Generational dichotomies in public perception of social media coverage of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests: Implication for networked communication

Joshua Aghogho Erubami¹, Emmanuel Ufuophu-Biri¹, Luke Ifeanyi Anorue²*, Uzoma Oluchukwu Nwabunze³ and Emeka S. S. Orekyeh²

Abstract: There are intense debates about the presumed generational dichotomies in the use and perception of new media technologies by young people and older adults. Proponents of this presumed generational divide contend that people born in the current dispensation of high-powered digital technologies (Digital Natives) would perceive and relate with technologies in significantly different ways from their older counterparts (Digital Immigrants). This study examines the possible generational differences in the perception of social media coverage of the #EndSARS protests that erupted in Nigeria in 2020. A cross-sectional survey of 384 residents of South-east Nigeria was conducted, using a questionnaire as a data collection instrument. Findings show that there are no significant generational differences in the extent of exposure to and sources of social media news on the protests, but the perception of social media performances in the coverage of the uprising was significantly different between the two generational cohorts, with the younger respondents having a more favourable perception towards social media than their peers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joshua Aghogho Erubami is a lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication at Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. He specialises in multimedia journalism, health communication and development advocacy.

Emmanuel Ufuophu-Biri (PhD) is an Associate Professor of Mass Communication at Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. He specialises in new media, print and broadcast journalism.

Luke Ifeanyi Anorue (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. He specialises in advertising and development communication.

Uzoma Oluchukwu Nwabunze is a Lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria. She specialises in health communication and development advocacy.

Emeka S. S. Orekyeh is a Lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka., Nigeria. He specialises in advertising and development advocacy.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Many scholars argue that the particular period in which people are born determines how they perceive, understand and use technologies. Those who suggest this generational dichotomy argue that people born after 1980 have the natural ability to use and perceive digital technologies in fundamentally different ways from their counterparts born in the pre-digital age. Hence, the category of people with this presumed innate technological flair are described as the Digital Natives, while those born before 1980 are said to be Digital Immigrants with limited capacity to appreciate emerging technological artifacts. This paper evaluates these assumptions based on how young and older Nigerians perceived social media coverage of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests that erupted in 2020. Our study showed that the Digital Natives have a more favourable perception of social media contents concerning the protests than the Digital Immigrants and these differences portend some implications for networked communication.
older counterparts. The study recommends the need for citizen journalists to enhance the perceived efficiency of social media by striving for a greater measure of credibility, accuracy and objectivity in their networked news.

**Subjects:** ICT; Mass Communication; Development Communication; Information Technology; Media & film Studies

**Keywords:** digital immigrants; digital natives; #EndSARS protests; police brutality; social media communication

1. Introduction

Digital technologies remain one of the significant factors influencing trends in today’s world. Proponents of the singularity paradigm contend that modern digital tools have not only contributed to the constant fluidity in societal dynamics but are essentially responsible for driving profound changes in human history (Magee & Devezas, 2011). These technologies are ever present with us, cutting across all spheres of the society and affecting both the popular and sub-culture of the world in uniquely profound ways (Bennett & Maton, 2010; Kopáčková, 2015). Specifically, they have offered mankind irresistible opportunities to operate on the virtual planet, giving rise to modern concepts like e-governance, e-learning, e-commerce, e-library and e-security (Harindranath, 2008; Oslon et al., 2011).

Previous research suggests some elements of distinctions among categories of digital technology users (Joiner et al., 2013; Suša, 2014). Many of such studies contend that the present generation of young people tends to perceive and deploy digital tools in significantly different ways from the older generation (Calvo-Porral & Pesqueira-Sanchez, 2019; Joiner et al., 2013). This idea of presumed generational dichotomy was first popularised in the works of Prensky (2001) who broadly classified users of modern digital technologies as “Digital Natives” and “Digital Immigrants”. In this wise, the Digital Natives were conceived as a unique category of homogenous people with unmatched natural capacity to explore digital technologies, whereas the Digital Immigrants have to pass through the crucible of traversing their pre-digital experience in order to fit into the digital culture (Prensky, 2001; Zur & Zur, 2011). Specifically, the Digital Natives are regarded as individuals who are exactly 35 years old or below, while those above 35 years old are regarded as the Digital Immigrants (Ufuophu-Biri & Ijeh, 2021).

Scholars argue that both generational cohorts tend to have a significantly different mindset, peculiar motivations and distinct perception towards digital technologies (Calvo-Porral & Pesqueira-Sanchez, 2019; Fietkiewicz, 2017; Prensky, 2001; Riegel & Mete, 2017). Perception is the cognitive process through which individuals construct and make meaning from the information they are exposed to. It does not only create people’s experience of the world around them but also allows them to act appropriately within a predefined environment (Erubami, 2020). How a phenomenon is perceived ultimately defines how it is assessed, embraced or rejected, given that there is an overlapping relationship between perception and technology use (Segaard, 2015).

In the later part of 2020, Nigeria witnessed one of its most significant public uprisings organised by young people against police brutality targeted at youths by operatives of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a special unit within the Nigerian police established to curb robbery and kidnapping activities across the country. The protests started across different social networking sites from where it spread to all parts of Nigeria, leading to the closure of major highways and destruction of public and private assets until the Nigerian government deployed armed soldiers to quell the uprising (Enogholase & Aliu, 2020). During the protests, participants provided constant updates on the movement using various social media platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, blogs, and WhatsApp. Expectedly, many of such updates have since received different appraisals from the public, with some contending that social media
coverage of the protests reflected the true realities of what transpired during the #EndSARS movement, while others argue that the networked protests were undermined by fake news and alternative truth (Bello, 2020).

