



Bridging Centuries of Solidarity: Interpersonal Communication Strategies in the French Revolution and Nigerian EndSARS Movement

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Résumé

Cet article examine le rôle de la communication interpersonnelle dans le renforcement de la solidarité et la mobilisation de l'action collective dans deux mouvements sociaux distincts : la Révolution française (1789–1799) et les manifestations EndSARS (2020). En adoptant une approche comparative, la recherche analyse les archives historiques, pamphlets et journaux personnels pour la Révolution française, ainsi que les témoignages de manifestants, données des réseaux sociaux et rapports médiatiques pour EndSARS. Des méthodes qualitatives ont été utilisées pour coder et catégoriser les stratégies de communication, en se concentrant sur les moyens oraux, écrits et numériques. Les résultats révèlent que, tandis que la Révolution française reposait sur les interactions en face à face, les pamphlets et les réseaux informels, les manifestations EndSARS ont adopté un modèle de communication hybride intégrant des méthodes interpersonnelles de base et des plateformes numériques. Malgré les avancées technologiques, les deux mouvements ont démontré l'importance durable de la communication interpersonnelle pour construire la solidarité et maintenir l'élan. L'analyse comparative met en lumière des similitudes essentielles, telles que l'accent mis sur les interactions locales et l'adaptation aux contraintes sociopolitiques, ainsi que des différences, notamment la rapidité et l'évolutivité permises par les outils numériques dans EndSARS. La discussion souligne les implications de ces résultats pour le succès des futurs mouvements, en insistant sur la nécessité d'intégrer des stratégies de communication traditionnelles et numériques pour renforcer l'unité et la résilience. Cette étude contribue à la compréhension de l'évolution des dynamiques de communication à travers les contextes historiques et modernes, offrant des perspectives pratiques aux organisateurs de mouvements sociaux.

Mots-clés : communication interpersonnelle, mouvements sociaux, Révolution française, EndSARS, solidarité, activisme numérique

Abstract

This paper examines the role of interpersonal communication in fostering solidarity and mobilizing collective action in two distinct social movements: the French Revolution (1789–1799) and the EndSARS protests (2020). Using a comparative case study approach, the research analyzes historical records, pamphlets, and personal diaries for the French Revolution, alongside protestor testimonials, social media data, and media reports for EndSARS. Qualitative methods were employed to code and categorize communication strategies, focusing on oral, written, and digital methods. The findings reveal that while the French Revolution relied on face-to-face interactions, pamphlets, and informal networks, the EndSARS protests utilized a hybrid communication model that integrated grassroots interpersonal methods with digital platforms. Despite technological advancements, both movements demonstrated the enduring importance of interpersonal communication in building solidarity and maintaining momentum. Comparative analysis highlights key similarities, such as the emphasis on grassroots interactions and adaptation to sociopolitical constraints, as well as differences, including the speed and scalability afforded by digital tools in EndSARS. The discussion underscores the implications of these findings for the success of future movements, emphasizing the need to integrate traditional and digital communication strategies to foster unity and resilience. This study contributes to the understanding of how communication dynamics evolve across historical and modern contexts, offering practical insights for organizers of social movements.

Keywords: interpersonal communication, social movements, French Revolution, EndSARS, solidarity, digital activism

1. Introduction

Background

Social movements have historically been catalysts for societal change, often emerging in response to systemic oppression, inequality, or injustice. The **French Revolution (1789–1799)** stands as one of the most significant historical movements, marking the overthrow of the absolute monarchy and the establishment of principles such as liberty, equality, and fraternity. The Revolution was driven by widespread dissatisfaction among the French populace, compounded by economic hardship, political corruption, and social inequalities. The movement's success was underpinned by the solidarity of diverse social groups, mobilized through interpersonal communication in salons, public gatherings, and revolutionary assemblies.

