Feminist Organising and Activism in Ghana: Commonalities, Differences, and Challenges

Amanda Odoi and Loretta Baidoo

Abstract

Research on digital feminism and feminist activism in Ghana has increased in recent years. Studies that focus on digital spaces such as Facebook and X, previously known as Twitter, have explored and profiled the nature of the activism, the issues it examines, its impact, and public reactions to the movements. A noteworthy aspect of findings from these studies is that these digital spaces have offered feminists distinct audiences and outlets to address issues which may not have been the focus of older movements. While the older feminist movements have focused on policy-oriented issues such as women's political participation, economic rights, education, and gender-based violence, digital activists have concerned themselves with resistance and protests around bodily autonomy, sexual desires, and orientation. Extending these studies, we explore the connections or commonalities between digital and pioneer forms of feminist organising in Ghana. Engaging digital archives of activism led by older feminists and interviews from young feminists in two digital movements in Ghana, #PepperDemMinistries and #HijabIsanIdentity, we compare the tools and approaches used by feminist activists in the country, analyse the points of convergence and divergence and examine how the two generations respond to the intergenerational shifts in feminist activism in Ghana. We conclude that while feminist organising in Ghana is evolving into digital spaces, digital feminist activism in Ghana is a continuation of the older forms of organising employed by pioneer feminists.

Keywords: Ghanaian feminism, Gender equality, Inter/Intragenerational Activism, New Media, Virtual space feminism, Feminist parallels and divergence, Women's Advocacy epochs

Introduction

In the last decade, feminist organising and activism in Ghana have experienced a significant shift from using predominantly physical spaces to including digital spaces (Darkwah 2021). The addition of the digital space has not only expanded the sites for feminist activism but also reignited and enhanced it, as well as enabled alterations in the ways activists communicate with their audience (Mohammed 2020; Dieng et al. 2022; Salami 2022). These digital spaces have also allowed for feminist organising for action locally, building connections, solidarity, education, and collective mobilising to go beyond the immediate community of activists and reach regional, national and international audiences at an easier and faster rate than was previously possible (Danso and Miller 2018; Mohammed 2020; Darkwah 2021).

Movements such as the #PepperDemMinistries have garnered a large audience and coverage since they entered the feminist and digital activism space in 2017. They have gained a wider audience from legacy media outlets, conventionally used by older feminist movements, such as print and electronic newspapers, national and international television stations, as well as new media platforms such as Facebook, X (Twitter), and Instagram (IG), which have all covered their advocacy and activism activities (General Entertainment 2018). In addition, local and international academic and non-academic researchers have researched these movements and their exploits (Donkor 2020). This coverage and online activism have re-centred and regenerated conversations about feminism in Ghana, giving space to more voices to contribute and critique gender inequities in Ghanaian society. They have also become spaces for peer education where people express and clarify differences through comments and reactions.

Despite these affordances, the Ghanaian feminist space has been inundated in the last five years with discussions and concerns for intergenerational feminist support and mentorship, arguments on whose activism or modalities are appropriate, and the acceptability of digital spaces for activism. While intergenerational feminist mentorship has been a practice in the country, the need for broad-scale discussions became paramount with the surge in digital feminism and questions or debates about tactics, relevance, and recognition of the works of pioneers, among others. Noteworthy, however, is that these dialogues

are not limited to Ghana. A 2017 FES Mozambique report on "Feminism in Africa: Trends and Prospects" reveals similar concerns about intergenerational struggles, the legitimacy of feminist theories in certain groups, and the connection between academia and activism being raised on the African continent (FES Briefing Papers 2017).

Deploying diverse outlets such as International Women's Day (IWD) celebrations, national feminist forums, workshops and in-group meetings, various women and feminist-friendly institutions and groups in Ghana have set aside spaces to discuss the intergenerational concerns being raised, offer support and find ways to bridge this seeming gap. The African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), for example, partnered with the #PepperDemMinistries to mark the 2018 IWD on the theme "Time is Now: Intergenerational Conversations on the Evolution of the Feminist Movement in Ghana" (The African Women's Development Fund 2018; Danso and Miller 2018; Darkwah 2021). The event, dedicated to enriching intergenerational discussions and finding solutions to the prevailing discourses of an intergenerational gap in feminist activism in the country, addressed mindsets and conversations around the lack of interaction between the various feminist generations, the danger this poses for the collective gain of feminism in Ghana and what needs to be done to bridge the gap (The African Women's Development Fund 2018).

To facilitate discussions at the event, speakers were grouped into three generations for a panel discussion. The panel constituted pioneer feminists in Ghana (referred to as "pacesetters"), the current wave of digital feminists (referred to as the "catalysts"), and a third group, referred to as the "bridge", who represented a connection between the pacesetters and the catalysts. Following the panel discussion and other intergenerational events and conversations, a gap was identified in the knowledge of catalyst feminists regarding the publications and activism of pacesetter feminists. It also emerged that there was a perceived lack of mentorship from pacesetter feminists, and there were calls for acknowledgement of the works of the pacesetters as foundational to current and future feminist activism in Ghana. In her address, Akosua Adomako Ampofo, the keynote speaker at the event, expressed the need for a continuum of feminist activism in Ghana. She highlighted the works done by pioneer feminists and the efforts of the catalyst feminists and urged the audience to focus on building on

existing platforms and knowledge and not tear down the progress made. She also emphasised in her speech:

> …many times, you hear conversations in political spaces, religious spaces, and feminist spaces as if what is being analysed and propounded is a first. I hope you will find that from the account that I provide today and interactions from the panel discussions, our efforts today have precursors… that there have been many foremothers who have made possible the many spaces women can so freely inhabit today, including family spaces where young women can feel free to express themselves in revolutionary ways…[1]

