



Networked mourning: Appraising stranger mourning and dialogic healing on X

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Abstract

This study investigates the distinctive characteristics and underlying motivations of communication behaviours within social media posts belonging to deceased strangers. Taking posts on X about the death of #Christain Atsu, a Ghanaian football star, who died in the 2023 earthquake in Turkey, as a case study, the study adopted a social networking and qualitative content analyses methods to develop close reading based on quantitative descriptions and topic clustering of text of more than 99,000 posts on X. In terms of mourning of #Christain Atsu, we grouped those that posted about his death into three categories: the *Condolers* and *Grievors*, the *Venerators*, and the *Probers*. The results indicate that social media, social culture, and individual actions collectively shape the interactions and norms related to dialogical healing. This study argues that when mourning occurs, individuals have more reciprocal relationships on a dyadic level which decreases modularity of the network. The study advances the scholarship on networked and stranger mourning as well as dialogic healing.

Keywords: Christian Atsu, collective mourning, crisis network theory, dialogic healing, networked mourning, online mourning, social media mourning, stranger mourning, X

Introduction

On February 18, 2023, ESPN posted of the passing of Ghanaian football super star, Mr. Christian Atsu. The post read, "Christian Atsu has been found dead under the building where he lived in southern Turkey after last week's earthquakes in the region, the player's agent has said" (ESPN, 2023). The post threw the footballing world into mourning as lovers of Football started posting their condolences. The post was reposted over 1,900 times and was viewed over 3.5 million times.

This post opened the floodgates of grieving, and mourning posts on social media platforms such as X. Christian Atsu had died in the 7.8 magnitude earthquake that rocked Turkey and Syria on 6 February 2023 (The Guardian, 2023). He was found in the rubbles of his apartment in Turkey (BBC, 2023). During a state funeral in his honour in Accra, Ghana, many mourners gathered to pay their last respect to Christian Atsu. While the collective and united front shown at the funeral speaks to the respect that people have for Atsu, this study is more interested on how people all around the world mourned Christian Atsu on X.

Grief and mourning are usually bundled together as concepts and conflated in some research. Grief is the usual reaction of bereavement; primarily an affective reaction to the loss of a loved one through death (Stroebe, 2001; Stroebe et al., 2008). This definition shows that grief is a specific emotion of sadness. However, mourning is an expression or other action of grief shaped by social or cultural practices (Durkheim, 1912/1965). Both in the Western tradition, where the psychology of bereavement and grief have been widely studied, and in the African tradition based on kinship, the relationship between mourners and the deceased is usually that of family and close friends. The act of mourning in these situations usually occurs after the death of the deceased, on specified dates each year. In the case of #ChristianAtsu, however, he was a stranger to the mourners.

A recent study has conceptualized two different practices of digital mourning, "personal digital grief" and "communal digital grief" (Babis, 2021, p. 397). Personal digital grief refers to digitally mediated mourning that results from a personal knowledge of the bereaved with the deceased person. In this scenario,

offline grief is thus transferred to the online world through posts shared by the bereaved, which therapeutically contribute to their grieving process. Communal digital grief occurs when mourners who belong to community groups on social media platforms, become involved in the grieving of a deceased by writing condolences on social media platforms. Babis (2021) argues that since these condolences are not specifically offered to the bereaved people but rather to the community at large, that they create a communal feeling.

Many studies (e.g., Cao et al., 2022; Cherasia, 2022; Erll, 2022; Hoskins, 2016; Jiwani, 2022; McCammon, 2022; Wertsch & Roediger, 2022) on online mourning align with this type of grief. In the existing research on the phenomenon of stranger online mourning (Hu & Jiang, 2025), the deceased can be categorized into two types: the first type is the traditional "celebrity". That is, celebrities and stars with a certain social status and fame; the mourning of celebrities mostly belongs to quasi-social interaction issues or "parasocial grieving" (Bingaman, 2022, p. 364). The other type is the "ordinary celebrity" portrayed by the news media, such as those who have lost their lives in public events, natural disasters, or state

violence. The mourning of ordinary celebrities is often associated with connective action and connective mourning. The study shows that beyond this realm of relatedness to mourn the dead, there is a large hidden world of "connective mourning" (Uwalaka, 2023a, 2023b; Uwalaka et al., 2023) where one mourns those that they do not have ties to or those unrelated to them but memorialized due to shared beliefs, and connective repertoires. The mourning of #ChristianAtsu falls into both categories. He was a football super star and died in a natural disaster.

Why do people leave messages on social media hashtag of an unknown deceased person? This study focuses on both the nature of #ChristainAtsu's death and his status in the society before his death. The paper examines the networked mourning of #ChristainAtsu. The study focuses on the motivations and meanings of strangers' persistent communication with the deceased on social media in the Ghanaian context. The study explores how X users used the platform to mourn the death of Mr. Christian Atsu.

Social Media and Mourning Practices

Social media is increasingly becoming the new habitat for the ghost (Peters, 2020). With social media providing multiple

extensions for the expression of grief, and with mourning no longer limited by tradition, time, place or relation, it can be argued that social media is redefining mourning in many ways. Online mourning brings people from different geographical locations and cultures together into mourning a loved one or someone that holds certain meanings to the bereaved. This could for instance be "hidden protests expressed through multi-semantic mourning" (Cao et al., 2022, p. 159). Cyber mourning refers to the practice of mourning through online media.

