

# **The political power of social media in Nigeria:**

## **A case study of the 2014 #Bringbackourgirls campaign**

Student Name: Wachikma Marc Mshelia

Student Number: 412913

Supervisor: Dr. Delia Dumitrica

Master Media Studies - Media, Culture & Society  
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication  
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis  
*June 2018*

## **Abstract**

The role of social media in politics has been notable in many countries over the years. The Arab Spring is one of the significant incidents that exemplified how powerful social media can be on national politics. With the help of social media, citizens were able to mobilize each other and overthrow authoritarian regimes. And since then, there have been many debates about the ability of social media to create a more democratic society.

In the year 2014, a campaign began on Twitter with *#Bringbackourgirls* after the abduction of over 250 schoolgirls in Chibok, a community in Northeast Nigeria. The campaign which started as a local Nigerian affair eventually spread like wildfire around the world. It was a turning point because that was the first case of online activism that galvanized attention within and outside the country.

This study looked to examine how mobilizers who participated in the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign and are known for active media presence consider the political power of social media. The research question to be answered is: How do grassroots social mobilizers in the 2014 Nigerian *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign perceive the political power of social media? The question was answered by interviewing 11 mobilizers with renowned social media presence, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews. The thematic analysis was deductive based on previous studies conducted on the role of social media in activism and social movements.

The results of the study yielded that; the participants perceive social media as a platform to pressure the Nigerian government into taking actions that favor the citizens. This point is characterized by the emphasis they laid on compelling the Nigerian government to rescue the girls as their aim of using social media during the campaign. Also, they regard social media as a facilitator of strong collective action, and a platform to create collective identity despite the religious and ethnic diversity in Nigeria. And lastly, as means to mobilize people quickly as well as garner support for the campaign. They also mentioned factors such as digital divide, vulnerability to attacks and weak ties as drawbacks to the political power of social media.

**Keywords:** digital activism, social movements, social media, social mobilizers, *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign

## Table of Contents

Abstract and keywords

1. Introduction.....	5
1.1. <i>Background of case study</i> .....	7
1.2. <i>Social mobilizers</i> .....	9
1.2. <i>Social and scientific relevance</i> .....	10
2. Theoretical Framework.....	12
2.1. <i>Digital activism</i> .....	12
2.1.1. <i>Advantages of digital activism</i> .....	13
2.1.2. <i>Limitations of digital activism</i> .....	17
2.2. <i>Social movements</i> .....	21
2.2.1. <i>Role of social media in social movements</i> .....	22
2.2.2. <i>Limitations of social media in social movements</i> .....	26
3. Method.....	30
3.1. <i>Qualitative interviews</i> .....	30
3.1.1. <i>Role of mediation in qualitative interviews</i> .....	31
3.2. <i>Research design</i> .....	32
3.2.1. <i>Selecting the participants</i> .....	32
3.3. <i>The interview</i> .....	35
3.4. <i>Data analysis</i> .....	36
3.4.1. <i>Coding process</i> .....	37
4. Results and discussion.....	39
4.1. <i>Wanting to make a difference</i> .....	39
4.2. <i>Social media use</i> .....	40
4.2.1. <i>Aims</i> .....	40
4.2.2. <i>Strategy</i> .....	41
4.3. <i>Benefits of social media</i> .....	44
4.3.1. <i>Connection</i> .....	45
4.3.2. <i>Collective identity formation</i> .....	47
4.3.3. <i>Usefulness of online collective action</i> .....	48
4.3.4. <i>Influence of social media on offline protests</i> .....	50
4.3.5. <i>Effects of social media on traditional media</i> .....	51

4.4. <i>Limitations of social media</i> .....	53
4.4.1. <i>Challenges faced by activists</i> .....	53
4.4.2. <i>Other drawbacks</i> .....	55
4.4.3. <i>Digital divide</i> .....	56
4.4.4. <i>Relevance of face to face connection</i> .....	57
5. Conclusion .....	60
5.1. <i>Limitations of study</i> .....	61
5.2. <i>Recommendations for future research</i> .....	62
References .....	63
Appendix A .....	76
Appendix B .....	80

## **1. Introduction**

As typical in most developing countries like Nigeria, citizens are confronted with challenges such as unemployment, lack of security, lack of constant power supply, violence, lack of proper hospital facilities and so on. Since Nigeria obtained independence in 1960 from her former colonial masters Britain, the nation has witnessed several protests in the form of mass demonstrations, general strikes, boycotts usually led by youth activists, labor unions, and social activists to convey their grievances to the relevant institutions (Hari, 2014). The most prominent reasons behind these protests are usually demand for the increase of salaries, better living conditions, provision of employment etc. Before the switch to a democratic system of government in 1999, the system of rule in Nigeria was a military dictatorship. During this period, ethnic-nationalist movements began to appear because of marginalization. An example of this is the Ogoni struggle, which arose from a strategic oil location in Nigeria because of how the locals were sidelined although the country has been dependent on the crude oil from their region (Olayode, 2011). Although these military regimes got replaced by democratic institutions about 19 years ago, the so-called benefits of democracy have not been accessible to help the marginalized groups. Based on these unfortunate situations, social protests became an indispensable alternative for people to voice out their opinions, expectations and demands from the government (Shigetomi, 2009).

Information communication technologies have been present in Nigeria since the country gained her independence in 1960. In the year 2004, the country's telephone connections rose to nearly 4.7 million, of which 3.8 million were mobile connections, in other words, they covered about 3.5% and 2.8% respectively of the 136,000 million Nigeria's population in 2004 (Adeyeye & Iweha, 2005). However, the internet penetration in the country was initially limited to the urban areas where the wealthy and educated live and afterwards, the rural areas began to enjoy the benefits of digital technologies. And it was after the transition to a democratic system of government in 1999, that the new democratic government gave attention to developing ICTs to reduce the digital divide by introducing policies that liberalized the Nigerian ICT industry (Adeyeye & Iweha, 2005). One of the major factors attributed to the rise in the number of mobile phone users in Nigeria is its affordability and cheap mobile data packages. For an amount of N1,000 (€2.50), one can buy a monthly data plan worth 1GB, and this is quite affordable considering the amount of data given although the minimum wage in the country is N18,000

(€42). As at the end of 2014, 32.7% of the 176,500,000 Nigerian population was recorded as internet users (Aderibigbe, 2014). Studies reveal that Nigeria is the leading country with high internet penetration in the African continent. And from 2013 until now, Nigeria is ranked among the top 25 countries with high internet users. Furthermore, the survey conducted by Pew Research Center in 2015 discovered that smartphone usage in the country is more familiar with Nigerians that have necessary English skills. As the results showed, those with secondary school level of education or higher degree are regular users of smartphones. Also, in a study about internet access in Nigeria, findings show that men are more likely to own smartphones than women (Bachan et al. 2015).

The 2011 general elections exemplified the high use of social networks among Nigerians. The importance attached to social media was explained by the actions of the former President Goodluck Jonathan, who declared his intentions to run for the seat of the presidency on Facebook (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). That announcement led to an increase in his fan base to over half a million followers. Similarly, his closest competitors also used the visibility of social media platforms to connect with the citizens. During that period, Nigeria's population was 164,000,000 and there were approximately 3 million registered Facebook users (1.8% of the total population) and about 60, 000 users on Twitter (4% of the total population) in Nigeria (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013; "51.8m Nigerians employed in 2011", 2011). Thus, relevant institutions involved in the elections such as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), media houses, political parties, candidates, the police and civil society groups also engaged in an aggressive social networking outreach (Odoemelam, & Chibuwe 2011). Before the existence of social media in Nigeria, the traditional media such as radio, newspapers were dominant and were directly or indirectly limiting popular participation because of factors such as scarcity of space for everyone to take part (Okoro & Nwafor, 2013). The 2011 general elections, therefore, portray how digital technologies propagated participation among the politicians and electorates.

In the global context, there have been discussions about the power of social media to foster political and social change. Proponents of the political power of digital technologies point to how the accessible and interactive features, make them revolutionary and helpful in enacting social change. New media provide platforms for people to express their opinions and act on national affairs without restrictions. Therefore, there is a changing form of authority (Gladwell, 2010; Jenkins, 2010). Based on notable examples of the political use of digital technologies such

as the Arab Spring, scholars argue that social media has transformed democratic movements through the creation of the extensive network and social capital, organization of political actions on a massive scale and speed, to reach once-unattainable goals (Howard & Hussain, 2011). As Hands (2011) states, digital technologies enable “new cycle of democratization and social, economic and political flux” (p. 47). To this end, even the marginalized groups now can resist and challenge authorities.

On the other hand, there have been arguments against the power of social media. Despite the revolutionary potential of social media, the influence of state is still prominent (Christensen, 2011; Shirky, 2011). And digital technologies are likely to empower the state more than the masses. Other hegemonic forces such as class, race, gender, and capitalism also adapt to digital technologies. Therefore, they tend to re-appropriate the transformative potential of technologies (Kidd & McIntosh, 2016). This study aims to explore how these discussions about the political power of social media, are applicable in the Nigerian context based on the prior reviews about the role of digital technologies in the country.

### **1.1. Background of the case study**

In April 2014, Nigeria witnessed another online social protest called *#BringBackOurGirls* which emerged as a result of the abduction of over 250 girls in a boarding school in Northeast Nigeria by the dreaded terrorist group called Boko Haram. 57 girls were able to escape, but 219 remained with the abductors. A former Nigerian minister of education and World Bank vice president, Oby Ezekwesili, alongside other social and activist groups led protests in the country’s capital to demand from the government to ‘bring back our girls’. Not long after, a Nigerian lawyer, Ibrahim Abdullahi, was the first to tweet *#BringBackOurgirls* reechoing the words of the former minister on 23rd April 2014 (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015). From there, the hashtag began to trend on Twitter appealing for the release of the girls. According to BBC Trending (2014), the hashtag was retweeted 3 million times, and 22% of the tweets were from Nigeria and 44% from the United States. Despite the pressure, the Nigerian government argued that their approach to rescue the girls which appeared to many as lackadaisical, was helpful because a rescue effort might risk the girls’ lives (Robins-Early, 2015).

What made this campaign interesting is the way Nigerians participated thereby, blurring the ethnic and religious differences because, the country is highly diverse (Chiluwa & Odebunmi, 2016). Also, it was a campaign that began as a local affair which eventually gained

international recognition. It became a collaborative action among grassroots, NGOs and global resources. The actors involved include relevant humanitarian organizations such as the UNICEF and Amnesty International. The campaign also engaged famous individuals such as Malala Yousafzai a Nobel peace prize winner, wife of the former United States President Michelle Obama. On the grassroots level, families of the victims and ordinary citizens got involved in the campaign (Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015). The involvement of ordinary citizens through which some rose to prominence because of the active role they played by mobilizing people, is one of the highlights of the campaign.

The online campaign was dominant in the news media, particularly international press for weeks with others commending social media for making people aware of a grassroots campaign, and others demanding that the drive needs to be accompanied with efforts from the government and other relevant institutions. Matt Collins, a columnist from one of the famous British newspapers with global audience Guardian, wrote about the revolution going on social media:

*“More than any other, the campaign [#BringBackOurGirls] has shown that social media is more than pictures of meals and cocktails—it’s a buzzing conversation hub of the important issues of the day ... Social media campaigns as widespread as #BringBackOurGirls are inevitably picked up and taken to newspapers, constituency offices and ultimately the corridors of Whitehall, where online action becomes real.”* (Collins, 2014).

One year later, the girls were still missing. And discussions began in the media, particularly international press such as The Guardian and Huffington post questioning the effectiveness of online activism (Robins-Early, 2015; Shearlow, 2015). On the contrary, most prominent Nigerian media did not address the role of digital technologies in the campaign. Some of the girls were rescued in small groups in the subsequent years, after a swap with some of the Boko Haram prisoners (Aluko & Akinloye, 2017). The online campaign has not been as active as when the girls were abducted in 2014. However, the offline protest has been ongoing. Just recently, the former minister Oby Ezekwesili and other members of the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign were arrested by the police during a rally in the federal capital. However, they were released after few hours (“Police arrest ex-Minister, Oby Ezekwesili,” 2018).

It was few months after I graduated from high school when the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign began. At the time, I was not knowledgeable about the power of social media as a



facilitator of change in the society. Hence, I was not entirely optimistic about the campaign. However, I started becoming hopeful after I saw on the news that celebrities such as Michelle Obama took part in the campaign. Thus, I believed that the government would improve their search for the girls. And, apart from the online campaign, there were offline protests led by a former minister of Education together with the parents of the girls demanding the release of the girls. So, I thought the combination of the online campaign as well as the offline protests would pressurize the government to save the girls on time. Although the online campaign did not create an immediate change as many of us were expecting, the critical point I learned is how boundless and unifying social media can be in our present society. Also, this experience made me think about questions such as, how powerful is social media in raising awareness about a grassroots campaign? What were the benefits of social media to the campaigners in the offline protest? Was the social media more helpful in keeping the public informed about the actual situation? The reason is that of the contradictory reports, given to us about the abduction from the news media outlets in the country.

## **1.2. Social mobilizers**

In a protest, grassroots mobilizers can be defined as people who act as network nodes by connecting and mobilizing people. Benett and Segerberg (2012) discuss that these people give a personalized identity to a movement because they are ordinary citizens who are determined to promote a course because of the personal and social significance of the social movements to them. Bakardijeva, Felt, & Dumitrica (2018) describe them as “sociometric stars” (pp. 18), who have been active online before the advent of the movement they are taking part in. The involvement of many ordinary citizens, who committed themselves to promote changes in the country without outside interests in the *#bringbackourgirls* campaign is one of the factors that made it significant.

To this end, this study aims to examine the perceptions of grassroots social mobilizers in the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign with regards to the democratic and political power of social media. Furthermore, this study seeks to discover if the utopian vision of social media as a facilitator of a democratic society is relevant in a developing nation with the prevalent digital divide. The research question to be answered in this study is as follows:

*RQ: How do grassroots social mobilizers in the 2014 Nigerian #BringBackOurGirls campaign perceive the political power of social media?*

Using a qualitative approach, the research question will be answered by conducting interviews with 10-15 social mobilizers who have an active social media presence. Thematic analysis will be used to analyze the interviews and discover dominant themes that, give theoretical insights to the research topic.

### **1.3. Social and scientific relevance**

As mentioned earlier, online social activism is a new phenomenon that is thriving in Nigeria despite the digital divide and other societal factors. This study will examine how social media is revitalizing social protests in Nigeria. Insights from the respondents in the study can provide a way to determine the potentials of online activism in the politics of a developing nation. Plus, it will provide helpful information about how individuals are fostering social change in an increasingly complex world of revolutionary technologies.

The study will also portray how social media is fostering citizens involvement in national issues. The topic of online activism's role to promote social change is still debated among scholars. Thus, the results of this research could help provide information about the prospects of online activism in Nigeria. Considering the challenges faced by activists during social protests before the advent of online activism in Nigeria, it is vital to discover what makes online activism different from the former. Social protests in Nigeria were not always successful because of the influence of the government and other higher authorities. Thus, it will be fruitful to discover if these challenges are prevalent online and how are they dealt with by the social mobilizers.

Some scholars that examined online activism in Nigeria conducted a critical discourse analysis on the tweets and Facebook posts of the #bringbackourgirls campaign to investigate the role of affective stance, articulation of group representations and constructions (Chiluwa, 2015; Chiluwa & Ifukor, 2015). Other studies looked at how contents of the conversations of Nigerians about political issues online display civic engagement (Chiluwa & Odenbunmi, 2016). However, no research paid attention to how social mobilizers of these online campaigns perceive the democratic and political power of social media. Understanding how the participants think about the power of social media as a political tool sheds light on how, when, and why certain strategies are employed during online activism. Additionally, most studies conducted on the political power of social media are based on a western or developed countries context. Thus, using a

Nigerian setting, this study will contribute to the debates about the ability of social media to cause socio-political change.

In the next chapter, an overview of the arguments about digital activism, its advantages and limitations are presented. Also, the role of social media in social movements is discussed. Chapter three describes the choice of method used in this study, the data collection process, and the type of analysis that was employed with justifications. Next are the results and discussion chapter, which presents the main findings and relates them to the theories. Lastly, chapter five presents a conclusion of the results, the implications and limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This chapter draws on theories such as digital activism and social movements, to build a framework for better understanding of how the political power of social media comes into play. Furthermore, the limitations of social media in digital activism and social movements are discussed. The aim is to contribute to the existing arguments about the power of social media to enact political and social change, by applying them to the Nigerian context. When discussing the relationship between social media and social movements, it is vital to discuss digital activism because it has implications for social movements by offering new opportunities to engage in social and political action.

