

**ANALYSIS OF ONLINE READERS' COMMENTS ON
#ENDSARS/SWAT PROTEST IN NIGERIA:
A STUDY OF SAHARA REPORTERS, THE GUARDIAN AND
DAILY TRUST NEWSPAPERS**



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Abstract

This study analysed the online newspaper readers' comments on the Facebook page of three select newspapers on #EndSARS/SWAT protests in Nigeria. In conducting this study, the Convergent Mixed Design was adopted. Quantitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis were used to generate quantitative and qualitative data for the study. Three hundred and ninety (396) comments were proportionately drawn for an equal distribution across the three select Facebook pages: Premium Times, Daily Trust and Punch. The findings revealed that the highest likes (81.1%) on stories of the #EndSARS/SWAT protests were from Sahara Reporters because they had a more interactive audience. The result equally showed that the tone of comments used by the online newspaper readers were the acclaim, attack, disapproval, defense, ethnic, religious, political and neutral tones. It was further identified that the dominant tone of comments used was the attack tone (34.3%) followed by the disapproval tone (26%). The least used tone was the political tone (2%). Based on these findings, it was recommended that the Nigerian government should carry out a total reorientation of every unit under the Nigerian Police Force and media messages should be disseminated to enhance oneness and not fuel conflicts in the Nigerian society.

Keywords: #EndSARS, protests, Facebook, Online newspaper and Comments

Introduction

There have been several cases of police brutality around the world and in Africa. The police in many African countries are known to resort to excessive use of force while carrying out their function of law enforcement (Okeowo and Mainga, 2020). A 2019 report by Corruption Watch suggested South Africa's police are the most corrupt public servants — with abuse of power and bribery being ripe (DW News, 2020).

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According to annual statistics from the Independent Police Investigative Department, South African police officers killed 538 people in the 2017-2018 reporting year, and 440 people in the 2018- 2019 reporting year (DW News, 2020). Several countries have had their fair share of police brutality including Nigeria.

There is a tall tale that the Nigerian police are your friend but based on the cases of police brutality over the years, they may not be our friend after all. Nigerians have suffered various forms of assaults, extortion and even murder. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) is a dreaded anti-crime unit of the Nigerian police unit under the criminal investigating department (CID). SARS has been accused of unlawful arrests, invasion of youths' privacy by searching phones and laptops, kidnapping, rape, humiliation, extortion and extrajudicial killings (Umegbolu, 2020). Salaudeen (2017) wrote that in a report in 2016, Amnesty International accused SARS officers of regularly detaining young adults unlawfully and extorting money from their families.

Human Rights Watch (2007) states that the Nigerian police have shot and killed more than 8,000 Nigerians since 2000. The figures show 785 killed in just three months in 2007, while the true number of people killed by the police since 2000 may exceed 10,000 (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Salaudeen (2017) also added that the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) released a report in August 2017 which found that Nigeria's police officers were the most likely of all civil servants to solicit and collect bribes. Oloyede and Elegu (2020) believe that the spread of the unit across the nation without a proper structure, accounts for some of its lawless characteristics.

However, since 2017, Nigerians have called for the termination of SARS but this squad has been operating all over the country after the Nigerian government claimed to disband them. In October 3, 2020, a video depicting two police officers dragging two men out from a hotel and murdering one of them went viral on social media (Umegbolu, 2020). This abuse of power led to an uproar on social media and led to the trend of #EndSARS campaign globally. The protests were reported through various channels of the mass media thus provoking different reactions from the audience.

"The growing presence of technology lets consumers connect with newspapers in a way not previously possible. Newspapers' websites often allow users to comment on any article or repost it via social networks" (Everett, 2011, p. 108 as cited in Eniang, 2020). Chung, and Chung and Yoo in Al-Rawi (2017) writes that before the introduction of social networking sites, news organisations realized the need to change their traditional one-way communication strategy by giving viewers the freedom to comment on news and allow them customise the online platforms to their preference. This drawback paved way for the newspaper to use the internet as a medium to disseminate information to a wider audience and also get the reactions of their audiences (Eniang, 2020).

