



## Research Article

# Social Media, Digital Peacebuilding and Youth Participation in Protests: A Focus on Nigeria

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## Abstract

Social media has revolutionised youth participation in protests and has developed into a tool for peacebuilding, presenting a means for youth mobilisation, and political engagement. Nonetheless, social media also poses concerns like misinformation, radicalism and has recently forced governance surveillance. While there is much interest in how social media drives protests, there are limited studies focusing on how digital platforms influence peacebuilding activities along protest participation, particularly in the Nigerian context. Therefore, this study investigates the impact of social media on youth participation in protests and digital peacebuilding in Nigeria using the social movement theory and uses and gratifications theory. The study investigates how social media shapes youth participation in protests; examines how social media influence youth participation in digital peacebuilding; assesses the challenges of using social media for peacebuilding and reviews the impacts of social media on peacebuilding in protest contexts. Existing studies suggest that social media has transformed youth participation in protests, facilitating rapid mobilisation and organisation of youths, while also slowing down the influence of traditional media. It will also highlight critical risks that require immediate action. Social media also helps drive and promote inclusiveness in nation building and peace agendas. Nevertheless, challenges such as online opposition, hate speech, governmental scrutiny and tracking, and digital exhaustion threaten its benefits. The study recommends the prioritisation of digital literateness, online autonomy, and free speech while eschewing online intimidation.

