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Social Media And Political Accountability: Spotlighting the Roles Of X (Twitter) and Instagram in Anti-Corruption Activism in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT - This study examined the roles of social media, notably X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram, in exposing political corruption and supporting justice advocacy in Nigeria. In a context where traditional media are constrained by censorship and political control, digital activism on these platforms has become central to holding public officials to account. Guided by Social Accountability Theory and the Digital Activism Framework, the study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design and a structured questionnaire comprising four Likert-type scales (five-point, from strongly disagree to strongly agree) that captured perceived roles of X and Instagram in corruption exposure, justice-advocacy strategies, challenges, and policy options. Using stratified random sampling, 500 Nigerian users of X and Instagram, journalists, and justice advocates were selected across the four strata and their responses analysed with descriptive statistics and correlation analysis. The findings show that between 80.0% and 82.8% of respondents agreed that X and Instagram are effective for exposing political corruption and that scandals publicised on these platforms influence public opinion and can trigger investigations and legal action (mean scores around 4.0 on a five-point scale, standard deviations of about 1.1). Similarly, around four-fifths of respondents supported integrating social media into official anti-corruption efforts and improving platform algorithms to prioritise credible anti-corruption content (mean = 3.94–4.00). Government restrictions, algorithmic suppression, and misinformation emerged as major barriers to effective digital accountability. The study concludes that X and Instagram now function as critical infrastructures of social accountability in Nigeria and recommends institutionalised collaboration between anti-corruption agencies, digital activists, and civil society organisations, as well as investments in digital literacy, evidence-based regulation of misinformation, and greater algorithmic transparency.

Keywords: *Political Accountability, Activism, Social Media, Corruption, Governance*

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Introduction

The increasing demand for accountability in governance in developing countries battling systemic corruption has encouraged the strategic use of social media as platforms for advocacy and activism. In Nigeria, citizens, journalists, and activists routinely deploy X and Instagram to reveal alleged corrupt practices by politicians. Through these platforms, real-time conversations enable users to document unethical governance, circulate visual evidence, and mobilise pressure for accountability (Okocha & Agbele, 2023). At the same time, the 2021 ban on Twitter (now X) illustrated the extent of governmental resistance to digital activism and anxiety about the power of networked publics to shape opinion and galvanise civic participation. Together, these dynamics capture the tension between digital mobilisation against corruption and formal attempts to curtail it.

Social media platforms have become pervasive partly because they enable users to circumvent the constraints, silencing, and censorship that characterise much of the traditional media landscape. This affords more pluralistic discourse and a relatively open environment for exposing corrupt acts in government. Whereas mainstream outlets are often expected to align with state control or the preferences of politically connected media owners, X and Instagram offer less rigid spaces where whistle-blowers and digital activists can document and publicise scandals (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022). These affordances were visible during the #EndSARS protests, when X served as a critical infrastructure for coordinating demonstrations against police brutality, amplifying testimonies of abuse, and archiving evidence that might otherwise have been suppressed (Adeniyi, 2022; Okocha & Ola-Akuma, 2023).

At the same time, the proliferation of misinformation and so-called "post-truth politics" on social media raises serious questions about the credibility of corruption allegations and contributes to competing narratives that blur factual accountability (Gbaje, Agwu, & Odigie, 2023). The label "fake news" is frequently mobilised by political actors to delegitimise genuine accusations of wrongdoing and to reframe documented abuses as partisan fabrication (Okocha & Ola-Akuma, 2023). Consequently, X and Instagram operate simultaneously as spaces for transparency and as contested arenas where disinformation can dilute or redirect public scrutiny.

These intertwined opportunities and risks underscore the need to interrogate how specific platforms work in practice and under what conditions digital activism compels state institutions to respond to allegations of corruption and rights violations. Advocacy conducted through X and Instagram can draw intense public attention to governance failures and, in some instances, stimulate institutional reforms (Okocha & Ishaku, 2023). Yet the rise of digital authoritarianism, manifested in state surveillance, platform regulation, and legal intimidation, increasingly constrains such efforts (Onanuga & Schmied, 2022). Governments' expansive use of cybercrime and national-security legislation to criminalise online dissent heightens risks for users who engage in anti-corruption advocacy, threatening the durability and effectiveness of digital campaigns.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines how X and Instagram contribute to accountability in governance by providing users with opportunities to contest corruption and demand justice. Specifically, it investigates the perceived roles of these platforms in exposing corrupt practices among Nigerian politicians and in supporting justice-oriented activism, the challenges that users encounter when deploying them for anti-corruption purposes, and the policy options that could enhance their effectiveness.

Despite several implementing anti-corruption regimes, such as the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), these organisations have not been able to curb corruption, which is deeply entrenched in Nigeria's governance structure. Institutional bottlenecks, political interference, and a lack of strong enforcement mechanisms continue to hinder the accomplishment of their mandates (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022). Empirical studies show that more than 85% of Nigerians see government institutions as corrupt, and Nigeria occupied the 150th position out of 180 countries in the 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) of Transparency International. These have continued to serve as disturbing facts for accountability in governance in Nigeria. Traditional media that have historically helped expose corruption have been undermined through government censorship and media owners' biases and underfunding (Akindoyin, 2024). Alternatively, the emergence and proliferation of new media enables digital activism to emerge and flourish as an initiative to enable real-time documentation and exposure of corrupt acts over social media platforms, notably through X and Instagram. However, while these platforms have enormous potential to advance political transparency, the issue of their efficacy is severely under-researched in the academic literature (Jimada, 2019).

