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## Public Engagement and Resistance in the Niger Delta through Social Media and Rhetorical Discourse

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the rhetorical agency and resistance strategies of Nigerian netizens on social media to address environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. Framing social media as a modern public sphere, the research explores how Twitter-like platforms enable the mobilization of marginalized groups to articulate their grievances and demand accountability among corporate and governmental entities. Drawing on critical discourse analysis and the Appraisal Framework, this study examines tweets and their linguistic strategies that have been used to amplify calls for environmental justice through emotive language, moral judgment, and visual imagery. The research underlines the intersection of digital activism and socio-political resistance through the analysis of themes such as oil exploitation, systemic neglect, and failures of governance. The results, through comprehensive analysis, detail how Nigerian netizens frame oil as a “curse,” while also critiquing state inefficiencies and mobilizing in global solidarity via hashtags and visual narratives. The research highlights social media for democratizing public discourse and enabling the voices of underrepresented regions to influence policy and challenge hegemonic structures. This paper contributes to the knowledge of digital activism in postcolonial contexts and illustrates the transformative power of language and digital platforms in the struggle for environmental justice and political accountability in the Niger Delta.

### INTRODUCTION

The notion of the public is very important to rhetoricians, especially in studies that explore the fusion of vernacular speech, place, and political action. Social media as a public fits Gerard Hauser’s (1987) description of a social-psychological space that houses a common world that has common meanings for those inhabiting it. According to Gerard Hauser (1987), such a space is filled with values and norms that are constantly evolving through the experiences of strangers speaking and acting on issues that are discussed. The public sphere thus refers to a discursive realm that gives individuals and groups the affordances to interact freely with the intention of forming a common sense of reality (Hauser, 1985; Hauser & Blair, 1982). According to Gerard (1987), the public sphere allows citizens to voice their concerns and pursue a common cause. The rhetorical possibilities of discursive spaces rely on the open-endedness of the public sphere. In such spaces, rhetoric, and conflict are possibilities. Gerard (1987) states that “The possibility of conflict enables social actors to appear and to stake their claims to historicity. It allows power to be concretely manifested since only empowered social actors may appear and may speak. Consequently, public communication is always in a necessary relationship to conditions of power, since one cannot exercise one’s rhetorical franchise without simultaneously exercising power.” Over the past two decades, there has been an increasing force of social media - that also challenges the degradation of the environment in the Niger Delta. Social media in Nigeria

and beyond has become a vibrant avenue through which citizens voluntarily assemble to deliberate on issues of public interest and influence the political management of such concerns.

The Niger Delta in Nigeria has become one of the hotspots in nature degradation and socio-political conflict impelled by resource exploitation, particularly oil (Ogungbemi, 2023). The resulting deforestation, pollution, and displacement have left the region’s environment in crisis while communities continue to suffer the compounded negative effects of corporate negligence and governmental inaction (Ogungbemi, 2024). These challenges have been provoking both violent and nonviolent forms of resistance; the latter increasingly take the forms of literary activism and social media advocacy. Social media is especially fast becoming a key public sphere in which Nigerian netizens engage in discourses, amplify their voices, and mobilize for action over environmental injustices. Despite its potential, there is yet limited scholarly attention to ways in which these online discourses function as spaces of resistance in fostering rhetorical agency, shaping public consciousness, and challenging power dynamics. The research seeks to bridge this gap by considering the role of social media in shaping environmental discourse and activism within the Niger Delta, with focus on its rhetorical and discursive dimensions. Guided by the following questions, the research looks at: How are social media interactions, particularly those related to environmental issues in the Niger Delta, locally organized and constructed? To what

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extent are Nigerian netizens using social media platforms to challenge environmental degradation and hold corporate and governmental actors accountable? How does social media discourse contribute to the resistive work against hegemonic power structures and amplify environmental justice both as an idea and practice?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

