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SOCIAL MEDIA AND YOUTH MOBILISATION DURING THE END SARS PROTEST

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Abstract

Social media has become a significant medium of communication for youth mobilisation in Nigeria. It gives a platform for young people to interact, share knowledge, and organise around social and political issues. This research investigated the role of social media in youth mobilisation in Nigeria. It focused on how young people have utilised social media to effect social and political change. The study was hinged on the technological determinism theory which was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1964. The paper adopted the quantitative research approach, employing the use of questionnaire, and a case study of the ENDSARS social campaign. The study highlighted the ways in which social media has enabled young people to challenge and contest established power structures and to amplify their voices in public discourse. The study also identified some of the challenges and risks associated with social media mobilisation, such as network problems, threat to personal safety, unprofessional and unethical conduct, to mention few. Overall, the paper established that, social media has emerged as a powerful tool for youth mobilisation in Nigeria, providing a platform for the young to connect, organise and demand change. In conclusion, the paper recommended that social media should be used with caution, and that the youths must be mindful of the dangers and challenges associated with online activism.

Keywords: Social media campaign, social change, youth mobilisation, social media, EndSARS

Introduction

Every piece of media content seeks to influence the attitudes and actions of its intended audience. It is therefore expedient for media professionals to comprehend the psychographic and demographic facts of the target population. In other words, they must understand the prevalent culture of the population and the most effective and compelling method for influencing attitude.

The introduction of the internet in the 1990s brought about significant changes in the realm of communication. Internet has firmly established itself in the lives of people today. It is challenging to

visualise a contemporary man who does not check for changes on social media platforms and read the news at least once every day. Modern existence necessitates that we keep in touch and are current on recent global events.

The social media is a collection of information technologies that enhance communication and networking. Social media is essentially internet-based platforms for human-to-human information sharing and discussion. Oestreicher-Singer and Zalmanson (2013), opine that social media is a categorisation of websites according to user engagement and consumer content. Among these are social networking sites such as X, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp that are oriented on user engagement and practises that people use to exchange thoughts, insights, experiences, and viewpoints (Kapoor, 2017).

Despite its best efforts, mainstream media has not yet completely recognised the power that social media has to provide the people a voice. People will have more flexibility to use social media whenever and wherever they choose as internet access spreads and information and communication technology advances. This has been used to generate social unrest, which is frequently the consequence of young mobilisation via social media platforms. The internet protest against police violence perpetrated by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) is a prime example of this. In recent years, young Nigerians have intensified online and offline protests against the police's excessive violence (Obayi et al., 2024). The protestors' main demand was that President Muhammadu Buhari's administration should disband the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), an infamous "special" police unit that was supposedly established to prevent armed robberies but was more known for its flagrant extortion and, occasionally, extrajudicial killings (Ige, 2020).

The transition of the anti-SARS rallies from internet tags to street demonstrations marked a turning moment for a generation of politically informed young Nigerians. Integral to the ENDSARS protests was the seamless shift across online and offline advocacy. Youths have organised and mobilised waves of protests in various regions of the country, mostly via the use of Twitter and WhatsApp, using relatively simple formulas (Ikegbunam, 2020). For instance, when dozens of individuals gather at a location to stage protests, they tweet their location and want "reinforcements." In certain instances, this has caused crowds to develop from a few dozens to hundreds within hours.

Because previous attempts to regulate social media in Nigeria have failed, the Nigerian government is terrified of the potential of social media and technology. Recent trends indicate that internet advocacy will continue to grow louder, which is unfortunate for the government. GSMA forecasts that Nigeria will account for more than a fifth of sub-Saharan Africa's 475 million mobile internet users by 2025. The nation would also add 25 million mobile customers (Ezeugwu et al., 2021).

Despite the fact that countless studies have been conducted on social media and its effect on youth mobilisation (Uji, 2015; Iwilade, 2013; Bacallao-Pino, 2014; Nwafor & Nwabuzor, 2021), there are few studies that have been conducted on how social media might be utilised to spread discontent among youths without heavily referencing the ENDSARS movement (Ezeugwu et al., 2021). In light of these trends, the objectives of this study are to:

- i. Find out the types of social media that was used for youth mobilisation during the End Sars Protest,
- ii. highlight the benefits if using social media for youth mobilisation and
- iii. Identify the challenges involved in using social media for youth mobilisation.

