

Exploring the Influence of Celebrities in the Organisation of the 2020 #End SARS Protests in Nigeria

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Abstract

Unlike early scholars of social movements, and resource mobilisation theories, recent social movements scholars have paid decreased attention to, and sometimes dismiss the role of leadership in the organisation of protest movements. However, studying the importance, influence, and types of leadership in the organisation of social movements is vital in understanding the totality of factors that aid the success or failure of such protest movements. Thus, this study attempts to update the literature in this regard by examining the importance of leadership in the organisation of protests and how leadership types adopted and accepted by the demonstrators impact the organisation of the protests. Analyses of survey data collected in 2020 during the protests in Lagos and Port Harcourt, Nigeria (N=391) and Facebook contents from the posts with the most reactions show that protesters who used WhatsApp, and Facebook frequently and as reliable sources of information about the protests are more likely to adopt and accept celebrities online or offline as leaders of the protests than those who reportedly used TV and radio, print media, and SMS frequently and as reliable sources of information about the protests. Findings further illustrate that celebrities steered the agenda of the protests by motivating those around them to join the protests. Finally, this study refutes the insinuations in the literature about how celebrities are hated by digital activists.

Keywords: social movement, social media, #EndSARS, Nigeria, techno-enthusiasts, celebrities

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1. Introduction

Leadership has been a topic of much interest in the examination of social movements (Uwalaka, 2020a). This is because it helps social movement theory scholars to understand the influence of leadership on the outcomes of social movements and help them explore how it contributes to social change. Social movement leaders have been defined as strategic decision-makers who inspire and organise others to become involved, and that through sharing of stories, socially constructing meanings, and exploring new ideas, they develop the capacity to persuade other individuals to join in their social movements (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004). Some others see social movement leadership as accepting responsibility to create interpersonal, structural, and procedural conditions to enable others to achieve a shared purpose in the face of uncertainty (Ganz, 2000).

Unlike early scholars of social movements, and resource mobilisation theories (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Melucci, 1989, 1996), recent social movements scholars (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Castells, 2012) have paid decreased attention to, and sometimes dismiss the role of leadership in the organisation of protest movements. Minority of studies (Bakardjieva et al., 2018; Gerbaudo, 2012, 2017; Poell et al., 2016) have discussed the importance of leadership in the organisation of protest movements. Given the disparity between the number of studies that evaluated the use of social media in the organisation of protest movements around the world and the number of studies examining the importance, influence, and types of leadership in social movements, it appears that contemporary social movements especially digital activism researchers are not as enthused to study the latter as they are in studying the former. However, studying the importance, influence, and types of leadership in the organisation of social movements is vital in understanding the totality of factors that aided the success or failure of such protest movements. One of such protest movement is the 2020 #EndSARS protest movement in Nigeria.

The 2020 #EndSARS protest movement are series of global mass protests that started on October 7, 2020, against police brutality in Nigeria. The protesters called for the dissolution of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). SARS is a special unit of the Nigerian Police Force that achieved notoriety with a long record of abuses (BBC, 2020b; Orjinmo, 2020). Nigerians have always complained about the highhandedness with which SARS handles cases. The Nigerian youths did not however, pursue the disbanding of SARS. This posture changed when a video emerged on 3 October 2020, revealing some Officers from the SARS unit fleeing a scene in a white vehicle that allegedly belonged to an unnamed man they had shot in front of the Wetland hotel in Ughelli, Delta State (Dambo et al., 2021). The reaction that followed the circulation of the video was swift and substantial

as many Nigerians took to the streets of Nigeria and many other cities around the world, protesting and asking the Nigerian President, Mohamadu Buhari, to scrap the police unit (Orjinmo, 2020; Uwalaka, 2021).

The revitalisation of Nigerians' angst against the Nigerian Police Force, particularly SARS maybe a response and experience gathered from the global social movement against police brutality from the kneeling to death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States of America (Cappelli, 2020; Derrick, 2020). George Floyd's death and subsequent protests exposed the callousness of some law enforcement Officers not just in the US, but across the globe. This is why 'I can't breathe' or Black Lives Matter protests resonated across the world. It was in that edgy time and maximum suspicion of Police Forces around the world that the SARS video emerged and trended online. The video showed a lifeless body and a paucity of empathy shown by the fleeing SARS Officers.

Unsurprisingly, Nigerians, especially the youths, became irate and marched to the streets of Nigeria and other countries such as Canada, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, United Kingdom, United States of America, South Africa and Australia (Lawal & Olanrewaju, 2020; Uwalaka, 2021). In majority of the states in Nigeria, the protests were ferocious, with huge turn outs and zest unseen in protests in Nigeria. Many Nigerian youths staged multiple candle nights and in some instances the protest became a show as many Nigerian artistes delivered renditions of their popular albums while protesters danced along. The protests were deadly serious and fun-filled at the same time. After a sustained protest for four days, the Nigerian Police Force announced that it has dissolved the SARS unit in the Nigerian Police Force (Aljazeera, 2020). The announcement was received widely with mirth and thoughts of triumph enveloped the protests grounds (Aljazeera, 2020). News soon broke that instead of disbanding SARS that President Buhari is renaming them SWAT – Special Weapons and Tactics. The joie de vivre turned to disillusionment and the protests returned. This time, the protesters chanted, 'EndSARS, EndSWAT' (BBC, 2020a; Uwalaka, 2021).

On 20 October, 2020, following violent escalations and attacks by hired political thugs against the police and protesters, the Governor of Lagos State, Babajide Sanwu-Olu proclaimed a state-wide dawn-to-dusk restriction (Orjinmo, 2020). The protesters declined to stop the protest arguing that Lagos State Government wants to silence their voices and that the curfew was a ploy to disperse the protest. Few hours later, armed men from the Nigerian Army arrived at one of the protest venues in Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos State. It was then reported that the Nigerian Army Officers opened fire on the protesters with live ammunitions, thereby, killing several protesters in Lekki in Lagos State (Orjinmo, 2020). An Instagram video by D.J Switch showing the shooting by the Nigerian Army trended on the internet.

