THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS ON THE AMPLIFICATION OF #END-BADGOVERNANCE PROTESTERS' VOICES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram have become significant tools for global communication, self-expression, and collective action. They providee spaces where citizens can voice demands for social change. In Nigeria, August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests underscored the role of social media in galvanizing mass movements. This research investigates the impact of social media algorithms on the amplified voices of #EndBadGovernance protesters. The study specifically aims to evaluate the extent of social media engagement during the protests, analyze how algorithmic amplification influenced the visibility of protest-related content, and identify the key messages that contributed to mobilizing the protesters. The theoretical framework is grounded in public sphere theory, alongside the logic of collective and connective action, to better understand how social media platforms foster collective dissent. A quantitative research design was adopted, with data collected through structured questionnaires from participants in the Karu and Jos North Local Government Areas in Nasarawa and Plateau States, respectively. The findings revealed that social media was instrumental in mobilizing protesters, with algorithm-driven amplification significantly increasing the visibility and reach of protest-related posts. Key messages that galvanized the protests focused on issues such as the high cost of governance, corruption, inadequate educational and health care systems, widespread poverty, and hunger. This study highlights social media's critical role as a powerful tool for citizens to demand accountability and good governance. It calls for responsible and ethical use of these platforms to ensure that legitimate concerns are effectively communicated while adhering to civic responsibility.

Keywords: Social Media, Protests, Algorithms, Amplification, Governance, #EndBadGovernance.

Introduction

Throughout history, protests have played a vital role in advocating for justice, challenging bad governance, and shaping social progress. For example, in 2023, France witnessed mass protests where over one million people

took to the streets to oppose the pension reform bill proposed by the Borne government, which sought to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 (Schofield & Plummer, 2023). Similarly, in the United States, numerous protests have been driven by citizens' discontent with policies perceived as incompatible with democracy. Notable examples between 2020 and 2023 include protests following the death of George Floyd, the Women's March in 2017, and the March for Our Lives in 2018, all aimed at addressing various social injustices (State Historical Society of Iowa, 2024; Winston, 2014).

In China, protests such as the 1959 Tibetan uprising, the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, the Falun Gong demonstrations of 1999, and the 2022 COVID-19 protests have all left significant marks on the country's political and social landscape (Amnesty International, 2023). Similarly, in Bangladesh, the 2024 student demonstrations, initially aimed at abolishing civil service quota systems, escalated into anti-government protests that ultimately led to the Prime Minister's departure from the country (Ethiraja, 2024).

India has also witnessed a long history of protests, shaping its democracy. For instance, in 2020, more than 250 million workers and farmers protested against unfavorable policies (Deswal, 2021). Earlier movements, such as Jayaprakash Narayan's protests in 1977, Anna Hazare's anti-corruption campaign in 2011, and the anti-rape protests of 2012-2013, forced the government to address critical issues promptly (Deswal, 2021). In Thailand, protests in 2020 and 2021 called for the dissolution of parliament and constitutional reforms to address the nation's contemporary challenges (PBS News, 2022).

Africa has also witnessed significant social, economic, and political reform protests. Recent examples include the 2023 Kenyan protests against tax hikes, the July 2023 anticorruption protests in Uganda, Nigeria's #EndSARS protests, and the #OccupyJulorbi cost of living demonstrations in Ghana (Nyeko, 2024; Meron, 2024; africanews, 2024).

The mass media has historically played a crucial role in mobilizing protests, and with the advent of new media, this mobilization has intensified. Social media was central to the Arab Spring that swept through countries like Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco. Chiamogu, Obikeze, and Ochiamogu (2021) asserted that social media platforms have become indispensable tools for social activism, empowering citizens to demand adherence to democratic principles. Dewan (2013) similarly observed that social media has revolutionized information dissemination, enhancing advocacy efforts for good governance globally. The rapid, interactive nature of these platforms has transformed social mobilization, allowing both domestic and diaspora communities to engage in their countries' socio-political discourses.

