

## Social Media and Security Challenges in Nigeria: The Way Forward

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**Abstract:** Social media are the internet based tools and services that allow users to interact with one another online. In the course of the interaction, they generate contents, distribute and search for information. By implication, every user becomes a communicator. The sites used for interaction online are known as social networking sites and they include; Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Yahoo messenger, Blackberry messenger (BBM), Google talk, Google messenger, Instagram, Snapchat, among others. Social networking is a welcome development because of its numerous benefits such as the speed at which information is disseminated, enhancing learning opportunities and so on. On the other hand, the disadvantages of social media abound and they include lack of privacy and sharing false information about themselves and others. Such information could lead to insecurity in Nigeria. So, this paper analyzed social media and security challenges in Nigeria and also proffered a way forward. It is a theoretical paper with descriptive and analytical approach and anchored on the Technological Determinism Theory. The paper revealed that the social media have contributed highly to security challenges in Nigeria. So, one of the recommendations is that there should be policies and legal framework to regulate the negative use of the social media and the government should ensure that such policies are implemented to the core.

**Key words:** Social Media • Security Challenges • Social Networking • Technological Determinism Theory

### INTRODUCTION

Communication which is the dissemination of information from the source to the destination is very important to human existence in the sense that life would have been boring without communication. Imagine a situation where one gets up in the morning and nobody talks to anybody in the family, the same situation prevails at the work place, market, shops, among others, no news on radio, television and newspaper and no communication of any type using the New Information Communication Technologies. Definitely, life will be unbearable. In support of this illustration, Nana [1] posits that time shall come when philosophers will argue that ‘the media made man.’

In the traditional African setting, Nwabueze [2] sees traditional media as the extension of people’s culture which ‘facilitates the exchange of ideas or information in a typical African society.’ Such traditional media include wooden and metal gongs, flutes, oral tradition, use of symbols such as green leaves, red cloth, raffia and use of signals, white chalk (nzu) among others. He further opines

that those traditional media still remain relevant means of communication in contemporary African society despite the fact that they do not reach large audience.

The advent of civilization brought in modern mass media such as newspaper, magazine, radio and television. Mass Communication is the dissemination of information to a stratified and diversified audience simultaneously through the mass media which are classified mainly into print and electronic media. Basically, the mass media inform, educate, entertain, socialize, mobilize, persuade, set agenda among other things [3].

Advent of the new technologies has turned the world into a global village and the speed at which information is disseminated far more surpasses that of print and electronic media. Buttressing the above point, Amana and Attah [4] posit that the degree of penetration of the social media within the nooks and crannies of modern society and the speed of its diffusion is to say the least staggering to the mind. One needs no sociologist of media to decipher that the rate of adoption of the social media is far faster compared to the assimilation of other media that have preceded them.

However, it is pertinent to note that the media, particularly the social media which is the focus of this paper are powerful because they can combat insecurity and at the same time pose security threats. It is against this background that the authors studied the social media, security challenges and the way forward.

### Conceptual Clarifications

**Social Media:** Social media are forms of electronic communication which facilitate interaction based on interests and characteristics. Social media which include web and mobile-based technologies are used to turn communication into interaction among individuals, communities and organisations [5].

Social media has been classified into six classes namely:

- Collaborative projects exemplified by the Wikipedia, blogs and weblogs.
- Virtual social worlds (second life)
- Content communities example Youtube
- Social networking sites example Facebook
- Virtual game world examples include world of warcraft
- Blogs and weblogs, example twitter [6] and [4].

**Social Networking:** Social Networking is a kind of communication that takes place online, using some kind of platform (website) such as Facebook, Twitter and Ning in which people place messages and connect with others who are on the website. [7] in [8].

Historically, social network has been with us since ages because humans have been socially networked in one way or the other. People have also availed themselves many successive techniques and instruments for facilitating and maintaining such networks. [9] in [10].

