

Social Media and Protest Escalation/De-Escalation: An Assessment of End Sars Protest in Nigeria

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Abstract- *This study explores the pivotal role of social media in shaping the dynamics of the End SARS movement in Nigeria, with a focus on its impact on protest escalation and de-escalation. The objective of the study was to assess the role of social media in the escalation and de-escalation of the End SARS protests and analysed the role of social media in influencing the escalation of protests during the End SARS movement in Nigeria. Public Sphere Theory and Technological Determinism Theory were employed as the theoretical underpinning of the study. The study revealed that the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria showcased the dual role of social media in both escalating and de-escalating protests. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook were pivotal in mobilizing participants, amplifying messages, and coordinating activities, transforming the movement into a national and international call for justice against police brutality. By enabling real-time updates, emotional appeals, and global solidarity, social media significantly escalated the protests' momentum. At the same time, these platforms played a crucial role in de-escalation by facilitating negotiations, promoting conflict resolution, and shaping narratives for systemic reform. Hashtags like #ReformPoliceNG helped articulate demands, while community-driven initiatives provided relief and fostered reconciliation. Moreover, the platforms archived events and framed peaceful advocacy as a legacy, encouraging institutional engagement and voter participation. The #EndSARS movement demonstrates how social media can be leveraged as a powerful tool for both activism and sustainable conflict resolution in polarized societies. The study therefore recommended among others; Stakeholders should strategically utilize social media for conflict resolution by establishing official platforms to promote transparent dialogue, counter misinformation, and involve neutral mediators in peacebuilding efforts.*

Keywords: *Social media, End SARS movement, protest dynamics, escalation, de-escalation, activism, digital mobilization.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has emerged as a transformative force in civic engagement and protest movements worldwide, fundamentally altering how citizens organize, mobilize, and advocate for change (Adegoke, 2021; Mohammed & Suleiman, 2022). In Nigeria, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become indispensable channels for expressing grievances, demanding accountability, and coordinating collective action. This phenomenon was notably exemplified during the End SARS protest of 2020, a nationwide movement against police brutality that captured global attention and demonstrated the dual role of social media in both escalating and de-escalating protest dynamics (Adegoke, 2021; Mohammed & Suleiman, 2022).

The End SARS movement originated in response to widespread misconduct by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a unit of the Nigerian Police Force notorious for extrajudicial killings, harassment, and extortion (Okon, 2021). While public discontent with SARS had simmered for years, the killing of a young man by SARS operatives in October 2020 triggered an overwhelming wave of outrage. Within hours, social media platforms were inundated with posts documenting police violence, calling for reform, and rallying support under the hashtag #EndSARS, which quickly trended globally and drew international attention from celebrities, activists, and media outlets (Okon, 2021).

Social media proved instrumental in mobilizing mass participation in the protests (Ibrahim, 2021). Through platforms like Twitter, organizers disseminated real-time information about protest locations, safety protocols, and logistics, effectively circumventing

traditional barriers to mass mobilization. The decentralized nature of the movement, facilitated by social media, enabled grassroots participation and gave voice to marginalized groups (Ibrahim, 2021). Furthermore, the visual documentation of police violence shared widely online galvanized public sympathy and heightened the movement's legitimacy, underscoring social media's capacity to amplify collective grievances and foster solidarity among diverse stakeholders (Ibrahim, 2021).

However, social media's role in the End SARS movement was not without controversy (Adebayo, 2022). While serving as a unifying force, it also contributed to the escalation of tensions. The viral spread of graphic images and videos of violence intensified emotions, fueling anger and, in some cases, inciting retaliatory actions (Adebayo, 2022). The proliferation of misinformation and unverified claims further exacerbated the situation, creating an environment of distrust and panic. This duality highlights the complex interplay between social media and protest dynamics, where platforms can simultaneously empower movements and introduce risks of escalation (Adebayo, 2022).

Efforts to de-escalate the End SARS protests also leveraged social media (Onyeka, 2021). Activists and civil society organizations used these platforms to advocate for dialogue, promote nonviolence, and counter misinformation. Campaigns emphasizing peaceful protest and structured negotiations sought to channel public outrage into constructive outcomes (Onyeka, 2021). Additionally, social media's role in maintaining international attention on the protests placed pressure on the Nigerian government to address the movement's demands. Yet, the eventual suppression of the protests, marked by the controversial Lekki Toll Gate shooting, underscored the limitations of social media as a tool for sustainable conflict resolution in the face of state repression (Onyeka, 2021).

