

***Performing Microcelebrity:
Analysing Kairos, Modes, and Practices in the Era of Breaking of World Record in Ghana***

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Abstract

Ghana was shaken when Afua Asantewaa Aduonum attempted to break the Guinness world record for the longest singing marathon by an individual dubbed the “sing-a-thon”. Drawing inspiration from Hilda Basse in Nigeria who broke the world record for the longest cooking marathon by an individual dubbed “cook-a-thon” which lasted only for a while. Ghanaian social mediaspace sprang into a spiral of a ripple effect to hold the record-breaking event as it draws others to do the unimaginable to attain break a world record. In this essay, I seek to understand how attempters of the Guinness world record in Ghana are performing micro-celebrity practices by deploying Kairos and modes of credibility through Guinness world-breaking events to advance their agenda of attaining a microcelebrity status. I argue these world-breaking events aid in manufacturing creative practices and modes for attaining micro-celebrity status in Ghana. I address these questions; In what ways does the practice of breaking world records enact micro-celebrityness? how do the Kairos and modes influence the making of micro-celebrities in Ghana? I focus on how Guinness World Record events held in Ghana produce microcelebrities through mediatization. Using rhetorical analysis, I employ Afua Asantewaa’s Aduonum sing-a-thon (longest singing marathon by an individual) as a case study. I conduct a microscopic analysis of her discourse from her TikTok account leading to the Guinness world-breaking event. This paper contributes to existing research on microcelebrity production and labor, especially in the Ghanaian context, and provides a nuance to understanding microcelebrity practices and their participatory nature.

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Introduction

The Ghanaian social media space was enthused by Hilda Baci's cooking marathon dubbed "cook-a-thon" a world-record event that broke the internet with overwhelming support from Africans (Stewart, 2023). This inspired a wave of record-breaking attempts across Africa, as countries sought to make their mark on the world stage. Ghana yearned for a hero to elevate its global standing. Afua Asantewaa Aduom took to her TikTok page to announce her Guinness World Record event as she sought to break the world record for the longest singing marathon by an individual dubbed the "sing-a-thon" (Asantewaa, 2023: TikTok). Afua Asantewaa an event entrepreneur proclaimed her Guinness World Record attempt as a medium to promote Ghanaian-ness. Following this event, traditional media in Ghana gave significant attention to world record attempts, elevating them to a national discussion. In this essay, I examine how Afua Asantewaa's Guinness World-Breaking Record (hereafter GWR) event in Ghana constitutes performing micro-celebrity-ness by deploying kairos, modes, and creative practices for breaking world records. I argue that these world-breaking events aid in manufacturing creative practices and modes for attaining micro-celebrity status in Ghana. I address these questions: in what ways does the practice of breaking world records enact micro-celebrity? how do the kairos and modes influence the making of micro-celebrities in Ghana? I focus on how Guinness World Record events held in Ghana produce microcelebrities through mediatization.

Methodology

I deploy rhetorical analysis to understand how Afua Asantewaa's utilizes kairos, and modes and manufactures practices for microcelebrity. Applying rhetorical analysis enables the researcher to draw out the "universal discourse" (Discenna et al., 2017) that takes into consideration every facet of the situation which provides a nuanced approach to understanding the text. Winton (2013) argues that rhetorical analysis provides a critical examination of text that identifies its strengths and biases to advance access to the circulation of ideas, values, and beliefs that shape diverse discourse. Analyzing Asantewaa's discourse and promotional campaign preceding the GWR event implies drawing the connection between her persona, microcelebrities and usage of Tiktok offers a rich critical reading that exhibits the rich relationship in the text, which makes us understand the presence, meaning, and intricacies of a text. Exposing its implication for broader discourses that help build and define communities. (Woo et al., 2019). First, I discuss the Guinness World Record and its significance for creative industries. I then delve into assessing how kairos, modes, and practices were deployed by Afua Asantewaa and their implications for microcelebrity culture in Ghana. I ultimately conduct a microscopic analysis of her discourse from her TikTok account leading to the Guinness world-breaking event.

