

THESIS

INVISIBLE CITIZENS: HOW MARGINALIZED GHANAIAN LGBT+ CITIZENS
SHAPE THEIR STORIES ON INSTAGRAM

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

INVISIBLE CITIZENS: HOW MARGINALIZED GHANAIAN LGBT+ CITIZENS SHAPE THEIR STORIES ON INSTAGRAM.

In Ghana, like most African countries, LGBT+ members are relegated to the background and generally live in fear of persecution. The media has played an instrumental role in framing the discourses surrounding queerness, leading to exclusion, marginalization, and moral panic in the country. Currently, the emergence and active use of social media have afforded many Ghanaians a platform to engage and express harmful opinions that are implicit and explicit queerphobia. In a similar vein, queer activists and some LGBT+ individuals have appropriated social media platforms, including Instagram, as a powerful alternative platform to redefine negative stereotypes, challenge the narratives around marginalized LGBT+ citizens and provide an alternative way of viewing their worlds. Using defensive digital alchemy as its theoretical framework, this thesis employs Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis to assess @lgbtrightsghana's defensive digital alchemy in Instagram to fight against the marginalization of sexual identities in the face of Ghana's anti-LGBT+ Bill. The findings suggest that @lgbtrightsghana's defensive digital alchemy challenges master narratives, redefines negative stereotypes, and provides alternate views of queer Ghanaians.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of sexuality politics in Ghana and Africa is influenced by religious, cultural, colonial, and postcolonial factors (Epprecht, 1998; Tamale & Murillo, 2007; Tamale, 2013; Epprecht, 2018). As exemplified in work undertaken by Epprecht (2018), "Two decades of sexuality research in Africa south of the Sahara," countries like Zimbabwe, Uganda, Nigeria, and Ethiopia vehemently oppose the idea of the existence of queer Africans and their demands for queer rights. They maintained that "homosexuals were foreign to Africa. Thus, the present-day existence of black homosexuals testified to a history of white perversion imported through colonialism" (p.2) and "through faith, in many cases through fundamentalist expressions of Islam, Pentecostalism, or charismatic Christianity" (p.4), therefore charting the rise in anti-LGBT+ Bills and laws across the continent. It is noteworthy that countries like Cape Verde, Mozambique, and South Africa have laws that decriminalize non-normative sexualities and genders.

Fundamental religious beliefs have heavily influenced anti-queer rhetoric across the continent (Benyah, 2019; Ejikeme, 2023). Religion and the media play a central role in the ways that queerness is presented and discussed, thereby influencing public opinions and debates. The media works in tandem with religious and political leaders to report their religiopolitical perspectives on queer people. Mainstream media provides them with the platform, airtime, and interview opportunities to present their ideas on marginalized sexual identities with the goal of persuading their audience. As Atieku-Boateng (2023) puts it, "Religion plays a critical role in the decision formation of individuals; as such, an essential element that drives perceptions, which include reception or acceptance of any subject matter. With LGBT+ as a topic, it is evident that the religious aspect will play a role in the perceptions of individuals in Ghana" (p.2). Benyah

(2019) supports this claim that “Homosexuality is repeatedly constructed in the media by preachers and church leaders as a perverted act and an aberrant lifestyle that deserves extermination and condemnation to eternal damnation” (p.126). In Ghana, the media feeds on these contentious issues about LGBT+ individuals that reinforce the dominant social perspectives (Namubiru,2022). It tends to portray a one-sided account of LGBT+ people, thereby hiding the larger issues, including discrimination, inequality, and injustice. As Mohammed (2020) puts it, “the media expresses simplistic and dominant views that align with the status quo. By so doing, the media avoid a more nuanced discussion on LGBT+ issues and instead present queerphobic discourses as normal” (Nartey, 2022, p.8). In recent years, there have been numerous and consistent media reports of violence, intolerance, and prejudice against LGBT+ folks.

The media framing of LGBT+ issues provides the basis for LGBT+ persons to be vilified, ridiculed, demonized, and regarded as outcasts. It is, therefore, not surprising that “Ghanaian journalists are driving an anti-LGBT+ campaign that could result in one of the world’s harshest homophobic laws” (Namubiru, 2022). The interplay between media and religious discourse creates a potent environment where political opinion and motives are heavily influenced. By perpetuating negative stereotypes and moral judgments, both the media and religious leaders can drive the political agenda toward anti-LGBT+ policies. Politicians, in turn, leverage these sentiments to bolster their positions and achieve electoral gains, reinforcing a cycle of discrimination and opposition to LGBT+ rights.

In Ghana, like most African countries, LGBT+ people are relegated to the background and generally live in fear of persecution. In the year 2024, Ghanaian LGBT+ individuals continue to be othered and seen as inferior. Most people who are suspected of identifying as LGBT+ are likely to be raped, attacked, and in the worst-case scenario, killed. LGBT+ individuals frequently

experience both online and offline queerphobic and transphobic attacks. The media has played an instrumental role in framing the discourses surrounding minoritized sexual citizens, leading to exclusion, marginalization, and moral panic in the country. Currently, the emergence and active use of new media has afforded many Ghanaians a platform to engage and express harmful opinions that are implicit and explicit queerphobia. Nartey (2022, p. 4) posits that:

Often uncritical and unbalanced, the news articles employ various forms of othering, including alienation, discrimination, and criminalization, that reinforce and legitimize discourses of implicit and explicit homophobia . . . the media's framing of LGBT+ issues lead to the production of moral panic – that is, “a condition, episode [in which] a person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” (Cohen, 2002, p. 9).

Building on Nartey's argument regarding the role of the media in the framing of LGBT+ issues, my thesis will focus on how social media, specifically Instagram, is being used as a defensive tool to reshape the narratives around marginalized queer citizens. I will be focusing on identifying a counter-narrative that is used to challenge cultural, social, legal, and institutional toxic narratives on LGBT+ issues.

1.1 LGBT+ Rights Ghana Organization

LGBT+ Rights Ghana Organization was founded in 2018 by Alex Kofi Donkor with the aim of advocating for the rights of LGBT+ Ghanaians. According to their social media pages, Instagram, X, and TikTok, LGBT+ Right Ghana is “a movement of LGBTQIA championing the freedom. For all LGBT+ persons in Ghana” (@lgbtrightsghana, 2024). The organization has engaged in various forms of online and offline activism to fight hate against minoritized sexual

identities. For example, in August 2023, a music charity festival dubbed Love Ghana charity concert was organized to raise funds for the organization in Copenhagen, Denmark. Through its fund-raising efforts, LGBT+ Rights Ghana can provide support for victims of queerphobia. Currently, the organization uses its social media platforms to raise awareness and advocate against the anti-LGBT+ Bill in Ghana. It has 19.4k on Instagram, 2864k on TikTok, and 12.8K followers on X. With the affordances the social media platforms provide, the organization can engage in its online advocacy campaign, “We are all Ghana” to counteract the current anti-LGBT+ Bill. In 2021, the organization secured a safe space community center for its activism work in Accra. The Ghana police service raided the center, and members of the organization were arrested and detained. News of the LGBT+ Rights Ghana Organization's first public community office sparked a furious public outcry that ultimately resulted in its closure (Princewill, 2021; Mohammed, 2021; Nuer, 2022). According to McKenzie and Princewill (2021), “the center was closed less than a month after it had opened. Soon afterward, plans for the draconian new anti-LGBT+ law began to emerge. The Bill was introduced in parliament in early August”.

1.1.2 The Anti-LGBT+ Bill in Ghana

Many Ghanaians were infuriated by the boldness of LGBT+Rights Ghana to establish its office in Accra, the capital of the country, in 2021. In the same year, the anti-LGBT+ Bill was introduced in parliament by eight members of parliament. The eight MPs were Sam Nartey George, Della Sowah, Emmanuel Bedzrah, Alhassan Suhuyini, Rita Sowah, Helen Ntoso, Rockson-Nelson Dafeamekpor, as well as John Ntim Fordjour. These members of parliament have held office for over a decade, with the longest tenure being fifteen years and the shortest being four years. It is worth mentioning that Sam George, the lead convenor of the Bill, is a well-known

politician who was ordained as an Elder of his church, Perez Chapel International, in 2021. Additionally, Alhassan Suhuyini was a journalist before transitioning into politics. The Anti-LGBT Bill proposes to criminalize queer individuals and protect authentic Ghanaian culture and the family structure in the country. However, as Coleman, Ako & Kyeremateng (2023) purport, the true motive behind the Bill's introduction in Parliament is for politicians to gain favor with the electorate to stay in power (p.102). The Anti-LGBT+Bill was passed on February 28th, 2024, and it is currently awaiting the president's assent to become law. The next chapter expounds in detail on what the Bill entails.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is defensive digital alchemy, as proposed by Moya Bailey (2021). This theory examines the strategic use of digital and social media platforms to transform harmful narratives of marginalized groups and the promotion of positive self-representation. Defensive digital alchemy as a theory enables us to understand the use of technological platforms as tools for reimagining ways of being, which challenges negative stereotypes through digital culture and content creation. This theory is a useful framework for understanding and addressing the media representation of marginalized communities. By focusing on social media as a social justice media, advocacy, and representation, defensive digital alchemy provides a comprehensive approach to challenging oppression and marginalization. I employ defensive digital alchemy as a theoretical lens to build towards an understanding of LGBT+Rights Ghana as a digital alchemist on Instagram that challenges negative stereotypes of the LGBT+ community and combats queerphobia.

1.3 Methods Rationale

This thesis uses Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis to assess @lgbtrightsghana's defensive digital alchemy on Instagram to fight against the marginalization of sexual identities in the face of Ghana's anti-LGBT+ Bill. CTDA, as a multimodal analytic technique, offers me a way to understand how the affordances within Instagram and its technological practices contribute to the production of meaning while interrogating power relations in digital discourses that specifically focus on the experiences of marginalized and minoritized populations (Brock, 2016). CTDA will work well with defensive digital alchemy as a conceptual framework where @lgbtrightsghana circumvents a technological platform, Instagram, for social justice, activism, and awareness.

1.4 Research Questions

RQ1. How does LGBT+ Rights Ghana use the affordances of Instagram for defensive digital alchemy to construct counter-narratives about people with marginalized sexual identities in the nation?

RQ2. How does LGBT+ Rights Ghana's defensive digital alchemy in Instagram counter master narratives present in the anti-LGBT+ Bill?

1.5 Importance to the field

This thesis seeks to add to African queer epistemologies bridging the gap between media communication and queer perspectives. Drawing on communication theories and queer perspectives framed within an African context, my work seeks to highlight how LGBT+ Rights Ghana, as a digital alchemist, is reshaping the contentious narratives around sexual minorities in

Ghana. There is a need to tell the stories of queer Ghanaians from their perspectives as a form of counter-power to the master narratives that are continually spearheaded by powerful organizations, including political leaders, religious leaders, and the media. In that sense, this thesis will contribute to the ongoing discussion in Ghana on marginalized sexual minorities.

1.6 Organization of Thesis

Chapter 1 sets the study's context, explaining its purpose while emphasizing its importance to the field, and gives an overview of LGBT+ Rights Ghana Organization. It also includes a brief introduction of the anti-LGBT+ Bill, the theoretical framework, a rationale of the method, and research questions. Chapter 2 reviews pertinent literature from related research areas and outlines the study's theoretical framework. Chapter 3 is the method section, which includes an explanation of the method, research design, pilot study, researcher's positionality, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 explains the data analysis and findings. Chapter 5 is dedicated to the study's conclusion and limitations and offers suggestions for future research. This thesis concludes with a bibliography.

CHAPTER 2. Literature Review

This section draws insights from the theories of narratives, master narratives, counternarratives, defensive digital alchemy, counter-power, queer theories, and other relevant frameworks establishing the context for the arguments and analyses presented here and in the subsequent sections to study LGBT+ rights and how it uses its Instagram account to fight against harmful and hateful rhetoric, and the anti-LGBT+ Bill in Ghana.

