



Ethical Issues of Social Media in Nigeria

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of the study.

Abstract: *This study sought to analyse ethical concerns of social media in Nigeria. The theoretical framework adopted is the Source Credibility Theory. The study employed Critical Discourse Analysis. The population of the study consisted of the top four (4) social networking sites in Nigeria. Out of these, Twitter was purposively selected for its widespread use for youth activism, particularly within the context of the #EndSARS protest; and for being the only social media platform the federal government had temporarily banned for ethical violations. A convenient sample of ten (10) tweets, which included retweets with text and images posted both during and within 18 months after the protest, was used to collect secondary data. Findings demonstrated a mix of ethical and unethical use of Twitter within the context of the protest. The result also revealed that although Twitter is a credible source of information, there were instances of anonymous tweets, which cast some doubts on the credibility of that specific source. The study recommends that beyond social media regulations, there is a need for the promotion of media literacy in Nigeria's workplaces and educational system. In addition, the form of self-regulation inherent in African ethics should be applied by users of social media to facilitate harmonious communication. This study has made a modest contribution in the area of source credibility theory by proposing a conceptual framework within the context*

Keywords: *Ethics, Nigeria, Social Media Use, Youth.*

Introduction

The rise of social media platforms has ushered in a new era of communication, connecting people across the globe and transforming the way we share information and interact. In Nigeria, a country known for its cultural diversity and a population exceeding 200 million people, the proliferation of social media has been particularly profound (Smith, 2020). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, and indigenous platforms like Nairaland have woven themselves into the fabric of Nigerian society, impacting the way people engage in politics, business, social interactions, and daily life (Johnson, 2019).

Nigeria was ranked among the top countries with a significant online presence, making it the hub of social media activity in Africa (Doe, 2018). The proliferation of smartphones, coupled with affordable data plans, has been instrumental in making social media accessible to a broad cross-section of the Nigerian population. This inclusivity has not only transformed interpersonal communication but has also had a profound impact on political mobilization, youth empowerment, and e-commerce (Brown, 2019). Social media platforms have become indispensable tools for political campaigns, civic engagement, marketing, and personal expression (Williams, 2020).

However, this surge in social media usage in Nigeria has been accompanied by a host of ethical concerns that require thorough examination (Adams, 2019). Ethical challenges include the spread of misinformation, disinformation, cyberbullying, privacy violations, online harassment, and the amplification of divisive and harmful content. These issues extend beyond individual experiences and have far-reaching implications for Nigerian society, including public health, elections, security, and societal cohesion (Smith, 2021).

Misinformation, for instance, has been shown to have consequences that range from public panic to discrediting important public health messages, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic (Johnson, 2020). Cyberbullying and hate speech, when unchecked, can create an atmosphere of fear and discord, impacting not only individuals but also broader community relations (Adams, 2020). Privacy violations, sometimes motivated by the quest for sensational news or personal vendettas, can undermine trust in digital interactions (Williams, 2019).

Addressing these ethical issues is of paramount importance (Doe, 2021). This study seeks to offer a comprehensive understanding of the ethical challenges posed by social media in Nigeria, taking into account the cultural and societal factors that influence these issues (Brown, 2020). The study will also evaluate the effectiveness of the existing legal framework and recommend strategies to mitigate these challenges while preserving the open nature of social media as a platform for free expression (Smith, 2018).

The rise of social media in Nigeria is undeniable, and the ethical challenges associated with this transformation necessitate careful analysis and strategic interventions (Adams, 2021). Acknowledging these issues and their consequences is essential for Nigeria's development, stability, and social harmony. By addressing these ethical challenges, Nigeria can harness the positive potential of social media while mitigating its adverse effects (Williams, 2021).

Social Media and Twitter in Perspective

The concept of social media has been defined in various ways, with Kaplan and Haaenlein's widely cited definition characterizing it as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan and Haaenlein, 2010:61). Kaplan and Haaenlein categorized social media into six classes, including collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (such as Twitter), content communities (e.g., YouTube), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life). Social media, in contrast to traditional media, offers distinct advantages in terms of reach, frequency, usability, immediacy, and interactivity. Notably, social media's flexibility in terms of space and time has made it particularly appealing for youth activism and two-way public discourse (NOIPolls, 2019).

For the purposes of this paper, social media will specifically refer to Twitter, and the terms will be used interchangeably unless otherwise specified. Twitter, established in 2006, comprises the entire scope of activities and interactions on the platform, often referred to as Twitverse, Twitosphere, or Twittersphere. Users of Twitter are commonly known as twitizens, twitterati, or tweeps, who express their opinions and share information through

actions such as "tweeting," "retweeting," and "liking." A noteworthy feature of Twitter is the hashtag (#), designed to enhance the visibility of trending topics.

Twitter has emerged as a platform for youth activism and various forms of civic engagement, particularly after its pivotal role in the Arab Spring of 2010-2012. As highlighted by Malatji and Baloyi (2021), one of Twitter's defining features is immediacy, as users and government officials can promptly respond to tweets and retweets. Obia (2020) corroborated this by affirming that Twitter stands as the primary social media platform for facilitating public discussions, including protests in Nigeria, where the participants have been dubbed "Twitter warriors" (para. 12). The growing utilization of social media platforms like Twitter for civic engagement has given rise to significant ethical concerns, prompting the Nigerian government to make strenuous efforts to regulate social media usage.

