. All these forms of diversity are critical in the contextual understanding of polarisation in Kenya. First, ethnicity describes all the aspects associated with a culturally constructed notion of group identity (Obala & Mattingly, 2014). It is the way in which the cultural and social aspects of a society intersect with one another through the interaction of distinct ethnic groups (Bedasso, 2015). Ethnic diversity in Kenya has very serious implications for governance and democracy. One consistent challenge is how to combine the majority rule and still accommodate minority rights in such a pluralistic society (Ogude, 2002). This challenge is compounded by the primordial understandings of ethnicity as a means of achieving difference, advantages or exclusivity, for social and political expediency is common in Kenya. The instrumentalisation of ethnic identity as the primary means of political mobilisation is an inescapable fact of Kenya's socio-political dynamics (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2012). This has resulted in what is referred to as politicised ethnicity and it describes the deliberate politicisation and mobilisation of ethnic identities to achieve certain economic and political objectives (Ajulu, 2010; Klopp, 2002; Ogude, 2002).

The diverse ethnic groups in Kenya can be categorised into three main ethno-linguistic and cultural groupings, namely, Cushitic-speaking, Bantu-speaking, and Nilotic-speaking groups. They not only speak different dialects and languages but also occupy diverse geographical/ecological zones (CRECO, 2012; Kanyinga, 2014; Makoloo, 2005; Ombaka, 2015). There are 42 ethnic communities based on the three main ethno-linguistic and cultural groupings. Out of 42 ethnicities in Kenya, only five are considered dominant based on their total share of the entire national population. Based on the 2019 population census, the major ethnic groups whose individual share of national population exceeds 10% are the Kikuyu (22%), Luhya (14%), Kalenjin (12%), Luo (13%), and Kamba (11%) (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Their combined share of the national population exceeds 64%. Therefore, the absence of a single numerically dominant group, and the relative equality in size of the five main ethnic tribes is the source of ethnic politicisation in Kenya (Nyaura, 2018).

In view of five tribes with near equal numerical strength, ethnic diversity enforces strong ties within, rather than among, groups, where the dominance of one group is achieved over others (Sahle, 2012). However, some ethnic communities consist of several sub-groups (for example the Kalenjins have nine subgroups) which further complicates the elements of ethnic diversity (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). As earlier noted, ethnic dominance is achieved through the numerical strength of one ethnic community over the other. Politicised ethnicity, therefore, drives party coalitions and power sharing agreements (see the section below). The challenge with ethnicity in a polarised context like Kenya is the danger of collapsing negative issues regarding people's identity and diversity using highly atrophied and simplistic notions without considering a whole range of contextually specific issues (Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2012; Gerhart, 1994; Omulo & Williams, 2018).

Understanding these dynamics, political elites in Kenya tend to mobilise and campaign for political support based on an ethnic identity (Kabiri, 2014). Ethnic identity defines how and

why the political elite seek, retain, or cede political power (Ajulu, 2010; Carrier & Kochore, 2014). Ethnic voting is also linked to the ethnic composition of political parties ranging from party leaders to the grassroots members. Therefore, political ethnicisation and its consequences on polarisation in Kenya are the result of a very complex and interconnected host of factors including: colonial policies and practices, post-independence political practices, and historical experiences and grievances (Ajulu, 2010; Carrier & Kochore, 2014; Khadiagala, 2017; Klopp, 2002; Omulo & Williams, 2018). Other factors include the centralisation of executive powers, lack of coherent party ideologies, and the lack of strong institutions including electoral bodies (Leighley & Vedlitz, 2017). Some of these factors can be categorised as institutional, historical, administrative, political, and social in nature and are further explored in the sections below.

The second aspect of structural diversity that coincides with ethnic diversity relates to regional disparities (Ogude, 2002). Regional boundaries coincide with ethnic settlement patterns that determine resource allocation formulas as required by the constitution. Ethnically marginalised and lowly developed regions blame post-independence governments for neglect and being underfunded (Kanyinga, 2014). After independence, ethnicity was viewed in the context of regionalism. This is why devolution (also known as *Majimbo*) was among the first proposed initiatives to dissolve power from the two dominant communities at the time: The Kikuyu and Luo communities. The unequal distribution of state resources created infrastructure inequalities and generated resentment across marginalised ethnic areas (Kabiri, 2014). This intensified polarisation and conflicts because access to and control of political power was viewed to directly influence access to state resources (Nyaura, 2018). Since independence, some regions in Kenya continue to suffer due to unbalanced regional, economic and social development (Burgess et al., 2015). Despite various policy interventions, the government has failed to reverse the discriminatory and divisive effects of colonial policies that had privileged one region over another and widened the disparities and imbalances between regions. After

decades of experimenting with different socio-economic policies, regional disparities and imbalances represent one possible cause of polarisation and conflict.

It is not a coincidence that the regions with the lowest proportion of the population living below the poverty line are Central Kenya and the Rift Valley provinces. The two leading provinces, in terms of affluence, are among the largest ethnic populations proportionate to the national population and have always been represented in political leadership since independence (Leighley & Vedlitz, 2017; Omulo & Williams, 2018). Another form of regional disparity is between urban and rural areas where those living in rural areas experience comparatively minimal resource allocation and higher rates of poverty. In the 2007/8 election, Kenya experienced post-election violence which was predicated on extremely weak institutions and ethnicised resource governance (Atanda & Iyi, 2011; Finkel et al., 2012). While the 2010 constitution established radical changes in resource governance and granted more voice to marginalised communities through deliberations and participation in the devolved system, it also creates new avenues with a possibility of deeper marginalisation and disparities in the new county structures (see the section below). For example, the establishment of political and administrative units is still driven by population sizes. Hence, county allocation of revenues depends on population-based formulas and calculations (CRECO, 2014; Kanyinga, 2014; Lind, 2018). Equity dictates that larger populations should access comparatively more resources. Popularly christened as ‘tyranny of numbers’, majoritarianism is problematically transferred to the architecture of resource governance (Cunningham, 2002; Harper, 2017; MCK, 2015).

The combination of ethnic and regional disparities in Kenya can be explained from a number of perspectives: geography-based explanation which attributes regional disparities to the migratory patterns of various ethnic communities. It states that the differences in economics and the resulting resource endowment are because of the regions where the ethnic group settled (Robinson & Berkes, 2011). Region of settlement influenced resource availability, economic

activity, climatic conditions and capitalist penetration. The class-based explanation which argues that wealthy participants and communities have dominated politics and resource governance since independence (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009). This dominance has skewed the distribution of resources in favour of areas whose populations dominate leadership positions at any given point. Another explanation relates to access to public services and social amenities such as education, infrastructure, and health care provided by the state. As earlier discussed, such resources and public services have been controlled by specific dominant communities since independence as well (Gerhart, 1994; Halakhe, 2013; Mbithi, Ndambuki, & Juma, 2018). This is interlinked to the struggle to control the state, government, and other constitutional institutions through discriminatory and exclusionary policies (Speich, 2009).

The third form of structural diversity is ideological and reflects systems of belief, political programmes, and specific objectives adopted with the purpose of legitimising social and political action (Kanyinga, 2014). Unlike the highly categorised and defined ideological party systems in the US and the UK, Kenya's political parties are more fragmented by ethnic affiliation than by political ideologies (Ogude, 2002). However, Kenyan parties are essentially personalised political outfits devoid of a coherent governance ideology, independent structures or internal democracy. While few parties are able to articulate their party positions on various issues, most engage in divisive and banal politics that basically further fragment and polarise the society to achieve popularity (Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2012). Incoherent party ideology is considered the reason why ethnic mobilisation remains the default approach during elections (Carrier & Kochore, 2014; Ohman & Lintari, 2015). Some scholars, however, argue that the fluidity of Kenya's political alliances and the lack of coherent ideological positions prevents the emergence of a stable balance of forces, thus leading to polarisation (Ishiyama et al., 2016; Obala & Mattingly, 2014).

There are various political, and governance issues that have polarised Kenyans into ideological factions in the past decade. The constitutional review process in itself was polarising because of contentious issues like abortion, the administrative structures of government, Kadhi courts,⁹ resource governance, place of party coalitions, and review of county boundaries all of which reflected deep-seated ideological divergence (Carrier & Kochore, 2014; Cornell & D'Arcy, 2014; Hassan, 2015; Kanyinga, 2014; Ohman & Lintari, 2015; Steeves, 2011). Periodic elections are equally polarised and heavily contested every five years with repetitively volatile consequences. In the past, dialogue has strategically resolved inter-community conflicts and achieved stability before and after elections. Therefore, commentators have suggested the solution to political, tribal, economic, and religious animosity, is honest, open, and reflective national dialogue and deliberations between citizens, communities and the political leadership (Benesch, 2014; Gutiérrez-Romero, 2012; Long et al., 2013). Deliberations were thus considered a solution to curbing negative ethnicity, promoting accountability, empowering communities, and fostering patriotism.

The last form of structural diversity in Kenya reflects its religious composition with 83% of the population being Christian (Protestant 47.7%, Catholic 23.4%, and other Christian 11.9%), 11.2% Muslim, 1.7% African traditional religions, while the rest are unspecified (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Kenya's Muslim community, being in the minority, has long claimed socio-political and economic discrimination by Christian-dominated governments since independence. Whereas a clear separation between church/religion and state exists, according to the constitution, religion drives polarisation when differing religious positions are directly tied to competing political interests (Kimani et al., 2013; Kjær, 2014; Whitaker & Giersch, 2009). Moreover, religious identities in Kenya have become significant and effective platforms from which to achieve ideological mobilisation

⁹ Kadhi's courts are a form of court systems in Kenya that enforce specific limited rights of family, inheritance, and succession among the Muslims communities.

which permeates secular and political contestations and conflicts. Religious groups and organisations such as SUPKEM and NCKK¹⁰ can enter into the political arena either to advocate for collective religious values or to defend their unique, temporal interests, thus generating polarisation in the process (Kimani et al., 2013; Kjær, 2014).

Despite the diverse religious identities in Kenya and the appearance of neutrality, it seems that the government grants more attention to the mainline Christian churches and specific brotherhoods of Islam to drive national discourse (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009). Minority religious identities appear to be subordinated which is a recipe for polarisation and potentially violent sectarian confrontations. In theory, the constitution demands that bodies including political parties reflect a national character; it outlaws the formation of social associations, and political parties on the basis of language, religion, or race (Kimani et al., 2013). Yet, despite efforts towards inclusivity, differing religious beliefs, ideologies, and influence have permeated every aspect of political thinking to the extent that it was viewed negatively in the truth, justice and reconciliation commission report recommendations of 2013.

3.2.2. Impact of Structural Diversity and Polarisation in Kenya

There are different ways in which Kenyan structural diversities, are linked to the various forms of polarisation mentioned in Chapter 2 (affective, attitudinal, ideological and group polarisation). First, structural diversity is likely to deepen the level of affective polarisation, which in turn, strengthens ethnic tendencies where the loyalty to in-group results in conflict and antagonism towards the out-groups. Affective polarisation in Kenya is characterised by accumulated rifts that reflect deeply unresolved social, political, and historical issues. These issues are often revived and constantly reused to arouse polarised feeling around issues that are pertinent during electioneering periods. Affective polarisation is, therefore, highly likely

¹⁰ NCKK, meaning the National Council of Churches of Kenya is a fellowship of Protestant churches and Christian organisations registered in Kenya.

during party coalition formations when the diverse nature of intergroup party dynamics plays out because party members are loyal to their in-group (Kanyinga, 2014). Ironically, party alliances and coalitions were initially thought to aggregate ethnic inclusivity, enhance broad representation, and achieve depolarisation (Khadiagala, 2017; Lynch, 2014). Affective polarisation in Kenyan parties arose from variegated movements and coalitions that reflected deep ethnic and regional divisions. This legacy has not disappeared in the era of competitive multi-party politics inaugurated in the early 1990s (Khadiagala, 2017). These coalitions have arrested the evolution of parties along more coherent, predictable and institutional lines.

Instead of coalescing around common principles and ideals to boost their competitiveness, Kenyan parties are affectively polarised opportunistic machines for ethnic alliance and coalition building, a process that frequently engenders instability rather than predictability in political competition (Kramon & Posner, 2011; Mueller, 2008; Onyebadi, 2012). Affective polarisation in Kenya is also more likely to be driven more by cultural identity dynamics than by ideological issues. During electioneering periods, the media often creates a perception of affective polarisation when it makes reference to a ‘two-horse-race’ to describe fiercely contested elections between parties (Kasara, 2013). While such descriptions heighten the stakes for participants, the fluidity of political coalitions in Kenya prevents the emergence of a stable and strong balance of forces on both sides of a polarising boundary. Considering that elections in Kenya are, to a large extent, driven by personalities, the ethnic and ideological differences between political elite affect the citizens’ affective orientations toward them.

Secondly, the fierce competition for state resources means that democratic processes like voting in a structurally diverse context translate into zero-sum perceptions (Cornell & D’Arcy, 2014; Ghai, 2008; Gutiérrez-Romero, 2012). Perception of politics and governance as zero-sum contests increases the social distance and enhances group polarisation. This was evident during the 2007/2008 mediations leading to the power sharing agreement in

government (Obel Hansen, 2013). Achieving a negotiated deal during the negotiations was challenging because of hard-line positions between Party of National Unity (PNU) and Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Group polarisation driven by an ethnic perspective is perpetrated by a struggle to adopt a colonially imposed socio-political configuration of nationhood that instead yields factionalism (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009). The contests between ethnic and religious groups in some counties decreases the willingness to cooperate, concede, and compromise with the political out-group (Schreiber, 2016). The place of deliberations with a possibility of consensus in such scenarios is often missing and can lead to actual conflict. Proponents of devolution in Kenya have argued that it will promote ethnic peace by removing the zero-sum nature of resource distribution and national electoral contests (Ajulu, 2010; Kramon & Posner, 2011; Mueller, 2008). In contrast, devolution simply shifts the locus of resource governance, political competition, and ethnic conflict to local levels (Nyaura, 2018). In Kenya, attitudinal and ideological polarisation due to structural diversity can frustrate technical exercises such as population censuses. Inclusion of various aspects of structural diversity such as people's ethnicity and religion often ignite contested census results due to claims of biased enumeration (Amutabi, 2013).

Thirdly, attitudinal polarising rhetoric centred on 'us versus them' leads to alignment of group interests around one critical social cleavage. This form of attitudinal and group polarisation suppresses and reduces the place and importance of other structural diversities and cross-cutting cleavages. For instance, Cottrel-Ghai et al., (2013), making reference to the 2007/2008 post-election violence, argued that the ethnic diversity at the time emphasised attitudes related to cross-cutting differences. Such emphasis reinforced a multiplicity of differences whereby ethnic groups increasingly perceived politics through positions of the in-group and out-group. In Kenya, ethnicity provides the simplest foundation for attitudinal divergence and the construction of in-group and out-group identities. Such attitudinal

polarisation means that conflicts based on structural diversity, especially relating to ethnicity, state resources, and political power, are often seen as unbridgeable scenarios, as exemplified in Bungoma, Wajir, and Mandera counties (Khadiagala, 2017). 'It is our turn to eat' is a common in-group slogan that reflects the attitudinal polarisation of ethnic groups who coalesce to achieve control over resources and political power (Hassan, 2015; Kanyinga, 2014; Lieberman., 2014). Attitudinal polarisation in Kenya is also evident in some of the stereotypes that exploit negative ethnic and religious characterisation of differences in society to enhance a perceptive split on key issues. These stereotypes were used to drive sensationalist rumours and narratives that perpetrated ethnic conflicts in counties like Nakuru, Eldoret, and Kericho during the 1992,1997, and 2007/8 campaigns (Omulo & Williams, 2018).

In sum, all these forms of polarisation have diverse effects on the management of Kenya's structural diversity. For instance, ideological and group polarisation in Kenya threatens the governability of ethnically diverse regions and the state of cohesion in these areas. According to Tiyaambe (2010), politically motivated exclusion of marginalised ethnic communities from state-sanctioned development inevitably drives discontent, polarisation, and the potential for real conflict. Ethnicity translates into unhealthy inter-community competition in governance and politics (Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2013). Holmquist & Oendo (2001) support this observation. These circumstances are often compounded by structural and systemic processes and policies targeting entire communities for discrimination by the state (Ombaka, 2015). It is worsened through economic exclusion, political isolation and attendant social injustices (Omolo, 2015). Eventually, indigenous and minority groups become bitter and negatively impacted by the tide of persistent and systematic exclusionary politics (Sheely, 2015). The Ogiek community, for instance, is comparatively less developed and involved in governance due to systematic exclusion (Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2013). Some ethnic groups like the Oromo, Rendile, and Ogiek have always lacked a single representative at any level of governance due

to numerical disadvantages (Carrier & Kochore, 2014). Some scholars argue that Kenya is not polarised because of diverse ethnic groupings, rather it is divided because different ethnic communities relate differently to the state's natural and productive resources (Miguel & Gugerty, 2005).

3.3. Managing Structural Diversity and Polarisation in Kenya

The state has adopted and implemented various legislative and administrative initiatives to manage structural diversity and achieve depolarisation in Kenya. These are categorised into two types: post-independence legislative and administrative initiatives, and the constitutional review process, 2010. Considering that structural diversity and polarisation have made Kenya's budding democracy very fragile (Ghai et al., 2013), post-independence legislative and administrative initiatives have achieved diverse outcomes. The key characteristic that cuts across these remedial initiatives is their aim to achieve inclusivity and enhance citizen deliberations. The failure of various post-independence initiatives culminated in the constitutional review process in 2010. In some ways, the constitution drew on the experiences of previous initiatives and integrated them into a more solid legislative foundation that was less easy for the political elite to manipulate. However, it is unclear whether the structures and processes established through the constitution have succeeded in achieving depolarisation a decade later.

3.3.1. Legislative and Administrative Initiatives

Deliberative governance has undergone significant evolution as a critical concept in public administration in post-independence Kenya. Legislative and administrative efforts towards inclusive deliberation were driven by the utility and applicability of deliberation as an alternative method for dispute resolution, conflict management, and depolarisation (Willis & Chome, 2014). The Kenyan government and various international-donor funded organisations

have progressively introduced various kinds of deliberative governance over the past three decades. This trend is partly a response to the increasing demands for transparency and accountability in resource management (Sahle, 2012), due to corruption and the progressively declining trust in government and governance institutions (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). Other significant drivers of deliberation include heightened awareness and literacy rates, information flow, and interaction through social media in Kenya's contemporary communities who demand meaningful involvement in policy decisions that affect them (Wampler & McNulty, 2011).

Noting the contested nature of elections in Kenya, some rightly argue that periodic voting, (every five years), is grossly insufficient to guarantee the election of leaders who will implement policies that will drive national cohesion and lead to depolarisation (Long et al., 2013). Doubts exist relating to the interests of elected political elites and the extent to which they represent the public interest. Apart from being hotly contested, periodic elections in Kenya rely on the aggregation of pre-determined preferences as opposed to deliberated and collective decisions (Lind & Howell, 2010). Similarly, Kenya's political elite and key decision makers have become increasingly aware of the advantages of guided public debate in micro deliberative structures (World Bank, 2015). Some governance institutions are equally mandated to draw from various experiences and information from public knowledge as part of their mandate in polity formation. Furthermore, the push for public deliberation in policy is supported by incremental reform in public management agendas that emphasise the place of 'service users' involvement in the case of public goods (Hassan, 2015; Lind, 2018; Mbithi et al., 2018); the constitutional review process is a good example (see the section below).

Table 1 details a chronology of the key legislative and administrative initiatives that have progressively established deliberation structures as components of participatory initiatives in Kenya.

Table 3. 1: Timelines of Key Deliberative Initiatives in Kenya (1963-2019)

Deliberative Initiative	Year	Deliberative Structure	Headship	Objectives of Deliberation	Participants
<i>Majimbo</i>	1963	Micro & Macro	Regional Representatives	Participatory development, regional equality, depolarisation	Select representatives and the public
Session paper No 10 of 1965	1965	Micro	Government Bureaucrats	Inclusivity in post-independence development	Select government bureaucrats
District Focus for Rural Development	1983	Micro	District Officers	Decentralised planning & citizen-driven development	Government bureaucrats and the public
The Physical Planning Act, 1996	1996	Micro & Macro	Government Bureaucrats	Development planning & resource distribution	Select representatives and the public
Local Authorities Service Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP)	2001	Micro	Heads of Local Authorities	Community participation in managing Local Authority Transfer Fund	Select members of the public
Constituency Development Fund (CDF).	2004	Macro	Members of Parliament	Deliberative & participatory governance at the constituency level	Members of the public
Devolved systems through constitutional review	2010	Micro & Macro	County Heads	Deliberative governance at the county level	Select representatives and the public

Source: Researcher, 2020

The first attempt at deliberations in Kenya was the implementation of the *Majimbo* system of devolution in 1963 (Mukhongo, 2015). *Majimbo* is a Westminster-style system of public administration with multiple levels of government (Gustafson, 1995). Eight autonomous regions under *Majimbo* formed the basis for micro- and macro-deliberation structures in Kenya's post-independence deliberative paradigm (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009). *Majimbo* was able to reveal the critical areas of divergence in Kenya's structural diversity being the first post-independence initiative. It was critical in identifying three governance challenges to be tackled by the first post-independent government including: poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. It was a short-lived initiative and did not achieve much in terms of managing structural diversities and achieving depolarisation. The challenges of *Majimbo* included high rates of illiteracy,

meaning citizens were unable to fully understand their rights and responsibilities to ensure substantive deliberations (Holmquist & Oendo, 2001). Further, access to information was restricted and safeguards entrenched by enacting the Official Secrets Act of 1968 (Lynch & Crawford, 2011). The factional political bickering that characterised KANU, KADU politics eventually led to its inoperability. The conditions established under *Majimbo* did not facilitate open, reasoned, and equal deliberations on governance issues (Mueller, 2014).

After the abolition of the *Majimbo* system in 1965, the government developed session paper number 10 of 1965 (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009). Here the aspiration was planned economic, political, and social policies rooted in traditional African forms of solidarity and deliberations (Speich, 2009). The pillar of the sessions paper was public consultation and deliberation to generate common development priorities through micro- and macro-deliberation structures (Lind & Howell, 2010). The session paper succeeded in achieving inclusivity, structured deliberations, and implementable decisions, according to Mueller (2014) and Sheely (2015). However, further progress under the framework of deliberative governance under the session paper failed because of a communist tag during the ideological confrontation of the Cold War (Mukhongo, 2015). Furthermore, immediately after 1965, Kenya became a de facto one-party state (Kelsall, 1996). Just like *Majimbo*, implementation was hampered by ethnic segregation, literacy issues, limited resources, and lack of clear developmental priorities (Speich, 2009). The one-party regime was distrustful and unaccommodating of criticism including any form of citizen dissent even within the framework of deliberations and participation (Hassan, 2015; Holmquist et al., 2001; Mukhongo, 2015).

The third attempt at deliberation by the State was the District Focus for Rural Development, popularly known as DFRD. This was a relatively successful and comprehensive participation strategy which conclusively operationalised after 1983 (Nizam & Muriu, 2015). It established a combination of micro- and macro-deliberation structures through a five-tier

participatory structure consisting of the district, divisional, sub-locational and locational levels (Burgess et al., 2015). DFRD succeeded in increasing deliberations between government officers and the local communities compared to previous initiatives. Government officers were heavily involved in planning and advising on the implementation of community plans (Nizam & Muriu, 2015). However, citizens often felt minimally involved and merely embedded for political convenience rather than beneficially engaged in the process (Ogude, 2002). Proper structures for implementing and monitoring deliberation outputs were lacking or weak (Kimeli et al., 2014; Steeves, 2011). DFRD was further affected by resource constraints and persistent inequalities between ethnic communities that made it markedly difficult to achieve deliberative ideals (Nizam & Muriu, 2015; Steeves, 2011). Elite in bureaucratic positions manipulated and excessively controlled the process, making it a 'limp and ineffectual administrative ritual', according to Forde et al. (2012, p. 526). Deliberative ideals such as equality, reciprocity, and inclusiveness were marred by incivility and issue polarisation (Willis & Chome, 2014).

After 1983, several other participatory development strategies involving citizen deliberation emerged through policy enactments and pronouncements (Makinda, 1996). Based on their set-up, composition, implementation, and administration (Branch & Cheeseman, 2006), the guarantee of the sustainability and survival of such strategies was minimal (World Bank, 2015). Multi-party democracy in the 1990s was a significant step towards the re-introduction of progressive deliberative governance (Makinda, 1996). Financial donors pressured for citizen deliberations and involvement in their funded projects and, at the same time, press freedom improved significantly (Mbeke, 2008).

More efforts towards deliberative governance occurred in 1996 following the establishment of the Physical Planning Act, 1996. This act was progressive in that it provided an opportunity for communally moderated deliberation in creating and implementing concrete plans for development in different localities (Mitullah et., 2014). The Physical Planning Act,

1996 as a deliberative strategy, however, lacked vital community awareness and sensitisation in terms of the roles and responsibilities of the participants. Thus communities in very remote settings were unaware of it and marginalised in the process (Gustafson, 1995). Communities reported that the process was time taxing, politically unfeasible, and logistically complicated (Atieno et al., 2014). The decision-making process was slow and challenging to achieve (Lynch & Crawford, 2011).

A ministerial circular in 2001 introduced another deliberative governance model called the Local Authorities Service Delivery Action Plan (LASDAP) (Ghai, 2008). The priority of LASDAP was to enhance public deliberation and involvement towards contributions to identify projects on education, infrastructure, and health in local authorities (Muriu, 2014). The structure of LASDAP failed in its implementation because of political and financial challenges (Lynch & Crawford, 2011). Some scholars argue that the new regime in 2003 created a bigger platform for public deliberation in budgeting, policymaking and in other issues deemed contentious like resource mining and revenue allocation (Mapuva, 2015). Public deliberation also improved because civil society and the media also blossomed during this period (Lind & Howell, 2010).

The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) was another structured attempt at deliberative governance and participatory development. Members of parliament continue to manage CDF funds as a top-down rural development program (Ngacho & Das, 2014). Its legal provisions shape it into a model for decentralisation of development planning, deliberation, and inclusive implementation. Unlike other previous participatory processes, the CDF Act of 2004 anchors CDF in the law through an act of parliament. The act targets projects aimed at improving infrastructural development, and reducing levels of poverty at the constituency level. Principally, such projects are solely identified by communities through deliberative governance within a participatory framework (Ngacho & Das, 2014). However, the CDF

continues to face numerous challenges including: corruption (Kasara, 2013), political capture, low community participation (Kabiri, 2014), inadequate monitoring of fund utilisation (Oduor, Wanjiru, & Kisamwa, 2015) and partisan distribution of funds in constituencies (Kabiri, 2014).

3.3.2. Deliberative Governance and Constitutional Enshrinement

As indicated in Table 1 above, the most recent legislative and administrative remedial initiative was the constitutional review process in 2010. Before the constitutional dispensation of 2010, Kenya's governance policy continued to be centralised and ambivalent towards the minorities despite successive legislative and administrative attempts right from independence (Kanyinga, 2014). Successive regimes and political elite also pursued what appeared to be an 'ethnically blind' approach to national development without dealing with the divisive issues (Bing, 2015). Over time, the failure to effectively manage structural diversity enhanced deep fissures and acrimony between Kenyan communities (Carrier & Kochore, 2014).

The rigged elections in 2007/8 were a trigger rather than the main cause of violence that ensued. The post-election violence can be explained through three perspectives. First, it was an explosion of a society that had attempted to stay intact despite the glaring inequality, ethnic antagonism, rigged elections, polarised political processes, and historical injustices (Obel Hansen, 2013). Secondly, it was the effect of a series of failed legislative and administrative efforts to hold together a fractured society (Kimani et al., 2013). Lastly, it was also symptomatic of how Kenya was subjected to guided democracy bordering on authoritarianism, and the perpetuation of the interests by and for the majority (Finch et al., 2015). Hence, solving these challenges is what informed the constitutional review process, after the 2007/2008 post-election violence (Mueller, 2014).

Recognising decades of piecemeal governance reforms (Atieno et al., 2014), the Kenyan constitution was substantially reviewed in 2010 and received majority (67%) approval

in a referendum (Hassan, 2015). The constitution introduced a number of remedial measures to deal with polarisation and enhance national cohesion and integration. First, the constitution recognised that Kenyan society is structurally diverse and consists of distinctive groups, based on language, ethnicity, race or religious autonomy (Burgess et al., 2015). With this recognition, it sought to achieve consensus between the diverse groups through a deliberative and participatory process that brings all stakeholders into a governance process. This involved efforts to remedy the issue of proportional representation by creating layers of representative democracy at the national and county government (Carrier & Kochore, 2014). Secondly, the constitution redefined resource governance transferring some decision-making to the county assemblies away from the national assembly. This way, it created a form of elasticity in terms of policies and projects that were implemented at the county level (Ghai, 2015). It was hoped that this elasticity would dispel the rigidity of having centralised, top-down, and prescriptive distribution of state resources. The elimination of centralised resource distribution decisions was designed to avoid inherent structural and systematic biases that favoured one community over another (Nizam & Muriu, 2015).

Thirdly, the constitution entrenched clauses that defined the role of public participation and deliberative governance in informing, engaging, consulting, collaborating and empowering the citizenry in different ways (Berg-Schlosser, 2017; Finch et al., 2015; 2016; Kimeli et al., 2014). It made citizen deliberation and public participation mandatory in all governance processes including the appointment of public officials and constitutional office holders. It recognised the place of periodic elections, representative democracy and critical institutions such as the media and civil society in various stages of policy making (Mbithi et al., 2018). Fourthly, it sought to change the developmental crisis of historical imbalances that had encumbered the country's economic and social growth in the past by enhancing accountability,

transparency, equity, service delivery, and inclusiveness (Berg-Schlosser, 2017; Finch et al., 2015; 2016; Kimeli et al., 2014).

Lastly, it established a two-tier government (national and county government) approach geared towards structural administrative and governance reforms (Kramon & Posner, 2011). The two-tier approach, which is the focus of this study, anchors the devolution of power and decentralisation of authority as a system of government in Kenya (Hassan, 2015). It mandates county governments to pass legislation that promote the interests, priorities, and rights of minorities and marginalised communities in development programs (Hassan, 2015). Despite these constitutional changes, some challenges, including the localisation of corruption, increased polarisation, exacerbation of inter-communal conflict, and the inefficient duplication of resources, have resurfaced yet again (Boone, 2012; Cheeseman et al., 2014; Hassan, 2015; Hope, 2014; Kanyinga, 2014; Omulo & Williams, 2018). The section below examines the content of specific legislations that are relevant to this study.

3.4. The 2010 Constitutional Reform and Deliberation Governance

To begin with, Article 1(1) and Article 1(2) of the Constitution of Kenya 2010 (Government of Kenya, 2010) bestows sovereignty on the Kenyan people. The people's power is to be exercised in two ways: either directly through public participation or indirectly through democratic representations. The First Schedule (Article 6(1) of the Kenyan constitution) creates the national government and 47 county governments. Article 10(2) (a) of the constitution identifies the sharing of power and devolution as values and principles to guide Kenya's democratic governance. Kenya's devolution and decentralisation involve large-scale fiscal, political and administrative decentralisation (Burbidge, 2011; Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2012; Shrum et al., 2011). Furthermore, participation was established as a national value and a principle of public service in Articles 10(2a) and 232(1). Article 232(d) has guaranteed the

citizens' involvement in deliberative governance and the policy-making process. Further, Article 196(1)(b) calls on the County Assemblies to facilitate deliberations and public participation (see the section below).

Subsequent legislation, including the Public Finance Management Act (Government of Kenya, 2012b), the County Government Act (Government of Kenya, 2012a), and the Urban Areas and Cities Act (Government of Kenya, 2011), also incorporated public participation and deliberations in their core processes. These legislations decree participation and deliberations in all aspects of policy including determining budget priorities, drafting new legislation, and contributing to the audit of public-sector performance (Boone, 2012; Hassan, 2015; Kramon & Posner, 2011). In the newly devolved systems, deliberative governance and citizen participation are required in the review of local county expenditures and the submission of community petitions. County governments are tasked with ensuring that citizens receive relevant, timely, and comprehensive information for deliberation (Mbithi et al., 2018).

Furthermore, county governments are required to establish structures and mechanisms to guide the process of public participation and deliberative governance. County administrators are required to provide an annual report on citizen participation to the County Assembly. Recognising the potential lack of political goodwill, Article 232(1), (d) states that citizen participation in policy deliberation and the decision-making process is paramount and compulsory. Part (f), as earlier stated, provides for the accurate and timely provision of information to the public to enhance proper deliberations. The definition of accurate and timely provision of information is subjective and manipulated to frustrate effective participation and deliberations.

Similarly, Article 174(c), states that devolution seeks to give the power of self-governance to the Kenyan people. Devolution enhances deliberative governance rights in the exercise of state powers and, more especially, in making governance-related decisions affecting

citizens. The above article of the constitution assumes citizens are empowered towards deliberative governance. This is why Article 174(d) recognises the rights of each individual in communities to govern their affairs and dictate their own development agenda. The Fourth Schedule, Part 2(14) established a constitutional framework to ensure full implementation of deliberative governance.

The Fourth Schedule, Part 2(14) further states that the county governments, through their powers and functions, will plan, coordinate and ensure participatory and deliberative governance at all local levels. This law obligates counties to facilitate capacity building of communities enabling them to effectively exercise powers, functions, and rights under devolved governance mechanisms. Capacity building has been achieved through resource allocations and civic education in most counties (Nizam & Muriu, 2015). Section 207 of the Public Finance Management Act, 2012, requires county governments to put in place mechanisms, structures, and guidelines for deliberative governance in resource management (Mbithi et al., 2018). Consequently, the County Governments Act (2012), in Subsection 91, giving effect to Article 174(d), identifies modalities and platforms for mobilising citizen participation and deliberations in governance. These obligate county governments to facilitate structures for citizen mobilisation, deliberation, and participation using:

media platforms, information communication technology-based platforms, town hall meetings, budget preparation and validation fora, notice boards that announce jobs, appointments, procurement, awards and other important announcements of public interest, development project sites, avenues for the participation of peoples.

Further, Part IX, Article 94 of the County Government Act, 2012 states that:

The County government shall use the media to achieve three objectives: first, ‘to create awareness and promote deliberations on devolution and enhance good governance’, Secondly, ‘to promote citizen’s participation and deliberations for purposes of peace, national cohesion and integration’; and lastly is to ‘undertake advocacy on core development issues such as agriculture, education, health, security, sustainable environment and economics, among others.

Article 94 of the County Government Act, 2012, then spells out deliberative governance as a subset of public participation. Sections 100 and 101 seek to ensure the institutional framework

by county governments towards civic education to further awareness on deliberative governance. The Urban Areas and Cities Act, 2011,¹¹ states that citizens' participation and deliberation in the governance of urban areas and cities is a critical necessity. Kenya's Vision 2030¹² seeks an open and participatory political process through increased deliberations in the country's economic, social and political decision-making processes (Oduor et al., 2015). The media is required to facilitate this decision-making process. Furthermore, the political pillar of Kenya's Vision 2030 provides for equal citizenship rights and equality of participation and deliberations in major policy decisions (Nyaura, 2018). This was instituted in a bid to create social equity for marginalised communities and ensure issues affecting them are channelled into public policy.

The result of all the above legislation is what Cornell & D'Arcy (2014) call redefining the use of state power by different actors along multiple lines. It combines lateral, horizontal and vertical dimensions of power and authority, meaning that power and decision-making authority are decentralised to different levels and governance institutions (Finch et al., 2015). Such combinations form the foundation of participatory and deliberative structures and systems in governance (Kramon & Posner, 2011). It means that part of the administrative powers, financial resources and, policy-making roles are relegated to the devolved level of government and to citizens in particular (Nizam & Muriu, 2015), and that media and information technology platforms should be central to this.

3.5. Deliberative Governance Under the 2010 Constitution

A decade after implementing the 2010 constitution, various studies have documented the gains and challenges of deliberative governance in the county context (Atieno et al., 2014; Finkel,

¹¹ Article 184 of the constitution states that urban areas and cities shall be governed independently. The Urban Areas and Cities Act, 2011, deals with the establishment and governance of urban areas. Section 22 and the second schedule of the Urban Areas Act, 2011, grants citizens the powers to have a say in the governance of their cities.

¹² Vision 2030 is the Kenya's transformative development agenda that was inaugurated in 2008 and runs until 2030 as a blueprint for political, economic, and social progress.

2002; Lynch & Crawford, 2015; Marine, 2015; Sneddon & Fox, 2016). As required by Article 94 of the County Government Act, 2012, most counties have established deliberation platforms as envisaged by the constitution (Kanyinga, 2014). Deliberation models in counties like Makueni have even been lauded by development partners like DFID and the World Bank (2016). Through various models examined by the World Bank, the county has been able to drive some development priorities at the grassroots level through deliberated consensus. Its citizens are consistently involved in the prioritisation, planning, budgeting, implementation, and audits of development projects (Cornell & D'Arcy, 2014; Mbithi et al., 2018). World Bank reports have further claimed that deliberative governance has promoted continuous interaction between leaders and citizens, thus improving institutional accountability and increasing the responsiveness of governance institutions (World Bank, 2015). Some studies suggest that deliberative governance has enriched the redistribution of power that was historically entrenched in central government (Kanyinga, 2014), and apparently created less alienation of citizens from governance processes (Carrier & Kochore, 2014).

The implementation of Section 207 of the Public Finance Management Act, 2012, has entrenched the decentralisation of decision-making about resources to the local level. Revenue allocation formulas and ratios are shared and communicated across relevant deliberative forums as a legal requirement (World Bank, 2012). This has facilitated more understanding and contributed, to some extent, to the amicable sharing of national resources especially in areas with marginalised communities like Taita Taveta, Lamu, and Mandera counties (International Budget Partnership, 2014; Mbithi et al., 2018). The argument for local solutions for local problems has translated into greater participation in deliberations in counties like Machakos, Kisumu, and Mombasa, according to Mapuva (2015). Deliberative governance is now widely associated with the adoption of citizen-driven policies which are positively viewed compared to policies made through representative democracy (World Bank, 2015). This

positive perception has strengthened the responsiveness of county assemblies and the senate to deliberative governance outcomes that are specific to citizen needs (Mbithi et al., 2018). This has ensured that progressive and inclusive policies are developed in view of the needs of local communities especially mining communities in Turkana and Taita Taveta counties (Finch et al., 2015).

However, there is a significant similarity in the challenges currently faced in the implementation of deliberative governance and the previously discussed remedial attempts since independence (see the section below). These challenges include minimal support from the political elites and inadequate civic education of citizens (Ahluwalia, 2013). Marine (2015) observes that the culture in government bureaucracy has not supported deliberative governance mechanisms as envisaged by the law. There is a need to transform this bureaucratic culture and ensure citizens are co-partners rather than clients in the county governance process (Ahluwalia, 2013). Eliminating needless bureaucracy will ensure citizens are the provenance and beneficiaries of deliberative planning (Williams, 2008). Malpractices like tokenism and corruption that are embedded in bureaucracy and have thwarted the effectiveness of deliberative governance in counties like Turkana still exist (Agade, 2014). Bureaucracy also means that governance institutions continue to rely on conventional information exchange channels such as public hearings (Cheeseman et al., 2016). Such deliberation forums have failed to implement or adhere to deliberative norms and are often marked by incivility and inequality due to handpicked participants. These channels, according to Omanga (2019), are sometimes unidirectional and tokenistic and not oriented towards problem-solving.

While deliberation seeks to remedy historical injustice through discussion and consensus, low institutional cultures and corrupt political elite are its foremost obstacles Omolo (2015). Therefore, the assumption that the constitution, in its design, would tackle historical challenges related to Kenya's structural diversity is highly impractical and naïve (Nederveen,

2001). For instance, lack of consensus in deliberation forums has revealed the impracticality of meaningful progress especially when hotly contested issues are involved (Kireia, 2018). The overwhelming propensity to override citizens' will and desires due to a lack of consensus exists (Hassan, 2015). Lack of consensus slows inclusive decision outcomes and exposes the process to political pressure and state capture by powerful interest groups who often subvert or thwart objective policy deliberations and decision-making (Cheeseman et al., 2014; Cornell & D'Arcy, 2014).

Further, the constitution has succeeded in restructuring governance institutions but grossly failed to infuse relevant values and the necessary principles and norms of deliberations (Burgess et al., 2015). Emphasis on important values such as reciprocity, inclusivity, equality, and fairness and restructuring of governance institutions should happen contemporaneously (Kameri-Mbote & Kabira, 2016). There are many other technicalities that create major hurdles in the implementation of the deliberative governance process at county government level. Issues like inadequate resources and fledgling accountability systems are two examples noted by Uraia Trust (2012). Resources are needed to mobilise and put in place systems that will ensure feedback from deliberation is implemented. Constitutionalism depends on the strict adherence to and implementation of legislative clauses for better results (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). Evidence shows that well-structured deliberations have significantly managed some perennial challenges like exclusion, marginalisation, and inequality in counties like Lamu and Kilifi (Lind, 2018).

3.6. Polarisation and Devolution in Kenyan Counties

Devolution, according to the constitution, was also meant to be the panacea for polarisation in Kenya. By decentralising power through the 47 counties, each with democratically elected representatives (senators, governors, and county representatives), devolution was expected to

lead to more inclusive and accountable county institutions. Devolution was also expected to prioritise and facilitate the management of structural diversities able to deliver better services for all, and consequently reduce the tensions and divisions that cause conflict. But has devolution established a mechanism for achieving peace and lessening polarisation? This is examined from two perspectives in the following sections.

3.6.1. Impact of Devolution on Polarisation

Devolution has translated into positive outcomes over the past decade in Kenya. Institutionally it has enlivened participation and strengthened democracy in Kenya (Ghai, 2008). It has further entrenched the separation of powers and established a set of powerful new actors in the form of governors. The new actors mean that the politics around devolution continues to heighten tension and polarisation in Kenyan counties (Muriu, 2014; Orr, 2019). As Nyaura (2018, p.18) argues for devolved ethnicity, where divisive ethnic politics of identity that existed in the national level are transferred to the devolved level, it is possible that Kenya is now experiencing a state of devolved polarisation. Devolution has further strengthened a sense of ethnic identity and heightened affiliation to ethnic homelands (Nizam & Muriu, 2015). It has created intra-county ethnic minorities because counties were formed to accommodate various ethnic bands in the same geographical regions (Cornell & D'Arcy, 2014). As earlier noted, some minority ethnic groups, like the Ogiek and Rendile, experience exclusion within spheres of large ethnic dominance. Marginalisation of minorities, which happened before on a national level, now happens at the county level (Carrier & Kochore, 2014). This means that devolution has exacerbated and escalated existing tension among communities in the quest for power and resources at the county level (Mapuva, 2015). Further, the re-drawn geographic boundaries of most counties mean that majoritarianism that existed at the national level is now evident at the

county level. For instance, devolution has somehow re-ignited many pre-existing land conflicts and further created new ones (Finch et al 2015).

Devolution has resulted, though, in more resources being sent to the county governments and the communities that were, for a long time, marginalised from national politics can access such resources. Yet, devolution has paradoxically worsened the contestation of scarce resources and enhanced imbalanced power relations in historically polarised areas (Flache & Macy, 2011b). Here, identity politics, rather than sound policies, continue to drive resource governance discussions in cosmopolitan counties like Nakuru and Bungoma (Berg-Schlosser, 2017). Contestation of resources is also tied to county electoral positions, for example gubernatorial and senate, which are continually resolved through ‘negotiated democracy’ (Barret & Zani, 2014). Negotiated democracy is based on ethnically and politically negotiated power-sharing blocs between political elite representing specific community interests. Such a system focuses on political elites and the positions they hold in view of their communities. This pacifies, but fails to solve, perennially divisive issues through an integrated, holistic deliberative approach involving citizens. Devolution appears to have deflected rather than resolved governance grievances in Kenya (Kasara, 2013; Obala & Mattingly, 2014).

The resources allocated directly for stakeholders’ engagement under devolution are often meagre and grossly inadequate to support extensive deliberations. There are fewer deliberations forums to facilitate proper deliberation on contentious issues. Resources are channelled to development ‘priority’ areas and projects with what is considered to be ‘tangible’ outcomes for political expedience (Kabiri, 2014). Devolved governments are continuously limiting budgets allocated for deliberative forums especially on contested issues. Consequently, achieving depolarisation in counties remains something of a mirage (Boone, 2015). Devolution further magnifies some underlying challenges including: resource patronage (Kabiri, 2014), and fierce competition over administrative positions (Rohwerder, 2015). The

high stakes ‘winner takes all’ politics previously seen at the national level now exists at the county level (Kasara, 2013).

Finally, devolution has created a new set of bureaucratic positions in the form of elected representatives (Kanyinga, 2014). These positions have become hotly contested and led to the devolution of patronage-based politics and polarisation previously witnessed at the national level in the 2013 and 2017 general elections (Foulds, 2014). Kenya’s devolution reform agenda still remains vulnerable to manipulation by the governing elite (Willis & Chome, 2014). Contrary to the optimism that devolution will reduce spatial inequalities, studies suggest that it has inadvertently magnified horizontal inequalities between low and rich regions (Kanyinga, 2014; Lavallo et al., 2011; Mbuyisa, 2014). The systematic entrenchment of regional and ethnic inequalities in devolved areas will most likely be the basis of mobilisation for national politics (Atieno et al., 2014). Despite the implementation of devolution, the manipulation of devolved regions by the central government through resource allocation is a reality (Muriu, 2014). This form of influence means politicians in the national arena can use divisive politics in the devolved contexts to advance their agenda.

3.6.2 Impact of Polarisation on Devolution

It can be argued that polarisation has equally influenced devolution. Polarisation has created a gridlock in devolved processes delaying, for example, the passing of critical bills by county assemblies (Lind, 2018). Polarisation within the counties has slowed down decision-making for devolved functions which harms pragmatic response patterns for urgent issues like disaster response in the face of crisis. Tension and polarisation devoid of violence is a key driver of participatory interests (Jehn, 2001). Polarisation has broadened and deepened the level and nature of some contested issues in Kenya’s devolved systems (Cheeseman et al., 2016). It is unclear whether such deeply contested issues result in stronger or weaker resolutions especially

in macro-deliberation structures like county assemblies. Consequently, polarisation has been very useful in understanding and making choices related to contentious issues and differences. It has helped clarify the policy choices that participants have in a devolved context (Kibet & Ward, 2018). When counties are polarised around rifts reflecting critical, unresolved historical issues, then polarisation will be enduringly harmful.

Polarisation has also caused the intense de-legitimisation of devolved processes and functions. It has challenged democratic systems and deliberative governance ideals in contexts where diversity and contested issues have not been managed very well (Carrier & Kochore, 2014). Often when polarisation becomes a challenge rather than an inherent part of democracy, it becomes disruptive even in the context of negotiated democracy, as earlier described in some counties (Lynch & Crawford, 2011; Oduor et al., 2015). Unfortunately, polarisation has weakened accountability structures in county governance institutions (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009). Studies in Nyeri and Kiambu counties suggests that polarised groups have developed an antagonistic attitude and support their side regardless of the facts (Muriu, 2014). Extreme polarisation instigates participants to respond to devolved contentious issues through their group identities rather than rationalised assessment (Obala & Mattingly, 2014; Pattie & Johnston, 2016). This has promoted ethnically instigated camp-mentality while promoting the extent of disinformation effect.

Polarisation in some county deliberative forums has deepened because decision-making, which hitherto was made at the national level, now rests with inexperienced participants due to devolution (Nyaura, 2018). Groups are forced to take sides, and the middle ground shrinks progressively. Attempts to seek compromise with opposing sides of the debate are considered adversely (Owen et al., 2011). The quality of deliberation in devolved governments is, to a large extent, shaped by prevalent tensions, contradictions, and attitudes around governance issues (Hassid & Brass, 2015). It is also shaped by the level of polarisation

and conflicts straddling political power relations, ideological, and economic apparatus at the county level (CJPC, 2014). Optimistic scholars note that strong partisanship in polarised contexts tends to have a stabilising effect in divided and devolved systems like Kenya (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009; Ogude, 2002; Snow & Taylor, 2015; Whitaker & Giersch, 2009). Polarisation has freshly exposed socio-political cleavages in devolved systems which needs confrontation (Barret & Zani, 2014). From county forums, polarisation has created easily identifiable positions, interests, and priorities that can be harnessed into quick gains during deliberations (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009; Mueller, 2014).

3.7 Deliberation Governance and Polarisation in Kenya

The majority of studies conducted on deliberation and polarisation in Kenya are based on offline public forums. Those studies suggest that deliberation in a context of diversity like Kenya would encourage people to consider alternative views towards depolarisation (Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2013; Halakhe, 2013; Muendo, 2017; Sturgis et al., 2014). Pessimists, however, argue that there is a threshold beyond which polarisation is too deep to be resolved through deliberation (Caluwaerts & Deschouwer, 2014). Deeply rooted issues bordering on historical injustice are firmly etched in the fabric of Kenya's societies (Cottrel-Ghai, Ghai, Oei, & Wanyoike, 2012). Such grievances have metamorphosed and become more convoluted over time and cannot be eradicated through exposure to diverse information as required during deliberations (Tiyambe, 2010). Considering the various failed attempts at instituting deliberation and participation in governance processes, it is possible that solutions for polarisation will take time to realise.

Studies in Kenya also indicate that when people encounter political disagreement, their views and strongly held opinions are likely to thwart effective deliberative effort and its outcomes (Agade, 2014; Kimeli et al., 2014). In a context like Kenya, where ethnicity is at the

core of polarisation, exposure to heterogeneous views is likely to motivate people to uphold their existing biases and beliefs, regardless of the facts (Kimeli et al., 2014). These perspectives ignore the critical element of group effort and individuals' investment in pertinent issues and power dynamics at the county level. The perspectives also ignore the actors and multiple dynamics that can complicate achieving tangible results in a deliberative platform. Specific deliberative methods previously used in Kenya, including structured and unstructured face-to-face deliberation have been found to enhance disagreement that polarises participants (Kasara, 2013; Munyua, 2016). Deliberations, in some contexts, have failed to moderate participants' extreme opinions but rather exposed their firm biases instead (Willis & Chome (2014). Another fact is that Kenya's ethnic groups have often ignored their differences and embraced one another during periods of political party coalitions (Munyua, 2016). Political elites have driven discussions in inter-party micro-deliberation structures leading to temporary co-existence and mobilisation of resources towards common interests during election periods.

While the constitution and other legislation lay the foundation for a more structured and inclusive deliberative process at the county level, managing disagreement in deliberation is not adequately considered. Disagreement handling mechanisms are critical in exacerbating or moderating extreme viewpoints (Omolo, 2015). Handling disagreement ensures continuity of dialogue to avoid breakdown of deliberations. This is relevant in a socio-political environment where multiple actors and multifaceted contested issues complicate the deliberation process (Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2013). Therefore, the link between deliberations and polarisation in Kenya can be explained through a number of critical assumptions: first, participants are assumed to express competing and convincing arguments during deliberations. Arguments are expected to aid comprehension of problems and assist in identifying solutions. Studies that examined offline deliberative forums in Kenyan counties observed that convincing arguments rarely worked in an environment of deep polarisation characterised by hard-line positions (Kasara,

2013; Khadiagala, 2017; Lieberman et al., 2014). Lieberman et al. (2014) also noted that joint solutions in politics and governance are rarely achieved except in instances where participants had common interests.

Secondly, it is expected that participants in a deliberative forum will respect dissimilar views and that deliberation will be issue-centred. Studies show that polarised participants deliberating on polarising issues like land or resource allocation are less likely to be issue-centred (Ajulu, 2010; Makinen & Kuira, 2008a). For instance, ancestral land is a highly emotive issue in Kenya (Boone, 2012). Kasara (2013), in his study, argued that tolerance and respect for diverse opinions were dependent on the political actors involved, the outcomes at stake, and existing pressure points. These two assumptions, however, ignore the place of divergent communication and interactive skills, which are determined by each participant's literacy levels. Articulate and elaboration skills may not be commonly available across the spectrum of people in deliberative forums (Namasaka, 2012). The place of strongly held opinions, personalised issues, and their emotive value in a polarised context should not be ignored (Boone, 2012).

Nonetheless, some proponents consider structured deliberation to be capable of mitigating ideological polarisation on governance issues. Some of the assumptions above are not entirely baseless. Unstructured deliberation in informal groups in Kenya shows that discussing politics with diverse friends, family, or workmates may promote tolerance, familiarity, and trust (Kamwaria et al 2015; Kasara, 2013). Further, exposure to diverse participants and viewpoints has been found to enhance ambivalence and belief complexity, according to Ahluwalia (2013). She further indicates that belief complexity is possible when participants achieve moderate evaluations and balanced judgments on contested issues. When this happens, participants can recognise that governance issues are complex and not necessarily

‘black and white’. They eventually appreciate that contrasting opinions have legitimate concerns and viewpoints as well.

The initially held positions may be abandoned, and a shift toward the common views favourable to all may be adopted. Robinson & Berkes’ (2011) study further found that the pursuit of environmental solutions in urban areas in Kenya through deliberations translated into less acrimony when participants explored solutions independent of each group’s interests. It is also possible for deliberation to deepen the level and nature of polarisation and conflict, which it intends to resolve (Cornwall, 2008). For instance, deliberations in county hall forums have often resulted in historical and long-forgotten issues resurfacing (Wekesa & Tsuma, 2014). It often only takes a few individuals to make lopsided arguments to sabotage deliberations.

The above outcome can be explained in view of the individual or group understanding of a contentious and emotive issue. The impassioned understanding of a subject significantly alters the way information in deliberation is received, perceived, and interpreted (Owen et al., 2011). Ilorah (2009) argues that it dictates how information is evaluated and the subsequent behavioural process. Studies on community policing deliberation forums in Kenya indicate that people who are committed and motivated to defend their views tend to extensively rationalise such views (Atieno et al., 2014; Kodila-Tedika, 2018). They also tend to shield their minds from new and different information. Achieving depolarisation through deliberation is not just about exposure to divergent information in a context like Kenya. If people fail to recognise differing viewpoints, they may discredit such information or fail to appreciate its relevance.

3.8 Deliberative Norms and Group Polarisation

Achieving depolarisation through deliberations is also dependent on the deliberative norms of the group (Kimani et al., 2013). Social behaviour research in Kenya has examined how highly egocentric personalities tend to perceive most views as oppositional, even when it is not the

case (Berg-Schlosser, 2017). This has also been observed in deliberative forums where politics is at the core (Kimani et al., 2013). Speer (2012b) suggested that politicians with big egos tend to drive deliberations to the extreme. When political ego drives the deliberative agenda, individuals tend to disregard measures of civility or counter-attitudinal information. Political and social pressure will drive the strength of opinion attached to some issues by groups. Studies on subsidy discussions among rural farmers in Kenya indicated that groups with strong and rigid opinions tend to reject counter attitudinal information regardless of the facts (Roberts, 2004). Such groups are also motivated to avoid the scrutiny of arguments or exposure to information that discredits their prior knowledge.