2.1 The Anti-LGBT+ Bill

The anti-LGBT+ Bill, known as Proper Human Sexual and Ghanaian Family Values, was introduced to parliament in 2021 by eight members of parliament. (Coleman, Ako & Kyeremateng, 2023). The Bill purports to defend Ghanaian cultural and family values, emphasizing traditional marriage between biologically assigned male and female partners (Coleman, Ako & Kyeremateng, 2023). The resistance to the existence of LGBT+ individuals in Ghana is with the motive to defend the authentic Ghanaian identity and culture from Western ideals. As rightly put by Coleman, Ako & Kyeremateng (2023),

the law will also entrench a mistaken belief that homosexuality is a Western decadence imposed upon Africans and Ghanaians by the Western world. Most importantly, the anti-LGBT+ Bill will erode Ghana's democratic gains, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and constitutionalism achieved in the last two decades of democratic rule. (p. 98)

For instance, the current president of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, is also a human rights lawyer who has been lauded as a peaceful president and a social justice and human rights leader whose governance has contributed to the democracy of the country. The passage of this Bill

will damage the prestige and international reputation of the country as hospitable, peaceful, and welcoming of everyone. For example, in 2019, the Government of Ghana launched a Year of Return initiative to encourage African diasporans to return to Ghana, connect with their roots, and invest in the country's future. The Year of Return attracted many visitors, particularly from the African diaspora, who value diversity and inclusivity. The passage of the anti-LGBT+ Bill can create a negative international perception, deterring not only LGBT+ individuals but also allies and supporters from visiting Ghana.

The Bill represents a threat to the very existence of individuals perceived as LGBT+. It goes beyond denying their right to exist; it seeks to erase their presence and silence them completely. According to Asebi-Boakye (2021), this is a deliberate attempt to instill “fear and intimidation into a growing LGBT+ community that advocates for equal rights” (p.15). This legislation effectively makes LGBT+ people vulnerable to scrutiny and violence, a distressing trend that is becoming increasingly prevalent in the country. The Anti-LGBT+Bill was passed on February 28th, 2024, and it is currently awaiting the president's assent to become law. Should the president assent to it, the law would effectively sanction acts of hostility, discrimination, and violence against the LGBT+ community (Mohammed, 2021; Nuer, 2022).

The main characteristics of the anti-LGBT+ Bill (Nuer,2022, Atieku-Boateng, 2023, Coleman, Ako & Kyeremateng, 2023) include,

- Criminalization of anyone who identifies as LGBT+. They could be imprisoned for up to 10 years.
- Imprisonment of allies and advocacy groups for up to 5 years.
- Forced policing and reporting of LGBT+ individuals; failure to report them could lead to 5 to 10 years imprisonment.

- Support for conversion therapy.
- Criminalization of media reportage, online publication, and any distribution of materials for the promotion of sexual minorities.

The Bill does not actually represent the pre-colonial histories of queer people in Ghana and the African continent at large. Instead, it is the product of oppressive colonial ideologies that have been incorrectly conflated with African cultural values and traditions.

2.2. Back to the Roots: Pre-Colonial Queer Narratives

It has been established that pre-colonial African civilizations tolerated queer relationships (Roscoe & Murray, 1998; Epprecht, 2009; Nyeck & Epprecht, 2013; Gyasi-Gyamera et al., 2019). Anthropological studies and researchers have provided evidence and debunked the myth of heterosexuality as the only form of sexual orientation in Africa (Epprecht, 1998). Murray and Roscoe, in their book, *Boy-Wives, and Female Husbands*, historicized and traced the existence of queer people in some fifty African countries, including Ghana (Sweet, 2000). Therefore, it is unfounded, the notion that queer practices are alien to African societies.

Queer practices were found in many cultures in Africa. Sociologist Oyeronke Oyewumi (2005) indicates the complexity and fluidity of gender identities in the Yorùbá culture. She challenges Western gender binaries by theorizing about gender fluidity in Yorùbá society. According to her, the Yorùbá society prior to Western colonization did not assign a specific gender at birth. She states that “the social categories “men” and “women” were nonexistent, and hence no gender system was in place” (p. 99). Likewise, Ife Amadiume, in her book, *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in African Culture*, highlights the flexible gender systems that existed in Igbo culture. Amadiume (2015) asserts that “the flexibility of Igbo gender construction

meant that gender was separate from biological sex. Daughters could become sons and consequently male. Daughters and women in general could be husbands to wives and consequently males in relation to their wives” (p.86). Hence, the focus of these scholars is on the fact that gender did not solely dictate how individuals perceived themselves and their roles in African societies. It was much more encompassing and flexible, accommodating various forms of gender expression and identity beyond the hegemonic binaries.

Similarly, diverse sexual identities and practices can also be traced in indigenous Uganda cultures. Scholars, including Marc Epprecht (2018) and Sylvia Tamale (2013), have asserted a widening range of arguments and evidence to support the notion that LGBT+ people in Uganda predate colonialism. For example, according to Sylvia Tamale in the book *Africa After Gender* (2007, p.19), queer people were acknowledged amongst the Langi of northern Uganda (Driberg, 1923), the Iteso (Laurance, 1957), the Bahima (Mushanga, 1973), the Banyoro (Needham, 1973), and the Baganda (Southwold, 1973).

In the Ghanaian context, the assertion of the existence of many non-normative sexualities is further substantiated with ample evidence from the pre-colonial era. Banks (2013) shines new light on these debates through an examination of the Saso community in Ghana. He explored how indigenous Ghanaian religious priests negotiated diverse identities and sexualities and helped community members reconcile their identities as queer and Ghanaian. Fiaveh (2023) also points to the plurality of genders and sexualities in his paper, *LGBQ+ in Ghana: Analyzing Local and Western Discourses*. Fiaveh argues that “previous history shows that among the Nzema men who lived close to the Tano River, older men married good-looking young men for social reasons such as the inability to impregnate a female partner (Greenberg, 1988; Murray and Roscoe, 1998). By far, perhaps, the most comprehensive account of the presence of minoritized sexual and gender-

variants in the Ghanaian culture is found in the work of Ernest Yaw Ako (2023), who provides a historical account of LGBT+ relationships and sexual practices that predate colonialism. He posits that queer people have always existed in the Ghanaian culture (p.47).

2.2.1 Spread of Colonial-Based Queerphobia

Despite the aforementioned variety of historical information, I am concerned about how Ghanaians and most Africans came to support queerphobia. In response to this concern, many scholars (Dlamini, 2006; Tamale, 2013; Durkin, 2017; Epprecht, 2018; Benyah, 2019) have demonstrated that queerphobia in Africa is a colonial import. The erasure of sexual minorities in Africa is because of colonialism, where a culture of compulsory heterosexuality was imposed on colonized people on the African continent. Epprecht (2018) affirms that after two decades of sexuality research in Africa south of the Sahara, “cultures in the region of southern Africa understood and responded to non-normative sexuality prior to colonialism, capitalism, and Christianity, establishing how new types of sexual relationships and vocabularies emerged in the racial capitalist context, tracing the development of the ‘homosexuality is un-African’ rhetoric over time. . .” (p.2).

In Ghana, during colonial rule, the act of homosexuality was deemed illegal according to the British Offences Against the Person Act 1861, which was enforced in all British colonies (Nuer, 2022). The moral and religious perspective of the British influenced the drafting of this act. Following Ghana's independence, the country's Criminal Code of 1960 upheld this illegality in Section 104, specifically addressing "unnatural carnal knowledge," a term describing sexual activities beyond heterosexual intercourse involving male-female penetration, thus contributing to the basis for queerphobic arguments against marginalized sexual minorities due to the perceived

illegality of engaged sexual practices (Asebi-Boakye, 2019; Ako, 2023). Durkin (2017) determines that “sodomy laws did more than regulate African bodies: they standardized and normalized contemporary forms of homophobia” (p. 42).

Various studies (Atuguba, 2019; Asebi-Boakye, 2019; Nuer, 2022; Ako, 2023) have argued that colonial queerphobic laws have influenced the stringent anti-gay Bill. The Bill on Proper Human Sexual and Ghanaian Family Values, that is, the anti-LGBT+ Bill, was proposed by eight members of the parliament of Ghana. Suffice it to say that the immense support for the decriminalization of LGBT+ people in Ghana by members of parliament is to avert concerns and attention from its own failures, escape accountability, and gain favor with the public (Adjepong, 2021). Coleman, Ako & Kyeremateng (2023) expressed similar sentiments that “the real reason for introducing the Bill in Parliament is for politicians to obtain the favor of the electorate to stay in power” (p. 102). Many scholars aver that the anti-LGBT+ Bill proposes harsh penalties for queer affection and advocacy, with a maximum 10-year sentence. It restricts LGBT+ activities, penalizes advocates, and prohibits online support campaigns (Nuer, 2022; Atieku-Boateng, 2023; Coleman, Ako & Kyeremateng, 2023). The introduction of this Bill suggests an institutionalization of homophobia in Ghana (Mohammed, 2021). Its effects are seen in the loss of jobs, accommodation, and prevalent attacks on the lives of LGBT+ people.

2.2.1a. Current Anti-LGBT+ Laws in Africa

In recent years, there has been an active campaign to pass laws and Bills criminalizing queerness in some African countries. Although most African countries have existing colonial laws that illegalize queerness, many of their leaders have stiffened these existing laws. According to

Ejikeme (2021), “homosexual activity is illegal in at least half of all African countries” (p. 1439).

Figure 1 below demonstrates the countries within Africa that have stringent laws.

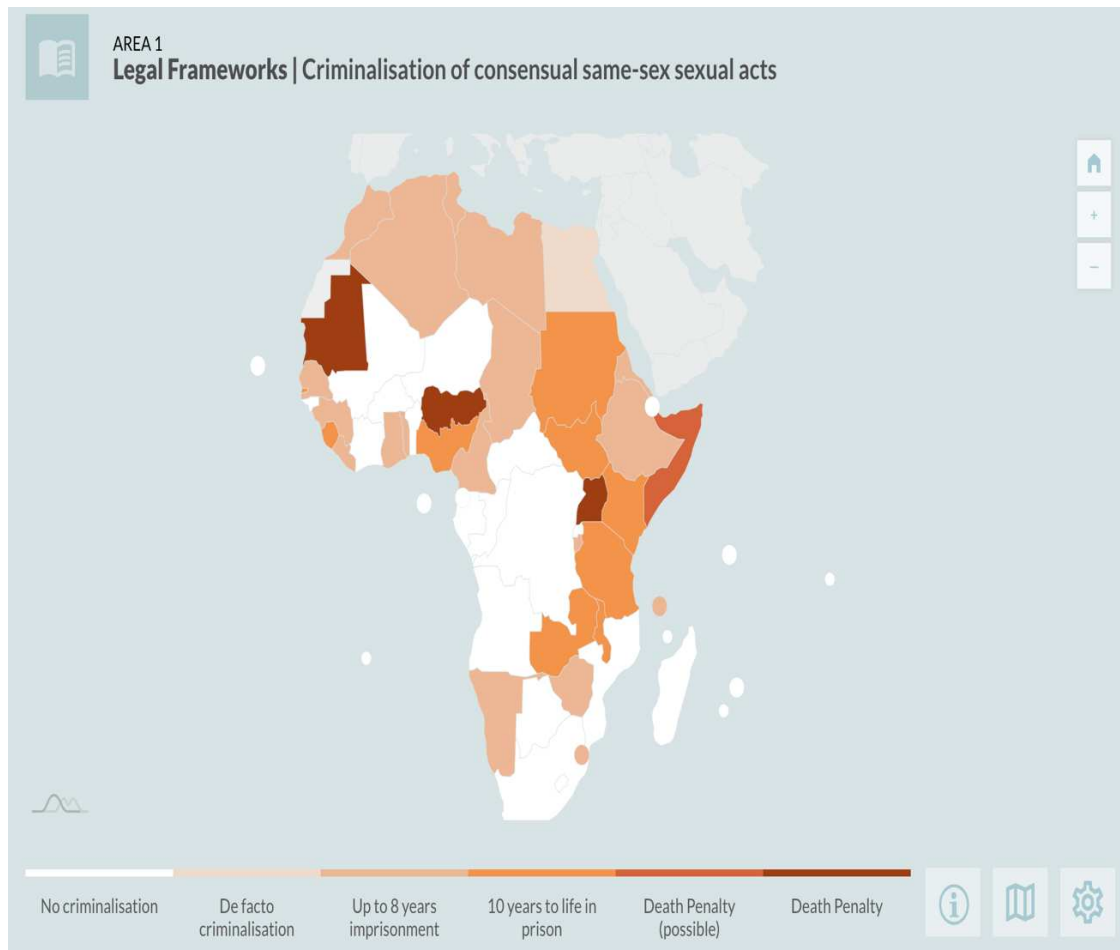


Figure 1: African map depicting countries that criminalize same-sex sexual acts. Source: International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Intersex Association (ILGA).