In Nigeria, platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, and Instagram were instrumental in mobilizing for the #EndBadGovernance protests on August 1, 2024. Against this backdrop, this study investigates the impact of social-media algorithms on amplifying the voices of protesters during these demonstrations. This research deepens the understanding of social media's influence on contemporary protests by analysing how digital communication tools have been used to mobilize public participation.

Statement of the Problem

Access to information is essential for individuals to broaden their perspectives on both local and global issues and to engage in discussions that shape the future of their societies. When people have access to relevant information, they can explore new areas of knowledge and address personal and communal challenges. One key instrument that provides such information is the mass media. Abdulyakeen and Yusuf (2022) emphasized that mass media plays a crucial role in society by disseminating important information that shapes public consciousness and enables individuals to make informed decisions.

With the advent of internet-based media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube, access to and sharing of information has significantly increased. This development has prompted scholars to investigate how these platforms have facilitated civic engagement and contributed to changing social, political, and economic narratives. For instance, Uji (2015) examined the role of social media in mobilizing youth for socio-political participation. Similarly, Akpan and Targema (2022) focused on social media, mass mobilization, and national development in Nigeria, with lessons drawn from the #EndSARS protest. Valenzuela (2013) explored the use of social media in protest behaviours, particularly the roles of information dissemination, opinion expression, and activism. Britto (2023) analyzed social media engagement and its impact on youth civic participation in Tanzania. Uwalaka and Nwala (2023) studied the role of social media and mobile networking applications in socio-political contestations in Nigeria, while Abdulyakeen and Yusuf (2022) focused on social media and political participation among youth in southeastern Nigeria, specifically during the 2015 and 2019 general elections. Chiamogu et al. (2021) also examined the influence of social media on group consciousness and the prevalence of sociopolitical protests in Nigeria.

Despite the significant contributions of these scholars, a gap remains in the literature regarding the influence of social media algorithms on the amplified voices of protesters, particularly during the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. This study aims to address this gap by investigating how social media algorithms have shaped the amplification of protesters' voices, contributing to a broader understanding of social media's role in contemporary activism.

Objectives of the Study
1. To investigate how social media posts influenced respondents' protests.
2. To explore the extent to which social media posts influenced respondents' protest responses.
3. To identify the themes of posts on social media that mobilized respondents to the protests.

Conceptual Clarifications

The Concept of Social Media

The concept of social media has evolved significantly since its inception. Initially, social media was primarily used for personal communication and social networking. However, it has become a powerful tool for social, political and economic change communication and engagement (Towner & Dulio, 2017). This evolution is driven by the ease of access, the rapid dissemination of information, and the potential to reach a vast and diverse audience. Social media platforms offer a diverse array of features and tools that enable user-generated content, including text posts, photos, videos, hyperlinks, and interactive comments (Abdulazeez, et al., 2023). Users are granted the ability to express their thoughts, share their experiences, and participate in dynamic conversations with a global audience. Social media platforms allow users to follow and interact with specific individuals, organizations, or groups through their profiles or pages.

The widespread adoption of social media has fundamentally reshaped communication patterns and social interactions globally. Social media has emerged as a platform that offers opportunities for global connectivity, rapid information dissemination, and the establishment of virtual communities (Damilola, 2022). Prominent social media platforms, including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, Snapchat, and TikTok, each bring their unique features, catering to diverse audiences and content types.

Review of Empirical Studies on the Use of Social Media in Protests

Okocha and Dapoet (2022) conducted a qualitative research study reviewing documents to establish that social media has become an essential tool for mobilizing citizens against poor governance. Using Technological

Determinism theory, the study found that social media platforms serve as revolutionary tools for advocacy and raising awareness about developmental projects aimed at driving social change across the nation. The researchers concluded that when combined with proper motivation and energy, social media can be strategic in compelling governments globally to meet the demands of their citizens. The study further advocated for in-depth investigations into how social media contributes to a new communication revolution, amplifying the voices of the governed, particularly marginalized groups. Egbunike (2015) corroborated this finding, noting that social media played a key role in the mobilization of the 2012 #OccupyNigeria protests, which drew attention from local, national, regional and international communities.

