ANALYSIS OF ETHICAL CONCERNS IN SOCIAL MEDIA USE AMONG YOUTH IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to analyse ethical concerns in social media use among the youth in Nigeria. The theoretical framework adopted is the Source Credibility Theory. The study employed Critical Discourse Analysis. The population of the study consisted of the top four (4) social networking sites in Nigeria. Out of these, Twitter was purposively selected for its widespread use for youth activism, particularly within the context of the #EndSARS protest; and for being the only social media platform the federal government had temporarily banned for ethical violations. A convenient sample of ten (10) tweets, which included retweets with text and images posted both during and within 18 months after the protest, was used to collect secondary data. Findings demonstrated a mix of ethical and unethical use of Twitter within the context of the protest. The result also revealed that although Twitter is a credible source of information, there were instances of anonymous tweets, which cast some doubts on the credibility of that specific source. The study recommends that beyond social media regulations, there is a need for the promotion of media literacy in Nigeria's workplaces and educational system. In addition, the form of self-regulation inherent in African ethics should be applied by users of social media to facilitate harmonious communication. This study has made a modest contribution in the area of source credibility theory by proposing a conceptual framework within the context of the study.

Keywords: Ethics, Nigeria, Social Media Use, Youth.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and several others have become indispensable tools for activism and public discourse. The pervasive use of social media cuts across people of all ages and socio-cultural backgrounds, which has raised ethical concerns (Barrett-Maitland & Lynch, 2020). However, observations show that the phenomenon of using social media for civic engagements is more rampant among the youth. In Nigeria, the widespread use of social media has undoubtedly increased with enhanced internet penetration. A poll conducted by NOIPolls (2019) reported that estimates from the Nigeria Population Commission showed that 120 million (61%) Nigerians out of a population of 198 million have access to the Internet. Out of this figure, "70 per cent of young Nigerians aged between 18 – 35 years have access to the internet compared to the 56 per cent for those aged between 36 and 60 years and 28 per cent for those aged 61 years and above" (NOIPolls, 2019:5). The poll also found that 95% of respondents use social networking sites and applications on the Internet, with Twitter ranking in the top four.

Nzewi (2021) aptly noted that now, rather than engage in face-to-face interaction with friends, Nigerian youths spend hours browsing the Internet, engaging one another in chatting and socializing on various social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Google+, Tumblr, and Instagram amongst others. Besides this, Nigerian youths have been known to have used Twitter for digital activism and protests. The reason for this preference is perhaps, obvious. On Twitter, information is rapidly shared, and displeasure and opinions are easily expressed on any topic. Such civic engagements are via short messages called "tweets", usually a maximum of 280 characters when the message is from the first source, or "retweets" when the message is re-shared by others. Thus, in January 2012, the #OccupyNigeria protest birthed Twitter-enhanced activism. Hari (2014) examined the role of social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter in the coordination and mass mobilisation of the #OccupyNigeria movement. Hari rightly predicted that with the increasing penetration of the Internet in the country, the use of social media to mount pressure on the government on public issues would also increase.

Since then, several other hashtag protests have gained cult followings and become popular on Nigerian Twittersphere, including the #BringBackOurGirls

and the #NotTooYoungToRun movements. However, so far, the #EndSARS protest of October 2020 which has now metamorphosed into a movement for socio-political change has been the most impactful. The EndSARS protest first emerged on Twitter in 2017, with the hashtag #EndSARS, demanding the scrapping of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) on account of extrajudicial killings, brutality, extortion and gross human rights abuse by the personnel of the SARS unit, particularly against the youth (Amnesty International, 2020; Chinweobo-Onuoha et al., 2021; Ochi & Mark, 2021). A new wave of the #EndSARS protest started trending on Twitter on the 8th of October 2020, in protest of the gruesome killing of a young man by SARS operatives a few days earlier in Delta State. The protest raged for weeks, leading to the disbandment of the SARS within days of the protest and the infamous Lekki Massacre. Though the government denied the killing of protesters during the protest in Lekki, in November 2021, a panel of inquiry confirmed that some protesters were indeed killed, further confirming the earlier reported killings.

Obia (2020) noted that Twitter is unique because it has become part of Nigeria's political discourse, and is described as a land whose inhabitants "are not subject to anyone's control" (para. 12). This unregulated use of Twitter has thrown up ethical concerns. For this and several other suspicious reasons, on Friday, 4 June, the Nigerian authorities announced an indefinite ban on Twitter in Nigeria and directed internet service providers in Nigeria to block access to Twitter. Media houses also were directed to deactivate their Twitter accounts. Though the ban was lifted on 13 January 2022, so far, Twitter happens to be the only social media platform that has faced such extreme regulatory measures. In recent years, Nigerian youth have been the subject of unethical social media use.

The urgent question is: Are the youth the only ones using social media in an unethical manner? The question deserves more consideration, despite the appearance to the contrary. For example, Amnesty International (2021) reported that Twitter deleted tweets and videos of President Muhammadu Buhari threatening to punish the IPOB sect after he blamed them for attacks on government buildings. The President referring to the Nigerian Civil War had reportedly threatened in a tweet to deal with troublemakers in the country by employing "the language they understand" (Amnesty International, 2021, para. 2). Again, are the youth only accused of ethical misconduct when their

social media use poses a threat to the political establishment rather than the general populace? This question also begs for an answer.