There has been an upsurge of laws and policies targeting queer people. For instance, in the year 2023, six countries, Kenya, Ghana, Namibia, Niger, Tanzania, and Uganda, proposed anti-LGBT+ Bills (Cohen, 2023). The list below enumerates the countries that have enacted draconian laws and or threatened to revise the laws against the fundamental human rights and freedoms of queer people and activists on the continent. (Cohen, 2023; News 24, 2023)

- Ghana– Anti-LGBT+ Bill - 2024

- Uganda - Anti-Homosexuality Act – 2023. (law)
- Kenya - Proposed Family Protection Bill - 2023
- Niger – Proposed a new penal code - 2023
- Tanzania – Debating to criminalize further - 2023
- Namibia – Proposed anti-gay Bill to reinforce existing law - 2023
- Nigeria – Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act - 2013 (law)

2.2.2 The Rise in Queerphobia

There is some evidence to suggest that queerness was not a contended issue or a national problem until charismatic Christian organizations brought about the existence of the relentless hate campaign. Religion is another key factor fundamental to queerphobic rhetoric, which contributes to the marginalization of LGBT+ individuals. Abrahamic religions, such as Pentecostalism, charismatic Christianity, Catholicism, and Islam, contribute significantly to the spread of queer hatred. Predominantly, Ghana is described as a Christian nation and, therefore, plays a significant role in the daily experiences of Ghanaians. (Asebi-Boakye,2019; Fiaveh,2023). Numerous religious figures, such as pastors, Catholic bishops, and the chief Imam, are highly esteemed in society. Consequently, their perspectives on matters concerning the LGBT+ community are widely acknowledged and honored.

These influential leaders employ their platforms to discourage queer identities, arguing that they go against religious beliefs, are immoral, and are associated with evil and satanic influences. They have labeled queer individuals as sinners in need of redemption. Many Pentecostal and charismatic congregations have amassed significant followings and have played a crucial role in fostering and propagating queerphobic sentiments. Asante (2022) opines that

the Christian Council preached it into existence with its relentless hate campaign. Yes, hate campaign. Let's call those cruel and awful sermons what they are – hate campaigns. Every time gays in the West gain some rights, statements are issued warning the government against the legalization of gay marriage in Ghana (Nyamewaa).

I share similar views with Asante that the continual preaching about God's wrath and the description of queerness as evil, satanic, and ungodly can be likened to hate campaigns. To illustrate further, the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), on October 5th, 2021, issued a joint official statement against the LGBT+ community in the country. In their joint communique, both councils made a strong case for the passing of the promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and the Ghanaian Family Value Bill. They argued

that as Christians, we uphold the Bible as our Principal guide and consider the LGBT+ in all its forms as unacceptable behavior that our God frowns upon (Romans 1:25-28). Moreover, it is alien to the Ghanaian culture and family value system, and as such, the citizens of this nation cannot accept it . . . we call on all Ghanaians to pray for God's grace and intervention for the passage of the Bill into law (2020).

Regarding the rise in queerphobic rhetoric, there is also a growing body of evidence (Banks, 2013; Adua, 2021; Mohammed, 2021; Nuer, 2022) to suggest the media sparked conversations about LGBT+ Ghanaians nationally between 2006 and 2012. In 2006, the first proposed gay and lesbian conference planned to take place in Accra and Koforidua was made public, which led to an uproar calling for the cancellation of the event. Threats were made to cause harm to the event organizers and its participants should the event be held (Banks, 2013). In 2011, David Cameron, a former British prime minister, linked financial aid to the legalization of queer

couples. In response to this declaration, the then government, religious authorities, and traditional leaders denounced LGBT+ relationships (Adua, 2021). In 2012, then-U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon opposed the pervasive homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia that exists in many African countries. The then-president, John Atta Mills, following his return from the meeting, “used his position not only to promote homophobia but to openly support religious institutions and organizations in their efforts to dehumanize LGBTQI Ghanaians” (Mohammed, 2021).

In 2021, news about the opening of the first public office by LGBT+ Rights Ghana stirred intense public outcry, leading to its closure. In the same year, 21 activists were arrested and detained for organizing a workshop in HO, the Volta region in Ghana. Given the extreme animosity against sexual minorities, it is hardly surprising that the anti-LGBT+ Bill has been proposed and is waiting to be passed by lawmakers. This Bill will not only criminalize sexual minorities but will institutionalize queerphobia. As addressed thus far, the media produces less nuanced reports on issues regarding minoritized sexual identities, and as such, there is a need for LGBT+ individuals to center their narratives. Fortunately, with social media and its affordances, many activists and human rights organizations capitalize on it as a defensive counter platform to project the experiences, realities, and stories of sexual minorities in Ghana.

Furthermore, to gain a thorough understanding of the extent to which anti-LGBT+ sentiments are ingrained, it is necessary to recognize the complicity of key stakeholders, including political figures, the speaker of parliament, government officials, Chiefs, and the media in perpetuating harmful rhetoric against marginalized sexual minorities. Godfried Asante (2022) argues that “sexuality in Ghana is a site of deep-seated political conflicts over African identity, integrity, and morality. Sexuality in Ghana is also a site of struggle over cultural authenticity” (p. 5). This viewpoint is described by Kaoma (2018, p. 14) as “protective homophobia.” Protective

homophobia is exemplified in the work of the anti-LGBT+ Bill spearheaded by Sam George, member of parliament for Ningo-Prampram, the lead MP, and seven other MPs. It is further illustrated by Alban Bagbin, Ghana's speaker of parliament, who declared that under his leadership, Ghana's anti-homosexuality laws would not be changed. The aforementioned arguments work together to promote hostility and violence against sexual minorities in the country. It is worth noting that this present government often uses LGBT+ issues to distract attention from its own failures, escape accountability, and gain favor with the public using media as its main tool of oppression (Otu, 2020).

2.3 The Mouthpiece of Destruction: The Media's Role in Reinforcing Queerphobic Narratives in Ghana.

LGBT+ topics in Ghana have gained significant media coverage in recent times, where the media acts as a powerful agent in shaping the ideologies around minoritized sexual identities, resulting in heightened social anxieties. It is noteworthy that discussions about LGBT+ people in the country are often portrayed negatively, influenced by cultural, religious, and political factors. This is particularly evident in the anti-LGBT+ rhetoric and queerphobic sentiments emphasized in the media's reportage on marginalized sexual minorities. To extend this argument, Nartey (2022) points out that the media in Ghana "employ various forms of othering, including alienization, discrimination, and criminalization, that reinforce and legitimize discourses of implicit and explicit homophobia" (p.4). This is evident in the headlines exemplified below,

- "Nima youth assault gay man" - reported under the Crime and Punishment section of Ghana Web – August 17, 2015
- "Most Homosexuals are Satanists – Prof. Martey" – Adom Online, March 5, 2018

- “Homosexuals deserve no rights; they are deviants – Speaker roars” - Ghana Web, October 30, 2019
- “Go away, we don’t need you - Kennedy Agyapong to LGBTQ group” – Peace FM online, March 4, 2020
- “Don’t bow to pressure over anti-LGBT+ Bill office of chief imam urges MPs” - Graphic Online, November 5, 2021
- “Pull down LGBTQI billboard - MPs to police” – Graphic Online, June 9, 2022
- “All 275 MPs consent to passage of the anti-LGBTQ Bill” - Joy Online, July 5, 2023
- “Anti-LGBTQ Bill: you can keep your visa, I care less – Dormaahene to US ambassador” – The Independent Ghana, September 30, 2023

The evidence presented thus far reiterates the notion that the media reports on dominant narratives that exclude the voices of marginalized sexual minorities and thus present queerphobic discourses as normal. As Asante (2019) echoes, “the Ghanaian “house style” journalistic style ensures that voices from human rights defenders and queer Africans are overlooked, albeit erased from media reports” (p.14). Consequently, the media in Ghana present a one-sided account of the queer people, thus hiding the larger story. This phenomenon has led to moral panic and increased public fear of losing cultural family values, instigating the witch-hunt of LGBT+ individuals in various regions in the country.

2.4 Master Narratives in the Construction of LGBT+ Discourse in Ghana

This section offers master narratives as a theoretical framework for understanding the narratives that shape the experiences of marginalized sexual minorities in Ghana. Master Narrative is a post-modern ideology by Lyotard, coined in 1984 and popularized in psychology by McLean

& Syed in 2015 as a framework for understanding identity development. They defined master narratives as “culturally shared stories that guide thoughts, beliefs, values, and behaviors” (2016, p.7). Scholars like McLean, Boggs, Haraldsson, et.al. (2019) noted that “master narratives serve as templates for the kinds of experiences one should be having, and how to interpret them” (p. 2).

In the literature, the term tends to refer to a cultural product that dictates ways of being and how to belong to a group (Bradford & Syed, 2019; McLean & Syed, 2016; McLean & Syed, 2022). What is remarkable about this definition is that it acknowledges that master narratives are culture-specific. They are created within a culture where individuals may have access to potentially internalize, both consciously and unconsciously (McLean & Syed, 2017). Master Narratives, from its inception, was conceived within a white heteronormative culture with the proclivity to impose its ways of being and to oppress those who deviate from its established norms. As highlighted in Rogers et al. (2023, p.8), “the white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist subject represents the standard for human or the figure of a whole person, and everyone else is a fragment (Leonardo, 2004, p.139)”. With Ghana having been colonized by the West, these Western standards of being—rooted in white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexuality, and capitalism—were imposed on its citizens. As a result, in a post-colonial era, the country continues to uphold these established norms as the standard of being, in this case, heterosexuality, and cisnormativity as the standard that everyone is expected to conform to or emulate. Hence, the country maintains a white, hegemonic, hetero-patriarchal system of gender and identity that guides the construction of sexuality and identities.

An important aspect of master narratives is the role that power plays in maintaining the status quo. The rigidity of master narratives is sustained by hegemonic power. These narratives have been persistent for many years because any form of resistance to these narratives would be

critical to the cultural system. The stifling nature of master narratives shapes and influences the daily experiences of those who do not conform. The notion of compulsory heterosexuality and cisnormativity in Ghana has been heavily sustained as the only form of sexual practice by powerful agents, including governmental institutions, religious leaders, and the media. The power within a master narrative confines the agency of those who do not conform and resist its dominance, rendering them marginalized. It is interesting to see how power is negotiated to resist culturally defined ways of being.

McLean & Syed (2015) propose five principles that underline master narratives. These principles include ubiquity, utility, invisibility, rigidity, and compulsory nature. (McLean & Syed, 2016; McLean, Lilgendahl, Fordham, et.al., 2018; Bradford & Moin Syed, 2019). According to McLean & Syed (2015), a master narrative is ubiquitous when commonly shared within a culture. Its utility is seen in its ability to define ways of being and how to belong to a group. In the same way, master narratives are invisible. Many people in society unconsciously succumb to these ideal ways of being. It, therefore, becomes visible when individuals create alternative ways of being (Bradford & Moin Syed, 2019). However, these narratives are rigid and compulsory in nature. McLean & Syed (2015) state that these culturally defined narratives are difficult to change and set the standard for everyone to adhere to; consequently, those who rebel against these defined ways of being are marginalized and oppressed.

