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# Keeping the Port of Tema afloat during COVID-19: Media responses to user informational and conversational needs

Nicolaisen, MA

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**Keeping the Port of Tema Afloat During COVID-19: Media Responses to User  
Informational and Conversational Needs**

MARTIN ARVAD NICOLAISEN

Aarhus University

CASPER ANDERSEN

Aarhus University

PHILLIP STENMANN BAUN

Aarhus University

JONAS ARYEE

University of Plymouth

ANNETTE SKOVSTED HANSEN

Aarhus University

## **ABSTRACT**

Two different media platforms played a key role in keeping Tema Port in Ghana afloat during the period immediately leading up to and during the three-week COVID-19 pandemic-related lockdown in late March–April of 2020. The one media platform, Eye on Port, is a weekly broadcast television show by the port's authorities, which caters primarily to external commercial stakeholders of the port. The other platform is a closed WhatsApp forum used by stakeholders working at the operational level of the port. Both platforms served specific needs among their users, who had been restricted in their mobility but had to keep the port operational. Combining 'scalable sociality' with the concept of polymedia, we identify how the two media functioned to meet the different informational and conversational needs of their respective users. We argue that either medium alone could not fulfil the communicative needs necessary to keep the port operational during the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **BOX: Covid-19 Pandemic in Ghana, Spring 2020. Key Dates and Interventions**

15.03.2020	Maximum of 25 people permitted at social gatherings
17.03.2020	First COVID-19 patient diagnosed in Tema – ‘an independent port worker’
21.03.2020	First COVID-19 death confirmed in Ghana
22.03.2020	At Midnight Ghana closes its international borders
25.03.2020	National day of fasting and prayer, as decreed by Ghana government
27.03.2020	Announcement of lockdown of Kumasi and Accra Metropolis (incl. Tema)
30.03.2020	Lockdown started at 01:00 AM, enforced by police and military checkpoints
20.04.2020	Lockdown ended
21.04.2020	GPHA implements ‘No-Mask-No-Work’ policy at Tema Port
31.05.2020	Maximum of 100 people permitted at social gatherings, min. 1-meter social distancing
15.06.2020	Re-opening of most Ghanaian public schools and institutions

## Introduction

Social media platforms kept Tema Port in Ghana afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic initially by responding to user needs for pertinent practical information to continue import and export of goods flowing uninterrupted. Subsequently, the platforms adapted to users more emotional needs for verification and clarification of information and for engaging conversations on ways to stay safe, healthy, and protected. We define media users to include all media content creators including producers, viewers, consumers, Facebook group followers, as well as social media participants/enjoyers, because they are all part of an on-going user generated interaction (Picone 2017).

The empirical focus of this article is the lockdown in Accra metropolis and Kumasi from 30 March to 20 April and the preceding two weeks. During this period media provided the only points of interchange and negotiations available to port users. The port differed from most other physical spaces during the lockdown, because the port workers had to continue ensuring that port operations were not disrupted (Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority [GPHA] 2020; GhanaWeb 2020). They had to go to work wearing masks and respect all safety precautions precluding any meetings of more than 25 persons. These circumstances availed media platforms with increased immediate prominence in their users' daily lives, which we examine by focusing on two key media platforms at the port, the televised show *Eye on Port* and a WhatsApp group used by operational stakeholders at the port. The question becomes how these platforms responded to media user needs and how users contributed to the adaptation by expressing their shifting needs.

## Two Media Platforms

The two media platforms we analyse have different user bases, while they shared the goal of keeping the port as operational as possible during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Eye on Port* was established in 2015 on YouTube (currently 1.21K subscribers) and got on Facebook in 2017 (12,650 followers). It runs a weekly program live on Metro TV, which is replayed on Ghana TV and GhOne TV. One newspaper (B&FT) and GhanaWeb (an online portal) are media partners that also publish the discussions in the program. Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority (GPHA) as well as some businesses including Ghana Oil Company fund the program with the stated aim of bringing the activities of the port closer to the public and the public closer to the port ([REF to \*Eye on port\* mission statement](#)). While GPHA owns and produces the show, the host has some autonomy in choosing the issues discussed. An important rationale for establishing the platform was to redeem the image of GPHA by explaining the functions of the various state institutions at the port and the private service providers. It is also part of the PR strategy of the GPHA to counter critical voices. The highly politicized port is of interest to many in Ghana (Lawer 2019; Chalfin 2010) and the fact that the host addresses controversial issues and invites prominent panels with diverging views satisfies also the many critical viewers.

