



Public perceptions of Yahya Bello arrest by EFCC over n8.4 billion fraud in an era of social media: A study of Awgu Community

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Abstract

The study investigated the public perceptions of the arrest of former Governor Yahya Bello by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) over allegations of misappropriating 8.4 billion Naira in this era of social media. The study was conducted in the Awgu community, located in Enugu State, Nigeria in the year 2024. Awgu is semi-urban and headquarters of local government area; predominantly agrarian community with few white – collar jobs. It has an estimated population of 390,681, according to the 2006 census. The study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating survey research with thematic analysis. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, and thematic analysis was applied to examine public perceptions of social media coverage related to Yahya Bello's arrest. A purposive sampling technique was used to select social media users familiar with the case, followed by stratified random sampling to ensure representation across age, gender, and socioeconomic groups. The sample size was determined using Fischer's formula, resulting in an adjusted sample of 422 respondents, with a final total of 490 questionnaires collected. Data collection was carried out using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and discussion guides. The validity and reliability of the research instruments were assessed, with reliability determined using Cronbach's alpha. For data analysis, descriptive statistics were employed to examine the distribution of responses within the community. Findings from the study indicated a high level of awareness among respondents, with platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp being pivotal in disseminating information. However, concerns regarding the objectivity of the coverage emerged, with many perceiving it as biased and sensationalized. The study revealed a mixed public opinion on the allegations against Yahya Bello, reflecting skepticism towards governance accountability and the credibility of anti-corruption agencies. The results underscored the dual role of social media as a powerful engagement tool and a medium susceptible to misinformation. Recommendations for enhancing media literacy and institutional reforms are proposed to foster a more informed public and strengthened trust in governance.

Keywords: Arrest, awgu community, coverage, efcc, fraud, public perceptions, social media, yahya bello

Introduction

The internet has become the primary means of communication in the twenty-first century. Specifically, the majority of people have embraced these communication channels as the best means of staying in touch with friends, family, and socioeconomic happenings. According to data, over half of Nigerian teenagers regularly access their social media accounts, and over 80% of them utilize the internet. Youths use the internet for a wide range of purposes, including schoolwork, news gathering, gaming, downloading films and music, viewing pornography, and bullying.

Social media platforms have evolved into online gathering places where young people occasionally congregate with their peers. Many experts thought that social media use among young people may have a negative effect on their lives and behavior, lower their feeling of wellbeing, and inevitably change how they perceive social and political events. It has been noted that for the majority of young people, creating networks and online content has become an essential mode for managing their identity, lifestyle, and social relations. This study therefore seeks to determine how the public perceives Yahya Bello's arrest by the Economic

and Financial Crimes Commission over a N8.4 billion fraud in this era of social media: A study of the Awgu community.

Research Methodology

Research methodology covers the study location, research design, sampling procedures and sampling size, instrument for data collection and method of data analysis.

Study Location

The Awgu community is the study's location. It was formed from the Aninri and Oji River Local Government Areas, which were part of the larger Awgu Local Government Area. In Enugu State, Nigeria, the Awgu Local Government Area (LGA) has its headquarters in Awgu (Nwankwo, 2014: 7) [16]. The approximate geographic location of the Awgu Local Government Area is between latitudes 06 001 and 06 191 North of the Equator and longitudes 07 231 and 07 351 East of the Greenwich Meridian. The climate features a hot, muggy, partly overcast dry season and a warm, oppressive wet season, with temperatures often between 65°F and 88°F and rarely falling below 58°F or rising above 91°F (Weather Spark, 2023) [20].

In addition to Oji River Local Government Area, Aninri

Local Government Area, and Ivo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State in the west, Awgu Local Government Area shares a border with Umunneochi Local Government Area of Abia State in the south. To the north, it is bounded by Udi and Nkanu West Local Government Areas. Orie Awgu is the name of the principal market (Nwankwo, 2014: 9) [16]. Based on the 2006 census, its population is 390,681. There are 102,713 females and 95,421 males among them (Nwankwo, 2014: 10) [16]. The population is not evenly distributed; several places are nearly uninhabitable, while a

few are heavily populated. Due to the challenging topography and the richer soil in the lowlands, which promotes higher crop yields, the majority of people choose to live at the base of the hills. The other towns in Awgu Local Government Area are: Agbogugu, Isu-Awa, Ituku, Ihe, Ogbaku, Owelli, Ogugu, Agbudu, Amoli, Mmaku, Ugbo, Obeagu, Mgbidi, Ugwueme, Nkwe, Ezere, Awgu, Nenwenta, Awgunta and Mgbowo (Nwankwo, 2014: 12) [16].

