

Socialscientia Journal of the Social Sciences and Humanities

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Online access: <https://journals.aphriapub.com/index.php/SS/>

The Influence of social media on Protest Mobilization and Public Perception: A Study the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance Protests in Nigeria.

Beatrice Ifesinachi NWAFOR¹ and Cornelius Aghadiegwu UKWUEZE²

¹Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, NIGERIA

²Department of Broadcasting, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, NIGERIA

[0221] Abstract

This study examines the Influence of social media on Mobilization and Public Perception during the August 1, 2024 End- Bad-Governance protests in Nigeria. The research aimed to understand how digital platforms shaped the protest organization, citizen engagement, and information dissemination, and how credibility of online sources affected public response. Guided by Technological Determinism Theory and Source Credibility Theory, the study explores the dual role of social media as both a structural enabler of protest activity and a platform where trust in information sources determines influence. A quantitative survey approach was used, with structured questionnaire administered to 400 respondents, and 385 valid responses analyzed. Findings show that social media played a key role in organizing protest activities, spreading information quickly, and encouraging public participation. However, misinformation was identified as a factor that escalated tensions during the protest. The study concludes that social media is a powerful tool for civic engagement and political mobilization, but its effectiveness relies on critical content evaluation and awareness of online risks. Recommendations include promoting media literacy, responsible social media use, and strategies to reduce misinformation. This research contributes to a clearer understanding of how digital platforms influence political movements in Nigeria.

Keywords: #Endbadgovernanceprotest, Misinformation, Political Mobilization, Public Perception, social media.

1. Introduction

The advent of social media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of political mobilization and public perception, particularly in regions experiencing sociopolitical upheaval (Augusta 2022). Protests have long been a significant aspect of human history; often serve as a means to compel governments to address public grievances. Historical records reveal that protest movements have been integral to societal reform across different eras and regions (Tilly, 2004; Della Porta & Diani, 2006). In Nigeria, protests have long served as a means for citizens to challenge political and economic inequalities, from the anti-colonial movements to the more recent #EndSARS demonstrations (Oyeleye, 2021; Adebayo, 2020). The protests on August 1, 2024, represent a significant case study in this tradition, as citizens extensively utilized digital platforms to voice dissent against socioeconomic injustices and perceived governmental shortcomings, reflecting a broader trend in the digital-age mobilization (Ekman, 2014; Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018). This phenomenon aligns with prevailing existing literature that posits social media as a facilitator of grassroots movements, enabling rapid information dissemination and fostering collective identity (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Tilly, 2004).

In the Nigerian context, social media serves not only as a tool for mobilization but also as a medium through which narratives are shaped and contested. Recent studies have indicated that

platforms like X (formally Twitter) and Facebook play crucial roles in influencing public perception by framing issues, galvanizing support, and fostering community solidarity (Castells, 2012; Bruns, 2018). The interplay between online activism and traditional media further complicates this landscape, as mainstream outlets often rely on social media for real-time reporting, thereby shaping public discourse and policy responses (Hermida, 2012).

Despite the increasing reliance on digital platforms for civic engagement, there is a troubling lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the specific mechanisms through which social media influences collective action and shapes public narratives during times of unrest. Moreover, while the role of social media in activism has been explored in various global contexts, the specific implications for political outcomes in Nigeria remain under examined. This study therefore sought to analyze the influence of social media on the mobilization efforts during the August 1 protests and its effects on public perception of the protest and governance in Nigeria. To do the analysis above, the study sought to: (a) Analyze how social media was used as a mobilization tool during the August 1, 2024 protest in Nigeria. (b) Determine the ways social media influenced public opinion about the protest. (c) Examine the impact social media messages on the protest had on the people. (d) Assess how the Nigerian government responded on social media to the protest.

Conceptual Review

Social Media and its Role in Mobilization

Social media refers to digital platforms that allow individuals to create, share, and engage with content, facilitating communication across various social networks. These platforms, which include X, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp among others, enable users to interact with one another in real-time, creating a global web of interconnected individuals. The rise of social media has dramatically transformed political engagement and activism, enabling new forms of collective action. Initially, social media was largely used for personal communication and entertainment. However, over the past two decades, it has evolved into a powerful tool for political and social movements globally and, specifically, in Nigeria (Adebayo & Bakare, 2018). Social media consists of interactive online platforms that enable users to connect, communicate, and exchange information at little to no cost. These platforms facilitate networking, sharing ideas, and distributing content to a wide audience (Baruah, 2012). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), as cited in Bassey *et al.*, (2024), characterize social media as a suite of internet-based applications developed using Web 2.0 technologies, which are designed to support the creation and sharing of user-generated contents.