The End SARS movement offers a compelling case study for understanding the role of social media in protest escalation and de-escalation (Chukwuemeka, 2022). It illustrates how digital platforms can amplify marginalized voices, coordinate large-scale actions,

and sustain global advocacy while simultaneously revealing the challenges posed by misinformation, emotional escalation, and the limitations of online activism in effecting systemic change (Chukwuemeka, 2022). As Nigeria continues to grapple with issues of governance, social justice, and civic engagement, the lessons of the End SARS movement remain pertinent (Chukwuemeka, 2022).

This study critically assessed the role of social media in the escalation and de-escalation of the End SARS protests. It analysed the role of social media in influencing the escalation of protests during the End SARS movement in Nigeria, focusing on its impact on mobilization, message amplification, and coordination among protesters, and examined the role of social media in facilitating the de-escalation of the End SARS protests, with emphasis on its use in negotiation, conflict resolution, and shaping narratives during and after the movement.

II. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Concept of Social Media

Social media are interactive platforms hosted on the internet that facilitate easy exchange of information and socialization among users (Nwabueze, 2014; Shaw, 2016). They encompass several platforms that help actualize the essence of this interaction such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, and Telegram, among an endless array of other platforms, both universal and geo-specific. Nwabueze (2014) defines social media as interactive web-based media that engage key players in a communication channel in defining and determining the message content. Shaw (2016) defines social media as "the means of interactions through web-based technology among people in which they create and exchange information, ideas and opinions in virtual communities and networks" (p. 2). Social media are internet-based media channels that facilitate dialogue or two-way active contributions by both senders and receivers in message development.

According to Obono (2016), social media represent new trends of communication among people who depend on the media for news and information. They are liberal channels of communication that facilitate the process of creating, sharing, and exchanging ideas

among a network of people in the digital space. Social media are internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. They enable individuals, groups, and organizations to create and share content, including videos, photos, images, texts, news, ideas, insight, humor, opinions, and gossip. Likewise, social media facilitate social interactions and enable the development and diffusion of information. Social media are characterized by five key features, namely participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness (Obono, 2016). They are interactive forums that are not bound by one's location; more precisely, individuals can access information communicated via the various platforms and create and share content as long as they are connected to the internet.

Nwabueze (2014) identified various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and Instagram. Dauda et al. (2017) added MySpace, Pinterest, Tumblr, Foursquare, and WeChat as some of the popular social media platforms with a large user base in Nigeria. Obono (2016) grouped social media into the following categories: collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g., 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., SoundLife). Numerous other geo-specific social media platforms exist and are used in different societies. To illustrate, in Nigeria, social networks such as Palmchat, Imo, 2go, and Meetme are used although they are not as popular as the ones mentioned above (Targema, 2020).

Social media thrives in Nigeria primarily owing to the massive importation of digital technologies that facilitate their usage and high internet penetration (Dauda et al., 2017). Nsude et al. (2021) noted that recent internet penetration statistics rank Nigeria at the top of the list of African countries based on the share of internet traffic. More specifically, internet penetration amounted to 46.6% of the population in 2020 and is projected to reach 62% by 2025, which has boosted the ubiquity of social media in Nigeria,

driving their impacts across several dimensions of human endeavor.

Lutkevich and Wigmore (2023) define social media as a collective term for websites and applications that focus on communication, community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration. These platforms are widely used for marketing products and individuals, promoting brands, connecting with customers, and fostering new business opportunities. Social media enable people to stay in touch and interact with friends, family and various communities worldwide.

Tufts University (2024) describes social media as the means of interactions among people where they create, share and exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. This user-generated content aspect is a significant reason youth are attracted to social media for communication and mobilisation. Some major social media platforms include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WeChat, WhatsApp, LinkedIn and TikTok. Similarly, Jantsch (2008) defines social media as "the use of technology combined with social interaction to create or co-create value." Solis (2010) further elaborates that social media are the democratisation of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. They represent a shift from a one-to-many broadcast mechanism to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations among authors, people and peers. This transformation creates a dynamic environment where people discover, read, and share news and information, blending sociology and technology to facilitate dialogues rather than monologues.