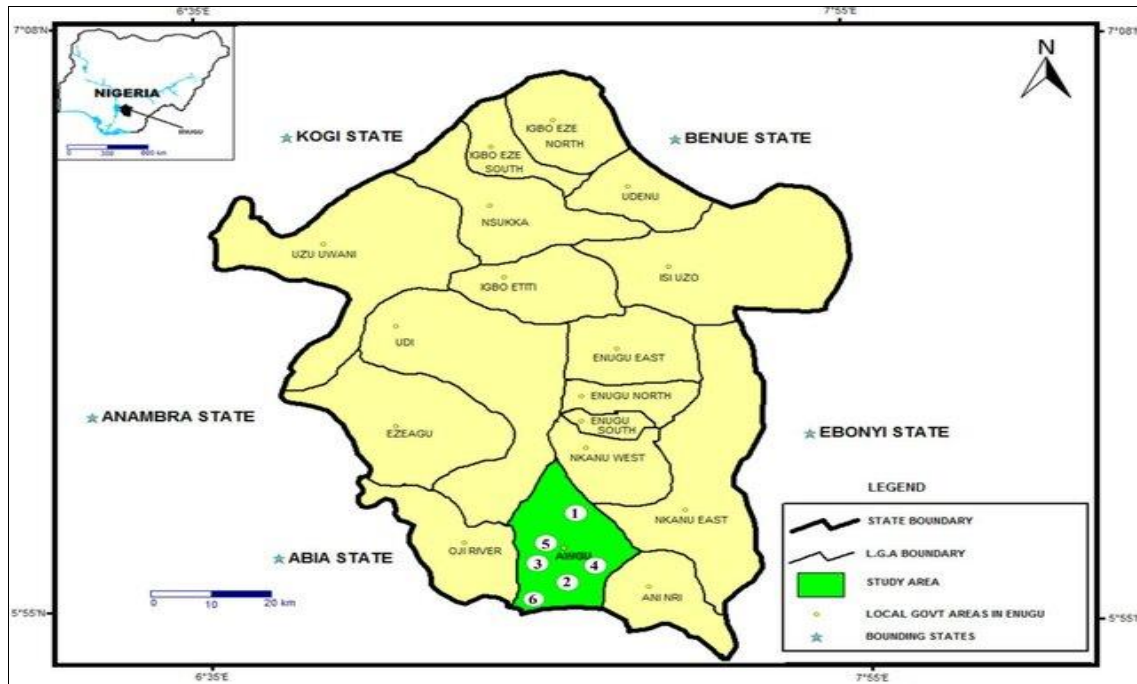


Fig 1: Location of the study area and the investigated autonomous communities: 1: Agbogugu, 2: Awgu, 3: Mgbidi, 4: Mgbowo, 5: Mmaku, 6: Ugwueme

Awgu is made up of 11 communities with some having autonomous status and others none. It is a rural town being a primary agricultural producer (Areola *et al.*, 2001) [4]. Within each community are a number of public and private primary schools; and five secondary schools with junior and senior status. The communities are homogenous in terms of ancestral decent and farming practice.

Research Design of the Study

The project used a mixed-methods approach, integrating survey research techniques with thematic analysis. A questionnaire was used in the survey research approach (Glasgow, 2005: 1–25) [12]. The public perceptions of social media coverage of Yahya Bello's arrest were also investigated using thematic analysis. Glasgow (2005: 1–25) [12] states that survey research focuses on a specific population of people, things, or circumstances in a specific geographic area. It entails gathering pertinent information from or about the populace in order to describe people, things, or circumstances as they are.

Population of the Study

The study's population consists of people who live in the Awgu community. The sampled community's skilled and literate professionals were methodically chosen, including public officials who teach in government and private primary and secondary schools, as well as health experts

working in both public and private settings. This acts as the unit of representation for the communities being studied.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Selecting respondents who use social media and have engaged with or seen news of the Yahya Bello case was done through the use of purposive sampling. Subsequently, stratified random sampling was employed to guarantee representation in the community across age, gender, and socioeconomic status groups (Beebe, 1985: 89–100) [6].