Of Setting and Breaking Records: The Story of Guinness World Records

The GWR is an organization set out to push everyday people to do the unimaginable. The organization started in 1955 with its first published records (Guinness World Record, 2024). GWR was started by Sir Hugh Beaver and his twin brothers Norris and Ross McWhirter because they could not fact-check information in their time. Subsequently, the brothers then published a book of record every year in Britain as a reference book for individuals who set or broke a record. In 1999, the name of the book was changed from Guinness World Record to The Guinness Book of Records and produced in the United States. The book features

individuals and animals who have accomplished remarkable feats in the natural world (Guinness World Record, 2024).

GWR is published internationally in 23 languages, currently in its 69th publication, and maintains over 53,000 records in its database (Guinness World Record, 2024). Guinness World Record has become the primary international source for cataloguing and verification of a huge number of records. It has become an authenticator for setting and breaking records. To ensure credibility and fairness, it deems that participants follow their guidelines and protocols to be considered eligible. GWR also owns a television station, merchandise, an educator's program, a kids' section for the Guinness World Record, and museums. With the vision of inspiring wonder and documenting the incredible, GWR is not stopping any time soon.

Ghana is not new to the Guinness World Record. Several individuals and organizations have set or broken GWR records. Ghana entered the books of GWR in 1980 and 1991 when Ferdie Ato Adobe set the record for running 100 meters backward in 13.7 and 12.1 seconds respectively. (Okyere, 2024). Since then, Ghanaians have continued to appear in the GWR achieving incredible milestones. The last time a Ghanaian set a record was in 2015. However, none of the previous record holders have achieved the microcelebrity status of Afua Asantewaa. How did she gain so much attention?

On 11th May 2023, Hilda Baci, a Nigerian chef set out to break the GWR or the longest cooking marathon done by an individual (Throne, 2023). She was awarded the world record on the 15th of May 2023 after cooking for 87 hours and 50 minutes. Hilda Baci dubbed her cooking marathon a "cook-a-thon" which saw the presence of a lot of celebrities and political figures from Nigeria (Daramola, 2024). With various hashtags such as #Hildabacicookathon, and #GoHildaGo¹ raced across social network sites to support her effort. Hilda Baci singlehandedly inspired a lot of Africans to set or break a record. Afua Asantewaa attributed her inspiration to break the record to Hilda Baci's strength and determination. Given that Ghana and Nigeria have a cultural banter,² Afua Asantewaa's sing-a-thon provides the right time for Ghana's image to be enhanced through the GWR. Thus, GWR offered an opportunity for these countries to exhibit their incredible talents which would lead to their recognition in their respective countries, in the continent, and across the world.

Kairos

Kairos is traditionally described as the opportune moment characterized by "the right time and due measure" (Thompson, 2000, p. 75). Wilson (1981) defines kairos in three ways: as a due measure, as an opportunity, and as spatial or tactical/temporal. He categorizes kairos as multifaceted that is "kairos as due measurement", "kairos as an opportunity", and "kairos as spatial and tactical or temporal". Rooted in Aristotelian and Isocratean traditions, kairos emphasizes seizing timely opportunities. Smith (1969) elaborates that kairos involves a special temporal position crucial for historical action and inquiry, highlighting its relevance to understanding events' significance and purpose within specific temporal sequences.

¹ The Twitter trends #Hildabacicookathon and #GoHildaGo circulated on African Twitter to encourage Hilda Baci during her Guinness World Record Event. This trend circulated from May 12th -15th 2023.

² Ghana and Nigeria have been battling with geocultural diplomacy since the 19th century. These cultural banterers focus on cultural supremacy and are conducted cordially online. Examples of these banterers include the famous jollof wars, football, and music.

Kairos denotes the optimal moment for events to unfold or actions to be taken, akin to the English concept of "timing." However, it also extends beyond mere timing to encompass spatial dimensions (Crowley & Hawhee, 2002). This implies that critical moments and opportunities are not only temporally defined but also influenced by the specific contexts or environments in which they occur. Just as timing is critical, so too is the physical or social space where decisions or actions transpire. Unlike *chronos*, which measures time directly, *kairos* focuses on linear windows of opportunity that require recognition and decisive action (Smith, 1969; Crowley & Hawhee, 2002; Simile, 2022).

