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Social Media and Mass Mobilisation: An Analysis of X (Twitter) and the #Endsars Protest

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Abstract

The #EndSARS protest that swept across Nigeria in October 2020 remains a defining illustration of how social media can amplify collective outrage and transform dispersed sentiments into coordinated civic action. This study examines the catalytic role of X (formerly Twitter) in shaping the movement's visibility, sustaining communication flows, and enabling mass mobilisation across diverse social and geographic communities, echoing broader scholarly arguments about the power of networked digital platforms in contemporary activism (Castells; Jenkins; Mora). Using a quantitative approach, the study deployed an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to 537 respondents across Lagos, Ekiti, and Abuja, yielding 470 valid responses after data cleaning. The findings reveal that 72 percent of participants viewed X as a major catalyst for mobilisation, while 25.5 percent identified hashtags as pivotal features for amplifying the protest's messages, and 74 percent affirmed the platform's critical role in communication and coordination among activists. These results resonate with research on participatory cultures and the networked public sphere, suggesting that X's design – its immediacy, virality, and user-generated affordances – shaped both the tempo and texture of the movement (Akinyetun; Nnaemeka; Tufekci and Wilson). The study contributes to ongoing debates about digital activism by illustrating how online platforms influence the cultural performance of protest and the construction of collective consciousness in moments of national crisis. Overall, it highlights the evolving ways in which digital infrastructures reconfigure sociopolitical participation and shape the possibilities of civic transformation in the digital age.

Keywords: Social Media, Mass Mobilization, X, EndSARS, Networked Sphere

Introduction

The world is undergoing an accelerating digital revolution that continues to reshape how people communicate, organise, and confront social and political challenges. Social media platforms, now integral to everyday life, have redefined political participation by enabling real-time interaction, rapid information exchange, and horizontal communication flows that circumvent traditional gatekeepers (Makatlal and Kumar; Breuer et al. 764–92; Cain). Within this shifting terrain, the #EndSARS movement remains one of the most compelling demonstrations of youth-led digital mobilisation in Africa. Olise and Nnaane observe that the protest revealed the transformative potential of social media to create shared spaces for discourse, solidarity, and civic agency across diverse social groups. At the centre of this transformation stood X (formerly Twitter), which functioned as the communicative core of the movement and the organisational engine that sustained its momentum.

X's evolution reflects broader shifts in digital culture. Founded in March 2006 by Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone, and Evan Williams, the platform blended the speed of instant messaging with the public reach of microblogging, allowing users to share short posts containing text, images, or links across mobile and web interfaces (Hetler). By 2019, X had amassed more than 330 million monthly active users, becoming a global stage for news, public commentary, and civic discourse (Hetler). Its subsequent acquisition by Elon Musk in 2022 for US\$44 billion (CNN) and rebranding in 2023 (BBC) further cemented its visibility as a platform that shapes contemporary political engagement. More than a technological tool, X has become a site where personal expression, collective storytelling, and sociopolitical critique converge, creating fertile conditions for movements such as #EndSARS to gain visibility, rhythm, and force.

The #EndSARS movement originated as a decentralised, youth-driven protest against the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a police unit long associated with extortion, brutality, and extrajudicial killings (Kingsley). Although early calls to abolish SARS surfaced on X in 2017, the movement re-ignited in October 2020 when a video depicting the killing of a young man in Delta State circulated widely online, sparking nationwide outrage (Okon; Busari et al.). X quickly became the movement's organising centre – an arena where activists documented incidents of abuse, coordinated protest routes, shared safety alerts, and amplified the voices of victims. Through hashtags, eyewitness accounts, short videos, and an avalanche of retweets, participants created a shared digital consciousness that transcended physical boundaries and catalysed mass participation.

The protest's growth reflected the unique affordances of the platform. Hashtags such as #EndSARS and #EndPoliceBrutality aggregated millions of posts, transforming dispersed grievances into a unified narrative thread (Akerle-Popoola et al.; Nnaemeka). Livestreams and real-time updates enabled protesters to identify threats, signal safe routes, and organise medical or legal support. These practices amounted to a digital choreography of resistance – an improvised but coordinated performance sustained by ordinary citizens who curated and circulated stories demanding reform. Horizontal communication replaced hierarchical leadership, and narrative control rested with the public rather than official institutions.

Support for the movement was not confined to Nigeria. Global engagement amplified visibility and placed international pressure on Nigerian authorities. High-profile celebrities and then U.S. President-elect Joe Biden expressed solidarity via social media, broadening the movement's moral reach (Raimi et al.). Jack Dorsey endorsed fundraising channels and encouraged supporters to use protest hashtags, contributing to the mobilisation of nearly 74 million naira in donations. According to Brandwatch analytics, the protest generated more than 25 million mentions of #EndSARS worldwide within the first ten days – an extraordinary testament to the movement's digital resonance.

