Article

A Discourse Analytic Study of #FixTheCountry on Ghanaian Twitter

Mark Nartey[1] and Yating Yu[2] iD

Abstract

This article analyzes tweets produced during the "fix the country" campaign on Ghanaian Twitter. It illustrates how the affordances of social media can empower campaigners and how linguistic choices, even on digital platforms, can be conditioned by sociocultural context, spatiotemporal factors, and local politics. The findings reveal three main discursive strategies utilized in the tweets to construct the protest as a discourse of contestation intended to resist social inequalities and promote a shared vision: (1) depicting the Ghanaian government as irresponsible, (2) portraying the Ghanaian people as victims, and (3) issuing a clarion call to action. These strategies were framed with various linguistic resources, and they enabled the protesters to recruit support for their objectives, mobilize the masses for social action, and lay the foundation for an offline demonstration. The article holds implications for the burgeoning scholarship on framing processes and the discursive strategies of online social movements.

Keywords

discourse of resistance, collective action, digital activism, online social movement, social media critical discourse studies

Introduction

In the last decade, research on the significance of social media for activism, advocacy, and civic engagement has received increased attention in communication studies. This scholarship has shed light on issues such as gender, feminism, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, Islamophobia, political accountability, and echoes Freelon et al.'s (2016, p. 2) assertion that digital platforms "have become essential tools for 21st-century social movements." This body of work includes Lev-On's (2019) paper on the tent protest in Israel, Li et al.'s (2020) article on feminist social movements, Bhatia's (2016) study on Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement, and Wolfsfeld et al.'s (2013) paper on the Arab Spring. Various studies in Africa have also examined how social media is influencing sociopolitical engagement and citizenship participation on the continent. Mutsvairo (2016), for instance, explores the potential of new media to transform online-based civil action across Africa using case studies such as the #BringBackOurGirls campaign in Nigeria and the #FeesMustFall protest in South Africa. This edited collection deconstructs digital activism in specific contexts and demonstrates how social media platforms are deployed by activists, pressure groups, and social movements to negotiate and advocate positive social change in Africa. Dwyer and Molony (2019) also investigate the sociopolitical and

historical context of social networking sites in Tanzania, Somalia, Zimbabwe, and Kenya. This collection of papers explicates the impact of surveillance, cyber-crime, and cyber-activism on political participation, and reveals that social media often function to highlight existing power relations rather than oppose them. In addition to the edited volumes reviewed above, other research on digital activism in Africa has analyzed advocacy and civic engagement on Ghanaian Twitter (Nartey, 2022a), social media soft power in Kenya and Nigeria (Adeiza & Howard, 2016), the use of social media as a new source of empowerment in Algeria (Zaghlami, 2020), women and election activism in Uganda (Selnes & Orgeret, 2010), the use of "nano-media" (i.e., performances like political theater, murals, dance, and poetry) in social media activism in South Africa (Dawson, 2012), cyber-protests in Zimbabwe (Mpofu & Mare, 2020), and the role of affective stance in #BringBackOurGirls campaign discourse in Nigeria (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015).

[1]University of the West of England, UK
[2]The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Corresponding Author:
Yating Yu, Department of English and Communication, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong.
Email: tiffany-yyt.yu@connect.polyu.hk
Twitter: @YUYating88

The scholarship on social media activism delineates various discursive strategies employed to advance the cause of protesters. These strategies can be understood within a framing paradigm (Benford & Snow, 2000) that illustrates how issues are presented by protesters as part of their effort to construct group identity, instantiate opposition and alliance, and formulate common objectives. Frames function ideologically in the message they convey or suppress and hence involve salience and silence. As Entman (1993) puts it,

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 52)

Consequently, the strategic and systematic use of language (i.e., discursive strategy), which can be realized by various lexico-syntactic resources, contributes to the framing of issues from particular perspectives. In the existing studies on online social movements reviewed above, some of the discursive strategies identified include (de)legitimation, membership categorization, nomination and predication, positive in-group and negative out-group presentation, as well as intensification. The framing processes of online social movements and their accompanying discursive strategies have contributed to an understanding of the emergence, mobilization, and restructuring of social movements (Leong et al., 2020) and have explicated the ends to which these movements put their discourse, including constructing resistance and opposing hegemonic discourse (Orlandi et al., 2022). This article contributes to this line of research and argues that digital activism constitutes a form of emancipatory discourse (see Nartey, 2022b).

Generally, the existing work on online activism in Africa reviewed above can be found in political science, African Studies, and Social Movement Studies, and they rarely take a discursive approach apart from Chiluwa and Ifukor's (2015) study. As noted by Orlandi et al. (2022), there is relatively little research on the specific linguistic devices employed by online social movements to formulate their discursive strategies. Hence, by taking a discourse analytic approach to the examination of digital activism on Ghanaian Twitter, this study contributes to the few linguistic studies on online activism and extends the scope of work in this field of inquiry. Specifically, the study examines the "fix the country" campaign on Ghanaian Twitter and highlights how the discursive strategies used by the protesters are shaped by sociocultural context, spatiotemporal factors, and culture-specific politics. We will demonstrate that the local contextualization of the discursive strategies enables the protesters to foreground their discursive power in a manner that provides further evidence for KhosraviNik's (2022) view that social media technologies have decentralized and democratized access to discursive power. The article thus sheds light on how people with little-to-no institutional power can be emboldened by their discursive practice, thereby underscoring the role of language as an inspiring artifact and as a resource for agency.