Similarly, the **EndSARS protests in Nigeria (2020)** were a defining moment in contemporary activism. Sparked by widespread police brutality, particularly by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), the movement quickly became a symbol of resistance against systemic oppression in Nigeria. EndSARS

highlighted the power of collective action, as young Nigerians utilized grassroots interpersonal networks alongside digital platforms to mobilize and sustain protests. While social media played a significant role, the movement's local dynamics, characterized by face-to-face organizing and decentralized coordination, were crucial in building solidarity. Communication has consistently been a cornerstone of social movements, serving to foster solidarity, mobilize participants, and sustain momentum. However, while much attention is given to the political, economic, and social drivers of movements, the **mechanisms of interpersonal communication** remain underexplored, despite their critical role in shaping outcomes.

Problem Statement

Despite the recognition of communication as essential to social movements, **limited research** delves into the specific role of **interpersonal communication** in fostering solidarity and driving collective action. Scholars frequently analyze the broader **political, social, and economic contexts** of movements, yet the **nuanced interpersonal mechanisms**—such as face-to-face interactions, informal networks, and the strategic use of dialogue—are often overlooked. Moreover, there is a lack of comparative analysis between historical and contemporary movements. While studies on the **French Revolution** often emphasize macro-level factors like political reforms and economic upheaval, they rarely explore how grassroots interpersonal communication shaped the movement's success. Similarly, analyses of **EndSARS** disproportionately focus on the role of digital platforms, neglecting the interplay between digital tools and interpersonal communication in mobilization and solidarity-building. This oversight leaves a significant gap in understanding how communication strategies evolve across time and context.

Research Gap

The existing literature lacks a focused examination of **interpersonal communication strategies** used by participants to build solidarity in movements like the French Revolution and EndSARS protests. While both movements have been extensively studied in their respective domains, there is no **comprehensive comparison** of how historical and contemporary communication methods adapt to different sociopolitical and technological contexts.

Specifically, the gap lies in:

1. Understanding how **interpersonal communication strategies** contribute to solidarity and movement sustainability.
2. Comparing how such strategies are shaped by **historical constraints** (e.g., limited technology in the French Revolution) versus **modern advancements** (e.g., social media in EndSARS).
3. Identifying the lessons these movements offer for communication dynamics in future social movements.

Objectives

This research aims to address the identified gaps by:

1. **Examining the role of interpersonal communication** in fostering solidarity and mobilizing participants during the French Revolution and EndSARS protests.

2. **Comparing and contrasting communication strategies** across historical and modern contexts, highlighting their similarities and differences.
3. **Identifying the contextual factors** (e.g., technology, political structures, social norms) that shaped communication dynamics in these movements.
4. **Deriving lessons from these cases** that can inform the planning and execution of future social movements.

Research Questions:

1. What interpersonal communication strategies were employed during the French Revolution and EndSARS protests to build solidarity?
2. How did these communication methods facilitate or hinder movement success?
3. What sociopolitical and technological contexts influenced communication dynamics in these movements?
4. How have interpersonal communication strategies evolved over time?
5. What lessons can contemporary movements draw from the comparative analysis of these cases?

Literature Review

1. Theoretical Foundations

The analysis of interpersonal communication strategies in social movements draws on **Karl Marx's Conflict Theory** and **Network Theory**, both of which illuminate the underlying drivers of collective action and solidarity.

- **Karl Marx's Conflict Theory:**

Marx's Conflict Theory underscores the inevitability of societal upheaval in the face of structural inequalities and exploitation, focusing on the struggle between oppressed and ruling classes. During the **French Revolution**, the Third Estate—a majority population burdened by taxes and disenfranchised politically—mobilized against the privileged First and Second Estates (the clergy and nobility). The collective frustrations of the Third Estate were articulated through communication strategies such as pamphlets and public assemblies, which unified disparate social groups around shared grievances (Furet, 1981).

