



ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of social media in fostering citizen engagement against corruption in Nigeria through case study analysis of eleven movements spanning 2012-2024, including #EndSARS, #BringBackOurGirls, #OccupyNigeria and #EndBadGovernance. Employing qualitative content analysis of digital campaigns, the research investigated how platforms such as Twitter (now X), Facebook and WhatsApp enabled real-time interaction, anonymous whistleblowing and advocacy coordination. Grounded in Participatory Communication and Network Society theories, findings indicated that social media effectively facilitated rapid mobilisation through hashtags, supported whistleblowing and enabled transnational solidarity. However, critical limitations emerged including misinformation proliferation, government surveillance and persistent digital divides excluding marginalised populations. The study concluded that whilst social media is not a panacea for eradicating corruption, it serves as a vital supplement to traditional anti-corruption mechanisms by amplifying civic voices and fostering transparent governance. The study recommends developing digital literacy programmes, integrating online-offline activism, strengthening privacy protections and implementing strategic communication frameworks to optimise social media's effectiveness in sustainable anti-corruption efforts.

Keywords: Social Media; Citizen Engagement; Corruption; Digital Activism; Transparency and Accountability

Introduction

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool that influences nearly every aspect of human interaction, including political participation, public discourse and the fight against corruption. With platforms such as Twitter (now X), Facebook and WhatsApp, citizens are no longer passive consumers of news but active participants in shaping narratives and influencing governance. These platforms have amplified the voices of the masses and enabled ordinary people to expose corrupt practices, mobilise for collective action and demand accountability from public officials (Obaid, 2020; Van, 2019; Obayi et al., 2024).

Social media's potential was especially evident in the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria, where thousands of citizens organized online protests against police brutality that eventually spilled into offline demonstrations (Amnesty International, 2020; Paul, 2019). Similarly, in other parts of the world, such as the Anna Hazare anti-corruption movement in India or the Women's March in the United States, social

media proved instrumental in mobilising supporters and framing public discourse (Silva & Syed, 2019). These instances underscore social media's capability to act as both an information hub and a catalyst for grassroots advocacy (Myoung-Gi&Hyojung, 2019).

Framing, participation and emotional engagement are critical components of this digital mobilisation (Guenther et al., 2020). As social media allows for anonymity, immediacy and wide reach, it serves as an ideal channel for whistleblowing, community-building and pressure for systemic reform (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019; Hill, 2019; Nsude, & Etumnu, 2023).

Despite the growing role of social media in citizen engagement and anti-corruption efforts, several challenges and limitations hinder its optimal effectiveness. One significant issue is the prevalence of misinformation and propaganda that can mislead the public and derail legitimate advocacy (Jimoh et al., 2025; Schneider & Carpenter, 2020). Moreover, digital surveillance and censorship by state actors can silence dissent and threaten the safety of vocal activists (Alakklouk & Gülnar, 2023; Guenther et al., 2020).

Additionally, there is the issue of digital inequality: marginalized communities with limited access to the internet or digital literacy remain excluded from online campaigns, thus reinforcing pre-existing societal gaps (Amnesty International, 2020). While social media can highlight cases of corruption and facilitate mass mobilisation, it cannot always guarantee institutional change. The short-lived nature of online trends and the risk of slacktivism—performative activism without real-life impact—remain critical concerns (Manju, 2019).

Although the literature is growing, there remains a paucity of research that holistically evaluates how social media is used in real-time by Nigerian citizens to fight corruption. This study seeks to bridge that gap by assessing the dynamics of digital advocacy and its implications for governance and citizen empowerment.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the role of social media in fostering citizen engagement against corruption. The specific objectives are:

1. To examine how social media platforms facilitate awareness and reporting of corrupt practices.
2. To assess the effectiveness of social media in mobilising collective citizen action.
3. To identify the challenges and limitations associated with using social media for anti-corruption advocacy.
4. To explore the influence of social media framing on public perception of corruption and activism.

