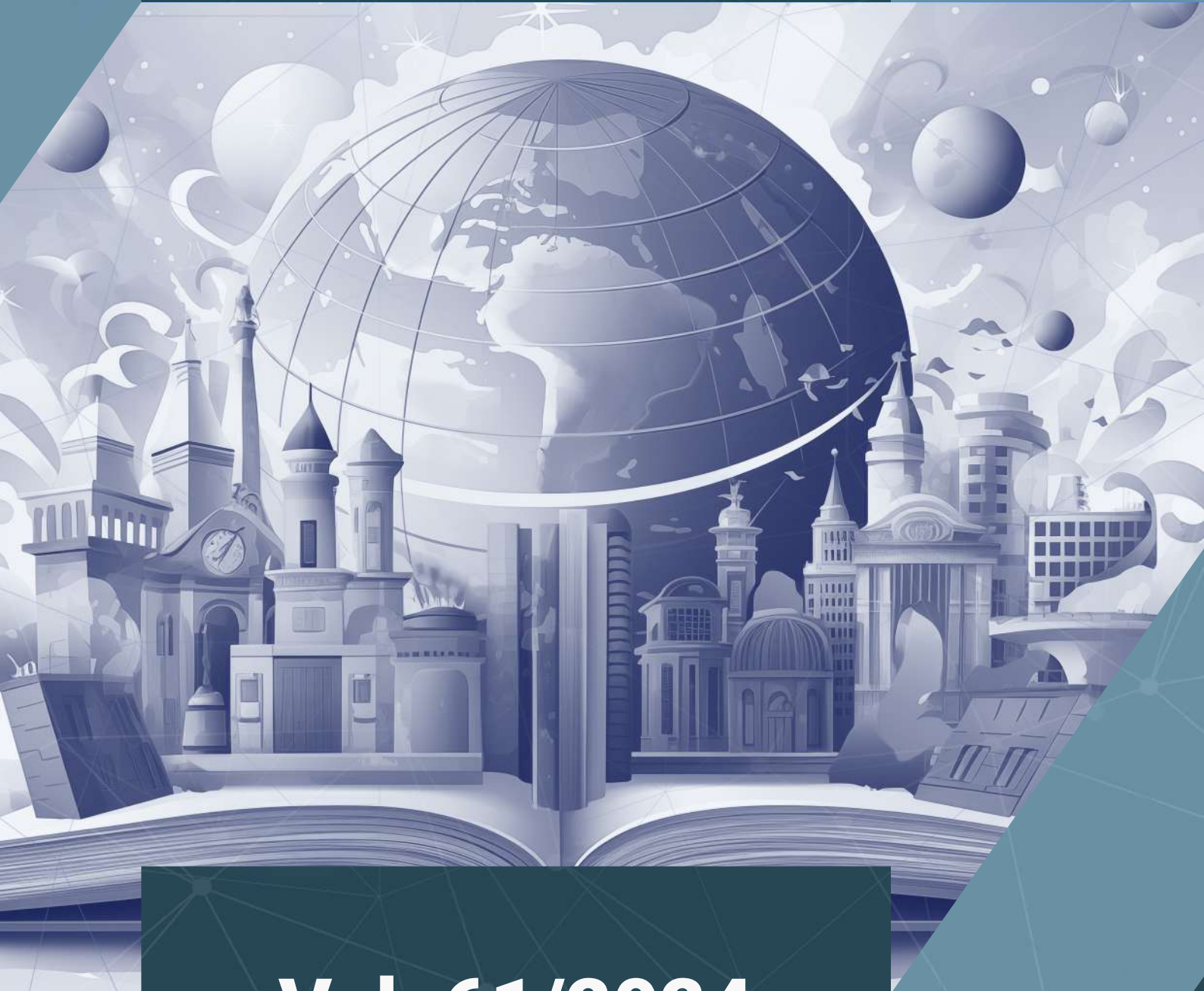




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Investigating the Influence of Social Media on Youth Engagement in the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance Protests in Nigeria

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Abstract. Social media has emerged as a significant platform for political, economic, and social dialogue worldwide, acting as a vehicle for self-expression and a means to hold political leaders accountable. In Nigeria, platforms such as Facebook, X, WhatsApp, and Instagram have played a crucial role in the organisation and mobilisation of protests. This study explores the impact of social media on youth participation in the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. Using the public sphere theory, the research adopted a quantitative survey approach, collecting data from 300 respondents across the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The results reveal that social media was instrumental in mobilising and engaging young people during the protests. Prominent themes discussed on social media included the high cost of living, reversal of the fuel subsidy removal, investigation of the fuel subsidy regime, reduction in electricity tariffs, high cost of governance, corruption, deficiencies in educational and healthcare systems, unemployment, insecurity, and widespread poverty. This study highlights social media's dual function as both a catalyst for mobilisation and a tool for organisational coordination. It is recommended that public training on the responsible use of social media be implemented to maximise its effectiveness in civic engagement.

