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Alternative Journalism and Hashtag Activism: The Influence of Netizens in the Drive for Social Justice in Southern Nigeria

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Abstract
Violations of civil liberties and disregard for basic human needs in Nigeria's socio-political and economic setting have given rise to alternative journalists; equipped with social media and the effective use of hashtags, drawing attention to various social issues and mobilising for action towards amelioration such problems. This study investigated the trend of alternative journalism facilitated by hashtag activism in Southern Nigeria and how it has been used in advocating for social justice in Southern Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted and 122 Mass Communication students responded to the Google Forms questionnaire from three Nigerian universities in Southern Nigeria. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics. An average mean rating of 3.27 and 3.02 indicated respondents' concurrence with using hashtags and their impact on social justice advocacy respectively. Concerted government and public response in addressing issues given prominence by alternative journalists is important to foster social justice.

Keywords: Alternative, Journalism, Hashtag, Netizens, Social Justice

Introduction

The auctioning of telecommunication licenses by the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) in 2001 effectively laid the foundation for the present information revolution in Nigeria which has resulted in the emergence of amorphous and consequential forms of digital activism in recent times (NCC 2001). The sheer ubiquity of digital devices and social media platforms has not only enabled a digital revolution but has also facilitated digital activism. In this digital world of data, information is power. Internet users who have near unlimited access to information can engage in discourses and advocate for social change in a way that was not previously possible. Due to the socio-political landscape of Nigeria, these social media users make use of such platforms to demand accountability from the government and social justice for themselves when it is due. These journalists enabled by various digital media have become the new independent media in the Nigerian context (Usman 2019). Information dissemination and news reporting have been decentralized and deregulated respectively (Udoinyang & Nwazuni 2024: 37).

Designations such as citizens', community, participatory, social movement, grassroots, counter information journalism or media as the case may be have been utilized in denoting such forms of media practice (Harcup 2013). This study adopts alternative journalism as the designation that refers to such forms of journalism conducted in "a relatively participatory, non-professionalized and non-commercial" pattern (Harcup 2013). It embodies a philosophy of journalism not only rooted in the typical life of citizens but also created and driven by them (Atton 2008). The major agenda of this form of journalism is counterhegemony to mainstream journalism, a "progressive and emancipatory political agenda" and sentimentality towards social responsibility and advocacy (Atton 2008; Farooq 2020:7). Alternative journalism through the instrumentality of social media and hashtags has been pivotal in raising public awareness, mobilising public support, facilitating collective action, influencing policymakers and ushering a level of transformation to various issues and events (Okocha & Dapoet 2022).

There are many channels to communicate cases of injustice that citizens have experienced or observed but none comes close to a hashtag in being "compact, mobile, and easily digestible" (Okocha & Dapoet 2022 :2). The hashtag as a means to an end converts literal messages into calls to action. The dissemination of ideas through hashtags is so rapid that within hours of the creation of such hashtags, thousands of social media users have been exposed to the message or issue in question. The aim of the hashtag is not limited to creating awareness of the issue but to make an impact as it concerns the issue. Recent times have seen the surge of "an emerging age/group of cyber-savvy and click-ready social activists" who in popular culture are referred to as netizens, a portmanteau that combines the internet and citizens (Farooq 2020). A netizen is a member of a social media platform who uses such a platform to draw the attention of the government to certain socio-political issues and advocate for social change and justice. Ebenezer (2021:25) describes netizens as the "rise of a new generation of activists steeped in new rules and technologies of civic engagement." Determination to speak truth to power and fearlessness in the face of any repercussions are some of the qualities journalists should possess.

Netizens embody these features in their bid to voice out injustice in Nigeria. The 2020 #EndSars and 2024 #EndBadGovernance campaigns are prime examples of alternative journalism facilitated by hashtag activism. Various causes for social justice have also gained support through this medium in recent times. In November 2021, 12-year-old Sylvester Oromoni Jnr, a student of Dowen College, Lagos got bullied to death which led to the #JusticeForSylvester advocacy (Adelagun 2023).

In 2022, #JusticeForBamise became a campaign to seek justice for 22-year-old Bamise Anyawola raped, killed and mutilated in a BRT bus on February 26 on her way home in Lagos State (Soyele, 2024). The online justice campaign for Ilerioluwa Oladimeji Aloba (Mohbad) bullied to death by a music cartel attracted more attention in 2023, even sparking protests (Akhimien 2024). Condemnation of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission's (EFCC) act of breaking into hostels and hotels, assaulting staff and engaging in mass arrests and journalists detained by state agencies form a bulk of calls for social justice in Nigeria.