For rhetoric, *kairos* encourages rhetors not to seek certainty before composing but rather to embrace writing and speaking as exploratory processes that engage with the nuances of timing, place, and community. *Kairos* in rhetoric emphasizes the importance of understanding an issue's relevance to its temporal and spatial contexts (Simile, 2022). Rhetors must be prepared to recognize and respond to *kairotic* moments, which demand awareness of community perspectives and the dynamic nature of arguments over time.

Kairos, then, combines the temporal and spatial dimensions, highlighting the fact that taking advantage of the perfect opportunity requires not only the proper timing and strategy but also the right location and context for actions or decisions. This all-encompassing understanding of *kairos* encourages contemplation on the relationship between time, place, and action, increasing its relevance in rhetoric, ethics, and decision-making (Crowley & Hawhee, 2002).

I argue that most celebrities and microcelebrities are born out of *kairos*. From YouTube to Twitter, individuals have grown into microcelebrities due to their ability to harness the opportunities and environment in which they find themselves. For example, Khaby Lame became a TikTok sensation and rose to fame during the pandemic by simply posting comedy skits and making them affable while not speaking (Binoo, 2024). Lame appeared on the app at a time when people needed humor as a distraction during the pandemic: his TikTok videos appeared at the right time for the right audience. Senft (2008) coined the term microcelebrity and defines microcelebrity as a burgeoning online trend wherein people attempt to gain popularity by employing digital media technologies - videos, blogs, social media, etc". Microcelebrity is defined as a set of practices wherein a user's audience is viewed as a fan base with whom they constantly engage to ensure continued popularity (e.g., Abidin, 2014; Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2008). Hence, it takes specific planning and management to display oneself for consumption. Furthermore, Abidin (2014) argues that microcelebrity is a process that evolves to capture structures, practices, and platforms that enable celebrification. She indicates that in contemporary times microcelebrities exist in two forms: systematic and diffuse (Mavroudis & Milne, 2016; Abidin, 2015b). Systematic micro-celebrities are strategic and lean towards branding themselves for marketability, however, diffuse microcelebrities typically have a less structured approach and are followed by audiences consistently, often gaining popularity before achieving micro-celebrity status. Thus, the taxonomy of microcelebrities points to the continuous use of digital tools for the attention economy which leads to their visibility and profitability (Gamon, 1994; Lanham, 1997; Mavroudis & Milne, 2016). By harnessing likes, shares, and comments on social network platforms, becoming a microcelebrity has become the norm for living which is produced through *kairos* as it facilitates the process of harvesting fans and enacting an attention economy.

To demonstrate how attention to *kairos* can guide the analysis of an issue, I look at how Afua Asantemanwaa sing-a-thon constitutes *kairos*. Before Asantewaa's world-breaking announcement in 2023, no Ghanaian had attempted a GWR *event*, given that a Nigerian had

undertaken such an arduous task. Hilda Baci, a Nigerian chef, cooked for 93 hours and 11 minutes while distributing her meals to the less privileged in Nigeria. Hilda Baci was officially recognized by GWR on June 13, 2023, and as she says, “I cooked for 100 hours to put Nigeria on the map” (BBC, 2023). Six months after Hilda Baci was officially endorsed by GWR, Afua Asantewaa was the awaited heroine to put Ghana on the map by announcing her sing-a-thon on her TikTok page. Having that no Ghanaian had attempted the GWR after Baci’s attempt, she painstakingly educated Ghanaians about the Guinness record processes. This built her ethos which is a desired quality in the eyes of the everyday Ghanaian. She asserts, “even if I want to give up on myself at this point I can’t because the support is too much. I thank all other African countries for reaching out and supporting me, but this is not about me, it’s about Ghana it’s a win for Ghana” (Mensah, 2023).