The closed BERMA WhatsApp group was established on December 31st, 2015 to serve as a supplementary digital communication platform mainly for professional stakeholders working at the operational level of Tema Port. BERMA stands for Berthing

Meeting Association of Tema and is a local voluntary association that since 1986 has facilitated thrice weekly in-person informational meetings between public and private sector operational level stakeholders of the port. The physical meetings typically attract 50-60 people comprised of representatives from GPHA as well as other public authorities, along with representatives of shipping agencies, stevedores, and other commercial actors at the port. In March – April 2020 the BERMA WhatsApp group had 156 members, all registered with Ghanaian telephone numbers. Only about 30 of these members posted with some regularity during the period of study, while close to 100 members did not post anything at all. The average daily number of posts during this time was about 36 (from March 16<sup>th</sup> to April 20<sup>th</sup>, with 1,305 posts total), with posting activity that spiked to two- to three times that number during the days immediately preceding the commencement of the lockdown. The invite-only access to membership of the BERMA WhatsApp group means that this forum is characterized by locally residing people who make their daily livelihoods in and around the Port of Tema. Therefore, most group members are acquainted offline.

*Eye on Port* is primarily aimed at external stakeholders to the port including importers, exporters, and freight forwarders, whereas the BERMA WhatsApp group is aimed at internal port operational users. They both focused on adapting their media channels to their user needs during the initial stages of the COVID-19 crisis in Ghana. While we found little indication of cross-communication between these two platforms they can be regarded as what Miller et al (2016, 109) refer to as polymedia that is “as a general range within which each [media] has a complementary niche” (See also Madianou & Miller 2013). In our analysis, the complementarity reflects how different platforms allow users to organise their social world in different categories and people select specific media for particular genres of interaction. The notion of “scalable sociality” is also useful for our purposes, because it allows us to place the two media on a spectrum according to group size and degree of privacy. On this spectrum *Eye on Port* is close to the traditional broadcast (largest group, most public) while Berma WhatsApp is close to the private dyadic communication (smallest group, most private) (Miller et al 2016, 3-4). However, both platforms have elements of user interaction and are as such “social” media. The difference with respect to size and privacy (and perceptions thereof) influenced media user choices and hence the role of the media during COVID-19.

## **Theoretical Considerations**

The scalable sociality in combination with polymedia in the context of the array of media platforms in 2020 demands new understandings of media dependency not only as information channels mass communicated, but also as sites of user-driven conversations. Already in 1976, Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur developed what is still referred to as the Media Dependency Theory (MDT). However, the media landscape has radically changed since the 1970 regarding the availability of a multitude of media platforms, usages and users. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur focused on audience dependency on media information resources as a key interactive condition for the alteration of audience beliefs, behaviour or feelings, because of mass communicated information. We will include informational needs in our analysis, but our findings reflect conversational needs to a much larger extent. Therefore, we argue that the conversations on social media such as WhatsApp, significantly, contributed to keeping Tema Port in Ghana

operational during the COVID-19 lockdown in the spring of 2020. This reading supports the combination of MDT with more recent studies on media usage during a crisis, for instance, the arguments by Sellnow and Sellnow (2010) that risk and crisis communication theory needs to be expanded beyond a focus on linear dialogic communication.

Not least at times of crisis, the media may hold or withhold scarce and valuable information. Tai and Sun's (2007) work on the SARS epidemic in China in 2003 illuminated how the need for information escalates during times of crisis, especially when and where authorities are not forthcoming with information. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2012) report widespread public use of social media to extend and amplify government information during a crisis situation following a cyclone, something the authors found had a positive psychological effect on the affected communities. Simon et al. (2015) address the issue of information sharing from formal and informal sources among the general public. Of course, we may add this has been done by word of mouth predating any mass communication.