Ubong (2024) confirms that social media platforms as well as their embedded tools have been instrumental and strategic for conducting socio-political activism, with unprecedented levels of awareness, engagement, mobilization and advocacy being the result of such efforts. These digital activism efforts have also been described as clicktivism, armchair activism, sentimentalism and slacktivism – a situation where users become satisfied by just posting/tweeting contents (Ofori-Parku & Moscato 2018; Abimbola, Adekemi & Adetola 2024). They have also been regarded as sentimentalism, having no impact on the issues or lives of the people in question (Ofori-Parku & Moscato 2018). The fact that one may post, like, share or Tweet user generated content relating to issues of social injustice does not mean one is concerned about it

Statement of the Problem

Protests since the colonial era have been an element of Nigeria's national identity and an avenue for accessing social and political justice (Onu 2024). As a reaction to the opposition to protests by the government and the presence of digital technologies and social platforms, these protests have been adopted in digital spaces through hashtags either to fight for effective policing or other socio-economic benefits by Nigerians (Johanna 2014; Ofori-Parku & Moscato 2018; Akinyetun, 2021). It took the massive traffic that was generated by these trending hashtags through the efforts of netizens for the mainstream media and the government to focus on the issues by conferring status on these issues as well as reinforcing it. Social media has provided platforms for a network of digital citizens (netizens) interested and involved in socio-political processes of change. The practice of alternative journalism which democratizes the notion of journalism has given these netizens a shot at being the audience and news creators (Atton 2010). As such, socio-political change formerly thought to be only actualized on the streets through protests and demonstrations, legislative chambers and courtrooms, can also be induced virtually. This study is geared towards exploring how the activities of netizens acting as alternative journalists have impacted the drive for social justice in the Nigerian society.

Aim and objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to assess how hashtag activism has influenced the drive for social justice in Nigeria. The specific objectives are as follows to:

1. explore the trend of hashtag activism during the #EndSars and #EndBadGovernance campaigns.
2. examine the influence of this form of hashtag activism in the drive for social justice in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Concepts relating to the topic such as social media, alternative journalism, hashtag activism and social justice will be studied in this section.

Social Media

The common denominator between contemporary forms of alternative journalism and hashtag activism is the use of various forms of social media. One cannot exist without the other. Kietzmann et al cited in Akinyetun (2019:5) define social media as "a medium that employs mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms via which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content." This technical definition captures the essence of social media but a more social definition would fit the context of this work. Hence, it can be said that social media provides a platform for citizens to "share, interact and engage" within the digital space (Okocha & Dapoet 2022:1).

Some of its defining features such as its "immediacy, interactivity, virality, and cost-effectiveness" have made it omnipresent in contemporary times (Bassey 2024:93). Social media platforms serve as avenues for the free discussions on socio-political issues especially in circumstances where the government of the day is repressive towards a free press. To Ubong (2024), social media platforms in the Nigerian cyberspace have become critical tools for activists and alternative journalists by providing with platforms that enable them "to raise awareness, coordinate actions, and mobilise support for various causes." Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have become a sort of public sphere where various social, political and economic issues are analyzed, discussed and debated (Usman 2019; Nnaemeka, 2021).

Alternative Journalism

Media practices that offer an alternative to conventional modes of communication that explore how information is sourced and those that relegate the audience to the subordinate role of a receiver can be described as alternative media and journalism (Harcup 2013:14). It is not a novel form of journalism. Harcup (2013) further argues that alternative journalism might have been in existence before the emergence of conventional mainstream journalism. Alternative media is succinctly described by Atton cited in Harcup (2013:11) in two folds. Firstly, as sites for the "explorations of individual enthusiasm and subcultural identity just as much as they may be homes to radical visions of society and the polity", and as opportunities providing "possibilities for individuals and groups to create their media from the periphery."