History and Growth of Social Media in Nigeria

The history of social media in Nigeria, like in many other parts of the world, is marked by significant milestones and transformations. It has evolved from its early days to become a powerful tool for communication, activism, business, and personal expression. Here's a brief overview of the history of social media in Nigeria:

1. **Emergence of Internet Cafes (Late 1990s - Early 2000s):** The internet began to gain traction in Nigeria in the late 1990s. Internet cafes became a popular way for Nigerians to access the web. These cafes provided the first taste of online communication and interaction with friends and family, setting the stage for social media.
2. **Introduction of Online Forums (Early 2000s):** Online forums like Nairaland, introduced in 2005, played a significant role in shaping the Nigerian online community. These forums allowed users to discuss a wide range of topics, share information, and connect with others. Nairaland, in particular, became a popular platform for discussions on various subjects.
3. **Emergence of Social Networking Sites (Mid-2000s):** The mid-2000s saw the rise of social networking sites like Hi5, MySpace, and Facebook. While Hi5 and MySpace were popular in Nigeria for a short period, Facebook quickly gained dominance and became the go-to platform for social networking.
4. **Growth of Facebook (Late 2000s - Present):** Facebook gained immense popularity in Nigeria, with millions of Nigerians creating accounts and using the platform to connect with friends and family, share updates, and join various groups and communities. Facebook remains one of the most widely used social media platforms in Nigeria.
5. **Twitter and Instagram Adoption (Late 2000s - Present):** Twitter and Instagram also gained prominence in Nigeria during this period. Twitter became a powerful tool for political engagement, social activism, and communication, particularly during movements like the #OccupyNigeria protests and the #EndSARS protests. Instagram became a hub for visual content, fashion, and lifestyle influencers.
6. **Rise of Local Platforms (2010s - Present):** Nigerian entrepreneurs recognized the potential of social media in the country and began creating local platforms. Naijapals,

Linda Ikeji's Blog, and Naijaloaded are examples of local platforms that have carved their niche in the Nigerian social media landscape.

7. **Influence of Nigerian Celebrities and Influencers:** Nigerian celebrities, musicians, actors, and influencers have a significant presence on social media. They use their platforms to engage with fans, promote their work, and advocate for various causes. Some have millions of followers and influence public opinion.
8. **Role in Political Activism:** Social media has played a crucial role in political activism in Nigeria. Movements like #OccupyNigeria, #BringBackOurGirls, and the #EndSARS protests used social media platforms to mobilize and raise awareness about social and political issues.
9. **Business and Marketing:** Nigerian businesses have recognized the marketing potential of social media. They use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter for advertising, customer engagement, and e-commerce.
10. **Regulatory Challenges:** The Nigerian government has, at times, attempted to regulate social media use. Laws and regulations have been proposed to control the spread of false information and hate speech on these platforms. These initiatives have generated debates about freedom of speech and online privacy.

The history of social media in Nigeria reflects its rapid evolution and its profound impact on communication, activism, business, and entertainment in the country. It continues to be a dynamic and transformative force in Nigerian society.

Ethical Concerns: Rationale for Regulating Social Media

Ethical considerations encompass the moral compass that guides human conduct, addressing questions of fairness, accuracy, and the mitigation of harm. It establishes the code of conduct for harmonious coexistence within any societal group. Aristotle, as noted by Dalfovo (2002), is credited with introducing the term "ethics" in philosophical discourse. He referred to "ethike theoria" to delineate the domain of philosophy concerned with human behavior and the criteria for evaluating actions (Dalfovo, 2002). African traditional culture has historically embraced a communal ethos where ethics played a central and robust role (Dalfovo, 2002). African ethics placed paramount importance on an individual's conformity to the social group to preserve harmonious human relationships (Kigongo, 2002). In this paradigm, the individual is regarded as the focal point of the relationship, actively participating in it and regulating their behavior in accordance with ethical principles. However, the importation of individualism over collectivism has constrained ethical and moral conduct, often relegating it to the realm of individual conscience (Dalfovo, 2002). As articulated by Fidiyani et al. (2017:258), every environment is governed by laws and ethics, which serve as guidelines for behavior and yield three-fold impacts, encompassing legal, ethical, and social dimensions. In the context of the Internet, new norms, or "Netiquette," have emerged to guide ethical behavior and communication among netizens. This framework for ethical internet use can be extrapolated to social media. Azinge (2012) emphasized that in journalism, ethical standards like fairness and balance are still essential, even for individual users of social media who aren't held to the same standards. Yet, social media platforms have grappled with ethical violations, with the proliferation of unethical conduct, including the dissemination of fake news, hate speech, and propaganda (Duru,

2016). While the Nigerian Cybercrime Act of 2015 stands as a significant mechanism for the regulation of social media, it's important to note that mainstream media outlets are subject to regulatory measures that social media is not (Mohammed, 2021).

Fidiyani et al. (2017) underscored the importance of netizens adhering to prescribed "netiquette" for harmonious communication.

Social media, while instrumental in raising political awareness among Nigeria's electorate, has simultaneously been used for negative propaganda and the dissemination of unethical content, such as fake news and hate speech (Emetumah, 2016). Moreover, the traditional principles of photojournalism, which prohibit the indiscriminate use of photos, images, and videos, have been frequently disregarded by numerous social media users (John, 2012).

These growing ethical concerns associated with social media use have fueled calls for regulation (Moses et al., 2022). Regulatory efforts have primarily focused on national security concerns. Since 2015, several attempts have been made, including the "Frivolous Petitions (Prohibition) Bill 2015," often referred to as the "Social Media Bill," to exert control over social media usage in Nigeria (Agbedo, 2021; Paul, 2019).

However, prioritizing social media regulation for national security reasons may be misguided. Such regulations, if enforced, could potentially stifle public discourse on critical matters related to national security and governance (Moses et al., 2022). Freedom of expression is recognized as a fundamental human right and is safeguarded under Section 33 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended). Although freedom of opinion and expression is not absolute, it is imperative to strike a balance. A comprehensive approach, combining government regulation, self-regulation rooted in African ethics, and media literacy, may offer a more effective means of curbing unethical social media use (Dalfovo, 2002).

Media Literacy and Social Media Ethics

The term 'media literacy' has often been shrouded in conceptual ambiguity. According to Aufderheide (1993), media literacy is essentially a tool designed to enable individuals to comprehend, create, and negotiate meanings within a culture dominated by images, text, and audio. Bulger and Davison (2018) define media literacy as a skill set that empowers critical engagement with the messages conveyed by the media. This suggests that a media-literate person possesses the ability to decipher, assess, scrutinize, and create content across both traditional and digital media platforms (Aufderheide, 1993).

Koltay (2011) highlights that as digital technologies continue to advance, awareness of media has become increasingly vital. This heightened media consciousness becomes even more imperative among the burgeoning youth who frequently employ a plethora of social media platforms to satisfy their diverse needs. In alignment with this perspective, Bulger and Davison (2018) put forward that contemporary media literacy revolves around five core themes: youth participation, teacher training and educational resources, parental support, policy initiatives, and the establishment of an empirical foundation. They further emphasize that these programs hold great promise, particularly when it comes to responding swiftly to breaking news events, bridging the gap between critical thinking and behavioral changes, and appraising partisan content. Although Bulger and Davison (2018) acknowledge the

scarcity of comprehensive evaluation data concerning media literacy endeavors, they unequivocally endorse the indispensability of media literacy for ethical communication within online spaces.

