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The Digital Frontline: A Qualitative Analysis of Social Media Utilisation during Nigeria's #EndSARS Protest

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Abstract

Background: In recent times, social media platforms have transitioned from simple communication tools to the driving force for global protest mobilisation. These platforms serve as vital channels for collaboration and information dissemination, effectively archiving collective memory for future generations. While scholarship has acknowledged the general role of digital media in protests, there remains a notable gap in understanding the specific qualitative nuances of how these platforms are used to promote movements in developing democracies such as Nigeria.

Objective: The primary objective of this study was to determine the specific ways in which social media platforms were utilised during the 2020 #EndSARS protest in Nigeria to foster mobilisation and awareness.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative content analysis design anchored in the uses and gratification theory (UGT). Data were collected through structured interview sessions with 32 social media users who were active participants in the #EndSARS protest. The interviews, conducted via Google Meet, were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using a grounded theory approach to generate initial categories and dimensions.

Results: The findings identified six key themes explaining the instrumental use of social media during the protest: coordinating activities, sustaining the movement over time, promoting the goal of the protest to the international community, providing real-time updates, justifying the protest through shared experiences of brutality, and leveraging social media attributes like accessibility and multimedia capabilities. The results demonstrate that protesters combined online and offline forms of participation to increase movement effectiveness.

Conclusion: The study concludes that social media serves as a powerful vehicle for solidarity in Nigeria, enabling citizens to challenge dominant power groups and maintain collective action despite threats of state repression. The findings suggest that properly managed social media serves as a digital opposition, holding the government accountable by highlighting social recriminations and economic downturns.

Keywords: Protest; #EndSARS; social media; motivation; police.

Introduction

Although the role of social media during protests has continued to attract attention from scholars (Akerele-Popoola et al., 2022; Dambo et al., 2022), most of these studies did not examine how social media platforms were used; rather, they focused on the role of social media in such protests. Additionally, the majority of these studies used a quantitative approach without considering a qualitative one, which can provide deeper insights into the issue being examined. This has created a gap in both methodology and literature. Therefore, the objective of this study was to ascertain how social media platforms were used during #EndSARS protest of 2020 in Nigeria. Protest is not a novel phenomenon, nor is it alien in history. Eesuola (2015, p. 38), states that "Protest demonstration is fast becoming an entrenched symbol of political participation amongst all nations of the world. It is perhaps the most used means of participation now, probably because it does not have age or gender restrictions, and it demands no known "protocol". Throughout history, citizens of several societies have always risen in unison against their government. Amid the various differences, there are a couple of common trends in protests, including citizens seeking accountability from the government, speaking up against injustice and oppression, and airing demands for reforms and better policies. Since the start of time, the trigger for protests has spurred citizens to organise marches in the streets to have their voices heard.

However, it is worth noting that the idea of protests has not changed even in this day and age. There is a slight distinction, however: the presence of social media. Protests have become amplified with social media. Soladoye and Ojo (2020, p. 15) refer to it as a new medium of providing rapid communication. In other words, social media has become a vehicle for galvanising protests across different countries and continents. Before social media, protests were usually sporadic. There were no channels of communication among the populace, thereby making the movements disorganised. However, social media platforms have created massive channels for