This study seeks to investigate whether public perception of social media coverage of the protests varied significantly between the digital natives and the digital immigrants. Specifically, the study seeks to (i) determine the differences in the frequency of obtaining social media news on the protests by young and older Nigerians, (ii) ascertain the differences in the main sources of social media news on the protests to both generational cohorts, (iii) evaluate the differences in the perception of young and older Nigerians on social media coverage of the protests. Studies interrogating the presumed generational divide among technology users in Nigeria are markedly limited, and many of such studies are tilted towards students and educational institutions. The present study aims to extend the discourse on the presumed digital natives-immigrants dichotomies by focusing on how these supposedly distinct cohorts perceived the use of social media tools in the coverage of burning security issues, such as the Nigerian #EndSARS protests.

2. Literature review

2.1. The generational dichotomy debate

Over the years, technological advancements have been seamlessly used as one of the prime parameters for delineating man’s history into distinct generational cohorts. One of such categorisations classified human generations into the “Baby Boomers” (with reference to those born between 1946 and 1964), “Baby Busters” or the “Generation X” (1965–1976) and the “Echo Boomers”, also nuanced as the “Generation Y”, the “Net Generation” or the “Millennials” (1977–1997) (Tapscott, 2008).

In 2001, Prensky offered a categorical delineation of technology users into what is now commonly referred to as the “Digital Natives” and the “Digital Immigrants”. Using the age bracket factor, Prensky presented a metaphorical description of the digital natives as the generation of young people born in the digital age (after 1980) and have lived all their lives surrounded by and using computers, digital music players, videogames, cell phones and sundry other tools of the digital age. As a result of this constant interaction with technologies, this generation has become the native speakers of the digital computer language, making them think and process information in fundamentally different ways from older adults. Conversely, Prensky posits that the digital immigrants are the generation of people born before the digital age, but as they moved into the digital world, this category of technology users tried to adopt some aspects of modern technologies and adapt to the new environment while also retaining their natural accents. These retained accents are manifest in their tendency to turn to the newspaper first to read the news before checking the same on the internet, or reading a programme manual rather than running the programme first and learning its applicability on the go (Prensky, 2001).

Prensky’s argument was hinged on the assumptions that a distinct and significantly different generation of homogenous digital natives exists and that they possess some forms of innate special ability to use digital tools; hence, education must be changed in principles to accommodate their peculiar needs (Kopáčková, 2015; Virkus, 2008). In this regard, the digital natives are ascribed certain characteristics that set them apart from the digital immigrants comprised by older adults. For example, they are presumed to be highly fluent in acquiring and learning diverse technologies, learn intuitively as opposed to logical learning, consider digital technology as integral part of their lives, enjoy multitasking, prefer electronic interactions to face-to-face chats and enjoy social interaction using social media. Conversely, the digital immigrants are presumed to consider technology as an add-on to their daily affairs, prefer face-to-face interaction to texting, focus on one task at a time, and follow logical ways of learning and using technology (Riegel & Mete, 2017; Zur & Zur, 2011).
Some studies have either wholly or partly supported these assumptions. For example, Suša’s (2014) assessment of the attitude of the digital natives and digital immigrants towards learning business informatics at higher education level shows significant differences in the perception of competences by the two groups as the digital native cohort tends to report higher perceived competences than the digital immigrant group in all the measured indices. Similarly, the study by Joiner et al. (2013) shows that young people tend to have significantly lower anxiety and greater positive attitude towards the use of technology than their older counterparts.

Nevertheless, Prensky’s assumptions have been heavily criticised by scholars who contend that the assumptions are reflective of “academic moral panic” induced by dramatic languages that tend to close down genuine debates and necessary scientific rigour (Bennett & Maton, 2010, p. 328). In their empirical review, Bennett and Maton (2010) stressed the need for current research to traverse the seemingly generational dichotomies inherent in the digital natives-immigrants debates and advance more nuanced clarifications of people’s technology experiences. Generally, proponents of the digital nativism paradigm tend to assume a sharp generational dichotomy in terms of ICT competence with the two main categories of technology users treated as mutually exclusive cohorts (Jones & Czerniewicz, 2010). However, several studies indicate that the digital natives may be less homogenously technology-savvy than being presumed (Wang et al., 2013), and some young people may be ill-prepared to work with technology (Ko et al., 2014).

Consequently, Guo et al. (2008) conclude that even when it seems reasonable that Prensky’s hypothetical digital natives might have had greater exposure to digital tools than any previous generation, there are no statistically significant differences in the ICT competence of both cohorts, and the presumed generational dichotomy might have been over exaggerated. Wang et al. (2013) propose a re-conceptualisation of the digital nativism notion as digital fluency to fully capture the capacity of technology users to reinvent knowledge and churn out information that is expressive of their digital creativity.

2.2. Dichotomies in the frequency and pattern of technology use

While most arguments on the digital natives-immigrants debates have been primarily targeted at the presumed homogeneous technology-savvy nature of the digital natives (Guo et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2013), research nonetheless indicates some forms of significant variations in the frequency and pattern of using digital technologies by both groups (Ufuophu-Biri & Ijeh, 2021). Earlier concerns about the deployment of technologies were on the presumed steep divide in access to emerging digital tools, and the tendency then was to equate access to technology to digital equality (Fietkiewicz, 2017). However, the mere access to technologies (such as the internet) does not guarantee its use; rather, the willingness to use technologies is influenced by their perceived usability, perceived ease/convenience of use and perceived usefulness or relative advantage (Choudrie et al., 2013; Osland et al., 2011).

Wang et al. (2013) posit that while there may not be a homogenous generational dichotomy in the competence and general use of digital tools, there are statistically significant variations between young people and older adults in the frequency of using digital technologies. For instance, they conclude that while young people may not necessarily be more fluent than older adults, the digital natives are more commonly disposed to frequently use modern social networking tools than the digital immigrants. Similarly, a German study showed that, whereas older adults between 40 and 59 years (also nuanced as silver surfers) account for the highest population of internet users, children and other young people within the adolescent age are the most notable active daily users of the internet (Frees & Koch, 2015).

