ASSESSING THE PLACE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an empirical research targeted at assessing the place of social media and insecurity in Nigeria. The role of social media in facilitating insecurity and identifying the dominant social media platform used in Nigeria. To achieve this objective, the paper first reviewed relevant works done in the past in order to look at the issue of social media and insecurity in Nigeria. Using the survey research design, the study collected empirical data from a sample of 200 social media users across various platforms using questionnaire. The data were analysed in simple percentages and presented in tables and charts. Findings of this research work exposed that social media affects the Nigerian security system to a large extent through dissemination of fake information and extremist ideologies. Findings of the study also revealed that WhatsApp and Facebook were the leading platforms used in promoting insecurity in the country. In conclusion, the study therefore sees social media as playing both the good and bad role in the fight against insecurity in Nigeria. The study recommended that the Nigerian populace should try as much as possible to curtail disseminating and encouraging of aggressive, insulting and false news that may result in communal hate as well as insecurity reports taking place in social media platforms.

Key words*: Security, Social Media, Conflict, Communication*

1.0 Introduction

The continued security challenges in the country more than ever has remained a pain in the neck as the peace and progress of Nigeria remains a menace. No part of the country today that is exempted from the overwhelming situation of insecurity. This has indeed caused serious mayhem to most part of the country. All the happenings in the northern and southern part of Nigeria such as insurgency, banditry, herdsmen/farmers, armed robbery, kidnapping are daily incidents across Nigeria. This continuous insecurity and the negative impact created has no doubt even affected our national economic growth.

Many reasons have been fingered as the major causes of insecurity in Nigeria such as: social media, the inability of security agencies in information sharing, government not connecting with the people, religious/tribal conflicts among others. Though, one of the major factors which has been fingered is that of social media. On this premises, the researcher want to assess the place of social media and insecurity in Nigeria.

Social media is the most widely accepted technological intervention of the 21st century as well as a valuable channel for news plus communication meant for the citizenry in Nigeria. Social media platform connects people and enable interaction over the internet which have played both positive and negative roles in the fight against insecurity in Nigeria. Over the past decade, several attempts by researchers to explain how social media effect insecurity in Nigeria and the world at large have yielded contrasting results. It is relevant to conduct a study of this nature especially where insecurity have been on the rise due to the activities of hoodlums, bandits, armed robbers, kidnappers, communal clashes, boko-haram sects, and human trafficking. According to Nsudu and Onwe, (2017), social media is used by terrorists with specific servers and websites to perpetrate crime by recruiting new members, raising funds and other forms of cybercrimes that threatens the country's security. Similarly, Kimutai, (2014) noted that extremist use the opportunity of the platform to connect with internet fraudsters group and other criminals, organise with them on how to carry out fund raising activities on the internet. Amidst the recent security challenges ranging from farmers/herders' clashes, bandits attack to armed robberies, Ayih and Shem, (2020) opined that citizen use the opportunity to manipulate information related to these activities to achieve political and religious goals on social media platforms like Twitter, WhatsApp, and Facebook.

According to Ngige, Badekale and Hamman, (2016), social media plays a very crucial role in the fight against global terrorism but also opined that the platform can be used to duel different kinds of criminal activities. Chukwuere and Onyebukwa, (2018) describe social media as an open world of communication with minimal or no control by the government and noted that Boko Haram and IPOB have noticeably used the platform in advancing their activities and in turn, threatening the country's security. Social media platforms, according to Pandalai, (2016) play a pivotal role in some instances to strengthen good governance as citizens share social issues among themselves to ensure effective communication flow. On the importance of social media, Abdullahi and Abdul-Qadir, (2019) noted that social media platforms enable activists and social movements to carry out their activities and to distribute movement goals more easily, sighting examples from the abducted Chibok school girls in April 2014 in Borno State, northern part of Nigeria. Social activists, via the social media platform, condemned the nonchalant attitude of the government in equipping the internal security of the country while others decry the carelessness of security personnel which allowed the terrorists to unleash such attack on women and children.

