

Social Media Ephemeral Stories: Memory, Young Nigerians and their Struggle Against Police Brutality

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Abstract

On 3 October 2020, a 22 years young man identified as Joshua Ambrose was allegedly shot dead by a team of the Nigerian Police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) in Delta State, Nigeria, on the allegation that he was an Internet fraudster (Dambo et al., 2021). The SARS was established in 1992 to curb crimes such as robbery and kidnapping. However, the SARS has been accused of gross human rights violations (Wada, 2021). Joshua's shooting was captured in a video. The audio in the video states that the Police just shot and killed the owner of the Lexus SUV and zoomed off with his car (Agbo, 2021). The viral video generated outrage that condemned the victim's ordeal and reflected the long-standing frustration about police brutality in Nigeria. In a few days, the online agitation had transformed into vast decentralised street protests in major cities in the country, mainly organised through social media. Again, on 20 October 2020, the Police, in an attempt to disperse peaceful protesters of the EndSARS movement, shot and killed untold persons at a popular protest site, Lekki Tollgate, Lagos, Nigeria (Uwalaka, 2022). Since 20 October 2020 to date, the movement has had two commemoration protest anniversaries. The movement has continued to construct memories across time, an area dominated by Western studies (Daphi and Zamponi, 2019; Smit et al., 2018; della Porta and Diani, 2020). Researchers have explored the EndSARS movement from diverse angles; comparison to Black Lives Matter (Nwakanma, 2022; Wada, 2021); the influence of celebrities on the protest (Uwalaka, 2022; Ajaegbu et al., 2022), queer solidarity at the movement (Nwabunnia, 2021); young people, their social media use and #EndSARS protest (Obia, 2023; Dambo et al., 2021); feminist movement and #EndSARS (Nwakanma, 2022). Despite the burgeoning literature on EndSARS, the literature is devoid of studies from the memory study perspective, a critical area in social movement studies (Smit, 2020; Daphi & Zamponi, 2019; Merrill & Lindgren, 2020). Besides, I argue that considering the online feature of the movement, the current literature on EndSARS needs to include the novelty and methodological rigour of virtual ethnography. Consequently, this study attempts to understand how protesters use Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram "Stories" (Ephemeral; 24-hour "Story") to construct a memory of the EndSARS Movement in Nigeria from 2020 until its Anniversaries in 2021, 2022, and 2023. Preliminary findings indicate that the "Story" enables connective memory, constructs memetic resurrection, networked commemoration and digital narration of the EndSARS movement.

Keywords: Memory, Social Media, EndSARS, Nigeria, Story

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