Similarly, research has shown that there are generational differences in the patterns of using digital technologies, and these differences are reflective of the manner and motivations for using technologies (Fietkiewicz, 2017). In their study, Jarrahi and Eshraghi (2019) found that whereas the digital natives are more likely to make extensive use of social media technologies for mediating...
knowledge sharing, socialising and making connections, the pattern of using social media technologies among older adults tends to be reflective in their general use of e-mail and telephone for knowledge sharing, business needs and professional networking on LinkedIn. Regarding online communication, the activities of older adults tend to be restricted to the sending and receiving of e-mails, with only about 15% of them regularly using instant messaging services like WhatsApp and 11% visiting social networking sites on a weekly basis (Frees & Koch, 2015).

Furthermore, while older adults may prefer face-to-face or telephone conversations, younger people (between 12 and 17 years old) use instant texting as principal means of communication and prefer this approach to telephone and face-to-face conversations (Joshi et al., 2019). A similar study showed that while the digital immigrants preferred text-based social networking services like Twitter, the digital natives were more favourably disposed towards picture and video-based platforms like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube (Fietkiewicz, 2017). A recent Nigerian study further affirms that there are significant generational differences in the frequency and pattern of using the internet by students and lecturers of tertiary institutions of learning (Ufuophu-Biri & Ijeh, 2021).

2.3. Social media coverage of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests
Social media have assumed a crucial position in human rights advocacy efforts around the globe. The digital tools are unsettling key human rights practices, particularly in the key areas of preventing human rights abuses, seeking redress against rights violators and promoting the broader culture of human rights across various echelons of the society (Ugwuoke & Erubami, 2021). As tools for human rights promotion, social media increase users' social capital by expanding their network (Ufuophu-Biri & Ojoboh, 2017), offer innovative opportunities for social action (McGarthy et al., 2014) and promote equality of visibility among users (McPherson, 2017). Remarkably, these unique affordances were noticeable during the Nigerian #EndSARS protests recorded in 2020.

The Nigerian #EndSARS movement officially began in 2017 following increasing cases of systemic profiling of young Nigerians by SARS personnel who publicly harass, arrest, extort, torture and even kill innocent citizens under the pretense of combating crime (Amnesty International, 2021). The #EndSARS hashtag first appeared on Twitter and other social media platforms in 2017 (Malefakis, 2021). However, the hashtag took on a new dimension in April 2019 after social media users shared a video showing how SARS personnel brutalised a young university student and destroyed his phone over an unconfirmed suspicion that the victim was a fraudster (Ugwuoke & Erubami, 2021). The resulting public outcry prompted the Nigerian Police Authority to launch a review of the Force Order 237, which essentially sought to redefine police-citizen engagement in Nigeria, but not much was achieved after the launch (Dambo et al., 2020).

About a year later, another video went viral on 3 October 2020 showing how SARS personnel shot at another Nigerian youth and carted away his Lexus SUV and other valuables, leaving the victim in a pool of blood. Expectedly, the news sparked off another round of social media activism against police brutality, with social media users calling for the immediate disbandment of SARS. Some popular celebrities, including Falz, Burna Boy, Bovi, Tiwa Savage, Runtown and Davido, also joined the movement and called for offline protests, and by 8 October 2020, the uproar had moved from social media to street demonstrations in Lagos State, Abuja and other parts of Nigeria (Adekanye, 2020). In frantic efforts to quell the uprising, the Nigeria Police Authority immediately announced the dissolution of SARS, but the protesters remained unyielding as this was the fifth time since 2015 that the erring police unit was being allegedly disbanded (Amnesty International, 2021).

Consistent with most digital technology-driven protests (Ufuophu-Biri & Ojoboh, 2017), the Nigerian #EndSARS protests had no centralised leadership structure; rather, each protestor provided real-time updates concerning the protests in their various locations using the #EndSARS hashtag to effectively coordinate and network their various posts. Within 3 days of the protests,
the #EndSARS hashtag became one of the most trending online resources in Nigeria, garnering about 28 million mentions on Twitter alone (Malefakis, 2021). The protesters used Twitter to map out specific locations for their daily convergence, making it impossible for the government to track down their movements. Twitter was also used to share real-time images and progress reports on the protests, draw the attention of international celebrities, diplomats, politicians and media organisations to the plight of the protesters and to share crowdfunding links that were used to raise over $380,000 within few days of the protests (Malefakis, 2021).

On YouTube, the protesters created and shared considerably large visual contents on high handedness by SARS personnel, as well as general updates on the anti-SARS movement. Popular YouTube channels, such as the ones run by Debo Adebayo (professionally known as Mr. Macaroni), Mark Angel and many others, freely created and shared contents that inspired support for the #EndSARS movement. Activities concerning the protests were also very visible on Facebook, where protesters created new pages strictly for updates on the #EndSARS movement. Facebook was essentially used to provide live coverage of the protests, including the 20 October 2020 tollgate gathering in which soldiers allegedly shot at protesters, killing at least 12 people in the process (Amnesty International, 2021). Similarly, the pages of notable Nigerian youths, such as Aisha Yesufu, DJ Switch, Ayo Makun and Yul Edochie, were actively used to provide updates on the protests as these celebrities led thousands of protesters in different parts of the country. It was mainly through these social media reports that Nigerians and people around the world got information about the protests as the mainstream media were politically restricted from covering the movement. However, there have been debates about the nature of coverage provided by social media users during the protests, with some observers contending that the reports were distorted and imbalanced (Bello, 2020). These arguments necessitated the current study.

3. Theoretical framework
The study was anchored on the Social judgment Theory (SJT) and the Technological Frame of Reference (TFR) theory. Propounded in 1961 by Muzafer Sherif, Carolyn Sherif and Carl Hovland, the SJT explains the underlying factors that may actuate people’s acceptance, rejection or non-commitment to a communication encounter based on their perception and cognitive map. In relation to the current study, the SJT suggests that people’s exposure to social media reports on the Nigerian #EndSARS protests will trigger their pre-existing attitudes and experiences, and their overall reactions to the received information will be largely influenced by their subsisting disposition during the exposure.