Relating these five principles to marginalized sexual minorities in Ghana, I argue that the cultural norms place a strong emphasis on cisnormativity and heterosexuality as the standard that everyone is expected to adhere to or emulate. Social structures consisting of political, religious, legal, and social institutions and the media entrench and uphold the rigidity of cultural stipulations regarding queerness, resulting in the oppression of LGBT+ individuals in the country. The master

narratives about LGBT+ people in Ghana are that they are un-African (Asante, 2020; Mohammed, 2019), unclean and incompatible with the values of Abrahamic religions (Mohammed, 2022), and have a mental illness (Mohammed, 2019; Nartey, 2022). The master narrative framework leads to “the exclusion and denial of particular kinds of stories, those that do not uphold the status quo, and those that challenge the idea of individual agency” (Syed & McLean, 2022).

In negotiating these master narratives, LGBT+ individuals, scholars, and activists are creating alternative narratives that are direct responses to these narratives to combat queerphobia. To do so, these marginalized sexual minorities have taken advantage of social media and its affordances as a counter-power tool to the media’s alarmist and negative portrayal of queer relationships. The next section parses out the important role digital resistance plays in enabling queer organizations such as LGBT+ Rights Ghana and LGBT+ individuals to negotiate their identities and challenge the narratives around queerness in Ghana.

2.5 Social Media Activism

Mainstream media platforms in Ghana do not prioritize the voices and perspectives of sexual minorities. With the emergence of social media, the articulation of marginalized voices can be amplified. It provides queer organizations, activists, and scholar-activists the space to expand the stories of oppressed LGBT+ individuals, organize, and advocate against the anti-LGBT+ Bill in Ghana. For instance, *Online Activism: Centering Marginalized Voices in Activist Work* (Mohammed, 2021) demonstrates how digital shaming was employed by Ghanaian feminist-activists on Facebook as a digital protest tool in bringing justice for Sadia, who was verbally and psychologically abused.

I build toward an understanding of the use of social media as a social justice tool for marginalized identities. Moya Bailey, in *Misogynoir Transformed*, articulates the use of social media by Black women and Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant folk as a form of digital resistance against misogynoir and in redefining their narratives. Bailey (2021) theorizes this phenomenon as digital alchemy. According to Bailey, “Black women and Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant folks’ digital resistance through content creation that challenges these problematic representations is a form of self-production that disrupts the mainstream narrative that promulgates narrow and stereotypical visions of identity” (p. 56). Bailey further develops this framework into two: defensive digital alchemy and generative digital alchemy. I elaborate on the theory of defensive digital alchemy as an appropriate foundation for this research.

Defensive digital alchemy suggests the use of social media by Black women and Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant folk as an alternative platform to redefine negative stereotypes, challenge master narratives, and provide another way of viewing their worlds. Drawing upon Bailey’s digital alchemy theory, I assert that LGBT+ Ghana Rights can be considered as defensive digital alchemists who have taken advantage of Instagram and its affordances to reconstruct the narratives about sexual minorities in Ghana, consequently transforming these social media platforms into digital social justice platforms to amplify the voices and experiences of LGBT+ individuals in the country since mainstream media is complicit in propagating hostility towards the community.

This phenomenon is described by Manuel Castells (2007) as counter-power. According to Castells (2007), “media act as gatekeepers of the information flows that shape public opinion” (p.17). He, therefore, contends that with the emergence of social networks, what he calls mass self-communication, social actors have the power to use technology as a medium to confront powerful

institutions, challenge the status quo, and resist domination for social change. Hence, I assert that counter-narratives emerge as a result. Several scholars ((McLean & Syed, 2016; McLean, Lilgendahl, Fordham, et al., 2018; Bradford & Moin Syed, 2019) agree that counter-narratives develop as narratives that contrast the socially accepted master narratives. McLean et al. (2017) confirm that “those at the structural margins of society and who cannot fit into master narrative expectations by virtue of their life experiences, identity characteristics, or other rather unmalleable aspects of self. . .” (p. 3) are more than likely to develop counter-narratives. Through social media activism, LGBT+ people reclaim their power to own their stories and active participants in creating their narratives.

Ultimately, I seek to answer the research questions outlined below,

RQ1. How does LGBT+ Rights Ghana use the affordances of Instagram for defensive digital alchemy to construct counter-narratives about people with marginalized sexual identities in the nation?

RQ2. How does LGBT+ Rights Ghana’s defensive digital alchemy on Instagram counter master narratives present in the anti-LGBT+ Bill?

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

3.1 Research Objectives

The research objective of this thesis is to understand how marginalized sexual minorities in Ghana are utilizing social media, specifically Instagram, as a defensive tool against the anti-LGBT+ Bill while legitimizing their experiences as LGBT+ individuals. Given that mainstream media often contributes to the propagation of queerphobic narratives and instigates hate against marginalized sexual minorities, it is prudent to turn to social media to amplify the voices of those facing marginalization and living in constant fear for their lives. Transforming Instagram, a social media platform, into a social justice media, LGBT+ Ghanaians share their stories from their own perspectives to counter the master narratives that are continually promoted by powerful organizations, including political leaders, religious leaders, and the media. In doing so, this section will aid our understanding of how technological platforms and affordances are used to construct alternative narratives and ways of being opposed to master narratives.

3.2 Research Questions

RQ1. How does LGBT+ Rights Ghana use the affordances of Instagram for defensive digital alchemy to construct counter-narratives about people with marginalized sexual identities in the nation?

RQ2. How does LGBT+ Rights Ghana's defensive digital alchemy on Instagram counter master narratives present in the anti-LGBT+ Bill?

3.3 Framework of the Method

I employ critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA), a qualitative methodology, to examine the way LGBT+ Rights Ghana is using Instagram to disrupt Ghanaian gender and sexual ideologies. Critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA), proposed by Andre Brock (2018), is a multi-modal technique that provides a way to think about interfaces, the production of meaning through IT practices, and how people understand themselves using these practices in a particular app. As a method, CTDA enables us to understand how technological artifacts, their affordances, and user discourse work together to produce meaning.

CTDA provides a lens to assess how dominant ideologies are reinforced and disrupted. According to Brock (2020), CTDA considers the epistemological standpoints of underrepresented groups. Therefore, it centers issues around marginalized and minoritized communities to uncover the power dynamics within their experiences, thus leading to change. Specifically, it probes the usage of social media by marginalized sexual minorities to challenge negative stereotypes while creating new ideas that legitimize their experiences. CTDA is invaluable to this study because it interrogates technological platforms as text, text practices, and cultural ideologies around marginalized issues. For example, Instagram affordances like Insta Live enable LGBT+Rights Ghana to create an online space to hold dialogues on issues affecting the LGBT+ community. In contrast, their lives would be endangered should they host such discourses in a physical space, thus repurposing technological affordances and practices into social justice media. Brock (2018) defines this phenomenon as reorienting a technocultural practice to the cultural context and ultimately defining the technocultural space in which they operate and exist.

CTDA recognizes technology as a cultural phenomenon that influences the ways of being within a community. It is used to analyze how cultural ideologies and technology interact critically.

Brock (2018) articulates that CTDA “formulates technology as cultural representations and social structures to simultaneously interrogate culture and technology as intertwined concepts” (p.1). Hence, central to CTDA is a conceptual framework applicable to the critical analysis of a technocultural discourse. A conceptual framework, including theoretical concepts like critical cultural theory, critical race theory, feminist, gender, and queer theories, is fundamental to the epistemological standpoint of underrepresented communities.

This leads to the second reason this method is suitable for the study. CTDA lends itself well to the theoretical concept of defensive digital alchemy. Defensive digital alchemy, proposed by Moya Bailey (2021), suggests the use of social media by Black women and Black nonbinary, agender, and gender-variant folk as an alternative platform to redefine negative stereotypes, challenge master narratives, and provide another way of viewing their worlds. I assert that LGBT+ Rights Ghana can be considered a digital alchemist that has taken advantage of Instagram and its affordances to reconstruct the narratives about sexual minorities in Ghana. Consequently, LGBT+ Rights Ghana transforms this technological platform into a digital social justice platform to amplify the voices and experiences of LGBT+ individuals in Ghana.

Although CTDA is a new and growing method within social media research, it has been used by several scholars. CTDA was first used by Andre Brock to analyze African Americans’ use of Twitter (Black Twitter) and the ways Twitter affordances enabled its users to engage in cultural practices drawn upon African American culture (2012). Similarly, Williams (2020) used this method to illustrate Black Twitter’s use of Black memeing to resist white supremacy and surveillance, afford agency to Black communities, and subsequently call for accountability. Arthur (2021) used CTDA to investigate the use of Instagram and its affordances by two Black travel influencers to promote the idea of digital culture bearing at the intersection of race, gender, culture,

and global travel. Arthur challenges the hegemonic notions of Africa and gender through these travel influencers, thus reimagining new ideologies of the African continent. Also, Childs (2022) used CTDA to explore the ways in which Black beauty influencers use Instagram and YouTube affordances to call out racist practices within the beauty industry. Ultimately, these studies illustrate how minoritized and marginalized people apply technology, technological practice, and cultural ideologies to interrogate power relations.

3.4 Explanation of Method

Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis is a multimodal analytic technique. There are three components of analysis for CTDA informed by a conceptual framework.

Affordance (technology) + Practice (act of) + Ideology (Belief/Culture)

Brock defines affordances as a “set of rules and resources built into the technology by designers during its development which are then appropriated by users as they interact with the technology” (2018, p.5). Instagram’s interface, including a profile photo and bio section, allows LGBTQ+ Rights Ghana to signal its identity as an organization. The organization describes itself in its bio section thus: “We are a movement of Lesbians, Gays, Bis, Trans, Intersex, Queers & Allies championing the freedom for #LGBTQ+ persons in #Ghana 🇳🇬🏳️🌈 Please Donate 📌 (@lgbt+rightsghana, 2024).

Instagram's affordances, for example, encompass various elements like posting photos, videos, captions, hashtags, geotags, emojis, Insta stories (allows users to post images or videos for up to 24 hours) and Insta Lives (allows users to stream live events, discussions and interact with their users), and direct message. Additionally, Instagram supports multimedia content, allowing users to share videos, images, audio, and text. Each of these features serves as a form of communication and contributes to the overall meaning of the platform. These artifacts and features

on Instagram provide LGBT+ Rights Ghana with the means to post pictures, use the Insta Live feature to share their stories, and use hashtags and geotags to drive user interaction and visibility.

CTDA also encompasses technological practice, which refers to how individuals, including social actors, users, and the audience, use technology-related actions to convey meaning on a social media platform. In essence, technological practice involves how users and observers utilize platform features to create meaning. For instance, on Instagram, technological practices involve the creation and sharing of posts, images, videos, captioning, hashtagging, geotagging, and commenting to facilitate meaning-making. These actions are central to the process of conveying and creating meaning on the platform.

Furthermore, CTDA as a method enables researchers to understand the reasons behind the use of certain artifacts, what artifacts are not used, and the motivations for these choices. Instagram has many features, including Insta Stories (allows users to post images or videos for up to 24 hours), Insta Highlights (enables users to save images or videos from their Insta stories even after they disappear after 24 hours), Insta Lives (allows users to stream live events, discussions, and interact with their users) and Reels (allows users to create short videos). For example, LGBT+ Rights Ghana used Insta Live for their Color Dialogue series instead of Reels. The organization has defined the Color Dialogue series as a daily live conversation scheduled for a specific date and time, allowing followers and allies to plan and include it in their schedules. Instagram Live provides the organization with the opportunity to interact with both participants and the audience simultaneously. During the live streaming, followers of the @lgbtrightsghana page can join and engage in real-time conversations, unlike with Reels. Reels allow users to record 90 seconds of a video and share it with followers who can engage with it at any time. Additionally, Instagram permits users to make Reels available to the broader Instagram community through the Explore

page. Reels within the Explore page support users to reach new audiences on a global stage. With their shorter video format, Reels target a wider audience, while Instagram Live allows for longer, more in-depth interactions. A model suitable for the Color Dialogue series.

The final analytic component of CTDA involves examining the cultural beliefs and ideologies that shape the interaction between users and their audience in a digital context. Cultural ideologies influence ways of being and how one is perceived in a community. Cultural notions of gender underline the master narratives concerning marginalized sexual minorities in Ghana. In this case, LGBT+ Rights Ghana, as a defensive digital alchemist, employs ideologies that validate the existence of queer people, queer struggle, and resistance in Ghana.