Conceptual Clarifications

Social Media

Social media refers to interactive digital platforms that allow users to create, share and engage with content in real time. It encompasses a broad range of applications such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram, WhatsApp, TikTok and YouTube. These platforms facilitate two-way communication and provide users with tools to produce media content, participate in discussions and build virtual communities (Guenther et al., 2020; Etumnu et al., 2025).

Unlike traditional media, social media is decentralized and user-driven, making it a critical instrument for citizen journalism and activism (Van, 2019). Social media's unique features—immediacy, virality, anonymity and accessibility—have transformed it into a powerful space for civic engagement and

accountability. Users can disseminate information, mobilise support, crowdsource ideas and hold public officials accountable without relying on mainstream media channels (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2019; Silva & Syed, 2019).

Corruption

Corruption is broadly defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It manifests in various forms such as bribery, embezzlement, nepotism and abuse of office. In the Nigerian context, corruption is deeply institutionalized and often erodes public trust in governance (Jimoh et al., 2025).

Citizen Engagement

Citizen engagement refers to the active participation of individuals in civic life to influence decision-making and promote accountability. It involves actions like voting, advocacy, protest, public dialogue and social media activism (Obaid, 2020). In digital spaces, this engagement is amplified through hashtags, live-streaming and online petitions, enabling citizens to act as watchdogs and change agents (Ugochukwu & Nwolu, 2021).

When citizens use social media to report abuses, demand justice, or promote transparency, they engage in participatory governance. The success of the #EndSARS campaign in drawing international attention to police brutality in Nigeria demonstrates how digital tools can empower citizens to challenge systemic corruption (Amnesty International, 2020; Paul, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Participatory Communication Theory and Network Society Theory as its guiding frameworks. These theories help explain the interactive, decentralized and mobilising capabilities of social media in anti-corruption efforts.

Participatory Communication Theory

Participatory Communication Theory emphasizes inclusive dialogue, community voice and bottom-up communication in the development process. It posits that individuals should not be passive recipients of information but active co-creators of meaning and social change (Baraybar-Fernández et al., 2020). Applied to this study, the theory supports the idea that citizens can use social media not only to receive information but also to shape public discourse, report abuses and demand institutional reforms.

Social media, therefore, becomes a space for deliberation, awareness-raising and coalition-building (Adekoya & Olaseinde-Fayomi, 2021). In campaigns such as #JusticeForSylvester or #EndSARS, the theory is visible in how ordinary users became agents of communication, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers to raise awareness and provoke public action (Sahara Reporters, 2021a, 2021b).

Network Society Theory

Proposed by Manuel Castells (1996), Network Society Theory describes a social structure made up of interconnected digital networks that shape culture, politics and communication. In this model, power is distributed through nodes and links rather than centralized hierarchies (Myoung-Gi & Hyojung, 2019). This

theory aligns with how social media enables peer-to-peer activism, collective mobilization and decentralized leadership. Movements like #MeToo and #EndSARS exemplify how individuals, united by shared goals but not formal organisations, can form digital networks to advocate for systemic change (Schneider & Carpenter, 2020).

Network Society Theory helps explain the horizontal nature of digital activism, where anyone can become a leader, influencer, or mobiliser within a social cause. These networks are fluid and adaptive, allowing for rapid response to new developments, which is crucial in confronting corruption that is often dynamic and covert. Together, these frameworks provide a robust lens through which to examine the transformative potential—and limitations—of social media in promoting citizen engagement and accountability in govern.

Literature Review

Social media has increasingly become a strategic tool for citizens to engage in the fight against corruption. By offering immediacy, wide reach and participatory communication, digital platforms like Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook have disrupted traditional information hierarchies and empowered ordinary people to demand transparency and justice.

Real-Time Information Sharing

One of the most defining features of social media is its capacity for real-time communication. Users can report corrupt acts as they happen, circulate evidence through videos or texts and instantly gain the attention of the public and relevant institutions. According to Obaid (2020), social media facilitates horizontal communication, allowing users to bypass traditional gatekeepers and directly share information with large audiences.

