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Full Length Research Paper

Let the Silenced Speak: Digital Platform Usage by Feminist and Gender Equity Nongovernmental Organizations in Ghana

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The freedom and acceptance of feminists' activities in Ghana hit several rocks after the first African Feminist Congress in Ghana in 2004. In Ghana, research on gender advocacy and feminist organizations has increased, but little emphasis has been paid to the contribution of self-identified feminists to women's empowerment. I explored how self-identified feminists and gender equity-focused NGOs in Ghana leverage social media to educate and advocate for women's and children's welfare. I also examined how these feminists and NGOs engage women in rural areas in seminars, discussion sessions, and training workshops to create spaces for women to voice their concerns and gain empowerment. Given this, 17 in-depth interviews were conducted with self-identified Ghanaian feminists and NGO leaders. I employed muted group theory and African feminist theory to guide the data analysis. I argued that Ghanaian self-identified feminists and NGOs have put in a lot of work to empower Ghanaian women to enable them to express themselves and share their experiences. The findings contribute to the discussion on Ghanaian feminism and how they enact empowerment and advance how the growing acceptance of feminism in Ghana allows Ghanaian women to speak for themselves and have their voices heard in national and global digital spaces.

Keywords: Freedom, Feminism, Digital platforms, Muted Groups, NGOs

In the past decade, a significant increase has been observed among feminists and organizations in Ghana. However, misinformation is still spreading regarding the character, extent, and use of feminist activity in Ghana. The media in Ghana is highly influential in forming opinions and upholding beliefs on intricate political, social, and cultural narratives (Avle, 2011). Following the adoption of Ghana's 1992 constitution, which guaranteed freedom of speech, social groups aimed at combating harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, the Trokosi system, child marriage, and witches camp practices for women began to emerge and grow (Ameh 2004; Authority & Council, 2000; Kreitzer, 2012).

Before the 1992 Constitution, state measures such as the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) Law 111 provided some liberation to women who lost the assets they may have gained during their marriage before the 1992 Constitution (Korang-Okrah & Haight, 2015). According to Korang-Okrah and Haight (2015), the PNDC Law 111 and the 1992 Constitution laid a crucial foundation for women to break free from silence and actively contribute to dismantling systemic barriers to their rights. These legal frameworks paved the way for women to assert their rights to property ownership, pursue higher education, combat economic injustices, advocate for maternity leave policies, and demand unrestricted access to quality healthcare and social amenities.

However, Ghanaian gender advocacy groups and practices have seen a diffusion with greater educational attainment, the introduction of technologies and social media, and women's rights advocacy. This has advanced women's accessibility to

social utility and bumped media engagement by women (Badri & Tripp, 2017). Although there has been a growth of women in Ghanaian media throughout time, this growth has been gradual.

According to Gadzekpo (2011), only 11% of Ghanaian women participate in discussions on the radio. Gadzekpo argues that Ghanaian media do not adequately address women's issues, including rape and other gender-based crimes. Ghanaian women's lives are changing dramatically, with social media and technology creating a culture of connectedness (Van Dijck, 2013). According to Fotopoulou (2021), the existence of modern technology has ushered in a period of "Empowerment versus Vulnerability" (p. 1).

Chiluwa (2022), in her study on "Women's online advocacy campaigns for political participation in Nigeria and Ghana," argued that online media allows advocacy groups to extend their voices and reach national and global audiences. However, the most vulnerable women, particularly those in rural areas of West Africa and other underprivileged audiences, are often muted by privileged individuals. She noted, "only a small percentage of women in rural areas have access to the internet, thereby limiting participation in online activism in cities and urban centers" (Chiluwa, 2022, p. 465).

Review of Literature

Women cannot be left out when telling the history of Ghana. In many ways, African women have made significant contributions to the liberation across the continent. Although the precise start date of African feminism is uncertain, it is believed to have started long before colonialism, although

within that period, it was not identified as feminism (McClaurin, 2001). Ghanaian women are one of the nation's precious yet undiscovered growth resources. Although there have been consecutive hegemonic political administrations, Ghanaian women have been included in the developmental discourse since the country's struggle for independence (Nartey, 2021). However, whenever these women were brought up throughout our country's progress history, they were viewed as silent activists or helpers (Mohammed, 2022; Mohammed, 2023). This sense of silence on the path of women displays the history of gender and development as a tale of the trajectory of female agency in the development of Ghana.