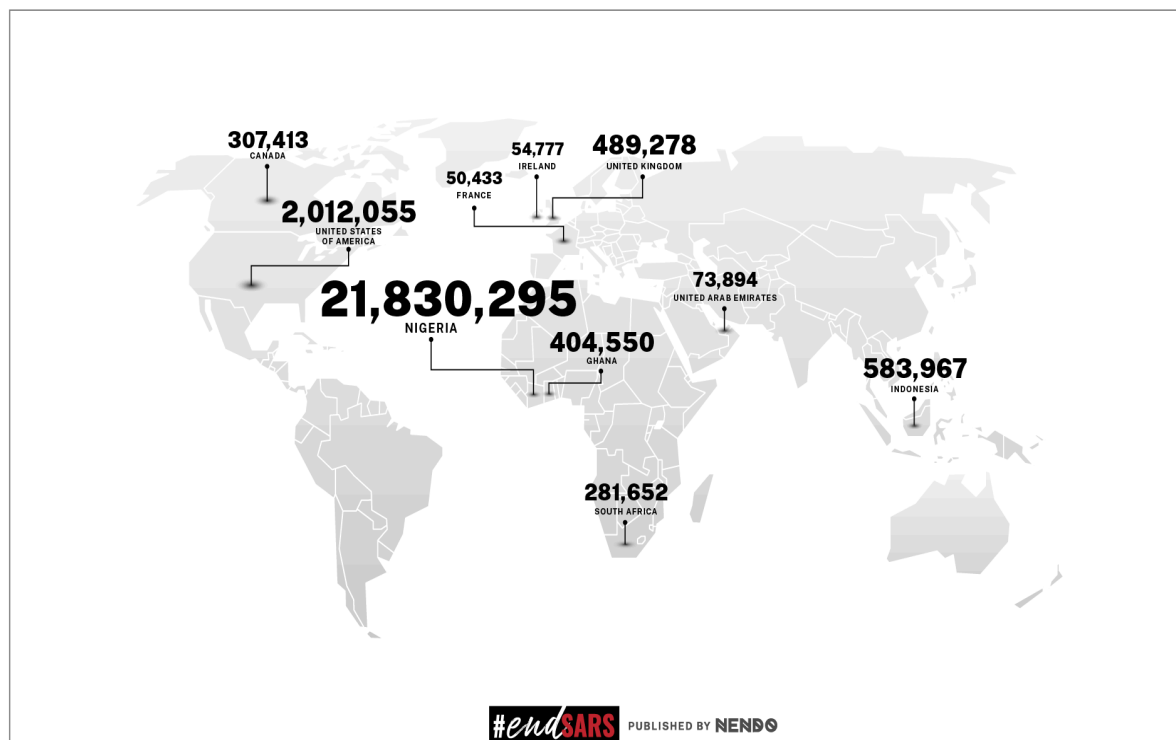


Figure 1 Volume of #EndSARS Mentions by Country

Source: (Brandwatch, 2020)