During the #EndSARS protests, platforms like Twitter enabled activists to stream events live, document human rights abuses and attract global solidarity within minutes (Amnesty International, 2020). Real-time sharing also enables rapid verification or repudiation of misinformation, strengthening the credibility of citizen journalism (Alakklouk & Gülnar, 2023; Apuke, 2019).

Anonymous Whistleblowing and Protection

Social media provides anonymity that empowers citizens to expose corruption without fear of retribution. Many platforms allow users to create pseudonymous accounts or use encrypted messaging, thereby creating a safe space for whistleblowers and victims. This feature is critical in contexts like Nigeria, where reporting corruption can lead to threats or victimization (Jimoh et al., 2025). Through anonymous pages, leaks, or hashtags, users reveal misconduct involving politicians, law enforcement officers and corporate actors.

The Downen College case, in which widespread calls for justice emerged following the death of Sylvester Oromoni, gained traction after anonymous voices amplified the incident on Twitter and Facebook (Sahara Reporters, 2021a). Furthermore, anonymity helps build a culture of accountability from below, fostering the emergence of watchdog communities that monitor government and institutional behavior in real time (Horoub, 2023; Van, 2019).

Mobilisation and Coordination of Protests

Social media has also become a powerful engine for organizing protests and coordinated advocacy efforts. It simplifies the process of gathering support, distributing logistics information and rallying diverse communities around a unified cause. Platforms such as WhatsApp groups and Twitter threads were pivotal in coordinating logistics and communication during protests like #OccupyNigeria and #EndSARS (Paul, 2019).

As Myoung-Gi and Hyojung (2019) explain, the connective logic of social media allows for the formation of loosely coordinated yet highly efficient networks of activism. Hashtags, viral posts and digital posters help maintain momentum and internationalize local issues, often forcing government response or policy reversal. Moreover, social media campaigns often include online petitions, crowdfunding for legal aid and direct tagging of public officials to create pressure for institutional response.

Methodology

This study employs a case study methodology to examine social media's role in citizen engagement against corruption in Nigeria. The case study method is a qualitative research approach involving in-depth examination of specific phenomena within their real-world contexts (Yin, 2018). This method is particularly valuable for exploring contemporary events where boundaries between phenomenon and context are unclear, utilizing multiple evidence sources for comprehensive understanding (Stake, 1995).

Justification for Case Study Approach

The case study approach was adopted because it offers several methodological advantages aligned with research objectives. First, it allows examination of social media's role within natural settings, preserving contextual factors influencing digital activism. Second, it enables analysis of multiple engagement dimensions including platform usage patterns, message framing strategies, mobilisation techniques and government responses across different periods and contexts. Third, it facilitates data triangulation from digital content analysis, media reports, academic literature and documented movement outcomes, enhancing validity and reliability.

Case Selection

The study examines eleven Nigerian social movements spanning 2012-2024, categorized into historical cases (2012-2019): #OccupyNigeria, #BringBackOurGirls, #NotTooYoungToRun and #RevolutionNow; and contemporary cases (2020-2024): #EndSARS, #JusticeForSylvester, #EndNairaScarcity, #EndBadGovernance, #TinubuMUSTGo, #FearlessInOctober and #10DaysOfRage.

Cases were selected based on diversity of corruption issues addressed, temporal spread enabling evolution analysis, varying impact scales, platform diversity across Twitter/X, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, government response variation, demographic and geographic reach diversity and comprehensive documentation availability through academic publications, media reports and archived digital content.

Case Studies

Case 1: The #OccupyNigeria Movement (2012)

The #OccupyNigeria protest emerged in January 2012 as a response to the government's removal of fuel subsidies, which led to significant price increases affecting ordinary citizens. Social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, served as coordination tools for nationwide protests (Ifukor, 2010; Okoro, 2013). Citizens used these platforms to share protest locations, document government responses and build solidarity across different states.