Keywords. Social Media, Protests, Influence, Youth Engagement, #EndBadGovernance, Nigeria

Background of the Study

Protests have long been a significant aspect of human history, often serve as a means to compel governments to address public grievances. Historical records reveal that protest movements have been integral to societal reform across different eras and regions. For example, in the United States, protests such as the George Floyd demonstrations (2020-2023), the 2017 Women's March, and the March for Our Lives (2018) have sought to address various social issues and advocate for reforms (State Historical Society of Iowa, 2024; Winston, 2014). Similarly, Europe has seen significant protests over the centuries, from the Chartist movement in the 19th century to modern-day demonstrations concerning economic and social issues (British Broadcasting Corporation & Ethirajan, 2024)

In recent years, protests have continued to shape political landscapes around the world. In Bangladesh, student protests initially aimed at abolishing quotas in civil service jobs evolved into broader anti-government demonstrations. In Thailand, citizens protested between 2020 and 2021, demanding the dissolution of parliament and reforms to the constitution (British Broadcasting Corporation & Ethirajan, 2024). On the African continent, protests have been a common response to government policies perceived as detrimental to public welfare. The Arab Spring, for instance, prompted significant uprisings across North Africa, while more recent protests in Kenya addressed contentious tax hikes and governance issues (Meron, 2024).

The tradition of protest in Nigeria can be traced back to the early 20th century. One of the earliest notable instances was the Aba Women's Revolt of 1929, where women from the southeastern region of Nigeria protested against the colonial taxation policies that they deemed exploitative (Nwankwo, 2017). This revolt was a pivotal moment in Nigeria's resistance against colonial rule, highlighting the role of grassroots movements in challenging oppressive policies.

In the 1970s and 1980s, student protests became a prominent feature of Nigeria's political scene. The Ali Must Go protest of 1978, driven by students' dissatisfaction with the government's education policies and poor living conditions, marked a significant period of activism (Ojo, 2012). Similarly, in 1986, students protested against the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) introduced by General Ibrahim Babangida's military regime, which they felt adversely affected the education sector and broader socio-economic conditions (Akintoye, 2010).

The 1993 June 12 protests were another critical moment in Nigeria's protest history. These protests were sparked by the annulment of the presidential election results, which had been won by Moshood Abiola. The widespread civil unrest demonstrated the public's demand for electoral integrity and democratic reforms (Ibrahim, 2015).

In the 2000s, protests continued to evolve, with the Occupy Nigeria movement of 2012 being a notable example. This movement was a response to the government's removal of fuel subsidies, which led to significant increases in fuel prices and a rise in the cost of living. The protests reflected widespread discontent with the government's economic policies and its perceived lack of accountability (Adesina, 2018).

The EndSARS protests of 2020 represented a significant modern uprising against police brutality, particularly targeting the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). This movement gained substantial international attention and showcased the power of social media in mobilising large-scale protests (Akinola, 2021).

On 1 August 2024, Nigerian youths staged the #EndBadGovernance protests, as a response to ongoing governance issues. The protests were driven by demands for a reversal of fuel subsidy removals, reduction in electricity tariffs, and greater accountability in governance among other demands. The mobilisation for these protests was notably facilitated by social media platforms, reflecting the evolving nature of political activism in

The rise of the internet and social media has dramatically transformed how political activism is conducted. The proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has facilitated unprecedented levels of engagement and organisation (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, as cited in Bassey, Kente, Akpede, & Ogande, 2024). Social media platforms have become critical tools for activists, enabling them to raise awareness, coordinate actions, and mobilise support for various causes (Chiamogu, Obikeze, & Ochiamogu, 2021). Ufuophu-Biri & Ojoboh, (2017)

argues that these platforms have significantly enhanced the dissemination of information and facilitated advocacy for good governance worldwide. This study aims to

explore the role of social media in influencing youth engagement in the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. By examining how these digital platforms were used to galvanise public sentiment and organise protest activities, this research seeks to contribute to the understanding of social media's impact on contemporary social movements.