In October 2020, GlobalStats (2020) revealed that the Social Media Statistics in Nigeria identifies that Facebook constituted 55.13%, Twitter had 22.01%, Pinterest

had 11.03%, Instagram had 6.89%, YouTube had 4.4% and LinkedIn 0.23%. According to Wow Effect (2020), Facebook has always topped the list of the most popular social media platforms in Nigeria. It is a very effective for audience participation in journalism through comments in response to broadcasts and print messages. Ezegwu, Chime-Nganya and Obichili (2021) observe that one of the good qualities of the online news website is that it allows readers to comment on any news story instantly, and the comment section of online newspapers has changed into spaces for debate and discussions by the readers.

Online readers see the interactivity platforms as outlets for civic engagement as they 'not only post comments, but also engage in social analysis and criticism' of the socio-political order of the society (Chiluwa as cited in Ajiboye, 2013). Online interactivity therefore creates a public sphere where social media users debate on an issue of national concern like police brutality. Social media is useful to understand how its dynamics influence social tone, perceptions and dialogue about police brutality in Nigeria. It is against this background the study examines online newspaper readers' comments on #EndSARS/SWAT protests in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The video that surfaced online on October 3, 2020, allegedly showing a SARS officer shooting a young man in Delta state sparked the protests by Nigerians on October 8, 2020 across the country and all over the world. SARS have gotten away with series of brutality over the years and Nigerians decided to trend hash tags like #EndSARS, #EndSWAT, #EndPoliceBrutality and #EndBadGovernanceNow on social media. The Nigerian media took it upon themselves to cover these protests and post the stories on their social media platforms. Through the online media, people became more informed about societal issues and they also have a platform to deliberate on them.

Several studies have been carried out on the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria. Ogbette, Idam and Kareem (2018) examined an overview of the impact of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Nigeria, Oloyede and Elegu (2019) explored hashtag activism in Nigeria, using #EndSARS campaign as a case study, Umegbolu (2020) studied End SARS: A Revolution by the people for the people on police brutality in Nigeria and Ujene and Orji-Egwu (2018) examined the information communication technology as a tool for social control, studying Nigeria's #EndSARS.

Amongst the studies conducted on the #EndSARS/SWAT protests in Nigeria, no study has been conducted to analyse the online readers' comments on #EndSARS/SWAT protest in Nigeria. Therefore, this study examines the online newspaper readers' comments on #EndSARS/SWAT protest in Nigeria by ascertaining the frequency, the tone of comments as well as the dominant comments of the online newspaper readers.

Research Questions

1. What is the volume of likes on the #EndSARS/SWATprotest stories in the select Nigerian newspapers' Facebook pages?
2. What is the frequency of comments of the online newspaper readers on #EndSARS/SWATprotest in the select Nigerian newspapers' Facebook pages?
3. What are the tones of comments used by the online newspaper readers on #EndSARS/SWAT protest?
4. What is the dominant tone of comments on #EndSARS/SWAT protest on the Facebook pages?

Literature Review

Concept of the #EndSARS/SWAT Protest in Nigeria

An average Nigerian is scared and holds a negative perception as well as low confidence in the police force. The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was created in 1992. It was established as a faceless police unit that performs undercover operations against armed robbers and to combat other serious crimes. For years, the unit has allegedly been implicated in widespread human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture, arbitrary arrests, unlawful detention, and extortion (Oloyede and Elegu, 2019). Many Nigerians feel that the unit has deliberately profiled and targeted young people, especially those with tattoos, dreadlocks, and visible possessions such as phones and laptops.

The first #EndSARS social media campaign started on the 2nd December, 2017, when footage of police officers attached to the unit shot and killed a man surfaced online (Oloyede and Elegu, 2019). Over the years, Nigerian authorities have repeatedly promised to reform SARS and ensure accountability for abuses by its officers, but with few results. The Nigerian government decided to reorganize SARS in 2017, the same unit was also disbanded in 2018 and dissolved in 2019.

The second wave of the protest began after a video of a SARS officer shooting a young man in Delta state surfaced online on October 3, 2020, the hash tag #EndSARS trended again globally on Twitter. Nationwide protests began on October 8, 2020, calling on the authorities to abolish SARS and this led to protests in other cities around the world. In order to meet the protesters' demands, the government announced on October 11, 2020, that the SARS unit would be disbanded. Yet its members will be integrated into other police units following "psychological tests," and SARS is to be replaced by a Special Weapons and Tactical Team (SWAT) that is to begin training (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Nigerians disagreed with the SWAT establishment and also protested with the hashtag, #EndSWAT.