Schultze (2024) adds that while social media is theoretically a technology for sharing information and facilitating conversations easily and socially; they have evolved into an engagement model that has introduced significant changes to society, affecting both business and non-business relationships. Social media's impact extends beyond personal interactions, influencing how communities mobilise, how businesses engage with customers and how information is disseminated and consumed globally.

III. CONCEPT OF PROTEST

Protest represents a fundamental form of collective action through which individuals and groups express dissent, challenge existing power structures, or demand change in response to perceived grievances, injustices, or systemic failures (Tilly, 2004; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). It is a vital mechanism of democratic participation, enabling citizens to exercise freedoms of assembly, speech, and association to influence public policy and hold authorities accountable (Habermas, 1989; Tarrow, 1998).

The study of protest encompasses multiple dimensions. Resource mobilization approaches focus on how organizational skills, financial resources, and manpower are strategically deployed to challenge established power structures (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Social-psychological accounts emphasize the role of grievances including moral indignation, feelings of injustice, relative deprivation, and perceived illegitimate inequality alongside identity and emotion as key drivers of protest participation (Snow & Benford, 1988; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Melucci, 1996).

Protest can take various forms, ranging from organized demonstrations, rallies, and marches to more nuanced expressions such as symbolic acts and even silence as a form of speaking out (Tilly, 2004; Castells, 2012). Contemporary protests increasingly leverage digital platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram for mobilization, using hashtags to amplify messages, coordinate activities, and draw international attention (Castells, 2012; Tufekci, 2017; Adesina, 2021).

Important dynamics include escalation, where protest activities intensify through increased participation, more disruptive tactics, or heightened confrontations with authorities, and de-escalation, involving reduced intensity through negotiation, shifts to nonviolent methods, or conflict resolution efforts (Tarrow, 1998; Adebayo & Okeke, 2021; Onyeka, 2021). While protest can drive social change, it faces limitations including the ephemeral nature of many movements, the challenge of translating online activism into durable institutional change, and the risk that

violence (whether by protesters or state forces) distracts from the genuine grievances that motivated the action (Tufekci, 2017; Chukwuemeka, 2022).

Global Historical Context of Social Media in Protests
The advent of social media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of protest movements worldwide, with digital platforms progressively reshaping how citizens organize, mobilize, and sustain collective action across different historical moments (Shirky, 2011). The evolution of social media's role in protests can be traced from its nascent influence in the early 2000s, when platforms like MySpace and Friendster offered limited connectivity, to the watershed moment of the 2009 Iranian presidential election dubbed the "Twitter Revolution" where protesters circumvented government censorship to disseminate information globally, demonstrating the potential of digital tools for political mobilization despite initial exaggerations of their impact (Morozov, 2011; Aday et al., 2010). This trajectory reached its zenith during the Arab Spring of 2010-2011, where platforms like Facebook and Twitter proved instrumental in organizing protests across Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, enabling activists to bypass state-controlled media, share real-time updates, and galvanize international solidarity, as exemplified by the "We Are All Khaled Said" Facebook page that mobilized hundreds of thousands of Egyptians (Howard & Hussain, 2011; Lotan et al., 2011; Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). However, scholars such as Tufekci (2017) caution that while social media facilitated unprecedented mobilization, it also exposed movements to misinformation, government surveillance, and the persistent challenge of translating online activism into sustainable political change. The 2011 Occupy Wall Street movement further illustrated both the power and limitations of digital activism, as hashtags like #OccupyWallStreet and #WeAreThe99Percent fostered solidarity and coordinated protests across multiple cities, yet the decentralized structure enabled by social media simultaneously hindered cohesive messaging and strategic coherence (Juris, 2012; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012). More recently, the Black Lives Matter movement has demonstrated the sophisticated deployment of social media for contemporary activism, with hashtags such as

#BlackLivesMatter and #Ferguson serving as rallying cries that amplified marginalized voices, documented police violence through live streaming, and built transnational networks of solidarity, though the movement continues to grapple with online harassment, misinformation, and the digital divide that restricts its reach (Freelon et al., 2016; Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Jackson et al., 2020). Collectively, these historical instances reveal a consistent pattern wherein social media functions as a double-edged sword simultaneously empowering grassroots mobilization while introducing vulnerabilities that complicate sustained political transformation, a duality that remains central to understanding contemporary protest dynamics in an increasingly digitized world.