The defining features of social media include its immediacy, interactivity, virality, and cost-effectiveness. Bakare, Abdurrahman, and Broni (2020) highlight that social media encompasses a range

of applications enabling the sharing of text, images, and videos to a broad audience. These platforms are crucial for the swift dissemination of information and for providing entertainment. Consequently, social media is not merely a digital tool but a central element of contemporary communication and entertainment. Chiamogu, Obikeze, and Ochiamogu (2021) argue that social media platforms facilitate interactions through end-to-end encryption, allowing users to post, comment, and share multimedia content, including audio and video clips. This secure communication method ensures the privacy and integrity of users' interactions. Beer (2008) views social media as a set of online applications that promote expression and interaction, while Kietzmann *et al.* (2011) contend that social media leverages mobile and web-based technologies to create dynamic platforms where individuals and communities can share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.

Social media's growing influence in political activism can be traced to major global movements such as the Arab Spring, where platforms like X and Facebook were used to organize protests and share real-time updates, allowing activists to bypass traditional media channels. This shift to social media-based mobilization is particularly significant in countries with restrictive media environments or where there is a distrust of state-controlled media. In Nigeria, social media has become an indispensable tool

for political engagement and protest, especially among young people who make up a large portion of the online population (Ajiboye, 2020). With increasing internet access and the prevalence of smart phones, Nigerian activists have adopted social media to challenge the government, organize protests, and frame political issues in their terms.

The role of social media in Nigerian protests gained widespread recognition during the #EndSARS movement in 2020. The hashtag-driven protest against police brutality and systemic injustice captured the attention of the global community, with Nigerian youth mobilizing in large numbers through X and Instagram, drawing significant media coverage and governmental attention (Ogunjimi, 2020). These protests marked a pivotal moment in the evolution of social media activism in Nigeria, signaling a shift from traditional forms of political engagement to digital platforms. Several studies have highlighted the pivotal role that social media plays in protest mobilization, both globally and within the Nigerian context. Social media platforms like X, Facebook, and Instagram are shown to facilitate communication, create networks, and mobilize protesters to take action (Okoye, 2020). In Nigeria, social media was crucial during past protests, such as the #EndSARS movement, where it enabled activists to organize, raise awareness, and disseminate real-time information (Akinyemi, 2018). These studies underscore that social media serves as a tool for both mobilization and resistance, providing an essential mechanism for organizing protests and facilitating participation. However, despite these insights, there remains a need for deeper examination of how these platforms were used in the August 2024 protests, as this case has not been extensively studied in the literature.

Social Media and Public Perception

Public perception in this context refers to the collective understanding or view of events, issues, or movements, formed by individuals or groups within a society. In the case of protests, public perception is shaped by various factors, including the information disseminated about the protests, the way in which these events are framed by the media, and the experiences or biases of the individuals receiving that information. Media plays a key role in influencing public perception by determining the framing of an event or issue, which ultimately affects how it is understood by the public. According to Tufekci (2017), the way media particularly social media covers a protest can either amplify or suppress public support for the cause.

Historically, the mainstream media has held a monopoly on shaping public perception. However, with the advent of social media, that dynamic has shifted. Social media platforms such as X, Facebook, and Instagram have democratized information dissemination, allowing for a more diverse range of voices to shape public opinion. This is particularly evident in the context of protests, where activists, ordinary citizens, and influencers use these platforms to share real-time updates, express grievances, and rally support. In Nigeria, the increasing use of social media has had a profound impact on public perception of protests. While protests like #EndSARS were initially framed in traditional media outlets as incidents of unrest or violence, social media provided a space for protestors to communicate directly with the public, shaping the narrative around the protests (Ajiboye, 2020). Social media, by providing an alternative narrative to the one put forward by the state-controlled media, has thus empowered protestors to reframe their struggles in ways that resonate with both national and international audiences (Adebayo & Bakare, 2018). The public perception of a protest can also be influenced by the emotional appeal conveyed through social media content, which often includes graphic images and videos of police brutality or acts of resistance. In the context of Nigerian protests, visual representations of police brutality shared through social media have been found to communicate protestors' grievances, generate emotional responses, and contribute to the construction of narratives around injustice and resistance. Aliu (2023), in a study of visual narratives associated with the #EndSARS protest, found that social-media visuals depicting police brutality were strategically used to portray victims as innocent and security personnel as abusive, thereby helping to legitimize the protest and encourage resistance against social injustice.