Human Rights Watch (2020) stated that the protesters were calling for more far-reaching reforms and critical action to address police brutality, especially in the wake of attacks against protesters. Human Rights Watch (2020) noted that during the protests, the police shot tear gas, water cannons, and live rounds at protesters, killing at least people and wounding many. Armed thugs have also disrupted protests and

attacked protesters and there were reports of police damaging and confiscating the cameras of protesters and journalists. Alleged pro-government thugs have also injured protesters and destroyed property, media reported (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

On October 15, 2020, the Nigerian army warned “subversive elements and troublemakers” to desist and offered to “support the civil authority in whatever capacity to maintain law and order” (Human Rights Watch, 2020). On October 20, 2020, there was an alleged massacre by the Nigerian Army at the Lekki toll gate, Lagos. In all these, Human Rights Watch (2020) observes that no steps were been taken to hold SARS officers to account for past abuses, or to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the recent crackdown on protesters.

Ogbette, Idam and Kareem (2018) examined the impact of Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Nigeria. The study solely depended on the secondary source for information. From the positive point of view, SARS has been able to reduce robbery and kidnapping to an extent but unfortunately, people now use them as bodyguards to intimidate, suppress, and harass other people. From the findings, SARS tortures people mercilessly, extort, beat, kill and jail people who are not forthcoming with their demands. It was also discovered that, most of them lacks orientation on human relation which is a big gap the Nigeria Police Force need to cover by re-orienting them. The study recommended that control measures should be put in place for SARS to be stopped from torturing people and the Nigeria Police Force and Nigeria Police Service Commission need to often re-orient these officers on human relations.

Ujene and Orji-Egwu (2018) examined the information communication technology as a tool for social control, studying Nigeria’s #EndSARS. They observed that the #EndSARS hash tag on Twitter availed the Nigerian youths the opportunity to recount the perceived atrocities of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad of the Nigeria Police, which range from brutality, sexual harassment, illegal arrests and detention to extra-judicial killings. It forced the authorities to fist, reorganize the unit, order an investigation into the allegations raised so far and later ban the usual “stop and search” by members of the squad. The study conducted a secondary data analyses with contents from the different Twitter handles. It therefore recommended that roles should be played with the rule of law in mind.

Clark, Bland and Livingston (2017) examined social media and the interactive construction of police brutality following the lessons from #McKinney. In June 2015, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter comments on a citizen captured video of a police officer attempting to apprehend an African-American girl at a pool party in McKinney, Texas, trended as one incident in the #BlackLivesMattermovement’s canon of police mistreatment of African-American citizens. Through the lens of critical race theory, this qualitative content analysis triangulates data from three social media platforms to explore how users interpreted the incident. The study developed insights on how a “celebrated case” of police brutality is constructed by social media audiences.

Ajiboye (2013) analysed the functions of readers' comments on reports of socio-political crises in Nigeria using critical discourse analysis. The study sampled comments from ten Nigerian online news websites and discovered that news readers, as social actors use discourse to shape the attitudes and value judgments of other readers. This was achieved through the use of ideological strategies such as polarisation, generalisation, lexicalisation and hyperbole among others. This study further established that interactions on news feedback forums are largely based on shared knowledge of the social context, and that socio-political crises give rise to lexical choices and discourse patterns that are controlled by already acquired ideological judgments of language users. Intensive discussions on these practices made the research to conclude that ideological differences are very likely going to continue to feature within interactive feedback comments on online reports of socio-political crises in Nigeria.

Ezegwu, Chime-Nganya and Obichili (2021) examined online newspapers' comments on the lockdown of select states in Nigeria. The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative content analysis method. The results showed that online readers employed varieties of the tone of comments to express their views on select States' lockdown in Nigeria. The comments' tone includes: Praise comments, offensive/attack comments and ethnic/religious. The study recommends that online newspaper readers should avoid using derogatory and abusive languages to react to issues in society.

In 2017, Oyero, Oyesomi, Usaini and Omole conducted a study to examine the readers' comments on online news reports to understand the readers' attitudes on political issues during the 2015 presidential elections. The discourse analysis approach was based on polls shift and Buhari's certificate crisis. Findings of the analysis revealed that readers were divided along ethnic, religious and political parties' affiliations. It was further revealed that the feedback was more of hate comments due to the politics of bitterness in Nigeria. It was recommended that the Nigerian government should ensure true integration among various divides for good governance.

