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THE PANDEMIC IS NOT KILLING US, THE POLICE ARE KILLING US: HOW THE CHANGE IN THE SUBJECTIVE REALITY OF NIGERIAN CITIZENS BROUGHT ABOUT THE #ENDSARS PROTESTS

Olabode Adefemi Lawal
California State University − San Bernardino

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A Thesis

Presented to the

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In Partial Fulfillment

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in

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_____

by

Olabode Lawal

August 2022

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Approved by:

Dr. Ahlam Muhtaseb, Committee Chair, Communication Studies

Dr. Thomas Corrigan, Committee Member

Dr. Shafiqur Rahman, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

Using the theory of the social construction of reality, I researched the multiple roles of social media in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests. I interviewed 16 Nigerian protesters from the #EndSARS movement for this study: eight participated in-person while eight protested in-person and digitally (hybrid). Participants were asked a series of scripted questions regarding the #EndSARS protests to understand the roles social media played in shaping the subjective reality of Nigerians during that time. Using thematic analysis, this thesis proposes that the change in the subjective reality of some Nigerians contributed to the October 2020 #EndSARS protests. This thesis also compares the Nigerian #EndSARS protests and the Arab Spring protests.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

To my sweet mother, Mrs. Titi Alake Lawal, I am very grateful to you for sending me out here to get better and be better. I love you now and beyond eternity.

To my brothers, Tomiwa, Lanrewaju and Illestkunle; We homies foreva and thank you for your support,

Special gratitude to my girlfriend, Alexus, for listening to me explain my research repeatedly and showing interest in my topic.

To the readers. My expressed gratitude for taking a moment to read this work of art!

To Olabodel (me), one of the best, see you at the top!

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One sunny Saturday morning, I was out with my friend, Illestkunle, and his sister in Kunle's car. We were out running errands, and, on our way back, something felt unusually off to me. Then I remembered, and I said, "How come we haven't been pulled over by the cops yet?" Less than two minutes later, we were stopped for an unwarranted search by members of the Nigerian police force. After conducting their illegal search and finding nothing, they asked for "settlements." Settlements here refer to a connotative word for a bribe. Kunle and I refused, saying why we should give them any money? That they don't deserve anything from us. This single experience was one of many and was how frequent the Nigerian Police and other units within would stop Nigerians and conduct unwarranted searches of their vehicles, phones, and baggage.

Being a person of color in today's world already has its impacts and detriments to one's way of living. Growing up in Lagos, Nigeria, I heard many stories from international media outlets that addressed how people of color, especially those with a high level of melanin (of African origin), were treated. Terms like racism, stereotype, prejudice, ethnocentrism, and so on were nothing more than words to me because living in a Black nation rarely subjected me to experiencing those words. Like the transition from sunset to sunrise, things started to change when I came to the United States. I became more and more aware of what some of those terms meant as I witnessed them. Back in Nigeria, I

was the victim of a different type of stereotyping: I had been stereotyped as a

member of *Yahoo Boys* (Internet fraudsters) by the Nigerian police force based

on my clothing and appearance. A stereotype, according to McLeod (2017), is a

"fixed, over generalized belief about a particular group or class of people" (para.

1). When we engage in stereotyping, we assume that an individual has traits like

all members of their group. The term *Yahoo boys,* according to Mutsoli (2021),

refers to "fraudsters who make money through dishonest means on the internet"

(para. 2). In Nigeria, these *Yahoo Boys* are known for their illegitimate wealth,

lavish lifestyle, and expensive clothing and accessories. Most Yahoo Boys are

not known to keep quiet as they like to show off their flashy lifestyles. Therefore,

they attract attention from various ordinary citizens, celebrities, blogs, and the

Nigerian police. The Nigerian police now uses the justification that most young

Nigerian citizens (primarily people who identify as male) are members of the

Yahoo Boys. Without any idea, if you worked for your money, scammed your

riches, or were even born into wealth, you get stopped, harassed, and probably

extorted by members of the Nigerian Police. This logic that the Nigerian police

uses is that the only way to be young and wealthy is to be an Internet fraudster.

I witnessed stereotyping at different times, including when the Nigerian

Police Force (NPF) assumed that I was part of a criminal organization based on

the clothes that I wore and the gadgets that I owned. Using a newer phone, e.g.,

the iPhone 12, as early as 2-3 months after its release date, gave some

members of the NPF the idea that one is a part of a criminal organization

(Internet fraudsters or Yahoo boys). To the members of the NPF, the only way such gadgets could have been acquired by most young Nigerians was through theft or fraudulent acts. I have been beaten, arrested, attacked physically and even harassed several times by the SARS unit of the NPF back in Nigeria. SARS, according to Malumfashi (2020), stands for "Special Anti-Robbery Squad," and they are a unit setup by the Nigerian government to oversee serious criminal activities, such as armed robbery, motor vehicle theft, kidnapping, cattle rustling, Internet fraud, terrorism, etc. (I will provide more information about SARS later in the literature review). My friends and I know what it feels like to be classified as members of the *Yahoo Boys* based on hairstyles, clothing, gadgets, or a vehicle one owns or uses.

With the introduction of digital media and the emergence of technological innovations such as smart phones and social media applications came certain changes in our way of life and functioning as a community. These changes affected almost every sphere of the world including mass media, information dissemination, and media's influence. Digital media enhanced the process where the purpose of the communication was not only for the exchange of ideas/information, but also to help involved parties build a relationship, define who they are, and foster communication to help build and strengthen communities (Ashman, 2018). While researching this topic, I was fascinated to find out that the media do not have a lot of influence on situations as I always believed. Tools of the media are not all-powerful and persuasive; it is a more

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complicated process. Users of social media, e.g., subscribers of a YouTube channel or Twitter users, etc., have more power and influence on social media than vice versa (social media have on users). Social media are known to serve as a tool for connection, information, and entertainment and have also been proven to influence situations or events such as protests (Aleya-Sghaier, 2012; Charrad & Reith, 2019), riots, concerts, elections (Soon & Cho, 2014), etc. Although social media applications such as Twitter do not and cannot directly impact the popularity of an event, such as a concert, without its users, they still play an active role in creating prominence on their platform using algorithms (Ahmad et al., 2015; Charrad & Reith, 2019; Halverson et al., 2013).

Different research studies had been carried out regarding mobilizing people to fight for a cause through citizen journalism and social media. For example, there is the Jasmine revolution in Iran of 2010 (Charrad & Reith, 2019), and the Arab Spring of Tunisia and Egypt, among others (Hermida et al., 2014; Sumiala & Korpiola, 2017).

The Arab Spring is an uprising that occurred between 2010 and 2012 in Tunisia and Egypt (and other Arab countries like Yemen and Syria, etc.) where the citizens in all, stood up and opposed the tyranny and bad policies of their governments. Some people attributed the success of this uprising to social media usage (Ahmad et al., 2015; Al'Uqdah et al., 2019; Charrad & Reith, 2019; Halverson et al., 2013; Maamari & Zein, 2014), while others disagreed, explaining that social media do not possess such power (Gladwell, 2010; Khamis

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& Vaughn, 2011). I bring it up here because of its connection to the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria. The #EndSARS protests are uprisings in Nigeria that started off on social media and eventually bled into the streets of Nigeria. The protests seized the streets of Nigeria for two weeks restricting major movements and impacting the reputation of Nigeria in the international sphere.

This topic gained my interest for different reasons. First is my experience as a victim of police brutality in Nigeria. As stated earlier, I have been victimized by the SARS unit as a Yahoo Boy based on my appearance and how expensive my cellphone was. Being a firsthand witness and sharing my experience with my friends who had similar fates added to my interest in this topic. It made me know and realize that I didn't go through the hardships of the SARS unit alone. In addition, stereotyping and prejudice sparked my interest in this topic.

Second, I observed how social media platforms were being used to highlight topics about injustice and to share individual experiences. I remember how I used to go on Twitter to read about similar experiences and sometimes share mine as well.

Third, the popularity of the October 2020 Nigerian #EndSARS protests; Seeing how the hashtag EndSARS was part of the top 5 trends in the United States and the United Kingdom made me curious to understand how media were involved.

Being Nigerian born and raised, I have witnessed different abuses of power by the government and elected officials. Corruption, injustice, killing, and

bribery have become the words I hear some people describe the country. All of these have resulted in the casting of the nation by the actions of a few. The international news media have also contributed to the depiction of Nigeria in a negative light. Foreign news media barely talk about Nigeria in their news reports, but when they do, they lump in Africa as a whole and report on it in a way that portrays the continent of Africa as a single country (Adegbola, et al., 2018; Jackson, 2004). When these news media then broadcast reports on Nigeria as a country (not Africa as a country), they tend to depict the country as a backward state. For example, Ekeanyawu (2008), in an analysis of the coverage of Nigeria in the *Newsweek* and *The Economist* from 2003 to 2005, discovered that most of the reports on Nigeria in these platforms were negative and addressed the politics and economy of the country. We should not forget the comment by former President of the United States, Donald Trump, who referred to African nations as terrible countries (or "shitholes" to use his exact words) (Mathekga, 2018; Vitali, et al., 2018). Although, there exists levels of corruption in the Nigerian system, the international media worsens the case than it really is. For instance, the international news media has depicted Africa in different ways that paint the continent to be one of famine, war, extreme poverty, terrorism, etc. and this is far from the truth. Nigeria, like any other country, has poverty, war, famine, etc. but it also has the 132nd richest person in the world. The media presenting Nigeria, as a whole, as a corrupt nation is a way of generalizing the

actions of some government officials and making those as that of the whole country. Most Nigerians are victims to the corruption of the government.

The corruption and lawlessness in Nigeria have lately increased and grew in reach, influencing people down the hierarchy of power, till it got to the police officers recruited to protect the citizens of the country. Citizens became scared to speak up due to fear of being killed as their lives were considered anything but worthy. All these crimes went on for so long and most Nigerians were quiet about them until October 4, 2020. On this day, a Nigerian, Daniel Chibuike whose crime was using a high-end luxury car was shot and killed by police officers (Malumfashi, 2020). "These accounts are just two of many that sparked protests against the unit across Nigeria. It has been accused of harassing and physically abusing thousands of civilians since it was created in 1992" (Malumfashi, 2020, para. 5).

This sparked a series of events that lit the flames of my interest in conducting this study.

Sometimes, there are reports of power being abused by the government of a country and mainstream media refuse to address these issues out of fear of being torn down and sanctioned. In these cases, individuals who do not belong to any news media house are the ones who risk life and limb to record and report (sometimes live) what is happening around them. The same applies to Nigeria; people kept quiet and suffered under misconduct of the government until

recently, when a footage of a victim of police violence was aired by a street journalist, which ignited the flame in the hearts of the citizens.

This thesis discusses what roles social media and citizen journalists played in the dissemination of information and creation of awareness on social issues in the Nigerian context. Many scholars have examined how social media affect decision making and buying power. For my study, I wanted to know what role social media played in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests (if it played any), how social media were used in the protests (if they were used), and how the subjective and objective realities according to Berger and Luckmann (1967) of Nigerians affected the protests. By using narrative interviews with Nigerian citizens and thematic analysis of the responses I got from the Interview, I attempted to uncover common patterns from my interviews that helped me answer my research questions and better understand how social media influence people's high-risk decisions. My goal for this study was to discover the roles social media users play in situations such as protests, to revolt against bad government practices.

There are many studies that explain how social media affect decision-making. In my literature review, I will expand on these studies and explain the research that other scholars have conducted on this topic and their conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of communication has been studied since its inception starting with the method of one-way mass communication through news media channels (journalism). It has become a method of communication where anybody in any part of the world can communicate with a mass audience from the comfort of their homes, even without support from news agencies. New media resulted in changes in the communication model from the obsolete method of information transfer that was from a sender to a receiver (Shannon & Weaver, 1948) to one in which parties involved in the communication process act as both senders and receivers (Schramm, 1954). Another change witnessed in media is the introduction of various web-based applications used for instantaneous communication. With the proliferation of the Internet came about new means of communication, which Castells (2009) referred to as "mass self-communication" (p. 55). According to Castells, this new form is coined mass self-communication because the shared message has the chance of reaching a worldwide audience. Castells (2009) gives examples of mass self-communication as

the posting of a video on YouTube, a blog with RSS links to a number of web sources, or a message to a massive e-mail list. At the same time, it is self-communication because the production of the message is selfgenerated [sic], the definition of the potential receiver(s) is self-

directed, and the retrieval of specific messages or content from the World

Wide Web and electronic communication networks is self-selected. (p. 55)

Take for example the Nigerian #EndSARS protest. Most participants who

shared posts (videos, tweets, or photos) on their page did that with the goal of

reaching a selected few (their followers or friends), but the global world became

aware of the protests from the personal posts, thereby making the posts a form

of mass self-communication.

Similarly, Haythornthwaite (2005) states that the Internet has come to be

known and accepted worldwide as a tool of linking individuals by equipping them

with easier methods (whether individuals, organizations, or groups) to utilize one-

on-one methods of communication. The use of technology-based devices of

communication (digital media) helps develop a network of people based on

shared interests, who then use this shared interest to conjoin and mobilize

people towards a cause rather than conjoining users based on similarity in

location, common friends, or social position (Haythornthwaite, 2005).

Some scholars such as Castells (2009) explain that the Internet serves as

the pillar of humans' lives as it is used for many reasons including personal

interactions with friends, families, or associates, one's job, for social connections,

as means of information, for public services, political reasons, religion and for

entertainment. Initially, people could not use media for personal interactions as it

was a one-way street. A one-way method of communication, from the news

media to the citizens or masses of that community. Technological advancements

brought about these benefits and affordances as they created one-to-one communication methods.