Context: Social Media in Ghana

There are about six million social media users in Ghana (Global Digital Report, 2020). The two leading social media platforms are Facebook and YouTube—platforms like Twitter and Instagram have emerged in recent years and are gaining prominence. In terms of demographics, most social media users include the youth, educated people, and individuals who belong to the middle and upper class. There are also more males than females in terms of usage. Social media platforms in Ghana, like other parts of the world, have become tools for political mobilization and have thus been used by Ghanaian political parties together with traditional modes of communication such as radio, television, and the press. This is most evident in the last three general elections (2012, 2016, 2020), where the platforms were used to mobilize support and membership for various parties, raise funds, discuss, and elicit people's opinions on sociopolitical issues and articulate policies on key socioeconomic and governance issues (Gyampo, 2017). The use of social media for activism and resistance is a new trend in Ghana and the "fix the country" campaign examined in this article is one of the most recent online protests in the country. Other campaigns that have been launched in the past include #SaveTheGHMovieIndustry, #DropThatChamber, #OccupyFlagstaffHouse, #HijabIsAnIdentity, #DumsorMustStop, and #RedFriday.

The "fix the country" campaign aimed at expressing outrage about economic hardship and the level of underdevelopment superintended by successive governments. The campaigners, predominantly the youth, lamented the country's inadequate and/or non-existent social amenities, deplorable infrastructure, poor sanitation, housing deficit accompanied by exorbitant rent, high levels of unemployment, and general high cost of living. The online campaign was launched on 3 May 2021 and was followed by an offline protest on 21 September 2021. According to the conveners of the campaign, "fix the country" is a non-partisan and non-political civic movement by Ghanaian youths for Ghana and seeks to mobilize ordinary Ghanaians for a new Ghana. Three cardinal principles undergird the movement: (1) demanding a new [Ghanaian] society founded on justice, (2) refusing to play by the rules of a political class that is disinterested in the Ghana project, and (3) asking for a reset in the direction and the assumptions that pervasive immorality thrives on in [Ghanaian] body politic (www.fixthecountrygh.com).

Theoretical Framework

This article is informed by the social movement theory (Cammaerts, 2015), a framework that explains how and why

people organize themselves for sociopolitical action and the impact of such action. A social movement can be defined as "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" (Cammaerts, 2015, p. 2). That is, it is a network of interactions between individuals, groups, or organizations on the basis of one common grievance, typically a perceived lack of social justice in a specific sociopolitical setting (Tilly, 2004). Consequently, the members of the network engage in what Tilly (2004) describes as a form of "contentious politics" aimed at eliminating categorical inequities. This article takes a relational approach to social movements. Hence, it echoes Tilly and Wood's (2003) view that social movements constitute a form of collective action that can create new forms of political repertoires and forge relations to other sociopolitical actors both locally and nationally. That is, social networks enable movements to form alliances, establish conflictual relationships with opponents, and enact (new) discursive practices in tandem with their goals. A relational approach to social movements highlights "the role of networks as facilitators or constraints of individual recruitment, various forms of interorganizational networks and the relationship between social networks and the political context in which social movements operate" (Diani & McAdam, 2003).

As already indicated, one of the main approaches employed in the theorization of social movements in recent years is a framing paradigm (Benford & Snow, 2000). This research has discussed the work or meaning construction engaged in by movement adherents and earlier studies in non-online contexts have explored how frames emerge, align, change, and are maintained (see Gamson et al., 1982; Marullo, 1996). Regarding digital environments, the existing scholarship has illustrated how social media and other online platforms can shape the activities and framing processes of movements (see Miranda et al., 2016; Pu & Scanlan, 2012). These studies notwithstanding, there is still little research on the linguistic-discursive dimension of framing processes of online social movements, especially in non-Western contexts. By examining the discursive strategies used to frame the "fix the country" campaign on Ghanaian Twitter, this study builds on the few linguistic studies on digital activism and extends the scope of work in non-Western contexts, especially Africa.

Data and Method of Analysis

The data for this article consist of tweets, retweets, and mentions of the Twitter account of @Ghfixthecountry before, during, and after the #FixTheCountry campaign. The sample spans 5 months of activity, from 1 May 2021 to 30 September 2021. This period was chosen by identifying the date the "fix the country movement" was launched on Twitter and the date of their offline protest in September 2021. This timeframe was chosen because the campaign was highly intensive during this period. Even though messages about the campaign were also posted on the movement's Facebook page, there was less activity here as the protest was more dominant on Twitter. We therefore decided to focus on messages on their Twitter account as an instance of the discourse of contestation on a particular social media platform.

A total of 1,500 tweets were manually collected and numbered TWT 1 to TWT 1500, where TWT means "Tweet." As this article is a qualitative, linguistic analysis of small corpora used in discourse analysis, this number was considered sufficient for a detailed investigation (see Bhatia, 2008). Given the objective of the study and the qualitative approach adopted, we did not quantify retweets since we did not collect all the available tweets of the movement. Apart from #FixTheCountry, other hashtags that accompanied the tweets collected include #FixMotherGhana, #FixTheCountryGhana, #FixingTheCountryGhana, #FixItNow, #AriseGhanaYouth, and #WeAreAngry. The tweets discussed issues such as social amenities, the economy, infrastructure, energy, and corruption, which underscore the main concerns of the protesters, their evaluation of the state of affairs in Ghana (which is the basis of their activism), and, more crucially, their demand for change. On Ghanaian Twitter, the country's official language functions as a lingua franca; hence, the tweets were produced in English except in few instances when local languages were combined with English to emphasize a point. The data collected were complemented by the first author's observation of the activities of the movement given their positionality as Ghanaian and an active user of Twitter coupled with their understanding of the Ghanaian sociocultural context.

In terms of the method of analysis, the article draws on insights from social media critical discourse studies (KhosraviNik, 2022). It is an approach that draws on insights from critical discourse analysis and digital media research to analyze social media communication. It investigates meaning-making, content, and practice by deconstructing digital discourse/digital practice as a unique and relevant dynamic in its own right. Hence, our analysis focused on the discursive strategies used to construct resistance in the #FixTheCountry tweets while noting that meanings are negotiated at the intersection of individuals, culture, and media technology. We considered the actual language in the tweets, the intertextual, and interdiscursive links between the tweets, the institutional frames of the context within which the tweets were produced (including aims, agents, and the targeted audience), and the broader sociocultural, political, and historical context in which the discursive practices revealed in the tweets are embedded (see Wodak, 2001).

