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Strategic use of social media in organizational conflict management: Evaluating digital engagement practices in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study evaluated the use of social media in conflict management in Abuja, Nigeria, with a focus on how digital platforms contribute to either peacebuilding or the escalation of unrest. A qualitative design was employed, and data were collected through structured key informant interview process. The recorded interview was transcribed verbatim and analysed data using Nvivo version 14. Findings indicate that social media serves as a powerful tool for dialogue, advocacy, and public engagement, but also presents challenges such as the spread of misinformation and cybercrime. The study recommends that government agencies and stakeholders invest in digital literacy and public enlightenment campaigns to promote the constructive use of social media in conflict resolution and national security discourse.

Keywords: Social media; Conflict management; Public sector; Digital human resource management; Nigeria

1. Introduction

Social media has become a universal platform for communication, with over 4.7 billion users globally more than half the world's population actively engaging on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Andreou, 2024; Radcliffe et al., 2023). In organizations, the rise of social media and digital communication tools has transformed how employees and institutions interact. Social media has dismantled traditional communication hierarchies and has introduced new avenues for collaboration, dissent, and visibility (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017; Meikle, 2016).

Studies have noted that social media is transforming how, when, and whether conflicts manifest in the workplace, with online interactions capable of amplifying tensions through rapid information diffusion and polarized group dynamics (Haider, 2024; Upchurch & Grassman, 2016). While social media enables dialogue, collective action, and responsiveness, it also serves as a channel for misinformation, harassment, and institutional backlash, making it a double-edged sword in modern conflict management. These dynamics necessitate a digital lens in understanding and improving how organizations anticipate, prevent, and resolve conflict (Odole, 2023; Sulianta, 2024; Sultan, 2023). In both public and private sectors, social media increasingly blurs the lines between internal organizational communications and public discourse (Fuchs, 2015; Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). Employees may raise workplace grievances on platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) or Facebook, while institutional leaders issue public statements that may provoke or pacify stakeholder reactions. Unchecked, interpersonal or policy-related disputes can escalate rapidly in these digital spaces (McDonald & Thompson, 2016). For Human Resource Management (HRM), this evolution poses new challenges and opportunities, according to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), Human Resource (HR) professionals are now "on the front lines of helping organizations navigate the benefits and risks of social media," including developing and enforcing policies that govern employees' online conduct (SHRM, 2023). Effective conflict management in this context demands not only the traditional tools of dispute resolution but also digital fluency skills in online engagement,

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reputation management, and proactive listening that can shape organizational climate and public perception (Omowon, n.d.).

Nigeria provides a compelling context for examining the strategic use of social media in organizational conflict management. With more than 122 million internet users as of 2023, and over 30 million active social media users, the country's digital landscape is youthful, dynamic, and deeply embedded in everyday governance and activism (Aondover et al., 2024; Bello, 2022; Okpalaibekwe & Anikeze, 2024). Platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and X play a central role in political discourse, public protest, and institutional reputation management (Onuegbu, 2024). Perhaps the most iconic example of this was the #EndSARS movement in 2020 a youth-led protest against police brutality by Nigeria's now-disbanded Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). What began as digital storytelling and whistleblowing on Twitter quickly escalated into nationwide demonstrations catalyzed by viral videos, hashtags, and real-time mobilization (Makinde, 2021). The hashtag #EndSARS generated over 28 million tweets in a single weekend, making it one of the most impactful digital movements in African history (Change, 2021; Obia, 2025).

The digital response from government institutions during the #EndSARS crisis reflected both the promise and pitfalls of social media in public sector conflict management. Notably, Nigeria's Vice President, Yemi Osinbajo, issued a public apology via Twitter, acknowledging the government's slow response and promising reforms—a rare move in Nigerian governance that temporarily eased tensions (ThisDay, 2020). Yet, by mid-2021, the federal government had banned Twitter entirely, following the platform's deletion of a controversial tweet by the President (Obia, 2025).