Nonetheless, the significance of the massive use of Twitter by the Nigerian youth during the #EndSARS protest threw up ethical concerns, making it useful for this study. There are ample studies on the use of social media regarding the #EndSARS protest. Dambo et al. (2021) did a qualitative analysis of Twitter activities during the Lekki shooting in Nigeria's #EndSARS protest. Ajepe and Aroge (2021) conducted a multimodal sentiment analysis of the 2020 EndSARS Lekki massacre using reports from the BBC. Chinweobo-Onuoha et al. (2021) modelled journalists' coping strategies for occupational hazards in the ENDSARS protest. Ige and Ige (2021) investigated risk perception by journalists and coverage of the EndSARS protest. Usua and Agbo (2021) assessed the possibilities and limitations of citizens' moral panic in the EndSARS protest.

However, there appears to be a dearth of studies that have used Critical Discourse Analysis to examine ethical concerns on social media use among Nigerian youth, within the context of the #EndSARS protest. The researcher intends to help close some knowledge gaps in this area of research by focusing on Twitter. The aim is to ascertain whether the discursive strategies the protesters employed on Twitter violated ethical standards. It is also hoped that the textual and visual deconstruction and analysis of tweets might make a modest contribution to knowledge in source credibility research.

Social Media and Twitter in Perspective

The concept of social media has been variously defined. One of the widely cited definitions is that of Kaplan and Haaenlein (2010:61) who defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content". Kaplan and Haaenlein provided six classifications of social media as follows: collaborative projects (Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g., Twitter), content communities (e.g., YouTube), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft), and virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life). Social media differs from legacy media in the aspects of reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and interactivity. Social media holds huge promise

because they are not bound by space and time (NOIPolls, 2019). These affordances have made it attractive for youth activism and two-way public discourse.

In this paper, social media will specifically refer to Twitter and both terms will be interchangeably used, except otherwise stated. Twitter was founded in 2006. The entire universe of Twitter and activities that take place on the platform can be referred to as Twitterverse, Twitosphere, or Twittersphere, while Twitter users are called twitizens, twitterati or tweeps, who express opinions and share information via a "tweet", "retweet" and "like". Another pacesetting feature of Twitter is the hashtag (#) designed to enhance the visibility of a trending topic.

Twitter has become a platform for youth activism and other civic engagements since it produced successful outcomes in the Arab Spring of 2010-2012. As Malatji and Baloyi (2021) pointed out, immediacy is one of the hallmarks of Twitter engagements because users and government officials can instantly reply to tweets and retweets. Obia (2020) affirmed that Twitter is the foremost social media platform for holding public conversations such as protests in Nigeria and such campaigners have been called "Twitter warriors" (para.12). The increasing use of social media like Twitter for civic engagements has widespread ethical concerns, which has seen the Nigerian government make frantic efforts to regulate social media use.

Ethical Concerns: Grounds for Social Media Regulations

Ethics loosely connotes the rightness or wrongness of an act or behaviour. In general, ethics answers the question of what is fair, accurate and minimises harm. It is the code of conduct for living within any social group. According to Dalfovo (2002), Aristotle was the first to use the term "ethics" in philosophical discourse. He claimed that Aristotle used the term *'ethike theoria'* to define the area of philosophy that examines human conduct and the criteria for assessing behaviour and decisions (Dalfovo, 2002).

Specifically, African traditional culture has always been communal in which ethics was a strong and healthy asset (Dalfovo, 2002). African ethics places significant value on the conformity of the individual to the social group to preserve the harmony of human relationships (Kigongo, 2002). It means that the human being is perceived as the centre of the relationship, and as an

active agent and participant in the relationship. Therefore, each individual is expected to self-regulate and take responsibility to ensure the harmonic co-existence of their social group, by upholding the ethics guiding them. However, the imported culture of individualism rather than collectivism has placed restrictions on ethical and moral behaviour within the realm of individual conscience (Dalfovo, 2002).

As Fidiyani et al. (2017:258) stated:

> Every environment has its law and ethics as the guidelines how to behave by which the perpetrator causes three impacts, such as law, ethic, and social. The methods of the research are quantitative and qualitative research with legal approach as law in action. It is a non-doctrinal empirical social science. The Internet provides a new world, way of thinking, and way to communicate. Thus, there is Nettiquette, an ethical guideline of how to behave or to communicate among netizens.

By implication, such ethical guidelines regulating Internet use can be extended to social media. Azinge (2012) submitted that in journalism, ethical standards of fairness and balance are still required against individual users of social media who are not subject to the same standards. Despite these prescribed ethics, social media has been burdened with ethical violations. As Duru (2016) aptly stated, the Internet has altered the process of news and information gathering and dissemination and violating the ethics of the profession has become its major problem. The Nigerian Cybercrime Act, which was passed into law in 2015, is the only important mechanism for the regulation of social media, but the regulation of the mainstream media allows authorities to checkmate the press (Mohammed, 2021). However, Fidiyani et al. (2017) emphasised that for harmonious communication to happen, it is important for netizens to comply with the prescribed netiquette.

Emetumah (2016) revealed that although social media have been useful to create political awareness among Nigeria's electorates, they have been used for negative propaganda, spreading hate speech and other unethical conduct like fake news. John (2012) also observed that there are traditional principles of photojournalism that forbids the indiscriminate use of photos, images and videos, but countless social media users have the propensity to disregard this ethical obligation. The increasing ethical concerns about

social media use have resulted in the push for regulations. Moses et al. (2022) posited that the great effort put into government regulation of social media in Nigeria is evident in the frantic efforts by state actors to promote a negative relationship between social media and national security. Against this backdrop, Moses et al. (2022) noted that since 2015, at least four unsuccessful attempts have been made to pass legislation, including the Frivolous Petitions (Prohibition) Bill 2015, often known as the Social Media Bill, to control social media usage in the country (see also Agbedo, 2021; Paul, 2019).