Defining Ghanaian Feminism

Ghanaians are not enthused about feminism and all the ideas that are associated with it. According to Mohammed (2023), "Feminist politics, feminist activism, and feminism was frowned upon in Ghana (Mohammed, 2023, p. 1). Bawa (2018) claimed that Ghanaian culture thought that because feminism disregarded the societal duties assigned to women, it was a threat hidden in plain sight. Ghanaian feminism was acknowledged for challenging and upending dominant bourgeois cultural practices and beliefs (Bawa, 2018). Consequently, women prefer the identification of "gender advocates, women's rights activists, women's empowerment advocates," and gender-sensitive persons rather than being tagged as feminists. (Mohammed, 2020, p. 5).

In the history of Ghana, women were also freedom fighters during the fight for independence. Women such as Yaa Asantewaa, Sophia Doku, Leticia Quaye, and Hannah Kudjoe made sure to support the course for Ghana's independence with their skills, courage, and finances. (Mohammed, 2022). Even after independence, Ghana can boast of women like Rose Mensah-Kutin, Takyiwaa Manuh, and Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, who still advocate for women's rights and inclusion. However, women are not recognized for this role and contribution, leading to their erasure from the history of Ghana (Akuffo, 2023). Sometimes, when these women get the privilege to be acknowledged, they are considered less central to the independence movement (Allman, 2009). To deal with this erasure, most African feminist organizations have come together to acknowledge the efforts of these women and their contribution to the continent's development (Davies, 2014).

The Ghana Women's Manifesto was formulated in 2004 by a coalition of women who sought to address issues from women's rights to reproductive health care, economic and political equality, and other rights (Fallon & Boutilier, 2022). Other issues, including patriarchy, economic disparities, societal standards, and assigned duties for women, are encompassed by the concept of gender inequality (Mohammed, 2023; Sultana, 2010). Although Ghanaian feminists haven't made much headway, they are working to address several concerns listed in this manifesto. Chomsky et al. (2021) argued that "contemporary activism from an embodied perspective is organic and complex" (229). As part of these steps for change, Ghanaian feminist activists seek new avenues to advocate for social change. McInroy and Beer

(2022) acknowledged that social media is one of the new channels for nonprofits seeking to cause radical social change.

Feminist Usage of Social Media in Ghana

According to Nwaolikpe (2021), digital media provides victims of domestic abuse with a platform to express their feelings, inform the world, and find answers to their issues. According to his research, activists noticed that the information they shared on Facebook created awareness of domestic violence and offered networking opportunities and education. Furthermore, Nartey (2021) contended that social media was utilized in Ghana to confront misogyny and denounce sexists like Kennedy Agyapong and George Lutterodt. As a result, women in Ghana who battled to defend other women were commended for their efforts.

Nartey (2021) argued that Ghanaian feminists have been utilizing social media to challenge laws and policies that deprive women of their rights and create injustice. It is interesting to witness how women are speaking up for themselves in Ghana and around Africa. According to Loiseau and Nowacka (2015), social media is an effective tool for promoting women's rights, holding people accountable for their actions, and dispelling discrimination and stereotypes that negatively impact women. Women's groups like the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT), the Gender Centre for Empowering Development (GenCED), and National Empowerment for Democracy, which is based in Nigeria, have expanded their support to women in politics through social media activity.

African women organized themselves before colonization. However, the ideology of feminism has not been entirely accepted by all the women in the movement (Horn, 2013; Mama, 2011). Studies on Ghanaian feminism frequently have been focused on the country's opposition to feminism. These studies do not include instances of silencing or how NGOs and self-identified Ghanaian feminists educate and train women to voice out and be heard. It is critical to study how, what, and why these self-described feminists and NGOs carry out activities to help empower women, as it will enable people to recognize their contribution toward achieving gender equality. To address this gap, the following questions guided this study:

1. How has feminist activism in Ghana evolved from 1992 to 2022?
2. In what ways have self-identified Ghanaian feminists managed to avoid being silenced?
3. What phenomena do feminist and gender equity NGOs in Ghana address through social media to advocate for Ghanaian women's and children's welfare?