Alternative journalism has provided an avenue for alternative voices to make themselves heard. Apart from being a form of media production, Harcup (2013) sees alternative journalism as a form of education that teaches the important lesson that ordinary persons could help themselves with what they expected professionals to do (Harcup 2013). Framing and gatekeeping of information is in the hands of a network of social media users; comprising of a greater majority of ordinary individuals and few elite communicators. This debunks the myth that alternative journalists are only comprised of ordinary, illiterate citizens. Alternative journalism has been massified to include a large number of people which was previously not feasible but has become possible today due to the ubiquity of digital technologies and hashtag activism. The common denominator is that their channel is not an established or institutionalised channel for disseminating such information (Ofori-Parku & Moscato 2018).

Farooq (2020:6) makes a distinction between citizen and alternative journalism by describing the former as constituting "non-professionalized, user-generated news-gathering and dissemination practices" undertaken by ordinary citizens and professionals alike. He describes the latter as "citizen discursive spaces that ordinary individuals and small groups can be in command of…can function as vital and pervasive undercurrents and reservoirs of political commentary and potential mobilization" (Farooq 2020:8). Alternative journalism does not just concern itself with the dissemination of online content but is also a socio-political tool for counterhegemonic, oppositional, emancipatory and progressive socio-political advocacy and mobilization.

Hashtag Activism

A hashtag is represented by the hash symbol (#) followed by a short message. However, in the context of this study, a hashtag comprises of the hash symbol followed by a direct and short message surrounding an issue, event or a cause. The use of hashtags has achieved a lot due to their interactive nature. Yang cited in Okocha and Dapoet (2022:3) defines a hashtag as "a discursive protest on social media, united through a hashtag, word, phrase or sentence." This work maintains the definition by Ofori-Parku and Moscato (2018:248) which describes hashtag activism as "the activity of using hashtags to bring attention to social issues and mobilize communities for action." Hashtags have become so ubiquitous that their use goes beyond mobilizing support for socio-political change to marketing, advertising and other forms of awareness. The use of hashtags permits the "direct communication of raw and imagined emotions, images, and ideologies as well as their widespread dissemination in an unprecedented way" (Okocha & Dapoet 2022:2).

On social media platforms, hashtags have semiotic significance (Ofori-Parku & Moscato 2018). This necessitates these hashtags to be created by netizens, activists, organisations and social media influencers and directed to the wider netizen community for upward dissemination to other netizens through retweeting and posting messages, especially around certain issues and causes. Hashtag activism in recent times has been elevated to an advocacy machinery through which netizens promote and call out issues of social justice and injustice respectively. Ofori-Parku & Moscato (2018:248) note that the hashtag "serves as an indexing system, making it easier to store, search for, and collect information" about particular issues, events, places and people. This feature of efficient information gathering and collection cannot even be rivalled by the more established mainstream media. The mainstream media which also have social media accounts on platforms like Twitter contribute to this vast information bank.

Recent studies which focus on how social media influences youth civic participation vis-à-vis activism are being tailored down to their use of hashtags as an aspect of civic participation and activism (Akinyetun 2021). While social media in extant literature has been regarded as a platform for the local and global dialogues that range from political, social, economic and cultural, the hashtag, a creation of the social media has played a significant role in the organisation, mobilization, engagement and indexing of such dialogues (Ubong 2024). Social media and hashtags have transformed social and political activism as well as the drive for social justice in Nigeria. Hashtag activism has evolved into a form of political action. The 2020 #EndSars campaign against SARS is the most iconic example of such. The online campaign ran simultaneously with what was taking place on the streets but the awareness it created was a result of what was going on online. Nigerians from their homes in any part of the country could follow the protests as things unfolded in real time and those who could not afford to join physically made the hashtag trend which brought it to the international stage. The process of reporting real-time and daily news and events surrounding the campaign by those physically on the ground to their Twitter accounts using the #EndSars hashtag is nothing short of citizen journalism (Nnaemeka, 2021).

The Concepts of Justice and Social Justice in Nigeria

Justice is a dynamic term that describes what is just, right or reasonable. Justice is dynamic because over the years, what has come to be just, right or reasonable has not been limited to a particular set of ideas or values. Ejumodu (2010) believes that the contemporary view of justice is different from the traditional view of justice. According to him, the traditional concept of justice was focused on

the individual level where people were extolled as being just as part of their moral disposition while the contemporary view of justice is focused on the collective or community level for the realization of certain societal goals. It can be otherwise said that while the traditional sense of justice was conservative in orientation, the contemporary sense of justice is progressive. Barker cited in Ejumodu (2010) notes that justice is a synthesis of the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. In a contemporary sense, justice is socially constructed.