Statement of the Problem

Access to information is crucial for individuals to understand their immediate and distant environments, make informed decisions, and engage with ongoing events. Information access empowers people to learn about new issues, solve problems, and participate in societal activities. Traditionally, mass media has been a primary source of information dissemination. Bassey et al., (2024) assert that mass media is a fundamental component of societal functioning, providing critical information that shapes public awareness and decision-making. With the rise of digital media platforms, there is growing academic interest in examining how these online tools facilitate civic engagement and influence governance narratives. Previous research has explored the role of social media in fostering political activism and challenging ineffective governments globally. Ufuophu-Biri & Ojoboh, (2017) investigated how social media impacts youth civic engagement in Tanzania. Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabucedo (2014) studied mobilization through online networks in Spain, while Scherman and Rivera (2021) analysed pathways to protest participation in Chile. Augustine (2022) explored social media's influence on the ENDSARS protests in Lagos, Nigeria, and Valenzuela (n.d.) focused on social media's role in protest behaviour, including information dissemination and activism.

Despite these contributions, there is a notable gap in research specifically addressing how social media influenced youth engagement in the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. Previous studies have not concentrated on the impact of social media on the mobilisation of youth within the six Area Councils of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Against this backdrop, this study aims to investigate the role of social media in shaping youth participation in the August 2024 protests, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of digital activism in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the role of social media in shaping youth engagement during the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To assess the degree to which social media influenced youth participation in the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria.
2. To identify and analyse the key themes prevalent in social media posts that contributed to the mobilisation of youth for the #EndBadGovernance protests.

Conceptual Clarifications

Social Media

Social media consists of interactive online platforms that enable users to connect, communicate, and exchange information at little to no cost. These platforms facilitate networking, sharing ideas, and distributing content to a wide audience (Baruah, 2012). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), as cited in Bassey et al. (2024), characterise social media as a suite of internet-based applications developed using Web 2.0 technologies, which are designed to support the creation and sharing of user-generated content. The defining features of social media include its immediacy, interactivity, virality, and cost-effectiveness. Acheampong Owusu,

Bakare, Abdurrahman, and Broni Jr. (2020) highlight that social media encompasses a range of applications enabling the sharing of text, images, and videos to a broad audience. These platforms are crucial for the swift dissemination of information and for providing entertainment. Consequently, social media is not merely a digital tool but a central element of contemporary communication and entertainment.

Chiamogu, Obikeze, and Ochiamogu (2021) argue that social media platforms facilitate interactions through end-to-end encryption, allowing users to post, comment, and share multimedia content, including audio and video clips. This secure communication method ensures the privacy and integrity of users' interactions. Beer (2008) views social media as a set of online applications that promote expression and interaction, while Kietzmann et al. (2011) contend that social media leverages mobile and web-based technologies to create dynamic platforms where individuals and communities can share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.

Youths

The term "youth" does not have a universally accepted definition, as its meaning varies significantly across different countries, cultures, and contexts (Borges, 2020). The United Nations (1992), as cited in Apam (2010), defines youth as individuals aged 15 to 24 years, a classification that encompasses both a biological stage and a social construct. This definition is also employed by UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) (Apam, 2010), with a further distinction made between adolescents (aged 10 to 19 years) and young people (aged 10 to 24 years). According to UNESCO (2010), as cited in Van-Morgan and Morgan (2010), youth is described as a transitional phase from childhood dependence to adult independence, categorising individuals aged 15 to 35 years within this bracket. This broader range is consistent with the African Union's (AU) perspective, which acknowledges that the transition from childhood to adulthood varies according to social, political, economic, and cultural contexts.

In many African societies, including Nigeria, the extended age range of up to 35 years reflects the prolonged period of dependency experienced by many individuals (Apam, 2010). Although the United Nations and other international bodies typically use the 15 to 24 years range for statistical purposes, this classification may be too restrictive for certain contexts. For instance, in Nigeria, while the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) follows the international standard, in practice, youth is often defined as those aged 18 to 35 years, reflecting the country's unique political, historical, and socio-economic realities (Ashiru, 2010). For this study, 'youths' refers to young individuals actively engaged in social media activism, particularly those who use these platforms to participate in protests like the #EndBadGovernance demonstrations in Nigeria.