The attempt to regulate social media on account of national security is a wrong priority because if enforced, such regulations will shut avenues for the public to have critical discourse on national security and governance (Moses et al. 2022). The right to freedom of expression is recognised as a human right and protected under Section 33 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) even though freedom of opinion and expression is not absolute. As Dalfovo (2002) pointed out, individual inclinations limit ethical and moral behaviour within the realm of individual conscience. Therefore, to ensure a balance, a three-pronged approach involving some sort of government regulation, self-regulation as enshrined in African ethics and media literacy might prove more effective in stemming unethical social media use.

Media Literacy and Social Media Ethics

The term 'Media literacy' is encumbered with conceptual haziness. For Aufderheide (1993), media literacy is designed to help to understand, produce and negotiate meanings in a culture of images, words and sounds. Bulger and Davison (2018) said media literacy is most commonly described as a skill set that supports critical engagement with messages the media produce. This implies that a media-literate person can decode, evaluate, analyse and produce both print and electronic media (Aufderheide, 1993).

Koltay (2011) noted that awareness of media is becoming more important with the advent of digital technologies. Such media awareness should even be more among the teeming youths who use an array of social media to gratify various needs. In light of this, Bulger and Davison (2018) asserted that modern media literacy tends to revolve around five themes: youth participation, teacher training and curricular resources, parental support,

policy initiatives, and evidence base construction. They added that these programmes hold a promise, particularly in the case of rapid responses to breaking news events, connecting critical thinking with behaviour change, and evaluating partisan content. Though Bulger and Davison (2018) reported a general lack of all-inclusive evaluation data of media literacy efforts, they, however, acceded to the imperativeness of media literacy for ethical communication in online spaces.

Apuke et al. (2022) also reported on studies such as Carr et al. (2020) and Vraga and Tully (2021) that have shown that literacy intervention is effective to increase knowledge to fight unethical practices such as fake news detection skills and reining in fake news On this premise, it may be stated that, in addition to regulations, fostering media literacy among the youth in formal and informal educational settings is crucial for encouraging the ethical use of social media.

Nigerian Youth and the #EndSARS Protest

In 2019, the National Youth Policy (NYP) reviewed the age bracket for youths as those in the age bracket of 15 – 29 years. According to the NYP (2019), the Nigerian youth uses social media to gratify the following needs: communication, stakeholder engagement, Aknowledge acquisition/sharing, awareness building, volunteer management, accountability advocacy, political participation, brand building, relationship building, and entertainment.

At the moment, youths in Nigeria are brutally weighed down by several challenges and are unable to attain their full potentials (NYP, 2019). These frustrations have compelled the youths to massively use social media to express their dissatisfaction with the government. A significant example is the youth-led #EndSARS protest of October 2020. The #EndSARS protest was significant because it highlighted the skills, talents and organisational capabilities of the Nigerian youth, which led to the disbandment of the SARS unit within days of the protest. Dajo and Akor (2021) opined that Nigerian youths have become more aware of the conditions that enslave them, hence their determination to adopt non-violent means to pull apart the structures of injustice, oppression, domination, and exploitation in their environment.

A BBC report as cited in Moses et al. (2022:8), stated that: 'a potent mix of street protests and social media has given young Nigerians a voice that has

shattered the country's culture of deference'. Given the "leaderless" and somewhat impromptu nature of the #EndSARS protest, it was clear that social media was incredibly effective in bringing the youth together (Moses et al., 2022). This confirms the idea that Twitter has emerged as a key forum for socio-political engagements and as a major information source for the youth, particularly in the context of protests.

THEORETICAL ANCHOR

This study is anchored on the Source Credibility Theory (SCT). Studies have demonstrated that the concept of source credibility dates back to the Aristotelian era (Asemah & Ogwo, 2013; Umeogu, 2012). Aristotle first espoused that the source of the message, which he partly referred to as ethos, contributes to the persuasiveness of that message (Teven as cited in Umeogu, 2012:114). Such an ethos entails the communicators' knowledge, understanding of the message, moral authority and expressed goodwill of the sender, all of which contribute to the credibility and trust placed in the communicator (Umeogu, 2012).

As research on source credibility evolved, Hovland et al. (1953) in their seminal work on persuasive public speech, propounded the Source Credibility Theory (SCT). The SCT stresses the premise that a message receiver is more prone to be persuaded when the source of the communication presents itself as credible (Hovland et al., 1953). According to them, the believability of a source rests on two primary perceptions: trustworthiness and expertise of the information source. Ever since several other influential studies such as Berlo et al. (1969) and McCroskey (1966) have built on the theoretical and empirical foundations of Hovland and his colleagues. In their study, Berlo et al. (1969) brought in secondary dimensions to perceived source credibility: safety, qualification, and dynamism. In addition to the other traits, Berlo et al. (1969) emphasised the importance of the dynamism of the source in predicting the credibility of a message. In this present study, the researcher adopted the classic primary and secondary attributes of SCT: trustworthiness, expertise, and dynamism.

Hovland et al. (1953:21) defined trustworthiness as "the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid," whereas expertise is "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions" Simply put, expertise has to do

with the trust the receiver of a message has based on perceived knowledge, skill, and experience of the source of the information. The third dimension, dynamism, describes the extent to which a source is "fast, energetic, bold, colourful, and confident" (Berlo et al., 1969:567). In order words, dynamism refers to the way the message is creatively portrayed by way of verbal and non-verbal cues.