As young feminists from Ghana, we acknowledge some of these knowledge gaps that have been identified during discussions on intergenerational feminism in Ghana. Further, we recognise that as feminists in academia, we are privileged to have access to some literature on and knowledge of the works of the pioneers. We have been mentored by some of the pioneer feminists and have taken courses on women's and gender studies as part of our graduate studies. However, this privilege may not extend to other young feminists in Ghana who may have gained their knowledge from new media spaces or feminist literature from other jurisdictions. With the dominance of the Internet, the emergence of social media as the fastest and easiest source of information, particularly for young people, for some of whom it is also the first source of knowledge about feminism (Mendes et al. 2018; Gu et al. 2023), young feminists in Ghana, for example, may lack access to relevant events such as the 1999 women's march against female murders in Ghana. This is because some of the young feminists in the country may not have been born, or may have been too young to witness this landmark event. A simple web search for this event in 2023 only shows one source of material on the march, which may not provide comprehensive information (Nsefo 2000). By contrast, there is a plethora of information on women's marches from other geographical contexts that occurred in the age of digital activism or in countries where the digitisation of news and events goes far back to events preceding the current wave of digitisation.

Given the lack of direct experience (lived or learned) or depth of knowledge of the histories of pioneer feminist activists, these online sources that focus on activism post the1999 march are important for understanding feminism and mentorship spaces as well as catalysts for feminist causes. Young feminists'

definitions of feminism are thus influenced by transnational events and hashtag feminisms (Mendes et al. 2018), such as the global #MeToo movement in 2012, South Africa's #MenAreTrash in 2016, #beingfemaleinNigeria in 2015 and the #PepperDemMinistries in 2017. In this respect, they can be said to engage in what Salo and Mama refer to as "deductive generalisation and observation from the outside, from a physical and analytical distance, rather than from the perspective of someone engaged in feminist activism" (2001, 60) founded on deep Ghanaian feminist history.

These accounts are not intended to suggest that young feminists do not recognise the support of some pioneer feminists in Ghana. During the AWDF and #PepperDemMinistries IWD 2018 event, for example, Louise Carol Donkor, a member of the Pepper Dem Ministries, acknowledged the immense support from the pioneer feminists. In her words:

> I mean, when Pepper Dem Ministries started, one thing that we have not taken for granted, one thing that we feel very grateful for, is the quality of support that, you know, we have enjoyed till today, and here in this room, we have unique people very amazing people who are high-profile people that you know lend their support to us, lend the legitimacy to our cause and we really do not take that for granted[2]

However, the fact that this debate and questions on the sufficiency or otherwise of intergenerational feminist support and mentorship, whose activism or modalities are appropriate, and the acceptability of digital spaces for activism still exist requires that conversations be initiated to tease out and piece together the connections between these two movements. Doing so would require going beyond conversations in meetings, to documenting such connections and histories as part of efforts to bridge the intergenerational gap and make relevant resources accessible to the current and future generations of feminists. We argue that documenting the histories, tools, platforms and approaches used by pioneer and digital feminist movements, as well as exploring their intersections, synergies and differences, could offer a resource for addressing current debates on feminist activism in Ghana; historicising these movements, their commonalities and differences; and building on this knowledge for future activism.

This article highlights how the current generation of feminist activists share similarities with those of previous epochs in their focus, tactics, and approach.

It also explains how these activists provide valuable resources and contribute to the activism spaces and explores the impact of this intergenerational activism on the country.

Methodology

To carry out this analysis, we employ interviews with seven young digital feminist activists from two prominent digital feminist activism spaces in Ghana, #PepperDemMinistries and #HijabIsanIdentity. The interviews were conducted in 2022 and supported by digital archives of discussions from forums on intergenerational feminism in Ghana, Facebook posts, tweets on X (Twitter) handles of these movements and some of their individual members, and reactions to these posts. The archival data on intergenerational discussions was collected from three conversations that featured panellists who are members of the movements under study. These are the National Feminist Forum 2021 and 2022 of the Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT) and the AWDF and #PepperDemMinistries IWD celebration in 2018. We also used a documentary on older feminist activism, "When Women Speak" (2022), co-produced by Akosua Adomako Ampofo and Kate Skinner and directed by Aseye Tamakloe, as data sources for this study. This documentary, in addition to existing peer-reviewed literature on feminist activism in Ghana, helped us tease out the experiences and perspectives of the pioneer feminists. We used all these data sources in a way that enables them to complement and validate each other.

While digital feminist activists in Ghana operate different platforms for their activism - Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, and YouTube, among others (Donkor 2020; Mohammed 2020; Darkwah 2021) - we limit our focus in this study to posts and reactions from X (Twitter) and Facebook pages, the spaces most utilised by these activists. Further, while digital feminism and activism in Ghana predate the events of 2017 (Darkwah 2021; Plange 2021), our study focuses on movements or activism that gained momentum from 2017, namely #PepperDemMinistries and #HijabIsanIdentity. These movements catalysed the shift to digital space activism by feminists. The popularity of their approaches has contributed to widening the scope of reach and conversations on feminism in the country and beyond. They were also chosen for being feminist-led and

their activism being feminist-oriented; "they fight against rules and practices that restrict and undermine women and profess and advocate ideologies that aim to achieve social, economic, and political equality for women and that recognise the larger socioeconomic forces at play beyond individual female and male relations" (Adomako Ampofo 2018[3]).

