

The Digital Public Sphere in Nigeria: A Review of Politeness, Dissent, and Identity in Online Comment Sections

Ife Ajepe

Afe Babalola University Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

Email: ifeajepe@abuad.edu.ng

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Abstract

This paper presents a systematic review of the growing body of scholarship on the Nigerian digital public sphere, with particular attention to three analytically intertwined dimensions: politeness and linguistic incivility, dissent and counter-hegemonic mobilisation, and identity construction and ethnic polarisation. Drawing on the PRISMA framework, the review synthesises approximately 92 peer-reviewed studies published between 2015 and 2026, sourced from platforms including X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, TikTok, and Nairaland. The paper interrogates the adequacy of Habermasian models of rational-critical discourse when applied to postcolonial, multi-ethnic, and economically stratified digital environments. The review finds that Nigerian online comment sections simultaneously enable grassroots civic resistance and reinforce ethno-religious division, functioning neither as straightforward democratic public spheres nor as simple arenas of noise and disorder. Rather, they constitute what this paper terms a hybrid sphere, a contested communicative terrain in which identity performs, politeness is weaponised, and dissent is always already entangled with belonging. The paper concludes by identifying critical gaps in the literature, particularly around TikTok comment discourse and WhatsApp political communication, and calls for more mixed-method and computationally grounded approaches to the study of Nigerian digital publics.

Keywords: *Nigerian digital public sphere, online politeness, political dissent, ethnic identity, social media, discourse analysis*

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the Nigerian political communication landscape has been radically transformed. As the legacy media gradually lost its monopoly on public conversation, and the mobile internet infrastructure was expanded, a new communicative space emerged-decentralised, participatory, and set in stone by the affordances of social media. If the realms of political debate were once relegated to broadcast television, national newspapers, and state radio, the realms of public contest, performativity, and negotiation are now imagined primarily in comment sections, forum threads, and viral hashtags (Uwalaka & Nwala, 2023, N., et al., 2025).

This said, the form varies greatly depending on their hosting platform as each public sphere-be it Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Nairaland, or TikTok, has been structured quite uniquely over time to accommodate different audiences in globalized Nigeria. X (formerly Twitter), has remained politically hegemonized by state-sponsored political elites, journalists, and the urban educated youth, and tends to be fast-paced, frank, and liberal in terms of expression, with an increasing institutionalization of the performance (and performance-degradation) of dragging the public-

humiliating publicly the person, politics, or ideology in question (Obia, 2023). Facebook, on the other hand, has become more geographically dispersed across Nigeria, spreading more thinly over time to have sometimes localized communities based on ethno-regional partisanship expressed by the commentary threads underneath news media and community pages (Onoja et al., 2022; Sanda & Targema, 2022).



Statista. (2024). Social media usage and digital ecosystem.

Nairaland is perhaps most uniquely poised as an organism of pseudonymous collection of nationwide opinion, a carrel for nearly twenty years of electoral politics, ethnic tension, religious controversy, popular culture, and the like playing out in major growth zones of the internet from everyday Nigeria (Waziri, 2025; Oyadiji, 2020). TikTok, meanwhile, is arguably still nascent—though perhaps no less fascinating as the more youthful Nigeria leans more heavily on image-based memes, vernacular music, joke-based humor, or video parodies to deliver political, cultural, and economic bites (Afolabi & Gabriel, 2025). In order to theorise these innovations, researchers have consistently drawn upon Jürgen Habermas's notion of the public sphere—the construct, first advanced in his 1962 thesis of structural transformation, and elaborated in various forms during subsequent eras—that democracies operate within a realm of communicative action whereby private actors unite as a public, come to reasoned common consensus about issues of shared concern, and with the legitimation of superior argument constrain the state (Habermas, 2022). The inherent logic of this conception in relation to social media—X, Facebook, for instance, does create literal spaces where millions of users engage in internationalised deliberation about citizenship, culture, and politics, which is sensible: the Habermasian ideal does translate across to Nigerian online-mediated communication in significant ways (Ritzi, 2023; Darkwa et al., 2024; Li, 2025). They are challenged, of course, not only by the specific content of Nigerian discourses but also by the infrastructural circumstances of postcolonial communication itself. Nigeria's online spaces are not the nondialectical universal forum of liberal theory; rather, they are spaces that are segmented along axes of ethnicity, religion, class, gender, and political clientelism in which rational-critical debate is constantly obstructed by the burden of history, past injuries, and the drama of identification performance. The notion of counter-publics, from which theorizations of accessible, oppositional spaces within dominant discourses and social formations derive (Jackson & Kreiss, 2023; Henriksen, 2024; Dhamala, 2020), is therefore considerably more usefully stimulating.

Nigerian online comment pages seem, after all, to constitute precisely those counter-public spaces in which erosion-prone groups, including ethnic minorities, young people, the working-class, and women, subvert state authority and hegemonic narratives through the challenge and/or satirization of a pre-existing, hegemonic political class's authority and the factors that legitimize that authority, now firmly in control of popular communicative channels.

This review synthesises and critically reflects on the emerging corpus of empirical research on Nigerian digital publics along three analytically linked themes. First, it explores the linguistic dynamics of online interaction. In particular, how politeness, impoliteness, incivility and the strategic breach of established conversational practices play out in Nigerian comment threads. Second, it considers the comment sections as sites of political challenge. From the nascent movement of anti-establishment mobilisation in 2012, to the momentous 2020 #EndSARS protests, and finally, to the turbulent partisan politics that defined the 2023 general elections, comment sections emerge as institutional sites of contestation. Third, and finally, it focuses on the performativity, negotiation and deployment of identity (notably ethnic, religious and partisan identities) through online engagements, and its implications for Nigeria's thriving yet unstable civic culture. While previous empirical studies have examined discrete dimensions of Nigeria's online cultures, a comprehensive and systematic articulation of how linguistic strategies (politeness) convey and are shaped by sociopolitical activation (dissent) and cultural oversights (identity) remains elusive in the existing online literature. This paper seeks to fill that lacuna. By providing an overview of the existing academic landscape and teasing out its prominent claims, methodological features, and contradictions, it aims to provide a useful point of reference for scholars at the intersection of linguistics, political communication, and African digital studies, or an appropriate terminology for what is the world's most significant digital public in the twenty-first century. Figure 1 illustrates the interconnected digital ecosystem within which political communication and online discourse occur in Nigeria.

2. Methodology

This paper uses a systematic review approach using the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework for identifying, screening, and synthesising a defined body of literature in a transparent and reproducible manner (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2022). These considerations are supported by the wide variety of the field being investigated: scholarship on Nigerian digital discourse has been carried out in fields as diverse as linguistics, communication studies, political science, sociology, and computer science, and is spread across a large number of journals, conference proceedings, and preprint archives.

2.1 Database Selection and Search Strategy

Three primary academic databases used in this literature, as indicated in the Prisma flow diagram in Figure 2, were Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, which were used to compile the original literature. These have been chosen for their ability to cover social science, humanities, and interdisciplinary research, and for their ability to access existing peer-reviewed research and new scholarship from African and Global South institutions, which might not be as well represented in narrower disciplinary indices.