Youths and protesters in Nigeria became enraged about the Lekki shooting that some in Rivers State (Port Harcourt and Oyigbo) and Lagos State, started chasing and killing police and military officers as well as burning government buildings and police stations (BBC, 2020a). Protesters also burned Television Continental (TVC) owned by Bola Tinubu, a national leader of the ruling All Progressive Congress (APC) and the palace of the Oba of Lagos amongst others. The protest took a dark and violent turn as protesters began asking incisive questions about their leaders and bad governance. Protesters started calling for the resignations of corrupt leaders. Serendipitously, a protest group found Covid-19 palliative items for their state hidden by their leaders in a warehouse. Protesters carted away with the food items. After that, a state-by-state search of Covid-19 palliative items ensued in Nigeria. Many protesters were able to locate where these items were hoarded and shared the items (Punch, 2020). The concealment of Covid-19 palliative care items as the populace perished in hunger angered the protesters even more as they began pressing the leaders to give account of their stewardship (BBC, 2020b; Punch, 2020). It was later reported that about 69 people had been killed in the #EndSARS protest. According to a press release from the President of Nigeria, those killed were mainly civilians but also included soldiers and police officers. According to the report, 51 were civilians, 11 police officers, and 7 soldiers (BBC, 2020b; Uwalaka, 2021).

Like previous protests such as the 'Occupy Nigeria' protests (Uwalaka, 2017; Uwalaka et al., 2018; Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018), #BringBackOurGirls protest (Akpojivi, 2019; Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015), the church must vote and #notsoyoungtorun campaigns (Uwalaka et al., 2020; Uwalaka, 2020b) and #socialmediabill protest (Uwalaka, 2016), the #EndSARS protests were reported to have been effective due to the diffusion and innovation in social media technologies. The protests have been observed to have emanated from social media platforms (Dambo et al., 2021). It has been reported that social media give Nigerians the space and channel to 'soro soke'. Soro soke is a Yoruba phrase that means 'speak louder' (BBC-Pidgin, 2020). In this instance, it connotes "speak out" (BBC-Pidgin, 2020; Thisday, 2020). It has been noted that social media platforms provide channel for people to speak out in Nigeria regarding the ills in the Nigerian society and in this case, police brutality in Nigeria.

It has been suggested that the protests achieved its aim of dissolving the police unit due to social media platforms, and that social media platforms were used to mobilise, communicate, and provide real-time updates to protesters (Dambo et al., 2021; Uwalaka, 2021). However, there have been no published study that empirically test leadership during the 2020 protests and how leadership or lack thereof, impacts the success or failure of the

protests. This study is a response to that lacuna in the literature.

2. Evaluating the leadership argument in social movements

The assertions about the waning leadership role in contemporary social movements have increasingly necessitated debate about how activists plan collective actions. Studies that maintain the limited leadership argument (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, 2013; Castells, 2012; Flesher Fominaya, 2020; Liang & Lee, 2021; Margetts et al., 2013; Tuli & Danish, 2021), state that there is a rising derision for hierarchical social movement organisations and activist leaders. It has been asserted that the flat nature of networks “supports corporation and solidarity while undermining the need for formal leadership” (Castells, 2012, p. 255). The internet, it has been noted, creates the circumstances for a form of shared practice that allows a “leaderless movement to survive, deliberate, coordinate and expand” (Castells, 2012, p. 229). Scholars contend that modern social movements can be seen as non-violent and leaderless; global and local at the same time; involves multiple forms, flowing from online spaces to urban, project oriented, and public outrage transitioning to hope through deliberations in the space of autonomy (Castells, 2012).

It has been demonstrated that taking public action is becoming an act of personal expression and recognition or self-validation (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Digital activism participants detest the idea of “leaders and official spokespeople” as personalised content sharing across media networks are now becoming prominent in contentious politics; and self-organising, organisationally enabled networks and organisationally brokered networks are helping to organise movements and protests (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, 2013). It has been argued that social media helped to facilitate online collective actions or participatory actions such as signing e-petition or raising the profile of a demonstration through endorsement or notification, and that online starters and followers have a role of leadership without a leader (Flesher Fominaya, 2020; Margetts et al., 2013).

Other scholars have noted that leadership is still very important in contemporary social movement. For example, social media platforms were used as part of a project of re-appropriation of public space, and that these handful of soft leaders controlled the flow of communication, directing people towards specific protest events, providing participants with suggestions and instructions about how to act, and constructing emotional narration to sustain their protests (Gerbaudo, 2012, 2014, 2016). Furthermore, it has been determined that social media teams were seen as “digital vanguards”, collective and informal leadership structures that perform the role of directors of collective action using digital communication (Gerbaudo, 2017, p. 185) This argument about leadership online is similar to the argument regarding “Cyberchief” and “Techno-Enthusiast” (O’Neil, 2009; Uwalaka, 2020a). Techno-Enthusiasts attained leadership and legitimacy in their protest groups via their technological brilliance. Technology mediated charismatic brilliance is what group members see when ascribing leadership and legitimacy to their leaders. This type of leadership is quite different from organizationally brokered collective action leadership. Such leadership is seen as ‘forced’ leadership and online community members and protesters hate and resist such leadership. They prefer to ascribe leadership to their fellow community members (Uwalaka, 2020a) as this leadership relates to personal characteristics and communication activities (Liang & Lee, 2021).

