

#ShutItAllDown social protest: Examining emotional content on Twitter against sexual gender-based violence in Namibia

Protes sosial #ShutItAllDown: Memeriksa konten emosional di Twitter terhadap kekerasan seksual berbasis gender di Namibia

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Abstract

Over the years, social media has evolved into the primary platform for political activism. Citizens have utilized social media platforms to mobilize people to band together and rise against injustice. Social protests usually occur because of citizens' emotional reactions to perceptions of injustice. Citizens have traditionally used social protests to voice their dissatisfaction with government policies and to influence political reforms. Citizens' participation in social protests is fraught with emotion. Emotions elicited by political stimuli play a vital role in initiating and guiding goal-directed behavior. Therefore, this study intends to analyze the emotions expressed in Twitter posts during the #ShutItAllDown social protest. This study uses a quantitative approach. The findings show that both positive and negative emotions expressed on social media accelerate Namibian youth participation in the #ShutItAllDown social protests. Fear, anger, and anticipation instigate people's participation in protests, whereas joy and happiness are feelings of satisfaction that are experienced during goal achievement. Thus, protest participation arising from both positive and negative emotions enforces government reforms.

Keywords: government response and reforms; positive and negative emotions; social media; social protest

Abstrak

Selama bertahun-tahun, media sosial telah berkembang menjadi platform utama untuk aktivisme politik. Warga telah memanfaatkan platform media sosial untuk memobilisasi orang agar bersatu dan bangkit melawan ketidakadilan. Protes sosial biasanya terjadi karena reaksi emosional warga terhadap persepsi ketidakadilan. Warga secara tradisional menggunakan protes sosial untuk menyuarakan ketidakpuasan mereka terhadap kebijakan pemerintah dan memengaruhi reformasi politik. Partisipasi warga dalam protes sosial penuh dengan emosi. Emosi yang ditimbulkan oleh rangsangan politik memainkan peran penting dalam memulai dan membimbing perilaku yang diarahkan pada tujuan. Oleh karena itu, studi ini bermaksud menganalisis emosi yang diekspresikan dalam postingan Twitter selama protes sosial #ShutItAllDown. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa emosi positif dan negatif yang diekspresikan di media sosial mempercepat partisipasi pemuda Namibia dalam protes sosial #ShutItAllDown. Ketakutan, kemarahan, dan antisipasi memicu partisipasi orang dalam protes, sedangkan kegembiraan dan kebahagiaan adalah perasaan puas yang dialami selama pencapaian tujuan. Dengan demikian, partisipasi protes yang timbul dari emosi positif dan negatif mendorong reformasi pemerintah.

Kata kunci: tanggapan pemerintah dan reformasi; emosi positif dan negatif; media sosial; protes sosial

Introduction

Social protests are essential to democracy, serving as a platform for citizens to express their dissatisfaction with government institutions and policies (Van Ness & Summers-Effler 2018). Social protests aim to inform, educate, and motivate people and, at the same time, put pressure on public officeholders to give in to their demands for policy reforms (Van Troost et al. 2018). Social protests are a legitimate means of policy change and reform in any democratic society (Neogi et al. 2021) and remain a mechanism that reflects society's demands, wants, and needs, especially when government policies are inconsistent with citizens' needs and demands (El-Mallakh 2020).

Social protests are important tools that unite individuals into collective action to open a path for political and institutional reform (Giugni & Grasso 2022). Social protests begin with the transformation of emotions expressed on social media into offline collective action. When there is a perception of injustice, social protests will always occur either gradually or spontaneously (Power 2018). Consequently, citizens will express their emotional response to injustice on social media, organize and mobilize on social media, and then demonstrate offline for policy change and reform. Emotional responses of citizens on social media bind them together on social media and subsequently on the streets for collective action.

Social media has significantly influenced social protests, providing protest information, assisting with action and mobilization, organizing collective action and initiatives, promoting interaction among groups, and serving as an outlet for the creative expression of emotion (Seelig et al. 2019). Social media provides activists with access to media platforms that cultivate a new political landscape in which they can debate grievances, share information, and create collective demands. It enables the quick dissemination of information about upcoming events and political developments, aiding the coordination of protest activities. Facebook messages, tweets, and blog posts have acted as important emotional channels through which the organizers and protesters have condensed their sentiments of outrage, anger, pride, and a sense of common suffering into political passions, fueling the mobilization and participation process (Poell & Van Dijck 2018).

