Advocacy and civic engagement in protest discourse on Twitter: An examination of Ghana's #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns

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Abstract

This paper examines tweets produced by Occupy Ghana during their #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns. It sheds light on how activist discourses are most persuasively narrativized when they capitalize on local sentiment and language features characteristic of local communities and audiences. The findings reveal three mechanisms employed in the tweets: constructing the Ghanaian government as insensitive, representing Ghanaians as the suffering masses, and exploiting stance for sociopolitical objectives. The paper highlights the synergy between social movement theory and social media critical discourse studies.

Keywords: social media, critical discourse analysis, identity and solidarity, online activism, social movement

Introduction

In addition to networking, sharing, and advertising, social media sites function as a tool for activism.[1] Online activism is marked by ideological constructions of group identity, the negotiation of solidarity, and the articulation of dissent. It has centered on issues including gender, racism, Islamophobia, and political accountability. Protest discourse has been used by pressure groups and social movements to demand change, indicating how social media empower and transform everyday discourses into opportunities to confront undesirable systems and/or the status quo.[2] In this study, I examine the online campaign of a pressure movement in Ghana (Occupy Ghana) to shed light on how the linguistic choices and decisions made by activists were conditioned by the Ghanaian sociocultural context, thereby illustrating how culture-specific politics shapes language and how sociopolitical language can take on the unique linguistic

properties of the cultural contexts in which it is conceived. Focusing on the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns on Twitter, I highlight the discursive strategies employed by activists to hold the Ghanaian government accountable and advocate for reforms. I discuss the tweets produced by Occupy Ghana as a persuasive communicative practice and an emancipatory discourse aimed at effecting social transformation. The paper highlights the view that although the leaders of the movement mobilized support on social media to advance their cause, their physical protest complemented their digital activism and strengthened their advocacy. Therefore, I argue that social media campaigns and digital activism can be fruitful if they are followed up by practical offline actions, the absence of which can result in slacktivism—supporting a cause by performing simple measures without being truly engaged or devoted to making a change.

Research on digital activism

Activist or protest discourses on social media and the discursive contentions that manifest on such platforms have received ample attention in media and critical cultural studies scholarship. Such research, often focused on nondominant groups, has highlighted discourses of repression, discrimination, exclusion and prejudice, as well as how social groups construct their own identity and resist hegemonic discourses directed against them. For example, Dhiraj Murthy's edited collection of essays explores the relationship between media activism and organizational communication to illustrate "how social media are not only shaping social movements, advocacy and activism from the point of view of organizational communication, but also changing ways in which activists and social movement organizations interact with each other."[3] Other studies have focused on the tent protest in Israel,[4] feminist social movements,[5] Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement,[6] protest hashtags in Saudi Arabia,[7] the Arab Spring,[8] and

how the rise of social media affects the temporal relations of protest communication and protestors' efforts to gain public legitimacy.[9]

This scholarship illustrates how social media and digital platforms can be framed as political instruments or protest tools that assist social movements and pressure groups with the recruitment, mobilization, organization and dissemination of information to protesters. This body of knowledge also reveals various rhetorical devices used in digital activism to construct multiple identities, resistance discourses, and solidarity formations for group empowerment and to foreground the voice and agency of protesters. These linguistic resources include modality, superlatives, pronoun use, temporal referencing, category-pairings, positive/negative presentation, intertextuality and interdiscursivity, metaphor and metonymy, insinuation and presupposition, recontextualization, (re)framing, agenda setting, and cultural models.

In Africa, a number of studies have discussed how social media is transforming political engagement on the continent. Maggie Dwyer and Thomas Molony explore the historical, political and social context of social media platforms in various African countries, including Kenya, Somalia, Zimbabwe and Tanzania, and highlight the profound effects of cyberactivism, cybercrime, state policing and surveillance on political participation.[10] Their book demonstrates that social media often reinforces existing power dynamics, rather than challenges them. Bruce Mutsvairo's collection of essays investigates digital activism in particular, probing the potentiality and ability of new media to drive online-based civil action across Africa using empirical case studies such as the #FeesMustFall and #BringBackOurGirls campaigns in South Africa and Nigeria respectively.[11] His collection focuses on political engagements in mediated online communities, civic activism in the African blogsphere, and gender and LGTB movements online. Mutsvairo's work theorizes digital activism within social and geopolitical realms and

illustrates how activists use social networking sites to negotiate and push for reform-based sociopolitical changes in Africa.

