



Research Article

Effect of Social Media on National Security During the 2020 ENDSARS Protests in Lagos State

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Abstract

This paper examines the effect of social media on national security during the 2020 ENDSARS protests in Lagos State, Nigeria. Quantitative design and primary sources of data were utilised. 357 Lagos State residents were sampled using a combination of simple random and convenience sampling techniques. In the data analysis, ordinal logistic regression was employed. The key findings are that social media roles such as the organisation of protesters and promotion of accountability had positive effects by contributing to better coordination and stability while roles such as the amplification of grievances, and documentation of human rights abuses had negative effects by exacerbating tensions and leading to greater instability. The paper concludes by recommending that the government should compel social media platforms (particularly X) to have a unit for fast-checking information content before being shared on their platforms and flagging up fake/misleading information, thereby mitigating potential security risks of social media; and the government (National Orientation Agency) should invest in digital literacy programmes to help the public better navigate the complexities of social media, particularly in distinguishing between accurate information and misinformation/fake information.

Keywords: protest; information; social media; national security; ENDSARS



1. Introduction

Social media, a web-based communication channel that facilitates interaction among people, businesses, and organisations through diverse platforms and applications, is the most significant innovation in the digital age (Chukwuere and Onyebukwa, 2018; Omede and Alebiosu, 2015). It can rapidly disseminate information to a global audience at minimal or no cost. This empowers people to react and contribute to public discourse in ways that traditional media, such as newspapers, television, and radio overlook (Omede and Alebiosu, 2015). This democratisation of information flow has reshaped societal engagement and made social media an influential force in shaping opinions, mobilising communities, and even influencing the national security apparatus.

According to Omede (2012), national security is the protection of a nation's sovereignty, citizens, resources, and institutions from internal and external threats. This encompasses various dimensions such as military defence, social cohesion, and economic and political stability. National security guarantees the safety of lives and property, upholds democratic values, and enhances a conducive environment for economic growth and development (Ogunmola-Daomi, 2015). However, the evolution of digital technology, especially social media, has complicated national security management. Studies have revealed that social media is instrumental in mobilising protesters and drawing global scrutiny to human rights abuses (Usman and Oghuvbu, 2021). Thus, the rapid spread of information, whether factual or misleading, escalates conflicts, incites violence, and challenges governmental authority, as manifested in the October 2020 ENDSARS protests.

Before 2020, there had been reports of police brutality, and the government appeared reluctant to fully address the issue. The accumulation of grievances about police brutality resulted in the ENDSARS movement, which began as a digital campaign on Twitter (now X). This movement rapidly utilised momentum as young Nigerians utilised social media to document police brutality, coordinate protests, and garner international attention (Usman and Oghuvbu, 2021). The hashtags such as #ENDSARS united citizens against systemic injustice and used platforms such as Twitter to amplify their grievances that traditional media overlooked. Despite social media's positive effects, it contributed to security challenges, particularly during the protests. Misinformation and disinformation content, such as false narratives, fabricated images, and unverified reports heightened public anxiety, increased the tension of civil unrest, and led to violent confrontations with security agencies (Usman and Oghuvbu, 2021). This pointed to the negative side of social media as its susceptibility to manipulation by bad actors seeking to exploit public grievances for personal gain.

Against the above background, this study seeks to examine the effect of social media on national security, focusing specifically on the 2020 ENDSARS protests in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Objectives of this study

The paper examined the effect of social media on national security during the 2020 ENDSARS protest in Lagos State. To achieve the aim, the specific objectives were:

- i. examine how social media affected the safety of life and property during the ENDSARS protest in Lagos State.
- ii. examine the effect of social media on economic security during the ENDSARS protest in Lagos state; and
- iii. examine how social media influenced socio-political stability during the ENDSARS protest in Lagos State.

Research hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested to achieve the objectives of the paper.

H₁: Social media has no significant effect on safety of life and property during the ENDSARS protest in Lagos State.

H₂: Social media has no significant effect on economic security during the ENDSARS protest in Lagos State.

H₃: Social media has no significant effect on socio-political stability during the ENDSARS protest in Lagos State.

2. Literature review

Social media and national security

The Internet and the evolution of Web 2.0 technologies have significantly transformed global communication. In past decades, the dissemination of information and the mode of communication were restricted and censored with the aid of traditional media. Now, dissemination of information has become a dynamic, user-driven, and interactive communication method powered by social media platforms (Sajithra and Patil, 2013). These platforms facilitate the real-time creation, sharing, and modification of content; this effectively collapses territorial boundaries to reshape public discourse (Chukwuere and Onyebukwa, 2018). Social media, such as wikis, blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, enable peer-to-peer communication and collaborative engagement (Trottier and Fuchs, 2014). In Nigeria, platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have played a significant role, not only in improving everyday communication but also in mobilising mass protests such as a citizen-led campaign (Nsudu and Onwe, 2017). Many studies recognised the unique dynamics of this movement, they, however, failed to offer generalisations about the effect of social media in activism without deeply engaging with contextual nuances. A significant gap exists in the critical examination of social media's impact; it needs to move beyond global generalities and engage with local contexts.