Muted Group Theory (MGT)

Muted group theory (MGT) was created in 1975 by feminist researcher Shirley Ardener and cultural anthropologist Edwin Ardener (Mearns, 2017) and revealed the sociolinguistic power disparities that can potentially silence the voices of social groups. Inequitable restrictions that prevent a social group from expressing itself are referred to as mutedness. According to the MGT, there are two ways a dominating

group and subordinate group(s) are related: The dominant group creates the lexicon and social norms that permeate the language system. To communicate, subordinate group(s) learn to speak in the language of the majority (Meares, 2017). In this study, I employed MGT from “a call to attention to the muting of women’s voices and, thus, experiences; and to reform language so that women’s experiences from women’s perspectives are fully represented” (Wood, 2005, p. 63). The MGT is valuable and applicable to the Ghanaian context because the idea of muted groups clarifies how dominant systems suppress women, which helps to explain the difficulties Ghanaian self-identified feminists and NGOs encounter when promoting women’s rights.

African Feminist Theory

African feminist theory challenges Eurocentric mainstream feminist theories by highlighting African women’s unique perspectives and experiences. African feminism moves beyond essentialist definitions; Thiam (1986) argued that African women face multiple forms of oppression based on sex, class, and race. However, it is stereotypical that African women should be viewed as liabilities; instead, they should be recognized as individuals with special capabilities, self-worth, and priorities. Consequently, through this theory, women within Africa are recognized as powerful, with their respective agency to make decisions based on their unique experiences.

Wane (2011) argued that based on the lived experiences of African women, they embrace various indigenous and creative ways of knowledge. It extends beyond issues of gender to address the intersecting socio-economic, political, and cultural factors that position women as subordinate to their male counterparts (Davies & Graves, 1986). African feminism makes society conscious of the impact of societal issues on women in Africa. African feminism therefore aims to pinpoint and demolish the current power structures that exist between men and women. It allows women to recognize their talents, gendered place in society, and numerous identities in the face of adversity (Steady, 1987; Nnaemeka, 1998). African feminism, as part of a worldwide movement, seeks to destroy patriarchy in all its manifestations (Steady, 1987).

Research can benefit from the paradigms offered by African feminist theory and MGT, which emphasizes power relations and underrepresented voices. By highlighting the intersections of gender, race, and class, African feminist theory places these issues within the African sociocultural framework. Together, they add to the more extensive conversations on feminist praxis and empowerment by providing insights into the tactics used by NGOs and feminists to elevate underrepresented voices and promote gender equity in Ghana, locally and globally.

Methods

In this study, I employed a qualitative research design. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2008) claimed that qualitative research entails gathering and examining statements and non-numerical data (such as text, video, or audio) to comprehend ideas, attitudes, or experiences. For this study, I employed the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling, as described by Luther and Meadows (2015), is

choosing survey participants through introductions and recommendations. I had to choose prospective Ghanaian participants and declare myself a feminist to apply this sample approach. Following their introduction, these potential participants introduced me to further possible participants who share their attributes. The participants then recruit new individuals by introducing them to me. Therefore, with this research, I interviewed 17 self-identified feminists in Ghana. Out of these 17 women, 14 of them identified as feminists, two identified as gender activists, and one person identified as a humanitarian. Also, because the research focused on gender equity in nongovernmental organizations, I sought to determine if these women belonged to such organizations. Of 17 women, 10 were affiliated with nongovernmental organizations focused on gender-related issues. To protect the identity of the participants, I used pseudonyms to refer to these research participants. This sampling method was chosen because it is characterized by networking and flexibility, and it helps me to be able to reach my participants, as I could not contact them directly due to geographical boundaries.

Using purposive and snowball sampling (Luther & Meadows, 2015), 17 feminists were selected to be interviewed to gain in-depth information concerning the concept of feminism in Ghana, how this notion has evolved over the years, feminists’ activities and their publication of their issues affecting women on social media. In addition, data were gathered from the participants through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. According to Mears (2012), an in-depth interview is an open-ended, discovery-oriented method for obtaining comprehensive information on a topic from a research participant. These involved a flexible format that allowed the interview to follow the interests of the person being interviewed but was guided by the research questions, enabling the interview to be carried out based on the availability of the interviewees.

With this study, all the collected early data were carefully studied, separated, sorted, and synthesized through qualitative coding (Charmaz, 2000). Thus, the data were sorted and grouped into segments. I stopped interviewing when I reached the point of data saturation; signifying the point at which no new information emerges from participants, which validates the depth of data collected (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Complemented by transcription applications, manual coding enabled meticulous examination of responses, ensuring completeness and accuracy.

Ethical principles were employed in the data collection process. These include informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality principles (Ryan & Beasley, 2017). All IRB protocols (IRB #735880-17) were duly observed. Trust and mutual respect were cultivated through transparent communication regarding the study’s purpose, funding, and potential benefits.