Our analysis thus interprets digital performances of collective action within a sociocultural context that embeds the digital mediation and explores both micro-communicative patterns and macro-discursive structures that shape the #FixTheCountry campaign. To accomplish this, we examined

linguistic resources such as referential terms, attributional expressions, predication, and intensifiers (see Wodak, 2001) to shed light on how they contribute to an understanding of the discursive practices enacted by the protesters. Few tweets had URLs (mainly of news reports) and we used this information as part of the broader social context of the tweets during our analysis. Hence, we did not analyze these URLs separately (given their limited number) but considered them as elements of evidentiality that sought to reinforce the message of the protesters.

Results and Discussion

The study identified three discursive strategies employed in the tweets to promote the objective of the campaigners. These strategies realize a social activism function aimed at raising critical awareness, mounting pressure on the government to address the country's worsening economic situation, and holding political leaders accountable. The online activism culminated into a demonstration (in the physical world) that received media attention both nationally and internationally, thereby suggesting that social networks enable movements to form alliances and oppositions that can be used to enact new discursive practices in sync with their objectives. The identified discursive strategies have been discussed below.

The Ghanaian Government as Irresponsible

To achieve their objectives, the protesters foreground the insensitivity of the Ghanaian government to the predicament of the Ghanaian people by deploying an "us" versus "them" dichotomy that informs "the myriad of opinions and attitudes We have about Them in more specific social domains" (van Dijk, 1998, p. 25). They depict the prevailing situation as a crisis that the government appears not to care about, and hence want to use the #FixTheCountry campaign to demand positive change as illustrated in the tweets below:

> TWT 38. #FixTheCountry isn't a protest to defend or against a political party. NPP and NDC gave us poor governance. In all their terms in office, tell me who solved the following:

> TWT 43. #DearGhana, you have all the potential of being a developed country. Your managers have let you down on countless occasions but it must stop. #FixTheCountryNow

> TWT 119. You don't necessarily need atomic bombs to destroy a nation. Politicians who value their pockets than the life of citizens always do that every day. Most of our leaders have bad characters and they are displaying it, just look at the country. #FixingTheCountryGhana

> TWT 150. The media can't talk because they fear they will lose their job. The hashtags are being reported. Injunction being placed on the demonstration. They are not ready to listen. They

are not ready to work. They are not ready to be held accountable. #FixGhanaNow

> TWT 331. This is pure wickedness; our leaders have so much failed us. Look at the waste of money and resources and later they will go and seek loans from other countries. #FixTheCountry

> TWT 350. Nkrumah's Ghana! Tweeeeaaa This #FixTheCountryGhana is not rocket science oh but sometimes it seems some of the presidents we've had have made a personal vow not to go beyond the legacy of Nkrumah . . . minimalistic ideologies nkoaaa

Based on a nomination strategy expressed by noun phrases such as "our leaders," "your managers," "the presidents," "NDC and NPP," "politicians," and "they," the protesters clearly establish the "object" they perceive to be answerable for their woes. The use of indexical markers such as "they" and "our" suggests that the tweeters regard the government as an adversary of a sort—that is, as a system or an entity that is detrimental to them owing to its unresponsiveness to their needs. The identification of an adversary, as Bhatia (2008) notes, does not only define a target of the attack, but also establishes the need for collective action. Consequently, having established the government as their enemy, the protesters utilize a predicational strategy to underscore various negative features of the government, thereby evaluating government officials in pejorative terms. This negative judgment is articulated by verb phrases such as "failed us," "seek loans," "gave us poor governance," "have let you down," "destroyed the country," and "vowed not to go beyond the legacy of Nkrumah." Reinforcing this unfavorable characterization, expressions that border on morality (e.g., "pure wickedness," "bad character") are used to intensify the insensitivity and irresponsibility of the government. It can thus be inferred from the characterization above that the government is portrayed as one that is not in touch with the plight of the people in view of which the masses are angry. By suggesting that the government is a non-listening administration, the protest discourse produced by the tweeters is legitimized by implying that the best and, perhaps, the only way to communicate with the government is via civil revolt.

The analogy used in TWT 119 (i.e., the reference to atomic bombs) is instructive as it establishes a correlation between Ghanaian politicians and a menace. We argue that this construction of politicians as saboteurs of the nation and as selfish individuals who are destroying the country heightens the grievance voiced by the protesters. When this analogy is analyzed in conjunction with the parallel structure, "They are not ready to listen. They are not ready to work. They are not ready to be held accountable" (TWT 150), the protesters suggest that their activism is legitimate. That is, when a group of people think that they are being oppressed by a constituted authority, they are likely to resist this authority to cause a change by "their own means or with the help of

others to attain a certain state of happiness" (Eamonn, 2004, p. 35). The use of an elongated form of "tweaa" in TWT 350 is also noteworthy. "Tweaa" is an emotive Akan interjection that went viral in 2014 and has since been used against politicians and other national leaders in online discourses given the anonymity of digital platforms. From a semantico-pragmatic perspective, "tweaa" is derogatory and expresses strong disapproval and contempt for a person and can also be used to "pooh-pooh" an idea (Thompson, 2019). Hence, the use of the expression as a form of code-switching highlights how activist discourses can be shaped by sociocultural context and culture-specific politics. It also illustrates how 'activist discourses are most persuasively narrativized when they capitalize on local sentiment and language features characteristic of local communities and audiences' (Nartey, 2022a, p. 1).