Traditional views of national security prioritised military readiness and state control, focusing mainly on geopolitical and defence issues (Omede, 2012; Ogunmola-Daomi, 2015). The changing global environment has prompted

scholars to embrace a more comprehensive view of security, encompassing economic, ideological, and environmental factors (Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013). In today's global dispensation, national security has been influenced by activities on social media platforms. Social media emerges not only as a tool of communication but as a strategic platform where narratives of national security are contested, constructed, and sometimes subverted. It offers new opportunities for state–citizen engagement and public diplomacy, while also challenging traditional modes of state control over information flow and public perception (Al Abd, 2023). Erbschloe (2017) and Kim (2017) argue that the decentralised nature of digital communication undermines the state's monopolistic control over security matters. Notwithstanding, such studies neglect that law enforcement agencies are adapting to and even weaponizing these same platforms for security purposes (Al Abd, 2023). In Western democracies, these social media platforms are leveraged for transparency, but in other contexts, such as Nigeria's experience during ENDSARS, they reflect a more contested platforms where the state and citizens vie for narrative dominance.

The impact of social media on national security is widely acknowledged. Al Abd (2023) and Biały (2017) assert that platforms such as Twitter enhance democratic participation and citizen surveillance of government activities, thereby strengthening civic engagement. Conversely, social media's unregulated nature facilitates disinformation, propaganda, and hybrid warfare tactics (Erbschloe, 2017; Citron and Chesney, 2019). These conflicting perspectives reveal the ambivalence surrounding social media's effect on governance and national security. In the context of Nigeria, the ENDSARS protests vividly illustrate this tension. Social media allowed activists to bypass traditional media, amplify marginalised voices, and mobilise mass participation. However, it also enabled the circulation of manipulated content, unverified claims, and counter-narratives that confused the public and justified the state in clamping down on dissent. Studies have not adequately synthesised such contradictory dimensions within protest movements (Erbschloe, 2017; Al Abd, 2023; Biały, 2017; Citron and Chesney, 2019). Furthermore, there is limited engagement with how social media architecture, especially algorithms that prioritise sensationalism, contributes to the volatility of security environments.

Case studies such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Arab Spring demonstrate how social media platforms are used strategically to influence public sentiment and shape security outcomes (Ciuriak, 2022; Mugari and Chisuvi, 2021). Governments and non-state actors alike exploit these digital spaces for information warfare and psychological operations thereby influencing campaigns. McLoughlin, Ward and Lomas (2020) examined how Western states have incorporated social media intelligence into national defence strategies while similar frameworks have been underdeveloped or inadequately documented in the Global South, especially in Nigeria. The Nigerian government's response to ENDSARS, which included banning Twitter, social media monitoring, and the labelling of online activists as threats to national security, reflects a reactive rather than a strategic approach. This reveals a significant gap in studies on indigenous digital security strategies that balance surveillance with civil liberties. Although Bhosale and Bhanke (2021) raise ethical concerns about digital privacy, their study lacks specific references to African contexts.

Despite its vulnerabilities, social media offers strategic potential for enhancing national security through rapid communication, early threat detection, and crisis management (Al Abd, 2023). During the 2013 Westgate Mall attack in Kenya, law enforcement leveraged Twitter to manage panic, share updates, and counter misinformation (Mugari and Chisuvi, 2021). Similarly, the use of social media by the U.S. military to simulate public response scenarios reveals the growing recognition of digital platforms in contemporary security frameworks (Biały, 2017). However, these benefits need to be weighed against the risks of digital authoritarianism, where the guise of security is used to justify human rights infringements (Erbschloe, 2017). The studies need to critically assess what social media does and how influence is exercised through it. This requires a shift from descriptive accounts to analytical frameworks that recognise social media as a space of contestation shaped by political, technological, and sociocultural forces.

Social media and protest movements

The rise of social media has reshaped political activism in democratic societies by offering platforms for grassroots mobilisation, real-time information dissemination, and accountability. In Nigeria, these dynamics were most visibly amplified during the ENDSARS protests, where digital activism translated into street-level demonstrations against police brutality. Studies have acknowledged that social media enables marginalised voices to bypass traditional gatekeepers (traditional media), thereby facilitating broader visibility of sociopolitical grievances (LeFebvre, 2016; Poell, 2019). However, there exists a divergence on the implications of this transformation, particularly in contexts of weak institutional trust and fragile state legitimacy. Studies revealed how platforms such as Twitter and Instagram democratize protest communication (Al Abd, 2023; Chukwuere and Onyebukwa, 2018), but others caution that this immediacy may accelerate the spread of misinformation and manipulation that undermines the authenticity of protest movements (Vosoughi, Roy and Aral, 2018). In the case of protests, this duality is evident: social media catalyses mass mobilisation and international attention, yet it also gives rise to conflicting narratives about protesters' motives, security force actions, and state responses (Palmieri-Branco, 2021). These tensions point to a need for a critical interrogation of not only what social media enables but also how these affordances are contested and weaponised in real-time.