Thematic Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as a method used for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within the data collected by the researcher. Thematic analysis is also described by Boyatzis

(1998) as a translator that enables researchers to interact even using different research methods. Braun and Clarke (2006) opined that frequent thematic analysis produces trustworthy and insightful findings from the research data.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), although thematic analysis does not entail detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of other qualitative approaches, it provides a highly flexible research process that leads to the modification of the needs of many studies, hence, providing a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data. Also, the thematic analysis is easily accessible during analysis, especially for new researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is because the process of thematic analysis is easy to learn, adapt, and apply to one's research.

Through this process, I had over 500 initial codes grouped into categories and themes for my research using different color schemes. During interview sessions, I wrote memos to keep track of my participant's processes, suppositions, and mannerisms (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014). Writing and maintaining memos enabled me to consider other factors, such as tone, body language, and confidence, and move beyond individual discussions and literature to search for more categories.

Results

I sought to discover how feminism was perceived and how it helped provide women in Ghana with their voice and language. I considered the activities carried out by individual and organizational feminists in Ghana that have changed the perception of feminism in Ghana. Through the analysis of the interview data, three thematic categories were identified in response to the first research question. These themes include the diverse notion of feminism in Ghana, Misinformation as a cause of Ghana feminists being muted, and Ghana's acceptance of feminism.

The Diverse Notion of Feminism in Ghana

The theme of the diverse notion of feminism refers to the different interpretations, conceptions, and impressions that people have of something known or unknown. In this study, feminism is a known and unknown concept within Ghanaian society. Thus, most of the participants I engaged were well acquainted with the term "feminism," while a few had a shallow understanding of it.

Feminism as a term has been highly misunderstood within Ghanaian society. Bawa (2018) argued that Ghanaian culture perceives feminism as a threat in disguise because it has led women to reject the social roles assigned to them. This argument is due to a misunderstanding of what feminism embodies within Ghanaian society. Bawa (2018) highlighted the issues of a diverse notion of what feminism seeks to symbolize, how the understanding of Ghanaian society concerning the connotation of feminism and the representation of a feminist. This issue of diverse notions of feminism is evident in the participants' responses. In line with this, one of my participants, Sitso, stated, "I believe that feminism is about fighting for equality for women. Feminism is about advocating for women's rights. On the other hand, people believe that

feminism is about fighting so much against men." (Sitso, zoom interview, 2022)

Sitso's response highlights her understanding of feminism and society's other interpretations concerning feminism. Although she thinks of feminism as a cause for "gender equality," she does not deny that Ghanaian society perceives "feminism" as a battle-causing ideology between men and women in the community.

Another participant, Delali, stated that:

Ghanaians do not understand feminism. I know feminism means a group of women advocating for women's rights and equality. In Ghana, feminism was seen in the past as a group of women who did not want to get married or be controlled by men. Given this, they assume the identity of feminism to scare away men. (Delali, Zoom interview, 2022)

From Delali's response, it can be perceived that there is some lack of understanding of feminism. Although she uses the word "Ghanaians," it cannot be concluded that all Ghanaians are guilty of this lack of misunderstanding about feminism. Her response complements Ama's response on how feminism is interpreted differently among people. She avers one's mind to how it was understood two decades ago and how it is currently understood. Although the negative connotation that was associated with feminism still lingers, there has been some level of clarity in meaning. Given this, another participant, Nuna, stated, "A feminist is a person that believes in the power of women. That women must stand for something and think they can do what they set out to do." (Nuna, Zoom meeting, 2022)

Nuna's response shows her interpretation of feminism. She believes feminism stands for women's power and ability to do what they set out for. Though her performance is not far from what is understood as feminism, one can perceive the difference in interpretation from that of the earlier respondent. This shows that even though all these participants are within Ghana, their understanding of feminism differs from one person to the other.

Misinformation as a Cause of the Silencing of Ghana Feminists

Ghanaian women have been muted in so many ways by patriarchal norms through the dissemination of wrong information. This has contributed to some women picking up the language of the majority to communicate. However, I discovered that Ghanaian feminists are working hard to avoid being muted and giving women the chance to own their voices and narratives. In this study, I found that one of the ways that Ghanaian feminists were being muted was through the spread of misinformation. Misinformation intentionally spreads false or inaccurate information, primarily deliberately intended to deceive (Allein et al., 2023). Thus, it involves creating and spreading wrong information about feminism or feminists in a given society to mislead, confuse, or deceive people, especially those with little to no knowledge about what feminism entails, which leads to subordinate group(s)

integrating or picking up the language and wrong ideas about feminism of the majority when discussing the subject.