The #PepperDemMinistries movement, which gained momentum in 2017, is the first to have spurred digital feminist activism. The convenors of the movement engaged social media platforms, notably Facebook, to advocate against patriarchy, disrupt dangerous narratives around gender constructions and expectations, and hold men accountable for their patriarchal societal actions. The #HijabiIsanIdentity movement has been in existence since 2019. The convenors protest discrimination against hijab-wearing women in schools and workspaces in Ghana and employ Facebook and X (Twitter) in organising and raising awareness. While these movements seem discreet, their young feminist activists share a lot in common, from being friends on social media to co-conveners of their movement events (see Table 1).

Table 1: Convenors of digital feminist movements

Movement	Feminist Conveners/Activists
#PepperDemMinistries	Louise Carol Donkor, Ama Opoku Agyemang, Efe Plange, Jayjay Akuamoah, Amazing Grace Danso, Noelyne Mensah, Henrietta Mercer, Felicity Nelson and Efua Sintim
#HijabIsanIdentity	Bashiratu Kamal-Muslim, Bilkis Nuhu and Hajia Xalia

Feminist activism in Ghana: An inter/intragenerational analysis.

Feminist and gender equality organising and activism efforts in Ghana have primarily been documented by the activists in the movements themselves or by other persons outside of the movements (Tsikata 1989; Manuh 1991; Manuh 1993; Mama 2003; Prah 2003; Mama et al. 2005; Tsikata 2009; Sheldon 2016;

Britwum 2020; Darkwah 2021). While documented evidence indicates that such activities predate colonialism, documenting specific events has been a meandering process (Prah 2003). Prah, for instance, notes:

> In organising my thoughts in preparation for writing this paper, I realised that I had also been chasing illusions. I had naively assumed, somehow, that the analysis of the trajectory of women's participation in Ghana's political, intellectual, and cultural life would follow a fairly uniform, straight path characterised by steps or phases. However, history is not linear, and the course of the feminist agenda may better be viewed as a meandering path than one that moves in a regular pattern of progression (2003,1).

Prah, however, goes ahead to categorise her analysis into two time frames: the Pre-Independence Feminism and Gender Politics period, which looked at the state of women before colonialism, the Convention People's Party (CPP) era and the period of military rule; and the period of "Grand 'Feminist' Illusion" which discusses the start of actual feminist activism in Ghana (Prah, 2003, 34). Britwum and Odoi (no date) also identify four epochs of feminist organising and activism and how they have evolved over the years: the pre-independence era, which covers organising and activism preceding the 1950s; the post-early independence period, which looks at events from 1967 to the1980s; the mid independence period, which highlights occurrences in the 1990s to the period preceding digital activism; and the digital wave of women's organising beginning in 2012.

We situate our intergenerational analysis in two epochs by Britwum and Odoi (no date), namely the post-early independence period beginning in the 1980s, which Prah (2003) also identifies as the period of actual feminist activism in Ghana, through to the digital wave of feminist activism from 2012 to date. Worth noting is that women's organising or presence in the movement has not necessarily meant that they are feminist-oriented (Prah 2003; Mama, 2005; Mama 2011). Women's activism mainly dominated the pre-colonial period. However, we are interested in feminist-specific activism led or aligned in Ghana, hence our focus on the chosen periods. We further reframed the classifications of the women's movement into two periods for this paper to reflect the generational analysis of interest to the authors: pioneer feminist activism from 1980 to 2016, and digital feminist activism from 2017 to date. The year 2017 was selected as

the marker for digital space activism because it signified the pronounced shift of feminist activism to digital spaces by the digital feminists engaged in this study.

Feminist Organising and Activism in Ghana: Commonalities and Differences in Tools and Approaches among Pioneer and Digital Feminists

This section explores the various organising and activist tools/approaches employed by pioneer and digital feminists in Ghana. We compare the tools and strategies used by these feminists, explore the commonalities and differences, and analyse the intersections therein and their responses to intergenerational activism.

Feminists in Ghana, irrespective of the generation under consideration, have rallied around diverse subjects of interest to challenge exploitative systems that inhibit the development of women and propose ways to better the lives of women in the country. Their rallying has also been guided by the desire to transform gender relations and correct existing inequalities in structures in both public and private spheres to achieve equity in society and advance the diverse interests of women (Prah 2003; Tsikata 2009; Darkwah 2021). To achieve these goals, Ghanaian feminists have employed diverse spaces in their organising and activism, informed by the times and the availability of resources. The social, historical, political, and technological environment offered space, favoured and spurred certain kinds of activism and generated issues of interest. Factors such as the background, age, educational background, or career type of these feminists have shaped the approaches employed. These factors notwithstanding, an intergenerational analysis of secondary data, digital archival data, and interviews shows that the methods used by these digital feminists do not differ from those of pioneer feminists. As with pioneer feminists, digital activists also employ grassroots approaches to reaching out and addressing women's issues.

Pioneer Feminist Organising and Activism in Ghana, 1980 to 2017

Pioneer feminists have engaged tools such as mass media, broadcast and print media, communication and other modes of activism such as face-to-face interactions, picketing, marches, vigils, demonstrations, forums, coalitions (Women's Manifesto, Domestic Violence Coalition, Sisters Keepers and NETRIGHT), mentorship, academic and non-academic publications, training workshops on women's empowerment, the teaching of gender-related courses in institutions of higher education, and pushing for the introduction of women-friendly laws (Prah 1996; Prah 2003; Mama 2005; Tsikata 2009; Amoah-Boampong 2018). They led or aligned with other women's groups to push for issues such as women's political participation, economic empowerment and justice, education, laws, and policies on women, and/or advocate for the effective implementation of such laws (Prah 2003; Tsikata 2009; Britwum 2020). Pioneer feminist academics have used their activist spaces in and out of the universities to push for and help found gender centres and pioneer the introduction of women's and gender studies courses in universities in Ghana (Prah 1996; Tamakloe 2022).