Similarly, the **EndSARS protests** in Nigeria represent a conflict between the disenfranchised youth and the state, characterized by systemic police brutality and economic marginalization. Marx's framework helps contextualize the protests as a response to the chronic failures of governance and repression of fundamental human rights, as exemplified by the persistent abuses of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The theory highlights how communication fosters solidarity, allowing oppressed groups to articulate demands and mobilize for collective action.

- **Network Theory:**

Network Theory focuses on the role of social and interpersonal connections in disseminating information, fostering trust, and enabling coordination within movements. In the **French Revolution**, salons, clubs, and public gatherings acted as hubs of revolutionary thought, linking participants across social strata (Aulard, 1901; Duprat, 2002). These networks created a foundation for unified action, culminating in landmark events such as the Storming of the Bastille.

In contrast, the **EndSARS protests** utilized a blend of grassroots interpersonal networks and digital platforms. Physical gatherings, including candlelight vigils and protest marches, provided opportunities for direct interaction and solidarity-building. Digital platforms like Twitter amplified these efforts by connecting participants across Nigeria and the global diaspora, creating a decentralized but cohesive movement (Nendo, 2020; Obia, 2020). Network Theory helps analyze how these connections sustained momentum and overcame barriers such as government repression.

2. Historical Context

The **French Revolution** illustrates how interpersonal communication strategies shaped one of history's most transformative social movements.

- **Role of Communication in 18th-Century Revolutions:**

In an era devoid of modern communication technology, interpersonal and print-based communication played a pivotal role. Revolutionary leaders such as Abbé Sieyès and Georges Danton used pamphlets, speeches, and public meetings to articulate grievances and rally the population. For instance, Sieyès' seminal pamphlet, *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers État?*, framed the revolution as a fight for justice and equality, galvanizing widespread support among the Third Estate (Tackett, 2004).

Public assemblies, such as those at the Estates-General and the National Assembly, were critical forums where revolutionary ideas were debated, fostering a sense of shared purpose. The **Tennis Court Oath**, an act of defiance by the Third Estate, demonstrated how physical gatherings and collective communication strategies united participants under common objectives (Aulard, 1901).

- **Informal Networks and Interpersonal Tools:**

Informal networks were central to the revolution's success. Salons, hosted primarily by influential women, served as incubators for revolutionary thought, enabling dialogue among intellectuals and activists. Street gatherings and rallies further expanded the reach of revolutionary ideas, engaging the broader public in the movement (Duprat, 2002). These grassroots interactions not only mobilized support but also provided resilience against government repression.

3. Contemporary Dynamics

The **EndSARS protests** exemplify how communication strategies have evolved in the digital age while maintaining roots in interpersonal networks.

Communication Strategies in Digital-Age Protests:

The EndSARS movement relied heavily on digital platforms to mobilize participants, coordinate actions, and draw international attention. Platforms like Twitter and Instagram were used to share live updates, organize protests, and amplify voices of dissent. Hashtags such as #EndSARS became rallying points, uniting participants globally and making the movement visible to international audiences (Nendo, 2020; Obia, 2020).

Despite its digital prominence, the movement maintained a strong interpersonal dimension. Localized meetings, community-driven support initiatives, and direct engagement with protesters reinforced trust and solidarity on the ground. For example, candlelight vigils held to honor victims of police brutality offered emotional connections that transcended online interactions.

Integration of Digital and Interpersonal Methods:

The hybrid communication model of EndSARS demonstrates the synergy between traditional and modern methods. While social media facilitated rapid dissemination and coordination, face-to-face interactions anchored the movement in tangible spaces. This dual approach mitigated the challenges of misinformation and government-imposed restrictions, such as internet blackouts.

4. Comparative Studies

A comparative perspective highlights the evolution of communication strategies while emphasizing enduring principles of solidarity-building.

Current Literature on Historical vs. Contemporary Movements:

Historical analyses of the **French Revolution** often prioritize political and economic transformations over the interpersonal mechanisms that enabled them (Furet, 1981; Tackett, 2004). Similarly, contemporary studies of the **EndSARS protests** frequently focus on digital activism, overlooking the interplay between online platforms and interpersonal networks (Nendo, 2020; Obia, 2020).