Mobilisation through social media is celebrated for its decentralised and participatory potential. Zeitoff (2017) and McKeon and Gitomer (2019) argue that platforms like Facebook and Twitter (X) enhance logistical coordination and symbolic unity in protest movements. In the ENDSARS context, social media acted as both a recruitment tool and an organisational hub, with users' crowd-sourcing legal aid, medical assistance, and protest funds. This echoes Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) theory of "connective action," which posits that individualised digital participation builds robust collective identities without the need for traditional organisational structures. Yet this optimistic view is tempered by critiques from scholars such as Gladwell (2010), who dismiss online activism as "slacktivism," an ephemeral form of engagement that lacks the depth and resilience of structured civic mobilisation. The ENDSARS protests serve as a middle

ground in this debate: although highly decentralised, they sustained engagement across online and offline spaces for several weeks and were notably supported by a diaspora network. This suggests that while connective action has limitations, under specific conditions such as shared trauma and state violence, it can evolve into sustained resistance.

Social media not only facilitates participatory protest cultures, but it also exposes movements to co-optation, surveillance, and disinformation. Woolley and Guilbeault (2017) underpinned how state actors and counter-movement forces employ bots, trolls, and algorithmic manipulation to derail online protest narratives. In the ENDSARS movement, reports surfaced of state-sponsored digital campaigns aimed at delegitimising protesters by framing them as violent anarchists or foreign agents (Palmieri-Branco, 2021). This was further compounded by the proliferation of echo chambers, where algorithmic filtering reinforced ideological divisions and eroded opportunities for deliberative discourse (Erbschloe, 2017). Studies highlight this paradox where social media allows for broader participation, but it simultaneously facilitates surveillance and narrative hijacking (Palmieri-Branco, 2021). Thus, in Nigerian case, where state responses included internet shutdown threats and the freezing of protesters' bank accounts, these actions reveal that social media is not a neutral tool, but a contested space where power is exercised and resisted.

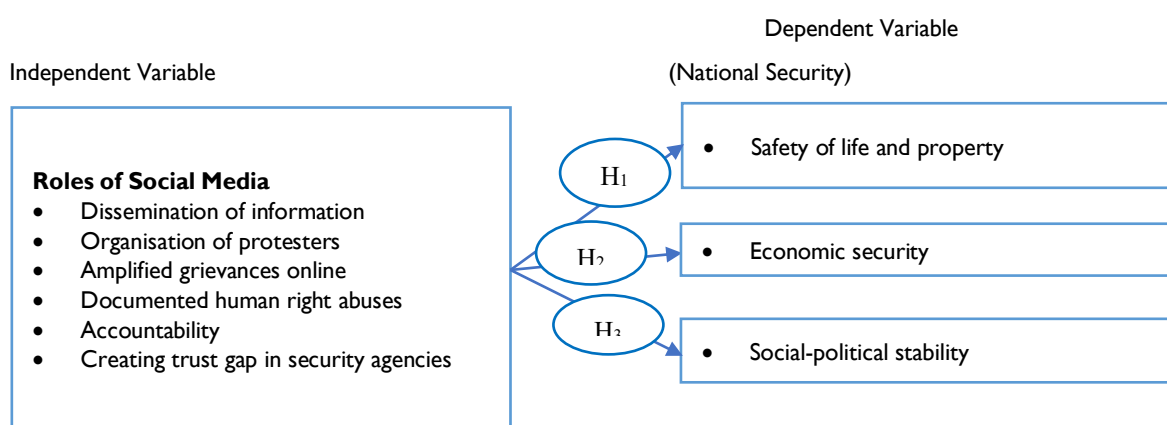
The evidentiary power of social media, particularly through user-generated content (UGC), has transformed the documentation of state violence. Tumber and Waisbord (2017) and Cheng and Chan (2017) argue that platforms such as Twitter (X) and YouTube operate as "public screens" where citizen-recorded videos expose abuses that would otherwise remain hidden. In the ENDSARS protests, viral footage of police brutality galvanised public outrage and compelled official responses. This marks a significant departure from earlier eras when state narratives dominated. However, this evidentiary function is double-edged. UGC fosters accountability, but it is also susceptible to misrepresentation and ethical dilemmas. The permanence and virality of digital content mean that inaccuracies of information in the public domain have long-lasting effects on public perception (Zeitzoff, 2017). Moreover, governments have increasingly weaponised these platforms through surveillance technologies and digital counter-narratives, which complicate the emancipatory promise of social media (Barnett, 2019; Palmieri-Branco, 2021). In Nigeria, the use of digital tracking and online harassment against activists indicates a growing sophistication in state responses to digital dissent. These developments demand a rethinking of the assumption that transparency automatically translates into accountability.

A particularly underexplored but increasingly urgent dimension is the impact of social media on public trust in security institutions. Social media platforms such as Twitter (X) have allowed for the exposure of police misconduct, but they have also contributed to a broader crisis of legitimacy for state agencies. Saaida and Alhouseini (2023) observe that repeated visual exposure to police brutality leads to generalised distrust in law enforcement, a phenomenon evident in the aftermath of many past protests, such as the Arab Spring. Saaida and Alhouseini (2023) warn that when such distrust is not balanced by institutional reforms, it escalates into social unrest and delegitimises all forms of state authority. The challenge is to distinguish between necessary scrutiny and disillusionment. This is in line with Kawerau, Weidmann and Dainotti (2023) who argue that unbalanced narratives on social media risk reinforcing polarisation rather than enabling constructive civic dialogue. The past mass protests exemplify this dilemma, where digital activism succeeded in drawing global attention, but it also polarised domestic audiences and left unresolved questions about reform implementation. In essence, social media has transformed the political opportunity structure for activism, while its long-term implications for democratic trust and institutional resilience remain contested.