For decades, the Niger Delta of Nigeria has grappled with profound social conflict and ecological degradation rooted in the region's exploitation of oil resources (Iheka, 2021; Ogungbemi, 2016). The German company Nigeria Bitumen Corporation carried out the first oil exploration in Nigeria in 1908 (Steyn, 2009). However, it was in 1956 that Shell-BP drilled its first oil well in Oloibiri, commencing exports by 1958 (Iheka, 2021). Deforestation, pollution, and displacement associated with oil prospecting have been catastrophic for vegetation, human settlements, and farmlands; indeed, aquatic life has been grossly affected in all oil-prospecting areas of the region (Ogungbemi, 2024). The ecological damage in the Niger Delta has largely gone uncompensated, leaving communities to bear the brunt of corporate negligence and government inaction (Eyinla & Ukpo, 2006; Afinotan & Ojajorotu, 2009). This continued degradation has catalyzed both violent and nonviolent resistance from the region's inhabitants and sympathetic Nigerians. Violent resistance often manifests in the form of militant activities, which include the bombing of oil installations and the kidnapping of oil workers for ransom (Ogungbemi, 2023). On the other hand, nonviolent resistance is articulated through creative, and other intellectual mediums. Literary and artistic productions like music, films, poetry, and prose have been used by writers, artists, and activists to highlight the catastrophic situation of the region's environment and people.

Unlike traditional forms of protest, social media offers unparalleled flexibility, creativity, and rapid information circulation, making it an effective tool for mobilization. In this way, social media is becoming a key cultural site of protest, allowing Nigerians to mobilize, disseminate information, and amplify their voices in solidarity with the Niger Delta and other affected areas. They democratize public debate by allowing both individuals and communities to contest the status quo and demand justice in manners that breach physical and geographical boundaries. The literary activism joined by the protests in social media, all together forge an enormous, ever-changing resistance to environmental injustice in the Niger Delta.

By applying both discourse and linguistic perspectives to the study of public participation in environmental discussions on Twitter, the study reveals how non-dominant groups in Nigeria benefit from the new regime of rhetorical agency and self-enfranchisement that social media affords them and makes them participatory actors in the political/public deliberations in the country. Social media provides a safe space for ordinary Nigerian netizens

and empowers them and gives them the visibility and voice to evaluate, negotiate, make choices, and question untoward actions regarding the environment.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The analysis in this paper is done in a critical manner, leveraging Ogungbemi's (2023) and Ogungbemi (2024) innovative approach in the integration of CDA principles and the Appraisal Framework for a broad comprehension of environmental discourse. This hybrid framework enables us to examine how speakers articulate their positions, views, judgments, and attitudes regarding certain environmental contexts. Critical Discourse Analysis, as initiated by Fairclough (1995), centers around the relationship between language, power, and social structures, highlighting how discourse represents and maintains societal ideologies. In contrast, the Appraisal Framework, emanating from systemic functional linguistics, provides apparatus that investigates the lexis of evaluation for the expression of attitude, the negotiation of relationship, and the positioning of interlocutors within a discourse.

According to Fairclough (1995), CDA aims at the systematic investigation of often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events, and texts and (b) broader social and cultural structures, relations, and processes. This method looks into how such discursive practices and texts emerge from and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power. Furthermore, CDA critically examines how the opacity of these relations between discourse and society serves to secure power and maintain hegemony (Ogungbemi & Okunsanya 2016; Ogungbemi, 2018). Fairclough's framework suggests a critical discourse analyst has to go beyond intra-textual analysis to inter-textual analysis. This entails situating the linguistic findings within the broader socio-cultural and political contexts that shape the text, making visible the underlying ideologies and power dynamics at play.

Fairclough's tripartite framework incorporates three levels of analysis: (1) the analysis of spoken and written texts/discourses, (2) discourse practices (the production, distribution, and consumption of texts), and (3) discursive events as instances of broader socio-cultural practices. Applied within the frame of literary criticism, this approach enriches our understanding of the complex socio-political and ideological nuances interwoven into literary creations. It reveals the dynamic interactions between language and its historical and cultural contexts, offering a multidimensional lens for interpreting narratives and their impact on societal structures. By adopting Fairclough's framework, researchers can gain a holistic perspective that connects textual features to broader societal dynamics, making it a powerful tool for uncovering latent power structures and ideological influences embedded in texts (Ogungbemi, 2016; Ogunsiji & Ogungbemi, 2016).

These frameworks integrated allow the researcher to

capture both structural and emotional dimensions of environmental discourse. While CDA is a lens through which to peel back the layers to expose latent power dynamics, ideologies, and social practices structuring discourse, the Appraisal Framework is used for the fine-grained investigation of how speakers use language to express affect (emotion), judgment (moral evaluation), and appreciation (valuation of phenomena) (Biber 2006; Olaluwoye & Ogungbemi, 2020). The duality of the approach finds relevance in environmental discourse, as the language here describes the ecological challenges but also appeals for action, criticizes institutional failures, and frames issues of justice and responsibility.