The use of social media as an easy and available medium makes it a desirable platform for exchanges under crises circumstances. Derani and Naidu (2016), Lindsay (2011) and Goolsby (2010) among others recognize social media and IT platforms as mediums that can be used as a gauge of audience needs and effectiveness of the response, especially in crises situations. A study by Simon et al. (2015) found that user-generated information on social media usually precedes official information; hence, emergency managers need to be proactive in using the same media to provide official information to the public. Similarly, social media has been vital in informing the public about COVID-19. However, users' various needs influence and are satisfied by different social media. Alexander (2014) found ten ways in which social media perform during times of crisis, disaster and emergencies. He differentiated between seven positive and three negative uses. In his interpretation the seven positive ways are: (1) listening to public debate, (2) monitoring situations, (3) extending emergency response and management, (4) crowd-sourcing and collaborative development, (5) creating social cohesion, (6) furthering causes (including charitable donation) and (7) enhancing research. The negative uses according to Alexander (2014) are: (1) disseminating rumours, (2) undermining authority and (3) promoting terrorist acts. The seven positive uses largely align with Whiting and Williams's (2013) list of ten uses and gratifications for using social media: social interaction, information seeking, passing of time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of opinion, information sharing and surveillance/knowledge about others as individual needs fulfilled on social media, which we find to match our findings closely. However, avoiding a priori distinction between positive and negative uses of social media during times of crisis, we have chosen to differentiate between informational and conversational needs, because this approach allows us to better understand user intentions and responses during the onset of an unexpected crisis situation. Rather than looking to identify examples of misinformation, we explore the roles and postures, which users assumed – as experts, gatekeeper and watchdogs among others – in order to ensure that the media would fulfil the functions they as users saw as essential. We argue that an important user need was to ensure that the available media platforms specific to the port remained as trustworthy as possible. Our emphasis on trust is in line with recent findings by Obrenovic et al. whose study of organizational sustainability during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic lead them to conclude that 'prosperous organizations meet the needs of stakeholders by leveraging Internet and Communication Technology (ICT) and by integrating intranet, social media, and

online communication platforms, as this helps to establish trust and build bonds with employees, stakeholders, and customers during and post-crisis' (2020: 1).

## **METHODS: INFORMATION AND CONVERSATION (USERS AND MEMES)**

Our empirical research at the port of Tema in Ghana in 2019–20 before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic identified two key media platforms, *Eye on Port* and *BERMA WhatsApp*. During interviews, a wide range of stakeholders working at the operational level of the port, Port Authority management representatives and professional *Eye on Port* contributors mentioned the two media platforms as particularly relevant information channels for users of Tema Port. Furthermore, as part of these empirical studies, we sought out and were granted access to the BERMA WhatsApp group. Data collection across these two different platforms required different approaches. While the public broadcast nature of *Eye on Port* made it easy to access archived shows and user responses on Facebook and YouTube, the data gathering on WhatsApp necessitated particular considerations from both methodological and ethical standpoints.

Methodologically, all online shared media imagery was saved on an ongoing basis and linked to the specific context of their postings through textual chat transcripts and researchers' field notes. In several cases, individual WhatsApp users clarified their intentions and contexts of particular posts, when contacted, resulting in a methodological approach that combines what Akemu and Abdelnour (2020) describe as engagements with digital technologies both as archives and as a process. The data contextualizing efforts helped enhance the quality of the subsequent coding beyond the immediate level of 'found' digital data (Hine 2011) by multi-situating the findings both online and offline (Beneito-Montagut 2011). As argued by Barbosa and Milan (2019), research within encrypted chat apps requires particular ethical sensitivities that go well beyond any one-stop checklist or research consent form. This important concern has in the present study been sought addressed through the analytical focus on the more abstracted significance of posted imagery as either informational or conversational content, both aimed towards a more general understanding of the importance of the media platform usage for the continued operation of Tema Port amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Thereby, this framing of the study avoids engagements with data on the level of identifiable individual users.

Understanding user responses on the two different platforms has called for two different analytical approaches. For *Eye on Port*, we identified and analysed user responses on the programme's Facebook page and watched the show focusing on the interactions with users. With the sharing of pictures being a large part of the communication in the WhatsApp group, we coded the iconographic material based on their primary communicative intent. This division was then broken down into subcategories depending on their common thematic or medial formats. This practice revealed several distinct clusters of images and videos that gave clues to the different symbolic practices that were instrumental in keeping work relations afloat. We coded communicative intent based on whether the image/video material was intended to convey a primarily informational or emotive message. Examples of primarily informational communication can be the sharing of general news, public policy responses to COVID-19, announcements of government addresses, port-related measures as well as documents and spreadsheets. Examples of primarily emotive communication were any type of image/video



intended to express an emotive engagement through for example the sharing of memes, religious or inspirational messages, as well as other conversational exchanges.

Many instances of iconographic communication certainly include both informational and emotive aspects. The sharing of COVID-19 case updates for example necessarily implies both a desire to pass on relevant information and signify predisposed sentiments behind a piece of information. As the analysis will show, users' emotive engagements were often provoked by informational content and vice versa. By interpreting the image/video material dichotomously based on their primary intention, the interplay between information and conversation became clear and we found that the distinction as shown in Figure 2 could be applied to other types of posts.

Figure 3 illustrates how the beginning of the lockdown, initially, brought about spikes in information followed a few days later by conversation.

The pie chart [figure 2] shows the distribution of the image material.