In recent years, social media has effectively mobilized citizens to participate in protests such as The Arab Spring, Hong Kong Umbrella Movement, the South Korean candlelight movement, #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and #EndSars (Highfield et al. 2016, Funke et al. 2017, Lee 2018, Jenzen et al. 2021). Social media has fostered state intervention and plays a critical role in the reform of legislation and the delivery of justice in cases that would otherwise have been dismissed. It has generated an unparalleled amount of openness, allowing injustices perpetrated by governments and government institutions to be broadcast on a global scale. People use social media to voice their dissatisfaction with political situations and to connect with others who share their viewpoints, thereby social media enables a platform for individuals to express their emotional responses to government policies and translate them into political action.

Social media helps the distribution of emotional and motivational content in support of protest activities (Jost et al. 2018). Social protests are accompanied by emotions that create motivations and goals. Jasper (2018) noted that emotions are fundamental to social protests and that social protests are impossible to envision without them. Heaney (2019) identified that social protests are often triggered by people's views of injustice and that the emotion associated with this injustice is anger. When a group of individuals experience injustice, then fear and anger erupt. In democratic systems, emotions induced by political stimuli are significant. Tausch & Becker (2013) stated that emotions play an essential role in initiating and guiding goal-directed behavior, and citizens take action based on their emotions.

The role of emotions in protest has resulted in rich literature linking emotions to a variety of political attitudes and behaviors (Groenendyk & Banks 2014, Lee & Kwak 2014, Ellefsen & Sandberg 2022). Emotions are generally classified as positive or negative: positive emotions focus on dimensions such as anticipation or hope, while negative emotions focus on dimensions such as anger and fear (Scott & Collins 2020). Early studies found that both negative and positive emotions accounted for ways of dealing with one's political environment (Heaney 2019, Jasko et al. 2019). Webster & Albertson (2022) stated that both positive and negative emotions increase citizen participation by triggering different cognitive methods for dealing with the environment. Fear triggers attention to the environment, while a sense of joy and anticipation is felt when goals are achieved (Groenendyk & Banks 2014, Wagner & Morisi 2019). Tausch & Becker (2013) stated that fear triggers information seeking, anger triggers political participation, and joy is directly tied to goal achievement.

Negative and positive emotions are primary incentives for individual participation in social protests (Castells 2015) and both significantly affect people's behavior, perception, and judgment. Fear and anger are emotions with negative vibes (Webster et al. 2021). When people are angry, they negatively evaluate issues. People experiencing anger and fear are compelled to take actions that are meant to alleviate their

emotional stress, while anticipation and hope are positive vibes, they motivate citizens to fight for what they believe is right and hope for the possibility of change (Sabucedo & Vilas 2014). Anger is known to be associated with the frame of injustice in collective action, while participation is linked to positive emotions. This allows negative and positive emotions to act jointly toward collective action. As a result, both positive and negative emotions are considered critical dimensions and pathways for examining citizen participation in social protests for government reform.

To the best of my knowledge, previous studies on emotions in protests have mainly focused on the emotional role in protest mobilization and participation; however, emotion during reforms is usually ignored. Several studies (Earl et al. 2013, van Troost et al. 2013, Gómez-Román & Sabucedo 2014) have identified three main phases of protest action: before, during, and after the protest. However, this study intends to include emotions during government response and reform. This inclusion was based on the following two factors. First, every protest has a trigger event and goal achievement (Carothers & Youngs 2015, Korolov et al. 2016, Whitehead 2021) and there is a need to analyze the emotions experienced during the trigger event and protest period. Second, most protests lead to political and institutional reform, which indicates the success or achievement of the protest. Hence, there is a need to measure the emotions experienced during the government response and reform. Therefore, this study builds on the premise that social media helps mobilize for collective action while positive and negative emotions accelerate participation in social protest for government reform. Based on this premise, this study intends to analyze the emotions expressed in Twitter posts of the #ShutItAllDown social protest against sexual and gender-based violence by answering the following research questions: (1) Which emotion was dominant during each phase of the observation period? (2) How did the emotions transit through the three phases?

The #ShutItAllDown social protest, which started on October 8, 2020, gained global attention after the horrific murder of Shannon Wasserfall, which was attributed to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In Namibia, there is a high incidence of SGBV targeting women. More than 5,000 cases of SGBV and 700 incidents of rape were recorded in 2020 and 2021 (Wyk 2022, Regional Office for Africa 2023). The #ShutItAllDown protesters used the hashtag #ShutItAllDown on social media to raise awareness and inspire others. The protesters also took to the streets to put pressure on the government to reform its policies. They asked the Namibian government to proclaim a state of emergency in response to the SGBV. In response to their demands, the Namibian government issued an official statement on October 13, 2020, expressing its commitment to combat the SGBV epidemic. The Namibian government acknowledges the SGBV situation in the country as a serious national problem and has enacted legislation, policies, and action plans to address it. These include the SGBV Action Plan and Domestic Violence Act (Republic of Namibia 2020).