**Keywords:** social media; youth activism; protests; digital peacebuilding; political mobilisation

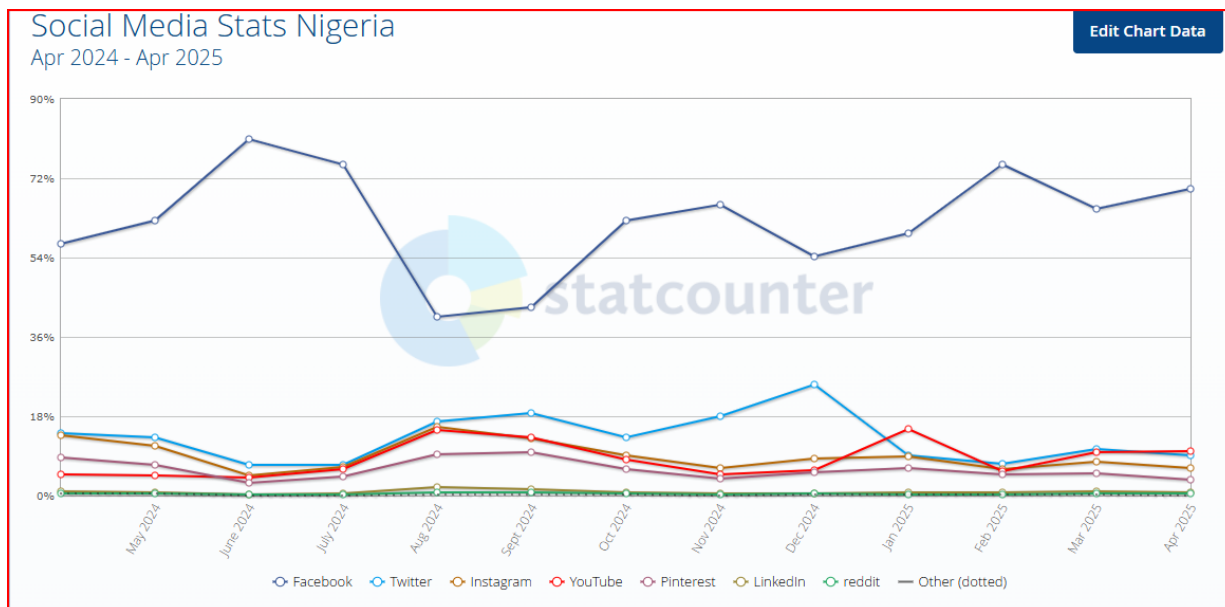


## I. Introduction: the rise of social media and youth activism

As the 20th century transitioned into the 21st, social media rapidly evolved, boasting 5.04 billion users by January 2024 (Shaikh, 2024). Social media has also transformed youth activism by offering avenues for mobilisation, political engagement, and digital peacebuilding (Cortés-Ramos, 2021). In addition to activism, social media has developed into a mechanism for promoting digital peacebuilding (Reuss, and Stetter, 2025), facilitating conversation among several groups and combating contentious discourse. By amplifying marginalised perspectives, offering alternative narratives, and enabling grassroots movements, social media platforms have revolutionised youth engagement with governance and societal issues. In the digital era, social media emerged as a vital instrument for youth activism, giving an accessible forum for young people to raise awareness, activate communities, and drive social justice efforts (Fish, 2017). Nigeria's population today stands at a robust 228.9 million, with a considerable majority being young individuals of social media age (Mbanaso, 2015). Despite the enormous number of social media users in Nigeria, it is fascinating to note that a considerable majority do not utilise social media. Between years 2014 and 2024, approximately 189.75 million individuals in Nigeria do not utilise social media platforms, representing about 83.8% of the population (VerivAfrica, 2024). This group, representing about 16.2% of the overall population, indicates minimal social media utilisation in the country.

Although these social media platforms facilitate unprecedented connectivity and self-expression, it also facilitates detrimental actions without detection due to a factor described as anonymity afforded by internet platforms (Kim et al., 2023; Mondal et al., 2020). This implies that social media also proves to be a double-edged sword which promotes both conflict and peace, with platforms like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) (see Figure 1) significantly directing and transforming online discourse and have become arenas for youth-led movements. These digital platforms also enable young protesters to enhance their voices, confront conventional power structures, and promote change in a society characterised by systemic inequalities. The burgeoning youth movements in Nigeria demonstrate the considerable influence of social media in mobilising young individuals for protests and peacebuilding efforts. This study investigates how social media shapes youth participation in protests; it examines how social media influence youth participation in digital peacebuilding; it assesses the challenges of using social media for peacebuilding and reviews the impacts of social media on peacebuilding in protest contexts.

**Figure 1:** Social media use in Nigeria



Source: Statcounter (2025)

### Significance of the study

This study sheds light on how social media shapes youth engagement in protests and peacebuilding; two forces in today's social and political landscape. The review aims to assist policymakers and activists in fostering safer and more effective spaces for driving meaningful change. It will also highlight critical risks that require immediate action. Furthermore, identifying the positive impacts of social media in advancing digital peacebuilding is expected to offer practical insights for leveraging these platforms to promote peace and constructive activism. Largely, this study will bridge the gap between youth digital participation and sustainable peace efforts in Nigeria, thereby guiding future interventions that amplify young voices while minimising increase in conflicts.

## Conceptual clarification

- a. **Peacebuilding:** Peacebuilding implies the long-term process of initiating the terms for settlement, social cohesion, and economic growth (Lederach, 1997). In contemporary perspectives, digital peacebuilding has arisen as a robust apparatus for promoting dialogue and tolerance across societies, especially when established procedures of conflict resolution are inadequate. Social media plays a key part in this, offering the means for sustainable peace by tackling the foundational causes of conflict and fostering peaceful activism, educational campaigns, and creating needed awareness about rights and justice.
- b. **Protests:** A protest is commonly known as a group action for stating disagreement or resistance or calling for change, mostly in the shape of an open protest march, or virtual campaigns (Andrain and Apter, 1995). Protests are a way of expressing dissatisfaction over social, political, or economic concerns and can work as a means for contesting with authority and calling for justice. Nevertheless, the way social media has been blended into youth-led activities, has made protest a progressive avenue for coordinating and publishing initiatives, increasing the expressions of disregarded groups.

## 2. Literature review

### *Social media and socio-political protests*

Social media platforms continue to flourish as their mechanisms become intimately woven into various cultures. The expansion of social media platforms is improving communication among citizens and between the governed and their leaders. This improved communication is promoting the accountability of individuals in positions of authority for their actions. Despite the normalisation of digital media, its influence on political participation and engagement, particularly during contentious political events, remains debateable. The increasing prevalence of global protest movements, with improvements in social media, raises questions about the role of digital media platforms as catalysts for dissent, protests, and several types of contentious politics. Several research exhibit scepticism and dismissal about social media platforms as tools for political transformation (Fenton and Barassi, 2011). These studies assert that social media platforms promote complacent and ineffective activism. The findings show that activism organised via social networks, devoid of an ideological foundation, is ineffectual and unable to achieve its goals. In contrast, alternative studies are affirmative, perceiving digital media platforms as essential for modern political activism (Bosch, 2019; Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). The expansion of social media coincided with worldwide protests. Prominent protests encompass the Indignados, the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and several other movements, including the Occupy Nigeria events. The organisation and arrangement of these protest movements were unconventional. This led researchers to conduct studies assessing the influence of digital media platforms on protest movements, with numerous findings suggesting positive consequences (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). Studies prove that protest networks employed digital media to engage with participants during the 2009 G-20 protests in London (Bennett et al. 2014).