Apuke et al. (2022) also draw attention to studies such as those conducted by Carr et al. (2020) and Vraga and Tully (2021), which have demonstrated the effectiveness of literacy interventions in enhancing knowledge and combating unethical practices, including the detection of fake news and the mitigation of its influence. Therefore, it can be asserted that, in addition to regulatory measures, fostering media literacy among the youth in both formal and informal educational settings emerges as a paramount requirement for promoting the ethical utilization of social media.

Analysis of existing laws, regulations, and their effectiveness in addressing social media ethics.

The proliferation of social media in Nigeria has presented policymakers with the challenge of effectively regulating these platforms to address ethical concerns. There are existing laws and regulations that touch upon various aspects of social media use, but their effectiveness in curbing unethical behavior remains a subject of scrutiny (Okeke, 2019).

1. **Cybercrime Act (2015):** The Cybercrime Act of 2015 is one of the primary legal instruments relevant to social media ethics in Nigeria (Adewale, 2018). This law addresses various cybercrimes, including identity theft, hacking, and cyberbullying. However, its effectiveness in deterring cyberbullying and harassment on social media remains debated (Nwabueze, 2020). Critics argue that enforcement is often lacking, and cases may not be promptly investigated or prosecuted.
2. **National Broadcasting Code:** The National Broadcasting Code, overseen by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), provides guidelines for ethical standards in broadcasting, including the airing of content on social media (Okonkwo, 2019). While it sets certain ethical expectations, it lacks direct authority over online platforms. Enforcement challenges and the rapid growth of user-generated content make its effectiveness in regulating social media content a subject of ongoing discussion (Afolabi, 2021).
3. **Data Protection Regulations:** The National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) has introduced data protection regulations aimed at safeguarding user data privacy (Ogundele, 2018). These regulations require entities to obtain consent for data processing and inform users about how their data is being used. However, ensuring compliance and penalizing violations, particularly on social media platforms, remains a complex task (Adams, 2020).
4. **Freedom of Expression:** The Nigerian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression (Balogun, 2020). This freedom extends to online expression, including on social media platforms. Balancing the need to protect this constitutional right with the necessity of regulating harmful content and misinformation poses a significant challenge for legislators and regulators (Oluwaseyi, 2021).
5. **Lack of Specific Social Media Legislation:** Notably, Nigeria lacks specific legislation tailored to the unique challenges posed by social media. The absence of dedicated regulations often means that existing laws and regulations are applied in an ad hoc

manner, resulting in varying interpretations and enforcement strategies (Adeniji, 2019).

6. **Global Social Media Platforms:** Many social media platforms used in Nigeria are global, and their policies and standards are often developed outside the country. The Nigerian government's ability to influence and enforce ethical standards on these platforms is limited, raising questions about the effectiveness of national regulations in a global digital environment (Williams, 2021).

The effectiveness of existing laws and regulations in addressing social media ethics in Nigeria is a topic of ongoing debate and research (Adeleke, 2020). Policymakers and regulatory bodies are faced with the challenge of adapting regulations to the evolving digital landscape and ensuring that these laws are effectively enforced, particularly when it comes to addressing misinformation, cyberbullying, and privacy violations on social media.

Mitigation and Solutions: Addressing Ethical Challenges on Social Media in Nigeria

As Nigeria grapples with a plethora of ethical challenges arising from the use of social media, it becomes essential to explore viable solutions and strategies to foster a more responsible and ethical digital environment (Okeke, 2020).

1. **Media Literacy and Education:** Promoting media literacy and digital citizenship among users is a fundamental step in addressing ethical challenges. Education and awareness campaigns can help individuals critically evaluate the information they encounter on social media and discern between reliable and false content (Nwabueze, 2018).
2. **Strengthening Cybersecurity Measures:** Enhancing cybersecurity measures and collaborating with internet service providers and social media platforms can help in curbing cyberbullying, online harassment, and hacking incidents (Adams, 2019). Stronger cybersecurity can provide users with a safer online experience.
3. **Effective Implementation of Existing Laws:** It is crucial to ensure the effective implementation of existing laws and regulations governing social media (Afolabi, 2020). This includes strengthening law enforcement capacity and ensuring that those who engage in malicious activities are held accountable.
4. **Collaboration with Social Media Platforms:** Collaborative efforts between the Nigerian government, regulatory bodies, and social media platforms are vital (Okonkwo, 2021). This collaboration can lead to the development and enforcement of community guidelines, content moderation, and mechanisms to report and address abusive content.
5. **Promotion of Positive Online Behavior:** Encouraging positive and respectful online behavior is essential (Adeleke, 2021). This involves promoting constructive engagement, empathy, and tolerance, which can help mitigate hate speech and incendiary content.
6. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Solutions must be culturally sensitive, considering Nigeria's diverse cultural and linguistic landscape (Balogun, 2019). Crafting policies and interventions that resonate with various cultural groups can lead to more effective results.

7. **Empowerment of Regulatory Bodies:** Strengthening the capacity and independence of regulatory bodies responsible for monitoring and enforcing ethical standards on social media is imperative (Adewale, 2021). These bodies should have the resources and authority necessary to fulfill their mandates effectively.
8. **User Responsibility:** Encouraging users to take responsibility for their actions on social media is essential (Williams, 2020). Individuals should be aware of the consequences of their online behavior and strive to engage in ethical, respectful, and constructive interactions.
9. **Research and Monitoring:** Conducting ongoing research to understand emerging trends and challenges on social media is crucial (Oluwaseyi, 2019). This research can inform the development of responsive policies and strategies.
10. **Government-Platform Dialogue:** Establishing an ongoing dialogue between the Nigerian government and social media platforms is vital (Adeniji, 2018). This can facilitate the development of policies that align with the global digital landscape while addressing the unique challenges within Nigeria.

The effective mitigation of ethical challenges on social media in Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach, involving stakeholders at various levels, from individuals and regulatory bodies to social media platforms. By implementing these solutions and strategies, Nigeria can harness the positive potential of social media while mitigating its adverse effects (Ogundele, 2021).