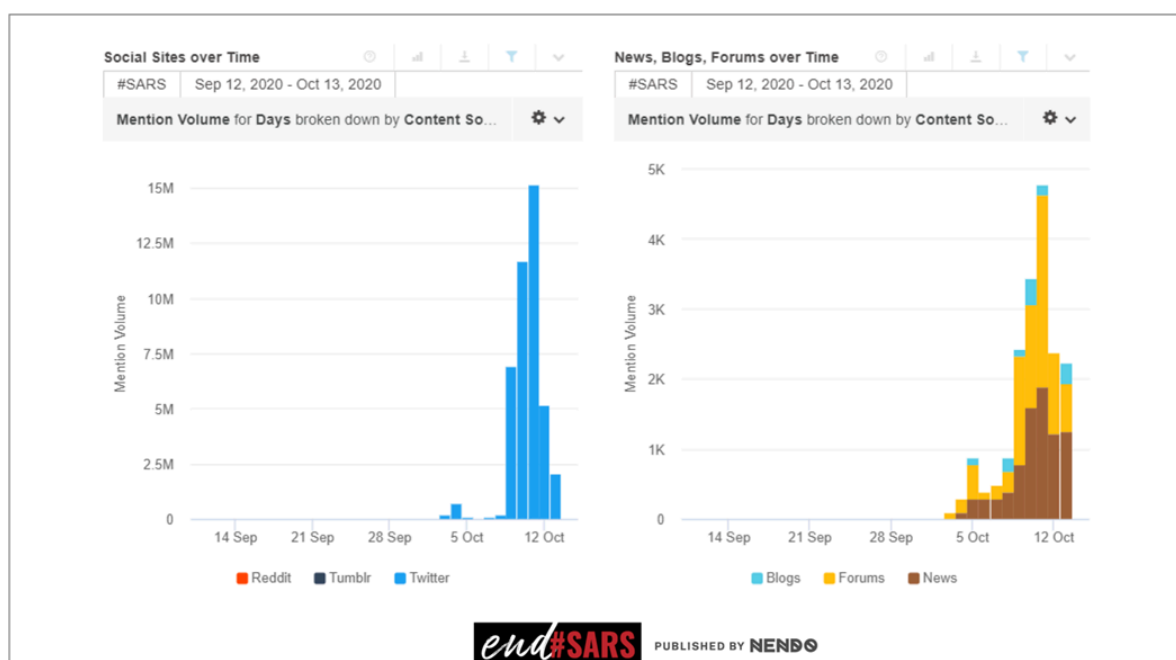


Figure 2 Use of X and Other Social Media Platforms During #EndSARS Source: (Brandwatch, 2023)

Beyond visibility, X shaped the movement’s strategic responsiveness. Activists used the platform to announce protest routes, mobilise logistics, alert others to attacks, and connect lawyers with detainees. These communicative practices helped protesters counter misinformation, navigate state surveillance, and maintain cohesion despite efforts to disrupt mobilisation. Even after the government announced the dissolution of SARS on 11 October 2020 (Ademoroti), digital momentum sustained public pressure and demanded accountability. X thus served as more than a communication tool – it became a public stage where Nigerian youth asserted agency, preserved collective memory, and transformed local grievances into a global call for justice.

Rooted in decades of frustration with police violence and institutional distrust, the #EndSARS protest offers fertile ground for examining how digital technologies

reshape mass mobilisation. Castells argues that the networked public sphere thrives on user participation and rapid information exchange – conditions that X intensifies through its design. Its affordances – hashtags, retweets, replies, and livestreams – enabled Nigerian youths to frame narratives, build solidarity, and sustain pressure in ways traditional media could not replicate. Yet, as Stepanova and Neblo remind us, digital mobilisation also carries inherent vulnerabilities: misinformation, surveillance, and echo chambers that complicate the promise of online activism.

This study draws on Castells' networked public sphere and Jenkins' participatory culture to illuminate the mechanisms through which X shaped the protest's communicative and organisational dynamics. Obar and Wildman highlight how digital platforms create interconnected spaces where individuals collaborate outside hierarchical structures. Jenkins, Ito, and Boyd emphasise the participatory ethos that transforms users from passive consumers into active co-creators of political meaning. Together, these frameworks help explain how #EndSARS grew organically, remained coherent despite decentralisation, and engaged both local and global publics.

Yet alternative perspectives, such as those advanced by Gladwell and Morozov, caution against overestimating digital activism's structural depth, arguing that online mobilisation may lack the enduring organisational scaffolding of traditional movements. Their critiques remind us that technology alone cannot deliver lasting reform. Nonetheless, by situating #EndSARS within these debates, this study highlights how digital platforms mediate both the possibilities and complexities of contemporary civic resistance. Ultimately, the #EndSARS movement demonstrates how X has become a stage for youth-led cultural performance, public imagination, and political agency in Nigeria and beyond.

Literature Review

Social media has become one of the most transformative communication infrastructures of the twenty-first century, reshaping public discourse, collective action, and the ways individuals construct shared meaning and mobilise around sociopolitical concerns. As Kaplan and Haenlein (qtd. in Akinyetun) note, these platforms are rooted in Web 2.0 technologies that allow users to create and exchange content, reflecting the participatory ethos that now underpins digital interaction. Scholars such as Davis, Shaw, and Nnaemeka emphasise that social media permeate everyday life – shaping how people form opinions, engage with public issues, and access information. With features that enable rapid circulation of posts, videos, and hyperlinks, social media facilitate communication across vast geographies with immediacy and emotional resonance (Hetler). This ubiquity has offered fertile ground for new forms of activism where users frame narratives, mobilise networks, and demand accountability in real time. Consequently, scholarship has increasingly turned to analysing how these digital platforms intersect with democratic participation, youth agency, and civic resistance.

The early twenty-first century witnessed a global surge in protest movements catalysed by digital technologies that served as vehicles for mobilisation and documentation. Mora argues that technology-mediated activism has become commonplace, supplementing and sometimes challenging traditional media as citizens monitor abuses, record violations, and coordinate resistance. Ortiz et al. observe that Sub-Saharan Africa alone recorded over 2,809 protests between 2006 and 2020, reflecting widespread disillusionment with governance, inequality, and institutional failures. The Arab Spring, Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement, and Nigeria's #EndSARS protests illustrate how social media amplify local grievances, generate international attention, and sustain collective momentum (Mora; Akinyetun 4–10; Khan 12–28). Lindsay underscores the role of digital platforms in crisis communication – facilitating rapid updates, crowdsourced assistance, and community engagement during unfolding events. Khan's discussion of Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation further demonstrates how social media enable local incidents to trigger global outrage, highlighting the political force of virality. Together, these studies show that digital media foster new modes of mobilisation anchored in affective expression, connective

action, and transnational solidarity.