We adopt Ogungbemi's (2023) innovative method for this paper to observe how speakers identify and apply evaluative strategies in framing environmental issues, power relations, and advocating change. This is particularly appropriate for teasing out the intricacies of how individuals and communities express their concerns and resistances within the broader context of environmental degradation. By combining these perspectives, the study attempts to offer a deeper understanding of how language functions as both a reflective and transformative tool in the fight for environmental justice.

Stance refers to how writers or speakers deploy lexicogrammatical options to express their perspectives, beliefs, judgments, and attitudes (Biber, 2006; Ogungbemi, 2016; Ogungbemi, 2018). Biber and Finnegan (1989) note that stance involves the deployment of lexical and grammatical articulation of judgments, feelings, or devotion within a text. Discussing stance, Hyland (2005) observes that it allows writers or gives them the freedom to either confirm their authority and identity with their arguments or to distance themselves by masking their involvement. One can extrapolate from Hyland's position that stance concerns positioning the writer and determining whether they identify with their arguments or not. Du Bois (2007) suggests that positioning functions to evaluate a social actor to evaluate them for stance and socio-cultural value. Nigerian netizens on Twitter deploy language to ask questions, evaluate, and ask questions in a bid to compel the ruling class to do something to solve the country's environmental crisis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Emotive Language and Moral Judgment in Environmental Activism

In environment discourses regarding the Niger Delta of Nigeria, agency is not only a property of the human but also that of the non-human (material). Tweepers rely on the combination of images and texts in bringing attention to the degradation of the environment of the Niger Delta and its people. Responses to the degradation of the Niger Delta have taken various dimensions over the years, from Niger Deltans taking to peaceful protests to call the attention of the government to their plights, to literary writers devoting extensive energies in fictionalizing the crisis.



Figure 1: A tweet asserting that oil is a curse

These tweets show a discursively coherent framing of oil as a “curse” to the Niger Delta by employing various linguistic strategies to signify resource exploitation. Through repeating such themes, terms like “curse,” “servitude,” and “agony” underscore the negativity brought by oil extraction into this region. The responsibility is being directly placed upon the Federal Government, as evident from statements like “FG sucks oil from those oil communities” and “leave the cash cow in agony and servitude.” This kind of language not only speaks to governance but also points to a power relationship wherein the Niger Delta is exploited and neglected. Strong modality, such as the emphatic “OIL IS A CURSE TO NIGER DELTA!!” and cautious warnings like “If not handled with care,” add urgency and certainty to the discourse. Intertextual references to the region's history of exploitation further anchor the tweets in shared cultural and political understanding, giving the messages broader resonance.

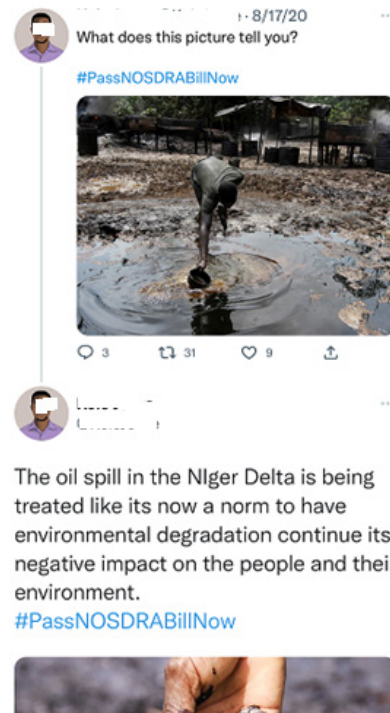
The information in these tweets emanates from persons with first-hand knowledge or strong interest in the socio-political concerns besetting the Niger Delta. These are tweets based on lived experiences and media discourses of the region. Social media, especially Twitter, has become a megaphone through which these voices can reach audiences everywhere, reinforcing their articulation into global conversations around environmental justice and political accountability. Hashtags like #endbadgovernanceinnigeria and #WellsOfDilemma serve as rallying points, calling people to collective action and interpretation of systemic failure. The discourse reflects a deeper ideological critique of postcolonial extractive economies, where resource wealth often exacerbates inequality and environmental degradation.

It challenges entrenched power structures that prioritize profit over the welfare of affected communities, with the historical context of the Niger Delta's exploitation providing a critical backdrop for these ongoing socio-economic and ecological struggles.