Ultimately, I will use CTDA to demonstrate the intersection of technology artifacts, technology practices, and cultural ideology as they relate to defensive digital alchemy leading to the research question.

Table 1: Represents CTDA explanation: The connection between a conceptual framework, technological affordances, and practices leading to the research question.

Defensive Digital Alchemy	+	CTDA	+	RQ
Redefined Negative Stereotypes		Affordances		RQ1. How does LGBT+ Rights Ghana use the affordances of Instagram for defensive digital alchemy to construct counter narratives about people with marginalized sexual identities in the nation.
Challenge Master Narratives		Practices		RQ2. How does LGBT+ Rights Ghana's defensive digital alchemy in Instagram counter master narratives present in the anti-LGBT+ bill?
Alternate views of gender & Sexuality		Ideology		

3.5 Limitations of Method

Though CTDA is precise and flexible, it is limited in a number of ways. CTDA does not lend itself well to larger data sets. The overall data pool for this research is 20 Insta Live videos. This method works well with mostly posts and not comments on technological platforms. According to Brock (2020), researchers bring to the data perspectives rooted in cultural, disciplinary, and societal expectations; hence, it may be challenging to replicate this research by empiricists and quantitative scholars. Consequently, researcher bias limits CTDA in its usage. CTDA is a new method that is predominantly used by minoritized and marginalized groups; therefore, there are limited studies. Crucial to CTDA are technological platforms and affordances; different platforms and affordances require different analyses. For instance, LGBT+ Rights Ghana has TikTok and X pages, and these platforms have different interfaces, features, and technological practices that influence user experience.

3.6 Why Instagram

I chose Instagram as a site of inquiry because of its richness in data. Instagram's technological artifacts and practices require each post to have an image and/or video attached with a caption, allowing for a "high degree of interpretability" (Quan-Haase & Sloan, 2022, p. 583). Instagram is an image-based social media application launched in 2010. As a site of inquiry, Instagram affords easy "searchability through built-in search functions for usernames, hashtags, and locations" (Quan-Haase & Sloan, 2022, p. 583) to enhance visibility and the ability to measure reach and influence through post engagements, hashtags, likes and comments. Instagram is currently the most prominent image-based network (Kocak, Nasir & Turker, 2020, p.1). Huang and Su (2018)

described it as a social media app that uses images as a means of communication (p. 2). Instagram allows its users to express their identities and promote self-presentation.

With its distinct technological features, Instagram sets itself apart from other social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter/X, and TikTok. Users can curate and document their daily live activities through photographs, short videos, and captions. Instagram allows its users to create either public or private accounts. Public accounts are open and accessible to anyone. Users take advantage of affordances like sharing photos and videos, making Reels, using hashtags and geotags, posting Stories, tagging other users, and using built-in photo filters to create quality visual effects to document their stories and challenge stereotypes.

As part of their defensive digital alchemy strategy, LGBT+ Rights Ghana employs Instagram as a form of “digital resistance through content creation that challenges these problematic representations is a form of self-production that disrupts the mainstream narrative that promulgates narrow and stereotypical visions of identity” (Bailey, 2021, p. 64). Therefore, Instagram’s strong visual-oriented culture lends itself well to the methodological framework, CTDA, a holistic analysis of the interactions of technology platforms, technology practice, and cultural ideology (Brock, 2018).

3.7 Pilot Study

The pilot study for this thesis was conducted using the @crazinistartist Instagram page. Va-Bene Elikem Fiatsi, known as Crazinist artist, is a trans woman and a multidisciplinary artist who uses her body to have uncomfortable discussions about gender stereotypes, queerness, identity politics, and how they affect marginalized sexual minorities in the country. Crazinist artist uses her Instagram page to denounce the anti-LGBT+ Bill. As a pretest, I used CTDA as a methodological

framework to uncover the ideologies embedded in the messaging of Crazinist artist's posts on Instagram.

The pilot study revealed that Crazinist, as a digital alchemist, uses Instagram's artifacts like posts, captions, hashtags, geotags, emojis, and reposts to initiate conversations around queerness and the anti-LGBT+ Bill. Crazinist uses various forms of media, such as photographs and videos, captions, geotags, likes, comments, and hashtags to drive user interaction and visibility. Using her Instagram page, she connects with Ghanaians and other nationals on ideologies related to the LGBT+ community. She educates, calls for support, and highlights the oppression experienced by marginalized sexual identities in the country through technological practices like commenting, reposting, and liking posts on her Instagram account.

Using CTDA and the theoretical framework of defensive digital alchemy, the themes that were identified include,

- A call for support and allyship.
- An act of resistance to oppression
- An active stance against the Bill
- Education on the Bill and gender stereotypes

As a digital alchemist, the interaction between Instagram's affordances, practices, and cultural ideologies enables @crazinistartist to create meaningful contents that challenge the notions of queerness in Ghana. The pilot study was successful in proving the validity of the proposed study using both CTDA and defensive digital alchemy to study marginalized groups.

3.8 Color Dialogues Series

Color_Dialogues are a series of conversations that take place during Pride Month to raise awareness of LGBT+ issues and also to celebrate Pride. Color_Dialogues consist of online daily talks between LGBT+ activists and allies. The organization also described it as “a month-long Pride celebration for Queer Ghanaians” (@lgbtrightsghana, 1st June 2023). Since the closure of their office, Color_Dialogues has been moved online to avoid attacks and arrests of the members of LGBT+ Rights Ghana. On May 30th, 2023, Color_Dialogues was advertised to take place on the Instagram page of the organization @lgbtrightsghana from June 1st to June 30th, 2023, at 6 pm GMT.

3.9 Data Collection

LGBT+ Rights Ghana Organization @lgbtrightsghana on Instagram has 19.4K followers and 1.739 posts as of May 10th, 2024. To study this account using CTDA, I observed the page to understand how the organization uses Instagram affordances and its practices to explicate ideologies on advocacy, identity, and sexuality politics. Ultimately, I decided to focus on the #Color_Dialogue series, which took place in June 2023. I choose to focus on the year 2023 specifically because hostility towards marginalized sexual minorities in the country has intensified in the face of the anti-LGBT+ Bill, which effectively has made LGBT+ people vulnerable to violence.

I searched for the Insta Live videos using the hashtag #Colour_Dialogue and saved them on Instagram, using the save feature on the platform. I created a specific folder titled Color Dialogue to collect and save the selected posts. In all, I have 20 posts. Reading the titles and captions for the videos, I have determined that 9 Insta Live videos out of the 20 videos fit the

parameters of the theoretical framework, defensive digital alchemy or videos that challenge master narratives, redefine negative stereotypes, and provide alternate views of the world.

To avoid data tainting, I looked at the title captions for each Insta Live session and watched the first few minutes of the videos to gain a fair idea of the topics. The overall data pool from June 1st through to June 31st, 2023, is $N=20$, and the final data pool for coding and analysis is $N=9$. To collect data for the study, I downloaded the videos from Instagram for analysis using the Snap Insta App, a free online platform, onto a laptop. Also, I used a paid subscription account on the Parrot AI online platform to transcribe the videos and manually translated any part of the dialogues expressed in the local Ghanaian language, specifically the Twi dialect, into English. It is important to note that one of the participants of the Color_Dialogue series expressed themselves in English; however, they did make some utterances in the Ewe dialect, which the participant translated during the conversation. In all, 9 Insta Live videos $N=9$ were analyzed.

Each video had a different time stamp. The longest video was an hour and 15 minutes, while the shortest was 21 minutes and 9 seconds. At the time of analyzing these videos, I noticed that some of the selected videos for analysis were no longer available on the Instagram page of the LGBT+Rights Ghana Organization. The organization had taken down or hidden five of these videos from their Instagram main feed. This could be due to safety concerns due to the heightened call for the passage of the Bill in February 2024. However, I decided to incorporate the five hidden videos in my analyses. I chose to do so because they capture a wide range of opinions expressed by participants in conversations about queer issues in Ghana. These videos provide a nuanced understanding of the anti-queer rhetoric and highlight the societal attitudes that were prevalent at the time they were posted. Their removal is indicative of the censorship of queer voices in the country. As such, analyzing these videos can shed light on the dynamics of visibility and erasure

of the queer community. Including these videos ensures a more comprehensive analysis; excluding them would create gaps in the data, potentially skewing the understanding of the overall narrative of queer experiences. For ethical reasons, I decided to anonymize all the participants who partook in the daily Instagram Live conversations. All interviewees from the LGBT Rights organization are coded as Participant X, while interviewed participants are anonymized as M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, T, and U.

3.9.1 Codebook and Codes

I developed a codebook to analyze the data similar to the one developed for the pretest. I used Google Sheets to design the codebook. The code book has 5 distinct sheets. The first sheet outlines the overall data pool. This comprises the post caption, topic title, a link to the post, the date of the Insta Live session, the number of views, comments, hashtags, and emojis.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
	Post Description	LGBTR-GH Topic	Post Link	Live Date	Type of Post	Number of Views	Number of Comments	Hashtag(?)	Emojis(?)
1	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	[Redacted]
2	[Redacted]	Color Dialogue	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	Insta Live	1551	16	no	🌈
3	[Redacted]	Interfaith Dialogue- Faith Activism: The journey so far	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	Insta Live	456		#pride2023 #colordialogue 1 #WeareallGhana	no
4	[Redacted]	Why celebrate Pride?	[Redacted]	[Redacted]	Insta Live	938		#colordialogue 3 #pride2023	NO

Figure 2: A screenshot representation of CTDA Components: Technological artifacts within the data.

The second sheet is dedicated to the deductive codes derived from Moya Bailey’s proposed theory of defensive digital alchemy. These codes challenge master narratives, redefine negative stereotypes, and provide alternate views of the world.

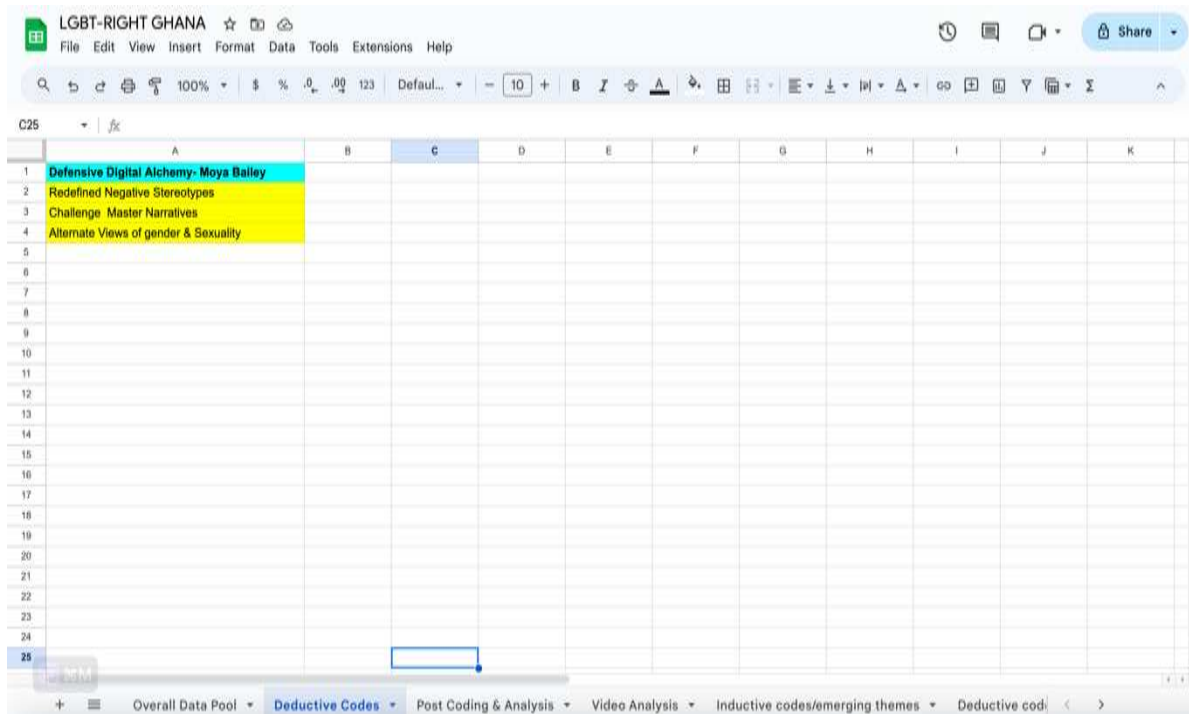


Figure 3: A screenshot representation of deductive codes.