This research addresses these gaps by systematically comparing the communication strategies of both movements, emphasizing how they adapted to their unique sociopolitical and technological contexts.

Highlighting Gaps in Interpersonal Communication Analysis:

While both movements leveraged communication to build solidarity, the mechanisms through which interpersonal strategies were adapted to distinct eras remain underexplored. By examining these cases side-by-side, this study identifies commonalities and differences, offering insights into the evolution of communication in social movements.

Methodology

The methodology for this study employs a qualitative, comparative case study approach to analyze the communication strategies used in the **French Revolution** and the **EndSARS protests**, focusing on how interpersonal communication fostered solidarity and coordinated collective action.

1. Comparative Case Study Approach

The comparative case study method allows for an in-depth analysis of the **French Revolution** (1789–1799) and the **EndSARS protests** (2020), highlighting both historical and contemporary contexts.

French Revolution as a Historical Case:

This case is selected for its transformative impact on global political ideologies and its reliance on interpersonal communication to mobilize and sustain revolutionary action. The salons, public assemblies, and pamphlets used by the Third Estate exemplify how interpersonal networks were leveraged to unify participants and challenge oppressive systems.

EndSARS Protests as a Contemporary Case:

EndSARS represents a modern movement driven by a hybrid communication model that integrates grassroots organizing with digital platforms. The protests' decentralized leadership and emphasis on community support mirror historical movements while incorporating tools unique to the digital age, such as hashtags and live-streaming.

This approach provides a comparative lens to explore the evolution of communication strategies across two distinct sociopolitical and technological contexts.

2. Data Collection

The study utilizes a multi-source data collection strategy to ensure a robust understanding of the communication dynamics in both cases.

Archival Research for the French Revolution:

Data includes:

- **Pamphlets and Revolutionary Texts:** Key documents, such as *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers État?* by Abbé Sieyès, provide insights into how revolutionary ideas were communicated and disseminated.
- **Personal Diaries and Letters:** Records of revolutionary leaders and participants capture the interpersonal dynamics and strategies employed in salons and assemblies (Aulard, 1901; Duprat, 2002).
- **Assembly Records and Meeting Notes:** Documentation of debates and decisions within the Estates-General and National Assembly reveal how communication fostered collective action.

Qualitative Analysis of EndSARS Protests:

Data includes:

- **Protestor Testimonials and Interviews:** First-hand accounts from participants, highlighting the interpersonal and emotional dimensions of the protests (Nendo, 2020; Obia, 2020).
- **Social Media Data:** Analysis of hashtags such as #EndSARS and #SARSMustEnd to track digital engagement and its interplay with grassroots efforts.
- **Media Reports:** News articles and broadcasts provide context for how the movement was perceived and communicated locally and internationally.

3. Qualitative Analysis

The study employs qualitative methods to code and categorize communication strategies, focusing on their role in fostering solidarity and coordinating action.

Coding and Categorization:

Data is analyzed to identify:

- **Oral Communication:** Speeches, public debates, and face-to-face interactions in both movements.
- **Written Communication:** Pamphlets, revolutionary texts, and online posts.
- **Digital Communication:** Social media campaigns and live-streaming in the EndSARS protests.

Patterns of Solidarity-Building and Coordination:

The analysis focuses on how these communication methods were used to:

- Build trust and unity among participants.
- Mobilize diverse groups toward collective goals.
- Sustain momentum despite repression.

4. Comparative Analysis

A systematic comparison of the communication strategies in the French Revolution and EndSARS protests highlights parallels, divergences, and the evolution of communication over time.

- **Parallels:**

Both movements relied on interpersonal communication to mobilize marginalized groups and maintain solidarity. For example:

- In the French Revolution, salons and assemblies served as hubs for dialogue and coordination.
- In EndSARS, grassroots meetings and community-driven initiatives complemented digital platforms.

