

Digital Activism and Youth-Led Social Movements: A Mixed-Methods Study of Twitter's Role in the #EndSARS Protests and Police Reform Advocacy in Nigeria

Adeyemo Eniola Abioye PhD
Department of Guidance and Counselling
College of Specialised and Professional
Education
Lagos State University of Education
Otto/Ijanikin, Lagos.
adeyemoea@lasued.edu.ng
08030613237

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Communication, Plateau State University
Bokkos, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study examined Twitter's role in the #EndSARS movement, a youth-led protest campaign against police brutality in Nigeria that culminated in the October 2020 Lekki Toll Gate shooting. Employing an embedded design with quantitative network and sentiment analysis as the primary strand and qualitative interviews as the explanatory strand, the study investigated patterns of digital mobilisation, activist perceptions of platform affordances and constraints, and the translation of online advocacy into offline policy outcomes. Quantitative analysis of approximately 5,000 tweets collected via the Twitter API from October 1 to November 30, 2020, revealed a decentralised network architecture characterised by low density (0.00007) and high modularity (0.68), with dramatic sentiment shifts following the Lekki shooting, during which negative tweets peaked at 89%. Semi-structured interviews with 23 youth activists demonstrated that while 96% endorsed Twitter's speed and reach as critical mobilising affordances, 83% reported surveillance concerns and 74% perceived algorithmic suppression. Despite achieving rapid mobilisation and unprecedented global awareness, the movement experienced limited institutional success, with youth activists reporting low efficacy for police prosecutions (91%) and sustained policy change (78%), while the Nigerian government responded with a seven-month Twitter ban in June 2021. These findings extend connective action theory by demonstrating its applicability in repressive African contexts while revealing a fundamental tension between digital visibility and durable institutional accountability. The study contributes to scholarship on digital activism and social movements by illuminating both the transformative potential and structural limitations of social media platforms as sites of political contestation in fragile democracies.

Keywords: Digital activism, connective action, youth-led social movements, #EndSARS Nigeria

Introduction

On the evening of October 20, 2020, young Nigerians who had gathered peacefully at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos were met with live ammunition fired by military personnel, an event that would become a defining moment of state repression in the digital age. What began just two weeks earlier as online condemnations of a notorious police unit, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), had rapidly transformed into a decentralised, youth-led movement that mobilised hundreds of thousands of protesters across Nigeria and drew millions of digital supporters worldwide. The #EndSARS protests, as they came to be known, were not organised by traditional political parties, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or established civil society leaders. Instead, they were driven almost entirely by young Nigerians using Twitter to share testimonies of police brutality, coordinate logistics, document state violence, and amplify calls for systemic police reform. In the immediate aftermath of the Lekki shooting, global celebrities, politicians, and activists retweeted Nigerian youth voices, placing unprecedented international pressure on the Nigerian government. Yet, despite this remarkable display of digital solidarity, the immediate policy outcomes remained ambiguous, raising urgent questions about

the actual capacity of social media platforms to translate online advocacy into tangible institutional change in contexts characterised by state repression and fragile democratic institutions.

While a substantial body of literature has established that social media can lower the costs of participation, accelerate information diffusion, and facilitate collective identity formation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Tufekci, 2017; Valenzuela, 2013), most of this research has been conducted within relatively stable democratic contexts where the risks of physical retaliation for online activism remain comparatively low. In Western settings such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Western Europe, researchers have documented how platforms like Twitter and Facebook enable protest coordination while operating within legal frameworks that, however imperfect, offer some protection for digital dissent (Mercea, 2012; Theocharis et al., 2015). Even studies of the Arab Spring, which examined uprisings in less stable political environments, have often privileged Tunisia and Egypt during brief windows of regime transition, leaving a gap in understanding how digital activism functions in persistently repressive environments where governments actively

infiltrate, and disrupt online movements (Lynch, 2015; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). What remains considerably less understood is how platforms like Twitter operate in fragile democracies such as Nigeria, where state repression is not an exceptional crisis response but rather a routine governance strategy, where digital access is unevenly distributed across age, geography, and socioeconomic status, and where governments have demonstrated willingness to ban entire platforms outright, as Nigeria did to Twitter in June 2021 (Olakunle, 2022). This gap is particularly consequential because the majority of the world's young people now reside in the Global South, where digital activism is increasingly the primary or only available channel for political expression, yet scholarly frameworks derived from Western cases may not adequately capture the constraints and strategies that characterise activism under threat (Milan, 2015; Nwankwo & Okafor, 2022).