Similarly, the TFR, espoused in the 1994 works of Wanda Orlikowski and Debra Gash, assumes that individuals hold distinct perception towards the usefulness, importance and significance of technological artifacts, and these differences significantly define how they perceive and relate to such technology (Segaard, 2015). According to the theory, people develop different frames—assumptions, expectations and knowledge—about a technology while trying to understand such technology and these developed frames inadvertently shape their subsequent actions and dispositions towards the technology. Deductively, the TFR suggests that people’s perceptions on social media coverage of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests will be influenced by their experiences, generational cohort, assumptions, expectations and knowledge about online communication platforms.

Arising from these theoretical and empirical findings, the current study proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant difference in the frequency of obtaining social media news on the Nigerian #EndSARS protests by young and older Nigerians.

H2: The main sources of social media news on the Nigerian #EndSARS protests to young and older Nigerians will vary significantly along their generational cohorts.
H3: There is a significant difference in the perception of social media reports on the Nigerian #EndSARS protests by young and older Nigerians

4. Materials and methods

4.1. Design and sampling procedure

The study adopted the survey research approach, which seeks to find out why people behave in certain ways (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). The population of the study comprised all residents of Nigeria’s South-east geopolitical zone, which was one of the hotspots for the #EndSARS protests. The zone consists of five states covering about 41,440 km², with a population of 21,955,414 people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). A sample of 384 respondents was drawn using the sample size determination formula advanced by Cochran in 1963. Participants were selected using a multistage sampling technique. In the first stage, the South-east geopolitical zone was stratified on the basis of states—Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. In the second stage, a simple random sampling technique was used to select Ebonyi and Anambra States through a lucky dip. In the third stage, a purposive sampling technique was used to select the capital city of these states, Abakaliki and Awka cities, as the study locations. The fourth stage involved the selection of individual respondents from the selected cities using the convenience sampling technique. The final sample included a total of 192 digital natives, defined as people below and/or exactly 35 years old and 192 digital immigrants, defined as people above 35 years old (Prensky, 2001; Ufuophu-Biri & Ijeh, 2021). The data collection instrument was shared with individuals in selected households within the studied cities through the aid of four research assistants. A graphical representation of the four stages of the multistage sampling technique is presented in Figure 1.

4.2. Instrument and measures

A closed-ended questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. The measures were drawn with recourse to previous studies on technology use and generational dichotomies. Prior to the actual data collection exercise, the instrument was subjected to content validation by two experts in research and media studies, while a pilot survey was carried out on 20 residents of Nsukka, a relatively fast-growing town in Enugu State to determine the reliability of the instrument. The result yielded an overall acceptable Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.89.
4.3. Measurement

4.3.1. Frequency of exposure
This measure was adapted from previous studies on social media exposure (Oji & Erubami, 2020; Ufuohu-Biri & Ijeh, 2021; Wang et al., 2013). Respondents were asked to value a single-item 5-point Likert type question, “How often were you exposed to social media reports on the Nigerian #EndSARS protests?” Possible responses ranged from Never (1) to Very often (5).

4.3.2. Sources of social media information
The measurement of this variable was developed based on previous studies (Mwilima & Matali, 2018; Ufuohu-Biri & Ijeh, 2021; Ufuohu-Biri & Ojoboh, 2017) which had identified the main sources of social media information during national security crises. Respondents were required to identify their main source of social media information during the Nigerian #EndSARS protests, with possible responses being Facebook (1), Twitter (2), YouTube (3), WhatsApp (4) and blogs (5).

4.3.3. Perception of social media coverage of #EndSARS Protests
The measurement of this variable was adapted from previous studies on media perception (Ajaero et al., 2016; Erubami, 2020). Respondents were required to state their extent of agreement or disagreement with four items on a 5-point Likert scale: (1) Social media reports successfully sensitised the public on the main reasons for the #EndSARS protests, (2) Social media reports provided successful coordination and mobilisation of participants across the country for the #EndSARS protests, (3) Social media reports truly reflected the successes and failures of the #EndSARS protests, (4) Social media reports provided accurate and objective coverage of what transpired during the #EndSARS protests. Possible responses ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

4.4. Data analysis
Descriptive statistics were used to present the demographic characteristics of the study population, their frequency of exposure to social media news on the Nigerian #EndSARS protests, sources of social media news on the protests and their perception of social media reportage of the uprising. In addition, ANOVA and independent sample t-test were used to test for significant generational differences in the respondents’ frequency of exposure, sources of news and perception towards social media coverage of the protests. Statisticians assert that the ANOVA test and t-test are robust and work well even if the distribution violates the Gaussian/normality assumption, especially when the sample has more than 100 subjects (Cronk, 2008; Marusteri & Bacorea, 2009). The effect size (Cohen’s d) was calculated using a free online statistical calculator available at www.socscistatistics.com/effectsize/default3.aspx