At the University of Ghana, pacesetter feminists such as Profs. Takyiwah Manuh, Dzodzi Tsikata and Akosua Adomako Ampofo were instrumental in establishing the Centre for Gender Studies and Advocacy (CEGENSA) in 2004 (Tamakloe 2022). Similarly, Profs. Mansah Prah and Akua Opokua Britwum were key in establishing the Centre for Gender Research, Advocacy and Documentation (CEGRAD) at the University of Cape Coast in 2013. Through their research, they have produced a body of work that has enriched the knowledge of both feminists and non-feminists about the critical roles women have played in Ghana, their political struggles, organising and activism efforts, and women's economic life (Manuh 1991; Darkwah 2001; Prah 2003; Britwum 2020; Tamakloe 2022). They also partnered with other networks and movements to develop programmes on gender and gender research to help shape the discourse (Prah 1996; Tamakloe 2022) and bridge the gap between academics and activists. The Women's Manifesto Coalition (WMC) initiated by ABANTU for Development drew attention to the insufficient attention given to critical issues affecting women generally and concerns about the under-representation of women in politics, policy and decision-making (Tsikata 2009). The Domestic

Violence Coalition, akin to the WMC, was made up of groups and individuals who pushed for the Domestic Violence Act (Act 732) to safeguard women from diverse abuses (Tsikata 2009; Amoah-Boampong 2018).

The shift between feminist activism then and now is that the older generation, through their interconnectedness, addressed issues on different levels and targeted shifts in policy-making. However, that is not necessarily the case for the younger generation. As indicated earlier, based on the two movements examined, feminist agendas are pursued socially using social tools, but we at no point encountered legal pursuit of concerns raised. This is not to say that issues pursued are mutually exclusive of policy attention, especially with discussion on the HijabIsanIdentity movement. However, there is a clear distinction in the modalities of engagement between the two generations, especially when discussions transcend advocacy dissemination.

Pioneer feminist lawyers such as Akua Kuenyehia, Dorcas Coker-Appiah, Nana Oye Lithur, and Sheila Minkah-Premo used their knowledge and platform as lawyers to found and work on legal issues of interest to women in Ghana. They created forums and spaces to support and educate women on their legal rights and push for laws on women. Going by the ideology that "Laws do not get implemented on their own unless people know about them" (Coker-Appiah, as featured in Tamakloe 2022), these feminists, through research and legal education with women in different public spaces, took on issues that affected women's effective economic participation, pushed for changes in unhealthy workplace rules and practices, and the abolishing of harmful practices such as trokosi (Tamakloe 2022). They also set up offices to receive women's complaints and offer them support. Reports produced from the nationwide research on violence against women conducted by the Gender Centre and Human Rights Documentation Centre became the advocacy tool for the passage of the Domestic Violence Law of Ghana (Dorcas Coker-Appiah, as featured in Tamakloe 2022).

These pioneer feminist lawyers also made conscious efforts to mentor young lawyers. Nana Oye Lithur and Sheila Minkah-Premo, during their panel discussions at the AWDF and Pepper Dem Ministries 2018 IWD intergenerational event, recounted how pioneer lawyers such as Akua Kuenyehia and Dorcas Coker-Appiah had mentored and supported them on their journey as lawyers and feminists.

Digital Feminist Organising and Activism in Ghana, 2017 to Date

The shift to the recent digital platform activism is characterised by a young demographic of feminists (Darkwah 2021), mostly in their mid to late thirties or younger. These feminists have predominantly engaged new media platforms, such as X(Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram, in promoting their issues and agenda. In these spaces, self-identified individual feminists, as well as groups, have engaged in sensitisation on gender equality, challenging patriarchal structures and other forms of social justice concerns. On their group and individual social media handles (X and Facebook), the #PepperDemMinistries, for example, have flipped gender narratives to encourage critical, radical, robust, honest analysis and appreciation of gender stereotypes in Ghanaian society and generate conversations on gender inequality.

> #PepperDemMinistries (PDM) is a group of like-minded women on Facebook who were already probing into the structures operating in Ghanaian society that somehow leave both genders imbalanced and incompatible to work in unison to advance society. We are called "Pepper Dem Ministries" because we engage with the issues which are primarily uncomfortable and unpopular in our socio-cultural space. Pepper can burn, and we raise issues that make people shift in their seats. Our advocacy focuses mainly on gender (@Pepper Dem Ministries Facebook page 22 September 2017).

A distinguishing feature between these activists, however, is their religious affiliation and regions of origin. The Pepper Dem Ministries movement comprised mostly Southern Ghanaian, middle-class, educated young, mostly Christian, and non-practising religious feminists. Despite these characteristics, their discussions were mainly socially based. HijabIsanIdentity, while having similar identities with the Pepper Dem Ministries feminists, had a significantly marked identity which formed the core of the movement. Religion was a fulcrum and pivotal in setting the movement's agenda. They specifically used their platform to raise awareness and engage institutions on the ills of discriminating against hijab-wearing women. Their movement centred on the discrimination that targeted hijab-wearing women and girls in institutional sales in Ghana. In 2019, they used their social media handles to mobilise for a march against hijab-wearing discrimination.