Scholars see the administrators of the Kullena Khaled Said Facebook page as connective leaders (Poell et al., 2016; Uwalaka, 2020a). This is because rather than engaged their group members with the styles and tactics of traditional social movement leaders, connective leaders, “invite and steer user participation by employing sophisticated marketing strategies to connect users in online communication streams and networks” (Poell et al., 2016, p. 994). Their argument is that leadership is essential in stimulating and forming a stream of user activity since connective leadership works through the construction and activation of social protest networks and streams. Bakardjieva et al. (2018) propose organic intellectuals, sociometric stars and caretakers as leaders in social movements. According to them, organic intellectuals act as “‘dirigenti’, that is, leaders of collective action of their home group towards change” (Bakardjieva et al., 2018, p. 905).

Prior to social movement research on leadership, a number of scholars have argued that leadership is crucial to movement emergence and its effectiveness. Researchers have labelled social movements’ leaders so many things. Terms such as “mobilizer” (Gusfield, 1966), “charismatic leader” (Weber, 1968); “outside leaders” (Morris & Staggenborg, 2004), “distributed leadership” (Brown & Hosking, 1986), and “the bureaucrat and enthusiast” (Roche & Sachs, 1955). In comparing the bureaucrat and the enthusiast, Roche and Sachs (1955) argue that the enthusiast has no concrete symbols to derive satisfaction and security but believes in the ultimate value of things unseen and is likely to scorn institutions as “snares set to draw men from the paths of righteousness” (Roche & Sachs, 1955, p. 255). They note that the bureaucrat is an instinctive collectivist; the enthusiast is a “militant individualist”, prepared like “Nietzsche’s ‘Super Man’ to achieve self-fulfilment at whatever cost to the social fabric” (Roche & Sachs, 1955, p. 255). From the foregoing, it appears that the Bureaucrat espouses collective action as his/her personality is dominated by caution and fear of the unorthodox. In contrast, the Enthusiast ascribes to connective action as he/she believes in individuation and detests hierarchical institutions.

Research has indicated that leadership remains crucial to the organisation of social movements in Nigeria. It has been presented that leadership style adopted impacts a protest in Nigeria, moreso, than the media platform (Uwalaka, 2020a), and that Techno-Enthusiasts used their technological skills to rouse a passive generation into action. It is apparent from this assessment that despite an abundance of research in digital media literature, investigating leadership in online social movement, most of the existing research has been conducted in advance western democracies or authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. Limited inquiry has evaluated leadership in online social movements in Sub-Saharan Africa. This study attempts to address this gap in the research questions two by evaluating the connections between media used and leadership style adopted and accepted by the protesters during the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria.

3. The research questions

Socio-political protests movements literature has suggested several ways in which digital media affects collective and connective actions. These frames involve the provision of coordinating records and news not available in other media platforms (Bennett & Segerberg, 2014), aiding in the organisation of protests, assisting users to subscribe to political causes, producing openings to discuss or chat with other people (Segerberg & Bennett, 2011; Walgrave et al., 2011), and propagating excitement and enabling emotional contagion (Gerbaudo, 2012, 2016).

However, there is comparatively modest interest in exploring issues concerning leadership around these social movements, and bulk of those that attempted to study leadership in social movements fail to conduct empirical studies. Rather, they work at the conceptual levels. Many of these studies argue that contemporary social movements are leaderless, horizontal and bottom up (Castells, 2012). They are all in agreement that online activists detest the idea of an official spokesperson or celebrities leading the protests (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2012; Uwalaka & Watkins, 2018). Scholars have varied result and conceptual analyses as to what type of leadership or lack thereof, exists in online and offline social movements.

Furthermore, few studies (Gerbaudo, 2012, 2014, 2017; Uwalaka, 2020a) that empirically examined leadership in contemporary social movements adopted qualitative research methodology. Also, only one study has evaluated the hypothesis about the salience of online media during the 2020 #EndSARS protests (Dambo et al., 2021). While the study is vital to understanding some aspects of the hypothesis, it however, looked only at spread of messages on twitter but failed to interface with the protesters on the streets. The study did not also interrogate the issues of leadership during the protests. It is fundamental and essential to hear from the protesters than draw contentious inferences. This study is designed to provide further insights and understanding to the literature regarding the peculiarities of the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria. Thus, this study attempts to bridge the foregoing gaps by adopting a quantitative methodology and examining the 2020 #EndSARS protesters perception of leadership and types of leadership or lack thereof, during the protests.

From the foregoing, the aim of this study is to situate the influence of social media in contentious politics. Thus, the analyse the importance of leadership in the organisation of the protests and how leadership types impact the organisation of the 2020 #EndSARS protest in Nigeria. This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the connection between media used for protest purposes and leadership type adopted and accepted by protesters during the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria?
2. What is the importance of leadership in the organisation of the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria?

4. Methods

The study adopted a mixed methods consisting of protesters in Nigeria was taken over a 3-day period beginning on Friday, October 9, 2020; two days after the 2020 #EndSARS protests started in Nigeria, and content analysis of Facebook posts and comments from protesters in Nigeria during the 2020 #EndSARS protests. The survey was collected from Port Harcourt, Rivers State, and Lagos, Lagos State of Nigeria protest venues. To manage the raucousness and disorderliness as well as the sensitive situation informing the protests, the research team used snowball sampling approach in which protesters were recruited through referrals (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). The interviews were conducted in diners, by the side of the road, inside a hall in Mile 1 in Port Harcourt and inside a van prepared for the interview.

A total of 450 interviews were conducted with Nigerians who were participating in the protest. Questionnaire not completed due to security concerns, yelling that detracted the participants, and unintelligible responses were dropped, yielding 391 valid surveys. The research team estimated a response of 87%. This is impressive given the tumultuous environment from which this was gathered.