### *Protest and online activism: the Nigerian context*

Protests are events where individuals vocalise, chant, and display placards to express their grievances, dissent, or opposition to a certain issue. Protests provide citizens with the opportunity to express their demands for political change or to convey complaints over specific political issues. Habeeb's (2021) study employs Olukayode Eesuola's definition of protest: "...all forms of protest activities or actions exhibited in public spaces [and] typically intended to capture the attention of the authorities to whom such protests are directed" (Eesuola, 2015:29). Agitations, rallies, protests, and confrontations have persistently occurred inside Nigeria's socio-political milieu. By the 20th century, protests and demonstrations underwent substantial evolution, predominantly involving large assemblies of individuals articulating dissatisfaction with specific governmental policies through public displays in streets, marketplaces, and governmental institutions (Mai-Bornu, 2020). This approach was more initiative-taking and included leaflets, banners, and diverse clothes to convey their dissatisfaction. There have also been other protests such as, women's protest in Eastern colonial Nigeria against the high tax imposed by colonial authorities from 1925 to 1930, known as the "Aba women's riot." Similarly, on November 29, 1947, Madame Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti led a protest in Abeokuta pushing for the abolition of the tax on women, along with several welfare concerns. The protest led to the annulment of the tax measure, and the Alake of Egbaland relinquished the throne on January 3, 1949. This action has been termed the 'Egba Women's Revolt'; it provoked more demands and motivated subsequent protests throughout this era.

Since gaining independence, Nigeria has experienced ongoing demonstrations by citizens, trade unions, workers, secessionists, and opposition parties. These include the "SAP Riots" of 1989 and the "Ali Must Go" controversy that unsettled the nation in 1978. During the "June 12" protests, against General Sanni Abacha's military regime, numerous individuals, including students, were killed. In the twenty-first century, social media has revolutionised the dynamics of protests in Nigeria. Social media as defined by the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC), constitutes a web-based application platform that enables users to create and spread-wide content interactively and responsively (Board, 2020). The common denominator is characterised by the user-generated and managed form of interactions or content. Research by Uwalaka and Watkins (2018) examined the impact of social media on the organisation of the Occupy Nigeria movement and its role in promoting accountability from mainstream media during the event. Interviews were conducted with nineteen students from two liberal Nigerian colleges who took part in the event. The research analysed 13,031 content items from protesters' Facebook posts and tweets concerning the Occupy Nigeria protests. The findings prove that social media platforms were primarily employed by the protesters to strategise and

coordinate the 2012 Occupy Nigeria movement. The authors' findings suggest that the local mainstream media yielded to official pressure by initially not reporting on the event until prompted by the marchers. Some participants mentioned the local mainstream media's perceived inaction as a motivating reason for their participation in the protest. This study asserts, under the framework of social capital theory, that social media—the fifth estate—enabled connection, socialisation, communal engagement, and liberation lacking in mainstream media. A later study by Uwalaka (2022) investigates the methods by which protesters obtained knowledge and coordinated the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria. Analysis of 2020 survey data, collected during the protests, in conjunction with a content analysis of tweets, reveals that protesters aged 30 and above who employed Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter for information dissemination and organisation of the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria were more likely to have participated on the inaugural day of the protest. Data revealed a correlation between protesters' perceived utility of a social media platform and their engagement with these networks during protests.