Her decision to host the event in December during the Christmas festive season was also very strategic. In Ghana, Christmas festivities create an atmosphere of joy, and an abundance of events where people enjoy themselves thus the GWR became a concert instead of a GWR event. The GWR event was held from the 24th-27th of December. With such timing, she was able to attract the everyday Ghanaian who had free time during the December period to support her mission (Asantewaa, 2023). She also changed her venue to a spacious area indicating her ability to host a lot of people. An invitation to the Ghanaian to show up and turn up (Thiga, 2022).

Furthermore, her GWR event clashed with the Creative Arts Agency Ghana’s “Play Ghana” campaign which advocated for playing seventy percent of Ghanaian music on traditional media and occasions (GhanaWeb, 2023). According to Afua Asantewaa, her aim for the GWR event was to sing and advocate for authentic Ghanaian music which was phasing out in Ghanaian society. In this way her effort was helping save the Ghanaian industry, she asserted “This is a fine opportunity to sell amazing Ghanaian music to the world” (Nairaland, 2023). This provided an allyship with the national agenda of promoting Ghanaian authentic music and provided her with governmental support hence a greater visibility and reach. Afua Asantewaa’s GWR then became the face of the “Play Ghana campaign”. Thus, she enjoyed support from the government and the creative art industry in Ghana helping her ascend to celebrification.

With a combination of these factors, Asantewaa utilized the opportune moment and built her credibility to break the world record. Using her TikTok page, ethos, and drawing in from the Ghana and Nigerian cultural banter she sparked a flame for microcelebrity at the right time for the yearning audience.

Modes

Mavroudis theorizes fame labor as the strategies and experiences that afford people visibility labor leading to microcelebrity and non-microcelebrity (Mavroudis, 2018). Hence, microcelebrities need deliberate self-curation to produce a sense of self online which works through social network sites. Microcelebrity and non-microcelebrity utilize several media platforms to project their labor. I define modes as the use of media to project the self toward celebrification. (Abdin, 2015; Mavroudis & Milne, 2016; Mavroudis, 2018) Thus, microcelebrity performs their labor through several modes that facilitate their agency as it draws in followership and through several techniques and socio-political frames enhance their authenticity and likeability (Khamis & Welling, 2017). Here, microcelebrities’ choice of

social network sites produces systems or procedures through which others can become like them and provide nuanced ways of deploying social network sites to attain microcelebrity.

Afua Asantewaa primarily used her TikTok account to promote her Guinness World Record event. TikTok as a platform offered her the opportunity to reach everyday Ghanaians. According to Statistica (2023), TikTok is the third preferred social app in Ghana. Subsequently, Afua Asantewaa announced her eligibility to undergo the GWR event by showing her acceptance email on TikTok (Asantewaa, 2023). This helped her achieve credibility as she started her GWR event by being honest and factual, hence increasing her authenticity. Deploying evidence as ethos sent a message of confidence and assertiveness exhibiting her eruditeness of the Ghanaian populace. According to Gibbs (1978), when individuals build trust in a group it increases their functionality and creates a space for dialogue and solutions. Similarly, Faltesek et al, (2023) conclude that TikTok is growing in popularity because of its flow -the ability to switch to a different account and the abundance of different videos which makes it a great site for “broadcasting talent”. Hence TikTok is the new television because it continuously provides on-demand cultural and technical forms of media flow. TikTok also uses vernacular discourse which makes it one of the preferred short-form video apps.

Afua Asantewaa also uses her persona as a mode. Afua Asantewaa has been active in media and event planning in Ghana, albeit behind the scenes. She has been involved in two prestigious pageantries: inner of Miss Tourism Ghana and second runner-up for Ghana’s Most Beautiful. She capitalized on her pageant success by creating her pageantries: Miss Teen Ghana and Miss Kidi Ghana. She also owns a media production company and three award schemes: Ghana Outstanding Women Awards, Africa Outstanding Women Awards, and a modeling agency, which gained her access to the media (GhanaWeb, 2023). Leff and Utley (2004) argue that the persona of the rhetor adds to their persuasion as their character is composed of “exigencies, constraints, others, and self”. Through her affiliation with the media and pageantry, she produced an online self on TikTok. Consequently, Bhandari and Bino (2022) argue that TikTok offers the everyday person a mode of self-making and self-representation through TikTok features such as the algorithm of a networked self. This is why TikTok is the easiest app to use and to become a microcelebrity on, especially in comparison to Facebook and Instagram. Self-making on TikTok differs from other social network sites through the spread of the algorithmized self.