- **Divergences:**

The study examines differences in technological and sociopolitical contexts, such as:

- The absence of digital tools in the French Revolution, necessitating reliance on print media and face-to-face interactions.
- The hybrid model of digital and interpersonal communication in EndSARS, allowing for rapid dissemination and global visibility.
- **Evolution:**
 - By comparing these cases, the study traces the progression of communication strategies, highlighting
- how advances in technology and shifts in political structures influence the dynamics of social movements.

Findings and Discussion

The findings explore how communication strategies in the **French Revolution** and **EndSARS protests** contributed to solidarity-building, movement coordination, and eventual outcomes. A comparative analysis highlights parallels and divergences, while implications emphasize the importance of effective communication in sustaining social movements.

1. French Revolution

The **French Revolution** (1789–1799) relied heavily on interpersonal communication to foster collective identity and mobilize action.

- **Role of Face-to-Face Interactions, Pamphlets, and Informal Networks:**
 - **Face-to-Face Interactions:** Public assemblies, such as the meetings of the Estates-General and the National Assembly, served as crucial spaces for articulating grievances and organizing revolutionary action. Informal gatherings in salons and public squares provided additional venues for dialogue and trust-building among participants. These spaces allowed revolutionaries to align their goals and strategies despite differing class interests.
 - **Pamphlets and Written Communication:** Revolutionary texts, including Abbé Sieyès' *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers État?*, were instrumental in disseminating revolutionary ideals and uniting the Third Estate. These pamphlets provided accessible and persuasive narratives that galvanized widespread support (Furet, 1981).
 - **Informal Networks:** Networks established through salons and local assemblies helped bridge social and ideological divides. They facilitated the coordination of key events, such as the Storming of the Bastille, by enabling real-time communication and trust-building among diverse participants (Duprat, 2002).

How Communication Facilitated Coordination and Collective Identity:

Communication played a central role in creating a sense of shared purpose. By framing the revolution as a collective struggle against oppression, leaders fostered unity among participants from various social strata. The use of common symbols, slogans, and rhetoric reinforced this collective identity, making the movement resilient against internal and external threats.

2. EndSARS Protests

The **EndSARS protests** (2020) demonstrate how contemporary movements blend digital and interpersonal communication to achieve their goals.

Hybrid Communication Model: Digital Platforms Amplifying Interpersonal Interactions:

- **Digital Platforms:** Social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp were essential tools for disseminating information, coordinating protests, and amplifying the voices of marginalized groups. Hashtags like #EndSARS and #SARSMustEnd became rallying points for both local and global support. These platforms allowed participants to bypass traditional media channels and maintain control of the narrative.
- **Interpersonal Interactions:** Despite its digital prominence, the movement relied heavily on grassroots interactions. Physical protests, candlelight vigils, and community support initiatives fostered emotional connections among participants and provided spaces for direct engagement.

● **Decentralized Leadership and the Role of Social Media in Mobilization:**

The EndSARS movement's decentralized leadership structure encouraged collective participation and reduced the risk of targeting specific individuals by authorities. Social media facilitated this model by enabling horizontal communication, where participants could independently organize local protests while aligning with the broader movement goals (Nendo, 2020; Obia, 2020).

3. Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis of the French Revolution and EndSARS protests highlights both similarities and differences in communication strategies across historical and contemporary contexts.

Similarities:

- **Grassroots Interactions:** Both movements relied on local, interpersonal networks to mobilize participants and sustain momentum. In the French Revolution, salons and assemblies served as hubs for dialogue, while in EndSARS, grassroots meetings complemented digital activism.
- **Emphasis on Solidarity:** Communication in both movements was designed to foster unity and a shared identity. Revolutionary rhetoric in the French Revolution paralleled the unifying hashtags and slogans of the EndSARS protests.