Early research on online mourning formed a framework that focused on the psychology and sociology of grief and support (Graham et al., 2013). Social media platforms such as X and Facebook allow for affective expressions of grief – underpinning a "networked sociality and articulating politics of opposition from the group-up" (Jiwani, 2022, p. 1). There are different typologies of online mourning. These include "social media mourning" (Moore et al., 2019), "networked grief" (Brubaker et al., 2019), "digital mourning" (Zhao et al., 2025) and "hyper-mourning" (Giaxoglou, 2020).

While social support and continuing bonds are often used for mourning

practices that are familiar between the mourner and the deceased, the digital action framework is more commonly used in the study of stranger mourning practices (Hu & Jiang, 2025). Scholars believe that while Western modern concepts have avoided and isolated death, online mourning has once more made mourning a collective experience (Brubaker & Hayes, 2011). The increasingly normative, ubiquity and affordances of online platforms allow for an increased expression of individualistic performances grounded in a more loosed network affinity. Online gatherings of mourners create "collective mourning" landscapes, which are then constructed into a series of enduring digital memories (Gotved, 2014; Jiwani, 2022; Morse, 2023a). These platforms "enable and empower those marginalized by traditional forms of grief to stay connected to the deceased" (Carroll & Landry, 2010, p. 1130; Morse & Birnhack, 2022). Through these networks, the mourners form collective memorial landscape which then build into a collection of enduring digital memories (Pasquali et al., 2022; Pennington, 2013; Veale, 2004).

The collective mourning perspective focuses on how grief is organized on a social and political level and how

collective mourning shapes the feelings and actions of group members facing a shared loss (Morse, 2023a, 2023b; Wagoner & de Luna, 2021). Collective mourning is a social ritual that leads to various socio-political outcomes. For example, it can strengthen group solidarity, allow the group to confront others, or trigger social change within the group (Wagoner & de Luna, 2021).

Uwalaka (2023a) conceptualized "connective mourning" based on the crisis-network effect (Danowski, 1982; Danowski & Edison-Swift, 1985). He suggests that beyond the realm of blood-based mourning, that there is a vast hidden world of connective mourning in which people grieve those they do not know well but create a social community through grief and mourning due to shared beliefs and experiences (Uwalaka, 2023a, 2023b; Uwalaka et al., 2023). Connective mourning emphasizes that connectivity transforms grief into digital mourning, generating complex actions in the collision of people and media. Connective mourning aligns with Babis (2021) communal digital grief concept. It entails mourning a deceased on social media even when the mourners may not have personally known the deceased. The point is that whether collective mourner, connective mourner or even communal

mourner, digital grief helps rebuild the psyche of the mourners and attempt to bring healing.

Connective mourning, that is mourning online via platforms such as X, particularly of strangers, has a dialogic healing power. Such mourning is most times parasocial in nature. Parasocial relationships are one-sided emotional attachments to media figures like celebrities, influencers, or fictional characters.

Studies have looked at parasocial relationships and mourning of celebrities who have passed and how their fans mourned them. Some of these celebrities include, Michael Jackson (Courbet & Fourquet-Courbet, 2014), Stephen Hawking (Akhther & Tetteh, 2023), Maradona (Greco, 2024), Queen Elizabeth (Anderson, 2025; Sanghera, 2025; Uwalaka, 2023a) and others (Zhang et al., 2025). The parasocial mourning could be for a traditional celebrity or ordinary celebrity.

As noted earlier, the deceased can be categorized both as a "traditional celebrity" – that is a star with certain social status and fame and "ordinary celebrity" – that is someone who may be portrayed by the news media as celebrity

due to the nature of their death. As a global Football star, Christian Atsu was a traditional celebrity. One can argue that mourners could have engaged in parasocial mourning (Bingaman, 2022) in this respect. However, dying during a natural disaster (earthquake) also means that Christian Atsu could be seen as an "ordinary celebrity". Studies have looked at mourning from accidents, depression, terrorism, and COVID-19 as well as mourning of directly related loved ones (e.g., Brubaker et al., 2019; Giaxoglou, 2020; Moore et al., 2019). Others examined mourning either from suicide based death and death from mourning (Anih et al., 2023) or mourning elicited via state aggression such as the killing of protesters during the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria and the mourning and memorialization that followed (Asogwa et al., 2021; Dami, 2021; Ola, 2021; Shija & Onwugbufor, 2021; Udenze, 2025; Uwalaka, 2021).

The current study looks at a mourning that was occasioned by the sudden death of a football star during an earthquake. The study also analyzed the posts of mourners who hitherto may not have known the deceased that they were mourning on X. It looks at the distinctive features and underlying motivations of communication behaviours around the

death of #ChristainAtsu on X by social media users. The study also aims to assess whether online mourning engagement helps continue the bond that mourners had or wish they had with the deceased.