The following boolean search strings were systematically used on all the three databases: ("Nigeria*" AND ("online comment*" OR "social media" OR "Twitter" OR "X" OR "TikTok" OR "Facebook" OR "Nairaland")) AND ("politeness" OR "impoliteness" OR "incivility" OR

"dissent" OR "resistance" OR "identity" OR "ethnicity"). The supplementary searches used terms that were relevant to the review in that they captured specific phenomena of interest, such as the digital public sphere, counter-public, #EndSARS, Nigerian internet discourse, ethnic polarisation online, and code-switching social media in Nigeria.

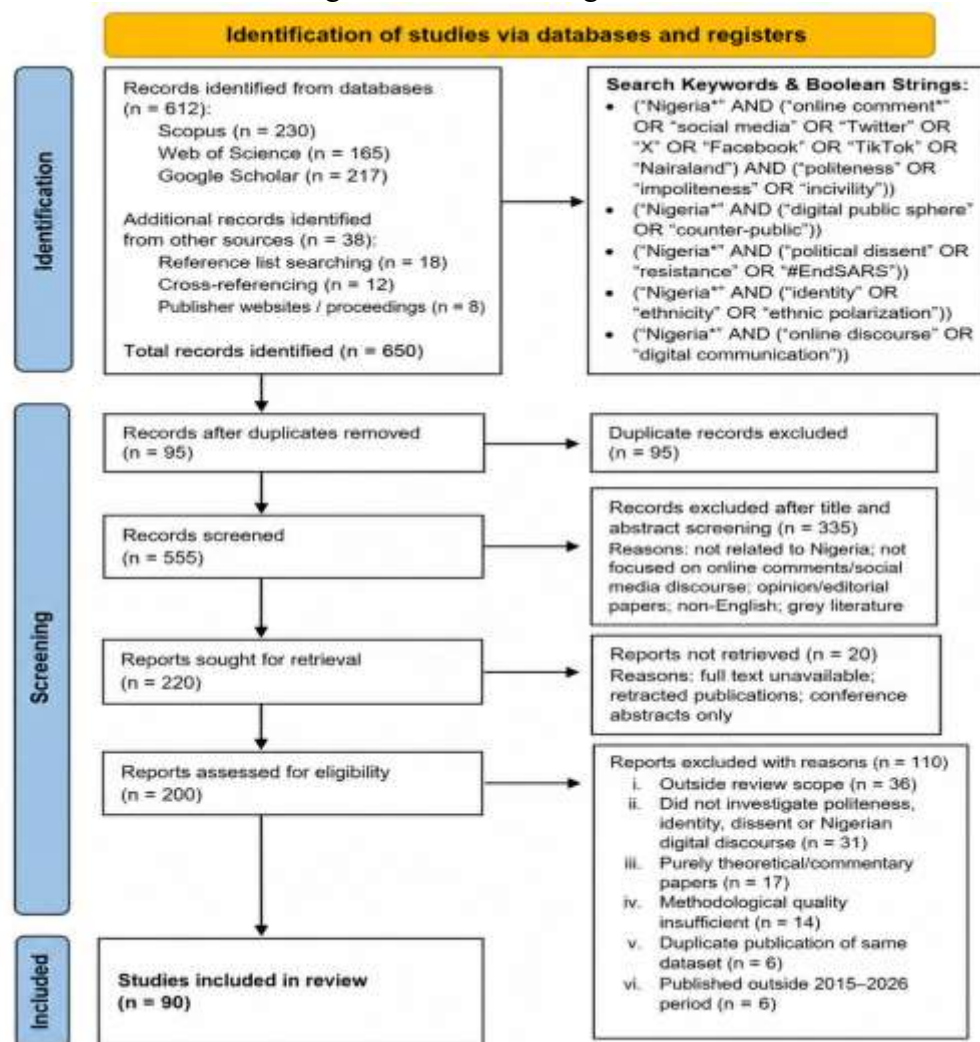


Figure 2: Prisma flow diagram

2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were selected for review if they were: published between 2015 and 2026, written in English, explicitly or substantially discussed Nigerian online communication, such as analyzing online data from Nigeria, or employed comparative approaches that explicitly or substantially included Nigeria as one of several main cases, published in peer-reviewed journals, edited book chapters, or established conference proceedings. Studies that appeared in non-peer-reviewed publications (blog posts, grey literature, or op-eds) which neglected to focus specifically on the sociolinguistic/ political aspects of the phenomenon under study, and those that discussed Nigerian media at large and did not have a specific focus on digital or online communication were excluded.

Also, a few comparative and theoretical works from other Global South and African contexts that offered indispensable theoretical scaffolding as well as productive comparative insights, especially in the context of counter-public theory, digital activism, and platform-level dynamics of incivility, were preserved. These were used as contextualising, but not as primary literature.

2.3 Data Extraction and Synthesis

Selected studies were thematically synthesized in a matrix. The following data for each study were retrieved: author(s) and year of publication; platform or digital space studied; theoretical framework used; methodological approach; and the key findings. Based on this matrix, the review was organised thematically, with the literature organised in three interrelated themes: linguistic mechanics and digital incivility; counter-hegemonic mobilisation and dissent; and identity construction and ethnic polarisation. In the event of studies covering several themes, each theme was covered in turn, and the studies in the other themes were referenced within the text, as was the case with research on the #EndSARS movement, which covered all three themes. The synthesis was developed by an iterative analytical reading method, which was a process of analyzing literature and finding patterns, tensions, and convergences instead of merely adding up results from the literature.

3. Thematic Review

3.1 Linguistic Mechanics and Digital Incivility

Linguistic practices have been a recurring theme in the literature on digital public discourse in Nigeria and are one of the main ways political identities are negotiated, civic dissent is expressed, and social boundaries are challenged. In contrast to those studies that focus on the outcome of online hostility as a result of the affordances of the internet, recent scholarship has increasingly begun to view language as a strategic political tool that users of the internet use to create legitimacy, contest authority, build collective identities, and manage the nature of participation in digital environments. A variety of recurring communicative patterns has been identified across platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, TikTok, and Nairaland; these patterns range from direct face threatening acts, public ridicule, multilingual code-switching to identity-based derogation, and have rather fixed characteristics, not simply a product of individual behaviour. The linguistic practices indicate just how far Nigeria's digital participation is determined by an existing socio-cultural norm and also by the communicative affordances of networked media.

The literature tends to coalesce on four major types of linguistic behaviour that are common across the studies: linguistic directness, constructive dragging, satirical code-switching, and intolerant bigotry. These categories collectively highlight the main dimensions through which language becomes a tool of empowerment for political participation and a means of silencing, polarizing, and symbolically harming. Table 1 is a summary of the main linguistic strategies found in the literature that were identified to have sociolinguistic characteristics, platform-specific prevalence, political functions, and exemplary studies. Each subsequent section reflects a critical analysis of the respective category and its implications for the understanding of the changing nature of the Nigerian digital public sphere.