The conversation about environmental degradation is mainly on the centrality of oil as an agent of curse to the land and people of Niger Delta. Oil is experienced and constructed, verbally and visually as a central material problem. Oil which is meant to be a blessing has become a curse according to the Tweep in Figure 1. The criminal neglect of oil communities by oil multinational companies and the Federal Government is evidence of the state's disrespectful and malicious attitude toward the region. The tweet claims that oil becomes an agent that is exploited by the federal government—“FG sucks oil from those oil communities”. The tweet alleges that the government uses the money made from oil communities to develop communities that do not have oil, leaving the environment of the oil communities extremely degraded. Another tweet by Mwanake Mwanake with hashtag #WellsofDilemma provides a transnational approach to the agency of oil in Africa. The tweet refers to oil that is discovered in Turkana, Kenya, drawing a comparison between the criminal neglect of the environment of the Niger Delta and what can happen if the Kenyan government is not careful and discreet in their handling of oil exploration in the region.

The tweets show intense emotive engagement through their affective language; the words “agony,” “curse,” and “servitude” have effectively displayed anger, frustration, and despair over the effects of oil exploitation on the Niger Delta. This emotive tone is combined with moral judgment: implicitly, the Federal Government and those responsible for policymaking are criticized for neglect and exploitation in not responding to the needs of the region. Moreover, oil is valued not as a source of prosperity but as a “curse,” a token of injustice and systemic suffering. This negative judgment reconfigures what is conventionally perceived as an economic blessing into a cause of great social devastation and affirms the larger significance of resource mismanagement and inequity.

From an engagement point of view, most of the tweets apply dialogic contraction since they make use of declarations like “OIL IS A CURSE TO NIGER DELTA!!” to state their arguments as undisputed facts, shutting off spaces for any other stance. On the other hand, some are dialogically expanded, as in “If not handled with care,” when the discursive space was opened for better governance to alter the impacts of oil exploitation. Gradation techniques further intensify the strength and sharpness of the message. Writing in capital letters (“OIL IS A CURSE”) and using exclamation marks underlines the urgency and emotional weight of the discourse, while an accurate focus on the Niger Delta and the Federal Government tightens the clarity and directness of the critique to make the intended message strike powerfully home with its audience.



**Figure 2:** A tweet that captures oil spill on the environment

In figure 2, visual imagery works, here, on several interrelated levels. First, the tweet posts an image that shows a raw sample of an oil spill in a body of water in a location believed to be the Niger Delta in Nigeria. In the contaminated water, there is a man trying to scoop water. Second, the tweet asks the question: “What does this picture tell you?” The question becomes an invitation for the public to be witnesses to the level of environmental ruination that the members of oil communities live with daily. The relatively unmediated image and the text in Figure 2 reveal the frustrations of the people about the oil spill that the government has left unattended to. The tweet uses the tweet to call on the Nigerian senate to #PassNOSDRABillNow. The bill is directed at ensuring a timely and effective response to all oil spills in the upstream, midstream, and downstream sectors in Nigeria. After the online campaign to #PassNOSDRABillNow, the federal government of Nigeria declared that it would review the NOSDRABill. This showed the success of this campaign geared toward awakening the government toward cleaning oil spills and rescuing the heavily degraded Niger Delta environment. To realize the fuller impact of the analysis done so far and garner more out of the oil spill materially, rhetorically, and even politically, one should be attentive to not only the performative nature of the image of the oil spill but also the message it communicates to capitalism and the Nigerian government. Here we could understand the oil spill to be functioning as a synecdoche for the excesses of liberal capitalism and the refusal of the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian government to clean the oil spills as the failure of capitalism in the country and other places where those

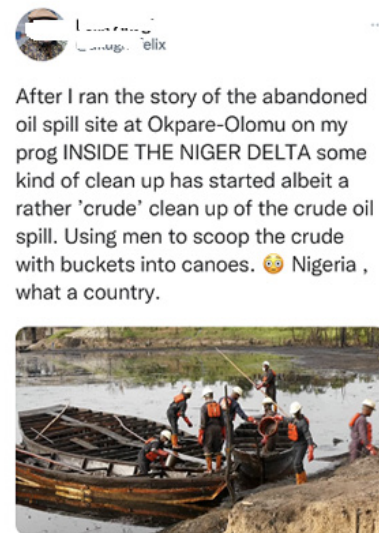
multinational companies operate. From the perspective of intersectional rhetoric, the offensive image of the oil spill, and the inciting question “What does this picture tell you?” incited animosity that calls into question the literal and symbolic shady actions of liberal capitalism, and invited the public to begin advancing social movement against the government and the oil companies who are responsible for the oil spills and the general degradation of the Niger Delta environment.