Social justice as a concept is multidisciplinary in nature and any attempt to broadly delineate it would be nebulous. Ejumodu (2010:214) relates the concept to the "promotion and application of basic human rights, basic human needs and the means of impartially protecting and enforcing them legally in any society." Ekesong (2010:155) notes that the thrust of social justice revolves around addressing "the welfare of citizens of a given nation-state." Ujomu (2002:225) defines social justice as "a fundamental framework for the total development of the human person in his or her physical, social and spiritual life." It also constitutes the achievement of good at the societal level.

Ucheaga cited in Ekesong (2010:156) submits that "social justice is predicated on the notion that organized society, as an association of people, creates in the members certain expectations or claims, which …would be unfair for society to deny or fail to meet." Free and fair elections, protection from violation of human rights, government accountability, equal access to welfare services provided by the state, nondiscrimination, application of the rule of law, and the general administration of justice are all indices of an atmosphere of social justice that Nigerians expect from the government. Actualising social justice is the challenge of both the government in power and the citizenry of a state, especially in a democratic dispensation.

Theoretical Framework

This work will be analyzed through the lens of the public sphere theory. Habermas cited in Nnaemeka (2021:18) defines the public sphere as "a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the people." The elimination of professionals who curate and disseminate information is an integral feature of the public sphere. Here, everyone can partake in societal discourse because such discourse affects them and not necessarily because they have gone through formal education to do so. Roles reserved for professional commentators have been open to all and sundry (Udoinyang & Nwazuni 2024).

In today's information age, social media has been integral in firmly accentuating this aspect of Habermas' theory. Netizens have turned their various social media platforms into sites of critical discussions where opinions are generated, various ideas interact and support is garnered (Udoinyang & Nwazuni 2024). In many instances, these discussions are geared towards influencing government policies and actions (Nnaemeka, 2021). Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, online blogs, but especially X (formerly Twitter) "have constituted strategic instruments for political protests, democratic consolidation and many other forms of socio-political change in countries across the world" (Okocha & Dapoet 2022:3). Among other things, the reality of the public sphere has enhanced public participation in societal discourses.

With social media clicks, direct actions can be taken to attain various socio-political agendas. The 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, the 2012 #OccupyWallStreet campaign, the 2014 #BringBackOurGirls campaign, the 2019 Hollywood #MeToo campaign and the 2020 #BlackLivesMatter and #EndSars movements are examples of social media-originating campaigns and movements that translated into real

action in various countries and industries. Others have called such social media-motivated causes "clicktivism" which has not brought about the expected change while those who hide behind their keyboards in the name of activism are called keyboard warriors (Endong 2018). However, with the amount of change social change the use of social media has necessitated, it could be opined that the click is mightier than the sword.

Habermas conceptualised the public sphere as a meeting between civil society and the state where critical discussions between citizens that concern the state are held. The infusion of web 2.0 technologies of the internet and social media in communication has enabled citizens who were at the periphery of public discourse to come to the fore. This theory exposes how alternative journalism via social media has provided a sphere and platform for marginalised demographics to participate in discourses concerning social justice in Nigeria.

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study to investigate how netizens, aided by alternative journalistic practices and hashtags have impacted the drive for social justice in Southern Nigeria. The study's population comprised students of the Department of Mass Communication in three universities in Southern Nigeria: University of Nigeria, Enugu State, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State and Dennis Osadebey University, Delta State. This population was purposely selected as there were significant alternative journalistic activities among these students during the 2020 #EndSars and 2024 #EndBadGovernance campaigns. 122 students responded to the Google Form questionnaire curated for the study which was sent to various departmental WhatsApp groups in the selected universities.

The first draft of the questionnaire underwent face validation by the researcher. The instrument's reliability was confirmed through the test-retest method where links of the instrument were sent to various social media conversant with both the concept of alternative journalism and hashtag activism. Data was analyzed and interpreted with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 25). This was done to obtain frequencies, percentages and other statistical measures of central tendencies and dispersion such as mean value. Results were presented in tables and charts. A four-point Likert scale where mean scores equal to or greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 indicated acceptance, while mean scores below the criterion mean of 2.50 indicated disagreement.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 122 valid responses by respondents were recorded from the Google Forms questionnaire deployed and shared through WhatsApp to the respondents.