Table 1: Linguistic Typology of Online Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

Discursive Strategy	Socio-Linguistic Mechanics	Platform Prevalence	Political/Cultural Function	Key Citations
Linguistic Directness	Systematic omission of honorifics; deployment of blunt imperative constructions.	Nairaland, X	Ideology critique targeting elite distinction and traditional age hierarchies.	Taiwo et al. (2021); Ademola (2023)
Constructive Dragging	Group-produced public disapprobation and sharp, targeted ridicule.	X (Twitter)	Enforcing popular, alternative accountability where formal institutions fail.	Obia (2023); Ahumaraeze et al. (2026)
Satirical Code-Switching	Interlocking Standard English, Nigerian Pidgin, and indigenous phrases (e.g., <i>Sòró Sókè</i>).	TikTok, X, Facebook	Establishing cross-ethnic grassroots solidarity and popular authenticity.	Egbe (2022); Afolabi & Gabriel (2025)
Intolerant Bigotry	Cyberbullying, dehumanizing epithets, and theological othering.	Nairaland, X	Solidifying rigid in-group boundaries while aggressive delegitimizing rivals.	Ridwanullah et al. (2024); Ajala & Alayinde (2025)

The first and maybe most basic of the changes is the decay of the traditional norms of deference that have provided a template for interpersonal communication in Nigerian society. This change is a consistent feature of the literature reviewed, from which many of the current forms of digital incivility have emerged.

3.1.1 The Collapse of Traditional Deference Online

The literature on online communication in Nigeria provides a wealth of empirical evidence on the sharp contrast between the norms of deference associated with face-to-face communication typical of most Nigerian cultural contexts and the comparatively uninhibited register of online communication. In Nigeria, offline communicative practices are marked by intricate age-graded attitudes and norms of respect, e.g., title-based address, and norms of deference to authority figures, elders, and social superiors, which are enforced by the community. These conventions are not only a way of doing things but are integral to social order and the preservation of face, as defined by both Goffman and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, among Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa-Fulani, and other ethnic groups (Oyadiji, 2020).

The literature shows that such hierarchical norms are not directly applicable to online environments. In the anonymity, pseudonymity and space-temporal distancing of interlocutors that are typical of the conversation, the social differences would be marked differently, thus making the conversation itself much less hierarchical. The study reveals that register violations involving imperative constructions (blunt) and unsolicited corrections and dismissive rejoinders routinely occur among Nairaland users using a pseudonymous handle and would have serious consequences if used in offline communication (Waziri, 2025). A discursive directness that has been described by scholars as systematic face-threatening behaviour rather than random conversational disorder

has been reported on Twitter in Nigeria, where the speed of the platform and the lack of direct social accountability allow for such directness (Taiwo et al., 2021; Ononye et al., 2025).

Research on digital incivility as a whole distinguishes between incivility (the non-respectful treatment of another person's public image) and impoliteness (the communicative action of attempting to damage an interlocutor's public image) (Stoll et al., 2020; Rossini, 2020; Esau, 2021). The two have been widely reported online in Nigeria. Based on cross-national data, Frischlich et al. (2021) identify personality traits, media consumption patterns, and negative prior online experiences as predictors of uncivil participation, consistent with the results for Nigeria, where a history of violent state actions coupled with widespread economic insecurity and political discontent has created a user base that has a structural motivation to be hostile. Rega et al. (2023) also classify impolite and intolerant discourse, with the latter being, above all, an assault on the personhood and legitimacy of interlocutors, not just their arguments, and this type of discourse is disproportionately linked to politically charged threads, a phenomenon that has been well documented in Nigerian political comment sections.

This literature raises the larger theoretical question about the connection between incivility and democracy. In the case of Nigeria, the tension between viewpoints that digital incivility undermines the quality of public deliberation and those that consider it a form of political anger from historically marginalized publics is particularly pronounced, as this has historically been the case with the norms of rational-critical exchange (Davis, 2020; Aytac, 2022; Patberg, 2025). Ademola (2023) illustrates this point, to the extent that he undertakes a detailed examination of the Nigerian Twitter discussions about honorifics, demonstrating that objections to the use of honorifics are not just rude, but are forms of ideology critique of the everyday production of elite distinction.

3.1.2 Dragging, Clapping Back, and Face-Threatening Acts

In the literature on digital discourse, perhaps no communicative practice deserves as much consistent scholarly interest as dragging, which is the sustained, and sometimes group-produced, public disapprobation of a person or an institution that breaches community norms or claims that are considered as false, hypocritical or offensive. The most comprehensive theorisation of this phenomenon yet was provided by Obia (2023), which placed dragging in a wider ecology of Twitter activism, such as subbing (indirect criticism made to be understood by the target's followers), cancelling, and what Obia calls constructive confrontation (ridiculing another person in a pointed way that is not just a public embarrassment but a form of discursive accountability). Dragging is a liminal space in this study. On one hand, in the technical sense, a face-threatening act, one that strikes at the positive face of the target by clearly challenging their competence, integrity, or credibility in the public forum. On the other hand, it serves as a way of popular accountability in a political context where formal accountability practices are regularly absent or manipulated by the elite (Ahumaraeze et al., 2026; Ifeanyichukwu & Hoffman, 2025). The Nigerian literature on the subject of dragging seems to focus on three target groups: first, government officials and politicians, second, high-profile public commentators whose online comments are criticised by their followers, and third, media outlets whose reporting is contested in the comments sections below articles (Bossan & Oyedeji, 2020; N. et al., 2025).

However, impoliteness is used in protest-related comment sections as a political weapon, and systematic violation of conventional politeness norms in the comment sections of #EndSARS discourse is not a communicative competence failure, according to Ikechukwu-Ibe (2023). In the

same vein, Waziri (2025) examines a corpus of Nairaland threads from 2017 to 2023 and finds that condescension, sarcasm, personalised invective, and strategic use of ethnic epithets are the main impoliteness strategies used by the users to position themselves and their interlocutors in the community's reputational economy. Building on this analysis, Temitope (2026) examines the case of online music discourse and demonstrates that the verbal aggression on comment threads under music posts is a way to enact membership to the in-group and cultural authority, an identity work that is performed through the enactment of linguistic toughness.

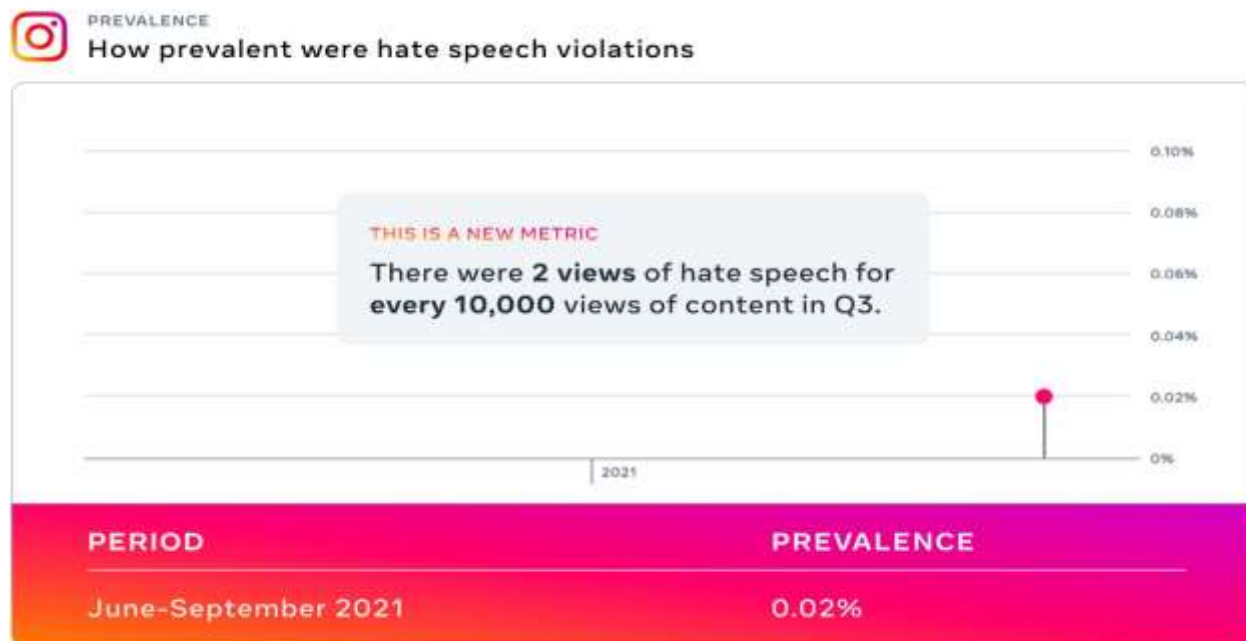


Figure 3: Hate speech violations and prevalence (Integrity, 2021)