Although it was impossible to access the representativeness of the sample because of the conditions at these protest venues, perhaps, the best that can be said is that the research team believes that the sample was similar in demographic terms to those they witnessed protesting in both Lekki Tollgate in Lagos and at Mile 1 and front of the Government House in Port Harcourt. Eight interviewers and eight logistics personnel were used during the

interviews. The eight interviewers had previous survey and research experience.

The questionnaire was conducted in English and on paper. It required 25 to 30 minutes to complete and consisted of 38 mandatory questions. The survey consisted of 3 sections, including general information, media use frequency, and leadership type. Common method variance was reduced by mixing positive and negatively worded items in the questionnaire. The negatively worded items were re-coded during the data coding period to make constructs symmetric, and this procedure satisfied common methods bias variance.

Frequency of media use to communicate about the protests and media used as reliable source of news of the protests (Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, SMS, TV and Radio, print, etc) were measured using a Likert scale where 1 = not at all reliable and infrequent to 5 = very much reliable and frequently; gender, was measured dichotomously as 1 = male and 0 = female. Education and age were measured categorically. Leadership types were measured using the Likert scale with 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. The media use part of the instrument was adopted and adapted from previous studies that investigated similar phenomena (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012; Uwalaka, 2017) while the leadership types were adapted from a qualitative study that highlighted types of leadership in a protest (Gerbaudo, 2012; Uwalaka, 2020). This study attempts to quantitatively conceptualise and test hypotheses of these leadership types.

The internal consistency or reliability of the instrument on leadership type was measured, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole instrument was .89, which is higher than the minimum acceptable value of 0.7 (Pallant, 2013). Also, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted. A principal components analysis with oblimin rotation was run through SPSS on 14 items from the leadership type section of the survey. Moderate and high correlations were found among the items, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.39 to 0.97. The result of the Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure was excellent, with the value of 0.891. This was supported by the individual values of measures of sampling adequacy (MSA) which ranged from .882 to .957. Likewise, Bartlett's Test of sphericity was significant at ($\chi^2(391) = 5732.33, p < .005$), suggesting that the correlation matrix was different from the identity matrix. Both KMO and Bartlett's Tests indicated that the data was appropriate for a factor analysis. According to Table 1, a four-factor solution emerged. The reliability coefficients were 0.880 for celebrities, .883 for Trade Unions (NLC), 0.879 for Online leaders, and .725 for No leaders. All were above the criteria of .6 for acceptance (Hair et al., 2006; Pallant, 2013; Pett et al., 2003; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Secondly, content from social media posts regarding the protests were examined. Social media platforms such as Facebook are found to be promising sites for analysing global debates on key issues due to its close ties with the overall government, media and the relatively open environment of the data (Hussain et al., 2021). This study adopted a content analysis technique to analyse Facebook posts and comments with the most reactions and followership about the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria. Researchers are enticed to social media platforms since they can collect thousands of contents using freely and openly available and simple configurable tools (Bosch, 2017).

Posts relating to #EndSARS were scraped using NCapture. The posts were subsequently imported into an NVivo 12 Pro for analysis. NVivo is a data analysis software that helps the researcher come up with themes and other relevant trends, simple statistics as well as graphs in a qualitative data. Since this study was interested with those whose posts and comments resonated more with Facebook users in Nigeria using likes, comments, and shares as scale of measurement. Thus, about 200 posts were analysed from about 8,000 posts and comments that were scraped with the NCapture, for the purpose of this study. Facebook posts with at least 2,000 likes or 1,000 comments or 800 shares were adjudged to be popular posts.

Table 1. Factor loadings and communalities based on a principal components analysis with oblimin rotation for 16 items from the leadership scales (N =391)

	Celebrities	Trade Unions (NLC)	Online leaders	No leaders
Cronbach's Alpha	.890	.880	.879	.797
Leaders in this protest are online comedians	.89			
Actors are not the leaders of the protests*	.68			
Musicians are not leaders of the protests*	.83			
NLC are the leaders of the protests		.97		
TUC are the leaders of the protests		.67		
NUT are not the leaders of the protests*		.57		
29ASUU are the leaders of the protests		.58		
Civil society groups are leading the protests		.59		
Online leaders but not celebrities are leading the protests		.41	.71	
There is a leader online, but I don't know the person		.39	.84	
Popular overseas politicians are leaders of the protests			.81	
Politicians from Nigerian are not the leaders of the protests (online or offline) *			.85	
There are no leaders online				.51
There are no leaders offline				.69
I don't care about leaders in these protests				.84
We don't have leaders in these protests				.88

*Reverse coded.

5. Results

As shown in Table 2, participants in this study were mainly between the ages of 25 and above as they account for 90% (351) of the respondents of the study while 18 to 24 years old made up of 10% (39) of demonstrators that were interviewed. Male participants were slightly in the majority as about 53% (207) of the participants in the study were male while 47% (183) were female. Participants with a bachelor's degree had a higher representation in the study as 64% (250) of the participants in the study reportedly completed a bachelor's degree as their highest qualification while 9% (33) reported Senior School Certificate as their highest qualification and the remaining 27% (107) participants reported completing a postgraduate degree as their highest education. In this sample, zero protester reported to having First School Leaving Certificate or less revealing that this cohort of demonstrators were very educated. It is also clear from the data that majority of the demonstrators have previous social movement experience. Seventy one percent (280) of the protesters reported to have social movement experience while about 27% (104) reported having Student Union activism experience. Less than one percent reported being either a member of a political party in Nigeria or a member of social charities in Nigeria.