5. Results
A total of 384 respondents participated in the study, but during the initial data screening processes, 13 responses were found to be significant outliers; hence, their outright removal (Cronk, 2008). Therefore, the analysis was based on 371 copies of the questionnaire, representing 96.4% response rate. Based on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, there were more males (54.2%) than females (45.8%), indicating that the sample was representative of the general Nigerian population, which has about 1.04 males for every female (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018; Teragon Insights, 2013). On age grouping, 7.8% fell within the range of 16–20 years old, 42.3% were between 21 and 35 years of age, 18.3% were aged 36–44, 13.5% were 45–54 years old, 5.7% were aged 55–64 and the remaining 12.4% were 65 years old and above, indicating that both generational cohorts were equally sampled. Regarding the highest educational attainment, a total of 10.8% of the respondents have had primary education, 48% have had secondary education, while the remaining 41.2% have received various levels of tertiary education. In addition, 62.5% of the respondents had various forms of active employment, while 37.5% were unemployed.
Table 1. Cross tabulation for respondents’ frequency of exposure to social media news on the Nigerian #EndSARS protests

| Generational cohort | Very Often | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never | Total |
|---------------------|------------|-------|-----------|--------|-------|-------|
| Youths              | 42 (22.0%) | 70 (36.6%) | 45 (23.6%) | 34 (17.8%) | –     | 191 (100%) |
| Older Adults        | 47 (26.1%) | 70 (38.9%) | 44 (24.4%) | 19 (10.6%) | –     | 180 (100%) |
| Total               | 89 (24.0%) | 140 (37.7%) | 89 (24.0%) | 53 (14.3%) | –     | 371 (100%) |
Table 2. Independent sample t-test comparing generational differences among respondents

|                | Youths (n = 191) | Older Adults (n = 180) | 95% Confidence Interval |
|----------------|------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| \(\bar{x}(SD)\) | \(3.63 (1.02)\) | \(3.81 (0.95)\)       | \(-1.736\)              |
| \(t\)          |                  |                        | \(0.066\)               |
| \(p\)          |                  |                        | \(0.18\)                |
| \(d\)          |                  |                        | \(-0.37815\)            |
| \(\text{Lower}\) |                  |                        | \(0.0238\)             |
| \(\text{Upper}\) |                  |                        |                          |

\(\bar{x} = \text{Mean; SD = Standard deviation; } t = t\)-value; \(p = \text{significant value; } d = \text{Cohen's } d\)

5.1. Frequency of exposure

Data presented in Table 1 show that both youths and older adults had a near equal frequency of exposure to social media news on the Nigerian #EndSARS protests. For instance, the results indicate that while about 22.0% of the young respondents obtained news on the protests from social media very often, 26.1% of the older respondents also did so. The results of an independent sample t-test presented in Table 2 show that there is no significant difference in the frequency of exposure to social media information on the protests between the younger respondents (\(X = 3.63, SD = .102\)) and their older counterparts (\(X = 3.81, SD = .95\)); \(t(369) = -1.736, p < .066\). The magnitude of the difference in means (mean difference = .18, 95% CI: \(-.37815, .02358\)) was small (Cohen’s \(d = 0.18\)). Thus, the result did not support the assumptions of H1.

5.2. Sources of social media information

Regarding the respondents’ main sources of social media news on the protests, Table 3 shows that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were the most popular social media platforms used for obtaining news on the protests by both generational cohorts. We conducted a one-way between-group analysis of variance (ANOVA) to ascertain if the main sources of news on the protests among the respondents varied significantly along generational divides. Although the Levene’s test showed that the homogeneity assumption among the variables was not violated (1.32 < .05), the results presented in Table 4 show that the respondents’ main sources of social media news on the protests did not vary significantly along their generational cohorts (\(F(1, 369) = .052, p = .819\)); hence, the assumption of H2 was rejected.

5.3. Perception of social media coverage of the #EndSARS Protests

In terms of perceptions of social media coverage of the protests, Table 5 indicates a divergence of opinion between the Digital Natives and the Digital Immigrants. The majority of younger respondents generally had a positive perception towards social media as indicated by the higher means, whereas the older respondents tended to have a negative perception towards the digital platforms with respect to their coverage of the protests. We tested if these observed generational differences were statistically significant. According to the results of the independent sample t-test presented in Table 2, there was a significant generational difference in the perception of social media reports on the protests. Based on the results, younger people tended to, on average, have a greater positive perception of social media coverage of the protests (\(X = 3.86, SD = .75\)) than their older counterparts (\(X = 2.61, SD = .61\)); \(t(369) = 17.545, p < .000\). The scale of the difference in means (mean difference = 1.25, 95% CI: \(1.10537, 1.38445\)) was large (Cohen’s \(d = 1.83\)). Thus, the result supported the postulation of H3.

6. Discussion

Analysing data collected from two distinct generational cohorts of social media users in Nigeria, this study attempts to provide a nuanced understanding of the presumed differences in the use and perception of social media tools in the coverage of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests organised
Table 3. Cross tabulation on respondents’ main sources of social media news on the Nigerian #EndSARS protests

| Generational cohort | Facebook | Twitter | Youtube | WhatsApp (17.3%) | Instagram (13.1%) | Total (100%) |
|---------------------|----------|---------|---------|------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Youths              | 41 (21.5%) | 51 (26.7%) | 41 (21.5%) | 33               | 25               | 191          |
| Older Adults        | 37 (20.6%) | 45 (25.0%) | 20 (11.1%) | 56               | 22               | 180          |
| Total               | 78 (21.0%) | 78 (21.0%) | 61 (16.4%) | 107              | 47               | 371          |
by young Nigerians in 2020 against police brutality and disregard for citizens’ fundamental rights. The study indicates that there was not much difference in the frequency of obtaining social media news on the protests by both generational cohorts. While the younger respondents obtained social media news on the protests on a very often basis (22.0%), often (36.6%) or sometimes (23.6%), the older adults also reported to have received such news very often (26.1%), often (38.9%) or sometimes (24.4%). Accordingly, the results of the independent sample t-test showed that there was no significant difference in the frequency of exposure to social media information on the protests between younger and older Nigerians. Hence, age or generational partition did not influence the level of exposure to social media for news on the Nigerian #EndSARS protests.