The gendered nature of face-threatening acts in the context of online spaces has also been of scholarly interest, but not as extensively as it could be expected to be, with the reported high prevalence of online misogyny and hate speech, as shown in Figure 3. Chiluwa (2021) studies online advocacy campaigns by women in Nigeria and Ghana: women political actors have a double bind between challenging authority through direct confrontation and being characterized as unfeminine, aggressive, and by deferential language undermining the authority of the political claim being made. This tension shapes women's communicative options over platforms and gives rise to distinct ways of hedged assertion and strategic indirectness, which are very different from the direct ways in which men assert themselves in the same types of discourse on the same platforms.

There are examples of hateful and discriminatory language being mobilised in literature in comment sections. Akinsanya (2024) systematically analyzes hate speech in Nairaland, which reveals the context and pattern of dehumanising rhetoric against ethnic and religious minorities. Specifically, Ridwanullah et al. (2024) examine how the affordances of X (i.e., retweets, quote tweets and coordinated hashtag amplification) were weaponized in spreading ethnically tainted political discourse in the run-up to and following the 2023 elections. In an online context, Ajala and Alayinde (2025) record the functioning of cyberbullying as a form of theological bigotry

against identifiable users of online spaces in Nigeria, demonstrating how theological differences are used to legitimate sustained personal attacks against others.

3.1.3 Pidgin, Memes and Satirical Code Switching

The third is the multilingual and multimodal nature of Nigerian online communication, which distinguishes it from other forms of communication. Nigeria's digital public sphere is not monolingual in English, but is a hybrid communicative space that is active with the flow of standard English, Nigerian Pidgin, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and a myriad of neologisms and slang terms, all of which circulate within the same comment thread, or even within the same sentence (Adebayo et al., 2025; Taiwo & Olarewaju, 2025). This code switching is not just for show. It has great pragmatic, social and political value – it indicates the region, education, age and in-group intimacy of the speakers. While also revealing how Nigerian Pidgin undermines the universalist and multilingual discourse of #EndSARS by producing a space of popular authenticity and grassroots solidarity, Egbe (2022) looks at the Englishisation of #EndSARS discourse, which is the strategic use of English as a political universalist and as a tool to make the protest discourse cross ethnic. Pidgin is an asset to mobilisation across the ethnic fault lines of Nigeria because English, Yoruba and Igbo cannot do this. Ugah (2023) shows that this is exactly what happened with the satirical coinage, atikuloot, which was a combination of the name of the 2023 presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, and the English word 'loot', and whose circulation on the comment sections and on timelines was a type of 'distributed political satire,' which no single media outlet could have created or contained. Memes and visual satire also play a significant role in the linguistic repertoire of the Nigerians. Okesola and Oyeboode (2023) provide a multimodal discourse analysis of a corpus of memes about #EndSARS to show how the interplay of image, slogan and the implied cultural reference makes it possible for protest communication to fit complex political arguments into units that can be shared on social media and easily read. The Yoruba phrase "Soro soke" or speak up, speak louder, emerged as one of the defining verbal artefacts of the #EndSARS movement as an entire generational politics of reclaiming voice against silencing authority was condensed into two words, which proliferated on memes, T-shirts, protest placards, and online comment boxes (Afolabi & Gabriel, 2025). In Nairaland discussions, new words, phrases, and registers are being invented, experimented, accepted or rejected by the community as they go, and these are likewise found and analyzed by Taiwo and Olarewaju (2025), who extend this analysis to the general phenomenon of neologism and coinage within the forum.

This linguistic creativity is also of theoretical interest, going beyond stylistics. Ademola (2023) suggests that the mock-formal register, with its use of honorifics, malapropisms and ironic forms of address, is an ideological subversion in which the ordinary register users assert their opposition to the claims of cultural and political authority represented in the elite register. A broader scholarship on code switching in a digital context has found that multilingual speakers are not just switching between languages but use the associations, connotations and social indexicalities that are attached to each language, or variety, to engage with multiple social relations and self-presentations in a single instance of code switching (Adebayo et al., 2025). The decision to use Pidgin as a writing medium and not Hausa, and/or to move from English to Yoruba at an emotionally charged moment, is never neutral in the Nigerian context, where language use is already the site of social meaning.

3.2 Comment Sections as Arenas of Counter-Hegemonic Mobilisation

3.2.1 Subverting State and Corporate Narratives

A significant body of the literature explores the online comment sections in Nigeria as spaces of resistance to the narratives produced and circulated by the state, key political actors and the commercial media outlets that have traditionally dominated Nigerian public communication. The main characteristic of the media in Nigeria is that its mainstream platforms have long been associated with political and economic elites, and its reporting often reflects official interpretations of events while neglecting alternative perspectives. This journalistic authority is challenged, amended or lampooned in the comment sections under news reports on the Facebook pages and X accounts of these outlets in the last ten years (Bossan & Oyedele, 2020; Mohammed & Adedokun, 2023). Through a comprehensive discourse analysis of comment sections under the Facebook posts of Channels Television on farmers-herders conflicts in central Nigeria, Onoja et al. (2022) show how audiences purposefully challenged the official framing of the conflicts, offered alternative explanatory narratives and challenged the implicit ethnic and religious attribution in the coverage. The research is important because of its ability to demonstrate that the audience comments are not only responses to the media content but rather an active second protocol of the meaning-making process that can quite significantly modify, challenge, or subvert the primary journalistic meaning. Aboh (2023) takes this further in #EndSARS discourse, where the Twitter hashtag served a function of a counter-narrative and organising a network of user-generated accounts that challenged the official government narrative and sanitised mainstream media reporting on police violence. In June 2021, the Nigerian federal government banned Twitter, a move widely believed to have been prompted by the platform's use by #EndSARS protesters to communicate and expose the Nigerian state's use of guns to suppress protesters, thus making it impossible for the government to deny the violent nature of its actions to the rest of the world. Using text analytics and survey information, Mohammed and Adedokun (2023) examine how the ban was felt by the public, finding that it was generally interpreted not as a form of regulation, but as an acknowledgment of the government's "anti-civic communication stance," and thus was picked up on other social media platforms as an additional critique of governmental authority. Similar dynamics are reported in the Niger Delta communities, where social media comment sections have given communities, which have historically been denied access to mainstream communicative channels, a platform to publicise environmental issues, to call into question corporate narratives about oil extraction and to create a sense of solidarity across communities (Adegbenro and Akinola 2025). But the disinformation aspects of #EndSars digital discourse have been explored by Francis (2025), who finds that many of the same platforms that allow for authentic civic discourse also held spaces for deliberate disinformation, bogus images, misinformation, and misinformation strategically timed to either bolster or undermine the protest movement. In the elections of 2023, the social media comment sections were examples of spaces that were at the same time engaged in genuine political discussions, but also facilitated coordinated campaigns of hate and misinformation, as described by Jimada (2023). Theoretically, these results highlight the potential of digital counter-publicity to draw to the fore the double nature of communicative affordances, as they can help the voices of the subalterns to challenge dominant narratives, but can also be used by bad-faith actors to leverage the infrastructure of open discourse for strategic disinformation.