Social Protest and Mobilization in the Emergence and Era of Social Media in Fourth Republic Nigeria

The emergence of social media as a potent tool for political mobilization and social protest in Nigeria during the Fourth Republic has generated a rich body of literature (Adesina, 2021; Adebayo & Ajayi, 2020; Okoro & Nwafor, 2022). This discourse explores how digital platforms have revolutionized activism, political engagement, and governance dynamics. Adesina (2021) emphasized the transformative impact of social media on youth activism during the #EndSARS protests, showcasing its ability to unite diverse groups and demand accountability. Similarly, Adebayo and Ajayi (2020) revealed that social media extends beyond urban areas, fostering political mobilization even in rural communities, thus bridging a crucial participation gap.

Okoro and Nwafor (2022) analyzed digital activism, particularly the #EndSARS movement, noting that platforms like Twitter and Instagram became critical for organizing protests, disseminating information, and attracting international solidarity. Ogundele (2023) investigated the role of social media in the 'Obidient Movement,' highlighting its capacity to mobilize young Nigerians toward challenging entrenched political structures and advocating for governance reforms. In the same vein, Ojo (2020) explored the duality of social media, noting its potential for non-violent mobilization, as well as its

misuse for violent propaganda, citing Boko Haram's online presence as a case in point.

Furthermore, Egwu (2021) examined the democratizing effect of social media, arguing that it disrupts traditional media gatekeeping and allows marginalized voices to participate in public discourse. Agwu and Eze (2022) focused on social media's role in shaping public opinion during elections, finding that platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp are increasingly used to campaign and counter misinformation. An important critique by Ibrahim and Suleiman (2021) highlighted the dangers of echo chambers and fake news proliferation, which can distort civic engagement and amplify divisive rhetoric.

Additional studies such as Alabi et al. (2020) demonstrated that social media platforms, when strategically employed, can be vital tools for non-governmental organizations and civic groups in mobilizing support and resources for social causes. Similarly, Akande and Ojo (2022) examined the intersection of social media, political apathy, and voter education, noting that while digital platforms boost awareness, they are less effective in translating online activism into offline electoral participation.

Udo (2023) emphasized the role of social media in amplifying women's voices in Nigerian protests, particularly during the #ArewaMeToo movement, while Bamidele and Onyekachi (2022) critically examined how social media was used to coordinate logistics and sustain momentum during the #OccupyNigeria protests of 2012, illustrating the long-term trajectory of digital activism in Nigeria.

These studies collectively underscore the profound influence of social media in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, reshaping protest dynamics, political engagement, and governance (Adesina, 2021; Adebayo & Ajayi, 2020; Okoro & Nwafor, 2022). While the benefits of digital mobilization are evident, challenges such as misinformation, online violence, and regulatory constraints remain critical areas for further investigation (Ibrahim & Suleiman, 2021).

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is moored on two theories, they include: The Public Sphere Theory and Technological Determinism Theory. The Public Sphere Theory was propounded by the German sociologist and a member of the Frankfurt school, Habermas in 1989. His discourse on the structural transformation of the public sphere, which contributed immensely to the refinement of the theory in which he devoted attention to the interaction between the civil society and the state based on concern for legitimacy in the political system of a society (Habermas, 1989). As Okoro and Diri (2009) note, the public sphere is an area in social life where individuals can come together freely discuss and identify societal problems and through that discussion influence political action. It is a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual concern. Discourse on the political imperatives of media in raising the issues of governance and political participation to the plane of discourse, reflects on Habermas, Mongenthau and Max's ideals of the public sphere, which is described as a genuine articulation of a fundamental social need; thus, political communication between the state and its citizens is considered a very fundamental principle in developing the public sphere. This is because; information plays a vital function in helping the public to have a considerable public opinion rather than merely a state of consensus.

This theory is relevant to this study because it provides a forum for explaining how citizens through the platform of social media, could be brought to the public domain for participatory discourses on protest. The underlining principles of the public sphere involves an open discussion of all issues of general concern in which discursive argumentation is employed to ascertain general interests and the public good. The public sphere thus presupposes freedoms of speech and assembly, a free press, and the right to freely participate in political debate and protest decision-making, and the study notes here that social media facilitates such a discourse.