Social Media and Governance Change Protests: A Review of Empirical Studies

This review examines the influence of social media on youth engagement in the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria, drawing insights from various empirical studies on the topic.

Chiamogu et al. (2021) conducted an investigation titled "Social Media and Group Consciousness in Nigeria: Appraising the Prevalence of Socio-Political Protests". This study focused on prominent Nigerian protests, including #BringBackOurGirls, #RevolutionNow, and #EndSars. Employing a qualitative research design and secondary data sources, the researchers applied social movement theory to frame their analysis. The findings indicated that prolonged marginalisation and lack of accountability among certain societal groups led to the emergence

of social media-driven movements. The study highlighted that social media platforms facilitated the organisation of groups expressing discontent and advocating for change. The authors concluded that social media was instrumental in mobilising people, fostering political consciousness, and driving protests against poor governance. They recommended continued use of social media for demonstrations, campaigns, and holding government officials accountable.

Rajendran 2023 explored the topic "Social Media Engagement and Democracy: Understanding the Impact of Social Media on Youth Civic Engagement in Tanzania". Using focus group discussions and a quantitative survey involving 376 participants, the study found that social media was actively used by youths to engage in civic activities, both online and offline. The research established a clear connection between social media interactivity and increased offline civic participation. Rajendran suggested that further research should focus solely on qualitative methods to deepen understanding of these dynamics.

Valenzuela (n.d.) examined "Unpacking the Use of Social Media for Protest Behaviour: The Roles of Information, Opinion Expression, and Activism" in Chile. The study employed a representative survey to gather data, revealing that social media was extensively used for expressing opinions and activism. The results demonstrated a strong correlation between social media usage and protest behaviour. Valenzuela concluded that social media significantly influences and facilitates direct political action. The study recommended that protest organisers and activists use social media responsibly while advocating for good governance.

Scherman and Rivera (2021) investigated "Social Media Use and Pathways to Protest Participation: Evidence from the 2019 Chilean Social Outburst." This study hypothesised that individuals who use social media for political purposes are more likely to engage in protests compared to those who use social media for other reasons. Employing a survey research method, data were collected from 1,000 respondents. The findings indicated that Facebook was the predominant platform used by respondents to participate in protests. The study also highlighted a strong correlation between political activity on social media and protest participation, whereas using social media for information gathering or sharing common interests did not show the same level of impact. The study also explored the indirect effects of social media on protest participation through interpersonal conversations, revealing that Instagram, widely used among young Chileans, facilitated discussions on personal issues, which in turn increased protest participation. The study concluded that social media remains a powerful force in shaping political behaviour and activism despite evolving patterns of use.

In a similar vein, Augustine (2022) examined "How Social Media Influenced the EndSARS Protest in Lagos, Nigeria." Using socio-materiality theory, Augustine conducted an inductive qualitative study, employing in-depth interviews to gather data. The research found that various social media groups played a crucial role in organising the EndSARS protests. Social media provided a platform for protesters to highlight issues related to police misconduct and demand governmental accountability. The study concluded that social media extended the scope for activists to engage with the government, recommending that public officials should support free speech and use these platforms to understand and address public concerns. Furthermore, it suggested that both government and civil society organisations should promote responsible social media use.

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is grounded in the public sphere theory, originally developed by German sociologist Jürgen Habermas in the 1980s. Habermas conceptualised the public sphere as a

space between civil society and the state where individuals engage in critical discussions about issues of general interest (Habermas, 1989). This sphere is characterised by open discourse, where people exercise their rights to free speech, association, assembly, and the dissemination of ideas without undue interference from political or economic powers. According to Flichy (2010, as cited in Bassey et al., 2024), the advent of Web 2.0 has enabled non-experts to contribute to discussions, interact with diverse viewpoints, and garner support, thus reinforcing Habermas's theory. Given this background, amateurs gain a level of influence that was once the preserve of experts and professionals. Flichy, (2010), as cited in Bassey et al., (2024) argues that this broadening of participation is particularly significant in political discourse and other societal issues. The public sphere theory is pertinent to this study as it elucidates how social media provides a platform for young people to engage in public debates about governance, particularly in the framework of the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. Thus, the theory is instrumental in understanding how social media facilitates youth participation in discourse on the necessity for improved governance.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative survey methodology to investigate the influence of social media on youth engagement in the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. The quantitative approach was chosen due to its effectiveness in gathering data on attitudes, opinions, and interests through structured questionnaires. This method allows for the exploration of various aspects of the research topic, as noted by Beer (2008) who asserts that "quantitative survey is probably the best research method available to the social scientist interested in collecting original data for the purpose of describing a population too large to be observed directly" (p. 525).