Moreover, digital media and activist movements literature offer several viewpoints on the impact of digital media on the organisation of collective action. Methods encompass aiding protesters in aligning with political objectives, providing resources and information for coordinating protest activities, and creating deliberative forums for the public (Bennett et al., 2014), as well as fostering enthusiasm that facilitates emotional contagion (Gerbaudo, 2016). Online protest movements are conceived, strategised, and coordinated using digital networks. Numerous events entail challenging the prevailing position and obstructing the hegemonic and bourgeois cultures that protesters regard as oppressive (Castells, 2012). The 2020 #EndSARS demonstrations in Nigeria illustrated this scenario. Numerous research on socio-political protests have shown that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter facilitate protest organisation when employed. Researchers have also commenced examining the platform effects of social media and mobile social networking applications, particularly the overreliance on "frontstage" digital media platforms and the inadequate acknowledgment of "backstage" activist practices, alongside the widespread incorporation of mobile social networking applications such as WhatsApp, Telegram, Badoo, and 2go in protest movements (Baulch et al. 2020; Tréré, 2020). It has been asserted that Eskimi, a mobile social networking application, was employed by the protesters to acquire information and devise their participation in the 2012 #Occupy Nigeria protests. Furthermore, it was disclosed that a protester employing Eskimi to get information about the protests or to strategise their participation markedly increased the likelihood of reporting involvement on the first day of the 2012 Occupy Nigeria movement (Uwalaka, et al. 2018). A similar result was recorded for Facebook in Egypt during the 2011 Tahrir Square protests (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). Furthermore, Tréré (2020) illustrated how activists in Spain and Mexico have included WhatsApp into their media frameworks to enhance collective identification, reinforce internal cohesion, and mitigate protest pressures. He further showed that WhatsApp functions as a powerful organisational instrument and is intricately integrated into the structures of organisations and movements (Tréré, 2020). Activists and organisational networks employ WhatsApp to mobilise and coordinate protest activities (Pang and Woo, 2020).

### *Global context*

The year 2020 saw substantial protests despite the pandemic and the associated restrictions, a viral threat that engendered a repressive environment. While the pandemic persisted, the outbreak prompted protests in response to stringent public health measures (Sharma et al. 2024). These measures elicited political criticism, including anger over lockdowns, governmental mismanagement of public health and financial resources, economic disruption, and unemployment. Individuals were restricted, discontent with state interference in their lives, apprehensive about health and economic concerns, and mostly engaged with social media and news outlets while confined to their homes. Multiple gatherings concentrated on core issues that have driven the current global surge of protests (Hellmeier, 2023), including widespread grievances such as pervasive corruption and state-sanctioned corruption under President Nicolás Maduro provoked protests in Venezuela (Roht-Arriaza, and Martinez, 2019). Also, corrupt activities in Bulgaria provoked months of protests, against Prime Minister Boyko Borisov (Stoyanov et al. 2014). Furthermore, protest issue of 2020 was societal indignation against police brutality such as the 'Black Lives Matter' demonstrations in the United States following the murder of George Floyd (Chaudhary, and Richardson Jr, 2022).

Some of the identified gaps in the reviewed studies suggest that while they extensively used qualitative approach, such as expert interviews, literature reviews, and historical accounts, there was a lack of quantitative or statistical evidence to assess the level of youth engagement in protests, the volume of social media contents analysed, or the socio-demographic information of youth participants. Also, while the reviewed studies acknowledged prevalent social media platforms in Nigeria, such as Facebook, Twitter/X, WhatsApp, Eskimi, they did not thoroughly evaluate the specific contributions of each of these platforms to youth engagement or their role in peacebuilding. Moreover, the study failed to address the unique ways in which young men and women, or youth from different regions of Nigeria, engage in digital activism and peacebuilding, overlooking critical and socio-cultural issues.

## **3. Theoretical framework**

### *Social movement theory (SMT)*

SMT is an interdisciplinary approach within the social sciences which elucidates the reasons for social mobilisation, the manifestations it takes, and the potential social, cultural, political, and economic repercussions, including the establishment and operation of social movements (Tarrow, 1998). The influence of social media on social movements has been classified into three perspectives: optimism, pessimism, and ambivalence (Kidd and McIntosh 2016). Gbobadi and Sonenshein (2024) assert that platforms such as Facebook and X facilitate activism by enabling the swift dissemination of information and collaboration.