Despite this promise, scholarly debates reveal divergent perspectives on the impact of social media on the success and organisational durability of protest movements. Stepanova cautions that social media often function more as catalysts than decisive forces, noting that online mobilisation cannot substitute for structured organisation or long-term political strategy. Gladwell similarly critiques digital activism for fostering “weak-tie” participation, arguing that online engagement may lack the depth and risk-bearing commitment associated with high-risk activism. Morozov adds that digital platforms may reinforce state power by enabling surveillance, manipulation, and the illusion of participation without structural change. These counterarguments remind us that digital mobilisation is inseparable from broader political contexts shaped by power and inequality. Nevertheless, scholars such as Akinyetun, Uwalaka and Nwala, and Okon highlight that social media still serve as organisational backbones that facilitate resource mobilisation, tactical coordination, and sustained visibility. The #EndSARS movement exemplifies this dual reality: digital platforms enabled significant mobilisation even as activists confronted misinformation, repression, and attempts to disrupt communication.

The public sphere remains a central analytical lens for understanding digital activism. Habermas conceptualised the public sphere as a space of deliberation where citizens discuss matters of common concern. Contemporary scholars argue that this sphere has expanded into digital spaces, where geographically dispersed users convene to deliberate, share news, and influence sociopolitical action (Nnaemeka). Friedland’s notion of the “networked public sphere” extends this concept by emphasising how digital technologies erode traditional media’s agenda-setting monopoly and lower participation barriers. Dunu and Uzochukwu characterise social media as dynamic virtual spaces where individuals and institutions contribute to discourse that shapes political life. These frameworks illuminate how digital platforms enable citizens to exercise agency, particularly in contexts where state-controlled media curtail public expression. At the same time, challenges such as echo chambers, filter bubbles, and digital divides expose the uneven nature of participation shaped by algorithms and access constraints (Castells; Neblo). While imperfect, the public sphere framework remains crucial for understanding how social media mediate collective identities and public opinion during civic upheavals.

Insights from media and performance studies complement these perspectives by conceptualising protest as a cultural performance. Alexander, Amin, and El-Khatib argue that demonstrations are not merely political events but expressive acts that communicate resistance through gestures, symbols, chants, and embodied actions. In digital contexts, these performances manifest through hashtags, images, livestreams, and narrative fragments that collectively form a repertoire of dissent. Nnaemeka highlights how #EndSARS activists used placards, chants, and livestreamed confrontations to craft powerful scripts of public resistance that circulated widely online. Jenkins’ theory of participatory culture reinforces this understanding by illustrating how digital platforms empower users to produce, remix, and distribute content that shapes the symbolic meaning of movements. Corral further notes that participatory culture thrives in collaborative environments where users collectively negotiate meaning. These expressive practices reveal why digital activism resonates strongly within youth cultures: social media become stages where individuals articulate grievances, assert dignity, and transform personal experiences into public demands.

The literature thus reveals a complex interplay between social media and contemporary protest cultures. On one hand, platforms like X enable rapid mobilisation, narrative framing, global visibility, and affective ties that sustain movements. On the other hand, they host misinformation, surveillance, and fragmentation, requiring activists to adapt constantly. Scholars largely agree that social media do not in themselves guarantee political change; instead, they shape the conditions under which movements emerge and evolve. The #EndSARS protest

exemplifies this dynamic, offering a vivid case study of how digital tools, youth agency, cultural expression, and structural constraints converge in shaping modern resistance.

This study draws primarily on two theoretical frameworks – Castells’ networked public sphere and Jenkins’ participatory culture – to analyse the role of X in the #EndSARS movement. Castells, as interpreted by Obar and Wildman, argues that the rise of internet-based platforms has expanded the public sphere into a decentralised network where individuals participate in horizontal communication. This framework is apt for understanding #EndSARS, where young Nigerians used X for rapid information exchange, emotional expression, and collective deliberation outside traditional media control. The platform’s affordances – hashtags, retweets, livestreams – align with Friedland’s assertion that digital platforms erode conventional agenda-setting power. Nonetheless, Castells and Neblo warn that algorithmic curation, echo chambers, and digital divides complicate discourse, revealing vulnerabilities in networked activism. These contradictions underscore the importance of analysing both the potential and the limits of digitally mediated resistance.