In a related study, Augustine (2022) explored the influence of social media on the #EndSARS protest in Lagos, Nigeria. Using a qualitative approach and in-depth interviews, the research identified several factors that contributed to the mobilization of youths on social media for the protests, including police brutality, high unemployment, government corruption, and insecurity. The study concluded that the poor state of Nigeria's economic, social, and political affairs was a major driver behind youths turning to social media to express frustration.

Britto (2023) examined social media engagement and democracy, specifically, the impact of social media on youth civic engagement in Tanzania. Data were collected through focus group discussions, and the findings revealed that youths used social media to disseminate messages, share comments, videos, and images related to community development. The study concludes that there is a strong connection between social media and youth engagement, particularly in shaping the political, economic and social development of the country. The study recommends that youths continue to use social media responsibly to influence governance narratives in Tanzania. Valenzuela (2013) assessed the use of social media for protest behavior, focusing on the roles of information dissemination, opinion expression, and activism. The study used a survey research strategy to gather data on the large-scale protests in Chile in 2011, which were organized through social media platforms. The results indicate that social media facilitates protest behavior by providing a space for opinion expression and activism, reinforcing the role of digital platforms in direct political action.

Akpan and Targema's (2022) study focused on social media, mass mobilization, and national development in Nigeria, drawing lessons from the #EndSARS protests. Using secondary data sources, the researchers found that the #EndSARS movement offers significant opportunities for citizens to engage with government officials in the pursuit of national growth and development. The study concludes that the effective use of social media for community engagement can foster meaningful interactions between citizens and their governments.

Similarly, Uji (2015) concluded that social media platforms have become crucial tools for communicating the concerns of ordinary people. This study argued that social media has emerged as a form of "liberation media" in an environment dominated by elite-driven media industries, where media access and financial power are closely linked. Uji posited that social media has created a platform for setting agendas for elected representatives, giving the masses a voice in governance. Oke (2019) concurred, noting that the widespread use of new media applications has led to significant social changes and is increasingly being viewed as a catalyst for social transformation (p. 213).

In Bassey A. U.'s (2024) research journal titled: "*Investigating the Influence of Social Media on Youth Engagement in the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance Protests in Nigeria*", the study examines how social media influenced youth participation in the 2024 protests aimed at advocating for governance reforms across Nigeria. The primary objective of the research was to explore the role social media played in mobilizing young people for

these protests and to investigate the dynamics of their engagement on various social platforms during the events. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combined both quantitative and qualitative data. Surveys were conducted with 300 youths who actively participated in the #EndBadGovernance protests, while in-depth interviews were held with key organizers and social media influencers. Data collection instruments included questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides and social media activity analytics, which were used to trace engagement patterns. This research is grounded in public sphere theory, originally conceptualized by the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas in the 1980s. Habermas describes the public sphere as a space where civil society engages in critical discussions on issues of public interest (Habermas, 1989). The theory is relevant to this study because it highlights how social media provides a modern platform for young people to engage in public debates about governance, particularly within the context of the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests. The findings revealed that platforms such as Twitter (now X), Facebook, and WhatsApp were instrumental in organizing protest activities, spreading awareness, and mobilizing thousands of young Nigerians. These platforms have served as vital tools for collective action and civic engagement.

However, despite these valuable insights, Bassey's (2024) research leaves some gaps. Specifically, it did not thoroughly explore the role of social media algorithms in either amplifying or limiting the reach of protest voices. While the study focused on youth engagement and the organic spread of protest content, it did not explore how algorithms influence content visibility, prioritization, and vitality. This aspect is crucial in the digital age, where algorithms play a significant role in controlling the dissemination of content.