Elsewhere, it is contended that social media fosters superficial interactions that can be used by an authoritarian state masquerading as monitoring (Jones 2022). For Onyejelem et al. (2024), it is asserted that social media is not a certain instrument for revolution, however, it has significant relevance within the overarching framework of social movements. These dual perspectives highlight that whereas social media facilitates communication and mobilisation, tangible action in the real world remains essential. For Zhuravskaya (2020) social media is a mobilising framework that engages with opportunity structures, like political instability and economic downturns, to promote social movements. As a result of this, there is a decrease in coordination expenses while enhancing collective action among groups that may otherwise refrain from participation. Lopes (2014) contends that social media serves as a potent catalyst; yet it is limited to operating inside and relying on pre-existing grievances and institutional processes. While SMT elucidates the processes by which collective action arises, mobilises resources, and maintains involvement to effectuate social change (McAdam et al. 1996). This theory emphasises those digital platforms function as resource mobilisation instruments in the realm of social media and young protests, enabling communication, coordination, and the construction of protest narratives. Social internet diminishes entry barriers, allowing adolescents to organise swiftly and enhance their voices (Tufekci, 2017). The idea indicates that understanding online mobilisation techniques is crucial to studying how youth harness social media for both protest participation and digital peacebuilding activities. It is argued that SMT has a Western bias, prompting numerous authors to assert that mainstream theories inadequately elucidate social movements in the Global South, as they were initially formulated to account for movements in the North. However, the postcolonial critique has been dismissed for its inability to produce novel empirical results, provide alternative explanations for the evolution and conduct of social movements, or elucidate international movements (Chibber, 2023). It has been contended that postcolonial social movement studies, although offering valid critiques, may inadvertently foster a kind of cultural essentialism and a 'new Orientalism' (Chibber, 2023).

### *Uses and gratification theory (UGT)*

The UGT is a communication framework that elucidates the motivations and methods through which individuals engage with media to fulfil specific needs (Menon 2024a). The idea posits that media is a readily accessible commodity, with audiences serving as its consumers. Audiences select the media to fulfil specific requirements and for social and psychological purposes, including information acquisition, relaxation, social interaction, and entertainment (Menon, 2024b). The uses and gratifications idea originated from several preceding communication theories and studies undertaken by other thinkers. The theory possesses heuristic value as it provides academic communication with a framework to examine many concepts and theories related to media selection, consumption, and effect (Kalyan, et al. 2025). The UGT has, since its conception, been regarded by critics as failing to achieve the requisite standards of a theory. Critics contend that it is primarily an analytical technique or a data-gathering tactic (Littlejohn et al. 2002). Common criticisms include that gratifications are more reliant on researchers' input than on the choices of research subjects; that early studies employed flawed methodologies, resulting in exaggerated findings; that audiences of varying ages likely possess distinct motivations for engaging with the same media and may experience different gratifications; that most research depends on mere recollection rather than empirical data; and that it overstates the notion that individuals have the autonomy to select their preferred media and interpretations (Lometti, et al. 1977). The #EndSARS protest depicts the existing impact of social media in mobilisation of youth and peacebuilding endeavours. This aligns with the SMT and UGT wherein platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, X, and Instagram, eased Nigerian youths' protests mobilisation, criticised poor governance, and ease social justice causes. SMT rationalises how digital platforms are means for protest mobilisation, promoting group action via fast sharing of information (Tufekci, 2017). These platforms-initiated spaces for youths helped form protest plots and make demands on government accountability. Concurrently, UGT demonstrates that social media fulfilled expressive, sociocultural, and informational requirements where youths engaged through these platforms to voice their dissatisfaction, relate with others, and find shared goals. The #EndSARS movement exhibits how social media can operate as both a tool for mobilisation during protest and an avenue for peacebuilding through discussion, shared aims, and compromise efforts. However, social media also impaired polarity and resentment, emphasising its twofold role in influencing both activism and peacebuilding (Kim et al., 2023; Mondal et al., 2020).

## **4. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative, thematic desk review, applying narrative synthesis as its method of data collection. This method helped to synthesise and provide insights from existing literature relevant to the topic of this study. Therefore, academic articles, institutional reports, and policy briefs ranging between 40–50 documents, were included in this review. While this review did not apply a strict publication date range, the review however included both recent and foundational sources with relevance to Nigerian youth protests, digital activism, and peacebuilding. This guaranteed that an inclusive range of perspectives were captured. Consequently, sources like non-peer reviewed articles, unapplicable content or those that did not generally meet the inclusion criteria were excluded from the review. The themes were derived from literature through an inductive emergence where some themes emerged as the literature was reviewed. Also, some themes appeared through pre-structured themes where themes were structured based on the adopted research questions and theoretical framework. The pre-defined themes ensured the shaping of the review and offered a foundation for assessing the connection between social media, youth participation in protests and peacebuilding. The justification for using a desk review method is because the researchers could access extensive data already available through the method which also guaranteed that the study was built on hitherto established studies. It also availed the flexibility to analyse varied perspectives and combine findings across diverse backgrounds, thereby improving the study's depth and scope. It is crucial to note that the literature-based method employed in this review is limited by a review of limited or available sources, a lack of direct perspectives of the Nigerian youths and the method does not also embody all viewpoints equally.