Misinformation about feminism significantly challenges people's understanding of the 'truth' about what feminism represents and the essence of feminism within Ghanaian society (Banet-Weiser, 2021). These stories and misleading information about feminism are misinformation about women and feminists within a given society. This information is circulated through actual individuals, bloggers, and websites. Banet-Weiser (2021) argued that deliberately spreading untrue information about feminism reveals the entwined relationship between misogyny and misinformation. The response of Yawa, a participant, advocates that misinformation about feminism has contributed to fear of women speaking up or joining the feminist movement. This is evident in her statement, "People are being silenced and discouraged from embracing feminism due to exposure to wrong information about what feminism is, which is due to the corruption of messages about feminism." (Yawa, Zoom interview, 2022)

Yama's response presents the case of the meaning of feminism being distorted due to the corruption of the true sense of what feminism stands for or represents. From the response of Yama, due to this wrong "corrupted" message about feminism, people do not get the true definition of feminism. As a result, women are afraid to speak about their interest in feminism or add to the discourse. Based on this, whenever women talk about feminism in Ghana, they rely on the words or phrases used by men, "feminism is evil," to describe it. Another participant, Dosia, stated,

Because of information overload on social media, people tend to get false information about issues, which include feminism. They also fail to go back and cross-check their book to verify if the information they get is true. Due to lack of verification, they post and share this misleading information about feminism. (Dosia, Zoom interview, 2022)

From these responses, misinformation is one of the factors that contributes to the muteness of feminism as well as the misunderstanding about feminism. This presents Ghanaian women with restrictions that prevent them from expressing themselves and learning about the uniqueness of Ghanaian feminism. These assertions by the respondents align with the argument made by Aune and Redfern (2013), who stated that many misinformation and common misconceptions fight against achieving true freedom of rights and opportunities, regardless of sex or gender. Thus, due to misinformation, people within Ghanaian society cannot recognize the role of feminists and their voices in the fight for the rights of the weak in each community.

Ghana's Acceptance of Feminism

Digital platforms continue to rally people to communicate and share their experiences, ideas, and arguments and advocate for social causes (Brock, 2012; Knight-Steele, 2021). Digital media have constraints, affordances and features that can enable users to perform certain actions with it (Jean-Christophe & Aswin, 2019). However, digital platforms

such as social media engender community building and enable resistance patterns. Lu and Knight-Steele (2019) demonstrated that public advocates deploy the affordances to assert greater authority in digital spaces and to provide public visibility for groups that use it.

Focusing on how feminists and gender equity nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Ghana use digital platforms to advocate for Ghanaian women and children, my participants mentioned that some issues that are addressed are issues of women's involvement in developmental discourse, women's rights, gender equality, and initiatives to achieve gender equality through using their voice and language. Mohammed (2022) noted the minds of scholars about how digital platforms are being used to create an avenue for people to contribute their views and thoughts on feminist activism in Ghana. The themes discovered were that these digital platforms were used as digital classrooms to educate women on their rights and as an avenue for training women on hard and soft skills and using female celebrities.

Education: Digital Classrooms

The research participants indicated that providing education was one of the means through which feminists and gender equity nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Ghana use digital platforms to advocate for Ghanaian women and children. Mohammed (2020) and Tetteh (2018) argued that to advocate for women and children in Ghana, feminists and gender equity NGOs use digital platforms to educate women on their rights. This means that digital media serve as digital classrooms through which Ghanaian self-identified feminists provide information to Ghanaian women on advocating for their welfare, rejecting the linguistic system infused with social norms. Regarding this, a participant, Rose, explained,

Now, we can have educational groups to educate women through these digital platforms, especially Twitter. These provide new help to working mothers and women in business and much information on their rights as women. (Rose, Zoom interview, 2022)

Similarly, Lili also emphasized the immense role of digital classrooms in feminist advocacy. Lili says, "Social media contributes to ensuring that education and awareness are out there for everyone." She explains this by saying that these digital platforms used by Ghanaian feminists enlighten them on some of the misleading information they have been exposed to while being socialized into Ghanaian society. She emphasizes this by saying, "We all grew up with these toxic learning and training until we get to know that all these things are wrong...Social media specifically is like a place where we go to learn." (Lili, Zoom interview, 2022).