Apart from the two edited volumes mentioned above, other studies on online activism in Africa have discussed the use of "nano-media" (i.e. performances such as dance, poetry, murals and political theatre) in social movement activism in South Africa,[12] student protests in South Africa,[13] social media soft power in Nigeria and Kenya,[14] women and election activism in Uganda,[15] cyber-protests in Zimbabwe,[16] and the use of social media as a new source of empowerment in Algeria.[17] The studies above on the dynamics of digital activism in Africa notwithstanding, there is a need for further research in this area as the African context, compared to other settings, remains underexplored in the literature. In addition, aside from studies that examined the #BringBackOurGirls campaign in Nigeria, most papers concentrated on issues in Eastern and Southern Africa. Hence, by analysing tweets produced by Occupy Ghana, a pressure movement in West Africa, the present study extends the scope of work on digital activism in Africa.

The use of social media in Ghana

There are approximately 6 million social media users in Ghana. WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube are the three dominant social media platforms, while Instagram and Twitter have emerged as platforms that are gradually gaining popularity. The majority of users are the youth, educated individuals, and persons who belong to the middle class and above. Men also outnumber women in the usage of these social media platforms.[18] As a tool for political mobilization, social media have largely been used by Ghanaian political parties to complement their traditional communication channels, especially in the 2012, 2016, and 2020 general elections. They have used these platforms for purposes such as communicating their party

policies and positions on key socioeconomic and governance issues, discussing and soliciting people's opinions, mobilizing support and membership for their parties, and raising funds.[19] The use of social media for online activism in Ghana is an emerging trend and the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns analyzed in this study represent some of the first online protests in the country. Other campaigns after these two include #DumsorMustStop, #DropThatChamber, #HijabIsAnIdentity, #SaveTheGHMovieIndustry, and #FixTheCountry.

The two campaigns examined in this paper aimed at mounting pressure on the government to tackle corruption, infrastructure decay, the worsening economy, deteriorating social conditions, the depreciation of the cedi, and the shortage of fuel. The #OccupyFlagstaffHouse campaign was the first to be launched on Facebook and Twitter on June 28, 2014, and within four days led to a demonstration at the Efua Sutherland Children's Park in Ghana's capital and picketing at the Flagstaff House, Ghana's presidential palace or seat of government. Ten days after the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse demonstration, the organizers launched another campaign called "The Red Campaign" (#RedFriday) aimed at compelling the government to address the issues raised in the twenty-point petition submitted during their first demonstration. This second campaign encouraged Ghanaians to wear red on Fridays as a way of indicating solidarity with the campaign, and to post photos and videos of themselves on Facebook and Twitter using the hashtags #RedFriday and #OccupyFlagstaffHouse. The #RedFriday campaign sought to promote greater citizen participation in governance—using social media as a primary outreach vehicle—in a conscious effort to influence public decisions and governmental policy. The views expressed by the protesters and their campaign for positive social change on Twitter via the abovementioned hashtags, constituting an expression of social and political tensions arising from shared interests and opinions, are analyzed in this paper as an

instance of online protest discourse that realizes sociopolitical objectives of advocacy and civic engagement.

Framework

This study is based on social movement theory, which delineates how and why people mobilize themselves for sociopolitical action as well as the resultant effect of such action. A social movement refers to "a social process through which collective actors articulate their interests, voice grievances and critiques, and propose solutions to identified problems by engaging in a variety of collective actions."[20] It thus seeks to explain why social mobilization occurs, the forms under which it manifests, as well as the potential social, cultural, and political implications it holds. Social movements are characterized by three features: (1) they have clearly defined opponents with whom they have a conflictual relationship, (2) they are organized via various structures and networks, and (3) they are aimed at group solidarity and developing, sustaining, and sharing collective identities. To social movement theorists, protests can be viewed as "politics by other means,"[21] thereby enabling social movements to reject (political) systems and states of affairs they consider to be undesirable and demand change. Research on the actions and outcomes of social movements has demonstrated how such groups have functioned to protect the interests of minority and marginalized groups.[22] This literature has also highlighted how social media have contributed to the activities and spread of social movements as well as how the combination of traditional and digital media enhances the expression of public opinion and empowers ordinary people to shape society through advocacy, civic engagement and political participation.

The importance of social movements notwithstanding, Carlos Domínguez contends that the development and life span of a social movement depends on the extent to which "the

dialogical relation between collective discourses and processes of identity formation at the micro-sociological level is allowed or hampered by other contextual and organizational variables."[23] Recent work on social movement discourses and theories has started to examine issues outside western contexts, with a focus on regions such as Africa, Asia and Latin America, where social protests, demonstrations and revolutions are beginning to occur frequently. The present paper contributes to this line of research by analyzing tweets produced by Occupy Ghana, a social-cum-pressure movement in Ghana, during their #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns aimed at holding the Ghanaian government accountable and effecting societal transformation.