organisation, rapid communication, and unison in the planning and execution of protests (Jost et al., 2018). In most cases, the platforms are used as channels to supplement citizens' physical protests (Breuer, 2012). In Nigeria, the populace has used social media platforms to protest against unfavourable government policies. For instance, citizens have expressed outrage at the government, which has been successful. In like manner, a few days after Nigeria's 60th Independence Day in 2020, citizens began trending various hashtags, including #EndSARS, #EndPoliceBrutality, and #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria (Ekoh & George, 2021). It was soon followed by several groups of Nigerians who took to the streets to protest the Nigerian police unit known as SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad). The complaints against the unit span several years of extortion, brutality, forceful abduction, rape, mutilation, and even killing of individuals they perceived to be criminals (Amnesty International, 2020; Talabi et al., 2021; Chinweobo-Onuoha et al., 2021). The citizens called for the scrapping of the SARS unit from the police force. The usage of social media, especially in this protest and its wide support and mobilisation across the country, shook the Nigerian government, with social media platforms serving as important tools. From the foregoing, the issue is not that social media have not been examined vis-à-vis protests but the approach that previous studies have adopted and the results that were reported. Evidence abounds that social media plays a huge role in protests, but how this happens remains largely under-investigated, especially in the context of the ENDSARS protests. Egbunike and Olorunnisola (2015) also examined the use of social media during the # Occupy Nigeria protest and found that social media platforms were used, but they also did not explain how the platforms were used. The current study filled this gap.

Social media platforms and the #ENDSARS

Social media are Internet-powered communication platforms that allow for the sharing of user-generated content. These platforms have made communication at the beck and call of most people in the world via telephony, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Telegram, among others. The availability of Android telephony makes communication easy, cheaper and far-reaching than before. Thus, developments in a given area can be shared via video, messages, and chats in real time. This is a double-edged sword, as it can inflame passion while also trying to inform people. Thus, there is a need to handle it with utmost care, but those spreading information may not know the ripple effects of such information they are passing through social media. For instance, the Arab Spring was ignited when the security agents in Tunisia seized the wares of a struggling young man, forcing him to douse himself with petrol (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2013). This swept through the Arab world in protests, and the heartlessness of the ruling class and their inability to provide a social safety net to alleviate the economic difficulties afflicting the vast majority of the people. Indeed, social media can ignite a fire in the form of mass protests in split seconds; this is why it is termed the "new normal": like a smouldering fire, it can burst out without prior security forestalling such an outburst of angst against authority. However, the world is in the embrace of democracy and assertion of rights, and it is through social media that it is ventilated. Thus, the ruling class must be vigilant and ready to address social convulsions, or the social media will quicken it for them.

Efforts were made across several social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, to disband the SARS unit (Ekoh & George, 2021, p. 161). However, #ENDSARS began trending on Twitter on the 4th of October 2020 after a viral video emerged online of a young man shot by SARS in Delta State. The authorities denied the video's veracity, sparking further outrage

among citizens and igniting protests (Malumfashi, 2020). The Nigerian youth soon began sharing their experiences on Twitter, calling on Nigerian authorities to disband the SARS police unit (Soladoye & Ojo, 2020, p. 16). Nigerian Youths took to the streets from the 8th of October 2020 in protest against the government in different states across the country, and social media served as the platform for sharing information and updates about the protests. The Unit was disbanded on the 11th of October 2020. Unfortunately, this would be the 5th time the SARS police unit would be scrapped by the authorities, thereby eliciting more protests from citizens (Amnesty International, 2020) due to the government's ineptitude and lack of political will to enforce reforms in the Nigerian Police Force.

Background of the SARS Police Unit

The SARS is an acronym for Special Armed Robbery Squad. The unit was established in 1992 under the administration of Gen. Ibrahim Babaginda. The aim was to halt the rampant robbery activities across the country at the time (Amnesty International, 2020). Before that period, the responsibility of combating robbery crimes fell to the Nigerian police force. So, an anti-robbery unit began operating separately as part of different states' criminal investigation departments, but soon enough it evolved into a more oppressive front. Their activities changed from seeking out robbers to unleashing menace upon innocent citizens by setting up roadblocks, extorting money from people, arresting, and brutalising non-cooperative citizens, most especially the male youths. The unit that had not previously carried arms began carrying them in public. Their activities were so notorious among the populace that by 2017, the citizens began speaking out against the unit with the hashtag #ENDSARS (Amnesty International, 2020). However, it was the viral video on the Twitter platform of the shooting of another youth on the 4th of October 2020 in Delta State, Nigeria, that prompted and attracted public outrage across the country in a bid to finally put an end to the menace.