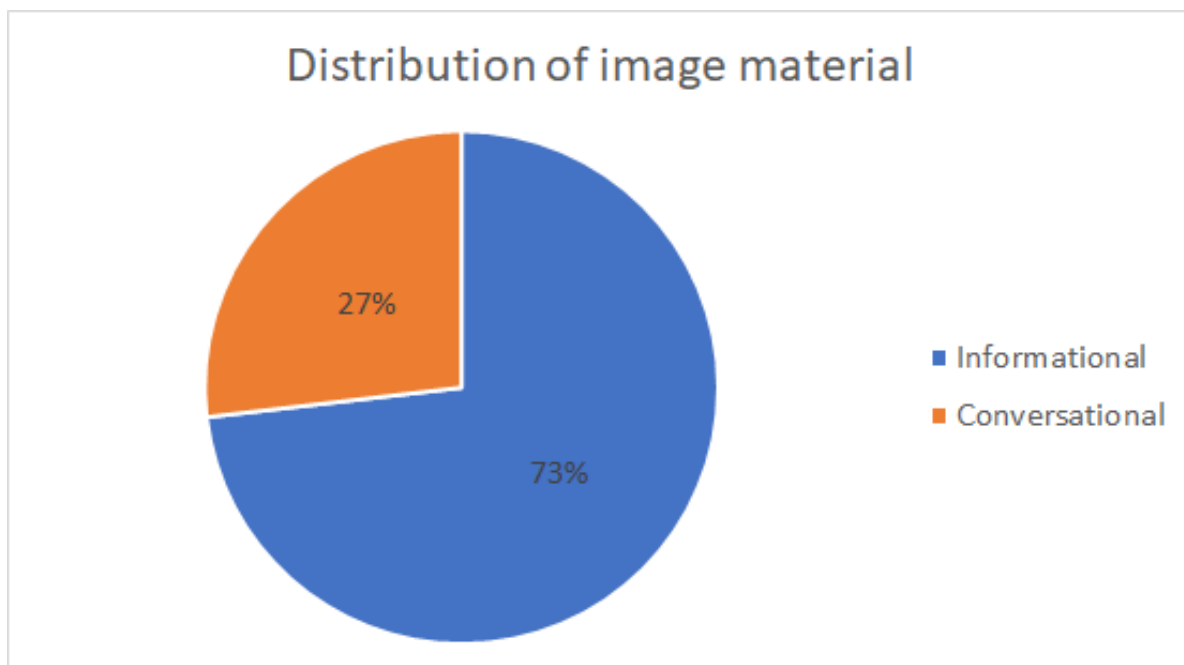
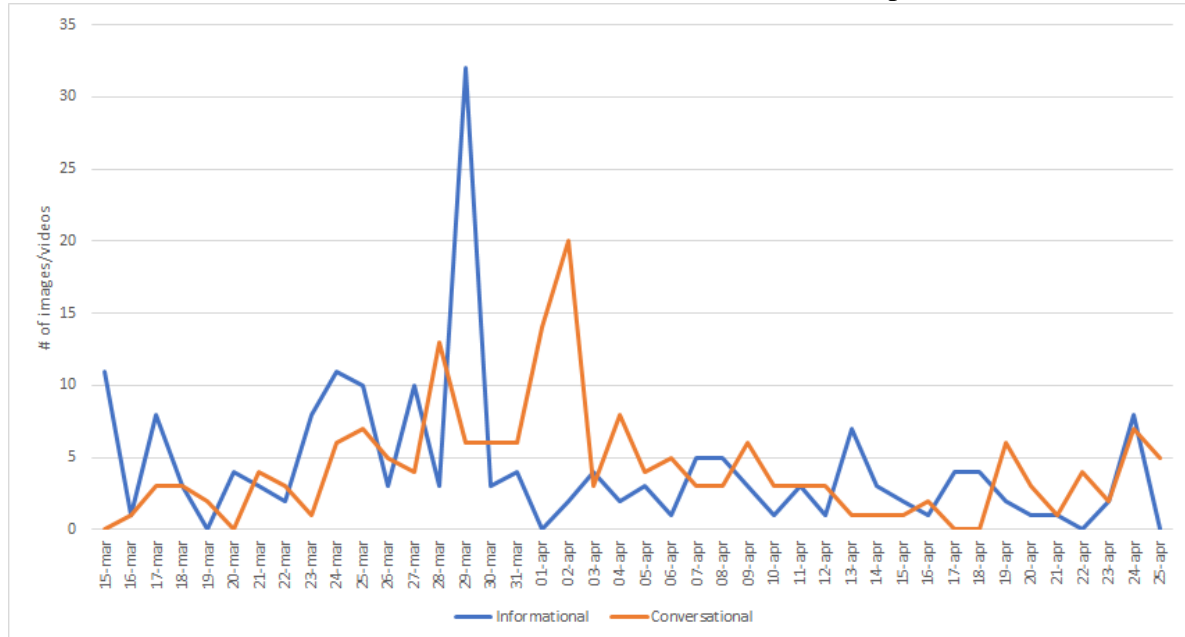