Wireless communication has become a transfer method for different kinds of digital services. These services include music, photos, gaming files, news, and instant messaging that features most activities from the professional level to the personal levels (Castells, 2009, p. 69). The emergence of different forms of wireless communication has resulted in a new form of "issue selection and influenced different aggregation within groups" (Garcia, 2015, p. 4). These applications came to have a universal term known as social media. Social media have become a way of life. Different studies have examined the role of these software and why they are regarded with utmost importance (Ahmad et al., 2015; Haciyakupoglu & Zhang, 2015; Tudoroiu, 2014).

One of the unintended impacts of social media is the creation and fostering of cyberactivism. Hennefer (2013) defines cyberactivism as the digital process of involving oneself in political issues. According to Hennefer, cyberactivism is a subcategory of civic education and shares similar features with civic education. Howard (2011) explains cyberactivism as "the act of using the Internet to advance a political cause that is difficult to advance offline" (p. 145). Examples of cyberactivism that have been noteworthy include: the Zapatista uprising in Mexico (1994), the 1999 Battle of Seattle, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004), the 2007 Saffron Revolution in Myanmar, the Jasmine

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"Twitterized" revolution in Iran of 2010, the Arab Spring of Tunisia (2010 – 2011), and the "Facebook" revolution of Egypt (2011), among others.

Recent research on previous social movements have shown the vital role that information technology tools like social media play in social protests, social activism, and political movements. The use of social media in different social movements have become one of formidable ways for citizens to express themselves against the government or certain public policies. This then necessitates the need to have a look at social media as they have been researched by different authors to play vital roles in political activism, social protests, and social activism (El-Nawawy & Khamis 2012; Robertson et al., 2010; Sandoval-Almazan & Ramon Gil-Garcia, 2014).

<center>Social Media</center>

Social media, according to Greenhow et al. (2017), are seen as any computer-mediated communication that allows participants to meet and network with other participants or the contents of other participants. Boyd and Ellison (2007) see social media as digital tools that afford users the ability to "(1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 211). According to Cohn (2011), social media are an umbrella term for a tool that covers a variety of other media including blogs. He sees social media as a

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platform where ideas, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs can be shared from one person to another. Cohn (2011) sees social media as "a vehicle of communication" (para. 4). A subcategory of the social media are social network(ing) sites (Cohn, 2011) or SNS. According to Greenhow et al. (2017), examples of social media platforms include SNS like Facebook and LinkedIn; wikis like Wikipedia; blogs like Blogger, micro-blogging services (Twitter), video-sharing (YouTube), photo-sharing (Flickr, Instagram), among others.

Part of the technological innovations that resulted from the development of faster means of communication is the creation of platforms that enable users from different locations to interact, exchange information and ideas and if interested, build relationships. From the inception and production of social networking sites, many consumers of SNS, and the byproducts of SNS, have been lured in and have come to include the use of SNS in their everyday routines (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Teenagers, youth and some adults now use social media applications for a number of reasons that range from connection, information, expression, impression or even extension of services. Currently, there exists a wide range of SNS applications that offer different features to their consumers (Bossio & Bebawi, 2016; Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Some SNS applications allow users to continue previously existing relationships while others connect users to one another based on "shared interests, political views, or activities" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 210). For people who are willing to learn but do not want to be confined in the four walls of the classroom, SNS connects them to virtual

students, instructors, and lecture contents from wherever in the world they may be, even thousands of miles apart (Greenhow et al., 2017), especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social networking sites have also been researched by several scholars to play significant roles in social protests. Ghannam (2011) explained that SNS serve as tools for information, organization, amusement, and communities' creation, also to "increase transparency and seek to hold governments accountable" (p. 4).

The reach and influence of social media are some of the topics examined by different scholars (Holt et al., 2013; Katambwe, 2020; Swasy, 2016) to address and shed light on the influence of social media. Among the different roles social media play is the role of mobilizing people around a movement, (Boulianne et al., 2020); presenting citizens with information in states with authoritarian leaders (Piechota & Rajczyk, 2015); an avenue for people to air their views of the society they live in (Hari, 2014); a place where users can request for changes in governmental practices (Shigetomi & Makino, 2009); a platform for raising capital towards a cause; a way of delegating tasks; creating awareness about issues to citizens; and influencing them to act and "and showing the scale of the protest" (Piechota & Rajczyk, 2015, p. 1). Shirky (2011) said on a podcast in the *Annenberg Media Center* that social media tools afford citizens "a way of taking on the state in a way that at least so far the states have a hard time responding to in completely coherent ways" (09:39).

Documentary-dramas like Orlowski's (2020) and Jacoby's (2018) also addressed the influential nature of social media. In these documentaries, we are shown the way social media algorithms work in the mobilization of citizens to stand up against rules, regulations, and injustice in society. The documentaries also talked about how our actions are controlled and manipulated by these applications as they influence our choices. In different scenes in Orlowski (2020), we are presented with situations where social media applications use algorithms created with the purpose of fostering addiction to their platforms among their users (Barnet & Bossio, 2020). The documentary showcased how social media companies harvest their users' personal data, as well as impact privacy and democracy in the U.S. (Koch, n.d., para. 1). We also see the operators of different social media apps customizing notification and content to be pushed to the users' phones. They push notifications to users' phones and create an illusion of choice while already knowing the users' preferences and displaying them in an attempt at manipulation. Algorithms in the documentary are also seen to create ideological bubbles that puts people of similar interest with each others and against "others".

The Facebook dilemma discussed so many relevant and serious topics regarding how social media and decision-making have been made two sides of a coin, each going hand-in-hand, and how they are made to function together. The documentary also discussed how social media companies use algorithms to create certain ideological islands that create a divide and opposition between

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people, as well as how they promote violent acts all around the world (Koch, n.d., para. 2). Koch (n.d.) stated in the documentary that

> the Facebook Dilemma tells the story of how decisions were made by the company as it sought increased wealth and new users transformed Facebook into a surveillance company, a media company and a player in social movements and elections around the world. (Koch, n.d., para. 6)

Roger McNamee (n.d.), a Facebook investor and venture capitalist, told Frontline in an article on *the facebook dilemma* that "Facebook systematically went from interconnecting people to essentially having a surveillance system of their whole lives" (as cited by Koch, Frontline, The Facebook Dilemma, n. d., para. 6).

The existence of digital communication with over 6 billion smartphone users in the world (O'Dea, 2022) made it easy to diffuse messages about incompetent governments to people anywhere in the world, including diasporic communities of certain countries. Using the "small world" effect by Buchanan (2002) (as cited by Castells, 2009), the message in this sense can be "an image, sentence, song or a recording of an unruly behavior by those in power" (p. 245) and could reach thousands of other users and create awareness about an occurrence in that one user's location.

Being able to share information with millions of people worldwide creates a vast network of consumers for broadcasted information. People in a city in China, for instance, could be aware of what is happening thousands of miles away in a city in Nigeria. This feature of the media creates an instantaneous

availability of information about what is happening everywhere in the world.

Another feature of social media is the ability for users to generate their own

contents (Cohn, 2011).

<u>User-Generated Content</u>

Part of the features and powers that social media apps grant its

consumers is the ability for users to create their own posts, captions, pictures, or

messages. This feature is called user-generated content (UGC) or the "electronic

word–of–mouth (eWOM)" (Bahtar & Muda, 2016, p. 338). UGC, according to

Manap and Adzharudin (2013), works literally the same way orally communicated

messages work. UGC is a process whereby users share their opinions, values,

beliefs and experiences using a product or service via social media platforms

because they believe their shared opinions would inform others about the

product or service (Bahtar & Muda, 2016).

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) define UGC/eWOM as "any positive or

negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a

product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and

institutions via the Internet" (p. 39). Hennig-Thurau et al. go on to mention forms

of eWOM/UGC to include "web-based opinion platforms, discussion forums,

boycott websites, news groups" among others (2004, p. 39). The expressed

opinions, feelings, and views by customers on these platforms in the form of

UGC are based on the consumers' experiences. Gallegos (2016), in *What Is*

User Generated Content: Complete Guide To UGC & Why You Need It, defines

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UGC "as any type of content that has been created and put out there by contributors or, using a better term, fans. It can refer to pictures, videos, testimonials, tweets, blog posts, and everything in between" (para. 7). It is the act whereby consumers of a product promote the product themselves in place of the product's company doing their own promotions.

The availability of social media to every and anyone who can afford a smartphone also shifted our daily interactions (Rajabi, 2014). "The technological development of computer-mediated communication impacts all stages of communication" (Lăzăroiu, 2012, p. 20). Now, anyone can serve as a journalist as the invention of the digital world has created avenues because people who served as audiences can now act as journalists. This is done by users either making their opinions heard through the comment feature that most social media applications have or through the sharing of what is happening around them (of relevance to them). Granting the ordinary citizen this reporting power enables them to share any and every bit of information they consider vital. "The principal feature of social media is co-creation by the users" (Sandoval-Almazan & Ramon Gil-Garcia, 2014, p. 368) so, people share all types of information with their 'friends' on social media applications. Despite not knowing this friend fully or even remotely, they go on to disclose all sorts of personal information with them. Some of the shared information could be of political nature or on issues affecting them and the country.

<u>Citizen Journalism</u>

With the advent of technological innovations such as social media applications came the proliferation of self-acclaimed journalists, reporting on issues deemed newsworthy to every part of the world from any part of the world. Now, stories can be spread by anyone from anywhere in the world even before the authentication of the credibility of the source. Laymen with no prior journalistic knowledge, any form of training on news reporting or adherence to the principles of journalism, see themselves as journalists and provide updates on what is happening around them. The portability of the mobile phone and availability of wireless Internet connection promotes these practices. These practices of anyone serving as a reporter on issues happening around them (important or not) is referred to as citizen journalism. Citizen journalism (CJ) in simple terms refers to news by the citizens (Pain, 2018). Rodriguez (2001) defines citizen journalism as a concept that embodies a form of "journalism and a set of practices" that are included in people's mundane habits and therefore, the media created "is driven by the motives of these people" (p. 20). Salazar and Cordova (2008) defined CJ as "the poetics of indigenous media" (p. 40). Pettit et al. (2009) refer to this as "the critical and active practice of media making in which citizenships are enacted through everyday life media practices" (p. 445).

Citizen journalism has contributed to creating awareness of issues, events and happenings that mainstream media have refused to address or ignored. CJ is a source of information free from the restrictions of governments, corporate

entities, and organizations, created by individuals to address issues mainstream media would not address. As most citizen journalists use the smartphone as their conduit of information dissemination, it is hard for citizen journalists to be red taped or silenced unlike most traditional media houses. We witnessed the influence of citizen journalists in the case of George Floyd's murder (2020) as mainstream media refused to address the issue till footage of the African American man being knelt on was aired all over social media. This caught the attention of a variety of people, both of color and Caucasians, among the electoral posts and ordinary citizens, Americans and non-Americans. Citizen journalism has helped create awareness on different grassroot issues that either mainstream media avoid or miss. CJ is seen again in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests as reports, updates and stories came from regular citizens and barely from professional media.

Mobile phones have also been known to play important roles in the unification and deployment of social protests around the world, from one social movement to another (Castells 2009).

The Arab Spring

The countries of Tunisia and Egypt (to name a few) in 2010 and 2011 witnessed uprisings that came to be known globally as the "Arab Spring", which was studied by several researchers. These uprisings were instrumental in establishing knowledge on the role of digital media in uprisings and protests by

the citizenry of a nation (Ahmad et al., 2015; Charrad & Reith, 2019; Dewey et al., 2012; Hermida et al., 2014; Sumiala & Korpiola, 2017). These protests, according to Sumiala and Korpiola (2017), came to be known in Tunisia and the Arab world generally as the "Arab Spring" (p. 53), and to others like *The Washington Times* as "the social media revolution" (Halverson et al., 2013, p. 313). Most Arab countries were/are ruled by authoritarian rulers, and they also lacked "free and fair elections" (Dewey et al., 2012, p. 4). The Tunisian Jasmine revolution of 2011 (Halverson et al., 2013) was sparked because of citizens' rejection of the government's disregard for human life and bad practices. The origin of the protests was Tunisia, but they shortly spread across North African and other Arab countries like Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, and Morocco, among others. The Arab Spring protests happened as a "mass demonstration that has shaped the Middle East and North African (MENA) countries" (Ahmad et al., 2015, p. 220).

The protests began when a 26-year-old Tunisian street fruit vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi engaged in an act of "self-immolation" (Dewey et al., 2012, p. 1; Halverson et al., 2013, p. 315) in front of a government building (Sumiala & Korpiola, 2017). Like many African countries, such as Nigeria, with high unemployment rates, Tunisia also suffered the same fate where Bouazizi who was a college graduate could not find employment. Instead of Bouazizi joining a group of unemployed youths, he chose to sell fruits and vegetables to make a decent living. Bouazizi had no business nor selling license and so he was

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publicly harassed and brutalized by the police. On December 17, 2010, Bouazizi

set himself on fire after the police denied his right to conduct business in the

streets. It is important, however, to note that Bouazizi was not the first Tunisian to

engage in suicide in an attempt to oppose the Tunisian government's regime.

Abdesslem Trimech, another street vendor, also set himself ablaze on March 3,

2010 in Monastir (Halverson et al., 2013) among many others. The reason for the

popularity of Bouazizi's self-immolation over other Tunisian cases, according to

Halverson et al. (2013), was the usage of digital media as the method of

information transmission throughout Tunisia; "the utilization of well-known

iconography, and the integration of his story into a culturally familiar narrative

system" (p. 315).