3.5. Sample Size Determination

To calculate for sample size, the Fischer's formula for calculating sample size was employed:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times P \times (1-P)}{E^2}$$

Where

- n = sample size for the population.
 - Z = Z-value (1.96 for 95% confidence level).
 - P = Estimated proportion (use 0.5 if unknown).
 - E = Margin of error (e.g., 0.05 for 5%).
- Inputting the values, we arrive at a population of 384.

To find population of Awgu for this study, we adopted the following (N= 390,381)

$$n_{adjusted} = \frac{n}{1 + \left(\frac{n-1}{N}\right)}$$

$$n_{adjusted} = \frac{384}{1 + \frac{(384 - 1)}{390.681}}$$

$$n_{adjusted} = \frac{384}{1 + 0.00098}$$

$$n_{adjusted} = \frac{384}{1.00098} = 383.6$$

Adjusting for a non-response rate of 10%, our final sample size = 422

Total sample size = 422

The researcher decided to go above the sample size, collecting a total of 490 questionnaires which served as the representative sample.

Instruments for Data Collection

Data was gathered via administering questionnaires. According to Chambers (1980: 90–112) [10] and Beebe (1985: 89–100) [6], survey research uses questionnaires as a key data gathering tool. Semi-structured interview and discussion guides with an emphasis on topics including media narrative influence, information transmission, and media trust was used.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The content validity and reliability of the survey instrument were ascertained; and the outcome of the validation were deployed to improve the survey instruments in terms of sequential arrangements and clearing ambiguities. By reducing selection and information biases, the study's validity was secured.

However, Cronbach's alpha formula was used in the calculation of reliability.

The formula for Cronbach's alpha is:

$$\alpha = \frac{N \cdot \bar{c}}{\bar{v} + (N - 1) \cdot \bar{c}}$$

Where:
 N = the number of items.
 \bar{c} = average covariance between item-pairs.

\bar{v} = average variance.

Rule of Thumb for Results

A rule of thumb for interpreting alpha for dichotomous questions (i.e. questions with two possible answers) or Likert scale questions is

Cronbach's alpha	Internal consistency
$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellence
$0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$	Good
$0.8 > \alpha \geq 0.7$	Acceptable
$0.7 > \alpha \geq 0.6$	Questionable
$0.6 > \alpha \geq 0.5$	Poor
$0.5 > \alpha$	Unacceptable

Method of Data Collection and Data Analysis

The researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Director, National Open University of Nigeria, Awgu Study Centre as a backup for security reason and for ease of access in the sampled communities in order to administer the questionnaires to the respondents. A structured survey questionnaire was distributed by the researcher and other trained research assistants. They assisted in the collection of the completed questionnaire for data analysis.

Descriptive statistics (Gomez, 1980) [14] was used in analyzing the collated data. This is necessary in order to determine the distribution of the respondents within the community.

Results and discussion of the findings

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This table provides insights into the demographic make-up of respondents in the Awgu community, including their gender, age, marital status, education, and occupation. Understanding these variables is critical because public perception can vary significantly based on demographic factors.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	350	71.5
Female	140	28.5
Total	490	100
(ii) Marital status of respondents		
Married	330	67.3
Single	100	20.4
Engaged	60	12.3
Total	490	100
(iii) Age distribution of respondents		
20 – 29 years	170	34.7
30 – 39 years	220	44.9
40 – 49 years	90	18.4
50 and above	10	2.0
Total	490	100
(iv) Educational qualification of respondents		
Primary education	60	12.2
Secondary education	210	42.8
ND/NCE	70	14.3
HND/B.Sc.	90	18.3
PGD	30	6.2
M.Sc. and above	30	6.2
Total	490	100
(v) Occupation		
Farmer	270	55.2
Civil servant	110	22.4
Trader	110	22.4
Total	490	100

The majority of respondents are male (71.5%) and predominantly in the 30–39 age bracket (44.9%). This indicates that men and younger adults are the primary contributors to the data collected. Most respondents have secondary education (42.8%) or higher, suggesting a relatively educated sample that may engage critically with social and political issues. Farmers constitute the largest occupational group (55.2%), reflecting the economic structure of the Awgu community. This demographic context can shape perceptions, as rural-based populations might rely more on word-of-mouth or selective media platforms compared to urban populations.