Figure 1

Distribution of the University of Respondents
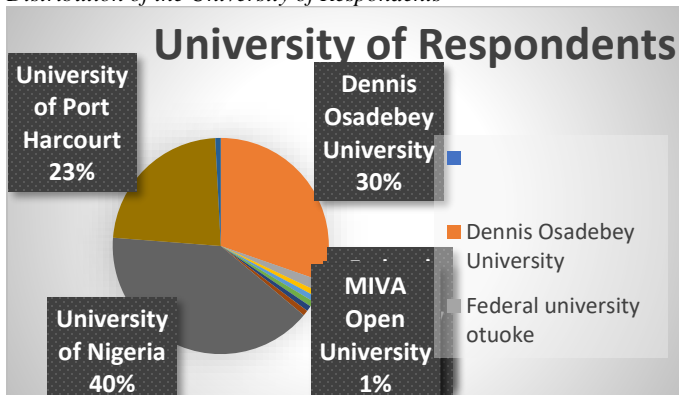
Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 1

Response to objective 1: To what extent was hashtag activism employed during the #EndSars and #EndBadGovernance Campaigns?

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	DECISION
1	Social media was utilized during the 2020 #EndSars and 2024 #EndBadGoverance Campaigns	61 (50%)	47 (38.5%)	11 (9.0%)	3 (2.5%)	3.36	Accepted
2	Hashtags were created for the protests on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram	52 (42.6%)	49 (40.2%)	14 (11.5%)	7 (5.7%)	3.20	Accepted
3	Videos, images, news and texts were posted and tweeted using these hashtags	59 (48.4%)	49 (40.2%)	11 (9.0%)	3 (2.5%)	3.34	Accepted
4	These hashtags trended on various social media platforms	61 (50.0%)	48 (39.3%)	11 (9.0%)	2 (1.6%)	3.38	Accepted
5	People interacted with videos, images, news and texts posted with these hashtags	52 (42.6%)	50 (41.0%)	16 (13.1%)	4 (3.3%)	3.23	Accepted
6	People did not need to be trained journalists to share their experiences of social injustice in Nigeria	53 (43.4%)	44 (36.1%)	16 (13.1%)	9 (7.4%)	3.16	Accepted
	CLUSTER MEAN					3.27= Acceptance	

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The data in Table 1 illustrates the extent hashtags embedded in various social media platforms have been used in social justice advocacy in Nigeria. 61 (50%) of the 122 respondents strongly affirm while 47 (38.5%) affirm the usage of social media during the #EndSars and #EndBadGovernance campaigns signifying the significant use of such platforms. On the question of creation of specialized hashtags for these campaigns on social platforms, 52 (42.6%) and 49 (40.2%) of the respondents strongly agree and agree respectively. The use of the hashtags to complement the posting/tweeting of other user-generated content during the campaigns was strongly affirmed by 59 (48.4%) and affirmed by 49 (40.2%) of the respondents. 59 (48.4%) and 49 (40.2%) strongly agree and agree respectively that these hashtags trended on various platforms while 52 (42.6%) and 50 (41%) strongly agree and agree to the interactions surrounding these hashtags on the platforms. 53 (43.4%) and 44 (36.1%) of the respondents strongly agree and agree that during the campaigns professional journalistic training was not requisite in sharing experiences of social injustice. This confirms the relative belief of the respondents in alternative journalistic practices. Summarily, a cluster mean of 3.27 is indicative of the respondents' general affirmation to the use of hashtag activism-facilitated alternative journalism in social justice advocacy in Nigeria.

Table 2

Response to research question 2: To what extent has hashtag activism influenced the drive for social justice in Nigeria?

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	DECISION
1	It has been used to advocate for social justice and change	35 (28.7%)	63 (51.6%)	20 (16.4%)	4 (3.3%)	3.06	Accepted
2	It has drawn the attention of the government and public to issues of social justice	27 (22.1%)	63 (51.6%)	27 (22.1%)	5 (4.1%)	2.92	Accepted
3	It has allowed ordinary citizens to share social, political and economic injustices they have experienced	44 (36.1%)	66 (54.1%)	10 (8.2%)	2 (1.6%)	3.25	Accepted
4	Experiences of social injustice can be shared rapidly with a large audience	48 (39.3%)	64 (52.5%)	10 (8.2%)	0 (0%)	3.31	Accepted
5	There is increased youth participation in advocating for social justice	38 (31.1%)	69 (56.6%)	14 (11.5%)	1 (0.8%)	3.18	Accepted
6	Issues of social injustice have been addressed by the government as a result of hashtag activism	19 (15.6%)	36 (29.5%)	43 (35.2%)	24 (19.7%)	2.41	Disagreement
	CLUSTER MEAN					3.02=Acceptance	