Deliberations that follow relevant norms and procedures will reduce the threats of the above-mentioned shortcomings (Lind & Howell, 2010). Deliberative forums with specific agenda, timelines, and expected outcomes utilised deliberative norms advantageously (Robinson & Berkes, 2011). Such advantages were possible despite the polarising nature of issues under discussion. This confidence in deliberative norms is anchored on the differences between systematic exposure to well-thought arguments (Ofunja et al., 2018), and combative interpersonal everyday talk. Systematic talk is expected to stimulate deep reflective thinking and depolarising interaction. It is also expected to increase group tolerance where information is depersonalised and projected as contexts of ideas rather than of persons. This does not work well in deeply polarised contexts where issues are processed emotively.

Some scholars have consequently supported the idea that deliberation is likely to achieve group convergence (Long et al., 2013; Ofunja et al., 2018). They further argue that group convergence will occur if moderates move in the opposite direction of extreme members towards the middle ground. Research by Kimeli et al. (2014) show that opposing groups in public forums move toward the common centre due to exposure to persuasive arguments. A study by Lind & Howell (2010), on public election campaign forums in Kenya, pointed out the

role of stereotypes when deliberating on issues like terrorism. Disagreement in public deliberation is likely to degenerate and trigger the use of stereotypes to define, understand and describe issues or people. When this happens, the views of other participants, however legitimate, are dismissed and stifled.

Extreme groups are likely to label those who disagree with them as an ‘out-group’ (Kimani et al., 2013). This increases with the level of polarisation experienced in a given context but often leads to dismissal of the ‘out-group’ as unworthy or undeserving as was the case in the power-sharing process in Bungoma county (Rinch, 2014). This exacerbates the level of polarisation. Public deliberation forums to discuss contentious issues like abortion in Kenya have shown that groups who consider themselves the majority tend to do less preparation for deliberations (Robinson & Berkes, 2011). They are also more likely to be inconsiderate, hardliners, and are more likely to concentrate on the merits of their own position. Research on community forums has also documented how majority group members may enter a deliberation with the intention and readiness to ignore opposing views, regardless of prevailing rationality (Berkes et al., 2011).

Deliberation during the constitutional referendum found that knowledgeable participants who deliberated on emotive ancestral land issues changed their views the least (Robinson & Berkes, 2011). This obstinacy was also evident when deliberation was not consensual or forced. The same pattern of strong opposition was observed during deliberation on issues of county resource distribution even when the points were structured and presented with convincing logicity (Ndavula & Mberia, 2012). Deliberation among homogenous group members on issues like abortion sometimes leads to the amplification of cognitive errors. In such contexts, biased information and erroneous epistemic views are repeated and corroborated. When deliberative forums tackle issues that are long-standing or deeply rooted, it is highly unlikely that participants will present novel or fresh arguments. Even if novel, valid,

and cogent arguments are made, social validation aspects within a group are likely to diminish a positive depolarising outcome. Hence, social identities are likely to be turned into discursive weapons towards the automatic refutation of opposing views (Ofunja et al., 2018).

3.9 Conclusion

From this chapter, it is evident that the colonial administrative structures and policies have created a deeply polarised Kenyan state. Policies like ethnic isolation, divide and rule, and inequality in resource access enforced by the British in Kenya have further influenced the conceptual understanding of heterogeneity and polarisation of ethno-political identities. This state of polarisation was strategically retained by the post-independent political elites to further their advantage. Kenya's political elite have consistently exploited exclusionary ethnic tactics. They have occasionally deployed divisive political rhetoric leading to violent displacement of people to reshape electoral geography. This has led to deep fissures and polarisation based largely on ethnic cleavages and historical injustices.

These pressure points exploded during the 2007/8 post-election violence, risking the collapse of the democratic system. This provided the stimulus for a constitutional review process seeking long-term solutions to improve governance and reduce polarisation. The resulting new Kenyan constitution created a two-tier system which anchors the devolution of power and decentralisation of authority as key elements of democracy in Kenya. Such a system is supposed to achieve a government closer to the people. Hence, local county governments are mandated to ensure inclusive participation and deliberation of the people in all significant governance decisions. However, while devolution and decentralisation were considered to contribute to depolarisation, the former has strengthened ethnic identity and affiliation to individuals' homelands. Contestations of resource distribution are now decentralised and localised. Devolution and decentralisation have arguably further magnified a number of

underlying challenges including: resource patronage; fierce competition over administrative positions; and political, ideological dissension.

Central to these processes of deliberation and depolarisation is the use of all forms of media. The County Government Act of 2012, for instance, requires county governments to use all forms of media to mobilise towards participation and deliberation in governance. The counties are also required by law to use the media, including social media to promote citizens' participation and deliberations for the purposes of peace, national cohesion and integration. However, the stipulated role of SNSs in the new system of deliberative governance has received minimal scholarly attention in Kenya. The next chapter assesses this research.

Chapter Four

SNSs, WhatsApp and Deliberative Governance in Kenya

4.0 Introduction

As noted in Chapter 3, the Kenyan Constitution and Part IX, article 94, 95 of the County Government Act, 2012 highlights the role of the media, mainstream and social media, in governance and polarisation. In particular, the rapid growth of SNS platforms is seen as offering particular potential for deliberation governance and depolarisation. The chapter begins by examining the SNS landscape in Kenya, focusing on its adoption, patterns of utilisation, and affordances. The key drivers of SNSs use in Kenya are the strong internet penetration and broad mobile phone uptake in the last decade. This wide adoption means SNSs have improved the feedback loop on governance and policy issues, enhanced users' mental elaboration and cognitive skills, and transformed governance discourse through the formation of governance networks. Its negative and positive contributions on polarisation before and after the 2007/8 post-election violence are clear. The focus of this study is on WhatsApp, which is currently the largest SNS platform with more than 12 million users in Kenya. WhatsApp has achieved wide adoption in Kenya due to its affordances. The core argument of this study is that WhatsApp has significantly transformed the concept of public sphere and influenced governance and polarisation. First, it is critical to understand whether WhatsApp qualifies as a public sphere based on the Habermasian ideals of: diversity, inclusivity, rationality, civility, and moderated involvement for deliberations. Further, it is important to establish whether it allows unfettered and unlimited access to information, and whether it lacks institutional or commercial influence. It is in the above context that this chapter examines scant scholarly literature to establish the link between WhatsApp use, deliberative governance and polarisation in Kenya.

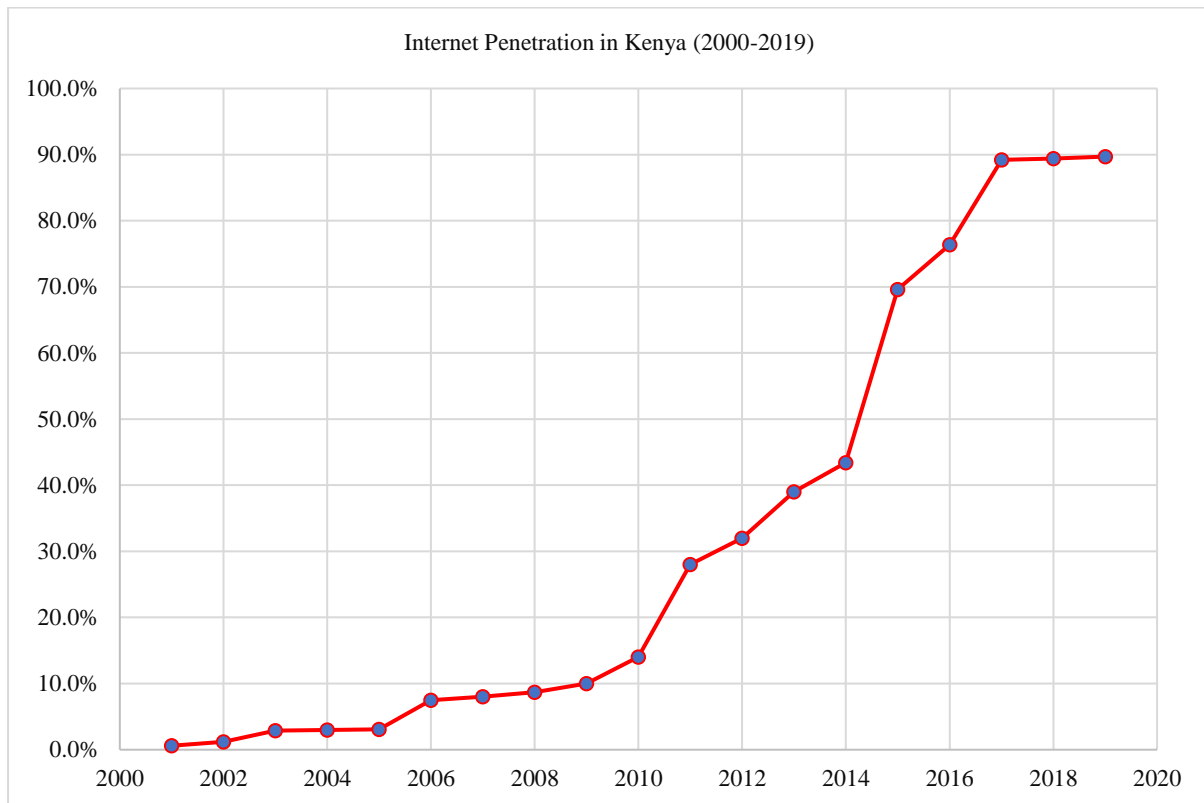
4.1 SNS Landscape in Kenya

The use and adoption of SNS in Kenya is significantly determined and reflected by the general socio-demographic characteristics of its population. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2019) census report, Kenya's total population as at 2019 was 47 million people (50.3 % and 49.7 % are males). The annual average change in Kenya's population currently stands at +2.5% which reflects a positive deviation indicating an annual marginal increase in the population. The median age in Kenya is 20 years which means that majority of the population is made up of young people. The current rate of urbanisation stands at 27% which indicates that majority of Kenyan's still live in the rural homes. A significant percentage of Kenyans are educated because the literacy of adults aged 15 and above stands at 79%; the female literacy level being 79% while that of male is 84% (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019).

4.1.1 Penetration and Usage of SNSs in Kenya

The combination of good Internet speed and a widespread mobile phone penetration have facilitated the significant uptake of SNSs in Kenya over the past two decades. According to the *Africa Internet Users report* (2019), 46,870,422 Kenyans against a total population of 52,214,791 million had Internet access in Kenya by the end of 2018. This figure reflects a penetration rate of approximately 89.7% by December 2019 (*see Table 4.1*). Currently, there are more than 72 licensed Internet Service Providers (ISPs) of which about half are operational. Kenya also has one of the highest Internet-speeds at 10.71Mbps across Africa and amongst the highest globally according to the *Internet Users report* (2019). Similarly, Kenya's mobile penetration, at 88 % (CA, 2017), is one of the highest in Africa.

Figure 4. 1: Internet Penetration Trend in Kenya from 2000-2019



Data Source: Africa Internet Users report (2019)

A variety of factors account for the rapid increase in mobile penetration: firstly, there has been a rapid reduction in handset costs, value and costs of callings cards (vouchers) from the lowest in 1999 being Ksh 250 to the lowest in 2012 being Ksh5 (Amutabi, 2013); secondly, the investment and improvement of communication technology infrastructure has propelled the growth in the number of service providers (Souter & Kerrets-Makau, 2012). More service providers means more competition, more customer options and a greater reach of telecommunications infrastructure (Aktas et al., 2014; Jeong et al., 2016); thirdly, market liberalisation reforms in the telecommunication industry in the past two decades have resulted in the greater affordability of internet mobile services in Kenya (Groshek, 2009). They have also resulted in tariff rebalancing for fixed operators (Ott & Rosser, 2007), and increased usage of Internet and SNS tools (Kamwaria et al., 2015).

In terms of the different types of SNS platforms, WhatsApp has become the most popular with an estimated 12 million users in 2019 (Africa Internet Users, 2019) which is higher than the combined users on Twitter (2.8.m), Facebook (7m) and Instagram (3m) (Africa Internet Users, 2019) (*see Figure 4.1*). The profile of SNS users is overwhelmingly urban, highly localised, educated, and fairly well-off on the socio-economic ladder (Bing, 2015; Kamau, 2017; Kireia, 2018; Makinen & Kuira, 2008b, 2008a; Mutahi & Kimari, 2017; Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017; Ogaji, Okoyeukwu, Wanjiru, Adhiambo, & Akoth, 2017; Adini et al., 2014). Studies also tend to confirm that most SNS users are young, male, educated, and able to afford digital connectivity gadgets like mobile phones, iPads and laptops. For example, in the case of Twitter, 60% of Twitter users in Kenya are younger (21–29 year-olds) compared to the global Twitter average age of 39 years (Phua, Venus, & Jay, 2017).

The majority of Kenyans aged 21-35 years spend more than three hours on SNSs daily (Bing, 2015). Studies show that between 4.3 and 5.1 million users visit the Facebook platform monthly. Again, the majority of these users are concentrated in major cities and towns in Kenya (Benesch, 2014). SNS platforms in Kenya are used for various functions including: accessing news and politics (74%), entertainment (67%), networking (56%), contributing to a deliberation (56%), meeting friends (48%) and checking adverts (40%) (GeoPoll, 2017). In relation to the focus of this study, a culture of online deliberation has already emerged, where more than 76% of adult Kenyans (age 18-56) have participated in an online deliberation on any SNS platform (Alliance for Affordable Internet, 2017; Kamwaria et al., 2015; Ndavula & Mberia, 2012; Simon et al., 2014).

4.1.2 SNS and Deliberative Governance in Kenya

As noted in Chapter 3, Part IX, article 94 of the County Government Act, 2012 the County government is mandated to use the media (mainstream and social media) to achieve three

objectives: firstly, ‘to create awareness and promote deliberations on devolution and enhance good governance’; Secondly, ‘to promote citizen’s participation and deliberations for purposes of peace, national cohesion and integration’; and lastly to ‘undertake advocacy on core development issues such as agriculture, education, health, security, sustainable environment and economics, among others. Part 95 states that the county governments will establish mechanisms to facilitate public deliberation and access information in the form of traditional and social media. A decade after implementing the constitution, the effects of SNSs on deliberative governance and polarisation in Kenya has received minimal scholarly focus. Nonetheless, existing related studies looking at SNS use in various socio-political contexts in Kenya have found different results. Deliberation on SNS platforms has been found to improve the feedback loop on governance and policy issues (Wyche, Schoenebeck, & Forte, 2013) and enhance mental elaboration and cognitive skills (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017). It has transformed governance discourse through the formation of governance networks, and improved mobilisation for participation in deliberation. These key points are further elaborated in the section below.

The use of SNSs as a feedback platform on governance and policy issues has improved the delivery of government service in Kenya (Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017). Kenyans on Twitter (KOT), a collective group of Twitter, has achieved responsive action from governance institutions due to issue-based advocacy and complaint tweets. Such complaints/feedback have prompted positive responses from government and precipitated candid dialogue between stakeholders. This way, SNSs like Facebook and Twitter, have strategically contributed to a more interactive policy-making process (Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017). SNS feedback loops on policies have also reduced tedious bureaucratic engagement characteristics of governance institutions at the county level (Baruah, 2012). Most counties now accept digital and SNS feedback as key contributions to their policy and legislation making processes (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017).

Deliberations and subsequent feedback on SNSs were found to increase bridging capital among environment governance experts and other stakeholders in Kenya (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009). SNSs have enhanced the possibility of contesting governance policies in a more interactive, unrestrictive way compared to the unidirectional mainstream media platforms (Wyche et al., 2013).

Such unrestricted and interactive discussions crystallise key political and social issues into attitudes and have been found to improve cognitive skills (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017). The crystallisation of attitudes can either be positive or negative, according to Mutahi & Kimari (2017). They found that the formation of attitude among SNSs users enhanced their mental elaboration (the collective consideration of topics of concern) and the development their cognitive skills (Gil de Zuniga et al., 2013). Mental elaboration is what emboldens positive, collective, voter-led, anti-rigging monitoring actions as witnessed during the 2013 and 2017 general elections in Kenya. Ishiyama et al. (2016), looking at voting patterns among young people in Kenya, noted that attitudes that favourably consider collective actions develop mainly from peer interactions and deliberations on SNSs. Peer deliberations, they found, encourage positive attitudes towards collective involvement and a sense of efficacy (Hassid & Brass, 2015). However, peer deliberations can also influence deliberators to take extreme intolerant positions on specific governance issues. Further, the crystallisation of attitudes in a polarised context like Kenya can equally create negative salience and undesirable outcomes that have been known to fuel actual violence during election cycles (Lynch, 2014). Polarised deliberations outcomes that are collectively agreed can stifle inclusivity to achieve consensus in governance. This happens when the pursuit of consensus is valued more than the equality of voices for the minority groups. In such instances, deliberations harden ideological positions and erase the middle ground on key governance issues (Makinen & Kuira, 2008b).

The crystallisation of positive attitudes through SNSs deliberations can be argued to benefit urban dwellers due to the limitations of the digital divide (Kanyam et al., 2017). While the use of SNSs is very common in urban areas, challenges of digital illiteracy and access to digital technology remain unresolved in some remote areas/ counties in Kenya (Fuchs & Horak, 2008). Therefore, whereas SNSs have generally increased the volume of governance discourse across the board (Kanyam et al., 2017), a critical section of the population remains digitally marginalised. Whereas more issues relating to transparency and accountability in both national and county governance are now brought to light than ever before, certain narratives by marginalised communities are still missing because the digitally illiterate are increasingly locked out of online deliberation in Kenya (Fuchs & Horak, 2008). Such individuals can read/write/communicate but they lack access and familiarity with digital tools.

SNSs support the formation of online governance networks as an extension of offline ones. The use of SNSs for online governance networks expands and sustains the activities and connections between governance institutions, political actors, civic societies, and citizens beyond physical forums. A good example of governance networks with SNS presence is the national informal settlements coordination committee. The network exploits a web of relationships to advance specific governance agenda. The online network also encourages both formal and informal interactions on governance issues and is underpinned by either loose or close social ties between governance stakeholders (Hendriks, 2010). However, the norms of trustworthiness, inclusivity, diversity, and reciprocity which are pillars that often hold such governance networks together are sometimes challenging to develop in SNS contexts (Ramia et al., 2018). Because of its pluralistic composition, governance networks such as NISCC, with an online presence, are multi-sectoral, non-hierarchical platforms and can tackle emerging issues in their areas of jurisdiction. Governance networks advance and prioritise the convergence of thought on critical governance issues at the county level (Mkinen & Kuira,

2008). Unfortunately, these networks, even within online spheres, are sometimes plagued by unmoderated power differentials between various entities. Despite this, online governance networks have resulted in a number of positive aspects, including relational persistence in tackling governance issues (Baek, 2015) and pervasive awareness of diverse views leading to moderated opinions (Livingstone, 2014).

Other influences of SNSs in deliberative governance include their use for rapid mobilisation for participation in county deliberation forums (Hampton & Lee, 2011). Most SNSs are characterised by local, regional and national networks which make them apt for mobilisation. Further, these platforms have reflected a sense of national unity in instances where Kenyans, despite their diversity, agree on some fundamental governance issues. These platforms are strategically tapped by human right groups with nationwide reach to mobilise, deliberate and coordinate programmes (Mwangi (2014). For instance, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) uses its countrywide SNS platforms to receive, assess, monitor and respond to human rights issues in all counties in Kenya (Obel-Hansen, 2013). Additionally, SNSs in Kenya have enriched lateral engagement without necessarily disrupting existing hierarchical systems (Snow & Taylor, 2015). In effect, they have reshaped and revamped traditional forms of governance activities, movements, and institutions and entrenched online protesting cultures. SNSs in Kenya can be said to have expanded the diversity and inclusivity in governance discourse compared in a way that sometimes influences the coverage priorities and agenda-setting role of the mainstream media (Kasara, 2013).

SNSs have also heightened the general awareness, knowledge and contribution to governance discourse among Kenyans (Kamau, 2017; Marine, 2015; Mbithi et al., 2018). However, considering the information-sharing structure of SNS in Kenya, gaining knowledge depends mostly on substantive exposure elaboration (Kimeli et al., 2014; Omanga, 2019a). Exposure increases when participants involved in deliberation are well versed and informed

about the subject matter. It is also enhanced when users share content freely within and across SNS platforms. Information received via SNS platforms often forms the fodder for extended, considered interpersonal deliberations. However, the level of seriousness of information shared and attention accorded to such information on SNS are in doubt. News and information on topics like corruption, sex scandals, and political wrangles easily dominate SNS platforms in Kenya (Ogaji et al., 2017). Such topics, characterised by contention, glamour, humour, and sensual appeal, are more likely to ignite animated deliberations as opposed to governance issues (Wasserman & Maweu, 2014). This ostensibly creates aspersions on the ability of SNS to inform serious governance discourse effectively. Furthermore, the multiplicity of SNS audiences demands the acquisition of new skills, including the ability to handle context collapse characterised by diverse audiences (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018). The collision of formerly distinct audiences on SNS platforms means attributes like inclusivity, diversity, and tolerance are crucial skills for online deliberative governance (Winter & Rathnayake, 2017).

4.1.3 SNSs and Polarisation in Kenya

The role of SNSs in polarisation and the potential for violence was more evident following the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya. Consequently, a power-sharing agreement was signed after the controversial presidential election results were announced (Shrum et al., 2011). Before this solution was achieved, the mainstream media had published the election results and the ensuing chaos and mayhem live on mainstream media. This was accompanied by ‘expert’ analysis and media commentaries that were deemed very biased, provocative, and inflammatory at that time (Simiyu, 2014). As a security measure, the government banned the live broadcast of all such election results and thus created an information blackout (Kasara, 2013; Simiyu, 2014). Following the news blackout, Kenyans found other means of obtaining and relaying news. Fake news, misinformation, conspiracy theories, and inflammatory content

was widely exchanged across short message services (SMSs) further enhancing intolerance (Makinen & Kuira, 2008a). Consequently, the government then blocked the transmission of SMSs during the period of violence as well. Following this blockage, Kenyans turned to SNSs for updates. Many were actively involved in citizen journalism with constant reporting and updates on the ongoing situation in their communities, and on a national level, but largely influenced by speculation and personal opinions (Ishiyama et al., 2016).

Yet SNS platforms offered citizens narratives consisting of polarised, inflammatory and exaggerated accounts of grassroots reactions during the crisis (Ishiyama et al., 2016; Makinen & Kuira, 2008a). While the mainstream media was partly resigned to government censorship due to fears of repression, SNS platforms like Twitter and Facebook offered swifter, unmoderated, very subjective, and more detailed accounts of the volatile post-election situation (Gutiérrez-Romero, 2012; Kanyinga, 2014; Makinen & Kuira, 2008a). According to Makinen & Kuira (2008), SNS platforms were not neutral but were culpable; they were a conduit, rather than the main cause of the post-election violence in Kenya (Shrum et al., 2011).

Organising, coordination, financing, and mobilising for and against violence in 2007/8 essentially relied on SNSs and other digital platforms (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017). Mobilisation for financial contributions towards the spread of specific polarised ideologies and messages were made via SNSs like Facebook and Twitter (Shrum et al., 2011). The same was true for groups and organisations that sought to promote peace and national coexistence during the period of tension (Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2012). What became abundantly clear was that security management in the age of digital technology could be very challenging in an environment of incivility and heterogeneity of views. Despite online tracking of digital technology in efforts to prevent violence, it was problematic for both state and non-state actors to detect online hate (Long et al., 2013). Messages exchanged on WhatsApp made it harder to penetrate encrypted

conversations. Laws and regulations on privacy also made it difficult for security personnel to intercept chats without authorisation (Ishiyama et al., 2016).

Various scholars agree that the incitement to violence, intolerance, and ethnic hatred through SNSs in Kenya was largely facilitated by internet penetration, the rapid spread of mobile phones, and wide usage of SNSs (Finkel et al., 2012; Mäkinen & Kuira, 2008a; Shrum et al., 2011; Toka, 2008). However, polarisation and incitement did not start immediately after the contested election results (Simiyu, 2014). Before the elections, SNSs had already provided an opportunity for politicians to mobilise and campaign around incivil, inflammatory messages, thus reaching their constituency at little cost and with utmost convenience. Simiyu (2014) observed that the newly found power via SNSs emancipated mediated communication from a regulated and state-centred approach. It gave unmoderated power and agency to ordinary participants to openly voice their sentiments, some of which were laden with hatred and ideological polarisation (Ishiyama et al., 2016). This finding was further corroborated by Judge Kriegler's commission report (Shrum et al., 2011). While the commission did not recommend the regulation of SNSs, it advised on the formation of an organisation to promote national cohesion and integration (Steeves, 2011). The National Cohesion and Integration Act (2008)¹³ was instituted to tackle online polarisation and the spread of online hate. Under sections 13, 62, and 63 of the National Cohesion and Integration Act (2008), hate speech on any platform is considered a criminal offence. The Act prohibits individuals from making hateful and inflammatory statements to spread hate and polarisation. It prohibits the use of images, words and programmes in a way that is considered abusive, incivil, intolerant, or insulting or polarising with the intention to threaten social cohesion. This law also prohibits

¹³ The National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) of Kenya is a government agency intended to address the issue of inter-ethnic polarisation and conflicts. The Commission was set up through the National Cohesion and Integration Act (no. 12 of 2008) after the 2007- 2008 post-election crisis.

the use of abusive language to commit an offence, including stirring up ethnic hatred Kagwanja & Southall (2009).

With this legislation and a constitutional institution to fight polarisation, the country experienced less polarisation and suppressed ethnic incitement on SNS platforms after the 2007/8 crisis (Ishiyama et al., 2016). However, such platforms continue to provide alternative ways to spread incivil, polarising, and inflammatory political messages. Since its inception, the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) has prosecuted few people on charges of sharing inflammatory content, incitement to violence, or spreading hate speech. This has been attributed to legislative loopholes and logistical challenges of monitoring, enforcing, and tackling hate crime, which according to Halakhe (2013) partly explains its inability to tame online hate speech and polarisation.

However, before the general elections of 2013, SNSs were yet again polarised with statements of negative ethnicity, propaganda, intolerance, hate speech, and incitement (Mwangi, 2014). This time, polarisation was driven by the supporters of the two major antagonising political factions (Ombaka, 2015). SNSs were used to express the rift, which fortunately did not result in any actual violence as in 2007/8. The contested electoral outcomes and the ruling of the Supreme Court heightened the level of intolerance, polarisation, and tension even further (Cheeseman et al., 2014). Constant SNS updates with additional speculative content eventually heightened polarisation. Kameri-Mbote & Kabira (2016) and Kanyinga (2014) noted a pattern whereby voters are increasingly electing county and national legislators with more populist and polarised ideologies than their constituents. Consequently, discussions in parliament are more polarised and thus a spiral of polarised exchanges between political factions has been created. Conspiracy theories shared via SNSs can fuel partisan suspicion and can drive polarisation (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017). In every election campaign

period, the circulation of false narratives via SNSs risks igniting polarisation and tension in counties where ethnic allegiances form the core of politics and the governance process.

Nonetheless, SNSs have also been strategic in finding solutions to some issues of polarisation and conflict management in Kenya. The integration of SNS affordances with other digital technologies have helped to identify conflict hot spots during election periods (Mukhongo, 2015; Mutahi & Kimari, 2017; Rohwerder, 2015). A good example is ‘*Ushahidi*’ meaning witness. ‘*Ushahidi*’ is a platform empowering citizen to map out, expose and discuss issues like corruption, hate speech, violent outbreaks, and human rights violations (Freedom House, 2012; Souter & Kerrets-Makau, 2012). *Ushahidi* combines geo-mapping technology with SNS features to promote rapid response measures during natural disasters and catastrophes. Since its inception in 2008, *Ushahidi* has spread to more than 150 countries (Souter & Kerrets-Makau, 2012). The use of *Ushahidi* shows how SNSs adopt the elements of Web 2.0 in identifying conflict hotspots and conflict management. Using *Ushahidi*, participants share their experiences, including first-hand accounts of vote bribery, electoral violence, and rigging practices (Kireia, 2018).

Users can attach evidence using photos and videos of their revelations via SNSs. SNSs in Kenya have facilitated the development of critical and effective early warning systems that curb the spread of violence. Integration of SNSs in early warning systems allows for micro-level intervention and responses to violent conflict (Karume, 2016). Stakeholders are then able to prevent developing conflict in its early stages. This bottom-up approach to conflict management, as argued by scholars, is more effective than state-centric interventions (Bratton, 2012). However, the role of algorithms in the ranking, selecting, filtering, and recommending of specific content displayed on the users’ SNS feeds is a worrying trend for sensitive interventions like conflict. For instance, bots¹⁴ are highly ranked Twitter influencers in Kenya

¹⁴ Bots are computer programs that work automatically and more especially those that searches for and finds information on the internet.

at 27.6% (Bloggers Association of Kenya, 2017). This means bots are potentially more influential than the media, bloggers, and politicians. More bots can mean a more rampant spread of intolerant, polarising, misinformation and fake news.

Another significant aspect of SNS adoption in the Kenyan context is crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing using SNSs creates a problem-solving model through the integration of information, interventions, and practice in online communities (Simon et al., 2014). This strategy was mainly applied during the 2007/08 post-election violence in Kenya. Citizens were able to document and report conflict hotspots and violent incidents during the crisis (Benesch, 2014). They shared videos and photos instantaneously with a twin effect: firstly, it further inflamed and aggravated the existing tension and conflict. It created a platform for understanding the scale, scope and horror of the conflict through rich media content exchange (Benesch, 2014; Mutahi & Kimari, 2017). Key actors were consequently able to track, analyse, and document the existing structural tensions, flashpoints and social divides (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017). The concept of digital humanitarians was conceived where aid, volunteers and donors were mobilised via SNSs to assist those affected (Ndavula & Mberia, 2012). SNSs in Kenya can be said to have promoted a sense of communal interaction revolving around user-created content and shared meaning (Omanga, 2015). In this case, the user is elevated to the level of the content creator and consumer. This is a very powerful function where information content and narrative are controlled by citizens. SNSs in Kenya have consolidated the convergence of societies, thus transforming them, in some cases, into participative, informative and connected systems (Makinen & Kuiru, 2008a, 2008b; Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017).

4.2. Affordances and Usage of WhatsApp

The focus of this study is WhatsApp as the largest SNS platform in Kenya. WhatsApp messenger started as a proprietary cross-platform, instant messaging service for smartphones

(Sarker, 2015), and is now available in new generation smartphones using Android, and Blackberry across the globe (Mefolere, 2016). The enhanced affordances of WhatsApp now allow users to send and receive video, images and audio messages using enhanced integrated location mapping features (Rastogi & Hendler, 2016). According to the founders/developers, it was to replace text messaging via the SMS platform (Rastogi & Hendler, 2016). It was expected to be uniquely different from other SNSs being a charge-free, advert-free and more flexible communications platform (Kurowski, 2016).

WhatsApp messages tend to be more informal, social, and conversational in nature compared to SMS messages. A particularly remarkable feature of WhatsApp messaging is its networking function and ability to afford multiple integrations of individual users into public groups. It is common in Kenya to find open, inviting, and accessible public WhatsApp groups. The links to these WhatsApp groups are frequently publicised on well-known SNS platforms and popular websites. These groups are typically themed around specific agendas or particular topics like politics, community development, interest groups, ideological pursuits, sports and professions alignments.

WhatsApp has a range of inherently distinct properties that are dissimilar to other SNSs and are conceptualised as affordances in its networking functionalities. The user's phone number and the SIM cards are the primary and unique identifier in WhatsApp groups (Mefolere, 2016). Setting up a WhatsApp account requires an individual to have an active phone number and Internet connection. The user's phone number acts as the app's unique identification component. It can provide user-to-user connection, broadcast messages, and also group chats as earlier noted. WhatsApp interactions reflects an engagement using various formats including: plain text messages and multimedia files, i.e. audio, images, and video (Muendo, 2017). It also entails the use of geolocation information and contact cards.

Each WhatsApp user is identified with a specific profile. Like other SNS platforms, a profile consists of a set of information, including a user's name, status line, and profile picture. The profile storage of each user's profile happens centrally. This profile is visible to oneself and other users who can download it as long as they are added to the contacts. The central messaging systems of WhatsApp also manages other processes like user authentication, registration, and message relay. Unlike other SNSs, WhatsApp privacy settings and features afford the user comparatively more accessibility controls for their profile. Moderation of engagement with other users happens through blocking like in other SNSs. WhatsApp also enables the user to block a user from their contact lists. WhatsApp also stores all the sent or received content in a chat database.

WhatsApp utilises a customised version of the open standard, extensible messaging and presence protocol (XMPP) (Mefolere, 2016). Principally, the user's phone number is used to generate their profile and account, which then becomes the standard for establishing a username (Calleja-castillo & Gonzalez-calderon, 2018). Through a WhatsApp web interface, WhatsApp web capabilities are accessed through laptops and computers based on a scanned configuration application where users download an app player (Kurowski, 2016). Service users can download the WhatsApp web version which they can use as comfortably as their phone-based versions. This means WhatsApp is heavily loading the critical access network and in particular, the uplink direction (Fiadino et al., 2016).

WhatsApp has other attractive affordances similar to other SNS platforms. Its global dispersion and penetration networks allow users to pursue personalised networking and still remain in a global network. This leads to the formation of private, individualised and egocentric sociability portfolios (Ndlela & Mulwo (2017). Research on WhatsApp messaging across various fields reflect its use to connect and engage with social and professional peers virtually

like in medicine, psychology, imaging, media and education (Ellanti et al., 2017; Martinez et al., 2017; Mazzuocolo et al., 2018; Garrison et al., 2016; Srilakshminarayana, 2016).

An individual's group of friends consists of participants already existing in their phone's contact list. Addition of a new group member entails first adding them into one's phonebook/ contacts. Unlike other SNS platforms, the formation of private WhatsApp groups is a more intentional, laborious, and selective process. Otherwise, WhatsApp automatically identifies phone contacts in a user's phone. Visible contacts become eligible members of one's group. Click-to-join WhatsApp links can now be formed and shared for anyone to join, since a recent development. Administrators can control a group of networked members because of their choice and control over their list of contacts (Fiadino et al., 2015).

The establishment of public WhatsApp group links makes it easier to join such groups without saving phone numbers to a user's phone as a precondition. Initially, mutual consent was not compulsory in order to add someone into one's group. However, as earlier noted, recently updated affordances now prohibit establishing a group without the consent of target users (Okeowo, 2019). The disadvantage is that a user's phone contacts and members are automatically visible to all group members. Similarly, any comments or contributions by any members are identifiable to that particular individual. The conversation amongst a group of participants on the same platform is called a 'group chat'. Users in public groups can suggest other users' contacts and addition via the snowball method. There can be several administrators in a WhatsApp group. Blocking a specific user prevents all future contact and consequently hides all future edits to profile information (Kurowski, 2016). Profile information is unique in WhatsApp in the sense that it is visible to all contacts by default, participants on the same platform is called a 'group chat'. Users in public groups can suggest other users' contacts and addition via the snowball method. There can be several administrators in a WhatsApp group. Blocking a specific user prevents all future contact and consequently hides all future edits to

profile information (Kurowski, 2016). Profile information is unique in WhatsApp in the sense that it is visible to all contacts by default but the user can limit the visibility of the profile by choosing options in the settings menu. The key advantage of WhatsApp as envisaged by the developers was its end-to-end encryption features to guarantee information security, sanctity of deliberations and protect user privacy (Rastogi & Hendler, 2016).

4.2.1 WhatsApp's Popularity in Kenya

As earlier noted, WhatsApp is more popular than Facebook or Twitter in Kenya (GeoPoll, 2017). Studies have linked the high WhatsApp usage in Kenya with its user-friendly interface and appealing interactivity affordances (Waterson, 2018). It uses a small internet bandwidth which makes it affordable and accessible to people in the lower socio-demographic categories. Its ability to share images and video and the fact that such content can easily cascade through groups makes it an apt SNS for governance deliberations. WhatsApp does not employ an algorithm that limits its organic reach (Gonçalves & Santos, 2014). It is devoid of negative content sieving that is characteristic of algorithms, machine learning, and data science on other SNS platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Gudipaty & Jhala, 2015).

WhatsApp has tipped the smartphone into mainstream culture across the globe (Rastogi & Hendler, 2016). In contexts like Kenya, network service providers like Safaricom now sell smartphones with incentives that include free bandwidth to access services such as WhatsApp and other SNS platforms (Oteri, Kibet, & Ndungu, 2015). It has revolutionised the way of life while influencing deliberations and socialisation in both developed and developing countries but the user can limit the visibility of the profile by choosing options in the settings menu. The key advantage of WhatsApp as envisaged by the developers was its end-to-end encryption features to guarantee information security, sanctity of deliberations and protect user privacy (Rastogi & Hendler, 2016). WhatsApp allows closed, more asynchronous, and intimate

deliberations between group members. Its end-to-end encryption boosts user perception of privacy and security (Rashidi et al., 2016; Rastogi & Hendler, 2016). The specificity of groups members through systematic addition and selection, as in the case of private WhatsApp groups, further enhances the perception of privacy. Exclusivity in private WhatsApp groups means the possibility of reaching ideologically minded participants or creating echo chambers exists. Homogeneous WhatsApp users are often selected to fit or suit a specific purpose of communication (Bouhnik et al., 2014).

While it serves the purpose of mass communications like any other SNS, WhatsApp can keep the initial source of the message anonymous (Sarker, 2015). With the viral transfer of information, it is challenging to trace the originator of messages. This presents a technical difficulty when curbing misinformation, hate speech, radicalisation, and polarisation via WhatsApp (see the section below). The dissemination through the app allows personalised messages because the exchange mostly happens between known users with one another's contacts. WhatsApp has also facilitated what Morris (2017) calls the hybridisation of media. In a 'twist of reversed digital engagement protocol', mainstream media are now turning to WhatsApp for news collection and dissemination (Bright, 2016, p. 19).

Among young people in Kenya, WhatsApp has achieved broad adoption because it is a stable, secure platform, cheaper than text messaging, user-friendly, and has a comparatively high hyper proximity with users (Kuroski, 2016; Rastogi & Hendler, 2016). As with many SNS platforms, WhatsApp strips images of any useful metadata (Sarker, 2015). This happens when images and videos start circulating within groups, and among users, and it is difficult to determine the origin of such content. As mentioned earlier, this is a great setback in the fight against radicalisation, criminal indoctrination, and terrorism. WhatsApp messaging has raised concerns relating to the spread of obscene videos and images.

Political aspirants continue to use WhatsApp to communicate with their voters (Rashdi, 2018). This has included sharing political adverts in the form of videos, catchy phrases, and audio recordings with their constituency. On the other hand, voters have used it to discuss and share their political preferences (De Zúñiga et al., 2019). WhatsApp use is popular for entertainment purposes such as to share jokes or funny messages. WhatsApp messaging is primarily used to 'dwell' with significant others in the virtual space (Flores-salgado & Castineira-benitez, 2018). The effects of WhatsApp use on social relationships includes a sense of belonging and a secure bond of commitment (Sarker, 2015). WhatsApp adoption is intended for interaction with close ties in comparison to more public platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (Rosenfeld et al., 2018), which revolve more around interaction with weak ties.

Studies looking at the digital discourse of WhatsApp group messages suggested the use of hybrid language as a distinctive pattern and feature of this platform in Kenya (Mefolere, 2016; Montag et al., 2015; Omanga, 2019a). Scholars have inferred the critical functions of emoji, emoticons, and memes on WhatsApp as reinforcing the message and possible action (Butticè et al., 2018; Cetinkaya, 2017). These affordances are also important for conveying feelings and emotions that are contextually understood and appropriate but challenging to transmit in a written style (Handelman, 2018). In contexts like Kenya, the nature of WhatsApp groups follows a deterministic social perspective. Social dynamics between participants, the level and nature of interactions between them dictate how participants establish, use and interact within their WhatsApp groups (Fiadino et al., 2015).

4.3. WhatsApp as a Public Sphere in Kenya

Having looked at WhatsApp affordances and its significant adoption in Kenya, its pervasiveness raises questions about its impact on socio-political dynamics related to

deliberative governance. These questions centre on whether WhatsApp has really transformed and revitalised the Habermasian concept of the public sphere. The public sphere, according to Habermas, should have three components (*see Chapter Two, pp 69-75*): it should have equal, inclusive, and protected involvement of participants and groups. Secondly, it should facilitate unfettered and unlimited access to information. Lastly, the platform should be devoid of institutional or commercial influence (Habermas, 2005; Habermas, 1989; McLaverty & Halpin, 2008; Ofunja et al., 2018; Susen, 2018). This section examines whether WhatsApp meets the Habermasian criteria of a public sphere and its aptness to enhance deliberative governance in Kenya.

According to Habermas (1987, 1989, 1992), the public sphere is a unitary sphere which allows universal access (cited in Dahlberg, 2010). With over 12 million users in contexts like Kenya, the potential for WhatsApp to facilitate productive governance discourse is at least superficially compelling. WhatsApp provides wide access because people in geographically dispersed locations can join and form multiple interlinked networks. Hence, it can be argued that WhatsApp can facilitate more equal, inclusive, and protected interaction of participants and groups in deliberations. As a platform, WhatsApp dispels some critics of the public sphere that it privileges a particular style of deliberation, class of individuals, and level of rationality (Silva, Colussi, & Rocha, 2018). This is because those who view one another to be in the minority can form their own groups and networks via WhatsApp. However, such self-selected membership to WhatsApp can create homogeneous groups leading to echo chambers and selective exposure effects (*see Chapter Two, pp.69-76*). WhatsApp has widened and broadened the calibre of participants in the public sphere by including groups initially excluded from public discourse and deliberation such as minority groups and women (Rashdi, 2018). Yet, information on WhatsApp is not entirely unlimited, nor is there inclusivity and equality in its access (Dahir, 2017). Whether WhatsApp achieves equality, inclusivity, and unfettered access

are context dependent when looking at the Habermasian ideal. Due to the digital divide in Kenya, WhatsApp is significantly limited to particular socio-demographic groups.

As a digital public sphere, WhatsApp has enhanced individuated networks and revamped online deliberative structures (Dayani & Ariff, 2014). WhatsApp encourages participants in groups to express their private dissenting views openly in what they consider to be safe 'spaces'. Further, WhatsApp groups may project a perception of tightly closed discussion enclaves with limited and selected exposure engagement with the outside entities. However, for public WhatsApp groups with online click-to-join links, the potential of content reaching diverse audiences through numerous interconnected public and private networks is immense. Unlike before, when dissenting or anti-establishment views could only be channelled through mainstream media for wide reach and coverage, WhatsApp now acts as an alternative ideology propagation route for pressure groups and civil society actors in Kenya (Moura & Michelson, 2017). Through WhatsApp, governance interest groups can access both niche and mass audiences more quickly and effectively (Guler, 2017).

In an era of heightened surveillance by the Kenyan government security apparatus, WhatsApp provides a more secure alternative space devoid of institutional and commercial influence in line with Habermasian ideals. Habermas noted the destructive factors that prevented the proper functioning of the public sphere (Kruse et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2015). For instance, he argued that commercial interests limit the role of mainstream media as effective public spheres (Habermas, 2005; Habermas, 1989). Habermas suggests that the public sphere should be revitalised through 'speech communities' (Kruse et al., 2018a). Such communities should be free from institutional influence and commercial interests that would prevent clarity, cloud objectivity, and prevent particular actions (Srinivasan et al., 2019a). Speech communities, for instance, prioritise deliberations as well as network building which are

translated into action (Karapanos et al., 2016). WhatsApp is a good example of such speech communities.

However, the concept of WhatsApp as a public sphere faces various challenges in the Kenyan context. WhatsApp has promoted a fragmented deliberative structure within Kenya's public sphere and political culture including: the fragmentation of space-time interactive dynamics as noted by Opperman & Vuuren (2018). Transient, asynchronous, and often incidental interactions via private and public WhatsApp groups eventually become pervasive in a user's daily life (Silva et al., 2018). This means that while various issues of public concern are deliberated and forwarded within the confines of private groups and public spheres, it is impractical to pay attention to all shared content unless selective exposure is practiced. Such a practice is, though, problematic (*see Chapter Two, p.71*), whereas instant interactive dynamics in WhatsApp groups increases issue prominence and exposure; these increases risk issues associated with misinformation (Sevdalis et al., 2015).

Transient, asynchronous, and often incidental interactions create difficulties for governance institutions to grasp pertinent issues (Santos & Faure, 2018). Fragmented deliberative structures also mean privileged governance information is circulated and accessed within a specific WhatsApp group only. This negates the idea of WhatsApp as a public sphere. Similar to other SNS platforms, WhatsApp is likely to amplify and reinforce certain negative tendencies that already exists in Kenya's socio-cultural and political context such as intolerance and limited inclusivity (Durmaz et al., 2019; Flores-salgado & Castineira-benitez, 2018). In the context of pluralistic cultural interactions, WhatsApp users' interest and demands are likely to become more intertwined and inconsistent (Durmaz et al., 2019). Deliberative governance via WhatsApp can become saturated with multiple voices (Maqsood et al., 2016). Multiple voices within fragmented social relations can jeopardise the stability of the public space if not well managed.

WhatsApp use and formation of WhatsApp groups in contexts like Kenya is shaped by specific social interaction patterns (GeoPoll, 2017; Mychelle et al., 2016; Omanga, 2019a). Such interaction patterns defines how people and groups connect, adopt, and interact in a unique way in their SNSs platform (Anglano, 2014). For instance, one common interaction pattern in Kenya is that individuals and groups who meet offline form WhatsApp groups where they continue their interactions and engagement online (Kibet & Ward, 2018). Therefore, it lengthens conversation and deliberations that would otherwise end with the physical separation of participants (Mychelle et al., 2016). Another interactive pattern involves the integration of evidenced-based deliberations. Using WhatsApp affordances, sharing of videos, audio, web-links, and textual material to corroborate deliberative arguments is common (Omanga, 2019a). Evidence-based deliberation via WhatsApp has enhanced the credibility of arguments by ordinary and grassroots organisations especially on matters related to human rights and politicisation of ethnicity. In Kenya, WhatsApp allows people to retain the connection with their villages which then promotes information exchange between the urban and rural groups (Omanga, 2019a). WhatsApp groups in urban and rural areas have seen resource-rich urban groups support less endowed rural groups with tangible results through fundraising and mobilisation of other development resources (Omanga, 2019b).

An existing culture in Kenya relates to how WhatsApp may have transformed the place of humour and its relevance within the public sphere. Humour in previous research has been considered as averse to deliberation, mobilisation, and efforts towards building social capital (Killen et al., 2018; Holton & Lewis, 2011; Lange, 2008; Lee, 2012). However, humour in WhatsApp can provide an aesthetic value to otherwise mundane deliberative discourses. WhatsApp provides a para-social space where groups converge and this affords them a platform to share, to belong, and to connect (Kibet & Ward, 2018). Humour is very important in creating a sense of belonging and connection necessary for deliberation. Deliberation,

reinforced with humour, has been found to enhance the capacity for message reception and persuade attitudes (Boria, 2011; Livingstone, 2014). Humour in WhatsApp is shared in the form of videos, memes, jocular quotes, and emojis. Creation and forwarding of memes and humorous videos are part of a pervasive sub-culture in WhatsApp interaction in Kenya. Furthermore, humour on WhatsApp can help relax the discursive style and thus provide an alternative to the rigid elite-controlled broadcast platforms. However, while the sharing of humour in WhatsApp groups holds a promise for increased access to governance discourse, it is possible that parody and humour can, at the same time, foster apathy and cynicism according to (Davis et al., 2018). Cynicism, in the context of deliberations, is likely to lessen the seriousness and attention that should accompany deliberative governance.

4.5 WhatsApp and Deliberative Governance in Kenyan Counties

The challenges and shortcoming of deliberations in public forums across various counties has led to the adoption and use of WhatsApp to fill the gap. For instance, public forum venues had restricted access in terms of the number of people who participated in deliberations (International Budget Partnership, 2014). In addition, the documents that guided deliberations in public forums were packaged in technical language containing jargon (Omanga, 2019). They were bound in highly voluminous texts with dense prose making grassroots interrogation of the documents challenging and near impossible for some participants (Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017). In some instances, the actual role of public deliberation in the forums was grossly ignored or misunderstood (World Bank, 2015). County officials considered it as a bothersome legal routine while citizens saw it as a platform to self-express and speak to power on anything. Therefore, there was a general mismatch between the intent and actual outcome as regards public deliberation forums. Consequently, the spaces and public forums convened as per the constitutional requirement were not diverse, inclusive or representative as anticipated (Dahir,

2017). There was a pattern of mere tokenism where public deliberations sought to attain the minimum legal requirements in form but not in actuality (Finch et al., 2015). Citizens, exasperated by the superfluity and unreliability of public deliberations, sought alternative platforms for meaningful engagement. Such a context gave rise to SNS platforms like WhatsApp to fill the void. The influence of WhatsApp on county deliberative governance in Kenya, it can be argued, revolves around various factors (Connectivity; watchdog role; mobilisation and transformation of deliberation):

Connectivity - Digital optimists argue that WhatsApp has transformed the structure of networking compared to other SNS platforms that have positively influenced county government political and governance discourse (Kanyinga, 2014; Maloiy et al.,2016). WhatsApp has supported the translation of county public forums into virtual networks of interaction and thus lengthened deliberations beyond offline contexts (Lynch & Crawford, 2011). For instance, a WhatsApp group called '*Sauti ya wachuuzi*'¹⁵ (voice of young traders) began after its members met in a public forum in Nakuru county. It has more than 300 members and is touted as having contributed effectively to the election of the 'peoples' Governor in the 2017 general elections. The WhatsApp group was the centre of platform debates and analysis that informed the decisions of many to choose the leaders they settled for at the county and national level elections. The group drew diverse small-scale traders from across the county and created a large network of similar minded participants via the WhatsApp group. This exemplifies the adoption of WhatsApp for networking, deliberation, and coordination of a strategy to achieve governance outcomes (Kiptalam & Rodrigues, 2010).

Mobilisation-Some scholars have connected WhatsApp use with improved networking dynamics and political volunteerism in civil society organisations in Kenyan counties (Nyambura & Waema, 2011). WhatsApp is among the leading platforms used by non-

¹⁵ Sauti ya wachuuzi is a WhatsApp group that has more than 500 members across Nakuru County. Their aim is to advocate for improved trading conditions and environment for small scale traders at the county level.

governmental organisations for informal engagement at the county level (Kanyinga, 2014; Maloiy et al., 2016). WhatsApp groups like ‘*Sauti ya wachuuzi*’ have shown a great potential to create substantial network capital consisting of both informal and informal engagement (Simon et al., 2014). It has promoted the merger of participatory capital and enlivened the groups’ commitment towards a culture of informal, purposeful but coordinated discussions (Srinivasan et al., 2019b). Evidence shows that groups like ‘*Sauti ya wachuuzi*’ have positively restructured and transformed the submission of petitions on political and governance processes at the county level (Karombo, 2019). ‘*Sauti ya wachuuzi*’ group members discuss and agree on specific issues, then select a group of representatives who then present their petitions during county assembly public participation forums. Similarly, petitions can be forwarded to relevant county leaders through WhatsApp platforms directly. Such networking and coordination has improved inclusivity to the extent that geographically diverse groups can instantly contribute and aggregate their discussions into petitions at the county assemblies (Swigger, 2013).

Transformation-WhatsApp, has transformed a non-hierarchical and dialogical interaction thus making deliberations more inclusive and responsive at the county level (Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017). The implication of a non-hierarchical approach is the decentralisation of deliberations to a more local level within the counties (Kanyinga, 2014; Maloiy et al, 2016). Whereas county governance institutions mismanaged public forums and sometimes manipulated information flow through a top-down approach in governance (Brooks et al., 2014), platforms like WhatsApp allowed a convergence of a top-down and bottom-up flow of information. This has resulted in a more responsive governance interaction framework which takes user-centred perspectives and views into account (Fiadino et al., 2016). WhatsApp in some counties has mainly facilitated a bottom-up approach where informal discussions on the platforms have led to the submission of formal budgetary proposals. This has translated into a much more pro-active and inclusive budget-making process than before (Osatuyi, 2013). ‘*The*

Nakuru Analyst', using both formal and informal budget discussions forums, champions policies and issues they feel the county government has long ignored or needs to address.

Part of the group's aim was to create a convergence platform for county citizens and elected county authorities in one digital space for deliberation (Omanga, 2019b). Omanga (2019) describes the WhatsApp group as an alternative platform to public forums and a specific barometer of county governance and political affairs. Because of the limited number of participants who can join the WhatsApp group, the administrator encourages activeness in contribution, interaction, and engagement among its members, failure to do which risks removal from the group as a member. During the electioneering period of 2017, the administrators of '*The Nakuru Analyst*' invited aspirants of various elective seats in the county to sell their manifesto and answer questions of interest to the WhatsApp group members. With increased interest in the concept, the '*The Nakuru Analyst*' was replicated and formed at sub-county levels (constituencies) through a network of other WhatsApp groups known by the same name: 'Analysts' (Omanga, 2019b), for example, Kuresoi Analysts, Naivasha Analysts, Molo Analysts, and Njoro Analysts, and so on. An interesting dynamic that was evident in the 'Analysts' WhatsApp groups is the focus and attention on specific discussion norms (Omanga, 2019b). Discussion norms enforced include: civility, tolerance, respect of others' opinions, and forbidden sharing of content that is obscene, inflammatory, bordering on rumours or doesn't add value to the deliberations (Omanga, 2019b).

Watchdog role- WhatsApp groups in Kenyan counties have also strengthened citizens' watchdog roles in governance by pushing for accountability and querying processes and activities at the county level. A good example of a public watchdog via WhatsApp happens in groups such as '*The County Watch*' (*Kericho County*) and '*The Accountability Demand Network*' (*Nairobi County*). These WhatsApp groups use videos, audio, pictures, and even written submissions to document and share perceived misappropriation, malpractices, and

resource misuse within the county. Various cases of corruption, low service delivery and slothful transaction in county governance institutions have been captured and forwarded to relevant authorities for redress through initiatives of the '*The County Watch*'. However, due to the sensitivity of these group's activities, most of its member have been threatened and silenced because of their pursuits. Another challenge has been the lack of a legislative framework to strengthen the group's demands for accountability due to lack of access to information laws. Instant messaging platforms like WhatsApp have thwarted and frustrated attempts by governments to suppress access to information (Ott & Rosser, 2007). WhatsApp has significantly circumvented government censorship of information and access due to its securitised end-to-end encryption (Silva et al., 2018). WhatsApp can strategically circumvent spatial, cognitive, and temporal constraints individuals face in establishing accountability networks within their counties (Boulianne, 2018). A study on the perception of privacy on SNS platforms ranked WhatsApp very high among young and educated respondents across East Africa (Mefolere, 2016), and accounts for the overwhelming membership by this segment of the population.