To achieve the above stated aim, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the themes that emerged from posts and replies from X users on the death of #ChristianAtsu?
2. What do the diameter, density, reciprocity, centrality, and modularity measures reveal about the conversations around the death of #ChristianAtsu?
3. How should we interpret the meaning of this communication practice within the context of African culture?

Method

Data collection

This paper adopted a qualitative content analysis design and specifically utilized social media network analytics. Using Netlytic (Malik et al., 2022; Meneses, 2019), we scraped 99,000 messages on X

from the 19 of January, 2023 to 22 of February, 2023. After scraping the data, we downloaded the responses as an excel document into NVivo for qualitative data analysis. Our goal was to download messages (posts, replies and reposts) concerning the death of #ChristianAtsu. We wanted to understand the nature of the messages and condolence messages sent to the family of #ChristainAtsu on X. Further, we wanted to also examine the network measures and visualization to understand the type of crowds that were posting about the demise of #ChristianAtsu on X. We searched the hashtag, "#Christian Atsu" for the data.

Data analysis

The study analyzed posts from the hashtags "#ChristianAtsu" to determine the nature of conversations and crowds that used the hashtag, as well as the number of posts and reposts and the themes that emerged from the posts on how X users mourned the death of #ChristianAtsu.

The X posts that were collected were analyzed using the framework that was developed by Uwalaka (2023a). In this analysis, keywords were highlighted. Also, network properties were identified, analyzed and visualizations were observed and discussed. For the social

network visualization, the study used the Distributive Recursive Layout (DRL) which is a "forced-directed graph layout, effective for visualizing large networks" (Meneses, 2019; Uwalaka, 2023b; Uwalaka et al., 2023). In this layout, long edges are hidden to highlight clusters or communities of conversation. Clusters are groups of nodes that share a particular characteristic. These communities appear on the graph as round or oval shapes (Santarossa et al., 2022; Suhaimi et al., 2021).

After analyzing the posts on Netlytic, the scraped posts and replies were downloaded from Netlytic and stored as a CVS file. The downloaded and stored dataset was then exported into NVivo (Crowley et al., 2002; Hilal & Alabri, 2013; Phillips & Lu, 2018) for further qualitative analysis.

We evaluated diameter, density, reciprocity, centralization, and modularity to understand the typology of the network. We also examined who was mentioned the most, who posted the most, and who were reposted the most to assess influence. In examining these different network properties, we were able to adjudge which among these network properties might affect the successful dissemination of mourning

messages during the death of Mr. Atsu. The diameter measures the longest distance between two users in the network, counted in the number of nodes or unique X user accounts (@name), that it takes to get from one participant to the other (Pascual-Ferra et al., 2020). Density is another network property. It measures how close nodes are in a network.

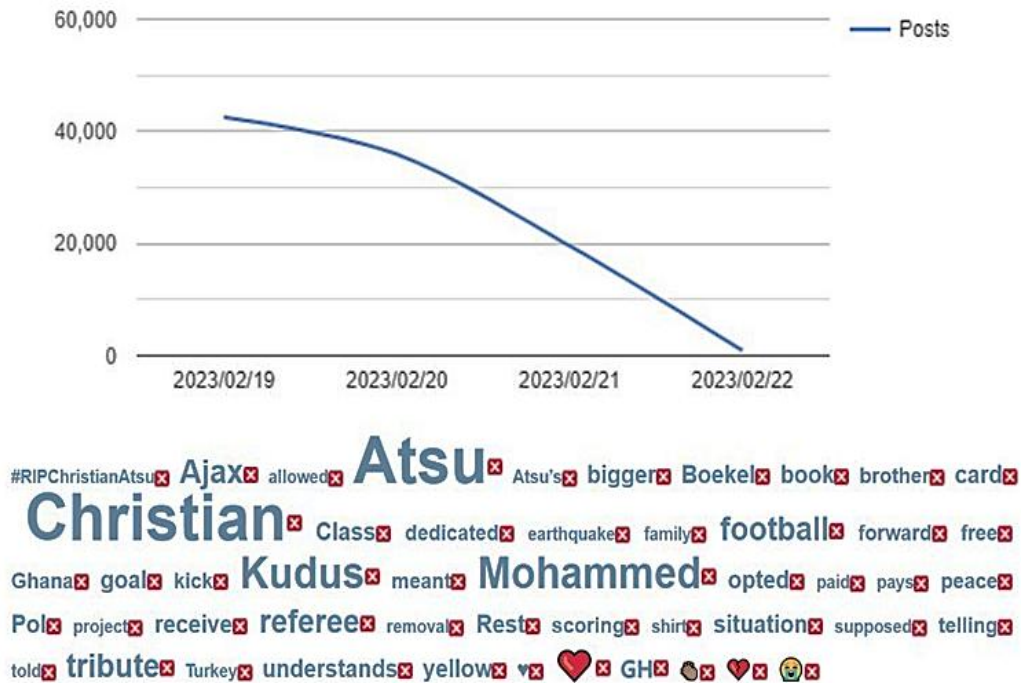
Reciprocity measures the tendency for users to reciprocate communication or how many nodes are talking to each other. Centralization measures the extent to which a few nodes dominate the conversation. Each node has a centrality measure: "indegree (based on times it has been mentioned or replied to)", "outdegree (based on times it has mentioned replied to others)" and "total degree (the sum of both)" (Pascual-Ferra et al., 2020, 563). The final network property is modularity. This measures the fragmentation of a network into distinct communities. For all these measures, values range from 0 (lowest) to 1 (highest). This means that a modularity value that is close to 1 "indicate clear division between communities" whereas values less than 0.5 suggest that "the communities overlap more; the network

is more likely to consist of a core group of nodes.