### **2.1. Digital activism**

The emergence of smartphones and the internet has changed the usual way of organizing social movements and political protests. Citizens organize digital activism or online activism primarily to implement change, by putting political pressure on political actors. Furthermore, digital activism has been playing a significant role in grassroots political mobilization by providing ways of mobilizing protesters. According to Vegh (2003), digital activism has to do with a political movement depending on the internet, aimed at achieving specific goals and the authorities imposing them. Joyce (2010) similarly defines digital activism as “the use of digital technologies; mobile phones and internet-enabled devices for example-in campaigns for social and political change” (p. vii). In this sense, digital activism may be internet-based or enhanced by the internet. Digital activism rests on the premise of fostering a more participatory and equal political society, where the marginalized or minorities also can be heard. Thus, digital activism entails that digital technologies facilitate coordination of people to take part in a protest. According to Mann (2000), digital activism illustrates the new “interstitial locations” enabled by the internet which consists of the nooks and crannies in and around dominant institutions (p. 13). Interstitial locations, therefore, allow marginalized groups to come together and circumvent dominant institutions.

The first example of internet use in activism is the indigenous EZLN Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico which happened in the 1990s (Kahn & Kellner, 2004). The incident exemplified how the collaboration between new media and grassroots activism, might be impactful and can change the traditional political culture. Similarly, another early example of

digital activism is the 1999 protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) known as the “Battle in Seattle”. Most participants were organized online and through independent media (IndyMedia). The incident illustrated how the internet functioned as a tool to help mobilize people on a massive scale (Stein, 2017).

Vegh (2003) classifies digital activism into three types:

1. Awareness/advocacy activism entails the use of new media by activists, to highlight information or news that the traditional media might have misreported, ignored or under-reported. In this way, they are trying to convey correct information.
2. Organize or mobilize offline action or call for action online: this refers to how digital technologies can be used to provoke offline protests. The #bringbackourgirls campaign is a combination of this type of digital activism and the awareness activism.
3. Action/reaction (Vegh, 2003): this has to do with deliberate destructive action online such as hacking to attract attention to an issue or to destabilize the targeted individual or institution.

Also, it is worth noting that the widespread of digital activism is motivated by the historical problems of activism where activists struggled to gain access to mass media to reach broader public (Poell & van Dijck, 2015). As Van de Donk, Loader, Nixon & Rucht (2004) state, “from the local to the global levels, movements struggle for public visibility as granted (or refused) by the mass media.” (p. 75).

The next section presents the advantages of digital activism. Based on the scholarly arguments about the benefits and limitations of digital activism, I intend to show how social mobilizers used the advantages and their experiences with the limitations during the #Bringbackourgirls campaign.

### **2.1.1. Advantages of digital activism**

The presence of digital activism has enabled better support and organization for activism, visibility to the activists, an opportunity for activists to participate in government affairs, external collaboration, low cost of participation and many other benefits that digital tools promote. Other benefits of digital activism include secure communication and collaboration with international sources. Scholars also emphasize the collapse of the boundaries created by time, space, money in online activism because of how information is cheaply distributed to many people in various

places (Ribeiro 1998; Castells 2001; Juris 2005). The following paragraphs throw more light on the advantages of digital technologies in activism.

Using the movement of 15M in Spain, George and Leidner (2018) argue that digital activism fosters inclusiveness and provides weak or poorly funded movements with the ability to communicate to a broad audience. Another prominent example is the LGBT community in China, which employs the affordances of the internet for support and organization. Melki and Mallat (2014) found that digital tools are crucial for the internal and external organization in activism. Using digital platforms such as Facebook, activists own multiple Facebook pages that deal with organizing meetings internally and external collaborations and relationships. Breuer, Landman, & Farquhar (2015) discuss that social media provide platforms for intergroup partnership and strengthening relationships. Thus, digital activism has resources that help intergroup collaboration and challenge the strategies prevalent in authoritarian regimes to restrict civil society groups from operating. Howard and Hussain (2011) claim that digital technologies have become the scaffolding upon which civil society can thrive because of the support they give to activists through coordination and networking.

Secondly, unlike in traditional activism where hierarchy is often present the use of digital technologies enables the voices of the minorities to be heard. Conducting a study on the state of digital activism in Lebanon, Melki and Mallat (2014) show that the use of social media facilitates greater visibility and exposure to the activists. Also, audiences such as the millennials who do not often consume mainstream media are easily reached with the help of digital platforms. Furthermore, the results revealed that activists acknowledge communication with ease, breadth and versatility as a result of the features of the digital technologies. Thus, information is quickly dispersed. Examining the Spain indignados movement, Postill (2014) describes how the use of digital platforms such as Twitter attracted attention to the protest which began offline and thereby, increasing the number of protesters. The visibility also transcends to international communities. During Iran's green movement in 2009, activists and regular people used digital tools such as text messaging, Twitter, Facebook, and other social networking sites to call for demonstrations and also connect to the Iranian diaspora and other global communities (Diamond, 2010; Howard et al. 2011). Thus, this underscores how digital platforms help activists to reach broader audiences inexpensively.

Thirdly, digital activism serves as an alternative media which activists use to avoid the mainstream media. Many scholars contend that social media serve as an alternative platform for activists because of its decentralized, fluid, and open nature (Bruns, 2008; Castells et al. 2009; Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2008). Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol, Qiu, & Sey (2009) state that “as people (the so-called users) have appropriated new forms of communication, they have built their systems of mass communication, via SMS, blogs, vlogs, podcasts, wikis, and the likes” (p. 65). Similarly, Shirky (2008) asserts that in contemporary society everyone is a media outlet. Therefore, the process of communication has changed concerning how everyone can spread information (also Lotan et al. 2011). Investigating the social media communication of the 2010 Toronto G20 protests, Poell and Borra (2012) also discovered that social media functioned as a useful communication tool for activists, regarding how they were able to accurately report and communicate the events on the streets of Toronto. Papachrisi and Oliveira (2012) use the term “instantaneity” to describe the prompt recording and reporting of unfolding events, in contemporary information sharing environment facilitated by social media platforms (p. 74).

Furthermore, in open societies or where a democratic system of government is present, digital activism tends to be impactful on a large scale. The reason is that in democratic societies, there are minimal or no restrictions and controls on activism or citizens’ use of the internet. Thus, activists can challenge leaders. Also, digital activists can take part in governmental affairs through policy formation, execution and monitoring (Glaiyser, 2010). A notable example of digital activism in an open society is the 2008 US presidential campaign. The event showed how digital activism intertwines with the government. Digital tools were used to mobilize many people, because of the low costs of assembling people online as well as managing their participation online (Takaragawa & Carty, 2012). Therefore, based on such cases it could be argued that digital activists can play a role in the structure of governance change.

Fifthly, online activism can provoke offline activism. Tufecki and Wilson (2012) show the evidence of the power of Facebook and Twitter in protests, based on the uprisings in Egypt during the Arab Spring which eventually led to the resignation of the former president Hosni Mubarak. Harlow and Harp (2012) also present a similar argument in a study on American and Latin American activists, where the respondents acknowledge the ability of online activism to inspire or translate into offline activism. Their findings revealed that the movement began on Facebook and it eventually moved offline. Users’ motivational and protest-related comments,

plus use of links and other interactive tools of Facebook helped facilitate offline activism demanding for justice. Kahn and Kellner (2004) argue that online activism provides the basis for a new politics of alliance and solidarity to challenge postmodern politics. Other scholars also examined the influence of digital activism on offline protests (Bastos, Recuero, & Zago, 2014; Jungherr & Jürgens, 2013; Vasi & Suh, 2013). Studying the Occupy Wall Street movement incident, Vasi and Suh (2013) found that Facebook and Twitter information streams positively influenced the spread of offline protests.

Prominent scholars positive about online activism such as Shirky (2008) are positive about the power of digital technologies to facilitate solutions to causes and concerns. Shirky (2008) argues that humans tend to avoid coordinated actions because of fear that others may take advantage of them. However, because of online activism speeds, risks, and costs of operation are reduced people tend to participate more. Costs of action are not only in monetary form, but there could also be physical consequences of joining a protest. Thus, digital activism may appeal to individuals because of the minimal repercussions involved. The lower communications costs are a strong incentive for activists to take part in protests. Moreover, social media serve as communication channels through which potential participants are targeted (Breuer, Landman, & Farquhar, 2015).

Subsequently, Bennett and Segerberg (2012) argue that the development of social media has introduced a new form of activism termed connective action. Instead of depending only on formal organizations and collective identity frames that guide traditional activism, connective movements also depend on easy to personalize ideas like “we are the 99%” shared on social media. Other scholars reiterate that personalization of activism does not hinder the development of strong solidarity during protests. As Poell and van Dijck (2015) argue, social platforms direct users towards personalized connections while at the same time promoting viral mechanisms that foster moments of togetherness. And this is where the mainstream media is limited because social media penetrates peoples’ communication. Thus, enabling activists to reach or recruit more participants. Examining several cases on the 2011 protests, Gerbaudo (2012) concludes that “social media have become emotional conduits for reconstructing a sense of togetherness among a spatially dispersed constituency, to facilitate its physical coming together in public space” (p.159). Papachrisi and Oliveira (2012) similarly observed that digital activism involved “overwhelming expressions of solidarity” in their study on the Egyptian revolution.



Lastly, digital activism also provides the opportunity for citizens to act as watchdogs on their government. Considering the rapid spread of information because of digital tools such as live videos, transparency and accountability is encouraged in the government (George & Leidner, 2018). Similarly, Kahn and Kellner (2004) argue that online activism has created a new space of politics whereby individuals and groups have formed new social relations and political possibility.

Like in the developed countries where the benefits of digital activism are many, they are also applicable in the Nigerian context. As earlier stated in chapter 1, digital media got adopted in Nigeria at a fast rate, therefore, suggesting that digital cultures and practices have grown in the country despite the challenges prominent in a developing nation (Jelili, 2017). Considering how the story of the girls' abduction attracted national and global attention, it suggests how social media played a crucial role in providing more visibility and exposure to the activists in the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign. Furthermore, the spread of information and constant updates about the abduction showed that social media was regularly used for dissemination of information, thus highlighting the argument that online media serve as an alternative media in digital activism (Bruns, 2008; Jenkins, 2006). Reflecting on earlier online activism cases, a Nigerian writer remarks that "social media create echo chambers more effectively than you can manage offline" (Jelili, 2017). To conclude, it is evident digital activism that can thrive in Nigeria essentially because of the system of government that allows for the liberal use of social media.

### **2.1.2. Limitations of digital activism**

Brodock (2010) argues that despite the seeming contributions of digital technologies to activism, there are limitations that hinder the success of digital activism. For instance, the digital divide is still a significant issue in many countries. Censorship is equally prevalent in authoritarian regimes, technological features such as algorithms that are controlled by social media corporations, and other matters hegemonic as capitalism are all drawbacks on the success of digital activism. The following paragraphs present the arguments made by scholars about the limitations of digital activism.

First, access to digital technologies is necessary for the emergence of digital activism. However, many people from developing nations do not have access to these technologies because of insufficient funds. Thus, the economic differences lead to empowering existing elites

who can afford to acquire digital tools (Morozov, 2009; Glaisyer, 2010; Harlow & Harp, 2012). According to the report of the digital activism survey conducted in 2009, in developing countries where access to the internet is quite expensive, economic elites are the ones that can participate (Brodock, Joyce, & Zaack, 2009). In this way, the working class or poor people are alienated. Problems with access to the internet can also emerge from the existing offline social inequality. For instance, men are more inclined to use the internet more than women because of how the female gender is considered inferior in the society. Lack of skills is another factor broadening digital divide. Van Deursen and van Dijk (2010) term this “strategic internet skills” which refers to the ability of the activist to use the internet for specific goals thus, needing a certain level of savviness that goes beyond the regular use of the internet. These arguments show how social issues are translated into the digital sphere, therefore, creating more advantages for those already in a privileged position, and challenging the primary goal of digital activism of fostering an equal society. Furthermore, in the international political context, it means that citizens of developed or higher-income countries take advantage of digital tools over more impoverished nations. In the same vein, Schradie (2018) discusses that these factors behind digital divide create high costs of online participation for the working-class groups. Thus, rather than reduced costs of participation activists experiencing digital divide are confronted with the inflated price of participation. Morozov (2009) uses the case of the Twitter revolution in Iran to highlight the drawbacks of digital technologies as influential on societal change. He argues that a lack of familiarity with the internet culture in some countries makes it difficult to contextualize the role of social media in global politics. In other words, digital activism may not be productive or successful in an environment with insufficient experience.

Digital activism is also confronted with low effort action. Issues such as slacktivism and clicktivism entail political action by liking or sharing a post. However, this action is characterized by having minimal effect on achieving the goal of the movement (George & Leidner, 2018). Furthermore, some activists reiterate that over-reliance on social media does not always lead to achieving desired results. Thus, it is pertinent to balance online and offline activism. Gladwell (2010) also states that online activism tends failing because it is “small change” in other words (p.42), unlike traditional activism which is “high-risk activism” because of the strong relationship and sacrifices people make (p. 44). Hence, based on this argument it could be concluded that in online activism strong relationships that can produce social change

are not created. However, Harlow and Harp (2012) show in their study that online activism is influential in contemporary activism through the construction of valuable relationships.

Subsequently, in closed societies where an authoritarian regime is dominant, digital technologies become susceptible to the influence of the state. Therefore, digital activists are often in danger (Glaisyer, 2010; Morozov, 2009). According to Christensen (2011), despite the emancipatory features of the internet, the power of states is still necessary to consider. Using the case of the Iranian protests in 2009, Glaisyer (2010) notes how governments use the digital tools used by protesters for digital surveillance. Similarly, in China another closed society, digital technologies have disempowered activists because the government and anti-activists use the tools to empower themselves and be in control of people's online activities. Shirky (2011) similarly argues that the effectiveness of social media in activism depends on the political climate of a state. Thus, digital technologies are likely to fortify authoritarian regimes rather than weaken them (for example, China). Furthermore, Marmura (2008) also acknowledges the part of the internet for effective organization in activism. However, in his study on the Arab-Israeli peace organizations and Jewish Zionists, he found out that activist networks that confront powerful interests are unsuccessful. The reason is that most of the powerful interests have to do with ideologically contentious issues. Therefore, digital activists are hindered from influencing government policies.

Another disadvantage of digital activism is its reliance on the algorithms of social media platforms. Through algorithm selecting features such as retweeting, following, liking etc., particular contents become more present than others. Thus, social platforms shape how users interact on social media. And these technological shapings do not work by users' interests; therefore, these can hinder the spread of information during an online protest (Poell & van Dijck, 2015). Social media algorithms can also clash with what users consider relevant. Hence, relevant hashtags in digital activism may fail to trend. Furthermore, Lotan (2011) illustrated that trending topics are not determined based on the number of tweets but on "the algorithm adapts over time, based on the changing velocity of the usage of the given term in tweets. If we see a systematic rise in volume, but no clear spike, it is possible that the topic will never trend".

Lastly, scholars argue that despite the potential of digital technologies to facilitate collective identity, issues such as selectivity may arise. Diani (2000) cautions that the use of the internet could prevent recruiting new participants because most activists are already predisposed

to the issues and are already involved with them. Similarly, Gillan (2009) points out that digital activists may be selective and thereby create “informational cocoons” (p. 29). Besides, Fenton (2008) also argues that it is challenging to ensure that digital platforms do not fall victim to civic privatism that will develop disjointed groups. To this end, the ability of digital activism to include new people in a movement is uncertain. Other hegemonic forces such as class, race, gender, and capitalism also adapt to digital technologies. Therefore, they tend to re-appropriate the transformative potential of technologies (Kidd & McIntosh, 2016). And because these forces are fixed in societies, they generate structural constraints that hinder activists from using social media to cause socio-political change.

These limitations of digital activism are also present in the Nigerian context. One of the limitations significant in the country is the digital divide. Many people living in the rural areas have no access to internet connection and are not financially capable of owning a smartphone. Thus, they are unable to take part in any digital protest. Also, social inequality is another major issue prevalent in the country. Therefore, men are likely to use smartphones and the internet more than the women because of their status in the society (Bachan et al. 2015). Furthermore, as Olorode (2014) illustrated in a study on the political participation of Nigerians on social media, educated people tend to take part more in political discussions. Therefore, this suggests how those without enough knowledge of how to use the internet are alienated. And this is a significant issue broadening digital divide because the number of uneducated persons in the country is very high (Amzat, 2017).

Furthermore, considering Morozov’s (2012) argument, despite the rapid adaptation of digital technologies in the country and few cases of online activism, there is still lack of familiarity with digital activism. Therefore, the effectiveness or success of digital activism is highly limited because people do not understand the dynamics. Lastly, although the Nigerian constitution guarantees freedom of speech, people are still constrained to participate in a democratic manner because the government sometimes monitors the citizens’ online activities (Ogudinmu, 2013).

In conclusion, digital activism has indeed contributed to a more democratic and free society. Also, other crucial areas of activism such as the creation of awareness and mobilization of people have become easy to achieve. However, if the problems of the digital divide, censorship, slacktivism are still dominant, digital activism would be less effective. Lastly, to

tackle the issue of weak tie connections, digital activism and offline activism need to be combined. As earlier studies have shown, digital activism seems to make the most impact when it used as a complementary tool to offline activism or used as a tool to inspire offline action.

## **2.2. Social movements**

Contemporary social movements have also adapted to media-saturated society by using advanced forms of technology as a tool to mobilize people and as an alternative media (Carty & Onyett, 2006). It is worth noting that, more theoretical insight into the role of social media in citizen mobilization comes from social movements literature. Thus, the studies discussed below clarify what is relevant to mobilize citizens and help in illuminating the crucial role of social media. Before discussing the role of social media in social movements, I begin by discussing the social movement theory and what it entails.