Challenges and Limitations: Implementing Ethical Solutions and Regulatory Approaches

While addressing ethical challenges on social media in Nigeria is crucial, the process of implementing solutions and regulatory approaches is not without its challenges and limitations (Okeke, 2020).

1. **Enforcement Challenges:** One of the significant hurdles is the enforcement of regulations. Nigeria's vast and diverse online community makes it challenging for regulatory bodies to monitor and enforce ethical standards effectively (Nwabueze, 2018). The sheer volume of social media content and the rapid pace at which it is generated present logistical challenges for enforcement.
2. **Global Nature of SocialMedia:** Many social media platforms used in Nigeria are international, making it difficult for national regulations to exert control over their content (Adams, 2019). Platforms based outside Nigeria may not prioritize the nation's specific ethical concerns, posing limitations on the effectiveness of regulatory approaches.
3. **Free Expression vs. Regulation:** Striking a balance between the right to free expression and the need for regulation remains a fundamental challenge (Afolabi, 2020). Overly restrictive regulations may inadvertently curb freedom of expression, while lax regulations may lead to ethical issues. Finding the right balance is a complex task.
4. **Resource Constraints:** Regulatory bodies often face resource constraints, limiting their capacity to monitor and enforce ethical standards (Okonkwo, 2021). Adequate

funding and resources are essential to effectively combat ethical challenges on social media.

5. **Technological Advancements:** As technology evolves, so do the methods and tools used for unethical behavior on social media (Adeleke, 2021). Regulations may struggle to keep pace with emerging technologies and evolving tactics used by malicious actors.
6. **Cultural and Linguistic Diversity:** Nigeria's cultural and linguistic diversity poses a challenge in crafting regulations and solutions that resonate with all communities (Balogun, 2019). What is considered ethical in one culture or language group might differ from another, making it challenging to create universally applicable standards.
7. **User Responsibility and Awareness:** Encouraging users to take responsibility for their online behavior is a complex task (Williams, 2020). Awareness campaigns may not reach all users, and some may remain unaware of the consequences of their actions on social media.
8. **Legal Framework Gaps:** The absence of specific legislation tailored to social media in Nigeria creates gaps in the legal framework (Adewale, 2021). The lack of dedicated regulations can hinder the effectiveness of regulatory approaches when addressing social media ethics.
9. **Global Platforms' Autonomy:** Social media platforms often maintain a degree of autonomy in regulating content (Oluwaseyi, 2019). This can limit the impact of national regulations, as platforms may interpret and enforce ethical standards based on their global policies.
10. **Resistance to Change:** Implementing ethical solutions and regulatory changes often encounters resistance from various stakeholders, including platform users, businesses, and advocacy groups (Adeniji, 2018). Convincing these stakeholders to adapt to new ethical standards can be a challenging endeavor.

While these challenges and limitations are significant, they do not diminish the importance of addressing ethical concerns on social media in Nigeria. Recognizing and understanding these hurdles is essential in developing more effective and nuanced approaches to fostering a responsible and ethical digital environment (Ogundele, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

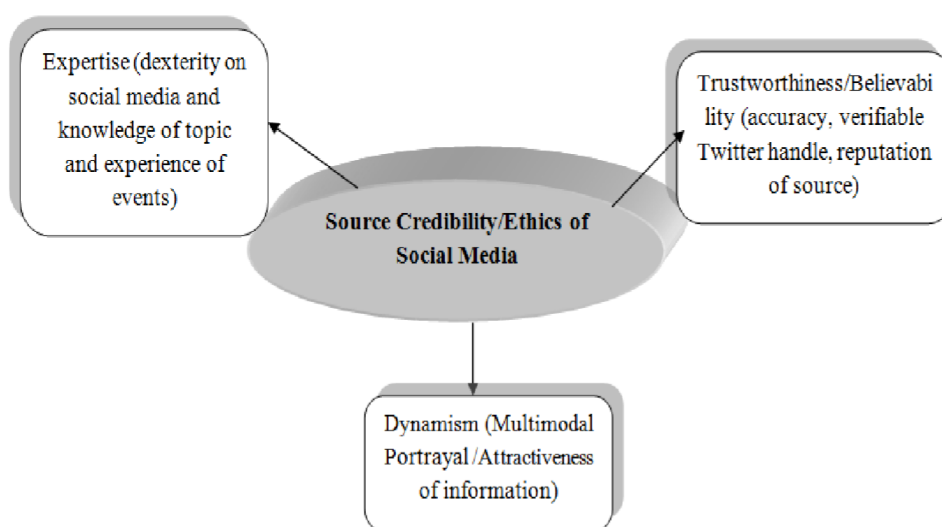
This study is firmly grounded in the Source Credibility Theory (SCT), which has its roots in the earliest discussions of source credibility. It's noteworthy that the concept of source credibility traces back to the era of Aristotle, as highlighted by Asemah and Ogwo (2013) and Umeogu (2012). Aristotle, among his many insights, emphasized that the credibility of the source, partially referred to as *ethos*, significantly contributes to the persuasiveness of a message (Umeogu, 2012:114). This *ethos* encompasses factors such as the communicator's knowledge, understanding of the message, moral authority, and goodwill, all of which collectively shape the credibility and trust associated with the communicator (Umeogu, 2012).

The Source Credibility Theory (SCT), as advanced by Hovland et al. (1953) in their seminal work on persuasive public speech, underlines the premise that a message recipient is more likely to be persuaded when the source of the communication is perceived as

credible (Hovland et al., 1953). They assert that the credibility of a source hinges on two primary dimensions: trustworthiness and expertise of the information source. Over time, scholars like Berlo et al. (1969) and McCroskey (1966) have expanded on Hovland's foundational work. Berlo et al. (1969) introduced additional attributes to the perception of source credibility, including safety, qualification, and dynamism. They particularly underscored the significance of dynamism in predicting message credibility. Thus, this study, in keeping with the SCT, incorporates the classic primary and secondary attributes of trustworthiness, expertise, and dynamism.

Trustworthiness, according to Hovland et al. (1953:21), is "the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid." Expertise is "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions." In simpler terms, expertise revolves around the trust that the message recipient has in the perceived knowledge, skill, and experience of the information source. Dynamism, the third dimension, characterizes the extent to which a source presents information in a fast, energetic, bold, colorful, and confident manner (Berlo et al., 1969:567). In essence, dynamism pertains to how a message is creatively conveyed through verbal and non-verbal cues.