So, social networking is the natural grouping of individuals into specific groups like small rural communities or a neighbourhood subdivision. Although, social networking is possible in persons, especially in workplace, universities and high schools, it is most popular online. [4] in [10]

**Social Network:** Social Network is a new technology made up of individuals or organisations called 'nodes', which are tied (connected) by one or more specific types of interdependency, such as friendship, kinship, common interest, financial exchange, dislike, sexual relationships or relationship of belief, knowledge or prestige [7] in [8]. In other words, social network is the platform or sites in which social networking takes place.

These are a few social network sites

- Facebook: is the world's largest social network with over 1.4 billion members and annual revenues exceeding \$12 billion. There are apps available that allow retailers (or even consumers) to sell to this community. Facebook is available worldwide.
- WhatsApp: WhatsApp is another instant-messaging-focused social network with over 700 million members globally. It was acquired by Facebook in February 2014 but operates as a separate entity.
- Skype: Skype offers a social network that allows users to communicate by (a) voice using a microphone, (b) video by using a webcam and (c) instant messaging over the Internet. Skype-to-Skype calls are free of charge, while calls to landline telephones and mobile phones (over traditional telephone networks) are charged via a debit-based user account system called Skype Credit. Skype has over 300 million active users.
- Google: Google is Google's social community with over 300 million members. It offers a popular video conferencing feature called Hangouts.
- Instagram: Instagram is a photo-sharing and video-sharing social network with over 300 million members. It is part of the Facebook family. Instagram gained rapid adoption because of its ability to easily apply multiple filters to a photo, which can post to different social networks, like Facebook and Twitter.
- Twitter: Twitter enables it's just under 300 million users to send and receive 140-character messages that are called tweets. Twitter is available worldwide and also offers commerce features for shopping directly using tweets.
- Snapchat: Snapchat is a messaging social network that allows sharing of photos and videos for a limited period of time that is defined by the user. It has over 200 million users. The service is available in over 15 languages.
- YouTube: YouTube is a video sharing social network that enables its users to upload, view and share videos. It is available worldwide and is one of the most accessed sites on the web.
- Badoo: Badoo is a dating-focused social network with a presence in almost 200 countries. It is popular in Latin America, Italy, Spain and France and has about 20 million active users.

- **WeChat:** WeChat is a social mobile app with voice and text messaging and almost 500 million members. This is another social site that is part of Tencent. Users can register using their phone numbers or even their Facebook account. Phone numbers of approximately 100 countries are supported. WeChat also works with QQ.
- **LinkedIn:** LinkedIn is a social network for professionals. It has about 350 million members. LinkedIn is available globally in 20 different languages and is used by the recruiting professionals for hiring the right candidates.
- **National Security:** This is the aggregate of security interests of all individuals, political entities, human associations and ethnic groups which make up the nation [11].

**Theoretical Underpinning:** This paper is anchored on Technological Determinism Theory associated with the works of [6]. The theory posits that media technologies shape how we as individuals in a society think, feel, act and how society operates as we move from one technological age to another. It best explains the impact of ICTs on how information is consumed, retrieved and disseminated in contemporary society. The theory argues that changes in communication modes largely determine the course of history. It draws attention to the strength of communication technologies in fostering human interactions.

The theory regards the wider dimension of information craze in the society as a direct result of the information explosion fostered by Information and Communication Technologies. It believes that the social, historical, economic and cultural changes occurring in human society today could be linked to the invention and development of new technologies. These technologies emphasize - new media and social media in particular are turning the world into an interactive forum, allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends, share personal information as well as publish their own views on issues on the internet [2].

However, [12], note that the theory of technological determinism attracted serious criticisms. For example, some scholars were of the opinion that McLuhan's idea should be discountenanced in the academic circles for lack of empirical support. However, it could be argued that his idea (technological determinism) has found greater expression in contemporary society more than ever before. In line with this, Baran [13] posits that:

What has returned McLuhan to the forefront of the cultural discussion surrounding the mass media is the internet. McLuhan's ideas resonate with those who believe the new medium can fulfil his optimistic vision of an involved connected global village.