From Rose's and Lili's responses, I infer that digital platforms create a classroom atmosphere where women and girls get educated. Feminists use these platforms to inform women of using their linguistic system to reject social norms that increase patriarchal notions. It also helps women to unlearn all the lexicon and principles that the dominant group has created to limit marginalized groups. This allows them to be more equipped with information that can be used to protect themselves and their children and voice their concerns.

Sunflower also stated that “social media plays a vital role in educating women: There is a lot of educated stuff that is provided for women by feminists on social media.” (Sunflower, Zoom interview, 2022)

Probing further, Sunflower continues that Twitter (now X) especially helps ensure that education and awareness are provided to women. Social media groups are being created, and issues such as marital rape and domestic violence that most women go through in their marriages but cannot talk about are being discussed, and duly educated on measures to handle these kinds of issues. Kavi stated, “These platforms provide everyday opportunities for us to learn about this happening to women and about sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and issues of consent.” (Kavi, Peer Facilitator of CEGRAD, Zoom interview, 2022).

To Kavi, this education goes a long way in protecting “ourselves” and others. It helps them as feminists to understand the context of these issues, allows them to avoid victimization of those who go through these circumstances, and enables them to encourage victims of sexual and gender-based abuse. Thus, it is evident that this approach aids young women and feminists in grasping the contextual nuances of these issues, enabling them to express their experiences and empowering them to support other survivors in sharing and pulling through their experiences equally.

Avenue for Training Women

Regarding feminist and gender equity, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Ghana use digital platforms to advocate for Ghanaian women and children. The participants, some of whom belong to gender equity nongovernmental organizations, attested that providing training is one of the ways through which they use these digital platforms to advocate for women's and children's welfare. Tetteh (2017) argued that feminist and NGO voices are active on digital media, and the training of other women feels their presence. These training activities serve as an empowerment mechanism for these women to use economically to care for themselves and their children.

Some self-identified feminists and Gender equity NGO affiliates stated that the training equips women to protect themselves and their children from abuse. Edem acknowledged this by saying, “We bring people on board on our digital platform to train people (women) on what they can do when they face any harassment. Many women are housewives. We encourage them to take advantage of what they see other women doing.” She continues to say that “there are some people (gender-based organizations) who offer free training to women on social media.” (Edem, Zoom interview, 2022).

From Edem's responses, it is evident that providing training for women through these digital platforms helps to build the women's ability to face and overcome the challenges they may face. Furthermore, these pieces of training create avenues for them to connect with others in localized creative spaces. Listening to these feminists, one can understand what they encounter during their training. These women can amplify their voices in defense of other women who are weak and help

in seeking the welfare of children, too. This supports Taylor et al.'s (1995) assertion that women have become active in amplifying women's voices. Based on this, it is evident that women have moved from being passive (silenced). Thus, women have become central in raising women and children's welfare while extending some defense against women's silencing, rejection, and discrimination. Ghanaian women have gained their voices, which prevents them from being marginalized by dominant narratives (Meares, 2017).

Dzifa shared her experience on how an NGO using social media, provided the skills she has now. She maintained that gender equity and Feminist NGOs are using various digital spaces to provide complex and soft skills to help empower women to become advocates for their welfare. Dzifa stated that,

Before I became a part of my NGO, I so that the head of the NGO posted a training program she was running for women on Facebook. I took advantage and registered for the training program. I then got to meet others, especially the manager of the NGO, and I became empowered. (Dzifa, Project officer for Nsreku Academy, Zoom meeting, 2022)

Takyi, the head of a gender equity nongovernmental organization, shared how she uses digital spaces (Instagram and Facebook) to train women and girls. She affirms:

I use these social media to train and to address the issue of period poverty in society. I teach kids, young ladies, and women. We spend quality time with our kids, so if I am empowered, the kids coming up will be empowered and in outstanding positions to protect themselves. (Takyi, Zoom interview, 2022).

This statement of Takyi shows how her organization uses social media to seek financial support and call for change in policies that affect women. Her foundation has used its social media platforms to discuss issues of period poverty. It has even sought sponsorship to provide sanitary pads for teenage girls who cannot afford them in Kumasi in the Ashanti region of Ghana.