The movement successfully forced the government to partially reverse the subsidy removal, demonstrating the power of digital mobilisation in economic policy advocacy (Adebanwi, 2017). This case established patterns that would characterize subsequent Nigerian social media activism: the use of hashtags for visibility, real-time documentation of events, coordination across multiple platforms and the ability to sustain momentum over several weeks despite government resistance.

Case 2: The #BringBackOurGirls Movement (2014-present)

The #BringBackOurGirls movement began in 2014 as a Twitter campaign to bring worldwide awareness to girls abducted in Chibok, Nigeria by Boko Haram. The hashtag was started by Ibrahim M Abdullahi, a lawyer in Abuja (Chiluwa & Adegoke, 2013; Ogbonna, 2019). The movement evolved from online activism to sustained offline protests, with the hashtag trending globally on Twitter by May 2014 (Ekine, 2010; Oyesomi et al., 2014).

Unlike many digital campaigns, the BBOG movement sustained for over four years, transitioning from a planned one-day march to a long-term advocacy organisation. The campaign successfully pressured the Nigerian government to intensify rescue efforts and brought international attention to security challenges in Northern Nigeria (Adamu, 2021).

Case 3: The #NotTooYoungToRun Campaign (2016-2018)

This movement advocated for constitutional amendments to reduce age requirements for political office in Nigeria, addressing political exclusion that activists framed as systemic corruption favoring entrenched elites. Young activists used social media to educate citizens about age-related barriers in politics and lobbied for legislative changes (Adejumo & Adeleye, 2018; Osisanwo, 2017). The campaign utilised platforms like Twitter, Instagram and Facebook to share infographics, organize town halls and pressure lawmakers. The movement achieved significant success when the National Assembly passed the "Not Too Young to Run" Act in 2018, reducing the minimum age for presidential candidates from 40 to 35 years (Salawu, 2018).

Case 4: The #RevolutionNow Movement (2019-2021)

Initiated by activist Omoyele Sowore, this movement used social media to call for protests against bad governance, corruption and economic hardship. The campaign utilised Twitter, WhatsApp groups and Facebook to coordinate nationwide protests and share information about government policies (Alimi, 2022; Omilusi, 2021). Despite facing government crackdowns, including Sowore's arrest, the movement continued using digital platforms to maintain momentum and document human rights violations, showcasing both the potential and limitations of social media activism in restrictive political environments.

Case 5: The #EndSARS Movement (2020)

The #EndSARS movement stands as one of the most compelling demonstrations of how social media can mobilise mass action against systemic corruption and abuse. Initially sparked by online posts documenting police brutality by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), the movement gained nationwide attention through the viral hashtag #EndSARS on Twitter (Adesoji, 2021; Oluwole & Adebayo, 2022).

As Amnesty International (2020) documents, the movement evolved from a digital protest into large-scale physical demonstrations across major cities. Social media played pivotal roles: exposing atrocities, coordinating protest logistics, raising funds through platforms like Flutterwave and attracting international solidarity from celebrities and human rights organisations (Okafor, 2021; Taiwo & Omojola, 2021).

Activists live-streamed events, countered misinformation and applied pressure on government bodies (Nwachukwu & Ogu, 2022). According to Ugochukwu and Nwolu (2021), the social media framing of the #EndSARS campaign heightened emotional engagement, particularly among Nigerian youth. Despite eventual state crackdown, the movement succeeded in compelling the government to announce SARS's disbandment and brought police reform into national discourse (Adebisi et al., 2022).

Case 6: The #JusticeForSylvester Movement (2021)

Following the death of 12-year-old Sylvester Oromoni at Downen College in Lagos, social media became the primary platform for demanding justice and accountability. The hashtag #JusticeForSylvester trended on Twitter as citizens shared the story, called for investigations and pressured authorities to ensure justice (Okoro & Nwankwo, 2021). Over 180,000 people signed a digital petition demanding justice within days (Sahara Reporters, 2021a). The movement led to investigations, temporary school closure and policy discussions about student safety in Nigerian schools.