Despite efforts that examine roles of Twitter and narratives (Onanuga & Schmied, 2022), rise of digital activism among students (Uwalaka, 2017), misinformation in Nigerian political discourse online (Gbaje, Agwu, & Odigie, 2023), roles of social media in protests particularly #OccupyNigeriaProtest little has been done to examine the perceived roles of X and Instagram in digital activism for anti-corruption in Nigeria. For instance, it is well established in the literature that X played significant roles in enabling the #EndSARS protest (Adeniyi, 2022).

Accordingly, the study inquires to provides answers to questions such as what are the roles of X and Instagram in exposing corrupt practices among Nigerian politicians? what are the perceived impacts of X and Instagram in fostering digital activism for anti-corruption in Nigeria? What are the challenges associated with using X and Instagram for anti-corruption activism? What are the alternative policy strategies to enhance the effectiveness of X and Instagram for anti-corruption activism?

It is also noteworthy that digital activism signifies a strategic use of online platforms such as X, Instagram, and Facebook for mobilising public opinion, advocacy, and political reforms (Obong, Udoudom, Etifit, & Idiong, 2024). One recent movement in which thousands of Nigerians used X to reveal rampant police brutality and testify to a corrupt system was the #EndSARS (Osazuwa & Oghogho, 2024). Digital activism is unlike traditional forms of activism, such as instant global reach, decentralisation, and real-time engagement, which are used for advocacy at a stretch (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022). It is also not short of its share of challenges, state censorship, misinformation, and algorithmic suppression, which threatens its concern in bringing a permanent policy change (Ologunebi & Taiwo, 2025).

Research shows that although the short-term success of a movement may be catalysed by online activism, the more durable success mainly relies on institutional support and sustained offline mobilisation for action (Osazuwa & Oghogho, 2024). The repressive tactics adopted by regimes that are fully authoritarian or semi-authoritarian for the subjugation of online dissent are internet shutdowns, digital surveillance, and misinformation campaigns against online citizens. Even with these challenges, empirical studies show that digital activism is triggering an evolution

of the public sphere with new dimensions to expose marginalised voices increasingly capable of exercising influence over policy and governance discourse (Obong et al., 2024).

There are orchestrated efforts towards justice advocacy; these include organised attempts to create fairness, transparency, and accountability in what governments or states do in governance and public affairs. Advocacies include pressuring policymakers, mobilising citizens, and bringing media platforms into the limelight on injustices (Osazuwa & Oghogho, 2024). Social media has redefined justice advocacy by democratising the voices of marginalised communities and providing a direct channel for activists to engage with decision-makers in government.

There are challenges to justice advocacy despite these developments, as well as fake information online, government monitoring, and threats to activists through digital means (Auwal & Ersoy, 2024). Such laws prohibiting acts in cyberspace are usually subject to disinformation campaigns by state actors to suppress online dissent (Obong et al., 2024). Some activists have even been arrested and threatened with punitive measures by governments for their involvement in unearthing corruption and inept governance through social media networks (Ologunebi & Taiwo, 2025).

Just as public participation and institutional cooperation have a role in ensuring the effectiveness of justice advocacy, digital campaigns alone cannot guarantee long-term systemic reforms (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022). Recent studies have shown that even legal action and policy lobbying, grassroots mobilisation, and justice advocacy on platforms like Twitter and Instagram proved most effective (Gbaje, Agwu, & Odigie, 2023). For instance, while the #EndSARS movement focused global attention on the issue, it faced severe government pushback and a lack of organised policy engagement to create change at deep levels in the police force (Osazuwa & Oghogho, 2024).

The capacity of digital platforms to expose wrongdoing and sustain public pressure on officials depends on how effectively citizen-generated narratives can counter official spin and state-aligned media frames. In settings where conventional media are heavily constrained, platforms such as X and Instagram become central spaces in which corruption is exposed, protests are coordinated, and failures of governance are contested (Adeniyi, 2022).

However, algorithmic manipulation, organised misinformation, and direct state interference remain formidable obstacles to digital accountability. Governments may collaborate with platform providers or exploit opaque content-moderation processes to remove or downgrade politically sensitive material under the guise of combating misinformation (Obong et al., 2024). State-sponsored influencers and bot networks further flood timelines with counter-narratives that question the legitimacy of social movements and cast doubt on corruption allegations (Osazuwa & Oghogho, 2024).

Scholars also warn that over-reliance on social media as a vehicle for accountability can foster sensationalism, where issues gain visibility primarily because they go viral rather than on the strength of underlying evidence (Onanuga & Schmied, 2022). This risk highlights the importance of robust fact-checking, digital literacy initiatives, and legal protections for whistle-blowers if the Nigerian digital sphere is to support sustained, evidence-based scrutiny of those in power (Ologunebi & Taiwo, 2025).