The next Google sheet contains a post-coding analysis. This includes the overall data pool, CTDA—artifacts/Affordances used to create Insta Live, CTDA—practices apparent in the live stream, CTDA (Ideology), which is the deductive codes, and CTDA (Ideology), which is inductive or emerging codes.

[illegible]

Figure 4: A screenshot representation of all three CTDA Components within the data

The fourth Google sheet is for video analysis. It includes columns for all the above as well as a section for visual analysis and overall post-analysis.

[illegible]

Figure 5: A screenshot representation of all three CTDA Components for video analysis

The final sheet contains the inductive codes. This codebook enabled me to unpack the connection between communication technologies and cultural ideologies.

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	Inductive/ emerging themes										
2	Creating a safe space to be fully authentic queer- a community with its own culture -that influences mainstream pop culture.										
3	Highlight the existence of queer Ghanaians. Media taking advantage of queer people for entertainment-Exploitation, holding government accountable for the social & economic challenges in the country- increased cost of living, street children, increased taxes,										
4	the existence of vocal queer community										
5	Queer resistance, celebrating progress- 5 years (community, safe spaces, safe houses), education- queer documentation for future queer Ghanaians										
6	Passion for advocacy based on lived experiences, education on queer lived experiences,										
7	Politicizing queerness for political gains and interest, Advocacy -for present and the future										
8	Use of creative acts- storytelling/writing -to come out of the closet, to heal,										
9	The anti-lgbtq+ bill- criminalizes everyone; it doesn't only affect queer people but everyone; the queer community is not asking for marriage,- a political agenda; the bill supports binary categories of genders-Male & female, educating										
10											

Figure 6: A screenshot representation of inductive codes

3.10. Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration is crucial to my research into vulnerable human subjects, in this case, marginalized queer Ghanaian citizens. As the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) Internet Research Ethics Guidelines 3.0 stipulates, ““the greater the vulnerability of our subjects, the greater our responsibility and obligation to protect them from likely harms’ (2020,17). To study the organization LGBT+ Rights Ghana’s page on Instagram, it is prudent for me as a researcher to consider the potential harm my research may cause to the subject of study. One of the ethical considerations in researching subjects on Instagram is to reflect whether the account being studied is private or public. If it is private, I would have to obtain informed consent from the account user

to study the account. However, LGBT+ Rights Ghana has a public Instagram page with 19.3k followers (as of April 14th, 2024).

Privacy concerns are one of the major ethical considerations in researching vulnerable human subjects. The issue of privacy, as argued by Quan-Haase & Sloan (2022), is “often intertwined with aspects of social marginalization, exclusion, and power” (p. 715). The #color_dialogue series was public, and the Insta Live videos were kept on the organization’s main Instagram feed from June 2023 until the end of January 2024, when some videos were deleted. Due to the serious safety concerns of marginalized queer Ghanaians both online and offline, and the deletion of five of the videos, I decided to use anonymization to protect the identities of participants of the colour_dialogues series. Also, it is important to highlight that during this research process, the Anti-LGBT+Bill was passed on February 28th, 2024, and it is currently waiting for the president to assent into law. I have therefore endeavored not to include the full names, usernames, or any identifying features of the participants to mitigate the risk of possible exposure and harm.

3.11. Researcher’s Positionality

Reflexivity is an important value to have as a researcher. To conduct research in the margins, reflecting on the bias I may bring to the research is prudent. I bring to this research both an insider and outsider perspective as well as my privileges as a cis-gendered woman with a North American education. My position as an insider, one who belongs to the culture, was raised in this culture, and has knowledge of how sexual minorities are marginalized, enables me to speak to the injustices they experience in the nation. My educational background and an understanding of Ghanaian culture provide me with a lens through which I can make visible the oppressive patterns

that harm queer individuals. However, my position as an ally, an outside member of the LGBT+ community, means I have limited knowledge of queer lived experience and what it means to live life as LGBT+ in Ghana. I hope that with this research, I can shine a light on how LGBT+ Rights Ghana is reconstructing the narratives of sexual minorities and fighting against oppression.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four provides an in-depth data analysis, results, and discussion. This chapter delves into LGBT+ Rights Ghana's use of Instagram as a defensive digital alchemy in the fight against the anti-LGBT+ Bill, thus, reshaping the narratives around the marginalized queer community. Using CTDA, it provides important methodological insights into how LGBT+ Rights Ghana uses technological affordances and practices to unpack the ideologies around queer Ghanaians. This chapter has been divided into two sections. The first begins with an interface analysis of LGBT+ Rights Ghana's Instagram page, affordances, and practices, drawing together the relationship between technological platforms and cultural ideology. This is followed by a critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) of Instagram's communicative functions and user discourse, which aids in meaning production.

4.2 A Shift in Dataset

As the political situation becomes dire with the passage of the Bill, there has been a shift in my data set. Therefore, it is practical to consider what this phenomenon means to my research. I began my research with nine videos; however, during the data analysis phase of this study, I noticed five of the selected videos for analysis were no longer available on the Instagram main page of the LGBT+Rights Ghana Organization. These five videos could have been removed between January 22nd and 26th, 2024. I am of the opinion that these videos were removed for the safety of the participants. These videos were public and had been online for seven months. I will continue to use all nine videos in my analysis as planned. However, I will anonymize all the participants and talk about them without revealing their identities and locations. To ensure their

safety, I will expand on the overall themes and narratives without being specific about the participants.

4.3 Instagram Interface Analysis

CTDA, as a multimodal method, considers technological interfaces, affordances, and practices (Brock, 2018). A CTDA analysis of Color Dialogues will look at 1. Instagram interface, artifacts, and how LGBT+Rights Ghana uses its affordances to construct counter-narratives; 2. Digital practices of both the creator and its followers contribute to the narratives constructed, and 3. the ideologies that are reiterated and opposed based on interviewee and user interaction. An overall critical analysis may reveal ideologies that challenge master narratives, redefine negative stereotypes, and provide alternate views into the world of the Ghanaian LGBT+ community.

To examine the Instagram interface of the LGBT+ Rights Ghana page, I analyzed the affordances and practices of the organization. Results from the data indicate that @lgbtrightsghana uses the affordances of Instagram to establish its presence online. By so doing, it legitimizes their existence in the country while ensuring their perspectives are communicated in an oppressive society where their voices are silenced. They employed Instagram features like a profile photo, bio section, follow tab, message tab, post, captions, hashtags, geotags, emojis, reels, tags, comments, Insta Stories (allows users to post images or videos for up to 24 hours), Insta Highlights (enables users to save images or videos from their Insta stories even after they disappear after 24hours) and Insta Lives (allows users to stream live events, discussions, and interact with their users). For instance, Instagram allows users to create an identity on its platform. Affordances like the profile photo and bio section allow LGBT+ Rights Ghana to signal its identity as a queer organization based in Ghana. While there are several non-governmental queer-affirming and

human rights organizations in the country, LGBT+ Rights Ghana stands out as the first active and highly visible online queer organization. The past five years have seen increased attention and awareness around queer issues and a greater recognition of the existence of queer people thanks to the efforts of the LGBT+ Rights Ghana organization.

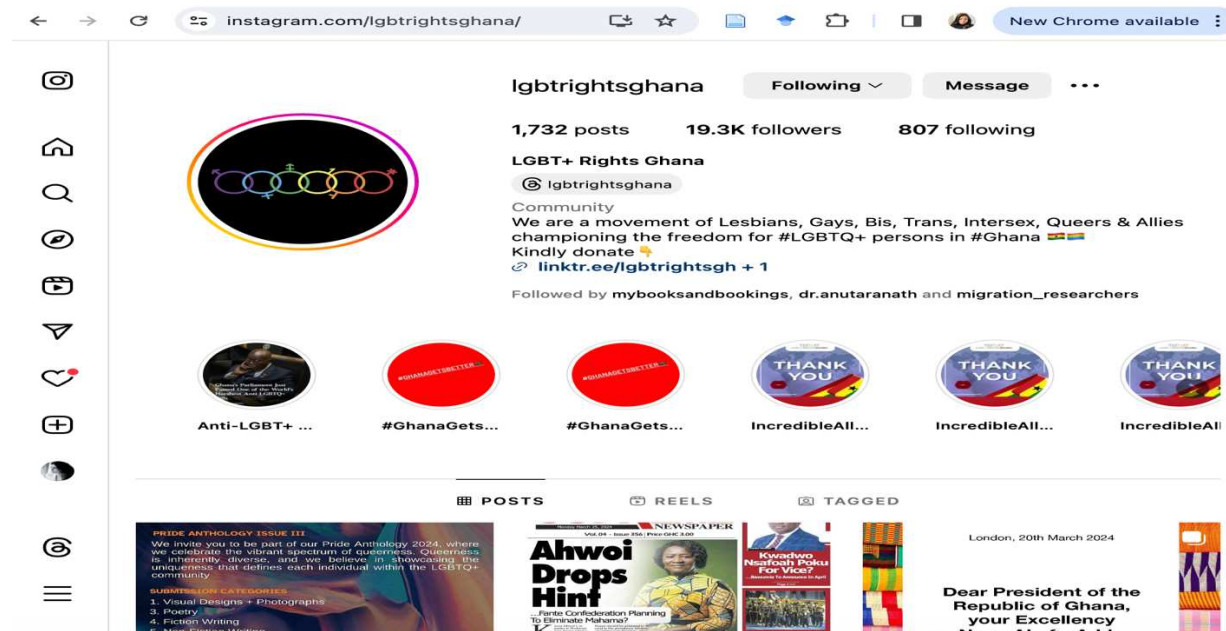


Figure 7: Screenshot of @lgbtrightsghana Instagram page

The Instagram affordance, Highlight, is a feature that @lgbtrightsghana employs to document and archive some of their work. These Highlights appear below the profile picture. According to Bojkov (2023), the Instagram Highlights feature serves as “the perfect indicators to show users what your brand is all about . . . and therefore acts as social proof of your brand quality.” @lgbtrightsghana has 20 story Highlights on its page, which begins with an Anti-LGBT+ Bill Highlight. This specific Highlight raises awareness of the Bill. A cursory analysis of the Anti-LGBT+ Bill Highlight reveals posts and reposts of solidarity messages and news articles about the Bill from other Instagram pages. The use of Highlights depicts the solidarity efforts of other

organizations within the continent and the world at large, raising awareness of the dire situation against the queer community in Ghana.



Figure 8: Screenshot of @lgbtrightsghana Instagram highlights

Consequently, as a digital alchemist, LGBT+Rights Ghana repurposes technological affordances and practices into social justice media, which Brock (2016) describes as reorienting a technocultural practice to the cultural context and ultimately defining the technocultural space in which they operate and exist.

Further analysis of the Instagram interface shows that hashtags and emojis play a critical role in centering the discourse around marginalized sexual identities. To illustrate, @lgbtrightsghana indulges in the practice of hashtagging and adding emojis to their captions to drive and increase the visibility of their advocacy. The primary hashtags used in the captions for their color_dialogue series were #pride2023, #colordialogue, #WeareallGhana, and #LoveWins. Emojis included the pride flag (🏳️‍🌈) and love emoji (❤️).