Technological Determinism Theory was propounded by McLuhan in 1962. The theory supports this study

because the theory states that media technology shapes how individuals in a society think, feel, act and how the society operates as people move from one technological age to another (McLuhan, 1962). The theory has various assumptions, which he broke down into individual interpretations, Metatheoretical assumptions, which cover ontological assumptions, epistemological assumptions and axiological assumptions.

The theory postulates that in individual interpretations, people learn, feel and think the way they do because of the messages they receive through the current technology that is available. The radio required people to only listen and develop their sense of hearing. On the other hand, television engages both hearing and visual senses. People then transfer those developed senses into everyday lives and they want to use them again. The medium is then the message. This to an extent seems to be closely related to the agenda setting theory, which describes the ability (of the social media) to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda.

That is, if a news item is covered frequently and prominently the audience will regard the issue as more important. The innovations that affect the media especially in the area of online technology have to a large extent influenced some of the notable changes in the society. The types of phones that were used to communicate back then are now advanced and have been a major tool used to influence the way communication is done this day. Taking a look at some other assumptions of the theory sheds more light on the role, the changes in technology has on the media as well as media consumers (Castells, 2012).

Humans do not have much free will at all. Whatever society as a whole is using to communicate, they too will use to communicate. Therefore, they will adapt to the medium they are using so that they can send and receive messages like everyone else. People know that there is one truth by observing what has happened over time. As the medium changes so does society's way of communicating. People can only use the medium for which it was created (phone for talking over lines or electronic mail for talking via computer). If the medium is impersonal (social

media) then the message too is impersonal. Despite some of the criticism of the theory, it is safe to say that as much as the changing technology affects the various mass media it is not a sole requirement to changing the way humans think, feel or act, there are other factors that could also influence the way people behave the way they do. However, it should be noted that the various technological developments in the Nigerian society have brought about an improvement and change in the way the various traditional mass media operates, thus, the theory is considered in this study.

Application of the Theories to the Study

The Public Sphere Theory is highly relevant to the study as it provides a framework for understanding how social media platforms have become modern-day arenas for public discourse and civic engagement (Habermas, 1989). The theory explains how the EndSARS protest was facilitated by the public's ability to engage in open discussions on social issues, especially police brutality, through social media. These platforms allowed for the exchange of ideas, shared grievances, and collective organization without the constraints of traditional media, empowering citizens to mobilize and influence policy.

Social media as the new public sphere: Social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, functioned as spaces where Nigerians could freely debate, share information, and build a collective voice against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). In line with Habermas's idea of the public sphere, these platforms were vital for bringing together people from different backgrounds to deliberate on national issues and take collective action.

Mobilization of the masses: Public Sphere Theory explains how online conversations in these digital spaces were transformed into offline protests. The theory is relevant to this study as it shows that social media created a virtual public sphere, enabling mass mobilization of individuals who shared similar concerns about police violence.

Influencing policy: The theory underscores the role of rational-critical discourse in shaping public opinion and influencing governance. During the EndSARS protest, social media facilitated communication between protesters and the government, leading to concessions like the disbandment of SARS. Understanding this dialogue is key to analyzing both the escalation and de-escalation phases of the protest. Thus, Public Sphere Theory is essential to this study because it highlights the significance of social media in fostering democratic participation, citizen mobilization, and shaping the political response during the EndSARS protest.

The Technological Determinism Theory is also directly relevant to this study as it emphasizes the influence of technology (in this case, social media) on social behavior, culture, and political processes (McLuhan, 1962). The theory suggests that technological innovations drive societal change, which is evident in how social media transformed the nature, scale, and impact of the EndSARS protest.

Social media as a technological force: Technological Determinism explains how the development and accessibility of social media platforms like Twitter and WhatsApp became central tools for protest coordination. The instantaneous nature of these platforms allowed real-time communication, organizing, and mobilizing during the protests, which shaped the intensity and spread of the EndSARS movement. Without social media technology, the scale and speed of the protest might not have reached the same levels.