　　　Just as Bouazizi's case, many Africans experience different forms of

oppression from the police, government, and different people in power. The

death of Bouazizi sparked anger and unrest among the citizens and lit the flames

of protests against the government. Bouazizi was later made a martyr by the

people of Tunisia. In Nigeria, there are cases of police brutality and abuse of

power as well. The unemployment rate in Nigeria, for example, was 8.10% in

2018 (Nigerian Unemployment Rate, 2018). There, the citizens engage in

numerous menial jobs to sustain life and have a source of income. College

graduates, and even Masters' degree holders, must compete to find minimum

paying jobs. When one tries to embark on any type of entrepreneurship business,

the government, possibly due to lack of understanding of the emergence of new

methods of business and sources of income, sees it as fraudulent acts and uses their power through the police officers to disrupt this business.

Different scholars have held varying standpoints on the role social media played in the Arab Spring. Some have romanticized social media and appraised it as the key factor of the protests (Charrad & Reith, 2019; Halverson et al., 2013; Tudoroiu, 2014), while others have criticized social media as merely a facilitator arguing that though they are needed, they are not enough to bring about desired results (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). In the Tunisian Arab Spring, social media served as a facilitator as it helped in the dissemination of news across the country and to bring about awareness of the protests to the world in general (Tudoroiu, 2014). Different scholars (Abd Latif, 2011; Maamari & Zein, 2014; Tudoroiu, 2014) stated that the Arab Spring brought about two opposing groups of scholarly opinions on the role of social media in the revolution; first are the "cyber-skeptics" or "techno-realists" (Tudoroiu, 2014, p. 348), who disagreed with the notion that social media served as a facilitator in the protest as they cautioned against linking the accomplishments of the revolution to technology. The second group of scholars and academics are what Tudoroiu (2014) referred to as "cyber-enthusiasts" or "digital evangelists" as they believe that social media were very vital to the protests and played an important role as an instrument used in the organization and carrying out of the Arab Spring protests.

Cyber-skeptics such as Malcolm Gladwell and Evgeny Morozov are of the opposing standpoint because they claim that applications such as social media

are tools useful for protecting the country as opposed to protecting the protesters (Tudoroiu, 2014). Gladwell (2010) explained that social media are unworthy of the credit they received because social media "are built around weak ties" (p. 7) and thus do not have the capacity to initiate such ties that inspire the citizens to come together against their government. Social media only increase engagement because they are an easier platform for users to communicate. Gladwell (2010) goes on to state that "high-risk activism" (p. 6) is what brings about actual change in policies and regimes. High-risk activism, according to Gire (2017) and Gladwell (2010), means situations whereby protesters have something to lose and there is a connection between the protesters. Digital media, on the other hand, possess low-risk activism that "creates networks with loosely bound members" who do not possess the existence of well-defined goals, guidelines, and a clear command chain" (Tudoroiu, 2014, p. 348). Gladwell (2010) explains, against the idolization of social media in social protests, that "where activists were once defined by their causes, they are now defined by their tools" (p. 3), meaning that the people behind the protests are being forgotten while the method used in the protests are now praised as the savior.

According to Gladwell (2010), with social media, users think that they are participating and making a difference through their comments, likes or retweets on social media posts but social media merely "are effective at increasing *participation*—by lessening the level of motivation that participation requires" (p. 8). Gladwell goes on to justify this claim by stating that "Twitter is a way of

following (or being followed by) people you may never have met. Facebook is a tool for efficiently managing your acquaintances, for keeping up with the people you would not otherwise be able to stay in touch with. That's why you can have a thousand 'friends' on Facebook, as you never could in real life" (p. 7).

Cyber-enthusiasts, on the other hand, such as Manuel Castells and Clay Shirky, claim that they are aware that social media were not what fueled the protests, but they served as more of a device of organization and information dissemination (Abd Latif, 2011; Gire, 2017; Maamari & Zein, 2014; Tudoroiu, 2014). They went on to state that social media did, however, help the revolution by creating an avenue for individuals with similar goals (e.g., fight the Tunisian government) to meet one another. Social media also reduced expenses for the revolution as organization and communication via social media platforms were much cheaper and effective. It also helped create "shared awareness," which eventually resulted in the creation of "an imagined community" (Tudoroiu, 2014, p. 348). The Cyber-enthusiasts argue that social media algorithms aided the protests as it brought people with similar goals and intentions together and helped in the organization and mobilization of protesters. These algorithms were later used as tools to suppress and isolate protesters.

In the Arab world, social media served as a pivotal tool for the protests although their position has changed due to several reasons such as place, time, and leader type for each country (Gire, 2017). In Tunisia and Egypt, social media fostered the spread of information and helped them "overthrow their dictators by

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organizing protests and rallies" while in Libya, social media were vital in the exchange of messages and providing new information regarding the protests (p. 7).

The case of the Arab Spring is relevant to my research because many scholars have researched how the Internet, citizen journalists and digital media assumed important roles in bringing to light the dehumanization of the citizens of Tunisia and Egypt (Sumiala & Korpiola, 2017), thereby awakening the citizenry to speak up against bad government practices and police brutality around the country. Also, the Arab Spring revolution happened in the northern part of Africa which is in close proximity to West Africa where Nigeria is. The proximity factor makes the Arab Spring an important information resource for the Nigerian #EndSARS protests, and it also provide an ideal comparative case.

The #ENDSARS Origin

Nigeria is a country with the most populous Black community on earth (Varrella, 2021). Nigeria is also home to the second largest film industry in the world, Nollywood, and is known as the technological, creative and fashion country in Africa (*Google Arts & Culture, n.d.).* The giant of Africa, Nigeria, is a developing nation (some argue it is an underdeveloped country) in the heart of West Africa. Like most developing countries and underdeveloped countries, Nigeria is faced with a variety of issues and obstacles that hinder the growth of its citizenry. Among such obstacles exist a high level of poverty, bad governance,

illiteracy, unemployment, lack of value for human life by police officers, lack of

fundamental human rights from the government, and police brutality to name a

few (Hari, 2014). Although there exists a democratic government, the country is

still being ruled like it is a military dictatorship and the basic right of 'freedom of

expression' is lost. People in countries such as these would rather stay behind

their screens (laptops or phones) in order to fight these bad governances than

stand in person due to the fear of loss of life. At times, when people choose to

take a stand and protest, they are usually mobilized by a body of activists.

The origin of the #EndSARS online campaign in Nigeria dates as far back

as December of 2017 (Dambo et al., 2020). SARS is an acronym for the special

antirobbery squad, a division of the NPF setup by the federal government in 1992

(Chow, 2020) to fight robbery and serve and protect the citizenry of Nigeria

(Malumfashi, 2020). Rather than carry out their sworn duties, the SARS unit of

Nigeria terrorizes the citizenry, steals from them and in some cases attacks

people who appear wealthy and are young (*Amnesty International,* 2020). The

hashtag #EndSARS, according to Dambo et al. (2020), was launched on the

social media platform Twitter by Nigerian youths to protest the brutalities and

abuse of power by the NPF. Although the #EndSARS protests started off as a

rebellion against police brutality, it soon expanded to involve other negatives

practices in the country such as violations of human rights, lack of basic

amenities such as electricity, good road and water, as well as bribery and

corruption (George, 2020). Some people partook in the protests to make being a

Nigerian mean and feel a lot more than it currently does (George, 2020).

Although the SARS division did succeed during its inception in carrying

out its duties, its current acts cannot be overlooked due to past glories. The

violence started as far back as 1993 when a graduate of the University of Lagos,

Ayotunde Adesola, was falsely accused of being a gang member and thus

arrested (Chow, 2020). To coerce a confession from him, Ayotunde was put

through brutal torture including pouring "irritant powder on his face while beating

him" (Chow, 2020, para. 6). Ayotunde's case was one of many police brutality

cases of the SARS division in Nigeria from its date of creation till today. Another

case happened in 1995 when two university students, Ayodele Adejuyibe and

Bola Afilaka, were both killed after being shot by officers of the SARS division

because Afilaka refused to stop his car at a checkpoint. In 1999, another man

died in SARS holding after being brutally tortured and interrogated for allegedly

stealing a car (Chow).

The history of the protests digitally can be traced back to 2017 when the

hashtag #EndSARS started to trend with tons of people sharing their terrifying

stories and horrible experiences with this division (Chow, 2020). By December of

that year, the inspector general of the NPF made promises to dissolve the SARS

unit and impose appropriate punishments and sanctions on those officers

responsible for police brutality. That same month, the Anti-Torture Act was

introduced by President Muhammadu Buhari, which banned the use of torture.

All of these measures did not deter the violent acts by the SARS unit. In 2018,

the vice president of Nigeria, Yemi Osinbajo, demanded that the unit be once

again disbanded and that "a federal human-rights desk… to address violations"

be launched (Chow, 2020, para. 17). According to *Amnesty International* (2020),

there has been over 82 cases of police brutality, torture, abuse, wrongful

practices, murders, etc. by the SARS unit between January 2017 and May 2020.

This means that the brutalities of SARS still continued in Nigeria despite multiple

claims by the Nigerian government that the unit has been reformed or/and

disbanded.

Recently, on October 4, 2020, the hashtag #EndSARS became a trend in

Nigeria and different parts of the world again following the broadcast of a video

that showed officers of the SARS unit dragging two men from a hotel, Daniel

Chibuike, and his friend, then shooting and killing Daniel (*Amnesty International,

2020*; Chow, 2020; Mbah, 2020). Instead of the officers helping or calling an

ambulance, they drove off in the victim's car and abandoned the body of the

victim which appeared lifeless and was bleeding by the side of the road (Mbah,

2020). Shortly after the video that showed members of the SARS unit,

unprovoked, harassing and killing the man went viral across multiple social

media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, to name a few), the

hashtag #EndSARS became a trend once again across Nigeria. People came

out in thousands to oppose the cruelty of the NPF and this march soon led to

protests against bad governance and police brutality (*Amnesty International*, n.d.;

BBC news, 2020; Chow, 2020; George, 2020; Mbah, 2020). It is unclear if the protests were sparked by the usage of social media or whether members were recruited due to the trending of the hashtag across Nigeria before trending in countries like Canada, the United States, and the UK at number 1 spots for weeks or if it was both.

According to Castells (2009),

emotions can act directly on the process of decision-making, by prompting the subject to decide the way she feels. It is not that judgment becomes irrelevant, but that people tend to select information in ways that favor the decision they are inclined to make. (p. 144)

How we feel dictates what steps we take when faced with a decision. Happy/joyous emotional states tend to result in more positive results than sad/moody/angry emotional states. Social movements are formed by communicating messages of rage and hope (Castells, 2009, p. 371). The Nigerian #EndSARS protests started, as mentioned above, due to several reasons such as bad government practices, anger towards the government, etc. According to Castells (2009), "anger is one of the most potent emotions behind rebellious practices as it reduces the perception of risk and increases the acceptance of risk-taking behavior" (p. 346). He goes on to state that the emotional state of anger worsens when the parties involved feel they have been treated unfairly and when they know those responsible for such treatments. It is then evident that anger has been the fuel of revolutions, protests, uprisings and

challenging people in power, "starting from an aggravating event, and escalating into a rejection of the authority responsible, as the accumulation of injuries and insults suddenly becomes intolerable" (Castells, 2009, p. 347).

Castells says that "the price of bread, the suspicion of witchcraft, or the injustice of rulers have been more frequent sources of revolts and social movements than the ideals of emancipation" (p. 347). This logic applies to the Nigerian economy before the #EndSARS protest. The prices of food and fuel products were outrageously high, oppression and dictatorship by the government continued yet, Nigerians remained calm and endured. For there to be an uprising, there must be a mixture of group communication with personal anger, or as Castells puts it, "transforming lonely nights of despair into shared days of wrath" (2009, p. 347) or when subjective conditions become intersubjective. This happened to Nigerians when there was video evidence of murder by the NPF being circulated on social media. Thus, that's why the Nigerian government attempted to control the spread of information by banning one of the social media platforms used in the protests, Twitter.

The mass media were initially the source of information, providing updates and means of rallying people around a cause, but now that new media exist, people get updated through social media. They get information from social media and rally against a system of government they do not support through social media (Aleya-Sghaier, 2012; Charrad & Reith, 2019; Soon & Cho, 2014). With the vast number of social media applications that users have and the increase in

the number of protests fostered through social media, I believe it is of utmost importance to study the roles, if any, both social media and citizen journalism played in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests that occurred in Nigeria before spreading to different countries all around the world.

Being born in Nigeria, I have past knowledge and experiences of bad governments and lack of basic amenities. In my opinion, the Nigerian government has always cared less about its citizenry and the state of the economy had always been depreciating. Over the 24 years I spent in Nigeria, there had always been cases of corruption, bribery, and lack of basic amenities in the country. Despite the backward state of the country, there were little to no reports of anti-government protests. Could the inclusion of extortion of citizens and presence of evidence of such corruption be the cause of the 2020 protests? Or was it the realization by Nigerians that the government is trying to create an objective reality that includes the loss of lives that sparked the protests?

The Social Construction of Reality

The theory of social construction of reality will be used as a guiding theory to understand the role of social media (or lack of) in starting and maintaining the Nigerian #EndSARS protests.