The effect of online readers' comments on national unity was examined by Jibril and Simon in 2017. The critical discourse analysis indicated that acclaim, attack and defence were the major theme of comments. Readers were polarised along regional lines in their comments, posting negative and injurious comments, and this had the capability of reducing the platform into a chaotic and indiscreet battlefield where readers engage in war of words. Jibril and Simon concluded that the realization of the much desired unity in diversity in the country via this platform is not only far from reality, but also endangers national peaceful coexistence. It was recommended that readers should exhibit the highest degree of maturity while commenting on issues on the platform so as to foster unity and national integration.

Theoretical Framework

Public Deliberation Theory

The public deliberation theory evolved from the concept of the "public sphere" by Jürgen Habermas in 1989. According to Poor as cited in Adeyanju (2014), adapting Habermas' idea of "public sphere" identifies three elements necessary to form a public sphere. The first is being able to provide a deliberative space for those previously excluded from political discourse. The second according to him is that the public sphere should be formed through mediated discussion while the third says ideas presented should be considered based on merit and not on the social standing of the commenter. The internet has amplified the public sphere and has made individuals form a public body as they engage in a deliberation where they share their opinions, facts and falsehood on a subject with the freedom of association and expression to give their takes on matters of general interest.

This theory is relevant to this study because it explains how social media platforms create an avenue for the discussion and criticism of issues that interest the public. Through the tone of comments, like section reaction and dominant tone of comments, this study will identify the online readers' comment on #EndSARS/SWAT protest.

Technological Determinism Theory

Technological determinism is the ability of a technology to be the sole causes of changes in society and a fundamental condition underlying the pattern of social organization. It is the study of cultural effects of technological developments- focus is on the way a new technology creates a new potential and possibility for human activities and thoughts. This theory was originated by Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929).The media changed society as the entire form of society is seen as being determined by technology and new technologies transform society including its social interaction and individuals. With the internet, everyone can now be an equal sender and receiver of information.

This theory focuses on how the media using the internet or social media places emphasis on certain events or happenings in the society that become the point of discussion among the targeted audience. Relating this theory to this study, it shows that social media users used Social Networking Sites like Facebook to publish their view on the #EndSARS/SWAT protest.

Method

The researcher adopted the convergent mixed methods design to collect and analyse both quantitative and qualitative data, and use the results to explain a research problem. This study employed critical discourse analysis and quantitative content analysis methods for this study. Since the present study borders on the comments of online newspaper readers on #EndSARS/SWAT protests in October 2020 on the

Facebook pages of select online newspapers, critical discourse was considered most appropriate to study the communication pattern in the comment section of the select newspaper Facebook pages.

The population for this study comprises the total number of online readers' comments on #EndSARS/SWAT protest in October, 2020 via the Facebook pages of *Sahara Reporters*, *The Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. The three newspaper Facebook pages were purposively selected for this study based on their consistency, strong Facebook presence, the number of followers they have and researchers' discretion. A total of 57 news stories on the #EndSARS protests reported by *Sahara Reporters*, *Guardian* and *Daily Trust* were analysed with a critical discourse analysis of the readers' comments. It also analyses the volume of likes and comments on the issue under investigation.

The proportionate sampling method was adopted by the researcher because the population of the study was divided into subpopulations and a random sampling technique was applied to each subpopulation when choosing comments on #EndSARS/SWAT protest in Nigeria. This made it possible to round the sample size off to 396 for an even distribution among the select online newspapers. To select the 396 comments, the discretion of the researcher was used for each of the online newspaper to pick the comments, which resulted in selecting 132 from *Sahara Reporters*, 132 from *Guardian* and 132 from *Daily Trust*.

In this study, the unit of analysis is the online newspaper readers' comments on #EndSARS/SWAT protest in Nigeria. In using this research approach, the need to define and categorise the contents into which units of analysis are grouped.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data collected and analysed using the defined procedure produced the following result.