3.2.2 From Comment Threads to Street Action: The Digital Footprint of Mobilisation

One of the best studied aspects of the Nigerian digital discourses is the connection between online and offline collective action. From the initial experiments of social media mobilisation during the 2012 Occupy Nigeria protests over the fuel subsidy, to the extraordinary events of October 2020, when a sustained campaign of social media organisation and documentation resulted in the largest and most geographically dispersed public protest movement in decades in Nigeria (Dambo et al., 2020; Inobemhe & Santas, 2022).



Figure 4: Protesters at the EndSARS protest in Lagos, Nigeria (AriseNews, 2021)..

It seems the #EndSARS campaign, in the opinion of most commentators, is an entirely new political mobilisation tool in Nigeria, and has garnered a level of scholarly interest that is far out of proportion to its brief period of operation, which was interrupted by the shooting of the toll gate at Lekki on 20 October 2020 (Figure 4). Uwalaka (2021) recounts the digital architecture of the movement, which saw a coordinated network of protest emerging from Twitter hashtags, WhatsApp to coordinate activities, Instagram to document their experiences, and Flutterwave donation systems. Inobemhe et al. (2025) look at the communication and management roles social media platforms played in supporting the protests, in which protesters could use digital channels as a way to mobilise, but also as a method of real-time coordination to avoid dangerous police concentration, provide legal advice, and record events as they were happening.

The #EndSars memorialisation itself has been a subject of academic study. Uwalaka (2021) examines the digital content created in the 2021 anniversary protests, observing how this digital production is bringing about an "era of connective mourning" that involves prolonged engagement with collective emotional ties to a shared traumatic experience, while also creating political community and imposing pressure on the state. Uwalaka et al. (2023) then take this analysis further to a more comprehensive analysis of online activism and connective mourning during a series of #EndSARSMemorials, in which they conclude that annual digital commemorations are akin to civic calendar events in which the counter-public is reconstituted and reiterates its demands for public attention. According to Onayinka et al. (2026), the continuity between #EndSARS and the 2023 elections can be attributed to the fact that the Obidient movement, the mass online and offline supporters base of Labour Party presidential Candidate, Peter Obi, is a partial transformation of the #EndSARS civic energy and not a new political phenomenon. This argument is supported by findings that these digital practices, communication networks, and activist identities created during the #EndSARS protests were carried over for electoral mobilization, indicating that online protest communication leaves behind its institutional sediments that mould the way people communicate

in politics. In this analysis, Filibus et al. (2025) now focus on more recent moments and investigate the persistence and evolution of digital civic culture through the lens of an online influencer whose unrelenting accountability activism on TikTok and X has cast him as a possible replacement to the decentralized activist community of #EndSARS to understand how digital civic culture is sustained and developed across political conjunctures.

Oghogho and Osazuwa (2024) place these developments in the wider context of a reimagined political discourse in Nigeria in the digital era, arguing that the shift is not only from medium but of the very language of political address. The communicative structure in the pre-digital era, in which the authoritative information was sent out to passive recipients, is contrasted with the communication structure of the digital era, where audiences are already speakers and any statement is permanently open to contestation from an unlimited number of sources.

3.2.3 Digital Activism or Slacktivism? Assessing the Limits of Online Dissent

Not everyone is optimistic about the impact of digital activism in Nigeria. Many streams of research examine the apparent energy of online mobilization while highlighting the structural problems of Nigerian governance, which has led to a provocative question: Does outrage in the comment section represent a real avenue for political change or rather a psychological discharge for the politicized yet formally excluded youth population in Nigeria? (Chiamogu et al., 2021; Dey, 2020). While Uwalaka (2023) acknowledges the transformative capacities of mobile internet and social network applications on the organizational capacities of civil society in Nigeria, he does not assume that digital mobilization is always equivalent to structural political change. However, the potential of digital platforms to mobilize quickly and spectacularly is not necessarily a guarantee of lasting institutional change; many actors from the state have been able to cultivate sophisticated skills in how to manage and neutralize digital threats to their authority in a political setting, as seen in the #EndSARS mobilization. This argument is extended by Uwalaka and Nwala (2023), who demonstrate a gradual evolution in the repertoire of digital counter-mobilization strategies that the Nigerian state has adopted, such as the use of pro-government digital influencers, the orchestration of harassment campaigns online against prominent activists, and the extreme case of the Twitter ban in 2021, whereby the platform was directly and massively suppressed.

Others, like N. et al. (2025), are more sanguine, suggesting that while social media may not have created transformative structural changes in Nigeria, it has definitely enhanced the scope and reach of civic engagement. In contrast, Khalafallah et al. (2025) argue that the Nigerian young activists do not share a singular 'path' but a transformation of the political 'imaginary', the notion of what citizens can demand, organize for, and achieve through action on their own. Based on analogous examples in Senegal and Sudan, the authors suggest that the common denominator is not the actualization of a policy outcome, but rather, the evolution of the citizens' political imagination: what they can demand, organize for, and accomplish collectively. Like Kaur (2025), I concur that online and offline mobilization is not a dichotomy but a complementarity: An online mobilization is a register of a political repertoire that complements an offline mobilization, and, as Kaur points out, the dismissal of complex digital activism as 'slacktivism' is an error in understanding how online communication serves as a mediator between offline mobilization.

The slacktivism debate is further complicated by the issues of class, access, and the differential knowledge of digital literacy among the Nigerian populace. Digital activists' most visible locations are disproportionately Lagos and Abuja; they tend to be relatively better educated and have the technical and cultural capital necessary to operate within the norms of global digital discourse. The

rural poor, the Northern periphery, and the non-English-speaking majority are also under-represented in the 'digital publics' that academic research has generally studied, though the literature only intermittently references such populations (Apata, 2025; Adams & Dorcas, 2024).