What is considered real, normal, or acceptable today? How can we tell? What constitutes reality and what makes an idea a representation of what the given word is? Let's take a school for instance; what makes that building(s)

different from any other building(s)? Humans live in groups of people, forming communities, and these communities agree on what is regarded as normal, real, or even an idea like a school. Our definition of reality is based on our experiences and societal rules and norms (Van den Bulck, 1999). Every single individual has knowledge about the community or society they live in. Through an accidental or intentional learning process, new information, opinions, views, and ideas about different topics are acquired. "Whether one is aware of it or not, everyone has an image of one's own place in society" (Van den Bulck, 1999, p. 3). This process follows the theory of the social construction of reality. This theory posits that there is no universal or "objective" perspective of reality but rather that reality is understood through "human experiences" and that the society we live in is the result of "conscious processes" (Siu, 2009, p. 5).

The social construction of reality is a theory founded by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in the year 1967 (Siu, 2009; Sobel et al., 2019; Van den Bulck, 1999). Some scholars, such as Adonai and Mane (1984), explain that the process of "reality construction" is referred to as social because reality can only be constructed through the existence of "social interactions" (p. 325). In their book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), Berger and Luckmann argued that society and reality are man-made, meaning that what is regarded as "normal" or as a "society" was created because of human interaction. This process was referred to as "habitualization" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 70). Habitualization, according to Berger and Luckmann (1967), occurs when any

action is reoccurring regularly until it turns into a "pattern" (p. 71) that could be performed again with little efforts until it becomes registered in the mind of the performer as a pattern. Berger and Luckmann give an example using the "solitary individual" isolated on an island who engages in habitualization. This individual awakes and goes about their "daily routine" of building a canoe from matchsticks and might say to themselves "there I go again" (p. 71) as they embark on their step-by-step process. To Berger and Luckmann, even this "solitary individual" engages in habitualization.

Adonai and Mane (1984) proceed to mention that the process of reality construction is "dialectical" because we, individuals, are both the creators and products of our "social world" (p. 325). Just as we experience the social world, we also create our own versions of the world. To simplify what Adonai and Mane propose, I would use the following example: We serve as "creators" when we contribute to our communities. If I should build a school for instance, this building would come to serve as a school in different individuals' versions of their community-based reality. Even years after I am long gone, the building would continue to be known as a school in different individual's realities unless the building gets demolished or changed to something else, and in that sense, I have "contributed" to the social world as we all (in our own capacities) serve as creators of our realities. In addition, humans are the products of our social world, which means that we exist as members of the community that is already created.

We engage in social interaction with members of our different communities, and we are products of the social world.

To further clarify the concepts of reality construction, I would give another example of reality construction through communication. Let's imagine that Sodiq and Aisha, both Nigerians, are in love and in a relationship. If they both agree that seeing other people while in a relationship with one another is not cheating and is pleasing and acceptable, they have engaged in constructing a social reality through communication. Other people who are not in a relationship with them might probably interpret seeing either Aisha or Sodiq with someone else as cheating. Aisha and Sodiq have constructed an objective reality for themselves using social interactions and communication. Other's perception of Aisha and Sodiq's agreement is the subjective reality.

Schulz (1982) states that humans are steered majorly by how they think, feel and what they know or believe, even the least to be correct. "It is the meaning of our experiences and not the ontological structure of the objects which constitutes reality" (Schulz, 1982, p. 230). For example, if I think a lecturer is "not good" simply because they are strict with their class policies, this perception will influence my attitude about that lecturer. At this point, it is irrelevant if the lecturer was not actually a good lecturer or if being strict was a valid indicator of competence. This is my reality and as such, my opinion would be influenced by my perception of this reality. Using the Nigerian #EndSARS protests to clarify Schulz's statement, police brutality, harassment, etc., are all objective conditions.

Whether people are aware of them or not, they happens; this is a fixed condition in Nigeria. Being conscious or not aware of objective reality does not approve or reject said reality. Police brutality occurred/ is occurring in Nigeria. People believing it, seeing it as false or even seeing it as a good or bad thing are part of the subjective interpretation of said fixed realities.

According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), there are two types of realities: objective and subjective social facts, and it is important to differentiate between them. The objective social reality is commonly referred to as "the real world" or, as put by Van den Bulck (1999), "it is the social order, society such as it is before and without the individual" (p. 3). The objective social reality exists in our communities, things that are fixed whether people know about those things or not (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). For example, every country has rules, and laws that govern the state. A universal standard is corruption. If person A claims they don't know about the existence of such laws against corruption and still goes about embezzling state funds, this doesn't erase the laws against corruption. If this action is carried out successfully by the person, without ever being caught or punished, this doesn't negate the existence of said laws. If the person is caught, this shows the presence of rules against corruption and just how objective and apparent reality is. The failure of said actions by person A makes them realize that not knowing that corruption is wrong or punishable by law does not necessarily give them a get-out-of-jail-free card. They would still face the

objective laws of said society when caught embezzling state funds. Corruption

exists whether or not everyone is aware of it

Subjective reality, on the other hand, is the perception individuals create of

the objective reality (Van den Bulck, 1999). "In order to be able to live and act in

the world each person has to internalize objective reality" (Van den Bulck, 1999,

p. 3). Berger and Luckmann (1967) explained that in any given society, every

member of such society is faced with the same version of objective reality like

everyone else in that same community. As such, everyone knows every role

played in that society. For example, at California State University, San

Bernardino (CSUSB), everyone knows what roles they play individually and

collectively. The lecturers know that they are the lecturers, and the students

know they are the students. Both groups recognize the role of each group. I, for

example, know that I am a student subjectively in that objective reality. In

Berger's and Luckmann's words, "everyone pretty much is what he is supposed

to be. In such a society, identities are easily recognizable, objectively, and

subjectively. Everybody knows who everybody else is and who he is himself" (p.

184). This process is referred to by Berger and Luckmann (1967) as

"socialization" (p. 183).

During socialization, members of a given society view their community the

same way others view it (shared perception). Through shared perception (social

interaction) and not through isolation, reality is constructed. "Thus, the actors'

definition of the situation and how they recognize, produce, and reproduce social

action intersubjectively is central to how they make sense of their world" (Trivedi, 2020, para. 1). Intersubjectivity plays a vital role in the construction of objective realities. Citizens of a community must agree on that object to be considered a part of their objective reality. Tying the concept of intersubjectivity to this research, Nigerian citizens shared their perceptions, shared understanding, socio-historical context, experience with the SARS unit, and this social interaction helped them (Nigerians) make sense of their world and create their objective realities/conditions in the SARS unit. "Objective reality only makes sense when we give subjective meaning to it" (Trivedi, 2020, para. 2). Trivedi (2020) explains that "social construction is the process whereby a phenomenon is built up through social processes rather than being a natural occurrence. It is the process by which a concept or practice is created and maintained by participants who collectively agree that it exists" (para. 2).

In socialization, individuals must learn their roles in society as well as how others see the world. Socialization, according to Berger and Luckmann (1967), has successfully taken place when there is "the establishment of a high degree of symmetry between objective and subjective reality (as well as identity) … although, totally successful socialization is anthropologically impossible" (p. 183). A society can only achieve the most successful "socialization" if it engages in the most simplistic form of "division of labor and distribution of knowledge" (p. 183). This is possible because in such societies, individuals have "identities that are socially predefined" and as such, they already know what their role is or who they

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are. Berger and Luckmann gave an example of "a knight is a knight, and a peasant is a peasant, to others as well as to themselves" (p. 184). This means that in such communities or societies, there are no identity issues or questioning of one's purpose as every individual knows who they are as well as who others are. In today's societies, socialization is rare because individuals serve multiple functions. For example, in my school community, CSUSB, I play several roles, including a student, an instructor, and a staff member, among several other minor roles. I have multiple subjective identities in that objective reality, and this makes socialization in this context not as successful, as I play multiple roles in my community.

The social construction of reality theory aligns with the proposed study as it discusses the two kinds of realities that exist in each community: the objective and the subjective. The gap between the two realities in the Nigerian context (corruption existing as a norm and people being nonchalant about it when in the normal sense, corruption is wrong and should be rooted out), was one of the factors that influenced the Nigerian #EndSARS uprising in October 2020, alongside the citizen journalists and social media. Social media have been presented by "digital evangelists" (Tudoroiu, 2014, p. 348) to play a pivotal role in protests such as the Arab Spring (Charrad & Reith, 2019; Halverson et al., 2013; Tudoroiu, 2014); and have also been criticized by "techno-realists" (Tudoroiu, 2014, p. 348) who explained that they did not support the claim that social media played a pivotal role for democracy and freedom. The theory of social

construction is used to examine what roles social media played (or did not) in the Nigerian #EndSARS protest and if a change in the perception of the subjective reality of Nigerians had been a factor in the protests. The role of citizen journalists in information dissemination and how social media created awareness (if they did) was also studied.

Compared to most countries, Nigeria has a different objective reality. The citizens of Nigeria have become used to bad governance; it has become a part of our internalized subjective reality. Not to contribute to the negative stereotypes of Nigeria as given by many international media outlets, but most Nigerians are used to little or no efforts from the government to serve its citizens and protect them. Nigerians are used to working extra hard for what they want, going the extra mile to succeed, and not expecting even basic amenities like electricity, water and security from the government. Having lived in the United States for over three years now has helped me learn a little about U.S. society and the workings of the state to some extent. Having at least a bachelor's degree in the U.S. can help one live a comfortable life. That's the set reality, the "real world" for Americans in America. In Nigeria, our real world comprises of alleged bad governance, bribery, and corruption. We also have to work twice as hard and knowing people (friends) in places of power or as popularly termed by Nigerians, connections that can be relied on for their influence. We, Nigerian citizens, have had our rights taken away from us for so long to the extent that what is considered as a reality in the US is referred to as a dream or a wish to Nigerians.

The SARS unit of the Nigerian police force according to Malumfashi (2021) was established with the task of promoting peace, reducing crimes, and securing citizens and their belongings. This was the use of social interactions to construct an objective reality for the SARS unit. Sadly, this objective reality and the subjective one differed based on practice. Numerous reports, including self-experience, have shown that the SARS unit uses its powers and protection (from the government) to extort and harass Nigerian youths. Living in a state of constant fear is what many Nigerians feel. There has been a role reversal by the SARS unit which in turn changed the subjective reality of Nigerians to one of terror and fear. This role reversal also changed the objective reality to that of torture, abuse, and death. To the government, the SARS unit are indeed performing their duties by reducing criminal activities but by so doing, they harass more innocent than guilty parties.

Nigerians were used to living in this deficient version of reality with little to no complaints till things got worse. As there is no research on the role of subjective and objective reality in the Nigerian #EndSARS protest; it is unclear if the protests were caused by the change in the objective reality of Nigerians, or if the involvement of social media which presented Nigerians with "evidence" of police brutality did. A popular example of a situation where social media reaction to police brutality led to a protest is the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement where we have heard of several reports of police brutality against African Americans. There have been a lot of reports of killings, harassments, baseless

arrests, and false imprisonment of African Americans in the U.S. and until recently, there had been little to no news of justice being served. Activism on social media and citizen journalism helped provide proof of police brutality against African Americans; just like Will Smith, an African American actor, producer and rapper explained on *The Late Show*, "racism isn't getting worse, it's getting filmed" (Thomas, 2020). From Will Smith's comments, we can infer the meaning from the last paragraph. Black people did not just start getting brutalized by the police; this had been happening for a while, but nothing had been done or no true change came about till the proofs started getting publicized via the usage of cellphones and social media to capture these practices, sometimes live as they occur. This in turn resulted in justice to a few of the victims of police brutality.

The case of the BLM and the Nigerian #EndSARS protests are similar in the sense that in Nigeria, police brutality has been happening for as long as I can remember. Corrupt acts by the government have existed longer than I have lived, and they are not regarded as "news" or a sudden change. Innocent killings, kidnappings, rotting of the police force, extortion of innocent civilians, among many more have been forced upon Nigerians as a reality that they have to accept and little to no revolts took place. This was until October 4 of 2020 when video footages of the killing of Daniel Chibuike, the man from Ughelli, surfaced. Refusing to be quiet as people were not only being extorted but also killed by the

SARS unit led the Nigerian youths to revolt against the government, thereby, challenging the objective reality the government was trying to create.

Therefore, this thesis aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What role(s) did social media play in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests in terms of spreading information and changing the subjective reality of Nigerians, if any?

RQ 2: How did activists on the street and activists (citizen journalists) on their cellphones help in the spread of information about the protests?

RQ 3: What made the subjective reality of Nigerians change to the extent of an uprising?

RQ4: What role did the proliferation of the October 4 video, which showed the killing of Daniel Chibuike, play in changing the subjective reality of Nigerians in relation to the protests?

Using the theory of social construction of reality, I examined what role perception and reality (subjective and objective) played in influencing Nigerian citizens' attitudes about the protests. I also examined the multiple roles of social media and citizen journalists in aiding or constricting the spread of information during the protests. For me personally, I saw the video of the October 4, 2020 murder and could not help but join the Los Angeles protests against the Nigerian government. I wanted to see if this was the case with my other interviewees.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were used because they are more flexible and organic, and they allow room for a discussion as opposed to the interviewer dictating the questions (Tracy, 2020). The semi structured interview, as stated in Tracy (2020), encouraged me to "listen, reflect, adapt to ever changing circumstances" (p. 158), and let the interviewee lead the discussion.

Tracy proceeds to mention that the advantages of the semi structured interviews are that "they allow for more emic, emergent understandings to blossom, and for the interviewees' complex viewpoints to be heard without the constraints of scripted questions" (p. 158). According to Tracy (2020), "interviews are conversations with a purpose" (p. 157), and due to their conversational nature, they can be organized in different ways.