Table 2. Participants sample characteristics, N=391 (% in bracket)

Description	Options	Frequency (%)
Age	18-20	0 (0)
	21-24	39 (10)
	25-29	146 (37)
	30 and above	205 (53)
Level of study	First School or Less	0 (0)
	O'Level	33 (9)
	Bachelor	250 (64)
	Postgraduate	107 (27)
Gender	Male	207 (53)
	Female	182 (47)
Protest Experience	Student Union	104 (27)
	Political Parties	4 (1)
	Social Movement	280 (71)
	Social Charities	2 (.5)
	Others	1 (.5)

Demonstrators frequently used Facebook to communicate about the protest among other media platforms. Respondents indicated that Facebook (97%), WhatsApp (92%), SMS (87%), Face-to-face (82%) and Twitter (37%) were media platforms they used frequently before, and during and the 2020 #EndSARS protest. All other

communication options barely registered as a means of communication during the protest.

5.1 Relationship between media used and leadership style adopted and accepted

Using SPSS, multiple regression analyses were conducted to address RQ1, that is, whether leadership type (no Leadership, online leaders, celebrities, and Trade Union (NLC) during the protest could be predicted as a function of media used for protest purposes during the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria, age, gender, protest experience, educational level, and Day joined the protests. In these multiple regression analyses, Online leaders, Celebrities, NLC, and No Leadership were the criterion variables while SMS, print, TV and radio, Face-to-Face, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, 2go, Twitter, Instagram use frequency, SMS, Print, TV and radio, face-to-Face, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, 2go, Twitter, Instagram use frequency and as reliable platforms for information about the protests, gender, and age, were the independent variables.

Prior to conducting regression analysis, preliminary analyses were conducted to check for outliers and evaluate assumptions. No observations were identified as outliers, meaning that all 391 cases were involved in the analyses. All variance inflation factor (VIF) values were well below the threshold of 10. The highest value of VIF was 1.44, this means that no values were indicative of problematic collinearity. The inspection of the normal probability plot of standardized residuals as well as the scatterplot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values indicated that the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were met.

In examining the no leaders' concept, the 24 predictor variables accounted for a statistically significant 34.3% of variability in no leadership during the protests, [F (22, 303) = 1.1839, $p < .005$]. Among the predictor variables, only those that reported using TV and radio frequently and those that reported using 2go for reliable information about the protest uniquely contributed to the model: TV and radio use frequency ($\beta = .179$, SE = .060, $p < .05$), and 2go Reliable, ($\beta = -.115$, SE = .135, $p < .05$). These show that protesters who reported that they used TV and radio frequently during the protest believed that there were no leaders during the protests while those that reported using 2go for reliable information about the protests were less likely to accept that there were leaders during the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria.

Three further multiple regression analyses were conducted about the likelihood of accepting Trade Unions such as the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), celebrities and online leaders as leaders during the 2020 #EndSARS protests. For Techno-Enthusiasts (Online leaders), the 24 predictor variables explained 46.6% of the variance of demonstrators reporting accepting Online leaders as leaders during the protests [F (22,304) = 3.837, $p < .001$]. Of these predictor variables, Face-to-face reliable, WhatsApp use frequency, WhatsApp use for reliable information about the protest, Facebook use for reliable information about the protest, age and gender uniquely contributed to the model: Face-to-Face Reliable ($\beta = -.281$, SE = .068, $p < .001$), WhatsApp Frequency ($\beta = .197$, SE = .036, $p < .05$), WhatsApp Reliable ($\beta = .167$, SE = .030, $p < .001$), Facebook Reliable ($\beta = .153$, SE = .021, $p < .001$), age ($\beta = -.182$, SE = .107, $p < .005$), and gender ($\beta = -.117$, SE = .058, $p < .05$). These findings reveal that protesters who reported to have received reliable information about the protests via face-to-Face communication are less inclined to accept that there were leaders online. However, those who reported using WhatsApp frequently for protest purposes, those who reported that WhatsApp and Facebook were channels where they found reliable information about the protest, younger and male protesters were far inclined to accept online leadership as the leaders of the protests.

For NLC, from Table 2 below, the 24 predictor variables accounted for a statistically significant 46.8% of variability in NLC's leadership during the protests, [F (22, 302) = 3.855, $p < .001$]. Six of the predictors uniquely contributed to the model: SMS use frequency ($\beta = .047$, SE = .049, $p < .005$), Print use frequency ($\beta = .158$, SE = .050, $p < .005$), TV and radio use frequency ($\beta = -.207$, SE = .053, $p < .001$), SMS Reliable ($\beta = .203$, SE = .059, $p < .001$), Face-to-Face Reliable ($\beta = .114$, SE = .064, $p < .05$) and gender, ($\beta = .115$, SE = .054, $p < .05$). These findings show that protesters who reported to have used SMS, print media, TV and radio frequently as well as those that report used SMS, and Face-to-Face communication as channels for reliable information regarding the protests and females accepted NLC as the leaders of the protests. This means that mainstream media platforms and female protesters were inclined to accept NLC as leaders than social media platforms and male protesters.

For celebrities, the 24 predictor variables accounted for a statistically significant 43.6% of variability in celebrities' leadership during the protests, [F (22, 303) = 3.234, $p < .001$]. Among the predictor variables, those that reported using print media frequently during the protest, and those who reported using TV and radio, Face-to-Face communication, and WhatsApp for reliable information regarding the protests made unique contribution to the model: Print use Frequency ($\beta = .110$, SE = .077, $p < .05$), TV and radio Reliable ($\beta = .117$, SE = .060, $p < .001$), Face-to-Face Reliable ($\beta = -.148$, SE = .098, $p < .05$), and WhatsApp Reliable ($\beta = .351$, SE = .052, $p < .001$). This means that those who reportedly used WhatsApp, TV and radio as a reliable source of information for the protests and those who used print media frequently for protest purposes had greater chance of accepting and adopting celebrities as the leaders of the protests. However, those who reported to have used Face-to-Face communication as a source of reliable information about the protests are less likely to adopt and accept celebrities as the leaders of the protests during the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria.