Case 7: The #EndNairaScarcity Campaign (2023)

During Nigeria's currency redesign policy that led to severe cash shortages, citizens organized online protests using the hashtag #EndNairaScarcity. Social media platforms became spaces for sharing experiences of hardship, coordinating protests and pressuring the Central Bank of Nigeria and federal government to address the crisis (Adamu & Ibrahim, 2023; Okechukwu, 2023). The movement used Twitter spaces, Facebook live sessions and WhatsApp broadcasts to organize resistance and document the policy's impact on ordinary Nigerians.

Cases 8-11: Contemporary Movements (2024)

The #EndBadGovernance movement (August 2024) consisted of decentralized mass protests triggered by rising cost of living, with thousands protesting poor governance and corruption (Nnanna, 2024; Yusuf & Ahmed, 2024). The #TinubuMUSTGo campaign specifically targeted President Bola Tinubu's administration, demanding accountability for economic policies that worsened living conditions (Ogundimu, 2024; Peterside, 2024).

The #FearlessInOctober movement (October 2024) organized protests to coincide with Nigeria's Independence Day, highlighting the irony of celebrating independence while facing economic hardship (Musa, 2024). The #10DaysOfRage campaign (August 2024) called for sustained protests over ten days, though the appearance of Russian flags complicated the narrative and provided government officials ammunition to discredit the movement (Olamide, 2024).

Discussion of Findings

The case studies consistently demonstrate that social media platforms enable unprecedented speed in exposing and reporting corruption. From #OccupyNigeria in 2012 to #EndBadGovernance in 2024, activists successfully used platforms like Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp to disseminate information about corrupt practices in real-time.

The #EndSARS movement particularly exemplified this capability, with activists live-streaming police brutality, sharing evidence instantaneously and coordinating nationwide awareness campaigns across multiple cities simultaneously (Amnesty International, 2020; Adesoji, 2021). The anonymity features provided by social media proved crucial in facilitating whistleblowing and corruption reporting. Anonymous accounts played vital roles in exposing corruption in the Downen College case (#JusticeForSylvester) and documenting government misconduct during various protests. This anonymity is particularly important in Nigeria's context, where reporting corruption or criticising authorities can result in harassment, arrest or violence (Jimoh et al., 2025).

However, the speed of information dissemination presents double-edged implications, as misinformation can spread as rapidly as factual reports. During the #EndSARS protests, both activists and government supporters spread contradictory information, making it difficult for citizens to distinguish verified facts from propaganda (Nwachukwu & Ogu, 2022). The #JusticeForSylvester case also saw conflicting narratives, with some accounts later disputed (SaharaReporters, 2021b).

Social media demonstrated remarkable effectiveness in mobilising collective action through hashtag activism and coordinated campaigns. Hashtags like #EndSARS, #BringBackOurGirls, #JusticeForSylvester and #NotTooYoungToRun functioned as powerful tools for framing issues, building collective identity and maintaining campaign visibility. The #BringBackOurGirls hashtag achieved global trending status, transforming a local security issue into an international humanitarian concern (Ogbonna, 2019), whilst #EndSARS generated millions of tweets and attracted solidarity from diaspora communities and international human rights organisations (Ugochukwu & Nwolu, 2021).

The effectiveness of mobilisation is evident in concrete outcomes: the #NotTooYoungToRun campaign achieved legislative victory with constitutional amendments reducing age requirements for political office (Salawu, 2018), the #OccupyNigeria movement forced partial reversal of fuel subsidy removal (Adebanwi, 2017), whilst #EndSARS compelled the government to announce SARS's disbandment (Adebisi et al., 2022).