Also related to its watchdog role is that WhatsApp has expanded the scope of citizen involvement in identifying remedies for practical, technical and structural shortcomings affecting accountability and transparency in governance (Uraia Trust, 2012). WhatsApp groups like '*The County Watch*' have positively contributed to addressing the unstructured and unresponsive county governance institutions. WhatsApp groups on politics and governance are driven by gaps in voice and accountability between leaders and citizens (Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017). Another vibrant and effective WhatsApp group examined in the study is called '*In The Streets of Nakuru*', whose objectives are enhancing environmental conservation and county sanitation awareness. This WhatsApp group spearheaded the #ISupportBanPlastic, advocating the plastic ban of below 100 microns. With their petitioning, the county government banned

plastics and this resulted in nationwide modelled legislation and implementation. The ease and speed with which information related to transparency issues related to governance are widely shared, discussed and analysed via WhatsApp is both remarkable and dangerous (Asongu & Odhiambo, 2018). By contributing to free speech and the free flow of information, WhatsApp can liberalise voice, power and communicative efficiency on governance issues according to Boulianne, (2018). For instance, members of county assembly are now able to instantly update and inform their constituency on various bills on the floor of the house via WhatsApp. In turn, interest groups and citizens are able to relay real-time feedback to their representatives to fortify their arguments in the county assemblies (Omanga, 2019).

While no study has been done, digital pessimists have hinted on the narrowcasting features of WhatsApp and its potential to enhance political polarisation, ideological intolerance, and social fragmentation at the county level (Mueller, 2014). However, the pluralist structure of WhatsApp groups will possibly enhance exposure and exchange of diverse content. It is not clear whether the diversity of information sources has translated into the plurality of viewpoints in the Kenyan context. There is a possibility that homogeneous WhatsApp groups will consult specific subject matter experts and analysts on specific governance issues. This practice is likely to further narrow the homogeneity of their perspectives, views and information. However, the contrary perspective is that WhatsApp users, like on other SNS platforms, can have general exposure to content outside their spheres. Access to information sources through shared links from other SNS platforms can challenge the ideological preferences and issue positions of WhatsApp group members (Nickerson, 2017). The frequency of interaction and deliberation that is characteristic of WhatsApp use means access to diverse content will happen more profoundly and continuously.

Whereas WhatsApp has attained greater adoption in Kenya, it may have supported the reinforcement hypothesis by granting significant benefits to those already vibrant on other SNS

platforms (Buys et al., 2009; Makinen & Kuira, 2008b; Ndavula & Mberia, 2012). WhatsApp may have attracted participants who possess the requisite civic skills, income, inhabit strategic areas of residence (urban dwellers), and have access to socially supportive civic networks all of which are important determinants of participation in deliberations (Makinen & Kuira, 2008b; Ndavula & Mberia, 2012). Based on the arguments of a transformed public sphere, improvements in the platform of interactions, as in the case of WhatsApp, may not significantly improve the cognitive and interactive dynamics of deliberators (Boulianne, 2019). Studies on media effects have argued that simple knowledge-based stimulus-response models only account for a minute fraction of human behaviour (Iyengar et al., 2016). By increasing the range of information, scholars found that SNS platforms like WhatsApp do not necessarily translate into an informed populace (Berg-schlosser, 2017; Ndavula & Mberia, 2012). While examining the gaps between the availability of information via SNS platforms and low participation levels among Kenyan voters, Maloiy et al. (2016) found a negative correlation. Information has to be processed by users to create meaning. Practical knowledge rather than mere information translates citizens' apathy into efficacy and participation in deliberations (Loader & Mercea, 2011a). Improved cognitive abilities among WhatsApp users is not solely dependent on the availability of information (Price et al., 2002); other factors account for such abilities as well.

4.6 WhatsApp Groups and Polarisation in Kenya

Having looked at the impact of WhatsApp on governance dynamics related to connectivity, watchdog roles, mobilisation, and transformation of deliberations, no study linking WhatsApp and polarisation currently exists in Kenya. This research, however, suggests that the connection between the two is likely to depend on the deliberative structure and deliberative norms in the platform (*see Chapter Two, p.37*). These two factors are likely to influence the quality and

plurality of reasoned arguments on governance and polarisation on WhatsApp. As a deliberative structure, WhatsApp messages are generally encrypted and their suitability for spreading fake news, inflammatory content, and misinformation is very high (Santos & Faure, 2018). End-to-end encryption means that only the intended recipients can access their messages (Yus, 2017) and, therefore, provides a safe-haven away from government regulation and monitoring by security agencies (Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017; Srinivasan et al., 2019a). Encrypted messages make it challenging to fact-check, monitor, and control the spread of polarising content (Mychelle et al., 2016). It is critical to understand the socio-demographic usage of WhatsApp as a deliberative structure. Studies on SNS platforms in Kenya suggest that polarisation is more prevalent among older age groups who are least likely to join any such platforms (Kireia, 2018). Other studies have also found group polarisation to be more prevalent among rural as compared to urban groups (Ndavula & Mberia, 2012; Wyche et al., 2013).

As relates to exposure to heterogenous viewpoints, WhatsApp is likely to embolden how participants express their diverse identities and ideological positions (Mutahi & Kimari, 2017; Mychelle et al., 2016). As suggested in other SNS studies, WhatsApp groups are likely to consist of homogeneous participants, and they are likely to heighten awareness of in-group and out-group identities. This is likely to foster the increasing growth of negative perceptions towards those holding divergent opinions as has been proven on other SNS platforms in Kenya (Wyche et al., 2013). Furthermore, identity politics that is characteristic of Kenyan society is likely to exist in enclosed online environments such as WhatsApp groups (Karpisek et al., 2015). It is, however, not clear whether diverse participants translate into diverse viewpoints. Research in other contexts shows that it is possible to have diverse participants with homogeneous viewpoints (Duggins, 2017). It is also unclear whether exercising moderation and enhancing tolerance in a diverse context will achieve less polarisation of divisive governance issues in deliberations.

To manage appropriate use of the platform and the enforcement of deliberative norms, WhatsApp has also recently introduced a number of measures to curb misinformation and polarisation (Marfianto & Riadi, 2018). The explicit labelling of multi-media content as forwards (Marfianto & Riadi, (2018). This was intended to limit the replicability and scalability of incivil, hateful, and inflammatory content. The content is strictly limited to five forwards at a specific time. The most frequently forwarded messages are also identified and labelled. Secondly, unlike previously, WhatsApp users have a choice about whether to be added to groups or not. Initially, this could be done without prior permission from the user as a default option. Lastly, WhatsApp group administrators have been granted more powers regarding which users can share and forward content (Kizel, 2019). Addition of users after they have left the group is also restricted. WhatsApp users now have greater control over whether an unknown user can see their content even though in the same group. In the past, several WhatsApp group administrators have been arrested for sharing hate messages via WhatsApp in Kenya (Dahir, 2017). The charge sheet stated that they threatened national security by spreading alarming propaganda via WhatsApp. However, no comprehensive legal framework exists to tackle issues of polarisation, especially in the online domain (Dahir, 2017).

Nonetheless, positive examples of how WhatsApp has fostered de-polarisation exists in Kenya. For instance, the *Uwiano* Peace Platform takes advantage of WhatsApp affordances to obtain information on hate speech, tensions, incitement, threats and violence across the nation (Halakhe, 2013; Mutahi & Kimari, 2017). Previously, information was sent to analysts who then mapped, verified, and forwarded the data to a multi-disciplinary rapid response system for quick intervention (Halakhe, 2013). *Uwiano* takes a different approach to tackling polarisation and violence compared to what has been adopted in other areas of the globe in the form of product design and more literacy campaigns. Furthermore, WhatsApp now uses

machine-based learning mechanisms to identify, analyse, and ban accounts that forward bulk messages (Rastogi & Hendler, 2016).

4.7. Conclusion

The Kenyan Constitution and the County Government Act, 2012 spells out the role of the media (mainstream and social media) in deliberations and polarisation. This legislative mandate is not entirely baseless because SNSs are widely used in Kenya. The combination of good Internet speed and a wide mobile phone penetration have facilitated the significant uptake of SNS platforms. Therefore, these platforms are an indispensable component of deliberative governance processes and depolarisation in Kenya. For instance, deliberation on SNS platforms had been found to improve the feedback loop on governance and policy issues and enhanced mental elaboration and cognitive skills. SNSs have also transformed governance discourse through the formation of governance networks, and improved mobilisation for participation in deliberation. However, deliberative governance on SNS platforms is limited by critical factors such as the digital divide that still exists between urban and rural dwellers in Kenya. Further, there is a tendency for SNS users to dismiss, satirise and degrade serious governance issues into mere dramatic occurrences. While SNS platforms have positive outcomes regarding deliberative governance, their history and effects on polarisation has been negative. For instance, the role of SNSs and their potential to fuel violence was more evident following the 2007/2008 post-election violence in Kenya. They provided a platform to drive citizen narratives consisting of polarised, inflammatory and exaggerated accounts of grassroots reactions during the crisis. With an understanding of this SNS history and background, it is of interest that the constitution would mandate the use of this platform to achieve depolarisation.

With over 12 million users in Kenya, the potential for WhatsApp to facilitate productive governance discourse as a public sphere is compelling. Based on some of the normative

Habermasian tenets, the chapter has argued that WhatsApp does not entirely meet the key considerations for a public sphere. WhatsApp has facilitated unfettered and unlimited access to information to specific demographic segments who are not limited by digital the digital divide. As a public sphere, one common subculture in Kenya involves the use of WhatsApp to translate offline public spheres into online networks instantly. WhatsApp, like other SNS platforms amplifies and reinforces certain tendencies that already exist in a socio-cultural context. It makes multidimensional deliberation possible through the ability to join various groups and engage asynchronously. As a public sphere, the influence of WhatsApp on deliberative governance in Kenya revolves around various factors: connectivity, watchdog role, mobilisation, and transformation of deliberations. Despite these positive outcomes of deliberative governance, WhatsApp has narrowcasting features that are likely to enhance political and social fragmentation. Such a fragmented deliberative structure also means privileged governance information is circulated and accessed within specific WhatsApp groups only. Further, it may have supported the reinforcement hypothesis by granting significant benefits to those already vibrant on other SNS platforms.

The link between WhatsApp and polarisation is likely to depend on two factors: its deliberative structure and deliberative norms. The challenges of WhatsApp and polarisation in Kenya relate to its suitability to spread fake news and misinformation. For instance, end-to-end encryption is likely to provide a safe-haven from government regulation and monitoring by security agencies. This implies that such sense of security is likely to embolden participants to make extreme claims and views during deliberations. WhatsApp, like other SNS platforms, has radically transformed how participants express their political identities and ideological positions in Kenya. This may have fostered the increasing growth of negative perceptions toward those holding divergent opinions. WhatsApp interlaces polarising information into a broader stream of content easily accessible to users.

Chapter Five

Research Design and Methodology

5.0 Introduction

The research approach adopted in this study consist of four elements: research paradigm, epistemological stance, research methodology, and the research design. Critical realism is the research paradigm used in this study. It strategically interrelates epistemology and ontology. As a paradigm, it is well suited to merge the strengths of both positivist and interpretivist perspectives. It also offers a more tenable position concerning the status of knowledge and specific claims about the existing reality. Critical realism often adopts triangulation and mixed research methods in its approach. Triangulation was adopted in this study for three reasons which are to achieve completeness, confirmation, and retrodution in the study of the research phenomenon. As regards to mixed methods, the study used both quantitative (online surveys), and qualitative research (online focus groups) designs, both of which were managed via WhatsApp platform. The choice of both methods in this study was informed by the research objectives, context, and nature of this research inquiry. The multi-disciplinary and multi-contextual aspect of this study also influenced and informed this choice. The study respondents for both qualitative and quantitative methods were sampled from specific WhatsApp groups using both probability and non-probability sampling methods. This research, therefore, relies on primary data obtained directly through fieldwork using online surveys and focus group discussions. The chapter elaborates some of the statistical approaches used in the research, some of which have been previously used in similar studies. The chapter ends with a review of the ethical guidelines for digital media research that guided this study.

5.1 Research Paradigm

According to Aliyu et al., (2015), a research paradigm consists of an all-encompassing system of interconnected thinking and practice which elaborately defines the nature of the research enquiry. Morgan, (2007) argued that a research paradigm is a shared belief system that dictates the nature of knowledge and evidence researchers seek and how they interpret its content. Morgan, (2007) further categorises the conception of a research paradigm concept into four elements: (1) the researcher's worldviews; (2) as the kind of epistemological stance in research; (3) as shared beliefs and research approaches related to a particular area of study; (4) and as a model of research. This research study adopts the second and third categories being the most popular in social sciences (Morgan, 2007).

Paradigms can be depicted based on a continuum with positivism on one end and constructivism on the other end (Deforge & Shaw, 2012; Denzin, 2012). This leaves critical realism and pragmatism at the middle of the continuum according to (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). The idea of a continuum elaborates and simplifies the controversy and dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism (Feilzer, 2009; Morgan, 2014). According to Sefotho, (2015), a continuum is significant in understanding the paradigmatic differences between ontological and epistemological components of a research. A researcher at the initial stages of the study adopts a specific paradigm regarding the nature of knowledge they wish to pursue (Black, 2006). This forms a researcher's theoretical perspective and guides the nature of research questions and shapes the researcher's choice of research methodology and method.

Some scholars argue that ontology and epistemology are mutually dependent and therefore, difficult to distinguish conceptually (Aliyu et al., 2015; Black, 2006; Goldkuhl, 2012; Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Epistemology is considered as the construction of particular meaning while ontology is the construction of a meaningful reality (Cameron, 2011). Epistemology generally guides the researcher's assumptions about knowledge (Chatterjee, 2013). It seeks to

establish a philosophical grounding for researchers to decide what kinds of knowledge are possible (Chatterjee, 2013). It further guides how researchers ensure that their pursuit of knowledge is legitimate and adequate. Therefore, an epistemological stance implies a specific ontological stance and vice versa (Plewis & Mason, 2005). According to Brannen, (2004), they are dissimilar, but interconnected. Both ontological and epistemological shapes the perceived and relative importance of the aspects of reality as considered in any research study (De Lisle, 2011). Based on existing research paradigms, epistemological stands can be categorised into two possible worldviews: objectivistic and constructivist (Black, 2006; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013).

5.1.1 The Ontological and Epistemological Dimensions of Critical Realism

As indicated in (*Figure 1*) below, critical realism is the research paradigm guiding this research study. Critical realism, developed by Bhaskar, (1975), is a comparatively new philosophical perspective. It shapes a wide range of research concepts, including epistemology, causation, ontology, persons, structure, and forms of explanation. Critical realism, according to Miller & Tsang (2010), strategically interrelates epistemology and ontology. It is an alternative paradigm both to the established paradigms of interpretivism and positivism. Due to its applicability in both natural and social sciences, it has received scholarly attention in a wide variety of research fields (Archer et al., 2013; Bhaskar, 1975, 2014; Decoteau, 2017; Eastwood et al., 2014; K. D. Miller & Tsang, 2010; Mingers & Standing, 2017; Sorrell, 2018; De Souza, 2013; Steffansen, 2016; Steinmetz, 1998).

Critical realism situates itself as an alternative to the positivists philosophical perspective that emphasize specific validity and reliability factors in research according to Souza, (2013) and the use of regression-based variables models according to Eastwood et al., (2014). Furthermore, critical realism is an alternative to the interpretivist perspective and emphasises the explanation of phenomena using a holistic perspective (Sorrell, 2018). There is

no unitary research framework, research methodology, universally accepted academic dogma or set of beliefs that unites critical realists. Yet as an increasingly prominent philosophy adopted by social scientists, it is founded on a priori or critical truths and phenomenon relating to the nature of the world researchers seek to understand (Bhaskar, 2014).

Critical realism, according to Sorrell, (2018), offers a more tenable position concerning the status of knowledge and specific claims about the existing reality (epistemology). It aptly assists researchers to define and apply the nature of a particular reality (ontology). The progress by critical realists has been possible due to its adoption of all intransitive dimension of reality and phenomenon in its processes and design (Steffansen, 2016). As Bhaskar, (1975) noted, it provides a critical point of reference through which theories can be tested. However, critical realists acknowledge that it is impossible to fully comprehend and categorise some realities (Archer et al., 2013). The researcher's perceptions when using critical realism are defined by their investigative interests, the nature of research questions, and the limits of the resources available for the process (Decoteau, 2017).

Considering topics like polarisation and deliberative governance, it is possible that the knowledge of the context of research is largely mediated by other factors outside a researcher's scope of consideration. Hence, it is only possible to obtain empirical feedback from specific aspects of the context of study that are available and accessible. This is why critical realists categorise ontological and epistemological into three modes or domains of reality (Bhaskar, (1975) and Archer et al., (2013). The first category is the empirical which defines the aspects of reality experienced either indirectly or directly. The second is the actual and defines those aspects of reality which actually occur but impossible to measure or categorise as research variables. The third relates to the real mechanisms and structures that influence the actual research phenomena and are often manifest during research processes.

A second critical realist ontological dimension argues that reality is stratified (Eastwood et al., 2014). However, according to some critical realists, the argument that reality is both hierarchically ordered and categorically defined in different levels is untenable. The lower level is thought to create foundational conditions for the higher level (Eastwood et al., 2014). Each stratum is distinct and separate but has the potential to interact with the layer below or above to produce new objects, social phenomenon, mechanisms, and events (Steffansen, 2016; Steinmetz, 1998). The ability of mechanisms in a social context to combine and recreate something new is referred to as emergence (Eastwood et al., 2014). Therefore, the task of critical realists is to unearth the underlying mechanisms that produce a particular phenomenon (Decoteau, 2017). Further, their role is to establish the interplay between such social phenomenon and their impact on the overall outcome.

Critical realists argue that causal mechanisms cannot be inferred with certainty because they cannot be openly or directly observed. According to Mcevoy & Richards, (2006) and Miller & Tsang, (2010), causation can be inferred through a combination of theory construction and empirical investigation. Whereas this study's interest relates to the correlational as opposed to causation mechanisms, its ultimate goal is to delve deeper than a mere correlation matrix and develop deeper explanation and broader levels of understanding of the research phenomena. Unlike positivism, this study does not aim to identify and establish generalisable laws relating to the subject of study. Neither does it seek to explore the shared beliefs or the lived experience of the research participants as is the case in interpretivism.

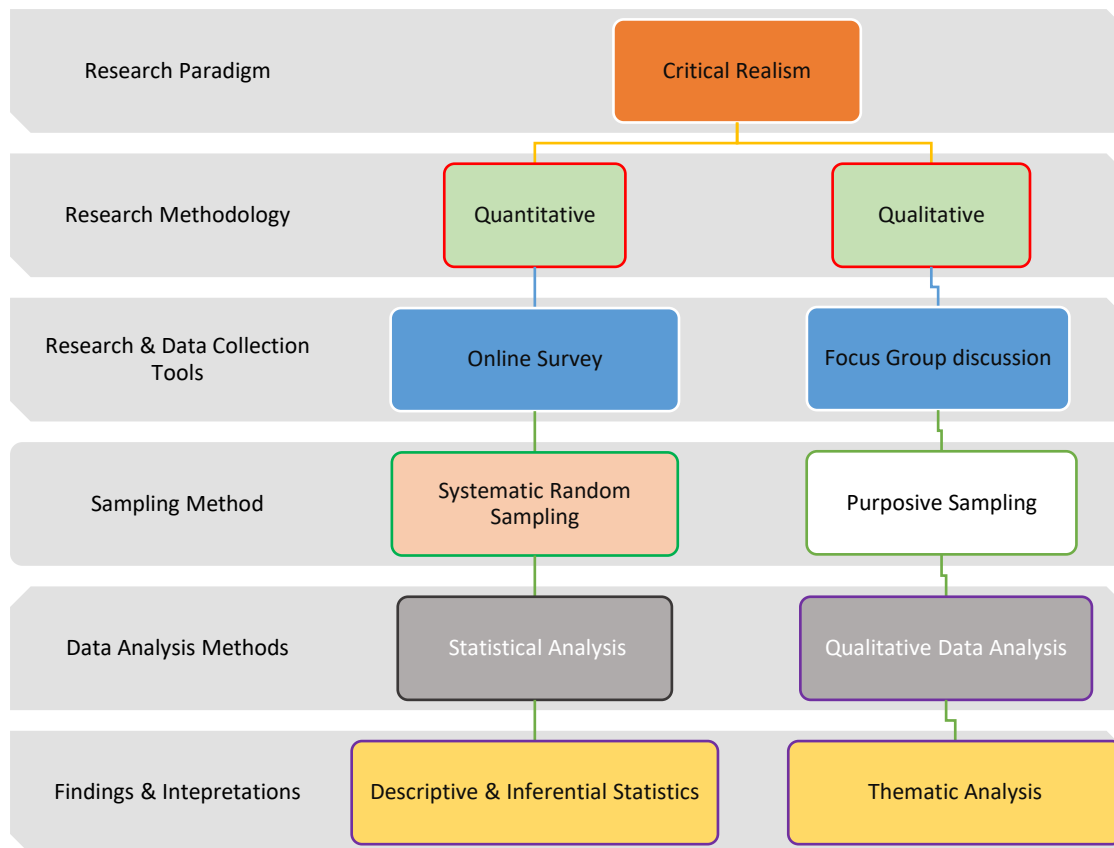
From a critical realist perspective, positivists focus on observable events or phenomena while failing to consider the extent to which such observations are pre-influenced by intervening factors and theoretical frameworks (Archer et al., 2013). Positivists unrealistically deal with relationships between variables and component of a social systems in isolation (Mingers & Standing, 2017). They assume a closed system and ignore or minimise the impact

of the interactions between mechanisms, variables and phenomena within a particular context in which they occur (Decoteau, 2017). On the other hand, critical realists acknowledge the place and value of interpretivist approaches focusing on valuable discourse, social interactions, human perception and motivation (Bhaskar, 2014; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). Interpretivists appreciate that human reasons and interactions can provide causal explanations (Easton, 2010).

However, critical realists are critical of interpretivists when they fail to relate human discourses and underlying social structures (Deforge & Shaw, 2012; Mcevoy & Richards, 2006). This creates a challenge where the actions of participants are constrained to the social networks in which social actors are embedded (Mcevoy & Richards, 2006). Importantly, critical realists acknowledge that the accounts of research participants may be incomplete, misguided or falsified to create good impressions (Miller & Tsang, 2010; Steinmetz, 1998). Critical realism is a suitable paradigm for this study because it acknowledges that the real world, such as governance institutions, operates as multi-dimensional, interactive open system.

The effects on variables result from the interaction between social structures, systemic mechanism, and human agency (Bhaskar, 2014). Causal mechanisms have a greater potential to impact on the structures and social phenomenon under study (Shannon-Baker, 2016). Besides, the actualisation of the mechanism is dependent upon the variable conditions in which the mechanism operates (Archer et al., 2013). It is, therefore, more appropriate to think in terms of the tendencies that are produced by underlying causal mechanisms, than in terms of empirical generalisations.

Figure 5. 1: Diagrammatic Elaboration of Research Approach and Design



Source: Researcher, 2018

Critical realism also relies on the concept of retrodution (Easton, 2010; Eastwood et al., 2014; Steffansen, 2016). This involves moving beyond observations and lived experience to postulate and seek explanations on the underlying mechanisms and structures that account for a research phenomenon. Retrodution involves asking why social events and specific phenomena happened in a particular way (Eastwood et al., 2014). Meaning, a critical realist consider the best explanations are those with the greatest explanatory power. According to Steinmetz (1998), explanations are potentially open to review and revision. It also follows that accepted theories and explanations can be rejected in favour of more convincing alternatives. This happens if the alternative can better explain a phenomenon in a much deeper and broader way with the potential to generate theoretical arguments that are actually realised.

5.1.2 Triangulation and Mixed Methods Design

Critical realists argue that the choice of methods should be dictated by the nature of the research problem (Bhaskar, 2014; Mcevoy & Richards, 2006; De Souza, 2013; Steffansen, 2016). Most critical realists also argue that an effective approach will most likely combine both qualitative and quantitative methods or techniques (Bhaskar, 2014; Eastwood et al., 2014; Mcevoy & Richards, 2006; Mingers & Standing, 2017; De Souza, 2013; Steffansen, 2016). Importantly, critical realists are keen to focus on how qualitative and quantitative methods are used. Quantitative methods help to develop reliable descriptions and provide accurate comparisons (Shannon-baker, 2016). In the exploratory phase of a research study, quantitative methods can help identify covert patterns, correlations, and associations (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). This shapes how a critical realist teases out unexpected and new causal explanations and mechanisms (Deforge & Shaw, 2012).

Quantitative methods can be used to examine theories and their interactions with causal mechanisms within a specific context (Miller & Tsang, 2010). From a critical realist perspective, qualitative methods are open-ended and comparatively more flexible tools of inquiry (Bhaskar, 2014). Qualitative methods allow themes to emerge during an inquiry that could not have been anticipated in advance (Sorrell, 2018). Qualitative methods also illuminate complex relationships and concepts that are often missed in predetermined response categories or during standardised quantitative measures (Archer et al., 2013; De Souza, 2013).

As noted in (*Figure 5.1*) above, this study adopted triangulation which incorporates more than one source of data or research method to examine a social phenomenon. A mixed methods approach incorporates distinct set of analytical practices and methodologies. Mixed methods are characterised by ‘paradigm pluralism’ and ‘eclecticism’ (Denzin, 2012, p. 82). According to Morgan, (2009), it is a rejection of rigid dichotomies and a celebration of research

contextual diversity according to (Denzin, 2012). This is an iterative approach to research inquiry with a specific emphasis on the research question (Bryman, 2007).

Critics of the mixed methods approach can be found among those who view and consider the incommensurability and incompatibility of mixed methods (Denzin, 2012). The complexity is based on the argument that quantitative or qualitative methods are established on different paradigmatic assumptions which cannot be combined (Goldkuhl, 2012). Practically, mixed methods designs are very expensive as a research strategy (Cameron, 2011). Other critics argue that mixed methods also achieve undesirable effects in what (Denzin, 2012, p. 83) terms as ‘methodological bilingualism’ which means that some researchers do not have adequate skills to merge the findings from mixed methods research.

Mixed method designs are categorised based on the level of prioritisation of either quantitative or qualitative approaches (Feilzer, 2010) (*see Figure 5.1*). It also depends on the strategic ways in which combining data is possible, considering the priority and timing of data collection (Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). Under critical realism, the combination and collection of data can occur sequentially or concurrently (Driscoll et al., 2007). All these are dictated by specific constraints and boundaries of the study context (Snelson, 2016). Based on arguments by Mcevoy & Richards, (2006), triangulation in this study is adopted as a component of critical realism for three reasons: (1) completeness; (2) confirmation; (3) and retrodution.

Triangulation in this study seeks to achieve confirmation which enhances the reliability and validity of the research findings (Florczak, 2015). The combination of research approaches and methods assist the researchers to counteract the biases and shortcomings associated with adopting a single research method (Carroll et al., 2011). The assumption is that triangulation will achieve the corroboration of data to support more robust conclusions (Shannon-baker, 2016). Combining both approaches and designs in mixed methods empowers the researcher to

improve the accuracy of their data (Feilzer, 2010). The use of triangulation in mixed methods produces a clearer picture in research (Morgan, 2014). This is what is referred to as completeness. Completeness also refers to the way in which the combination of research methods compensates specific strengths and weaknesses associated with one particular method (Cameron, 2011; Morgan, 2014; Shannon-baker, 2016).

Triangulation makes sense for a critical realist and positivist than to an interpretivist (Ruwhiu & Cone, 2010). This is based on the argument that interpretivists, unlike critical realist and positivist, are generally agnostic about the question of whether or not there exists a tangible reality (Brannen, 2004; Cameron, 2011; Mertens, 2011; Onwuegbuzie, 2012). Secondly, triangulation achieves completeness when it seeks to obtain a more complementary and deeper perspectives of social phenomenon using different data source (Denzin, 2012; Hussein, 2009; Mertens & Hesse-Biber, 2012). Triangulation often comes in handy as a way of developing the analysis (Coxon, 2005) and building upon initial findings using contrasting kinds of data or methods (Agee, 2017). Whereas a positivist seeks confirmation to reveal different aspects of a social phenomenon, an interpretivist seeks it to provide a much deeper range of perspectives (Bryman, 2007). For a critical realist, both of these goals are critical and compatible with the objectives of the paradigm. Lastly, triangulation provides a platform for achieving a retroductive inferences about the causal mechanisms in a specific context (Carter et al., 2014).

5.2 Research Methodology

In line with critical realism as earlier explained, the study used both quantitative (online surveys) and qualitative research (online focus groups) designs. At one level, qualitative and quantitative refer to distinctions about the nature of knowledge (Brannen, 2004): how one understands the world and the ultimate purpose of the research (MacDonald & Headlam, 1999).

On another level of discourse, the terms refer to research methods, that is, how data are collected and analysed (Brannen, 2005). It shapes the type of generalisations and representations derived from the data. It is important to underline that quantitative research design as used in this study does not aim to achieve representative results and conclusions; rather, it examines the nature and strength of association between variables. As a design, it seeks to analyse and understand the relationship between variables through statistical and mathematical analysis and methods (Brannen, 2005; Bryman et al., 2008).

A qualitative research method is also used in this study to understand the context of the research phenomenon and explore the mechanisms through which it arises. Therefore, the quantitative methods in this study is not used to discover the causal relations between variables. Qualitative methods, on the other hand, is used to explain the relations between variables upon which the causality depends. Because critical realists accept that there are two ways of viewing the world: mental and physical, both qualitative and quantitative methods are used to understand this reality (Plewis & Mason, 2005). Researchers should take account of this by seeking an understanding through both objective and subjective data (Gray, 2014).

The choice of both methods in this study is also informed by the research questions, context, and nature of this research inquiry. The multi-disciplinary and multi-contextual aspect of this study also influenced and informed this choice. WhatsApp is a relatively understudied SNSs platform which reflects minimal research footprints. In qualitative research, different knowledge claims, enquiry strategies, and data collection methods and analysis are employed (Pickering, 2008). However, this study chose to use WhatsApp based focus group discussions as informed by the platform under study. Using a quantitative methodology, the research study measured variables on sampled subjects and expressed the relationship between variables. It used various effect statistical analysis procedures such as correlations, relative frequencies, or differences between means. Whereas the primary purpose of quantitative research is: to

describe, compare and attribute causality (Brannen, 2004; Feilzer, 2009), this study does not aim to attribute causality through this method.

5.3 Sampling Process and Framework

Based on quantitative and qualitative research designs, this research combined both probability and non-probability sampling techniques to achieve its target sample as indicated in (*see Table 5.1*). Sampling was done in four counties (Kericho, Nairobi, Nakuru, and Bomet); two fragile and two non-fragile counties (*see Table 5.1*). Purposive sampling was used to identify and categorise the fragility of counties based on three factors: (1) prevalent conflict vulnerability related to structural diversity factors such as ethnic and religious conflicts (*see Chapter Three, pp. 82-85*); (2) the power dynamics within the county administrative structures and how it affects political contests during election periods; (3) historically experienced resource conflicts from the period after independence to date. Sampling polarised and conflict-prone counties were based on Kenyan government and various sectoral reports. Example of such reports includes: *Conflict Analysis of Kenya* by (Rohwerder, 2015), *National Conflict Mapping Strategy Report* by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (2016) and the Kenya Conflict Analysis Summary Report (2015).

The sampling frame consists of the total number of members in both formal and informal WhatsApp applications (*see Table 5.1*). As earlier noted in chapters one and four, this study considers two types of WhatsApp groups; top-down groups in each county formed by the county government officials, their affiliates and representatives. Bottom-up groups are those created by citizens on their initiative to discuss governance issues.

Table 5. 1: Tabular Presentation of Sampling Matrix

County	Number of WhatsApp Groups	Aggregate WhatsApp Membership	Cochran' Sample Figures	Achieved Sample Survey	FGD Sample	Achieved Sample WFGDs
Nakuru	6	1289	487	119	24	18
Kericho	7	1576	531	101	24	17
Nairobi	9	2011	766	261	24	20
Bomet	5	1266	428	103	24	16
Total	27	6142	2212	584	96	71

(Source: Researcher, 2018)

The first process of sampling and recruiting respondents involved identifying specific, relevant, and open WhatsApp groups. Identifying relevant WhatsApp group was possible because of the name or group's masthead. More than twelve of the sampled WhatsApp groups had their click-to-join links advertised and published online. Some WhatsApp groups were identified through referrals made to the researcher. A total of 27 WhatsApp groups were sampled in the four counties (*see Appendix B*). As indicated in the title, some of the groups were easier to identify; others necessitated the researcher to contact the group administrators as in case of referrals.

Figure 5. 2: Images of WhatsApp Group Click-to-Join Links used in Sampling

Nakuru: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/ECU1aZGR0GoHnGg4PiU2E2>
 Nyeri: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/EehDZX65sp2CzSdlIgGnPm>
 Nyeri2: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/IQYPXI8LhgXBvqBQSMhwFX>
 Tharaka Nithi: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/JgRVB4i3dhiK8VDtCf9YmZ>
 Nyandarua: <https://chat.whatsapp.com/Ca4vXQPlcvtDKmyqXnj7i6>
 Kirinyaga <https://chat.whatsapp.com/L1al8Lui87N46h1OFUKt2S>
 Muranga <https://chat.whatsapp.com/IpfvD83Sy66c9Ee4MgqzP>
 Laikipia <https://chat.whatsapp.com/Ec4mcl3mLAKCGL5KdRDali>
 Meru <https://chat.whatsapp.com/Iu05mFFEqPV60Y0ohbDd39>
 Embu <https://chat.whatsapp.com/B5V7nYkERY6DyVaxz6orQl>
 Kisumu (:): <https://chat.whatsapp.com/L4GQXZvvhFsG8Kgrm2wQs1>
 Migori
<https://chat.whatsapp.com/LX47FJFSOeTGK1wk29BMAb>
 Nyamira <https://chat.whatsapp.com/IcHuWeiThASJXk1txS87I8>
 Siaya <https://chat.whatsapp.com/FDh5yatlciv7ahGrxVd9zM>
 Kisii <https://chat.whatsapp.com/F7WfIWfV9Pp18mws18IgeH>
 Homabay <https://chat.whatsapp.com/DgnqhcKYgBjAJ2Yvj2kM>



(sources: Author, 2020)

Having identified the relevant groups, the researcher then requested to join the sampled WhatsApp groups. Some groups were full having reached the maximum allowed capacity of 256 membership limit in WhatsApp groups. The researcher approached more WhatsApp groups to attain a practical and reliable sampling size. After joining the group, it was possible to see the group profile including; group administrators, the number of participants in each group, contacts of group participants and when the group was formed. The sampling frame, therefore, consists of the aggregate number of individual in all sampled WhatsApp groups (*see Table 5.1*).

Using the Cochran' sampling formula (*see Appendix D*), the target respondents were derived from the sampling frame per county. The Cochran's expected sample was 2212 (*see Table 5.1*). The researcher approached all the forum administrators explaining the intent and purpose of the survey. A customised introduction write-up of the purpose, scope, and the estimated time to fill the survey was posted on the WhatsApp chat wall. The researcher faced various challenges at this point including: a general suspicion among potential participants on the intent, timing, and scope of the study. Non-responses from WhatsApp group participants and, finally, a lack of support from WhatsApp group administrators. Persistence and application of different engagement approach allowed eventual success in some instances. The refunding of data bundles and small tokens of minute airtime and SMSs offers were used as forms of incentives to encourage more responses. The researcher developed a WhatsApp friendly survey with a consent form attached at the beginning. The consent form required potential participants to state whether they: had read and understood the scope of the survey; were willing to participate on a voluntary basis and willing to be added to a separate research group; were willing to be contacted for further research.

Subsequent selection of individual survey respondents was through probability sampling using systematic random sampling. With access to each WhatsApp group participants

list, the selection of n'th phone number/contact from the list was picked. The survey link was then copied to individual respondents WhatsApp number. The challenge at this stage was then related to suspicion of the survey link as malware. This was managed through a prior explanation to individual's respondent before pasting the survey link to their WhatsApp wall. Respondents were subsequently able to fill the survey and confirm completion through a message to the researcher. A small token as reimbursement for airtime and data bundles used was awarded to respondents. The total complete responses achieved across the four counties was 584 out of a targeted 2212. This represents a response rate of 26.4% which falls within the 'normal' rates of most online surveys (Pan, et al., 2013; Basa-Martinez et al., 2018; Nulty, 2008).

As with other online surveys, five factors may have influenced this response rate:(1) The sampling methods where participants were already willing to participate; (2) the methods, message and time of contact was also an important factor. Various respondents used WhatsApp after work mostly in the evenings; (3) the invitation process and designs where respondents were added to a separate WhatsApp group made communication easier and improved response rate; (4) The use of pre-notification, follow-ups, and reminders also shaped the response rate. (5) Lastly, the use of incentives in terms of bundles and airtime improved the response rate. It is critical to underline that the respondents in this research study are active participants in online and web-based applications. The mode and mannerism of engagement in activism, interest groups, and citizen journalism was high. Whereas the sampling process for online surveys was based on probability, the results achieved through this process are not representative. In effect, it is a study of those who are already engaged and participating in deliberations in their WhatsApp groups. It is also likely that the 26% who responded are those who experienced an even higher level of motivation, interest, and willingness to participate.

Table 5. 2: Tabular representation of County Response, Mean, and Standard Deviation

County	County	Freq, Per	Mean	SD
	Bomet County,	(126) 21.62%	2.95	1.187
	Kericho County,	(111) 19.06%	2.94	1.246
	Nairobi County	(171) 29.40%	3.12	0.932
	Nakuru County	(176) 30.24%	2.77	1.213

5.4 Research and Data Collection Tools

5.4.1 Online Survey

As indicated in (*Table 5.1*) above an online survey was used for quantitative research questions. Using the free Google Form platform enabled the researcher to obtain data from WhatsApp group participants. Google Form is a google hosted platform created as Web forms with an independent database. The database serves as a store for the submitted responses (Onwuegbuzie, 2012). The platform has inbuilt analytical capability of submitted data and provides quick analytics and results. Online surveys platforms like Google Form are very valuable tools for assessing and understanding opinions and trends of a large number of respondents (Torrance, 2012). The online survey method enabled the use of quantitative analytical techniques which facilitated inferences regarding existing associations between WhatsApp group profiles and polarisation. Secondly, it permitted the researcher to study more variables at one time. This is particularly important considering the multiplicity of variables characterising this study. One shortcoming of online survey method noted during fieldwork was the incomplete submission of survey responses (Pan et al., 2013) Approximately 23% of online survey responses were incomplete and couldn't be used in the quantitative analysis. It was also unreliable in getting proper answers for questions considering that no question needed descriptive responses (Nulty, 2008). Essentially, respondents prefer multiple-choice responses. This shortcoming was circumvented through the application of qualitative research design which was used to understand any unexplained phenomenon (Black, 2006).

Although it relies on recollection and cognitive comprehension, it is an appropriate method for understanding self-explanatory phenomenon (Bista, 2017; Pan et al., 2013). It allows a cross-sectional study of large populations in situations where experimental research is costly or cannot yield valid results (Gray, 2014). The online survey questionnaire was distributed through WhatsApp platform. This meant designing a WhatsApp friendly questionnaire that was easily accessible through a respondent's phone. Likert scale and ranking scale questions allowed respondents to simply check boxes of appropriate responses. The questionnaires constituted a combination of carefully worded multiple-choice questions and close-ended questions constructed for easy comprehension.

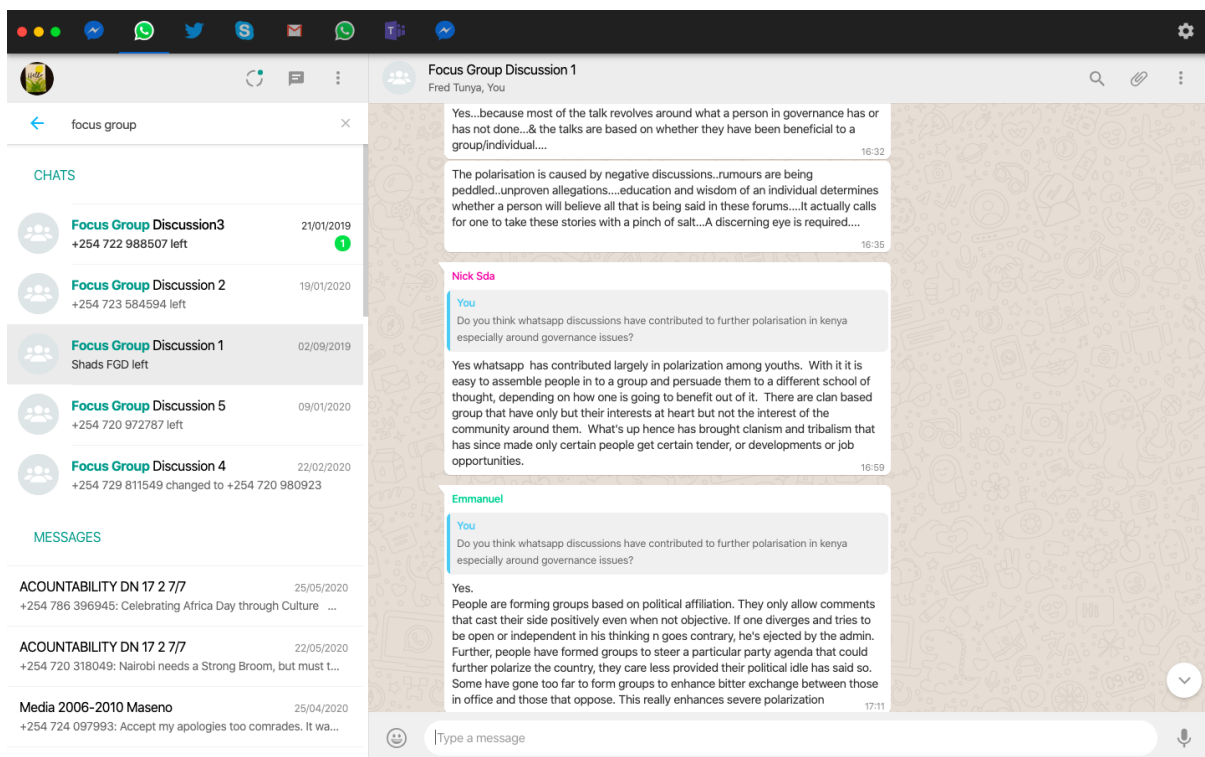
Various advantages were evident with the use of this data collection technique including: (1) time saving and efficiency; (2) costs effectiveness by lowering the overhead costs and (3) high response rates. Responses were accessed instantly through databases (Bista, 2017; Heidemann et al., 2012; Onwuegbuzie, 2012; Pan et al., 2013). Online survey questionnaires allow rapid deployment and return times which critically advantaged handling quick surveys (Bista, 2017). Additionally, online surveys are convenient platforms for respondents because they can complete them in comfortable schedules (Pan et al., 2013). Flexibility in online surveys allowed intricate skip patterns where logic can be employed seamlessly (Nulty, 2008).

5.4.2 WhatsApp Focus Group Discussions

WhatsApp-based focus group discussion (WFGDs) discussions were used to understand and clarify patterns and results arising from the quantitative study. The researcher created and managed discussions in the WhatsApp discussion groups. This was done after the end of the online survey. Two WFGDs were selected for each county and each group consisted of between 8-12 respondents. A total of eight focus groups were created with 71 respondents overall. The

respondents were derived from lists of those who had participated in online survey. Participants for WFGDs were recruited through convenience and purposive sampling procedure (willing participants). The sampling method applied adopted a pragmatic approach which ensured effective recruitment. The respondents were then banded into eight WhatsApp groups formed for the purposes of the survey.

Figure 5. 3: Sample of WhatsApp Group Based Focus Group Discussion



(Source: Author, 2020)

The researcher moderated and ensured structured discussions and engagement among participants via the WhatsApp web version. This ensured a consistent, cohesive, and exhaustive discursive approach across all WhatsApp groups. Research questions were floated one at a time while allowing time for asynchronous response in relations to each research questions. Cross-reference chatting and asynchronous response patterns allowed participants to respond to question at their convenient time. However, each item/question was allowed ample discussion time before the introduction of another. Through constant comparison and monitoring of

discussions and feedback, group response saturation was assessed. Discussions were often concluded through restatement and summary of topical highlights. At this point, respondents were encouraged to affirm or contradict the highlights in a way that elicited the participation of most respondents. Using the WhatsApp chat exporting features, participant's responses were exported to an email and downloaded for analysis. Participant's typed responses were considered as verbatim responses. This meant no further transcription was needed. The findings are presented in the discussion section of this study.

The purpose of WFGDs was to explore the social dynamics of the WhatsApp group, with the help of a moderator/facilitator, to stimulate participants to reveal essential information about people's opinions, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. This is specifically applicable when doing research related to vulnerable population groups and geopolitical areas. Its security protocol creates perceptual confidence required to discuss sensitive subjects bordering on individual's feelings, needs, and perceptions of various topics including health, security and politics in restricted/ authoritarian environments. WFGDs happen in two ways: synchronously or asynchronously. Synchronous sessions in WhatsApp group refer to sessions that are real-time. Participants take part in typing and contributing to the discussion at the same time as everyone else. This is possible with the researcher's arrangement. Asynchronous sessions typically happen when participants read others' comments and contribute or make comments at later times. This does not necessarily happen when anyone else is participating. WhatsApp focus group discussions can be used to collect rich narrative data through online focus groups gather opinions, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, behaviours and motivations about a topic.

WhatsApp can collect rich qualitative and narrative data through online focus groups. This is specifically applicable when doing research related to vulnerable population groups and geopolitical areas (Freitas et al., 1998). Its security protocol creates perceptual confidence required to discuss sensitive subjects bordering on individuals fears, needs, and perceptions of

various topics including health, security and politics in restricted environments (Hussain, Mahesar, Shah, & Memon, 2017; Sánchez-moya^a & Cruz-moya, 2015; Sarode et al., 2017; UNDP, 2018). Such methods have been used by international organisations like UNDP. Other advantages of WFGDs is that they are more structured compared to the conventional face to face focus group discussions. Just like conventional focus group discussions, this can be attributed to the complexity in bringing structure and orderliness in any group (Brannen, 2004). Despite this shortcoming, WFGDs provided rich data mined through downloads of the typed interaction within the diverse respondents of the research group. Through WFGDs, issues that were emergent from the survey questionnaire were discussed. WFGDs allowed the researcher to achieve multiple perspectives on the phenomenon of research. This is because open-ended questions that were carefully sequenced, clearly formulated, and easily understood were presented for discussion (Freitas et al., 1998; MacDonald & Headlam, 1999).

Additional advantages of using WFGDs included that word-for-word transcripts are available almost immediately, allowing the capture of complete sentences and thoughts. Furthermore, the virtual meeting via WhatsApp groups eliminates the need for physical meeting hence lowering research costs. The relative anonymity of WhatsApp translated into a more candid discussion of sensitive issues. Its potential to reach a broad geographic scope meant that participants could be recruited from diverse geographical locations as well as from different social and demographic groups. It provided for a convenient way of participating in the comfort of participant's homes. The challenges of using WFGDs is that they can reflect less robust discussions compared to the verbal ones. Furthermore, it is impossible for the researcher to observe critical non-verbal body language and expressions which are sometimes very relevant in analysis and inferences of research findings (Freitas et al., 1998). Non-verbal communication plays a significant role in conveying meaning and emotion, and its failure can affect the interpretation of messages (Carter et al., 2014). One critical challenge experienced

was the relatively slow pace of responses from specific participants limits topics that can be covered. There were also fewer spontaneous comments unlike in conventional focus groups (Biedermann, 2018; Rabiee, 2004). Potentially, more guarded comments that happened in some WhatsApp groups resulted in less robust discussions.

5.5 Measuring Specific WhatsApp Group Variables in the Study

The aim of this research study was to understand the influence of WhatsApp groups on polarisation and deliberative governance in Kenyan counties. To achieve this, the study sought to first, establish the deliberative structure and norms of WhatsApp group's participating in deliberative governance, understand the influence of WhatsApp groups deliberative structure and norms on polarisation, establish the effectiveness of top-down approach in deliberative governance, and to influence of WhatsApp group deliberative governance on polarisation. The study variables were categorised into two: deliberative structure and deliberative norms.

5.5.1 Measurement of Deliberative Structure

Socio-demographics/Control Variables: Socio-demographics also acted as control variables and included; age, gender, and level of education. All three variables were appropriately measured through nominal, and categorical scale measurements appropriate for quantitative research method adopted from other similar studies (Baek, 2015; Ganasegeran et al., 2017; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Careful categorisation and was done for each of the variables where age (18-24; 25-34;35-44;45-54; 55-64), gender dichotomy consisted (Male and Female), and Level of education (Diploma; Doctorate; Masters; Secondary, Tertiary, Certificate, Undergraduate). Further, respondents were also required to indicate their county of residence with the options limited to those under the scope of this study (Kericho, Bomet, Nakuru, and Nairobi).

Type of WhatsApp group (Formality): Classification of WhatsApp groups was in two categories based on their manner of formations; formal and informal WhatsApp groups. A brief definition and description were attached to each of the two choices to aid respondent's clarity and understanding in responding. Formal WhatsApp groups are those formed Respondents ticked the appropriate box that best described their WhatsApp group formation (M = 2.03, SD = 1.62).

Recruitment method: This refers to the methods used to get members joining the WhatsApp group. Two methods were categorised as follows: self-selection, where respondents added by a friend, colleague, or acquaintance. Random selection is where respondents joined the group via public click-to-join WhatsApp group links. A description of each category was given to aid respondents in understanding the choices.

Group Ties: Measurement of this variable was guided by studies done by (Conroy et al., 2012; Dennis & Chadwick, 2016; Enjolras et al., 2012; Graham et al., 2016; Gustafsson, 2012; De Zúñiga et al., 2017). Most studies conceptualise the relationship among participants as social or network ties. A brief definition and classification of each type of tie was attached to all choices to aid respondent's clarity and understanding. The classification of ties was adopted from studies done by (Gilbert & Karahalios, 2009). This was classified as follows; *No Ties* (members do not know each other personally and do not engage outside the WhatsApp group), *Strong Ties* (members know each other personally and engage outside the WhatsApp group as well) and *Weak Ties* (group members know each other from WhatsApp group but not personally), *Cordial Ties* (members met in the WhatsApp group and have met in person), All the four types of ties were averaged to create a composite measure for each category (M = 2.69, SD = 1.09).

Group Size: Group size, according to this study, refers to the number of participants in the WhatsApp group. Other studies conceptualise group size to mean the number of people in a group with whom an individual discusses politics (Eveland & Hively, 2009; Hill & Dunbar, 2003; Killworth et al., 2001). WhatsApp groups analysed in this study consisted of group membership ranging from 50 to 256 (256 being the maximum membership). Categorisation was as follows: Btw 50-100, Btw 101-150, Btw 151-200, Btw 200-256. The number of members in a WhatsApp group is indicated as part of the applications interface features and respondents were required to check the nominal values from their WhatsApp groups. The average values of participants were then calculated for each type of WhatsApp group ($M = 1.35$, $SD = 1.73$).

5.5.2 Measurement of Deliberative Norms

Heterogeneity of viewpoints: This variable sought to establish whether respondents were exposed to diverse perspectives, opinions, arguments and positions with measurements previously adopted by Scheufele et al. (2004, 2006), Kim & Chen, (2015), Lee et al., (2014), Brundidge, (2010) and Kim et al., (2013). Heterogeneity was measured in three aspects; (1) deliberation with diverse others (*composition*) (gender, religion, ethnicity, and region of origin), (2) frequency of exposure to diverse viewpoints (*exposure*), (3) and interaction with different information sources on governance (*information sources*). A Likert 5-point scale was used where all the items were combined into a singular factor and averaged into an index of heterogeneity of viewpoints where (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.732$, $M = 8.11$, $SD = 3.08$).

Diversity of participants: Measuring participants diversity considered other studies done by (Aulich, 2009; Laurence & Bentley, 2016; Sturgis et al., 2014). This study considers diversity to encompass the various forms of socio-political heterogeneity in

a particular range of dimensions. It is also similar to what Unzueta et al., (2012) referred as the distribution of differences and demographic dimensions in society and includes racial and ethnic variations. Diversity consists of multiple aspects of observed and perceived social difference and include; race, age, ethnicity, gender, etc. Various studies on social media have used similar conceptualisation of diversity (Binder et al., 2016; Hampton & Lee, 2011; Kibet & Ward, 2018; Messing & Westwood, 2014; Molyneux et al., 2014). Respondents were asked to indicate if people with the following diversity aspects were part of their WhatsApp groups; religious (religious affiliations such as Muslims, Christians and others), ethnic (ethnic identities), ideological (difference in political party affiliations) regional (sub-counties of origin). Yes, responses were coded as '1' and No responses were coded as '0'. An aggregate value of all types of diversity was calculated, first for each WhatsApp group then the overall diversity value for both WhatsApp types ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.88$).

Moderation: Moderated discussions in the context of WhatsApp groups occur when administrators establish the rules of discussion and engagement. Respondents were required to indicate the level of moderation that exists in their WhatsApp group. A 5-point scale ranging from 'Well moderated' to 'Not moderated' was used in this variable. ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.48$).

Tolerance: Tolerance according to this study was considered as allowing the discussion, occurrence, existence, or practice of something which one does not necessarily agree with or like without making any interference. This is similar to what is adopted by (Kim et al., 2013; Pickering, 2008). As adopted from Bangwayo-Skeete & Zikhali, (2013), tolerance was defined and measured by the ability of group members to respect the contributions of others during WhatsApp group discussions. Respondents were asked to indicate the perceived level of tolerance in their WhatsApp groups using

a 5-points differential scale, ranging from highly tolerant to highly intolerant. This item was consequently folded into a 3-point scale, ranging from strong to weak level of intolerance ($M = 1.82$, $SD = 1.71$).

Incivility: Incivility in measuring this study was based on the extent to which people show disrespect for others using demeaning or impolite language for those who express opposing viewpoints. This definition and operationalisation of the term was derived from various scholars (Antoci et al., 2016; Druckman et al., 2019; Kim & Park, 2019; Kim & Kim, 2019; Lee et al., 2019; Masullo Chen et al., 2019). However, for the purpose of clarity, the definition of incivility was broadened to include any rude, demeaning, offensive, and impolite use of language targeted at individuals and groups during the deliberations in the focus group discussions. A five-point differential Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree enabled respondents to categorise their perceived level of incivility in their WhatsApp group deliberations ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 1.95$).

Inclusivity: Whereas diversity looked at the structural composition of the WhatsApp group in view of the various segments of the Kenyan society, inclusivity examined whether their voices are included, accommodated and heard in WhatsApp deliberations. Inclusivity considers the equality, fairness, and representativeness of contributions by the WhatsApp group deliberators (Karpowitz et al., 2016c; Erman, 2016; Karpowitz & Raphael, 2016; Schneiderhan & Khan, 2008; Thomassen, 2006). The question on inclusivity followed the one on diversity where respondents were asked the extent to which they thought the contributions of various groups are included in deliberations. Four Likert scale categories ranging from 'Not inclusive at all' to 'Definitely inclusive' were given as options in the survey question.