The Use of Celebrity Advocacy

The publicity of campaigns or advertisements in Ghana is usually accomplished with the assistance of celebrities in Ghana (Agyepong, 2017). The success and ratings of these campaigns are generally high due to the presence of these celebrities. These celebrities also play diverse roles in ensuring that feminism is understood and there is attainment of gender equality in Ghana. The use of stars shows that celebrity force has become the fueling factor of feminist discourse and political activity, which is more pertinent now than ever (Ocran, 2014). These celebrities, who identify as feminists and gender equality advocates, usually journalists and movie stars, use their popularity and programs to broadcast and educate people about gender equality. They also use their digital platforms as avenues for discussion about gender equality. Ama, one of the participants, responded that Ghanaian female celebrities and top women have been doing a lot to champion the cause for gender equality. This is evident

in her statement: “We’ve got some top Ghana women; maybe somebody like Nana Aba Anamoah is huge on Twitter and doing all kinds of engagements on Twitter, and she’s got a good following. They have conversations on issues that contribute to the empowerment and development of women.” (Ama, Zoom interview, 2022)

Joy, another respondent, responded similarly concerning feminists and NGO contribution to SDG 5 through celebrity advocacy. She stated that,

Nana Yere Gifty Anti is an author and a show host. She’s always mentoring young women to be their best version of themselves and helping them understand their dreams are valid. You know she’s at an epitome. (Joy, Zoom interview, 2022)

For Joy, the acts of Gifty Anti contribute to empowering young ladies to look beyond the societal and patriarchal norms that restrict them, hence causing them to aspire for great success in whatever they do. Furthermore, her response suggests that the encouraging words and programs these public figures hold contribute to building great women for leadership, governance, and decision-making in every capacity they find themselves in, especially among their male counterparts. Eventually, this contributes to achieving gender equality in Ghana.

Yaa, another participant adds:

I know Anita Erskine and others, like Nana Anamoah, have some groups like that that help empower young women. I don’t know their names, but they have groups that empower women. Anita even has a program she shows on DSTV about women’s empowerment. (Yaa, Zoom interview, 2022)

Yaa continues to say that “it is good that these female celebrities do what they do.” Through their digital platforms and programs, they inform young ladies and women about what they went through before getting to where they are now. They share some entrepreneurial ideas, their vision for women, how they started, and where they are now. All these play a significant role in educating and advocating for girl child empowerment and, eventually, gender equality.

The participants’ responses prove that using feminist celebrities and gender advocates goes a long way in contributing to gender equality in Ghana. Thus, these celebrities use their fame, digital platforms, and experience to challenge, educate, and empower women to achieve greatness and take up positions that put them in the proper standing to become advocates for other women and children. All these responses agree with the notion that the use and role of these celebrities contribute to the journey of attaining gender equality in Ghana. The assertion complements the argument made by some earlier scholars (Odoom et al., 2022; Ussher et al., 2022) that through female celebrity, expected gendered behaviors and attitudes are promoted, which usually aligns with achieving success as women. Because of this, Adamson and Kelan (2019) agreed that celebrities are highly influential in promoting specific managerial trends and leadership styles. All these activities by Ghanaian feminists correlate with the

meaning Frazer (2013) made of Habermas’ concept of decolonization. Frazer (2013) opinions that feminists usually struggle to ensure a redistribution and democratization to access and control the distribution of resources equally with men in socio-political discourses and decision-making. Thus, the efforts of these Ghanaian women to educate, train, and empower other women add to their efforts in their fight for an egalitarian society in Ghana.

Discussion

In this study, I examined the evolution of Ghanaian feminism and how Ghanaian feminists use digital platforms to provide women the space to express themselves and share their experiences without influence from dominant groups. The data analysis and response to the first research question support that Ghanaian feminism has moved from a demonized stage to a gradually open-minded society. Similarly, Ghanaian women are becoming more knowledgeable about the importance of feminism and the need to share their experiences with others. My findings reinforce the argument that Ghanaian women are no longer muted but are more active in speaking through their lexicon and understanding of feminism, gender empowerment, and the benefits of digital platforms in these movements, as also noted by Mohammed (2022).

According to Hudson-Weems (2019), the narrative on feminism has changed over the years. Using the MGT, there are lessons that I have learned from the narrative of these Ghanaian women. First, Ghanaian women are trying to call people’s attention to how dominant cultural narratives have muted women’s voices over the years. Thus, they use their digital platforms to project the experiences of Ghanaian women while calling for acceptance of the uniqueness that feminism brings to women’s empowerment and national development. This ensures that women’s perspectives are fully represented and that every woman in Ghana can express their own experiences and contribute to the feminist movement without influence from the dominant group. My interaction with these women has provided information that they have decided to embrace the concept of feminism on their terms and voice and through their understanding of their strength as women.