Social movements involve interaction or contestation between challengers and powerholders, with the goal of achieving social change (Tilly 1978). They consist of a series of collective campaigns through which people make claims on others (Tilly, 2004). Also, a social movement entails an informal network of relationships between individuals and organizations, works by creating a collective identity, and aims at achieving a political or social goal (Diani, 1992; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002). Furthermore, social movements are dependent on the group's common interests and shared identity, available resources, its opportunities and threats and political power to succeed. Most social movements seek to change opinion, influence policymakers to change their decisions, or challenge political and institutional structures that are against civil society (Marullo & Meyer, 2004). Thus, the success of social movements is measured concerning how consciousness and voice are heard (Carty & Onyett, 2006).

Furthermore, collective action frames are vital aspects of social movements in the sense that they organize and guide actions of social movement actors in ways that are intended to mobilize potential participants, gather support, and demobilize those against the movement (Benford & Snow, 2000). Social movement actors utilize frames to establish a collective identity that separates them from others and enable them to recruit more participants. Also, collective action frames recognize shared interests among the oppressed, and provide a rationale to protest against unfair social arrangements. Thus, for a frame to provoke action, it must contain injustice, identity and agency. As Carty and Onyett (2006) discuss, developing a strong collective identity

is dependent on how organizers frame their issues in a way that can attract potential participants by linking their grievances to mainstream beliefs with the hope of creating a change.

According to Carty and Onyett (2006), the emergence of advanced technologies has fostered the rise of new social movements (NSMs). NSMs are more related to identity-issues and work at the grassroots level. Diani (1992) states that the essential characteristics of NSMs include networks of relations between a plurality of actors, a sense of collective identity, and shared of conflictual issues. Langman (2005) further argues that “although general social movements still pursue traditionally conceived social and political goals, more paramount to NSMs is the construction and legitimization of collective identities for coherence and to articulate resistance” (p. 8). As the next section will show, social media have enabled construction of collective identities and avenue for resistance.

Subsequently, another vital aspect of social movements is mobilizing strategies and political opportunity structures. Mobilizing strategy refer to the collective vehicles informal and formal that enable people to assemble and engage in collective action. The success or failure of the mobilizing strategy depends on political opportunity structures which either allow or limit incentives for collective action (Tarrow, 2001). To this end, social movement actors strategize to capitalize on new opportunity structures to foster collective action.

What makes these scholarly arguments helpful in this study is that they give a comprehensive description of the case study of the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign. As already explained in Chapter 1, this campaign is a new social movement fostered by digital technologies which emerged from the grassroots level.

### **2.2.1 The role of social media in social movements**

Mediation has always been relevant to social movements in the sense that, media and communication are determinants of the success of a social protest particularly in a contemporary media-saturated environment (Cammaerts, 2012). And it is notable that in this modern media-saturated society, social movements have many opportunities to exert their freedom, self-represent themselves and to challenge structural constraints such as negative portrayal in the mainstream media. Thus, in these present days access to, and use of digital technologies have become relevant resources for a successful movement (Rolfe, 2005). The role of social media on social movements have improved existing repertoire, transformed public sphere, fostered collective identity creation, provided alternative press and create online campaigns that

eventually go offline. Prominent examples include the Twitter revolution in the Middle East and some parts of North Africa and the #OccupyWallStreet movement which served as a model to other protests around the globe (Howard et al., 2011; Howard & Hussain; 2011, Lim, 2012).

Many scholars see the role of the internet in social movements as double fold: the internet can help facilitate traditional offline movement by improving existing repertoire for instance, by adding email campaigns, online petitions, and other online actions to activists' existing toolbox (Castells, 2001; Juris, 2005). Also, the internet can generate new forms of engagement and resistance (Cardoso and Pereira Neto, 2004; Rolfe, 2005; Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2009).

Before the widespread of the internet, Castells (2001) claimed that the internet would enable networked individualism in which individuals can establish their networks. Thus, in the case of social movements, the internet has the potential for the network of people to collaborate and spread their message. Historically, social movements entail the coming together of people in public arenas to discuss their grievances (Hari, 2014). With the emergence of new media, social media are gradually playing the role of the public sphere where issues are discussed. These communicative platforms have granted various actors such as social mobilizers the opportunity to be politically engaged and play out activism (Hari, 2014). Social media now serve as a haven for citizens and social movement organizations, that have been unable to participate in the traditional public sphere because of restrictive state policies (Olurinnisola & Martin, 2013). In the same vein, Fahmi (2009) states that digital technologies have fostered "new geographies of protest" and have "shifted campaigns and resources to alternative virtual venues" (p. 90). Additionally, the decentralized feature of digital technologies has been a significant factor behind the collaboration of people for protests. To this end, social media serve as tools and spaces in which various communication networks that create social movement appear, collaborate, breakdown, and develop (Lim, 2012).

Thirdly, according to Taylor and Whittier (1992), collective identity in social movements involve three elements. First, actors in a social movement share a sense of "we" when they recognize some shared characteristics as relevant. Secondly, actors form a consciousness which is shared interpretive frameworks that guide their actions in the social movement. Lastly, there is a culture that is directly oppositional to the dominant order. Garret (2012) defines collective identity as a perception among individuals that they are part of a large community, because of the grievances they share. Collective identity formation and maintenance in social movements

are dependent on networks (Nip, 2012). As Lim (2012) contends, networks of people clustered together by a common cause are the fundamental factor behind social movements. Digital technologies help to reinforce existing social networks, as well as give an opportunity for new networks to be formed (Garett, 2007). Also, the decentralized and open nature of social media illustrate the opportunity structures available for social movement actors to construct a collective identity relevant to creating a change. Also, social media serve as a space for enlarging and sustaining the networks upon which social movements rely on (Langman, 2005; Marmura, 2008).

One of the significant problems social movements have been confronted with, is the recruitment of individuals to join the movement. However, with the help of the digital tools it has become easier to recruit people from different areas (Harlow, 2011; Opp, 2009). Postmes and Brunsting (2002) contend that social media can influence collective action in two ways: new participants can be a part of the movement, and social behavior may occur because individuals can relate to their social identity because the group is internalized individually. Moreover, social media enable the emergence of subcultures that support collective action. Also, social media have allowed the creation of social networks as avenues for mobilization and collective action without organizations.

Another advantage appears from how social media seems to be playing a significant role in social movements because of how protesters, often create their media to bypass the hegemonic messages, negative portrayals and misinformation of social movements prevalent in mainstream media. Thus, social media can be considered as an alternative media (Downing, 2008; Harlow & Harp, 2012; Rodriguez, 2001). This argument rests on the premise of the protest paradigm which suggests that social movements are negatively portrayed in traditional media. Thus, crippling movements and their mobilization efforts (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). Social media, therefore, grants opportunity for protesters to avoid traditional gatekeepers and voice out their concerns without hindrance (Harlow & Harp, 2012). Tufecki (2013) also argues that “the ‘power-dependency’ relationship between media and the social movement actors has been fundamentally altered” (p. 867). Hence, mainstream media are no longer the only way for social movements to reach large audiences. This is particularly essential for marginalized groups that have no substantial support. Thus, new media can be used to influence traditional media coverage (Downing, 2008; Postmes & Brunsting, 2002; Smith, 2001).



Lastly, Harlow (2012) shows that through comments and other tools available on Facebook, offline social movements could be incited. In this sense, the role of digital technologies in contemporary social movements is not only to facilitate mobilization of existing movements but also to build new online movements then eventually go offline. Castells (2012) also states that social movements with the help of social media have transformational power. However, he emphasizes on the relevance of face to face connection for social movements in the form of “occupied space” referring to the physical spaces protesters to converge, organize and act. Furthermore, he calls the connection between social movements and social media a space of autonomy based on how the new movements provoke moments of anger and spread virally both online and offline. Lim (2012) uses the case of Egyptian uprising in 2011 to argue that social media played a prominent role in facilitating an oppositional network with people from various background to challenge the government. Thus, online participation is not phasing out face to face participation or communication. This finding, therefore, underscores the symbiotic relationship between online and offline social movements.

As discussed earlier in chapter 1, social movements in Nigeria became an indispensable alternative for citizens to voice out their grievances towards the government after the country obtained her independence (Hari, 2014). And unlike in the western world, digital technologies did not start to play a role in social movements until recently. Notwithstanding, the processes involved in online social movements favored for the mobilization of people is like other cases of online social movements.

Considering the status of Nigeria as a vast and culturally diverse country, societal differences usually causes restraints on social movements as everyone feels inclined to take part when the protest is in proximity to his or culture. However, during the #OccupyNigeria protest in 2011, the internet seemed to have fostered a collective identity across ethnic and religious differences regarding how Nigerians developed the shared sense of victimization and suffering (Ayobade, 2015). As Lim (2012) argues, digital technologies offer the opportunity for people from diverse backgrounds to collaborate in addressing problems in their society. This argument was exemplified in the #OccupyNigeria protest because the majority of Nigerians survive on a meager income. Thus, cheap petrol was viewed as the only tangible benefit the government could provide. So, the removal of fuel subsidy by the government generated the widespread condemnation (Hari, 2014). And what made the #OccupyNigeria protest noteworthy is the role

played by social media. While offline demonstrations were going on, there were also online protests on Facebook, Twitter and other platforms. This development also highlights Deluca, Sun, & Yun's (2012) claim that social media generate new contexts for activism because, they “foster an ethic of individual and collective participation, thus creating a perpetual involvement norm and that norm creates new expectations of being in the world” (p.483). To this end, the ability of social media to create a network from different ethnic and religious backgrounds in social movements seems to be most impactful in a diverse country such as Nigeria (Ayobade, 2015; Okafor & Nwafor, 2013).

Still on the #OccupyNigeria protests, Hari (2014) found that social media served as alternative media to many Nigerians because most reliable mainstream media have limited coverage, and access to them requires the purchase of cable and satellite which are unaffordable to most citizens. Plus, the accessible government-owned media were hesitant in covering the protests. This highlights Smith et al. (2011) about the decentralized channeling of information social media allows. Furthermore, this shows that the activists had the opportunity for self-mediation hence, the spread of information on social media (Cammaerts, 2012).

In conclusion, the contemporary social movements portray the networked opportunity structure social media have granted activists through easy mobilization, alternative media helping offline protests and building networks and connections.

### **2.2.2. Limitations of social media in social movements**

Other scholars have questioned the ability of social media to sustain collective action. In this section, I discuss lack of trust, weak ties, digital divide, political opportunity structures, the flow of false information as drawbacks of social media in social movements.

Diani (2000) argues that virtual interaction is not capable of promoting and maintaining trust between participants in a social movement. The absence of trust could lead to the movement's fall despite its tendency to gain support and grow initially (Diani, 2000; Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2009). Furthermore, virtual ties alone without physical interaction may not successfully mobilize or sustain a social movement because face to face interactions are considered more effective and efficient in supporting relationships than mediated interactions (Diani, 2000, Ribeiro, 1998). In other words, the use of digital technologies in social movements are instrumental rather than symbolic (Nip, 2012). Additionally, the findings of the study conducted by Aday et al. (2012) revealed that new media did not play a significant role on in-

country collective action and regional diffusion during the 2011/12 Arab Spring period. However, the authors argue that this does not mean that digital media were irrelevant but there is insufficient evidence that shows that, the media that use bit.ly links such as Twitter were significantly impactful on the Arab Spring political protests.

Similarly, Carty (2010) states that another limitation of digital technologies on social movements is that “virtual social relations in cyberspace are not a substitute for more traditional forms of community, protest, and collective identity due to a lack of interpersonal ties” (p. 160). Fisher and Boekkoi (2010) contend that the possibility of an individual participating in a social movement learned via social media is lesser than the participation of an individual who was informed through face to face communication about social movement activities. The reason is that offline protests strengthen ties with local communities. Thus, social networks are created. Online mobilization, on the other hand, fosters isolated individuals. In other words, offline communication is still very relevant in the participation and recruitment of social movement participants. Thus, traditional or offline processes in social movements are still essential in achieving local mobilization because of the strong ties (Aouragh, 2008).

Another limitation relates to digital divides. Garrett (2006) argues that not every combination of social media with social movement is productive because many benefits of digital technologies remain inaccessible to the underprivileged. Furthermore, practical use of social media needs skills and internet access. Thus, some people with insufficient skills or access may be left out (Anduiza, Cantijoch, & Gallego, 2009; Benkler, 2006; Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2005). Thus, because of these factors, the idea about the low cost of participation in online movements is challenged because it is a high cost of participation for people living in areas where digital divide is prevalent.

Some scholars, however, criticize the power of social media on networks by arguing that they may not function well in the absence of preexisting traditional social networks (Siegel, 2011). So, for example, new media technologies may increase the speed of communication; however, there is a possibility that the ties between the social actors may be weakened thus, hindering collective action in repressive environments. Besides, the above argument by Siegel (2011) suggests the relevance of traditional social movements to enable new media technologies to function.

Subsequently, in a study on the use of the internet to promote awareness and participation in Arab-Israeli peace activities Marmura (2008) argued that the use of the internet in social movements is weak to circumvent ideological strongholds and to influence state policies. The reason is that the political opportunity structures that determine the success of traditional social movements, also prevail in the online sphere. Meikle (2014) also mentions surveillance, retaliation from targets and anti-social movement institutions as drawbacks on the use of social media in social movements. So, although the social media may be empowering movements, anti-social movement institutions can also empower themselves using digital tools that enable them to disempower online protests.

Despite the role of social media as an alternative media to social movements, the absence of gatekeepers could be a problem for activists (Castells, 1997). Social media enable flow and availability of information; however, it also makes it more challenging to separate credible information from false information. Thus, increasing the burden on movements to distinguish themselves from less credible information and on individuals who must develop strategies for figuring out the reliable information (Garett, 2006). The lack of control over the spread of information also means that social movements may increase their dependency on the mainstream media (Bonchek, 1997). In the same vein, the fluid and democratic nature of social media that foster lower thresholds for participation could serve as a problem for movements because of lack of control over participants.

In conclusion, despite the various arguments about the advantages and limitations of social media in social movements, it is apparent that the symbiotic relationship between offline and online social movements is essential for contemporary social movements. Traditional processes, help curtail the weaknesses of the dynamics of online social movements such as weak ties and lack of trust. Likewise, the presence of digital technologies circumvents the prominent issues such as cost, time and geographical distance in traditional social movements. Van de donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht (2004) however argued that there is a likelihood that activists may undervalue the easy virtual mobilization because it lacks the group experience of a physical protest.

On the other hand, the trajectory of internet penetration around the world suggests that scale of the impact of digital technologies on societal issues will always differ. And as earlier stated in Chapter 1, digital divide is still a prominent issue in Nigeria; therefore, new social

movements may not be capable of pressurizing the government into action. The democratic system of government in Nigeria suggests the fluidity and openness of social media use in the country. Thus, this indicates that social movements in the country may also be confronted with the challenge of controlling and spreading accurate information (Castells, 1997; Garrett, 2006).

Considering how social media played a role in earlier Nigerian social movements, this study seeks to examine whether social media fostered the creation of collective identity in the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign, how was collective action carried out and how did social media affect the offline protests. Also, the limitations of social media in the campaign will be studied.

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter starts with an explanation of the research method that was employed in the study and why it is considered suitable, followed by collected discussion of the research design. The last two sections present the data analysis approach and the coding process.

#### **3.1. Qualitative interviews**

Qualitative approach was considered most suitable for this study because, it gives a good description of the social world in which symbols, activities, and organizations emerge and interact (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). Also, the approach enables natural exploration of meanings and how meanings are constructed. Plus, the qualitative approach gives an in-depth description of people's feelings. The focus of this research is to examine the opinions of the participants, who engaged in the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign as online mobilizers with regards to the political power of social media.

Interviews are considered the usual method of data collection in qualitative research. An interview can be described as a conversation with a purpose where knowledge between the interviewer and interviewee is produced. Kvale (1983) defines qualitative research interview as "an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 174). Lindlof and Taylor (2010) discuss that qualitative interview helps the researcher to understand the social actor's experience and perspective. Given this study is focused on gaining the participants' knowledge and perspective about the political power of social media, interviews are a suitable methods of data collection.

There are three types of qualitative interviews namely: structured, semi-structured and informal. This study used semi-structured interviews. Semi structured interviews consist of a set of open-ended questions with other questions emerging during the interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to be flexible although, there is a structure available based on the interests of the researcher and interview guide (Brinkmann, 2014). Farr (1984) defines it as "a peculiar form of conversation in which the ritual of turn-taking is more formalized than in the commoner and more informal encounters of everyday life" (p. 182).

Besides trying to get information on the phenomenon, the role of the interviewer makes the interviewee comfortable, establishing rapport while maintaining the direction of the interview (Brewerton & Millward, 2001). In this way, respondents also have an opportunity to give more spontaneous descriptions and narratives thus, providing fruitful results to the researcher. Also, a semi-structured interview is beneficial because it allows the researcher to explore particular themes and probe the interviewee further for clarity. To this end, an interview guide was created with a set of flexible questions. It consists of a set of topics and questions that I touched upon in the interviews.