The social movement theory adopted in this study is combined with a social media critical discourse studies approach (SM-CDS).[24] Although SM-CDS draws on insights from scholarship in digital media and technology research, the central object of analysis is discourse (not the technology). Hence, in addition to what happens in the media, SM-CDS is interested in how issues shape and influence the sociopolitical sphere of our life/world and vice-versa. That is, digital performances of identity, solidarity, conflict, advocacy, and misogyny, among others, must be interpreted within a sociocultural context that embeds the digital mediation. The underlying assumption of SM-CDS is that meanings are negotiated at the intersection of individuals, culture and media technology in view of which digital critical discourse studies explore both micro-communicative patterns and macro-discursive structures that constitute culture. The incorporation of social movement theory with an SM-CDS approach enables a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the contextual creation and interpretation of meaning on social media (here, in terms of how protesters represent themselves, their (perceived) opponents, and the system, policy, or concept they are fighting against).

Data

      The data for this study is comprised of tweets produced by and/or interactions involving the Twitter account of OccupyGhana Official before, during and after the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns. The name of the Twitter handle is @occupyGh. The sample spans twelve months of activity, from June 28, 2014 to June 30, 2015. The period was selected by identifying the date the Occupy Ghana movement was launched on Facebook and Twitter to mobilize support for the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse campaign. The online activism, as already indicated, led to an offline protest on July 1, 2014 and the launch of another campaign named #RedFriday. Interactions involving the OccupyGhana Official account within twelve months of the protest were collected because the activities of the group in relation to their two campaigns were intense during this period. A total of 1015 tweets that directly discussed the two campaigns were downloaded and numbered TWT 1 to TWI 1015, with 'TWT' referring to 'Tweet.' Apart from #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday, other hashtags that accompanied the tweets collected include #Occupy, #OccupyGhana, #GhanaMustWorkAgain and #GhanaCanWorkAgain. The tweets covered topics such as corruption, infrastructure, social amenities, energy and the economy, highlighting the main concerns of the protesters, their position on the state of affairs in Ghana (which forms the basis for their activism) and, more importantly, their request for the government to quickly address their concerns. It is important to state that the tweets were produced in English. Although Ghana is a multilingual country with over 60 languages, such multilingualism is prevalent in spoken interactions, rare in written discourses, and entirely absent in computer-mediated interactions or on social media where English, the country's official language, serves as a lingua franca. Although the use of English in Ghana is combined with local languages in various contexts, this is not the case on Twitter

except on few occasions when a word in a local language may be cited to make a point. Additionally, given that Ghanaian Twitter is generally considered an "elite" platform, the use of English is invariably the norm, making it necessary for the organizers of the protest to combine their online activities with offline actions such as visits to local radio and television stations to galvanize more support for the protest. The primary data collected were complemented by interviews with two leaders of Occupy Ghana to understand the dynamics of the group's operations, my observation of Occupy Ghana's activities based on my positionality as a Ghanaian and an active user of Twitter, as well as my understanding of the Ghanaian sociocultural context.

Findings and discussion

The analysis revealed three mechanisms utilized in the tweets to promote the objectives of the protesters and to put pressure on the government to tackle the issues responsible for the debilitating economic situation. Through these strategies, the tweets perform a dual function of social activism in the form of promoting critical awareness and preparing the ground for an offline demonstration. This latter function is particularly important given that some social media campaigns and digital activism have been found to end up as mere slacktivism.[25]

Constructing the Ghanaian government as insensitive

Based on an "us versus them" discourse that influences "the myriad of opinions and attitudes We have about Them in more specific social domains,"[26] the tweeters represent the Ghanaian government as an uncaring administration that shows little to no concern for the plight of Ghanaians. They perceive the state of affairs as a "crisis" the government seems to be downplaying, and thus set out to use the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns to

compel the government to find lasting solutions to their grievances and treat their concerns as a matter of urgency. Tweets that served this purpose have been listed below and they constituted about 37 percent of the entire dataset.

TWT 31. The government has been slow to respond to our #OccupyFlagstaffHouse petition. The cedi hasn't fared better. The economy isn't better.

TWT 36. The reason this government is not getting citizen support is that they deny what the real effects of their lack of ideas is on the masses.

TWT 59. When we started #OccupyFlagStaffHouse, they said we didn't have the numbers. We only stirred the waters for what was to come. #TUCDemo

TWT 307. #RedFriday because our Government needs to be sensitive to the needs of Ghanaians.

TWT 308. #RedFriday because our Government needs to think about the implications of its decisions on the wellbeing of Ghanaians.

TWT 309. #RedFriday cos we want our Gov to wake up and empathize with Ghanaian workers struggling to take care of themselves and their families.