Research Method

A total of 51,547 Twitter posts with the hashtag #ShutItAllDown tweeted between 6th to 14th October, 2020 were extracted on 12th October, 2022, using SNSCRAPPE. SNSCRAPPE is an open-source Python package that directly accesses the Twitter API, collects tweets, and stores them in .txt format. The tweets gathered were all in English. Data were collected according to three phases: The trigger event period, which was between 6th - 7th October, 2020, the protest period between the 8th - 9th of October, 2020, and the government response and reforms period between 10th - 14th October, 2020. Table 1 shows a sample of the #ShutItAllDown social protest tweets.

Data pre-processing is divided into two parts: data cleaning and tokenization. Data cleaning is the process of deleting extraneous data from a dataset to avoid inconsistencies. Tokenization is the process of breaking up huge volumes of text into smaller chunks called tokens. Hashtags, links, RTs, email addresses, and words beginning with the letter @ were deleted using the re Python module. The Porter stemmer was used to tokenize the data into a list of tokens (Neogi et al. 2021). Table 2 shows a sample of cleaned and Tokenized #ShutItAllDown Tweets.

Table 1.
Sample Dataset of #ShutItAllDown social protest tweets

Raw Tweets
They are still destroying my life right now and you #STILL haven't bothered to #shutitalldown. Don't get lost, let's show up in numbers #ShutItAllDown
TW: Rape: "the crime, typically committed by a man, forcing another person to have sexual intercourse with the offender against their will." #ShutItAllDown #SGBV https://t.co/7bTaPWz8oT
A large percentage of women and girls are more likely to experience domestic violence/Intimate partner violence, Sexual harassment, Sexual violence, Stalking and violence from men in Namibia #ShutItAllDown
Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) is indeed a persistent challenge in Namibia. We have seen an increase in the incidences of intimate-partner violence, sexual violence and femicide against women and girls. ♡Something must be done or we'll #ShutItAllDown !!

Source: Data extracted from Twitter (2022)

Table 2.
A sample of cleaned and Tokenized #ShutItAllDown Tweets

'They', 'are', 'still', 'destroying', 'my', 'life', 'right', 'now', 'and', 'you', 'STILL', 'haven't', 'bothered', 'to', 'shutitalldown', 'Dont', 'get', 'lost', 'lets', 'show', 'up', 'in', 'numbers', 'ShutItAllDown', 'TW', 'Rape', 'the', 'crime', 'typically', 'committed', 'by', 'a', 'man', 'forcing', 'another', 'person', 'to', 'have', 'sexual', 'intercourse', 'with', 'the', 'offender', 'against', 'their', 'willnnShutItAllDown', 'SGBV', 'A', 'large', 'percentage', 'of', 'women', 'and', 'girls', 'are', 'more', 'likely', 'to', 'experience', 'domestic', 'violenceIntimate', 'partner', 'violence', 'Sexual', 'harassment', 'Sexual', 'violence', 'Stalking', 'and', 'violence', 'from', 'men', 'in', 'Namibia', 'ShutItAllDown', 'Sexual', 'and', 'Gender', 'Based', 'Violence', 'SGBV', 'is', 'indeed', 'a', 'persistent', 'challenge', 'in', 'Namibia', 'We', 'have', 'seen', 'an', 'increase', 'in', 'the', 'incidences', 'of', 'intimatepartner', 'violence', 'sexual', 'violence', 'and', 'femicide', 'against', 'women', 'and', 'girls', 'Something', 'must', 'be', 'done', 'or', 'well', 'ShutItAllDown'
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Source: Data extracted from Twitter, tokenized (2022)

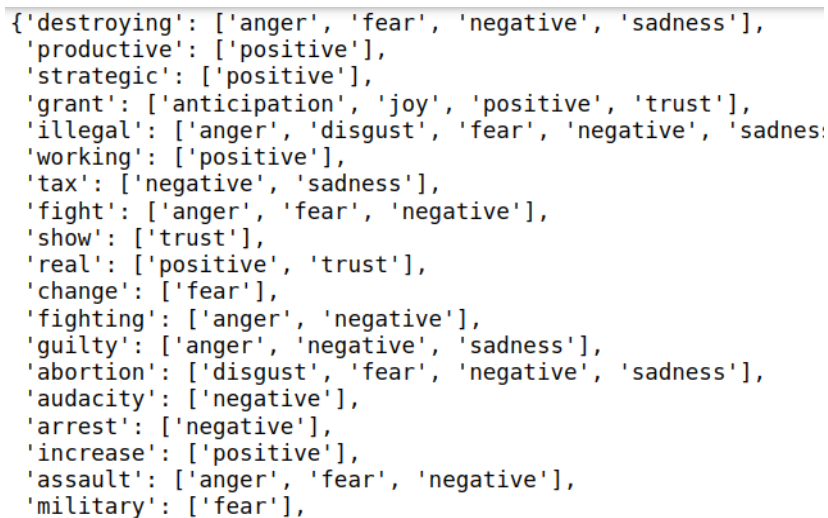


Figure 1.
A sample of the affect dictionary of the #ShutItAllDown social protest
Source: Data extracted from Twitter, NRCLexicon's affect dictionary (2022)