Awareness and Perception of Yahya Bello Arrest

This table measures how informed the respondents are about the EFCC's actions against Yahya Bello. It highlights the role of information dissemination within the community and the effectiveness of media (including social media) in spreading news.

Table 2: Awareness of Yahya Bello Arrest by EFCC

Level of Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Very Aware	240	49.1%
Somewhat Aware	140	28.5%
Unaware	110	22.4%
Total	490	100

Nearly half of the respondents (49.1%) are "very aware" of the case, while 28.5% are "somewhat aware," suggesting that awareness levels are generally high. However, the 22.4% who are "unaware" reflect a gap in the reach of media coverage within the community.

Social Media Coverage of Yahya Bello Arrest by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) over N8.4 billion Fraud

This table evaluates the community's opinion on whether social media platforms covered the case fairly or displayed bias which is vital for understanding the role of media credibility in shaping public perception.

Table 3: Perceived objectivity of Social Media Coverage

Level of Objectivity	Frequency	Percentage
Very Objective	140	28.5%
Somewhat Objective	120	24.4%
Neutral	100	20.4%
Somewhat Biased	70	14.2%
Very Biased	60	12.2%
Total	490	100

Only 28.5% find social media coverage "very objective," while 36.6% view it as biased to some degree ("somewhat biased" or "very biased"). This suggests skepticism about the impartiality of social media narratives, potentially undermining their influence on public opinion.

This table identifies which platforms were most effective in creating awareness. The data reveals trend in platform popularity and their influence within the Awgu community, crucial for targeted media engagement strategies.

Table 4: Social Media Platforms Influencing Awareness

Most Used Social Media	Frequency	Percentage
Facebook	180	36.7%
Whatsapp	150	30.6%
Instagram	100	20.4%
Twitter	60	12.2%
Total	490	100

Facebook (36.7%) and WhatsApp (30.6%) are the most influential platforms, indicating their dominance in the community. Instagram (20.4%) and Twitter (12.2%) have lesser impact, likely due to differences in accessibility or platform familiarity among respondents.

Table 5 examines the perceived importance of social media in disseminating information about the case. It helps to determine how deeply social media impacts public awareness compared to traditional media or word-of-mouth.

Table 5: Role of Social Media in Awareness of Yahya Bello Arrest by Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) over N8.4 billion Fraud

Role Level	Frequency	Percentage
Major Role	180	36.7%
Moderate Role	100	20.4%
Minor Role	120	24.5%
No Role	90	18.4%
Total	490	100

57.1% of the respondents believe that social media played a "major" or a "moderate" role in raising awareness, underscoring its significant influence despite perceived biases.

Table 6 assesses how the community perceives the allegations. Responses indicate whether the allegations were considered credible, highlighting the level of trust in the EFCC and broader governance institutions.

Table 6: Public Perceptions of the Allegation of N8.4 billion Fraud against Yahya Bello

Questions	Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Awareness of EFCC Arrest of Yahya Bello	Very Aware	240	49.1%
	Somewhat Aware	140	28.5%
	Unaware	110	22.4%
Credibility of Allegations of N8.4 billion fraud against Yahya Bello	Strongly agree	90	18.4%
	Agree	80	16.4%
	Neutral	140	28.6%
	Disagree	110	24.4%
	Strongly disagree	70	14.2%
Public Perceptions of the Allegations Against Yahya Bello	Strongly Agree	90	18.3%
	Agree	100	20.4%
	Neutral	150	30.6%
	Disagree	100	20.4%
	Strongly Disagree	50	10.2%

A significant proportion of the respondents (49.1%) reported being very aware of the attempted arrest, while an additional 28.5% were somewhat aware. This indicates that over three-quarters of the population had some level of knowledge about the incident, reflecting effective dissemination of information, likely through social and traditional media. However, a notable minority (22.4%) was unaware, suggesting that there may be gaps in outreach or engagement with certain segments of the community.