In the second part, the data were moved into qualitative software called NVivo. Using the three theme coding framework of Uwalaka (2023a), we retrieved the data and build a conceptual network that was handy at the theme development and meaning condensation stages. We adopted thematic and meaning condensation approaches to make sense of the data. This approach "entails an abridgement of the meanings expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations" (Kvale, 1996, p. 192). Its purpose is to allow the researcher to go "beyond what is directly said (posted) to work out structures and relations of meaning not immediately apparent in a text" (Kvale, 1996, 200). In a nutshell, the approach allowed the user to add subjective interpretations based on what the meaning is perceived to be from the experience undergone during the interview.

Our evaluation of the posts and replies were classified into three broad themes: (i) the Condolers and Grievors, (ii) the Venerators (iii) the Probers.

Figure 1: Word Cloud and Data Collection Dates



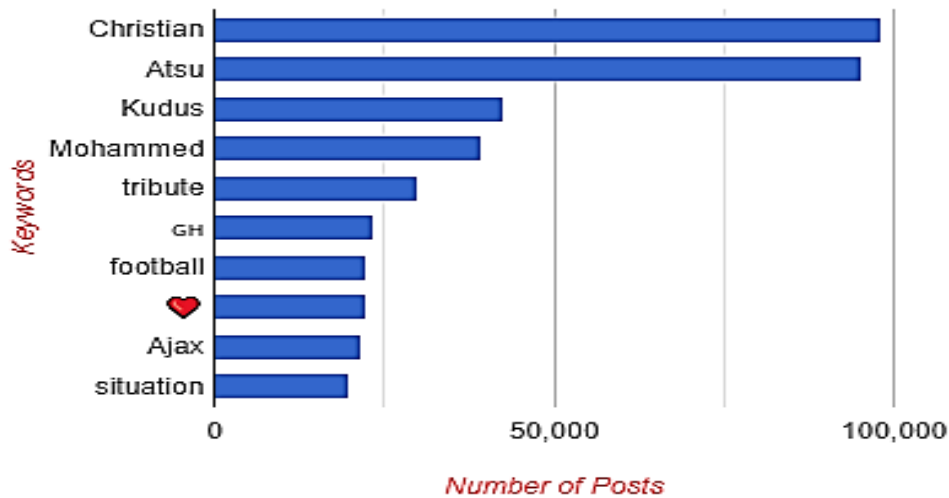
Results

Results from Social networking analysis

Figure 2 below highlights ten keywords that were prominent in the posts and replies from X users around the world. The keyword that was most used in the posts is "Christian". It was mentioned about 98,364 times from our data. This is

followed by, "Atsu" (95,162), "Kudus" (42,556), "Mohammed" (40,147), "Tribute" (30,117), "GH", that is Ghana (23,524), "Football" (22,390) Love (22,178), "Ajax" (21,733), and "situation" (19,212). These numbers and categories show that the name of Mr. Atsu was front and center in the online discourses around his death.

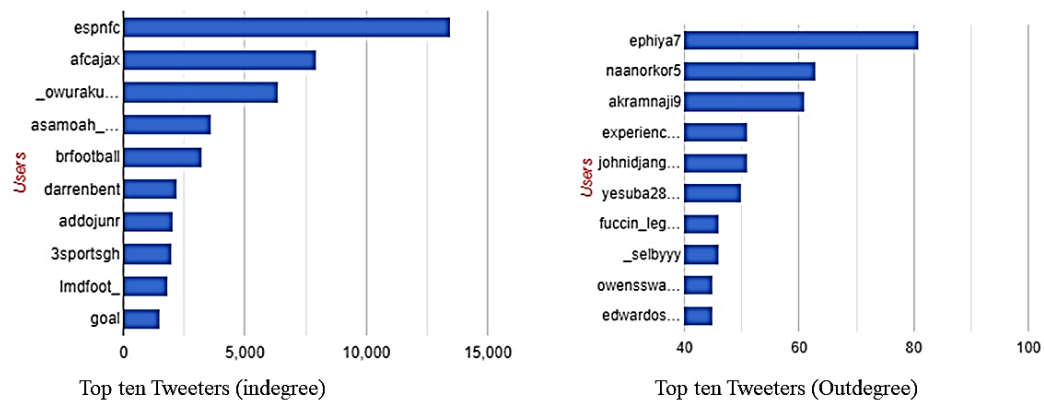
Figure 2: Ten Most Frequently Used Keywords.