Several studies have examined the use of social media platforms, notably X and Instagram, as instruments for political accountability and corruption deterrence. An investigation by Jimoh, Abdulrasaq and Olawale (2024) examined the impact of Twitter on anti-corruption movements in

Nigeria. The result established that before the 2021 Twitter ban, activists used the platform to fight against governance's downturn in real time.

Indeed, despite these merits, the incursion of such social media spaces within the government dimension becomes denials to state crap. Under this idea, Aiseng (2024) analysed "Black Twitter" in South Africa. Just as with other parts, this space used "the marginalisation of local communities" to continue politics; however, state repression and misinformation were great. Consistent with this, research by Duygu (2023) saw governments use digital misinformation to water down online accountability efforts and make it difficult for activists to carry a continuous tempo into political reform movements.

Many pieces of literature have analysed the effectiveness of fact-checking mechanisms, especially in combating misinformation. Ridout and Cakmık (2024) also found that while fact-checking tools on Twitter sharpen political conversation, government counter-effects, such as censorship laws, diminish their effect. Furthermore, the work of Arce-García and Menéndez-Menéndez (2022) showed that bot-driven disinformation campaigns have significantly tarnished the efforts of digital activism, especially in authoritarian-leaning countries.

The empirical studies prove that Twitter and Instagram can hold aloft the banner of wastage from corruption publicising; however, they also say that actual evidence collected suggests that advocacy conducted online does not bring about legal and policy changes.

A comparative study by Stavropoulos (2024) systematically gauged the influence of these two movements: #EndSARS and #MeToo. It found that though they managed to generate considerable public discourse, such debate did not translate into serious institutional reform as they did not have the requisite structural and legal apparatus for change. Peterson (2024) investigated the justice work of influencers on Instagram and found that even though these figures draw lots of responses from the public on corruption matters, their mobilisation campaigns are usually poorly thought out and lack the tactical depth needed to effect policy change.

Quiles-Kwock et al. (2024) have found that justice campaigns on Instagram are by influencers very participatory and primarily reliant on going viral, as opposed to impacting sustained governance reforms Ho and Tanaka (2023). Therefore, these same researchers argue that while digital activism is good at mobilising protest, it has much difficulty in achieving systemic governance reforms because it lacks the enforcement of legal mechanisms.

Thus, they are loud in saying that "while it can be action inducing," Twitter and Instagram suffer through significant obstacles to their norm of fostering political accountability, algorithmic suppression, state-sponsored misinformation, and public censorship. Onanuga and Schmied (2022) observed that Twitter and Instagram ranked high in politically sensitive content because these platforms masked their under-content moderation, considering they are invisible to anybody.

Susceptibility to misinformation is one of the main problems for the public in digital activism. Gbaje, Agwu, and Odigie (2023) found that 47% of Nigerians possess inadequate digital literacy to distinguish credible information from manipulated one; hence, state-sponsored disinformation may easily trap them. Gremler and Weidmann (2024) studied algorithmic bias on social media more in-depth, concluding that entertainment rather than political activism is highly preferred on the platforms, drastically reducing the reach of overcrowded corruption-related discussions.

The 2021 Twitter ban in Nigeria illustrated how governments suppress digital activism via legislative and technological controls. Auwal and Ersoy (2024) sample an analysis of the restrictions that disrupted online advocacy pathways; thus, the activists had to turn to more dangerous methods that exposed them to state repression. Trzoss et al. (2023) examined the state's control of social media narratives, where the government utilises censorship laws and social media regulations to control online discussions and suppress anti-corruption movements. states often monitor social media to counter and retaliate against activists, making digital advocacy even more precarious. In several authoritarian regimes, the study noted that social media users criticising the state often face online harassment, deplatforming, and legal actions.

A glaring gap in digital justice advocacy literature pertains to sustainability. Faniyi (2023) averred that most social media-based anti-corruption movements lack institutional support, rendering any long-term impact highly uncertain. The authors of Smit and van Leeuwen (2024), arguing about justice movements on Instagram, concluded that while these may garner substantial initial media presence, in general terms, they may not sustain public engagement beyond the first wave of exposure.

In a similar line, Odilla and Veloso (2024), in their study of collecting web-based anti-corruption initiatives, stated, "these platforms are effective for creating awareness… [yet] they need the support of law and the frameworks of formal institutions" to be able to carry any hope of long-term policy change. A widespread review by Marchetti et al. (2024) found that most digital activism studies emphasise social interaction metrics above policy consequences, thus inhibiting their ability to measure national governance impact adequately.

While Twitter and Instagram have proven instrumental in justice advocacy, concrete evidence from empirical studies on how digital activism translates into policy change is scant. Studies acknowledge a relationship between social media exposure and public engagement, yet little has been explored about how such engagement advances legal reforms and institutional accountability. This study shall narrow the existing gap by engaging in an empirical assessment of the effectiveness of Twitter and Instagram in the Nigerian political setting, focusing on policy advocacy and governance reforms.