The finding aligns with previous studies (Bennett & Maton, 2010; Guo et al., 2008; Jones & Czerniewicz, 2010) which concluded that there are no significant generational dichotomies in public exposure to and use of new media technologies, such as social media. However, it refutes the conclusion of other studies (Frees & Koch, 2015; Ufuophu-Biri & Ijeh, 2021; Wang et al., 2013)

---

### Table 4. Test of homogeneity of variances and ANOVA

| $H_0$ | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | $F$ | Levene Sig. | P-Value |
|-------|----------------|----|-------------|-----|-------------|---------|
| H2    | Between Groups | .096 | 1            | .096 | .052        | 1.32    | .819    |
|       | Within Groups  | 681.97 | 369         | 1.85 |             |         |         |
|       | Total          | 682.07 | 370         |      |             |         |         |

---

### Table 5. Cross tabulation on respondents' perception of social media coverage of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests

| S/N | Item                                                                 | Generational Cohort | $\bar{X}$ | SD |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|----|
| 1   | Social media reports successfully sensitised the public on the main reasons for the #EndSARS protests | Youths              | 4.37      | .90|
|     |                                                                     | Older Adults        | 3.15      | .81|
| 2   | Social media reports provided successful coordination and mobilisation of participants across the country for the #EndSARS protests | Youths              | 4.14      | .77|
|     |                                                                     | Older Adults        | 2.95      | 1.56|
| 3   | Social media reports truly reflected the successes and failures of the #EndSARS protests | Youths              | 3.74      | .98|
|     |                                                                     | Older Adults        | 2.69      | 1.56|
| 4   | Social media reports provided accurate and objective coverage of what transpired during the #EndSARS protests | Youths              | 3.26      | 1.16|
|     |                                                                     | Older Adults        | 1.41      | .75|
which found significant generational differences in the use of emerging digital technologies. Observably, an individual’s extent of exposure to new digital technologies is more of a function of their personal choices and media orientations than the age and generational group they fall into. Thus, there could be highly digital fluent older adults and less technology-savvy Digital Natives and vice versa.

Furthermore, the study investigated the main social media platforms from which the respondents received salient information on the Nigerian #EndSARS protests. According to our results, social media sources, such as Twitter (26.7%), Facebook (21.5%), YouTube (21.5%), WhatsApp (17.3%) and Instagram (13.1%) ranked highest among the young respondents, whereas sources, such as WhatsApp (31.1%), Twitter (25.0%), Facebook (20.6%), Instagram (12.2%) and YouTube (11.1%) dominated the main sources of information on the uprising among the older respondents. A further analysis, however, showed that the respondents’ main sources of social media news on the protests did not vary significantly along their generational cohorts. The results, therefore, refute the suggestion that an individual’s age could significantly predict their choice of social media platforms (Fietkiewicz, 2017; Ufuophu-Biri & Ijeh, 2021). For instance, Fietkiewicz’s (2017) study showed that while older people preferred text-based social networking services like Twitter, the digital natives were more favourably disposed towards picture and video-based platforms like Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. Similarly, the current study showed that the most commonly used social media source among the younger respondents was Twitter, while WhatsApp ranked highest among the older people. However, this observed difference was not statistically significant on the basis of their generational cohorts. It is likely that the peculiar purposes for which the respondents use social media will wield a more significant influence on their choices of social media sources than the generational divide to which they are arbitrarily classified (Jarrahi & Eshraghi, 2019).

Finally, the study investigated whether there were significant generational differences in the perception of social media coverage of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests. The results suggested that the younger respondents tended to perceive the performance of social media in the coverage of the protests differently from how it was perceived by the older adults. Majority of the younger respondents generally perceived that social media news did well in the sensitisation of the public on the main reasons for the protests, successfully coordinated and mobilised participants across the country for the protests, did well in reflecting the successes and failures of the uprising, and provided accurate and objective coverage of what transpired during the protests. However, the older respondents disagreed with all the statements apart from accepting that social media news did well in the sensitisation of the public on the main reasons for the protests. Accordingly, results of the independent sample t-test showed that the difference in the perception was both significant and large. According to the result, the positive perception held by the younger respondents towards social media coverage of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests was significantly different from the opinion of the older respondents, which was largely negative.

The result is in tandem with previous studies, which showed that older adults perceive technologies in significantly different ways from the younger generation (Calvo-Porral & Pesqueira-Sanchez, 2019; Fietkiewicz, 2017; Prensky, 2001; Riegel & Mete, 2017). The current study, thus, affirmed that the older generation tends to perceive social media contents in a negative light, and would, therefore, doubt the credibility, accuracy and believability of news and information posted on social media concerning the #EndSARS protests. A possible reason for this could be the propensity of social media users to deploy the technology in the spread of fake news and alternative truths, which are capable of spreading misinformation and disinformation that could breach peace and undermine national security (Okoro & Emmanuelt, 2019).
The findings of the study lend further credence to the assumptions of the SJT and TFR upon which the study was anchored. Observably, the digital natives have had a long experience with social media and other digital tools, making them to easily accept and hold positive perceptions towards the contents shared via the online platforms. In addition, many young people perceive that unlike social media, the mainstream news media have been so compromised and strictly regulated that they may be unable to reflect the actual yearnings of youths in Nigeria. On the other hand, the older adults have consistently argued that the emergence of social media has made many youths become lazy and idle, making them peddlers of unsubstantiated information online (Dambo et al., 2020; Malefakis, 2021). It is likely that this thinking might have influenced the digital immigrants’ overall perception of social media coverage of the #EndSARS protests as espoused by the two theories.

7. Conclusions and implication for networked communications

Before drawing conclusion, it is important to identify some possible limitations to our study. First, it is likely that the results of this study may be limited by the geographical spread of the participants. Although the study generally evaluated generational dichotomies in public perception of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests, the participants were only drawn from the south-east region of the country, and this may affect the generalisability of our findings to other parts of Nigeria. Hence, we recommend the inclusion of a more representative sample in future research. Nevertheless, the studied region was one of the hotspots for the Nigerian #EndSARS protests, and the results indicate that the demographic spread of our study sample did not differ much from the general Nigerian offline population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018; Teragon Insights, 2013). Second, our study used a self-reported measure of respondents’ exposure and perception on social media coverage of the protests. Although this method is widely used in behavioural research (De Vreese & Neijens, 2016), its measurement accuracy is dependent on respondents’ willingness and ability to accurately recall their past behaviours and perception. To overcome this limitation, future research should adopt a mixed research method that guarantees a more robust data collection.