The tweets highlight the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, framing it as a normalized crisis. Through phrases like “treated like it’s now a norm,” the text emphasizes systemic neglect and resignation, suggesting a deeply rooted societal and institutional failure to address the issue. Responsibility is subtly attributed to governance structures and corporate actors, critiquing their lack of accountability in managing the environmental impacts of oil spills. Additionally, the hashtag #PassNOSDRABillNow draws on legislative discourse, linking the environmental crisis to broader policy shortcomings and advocating for reform to address the persistent degradation and its consequences. The production of the tweets appears to stem from an advocate or concerned citizen, utilizing a combination of striking visuals and compelling textual appeals to highlight the severity of the situation. Social media, particularly Twitter, plays a crucial role in distributing this message, amplifying its reach and connecting it to ongoing advocacy efforts through the strategic use of hashtags. The audience is invited to interpret the imagery and text as evidence of a critical and unresolved issue, encouraging engagement and participation in the campaign for legislative action. The text critiques the extractive economy’s role in perpetuating inequality and environmental harm, situating itself within broader calls for environmental justice and governance reform. This discourse challenges the power dynamics between local communities and the authorities or corporations benefiting from resource exploitation, while drawing on the Niger Delta’s historical context of systemic neglect and failed regulatory measures.

The emotional tone of the tweets is conveyed through language and imagery, eliciting responses of frustration, despair, and urgency. Terms like “negative impact” and “norm” highlight the severity of the situation, while the moral judgment implicit in the critique of policymakers and corporations frames them as complicit in allowing environmental degradation to persist. The oil spill is evaluated negatively, representing not only environmental harm but also governance failure, which underscores the broader systemic issues at play. The rhetorical question “What does this picture tell you?” expands the discourse, inviting readers to reflect and engage critically, while the statement “treated like it’s now a norm” contracts the conversation, presenting the issue as an undeniable reality. Graduation techniques amplify the intensity of the message through evocative imagery, such as oil-soaked environments and polluted hands, while the hashtag

sharpens the focus on actionable advocacy, providing a clear legislative solution to the crisis. Together, these elements create a powerful and urgent call for reform and accountability.

In figure 3, the tweep, Felix Akugha who is a broadcast journalist and the anchor of the program: Inside the Niger Delta-Tv, and Which Way Nigeria- Radio, also tweeted a tweet containing an image of some men who are crudely engaging in scooping crude oil with buckets into canoes.



**Figure 3:** Men scooping crude oil spills with buckets into canoes

In figure 3, the agency of oil and its materiality also take center stage. The distressing image of men crudely scooping crude oil with buckets reveals the travesty of the clean-up purportedly organized by the government and the oil companies. Whether or not the clean-up is thorough, it is important to focus on the effect of the action of the public in getting the government and the multinational companies to be responsible. The practical goal of any rhetoric is to persuade people to act in one way or another. Calling out the government and the multinational oil companies for neglecting oil spills at Okpare-Olomu should be considered successful because the performance of Felix Akugha using his Tv program INSIDE THE Niger DELTA provided intersectional rhetoric of resistance that challenged the constraints of the system on the sociopolitical agency. He used the program to uncover the neglect suffered by the community and to expose those behind the oil spill. Taking to Twitter to report on the effect of the call-out, the tweep is further enlisting the concerned public in policing the forces of capitalism and the government that has deliberately polluted the environment and has refused to clean it up.

The tweet shows the incompetence and inefficiency of cleaning up oil spills in the Niger Delta and evidence systemic neglect in attending to such environmental

disasters. This phrase, “rather ‘crude’ clean-up of the crude oil spill”, strikes a chord in that it has compared the severity of the problem with the most rudimentary ways of trying to attend to it. This ironic wordplay underlines not only the primitiveness of the response but also the larger systemic failure to apply effective solutions. The description of workers “using men to scoop the crude with buckets into canoes” further underlines this inadequacy, reflecting poorly on governance and institutional structures tasked with managing such crises. The rudimentary methods of cleanup are a strong representation of how the wealth generated from oil extraction is not complimented with infrastructure or resources to mitigate its harmful impacts.