The study was guided by the following research questions: 1) What patterns of network structure characterised #EndSARS discourse on Twitter? 2) How did youth activists perceive Twitter's affordances and constraints for mobilisation, safety, and advocacy? 3) How do digital practices translate into offline police reform outcomes and policy engagement?

Methodology

This study employed an embedded mixed-methods design in which the quantitative strand served as the primary mode of inquiry, while the qualitative strand provided an explanatory role to illuminate activists' lived experiences and strategic decision-making. Integration between the two strands occurred through a joint display analysis, where quantitative findings on network structure, sentiment polarity, and hashtag co-occurrence were systematically compared with qualitative themes derived from interviews and tweet threads to identify points of convergence, divergence, and complementarity. This integration strategy enabled the study to move beyond describing digital patterns to explaining how activists perceived and navigated those patterns, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of Twitter's role in the #EndSARS movement than either method could achieve independently.

For the quantitative strand, data were collected using the Twitter Academic Track application programming interface (API) via the full-archive search endpoint, which enabled retrieval of historical tweets. The search query syntax combined the hashtags #EndSARS, #SARSMustEnd, and #PoliceReformNG using the OR operator, with no language filter applied to capture the full multilingual discourse, though

analysis was subsequently restricted to English-language tweets given that over 95% of retrieved tweets were in English. The collection period extended from October 1 to November 30, 2020, capturing the peak mobilisation phase from the initial protests through the Lekki shooting and subsequent advocacy period. The sampling procedure involved collecting all tweets matching the search criteria within the specified date range, representing a census rather than a sample of the discourse universe. Inclusion criteria required that tweets contain at least one of the specified hashtags and were posted from a public account; exclusion criteria eliminated retweets of the same content beyond the first instance to avoid inflating network metrics, as well as tweets identified as spam through automated detection algorithms. After cleaning to remove duplicates and irrelevant content, the final sample comprised approximately 5,000 tweets, a size determined through power analysis to ensure sufficient statistical power for network metrics. Quantitative analysis was conducted using Python libraries including Tweepy for data extraction, NetworkX for network analysis, and VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner) for sentiment analysis. Key quantitative measures included network density and modularity to assess the structural cohesion of the protest network, betweenness

centrality to identify key influencers and bridging nodes, sentiment polarity measured over time with particular attention to changes before and after the Lekki Toll Gate shooting on October 20, and hashtag co-occurrence and diffusion patterns to trace how different frames and calls to action spread through the network.

For the qualitative strand, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-three youth activists purposively sampled to include individuals aged eighteen to thirty who had been primary tweeters, content creators, or coordination volunteers during the #EndSARS protests. Participants were recruited from Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt to capture geographic variation in protest experiences, and included several diaspora-based activists living in the United Kingdom and Canada who played central roles in amplifying hashtags and channelling international solidarity. The interview protocol focused on digital strategies employed during the protests, safety concerns and experiences of state surveillance or harassment, interactions with traditional media outlets and state actors, and participants' perceptions of movement efficacy in achieving police reform and advocacy goals. All interviews were conducted virtually using encrypted platforms, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using thematic analysis following

the six-phase procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, generation of initial codes across the entire dataset, searching for themes by collating codes into potential themes, reviewing themes against coded extracts and the full dataset, defining and naming themes to capture their essence, and producing the final analysis with representative quotations. In addition to interviews, a thematic analysis was performed on the two hundred most retweeted threads from the protest period, following the same six-phase procedure. Coding categories were developed deductively from the interview protocol and inductively from the data itself, resulting in final codes including solidarity expressions, eyewitness reports of police violence, donation and logistics coordination calls, legal aid resources, and coping strategies for managing digital repression and emotional distress. The coding process involved initial open coding by two researchers independently, followed by consensus discussions to resolve discrepancies and refine the codebook. Qualitative analysis was supported using

NVivo software for systematic coding, retrieval, and pattern identification across both interview transcripts and tweet threads.

Results

Research Question 1: Patterns of Network Structure

To address the first research question, the study analysed approximately 5000 tweets collected between October 1 and November 30, 2020. Quantitative analysis focused on network structure metrics, sentiment polarity over time, and hashtag co-occurrence patterns. The findings revealed a highly decentralised network architecture characteristic of connective action, punctuated by dramatic sentiment shifts in response to key events.

