SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF THE #ENDSARS MOVEMENT'S MOBILIZATION STRATEGIES

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Abstract: This study investigates the critical role of social media in the #EndSARS movement in Southwest Nigeria, specifically, in 2020. Using a quantitative approach and online survey data from 250 active participants, the research examines how social media facilitates information dissemination, mobilizes support, shape's public opinion, and influences government response. The theoretical implications of digital activism and networked public frameworks are drawn, providing insights into the complex interplay between social media, political activism, and governance in Nigeria. Findings reveal that social media was instrumental in mobilizing and organizing the movement, enabling activists to disseminate information, coordinate protests, and build a sense of collective identity. Participants who actively used social media reported significantly higher levels of involvement in mobilization efforts. While social media played a crucial role in shaping public opinion, the study also highlighted challenges such as government censorship, misinformation, and online harassment. This research contributes to understanding social media's potential for promoting democratic governance and social justice in Nigeria. The study underscores the importance of addressing the challenges and limitations associated with social media use in political mobilization, including the need for effective counter-narratives to combat misinformation.

Keywords: social media, political activism, #EndSARS movement, Nigeria, mobilization, public opinion, challenges, limitations, implications.

Introduction

The advent of social media platforms has revolutionized communication and information dissemination, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria (Adeola & Ogundele, 2019; Olorunfemi & Adeyemi, 2020; Afolaranmi, 2023). Their impact on political processes, including mobilization and activism, has become a subject of increasing scholarly interest. Understanding the role of social media in political mobilization is crucial for several reasons. First, it can provide a platform for marginalized voices to be heard and to participate in political processes (Oyebola & Oladipo, 2021). Second, it can foster civic engagement and encourage citizens to take

action on issues that matter to them (Nwolise & Onah, 2022). Third, accountability can hold governments accountable by exposing corruption and abuses of power (Ezenwa-Ohaeto & Onah, 2020).

Previous studies have examined the role of social media in political mobilization in various contexts, including Nigeria (Adeola & Ogundele, 2019; Olorunfemi & Adeyemi, 2020). However, there is a growing body of literature focusing on the unique dynamics of social media activism in developing countries, particularly in Africa (Oyebola & Oladipo, 2021; Nwolise & Onah, 2022). While existing research has provided valuable insights, more in-depth case studies that examine specific social media-driven movements in African contexts are needed. This study contributes to the literature by analyzing the #EndSARS movement in Southwest Nigeria, a significant example of social media-fueled political mobilization.

This research aims to investigate how social media platforms contributed to the mobilization and organization of the #EndSARS movement in Southwest Nigeria. Specifically, it explores the role of social media in disseminating information and raising awareness about the issues that led to the movement, examines how social media was used to mobilize protesters and coordinate actions, and assesses the impact of social media on the movement's outcomes and its long-term implications for political activism in Nigeria.

The #EndSARS movement emerged in response to the brutality of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a Nigerian police unit. The movement gained significant traction by using social media platforms, particularly Twitter. By analyzing the content of social media posts, online discussions, and interviews with key actors involved in the movement, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in the #EndSARS mobilization.

Literature Review

This study draws upon theories of digital activism and networked publics to understand the role of social media in the #EndSARS movement. Digital activism refers to the use of digital technologies to organize, mobilize, and advocate for political or social causes (Shirky, 2008). Networked publics are communities formed through online interactions that facilitate collective action and social change (Van Dijck, 2009).

Previous research has explored the role of social media in political mobilization in various contexts, including Nigeria (Ojo, S. O., & A. O. Afolaranmi, 2024). For instance, Adeola and Ogundele (2019) examined the use of social media in the 2019 Nigerian general elections, highlighting its potential to empower marginalized groups and challenge traditional power structures. Olorunfemi and Adeyemi (2020) investigated the role of social media in shaping public opinion and mobilizing support for political causes in Nigeria.

In the context of the #EndSARS movement, several studies have analyzed the role of social media in raising awareness, mobilizing protesters, and shaping public opinion. For instance, Akinyemi (2021) examined how social media was used to document police brutality and mobilize public support for the movement. Olorunfemi (2021) analyzed the role of social media in shaping the narrative surrounding the #EndSARS movement and its impact on government policies.

While existing research has provided valuable insights, there is a need for more in-depth analysis of the specific strategies employed by the #EndSARS movement on social media. Additionally, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that examine the challenges and limitations faced by activists using social media to mobilize in Nigeria.

This study contributes to the literature by providing a detailed analysis of the role of social media in the #EndSARS movement. This study addresses the following research questions:

- How did social media platforms facilitate mobilization and collective action for the #EndSARS movement in Southwest Nigeria?
- How did social media platforms shape public opinion surrounding police brutality and the #EndSARS movement in Southwest Nigeria?

- What challenges and limitations were associated with the use of social media for political mobilization and grassroots activism during the #EndSARS movement in Southwest Nigeria?
- What is the long-term impact of social media on the #EndSARS movement and its legacy in Southwest Nigeria?

By answering these research questions, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of social media in political mobilization in Nigeria and its potential implications for future movements.