The construction of the Ghanaian government as irresponsible is amplified in the tweets via a name-and-shame mechanism that calls out the negligence of specific politicians, including members of parliament, the president and vice-president, ministers, and municipal chief executives. The tweets below exemplify this point:

> TWT 129. This is the Tanoso Kessben area! This is supposed to be a bridge! Not safe at all. Dr. Kingsley Nyarko. Sir, kindly fix this death trap bridge. #FixGhanaNow #NameAndShame

> TWT 130. William Owuraku Audio, MP for Afigya Kwabre South, Dep. Minister for Energy. You promised us better roads and reiterated it would be completed before elections. See how it's going. Yabre #NameAndShame

> TWT 133. 14 years abandoned Krofrom MARKET, Kumasi If this project is completed it could absorb many traders from the street and help in decongesting the CBD of the Ashanti regional capital. Regional Minister, the MP and MCE for the area must save the project. #NameAndShame #FixGhanaNow

> TWT 136. Look at Assin Central Do Not Even Have Portable Water And Good Road But Yet Their Mp Hon Kennedy Agyapong Sit On National TV And Humiliate, Disgrace And Judge People Negatively it's So Sad.

> TWT 137. Hon Adwoa Sarfoa, this is hospital bed in your constituency, Abokobi, the road you fixed 2 days to elections so full of potholes now, thank you. #nameandshame

> TWT 201. #Fixthecountry: This is enough evidence that Akufo-Addo and Ken Ofori-Atta don't need an additional tax to deal with the sanitation in Ghana. They only need to deal with the fraud and obscene monopoly in the sanitation sector.

In these tweets, the protesters combine #FixTheCountry with #NameAndShame to identify several leaders that they perceive to be responsible for the debilitating situation in the country. By so doing, they move from a macro construction of the government as an enemy to a micro construction of politicians as enemies of the state in a way that makes the focus of the frustration more targeted. Among other things, the tweets highlight failed promises, character flaws evidenced by corruption, and lack of ingenuity on the part of the leaders. Generally, naming and shaming serves the purpose of publicly identifying a person, group, or organization that is guilty of some criminal or anti-social behavior so as to expose them to public shame. It is often used to rally popular opinion against and in turn discourage certain kinds of behavior or enterprises (DeMerit, 2012). Consequently, the use of naming and shaming can be analyzed as a legitimation strategy that seeks to justify the actions of the protesters by implying that the country is in the doldrums, and hence their concerns require immediate redress. It is important to note that as part of the name-and-shame mechanism, the protesters cite examples of failed leadership by employing linguistic evidentiality. This confirms Orlandi et al.'s (2022) view that online social movements can utilize both evidence-based and emotions-based argumentations as part of their discursive and framing processes. The use of a name-and-shame mechanism, analogy/metaphor, referential terms, and a local invective like "tweaa," as demonstrated in the analysis above, sheds light on how protesters can ascribe negative frames to the sociopolitical actors they consider culpable for categorical inequalities (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015). These linguistic resources allow protesters to legitimize their position, establish conflictual relationships with their "enemy," and demand positive change as part of their efforts for emancipation (Miranda et al., 2016).

The Ghanaian People as Victims and the Vulnerable Masses

The protesters portray themselves as representatives of the ordinary Ghanaian and in this capacity sculpt the Ghanaian people as the suffering masses. This finding aligns with previous research on protest discourses that illustrates that protesters perceive their circumstances as undesirable (see Bhatia, 2016; Ghareeb, 2000; Nartey, 2022a). This negative assessment becomes their reason for mobilizing for sociopolitical action as demonstrated in the following tweets:

> TTWT 11. I really wish people can understand that fix the country is not an attack on a specific political party. It's Simply a request from tired citizens. Citizens who are only asking to be seen as human beings. Fix the country is a cry for help, please. #FixTheCountry

> TWT 12. Letter to #DearGhanaDear Momma Ghana, A Mom that has toiled and is on her retirement, 64 years you have suffered, not because you didn't have enough. Greedy leaders squandered your riches. Our very land they've sold to powers elsewhere.

TWT 22. No more blame games, No more Excuses. Why are we living like slaves in our own country? The people of Ghana are tired and are voicing out their tiredness. We are tired of failed greedy corrupt leaders. #WeAreAngry #FixMotherGhana

TWT 46 #DearGhana I weep every day because of the way things are going; it seems the blood and toil of our ancestors have been in vain. The system has failed the ordinary and it seems to only favor those in power. We are suffering oooo we are suffering. Our mentors have become our tormentors.

TWT 97. We are coming with placards, they are coming with hot water cannon machines. How backward. How oppressive. How against the people. A state that chooses to oppress rather than liberate. To suffocate rather than enliven. This is why #WeAreAngry and marching to #FixMotherGhana.

TWT 197. The rock in the middle of the river and the one on dry land near the river both see the sun. But only one of them feels it. #FixTheCountryNow

TWT 351. The system has failed us the youth, look at the fuel prices, look at the roads, we are suffering, we are really suffering. No youth in Ghana here can say he or she is not suffering. #FixTheCountry

In the tweets above, the protesters indicate that they are suffering hardship because of their deteriorating economic situation caused by poor governance. Using lexicalization realized by expressions such as "suffering," "slaves," "oppress," "suffocate," "tired citizens," and "a cry for help," the tweeters present Ghanaians as victims of a malfunctioning government, hence the need to "demand better leadership, a country of equal opportunities and social justice" (TWT 111). The vulnerability of Ghanaians as well as the severity of their situation is heightened using metaphorical constructions such as "slaves," "tormentors," and "Momma Ghana." Metaphors are an important resource for persuasion given their power of appeal that stems from exaggeration and ideological presentation (Charteris-Black, 2004). Beyond renaming, they reconceptualize and recontextualize issues in ways that align with specific intentions (Zinken, 2003). To foreground the plight of Ghanaians, the protesters assert that Ghanaians are being treated as slaves in their own country and are being tormented by their leaders. The comparison of Ghanaians with slaves and the comparison of the political leaders with tormentors realize an intensification and emotionalization function that seeks to rally support for the protest, ignite fury for the politicians, and invite action on the part of Ghanaians.