The study aligns with the propositions of Social Accountability Theory and Digital Activism Theory. The Social Accountability Theory was proposed by Carmen Malena, Rogers Forster, and Janmejay Singh in 2004. The core tenet of the theory emphasises the direct participation of community members in activating accountability mechanisms, reflecting individual practitioner and organisational core values. The Digital Activism Theory has been advanced by many contributors. Its foundational concepts of “social activism” or “social movement” are attributed to the works of Saul Alinsky, but Jill Hopke emphasises the blurring lines between offline and online activism. Suay Ozkula identified four key features that differentiate online from offline activism. These theories jointly provide heuristic explanations of how social media platforms are utilised by users to foster accountability, especially in governance, as well as provide opportunities for activism. Specifically, many studies that utilise this framework underscore how X and Instagram, as platforms, facilitate political transparency, citizen mobilisation, and justice advocacy.

Firstly, the accountability theory examines social accountability, arguing that citizen participation and participatory governance strengthen the government's accountability under social control (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015). This means that with proper tools and access to information, citizens can effectively monitor and demand accountability from public officials

(Grandvoinnet et al., 2015). This relates well to Nigeria's social media landscape, where Twitter and Instagram have been deployed to expose political misconduct and demand changes by institutions.

Evidence has shown that social media-driven transparency mechanisms increase the accountability of governments, particularly when there is widespread mobilisation and advocacy through the digital (Bailur & Gigler, 2011). However, for all its advantages, social accountability is oftentimes undermined by the state through surveillance, misinformation on social media, and resistance from institutions to transparency (Bukenya, Hickey, & King, 2012). Governments adopt Various digital repression mechanisms against online dissent, including content moderation policies, cyber laws, and internet shutdowns, to retaliate against whistleblowers (Fotopoulou, 2021).

The current study further applies the Social Accountability Theory by looking at the various ways through which X and Instagram give Nigerian citizens some power in holding their leaders accountable. Twitter and Instagram amplify the denunciation of information, enable citizen political scrutiny, and castrate public opinion on governance (Shkabatur, 2012).

Ziccardi (2013) explained the Digital Activism Framework as a means of observing how digital platforms might spur political participation, grassroots movement activities, and justice advocacy. Digital activism has reshaped Nigeria's political landscape such that Twitter has become an arena of political discourse, particularly in a media landscape dominated by state-controlled traditional outlets (Mattoni & Odilla, 2021).

Movements such as #EndSARS, which gained international recognition through social media advocacy, exemplify how digital platforms enable mass mobilisation and generate political discourse (Tonderai & Nirmala, 2023). Twitter and Instagram thus act as organising tools that connect activists, exchange information in real-time, and amplify grassroots movements crossing national boundaries (Land & Aronson, 2020). However, challenges to digital activism include government surveillance, algorithmic suppression, and misinformation campaigns, which often dilute the effectiveness of online advocacy (George & Leidner, 2019). Research demonstrates that while online activism can garner immediate political attention, the sustainability of such activism hinges on legal frameworks, policy integration, and offline advocacy activities (Heimstädt & Dobusch, 2020).

The study, hence, extends and builds on the Digital Activism Framework by seeking to understand how X and Instagram shape citizen engagement, governance narratives, and justice advocacy in Nigeria. It elaborates on how digital movements sustain political discourse, the role of influencer-led activism, and algorithmic control's impact on activism consequences (Mason, 2020).

By integrating both Social Accountability Theory and Digital Activism Theory, the study offers a more extensive understanding of how digital platforms enable political transparency and justice advocacy in Nigeria. While the Social Accountability Theory analyses citizen engagement and oversight of institutions, the Digital Activism Theory analyses how social media enables online mobilisation and advocacy for systemic changes (Goncharenko, 2019).

The study also discusses some of the limitations of digital accountability, such as state control over online discourse, misinformation, algorithmic mischief, and access to equity from online advocacy tools (Griffin, 2023). Addressing these aspects contributes to the broader topic of

how social media activism has affected governance and anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria (Klugman, 2011).

Method

This study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design using a survey method, which is appropriate for assessing how X and Instagram are used to foster anti-corruption activism and justice advocacy in Nigeria. Survey research allows for the systematic collection of standardised data from a relatively large number of respondents, thereby supporting statistical analysis of patterns in perceptions and experiences (Shafique, 2024). The quantitative approach also facilitates generalisation of findings to the wider population of engaged users, provided that sampling and measurement procedures are handled rigorously.

The population of the study comprises all users of X and Instagram in Nigeria, including journalists and justice advocates who rely on these platforms for political communication and mobilisation. As of December 2024, there were an estimated 12.6 million Instagram users and 5.7 million users of X in Nigeria. Within this broader population, the study focused on adults who self-identified as using X or Instagram to obtain political information, discuss governance, or participate in anti-corruption or justice campaigns.

A total sample of 500 respondents was selected using a stratified random sampling technique to enhance representativeness and minimise sampling bias. Consistent with methodological recommendations for online survey research, a sample of at least 400–500 participants is considered statistically robust for detecting population-wide trends in attitudes and behaviours (Seng, 2024). Stratification and random selection together support the external validity of the findings for Nigerian users who are actively engaged with social media in political life (Shoukat & Awan, 2025).