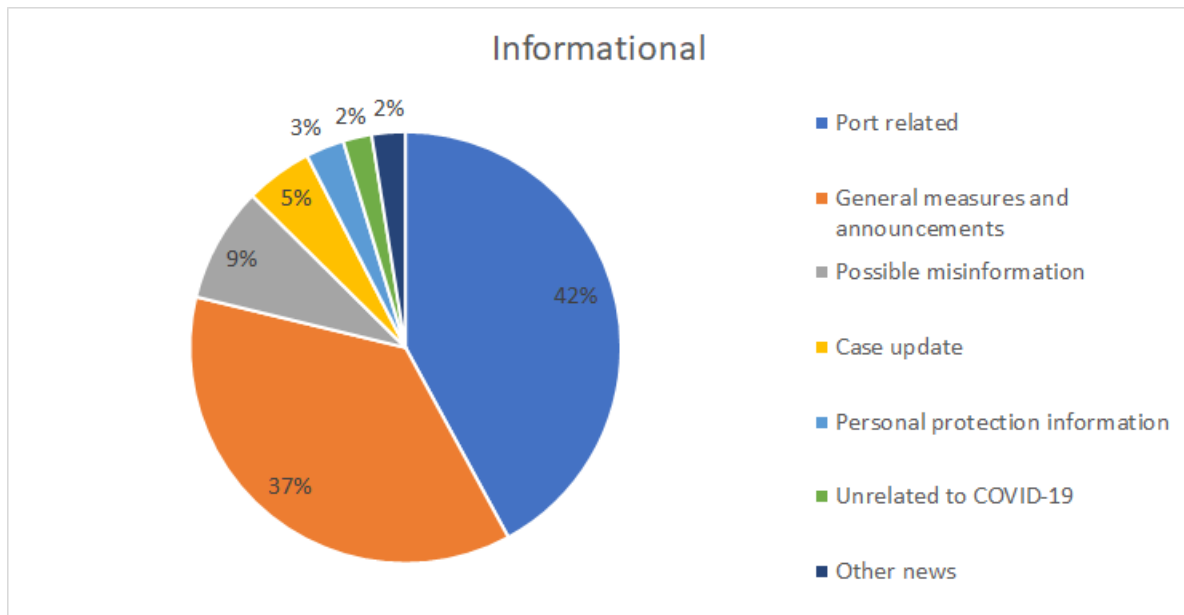
Figure 3 shows the distribution of informational and conversation images and videos from March 15 to April 25.



Initially, the users needed information about the rules and practicalities of the lockdown and after a few days locked down at home a surge of need for interaction with people outside the home brought a range of conversations reflecting various emotional needs.

### Information needs

The first live *Eye on Port* show on COVID-19 aired on YouTube 16 February 2020 informing about the pandemic as a global threat not yet in Ghana. The first mention of COVID-19 in the Facebook group appeared ten days earlier followed by another post on 12 February both with the stated aim of preventing the pandemic to reach Ghana through its ports, considering the image of the port as an important gateway to economic success, not to foreign threats. The initial attempts to prevent the disease from getting to Ghana intensified after the live show on 16 February. A Facebook post on 16 March 2020 mentioned the first suspected case on a vessel in the Port of Tema. From that point on, the posts and live shows focused on preventing further spread of the virus by re-posting official announcements to reduce all non-essential activity at the port, while still preserving the port operations necessary to keep the Ghanaian economy afloat. The live shows from 22 March 2020 were all information about how to continue ‘essential cargo services’ similar to information in other countries while restricting movements of persons, without unnecessarily endangering the Ghanaian population in general and the port workers in particular. *Eye on Port* at this period of time provided general information about access to the port, what measures were taken to contain the spread and ensure a safe environment. The port authority as the producer of the show displayed how they handled the situation, efficiently.