Sentiment analysis, commonly referred to as opinion mining, uses text analytics and natural language processing to ascertain a person's feelings toward a certain subject. The emotional analysis was carried out using NRCLexicon. The NRCLexicon Python package measures the sentiment and emotion of a given text. The library comprises around 27,000 words and is based on the NRC affect lexicon and the NLTK library's WordNet synonym sets. The main benefit of using NRCLexicon is that it is much easier to comprehend, and the library measures the emotional effects of words and categorizes them into eight primary emotions (anticipation, anger, fear, disgust, joy, surprise, sadness, and trust) and two sentiments (negative and positive) (Mohammad & Turney 2013). The NRCLexicon offers a number of techniques for categorizing emotion in text. The `affect_dict` returns the affect dictionary of the given text. A sample of the affect dictionary of the #ShutItAllDown social protest is given in Figure 1.

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The NRCLexicon ‘s raw_emotion scores method returns the emotional score of emotions in a given text. The distribution of the emotional score of the #ShutItAllDown social protest is given in Figure 2.

```
{'anger': 11726,  
'fear': 11898,  
'negative': 13446,  
'sadness': 4909,  
'positive': 10402,  
'anticipation': 6436,  
'joy': 6697,  
'trust': 4288,  
'disgust': 4894,  
'surprise': 3503}
```

Figure 2.

The distribution of the emotional score of the #ShutItAllDown social protest
Source: Data extracted from Twitter, NRCLexicon ‘s raw_emotion scores (2022)

The NRCLexicon’s affect_frequencies method returns the frequency distribution of emotions in a given text. The distribution of the affect frequencies of the #ShutItAllDown social protest is given in Figure 3.

```
: {'fear': 0.15233375156838144,  
'anger': 0.1501298491793204,  
'anticip': 0.0,  
'trust': 0.05490541059585692,  
'surprise': 0.04481827260389727,  
'positive': 0.13318848744014544,  
'negative': 0.17215890968683584,  
'sadness': 0.06285089493764884,  
'disgust': 0.06266075333521112,  
'joy': 0.0857438993163137,  
'anticipation': 0.082409771336389}
```

Figure 3.

The distribution of the affect frequencies of the #ShutItAllDown social protest
Source: Data extracted from Twitter, NRCLexicon’s affect_frequencies (2022)

The NRCLexicon’s affect_frequencies method was employed to measure the prevalent emotions in each of the three phases (trigger event phase, protest phase, and government response and reforms phase) of the #ShutItAllDown social protest as seen in in Figure 4(a)-(c). Figure 5 depicts the emotional transitions across the three phases of the #ShutItAllDown social protest. A sentimental analysis to investigate how positive and negative emotions change across various phases of the #ShutItAllDown social protest will reveal the prevalence of positive and negative emotions as they differ systematically between the different phases of the protest.

Results and Discussion

The study objectives have been explained along with several previous study approaches in accordance with the topic of studies relating to social protests. The following discussion focuses on two main things; The #ShutItAllDown social protest and its impact on government policy and the #ShutItAllDown social protest on Twitter.

The #ShutItAllDown social protest and its impact on government policy

In early October 2020, hundreds of Namibian youths, predominantly teenage girls, and women, marched through the streets of Windhoek, Namibia’s capital, and other Namibian cities to protest the high prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence. Their actions were triggered by the horrific murder of Shannon Wasserfall. Wasserfall, a 22-year-old mother, went missing on April 10, 2020. Her disappearance was attributed to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). SGBV is described as

physical, social, or sexual abuse perpetrated against a person, based on their gender roles and societal expectations. It is rooted in structural power imbalances between men and women. SGBV includes sexual abuse, harassment, exploitation, forced marriage, gender discrimination, and female genital mutilation (Shabrina et al. 2018).

Wasserfall's disappearance and the urgent appeals of her family, activists, and community went viral on social media. Her purported disappearance swiftly gained public attention, attracting the attention of the First Lady of Namibia, Monica Geingos. In her tweet, she stated that "As an office, we are dedicating our commitment to this cause and have met with the lead investigation team on the case" (Shikongo 2020).

Similarly, Wasserfall's mother pleaded with whoever took her daughter to return her safely. "If I have offended anyone, please forgive me," she begged. "Instead, take me and return my baby. I am willing to sacrifice my life. I implore you to return my daughter" (The Namibian 2020). The Namibian government also set aside N\$50,000 for anyone who can give useful information on Wasserfall's whereabouts (New Era Live 2020).