I used the "informant interview" model, in which the participants were "veterans, experienced insiders, key connectors" in the field (Tracy, 2020, p. 159). Unlike other interview types, the informant interview is usually a conversational interview-type, where both participants and interviewer(s) have a "long-term relationship," are interested in talking to one another and are "friendly" (Tracy, 2020, p. 159). The interview stance used for a study of this nature was the responsive interviewing method. The responsive interview, according to Tracy, implies that as researchers, we have the duties to create a mutual

relationship between the participants and ourselves, treating our participants with the utmost respect, considering, accepting but avoiding our biases and their effects on the study as well as acknowledging the influence of the interviews on emotions.

Participants

The participants for this study were 16 people of Nigerian origin between the ages of 18 and 40. There was an age limit because the protest is known to have consisted majorly of younger generations and so, they were the most useful sample to help me answer the research questions. To get different perspectives on this research, I used the criterion sampling method (Palys, 2008). According to Palys, the criterion sampling method entails looking for participants who meet "certain criterion" (p. 697). The criterion of selecting my sample of interviewees were:

1. Participants who were online activists; this means participants who joined the protests via smartphones or computers only (and not in-person), either by liking, sharing, or hash tagging information on the protests or any other online act(s) on the protests.

2. Participants who were hybrid protestors; this means those who performed all the duties of the online activist and were also physically present at the site(s) of the protest(s).

Recruitment

For convenience, the snowball sampling technique was adopted for this study to find my participants, by first asking some of my friends who I knew participated in the protests (online or hybrid) to be a part of this study. Then, I asked them to refer other people that they knew partook in the protests (virtually or in-person) to be interviewed. All participants are active on social media; i.e., users who checked social media daily or weekly (e.g., spent 45 minutes to 1 hour on social media daily, or 8 hours a week). Participants also had first-hand knowledge about the Nigerian 2020 #EndSARS protests and had to be either Nigerian or of Nigerian origin. In the snowball sampling technique, the sample is built on recommendations from participants. This way, one can more easily include members of groups not on lists or people who would not be easily accessible.

Data Collection

Participants were individually interviewed for about 15-40 minutes via zoom. The interview length was dependent on each participant's responses and how lengthy they were. The length of the interview was also affected by how much each participant decided to disclose and share. All the interviews were audio recorded but only some were video recorded because some interviewees were not comfortable with a video interview.

To interview my participants appropriately and ethically, I obtained prior IRB approval from the IRB board of California State University, San Bernardino since I worked with human "subjects" (participants) for my study. This study followed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) procedures by making sure that all the participants in this study, as well as the study process, were treated according to the IRB ethics guidelines. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form and to verbally consent to conduct the study when interviewed. The consent form provided information to the participants explaining what the study was about, potential risks and benefits of the study, and it also requested participants' permission to allow me to use their interviews to conduct my study. The audio consent form, like the original consent form, informs my participants that with their permission, I would be video or audio recording (whichever they felt most comfortable with) each interview so I could better transcribe interviews and analyze the data. The forms also gave detailed information about participants' privacy protection. The purpose of the consent form was to give each participant a better insight of what my study was about and to assure them that their safety and privacy are important. I reminded each participant that what is said in the interviews will only be used for my research study and nothing else. The interviews and audio recordings were locked in a safe and secure place to which only I had access. To ensure the privacy of my participants, I will not be disclosing any of my participants' government-issued names in this study. A copy of both consent forms is attached to this study (Appendix B).

I asked each participant 21 interview questions (see Appendix A). As a researcher, I provided a quiet and safe environment to conduct my interviews where my participants felt comfortable sharing their social media experiences, especially that those experiences were politically charged. Upon completion of the interview process, I transcribed the interviews into typewritten textual records for an easier narrative analysis. After transcription, I coded the data to identify common patterns and themes in relation to the social construction of reality theory.

During each interview, I was attentive and listened to what each participant had to say. During the interview process, I jotted down parts of the interviews that stood out to me the most. As a researcher, I ensured I paid close attention to what my participants had to say, making sure that I had a clear understanding of what they were saying so I can look for common patterns and ask any follow up questions if needed.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Data Analysis

I used a thematic analysis process for this study. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis "is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into, patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset" (p. 2). It is usually applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly (para.1). Thematic textual analysis involves interpretively analyzing and coding qualitative data, and then organizing the data into themes that can help answer the research questions. During each interview, I took extensive notes that recorded certain nonverbal cues from the interviewees such as pauses, sighs, laughter, anger, or frustration. I used these cues to generate analytic and interpretive second-level codes. After I finished interviewing all my participants, I reviewed my notes and audio/visual recordings (as the case may be). After reviewing my audio/visual recordings, I transcribed each interview into English as some of my participants used certain Nigerian slangs. Then, I read through each transcription and generated alternative words for replies. For instance, if a participant said, "I was happy," I transcribed that to "Emotions positive," and if they said, "I was joyous," I put this in the same category. Each pattern was examined to better understand

what roles social media, citizen journalism and the social construction of reality played in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests. After doing this for each participant's responses, I labelled it my first-level coding.

Next, I looked for umbrella terms for each first-level code and put similar codes into umbrella words. This was my second-level coding. Once I identified the common patterns, I was able to generate specific themes and started answering my research questions.

To support my interview findings, I used a secondary method of data collection; watching news reports (past and recent), reading websites and blogs as well as watching footage of the protests. Conducting this secondary research helped me with foundational knowledge on the protests before reaching out to participants. It also provided me with a general idea of the different types of discourse on this phenomenon.

An outsider trying to conduct this study would prove difficult, as the participants would likely not express themselves fully to an outsider. The reason for this mistrust might be that an outsider could be a spy for the Nigerian government, trying to get information about the October 2020 protests. Being a Nigerian served as both an asset and baggage for this research. My background is an asset to this research because of my experiences with police brutality and my connections to Nigeria (having my family there), so I know how to tackle research on this topic, what questions to ask and whom my participants should be. My background could also serve as a liability because I only see this

research from one angle (police brutality exists in Nigeria). My migration from Nigeria to the US in 2018 could also serve as an 'outsider' element and a liability in this research. I have been living in the US since September 2018, and some of my perspectives on things might have changed even just a little. Some Nigerians might call me an outsider and refer to me as Nigerian-American as I have not stepped foot in Nigeria for almost four years. It could have created a gap in the relationship between the participants and myself.

Results

This study aimed to discover the role social media and citizen journalism played in the Nigerian #EndSARS protest. I also wanted to determine if perceptions of what is real and what happens in our everyday lives influence our behaviors. As stated in chapter 2 of this thesis, I used Berger and Luckmann's (1967) social construction of reality theory. This helped me confirm that there was a change in the objective reality of Nigerians through the actions of the Nigerian government, and this resulted in a change in how Nigerians perceived their personal (subjective) realities. This change resulted in an unsuccessful socialization of Nigeria, as there was a conflict between everyone's specific roles in the society and this led to protests.

For this research, I interviewed a total of 16 participants. Eight identified as female and eight identified as male. Regarding participation, eight interviewees were strictly online protestors and the other eight were hybrid

protesters (meaning they participated online by reposting, posting on their social media pages and attended at least 1 of the in-person protests). Each participant in this study was an active social media user. The participants had a minimum of four and a maximum of seven social media accounts. Each participant had an Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat account at the least, and logs into these accounts daily or weekly. The time spent on social media varied. I got an estimated average time of 16.8 hours daily by asking each participant how much time they would estimate they spend on social media apps daily. After getting the estimated whole numbers for each participant, I summed them up and divided by the number of participants I have (16). On average, all 16 participants spend 16.8 hours a day on these platforms.

I used a qualitative, interpretative approach known as thematic analysis. In the following sections, I will explain the roles of social media, citizen journalism, and constructed realities using the Nigerian #EndSARS protest in details.

In this section, I will present my main findings and explain the patterns that I discovered while conducting my interviews. I will also be linking those findings back to my research questions.

Findings

RQ1: What role(s) did social media play in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests in terms of spreading information and changing the subjective reality of Nigerians, if any?

According to my participants, social media played multiple roles during the Nigerian #EndSARS protests. For this study, many of the participants used one word to describe the role of social media: "awareness." Awareness in this context did not only mean knowing about police brutality or the protests but also, it is awareness in the form of:

1. Naming/framing their experiences (subjective reality).

2. Building solidarity in the community through the process of sharing individual experiences (change in subjective reality).

3. Mobilization (sharing action steps, time, and place for the peaceful protests).

4. Creating hashtags for followers of the protests to get information through.

5. Influencing people to participate in the protests physically and not only from behind their screens and keyboards.

6. Bringing about some division between Nigerians as some disagreed the existence of police brutality

Regarding the role social media played in the change of their subjective reality, many participants explained how sharing stories with one another through social media made them become aware of their reality, which is impacted by police brutality and bad governance. They explained how their experiences with the Nigerian government (and arms set up by the government) have repeatedly shaped their reality to be that of extortion, corruption, and negligence of duties. None of my participants attributed social media to be responsible for the change

in their realities but that social media did aid in the spread of information about the protest and providing them (Nigerians) with a safe space to share their different experiences/encounters with the SARS unit.

Participant 1, a 25-year-old Female biochemist and a heavy Instagram user, said: *I remember it on Instagram where people were saying they wanted to gather on this particular place… so yeah it was. This time, when they say, making plans that was when I became aware of the protest.*

Participant 12, a 23-year-old Female recent college graduate and a heavy Twitter user, said: *before the protest occurred, there were like information online because I use Twitter, I saw the information online that there was going to be protest a protest and all of that, so, I was aware.*

Participant 2, a 20-year-old female college student and a heavy Twitter user, said: *I became aware of the protest the minute it started like on Twitter… so I found about the protests through Twitter. People were talking about it and stuff like that. Even the videos they were posting on social media that thing was really, really disheartening.*

Participant 11, a 30-year-old male insurance underwriter and a heavy Instagram user, said: *people tweeted about them on Twitter, people talked about them on Twitter because you know Twitter's like more interactive than the other media we use. Then, on some platforms, like some groups like WhatsApp, people talked about coming for the protest, picking dates and venues for the protest so basically, social media was much more, was very, very influential in knowing about the protest's dates because social media makes it easy to reach out to people to lots of people.*

Participant 3, a 23-year-old female college student and a social media business owner, said: *It started online, I think on Twitter mainly. Everyone trying to push the hashtag #EndSARS, #EndSARSinNigeria #Endpolicebrutality, then I think we went to protest grounds carrying placards, so I think that's it.*

Participant 6, a 26-year-old male banker and a heavy Instagram and Twitter user, said: *social media, mostly Twitter. Then, Twitter was open. I was always on Twitter so and definitely noticed that roads have been blocked because a lot of people were out there having a peaceful protest. So yes, It was well known that something was going on.*

Participant 10, a 26-year-old male college student, said: *Me finding out about the protest was majorly on Twitter; a lot of Nigerians had the hashtag #EndSARS on every tweet put out there and I was very happy about that; that people were talking about things that were disturbing them and issues in the country. So it literally was from Instagram and Twitter but majorly Twitter.*

Participant 7, a 25-year-old female, said: *I think, it's the two* [social media promoted unity and division] *because, not everybody were supporting what we were doing. They were not really supporting the #EndSARS protests and it kind of brought unity to most of us that have experienced police brutality and for us to come up and protest, it brought unity, and it also brought conflict, because so many people were saying that why were we protesting that… it doesn't make sense, that SARS was not even on the street, they were not believing us that SARS were still on the streets, so I think social media had so many things against us.*

Participant 7 explains that although social media aided in uniting those who had experienced police brutality, it also created division between some Nigerians. She explained that those Nigerians who had never experienced police brutality disagreed that there was even a SARS unit and that the protests were pointless and just a way to cause conflict among Nigerians.

My participants stated that social media (Twitter mostly and Instagram) were responsible for creating awareness and spreading information regarding the Nigerian #EndSARS protest. Some of my participants stated how they wouldn't have known a protest was happening or the cause of the protest if it weren't for social media that helped them become aware of police brutality occurring on a mass scale. After discussing with the participants what caused the protest, a majority attributed part of the cause to seeing videos of police brutality from different Nigerians and realizing that these acts were beginning to shape their subjective reality.

Participant 10 continues: *Actually, my perception of the government didn't trigger this. It's the way the police brutalize and treat civilians anyhow, even before leaving Nigeria, I have had cases of police stopping me over just because I looked a certain way, or I drove a certain type of car so it's just the things that we all faced as Nigerians.*

After discussing the role of social media in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests, we discussed what role(s) did citizen journalists (referred to here as people on the street) play in the protests, in an attempt to answer the second research question:

RQ2: How did activists on the street (citizen journalists) and activists on their cellphones help in the spread of information about the protests?

Among the participants, 15 attested to have been made aware of the protests and other happenings, such as police brutality and harassment, by

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everyday citizens such as themselves. They all praised the actions of people who

attended the protests and decided to share their experiences of police brutality

and harassment, both in the past and in the present. These experiences were

shared by posting photos and videos of the protests and police brutality. The

participants also shared how citizen journalists aided in the spread of information

by hosting live-discussion fora on Instagram and the newly developed social

audio app, Clubhouse. The involvement of Clubhouse in the protests would be

discussed in the next chapter. According to four participants, professional media

outlets reported on the protests late, after the protest had started. These 'news'

agencies only addressed what was happening after many citizen journalists had

done most of the updates. However, some participants mentioned how only one

media outlet in Lagos State of Nigeria, which is Arise News, addressed the

protests. Arise News is a London-based media outlet with studios in London,

New York city, Abuja, Johannesburg, and Lagos.