In the iconographic material posted on the WhatsApp group, almost half the images were directly related to practical matters of work at the port. indicates that the group was used as a horizontal informational channel, in order to convey important information urgently needed during the COVID-19 lockdown, such as what parts of the port are operational, who gets access clearance, and how to acquire safety passes. Other information related to the normal operation of port functions, such as schedules for berthing vessels –normally disseminated in the physical berthing meetings – also made their way into the group conversation, highlighting how the digital tool functioned to sustain routine activities (now online) during the crisis.

However, the WhatsApp group's informational capacity was not limited to act, merely, as a device for sustained collegial knowledge sharing. The iconographic material reveals how the forum functioned as a sort of digital town square, where users act as criers proclaiming official statements to their assembly. Such statements come in the form of, for example, announcing times for the broadcast of upcoming presidential addresses, what health and safety measures are being implemented by whom, as well as up-to-date numbers of new cases of infected, critically hospitalized and deceased Ghanaians with COVID-19. Other general and local public service announcements related to Coronavirus ranged from the most effective fabric for mask wear to symptom diagnosing, as well as 'cues' via infotainment posters and commercials. This sheds light on how top-down government directives, as well as national and international health and safety guidelines for combatting COVID-19, become re-mediated through unofficial channels before they are received by a target populace.

These conditions also seem to foment the spreading of misinformation, which take up a substantial amount of the source material. These include undocumented claims about the virus, miracle cures and misleading information about government addresses such as false dates, figures and implementations. It should be noted though that the underlying intent behind the sharing of this type of (mis-)information is not always clear, nor how an audience may react to it. Based on the conversational context it seems users of the WhatsApp group engaged with misinformation in more ways than just taking it at face value. Some shared with the intent of spreading awareness of its circulation to warn potential believers of its message, while others baulked at the occasionally outlandish claims, finding the content to have more humorous than informational value. The ambiguity of the informational content's intended purpose underscores the uncertainty of the

situation during COVID-19, and how the supply of an abundance of perspectives on COVID-19 influenced the demand for concrete and reassuring information.

### **Conversational needs**

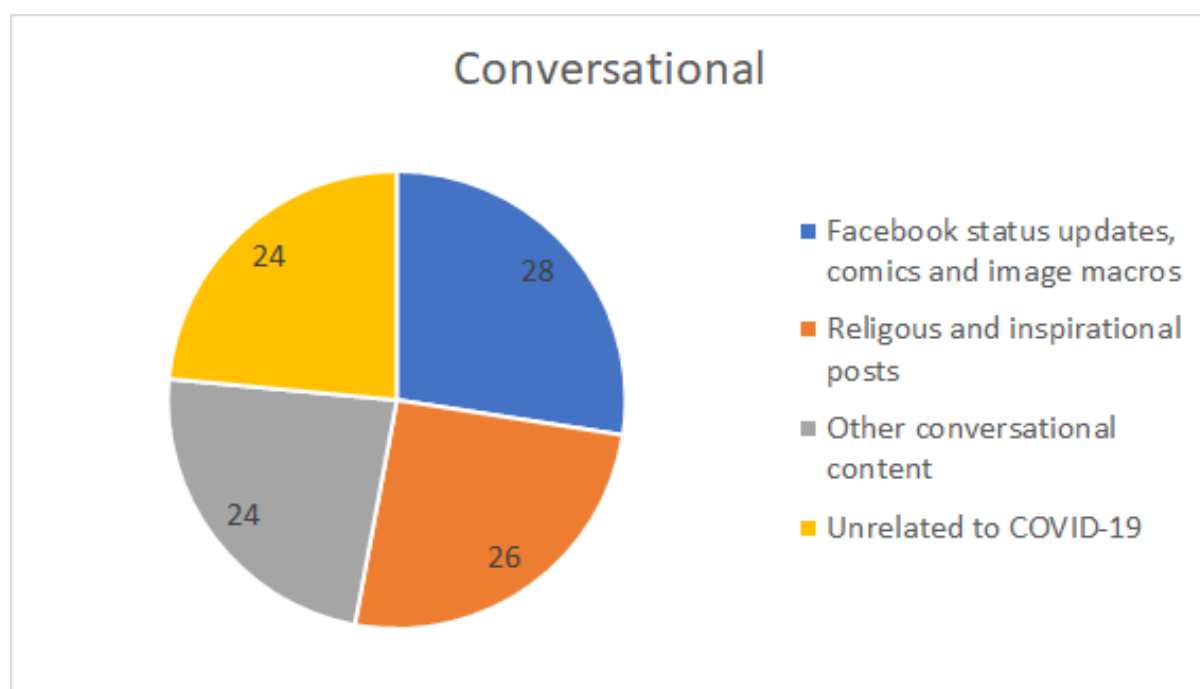
Users found and requested information on both platforms and often became a topic of conversation for various reasons. In the WhatsApp group information shared had sometimes been requested by a member and sometimes generated conversations about whether it was fake, useful or fit the purpose of the platform. At *Eye on Port*, the information given in the programmes, at times, generated questions and requests for clarification, answered in the Facebook group and during the call-in part of the programmes. As this section demonstrates, the conversations on both media platforms show an involved user group with clear needs for supportive engagement or for specific information that can ameliorate the crisis. *Eye on Port* included conversational elements besides negotiations between different stakeholder groups by offering the option for viewers to call-in during the show or to engage in a Facebook group dialogue. Conversations on *Eye on Port* took the form of panel discussions made up of key stakeholders responsible or concerned about how to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at the port. The conversations helped alter some of the port processes. The new procedures aimed for example to safeguard officials of the port operations department, Immigration Service, Port Health and Customs from contracting COVID-19 from a ship's crew. In normal port operations at the port, the pilots will be the first to meet the ship's crew, when they bring the ship in from anchorage. Followed immediately by Customs, Port Health and Immigration Service in no particular order to perform their statutory duties before cargo operations, discharging and loading of cargo, which involves a large number of stevedores and shipping agents. The idea generated from the *Eye on Port* panel discussion was to make the Port health go to the anchorage to test the ship's crew before calling the pilots to take the ship into the port. The alternative was for the pilots to go to the ship in full safety suits/gowns and PPEs to bring the ship in and thereafter, Port health can check and declare the ship safe for the other agencies to do their job and the cargo work to begin.