One of the major limitation of semi-structured interviews is that they are time consuming both in terms of data collection and of data analysis. The reason is because the interview is flexible like a conversation therefore, it can last more than scheduled. Also, because some questions emerge during the interview respondents' answers may differ thus, sometimes making it difficult for researcher to compare the results. Furthermore, considering the non-standardization of the interviews questions, the interview may be difficult to replicate. In addition, the sample for semi-structured is usually small therefore, the results cannot be generalizable.

### **3.1.1. The role of mediation in qualitative interviews**

The flexibility of semi-structured interviews makes it easy for the latter to be carried out via online platforms (Longhurst, 2003). Mediated interviews are helpful in reducing the distance of space, which enables research to be readily internationalized, and it can be valuable for researchers whose potential participants are not in proximity (O'Connor et al., 2008). Hanna (2012) contends that, through mediated interviews there is no encroachment of personal space of the interviewee as a neutral, but personal locations are maintained for both the interviewee and interviewer.

Some scholars argue that the quality of responses obtained in mediated interview is the same as in face to face interviews. The dynamics of face to face interviews such as pauses, repetitions, recasts are also prevalent in mediated interviews (Denscombe, 2003; Cabaroglu, Basaran, & Roberts, 2010). One of the most common medium used for mediated interviews is Skype. Researchers found that there is no much difference between Skype interviews and face to face interviews. Deakin and Wakefield (2014) discuss that Skype interview allows for flexibility in the sense that, respondents were able to participate at a time and place convenient for them.

Smith-Stoner and Weber (2000) also discovered that the flexibility encourages more people to participate. Furthermore, Sullivan (2012) argues that access to verbal and non-verbal cues in Skype interviews can provide the same authenticity level with face to face interview because the opportunity because, there is an opportunity for the visible part of the impression management process to be evaluated.

However, some of the drawbacks of mediated interviews include the possible exclusion of some participants due to the need to have the technical competence to participate (O'Connor, Madge, Shaw, & Wellens, 2008). Other technical problems such as sound quality, connection problems may also affect the flow of the interview (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Also, building rapport can be difficult (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). Despite the synchronous visual presence, the customs of familiarizing with the respondent as in a face to face interview are absent. Lastly, because the interviewer does not know where the interviewee is situated, it could be challenging to create a pleasant interview ambience (Opdenakker, 2006).

### **3.2. Research design: studying the *#BringBackOurGirls* digital campaign**

The focus of this thesis is to discover the role of political power of social media during the 2014 *#bringbackourgirls* campaign. To study this campaign, the project relied on eleven interviews with Nigerian citizens who have participated as social mobilizers in the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign (social mobilizers refer to those who organized and mobilized people during the campaign and are known for their visibility on social media). Since this campaign took place in 2014, the interviews focused on that period. However, since the campaign is still ongoing the interview also discussed present day dynamics.

#### **3.2.1 Selecting the participants**

Tuckett (2004) contends that although there are no specific rules for sample sizes, qualitative research does not often rely on large numbers as in quantitative research because, the aim is to have an in-depth understanding of the sample. Furthermore, because there is no exact size perfect for qualitative research, most researchers use data saturation as a guiding principle during data collection. Data saturation is known as the process of putting an end to data collection when no new information is emerging ((Mason, 2010). The data in this project comes from eleven interviews. The number of participants was in line with the methodological guidelines of the Erasmus School of History, Culture & Communication. Each interview lasted between 45



minutes to 1 hour. Interviewing 11 people is considered enough because of the brief time duration that the study had to be conducted, and the small scale of the research. More importantly, I decided to stop at 11 participants because the last three interviews were repetitive of what was already mentioned by the other respondents about the role of social media in the campaign. So, there was no new information emerging.

The criteria used to select the units of analysis included: they must be social media users who have a reputation for online media visibility at least before the emergence of the campaign in 2014. Bakardjieva, Felt, & Dumitrica (2018) refer to this type of grassroots mobilizers as “sociometric stars”: they are individuals who have strong media visibility characterized by many followers, and have a long-standing online profile which they acquired before the movement they organized (p.18). They act as central agents in movements by holding a position of leadership because of their online reputation. An example of an interviewee for this study is a Nigerian humanitarian worker has been active on Twitter since 2012, two years before the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign. He has over 14,000 followers, and apart from his Twitter activities, he is also a popular figure on Facebook with 4,995 friends and 3,000 followers. He played a role as an organizer in the *#Bringbackourgirls* because of his online reputation by not only mobilizing people, but also mediating between the parents of the victim and the Chibok community and international organizations.

Since the primary goal of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth understanding of phenomena, the researcher targets a specific group, event or process. In this study, a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling was used. Palinkas et al. (2015) state that purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research because it involves selection of cases, related to the research interest. Here, the criteria above served as the basis for selecting participants. The individuals were contacted for permission to be interviewed, using a brief recruitment message that contains the aim of the research. And due to the distance, access to other participants who were involved in the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign was difficult. Thus, there was need for participants to refer to others who can contribute to the study. Snowball sampling was therefore helpful, by limiting the problem of inaccessibility to participants. Using purposeful sampling, six of the respondents were identified and contacted via Facebook. Three participants were already my friends on Facebook thus, to get more participants I went through their friend lists and the groups they are part of and found potential participants that fit the criteria. However, only four

responded to my messages and the interviews took place. After interviewing the first six people, I asked to be connected to other people I can interview and that was how the other five participants were contacted through snowball sampling. It is worth mentioning that one of the three participants in my Facebook friends list was supposed to be interviewed however, due to unforeseen circumstances I could not interview him. Hence, I ended up interviewing eleven participants.

The eleven individuals interviewed are described briefly below. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, each participant is described with a pseudonym.

**Table 1: List of interviewees**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Role in the campaign</b>	<b>Social media details</b>
Chris	32	Masters student	Participant	4, 000 Facebook friends
Olumide	45	Humanitarian worker	Organizer	12, 000 twitter followers
Solomon	45	Human rights activist	Organizer	9, 000 twitter followers + 2, 000 followers for Facebook page
Ibrahim	38	Humanitarian worker	Organizer	5,000 Facebook friends
Salome	35	Civil servant	Participant	3,000 Facebook friends + 1,000 followers
Hassan	29	Civil Engineer	Participant	5,000 Twitter followers
Peter	35	Human rights activist	Organizer	10, 000 twitter followers
Yohanna	35	Politician & humanitarian worker	Organizer	5,000 Facebook friends + 1,065 followers
Timothy	36	Lecturer	Participant	4,000 Facebook friends
Ali	37	Human rights activist	Organizer	3,500 Facebook friends

Joseph	30	Civil engineer	Participant	7, 00 twitter followers
--------	----	----------------	-------------	-------------------------

These participants come from various parts of the country thus, offering me a diversity of opinions about their perception of the political power of social media. Six participants were from Maiduguri, Borno State (the capital city of where the girls were abducted), Two were from the Southwest, and the other three were from the Northwest. It was interesting to discover that, the two participants from the Southwest functioned as organizers and not participants during the campaign.

### 3.3 The Interview

Although qualitative research does not lay as much emphasis on operationalization as quantitative research, it is still relevant to discuss how the concepts in the research question and the literature review informed the interviews. The aim of the interview was to discover how the respondents, perceive the political power of social media in activism based on the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign that occurred in Nigeria.

The notion of the political power of social media was understood here as the new space, which allows for creation of solidarity and alliance in which people come together to express their shared grievances and strategize to create changes. Furthermore, the concepts discussed in the literature review were directly used in the interviews. For instance, since the literature points to the ambiguous effects of online campaigns on offline dynamics, the interviewees were asked about the impact of social media on offline political transformations. Also, to discover the role of social media platforms in activism they were asked about their own practices of using the most popular platforms in Nigeria to mobilize people. The interviewees were also asked about other important concepts in this research such as digital divide and the influence of the state. Furthermore, they were also asked about collective action and the differences between face to face and online connections.

At the beginning of the interview, I explained what my study is about again (because they already got an idea from the recruitment message I sent to them), and I asked for verbal consent to proceed. I asked for permission for the interviews to be recorded. It is worth mentioning that, bad internet connection disrupted the interviews several times thus, sometimes we had to opt for the chat option in Skype to continue the interviews or rely on direct phone call. This happened in

interviews with seven respondents therefore, only four respondents were successful without network issues (two via video call and two via audio call).

The first part of the interview included questions about the involvement of the interviewees in the campaign and their activism background. I wanted to have a better understanding of their interest in activism (see Appendix A). The second part of the interview focused on the social media usage during the campaign. Here, questions were asked to discover what social media platforms were actively used, participants' strategy guiding their social media use, how they connected with other people etc. Using these questions, I also tried to understand how they describe the power of social media in the campaign, focusing on the type of words and phrases they use to explain how social media helped them. The third part of the interview discussed the type of collective action present in this campaign. Questions were asked about the collective action they built from the campaign, the power and usefulness of online connection and the difference between face to face connection and online connection.

### **3.4. Data analysis**

For the analysis of the data, a thematic analysis method was used. Themes can be defined as the coherent integration of the different pieces of data that constitute the findings. Also, a theme captures aspects of the data that relate to the research question, and represent some meanings (Braune & Clarke, 2006; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bodnas, 2013). Braune and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as the process of discovering, analyzing and interpreting patterns within data. Themes can emerge from manifest content (aspects of the text that are directly observable) and from the latent content (which refers to implicit meanings in the text) (Joeffe and Yardley, 2004).

Two approaches are identified with thematic analysis namely: inductive and deductive approaches (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Inductive approach is employed when there are no previous studies on the topic. A deductive approach, on the other hand, is used to test an established theory in different situations (Hseih & Shannon, 2005). The inductive approach gives an opportunity for the researcher to discover hidden patterns from previous studies, and it also keeps the researcher very close to the data (Braune & Clarke 2006). However, it can be time-consuming and difficult to replicate. Based on the established theories, it is easy to make distinctions in the data using deductive approach. It is also easy to repeat and can be applied to large samples (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). One of the significant disadvantages of the

deductive approach however, is that new themes may be overlooked in the data. In this study, the deductive approach was employed because of the large number of studies conducted on the power of social media in activism and social movements. The inductive approach was relevant because of the paucity of research about how people, perceive the power of social media particularly in developing nations.

One of the drawbacks of thematic analysis, is low reliability because it relies heavily on the researcher's interpretation. Braune and Clarke (2006) also argue that, thematic analysis has restricted interpretive power beyond mere description if it is not used within an existing theoretical framework. However, this is not a limitation in this study because the interview guide was created based on the discussions in the literature review.

### **3.4.1. Coding process**

The process of doing thematic analysis discussed by Braune and Clarke (2006) was used analyze the data. After the interviews were conducted, I familiarized myself with the data to take note of salient points made by the interviewees. And this process involves, transcribing data, reading and rereading data, and taking notes. The next stage included coding relevant aspects of the data systematically and collating data relevant to each code. Thematic analysis is usually done in three stages of interconnected coding namely: open, axial and selective coding. Coding refers to the structuring of large quantity of texts into smaller categories (Hseih & Shannon, 2005). Coding also means reassembling of qualitative data to find to discover patterns (Boeije, 2010). The coding of the interviews in this study was done by drawing a table with four columns namely: frequency of codes, open codes, axial codes and selective codes in Microsoft word.

Open coding refers to the initial stage of the coding where the raw data in this case interviews, are collected word by word and line by line. The idea behind open coding is to break down data into segments, in order to interpret them. In this stage, short descriptive codes that describe what the respondents said were assigned. And in some cases, in vivo codes which refer to the use of the literal words that were used in the interviews were coded. I started by reading the transcripts then I began to code what the respondents said. This stage yielded 311 open codes.

In the next stage called the axial coding, categories were created based on the relationships between the open codes. The purpose of this stage is to group the codes into subcategories based on the themes they address (Boeije, 2010). As earlier mentioned, the

interview guide is divided into four parts so, I gathered the open codes from each part and created subcategories for them. At the end of the process, 17 axial codes were discovered (See Appendix B).

Finally, the selective coding stage allows for larger categories to be formed and give theoretical definitions to the subcategories formed in the earlier stage. According to Boije (2010), the main categories help give better theoretical understanding of the research topic. Also, the categories from this stage explain the central phenomenon emerging from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Thus, in this stage I developed overarching themes that describe the subcategories and 4 core themes were discovered (See Appendix B).

## 4. Results and discussion

This study began with the aim of discovering how social mobilizers (with active social media presence) who participated in the 2014 #Bringbackourgirls campaign, consider the political power of social media. This section presents the findings of the study based on the interview with 11 social mobilizers. Four main themes were discovered in the analysis: *wanting to make a difference, social media use (aims and strategies), benefits of social media (online connection, usefulness of collective action, effects of social media on traditional media, influence of social media on offline social movements)* and *limitations of social media (misinformation, retaliation from government, slacktivism, digital divides, relevance of face to face connection)*.

### 4.1. Wanting to make a difference

The grassroots mobilizers highlight their reason for joining the campaign using the *political state of the country*. First, five out of the eleven respondents stated that they wanted to put *pressure on the government* to tackle the insurgents because prior to the abduction of the girls, they were other attacks by the terrorists and no actions were taken. Secondly, *disappointed at the incompetence of the government* was another reason that appeared in the answers of five respondents. As discussed in the theoretical framework, digital activism involves putting efforts with the aim of pressurizing political actors to take a decision or act on a prevailing problem confronting the citizens (Glaiyser, 2010). And this is what the interviewees sought to achieve by joining the #Bringbackourgirls campaign.

*“....so, before the abduction of the Chibok girls there was this killing at Federal Government college Buni Yadi, several students were slaughtered, and the nation was quiet about it. Nothing happened about it. And when Chibok girls happened, it was the last straw that brought about like minds, to demand from the government why they are quiet because the primary responsibility of the government is protection of lives and properties.”* (Solomon, M, 45, organizer).

Social networks are relevant for mobilization however, injustices that trigger shared anger and resentment are often necessary to begin actual participation in collective action and social movement (Yang, 2007 as cited in Lim, 2012). The quote above highlights that the abduction of the girls triggered shared bitterness about the conducts of the government towards the terrorist attacks.

Another reason given for joining the campaign is *empathy*. The respondents acknowledged the helplessness of the victims due to the lackadaisical attitude of the government. Therefore, they felt it was morally right to partake in demanding the release of the schoolgirls. The excerpt below illustrates this point:

*“I joined because of empathy and sympathy about the missing girls. They are my fellow citizens and sisters, and at that time I believed silence was never an option for me.”*

(Hassan, M, 32, participant)

Based on cultural backgrounds of some of the activists, there was an indication that some of them come from the area where the girls were kidnapped. Hence, *relationship with victims* was another reason for joining the campaign. Out of the eleven respondents, two stated that some of the schoolgirls were their cousins and relatives. Thus, they decided to use their visible position to advocate for their release

*“The reason why I joined this campaign is because I am from Chibok, and it has directly affected me, so I felt I should just be among those that are in the campaign”* (Ali, M, 37, Organizer)

Lastly under the theme of *wanting to make a difference*, a respondent remarked that the social media post of Chris Brown, an American musician prompted him to join the campaign by retweeting the singer’s tweet and then people began retweeting his post as well. This exemplifies the argument by Postill (2014) who argued that, the visibility digital technologies grant to grassroots activism and activists often transcends to international communities. In that way, the respondent felt more inclined to retweet because Chris Brown is a popular individual.

#### **4.2. Social media use**

The primary aim of this research is to discover how the grassroots mobilizers perceive the power of social media based on the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign. Thus, the theme of *social media use* is one of the central themes to answering the research question because it explains how social media was used. The theme is divided into two sections: aims and strategies.

Regarding their aims of using social media in the campaign, the respondents made it clear that they wanted to *draw attention to the problem*. This aim is broken down into six components: *inform people* (4 respondents), *make the story viral* (6 respondents), *reach influential people and nations for support* (7 respondents), and *mobilize people*. They also wanted to *make a difference by pressurizing the government* (3 respondents) and *expose the wrongdoings of the government*



(5 respondents). These reasons given by the respondents suggest that they view social media as a liberation technology. As Diamond (2010) asserts, liberation technology enables citizens to mobilize protests, spread information, expose wrongdoings, challenge government and expand the horizons of freedom. The quote below exemplifies how the participants regard social media:

*“... the government did not treat the issue with immediate alacrity, and before the kidnap of the schoolgirls, the terrorists have been causing mayhem by killing and kidnapping people which many people within and outside Nigeria were unaware of. So, we used social media because we were sure the story would go viral and people’s attention would be drawn to the situation.”* (Yohanna, M, 35, organizer).

Just like any group organization, the #Bringbackourgirls group is also guided by values thus, members are expected to abide by them. *Commitment to group’s values* was present in only three interviews. The three respondents recounted how they planned to be *credibly factual and share truthful and objective information* on social media. The quote below by Mr. Peter illustrates how the core values translate to the online sphere.