> **Participant 4, a 25-year-old female and a recent graduate, said**: *… I
> was more aware of the protest by the street reporters, journalists. This is
> because they were the ones live at the scene, they had a better
> understanding of what was going on. So, those are the ones you would
> see the truth in… They (people on the street) made sure that every video,
> word, and message was passed at the right time and through the right
> channel… social media was able to share these videos, get them as soon
> as they were distributed. So yes, street journalism… because if they had*

waited till one of the professional news stations, it would have taken hours

for people to be aware of what went down that day. Compared to when it's

happening (live), we know what is happening.

Participant 6 said: *so, we have a lot of celebrities who were key players*

of this #EndSARS protests, and I'll call them heroes, right. Persons like…

those people were the ones that's [sic] *for me were the key players that*

made me aware of the protests… For me, yes, the professional journalists

came in afterwards. When they were helping with the whole broadcasting,

but initially, it all started from social media Instagram, Twitter and that was

what led to the ban of Twitter.

Participant 12 said: *Well, I found out through Twitter. I can't remember*

the person, but like I just saw like an info like Okay, there was going to be

a peaceful protest, then before the protest day happened, it all started

spreading like it became really serious and I was like Okay, they are really

going to do the protest. So it was through social media, my Twitter.

One participant explained how she had always been aware of the #EndSARS

protest years before the protest of 2020. She said that she was aware of the

protest because she lost a friend to these police officers.

Participant 13, a 24-year-old female with over 20 years of social media user experience, said: *I have been aware of the Nigerian #EndSARS protest before 2020, before the actual one that happened. Yeah because, I had a friend that died because of SARS, so I've been aware of this #EndSARS movement since before it became so big and everyone were talking about it.*

When the same participant was asked later about who helped her become aware of the 2020 Nigerian #EndSARS protest, she mentioned street journalists, as they made videos for their followers and everyone else to view and stay updated on happenings at the protest ground. She also praised one of the professional media outlets in Nigeria, as according to her, they were the only ones who reported on the protest.

Participant 13 continued: … *I'd say street journalists, the people who live streamed and were at the protests making videos. And, I'd also like to credit Arise TV which became the choice News station for every young person because they covered the facts and they weren't swayed by all the tactics of the government, because, I also heard so many different things were happening to them on the business side because they were showing the truth and not being like channels TV* [TV channels mentioned here is a

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television station in Nigeria like Aljazeera and CNN] *that was being sweet and manipulated by the Nigerian government.*

Next, we discussed what caused the Nigerian #EndSARS protests. The cause of the protest needed to be discussed to have a clearer picture of what influenced the perceptions of Nigeria and how this shaped and transformed the subjective reality of Nigerians.

RQ3: What made the subjective reality of Nigerians change to the extent of an uprising?

To answer this question, I engaged the participants with a list of possible causes for joining the protest or transforming their position from pacifism into activism. Answers varied according to each participant but ultimately, 14 out of 16 participants chose either police brutality (this includes but is not limited to the physical acts of violence and harassment, consuming media that showed gruesome videos of other Nigerians being harassed, hearing about others' experiences), corruption of the government, and/or being tired of bad government practices as the primary reason(s) for the protests. Secondary reasons included more free time because of the COVID-19 lockdown, peer influence, being tired of stereotyping and role reversal by the Nigerian police. Role reversal here means situations where the Nigerian Police inflict harm in the

form of forcefully taking things (money or properties) from the citizens they were meant to protect.

> **Participant 2 said:** *What influenced me was the government. Also the video I was seeing. I just cannot wrap my head around it and just seeing a human being just pull a gun on somebody, just end it, with no heart and also, seeing videos where the police officers shoot you for no reason. Just seeing those videos. They think they're not being watched but the whole world saw it and they've been basically exposed and embarrassed, but it will be a mix of how the Nigerian Government is and also videos I've seen.*

> **Participant 1 said**: *I feel like it's a lot of things in one. First off, bad governance. Second of all* [sic]*, the killing of the youth. Third, people were just tired, and I think I'll start with the youths.*
> *You know, for example, people were tired of the norm like they were tired of the whole fake promises, and everything wasn't working and then they were tired of police officers harassing young boys, you know if they see you with dreadlocks, for example, you are a yahoo boy (Internet fraudster), if you have a laptop, you are an Internet fraudster as well.*

Participant 4 said: *Okay, so you know, from the video first off, then people sharing their stories. You would think you've experienced the worst of it all till you hear someone else's stories that would trigger you. Hearing different people's stories and even your own personal experience would trigger the need to do something. And, you said why now?... I'm not saying that people have not tried their best … but because they know the country, they are in that they could be locked up… Trust me, that death wasn't the first. It's because that was the first one that became evident. These deaths have always been there but there would always be a moment when you cannot take it anymore… whereby, we have to bring about a change.*

Participant 5, a 23-year-old female fashion designer and a heavy Instagram user, said: *what influenced me is SARS themselves, the anti-robbery squad. The main body. I've seen them harass a lot of people, even my friends. Most of them come around and say they were harassed today because of how they were dressed and at the end of the day, these SARS officials only asked to be bribed. They didn't arrest my friends or take them to the police station. Over 10 people that I know…*

Participant 5 explained that she had never experienced police brutality but her friends and some people around her have influenced her and made her an activist in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests.

Participant 5 continues: *No, I have not witnessed police brutality but people around me have so that actually triggered me and gave me the urge to protest.*

Participant 8 said: *yeah, like I mentioned earlier, that it was first about the #EndSARS protest. It was about the antirobbery unit that were created that were extorting people, raping women extorting from young Nigerians. Along the line, it evolved into bad government based on people were already frustrated about the economy… So, it was more of like a protest against the police that evolved into a protest against bad governance. So, people were fed up.*

Participant 9, a 23-year-old male chemical engineer and heavy Instagram user, said: *I think its seeing videos recorded by other citizens; I mean killing of the young man in Edo state and also, experiencing it firsthand so, I know how bad it can be… Yes, it's like a mixture of everything. We were just tired and decided it's time to speak up.*

Participant 11 said: *It is because of what I see generally, it's not just about the complaints of people, but like I witnessed it firsthand* [sic] *so I know it's true, it is not just about my perception of them it is my experience.*

One participant explained that she engaged in the protest recently (2020) and not earlier out of fear of being harassed or worse by the Nigerian police force. This participant explained how the lack of accountability by the Nigerian government scared her out of speaking up and protesting for what she believes in.

Participant 12 said: *Well, first of all, you can't go on a one-man-protest in this country; they are just probably going to… probably just shoot your leg or something I don't know, because this country's crazy. So, I think this was like the first time, like youths came together and said "Okay, we are going to go together and no matter the situation, no matter what's going to happen, we are still going to be out there."*

Participant 12 goes on to explain that seeing videos of people harassed and sometimes killed also played a role in her participation. Her fear of a family member being the victim of police brutality made her decide to speak up and participate in the protest.

Participant 12 continues: *And yes, those videos of people being killed also contributed, because it could be my brother one day that is just on the road and he's being harassed by these people.*

And, I can relate to how losing a loved one feels. It is not even a nice feeling in any way. So aside for doing it for myself, we just have to do it for everybody, like we are all in this together in this country.

Another participant explained that she feels that she and other Nigerians participated in the protest because of the COVID-19 lockdown and people having more free time. To this participant, if Nigeria was not on a lockdown or forced to stay home, the situation in Nigeria would not have escalated to the point of a protest. In her opinion, the lockdown and seeing videos of people who were harassed by SARS were the primary reasons for the protest.

Participant 13 said: *I think the pandemic had a lot to do with that. People were forced to stay inside, and they could really see all the social issues. You know when you're forced to be grounded and you are just in one place, and you have to think and you see all the social issues that are happening like we're going through a pandemic; the pandemic is not killing us, but then other people are killing us. I think the pandemic had something to do with that and I think someone died recently or a few*

people died recently and the way they died were so gruesome so some

people had to just get up and fight, so I think that's what led to the protest.

Next, I wanted to better understand what role the October 4 video of police

brutality played in the formation of the subjective reality of Nigerians and how it

led to the protests, which brings me to the next research question:

RQ4: What role did the proliferation of the October 4 video, which showed

the killing of the young man, play in changing the subjective reality of

Nigerians in relation to the uprising?

To answer this research question, I asked the participants several

questions around the incident of October 4, 2020. The participants used the word

"trigger" to describe the role of the October 4 event. Although all 16 of the

participants gave replies that answered the research question, there were still

variations in their answers. Some participants stated that although the October 4

event played a vital role in the spark of the protest flames, it was not the only

cause of the protest. Other factors such as bad governance, corrupt leaders, the

state of the economy, extortion by the NPF, stereotyping, shared experiences

from fellow Nigerians, among other factors all served as "triggers" that led to the

protest. Here are few examples:

Participant 2 said: *That's a very interesting question because there might*

have been a protest. Actually, no I think the video is what triggered

people, and you know, I'm sure that's been happening in the micro scale

or on people as well, but people just don't know what to do, you know…

they just feel like what can we do you know, but like seeing that probably

triggered the actual protests. Because people have been like I've

experienced this. They did this to me, let's all rise together. Does that

make sense.

Participant 9 said: *Well, I feel it's like the best description, I can give is*

like… there's this law about an elastic object, if you keep on stretching it

and stretching it, and stretching it, it gets to a point where it just breaks…

That particular incident was like a trigger, a major trigger like okay, I think

it is time for all this to stop. It was a trigger. Other incidents had happened

earlier but that particular incident, that's what I call a breaking point.

Because they have stretched and stretched our patience. So, the breaking

point was October 4.

Some participants stated that if the protest did not occur at that time in October of 2020, it would have still occurred later, as Nigerians have always complained about, and were tired of, how they were treated. The video from October 4, 2020 served as a trigger that resulted in the protest happening that month.

Participant 5 said: *I feel there would have been* [a protest] *but may not have happened at that time yeah but I feel, even if it didn't happen, people would have stood up for themselves. Probably months after because, of course, people have been complaining about the SARS unit… the October 4, 2020 event was the trigger.*

Participant 13 said: *Well, I feel like people would have continued to protest but then it would get to a point that they would stop because… even the President didn't address people like some days after. So, it's like what are we even protesting at this point?*

Participant 7 said: *Yes, of course, we were not protesting only because of that video; we were protesting for people that have died through* [sic] *the hands of these police. We were protesting because we wanted this SARS unit to leave the streets. Because they kept on extorting students, youths. Most of us, even people in dreadlocks. If you're using an iPhone, you're using this, you're using that. So those were the kind of things, that we wanted to kick against on the streets.*

Participant 7 goes on to explain that she and other Nigerian youths had the need to be heard by the government. They wanted their requests granted and were not

going to accept being ignored, and those were other factors that contributed to the protests.

> **Participant 7 continues**: *We wanted the government to hear us that these people should be removed from the streets, because they keep on telling us that they have removed these people from the streets since 2015. So, we kept on hearing these kinds of stories and these people, they keep on saying the same thing, every time to us, I think again today, I still saw a video of Mr. Macaroni* [Mr. Macaroni is a popular Instagram celebrity who makes humorous skit/videos], *a popular person like that at Ogudu, Lagos state… I don't think it's because of a particular video because these things keep on happening every day, every time. So, those are the kind of things that made us very angry last year October. We wanted these people to leave the streets, these people should accept our demands. We want this, we want that… we want you guys to like reform the government, reform the police reform so many things that these people are not safeguarding our properties or guiding our lives. They are killing us. Every day they are killing us.*

While there were variations in the participants' responses on whether the protests would have happened when they did (2020) or months or years later in the future, results indicated that a protest would have definitely occurred. Without the October 4, 2020 event, the participants explained that the protest would have

still occurred, as these feelings of exhaustion have always been on the minds of Nigerians and all they needed was a little push. Analogies like "there's this law about an elastic object, if you keep on stretching it and stretching it, and stretching it, it gets to a point where it just breaks" (participant 9, 2021) were used to describe the level of patience of Nigerian youths. This means that eventually, if not the year 2020, maybe 2021, 2022 or soon, Nigerians would have eventually stretch to their point of breaking. The video also played a major role in reshaping the reality of Nigerians, as it served as proof of police brutality happening in the country. The video made all the participants realize that they, their friends, or even family could be victims of police brutality. The victim being Nigerian made the situation more relatable to the participants.

Now that I have noted the patterns from the data, I will explain these patterns further in the discussion section.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

This research study analyzed the role(s) human perception(s) played in shaping the subjective realities of some Nigerians in the case of the Nigerian #EndSARS protest. Through the data gathered for this research, it can be argued that the use of social media by citizen journalists in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests had some positive impact on the protests. Citizen journalists, during the protests, took to the streets of Nigeria, risking life and limb to report live events of the protests to their social media followers. Citizen journalists were the critical agents in spreading information to many Nigerians. Without the street journalists, who took to the streets to participate in the protests and record what was happening, information about the protests would have been delayed and not as instantaneous. Social media were helpful but could have been somewhat easily replaced by word-of-mouth, while professional media channels could not have replaced citizen journalists. This is because media channels in Nigeria are known for following broadcasting rules, as stated by the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC). One of these broadcasting rules, according to *an Agency report* (2020), states that "in line with the provision of section 5.6.9 of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code which states that the broadcaster shall be held liable for any

breach of the code emanation from the use of material from User Generated Sources" (para. 4).