- **Adaptation to Sociopolitical Constraints:** Both movements adapted their communication strategies to counter state repression and mobilize marginalized populations. For example, revolutionary pamphlets in the French Revolution circumvented censorship, while EndSARS activists used social media to bypass state-controlled narratives.
- **Differences:**
 - **Impact of Technological Advancements:** The technological context shaped the speed, reach, and sustainability of communication in each movement. While the French Revolution relied on print media and face-to-face interactions, EndSARS leveraged digital platforms for real-time updates and global engagement.
 - **Scalability:** Digital tools enabled the EndSARS movement to scale rapidly, attracting international solidarity in ways that were not possible during the French Revolution.

4. Implications for Movement Success

Effective communication was critical in both movements for sustaining momentum and achieving their goals.

- **Sustaining Momentum:**

The ability to maintain participant engagement despite challenges such as state repression and resource limitations was largely dependent on communication strategies. In the French Revolution, ongoing assemblies and the dissemination of pamphlets sustained revolutionary fervor, while in EndSARS, continuous online activism and localized protests kept the movement alive.

- **Achieving Goals:**

Both movements demonstrated that effective communication strategies could translate solidarity into tangible outcomes. The French Revolution led to the dismantling of feudal privileges and the establishment of new political structures, while the EndSARS protests forced the disbandment of SARS and drew international attention to systemic issues in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study explored the pivotal role of communication in fostering solidarity and coordinating collective action in two distinct social movements: the French Revolution (1789–1799) and the EndSARS protests (2020). The findings revealed that while the specific methods of communication evolved significantly over time, the fundamental principles of effective communication—such as trust-building, mobilization, and sustaining solidarity—remained consistent. During the French Revolution, interpersonal communication through salons, public assemblies, and pamphlets was instrumental in unifying diverse social groups. These methods fostered a collective identity that helped sustain revolutionary fervor, even in the face of internal divisions and external repression. Similarly, the EndSARS protests demonstrated a hybrid communication

model that integrated digital tools with grassroots interpersonal strategies. Social media platforms amplified voices and connected participants on a global scale, while localized gatherings reinforced emotional and physical solidarity. This comparison underscores the enduring importance of interpersonal networks, even in the digital age, for sustaining collective action. By bridging historical and contemporary perspectives, the study contributes to the literature on social movements by highlighting the nuanced role of interpersonal communication in building solidarity and mobilizing participants across different eras. This insight fills a critical gap in the existing scholarship, offering valuable lessons that extend beyond the specific cases of the French Revolution and EndSARS.

The findings suggest several practical recommendations for organizers of future social movements. First, movements should adopt a hybrid communication model that combines digital tools with traditional interpersonal methods to maximize both reach and depth. While social media platforms are invaluable for amplifying messages and connecting participants globally, grassroots interactions remain essential for fostering trust, emotional engagement, and localized solidarity. Second, movements can benefit from decentralized leadership and horizontal communication structures, as seen in the EndSARS protests. Decentralization allows movements to remain flexible and resilient against state repression, while horizontal communication enables participants to coordinate independently while maintaining alignment with the broader movement goals. Third, movements should leverage cultural symbols and shared narratives, drawing inspiration from the French Revolution's use of slogans and pamphlets. Unifying symbols and resonant narratives help reinforce collective identity and sustain momentum in challenging circumstances. Additionally, movements must adapt their communication strategies to the specific sociopolitical and technological contexts they operate in. In environments with limited internet access, interpersonal networks and local gatherings may be more effective, while in highly digitized societies, social media platforms can be used for rapid dissemination and global advocacy. Lastly, movements should prioritize continuity beyond their immediate goals. To sustain long-term impact, organizers can establish structures that facilitate ongoing communication and advocacy. This might include creating repositories of protest materials and fostering networks that can be reactivated for future causes. By synthesizing these insights, the study provides a roadmap for future activism, emphasizing the timeless principles of effective communication while advocating for innovative, context-sensitive approaches to organizing movements.

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