Literature Review

Social media refers to the internet tools and services that allow individuals to engage, create content, disseminate it, and search for it. In other words, social media are web-based interactive media platforms

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that enable users to connect, share ideas, experiences, opinions, contacts, knowledge, and experience, as well as additional information such as career and employment counselling. They are part of a new style of media that emphasises social networking and gives users more liberty to express themselves, interact with friends, exchange information, and post their ideas on the Internet (Rufai, 2019; Etumnu & Williams-Etumnu, 2023).

The interactive or collaborative nature of these products, according to Bacallao-Pino (2014), is what makes them social. There are problems to defining social media due to the large number of stand-alone and integrated social-media platforms now accessible. However, a number of features are shared:

- i. Social media are interactive Web 2.0 applications (Kulkarni, 2017)
- ii. The fundamental components of social media are user-generated content, including textual postings or comments, digital photos or videos, and data produced by all online activities. The social media company creates and manages user profiles tailored to the website or application's services (Tyler et al., 2016)
- iii. Social media promote the expansion of online social networks by connecting an information about the user to those of other people or organisations (Winchester, 2013).

According to Admin (2023), examples of social media platforms that can be used for youth mobilisation include Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter), WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, etc.

Benefits of Using Social Media for Youths Mobilisation

Social media has created a "society" within the society in which we live, as described in the preceding section. Social media provides a medium through which all individuals can be reached without bias or prejudice, irrespective of ethnicity, faith, sex, educational background, etc. It also enables a multitude of audiences, spread throughout Nigeria and abroad, to be addressed simultaneously without geographical limitations or constraints. Social media also gives a low-cost platform for reaching the intended audience. The enormous amount often spent on mobilisation is decreased.

These benefits have a significant impact on the mobilisation of young people for the purposes of any social movement. Social media expands the scope of organisation and campaigning (Sani, 2014).

Another benefit of social media is the opportunity to carry out an opinion poll. Thompson, et al., (2024) defines public opinion as the opinions of average citizens that elected officials consider when deciding whether or not to act. In a participatory democracy, it is a top priority for every responsible administration to guarantee that the majority of the people supports their overall decisions. Occasionally, the government solicits the public's opinion on whether to implement a proposed policy.

Again, the social media (internet) gives an excellent venue for gauging public sentiment. The government can highlight matters of public concern through this forum so that the populace can express their opinions.

Maybe the most noticeable benefit of the social media is the fact that it allows for the population the much-desired possibility to express their ideas, to criticise or admire any government without fear of arrest (Okoro et al., 2019). Nigerian youths protested against police brutality and called for more change in their nation on social media and on the streets (Eligon, 2020). On Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, a large number of people called for a stop to SARS and its unfair practices. Nevertheless, the Nigerian government gave little consideration to these online complaints. This persisted until a recent shooting in Delta resulted in widespread demonstrations and the potential for severe civil upheaval and the deaths of 12 more people nationwide (Makinde, 2020).

Theoretical Framework: Technological Determinism Theory

The technological determinism theory was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1964. The theory's central claim is that new technological advancements frequently foster changes in society, the social system, and the general population. Technological determinism theory posits that technology is the primary driver of social change, shaping society's structures and cultural values (Hauer, 2017). In the context of the End SARS protest in Nigeria, social media played a pivotal role in mobilizing youth and orchestrating nationwide demonstrations against police brutality. According to technological determinism, the advent of social media platforms such as X, Instagram, Facebook, etc. fundamentally altered the dynamics of social activism.

The End SARS protest highlights how social media technology did not merely facilitate existing forms of activism but transformed them. Traditional forms of protest relied heavily on physical gatherings and hierarchical organization structures, which were often slow and limited in reach. In contrast, the technological affordances of social media allowed for decentralized, agile, and large-scale mobilisation. This shift underscores technological determinism's assertion that technology itself can redefine social interactions and power dynamics. Social media's real-time feedback loops, virality, and visual storytelling capabilities created a new paradigm for protest, where digital participation could influence on-the-ground actions and vice versa. Furthermore, the technological determinism theory suggests that the influence of social media on the End SARS movement extended beyond immediate mobilisation to broader social impacts.