3.3 Weaponized Belonging and Online Polarization

3.3.1 Ethno-Regional Binarization

The ethnic/regional aspect of digital discourse in Nigeria is the most well-documented and, in many ways, the most problematic form of literature. The result is a communicative landscape that is so deeply ethicized by a dominant triad of Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups that each group has distinct regions, religious beliefs, and political backgrounds, and that ethnic identity is an omnipresent organizing principle of online interactions in Nigeria. The literature is unanimous that this organization does not produce neutral content, but rather is a consistent generator of othering, binarization, and the circulation of stereotypes that flatten complex social realities into the two-dimensional categories of ethnic antagonism (Aboh et al., 2024; Aminu et al., 2025). Whereas Ayantayo (2021) reveals the widespread nature of ethnic sentiments on Facebook comment sections, demonstrating how the language is used by users to make in-group boundaries and stigmatize out-groups in a manner that closely mirrors the ethnic geography of Nigerian politics. The findings of this study show that the Facebook community-building structure (group formation, following pages, aggregating comments under common content) fosters the emergence of opinion communities with homogeneous ethnic profiles. Building on this analysis, Sanda and Targema (2022) examine the management of ethno-religious conflict and find that social media platforms can both be used to distribute inflammatory content rapidly, and can also be used to attempt to engage in cross-ethnic conflict management and discussion – the latter of which is more likely to succeed or fail depending on the moderating practices of community leaders and platform managers. Nairaland is clearly an area of ethnic polarization in that it is a space where research on the internet is concentrated. In a series of Nairaland political threads, Aboh et al. (2025) show how the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria was constructed to systematically map the ethnic stereotypes of the two leading candidates, Atiku Abubakar and Muhammadu Buhari, onto the ethnic/regional boxes to which they attach perceived traits and abilities. Akinsanya (2024) points to similar dynamics in an extensive study of Nairaland hate speech, where the anonymous structure of Nairaland's forum means the social costs of ethnic stereotyping and dehumanizing language are close to zero, making expressions of inter-ethnic contempt part of the routine conversational currency. The Culpeperian impoliteness mechanisms (banter, mock-polite, and face-off) that encode and enact ethnic hostility in the discourse of Nairaland are also documented by Waziri (2025). There is a uniquely secessionist digital discourse that has been the subject of considerable academic research since 2017, with the Biafra independence agitation led by Nnamdi Kanu and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) organization, and the Yoruba Nation project of Sunday Igboho, being its main protagonists. In the face of decades of official suppression, Ajiboye (2020) examines the online maintenance of Biafra secessionist discourse and how social media platforms enable geographically dispersed Igbo communities, including the diaspora, to sustain and reinforce ethnic nationalist affiliations. Oisanwo and Akano (2023) perform a critical discourse analysis of Yoruba Nation secessionism, which documents the manner in which secessionist actors create their claims, employing historical grievance narratives, appeals to ethnic cultural distinctiveness, and polarizing language that seeks to close the space for cross-ethnic dialogue. Aminu et al. (2024) explore multimodal practices in

the discursive construction of the secessionist movement of the Oduduwa and how image-centric political discourses are effectively transported across the image-primed architecture of social media.

The context of the scholarship of ethno-religious conflict and digital mediation adds another dimension to this image. Chigbu et al. (2024) and Aboh et al. (2024) report on the systematic othering of ethnic and religious minorities in electoral speeches and conclude that the line between legitimate political disagreement and dehumanization of out-groups is easily breached in online political comment sections during election periods. Adenuga et al (2023) locate these dynamics in the context of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria during the Fourth Republic, where digital platforms have offered new avenues for the transmission of the conflict narrative and, in some instances, facilitated cross-community communication essential to conflict resolution. These structural analyses are complemented by the psychological analyses of Tuki (2024, 2025), who explores how the experience of violent conflict influences out-group hostility within Nigeria's communities, and how digital environments can exacerbate hostile intergroup effects through low-cost, low-risk avenues for the expression and spread of prejudice.

3.3.2 Partisan Echo Chambers and Cyber-Factions

The 2023 Nigerian general election, marked by Peter Obi's incredible mobilization of new political power under the Labour Party banner and eventual triumph, and the general election results controversy, developed a political communication dataset of epic scope for scholars of digital political communication. During this period (late 2022 – early 2024), there were identifiable partisan cyber-factions – the Obidients following Peter Obi, the Batists following Bola Tinubu, and the Atikuylists following Atiku Abubakar – each with its own distinctive discursive style, internal solidarity practices, and attack repertoires on opposing factions (Onayinka et al., 2026; Filibus et al., 2025). During this time, Ridwanullah et al. (2024) analyze the politicization of hate and the weaponization of X, tracing the emergence of partisan cyber-factions deploying advanced coordination strategies to spread proponents' narratives and attack candidates and their supporters through systematically relying on ethnic stereotyping to delegitimize their rivals. The findings reveal that ethnicity and partisan identity were not distinct concepts in the 2023 electoral context but were consistently coupled together: ethnicity served as the key explanatory concept in the understanding and contestation of partisan decisions. Jimada (2023) records the specific involvement of fake news and coordinated hate speech campaigns during the 2023 electoral cycle, targeted at organized disinformation that used the partisan division of digital publics to disseminate falsehoods that would be believed by in-group members but ignored by out-groups, thus exacerbating and not resolving political division. These dynamics are in line with the theoretical literature about digital polarization, which offers relevant background knowledge. Positional polarization (growing divergence between partisan policy positions), interactional polarization (the development of hostile cross-partisan communication patterns), and affective polarization (increasing negative affect toward partisan out-groups) are the three types of polarization that Yarchi et al. (2020) identify and distinguish, revealing that affective polarization is the most tenacious and politically impactful form, according to their cross-platform analysis. In Nigerian evidence, this taxonomy closely translates to what scholars of Nigerian partisan cyber-factions report, namely the affective polarization, which manifests as mutual contempt between opposing partisan communities, and is not necessarily driven by but expressed through positional disagreements about policy. The findings of Wuestenenk et al. (2023) have implications for the

dynamics of partisan discourse in Nigeria as it has been proven that group membership also significantly influences online expressions and helps to polarize discussion platforms. In a study on Facebook use in an ethnically polarized environment, Asimovic et al. (2021) show that ethnic prejudice can be reinforced or sustained by outgroup content on social media, depending on the circumstances, which challenges easy narratives of reconciliatory potential of cross-cutting digital exposure. This rhetorical analysis of online civic engagement on Nairaland's Yoruba Nation movement by Akano (2024) provides a detailed account of the processes of appraising and the construction, defence, and critique of ethnic nationalist positions. Osisanwo and Akano (2023) argue that the same secessionist movement is discursively produced in very different ways in different digital communities, with some communities making it the legitimate expression of self-determination, while others make it appear as a threat to national unity, making any single, unified public conversation about controversial political questions impossible in the current digital landscape of Nigeria.

3.3.3 Intersectionality: Gender, Religion, and Class

Identity in Nigerian digital spaces have been largely focused on ethnicity and partisan affiliation, while other aspects of identity, such as gender, religion, and class, have been comparatively given less systematic focus. Despite this, an emerging literature on “intersectionality” has begun to chronicle the intertwining and intertwining of Nigerian online identity politics, as to how gender, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic position work alongside ethnic and partisan identity to shape the conditions of engagement in digital public discourse.

Feminist scholarship on #EndSARS has played the most significant role in the understanding of the gendered dynamics in digitally mediated spaces in Nigeria. In Faniyi's analysis of the feminist and queer networks that developed on the #EndSARS movement, she highlights that the protests also attracted LGBT+ activists and feminist campaigners who did not have a primary focus on police brutality and bad governance. These tensions exposed the politics of inclusion, both in the comments sections and as direct responses, leading to a sub-literature on the politics of inclusion in Nigerian digital civic spaces. Okeke et al. (2025) analyze the particular problems encountered by queer persons in Nigeria in relation to visibility in digital environments and the hostile context in which they operate, which is frequently expressed in religious terms.

Omotoso and Opesade (2025) examine the use of sexual and body-based language in political communication during #EndSARS, and the way in which women's voices took up public space and challenged the conventions of civic communication in Nigeria with patriarchal language. In their analysis of comments written by users on Facebook pictures, Aboh et al. (2023) show how apparently benign language of appreciation and affection is a subtle process of gender identity formation that normalizes feminine gender categories in digital environments. This is linked to macro-level issues of political representation in this analysis, as Chiluwa (2021) demonstrates that the digital advocacy discourse of women's activism in Nigeria and Ghana is influenced by the double bind of gendered communicative expectation.