This notwithstanding, the issues they have addressed and the approaches employed beyond the digital spaces have been similar to those of pioneer feminists. Feminists in both epochs dealt with social issues interconnecting gender, religion and other gendered traditional norms that had been institutionalised formally and socially. They have addressed diverse issues of violence against women, such as rape culture and physical abuse, and raised funds to support institutions and individual women. Pepper Dem Ministries raised funds to support the reopening of the Ark Foundation in 2018. Some of their convenors have published academic works about the movement (see Plange 2021). Bashiratu-Kamal Muslim, one of the convenors of the #HijabIsanIndentity movement, also has published work regarding their experiences as convenors (see Clark and Mohammed 2023).

The activities and issues pursued are also event-based. For example, the #PepperDemMinistries began in response to specific events and online reactions to them. Efe Plange, giving a brief background to the events leading to the start of the Pepper Dem Ministries Movement, explained that the modality of flipping scripts entrenched in Ghana's social system was inspired by an online altercation between two male Ghanaian journalists. She noted that by flipping the scripts, the Pepper Dem Ministries activists started promoting the message, "Men are their enemies". Narrating the success of this approach, Efe Plange remarked,

> The hashtag trended because it was different; you always hear 'women are their enemies'. So, I think because of how ridiculous that statement is, 'men are their own enemies,' it became popular, it trended for some time, and many people started joining, so that is how we discovered more girls and women like us[4].

Another important event that advanced the activism modality explored by the Pepper Dem Ministries movement was an incidence of marital "misconduct" involving a social media socialite, Efua Schwarzenegger, and how social media users pursued it. The movement sought to change the narrative around marital behaviour, highlighting the double standards and gender biases that often place blame on women when their partners engage in infidelity. Efe details this in our interview, indicating that,

> Shortly after that was Efua Schwarzenegger's issue, where her ex-husband caught her in bed with another man and leaked nude photos of them in bed immediately. We knew what the narrative was going to be. Men cheat on women all the time, and what society does when it happens is blame it on women and make it seem like they are not doing some things right. We decided to use the opportunity to touch on even more harmful narratives that we wanted to see changed in Ghanaian society. Made it official and created a Facebook page; the following day, it grew to twenty thousand followers. I think that is where we realised that we could really do something with it[5].

The two scenarios the authors found offered the Pepper Dem Ministries activists the opportunity to flip gender narratives to incite critical, radical, robust, and honest analysis and appreciation of gender stereotypes in our society. Similarly, the pioneer activists capitalised on pending issues and picketed to draw attention to injustices faced by women in Ghana (Nana Oye Lithur as featured in Pepper Dem Ministries and AWDF 2018; Tamakloe 2022).

In addition, digital feminist activists engage not only in digital spaces for their activism but also in offline in-person outlets as catalysts or triggers for founding their movements, recruiting members and mobilising for offline activism. Although their first point of contact for activism was the digital space, digital feminists still used traditional media spaces for different reasons. They extended their activities to traditional platforms because of the limitation of the digital spaces in terms of access. While social media undeniably has a significant reach as compared to traditional media, it is only accessible to a distinct population who have access to digital devices and the Internet, and who are literate enough to read and understand the messaging being sent. This meant a significant population size was excluded by virtue of their literacy levels, economic class, geographical positioning and access to the Internet. Pepper Dem Ministries, for instance, have employed radio programmes on class FM to discuss women's issues and hold intergenerational discussions on feminism, and door-to-door interactions to educate on women's issues. #HijabIsanIdentity conveners have also engaged in physical marches, radio engagements and door-to-door outreaches to educate and mobilise people.

> We use all the areas from social media to the traditional media, which is TV and radio; we protest in person, we march, etc., in trying to reach the intended target, and it is not the woman who wants to wear the hijab. However, it is the institution that has the final say in what goes on in schools, workplaces, etc. So, we use all forms of media (Xalia 2022[6]).
>
> Okay, we have used Facebook, Twitter, and others, but mostly these two and outreaches, door-to-door, then town hall meetings, but not in Accra; we have yet to be able to have such meetings in Accra (Akuamoah 2022[7]).

Using these grassroots spaces or off-new media platforms debunks assertions that young people's advocacy is limited to social media spaces. "Every time people countered our narrative, they said go to Gambaga, go on the ground and dismiss online advocacy" (Plange 2022[8]). It is worth noting that the reverse in sequence exists between the two generations. In the cases where movements have used media spaces in the past, it has been mainly as a tool for knowledge dissemination and transfer. Mobilisation was therefore conducted outside media spaces. However, in the case of current feminist activism, the social media spaces are where most engagements occur, notwithstanding the use of other conventional spaces to raise awareness about the movements.

Another similarity between the two movements was the shared personal and professional spaces of their members, which enabled the easy establishment of the movement through social media and its travel into a physical space. Pioneer feminists shared these similarities and also established contacts through their direct circles. They also, as with the pioneer movement, employed convenorship as a tool for mobilising and carrying out their activism. Such convenors served as leaders of the movements.

The major differences in these movements have been the points of initiating relationships and the outputs generated. Digital feminists initiated their relationships on social media through personal and professional circles, while pioneer feminists initiated their movement offline. Further, most older movements have scholarship connected to the activist work produced, either in conventional academic scholarship or in legal approaches. However, this is not usually the case with the movements engaged by the younger generation. It is generally not common for the younger generation of feminists to connect their activist work with traditional academic scholarship, although there are a

few exceptions, such as Efe Plange and Basiratu-Kamal Muslim. Most of the scholarly work on this movement has been conducted by individuals who are not part of the movement.

Why the choice of the tools and approaches: Agenda setting and/or user gratification?