Furthermore, Figure 3 below shows the top ten posters (indegree and outdegree) during the death and funeral of Mr. Christian Atsu on X. In the indegree section, that is X users who were posted, quoted, and replied the most, @espnfc (13,499) received the highest number of

inward posts directed about the passing of Mr. Atsu. This was followed by @AFCAjax (7,984) @brfootball (3,261), @lmdfoot (1, 845), etc. For outdegree, that is, those who posted the most, they are @ephiya (16%), @naanorkor5 (10%), @akramnaji9 (10%), etc.

Figure 3: Top Ten Tweeters on Mr. Atsu's Death (indegree and outdegree)



In Figures 4 and 5 below, the diameter is 11. In network properties, this means that the longest distance between two users in the network is 11. This is counted in the number of nodes or unique X user accounts that it takes to get from one participant to another. Density measures how close nodes are in the network. In this Figure, while the density is 0.57, reciprocity = 0.62, centralization = 0.72 and modularity = 0.31. Reciprocity measures two-way communication or how many nodes are talking to each other. Centralization measures the extent to which a few nodes dominate the conversations. Each node has a centrality measure – indegree (based on times it has been mentioned or replied to) and outdegree (based on the number of times it has mentioned or replied to others). The sum of both is labelled "total degree".

Modularity measures fragmentation of networks into distinct communities. For all these measures, values range from 0 (lowest) to 1 (highest). Based on this, the modularity of the graph is less than 0.5. This suggests that as the communities "overlap more; the network is more likely to consist of a great core group of nodes" (Pascual-Ferrá et al., 2020, 563).

Figures 4 and 5 show that the conversations in these Figures are centralized, have high reciprocity (meaning that participants were talking amongst themselves and are a close-knit) and homophilous network. This is because of the moderate value of the diameter and the high density of the conversations. The point here is that although @espncf did not engage with those who responded to the announcement about Mr. Atsu's passing, X users did in fact communicate with one another

Figure 4: *Network Visualisation (DrL)*

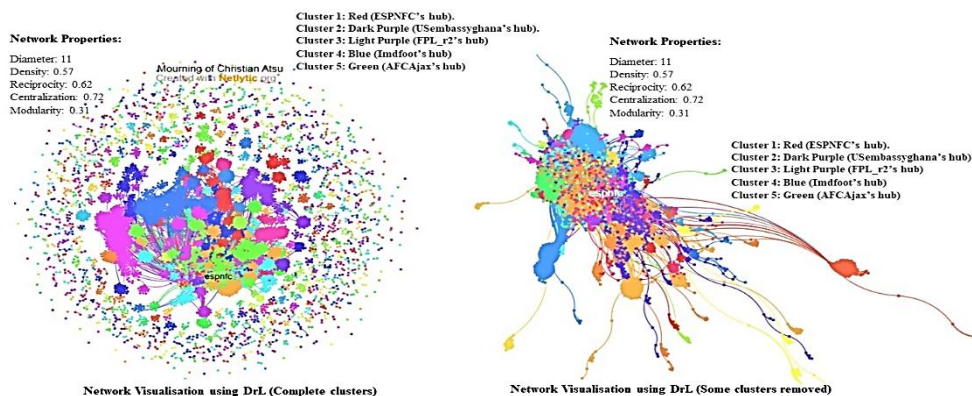
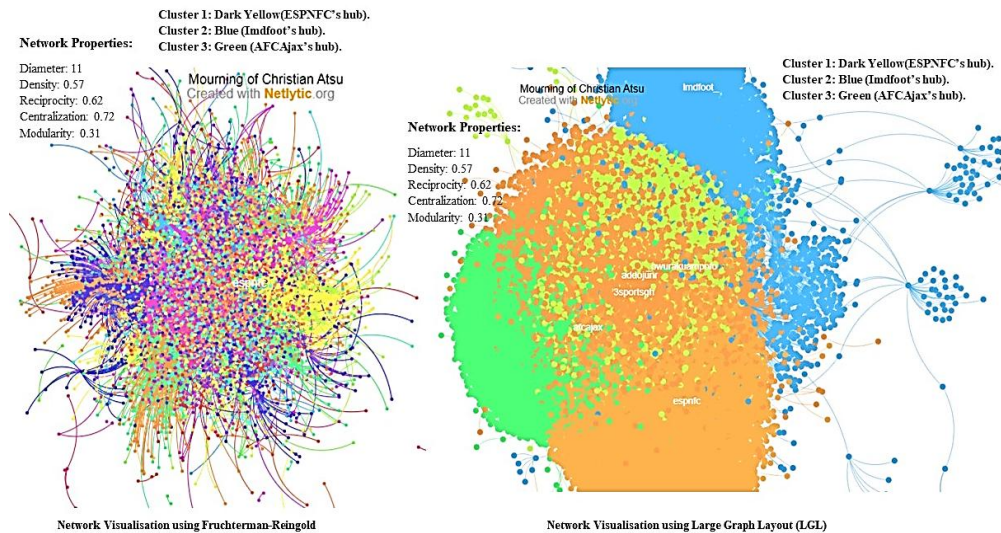


Figure 5: Network Visualisation (Fruchterman-Reingold and LGL)



The network pattern is alike when we visualize the network outputs in all layouts. The two charts in Figure 4 are DrL outputs while Figure 5 shows the outputs of Fruchterman-Reingold, a popular forced based algorithm that works best when networks have 1000 or less nodes (Fruchterman & Reingold, 1991), and Large Graph Layout (LGL), which is used to visualize large networks while avoiding hairballs (Adai et al., 2004).