In these tweets, the protesters, via a referential strategy realized by noun phrases such as "the government," "this government," "our government" and "they," explicitly identify the entity they consider to be responsible for their predicament. The use of deictic designators such as "our" and "they" infers that the tweeters consider the government as an "enemy"—an entity or a system that is hostile to them. Having established the government as the cause of their woes, a predicational strategy is employed to highlight specific negative attributes and activities of the government, thereby giving the officials in government a pejorative evaluation. This unfavourable characterization is evident in verb phrases such as "has been slow to respond," "is not getting citizen support," "deny what the real effects of their lack of ideas is," and "said we didn't have the numbers." It can be deduced from these predications that the government is depicted as a non-listening administration, one that is out of touch with reality and one that the

masses do not have confidence in. Such framing legitimizes the protest discourse produced since it implies that protests are, perhaps, the best way to communicate with the government or the government only understands the language of civil revolt.

In the months leading up to the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns, Ghana experienced a deteriorating economic situation and governance. This could be seen in the depreciation of the cedi against major world currencies, limited access to water and healthcare, rising levels of unemployment and worsening inequality, utility price hikes and lack of energy for both domestic and commercial purposes.). The situation came to a head when the government announced the introduction of new taxes since the expectation was that the government would be sensitive and consider the challenges posed by the economy. Given the government's position on the new taxes, the organizers of the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns believed that the government was either insensitive or clueless about how to deal with the challenges. In an interview, a leading member of Occupy Ghana noted the thoughtlessness of the government in sending a three million dollars appearance fee in cash to the Black Stars, the senior national men's football team, ahead of their last World Cup game, an incident that was telecast live on national television in Brazil where the World Cup was taking place. The general sentiment after this incident was that the government did not care about the citizenry, leading to outrage on radio, television, and social media. The organizers of the protest capitalized on the mood of the country and the negative international attention the country was receiving to launch the protest.

The portrayal of the government as insensitive and clueless is evident in the tweets via expressions such as "our Government needs to be sensitive to the needs of Ghanaians," "our Government needs to think about the implications of its decisions on the wellbeing of Ghanaians," and "our Gov [needs] to wake up and empathize with Ghanaian workers." This

negative presentation can be analyzed as the use of descriptor designators to categorize social actors (here, all the people in government and the president in particular).[27] Such categorization has a powerful persuasive effect because it carries with it both a descriptive function that describes the types of people and an ascriptive function that foregrounds how the people described are likely to behave in the future, thereby weakening or negating any explanations and/or justifications (to be) provided by the people who have been categorized. The protesters' reference to the insensitivity of the government came to the fore more forcefully when on the evening of their demonstration the minister for foreign affairs and regional integration tweeted that "their social media campaign was much more effective than the actual turnout".[28] Such enunciation not only gave the protesters an opportunity to reiterate their position, but also contributed to the launch of the #RedFriday movement ten days after the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse campaign with the aim of putting more pressure on the government to address the concerns raised in the first campaign.

The construction of the Ghanaian government as insensitive is reinforced using metaphor as the following tweets demonstrate.

TWT 83. "You can't wake a person who is pretending to be asleep." - Navajo Proverb #OccupyGhana

TWT 150. We took a breather after #OccupyFlagStaffHouse because we expected them to find urgent answers. They're still sleeping. #redFriday

TWT 151. Our nation needs to be treated like an emergency case and not the Out-Patient case the government takes it for. No Urgency. #redFriday

TWT 186. The opposition have not kept the govt on their feet. They have been busy preparing for elections while the food burns. #OccupyFlagStaffHouse

Metaphors constitute an important rhetorical resource for persuasion and argumentation owing to their power of appeal deriving from exaggeration and ideological presentation.[29] They are not just about renaming; more importantly, they entail a reconceptualization of issues in a manner that corresponds with specific aims or intentions.[30] To foreground the insensitivity and irresponsibility of the government, the sleep metaphor is used in the tweets above, and a health/hospital metaphor is employed to emphasize the seriousness and gravity of the worsening economic situation. In addition to highlighting the uncaring posture of the government, these metaphors enable the protesters to construct themselves as the ones to wake the government up from slumber, thereby realizing an instance of positive self-presentation. The comparison of the government to a person who is pretending to be asleep and the comparison of the country's economic situation to an emergency case also serve to highlight the deceitful nature of the government and the urgency of the situation at hand.