Complementing this perspective is Jenkins’ theory of participatory culture, which elucidates the expressive, creative, and collaborative practices that animated the movement. Jenkins, Ito, and Boyd argue that participatory culture flourishes in environments where users are encouraged to create and circulate content, collapsing boundaries between media producers and audiences. This conceptualisation helps explain the performative dimensions of #EndSARS, where young Nigerians documented abuses, shared symbolic artefacts, and curated hashtags that conveyed collective emotion and political urgency. Mora similarly observes that technology-mediated activism empowers ordinary people to document violations in real time, shifting narrative authority from institutions to citizens. Yet critiques by Stepanova, Gladwell, and Morozov caution against idealising participatory spaces, noting that digital activism may face structural limitations, weak-tie engagement, and risks of surveillance and misinformation. These counterarguments are essential for contextualising #EndSARS, which encountered digital repression despite its successes.

Together, the frameworks of Castells and Jenkins offer a nuanced lens for interpreting the communicative, organisational, and performative dimensions of #EndSARS. They reveal how digital platforms mediate collective identity formation, amplify marginalised voices, and facilitate rapid mobilisation, while also exposing movements to vulnerabilities shaped by technological design and political context. Applied to #EndSARS, these theories highlight how X enabled a decentralised yet coherent movement that connected personal stories to national demands and local struggles to global solidarities. Ultimately, the literature demonstrates how social media now play an indispensable – though imperfect – role in the cultural and political imagination of youth-led movements in Nigeria and beyond.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative survey design to investigate the role of X (formerly Twitter) in the mobilisation, coordination, and communication dynamics of the #EndSARS protest. A survey approach was adopted because it enables researchers to capture patterned behaviours, perceptions, and digital practices across a relatively large population of participants, particularly in movements where physical fieldwork may be constrained by post-protest sensitivities, safety concerns, and the dispersed nature of digital activism (Gabel et al. 3–5). The data collection period spanned two months – 9 April to 9 June 2022 – allowing respondents adequate time to participate voluntarily and without pressure. Although the event itself occurred in October 2020, post-movement surveys remain valuable for eliciting reflective accounts of digital participation, as demonstrated by studies of the Arab Spring and other networked movements, which also relied on retrospective digital-user narratives (Tufekci and Wilson 365–68; Breuer, Landon, and Farquhar 774). This temporal distance, however, introduces potential recall limitations, which are acknowledged later in the study’s

limitations.

A purposive–convenience sampling technique was adopted to ensure that individuals with relevant protest experience, digital familiarity, and prior engagement with X were well represented. Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of respondents who had interacted with #EndSARS content, while convenience sampling helped reach active digital communities that often congregate in fluid, informal online spaces such as activist group chats, youth networks, and protest-adjacent social clusters (Uwalaka and Nwala 179–81). The researcher disseminated the questionnaire primarily through Google Forms and social media activist networks, drawing on the insight that contemporary protest actors often treat digital platforms as organisational backbones for civic mobilisation (Segeberg and Bennett 198; Okon 17). Snowball sampling further extended the reach, as participants were encouraged to share the link with peers, reflecting the connective logic that also shaped the #EndSARS protests themselves.

A total of 537 responses were received. After screening for incomplete entries, concerns about surveillance noted by some respondents, and unintelligible submissions, 470 valid questionnaires remained for analysis. These data were stored securely on a password-protected device, and all participants were informed of the study's aims, anonymity assurance, and the voluntary nature of participation before opting in. Ethical compliance was maintained in accordance with the researcher's institutional guidelines, aligning with international best practices regarding digital-era research involving politically sensitive issues, where protecting respondents from traceability is of paramount concern (Lindsay 3–4; Hussain, Shahzad, and Saud 7).

To deepen contextual understanding beyond numerical trends, the study also incorporated a light content-oriented examination of publicly accessible tweets bearing the “#EndSARS” hashtag. This approach, though modest, follows established traditions in digital activism scholarship that treat social media posts as artefacts of collective meaning-making and cultural performance during protests (Alexander 33; Amin 56). The analysis was not computationally extensive; rather, it served to enrich interpretation by reflecting the tonal, thematic, and affective contours of protest communication already documented in parallel research such as Brandwatch's 2020 report. Although reliance on hashtag-based sampling has been critiqued for excluding non-hashtag users and for producing datasets that skew toward more visible or vocal participants (Rafail 197–200), hashtags nonetheless remain a legitimate and widely used mechanism for capturing thematic clusters and networked discourse during movement episodes (Jensen, Neumayer, and Rossi 63).

Data analysis relied on descriptive statistics, focusing on frequencies and percentages to illuminate participation patterns, communication practices, and perceived affordances of X during the #EndSARS protests. While inferential statistics could have offered deeper causal insights, descriptive analysis is consistent with early-stage exploratory studies of large-scale digital movements, where the objective is to map behaviours and perceptions rather than establish causal hierarchies (Brodock, Joyce, and Zaack 45). Tables were constructed to present respondent demographics, usage frequencies, perceived contributions of X, communication modes, global engagement patterns, and perceived risks such as misinformation, surveillance, and censorship. Each dataset provides an empirical foundation for later interpretation, though the study acknowledges that digital self-reporting comes with inherent biases including selective memory, social desirability tendencies, and differential platform literacy (Morozov 82; Cicognani et al. 565).