3. Conceptual framework

The rationale for this study is encapsulated within the conceptual framework, providing a blueprint for understanding the objectives and methodology of the research. Figure 1 below visually illustrates the conceptual framework adopted in this study, featuring independent and dependent variables. On the right side, there is the dependent variable (national security) and its components. Conversely, on the left side is the independent variable.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Source: Researcher's Construction (2025)

4. Theoretical framework

Securitisation theory originated from the Copenhagen School and was developed by Ole Wæver (1993). This theory shifts the focus of security studies from material threats to discursive constructions. The theory posits that issues become “security threats” not because of objective danger, but rather powerful actors declare them as such through speech acts, performative utterances that frame a subject as an existential threat requiring extraordinary measures (Wæver and Wæver, 1993). This approach treats security as a social process involving actors, audiences, and contexts, where securitising actors, typically elites such as state officials, attempt to convince a relevant audience that a particular issue warrants immediate action outside the bounds of normal politics (Stritzel, 2014). Thus, Securitisation is not automatic; it depends on audience acceptance. In the digital era, platforms such as Twitter and Instagram have broadened the range of actors who can initiate and contest securitising moves, giving voice to marginalised groups. This dynamic is especially visible in Nigeria’s ENDSARS movement, where social media has acted as both the stage and amplifier for competing security narratives between the state and civil society.

The securitisation theory is applied to the ENDSARS protests, especially in the context of social media-mediated contestation. Protesters used social media to frame police brutality not as an isolated issue, but as an existential threat to the safety and dignity of Nigerian citizens. Hashtags such as #EndSARS, #EndPoliceBrutality, and viral videos of abuses served as speech acts that redefined the Nigerian Police Force, specifically the SARS unit, as a primary threat to human security rather than a guardian of it. By tagging these practices as existential threats, protesters demanded exceptional responses such as the disbandment of the unit, independent investigations, and structural reforms. This represents a bottom-up securitising move that challenges traditional elite-dominated discourse. Conversely, the Nigerian government and its officials responded by framing the protests themselves as threats to national unity and stability, thereby engaging in a counter-securitisation strategy.

Government statements that labelled protesters as “hoodlums” or “insurrectionists” and called for military intervention and social media censorship functioned as their set of speech acts aimed at justifying crackdowns and reasserting state control. This dual process illustrates how securitisation theory is not static but contested, with social media enabling rival actors to define and dispute the boundaries of security. Thus, the ENDSARS movement exposes a key tension within securitisation theory: it traditionally emphasises elite actors, but the digital public sphere complicates this hierarchy by enabling grassroots actors to perform effective securitising acts.

5. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative methodology. Under this methodology, a descriptive survey research design was employed. The descriptive survey design offers quantitative data to evaluate broader trends, patterns, and perceptions regarding the role of social media in shaping national security concerns during the ENDSARS protests in Lagos State.

The targeted population was residents of Lagos State. The inclusion criteria were residents aged 18 years and above who reside in Lagos State and use social media, particularly X (formerly Twitter). Lagos was selected because it was the epicentre of ENDSARS, and its residents are familiar with internet usage as well as being witnesses to security challenges during and after ENDSARS, making them particularly relevant to the study’s objectives.

The population for this study was 17,411,358 Lagos State residents aged 18 years and above (Lagos State Ministry of Economy, Planning, and Budget, 2018). This study employed Taro Yamane’s (1964) sample size determination method to ascertain the appropriate sample size from the targeted population.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + e^2(N)} \quad \text{Where, } n = \text{Sample size; } N = \text{Population; } e = \text{Level of significance (0.05)}$$

$$n = \frac{17,411,358}{1 + 0.05^2(17,411,358)} = \frac{17,411,358}{1 + 0.0025(17,411,358)} = \frac{17,411,358}{1 + 43528.395} = \frac{17,411,358}{43529.395}$$

$$n = 399.9908108 = 400 \text{ Lagos State residents, approximately}$$

This study adopted simple random sampling and convenience sampling to enhance both rigour and practicality. Simple random sampling was employed to minimise selection bias to ensure that all Lagos State residents aged 18 and above with access to social media had an equal probability of participation (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). However, due to limitations in accessing a comprehensive sampling frame of all eligible social media users in Lagos state, convenience sampling was employed, as participation depended on users’ willingness to engage with the post.

Primary data was collected through an online structured questionnaire. The survey instrument was designed to ensure clarity, consistency, and analytical precision. The instrument has two sections. Section A captured respondents’ socio-demographic details, including age, gender, occupation, and education level. Section B focused on the effect of social media on national security during the ENDSARS protests. The survey utilised a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to measure perceptions. The questionnaire was computed and administered using Microsoft Forms, which allows seamless and anonymous participation. The researchers primarily used Twitter (X), where the survey link was shared through protest-related hashtags (#EndSARS, #EndPoliceBrutality, #EndSARSprotest) and retweeted by influencers for respondents to be randomly involved in the study. The survey link was also distributed on Instagram and Facebook. The questionnaire began with a consent form and an inclusion criteria question: Do you

understand and agree with the consent form? And are you from Lagos state? Only participants who selected “Yes” to the two questions could proceed; those who declined were automatically excluded from the survey.