Despite its centrality to modern governance and public discourse, the strategic use of social media within Nigeria's public institutions remains underdeveloped (AKINDOYIN, 2024; Shinkafi, 2016). While guidelines such as the 2019 *Framework for the Use of Social Media Platforms in Public Institutions* issued by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) acknowledge the importance of two-way digital communication, implementation remains inconsistent. Many agencies lack trained personnel, clear social media policies, or operational procedures to manage conflict-related communication online (NITDA, 2019) (Babalola, 2021; FASINU et al., n.d.; Ojih, 2025). Empirical studies show that while most federal and state agencies in Nigeria maintain official social media accounts, their engagement is often irregular, with outdated content and limited stakeholder interaction (Aribisala et al., 2023). Moreover, these official accounts are frequently overshadowed by the more active and sometimes inflammatory personal accounts of political figures, leading to confusion about institutional positions and undermining organizational coherence (Olowookere & Adeyemi, 2021).

This lack of structured digital engagement has direct implications for conflict management. In a context where public trust in institutions is fragile, failing to engage meaningfully online can result in missed early warning signs, unaddressed grievances, and reputational damage (Barker, 2021; Harriott, 2024; Zuckerman, 2021). For HR managers and policymakers in the Nigerian public sector, this represents an urgent frontier: building digital capacities to prevent, monitor, and respond to organizational conflicts as they unfold on social media platforms (Odole, 2023; Onuegbu, 2024).

In this study, we assessed how Nigerian government agencies utilize social media in managing organizational conflicts. Drawing on expert interviews and illustrative case studies, we assess the effectiveness of current practices and highlight opportunities for improvement. Our aim is to provide a grounded, evidence-based understanding of digital engagement in the public sector, and to offer insights that can inform HRM policies, conflict resolution strategies, and institutional digital transformation in Nigeria.

2. Methods

This research employed a qualitative approach to examine the use of social media in organizational conflict management within Nigerian government agencies. We conducted a qualitative interview to capture nuanced, context-rich insights into how digital engagement is being used in practice, beyond what quantitative surveys alone could reveal. By analyzing expert perspectives alongside real-world conflict scenarios, we aimed to develop a grounded understanding of strategies, behaviors, and outcomes associated with social media use in conflict situations.

2.1. Data Collection

We conducted semi-structured interviews with a conveniently selected participants from randomly selected government agencies (N=10) comprised of senior HR practitioners, conflict resolution specialists, and public relations. Participants were asked to share their observations and evaluations of how government agencies have utilized social media in managing internal disputes, employee grievances, or conflicts with external stakeholders (such as citizen groups or the media). The expert panel method allowed us to tap into experiential knowledge and practitioner insights

on sensitive organizational processes that might not be documented in the public domain. We also compiled case examples of digital conflict scenarios involving Nigerian government entities. These case examples were drawn from public records, including news reports, official statements, and social media content related to notable incidents. Examples included: the 2020 #EndSARS protest movement (as a case of a public conflict wherein government communication played a role); the 2021 Twitter ban (as a conflict between the government and a social media company with broader organizational ramifications); and several less high-profile instances of workplace disputes or public-relations crises that unfolded on social media (such as ministry officials sparring with critics on Twitter, or misinformation about government policies causing public alarm). These cases provided concrete instances of social media conflict engagement (or lack thereof) for analysis.

2.2. Data Analysis

Recorded interviews was transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic content analysis techniques. All expert interview transcripts and case documents were coded inductively with the aid of Nvivo version 14, following the steps of familiarization, code development, and theme identification. We paid particular attention to recurring patterns or strategies mentioned by participants and to outcomes observed in the case examples. Three overarching thematic categories guided by our research objectives were used as an analytic framework: (1) Conflict Prevention – ways social media was used proactively to avert or mitigate conflicts; (2) Conflict Escalation – ways social media use (or misuse) contributed to intensifying conflicts; and (3) Conflict Resolution – ways social media was leveraged to de-escalate disputes or resolve issues. Under each category, more granular sub-themes were identified (for example, under Conflict Prevention, sub-themes included *early warning and rumor management*, and *employee engagement and feedback channels*). To ensure reliability, two researchers independently coded a subset of the data and discussed any discrepancies in theme interpretation until consensus was reached – a form of analyst triangulation. We also cross-validated the expert insights with the case evidence: if an expert asserted a particular practice was common, we looked for corroborating examples (or counter-examples) in our case dataset. Given the qualitative nature of the research, our goal was not to generalize statistically, but rather to develop a rich narrative and conceptual model of current practices. All evidence from interviews was anonymized, and for case materials, we relied on publicly available information while adhering to ethical guidelines for reporting (including careful consideration of attributions and avoidance of unverified claims). The findings from this analysis are presented in the following section, organized by the key themes of prevention, escalation, and resolution as they relate to social media use in conflict management. Where applicable, direct quotes from experts or specific examples are used to illustrate each point, supplemented by references to existing literature for context.