Methodology

This research employs a quantitative approach using an online survey instrument to investigate the role of social media platforms in facilitating mobilization and collective action for the #EndSARS movement in Southwest Nigeria. This method allows for efficient data collection from geographically dispersed populations residing in Lagos, Ogun, and Oyo states. These states were pivotal centers of the movement and offered diverse urban and rural samples for analysis.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants, specifically focusing on individuals who confirmed involvement in the #EndSARS movement and resided within Lagos, Ogun, and Oyo states. This approach allowed researchers to select participants with direct experience and knowledge of the movement, thus ensuring the relevance of their insights to the research question.

A self-administered online survey was developed using Google Forms, a readily accessible and user-friendly platform. The survey link was strategically disseminated through social media platforms and relevant online communities specifically focused on the #EndSARS movement.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Age and social media use of the respondents (n=250)

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	28.5	5.2
Social Media Use (hours/day)	3.5	1.8

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Table 1 reveals the mean and standard deviation of age and social media use per hour/day respectively 28.5(5.2) and 35(1.8). Which can be interpreted as age mean = 28.5 years, Standard Deviation = 5.2 years, frequency of social media use per day = 3.5 hours while the other analysis not in the table shows that: Gender: Male: 60%, Female: 40%; Education level: Bachelor's degree: 55%, Master's degree: 30%, High school diploma: 15%; Occupation: Student: 35%, Employed full-time: 40%, Employed part-time: 20%, Unemployed: 5%.

Analysis of Social Media Use and Mobilization

To examine the relationship between social media use and mobilization efforts, one-sample t tests were conducted to compare the mean scores of participants who actively used social media during the #EndSARS movement with those who did not.

Table 2: Statistics of protest participants, information sharing, and donations

Variable	Mean (Active Users)	Mean (Non-Active Users)	t-statistic	df	p-value
Protest Participation	3.8	2.2	4.25	248	$< .001$
Information Sharing	3.7	2.5	3.87	248	$< .001$
Donations	3.2	1.8	3.95	248	$< .001$

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Table 2 reveals **that participants** who actively used social media during the movement reported significantly higher levels of involvement in mobilization efforts (t = 4.25, df = 248, p < .001). Specifically, those who used social media more frequently were more likely to participate in protests (t = 3.87, df = 248, p < .001), share information online (t = 4.12, df = 248, p < .001), and donate to the movement (t = 3.95, df = 248, p < .001).

Discussion

This study provides valuable insights into the role of social media in the #EndSARS movement. The key findings are as follows

- Social media-facilitated mobilization and collective action: Participants who actively used social media were more likely to engage in mobilization activities, such as protests, information sharing, and donations.
- Social media shaped public opinion: By disseminating information and personal stories, social media helped to raise awareness of police brutality and generate public support for the movement.
- Social media faced challenges and limitations: Participants encountered government censorship and surveillance, the spread of misinformation and disinformation, and online harassment and threats.
- Social media had a lasting impact: The #EndSARS movement demonstrated the potential of social media to mobilize citizens and challenge government authority.

Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers, civil-society organizations, and activists seeking to leverage social media for political mobilization.

- Invest in digital literacy: Promote digital literacy among the population to ensure effective use of social media platforms for civic engagement.
- Support independent media: Promote a vibrant and independent media landscape to counter government censorship and misinformation.
- Protect online freedom: Advocate policies that protect the freedom of expression and access to information online.
- Build the capacity of civil-society organizations: Support the development of civil-society organizations with expertise in using social media for political mobilization.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations, including the sample size, reliance on self-reported data, and focus on the early stages of the movement. Future research could explore these areas further, as well as conduct a comparative analysis with other social media-driven movements, track the long-term impact of the #EndSARS movement, and conduct in-depth interviews with activists and other stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives.

Overall, this study highlights the significant role of social media in facilitating political mobilization and shaping public opinion in Nigeria. By understanding the strengths and limitations of social media activism, policymakers and activists can leverage these platforms more effectively for positive social change.

Conclusion

This study investigated the role of social media in facilitating mobilization and collective action for the #EndSARS movement in Southwest Nigeria. The findings demonstrate the significant role of social media platforms in raising awareness, mobilizing protesters, and shaping public opinion.

However, the use of social media in political mobilization is not without its challenges. Participants were exposed to government censorship, misinformation, and online harassment. Despite these limitations, the #EndSARS movement highlights the potential of social media to empower marginalized voices and challenge traditional power structures.

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers, civil-society organizations, and activists seeking to leverage social media for political mobilization. By investing in digital literacy, supporting independent media, protecting online freedom and building the capacity of civil society organizations, it is possible to harness the power of social media to promote positive social change.

Recommendations

Future research should explore the long-term impact of the #EndSARS movement and the role of social media in sustaining political activism in Nigeria. Additionally, a comparative analysis with other social media-driven movements can provide valuable insights into the broader trends and challenges in the use of social media in political mobilization.

In conclusion, this study contributes to a growing body of literature on the role of social media in political activism. By understanding the strengths and limitations of social media, policymakers and activists can effectively utilize these platforms to promote democratic governance and social justice.

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