Given the focus of this study, the researcher considers information sources to include social media and its users, with emphasis on Twitter and Twitterati. Except stated otherwise, the term source credibility will also refer to perceived source credibility, both of which can be used interchangeably. The increasing dependence on social media as news sources and the youth's growing trust can serve as a stimulus for online news providers to improve the ethical principles of truthfulness, fairness, and accountability (Akoja & Nwenearizi, 2020). Due to the close link between ethics and source credibility, the SCT justifies this study's objective of exploring ethical concerns about the use of social media (Twitter) by youths in Nigeria, within the context of the #EndSARS protest. Specifically, the researcher proposes a conceptual model shown in Figure 1 based on the main primary and secondary attributes of the SCT. Therefore, it is conceptualised that the degree of twitizens' persuasiveness or responsiveness to the #EndSARS protest on Twitter will relate to the perceived credibility (i.e., trustworthiness, expertise and dynamism) of tweets and retweets.
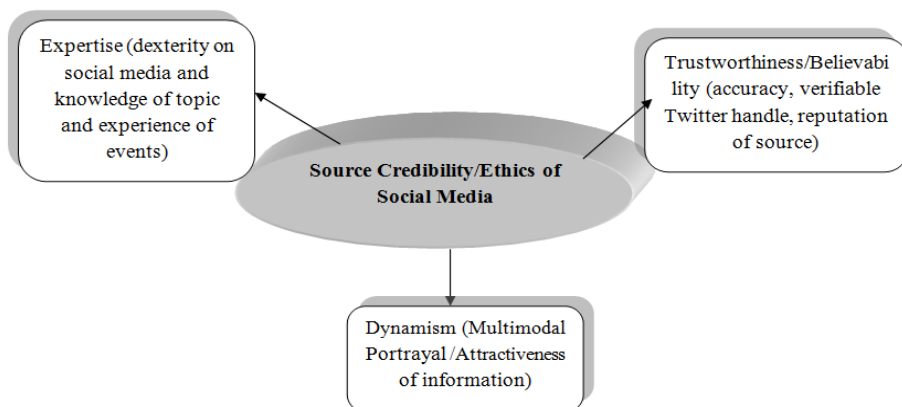

Figure 1: A Conceptualisation of source credibility of social media (Twitter)

As Figure 1 shows, trustworthiness will mean the degree to which the Twitterati perceive that they believe and trust the tweets about the #EndSARS protest. Trustworthiness will be predicated on the accuracy of facts from verifiable Twitter handles, and the reputation of the originator of the tweet, which can be partly measured by the following and followers. Expertise is conceptualised as dexterity in using Twitter, adeptness in the use of persuasive language, knowledge of the issues surrounding the protest or/ and experience (physical encounter) about the event by the person tweeting or retweeting. Dynamism will mean the vivid portrayal and attractiveness of the tweet, which will be assessed by the multimodality (textual, picture and animation) of the tweets.

Several Nigerian scholars who have applied the SCT perspective to social media have demonstrated the credibility of social media (Akoja & Nwenearizi, 2020; Asemah & Ogwo, 2013; Edogor et al., 2015). Specifically, Akoja and Nwenearizi (2020) found that a source with high credibility leads to more usage of the medium. On the contrary, Agboola et al. (2016) reported a lack of credibility in both social media content and the source of their content. Mustapha et al. (2020) also found that digital media platforms renewed the interest of the young audience; however, these alternative sources lack adequate gatekeeping, thereby evoking spectres of doubts about the credibility of such sources.

In another study, Wada (2021) found that though a significant number of younger Nigerians source their news from social media only, most users may not deem it necessary to verify the credibility or authenticity of a news item before they use, share, or act on it. John (2012) also stated that unethical practices such as anonymity and manipulation of images are easily accepted online. Again, the role of celebrities and influencers is useful in predicting Twitter's credibility within the context of the #EndSARS (Dambo et al., 2021). On their part, Ihebuzor and Egbunike (2018:17) identified features of political conversations on Twitter to include: "rumours, insults, rage driven communication, and sweeping generalizations, twisting evidences and single stories".

Extant Western studies on SCT in online sites such as those of Lowry et al. (2013) have found that colour schemes and other visual components predict perceptions of credibility. Sometimes, the only information source is a username, incomplete identity, or even a fraudulent identity on Twitter

or YouTube, which casts doubt on the credibility of the source (Abbasi & Liu, 2013). According to Metzger and Flanagin (2013), the abundance of information online and the lack of proper authentication by experts have resulted in most online information being dated, incomplete or inaccurate. In their study, Lee and Sundar (2013) showed that the credibility of tweets is positively predicted by the expertise of the source, but the credibility of retweets is positively predicted by the trustworthiness of the initial source. The "language used online, expertise heuristics, and bandwagon heuristics" were among the characteristics identified by Jenkins et al. (2020) as having an impact on credibility. The attributes of the SCT in the foregoing narrative, further demonstrate its aptness for this study.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The broad field of discourse analysis is a part of linguistics that deals with the creation of meaning from mainly textual communication. Discourse analysis involves understanding both the potential of language and its realisation within a text (Stubbs as cited in Saheed 2019:28). However, scholars like Fairclough (1992) posited that text analysis alone might not be enough, as it does not illuminate the connections between texts, societal, cultural processes and structures. This gap the CDA attempts to fill.

Fairclough (1995) used the CDA to describe an analytical technique within the wider domain of discourse analysis that goes beyond surface textual analysis to create deeper meaning in other formats as well. Therefore, according to Fairclough (2012), CDA brings the critical tradition of social analysis into language studies and contributes to a critical social analysis. It achieves this by focusing particularly on discourse and other social elements like power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities, and so forth (Fairclough, 2012). As Lirola (2015) also pointed out, CDA improves understanding of the relationship between various linguistic and visual choices and what they transmit in context by revealing the sub-textual or inferred meaning of a text.