The emotional effect invoked by these metaphors is strengthened by the connection made between Ghana and a mother who has toiled and suffered for 64 years because of greedy politicians (TWT 12). When these metaphors are combined with expressions of wailing such as "we are suffering oooo, we are suffering" (TWT 46) and "we are

suffering, we are really suffering" (TWT 351), the victimhood portrayal of the people becomes more pronounced and the urgency of their situation is underlined. This urgent-cum-crisis situation is further expressed by the exclamation "oooo" in the assertion "we are suffering oooo, we are really suffering." Such an exclamation is used in Ghanaian parlance as a foregrounding mechanism that is intended to draw people's attention to the seriousness of an assertion or the gravity of a matter. As previously indicated, such enunciation gives an indication of how linguistic choices, even on digital platforms, can be conditioned by sociocultural and spatiotemporal context. This view is reiterated in TWT 197 where an African proverb is used to rhetorically suggest that the people of Ghana are the ones bearing the brunt of the mismanagement of the economy while the politicians are unaffected. By framing the Ghanaian people as the suffering masses and attributing their suffering to failed leadership, it can be asserted that the protesters use contrasting frames to forge different relations to specific sociopolitical actors, thereby establishing both coalition and conflict in a manner that corresponds with their aims (see Tilly & Wood, 2003). We argue that such dual framing forms part of a membership categorization mechanism that enables social movements to recruit support for their ideas and mobilize the masses for sociopolitical action. This framing process thus highlights the role of social networks as facilitators of individual recruitment for "contentious politics" and contestation (see Diani & McAdam, 2003).

The idea of victimhood and vulnerability constructed in the tweets above is reinforced by specifying the decline in various aspects of the economy, as shown in the tweets below:

TWT 10. Chale the health system in Ghana is bad. I agree with this man on the fact that no government official should be allowed to seek health care outside the country. The housing project left unfinished kraaa dey make me go mad. When a govt doesn't finish it project the next one must finish it whether they like it or not. Abufu sem. #FixTheCountry

TWT 14 #DearGhana, you shall be clean. You shall have good healthcare systems. You shall have clean water. You shall have good educational system. You shall have all that a Hardworking Mom should have. Your retirement will look great. This is a solemn promise we're making. #DearGhana

TWT 15 Our roads are not worth our cars but we are paying road worthy. #FixTheCountry #FixMotherGhana #WeAreAngry No 88 district hospitals, no stable electricity, no new universities, no new job opportunities, no increase in salaries, no water! #FixTheCountry

TWT 37 Is #FixTheCountry too much to ask for? Where are the ICU beds? Why is the city so dirty? Don't we deserve better roads? What at all is happening in this country. Ei, Ghana is sick.

TWT 260. Politicians pretend they don't know what the country's problems are. when the problems haven't changed since their social studies exams: lack of potable water, lack of social amenities, lack of employment, lack of quality education, bad roads, corruption. #FixTheCountry

TWT 367. What is there TO FIX?? FIX the constitution. FIX the education. FIX the economy. FIX the unemployment. FIX the Health Services. FIX the roads. FIX the corruption. FIX the water. FIX the electricity. FIX the accommodation. FIX the sanitation.

The tweets above, some of which utilize metaphor and hyperbole for persuasive purposes, paint a picture of national tragedy by connoting that most, if not all, sectors of the Ghanaian economy have deteriorated and require fixing. Referencing a declining economy, poor health care, terrible infrastructure, a broken education system, mass unemployment, social injustice, ineffective institutions, and a failed constitution, the tweets give an impression of a crisis by communicating a message that borders on a national disaster. This view is echoed by the question-and-answer strategy "Q: What specifically do you want to be fixed in Ghana? A: Can you tell me a single aspect of Ghana that doesn't need fixing?" (TWT 191). This adjacency pair implies that the country is directionless and is without leadership, thereby enabling another protester to tweet that "This isn't a flawed system worth salvaging. This is a decadent empire on the decline that has embraced its inequity and will collapse under the weight of its own contradictions" (TWT 420). Since the ordinary Ghanaian will suffer because of the failed leadership/system, the framing of the people of Ghana as victims and the vulnerable masses is given validity and the posture of the campaigners for government to tackle the existing problems is accentuated. The need for swift and decisive intervention by government is enhanced by the comparison of Ghana with a sick person (TWT 37), most likely with a patient in an intensive care unit or at an emergency ward. The exaggeration and emotionalization in the tweets above echo Orlandi et al.'s (2022) view that online social movements can move from an evidence-based stance to emotions-based argumentations as far as their discursive strategies and linguistic devices are concerned. We submit that these emotions-based argumentations achieve an intensification function aimed at enlisting support and boosting morale for collective action. That is, they allow social movements to ingratiate themselves with the masses and articulate resistance based on shared interests.

Yet again, there is evidence of how social media campaigns (can) draw on local linguistic resources to achieve the objective of sociopolitical mobilization and participation. In this regard, expressions such as "Chale" (a solidarity term akin to "Charlie" in English), "kraa dey make me go mad" (a Ghanaian pidgin expression which translates as "even drives me mad"), and "Abufu sem" (an Akan exclamation that literally means "annoying things!") (TWT 10) have been tactfully deployed to reinforce the message conveyed by the tweets and, more importantly, to make the message relatable to the Ghanaian public. Such code-switching highlights the importance of sociocultural context, spatiotemporal factors, and culture-specific politics in the construction of online social movements. Hence, the conceptualization of these networks cannot be detached from the social, cultural, and political context in which they operate.

Although the protesters construct the people of Ghana as victims and the vulnerable masses, they also offer a message of hope and inspiration, thereby framing the protesters in positive light (i.e., as instigators of positive change and social transformation). The following tweets express this point:

TWT 3. When ordinary people wake up, elites begin to tremble in their boots. They can't get away with subjection. They can't get away with subjugation. They can't get away with exploitation. They can't get away with domination. It takes courage for folk to stand up. #FixGhana #WeTaya

TWT 20. Who said we don't have a voice? Who said they love NPP? Who said they love NDC? Sorry, we have a voice, we love Ghana and we will fight for it. #FixMotherGhana #WeAreAngry

TWT 24. Arise Ghana Youth! This is time to let your voices be heard. Speak up today! Arise Ghana youth for your country. The nation demands your devotion. Let us all unite to uphold her. And make her great and strong. We are all involved in building our motherland. #FixTheCountryNow

TWT 126. This is not NDC or NPP!!! New revolution!!! Ghanaian Youth Arise!! Let's voice out. Fix Ghana or you'll understand what Nkrumah said by Ghanaians are not timid people, we will not be swayed, bought, distracted or even stopped, we are the power, we are the people, Fix Ghana or else Vox Populi, Vox Dei.