Public Sphere Theory

The originator of the Public Sphere Theory was Jürgen Habermas, who developed the concept in the 1980s. Habermas, a prominent German sociologist, described the public sphere as a space where individuals within a community come together to discuss and contribute their views on matters of public interest, particularly those benefiting the state. According to Habermas, this sphere is characterized by open dialog and discussions, allowing members of society to freely express their opinions and rights. Facilitates the formation of associations and groups, enabling individuals to share ideas without interference or intrusion from the government or its agents.

Flichy (2010) supported Habermas' view, asserting that the advent of the internet has empowered citizens, regardless of their social, economic, or political status, to engage in meaningful discussions. The internet allows people from diverse backgrounds to network and collaborate on shared causes. This underscores the role of online platforms in giving ordinary citizens a voice in social, economic, and political debates that were previously dominated by experts and elites.

This theory is highly relevant to this research as it elucidates how social media, as an internet-based communication tool, provided a platform for the mobilization of citizens during the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. Social media enabled individuals to organize, express their dissatisfaction and participate in collective action against perceived injustices in governance.

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design to collect and analyze data. The use of this approach is justified by the consensus among scholars that it facilitates the collection of reliable, objective data from a large sample of respondents (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative research is particularly suitable for this study as it allows for the generalization of findings and provides measurable insights into the impact of social media algorithms on the amplification of #EndBadGovernance protesters' voices in Nigeria.

The study population consisted of residents from the Karu Local Government Area (LGA) in Nasarawa State and Jos North LGA in Plateau State, Nigeria. These two areas were specifically chosen due to their active participation in August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests. By selecting these LGAs, the researchers aimed to gather data from regions where the protests had a significant presence, thus making the findings more relevant to the research topic.

The researchers employed purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to target individuals who had actively participated in the protests, ensuring that the respondents were directly relevant to the study objectives. Snowball sampling further facilitated the identification of additional participants by allowing initial respondents to refer to others who had been involved in the protests. This method was essential for reaching a specific but scattered population of social media users who participated in the protests.