In most Ghanaian cultures, including the Gãs, Akans and Ewes, "sleep" can be used as a euphemism for death;[31] hence, the description of the government as being asleep can also be analysed as the use of hyperbole for ideological purposes, thereby intensifying the uncaring posture constructed for the government. Further, the use of the metaphors can be interpreted as a legitimation strategy that seeks to justify the actions of the protesters, implying that their grievances warrant an appropriate and immediate response or else the country would be plunged into the doldrums.[32] By combining the metaphorical expressions with the intertextual reference to a Navajo proverb in TWT 83, the message communicated is strengthened and the negligence of the opposition party in terms of abdication of their duties is brought to the fore. The latter point is instructive because it suggests that the dereliction of responsibility by the opposition party, whose duty it is to keep the government in check, makes the campaigns of the protesters

extremely significant. That is, unlike the opposition, the protesters claim that they have not shirked their civic responsibility of working to make a difference in the life of their nation. Although non-Ghanaian, this Navajo proverb helps to highlight the insensitivity of the government, thereby indicating how protest discourses can draw on any resource, be it local or non-local, to achieve the objective of sociopolitical mobilization and participation. Given the importance of proverbs in Ghanaian languages such as Gã, Akan and Ewe, the use of a proverb as a form of intertextual reference will serve to underline the wisdom or even the truth in the tweet and by extension the legitimacy of the protest. This shows how conceptual traditions, including idioms, proverbs and other culturally important discursive traditions, inform sociopolitical interactions, even on a virtual platform.

Representing Ghanaians as the suffering masses

Positioning themselves as the voice of the people, the protesters construct Ghanaians as a people suffering due to poor leadership, bad governance, and mismanagement of the economy. Constituting approximately 39 percent of the tweets analysed, this representation echoes the findings of previous research on activist discourses, which show that protesters invariably consider their circumstances to be unfavourable and unacceptable.[33] Owing to this assessment of perceived victimization and feeling threatened, they mobilize themselves for sociopolitical action often using language in direct rejection of their perceived oppression. The tweets below illustrate the protesters' construction of themselves as the suffering masses due to failed governance.

TWT 247. #RedFriday because we are all living under increasingly harsh conditions and with IMF, we are likely to have worsened living conditions.

TWT 248. #RedFriday because workers face rapidly declining real wages due to the depreciation of the currency and, increasing inflation.

TWT 253. #RedFriday because we want to remind our President that he promised us a better Ghana.

TWT 309. #RedFriday because prevailing economic and social conditions in the country are bad.

TWT 310. #RedFriday because Ghanaians can't afford the increases in water, electricity, fuel and transportation on top of the already high cost of living.

TWT 314. #RedFriday because we want our Government to wake up and see that Ghanaians are struggling to take care of themselves and their families

These tweets illustrate that the protesters feel oppressed by their deteriorating economic situation, and they perceive that their unpleasant circumstances are unlikely to change. There is therefore a need for them to muster courage to effect change by "their own means or with the help of others to attain a certain state of happiness."[34] Using expressions such as "dire economic conditions," "worsened living conditions," "increasingly harsh conditions" and "declining wages," the tweeters frame the people of Ghana as victims of an irresponsible government; hence, the need to "remind our president that he promised us a better Ghana" (TWT 253). The vulnerability of Ghanaians, the desperate nature of their situation and the view that they are suffering all manner of unpleasant experiences can be extrapolated from the following rhetorical question: "What crime of ours has willed upon us such clueless on one side and then lawless politicians on the other in this crucial time of our lives?" (TWT 28). This expression of frustration points to a feeling of misery and despair being experienced by Ghanaians, and lends credence to the position that the construction of a crisis situation is pivotal to protest discourse such as language use in outright rejection of perceived victimization and suppression, denial or violation of rights and marginalization.[35] As already stated, the use of descriptor designators such as "clueless" and "lawless" in reference to government officials realizes a membership categorization strategy that legitimizes the ideological stance of the protesters. In this instance, the use of these epithets intensifies the victimhood-cum-suffering status the protesters construct

for themselves and Ghanaians in general as it exclusively attributes the people's predicament, perhaps exaggeratedly, to "clueless" and "lawless" politicians.

The use of the color red in #RedFriday embodies the idea of suffering and is instructive given its sociocultural implication. In Ghanaian color symbolism dating back to the socialist and post-socialist history of Ghana, red represents sacrificial rites, bloodshed and death; hence the wearing of red cloth at funerals and wakes. The red color also captures pensive or serious spiritual and political moods—for instance, the red color of the national flag of Ghana signifies the blood of people who led the struggle of independence and shared their blood through death.[36] Hence, the use of #RedFriday can be analyzed as a strategic choice by Occupy Ghana to negotiate meaning at the intersection of individuals, culture and media technology in order to achieve their sociopolitical goals. Importantly, #RedFriday was not only used linguistically on Twitter, but also practically as protesters wore red outfits, armbands, accessories, and headgear to work and posted their photos on Twitter. Additionally, red artifacts, murals and other artistic works were shared on social media. Altogether, this "performance" helped Occupy Ghana to publicize their activism and offers insights into their framing process as a social movement. Further to the point that activist discourses are shaped by sociocultural context, one of the leaders of Occupy Ghana recounted that the decision to use Friday stemmed from their research that there was more attention on Ghanaian Twitter that day. He added that because people are allowed to dress casually and wear T-shirts to work on Fridays in Ghana, it aligned with their strategy to ask supporters to wear red T-shirts and post their photos on Twitter.[37]

The idea of suffering expressed by the protesters is strengthened by their identification of decline in various sectors of the country. This points to an ailing economy and further highlights the predicament of the protesters as the tweets below show.