Other salient features of the text are intertextuality; for example, it mentions a program, INSIDE THE NIGER DELTA, and a location, Okpare-Olomu. These references place the issue in a broader context of neglect, which is well-documented and forms the subject of much debate in the media and public space. The tweet especially points out that attention was paid only after this story was broadcast, hence underlining the importance of media in bringing these crises to attention. However, the response being crude, shows again the systemic inefficiencies of dealing with environmental degradation. It is an invitation to view the incident considering a broader pattern of governance and institutional failure.

The production by a journalist or media figure adds another layer of critique, as it situates the narrative within the framework of investigative journalism prompting action. This tweet would, in other words, suggest that without media attention, even this inadequate cleanup might not have taken place. This dynamic reflects the institutional structures that do not have the ability to act without external pressure, and even then, the responses are woefully inadequate. Social media, in this case, Twitter, acts as the distribution platform to spread the message far and wide. The visual imagery together with the textual description increases the level of urgency that the reader cannot afford to look away from. The concluding phrase, “Nigeria, what a country,” speaks volumes about resignation and frustration, encouraging readers to read the cleanup as symbolic of deeper systemic inefficiencies. The social practice of this discourse provides a critique of the greater ideological framework of governance and the extractive economy in Nigeria. While the country is rich in oil, no investment in environmental stewardship or disaster management infrastructure is in place. The criticism follows decades of complaints of poor resource management in Nigeria, where oil extraction revenues often go to corporations and a wealthy elite while local communities receive nothing in return. The tweet thus showcases how those communities have become so powerless that they use their hands and shoddy equipment to try to handle these supposedly very technical aspects of environmental degradation. This is where power dynamics are in play: while local labor is tasked with cleaning up, those in powerful positions avoid liability altogether.

Decades of oil spills and environmental degradation have characterized the Niger Delta due to corruption and a lack of corporate responsibility. The tweet draws on this historical context to underscore the enduring nature of the problem. It reflects a cycle of neglect and inadequate responses that perpetuate the suffering of local communities and the degradation of their environment. This narrative is a critique of the present, a reminder of past failures, urging systemic change to break this cycle of environmental harm and institutional neglect. Together, the text and context frame the issue as an urgent problem which needs more than temporary or superficial fixes-it needs the changing of governance, accountability, and resource management at its root.

figure 3 involves high emotional responses because of its lexical and graphic support to show frustration, dismay, or disappointment. Terms like “crude” point to a primitively inadequate way to answer to one of the major environmental disasters; a shocked emoji ???? also served the same function to reveal that disbelief for an insufficiency in a response. These affective elements underscore the emotional weight of the situation, calling attention to the jarring contrast between the gravity of the oil spill and the primitive means utilized in cleaning it up. The text taps into collective frustration over systemic neglect, inviting readers to share in the emotional outrage over the lack of meaningful action. In that sense, moral judgment implicitly targets policymakers and corporate actors for their neglect and ineptitude in managing environmental disasters. This tweet frames those stakeholders as irresponsible or incapable of providing the needed resources and infrastructure to respond to disasters. Such an act of scooping oil manually into canoes was in vivid detail a symbol of institutional failure, reflecting poorly on governance structures that would allow such inefficiency. This critique spans beyond the immediate scene into broader issues of accountability and governance, positing the cleanup process to be emblematic of the deeper systemic dysfunctions.

The evaluation of the cleanup is overtly negative, with terms such as “primitive” being used to describe it as grossly insufficient. The text has gone ahead to describe the efforts as a “crude clean up of the crude oil spill”; this is a sharp critique of the mismatch between the severity of the environmental damage and the resources or methods applied to address it. This appraisal reflects poorly on institutional responses, casting them as not only inadequate but also as indicative of a broader pattern of neglect and lack of preparedness. The imagery reinforces this assessment, driving the message home that the response to the oil spill falls far short of the standards required to effectively address the crisis. Engagement-wise, the tweet employs a mix of dialogic contraction and expansion. The statement “Nigeria, what a country” contracts the discourse by closing off alternative interpretations, framing the situation as an unchanging and systemic dysfunction. This declarative tone leaves little room for debate in presenting the inadequacy of this