The conversations on *Eye on Port* sometimes focused or refocused attention on issues that hitherto had nothing to do with COVID-19 but had suddenly become imminent due to COVID-19. For example, in March, the conversation addressed (1) the role of state phytosanitary agencies in safeguarding the public from a disease like COVID-19 at the port of entry, (2) the issue of paperless port and the general use of technology resurfaced, when the government declared a lockdown and, subsequently, (3) the issue of demurrage payment, which is a charge paid to shipping lines for keeping your goods in their container beyond an agreed period. These are examples of national issues that pre-date COVID-19 that *Eye on Port's* COVID-19 discussions brought back into public debates.

In early March, when the conversation about COVID-19 centred around animal products, the Veterinary Service sought to convince the public that they had to be given a prominent role in inspecting imported animal products at the port to ensure the safety of the public. That seems to have gained the sympathy of some viewers who called in to the programme to express their dismay that the agency's work is delegated to a private company. By late March when the government locked down Accra and Kumasi, the conversation turned to the need for increased/rapid implementation of a paperless system and usage of technology in port transactions as the movement of people was restricted. In particular, due to the

lockdown, the call-in segment was awash with enquiries on how to access permits to enter the port (exempted to operate), how to get cargo into other parts of the country and how to transact business with the port and other service providers in the port. With the lack of knowledge about the transmission of the virus, a caller raised the issue of imported used clothes from western countries.

Conversations in the whatsapp group illustrated the self appointed roles of members as experts, watchdogs or gatekeepers. The experts posted advice on anything from how to deal with the crisis with a religious prayer to cautionary posts about the risks of the very flammable hand sanitizer. The watchdogs called attention to episodes of misconduct such as Kumasi soldiers' sometimes rather brutal handling of situations by posting videos recorded on their phones or forwarded to them from elsewhere. These instances of 'citizen journalism' emphasized how users employed the digital capacities of the WhatsApp group to document (and criticize) government



encroachment on normal civil society, using a forum relatively free of oversight. The gatekeepers objected when others posted political content in violation of the rules of BERMA on good conduct or if they determined that too many jokes obfuscated the posts with informational content essential for the members. The conversations were often negotiations of rights and access or coping strategies for emotional needs, including religious prayers and words of wisdom, sharing of purported COVID-19 miracle cures and safety measures, as well as what was considered trustworthy expert knowledge based on the information.

While the BERMA WhatsApp group does not have a formal written code of conduct, members frequently remind each other to keep the postings relevant to the maritime sector, and especially relevant to people working at the Port of Tema. Members especially frown upon posts of a political nature and commercial advertisements, whereas they welcome posts of a religious nature, if made with a tone of respect for the religion itself as well as for people of other beliefs. Humorous content constitutes a nebulous category, frequently posted and lauded by many, yet, sometimes chided by some as distracting from the intended maritime

focus of the group. Arguably, religion and humour both address emotional needs at a time of crisis.