Similarly, Awopetu and Chilwa (2023) found that images from the #EndSARS protests communicated the frustrations and demands of protestors and helped construct representations of the realities of the protest in the #EndSARS protests, for instance, viral videos of police violence sparked

empathy and solidarity, shaping public opinion and influencing global support for the movement (Ogunjimi, 2020). However, social media's influence on public perception can be both positive and negative, depending on the nature of the information shared and the manner in which it is received. On one hand, social media can significantly enhance public support for a protest by providing a platform for activists to share their grievances and call for solidarity. On the other hand, it can also be used to spread misinformation, sensationalize events, or frame a protest in a negative light, thus eroding public support. Conversely, social media also enabled certain narratives to be constructed that framed the protests negatively. The Nigerian government, along with pro-government actors, used social media to undermine the legitimacy of the protests, accusing protestors of being violent or of acting under foreign influence (Ajiboye, 2020). These counter-narratives sought to delegitimize the movement by portraying it as a threat to national security, and social media provided an effective means of spreading these messages.

Social media's impact on public perception is heightened by the speed at which information spreads. Unlike traditional media outlets, where news is often subjected to fact-checking and editorial processes, social media platforms allow for rapid dissemination of both accurate and inaccurate information. This immediacy can influence public opinion in real-time, as seen in the #EndSARS protests when viral content whether genuine or fabricated—quickly altered the perceptions of people both within Nigeria and across the world (Olumide, 2019). Social media does not only mobilize people; it also shapes the public's perception of protests, political movements, and government responses. Previous studies have demonstrated that digital platforms significantly influence how protests are perceived by the public. In the Nigerian context, for example, the #EndSARS movement was shaped by social media narratives that framed the protests as a fight for justice and against police brutality (Lawal, 2019). Social media, therefore, plays a dual role: not only does it act as a platform for mobilization, but it also creates and amplifies public narratives about the legitimacy or violence of protests. The influence of social media on public opinion during protests remains under-explored, particularly concerning how real-time narratives shift as events unfold. The existing literature does not sufficiently address how public perception of protests evolves over time through social media, particularly during active protests like those seen in August 2024.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Technological Determinism Theory and the Source Credibility Theory; *Technological Determinism Theory*

The technological determinism theory was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1962 (Mohammed & Ogwuche, 2021). The theory is seen as driver of change to the extent that whenever it is introduced into any social system, it alters the way the system functions (Okoli *et al.*, 2024). It is perhaps with this in mind, according to the authors, that the theory derives its name which is technology determinism. It implies that the functioning of a society is determined by the technology available to its actors (Okoli *et al.*, 2024). Chandler (2000), states that the theory assumes that the complete form of society, is seen as being determined by technology. He believes that new technologies transform society at every level, including institutions, social interaction and individuals. The theory explains that media technology shapes how individuals in a given society think, feel, and act, as society moves from one technology age to another (Mohammed & Ogwuche, 2021). McQuail (2010) affirms that technological determinism theory means that communication technologies are fundamental to society as each media technology has a bias to particular communication forms, contents and uses.

In relation to this study, Technological Determinism provides a framework for understanding how the design and architecture of social media platforms inherently influenced the course and character of the August 1, 2024 protests in Nigeria. The protests were largely organized, mobilized, and sustained through digital platforms such as Twitter (X), WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. These platforms were not merely tools in the hands of activists; they played a defining role in shaping protest behaviour. Features such as real-time updates, algorithmic amplification, multimedia sharing (photos and videos), hashtags, and geolocation tagging created a new digital public square where information spread rapidly and engagement was decentralized. The theory assumes that the structure of social

media platforms enabled mass mobilization by allowing users to bypass traditional media filters and institutional gatekeepers. Protesters could disseminate information instantaneously, coordinate actions without centralized leadership, and challenge official narratives. The platforms' very affordances speed, virality, user-generated content, and interactivity determined how and why the protests gained momentum. In this sense, the medium shaped not just the message but also the movement itself.