A rigorous assessment of research instrument reliability was conducted to ascertain whether the research measures consistently produced the same results across different situations. To ensure the dependability of the data, two approaches were employed, which are triangulation and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient result was 0.853, which was greater than 0.6; therefore, the research instrument is good and acceptable. On ethical issues, the research followed the BERA ethics guidelines. The respondents’ informed consent was obtained by an introductory section of the survey, declaring the study’s objectives, procedures, and the right to withdraw at any time before data submission of the study. After submission of the survey, the responses would automatically be anonymised.

On data analysis, the researcher harvested the unprocessed responses from the Microsoft format and extracted them into SPSS. Thus, the statistical technique used was inferential statistics (Ordinal Logistic Regression analysis). Through this method, the likelihood of the regression coefficient was calculated, as shown in the model specification below:

Social Media’s Roles and National Security (Safety of life and Property)

$Y = f(X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5, X_6)$

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

Description: Y = Safety of life and property (Dependent Variable)

X1 = Dissemination of information

X2 = Organisation of protesters

X3 = Amplification of grievances online

X4 = Documentation of human rights abuses

X5 = Accountability

X6 = Creating a trust gap in security agencies

β_0 = Constant

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5$ & β_6 = Each variable’s coefficient

ε = Error

Social Media’s Roles and National Security (Economic Security)

$Y = f(X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5, X_6)$

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

Description: Y = Economic security (Dependent Variable)

X1 = Dissemination of information

X2 = Organisation of protesters

X3 = Amplification of grievances online

X4 = Documentation of human rights abuses

X5 = Accountability

X6 = Creating a trust gap in security agencies

β_0 = Constant

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5$ & β_6 = Each variable’s coefficient

ε = Error

Social Media’s Roles and National Security (Socio-political Security)

$Y = f(X_1, X_2, X_3, X_4, X_5, X_6)$

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \beta_5 X_5 + \beta_6 X_6 + \varepsilon \dots\dots\dots (3)$$

Description: Y = National Security (Dependent Variable)

X1 = Dissemination of information

X2 = Organisation of protesters

X3 = Amplification of grievances online

X4 = Documentation of human rights abuses

X5 = Accountability

X6 = Creating a trust gap in security agencies

β_0 = Constant

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4, \beta_5$ & β_6 = Each variable's coefficient

ϵ = Error

6. Findings

After the computation of the questionnaire on Microsoft Forms, a total of four hundred (400) responses were expected across 20 local government areas in Lagos State. Out of that number, a total of three hundred and fifty-seven (357) were received, giving an 89.3%, which was considered adequate for reaching a valid conclusion. This study's findings are presented below.

H₀₁: Social media had no significant effect on national security (safety of life and property) during the ENDSARS protests in Lagos State.

Table 1: Parameter estimates of social media and national security (safety of life and property) during ENDSARS protests in Lagos state

				95% Confidence Interval		
Variables	Measures	Estimate	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Decision
National Security	Safety of life and property	-12.919	.000	-15.363	-10.475	
Social media	Dissemination of Information	-2.011	.041	-3.941	-.081	Significant
	Organisation of Protesters	2.213	.017	.389	4.037	Significant
	Amplification of the grievance of the protesters	-6.986	.000	-9.472	-4.501	Significant
	Documentation of human rights abuses	2.655	.000	1.243	4.066	Significant
	Accountability	2.488	.004	.817	4.159	Significant
	Creating a trust gap in security agencies	-2.343	.019	-4.305	-.382	Significant

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2025.

**P-value = 0.05

Table 1 details the parameter estimates for the effect of social media on the safety of life and property. First, the dissemination of information on social media (estimate = -2.011, p-value = 0.041) indicated a statistically significant but negative effect on national security. Second, the organisation of protesters (estimate = 2.213, p-value = 0.017) through social media channels has a positive effect. Third, the amplification of grievances (estimate = -6.986, p-value = 0.001) on social media shows a significant but negative effect. Fourth, the documentation of human rights abuses (estimate = 2.655, p-value = 0.001) using social media has significant effects on the safety of life and property by raising awareness and prompting protective actions. Fifth, the accountability (estimate = 2.488, p-value = 0.004) on social media has a significant effect on national security during the protests by holding law enforcement agencies accountable for their actions and inactions. Lastly, the finding revealed that social media use significantly undermined public trust in security agencies, creating a trust gap (estimate = -2.343, p = 0.019). Thus, this hypothesis provided strong statistical evidence that social media significantly affected national security during the ENDSARS protests in Lagos State. Specifically, the organisation of protesters, documentation of human rights abuses, and promotion of accountability through social media positively influenced the safety of life and property, but the dissemination of information, amplification of grievances, and creation of a trust gap in security agencies had negative effects.

H₀₂: Social media had no significant effect on national security (economic security) during the ENDSARS protests in Lagos State.