Stratified random sampling was implemented by dividing potential respondents into four key subgroups: regular users who primarily engage with X, regular users who primarily engage with Instagram, practising journalists, and justice advocates (such as members of civic organisations or anti-corruption networks). Sampling frames were constructed from publicly accessible online communities and professional networks associated with each subgroup, after which simple random selection was applied within each stratum to reach the overall target of 500 participants. This design reduced selection bias and ensured that the perspectives of different stakeholder groups involved in digital activism were adequately represented in the data (Chang, 2024; Saini, 2024).

Data collected through survey responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, means, and percentages, using SPSS version 25. This approach identifies trends, patterns, and key insights into Twitter and Instagram's role in corruption exposure and justice advocacy (Batelaan, 2024). Furthermore, this study employs correlation analysis to examine the relationship between digital engagement and perceptions of social justice outcomes.

Data were collected with a structured self-administered questionnaire. The instrument comprised four sections aligned with the research questions and theoretical framework: (i) perceived roles of X and Instagram in exposing political corruption, (ii) justice-advocacy strategies and impacts of digital activism, (iii) challenges and risks associated with platform use for anti-corruption, and (iv) preferred policy and governance responses to enhance effectiveness. Most items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 =

strongly agree. Items were adapted from prior studies on digital activism, social accountability, and media use, and were reviewed by two experts in political communication and one expert in survey methodology to establish content validity. A pilot test with a small group of respondents was used to refine wording and response options, and internal consistency of the multi-item scales was examined using Cronbach's alpha in line with standard psychometric practice.

Result and Discussion

For each section, there is a table showing the frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation for each statement. In this case, mean and standard deviation provide an idea about their central tendency and variability of their responses.

What are the roles of X and Instagram in exposing corrupt practices among Nigerian politicians?

The results in Table 1 indicate strong agreement that X and Instagram make a substantive contribution to exposing political corruption in Nigeria. Across all five items, mean scores are clustered around 4.0 on the five-point scale and standard deviations are approximately 1.1–1.2, signalling a clear tendency towards agreement with moderate variation in intensity. For example, 82.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that X is an effective platform for exposing political corruption, while 80.0% affirmed that Instagram's visual storytelling enhances citizens' awareness of corruption. Similar proportions (around 80–81%) endorsed statements that corruption scandals publicised on these platforms influence public opinion and that cases exposed on social media can lead to investigations or legal actions. Taken together, these patterns show that respondents view X and Instagram not merely as discussion spaces but as functional tools for surfacing specific allegations and triggering institutional responses.

In the Nigerian context, X and Instagram have therefore become complementary – and sometimes alternative – forums to traditional media for spotlighting misconduct by political officeholders. A high proportion of respondents (80.8%) agreed that social media platforms provide an alternative to conventional outlets for holding politicians accountable, reflecting a perception that state-aligned censorship, ownership concentration, and resource constraints limit what legacy media can report (Cheeseman & Peiffer, 2022; Akindoyin, 2024). This aligns with Social Accountability Theory, which emphasises that when citizens have timely access to information and communicative tools, they are better able to monitor public officials and demand redress (Grandvoinnet, Aslam, & Raha, 2015).

The finding that approximately four in five respondents believe that corruption cases exposed on X and Instagram can lead to investigations or legal action points to a perceived link between online denunciation and formal accountability processes. This resonates with recent Nigerian examples in which viral posts, hashtags, and user-generated evidence have prompted official inquiries or public clarifications from implicated actors (Jimoh, Abdulrasaq, & Olawale, 2024). It is also consistent with international research suggesting that the visibility and permanence of digital records can raise reputational costs for officials and institutions, even in contexts where legal sanctions are rare.

Table 1. X and Instagram's Contribution to Exposing Political Corruption in Nigeria

S/N	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Twitter is an effective platform for exposing political corruption in Nigeria.	34 (6.8%)	34 (6.8%)	18 (3.6%)	216 (43.2%)	198 (39.6%)	500 (100%)	4.02	1.14
2	Instagram's visual storytelling enhances awareness of corruption among citizens.	34 (6.8%)	41 (8.2%)	25 (5.0%)	213 (42.6%)	187 (37.4%)	500 (100%)	3.95	1.15
3	Social media platforms provide an alternative to traditional media in holding politicians accountable.	37 (7.4%)	41 (8.2%)	18 (3.6%)	212 (42.4%)	192 (38.4%)	500 (100%)	3.96	1.16
4	Political corruption scandals exposed on Twitter and Instagram influence public opinion.	38 (7.6%)	37 (7.4%)	21 (4.2%)	215 (43.0%)	189 (37.8%)	500 (100%)	3.96	1.16
5	Corruption cases exposed on social media lead to investigations or legal actions.	38 (7.6%)	42 (8.4%)	18 (3.6%)	206 (41.2%)	196 (39.2%)	500 (100%)	3.96	1.18

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

At the same time, the reliance on user-generated content means that the perceived effectiveness of X and Instagram in exposing corruption is intertwined with wider debates about verification and credibility. While respondents broadly endorse these platforms as mechanisms for surfacing wrongdoing, qualitative comments and the wider literature remind us that not all viral allegations are substantiated and that counter-campaigns by powerful actors may seek to discredit

whistle-blowers or reframe accusations as partisan attacks (Aiseng, 2024; Duygu, 2023). The descriptive results for RQ1 therefore highlight both the promise and the contested nature of social media as instruments of political exposure.