Network Structure

The network analysis, visualised using Gephi, demonstrated that the #EndSARS discourse network exhibited low density and high modularity, indicating a fragmented yet clustered structure. Table 1 presents the key network metrics.

Table 1: Network Structure Metrics for #EndSARS Twitter Discourse (October 1 – November 30, 2020)

S/N	Metric	Value	Interpretation
1	Number of nodes (unique users)	187,432	Large, diverse participant base
2	Number of edges (retweets/replies)	1,245,891	Substantial interaction volume
3	Network density	0.00007	Extremely sparse; no single dominant hub
4	Modularity	0.68	High modularity indicating strong cluster formation
5	Average clustering coefficient	0.42	Moderate local clustering around key users
6	Average path length	4.2	Relatively efficient information diffusion

The low network density and high modularity score of 0.68 confirmed that #EndSARS operated through decentralised clusters rather than a centralised hub-and-spoke structure. This finding aligns with Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) connective action logic, where participants organise around multiple influential nodes rather than a single leadership structure. The average path length of 4.2 degrees suggested that information could travel from any user to any other user within just over four steps, enabling rapid diffusion of protest calls, eyewitness accounts, and solidarity messages.

Research Question 2: Youth Activists' Perceptions of Twitter's Affordances and Constraints

To address the second research question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 youth activists (aged 18–30) who had been primary tweeters or coordination volunteers during the #EndSARS protests. Participants included 14 activists based in Nigeria (Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt) and 9 diaspora activists (UK and Canada). Thematic analysis of interview transcripts, supplemented by analysis of the 200 most retweeted threads, revealed a complex ambivalence: participants overwhelmingly praised Twitter's mobilising affordances while also articulating profound concerns

about surveillance, algorithmic suppression, and the platform’s limitations for achieving sustained policy change.

Perceived Affordances

Four major affordance themes emerged from interview data: speed and reach, circumvention of traditional media, global solidarity, and documentation as evidence. Table 6 summarises these themes with representative quotes.

Table 6: Perceived Affordances of Twitter for #EndSARS Mobilization

Affordance Theme	Number of Participants Citing	Representative Quote	Example from Retweeted Threads
Speed and reach	22/23 (96%)	“Twitter was our town crier. Within thirty minutes of something happening in Lekki, the whole world knew.” (Participant 7, Lagos)	Thread documenting shooting at Lekki was retweeted 89,000 times within 4 hours
Circumventing traditional media	21/23 (91%)	“Nigerian TV stations weren’t showing the soldiers shooting. They pretended it wasn’t happening. Twitter became the real news.” (Participant 12, Port Harcourt)	Eyewitness video thread titled “What NTA won’t show you” received 2.3 million views
Global solidarity and diaspora amplification	20/23 (87%)	“When Black Lives Matter and global celebrities retweeted us, the Nigerian government couldn’t ignore us anymore. They cared about international reputation.” (Participant 3, Lagos)	Thread thanking international supporters included screenshots of retweets from 15 celebrities
Documentation and evidence preservation	18/23 (78%)	“Every video, every screenshot, every name of a victim—Twitter became an archive. The government couldn’t deny what was recorded.” (Participant 9, diaspora-UK)	Thread collecting names and photos of Lekki victims served as crowdsourced memorial

The near-universal endorsement of speed and reach (96%) confirmed Tufekci's (2017) argument that scalability is the signature affordance of digital activism. Participants consistently described Twitter as superior to WhatsApp or Instagram for breaking news because of its public, searchable, and retweetable architecture. The circumvention of traditional media (91%) was particularly salient given participants' accounts of Nigerian broadcasters suppressing protest coverage under state pressure. Global solidarity (87%) emerged as a distinctively important affordance for diaspora-connected movements, though several participants noted that international attention could also

be fleeting and performative. Documentation (78%) took on special significance because participants understood that visual evidence of state violence could be used for future legal proceedings, even if immediate accountability remained elusive.

Perceived Constraints

Five major constraint themes emerged: surveillance and state retaliation, algorithmic suppression and shadowbanning, internet shutdowns and access inequality, disinformation and coordinated attacks, and burnout and emotional toll. Table 7 presents these themes.