Six months after her disappearance, Shannon's father received an anonymous text message informing him of her probable location. Wasserfall's body was discovered in a shallow grave near Walvis Bay on October 6, 2020, after her father informed the police of an anonymous message about his daughter's whereabouts. Shannon's father said that:

"They were hopeful for Shannon's safe return and their expectations were shattered when her remains were discovered. Her siblings and the entire family are struggling to cope with her death. It is very difficult for them as a family since they had so many hopes and aspirations for Shannon, which have now been dashed." (Eveline de Klerk 2020).

The disappearance and ultimate discovery of Shannon Wasserfall's body sparked widespread national outrage, as Namibian youth were fed up with the ongoing SGBV culture and the police's lack of action. Several groups campaigning for women's rights, human rights, and LGBT rights, including Slutshame Movement, Voices for Choices and Rights Coalition, Out-Right Namibia, and Holistic Education for Sexual and Reproductive Rights, have openly expressed sympathy with Namibian youth. The Namibian youth also marched to several government offices, including the National Assembly, to hand over the official ShutItAllDown petitions. Protesters are requesting, among other things, the proclamation of a State of Emergency in relation to femicide and gender-based violence, the prioritization of a sex offender registry, the rapid reorganization and re-training of the police force, and a review of all instructors who have previously been charged with sexual assault or rape (African Feminism 2020).

Shannon's disappearance initially generated the #BringShannonHome hashtag, and subsequently, the #ShutItAllDown demonstrations, which erupted after Wasserfall's body was discovered. During the #ShutItAllDown social protest, the sentiments of Namibian women were encapsulated in a placard that read: "Words cannot properly express how TERRIFIED I am to exist as a woman in NAMIBIA" (Ossenbrink 2020).

Similarly, Namibian writer and activist Martha Mukaiwa tweeted that, "You stay, you're abused. You leave, you get murdered. When you go to the police, they blame the victim, misplace case documents, or blame you for arriving too late. You protest, and law enforcement harasses or arrests you; We are tired" (Melber 2020).

In addition, the First Lady of Namibia, Monica Geingos, said:

"Gender violence was beginning to lose policy focus at the time of Wasserfall's murder. But it was one trigger too far for the young women who bore the brunt of this brutality. They took to the streets to protest. The protests were essential. Even if you disagree with their demands or how they presented their case, you must acknowledge that they brought SGBV back for discussion." (Sawhani 2021).

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The #ShutItAllDown social protest on October 8, 2020, was a call by the Namibian youth to end all forms of violence against women. Several protestors defined the #ShutItAllDown demonstration as a series of political actions aimed at addressing femicide, rape, and sexual abuse. The protestors said that, in addition to being shown on television, the #ShutItAllDown social protest would also be tweeted and Instagrammed (Ossenbrink 2020). They used the hashtag #ShutItAllDown on social media to raise awareness and inspire others. They also took to the streets to put pressure on the government to reform its policies. Namibian youth asked the government to proclaim a state of emergency in response to the SGBV.

In response to the demands of Namibian youth in the #ShutItAllDown social protest, the Namibian government issued an official statement on October 13, 2020, expressing its commitment to combat the SGBV epidemic. The Namibian government acknowledges the SGBV situation in the country as a serious national problem and has enacted legislation, policies, and action plans to address it. These include the SGBV Action Plan and Domestic Violence Act. The government also noted that Namibia is a signatory to international protocols and agreements aimed at promoting the protection and empowerment of women and children and had prioritized the implementation of these frameworks.

The Namibian government’s action plan includes aspects of law enforcement, crime prevention, and education. First, aspects of law enforcement: the government promised to establish a Sexual Offenders Register, Sexual, and GBV Offenses Courts, review sentencing rules for sex offenders, an expedition of current murder and sexual offences, review existing inmates in the correctional services system, and segregate known repeat-offenders, and revoke the bail of current trial awaiting people suspected of sex offences or murder. Second, crime prevention aspects: the government vowed to set up 24-hour armed patrols and prohibited the withdrawal of SGBV cases. It also vowed to increase the number of GBV Protection Units, improve the capabilities of forensic specialists and investigators, mandate that the GBV Protection Unit be operable 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and provide remote and mobile GBV Protection Units. Lastly, the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture will develop a curriculum and implement an SGBV prevention program to provide educators and students with the necessary skills, information, and attitudes; and all school policies will be reviewed in order to boost the fight against SGBV (Republic of Namibia 2020).