Finally, while the integration of Brandwatch's public analytics and tweet examples additional insights, the study recognises that digital trace data are shaped by platform algorithms, visibility hierarchies, and interface designs that privilege certain voices over others. Scholars such as Castells, van Dijck, and Tufekci caution that digital platforms are not neutral conduits of information but contested terrains where power, visibility, and datafication intersect with activism (Castells 54; Tufekci 370). This

awareness ensures that the methodology does not treat X as a transparent window into protest realities but rather as a socio-technical environment whose affordances both enabled and constrained the #EndSARS movement. The methodological choices therefore reflect a balance between pragmatism, accessibility, ethical care, and theoretical sensitivity to the complexities of studying digitally mediated protest movements.

Findings

The findings begin with an overview of respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, which provide crucial context for understanding participation patterns and digital engagement during the #EndSARS movement. The gender distribution reveals a noticeable imbalance, with male respondents forming the overwhelming majority. This pattern resonates with earlier studies indicating that, although women are increasingly present in digital spaces, they may be structurally or culturally discouraged from sustained political engagement online, especially in societies where gendered expectations shape public participation (Cicognani et al. 564–66). Such gender disparities are significant because they shape the interpretation of how digital activism unfolds across demographic lines. They also remind us that online movements do not always flatten social hierarchies, a counter-argument often raised by scholars who warn against romanticising social media's equalising potential (Morozov 79–81). Understanding these dynamics provides a necessary backdrop for interpreting subsequent data.

Table 1.1: Showing Respondents' Gender

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender:		
a. Male	331	70.4
b. Female	139	29.6
Total	470	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

The age distribution reveals that 18–24-year-olds dominate participation, reflecting youth-driven digital mobilisation but also raising questions about how well older demographics are represented in the movement (Bennett and Segerberg 199; Shaw 22–25).

Table 1.2: Showing Respondents' Age

Age:	Frequency	Percentage (%)
a. 18-24	248	52.8
b. 25-34	162	34.5
c. 35-44	50	10.6
d. 45-54	10	2.1
Total	470	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

Occupational data show students as the largest group of participants, aligning with youth-led protest trends but suggesting that other occupational groups may be underrepresented in visible digital activity (Uwalaka and Nwala 183; Mora 114).

Table 1.3: Showing Respondents' Occupation

Occupation:	Frequency	Percentage (%)
a. Student	310	66

b. Employed (Full-time)	118	25.1
c. Employed (Part-time)	10	2.1
d. Self-employed	28	6
e. Unemployed	4	0.8
Total	470	100

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork

Most respondents had active X accounts, reinforcing the platform’s centrality to #EndSARS communication while underscoring that offline and low-tech participants still shaped the movement’s broader ecosystem (Tufekci and Wilson 364; Stepanova 2).

Table 2: Showing Respondents with X Account

4. Do you have an X account?

a. Yes	288	61.3
b. No	182	38.7
Total	470	100

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork

Daily users formed the largest subgroup, illustrating that #EndSARS activism was embedded in routine digital practices, though some participants engaged meaningfully without frequent X usage (Segeberg and Bennett 203; Khamis and Vaughan).

Table 3: Showing How Frequent Respondents Use X Account

5. How frequently do you use X?		
a. Daily	106	36.8
b. Weekly	60	20.8
c. Monthly	12	4.2
d. Rarely	64	22.2
e. Never	46	16
Total	288	100

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork.

6. Have you ever participated in or supported the #EndSARS protest on X?		
a. Yes	147	51.0
b. No	141	49.0
Total	288	100

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork

Among those active on X, sharing information was the most common form of participation, reflecting the prominence of micro-contributions in digital activism while illustrating ongoing debates about the limits of low-cost engagement (Jenkins, Ito, and Boyd 21–24; Gladwell).

Table 4: Showing How Respondents Participated in #EndSARS Protest on X

7. If yes, in what capacity did you participate or support the #EndSARs protest on X?

a. Activist	20	6.5
b. Sharing Information	146	47.1
c. Donating	16	5.2
d. Others	128	41.2
Total	288	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

Respondents widely agreed that X was a major catalyst for mobilisation, mirroring theories of networked publics while affirming that underlying grievances – rather than technology alone – drove the movement (Castells 53–55; Stepanova 5).