Regarding the credibility of the allegations, opinions were varied. While 34.8% of respondents (18.4% strongly agreeing and 16.4% agreeing) believed the allegations were credible, a similar proportion (38.6%) disagreed, with 24.4% outright disagreeing and 14.2% strongly disagreeing. The remaining 28.6% were neutral, highlighting a

significant number of individuals who may either lack sufficient information to form an opinion or prefer to withhold judgment. This division underscores a community split on trust in the allegations and possibly in the EFCC's actions.

Public perceptions of Yahya Bello in light of these allegations also reflects this diversity of opinion. About 38.7% of respondents viewed the allegations negatively, either strongly agreeing (18.3%) or agreeing (20.4%) that they have tarnished Yahya Bello's image. On the other hand, 30.6% of respondents expressed neutrality, suggesting indifference or uncertainty about the case's impact. Meanwhile, 30.6% expressed less negative views, with 20.4% disagreeing and 10.2% strongly disagreeing with a negative perception, indicating a segment of the population that may still view Yahya Bello favourably despite the allegations.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

Research Question 1: Public Perceptions of the Arrest

i). How did you first hear about the EFCC's arrest of Yahya Bello?

The responses highlighted that social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter are primary sources of information in the community. This demonstrated the prominence of digital platforms in disseminating news. The variation in sources (e.g., posts, group chats, hashtags) indicated a fragmented information environment where individuals rely on diverse channels. Discussions in comments and group chats suggests that these platforms are not just used for information but also for opinion sharing and debates, reflecting the participatory nature of digital media.

One of the respondents said

"I first heard about it on Facebook when a friend shared a post from a popular news page. The post included a short headline and a link to an article, which I clicked to read more. The comments section was full of arguments, with some people defending him and others criticizing the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission."

Another respondent wrote

"I came across the news on WhatsApp in a family group chat. A relative forwarded a video where someone was narrating the allegations, but there were no concrete details provided. It sparked a lot of discussions in the group about corruption in Nigeria."

Yet another respondent posted

"I saw the story trending on Twitter, with hashtags like EFCC and Yahya Bello. People were sharing memes, analysis, and screenshots of supposed evidence. It caught my attention because it was being discussed widely."

What is your opinion about the EFCC's action in this case?

There is cautious optimism about the EFCC's efforts, with some respondents viewing it as a step toward accountability. However, skepticism about the agency's motives and effectiveness is prevalent. The responses reflect a broader distrust in anticorruption agencies due to historical precedents of inconclusive cases. This suggests a need for the EFCC to demonstrate greater transparency and results. The mixed reactions also indicate that public opinion is

shaped by past experiences and the perception of selective justice in Nigeria

"I think it is a bold step by the EFCC, as it shows they are willing to take on high profile politicians. However, I am skeptical about their intentions because we have seen similar cases in the past that did not lead to any convictions."

Again

"While I support the EFCC's actions in principle, I feel like this is just another politically - motivated move. They need to provide concrete evidence to gain public trust and avoid the perception of bias."

Another respondent said

"The EFCC's involvement is necessary, but their approach often seems more about making headlines than ensuring justice. I would prefer a thorough investigation before publicizing such cases."

Do you think such allegations impact the public's trust in political leaders? Why or why not?

Responses pointed to the erosion of trust in political leaders as a recurring theme, with financial crime allegations reinforcing negative perceptions of governance. Some respondents suggest that public trust is already low, indicating that allegations might not significantly alter existing attitudes. Others noted that inconclusive cases damage trust in both leaders and institutions, emphasizing the importance of credible investigations and outcomes to restore confidence.

A respondent mentioned

"Yes, it definitely impacts public trust because it reinforces the perception that most politicians are corrupt. People start to question how public funds are being managed and whether leaders are genuinely working in their interests."

Another respondent said

"I don't think it significantly changes trust in political leaders because many Nigerians already have low expectations from them. Allegations like this just confirm what people already believe."

A third respondent said

"These cases sometimes worsen public cynicism because when nothing comes out of them, it feels like a waste of time and resources. Trust is eroded not just in the leaders but also in the institutions handling these cases."

Research Question 2: Social Media Coverage

In your experience, how has social media covered Yahya Bello's alleged fraud case?