For the purposes of this study, the information sources include social media and its users, with specific attention to Twitter and Twitterati. Unless otherwise specified, the term "source credibility" will be used interchangeably with "perceived source credibility." The growing reliance on social media as a news source and the increasing trust of young users serve as drivers for online news providers to enhance ethical principles such as truthfulness, fairness, and accountability (Akoja & Nweneazizi, 2020). Given the inherent connection between ethics and source credibility, the SCT provides a robust foundation for exploring ethical concerns surrounding the use of social media, particularly Twitter, by Nigerian youth during the #EndSARS protest.



Picture 1

In line with the SCT, this study presents a conceptual model (Figure 1) based on the primary and secondary attributes of source credibility. It is conceptualized that the degree

of persuasion or responsiveness of Twitter users (twitizens) during the #EndSARS protest is associated with the perceived credibility of tweets and retweets. Trustworthiness pertains to the degree to which twitizens believe and trust tweets related to the #EndSARS protest, based on factual accuracy from verifiable Twitter accounts and the reputation of the tweet originator, partly measured by their number of followers.

Expertise is defined as proficiency in using Twitter, skill in employing persuasive language, knowledge of the issues surrounding the protest, and possibly firsthand experience with the event, all of which contribute to the perceived credibility of the source. Dynamism refers to the vivid and attractive portrayal of tweets, assessed through the multimodality of the tweets, which includes textual, visual, and animated elements.

Several Nigerian scholars, like Akoja & Nweneazizi (2020), have applied the SCT perspective to social media, demonstrating the credibility of these platforms. For instance, Akoja & Nweneazizi (2020) found that a highly credible source leads to increased usage of social media. However, Agboola et al. (2016) reported a lack of credibility in both the content and sources on social media. The study also found that digital media platforms pique the interest of young audiences but lack adequate gatekeeping, raising doubts about the credibility of such sources.

Wada (2021) discovered that while a significant number of younger Nigerians source their news solely from social media, many users may not feel compelled to verify the credibility or authenticity of news items before sharing or acting on them. John (2012) noted that unethical practices, such as anonymity and the manipulation of images, are readily accepted online. Moreover, the influence of celebrities and influencers plays a critical role in determining Twitter's credibility within the context of the #EndSARS protest (Dambo et al., 2021).

Western studies, such as those by Lowry et al. (2013), have found that visual elements, including color schemes, significantly predict perceptions of credibility. In some cases, the only source of information is a username, an incomplete identity, or even a fraudulent identity on Twitter or YouTube, which raises doubts about the source's credibility (Abbasi & Liu, 2013). Metzger and Flanagin (2013) observed that the abundance of online information and the lack of proper expert authentication result in much online information being outdated, incomplete, or inaccurate. Lee and Sundar (2013) demonstrated that the credibility of tweets is positively predicted by the expertise of the source, while the credibility of retweets is positively predicted by the trustworthiness of the initial source. Jenkins et al. (2020) identified various characteristics, such as online language use, expertise heuristics, and bandwagon heuristics, as influencing the credibility of online content.

These attributes of the SCT demonstrate its suitability for this study.

Methodology

This study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary methodological approach. Discourse analysis, situated within the broader field of linguistics, focuses on the construction of meaning from textual communication. It involves a comprehensive understanding of the potential inherent in language and its actualization within a text (Saheed, 2019:28). However, scholars like Fairclough (1992) have argued that textual analysis alone might be insufficient, as it fails to shed light on the intricate

connections between texts, societal, cultural processes, and structures. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) endeavors to bridge this gap.

Fairclough (1995) introduced CDA as an analytical technique within the larger domain of discourse analysis, extending beyond surface-level textual examination to unveil deeper layers of meaning in various formats. Consequently, according to Fairclough (2012), CDA incorporates the critical tradition of social analysis into language studies, contributing to a critical social analysis. It achieves this by placing particular emphasis on discourse and other social elements such as power dynamics, ideologies, institutions, social identities, and more (Fairclough, 2012). As noted by Lirola (2015), CDA enhances comprehension of the relationship between linguistic and visual choices and their contextual implications, revealing the subtextual or implied meanings within a text.

In essence, CDA explores how language creates and perpetuates social realities to uncover instances of injustice, power imbalances, the abuse of power by certain social groups over others, or inequalities rooted in factors like race, social class, or gender (Saheed, 2019; Wodak & Chilton, 2005). CDA is particularly relevant to this research because the aim is to analyze more than just language use in tweets. The principles of CDA will enable the deconstruction of the interplay between language (text) and visuals (images) in tweets related to the #EndSARS protest, delving into ethical concerns and broader social issues of youth dominance, inequality, and oppression in Nigeria.

The study's population encompassed the four most popular social networking sites in Nigeria: Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter, as identified by NOIPolls in 2019. Out of these, Twitter was purposively selected for two primary reasons. Firstly, it emerged as the most suitable platform for the study due to its widespread use during the #EndSARS protest and its subsequent relevance in discussions of ethical concerns on social media. Secondly, Twitter's user base played a significant role in shaping the discourse surrounding the protest, making it an ideal source for analysis.

Twitter with its 280-character limit tweets and multimodal affordances has become an attractive source for youth activism, information generation and diffusion among youth in Nigeria. Zoaka (2021) affirmed the inherent capabilities of Twitter as an electronic platform for multidimensional communication to foster social change, political education and engagement, civic discourses, and voter mobilisation. Secondly, Twitter was purposively selected since so far, it is the only social media platform that the federal government temporally suspended its operations in the country in June 2021 for ethical violations.

Due to time and space constraints, secondary data was elicited from a convenient selection of ten (10) tweets including retweets containing text and images posted by the youth protesters during and within 18 months after the "#EndSARS protest. The selection of tweets was done manually by using the keyword "#EndSARS protest 2020" and "Images from the #EndSARS protest." The tweets were compiled and analysis was done based on the main linguistic and visual presentations.