From the above introduction and review, it can be observed that the issue of social media and insecurity have long been studied without a consensus of findings. While some researchers found social media to be relevant in combatting insecurity, others found the platform to be a means of perpetrating crime and fuelling insecurity in the country. This study reviews literature on various works done to assess the place of social media and insecurity in Nigeria. Based on the above review, the objective of the paper is to assess and identify the relationship between social media use and insecurity in Nigeria, stating evidence from the north-central part of the country where there is persistent clash between farmers and herders as well as bandits' activities. The major concern that necessitated a study of this nature is the uncertainty regarding the role of social media platforms in facilitating security challenges. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the nexus between social media and insecurity in Nigeria. Subsequent sections shall focus on the research questions that the paper seek to answer upon completion and to guide the researcher in providing answers to the questions.

Research Objectives

The study seeks to achieve the following objectives upon completion:

1. To identify the role of social media in facilitating criminal and fraudulent activities in Nigeria.

2. To identify the dominant social media platform used in promoting insecurity in Nigeria.

Research Questions

This paper seeks to answer the following questions based on empirical evidences:

1. To what extent is the role of social media in facilitating criminal and fraudulent activities in Nigeria?

2. What is the most frequent used of social media platform in promoting insecurity in Nigeria?

2.0 Conceptual Review

Trottier and Fuchs, (2014) defined social media as a set of networked tools and applications that allow connection between two or more people. They further noted that social media, like any other computer technology, facilitates cognitive systems as a result of collecting individual and societal values. Cann, (2011) noted that social media is a set of internet based-services that allow users to generate their own contents for service and others. He further stated that the presence of social media in Nigeria sometimes threatens the peace and stability of Nigeria and gives rise to insecurity across the country. In an attempt to identify the most dominant social media platform in Nigeria, Nsudu and Onwe, (2017) submitted that Facebook as the mostly used and mentioned social media platform when talking about social networking platforms, including WhatsApp and Twitter. According to Chukwuere and Onyebukwa, (2018), social media tools have affected the social, economic, cultural and political aspects of human endeavours as events and information associated with these aspects are virtually discussed, which gather very large audiences.

According to Achumba, Ighomeroho and Akpor, (2013), insecurity is defined from two perspectives. Firstly, they defined the concept as a state of being open or subject to danger and conditions of being susceptible to harm or injury. Secondly, they defined insecurity as the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety as a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune. Ndubisi-Okolo and Anigbuogu, (2019) noted that insecurity signifies danger, hazard, uncertainty, lack of protection, and lack of safety.

2.1 Social Media and Insecurity in Nigeria

Chukwuere and Onyebukwa, (2018) deployed a quantitative research method through online questionnaires to determine the impacts of Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp as social media tools on insecurity in the northern and south-eastern parts of Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed that Nigeria's security climate is very poor and social media is not a threat to Nigeria national security. The study also revealed that the public is uncertain whether Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have increased insecurity in the northern and south-eastern parts of

Nigeria and many more. Kimutai, (2014) conducted a similar study and found that terrorist groups take advantage of social media to communicate with fraudsters in cybercrime groups and to coordinate along with them fundraising activities carried partially or completely over the internet. The study also revealed that terrorist groups use social media as a tool to recruit, communicate and spread propaganda. Cuman, (2012) conducted a documentary analysis on the extent to which social media platforms such as the Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube and weblogs played in facilitating uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria. Findings of the study revealed that the usage and growth of social media in the Arab region, to a great extent, facilitates the mass mobilization of protestors, empowerment, shaping of opinions and influencing change.