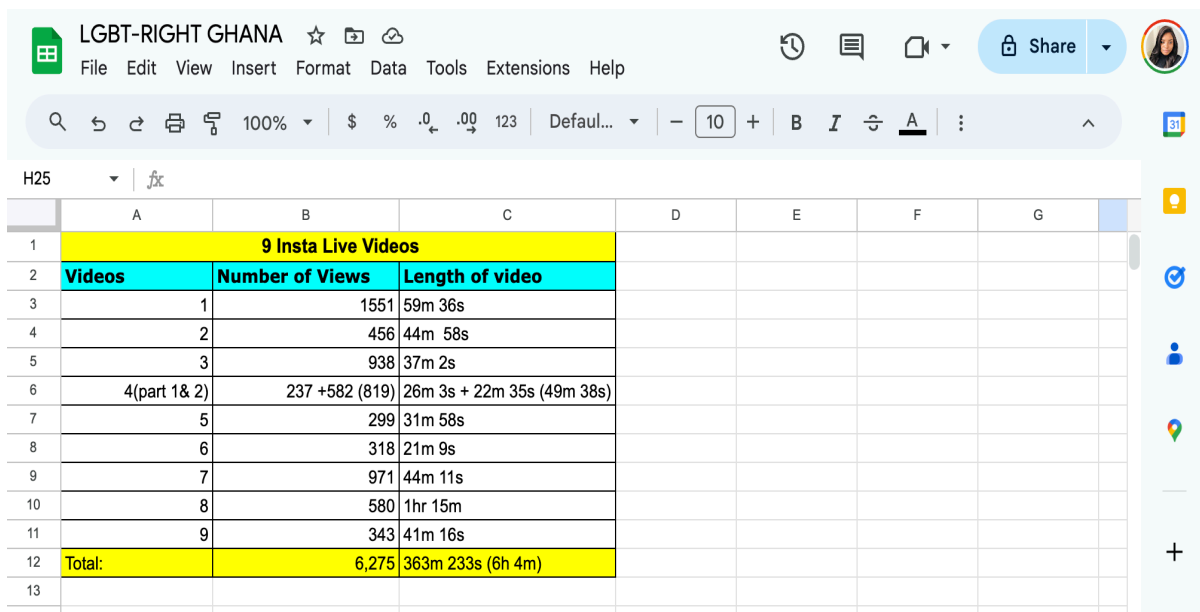
Another significant technological practice and Instagram affordance presented in the data is Insta Live video. Insta Live video provides a digital space where the creation and receiving of content occur due to the interactions between technology, cultural ideology, and technology

practice. Insta Live video allows the administrators of the @lgbtrightsghana page to live stream from any part of the country or the world, invite and accept participants to join the live stream, respond to comments, and delete harmful comments. As one of its affordances, Instagram allows these live videos to be saved as reels on the main feed. Therefore, any user can access the live stream after it ends. However, it is crucial to note that the organization can hide or delete these live broadcasts if it wishes to do so. The live broadcast revealed that many of the participants of the Color_Dialogue series were located in their homes and an undisclosed office in Ghana. An Insta live broadcast enabled LGBT+Rights Ghana to create an online space to hold dialogues on various issues of concern within the LGBT+ community. In contrast, their lives would be endangered should they host such discourses in a physical space. This technocultural practice is determined by Bailey (2021) as “digital resistance.” A case in point is the arrest and detention of twenty-one queer activists who were charged with unlawful assembly for hosting a paralegal training workshop about how to document and report human rights violations against LGBT+ people. (Human Rights Watch, 2021). The issue of safety cannot be overemphasized, as there have been many instances of danger that have instilled fear in the community. These can be observed through constant media reports of harm, such as queer individuals being assaulted, ridiculed, robbed, arrested, and expelled from their homes. Such media reports include;

- “Gay Man beaten to a pulp by homophobic mob in Ghana” – Pink News, July 16th, 2021
- “LGBTI+ people beaten, robbed and arrested at a party” – Mamba Online.com, July 1, 2022
- “Teacher commits suicide after being mocked for being bisexual” – The Ghana Report, September 26, 2023

Through Insta Live videos, viewers are invited into the lives and realities of queer Ghanaians in ways that mainstream media do not portray on their platforms, thus promoting queer visibility and resistance. Through the Color Dialogues Insta Live videos, LGBT+Rights Ghana has offered a digital safe space for queer Ghanaians to be authentically queer, express queer joy, highlight the existence of queer Ghanaians, and emphasize the fight against queer marginalization. As Participant G succinctly puts it, “before we are able to create a safe and inclusive society, we are taking it upon ourselves to create safe spaces within our spaces for queer people” (Color_Dailogues,2023). This sentiment is affirmed by Moya Bailey as “carving out their own spaces rather than trying to make room for themselves within existing frameworks” (2021, p.67).

Furthermore, the number of views is indicative of public interest in the issues affecting marginalized queer Ghanaians. The highest number of views was 1,551, and the lowest was 299. These live videos educate and create awareness of the Anti-LGBT+ Bill, subsequently garnering public support and solidarity within Ghana and globally.



LGBT-RIGHT GHANA			
	A	B	C
1	9 Insta Live Videos		
2	Videos	Number of Views	Length of video
3	1	1551	59m 36s
4	2	456	44m 58s
5	3	938	37m 2s
6	4(part 1& 2)	237 +582 (819)	26m 3s + 22m 35s (49m 38s)
7	5	299	31m 58s
8	6	318	21m 9s
9	7	971	44m 11s
10	8	580	1hr 15m
11	9	343	41m 16s
12	Total:	6,275	363m 233s (6h 4m)

Figure 9: Screenshot of @lgbtrightsghana Instagram live video- views and timestamps

Finally, it is important to point out that though CTDA as a methodology looks at its users' information technology practices, it is also concerned with technological affordances that users have not taken advantage of. I draw attention to the digital affordances that @lgbtrightsghana is not engaging with to expand on its technocultural practice. In this case, the Instagram feature, Insta Live, allows users to use various filters to anonymize their identities and allows participants to blur their backgrounds during a live broadcast. I noticed from the color dialogue videos that neither the organization nor the participants utilized filters to mask their identities and protect their locations. Brock (2018) argues that a CTDA analysis examines how actors shape technologies and themselves in response to the technologies they use.

Thus, I contend that this bold move made by these queer participants is indicative of their fearlessness and exhaustion of always having to hide in fear of persecution. Participant R rightly puts it, “whether you like it or not, we are here. We are staying. We are making our faces known here just like you. You can come and watch, like this is my face” (Color Dialogues, June 2023). Their refusal to use filters suggests a strong desire that queer Ghanaians have to be free, to be unapologetic, and to resist oppression irrespective of being susceptible to arrest and potential violence that can harm their bodies and livelihoods. Participant M posits that,

. . . I love the fact we did not just sit back and allow them to throw whatever they want to throw at us. We also counteracted by just being our authentic selves and telling them that enough of the bullshit, enough of the concocting stories, enough of imposing your most wild and vile narratives on us, enough of always subjecting us to dispute, enough of always coming at us as if we have done anything to deserve this, enough of always coming for us.

. . . we elevated ourselves beyond the fear and the sentiments to attack us and to divide us and to tell us we are not Ghanaians (Color Dialogues, June 2023).

4.4 CTDA

After critically analyzing the technocultural practices within @lgbtrightsghana Instagram's defensive digital alchemy, a number of ideologies were reiterated and opposed based on interviewee and user interaction. This section on CTDA reveals ideologies that challenge the master narratives around queerness, redefine negative stereotypes, and provide alternate views into the world of the Ghanaian LGBT+ community. Below are the results or themes that emerged from the analysis.

Table 2: A table of the themes

	Emerging Counter-Narratives		
Master Narratives	Challenge Master Narratives	Redefine Negative Stereotypes	Provide alternative Views of Queer Ghanaians
Queerness is un-African (Un Ghanaian)	Queerness is African; It is not a western import; Queer Ghanaians exist	Queer people are Ghanaians. (Africans); Queer people are not strange people; they are regular everyday Ghanaians	Queer Ghanaians exist, Queer joy and happiness; Queer bravery, Queer visibility, Queer pride, Queer acceptance, Chosen family, Queer rights; one can be queer and religious, Queer resistance,
Cisnormativity and heterosexuality is the standard	Existence of diverse genders and sexuality indigenous to the Ghanaian culture	Queerness subverts heteronormativity; gender identity is not synonymous with sexual identity; Queer Ghanaians have rights just like every other Ghanaian.	
Evil and incompatible with Abrahamic religion	Queer religious people exist	Queer religious people exist; some practice Abrahamic religions and others are traditionalists,	
	Queerness as political and religious tools for political gains and interests.	Queer Ghanaians are not requesting for marriage	

4.4.1. Challenging Master Narratives

As expounded in chapter two, many scholars, including Bradford and Syed, 2019; McLean and Syed, 2016; and McLean and Syed, 2022 suggest that master narratives are cultural narratives that set the standard of being and how to belong in society. In Ghana, the master narratives around queerness are perceived as un-African (Nartey, 2022; Asante, 2020; Mohammed, 2019), unclean, and incompatible with the values of Abrahamic religions (Mohammed, 2022), while cis heterosexuality and cisnormativity are upheld as the standard. This study found that LGBT+Rights Ghana, through its defensive digital alchemy, has negotiated these ideologies by producing counter-narratives centered on the lived experiences of queer Ghanaians as direct responses to these master narratives to combat queerphobia. As digital alchemists, @lgbtrightsghana, through their online defensive technocultural practices, reclaim their power to own their stories and be active participants in shaping the narratives about marginalized queer Ghanaians.

The claim that queerness is un-African is one of the main discourses that has been used politically, religiously, and propagated by mainstream media to marginalize queer people on the African continent. (Asante (2022; Banks, 2013; Adua, 2021; Mohammed, 2021; Nuer, 2022). This notion contributes to the master narrative that queerness is a Western import into Africa. However, queer people have always existed on the African continent and particularly in Ghana. (Roscoe & Murray, 1998; Oyewumi, 2005; Epprecht, 2009; Banks, 2013; Nyeck & Epprecht, 2013; Tamale, 2013; Epprecht, 2018; Gyasi-Gyamera et al., 2019; Ako, 2023; Fiaveh, 2023). All the participants debunked this assertion, declaring that Ghana is their home and queerness is authentic to the Ghanaian culture; hence, it is African. This is evident in the case of Participant M, who confirms that “I am a Ghanaian, You are a Ghanaian, we are Ghanaian. . . . take away sexuality, and we are

still Ghanaians, we are still Africans, we are still humans just like you, you need to accord us the same respect just as we do for you.” (Color Dialogues, June 2023)

Therefore, contrary to the popular belief, queer Ghanaians exist. Participant P also sheds light on this. According to Participant P, “I was born in Ghana. I have lived most of my life in Ghana. As a matter of fact, I have not spent more than a year outside of Ghana. That tells you how embedded I am in my country.” (Color Dialogues, June 2023). Subsequently, these participants are affirming what literature tells us about the histories of queer people in Africa, particularly in Ghana. These queer participants emphasize the indigeneity of their identities in that their queerness is not separate from being Ghanaian.

In a similar vein, the notion that cisnormativity and heterosexuality are the only forms of gender and sexual identities in Ghana has been challenged through the color dialogue series. Results from the data proved that diverse genders and sexual identities exist in the country. Through the color dialogue series, we are introduced to a number of queer Ghanaians who proudly proclaim, “I am gay, I am trans, I am Ghanaian, I am queer” (Color Dialogues, June 2023).

Furthermore, queer participants of the color dialogue series have vehemently opposed the concept that queerness is incompatible with the values of Abrahamic religions. Participants indicated that queer religious people exist in the country. According to Participant N, religious queer people exist, and one can be queer and a believer that God is love and the embodiment of acceptance. It is key to note that Participant N is not based in Ghana; as such, this participant is able to join in religious activities freely. While queer religious people in Ghana are not able to openly practice their faith for fear of being harassed, embarrassed, and, in the worst cases, forced to renounce their queerness. Participant X supports this argument that there are queer religious people in every demographic around the world. According to Participant X, “We have queer

Jewish, queer Mormons, queer protestants, and queer Muslims. So, you can be queer and a believer, and you are valid.” (Color Dialogues, June 2023). Hence, the argument that queerness is evil and satanic has been debunked by queer religious Ghanaians.