Escalation and amplification: The theory illustrates how technology itself shaped the trajectory of the protest. Social media amplified grievances against SARS, enabled instant dissemination of information, and provided a platform for global attention. These technological features contributed to the rapid escalation of the protest across the country and internationally.

De-escalation and control of information: The same technological tools that escalated the protest also played a role in de-escalating it. Authorities used

social media to respond, while fact-checking mechanisms on social platforms helped counter misinformation and restore some level of calm. This reinforces the theory's relevance in explaining how technology can drive and manage social movements. The Technological Determinism Theory is thus relevant because it offers insights into how technological innovations, particularly social media, influenced the organization, communication, and overall trajectory of the EndSARS protest.

Both Public Sphere Theory and Technological Determinism Theory are highly relevant to this study. Public Sphere Theory helps explain how social media became the arena for collective deliberation, mobilization, and political engagement, while Technological Determinism highlights the transformative role of social media technology in shaping the course and outcome of the protest. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive understanding of how social media both escalated and de-escalated the EndSARS protest in Nigeria.

V. METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative research where the research process focused on discussions and analysis. As such, data analysis in this research were organized categorically and chronologically. Therefore, the major sources of data were obtained through a literature survey of books, journals, and reports of dailies amongst others on the subject matter of the study.

The Role of Social Media in Influencing the Escalation of Protests During the End SARS Movement in Nigeria: Mobilization, Message Amplification, and Coordination

The #EndSARS movement in Nigeria represents a landmark in the history of protests within the country, largely due to the transformative role played by social media platforms (Adesina, 2021; Okoro & Nwafor, 2022). Social media was instrumental in mobilizing citizens, amplifying messages, and coordinating activities, contributing significantly to the escalation of protests against police brutality and

the broader issues of governance and systemic injustice (Adesina, 2021; Okoro & Nwafor, 2022).

Mobilization of Protesters

Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram played a critical role in mobilizing millions of Nigerians, especially the youth, to participate in the #EndSARS protests (Adesina, 2021). The hashtag #EndSARS, which gained international traction, served as a rallying point for individuals to share their experiences with police brutality and call for action. According to a report by Statista (2020), over 40% of Nigerians were active on social media during the protests, with Twitter emerging as the primary platform for organizing and mobilizing protests.

The speed and efficiency of mobilization were unprecedented (Adesina, 2021). Through social media, protesters could reach a large audience within a short time frame, transcending geographic, ethnic, and socioeconomic barriers. For instance, influencers and celebrities like Rinu Odua and Falz utilized their significant online followings to amplify the call for protests, encouraging mass participation. Research by Adesina (2021) highlights that the availability of real-time updates on social media significantly contributed to the spread of protest information, motivating individuals who were initially apathetic to join the cause. Furthermore, the viral nature of social media posts allowed for emotional appeals including photos and videos of victims of police brutality---to resonate deeply with users, creating a sense of urgency (Ibrahim, 2021).

Amplification of Messages

Social media also served as a megaphone, amplifying the messages of the protests both within Nigeria and on a global scale (Okoro & Nwafor, 2022). Hashtags such as #EndSARS, #SARSMustEnd, and #PoliceReformNow trended on Twitter for weeks, drawing attention from international media and prominent figures worldwide. A study by Okoro and Nwafor (2022) notes that the amplification of protest messages on social media generated widespread awareness and sympathy, turning what could have been a localized movement into an international phenomenon.

Platforms like Instagram and Facebook were used to share impactful visuals and testimonies that highlighted the brutality of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (Ibrahim, 2021). The viral spread of videos such as the Lekki Toll Gate shooting on October 20, 2020, garnered global outrage and pushed international organizations, including Amnesty International, to demand accountability. Research by Adebayo and Ajayi (2020) further underscores that this level of message amplification fostered solidarity among Nigerians in the diaspora, many of whom organized protests in major cities worldwide, including London, New York, and Toronto.

Moreover, social media's interactive nature allowed protesters to counter government narratives effectively (Ibrahim & Suleiman, 2021). For example, during the protests, the Nigerian government's attempts to discredit the movement were swiftly debunked through fact-checking initiatives on Twitter and Facebook. Ibrahim and Suleiman (2021) argue that this ability to control the narrative empowered protesters and kept the momentum of the movement alive.