Source Credibility Theory

The Source credibility theory was propounded by Hovland, Janis and Kelly (1963) and they stated that people or receivers are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible (Okunade, 2025). The theory elucidates the influence of the perceived traits of the source on the persuasiveness of the message (Mahar *et al.*, 2026). The theory in its simplest form assumes that people are more apt to be convinced when they believe that the communicator is credible, reliable and knowledgeable (Mahar *et al.*, 2026). These perceptions, according to the authors, lower cognitive resistance and increase internalization of messages communicated, and hence, affect attitudes and later behaviour.

The Source Credibility Theory has over time, developed tremendously, as it has been able to adapt to the change in communication mediums and audience dynamics (Mahar *et al.*, 2026). The authors stated that credibility in the traditional media setting was usually linked to institutional power or professionalism. But the emergence of digital platforms has however broadened the concept to incorporate relatability, authenticity and perceived similarity between communicators and audiences (Mahar *et al.*, 2026). In the context of the August 1, 2024 protests in Nigeria, Source Credibility Theory provides insight into how citizens assessed and responded to various information sources on social media. A major feature of the protest was the emergence of key online influencers, journalists, activists, and citizen reporters who were widely perceived as credible. Many of these individuals had built reputations over time as advocates for social justice, transparency, and democratic values. As a result, when they shared updates, called for peaceful demonstrations, or exposed government actions, their messages were readily accepted, shared, and acted upon.

Another important aspect of the theory's relevance to this study lies in how credibility is constructed on social media. Unlike traditional media where authority is often institutional, online credibility is often peer-generated built through consistency, transparency, engagement, and proximity to events. Eyewitness accounts, live streams, and viral tweets from individuals on the ground were often seen as more credible than sanitized or delayed news reports. This shift from institutional to decentralized sources of credibility significantly shaped how the Nigerian public perceived the protest and the government's response.

3. Methodology

The survey research design was employed in the conduct of this study. The use of survey enabled the researcher to study Anambra State residents whose population is 5,953,500, according to 2006 **CENSUS** figures, as well as their 2022 projected populations, which were published by the **NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS**. The number of residents that were studied which is otherwise known as the sample size (400), was determined using the Taro Yamane formula while the 400 residents were selected using multi-stage sampling procedure. Copies of a valid and reliable 5-point Likert scale structured questionnaire were used to obtain data from them while the data that were obtained from the respondents were analyzed using frequency tables and simple percentages.

Findings

The researcher administered the copies of questionnaire personally on the respondents. Out of the 400 copies of questionnaire distributed, 385 were completed and returned. The data from the research is presented as follows:

Section A: Demographic Data

TABLE 1: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-24	20	5.1
25-34	70	18.2
35-44	195	50.6
45-54	85	22.2
55 and above	15	3.9
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table above shows that 20 (5.1%) of the respondents fall within the age ranges of 18 -24yrs, 70 (18.2%) fall within 25-34 years, 195 (50.6%) fall within the age of 35- 44years, 85 (22.2%) respondents fall within the age of 45-54 years, while 15(3.9%) of the respondents fall within the age ranges of 55 and above. Majority of the respondents were of age range between 35-44 years (youths)

TABLE 2: GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	200	52.0
Male	185	48.0
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table above shows that 200 (52.0%) of the respondents were female while 185 (48.0%) were male. The implication is that there are more male respondents than female.

TABLE 3: LEVEL OF EDUCATION OF RESPONDENTS

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Secondary School	153	39.7
Bachelor's Degree	210	54.6
Master's Degree	20	5.2
Doctorate/PhD	2	0.5
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

From table above, it is evident that 153 (39.7%) of the respondents have Secondary school Certificate, 210 (54.6%) were Bachelor Degree (BA/B. Sc) holders, 20 (5.2%) of the respondents have Master's Degree, while 2 (0.5%) have Doctorate Degree (PhD)

TABLE 4: LOCATION OF RESPONDENTS

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Urban area	355	92.2
Rural area	10	2.6
Suburban area	20	5.2
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table above shows that the respondent's Locations are Urban area, Rural area and Suburban area thus: 355Urban (92.2%), 10 Rural (2.6%), and 20 (5.2%) are from Suburban area.

Section B: Thematic Data

How social media was Used as a Mobilization Tool During the August 1, 2024 End-Bad-Governance Protest in Nigeria

TABLE 5: SOCIAL MEDIA WAS THE PRIMARY TOOL USED TO ORGANIZE THE AUGUST 1, 2024 PROTEST.