According to available statistics, the estimated population of Karu LGA as of September 2024 was 333,800, while that of Jos North LGA was 643,200 (City Population, 2024). However, the focus of the study was narrowed to social media users within these populations, as they were the primary agents of information dissemination and engagement during the protests. To ensure manageability and effective data collection, the researchers selected 150 social media users from each area, resulting in a total sample size of 300 respondents.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, which included the presentation of results in tables, charts, figures, frequencies, percentages, and mean deviations. The responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD), allowing for an in-depth understanding of the participants' views on the role of social media algorithms in amplifying protest voices.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In total, **300 questionnaires** were distributed by the researchers. Out of these, **277 copies** were successfully completed and returned, representing valid responses for analysis. The response rate demonstrated a strong level of participation and was sufficient to provide reliable data for the study.
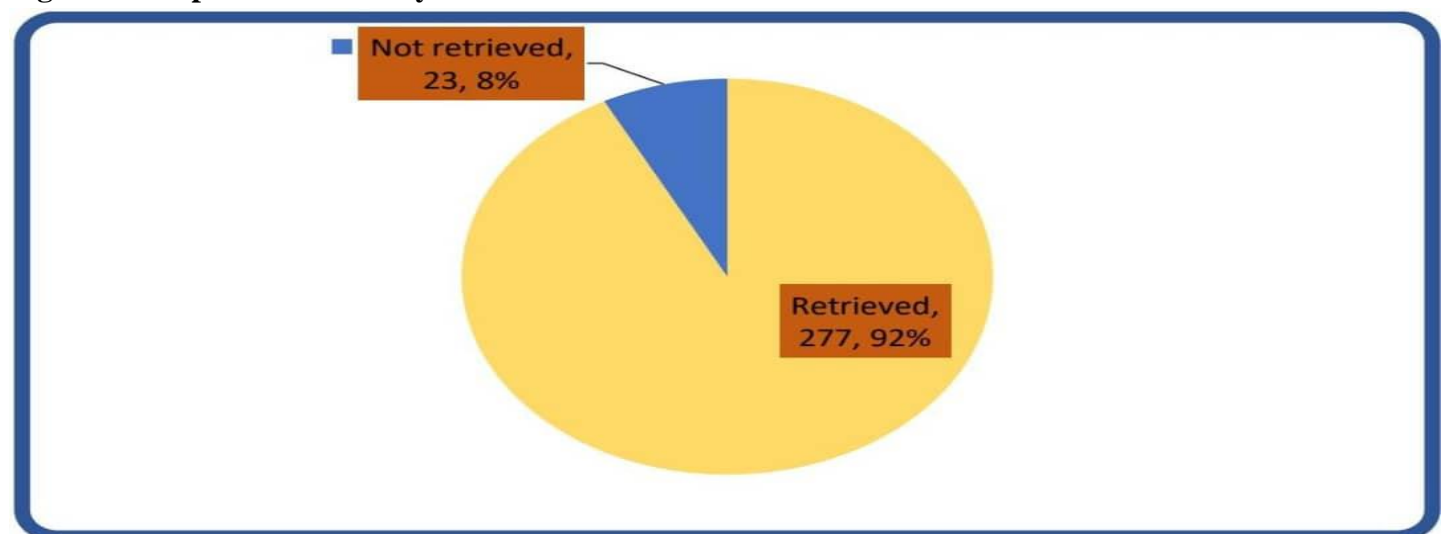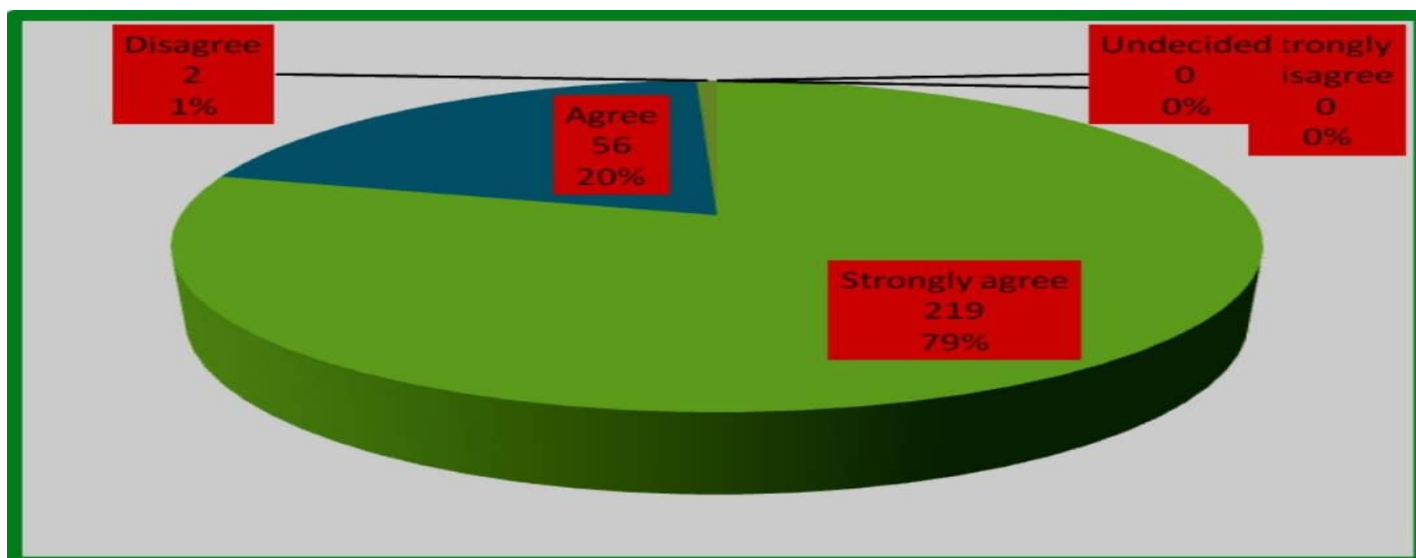
Figure 1: Response Rate Analysis