Table 2: Parameter estimates of social media and national security (economic security) during ENDSARS protests in Lagos state

				95% Confidence Interval		
Variables	Measures	Estimate	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Decision
National Security	Economic Security	-8.473	.000	-10.605	-6.342	
Social media	Dissemination of Information	-4.742	.000	-6.165	-3.320	Significant
	Organisation of Protesters	.165	.851	-1.560	1.890	Insignificant
	Amplification of the grievance of the protesters	-2.229	.059	-4.545	.088	Significant
	Documentation of human rights abuses	-2.554	.000	-3.987	-1.121	Significant
	Accountability	-.264	.745	-1.852	1.324	Insignificant
	Creating a trust gap in security agencies	5.459	.000	3.360	7.558	Significant

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2025

**P-value = 0.05

Table 2 details the parameter estimates for the effect of social media on economic security. First, the dissemination of information (estimate = -4.742, p-value = 0.001) using social media has a significant but strong negative effect on economic security. Second, the findings reveal that social media played a role in facilitating the organisation of protesters (estimate = 0.165, p-value = 0.851), but its effect on economic security was statistically insignificant. Third, the amplification of grievances (estimate = -2.229, p-value = 0.059) on social media reveals that social media use has an insignificant impact on economic security. Fourth, social media aided the documentation of human rights abuses (estimate = -2.554, p-value = 0.001), which is a significant but negative effect on economic security. Fifth, the promotion of accountability (estimate = -0.264, p-value = 0.745) shows an insignificant impact on economic security. Lastly, creating a trust gap in security agencies (estimate = 5.459, p-value = 0.001) has a strong, significant, and positive effect on economic security. In a nutshell, the analysis indicated that social media played a significant role in shaping economic security during the ENDSARS protests. Some roles, such as the dissemination of information and documentation of abuses, had negative effects, while creating a trust gap in security agencies had a positive effect.

H3: Social media have no significant effect on national security (Socio-political Stability) during the ENDSARS protests in Lagos State.

Table 3: Parameter estimates of social media and national security (socio-political stability) during ENDSARS protests in Lagos state

				95% Confidence Interval		
Variables	Measures	Estimate	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Decision
National Security	Socio-political Stability	-13.258	.000	-15.593	-10.923	
Social media	Dissemination of Information	-4.985	.000	-6.890	-3.080	Significant
	Organisation of Protesters	2.336	.006	.665	4.007	Significant
	Amplification of the grievance of the protesters	-4.479	.000	-6.781	-2.177	Significant
	Documentation of human rights abuses	-4.327	.000	-6.167	-2.488	Significant
	Accountability	2.112	.010	.511	3.713	Significant
	Creating a trust gap in security agencies	-1.159	.249	-3.130	.812	Insignificant

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2025

**P-value = 0.05

In Table 3, the parameter estimates reveal how social media influenced socio-political stability during the ENDSARS protests. First, the dissemination of information (estimate = -4.985, p-value = 0.001) through social media has a significant but negative impact on socio-political stability. However, protesters' organisation through social media (estimate = 2.336, p-value = 0.006) has a positive effect. Also, the amplification of grievances (estimate = -4.479, p-value = 0.001) had a significant but negative effect on national security. Similarly, the documentation of human rights abuses (estimate = -4.327, p < 0.001) has a significant but negative impact. On the other hand, social media in promoting accountability has a positive and significant effect on stability (estimate = 2.112, p = 0.010). Lastly, creating a trust gap in security agencies had a negative effect (-1.159), but this effect was not statistically significant (p-value = 0.249). Thus, social media use had a significant effect on national security (socio-political stability) during the ENDSARS protests. The dissemination of information, amplification of grievances, and documentation of human rights abuses through social media were associated with decreased socio-political stability. In contrast, the organisation of protesters and the promotion of accountability had stabilising effects.

7. Discussion of findings

This section discusses the main findings of this study pertaining to the effect of social media on national security (safety of life and property, economic security, and socio-political stability) during the ENDSARS protests in Lagos.

Information dissemination and national security

The findings reveal a consistent and statistically significant negative impact of information dissemination through social media on national security, economic security, and socio-political stability during the ENDSARS protests. With estimates such as -2.011 (p = 0.041) for national security, -4.742 (p = 0.001) for economic security, and -4.985 (p = 0.001) for socio-political stability, the findings reveal how unregulated information flow can exacerbate insecurity. These findings challenge optimistic views such as Sajithra and Patil (2013) and Chukwuere and Onyebukwa (2018). These views highlight social media's democratising potential by revealing its volatility in fragile democracies. The findings align with Erbschloe (2017) and Citron and Chesney (2019), who underscore the risks of misinformation and digital manipulation. Particularly in Nigeria, where institutional trust is weak, the spread of unverified or sensationalist content on platforms such as Twitter and WhatsApp heightens public fear and tension, discouraging economic activity and undermining political stability. The implication is that information dissemination through social media can empower citizens, but in highly charged contexts, it can function as an accelerator of unrest. Future strategies need to focus on balancing freedom of information with digital literacy and fact-checking mechanisms to prevent social media from becoming a catalyst for insecurity.