In a nutshell, CDA studies the way language creates and reproduces social realities to observe possible situations of injustice, power abuse of some social groups over others, or inequality based on race, social class or sex, among others (Saheed, 2019; Wodak & Chilton, 2005). CDA is relevant to this research because the researcher aims to analyse more than language use

in tweets. In this sense, the principles of CDA will enable the deconstruction of the interplay between the use of language (text) and visuals (images) on tweets of the #EndSARS protest that were steeped in ethical concerns, as well as social issues of dominance, inequality, and oppression of the youths in Nigeria.

The population of the study included the four (4) most popular social networking sites in Nigeria. These include Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Twitter (NOIPolls, 2019). Out of these the researcher purposively selected Twitter for two reasons. First, out of all social media platforms, Twitter with its 280-character limit tweets and multimodal affordances has become an attractive source for youth activism, information generation and diffusion among youth in Nigeria. Zoaka (2021) affirmed the inherent capabilities of Twitter as an electronic platform for multidimensional communication to foster social change, political education and engagement, civic discourses, and voter mobilisation. Secondly, Twitter was purposively selected since so far, it is the only social media platform that the federal government temporally suspended its operations in the country in June 2021 for ethical violations.

Due to time and space constraints, secondary data was elicited from a convenient selection of ten (10) tweets including retweets containing text and images posted by the youth protesters during and within 18 months after the "#EndSARS protest. The selection of tweets was done manually by using the keyword "#EndSARS protest 2020" and "Images from the #EndSARS protest." The tweets were compiled and analysis was done based on the main linguistic and visual presentations.

Sample 1

Source: Captain. (2020, October 15)

Twitter handle: @ImCaptain_Sam

Format: Text and image

The image in Sample 1 was a tweet by a twitizen named Captain on October 15, 2020, during the #EndSARS protest. The original tweet had an appreciable level of following and interactivity with 27 tweets, 558 retweets and 748 likes. From the long-shot images of sleeping protesters, it is evident that the protest that started on Twitter had been taken to the streets. At a glance, the images show some youths sleeping on the streets. The bold black and red textual contents on the banner were probably for emphasis and amplification of their fight against oppression. The scene of the youth sleeping on the bare floor conveys a message of steadfast tenacity and commitment to alter the status quo. This result is congruent with Dajo and Akor's (2021) findings, which showed that Nigerian adolescents are more aware of the circumstances that keep them in captivity and are therefore more determined to use nonviolent measures to fight against the systems of injustice, oppression, dominance, etc.

However, though the image in Sample 1 appears to be accurate and true, the source of the tweet named Captain; probably a pseudonym lacked a clear identity. Moreover, one of the hashtags "#Anonymous" above the image affirms the lack of identity of the source and casts doubts on the credibility of the tweet. This agrees with the findings by Wada (2021) and

Abbasi and Liu (2013) who reported a lack of identity of information sources on social media. This lack of identity violates social media ethics and the truthfulness attribute of the SCT. Yet the post had been retweeted 558 times, giving credence to claims that social media users in Nigeria may not verify the credibility or authenticity of information before using, sharing, or acting (Wada, 2021). In summary, the result of this present study showed a mix of ethical and unethical conduct in this tweet. The implication is that ethical and unethical issues may be found within a single tweet (source). Thus, it would require critical analysis to discern what to trust and believe on social media.

Sample 2
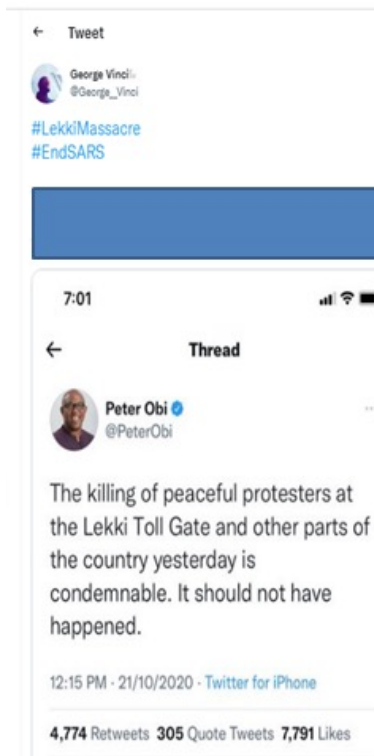
Source: Vinci, G. (2022, February 5)
Twitter handle: @George_Vinci
Format: Text
Note: The researcher covered some areas of Sample 2.
Sample 2 allegedly contains a tweet in response to the killings in Lekki from

well-known politician Mr Peter Obi. The tweet was initially sent at 12:15 PM on October 21, 2020, and received 7,791 likes, 305 quote tweets, and 4,774 retweets at the time of this research. While the shootings took place at the Lekki Toll Gate, tweeps amplified the unfortunate event via retweets and quote tweets. As Sample 2 further demonstrated, George Vinci, a twitizen, continued to denounce the killings on February 5, 2022, when he tweeted (tweet covered) about the Lekki killings and tagged Mr Obi's tweet from October 21, 2020, which was tweeted the day after the shootings. The tagging of a political influencer's tweet was likely done to give the Lekki killings report some credibility. This finding is consistent with the assertion of Dambo et al. (2021) that influencers played a key role in determining Twitter's credibility during the #EndSARS protest.