Table 5: Showing the Extent to which X Served as a Catalyst

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
8. To what extent did X serve as a catalyst for the mass mobilisation during the #EndSARs protest?		
a. Very significant	338	72.0
b. Somewhat significant	88	18.7
c. Not significant	32	6.8
d. No responses	12	2.5
Total	470*	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

Hashtags, retweets, and trending topics were identified as the most influential features, underscoring the role of hashtag publics while also highlighting vulnerabilities such as rapid discourse and misinformation (Nnaemeka 19; Morozov 90).

Table 6: Showing Features of X that Played a Pivotal Role

9. Which specific features or aspects of X do you believe played a pivotal role in amplifying the messages and reach of the #EndSARs movement?

a. Hashtags	292	25.5
b. Retweets	250	21.8
c. Replies/Comments	152	13.3
d. Live streaming	164	14.3
e. Direct messaging	50	4.4

f. Trending topics	214	18.7
g. Others	24	2.0
Total	470*	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

Respondents noted that X facilitated organisation primarily through real-time updates and rapid coordination, although scholars warn that such fluid structures may limit long-term strategic capacity (Amin 59–62; Morozov 101).

Table 7: Showing How X Contributed to Organisation and Coordination

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
10. How do you think social media, particularly X, contributed to the organization and coordination of the #EndSARS protest?		
a. Facilitated communication	348	74.0
b. Mobilized resources	56	12.0
c. Enhanced planning	32	6.8
d. Other	18	3.8
Total	470*	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

Real-time updates, tagging, and group chats were central to communication, illustrating how public and semi-private channels interacted within the movement's hybrid communication ecosystem (Lindsay 7; Davis 3).

Table 8: Showing How X Facilitated Communication

11. How did X facilitate communication among #EndSARs activists during the protest?		
a. Real-time updates	272	57.9
b. Group chats	32	6.8
c. Mention/tagging	118	25.1
d. Other	20	4.2
Total	470*	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

Hashtags, activist accounts, and news organisations emerged as key dissemination channels, reflecting the hybrid media system where institutional and citizen-generated content intersect (Hussain, Shahzad, and Saud 14–16; Chadwick).

Table 9: Showing Main Channels for Real-Time Information Dissemination

12. What were the main channels through which real-time information was disseminated on Twitter during the #EndSARs protest?

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a. News organizations	196	22.7
b. Activists' accounts	268	31.0
c. Government accounts	60	7.0
d. Hashtags	310	35.8
e. Others	30	3.5
Total	470*	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

Respondents agreed that X helped attract global audiences, enabling transnational solidarity while revealing the limits of international attention when not backed by sustained advocacy (Tufekci and Wilson 372; Amin 72).

Table 10: Showing the Role X Played in Engaging Global Audiences

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
13. In your view, what role did Twitter play in engaging global audiences and fostering transnational solidarity during the #EndSARs protest?		
a. Significant	340	72.3
b. Somewhat significant	76	16.3
c. Not significant	26	5.5
Total	470*	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

X amplified local voices and reshaped public opinion by enabling citizens to challenge state narratives, though its rapid communication cycles sometimes compressed complex debates (Olise and Nnaane 17; Gladwell).

Table 11: Showing How X Impacted the Local Narrative

14. How did X impact the narrative surrounding the #EndSARs protest within Nigeria?		
a. Amplified local voices	290	61.7
b. Shifted public opinion	80	17.0
c. Maintained the status quo	48	10.2
d. Others	22	4.7
Total	470	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

A majority felt that X significantly shaped the international narrative, extending the movement's visibility globally but also risking misalignments between external perceptions and domestic realities (Brandwatch 2020; Nanabhay and Farmanfarmaian 580).

Table 12: Showing How X Influenced the International Narrative

15. Were there specific instances where X influenced the international narrative of the #EndSARs protest?

a. Yes	390	83.0
b. No	48	10.2
Total	470	100

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork

Respondents identified misinformation and surveillance as major challenges, reflecting broader concerns about digital repression, trust erosion, and the strategic use of monitoring by the state (Akerlele-Popoola, Azeez, and Adeniyi; Rafail 200).

Table 13: Showing Challenges Faced by #EndSARS Protesters on X

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16. What challenges did the #EndSARs protest face on Twitter (X)?		
a. Spread of misinformation	288	44.7
b. Online surveillance	232	36.0
c. Digital echo chambers	88	13.7
d. Others	36	5.6
Total	470*	100

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork

More than half perceived risks of surveillance or censorship, reinforcing arguments about activism under monitoring and the adaptive countermeasures activists adopt in response (Morozov 102–05; Khan 14–16).

Table 14: Showing Respondents’ Perceived Risk of Surveillance

17. Did you perceive a risk of online surveillance or censorship during the #EndSARs protest on X?

a. Yes	270	57.4
b. No	122	26.0
Total	470*	100

Source: Researcher’s Fieldwork

Respondents also observed community-driven misinformation countermeasures, though such efforts often struggle against the speed and volume of false content in digital spaces (Dunu and Uzochukwu 14–16; Shaw 27).