This act helped spread details about what was happening at different times, informing the online activists and non-activists about the #EndSARS protests. My research also indicated that everyone's experience of police brutality and the presence of shared experience helped some Nigerians collectively agree that police brutality exists and creates objective conditions for the Nigerian government.

Similar to the conclusion reached by El-Nawawy and Khamis, this research identified several themes that all indicated that "the virtual community is an extension of the real community, and the meaning and values of a virtual community are derived from the participants in that community" (2009, p. 55).

During the interview process for this research, participants shared with me their opinions and experiences with the SARS unit. The participants in this research also stated how they exchanged information on present and past encounters with the SARS unit with other Nigerians, and how the process of sharing information stirred feelings of discontentment against the government amongst the Nigerian population. These feelings of discontentment then shaped their (Nigerian youths') perceptions of the Nigerian government (subjective reality). As the findings from this research revealed, conversations on social media (the virtual community) influenced participants' real lives and swayed them towards rebellion. The digital world is like a wing to the real world, and the

interpretation and beliefs of the digital world are gotten from the members of that community (El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009, p. 55).

The best way to learn about anything (let's say a skill) is through experience; we can read books, see movies, or listen to stories about events, but to truly understand those events, one needs to experience and go through them. The inadequacies of the Nigerian government are no longer news to me or to anyone who has lived in Nigeria. I, as a Nigerian, lived in an economy where basic amenities such as water, food, good roads, electricity, and security were not provided to us, and we had to get them ourselves. My interest in this topic was ignited by my firsthand experiences growing up in Nigeria; seeing and experiencing the state of things in Nigeria and comparing it with that of the U.S. made me decide to intertwine the conditions in Nigeria with my scholarly interests (social media and perceptions of reality). The role of social media in everyday life and how our perceptions of reality shape our behaviors have been studied time and time again by numerous scholars. Digital media have been accepted as a part of everyday life and one can almost not do without digital media or its services daily. The role(s) of social media and the role of the perceptions of Nigerians (about their government and the Nigerian reality) in the Nigerian #EndSARS protest, however, was yet to be studied at the time of this research. From this study, I have applied the theory of social construction of reality to this research, and I have been able to contribute to the literature on the roles of social media in social protests.

I believe it is also worthy of note that none of the participants in this research was strictly in-person. This is referred to in the scholarly community as the domestication process of technology and social media.

Conducting this study helped me share with others how there are individual perceptions of realities (subjective reality) and fixed/group realities (objective reality) and how both play important roles in every society's individual and collective behaviors.

Using the social construction of reality as a guiding theory in the case of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests, we notice that habitualization was almost successful in Nigeria. Habitualization, as defined in chapter 2, is a situation where an action keeps happening and reoccurring consistently until it turns into a "pattern" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 71). According to my data, Nigerians accepted the reoccurrence of extortion, bad leadership, and corruption from their leaders for years, and this went on for a long time until video evidence of what was happening came to light through social media applications like Twitter. For example, participant 4 stated, "*trust me, that death wasn't the first. It's because that was the first one that became evident*" (participant 4, 2021). Participant 4's response to "what made you change from a place of pacifism to that of activism" aligns interestingly with research conducted on the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) and the murder of George Floyd. Here in the United States, which is one of the 47 countries serving on the Human Rights Council, we witness police officers, people trained to serve and protect 'all' citizens of the country,

regardless of their skin color or how they talk, show that some lives do matter more than others to them. This had been the case for a long time without any proper sanctions by the department of justice or any recognition by news agencies until recently, especially after people became witnesses of the murder of George Floyd and felt compelled to act (or do something like that).

When videos, photos, and other media content (evidence) went live, topics on systemic racism and police brutality against African Americans gained more traction. Now, more people are willing to speak up (even if some people speak up only to show that and not because they really do care about equality and/or to 'play their parts') against racism. In the case of George Floyd, we were able to see the unsettling restraint methods used by officers of the Minneapolis Police Department, which resulted in the demise of George Floyd. The video of George Floyd's murder outraged people across the world (not just in the United States) and led to a massive protest outbreak worldwide. There had always been cases of systemic racism in the United States. Black Americans have been killed mostly by Caucasian American police officers and there had been no sanctions. What made the case of George Floyd standout was the presence and existence of evidence. This is like the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria; police brutality has gone on without sanctions or punishments in Nigeria for a long time. People had known about these things happening but chose to keep quiet until social media made police brutality visible. The realization and internalization of evidence that showed the killing of Nigerians by the Nigerian police, created a different reality

for Nigerians and brought about the need for them to speak up against the objective conditions even if they had been used to it almost to the point of habitualization. The availability of evidence that proved/confirmed the objective reality of Nigerians, shaped their subjective realities. Intersubjective reality also played essential roles during the #EndSARS protests as the presence of collective awareness and outrage influenced Nigerians. The presence of intersubjective conditions in the form of group acknowledgements of the existence of police brutality pushed some of the participants to revolt. The collective shift was also crucial in the shaping/changing the objective reality.

The Nigerian #EndSARS protest is like many uprisings that have happened in different countries (e.g., the Arab Spring). The Nigerian #EndSARS protest is like the Arab Spring in many ways: They both occurred in African countries; social media were hailed as playing important roles in both protests; and they both are examples of cyberactivism that led to physical protests. In the Arab Spring protests, scholars like El-Nawawy and Khamis (2009) explained how social media tools like Twitter and Facebook were regarded as vital tools in the uprisings. We witnessed the same in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests, as Twitter and Instagram were the major social media applications used in the protest. This could be the result of Facebook losing users and the decline in number of members the app has. Wani (2022), states that for a while, the consumption of Facebook has slowly decreased over time and towards the end of 2021, lost over five hundred thousand users. Heath (2021) explained that although usage of

Instagram has dropped by 13 percent since 2019, young people still prefer

Instagram over Facebook as Facebook has come to be associated as an app for

older people in their 40s to 50s. Heath goes on to state that users of Facebook

"have a wide range of negative associations with Facebook including privacy

concerns, impact to their wellbeing, along with low awareness of relevant

services" (para. 11). In a report by Socialbakers on "*The State of Social Media

Marketing: Facebook vs. Instagram in 2020,*" we see a comparison of a cross-

posting from Disney on Facebook and Instagram. Here, we notice how the

"interactions" of the same post on Instagram was much higher than interactions

on Facebook with a difference of over 85 thousand (p. 6). This comparison

provides support for my argument that perhaps Facebook is declining on the

social media consumption market and is less popular to the Nigerian youths

unlike Instagram. This decline might have made Facebook a less attractive

platform with lesser viewers to discuss the happenings in the country.

Twitter might have also been used more in the protests over Instagram

because of reports of Instagram cracking down on protestors by flagging posts

about the #EndSARS protests as false or fake news. According to a user of

Instagram (whose name was not mentioned) on *CBS News* (Jones, 2020), they

said they received this message from Instagram on their post about the protests:

"False: The same false information was reviewed in another post by fact-

checkers. There may be small differences. Independent fact-checkers say this

information has no basis in fact" (para. 6). This act of flagging down several

reports on the protests annoyed Nigerians and led to them to using Instagram less for updates on the protests. While Instagram's act implied opposition to the movement, Twitter aided Nigerians during the #EndSARS protests. Jack Dorsey, the then CEO of Twitter, tweeted on his page two links with the hashtag of the movement #EndSARS (Amaize, 2021). One of these links was to a page that gathered different personal stories from victims of the SARS unit, and the other to a Nigerian social movement group. I was conducting secondary research for my thesis, so I saw these tweets myself and retweeted them for others to see. Dorsey went further and tweeted a link to a *GoFundMe* that asked for donations to support victims of police brutality during the protests. Subsequently, Twitter developed a "tight-fist emoji draped in the Nigerian flag to support the movement" (Amaize, 2021, para. 10). These reasons played vital roles in the appraisal of Twitter and the condemnation of Instagram in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests.

In the Arab Spring, social media tools were used for information dissemination, mobilization, organization, awareness, splitting tasks, empowering activists with digital tools to update and arrange social rallies and become protestors (Ahmad et al., 2015; Charrad & Reith, 2019; Dewey et al., 2012; Gire, 2017; Hermida et al., 2014; Khamis & Vaughn, 2011; Sandoval-Almazan & Ramon Gil-Garcia, 2014; Sumiala & Korpiola, 2017). This study of the Nigerian #EndSARS protest explains how Twitter was used for information dissemination (to update people about the dates and locations of the protests), coordinating the protests, creating awareness, as a tool to transform the subjective realities of

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Nigerians, organize protestors, share experiences, develop hashtags, a safe space to communicate, raise donations, and decide to vote a better leader for the country. Instagram, on the other hand, was used mostly for the live recording/timestamp feature to show Nigerians and the world what was happening at protest grounds in real time, and to host live discussion forums with both online and on-the-ground activists. Social media applications like Clubhouse were used during the Nigerian #EndSARS protests mainly to host discussion forums regarding the protests. Clubhouse is an audio-based social networking app that has a theme of exclusivity created by Paul Davison and Rohan Seth (Marcin, 2021; Strielkowski, 2021). Clubhouse being a new social media application that utilizes an audio only feature provides participants, referred to as speakers, a layer of anonymity other live discussion applications like Instagram did not provide. Interested parties in Clubhouse need to be invited to become users of the application. This is because Clubhouse is an "invitation-only app" (Strielkowski, 2021, p. 2). Users on Clubhouse do not have to look at their screens to use the app, as it functions even in the background of a locked phone, like a radio. This is the first social media app to have such features (Strielkowski, 2021). The app describes itself as "a place for casual, drop-in audio chats… to meet with friends and new people around the world—to tell stories, ask questions, debate, learn, and have impromptu conversations on thousands of different topics" (*What Is Clubhouse?*, n.d., para. 1). As a way out of the everyday cycle of boredom and a way for users to express themselves,

Clubhouse was launched amidst the coronavirus pandemic in March of 2020 (Shead, 2021). "There is a large social component to Clubhouse that allows users to create and connect spaces where all kinds of topics are discussed, and it strongly promotes the formation and growth of networks" (Strielkowski, 2021, p. 3). Strielkowski (2021) goes on to explain that the name 'Clubhouse' is like a mental health program; the "Clubhouse model" (p. 4). Clubhouse was another social media app also used in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests that propelled the protests and discussions of the protests to an even larger audience group. In the scholarly world, it is referred to as affordances.

According to Gibson (1977), Affordances refer to the features, characteristics, or uses that an object provides. Gibson explains that "the affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill" (p. 127). Chong and Proctor (2019) define affordances as "the properties an object possesses that communicate possible actions to a user" (p. 117). This concept, in simpler terms, addresses what services an object has to offer. To further explain the concept of affordances, I would use one of the social media apps used during the #EndSARS protests, Twitter.

Twitter is a social networking app whereby short text messages (called Tweets) are shared with users. This act is referred to as Tweeting. Gil (2021) explained that the art of Tweeting involves "posting short messages for anyone who follows you on Twitter, with the hope that your words are useful and

interesting to someone in your audience" (para. 1). The affordances of Twitter in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests were providing a space for Nigerians to express themselves in the form of tweets. The use of Twitter provided a universal audience for Nigerians as they shared their experiences, stories, or firsthand witnesses of both the protests and the SARS unit. The affordance of Twitter also offers its users the option to upload photos and videos. They used it to upload proof of police brutality and provide updates about the protests. Twitter was the most popular social media tool used during the protests because of its app-related affordances and the affordance provided via its CEO, Jack Dorsey.

During the secondary data-gathering stage for this research, I joined rooms on Clubhouse that discussed the Nigerian #EndSARS protests. In these rooms, Nigerian audiences had a chance to narrate their experience with the SARS unit personally or about others. The audio-only feature of Clubhouse helped speakers feel safer as there were no identifying characteristics that could be linked back to them. Some Nigerians poured out their heart on these forums, creating intersubjective realities.

Sandoval-Almazan and Ramon Gil-Garcia (2014) state that "social protests have become powerful expressions against government regimes or specific public policies" (p. 365). This was evident in the case of the Arab Spring when the 26-year-old street fruit vendor, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire to oppose the Tunisian government's regime. This is similar to the Nigerian #EndSARS protest, as Nigerians set aside their personal differences and

conflicting cultures to stand in unity against the Nigerian government and its wrongdoings. Some of the people of Nigeria (though consisting of different tribes who speak different languages and have different beliefs) came together to speak one language, "End Police Brutality Now," during the #EndSARS protests.