Table 1: Volume of Likes

Facebook Pages	Likes	%
<i>Sahara Reporters</i>	36759	81.1%
<i>Guardian</i>	2564	5.7%
<i>Daily Trust</i>	5976	13.2%
Total	45299	100%

The data in the Table 1 above shows that a total of 45,299 online newspaper readers of the three select Facebook pages liked the stories #EndSARS protests in Nigeria within the period under review. The stories of the assault on *Sahara Reporters* had 36759 (81.1%) likes, *Guardian* had 2564 (5.7%) and *Daily Trust* had 5976 (13.2%). This means that *Sahara Reporters* have a more interactive readership, followed by *Daily Trust* while *Guardian* had the least interaction.

Table 2: Frequency of Comments

Facebook Pages	Comments	%
<i>Sahara Reporters</i>	132	33.3%
<i>Guardian</i>	132	33.3%
<i>Daily Trust</i>	132	33.%
Total	396	100%

The quantitative data in Table 2 shows that a total of 396 online newspaper readers' comments of the three select Facebook pages were analysed based on the stories of the #EndSARS protests within the period under study.

Table 3: Tone of Comments

Tone	<i>Sahara Reporters</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	Total	%
Acclaim	52	11	7	70	17.6%
Attack	34	62	40	136	34.3%
Disapproval	17	15	42	74	18.6%
Defence	-	2	4	6	1.5%
Ethnic	6	22	20	48	12%
Religious	7	2	-	9	2.2%
Political	4	3	1	8	2%
Neutral	12	15	20	47	11.8%
Total	132	132	132	396	100%

In Table 3, the researcher established the tone of online newspaper readers' comments on the #EndSARS/SWAT protests in Nigeria. It was found that attack tone had most of the items with 70 (17.6%) comments out of the 39.

Table 4: Dominant Tone of Comments

Tone	<i>Sahara Reporters</i>	<i>Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Trust</i>	Total	%
Acclaim	52	11	7	70	17.6%
Attack	34	62	40	136	34.3%
Disapproval	17	15	42	74	18.6%
Defence	-	2	4	6	1.5%
Ethnic	6	22	20	48	12%
Religious	7	2	-	9	2.2%
Political	4	3	1	8	2%
Neutral	12	15	20	47	11.8%
Total	132	132	132	396	100%

The implication of the data presented above is that majority of the online newspaper readers used the attack tone, followed by disapproval tone while the least used was the defence tone to react to the #EndSARS/SWAT protest in Nigeria.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Online Newspaper Readers' Comments

Social media discourse (particularly on Facebook) on the #EndSARS/SWAT protests in Nigeria, has attracted lots of controversies. The research findings present an overview of the tone of comments prevalent in the comments sections of the select Facebook pages on the #EndSARS/SWAT protest in Nigeria.

Comments that had the **acclaim tone** were supportive in nature. These comments support the #EndSARS/SWAT protest. Such comments constituted 17.6% of the total sampled comments. Examples are:

"This protest must never stop... They should protest for end of this government" (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

"For Nigeria's top police officers, understanding of Reform means changing of d men's Uniform. E.g. from black to blue!" (Guardian, October 2020).

"That's the language they understand. Visa Ban!! Please put the ban from CP rank and above... All of them" (Daily Trust, October 2020).

"Solidarity forever, solidarity forever, solidarity forever, we shall always fight for our right. ALUTA CONTINUA!!!" (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

"There is nothing to reform. End SARS now... APC leader should be sensitive" (Guardian, October 2020).

"In your mind you think SARS was disbanded, the government just played on people's intelligence, look critically, SARS has been disbanded four times in the past. I think the protest demand should be expanded to other things like the cost of living, corruption and so many others" (Daily Trust, October 2020).

As evident from the above, the comments supported the #EndSARS protests in Nigeria and other cities of the world. These comments manifests in such expressions as: "This protest must never stop;" "Visa Ban;" "ALUTA CONTINUA;" "There is nothing to reform;" "Please END SARS;" etc.

However, comments with the praise tone ignited further comments that were tilted towards the Nigerian government and the Nigerian Police Force. Such comments had the **attack** tone and they revealed the online readers' anger and opposition for their actions towards the #EndSARS protest in Nigeria. These comments were aggressive and they constituted 34.3% of the total sampled comments. Few examples include:

"Are you happy with what is happening in Nigeria? Just say you are happy with kidnapping, banditry, insurgency that has led to the displacement of millions of our citizens., hunger poverty over 83 million Nigerians are living below poverty line just tell me you are happy with this place" (Daily Trust, October 2020).