Although women’s empowerment programs have received a lot of attention in the last decade (Nartey, 2022), it is apparent that issues of intersectionality are not just about subordination among the various genders in society but also the evident gap that exists among women based on privileges that are exhibited through digital organization and discourse. This compounds the discrimination against marginalized women, and their voices become muted within feminists’ discourse (Collins, 2002). Crenshaw (1989) argued that “the inability to allow disadvantaged people to speak out and be represented may be a defeat to restructuring the distribution of opportunity and eliminating the issues of hierarchy” (p. 145). Thus, society must allow these self-identified Ghanaian feminists and the women they work to use their own words and voice in describing experiences and their contribution towards gender empowerment and social justice.

Despite this shortcoming, another thing to consider is how these Ghanaian women focus on the forward movement of their fight for women's rights (Research Question 3). Through NGOs' help, these women start movements geared towards dismantling the predominant structures of patriarchy (issue one). NGOs and feminists work together to educate women, empower them to initiate divorce proceedings that save them from toxic marriages and educate them on their right to make individual decisions regarding pregnancy, contraceptives, and abortion (issue two). What I see here are strong women who carve their paths and use their tools to contribute to feminism and work towards achieving gender equality (issue three).

Finally, in response to Research Question 2, it is evident that through the activities of self-identified Ghanaian feminists and NGOs, feminist voices, especially feminists who operate in rural areas, are nurturing and empowering women through accessible digital platform training, online tutorials, in-person training, and introducing these women to free tools that can be explored to bridge the social, political and organizational gap in their society. These women are being supported to become essential public speakers who can contribute to development. Through this, equal opportunities and new freedoms are created for these women.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate continuous evidence of feminism's acceptance rate in Ghana over the years. Earlier research portrays negativity hovering around feminist discourses in Ghanaian society (Dery & Apusigah, 2021; Mohammed, 2020; Mohammed, 2022, Nartey, 2021). Based on these, there is a need to reorient people to what feminism means or the reality of feminism within Ghanaian culture and how power dynamics have influenced notions about feminism within the Ghanaian setting.

This brings me to the critical point of how self-identified Ghanaian feminists have thought of honing on the fact that Ghana has always been open to feminism based on our analogy of tagging Ghana with the femininity of Mother Ghana. This goes back to the reality of the fact that feminism is being gradually accepted in Ghana. Based on the hard work of our feminist ancestors, the space for discussion on the importance of women being outspoken and empowered is being normalized both on broadcast and digital platforms (Mohammed, 2023). Although Ghanaian traditional media initiated the amplification of muted voices of women within the African digital spaces, digital spaces, mainly social media platforms, have become additional outlets for creating, educating, training, and organizing empowerment programs for women, which enables older and younger women to share their experiences. This justifies the argument of Atenas et al. (2022) and Loney-Howes et al. (2020) that gender and feminist activists acknowledge that utilizing new media and digital platforms are inclusive aids in facilitating global consciousness-raising, creating connections and empowering women through visibility and voice.

Thus, a wheel of change has been put in motion to change the notion that Ghanaian women are not capable, that they can speak, and they can break the barriers set by dominant groups

in society. Moreover, they are as capable as their male counterparts and fight for their liberation by resisting dominant masculine norms, ideas, and language limiting women. Thus, education and training provide women with a fair middle playing ground to shun elements of patriarchy, capitalism, dominance, subordination, and control in any respect and to restructure through their activities of socially gendered categories or roles, which is long overdue.

Notwithstanding, the difference in dynamics and characteristics of what will come to be known as "Ghanaian feminism" will play a key role in understanding how feminism is conceptualized differently within African geographies. From all the responses, it can be concluded that Ghanaian feminist and gender equity nongovernmental organizations' usage of social media in Ghana has enabled the amplification of the authentic voices of Ghanaian Women. Thus, despite the pushback due to the social construct, Ghanaian women have become active participants in the national discourse, expressing their womanhood in various ways and creating spaces to exhibit their potential to the best of their capability. Although some may perceive Ghanaian feminism as directly linked to African feminism, I argue that if we want to strengthen the elements of African feminism, society must allow the features and potentials of Ghanaian feminists to speak for themselves and have theories that portray the elements of their style of feminism. Thus, an exhibition of Ghanaian feminism has allowed Ghanaian women to participate in developmental discussions, leadership, and politics, express their joy, and respond to women's call for social justice.

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