The iconographic material also reveals an underlying political dimension in the WhatsApp group, which indicates how the users' 'no-politics' moderation principle is primarily limited to national politics. A portion of the shared images and videos explicitly draw critical attention to unequal power dimensions on an international level, which become more obvious under the COVID-19 situation. While praising traditional African culture and religiosity as a preferable alternative in dealing with COVID-19, expressions of critique range from opposition to using Africa as a potential 'testing-ground' for a COVID-19 vaccine, the environmental effects of halting modern production society during the lockdown, and the unintended pollution of facemasks, to criticizing the powerhouses of globalism to causing, exacerbating and succumbing to the virus on the grounds of their interconnected lifestyles.

The image material also reveals that a comparatively large part of the conversations was *not* about COVID-19. These took the form of birthday greetings, the sharing of funny internet videos, or entertaining riddles or puzzles, inviting users to participate in playful conversation. Such cases may suggest that the WhatsApp group fills a demand of emotive outlet, otherwise, neglected during a time of crisis, and how the group may act as a safe environment digitally disconnected to the anxieties of the physical world, where one can forget - if only for a moment - about the crisis at hand. The fact also suggests the apparent risk of conversation being cluttered with content irrelevant to the intended purposes of the group in providing communication during contingent circumstances. Instances occur where users point out that conversation is being sidetracked or that the forum is being abused to share inappropriate content. Such attempts of moderating underscores the continuous negotiations of purpose and how different demands interplay in forming a usable platform for engagement.

The conversational form reflects the need to negotiate what is right and wrong, what members have an obligation to share and what simply does not fit. Members have principally decided that politics are unacceptable, however, humour as unnecessary clutter or meeting an emotional need not least in a stressful period as during the COVID-19 lockdown is still up for debate. A meme as in Figure 6 illustrates the positions in the debate: maturity and foolishness – which will keep you healthy during a crisis? One or the other – or allowing for both? The majority of the WhatsApp group users seem to endorse humour as an integral part of the shared community.

Most memes intend to inspire reflection with the use of humour. The meme in Figure 7 reflects a frustration across the African continent of being at a disadvantage in meeting the challenges of the pandemic. The openness of

**During this lockdown,  
don't let depression  
kill you because of  
"Maturity". When we  
are fooling, take part.**

(Image posted to BERMA WhatsApp chat on April 2nd, 2020)

Imagine getting killed by an overseas  
virus when you don't even have a  
passport.



(Image posted to BERMA WhatsApp chat on March 21st, 2020)

interpretability of an image, such as one of a man sitting and contemplating, is often what makes an image a good meme. It invites viewers to participate in ascribing meaning to the

image, to caption it with an appropriate text that reorients the image around new meanings, underscoring what Shifman (2014: 89) describes as spreading the notion of participatory culture itself. The meme also exemplifies the political opportunities that memes provide. Memes can be a way of asserting political influence in a bottom-up manner (Shifman 2014: 150). The juxtaposition of exclusion from global participation while still affected by an international calamity such as COVID-19 is a social critique mimetically embodied in the image of the contemplative man. The meme thus emphasizes the ‘glocalized’ aspects of memetic participation in the WhatsApp group (Shifman 2014: 154). The image lends itself to a multitude of interpretations based on the global practice of memetic participation, while at the same time blending with the local context when re-appropriated to express particular Ghanaian concerns towards COVID-19. This draws its inspiration from an international discourse on the relations and inequalities between the global South and North.

The style of the conversation differs to some extent between the two platforms, where conversations in *Eye on Port* often appear as clarifications about how the port operates during the pandemic and to some extent also as negotiations with authorities about access and rights. Whereas the insider group conversational style of WhatsApp allows for negotiations with and objections to the self-identified experts, watchdogs and gatekeepers, by calling out fake news and cautioning that humour serves an important role as a way to get through the crisis.

## **Conclusion**

Both platforms provided significant spaces for negotiations between users and media but in different ways. ‘Scalable sociality’ helps us make sense of these differences. *Eye on Port* with its large group size and a small degree of privacy is close to the traditional broadcast format providing authorized information with a relatively clearly defined sender. However, Facebook commentaries and call-in sessions in the programme facilitated some degree of exchange and allowed users to express their informational needs. As a small group with a high degree of privacy, the BERMA WhatsApp is in the other end of the spectrum providing users with a different set of options. In this forum, the conversational elements allowed for emotional responses to the pandemic as shown in the examples with the use of memes. During the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the two platforms reflected media dependency during a crisis and functioned as polymedia with complementary niches and appear to have played important roles during the period of study. Both catered to specific urgent needs among their users, yet each platform alone could not facilitate all the communicative needs required in order to keep Tema Port afloat.

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