Again, the tagged tweet in Sample 2 confirms the Lekki killings and may suggest that the on-going efforts to control social media are more likely motivated by stifling free expression than by ethical concerns. This result resonates with the observations of Moses et al. (2022), who claimed that the fight for State regulation of social media in Nigeria was an attempt to stifle free speech. As was previously mentioned, the Social Media Bill's passage was hampered as a result of strong opposition to social media regulations. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the government used draconian measures during the #EndSARS protest, even though these were peaceful protesters who mainly tweeted information about police brutality. This would imply that if social media restrictions are unsuccessful in achieving their goals, physical force may be the next option.

Sample 3
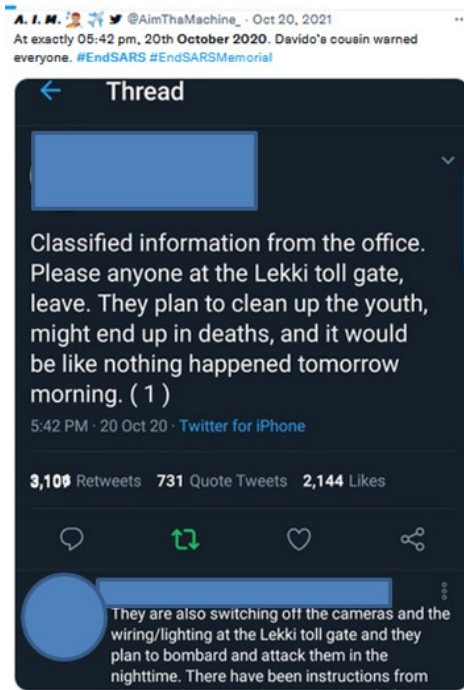
Source: A.I.M. (2021, October 20)

Twitter handle: @AimThaMachine_

Format: Text

Note: A portion of Sample 3 was covered by the researcher.

As Sample 3 shows, on October 20, 2021, a Twitter user tagged a textual tweet thread to mark one year since protesters were shot in Lekki. From excerpts of the tweet thread, it can be deduced that at 5:42 PM on October 20, 2020, another twitizen had alerted the #EndSARS demonstrators about an impending attack. The tweet received 2,144 likes, 3,100 retweets, and 731 quote tweets. Despite retweets about the warning, protesters were resolute in their mission. The tagged tweet's black background may have been chosen to emphasise the sombre mood of the potential deaths. The tweet said, in part: "…clean-up of the youth, might end up in deaths…" With the shootings and deaths occurring soon after the warning was tweeted, the

tagged tweet in Sample 3 looked to have refuted the view that information shared on social media is typically not credible.

This result agrees with those of Asemah and Ogwo (2013) and Edogor et al. (2015) who established that social media sites were rated as credible means of communication. However, the result in the present study sharply contrasts with those of Agboola et al. (2016) who reported a lack of credibility in both social media content and the source of their content (see also Mustapha et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the finding in this present study indicates that in this instance, Twitter is a credible source of information, which complied with the ethical standards of truth and facts. Even though the government denied that demonstrators were killed during the protest in Lekki, a panel of inquiry confirmed the killings, further proving that social media reports can be credible. In conclusion, the broad generalization that social media sources lack credibility may have started to become the exception rather than the rule.

Sample 4
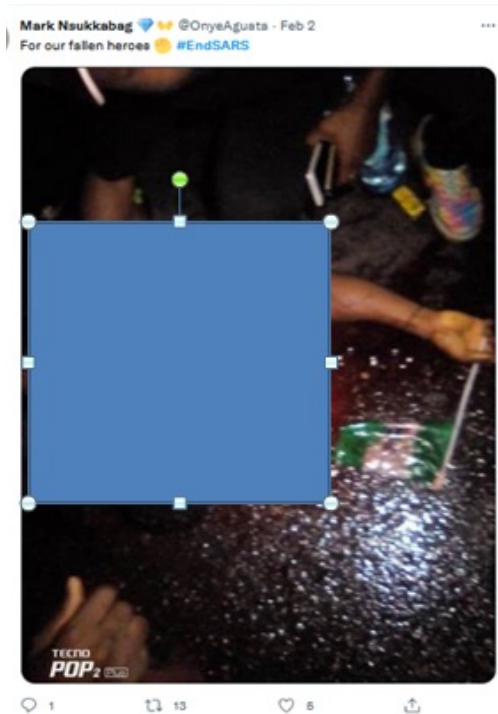
Source: Nsukkabag, M. (2022, February 2)

Twitter handle: @OnyeAguata

Format: Text and image

Note: The researcher covered some areas of Sample 4 to minimise its graphic impact.

The image in Sample 4 showed a victim who was reportedly shot dead on October 20, 2020, at the Lekki Toll Gate, a day now known as the "Lekki Massacre." The image was quite graphic and disturbing. Lying in a pool of blood, with the flag of Nigeria clutched in his right hand, depicts a picture of a young man. On February 2, 2022, the image was retweeted along with the hashtag "EndSARS" in honour of the fallen heroes.

Even though the tweet may have been accurate (credible), the unethical way the image was presented raised ethical questions. This is consistent with the observation of John (2012) that many social media users tend to ignore their obligation to respect photojournalism's ethical standards. A plausible explanation for this may be the graphic image could have served as propaganda to appeal to the emotions and garner the support of people. Again, the lack of media literacy and self-regulation of this particular news source may help explain the unethical conduct. This contention finds support in studies that found a link between media literacy and ethical social media use (Apuke et al., 2022; Bulger & Davison, 2018; Carr et al., 2020; Vraga &Tully, 2021). The argument is that the more the youths have a grounding in media literacy, the more likely they will apply social media ethics, particularly in the area of image presentation.