Figure 2: Influence of Social Media Posts on Respondent Participation in Protests

The data presented in **Figure 2** highlight the significant role of social media in mobilizing individuals to demand better governance from their elected or appointed officials. The results underscore the increasing importance of digital platforms in fostering public engagement and ensuring government accountability. This shift demonstrates how social media has become a crucial channel through which citizens can voice their concerns, advocate for change, and participate actively in societal governance.

Figure 3: Extent of Social Media Posts Influencing Respondents' Protest Participation
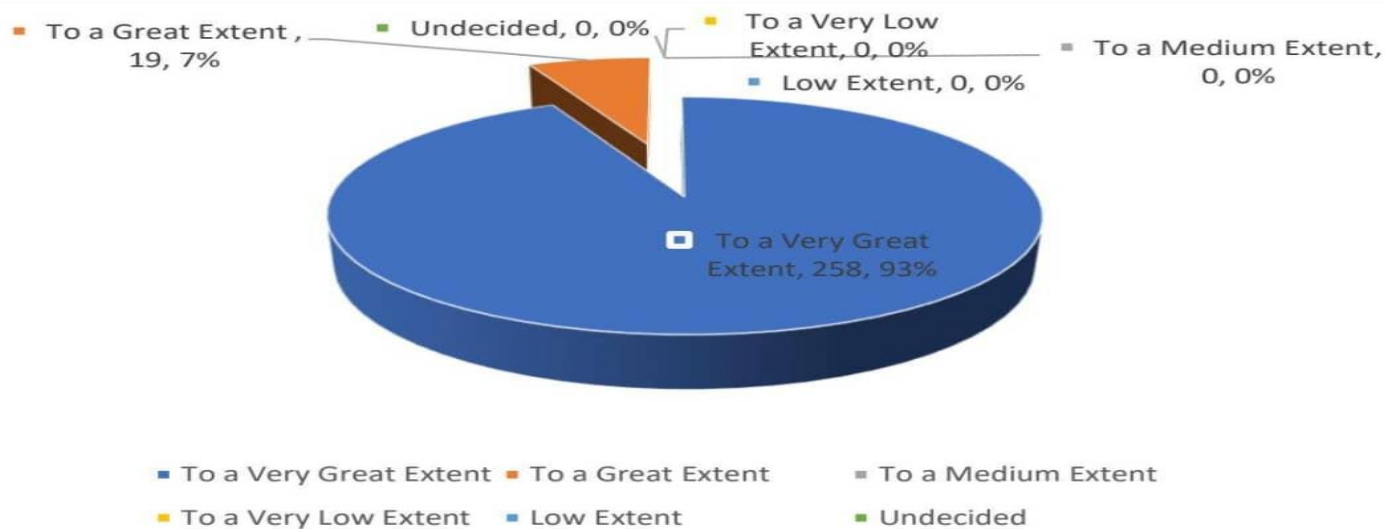
The data presented in Figure 3 suggest that social media continues to be a crucial communication tool for holding leaders accountable to the public. The findings indicate that a significant number of respondents were influenced by posts on social media to participate in the protests. This underscores the power of digital platforms in mobilizing individuals to demand transparency and responsibility from those in leadership positions and highlights the essential role that social media plays in facilitating civic engagement and promoting social change.