Polarisation: Based on the previous research studies (Beam et al., 2018; Garcia et al., 2015; Hong & Kim, 2016; Iyengar et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2014; Stroud, 2010), this study adopted time tested approaches of measuring the link between SNSs and polarisation. The survey questions on polarisation were designed to reflect the following six polarisation indicators: binary thinking, motivated reasoning, in-group and out-group identities, confirmatory bias, partisanship, and social comparison. Samples questions included: whether people in WhatsApp discussion take ethnic positions regardless of the facts presented (Motivated reasoning) or whether people take opposite positions to their opponents during discussions (partisanship). An aggregate polarisation index was established from both all the seven characteristics of polarisation (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.67$, (M = 3.10, SD = 2.24).

5.6 Data Analysis Procedures

5.6.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Due to the cross-sectional structure of the study and its empirical specification, data analysis was done using a combination of various statistical methods. These non-parametric statistical methods include: (1) Pearson's Chi-square correlations, (2) Kruskal-Wallis H test, (3) Phi Co-efficient, and (5) Cramer's V effects size analysis. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. Some of the statistical methods mentioned established basic descriptive statistical patterns while others established the strength and direction of associations between variables. The Kruskal-Wallis H test (one-way ANOVA on ranks) as a rank-based non-parametric analysis test was used to determine if there are any statistically significant differences between two or more groups of an independent variable (continuous variable) and dependent (ordinal variable) (Ostertagová et al., 2014). In this study, it was specifically used to establish the association between the dichotomised WhatsApp group variables and polarisation. The use of

the Kruskal-Wallis H test was to establish, for instance, the difference between the level of polarisation (whether low, medium, and high) for those who had low and high levels of education. The Kruskal-Wallis H test, however, is an omnibus test statistic and does not specifically tell which group of independent variables are statistically and significantly different from the others (Ostertagová et al., 2014). The Kruskal-Wallis H test also determines whether the medians of two or more variables are different (Bergsma, 2013). It specifies that at least two variables are different. This is why a post hoc test analysis was needed. The tests are apt for this study because no assumption of normality in data distribution was made.

The study also used the Pearson Chi-square analysis to evaluate *Tests of Independence* when using a bivariate table as is the case in this study. Cross tabulation or a bivariate table presents the distributions of two categorical variables simultaneously (Driscoll et al., 2007). The Pearson Chi-square is a non-parametric meaning it is distribution-free and is designed to analyse group differences when the independent variable is categorical and the dependent variable is measured at a nominal level (Hussein, 2009; Mertens, 2011). Like the Kruskal-Wallis H test adopted in this study, the Pearson Chi-square is a robust method of analysis and does not require equality of variances among the study variables groups categories or homoscedasticity in the test data (Driscoll et al., 2007). It has been adopted in this study because it permits evaluation of various dichotomous WhatsApp group independent variables, and of level, categories of polarisation (low, moderate, and high). Unlike many other non-parametric and some parametric statistics, the calculations needed to compute the Pearson Chi-square provides significant data information about how each of the groups performed in the study. This richness of detail from the Pearson Chi-square allows the researcher to understand the significant results and achieve more detailed information that can be usefully interpreted (Shi et al., 2018). Whereas the Chi-square is a test of significance statistic in itself, it should be

followed with an effect size or strength statistic. The Cramer's V is a very common strength test that accompanies the Pearson Chi-square test.

Cramer's V was used to compare the strength of association between the two WhatsApp group profiles based on the three test variables. Cramer's V analysis gave a reliable estimate in comparison of nominal data for various WhatsApp group profile with more than two categories. Cramer's V is based has the advantages of robustness with respect to the nature of the distribution of the data (Prematunga, 2012). In understanding Cramer's V results, a significance level that is very close to zero indicates that the variables are unlikely to have any association (Bergsma, 2013). The challenge with Cramer's V is the difficulty that arises with the interpretation of large data sets. Another challenge is its tendency to generate relatively low associational/correlation measures. This challenge was overcome by weighting the data variables and this gave more reliable Cramer's V values (*see Table 6.4*). The study also used the phi coefficient to establish the degree of association between binary WhatsApp group variables and polarisation. It is calculated along with Cramer's V analysis and reflects a cross-tabulated table data where the variables are dichotomous. As for the Phi coefficient, a large value close to +1 indicates a strong association between the dichotomous variables while a value close to 0 indicates a weak association between the two variables.

5.6.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

The goal of WFGDs quantitative analysis was to create descriptive, multi-dimensional categories that provide a preliminary framework for understanding quantitative findings. WFGDs was used to answer two research questions: the influence of WhatsApp deliberative structures and norms on polarisation, and the influence of WhatsApp group deliberative governance on polarisation. In the process of qualitative data analysis, the researcher focuses on the whole set of data obtained from all WFGDs groups. This was followed by an attempt to

break it down and gainfully reconstructing it again in a much more meaningful way as suggested by Chowdhury, (2015). The application of categorisation of WFGDs themes and topics enabled the researcher to achieve comparisons and contrasts between patterns as noted by (Bryman, 2007). This categorisation also reflected the complex threads and specific patterns of the data thus achieving deep understanding and making sense of findings in a more systematic way. After the WFGDs sessions, the researcher began by categorising and organising data in forms of critical themes, patterns, and meanings as emergent from the data. This is referred to as open coding by some digital media scholars (Z. Chen, Su, & Chen, 2019; Epstein & Leshed, 2016; Henn & Foard, 2014; Nelimarkka et al., 2018b). The researcher identified and tentatively named the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed would be grouped guided by the WhatsApp group variables.

Based on the learnings from the pilot phase of the interview questions, this study adopts specific categorisation of themes to answer the second research question. The themes relate to the influence of WhatsApp deliberative structures and norms on polarisation was based on the following seven indicators of polarisation: *binary thinking*, where group participants favour binary thinking and if an ‘us versus them’ positions in WhatsApp deliberations; *motivated reasoning*, where group participants only appreciate evidence that supports their position during deliberations; *in-group and out-group identities*, where the group’s participants favour those with similar viewpoints and positions and disagree with out-group regardless of the facts; *confirmatory bias*, disagreeing with other participants for oppositional reasons despite existing basic facts and evidence; *partisanship*, an inclination to staunchly support and favour a group’s viewpoint and opinion over alternatives; *social comparison*, where the in-group’s participants favour those with similar viewpoints and positions and disagree with out-group regardless of the facts; and *groupthink*, where the desire for group harmony and conformity shapes the group’s position during deliberations.

The analysis of WFGDs aimed to achieve the characteristics detailed by Rabiee, (2004) of being verifiable, systematic, sequential, and continuous. The analysis, therefore, began with familiarisation with the data after downloading it from the WhatsApp interfaces. The next stage involved identifying thematic patterns within the responses and linking them to key indicators of polarisation. During this stage, descriptive statements were established and analysis carried out in view of the study's research questions. The third stage involved indexing which was about sifting through the focus group data and highlighting and sorting out relevant quotations. The fourth stage of the analysis involved charting, where quotes were lifted and rearranged to make sense in the context of the research questions. The last stage involved the interpretation and connecting the responses to the context of study in relations to the quantitative study findings.

5.7 Ethical Considerations

In line with the ethical guidelines required for digital media research, all identifiable data was anonymised and safely kept as long as was needed. Consent was sought as required to access WhatsApp groups which covered the use and reporting of this study's findings. All the numbers and contacts used for setting up WhatsApp focus group discussions and any other data from such discussions was kept on a securely located, and encrypted hard disk only accessible by the main researcher. Part of the ethical safeguards depends on the end-to-end encryption of WhatsApp groups which is the focus of this study. In addition to such safeguards, all data was handled according to the guidelines set out by the AoIR guidelines (2012), SRA (2003), and the General Data Protection Regulation, 2018 (GDPR). For online surveys and focus group discussions, informed consent from individual respondents were sought before they filled the online survey. The guidelines made it clear that participants could quit at any time in line with additional ethical considerations of online surveys. Further, the research ethics for this thesis

was overseen and approved by the University of Salford's research, innovation and academic engagement approval panel.

5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a detailed account of the research philosophy, research design, research methodology and research methods used to answer this study's research questions. The research questions are: what are the deliberative structure and norms of WhatsApp group's participating in deliberative governance, what is the influence of WhatsApp groups deliberative structure and norms on polarisation, what is the effectiveness of the top-down approach in deliberative governance, and lastly, what is the influence of WhatsApp group deliberative governance on polarisation.

The chapter begins by defining and elaborating critical realism as a deconstructive paradigm that combines two epistemological stances and hence uses mixed research methods. One of the reasons why critical realism has been chosen in this study is that it accepts both singular and multiple world realities and is uniquely strategic in solving practical problems in the real world as explained by Feilzer, (2009). This means this research is undertaken under the premises of alternative to the established paradigms of interpretivism and positivism– in this case, online surveys and focus group discussions approach. Critical realists argue that the choice of methods should be dictated by the nature of the research problem. Most critical realists also argue that an effective approach will most likely combine both qualitative and quantitative methods or techniques. This study, therefore, adopted triangulation which incorporates more than one source of data or research method to examine a social phenomenon. Mixed methods and triangulation mean that both qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used. The multi-disciplinary and multi-contextual aspect of this study influenced and informed this choice. Based on quantitative and qualitative research designs, this research

combined both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Out of the targeted 2212 respondents as per the sample size, a response rate of 26.4% was realised.

Regarding the quantitative research design, an online survey using the free Google Form platform enabled the researcher to obtain data from WhatsApp group participants. This meant designing a WhatsApp friendly questionnaire that was easily accessible through a respondent's phone. Likert scale and ranking scale questions allowed respondents to check boxes of appropriate responses. WhatsApp-based focus group discussion (WFGDs) discussions were used to understand and clarify patterns and results arising from the quantitative study. The researcher created and managed discussions in the WhatsApp discussion groups. This was done after the end of the online survey. The variables were categorised into deliberative structures and deliberative norms according to the study objectives. WhatsApp group deliberative structure variables include: socio-demographic characteristics, group size, and group ties. The deliberative norms variables include: tolerance, moderations, civility/incivility, inclusivity, diversity, and heterogeneity of viewpoints. Quantitative analysis in this study used nonparametric statistical methods as follows: Pearson's Chi-square correlations and Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to establish the association between WhatsApp deliberative structures and norms and polarisation. The effect size analysis was used to find out the directions and strength of the associations used Phi Co-efficient and Cramer's V effects size analysis. The qualitative analysis used open coding to establish themes and sub-themes that matched the seven indicators of polarisation which are: binary thinking, motivated reasoning, in-group and out-group identities, confirmatory bias, partisanship, social comparison, and groupthink.

Chapter Six

WhatsApp Deliberative Structures, Norms, and Polarisation

6.0 Introduction

Based on the research method and design laid out in chapter five, this chapter seeks to answer two research questions. The first was to establish the socio-demographic profile of WhatsApp groups on governance in Kenyan counties. The study uses a quantitative method involving an online survey to examine the socio-demographic profile of WhatsApp group participants in terms of their age, gender and level of education. Understanding the socio-demographic profile seeks to find out who uses WhatsApp platforms and if there is any difference with other SNSs platforms. The second research question sought to understand if and how the WhatsApp group deliberative structures and norms influence group polarisation (*see Figure 6.1*). The research question was answered in two ways. The first uses quantitative methods to establish if any association exists between WhatsApp group deliberative structures and norms and group polarisation. The second uses qualitative methods through WhatsApp-based focus group discussion where deliberative structures and norms are discussed in relations to their effect on group polarisation. The respondent's feedback is classified into themes and compared to seven indicators of group polarisation. The seven indicators are binary thinking, motivated reasoning, in-group and out-group identities, confirmatory bias, partisanship, social comparison, and groupthink. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the implication of the findings on theories of selective exposure and echo chambers. It discusses some of the practical implications for deliberative governance and polarisation.

6.1 Profile of WhatsApp Groups; Deliberative Structures and Norms

The first research question sought to establish the socio-demographic profile of WhatsApp groups in Kenya. From the results in table 6.1 below, the profile of WhatsApp groups mainly consists of males (64.8%, $M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.44$), aged between 18-44 (91.3%, $M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.44$) and educated with an undergraduate and diploma certificates (67.7%, $M = 4.34$, $SD = 1.95$). These socio-demographic reflects the profile of other SNSs deliberation platforms (see the section below).

Table 6. 1: Descriptive Statistics of socio-demographic Variables

Variable	Categorisation	Frequency/Percentage	Mean	SD
Age	18-24 yrs	(125) 21.40%	2.88	1.138
	25-34 yrs	(280) 47.95%	3.00	1.158
	35-44 yrs	(106) 18.15%	2.85	1.156
	45-54 yrs	(49) 8.39%	3.09	1.026
	55-64 yrs	(24) 4.11%	3.02	1.040
Gender	Male	(378) 64.8%	2.85	1.013
	Female	(206) 35.2%	2.99	1.208
Education	High school	(27) 4.58%,	3.01	1.334
	Tertiary level	(43) 7.28%,	2.25	1.500
	Diploma	(108) 18.51%,	2.98	0.941
	Undergraduate	(287) 49.2%.	3.11	0.994
	Masters	(113)19.33%,	3.21	1.053
	Doctorate	(6) 1.02%,	2.86	1.157

6.2 WhatsApp Group Deliberative Structure, Norms, and Polarisation

The second research question sought to understand whether and how the WhatsApp group's deliberative structure and norms influence group polarisation. Answering this research question was realised in two ways. The first method was to establish if an association exists between various WhatsApp group profile variables and polarisation using the Kruskal-Wallis H test. For the statistically significant associations, further analysis was done using effect size statistical methods to determine the strength and direction of association using the Pearson Chi-

Square, Phi coefficient analysis and Cramer's V analysis. The second method involved WhatsApp based focus group discussions, where the findings were categorised into themes and compared to seven indicators of polarisation.

Table 6. 2: Descriptive Statistics of WhatsApp group deliberative structure and norms

Variable	Categorisation	Frequency/Percentage	Mean	SD
WhatsApp Group	Formal	(236) 40.41%	3.65	0.603
	Informal	(348) 59.59%	3.40	0.763
Group Ties	Cordial Ties	(107) 18.32%	3.00	1.000
	No Ties	(152) 26.03%	2.85	0.540
	Strong Ties	(227) 38.87%	2.64	1.102
	Weak Ties	(98) 16.78%	2.75	1.070
Recruitment	Self-selection	(204) 43.33%	2.08	1.311
	Random-selection	(273) 56.67%	2.36	0.959
Diversity	Gender	Yes (568) 97.29%	1.03	0.178
	Religion	Yes (523) 89.55%	1.03	0.182
	Ethnicity	Yes (571) 97.78%	1.03	0.173
	Ideological	Yes (511) 87.55%	1.03	0.158
	Regional	Yes (432) 73.97%	1.44	0.497
Group Size	Btw 50-100	(12) 2.055%	3.86	0.348
	Btw 101-150	(39) 6.67%	3.55	0.635
	Btw 151-200	(176) 30.13%	3.10	0.927
	Btw 200-256	(357) 61.13%	3.43	0.668
Civility	Civil	(398) 68.12%	2.85	0.364
	Incivil	(186) 31.88%	2.03	0.217
Moderation	Moderated	(298) 51.02%	1.98	0.342
	Unmoderated	(286) 48.97%	1.56	0.304
Inclusivity	Inclusive	(290) 49.66%	3.10	0.621
	Non-inclusive	(294) 50.34%	2.89	0.991
Tolerance	Tolerance	(393) 67.35%	2.66	0.545
	Intolerance	(191) 32.65%	2.01	0.990
Polarisation	High	(369) 63.21%	6.38	3.46
	Moderate	(112) 19.34%	2.22	2.01
	Low	(103) 17.45%	2.01	1.97

6.2.1 Association between WhatsApp Profiles and Group Polarisation

A Kruskal-Wallis H test was conducted to determine if the level of polarisation was different for the various age categories in WhatsApp groups. For the purpose analysis, age was categorised as younger (Btw 18-34 yrs.) and older (Btw 35-64 yrs.) while the levels of polarisation are categorized as low, medium and high (see Table 6.1). The test indicated no

statistically significant difference in polarisation for both the younger and older age categories across various levels of polarisation (*see Table 6.2*). The results show that the association between the younger age category is ($\chi^2(4) = 9.705, p = 0.097$) for high polarisation, ($\chi^2(4) = 2.461, p = 0.569$), for moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(4) = 3.809, p = 0.937$) for low polarisation. None of the categories is statistically significant as was the case with the older age groups as well. The results in table 6.3 suggest that the association between older age category is ($\chi^2(4) = 3.419, p = 0.201$) for high polarisation, ($\chi^2(4) = 2.098, p = 0.112$), for moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(4) = 2.110, p = 0.231$) for low polarisation. These results suggest that the respondents age is less likely to influence the level of group polarisation in WhatsApp groups.

Similarly, no statistically significant difference in polarisation was found between the gender dichotomies (males and females) where chi-square values were ($\chi^2(4) = 1.271, p = 0.260$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(4) = 2.336, p = 0.126$) moderate polarisation, ($\chi^2(4) = 1.311, p = 0.252$) low polarisation for the male respondents. The Chi-square values were ($\chi^2(4) = 0.922, p = 0.160$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(4) = 2.012, p = 0.213$) moderate polarisation, ($\chi^2(4) = 1.099, p = 0.188$) for female respondents. These results also suggest that a person's gender is less likely to influence the level of group polarisation in WhatsApp groups.

Education was also categorised into two for the purposes of analysis: lower education (High school, Tertiary college, and Diploma holders) and higher education (Undergraduate, Masters, and Doctorate) (*see Table 6.2*). The Kruskal-Wallis H test showed a statistically significant difference in polarisation for the lower and higher levels of education (*see Table 6.3*). For lower education, the chi-square values were ($\chi^2(5) = 21.829, p = 0.001$) for high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 19.365, p = 0.002$) for moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 34.623, p = 0.005$) for low polarisation. For higher education, the chi-square values were ($\chi^2(5) = 19.342, p = 0.003$) for high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 16.981, p = 0.011$) for moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 21.671, p = 0.005$) for low polarisation (*see Table 6.3*). The mean rank of polarisation

for those with lower education is (277.94) while for those with higher education is (256.48). The above mean ranks suggest that participants with a higher level of education are less likely to be polarised in deliberative governance in their WhatsApp groups (see the section below).

Table 6. 3:WhatsApp Group Variables and the Level of Polarisation

WhatsApp Variables	Dichotomy	Low	Moderate	High
Age	Younger	3.809	2.461	9.705
	Older	2.110	2.098	3.419
Gender	Male	1.311	2.336	1.271
	Female	1.099	2.012	0.922
Education	Lower	34.623*	19.365*	21.829*
	Higher	21.671*	16.981*	19.342*
Group Ties	Weak	1.400	0.620	0.525
	Strong	1.019	0.911	1.321
Group Size	Small	10.912*	11.222*	13.126*
	Large	10.001*	8.763*	9.001*
Moderation	Moderated	8.950*	6.450*	4.854
	Unmoderated	6.321*	8.361*	8.091*
Civility	Civil	3.001	3.451	3.091
	Incivil	3.980*	2.931*	4.201*
Tolerance	Tolerance	2.019	1.223	2.067
	Intolerance	3.116	2.871	2.109
Inclusivity	Inclusive	3.102	3.198	2.998
	Exclusive	2.197	2.100	2.015
Diversity	Diverse	11.334*	15.654*	9.493*
Heterogeneity of viewpoints	Heterogeneous	14.910*	16.450*	16.329*

*Notes: Cell entries are interpreted based on significance level where * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.*

For the purposes of this analysis, the nature of ties was categorised as strong (*Cordial and Strong ties*) and weak (*Weak and No ties*) (see Table 6.2). The Kruskal-Wallis H test showed no statistically significant difference in polarisation for both weak and strong categories of group ties in WhatsApp groups (see Table 6.3). The Chi-square values indicate that the association for weak group ties was ($\chi^2(3) = 0.525, p = 0.913$) for high polarisation, ($\chi^2(3) = 0.620, p = 0.932$) for moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(3) = 1.400, p = 0.706$) for low polarisation. For strong group ties, it was ($\chi^2(3) = 1.321, p = 0.172$) for high polarisation, ($\chi^2(3) = 0.911, p = 0.132$) for moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(3) = 1.019, p = 0.301$) for low polarisation. These results indicate that the nature of ties, whether weak or strong, are less likely to influence the level of polarisation in WhatsApp groups.

The Kruskal-Wallis H test found a statistically significant difference in polarisation between small and large group sizes (see Table 6.3). Small groups were categorised as consisting of between 50-150 participants, while large groups consist of 151-256 participants in WhatsApp groups. The chi-square values for small groups was ($\chi^2(5) = 13.126, p = 0.004$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 11.222, p = 0.011$) moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 10.912, p = 0.005$) low polarisation. The chi-square values for large groups was ($\chi^2(5) = 9.001, p = 0.022$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 8.763, p = 0.011$) moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 10.001, p = 0.007$) low polarisation. The mean ranks for the difference in group sizes were (329.06) for small groups and (375.02) for the large groups. Overall, these results tend to suggest that large WhatsApp groups are likely to have comparatively higher levels of group polarisation.

The findings also suggest a statistically significant difference between polarisation and the moderation of deliberations in WhatsApp group (see Table 6.3). Moderation of WhatsApp groups was categorised into two; moderated (*Well and average moderation*) and unmoderated deliberations (*Lowly and not moderated*) deliberations. The chi-square value for moderated deliberations was ($\chi^2(5) = 4.854, p = 0.003$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 6.450, p = 0.042$)

moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 8.950$, $p = 0.03$) for low polarisation. The values for unmoderated deliberations was ($\chi^2(5) = 8.091$, $p = 0.012$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 8.361$, $p = 0.005$) moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 6.321$, $p = 0.013$) for low polarisation. The mean ranks for polarisation in moderated WhatsApp groups were (263.30), and for unmoderated WhatsApp groups was (299.90). This implies that moderated deliberations in WhatsApp groups tend to have less polarisation comparative to unmoderated WhatsApp groups.

For purposes of analysis, civility in deliberations was categorised into civil and incivil deliberations (*see Table 6.2*). There was a statistically significant difference between polarisation and incivility but not for civil deliberations. The chi-square values for incivil deliberations was ($\chi^2(5) = 4.201$, $p = 0.021$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 2.931$, $p = 0.012$) moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 3.980$, $p = 0.001$) low polarisation. The chi-square values for civil deliberations was ($\chi^2(5) = 3.091$, $p = 0.221$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 3.451$, $p = 0.313$) moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 3.001$, $p = 0.441$) low polarisation. The mean ranks for the difference in polarisation was (234.81) for civil and (261.02) for incivil. This suggests that incivil deliberations were more likely to influence group polarisation or vice versa.

There was no statistically significant difference between polarisation and inclusivity because the chi-square values for inclusive deliberations was ($\chi^2(5) = 2.998$, $p = 0.134$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 3.198$, $p = 0.322$) moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 3.012$, $p = 0.231$) low polarisation. The chi-square values for exclusive deliberations was ($\chi^2(5) = 2.015$, $p = 0.221$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 2.100$, $p = 0.313$) moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 2.197$, $p = 0.441$) low polarisation. Similarly, there was no statistically significant difference between polarisation and tolerance in deliberations and supports the Kruskal-Wallis H test (*see Table 6.3*). The chi-square values for tolerance was ($\chi^2(5) = 2.067$, $p = 0.072$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 1.223$, $p = 0.111$) moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 2.019$, $p = 0.201$) low polarisation. The

chi-square values for intolerance was ($\chi^2(5) = 2.109$ $p = 0.06$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 2.871$, $p = 0.129$) moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 3.116$, $p = 0.09$) low polarisation.

The remaining two variables (diversity of participants and heterogeneity of viewpoints) could not be realistically dichotomised to analyse their association with polarisation (*see Table 6.2*). The findings here indicate a statistically significant difference between the diversity of participants and the various levels of polarisation. The Kruskal-Wallis H test shows that the chi-square value was ($\chi^2(5) = 9.493$, $p = 0.002$) for high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 15.654$, $p = 0.001$) for moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 11.334$, $p = 0.248$) for low polarisation (*see Table 6.3*). The findings from the Kruskal-Wallis H test further indicate a statistically significant difference between polarisation and the heterogeneity of viewpoints in WhatsApp group deliberations (*see Table 6.3*). The chi-square values for heterogeneity of viewpoints was ($\chi^2(5) = 16.329$ $p = 0.021$) high polarisation, ($\chi^2(5) = 16.450$, $p = 0.007$) moderate polarisation, and ($\chi^2(5) = 14.910$, $p = 0.001$) low polarisation.

6.2.2 Effect Size Measures of WhatsApp Variables and Polarisation

As noted above, the Kruskal-Wallis H tests analysed the statistically significant differences between some dichotomised WhatsApp group variables and the three levels of polarisation (*see Table 6.3*). However, findings on statistical significance can be different, if the variables are considered holistically (without dichotomisation). Therefore, a post-test analysis using Phi Coefficient and Cramer's V determined the strengths of association for all WhatsApp groups variables (*see Table 6.4*). The closer the value of Cramer's V is to 1, the stronger the association between the variables. The Pearson Chi-square results and the Cramer's V values indicates no association between a person's age, gender, inclusivity, and their level of polarisation (*see Table 6.4*). These results confirm the findings of the Kruskal-Wallis H test indicating that there

is no significant association between a person's age or gender and their level of polarisation (see Table 6.3).

Table 6. 4: Effect size analysis between WhatsApp variables and Polarisation

WhatsApp Variables	Pearson Chi Square	Phi Coefficient ϕ	Cramer's V ($\phi^2 c$)
Age	5.912	0.268	0.518
Gender	1.381	0.624	0.439
Education	9.018*	0.491*	0.677*
Group Ties	2.201*	0.038*	0.599*
Group Size	2.672*	0.126*	0.651*
Moderation	3.721*	0.112*	0.642*
Inclusivity	1.191	0.314	0.336
Tolerance	2.652*	0.088*	0.628*
Heterogeneity of viewpoints	3.982*	0.221*	0.732*
Diversity	3.119*	0.082*	0.619*
Civility	2.192*	0.501*	0.571*

Notes: Cell entries are interpreted based on significance level where * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

The results in Table 6.4 above confirm those of the Kruskal-Wallis H test, (see Table 6.3), indicating that the level of education, group size, and moderation are likely to significantly influence the level of polarisation in WhatsApp deliberations. Similar to the Kruskal-Wallis H test, the Cramer's V values indicates a strong positive association between the diversity of group participants, heterogeneity of viewpoints, and level of polarisation (see Table 6.4). Unlike the Kruskal-Wallis H test (see Table 6.3), the Cramer's V indicates both moderate and strong positive associations between the group ties, tolerance, civility, and the level of polarisation (see Table 6.4). The differences in the results in tables 6.3 and 6.4 reflects how the variables were analysed in relations to the level of polarisation. For the Kruskal-Wallis H test, the variables were dictotomised, sorted hierarchically, and weighted, while for the effect size

analysis tests such as the Cramer's V, the variables were considered holistically. The heterogeneity of viewpoints had the highest Cramer's V value (0.732) suggesting a very strong influence on the level of group polarisation in WhatsApp group (*see Table 6.4*). The level of education, the group size, moderation, tolerance and diversity all had Cramer's V values of more than 0.6 which also suggest strong influence of these variables on the level of polarisation in whatsapp groups. The nature of group ties and the civility had moderate (more than 0.5) but statistically significant values in relations to the level of polarisation.

6.3 WhatsApp Focus Group Discussions findings

The focus group discussion sought to establish if and how the WhatsApp group variables examined above influence polarisation in deliberative governance. As shown in (*Table 6.5*), the thematic analysis of the focus group discussions compared the arising themes with the following seven key indicators of polarisation: *binary thinking*, where group participants favour binary thinking and if an 'us versus them' positions in WhatsApp deliberations; *motivated reasoning*, where group participants only appreciate evidence that supports their position during deliberations; *in-group and out-group identities*, where the in-group's participants favour those with similar viewpoints and positions and disagree with out-group regardless of the facts; *confirmatory bias*, disagreeing with other participants for oppositional reasons despite existing basic facts and evidence; *partisanship*, an inclination to staunchly support and favour a group's viewpoint and opinion over alternatives; *social comparison*, group participants take certain positions because want to be perceived favourably by other group members; and *groupthink*, where the desire for group harmony and conformity shapes the group's position during deliberations (*see Table 6.5*).

Table 6. 5:WhatsApp Group Variables, Emerging Themes and Polarisation Indicators

WhatsApp Variable	Emerging Themes from FGD's	Polarisation Indicators	N (71)
Gender	Influence of gender-defined patriarchal norms and dynamics Digital divide impacts on gender dynamics in deliberations Conflict avoidance and ambivalence prevalent among women Women defensive/ survival strategies in deliberations	Partisanship Binary thinking Social comparison Groupthink	44
Age	Peer pressure defines the collective stand of young participants Socialisation on ethnic polarisation is from old to young participants Digital divide suggest younger are perceived to be polarised Ideological consistency of the old is mistaken for polarisation	Social comparison Binary thinking Partisanship Groupthink	48
Education	More education has encouraged bold expression of polarising ideas Educated participants become polarised influencers in the group More educated participants are likely to consume diverse content More educated participants are likely to be dogmatism and inflexible	Confirmatory bias Partisanship Motivated Reasoning	56
Group Ties	WhatsApp group formation shapes group ties and polarisation Close ties groups can easily form ideological cliques/consensus Group homogeneity and enclaves are likely with close ties Weak ties facilitate easier exposure to diverse content Close ties are likely to adopt same patterns of thinking	In-group and Out-group identity Social comparison Partisanship Confirmation bias	28
Moderation	Group administrators are seen as partisan and unable to moderate Informal norms of moderation do not work in WhatsApp groups Moderation was difficult due to non-compliance in the group Moderation of attitudes was noted to be difficult to achieve	Motivated Reasoning Social comparison	35
Heterogeneous Viewpoints	Diverse information challenges prior positions and opinions Heterogeneous content does not mean quality information Participants still can exercise content avoidance in the groups Exposure to cross-cutting content does not mean change of views	Binary thinking In-group and Out-group identity Motivated reasoning Groupthink	29
Tolerance	Tolerance is determined by personality type and social learning Issue framing determines occurrence of tolerance in discussions Keyboard warriors promotes intolerance through partisanship Anonymity in public WhatsApp groups aggravates intolerance	In-group and Out-group identity Binary thinking Partisanship	59
Civility	Incivil comments are viewed as an attack on the group Incivility increases negative labelling and reduce dialogue Incivil comments arouse negative emotions, and lurking Incivility exaggerates perceived bias leading to antagonism	In-group and Out-group identity Motivated Reasoning Confirmatory bias Partisanship	48
Group Size	Homogeneity of small groups promote enclave deliberation Large groups suggest exposure to cross-cutting viewpoints Partisan selection of group members suggests partisan ideologies Large group groups suggest inadvertent exposure of content	Motivated Reasoning In-group and Out-group identity Groupthink	47
Diversity	Information filtering is impossible hence incidental exposure Extreme positions realised due to the group's dominant view Expulsion from WhatsApp group results in enclave deliberations Spiral of silence for those who with minority opinion	Partisanship Motivated Reasoning In-group and Out-group identity Social comparison	55
Inclusivity	Power dynamics disadvantages contributions by minority groups Absence of two-sided deliberation leads to extremes positions Assuming individual views to represent the entire group's views Lack of inclusivity is a product of imbalanced power dynamics Lurking behaviour stifles inclusivity in deliberations	Partisanship Groupthink	49

6.3.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics and Group Polarisation

Gender Dichotomy and Group Polarisation

Respondents argued that males tend to be more polarised because they are comparatively more involved in politics and governance issues than women. Reference was made to the ‘patriarchal nature of the Kenyan politics’ whereby men had more interest, more exposure, and more say in politics and governance. Men, according to respondents, are more likely to join WhatsApp groups and seek avenues to further express their ideas on issues which they feel committed and passionate about. Such ideas, it was noted, was what made them more polarised. Respondents, however, also argued that women, having recently experienced more empowerment, have increased their involvement in online deliberations including on platforms like WhatsApp. Consequently, they are also more likely to take hard-line positions on the issues they are also passionate about. One respondent noted:

Both genders can be polarised in the same measure. Politics has largely been viewed as men’s domain for years which can make one infer that women are less polarised. However, polarisation has been noticed in women given they have now become more vocal on governance matters even in WhatsApp (WFGD 3, R 7).

Another respondent observed that:

...anybody can be polarised and the differences between men or women does not matter. Men have things [issues] they are keen on pushing as their agenda and the same case is for women. (WFGD 2, R 8).

Respondents noted that men are likely to deliberate on governance issues more frequently compared to women. This is because of how men are ‘socialised’, according to one respondent. Men invest more time and effort in county issues, meaning they would develop deeper personal convictions about particular ideologies with a higher possibility of being polarised. The effect of the digital divide was noted to negatively affect women compared to men and their access to platforms like WhatsApp, especially in rural areas, was also mentioned by respondents. The digital divide, it was claimed, meant fewer women on WhatsApp and less chance of them being exposed to polarised views and opinions during deliberations. One respondent suggested that polarisation in WhatsApp groups was influenced more by the topic of deliberation than by

gender dynamics. The contrasting perspective was that participants are polarised on governance issues that they have an interest in and this was largely influenced by participant's gender. Respondents noted:

Men in WhatsApp are more polarised than women because they are more techno-savvy. In most cases, men tend to get involved in politics and governance matters; in this case polarisation ends up affecting most men than it would with women (WFGD 2, R 4).

Another respondent suggested:

It is not gender that makes people polarised, it is the issues that men and women feel is important to them and they cannot compromise.... a good example is the gender rule which we have debated since 2010 (WFGD 2, R 4).

Other explanations for gender and polarisation, as given by respondents, relate to their personality differences or 'difference in behaviour' as one respondent put it. Respondents felt that women were comparatively more opinionated and were dogmatic in some ideologies compared to men. Men, according to respondents, are more assertive and sometimes dismissive of others' arguments in deliberations. One respondent noted that women were more likely to avoid 'conflict' and be ambivalent compared to men during deliberations. Men, it was noted, consistently expressed more conservative opinions than women on governance with a high possibility of being polarised. One respondent noted that both genders sometimes participated in deliberations with their minds already made up on certain contested governance issues because of 'their background'. The discussions also revealed that while county leadership positions were mostly occupied by men, WhatsApp deliberations did not elicit any form of binary affiliations based on any specific leaders and personalities. One respondent noted:

Women do not like conflict and where there is fights....and when discussions in our WhatsApp groups become heated, you can see that it is the men who always disagree and fight with each other (WFGD 5, R 1).

Another respondent stated that:

Gender is crucial according to me...it is all about what you value or don't in governance that will polarise people (WFGD 2, R 4).

Because women considered themselves 'the underdogs' during deliberation on certain governance issues, they were more likely to 'group together to fight back' and support each

other during WhatsApp deliberations. Men, it was suggested, lacked such patterns of defensive engagement during deliberations. However, men were more likely to become defensive just for the sake of it when they were challenged with what the respondents called ‘facts and figures’. One respondent felt that men were more likely to react negatively when their dominance and ‘privileges’ were challenged during deliberations. Respondents argued:

We women are the underdogs in many issues in our county. We often support one another in discussions when the men want to dominate everything. We have to join efforts and defend our issues (WFGD 5, R 1).

Men like to defend themselves...when their privileges are questioned or even threatened...they gang up (WFGD 3, R 6).

Despite the varied opinions on gender and polarisation, a significant majority of respondents held that gender is one of the least contributing factors to polarisation in their WhatsApp group. The respondents noted that gender was less likely to define their ideological positions compared to, say, ethnicity and religion. The findings also revealed an overall difference in the level of polarisation between both genders where men were more likely to be polarised compared to the women.

Age Factor and its Effects on Group Polarisation

Respondents agreed that the majority of WhatsApp groups consist of younger participants. The older age groups have been left behind by what one respondent called ‘a digital transformation’. The perception that polarisation is higher among younger participants on platforms like WhatsApp is a general result of this transformation. One respondent noted that the ideologies that fragmented younger and older participants in WhatsApp groups reflected the polarisation around what the age groups felt was pertinent to them. Some respondents argued that polarisation was a form of ‘socialisation’ and that it entrenches itself in a way that is self-perpetuating in society. They noted that while young participants use WhatsApp platforms

more, and appear to be more polarised, they have been socialised to be polarised around governance, ethnicity, and politics by older age groups. Respondents noted that:

Younger people are open to different opinions because it enables learning and growth and maybe out of respect for the older ones in our WhatsApp groups, by virtue of having more experience they can use it to change opinions. That is why they are less partisan (WFGD 6, R 4).

Older people have a more difficult time tolerating different opinions, one they may feel they know more or have experienced more (WFGD 2, R 1).

Another respondent added that:

Young people learn polarisation from older people...especially on issues touching on the ethnicity.... we learn it from our parents (WFGD 1, R 5).

Respondents argued that because young participants were more prone to peer pressure, they were more likely to stick to the group's position, especially on issues they felt disadvantaged. Younger participants, it was noted, added their friends to WhatsApp groups in a way that resulted in similar-minded 'cliques'. Such cliques supported one another in WhatsApp group deliberations. The link between age and polarisation was argued to depend on which age group had the resources to deliberate and engage in WhatsApp groups. However, no clear consensus was evident on whether younger or older participants had more access to resources like digital handsets, data bundles, and time for deliberations. It was, however, evident from the responses that the majority of young participants spend more time on WhatsApp and other social media. Respondents also argued that younger participants are more liberal than older participants who tend to be more conservative and polarised in their opinions. The respondent further noted that because the majority of people in urban areas in Kenya are younger age groups, they more tolerant and accommodating of other's views. Respondents used words such as 'open-minded', 'diverse' and 'accommodating' to describe how liberal young participants are when interacting on WhatsApp platforms. They also saw others as 'closed-minded', 'dogmatic', and 'unreasonable'. One respondent stated:

I agree, younger people are very open minded; they are willing to accept new ideas and opinions who unlike the old are stuck in old ways. That is why you have old men who are still voting for KANU [*One of Kenya's post-independence party*] more than 20 years after it was removed from power (WFGD 2, R 1).

The discussion then looked at whether older participants should be considered more ideologically consistent rather than being polarised and extreme compared to young age groups during deliberations. This emerged after one respondent noted how older age groups ‘tend to stick’ to ideologies and ‘ways of doing thing’. The older age groups were also noted to be more ethnically polarised compared to the younger groups. One respondent noted that:

Older people are more polarised as they tend to stick to known ideologies that may have worked in the past and may be unwilling to explore new ideas even when provided with new information. Can’t teach an old dog new tricks! (WFGD 2, R 4).

Another one also stated that:

People of my father’s age like sticking to old ways and I think this explains why they rarely change the parties they support...the same thing if they join WhatsApp group. I also think older people are very ethnically polarised...our generation is getting better in accepting ethnic differences (WFGD 1, R 4).

Another perspective was that polarisation was not age-dependent but rather issue-dependent. Therefore, polarisation in WhatsApp groups depended on whether issues deliberated affected younger or older age groups. Respondents noted that apathy and decreased participation in governance among young participants mean that they were less likely to engage and be polarised. Just like gender, some respondents thought age played a minimal role in defining the issues that polarised WhatsApp groups. They noted that whether young or old, factors like ethnicity were more likely to polarise compared to age. One respondent noted:

Younger people are not more polarised than older people as most are not even interested in politics to start with. How can younger people be polarised if they have stayed away from county politics and governance (WFGD 3, R 3).

Another suggested that:

The youth are united by very many things including unemployment, being excluded from county leadership. It is politics that poisons us (young respondent) and we become polarised (WFGD 3, R 7).

Respondents also noted that younger participants spent more time on WhatsApp groups than older participants. More time on WhatsApp, it was noted, meant constant exposure to different views and opinions on governance issues. Respondents further noted that younger age groups

were likely to be members of various other political and non-political WhatsApp groups. This, according to respondents, also meant wider exposure to different perspectives on issues.

Level of Education and Group Polarisation in WhatsApp

There was a general consensus among respondents that an increased level of education in Kenya's population is concurrent with the rising levels of perceived polarisation. However, the explanations given for this trend varied. Some argued that education had created more knowledgeable and confident participants who have consequently expressed their views and opinions more openly than before on platforms like WhatsApp. Others felt that polarisation among the educated and uneducated have been constant over the years. To them, WhatsApp and other online platforms have magnified the perception that polarisation is more widespread than before. One respondent indicated that:

Educated people, because they may be able to articulate themselves better may not be so tolerant of different opinions. It may also stem from the feeling that they are well read on an issue and do not need to be instructed by the ignorant [*clarified to mean the less educated*] (WFGD 6, R 3).

Others argued that participants who are less educated tend to be more dogmatic and 'stubborn' with their opinions and information. They are less willing to engage in deliberations that would otherwise change their positions on specific governance issues. Respondents noted that the education system engenders polarisation by heightening the focus and sensitivity around issues that divide society. Asked for an example, one respondent (male) suggested that education has taught women to be more empowered and fight for their rights and this has resulted in polarisation between men and women. It was further suggested that education has supported more 'evidenced' discussion which is more convincing. Hence, the perception that those who are more educated were more likely to be influencers in their WhatsApp groups.

One respondent noted:

The less educated tend to have less information and by extension believe that the information they have is absolute and true. They are not willing to participate on discussions that will enlighten or challenge their opinions (WFGD 1, R 6).

Another respondent noted a contrary perspective stated that:

Some people are stubborn because they feel they are well educated...I may be wrong but I have seen people in our group who are at each other's throats because they know a thing or two more than the rest of us...that is what education does (WFGD 1, R 6).

However, one respondent noted that influencers were more likely to be involved in framing issues in a polarised way during WhatsApp deliberations. Apparently, influencers in WhatsApp groups, just like in offline contexts, were purveyors of information from county authorities. They created a perception of being closely connected to power than the rest of the group members. They have what respondents referred to as 'in-house' information relating to county governance which they used to enhance their credibility. The argument on whether influencers are part of political elite was not conclusive; nonetheless, they were thought to be equally polarised. As one participant noted:

Our WhatsApp group has people who are close to county government power. They bring us information from county and act like opinions leaders. They are very authoritative and influence discussions in our WhatsApp group (WFGD 5, R 5).

Another argued that:

Interacting with political leaders who are also polarised does not make any difference...there is no neutrality on what they say and this is where I feel we need to speak out (WFGD 2, R 3).

Compared to the less educated who were less politically interested and inclined, educated participants were argued to be media junkies. Their behaviour of consuming diverse content gave the impression that they were more likely to be exposed to diverse information sources and content. One respondent argued:

Less educated people like to stick to belief systems that they are comfortable with. Also, less educated people tend to display bias where they embrace information that supports their beliefs and reject information that contradicts them (WFGD 2, R 5).

Another respondent also noted:

We who are educated like to read a lot and are exposed to variety of information...it might not help to change views we hold though. (WFGD 4, R 4).

Respondents had varied opinions on whether educated participants in their WhatsApp groups were likely to express civility and rationality in deliberations. Some argued that those who are

educated were more inclined to be moderate in their expressions and mindful of their language compared to the less educated. Other respondents, however, gave examples of how the most passionate, irrational and polarised positions had been advanced by those considered well educated.

Educated people believe they are knowledgeable and therefore they will stick more to their positions/ opinions in political discussions (WFGD 4, R 4).

Respondents suggested that because WhatsApp is mainly based on a written format and structure of engagement, those who are educated are more likely to be articulate and therefore appear more ‘opinionated’ compared to the less educated. Being opinionated, as argued by one respondent, was construed to mean being polarised. Yet the majority of respondents indicated that the level of education was not the leading factor that caused polarisation in WhatsApp deliberations. One respondent argued:

The reason people discussing governance issues don’t agree very often is because of those who argue do that in an uninformed way. To fix polarisation and the divide in many counties will happen if people are educated. If people are educated, it is easier to agree on the facts and move forward (WFGD 1, R 5).

6.3.2 Group Ties, Group Size and Polarisation

The categorisation between participants ties in the WhatsApp groups was classified in the WFGD’s as follows; Weak ties where members do not know each other personally and do not engage outside the WhatsApp group or where group members know each other from WhatsApp group but not personally. Strong ties where group members know each other personally and engage outside the WhatsApp group or where group members met in their WhatsApp group and have met in person. The majority of respondents agreed that the group ties influenced polarisation in WhatsApp groups. Respondents suggested that the manner in which WhatsApp groups are formed was determined by their pre-existing relationships. Most respondents agreed that the WhatsApp groups formed by those with prior relationships were more friendly and shared ‘somethings’ [*meaning views and opinions*] in common. Some WhatsApp groups were

noted to be very diverse and participants in them were likely to be strangers to one another. Respondents noted that friends, as opposed to strangers, were more agreeable during discussions but this did not mean they could be more polarised. Also apparent was that those with closer ties in their WhatsApp groups knew most of their group members by name. Two respondents noted:

I know all the people in my WhatsApp group. We picked and chose people we added to the group because we wanted only those who share same ideas with us. Our WhatsApp group is not for arguing things, it is for action (WFGD 2, R 7).

We were able to form our WhatsApp group because we are close friends in the first place. So, we happen to share many views in common on politics and governance. We also participate in many things together (WFGD 5, R 5).

There was general consensus that random selection as a recruitment method united participants with similar interests and goals in WhatsApp groups. However, such participants have different ideologies because the relationship between them is weak. Respondents also claimed that exposure to diverse information in contexts like public WhatsApp groups was, as one respondent put it, ‘impossible to avoid’. Another respondent argued that WhatsApp groups with weak ties encouraged participants to express their opinions more freely and without any inhibitions; they felt ‘nothing personal’ in relation to their audience. Respondents further noted that participants with close/strong ties are likely to seek group positions and seek issue consensus during WhatsApp deliberations. WhatsApp groups with strong ties, according to respondents, involved exposure to likeminded opinions while avoiding different perspectives. Those with close ties in their WhatsApp groups felt that they were likely to influence one another on specific views that defined the group’s identity.

According to one respondent:

No, actually people tend to be more polarised with strangers because they may have nothing to lose from the connection as compared to close ties. So, it may be easier to tolerate a differing opinion from a close tie because there’s value in the relationship (WFGD 3, R 3).

Some contrary opinions were that WhatsApp groups with weak ties eventually resulted in the formation of what respondents termed ‘inner circles’ within the WhatsApp groups. Those within the inner circles are likely to support one another in deliberations regardless of their affiliations. Further, close ties were possible because of what one respondent termed as ‘gang mentality’. Asked what this meant, the respondent noted that those with close ties were likely to rally around each other on emotionally driven points in deliberations. Also apparent from the respondents was that participants in weak ties engage in infrequent deliberations and have less opportunities for polarisation, whereas close ties interact quite freely and have a chance to deliberate deeply and exhaustively on issues. Discussion among ‘strangers’ in WhatsApp groups was considered to be done with a carefully weighed view of one’s reputation. This was, however, disputed by those who noted that the opposite was actually the case. One respondent observed that:

People in my WhatsApp group know each other very well; we were not friends before we joined our WhatsApp group but we work in civil society and we share and discuss things a lot more now than we did before (WFGD 7, R 2).

It was, however, noted that because weak ties in WhatsApp groups make it easier to introduce new ideas and information, they enhance more cross-cutting deliberations. Respondents further suggested that WhatsApp features allowed what one respondent called ‘mutation’. Asked what this meant, the respondent stated that mutation is where those with similar views self-identified within a heterogeneous WhatsApp group and created a different but homogeneous WhatsApp group. The result was WhatsApp groups made up of participants with similar ideologies and points of view. According to respondents, this was possible in WhatsApp groups with weak ties. Some respondents felt that the participant’s personality factors were a greater determinant of polarisation compared to the nature of ties on WhatsApp.

Group Size and Group Polarisation

Respondents generally argued that larger groups were more likely to be polarised because of a high number of viewpoints. Others suggested that it was much easier to achieve consensus or common ground in deliberations among smaller groups compared to larger ones. As one respondent noted: ‘participants are more agreeable in smaller groups’ compared to large ones. In large WhatsApp groups, respondents noted, it was easier for polarising opinions to be ignored or lost in the increased traffic of conversations. Large groups were noted to increase distrust between participants, and this was linked to higher chances of issue polarisation during deliberations. Smaller WhatsApp groups were also seen as more close-knit, with strong ties between participants compared to larger ones. Therefore, respondents felt that small groups tend to have more open and non-polarising discussions in more enclave deliberation environments. One respondent contended:

Different views, defended intensely within the group will generate more heat and draw battle lines easier than the smaller group. It is easier to find areas of common ground in smaller groups than in bigger groups (WFGD 2, R 5).

Another of a contrary opinion indicated that:

I think people who are close have very frank discussion with one another. They know each other and know what sets people off in discussion (WFGD 1, R 6).

The respondents argued that participants in small WhatsApp groups can easily form in-groups where particular information circulates. Larger groups increased the diversity of participants and this also meant more opinions, more cross-cutting views, and information sources, according to respondents. Respondents noted that participants in larger groups were likely to use angry and disrespectful tones in their discussions because of the impersonal relationships between participants. This led some to avoid participating in deliberations because they perceived the negative tones to mean heightened polarisation. One respondent noted that the addition of members to smaller WhatsApp groups was more likely to be based on a partisan selection process. Only participants who were perceived as ‘favourable’ or compliant with the group norms or characteristics were added to such small groups. A respondent declared:

A large group is more polarised as there are varying opinions presented over an issue...it is more like a market of ideas, too many ideas, too much noise and little understanding between people (WFGD 7, R 5).

Another respondent of a contrary perspective noted:

We don't need to look far for examples; just look at small groups where being added to the group is through favourability to group admin or members (WFGD 3, R 3).

Asked about the influence of binary and partisan positions, respondents argued that binary thinking was determined by the issues being discussed and less by the size of the group. The majority of respondents shared the opinion that particular attitudes and stereotypes that drive ethnic polarisation had nothing to do with the group's size. As one respondent put it:

Small networks tend to be more polarised as divergent opinions are fewer. Large networks tend to be more polarised as it holds many people with different political views; this might end up promoting polarisation (WFGD 3, R 7).

It was, however, noted that while some WhatsApp groups consist of large networks, very few participants actually participate in deliberations. Most practised lurking behaviour during discussions. The discussions then looked at whether lurking reflected a form of polarisation. Respondents noted that those who practised lurking behaviour are more polarised and did not want to reveal their positions. The other perspective was that lurking meant that the polarised nature of deliberations in WhatsApp groups pushed some to silence because they considered themselves to hold extreme but minority viewpoints. The respondent indicated their different views and diversity of participants in their group was one of the most polarising factors. They also felt that the group ties and the group size were some of the most polarising factors in their WhatsApp group.

6.3.3 Moderation, Civility and Group Polarisation

It was clear from the discussions that polarisation on WhatsApp is extremely challenging to moderate. Respondents noted that deliberations on contested issues in their WhatsApp groups shatter the informal norms of moderation and civility. Apparent from the discussions was that polarisation and intolerance were influenced by some features of WhatsApp including the lack

of appropriate moderation mechanisms for the group discussions. It was clear that some group administrators heightened polarity in deliberations rather than moderate engagement. Moderating opinions of participants who were believed to be speaking ‘facts’ were considered to be negative for group discussion and viewed as ‘gagging’ according to one respondent.

One group administrator noted:

As WhatsApp group administrator, I don’t feel I can moderate the discussions in my group because WhatsApp features are not very enabling (WFGD 1, R 1).

Another WhatsApp group administrator with an alternative view noted that:

Our work as admins [short for administrators] is not to limit people from having their discussions... we are not to police people in the group...but many time we have had to remove people who abuse others (WFGD 5, R 1).

It was apparent that moderation in some WhatsApp groups was done by ‘everyone’. Asked what this meant, respondents noted that the responsibility for pointing out abusive or demeaning utterances lay with the group participants as a whole. There was general ambivalence about the role of WhatsApp administrators during deliberations and how their contribution influences group polarisation. It was further noted that when participants believe their opponents are extreme with their views, they are more likely to be seen as biased, irrational, and selfish. The other side, it was noted, was likely to prefer to escalate the polarised deliberation and actions over civility or cooperation. Some respondents considered WhatsApp group administrators ‘helpful’ in maintaining civility during deliberations. However, others noted that they are not, as one respondent put it, ‘immune to polarisation’.

As one respondent indicated:

Moderation allows people to air different opinions on an issue without being victimised over a shared opinion but moderation can also skew the WhatsApp discussion to one side when the moderator is biased (WFGD 6, R 2).

Another respondent argued:

I doubt moderation is possible in our WhatsApp groups...everybody feels entitled to say what they think regardless of language they use and this is where it is helpful (*referring to moderation*) (WFGD 6, R 5).

Moderated deliberations, it was noted, depend on the compliance of participants which respondents noted was very low in most WhatsApp groups. Others noted that polarisation, like a ‘cancer’, had infected the entire society and spread to the online platforms sparing none, including the administrators. As one participant underlined :

Polarisation in Kenya is everywhere; it is like a cancer that has spread even to social media like WhatsApp. We need to do a radical surgery because no amount of talking and discussing will eradicate it (WFGD 2, R 2).

The same respondent noted that unless a ‘radical surgical’ is done to remove polarisation in Kenyan society, the moderation of polarised deliberations on platforms like WhatsApp meant nothing. The place for deliberations on polarisation led to a discussion the findings of which are presented in the next chapter. Some respondents noted that polarised attitudes, unlike visible behaviour, was challenging to moderate effectively. It was evident that respondents could collectively moderate their views and opinions during WhatsApp deliberations, ensuring they were less inflammatory and polarised. One respondent noted that their WhatsApp group used the term ‘call to order’ for participants who were making unrelated remarks or using incivil language. One respondent commented:

We all take responsibility to call one another to order. I feel this has helped in our discussions (WFGD 6, R 2).

Some respondents further noted that because their WhatsApp groups are moderated, they feel more confident to express their opinions knowing they will not be ‘attacked’. Whether the ability to express one’s thoughts freely was good or bad for polarisation was not apparent from the discussions. One respondent gave an example of a WhatsApp group they exited because they ‘could not continue in an environment of chaos, where negative comments were flying about’. One respondent noted that:

Inhibiting people who are intolerant of other views can only work within a short time frame. Dissidents may actually gain sympathisers who may be quickly be less tolerant. Rather than moderating discussions, I would propose educating/presenting facts rather than inhibiting those with hard-line stances (WFGD 4, R 1).

Another respondent added:

People expressing their minds freely should not be taken to mean that they are polarisation. I have seen people calling others out for speaking out [*mean speaking up*] their minds (WFGD 2, R 2).

Moderation may introduce fairness into discussion but in some WhatsApp groups, biased moderators expelled participants who expressed divergent opinions, according to respondents. It was further evident from the discussions that moderation of WhatsApp deliberations drives participants to form their own WhatsApp groups. Respondents argued over whether the group administrators should moderate the content or the expression of such content. This generated further discussion on whether it was the content or the manner of expressions that was polarising. As a respondent argued:

People are more willing to have conversations when there is a moderator because they feel their views will be fairly weighed. People are also more willing to hold moderate positions and not the content when moderators do their job (WFGD 1, R 2).