TWT 91. We need a clue about oil. If we produce it, we shd refine it. If we refine it, we should never have to queue for it. #OccupyFlagStaffHouse

TWT 93. We need a clue about our mines. No place in Ghana looks like we have mined gold here for 100yrs. Not less diamond & co #OccupyFlagStaffHouse

TWT 94. We need a clue about healthcare. Because really, we will enjoy today's clue when we are the old men and women who are covered by insurance!

TWT 95. We need a clue about water. In 2050, our kids should not be carrying buckets on their heads, gallons in their hands. #OccupyFlagStaffHouse

TWT 96. We need a clue about our educational future. Our kids should be smarter at 10yrs than we were at 12. Only then is progress. #OccupyFlagStaff

TWT 97. We need a clue about our country's energy future. If we suffer dumsɔ & leave it as an inheritance for our kids too, we failed. #OccupyGhana

TWT 110. What have happened to all those plans to fixing the rail sector? We don't seem to have a plan for anything in #Ghana. #occupyGhana

The tweets, some of which exploit hyperbole for ideological purposes, give an impression of a crisis by suggesting that nearly all key sectors of the nation, including oil and gas, healthcare, education, transportation, energy, minerals, and water resources, have been mismanaged. Thus, the message communicated is one that borders on a national disaster, especially given the use of the refrain "We need a clue," which implies that the government, at the present time, does not have a clue. This idea is amplified by the rhetorical question "What have happened to all those plans to fixing …" (TWT 110), giving an indication of purposelessness, a lack of focus and direction, and a nation without leadership. Since ordinary people are the ones to bear the brunt of this national tragedy, the discursive positioning of the people of Ghana as the suffering masses is given legitimacy, and the stance of the protesters on the need for the government to act swiftly in remedying the situation is foregrounded. The

exaggerated use of language in the tweets above, as already noted, functions as an intensification strategy that serves the purpose of recruiting support and galvanizing the masses for sociopolitical action. Such instantiation reinforces the analysis of metaphorical structures in the previous section (for example, "Our nation needs to be treated like an emergency case and not the Out-Patient case the government takes it for" (TWT 151), and demonstrates that the campaigners expect decisive interventions and drastic changes.

Despite portraying Ghanaians as the suffering masses and victims of failed leadership, the protesters convey a message of hope and inspiration, arguing that while "a clueless government is a threat to a country's progress, a clueless citizenry is worse" (TWT 100). This means that they can take their future in their own hands by, as the tweets below show, advocating the transformed society they desire.

TWT 104. We rise! We occupy!

TWT 105. "Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise." - Victor Hugo, Les Misérables

TWT 106. "People do not lack strength; they lack will." - Victor Hugo

TWT 108. "Life, misfortune, isolation, abandonment and poverty are battlefields which have their heroes" - Victor Hugo

TWT 109. "For man's greatest actions are performed in minor struggles." - Victor Hugo

TWT 210. While we agitate for a change in leadership response, let's keep looking on the bright side. This decline won't last forever.

Drawing mainly on intertextuality evidenced by reference to motivational quotes, these tweets evaluate the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns as a worthwhile goal, implying a necessary social effort, personal sacrifice and temporary suffering towards its attainment. The desirable destination and the worthiness of the hopes and aspirations of the protesters notwithstanding, movement towards their objective is difficult and requires some form

of sacrifice in the short-term in order to prevail against opposition. This conceptualization gives meaning to the difficulties to be encountered in pursuit of the noble goal of a transformed Ghanaian society, and it helps the protesters make sense of their experiences. Additionally, such an evaluation arouses positive emotions, increases the morale of the protesters, and rallies their support for the task at hand. The representation of Ghanaians as the suffering masses can be viewed as a double-edged mechanism that not only heightens the construction of a crisis situation for ideological purposes, but also provides the impetus for advocacy and civic engagement. Since motivational messages are a common feature of everyday interactions in Ghana and are thus common in sermons, on radio and television programs, and at social events, the consistent use of inspirational quotes in the tweets above is intended to whip up enthusiasm and reinforce the view that "Ghanaians must keep looking on the bright side [because] this decline won't last forever" (TWT 210). Yet again, a non-Ghanaian discourse evidenced by the reference to Victor Hugo is used to motivate the masses in order to stimulate action on their part. This reinforces the point already made that protest discourses can draw on any resource to achieve the objective of sociopolitical mobilization and participation.