The study's population consisted of youths in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria, selected due to the area's significant involvement in the #EndBadGovernance protests. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to ensure a representative sample. Data were collected from 50 youths in each of the six Area Councils of the FCT—Kuje, Gwagwalada, Bwari, Kwali, Abuja Municipal Area Council, and Abaji—resulting in a total sample size of 300 respondents. Questionnaires were distributed through face-to-face interactions facilitated by research assistants and the researchers themselves.

The initial draft of the questionnaire underwent face validation by the researcher. After personal scrutiny and feedback, it was reviewed by two additional research experts, including lecturers from the Department of Mass Communication at Nasarawa State University, Keffi, to refine and enhance the instrument before administration. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed using the test-retest method with individuals who are familiar with social media.

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, with results presented in tables, figures, frequencies, and percentages. The analysis employed a five-point Likert scale, where a criterion mean of 3.0 or above was considered indicative of acceptance, while a mean of 2.0 or below was deemed indicative of rejection.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In this study, a total of 300 questionnaires were distributed to respondents. Of these, 289 completed questionnaires were deemed valid and suitable for analysis. This response rate is illustrated in the graph below:



Figure 1: Response Rate Analysis

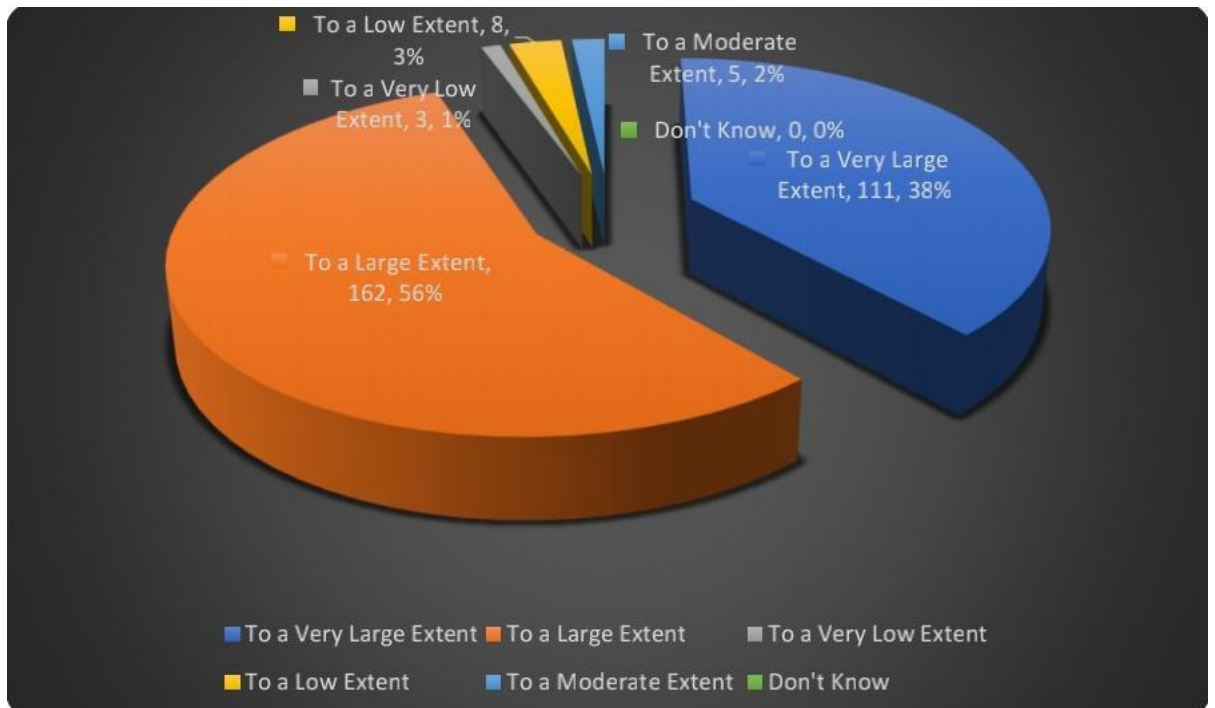


Figure 2: Extent to which Social Media Influenced Youth Engagement in the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance Protests in Nigeria

From the data presented in Figure 2, it can be inferred that social media has emerged as a crucial tool for citizens to demand good governance from their leaders. This trend highlights

the increasing role of digital platforms in facilitating public engagement and accountability in governance.