cleanup as a fact of reality. On the other hand, “my prog INSIDE THE NIGER DELTA” expands such discourse by acknowledging the role of the media in bringing attention to the crisis. Even this expansion is tempered by a limited and insufficient nature of an action it spurred, implying the need for broader systemic changes. Gradation techniques amplify the critique by heightening the intensity and sharpness of the message. The imagery of workers scooping oil into canoes is particularly powerful, underlining the inadequacy and absurdity of the response. The term “crude clean up” is even more strongly critical, highlighting the gulf between the seriousness of the spill and the primitive measures being used to try and remedy it. The focus on specific actions, such as the manual scooping of oil, coupled with the mention of location, Okpare-Olomu, makes the critique sharp by making the inefficiencies in environmental management highly visible and relatable. These elements ensure that the inadequacy of the cleanup efforts is not only understood intellectually but also felt emotionally, driving home the urgency of systemic reform.



**Figure 4:** A tweet indicting Shell in environmental degradation

The tweet represented by figure 4 brings to the attention of the public the raw and sad materiality of the flood that for decades has made life unlivable for the people of Joinkrama in the Niger Delta region. This is an indictment of Shell and the liberal capitalist system. The failure of capitalism is painfully obvious in the poignant images of a lady walking home in the flood and houses half submerged in the flood. Such images serve to make present the material scope of the problem in Nigeria. The tweet warns and admonishes that to keep on extracting oil from the Niger Delta is to keep on inviting such environmental problems as flooding. The tweet makes

Shell’s refusal to help combat the environmental ruination that its activities have largely been responsible for a sign of how capitalism is only interested in profit-making at the expense of all other things.

The text highlights the inefficiency and inadequacy of the cleaning up of oil spills in the Niger Delta, underlining the systemic neglect that characterizes environmental management in the region. The phrase “rather ‘crude’ clean-up of the crude oil spill” is particularly effective in bringing out the irony of using very primitive methods to tackle what was a major environmental disaster. The crudeness of the term “crude” in the light of such seriousness of an issue, however, highlights a severe deficiency of the response as part of the greater critique of institutional and governmental neglect. Further examples of such a rudimentary approach would be how workers used men to scoop the crude with buckets into canoes, again showing governance structures very poorly managing this kind of crisis. This imagery not only reveals the inefficiency of the cleanup but also serves as a strong metaphor for larger systemic failures in assuaging the environmental challenges of the Niger Delta.

Agency and responsibility are central to the critique, as the text implicitly seeks to hold policymakers, oil companies, and regulatory bodies responsible for the inadequacy of the cleanup efforts. The language emphasizes the failure of institutional structures to provide necessary resources or infrastructure to tackle the spill by shifting the focus to the manual and rudimentary methods employed. The phrase “using men to scoop the crude with buckets into canoes” suggests a reliance on unskilled labor and minimal tools, underscoring the lack of a coordinated, professional response. The critique runs much deeper than this immediate scene of devastation into broad systemic failures in governance, environmental protection, and disaster management of the region.

The intertextual reference to the program INSIDE THE NIGER DELTA and the place Okpare-Olomu sets this within a broader framing narrative of neglect and systemic failure. In referring to the program, it reveals a critical text aware of the role media could play in highlighting these crises to stimulate action, however inadequate. The specific mention of Okpare-Olomu situates the problem within a real, tangible community, emphasizing that these environmental challenges are not abstract but deeply affect the lives and livelihoods of local populations. These framing invites readers to connect the Niger Delta’s environmental degradation to broader issues of governance and corporate accountability, situating the crisis within a global discourse on resource exploitation and environmental justice.

The making of the tweet carries the hallmarks of its origin in investigative journalism, positioning the journalist as an agent through the broadcasting of the crisis to a wider audience. Yet, at the same time, it provides a critique of the limited and partial response that followed, suggesting systemic issues have not been resolved. Social media, in this context, Twitter, acts as the distribution platform for

this visual narrative, furthering reach and ensuring that the imagery and text resonate with a global audience. These striking visuals combined with a textual description make the tweet a compelling storytelling medium that points to the severity of the situation. The phrase “Nigeria, what a country” becomes a rhetoric that summarizes the systemic dysfunction of it all and invites readers to think of the issue as symbolic of broader national problems.