3. Results

3.1. Use of Social Media for Conflict Prevention

Our analysis found that in some instances Nigerian government agencies have begun to employ social media as a tool for conflict prevention, but such strategic use remains limited and inconsistent. On the positive side, participants noted that a few forward-thinking agencies actively monitor social media to detect brewing issues and address citizen complaints before they escalate. For example, the Public Relations department of the Nigeria Police Force was cited as using Twitter to quickly debunk rumors during tense moments, in effect trying to "get ahead" of misinformation that might incite public conflict. Such early response can be critical; as Mercy Corps' research in Nigeria and other countries suggests, incorporating social media into early warning systems can significantly enhance conflict prevention efforts. By engaging with online content in real time – correcting false reports or clarifying policy changes – organizations can prevent misunderstandings from hardening into full-blown disputes. Additionally, a few agencies have experimented with using social media for stakeholder engagement exercises that could preempt conflict. One expert gave the example of a state government that solicited public feedback on a contentious policy via Facebook live chats, hoping that inviting citizen input would mitigate backlash. These practices align with global trends where organizations use digital platforms to increase transparency and inclusion, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict born from suspicion or lack of information.

However, such proactive conflict prevention via social media appears to be the exception rather than the norm. The expert evaluations and case studies converged on a finding that many Nigerian public institutions underutilize social media for preventative engagement. A recent analysis of official government social media usage revealed that while virtually all national and state government bodies in Nigeria have some social media presence, their level of activity is low and sporadic. Facebook is the platform most commonly used by government offices, yet even there, only about two-thirds of the surveyed government units posted weekly content. On Twitter – arguably the most influential platform for real-time dialogue in Nigeria – government utilization was found to be below average (weekly activity around 48% of

the studied period). Moreover, interactive engagement is minimal: across Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram, the vast majority of posts by government accounts generated low public interaction (likes, comments, shares), indicating an "e-participation" level that is largely low. One implication of this passivity is that government agencies may not be effectively listening to concerns voiced online. As one expert remarked, "the government's ears are not tuned to the ground when it comes to social media – people are shouting into the void." Without active two-way engagement, grievances that surface on social media – whether employees discussing poor working conditions on LinkedIn or citizens complaining about a service outage on Twitter – can go unaddressed by the responsible agency. In our cases, we observed that unacknowledged complaints often fester and attract sympathetic traction, thereby laying the groundwork for conflict escalation. For instance, prior to the #EndSARS eruption, young Nigerians had for years shared their harrowing encounters with the SARS police unit on Twitter with little official response. The absence of a conflict prevention mechanism (like a social media listening or outreach initiative by the police to rebuild trust) contributed to public frustration reaching a boiling point. This highlights a missed opportunity where strategic digital engagement might have mitigated anger early on.

Several systemic issues hinder the use of social media for conflict prevention in Nigeria's public sector. One issue identified is the lack of clear guidelines and training at the agency level. While there is a national framework encouraging public institutions to use social media, many agencies have not translated this into internal protocols. Our expert panel noted that some civil service departments are uncertain "who should be in charge of the Twitter handle" or "what is appropriate to post," leading to either paralysis or ad-hoc, uncoordinated messaging. Another issue is the prevalence of dormant or unofficial accounts. The content analysis found multiple instances where an agency had duplicate Facebook pages or outdated Twitter accounts set up under previous administrations. In one case, the official account of a state government hadn't posted in over a year, while a former governor's personal account continued to engage the public, creating confusion about where citizens should direct their concerns. There have also been instances of fake social media accounts posing as government entities, sometimes spreading false information. Such chaos in online representation dilutes the credibility of official communications and impedes conflict prevention; citizens may not trust or even find the legitimate channels to voice grievances, potentially resorting to more confrontational means to be heard.