There was a discussion on how moderating can quickly degenerate into censorship because of what some respondents called ‘amateur’ and ‘over-zealous’ WhatsApp group administrators. It was also not clear from the discussion if discussion disagreement in WhatsApp group deliberation influences how open participants are to persuasion. Respondents noted that while it was possible to moderate WhatsApp group discussions in some instances, it did not mean participants expressed less polarised opinions. According to them, it meant that they did it in a more responsible and considerate way. The majority agreed that unmoderated discussion in their group is one of the most polarising factors.

Civility/Incivility and Polarisation

For clarity and depth of discussion, the definition of incivility was broadened to include any rude, demeaning, offensive, and impolite use of language targeted at participants and groups during the deliberations. Respondents noted that incivility was usually between participants who sometimes disagreed on governance issues, rather than between specific groups. However,

incivility was likely to be viewed as an ‘attack’ on the individual and the group affiliated to that person. Further, incivility was seen to target people rather than ideas or views they presented during deliberations. Incivility, it was further noted, resulted in defensive reactions to what was perceived as an attack on an in-group by the outgroup. Respondents noted how this was likely to enrage and worsen incivility in deliberation due to retaliatory behaviour.

Respondents claimed:

Sometimes abusive comments made on a person is taken to mean an attack on the group. People take things personally even in groups (WFGD 2, R 2).

People can be angry at the system but they don’t know how to discuss without aiming blows at each other in the group (WFGD 4, R 2).

Further, incivility was seen to increase negative labelling of the targets or opponents be they, individuals or groups. Some of the labels noted by respondents to describe incivil participants in their WhatsApp group included: ‘biased’, ‘emotional’, ‘unreasonable’, and ‘anti-discussion’, ‘blind to reason’ or ‘anti-progress’. Eventually, the resulting attitude was that the opposing group views the other as not worth engaging with. The contrary view was that incivility in WhatsApp groups had come to be viewed as the ‘order of the day’, to express its commonality, and this was a source of distrust in deliberations. As one respondent noted:

We are used people attacking each other and it’s the order of the day in our WhatsApp groups...although some topics are very heated than others (WFGD 3, R 7).

Further, respondents highlighted that incivil comments were more likely to be shared and forwarded in WhatsApp group discussions, and this encouraged certain participants who were seeking attention to use them. Incivil comments on sensitive issues, group identity or targeting ethnic tribes or political parties during deliberations were noted to elicit the strongest reactions from the WhatsApp group. Asked whether incivil comments are prevalent in WhatsApp groups with homogeneous participants, respondents noted that it was less likely to be the case. For instance, one respondent noted that:

I do not think people who know each other can use rude or abusive language at each other. That is why maybe we don’t have any in our group (WFGD 5, R 5).

Another respondent added:

Someone made comments about Kikuyus 'being who they are' (*stereotyped as thieves and corrupt*) and this was a big thing because people ended up abusing one another; some left the group (WFGD 3, R 7).

It was further evident from the respondent's views that exposure to incivil comments in deliberations was likely to spiral into more 'bile' and negative emotions. Asked to expound on this, respondents claimed that incivility was likely to drive negative emotions and evoke stronger attitudes. Respondents felt that the stronger the negative attitudes in a group, the more the participants expressed stereotypes against their opponents (out-group members). One respondent stated:

Going personal with rude comments has made people leave the group or demanded their opponents to leave...it depends on the group (WFGD 5, R 5).

Respondents further noted how incivility led to counter-attitudinal reactions such as 'closedmindedness' or 'shutting down' and heightened levels of defensiveness during deliberations. Incivility was thus linked to the use and spread of polarising fake news. One respondent noted that incivility and fake news 'go together'. Another noted that incivility and certain negative stereotypes are common in governance discourse. One respondent noted:

Some people cannot attack one another directly, so they use fake news...but the effect is still the same (*referring to breaking down deliberations*) (WFGD 2, R 7).

In WhatsApp groups, incivility touching on participant's positions or perceived privileges was likely to heighten extreme polarisation especially when incivil language justified dominance, demeaned an ethnic community, or targeted a political leader supported by segments of the group. It was noted that partisan affiliation to certain political elite in WhatsApp group deliberations encouraged incivility, especially when discussions centred around county government leaders and personnel. Asked to clarify this, respondents contended that the incivility was often heightened by supporters of warring county government politicians.

It is worse in our WhatsApp because there are those who feel they can tell everyone off because they work for county. County politics makes name calling even worse when it's about people who ate money (*referring to corruption*) (WFGD 5, R 5).

With WhatsApp group discussions, respondents stated that it is possible to skip incivil comments and scroll through negative chats. The discussions also looked at whether there was constant reminder through moderation when discussions turn incivil. Respondents observed that this was possible to the extent that participants were compliant. Incivility was also noted to influence participants to practice lurking behaviour. Some respondents noted that they would rather 'boycott', be quiet or do what one respondent called 'shutting down' [*meaning leaving WhatsApp for while*] rather than engage in incivil discussions. They also noted that they were likely to consider deliberations as non-serious when they saw the use of incivil comments.

I would rather shut down and not be involved...it is not in my nature to engage in such (meaning incivil debates) (WFGD 1, R 5).

It was, however, clear that incivility was more likely to exaggerate perceived bias that led to the antagonism characterised by 'us versus them'. Discussions that involved name calling were noted to mess up discussions and make further deliberations impossible. One respondent further noted that incivility was not just about specific swear words and that it could be about invoking certain stereotypes to ridicule or antagonise perceived respondents during WhatsApp group deliberations. Respondents felt that inclusivity was not one of the most polarising factors in WhatsApp group.

6.3.4 Heterogeneous Viewpoints and Diversity of Participants

Respondents felt that exposure to divergent viewpoints did not influence polarisation in any way because those who participated in WhatsApp deliberations held prior positions on governance issues before joining WhatsApp. Exposure to different perspectives would not, according to them, necessarily change their positions. This, they noted, was especially the case for strongly held opinions and deeply entrenched views. Some respondents argued that

changing opinions depended on an individual's understanding of those issues rather than exposure to diverse views. The counter-argument was that being exposed to different information was what informed opinion change. Respondents linked exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints with the group's increased appreciation for others' diverse opinions and views. Respondents also felt that when they engaged with those with different opinions, they were having 'good' quality discussions. One respondent stated:

Different opinions enable other people in the WhatsApp group to consider that someone else's opinion does actually make sense and they are entitled to it if it does not (WFGD 1, R 1).

The willingness to evaluate one's opinions, according to the respondents, was dependent on the quality of new information rather than exposure to diverse opinions. Diverse information founded on rumours and misinformation, as was noted to be common in WhatsApp groups, was less likely to change participants' opinions. It was also evident from the discussions that participants on WhatsApp can sometimes actively avoid content that counters their prior positions. This, according to respondents, happened in the following ways: ignoring specific contributors and exiting and forming other WhatsApp groups. As one respondent suggested:

Different points of view can be beneficial to help people realise that their line of thought/cherished beliefs may not be universally acknowledged by other WhatsApp group members. This can definitely reduce polarisation (WFGD 2, R 5).

The majority of the respondents were agreeable to encountering diverse viewpoints through different information sources; however, some doubted whether new information would change their views on specific governance issues. WhatsApp features tend to enhance information cascades where shared content quickly diffuses and grows exponentially through forwarding. Most respondents admitted having encountered diverse information on governance in their WhatsApp groups that challenged their points of view. It was not, however, clear if information cascades on WhatsApp involved like-minded groups or those with cross-cutting identities who are only loosely connected to each other. One respondent commented:

When different content is shared in WhatsApp, it will be a great eye opener to them and help them learn to appreciate other people's political opinions. The greatest danger is the people stay in their cocoon of information and think no one else's matters (WFGD 2, R 7).

It was further evident from the discussions that WhatsApp groups members experienced an inconceivably large amount of diverse content on governance. This created an information overload which forced users to choose and attend to information selectively. However, the selection of content to read was not necessarily based on the congruence of opinion. Rather, according to participants, it was based on factors including: humour value, mood, availability of time, nature of content (video or audio), type of WhatsApp and users' interests. Respondents implied that content that was considered outrageous, alarming or even counterintuitive was more likely to be circulated and viewed if it was believed to be true. It was not just about exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints on governance but also the packaging of such content that determined exposure in WhatsApp groups. One respondent indicated:

I use my WhatsApp once a day mostly in the evening after work. When I open it, I find thousands of messages and I cannot go through all of them coz I am mostly tired. So, I sieve through what I like (WFGD 3, R 4).

The majority of respondents agreed that their WhatsApp groups consist of diverse participants; the level of ideological homogeneity between them was minimal on a range of issues. Respondents noted that they shared similar opinions on issues that brought them together. However, the respondents argued that their opinions differed on various other governance issues and topics. One respondent gave an instance where while environmental governance issues led to the formation of some WhatsApp groups, it did not mean they agreed on revenue allocation issues at the county level. The diversity means that the groups availed of a lot of opportunities for participants to select their information sources during deliberations and filter out unfamiliar or challenging messages. One respondent stated:

Actually, WhatsApp removes the impact of a face-to-face discussion that allows one to wait for the other to share their opinion and the expression of non-verbal communication. This usually enables the person to know when to stop and if the participants are enjoying the discussion to continue (WFGD 3, R 1).

The respondents suggested that participants become polarised in concert with like-minded others due to the mutual affirmation of a shared identity. This behaviour intensifies their shared attitudes, including a negative view of outsiders or those of the out-group. Respondents further noted that the trouble lies with participants regarding their political and ethnic communities' affiliations as group identities in deliberations. It was further noted that WhatsApp deliberations happen in a way that reflects the warring political parties and ethnic affiliations. It was also noted that the diversity of participants can also render the WhatsApp group unmanageable. One of the respondents gave an example where the WhatsApp group he once belonged to was dissolved because of what he termed 'unmanageable differences' which made co-existence in the group impossible. Another observed:

People tend to form cliques on WhatsApp platforms just as in real life; therefore, they gravitate towards friends and people with same ideologies. Secondly, politics has an emotional component to it which cannot be quickly dismissed even in WhatsApp (WFGD 5, R 5).

Respondents gave instances where those with divergent opinions or persistent about 'pestering' the group were removed from the group. The respondents agreed they had developed more extreme positions and opinions compared to what they thought before they were exposed to particular topics in WhatsApp deliberations. It was also revealed that those with a minority position on specific governance topics became silenced or have a disproportionately minimal say or weight in WhatsApp deliberations. As one respondent indicated:

My experience – based on my WhatsApp group– is that with the anonymity most diverse people are emboldened and become more polarised. WhatsApp speed of communication oftentimes leads to polarisation due to the 'joys' some people find in bashing/trolling those of differing opinions (WFGD 7, R 8).

Exposure to diverse information creates an environment where various opinions are tolerated to the extent that is good for polarisation. Diversity, according to the respondents, encourages participants to appreciate a variety of views and opinions. A sense that the group was facing a

common fate or that the members were likely to have the same fate was noted to magnify intra-group similarity and this tends to increase polarisation.

6.3.5 Tolerance, Inclusivity and Group Polarisation

Respondents felt that participants using WhatsApp groups are more likely to be flexible and tolerant towards other political and religious beliefs and practices. The majority of respondents perceived themselves as tolerant in their WhatsApp group deliberations. The majority also agreed that tolerance enables participants in heterogeneous WhatsApp groups to find confidence in self-expression despite their existing differences in positions. There was a discussion about the difference between lurking and exercising tolerance in deliberation. One respondent observed that those who were extremely polarised and passionate would not keep silent when an opinion challenging their beliefs and positions was expressed in the group. The potential of tolerance to lead to constructive disagreements was noted by respondents. However, this was considered to be dependent on the issue being discussed. It was also evident that some respondents misconstrued disagreements to mean polarisation during WhatsApp groups. Some respondents noted:

Actually, tolerance may present itself as silence over the polarising discussion such that members of a social media group cease to talk over an issue rather than belabour over it because they may never agree (WFGD 6, R 2).

Intolerance in the society is the same as what is in WhatsApp groups (WFGD 1, R 2).

When people are emotional and make their points without logic in discussions, polarisation occurs. I can be right to say that opposition to our ideas helps them become stronger and more tolerant because we become stronger and more tolerating when we defend our ideas and positions. (WFGD 2, R 2).

Respondents reported varied levels of tolerance in their WhatsApp groups and the discussion looked at some of the possible explanations for such variance. Diverse personality, different levels of education, social learning, and being part of highly diversified networks were among the explanations respondents gave. For instance, education was argued to open participant's minds allowing the debunking of polarising stereotypes that often-caused intolerance. Those

in public WhatsApp groups (heterogeneous networks) felt that they were also more tolerant compared to those in closed (homogeneous networks) WhatsApp groups. Some WhatsApp groups consist of politicians and the discussion was whether their presence increased intolerance and polarisation in deliberations. One respondent observed that:

If the participants are exposed to different thought patterns or if facts are presented, it makes people start questioning opinions that have been cherished for long. Tolerance in discussion would reduce polarisation as people would be willing to listen to other views and be more accepting (WFGD 3, R 5).

Another respondent also indicated:

Tolerance can be taught and that is something most people in WhatsApp groups are not willing to learn (WFGD 4, R 6).

Respondents noted that WhatsApp groups have made what he called ‘social intolerance’ more visible and more acceptable [*legitimate*]. One respondent indicated that intolerance towards the minorities in their group has contributed to the pervasive negative public opinion against such groups. Some respondents noted that politicians in WhatsApp groups have amplified the perceptions and effect of divisive issues and made tolerance harder to achieve. Others argued how the presence of politicians had minimal effects on polarisation, especially given that their contribution was a small percentage in their deliberations. It was apparent that politicians influence the level of tolerance in WhatsApp groups. Intolerance was also blamed on issue framing in WhatsApp groups. Respondents indicated that the manner in which governance issues are broached and framed in their WhatsApp is sometimes antagonistic and leads to intolerance.

Tolerance in WhatsApp can help reduce polarisation as it gives others a chance to express their different political views...but when people move to defending their views or they feel attacked, tolerance is forgotten (WFGD 4, R 1).

It was also apparent that WhatsApp, unlike other social media platforms, allows the use of phone numbers, and this negates the element of anonymity and improves tolerance in deliberations. In contrast, some respondents argued that tolerance was not made better by removing anonymity. The discussion on whether it was easier to be tolerant of strangers (weak

ties) than friends (strong ties) achieved no clear consensus. Moderation was noted to enhance more tolerance, but the asynchronous nature of WhatsApp deliberations made it near impossible for group administrators to pay attention to all the polarising aspects of a discussion. No definitive position was arrived at with regard to whether tolerance exists in small networks compared to large ones. One respondent stated:

The existence of eco-chambers feeds polarisation on social media, making it difficult to be tolerant. Tolerance is the antithesis of polarisation (WFGD 7, R 2).

Further, respondents noted that those who are young are comparatively more tolerant in WhatsApp groups compared to the older age groups. Younger participants, it was argued, were more likely to take 'liberal' positions on many issues compared to the older age groups, and this is what defined polarisation. It was also noted that participants in WhatsApp groups became more intolerant when the issues being discussed touched on their individual or group identity. Issues touching on ethnic identity and ancestral issues of land were noted to heighten the level of polarisation in WhatsApp groups. Respondents noted:

I think that tolerance also depends on what level of education somebody has got...more educated can mean more understanding [also clarified to mean more tolerance] (WFGD 3, R 2).

Another stated:

we are very intolerant when we defend things [*clarified to mean governance issues*] that tie [*clarified to mean bind*] us together based on what we believe is about us as a people.....this is the case in WhatsApp discussions as well (WFGD 1, R 7).

The majority of respondents felt that intolerance is one of the most polarising factors in their WhatsApp group. Intolerance was noted to worsen when the hostility between the intergroups increased due to a feeling of being threatened and dislike by the outgroup.

Inclusivity and Polarisation

Respondents suggested that the challenges of achieving inclusivity arose because specific participants and groups dominated deliberation in WhatsApp groups. Respondents gave instances where power dynamics, for instance, between those who had expert knowledge and

those who did not translated into imbalanced input during deliberations. An instance was also given where participants exhibited different participatory tendencies where the persistent and assertive dominated WhatsApp group deliberations. Asked how this affected group polarisation, respondents felt that it made deliberations one-sided and this was likely to result in extreme positions. One respondent felt that because they lacked adequate knowledge on finance issues, they still wanted to participate in WhatsApp group deliberations on budget-making but did not have the ‘knowhow’ [*meaning expert knowledge*].

One respondent observed that:

Some people are also more likely to be assertive, while other are softer [*laid-back*] and accommodating... this is what makes a (WFGD 7, R 2).

Another respondent stated:

When we discuss budgeting, I am not expert in accounting or finance; what do you think happens to my input...I don’t have the knowhow (WFGD 7, R 2).

Some respondents, however, further argued that inclusivity was not a ‘big deal’ because at least those who spoke out were able to capture their opinions in some way. According to them, there was no need for ‘all’ [*meaning everybody*] to contribute to discussions because it would be ‘chaotic’. One respondent felt that surviving the deliberative environment required one to be one of the ‘fittest’, meaning those who were able to make contributions rather than feel excluded or ‘disadvantaged’. This, however, elicited comments by others who felt that large WhatsApp groups ‘crowded out’ those with minority opinions despite having contributions to make. For instance, one respondent argued:

Sometimes it feels like a struggle to be heard...to survive discussion you need to be fittest...I don’t feel ignored when my comments are not responded to (WFGD 3, R 2).

Another respondent also observed that:

...there is no need for all to contribute to discussion when your views have been presented already (WFGD 6, R 7).

It was also noted that in WhatsApp group deliberation, participants’ opinions and views are sometimes considered as a particular/single groups opinion. One respondent noted that while

most participants joined WhatsApp groups in their individual capacities, their voices were often ‘muted’ because they belonged to a particular group and certain participants spoke for those groups. Asked how this influenced polarisation, respondents noted the inclusivity of diverse voices reduced the friction that triggered polarisation. One respondent noted:

Some people think they speak for civil society. I come from Haki Africa (*a civil society*) and no one should talk for me apart from just me unless it is the organisation’s position (WFGD 2, R 1).

Further, respondents declared that texting and other aspects of WhatsApp deliberations related to sharing information, forwards and sharing screenshots of supporting evidence disadvantaged particular participants, including the less literate. It was stated that this limited their input during deliberations and limited their voices from being heard during discussions. The stream of discussions through chatting happens very fast, in large groups, and it was noted that more than twenty comments can be received at any given moment in WhatsApp groups. This means that some messages would receive more attention than others and participants would selectively choose what they consumed (selective exposure). It was noted that some deliberators were more ‘naturally’ capable of influencing the deliberations with their comments and contributions. This was further attributed to their positions in county government or hierarchies in society. One respondent observed that:

It depends on how fast in typing and organising your thinking. WhatsApp discussion and chatting happens so fast...by the time you make your comments, a new topic has been introduced (WFGD 7, R 2).

Inclusivity, as noted by some respondents, was considered a challenge founded on a person’s capabilities and endowments. It was also noted that equality of voices was affected by the nature of topics that were deliberated on. Respondents noted that some expert topics such as county legislation and finance that used legal jargon only privileged participants with specific endowments. Another instance noted by respondents was related to topics that did not touch on specific segments of the group. Factors such as level of education, gender, and knowledge were also raised in terms of their effects on equality of voice. The respondents indicated that

because most minority and marginalised groups were less likely to be educated, they were more likely to be disadvantaged in terms of contributing to discussions on such issues. One respondent argued that:

So some of it is really about the process and thinking, the words we use, the people we connect with which are real and they have huge personal impact. The differences we have should be considered. People are so used to listening to the same voices that they miss that diversity which includes hearing a different way of thinking from those with different education, knowledge and experience (WFGD 6, R 4).

Respondents further felt that the increasing demands for calls towards accountability and transparency were improved when majority of voices are included. It was generally agreed by the majority of respondents that excluding diverse voices in WhatsApp group deliberations especially when seeking to present county petitions can lead to skewed policies. One respondent observed that the lack of inclusivity in platforms like WhatsApp groups was emblematic of the exclusion that some groups experienced in deliberating critical issues in county governments.

We have seen what social media like WhatsApp can do but we have ignored the fact that not everybody uses it. Some people do not use it because of circumstances outside their control and therefore their voices are not heard or represented. What should be done about such people? (WFGD 5, R 8).

Some respondents stated that the inequalities experienced in WhatsApp group deliberation are inevitable especially because they are created by the circumstances such as access to communication devices, internet, and many other conditions outside the deliberation context.

6.4 Discussion of Findings

The discussion sections seeks to tie together all the quantitative and qualitative findings and put them into context compared to existing research. The section highlights the wider relevance of the study especially with regards to deliberative structures, deliberative norms and group polarisation. The results from both methodological approaches are interpreted, compared, and explained in relations to the research questions. The results and findings are also discussed in

view of two theories, selective exposure and echo chambers with a summary of the implications at the end of the section.

6.4.1 Profile of WhatsApp Groups; Deliberative Structures and Norms

The first research question sought to establish the socio-demographic profile of WhatsApp groups in Kenya. The findings suggest that WhatsApp groups consist mainly of young and educated participants. They are dominantly males (64.8%), aged between 18 and 44 years with relatively high academic qualifications with mostly diploma & undergraduate qualifications (*see Table 6.1*). The socio-demographic characteristics of WhatsApp groups mirror the demographic profiles of active users across other SNS platforms like Facebook and Twitter in Kenya (Banjac et al., 2016; Bing, 2015; Moreno et al., 2013; Ndavula & Mberia, 2012; Ndlela & Mulwo, 2017). The predominantly male, young, and educated socio-demographic composition of WhatsApp groups also reflects the demographic profiles of other digital deliberative platforms across the globe (Fischer, 2012; Friedman, 2006; Gustafson & Hertting, 2016; Houtzager & Lavallo, 2017; Bommel et al., 2010; Turnhout et al., 2010; Wampler & McNulty, 2011). This study's findings suggest that participants with high socio-demographic status tend to seek novel, pragmatic SNS platforms to realise extensive participation in deliberations. This also confirms studies linking resource capabilities to participation differences in deliberative governance in Kenya (Finch et al., 2015). However, the situation where younger participants participate more in WhatsApp group deliberations seems to defy the life-cycle effect (Dalton, 2008). The life-cycle effects state that young adults are disadvantaged in terms of resources because of their station in life. WhatsApp, like other SNSs, has facilitated more networking and participation in deliberations among young participants.

The findings concur with other studies on the reinforcement effects of media use. Reinforcement effects suggest that using an additional SNS platform is a result of pre-existing

deliberative behaviours on other online or offline platforms (Nam, 2012; Marien et al., 2013). WhatsApp's unique affordances, such as its securitised encryption, has significantly transformed specific aspects of the public sphere. Such instant messaging and social networking affordances and features which are unique to WhatsApp also attract the formation of diverse groups with different deliberative governance goals. However, like other SNS platforms, WhatsApp has reinforced existing socio-demographic inequalities in the access and use of digital platforms for deliberative governance. WhatsApp has aggravated the fact that lower socio-economic groups are more likely to be marginalised by emergent technology which consequently bolsters the status quo. The same voices and views that have been heard on other SNS platforms are merely replicated on WhatsApp, and this contrasts arguments for a transformed public sphere. Active SNS users consider WhatsApp to provide additional social networking infrastructure to widen their scope of interaction and deliberation.

Another explanation for this study's findings on WhatsApp profiles relates to a bias affecting the probability sampling method in SNS related surveys. This bias can partly explain the above socio-demographic profiles in WhatsApp groups. It is the tendency to sample from and over represent a segment of respondents who are robustly engaged (Asna et al., 2011). A study on participation in SNSs means establishing a sampling frame from the very platforms' researchers seeks to study. Sampled participants are, therefore, likely to be active and have the requisite socio-economic endowments for deliberations. Active participants in deliberative governance in WhatsApp groups are also likely to respond to online survey questionnaires. This sampling dynamic is also noted by Hsieh & Li (2014). This sampling bias is partly explained by the social desirability bias (Akbulut, 2017). Social desirability bias means the susceptibility of respondents to project themselves as possessing positive attributes like knowledge, civility, and rationality in questionnaires. Whereas they may actually not possess such desirable attributes, their responses introduce a subjective measurement error. Some

researchers argue that such forms of bias can be eliminated by weighting the findings across entire populations using statistical analytics (Heidemann et al., 2012). However, weighting does not fully eliminate the inherent biases emanating from such results.

6.5 WhatsApp Deliberative Structures, Norms, and Group Polarisation

The second research question sought to understand how WhatsApp group deliberative structure and norms influence group polarisation. As earlier noted, answering this research question involved establishing if any association exists between various WhatsApp group deliberative structures and norms and polarisation using the Kruskal-Wallis H test (*see Table 6.3*). The strength and direction of association was further analysed using the Pearson Chi Square, Phi coefficient analysis and Cramer's V analysis (*see Table 6.4*). The second research method involved WhatsApp-based focus group discussions which further explored the relationship between WhatsApp variables and polarisation based on seven indicators of polarisation (*see Table 6.5*).

6.5.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics and Group Polarisation

How Gendered Dynamics Shapes Group Polarisation

The study found no statistically significant difference between either male or female gender and polarisation (*see Table 6.3 & 6.4*). In contrast, the qualitative analysis revealed a number of possible links between the two variables (*see Table 6.5*). The findings reflect the influence of socio-political structures that define partisan and gendered dynamics in deliberative governance (*see Table 6.5*). The patriarchal system in Kenya that influences gender dynamics was noted to influence the gendered norms of interaction and deliberations in WhatsApp groups. Both men and women were observed to take specific inflexible positions on governance issues in a way that reflects binary thinking. This study's findings concur with other studies on the effects of binary thinking on polarisation (Atlee, 2019; Wood & Petriglieri,

2005). Binary thinking based on gendered dynamics can translate into binary positions in deliberations, meaning heightened polarisation.

Binary thinking means that governance issues deliberated are considered in view of the prevalent gender dichotomy which enhances more polarity (*see Table 6.5*). Groupthink among men is possible due to the comparatively lower level of participation by women in WhatsApp deliberations. Groupthink dynamics are enhanced by women's minority status, vulnerability to negatively gendered comments, and unwillingness to compete in deliberation spaces (*see Table 6.5*). This tendency for males to monopolise deliberation platforms explains their dominant perspectives and decisions which mirrors groupthink effects also found in other studies (Karpowitz et al., 2009; Lindell et al., 2017). This study's findings concur with others indicating that women are more likely to form their own enclave deliberation spaces and WhatsApp groups (Clark et al., 2015). However, enclave deliberations enhance the polarising effects of echo chambers (Abdullah et al., 2016a; Baldassarri et al., 2016).

Whereas men are considered more polarised than women in WhatsApp groups, one of the explanations is that men have more access to, interest in, and exposure to county politics and governance issues (*see Table 6.5*). They are more likely to form, join, and engage in WhatsApp group deliberations as opposed to shunning polarising and contested discussions. Studies have confirmed the effects of participation differences and gender inequalities due to the digital divide (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Brundidge et al., 2014; Galbreath et al., 2012; Min, 2010). The inadequate representation of women's voices due to digital divides is likely to result in the amplification of male-centric ideologies through groupthink. Apart from the domination of WhatsApp deliberation spaces by men, the findings further revealed that differences in personalities for genders were likely to influence polarisation. As was noted, women's conflict-avoidance in often male-dominated deliberative contexts are likely to reduce susceptibility to polarisation through the adoption of non-partisan ideologies (*see Table 6.5*).

The differences in personalities between genders are evidenced by studies suggesting that women are more persuadable compared to men (Herne et al., 2019a), and respond more to deliberations and debates (Clark et al., 2015). For polarisation, this means they are less likely to be partisan or exercise motivated reasoning. Similar to other studies in Kenya, partisanship defined by gender is often transcended by ethnic affiliations and allegiance to political parties during deliberation on particular issues (Cottrel-Ghai et al., 2012).

Further, the findings indicate that men are often perceived as more competent and expert on politics and governance, awarding them a higher status on deliberative governance. This means men are less likely to have their ideas, opinions, and views challenged in a deliberation context. Women, on the other hand, are seen to take certain positions during deliberations due to the influence of social comparison (*see Table 6.5*). Social comparison means that women are expected to take certain positions in support of their fellow women on certain issues, as a social norm, in WhatsApp deliberations. The expectations in terms of social comparison are considered to happen regardless of prevailing logic and facts presented during deliberations. What seems to be logical or factual is often lost in the deliberative environment where the dynamics of gender identity are tied to specific partisan governance issues. Such issues are always bound to heighten group polarisation, especially when connected to deeply-rooted or historical issues such as gender inequality in society. Whereas studies have shown that anonymous identities by use of pseudonyms have negated the power dynamics of gendered interaction norms in online spaces (Djupe & Mcclurg, 2010), this was not evident from this study's findings on WhatsApp group deliberations. Overall, this research revealed that gender is one of the most polarising factors in WhatsApp group deliberations.

The Bearing of Age Differentiation on Group Polarisation

The findings indicated no statistically significant difference between younger and older participants and polarisation (*see Table 6.3 & 6.4*). In contrast, the focus group discussions revealed various linkages the two variables emerged (*see Table 6.5*). Younger participants are likely to support their peers during WhatsApp deliberations which exemplify a form of social comparison. Social comparison is probably because young participants are keen on specific governance issues affecting them and are likely to take the same stance on them. The perception that younger participants are more polarised was because they use digital platforms more. Further, this contrasts with findings from other studies showing that older participants are more polarised (Boxell et al., 2017).

The negative effects of the digital divide affect the older age groups more and explains the perceptions that they are less polarised on online platforms like WhatsApp (*see Table 6.5*). There is a misconception about the ideological consistency that is common among the older age groups and polarisation. Whereas ideological consistency on certain issues is a form of absolutism, it may not necessarily reflect partisan extremity of opinions or polarisation. It is possible that these ideologies are passed from the older to the younger generations. Socialisation was seen to influence a form of partisan polarisation where the younger age groups assumed the ideological and attitudinal positions of the older generations in WhatsApp deliberations (*see Table 6.5*). This particularly applies to instances where an issue being deliberated touches on ethnic identity, which substantially transcends other forms of group identities such as age difference.

Studies in the US found that older Americans who rarely use SNS platforms expressed more polarised opinions than younger Americans who do (Boxell et al., 2017). The explanation for such polarisation among the older generation in the US is the consumption of cable TV and talk radio. Such age-defined consumption of cable TV and talk radio is not necessarily reflected

in the Kenyan context. WhatsApp groups may have a different impact on polarisation across different age groups, making some age groups more impacted compared to others. Differing prioritisation of county governance issues for different age groups seems to define partisan polarisation differently in WhatsApp group deliberations. The younger and older age groups are drawn into binary camps depending on the issues they support in WhatsApp groups deliberations (*see Table 6.5*). Polarisation defined by age group can also be explained in terms of the perception of the status quo. Having more experience of the repercussions of social and governance processes, the older age groups tend to prefer the status quo. In contrast, the younger age groups are considered ‘lacking in experience’ and are often willing to seek change through drastic governance processes.

Studies suggest that social, political and governance changes sometimes trigger polarisation as defined by age preferences (Abelson et al., 2003). The study also found that younger participants are more liberal than older participants who tend to be more conservative and polarised in their opinions. This can be connected with the fact that the majority of people in urban areas in Kenya are younger age groups (Nizam & Muriu, 2015), which suggest that they are more tolerant and accommodating of other’s views. Words such as ‘open-minded’, ‘diverse’ and ‘accommodating’ were used to describe the liberal and non-partisan approach to governance issues among young participants.

Group Polarisation and the Level of Education

The quantitative analysis found a statistically significant difference between participants with a lower and higher level of education and polarisation (*see Table 6.3*). The effects size analysis suggests that participants with a higher level of education are less likely to be polarised (*see Table 6.4*). In contrast, focus group discussion, however, revealed that those who are educated are more likely to be dogmatic in their beliefs especially when deliberating with those they

consider less educated in WhatsApp deliberation (*see Table 6.5*). They are likely to assume the role of influencers with their views being highly considered in WhatsApp deliberations. Education has emboldened the expression of partisan and polarised ideas in deliberation. Other studies found the role of elite polarisation as a primary cause of mass polarisation in various contexts including on digital platforms (Yamamoto & Kushin, 2014).

Research has also indicated the role of social influence and the tendency to adopt the opinions of influential participants with regard to being polarised in social networks (Ghadirian et al., 2018). Influencers are likely to hold polarised or partisan positions on certain issues. Their opinions cascade and are likely to be shared by a considerable number of participants in the WhatsApp group leading to more extreme group attitudes. The manner in which influencers frame county governance issues shapes whether such issues draw disagreement, collaboration or in-group identities. Influencers, including county officers, who are members of WhatsApp groups are likely to instigate polarisation within the groups in terms of what, how, when and with whom they share content. With the lead of influencers, it is highly likely that issues will be framed in line with the group identity. This is elaborately explained through the concept of social comparison showing how identifying with a particular group is likely to encourage alignments even in non-homogeneous groups (Tanczer, 2016).

The findings suggest that participants with a high level of education are assumed to make more sophisticated deliberators. The role of sophistication in deliberations is highlighted in other studies and is partly attributed to their consumption of diverse information (Stroud et al., 2015). They are often considered to possess better reasoning skills and a higher knowledge level which involves their ability to consider reasoned arguments and realise less motivated reasoning. Studies have, indeed, shown that high levels of education and knowledge about an issue foster the moderation of opinions (Herne et al., 2019a). This can be explained in two ways. First, educated and knowledgeable participants on WhatsApp platforms may possess

desirable democratic values and deliberation norms. These values mean they can exercise high levels of tolerance and respect for others' opinions in a way that moderates polarising opinion. Secondly, educated participants are likely to possess a higher level of cognitive complexity and interaction skills often instilled in the formal education systems (Herne et al., 2018). Cognitive complexity defines how the group receives, perceives, distinguishes, and integrates different dimensions of an issue under deliberation. Nonetheless, less educated participants can learn cognitive complexity skills through experience and can equally learn to accommodate divergent, conflicting opinions and values.

Both highly educated and the less educated can recognise and appreciate that divergent opinions are legitimate during deliberations and can be held simultaneously. This is likely to lessen the chances of confirmation biases leading to polarisation. The contrary perspective from this study's findings is that the less educated participants are equally likely to hold onto their values, positions, and attitudes in a polarised way (*see Table 6.5*). Participants with low education, especially those who form the minority and marginalised groups, are likely to lack access to occupations where essential deliberation skills such as reasoning and public speaking are developed. The more educated are better at finding support and arguments that are congruent with their own perspectives; meaning they have a higher propensity for confirmatory bias. In comparison, the less educated are more likely to be less confident about their partisan positions and opinions, meaning they can be more amenable to new popular, extreme, and sometimes polarising opinions in the group. The findings confirm other studies showing that educated participants can easily assimilate new information during deliberations and subsequently change their minds on partisan issues (Jurkowitz et al., 2020). Nonetheless, particular governance issues are likely to defy the influence of education and can drive participants towards polarised perspectives.

6.5.2 How Diversity of Participants and Viewpoints Influence Group Polarisation

The study found a statistically significant difference between polarisation and heterogeneity of viewpoints, and between polarisation and diversity of participants in WhatsApp group (*see Table 6.3*). The effects size analysis further revealed that WhatsApp groups with diverse participants and heterogeneous viewpoints were more likely to be polarised (*see Table 6.4*). The focus groups discussion findings revealed more clearly the relationship between the three variables (*see Table 6.5*). This research confirmed that WhatsApp group deliberations expose the group to diverse information which is likely to challenge prior positions and opinions (*see Table 6.5*). Similar to other studies, this happens through inadvertent or incidental exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints as advocated by various scholars (Lee, 2016; Lee et al., 2014; Tucker et al., 2018; Weeks et al., 2017). However, heterogeneous does not necessarily mean quality information in terms of shaping non-polarised deliberations in WhatsApp groups. The findings concur with existing literature suggesting that incidental exposure to diverse content undermines the practice of selective exposure in SNSs platforms (Conroy et al., 2012; Hyun & Kim, 2015). However, this study's findings indicate that participants can still exercise content selection in their groups (*see Table 6.5*). This is possible when participants scroll or sieve through WhatsApp content and chats based on information sources they consider discordant. Contrary to other studies, selective exposure in WhatsApp groups is not singularly motivated by the avoidance of discordant information in heterogeneous contexts (Bright, 2018; Halvorsen, 2003; Kim, 2015). This study found that selective exposure is motivated by other factors such as the content's humour, the mood of participants, time constraints, and the nature of the content (video or audio). Regardless of the motivation behind the practice of selective exposure in WhatsApp groups, it affects the participants' exposure to diverse content.

It was also evident from the findings that exposure to heterogeneous content in WhatsApp groups did not necessarily actuate change of views or positions. This was noted

especially for polarising issues that triggered dogmatic positions before or despite deliberations. This study suggests that groupthink and confirmation bias can affect dogmatism on certain issues in WhatsApp group deliberations. WhatsApp groups can support enclave deliberations where those with homogeneous viewpoints converge. This is likely to be influenced by the method of recruitment, whether through self-selection or random selection. Other research confirms this study's results suggesting that deliberation in homogeneous contexts like WhatsApp groups can breed groupthink dynamics, since the pool of argument is significantly limited by the network size and minimal viewpoints (Abdullah et al., 2016a; Lindell et al., 2017, 2017; Maija, 2015; Strandberg, Himmelroos, & Grönlund, 2019). Often, enclave deliberation dynamics means that the group is likely to make narrow decisions and take extreme positions based on incomplete, one-sided, and biased information. The contrasting perspective is that groupthink mechanisms in diverse click-to-join WhatsApp group contexts are limited, thus stifling potential attitudinal and ideological polarisation.

This study's findings suggest the practice of social comparison in WhatsApp group deliberation as defined by the homogeneity of views within the group (*see Table 6.5*). Respondents noted that those who expressed divergent opinions were sometimes expelled from their WhatsApp group. Expulsion means that participants who wanted to remain in the group endeavoured to conform to the group's opinion and perspective. This tendency to achieve group conformity and win social acceptance from other WhatsApp group members to avoid expulsion reflects the dynamics of social comparison associated with polarisation. Participants in such a context are also likely to adjust their opinions and viewpoints to match the dominant participants in the group. This is connected to the point that the majority of WhatsApp groups are formed by participants who share similar values and objectives (*see Table 6.5*). Emphasis on group identity is likely to translate into group pressure for ideological conformity during deliberations as also noted in other studies (Bimber & Copeland, 2013; Vissers & Stolle, 2014).

One plausible expectation with ideological conformity in homogeneous WhatsApp groups is the tendency to shift opinions towards the extremes, thus further enhancing group polarisation.

Alternatively, heterogeneous WhatsApp groups having exposure to diverse opinions might, after experiencing group pressure, develop moderated opinions (*see Table 6.5*). In a heterogeneous context, exposure to diverse arguments presented by various conflicting subgroups during deliberation can lead to depolarisation. This can happen when the position initially held and espoused by one group is abandoned in favour of that favoured by the others. Such shifts in opinion and perspective are likely to occur when the topic of deliberation is less emotive or deeply rooted in the group's identity. Due to the tendency of participants to self-identify in WhatsApp groups, the use of stereotypes, in-group favouritism, and out-group marginalisation are likely to enhance polarisation and the hardening of positions. The topic under deliberation can also activate in-group barriers within heterogeneous WhatsApp groups. Deliberation on issues such as women's affirmative action in governance policies that trigger gendered binary thinking can stimulate the creation of in-groups, even in diverse WhatsApp groups. Similar to findings in other studies (Messing & Westwood, 2014; Stroud, 2018; Wicks et al., 2014), the existence of heterogeneous in-groups within larger WhatsApp groups can heighten emotional or task-related polarisation and negate the deliberative outcomes. These polarising dynamics can be further exacerbated by the structural differences of WhatsApp group deliberators. Importantly, this study's findings revealed that heterogeneity of viewpoints and diversity of participants was one of the most polarising factors in WhatsApp group deliberations.

6.5.3 Group Polarisation in Inclusive and Moderated Contexts

The study found a statistically significant difference in moderation, unmoderated deliberations, and polarisation (*see Tables 6.4 & 6.5*). The findings indicate that moderated deliberations in

WhatsApp groups influence the level of polarisation in a positive way. This implies that moderated WhatsApp groups reflected lower levels of polarisation. The qualitative findings revealed that unmoderated deliberations are likely to heighten polarisation. This study also found that the challenge with WhatsApp groups is the lack of appropriate moderation mechanisms and low compliance to deliberative norms (*see Table 6.5*). The enforcement of what respondents called gagging as opposed to proper moderation in WhatsApp deliberations goes against the Habermasian ideals of deliberation as earlier noted (*see Chapter Two, pp. 47,49*). It was further noted some group administrators are biased and therefore, unable to moderate deliberations with fairness. This contradicts the concept of moderators acting as deliberative intermediaries (Barberá, 2014; Blatz & Mercier, 2018; Zhang et al., 2013), guiding the process in a more nuanced way without sacrificing openness and complexity as advocated by McDevitt (2003). Biased moderation is likely to trigger or worsen the perception of partisanship and polarisation.

It is further evident from this study that moderation can be perceived as a collective group responsibility or self-policing mechanism, especially when dealing with incivil or intolerant comments in a WhatsApp group. Such collective moderation was noted to discourage incivility in deliberations. Moderation as a group responsibility can help achieve better compliance in other forms of deliberative norms such as civility and tolerance. In contrast, moderation as a group responsibility requires the objectivity of the group which is often lacking in partisan contexts. Partisan contexts can encourage biased moderation, where the focus is on discouraging the expression of discordant opinions. This study's findings also suggest that moderated deliberations in WhatsApp groups can encourage participants to present their concerns and opinions more freely and thoughtfully (*see Table 6.5*). Uninhibited deliberations can help to debunk partisan narratives and encourage inclusivity.

The contrary reality is that improper enforcement of informal norms of moderation can skew deliberation of certain topics to one side and thus create polarised perspectives (Matakos et al., 2017). Further, moderation of attitudes resulting from or leading to motivated reasoning is difficult to achieve if founded on complex pre-existing beliefs. This concurs with studies suggesting that participants are more open to considering diverse and oppositional arguments when deliberations are moderated and civil (Barberá, 2014; Blatz & Mercier, 2018; Matakos et al., 2017). It also concurs with other findings showing that moderated deliberations in online platforms are more credible and persuasive than incivil ones (Zúñiga et al., 2018).

The focus group findings suggest that the success of moderation largely depends on the group's perception of the moderators and their reasons for moderating (*see Table 6.5*). These findings support previous research suggesting that when moderation is facilitated by interest groups or privileged persons (i.e. county officials), moderation is seen as censorship (Rademacher & Wang, 2014). The minority or non-privileged groups are likely to view the moderation through a binary perception; meaning 'they' are moderating 'us'. Ambiguity in the norms of deliberations can allow moderators to make unfair decisions in WhatsApp groups. Unfair moderation practices in themselves can generate polarised positions, especially when they are intended to stifle specific viewpoints. In sum, the study revealed that unmoderated deliberation is one of the most polarising factor in WhatsApp group deliberations.

The quantitative analysis did not reveal any statistically significant difference between inclusivity and polarisation (*see Tables 6.4 & 6.5*). In contrast, the qualitative findings indicate a few pointers between the two variables (*see Table 6.5*). Deliberation in large heterogeneous WhatsApp groups expands diversity but does not necessarily translate into inclusivity in deliberations. Lurking behaviour is an instance where, despite diverse participants in a WhatsApp group, the voices of a pro-active few dominate issue-deliberations (*see Table 6.5*). The result of lurking behaviour and the continued domination of a few participants in

deliberations means that exposure to diverse views are significantly narrowed and can lead to groupthink. This suggests that the power dynamics at play in WhatsApp group deliberations are likely to disadvantage contributions by minority groups (*see Table 6.5*). This finding supports similar studies on deliberations in other SNSs platforms and the impact of minority status in political discussions groups keep silent when they feel their voices are ignored or they feel frustrated (Sohn, 2019).

Inclusivity can be enhanced through well-moderated deliberations; the dynamics of achieving this are difficult to sustain even in small WhatsApp groups. Non-inclusive deliberations suggest the absence of a multi-sided, non-partisan deliberation which can lead to the adoption of extreme positions. However, this research further revealed that inclusivity or the lack thereof was sometimes because minority voices fail to take up opportunities to express their ideologies during deliberations (*see Table 6.5*). Inclusivity was considered to be for the ‘fittest’, who were able to navigate technology and WhatsApp group power dynamics to make their voices heard. The consideration of WhatsApp deliberation as a contest where survival is necessary is likely to reflect varied differential power dynamics. The perception of skewed power dynamics during deliberations suggests that participants can reject evidence-based deliberations (confirmation bias) expressed by those considered as the dominant groups.

Other factors that account for non-inclusivity in WhatsApp deliberations are a lack of expert knowledge and the asynchronous nature of discussion (*see Table 6.5*). The latter means that multiple chats at any given point will necessitate selective exposure to particular deliberation content. Some views may be missed or ignored. In instances where inclusivity of voice is lacking, the dominant views are often considered to represent the entire group’s views. This can then aggravate the level of polarisation when participants feel frustrated that they cannot express their views even in a supposed deliberative context. Thus it underlines the argument that the inclusion of diverse voices in deliberative governance is far more complex

than merely the diversity of deliberators themselves (Perrault & Zhang, 2019). Deliberation platforms are structurally diverse and inclusive to the extent that they are open to various participants affected by a decision (Davidson & Elstub, 2014). WhatsApp platforms are marked by socio-economic inequalities that are bound to limit the extent of inclusivity as also noted in other SNSs studies (Souza, 2001; Vecchione & Caprara, 2009; Zhang et al., 2019).

Inclusivity requires guaranteeing voice within the deliberative processes, which is shaped by the recruitment process. The method of recruitment, whether via self-selection or random selection, can reproduce and reinforce enduring hierarchies based on education, income, race, and gender. This is likely to happen even in diverse WhatsApp groups and can affect the extent of inclusivity in deliberations. For instance, when a WhatsApp group consists of participants with varying levels of expert knowledge, those who are more knowledgeable are likely to dominate subject matter deliberations. As earlier noted, for instance, men are likely to dominate deliberations compared to women. This study's findings found that the lack of inclusivity was one of the most polarising factors in WhatsApp group deliberations.

6.5.4 Group Ties, Group Size and Group Polarisation

The study found a statistically significant difference between group size and polarisation (*see Table 6.3*). As noted in Table 6.4, larger WhatsApp groups were found to experience more polarisation. In contrast, the focus group discussions found that participants are more likely to be homogeneous and agreeable in smaller WhatsApp groups (*see Table 6.5*). Smaller and homogeneous WhatsApp groups are likely to form echo chambers where the amplification of consonant perspectives occurs. Smaller, homogeneous groups are also prone to experiencing groupthink dynamics where particular homogeneous ideas and viewpoints are circulated and this can eventually influence the formation of extreme decisions. The argument that larger

WhatsApp group networks result in more heterogeneous voices and therefore less chance of being polarised is difficult to prove in view of ideological homogeneity even in large groups.

Nonetheless, large groups are also likely to have more information sources, more views, and more positions on governance issues that may result from group diversity (*see Table 6.5*). Studies have shown that heterogeneity of content and information sources is likely to reduce opportunities for partisan polarisation (Chan, 2016). This study's findings indicated that practising motivated reasoning and confirmatory bias was likely in both WhatsApp groups but more so for small homogeneous groups (*see Table 6.5*). Large WhatsApp groups are likely to have weak ties because of the method of recruitment. Public click-to-join links allow diverse participants to join the group with their varied views, opinions and positions on governance. This suggests an enhanced and inadvertent exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints and opinions and the possibility of less polarisation in larger WhatsApp groups.

It is possible that a proportionately large number of polarised, dogmatic participants with inflexible positions on different issues will be found in larger WhatsApp groups. This corresponds with studies showing that participants with a higher level of dogmatism and propensity for opinion leadership tend to target large groups (Choi et al., 2018). Larger and diversified group networks tend to have greater exposure impact for discordant content makes it easier to achieve selective exposure. Smaller WhatsApp groups are also likely to experience partisan selection of group members. This also suggests the existence of partisan ideologies during deliberations. Smaller sized WhatsApp groups are also likely to consider themselves as enclaves or in-groups where concordant ideologies are shared. Such distinctive characteristics of smaller WhatsApp groups make them more influential, particularly if they are very consistent in their positions and points of views. This study's findings found that group size was one of the most polarising factors in WhatsApp group deliberations.

The findings indicated no statistically significant difference in polarisation for both weak and strong group ties in WhatsApp groups (*see Table 6.3*). However, the effects size analysis indicated showed a strong association between group ties and polarisation (*see Table 6.4*). The focus group discussions revealed the connections between the nature of group ties and polarisation in WhatsApp groups (*see Table 6.5*). WhatsApp groups with close ties are more likely to form ideological cliques where homogeneous information is shared within the group (*see Table 6.5*). Further, close ties are likely to support some key tenets of the social identity whereby one's self-identity is understood in relation to the social identity of others within a group. Research has previously linked social identity to the formation of in-group and out-group identities (Iyengar et al., 2012). WhatsApp groups provide incentives where the group identity and ideologies are likely to be valued and protected in the same way as individual identity. Because of the close relationship among group members, participants are prone to develop strong emotional attachments due to the closeness and intimacy between them (Park, 2014). Social comparison was suggested to be less prevalent among weak tie groups. It was further evident that participants in weak tie groups are more likely to adopt moderate opinions due to incidental exposure to diverse information in deliberations.

Group-differentiation and groupthink mechanisms are likely to occur in close ties as opposed to weak ties (Karpowitz et al., 2009). Groupthink mechanisms are less likely in weak ties because they facilitate easier introduction of diverse content (Haythornthwaite (2011). This research in the Kenyan context confirm research from elsewhere showing that weak ties tend to consist of participants with heterogeneous views and this exposure is likely to reduce ideological extremism (Haythornthwaite, 2011; Hill & Dunbar, 2003; Rademacher & Wang, 2014). Inadvertent exposure to heterogeneous information in weak ties can also mean there is a lower likelihood of partisan motivated reasoning. Weak ties can easily translate into weak attachment and consequently result in partisan identity. This can happen when groups

uncritically accept information in line with their partisan views thus refusing conflicting information. This can lead to extreme views and polarisation. Partisanship in WhatsApp groups with close ties suggests that members can readily accept certain ideas advanced by their group members. WhatsApp groups with close ties, unlike weak ties, are likely to emphasise intergroup distinctiveness (*see Table 6.5*). This especially the case when self-selection is the method of recruiting group members. Intergroup distinctiveness, according to concurring studies, encourages group members to uncritically adopt ideologies advanced by partisan sources; reflecting a form of confirmation bias (Beam et al., 2016; Eveland & Hively, 2009). Overall, the research here found that group ties were one of the most polarising aspects in WhatsApp group deliberations.

6.4.5 Tolerance and Civility in WhatsApp Group Deliberations

It was also evident that moderated deliberations can build tolerance and understanding for those with diverse viewpoints (*see Table 6.5*). Engaging in a comfortable deliberation process is more likely to reduce tension and diffuse polarised positions than adversarial deliberation. The study found no statistically significant difference between different levels of tolerance and polarisation (*see Table 6.3*). However, the effect size measures found a significant association between tolerance and polarisation when all levels of tolerance are considered in aggregate (*see Table 6.4*). Evident from the focus group discussions, though, is that self-censoring is sometimes misconstrued as tolerance in WhatsApp deliberations (*see Table 6.5*). Self-censoring, misconstrued as tolerance, can encourage a spiral of silence effect in deliberations. Those with extreme viewpoints can refrain from expressing opinions deemed as intolerance.

It was not clear from the findings if the diversity of WhatsApp groups facilitates intolerance; considering existing literature that diversity of participants facilitates the exchange of diverse views that potentially enhance intolerance (Barberá, 2014; Ramírez & Verkuyten,

2011; Winter & Rathnayake, 2017). As confirmed by other studies examining various SNSs platforms (Johnson & Bichard, 2010), the anonymity in WhatsApp groups with weak ties can aggravate intolerance. Intolerance in deliberations can lead to extreme positions and more polarised disagreement. Furthermore, intolerance can deepen the impression that the differences between ideological positions in the WhatsApp group are unbridgeable. This validates the argument that ideological diversity challenges established predispositions and beliefs that feed intolerance in group contexts.

Other factors noted to affect the level of tolerance in WhatsApp groups include: diverse personality, different levels of education, and social learning (*see Table 6.5*). The influence of the participant's personality on tolerance as a social learning construct is evident in various studies (Bangwayo-Skeete & Zikhali, 2013; Finkel, 2000; Ramírez & Verkuyten, 2011). This study's findings also suggest that younger participants are more educated, liberal and accommodating of divergent views and opinions (*see Table 6.5*). Socio-demographic characteristics influence power dynamics that affect the level of tolerance in both online and offline deliberations (Bangwayo-Skeete & Zikhali, 2013; Harell, 2010; Mukherjee et al., 2013). The group's power dynamics determines whether the majority with a dominant view can tolerate the minority views during deliberations.

This study's findings further revealed that issue framing determines the occurrence of tolerance in discussions (*see Table 6.5*). Some issues, such as politics and governance, are sometimes framed as contests. Contests enhance the chances of deliberations degenerating into intolerant disagreements and extreme positions. Moreover, issue framing and the role of political actors within the WhatsApp groups seem to define the levels of tolerance in deliberative governance. When an issue is framed in a divisive way, it is likely to instigate motivated reasoning and intolerance (Harell, 2010). In close-knit, homogeneous WhatsApp groups, participants are likely to hold different standards of tolerance for those in their in-group

and contrasting standards for those in their out-group. Further, deliberations on issues touching on the in-group's social identity are more likely to heighten intolerance (*see Table 6.5*). In spite of the contrasting views and findings, this study's indicates that intolerance is one of the most polarising factors in WhatsApp group deliberations.

Our research found that incivil deliberations are more likely to influence group polarisation (*see Table 6.3*). The effects size analysis between polarisation and civility found a moderate association between the two variables (*see Table 6.4*). The qualitative analysis indicated that incivil comments are viewed as an attack on the in-group even though directed at an individual (*see Table 6.5*). This suggests that incivility is likely to trigger in-group defence mechanisms against the out-group in deliberations. Just like tolerance, previous studies have argued that participants are likely to hold different standards of incivility in their in-group and contrasting standards for those in their out-group (Druckman et al., 2019; Kim & Park, 2019).

It was also evident from the focus group discussions that incivility towards the in-group are likely to be responded to in a way that accelerates into more incivility. Incivility is also likely to increase negative labelling and reduce modest interaction needed to achieve good quality deliberations. Incivility in deliberations can be perceived differently indicating a strong cognitive bias that shapes how participants understand and respond to it. Cognitive bias is likely to exist when incivility by one's side of the group is overlooked or tolerated during deliberations. For instance, participants can choose to ignore any contribution accompanied by incivility and be seen as practising confirmatory bias. Incivility can drive participants to exercise lurking behaviour and this affects inclusivity in deliberations (*see Table 6.5*).