In the literature on digital othering and hate speech, religious identity, as it is entangled with ethnicity in Nigeria, plays a significant role. In their paper, Chigbu et al. (2024), they report on the systematic use of religious othering in electoral discourse and how Muslim-Christian binaries are used to delegitimize political candidates and organize political loyalties along communal lines. In a study of cyberbullying from a religious bigotry perspective, Ajala and Alayinde (2025) show how religious difference is being used as a means to sustain online harassment. While the existing

literature has tended to focus more on the nature of digital participation, the class dimensions of digital participation have been less directly addressed, with Apata (2025) raising questions about the causal links between digital literacy, civic agency, and socioeconomic position that suggest a critical sociology of access in the Nigerian digital public sphere.

4. Critical Discussion: The Nigerian Hybrid Sphere

The three thematic strands that were discussed in the previous sections (linguistic incivility, counter-hegemonic dissent, and identity polarization) do not exist in isolation in the Nigerian online comment sections but are intricately connected such that any comprehensive theoretical discussion of the Nigerian digital public sphere has to engage with them. In the middle of the argument advanced here is the fact that Nigerian online comment sections are what is described here as a hybrid sphere: a communicative space that is democratizing and destabilizing, liberating and exclusionary, and where the forces of civic emancipation and ethnic fragmentation are so deeply intertwined as to be analytically inseparable.

The way in which entanglements of identity, politeness, and dissent work is well documented in the literature, but not explicitly theorized. Any type of opposition to the power of the state in Nigeria is invariably ethnicized, it might be a protest against police brutality, election fraud, bad economic management, or environmental degradation. Respondents to government policies are generally pro-government, and when a user questions a government policy in a comment thread, the pro-government voices often challenge the dissent on grounds other than substantive ones, but rather because of the identity of the dissenting voice, in the sense that the respondent assumes that the identity of the user is enough to explain and delegitimize the dissent's standpoint. This could be called “ethnic reduction” policy, turning political dissent into ethnic allegiance, thus rendering any opposition marginalized as ethnic partisan interest instead of political universalism (Aboh et al., 2024; Aminu et al., 2025; Ridwanullah et al., 2024).

The linguistic resources of this ethnolinguistic reduction are the same ones found in the impoliteness literature: the use of personalized invective, ethnic epithets, mock-polite language that denigrates the opponent's stance as too ‘tribal’ for serious consideration, and the coordinated harassment that utilizes the affordances of the platform to amplify the attack ‘beyond the thread’. The impoliteness framework shows that these are not indiscriminate attacks on a group, but rather specific communicative acts which have identifiable functions in the way in which political competition is managed. The counter-public and dissent framework shows that the subjects of attacks – the ones who speak out politically against the attacks through ethnopolitical discourse – do not remain silent, but come up with counter-strategies – documenting attacks, invoking solidarity within the ethnic community, or using the counter-discourses of Pidgin and meme culture to neutralize the attack through humour (Ugah, 2023; Okesola & Oyeboode, 2023).

The mechanisms that make these dynamics happen are very important, and literature warrants a differentiated description of the intersections of identity, politeness, and dissent in different digital contexts. The platform comparison in Table 2 below is a synthesis of the key findings of the literature on the four major platforms that have received scholarly interest and attention in the Nigerian context.

Table 2: Platform-Specific Dynamics in the Nigerian Digital Public Sphere

Platform	Primary Discourse Style	Predominant Identity Marker	Function in the Public Sphere
X (Twitter)	Fast-paced, high-incivility; dragging and counter-narrative framing	Hyper-partisan factional identity	Elite agenda-setting and direct critique of state authority
TikTok	Vernacular, audiovisual, satirical; compressed political commentary	Generational Gen Z and youth subculture	Subverting state authority through humour, music, and meme culture
Facebook	Text-heavy, discursive, community-oriented	Ethno-regional and religious alignment	Grassroots community deliberation and regional echo chamber formation
Nairaland	Pseudonymous, forum-threaded, archival	Rigid tribal and regional polarisations	Historical archive of ethno-political tension and cultural contestation

The dynamics of dragging and counter-narrative production are most strongly focused on X, due to the specific affordances of the platform for quick, visible, publicly accountable exchange. Its elite bias is amplified by the fact that the vast majority of users on Nigerian Twitter are educated, urban, and speak English, thereby also effectively excluding them from the terms set. While the platform has undoubtedly played a prominent role in political mobilization, its role in political pluralism is less clear, and cross-party discussion is structurally difficult as the hyper-partisan groups and factions of Nigerian Twitter practice a kind of internal policing and external aggression.

How We Reduce the Prevalence of Harmful Content

Our efforts are having an impact on reducing how much harmful content people see on our apps. This chart demonstrates the actions we take to combat harmful content.



Figure 4: Meta Transparency Center: Community Standards (Integrity, 2021).

Facebook plays a different role in the digital ecology of the public sphere. Its community-page structure and its reach into older, less formally educated, and more geographically dispersed audience segments make it the platform of choice for what could be described as “grassroots” ethnic deliberation: the continuous, largely anonymous, and informal negotiation of communal memory, grievance, and solidarity within ethnic and regional communities. However, the comment sections of major news pages on Facebook are among the most useful corpora of Nigerian political discourse in terms of ethnographic specificity and national scale that can only be matched by other data sets that can be found on Twitter, which does not offer the same ability as Facebook to provide such a rich and varied collection of data (Onoja et al., 2022; Ayantayo, 2021; Sanda & Targema, 2022). What's unique about Nairaland is that it is very long-lasting and has an archive feature. It is a space that has been gathering discourse since 2005, which has left behind a record of the evolution of Nigeria's online political culture during almost 2 decades of democratic experience, economic change, and social turmoil. Because of its pseudonymous nature, Nairaland is more honest and more dangerous than real-name platforms, more honest since users are less burdened with social obligation, more dangerous because the lack of accountability allows for the expression of extreme views (Waziri, 2025; Oyadiji, 2020; Aboh et al., 2025).

While the other three platforms have been the object of numerous academic studies, TikTok has been the least studied platform as far as the literature is concerned and is, in some ways, the most theoretically interesting because of the way it generates a type of political speech that does not rely on the text as the primary medium. The discourse analysis approach that is prevalent in the existing literature cannot adequately explain the vernacular satire, musical commentary and visual humor in which Nigerian TikTokers engage with political events; further, the algorithm's ability to promote or demote content based on engagement as opposed to network connections gives TikTok a unique position on the counter-public sphere, where the act of visibility is not one of social capital but primarily of affective resonance (Afolabi & Gabriel, 2025).

The theoretical concept that best fits this overall picture is neither Habermas' rational-critical public sphere nor a simple counter-public. I believe the Nigerian public sphere can best be described as a structurally transformed public sphere. The platformization of communication has changed the conditions for doing public reasoning, but the public sphere is also a pre-existing space of ethnic, religious, and class segregation, which is intensified by the digital medium rather than erased, as shown in Figure 5. (Seeliger and Seignani 2022). There are helpful frameworks for understanding the space that such platform architectures afford to public discourse, as offered by Smyrniaios and Baisnée (2023) and Schlesinger (2024), as well as the anti-public and pseudo-public aspects of platforms that Davis (2020) and De Zeeuw (2024) describe. This resonance theory account of the affective dimensions of Nigerian digital engagements, how political emotion manifests in digital platforms rather than as rationality or debate, but as feeling, and how it engenders a sense of civic community, even when rational deliberation has failed, is what Rosa (2022) has picked up.