While these limitations may lead to a bias. However, the ethical responsibility of this review necessitated an acknowledgement of the potential harm that may emerge from a misrepresentation of Nigerian youths who participated in the selected case study protests reviewed in this study. Hence, the adoption of a desk-review approach ensures an accurate and balanced presentation of literature-derived sources without distortion or oversimplification, while also safeguarding the confidentiality and anonymity of the voices involved.

## 5. Results and discussion

### *How social media shapes youth engagement in protests. a case of #ENDSARS*

Social media played a crucial role in mobilising individuals for campaigns like #EndSARS and Occupy Nigeria, (Kelvin, and Tseguy, 2022) enabling organisation and real-time information dissemination. According to Akerele-Popoola et al. (2022), Twitter and WhatsApp were influential in easing protestors to strategise routes, react rapidly to dangers, and promote a shared identity. Uwalaka and Watkins (2018) opined that many youths were convinced to join in protests because social media presented narratives that conventional media either ignored or minimised. This implies confidence and dependence on online means for youth engagement (Tufekci and Wilson, 2012). These studies stress that social media helps young individuals create emotional and political momentum that can rapidly cross-national borders (Ferreira, 2024) through the distribution of impactful images, films, and speeches. Hashtags have been utilised to stimulate engagement, attracting support and attention from the diaspora and global human rights organisations (Tabatabaeiii et al. 2024). Moreover, digital movement on social media allows youths' evasion of traditional gatekeepers, media editors, politicians, and their parties. It hastens unbiased engagement in political disputes and reduces the challenges of participating in activism. The flexible, dispersed attribute of online grouping enables inspiration and revolution, characterised by the deployment of memes, viral films, and fund-raising initiatives. These digital materialisations redefine political engagement in the 21st century.

### *How social media influence youth participation in digital peacebuilding: case studies*

#### *#EndSARS Initiative*

The #EndSARS movement which gained a strong momentum in 2020, developed one of Nigeria's most far-reaching youth-led protests, mainly driven by social media. The protest's demand was the disbanding of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a police force notorious for its defilements of human rights, particularly among Nigerian youths. Social media became central in rallying youth nationally, with social sites including Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook empowering the propagation of information and the organisation of protests in various locations (Aubyn, and Frimpong, 2022). Social media played the role of disseminating youths' stories of police inhumaneness, circulating protests information, and engaging in activist efforts. The #EndSARS and #EndPoliceBrutality hashtags acquired global pull, raising the expressions of Nigerian youth and drawing international spotlight on the issue. Social media enabled the organisation of nonviolent protests, the spread of safety information (Lawal, 2022), and the provision of legal support (Shokoya, 2025). concurrently, effectively altering the digital space into an extension of the protest site. While helping achieve the mobilisation of youths for protests, social media helps facilitate youth involvement in digital peacebuilding through the promotion of peace-based narratives, and peace-driven dialogue among divergent Nigerian youths (Trere, 2020; Castells 2015). According to Ajao, (2023), the #EndSARS hashtag accumulated millions of tweets of over twenty-eight million mentions on Twitter alone in the preliminary weeks. Hashtags like #EndPoliceBrutality and #EndBadGovernance have served not just to stimulate gatherings but also to intellectualise policy transformation and justice (Uwalaka, 2022). The hashtags were able to achieve global status, trending throughout several countries and ensuing in vast media coverage. Social media reporting of the protests gained major international tension on the Nigerian government, climaxing in the demobilisation of SARS and obligations to police amendment (Lawal 2022).

Peacebuilding Impact: Social media enabled the organisation of protests as well as function as a medium for productive discussion. Protesters utilised it to promote fairness, human rights, and police culpability. Additionally, it fostered unity among many youth groups, exceeding locational, ethnic, and social borders. Nonetheless the violence that followed the protests, social media's role in uniting voices for a common purpose typified its capacity for digital peacebuilding (AdedokmU, 2022). Young Nigerians exploited storytelling, video campaigns, and live discussions to generate peace-oriented contents that questioned prevalent narratives and offered unconventional depths for national unity (Baulch et al. 2020). Social media works as a stage for both disagreement and compromise, enabling the convergence and shared insight of contradictory opinions. Such interactions reveal that peacebuilding spreads further than formal organisations and can occur in the everyday decisions of young people who choose to advance associations via their online activities.