Abdullahi and Abdul-Qadir, (2019) conducted a study to examine how different social media platforms were used in the context of mass mobilization for social support. Using the survey research methodology, the study revealed that the use of social media platforms is an effective medium of drawing for support for people in an emergency. Findings from the study further revealed that both the abducted schools and the Nigerian government received foreign and domestic assistance to help address the insecurity challenge due to social media intervention. In a study conducted by Alakali, Faga and Mbursa, (2017) to assess the audience perception of hate speech and foul language in the Social Media in Nigeria and the implications for morality, the researchers adopted survey research methodology and sampled respondents to gather data using the questionnaire and focus group discussion. Findings from the study revealed that promoting hate speech and foul language on social media have moral consequences on the society. The study also found that the masses, to an extent, did not know what obligations are created by law against perpetrators of hate speech and foul language in Nigeria.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study is built on the mediamophosis theory on the assumption that unsatisfied communication needs or gaps have the potency to alter the means and channels of communication as Cited in Alakali, Faga, and Mbursa, (2017). Fildler, (1997) argued that the social media platforms do not arise spontaneously and independently but rather emerge gradually from the shortcomings of older mass media means. This emergence is necessitated by the perceived shortcomings of the older media means and denials of opportunities to citizens and their pressing need for participation in the communication process and shape social phenomenon. Based on this argument, Ayih and Shem, (2020) infer that the failure of older media platforms like radio, newspaper, and television to holistically gratify the communication needs of its audience brought about the invention of the new media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and so on. The connection between this study and the mediamorphosis theory is the inability of the traditional media to freely allow citizens to disseminate information as well as interact privately and interpersonally or in social groups, encouraged the invention and usage of the new social media platforms which is often used by users to share a lot of information including fake news, hate speech and other illegal content that are harmful to the peace of the society and are capable of creating security concerns.

3.0 Methods

This study adopts the survey research design to assess the place of social media and insecurity in Nigeria. A closed ended questionnaire was used to collect data. This instrument was electronically distributed to social media users via WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram while others were distributed physically. Two hundred questionnaires were distributed to respondents

across these platforms. The researcher distributed 60 questionnaires each across these platforms and distributed 20 physically. The questionnaires were distributed from 7th June to 28th June 2021 with a 95% return rate which were analyzed in simple percentages and presented in tables and charts.

4.0 Results

This section focuses on analysis of the collected data in simple percentages and presents same in tables and charts.

4.1 Demographics

Table 4.1: Biodata of Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Sex:		
Male	102	52%
Female	93	48%
Total	195	100%
Age		
19-30	96	49%
31-40	59	31%
41-50	36	18%
50 above	4	2%
Total	195	100%
Education		
School Certificate	33	17%
Undergraduate	75	38%
Graduate	68	35%
Post Graduate	19	10%
Total	195	100%

Source: Field Survey (2021)

The above table shows respondent's demographic data with a significant number of both genders represented. The data also reveals that significant number of respondents are within the age of 18 and 40 which represents the age bracket that utilizes social media mostly in Nigeria. Over 80% of respondents have at least gone beyond the school certification level, indicating that respondents have some level of education and understood the questionnaire items.

4.2 Questionnaire Responses

4.2.1 How often do you use social media?

Figure 4.1: Social Media Usage
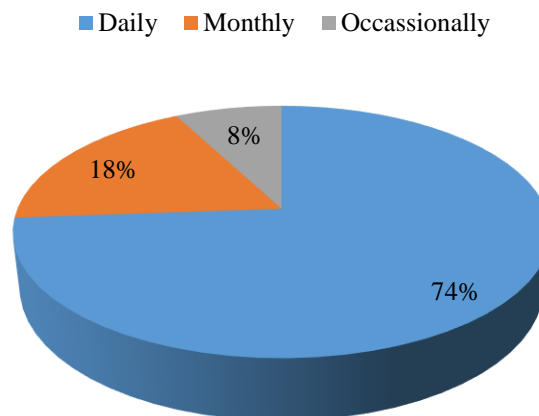
Significant number of respondents uses social media platforms on a daily basis. This exposes them to the platform and revealed that responses provided are to an extent from experienced users who uses social media platform more frequently.