Organisation of protesters and national security

The organisation of protesters through social media had a positive and statistically significant impact on the safety of life and property (estimate = 2.213, p = 0.017) and socio-political security (estimate = 2.336, p = 0.006), but its economic

impact was statistically insignificant (estimate = 0.165, $p = 0.851$). These findings validate the theory of “connective action” (Bennett and Segerberg, 2018:748), where digital coordination substitutes for traditional organisational structures to facilitate collective mobilisation. Contrary to critiques such as Gladwell’s (2010) “slacktivism” argument, the sustained and decentralised organisation during ENDSARS, both locally and via diaspora networks, demonstrated the potential for digitally mediated protest to translate into real-world impact. However, the absence of a significant economic impact indicates that the Nigerian economy may have already been weakened by the global pandemic (Covid 2019), making it difficult to observe any additional disruption. Also, this shows that online protest organisations contribute to orderly demonstrations and reduce state-provoked violence (thereby promoting safety and stability), but it does not inherently bolster economic resilience during periods of civil disobedience. The findings indicate a need for multi-sector engagement during digitally coordinated movements to mitigate the broader fallout. Thus, policy discourse needs to shift from questioning the legitimacy of online mobilisation to understanding its nuanced, context-dependent effects on various dimensions of national security.

Amplification of protesters and national security

The amplification of protesters’ grievances on social media has a strong and consistent negative factor across all three dimensions of national security such as safety of life and property (estimate = -6.986, $p = 0.001$), economic activities (estimate = -2.229, $p = 0.059$), and socio-political stability (estimate = -4.479, $p = 0.001$). These findings align with Palmieri-Branco (2021) who warn that algorithmically fuelled outrage can exacerbate polarisation and delegitimise state institutions. Social media platforms such as Twitter democratise access and voice for marginalised groups (LeFebvre, 2016), but the emotional intensity of grievances, especially in a context marked by years of police brutality, escalates public anger and collective anxiety. Notably, this amplification raised global awareness, but its immediate impact on stability was deleterious. The findings challenge oversimplified narratives that equate voice with empowerment rather than emphasising the emotional contagion potential of social media. The statistical strength of these negative effects suggests that amplification is symbolically powerful but carries real consequences in fragile contexts. Therefore, governance strategies should avoid censoring grievances but instead respond with transparent dialogue and reform to prevent digital discourse from becoming a trigger for civil unrest.

Documentation of human rights abuses and national security

The documentation of human rights abuses through social media platforms significantly improved the safety of life and property (estimate = 2.655, $p = 0.001$) but had negative impacts on economic activities (estimate = -2.554, $p = 0.001$) and socio-political stability (estimate = -4.327, $p < 0.001$). These contradictory findings reflect what Tumber and Waisbord (2017) and Cheng and Chan (2017) call the “public screen” effect, where social media platforms provide evidentiary tools for resistance but also provoke instability. In the Nigerian context, viral videos exposing police brutality galvanised domestic and international solidarity but also intensified outrage. This led to prolonged disruptions of both economic activities and socio-political stability. Furthermore, this duality is complicated by the potential for disinformation, as flagged by Zeitzoff (2017), which may erode the evidentiary value of citizen-generated content. Although awareness and protective actions were promoted, especially in terms of public safety, the broader climate of outrage negatively impacted economic activities and political cohesion. These findings reveal the need for ethical protocols and institutional frameworks for handling user-generated content during crises. Thus, the documentation function is indispensable for rights-based advocacy, but without structured state responses and media verification, it can deepen instability. Hence, human rights documentation through social media should be seen not as a threat, but as a call for systematic institutional responsiveness.

Promotion of accountability and national security

Promotion of accountability through social media demonstrated significant and positive effects on the safety of life and property (estimate = 2.488, $p = 0.004$) and socio-political stability (estimate = 2.112, $p = 0.010$), but its economic effect was insignificant (estimate = -0.264, $p = 0.745$). These findings underpin the democratic potential of social media in enhancing transparency and holding institutions accountable for their actions and inactions, as aligned with the findings of Al Abd (2023) and Bialy (2017). During the ENDSARS protests, the visibility of police actions spurred immediate public and international responses, which shows how digital spaces pressurise authoritarian tendencies. However, the lack of economic significance may reflect the temporal disjuncture between reputational accountability and structural reform, where exposure does not immediately translate into changes that stabilise the economy. Furthermore, digital civic engagement fosters democratic resilience but needs to be coupled with institutional mechanisms for reform. In contexts such as Nigeria, where trust in formal governance is low, social media becomes a powerful intermediary for civic expression. Despite that, this expressive function needs to be met by responsive governance; otherwise, it risks fuelling cynicism. Thus, promoting accountability through social media platforms should not only be viewed through a security lens but also as a governance imperative in rebuilding public trust.