The Namibian President, Hage Geingob, also met with the SGBV activists, calling for solidarity in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence as well as urgency in establishing safer communities. The Namibian President stated that, “I would be wrong to assume that we are at war with one another; instead, we must work together to resolve this problem.” He underlined the need to address gender-based violence as a nation (McSweeney 2020). Namibian youths’ #ShutItAllDown social protest has drawn attention to a larger societal problem and advocates for cultural change as well as legislation that protects women and efficiently prosecutes perpetrators of violence.

The #ShutItAllDown social protest on Twitter

Social protests have been characterized as a form of political participation by citizens that influences government policies in a democratic setting. The right to protest is an essential component of democracy, serving as a platform for citizens to express their dissatisfaction with government institutions and policies (Neogi et al. 2021). In recent years, social media has created a platform for citizens to participate in public discourse and criticize government policies. Social media facilitates social protests by organizing and coordinating disgruntled individuals to act publicly, as well as providing information flows that lead protestors to believe they have a chance to influence policy reform through protests. Citizens’ reactions to their social and political environments have an emotional component and citizens’ participation in protest is fraught with emotion. Without emotions, protest is inconceivable: emotions energize, stimulate, and compel individuals to participate in social protests. Castells (2015) noted that both negative and positive emotions, such as anger and hope, are primary incentives for citizens’ participation in social protests. This is evident in the Twitter posts of the #ShutItAllDown social protest.

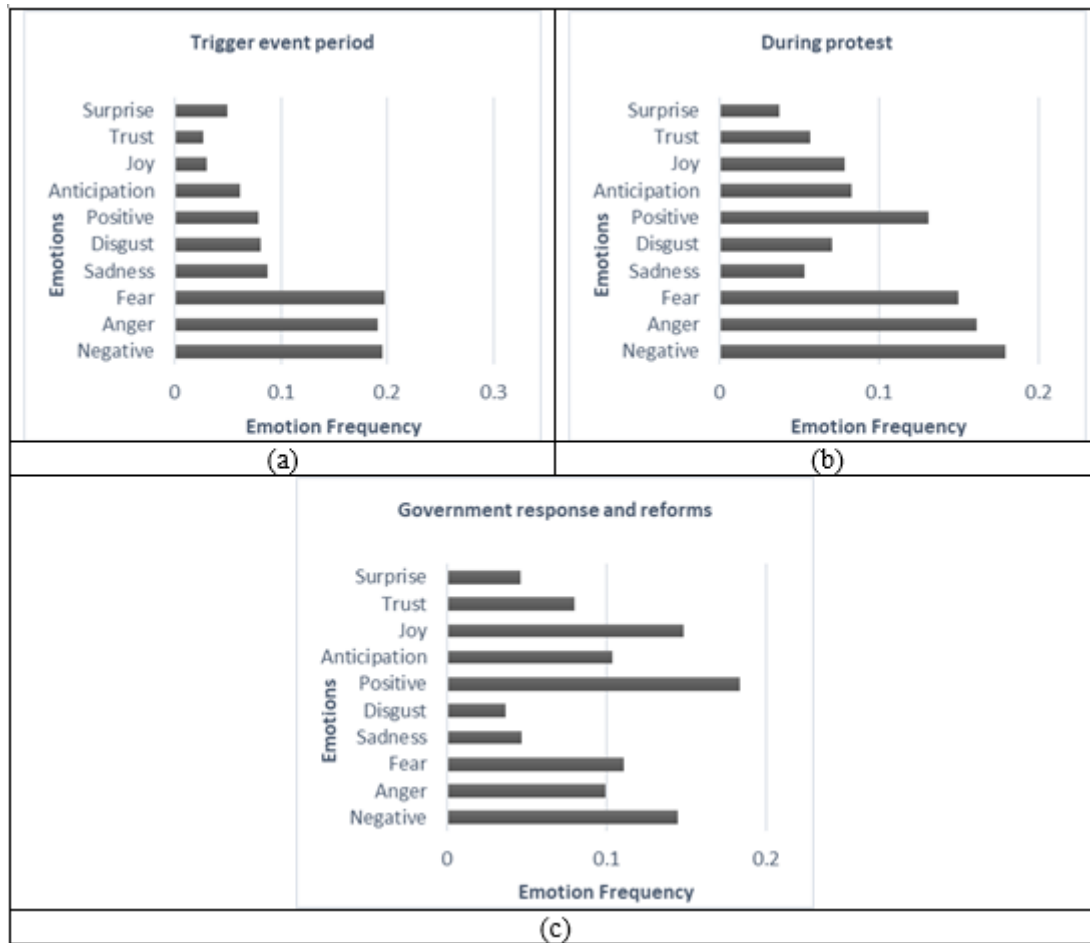


Figure 4(a) – (c).