The discussion discredits the broader ideological context of governance and resource management in Nigeria by pointing out how its oil wealth has been cut loose from investing in proper environmental stewardship. This narration puts in contrast the fact that the extractive economy prioritizes profit instead of being sustainable, with local communities left bearing the environmental and social brunt. The power dynamics could not be clearer: while environmental disasters strike, local workers and communities are left to improvise measures with meager resources while the corporations and authorities responsible flee from accountability. This imbalance reflects a larger pattern of exploitation and disempowerment where those most affected by resource extraction are the least prepared to deal with its consequences.

These tweets effectively employ an emotional appeal for sympathy and outrage. In the first tweet, visual imagery of “flooded homes & farms” coupled with urgent wording like “destroy their homes & farms” demands that readers place themselves in the shoes of the victims of environmental devastation. The second tweet draws on grief and indignation by referencing the historical injustice of Ken Saro-Wiwa’s execution, using phrases like “murdered for campaigning” to highlight the gravity of the event and its ongoing implications. These affective appeals aim to stir emotional connections and galvanize readers to act.

The Judgment aspect assesses the behavior of Shell and the Nigerian government by morally judging their complicity in environmental devastation and systemic oppression. Terms like “neglectful” and “exploitative” are used to posture these actors as guilty and unfair. What’s more, the tweets cast the environmental devastation and historical legacy of injustice under Appreciation, setting the catastrophic nature of the floods against the urgency and necessity of pursuing justice with persistence.

Both tweets apply Dialogic Contraction in establishing that action is urgent: “The time is now to #StopOil”; “27 years ago today. murdered for campaigning.” Little room is left for possible alternative interpretations; the issues are put in a frame of undeniable truths. Meanwhile, Dialogic Expansion is carried out through hashtags such as #StopOil, #ClimateJustice, and #KenSaroWiwa, to encourage readers to relate the local struggles of the Niger Delta to wider global movements for environmental justice and human rights. The dual strategy reaches both local and international audiences and creates a shared sense of responsibility and collective action.

The tweets amplify their power through Force by using

emotionally charged terms like “destroy,” “murdered,” and “inevitable.” These words raise the level of urgency and injustice depicted in the messages, while vivid imagery of flooded homes and references to Ken Saro-Wiwa’s historical struggle heighten the readers’ emotional responses. The tweets also show Focus: narrowing attention to specific locations, such as Joinkrama, Ogoni; events, such as the 27-year anniversary; and actors, like Shell and the Nigerian military government. It is such focused attention that roots the critique within concrete and relatable contexts, thus making the narratives compelling and convincing.

## CONCLUSION

The study examines pressing issues of environmental degradation and climate justice within the socio-political landscape of Nigeria, focusing on how these themes are articulated and contested on social media, particularly Twitter. The analysis situates these concerns within the historical and political context of Nigeria’s transition to democracy over the past two decades, which has created opportunities for increased public participation in addressing critical issues like the environmental impacts of oil exploration and systemic neglect in the Niger Delta. Social media now serves as a powerful platform that mobilizes activism, amplifies the voices of the marginalized, and fosters public engagement in environmental issues in which Nigerian netizens increasingly find an accessible and powerful means to advance change. This paper, through a rhetorical agency and stance analytical perspective, investigates how netizens utilize language, imagery, and discourse in order to talk back against institutional neglect and resist hegemonic power in the struggle for environmental justice. The tweets analyzed detail how public discourse frames oil as a “curse” and the exploitation of resources as a systemic injustice, placing government and corporations as direct causes of environmental degradation. The research underlines that social media enables ordinary citizens to take part in wider public debates, negotiate power dynamics, and demand accountability in ways previously unavailable.

Moreover, the study expands on existing research by integrating Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the Appraisal Framework, offering a nuanced understanding of how linguistic and rhetorical tools are employed to construct narratives of resistance and justice. The findings highlight the dynamic interplay between emotive language, moral judgment, and visual strategies in galvanizing public action and fostering solidarity. This approach reveals unique affordances of social media with respect to democratizing discourses and facilitating collective actions beyond physical and ideological barriers. This paper enriches the literature on how digital spaces such as Twitter work for effecting change regarding the current ecological crises in Nigeria. By examining the perspectives of Nigerian citizens, this research not only captures the lived realities of those

most affected by environmental degradation but also demonstrates the potential of social media to serve as a vehicle for systemic change. The study calls for further investigation into public participation in digital space, especially in postcolonial settings, to continue revealing how grass-rooted communities make use of these tools in trying to contest inequity, shape public consciousness, and advocate for sustainable futures.

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