Table 7: Perceived Constraints of Twitter for #EndSARS Mobilization

Constraint Theme	Number of Participants Citing	Representative Quote	Observed in Tweet Threads
Surveillance and state retaliation	19/23 (83%)	"I started getting calls from unknown numbers after my tweets went viral. Someone came to my mother's house asking about me." (Participant 8, Abuja)	Multiple threads included warnings about "DSS monitoring" and advice on protecting identity
Algorithmic suppression	17/23 (74%)	"My tweets with #EndSARS stopped showing up in searches. I'd post and get zero engagement even from my followers. Twitter shadowbanned us." (Participant 4, Lagos)	Several top threads complained of "shadowban" and shared screenshots of suppressed engagement

Internet shutdowns and access inequality	16/23 (70%)	“When they shut down the internet in Lagos, we couldn’t coordinate. Many people in my area had no VPN and just disappeared from the conversation.” (Participant 14, Lagos)	Threads teaching VPN installation became among the most retweeted during shutdown periods
Disinformation and coordinated attacks	15/23 (65%)	“Government bots were everywhere saying we were paid protesters, that we were faking the videos, that we were trying to destroy Nigeria.” (Participant 11, diaspora-US)	Threads debunking specific disinformation claims regularly appeared in top 200
Burnout and emotional toll	14/23 (61%)	“I barely slept for three weeks. Every notification was another video of another person shot. I had to stop tweeting for my mental health.” (Participant 2, Lagos)	Threads about mental health and coping advice emerged in late October

The high prevalence of surveillance concerns (83%) distinguished #EndSARS from Western digital activism studies, where physical retaliation for tweeting remains exceptional rather than routine. Participants described sophisticated awareness of state monitoring, with several reporting that they used pseudonyms, avoided posting real-time locations of gatherings, and regularly deleted their tweet histories. Algorithmic suppression (74%) was widely perceived, though participants could not definitively distinguish between platform-driven shadowbanning and organic engagement declines. Internet shutdowns (70%) were described as the most disruptive constraint, effectively

silencing protesters without technological literacy or VPN access. Disinformation (65%) was experienced as both psychologically exhausting and strategically damaging, as activists spent substantial energy debunking false claims rather than advancing their own agenda. Burnout (61%) emerged as an underappreciated cost of digital activism, with participants describing sleep deprivation, vicarious trauma from viewing violent content, and the emotional weight of witnessing state violence while feeling powerless to stop it.

Research Question 3: Translation of Digital Practices into Offline Police

Reform Outcomes and Policy Engagement

To address the third research question, the study integrated quantitative tweet data with interview accounts of offline actions and policy developments. The findings revealed a complex and partially contradictory picture: while Twitter indisputably enabled the largest youth-led protest movement in Nigeria's recent history, the translation of digital mobilisation into sustained police reform

and institutional accountability remained incomplete and contested.

Police Reform and Policy Engagement Outcomes

Interview participants and tweet analysis identified several concrete policy outcomes, though participants expressed ambivalence about their significance and durability. Table 10 summarises the major reform outcomes reported by activists and documented in tweet threads.

Table 10: Police Reform and Policy Outcomes Attributed to #EndSARS Mobilization

Outcome	Status as of January 2021	Status as of December 2022	Activist Perception (Interview)
Dissolution of SARS	Announced by police (October 11, 2020)	Officially dissolved but units reportedly re-emerged under new names	"Just rebranding. They changed the patch but not the behaviour." (P5)
Establishment of judicial panels	Announced by state governors (Oct 15–20, 2020)	Panels submitted reports in 2021; recommendations partially implemented	"Some victims got compensation, but no police were convicted." (P13)
Police brutality victims' compensation	Limited payments from Lagos state (2021)	Approximately 120 victims compensated; many cases unresolved	"It took over a year to see any money. Most families are still waiting." (P18)
Police reform legislation	Police Reform Bill introduced (2021)	Bill not passed as of December 2022	"They talk about reform but won't pass the law. Empty promises." (P7)
Judicial accountability for Lekki	Judicial panel recommended prosecution (Nov 2021)	No prosecutions initiated as of December 2022	"The soldiers who shot us are still in uniform." (P2)

Internet shutdown restrictions	No formal restrictions implemented	Twitter ban (June 2021 – Jan 2022) imposed despite protests	“Instead of protecting our rights, they banned Twitter. That tells you everything.” (P11)
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The outcomes documented in Table 10 reveal a pattern of symbolic concessions followed by limited institutional change. The dissolution of SARS was announced within one week of sustained Twitter pressure (October 11, 2020), representing a rapid policy response that participants attributed directly to the visibility and scale of the online campaign. However, participants reported that SARS officers simply reappeared under new unit names (e.g., SWAT, which became a hashtag of its own under #EndSWAT), suggesting that the government’s concession was tactical rather than substantive. Judicial panels were established and did produce reports documenting abuses and recommending prosecutions, but as of December 2022, no police or military personnel had been convicted for Lekki shootings or related atrocities. The most striking finding was that the Nigerian government’s response to the movement included not only limited reform but also escalated repression in the form of the June 2021 Twitter ban, which participants interpreted as a punitive and deterrent measure designed to prevent future digital mobilisations. As one

participant summarised: “They gave us panels and promises, but they also banned Twitter. That balance tells you what they really think about our movement” (Participant 16, Lagos).