Table 1: Themes of Social Media Posts That Mobilised Youth Engagement in the #EndBadGovernance Protests

Options	AS	A	U	SD	D	Total	Mean Rating	Decision
Posts on high cost of governance such as building of the Vice President house, buying of presidential jet, purchase of SUVs for members of the National Assembly	250	33	6	0	0	289	4.8	Accepted
Posts on reduction of the cost of food immediately, with solutions like food importation, subsidised credits, and intervention in logistics and storage challenges	208	78	3	0	0	289	4.6	Accepted
Post on reduction of pump price of fuel to N195 per litre to reflect current economic realities, as well as posts on reduction of electricity tariffs and import taxes	233	47	9	0	0	289	4.7	Accepted
Posts on curbing insecurity across the country, stopping the diversion of security resources such as money and people, and immediate prosecution of people instigating insecurity and criminals, as well as resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons immediately	231	51	7	0	0	289	4.7	Accepted
Posts on declaring state of emergency on education and increase budgetary allocation to education and healthcare by 20%	190	88	11	0	0	289	4.6	Accepted
Posts on the government at all levels to provide security to farmers across the county, restore stolen lands, subsidise farm inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, insecticides and ban destructive GMOs	218	63	8	0	0	289	4.7	Accepted
Posts on the release of all EndSars protesters, obeying ECOWAS judgement, make public the EndSars judicial panel reports and implement recommendations, including payment of compensations	227	57	5	0	0	289	4.7	Accepted
Posts on the implementation of Justice Uwais report on electoral reforms and inclusion of electronic balloting and transmission to IREV	209	77	3	0	0	289	4.7	Accepted
Posts on sponsoring of bill to amend the Constitution to allow for referendum	187	93	9	0	0	289	4.6	Accepted

Posts that most Nigerians have been subdued by poverty, hunger, frustration, pain and suffering since the advent of the All Progressives Congress (APC)-led Federal Government	235	50	4	0	0	289	4.7	Accepted
Posts on sincere fighting of corruption, high rate of unemployment and reduction on students school fees	215	72	2	0	0	289	4.7	Accepted

From the findings presented in Table 1, it can be deduced that Nigerian youths have recognised the critical role of digital communication platforms, such as social media, in advocating for the benefits of democracy.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the collected data reveals that social media played a significant role in the mobilisation of respondents during the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests (see Figure 2). This finding corroborates Augustine’s (2022) research, which demonstrated a similar extensive use of social media during the EndSars protests. The study identified several key themes in social media posts that contributed to youth mobilisation for the #EndBadGovernance protests, including concerns about the rising cost of living, the reversal of fuel subsidy removal, scrutiny of the fuel subsidy regime, and demands for reduced electricity tariffs. Other prevalent themes were issues such as high cost of governance, corruption, inadequate educational and healthcare systems, unemployment, insecurity, hunger, poverty, and widespread frustration (see Table 1).

These results are consistent with Chiamogu et al.'s (2021) findings, which highlighted that poor governance spurred Nigerians to use social media to voice their discontent during the #BringBackOurGirls, #RevolutionNow, and #EndSars protests. In addition, Rajendran’s (2023) study supports the notion that social media serves as a platform for citizens to engage in civic activities by commenting, sharing content, and participating in community affairs. The findings thus reinforce the relevance of the public sphere theory, which posits that social media enables open discussions on public matters, facilitating engagement and activism in democratic processes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the impact of social media on youth engagement during the August 2024 #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria. The findings indicate that social media platforms were extensively used to mobilise young people for these protests. It was concluded that social media provided a crucial space for youths to voice their concerns on pressing issues such as poverty, hunger, high governance costs, corruption, unemployment, insecurity, and the reversal of fuel subsidy removal, among other matters.

In light of these conclusions, it is recommended that the Nigerian government, which employs social media to promote its activities and gather public opinions, should enhance support for free speech via these platforms. This support would allow diverse perspectives to inform and shape government actions. Additionally, there is a pressing need to educate the public on the responsible use of social media to ensure it serves as a constructive tool for engagement and advocacy.

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