Result and Discussion



Picture 2. *Sample 1*

Source: Captain. (2020, October 15)

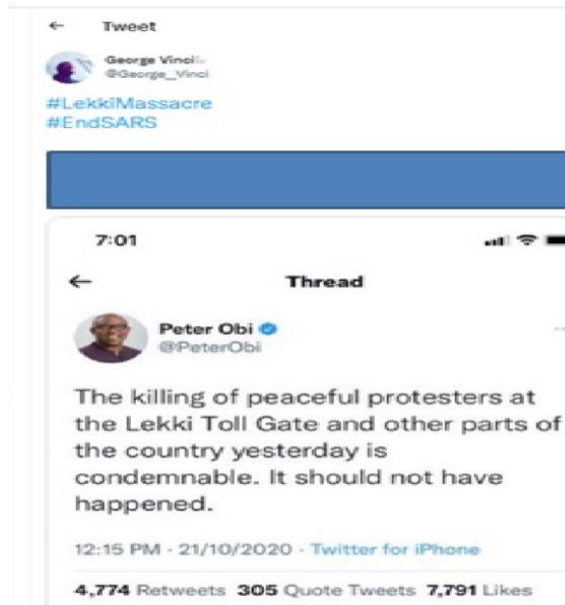
Twitter handle: @ImCaptain_Sam

Format: Text and image

The image in Sample 1 was a tweet by a twitizen named Captain on October 15, 2020, during the #EndSARS protest. The original tweet had an appreciable level of following and interactivity with 27 tweets, 558 retweets and 748 likes. From the long-shot images of sleeping protesters, it is evident that the protest that started on Twitter had been taken to the streets. At a glance, the images show some youths sleeping on the streets. The bold black and red textual contents on the banner were probably for emphasis and amplification of their fight against oppression. The scene of the youth sleeping on the bare floor conveys a message of steadfast tenacity and commitment to alter the status quo. This result is congruent with Dajo and Akor's (2021) findings, which showed that Nigerian adolescents are more aware of the circumstances that keep them in captivity and are therefore more determined to use nonviolent measures to fight against the systems of injustice, oppression, dominance, etc.

However, though the image in Sample 1 appears to be accurate and true, the source of the tweet named Captain; probably a pseudonym lacked a clear identity. Moreover, one of the hashtags "#Anonymous" above the image affirms the lack of identity of the source and casts doubts on the credibility of the tweet. This agrees with the findings by Wada (2021) and Abbasi and Liu (2013) who reported a lack of identity of information sources on social media. This lack of identity violates social media ethics and the truthfulness attribute of the SCT. Yet the post had been retweeted 558 times, giving credence to claims that social media users in Nigeria may not verify the credibility or authenticity of information before using, sharing, or acting (Wada, 2021). In summary, the result of this present study showed a mix

of ethical and unethical conduct in this tweet. The implication is that ethical and unethical issues may be found within a single tweet (source). Thus, it would require critical analysis to discern what to trust and believe on social media.



Picture 3. *Sample 2*

Source: Vinci, G. (2022, February 5)

Twitter handle: @George_Vinci

Format: Text

Note: The researcher covered some areas of Sample 2.

Sample 2 allegedly includes a tweet responding to the tragic events at Lekki, posted by prominent politician Mr. Peter Obi. This tweet was originally sent out at 12:15 PM on October 21, 2020, and had garnered 7,791 likes, 305 quote tweets, and 4,774 retweets as of the time of this research. While the tragic incident unfolded at the Lekki Toll Gate, Twitter users amplified the news through retweets and quote tweets. Furthermore, Sample 2 illustrates George Vinci, a Twitter user, continuing to condemn the Lekki killings on February 5, 2022, when he posted a tweet that referenced Mr. Obi's tweet from October 21, 2020, which was shared the day after the shootings. Tagging a tweet by a political influencer likely aimed to lend credibility to the report on the Lekki killings. This finding aligns with Dambo et al.'s (2021) assertion that influencers played a pivotal role in shaping Twitter's credibility during the #EndSARS protest.

Moreover, the tagged tweet in Sample 2 validates the occurrence of the Lekki killings and hints at the possibility that the ongoing efforts to regulate social media are primarily driven by a desire to curb freedom of expression rather than genuine ethical concerns. This result echoes the observations made by Moses et al. (2022), who contended that the push for state regulation of social media in Nigeria was an endeavor to suppress free speech. As previously mentioned, the SocialMedia Bill faced significant opposition, leading to its impediment. Therefore, it is not surprising that during the #EndSARS protest, the government resorted to draconian measures, even though the protesters were primarily

using Twitter to share information about police brutality. This suggests that if attempts to restrict social media prove ineffective in achieving their objectives, physical force might become the next option.



Picture 4. *Sample 3*

Source: A.I.M. (2021, October 20)

Twitter handle: @AimThaMachine_

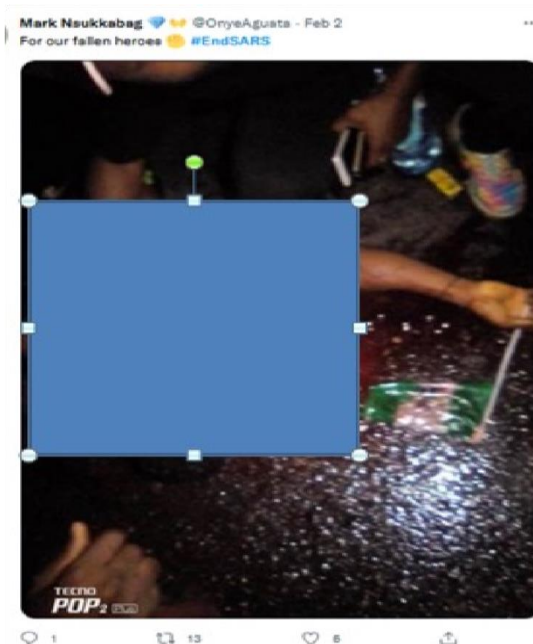
Format: Text

Note: A portion of Sample 3 was covered by the researcher.

Sample 3, dated October 20, 2021, illustrates a Twitter user tagging a textual tweet thread to commemorate one year since protesters were shot at Lekki. From excerpts of the tweet thread, it is apparent that at 5:42 PM on October 20, 2020, another Twitter user had alerted the #EndSARS demonstrators about an imminent attack. This warning tweet received significant engagement, with 2,144 likes, 3,100 retweets, and 731 quote tweets. Despite the retweets conveying the warning, the protesters remained steadfast in their mission. The choice of a black background for the tagged tweet likely aimed to emphasize the solemnity of the situation and the potential loss of lives. The tweet included the statement: "...clean-up of the youth, might end up in deaths..." Given that the shootings and fatalities occurred shortly after the warning was tweeted, the tagged tweet in Sample 3 appeared to challenge the notion that information shared on social media is generally lacking in credibility.