Social media is described as a double-edged sword: effective in raising awareness but prone to sensationalism and bias. The inconsistency in coverage quality reflects the challenges of verifying information in a digital environment, where both credible sources and rumour mills coexist. This suggests that while social media is a powerful tool for information dissemination, its credibility is undermined by the lack of regulatory oversight and fact-checking.

A respondent mentioned

"Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have been very active, but the coverage often feels sensationalized. Posts are filled with clickbait headlines, and

sometimes there's little evidence to back the claims. This makes it hard to separate facts from fiction."

Another respondent said

"I think social media is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it has brought the case to public attention, which is good. On the other hand, it is difficult to find unbiased reporting because many accounts share their personal opinions rather than factual updates."

Do you feel the coverage was fair and balanced? Please explain.

Many respondents feel the coverage was not balanced, with a tendency toward sensationalism and bias against Yahya Bello. This reflects the challenges of objective reporting in politically charged cases. Some respondents highlight the role of verified accounts and reputable news outlets in providing balanced coverage, suggesting that credibility varies across sources. The mixed responses underline the need for improved media literacy among users to discern between factual reporting and opinion-driven content.

A respondent said

"No, I don't think it was balanced. Most posts seem to focus on the negatives without waiting for the EFCC or Yahya Bello to provide detailed statements. The coverage leans heavily on public outrage rather than objective reporting."

A second respondent mentioned

"There were some balanced accounts, especially from verified news outlets on platforms like Twitter. However, the majority of posts were biased and leaned towards sensationalism to attract clicks and engagement."

A third respondent mentioned

"It's a mixed bag. While some posts and articles attempted to provide a neutral view, the majority appeared to take sides, either vilifying or defending Yahya Bello without offering sufficient evidence to support their claims."

Which social media platform(s) do you believe had the most influence in shaping opinions about the case?

Facebook and WhatsApp are highlighted as influential platforms due to their widespread usage in the community. This aligns with their popularity for news-sharing and discussions in Nigeria. The mention of Twitter suggests its role in reaching younger, politically engaged audiences through trends and hashtags, making it a critical platform for public discourse. These responses emphasize the varied impact of platforms based on their user demographics and functionalities, with WhatsApp dominating informal group discussions and Facebook offering broader public engagement.

A respondent mentioned

"Facebook had the most influence because it's widely used in this community. Posts from news pages and personal opinions in the comments section often shape how people think about the case."

A second respondent mentioned

"WhatsApp was very influential, especially for older individuals who prefer forwarding voice notes and videos. These formats spread quickly but are not always reliable."

Another respondent said

"Twitter played a big role for younger and more politically engaged users. The hashtags and threads made it easier to follow the case, though it was sometimes difficult to tell apart factual updates from propaganda."

Research Question 3: Perceptions of the Allegations

Do you believe the allegations against Yahya Bello are valid? What informs your view?

The responses show a mix of belief and skepticism, reflecting the complexity of public opinion in corruption cases. Belief in the allegations is often linked to the perception of systemic corruption in Nigerian politics. However, skepticism arises from the lack of visible evidence and past experiences with inconclusive cases. This highlights the importance of transparency in the EFCC's investigations to ensure the public's trust and engagement.

A respondent said

"I think the allegations might have some truth to them because the misuse of public funds is a common issue in Nigerian politics. However, I haven't seen clear evidence yet, so I'm reserving judgment."

Another respondent mentioned

"I'm unsure. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission has accused many politicians in the past, but some cases were later dropped without explanations. This makes it hard to know whether these allegations are genuine or politically motivated."

A third respondent said

"There is a possibility that the allegations are valid, but I would like to see more concrete evidence or documentation before making a conclusion."

How has the allegation shaped your perception of leadership accountability in Nigeria?

Many respondents express frustration over the lack of effective accountability mechanisms, suggesting a general disillusionment with governance. Some respondents see the case as a step toward accountability, provided it is handled transparently. This reflects a cautious hope for change. The responses underline the need for systemic reforms to strengthen institutions and rebuild public trust in leadership.

A respondent noted

"It has reinforced my belief that there is little accountability among Nigerian leaders. Even when allegations arise, the process of holding people accountable is often slow or inconclusive."

Another respondent said

"The case shows that accountability is still a work in progress. While it's good that such allegations are being raised, the lack of transparency in handling them makes it difficult to trust the process."

What should be done to ensure transparency and fairness in such high-profile cases?