TWT 356. May heavens and earth bear witness to this revolution. May heaven and earth hold up our call. May the voices of the enemies of this nation be mute and the voice of the people be heard! God bless our Homeland GHANA. #FixTheCountry

Drawing on an array of resources, including allusion to a Christian prayer (TWT 356), utilizing the notion of voice of the people (TWT 20, 126), reference to a motivational anthem for the Ghanaian youth (TWT 24) and parallelism (TWT 3), the tweeters submit that they are ready to take their future into their hands and advocate the transformed society they desire and deserve. By this discursive positioning, they frame the #FixTheCountry campaign as a noble pursuit that requires intentional and sustained effort as well as individual sacrifice for it to be achieved. That is, despite the worthiness of the desirable destination anticipated, there will be difficulty along the way. Hence, the people must be prepared to sacrifice in the short term to overcome any obstacles to be

encountered during the protest. The tweets above can be analyzed as a form of positive self-presentation that indicates how social movements position themselves in relation to their supporters, opponents, and their objectives. That is, in their construction of collective action, social networks forge relations to various sociopolitical actors at both local and national levels while simultaneously vocalizing cooperation and opposition (see Diani & McAdam, 2003; Tilly & Wood, 2003).

Issuing a Clarion Call to Action

Having highlighted the insensitivity and irresponsibility of the government as well as the suffering of the people, the protesters issue a clarion call to the government to demonstrate the social transformation they want to see. The specific demands they make and the tone of their illocution, as the tweets below reveal, reinforce their positive self-presentation as agents of change.

TWT 1. We want a Ghana where everyone is able to afford a decent life at least. A Ghana where there's room for different abilities and talents to flourish. We need a better Ghana, we need jobs and nothing else. #FixTheCountry

TWT 7. We must not relent on our efforts to demand for a better Ghana. Where are the 88 Hospitals, President @NAkufoAddo? #MAD Ghanaians are demanding for better leadership, a country of equal opportunities and social justice. No long talk and whining. #FixTheCountryNow

TWT 23 #AriseGhanaYouth These and many more are the reasons Ghana Youth are demanding #FixTheCountry. All the leaders should listen and learn and stop this nonsense. Stop talking and listen #WeAreAngry

TWT 75. They keep forgetting that we're not just fighting for us, we're fighting for our children & our children's children. We demand accountability & we want to SEE actual results not mere words from these. "LEADERS" #FixTheCountry #fixitnow

TWT 162. Ok to the specifics . . . we want/need a better and improved HEALTH SECTOR, EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM in Ghana, JOBS For the people, GOOD roads (not the disposable election kpakpakpa roads). We need reforms in our Constitution, EX-Gratia Article 71 (1) and 2 must be deleted ASAP. Guys, keep the list going. #FixTheCountryNow

TWT 218. Just #FixTheCountry As simple as that. Fix the crippling unemployment. Fix the street lights. Fix the erratic power supply. Fix the irregular water supply. Fix the killer roads. Fix the corrupt institutions. Fix the factories. Fix the educational system. Fix AGRICULTURE.

These tweets present the campaigners as citizens who are aware of their rights, and hence are prepared to hold their government accountable. As already indicated, the aim of social movements is to carry out, resist, or undo a social change. To this end, the #FixTheCountry campaigners hoped to mount pressure on the government to address what they consider to be a deterioration in nearly all aspects of the Ghanaian economy. As one of the conveners stated in a news report, they "want to use the campaign to institutionalize protest culture in Ghana [and] to use reasonable force to demand what they deserve so as to improve their living conditions" (www.citinewsroom.com). The convener's use of "force" is instructive and is evident in the tweets above via expressions such as "demand," "want," and "need." The combination of these verbs of compulsion with deontic modality realized by the predication "should listen and learn" (TWT 23) strengthens the force of the demands, forming an authoritarian language indicative of moral toughness (Fairclough, 2000). That is, the campaigners believe that it is their moral, legal, and social right to have access to good governance and effective institutions given the social contract they have with their leaders. This posture is reiterated in the tweet, "All we're saying is 'do what we brought you into power to do,' it's not so hard, is it?" (TWT 149), and it underscores the agentive discursive positioning of the protesters.

To reinforce their agentive posture, the protesters authoritatively stipulate the explicit reforms they want to see in health care, education, infrastructure, agriculture, (un)employment, government institutions, social amenities, and in the constitution. Their boldness-cum-audacity is further amplified by the imperatives "stop this nonsense" and "stop talking and listen" (TWT 23). Even though these commands can be considered face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987), we argue that they enable everyday people to project their power and express their voice as part of sociopolitical activism. The articulation of such imperatives to the powers that be is made possible by the affordances of social media, especially anonymity, and when these commands are combined with the pronouncement, "You can stop the protest, but you can't stop us from demanding that you fix the mess" (TWT 196), a solid confrontational tone necessary for a discourse of resistance is created. The uncompromising posture sculpted by the protesters in the tweets above lends credence to how discourses of disorder, including organized riots, strikes, and protests, serve to highlight fissures in society, express discontent, and challenge and effect change in existing sociopolitical and economic structures (Hart & Kelsey, 2019).