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	210	54.5
Agree	115	29.9
Neutral	35	9.1
Disagree	15	3.9
Strongly disagree	10	2.6
Total	385	100

Source: *Field Work, 2025*

Table 5 presents the distribution of responses to the statement: "Social media was the primary tool used to organize the August 1, 2024 protest." The analysis shows that a majority of the respondents affirmed this statement. Specifically, 210 respondents, representing 54.5%, strongly agreed, while 115 respondents (29.9%) agreed. Together, this accounts for 84.4% of the total respondents who supported the view that social media served as the primary platform for organizing the protest. Only a small fraction of respondents disagreed with the statement. While 35 respondents (9.1%) maintained a neutral stance, 15 (3.9%) disagreed and 10 (2.6%) strongly disagreed. The relatively low percentage of dissenting views indicates minimal opposition to the role of social media in protest mobilization.

TABLE 6: SOCIAL MEDIA MADE IT EASIER FOR PROTEST ORGANIZERS TO REACH A LARGE AUDIENCE QUICKLY.

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	195	50.6
Agree	130	33.8
Neutral	35	9.1
Disagree	15	3.9
Strongly disagree	10	2.6
Total	385	100

Source: *Field Work, 2025*

Table 6 indicates that a significant portion of the respondents acknowledged the role of social media in enhancing the speed and reach of communication.

Out of 385 valid responses, 195 respondents (50.6%) strongly agreed, and 130 respondents (33.8%) agreed with the statement. This brings the total agreement to 84.4%, which suggests a strong consensus among participants that social media served as an effective and immediate communication tool during the August 1, 2024 protest. A minority of respondents remained neutral (35 individuals, 9.1%), while only a small fraction expressed disagreement (15 respondents (3.9%) disagreed and 10 (2.6%) strongly disagreed). This minimal opposition further validates the assertion that social media platforms, with their broad user base and real-time capabilities, significantly enhanced outreach during the protest.

TABLE 7: SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS OR PAGES HELPED UNIFY PROTEST PLANNING.

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	180	46.8
Agree	140	36.4
Neutral	40	10.4
Disagree	15	3.9
Strongly disagree	10	2.6
Total	385	100

Source: *Field Work, 2025*

Table 7 illustrates respondents' perceptions of the role social media groups and pages played in unifying protest planning. The results show that a large proportion of respondents viewed social media as a vital tool for centralized coordination and collaborative planning. Out of 385 respondents, 180 (46.8%) strongly agreed, while 140 (36.4%) agreed that social media groups or pages contributed significantly to the unification of protest efforts. This combined agreement rate of 83.2% points to a strong majority recognizing the organizational value of platforms like Facebook groups, WhatsApp broadcast lists, and X threads. Meanwhile, 40 respondents (10.4%) remained neutral, suggesting some uncertainty or lack of direct engagement with such platforms. Only 15 respondents (3.9%) disagreed and 10 (2.6%) strongly disagreed, which indicates very minimal resistance to the statement.

The Ways Which social media Influenced Public Opinion About the August 1 2024 End-Bad-Governance Protest

TABLE 8: SOCIAL MEDIA POSITIVELY INFLUENCED MY PERCEPTION OF THE AUGUST 1 PROTEST

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	170	44.2
Agree	135	35.1
Neutral	50	13.0

Disagree	20	5.2
Strongly disagree	10	2.6
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 8 examines the extent to which social media influenced respondents' perceptions of the August 1, 2024 protest. The responses indicate a strong positive influence, with the majority acknowledging the role of social media in shaping how they viewed the event. Out of the 385 valid responses, 170 respondents (44.2%) strongly agreed, and 135 (35.1%) agreed that social media had a positive impact on their perception of the protest. This totals to 79.3% of participants who viewed social media as a constructive force in framing the protest in a favorable light. Fifty respondents (13.0%) remained neutral, while a smaller number expressed disagreement — 20 (5.2%) disagreed and 10 (2.6%) strongly disagreed. This minimal opposition underscores that while not everyone may have been influenced, a vast majority felt that social media improved their understanding and perception of the protest's purpose and significance.