Empirical Review

According to Obaid (2020), social media has a significant impact on social movements. These effects can be seen from two angles: on one hand, social media facilitates or expedites the processes of recruitment, interaction, mobilisation, information dissemination, and mobilisation; on the other hand, it expands the spaces available for collective action that were previously left open by more established, conventional mobilisation techniques or methods. Furthermore, Obaid believes that changes made to strategies and procedures to increase organisation and participation—thereby broadening the goals and reach of modern social movements—may be seen as evidence of the internet's influence on social movements. Additionally, it explains why protests can occur simultaneously offline and online, as was the case with the #ENDSARS demonstration in Nigeria.

According to a study by Soladoye and Ojo (2020), social media in Nigeria serves as a viral tool to engage the government and helps spread awareness about police brutality. Furthermore, the study found and demonstrated how social movements, especially ENDSARS, used social media to raise awareness among foreign communities and organisations of instances of police brutality, abuse, and harassment in Nigeria. The site acted as the spark that sparked the physical protests that were witnessed in the nation's major towns, neighbourhoods, and cities, leading the researchers to conclude that a sizable number of Nigerians participated in the rallies against police brutality by utilising Twitter to raise awareness. Thousands of Nigerians protested and called for a revision of the police's previous handling of important national issues.

According to the examined research, social media have a significant role in mobilising young Nigerians for social, political, and economic activities. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram have enabled youth to disseminate information, organise protests, build unity, and maintain themes in the public discourse. The studies reviewed by Obaid (2020) and Soladoye and Ojo (2020) offer broader perspectives

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on the role of social media in social movements, with Obaid discussing its global impact on recruitment, mobilisation, and collective action, and Soladoye and Ojo focusing on its use in Nigeria to engage the government and spread awareness about police brutality, particularly during the #ENDSARS protests. In contrast, this study would provide a highly focused analysis of how young Nigerians utilised platforms like X, Facebook, and Instagram to organise, communicate, and sustain the ENDSARS protest.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted using a cross-sectional survey design. A study of this nature employing survey design allowed the researchers to draw references that was generalised to the larger population at a lower cost and time. This study's sample population consists of residents of Surulere Local Government Area in Lagos State. According to the Lagos State Ministry of Science and Technology (2024), the total population or residents in Surulere Local Government Area is 744,400.

The socio-demographic factors of respondents include age, religion, sex, and occupation, among others. Using the convenience sampling technique which involves selecting participants based on their accessibility and availability to the researcher, and the online survey monkey calculator, a sample size of one hundred and fifty-one (151) respondents was arrived at.

The image shows a web-based calculator titled "Calculate your sample size". It has three input fields: "Population Size" with the value 744400, "Confidence Level (%)" with a dropdown menu set to 95, and "Margin of Error (%)" with the value 8.0. Below these fields, the text "Sample size" is displayed above a large green number "151".

The sample method utilised in this investigation is simple random sampling. This sampling strategy was utilised for the study because it is the most fundamental sampling technique, in which a subset of a larger population (a sample) is selected for investigation (a population). Every person is chosen at random, and every member of the population has the same chance of being selected for the sample—that is, every possible sample of a specific size has the same chance of being chosen. Subsequently, the researchers decided to randomly sample inhabitants from areas inside Surulere Local Government Area.

As a quantitative data collection strategy, the questionnaire was used to collect information for this study. The quantitative data collection instrument consisting of a series of questions to be presented to one or more respondents and printed on paper. This study's questionnaire contains questions pertinent to the study's aims and research issue. The argument for adopting the questionnaire is that it elicits uniform information. The questionnaire utilised in this study was divided into sections A and B. Part A contains the respondents' personal information, whereas Section B contains additional data deemed pertinent to the study's research aims. The acquired data was evaluated utilising straightforward percentage-based statistical methods for data analysis. The questionnaire was self-administered by the researchers. To check the validity of the instrument, copies of the questionnaire were given to communication experts to analyse. The reliability of the instrument was tested through a pilot study. Ten percent of the sample size of this study