One of the most influential network actors in the discourse about the death of Mr. Atsu is an X account, @espnfc. A look at Figure 4 reveals that @espnfc, who is the originator of cluster 1 (red) of

the network visualizations, @usembassyghana, who is in dark purple and the originator of cluster 2 in both charts, @FPL_r2, who is light purple in both charts, @imdfoot, who is the blue in both charts and @AFCAjax, who is the originator of cluster 5 and green were all influential in the network. Figure 5 shows how influential @espnfc (dark yellow in both) is in the network. The accounts @imdfoot and @AFCAjax had significant influence in network analyses.

These figures show the building of networks from these network actors and their connections to others are based on some common form of interaction (ties). Figures 4 and 5 show that as X users mourn Mr. Atsu, they developed on an

individual level, more reciprocal relationships. This dyadic level reciprocal relationship, which also is demonstrated with the networks' low modularity, occurs when there is a shock that creates uncertainty in the system.

Results from qualitative content analysis

The findings overall demonstrate that X users used the platform to mourn the passing of #ChristianAtsu. We organized the findings into three themes. According to Table 1 below, these are (1) Condolers and Grievors; (2) Venerators; and (3) Probers.

Condolers: X as a Platform for Mourning and Emotional Support

This is the most conspicuous theme from the posts and replies that we analyzed. This shows that X is becoming central to mourning around the world and is influencing mourning practices. The chance to mourn those who ordinarily, no one would have even known that they have passed is one of the reasons social media platforms such as X are popular. X users used the social media platform to grief and mourn the passing of Mr. Atsu. Here, Condolers and Grievors refer to posts that condoled, grieved, and mourned Mr. Atsu's passing.

After it was announced that the body of Mr. Atsu had been found in the rubbles,

condolence, grieve, and mourning posts started flowing in from different parts of the world. For example, an X user posted, "we are sending our deepest condolences to the family of Ghanaian international Christian Atsu, his friends and our brothers @ghanafaoofficial. May his soul rest in peace". These mourners ranged from just individuals to Football Leagues and Football Club sides. The kernel of these posts was to console Mr. Atsu's family and the people of Ghana. This is evident with the number of "RIPs" that people posted on the day of the announcement and on the funeral day. Another grieving and mourning aspect of this theme that was evident from the analyzed posts was that of sadness. X users displayed their sadness at the passing of Mr. Atsu. His age, charity engagements and the fact that he plays for the Ghanaian national Football team caused X users to be sad about his passing. This heartbrokenness and sadness could be attributed to the love and respect that mourners on X had for Mr. Atsu. The posts on this theme illustrate the respect and love that people, the world over had for Mr. Atsu and the forthright means in which they expressed their admiration for him and their sadness in his passing. It reveals how much Mr. Atsu meant to people around the world.

Table 1: Broad Themes and Sample Broad Themes and Sample Tweets

Themes	Sample Comments
Condolers and Grievors	• Devastated to hear the news of Christian Atsu. Rest in peace. • This video of Christian Atsu's Wife and Kids really be sad.
Venerators	• Christian Atsu paid the fines of 53 poor people, who were in prison for petty crimes in Ghana in 2018. He also gave them money to start a business. He upgraded the football pitch in Awutu Prison Camp. He donated to schools and hundreds of items to an orphanage in Senya Berekum.
Probers	• Did the Ghana Premier League observe 1 minute silence for Christian Atsu? • So, the Black Stars cannot even score to honour their brother Christian Atsu? • Why Christian, O God! Why?

Venerators: Mourning as a Means of Continuing Bonds

This is another theme that manifested from the corpus of posts that we analyzed. X users provided anecdotal evidence to buttress their points that Mr. Atsu was one of the finest gentlemen that has ever lived. One of the posts praised Mr. Atsu as a champion for orphans and the trafficked in his home country Ghana. He was lauded for being a

great human being. Posts alluding to Mr. Atsu's charity works, and service, all praised him for attempting to change the narrative of many poor children in Ghana. He was also praised for being a fantastic footballer. X users noted "RIP Christian a class act on and off the pitch, never forgotten for his role in @rafabenitezweb excellent promotion winning @NUFC team." While another posted, "Rip to one

of the best left footed wingers we have seen in recent years”.

These posts and many more show how appreciative X users were on the type of service that Mr. Atsu rendered. He was appreciated by even people who expressly noted that they were not from Ghana. His service and dedication were transcendental and was larger than himself. People on X connected to Atsu in death through his service to his people and the world. The posts evidently highlighted that people did respect Mr. Atsu for his sheer will to serve his people and fans. This connectedness reverberated throughout the posts. The high regard that X users have for him brought them together to grief for a man who they talked about as a gentleman and the embodiment of humility and dedication.