Despite the limitations discussed above, this study shows that social media have assumed a critical place in information gathering and dissemination processes, especially in times of national security challenges, and exposure to and perception of such information may be generally influenced by the generational cohorts to which social media users belong. The present study has shown that both young and older adults in Nigeria were adequately exposed to social media news on the #EndSARS protests and there was no significant generational difference in their extent of exposure to such news. Our study also concludes that while Twitter was a major source of social media news on the protests for young Nigerians, WhatsApp was predominantly favoured by the older respondents. However, these sources did not vary significantly along the generational cohorts of the respondents. Finally, the study concludes that there was a significant generational difference in public perception of social media coverage of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests.

These findings hold a number of implications for networked communication in Nigeria. To the fore, it underscores the need for citizen journalists to strive for greater credibility in their reports and ensure the accuracy and objectivity of information contained in their social media news. Also, given that technological changes will continue to actuate a flux in the dynamics of human communication, it is imperative for more people, especially older adults, to embrace emerging trends in communication and leverage such inevitable changes to enhance the satisfaction of their information needs. Importantly too, the government should pay closer attention to social media reports on public issues and take honest actions towards resolving societal crises that are discussed across social media platforms.
Funding
The authors received no direct funding for this research.

Author details
Joshua Aghogho Erubami1
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5577-2548
Emmanuel Ufufuhubiri1
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3066-6378
Luke Ifeanyi Anorue2
E-mail: ifeanyi.anorue@unn.edu.ng
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0097-2021
Uzoma Oluchukwu Nwabunze2
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2913-1587
Emeka S. S. Okeke2
ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4014-647X

1 Department of Mass Communication, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.
2 Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Citation information
Cite this article as: Generational dichotomies in public perception of social media coverage of the Nigerian #EndSARS protests: Implication for networked communication, Joshua Aghogho Erubami, Emmanuel Ufufuhubiri, Luke Ifeanyi Anorue, Uzoma Oluchukwu Nwabunze & Emeka S. S. Okeke, Cogent Arts & Humanities (2021), 8: 1988192.

References
Adékoye, M. (2021, October 8). Runtown, Falz, Tiwa Savage and other celebrities lead #EndSARS protest. The Guardian. http://www.m.guardian.ng/life/run-town-falz-tiwa-savage-and-other-celebrities-lead-#endsars-protest/
Ajaero, I. D., Okoro, N. M., & Ajaero, C. K. (2016). Perception of and attitude towards mass media reportage of the 2012 flood in rural Nigeria. SAGE Open, 6(3), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/215824401666887
Amnesty International (2021). #EndSARS movement: From Twitter to Nigerian streets. http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2021/02/nigeria-end-impunity-for-police-violence-by-sars-ends-sars/
Bello, O. (2020, November 2). Social media may be the cure for oiling democracies: Nigeria’s #EndSARS revolution. The Loop. https://theloop.ecpr.eu/social-media-may-be-the-cure-for-oiling-democracies-nigerias-ends-sars-revolution/
Bennett, S., & Maton, K. (2010). Beyond the ‘digital natives’ debate: Towards a more nuanced understanding of students’ technology experiences. Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 26(5), 321–331. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2729.2010.03630.x
Calvo-Porrall, C., & Pesquisa-Sanchez, R. (2019). Generational differences in technology behaviour: Comparing millennials and generation X. Kybernetes, 48(11), 2755–2772. https://doi.org/10.1108/K-09-2019-0598
Choudrie, J., Ghinea, G., & Songonu, V. N. (2013). Silver surfers, e-government and the digital divide: An exploratory study of UK local authority websites and older citizens. Interacting with Computers, 25(6), 617–642. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intcom.2013.02.003
Cronk, C. B. (2008). How to use SPSS: A step-by-step guide to analysis and interpretation (5th ed.). Pyrzcak Publisher.