Social Media and Conflict Escalation: The findings indicate that social media is a double-edged sword for Nigerian government agencies – in many cases, it has served to escalate conflicts when not handled strategically. A recurring theme from the expert interviews was that silence or slow response on social media can exacerbate a conflict situation. In fast-moving disputes, the public often turns to social media for immediate information and reactions. When an organization fails to respond in that same space, it cedes control of the narrative. We saw this in the case of a labor dispute within a federal agency: employees began tweeting about their unpaid salaries and poor working conditions, attracting public sympathy and media coverage. The agency's management, however, did not issue any statement online for days, allowing anger to mount. By the time an official press release was given to traditional media, the conflict had already escalated online with hashtags calling out the agency's leadership. This pattern – where digital vacuum leads to rumor and outrage filling the gap – was noted in multiple cases. It underlines the notion that in the digital age, a slow or absent communication can be as harmful as a miscommunication in fueling conflicts.

Paradoxically, when officials do engage on social media, their actions can also inflame tensions if done impulsively or punitively. One stark example was the now-infamous Twitter exchange in June 2021 that precipitated Nigeria's ban on Twitter. President Muhammadu Buhari had posted a tweet appearing to threaten violence against secessionist agitators in the country's Southeast, invoking memories of the civil war. The tweet was widely criticized as provocative and in poor taste, and Twitter deleted the President's message for violating its policy on abusive behavior. Rather than de-escalating the situation, the government responded with a sweeping and punitive measure – suspending Twitter's operations nationwide. This action turned a contained incident (the deletion of a single tweet) into a protracted conflict between the Nigerian state and both domestic social media users and international free speech advocates. It exemplifies how an adversarial stance toward social media criticism can escalate conflicts instead of resolving them. The Twitter ban provoked an outcry, drove activists to use alternative platforms or VPNs, and drew more negative attention to the very issue the government was sensitive about. As Malefakis (2023) observed, social media companies and the Nigerian government have "come into confrontation," with official shutdowns and bans ultimately feeding into conflict dynamics rather than controlling them. Our experts concurred that trying to censor or suppress online dissent through heavy-handed means tends to backfire, often internationalizing the conflict (as global media and human rights organizations weigh in) and eroding public trust further.

Even short of extreme cases like a platform ban, many everyday missteps by officials on social media have led to conflict escalation within organizations. Experts recounted incidents such as government representatives engaging in Twitter feuds with citizens or journalists, which only served to amplify the controversy. In one case, a ministry's spokesperson

responded defensively to a critical Facebook post by an employee's union leader, leading to a war of words in comments that spilled into mainstream news. What might have been an internal negotiation issue became a public spectacle, hardening positions on both sides. Another example involved a senior civil servant making an inappropriate joke on his personal social media about an ethnic group; though made outside of work, the comment sparked outrage among colleagues and the public, forcing the agency into damage-control mode. These scenarios highlight the blurring of personal and institutional conflict on social media – an employee or official's online behavior can rapidly become an organizational issue. Without clear social media conduct guidelines, such incidents are more likely, and HR departments then have to intervene after the fact, often under public scrutiny.

A notable insight from the interviews was the absence, in many agencies, of a crisis communication plan for social media conflicts. While organizations might have traditional crisis management protocols, they often lack playbooks for handling viral social media events. As one communications expert put it, "They're writing the script as they go, which means mistakes are made in the heat of the moment." For instance, during the #EndSARS protests, several official Twitter accounts (including that of the Nigerian Army) issued statements that were seen as confrontational or denying well-documented incidents, which further enraged the public and protesters. With hindsight, experts noted that a more conciliatory and transparent digital communication strategy could have reduced mistrust. The speed and emotional intensity of social media require a different approach – rapid acknowledgment of issues, empathy, and factual updates – to avoid escalation. Our content analysis of conflicts showed that when agencies did not follow these principles, online discourse quickly turned hostile and polarized, making resolution more challenging.

Use of Social Media for Conflict Resolution: Despite the challenges, the research also identified instances where social media was harnessed in a constructive way to resolve or at least temper conflicts, offering important lessons for public sector HRM. One of the clearest examples was the government's response to the #EndSARS protests once the magnitude of public anger became apparent. In mid-October 2020, as protests continued nationwide, Vice President Yemi Osinbajo took an unprecedented step of addressing citizens directly through a series of tweets. In these messages, he openly apologized on behalf of the government for not acting swiftly enough to address police brutality, saying "Dear Nigerians, I know that many of you are angry, and understandably so… We could've moved faster and for this we are sorry". He also outlined concrete actions being taken (such as the dissolution of the SARS unit and the establishment of judicial panels to investigate abuses) and assured the public that their voices had been heard. This use of social media to deliver an apology and policy update was a notable conflict resolution tactic. It provided a measure of validation to the protesters' grievances and communicated a willingness to reform, all in real time and in a conversational tone that traditional press conferences often lack. Many observers credit this digital engagement, along with similar social media announcements by other officials, with helping to de-escalate tensions at critical moments. Although not all protesters were satisfied by words alone (calls for "actions, not apologies" persisted in the Twitter discourse), the incident set a precedent in Nigeria for high-level leaders directly engaging the populace via social media in the midst of a crisis. From an HR and governance perspective, this demonstrated empathy and accountability – key ingredients in resolving conflict – conveyed through the very medium where public outcry was boiling.