Table 2. Justice Advocacy Strategies on Social Media

S/N	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Hashtag campaigns (e.g., #EndSARS) effectively mobilize citizens for justice advocacy.	34 (6.8%)	34 (6.8%)	23 (4.6%)	220 (44%)	189 (37.8%)	500 (100%)	3.99	1.13
2	Social media enables direct engagement between activists and policymakers.	36 (7.2%)	32 (6.4%)	24 (4.8%)	208 (41.6%)	200 (40.0%)	500 (100%)	4.01	1.14
3	Digital activism fosters community-driven campaigns against corruption.	36 (7.2%)	40 (8.0%)	25 (5.0%)	212 (42.4%)	187 (37.4%)	500 (100%)	3.94	1.16
4	Online petitions and social media protests are effective in influencing governance.	33 (6.6%)	36 (7.2%)	33 (6.6%)	211 (42.2%)	187 (37.4%)	500 (100%)	3.96	1.13
5	Twitter and Instagram help marginalized groups amplify their voices in justice advocacy.	32 (6.4%)	32 (6.4%)	23 (4.6%)	212 (42.4%)	201 (40.2%)	500 (100%)	3.99	1.12

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

The findings also underscore the transformative role Facebook and Instagram lent to the justice advocacy strategies of hashtag campaigns, direct engagement with policymakers, and online petitions. Respondents, by a wide margin, agreed that hashtags, including #EndSARS, mobilized citizens for justice advocacy, as indicated by a mean score of 3.99 (SD = 1.13). This is in agreement with the contention by Ziccardi (2013) in his Digital Activism Framework that digital platforms advance political participation, grassroots movements, and justice advocacy.

More than 81.6% of the respondents justify that social media could support direct engagement between activists and politicians. This supports Mattoni and Odilla (2021), who found that Twitter and Instagram are organizational instruments to share information and network among justice advocates in a real-time manner.

The study further endorses findings by Tonderai and Nirmala (2023), who disclosed how #EndSARS globally emerged due to social media advocacy, thus showing how digital platforms sustain justice movements beyond national boundaries.

The information given in Table 2 takes a holistic look into the perception of respondents on the efficacy of social media platforms as having helped Pulled Justice Advocacy efforts in Nigeria. The findings reveal a consensus leaning quite favourably toward the positive impact of such digital tools in bringing citizens together and into governance. About 81.8 percent of respondents are agreement or strongly agree with such hashtag campaigns as *#EndSARS* mobilizing people for justice advocacy, with a mean score of 3.99 and the standard deviation of 1.13. This further illustrates that organized movements via social media can carry public support against injustice. The *#EndSARS* movement, for instance, made the most use of Twitter for the coordination of protests and the dissemination of information, but most interestingly, underlined the power of the hashtags that can be used by different citizens for a common cause.

In the same vein, 81.6% of the participants say social media provides such a way for direct access between activists and policymakers with a mean score of 4.01 and a standard deviation of 1.14. This is as though Twitter and Instagram provide an easy platform for interaction where an activist can air their demands directly to the ear of authority through these social networks, effecting changes in policy and reforming a lot. This has been seen in different advocacy campaigns in Nigeria.

Digital activism has made a promise on the part of the community that it can host campaigns aimed at tackling the slide into everyone's perception of corruption, with 79.8% of respondents expressing such a view, a mean score of 3.94, and a standard deviation of 1.16. A strong indication exists here that online platforms can galvanize communities to mobilize them on various challenges that have been tied to matters of corruption. They could also aid grassroots movements in holding authorities accountable.

Again, 79.6% of respondents think online petitions and protests in social media can effectively influence governance. This is proved by a mean score of 3.96 and a standard deviation of 1.13. Such perceptions reflect the impression of digital advocacy's effectiveness in shaping the policies and actions of government. Most online petitions have served as momentum frames for policy discussions and reforms, catalysing the impact of action taken by the masses over digital platforms.

There are 82.6% of participants showing an agreement that Twitter and Instagram provide marginalized groups through a point of stretching out their voices from justice advocacy to a mean of 3.99 and a standard deviation of 1.12. This would be the role of social media in platforming on underrepresented communities sharing experiences and advocating for rights. Furthermore, marginalized groups can reach wider audiences and garner support for their causes through these mechanisms.

As the data reflects above, social media has a very robust endorsement as a tool in justice advocacy in Nigeria. The mean scores are all on the upper side, while the standard deviations are relatively low, signifying a consensus on the respondents' belief in the effectiveness of digital platforms. It is clear that citizens can be mobilized, directly engaged with policymakers, and have access for community-driven campaigns to influence governance and amplify voices that might otherwise go unheard.

Identify the challenges associated with using X and Instagram for anti-corruption activism?