A significant finding is the evolution of multi-platform coordination strategies across the examined period. Early movements like #OccupyNigeria (2012) primarily relied on Twitter and Facebook, whilst more recent campaigns employ sophisticated multi-platform approaches combining Twitter for visibility, WhatsApp for secure coordination and Instagram for visual storytelling. The #EndNairaScarcity campaign exemplified this evolution, using Twitter Spaces for live community discussions, Facebook Live for real-time engagement and WhatsApp broadcasts for coordinated action (Adamu & Ibrahim, 2023).

These case studies also suggest social media's capacity to internationalise local corruption issues, generating transnational solidarity. The #BringBackOurGirls campaign achieved unprecedented international attention (Ekine, 2010; Ogbonna, 2019), whilst #EndSARS attracted support from international celebrities and human rights organisations (Okafor, 2021). However, the study shows significant limitations in mobilisation effectiveness. The #TinubuMUSTGo campaign, whilst generating significant online engagement, struggled to translate digital momentum into concrete political outcomes (Peterside, 2024), supporting concerns about "slacktivism"—where online engagement substitutes for meaningful offline action (Manju, 2019).

The analysis shows challenges in sustaining digital movements beyond initial mobilisation phases. Whilst #BringBackOurGirls demonstrated unusual longevity (Adamu, 2021), most campaigns experienced

rapid rise and decline patterns. The #RevolutionNow movement struggled to maintain momentum across multiple protest cycles (Alimi, 2022; Omilusi, 2021), suggesting that social media's strength in rapid mobilisation may also be a weakness for sustained activism, as the algorithmic nature of platforms favours new, trending content. Additionally, the study shows a significant gap between announced policy changes and actual institutional reform.

Despite the announced disbandment of SARS, reports of continued police brutality suggest limited substantive change in law enforcement culture (Adamu, 2021). The analysis shows multiple critical challenges that constrain social media's effectiveness. Government surveillance capabilities have evolved to counter digital activism's protective features. The #RevolutionNow and #TinubuMUSTGo movements faced significant crackdowns, with authorities tracking and arresting organisers despite their use of digital security measures (Alimi, 2022; Ogundimu, 2024).

The charging of protesters with treason during the #EndBadGovernance protests demonstrates escalating government responses that seek to create chilling effects on digital activism (Nnanna, 2024). From 2012 to 2024, state responses progressed from largely ignoring online activism to sophisticated surveillance, internet restrictions and charges of treason. During the #FearlessInOctober and #EndBadGovernance protests, authorities employed internet throttling and arrested protesters (Musa, 2024; Nnanna, 2024).

Persistent digital divides limit inclusive participation. Despite social media's democratising potential, the movements examined were predominantly urban, youth-driven phenomena, with limited engagement from rural communities, older citizens and economically marginalised populations who lack consistent internet access or digital literacy (Amnesty International, 2020). The #EndNairaScarcity campaign, whilst addressing an issue affecting all Nigerians, saw most active participation from urban areas with reliable internet connectivity (Okechukwu, 2023).

Furthermore, international attention presents both opportunities and vulnerabilities. The government's framing of some movements as foreign-influenced—particularly during the #10DaysOfRage campaign with Russian flags—demonstrates how internationalisation can be weaponised to delegitimise domestic activism (Olamide, 2024). The framing power of hashtags significantly influenced public perception and emotional engagement. Emotional narratives combined with compelling hashtags rapidly mobilised public opinion and created pressure for institutional response. Within days of the #JusticeForSylvester campaign, over 180,000 people signed petitions demanding justice (SaharaReporters, 2021a).

According to Ugochukwu and Nwolu (2021), the social media framing of the #EndSARS campaign heightened emotional engagement, particularly amongst Nigerian youth through storytelling, personal testimonies and visual documentation. The strategic framing of movements around symbolic dates also influenced public perception. The #FearlessInOctober movement organised protests to coincide with Nigeria's Independence Day, highlighting the irony of celebrating independence whilst facing economic hardship (Musa, 2024).