This study's findings found that incivility increases negative labelling using participant's identity with the likelihood that it will reduce group deliberations (*see Table 6.5*). Negative emotions are a product of negative labelling, both of which lead to partisan polarisation. Incivility in WhatsApp groups can increase participant's perception of polarity

thus lowering the expectation of deliberative governance (*see Table 6.5*). Incivility can exaggerate perceived bias leading to antagonism that hinders the resolution of polarising issues in governance. The link between incivility and perception of bias was also evident in other studies (Sigelman & Kugler, 2003; Wright & Graham, 2017). Similar to other research, the qualitative analysis established a link between binary thinking and incivility in WhatsApp group deliberations (*see Table 6.5*) (Antoci et al., 2016; Druckman et al., 2019). Motivated reasoning seems to occur when participants in WhatsApp groups avoid contributions accompanied by incivil comments. This research here corroborates other work that has established a link between incivil discourse and participant's perceptual polarisation (Kim & Kim, 2019; Robison et al., 2016).

6.6 Implications for Theory and Research

The WhatsApp group deliberative structures and norms suggest specific influences on two critical theories related to polarisation. These theories are selective exposure and echo chambers

6.6.1 Selective Exposure and Group Polarisation

This study's findings challenge some key arguments of selective exposure and polarisation. As earlier defined, selective exposure reflects a cognitive behaviour where SNSs users prefer to encounter consonant information supporting their existing beliefs (Kim, 2015). Exposure to diverse views fosters cognitive dissonance through encountering various viewpoints (Garrett et al., 2013; Kim & Kim, 2017; Messing & Westwood, 2014; Stroud, 2010; Wicks, Wicks, & Morimoto, 2014). This study on WhatsApp group deliberations partly invalidates the association between selective exposure and group polarisation. Achieving selective exposure requires a situation of network/group homophily as indicated in existing literature (Kim, 2015; Messing & Westwood, 2014; Stroud, 2010; Weeks et al., 2017; Wicks et al., 2014). The profile

of WhatsApp groups examined in this study suggests largely non-homophilic deliberative environments currently exist. Controlling for homogeneity to achieve homophily (which is one of the foundational constructs of selective exposure) is a challenge in WhatsApp groups. Diversity of participants is a default consequence for the random selection and formation of WhatsApp groups. Besides, WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection cannot guarantee exposure to homogeneous content only. This indicates that WhatsApp group users readily experience inadvertent exposure to a variety of content due to the diversity of participants and the heterogeneity of viewpoints. Selective exposure in heterogeneous WhatsApp groups is challenging because participants can take advantage of the broader availability of content to increase their exposure to homogeneous views. In contrast to other studies, this does not mean that they will systematically avoid opinions that challenges their existing views (Conroy et al., 2012; Hyun & Kim, 2015).

Interactive WhatsApp affordances including: forwarding, posting, commenting, and sharing of content during deliberation enhance incidental exposure to counter-attitudinal ideas. These WhatsApp affordances imply cross-medium, cross-network, and cross-platform information sharing. This increases the likelihood of incidental exposure in WhatsApp groups which is a result of the weak-ties and the inevitable encountering of diverse information as confirmed in existing literature (Karnowski et al., 2017; Kim, Chen, et al., 2013; Tewksbury et al., 2001; Weeks et al., 2017). Further, WhatsApp group deliberations happen asynchronously, which severely inhibits the practice of selective exposure. The study contrasts with existing literature suggesting that repeated incidental exposure to counter-attitudinal information can eventually result in selective exposure. Such studies suggest that selective exposure and incidental exposure influence each other in a vicious circle (Karnowski et al., 2017; Stroud, 2018). Selective exposure in WhatsApp happens when participants seek to reaffirm and reinforce their projected identity through consumption of consonant ideological information.

This means that WhatsApp group participants can scroll through chat content and identify information or content that they will view or read.

Therefore, inadvertent exposure in WhatsApp groups happens when participants exercise imperfect selective exposure strategies. Selective exposure in WhatsApp groups is driven by participant's desire to access humour content such as videos and memes rather than content consonance. Time constraints also mean that participants will use the limited time available to consume what is possible. This is not entirely based on content consonance. The findings support research suggesting that moods can influence the selection of content in WhatsApp groups, and that those negative moods influenced by mental fatigue enhance selective exposure. This study also suggests that selective exposure occurs because participants select content based on their judgments about their content preferences. Therefore, selective exposure has an effect on the quality of deliberations because awareness of both sides of an issue is critical for an all-rounded discussion, especially on contested issues. Selective exposure affects the quality of deliberations because it can significantly reduce exposure to heterogeneous discussions and lessen the chances of participants learning, considering, and understanding different perspectives of an issue. This is also the case of enclave deliberations where participants are not exposed to diverse opinions and are less likely to be aware of others' legitimate perspectives and rationales; even their own rationales in some instances.

6.6.2 Echo Chambers and Group Polarisation

Echo chamber effects describe a situation where participants join or form SNS platforms where they encounter content they already concur with. Selective exposure and echo chamber theories are based on similar conceptual tenets. Given this study's findings and the above arguments relating to selective exposure, random formations of WhatsApp group significantly negate the ideological echo chambers. Self-selection, as opposed to random selection, is likely to result in

enclave WhatsApp groups as echo chambers. The tendency of small, close-knit, and homogeneous WhatsApp groups to result in enclaves is evident from this study. In-group favouritism has been linked to echo-chamber effects in various studies (Jamieson & Cappella, 2008; Sunstein, 2009). Expulsion of participants with discordant views or who express discordant views eventually creates enclaves and echo chambers. Inhibited exchange of ideas might mean information inside the echo chamber is vetted, redacted and sieved for ideological consistency.

WhatsApp groups provide an easier method for like-minded individuals to locate each other. Similar to other studies, it has increased the participant's propensity to cluster based on common interests and traits (Barbera, 2019). It was also evident from this study that the mechanisms of social influence and persuasive arguments in WhatsApp groups partly exists. The findings also coincide with other research on how enclave reinforcement seeking is linked happens when participants with discordant views are expunged from the group (Strandberg et al., 2019). Crosscutting interactions are based on an intertwining link between diverse participants and heterogeneous views (Hong & Kim, 2016). Crosscutting interactions in WhatsApp groups can slow the process of ideological polarisation by limiting the effects of enclave deliberations. Based on the idea of enclave WhatsApp groups, echo chambers can be understood as playing a key role in the formation of collective group identities which consequently defines interpretive frames on governance information.

6.7 Implications for Practice

The study findings have a number of implications for practice related to the use of SNSs platforms for deliberative governance and their impact on polarisation. First, the predominantly young, male and educated composition of WhatsApp groups suggests that the platform lacks a socio-demographic inclusivity that is needed to ensure a holistic deliberative framework in

solving group polarisation. This challenges the optimistic views that SNSs platforms are likely to transform the public sphere by drawing-in various groups affected by county governance decisions (Filatova et al., 2019; Kruse et al., 2018a). Whereas WhatsApp groups are structurally diverse in terms of religion, ethnicity, and ideology, the platforms has failed to mobilise a different socio-demographic composition for deliberative governance. Rather, through the reinforcement effect, the voice of a few dominant and privileged participants seems to be amplified. In a polarised context like Kenya, where the views of the marginalised and minority groups need to be heard, a holistic solution for polarising governance issues may not be realised. When participants in WhatsApp groups are exposed to echoes of their own views, the consequence may well be heightened polarisation.

Secondly, if the exit or expulsion of participants with discordant views is pervasive in WhatsApp groups, the tendency to extremism will be greatly aggravated. The WhatsApp group will end up being smaller, close-knit, with homogeneous participants who are more willing to take extreme measures, including violence in some instances. In certain instances, political extremism can be a product of group polarisation. This is because such enclave deliberations will produce more extreme and polarised views that can be targeted towards the out-group. When the strongest loyalists are the only participants who stay, deliberation will produce increasingly extreme views and movements. For better outcomes, deliberating groups should be appropriately heterogeneous and should contain a plurality of articulate participants with reasonable views. Social enclaves in digital platforms are breeding grounds for group polarisation, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse.

Thirdly, fair moderation devoid of illegitimate censorship is a very fundamental aspect for creating safe and engaging deliberative platforms. This is especially the case for polarised contexts where discussion on controversial topics happens. Otherwise, those with minority status in the group will often drift into a spiral of silence. Alternatively, their contribution will

have disproportionately little weight or influence in contexts of the entire discussion. The result can be that important content is held back and not shared within the group. The implication is that low governance decision can result from groupthink. Participants views can become more extreme when their opinions are corroborated. They gain more confidence after learning that others share their views as well. The confirmation from others can strengthen confidence in extreme expression. This can have a negative impact on whether tolerance is practised.

6.8 Conclusion

The chapter sought to answer two research questions, including understanding the socio-demographic profile of WhatsApp groups. The findings indicate that WhatsApp groups participants are predominantly male, aged between 18 and 44 years with relatively high academic qualifications (diploma or undergraduate). These findings mirror the demographic profiles of participants in other SNS platforms in Kenya. This similarity can be explained by a reinforcement effect theory which states that the use of additional SNS platforms is a result of pre-existing deliberative behaviours on other platforms. The study also sought to understand whether WhatsApp group deliberative structure and norms influence polarisation. The study found no statistically significant difference between specific WhatsApp group deliberative structure variables and polarisation. This suggests that whether participants are young or older, male or female, close ties or weak ties, in small or large groups does not influence the level of polarisation.

The study also found no statistically significant difference between deliberative norms and polarisation. This implies that whether participants are tolerant or intolerant, and whether deliberations are inclusive or exclusive does not affect the level of polarisation in WhatsApp groups. In contrast, WhatsApp groups with diverse participants where heterogeneous viewpoints are shared were more likely to be polarised. Incivil and unmoderated deliberations

are more likely to experience high levels of polarisation. The effects size analysis further suggests a significant association between polarisation and the level of education, group ties, group size, moderation, tolerance, heterogeneity of viewpoints, diversity of participants, and civility. The significant association for the majority of the above variables is because they were analysed as aggregate as opposed to dichotomies.

These above statistically significant associations were further confirmed or refuted by the respondent's feedback from the focus group discussions. The study found that groupthink among men is possible due to the comparatively lower level of participation by women in WhatsApp deliberations. As relates to age, younger, as opposed to older participants, are likely to support their peers during WhatsApp deliberations which exemplify social comparison as an indicator of group polarisation. Concerning education, the study found that the more educated participants are media junkies who are better at finding arguments that are congruent with their own perspectives; meaning they have a higher propensity for confirmatory bias. On the diversity of participants and exposure to heterogeneous content, the study found that WhatsApp groups can support enclave deliberations where those with homogeneous viewpoints converge and form echo chambers. While the quantitative study linked unmoderated deliberations to high levels of polarisation, the qualitative findings indicated that biased moderation is likely to trigger or worsen the perception of partisanship and polarisation. With regard to inclusivity, the study found that the lack of inclusivity implies domination by a few participants in deliberations. Such dominance suggested that exposure to diverse views are significantly narrowed and can lead to groupthink.

Regarding the group size, the study found that smaller and homogeneous WhatsApp groups are likely to form echo chambers where the amplification of consonant perspectives occurs. Larger and diversified group networks tend to have greater exposure impact for discordant content makes it easier to achieve selective exposure. In relation to group ties, the

study found that WhatsApp groups with close ties are more likely to form ideological cliques where homogeneous information is shared within the group. In contrast, groupthink mechanisms are less likely in weak ties because such ties facilitate the easier introduction of diverse content. On the issues of tolerance, the findings indicate that deliberations on issues touching on the in-group's social identity are more likely to heighten intolerance. Just like tolerance, participants are likely to hold different standards of incivility in their in-group and contrasting standards for those in their out-group. It was also evident from the focus group discussions that incivility towards the in-group are likely to be responded to in a way that accelerates into more incivility.

Chapter Seven

The Quality of Deliberation in WhatsApp Groups and Polarisation

7.0 Introduction

Two research questions are answered in this chapter. The first is to understand whether there is a variance in the quality of deliberation based on WhatsApp group formation. The quality of deliberations is based on the Habermasian deliberative ideals and include diversity, inclusivity, tolerance, civility, moderation, and heterogeneity of viewpoints (Habermas, 1996, 2003, 2005) (see Figure 1.1). The WhatsApp groups were classified into two based on formation and recruitment method. Formation was further classified into two where top-down WhatsApp groups are formed by the county government itself, its officials, their affiliates and representatives, and bottom-up are those formed by citizens on their own initiative and volition to discuss governance issues. Recruitment method was also classified into two: Self-selection is where the WhatsApp group is formed through addition by a friend, colleague, or participants who knew each other. Alternatively, random selection is where participants joined the group through click-to-join links. The second research question sought to establish whether and how the quality of deliberation in WhatsApp groups has influenced group polarisation. The focus group discussions on the quality of deliberations are guided by the Habermasian deliberative ideals. The discussions are guided by the seven indicators of group polarisation and how these indicators are shaped by the quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups. The chapter concludes by looking at some of the practical implications for deliberative governance and polarisation in Kenyan counties.

7.1 WhatsApp Groups Formation and Quality of Deliberations

The third research question sought to establish if there a variance in the quality of deliberation based on the formation of WhatsApp groups. WhatsApp groups are classified into two based on formation and recruitment. WhatsApp formation, according to this study consist of top-down where the groups are formed by the county government itself, its officials, their affiliates and representatives. The contrast is bottom-up which are those formed by citizens on their own initiative and volition to discuss governance issues. The method of recruitment, according to this study, consists of self-selection and random selection. Self-selection is where the WhatsApp group is formed through addition by a friend, colleague, or participants who knew each other. Random selection is where participants joined through click-to-join links. The analysis of the quality of deliberations uses Pearson Chi-Square tests followed by an effect size analysis using a Cramer's V tests.

7.1.1 Formation: Bottom-up and Top-down WhatsApp groups

Inclusivity had a positive statistically significant Cramer's V value for both top-down (0.389) and bottom-up (0.311) WhatsApp groups (*see Table 7.1*). Top-down WhatsApp groups had a comparatively stronger Cramer's V value with regards to inclusivity. These findings suggest that participants in top-down WhatsApp groups indicated comparatively higher inclusivity than those in bottom-up groups (*see Table 7.1*). The Cramer's V analysis for tolerance indicates a positive statistically significant value for both top-down (0.223) and bottom-up (0.244) WhatsApp groups (*see Table 7.1*). Respondents in bottom-up WhatsApp groups indicated a slight but comparatively higher tolerance (*see Table 7.1*). Moderation in WhatsApp groups had a positive, statistically significant Cramer's V value for both top-down (0.322) and bottom-up (0.293) WhatsApp groups (*see Table 7.1*). The Cramer's V value is slightly higher for top-down approaches suggesting that moderation is slightly better in such WhatsApp groups.

Table 7. 1: Formation: Bottom-Up and Top-Down Deliberations in WhatsApp groups

	Top Down Approach	Bottom Up Approach
	Cramer's V ($\phi^2 c$)	Cramer's V ($\phi^2 c$)
Inclusivity	0.389**	0.311*
Tolerance	0.223*	0.244**
Moderation	0.322*	0.293*
Diversity	0.251*	0.312*
Heterogeneity of viewpoints	0.524*	0.576*
Polarisation	0.301*	0.345*
Civility	0.277	0.338

Notes: Cell entries are statistically significant. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Diversity indicates a positive, moderate, statistically significant Cramer's V value for both top-down (0.251) and top-down (0.312) WhatsApp groups (*see Table 7.1*). These findings suggest that there is a difference in diversity for both top-down and bottom-up WhatsApp groups. However, this value is significantly higher for bottom-up approaches and suggest they are comparatively more diverse. Heterogeneity of viewpoints indicates a strong positive, statistically significant Cramer's V value for both top-down (0.524) and bottom-up (0.576) WhatsApp groups (*see Table 7.1*). These findings suggest that bottom-up WhatsApp groups have comparatively more diverse viewpoints. Civility indicates a low, positive statistically significant Cramer's V value for both top-down (0.277) and bottom-up (0.338) WhatsApp groups (*see Table 7.1*). This value suggests that civility is comparatively higher in bottom-up WhatsApp groups. Polarisation indicates a low, positive statistically significant Cramer's V value for both top-down (0.301) and top-down (0.345) WhatsApp groups (*see Table 7.1*). These findings indicate that bottom-up WhatsApp groups are comparatively more polarised.

7.1.2 Recruitment: Self-selection and Random Selection

Inclusivity has a weak, positive, statistically significant Cramer's V value in WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection (0.201) and random selection (0.271) (*see Table 7.2*). WhatsApp groups formed through random selection had a comparatively stronger Cramer's V value suggesting a comparatively more inclusivity.

Table 7. 2: Formation: Self-selection and Random Selection in WhatsApp groups

	Self-Selection	Random Selection
	Cramer's V ($\phi^2 c$)	Cramer's V ($\phi^2 c$)
Inclusivity	0.201*	0.271
Tolerance	0.431*	0.392
Moderation	0.333*	0.298*
Diversity	0.556*	0.618*
Heterogeneity of viewpoints	0.490	0.499*
Polarisation	0.596*	0.614
Civility	0.231*	0.219*

Notes: Cell entries are statistically significant. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Tolerance has a moderate, positive statistically significant Cramer's V value for WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection (0.431) and random selection (0.392). WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection had a comparatively stronger Cramer's V value implying a higher tolerance (*see Table 7.2*). Moderation has a weak, positive statistically insignificant Cramer's V value for WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection (0.333) and random selection (0.298) (*see Table 7.2*). The Cramer's V value for diversity for WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection (0.556) was moderate, positive, and statistically significant (*see Table 7.2*). Comparatively, WhatsApp groups formed via random selection had a higher Cramer's V value for diversity (0.618) (*see Table 7.2*). For heterogeneity of viewpoints, the Cramer's V value for random selection (0.499) and self-selection (0.490) are nearly similar and suggests no significant difference between them (*see Table 7.2*). A minimal difference was

also evident in polarisation between WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection (0.596) and random selection (0.614). Both Cramer's V values are high, positive statistically significant associations (*see Table 7.2*). Civility has a weak, positive statistically insignificant Cramer's V value in WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection (0.231) and random selection (0.219) (*see Table 7.2*).

7.2 Section Two: Quality of Deliberation and Polarisation in WhatsApp Groups

The fourth research question sought to establish whether and how the quality of deliberation in WhatsApp groups has influenced polarisation on county governance issues. The majority of respondents, as shown in the findings in Table 7.3 generally indicated that the quality of deliberations in their WhatsApp groups has aggravated polarisation on county governance issues. The results suggest that the quality of deliberations has heightened the perception of polarisation on deeply-rooted, historical, and contested governance issues (*see Table 7.3*). Further, it has facilitated the formation of enclaves and echo chambers which have amplified the polarity on county issues. Deliberation in WhatsApp groups has also enhanced the framing of issues as binary contests and deepened the perception of polarity. This also means that deliberation in WhatsApp groups has also intensified partisan information cascades where participants follow the cues of those who share their perspectives without regarding the opposing arguments (*see Table 7.3*). Lastly, deliberation in WhatsApp groups has worsened politicising of polarisation of the county governance. However, a few respondents thought that the quality of deliberations in their WhatsApp groups has attained specific goals such as consensus, moderate opinions, ideological convergence, and virtual interactions between county government leaders and their citizens (*see Table 7.3*).

Table 7. 3: Themes on the influence of deliberative governance in WhatsApp groups

Perspective	Main Themes from WFGDs	Sub-themes	N (71)	%
Quality	Low quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups	Inconclusive discussions, lack of clarity in discussions, too much politics, no support for arguments, personalised attacks, and domination by few voices. Mischief of trolls in deliberations Propagation of polarising conspiracy theories Referring to partisan drawing stereotypes Fake news, misinformation, and sensational content Synchronous or asynchronous deliberations <i>Contrary Views:</i>	43	60.5%
		Deliberations has facilitated consensus and tolerance Moderation of opinions has been realised Deliberation has translated into governance action	19	26.7%
Governance Issues	Heightened polarisation on deeply-rooted governance issues	Deep-rooted have always been polarising, no expected solutions Amplifies the salience of divisive issues Encouraged dogmatism in deliberations Encouraged use of group identity rather than facts <i>Contrary Views:</i>	34	47.8%
		Promoted convergence of people to discuss contested issues Presence of experts to elaborate on contentious issues Supported a holistic approach to partisan issues	18	25.6%
Ideological Alignments	Facilitated ideological factions, enclaves, and alignments.	Strengthened group/ethnic affiliations, echo chambers Enhanced regionalist, ethnicised deliberations Heightened group perception of partisan identity Encouraged use of coded language to refer to out-group Stifling out those with diverse viewpoints <i>Contrary Views:</i>	37	52.1%
		Empowered marginalised groups to speak out Emboldened use of local languages hence inclusivity Easier to enforce deliberative norms in enclave groups Enhanced micro-discourse feeding into macro-discourse	16	22.5%
Information Cascades	Intensified polarising information cascades	Manipulation of the group's opinions by influencers Increased evaluation on discordant information Ready acceptance of concordant information Lowered the credibility of evidence and facts provided Encouraged spiral of silence <i>Contrary Views:</i>	41	57.7%
		Enhanced ideological convergence, social comparison Supported interactional threads in deliberations	19	26.7%
Politicising Polarisation	Worsened politicisation of polarisation	Amplified negative views about opposing factions Paid agents share polarising shock-value content Exaggerated the state of partisan polarisation Encourage us vs them binary thinking in deliberations <i>Contrary Views:</i>	28	39.4%
		Enabled a virtual meeting of citizens and leaders Supported spontaneous bottom-up WhatsApp groups	16	22.5%

7.2.1 The Quality of Deliberation Has Worsened Polarisation

The majority of respondents felt that the quality of deliberations on county governance issues is low and has aggravated polarisation in their WhatsApp groups. When asked to clarify what they considered to be low deliberations in their WhatsApp groups, respondents noted: ‘inconclusive discussions’, ‘lack of clarity in discussions’, and ‘too much politics’ and ‘disrespectfulness’, ‘endless disagreements’, ‘lack of focus on one topic’, ‘irrational arguments’, ‘sharing of unrelated content’, and ‘lack of evidenced’ discussions, ‘sharing of personal content during discussions’, and ‘advertising stuff during serious discussions’. It was argued that this happened because: participants did not ‘take discussions seriously, there was ‘no support for arguments’, participants were ‘focused on attacking each other’, there was ‘domination by a few voices’ and participants ‘shared fake news’. Some respondents felt that there was inadequate information to inform quality deliberations. Some blamed the county governments for failure to comprehensively allow access to information on legislation. Others also noted that the information from the county government was ‘public relations information’ [*clarified to mean that it is subjective*]. Some respondents suggested:

Based on some of the topics I have seen being discussed on my WhatsApp group... there are conversations I've seen people being very rational and all...the issue is when you are discussing politics then people share memes that are not relevant (WFGD 2, R 1).

People end up insulting each other over the difference in opinion. This is especially so with those people affiliated with the main tribes and political parties (WFGD 4, R 2).

It is very hard to follow discussions in our WhatsApp group because people keep introducing new topics and posting new things before we even finish the previous one (WFGD 6, R 8).

Asked how the quality of deliberation in their WhatsApp groups enhances polarisation, respondents noted that non-serious discussions meant less time and effort spent on tackling partisan and divisive governance issues. Respondents also felt that low quality deliberations in their WhatsApp group sometimes caused discussions to end in a more divided way. As one respondent stated: ‘*the ending of discussion is worse than the start*’. Also apparent was that

WhatsApp group deliberations are also dominated by participants who sometimes ignore comments that do not support their view. One respondent observed that when they contribute, ‘...*I am not replied to or no one takes my comments*’. The few participants who dominated discussions took an approach which respondents called ‘controversial’. Such WhatsApp group discussions, according to respondents, created disinterest and encouraged lurking behaviour in WhatsApp group deliberations. One respondent explained that:

As opposed to a face to face discussion, individuals can troll other people’s opinions and even drag their names in the mud without fear. We have also not been very successful in using our social media pages to educate, sensitise and inform others about politics (WFGD 5, R 2).

However, some respondents had an alternative perspective. They suggested that deliberative governance on WhatsApp had facilitated consensus among those with divergent ideologies. WhatsApp groups, it was also suggested, have made deliberation and exposure to discordant views easier to achieve. Further, respondents pointed out how WhatsApp deliberations had facilitated more opportunities to expound on why participants hold particular beliefs about county governance issues. It has also helped groups to realise common ground on partisan governance issues where differences initially seemed unbridgeable. Some of the respondents, therefore, felt that WhatsApp groups have, to some extent, helped to clarify certain issues which cause partisan divides. This, it was observed, increased the sensitivity and consideration with which participants approached county governance issues.

Discussion with my WhatsApp friends means I can say things without offending them but also that when we disagree we don’t need to be nasty to one another. I think this is what will reduce ethnic polarisation (WFGD 5, R 5).

One respondent disagreed, stating:

Partly because our education system never taught us how to accommodate divergent views. It was the teacher’s way or no other way... we have people in the group who have been trained [*clarified to mean socialised*] to believe there can only be one bulldozed [*clarified to mean forced*] solutions to political (WFGD 7, R 3).

While some respondents argued that consensus was not easy to achieve on polarising topics, they felt that WhatsApp group deliberations allowed participants to ‘hear each other out’.

WhatsApp deliberations, according to some respondents, have made informal, free-ranging discussions between partisan parties much easier to achieve. WhatsApp discussions have significantly eliminated identification with ‘symbols’ that drive participants into partisan political camps. When asked to expound on the issue of symbols, one respondent talked about how joining WhatsApp groups using a pseudonym made it almost impossible to identify the participant’s name and their tribe. However, some other respondents contradicted this, claiming that issues as opposed to people are the drivers of partisan polarisation. One respondent observed that, while people are biased, WhatsApp groups have enhanced what she termed their ‘*natural instinct*’ to learn from one another. The respondent observed that:

People have a natural instinct to discuss serious topics in a peaceful manner just that some other crazy things come in the way and I think WhatsApp has made it possible for people to meet and talk about things in a way that they learn from one another...this is where the instinct comes in... (WFGD 6, R 1).

There were some suggestions that WhatsApp deliberations had moderated extreme opinions on partisan county governance topics. A small number of respondents claimed that deliberations in WhatsApp groups had bridged the gap between those holding partisan views. They felt that the middle ground had been growing following what they called ‘appropriate discussions’ [*clarified to mean deliberations*]. It was further apparent from the discussions that moderating opinions was somehow a challenge because it is dependent on a participant’s willingness to accept and be swayed by rational arguments. While there was no agreement about whether rational deliberation in WhatsApp groups is possible, respondents felt that deliberation had swayed participants away from holding partisan bias and their alignment to pre-existing beliefs. Some respondents further argued that because they are inadvertently exposed to more diverse views from different ethnicities, they have become more moderate in their views. It was also evident that some participants adopt moderate opinions regardless of the issues being discussed. The participants could not agree about whether the number of

participants holding middle-ground positions had increased or decreased following deliberations in their WhatsApp groups. One respondent felt:

Some people are becoming more quiet and withdraw when they see conflicts and polarisation. This can be confused with middle ground (WFGD 1, R 4).

Other Factors Affecting the Quality of Deliberations and Group Polarisation

Apart from the issues highlighted above, respondents suggested other factors that have aggravated the quality of deliberations and polarisation in WhatsApp groups. The first is what respondents referred to as ‘trolls’ and ‘moles’. Prompted to explain this, some respondents indicated that certain participants are hired to ‘advocate’, ‘push for’, or ‘frustrate’ particular ideological positions during WhatsApp group discussions. One respondent spoke about an instance of ‘moles’ in their WhatsApp group, people who were working for the county government. According to some respondents, trolls or moles were especially prevalent in public click-to-join WhatsApp groups. Trolls and moles provoke discussions in a disruptive way so that nothing meaningful related to ‘questioning’ or ‘scrutinising’ county governance can be discussed. One respondent observed that:

With trolls in WhatsApp, I don’t think we can really have healthy discussions...some are planted to disrupt discussions (WFGD 4, R 4).

Respondents gave instances where such participants dismissed another participant’s arguments, focused on minor issues, and used uncivil language targeted at specific participants in the group. Such trolls, it was further revealed, used divisive tactics such as refusing to acknowledge evidence presented during deliberations and being overly ‘argumentative’ and sometimes ‘intolerant’ when challenged. Respondents could not agree on whether such participants were ‘planted’ [*clarified to mean paid or hired*] to disrupt critical deliberations or whether it was just a personality issue. One respondent stated:

When they [referring to trolls] begin to argue for certain points, you can always tell who they will support or what evidence they will give (WFGD 6, R 3).

Secondly, some respondents also stated that deliberations in WhatsApp groups had compounded the sharing of conspiracy theories around county governance issues. Conspiracy theories create what one respondent termed ‘more confusion’ which sometimes draws participants into even more polarised positions. One respondent felt that conspiracy theories offer an understanding of complex county governance issues in a ‘dangerous’, over-simplified way during deliberations. One respondent suggested that conspiracy theories ‘*fill the gaps when people discussing...cannot find answers to questions*’. The anonymous forwarding of conspiracy theories in WhatsApp groups, according to some respondents, makes it difficult to establish the origin and validity of county governance information. Conspiracy theories allow polarising content to ‘*spread like wildfire*’ because they are fixated on simplified stories and narratives, according to respondents. Forwarding conspiracy theories, as discussed by one respondent, is most commonly used to legitimise or justify a group’s partisan position. One respondent observed:

...that why we have such theories for when we don’t really understand what is happening at the county level...we need more information (WFGD 6, R 4).

Another respondent stated:

...and sharing such theories happens when one side wants to counter what the other side has alleged.... mostly with made up information (WFGD 2, R 3).

Some respondents believed that conspiracy theories were often used to push particular ideas or positions. This was seen to blur constructive deliberations in WhatsApp groups even more. Asked to expound on the influence of conspiracy theories on polarisation, one respondent argued that participants who believe in such theories ‘*draw [in] their fellow believers*’ to WhatsApp groups. Participants form factions around the conspiracy theories they believe in or those propagated by their ‘sides’ [*clarified to mean in-group*]. Common conspiracy theories, according to respondents, often related to the misappropriation of county funds, bias in resource distribution based on factors such as tribe, wrangles between county governing agencies, and often how the country’s executive arm influences county politics despite the separation of

powers. Conspiracy theories, it was further noted, ‘cheapen’ the quality of arguments in WhatsApp deliberations especially when backed up with certain limited facts. One respondent revealed that conspiracy theories which are perceived to come from friends, influencers, and other trusted sources within their WhatsApp group deliberations enhanced the credibility and sharing of specific polarising narratives on county issues.

... seen in our group how some people rally behind some theories that nearly makes sense but they are not true if you scrutinise them well (WFGD 7, R 3).

...it happens when people don’t have clear information about somethings happening at the county level (WFGD 3, R 5).

The third factor is related to ‘fake news’: misinformation and disinformation. The majority of respondents agreed that partisan views and positions in their WhatsApp groups are aggravated by fake news. This happens because participants produce and share photo-shopped content and edited videos that fuel further polarisation. One respondent gave an example of unverified but circulated documents in their WhatsApp group asserting that certain regions had obtained a higher financial allocation despite the lower population size in such regions. If there is no opportunity to counteract fake news and sensational narratives in WhatsApp groups, misinformation and sensational content around governance issues worsen polarisation. It was also apparent that fake news and sensational information cross-shared from the internet and other social media means that everything is treated with suspicion. Discussing this issue, one respondent further indicated that fake news has lowered the admissibility of county governance information shared in their WhatsApp groups. Some respondents felt that the attention given to fake news is driven by the desire to win arguments, which the majority of respondents agreed was achieved with or without admissible information and content.

Instead, WhatsApp groups give room for arguments, with everyone trying to defend their opinion and just sharing information without verifying (WFGD 7, R 6).

Fake news in WhatsApp groups was also considered to increase the spiral of responses, comments, and forwarding of controversial topics on governance. Some respondents argued

that they had observed patterns where participants participated keenly in challenging fake news inconsistent with their pre-existing ideology. However, less critical deliberations and scrutiny were given to fake news supporting an individual's political ideology. One respondent argued that fake news on governance was thriving in WhatsApp group deliberations because participants are 'lazy'. According to that respondent, participants do not care to search for facts and truths beyond what they already know or believe. It was also evident that fake news relied on governance issues which made respondents feel most vulnerable, which they were most interested in, or even those that aroused a perception of 'being targeted'. One respondent observed that:

There is always something about fake news in out groups especially [*when*] it is mixed with truth and it can get confusing at time...it [*referring to fake news*] can be used target people for political gain as well (WFGD 4, R 3).

7.2.2 Heightened Perception of Polarisation on Governance Issues

Respondents felt that deep-rooted political and governance issues that characterise Kenyan society are the basis of polarisation. Such issues, as opposed to WhatsApp group platforms, are the key drivers of polarised deliberations according to some respondents. According to the majority of respondents, resolving such issues was a challenge even in well moderated deliberations. Respondents felt that participants join their WhatsApp groups with pre-existing positions or when they already hold partisan views. Nonetheless, respondents felt that WhatsApp group deliberations had heightened actual and perceived polarisation around deeply-rooted issues such as ancestral land. Some respondents claimed that WhatsApp groups have facilitated the convergence of participants who take 'hard-line' positions or even realise more 'stubborn' positions on deep-rooted county governance issues. Respondents suggested that discussing such issues led to inconclusive discussions which sometimes degenerated into incivility. This view was echoed by another respondent who suggested that they avoid talking

about deep-rooted and divisive issues in their WhatsApp group because participants always ‘fall out’. One respondent commented:

...my group discussion [WhatsApp] has made certain things we discuss to be very emotional [*clarified to mean sensational*]. Things that have always divided us will never be solved through discussion only in my opinion. Discussion can help a little but not solve anything fully (WFGD 3, R 2).

Other historical and deeply-contested governance issues that were seen as polarising included: skewed allocation of development projects; historical land appropriation inequalities; ethnic compositions of county employment; and power sharing in county politics. Moreover, participants were prone to disagree on gender issues such as support for more positions for women at the county level. One respondent noted:

There is no way we can ever agree on land even if we discussed, we need more action than discussions...we are done discussing. We know the right way (WFGD 1, R 8).

Another respondent observed that:

The disagreements that we have on the ground [*clarified to mean offline contexts*] have been transferred to WhatsApp groups. The chats [*deliberations*] divide people into digital communities based on tribal conflicts. That is why WhatsApp groups can’t do away with polarisation (WFGD 6, R 1).

Related to the deliberation of deep-rooted and historical issues, the participants also suggested that WhatsApp deliberations amplify the perceived differences between participants on some deeply rooted and historical issues. Respondents felt that they were not ‘*polarised all the time*’. They also felt that the governance issues that divide participants at the county level are ‘well known’, and respondents felt that constant sharing, discussion, and arguments in WhatsApp deliberations enhance the salience of such issues. This suggests that extreme views expressed through WhatsApp groups are not necessarily persistent over time. One respondent indicated that ‘*discussing makes it stick in our minds*’ (referring to the salience of divisive issues discussed in WhatsApp groups). One respondent felt that the constant discussion in their WhatsApp had worsened polarisation by encouraging participants to argue for or defend their positions based on their group’s identity. Hence, one respondent stated:

WhatsApp has exaggerated everything...we are not as divided as media reporting shows but also WhatsApp makes it look very bad (WFGD 4, R 4).

However, the amplified perception of polarising differences prompted participants to interpret issues under deliberation in a more polarised way. Further, salience was also considered to heighten polarisation when a governance issue was current and enjoying a wave of mainstream media attention. Respondents referred to the issue of county budget reviews and the submission of proposals. These are undertaken annually and arouse polarised discussion periodically in WhatsApp groups. It was also noted that partisan political elite who often weighed in on governance issues through WhatsApp groups somehow contributed to the salience of polarising debates. Weighing in on issues in WhatsApp discussions gave a sense of importance to the discussion on these divisive governance issues, and this elicited more polarised responses and discussions. One respondent stated:

When [*name of particular politician*] makes comments in our WhatsApp group, negative comments from people against him follow... then he is defended (those of his side come to his aid) (WFGD 1, R 1).

Respondents gave instances of how periodic elections of county leaders perpetuate cycles of polarised discussions in WhatsApp groups. County governments' handling of crises and budgeting are governance issues which occasionally caused polarisation, according to respondents. The majority of respondents agreed with the view that not all issues create partisan divides; however, this issue is made more difficult because some respondents misconstrue disagreements in deliberations as polarisation. One respondent observed that:

We can disagree most of the time in our WhatsApp...we agree more than we disagree, I hope you understand...like we are not badly off except when a hot topic [*clarified to mean polarising issue*] comes up (WFGD 4, R 7).

Respondents with differing perspectives argued that deliberations in WhatsApp groups have facilitated a holistic approach to divisive governance issues. According to these respondents, such deliberations are capable of supporting more holistic discourse and solutions to deeply-rooted, partisan county governance issues. Some respondents felt that WhatsApp groups had converged key governance professionals, development experts, and civil society activists onto

one platform where they can deliberate on common governance challenges. It was also implied that ‘*mwananchi*’ (citizens) who are part of WhatsApp groups benefit from the interactions with professionals within their group. One respondent indicated that:

For those who talk about not having accurate opinions and advice, I think WhatsApp has provided an open space for all professionals from all works of life to meet and discuss...local mwananchi can in the process benefit from the interaction (WFGD 1, R 5).

Some respondents claimed that polarising stereotypes and myths held by participants in the WhatsApp groups are potentially debunked through exposure to varied expert opinions and perspectives. Other respondents observed, in contrast, that it was not a lack of expert knowledge that was driving partisan polarisation in their groups. Some respondents were unable to agree on whether polarisation is a result of what they described as ‘ignorance of facts’ or what another respondent called ‘selective use of facts’ in deliberations. One respondent indicated that:

We are not polarised because we lack knowledge...ignorance is the issue. The challenge is that some people are not willing to listen to each other and talk with others in a sober discussion (WFGD 1, R 4).

No clear position was achieved from either perspective on this issue. However, the influence of experts in deliberative governance was assumed to depend on the issue under discussion in the WhatsApp group. One respondent observed that ‘*people in the group are sometimes very polarised to even listen to experts*’.

7.2.3 Facilitating the Formation of Enclaves and Echo Chambers

Polarisation, according to respondents, has increased because participants in WhatsApp groups feel more confident and expressive about their feelings and views in a way that they would not in a face-to-face situation. Respondents felt that participants who share the same ideology or share similar interests in political and governance matters converge in WhatsApp groups. Deliberation in some WhatsApp groups, it was observed, formed enclave spaces where extreme views were validated by those with close relations [*clarified to mean ties*]. Respondents felt

that some WhatsApp groups draw together participants with similar opinions and increase their confidence in expressing extreme opinions. This was, however, challenged by one respondent who commented that while their WhatsApp group consists of close participants, they still experienced divergent opinions and views including interactive disagreement on governance matters.

Discussing with different people in WhatsApp creates a false understanding that we don't agree with makes it appear that those we disagree with are usually very different and that we have a lot less in common politically than we can expected (WFGD 6, R 7).

Commenting on enclave WhatsApp groups, one of the respondents observed that like-minded participants convince each other '*how right they are*' or how valid their positions are. This was noted to be common in relation to governance-related grievances that led to radical and extreme demands made by WhatsApp group members. It was also apparent that this tends to validate the perception of in-group identity among those who hold similar ideological positions. One respondent claimed:

In fact, WhatsApp deliberations have brought to the fore a deeper and common understanding among Kenyans, who are now discovering that their perceived political problems are all the same and emanate from the political class (WFGD 4, R 5).

Another respondent also stated that:

Some people fear confrontation and become very bold and confident to say things because they are in WhatsApp and also because they know so and so will back them if they bring up a certain point (WFGD 2, R 6).

WhatsApp groups have also facilitated the formation of enclaves of participants from particular regions only. Such WhatsApp group enclaves adopt specific words, phrases and jargon that are unique to the group during deliberations. There was no consensus about whether enclave WhatsApp groups increase the expression of extreme views on certain topics during deliberations.

For example, the common *mwananchi* [*citizen*] doesn't independently critic[ise] a candidate based on what they can do, what they have achieved and their manifesto. We critic[ise] based on tribe and if that person is our person (WFGD 2, R 4).

It was further stated that some WhatsApp groups held deliberations using vernacular or local languages. The discussions also revealed how such groups enhance the formation of

homogeneous enclaves of people who speak a similar dialect, language and share near similar views on various governance issues. The fact that WhatsApp allows the recording of audio and video messages in vernacular language was considered to worsen the propagation of ‘coded’ polarising messages. One respondent explained the connection between coded messages and the perception of otherness, or difference among those with different positions or views within or outside the WhatsApp group. Respondents revealed an emergent trend in some WhatsApp groups where friends added one another to a heterogeneous WhatsApp group eventually stifling out those who did not ‘belong’. This technique of crowding-out those with divergent views encouraged the formation of homogeneous enclaves and was confirmed by some respondents. Some respondents admitted that they sometimes ‘flow’ [*clarified to mean conform*] with the group’s decision or position even though they may not necessarily agree with it. Such linguistically homogeneous WhatsApp groups, according to respondents, are further enhanced by the expulsion of those with alternative opinions and views by group administrators. As one respondent noted:

This increases the volume of information we receive from those with similar views, opinions and whose policies, statements views etc. we find acceptable or we support as opposed to the other views (WFGD 5, R 1).

Respondents with an alternative perspective observed that deliberation in such enclave WhatsApp groups has amplified the voices of the marginalised in society. According to some respondents, WhatsApp is where the marginalised can develop, compare, and share their unique perspectives and arguments comfortably. Prompted to explain further, these respondents felt that enclave deliberation in WhatsApp groups could be positive if it affords marginalised groups a platform for expressing their grievances. They also felt that deliberation among like-minded participants could be advantageous because it happens in an environment which one respondent referred to as ‘less tense’. Deliberations in such WhatsApp groups, it was argued, reduce the power dynamics common in diverse groups that sometimes disadvantage specific participants. Respondents observed that in such groups, marginalised and

minority groups have a much better opportunity to express their needs and opinions. It was noted that this can happen without participants feeling that they are in the minority as sometimes happens in partisan discussions. Respondents also stated that enclave WhatsApp groups are likely to have a ‘common purpose’ and ‘less friction’ in their deliberations. They are much easier to ‘control’ and make it much easier to enforce deliberation norms and manage partisan factions. One respondent explained:

When people share common interests in WhatsApp, there is less quarrelling and more action (WFGD 1, R 4).

Another suggested that:

There is bound to be less disagreement in the group...quick gains when people discuss. We can always disagree but we can control...the discussion (WFGD 1, R 4).

7.2.4 Enhancing the Framing of Issues as Binary Contests

Another aspect that impacts WhatsApp group deliberations and polarisation on county governance issues is framing, or what some respondents described as ‘*how issues are discussed*’ or ‘*what we focus on*’. It was suggested that county governance issues were sometimes framed as ‘contests’ or dilemmas, which encouraged participants to take sides without exploring middle-ground positions or looking at other alternatives. It was argued that discussions inciting participants against perceived injustices by the county government made it difficult to deliberate meaningfully. Similarly, cross-platform sharing of county governance content emphasising partisan positions on county issues were thought to instigate polarised debates in WhatsApp groups as well. Some respondents argued that county governance issues deliberated in WhatsApp groups originate from mainstream media and are sometimes packaged in terms of conflict. One respondent, explaining the link with mainstream media coverage of county issues, argued that participants sometimes ‘copy-pasted’ controversial content only, which heightened polarised deliberations. One respondent asserted that:

‘people share information from nation [*The Daily Nation Newspaper*] and others from standard [*The Standard Newspaper*] and depending on the angle of the newspaper. When this is copy-pasted to WhatsApp groups, people take sides (WFGD 5, R 5).

One respondent felt that participants in WhatsApp groups seemed to focus largely on the negative aspects of county governance that created divisions and conflicts. Prompted to explain this, the respondent argued that governance issues that generated greater participation in deliberations were those that were framed as conflicts or those that created the perception of ‘camps’ [*clarified to mean binary positions*]. The binary positions expressed in such topics, according to respondents, were enhanced by what each side considered ‘supporting evidence’. Asked to expand on the objectivity of ‘supporting evidence’, respondents argued that it referred to information confirming a participant’s views and positions on county governance. One respondent observed:

...the discussion is sometimes about which side has the supporting evidence for their argument...and it is just not correct evidence because no one shows evidence that is against what they are arguing (WFGD 7, R 3).

Respondents suggested that partisanship motivated participants to produce their often clashing versions of ‘supporting evidence’ which facilitated misinformation and ‘fake news’. It was further evident that WhatsApp groups easily facilitate the sharing and forwarding of skewed and unreliable evidence in discussions. Another issue related to the use of supporting evidence was that county governance data often shared in WhatsApp groups are generally considered suspicious and are not trusted. One respondent argued that the county government information sources cannot be trusted and that they were also a source of polarising deliberations. On the issue of the county budget, one respondent noted:

...that is why the budgeting process is often framed as ...those who support it against those who oppose (WFGD 2, R 4).

Another respondent suggested that:

Our habits of not looking at the evidence in WhatsApp discussion makes us jump into conclusions. We don’t have the discipline to look though information and identify facts and lies (WFGD 8, R 8).

Related to the framing of issues in a binary manner, the respondents observed how this has enhanced ethnic affiliation thus making it synonymous with polarisation. Ethnicity affects what side participants take during WhatsApp group deliberation in defence of governance issues. It was apparent that ethnicity affects how participants rationalise, simplify, and understand county governance issues during deliberations. It was also evident that WhatsApp has encouraged the formation of groups based on ethnicity or what one respondent called ‘tribal cocoons’. One respondent claimed:

WhatsApp groups are just tribal cocoons where people praise their tribal leaders. It is just an online version of what happens in *kamukunjis* [referring to informal street discussions] (WFGD 2, R 4).

An example was given of inter-ethnic contest between *Kalenjin* and *Kikuyu* for county leadership positions and resources which sometimes play out during deliberations in WhatsApp groups in Nakuru county. It was further apparent from the discussions that certain ethnicities, who had experienced discrimination historically, used WhatsApp more for advocacy than for deliberations. An example is the ‘*Ogiek Rights Group*’, a WhatsApp group formed to discuss the human rights issues of the *Ogiek* community. Respondents from the group argued that they staunchly defend those they perceive to represent their interests. They consider WhatsApp to be a platform for expressing their grievances or fighting perceived injustices. Instances of participants in WhatsApp groups defending their tribal leaders, regardless of facts implicating them in corruption, were common. Respondents also believed that WhatsApp groups encouraged the use of ethnically defined and negative stereotypes to identify and refer to other communities during discussions. One respondent commented that:

When the deputy governor was implicated in a water project scandal and when it came up in our WhatsApp group, most people from his area [clarified to mean region of origin] defended him saying he is being targeted because he comes from minority community (WFGD 6, R 6).

Respondents felt that WhatsApp groups have heightened awareness of participants’ identities and positions on specific governance issues and thus heightened polarisation. One respondent

claimed that *'WhatsApp has revealed who we truly are as a society'*. Respondents indicated that WhatsApp groups have revealed underlying partisan attitudes related to participants' identities over time. As one respondent stated:

I think the tone and how we conduct our political debate in WhatsApp groups has shown that Kenya has become more negative and divided over the last several years. We cannot change this very easily...not even by having more discussions (WFGD 5, R 8).

Some respondents further pointed out that because participants feel strongly about their political or ethnic identities, WhatsApp group affiliations have been transformed into a way of expressing a participant's identity. Asked to clarify this, some respondents believed that WhatsApp groups became a reference for individuals' actions and reactions during deliberations and interactions with others. This view was echoed by another respondent who argued that in such groups, discussions were mainly *'one-way'* [*clarified to mean imbalanced*].

A contrasting perspective from some respondents was that WhatsApp groups have enhanced discussion on collaborative governance action. Despite the glaring differences that have been magnified by WhatsApp group deliberations, respondents felt a keener interest in pursuing common governance solutions through collective action. Some respondents felt that owing to WhatsApp deliberations, opposing sides have identified and addressed bad county governance practices by coordinating demonstrations, community mobilisation, and joint petitions on governance challenges. Respondents gave examples of WhatsApp groups such as *'Sauti ya wachuuzi'*, *'The Nakuru Analyst'*, and the *'Kericho Renaissance Network'* as some of the WhatsApp groups where deliberations have translated into governance reforms at the county level. Looking at the above examples, respondents stated that WhatsApp groups reinforce individual thinking, actions, and interactions rather than being a forum for targeting others. This view was echoed by another respondent who also observed that deliberations have, in many ways, improved the group's *'willingness to participate'* [*clarified to mean group efficacy*] in county forums. One respondent observed that:

We used to struggle in the past to just get people coming together to talk especially during Moi's era [*referring to Kenya's second president*]. Today this are very easy because our discussion in the groups are followed by mobilising for demonstrations...we reach many people who participate with us... I think it bears fruit when you follow with action (WFGD 7, R 7).

For some respondents, WhatsApp groups are the reason for increased solidarity, especially when participants expressed their views in moderated and safe spaces. Other respondents also felt that the unifying imagery generated when WhatsApp deliberations translate into action had significantly eroded certain partisan views about diverse others. Respondents further noted the extent to which enforcing deliberation rules in their WhatsApp group is easier when a sense of collaboration and common purpose exists in the group. One respondent explained that:

When we all agree to something in the group, people are very keen to obey. I think it is because we have group goals and we must be disciplined when discussing them (WFGD 1, R 4).

7.2.5 Intensifying Partisan Information Cascades on Governance Issues

WhatsApp group deliberations have intensified what one respondent called '*herd behaviour*' [*clarified to mean information cascades*]. Information cascades, according to respondents, happen because participants are sensitive to large-scale distortions that are enhanced by WhatsApp affordances and features. Some respondents blamed the wide 'circulation' and 'forwarding' of seemingly credible content in WhatsApp groups. Another respondent implied that information cascades happen because participants have a minimal understanding of governance issues. Information cascades were further apparent when one respondent alluded to the notion that people '*toe the line*' when making group decisions. Prompted to explain the place of information cascades in WhatsApp groups, respondents felt it was impossible to challenge certain ideas, especially when they were in the minority. This phenomenon is also common in specific WhatsApp groups used to gauge or establish public opinion and interest in certain county governance policy issues.

...discussion is in such a way that you feel it is you against many... so if you cannot beat them just join them.... It is easier to toe the line when you know the things you disagree on don't matter to you very much (WFGD 3, R 2).

The decisions by the majority were considered the group's position in certain instances where the group needed to make decisions or take action. Commenting on the issue of inclusivity, one of the respondents said that discussion in their group was dominated by those who had the 'muscle' [*clarified to mean resources*] to implement the group's decisions. It was also apparent that some participants left specific WhatsApp groups because they had divergent opinions from the rest of the group. This is what some respondents referred to as 'lefting' [*clarified to mean withdrawing one's membership of a WhatsApp group*]. 'Lefting' was noted by most respondents to be voluntary or forced through what some respondents described as a form of purging. The result of 'lefting', according to the respondents, is that those participants who remained in the WhatsApp group expressed homogeneous ideas and views that are potentially polarising. One respondent observed:

...their discussions will be majorly to get other[s to] agree with them even when they don't make any sense socially, economically or otherwise. People who don't agree are usually lefting the group. This kind is difficult to reason with. Our elections are characterised by such polarisation (WFGD 2, R 2).

However, respondents with an alternative perspective felt that WhatsApp groups do support an interactional context and the threads needed for effective deliberations. Some respondents felt that WhatsApp groups, as deliberation platforms, provide better discussion threads that support rationalised deliberations. This allows participants to identify those who 'make sense' and use logic in arguments, thereby determining the attention participants gave to specific participants. Respondents argued that WhatsApp groups are relatively non-restrictive and allow for more elaborate discussions that can create clarity in discussions. One respondent suggested:

.. and this is where WhatsApp gets it right that you can make your points and clarify everything in a way that makes more sense to everybody. You can even write essays in Word [*clarified to mean Microsoft Office Word software*] and paste them in WhatsApp (WFGD 5, R 1).

The participants demonstrated from their responses that knowing each other in their WhatsApp groups helped them to manage group expectations. This was thought to affect polarisation in certain ways; it did not surprise other participants when specific participants made certain

comments and took certain positions during discussions. Asked to clarify further on this, respondents thought that knowing each other's positions and views on county governance issues helped them to 'avoid' or manage unhealthy disagreements that often led to polarised discussions. One respondent commented, '*we know how to handle the discussion with some people*'. Constant discussions in WhatsApp means participants have developed a certain familiarity with one another in a way that lessens intolerance and the use of uncivil language.

One respondent noted:

Just because we know and understand one another, we can have discussion very well...we still disagree but we manage it very well. We don't take it personally because we know each other's character (WFGD 5, R 1).

Commenting on their group's interactional thread in deliberations, respondents felt that WhatsApp group deliberations promoted a non-hierarchical interaction. The majority of participants agreed that WhatsApp groups had facilitated county citizens to imagine, invent and engage in non-hierarchical interaction on county governance matters. Respondents argued that actual grievances can now be channelled to relevant authorities for solutions by 'anybody' through open channels and platforms such as WhatsApp groups. One respondent alluded to the notion of not feeling 'powerless' anymore because ordinary citizens can access county leadership for redress on contested matters. Prompted to clarify this, one respondent argued that citizens had less need to target one another through partisan attacks as they could '*...address those who have the answers and solutions*'.

Being in the group has made it easier for many of us to access some of our leaders we would otherwise see on media. While we felt powerless before, we can now feel empowered... We can have discussions through WhatsApp (WFGD 4, R 8).

On grievance handling, one respondent assumed that WhatsApp deliberation has many mediators and adjudicators who intervene when partisan issues are discussed. WhatsApp groups are not always affected by partisan or polarised deliberations because a 'large' number of participants adopt a neutral position on county governance topics. One respondent pointed

out that WhatsApp groups have empowered viral discussions and marketing for innovative ideas that have created solutions to some of the most polarising issues at the county level.

...that is why I think some brilliant ideas on county governance have come from WhatsApp. It has a source of solution when people talk between one another (WFGD 1, R 4).

Focus group participants also argued that WhatsApp group deliberations had enhanced the prominence of specific influencers on county governance issues. Influencers are widely replied to, mentioned, or questioned during deliberations. This gave influencers the power to steer the deliberations, sometimes in a partisan and more polarised way. When asked to elaborate, respondents gave an example of discussions that sometimes happen in WhatsApp groups involving county governments and civil society leaders. Often, both groups held opposing ideologies and this created partisan clusters and alignments out of sync with the rest of the group members. For example, respondents suggested that discussing the county development record on human rights issues and access to social amenities often resulted in a contest between the county officials versus the activists (civil society). The rest of the group members aligned according to their ideological inclinations and views. In one case, the respondents thought that conforming to particular ideas and positions during deliberation was because participants wanted to maintain a favourable 'picture' [*clarified to mean perception*] of themselves among group members. One respondent noted:

People find it easier to take sides rather than stand with their own opinion. I know of people who normally just wait to see the position that certain county leaders take and they support (WFGD 1, R 7).