Afua Asantewaa’s association with the traditional media afforded her acceptance. Her first interview was with Peace FM a very popular media station in Ghana that popularized her GWR event nationally. Thereafter, she paraded across all national television and radio stations explaining the rudiments for attaining a GWR (Asantewaa, 2023). Because of the cultural plurality of Ghanaian society, she had to be interviewed on multiple and diverse media stations which her allowed to reach all the people of Ghana in their various local dialects. Through these interviews, she airs her mission for the GWR and its relevance to the Ghanaian event. In her press conference, she said “I am fully prepared and ready. I have been preparing since my submission. The love shown me urges me more but equally makes me realize that I need to do this regardless of the challenge ahead” (GhanaWeb, 2023). Afua Asantewaa directed the GWR event as a Ghanaian mandate; one that required all citizens to participate to exhibit a sense of patriotism.

Again, Afua Asantewaa’s portrayal of hyper-femininity cemented her authenticity. Murnen and Byrne (1991) define hyperfemininity as an exaggerated commitment to traditional

feminine gender roles in the context of heterosexual relationships. Here, Afua Asantewaa adapts the Ghanaian values of femininity and portrays such through her interviews, fashion sense, and family-centeredness on her TikTok page (Asantewaa, 2023). These posts provided a sense of Ghanaian values which is an enshrined statue of a married Ghanaian woman thus increasing her likeability and believability for the audience. Furthermore, Asantewaa made several references to Hilda Baci's event since it equipped her with the foundation to attempt her own GWR event: drawing inspiration from Hilda Baci. As she puts it:

"I do not like being comfortable. When I saw Hilda's attempt, I was like wow, it is an empowerment bit from her end regardless of the result. She empowered me and inspired me." (3news, 2023)

This enacted the notion of "*women supporting women*,"³ constituting performative blessing and support from Baci, which christened the Ghana-Nigeria frenemy relationship. However, Afua Asantewaa had not interacted with Hilda Baci. Her use of Ghanaian fashion and style illustrated her motherliness making her the perfect role model for attempting the GWR event.

Afua Asantewaa employed promotional material in advancing her GWR event. Promotional materials are printed, written, or graphic items used to advertise and promote a business, product, or service. Afua Asantewaa used her TikTok account, to push her promotional materials such as countdowns to the event, her images in Ghanaian traditional clothing captioned inspirational quotes, Bible scriptures, Ghana music as TikTok soundbites and T-shirts. (Asantewaa, 2023). These promotional materials helped her to engage with the audience while portraying her ethos to achieve her mission. She posted these promotional materials daily further highlighting her preparedness (Asantewaa, 2023). In the two press conferences, she uses her promotional material as an opportunity to engage the media in the possible ways they can help make the GWR event a successful one by giving them the details of the training she's doing to break the record (Joynews, 2023). She used the press conferences to show her versatility and tenacity as a woman to accomplish such an arduous task. As she asserts "I am ready for the challenge and call on all Ghanaians to come on board to support. This is just not for me but the country as a whole" (Frimpong, 2023).

Afua Asantewaa deployed a strategic campaign for her GWR event by utilizing her persona and TikTok tactically. Although she was on most social networks she did not engage in cross-platform branding but stuck to using TikTok to enhance her visibility and likeability through her promotional materials. Afua Asantewaa deployed hyper-femininity to secure her image as the traditional woman who can do it all and yet be successful (Asantewaa, 2023).