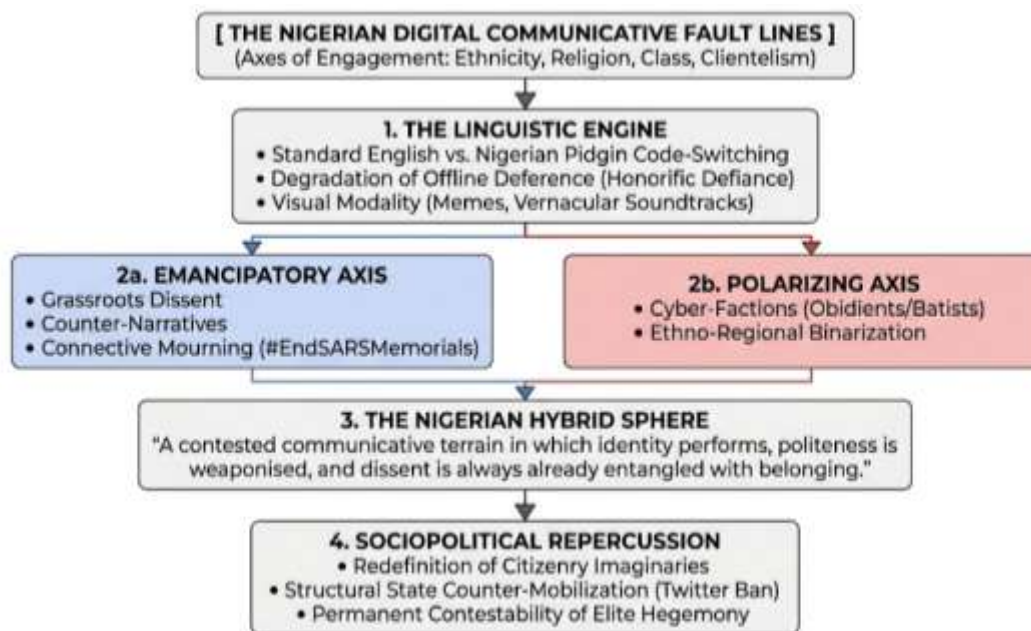


Figure 5: Conceptual Architecture of the Nigerian Hybrid Digital Public Sphere

The hybridity of the Nigerian digital sphere is therefore not a compromise between democratizing and destabilizing aspects of the digital sphere, but a radical inseparability of these aspects. Both dimensions are lived together by the same platforms, communicative practices, and in many cases, the same users. The youth who dragged a police spokesperson who was tweeting on Twitter during #EndSars and the Nairaland user who also resorted to ethnic stereotyping against political opponents could be and often are the same individual, operating in different communicative registers, in different contexts, and sharing a common repertoire of digital practice. To appreciate this hybridity is crucial to any balanced analysis of the political relevance of the Nigerian digital public sphere and any policy or scholarly consideration that only takes one part of the sphere seriously will be incomplete.

5. Future Research Agenda and Conclusion

5.1 Methodological Gaps

The current scholarly works on Nigerian digital discourse are dominated by content and language analysis in text and discourse. This has yielded interesting, context-rich analyses of the linguistic and rhetorical aspects of online communication, but has also led to some structural shortcomings. The qualitative interpretation in linguistic discourse analysis is complemented by the representativeness of quantitative analysis in computational text analysis, both of which are small and hand-curated corpora, inevitably raising questions of generalizability, and the field would benefit greatly from mixed-method approaches that fuse the two. The methodological integration works by Bello et al. (2023), Ilevbare et al. (2024), and Oladele and Ayetiran (2023) illustrates this type of integration, using sentiment analysis and natural language processing on large corpora of Nigerian Twitter data to complement qualitative interpretation.

More sustained interaction with digital ethnography, which looks at sustained, participant-oriented observation of an online community, as opposed to only a selected range of textual artefacts, would also benefit the field. The analysis of individual comments is limited to the textual aspects, the conversational context, community histories, interpersonal relationships, and the norms of the

platform around which the comments are produced and received, without considering the latter. Lorenz-Spreen et al. (2022) plea for greater scientific rigor in the causal and correlational research design in research on digital media and democracy, particularly resonates in the Nigerian context, as causal inference about the link between online communication and offline political outcomes has often been made based on empirically weak evidence.

5.2 Platform and Topical Gaps

In the Nigerian context, TikTok has been little studied, as mentioned throughout this review. It has emerged as the main space for digital communication for an entire generation of Nigerians who are born after 2000 — a generation whose political awareness is being shaped entirely by a digital media environment and, in the making of political discussion, the platform's unique features, such as short video clips, algorithmic content curation and audiovisual satire, is producing political discourse that is impossible to explain using traditional analytical tools. Likewise, although WhatsApp is clearly one of the most important tools in Nigeria's political lives at the grassroots level, it has been largely neglected in the peer-reviewed scholarly literature on political communication, especially regarding the extent to which it is used as a means of closed group mobilization, disinformation spreading, and community organization. The private and insular nature of WhatsApp communication is indeed a methodological challenge for researchers who are serious about data collection in an ethical manner; however, this is not a showstopper to the methodological challenges. The scholarly community's relative silence on WhatsApp is a gap in our understanding of the digital political culture in Nigeria.

More sustained attention is required in the literature to the economics of Nigerian digital discourse, especially of sponsored content, paid social media influencers, and the blurry economics of political astroturfing in the production of a sense of spontaneous online comment culture. While Oluyele et al. (2024) look at how offensive language is used in the social media discourse of Nigerian musicians, the full political economy of digital communication in Nigeria is not explored. There is also a need to give more sustained scholarly attention to the relationship of digital discourse and the formal legal system, especially in its application to the Cybercrimes Act and the use of the Act to curtail online political expression (Adams & Dorcas, 2024).

5.3 Conclusion

This review has charted a territory of emerging, but rapidly maturing scholarship. Within the last decade or so, research on Nigerian online comment sections has progressed from disparate empirical research articles to a coherent, if limited, knowledge base on the topic of politeness, dissent, and identity in Nigeria. However, the most significant theoretical development in the field to date is the realization that none of the three dominant perspectives on digital public discourse that of rational-critical exchange, counter-public theory of empowering marginalized voice, and polarization hypothesis, is adequate to explain the complexity of the reality of online public discourse in Nigeria. What is needed, and this review has helped to contribute to, is a more fitting framework for the postcolonial, multi-ethnic, economically differentiated nature of digital engagement in Nigeria, one that captures the liberative and the destructive sides, the innovative and the regressive, the democratic and the authoritarian, without reducing the one to the other. Nigeria's digital publics are not a reflection of a healthy democracy, nor of the inability of democracy in a multi-ethnic postcolonial setting. They are something more interesting and something more difficult; they are the continuous, debatable, inventive, sometimes violent, always

unfinished attempt of 220 million people to create a public sphere suitable for the complex life of the people. Knowing about effort in its linguistic features, its political dimensions, and its structural paradoxes matters not just to Nigerians but to every scholar, practitioner, and policymaker in the area of digital communication, democratic theory, and African politics. This review has tried to compile the building blocks that could serve as a basis for that understanding.

PRINT

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