Coordination Among Protesters

Social media also acted as a tool for coordination, enabling protesters to organize and execute activities efficiently (Adesina, 2021; Akande & Ojo, 2022). Platforms such as WhatsApp and Telegram were widely used to share logistics, including meeting points, protest schedules, and safety measures. Adesina (2021) observes that WhatsApp groups created by local organizers were instrumental in disseminating timely information while ensuring that protesters operated cohesively.

On Twitter, dedicated handles like @feminist_co took the lead in coordinating funds and resources for protesters (Akande & Ojo, 2022). This group raised over \$400,000 through online crowdfunding, which was used to provide food, medical supplies, and legal aid for arrested protesters. According to Akande and Ojo (2022), such coordinated efforts significantly enhanced the sustainability of the protests, as participants were assured of support in case of emergencies.

Furthermore, live streams and real-time updates on platforms like Instagram and Twitter allowed protesters to adapt swiftly to changing circumstances (Egwu, 2021). For instance, when security forces attempted to disrupt protests, live reports enabled participants to regroup at safer locations. Research by Egwu (2021) highlights that this level of coordination, facilitated by social media, was crucial in maintaining the decentralized nature of the movement, which made it difficult for authorities to suppress.

The #EndSARS protests demonstrated the immense potential of social media as a tool for social change (Adesina, 2021; Okoro & Nwafor, 2022). Through effective mobilization, powerful message amplification, and seamless coordination, social media platforms escalated the movement into a national and international call for justice and accountability. While the protests eventually subsided, the role of social media in shaping the dynamics of contemporary activism in Nigeria cannot be overstated. Future movements are likely to draw from this experience, leveraging digital tools to demand better governance and societal reforms (Adesina, 2021).

The Role of Social Media in Facilitating the De-escalation of the End SARS Protests: Negotiation, Conflict Resolution, and Shaping Narratives

The #EndSARS movement in Nigeria highlighted not only the power of social media in escalating protests but also its crucial role in fostering de-escalation through negotiation, conflict resolution, and narrative shaping (Adebayo & Okeke, 2021; Onyeka, 2021). As tensions rose during and after the protests, social media platforms became indispensable tools for dialogue, transparency, and post-protest reconciliation efforts (Adebayo & Okeke, 2021).

Facilitating Negotiation

Social media platforms served as intermediaries in fostering negotiations between protesters and the government (Adebayo & Okeke, 2021). Online campaigns and direct engagement with public officials via platforms like Twitter provided a channel for dialogue. Notably, hashtags such as

#ReformPoliceNG became rallying points for articulating specific demands, including police reform and justice for victims of brutality. Research by Adebayo and Okeke (2021) underscores how social media enabled protesters to frame coherent demands that were accessible to policymakers and the international community. For instance, prominent activists and organizations utilized Twitter Spaces to engage government representatives, allowing for transparent and inclusive discussions.

Social media also facilitated international advocacy, pressuring the Nigerian government to respond constructively (Okon & Adeyemi, 2022). By drawing the attention of global figures such as Jack Dorsey and Rihanna, the movement's legitimacy was bolstered, creating an atmosphere conducive to negotiation. According to Okon and Adeyemi (2022), this international spotlight compelled the government to announce measures such as the disbandment of SARS and the establishment of judicial panels of inquiry, showcasing the effectiveness of social media in driving dialogue.

Enabling Conflict Resolution

In moments of heightened tension, social media played a pivotal role in diffusing potential violence and fostering conflict resolution (Eze & Nnamdi, 2022). Platforms like Facebook and Instagram were used to share calming messages and debunk misinformation that could exacerbate hostilities. For example, during the aftermath of the Lekki Toll Gate incident, verified accounts and influencers shared real-time updates to clarify misconceptions and prevent retaliatory actions. Studies by Eze and Nnamdi (2022) emphasize that such interventions significantly reduced the risk of further violence by promoting fact-based narratives and encouraging restraint.

Community-driven initiatives on social media also supported conflict resolution (Akinbayo, 2023). Groups like @feminist_co coordinated relief efforts and shared resources on mental health support for affected protesters. These initiatives demonstrated a commitment to peaceful resolution, as highlighted by Akinbayo (2023), who notes that such grassroots

digital activism bridged divides and mitigated tensions within and between protest factions.