*“Yes. My use of social media is guided by the BBOG’s commitment to truth and our core values. The BBOG core values are HUMANITEEDS – Hope, Unity, Motivation, Affability, Nationalism, Integrity, Transparency, Empathy, Equity, Discipline, Sacrifice.”*

To sum up, the respondents’ aims of using social media suggest that they viewed social media as capable of helping their course through informing and mobilizing people and gathering support.

#### **4.2.1. Strategy**

Concerning the strategy of the respondents’ use of social media platforms during the campaign, the respondents stated how they utilized different social media platforms (Facebook and Twitter). Some of the prominent strategies include *private messages, tagging, use of the campaign #, tweets and retweets*.

*Facebook* was a recurring term among ten respondents who showed their activeness on the platform. Five respondents recounted that, they used Facebook to discuss via *private messages* asking people to join the campaign *and send messages* about the update of the girls and messages from the recognized #Bringbackourgirls group. Furthermore, using the option of share on Facebook, three respondents stated how they regularly *share posts* concerning the girls’

abduction. *Create groups* for discussions was another method two respondent mentioned in their use of social media for the campaign.

*Tagging* (8 respondents) was another regular method the respondents used to capture the attention of people. It is worth mentioning that *tagging* served different purposes. Considering the roles of the respondents as mobilizers, *connection* with other people is a relevant aspect of the campaign. As one of the respondents said, he capitalized on tagging because it has the ability to reach even people that are not his friends in that way, he was able to connect with more people:

*“So, I utilized the Facebook by tagging other people who are my friends because I have more than 2000 friends on Facebook and if I tag even just 100, you could imagine the impact it will have.”* (Chris, M, 32, participant).

Similarly, *tag like minds* and *influential handles* (5) was another strategy common in the respondents’ replies. The reason is because, tagging helps attract attention especially when the popular actors involved take note of the post. This suggests that they did not only wanted to mobilize people, but also ask for support from influential people as well. Below is a respondent’s statement about his strategy: As Harlow (2011) discussed, the interactive features of social media platforms facilitate connection as well as collective identity that can push the online movement into offline. The two quotes below illustrate how the respondents utilized the function of tweeting:

*“a lot of the celebrities that joined the movement started from social media including former US First Lady Michelle Obama. So, we realized by sending our message and tagging some the handles, the message would go far. With just a retweet or a like the message is out there to the world.”* (Hassan, M, 29, participant).

*“You know the social media also served a tool because when you put out a tweet out there, the people that such tweet resonate with, those people that have the same vision and mindset with you, they see it and connect with you and you interact.”* (Solomon, M, 45, organizer).

This statement about the impact of tagging, highlights the argument about the low cost of mobilization fostered by digital technologies (Takagarawa & Carty, 2012). Many people were informed and mobilized because of the tags on their friends’ wall and in a cheap way.

Furthermore, *uploading pictures* is another action that was regularly used on Facebook.

Regarding the *use of Twitter*, respondents mentioned *tweets* and *retweets* (6 respondents) as the functions they used on Twitter during the campaign. *Retweets* are usually from the official *#Bringbackourgirls* group's handle thus, they were sharing updates and other relevant information from the group directly. Melki and Mallat (2018) describe digital tools as helpful for organization in activism. And two of the respondents reiterated the assertion by mentioning that, they also use to Twitter to *post press releases* and other relevant information. It is worth mentioning that, the reason why only two respondents mentioned this is because of their roles like public relation officers for the campaign group. Furthermore, another peculiar response about twitter is the use of multiple handles to take part in the campaign. A participant who is a member of the *#Brinbackourgirls* group and owns an NGO describes how he interchanges between his personal and group handle:

“... *the Citizens of Impact foundation my NGO we always use the #bbog....so we use our handles individually and sometimes when the brinbackourgirls page on twitter post something we retweet from them...*” (Solomon, M, 45, organizer)

Additionally, only six respondents mentioned that they use Twitter and Facebook simultaneously. And when compared to the number of Facebook users above, it appears that Twitter is not used by many people like Facebook. This could be explained by the popularity of Facebook as the most used social media platform in Nigeria (Ayobade, 2015). The *actions on Twitter and Facebook* included *use of the #bringbackourgirls* by six respondents. Poell and Borra (2012) discuss that the hashtags are example of omnipresent sharing features that enable fast spread of news. Also, hashtags enable users to share and search for news on specific topics thus, they are contributory to enabling activists' mode of communication. Furthermore, a least but relevant action one respondent mentioned is *respond to conspiracy theories* (Olumide, M, 45, organizer). This could be explained by the position of the respondent during the campaign: as a relative to some of the victims, and as a connecting link between the Chibok community and people seeking for information like international journalists and NGOs.

Also, *send and accept friend requests* (6 respondents) was another recurring technique the respondents mentioned. For Olumide (M, 45, organizer), his connection is a combination of regular people and influential people:

*“I check those who sent connections, look at their previous engagements, and link up. I check out for influencers to follow, and mostly after radio or TV engagement, many sent me friends request or follow me on twitter.”*

The above quote suggests how critical the respondent was with his connections during the campaign in the sense that, he maintained a conscious gatekeeping effort. As Diamond (2010) discusses, the tools social media offer has transformed users from passive recipients to gatekeepers like journalists. Furthermore, *create and share campaign statements in groups* (3 respondents) was another way that eased the respondents’ connection with other people. Some of the groups were already existing before the #*Bringbackourgirls* campaign thus, it was easy to familiarize and mobilize people. The quote below illuminates this:

*“Also, they were already existing Facebook groups for people from the same ethnic group, so I joined those groups and shared posts, pictures and information about the abduction. In that way, I became familiar and connected with more people.”* (Salome, F 35, participant).

Papachrisi and Oliveira (2012) use the term “instantaneity” to describe how social media platforms foster connection in activism. Three respondents stated that through *live videos and posts Facebook, Twitter and Instagram*, they were able to get in touch with potential participants. They emphasize that the posts and videos are usually about their offline protests thus, many felt inclined to join. To this end, these functions on social media platforms enabled an information sharing environment for the participants which they used to increase awareness about their events as well as connect with people (Papachrisi & Oliveira, 2012; Poell & Borra, 2012).

To conclude, this theme of *social media use* portrays how the participants regarded social media as capable of pressurizing the government, drawing attention to the abduction issue by informing and mobilizing people. Also, it shows how the interactive features of social media enabled the participants to achieve their aims.

#### **4.3. Benefits of social media in the #*Bringbackourgirls* campaign**

Regarding the advantages of social media in the campaign, the findings revealed *connection, low cost of action, opportunity to demand for accountability, creation of collective identity, useful online collective action, influence on offline protests, and influence on traditional media* as the major contributions of social media perceived by the participants. These themes reflect the utopian views of the political power of social media, discussed in the literature review.

### 4.3.1. Connection

One of the prominent advantage of social media in activism is the elimination of distance and time barriers (Castells, 2001; Juris, 2005). Digital technologies have made connections in social movements easier, by collapsing the problems of time and distance. As Fahmi (2009) argues, social media platforms have become new geographies of protests whereby social movement activities happen virtually. In this way, the connection of people also becomes easier. *Easy and cheap to connect* is one of the recurring term that nine respondents characterize online connections during the interviews. They argue that, with the help of social media platforms it was easy to connect with other activists as well as potential activists at a very cheap rate. Furthermore, *less risk* (9 respondents) is another feature of online connections the respondents mentioned. As Anthony and Brandie (2013) discuss, social media now serve as a haven for activists and social movements to connect because of the absence of restrictive policies that are dominant in traditional public sphere. The policies could come from institutions or usually the government as one respondent recounts:

*“In face to face meetings, there may be instances where an individual wants to discuss some issues but finds it difficult to put it front. But online, you can address the government without fear of being intimidated or confronted”* (Yohanna, M, 35, organizer).

Additionally, *easy access to information* is another term respondent used to describe the benefit of online connection. Also, *collapse of distance and time* (8 respondents) is another recurring term respondent mentioned. The prominence of is contrary to most scholarly arguments as trust is believed to be more prominent in face to face connections. The issue of trust in face to face connections is elaborated in the subsequent paragraph.

Interestingly, one respondent (Hassan, M, 29, participant) mentioned that online connection is *effective in a large society* like Nigeria where geographical distances are huge. Lastly, only one respondent Mr. Ibrahim stated that: *“online connection gives birth to face to face connections”*. In a study, Tufecki and Wilson (2012) discovered that online activism can provoke activism. Likewise, Harlow and Harp (2012) present findings that confirm that offline activism can develop from offline activism. Thus, this study substantiates the findings of previous studies.

Furthermore, *cheap/requires few resources for mobilization* (8 respondents) is the next advantage mentioned. As discussed in the theoretical framework, one of the challenges in traditional social movements is recruiting new participants to join the movement however, social media has made it easier to mobilize people in an inexpensive way (Harlow, 2012; Opp; 2012). Thus, as Chris (M, 32, participant) states: “*it was more cheaper and more efficient in terms of the logistics in the campaign.*”. Still, two respondents state that social media cultivate *connection with good mentors* who are instrumental to the course of activism and humanitarianism.

In addition, as Valenzuela, Arriagada, & Scherman (2012) discuss, social media enable activists to reach many people because of the lack of boundaries. Similarly, Postill (2014) states that the use of digital platforms enhances the visibility of a movement by informing large number of people in a short period. These arguments were reflected in the interviews as four respondents mentioned that social media help to *create awareness on a large scale*. So, many people got to know about the abduction of the girls online.

Furthermore, Shirky (2008) argues that people may feel inclined to take part in online activism because of low costs of action. And these costs do not only refer to monetary aspects but could also be in form of potential risks of joining a movement. Thus, *inspired people to become part of the movement* is another benefit attributed to presence of social media in the campaign:

“*Through social media, we also inspired people to join the course of activism for instance myself. My drive for activism became stronger after I noticed the bbog campaign.*”  
(Solomon, M, 45, organizer).

Visibility and exposure is one of the examples of how social media has contributed to activism because of instantaneous communication and collapsed boundaries thus, activists tend to gather more *support* than usual (Melki and Mallat, 2018). Five respondents mentioned how social media *incited support locally and internationally* during the campaign.

One respondent who is from the community where the girls were kidnapped and has been an active voice mediating between the community and foreigners, states that the presence of social media has *incited support/fostered more attention on the grassroots*. His quote below gives a better explanation:

“*I have brought in many NGOs local and international to partner and work together through social media to translate work at the ground in northeast. So, the grassroots levels*

*are mostly enjoying the benefits of social media because they have become visible to the world. And this is not how it was many years ago.”* (Olumide, M, 45, organizer).

Looking at his last statement, “*this is not how it was many years ago*” suggests the influence social media have on social movements in Nigerian contemporary society, by making grassroots areas accessible and putting them on the spotlight.

According to Kahn and Kellner (2004), social media have created a new space whereby citizens have a political possibility to exercise their civic rights. Thus, with the help of digital tools such as live videos citizens can demand transparency and accountability from the government. These arguments were also present in the findings of this study. Two respondents mentioned that another benefit of social media in the campaign is how citizens got the opportunity to demand accountability from the Nigerian government. Considering how social media has transformed civic activism by enabling Nigerians participation in national issues, this finding suggests a remarkable change in the relationship between Nigerians and their government.

#### **4.3.2. Collective identity formation**

Diani (1992) discusses that social movements entail the formation of *collective identity* by individuals, aiming to achieve a political or social goal. As earlier discussed in the theoretical framework, the Nigerian society is characterized by diverse cultures, ethnicity and religions. When the respondents were asked if diversity played out online during the campaign, all of them confirmed that normally sentiments prevail in online discussions however, there was *minimal diversity in the campaign*.

*“When people realized that 80% of the people protesting for Chibok Girls have never even visited Borno in their lives. So, the message became clearer it’s about humanity not about a race or an individual or religion”* (Ibrahim, M, 38, organizer).

The idea of different ethnic identities was kept aside because of the goal of the participants which is, to make the government to rescue the girls. The *collective identity* that was created was based on a sense of shared disappointment in the government, anger and pain. As Lim (2012) argues, shared emotions trigger the formation of a collective identity in a movement. One respondent states that, *social media promote peaceful coexistence* considering how people from various parts of the country were able to join the campaign online.

Seven respondents recounted that *collaborations between cultural groups* was also present during the campaign. They argued that collaborations gave opportunity for *harnessing of ideas*. A reason that could be attributed to the unity, is the *campaign slogans against divisiveness* as reported by three respondents.

*“The fault lines of Nigeria are religion, regions, ethnicity, and party. We campaign against this and insist on humanity first before anything, every life matter, terrorists attack to one, is terrorists attack to all, and no Nigerian is more Nigerian than any Nigerian”* (Olumide, M, 45, organizer).

From the accounts of the respondents, it appears that those that took part in the campaign created a collective identity which aimed to demand for the rescue of the girls and advocate for the course of Nigerians. And this shared sense of “we” as discussed by Taylor and Whittier (1997) is a fundamental part of collective identity in social movements. Also, they show that the activists played a role in shaping social movements through their use of social media (Lim, 2012). As in this case, the use of social media transformed the campaign from a northern problem into a national affair hence, people from diverse cultural backgrounds took part.

#### **4.3.3. Usefulness of online collective action**

Scholars argue that the presence of social media in social movements, have fostered participation by increasing avenues for collective action. People are now better coordinated across geographic spaces with the help of digital technologies (Bosch, 2017; Juris; 2012). Thus, online collective action has become easier to form. And as Postmes and Brunsting (2002) discuss, social media have fostered the development of social networks capable of sustaining collective action. Based on the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign, seven respondents remarked that they see the online collective action they have built during the campaign as *compelling on government* to react to the citizens’ demand.

*“I will tell you this without reservations that connections I have built over social media have become a potent tool to pressure government and other organizations into doing the right thing especially in areas of human right abuse, negligence. For instance, just a few days we started to mount pressure on NAFDAC to lift the ban on Emzor Pharmaceuticals which they banned from production because of the recent report on codeine abuse by BBC”* (Joseph, M, 30, participant)



Furthermore, the respondents exemplified how useful online collective action is on compelling the Nigerian government by mentioning recent examples where the government had to yield in to the demands of the citizen because of outburst on twitter:

*“This week that just passed, there was a statement by the president that connotes that a fraction of Nigerian youths are lazy. And the action and rage on social media gave room that the presidency had to respond to do a damage control in trying to correct hats out there in the public. That oh the President did not say Nigerians are lazy bla bla bla.....”*  
(Solomon, M, 45, organizer).

Additionally, another respondent views the online collective action he has built as *strong for political movement*. In his words, *“we are still strategizing to join the political atmosphere more vibrantly and strongly in the forthcoming elections”*. Thus, this suggests that collective actions built do not only exist within the context of social movements sometimes, activists may decide to be in the government so as to be able to enforce the political and social changes they have been clamoring for. Another respondent sees online collective action as a platform that *“allows visions to be aligned”* (Peter, M, 35 organizer). In other words, the participant suggests that with online collective action people with the similar ideas are able to come together and create solution to a problem.

Furthermore, the development of the online collective action has become *a tool to demand for transparency and accountability* (3 respondents) from the government. George and Leidner (2018) contend that, with the help of digital technologies activists can act as watchdogs on their government. One of the three respondents (Yohanna, M, 45, organizer) highlights this assertion below:

*“online media has given us platform to hold government accountable and to push for transparency”*

Lastly, *unites citizens* (3 respondents) is another aspect of the *usefulness of online collective action*. One of the respondents (Hassan, M, 29, participant uses the word *“remarkable”* to describe how online collective action has fostered unity among Nigerians. The answers of the respondents illustrate how social media served as a space in sustaining the networks, upon which the *#bringbackourgirls* depended on.

To conclude, this theme illustrates how the respondents utilized social media as an opportunity structure to create social change by developing a collective action that has been

influential on not only the #bringbackourgirls campaign, but also the general political system in Nigeria. Furthermore, their remarks show how they constructed a collective action frame that captures their shared grievances as displeased citizens fighting against unfair treatment, with the help of social media as a platform to exercise their agency (Carty & Onyett, 2006). And through the collective action frame, they formed a collective identity online. These actions reflect the opportunity structures facilitated by social media, whereby networks that social movements rely on are built and maintained (Langman, 2005; Marmura, 2008).

#### **4.3.4. Influence of social media on offline protests**

Only four respondents confirmed that they were part of the offline protests in the capital city. However, the others who were unable to participate were still asked if they think social media facilitated the engagement of people in the offline protests. *Attracted more participants* (7 respondents) is one of the recurring term the respondents used to describe how actions online motivated people to join the offline protests. This confirms the findings of previous studies stating the ability of online actions to inspire offline protests (Harlow & Harp, 2012; Tufecki & Wilson; 2012).

Furthermore, scholars argue that social media tools help provide support and organization in movements through the options of events creations and sending messages for instance (George & Leidner, 2018; Melki & Mallat, 2018). Similarly, three respondents who participated in the offline protests highlighted that social media served as *information* and *organization tool* to them. The quote below by illustrates the point:

*“Yes, social media played a role by informing us about the schedule of the offline protests. So, it made organization easier.”* (Ibrahim, M, 38, organizer).