was used for the pilot study. 15 copies of the questionnaire were administered among residents of Surulere. The pilot study was conducted to measure the level of comprehension among the respondents, which aims to measure the data consistency. And the Cronbach alpha reliability test was calculated using SPSS. Cronbach’s alpha is a statistical measure of internal consistency reliability that can be used to assess the reliability of a set of items in a scale or survey. It’s a common method used to evaluate the internal consistency of a pilot study, BRousseau and Truxillo (2020) stated that Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is used in many research fields as a measure of the internal consistency of the items in a scale, and values ranging from 0.7 to 0.95 are generally acceptable. This provides assurance that the scale items are measuring the intended construct and are not redundant. After the pilot test was conducted, the calculated value was 0.637, which means that the instrument was reliable.

Result

The questionnaire was utilised in the gathering of data for the study. In this study, one hundred and fifty-one (151) questionnaires were distributed to respondents. However, only one hundred and two (102) were returned. Eighteen (18) were rendered null and void as a result of incorrect filling, while thirty-one (31) were not returned. Consequently, the researchers redistributed the 49 questionnaires to make up for the high mortality rate. However, 45 were retrieved. As a result, one hundred and forty-seven (147) copies of questionnaire were used for the analysis of this study. The simple percentage table was used for the analysis of data collected during field work.

Data gotten from the descriptive analysis done showed that 50.3% (n=74) represent the male respondents and 49.7% (n=73) represent the female respondents. By implication therefore, is that the distribution was even although slightly male dominated. On age of respondents, 69.4% (n=102) are between the age of 18-25 years, 20.4% (n=30) are between 26-33years, 10.2% (n=15) are between 34-41 years. Findings on educational attainments show that the level of education of respondents fall between OND and HND which are 45.6% (n=67), B.Sc. has 28.6% (n=42), SSCE, 15.6% (n=23), Primary school certificate has 10.2% (n=15).

Table 1: Social media platforms that might be utilised for youth mobilisation

Types of Social Media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	35	23.8
X/Twitter	58	39.5
WhatsApp	20	13.6
YouTube	10	6.8
Snapchat	5	3.4
Instagram	30	20.4
LinkedIn	5	3.4
Tiktok	10	6.8

Total	147	100
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Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 1 suggests that X/Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are the most effective platforms for engaging with respondents, while WhatsApp and YouTube may also be considered. Snapchat, LinkedIn, and TikTok may not be suitable for this audience.

Table 2: Perceived benefits of using social media for youth mobilisation

The mean range interpretation for a 4-scale Likert scale is as follows: 1.00-1.79 = Strongly Disagree, 1.80-2.59 = Disagree, 2.60-3.39 = Agree, 3.40-4.00 = Strongly Agree (Sözen & Güven, 2019).

Perceived Benefits	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	mean	St.d
Social Media can provide a platform through which all individuals were mobilised to join any social justice	90 61.2%	40 27.2%	10 6.8%	7 4.8%	3.57	0.73
Social Media can provide a very nice platform for measuring the opinion of the populace on social issues	80 54.4%	45 30.6%	15 10.2%	7 4.8%	3.42	0.78
Social Media can provide the platform for the target audience to be educated on social issues at almost zero cost.	95 64.6%	35 23.8%	7 4.8%	10 6.8%	3.52	0.73
Social Media can also provide a large scale for mobilisation and mass protest	100 68%	32 22%	3 2%	12 8%	3.58	0.71
Social Media can be used to encourage citizens to express their thoughts on social unrest	84 57%	42 28%	18 12%	3 2%	3.53	0.78

Source: Field Survey, 2023

From table 2 the mean scores range from 3.43 to 3.58, indicating a generally positive perception of social media's benefits for youth mobilisation. This suggests that respondents generally perceive social media as a valuable tool for youth mobilisation, with most agreeing that it can provide various benefits.

Table 3: challenges in using social media for youthmobilisation

Challenges	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Ownership and Control	7	4.8
Unprofessional/unethical attitudes of cyber journalist/bloggers	20	13.6
Threat to personal safety	44	30
Network problems	76	51.6
Total	102	100

Source: Field Survey, 2023

Table 3 suggests that respondents believed network problems and threat to personal safety as the major challenges in using social media for youth mobilisation. Although there were also concerns about unprofessional attitudes of cyber journalists/bloggers being the most prominent and ownership and control. This implies that addressing network problems should be a priority to ensure seamless communication and mobilisation. While safety and security measures should be implemented to protect youth mobilizers from online threats.