Shaping Post-Protest Narratives

The role of social media in shaping narratives during and after the protests was instrumental in de-escalation (Omotayo & Chukwu, 2023). Platforms like Twitter became archives of events, documenting evidence of police brutality and ensuring that the stories of victims remained central to public discourse. By amplifying voices of reconciliation and accountability, social media fostered an environment where constructive dialogue could continue beyond the streets.

Moreover, social media allowed for the emergence of a collective memory of the #EndSARS movement, focusing on peaceful advocacy and systemic reform (Omotayo & Chukwu, 2023). Research by Omotayo and Chukwu (2023) highlights how hashtags such as #EndSARSMemorial kept the movement's spirit alive while emphasizing non-violent approaches to achieving justice. This narrative reframing discouraged further unrest and encouraged civic engagement, such as participation in judicial panel proceedings and voter registration drives.

Organizations and influencers also used platforms to celebrate incremental victories, such as the suspension of certain police officers and the initiation of broader reforms (Adebisi & Olayemi, 2021). These positive updates reinforced a sense of progress, reducing frustration and the likelihood of renewed protests. Adebisi and Olayemi (2021) argue that such strategic communication on social media helped sustain hope and redirected activist energy towards institutional engagement.

Social media's role in the #EndSARS movement extended beyond mobilization and escalation to include significant contributions to de-escalation (Adebayo & Okeke, 2021; Onyeka, 2021). Through negotiation facilitation, conflict resolution, and narrative shaping, social media platforms provided tools for peaceful engagement and systemic reform. By fostering transparency and enabling constructive dialogue, these platforms contributed to defusing tensions and promoting sustainable solutions. The lessons from #EndSARS highlight the potential of

digital tools not only to amplify voices but also to facilitate the resolution of complex societal issues and strengthen civic engagement (Adebayo & Okeke, 2021; Onyeka, 2021).

VI. CONCLUSION

The #EndSARS campaign in Nigeria demonstrated how social media can revolutionise contemporary activism (Adesina, 2021; Okoro & Nwafor, 2022). The demonstrations against systematic injustice and police brutality were further intensified because of the vital role that social media platform played in organising people, spreading messages, and organising events (Adesina, 2021). The campaign became a national and worldwide demand for justice as a result of these platforms' ability to break down conventional barriers and promote previously unheard-of levels of involvement and global awareness (Okoro & Nwafor, 2022).

Additionally, social media was crucial to the demonstrations' de-escalation phase (Adebayo & Okeke, 2021; Onyeka, 2021). Digital platforms helped to promote communication, ease tensions, and advance systemic reforms by facilitating talks, encouraging dispute resolution, and strategically crafting narratives (Adebayo & Okeke, 2021). By encouraging civic participation and institutional responsibility, these initiatives made sure that the movement's spirit persisted outside of the streets (Omotayo & Chukwu, 2023).

Social media has the ability to both exacerbate and de-escalate social movements, as seen by the #EndSARS movement (Adesina, 2021; Adebayo & Okeke, 2021). Its significance as a vehicle for advocacy, reconciliation, and long-lasting change in tackling social issues is highlighted by this duality. The lessons from #EndSARS offer important insights into using digital technologies for social change as Nigeria and the international community navigate future action (Chukwuemeka, 2022). The study therefore, recommended the following:

- i. Promote Strategic Use of Social Media for Conflict Resolution: Stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations,

and protest leaders, should leverage social media platforms to facilitate transparent and constructive dialogue during times of crisis (Adebayo & Okeke, 2021). Establishing official social media handles dedicated to conflict resolution can help disseminate verified information, counter misinformation, and provide real-time updates on negotiation outcomes. Furthermore, these platforms can be used to involve neutral mediators who can build trust among conflicting parties and facilitate peaceful outcomes (Eze & Nnamdi, 2022).

- ii. Enhance Digital Literacy and Ethical Social Media Practices: To ensure that social media contributes positively to de-escalating protests, educational initiatives should be implemented to improve users' digital literacy (Ibrahim & Suleiman, 2021). This includes teaching the public how to identify and avoid sharing inflammatory content, fake news, or content that could escalate tensions. Workshops, online courses, and collaborations with tech companies can focus on promoting ethical social media use, fostering an environment where platforms are more likely to support peacebuilding efforts during protests (Ibrahim & Suleiman, 2021).

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