TABLE 9: VISUAL CONTENT (VIDEOS/PHOTOS) ON SOCIAL MEDIA INCREASED MY SUPPORT FOR THE PROTEST

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	190	49.4
Agree	135	35.1
Neutral	35	9.1
Disagree	15	3.9
Strongly disagree	10	2.6
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 9 shows that out of 385 respondents, 190 (49.4%) strongly agreed, and 135 (35.1%) agreed that photos and videos shared on platforms such as X, Instagram, and Facebook increased their support for the protest. Combined, 84.5% of respondents affirmed that visual media content strengthened their alignment with the protest's cause. Only a small number of respondents were neutral (35 individuals, 9.1%), while 15 (3.9%) disagreed and 10 (2.6%) strongly disagreed. This very low level of opposition indicates that visual storytelling on social media was a powerful factor in shaping public perception.

TABLE 10: CONTENT SHARED BY SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS AND PROMINENT PUBLIC FIGURES SHAPED MY PERCEPTION OF THE AUGUST 1, 2024 PROTEST.

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	95	24.7
Agree	135	35.1
Neutral	85	22.1
Disagree	50	13.0
Strongly disagree	20	5.2
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table 10 shows that 95 respondents (24.7%) strongly agreed and 135 respondents (35.1%) agreed that content shared by influencers shaped their perception of the protest. A notable 85 respondents (22.1%) were neutral, reflecting uncertainty or a balanced viewpoint, while 50 (13.0%) disagreed and 20 (5.2%) strongly disagreed. These results suggest that social media influencers played a substantial role in framing public perception, although not all respondents were influenced equally.

The Impact Which Social Media Messages on the Protest Have on the People

TABLE 11: HASHTAGS PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN COORDINATING PROTEST ACTIVITIES.

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	185	48.1
Agree	140	36.4
Neutral	35	9.1
Disagree	15	3.9
Strongly disagree	10	2.6
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

The table above shows that 185 (48.1%) strongly agreed, and 140 (36.4%) agreed that hashtags played a significant role. This brings total positive responses to 84.5%, indicating widespread recognition of hashtags as effective tools for organizing, spreading updates, and building momentum around protest events. Only 35 respondents (9.1%) remained neutral, while a combined total of just 6.5% (15 disagreed and 10 strongly disagreed) expressed doubt about the effectiveness of hashtags.

TABLE12: MISINFORMATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA CONTRIBUTED TO THE ESCALATION OF TENSIONS DURING THE AUGUST 1 PROTESTS

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	180	46.8
Agree	140	36.4
Neutral	35	9.1
Disagree	20	5.2
Strongly disagree	10	2.6
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

The data presented in Table12 indicates that a significant majority of respondents believe that misinformation on social media contributed to the escalation of tensions during the August 1, 2024 protests in Nigeria. Specifically, 180 respondents (46.8%) strongly agreed with the statement, while 140 respondents (36.4%) agreed, making a combined 83.2% in agreement. Only 9.1% of respondents remained neutral, whereas a small minority disagreed (5.2%) or strongly disagreed (2.6%).

TABLE 13: WITHOUT SOCIAL MEDIA, THE SCALE OF THE AUGUST 1 PROTEST WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH SMALLER

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	165	42.9
Agree	145	37.7
Neutral	40	10.4
Disagree	25	6.5
Strongly disagree	10	2.6
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

The responses to table13 reveal that a majority of participants acknowledged the significant role of social media in amplifying the scale of the August 1, 2024 protests. A combined total of 310 respondents (80.6%) either strongly agreed (42.9%) or agreed (37.7%) that without social media, the scale of the protest would have been much smaller. Only 10.4% of the participants were neutral, while a minimal proportion disagreed (6.5%) or strongly disagreed (2.6%). These results reinforce the argument that social media served as a critical tool for mobilization, allowing the protest to gain rapid traction and reach a broader audience than would have been possible through traditional means.

How the Nigerian Government used social media in response to the August 1 2024 End-Bad-governance protest

TABLE 14: THE GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL MEDIA RESPONSE WAS EFFECTIVE IN CALMING PUBLIC TENSIONS.

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	30	7.8
Agree	40	10.4
Neutral	65	16.9
Disagree	130	33.8
Strongly disagree	120	31.2
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

Table14 indicates that out of 385 respondents, only 30 (7.8%) strongly agreed, and 40 (10.4%) agreed that the government's social media response was effective in easing tensions. A total of 18.2% expressed a positive view of the government's online communication strategy. In contrast, a significant portion of the respondents disagreed: 130 (33.8%) disagreed and 120 (31.2%) strongly disagreed making up a

combined 65% who felt the government's efforts on social media were ineffective or counterproductive. An additional 65 respondents (16.9%) were neutral.