Table 3. Media use and leadership acceptance during the 2020 #EndSARS Protests

		No Leadership			Online Leaders			NLC			Celebrities		
		B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
1	(Constant)	2.401	4.790		9.753	4.509	*	-.608	4.211		7.992	6.470	
	SMS Freq	.006	.054	.007	.006	.051	.008	.125	.049	.047**	.020	.073	.016
	Print Freq	.081	.057	.082	.028	.054	.028	.146	.050	.158**	.153	.077	.110*
	TV and Radio Freq	.177	.060	.179*	.093	.057	.094	-.191	.053	-.207***	.022	.081	.016
	Face-to-Face Freq	.359	.351	.057	.136	.330	.022	-.246	.308	-.042	-.088	.474	-.010
	SMS Reliable	-.068	.067	-.061	.021	.063	.019	.210	.059	.203***	.081	.090	.052
	Print Reliable	-.045	.070	.078	.023	.076	.088	.337	.490	.456	.167	.056	.078
	TV and Radio Reliable	-.039	.044	-.053	-.52	.042	.072	.053	.039	.078	.120	.060	.117*
	Face-to-Face Reliable	.018	.072	.015	-.351	.068	-.281***	.133	.064	.114*	-.260	.098	-.148**
	Facebook Freq	-.225	.488	-.145	-.335	.459	-.215	.348	.429	.240	-.556	.659	-.254
	YouTube Freq	-.021	.032	-.037	.020	.030	.036	-.001	.028	-.002	.053	.043	.067
	WhatsApp Freq	-.018	.040	-.029	-.119	.036	.197***	.035	.034	.061	.299	.052	.351***
	2go Freq	-.409	.710	-.046	.283	.668	.032	-.196	.624	-.024	-.010	.959	-.011
	Twitter Freq	-1.113	2.022	-.176	-1.651	1.904	-.262	1.211	1.778	.206	-1.401	2.732	-.158
	Instagram Freq	-.182	.171	-.065	-.078	2.04	-.457	-.222	.150	-.084	.412	.231	.104
	Facebook Reliable	.043	.022	.125	-.052	.021	.153**	-.016	.019	-.049	-.055	.030	-.114
	YouTube Reliable	-.102	.063	-.103	.047	.059	.048	-.051	.056	-.055	-.012	.085	-.008
	WhatsApp Reliable	-.040	.032	-.074	-.091	.030	.167***	.049***	.028	-.096	-.075	.043	-.098
	2go Reliable	-.271	.135	-.115*	1.90	3.98	-.079	-.008	.002	-.032	.034	.089	.007
	Twitter Reliable	-.376	.187	-.098	-.038	.028	-.048	.023	.401	.502	-.056	.067	.073
	Instagram Reliable	-.690	.346	-.068	-.114	.127	-.049	.015	.118	.007	-.182	.182	-.055
	Protest experience	.030	.351	.005	-.091	.330	-.014	-.289	.309	-.049	-.300	.474	-.034
	Age	.034	.114	.022	-.287	.107	-.182**	.172	.100	.118	.152	.154	.068
	Educational Level	.088	.132	.051	-.110	.124	-.064	.210	.116	.130	.062	.179	.025
	Gender	-.120	.062	-.122	-.115	.058	-.117*	.143	.054	.115**	-.112	.083	-.080
	R ²	.118			.217			.468			.436		
	R ² Adjusted	.054			.161			.219			.190		

Note: $p < .05$, $p < .005$, $p < .001$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$, *** $p < .001$

5.2. Importance of leaders in protests movement

To understand the importance of leadership in the organisation of the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria, 200 contents from Facebook that received the most reactions such as likes, shares, and comments were analysed. Table 4 below shows that the most followed posts were from celebrities in Nigeria. The posts were related to the participation of celebrities in the protests. For example, one of the posts was from a celebrity Reverend Father, called Fada Oluoma. He simply posted “#EndSARS” (Oluoma, October 16, 2020) with a video where he explained why he supports the protests. The post received about 44,000 likes, 5,300 comments, and 34,000 shares. Similarly, an online comedian, Pararan Mock News, posted a video with the caption, “#EndSARS” (Pararan Mock News, Oct 19, 2020). The post received 24,000 likes, 2,500 comments, and 7,300 shares. Pararan Mock News also supported the protests further when he posted “#EndSARS, D matter dey big everyday” in his Facebook timeline. This post received wide reactions as well.

Furthermore, renowned Nollywood actress, Chioma Akpotha posted her frustrations at the Nigeria’s leaders, her support and participation in the protest. Her post received 85,000 likes, 2,200 comments and 14,000 shares. She posted:

They still think we are joking???? I hear someone from the older generation and possibly a part of the people who failed our generation say that “this” is “child’s play” and “nothing serious” Ogaaaaa you never chichonchin! This is #2020 (twenchy twenchy) the year of “le-farefase”!!!! We die hia!!! (Akpotha, October 15, 2020).

Posts from the likes of AY Comedian, Nosa Rex, Ken Erics, Mr Macaroni, Flavour, Oyinbo Princess were all well received by Nigerians on Facebook. AY Comedian posted a video of his participation in the protests. He said, “all we want is nation our kids will be proud of. #EndSARS. We move!!!”. AY Comedian also posted developments in other protest centres. For example, he posted a photograph with the caption, “#EndSARS protesters in Edo State cooking Sunday rice along Benin-Lagos expressway” (AY Comedian, October 19, 2020).

On his part, Nosa Rex, a popular Nollywood actor, posted, “#EndSARS” with a photograph of himself in the protest. Mr Macaroni, an online Comedian in Nigeria posted, “you have no business sending us tweets, Buhari. #EndSARS”. On her part, a British Comedienne based in Lagos, Nigeria, Oyinbo Princess, supported the protests by posting, “Nonsense. @muhammadubuhari u get mind o!!! U no fit try this sh** for Mama Charlie land. We don tire for u, step down joor!!” on her Facebook timeline.