“Rehearsal for the main revolution in Nigeria. Those old fools must leave Nigeria for the new productive leadership in the affairs of our nation” (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

“That's what I expect you to say, to defend your position and your co policemen without fact. Animal in human skin” (Guardian, October 2020)

“Nigeria will soon be a failed republic with this Buhari dullard as so called President of the country” (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

“They are not Pro-SARS, they are slouches of Schizophrenics!” (Guardian, October 2020)

“You see why we want SARS to be scrapped. You can't even be remorseful for once. You are still arresting and charging protesters to court. What's the similarity between protest and murder” (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

“In Nigeria constitution, nothing concern Yahoo boys and SARS. SARS is created for serious armed activities not for unarmed men. We have EFCC, let them do their work” (Guardian, October 2020).

“Because once the protest is stopped, I bet you the government will do nothing again apart from the false promise we are used to in Nigeria” (Daily Trust, October 2020).

It is obvious that most commentators opposed the decisions of the Nigerian government, the police force as well as the Pro-SARS group. This tone of comments manifest in such expressions as: “old fools;” “Animal in human skin;” “Buhari dullard;” “slouches of Schizophrenics;” etc.

Following the comments that attacked those against the protests, some comments condemned the #EndSARS protest by Nigerians as well disbelieved the killings of protesters at Lekki, Lagos. These comments fall under the category of **disapproval** tone and they constituted 18.6% of the total sample size. Some examples of these comments are:

“I can smell some questionable character, people of drugs pusher, child abuse, afraid of SARS, drugs law enforcement, sponsored by Sahara Reporters, Sowore, leader of revolutionaries wanted to turn the country to a lawless nation” (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

“I disagree with the call to end SARS but rather reform, rebrand, and re-educate them not to end them entirely” (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

“They don't have right to block the major road. SARS has been disbanded what actually do these protesters want again? Their right to Protest cannot override other people's right to free movement” (Guardian, October 2020).

“But SARS has been ended. What are they demonstrating about?” (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

“My question still remains... Can we see concrete evidence about those who died? So far so good, All photo posted as dead are denying the acclamation that they are alive sound and healthy. So who are the dead ones or all the dead people are vampire?” (Guardian, October 2020).

“This is a strong and enough evidences that the criminals like yahoo boys, armed robbers, ritualists, cultists, etc, are the brains behind this protests. If not

why carrying guns, charms for a peaceful protests? The government may be it actual targets" (Daily Trust, October 2020).

"I'm finding it difficult to believe it that Nigerian army did that I don't believe that, is just a set of disguise people who don't want the progress of Nigeria and I strongly believe Lagos state governor will not do this to his people. Is just conspiracy in disguise, may God help us.#GodBlessNigeria" (Daily Trust, October 2020).

Based on the above comments, the comments disagreed with the #EndSARS protest and also doubted the killings of protesters at Lekki, Lagos. This is portrayed in terminologies like: "drugs pushers;" "conspiracy in disguise;" etc.

Another category of tone used by the audience is the **defence** tone. The online readers used this tone to support and justify the actions of the Nigerian government on the #EndSARS protest. These constituted 1.5% of the total sampled size and manifest in comments like:

"Police should prepare for this protests so that they will not kill them because a reasonable human being will stand up against a particular security created by constitution especially the criminal-minded Nigerians" (Guardian, October 2020).

"Good development by now innocent citizens who are law abiding will pass free let the crocodile smile again" (Daily Trust, October 2020).

"If you can't respect the law I don't see the reason why police will fold their hands looking at you destroying properties of law abiding Nigerians" (Daily Trust, October 2020).

The comments that supported the decisions of the government on the #EndSARS protests were manifest in expressions like: "criminal-minded Nigerians;" "let the crocodile smile again;" etc.