The lack of accountability fosters and perpetuates impunity by SARS officers, creating an environment in which detainees are at risk of torture and other ill-treatment. Several of the notorious crimes committed by the SARS unit were documented by Amnesty International, a global movement for Human Rights. The report details the gross impunity and injustice meted out to the citizens by the SARS unit of the Nigerian police force. (Amnesty International, 2016).

Impact of social media on protests

The articles reviewed for this paper examine the influence of social media on protests in other countries. So, the papers were reviewed to ascertain the extent to which social media amplified or diminished the protests. Wolfsfeld and Sheafer (2013) examine the role of social media in the Arab Spring Protests and its relation to politics. Their findings affirm that social media did not trigger the protests but rather sustained the protests. The data showed that countries in the Middle East saw an increase in the registration of users who joined the Facebook platform only after the protests began, lending their voices to the protests. They assert that countries such as Egypt and Syria, which experienced greater political censorship, had higher protest indices than other countries such as the UAE and Oman. In conclusion, they posit that the Arab Spring Protests occurred for political reasons rather than because of social media. On their own part, Melki and Mallat (2014, pp. 4-12) explore the role that digital technology played in Lebanon for Civic activism. In their activism, many used Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to share existing video content related to the cause, such as footage of protests and illegal practices. However, they noted an over-reliance on online

activism, which yields no tangible outcomes for the causes. They stated that an online campaign does not make one an activist, compared to people who meet people on the streets and talk to them. Therefore, creating a bloated impression of mass social movements online, only to be deflated by a reality check when 'click-based activists' are called to the streets. They add that the counter-effect of online activism is that the news reaches mainly the movement's supporters or possibly urban dwellers, while other citizens in rural areas without Internet access are not privy to the activism's impact or importance. In contrast to Melki and Mallat's argument that digital activists are not real activists, Mundt et al. (2018) state that social media is instrumental in mobilising new activists for the Black Lives Matter cause. They deduced from their research that Black Lives Matter activists firmly believe in the importance of social media to the movement and that it helps create opportunities for participation, increasing protest turnout and fundraising and donation campaigns to support the movement. They add that social media has helped offline activists easily connect with people in their locality by simply searching for the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter and their location on any social media platform. They also state that online activism cannot be sustained without traditional protest methods, such as maintaining an active social media presence, and that supporting it with the traditional role of offline activism amplifies and delivers the desired results for any movement. As Hoskins (2017) reiterated," the memory of the multitude is all over the place, scattered yet simultaneous and searchable: connected, networked, archived". This is so because the new modus operandi of everyday communication- the link, like, messages, tweets, email, text-are archived into a chain of media memory (Hoskins, 2017). The happenings in the world that affect a whole lot of people in a globalised world contributed to the relief of citizens' experiences in their particular contexts. The same could also be said of the # EndSARS protest in Nigeria, where there was a fundraising and donation campaign to support the movement and end the "mother of all impunities" as represented by the activities of the Nigerian police force. In this way, those who could not be physically present contributed to its success and raised more awareness.

Thus, there is a significant increase in political mobilisation on social media compared with traditional mainstream media in Africa. Social media plays a role in connectivity. It enables the cultivation of relationships across different social strata that might not have been feasible without social media. More so, social media provides an avenue for unlimited freedom of speech and autonomy for users. Hence, they are more inclined to use the platform in lending their voices to a particular cause. From their research, Kalyango and Adu-Kumi (2013) found that citizens are motivated by the realisation that they can affect political change through social media activism, drawing on the results of the Arab Spring Protests in the Middle East. The authors also note that fulfilment, political change, and enjoyment are among the major reasons that motivate citizens to call and complain about government neglect. On the other hand, Cammaerts (2015) classifies the roles of social media into internal and external roles. The internal role involves organisation, coordination, internal debate, and decision-making. Whereas external roles refer to the mobilisations, recruitment, attack strategies, and the creation of alternative or independent channels of communication that contribute to a vibrant public sphere (pp. 4-5). Furthermore, social media also provides an archive, a memory, and storage of text and audio-visual content relating to protests, plans, organisations, and ideas. It equally prompts the formation of networks and the dissemination of information to people outside of the mainstream media. It aided in reporting protest events and facilitated the formation of a collective identity that transcended geographic and socioeconomic disparities by providing a mobilising factor spurred by collective grievances (Breuer, 2012). Thus, removing one of the central obstacles to collective action under