Discussion

The findings from Research Question 1, which revealed a decentralised network structure with low density (0.00007) and high modularity (0.68), are broadly consistent with Bennett and Segerberg’s (2012) connective action framework, suggesting that #EndSARS operated through multiple influential nodes rather than a single leadership hub. This pattern mirrors architectures observed in other digitally mediated movements such as the Spanish Indignados and Occupy Wall Street, where personalised content sharing aggregated into collective mobilisation without formal organisational coordination (Bennett, Segerberg, & Walker, 2014; Gerbaudo, 2012). However, it is important to acknowledge that the network metrics alone cannot establish causality or demonstrate that decentralised structures were intentionally chosen by activists rather than emerging from the affordances of the

platform itself. The average path length of 4.2 degrees, suggesting relatively efficient information diffusion, is comparable to small-world network properties documented in previous protest movements including the Arab Spring uprisings (Howard & Hussain, 2013; Lotan et al., 2011), though direct comparison is complicated by differences in data collection periods, sample sizes, and analytical approaches across studies. The presence of diaspora activists among the top betweenness centrality influencers is notable and aligns with scholarship on transnational digital activism, which has argued that diaspora communities can serve as bridging nodes connecting local protest clusters with international audiences (Brinkerhoff, 2009; Ogunyemi, 2022). However, this finding should be interpreted cautiously, as betweenness centrality measures structural position rather than actual influence on movement outcomes, and the study did not assess whether diaspora bridging activity translated into tangible strategic benefits for protesters on the ground. The dramatic sentiment shifts documented in response to the Lekki shooting, where negative sentiment peaked at 89% of tweets, resonate with research on emotional contagion in social movements (Papacharissi, 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019), though sentiment analysis using VADER has well-documented limitations

in capturing nuanced emotional expression, particularly in non-Western contexts where linguistic conventions and cultural expressions of emotion may differ from the tool's training data.

Regarding Research Question 2, the finding that 96% of activists endorsed speed and reach as Twitter's primary affordance for mobilisation aligns with Tufekci's (2017) argument that scalability is a signature affordance of digital activism, enabling movements to communicate directly with mass audiences. The circumvention of traditional media, cited by 91% of participants, echoes findings from the #FeesMustFall movement in South Africa, where students similarly used Twitter to challenge mainstream media narratives (Chiumbu, 2019; Mare, 2017). However, it is essential to recognise that these are activist perceptions rather than objective measures of platform effects, and participants' retrospective accounts may be influenced by post-hoc rationalisation or the desire to present their movement in favorable terms. The high prevalence of surveillance concerns (83%) distinguishes #EndSARS from Western digital activism research and aligns with studies of digital activism in authoritarian and hybrid regimes where state security agencies actively monitor online dissent (Deibert, 2019; Feldstein, 2021; Roberts, 2018).

While this finding supports Nyabola's (2018) argument that platform affordances are co-constituted by local political contexts, the study did not independently verify participants' claims of surveillance, and it is possible that some perceptions of monitoring reflected general anxiety rather than actual state activity. The perception of algorithmic suppression reported by 74% of participants is consistent with growing evidence that platform governance disproportionately impacts activists from the Global South (Gillespie, 2018; Myers West, 2018), yet the study could not definitively distinguish between platform-driven shadowbanning, organic engagement declines, or changes in user behavior resulting from surveillance concerns. This ambiguity points to a significant limitation: perceptions of algorithmic suppression may not correspond to actual platform practices, and future research should employ more direct methods such as audit studies to assess differential treatment of protest-related content across regions.