4.2.2 How many social media accounts do you have?
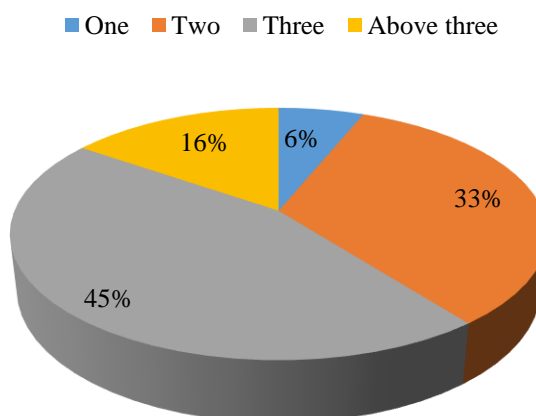
Figure 4.2: Social Media Accounts

Figure 4.2 above implies that majority of the respondents have more than one social media accounts. This implies that these respondents are equipped with wealth of experience on different social media platforms to provide the researcher with relevant and adequate information required to achieve the objectives of the study.

**4.2.3 Which Social Media Platform do you mostly use?**

Figure 4.3: Frequently used Social Media Platform
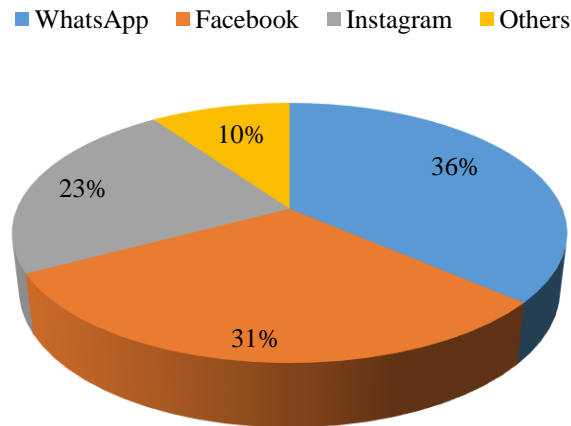
Majority of respondents use WhatsApp and Facebook platform. This implies that the majority of the respondents frequently or habitually use WhatsApp and Facebook, some uses Instagram while few uses other social media platforms. Safe to say that WhatsApp and Facebook are dominant social media platforms used to spread information and communicate in Nigeria.

4.2.4 How do you rate the current state of security in Nigeria?

**Figure 4.4: Current State of Security in Nigeria**
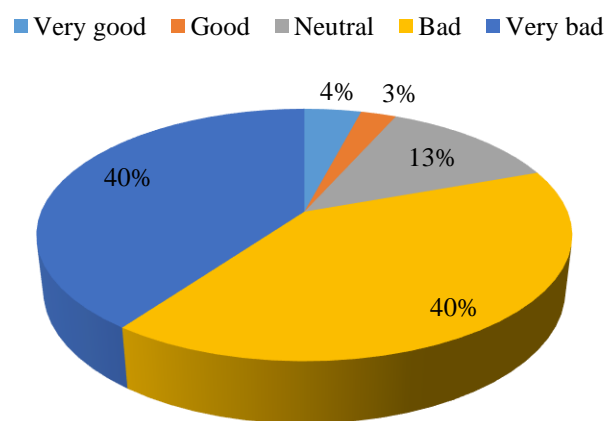
Majority of the respondents responded that the current state of security in Nigeria is bad. This implies that social media might have little or no part to play in the security situation in Nigeria as it is so bad already.

4.2.5 Do social media platforms a threat to the Nigerian security system?

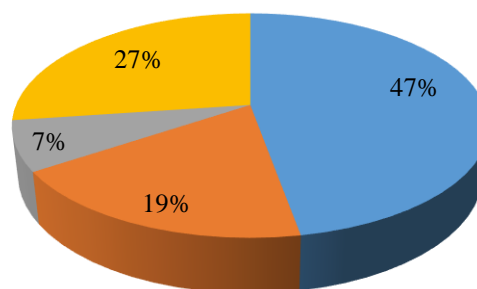# Figure 4.5: Threat of social media to security
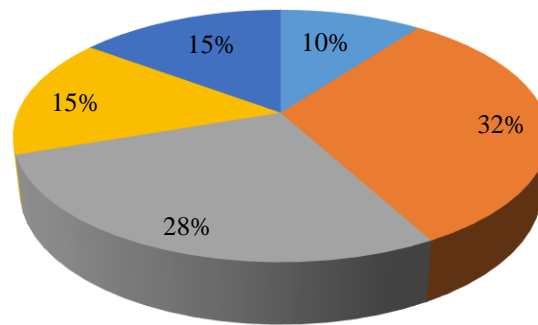
Majority of respondents opined that social media poses threat to the Nigerian security system to a large extent. This implies that social media in Nigeria, to an extent, is connected to the insecurity situation in the country due to the activities of insurgents on the platform.