#### *#EndBadGovernance Initiative (EBGI)*

The movement clamouring for an end to bad governance in Nigeria because of perceived persistent and systemic corruption and poor governance, gained traction through social media in advocating good governance from the authorities. The youth-led protests and digital initiatives aimed to emphasise the misdirection of public resources, administrative corruption, and the call for improved governmental transparency (Lawal et al., 2025). Social media was a medium through which Nigerian youth communicated their painful experiences with governance and stress systemic challenges repeatedly ignored by mainstream media. Consequently, Twitter and Facebook availed the means for planning and organising protests, circulating petitions, and organising

online meetings for political discourse. There also arose the #EndBadGovernance and #FixNigeria hashtags to gather massive support for necessary political reform (Egobueze, 2025). The social media drive promoting the EBG1 movement was considerably large and far reaching, with millions of Nigerian youths and other global supporters utilising the hashtags to demand political modification and transformations. As a result of these hashtags and youth protests leading to more media attention and public discussion and debates, the government was prompted to act, and create police reforms (Egobueze, 2025; Ubong, 2024). Social media became a stage for peaceful demonstrations of Nigerian youths and political engagement (Ojo, and Afolaranmi, 2024; Okocha, and Agbele, 2023). The EBG1 majorly stressed the need for government accountability, while also promoting peace-driven and political discourses, as well as the advancement of unity among Nigerian youths requesting systemic transformation through non-violent approaches.

Conclusively, these given case studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of social media as a compelling channel for digital peacebuilding where youths could mobilise, facilitate and participate in peaceful movements. The #EndSARS, #BringBackOurGirls, and #EndBadGovernance schemes demonstrate the diverse approaches by which social media may foster peace-driven messaging, demand, and effect substantial and genuine changes. While social media is a stimulus for protests and, it is also a means to promote cross-cultural discourses, exchange of ideas, and the facilitation of peaceful resolutions between rival parties. These case studies have shown that where social media has been effectively used, it can cultivate social cohesion, contest biased structures, and promote peace in the digital era.

### *The challenges associated with utilising social media for peacebuilding*

Aside from the capacity, utilising social media platforms aimed at peacebuilding is also sometimes confronted with extensive obstacles. The consulted studies such as Kim et al. (2023) and Mondal et al. (2020) associated internet partisanship and divides, the growth of ethnicity-driven slander and statements of hatred, and state-tracking of social media users to be major challenges. A key example of this is Nigeria's short-term Twitter embargo, which undoubtedly is a display of the Nigerian government's displeasure with what they perceived as negative role of digital networks (Uwalaka and Watkins, 2018). Also, anonymous utilisation of the internet is perceived to promote the spread of lies and distortion of truths, thereby declining peace effort (Guerts, et al. 2021). These assertions show the contradictory functions and character nature of social media which functions as both a means of acquiring information, spread of information, while at the same time presenting menaces that can intensify crisis or suffocate digital opposition, rebellion, and resistance. One significant challenge in digital space is its fluctuating nature. Online platforms often prioritise and promote content based on popularity or engagements. Consequently, peaceful messages or efforts may be ignored or overshadowed by more attention-grabbing content, thereby limiting their reach and expected impacts in the digital spaces (Gerbaudo, 2016). The passionate and enthusiastic nature of demonstrations can generate social situations, through which people are drawn to notions that assert their established opinions and beliefs. This not only constrains the scope of discussion but has the possibility of aggravating intergroup hostilities. For people endeavouring to traverse these turbulent situations, the distinction between positive involvement and damaging participation gets gradually unclear. Youth peacebuilders additionally endure stress and digital exhaustion. Frequent bombardment with unpleasant contents, the urge or pressure to give a sharp reaction, and online violence or abuse negatively impact on their emotional health (LaRose, 2001). Where there is no government support or officially endorsed responsibilities, many young protest advocates find it difficult to sustain their involvement. This implies the need for counselling services and a structured virtual peace-building mechanism that ensures the safe mental state of people involved in online activism.