In the Arab Spring, Facebook was crowned by some scholars (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011) as one of the most important tools in organizing the protests in January and February of 2011. We witnessed the same "cyber-utopianism" (El-Nawawy & Khamis, 2009, p. 10) from protestors of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests as they attributed social media, Twitter mainly, as being a pivotal tool of information dissemination and mobilization during the protests. Unlike the Arab Spring, none of the participants in this research were what El- Nawawy & Khamis (2009) called "cyber-skeptics" (p. 10). "Cyber-utopianism" also known as "Google Doctrine" according to Morozov (2011, p. 9), is when new media are accorded way more influence, reach and power than it really deserves or wields because of the convincing and undisputable opinion by cyber-enthusiasts that computer-generated machineries/tools contain an infinite level of control to unshackle the citizens of a nation from the tyranny of the government. In fact, the powers of social media are not limitless. The government could control or ban the 'limitless' power of social media, as was the case in Nigeria during the #EndSARS protests. After the Nigerian government witnessed the coverage social media apps like Twitter gave the protest, Twitter was banned in Nigeria for a 7-month period (Maclean, 2022). This was an attempt by the Nigerian government to curb

the power of social media, silence the youths and abruptly end the protests in Nigeria. Morozov (2011) explains seeing the positive influence of social media without seeing the negatives as

> visiting Berkeley, California, cyber-utopian headquarters, and concluding that this is how the rest of America lives as well: diverse, tolerant, sun-drenched, with plenty of organic food and nice wine, and with hordes of lifelong political activists fighting for causes that don't even exist yet. (pp. 20-21)

In an anti-Cyber-utopianism view, Iskandar (2013) stated that, "the problem with this logic is not its desire to determine the correlation between cyberactivism and mobilization, but rather its disregard for the experiential dimensions of online action and the contextual conditions that precipitate dissent offline" (para. 4). Iskandar (2013), proceeds and asks where does digital activism actually lead to street activism? How can you tell when an online campaign becomes successful? "What distinguishes a community of activists from slacktivists? When do people choose to move their dissent from the keyboard to the boardwalk?" (Para. 4). Digital media tools like Twitter, Instagram might play important roles in mobilization and possibly aid in the faster spread of information, but they should not be hailed as the tools responsible for social movements. During the interview process, participants in this research explained how protest places and times were decided on Twitter, but that does not make Twitter the savior or holy grail for the Nigerian #EndSARS protests. Yes, it helped

spread information and was used to discuss relevant information about the protests, but it was not the influential factor that moved protestors' position from the keyboard to the boardwalk.

Using the case of the murder of George Floyd, we see videos that showed the killing of George Floyd, shared on social media apps, (Twitter and Instagram majorly) and have other victims of either direct police brutality or witnesses of police brutality come forward to share their opinions on these social media apps. Social media however did not motivate/push/influence them to decide to take it from the keyboard to the boardwalk. They made those decisions themselves. Social media can only provide the information. The people themselves made the decision to protest the policing in America. This view of social media on social protests was also argued by Gladwell (2010) that "activism that challenges the status quo—that attacks deeply rooted problems—is not for the faint of heart" and cannot be brought about by social media (para. 11). To Gladwell (2010), what makes people choose to become activists for a cause is not out of a strong belief or tie to the cause but due to the level of "personal connection" they have to that social movement (para. 12). "High-risk" social protests according to McAdam (as cited by Gladwell, 2010), is a "strong-tie" phenomenon (para. 12). The uprisings of the murder of George Floyd and the Nigerian #EndSARS are both examples of "High-risk" activism and social media are not capable of such because the relationship built via social media are "weak ties" (Gladwell, 2010, para. 15).

The ties built by Nigerians via social media and intersubjective reality led to reactions of different levels. Some Nigerian youths decided to make the governments hear their voices in person. They decided to move the protests from the keyboard to the boardwalk. Their roles in the demonstrations switched from pacifism to activism when thousands of young Nigerians decided to occupy major streets in major cities in Nigeria (Jones, 2021). Some of these major cities occupied by Nigerians are the Lekki toll gate and the Ikoyi link bridge plaza, both in Lagos, Nigeria (Akinkuotu, 2021; *Amnesty International,* n.d.). According to Akinkuotu (2021), the closure of both locations cost the Lagos state government "at least 9.7 Billion Naira" (para. 1). According to the exchange rate. Org, today, that is over 23 million Dollars.

In the case of the Arab Spring, social media had its merits of aiding the protests and had its demerits; "widespread misinformation, hate speech, language translation mishaps and targeted surveillance" (Emmanouilidou, 2020, para. 3). This was similar to the Nigerian #EndSARS protests as social media also helped in the spread of misinformation and putting people of similar interests against each other. Social media are tools and like any other tool, can be used for positive and/or negative impacts. From time-to-time, different systems of government and individuals from various parts of the world have successfully armed social media as tools against the people rather than tools that work for the people (Emmanouilidou, 2020).

Future Research

No study can address all dimensions of an issue, and, as with any study, there is always room for improvement. Some might argue and state that my personal interests and experience in the subject matter of police brutality might be a limitation to this research, but I argue otherwise. Being a firsthand witness of the acts of the SARS unit puts me in the best position to conduct research in this field. My personal relationship with some of the participants might also have made them more inclined to express themselves freely during the interviews.

Although it can be argued that social media played vital roles in the protests, it is not clear whether this was done systematically or whether it brought in any new crowds onto the streets. To ascertain that, research needs to be carried out to discover if protestors were recruited to be activists through social media. It is also unclear if the Nigerian #EndSARS protests, and Arab Spring have more similarities than just the use of social media for mobilization. Conducting research on that area would be beneficial to this study. The field of study of social media is vast and more research from different angles on what roles social media played in the individual lives of Nigerians is also needed.

Conclusion

While Twitter has been attributed to play many roles in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests, one must take caution to avoid attributing all the successes of the #EndSARS protests to social media. Twitter could have been used for

publicity rather than organization, as pointed out by Morozov (2011), on the role

of Twitter in the Arab Spring. Citizen journalists or "Netizens" (El-Nawawy &

Khamis, 2009, p. 9) played more important roles in the protest than professional

journalists/media houses. In this study, social media, mainly Twitter, Instagram

and Clubhouse, were used to provide details about the time and place of the

protests.

According to Schulz (1982), we humans are steered mainly by how we

think, feel and what we know or believe (even when we believe we are only

partially correct). This was the case as some of the Nigerian youths thought

bribery, corruption, extortion, among many others, to be their reality, and this

steered them in the pacifist path, and they avoided confrontations with the

Nigerian government. However, when police brutality and loss of lives were

added to the mix, it brought about a change in their behavior. The objective

reality of Nigerians (despite how saddening it was, as it contributed to negative

stereotypes) is that of no basic amenities, corruption, bribery, and hardship. This

was accepted by many Nigerians and there were little to no protests. When the

government changed the objective reality with more police brutality and extortion,

a lot of Nigerians' 'perception' of the objective reality changed which resulted in

what Berger and Luckmann (1967) called an unsuccessful "socialization" (p.

183). According to the participants in this study, Nigerians were tired of the

norms (police brutality, oppression, extortion, etc.), which led to social media

usage to discuss similar experiences and share stories. These stories brought

about some form of bond between people with similar backgrounds and led to Nigerians agree intersubjectively to police brutality as part of their objective reality. It, in turn, brought about the protests as they refused to accept these 'norms' as part of their objective reality.

This paper and the findings therein contribute to research on social media, citizen journalism, and Berger and Luckmann's theory on social construction of reality.

APPENDIX A:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol (Based on Tracy, 2020)

Hello, my name is Olabode Lawal. I am a graduate student here at CSUSB. For the next 20-40 minutes (approx. time), I will be interviewing you regarding THE NIGERIAN #ENDSARS protests and your experiences as a Nigerian. Before we get started, do you have any questions?

- Present the participant with the IRB consent form. Get their consent on recording the interview.

- Hey, how are you doing? How are you holding on with the pandemic and everything else? (Then bounce off from their answer for the next 30-90 seconds to check in with them and stimulate mutual self-disclosure).

- Could you please state your age, sex, preferred pronouns, country of origin, current country of residence and racial group you identify with?

- How long have you been a social media user? And what accounts do you have?

- How much time do you spend weekly online?

- Are you aware of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests?

- Can you recall when you became aware of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests?

- Talk me through how you found out about the Nigerian #EndSARS protests?

- What events do you think led up to the protests?

- How did you become an activist in the Nigerian #EndSARS protests?

- What perceptions do you have about the Nigerian government?

- Do you believe the Nigerian government is corrupt? Why? How?"

- Do you think your perceptions played any role in your participation in the protests? Why now? The video showing the killing of the young man? Spread of information by social media? Seeing videos recorded by citizens on what is happening in the country? What?

- If things had remained the same as they were before October 4, 2020, do you think an uprising would have erupted?

- In terms of professional journalists such as reporters from CNN Africa, Channels TV, and Aljazeera or street journalists such as someone who Instagram livestreamed the protests, which do you think helped you become aware that a protest was happening?

- How do you think (answer from above) helped create awareness of the protests?

- Which of the following roles did you play during the protests reposting posts, tagging celebrities, physically protesting at one of the different sites, donating funds or anything that aided the protests?

- Where do you predict, these protests would lead to 5 years from now?

- Research shows that social media are responsible for creating awareness on protests, uprisings, and revolutions against the government. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- Some research also states that social media obstructs protests and leads to division, fragmentation and putting people of similar goals against each other. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

- Some scholars posit that change in realities can bring about change in behavior. Do you agree? If yes, do you think that brought about the protests?

- Do you plan to participate in any future protests if things remain the same?

APPENDIX B:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The study in which you are being asked to participate is designed to investigate the role of social media and citizen journalism in the Nigerian #EndSARS protest. This study is being conducted by Olabode Adefemi Lawal under the supervision of Dr. Ahlam Muhtaseb, Professor of Communication, California State University, San Bernardino; Dr. Thomas Corrigan, Professor of Communication, California State University, San Bernardino; Dr. Shafiqur Rahman, Professor of Communication, California State University, San Bernardino. This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board, California State University, San Bernardino.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research is to discover the roles social media users play in situations such as protests, revolting against bad government practices, and shedding light on hidden practices by various people in power. I want to know if social media are what determine the spread of information, resolution of conflicts, or creation of awareness about situations or if these are solely based on the actions of the platform's users.

DESCRIPTION: The interview would be hosted on zoom to enable me to record and watch the interview sessions as many times as needed for the coding, unless the participants refuse to be recorded, then I will take extensive notes. The interview would be recorded in video/audio format depending on the participants. Notes would also be taken but only as a support to audio/video

recordings as these would be the primary method of units of analysis (unless participants reject being recorded). After recording the audio/video interviews and transcribing them, the transcripts would be annotated by labeling relevant words, phrases or sentences with codes and the interviews would later be categorized into first-level coding, where I select codes that relate directly to my research. After this, I would categorize the discovered first-level codes into second-level codes by housing similar codes that fall under similar interpretation in the same umbrella term. The next step would be to create a code book that would include the name of the code, its explanation, and a real or hypothetical example from the interview data

PARTICIPATION: Your participation is completely voluntary, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time.

CONFIDENTIAL: Confidentiality would be ensured by storing video interviews on my Personal Computer which is password protected till after coding has been carried out on the responses then the video or audio interviews would be permanently deleted from my device 6 months after the research has been completed.

The interview would be recorded in video/audio format on Zoom or Google meet depending on the participants. Notes would also be taken but only as a support to audio/video recordings as these would be the primary method of units of analysis (unless participants rejected to be recorded). After recording the audio/video interviews on my PC in a folder and transcribing them, the transcripts would be annotated by labeling relevant words, phrases or sentences with codes and the interviews would later be categorized into first-level coding, where I select codes that relate directly to my research. After this, I would categorize the discovered first-level codes into second-level codes by housing similar codes that fall under similar interpretation in the same umbrella term.

The next step would be to create a code book that would include the name of the code, its explanation, and a real or hypothetical example from the interview data.

After coding has been completed, the interviews all stored in the same folder would be moved to the trash folder on my PC and permanently delete to protect participants' privacy. No names would be mentioned throughout the interview process to protect the identity of my participant and video recording would only be used to gather visual cues which cannot be noticed in audio recordings.

DURATION: The interview would take between 30 to 45 minutes per participant. I would also create a 5-minute window before and after the interview allocated time to cover for unexpected turns or questions

RISKS: Participants may express some upsetting views about the Nigerian government which may be interpreted as a negative spotlight on the Nigerian economy. The interview might shed light on some of the bad practices carried out by the government and their different encounter with the Nigerian Police Force during the #EndSARS protest. To protect participants and let them know information shared with us would not be made public, participants would be given the option to either conduct a video or audio interview and assured that the interviews would be completely erased. There is a risk of the Nigerian government, or any other government elsewhere, spying on its citizen, so I will inform my participants of that possibility and let them decide whether to take that risk or not.

BENEFITS: There are no benefits attached to your participation in this research.

VIDEO/AUDIO/PHOTOGRAPH:

I understand this research will be Video Recorded Initials_____

I understand that this research will be audio recorded Initials_____

CONTACT: In the advent of questions regarding this research, please contact

Dr. Ahlam Muhtaseb, Professor of Communication, California State University,

San Bernardino on amuhtase@csusb.edu or call (909) 537-5897

RESULTS: The results of this research can be obtained from Department of

Communication Studies, California State University, San Bernardino, UH-018.

CONFIRMATION STATEMENT:

I have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in

your study.

SIGNATURE

Signature: _____   Date: _____

APPENDIX C:

IRB APPROVAL

August 26, 2021

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Expedited Review
IRB-FY2021-301
Status: Approved

Prof. Ahlam Muhtaseb and Prof. Olabode Lawal
CAL - Communications
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Prof. Ahlam Muhtaseb and Prof. Olabode Lawal:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "The Role of Social Media and Citizen Journalism in the Nigerian #Endsars Protests" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants. The study is approved as of August 26, 2021. The study will require an annual administrative check-in (annual report) on the current status of the study on August 25, 2022. Please use the renewal form to complete the annual report.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's COVID-19 Prevention Plan for more information regarding campus requirements.

If your study is closed to enrollment, the data has been de-identified, and you're only analyzing the data - you may close the study by submitting the Closure Application Form through the Cayuse Human Ethics (IRB) system. The Cayuse system automatically reminders you at 90, 60, and 30 days before the study is due for renewal or submission of your annual report (administrative check-in). The modification, renewal, study closure, and unanticipated/adverse event forms are located in the Cayuse system with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission Webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. Please note a lapse in your approval may result in your not being able to use the data collected during the lapse in the application's approval period.

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