There is no doubt that McLuhan's critics have really surrendered to the supremacy of his argument. Therefore, the importance of Technological Determinism theory to this study is that the recent breakthroughs in ICTs have greatly enhanced the area of human communication, making everyone information creator instead of mere receiver [14].

**Methodology:** This is a theoretical paper that analyzed empirical works done by scholars in the area studied. Also, information was got on the internet, journals and textbooks.

**Security Challenges In Nigeria:** Nigeria as a country has been battling with serious security challenges right from 1967 when the Nigerian civil war started till today. The security challenges assume different dimensions at a particular period. They include inter-tribal or communal crisis, armed robbery, assassination, kidnapping, religious crisis, high rate of crime and quite recently the two major security challenges in Nigeria are

- Niger-Delta Militancy and piracy in the South-south states comprising Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers.
- The Boko-haram insurgency in the North Eastern states which include Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. This is the most serious security challenge in Nigeria now.

The name Boko Haram when literally translated from Hausa means 'Western education is forbidden.' It propagates a version of Islam that not only forbids any interaction with Western world but also against the traditional Muslim establishment and government of Nigeria. The irony is that the founder and former leader of Boko Haram was a highly educated man who lived a lavish life and drove a Mercedes Benz car (Nwabisi Denis [blogs.pot.com.ng/2012/history-and-origin-of-boko-haram-people.html](http://blogs.pot.com.ng/2012/history-and-origin-of-boko-haram-people.html)).

Akpan and Adeoye [7] posit that the group was founded by Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 in Maiduguri from where it spread to other parts of Northern Nigeria and that its members are mainly from the ranks of the socially oppressed, frustrated, unemployed and

unemployable youths from neighbouring Chad Republic. Unfortunately, many innocent Nigerians have lost their lives as a result of the attacks by this group. Below shows the summary of the attacks of Boko Haram on civilians from 2011 to 2016. [15].

2011

114 dead in 32 attacks

Boko Haram was established in 2002 in Maiduguri, but it was years before it spawned an insurgency. By 2011, its fighters were attacking government officials, police and religious figures. That December (2011) it launched a suicide attack on a U.N. regional headquarters in Abuja.

2012

910 dead in 148 attacks

The insurgents increased the sophistication of their attacks, with a gunfire-and-bomb assault on government buildings that killed at least 185 people in January in the Northern city of Kano.

2013

1, 008 dead in 108 attacks

As Boko Haram's attacks grew more brutal, President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in three states in the northeast. The U.S. government designated Boko Haram a terrorist organization.

2014

3, 425 dead in 220 attacks

The group gained international attention after its fighters kidnapped more than 200 schoolgirls, which prompted the global #BringBackOurGirls campaign. That August, Boko Haram announced it had established a "caliphate" in the expanding territory it controlled.

2015

6, 006 dead in 270 attacks

Boko Haram declared its loyalty to the Islamic State. Troops from Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger launched an offensive that eventually recaptured many towns from the militants.

2016

422 dead in 36 attacks

Boko Haram has been forced out from much of the territory it controlled, but it continues to carry out its satanic attacks.

**Social Media and Security:** Social media which are vital and integral part of modern life are technologies that facilitate social interaction, make cooperation possible and enable sharing of any information (Bryer)

On their own part, [12] posit that social media are internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about their words, pictures, videos and audio.

To Kaplan and Micheal (2010)[16] social media are "a group of internet based application that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content." The tools are social because they are created in ways that enable users to share and communicate with one another. Social media is a fraction of the internet hence it should not be used interchangeably with the internet.

Social media have really contributed so much in combating crime in Nigeria. This is because the perpetrators of crimes are often tracked using the social media. Examples are kidnappers, armed robbers, rapists, assassins, among others. [4] were of the same view when they eluded that one arena where the social media have continued to employ right from its assumption within the matrix of media surveillance is in relation to security. They further posit that the platform of social media has been exploited in developed countries to combat the menace of terrorism. That was why Sutton and Trina (2008) indicated in their empirical work that in 2007, wildfire razed down more than one thousand five hundred houses in Southern California, a majority of those who live within the neighbourhood, got their information from the social network.