The clarion call issued by the campaigners to the government as well as their demand for solutions is heightened by its association with the future generations of Ghana, especially the future of the youth. To this end, the clarion call is couched with a tone of urgency, if not emergency, and can be interpreted as a (subtle) threat to the government to address the grievances of the protesters or be judged unfavorably by posterity. The tweets below explicate this idea:

TWT 19. Unemployment in Ghana is a national security crisis. We have only ONE Ghana. Create an enabling environment for young people to find employment. #WeAreAngry #AriseGhanaYouth

TWT 89. Fix it so the Younger Ones can Wake up With Hope. So They can Dream of Being Anything They Want to be. #FixGhanaNow #WeAreAngry

TWT 90. Fix the country for the next generation of entrepreneurs, doctors, lawyers, teachers etc. Fix it so they can have a brighter future. #FixMotherGhana

TWT 102. One message from one people with one purpose #FixMotherGhana We have the Power, and our voices will be heard because we matter. We want our Children to live in a Ghana that is not dependent on foreign aid and also with a clear NATIONAL PLAN for 100 years. We have the POWER

TWT 215. This is about the youth and our biggest challenge at the moment, is UNEMPLOYMENT. The number of SHS, University and Polytechnic graduates on the streets is alarming. They want to work and be useful to society. We can't have our most industrious people wasting away. #FixTheCountry

Utilizing a referential strategy (e.g., the use of "young people," "younger ones," "our children," "the youth," "the next generation of [professionals]") for ideological purposes, the tweets above reinforce the idea that the clarion call of the protesters is a demand for the future of Ghanaian youths and for generation yet unborn. This implies that the demands being made by the protesters border on the hopes and dreams of the youth, and hence constitute a cause greater than "self." By establishing a nexus between their clarion call and the future generations of Ghana, the protesters elevate the #FixTheCountry campaign to a level of sacrosanctity that suggests that it is worthy of all forms of sacrifice. Apart from functioning as a warning to the government, we argue that such framing further reveals how social networks can deploy evidence-based stance toward values and emotions-based arguments to issues as part of their activism (Orlandi et al., 2022). This two-pronged strategy allows networks to underscore the importance of collective effort and to mobilize themselves against the "object" they believe is responsible for their predicament. It also allows networks to accentuate a certain version of reality using a framing process that advances their cause (Entman, 1993).

The urgent request for action advanced by the protesters feeds into the crisis narrative of the #FixTheCountry campaign and is necessary for the construction of activist discourses (Nartey, 2022a). It is therefore not alarming that the clarion call of the protesters is informed by critical comments such as "Unemployment in Ghana is a national security crisis" (TWT 19), "This whole country needs a reboot" (TWT 112), and "We can't have our most industrious people wasting away" (TWT 215). These comments realize an authorization function that validates the protesters' demands to the government and their call for prompt governmental action. By presenting themselves as proponents of change and portraying Ghanaian leaders as saboteurs of the nation who need to be "threatened" by a clarion call, the protesters exploit representation of social actors to interact with their audience on the basis of common interest and establish their worldview (see Tilly & Wood, 2003).

Conclusion

This study examined the tweets produced during the #FixTheCountry campaign on Ghanaian Twitter. It analyzed the discursive strategies employed in the tweets to construct the protest as a discourse of contestation intended to resist social inequalities and promote a common vision. These strategies include (1) depicting the Ghanaian government as irresponsible, (2) portraying the Ghanaian people as victims, and (3) issuing a clarion call to action. The strategies were realized by various linguistic resources, including nomination/predication, analogy/metaphor, code-switching, and intensification. Together, they enabled the protesters to recruit support for their stance, organize the masses for social action, and lay the foundation for an offline demonstration. The impact of the #FixTheCountry campaign is observable in the national and international media attention it received as well as the counter-discourses it generated (e.g., #FixYourself, #FixYourAttitude). In addition, the online campaign has morphed into a fully fledged social movement with active members and continues to critique the government and act as a watchdog in Ghanaian society. This article thus demonstrates that social media campaigns can be impactful, especially if they are backed by intentional offline actions.

This article illustrates that the affordances of social media can empower campaigners and linguistic choices, even on digital platforms, can be conditioned by sociocultural context, spatiotemporal factors, and local politics. It provides additional evidence for Orlandi et al.'s (2022) finding that online social movements employ specific sets of linguistic devices that support well-defined discursive strategies. This article, however, builds on Orlandi et al.'s (2022) work and other studies on social networks that take a discursive-cum-framing approach by shedding light on the role of local factors in shaping the linguistic resources used to frame the discursive mechanisms of online social movements and hence the need to examine such networks within the sociocultural and sociopolitical context within which they occur. This study therefore holds implications for the burgeoning scholarship on framing processes and the discursive strategies of online social movements. It also contributes to the growing literature on online social movements in non-Western contexts, thereby expanding the scope of work in this field of enquiry. Furthermore, this article illustrates the interaction between social movement theory and critical

discourse studies by highlighting how linguistic analysis can shed light on social movement studies.

Acknowledgements

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

ORCID iD

Yating Yu [iD] https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9416-0130

References

Adeiza, M., & Howard, P. (2016). Lessons from Nigeria's #Bringbackourgirls and Kenya's #Someonetellcnn. In N. Chitty, L Ji, G. Rawnsley, & C. Hayden (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of soft power* (pp. 219–231). Routledge.

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *26*(1), 611–639.

Bhatia, A. (2008). Discursive illusions in the American national strategy for combating terrorism. *Journal of Language and Politics*, *2*(2), 201–227.

Bhatia, A. (2016). Occupy Central and the rise of discursive illusions: A discourse analytical study. *Text & Talk*, *36*(6), 661–668.

Brown, P., & Levinson, L. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.

Cammaerts, B. (2015). Social media and activism. In R. Mansell & P. Hwa (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of digital communication and society* (pp. 1027–1034). Wiley-Blackwell.

Charteris-Black, J. (2004). *Corpus approaches to critical metaphor analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Chiluwa, I., & Ifukor, P. (2015). 'War against our children: Stance and evaluation in #BringBackOurGirls campaign discourse on Twitter and Facebook. *Discourse & Society*, *26*(3), 267–296.

Dawson, M. C. (2012). Protest, performance and politics: The use of "nano-media" in social movement activism in South Africa. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, *17*(3), 321–345.