TABLE 15: THE GOVERNMENT TRIED TO COUNTER PROTEST NARRATIVES ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	132	34.3
Agree	141	36.6
Neutral	58	15.1
Disagree	34	8.8
Strongly disagree	20	5.2
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

The responses in Table15 indicate that the respondents were largely aware of government efforts to counter protest narratives on social media. A total of 273 respondents (70.9%) either strongly agreed (34.3%) or agreed (36.6%) that the government attempted to influence public opinion online during the protest. This suggests that social media became a contested space where opposing narratives competed for public attention. While 15.1% of respondents remained neutral, only 14.0% disagreed or strongly disagreed. These findings underscore the strategic importance of social media in political communication and highlight its role as a battleground for shaping public perception during periods of social unrest.

TABLE 16: THE GOVERNMENT BLOCKED NETWORK ACCESS TEMPORARILY TO PREVENT LIVE COVERAGE OF THE PROTEST

Response option	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	99	25.7
Agree	81	21.0
Neutral	60	15.6
Disagree	50	12.9
Strongly disagree	95	24.7
Total	385	100

Source: Field Work, 2025

The responses in Table16 indicate that the respondents were largely aware of government response of blocking network access temporarily to prevent live coverage of the protest. A total of 99 respondents (25.7%) either strongly agreed or agreed (21.0) that the government blocked network access temporarily to prevent live coverage of the protest. While 15.6% of respondents remained neutral, only 12.9% disagreed and 24.7% strongly disagreed. These findings underscore the importance of good network coverage and access during protests of this nature.

4. Discussion of Findings

The demographic characteristics of respondents indicate that the majority were middle-aged adults, with 195 respondents (50.6%) falling within the 35–44 years age group, followed by 85 respondents (22.2%) aged 45–54 (Table1). Younger adults aged 18–24 accounted for only 20 respondents (5.1%), while older adults aged 55 and above were 15 respondents (3.9%). This suggests that the survey captured perspectives primarily from a mature, socially and politically engaged population. Gender distribution was relatively balanced, with 200 females (52.0%) and 185 males (48.0%) (Table 2), indicating no significant gender bias in the sample. Educational attainment was high, as 210 respondents (54.6%) held a bachelor's degree and 153 (39.7%) had secondary school certificates (Table3), suggesting a respondent pool capable of accessing and critically engaging with social media content. Respondents were predominantly urban-based (355; 92.2%) (Table4), which likely facilitated exposure to social media platforms and online protest activities.

The first finding of this study as clearly captured in tables 5 –7 showed that the respondents strongly agreed that social media was the primary tool used to organize the protest. They also strongly agreed that social media made it easier for protest organizers to reach a large audience quickly while social media groups or pages helped unify protest planning. This is a clear indication that social media

has enormous power and is very effective in mobilizing people for any purpose. This must be why Ajiboye (2020) stated that in Nigeria, social media has become an indispensable tool for political engagement and protest. With increasing internet access and the prevalence of smart phones, according to the author, Nigerian activists have adopted social media to challenge the government, organize protests, and frame political issues in their terms.

The second finding of this study as clearly captured in tables 8 –10 showed that social media positively influenced the respondents' public opinion/perception about the End-Bad-Governance protest. The respondents strongly agreed that the visual content (videos and photos) on social media increased their support for the protest while the content shared by social media influencers and prominent public figures shaped their perception of the protest. This finding gives credence to the Technological determinism theory which Mohammed and Ogwuche (2021) stated that it explains that media technology shapes how individuals in a given society think, feel, and act, as society moves from one technology age to another. Since the influence which the social media have on the respondents would not have happened without technology, it means that it was technology which social media can be accessed with, that determined or shaped how they felt about the protest and how the visual and written contents on social media increased their support for and perception of the protest. This influence can be beneficial to the respondents if they only follow and listen to honest social media influencers and prominent public figures and ignore the views of dishonest influencers and public figures.