Sample 5

Nedu Ekeke #LekkiMassacre ✓ @Nedunaija · Oct 31, 2020 ···
Let it be recorded in history, that on 20th **October, 2020**, the Nigerian Govt sent @HQNigerianArmy to attack unarmed peaceful protesters waving Nigeria's flag and singing the National Anthem at #LekkiTollGate

Some WERE KILLED, many were injured.

WE WILL NEVER FORGET. #EndSARS

Source: Ekeke, N. (2021, October 31)

Twitter handle: @Nedunaija

Format: Text and image

The text in Sample 5 is a long shot of the protesters at the Lekki Tollgate. The tweet was posted on 31 October 2021 and was tagged, "WE WILL NEVER FORGET. #EndSARS". The tweet had generated 1,900 retweets at the time it was a screenshot. The image resurfaced one year after the protest, and it captured the essence of the protest. It depicted that even without an official leader; the youths were united, peaceful, well-organised and equal in fighting a common cause. It also points to the hybrid (online and offline) nature of the protests. This is consistent with the BBC's 2020 report as cited in Moses et al. (2022) that young Nigerians now have a voice that has disrupted the nation's culture of respect due to a powerful blend of street protests and social media. It is important to note that the protesters successfully orchestrated a hybrid protest despite having no official leader, which speaks to their dynamism.

Sample 6
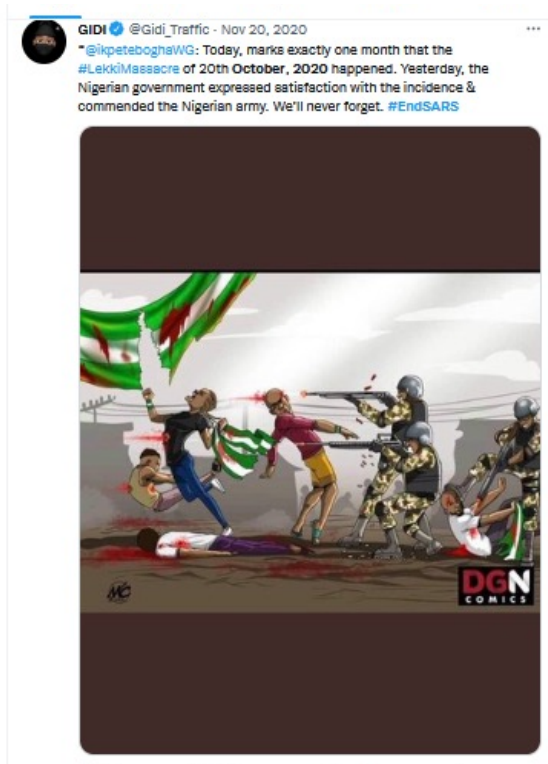
Source: GIDI (2020, November 20)

Twitter handle: @Gidi_Traffic

Format: Image

Sample 6 depicts the shooting of #EndSARS demonstrators on October 20, 2020, using animation. The tweeted image surfaced on November 20, 2020, to mark one month of the Lekki shootings. Perhaps, the broken walls, and torn, bloodied flags symbolise a nation on the precipice. The image is less disturbing, implying that the content creator was sensitive to the feelings of the public and therefore chose to use animation rather than real images. This attests to the expert skill, resourcefulness and knowledge of the source to be able to pull off such a professional portrayal, reinforcing the credibility of the source. This agrees with Lee and Sundar (2013) who found that the credibility of tweets is positively predicted by the expertise

of the source. Results on expertise and language use align with Jenkins et al. (2020) who demonstrated that expertise heuristics and language used online can impact source credibility.

Sample 7

Source: Somto. (2021, February 13)
Twitter handle: @somto_nda
Format: Image

The picture in Sample 7 depicts a young woman painting a scene of green and white leaves that are smeared with blood, with a child peeking through the sprout. The tweet was posted on February 13 2021, four months after the EndSARS protest. This implies that the protest has grown to become an ideology and movement. A critical analysis revealed ample use of some attributes of expertise in the artwork that was tweeted. By interpretation, the green and white colour of the leave symbolising the Nigerian flag portrays a country with growth potential, yet stifles her youth (the seed) from achieving their potential. This supported the argument made by Dajo and Akor (2021) that Nigerian youths have grown more conscious of the oppressive circumstances in which they live and are compelled to use nonviolent

means to dismantle the systems of injustice, oppression, dominance, and exploitation that exist in their society.

Sample 8   *Sample 9*

Source: Moe. (2021, October 20)

Twitter handle: @Mochievous

Format: Text and image

Source: Sogunro, A. (2021, October 20)

Twitter handle: @ayosogunro

Format: Text

Note: A portion of Sample 9 was covered.

Samples 8 and 9 are tweets marking one year memorial of the Lekki Massacre of October 2020. Both tweets were posted on October 20, 2021. For sample 8, the image of a candle carrying protesters at night indicates the sombre mood of the protesters. This is corroborated by the text "In loving memory of…#EndSARSMemorial". The faces of the processing youth were obscure, perhaps to convey the "facelessness" of the Nigerian youth and to give more prominence to those who lost their lives during the protests. Sample 9 is a creative textual portrayal of the Lekki killings of October 20, 2020. The date of the shooting written with red ink in bold capitals that seem to be dripping blood is indicative of the brutality that occurred during the protest.

Both tweets attest to the dynamism of the youth, post-protest. The glimpse of subtle propaganda via repetition of the protests' saddest moments was done probably to sway sympathy and manipulate the receivers of the tweets to align with the protesters' ideology. Though the approach was ethical in terms of the truthfulness of the facts, there was the danger of telling a single story. Ihebuzor and Egbunike (2018) identified single tales as one of the four characteristics of political debates on Twitter that may have a detrimental impact on source credibility. The outcome of this current study somewhat confirms their conclusions.