DeMerit, J. H. R. (2012). International organizations and government killing: Does naming and shaming save lives? *International Interactions*, *38*(5), 597–621.

Diani, M., & McAdam, D. (Eds.). (2003). *Social movements and networks: Relational approaches to collective action*. Oxford University Press.

Dwyer, M., & Molony, M. (2019). *Social media and politics in Africa: Democracy, censorship and security*. Zed Books.

Eamonn, C. (2004). *Power, discourse, and resistance: A genealogy of the strangeways prison riot*. Ashgate Publishing.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, *43*(4), 51–58.

Fairclough, N. (2000). *New Labor, new language?* Routledge.

Freelon, D., Mcllwain, C., & Clark, M. (2016). *Beyond the hashtags: #Ferguson, #Blacklivesmatter, and the online struggle for offline justice* (pp. 1–92). Center for Media & Social Impact, American University.

Gamson, W. A., Fireman, B., & Rytina, S. (1982). *Encounters with unjust authority*. Dorsey Press.

Ghareeb, E. (2000). New media and the information revolution in the Arab world: An assessment. *Middle East Journal*, *54*(3), 395–418.

Global Digital Report. (2020). www.datareportal.com

Gyampo, R. (2017). Social media, traditional media and party politics in Ghana. *Africa Review*, *9*(2), 125–139.

Hart, C., & Kelsey, D. (2019). *Discourses of disorder: Riots, strikes and protests in the media*. Edinburgh University Press.

KhosraviNik, M. (2022). Digital meaning-making across content and practice in social media critical discourse studies. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *19*(2), 119–123.

Leong, C., Faik, I., Tan, F. T. C., Tan, B., & Khoo, Y. H. (2020). Digital organizing of a global social movement: From connective to collective action. *Information and Organization*, *30*(4), 1–22.

Lev-On, A. (2019). Facebook framed: Portraying the role of social media in activism. *Journal of Language and Politics*, *18*(1), 40–60.

Li, M., Turki, N., Izaguirre, C. R., DeMahy, C., Thibodeaux, B.L., & Gage, T. (2020). Twitter as a tool for social movement: An analysis of feminist activism on social media communities. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *49*, 854–868.

Marullo, S. (1996). Frame changes and social movement contraction: U.S. peace movement framing after the cold war. *Sociological Inquiry*, *66*(1), 1–28.

Miranda, S. M., Young, A., & Yetgin, E. (2016). Are social media emancipatory or hegemonic? Societal effects of mass media digitization in the case of the SOPA discourse. *MIS Quarterly: Management Information Systems*, *40*(2), 303–329.

Mpofu, S., & Mare, A. (2020). #Thisflag: Social media and cyberprotests in Zimbabwe. In M. Ndlela & W. Mano (Eds.), *Social media and elections in Africa* (pp. 153–174). Palgrave Macmillan

Mutsvairo, B. (2016). *Digital activism in the social media era: Critical reflections on emerging trends in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Nartey, M. (2022a). Advocacy and civic engagement in protest discourse on Twitter: A discourse analytical study of Ghana's #OccupyFlagstaffHouse and #RedFriday campaigns. *Communication and Critical/cultural Studies*, *19*(4), 385–401.

Nartey, M. (2022b). Investigating emancipatory discourses in action: The need for an interventionist approach and an activist-scholar posture. *Critical Discourse Studies*, *19*(5), 459–464.

Orlandi, L. B., Veronesib, G., & Zardinic, A. (2022). Unpacking linguistic devices and discursive strategies in online social movement organizations: Evidence from anti-vaccine online communities. *Information and Organization*, *32*(2), 1–16.

Pu, Q., & Scanlan, S. J. (2012). Communicating injustice? Framing and online protest against Chinese government land expropriation. *Information, Communication & Society*, *15*(4), 572–590.

Selnes, F., & Orgeret, K. (2010). Women and election activism in Uganda: The #Pads4girls social media campaign. In M. Ndlela & W. Mano (Eds.), *Social media and elections in Africa* (pp. 31–58). Palgrave Macmillan.

Thompson, R. (2019). Tweaa!—A Ghanaian interjection of "contempt" in online political comments. *Ampersand*, *6*:, 1–7.

Tilly, C. (2004). *Social movements, 1768 – 2004*. Paradigm Publishers.

Tilly, C., & Wood, L. (2003). Contentious connections in Great Britain, 1828 – 34. In M. Diani & D. McAdam (Eds.), *Social movements and networks: Relational approaches to collective action* (pp. 147–172). Oxford University Press.

Van Dijk, T.A. (1998). Opinions and ideologies in the press. In A. Bell, & P. Garrett (Eds) *Approaches to Media Discourse*. Blackwell.

Wodak, R. (2001). The discourse-historical approach. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 63–94). SAGE.

Wolfsfeld, G., Segev, E., & Sheafer, T. (2013). Social media and the Arab Spring: Politics comes first. *The International Journal of Press/politics*, *18*(2), 115–137.

Zaghlami, L. (2020). Social media as a new source of empowerment in Algeria. In M. Ndlela & W. Mano (Eds.), *Social media and elections in Africa* (pp. 117–134). Palgrave Macmillan.

Zinken, J. (2003). Ideological imagination: Intertextual and correlational metaphors in political discourse. *Discourse & Society*, *14*(4), 507–523.

Author Biographies

Mark Nartey is a Lecturer in English Language and Linguistics at the Bristol Centre for Linguistics, University of the West of England. He is an interdisciplinary scholar who specializes in corpus-assisted discourse studies, with a focus on issues at the intersection of language, culture, and society. He has published extensively in applied linguistics, discourse analysis, and communication/media studies, including a recent monograph on political myth-making, nationalist resistance, and populist performance (Routledge) and an edited volume on emancipatory discourses (Routledge).

Yating Yu is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and a member of the Research Centre for Professional Communication in English (RCPCE). Her research interests are in gender studies, language and identities, and mass media. She has previously published in SSCI-indexed journals such as *Social Semiotics*, *Gender and Language*, and *Feminist Media Studies*.