The same is equally applicable in Nigeria. In highlighting this important point, [4] stressed the employment of social media in the realm of security operatives, secondly, the generality of the people and thirdly, by the perpetrators of nefarious acts. The two scholars further state that the social media provide security operatives a vast data base to study and analyse tendencies, intentions, movements, lines and linkages of rapport.

Also supporting the positive use of social media in combating crime, Popoola, [5] demonstrated the practical application of Facebook to combat human trafficking. Their research revealed that the content posted on Facebook by users had helped greatly in combating human trafficking in Nigeria.

Supporting the positive use of social media with regards to security, [4] opine that, one area where the social media have been used in Nigeria with regards to security is in the creation, dissemination and consumption of security information. Such information may be to warn people of danger. For instance, armed robbers robbing along a particular road or there is a fight between communities like (Ezza-Ezillo crisis in Ebonyi State). It could also be a case of a burning tanker as was on the news recently and the tanker blocked the road. Commuters got information on the social media and took another road. There was a similar experience when armed robbers came to rob in our neighbourhood, the man they came to rob sent a text message to the police and as they were struggling to break into the man's house, the police rounded them up.

Buttressing this point, [4] posit that since all and sundry are present on the social media, it has been equally utilized by security outfits in search for anti-social and deviant behaviours in our society. The capability of social media to bring about societal transformation, promotion and advancement is not in doubt. But the problem of lack of regulation and control has also made some scholars perceive them as a threat to democratic societies. [17]

[4] are of the same view when they posit that despite the numerous benefits of social media, they are sometimes used to perpetuate anti-social behaviour thereby posing threat to security. A good example was the case of Cynthia Osokogu. It was made known that Cynthia was killed by her Facebook friends in Lagos but her assailants were also arraigned and arrested by the same social medium. So, the social media are a blessing and at the same time a curse.

Supporting the above assertion, [3] notes that social media used to disseminate information very fast but has also become a platform for the dissemination of false reports and sometimes, these false reports spread so quickly. Also, security agents use social media to disseminate false information in order to ameliorate situations that could lead to security threat.

**Social Media and Security Challenges:** Globally, insecurity has been on the increase since terrorists struck in September 11, 2001 on the World Trade Centre in the United States of America. Security issues are also experienced by many African Countries that have led to the death of many people. To support this assertion, Alakali, Sambe, Friday and Tarnongo [18] posit that the

fight between government forces and militant groups in Sudan has claimed many lives and rendered several thousands homeless. The same applies to Egypt and Libya where insecurity caused the unceremonious exit of the former leaders of those countries.

Nigeria is not left out in the issues of insecurity. That is why [18] states that "it is not a fallacy to state that insecurity situation is one of the major factors impeding development in Nigeria".

Elaigwu in Alakali *et al.* [19] note that between 1999 and 2005, Nigeria has witnessed over 90 violent ethno-religious communal political conflicts of varying intensities and magnitude. Most recently, many lives have been lost through Boko Haram insurgency. Boko Haram leaders, especially Abu Qaza use the YouTube regularly to relay their messages [18].

Buttressing this point, [11] in [18] posit that terrorist groups use chat rooms, dedicated servers and websites and social networking tools as propaganda machines, as a means of recruitment and organization, for training grounds and for significant fund raising through cybercrime.

On how the Social Media are used to perpetrate crime, [18] summarized it thus:

- International terrorists use the Social Media to organize their attacks or devise ways to escape security agencies in order to carry out their attacks. That is why they have specific codes understood by the groups only. In line with this, Theohari and Rollins in [18] opine that many Arabic language websites are said to contain coded plans for new attacks. Some reportedly give advice on how to build and operate weapons and how to pass through border checkpoints. The scholars further posit that it has been reported on the news that a younger generation of terrorists and extremists such as those behind the July 2015 bombings in London are learning new technical skills to help them avoid detection by various nations' law enforcement computer technology.
- The terrorists use the Social Media to raise awareness for their cause, to spread propaganda and to inspire potential operatives across the globe.
- Hamas activists in the middle east for example use chat rooms to plan operations and operatives exchange e-mail to coordinate actions across Gaza the West Bank, Lebanon and Israel. Instructions in the form of maps, photographs, directions and

technical details of how to use explosives are often disguised by means of stenography, which involves hiding messages inside graphic files.