Creating of a trust gap in security agencies and national security

The creation of a trust gap in security agencies due to social media use had significant negative effects on safety of life and property (estimate = -2.343, $p = 0.019$) but had a positive impact on economic security (estimate = 5.459, $p = 0.001$), with an insignificant effect on socio-political stability (estimate = -1.159, $p = 0.249$). This divergence points to the complexity of how trust or its absence shapes protest settings. Saaida and Alhouseini (2023) stress that repeated exposure to misconduct erodes institutional legitimacy. This delegitimization weakened perceived personal safety during ENDSARS, but statistical evidence suggests that public pressure that is enabled by digital critique forced more cautious behaviour among security forces, thereby stabilising the economic climate. This supports the concept of strategic delegitimization, where the public’s

loss of trust compels state reform or restraint (Mugari and Chisuvi, 2021; Ciuriak, 2022). However, the long-term implications are less optimistic; that is, sustained distrust without institutional reform risks permanent legitimacy erosion that makes future civic cooperation more difficult. Thus, this trust gap needs to be understood as both an outcome of social media discourse and a strategic inflexion point for policy reform. Efforts to rebuild trust should focus on institutional transparency in security agencies, digital engagement policies, and accountability systems to prevent social media from becoming a platform for permanent alienation from state institutions.

Conclusively, the ENDSARS protests exemplify the multifaceted influence of social media on national security, oscillating between empowerment and disruption. These findings critically show that social media foster organisation, accountability, and documentation of abuses, which positively impact the safety of life and property as well as socio-political stability, but it also carries the risk of amplifying grievances, disseminating misinformation, and deepening distrust. This duality challenges simplistic narratives of social media as inherently liberatory or destabilising. Thus, there is a need for a contextual, evidence-based approach to policy that recognises the evolving nature of digital protest in fragile states. As such, the Nigerian experience calls for the development of hybrid governance models that integrate the participatory promise of social media platforms with institutional safeguards to ensure both freedom and security in digital civic life.

Conclusion

The ENDSARS protests in Lagos State during 2020 illustrated how social media serves as a transformative force in contemporary activism by both rallying citizens together, spreading grievances, and recording human rights violations during active protests. Through X (formerly Twitter), users gained unmatched coordination power, which let them circumvent mainstream media barriers to reach worldwide audiences. Social networks provided immediate access to information spread instantly, which allowed real-time updates, personal testimonies and action calls to reach millions of users in seconds. Information accessibility resulted in beneficial news sharing but also facilitated the swift distribution of false information and fake news at the same rate. The escalating tensions between security agencies and protesters happened because they received misleading content, false stories and unverified reports. Social media made it possible for activists to gain transparency, but it led to information disorder, therefore making crisis response difficult. Social media proved fundamental in escalating the public's reaction to institutional discrimination while deepening the gaps between people sharing different social beliefs. The creation of collective expression platforms helped build solidarity, yet it also sparked rising public frustration that intensified differences between different social groups. Social media operates in two distinct directions as it serves both the purposes of civic participation and unrest stimulation.

The recording of human rights violations during protests through social media shaped the reactions of citizens and governments to these events. Police brutality exposed itself through graphic evidence on social media platforms because some traditional media organisations banned these incidents from their coverage. Ethical concerns and psychological stress developed on social media platforms because they distributed disturbing content, which created widespread public panic. The revelation of state misconduct through social media caused both a decrease in public trust in security agencies and increased social tensions. The public developed strong doubts about security institutions because society witnessed police violence alongside government inaction. The decrease in public trust in security forces poses a serious threat to national security stability because weak state-enforced relationships lead to poor governmental functioning. Social media accountability, which exposes institutional failures, creates an apparent contradiction about its role in social activism, according to this study's findings. Social media platforms enhance citizen authority, but they simultaneously increase political instability, resulting in complicated and unforeseeable effects on national security.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations, which will help to address some issues raised in the study, are proposed.

- i. Regarding the safety of life and property, the government should ensure that all social media platforms (particularly X) have units that fast-check the information content shared on their platforms to reduce the security risks posed by the rapid spread of misinformation during protests. This aligns with the study's findings, which revealed that unverified information significantly compromises public safety. Thus, promoting verified information sources is the most effective strategy to reduce the spread of false news, thereby mitigating potential security risks posed by the use of social media during protests.
- ii. Security agencies need to engage transparently and proactively on social media platforms to rebuild public trust and reduce panic during protests. By disseminating timely and accurate updates and participating in digital dialogues, security institutions can close the trust gap identified in the study, improving public perception and cooperation in ways that enhance safety and order.
- iii. On socio-political stability, there is a pressing need to manage the dual nature of social media by investing in digital literacy. The National Orientation Agency should develop and implement nationwide digital education programmes to equip citizens, especially youths, with the skills to critically evaluate content, identify misinformation, and engage responsibly online. The findings show that the amplification of grievances and widespread documentation of abuses, sometimes constructive, but often intensify public outrage and socio-political instability. Digital literacy will help foster a more informed and resilient civic culture.
- iv. On national security, policymakers should develop legal frameworks that regulate the spread of false information on social media, not social media usage, without undermining constitutional rights to freedom of expression. Such frameworks would help prevent escalatory discourse that destabilises the political environment and erodes

investor confidence, thereby protecting both democratic values and economic stability. This recommendation reflects findings that misinformation undermines both socio-political trust and economic activities during crises.

Declarations:

- Originality statement: I, Oluwafemi Babatunde OLADIMEJI, confirm that this manuscript is original, has not been previously published, and is not under review elsewhere.
- Author approval statement: I, Oluwafemi Babatunde OLADIMEJI, confirm that all authors have read and approved the submitted manuscript, and the author order has been agreed upon by all co-authors.
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