7.2.6 Worsened Politicisation of Polarisation around County Governance

Polarisation in WhatsApp groups, according to respondents, has been aggravated because specific politicians and extreme groups exploit it for their benefit. Some respondents implied that polarisation is strategically used by the political elite to drive ethnically partisan agendas that benefit them. County politicians form WhatsApp groups to vilify their opponents' policies

and intensify favourable impressions related to their manifestos. One respondent stated that women were more targeted for such actions compared to men. They further argued that:

political leaders who are female are more likely to be abused and receive targeted hostility on WhatsApp, regardless of what they say or don't say...it is also that women are more likely to face negative reactions than their male politicians and it is not fair (WFGD 4, R 4).

One respondent observed that knowing the rapidity with which propaganda spreads within WhatsApp groups, opposing political elites use it to amplify dissatisfaction with county government. This happens when non-genuine grievances are raised during deliberations that feed into partisan narratives. It was further noted that counties have public communication teams who infiltrate public WhatsApp groups to steer favourable discussions or defend unpopular county government policies. One respondent described how:

When the governor fell out with his deputy governor, each one sponsored many messages in WhatsApp to smear the other with allegations that were often false. No good discussion can happen in such a situation (WFGD 8, R 8).

Another respondent observed that:

Polarisation benefits politicians who use it to appeal to their bases... due to lack of clear manifesto. It is easier to say we need to be in power because their tribe has been there longer...it is our turn to eat (WFGD 8, R 1).

Respondents felt that deliberating on certain governance issues such as county appointments focused on ethnic alignments rather than ideas and policies. Deliberation, it was suggested by some respondents, often degenerated into personality-based contests rather than issue-based discussion. It was also apparent that when WhatsApp groups aimed to collect the opinions and views of citizens, the responses are sometimes biased toward extreme opinions by a handful of dominant participants. County government then relies on such opinions and feedback from a few participants by be given more weight and consideration. This was further attributed to the ability of WhatsApp groups to personalise 'attacks', feedback, and comments as one potential interactive mechanism for causing polarisation. One respondent suggested that WhatsApp allows participants to respond to specific chats even in group discussions and this can intensify personalised attacks. One respondent indicated that:

In WhatsApp groups, attacks are common when you can reply to someone and tag them and also send them direct messages. People can often get very personal just like in other social media. There is not difference for those on Facebook, Twitter or WhatsApp (WFGD 6, R 3).

Despite claims of polarised politicisation in WhatsApp groups, some respondents argued that the groups have enabled virtual meetings of citizens and leaders. Respondents further felt that WhatsApp groups had created an opportunity for citizens to question their leaders and interrogate proposed governance policies. At the same time, leaders are able to respond to governance ‘queries’ in WhatsApp groups. Whilst a minority mentioned that WhatsApp groups have supported the effective functionality of representative democracy, the majority felt that it had actually changed their expectations of leadership. WhatsApp groups had afforded citizens an opportunity to challenge one another’s proposals in a less polarised environment where leaders can contribute to the discussions. The majority agreed that because polarisation was sometimes caused by a misunderstanding between citizens and their leaders, WhatsApp offers an opportunity for clarification of misinformation and biases.

One respondent observed that:

We are taking more time to query our leaders compared to the past...from the perspective of the civil society, I think WhatsApp has given as a best place [*clarified to mean platforms*] to meet the leaders who can’t stand us (WFGD 3, R 8).

Some respondents argued that the use of WhatsApp groups to consider certain actions, events, and policies at the county level was considered to drive partisanship among participants. In contrast, some respondents observed that WhatsApp group deliberations had improved the interrogation related to accountability and transparency at the county government level. One respondent claimed:

As the civil society, we have held our leaders to account in all forums including throughout WhatsApp...the widespread awareness has improved the response from leaders as well... I think it is easier to circulate news on corruption scandals in WhatsApp than in other social media...this is our target (WFGD 6, R 2).

Also apparent was that WhatsApp deliberations had facilitated more consistent engagement and the formation of positive attitudes between citizens and their leaders. Respondents felt that

this had improved cooperation and the handling of polarising governance issues. Prompted for further clarification, respondents felt that discussions in their WhatsApp groups followed by action have generally encouraged more openness and participation in discussions. It was also suggested that WhatsApp group discussions channelled to appropriate leaders had resulted in a more responsive county legislative process. This had somehow translated into fewer grievances in often polarising county governance issues. One respondent emphasised that:

Every time we discuss and come up with real action plans and present it to our MCA, we have seen some response... it is not always the best feedback but it makes people feel listened to. The problem is that some are very personal [*referring to what is presented to their leaders*] and not relevant to the whole society (WFGD 2, R 2).

Another respondent noted:

WhatsApp has improved how frequently we discuss, we don't have to meet face to face but we are still able to follow up on one another about county issues... (WFGD 7, R 7).

7.3 WhatsApp Group Formation and the Quality of Deliberations

The third research question sought to establish if there is a variance in the quality of deliberation based on WhatsApp group formation. WhatsApp groups were classified into two categories: those based on formation and recruitment.

7.3.1 Formation: Bottom-up and Top-down WhatsApp Groups

This study found a variance in the quality of deliberations between top-down and bottom-up WhatsApp groups. Top-down WhatsApp groups have a higher Cramer's V value for the quality of deliberation variables relating to inclusivity and moderation (*see Table 7.1*) Bottom-up WhatsApp groups, on the other hand, have a higher Cramer's V value for quality deliberation variables relating to tolerance, diversity, civility and heterogeneity of viewpoints (*see Table 7.1*). The variance in the quality of deliberation between top-down and bottom-up WhatsApp groups is not hugely significant based on the Cramer's V analysis. Nonetheless, the observed variance can be explained by the objective of formations, nature of ties, group size, and group composition. Top-down WhatsApp groups are formed in compliance with the legal framework

requiring the use of digital media to enhance engagement in deliberative governance. On the other hand, bottom-up WhatsApp groups are citizen-driven, counteractive, and structured to provide alternative deliberation spaces. Further, bottom-up WhatsApp groups are often initiatives to plug the gaps in official engagement and deliberation channels. WhatsApp groups are likely to consist of participants with varying interests, motivations, objectives, and group norms. Therefore, the variance in the quality of deliberation as defined by the group norms can be explained by three factors: group influencers, the group's interactive dynamics, and the group's social sanction.

Social sanctions shape the standard of behaviour defined by specific group norms that are deemed socially acceptable (Heckathorn, 2018). For instance, mutual respect as a social sanction among group members can make it easier to realise tolerance and civility in group deliberations. Social sanctions, even in online platforms, are also essential for a group to regulate itself and maintain order in deliberations. Just like in offline contexts, social sanctions in online platforms encourage group behaviours that are considered to be appropriate and deter those that are not. Deliberative norms, as defined by the group's sanctions, shape behavioural standards and expectations that make it possible to have better interactions and discussions. WhatsApp groups are likely to experience external social sanctions where the consequences for deviance are imposed by others. This, as earlier established, includes drastic actions such as expulsion from the WhatsApp group. Studies have found that social sanctions are weaker in diverse groups and communities (Miguel & Gugerty, 2005). Based on this logic, social sanctions that support deliberative norms are likely to be prevalent in small groups with close ties, even in online contexts.

The role of group influencers can partly explain the variance in the quality of deliberations based on norms such as tolerance, moderation and civility in WhatsApp groups. Influencers in WhatsApp groups can have a significant sway in shaping compliance with the

group's deliberative norms. In the context of WhatsApp groups, the group administrators are likely to be the group's influencers. The place of group influencers is stronger if they are perceived to have a broad range of experience, greater expertise, or deeper knowledge of a topic. The role of WhatsApp group administrators in establishing the groups grants them significant influence on the affairs and the group norms. Studies have also shown that enforcing the group's deliberative norms can define the roles of some group members (Connelly et al., 2006; Holdo, 2019; Thomassen, 2006). However, the question of whether the mechanisms of influencers in WhatsApp groups differ from those in conventional contexts is valid. Other studies have noted that desirable influencers are likely to possess favourable predispositions, domain-specific competence, and good social connections (Winter & Neubaum, 2016). Their influential positions within the group's structure are at the centre of networks linked by patterned flows of information. This is what makes them key influencers in terms of the group's deliberative norms. In top-down WhatsApp groups, the group's influencers are likely to be county officials who can either command the respect or otherwise of the group members; this affects their influence on group norms.

The group's interactive dynamics partly account for the variance in the quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups. When the group members wish for a framework enabling a more sustainable discussion, they are likely to pursue collective enforcement of deliberative norms; hence, there is a higher rate of compliance. Deliberative norms in WhatsApp groups are likely to be adopted if they can facilitate the group's objectives and survival. This is viable because WhatsApp groups, like conventional groups, can dissolve when faced with severe or unmanageable differences. The variance in the quality of deliberative norms may be related to the keenness to punish norm infraction such as expulsion. Cramer's V analysis shows that bottom-up WhatsApp groups are slightly more polarised than top-down WhatsApp groups (*see Table 7.1*). The compliance with group norms can depend on group cohesion and ties, which

somehow reflect the level of group polarisation. Group cohesion in public WhatsApp groups can be challenging due to its weak ties. Weak ties, as opposed to close ties, are likely to lead to less adherence to the group's norms unless effectively moderated. There are situations where the violation of specific deliberative norms should be considered valid. Violating deliberative norms in WhatsApp groups can be legitimised if it serves a noble deliberative function. Specific instances include when and if participants cannot contribute effectively to governance discourse with a biased enforcement of deliberative norms. In instances where moderation of WhatsApp group deliberations is biased and a threat to inclusivity, non-compliance should be deemed acceptable. It is also possible that defining and establishing a governance agenda within the public sphere might necessitate confrontational and contested discussion tactics marked by incivility, an argument that was also noted by Habermas (1991).

7.3.2 Recruitment: Self-selection and Random Selection

WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection were found to be comparatively more tolerant, moderated, and civil than those formed through random selection (*see Table 7.2*). The groups formed through random selection, on the other hand, were more inclusive, had more heterogeneous viewpoints, were more diverse, and more polarised (*see Table 7.2*). The method of recruitment defines the group's composition and other dynamics of interaction that are likely to influence the adoption of deliberative norms. Random selection processes have been linked to perceptions of group legitimacy (Leydet, 2019), and these, in turn, are connected to adherence to deliberative norms in online platforms such as WhatsApp groups. When the participants appreciate the legitimate existence of the group, they are willing to comply with the group's deliberative norms.

Both recruitment methods determine the homogeneity or heterogeneity of participants and this, in turn, shapes the deliberative and polarising dynamics such as the ability to achieve

tolerance. Self-selected members of a WhatsApp group are likely to be ideologically homogeneous. This means that they are likely to have close ties which help with compliance with the groups agreed deliberative norms. However, self-selection is also likely to result in homogeneous WhatsApp groups that are likely to reinforce polarisation by creating in-groups vs out-groups (*see Table 7.3*). It is further likely to enhance the formation of echo-chambers, which means a platform is not descriptively representative, which partly explains the comparatively low inclusivity noted in the findings (*see Table 7.3*). However, the composition of WhatsApp groups does not entirely define the quality of deliberation because the participants' argumentative strategies are equally important. The amplification of errors in homogeneous WhatsApp groups can be moderated in enclave deliberation if the participants adopt well-rounded argumentative strategies. This helps to compensate for the biases in the deliberation pool where some, for instance, act as devil's advocates by introducing discordant perspectives.

As earlier discussed, the lack of diversity, heterogeneity of viewpoints and inclusivity can negatively impact the epistemic goals of deliberation. This happens because homogeneity in self-selected WhatsApp groups substantially reduces exposure to diverse views and inhibits changes in opinion. It is also likely to enhance polarising groupthink dynamics where particular information is amplified, leading to poor or more polarised decisions. Formation of WhatsApp groups through self-selection can challenge the exposure to cross-cutting information which is important in promoting intergroup trust and reducing partisanship. This explains why such groups have comparatively fewer heterogeneous viewpoints and structurally diverse participants (*see Table 7.2*). Meanwhile, this study finds that WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection are significantly more tolerant than those formed through random selection. Other studies have found that exposure to heterogeneous views enhances tolerance in

deliberations (Kushin et al., (2015). Through exposure to heterogeneous views, participants are able to appreciate alternative opinions.

Contrary to the existing literature showing that random selection will reflect various segments of society in deliberations (Leydet, 2019), this study established a different situation. This study has demonstrated that random selection is likely to encourage more privileged participants, in terms of their socio-demographic composition, to join WhatsApp groups (*see Table 7.2*). Random selection is likely to bring together participants who have less affinity to the group's ideological position and are less susceptible to the extreme positions leading to polarisation. This study's findings suggest that participants in self-selected WhatsApp groups are more likely to achieve tolerance. This also implies that those with close ties are likely to be more tolerant of one another as opposed to those with weak ties as is the case in random selection. This has critical implications for group polarisation and contrasts with other studies on other SNSs platforms (Johnson & Bichard, 2010), suggesting that the anonymity of those with weak ties can aggravate intolerance. The group's power dynamics determine whether the majority in randomly selected groups with a dominant view can tolerate the minority views during deliberations.

7.4 The Quality of Deliberations and Polarisation on Governance Issues

This study found that the quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups fails to meet the Habermasian ideals, and this may account for its contribution to polarisation (*see Table 7.3*). WhatsApp group discussion exhibits fairly low rationality, inconclusive discussions, and generally reflects underdeveloped arguments (*see Table 7.3*). Deliberations are characterised by disrespectful engagement, incivility, endless disagreements, and sharing of unrelated content. Specific responses suggest that deliberations in WhatsApp fall short of the Habermasian ideals of rational and reciprocated deliberations within the public sphere

(Habermas, 2005). This contrasts with other studies that consider deliberations in the public sphere to represent unifying process even in fragmented societies (Dahlberg, 2005; Dallmayr, 2009; Jezierska, 2019b; Ofunja et al., 2018; Susen, 2018). WhatsApp groups have failed to meet the threshold for an inclusive, equal and open deliberative platform based on Habermasian ideals (*see Table 7.3*). The findings suggest that deliberations in WhatsApp groups lacks transformative capabilities, where participants are persuaded by objective arguments and evidence-based discussions. Deliberation in some WhatsApp groups fails to meet the definitive standards of deliberative governance in the public sphere which reflects similar findings to existing literature based on other SNS platforms (Baogang, 2018; Fischer, 2006; Hajer & Wagenaar, 2003; He, 2018; Hendriks, 2009; Hoareau, 2012; Tang, 2015).

The finding indicates that the quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups is affected by the inconclusiveness of discussions; this is related to the synchronous or asynchronous nature of deliberative platforms. Synchronous platforms necessitate that participants are together at the same time so that they can deliberate. The interaction is brief and often involves incomplete discussion of ideas due to time constraints. However, studies found synchronous interaction platforms to be persuasive, informative and relatively more interactive (Dylko, 2017; Ellison & Boyd, 2013; Esau et al., 2017). However, WhatsApp groups fall under the category of both synchronous and asynchronous platforms which affects the quality of deliberations. As asynchronous platforms, WhatsApp group participants can leave or join the discussion at their convenience and this suggests a disjointed and fragmentary process of deliberation. Owing to its temporal (visual and interactive) design limitations, participants in WhatsApp groups as asynchronous platforms can engage for longer in chats, at their convenience. This means that they are able to write longer messages, weigh up and analyse their chats, and explain their perspectives in a much more coherent way. Further, they are able to seek and present evidence to support their claims which enriches the quality of deliberations.

The challenge of low-quality deliberations in WhatsApp groups is not confined to the platform's features and affordances.

The low quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups is compounded by the failure to comprehensively implement the access to information bill at the county level. Challenges around access to information have two implications. The first is that it leaves a vacuum that is often filled by misinformation and disinformation; the second issue is that it creates a chance for inequality in terms of access to information. Inequality in access to information suggests that few participants have relevant governance information to contribute to discussions in WhatsApp groups. These participants are also bound to dominate deliberations based on this advantage. This falls short of the Habermasian deliberative ideal of inclusivity of voices in deliberations and can lead to poor decisions due to groupthink (Effing et al., 2011; De Graaf et al., 2010). This study's findings are consistent with the literature linking inaccessibility to credible information with increased polarisation due to misinformation and disinformation (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017).

Despite the arguments above challenging the effects of Habermasian deliberative ideals on polarisation, some positive responses were evident from the focus group discussions. Such findings indicate that some WhatsApp group deliberations have facilitated consistent exposure to cross-cutting, heterogeneous information leading to moderated opinions (*see Table 7.3*). Exposure to heterogeneous information and interactional threads in WhatsApp group deliberations have improved the logic and sense of other participants' views and opinions (*see Table 7.3*). Some WhatsApp groups have expanded the participants' ability to connect with diverse groups and enhanced opinion and ideological tolerance on county governance. These findings are similar to other studies which demonstrate that exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints can encourage participants to re-examine issues more critically (Wicks et al., 2014). It further confirms studies showing that exposure to heterogeneous content is likely to increase

tolerance and decrease polarisation (Harell, 2010). In contrast, when participants have pre-existing positions and views on certain governance issues before deliberations, exposure to heterogeneous viewpoints may not translate into moderate opinions or less polarisation.

In addition, some respondents suggested that their WhatsApp groups were able to realise consensus during deliberations through moderated opinions and the homogenisation of perspectives. Two issues can be inferred from the above findings. The first is that the aim of macro deliberative structures and any other public sphere such as WhatsApp groups is not necessarily the generation of consensus or binding decisions (Hendriks, 2006). According to Hendriks (2006), deliberations in the public sphere aim to sway public opinion, which he considers to be progressive (*see Chapter Two, p. 35*). The number of WhatsApp groups that claimed to realise consensus were notably few and should be considered as exceptional. Therefore, on a small scale, consensus due to moderated opinions can overcome partisanship in society and concurs with other studies (Bekkers et al., 2011; Chappell, 2010; Stockemer, 2014). Secondly, achieving consensus by eroding opinion polarity is an iterative and dynamic process, especially when it is based on multiple rounds of deliberations. Based on this logic, it is possible that some WhatsApp groups have contributed to the realisation of soft consensus as opposed to complete consensus. Soft consensus is where the group discover their shared interests, characteristics, and goals which are then amplified instead of the ordinarily glaring areas of divergence (Dong et al., 2018; Herrera-Viedma et al., 2017).

Further, achieving consensus in the public sphere can amplify the irreducibility of structural diversity that characterises most societies (Dahlberg, 2005; Habermas, 2005; Jezierska, 2019). Sometimes, deliberations leading to consensus in pluralist societies are not possible without the domination of certain interests or the exclusion of specific groups. It is possible that the consensus reported in WhatsApp deliberations is 'false consensus'. This comes about through the dominance of certain positions, views, and understanding during

deliberations in a way that shuts down criticism and scrutiny of alternative positions (Dahlberg, 2005; Habermas, 2005; Jezierska, 2019). WhatsApp group deliberations can lead to what Habermas acknowledged as ‘distortions’ that result in false consensus (Dahlberg, 2005). Nonetheless, deliberative governance in WhatsApp groups may generate consensual agreement from time to time. This is likely to be partial and fragmentary if and when it emerges. Consensual agreement can lessen the impact of group polarisation (Friberg-Fernros & Schaffer, 2014). This is very critical, especially for WhatsApp groups that aim to translate deliberations into action, as evident in groups such as ‘*Sauti ya wachuuzi*’ and ‘*The Nakuru Analyst*’ (see *Chapter Four, p. 147*).

In sum, the findings reveal a generally negative view regarding the quality of deliberative governance in WhatsApp groups and its impact on polarisation. However, the findings reveal instances where WhatsApp groups have influenced the evolution of opinion which describes a process whereby opinions are formed among a group of interactive participants (Dong et al., 2018). Opinion evolution requires participants to update their opinions based on new and diverse information. This demands openness to novel evidence and the willingness to be persuaded by factually discordant information. Opinion evolution can correct the impact of motivated reasoning and confirmation bias in polarised deliberation contexts (Dong et al., 2018; Zhao et al., 2018). However, trust relationships, which are defined according to the nature of the group ties, greatly impact on opinion evolution. This study’s findings suggest that deliberation in some WhatsApp groups can establish the credibility of disputed beliefs, values, and choices among diverse participants. However, this requires an instance where deliberation is rational and allows for extensive and logical arguments as advocated by Habermas. The implication of low quality deliberations is that some WhatsApp groups may have instigated context collapse which makes it difficult for users to engage constructively and conclusively on specific topics (Gil-Lopez et al., 2018). Context collapse

can produce self-censorship when participants realise that their participation in deliberations is not worthwhile, efficacious, or reciprocated (Winter & Rathnayake, 2017).

7.4.1 Other Factors that Define the Quality of Deliberations in WhatsApp Groups

Specific critical differences were evident from the results of this study as compared to existing research. Aside from Habermasian deliberative ideals, the study findings suggest that deliberation in WhatsApp has aggravated specific practices that have affected the quality of deliberation and polarisation. The findings have revealed the negative influence of trolls on the quality of WhatsApp deliberations (*see Table 7.3*). Trolls provoke partisan discussions in WhatsApp groups and exacerbate polarised behavioural tendencies such as confirmatory bias and motivated reasoning. Confirmatory bias means trolls in WhatsApp groups are likely to disagree just for oppositional reasons despite the presentation of evidence. The behaviour of trolls, including dismissing opposing arguments, focusing on minor issues, and incivility during WhatsApp deliberations are likely to trigger negative emotions (*see Table 7.3*). Similar to other studies (Smith et al., 2018; Sunstein, 2008), the role of negative emotions in heightening group polarisation is likely to be linked to incivility and intolerance in WhatsApp groups. The dedication of particular individuals to advocate, push for, or frustrate particular ideological positions during WhatsApp group discussions can heighten partisan polarisation. Further, the use of trolls to frustrate meaningful deliberations related to scrutinising county governance can significantly encourage extreme views against the county government and further lower the quality of deliberations. It can instigate the exit of certain individuals with implications for the group's inclusivity and diversity.

The findings also suggest that low quality deliberations in WhatsApp groups have enhanced the sharing of negative stereotypes that have fuelled polarisation. Stereotypes, based on partisan ideas, aid participants to frame discussions negatively and worsen confirmation

bias and motivated reasoning as well. This study's findings further concurs with other studies on the influence of stereotypes in exacerbating intergroup polarisation (Rothschild et al., 2019). Equally, however, stereotypes help participants make sense of complex governance issues, though they can promote cognitive laziness in polarised contexts. Partisan stereotypes can translate into intense binary, polarised identities around contested issues in WhatsApp groups. Framing of discussions using stereotypes in WhatsApp groups is likely to reflect perceived polarising cues rather than the group's factual ideological positions on governance issues. This is consistent with the literature based on other SNS platforms that has examined how partisan stereotypes can magnify perceptions of polarity during discussions and aggravate interparty disagreements (Rothschild et al., 2019; Tanczer, 2016).

Stereotypes in WhatsApp group deliberation are likely to be based on 'otherness' as a conception of polarising in-group and out-group dynamics (*see Table 7.3*). The argument by some respondents that anonymity and the absence of non-verbal cues in WhatsApp groups can significantly reduce partisan stereotypes seems untenable. However, the concept of anonymity and disinhibition effect in WhatsApp groups is debatable considering that a participant's profile has details including their phone contacts and other personal information (*see Chapter Four, p. 136*). Deliberations where participants have authentic profiles and use their real names tend to encourage rational, sincere, civil, and better quality deliberations. This, in part, supports the arguments by some scholars that discussions in online platforms are likely to persist over time when the participants are identifiable and recognisable among one another; suggesting a higher level of deliberation.

Another aspect that reflects low quality deliberations, according to this study, is the increased sharing of conspiracy theories during WhatsApp group deliberations. WhatsApp groups have amplified the sharing and forwarding of conspiracy theories during deliberations. Conspiracy theories require sustained attention, consumption, and distribution by their

supporters to reach a critical mass; WhatsApp groups have provided a conducive environment for such ideas. The findings suggest that conspiracy theories provide a simplified way of understanding complex county governance issues in deliberations (*see Table 7.3*). WhatsApp groups have compounded the difficulty of establishing the origin and validity of governance information often shared alongside conspiracy theories in deliberations. Consistent with the existing literature, conspiracy theories may involve information filtering which is a subjective process that is dependent on selective exposure and confirmation bias (Gustafsson, 2012; Park, 2015; Theocharis & Lowe, 2016). The effect of conspiracy theories in WhatsApp group deliberations is to create camps that define binary contests between participants.

When conspiracy theories are shared alongside facts, as is often the case, it significantly affects the quality, polarity, and credibility of deliberations in WhatsApp groups. The previous literature has found that the credibility of conspiracy theories is more accepted if it favours the in-group and when it vilifies the out-group (Barbera, 2019; Borges-tiago et al., 2018). Therefore, the use of conspiracy theories is greater for groups that have historically experienced socio-political discrimination or oppression (*see Table 7.3*). This study's findings partly support a growing number of studies indicating that conspiracy theories on SNS platforms have increased in tandem with affective polarisation and elite ideological polarisation (Barbera, 2019; Borges-tiago et al., 2018). In connection with elite polarisation, conspiracy theories on platforms like WhatsApp have affected the credibility and trust in county government information (*see Table 7.3*). The absolute rejection of county information regardless of its credibility reflects a form of polarity characterised by confirmation bias.

WhatsApp groups have aggravated the sharing of fake news, misinformation and disinformation in deliberations. Consistent with the previous literature in Kenya (Makinen & Kuira, 2008a), fake news, when shared among close ties, amplifies the content's emotional and ideological value during deliberations (*see Table 7.3*). WhatsApp groups have facilitated rapid

diffusion of photo-shopped images and misinformation on county governance, worsening polarisation. The rapid diffusion of fake news in WhatsApp groups can be explained by the group's affinity for emotionally-charged content, a trend that has been observed in other studies as well (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Fake news and sensational stories are amplified through the replication and embellishment of details from one chat group to another. WhatsApp group messages shared between groups can undergo what is known as the summary effect. This describes the distortion of messages as they pass through a chain of information forwarding and sharing (Ribeiro, Gligorić, & West, 2019). Therefore, WhatsApp groups do not have effective barriers for aggregating information and debunking fake news and partisan ideologies that cause polarisation.

Consistent with the existing literature on other SNS platforms (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017), confirmation bias, selective exposure, and availability bias related to fake partisan news are potential drivers of polarisation in WhatsApp groups. The biases inherent in fake news, coupled with alignment to the group's partisan views, creates a network supported by the group's homophily. This reflects a pattern that has been established in the existing literature where participants exercise confirmation bias by accepting information from their peers regardless of its credibility (Tornberg, 2018). The homophily of WhatsApp groups is aggravated by the closeness, centrality, and influence of the peer-to-peer relationships within them. In homophilous WhatsApp groups, deliberators gradually attach more weight to their partisan biases and less weight to expert views and opinions. This reflects a form of motivated reasoning and may lead to low quality deliberations and decisions due to groupthink. WhatsApp group are likely to enhance peer-induced factors that promote specific biases inherent in fake news. The link between network homophily and polarisation in WhatsApp groups exhibits similar patterns and effects to those of other SNS platforms (Halberstam & Knight, 2016; Koironen et al., 2019; Medaglia & Zhu, 2017). The findings partly imply that

WhatsApp groups are vulnerable to the manipulation of the group's opinion through socially driven, organically spread fake news in homogeneous groups (Halberstam & Knight, 2016).

7.4.2 The Polarising Nature of Governance Issues Deliberated

The findings suggest that deliberative governance in WhatsApp groups has a negative influence on polarisation around deeply-rooted governance issues. As earlier noted, participants join their WhatsApp groups with pre-existing positions and views especially on issues they are interested in or passionate about. Nonetheless, WhatsApp groups have heightened perceived and actual polarisation, especially around contested county governance issues. Interacting in homogeneous groups has enticed participants to confirm their previous positions and take more inflexible positions on deep-rooted issues. The study found that polarisation in Kenya revolves around deep-rooted issues that are challenging to resolve through deliberation in WhatsApp groups (*see Table 7.3*). Polarisation is not a recent phenomenon in the Kenyan context (Kanyinga, 2014). As earlier noted, polarisation in Kenya is the product of current contentious issues that are based on the country's structural diversity (Kagwanja & Southall, 2009). Based on the existing literature (*see Chapter Three, pp 84-89*), Kenya has experienced polarisation around its ethnic composition, ideologies, and historical injustices that have always been divisive (Ajulu, 2010; Carrier & Kochore, 2014; Khadiagala, 2017; Klopp, 2002; Omulo & Williams, 2018). This study's findings suggest that participants in WhatsApp groups are influenced by pre-conceived ideologies and positions before joining the platform (*see Table 7.3*). It is possible that the extremity of views and positions held by certain individuals motivates them to join certain WhatsApp groups for self-expression. This has profound implications for the effects of WhatsApp groups and polarisation because it partly supports the existing literature (Ishiyama et al., 2016; Makinen & Kuira, 2008) suggesting that SNSs are

not entirely responsible for instigating polarisation in contexts like Kenya but that they can worsen and deepen existing polarity.

This point is illustrated in how the negative framing of historically contested issues has heightened partisan divides among participants in WhatsApp groups. Consistent with other studies (Sunstein, 2008b; Swol, 2009), deep-rooted issues can aggravate group dynamics that further amplify the perception of partisan differences and this has two critical implications for polarisation. First, that WhatsApp groups have enhanced certain socio-political inequalities and exacerbated the imbalances in access, voice, and representation during deliberations (*see Chapter Six, p 225*). Secondly, it substantiates previous findings showing a relationship between political inequality, marginalised views and polarisation in Kenya (Cheeseman et al., 2016), demonstrating that inequality and exclusivity are further exacerbated when minorities groups are underrepresented on deliberative platforms like WhatsApp groups. Studies on the profiles of other SNS platforms in Kenya have reflected similar findings where the voices of the minority are minimal or lacking in political discourse (Kanyam et al., 2017).

Further, deliberating on deep-rooted governance and grievance-causing issues is likely to be challenging if participants in WhatsApp groups adopt inflexible positions before deliberations. As was evident from the focus group discussions, inflexible positions refer to a situation when group members will not accept evidence that contradicts their pre-deliberation positions regardless of its validity. Evidence in the existing literature demonstrates that adopting inflexible positions can entice participants to practice selective exposure, motivated reasoning or confirmation bias (Bright, 2018; Halvorsen, 2003; Kim, 2015). Such participants are prone to adopting extreme opinions in the direction of their pre-existing positions. Polarisation in WhatsApp groups is likely to worsen if participants identify strongly with specific issues through strong identity attachments. This, as was noted from the findings, is common in the context of deep-rooted and grievance-causing issues like ancestral land.

Whereas the governance issues that divide people at the county level are well known, the constant sharing, arguments, and discussion in WhatsApp groups enhance the salience of such partisan issues. The above findings also confirm the existing literature on the impact of salient and partisan issues on polarisation (Sigelman & Kugler, 2003; Wright & Graham, 2017).

The polarising effects of WhatsApp group deliberations will more likely be heightened when a divisive issue becomes highly salient. When partisan governance issues become salient, the political elite and influencers in a WhatsApp group are most likely to frame it and declare their positions. Citizens are polarised by taking cues from their preferred political elite and only accepting information that relates to their partisan ideological stances. Groups deliberating on such matters will readily line up behind their leaders and support partisan positions. Another explanation is that as a governance issue becomes highly salient, WhatsApp groups participants are likely to attach more importance to such issues in deliberations. Similar to other studies on partisanship and polarisation in SNSs, participants are likely to defend their positions and practice motivated reasoning and confirmation bias (Sigelman & Kugler, 2003; Wright et al., 2017). The above also means that motivated scepticism can occur in WhatsApp groups if participants adopt extreme views even after exposure to discordant governance information.

In sum, the findings suggest that the quality of deliberation in WhatsApp groups, regardless of the well-enforced deliberative norms, may not necessarily ameliorate polarisation around deeply-contested issues. This can be understood through a number of perspectives. The first of these is that participants with extreme views on certain contested issues are less likely to be ambivalent and uncertain after interacting with others of a different opinion. This is common when deliberating issues where a person's conviction and identity strongly define the positions and views taken during deliberation (Dalton, 2008; Stroud, 2015; Baumgartner, 2018). Secondly, when a person's identity is salient, such as their ethnicity or religion, specific

norms attached to this identity are likely to guide the participants' views and positions during deliberations. Further, when contested issues are salient in a WhatsApp group, isolated participants are likely to adopt positions that favour the in-group. Lastly, the findings suggest that WhatsApp has worsened polarisation by encouraging participants to argue for or defend their positions based on their group's identity. The reasoning behind this is that when participants in a group become depersonalised, they are less likely to engage as individuals and more likely to engage in line with their group identity.

7.4.3 Ideological Factions and Enclave Deliberations in WhatsApp Groups

The low quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups has aggravated polarisation by facilitating the formation of ideological factions and alignments (*see Table 7.3*). The research here confirms that WhatsApp groups have also provided a platform where validation of in-group identity occurs among participants, which concurs with other findings (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Hong & Kim, 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Sturgis et al., 2014). The convergence of homogeneous participants exemplifies the formation of enclaves and potential echo chambers and is also evident in existing literature (Abdullah et al., 2016a; Bársony et al., 2019; Grönlund et al., 2017; Karpowitz et al., 2009; Maija, 2015). In heterogeneous groups, those with inadequate knowledge on governance issues are likely to remain silent, neutral or take no position. However, WhatsApp groups have allowed the convergence of participants with ideological similarities in a forum in which they feel more confident to express extreme views. This is especially the case for WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection. Groups formed by those with close ties through self-selection are likely to experience reputational pressures. Reputational pressures, driven by social comparison effects, mean that participants in a WhatsApp group will change their views or keep silent to avoid the disapproval of others.

This study's findings further concur with social comparison effects noted in other studies (Sunstein, 2008b; Swol, 2009) showing that those with minimal knowledge adopt the group's stance due to a desire for conformity and favourable consideration by the group. Social comparison lowers the quality of deliberations because the validity of claims on governance issues goes unchecked and unchallenged due to ideological conformity. Therefore, there is a strong association between social comparison, groupthink and echo chambers based on this study's findings. The echo chamber effect means that the discussion within homogenous groups intensifies the impressions that the group's views are widely shared and popular (Colleoni et al., 2014; Esteve & Valle, 2018; Tornberg, 2018). Such impressions can lead to groupthink making the group vulnerable to disillusionment and indignation when they are eventually exposed to contradictory information. This has profound implications for ethnic polarisation. Ethnic groups that have experienced discrimination perpetrated by a corrupt governance system are more likely to form enclave deliberations and gravitate towards an extreme position on the ideological spectrum. WhatsApp groups have provided a platform where participants from such ethnic groups can easily converge. This is consistent with other studies (Khadiagala, 2017; Lynch, 2014), showing that ethnic affiliation shapes ideological partisanship; both of which have a link with polarisation.

When ethnicity shapes what sides participants take during WhatsApp group deliberations, it elevates ethnicity as a tool used to rationalise, simplify, and understand complex issues in a way that lowers the quality of deliberation and aggravates polarisation. This study found that WhatsApp deliberations sometimes involve the defence of specific leaders mentioned in corruption scandals based on their ethnic identity. This has various implications for polarisation. When the defence of particular ideologies or personalities happens regardless of the prevailing evidence, this is a form of confirmation bias (Stroud, 2018). This study's findings suggest a link between the ethnicisation of deliberations in enclave

WhatsApp groups and increased polarisation. Enclave WhatsApp groups are likely to include participants who share similar values, views and positions on county governance. However, a preference for engaging with homogeneous participants does not entirely eliminate disagreement in WhatsApp groups. The difference in disagreements within such groups is that it is less likely to be founded on deep ideological divergence. Further, the danger of homogenous WhatsApp groups is that new information is likely to be understood and interpreted using the group's dominant ideology and viewpoints. While groupthink is possible in homogenous WhatsApp groups, cross interaction of content across other diverse news sites and multiple social networks can lessen its effects. As earlier noted, WhatsApp groups have specific affordances that increase the chances of encountering heterogeneous views in deliberations (Fiadino et al., 2016).

The alternative perspective is that WhatsApp groups have facilitated enclave platforms where marginalised and minority groups can develop, compare, and share their unique experiences, and arguments. Such marginalised and minority groups may feel aggrieved and side-lined in governance policies, especially in polarised contexts like Kenya. Kenya's background structural diversity makes the situation even more complicated. Whereas various studies have associated enclave deliberation with the amplification of consonant views, cognitive errors, and heightened polarisation (Abdullah et al., 2016a; Bársony et al., 2019; Grönlund et al., 2017; Karpowitz et al., 2009; Maija, 2015), this study's findings make it apparent that it can have positive effects as well. As earlier demonstrated, deliberations in heterogeneous WhatsApp groups can easily draw marginalised and minority groups into a spiral of silence (*see Table 7.3*). This happens if such groups feel that their views on governance are unpopular or likely to be ignored. Enclave deliberation in WhatsApp groups offers a safe space where participants can gain the confidence to take positions that would otherwise be silenced, made invisible, or squashed in a heterogeneous deliberation context. The central

empirical idea is that high-status members in WhatsApp groups tend to engage more than others. Their ideas are more influential, partly because low-status members fear ‘retribution’ from the wider group. Due to the status-based hierarchies and power dynamics even in diverse deliberation contexts, it makes sense to form deliberating enclaves where the minority feels safe, recognised, and included.

The implications for the wider deliberative process within the county governance structure are profound. Incorporating views from such enclave deliberations among minority groups within larger deliberative governance forums or processes can have a positive impact on polarisation (Barisione, 2012). It can help achieve inclusivity in deliberations which moves towards the realisation of a more substantive dialogue and decision-making processes in county governance. It is possible that marginalised groups need to confer in enclave contexts in order to contribute autonomously, confidently, and effectively to deliberations within the wider public sphere. Enclave deliberations in WhatsApp groups can counteract the negative dynamics of structural diversity and inequalities within the wider deliberation context. Studies have established the value of enclave deliberations when an organisation is centred on group identity (Abdullah et al., 2016a). Nonetheless, the advantages of enclave deliberations can work for organised community forums and citizen assemblies but they have not been proven to work for informal macro deliberative structures such as WhatsApp groups (Chappell, 2010; Hendriks, 2006).

7.4.4 Information Cascades and Non-hierarchical Interaction

The low quality of deliberation in WhatsApp group has intensified polarising information cascades, according to the findings. Information cascades in WhatsApp groups mean that participants are unable to challenge certain ideas, especially when in the minority (*see Table 7.3*). When certain ideas go unchallenged or unquestioned, the ideas and views presented are

deemed to be accepted and valid. This is why the idea of information cascades is conceptually connected to the social comparison effect as earlier discussed (see section above). The arguments presented by specific group members, acting as influencers, are relied on in reference to the group's position or decision making. Different from the existing literature, this study found that the influence of information cascades was more prevalent in WhatsApp groups aimed at translating deliberations into actions at the county level. Also apparent from the findings was that those who had the resources were more likely to influence the group's decisions and drive the information cascades. This means that information cascades aggravated the power dynamics in a WhatsApp group where specific participants dominated the group's narrative while the rest were tagging along. The governance perspectives of those who dominate deliberations define the group's priorities, the terms in which such issues are discussed, and the group relations that frame those discussions. This is likely to be dangerous if it can lead the group to adopt more extreme and polarised positions.

If participants from marginalised or minority groups must express their views and positions using the concepts and language of those who are privileged or empowered, it is likely to unfairly disadvantage them. WhatsApp group deliberation would then be an additional tool that empowers those who are already privileged or active. Further, some participants are better than others at articulating their views and arguments in rational, clear and reasonable ways, making their ideas more powerful, and respected and eliciting more responses. When deliberations fail to achieve civility and equality as a starting point, attempts at deliberation are more likely to be futile. In such groups, the collective opinion of the group, whether perceived or real, becomes a positional or informational reference point for new or other group members (Borges-tiago et al., 2018; Ribeiro et al., 2019). Group polarisation is at the core of the cascade effects, especially when specific participants in the group have privileged information as so often happens within county governance structures. Those with privileged information are

likely to have significant influence on the group. Such influence can be projected negatively including through the development of intense and heightened concerns, fears and polarity about specific issues, policies or personalities at the county level.

Despite the information cascades, respondents with an alternative perspective argued that WhatsApp groups have enabled citizens to imagine, invent and engage in non-hierarchical interaction with the county government. This argument refers to the affordances and networking features that WhatsApp has facilitated as a deliberative platform. Habermas argued for such a non-hierarchical deliberative platform in his idealistic conception of the public sphere (Habermas, 2003). The quality of deliberation and subsequent petitions in WhatsApp groups has opened the channels of interaction and enhanced the responsiveness of county governance leaders and institutions. Such engagement is positive because partisanship and ethnic polarisation in contexts like Kenya are sometimes fuelled by the unresponsiveness of governance institutions (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). As relates to grievance handling, the findings suggest that some WhatsApp group deliberations have mediators or adjudicators who can help tackle partisan issues between opposing factions within the group. Whilst participants with neutral or moderate views exist in WhatsApp groups, the presence and effectiveness of mediators or adjudicators is characteristic of well-defined micro deliberative structures.

7.4.5 Politicisation of Polarisation and Virtual Connectivity

This study found that the low quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups means that partisanship and polarisation are harnessed for political expediency (*see Table 7.3*). It partly suggests that WhatsApp groups are a platform where elite polarisation can be translated into mass polarisation. Instead of facilitating deliberative governance, some WhatsApp groups have been hijacked by political elites and interest groups. The study found that some WhatsApp groups have specifically been established and sponsored to drive partisan narratives. The

propagation of polarising narratives in such WhatsApp groups takes advantage of the strong allegiance individuals may have to their ethnic, political, and ideological identities. The findings suggest that WhatsApp groups have equipped the political elite with a platform where they can heighten a sense of in-group solidarity while railing against perceived out-group political opponents (*see Table 7.3*). This supports the existing literature showing how the political elite have exploited the ‘us versus them’ narratives and identity in polarised contexts to gain political mileage (Antoci et al., 2016; Druckman et al., 2019). This is aided by the fact that it is easier for participants to cognitively process and understand such binary framing, especially in contexts where governance issues are contested. On the other hand, such binary framing provides quick, cheap, effortless mobilisation slogans, especially when the political elite lack any solid ideological manifestos to sell (Obala & Mattingly, 2014; Pattie & Johnston, 2016).

The role of paid political agents in sharing shock-value content in WhatsApp group deliberations was also evident from this study’s findings (*see Table 7.3*). Paid political agents mobilise by establishing contests in binary categories which are, in part, responsible for the increasingly polarised climate in WhatsApp groups. The challenge with defining contested issues in a binary format in WhatsApp groups is that it often intensifies ethnic polarisation. A good example, evident in the study, was in WhatsApp groups with *Kalenjin* and *Kikuyu* ethnic communities in *Nakuru County*. Binary framing when based on the participants’ ethnicity exploits the group’s insecurities and fears, and magnifies partisanship in deliberations (Barisione, 2012; Druckman & Bolsen, 2011; J. Han & Federico, 2018). The politicisation of WhatsApp group engagement is likely to intensify the perception of county governance issues as zero-sum contests. Politicians form WhatsApp groups to push divisive agendas including infiltrating other WhatsApp groups with misinformation and disinformation. Similarly, the county governments, with their public communication machinery, infiltrate public WhatsApp

groups to steer favourable discussions or defend unpopular county government policies. This implies that deliberations are likely to degenerate into personality-based contests rather than issue-based discussion. This is further compounded by WhatsApp affordances that enable participants to personalise ‘attacks’, feedback, and comments as one potential cause of polarisation.

Findings to the contrary suggest that WhatsApp deliberations have facilitated a virtual connection between citizens and their county leaders. This concurs with other SNS studies demonstrating the positive effects on polarisation of a two-way symmetrical interaction model between the governed and the governors (Baogang, 2018; Ganuza & Francés, 2012; Park et al., 2017a; Rosenbloom et al., 2017b). The implications of the convergence of citizens and their county leaders is twofold with regard to polarisation. The first is that the polarising misinformation among citizens and their leaders is potentially clarified via deliberations in WhatsApp groups. However, this is dependent on the extent to which discussions are rational, evidence-based, and logical; this is negated by low quality deliberations, as noted earlier. Secondly, the expectation that WhatsApp group engagement between citizens and their county leaders would be characterised by sophisticated discourse to tackle polarising issues seems unrealistic. If such discourse is challenging to achieve among the group participants, the same is likely to be the case when leaders are involved.

In sum, regardless of the quality of deliberations in a WhatsApp group, any participation in deliberation has value. Deliberations are not entirely irrelevant or problematic in polarised contexts simply because they fall short of the normative standards of ideal interaction between citizens and their leaders. WhatsApp groups have encouraged the formation of spontaneous bottom-up groups which have amplified marginalised voices and this is critical in ameliorating polarisation. The amplification of marginalised voices has enhanced inclusivity and enriched the quality of deliberations. Nonetheless, it is impossible to

accommodate a large percentage of people in formal deliberative contexts especially in numerically limited platforms like WhatsApp. Spontaneous bottom-up groups have created a platform for informal deliberations in the public sphere to organise, mobilise and influence formal processes at the county level. Even for spontaneous bottom-up WhatsApp groups, recruiting participants who are interested, knowledgeable, and focused about governance issues increases the quality of deliberations. It is also possible that having specific political elites co-participating in the deliberative process can elevate the quality of deliberations. Regardless of who participates, open, unthreaded, unmoderated deliberations that take place on WhatsApp groups may not support a conducive environment for good quality deliberations.

7.5 Implication for Theory

This study supports previous research suggesting that the Habermasian normative ideals are unrealistic and unattainable, especially in the online public sphere (Dahlberg, 2005; Dallmayr, 2009; Jezierska, 2019a, 2019b; Ofunja et al., 2018; Thomassen, 2017). As proposed by Habermas, this study supports the concept that deliberative platforms, including online ones, should mediate public and private lives by raising attention to common problems of concern. WhatsApp groups have realised this role within the Kenyan counties (*see Chapter Four, pp 146-152*). The study also concurs with Habermasian arguments that political institutions, such as county government, are capable of being influenced by an end process where citizens' engaging in logical, rational, and critical deliberations. However, Habermas's argument that deliberations can help citizens to construct unifying identities that mediate conflict and build cohesive communities is doubtful in the context of WhatsApp groups, as shown in this study's findings. This further negates the optimism expressed by the Kenyan constitution regarding the role of online platforms in building a cohesive society (*see Chapter Three, p. 104-108*).

The argument by Habermas that technology will transform and extend the confines of the public spheres to include diverse platforms with diverse participants is confirmed in this

study (Habermas, 2005). WhatsApp, like other SNSs platforms, tends to attract a privileged socio-demographic profile of participants (*see Chapter Six, pp 230,231*). It is critical to differentiate ordinary usage and active participation in deliberative governance in WhatsApp groups. This study on WhatsApp further contrasts the Habermasian normative ideals that engagement in the public sphere will be respectful, rational, inclusive, and diverse where arguments that are driven by the common good. This study' findings reflect other studies that found the lack of reciprocity, representativeness, irrational discourse, unmoderated deliberations, context collapse, and absence of legitimate outcomes in deliberations as some of the reason for low-quality deliberations (Blau, 2011; Dallmayr, 2009; Filatova et al., 2019; Iosifidis, 2011; Jezierska, 2019a, 2019b; King, 2005; Ofunja et al., 2018; Thomassen, 2017, 2006). The use of Habermasian normative ideals to gauge the quality of deliberations in digital platforms like WhatsApp has various implications.

The first is that it overlooks and significantly undervalues less sophisticated and informal deliberations that occur in the digital platforms. The normative Habermasian ideals place an unrealistic expectation on deliberation participants to adhere to sophisticated deliberative norms with other heterogeneous discussants. It is possible that a less constrained and controlled deliberative environment will yield more tangible and legitimate results than those guided by deliberative norms. Habermas, for instance, recognised that defining the agenda in the public sphere sometimes requires confrontational and contested discussion tactics marked by incivility (Habermas, 1991). Secondly, this study found that achieving the Habermasian normative ideals are limited by several platform-specific factors such as the affordance of the platform, the composition of participants, the quality information sources, and the nature of the topic under deliberations. The design and affordance of WhatsApp groups imply that they can facilitate the formation of enclaves and polarised echo chambers. WhatsApp groups formed through random selection will have a diverse composition and

characteristics of participants implying more enriched deliberations. The composition of the WhatsApp group is likely to have an impact on the standards of tolerance and the moderation of deliberations based on normative ideals.

Further, some topics under deliberations are deep-rooted, historical and inherently contentious in various contexts including in Kenya. Such topics are likely to encourage confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, and partisanship during deliberations in spite of the Habermasian deliberative ideals. Apart from heightening group polarisation, deep-rooted, historical, and inherently contentious topics are likely to result in more polarisation. Whereas the Habermasian deliberative ideals are critical in shaping the quality of deliberations, the provision of timely, reliable, and relevant information is critical. As relates to the quality of information, the study found that deliberations in WhatsApp groups seem more challenging due to a failure to comprehensively implement the access to information bill at the county level.

While the Habermasian normative ideals will continue to inform the expected standards of deliberations, this study argues that the scope and depth of what is considered quality deliberations should be expanded beyond what Habermas proposed. This is based on two reasons. The acceptable standards of deliberation tend to vary based on the context, platform, and objectives of deliberations. Based on the understanding of micro and macro deliberative structures, the expectation and quality of deliberations in micro deliberative structures are likely to be higher than those for macro deliberative structures. For instance, while consensus can be used as a standard to determine quality in micro deliberative structures being one of its objectives, it would be unrealistic to use consensus to measure quality in macro deliberative structures. This is because the primary aim of macro deliberative structures is to shape opinion rather than establish issue-consensus.

Another reason is that digital platforms such as SNSs have enhanced other factors that affect the quality of deliberations and polarisation. The viral distribution of fake news,

misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and stereotypes has been made much easier, faster, and with a greater impact through SNSs affordances. Sharing skewed information in SNSs has triggered high-arousal emotions that have worsened polarisation. Furthermore, the value of humour, personal experiences, and emotion, as part of online deliberations affects the quality of deliberations. Apart from attracting sustained interests in deliberative platforms, they help clarify specific perspectives, and also solidify group interactions. Further, WhatsApp groups fall under the category of synchronous and asynchronous platforms which affects the quality of deliberations. WhatsApp group participants can leave or join the discussion at their convenience, and this suggests a disjointed and fragmentary deliberations process. However, the asynchronous nature of WhatsApp groups means that they are able to write longer messages, weigh and analyse their chats, and explain their perspectives in a much better way.

7.6 Implications for Practice

Several implications for practice within the county governance setting are evident from this research. First, deliberative governance via WhatsApp groups may not be the panacea for Kenya's polarisation. The quality of deliberations is not according to standards based on the Habermasian normative norms. The politicisation and use of such platforms to propagate fake news and spread conspiracy theories make them unsuitable to inform serious governance and policy discussion at the county level. Further, the framing of governance issues as binary contests coupled with their use of ethnic stereotypes during deliberations suggest that these platforms are insufficient to steer meaningful, depolarising deliberations. Furthermore, WhatsApp groups, while mostly diverse, are not inclusive in terms of representing a diversity of voices across all participants.

Secondly, based on the deep-rooted nature of partisan and polarising governance issues in the Kenyan context, deliberations in WhatsApp groups may not provide holistic solutions.

It confirms the suggestion that whatever is tearing Kenya's socio-political fabric and governance structures apart is deeper and more universal. It is also historical and may not be simplified and explained by digital filter bubbles, echo chambers, and selective exposure practices during deliberations. Hence, it is problematic to suggest that SNSs platforms can achieve what the Kenyan constitution has failed to realise (*see Chapter Three, pp. 104-107*). However, it is prudent to include SNSs platforms as part of an overall strategy of ensuring integrated and cohesive Kenyan counties considering that SNSs platforms have made both negative and positive contributions to the state of cohesion and integration in Kenya (*see Chapter Three, pp. 126-130*).

Thirdly, despite the criticism that deliberative governance may not necessarily resolve the issues of polarisation among participants, it can still have some positive outcomes. Even in situations of ethnic and ideological polarisation or the majority domination, there is some evidence that participants can still learn new perspectives from others. They can develop moderate positions by empathising with others' views. Specifically, the positive effects of deliberation governance on the participant's issue knowledge, efficacy, and interest in participation is tenable. Deliberative governance in enclave platforms has also enabled marginalised and minority groups to express themselves freely and confidently in their own spaces. Such enclave deliberations should be integrated into the formal deliberative governance structures in a way that supports more inclusive deliberations. This partly explains why platforms like WhatsApp have instigated the formation of spontaneous bottom-up groups where participants self-organise to participate in offline activities at the county level.

Fourthly, online platforms, including WhatsApp groups that are used to collect, analyse, and integrate the views of citizens, can be systematically biased towards ideologically extreme opinions. This is based on this study's findings that deliberations in some WhatsApp groups are not inclusive, dominated by a few individuals and, therefore, not representative. The

county governments need to design an online deliberative process that is diverse and inclusive enough to integrate a wide range of public opinion. Such platforms should also have moderation mechanism to shield the minority from the whims of participants with populist and extreme views. WhatsApp groups used to collect public opinions should be well managed in terms of recruiting participants to encourage representativeness and inclusivity. The fact that WhatsApp groups are characterised by both synchronous and asynchronous online chats is problematic for supporting quality deliberations. The short messages in WhatsApp groups often lead to under-developed arguments, lessen the comprehensiveness and coherence of chat messages, and can encourage a high level of personalised attack among participants.

7.7 Conclusion

The study found a variance in quality of deliberation based on WhatsApp group formations. It found that top-down WhatsApp groups have a comparatively higher quality of deliberations based on inclusivity and moderation. Whereas, bottom-up WhatsApp groups, on the other hand, have comparatively higher quality deliberations based on tolerance, diversity, civility, heterogeneity of viewpoints. However, the variance between top-down and bottom-up is not hugely significant. WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection were found to be more tolerant, moderated, and civil than those formed through random selection, which was more inclusive, had more heterogeneous viewpoints, were more diverse, and more polarised. The type of WhatsApp group formation and the method of recruitment affects the quality of deliberations, but the difference between them is not particularly significant.

The study also sought to understand how deliberative governance in WhatsApp group influence polarisation. This study found that the quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups fails to meet the Habermasian ideals, and this may account for its contribution to polarisation. The quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups is also affected by fake news, widely shared

conspiracy theories and the framing of issues in binary categories. The presence of trolls and moles in WhatsApp groups have heightened polarised deliberations and increased the use of uncivil language. Whereas participants join their WhatsApp groups with partisan views, low quality deliberations have heightened actual and perceived polarisation around county governance issues. WhatsApp groups have heightened the formation of enclaves and echo chambers which have also increased the perceptions of polarisation. The findings suggest that the quality of deliberative in WhatsApp groups have strengthened group/ ethnic affiliation and further intensified partisan information cascades. Partisan and ethnic polarisation has worsened due to the politicising of polarisation which WhatsApp groups deliberations have worsened.