Dominant emotions in the three phases of the #ShutItAllDown social protest

Source: Data extracted from Twitter, showing dominant emotions in the three phases of the protest (2022)

The disappearance of Shannon Wasserfall provoked enormous public outrage and fueled the #ShutItAllDown social protest, evoking both fear and anger. Fear and anger involved in protests are central factors that motivate and sustain the protest. It is evident from the findings of this study that both anger and fear are dominant emotions during the trigger event period. As shown in Figure 4(a), fear dominated the first phase (trigger event period), followed by anger, demonstrating that fear and anger motivated Namibian youth to participate in the #ShutItAllDown social protest. This is consistent with previous studies (Nassauer 2016, Jasper 2017), which revealed that fear and anger motivate protest behaviors. It can also be observed from Figure 5 that the emotional frequency of anger and fear was significantly high, indicating that anger and fear are reactions to a social environment that is perceived as threatening and manifests itself in the form of escape or protection. This is consistent with the findings of Sabucedo et al. (2017) and Van Troost et al. (2018) who found that anger and fear amplify existing motives; for example, fearful or angry individuals are more likely to engage in protests.

The discovery of Shannon Wasserfall’s body ignited long-held grievances and concerns, indicating that social protest is an expression of suppressed anger and grievances. People expressed their anger and frustration through protest. Heaney (2019) stated that discontent may move a group of individuals to participate in a protest even though they are not themselves victims of the injustice the protesters seek to alleviate. Perception of injustice by a group of individuals creates an enabling environment for fear and anger both of which are pivotal to many aspects of protests as they motivate participation, and this explains why Namibian youths joined the #ShutItAllDown social protest. Findings from this study also show that anger is the dominant emotion during the protest period. As shown in Figure 4(b), anger was dominant in the second phase (during the protest), demonstrating that anger was highly connected to

social protest participation. This is consistent with previous studies, which found that social protest is an expression of people’s anger, frustration, and grievances (Chan 2016, Bray et al. 2019). This indicates that the #ShutItAllDown social protest was catalyzed by the anger felt by Namibian youth during the trigger event.

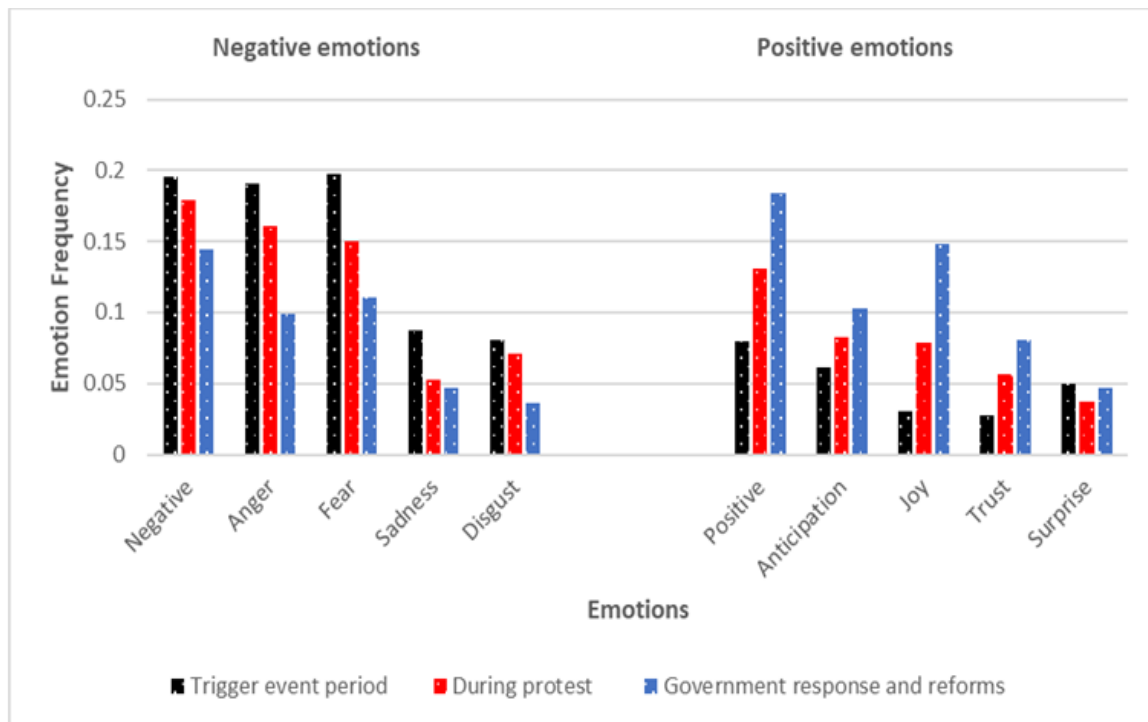


Figure 5.