Table 1: Themes of Social Media Posts that Mobilized Respondents for Protests

Options	AS	A	U	SD	D	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
High cost of governance, such as building the Vice-Presidential house, buying presidential jets, and purchasing SUVs for members of the National Assembly	257	18	2	0	0	277	4.9	Accepted
Corruption, poor educational and health systems, unemployment, and insecurity	246	31	0	0	0	277	4.8	Accepted
High cost of living, reversal of the removal of fuel subsidy, probing of the subsidy regime, and reduction in electricity tariffs	254	23	0	0	0	277	4.9	Accepted
The APC-led federal government has performed poorly	235	42	0	0	0	277	4.8	Accepted

The data presented in the table indicate that the respondents recognize the power and significance of social media in promoting democratic ideals. This acknowledgment reflects the growing influence of digital platforms on enabling active participation, fostering transparency and encouraging accountability in governance. Social media's role in amplifying the voices of the people, particularly in democratic processes, underscores its importance as a tool for political engagement and public discourse.

Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that social media algorithms played a significant role in amplifying the voices of #EndBadGovernance protesters during the August 2024 demonstrations. Platforms such as Twitter (now X), Facebook, and WhatsApp employed algorithmic mechanisms to promote content with significant engagement, thereby increasing the visibility of protest messages. This aligns with Valenzuela's (2013) earlier research, which highlighted social media's ability to rapidly disseminate information and foster political activism. By prioritizing highly engaging content, the algorithms enabled the protest posts to reach a wider audience, further driving mobilization efforts. This observation resonates with Habermas' (1989) Public Sphere Theory, which positions social media as a modern public sphere where individuals can engage in meaningful discussions on public issues and foster civic engagement.

In addition, the study reveals that social media, supported by algorithms, was essential in mobilizing youths for the protests by spotlighting critical socio-political issues. These included the high cost of governance, such as the construction of the Vice-Presidential residence, the purchase of a Presidential jet, the acquisition of SUVs for National Assembly members; corruption, inadequate education and healthcare systems, unemployment, insecurity, high living costs, removal of fuel subsidies, and increased electricity tariffs. The finding aligns with Bassey's (2024) research, which concluded that Nigerian youths increasingly turn to social media to express their frustration with poor governance and social inequalities. The amplification of these grievances through algorithms provided a rallying point for collective action, underscoring social media's influence in shaping political

discourse. This also correlates with Britto's (2023) research on youth civic engagement in Tanzania, which emphasized social media's significant role in youth-driven political movements. Again, Habermas' Public Sphere Theory offers an insightful framework for understanding this finding, as digital spaces created a virtual community for protest participants to exchange ideas and coordinate actions.

Finally, this research underscores the role of social media not only in mobilizing citizens for protests but also as a tool for advocacy and advocating for governance reforms. This finding supports Okocha and Dapoet's (2022) work, which identified social media as a powerful platform for raising awareness about developmental projects and holding governments accountable. The amplification of protest voices through algorithms strengthened social media's capacity for advocacy and change. Similarly, Uji (2015) observed that social media has emerged as a "liberation media" in environments where traditional media outlets are controlled by elites. In this study, social media provided ordinary citizens with a platform to set agendas, advocating for transparency, accountability, and reform, thereby reinforcing its role as a driver of democratic engagement and social change.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of social media algorithms on the amplified voices of #EndBadGovernance protesters in Nigeria. The findings demonstrate that social media, driven by algorithmic processes, has significantly contributed to mobilizing citizens and amplifying their demands for improved governance. By promoting highly engaging content, social media algorithms enabled the widespread dissemination of protest messages, which, in turn, influenced political discourse and facilitated collective action. It is concluded that social media remains a powerful tool for civic engagement, empowering citizens to demand accountability and advocate for government reforms. This research underscores the vital role that digital platforms play in fostering democratic participation and driving social change.

Recommendations

This study recommends the responsible use of social media as a tool for holding governments accountable and drawing attention to their constitutional responsibilities. Social media users should be encouraged to engage in constructive dialog and use these platforms ethically to advocate for governance reforms. In addition, policymakers are advised to acknowledge the influence of social media on shaping public opinion and to consider its potential as a channel for engaging with citizens and addressing their concerns effectively. Strengthening regulatory frameworks to ensure transparency in algorithmic content promotion could further enhance the positive impact of social media on democratic engagement.

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