Sample 10
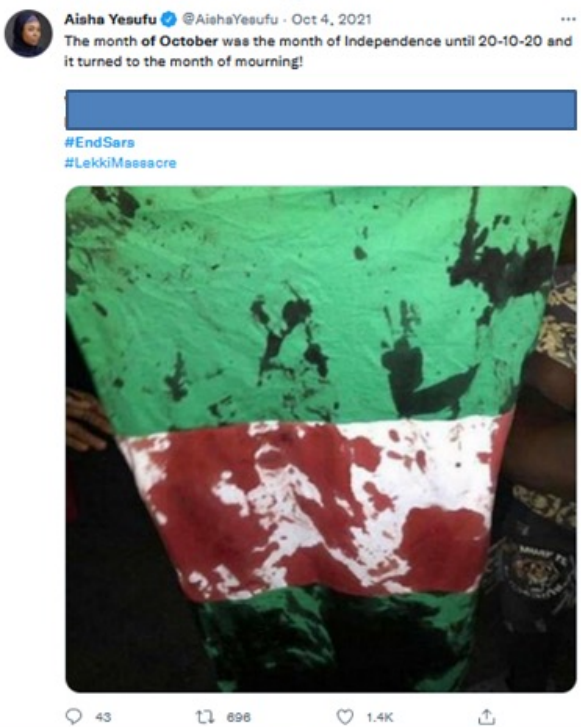
Source: Yesufu, A. (2021, October 4)

Twitter handle: @AishaYesufu

Format: Text and Image

Note: A portion of Sample 10 was covered.

Sample 10 is a tweet from one of the iconic figures of the #EndSARS protests, Aisha Yesufu. Even though the tweet was posted almost a year after the protests, it generated 696 retweets and about 1,400 likes at the time it was a screenshot. The tweet that included a Nigerian flag covered in blood may be relevant for two reasons. First, it was probably to keep the spirit of the protest alive by reminding her followers of the sad events of October 20, 2020. Secondly, it reinforces the significant roles of celebrities or social media influencers in enhancing the perception of source credibility on social media.

Celebrities and influencers have been a predictor of the dynamism construct of the SCT on social media. These findings find support in those of Dambo et al. (2021) who demonstrated that influencers played a significant role in the #EndSARS protest on Twitter. It would therefore mean that when celebrities or influencers align themselves to a cause on social media, there is the likelihood that information originating from them will be seen as credible.

CONCLUSION

Social media empowers youths to engage in activism and political discourse, which often raises ethical questions. This paper analysed ethical concerns on social media use among Youth in Nigeria, within the context of Twitter and the #EndSARS protest. Based on the SCT, the study found ethical and unethical use of Twitter during the #EndSARS protest. Findings reveal that several tweets adhered to ethical standards of knowledge, truth, and dynamism when portraying gruesome scenes in animated visuals. However, there were instances of unethical use, such as when a graphic image was handled improperly.

Also, there were tweets from anonymous sources, negating the principle of source credibility. The study also found glimpses of subtle propaganda via repetition of the protests' saddest moments and the dangers of a single story. Though this approach was ethical as it concerns truthfulness, such tweets might have been employed to sway sympathy and manipulate the audience in the desired direction.

Overall, the study found credible tweets that supported the traits of reliability, competence, and dynamism, demonstrating that Twitter can be a reliable source of information when it comes to protests. This suggests that the widespread assumption that social media sources are not credible may now be the exception rather than the rule. The study, therefore, recommends that efforts should be made by users of social media to reinstate the neglected self-regulation systems inherent in African ethics. Again, in addition to government regulations, media literacy needs to be promoted in Nigeria's workplaces and educational system to curtail the unethical use of social media among some youth.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study had certain limitations that provided a roadmap for future research. First, the purposive selection of Twitter was an obvious limitation to the generalisation of findings across social media platforms. Second, the cost of acquiring a social media research toolkit was beyond the reach of the researcher. As a result, data was curated conveniently via a time-consuming manual search, thereby limiting the objectivity and robustness of the dataset. Therefore, future researchers can use Twitter's Application Programming Interface (API) like Twitter Academic Developer API as a data access point, especially in light of the #EndSARS protest.

In addition, the present study focused on ethical concerns in the use of Twitter by youth during the #EndSARS protest. This narrow focus made it difficult to generalize the results to other social media platforms and demographics. Therefore, in the context of the #EndSARS protest and other popular hashtag protests in Nigeria and other countries in Africa, a future study may compare demographic variances in social media use on platforms like Twitter and Facebook.

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APPENDIX

Twitter Links

Sample 1: https://twitter.com/ImCaptain_Sam/
status/1316630579128008704

*Sample 2:*https://twitter.com/George__Vinci/status/1489905253847904257

Sample 3: https://twitter.com/AimThaMachine_/
status/1450603999577640963

*Sample 4:*https://twitter.com/OnyeAguata/status/1488986605419642880

Sample 5: https://twitter.com/Nedunaija/status/1322438329783230464

Sample 6: https://twitter.com/Gidi_Traffic/status/1329690937640050689

Sample 7: https://twitter.com/somto_nda/status/1360608424099209222

Sample 8: https://twitter.com/Mochievous/status/1450719009029173256

*Sample 9:*https://twitter.com/ayosogunro/status/1450681397849595912

*Sample 10:*https://twitter.com/AishaYesufu/status/1444963937724870658