Famous Nigerian musician, Favour posting on his business page, MasterKraft of life, supported and participated in the protests. He explained how he led the #EndSARS protests in Enugu, and his experience with law enforcement during the protests. He said, “today our lives were threatened, and we are making it clear that if anything happens to any single one of us or any protester, let it be known that it was done by the Enugu State Government” (Masterkraft, October 18, 2020). These posts and comments show that Nigerian celebrities supported and participated in the #EndSARS protests. From the number of likes, shares, and comments, it is clear that protesters and sympathisers hearkened and followed instructions from the celebrities. The more reactions that the posts received; the more people are exposed to the protests. This led to increase in protest participation.

Table 4. Facebook posts with most reactions about #EndSARS protests

Facebook Users	Number of posts	Likes*	Shares*	Comments*
Chioma Akpotha	12	1,120,000	168,675	52,400
Mr Macaroni	40	720,000	320,000	80,145
Ken Erics	18	396,232	398,897	20,152
Davido	3	350,000	122,000	40,000
Flavour	20	340,000	380,000	18,143
AY Comedian	22	264,829	288,106	28,732
Rex Nosa	10	253,028	178,000	25,000
Oyinbo Princess	25	220,000	37,500	11,850
Seun Kuti	15	207,757	88,456	40,008
Pararan Mock News	7	168,000	72,893	186,200
Fada Oluoma	3	112,000	85,000	12,482
Arise TV**	13	70,365	23,789	4,835
Punch Newspaper**	12	67,200	112,000	10,003

Note: *Cumulative **Mainstream media posts about celebrities’ participation in the protests

6. Discussion

Results from the study demonstrate that celebrities command remarkable legitimacy among protesters in Nigeria. They are accepted as leaders of the protest by both those that used mainstream media platforms frequently such as print media, and those that use TV and radio, and WhatsApp as sources of reliable information are all inclined to accept celebrities as the leaders of the protests. Findings further show that protesters in Nigeria loathe the Trade Unions such as the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) as only the protesters that used some mainstream media platforms frequently and as a source of reliable information such as Print media, SMS and Face-to-Face that accepted the NLC as the leaders of the protests. However, those who used TV and radio frequently are more likely to accept that there were no leaders during the protests. Findings further show that protesters who used WhatsApp frequently for protest purposes and used WhatsApp and Facebook for reliable information about the protest are more likely to accept online leaders or Techno-Enthusiast or opinion leadership (Liang & Lee, 2021; Uwalaka, 2020a). Results show that male protesters were also more likely to accept online participants as leaders.

This study uncovers that those online leaders and celebrities were influential in the formation and organisation of the protests as they created protest groups that then served as a source of information in both the mainstream and social media platforms. These platforms provided the prospective protester with the channels to deliberate their anger and helped them plan and coordinate the protests. The online and celebrity leadership styles were ascribed to the leaders other than them asking for it. This ascription type of leadership was important as it helped online leaders and celebrities to command the respect and legitimacy of the demonstrators.

Results from this study supports the argument that online leaders are crucial and contribute to the success of social movements. The contents and reactions from Facebook illustrate that celebrities were the livewire of the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria as their support and participation helped their teeming fans in Nigeria to join the protests. Thus, boosting the morale and number of protesters. Survey results demonstrated that protesters perceived celebrities and “techno-enthusiasts” as leaders during the protests. This result support the findings of other digital activism studies in Nigeria. Findings from this study confirms that social movement such as #BringBackOurGirls were championed by international celebrities (Endong, 2019). These celebrities, it can be

argued, adopts a participatory leadership role. In this role, the celebrities motivate people around them and their fans to join them participate in social movements (Lee & Chan, 2015). This was the case of celebrities such as AY Comedian, Ken Erics, Chioma Akpotha, Flavour, Mr Macaroni, etc during the #EndSARS protests as they posted videos and photographs of themselves participating in the protests as a way of mobilising support for the protests. This participatory leadership role of the celebrities helped them steer the agenda and influencing the mainstream media during the protests. This finding reflects how online communities steered the agenda during the Chibok Girls abduction crisis in Nigeria (Akpojivi, 2019; Carter-Olson, 2016; Olaniyan & Akpojivi, 2021).

This study shows that the NLC is loathed and distrusted by protesters in Nigeria. The result confirms the argument that digital activists despise ‘official spokespeople’ as they forbid organisationally brokered networks (Bennett & Segerberg, 2014; Castells, 2012). The result contrasts with other studies that lionise the contributions of Trade Unions such as NLC during social movements in Nigeria. For example, it has been argued that the 2012 Occupy Nigeria protests was organised by the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) (Kombol, 2014). Results from this study contradict the points espoused by the above study. This study confirms many aspects of the Techno-Enthusiasts’ conceptualisation (Uwalaka, 2020a). That said, this study uncovers and confirms that protesters that participated in the 2020 #EndSARS protests accepted celebrities as leaders of the protests (Dambo et al., 2021). This finding differs from the submissions of some scholars (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2012; Margetts et al., 2013) who argue in a sweeping manner that online activists despise celebrities and spokespeople. As shown in this study, such argument needs to be further tested. Consequently, this study cautions that digital activists’ gripe against traditional leadership is more nuanced and should be carefully defined and explained. It contends that if the phenomenon is not meticulously considered that it will likely lead to erroneous extrapolations instead of a more robust analysis that will aid in enriching the literature and deepening scholarly understanding of the phenomenon.