Practices

Crystal Abidin (2016) defines visibility labor as "the work enacted to flexibly demonstrate gradients of self-conspicuousness in digital or physical spaces depending on intention or circumstance for favorable ends "Fame labor" identifies the emotional work that cannot be easily observed or quantified by analytic software (Mavourdis, 2018). It's a special kind of unseen work connected to the "feeling of the rules" of microcelebrity culture. Therefore, "fame labor" refers to the unseen, emotional labor that both microcelebrities and nonmicrocelebrities perform (Mavourdis, 2018). This visibility labor becomes a creative

³ "Women supporting women" was a Twitter trend on African Twitter which sort of encouraged 21st-century African women to advocate for each other instead of doing the opposite.

process that is then copied or adapted by others, hence enacting a practice. Duffy et al (2021) define “platform practices as the strategies, routines, experiences, and expressions of creativity, labor, and citizenship that shape cultural production through platforms”. Microcelebrity practices are changing constantly and adapting to kairós to be contemporary. In this vein, Goffman (1956) identifies the presentation of the self as a performance made to impress the audience who then believe in the authenticity of the persona (Murphy, 2003), and thus a social identity is constructed as the standard that is opened to the audience for adoption or adaptation.

In the case of Afua Asantewaa’s sing-a-thon event, she provides nuances to microcelebrity practice in Ghana. Social network sites have and are still producing several microcelebrities. The GWR event led to manufacturing microcelebrities practices by attempting the GWR. Thus, it is not surprising that many Ghanaians trooped into GWR to set or break a record. This also indicates that Ghanaian society has many individuals who would want to become microcelebrities. As of the writing of this paper, someone is attempting to break the record for the longest dancing marathon in Ghana. Afua Asantewaa has also shown how TikTok can be used to achieve microcelebrities – growing from a social space into a physical space.

She set the pace on how to successfully organize GWR events in Ghana. Firstly, she exhibited her credibility by showing evidence of eligibility to compete and engage the everyday Ghanaian by using Ghanaian music and familiar promotional strategies of the audience. Her project sought to elevate Ghana’s music industry -fitting her mission into the broader national discourse on promoting Ghanaian music. She was readily available to all media houses in Ghana including newspapers- subjecting herself to the media for questioning and promotion. Her knowledge of GWR and ethos created believability and likeability for her image. Her partnership with the Government through the Ministry of Tourism and Art and Culture indicated the national support and a mantle bestowed on her to deliver national unity and pride (JoyNews, 2023).

Afua Asantewaa initially was to hold the *sing-a-thon* in a small venue, but the event was moved to a bigger venue where citizens could freely engage and participate in the event. Additionally, inviting the Ghanaian populace to be present (JoyNews, 2023). This differs from Hilda Baci event, whose venue was smaller and could not hold a large audience. All media houses in Ghana also televised her GWR event with discussions on the impact of the GWR event on Ghana’s image and tourism prospects. After her announcement to attempt GWR’s longest singing marathon, she changes her social media name to “afuaasantewaasingathon” for easy identification and commodification of her online self-branding (Asantewaa, 2023). Interestingly, although she had cross-platform recognition such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube before her sing-a-thon event, she deployed only TikTok for her promotional campaign.

Afua Asantewaa through her GWR event manufactured all these new practices for achieving micro-celebrity through the GWR event in Ghana. Being the pacesetter, she provided the guideline for achieving microcelebrity-ness in Ghana. On this account, it is not surprising that throngs of attempters in Ghana have followed a similar path.

Conclusion

In this essay, I argue these world-breaking events aid in manufacturing creative practices and modes for attaining micro-celebrity status in Ghana. Afua Asantewaa’s sing-a-thon GWR

event provides an avenue for understanding the Ghanaian microcelebrity culture which is very dependent on kairos. Indicating how the everyday Ghanaian takes advantage of an opportune event to promote their self-image owing to the advantages that an online identity provides for identity management (Papacharissi, 2011). GWR events and associated events also serve as a field to understand the internet culture of fandom and the utilization of TikTok as a platform for (re)constructing and deconstructing performance. Future research must conceptualize the GWR event and its connection to platform labor, identity management, and nationalism as its fame continues to grow stronger.

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