Evidence has indicated that social media has cut across diverse endeavours (Apuke and Tunca 2022), and feminist activism is no different. With the rise of feminist blogs and the increase in the use of the internet as platforms for establishing social networks, activism and organising, Léveillée refers to a fourth feminist wave, acknowledging the rise of feminist activism through digital technologies (2021). These new or social media outlets allow younger feminists to reach a larger audience instantly at a negligible cost. The digital space, therefore, presents itself as a good platform for activists to set agendas, and to envisage and target specific or multiple audiences while pursuing their feminist goals. Matusitz and Ochoa (2018) argue that social media can determine the salience of topics in the public domain based on the perceived relevance of the issues presented to recipients. Ogunyombo (2015) describes this agenda-setting as the capability of the media to capture the importance of an issue in the public's mind.

Drawing from the agenda-setting theory, the depth of coverage and frequency assigns significance, informing reactions. Although McCombs and Shaw's (1972) study was more aligned to traditional media platforms, it proves itself to be as relevant today as in the 1970s, where an indicated correlation between the study participants' viewpoint and subjects of media coverage is one of the pertinent reasons for the choice of social media as an organising tool. Agenda-setting pushes across messages as thought through by organisers and activists. It informs their call to pursue specific interests as informed by trends and events that serve as goal-setting triggers. This argument leads to the discussion of Blumler and Katz (1974), who advocate that people use certain media based on the gratification they derive, and place power in the hands of the users. So, it explains the choice of particular social media platforms based on their attractiveness and ability to hold users' attention and satisfy their needs. That the organisers carry out their activities on X and mostly Facebook, rather

than on other social media platforms, opens up the rationale behind using specific digital spaces with attention to the target audience, what feminist activists need to achieve, and what the chosen platform presents. We explored in this study the factors influencing their choices of spaces, communication modalities employed, and the relationship between the choices of outlets and approaches by pioneer and digital feminists. While the agenda-setting, uses and gratification theories are more germane to media analysis, we use them to explore how these feminists choose their tools and what is considered.

Both generations of activists have chosen and employed the spaces they engaged with, influenced first by the events of the time and second by the assumed reach relevance and effectiveness of the chosen tactics. Pioneer feminist activists are more inclined towards issues that inform policy, and their use of gender-related taught courses, for example, was a strategy to bridge theory with practice (Takyiwah Manuh as featured in Tamakloe 2022), which helped reach activists and equip them with the theoretical lenses required for their work. Coalition building helped amass the necessary numbers of women and activists to champion women's rights and introduce laws and policies. The Domestic Violence Coalition and the WMC have been fine examples (Mama 2005; Tsikata 2009).

Sharing the reasons for their choices, digital feminists offer various justifications for their single-use or blended approaches (online and offline) to activism. Key in these stories is the reach social media offers activists. They acknowledge social media's ability to reinvent and push for the regeneration of discussions as if they are new. The immediacy of use to propagate issues and results was one reason for using the platforms of interest. While social media activism covers several tools, YouTube, Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, among others, two key platforms were the choices for these activists- X (Twitter) and Facebook.

> Okay, so for Facebook and Twitter, it is the reach. Social media is now the fastest way to spread information, for good or bad, and there have been other benefits, such as being in real-time. So, for the immediacy of it, social media has been an enormous help. However, then, …the social issues we were targeting were something that had been highlighted before but had not been amplified to that level (Danso 2022[9]).

Feminist Activism in Ghana: The Challenges Therein

Feminist activism in Ghana has made numerous gains, from behaviour changes and formulation of laws and policy to knowledge creation. These gains notwithstanding, feminist activism seems to be accompanied by pushback, irrespective of the period. Tsikata (2009) attributes this to the kinds of issues pushed by feminist activists:

> … gender activists are accepted as long as they focus on programmes such as credit for women, income-generation projects and girls' education and couch their struggles in terms of welfare or national development. Once they broach questions of power relations or injustices, they are accused of being elitist and influenced by foreign ideas alien to African culture (Tsikata 2009,186).

Affirming Tsikata's assertion on the focus of activism being a source of discomfort and leading to unfavourable reactions, participants recounted pushbacks faced during the organising of the movements:

> I think no matter what period, feminism has always encountered pushback because upsetting the status quo is something the establishment doesn't want. Because when you upset the status quo when it comes to women's issues, the link to other issues is easily drawn, and I honestly think because of the existence of Pepper Dem, other movements and whatever have had the kind of radicalisation that they have right because we became a sort of blueprint that when you are controlling and disruptive and fierce and standing in it towards upsetting the status quo you will get the attention you desire and deserve. You would influence minds towards change, so even with Pepper Dem, we experienced repressive tactics from various sources. It is not different from what other movements are going through; there are so many similar actions of pressure groups around (Danso 2022 [10]).

Our analysis shows that the challenges faced by feminists do not change because of the space occupied or the approaches used. They, however, escalate depending on the issues addressed. Pioneer feminists and digital feminists alike encounter a range of attacks, from insults and name-calling, such as being labelled as misandrists and prostitutes, to more serious threats of death and of the termination of jobs. "They call you names such as Ashawo" (Felicity Nelson as featured in NETRIGHT 2021). Bashiratu Kamal-Muslim, a convener of #HijabIsanIdentity

also expressed on her social media handle how threats to her life extended to her family. Recounting in our interview a similar experience to that of Felicity and Bashiratu concerning how social media makes an activist vulnerable to attacks, Plange notes:

> Facebook gives everyone access to your account; there was a lot of bullying, insult, and body shaming; we received threats, rape threats, physical harm etc. It reached the point that when we went out, we could only post pictures of where we were once we'd left the place. Also, even though it's an organisation, the individual founding members became the face of the movement, so even if someone posts something personal on her page, it is seen as the group has done that, so it got to the point that we couldn't have our individual opinion that didn't allude to PDM.[11]

These attacks have come from women and men, both young and old. In response to Pepper Dem Ministries, for example, influential women in the media set up "Sugar Dem" movements to counter the narratives. Female gospel musicians who disagreed with the approach of Pepper Dem Ministries openly declared their stand in support of the men's superior position in society (Piesie Esther and Sika 2019). While most challenges come from external sources, others sometimes emanate from the group. "Another thing was that feminism has a very negative connotation in Ghana, so not everybody was comfortable being openly associated with it and agreeing that it's a feminist movement then the movement had to cater and respond to queer issues and not every member was bold to take a particular position for queer, abortions, etc. lives because lesbians are women" (Danso 2022[12]).