Source: Field Work (2025)

The data in Table 2 illustrates how hashtag activism-facilitated alternative journalism has impacted the drive for social justice in Nigeria. 63 (51.6%) and 35 (28.7%) of the 122 respondents agree and strongly agree respectively that this form of alternative journalism is being used in social justice advocacy in Nigeria. While 63 (51.6%) and 27 (22.1%) agree and strongly agree respectively that these journalistic activities have drawn the attention of the government and public to issues bordering on social injustice, another 27 (22.1%) disagree that such attention had not been instigated. Respondents affirm that ordinary citizens are now privileged to share their experience of injustice with 66 (54.1%) respondents agreeing and 44 (36.1%) strongly agreeing. On the question on the rapid sharing of these experiences to a large audience, 64 (52.5%) respondents agree while 48 (39.3%) strongly agree. 69 (56.6%) and 38 (31.1%) respondents agree and strongly agree respectively to the increased youth participation seen in social justice advocacy in Nigeria. 43 (35.2%) of the respondents are of the view that issues of social injustice given prominence by alternative journalistic activities have not been addressed by the government. 36 (29.5%) others agree that such issues have been addressed by the government. A cluster mean of 3.02 is an indication of respondents' agreement that hashtag activism-facilitated alternative journalism has had impact in the drive for social justice in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The responses to the first research question align with studies by Ebenezer (2021) and Ubong (2024) that indicate the instrumentality of social media in both the 2020 #EndSars and 2024 #EndBadGovernance campaigns. Hashtags as tools embedded in the functionality of various social media platforms were extensively used during the 2020 #EndSars and 2024 #EndBadGovernance campaigns. These hashtags were effective in communicating through text, pictures and videos the various events and incidences that surrounded the protest especially from an activism-related perspective. This communication was able to reach a wide range of social media users because of these hashtags. Unintentionally and

intentionally, these social media users engaged in alternative journalistic practices that challenged the present socio-political status quo as well as the maladroitness of the mainstream media.

The second research questions on the impact of hashtag-driven alternative journalism in delivering social justice in Nigeria elicited a largely ambivalent response. While it has been noted that the medium can be used to successfully advocate for social justice which draws public attention to such incidences as well as a significant level of youth participation in such efforts, the study also established that such issues raised in the public sphere may not be adequately attended to by the government. The fact that the government has been helpless in providing justice to cases such as that of Sylvester Oromoni and Bamise Anyawola after both families endured and are still enduring lengthy litigation battles is a testament to their inability in most cases to provide justice to victims of social injustices (Adelagun 2023; Soyele 2024). True success for hashtag-driven alternative journalism can only be realised when issues of socio-economic injustices raised by such efforts are adequately addressed by the government or institutions established by them to do so in order to bring about various aspects of socio-economic and political change.

Social media platforms as Habermas conceptualised, have become public spheres for Nigerians to engage in critical discussions about socio-economic and political issues that concern them and the Nigerian state. This hashtag activism is not reduced to clicktivism but have been translated to direct actions that are aimed at engendering socio-economic and political change in Nigeria especially by those who are not considered to belong to the corridors of power and influence. The major drawback however, is the nonchalant attitude towards addressing these issues that have been raised.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The recent emergence of hashtags activism-facilitated alternative journalism is a feature of the ongoing information and digital revolution in Nigeria. The trend has democratised information generation and dissemination. It has privileged erstwhile marginalised voices to be able to speak up about violations of civil liberties, issues of social injustice and oppression in Nigeria's socio-political and economic setting. The attention of the government and the general public have been drawn to these issues through these efforts. Mobilisation for actions have also been possible through these persons and platforms. The government and other concerned civil players need to do better in addressing the issues that are being raised by these alternative journalists to ensure that social justice is entrenched in our society. Social justice should be the drive for such hashtag activism efforts. When this medium starts becoming a tool for political propaganda, hate speech and bigotry, the essence of such collective efforts will be lost. Digital literacy training will be essential to ensure that such platforms are used effectively.

Conflict interest(s)

The author declares that they have no personal, professional or financial interest that may have inappropriately influenced the outcome of this research.

Ethical considerations

The author declares that this article was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and principles for research.

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