This finding aligns with the conclusions of Asemah and Ogwo (2013) and Edogor et al. (2015), who established that social media platforms were considered credible channels of communication. However, it sharply contrasts with the results reported by Agboola et al.

(2016), who found a lack of credibility in both social media content and its sources (see also Mustapha et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the outcome of this present study suggests that in this specific instance, Twitter served as a credible source of information, adhering to ethical standards of truth and accuracy. Even though the government initially denied the killings of demonstrators during the Lekki protest, an official inquiry panel later confirmed these events, further substantiating the credibility of social media reports. In conclusion, the once-prevailing generalization that social media sources lack credibility may be gradually becoming the exception rather than the rule.



Picture 5. *Sample 4*

Source: Nsukkabag, M. (2022, February 2)

Twitter handle: @OnyeAgusta

Format: Text and image

Note: The researcher covered some areas of Sample 4 to minimise its graphic impact.

Sample 4 displayed an image of a victim who reportedly lost their life on October 20, 2020, during the tragic events at the Lekki Toll Gate, a day etched in history as the "Lekki Massacre." The image, while accurate in its depiction, was profoundly graphic and disturbing. It portrayed a young man lying in a pool of blood, clutching the Nigerian flag in his right hand. On February 2, 2022, this image resurfaced in a retweet accompanied by the hashtag "EndSARS" as a tribute to the fallen heroes.

Although the tweet's content may have been factually accurate, the unethical manner in which the image was presented raised ethical concerns. This aligns with the observation made by John (2012), who noted that many social media users tend to disregard their responsibility to adhere to the ethical standards of photojournalism. One plausible explanation for this behavior could be that the graphic image was intended to serve as a form of propaganda, designed to elicit strong emotional responses and garner support from the audience. Additionally, the absence of media literacy and self-regulation within this

particular news source may contribute to this unethical conduct. This argument finds support in studies highlighting the correlation between media literacy and ethical social media usage (Apuke et al., 2022; Bulger & Davison, 2018; Carr et al., 2020; Vraga & Tully, 2021). The premise is that the better the youth's grounding in media literacy, the more likely they are to apply principles of social media ethics, particularly in the realm of image presentation.



Picture 6. *Sample 5*

Source: Ekeke, N. (2021, October 31)

Twitter handle: @Nedunaija

Format: Text and image

The content presented in Sample 5 is a wide-angle view of the demonstrators at the Lekki Tollgate. This tweet was shared on October 31, 2021, and was tagged with the message, "WE WILL NEVER FORGET. #EndSARS." At the time this screenshot was taken, the tweet had garnered 1,900 retweets. The image resurfaced one year following the protest, effectively encapsulating the spirit of the demonstration.

It conveyed the idea that even in the absence of a designated leader, the youth stood together, displaying unity, peacefulness, excellent organization, and equality in their pursuit of a common cause. It also underscored the hybrid nature of the protests, blending both online and offline elements. This observation aligns with the 2020 report from the BBC, as referenced in Moses et al. (2022), which highlighted that young Nigerians had found their voice, disrupting the traditional culture of respect through a potent fusion of street protests and social media. It is essential to acknowledge that the protesters effectively orchestrated a hybrid demonstration despite lacking an official leader, underscoring their dynamism and adaptability.



Picture 7. Sample 6

Source: GIDI (2020, November 20)

Twitter handle: @Gidi_Traffic Format: Image

Sample 6 depicts the shooting of #EndSARS demonstrators on October 20, 2020, using animation. The tweeted image surfaced on November 20, 2020, to mark one month of the Lekki shootings. Perhaps, the broken walls, and torn, bloodied flags symbolise a nation on the precipice. The image is less disturbing, implying that the content creator was sensitive to the feelings of the public and therefore chose to use animation rather than real images. This attests to the expert skill, resourcefulness and knowledge of the source to be able to pull off such a professional portrayal, reinforcing the credibility of the source. This agrees with Lee and Sundar (2013) who found that the credibility of tweets is positively predicted by the expertise of the source. Results on expertise and language use align with Jenkins et al. (2020) who demonstrated that expertise heuristics and language used online can impact source credibility.



Picture 8. Sample 7**Source: Somto. (2021, February 13)**

Twitter handle: @somto_nda Format: Image

Sample 7 features an image portraying a young woman in the act of painting a depiction of green and white leaves, smeared with blood, while a child curiously observes from behind the sprouts. This tweet was shared on February 13, 2021, four months following the EndSARS protest. The imagery conveys the notion that the protest has evolved into an ideology and a sustained movement.

Upon closer examination, the artwork displayed several elements indicative of expertise. The interpretation suggests that the green and white leaves symbolizing the Nigerian flag represent a nation with significant growth potential, yet it restrains its youth (symbolized by the seed) from realizing their full potential. This interpretation aligns with the argument presented by Dajo and Akor (2021) that Nigerian youth have become increasingly conscious of the oppressive conditions in which they live and are driven to employ nonviolent methods to dismantle the systems of injustice, oppression, dominance, and exploitation prevalent in their society.