authoritarianism: the lack of social interaction. Therefore, not only is it cost-effective for procuring evidence of events, but it also provides a significant avenue for activists to contribute to a comprehensive archive of protest artefacts.

Jost et al. (2018) examine the summary of protest movements in the United States, Spain, Turkey, and Ukraine. The evidence they collected clearly shows that social media platforms, specifically Twitter and Facebook, significantly aid the exchange of information essential for coordinating protests and sharing news about transportation, turnout, police presence, violence, medical services, and legal support. They also posit that social media is a major platform for the exchange of emotional and motivational content in support of and in opposition to protest activity, including messages emphasising anger, social identification, group efficacy, and concerns about fairness, justice, and deprivation. However, it is important to note that protests are not alien to Nigerian society. In the Human Watch report from 2003, they noted that the public organised a wide range of demonstrations across different parts of the country. The citizens also embarked on a 10-day strike. The reason for this is the more than 50% increase in fuel prices. Despite the lack of social media presence, the citizens took to the streets. And as can be seen with the recent protests, the police violently broke up demonstrations and rallies, dispersing protestors with tear-gas and live shots, even when there was no sign of violence. They shot dead several protestors and passers-by, and severely beat people, including several journalists who were covering the events. When interrogated, the police stated that the protesters were armed and those deaths were a result of motor accidents (Human Rights Watch, 2003). Also, Nigerians embarked on another protest in 2012 after the government removed the fuel subsidy. The president of the country, Goodluck Jonathan, then reaffirmed that the subsidy would not be reversed but promised to cut down government spending. However, this did not assuage the citizens, as many did not believe his promise; the protests continued. As such, Egbunike (2015), asserts that the newspapers played a more heterogeneous role in the coverage of protests. He deduced that in Nigeria, for instance, newspapers such as *The Guardian, Tribune,* and *Punch newspapers* proffered a more balanced discourse of the protests than the social media platforms of Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, which he stated were focused on drama and emotions without proposing a solution to their idealistic notions. Despite the identified shortcomings of social media platforms, their influence in social mobilisation cannot be overstressed.

However, unlike the #Occupy Nigeria Protest of 2012 and the 2003 protests, the #ENDSARS protests used social media not just for the expression of outrage but also for mobilisation, collaboration, the dissemination of information, organisation, and the raising of funds to support the movement. Therefore, the social media platform has been highly instrumental in the #ENDSARS protests. That being said, the articles evaluated are those who pioneered the use of social media as the main avenue for protests. This paper thus examines the role of social media in recent protests, such as the Myanmar protests, the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests, and the lessons that can be drawn for the #END SARS protests.

Digital media and protest in Nigeria

The interface between social media and protest movements became more pronounced during the 2020 EndSARS protest in Nigeria. Consequently, there is a plethora of literature bordering on distinct themes about the subject. The various ways in which social media was used to carry out the protest require scholarly attention. This section reviews relevant literature to provide a broader

view of what other researchers have done in identifying the inherent themes, significance, and gaps in each work and their bearing on the present research.