Another domain of conflict resolution via social media is in addressing internal conflicts and employee issues. Our expert panel noted that some HR units have started using enterprise social media platforms (like internal workplace forums or WhatsApp groups) to mediate minor disputes and improve communication with staff. For example, in one federal agency, when false rumors spread among employees about an impending mass layoff (causing anxiety and anger), the HR director quickly posted a clarification on the staff WhatsApp group and opened the floor for questions. By tackling the misinformation head-on in a familiar digital space, the HR team prevented a potential panic and work stoppage. While this is an internal channel (not public-facing), it reflects the broader principle of leveraging fast and interactive communication tools for conflict resolution. Even on public platforms, we observed instances where agencies tried to resolve conflicts by providing information and engaging directly with concerned parties. In one case, when a community raised complaints on Twitter about a local government's handling of flood relief, the state emergency agency responded with timely updates, answered questions, and coordinated volunteers through social media. This proactive approach turned a conflict scenario (accusations of government inaction) into a more collaborative problem-solving interaction, blunting public criticism.

It should be acknowledged that not all attempts to resolve conflicts through social media are successful. The effectiveness of digital engagement in conflict management often depends on credibility and consistency. If an organization only turns to social media in crisis moments, but is unresponsive during ordinary times, stakeholders may be skeptical of the sudden outreach. One of our interviewees, an experienced mediator, stressed that "social media can't just be a loudspeaker in emergencies; it has to be a listening tool every day for people to trust it during conflict." In line with this, agencies that had an established positive social media presence found it easier to mobilize that goodwill during disputes. For instance, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) built a strong reputation on Twitter through daily

COVID-19 updates; consequently, when misinformation spiked about a certain vaccine, the public readily looked to NCDC's Twitter for clarification, and their conflict with skeptics was mitigated by the trust they had banked. This suggests that integrating social media into regular organizational communication and community-building can pay dividends when conflict resolution is needed.