Exploiting stance for sociopolitical objectives

Referring to "the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes, feelings, judgements or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message,"[38] stance gives an indication of how writers present themselves and communicate their opinions and commitment. Thus, stance enables writers to position themselves in relation to others and to "stamp their personal authority onto their arguments or step back and disguise their involvement."[39] The use of stance in the form of "evidentiality," "affect" and "presence" helped the protesters project their positions and underline their advocacy and civic engagement commitments to persuade the masses to support

the goals of the protest. The manifestation of evidentiality, affect and presence constituted about 24 percent of the dataset, and they are subsequently discussed.

"Evidentiality" is operationalized in this study as twitter users expressed commitment to their topic and the credibility of their claims as well as the possible impact on the reader. In this study, evidentiality can be seen in the tweeters' explicit commitment to the protest, which explains why they embarked on the protest and how they engaged readers in their arguments while negotiating solidarity. In the tweets below, the protesters indicate their express commitment to their activism and suggest that they are fighting for a worthy cause.

TWT 73. #RedFriday demands @JDMahama should make prudent economic and social policies that would make the standard of living better for Ghanaians.

TWT 74. #RedFriday demands Government should manage the exchange rate and save the #Ghana Cedi from the current free fall to prevent price hikes.

TWT 117. What do we want from all this? That we will hand to our children a Ghana better than we inherited from our fathers. #redFriday

TWT 118. Ghanaians can't subscribe to a government that cannot provide nor create jobs for the people. #redFriday #OccupyFlagStaffHouse

TWT 199. Good morning to all. Yesterday was a big part of history for us. History cannot and shall not forget. #OccupyFlagStaffHouse

TWT. 325. Hello everybody, Ghana is our only home. We can make it great and strong. But we need you to stand with us #OccupyFlagStaffHouse

In conveying their positions and judgements in texts, writers are typically aware that their readers also have opinions on the issues they discuss. Their goal, therefore, is to convince readers that their position is plausible. According to Hyland, every written discourse envisions some kind of feedback from the reader because the discourse itself belongs to a community whose

members already subscribe to certain points of view or forms of argument on the issues being discussed.[40] Consequently, the tweets above lay claim to credibility through the use of modal and lexical verbs such as "should," "will," "can," "demand," and "need." As previously indicated, protest discourse is characterized by features that suggest group reaction to perceived oppression and victimization. Therefore, the use of evidentiality in the tweets strengthens the force of the message being communicated, and functions not only as a means of resisting the prevailing situation, but also as a way of enlisting support for an idea. The tweeters' overt commitment to the protest as well as their claim to rationality and plausibility is made more concrete by the topos of history: [41] "Yesterday was a big part of history for us. History cannot and shall not forget" (TWT 199). This assertion connotes that posterity will judge the actions of the protesters favourably, and their advocacy and civic engagement will create an indelible impression on the minds of Ghanaians or will be etched in the collective memory of Ghanaian society. And by stating that the reason for the protest is to secure the future of generations yet unborn ("That we will hand to our children a Ghana better than we inherited from our fathers" – TWT 117), the protesters elevate the importance of their activism by associating it with Ghana's past, present and future. Such an appeal to collective/popular memory contributes to a negotiation of group identity and solidarity formation necessary for realizing the goals of the protesters.

"Affect" is used in this paper to mean writers' communication of attitude, emotion and feeling vis-à-vis a proposition. Not surprisingly, the protesters project various negative emotions in expressing their concerns and opinions as shown in the tweets below.

TWT 1. Has dumsor shown any sign, even a little, of getting better?

TWT 2. My parents did not live through coups, Rawlings and the small enjoyment of the early 2000s to spend their retirement in this mess. Nope.

TWT 3. The thought of spending the rest of my life in a country governed by such evil, thieving, clueless, entitled leeches. #IShudder

TWT 17. We are not tolerant of corruption and bad leadership. We are just timid. And sometimes, viewed against posterity, timidity is complicity and laziness.

TWT 23. And I am getting ready to put on my red on #RedFriday. They should not see this to be just a shirt but my emotions towards the rot in #Ghana

TWT 29. The #OccupyFlagStaffHouse protest was a result of pent-up disappointment. Nothing has been done to assuage this. We are unhappy.