In addition, the actions online have been credited to creating *more awareness* about the offline protests. Diamond (2010) states that digital tools help create awareness in social movements through the spread of posts and other social media dynamics. In the excerpt below, Solomon (M, 45, organizer) confirms that personally social media provoked him to join the offline protests

*“Yes, in the beginning of the social protests, social media played a very active role and personally social media was one of the tools that got me to the unity fountain because I kept seeing the bbog posts and it was one of the factor that motivated me, and I said on this issue, I must be there.”*

To this end, it is apparent that online actions facilitated the offline protests by drawing more attention to the issue and encouraging people to join the offline campaign.

#### **4.3.5. Effects of social media on traditional media**

Regarding the relationship between social media and traditional media, the findings revealed that the former served as alternative media to the activists. And traditional media relied on social media for news. Social media platforms go beyond connecting people and making topics viral, they also serve as alternative media platforms to contemporary activists (Harlow & Harp, 2012). Postmes and Brunsting (2002) contend that the internet grants movements and activists the power of mass communication in the sense that, activists can be visible in the media by reaching to many people. *Loss of trust and audience* was visible in the respondents' replies when they were asked about the effects of the online campaign on traditional media. The fluid nature of social media allowed for people to contribute, and that shifted traditional media's audience focus to social media:

*“Here in Borno state to be specific, there are moments that if you want to air your view it will be very difficult to pass through the traditional media because they are government controlled. And to me I feel that the online media have given room for critical position to be taken by individuals and activists.”* (Yohanna, M, 35, organizer).

Furthermore, *reliance on international media and social media for credible information* is another effect highlighted. As Saleh (2012) argues, unlike in traditional activism where there is much dependence on mainstream media and governmental control, the presence of digital technologies has transformed activists into gatekeepers whereby they are able to control the media. As Olumide (M, 45, organizer) remarks:

*“Most of the traditional media failed to visit Chibok, failed to listen to credible information, but prefer official lines from government officials who usually were bent on lying and false information... Very well our online action brought in many foreign media house, some went and spent good time in Chibok for credible on the spot reporting.”*

In addition, respondents mentioned that *lack of connection with the grassroots* (3 respondents) contributed to the loss of trust in the traditional media. Most traditional media failed to get in touch with the community where the abduction occurred thus, their reports were conflicting with the stories of people from the community. This issue resonates with Vegh (2003) argument about activists depending on social media because the mainstream media often

underreport or misreport any social movement related event. The quote below supports Olumide's (M, 45, organizer) remark above, *lack of connection with the grassroots* cost the traditional media the trust people had in them:

*“And that is I think one of the major flaws of the traditional media, they did not relate with people on the grassroots level, so their reports were always inconsistent.”* (Salome, F, 35, participant).

From another angle, the traditional media's affiliation with politics affected people's perception of them thus, *politicized coverage* (4 respondents) was another reason that contributed to the *loss of trust and audience*. One of the respondents, who is active online and offline recounts how politics got into play whenever the traditional media came to cover their offline meetings or protests:

*“Channels TV, whenever we were having our meetings, they usually come and be with us. But NTA that is government owned, do not come to the meeting because they feel we are against the government. So, they do not show most of our activities for instance our march to the villa. They felt we are antigovernment. AIT during the previous government were just coming once in a while because they were for the former government. But now because there is a change of government they come often because they think we are against the current government.”* (Ali, M, 37, organizer).

The respondent's assertion about the government owned channel NTA, who rarely cover them because they are perceived as anti-government relates to the protest paradigm theory which suggests that social movements are portrayed negatively in the mainstream media (McLeod & Hertog, 1999). However, in this case the *#bringbackourgirls* movement were not even given opportunity to be heard because they were alleged as anti-government. And this is where social media played a significant role by giving them opportunity to be seen, and to spread information that may have been under-reported or ignored in the mainstream media (Vegh, 2003).

Subsequently, another effect of the online campaign on the traditional media is *alliance with social media*. This could be considered positive because according to the respondents, the traditional media were *pressured to align with social media buzz*. As stated in chapter 1, the reason the *#bringbackourgirls* campaign became viral is because of the contribution of social media. Thus, updates about the abduction emanated mainly from social media. Four respondents

confirmed this by mentioning that traditional media also depended on social media to obtain their news stories:

*“But the pressure and buzz from social media forced the traditional media to align with the buzz. And sometimes local media here when you are watching the TV, they come up with oh on the social media XYZ is going on and sometimes, they put out tweets and messages from Facebook”* (Solomon, M, 45, organizer).

It is also worth noting that, the abundance of information on social media confirms Shirky’s (2008) argument about the transformation of regular people or non-professional journalists into media outlets in contemporary society. Thus, explaining why the pressure on traditional media was much. Another respondent remarked that the pressure from the online media, also caused most traditional media to become active on social media by creating twitter handles for instance.

Despite the observations by other respondents about the influence of politics on traditional media, only one respondent stressed the positive collaboration between the former and their social media actions:

*“Yes, it’s our social media handles that notified the media houses and they bought the idea and from there we never looked back, it has been very positive, the combination of traditional media and our social media handles collaboration.”* (Ibrahim, M, 38, organizer).

Poell and Borra (2012) argue that the *pressure to align with social media buzz* is a typical occurrence in large protests like the *#bringbackourgirls* campaign because, online ecologies emerge in which social and mainstream media are deeply intertwined. And this offers strategic benefits to activists because, they get the opportunity to dominate the mediascape.

To sum up, this theme shows how the presence of social media does not only affect political dynamics but also critical institutions in the society such as traditional media. The democratic nature of social media made it convenient for the participants to self-mediate, and the reliance on social media eventually forced the traditional media to succumb to the pressure. To this end, social media enabled the participants to control their conducts in the media.

#### **4.4. Limitations of social media**

This section of the chapter mirrors the dystopian views against social media as capable of creating political and social change. The major limitations of social media in the campaign stated by the participants include: *misinformation, retaliation from the government, slacktivism, digital divide, and relevance of face to face connections.*

#### **4.4.1 Challenges faced by activists**

One of the drawbacks that come from the decentralized and open nature of social media is the inability to control the circulation of information thus, allowing for the distribution of inaccurate information (Castells, 1997). In other words, the absence of gatekeepers makes it difficult to separate incorrect information from correct information. This issue of *spread of false information and propaganda* is the most recurring disadvantage of social media that emerged in the interviews. Eight respondents mentioned that despite the contributions of social media, the credibility of their actions online is often threatened because the *spread of false information* creates confusion and disbelief. One respondent particularly emphasized on this:

*“people tend to abuse the online media and for that it tends to create so much propaganda and lies so it creates false believe in activists or people like us who are visible”* (Yohanna, M, 35, organizer).

Furthermore, *attacks and backlash* (4 respondents) is another drawback mentioned. As Cammaerts (2012) mentions, a highly volatile public opinion is one of the structural constraints inherent to mediation. Thus, explaining why the participants also reiterate the point. According to these respondents, they often get attacked by people who have contrary opinions. Moreover, the exposure on social media has made them *visible targets to threats* (four respondents)

Ten respondents recounted receiving *threat messages* because of their fight for the release of the girls. This is one aspect of the interview where the participants emphasized the gravity of their vulnerability:

*“Yes, I have been intimidated severally, I have received an inbox message threatening me that I am going to be killed.”* (Yohanna, M, 35, organizer)

As Christensen (2011) discusses that states are still powerful therefore, activists are susceptible to restrictions. Other respondents mentioned that there was *harassment offline* (4 respondents) during the offline protests.

*“Yes of course, there was one of my picture that was posted on social media, I was jumping struggling with the police because they wanted to arrest us. So, people saw the picture and called me to be very careful before they kill me.”* (Ali, M, 37, organizer).

In addition, another respondent asserts that there were even offered *bribe* and according to another, the *“rule of law is a theory”* in the country. This suggests how government and other elites are influential on the online sphere. As Ogudinmu (2013) discusses, although the Nigerian constitution allows freedom of speech, the problem lies on whether the freedom is still guaranteed after the speech. Thus, even though Nigerian activists may have the opportunity to express their dissatisfactions, they are still vulnerable to the government.

#### **4.4.2. Other drawbacks**

Gladwell (2010) argues that another prominent drawback of online activism is the weak relationships developed online unlike in traditional activism where people exert much efforts and form relationships strong enough to create a change. Furthermore, issues such as clicktivism or slacktivism which entail taking part online for emotional satisfaction have minimal contribution to a movement (George & Leidner; 2018; Morozov, 2009). Two respondents reiterated these arguments by saying that the *online drive does not translate to offline protest*. As Solomon (M, 35, organizer) puts it *“Sometimes, if you need to hold physical meeting, you may not get the drive”* likewise Peter (M, 35, organizer) argues *“it takes more than online participation to get things done”*.

Additionally, considering Nigeria as a highly diverse cultural and religious country, bias may reflect in the citizens use of social media. Thus, *religious and ethnic sentiments* is another disadvantage noted by Olumide (M, 45, organizer). Although he was the only one that mentioned this as a disadvantage, it is worth noting considering the diversity in the country. In this situation, the “informational cocoons” Gillan (2009) mentions as an outcome of selectivity by the activists is bound to prevail. Similarly, Fenton (2008) argues that digital platforms are susceptible to civic privatism therefore explaining why *religious and ethnic sentiments* may thrive in online activism in Nigeria.

Morozov (2009) argues that the lack of familiarity with internet culture is a limitation to the ability of social media to cause socio-political change. This point was reiterated by three respondents who said that the *lack of familiarity* with social media as a platform for activism,

affected participation in the campaign. With this issue, the effectiveness of online protests in Nigeria is therefore challenged. The quote below portrays the point:

*Also, most people take social media as just for entertainment and fun, they do not believe social media can be used for serious things. So, it was difficult to persuade them to participate.* (Salome, F, 35, participant).

Another less frequent but relevant drawback mentioned is, *physical protests are taken more seriously*. The only respondent Yohanna (M, 35, organizer) who mentioned this point argued that, sometimes the government take people more seriously when the protests are physical: *“when people go out for demonstration or to demand from government and they are live and direct, it sends that signal that people are serious and ready for action.”* This is a relevant point in the Nigerian context considering that online activism is a growing phenomenon.

#### **4.4.3. Digital divide**

As discussed in the literature review, another prevalent drawback of digital activism and the new social movements is *digital divide*. Many areas specifically the rural areas are still lagging in having complete access to the internet thus, some people tend to be left out in activities that concern digital technologies (Brodock, Joyce, & Zaeck, 2009; Harlow & Harp, 2012). This issue is prevalent in Nigeria as all the respondents confirmed that the internet circulation in Nigeria is limited in some areas thus, *rural dwellers with low internet penetration* were the prominent group of people that were left out during the campaign. However, one respondent made an exception by saying that there is *minimal internet impact at the grassroots*. He argues that:

*“However, the online media is still impactful because if you have one person in a house of ten people who has a smartphone and uses social media, based on the message he receives online he extends the awareness to the other nine people.”* (Yohanna, M, 35, organizer).

Thus, it can be argued that with this little development *digital divide* in Nigeria has the potential of fading away gradually.

Similarly, *poor people* were also left out because taking part in online activism requires a smartphone with internet connection and purchase of data subscription and this can be a challenge to people with low income.



*“But the created negative effect is absence of finances to afford phone, internet, and secondly, absence of internet signal especially in outside city centers, mostly no signal.”*  
(Olumide, M, 45, organizer).

Furthermore, *digital divide* does not only concern internet access or finances, Van Deursen and van Dijk (2011) argue that participating in digital activism also needs a level of savviness or skills thus, people that lack these skills are unable to take part in an online movement. *Lack of digital skills* was present in six respondents’ replies. The quote below explains better:

*“Some people who live in the cities who have internet connection but do not know how to use the internet, or smartphones were also left out because of insufficient education”*  
(Salome, F, 35, participant).

Olorode (2014) showed in a study that most Nigerians participating in political discussions are educated. Amzat (2017) also shows in study that the rate of illiteracy in the country is high. Therefore, this observation made by the respondents affirms that digital divide is a long-standing issue in Nigeria.

One more interesting group mentioned is those with *lack of interest in social media* thus, they purposely refuse to engage in online activities. Similarly, *aged people* (1 respondent) are another group that were mentioned as part of the digital divide. As the participant recounts *“...normally the aged people, who have decided to accept a particular stereotyped of lifestyle that they cannot adapt to the lifestyle of the contemporary society.”* (Chris, M, 32, participant). This is an interesting point that is common in Nigeria because from the studies conducted on social media users in the country, most users are below the age of 50 (Olorode, 2014). Thus, proving that societal issues are translated into the online sphere. Another unexpected but relevant point mentioned by one respondent is that *traditional media informed the grassroots* therefore reducing the digital divide. However, this point still shows the lack of participation from the grassroots since the mainstream media just informed them and not mobilize them.

#### **4.4.4. Relevance of face to face connections**

Lastly, the participants emphasized the relevance of *face to face connection* in social movements because of the limitations of online connection. *More trust* than in online connection, is the most common attribute the participants mentioned about face to face connection. The quote below exemplifies the respondents’ views about face to face connections:

*“When you’ve a physical meeting, then they are decisions that you could make. Sometimes, let’s assume you want to vote and you are using the social media platforms, I might not be able to put a face to the candidate even if that candidate puts down a picture.”* (Solomon, M, 45, organizer).

This quote reflects Carty’s (2010) argument about the limitation of online connection or virtual social relations because of lack of interpersonal ties. Furthermore, because of the trust built from physical interactions, face to face connections are considered more effective in maintaining relationships (Diani, 2000; Ribeiro, 1998). Thus, it appears that for the interviewees *face to face connection* fosters trust more than in *online connection* because of physical interaction.

Furthermore, *strengthens passion and commitment* (3 respondents) is another factor that distinguishes face to face connection from online connections. The three respondents who mentioned this attribute, argued that being together physically drives one to become more involved in the campaign. As one of the three respondents recounts below:

*“Face to face connections when people come to the sit out point, when they begin to listen and understand what we are about, they begin to shed tears.... So, once you are there, you develop the passion to join the action.”* (Ali, M, 37, organizer).

This quote underscores the relevance of physical interaction in social movements. As Fisher and Boekkoi (2010) contend, face to face connection fosters a sense of commitment to the movement. Furthermore, as stated in Chapter 1 despite the high internet penetration in Nigeria digital divide is still a major issue therefore, the impact of online connection or online activism is not prominent as in developed countries. *More effective in a developing society* is another benefit of face to face interactions three respondents noted in the interviews.

*“Face to face connections are still very important because in a country like ours, most times the government tend to respond quickly when people converge and merge to any government office”* (Salome, F, 35, organizer).

Additionally, *more privacy* (4 respondents) is another feature attributed to face to face connections. As the respondents stated, the decentralized nature of online media makes it difficult for the circulation of information to be controlled.

*“I can drop a document and it may just spread so you also think about privacy.... But once you put it to the social media, you cannot guarantee the safety or confidentiality of that document anymore”* (Solomon, M, 45, organizer).

Finally, face to face connections have been regarded as a *key aspect* of social movements by the respondents. As Diani (2000) argues, virtual ties alone without physical interactions may fail to sustain a movement. One of the respondent (Peter, M, 35, organizer) describes how face to face connections have been relevant and a *key aspect* of the #Bringbackourgirls campaign since it began in 2014. To this end, the dynamics of traditional social movements such as meeting face to face are still relevant in the contemporary media saturated society (Aouragh, 2011). Also, this shows that despite the role of social media in the campaign, online and offline social movements can have a symbiotic relationship whereby they are both influential.

To conclude this theme of limitations of social media, as Cammaerts (2012) discusses, despite the opportunity structures social media offer, there are structural constraints that still abound because of mediation. As in this case, the state was keen on shutting the activists up to save their image. And the fact that these participants are visible on social media made them susceptible to be confronted. Lastly, this also shows how the impact of social media visibility to activists works in two ways by empowering and disempowering them at the same time. Also, the participants showed that power of social media was limited in the #Bringbackourgirls campaign through exclusion of other citizens who are underprivileged or unskilled. Lastly, the emphasis laid on the relevance of face to face connections also show how the respondents are skeptical of the effectiveness of online connections.

## 5. Conclusion

The general conclusion of this study which examined the perception of social mobilizers during the #Bringbackourgirls campaign is that the participants are ambiguous on the political power of social media. They acknowledge the advantages of social media in the campaign, but they are also aware of its limitations. The participants regarded social media as a platform capable of pressurizing the Nigerian government to act, as well as a platform to inform and create awareness about the motive of the campaign. As stated earlier, at the beginning the Nigerian government's attitude towards the insurgency problem was not encouraging. Thus, this explains the participants' reliance on social media to propel the action. The results also show that social media contributed to transcend geographical and societal differences. It also gave the basis to form a collective identity supportive of protest action, against the government's relaxed attitude towards the insurgency problem. In this way, social mobilizers used social media as the foundation for the articulation of grievance, and a resource to create a collective action that helped a protest movement which resulted into galvanizing attention about the abduction of the girls. Considering the nature of Nigeria as a multicultural society, the findings suggest how social media through digital activism provide platforms that foster unity and sense of collective identity.