Finally, our results indicate an emerging trend of multi-stakeholder conflict resolution initiatives using social media as a platform. Beyond individual agencies, there have been efforts such as inter-agency Twitter Spaces or Facebook Live forums where officials, citizens, and mediators discuss contentious issues openly. An example highlighted was a digital town hall held after a contentious policy change in which the head of the civil service, union representatives, and employees participated in a moderated Facebook Live chat to air concerns and promises. Such initiatives, though still rare, represent innovative uses of social media to facilitate dialogue that might otherwise be hard to organize in person. They exemplify how, if managed impartially, social media can be a space for conflict resolution by bringing conflicting parties together in a public yet controlled setting. Several experts cautioned, however, that these forums require careful facilitation to avoid degenerating into flame wars; having clear rules of engagement and impartial moderators (possibly external conflict resolution professionals) was deemed critical. Figure 1 provides an overview of findings regarding the organizational use of social media.
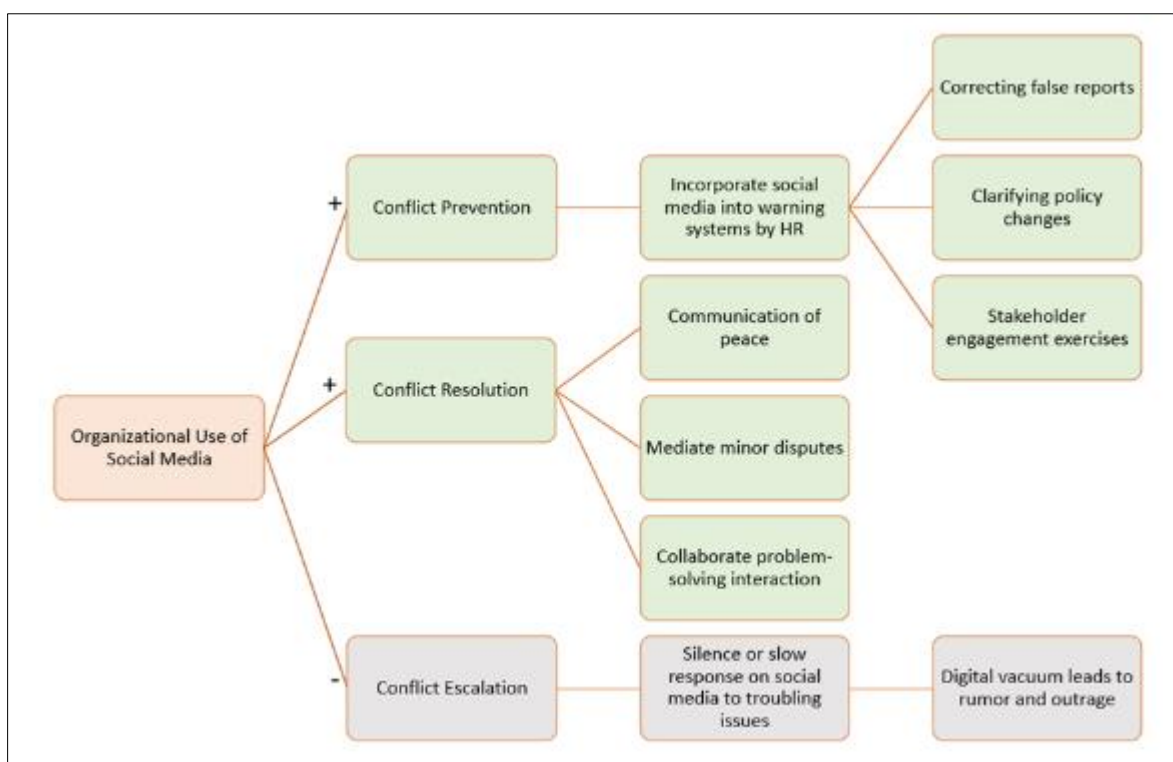
Figure 1 Summary of qualitative evidence highlighting both positive and negative aspects regarding organizational use of social media

4. Discussion

The findings underscore that social media has become a pivotal tool in organizational conflict management, offering new avenues for dialogue and transparency in the Nigerian public sector. Participants noted that platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and WhatsApp enable rapid information sharing and direct communication between stakeholders, which can help de-escalate disputes and address grievances. This aligns with other studies that reported that social media is used to facilitate dialogue and support participation in conflict prevention and resolution initiatives (Shinkafi, 2016). Social media helps close the gap between leaders and employees by allowing the employers to share their concerns and talk directly with those in charge. This open communication can build better understanding and help spot problems early, making it easier to solve conflicts before they get worse. The dual nature of social media in conflict dynamics was evident in the study. Consistent with other studies, respondents warned that while social media can foster peace and understanding, it can equally act as a catalyst for misinformation and rumor-spreading. Social media can amplify tensions from hate speech inflaming inter-communal conflicts to insurgent groups propagating disinformation

online. These risks highlight that the effectiveness of social media in conflict management depends on strategic usage and moderation(Abubakar et al., 2025; Stoakes, 2024). Therefore, social media with appropriate checks can transform conflict management processes by making them more inclusive, timely, and transparent, provided that its challenges are carefully mitigated.

A recurring theme in the discussion was the critical role of HR practices in enabling effective digital conflict management. This indicate that many public sector HR units in Nigeria are still developing the digital competencies required to navigate social media-driven conflicts. Participants reported gaps in skills and confidence when using online platforms for internal communications, this finding was similar to what was reported in other studies (Fuchs, 2015) Indeed, Nigeria's *National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy* (2020–2030) explicitly prioritizes digital literacy and proficiency as fundamental requirements for public sector employeesunesco.org. Consistent with this policy emphasis, recent capacity-building initiatives have been launched – for example, UNESCO's 2025 training of Nigerian civil servants in digital governance and artificial intelligenceunesco.org – underscoring a recognition that HR personnel must be adept with new technologies. These efforts support our finding that strengthening HR's digital skillset is a prerequisite for leveraging social media in organizational conflict management.