Table 3. Challenges Hindering Social Media-Driven Anti-Corruption Campaigns

S/N	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Government-imposed restrictions (e.g., Twitter ban) negatively impact online activism.	39 (7.8%)	35 (7.0%)	24 (4.8%)	207 (41.4%)	195 (39.0%)	500 (100%)	3.97	1.17
2	Algorithmic suppression (shadow banning, content de-prioritization) reduces the reach of anti-corruption campaigns.	32 (6.4%)	42 (8.4%)	24 (4.8%)	215 (43.0%)	187 (37.4%)	500 (100%)	3.97	1.14
3	Fake news and misinformation weaken the credibility of corruption allegations on social media.	40 (8.0%)	38 (7.6%)	19 (3.8%)	213 (42.6%)	190 (38.0%)	500 (100%)	3.95	1.18
4	Government-affiliated bots and influencers manipulate political narratives to suppress genuine activism.	38 (7.6%)	40 (8.0%)	21 (4.2%)	207 (41.4%)	194 (38.8%)	500 (100%)	3.95	1.17
5	Many social media-driven anti-corruption movements lack formal structures for sustained impact.	40 (8.0%)	42 (8.4%)	23 (4.6%)	209 (41.8%)	186 (37.2%)	500 (100%)	3.92	1.18

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Table 3 summarises respondents' perceptions of the key challenges that hinder social media-driven anti-corruption campaigns in Nigeria. Across all five items, mean scores lie between 3.92 and 3.97, with standard deviations around 1.14–1.18, indicating broad agreement that these barriers are salient, though not uniformly experienced by all users. Around four in five

respondents (80.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that government-imposed restrictions, such as the Twitter ban, negatively affect online activism, underscoring the disruptive impact of abrupt regulatory interventions on digital mobilisation (Auwal & Ersoy, 2024).

A similar proportion (80.4%) affirmed that algorithmic suppression including shadow banning and the de-prioritisation of certain content reduces the reach of anti-corruption campaigns. This reflects growing concern that opaque platform algorithms may systematically disadvantage civic and political content relative to entertainment or commercial material (Onanuga & Schmied, 2022; Gremler & Weidmann, 2024). Almost the same share of respondents (80.6%) agreed that fake news and misinformation weaken the credibility of corruption allegations, highlighting how disinformation ecosystems erode public trust in genuine exposés.

Respondents also perceived state-aligned digital actors as an important source of distortion. Approximately 80.2% agreed or strongly agreed that government-affiliated bots and influencers manipulate political narratives in ways that suppress genuine activism, echoing evidence of coordinated campaigns that drown out or delegitimise critical. Finally, 79.0% of respondents indicated that many social media-based anti-corruption movements lack the formal structures needed for sustained impact, pointing to organisational fragility once initial surges of attention have subsided (Faniyi, 2023; Odilla & Veloso, 2024).

Taken together, these findings portray a challenging operating environment in which digital activists must navigate simultaneous pressures from government regulation, platform design, and information disorder. While X and Instagram are widely regarded as effective tools for exposing corruption, respondents recognise that their accountability potential can be blunted by state censorship, algorithmic opacity, and the limited institutionalisation of many online movements.

What are policy strategies to enhance the effectiveness of X and Instagram for anti-corruption activism?

The results of the study can be seen in Table 4, which presents respondents' views on governance policies and strategies for leveraging social media in anti-corruption campaigns and accountability processes. The mean scores for the five items ranged between 3.94 and 4.00, with standard deviations ranging from 1.14 to 1.20, indicating strong support for institutional reforms that embed digital tools within formal governance structures.

First, 79.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that social media should be integrated into official anti-corruption efforts by government agencies (M = 3.94, SD = 1.20). This suggests public backing for mechanisms through which institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) systematically monitor, verify, and respond to credible allegations originating from X and Instagram. Such integration could include dedicated digital reporting channels, social media monitoring units, and protocols for escalating verified cases into formal investigations.

Similarly, 80.6% of respondents supported collaboration between government institutions and digital activists to enhance transparency (M = 3.95, SD = 1.18). This aligns with scholarship arguing that social accountability initiatives are most effective when citizen-led monitoring is connected to responsive state actors and clear institutional pathways for remedy (Grandvoinnet et al., 2015). In practical terms, this could entail regular consultative forums, co-designed campaigns, and formal commitments for timely public communication following major corruption exposés.

Table 4: Leveraging Digital Platforms for Effective Governance

S/N	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Social media should be integrated into official anti-corruption efforts by government agencies.	41 (8.2%)	40 (8.0%)	21 (4.2%)	204 (40.8%)	194 (38.8%)	500 (100%)	3.94	1.20
2	The government should collaborate with digital activists to enhance transparency.	36 (7.2%)	40 (8.0%)	21 (4.2%)	216 (43.2%)	187 (37.4%)	500 (100%)	3.95	1.18
3	Stronger regulations are needed to prevent misinformation and disinformation on social media.	34 (6.8%)	38 (7.6%)	22 (4.4%)	219 (43.8%)	187 (37.4%)	500 (100%)	3.97	1.16
4	Social media platforms should improve their algorithms to prioritize anti-corruption content.	32 (6.4%)	35 (7.0%)	22 (4.4%)	222 (44.4%)	189 (37.8%)	500 (100%)	4.00	1.14
5	Civil society organizations should use social media to educate the public on governance accountability.	39 (7.8%)	42 (8.4%)	22 (4.4%)	206 (41.2%)	191 (38.2%)	500 (100%)	3.94	1.20

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Respondents also emphasised the need to address information disorder and platform design. A total of 81.2% agreed or strongly agreed that stronger regulations are required to prevent misinformation and disinformation on social media (M = 3.97, SD = 1.16), while 82.2% believed that platforms should improve their algorithms to prioritise credible anti-corruption

content (M = 4.00, SD = 1.14). These views point towards a dual strategy of evidence-based regulation – that protects freedom of expression while penalising deliberate disinformation campaigns – and negotiated reforms with platform providers to increase the visibility of verified, public-interest information.