Comparing movements across the 2012-2024 period shows a shift in framing focus towards economic governance and cost-of-living issues. Whilst earlier movements addressed diverse concerns, recent campaigns like #EndNairaScarcity, #EndBadGovernance and #TinubuMUSTGo primarily framed issues around economic policies (Adamu & Ibrahim, 2023; Yusuf & Ahmed, 2024).

However, framing challenges emerged. The #10DaysOfRage campaign showed how rapidly evolving situations can lead to loss of message control, with the appearance of Russian flags creating confusion and providing opportunities for government delegitimation efforts (Olamide, 2024), highlighting the vulnerability of decentralised social media movements to narrative hijacking.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of social media in fostering citizen engagement against corruption in Nigeria through analysis of eleven movements spanning 2012-2024. The findings demonstrate that social media has fundamentally transformed anti-corruption activism by enabling real-time information sharing, facilitating rapid mobilisation through hashtags, providing anonymity for whistleblowers and generating transnational solidarity. Movements like #EndSARS, #BringBackOurGirls and #NotTooYoungToRun achieved significant visibility and, in some cases, concrete legislative changes.

However, critical limitations constrain social media's effectiveness. Misinformation proliferation undermines campaign credibility, government surveillance threatens activist safety, digital divides exclude marginalized populations and the gap between announced policy changes and actual institutional reform remains substantial.

Social media is not a panacea for eradicating corruption but functions as a vital supplement to traditional anti-corruption mechanisms. Its greatest value lies in amplifying civic voices and mobilising collective action. For effective contribution to anti-corruption efforts, social media must operate within an ecosystem including robust legal protections, independent institutions, media literacy programmes and efforts to bridge digital divides.

Recommendations

1. Civil society organisations should develop digital literacy programmes and verified information channels to enhance corruption reporting and counter misinformation.
2. Movement organisers should integrate online mobilisation with offline activism through institutional engagement and multi-platform strategies to sustain collective action beyond hashtag campaigns.
3. Platform providers, governments and public-private partnerships should address digital activism challenges through enhanced privacy protections, respect for digital rights and bridging digital divides via infrastructure development.
4. Organisers should implement strategic communication frameworks balancing emotional storytelling with factual evidence while employing symbolic framing and verification processes to optimize public perception.

Study Implications and Limitations

Implications

This study makes several important contributions to scholarship and practice in digital democracy and media activism. First, it provides empirical insights from the Nigerian context, examining how citizens in developing democracies use digital platforms to challenge power structures and hold officials accountable. The longitudinal analysis (2012-2024) shows how digital activism evolves, how governments adapt their responses and what factors contribute to movement success or failure.

Second, the study offers practical implications for policymakers, civil society organizations and platform providers. It identifies successful strategies—multi-platform coordination, strategic framing and transnational solidarity—providing actionable guidance for future anti-corruption movements that combine online mobilisation with offline institutional engagement.

Third, the research supports media literacy efforts by demonstrating that effective digital citizenship requires not just platform access but also skills in information evaluation, security practices and responsible engagement, with implications for educational curricula and public awareness campaigns.

Fourth, by critically assessing both potentials and limitations of social media in activism, the study provides a balanced perspective avoiding both techno-optimism and techno-pessimism, demonstrating that social media effectiveness depends on deployment within broader institutional, legal and social contexts.

Study Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the digital divide poses significant constraints, as many rural dwellers and older citizens lack regular social media access. The predominantly urban, youth-driven movements may not fully represent experiences of marginalized populations most affected by corruption.

Second, data from online interactions may not fully capture offline impacts or sentiments, making it difficult to assess engagement depth beyond visible metrics or evaluate true effectiveness in producing substantive institutional change.

Third, evolving platform features, policies and algorithms create analytical challenges, affecting content visibility and campaign effectiveness in ways difficult to track systematically, complicating longitudinal comparisons. The case study methodology also limits generalizability beyond Nigeria.

Finally, reliance on secondary sources and publicly available information may not capture behind-the-scenes dynamics, including internal movement strategies, government intelligence operations, or experiences of activists who maintain low public profiles for security reasons.

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