Study participants noted that digitally competent HR teams can use social media and internal communication platforms to proactively address workplace grievances, disseminate clarifications, and foster a culture of open dialogue. This reflects wider evidence that digital HR management, when effectively implemented, can enhance transparency and trust in organizations (Raza et al., 2023). However, some participants noted that some HR departments lack adequate infrastructure or face resistance to change, which hampers the integration of social media into conflict resolution workflows. These challenges are consistent with Naeem's (2020) observations that digital HRM adoption is influenced by complex factors ranging from individual skill levels to organizational readiness. Overcoming these barriers will likely require sustained investment in training, change management, and the modernization of HR policies.

The discussion highlights an urgent need for policy reforms and governance frameworks that guide the use of social media in conflict management within Nigeria's public sector. Currently, many public organizations operate in a policy gray area – there are few standardized guidelines on how civil servants should engage on social media during conflicts, leading to ad hoc and sometimes counterproductive approaches (Akindoyin, 2024). This study's findings suggest that, in the absence of clear policies, organizational responses to social-media-fueled conflicts tend to be reactive.

The Nigeria government opted at times to restrict social media access on grounds of national security, such heavy-handed measures including temporary bans and internet shutdowns usually leads to heightened conflict dynamics (Chukwuere & Onyebukwa, 2018; Moses et al., 2024). Participants argued that the reactionary posture of clamping down on social media illustrates the policy vacuum and the lack of a nuanced strategy for digital engagement. Therefore, participants called for more constructive governance approaches such as establishing protocols for monitoring and responding to online grievances, and frameworks to counter misinformation without curtailing legitimate expression. Many participants observed that their agencies often use social media in a reactive mode – for example, issuing press statements on Twitter or Facebook only after a crisis has escalated. This reactive use corresponds to what the OECD describes as a "passive" stage of social media adoption, where platforms serve mainly as outlets for information disseminationoecd.org. By contrast, a more strategic (or "dynamic") use of social media involves actively monitoring online sentiment, engaging in two-way conversations, and leveraging data analytics to inform decisionsoecd.org. Our analysis suggests that Nigerian public organizations are still in the early stages of this maturity spectrum. There is limited evidence of systematic social media monitoring for early warning or of protocols that use social media data to preempt conflicts. For instance, while some interviewees mentioned informally tracking public comments, none reported using dedicated analytics tools or dashboards to gauge citizen sentiment on contentious issues. A key insight from this study is that merely having a social media presence is not sufficient; public organizations must adopt a strategic approach to digital engagement and analytics to manage conflicts effectively (Hou & Lampe, 2015; Mergel, 2012).

To better manage conflicts, Nigerian public organizations need a clear social media strategy. This means setting up special teams trained in crisis communication and data analysis to monitor social media, detect early signs of conflict (like complaints or rumors), and respond quickly with accurate information. Listening and replying to public concerns can reduce tension and build trust. For example, an HR team that quickly apologized for a mistake online was able to stop a situation from escalating. Research shows that being open, taking responsibility, and showing concern during a crisis leads to better outcomes. Posting official statements on platforms like Twitter can calm situations and encourage cooperation. Strategic engagement also means working with others like civil society groups or tech companies to fight misinformation. Government agencies could partner with fact-checkers or join programs that help take down harmful

content quickly. They should also use data to measure how effective their responses are, just like PR teams track public reactions after news releases.

Globally, many governments are already using social media this way. In the UK, Indonesia, and the US, public agencies used platforms like Twitter to warn people during emergencies or to correct rumors. Nigeria can learn from these examples by encouraging two-way communication and using crowd-sourced information, like Kenya's Ushahidi platform, which collects real-time citizen reports to help prevent violence. However, digital strategies must be inclusive. Many people still lack internet access or digital skills, so traditional communication methods like radio or community meetings remain important. Also, people need to trust how their data is used. Public agencies must keep personal accounts separate from official ones and protect private information. Lastly, strong leadership is key. Where governments support open communication and train staff well, social media becomes a powerful tool for conflict prevention. Nigeria's digital plans could require all government offices to engage online effectively. By learning from other countries and focusing on ethical, inclusive, and strategic communication, Nigerian public agencies can turn social media into a force for peace and collaboration.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that social media can be a powerful tool for conflict management in Nigeria's public sector by promoting transparency, rapid communication, and inclusive dialogue. In order to maximize its benefits, public agencies must adopt strategic policies, build digital capacity, and use social media proactively to prevent and address conflicts effectively.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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