Online newspaper readers of the select Facebook pages also used the **ethnic** tone. With President Buhari being from the North, tribalism was employed to critic the protest. They constituted 12% of the total sampled comments and some of them are as follows:

"To a common southerner, Nigerian problems are caused by a Northern politician. They always exonerate their politicians as blameless. Our problem is caused by Nigerians from both divides" (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

"We don't have any doubt that they are doing the bidding of Nnamdi Kanu who ordered for the recent massive destruction to lives and property. No responsible Nigerian with a dint of patriotism in his mind can cause such a massive ridicule and embarrassment to his country at this material time when all hands are on deck to restore normalcy" (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

"See stupidity of some southerners, they made these countries like a heaven. Someone should remind them that we are independent" (Daily Trust, October 2020)

“Only God know the problem of those cow brains from that region. Always in support of the evil that's on going in the land, and they have head but can't use it to think positively. It's time to put an end to contraption called Nigeria” (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

“Why is it only northerners are the once condemning the protest of #EndSARS” (Guardian, October 2020).

“Since ideologies of Nigerian youth are the same but that of the northern part are difference then it's a very big problem in Nigeria. The best solution to this is to divide the country so the northern can let us be” (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

“Does SARS even exist in the northern part of this country?” (Daily Trust, October 2020)

Some online commenters believed that SARS does not brutalize Nigerians in the north and some northerners saw the south as the problem. Such comments were made: “Our problem is caused by Nigerians from both divides;” “stupidity of some southerners;” “cow brains;” “divide the country so the northern can let us be;” etc.

Explicitly, some comments on the #EndSARS protests had **religious** tone because the Vice President of Nigeria is a Pastor. They constituted 2.2% of the total sampled size and the comments below fits into this category:

“VP Yemi Osinbanjo sold his soul to the devil the day he accepts to be Buhari running mate. He's a disgrace to the noble career as a professor of law and to the body of Christ as a pastor. The bloods of all the innocents Nigerians murdered under their watch will hunt him, his cohorts and his generation forever” (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

“Wasn't the G.O of Redeemed Christian Church of God among the voices and support who brought BUHARI TO POWER” (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

“Enemies of Nigeria. A so called pastor ordering army to kill his people. I pray cry shall never seize in their families” (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

“You like it or not, Muslim and Christian can never live together. Nigeria have been divided already” (Guardian, October 2020).

Some phrases with religious tone on the #EndSARS protests emanated from the above comments, thus: “Yemi Osinbanjo sold his soul to the devil;” “so called pastor;” “Muslim and Christian can never live together;” “so called SHEIKHS;” etc. Following the protests, comments also made use of the **political** tone to blame the ruling party (All Progressives Congress) or opposition party (Peoples' Democratic Party). These comments constituted 2% of the total sampled sized. Few examples of these comments include:

“OK the battle line has been drawn. Now we know that the establishment of SARS was political and not to fight armed robbers in the country” (Guardian, October 2020).

"Government knows this is going to escalate out of control because people are looking for opportunity to vent their anger. It will surely turn into APC go" (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

"Our youths are going beyond SARS to pursue PDP agenda while I support end SARS we will resist any attempt to politicize this protest" (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

"They don't want to use police because of what the international community will say. Now they have hired thugs. Shame on APC and their sponsored thugs" (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

"Because PDP failed in Ondo Governorship election, that's what bring the Visa ban, Nigeria government will stand still no shaking, and SARS must remain in Nigeria to deal with bad eggs" (Daily Trust, October 2020).

"APC at it again" (Guardian, October 2020).

The above comments imply that some online newspaper readers politicize the protests and these manifests in such expressions as: "we know that the establishment of SARS was political" "It will surely turn into APC go;" "Shame on APC;" "Our youths are going beyond SARS to pursue PDP agenda;" etc.

Comments with the **neutral** tone revealed the online readers' non-sentimental stand on the #EndSARS protest. These comments were objective and they constituted 11.8% of the total sampled size. Few examples include:

"Anarchy should be discourage, but government should employed the most civilized approach in reacting to this situation" (Daily Trust, October 2020)

"Over to you heavenly father let the peace reign in this country and give the youths victory as we are fighting for better and good Nigeria" (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

"We need full power supply, our roads needs to be fixed too many avoidable accidents. Healthcare for all, job opportunities for our people. Power to the people" (Sahara Reporters, October 2020).

"Anti SARS thug versus pro SARS thug" (Guardian, October 2020).

"Just imagine, this country everybody should be very careful because this end" (Daily Trust, October 2020)

"The campaign is beyond police reform" (Daily Trust, October 2020)

Discussion of Findings

The findings that originated from the results in the data analysed are discussed in line with the research questions formulated to guide the study.