Concerning the limitations of social media, the participants mentioned digital divide, the spread of false information, retaliation from the government, slacktivism as factors that affected the power of social media during the campaign. Considering the status of Nigeria as a developing nation, digital divide was an expected drawback that affects the political power of social media. The stance of the participants towards the power of social media echo the discussions in the literature review. Indeed, social media is impactful on social movements. However, there are still factors that limit the ability of social media to cause political or social change. As in the case of Nigeria, factors such as the influence of government or elites and digital divide are the most prominent limitations. To this end, the extent to which social media can influence political change is dependent on the environment.

Regarding the implications of this study, the emphasis laid on how social media enabled connection and strengthened collective action suggests the potential of online protest in Nigeria. Also, the fact that differences were set aside, and a collective identity was created implies that online activism is bound to be useful in a large society. Previous research show that shared

grievances is fundamental to the formation of collective identity in a protest (Garett, 2012; Nip, 2012). This factor explains why diversity was made insignificant during the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign. Thus, if citizens are confronted with a common problem, they are likely to come together to seek solutions. Furthermore, looking at the aims of using social media mentioned by the respondents confirm that social media is still viewed as a liberation technology capable of causing socio-political change despite the contrary arguments against the power of social media (Diamond, 2010). The political state of Nigeria (democracy) could be attributed to why the participants acknowledge the political power of social media. Additionally, the effects of social media on the Nigerian mainstream media show how consumption and general media dynamics are changing in the country.

Furthermore, the prominence of digital divide implies that the effectiveness of next online campaigns in Nigeria is likely to be affected by the same problem measures are not put into place to tackle digital divide. On the other hand, the emphasis on the benefits of social media despite the problem of digital divide suggests the potential of online activism to thrive in Nigeria. Another prominent limitation faced by the participants as visible targets to threats show the role of social media as double-edged in the sense that it empowers and disempowers because of visibility.

To conclude, these findings also have implications for mobilizers and participants in online protests. It can help them understand how to mobilize and connect with people, create awareness and how to utilize social media platforms for protests. The benefits and limitations of social media in the campaign stated by the participants describe the opportunity structures and structural constraints determining the success of online activism in Nigeria. The study also fills a gap in academic research by presenting the role of social media in activism from the context of the non-western and developing world. Regardless of the context, it also contributes to theoretical arguments about the potential of social media to cause socio-political change.

### **5.1. Limitations of study**

One of the significant limitations of this study is that because the interviews were mediated, there was no opportunity to observe verbal cues. And in seven of the interviews there were internet connection problems, so we had to resort to the chat option or direct phone call. Also, with face to face interviews, the researcher would have more opportunity for probing the participants. Furthermore, the research suggests gender bias because, among the eleven interviewees, only

one is female. Including more females could give different perspectives on how they understand the political power of social media, considering how social inequality which prioritizes men over women is prevalent in Nigeria. Besides, considering the massive attention the campaign generated, the number of participants interviewed in this study is small. And most of the respondents interviewed were organizers; thus, the perceptions of those who played the role of participants towards social media is not sufficiently covered. Notwithstanding these limitations, the study yielded fruitful results that give a new dimension to the role of social media during the *#Bringbackourgirls* campaign. The collaborations between different ethnic groups and individuals in the campaign, show the ability of social media in fostering unity and collective identity in a multiethnic society like Nigeria. Also, despite the common limitations like digital divide, the respondents' emphasis on the benefits of social media in the campaign suggests how social media is gradually transforming movements in Nigeria.

## **5.2. Recommendations for future research**

Future research could also do a comparable study between the two prominent activism platforms in Nigeria, Facebook and Twitter to examine how mobilizing people on the two platforms differ. In addition, it will be interesting to compare mobilization of people on digital technologies and without digital technologies. It will also be fruitful to look at whether other online campaigns in Nigeria fostered a strong collective identity, or if forming a collective identity depends on the type of social movement. Furthermore, although this study touched upon the area briefly, future studies could look further into the effects of online activism on the mainstream media in Nigeria. Additionally, assessing whether other Nigerian online campaigns translate to offline protests will also be interesting.

This study revealed that although digital divide is acknowledged, the participants laid more emphasis on the advantages of social media in the campaign than the limitations. Thus, future research could look at why online activism appears to be thriving despite the presence of digital divide. Although lack of familiarity with online activism was not a prominent limitation highlighted by all the respondents, examining how and if Nigerians' familiarity with online activism is changing will add more insight to the potential of social media to cause socio-political changes in the country.

## References

- Aday, S., Farrell, H., Freelon, D., Lynch, M., Sides, J., & Dewar, M. (2013). Watching from afar: Media consumption patterns around the Arab Spring. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 57(7), 899-919. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764213479373>
- Aderibigbe, N. (2014, December 2014). Nigeria leads internet usage in Africa. *Ventures*. Retrieved from <http://venturesafrica.com/nigeria-leads-internet-usage-in-africa/>
- Adeyeye, M., & Iweha, C. C. (2005). Towards an effective national policy on information and communication technologies for Nigeria. *Information Development*, 21(3), 202-208. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666905057337>
- Aluko, O., & Akinloye, B. (2017, May 7). FG swaps 82 Chibok girls with Boko Haram prisoners. *Punch*. Retrieved from <http://punchng.com/fg-swaps-82-chibok-girls-with-boko-haram-prisoners/>
- Anduiza, E., Cantijoch, M., & Gallego, A. (2009). Political participation and the Internet: A field essay. *Information, Communication & Society*, 12(6), 860-878. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180802282720>
- Aouragh, M. (2008). Everyday resistance on the Internet: The Palestinian context. *Journal of Arab & Muslim Media Research*, 1(2), 109-130. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr.1.2.109\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jammr.1.2.109_1)
- Ayobade, D. (2015). Re/Reading Spectacles: Historicizing the Occupy Nigeria Movement. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 5(24), 61-65. Retrieved from <http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/27797>
- Bachan, L., Cobb, C., Fiore, A., Lieskovsky, M., & Paris, L. (2015). Internet Access, Usage, and Aspirations: A Case Study from Nigeria. 1-9. Retrieved from [https://paa.confex.com/paa/2016/mediafile/ExtendedAbstract/Paper7572/PAA2016\\_Bachan%20et%20al.pdf](https://paa.confex.com/paa/2016/mediafile/ExtendedAbstract/Paper7572/PAA2016_Bachan%20et%20al.pdf)
- Bakardijeva, M., Felt, M. & Dumitrica, D. (2018). The mediatization of leadership: Grassroots digital facilitators as organic intellectuals, sociometric stars and caretakers. *Information, Communication & Society*, 21(6), 899-914. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1434556>
- Bastos, M. T., da Cunha Recuero, R., & da Silva Zago, G. (2014). Taking tweets to the streets: A spatial analysis of the Vinegar Protests in Brazil. *First Monday*, 19(3). Retrieved from <http://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/5227/3843>

- BBC Trending. (2014, April 15). #BBCTrending: Lessons from Nigeria on social media activism. *BBC*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-27026755>
- Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual review of sociology*, 26(1), 611-639.  
doi/abs/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611
- Benkler, Y. (2006). *The wealth of networks: How social production transforms markets and freedom*. Yale University Press.
- Bennett, W. L. (2003). New media power. Contesting media power. In Couldry, N. and Curran, J. (Eds.). *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World* (pp. 17-37). Rowman and Littlefield: London.
- Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(5), 739-768. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661>.
- Boeije, H. (2010). Doing qualitative analysis. In H. Boeije, *Analysis in qualitative research* (pp. 93-121). London: Sage Publications.
- Bonchek, M. S. (1997). From broadcast to net cast: the Internet and the flow of political information, PhD dissertation, Department of Political Science, Harvard University
- Bosch, T. (2017). Twitter activism and youth in South Africa: The case of #RhodesMustFall. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(2), 221-232.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1162829>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. Retrieved from  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brewerton, P. and Millward, L. (2001). *Organizational Research Methods: A Guide for Students and Researchers*. Sage: London.
- Brinkmann, S. (2014). *Interview*. In Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology (pp. 1008-1010). Springer New York.
- Brodock, J. (2010). Economic and social factors: The digital (activism) divide. In Mary, J. (Eds.) *Digital activism decoded* (pp. 71-85). IDEA: New York.



- Brodock, K., Joyce, M., & Zaeck, T. (2009). Digital activism survey report 2009. *Creative Commons*. Retrieved from [http://www.digiactive.org/wpcontent/uploads/Research4\\_SurveyReport2009.pdf](http://www.digiactive.org/wpcontent/uploads/Research4_SurveyReport2009.pdf) Stand, 22.
- Breuer, A., Landman, T., & Farquhar, D. (2015). Social media and protest mobilization: Evidence from the Tunisian revolution. *Democratization*, 22(4), 764-792. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2014.885505>
- Bruns, A. (2008). *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and beyond: From production to produsage*. Peter Lang
- Cabaroglu N, Basaran, S, & Roberts, J. (2010) A comparison between the occurrence of pauses, repetitions and recasts under conditions of face-to-face and computer-mediated communication: a preliminary study. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology*, 9(2): 4–23. Retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/openview/bac1a20cb696ff955588f2410d117224/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=1576361>
- Cachia, M., & Millward, L. (2011). The telephone medium and semi-structured interviews: a complementary fit. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 6(3), 265-277. Doi: 10.1108/2F17465641111188420
- Cammaerts, B. (2012). Protest logics and the mediation opportunity structure. *European journal of communication*, 27(2), 117-134. DOI: 10.1177/0267323112441007
- Cardoso, G., & Neto, P. P. (2004). *Mass media driven mobilization and online protest: ICTs and the pro-East Timor movement in Portugal*. na.
- Carty, V. (2010). New information communication technologies and grassroots mobilization. *Information, Communication & Society*, 13(2), 155-173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180902915658>
- Carty, V., & Onyett, J. (2006). Protest, cyberactivism and new social movements: The reemergence of the peace movement post 9/11. *Social Movement Studies*, 5(3), 229-249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742830600991586>
- Castells, M. (1997). *Power of identity: The information age: Economy, society, and culture*. Blackwell Publishers, Inc.
- Castells M (2001). *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Castells, M. (2012). Space of flows, space of places: Materials for a theory of urbanism in the information age. In *Comparative planning cultures* (pp. 69-88). Routledge.
- Castells, M. (2015). *Networks of outrage and hope: Social movements in the Internet age*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Castells, M., Fernandez-Ardevol, M., Qiu, J. L., & Sey, A. (2009). *Mobile communication and society: A global perspective*. Mit Press.
- Chiluwa, I. (2015). Occupy Nigeria 2012: A critical analysis of *Facebook* posts in the fuel subsidy removal protests. *CLINA, 1*, 47–69. Retrieved from <http://revistas.usal.es/index.php/clina/article/view/12897>
- Chiluwa, I., & Ifukor, P. (2015). ‘War against our Children’: Stance and evaluation in #BringBackOurGirls campaign discourse on Twitter and Facebook. *Discourse & Society, 26*(3), 267-296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926514564735>
- Chiluwa, I., & Odebunmi, A. (2016). On terrorist attacks in Nigeria: Stance and engagement in conversations on Nairaland. *Communication and the Public, 1*(1), 91-109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057047315624926>
- Christensen, H. S. (2011). Political activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or political participation by other means?. *First Monday, 16*(2). [doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v16i2.3336](http://dx.doi.org/10.5210/fm.v16i2.3336).
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology, 13*(1), 3-21. doi:10.1007/BF00988593
- Deakin, H., & Wakefield, K. (2014). Skype interviewing: Reflections of two PhD researchers. *Qualitative research, 14*(5), 603-616. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794113488126>
- Denscombe, M. (2003). *The Good Research Guide*. Maidenhead: Open University Press
- DeLuca, K. M., Lawson, S., & Sun, Y. (2012). Occupy Wall Street on the public screens of social media: The many framings of the birth of a protest movement. *Communication, Culture & Critique, 5*(4), 483-509. DOI: 10.1111/j.1753-9137.2012.01141.x
- Diamond, L. (2010). Liberation technology. *Journal of Democracy, 21*(3), 69-83. doi:10.1353/jod.0.0190
- Diani, M. (1992). The concept of social movement. *The sociological review, 40*(1), 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1992.tb02943.x>

- Diani, M. (2000). Social movement networks virtual and real. *Information, Communication & Society*, 3(3), 386-401. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180051033333>
- DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical education*, 40(4), 314-321. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x>
- Downing, J. (2008). Social movement theories and alternative media: An evaluation and critique. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 1(1), 40-50. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2007.00005.x>
- Emmanuel, O. (2014, April 10). SSS keeps mum as anger mounts over whereabouts of man who tweeted pictures of gun battle at SSS headquarters. *Premium Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/158482-sss-keeps-mum-as-anger-mounts-over-whereabouts-of-man-who-tweeted-pictures-of-gunbattle-at-sss-headquarters.html>
- Farr, R.M. (1984), "Interviewing: the social psychology of the inter-view", in Copper, C.L. and Makin, P. (Eds.). *Psychology for Managers* (pp. 182-200). Macmillan and British Psychological Association: London.
- Fenton, N. (2008). Mediating hope: New media, politics and resistance. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 11(2), 230-248. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877908089266>
- Fisher, D. R., & Boekkooi, M. (2010). Mobilizing Friends and Strangers: Understanding the role of the Internet in the Step It Up day of action. *Information, Communication & Society*, 13(2), 193-208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180902878385>
- George, J., & Leidner, D. (2018). Digital Activism: a Hierarchy of Political Commitment. In *Proceedings of the 51st Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*. 2299-2208. Retrieved from <https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/50176>
- Gerbaudo, P. (2012). *Tweets and the streets: Social media and contemporary activism*. Pluto Press: London.
- Gillan, K. (2009). The UK anti-war movement online: uses and limitations of internet technologies for contemporary activism. *Information, Communication & Society*, 12(1), 25-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180802158532>
- Gilbert, N. (Ed.). (2008). *Researching social life*. London: Sage Publications.
- Gladwell, M. (2010). Small change. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell>

- Glaisyer, T. (2010). Political factors: Digital activism in closed and open societies. In Mary, J. (Eds.). *Digital activism decoded* (pp. 85-98). IDEA: New York.
- Habermas, J. (1989). The structural transformation of the public sphere, trans. Thomas Burger. *Cambridge: MIT Press*, 85, 85-92.
- Hanna, P. (2012). Using internet technologies (such as Skype) as a research medium: A research note. *Qualitative Research*, 12(2), 239-242. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794111426607>
- Hands, J. (2011). *@ is for activism: Dissent, resistance and rebellion in a digital culture*. Pluto Press: London.
- Hari, S. I. (2014). The evolution of social protest in Nigeria: The role of social media in the “# OccupyNigeria” protest. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 3(9), 33-39.
- Harlow, S. (2012). Social media and social movements: Facebook and an online Guatemalan justice movement that moved offline. *New Media & Society*, 14(2), 225-243. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811410408>
- Harlow, S., & Harp, D. (2012). Collective action on the Web: A cross-cultural study of social networking sites and online and offline activism in the United States and Latin America. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15(2), 196-216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.591411>
- Hassanpour, N. (2014). Media disruption and revolutionary unrest: Evidence from mubarak's quasi-experiment. *Political Communication*, 31(1), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2012.737439>
- Hay-Gibson NV (2009) Interviews via VoIP: benefits and disadvantages within a PhD study of SMEs. *Library and Information Research*, 33(105), 39–50. Retrieved from <http://www.lirjournal.org.uk/lir/ojs/index.php/lir/article/view/111>
- Hindman, M. (2008). *The myth of digital democracy*. Princeton University Press.
- Howard, P. N., & Hussain, M. M. (2011). The role of digital media. *Journal of democracy*, 22(3), 35-48. doi:10.1353/jod.2011.0041
- Howard, P. N., Duffy, A., Freelon, D., Hussain, M. M., Mari, W., & Maziad, M. (2011). Opening closed regimes: what was the role of social media during the Arab Spring?. *Project on Information Technology and Political Islam*, 1(1), 1-30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2595096>

- Hsieh, H. F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative health research, 15*(9), 1277-1288.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
- Imig, D. R., & Tarrow, S. G. (Eds.). (2001). *Contentious Europeans: Protest and politics in an emerging polity*. Rowman & Littlefield: New York.
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. NYU press.
- Jenkins, H. (2012, November 1). The new political commons. *Policy Options*. Retrieved from <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/come-together/jenkins/>
- Jelili, G. (2017, September 26). “#BringBackOurGirls: How online activism had helped in achieving a good course”. *Decoding Digital Activism*. Retrieved from <http://wpmu.mah.se/nmict172group6/2017/09/26/bringbackourgirls-online-activism-helped-achieving-good-course/>
- Joffe, H. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H, David & T, Andrew (Eds.). *Qualitative research methods in mental health and psychotherapy: A guide for students and practitioners* (pp. 209-223). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Joffe, H., & Yardley, L. (2004). Content and thematic analysis. In M, Davids, F, & Y, Lucy. *Research methods for clinical and health psychology* (pp. 56-69). Sage Publications.
- Joyce, M. C. (2010). *Digital activism decoded: The new mechanics of change*. IDEA: New York.
- Jungherr, A., & Jürgens, P. (2013). Forecasting the pulse: how deviations from regular patterns in online data can identify offline phenomena. *Internet Research, 23*(5), 589-607.
- Juris, J. S. (2012). Reflections on # Occupy Everywhere: Social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation. *American Ethnologist, 39*(2), 259-279.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2012.01362.x>
- Kelly Garrett, R. (2006). Protest in an information society: A review of literature on social movements and new ICTs. *Information, communication & society, 9*(02), 202-224.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180600630773>
- Kidd, D., & McIntosh, K. (2016). Social media and social movements. *Sociology Compass, 10*9, 785-794. 10.1111/soc4.12399