Conclusion

In this article, we aimed to explore the connections, commonalities, differences, and challenges faced by pioneering feminist activists from the 1980s to 2017 and digital feminist activists from 2017 to the present. We sought to guide conversations and debates on whose feminism matters in Ghana, particularly in documenting the historical significance of these two movements and identifying the resources and importance they offer to feminist activism in Ghana. The paper teased out the connections, commonalities, and differences between pioneer feminist activists from the 1980s to 2017 and digital feminist activists from 2017 to date; we also explored the challenges faced by both groups. We explored the differences between the interests of pioneer and digital feminists, acknowledging the theoretical situating of issues by the older feminist activists and their inclination towards policy-oriented issues.

The digital feminist movements explored were centred on resistance and protests around bodily autonomy, identity, and patriarchal norms internalised across generations. We aimed to show that despite the seeming disconnect in appreciating the spaces employed by multiple activists in Ghana, they may not be that different in focus, tactics, and approach, and that the various techniques offer resources and importance to activism and women's rights in Ghana. We compared the tools and approaches used by feminist activists in Ghana, analysed the commonalities and differences in these outlets, and examined how these outlets are used to set agendas and ensure the sustenance of target audiences' interests. Focusing on intergenerational shifts regarding feminist modalities, we conclude that while feminist organising in Ghana is evolving to include digital spaces, digital feminist activism in the country is a continuation of older forms of organising. Its modalities for organising and the issues pursued mirror and build on those of the pioneer feminists. We, therefore, align ourselves with the calls for movements to build on each other.

Notes

1. Adomako Ampofo, Akosua. 2018. Keynote Address, The African Women's Development Fund Reflections on Generations of Sisterhood: International Women's Day 2018. British Council, Accra. 8 March 2018.
2. Donkor, Louise Carol. 2018. Address, The African Women's Development Fund Reflections on Generations of Sisterhood: International Women's Day 2018. British Council, Accra, 8 March 2018
3. Adomako Ampofo, Akosua. Keynote Address. The African Women's Development Fund Reflections on Generations of Sisterhood: International Women's Day 2018. British Council, Accra. 8 March 2018)
4. Plange, Efe. Interview by Loretta Baidoo. Zoom Recording. Halifax, 3 July 2022
5. Plange, Efe. Interview by Loretta Baidoo. Zoom Recording. Halifax, 3 July 2022
6. Hajia Xalia. Interview by Amanda Odoi. Google Meet Recording. Accra, 12 July 2022
7. Akuamoah, Jayjay. Interview by Amanda Odoi. Zoom Recording. Cape Coast, 28 June 2022
8. Plange, Efe. Interview by Loretta Baidoo. Zoom Recording. Halifax, 3 July 2022
9. Danso, Amazing Grace. Interview by Loretta Baidoo. Zoom Recording. Halifax, 9 July 2022
10. Danso, Amazing Grace. Interview by Loretta Baidoo. Zoom Recording. Halifax, 9 July 2022
11. Plange, Efe. Interview by Loretta Baidoo. Zoom Recording. Halifax, 3 July 2022
12. Danso, Amazing Grace. Interview by Loretta Baidoo. Zoom recording. Halifax, 9 July 2022

References

Amoah-Boampong, Cyrelene. 2018. "Historicising the Women's Manifesto for Ghana: A Culmination of Women's Activism in Ghana." *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 29(2): 26-53. https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v29i2.2

Apuke, Oberiri D. and Elif A. Tunca. 2022. "Internet Usage for Research and Learning among University Students in Nigeria." *Library Philosophy and Practice*. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/6990

Blumler, Jay and Elihu Katz. 1974. *The Uses of Mass Communications: Current Perspectives on Gratifications Research*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

Britwum, Akua. 2020. "Women Organising in Ghana: The Network for Women's Rights (NETRIGHT) and NGO Networking for Policy Intervention." *Feminist Africa* 22:174-185.

Britwum, Akua and Amanda Odoi. No date. "History of Organising Towards Gender Equality." Unpublished training manual.

Clark, Msia Kibona and Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed. 2023. *African Women in Digital Spaces: Redefining Social Movements on the Continent and in the Diaspora*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers Ltd.

Danso, Amazing Grace and Jackson Miller. 2019. "#PepperDemMinistries: A Digital Afrocentric Approach to Feminism." *Gender Policy Journal (Harvard Kennedy School)*, August 22, 2019. https://hksspr.org/pepper-demministries-a-digital-afrocentric-approach-to-feminism/

Darkwah, Akosua. 2021. "Digital Activism Ghanaian Feminist Style." In *Producing Inclusive Feminist Knowledge: Positionalities and Discourses in the Global South*, edited by Akosua Adomako Ampofo and Josephine Beoku-Betts, 147-165. Leeds (UK): Emerald Publishing Limited.