The Probers

The last theme is the Probers. The Probers were posts that asked questions and attempted to dig further into the death of Mr. Atsu. Some of the probing posts appeared to be accusatory. The posts raised questions about the nature of his death, the report that he was found alive earlier before the more accurate report. Others asked why he was found many

days after the earthquake. For example, an X user from Ghana posted, “I presume he’s been declared dead and not recovered dead.”. Posts such as this might appear confusing on its surface, however, it alludes to conspiratorial views. Such views include an accusation that Mr. Atsu survived the earthquake but was later killed by people in Turkey.

X users mainly from Ghana did not believe the news of Mr. Atsu’s passing. They began to ask questions. Their questions or critical statements showed that they were yet to accept that Mr. Atsu was deceased. One X user asked, “can we see the body if it true? Because me, still no believe am ooooo.” These users are unhappy about the death of Mr. Atsu. They began to post probing questions and statements to register their anger at what they perceived to have led to his passing. The Probers, while significantly smaller than the Condolers, provided a strong voice against the handling of Mr. Atsu’s search and recovery.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that online mourners on X used the platform to mourn the death of Mr. Christian Atsu. A broad look and interrogation of the coordinated ways X users mourned the

passing of Mr. Atsu has opened a new window into how scholars can begin to study and appreciate the empowering nature of social media platforms particularly during crisis, such as mourning. The qualitative content analysis uncovered that those who posted about the death were *Condolers*, *Venerators*, or *Probers*.

The *Condolers* and *Grievors* were those who were saddened by the death of Mr. Atsu and showed through their posts how sad they were about his passing. The *Grievors* and *Condolers* posted their condolence messages and often prayed for Mr. Atsu's soul to rest in peace. The *Venerators* are also people that love and cherish the deceased. This cohort specifically loves him and extolled his devotion and service to his people. The *Venerators* posted "thank you" messages to Mr. Atsu. They praised his work on the football pitch as well as his humanitarian and charity endeavours. They uniformly agreed in their posts that Mr. Atsu was a gentleman. The *Venerators* feted him and appreciated his service to his people. The *Probers* were asked questions about the death of Mr. Atsu. They accused Turkey of not embarking on his search early enough. Some of the *Probers* also appear to not believe that Mr. Atsu was deceased. They noted that they would

only believe when they saw his body. This result shows that the *Condolers*, *Venerators* and *Probers* mourned Mr. Atsu as a way to show their respect and honour for him (Wiederhold, 2017). The way Mr. Atsu lived his life and the country that he represent showed how he was mourned and who did the mourning on X (Fernandez et al., 2011; Stevenson et al., 2016).

The network visualizations in Figures 4 and 5 above show a tight crowd, interconnected by issues that the online mourners are deliberating. What the figures illustrate is that digital mourners on X are switched on and engage with one another in a substantive way. A closer look at what the digital mourners are deliberating on X, shows topics ranging from Mr. Atsu's service, his charity works, achievements, condolences, and questions around his death. The interconnectedness of the networks show that this was not a polarized crowd but a tight crowd where all participants were talking to one another and engaging in substantive topics – mourning Mr. Atsu, extolling and lauding his dedication and devotion to his people, and the nature of his death.

This study uncovers that those grieving online acted as mediators within the

mourning community as they mourned on an individual basis and yet, contributed towards the collective mourning goals. Although these mourners acted on an individual basis, the common concern of respecting the service of Mr. Atsu brought them together. This togetherness of grief was not built through blood ties or strong and thick relations, but through common concern. However, because the grief was situated around a common concern (mourning the passing of Mr. Atsu), this stimulated feeling of collective grief or "benevolent grief" and connective memory which provided a form of collective memorial landscape, helping to build an enduring memory of the deceased (Hoskins, 2011, 2016; Morse, 2023b; Pennington, 2013). Online mourners' ability to stimulate commonality via decentralized and loose networks while allowing for solidarity building during mourning demonstrates the personalization of mourning and online connectedness of humanity. These networks help identify and validate grief in online groups (Marín-Cortés et al., 2023).

Besides the emergence of the themes, this study also showed the networked relationship among digital mourners. Figures 4 and 5 above showed a tight crowd where information disseminations

revolve around a few visible participants who then are placed in an opinion leadership position. The nature of this network showed that the topic under discussion was important and interesting. This demonstrates that mourners used the organizing tools of X to mourn and venerate Mr. Atsu. The high centrality, high density of reciprocity and low modularity lead to fast diffusion of information and promise to encourage widespread adoption of the communique proposed by the mourners around the world.

This study reveals that when collective mourning occurs online, individuals have more reciprocal relationships on a dyadic level and that the network has low modularity. Such a network effect occurs when there is a shock that creates uncertainty in the system. This is related to Danowski and Edison-Swift's (1985) "crisis-network effects" findings. Danowski and his colleague noticed that people emailed others that they have not emailed before during a crisis and that the messages were shorter and "one large user group formed" (Danowski & Edison-Swift, 1985, p. 251). This is akin to the network visualizations in Figures 4 and 5 where the mourning communities were tight-knitted and appeared to be grieving together. This shows that when a

community experiences collective mourning, individuals may seek out others, who are also affected by the loss of comfort, understanding, and emotional support. This process can lead to the forming of new relationships or strengthening existing ones, resulting in a more interconnected and reciprocal network at the dyadic level. This networked mourning like connective mourning (Uwalaka, 2023a) created a sense of shared vulnerability, like when other crises occur, leading individuals to empathize with others who are also grieving. This empathy may encourage people to reach out to others they have not frequently communicated with before the crisis or shocking incident, thus fostering new connections and reducing network modularity.