4.2.6 In which of the following areas do social media facilitate insecurity in Nigeria?

Figure 4.6: Areas of facilitating insecurity

Majority of respondents felt that the social media is mostly used to disseminate fake information and extremist's ideology. This implies that dissemination of fake information and extremist ideologies are the core areas which social media platforms facilitate insecurity in Nigeria.

4.2.7 Do Nigerian security agencies unintentionally disclose sensitive information on social media?

Figure 4.7: Security agencies and sensitive information
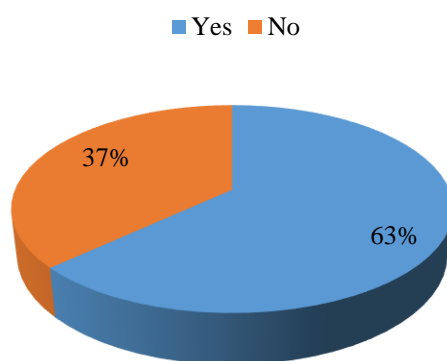
Majority of respondents concurred that there are incidences when the Nigerian Security Agencies unintentionally disclose sensitive security information on social media platforms. This results in leak of security information which insurgents and other crime perpetrators on social may take advantage of to operate.

5.0 Discussion of Findings

This research work was carried out in order to assess the place of social media and insecurity in Nigeria. Responses of the respondents from the survey exercise and critical review of literature form the basis for this study and the findings were discussed in line with the stated objectives below.

Research Objective one: To identify the role of social media in facilitating criminal and fraudulent activities in Nigeria.

Based on the above analysis, it was founded that current security situation in Nigeria today seems very bad ranging from the activities of bandits in the north to that of IPOB in the east. Findings also revealed that social media affects the Nigerian security system to a large extent as opine by 42% of the respondents. Findings of the study also revealed that social media facilitates insecurity in Nigeria through dissemination of fake information and extremist ideologies while security agencies sometimes unintentionally share security information on social media. This finding is in agreement with that of Chukwuere and Onyebukwa, (2018) and Cuman, (2012) who also found social media to be a facilitator of insecurity. The findings are also in contrast with that of Kimutai, (2014) and Abdullahi and Abdul-Qadir, (2019) whose studies found social media as channel curbing insecurity. This finding is also supported by the recent ban of Twitter by the Federal Government as perceived to be a challenge to the security system in Nigeria. This implies that the role played by social media is vital in facilitating insecurity in Nigeria. Consequently, the researcher concludes that social media in a way plays a key role which is no doubt assisting insecurity in Nigeria.

Research Objective two: To identify the dominant social media platform used in promoting insecurity in Nigeria.

Based on the above analysis, it was founded that Facebook and WhatsApp were the most frequently used social media platforms in Nigeria as opined by 67% of the respondents. This finding conforms to that of Chukwuere and Onyebukwa, (2018) who also found the platforms to be frequently used in Nigeria. The researcher therefore concludes that WhatsApp and Facebook are the dominant social media platforms used in promoting insecurity in Nigeria.

5.1 Conclusion, Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and review of empirical studies on the subject matter, the study concludes that the use of social media has both positive and negative influence on the Nigerian security system. Positive influence via healthy discussions to address security challenges and create awareness to prevent attacks. However, it influences the system negatively via dissemination of false information and used by terrorists and internet fraudsters to perpetrate fraud. This study recommends that the Nigerian populace should try as much as possible to curtail the spreading and promoting of offensive, abusive and fake information which results in social hatred and insecurity rumors on social media platforms. The study also recommends that the Federal Government and citizens should avoid drawing conclusions from information shared and read on social media. Since majority of the respondents use Facebook, WhatsApp, and to an extent, Instagram. Therefore, it is recommended that they use these platforms devoid of abuse on anyone or the public.

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