Dambo, T. H., Ersoy, M., Auwal, A. M., Olorunsola, V. O., Olorunola, A., Arikewuyo, A. O., & Joseph, A. (2020). Nigeria’s #EndSARS movement and its implication on online protests in Africa’s most populous country. Journal of Public Affairs, e2583, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2021.1988192
De Vreese, C. H., & Neijens, P. (2016). Measuring media exposure in a changing communications environment. Communication Methods and Measures, 10(2–3), 69–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2016.1150441
Enoghohase, G., & Aliu, O. (2020, October 17). #EndSARS day 8: Protest spreads, 4 die, scores injured. Vanguard. https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/10/endsars-day-8-protest-spreads-4-die-scores-injured/
Erubami, A. J. (2020). Public perception of social media contributions to political participation processes in Delta State, Nigeria. Acta Universitatis Danubius: Communicatio, 14(1), 110–126. http://journals.univdanubius.ro/index.php/communicatio/article/view/6680/
Fietkiewicz, K. (2017). Jumping the digital divide: How do “silver surfers” and “digital immigrants” use social media? Networking Knowledge, 10(1), 1–23. http://doi.org/10.31165/nk.2017.101.494
Frees, B., & Koch, W. (2015). Results of the ARD/ZDF online study 2015. Internet use: Frequency and diversity are increasing in all age groups. Media Perspectives, 9, 366–377. https://www.ard-zdf-onlinestudie.de/files/2015/0915_Frees_Koch.pdf
Guo, R. X., Dobson, T., & Petrina, S. (2008). Digital natives, digital immigrants: An analysis of age and ICT competency in teacher education. Journal of Educational Computing Research, 38(3), 235–254. https://doi.org/10.2190/EC.38.3.a
Harindranath, G. (2008). ICT in a transition economy: The case of Hungary. Journal of Global Information Technology Management, 11(4), 33–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/1097198X.2008.10856478
Jarrahi, M. H., & Eshraghi, A. (2019). Digital natives vs. digital immigrants: A multidimensional view on interaction with social technologies in organizations. Journal of Enterprise Information Management, 32(6), 1051–1070. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEIM-04-2018-0071
Joiner, R., Gavin, J., Brosnan, M., Cromby, J., Gregory, H., Guiller, J., Manas, P., & Moon, A. (2013). Comparing first and second generation digital natives’ Internet use, internet anxiety, and internet identification. Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking, 16 (7), 549–552. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2012.0526
Jones, C., & Czerwienicz, L. (2010). Describing or debunking? The net generation and digital natives. Journal of Computer Assisted Learning, 26(5), 317–320. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2729.2010.00379.x
Joshi, S. V., Stubbe, D., Li, S.-T.-T., & Hilty, D. M. (2019). The use of technology by youth: Implications for psychiatric educators. Academic Psychiatry, 43(1), 101–109. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40596-018-1007-2
Ko, C.-J., Thang, S. M., & Sherry Ou, S.-C. (2014). Investigating the ICT use and needs of ‘digital natives’ in learning English at a Taiwanese University. International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies, 9(2), 30–41. https://doi.org/10.4018/jwllt.2014040103
Kopčová, H. (2015). Characteristics of digital natives generation in the context of mobile learning. Conference proceedings of the International
conference on information and digital technology (pp. 155–160). http://doi.org/10.1109/DT.2015.7222966
Magee, C. L., & Devezas, T. C. (2011). How many singularities are near and how will they disrupt human history? Technological Forecasting and Social Change, 78(8), 1365–1378. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2011.07.013
Malefakis, M. A. (2021, January 29). Using social media and #EndSARS to dismantle Nigeria’s hierarchical gerontocracy. Toda Peace Institute. http://www.toda.org/global-outlook/using-social-media-and-endsars-to-dismantle-nigerias-hierarchical-gerontocracy.html
Marusteri, M., & Bacarea, V. (2009). Comparing groups for statistical differences: How to choose the right statistical test? Biochemia Medica, 20(1), 15–32. https://doi.org/10.11613/8M.2010.004
McGorthy, C., Thomas, E. F., Lala, G., Smith, L. G., & Bluic, A.-M. (2014). New technologies, new identities and the growth of mass opposition in the Arab spring. Political Psychology, 35(6), 725–740. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12060
McPherson, E. (2017). Social media and human rights advocacy. In H. Tumber & S. Waissbord (Eds.), The Routledge companion to media and human rights (pp. 279–288). Routledge.
Mwilima, F. J., & Matali, M. (2018). Social media as an effective communication tool for youth engagement on social political issues: A case study of the affirmative repositioning movement in Namibia. The Journal World of Media: Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies, 1, 49–58. http://doi.org/10.30547/worldofmedia.1.2018.4
National Bureau of Statistics (2011). Demographic statistics bulletin. http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/download/775
Oji, M., & Erubami, A. J. (2020). Discourse on social media use and reading culture of Nigerian youths. Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 9(6), 105–113. https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2020-0115
Okoro, N., & Emmanuel, N. O. (2019). Beyond misinformation: Survival alternative for Nigeria in the “post-truth” era. African Journalism Studies, 39(4), 67–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/23743670.2018.1551810
Oslon, K. E., O’Brien, M. A., Rogers, W. A., & Charness, N. (2011). Diffusion of technology: Frequency of use for younger and older adults. Ageing International,36(1), 123–145. http://doi.org/10.1007/s12126-010-9077-9
Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 1. On the Horizon, 9(5), 1–6. https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/10748120110424816/full/html
Riegel, C., & Mete, R. (2017). Educational technologies for K-12 learners: What digital natives and digital immigrants can teach one another. Education and Planning, 24(4), 49–58. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1208111.pdf
Segaard, S. B. (2016). Perceptions of social media: A joint arena for voters and politicians? Nordicum Review, 36(2), 65–78. https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2015-0017
Suša, D. (2014). Digital immigrants and digital natives: Learning business informatics at higher educational level. Business Systems Research Journal, 5(2), 84–96. https://doi.org/10.2478/bsrj-2014-0012
Tapscott, D. (2008). Growing up digital: How the net generation is changing your world. McGraw-Hill.
Teragon Insights (2013). State of digital media in Nigeria. Teragon Insights. https://nairametrics.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Nigeria-State-of-Digital-Media.pdf
Ufuophu-Biri, E., & Jih, N. P. (2021). The place of digital nativity and digital immigration on internet accessibility and usage by students and lecturers of tertiary institutions of learning in Delta State, Nigeria. Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 10(1), 214–227. https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2021-0019
Ufuophu-Biri, E., & Ojohoh, L. O. (2017). Social media as a tool for political resistance: Lessons from the Arab spring and the Nigerian protests. Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 6(1), 61–66. https://doi.org/10.5901/ajis-2017-v6n1p61
Ugwuoke, J. E., & Erubami, J. A. (2021). Old war, new battleground: Deconstructing the potency of social media for community engagement in Nigeria’s human rights advocacy efforts. World of Media Journal. Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies, 1(2), 56–74. https://doi.org/10.30547/worldofmedia.2.2021.3
Virkus, S. (2008). Use of Web 2.0 technologies in LIS education: Experiences at Tallinn University, Estonia. Program: Electronic Library and Information Systems, 42(3), 262–274. https://doi.org/10.1108/00303080892677
Wang, E., Myers, M., & Sundaram, D. (2013). Digital natives and digital immigrants: Towards a model of digital fluency. Business & Information Systems Engineering, 5(6), 409–419. http://doi.org/10.1007/s11576-013-0390-2
Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2011). Mass media research: An introduction (9th ed.). Cengage Learning.
Zur, O., & Zur, A. (2011). Psychology of the web & internet addiction. Zur Institute. http://www.zurinstitute.com/internetaddiction.html