Dieng, Rama Sallah, Toni Haastrup and Alice Jung Kang. 2023. "Centering Feminists and Feminism in Protests in Africa." *Politics & Gender, First View* 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X22000769

Donkor, Dorcas. 2020. "The Rise of Cyberfeminism in Africa: Pepper Dem Ministries Take on Ghana." PhD diss., Ohio University, Ohio (USA). http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=ohiou1597260157867617

Gu, Xiao, Bojan Obrenovic, and Wei Fu. 2023. "Empirical Study on Social Media Exposure and Fear as Drivers of Anxiety and Depression during the COVID-19 Pandemic" *Sustainability* 15 (6): 5312. https://doi.org/10.3390/su15065312

Mama, Amina. 2011. "What Does It Mean to Do Feminist Research in African Contexts?" *Feminist Review* e4-e20. DOI: 10.1057/fr.2011.22

Mama, Amina, Dzodzi Tsikata, Rose Mensah-Kutin, and Hamida Harrison. 2005. In conversation: The Ghanaian Women's Manifesto Movement. *Feminist Africa* 4:1-11

Manuh, Takyiwaa. 1993. "Women, State and Society under the PNDC." In *Ghana Under PNDC Rule*, edited by Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, 176-195. Dakar: CODESRIA.

Manuh, Takyiwaa. 1991. "Women and Their Organisations During the Convention People's Party Period." In *The Work and Life of Kwame Nkrumah*, edited by Kwame Arhin, 108–133. Accra: Sedco Publishing Limited.

Matusitz, Jonathan and Ochoa, David. 2018. Agenda-Setting Theory in the US Media: A Comparative Analysis of Terrorist Attacks in France and Nigeria." *Global Media Journal* 16(31):1-10

McCombs, Maxwell E. and Donald L. Shaw. 1972. "The Agenda-setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2): 176-187. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2747787

Mendes, Kaitlynn, Jessica Ringrose and Jessalynn Keller. 2018. "#MeToo and the Promise and Pitfalls of Challenging Rape Culture Through Digital Feminist Activism." *European Journal of Women's Studies* 25(2): 236-246. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506818765318

Mohammed, Wumpini F. 2020. "A Feminist Reading of Hashtag Activism in Ghana." Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology 16. DOI: 10.5399/uo/ada.2020.16.6

Ogunyombo, Oludare Ebenezer. 2015. "Dialectics of Mass Media Agenda Setting Theory in an Era of Confluence." *Journal of Media and Social Development* 2(1): 219-225.

Plange, Efe Franca. 2021. "The Pepper Manual: Towards Situated Non-Western Feminist Rhetorical Practices." *Peitho Journal of the Coalition of Feminist Scholars in the History of Rhetoric & Composition* 23 (4). https://cfshrc.org/article/the-pepper-manual-towards-situated-non-western-feminist-rhetorical-practices/

Prah, Mansah. 2003. *Chasing Illusions and Realising Visions: Reflections on Ghana's Feminist Experience*. Dakar: CODESRIA.

Prah, Mansah. 1996. "Women's Studies in Ghana." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 24(1/2):412–422. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40004542

Salami, Minna. 2022. "A Historical Overview of African Feminist Strands." *The House of African Feminisms.* https://houseofafricanfeminisms.org/A-Historical-Overview-of-African-Feminist-Strands

Salo, Elaine and Amina Mama. 2001. "Talking about Feminism in Africa." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity* 50: 58- 63. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4066405

Sheldon, Kathleen E. 2016. *Historical Dictionary of Women in Sub-Saharan Africa* (2nd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.

Tsikata, Edzodzinam. 1989. "Women's Political Organisations, 1951–1987." In *The State, Development and Politics in Ghana*, edited by Emmanuel Hansen and Kwame Ninsin, 73-93. Dakar: CODESRIA.

Tsikata, Dzodzi. 2009. "Women's Organizing in Ghana Since the 1990s: From Individual Organizations to Three Coalitions." *Development*, 52(2): 185–192. https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2009.8

Electronic sources

Léveillée, Jodoin Maude. 2021
Feminist Digital Activism: New Forms of Exclusion, or Connectedness for West African Feminists? *The Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness*. Accessed 12 March 2023. URL https://www.socialconnectedness.org/feminist-digital-activism-new-forms-of-exclusion-or-connectedness-for-west-african-feminists/

Nsefo, Joyce M. 2000. Ghana: Women Protest Against Police Inaction Over Serial Murders. Accessed November 10 November 2022. URL https://allafrica.com/stories/200007070395.html

Piesie, Esther and Sika Delali. 2019. "Women are not equal to Men. Piesie Esther disagrees with Pepper Dem Ministries". Daily Graphic online https://www.graphic.com.gh/ghana-news-videos/video/women-are-not-equal-to-men-piesie-esther-disagree-with-pepper-dem-ministries.html

Tamakloe, Aseye, dir. 2022. When Women Speak Film. Ghana. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PI1wekJw-GY

Network for Women's Rights in Ghana (NETRIGHT). 2021. Ghana National Feminist Forum. 2021. "Intergenerational dialogue on affirmative action for Ghana". 30 June, 2021. Facebook https://web.facebook.com/netrightghana/videos/ghana-feminist-forum-women-mobilising-for-change-bridging-the-gap/2182555888717848/?_rdc=1&_rdr

The African Women's Development Fund. 2018. Reflections on Generations of Sisterhood: International Women's Day 2018. *AWDF*. Accessed 19 February 2023. URL https://awdf.org/reflections-on-generations-of-sisterhood-international-womens-day-2018/

Pepper Dem Ministries.2018. Pepper Dem Ministries and The African Women's Development Fund: "International Women's Day Event: Time is Now, Intergenerational Conversations on The Evolution of the Feminist Movement in Ghana". 8th March 2018. Youtube https://www.youtube.com/@pepperdemministries7323