Contrary views are that WhatsApp groups have enhanced tolerance and issue consensus because of exposure to heterogeneous information. This has been possible because WhatsApp groups provide an interactional context allowing better discussion thread that supports more rationalised deliberations. As a digital platform, WhatsApp groups have enabled a virtual meeting of citizens and leaders where partisan issues are clarified and discussed. This is based on the argument that partisan positions are often a result of the in-group misunderstanding the ideological positions of the out-group. In some contexts, WhatsApp groups have facilitated the discussion of collaborative governance action between the governed and the governors. This has promoted a non-hierarchical interactive approach to common societal issues that enhance polarisation. Such a non-hierarchical interactive approach has also facilitated a holistic approach to divisive governance issues where the voices of the marginalised in society are included. Optimists argue that deliberative governance in this context is likely to result in moderate as opposed to polarised opinions.

Chapter Eight

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

8.0 Overview of the Study

This thesis has sought to establish the impact of deliberative governance on polarisation in WhatsApp groups in four Kenyan counties. Deliberative governance is established in the Kenyan constitution and other subsequent legislation. The legislation mandates counties to use the mainstream and social media for deliberative governance to promote national cohesion and social integration. Based on this, deliberative governance is considered a prescriptive solution to polarisation in Kenyan counties. This study is based on the proposition that the outcomes of deliberative governance and its impact on polarisation depend on the quality of deliberations. The existing literature indicates that the quality of deliberations on SNS platforms are characterised by irrationality, incivility, lack of inclusivity, unmoderated deliberations, and low tolerance (Benson, 2019; Chambers, 2003; Corus & Ozanne, 2012; Davidson & Elstub, 2014; Öberg & Svensson, 2012; Ofunja et al., 2018; Park et al., 2017a). However, no study has looked at the influence of Habermasian deliberative ideals on group polarisation on online platforms in the Kenyan context.

This study's proposition is that the quality of deliberation is dependent on the deliberative structure of the SNS platform and the deliberative norms adopted in a group context. The deliberative structure and norms adopted in a group are also likely to influence group polarisation. Deliberative structures, according to this study, consist of key features, structural organisation, and composition of the deliberative platform. They include factors such as: socio-demographic composition, recruitment method, group size, and group ties. Deliberative norms are informal deliberative guidelines of behaviour and an agreed code of conduct that ensure orderliness in group discussions for better outcomes. Deliberative norms are derived from Habermasian deliberative ideals and include: diversity, inclusivity, tolerance,

civility, moderation, and heterogeneity of viewpoints (Habermas, 1996, 2003, 2005). This chapter presents a summary of the findings of this thesis based on four research questions that the study sought to answer.

8.1 Summary of Study Findings

Socio-demographic Profile of WhatsApp Groups in Kenya

The first research question sought to establish the socio-demographic profile of WhatsApp groups in Kenya. The study found that WhatsApp groups participants are predominantly males, aged between 18 and 44 years with relatively high academic qualifications (diploma or undergraduate). These findings mirror the demographic profiles of participants on other SNS platforms in Kenya. A reinforcement effect theory can explain this similarity. It states that the use of additional SNS platforms is a result of pre-existing deliberative behaviours on other platforms. Further, age, education, and gender are key indicators of a participant's socio-economic and demographic conditions with regard to the (dis)advantages in resources and participation. This suggests that WhatsApp has reinforced existing socio-demographic inequalities in the access and use of SNS platforms for deliberative governance (*see Chapter Six, p.230*). WhatsApp has confirmed other studies showing that the lower socio-economic groups are more likely to be marginalised by emergent technology which bolsters the status quo (Arriagada et al., 2012). Another explanation for this study's findings on WhatsApp profiles relates to a bias affecting the probability sampling method in SNS related surveys. There is a tendency to sample from and over represent a segment of respondents who are robustly engaged. Active participants in deliberative governance in WhatsApp groups are also likely to respond to online survey questionnaires (*see Chapter Six, p.231*).

8.2 WhatsApp Groups' Deliberative Structure, Norms, and Polarisation

The second research question sought to understand whether and how WhatsApp groups' deliberative structure and norms influence polarisation. Overall, the study found that different variables that define the deliberative structure and norms in WhatsApp groups affect group polarisation. The link between deliberative structure and norms and polarisation was based on the seven indicators of polarisation (*see Chapter Six, p.201*).

8.2.1 Socio-demographic Composition and Group Polarisation

The study found no statistically significant difference between gender (whether participants were male or female) and polarisation in WhatsApp groups (*see Tables 6.3 & 6.4*). In contrast, the qualitative analysis suggests that the influence of patriarchal socio-political structures tends to define partisan and gendered dynamics in WhatsApp group deliberations. These structures encourage binary thinking based on gendered dynamics which can translate into binary positions in deliberations leading to group polarisation. This concurs with other studies that link binary thinking and group polarisation (Atlee, 2019; Wood & Petriglieri, 2005). The dominance of men in WhatsApp deliberations means that their views and opinions are likely to create groupthink. Similar to other studies on enclave deliberations (Abdullah et al., 2016a; Baldassarri et al., 2016), this study found that women are more likely to form enclave WhatsApp groups that reflect polarised echo chambers. The differences in personalities across both genders are likely to influence group polarisation. Women's conflict-avoidance and ambivalence imply that they are more likely to be agreeable and adopt less extreme views. In contrast, men are perceived as more competent in governance issues meaning that they are less likely to have their ideas and views challenged. This study also found that men are likely to dominate deliberations and develop groupthink decisions, as has been noted in other studies (Karpowitz et al., 2009; Lindell et al., 2017). This study suggests that the inadequate

representation of women's voices, due to existing digital divides, accentuates group polarisation. In concurrence with other studies on digital divides (Antonio & Tuffley, 2014; Brundidge et al., 2014; Galbreath et al., 2012; Min, 2010), this study found that the absence of women's voices is likely to result in the amplification of male-centric ideologies; leading to groupthink.

This study indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between age (younger or older) and polarisation in WhatsApp group deliberations (*see Tables 6.3 & 6.4*). In contrast, the qualitative analysis revealed various linkages between the two variables. The findings indicate that the digital divide affects the older age groups more, which explains the perception that they are less polarised in WhatsApp groups. This contradicts studies showing that older participants are more polarised (Boxell et al., 2017). In spite of the digital divide, this study found that the older socialised the younger age groups to adopt partisan ethnic ideologies as evident in WhatsApp group deliberations (Bright, 2018; Herne et al., 2019b; Spohr, 2017). Concurring with other studies on ethnic polarisation in Kenya (Obala & Mattingly, 2014), this study found that older participants are more likely to experience ethnic polarisation compared to younger participants. Young age groups were noted to be more liberal compared to the older groups who are more likely to be ideologically conservative. Words such as open-minded, diverse and accommodating were used to describe the young participants' non-partisan approach to governance issues. In contrast, a form of dogmatism was noted among older groups due to their ideological consistency. In other studies, such dogmatism was found to drive affective polarisation (Iyengar et al., 2019).

The study found a statistically significant difference between the level of education (higher or lower) and group polarisation (*see Tables 6.3 & 6.4*). The effects size analysis revealed that participants with a higher level of education are less likely to be polarised. In contrast, however, the qualitative analysis suggests that education has emboldened the

expression of partisan and polarised ideas in WhatsApp group deliberations. This suggests that those who are more educated are more likely to be dogmatic in their beliefs. The more educated are also likely to assume the role of influencers which reflects their role in elite polarisation. Participants with high levels of education are assumed to make more sophisticated deliberators because they are likely to consume heterogeneous content, as evidenced in other studies (Stroud et al., 2015). They are likely to possess better reasoning skills, and a higher subject knowledge level, meaning they have minimal susceptibility to motivated reasoning. The more educated are better at finding arguments that are congruent with their partisan positions which implies a higher propensity for confirmatory bias. In comparison, the less educated are more likely to be gullible and less confident about their partisan positions, hence more willing to change their views.

8.2.2 Heterogeneity of Viewpoints and Diversity of Participants

The study found a statistically significant difference between polarisation and the heterogeneity of viewpoints in WhatsApp group deliberations, and between polarisation and the diversity of participants (*see Tables 6.3 & 6.4*). The effects size analysis further revealed that WhatsApp groups with diverse participants and heterogeneous viewpoints were more likely to be polarised. In contrast, the qualitative analysis found that exposure to diverse information is possible in diverse WhatsApp groups. Diversity of content is likely to enhance inadvertent or incidental exposure which challenges the concept of selective exposure in group deliberations (Halpern & Gibbs, (2013). Unlike other studies, this study found that participants can still exercise content selection in WhatsApp. Further, selective exposure in WhatsApp groups is not singularly motivated by the avoidance of discordant information, as suggested in other studies (Bright, 2018; Halvorsen, 2003; Kim, 2015). Rather, participants were noted to exercise selective exposure based on other factors such as the content's humour value, participants'

mood, and time constraints as well. Nonetheless, exposure to heterogeneous content in WhatsApp groups does not necessarily actuate changes in viewpoints or positions in deliberations. This is because polarising governance issues can trigger dogmatic positions even before deliberations which encourage confirmation bias among participants.

This study found a connection between the diversity of participants and the recruitment methods in WhatsApp groups. WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection are likely to consist of homogeneous participants hence result in enclave deliberations and echo chambers effects. Similar to other studies, homogeneous participants and enclave deliberations in WhatsApp groups can lead to groupthink where a limited number of arguments are discussed (Abdullah et al., 2016a; Lindell et al., 2017, 2017; Maija, 2015; Strandberg et al., 2019). Furthermore, the expulsion of participants who express discordant views creates more homogeneous WhatsApp groups where enclave deliberations are practised. Expulsion also implies that participants who wish to remain conform to the group's dominant ideology. By doing so, they practice social comparison leading to extremely partisan polarisation. This study's findings, therefore, reflect the findings of other studies on other SNS platforms (Messing & Westwood, 2014; Stroud, 2018; Wicks et al., 2014). Emphasis on group identity is likely to translate into group pressure for ideological conformity during deliberations, as also noted in the existing literature (Bimber & Copeland, 2013; Vissers & Stolle, 2014). Participants in diverse WhatsApp groups are more likely to develop moderated opinions than those in homogeneous WhatsApp groups.

8.2.3 Moderation, Inclusivity and Group Polarisation

The findings indicated a statistically significant difference between the moderation of deliberations and polarisation (*see Tables 6.4 & 6.5*). Moderated deliberations reflected less polarisation compared to unmoderated deliberation in WhatsApp groups. In contrast, the

qualitative analysis found that moderation creates a perception of gagging, which compounds the notion that some group administrators are biased. Perception of biased moderations was noted to heighten partisan polarisation and encourage confirmation bias where participants rejected evidence-based deliberations. The perception of moderation as a group's responsibility was noted to achieve better results in terms of enforcing deliberative norms such as civility and tolerance. The findings suggest that well-moderated deliberations in WhatsApp groups can encourage open and free deliberations. In contrast, partisan contexts can encourage biased moderation, where the focus is on discouraging the expression of discordant opinions. This is necessary to debunk partisan narratives and encourage more inclusive deliberations. It was further apparent that moderating specific attitudes was challenging due to motivated reasoning founded on complex pre-existing beliefs. The marginalised and minority groups, influenced by binary perception, are likely to consider moderation as censorship.

The quantitative analysis did not find any statistical significance between inclusivity and polarisation (*see Tables 6.3 & 6.4*). In contrast, the qualitative analysis established a link between the two variables. Despite diverse participants in a WhatsApp group, the voices of a pro-active few dominate deliberations which is likely to result in groupthink. Similar to other studies, lurking behaviour in deliberations was noted in this study and is likely to affect the inclusivity of voices in WhatsApp groups (Schneider et al., 2013). In line with existing literature on the spiral of silence (Chen, 2018; Sohn, 2019), this practice, especially by the minority groups in WhatsApp groups, affects inclusive deliberations and limits the heterogeneity of voices in deliberations. The lack of inclusivity was seen as a failure by the minority to take up opportunities to express their views during deliberations. This view seems to be driven by the perception of deliberation as a contest espousing survival of the fittest. Similar to other studies on SNS platforms, this evidence revealed the power dynamics at play in WhatsApp group deliberations (Barberá, 2014; Herne et al., 2019a; Singer et al., 2019).

Therefore, the dominant views are often considered to represent the entire group's views, and can worsen partisanship.

8.2.4 Group Ties, Group Size and Group Polarisation

This study found a statistically significant difference between group size and polarisation (*see Table 6.3*). The effects size analysis revealed that larger WhatsApp groups are more likely to experience polarisation (*see Table 6.4*). The qualitative findings, however, demonstrate that participants in smaller WhatsApp groups are more likely to be homogeneous and hence agreeable. This implies, in a similar way to the existing literature, that smaller sized WhatsApp groups are more likely to be homogeneous echo chambers where amplification of consonant views, and thus polarisation, occurs (Dubois & Blank, 2018; Esteve & Valle, 2018; Garrett, 2009; Rao et al., 2016; Szab & Matuszewski, 2019; Tornberg, 2018; Vaccari et al., 2016). Unlike in larger groups, participants in smaller sized WhatsApp groups are likely to be exposed to very few alternative views and perspectives. Limited views increase the chances of groupthink decisions. In contrast, large groups are likely to have weak ties, with more information sources, and an enhanced opportunity for inadvertent exposure to diverse information, as evidenced in the existing literature (Bright, 2018; Halvorsen, 2003; Kim, 2015). Self-selection of participants into smaller WhatsApp groups can encourage participants to adopt more extreme viewpoints as influenced by social comparison.

The study found no statistically significant difference in polarisation for both weak and strong group ties in WhatsApp groups (*see Table 6.3*). However, the effects size analysis indicated an association between group ties and polarisation (*see Table 6.4*). The qualitative findings further revealed a link between group ties and polarisation in WhatsApp groups. WhatsApp groups with close ties make it easier for ideological enclaves to be formed, where homogeneous information is shared. Compared to weak ties, close ties are likely to mean that

self-identity among participants is understood in the context of the group's identity. Ideological differentiation and groupthink mechanisms are likely to occur in groups with small ties as opposed to those with weak ties, as also noted in the existing literature (Karpowitz et al., 2009). Weak ties are likely to enhance exposure to heterogeneous views through incidental exposure. This means that weak ties can easily translate into weak attachment to partisan identity. Social comparison was suggested to be less prevalent within groups with weak ties which contradicts similar studies on other SNSs such as Facebook (De Vries & Kühne, 2015). Similar to other studies on SNS platforms, it was evident that participants in groups with weak ties are more likely to adopt moderate opinions due to incidental exposure to diverse information in deliberations (Karnowski et al., 2017; Kim, Chen et al., 2013; Weeks et al., 2017). Inadvertent exposure to heterogeneous information in groups with weak ties can also mean a lower likelihood of motivated reasoning.

8.2.5 Tolerance and Civility in Group Polarisation

The study found no statistically significant difference between different levels of tolerance and polarisation (*see Table 6.3*). However, the effect size measures found a significant association between tolerance and polarisation across all levels of tolerance (*see Table 6.4*). The qualitative findings revealed that self-censoring, misconstrued as tolerance, can encourage a spiral of silence in deliberations. Therefore, those with extreme viewpoints can refrain from expressing opinions in light of the group's dominant positions. It was not clear from the findings if the diversity of WhatsApp groups heightens intolerance. However, it was evident that intolerance in WhatsApp group deliberations can lead to extreme positions and more partisan and polarised disagreement. Intolerance can deepen the impression that the differences between partisan groups in the WhatsApp group are unbridgeable and limit the chances of moderate opinions. Intolerance was further noted to encourage motivated reasoning and the practice of

confirmation bias. Socio-demographic factors can influence power dynamics that affect the level of tolerance in deliberations as noted in other studies (Barberá, 2014; Herne et al., 2019a; Singer et al., 2019). Politics and governance issues framed as contests are more likely to drive intolerance in WhatsApp group deliberations. This corroborates other findings on framing in deliberative governance (Barisione, 2012; Druckman & Bolsen, 2011; J. Han & Federico, 2018). Close-knit, homogeneous WhatsApp groups can hold certain standards of tolerance for those in their in-group and contrasting standards for those in their out-group.

The study found that incivility in deliberations is more likely to influence polarisation in WhatsApp groups (*see Table 6.3*). The effects size analysis between polarisation and civility suggests a strong association between the two variables (*see Table 6.4*). The qualitative analysis indicated that incivility is viewed as an attack on the in-group even though directed at an individual. This means that incivility is likely to trigger in-group defence mechanisms against the out-group in WhatsApp group deliberations. Incivility is also likely to increase negative labelling and reduce the modest interaction needed in deliberative governance (Stroud et al., 2015). Incivility increases the perception of partisanship and hostility based on the participant's identity with the likelihood that it will lessen group deliberations. One critical finding from this study is that those who ignored any contribution accompanied by incivility in WhatsApp group deliberations exercised a form of confirmatory bias that is likely to lead to polarisation. Unlike in the existing literature, this study further suggests a link between binary thinking and incivility in WhatsApp group deliberations (*see Chapter six, p, 249*). Further, motivated reasoning occurs when participants avoid contributions accompanied by incivility (*see Chapter six, p, 249*).

8.3 WhatsApp Group Formation and Quality of Deliberations

The study also aimed to understand if there is a variance in the quality of deliberations based on WhatsApp group formation. WhatsApp groups were classified into two types based on the manner of formation and recruitment method (*see Chapter Seven, p. 263*). This study found a variance in the quality of deliberations for top-down and bottom-up WhatsApp groups. Top-down WhatsApp groups were found to be more inclusive and better moderated. Bottom-up WhatsApp groups were more tolerant, more diverse, more civil, and had a high heterogeneity of viewpoints (*see Chapter Seven, p. 290*). The variance in the quality of deliberation between the two WhatsApp groups is not hugely significant based on the Cramer's V values for both WhatsApp group formations. Bottom-up WhatsApp groups were found to be slightly more polarised compared to top-down WhatsApp groups (*see Chapter Seven, p. 290*). The variance between the two formations can be explained by various factors such as the objective of formations, nature of ties, group size, and the group composition. On the other hand, WhatsApp groups formed through self-selection were found to be comparatively more tolerant, moderated, civil, and polarised than those formed through random selection (*see Chapter Seven, p. 291*). WhatsApp groups formed through random selection were more inclusive, had more heterogeneous viewpoints, and were more diverse. Both methods of recruiting participants are likely to define the group dynamics and polarisation. The recruitment method can also influence the deliberative structure and deliberative norms (*see Chapter Seven, p. 291*). The study found that self-selection is also likely to result in homogeneous WhatsApp groups that are likely to reinforce polarisation by creating in-groups vs out-groups.

8.4 The Quality of Deliberation and Polarisation in WhatsApp Groups

The study also sought to establish if and how the quality of deliberation in WhatsApp groups influences polarisation. The findings show that the quality of deliberations fails to meet the

Habermasian ideals and accounts for polarisation in WhatsApp groups. In addition, the study found that WhatsApp has enhanced or heightened trolling, fake news, misinformation, disinformation, sharing of stereotypes and forwarding of conspiracy theories around county governance issues, all of which have worsened polarisation (*see Chapter Seven, pp. 300-302*). For instance, trolls in WhatsApp groups are likely to take extreme positions and exhibit polarised behavioural tendencies such as confirmatory bias and motivated reasoning. The credibility of conspiracy theories is higher if it favours the in-group and vilifies the out-group and this heightens polarisation. The findings also suggest that the low quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups have amplified the perceptible differences between participants on some deeply rooted, contested, and historical governance issues in Kenyan counties (*see Chapter Seven, pp. 304,305*). The salience of such issues means that the political elite and influencers in a WhatsApp group are likely to frame such issues as contests. These findings concur with the existing literature on the role of the political elite in mass polarisation and how they drive the adoption of more extreme positions (Enders & Armaly, 2019; Robison & Mullinix, 2016).

The quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups have aggravated polarisation by facilitating the formation of ideological factions and alignments (*see Chapter Seven, pp. 307,308*). This has resulted in a platform where validation of in-group identity occurs among deliberators through the convergence of homogenous groups. WhatsApp groups have allowed the convergence of participants with ideological similarities in a forum which allows them to feel more confident about expressing extreme views which Vicario et al., (2016) linked to group polarisation. WhatsApp groups have also enhanced the issue of social comparison where participants wish to be considered favourably as group conformers. The ethnicization of deliberations in WhatsApp groups means that ethnicity is used to rationalise, simplify, and understand complex issues in a way that aggravates polarisation. This is likely to push

participants into ethnically defined factions as noted in the previous literature (Flache & Macy, 2011b).

The quality of deliberations in WhatsApp groups has intensified polarising information cascades characterised by an inability to challenge certain ideas perceived as dominant in the group (*see Chapter Seven, pp. 310,311*). Informational cascades are polarising if the group adopts a dominant position regardless of discordant voices so as to achieve issue-consensus (Boomgaarden, 2019). The focus on consensus can silence discordant voices and allow the amplification of dominant voices (Dong et al., 2018; Herrera-Viedma et al., 2017). The pursuit of consensus implies that confirmation bias can occur to maintain group harmony and consensus at the expense of diverse voices. In contrast, the study found that partisanship and polarisation in WhatsApp groups are harnessed for political expediency (*see Chapter Seven, pp. 312,313*). Some WhatsApp groups are specifically established and sponsored to drive partisan narratives. WhatsApp groups have heightened a sense of meaning and purpose through in-group solidarity while railing against perceived political opponents. Politicising of polarisation means that deliberations in WhatsApp groups are defined as binary contexts of ‘us versus them’. Such binary perception and thinking in group contexts encourage more partisan views where participants consider other factions as the disliked out-group (Esteban & Ray, 2007; Lee et al., 2014; Muste, 2014; Habermas, 1996, 2003, 2005).

8.5 Implications of the Study Findings

The study has a number of implications for research methodology, research theory, and practice considering that no study has combined and examined these concepts in the Kenyan context before. In addition, the study achieved general results that are not only applicable to Kenya but to other similar polarised contexts as well.

8.5.1 Implications for Research Methodology

This study has critical methodological implications in the study of WhatsApp groups and polarisation. Given the complex nature of the research concepts, this study combined two complementary methodologies to examine and elucidate the relationships between the quality of deliberation in WhatsApp groups and polarisation. These implications are discussed below.

WhatsApp: Despite its global reach, significant influence, and growing ubiquity in everyday life, thus far, WhatsApp appears to have attracted minimal research attention compared to other social media platforms (notably Facebook and Twitter). This is probably because Twitter and Facebook are widely used in western liberal democracies (North America and Europe), while WhatsApp is widely used in emerging economies such as India, Brazil and Africa. This was apparent during the formulation of this study's research design because there were very few examples of similar research to guide or inform the current study. Also apparent in the formulation of this study's research design is that the critical issues in WhatsApp research relate to the ethical and technical limitations of seeking respondents, scraping data, data collection and analysis of the platform (*see Chapter Five, pp. 170,173*). Studying WhatsApp raises various ethical challenges due to its security protocol such as its end-to-end encryption. Along with preventing interception of messages during transmission, the security protocols make data crawling and mining difficult or impossible. This means that researchers who wish to access a respondent's meta-data will require access to the latest copy of a user's daily backup as stored in their iCloud (Gudipaty and Jhala, 2015). The respondents' consent is, therefore, needed and this makes it challenging to recruit research participants.

It was further evident that WhatsApp has a quicker, interjected messaging, chat and response model that makes it challenging to trace coherent conversations for textual analysis (Anglano, 2014; Garimella and Tyson, 2018; Rashidi et al., 2016). This is compounded by its user-centred network formation model that makes it challenging to undertake and do network

analysis. This informed the alternative research methodology that was adopted in this study. Further, all these affordances complicated the possibility of logging meta-data from WhatsApp for this study. To overcome these challenges, this study used an integrated approach that combined conventional research methods using qualitative and quantitative designs and administered via WhatsApp (*see Chapter Five, pp. 187*). By combining the qualitative and quantitative approaches, the sequential design from combining both methods provided a holistic view and understanding of the research phenomenon under study. The comparative dimensions involving results from both qualitative and quantitative research designs allowed a framework for assessing the different components of deliberative structure, norms, and polarisation (*see Chapter Five, pp. 188,195*). Due to ethical challenges, the study was limited to public WhatsApp groups which are comparatively more accessible and permissible based on respondents' consent and ethical guidelines. Studying patterns of usage and interaction with a wider scope of objectives is possible in public WhatsApp groups. In contrast, studying private WhatsApp groups is also possible, but may experience a limitation of scope, sample size, which can affect other elements of the research study.

Polarisation: The measurement and conceptualisation of polarisation in this study has specific implications for future research in this area of study. The majority of studies on polarisation are based on the Western context and specifically the US (*see Chapter Two, pp. 24-28*). Whereas the definition of polarisation reflects a divergence and extremity of views on specific issues, polarisation also has a historical context. Therefore, the conceptualisation of polarisation in contexts like the United States is prominently based on the ideological dichotomy between the two major political parties, Democrats and Republicans (Mccoy et al., 2018). However, such a dichotomous understanding of polarisation around governance issues is less likely to characterise contexts like Kenya where various factors such as ethnicity,

regionalism, and resource distribution are at the root of polarisation (*see Chapter Three, pp. 94*). This study, being based on a non-Western context, has three implications for the study of polarisation. The first is that the understanding of polarisation even among research respondents is likely to be influenced by the context of study. For instance, while affective polarisation is common between Democrats and Republicans in the US, ethnic polarisation is common in Kenya where the divergence of political and governance issues is more likely to be shaped by ethnicity rather than party affiliations. This understanding affected how respondents interpreted and gave their responses in this study. Based on the interview questions used in the pilot stage of this study, respondents generally misconstrued disagreements founded on ethnic differences as polarisation and this is likely to affect the validity and reliability of the study findings on polarisation. The study resolved this challenge by using the seven indicators of polarisation (*see Chapter Six, p. 201*). The use of polarisation indicators can help researchers to identify specific themes from research participants' responses, and connect such themes to polarisation during qualitative analysis.

The second implication of this study relates specifically to the conceptualisation of group polarisation. The study found that group polarisation is likely to encompass all other forms of polarisation such as attitudinal, ideological, affective, and perceptual polarisation (*see Chapter Two, pp. 24-28*). This is critical because the study of group polarisation is likely to be definitive and strategic in revealing all other forms of polarisation. In addition, the use of the seven pointers of polarisation revealed an interconnected influence that happens at the individual and group level. For instance, binary thinking as an indicator of polarisation is connected to partisanship, which is also linked to in-group, out-group identities. Connecting all the indicators within a research context means that the study of group polarisation is likely to be holistic and integrated as reflected in this study. This study's contribution is also based on the fact that the majority of current studies on polarisation are focused on an individual as

opposed to the group perspective, and also focus on general political issues rather than specific governance issues as was the focus of this study.

The third implication of this study relates to the role of WhatsApp as an instant messaging application and a social networking site. Just like other SNSs platforms, WhatsApp has facilitated the process of self-selection into homogeneous groups where individuals can avoid discordant content. Like other SNSs platforms, it has enhanced exposure to diverse content through a cross-medium, cross-network, and cross-platform information sharing (*see Chapter Six, p. 255*). However, this study reveals some unique factors in WhatsApp that are critical in the study of polarisation. One of WhatsApp features is the voice recognition function that eliminates the need to type and allows illiterate respondents to input voice messages in their local language. This presents an opportunity and a challenge in the study of polarisation. The combination of voice data and chat messages provides an opportunity for rich textual data analysis on polarisation even among the illiterate groups. Further, the interaction between the researcher and the respondents can happen via recorded voice messages instead of typed chats. This can help to include a critical group of respondents in studies on polarisation who would otherwise be left out due to illiteracy. However, this is based on the assumption that they have digital literacy. In addition, the use of coded and polarising language in recorded voice interactions in WhatsApp group deliberations was noted in this study. Understanding the influence of coded messages, language and chats in SNSs platforms in polarised contexts is an area of polarisation worth looking further into. This is especially because the use of coded language based on linguistic undertones and the ethnic characterisation of otherness was one of the causes of the 2007/8 polarisation and post-election violence in Kenya.

8.5.2 Implications for Research Theory

The study findings have implications for three theories related to polarisation and deliberation in the public sphere. Deliberations in WhatsApp groups partly invalidate the association between selective exposure and group polarisation. Selective exposure requires a situation of network/group homophily which is negated by the diverse composition of some WhatsApp groups. Further, controlling for homogeneity to achieve group homophily, which is one of the foundational constructs of selective exposure, is a challenge in WhatsApp groups (*see Chapter Six, p. 255*). Diverse participants and content shared in WhatsApp groups increase the chances of inadvertent exposure through forwarding, posting, commenting, and sharing across other platforms. Meanwhile, incidental exposure to counter-attitudinal ideas challenges the concept of selective exposure, and the study found that selective exposure is remotely possible in WhatsApp groups (*see Chapter Six, p. 255*). The difference between this study and the existing literature is that, in this study, it is recognised that selective exposure in WhatsApp groups is partly shaped by factors such as time constraints, humour content, and the participant's interest in addition to the cognitive dissonance. Time constraints encourage selective exposure when WhatsApp group participants encounter an overwhelming trail of chat messages in their WhatsApp groups. They have to choose what messages to consume and this sometimes depends on factors such as humour content and the participant's interest at that specific time (*see Chapter Six, p. 255*).

The study suggests that WhatsApp groups are capable of creating ideological enclaves and echo chambers where homogeneous participants converge and deliberate on consonant content. Unlike the existing literature (Colleoni et al., 2014; Esteve & Valle, 2018; Tornberg, 2018), the findings here established a link between the formation of WhatsApp groups and echo chamber effects. Self-selection, as opposed to random selection, is likely to result in enclave WhatsApp groups as echo chambers. The tendency for self-selection to create small,

close-knit, and homogeneous WhatsApp groups which result in enclaves is worsened by the expulsion of participants with discordant views (*see Chapter Six, p. 256*). However, contrary to the existing literature on other SNS platforms, enclave deliberations in WhatsApp groups can counteract specific negative dynamics of structural diversity and inequalities within the wider deliberation context. This means that interaction in enclaves and echo chambers may be essential or even necessary for marginalised and minority groups to converge and deliberate without the pressure related to existing power dynamics in diverse WhatsApp groups (*see Chapter Six, pp. 307,308*). Nevertheless, despite the advantages of enclave deliberations, they can elevate ethnicity as a tool to rationalise, simplify, and understand complex issues in a way that further aggravates polarisation.

Overall, this study supports previous research suggesting that the Habermasian normative ideals are unrealistic and unattainable, especially in the online public sphere. Unlike existing studies that assessed the quality of deliberations in the online public sphere, the study went a step further to understand how the quality of deliberations affects group polarisation in polarised contexts. The use of Habermasian normative ideals to gauge the quality of deliberations on digital platforms like WhatsApp has various implications. The ideals are more suitable to establish the quality of deliberations in micro as opposed to macro deliberation structures. Being formal, it is easier to adopt deliberative norms such as inclusivity, rationality, moderation, and civility in micro deliberative structures. The application of Habermasian normative ideals in informal, macro deliberative structure such as WhatsApp groups is likely to undervalue the place of less sophisticated and informal deliberations.

Whether in micro or macro deliberative institutions, this study suggests that the Habermasian normative ideals are affected by several platform-specific factors including: affordance of the platform, the composition of participants, the quality of information sources, and the nature of the topics under deliberation (*see Chapter Six, p. 316*). For instance, the failure

to comprehensively implement the access to information bill at the county level leaves a vacuum that is often filled by conspiracy theories, misinformation and disinformation in WhatsApp groups. This means that digital platforms like WhatsApp groups are not only transforming specific aspects of the public sphere but are also redefining the factors that shape the quality of deliberations and polarisation. The study found that WhatsApp has made the viral distribution of conspiracy theories, fake news, and ethnic stereotypes more impactful based on its affordances (*see Chapter Two, p. 300*). The findings further suggest that what constitutes quality deliberations can be contextual and may not necessarily reflect those advocated by Habermas (Habermas, 2005). For instance, the definition of civility as a deliberative norm is based on etiquette and politeness in discussion which can vary based on context (*see Chapter Two, p. 60*). The subjectivity of the factors that define the quality of deliberation in different contexts affects the generalisability of findings.

8.5.3 Implications for Practice

The study suggests that WhatsApp groups like other SNSs are not entirely responsible for the country's polarisation and that participants converge and use these platforms when already polarised. This is compounded by the fact that polarisation in Kenya revolves around deep-rooted, historical issues that have always been divisive, which respondents felt are extremely challenging to resolve through deliberation in WhatsApp groups. Similar to other administrative and legislative initiatives that have been implemented or instituted since independence in Kenya, deliberative governance via WhatsApp groups is less likely to ameliorate the state of polarisation unless a number of issues are addressed. The study found that deliberations in WhatsApp groups attract a diverse composition of participants in terms of structural diversity based on, for example religion, ideology and region of origin (*see Chapter Six, p. 233*). Despite their structural diversity, the study found that the socio-demographic

composition of the WhatsApp groups consisted of specific privileged segments of society made up of young males, who are highly educated. Hence, WhatsApp groups, while diverse, are still likely to lack a representation of specific voices in deliberations. It has reinforced existing socio-demographic inequalities in terms of access and use of SNS platforms for deliberative governance. In cases where minority and marginalised groups participate in deliberations, the dominance of the majority groups leads to spirals of silence among minorities. In a situation where the county government uses WhatsApp groups to collect views or gauge public opinion, the views of the privileged minority are still likely to be heard and adopted (*see Chapter Six, p. 284*). This is likely to skew county governance policies and worsen polarisation.

Considering the dominance of male voices, as noted from the socio-demographic profile of WhatsApp groups, the inadequate representation of women's voices due to digital divides is likely to result in the amplification of male-centric ideologies through groupthink. The county governments should devise more strategies to encourage the representation of minority and marginalised groups in county governance discourse. Further, regardless of the challenges faced by digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups, it is prudent to include SNS platforms as part of an overall strategy for ensuring integrated and cohesive Kenyan counties. Despite the finding that deliberative governance via WhatsApp groups can heighten group polarisation among participants, it can still have some positive outcomes. For instance, the study found that governance issues in WhatsApp groups that generated greater participation in deliberations are those that were framed as conflicts or those that created the perception of 'camps' (*see Chapter Six, p. 281*). Habermas recognised that defining the agenda in the public sphere may often entail conflictual, confrontational, and contested discussion tactics marked by incivility (Habermas, 1991). This further connects with the findings in this study showing that unmoderated platforms are more likely to be perceived as more open and less biased which was noted to encourage more participation in deliberations (*see Chapter Six, p. 259*).

The study found that WhatsApp allows the recording of audio and video input for those who are illiterate in terms of writing. Further, the use of vernacular language in chatting was noted to be common in WhatsApp groups especially those that had a regional presence. This has various implications. Apart from enhancing enclave deliberations, it is likely to instigate the use of coded messages to describe and perceive otherness. As earlier noted, this is reminiscent of the role played by other SNS platforms in the 2007/8 polarisation and violence in Kenya (*see Chapter Four, p. 131*). This suggests that WhatsApp (formed in 2009) is likely to instigate the same level of polarisation through the use of coded language to vilify and highlight the otherness of specific individuals in society. Monitoring the millions of WhatsApp groups is logistically impossible and other solutions are needed to discourage the use and sharing of coded language (*see Chapter Six, p. 278*). However, the use of vernacular language in deliberations is important in reaching a critical segment of participants who are often marginalised or side-lined in deliberations which require the use of national languages only.

WhatsApp groups were also found to have provided an arena where elite polarisation can influence mass polarisation. WhatsApp groups have been hijacked by political elites and interest groups, and some have been established and sponsored specifically to drive partisan narratives. The propagation of polarising narratives by the political elite in such WhatsApp groups takes advantage of the strong allegiance participants have to ethnic, political, and ideological identities. This is also a red flag with regard to efforts towards national cohesion and integration efforts in Kenyan society. WhatsApp, like other SNS platforms that were used to instigate the 2007/8 polarisation and violence in Kenya, has been misused to drive binary categorisation especially with regard to contested governance issues and ideologies (*see Chapter Three, p. 92*). With over 12 million users and its forwarding and sharing capabilities, WhatsApp groups have significant and strategic power in fuelling mass polarisation. However, WhatsApp has also recently introduced a number of measures to curb misinformation and

polarisation such as labelling of multi-media content as forwards and strictly limiting the number of forwards to five at a specific time (Marfianto & Riadi, 2018). This has limited but not eliminated the replicability and scalability of uncivil, hateful, and inflammatory content. Despite its negative role in polarisation, as established in this study, *Uwiano* Peace Platform takes advantage of WhatsApp affordances to obtain information on hate speech, tensions, incitement, threats and violence across the nation (Halakhe, 2013; Mutahi & Kimari, 2017). Information is then sent to analysts who map, verify, and forward the data to a multi-disciplinary rapid response system for quick intervention. This is exemplary of how platforms like WhatsApp can be used to engage in creating solution models and tackle issues of polarisation and violence in society.

8.6 Limitations of the Study

Whilst this research has uncovered new original empirical material and fresh non-western perspective on deliberative governance and polarisation, there are a number of limitations which restrict its applicability in certain circumstances. The first limitation is that sampling was based on WhatsApp groups which means that the findings of this study are not generalisable in any way. This is because representative samples and generalisable findings would require more participants, a different approach, and a bigger scope of the research study. Further, representative samples are challenging to achieve in a social networking environment where the approach resembles that of a case study (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2018; Humphreys, 2008; Vesnic-alujevic, 2012). This limitation narrows the applicability and generalisability of the study findings. This study is an exploratory study, and paves the way for future research where the impact of each deliberative structure and norms variable on polarisation can be explored separately.

The second limitation relates to the social desirability bias faced during the WhatsApp-based focus group discussion. It was evident from the focus group data collection that social desirability can work both ways. Respondents were sometimes motivated to over-report or under-report their views, especially on deliberative norms in their WhatsApp groups. Informing respondents that their input would be considered verbatim may have heightened their sense of carefulness when responding to the study's focus group discussion questions.

The third limitation related to the comparatively smaller size of WhatsApp groups. WhatsApp groups are generally limited to 256 members per group. The study looked at WhatsApp groups with participants ranging from between 50 to 256. This affected the statistical results related to the third research question in this study. The third research question sought to establish whether there is a variance in the quality of deliberations based on WhatsApp group formation. The Cramer's V values are not significantly different between the variables because the sample size affects the variance analysis. The findings might have been different if groups ranging from, say, 50 to 1,000 participants had been considered. Another limitation related to the methodology is that this study is based on cross-sectional data. The findings may have been different if a different research approach involving a longitudinal data collection method had been used. Further, although this study inferred some correlational associations between variables, this cannot imply causality. The aim of this study was not to establish causality; the study used data triangulation to further explore the assumptive findings from the quantitative data. However, future studies could employ panel data to delve deeper into a causal premise between deliberative governance and polarisation guided by a non-recursive model. This study could have achieved more significant findings if undertaken with an enlarged sample size and coupled with strictly parametric tests.

8.7 Recommendations for Future Research and Practical Applications

This study sheds light on a rapidly expanding but critical segment of deliberative governance and polarisation in the public sphere. The focus on four deliberative structure variables and six deliberative norms variables meant that the study merely scratched the surface of the relationship between these variables and polarisation. Future studies could explore in much greater depth how each variable affects the quality of deliberations and other forms of polarisation such as affective and perceptive polarisation. It would be interesting to find out how the results from this study differ from other studies through a comparative approach with other SNS platforms such as Facebook and in other contexts as well.

Another area of study that can be looked at is a comparative dimension based on culture. There are very few studies focusing on a cross-cultural perspective and how different contexts shapes the nature of deliberation and polarisation. It would be interesting to understand how SNSs interactions shaped by western individualistic norms of interactions differ from the African and Confucian orientations of group identity interactions in view of group deliberations and polarisation. It would be interesting to also understand the reason why in spite of the structural diversity in a group's composition, the socio-demographic profile of participants is similar across the diverse groups as was evident in this study (*see Chapter Six, pp. 230-231*). Such an understanding can shed more light on the nature of mobilisation needed to enhance the participation of different groups in deliberative governance.

Further, this study was carried out in a polarised environment focused on the deliberation of deep-rooted, historical, and polarising governance topics. Future studies could replicate this study using similar research instruments but in different non-polarised contexts in a longitudinal study. It would be interesting to understand the influence of misinformation and disinformation in different deliberative contexts and platforms and how it shapes polarisation on governance issues. Future research could also examine the link between

selective exposure, echo chambers and the consumption of misinformation and disinformation in non-political contexts focusing on the group's response to fact-checkers. In contexts like Kenya, the association between misinformation and polarisation in SNSs platforms, and political and religious extremism can be examined based on a groups interactive dynamics. Owing to the small sample size in this study study, an inter-county comparative analysis proved challenging, and this is an area which future research could explore as part of an inter-contextual study.

8.8 Contributions to Research

This study made the following contributions to research. First, the study was based on an fresh methodological approach using WhatsApp-based focus group discussions. WhatsApp-based focus group discussions can be used to collect rich narrative data from online focus group discussions. Being online-based, it is a cost-effective method for gathering opinions, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, behaviours and motivations on sensitive research topics. Researchers can take advantage of the end-to-end encryption of WhatsApp; however, this should still be done in line with appropriate ethical guidelines. This study successfully used this focus group discussion method that eliminates the need for data transcription and can, thus, save time and resources. Further, the use of typed WhatsApp contributions and comments as verbatim quotes enhanced the precision that is sometimes lost during data transcription.

Secondly, the study also made a critical contribution by building on and going beyond existing research that has only explored the link between SNS platforms and the quality of deliberations guided by the tenets of Habermas. This study went a step further to explore the impact of deliberative governance on group polarisation and how the quality of deliberations mediates this relationship. The focus of this study in the polarised Kenyan context is a unique contribution considering that the majority of the current studies on deliberative governance and

polarisation are based on the Western context. Examining the root and nature of polarisation in the Kenyan context helped to create context to some of the responses from respondents in WhatsApp groups (*see Chapter Three, pp. 81-121*).

Thirdly, this study's findings have contributed concrete empirical findings on how specific WhatsApp groups have fostered real changes within county governance structures through deliberations and consequent actions. Some of the WhatsApp groups in this study have achieved policy-related results and managed to influence decision-making at the county governance structures. WhatsApp groups such as '*Sauti ya wachuuzi*', '*The Nakuru Analyst*', and '*The County Watch*' have demonstrated how group deliberations, meaningful interactions, collective efforts, coordinated petitioning, and organised networking can achieve tangible results within governance structures. The attention that such WhatsApp groups have attracted from policy makers and the positive responses realised by such groups demonstrates a positive effect of SNSs platforms that is often missed in non-empirical studies. Such platforms have realised epistemic gains that are commonly associated with formal micro deliberation structures only. This study has strengthened the argument that in spite of the negative characteristics associated with SNSs platforms with regards to deliberation and polarisation, such platforms have realised various democratically desirable outcomes in governance.

Fourth, this study suggests that the practice of selective exposure and the echo chambers effects challenges the quality of deliberations because when participants are not exposed to diverse opinions, they are less likely to be aware of others' legitimate perspectives and rationales. This is likely to affect the realisation of tolerance, consensus, and inclusivity of views in polarised contexts. Whereas the influence of algorithms and information customisation largely lacks in WhatsApp, these platforms have made information filtering among participants pervasively strong. With absolute ease, WhatsApp users can sort out content according to their biases, prejudices, and selectivity. If WhatsApp group participants

exercise selective exposure and prioritise different issues, then it can become challenging to find consensus on governance issues based on shared priorities.

Fifth, this study was able to link the formation of WhatsApp groups, and the method of recruiting participants into WhatsApp groups to the quality of deliberations. Further, the variance in the quality of deliberation as defined by the group norms can be explained by factors such as the group's influencers, the group's interactive dynamics, and the group's social sanction (*see Chapter Seven, p. 290*). For instance, the study found that the method of recruiting participants determines the homogeneity or heterogeneity of participants in a WhatsApp group. Self-selected members of a WhatsApp group are likely to be ideologically homogeneous. Ideologically homogeneous groups are likely to have close ties which facilitate the compliance with the groups agreed deliberative norms (*see Chapter Seven, p. 291*). Such homogeneous groups are also likely to form enclave deliberations and echo chambers. Random-selection of members is likely to converge individuals with diverse views in WhatsApp groups, which means exposure to diverse viewpoints, incidental exposure, and less selective exposure.

Lastly, the empirical examination of the constitutional assumption in the Kenyan context, regarding deliberative governance and polarisation, is a key contribution of this study. While this study was undertaken in an academic setting, it can inform other industry studies that seek to review the effects of lofty legislative assumptions on actual practice, especially in the area of deliberative governance. This study adds to the ongoing discussions on the role of SNSs in public participation and the attainment of administrative and legislative objectives within county governance structures. Worryingly, the study points to the potential misuse of WhatsApp group to instigate polarisation and violence just like other SNSs platforms were misused during the 2007/8 violence in Kenya. However, far from being a panacea for polarisation, deliberation via WhatsApp groups raises as many challenges as they solve.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

1. Indicate your age bracket, (1) 18-24, (2) 25-34, (3) 35-44, (4) 45-54, (5) 55-64
2. Indicate your gender: (1) Male, (2) Female
3. Which WhatsApp group are you a member of:
 (1) Official: formed by the county government officials, their affiliates and representatives
 (2) Unofficial: formed by citizens on their own initiative and volition
4. What is your level of education?
 (1) High school, (2) Tertiary level, (3) diploma, (4) undergraduate, (5) masters, (6) PhD
5. How would you categorise the relationship among people in your WhatsApp group?
 (1) No Ties (members do not know each other personally and do not engage outside the WhatsApp group),
 (2) Strong Ties (members know each other personally and engage outside the WhatsApp group as well) and
 (3) Weak Ties (group members know each other from WhatsApp group but not personally),
 (4) Cordial Ties (members met in the WhatsApp group and have met in person),
6. What is the approximate number of members in your group?
 (1) Btw 50-100, (2) Btw 101-150, (3) Btw 151-200, (4) Btw 201-256
7. How did you join your WhatsApp group?
 (1) Self-Selection: Was added by a friend, colleague, or person who knew me
 (2) Random Selection: Joined through a public WhatsApp link
8. How frequently do you discuss governance issues in your WhatsApp group?
 (1) Hourly, (2) Daily, (3) Occasionally (every other day), (4) Rarely
9. How would you categorise the level of tolerance in your WhatsApp group discussions? (1) High tolerance, (2) Moderate tolerance (3) slight intolerance (4) High intolerance
10. The use of demeaning or impolite language is prevalent in our WhatsApp group?
 (1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Undecided, (4) Disagree, (5) Strongly Disagree
11. How would you rate the level of moderation in your WhatsApp group?
 (1) Well moderated, (2) Averagely moderated, (3) Poorly moderated, (4) Not moderated
12. Indicate if the following type of diverse people exist in your WhatsApp group

		1	2	3
a	Religion (<i>i.e Muslims, Christians</i>)	Exist	Not sure	Does not exist
b	Ethnicity (<i>i.e Luos, Luhyas, Kikuyus, kalenjins</i>)	Exist	Not sure	Does not exist
c	Ideology (<i>People from different political parties</i>)	Exist	Not sure	Does not exist
d	Regional (<i>People from different regions and part of county</i>)	Exist	Not sure	Does not exist
e		Exist	Not sure	Does not exist

13. Considering question 12 above on diversity, are the diverse contributions of these groups included in your WhatsApp group discussions?
 (1) Not inclusive at all, (2) Not quite inclusive, (3) Slightly inclusive, (4) Definitely inclusive
14. Heterogeneity of Viewpoints

a	How often are you exposed to different points of view on governance in your WhatsApp group (exposure) <i>(1) Always, (2) Very often, (3) Sometimes, (4) Rarely, (5) Never</i>	1	2	3	4	5
b	My WhatsApp group consists of people with similar point of view on governance (composition) <i>(1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Undecided, (4) Disagree, (5) Strongly Disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5
c	Discussion in my WhatsApp group is based on information from different sources (information sources) <i>(1) Strongly Agree, (2) Agree, (3) Undecided, (4) Disagree, (5) Strongly Disagree</i>	1	2	3	4	5

15. Polarisation in WhatsApp group

Indicate the extent to which;		Low		Moderate		High		
a	ethnicity shapes the views and arguments people present in your group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
b	people take ethnic positions regardless of the facts presented on governance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
c	group members in your whatApp group are divided into opposing camps	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
d	people take certain positions because they want to be seen favourably by the group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
e	particular ideas and individuals dominate discussions on governance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
f	your group has people who share same views and opinions on governance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Appendix B

List of WhatsApp groups Sampled in the study

	WhatsApp Group Masthead	Nature of group	No of Members	County
1	<i>The analyst</i>	Accountability	254	Nakuru
2	<i>County Watch</i>	Accountability	254	Kericho
3	<i>Accountability Demand Network</i>	Accountability	56	Nairobi
4	<i>Kuresoi county group</i>	Youth	200	Nakuru
5	<i>Islamic Shahadaa network</i>	Religious Advocacy	193	Nairobi
6	<i>Kericho young professionals</i>	Youth	256	Kericho
7	<i>Kericho URP grassroots wingers'</i>	Politics	256	Kericho
8	<i>Ogiek Rights Group'</i>	Human Rights	254	Bomet
9	<i>Kericho Renaissance Network</i>	Politics	208	Kericho
10	<i>Langas Nyumba Kumi Initiative</i>	Security	256	Nakuru
11	<i>Nairobi Taxpayers' Association</i>	Budget	254	Nairobi
12	<i>Bomet County Government</i>	Politics	254	Bomet
13	<i>Tripple A Networks</i>	Politics	244	Nakuru
14	<i>Townhall Mobilisers</i>	Politics	239	Nairobi
15	<i>Kabete Crusaders Network</i>	Politics	201	Nairobi
16	<i>Kiamunyis Security Network</i>	Security	219	Nakuru
17	<i>The Nest</i>	Accountability	245	Bomet
18	<i>Kenyawest Alliance</i>	Politics	98	Kericho
19	<i>Kericho Young professionals group</i>	Politics	113	Kericho
20	<i>Wamama wa Kazi</i>	Politics	58	Nairobi
21	<i>Haki kwa Wote Network</i>	Human rights	126	Nakuru
22	<i>Kericho Power Group</i>	Politics	256	Kericho
23	<i>Bomet County</i>	Politics	256	Bomet
24	<i>Nakuru Sote Pamoja</i>	Politics	256	Nakuru
25	<i>The Wickets</i>	Politics	256	Nairobi
26	<i>Simama na Mama</i>	Politics	256	Bomet
27	<i>Nairobi street network</i>	Politics	256	Nairobi

Appendix C

A Semi-Structured interview Schedule

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to join this research WhatsApp group participate in this interview. I will be interviewing you to better understand and seek a clarification on some the responses you gave in the survey questionnaire. I do appreciate that you were able to provide good feedback. I am still looking at discussions and polarisation in your WhatsApp groups.

This chat will pose a number of questions and you are simply requested to post your views and follow the discussions and make comments as and when you like. So there are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions, I am interested in your own experiences.

Participation in this research is voluntary and your decision to participate and you are free to exit the group at your will. Please note that if you wish to participate in the group chats and do not have any data bundles, you can approach me for a facilitation.

You are free to tag someone's response to indicate what you are making your comments on. All responses will be kept confidential even if your chats are used verbatim. I will moderate the discussions and I request that we engage respectfully. Are there any questions or anything that need clarity?

Establishing Rapport

Before we begin, I would like to know how your WhatsApp group has changed your day to day life and if this experience is different from others like Facebook and Twitter

Section A

1. Socio-demographic characteristics

- How do you think the age, gender and level of education of the people in your WhatsApp group has affected polarisation in your county?
- Let us start with age, are younger or older people more polarised in your WhatsApp group?
Prompt: what is it that makes such a group more polarised than the other?
Prompt: Why do you think age is or is not a polarising factors in your WhatsApp groups?
- Between male and female, which do you think is the more polarised, and why?
Prompt: What is the difference in polarisation between both gender?
Prompt: Do you think gender is one of the most polarising factors in your WhatsApp groups, why?
- Do the level of education in your WhatsApp group shape whether people are polarised?
Prompt: Is there a difference in polarisation based on the level of education
Prompt: Do you think the level of education is one of the most polarising factors in your WhatsApp groups? What is the reason for your response?

2. Diversity of participants and heterogeneity of viewpoints

- Considering the number of participants in your WhatsApp group discussions, do you think they make the discussion more polarised?
Prompt: What in your opinion is the impact of diversity on partisan discussion in WhatsApp?
Prompt: Why do you think diversity on governance issues is or is not polarising?
- Whats do you think is the impact of different views and opinions expressed in your WhatsApp group discussion and polarisation?

Prompt: What would be the impact of exposing people to different opinions with regards to their polarisation?

3. **Group ties and Group size**

- Do you think that people with close connections/ties get more polarised than those who are not?
Prompt: Why do you think the nature of ties affect the level of polarisation in WhatsApp groups?

- Are WhatsApp groups with more people more polarised?

Prompt: Based on your response, what is the relationship between the size of the group and the level of polarisation?

4. **Moderation**

- What do you think is the impact of moderating social media discussions as relates to a polarisation?

Prompt: How would you describe the level of moderation in your WhatsApp group, how has it influenced polarised discussions?

Prompt: What do you think is the effect of moderation on polarisation in your WhatsApp group?

5. **Tolerance**

- Is there tolerance in WhatsApp group discussions, how would tolerance in discussion impact on polarisation?

Prompt: What is your opinion on the level of tolerance when discussing controversial topics in your WhatsApp group?

6. **Civility**

- What is your understanding of civil discussions in your WhatsApp group?

Prompt: What do you think is the influence of civil or incivil discussions on polarisation in your WhatsApp group?

Prompt: In what other ways does civility affect discussion in your WhatsApp group?

7. **Inclusivity**

What is the level of inclusivity in your WhatsApp group?

Prompt: Do you think all voices are represented during the discussions in your WhatsApp group?

Prompt: In what ways does inclusivity affect polarisation in your WhatsApp group?

Section B

1. How would you describe the quality of deliberations in your WhatsApp group on county governance issues?
2. Does the quality of deliberations in your WhatsApp groups affect polarisation?
3. Has polarisation increased or lessened in your WhatsApp groups and how has discussion contributed to this?
4. How has your WhatsApp group discussion influenced contested county governance issues?

Conclusion

Is there anything else that you would like to comment or add based on our discussion?

Thanks you for Participating.

Appendix D

Glossary

Cochran	This is a formula for determining an ideal sample size given a desired level of precision, confidence level, and the estimated proportion of the attribute present in the entire population.
Groupthink	Groupthink occurs when a group of the people in the group make irrational or non-optimal decisions in order to conform or the discouragement of dissent
Lefting	An act of withdraw one's membership to a WhatsApp group
Majimbo	Majimbo is a swahili word that refers to the process of political decentralisation and devolution of power
Mwananchi	This is Swahili word to mean an ordinary citizen; a member of the public.
Ushahidi	Ushahidi is a platform empowering citizens to map out, expose and discuss issues like corruption and human rights violations.
Uwiano	This is a conflict prevention strategy that enhances collaboration between peace actors in the country.