- Terrorists use Social Media to spread misinformation, to deliver threats intended to instil fear and helplessness and to disseminate horrific images of recent actions.
- In Nigeria, Boko Haram leaders continue to use Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other Jihadist networks to claim responsibility, celebrate success and issue threats for further attacks. The scholars also say that “there are unconfirmed reports that the Boko Haram continue to gain support from international terrorist groups and they use Social Media to contact and organize attacks.”

To further analyse the security challenges, the author examined two empirical studies. In an empirical work carried out by Asemah and Edegoh (2013)[20] on : “An Appraisal of Social Media and Insecurity in Nigeria”, the two scholars used the survey research method with a population 400 respondents and the following were their findings.

- The extent to which Social Media has caused insecurity in Nigeria is great, describing Social Media as a haven for uncensored free-wheeling discussions on everything from sexual fantasies to religious dogmas.
- Social Media are very difficult to control; rather they are controlling the users because of the freedom and absence of law guiding the cyberspace.
- The increasing use of Social Media has led to greater privacy challenges.
- Facebook causes insecurity more than any other Social network.

In their own study, Abdul raham and Dambazau are of the view that the key to tackling security challenges rests on finding the right leadership that would demonstrate good governance, tackle corruption as a matter of priority, that would be transparent and accountable, that would recognize the need to ensure inclusive and participatory governance as a reflection of the multi religious and ethnic composition of the Nigerian society. Other things to consider in tackling security as mentioned by the two scholars include:

Strengthening key institutions of governance, especially those within the criminal justice system;

improving the socio-economic well-being of her citizens especially in education, health, employment, food and shelter; reinvigorating Nigeria’s foreign policy focus that would emphasize unity even in cultural diversity to ensure stability; that would find solution to the current insurgency, militancy, cross borders trafficking in arms, drugs and humans. A leadership that would develop Nigeria’s critical infrastructure in transportation, water system and the energy that would develop the non-oil sector, especially agriculture and solid minerals. A leadership that would tackle environmental issues, especially desertification and erosion, ensuring the fundamental rights of citizens as enshrined in the constitution are guaranteed and protected.

## **CONCLUSION**

The patient’s condition is serious. Symptoms are multiple. His breath is noxious. He has a fever, higher than ever before. Efforts to bring it down are not working. Poison has been found in body fluids. When symptoms are treated in one area, more pop up in other body parts. Doctors in a state of confusion declared multiple sicknesses as chronic and terminal, [13].

What is happening to security challenges in Nigeria today with the advent of Social Media is analogous to the situation above. However, considering the numerous benefits of the social media as x-rayed in this work, one can safely conclude that social media are used to combat security threats and also used to perpetrate crimes. Unfortunately, just as the illustration above goes, all efforts made so far in Nigeria to bring the situation under control are not working. Since Social Media have come to stay because of their numerous benefits and also we are living in a technological world, the author therefore postulates the way forward.

### **The Way Forward:**

- The government should liaise with service providers so they can report any situation that could lead to criminal acts through their social media platforms to the government. The government on her part should give them enough incentives.
- There should be policies and legal framework to regulate the negative use of social media and the government should intensify efforts to ensure that such policies are implemented to the core, no matter who is involved.

- The government should send law enforcement agents for special trainings abroad to acquire new technological skills on how to combat negative effects of social media.
- There should be awareness campaigns on the negative effects of social media by the government, legislature, media and the masses in the interest of our society because Nigeria cannot develop amidst insecurity.
- There should be a good leadership that will address the problems of the masses and some of our leaders that support terrorism directly or indirectly should desist from that.

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