### *Nigerian youths' responses to challenges in digital activism*

Nigerian youth have had to become adaptive to promote their activism notwithstanding suppression and online barriers in reaction to the confrontations presented by social media in their efforts towards digital peacebuilding. There has been state sponsored surveillance, internet bias, and content suppression in Nigeria (Uchendu et al. 2025; Oyinloye et al. 2024). For instance, the Nigerian government for a short-term, banned X in the country, prompting Nigerian youths to adapt their methods to keep the momentum for social movements. One such momentum was the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPN) to evade government-imposed limitations, guaranteeing sustained access to global listeners (Ifeduba et al 2024). Also, because of the ban on X, many Nigerian youths moved over to Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram, which were believed to be more private with less surveillance for facilitating protests. Furthermore, Nigerian youths have shown defiance by executing unconventional contents, such as using visual storytelling and memes to disperse peacebuilding messages. These arrangements have shown to be better appealing and challenging to curb, permitting protesters to endure advancing consciousness while evading conventional censorship methods. Nigerian youth have displayed notable adaptableness in the face of restrictions, implementing tech-based solutions and creative content approaches to endure digital activism and spread peacebuilding endeavours despite the obvious difficulties faced online.

### *The impacts of social media on peacebuilding in the context of protests*

A study conducted by Tufekci and Wilson (2012) suggest that social media has conceptual and tangible implications on peacebuilding over protests. It has strengthened and improved the spread of awareness, promoted responsiveness and empathy across social lines, and lessened occurrences of viciousness in some cases by promoting non-violent protest approaches. However, despite the significant initial strides made online, the lack of structured follow-up most times result in these peacebuilding efforts being short-lived and ineffective. The concrete influence is quite difficult to measure without persistent or continuous tracking of

outcomes or continuous in-person actions (Baulch et al. 2020). The influence of social media in promoting digital cohesion and communal action is undeniable, and it offers opportunities and prospects if applied appropriately. The public display of peaceful protest movements online may perhaps function as a counter-narrative to state-run perceptions of youth as violent or ill-advised. Recordings of individuals offering first aid, protesters cleaning the environment, or protesters delivering solidarity talks helps reshape the public's perception of youth participation in protests (Uwakala et al. 2018). These cases, when amplified by social media, can impact policy debates and determine how potential protests are handled by the government and the media. Moreover, electronic recording of protests and peacebuilding efforts creates a collection of civic participation that might motivate generations to come. Digital records may serve as proof in campaigning, legal trials, and research purposes. However, maintaining these effects require perseverance and assessment of these digital footages and to incorporate them into thorough leads for civic literacy and youth involvement (Tere 2020).

## 6. Conclusion

The literature suggests that social media has revolutionised youth involvement in protests by making it easy for youths to rapidly converge at any given physical location, and conduct pressing discourse away from the erstwhile means of communication such as the national dailies. Social media also helps drive digital peacebuilding by offering means of being heard to perspectives that had been ignored by the government, thereby promoting inclusivity in nation building and peace agendas. Nevertheless, challenges such as online opposition, hate speech, governmental scrutiny and tracking, and digital exhaustion threaten its benefits. Apart from these challenges, social media continues to offer a possibilities and opportunities for awareness spread, compassion, and non-violent advocacy through protests; nevertheless, lasting peace outcomes demand combination with offline efforts. This study underlines the need for policies that protect digital space while prioritising healthy usage to lessen propagation of hatred, disinformation, and falsehood. Theoretically, the study has broadened social movement and uses and gratifications theories by signifying how technological platforms promote and facilitate gathering and peacebuilding among Global South youths. The study also underlines the limitations of online campaigns lacking systematised offline involvement, urging more improved models and strategies that reflect digital apprehensions and youth welfare. This study recommends policymakers to prioritise initiatives that will drive digital literateness and protect online autonomy, free speech and rights while reducing online intimidation. For activists, they should develop flexibility through mental reinforcement and the wise usage of many channels for encompassing peace discourse and interactions. Future research could focus on longitudinal approach to this study to examine the persistent effects of digital peacebuilding and explore gendered and region-based gaps in young digital activism to enable an adapted intervention.

## Declarations:

- Originality statement: I, Matthias Akaniyene Francis (PhD), confirm that this manuscript is original, has not been previously published, and is not under review elsewhere.
- Author approval statement: I, Matthias Akaniyene Francis (PhD), confirm that all authors have read and approved the submitted manuscript, and the author order has been agreed upon by all co-authors.
- Conflict of interest disclosure: The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest associated with this research. No financial, personal, or institutional relationships influenced the study's design, data collection, analysis, or interpretation. This disclosure affirms the objectivity and academic integrity of the work presented in this paper.
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