Table 15: Showing Efforts to Combat Spread of Misinformation

18. Did you observe any efforts to combat the spread of

misinformation during the #EndSARs protest on X?

a. Yes	270	57.4
b. No	170	36.2
Total	470*	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

Finally, respondents noted several tactics used to counter surveillance or censorship, demonstrating activist adaptability while reflecting persistent structural vulnerabilities in platform governance (Khan 19; Bolin 12).

Table 16: Showing Respondents' Acknowledgement of Countering Surveillance

19. Were there any notable instances of the #EndSARs movement countering online surveillance or censorship?

a. Yes	286	60.8
b. No	156	33.2
Total	470*	100

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

Discussion

The findings of this study illuminate the centrality of X in shaping the communicative, organisational, and symbolic character of the #EndSARS movement. The demographic profile – dominated by young, digitally fluent respondents – reinforces earlier scholarship asserting that contemporary movements draw strength from youth cultures that merge personal expression with civic action in fluid, networked ways (Bennett and Segerberg 198; Akinyetun 3). Their strong presence underscores how digital infrastructures have become embedded in the social rhythms of young Nigerians, enabling them to document injustice, articulate grievances, and build solidarities with remarkable immediacy. Yet these patterns also reinforce critiques suggesting that digital mobilisation may replicate existing inequalities, particularly where gendered social norms inhibit women's political visibility (Cicognani et al. 563–65). Thus, while X expanded opportunities for participation, access to voice remained uneven.

The findings also demonstrate that X served as both catalyst and connective tissue for the movement, consistent with Castells' theorisation of networked publics as decentralised arenas where power circulates horizontally (Castells 53–55). Hashtags, retweets, and live-streamed content enabled participants to craft real-time counter-narratives that contested state messaging and reshaped national consciousness. These practices mirror earlier insights on the Arab Spring, where user-generated content destabilised official narratives and amplified civic demands (Nanabhai and Farmanfarmanian 573; Khamis and Vaughan). Yet Stepanova's caution that social media accelerates mobilisation without guaranteeing structural cohesion is equally relevant here (Stepanova 2). The swift, emotionally charged visibility offered by X did not automatically translate into durable strategic leadership, leaving the movement vulnerable once state repression intensified.

The hybrid nature of the protest – spanning digital and physical spaces – further aligns with scholarship describing the merging of offline grievances with online connective action (Segerberg and Bennett 203). Real-time updates, tagging, and activist-driven information flows facilitated agile coordination, helping protesters

navigate risk, respond to threats, and sustain momentum. At the same time, respondents' concerns about misinformation, surveillance, and censorship reveal the double-edged character of digital activism. These findings echo Morozov's argument that platforms function not only as tools of dissent but also as infrastructures of monitoring and control that may discipline or endanger activists (Morozov 101–05). The Nigerian context reflects this tension: while X enabled unprecedented visibility, it also exposed protesters to state surveillance and algorithmic vulnerabilities.

The movement's global resonance – affirmed by respondents and visible in transnational expressions of solidarity – extends earlier claims that digital platforms collapse geographic boundaries and embed local struggles within global moral economies (Tufekci and Wilson 372). However, scholars such as Amin warn that global visibility may invite fleeting attention, raising questions about its long-term utility (Amin 72). For #EndSARS, international support amplified urgency but did not wholly alter the trajectory of state response.

Ultimately, the findings reveal a movement shaped by digital affordances, youth energy, and civic frustration, but constrained by structural inequalities, information volatility, and surveillance pressures. X was a powerful amplifier, yet not an equaliser; a catalyst, but not a substitute for enduring political organisation. These insights contribute to broader debates on digital activism by demonstrating how platform logics, socio-political contexts, and user agency intersect to shape the possibilities and limits of contemporary protest.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that X played a pivotal role in shaping the communicative fabric and mobilisation dynamics of the #EndSARS movement. Its affordances – hashtags, live updates, retweets, and user-generated documentation – enabled young Nigerians to amplify grievances, coordinate actions, and project their voices into national and global arenas. Yet the findings also underscore that while X accelerated visibility and facilitated decentralised organisation, it did not eliminate longstanding structural constraints, nor did it shield participants from misinformation, surveillance, or state repression. These tensions affirm Castells' view of networked movements as powerful but vulnerable formations, shaped by both digital possibility and socio-political fragility. Ultimately, the #EndSARS experience illustrates that social media can catalyse transformation but cannot substitute the sustained institutional, civic, and organisational work required for deep reform. The study contributes to ongoing debates about digital activism, showing that platform-mediated protest remains both indispensable and inherently limited within contemporary struggles for justice.

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