 To this end, Akerele-Popoola (2022) aimed to establish how Twitter, as a social driver, was used to carry out the EndSARS protest in Nigeria and, in this role, to understand whether it has promoted or degraded democracy. By and large, their findings indicate that Twitter not only serves as a tool for influencing people about the protest but also enhances democracy by allowing people to drive political change. This submission is in line with earlier findings that the use of social media enhanced protesters' ability to challenge dominant power groups while making it difficult for those groups to clamp down on them (Uwalaka et al. 2018). Although these findings are in line with the research findings of Yunus (2013), they sharply contrast with those of Iwuoha and Aniche (2021) and Usman and Oghuvbu (2021). Yunus found that social media is a basic component of social movements, connecting people with weak bonds and necessitating the flow of political information, thereby leading to mobilisation and social change as outcomes. On the other hand, Iwuoha and Aniche, corroborated by Usman and Oghuvbu, observed that, instead of delivering democratic dividends, civil rights movements such as the #EndSARS protest tend to provide exploitable opportunities for increased state brutality and repression. However, while Akerele-Popoola et al. (2022), Yunus (2013) and Iwuoha and Aniche (2021) are significant for establishing the connective power of social media to mobilise people towards organised sociopolitical action, none of them specified or elaborated on the various ways through which social media was instrumental to the mobilisation.

Dambo et al. (2020) found themes of human rights abuse, injustice, activism, and corruption in the hashtags of tweets during the 2020 EndSARS protest in Nigeria. These themes ideally justify the protest and stand as one way Twitter was used in the protest. Although this finding is apt it also creates a question of whether protest and social media can be used as an opportunity to defend injustice. This is one reason Nigeria became internationally notorious for crime and money laundering: the activities of Yahoo boys. These Yahoo boys at one time became the sole target of SARS. However, it should not be surprising that the most vociferous and active on social media for the EndSARS protest could comprise members of Yahoo boys and girls, as well as their relatives and friends who were victims of SARS. The content and dynamics of information on social media for the protest can help in this regard. Therefore, to fully understand and appreciate the strategic influence of Social media on EndSARS protests, there is a need to conduct a holistic investigation and uncover the various ways Twitter and other social media platforms were used in the protests.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the uses and gratification theory (UGT). Blumler and Katz suggested UGT in 1974 to explain the motivation for utilising media platforms. The fundamental consideration of the theory is to understand why people make use of the media. The assumption is that people do not just use the media, but do so with the aim of meeting certain needs. Such needs become the motivation that drives their media use. UGT regards media consumers as active individuals who consciously select their content based on their needs. Hence, the theory argues that media effects are actively determined by the audience, who select content to assist them in modifying their behaviour. The core components of the theory are media attributes (e.g., level of involvement, timeliness, etc), context of use (e.g., space, time, task-oriented), need (cause) and gratification (effect). Okoro and Gever (2018) aver that the theory has been found to be a useful

framework for investigating media utilisation patterns. According to Finn (1997, pp. 508–509), the ''most critical'' components of U&G theory are ''(a) the social and psychological origins of audience needs, (b) the different patterns of media exposure that purportedly result, and (c) the differential engagement in other activities.'' Our interest in the components of UGT, as pointed out above, is in the social and psychological needs. This is because using social media platforms for protests serves social and psychological needs. When people protest about an issue, they do so because it is of social importance and has resulted in psychological distress, and they want to voice their concerns. Whiting and Williams (2013) tested UGT with a sample of 25 interviewees and reported that social media users seek 10 gratifications, namely: information sharing, surveillance/knowledge, past time, information seeking, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, social interaction, convenience utility, and expression of opinion. This theory was used to understand the use of social media during the #ENDSARS protest in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study utilised content analysis to examine how social media platforms were used during the ENDSARS protest in Nigeria in 2020. The decision to use content analysis was made because it enabled the researchers to qualitatively assess how social media platforms were used during the ENDSARS protests of 2020 in Nigeria. The content analysis was based on interviews with approximately 32 social media users in Nigeria. The researchers sampled social media users using announcements posted on Facebook. Eligibility for inclusion required that participants have taken part in the #ENDSARs protest. The interview sessions were conducted through Google Meet, and each interview lasted 30-55 minutes. The interview sessions were recorded for reference purposes and transcribed. Each interview began with an introduction and exchange of pleasantries, followed closely by an explanation of the study's objective. The interview started with a broad question: "Can you tell us about your use of social media during the #ENDSARS protests?" Follow-up questions were asked as the sessions progressed. The instrument for data collection was a structured interview guide developed by the researchers. The code sheet was divided into three parts: the introduction, which introduces the study; the question segment, which contains interview questions; and the closing remarks. The following were the questions:

1. Tell us about your use of social media during the #ENDSARS protests
2. Tell us about your involvement during the ENDSARS protest.
3. In what ways do you think social media platforms were used during the protests?
4. In what way can you say that social media platforms helped the protests?
5. What motivated you to use social media for the protests?
6. Which social media platforms did you use most during the protests?

To analyse the data for the study, the researchers applied Glaser and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory approach, which involves a microanalysis of the data through detailed line-by-line analysis to generate initial categories, along with their dimensions and features. Therefore, the researchers used the qualitative method to analyse the data for this study. It was decided that the qualitative approach was important so that the researchers could bring out the salient points from the results. The researchers presented the results in prose format and supported them with the literature review.

Findings and Discussions

The participants were 20 males and 12 females. Regarding age, the mean age of the participants was 26 years, indicating that they were mainly young. All the participants took part in the 2020 #ENDSARS protest. The results of the study are presented in two subheadings: the degree of participation during the protest and the motivation for using social media for the protest.

a.   Participation during the protest

The participants who took part in the study reported that they took part in both online and offline activities related to the protest. They revealed that during the protests, they were actively involved in making sure that the government of Nigeria understood the gravity of the problem at hand. One of the participants (male) notes: "I was active during the protest. I was among those who invaded the Palace of the Orba of Lagos. The whole idea was to make a louder statement to the government." Another participant (female) revealed: "I was busy all through the time of the protest. I was protesting both online and offline. In fact, my middle name then was 'Mr Protest'." Another participant (male) notes: " I was highly involved. It was a time to make loud statements to the government and stop police brutality." The participants also revealed that they make changes to their social media profile pictures to reflect their involvement in the protest. One of them (female) notes: "My profile picture on Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter during the ENSARs protest." Another respondent (male) notes: "My Facebook and WhatsApp updates were a bout the protest, my Tweets were also about the protest." Overall, the participants in the study were active both offline and on social media. Overall, the participants agreed that they used different social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp, during the protest.

The result of the study above highlights the centrality of protests as a form of communicating public views to the appropriate authorities. The only difference is that participation has changed as citizens combine online and offline forms. This aspect of the findings has extended previous studies (Melki & Mallat, 2014; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2013) by showing that not only do people take to the street, but they also combine it with online activities. According to Breuer (2012), participation in protests via both online and offline channels increases their effectiveness.

b.   The ways   social media platforms were used during the protest

We sought to understand how social media platforms were used during the protest, and the participants' responses revealed six themes: coordinating the protest, sustaining the protest, promoting the protest's goal, updating people on the protest, justifying the protest, and social media attributes. These six broad reasons emerged during the interview sessions, with almost all participants citing them. One of the participants (male) commented on the use of social media to coordinate the protest, noting: "It was through social media that we were able to coordinate our activities seamlessly." Another participant (female) notes: "The protests needed to be sustained for a while, and this was only possible through social media platforms. We needed to encourage ourselves and keep the fire burning. Social media made it possible." Another participant in speaking on the use of social media to promote the goal of the protest reveals: "I personally use social media platforms to make the government and the international community understand why the protest was organised." One of the participants provided an elaborated comment thus:

Regarding motivation for using social media for protest, I would say a number of reasons made social media platforms important tools. First, we needed to mobilise and coordinate events during the #ENDSARS protest, and this could only be possible through social media. In the second place, we needed to attract and hold attention during the protest. In the third place, we needed to create awareness about the protest. All of these made social media platforms useful tools at the time.