Finally, one of the principal counternarratives that emerged from the data is the emphasis placed on the use of queerness as a political and religious tool to gain political advantage. Participants of the color dialogue series maintained that politicians are politicizing queerness to score political points, hence, the anti-LGBT+ Bill. Both participants, X and R, suggest that there is an ulterior motive for the anti-LGBT+ Bill. According to Participant R, the anti-LGBT strategy is used by politicians to score cheap political points. Participant R states, “I feel there is always a bigger motive, an ulterior motive, you know, when it comes to politics, LGBT sells; when it comes to religion, LGBT sells. People who strategize day in and day out on how to clamp down on our community have a bigger motive, probably for public acceptance” (Color Dialogues, June 2023). Participant P further reiterates the sentiments expressed by Participant R. He states that,

From childhood, we have been able to navigate graciously and survive till today. And then they turn around and say, oh no, we are not done. We will still bring a Bill for you to be ashamed of yourself, and people are capitalizing on it for their political gains and interests. If you are a politician, talk about things that will benefit the country, just like other politicians do in their country (Color Dialogues, June 2023).

Overall, the evidence presented thus far supports the idea that queer people are the scapegoats that political leaders use to escape governmental accountability and gain favor with electorates (Adjepong, 2021; Coleman, Ako & Kyeremateng, 2023).

4.4.2. Redefine Negative Stereotypes

In redefining the negative stereotypes associated with marginalized queer people in Ghana, results from the data demonstrate and support what literature stipulates about the histories of queer people in Ghana. The counternarratives that emerged as a result include,

- Queer people are not strange people; they are regular everyday Ghanaians
- Queerness subverts heteronormativity
- Gender identity is not synonymous with sexual identity
- Queer religious people exist; some practice Abrahamic religions, and others are traditionalists
- Queer Ghanaians are not requesting marriage

Some of the themes above have been elaborated upon in section 4.3.1. I will go on to expand on the theme of marriage, which is one of the stereotypes that underline the anti-LGBT+ Bill.

Sponsors of the anti-LGBT+ Bill have promoted the belief that same-sex marriage is detrimental to the traditional family system in the country. Consequently, the Bill, dubbed Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill, seeks to promote, and protect the family structure in the country. Nonetheless, results from the data clearly demonstrate that queer Ghanaians are not advocating for legal marriage in the country; instead, they are fighting for their fundamental human rights and safe and queer-inclusive institutions in Ghana. Participant R illustrates this point clearly. According to him, queer Ghanaians “are not asking for marriage rights. We want government representatives to enact laws that will protect us because we are being discriminated against. We are abused, trapped, and beaten. We are going through a lot, but nobody goes out courageously to tell their stories; hence, it just goes unknown.” (Color Dialogues, June

2023).

He further states, “I think we are asking for the bare minimum; it is something we should not ask for. What we are asking for is to be free, protected, to feel safe in our own country, in our own motherland where our constitution rightly enshrines some rights to us which has been taken from us because of our sexual orientation and our gender identity”. (Color Dialogues, June 2023). It is evident from the examples given here that freedom, protection, and the ability to exercise their rights as queer Ghanaians is of uttermost importance to the queer community. Adjepong (2023) reiterates this point in their article, “We don’t want marriage’: On community, solidarity, and queer freedom in Ghana. They argued that queer people and activists advocate for the recognition of their basic human rights and not same-sex marriage.

Another significant aspect of redefining the negative stereotypes around queerness is that queer people have been demystified. Marginalized sexual identities are regular people with families and friends living in Ghana. They are not strange animalistic people as have been purported by the mainstream media. (Nartey,2022) As noted by Participant M, queer Ghanaians are “the everyday family members you know; we are the people who are paying some of the bills for even our family, like some of us, our family rely on us. We are the pillar of our family”. (Color Dialogues, June 2023)

The color dialogue series brings to bare counter-narratives that redefine the negative ideas around queer people. It sheds light on the needs of queer Ghanaians by centering their voices through their digital alchemy strategies, which Bailey (2021) echoed as “carving out their own spaces rather than trying to make room for themselves within existing frameworks” (p.41). As a result of the technological affordance, Insta Live, @lgbtrightsghana, is able to provide a safe space for queer Ghanaians to shape their stories, which Participants M and R encourage as “having an

opportunity also to speak out and create our own narrative and show Ghanaians who we are and what we are asking for as queer Ghanaians” (Color Dialogues, June 2023).

4.4.3. Provide Alternative Views of Queer Ghanaians

If we look at the counter-narratives within this section, we see that @lgbtrightsghana has created an alternate view of the queer community that is often concealed from the public. Though the results determine the existence of queer Ghanaians, queer religious people, and diversity in gender and sexuality, it most importantly exposes what is often overlooked. That is queer joy, queer bravery, queer pride, queer acceptance, and queer resistance.

The focus on the struggle, the pain, and the discrimination of marginalized sexual minorities often overshadows the joy and happiness that queer people display as a community. Most of the participants expressed joy and pride for being queer. While other participants were proud to have found a community within the LGBT+Rights Ghana organization. As Participant M expressed,

we create joy and happiness around ourselves in a country that continuously denies us the basic things, so it is only fair to bring resources together to create a space that allows us to just be who we are without having to pretend on the daily (Color Dialogues, June 2023).

Participant O also conveyed a similar view; they stated

when we celebrate pride, we celebrate resistance, and we celebrate diversity. We celebrate community because for me, like from my personal experiences, community has been very important to me. I have found a lot of friends within the community. I have found a chosen family (Color Dialogues, June 2023).

As part of the month-long celebration of pride, LGBT+Rights Ghana organized the color dialogue series, an online event that aimed to celebrate queer joy, visibility, and solidarity. This event was also a reminder of the progress made in the fight for equal rights for all genders and sexual minorities.

Regarding the theme of queer bravery and resistance, it can be said that the establishment of a queer office in Accra, the use of Instagram Live to openly express their queerness without the need to protect their identities, and the existence of a vocal queer community, is a clear indication of queer bravery. In support of this resistance, Participant O claims, “In the suffering, I think we resist, and that, of course, is why I feel it is important to celebrate pride. It just makes sense because, in the middle of all these, we resist”. This theme of bravery and resistance bolsters the idea of counter-power by Manuel Castells (2007), where LGBT+ Rights Ghana as social actors utilize the power of technology to resist and challenge the status quo for change. Overall, it is evident that queer Ghanaians continue to resist the marginalization they face.

In conclusion, employing CTDA as a multi-modal technique reveals the interplay between Instagram, its technocultural practices, and the cultural ideologies around marginalized and minoritized sexual identities in Ghana. Arthur (2021) supports CTDA as a framework that has a way of centering underrepresented populations and marginalized voices. In this case, Instagram interface analysis establishes that @lgbtrightsghana uses the affordances of Instagram as a form of digital resistance to create alternate narratives steeped in the lived experiences of queer Ghanaians.

As a digital alchemist, @lgbtrightsghana employs Instagram’s technological functions to create visibility, amplify their advocacy, mobilize support against the anti-LGBT+ Bill, and fight queerphobia. So, through CTDA, LGBT+ Right Ghana uses its limited agency and power to

negotiate master narratives of queer people within the anti-LGBT+ Bill, which results in emerging counter-narratives that validate the existence of queer Ghanaians, which Bailey (2021) asserts that digital alchemy is “a praxis designed to create better representations for those most marginalized” (p.66).

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Overview

With the rise and expansion of social media, many social actors have turned to these new platforms as a counterforce to mainstream media, which gatekeeps information and influences public perceptions of marginalized sexual communities in Ghana. To illustrate, Ghanaian journalists formed a coalition called Journalists Against LGBT to establish their stance against the LGBT+ community. (Lydia Namubiru, 21 March 2022) Consequently, I argue that with its established stance against minoritized sexual citizens, mainstream media reinforces the master narratives around queerness while propagating hate against LGBT+ individuals in the country.

This thesis addressed the pertinent question of how LGBT+ Rights Ghana uses Instagram's affordances for defensive digital alchemy to construct counter-narratives about queer people in the country. It also answered the question of how LGBT+ Rights Ghana's defensive digital alchemy in Instagram counters master narratives present in the anti-LGBT+ Bill.

On the one hand, this research study provides evidence that critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) offers an effective methodological framework for examining the experiences of marginalized and minoritized queer communities. The study specifically highlights Instagram as a powerful tool for challenging and subverting dominant mainstream narratives about queer individuals. This finding suggests that social media platforms can be harnessed to counteract negative stereotypes and provide a platform for marginalized voices within the queer community. As Arthur (2021) indicates, critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA) is a comprehensive method for examining user engagement with technology. CTDA focuses on understanding how cultural ideologies influence technological behavior, especially with regard to underserved and marginalized communities. In this case, @lgbt+rightsghana employed Instagram Live as a

resistance media as well as a form of protection against queerphobia and harm to their lives and livelihood.

The findings from this study highlight three key counternarratives from @lgbtrightsghana, namely, challenging master narratives, redefining negative stereotypes, and providing alternative views of queer Ghanaians.

Firstly, in challenging master narratives, the notion that queerness is un-African was debunked by participants who asserted that Ghana is their home and queerness is part of Ghanaian culture, thus African. Similarly, the belief that only cisnormativity and heterosexuality exist in Ghana was challenged through the color dialogue series. Participants insisted on the diversity of genders and sexual identities in the country. Participants strongly opposed the idea that queerness conflicts with Abrahamic religious values, as queer religious people exist in Ghana.

Secondly, in redefining negative stereotypes, participants indicated that queer Ghanaians are not advocating for legal marriage in the country; instead, they are fighting for their fundamental human rights and the establishment of safe, queer-inclusive institutions in Ghana.

Finally, in providing alternative views of queer Ghanaians, @lgbtrightsghana revealed aspects of the queer community that are often hidden from the public, including queer joy, bravery, pride, acceptance, and resistance. The emphasis on struggle and discrimination typically overshadows the happiness and solidarity within the community. Many participants expressed joy and pride in being queer, and others were proud to have found a community within LGBT+ Rights Ghana.

All in all, this study uncovers both the theoretical and methodological implications of using CTDA to evaluate @lgbtrightsghana's defensive digital alchemy on Instagram in the context of Ghana's anti-LGBT+ Bill. Both defensive digital alchemy and CTDA work hand in hand to

expand their application and demonstrate their relevance in examining digital activism within marginalized queer community in Ghana. This study contributes to the body of knowledge challenging dominant narratives about queerness in Africa, showing how digital platforms can help redefine and shape these narratives. The study also underlines the importance of visibility and representation for queer communities in digital spaces, offering evidence of how online platforms can be leveraged to present the voices and stories of queer people as well as foster community and resilience. This year, @lgbtrightsghana organized the Color Dialogues series on Instagram and X (formerly Twitter), demonstrating the impact of queer voices and their strategic use of social media platforms. This act of bravery gives emphasis to the study's findings that queer individuals are not living in fear despite the passing of the Bill. The difference between this year's Color Dialogues and that of 2023 is a difference in the mode of advertisement. The posters used for 2024 do not have pictures of the participants for safety reasons. Also, despite the technological affordances allowing the organization to save live videos and make them available as Reels, they are not saving the videos. This caution stems from the very real threat of increased homophobia and abuses encouraged by the Bill.

5.2 Limitations and suggestion for future research

The study is limited to Instagram and its affordances. I use @lgbt+rightsghana as a single representation of organizations actively using social media in the fight against the anti-LGBT+Bill and queer narratives. Therefore, limiting the study to Instagram alone may not provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in sexuality politics. This research remains crucial due to the urgency and ongoing nature of the issue. Despite facing threats, the organization continues to persevere in its fight. This year, 2024, @lgbtrightsghana organized the

Color Dialogues series on both Instagram and X (formerly Twitter). However, the videos have not been saved. Making these videos publicly available in the future could significantly expand the data pool for future extended projects. It would allow for comparative studies across the different platforms. By examining how the organization utilizes the unique affordances of various platforms, researchers can better understand and add to the body of knowledge on queer media studies.

Also, as a researcher, the selection and interpretation of themes are based on my subjective position as an insider and outsider of this cultural experience. Therefore, my personal biases and perspectives may impact theme selection as critical technocultural discourse analysis depends on the researcher's active role in identifying a pattern in socio-political discourse.

Future research may consider investigating the use of social media as a digital resistance tool within the LGBT+ community on X, formerly Twitter, TikTok, Facebook, and other emerging platforms. Also, a multi-modal method approach to studying this phenomenon is advisable. The use of interviews, surveys, and focus groups could provide a holistic understanding of the activist work that is being done online and offline and how that impacts the minoritized sexual citizens in Ghana.

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