Suggestions such as regular updates, fact-checking, and independent oversight point to the public's desire for greater transparency and professionalism in handling corruption cases. The emphasis on media responsibility highlights the role of journalists and platforms in shaping perceptions

through accurate reporting. These responses reflect a call for institutional reforms to ensure fairness and accountability in political and financial crime investigations.

A respondent said

“The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission should release regular updates on the progress of their investigations, including evidence and timelines for prosecution.”

Another respondent said

“Media outlets should focus on fact-checking and avoid publishing unverified claims. This will help the public form informed opinions”.

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the public perceptions of social media coverage of Yahya Bello arrest by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission over N8.4 billion fraud. A significant majority of respondents (83.6%) were aware of the incident, highlighting the extensive reach of social media platforms in disseminating politically -charged information. This aligns with Meijer and Thaens (2013:6) ^[15], who noted that social media serves as a vital tool for spreading information and engaging the public in governance issues.

The demographic data revealed that 71.5% of respondents were male, while 28.5% were female, indicating a gender disparity in social media engagement or survey participation within the study population. The dominant age group was 25–34 years. This is consistent with studies like those by Collin *et al.*, (2011:9) ^[11], who observed that younger adults are the most active demographic on social media, particularly in politically sensitive discussions.

Regarding the perception of the allegations, 60.2% of respondents believed the arrest was justified, reflecting significant public distrust of governance practices and a demand for accountability. This finding is supported by Adegbamigbe (2008:11) ^[1], who observed that the public often views anti-corruption efforts as a necessary mechanism to address systemic mismanagement. However, 24.8% viewed the arrest as politically motivated, emphasizing lingering skepticism about the impartiality of graft agencies. This skepticism mirrors Wilson *et al.*, (2016:14) ^[21] findings that the public often questions the motives behind high-profile arrests, especially when they involve politically exposed individuals.

The study further revealed that Facebook (72.4%) and Twitter (65.8%) were the leading platforms for accessing information about the case. This aligns with Glynn *et al.*, (2012:2), who found that Facebook and Twitter are central to news consumption, especially during politically significant events. However, the negative tone of social media coverage, reported by 68.7% of respondents, raises concerns about the potential for social media to amplify bias and misinformation. This concern is supported by Spinello (2010:8) ^[18], who noted that social media platforms often contribute to sensationalism and the distortion of facts.

Interestingly, 53% of respondents reported that their perception of Yahya Bello worsened after engaging with social media contents related to the allegations, illustrating the influence of digital platforms on shaping opinions. This finding corresponds with Ruddell and Jones (2013:5) ^[17], who emphasized that public sentiment on social media often shifts based on the narratives presented. Conversely, some

scholars, such as Van Royen *et al.*, (2017:10) ^[19], argue that while social media influences perception, it is also subject to individual biases, which can affect how information is interpreted.

Summary, conclusion and recommendations

Summary

The study explored the public perceptions of social media coverage of Yahya Bello arrest by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) over allegations of misappropriating N8.4 billion, using Awgu community as a case study. The research adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys (quantitative) and qualitative interviews. The findings revealed a high level of awareness about the case among the respondents, with social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp playing dominant roles in disseminating information. However, the objectivity of the coverage was questioned, with many respondents perceiving it as biased and sensationalized. Additionally, public opinion on the allegations against Yahya Bello was mixed, reflecting skepticism about governance accountability and the credibility of anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media significantly influence public awareness and discourse on high-profile cases. While platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp effectively spread information, concerns about their credibility and the quality of reporting persist. Public trust in political leaders and institutions remains fragile, with respondents highlighting systemic corruption and the lack of transparent accountability mechanisms. These findings underscore the dual role of the social media as both a powerful tool for engagement and a medium vulnerable to bias and misinformation. Strengthening media literacy and institutional reforms are critical for fostering a more informed and engaged public.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following were recommended

- Regulatory bodies should establish frameworks to ensure balanced and factual reporting on social media platforms.
- Agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission should provide regular updates on their investigations to enhance public trust.
- Media outlets should adhere to ethical reporting standards, focusing on fact-checking and objectivity.
- Law enforcement and governance institutions should engage directly with communities through verified channels to counter misinformation and provide clarity.

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