Another important theme that emerged from the interview was that participants described social media as a useful tool during the protest. One of the participants (male) notes: " You know that social media platforms are cheap and accessible to anyone with the appropriate device and Internet connection, so it makes things easier." Another participant (female) note: With social media, it was easier for me to upload different message components regarding the protests. I was able to upload videos, pictures and illustrations."

The result of this study offers empirical evidence for understanding UGT. This is because the study has shown the centrality of motivation and media attributes in driving media use for protest purposes. Although researchers (Finn, 1997; Whiting & Williams, 2013) agree that motivation plays a critical role in driving media use, this study offers a fresh perspective by explaining it in the context of protest in a developing country like Nigeria.

The current study also extends that of Akerele-Popoola et al. (2022), who examined the role of Twitter during the ENDSARS protest and reported that the social media platform was heavily used during the public unrest. However, the study provided little information on how this was done. But in the current study, the researchers explain the specific ways in which social media platforms were used. Again, the studies by Akerele-Popoola et al. (2022) focused solely on Twitter. But our result showed that it was not only Twitter that was used; other social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram were also used.

Conclusion

As aforementioned, one can deduce the similarities that hold true across almost all protests. When the citizens are tired of oppression, they rise in agitation to oppose the government. Unfortunately, as can be seen in the Nigeria #ENDSARS protests, and several other protests such as the Arab Spring, Myanmar coup, Hong-Kong pro-democracy protests, the government always reacts to protests, albeit with violence. The aftermath of the #ENDSARS protests remains to be seen in Nigeria. If anything, the Nigerian government is propagating means to induce censorship of social media. As of 4th June 2021, Nigerian citizens have been prohibited access to the Twitter platform. Finally, one cannot help but notice the similarities in how the governments have reacted to these protests, especially when the said governments are under the umbrella of democracy. Certainly, Myanmar and China can be exempted because of the military rule and authoritarian rule practised in the countries, respectively. However, what is to be said about countries like Nigeria, America, and Russia, which claim to practice democracy? The implication is that these countries practice democracy on paper while citizens continue to bear the brunt of tyranny. Some laws, such as the Nigerian Public Order Act, negate the freedom to public protests without permission from authorities. However, such acts are in place to prevent the rights of citizens to peaceful demonstrations. Unfortunately, for the Nigerian # ENDSARS protests, the fire has been doused to some extent by the government's actions towards citizens. Regardless, Nigerians still utilised social media largely Twitter for online activism, but with the recent ban of the Twitter platform by the

Nigerian government, the status to which social media may be used concerning the #ENDSARS protests thus remains a long quest to freedom as the government is struggling to close up the civic spaces with laws and violence.

Indeed, social media is like an opposition party to the ruling party, tormenting it with vile criticism, often full of falsehoods and propaganda. Social media, when properly managed, can keep the government on its toes by highlighting social recriminations, economic downturns, and infrastructure deficits. Social media provides citizens with a platform to compare their government's performance with that of other governments worldwide. It is this contraction of the world into a global village through social media that has continued to arm critics of government with the information they need to make any government uncomfortable. Thus, the role of social media, particularly Twitter, in the □# EndSARS protest in Nigeria demonstrates how powerful social media can be in mobilising protests and social movements worldwide. Young Nigerians contributed funds to the protest via social media and advised and encouraged all those participating to be orderly, clean up the streets, and provide refreshments around the clock to keep protesters in the streets. The government was taken by surprise at how this protest was sustained for days without the protesters being fatigued and dispersing at their own volition. The Nigerian Security was over-stretched, and they had to resort to infiltrating this youth movement, which they feared could overthrow the government if not quickly stopped. Thus, the government has no other option than to resort to violence and, to make matters worse, to continue to deny unleashing this violent outrage against peaceful demonstrators.

Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest

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