Discussion of Findings

The first objective of this study was to find out the types of social media platforms used for youth mobilisation during the ENDSARS Protest. Findings revealed that X also known as Twitter is a preferred avenue for youth mobilisation in Nigeria. From the table, it can also be seen that Social Media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram were also used for youth mobilisation during the End Sars protest. This confirms the conclusion of Okoro and Santas (2017) that social media use in politics refers to the use of online social media platforms in political processes and activities. Since 2017, Nigerian activists, youth, and celebrities have taken to social media to oppose SARS violence and extortion and urge its disbandment in the online community, particularly on Twitter with the hashtag #ENDSARS.

The examination of the second objective indicates that the perceived benefits of utilising social media for youth mobilisation are numerous. Going by the respondents’ judgment, the top benefit of utilising social media for youth mobilisation is that social media users can express their thoughts on social unrest using the aforementioned platforms. This supports Makinde's (2020) claim that there have been countless calls on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for an end to SARS's unlawful activities, but that the Nigerian government started giving attention to the complaints when a lot of citizens started expressing themselves on social media platforms and not just celebrities. A vast majority of respondents, for example, feel that social media may provide a platform via which all individuals can be mobilised to participate in campaigns for social justice and similar causes. In a similar line, many believe that social media might serve as a useful forum for gauging public opinion. Many polls performed on social media platforms have repeatedly demonstrated this point. Additional benefits of social media include educating the public about social concerns and encouraging young people to express their opinions.

The analysis of the third research objective revealed that although the perceived challenges in utilising social media to mobilise youths during social unrest are many, the most significant problem is that

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users of social media believe that network and bandwidth technical issues will pose a significant obstacle when attempting to mobilise youths. Due to the lack of network masts in some rural sections of the region, network challenges such as poor connections and insufficient internet capacity may delay the communication process by preventing online audiences from obtaining online newsfeeds regarding the size and progression of social disturbance. This aligns to the study of Alodat, et al., (2023) that the lack of network masts in rural areas poses a significant challenge to social media mobilisation during social unrest. This lack of connectivity and internet capacity can delay or prevent online mobilisation efforts. This also aligns with the theory of Technological Determinism, which suggests that technology's affordances and limitations shape social and political outcomes (Inegbedion, 2021). The limitations of network infrastructure can significantly hinder the mobilisation of youths during social unrest. The "digital divide," which refers to unequal access to and utilization of digital technologies, is further exacerbated by the lack of network masts in rural areas (Inegbedion, 2021 & Cortés-Ramos et al. 2021). This underscores the need for investments in technological infrastructure, especially in rural areas, to facilitate effective social media mobilisation during social unrest.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Given the study's findings, it was discovered that X, Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp are the most efficient social media channels for rallying youths during any social media mobilisation. In addition, the use of social media to mobilize youth can have a significant impact on sociopolitical processes resulting from social discontent. Also, the challenges encountered when using social media to mobilize youths during social unrest are numerous and include slow connections and low internet bandwidth, which can delay the communication process by preventing online audiences from receiving online newsfeeds about social unrests in a timely manner.

In light of the research's findings, the researchers desire to make specific recommendations.

This research recommends that citizens must embrace the power of social media, as they did during the EndSARS demonstration, as a viable medium due to its complementary role in influencing not just political education, but also political involvement and mobilisation in all of its manifestations. There is also a need for citizens to use social media platforms to plan and execute more political campaigns anytime they are dissatisfied with the political situation in Nigeria.

In the same line, this study recommends that governmental and non-governmental bodies should engage in periodic public education on the use of social media platforms for political purposes, particularly among teenagers, given that they were used democratically by the public to protest police brutality. Moreover, prominent network providers are urged to increase their bandwidth and network connectivity as well as lower data purchase fees in order to promote the smooth transmission of information that can be utilised to mobilise and educate adolescents on social media about social discontent.

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Appendix I

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.637	16