Research Question One: What is the volume of likes on the #EndSARS/SWAT protest stories in the select Nigerian newspapers' Facebook pages?

The data above imply that *Sahara Reporters* have a more interactive readership, followed by *Daily Trust* while *Guardian* had the least interaction. Eniang (2020) in an analysis of Facebook comments on Senator Elisha Abbo's assault of a female

sales representative in Abuja, Nigeria, also found that *Daily Trust* had the least interactive readership.

Research Question Two: What is the frequency of comments of the online newspaper readers on the #EndSARS/SWAT protest in the select Nigerian newspapers' Facebook pages?

The implication of this is that 396 comments were selected and they were evenly distributed among the three select Facebook pages for equal analysis. This finding supports the use of technological determinism theory in the study. This is because; social media users used Social Networking Sites like Facebook to publish their view on the #EndSARS/SWAT protest.

Research Question Three: What are the tones of comments used by the online newspaper readers on #EndSARS/SWAT protest?

The use of the attack and acclaim tone showed that Nigerians were against the actions of the government on the #EndSARS protests and supported the protesters. It is evident that the comments linked the protests to politics, religion and ethnicity but some Nigerians disagreed of the protest by using the disapproval tone. The implication of the data presented is that Nigerians supported the #EndSARS/SWAT protests in Nigeria.

Social media platforms could also be used as effective tools not only for intensifying existing conflicts among different ethnic, religious, sexual identities but also reproducing them in daily life (Özarslan, 2014). Jubril and Simon (2018) found that that readers were polarised along regional lines in their comments and the realization of the much desired unity in diversity in the country via this platform is not only far from reality, but also endangers national peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. Konnikova (2013) in Jubril and Simon (2018) also found that most of the online readers' comments particularly, anonymous ones are usually uncivil, aggressive and negative in nature.

Research Question Four: What is the dominant tone of comments on #EndSARS/SWAT protests on the Facebook pages?

The implication of the data presented above is that majority of the online newspaper readers used the attack tone, followed by acclaim tone while the least used was the disapproval tone to react to the #EndSARS/SWAT protests in Nigeria. This agrees with the study by Ende and Dzurkogi (2012) that comments deemed as offensive employed hate speech, threats, abusive language and assassination of character on the social media to vent anger, frustration and register their dissatisfaction about political, economic, religious, security and social issues in the society. The tone of comments used by the audience was basically influenced by the ideological dispositions of the audience. The audience on the social media platforms hardly think about the implications of their comments which can increase the disunity among Nigerians (Dauda *et al* as cited in Auwal, 2018).

Conclusion

An analysis of the findings of this study and literature reviewed, the research was led to draw some conclusions. Facebook as a social media platform gives people the opportunity to interact and air their views on a subject of interest. The *Sahara Reporters* newspaper had a more interactive audience on Facebook than *Guardian* and *Daily Trust* newspaper. The researchers also concludes that the Nigerians were at rage concerning the #EndSARS/SWAT protests. This explains why majority of the online newspaper readers' comments used the attack tone and made hateful comments about the Nigerian government. More so, the disapproval tone was used to show that some online readers' disbelieved the killings at Lekki, Lagos and opposed the #EndSARS/SWAT protests in Nigeria and across other cities of the world. Again, the research concluded that some of the readers are tilting towards a division as the sought a separation of the North and South. This clarifies why the ethnic tone was used.

Recommendations

Following the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made

1. First, there have been cases of police brutality over the years that we consider it a norm. The government should carry out a total reorientation of every unit under the Nigerian Police Force. The Nigerian government should also endeavour to meet the demands of the Nigerian youths to prevent another wave of the protest.
2. Another challenge is that social media users inflict hateful statements while commenting on subjects they disagree with. There is a need for self-inflicted social responsibility on the part of social media users rather than passing opinions based on one's religion or ethnicity as evident from the numerous comments.
3. There should be campaigns to sensitize Nigerians to avoid creating rivalry within the country, especially between the North and South. Media messages should be disseminated to enhance oneness and not fuel conflicts in the Nigerian society.
4. Future researchers should use a different research method to fill the knowledge gap on the issue of police brutality in Nigeria. A survey method could be carried out to examine the perception of elderly Nigerians on the #EndSARS protest.

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