- Kvale, S. (1983). The qualitative research interview: A phenomenological and a hermeneutical mode of understanding. *Journal of phenomenological psychology, 14*(2), 171.  
doi: 10.1163/156916283X00090
- Labinjoh, J. (1982). Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: Protest music and social processes in Nigeria. *Journal of Black Studies, 13*(1), 119-134. doi: 10.1177/002193478201300109
- Langman, L. (2005). From virtual public spheres to global justice: A critical theory of internetworked social movements. *Sociological theory, 23*(1), 42-74.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0735-2751.2005.00242.x>
- Lim, M. (2012). Clicks, cabs, and coffee houses: Social media and oppositional movements in Egypt, 2004–2011. *Journal of communication, 62*(2), 231-248. DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01628.x
- Loader, B. D., & Mercea, D. (2011). Networking democracy? Social media innovations and participatory politics. *Information, Communication & Society, 14*(6), 757-769.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.592648>
- Longhurst, R. (2003). Semi-structured interviews and focus groups. In N, Clifford, M, Cope, T, Gillespie, & S, French (Eds.). *Key methods in geography* (pp. 117-132). London: Sage Publications.
- Lotan, G. (2011) “Data Reveals That "Occupying" Twitter Trending Topics is Harder Than it Looks!” SocialFlow, 12 October 2011. Accessed on September 10, 2013.  
<http://blog.socialflow.com/post/7120244374/data-reveals-that-occupying-twitter-trendingtopics-is-harder-than-it-looks>
- Marmura, S. (2008). A net advantage? The internet, grassroots activism and American Middle-Eastern policy. *New Media & Society, 10*(2), 247-271.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444807086469>
- Marullo, S., & Meyer, D. S. (2004). Antiwar and peace movements. *The Blackwell companion to social movements, 641-665*. <http://voidnetwork.gr/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/The-Blackwell-Companion-to-Social-Movements-Edited-by-David-A.-Snow-Sarah-A.-Soule-and-Hanspeter-Kriesi.pdf#page=650>
- Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. In *Forum qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: qualitative social research 11*(3), 1-19. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-11.3.1428>

- Matt, C. (2014, May 9). #BringBackOurGirls: the power of a social media campaign. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/voluntary-sector-network/2014/may/09/bringbackourgirls-power-of-social-media>
- Matfess, H. (2015, December 9). Nigeria's social media bill follows a trend of African governments keeping tabs on civil society. *Quartz Africa*. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/569372/nigerias-social-media-bill-follows-a-trend-of-african-governments-keeping-tabs-on-civil-society/>
- McLeod, D. M., & Detenber, B. H. (1999). Framing effects of television news coverage of social protest. *Journal of communication*, 49(3), 3-23. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02802.x>
- Meikle, G. (2014). *Future active: Media activism and the Internet*. Routledge: New York.
- Melki, J., & Mallat, S. (2014). Digital activism: Efficacies and burdens of social media for civic activism. *Arab Media and Society*, 1-15. Retrieved from <https://www.tasharuk.net/resources/files/1438761358MelkiMallatDigitalActivismFinal.pdf>.
- Morozov, E. (2009, September 5). From slacktivism to activism. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <http://foreignpolicy.com/2009/09/05/from-slacktivism-to-activism/>
- Morozov, E. (2009). Iran: Downside to the "twitter revolution". *Dissent*, 56(4), 10-14. doi:10.1353/dss.0.0092
- Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: How not to liberate the world*. Penguin UK.
- Nip, J. Y. (2004). The queer sisters and its electronic bulletin board: A study of the Internet for social movement mobilization. *Information, Communication & Society*, 7(1), 23-49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118042000208889>
- O'Connor, H., Madge, C., Shaw, R. & Wellens, J. (2008). Internet-based interviewing. In Fielding, N., Lee, R. M. & Blank, G (Eds.). *The SAGE handbook of online research methods* (pp. 271-289): SAGE Publications Ltd. DOI: 10.4135/9780857020055.
- Odoemelam, A., & Chibuwe (2011). Social media, electioneering and sustenance of democracy in Africa: A SWOT analysis. A paper presented at the African Media and Democracy Conference (AMDC), Accra: Ghana.

- Okoro, N., & Nwafor, K. A. (2013). Social media and political participation in Nigeria during the 2011 general elections: The lapses and the lessons. *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(3), 29-46.
- Olayode, K. (2011). Ethno-nationalist movements and political mobilisation in Africa: The Nigeria experience (1990-2003). *Stichproben. Vienna Journal of African Studies*, 20, 69-93.
- Olorode, O, S. (2014). *A comparative analysis of the use of social media by "People's Democratic Party and All Progressive Congress" during the 2011 general election in Nigeria* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from [https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10413/13066/Olorode\\_Sumbo\\_Oluwakemi\\_2014.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10413/13066/Olorode_Sumbo_Oluwakemi_2014.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
- Olorunnisola, A. A., & Martin, B. L. (2013). Influences of media on social movements: Problematizing hyperbolic inferences about impacts. *Telematics and Informatics*, 30(3), 275-288. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2012.02.005>
- Opdenakker, R. (2006). Advantages and disadvantages of four interview techniques in qualitative research. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 7(4), 1-13. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-7.4.175>
- Opp, K.-D. (2009). *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis*, Routledge, London.
- Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., & Wynaden, D. (2001). Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of nursing scholarship*, 33(1), 93-96. DOI: 10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00093.x
- Ott, B. L. (2017). The age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the politics of debasement. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34(1), 59-68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2016.1266686>
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533-544. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>



- Papacharissi, Z., & de Fatima Oliveira, M. (2012). Affective news and networked publics: The rhythms of news storytelling on# Egypt. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), 266-282. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01630.x>
- Pew Research Center (2015, April 15). Cell phones in Africa: Communication lifeline. *Global Attitudes & Trends*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/04/15/cell-phones-in-africa-communication-lifeline/>
- Poell, T., & Borra, E. (2012). Twitter, YouTube, and Flickr as platforms of alternative journalism: The social media account of the 2010 Toronto G20 protests. *Journalism*, 13(6), 695-713. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911431533>
- Poell, T., & van Dijck, J. (2015). Social Media and Activist Communication. In Atton, C. (Eds.). *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media* (pp. 527-537). London: Routledge
- Police arrest ex-Minister, Oby Ezekwesili. (2018, January 23). Premium Times. Retrieved from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/256437-police-arrest-ex-minister-oby-ezekwesili.html>
- Postmes, T., & Brunsting, S. (2002). Collective action in the age of the Internet: Mass communication and online mobilization. *Social Science Computer Review*, 20(3), 290-301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089443930202000306>
- Ribeiro, G. L. (1998). Cybercultural politics: political activism at a distance in a transnational world. *Série Antropologia*, 212.
- Robins-Early, N. (2015, April 14). Remember #BringBackOurGirls? This is what has happened in the 12 months since. Huffington Post. Retrieved from [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/14/bringbackourgirls-one-year-anniversary\\_n\\_7056592.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/04/14/bringbackourgirls-one-year-anniversary_n_7056592.html)
- Rolfe, B. (2005). Building an electronic repertoire of contention. *Social Movement Studies*, 4(1), 65-74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742830500051945>
- Salah Fahmi, W. (2009). Bloggers' street movement and the right to the city.(Re) claiming Cairo's real and virtual "spaces of freedom". *Environment and urbanization*, 21(1), 89-107. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956247809103006>

- Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2000). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of communication*, 50(2), 93-109. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02843.x
- Senate withdraws anti-social media bill. (2016, May 17). *Vanguard*.  
<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/05/senate-withdraws-frivolous-petitions-bill/>
- Shearlow, M. (2015, April 14). Did the #bringbackourgirls campaign make a difference in Nigeria? *The Guardian*. Retrieved from  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/14/nigeria-bringbackourgirls-campaign-one-year-on>
- Shigetomi, S. (2009). *Protest and social movements in the developing world*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Shirky, C. (2011). The political power of social media: Technology, the public sphere, and political change. *Foreign Affairs*, 90(1), 28-41. Retrieved from  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25800379>
- Siegel, D. A. (2011). When does repression work? collective action in social networks. *The Journal of Politics*, 73(4), 993-1010. Doi: 10.1017/S0022381611000727
- Smith, J. (2001). Globalizing resistance: The battle of Seattle and the future of social movements. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, 6(1), 1-19.  
[mobilizationjournal.org/doi/abs/10.17813/mai.q.6.1.y63133434t8vq608?code=hjdm-site](http://mobilizationjournal.org/doi/abs/10.17813/mai.q.6.1.y63133434t8vq608?code=hjdm-site)
- Smith-Stoner, M. & Weber, T. (2000). *Developing theory using emergent inquiry: a study of meaningful online learning for women* (PhD Thesis). California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, CA.
- Sullivan, J. R. (2012). Skype: An appropriate method of data collection for qualitative interviews? *The Hilltop Review*, 6(1), 53-60.  
<http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/hilltopreview/vol6/iss1/10>
- Taylor, V., Whittier, N., Morris, A. D., & Mueller, C. M. (1992). Collective identity in social movement communities: Lesbian feminist mobilization. In Aldon, D. M. and Carol, M. M. (Eds.). *Frontiers in social movement theory* (pp. 349-365). New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Tilly, C. (1978). Collective violence in European perspective. *Univeristy of Michigan*. 1-68.
- Tilly, C. (2005). *Social Movements, 1768-2004*. Paradigm Publishers.

- Tuckett, A. (2004). Qualitative research sampling: the very real complexities. *Nurse Researcher (through 2013)*, 12(1), 47.  
<https://search.proquest.com/openview/6c16c8fc5f577d36c9e5986f58015865/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=33100>
- Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing & health sciences*, 15(3), 398-405. DOI: 10.1111/nhs.12048
- Valenzuela, S., Arriagada, A., & Scherman, A. (2012). The social media basis of youth protest behavior: The case of Chile. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), 299-314.  
DOI: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01635.x
- Van Aelst, P., & Walgrave, S. (2002). New media, new movements? The role of the internet in shaping the 'anti-globalization' movement. *Information, Communication & Society*, 5(4), 465-493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691180208538801ss>
- Van De Donk, W., Loader, B. D., Nixon, P. G., & Rucht, D. (Eds.). (2004). *Cyberprotest: New media, citizens and social movements*. Routledge.
- Van Laer, J., & Van Aelst, P. (2009). Cyber-protest and civil society: the Internet and action repertoires in social movements. In Jewkes, Y and Yar, M. (Eds.). (pp. 255-272). *Handbook on internet crime*. Routledge: New York.
- Vasi, I. B., & Suh, C. S. (2013, February). Protest in the internet age: Public attention, social media, and the spread of 'Occupy' protests in the United States. *Politics and Protest workshop*, 13(1), 1-52. Retrieved from <http://www.politicsandprotest.ws.gc.cuny.edu/files/2012/07/PPW-2-Vasi.pdf>

## **Appendix A: Interview questions**

### **Involvement in the campaign and activist background:**

1. When did you join the *#bringbackourgirls* campaign and why?
2. Before then, have you had any experience with activism?
3. What about online activism? Because one of the major feature of the *bbog* campaign is the use of social media.
4. Were you active on social media before the emergence of the campaign? (asking this question depended on the answer to question no. 3).
  - a. (active here means engaging in political and societal issues)

### **Social media use in the campaign**

5. Tell me about your use of social media during this campaign: How did the platforms to mobilize people?
6. Did you have any strategy guiding your use of social media in the campaign?
7. What were you hoping to achieve with the help of social media?
8. How were you able to connect with regular people using social media?
  - a. What other actions did you engage in for the campaign?
9. Many activists felt traditional media were reluctant to cover the story of the abduction of the girls. Do you think online action, including people like you, had any effect on the traditional media?
10. What do you think about the online connections you have built with other people while using social media for this campaign? How useful are they for collective action – that is, citizens doing something together to pressure the government into action?
11. What about the difference between online connections and face to face connections. Are face to face connections needed for collective action? If so, why?

### **Influence of social media on offline social movement**

12. Apart from the online campaign, there were offline protests as well. Were you engaged with these protests in any way?
  - a. If yes, then did social media help you get engaged with these protests in any way?

### **Advantages & disadvantages of social media in the campaign**

13. What are the advantages of social media in the campaign?

**14.** What about disadvantages?

- a.** Studies reveal that Nigeria is among the top 25 countries with high internet penetration. However, the country is still developing which means not everyone have the means to use the internet. Do you think there were people that were left out of the campaign because of digital divide?
- b.** Considering how popular you are online; did you ever feel vulnerable to the influence of the state and societal elites? In what ways?

**15.** Nigeria is a very diverse country. Do you think this diversity played out online in any way?

- a.** Did you see collaborations and exchanges across cultural groups? Did you get involved in building such collaborations?

## **Consent request for participating in research**

### **FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:**

[Wachikma Mshelia, wachikma@gmail.com]

### **DESCRIPTION**

You<sup>1</sup> are invited to participate in a research about political power of digital technologies in Nigeria. The purpose of the study is to understand how social mobilizers who participated in the 2014 *#bringbackourgirls* campaign consider the political power of social media.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions will be related to how you used social media to mobilize people during the *#bringbackourgirls* campaign.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape recorder for the interview. You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

A. I am aware that the possibility of identifying the people who participate in this study may involve risks for revealing personal information. For that reason—unless you prefer to be identified fully (first name, last name, occupation, etc.)—I will not keep any information that may lead to the identification of those involved in the study. I will only pseudonyms to identify participants.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications

### **TIME INVOLVEMENT**

Your participation in this study will take 45-60 You may interrupt your participation at any time.

### **PAYMENTS**

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

### **PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS**

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any

---

time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

### **CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS**

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish my supervisor, Dr. Delia Dumitrica (dumitrica@eshcc.eur.nl).

### **SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM**

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name	Signature	Date
------	-----------	------

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name	Signature	Date
------	-----------	------

## Appendix B: Codebook

Selective codes	Axial codes	Exemplar open codes	Frequency
<b>Wanting to make a difference</b>	Compel government	Pressure the government	5
		Disappointed at government's incompetence	5
	Empathy	Help the victims	6
		Attract attention	5
	Relationship with victims	Relationship with victims	2
	Influence of international celebrity	Post of international celebrity	1
<b>Social media use</b>	Aims	Inform people	9
		Make the story viral	6
		Reach influential people and nations for support	7
		Expose the wrongdoings of the government	5
		Pressure the government	3
		Mobilize people	5
		Credibly factual, share truthful and objective information	3
	Strategies	Share messages/private message discussions	5
		Create groups	2
		Share posts	3
		Send and accept friend requests	6
		Create and share campaign statements in groups	3
		Tweets/retweets & follow	6



		Live videos and posts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram during offline protest	3
		Use of the campaign hashtag	6
<b>Benefits of social media</b>	Connection	Easy and cheap connection	11
		Less risk	7
		Cheap/requires few resources for mobilization	8
		Connection with good mentors	2
		Effective in a large society	1
		Collapse of time and distance	8
	Support	inspired people to become part of movement	4
		Incited support locally and internationally/	3
		More attention on grassroots	5
	Watchdog	Opportunity to demand for accountability	3
	Collective identity	Blurred diversity in online activism	11
		Oneness and unity	7
		Peaceful coexistence	1
		Harnessing of ideas	1
		Stronger relationships	7
		Campaign slogans against divisiveness	2
		Strong for political movement	3
		Alignment of visions	1

	Usefulness of online collective action	Compelling on government	7
		Potent tool to demand for transparency and accountability	3
		Unites citizens	3
	Impact of social media on offline movements	Attracted more participants	7
		Information and organization tool	3
		More awareness through twitter posts, hashtags and Facebook posts	3
	Effects of social media on traditional media	Reliance on social media/ international media for credible information	4
		No connection with grassroots	3
		Politicized coverage	4
		Pressure to align with social media	4
		Collaboration between old and new media	1
	Challenges faced by activists	Spread of false information/propaganda threatens credibility of online activists	8
		Attacks/backlash mostly from fake accounts	4
		Visible target to threats	3
		Susceptible to mistakes and unfair judgement on activists	1
Threat messages		10	
Bribery		1	

<b>Limitations of social media</b>		Harassment offline	4
	Other drawbacks	Lack of familiarity with online activism	2
		Online drive does not often translate to offline	2
		Religious and ethnic sentiments	1
		less awareness at the grassroots level	1
		Physical protests taken more seriously	1
		Digital divide	Rural dwellers with low internet penetration
	Poor people		11
	Lack of digital skills		6
	Lack of interest in social media		3
	Aged people		1
	Traditional media informed the grassroots		1
	Relevance of face to face connection	More trust	10
		Strengthens passion and commitment	3
		More effective in a developing world	3
		More privacy	4
		Inclusive	4
		A key aspect	1