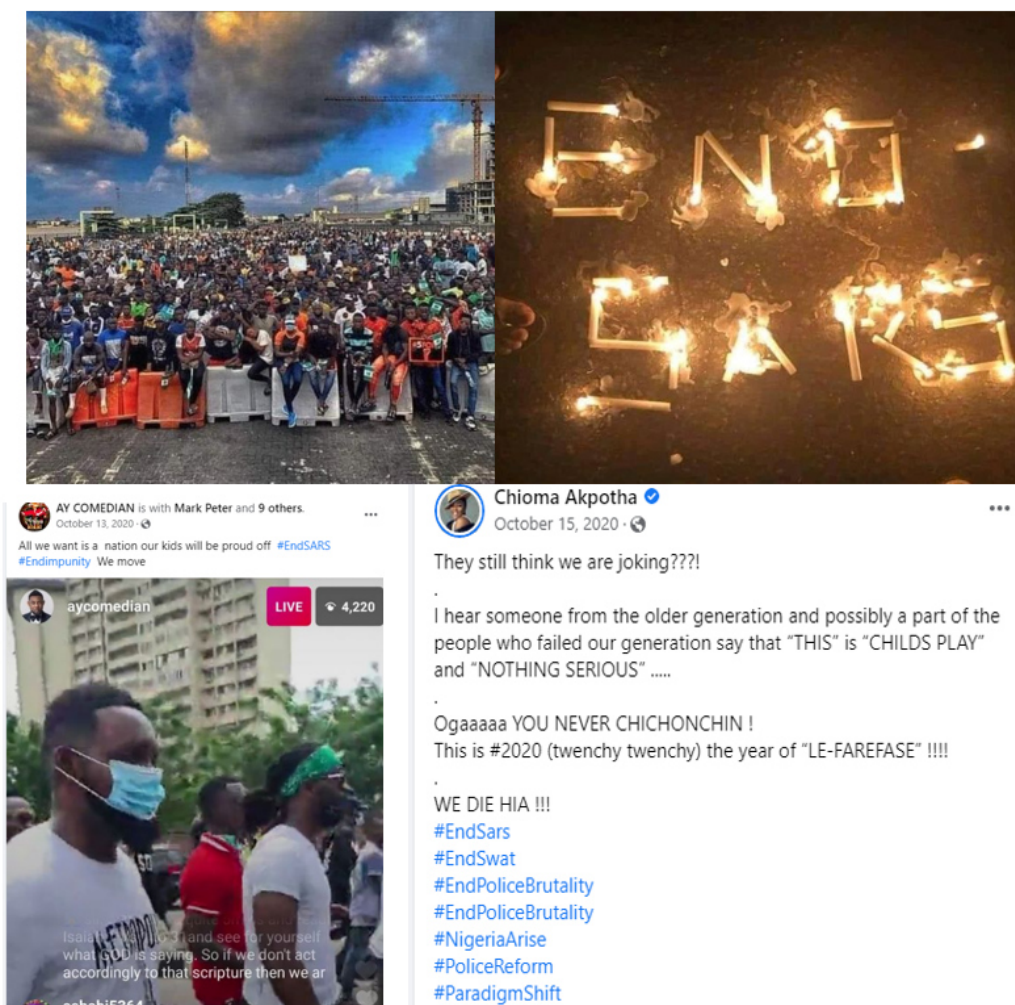


Figure 1. Sample Facebook posts from celebrities

7. Conclusion

Using an analysis of the mix of face-to-face, paper-based survey of protesters during the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria and Facebook contents of top posts and comments from digital activists in Nigeria during the protests, this study presents findings from an examination of the importance of leadership in the organisation of the protests and how leadership types adopted and accepted by the demonstrators impact the organisation of the protests.

Before delving into the conclusion, it is wise to highlight the limitation of the study. The sample of this study are protesters who were at protest venues. The rowdiness of the research site and uncertainty as to the representativeness of the sample is a drawback. The researchers tried their best to mitigate any shortcomings given the conditions of the research site by providing safer and quieter environment for the interviews and ensuring that the sample reflected protesters in age, gender, and ethnicity. Clearly the data for this study is salient as it is one of the few times that data sets of a protest were collected during the protest itself. This improves the validity of the instruments as respondents were still enmeshed in the protest at the time of data collection.

This paper illustrates that leadership is vital to social movement as it demonstrates the salience of Techno-Enthusiasts and celebrities in the organisation of a social movement in Nigeria. It shows that Techno-Enthusiasts' and celebrities use their superior technological skills to rouse citizens into joining contentious politics in Nigeria. The study supports, explicates, and extends the theorisation of the logic of connective action. Where it strong and thick ties are giving way to personalised and solitary actions. Where organisationally brokered networks such as NLC are frowned about but still have the desire to ascribe leadership to celebrities and online enthusiasts.

The study unpacks how self-organising, and personalisation of protests help metastasised collective and connective actions. The study extends the conceptualisation of Techno-Enthusiasts. These are technologically savvy individuals with no concrete symbols to derive satisfaction and security but believe in the ultimate value of things unseen and are likely to scorn institutions. The enthusiasts are individualist who use their technological brilliance to bring people together to fight for the good of the society. They use their technological skills to educate the masses and create easy to navigate applications and forum for communal engagement. Though individualistic in nature, they can use their skills to stimulate feelings of collective togetherness and of common goal that most times increase protest actions and change in the political environment. In the case of the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria, celebrities' (online or offline skills) were used to scrap a brutal secret police unit in Nigeria.

The paper points out some similarities and deviations from other studies in the debate about leadership in protests movements. In doing so, the paper shows that celebrities are critical to protests mobilisation and organisation. The study reveals that celebrities online and offline, steered the agenda of the protests by motivating those around them and their fans into joining the protests. More empirical studies are needed in countries like Nigeria in both development and government type to ascertain types of leaders in contentious politics and their impact in the organisation of social movements.

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