Finally, 79.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that civil society organisations should use social media to educate the public on governance accountability (M = 3.94, SD = 1.20). This underlines the continuing importance of non-state actors in translating complex corruption cases into accessible narratives, countering misinformation, and sustaining public engagement beyond short-lived moments of outrage. When combined with institutional reforms and platform changes, such civic education can help convert episodic digital activism into more durable accountability gains.

Overall, the policy preferences reported in Table 4 indicate that respondents do not see X and Instagram as self-sufficient solutions to corruption. Rather, they favour a model in which digital activism is embedded within broader ecosystems of legal reform, institutional responsiveness, platform governance, and civic education. This reinforces the study's theoretical argument that social accountability and digital activism are most impactful when mutually reinforcing rather than operating in isolation.

An important substantive contribution of this study is to show, using nationally oriented survey data, that Nigerians who are engaged on X and Instagram overwhelmingly endorse the incorporation of these platforms into formal anti-corruption architectures. Whereas much of the existing literature focuses on the visibility and mobilisation functions of digital activism, the present findings demonstrate a strong public appetite for institutionalised mechanisms through which online exposure of corruption can feed into investigations, sanctions, and long-term governance reforms.

The evidence that large majorities support co-operation between government agencies and digital activists, tighter but rights-respecting regulation of misinformation, and algorithmic adjustments that favour credible anti-corruption content provides a more fine-grained picture of how citizens would like digital accountability to evolve. Rather than viewing the state solely as an adversary, respondents appear to favour constructive engagement, provided that it leads to greater transparency and does not criminalise legitimate dissent (Heimstädt & Dobusch, 2020; Mattoni & Odilla, 2021).

The study also highlights the central role of civil society organisations in mediating between online activism and policy change. Respondents' support for expanded civic education via X and Instagram suggests that public trust in anti-corruption campaigns is likely to be strongest when citizen-generated allegations are accompanied by independent verification, legal advocacy, and sustained offline organising (Boulianne & Hoffmann, 2024; Odilla & Veloso, 2024).

Social media, particularly X and Instagram, emerge from this study as central infrastructures of political accountability and justice advocacy in contemporary Nigeria. The survey results show that large majorities of engaged users regard these platforms as effective channels for exposing corrupt practices, influencing public opinion, and, in some cases, prompting formal investigations or legal action. At the same time, respondents are acutely aware of the constraints imposed by government restrictions, algorithmic suppression, and pervasive misinformation, which together curb the transformative potential of digital activism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study advances the literature in three main ways. First, it provides systematic, survey-based evidence on how X and Instagram are jointly perceived as tools of anti-corruption activism, moving beyond case studies that focus on single movements or platforms. Second, it integrates Social Accountability Theory and the Digital Activism Framework to explain how citizen-led exposure, platform affordances, and institutional responses interact in a hybrid media environment. Third, by mapping citizens' preferred policy and governance responses, the study offers a nuanced account of how digital mobilisation might be translated into more durable accountability gains.

These contributions should, however, be interpreted in the light of several limitations. The study relies on cross-sectional survey data, which capture perceptions at a single point in time and cannot establish causality between platform use and changes in governance outcomes. The measures are based on self-report and may be affected by recall bias or social desirability. Although stratified random sampling was used within accessible online communities, the sample is still likely to over-represent relatively educated and digitally connected citizens, limiting generalisability to the entire Nigerian population. Future research could address these limitations by combining longitudinal designs, digital trace data, and qualitative interviews with activists, journalists, and policymakers.

Despite these caveats, the findings carry clear implications for policy and practice. First, they support the formal integration of X and Instagram into the toolkits of anti-corruption bodies such as the EFCC and ICPC, through dedicated reporting portals, monitoring units, and protocols for verifying and escalating credible allegations.

Secondly, they point to the value of structured collaboration between government agencies and digital activists, including co-created campaigns and regular dialogue on how citizen-generated evidence is handled.

Thirdly , the strong support for algorithmic improvements and fact-based regulation of misinformation suggests that both Nigerian policymakers and platform providers should prioritise transparency and accountability in content governance. Regulatory frameworks should target deliberate disinformation and coordinated inauthentic behaviour while safeguarding freedom of expression and the right to criticise public officials. Finally, respondents' emphasis on the educational role of civil society organisations underscores the need for sustained investment in digital literacy, fact-checking initiatives, and legal protection for whistle-blowers, so that online exposure of corruption can be converted into informed, collective action.

If these strands are pursued in combination with institutional reforms, platform governance, and civic education, X and Instagram are more likely to support not only episodic moments of protest but also the incremental, long-term work of strengthening accountability and curbing corruption in Nigeria's democratic trajectory.

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