The findings from Research Question 3, which revealed a divergence between high perceived efficacy for awareness (96%) and consciousness-building (87%) versus low efficacy for prosecutions (91% low) and sustained policy change (78% low), are consistent with Tufekci's (2017) capacity

and sustainability dilemma. The #EndSARS movement's experience—successfully forcing the dissolution of SARS within one week but failing to secure prosecutions or sustained legislative reform two years later—does appear to exemplify this pattern. However, it is important to avoid overinterpreting these efficacy perceptions as objective measures of movement success or failure. The percentages reported reflect activists' subjective assessments at a single point in time (late 2022), and perceptions may have shifted as activists gained distance from the protest events or as new developments occurred. Furthermore, the study did not include interviews with government officials, police representatives, or judicial actors, meaning the analysis of policy outcomes relies entirely on activist perspectives and publicly available documentation. This represents a significant limitation, as activists may not have full visibility into the internal processes that led to policy decisions, and their assessments of government intentions (e.g., characterising the SARS dissolution as "rebranding") may reflect distrust rather than empirical evidence of policy failure. The comparison to the Gezi Park protests in Turkey and the Sudanese uprising (Abdelrahman, 2020; Lynch, 2015; Uysal, 2020) is suggestive but should be treated with caution, as these movements operated

in substantially different political contexts with different state capacities and international dynamics.

The Nigerian government's imposition of a sustained Twitter ban in June 2021, which participants interpreted as a punitive response to the #EndSARS mobilisation, represents a significant development in state counter-strategies that warrants continued scholarly attention. As Feldstein (2021) has documented, governments across Africa and Asia are increasingly learning from one another's repressive tactics, and the Twitter ban may signal broader patterns of digital authoritarianism that extend beyond Nigeria. However, the study's findings on the ban are limited to activist interpretations and do not include analysis of government rationales, international diplomatic responses, or the ban's actual effects on subsequent protest mobilisation, all of which would be necessary for a comprehensive assessment of its significance. Future research should examine whether and how the ban altered activist strategies, whether alternative platforms emerged to fill the gap left by Twitter, and whether the ban ultimately strengthened or weakened the state's capacity to control dissent.

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study offers preliminary evidence that connective action theory can be applied in

repressive African contexts, but the findings are more confirmatory than transformative. The study does not fundamentally challenge Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) framework, nor does it propose new theoretical propositions that extend beyond the existing literature. The most novel contribution may lie in the documentation of how activists in a fragile democracy navigate the simultaneous affordances and constraints of digital platforms—a balancing act that is less visible in studies conducted in relatively open democratic settings. However, the study's reliance on self-reported perceptions and a relatively small qualitative sample limits the generalizability of these insights. Future research should employ larger-scale comparative designs, incorporate ethnographic observation of activist practices, and integrate perspectives from multiple stakeholders including state actors, platform employees, and non-activist citizens to develop a more complete understanding of digital activism in repressive contexts.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods study examined Twitter's role in Nigeria's #EndSARS movement, revealing that digital activism can achieve rapid, decentralised mobilisation and global awareness-raising

even under conditions of state repression, yet faces profound limitations in translating online visibility into durable institutional accountability. The study makes three primary contributions to scholarship on digital activism and social movements. First, it extends Bennett and Segerberg's (2012) connective action framework by empirically demonstrating its applicability in a repressive African context, showing that decentralised, personalised mobilisation can flourish even when activists face surveillance, internet shutdowns, and coordinated disinformation campaigns. Second, it provides one of the first mixed-method investigations of a Nigerian digital protest, integrating quantitative network and sentiment analysis with qualitative activist interviews to illuminate both the structural patterns of online discourse and the lived experiences of those who drove the movement. Third, it documents the emergence of state counter-strategies—particularly the sustained Twitter ban—that represent an escalation in digital repression with implications beyond Nigeria. However, these contributions must be weighed against the study's limitations, including its reliance on self-reported activist perceptions rather than objective measures of platform effects or policy outcomes, its focus on a single platform (Twitter) during a limited time window, and its inability to independently verify claims

of surveillance or algorithmic suppression. The finding that 91% of participants reported low efficacy for police prosecutions and 78% for sustained policy change underscores a fundamental structural challenge: digital platforms excel at mobilising outrage and attention but are ill-suited for the slower, institutionally embedded work of securing accountability and reform. This suggests that the transformative potential of digital activism in fragile democracies may depend less on platform affordances and more on activists' capacity to bridge online mobilisation with sustained offline organising, legal strategies, and institutional relationship-building. As repressive states across the Global South continue to adapt their counter-strategies, future research must employ comparative designs, incorporate ethnographic observation, and integrate perspectives from multiple stakeholders to develop a more comprehensive understanding of digital activism's possibilities and limits in contexts where state power remains formidable and institutional accountability remains elusive.

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