Emotion transition through the three phases of the #ShutItAllDown social protest
 Source: Data extracted from Twitter. Emotion transition through the three phases of the protest (2022)

Human emotion is a tool that triggers the actions of individuals and groups to satisfy their pressing concerns and help meet situational challenges. Anger is an intrinsic human emotion that provides an impetus for individuals and groups to indulge in violence (Sabucedo et al. 2017). Negative emotions, especially anger, have been known to trigger protests when they are connected to the perception of injustice. However, the rise in positive emotions during the protest indicates that positive emotions also facilitate political protests. Anticipation and hope are potential political emotions through which people protest. According to Landmann & Rohmann (2020), positive emotions deal with the expectation that a desired phenomenon will occur. The expectation that the goal set will be met inspired hope, which encouraged participation in a protest. Thus, both anger and anticipation play an important motivating role in influencing Namibian youths’ participation in the #ShutItAllDown social protest.

Social protests are an essential component of a democratic society as it has the potential for government reactions and reforms. Participation in social protests enforces government reactions and reforms and government reactions and reforms emerging from protest activities indicate goal achievements. Goal achievement breeds joy and happiness. Findings from the study show that joy is the dominant emotion during government reactions and reforms. This can be observed as shown in Figure 4(c), that joy was the dominant emotion in the third phase (government response and reforms), indicating that goal achievement promotes both joy and happiness. This is consistent with previous studies (van Osch et al. 2016, Ding & Zhao 2020), which indicate that achieving goals often leads to feelings of satisfaction, joy, and happiness.

Figure 5 also shows that, in the third phase, positive emotions experienced a significant rise indicating that positive emotions are directly tied to achievement-related activities. Social protests are goal-oriented and are accompanied by successes and/or failures. Protesters experience joy and happiness in relation to the success of a protest (Tausch & Becker 2013). According to Ahmed et al. (2017), if a protest achieves

its stated goals, protesters will feel a sense of accomplishment and be thrilled, joyful, and hopeful. The announcement of the government's commitment to combating the epidemic of sexual and gender-based violence and femicide on October 13, 2020, was a response to the #ShutItAllDown social protest. This indicates that the goal of participating in the #ShutItAllDown social protest has been achieved. Aleman (2013) explained that changes in government policy can be a measurable outcome of protest activities. The success of any protest lies in its ability to achieve the goal of government reforms. An early study by Branch & Mampilly (2015) found a positive relationship between protests and government reforms, while Makhamadze & Fikade (2022) stated that social protests often resulted in major government reform. Thus, social protests are critical to the development of society as they play a crucial role in government reforms.

Overall, negative, and positive emotions co-occur throughout the three phases (trigger event phase, protest phase, and government response and reforms phase). Negative emotions are prevalent in the first and second phases, indicating that fear and anger are the primary negative emotions people are most likely to feel during trigger events and during a protest. However, positive emotions became dominant in the third phase, indicating that joy and anticipation are the primary positive emotions most people are likely to feel when their goal has been achieved. The presence of both positive and negative emotions throughout the three phases demonstrates that all social actions are accompanied by emotions that provide both motivation and goals (Jasper 2018). Different emotions shape citizens' behavior in different ways. When a situation appears hopeless, negative emotions such as fear, anger, and sadness inspire citizens to take action, leading to social protests, whereas positive emotions such as enthusiasm, hope, and pride motivate citizens to take action, leading to goal achievement. Consequently, both negative and positive emotions generate emotional channels for social protests, particularly when legitimate avenues for reform within a democratic system are open.

Conclusion

The emotions expressed on social media for policy change have been studied using the #ShutItAllDown social protest in Namibia. The emotions expressed on Twitter were analyzed by modifying the protest phases to include the government response and reform period. This study further studied the prevalence of positive and negative emotions as they differed systematically between the different phases of the #ShutItAllDown social protest. During the protest, Namibian youth experienced emotions in relation to their political and social context. The discovery of Shannon Wasserfall's body evoked fear and anger, which set the grievances around which Namibian youth mobilized on social media. Fear and anger experienced by Namibian youths explain why they joined the #ShutItAllDown social protest.

The #ShutItAllDown social protest was conceived as a strategy utilized by Namibian youth to increase their bargaining ability and seek long-term solutions to their grievances. The #ShutItAllDown social protests have brought anxiety and hope to Namibia's political landscape and provided an opportunity for policy change that enforces government reactions and reform. The Namibian government's reactions and reforms emerging from the #ShutItAllDown social protest indicate goal achievement. Goal achievement, experienced by Namibian youth, brings joy and happiness. Thus, both positive and negative emotions expressed on Twitter played an important motivating role in influencing Namibian youth participation in the #ShutItAllDown social protest.

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