Source: Moe. (2021, October 20)



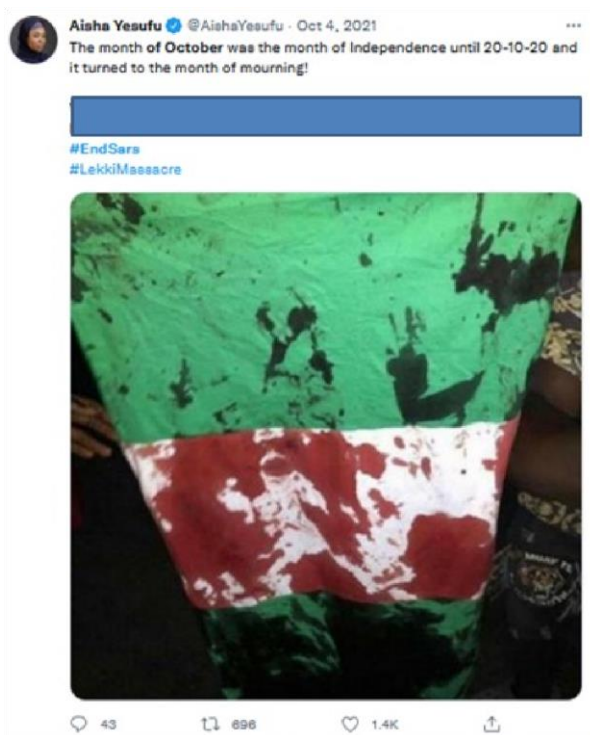
Source: Sogunro, A. (2021, October 20)

Twitter handle: @Mochievous**Format: Text and image****Twitter handle: @ayagosgunro****Format: Text****Note: A portion of Sample 9 was covered. (Picture 9 & 10)**

Samples 8 and 9 comprise tweets commemorating the one-year anniversary of the Lekki Massacre, which occurred in October 2020. Both tweets were shared on October 20, 2021. In Sample 8, the image showcases protesters holding candles at night, conveying the solemn atmosphere of the occasion. The text, "In loving memory of... #EndSARSMemorial," further emphasizes the mood of remembrance. Notably, the faces of the protesting youth are obscured, potentially symbolizing the facelessness of Nigerian youth and placing greater emphasis on those who lost their lives during the protests.

Sample 9, on the other hand, creatively presents the Lekki killings of October 20, 2020, through a textual representation. The prominent display of the date written in red ink in bold capital letters that appear to be dripping blood conveys the brutality that transpired during the protest.

Both tweets underscore the dynamism of the youth in the post-protest period. The subtle use of propaganda, achieved through the repetition of the protest's most sorrowful moments, appears to be an attempt to evoke sympathy and influence the recipients of the tweets to align with the protesters' ideology. While this approach maintains ethical standards in terms of truthfulness, it raises the risk of presenting a one-sided narrative. Ihebuzor and Egbunike (2018) identified single narratives as one of the four characteristics of political discussions on Twitter that could negatively affect source credibility. The findings of this study partly support their observations.



Picture 11. *Sample 10*

Source: Yesufu, A. (2021, October 4)

Twitter handle: @AishaYesufu

Format: Text and Image

Note: A portion of Sample 10 was covered.

Sample 10 presents a tweet shared by one of the prominent figures of the #EndSARS movement, Aisha Yesufu. Despite being posted almost a year after the conclusion of the protests, this tweet garnered 696 retweets and around 1,400 likes at the time it was captured. The tweet features an image of the Nigerian flag stained with blood, and it holds relevance for two primary reasons. First, it likely aimed to sustain the spirit of the protest by reminding her followers of the tragic events of October 20, 2020. Second, it underscores the influential role of celebrities and social media influencers in bolstering the perception of source credibility on social media.

Celebrities and influencers have been identified as a contributing factor to the dynamism construct within the Source Credibility Theory (SCT) framework on social media. These findings align with those of Dambo et al. (2021), who illustrated that

influencers played a substantial role in the #EndSARS movement on Twitter. Consequently, when celebrities or influencers align themselves with a cause on social media, there is a higher likelihood that information originating from them will be regarded as credible.

Conclusion

This research delves into the intricate realm of ethical considerations surrounding social media usage by Nigerian youth, with a particular focus on Twitter and its role during the #EndSARS protest. Within the framework of the Source Credibility Theory (SCT), this study unraveled a tapestry of both ethical and unethical practices observed on Twitter during this pivotal moment in Nigerian history.

The findings of this investigation shed light on a spectrum of Twitter activity during the #EndSARS movement. Some tweets admirably adhered to ethical standards by effectively disseminating knowledge, presenting truthful information, and infusing dynamism into their content, often employing animated visuals to convey gruesome scenes in a responsible manner. However, not all Twitter activity was marked by such integrity.

Instances of unethical usage emerged, notably when a graphic image was mishandled, potentially violating ethical boundaries. Additionally, tweets from anonymous sources raised questions regarding the credibility of their content, undermining the fundamental principle of source credibility. The study also uncovered subtle propaganda techniques, where poignant moments from the protests were repetitively emphasized, potentially aiming to manipulate sentiment and sway the audience's perspective. While these approaches maintained the ethical standards of truthfulness, they hinted at the dangers of crafting a one-sided narrative.

In essence, this research unearthed credible tweets that embodied the hallmarks of reliability, competence, and dynamism, unequivocally illustrating that Twitter can indeed serve as a dependable source of information, particularly in the context of protests. This challenges the prevailing assumption that social media platforms are inherently lacking in credibility, suggesting that such instances may be exceptions rather than the norm.

Consequently, this study advocates for a multifaceted approach to address the ethical dimensions of social media use. It calls for the revival of neglected self-regulation systems embedded in African ethics, emphasizing the importance of ethical conduct and responsibility among social media users. Furthermore, in addition to government regulations, the promotion of media literacy within Nigeria's educational institutions and workplaces emerges as a critical strategy to combat unethical social media practices among the youth.

Limitations And Recommendations for Future Research

This study encountered several limitations that serve as valuable signposts for future research directions. Firstly, the deliberate choice of Twitter as the primary platform for analysis limits the broad applicability of the findings to other social media platforms. To overcome this limitation, future research endeavors may encompass a more comprehensive range of social media platforms, allowing for a more holistic perspective.

Secondly, the financial constraints that hindered the acquisition of a social media research toolkit resulted in a laborious and manual data collection process. This not only compromised the objectivity of the dataset but also limited its robustness. To circumvent this challenge, future researchers could explore the use of Twitter's Application Programming Interface (API), such as the Twitter Academic Developer API, to streamline the data retrieval process, particularly in the context of dynamic events like the #EndSARS protest.

Furthermore, this study had a relatively narrow focus on ethical concerns within the realm of Twitter use by young individuals during the #EndSARS protest. This specificity constrains the generalizability of the findings to other social media platforms and diverse demographic groups. Therefore, future investigations could delve into the comparative analysis of demographic variations in social media engagement, not only during the #EndSARS movement but also in the context of other prominent hashtag-driven protests within Nigeria and across the African continent. This approach would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dynamics of social media usage in activism and political discourse.

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