The third finding of this study as aptly captured in tables 11 –13 shows that the respondents believe that social media messages on the protest had an impact on the people. This is evident in their responses in the tables where they indicated that they strongly agreed that hashtags played a significant role in coordinating protest activities. They equally agreed strongly that misinformation on social media contributed to the escalation of tensions during the protest. The hashtags and misinformation were able to do these things because people believed and trusted those that were respectively using the hashtags and spreading misinformation. This is exactly the position of the source credibility theory which Mahar *et al.* (2026) stated that it assumes that people are more apt to be convinced when they believe that the communicator is credible, reliable and knowledgeable (Mahar *et al.*, 2026). These perceptions, according to the authors, lower cognitive resistance and increase internalization of messages communicated, and hence, affect attitudes and later behaviour. Based on the finding, therefore, it can be said that people found the users of the hashtags and those spreading misinformation about the protest to be credible, reliable and knowledgeable which is not supposed to be. This impact is enormous which might be why the respondents believe that without social media, the scale of the protest would have been much smaller. While the use of the hashtags is not wrong, using it to spread misinformation is completely wrong and should not be supported by any well-meaning Nigerian. This is because spreading misinformation only defeats the purpose of the protest and gives the Government of the day a reason to criticize the protest and not allow a similar protest to happen in future.

The last finding which was captured in tables 14 –16 shows that the respondents are of the view that the Nigerian Government tried to counter protest narratives during the protest using social media and blocked network access temporarily to prevent live coverage of the protest. This is why the respondents do not believe that the Government's social media response was effective in calming public tensions. This gives the impression that the Nigerian Government is afraid of anti-government protests. Instead of looking for ways to stop people from protesting online and physically, the Government should rather channel that energy towards securing lives and properties, providing basic amenities and working to ensure that the country works for all and sundry.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that social media is an indispensable tool in modern civic engagement, particularly in contexts where traditional media may be limited or less accessible. During the August 1, 2024 protest, social media platforms served as vital channels for mobilizing citizens, spreading information, and fostering a sense of community. The ability to facilitate instant communication allowed the public to

actively participate in civic discourse, shaping both online and offline actions. At the same time, the research highlights the complex and sometimes problematic nature of social media. The rapid spread of false information poses risks to public understanding, trust, and safety. Therefore, while social media strengthens democracy and civic participation, it also requires careful management to prevent misinformation, confusion, and polarization. In essence, social media is neither inherently positive nor negative; its impact depends largely on how citizens, institutions, and platforms engage with it. Promoting responsible use, enhancing digital literacy, and encouraging transparent communication are crucial to maximizing its benefits while minimizing its risks.

Based on the findings of this study, several key recommendations are proposed to maximize the positive impact of social media on civic engagement while minimizing its potential risks: (a) Enhance Digital Literacy: Citizens should be equipped with the skills to critically evaluate online content, distinguish credible information from misinformation, and use social media responsibly. Educational programs, community workshops, and public awareness campaigns can play a vital role in fostering informed and responsible online behaviour. (b) Promote Transparent Communication by Authorities: Government agencies and public institutions should actively use social media to provide timely, accurate, and clear information to the public. Transparent communication can help build trust, reduce the spread of false information, and encourage constructive public participation. (c) Strengthen the Role of Civil Society: Non-governmental organizations, community groups, and advocacy networks should serve as reliable intermediaries in sharing accurate information. By actively engaging with the public and correcting misinformation, these organizations can enhance the quality of civic discourse and encourage informed participation. (d) Encourage Platform Responsibility: Social media companies should develop and enforce measures to limit the spread of false or harmful information, especially during politically sensitive periods. Tools such as fact-checking mechanisms, transparent algorithms, and responsive reporting systems can help maintain a balance between freedom of expression and social responsibility. (e) The Government should pay more attention to the security and welfare of the citizens which are their primary roles in governance. This should minimize protests and all forms of violence social media activism.

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Biographical Note

Beatrice Ifesinachi NWAFOR is a Masters Degree student in the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, NIGERIA. Her area of specialization is Broadcasting and has her areas of research interest around Broadcasting, Electronic media (NICTs), political communication and development. Phone: 234 (0)9028445715. E-mail: nwaforbeatriceifesi@gmail.com.

Cornelius Aghadiegwu UKWUEZE Ph.D is a Professor in the department of Broadcasting, Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, formerly in the department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, NIGERIA. His area of specialization is Electronic Communication, Broadcasting and New Media. His area of research interest is in Broadcast Media, New Information and Communication Technology (NICTs) and National Security and Development. E-mail: ca.ukwueze@unizik.edu.ng Tel: +2348063694405