Protests, as already mentioned, are mostly triggered by crisis or the need to voice grievances. This makes an affective stance crucial to the aims of a protest because it affords protesters the opportunity to express their frustration at undesirable situations. In the tweets, the negative emotions of the protesters are expressed by lexicalization such as "unhappy," "mess," "pent-up disappointment," "shudder" and "rot." The general sentiment is of anger, disappointment, frustration, dissatisfaction and sadness. Since affect is an emotional reaction to a behaviour, process or phenomenon, the negative emotions can be viewed as instances of inscribed attitude used to explicitly express the protesters' judgement. This also has the potential to influence readers' evaluation of the issues the protesters are fighting against. It is instructive that the protesters not only express their negative emotions towards the system/government, but also to Ghanaians who might be apathetic about the prevailing situation ("We are just timid. And sometimes, viewed against posterity, timidity is complicity and laziness" – TWT 17). Further, apart from conveying the feeling, attitude and judgment of the protesters, the use of affect invokes emotions from readers or other participants in the discourse.[42] Therefore, the affective stance constitutes "an important building block in framing (or representation), a resource that allows participants to construct frames that have specific grounding in identifiable social meaning."[43]

"Presence" refers to how a writer chooses to project himself or herself in relation to others. To champion their cause in a manner that is likely to appeal to Ghanaians, the protesters cast themselves in the mould of patriots acting in the supreme interest of Ghana. In the tweets below, the protesters project themselves as selfless citizens who want the best for Ghana and thus use presence to suggest that advocacy and civic engagement are patriotic acts that one must be proud of.

> TWT 10. Posterity shall see we weren't a generation that didn't care about the tomorrow we will leave our children. #dumsormuststop
>
> TWT 32. As a duty to ourselves and our country, we must not relent in holding our leaders accountable.
>
> TWT 138. The revolution will be live-tweeted. #redFriday #OccupyFlagStaffHouse
>
> TWT 320. #RedFriday because we love Ghana and want the best for Ghana.
>
> TWT 321. #RedFriday is for Ghanaians to come together irrespective of their political affiliations to demand the best for our country.
>
> TWT 322. #RedFriday is for Ghanaians everywhere to peacefully demand ACTION and ACCOUNTABILITY from our government

From the tweets, the protesters claim that given their love for Ghana, they will not sit down and watch the country slip into the doldrums. Instead, they will play their part to ensure that the state of affairs in the country improves. As expressed by one Twitter user, "Ghana will get better by the sweat of our brows and the strain of our hands" (TWT 33). In this vein, the protesters define themselves as pro-Ghana, non-partisan, nationalistic, patriotic, noble revolutionaries, freedom fighters and the voice of the people. This discursive positioning is strategic and allows the protesters to mobilize support from every cross-section of Ghanaian society irrespective of people's political affiliation, ethnic group or religious background. They employ a sameness strategy that appeals to the "Ghanaian-ness" of the masses, which helps in the negotiation of group identity and solidarity necessary for the effectiveness of protest

discourse and social activism. The use of "dumsor" in the tweets in relation to evidentiality, affect, and presence is noteworthy because it constitutes a popular Ghanaian slang used to give credence to the discursive positioning of the protesters, and highlights how issues shape and influence the sociopolitical sphere of our life/world and vice-versa. "Dumsor" is a coinage deriving from two blended Akan words: "dum," (which literally means "to turn off") and 'sɔ' (which literally means "to turn on"), and is used as a metonymy for persistent, irregular and unpredictable electric power outage in Ghana. This erratic power supply, sometimes accompanied by load shedding, has been an issue of national concern at various points in Ghana's history. By highlighting it, the protesters underline the government's incompetence in tackling the power outage issue and express their frustration in a manner that is likely to resonate with the masses. Since every Ghanaian can identify with the "dumsor" crisis, the attitudes, feelings, and judgments communicated by the tweets will sound rational, and subsequently motivate the masses to demand positive change.

Conclusion

The tweets and linguistic choices made by protesters during the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns were conditioned by culture-specific politics. I have argued in this paper that sociopolitical movements are most persuasively narrativized when they capitalize on local sentiment and language features characteristic of local communities and audiences. The study reveals three mechanisms employed in the tweets to promote the objectives of the protesters and to put pressure on the government to address their concerns: (1) constructing the Ghanaian government as insensitive, (2) representing Ghanaians as the suffering masses and (3) exploiting stance for sociopolitical goals. Drawing on legitimation strategies such as metaphor, membership categorization, nomination and predication, positive in-group and negative out-

group presentation as well as intensification, the protesters used the three procedures to recruit support for their ideas, mobilize the masses, and prepare the ground for an offline demonstration.

The Occupy Ghana pressure group founded in 2014 as a result of the #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns is still in existence, and it plays a pivotal role in national discussions. For instance, their leaders and members make regular media appearances, and they have also built alliances and partnerships with other civil society organizations, think tanks and political pressure groups to analyse and review public policies and initiatives. Hence, this paper demonstrates that social media campaigns and digital activism can be fruitful if they are followed up by practical and strategic offline actions. In the absence of such intentional engagement, social media campaigns can end up as mere slacktivism as noted in other studies. This paper contributes to the study of social movements, protest discourse and online activism in a context under-researched in the literature, and highlights the (possible) synergy between social movement theory and social media critical discourse studies.

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