The study reveals that mourners on X engaged in a communicative behaviour of healing through dialogue. The tightness of the crowd in Figures 4 and 5 shows that the mourners are communicating with one another in a bid to heal from the crisis. In this case, the mourners engaged in what some calls "mutuality of being" (Sahlins, 2011). This applies not only to kinship, but also between unfamiliar mourners, between the mourner and the deceased. Social media provides a network embodying many

existential mutuality. Thus, the practice of self-expression counteracts the crisis of self-presence that is common in depression.

A careful examination of the #ChristainAtsu's case mourning reveals that conversations or and posts on X by strangers to the deceased are digital interactions that combine interpersonal, quasi-interpersonal, and intrapersonal communication. The prevalent motive is mental healing during the mourning period. Our findings show that the meaning of emotional support and continuing bonds in this study are not just about healing grief over the loss of a friend or relative; posting a message on X about the death of #ChristainAtsu is instead a way for people to confide in one another, an externalization of their internal self-talk and a way of healing themselves. In this case, social media and the deceased as actors are jointly involved in the mourner's self-healing practices. For the X posters, the self-talk with the deceased on X has a relational implication that is generated by the dialogic interaction. This in some way alleviates the self-existential crisis and has a unique self-healing value for those suffering from a similar psychological disorder.

Limitations of the study

This study has some limitations. Although the data for the study was from 99,000 posts and replies about the death of Mr. Christian Atsu, we acknowledge that the study is limited in the number of posts that were collected for the purpose of analysis. Also, the categories that Netlytic showed were in single word format that needed a human subjective compilation. The categories used in the qualitative analysis were chosen by the authors and not validated by previous studies. Having said all these, the authors took steps such as using multiple analytic approaches to ameliorate the limitations.

Conclusion

The study illustrates that digital media acts as a mourning and solidarity platforms where mourners plan, coordinate and mourn their fallen compatriot. Results show that mourners on X communicated their grief and shared their condolence on the death of #ChristianAtsu. The study further shows that X helps mourners to organize memorials to not only sustain the grieving but also to venerate and probe the issues surrounding his death.

The qualitative content and social networking analysis of the death and mourning of #ChristainAtsu, a Ghanaian

professional football player demonstrated how people mourn on social media for strangers who passed away. The study found that people posting about the death of #ChristainAtsu are not mere mourners. They form a social support network through emotional communication with others who had similar troubles or experiences. They maintain a continuing bond with the deceased through self-expression. Unlike other forms of connective mourning and online collective mourning that deals with emotional perspectives of mourning, the communication on X from strangers did not merely bring about connective and networked mourning but also aimed to alleviate the grief of losing an important member of the community. The motivation for mourning practices exceeded mere grieving and rose to the level of self-psychological healing. Our results indicate that social media, social culture and connective actions collectively shape the interactions and norms related to dialogical healing. The communication practices motivated by self-healing occur in the online space left by the deceased. The study contributes to exploring and understanding different types of online mourning practices within various cultural contexts, particularly in the context of Africa, by advancing the

scholarship on stranger mourning and dialogic healing.

The study demonstrates that in times of crisis or uncertainty, people search for information to make sense of the situation and reduce feelings of confusion or helplessness. This can lead individuals to connect with others who may possess relevant knowledge or experiences, even if this is the first time they have communicated with them. This is why the network becomes less modular. The findings from this study suggest that when a community experiences a shock that creates uncertainty, such as the death of Mr. Atsu, its members bonds together to cope and rebuild their sense of security. This collective coping fosters new connections and strengthens existing ones as individuals work together to make sense of the uncertain environment and reduce stress.

A higher-order construct encompassing the phenomena in this study is the emotional disturbance producing a significant increase in negative emotions. Emotional disturbances can result from various crises, including the death of a football star as was the case in this study or other traumatic events, leading to heightened stress levels. To reestablish baseline functioning, individuals need to

alleviate this stress. One effective way to reduce this type of stress is through the sharing of emotions openly and without filters. Connecting with new online users facilitated a deeper sharing of emotional responses. Established social relationships might not be optimized for unbridled emotional expression, as it can threaten perceived social acceptance and may not provide the support needed in times of crisis. This is why there was a preference for connective engagement as the mourners were able to share high vulnerability more readily with strangers or with less familiar contacts. Sharing intense emotions with new connections can lead to more of a sense of release and shared relaxation response, ultimately proving more effective in coping with emotional disturbances.

The study shows that stress reduces the ability to think, limiting the development of a good working model, along with the need to reduce the physical stress response; it motivates communication because normal coping mechanisms are not effective. Consequently, the network crisis effect model submits that the need for stress reduction and emotional support drives individuals to reach out to new contacts, leading to more reciprocal relationships at the dyadic level and decreased network modularity.

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