



SOCIAL MEDIA AND INSECURITY CHALLENGES AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Insecurity challenges has threatening oneness of the nation Amidst Covid-19 Pandemic and it has negatively affected Economic, education and political system. Among the issues, the EndSARS agitation by some acrimonious and organized youths who seek a reform in the Nigeria epileptic political system that is in undated with prejudice, tribalism, venality, brutality, glutton and divide and rule system. Also, the mass destruction of life and properties by unknown gunmen in some state capitals, coupled with the herdsmen/farmer crisis in some part of Nigerian states over land ownership, Bokoharam unrelenting adoption of school student in the North-east, the activism for self-determination by the indigenous people of Biafra in the south-east, the Oduduwa Republic agitation in the south-west and jail brake in many part of the states. The insecurity challenges have increased concern of poverty, pain sickness, suffering and death of the people and underdevelopment to the Nigerian state. It is to the ugly situation that this paper therefore examine the role of social media in the documentation and dissemination of insecurity in Nigeria amidst Covid-19 Pandemic. This work is anchored on social media theory and employed documentary source of data collection. The work concluded that social media platforms have distinctively assisted towards capturing and disseminating crucial information. The paper recommended that social media houses should be empowered and protected as that will increase confidence in the discharge of duty.

Keywords: *Social Media, Insecurity, COVID-19 Pandemic, Kidnapping, Government.*

Introduction

The crisis of insecurity resulting in wanton destruction of life and properties is the major cankerworm that has passed as the greatest enemy of the Nigerian state in the 20st century. This contradicts and disavows the ideologies that National security is a premise for national economic growth and development of nations. The rate with which evil is perpetrated in Nigeria and the merciless ways that lives of acquitted ones are being wasted are worrisome. Citizens are burdened on a daily basis with psychological and emotional trauma resulting from gory sights of lifeless and mutilated bodies of loved family members, close associates and colleagues littered on the streets, public squares and everywhere (Jacob & Andrew, 2016).

Ojobah, Frank, Agim & George (2021) noted that “security is the pillar upon which every meaningful development could be realized and sustained”. Regrettably, Nigeria as a nation state, according to Jacob and Andrew has witnessed unprecedented series of security threatening situations in the forms of kidnapping and abduction, armed robberies, bombing, and carnages of all forms and magnitude in the past decade and a half. Synonymously, Adejumo (2011) in Jacob and Andrew (2016) insisted that “in fairness, insecurity is not a problem that is unique to Nigeria. It has geographical spread across the globe. The United States, United Kingdom and many countries face the challenges of insecurity within their borders on a daily basis”. The difference between these nations and Nigeria according to Adejumo (2013) in Jacob and Andrew (2016) is how they manage the threats which rather makes it complex and frightening. The increase in the activities of the Islamic sect (Boko Haram) has led to loss of lives and properties specifically, in the Northern part of Nigeria. Some of these activities include bombing, suicide bomb attacks, sporadic shooting of unarmed and innocent citizens, burning of police stations, churches, kidnapping of school girls and women, etc. Kidnapping, rape, armed robbery and political crises, murder, destruction of oil facilities by Niger Delta militants alongside the attacks carried out by Fulani Herdsmen in some communities in the North and South; the unknown gun men attack on police stations and army military checking points, and the secessionist agitation by the Indigenous People of

Biafra (IPOB) that has resulted to wanton destruction of lives and properties and Oduduwa Republic agitators have been another major insecurity challenge facing the country (Callister, 2015).

All these pressed home agitations are happening amid COVID-19 pandemic which served as major attack on human race after the first and Second World War, thus, has ridiculed economic cum political strata of the nations of the world. Nigeria, according to Callister has been included among one of the terrorist countries of the world. Many lives and properties have been lost and a large number of citizens rendered homeless. Families have lost their loved ones; many women are now widows; children become orphans with no hope of the future (Callister, 2015).

This, according to Ojobah et al (2021) has implications for national development and had made frantic efforts to tackle these challenges posed by terrorism and insecurity in the country and put an end to it but the rate of insurgency and insecurity as perceived by Ojobah et al (2021) is still alarming. The events surrounding September 11, 2001 and other recent events of terrorism across the globe especially the current wave of terrorism in Nigeria, have focused our minds on issues of terrorism and insecurity. In all these agitations by these splinter groups, Social Media has stood over time as instrument of capturing, storing and broadcasting the theatrical manifestations of these malicious pandemonium, which often times, are manifesting through violence (Patrick, 2020).

It is on these premises therefore that this study aims at identifying the role of social media in the fight against insecurity issues in the Nigerian state. To achieve this aim, Secondary Methodology and Narrative theory are employed as guide.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to identify the role of Social Media in documenting and disseminating insecurity issues amid COVID-19 pandemic. The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the role of social media in the fight against insecurity in Nigeria amid COVID-19 pandemic.
- ii. assess factors militating against social media in the fight against insecurity in Nigeria amid COVID-19 Pandemic.

- iii. investigate the causes and effects of insecurity in the Nigeria amid COVID-19 pandemic.
- iv. To proffer useful suggestions on possible ways of curbing insecurity in the Nigerian state amid and post COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

- i. What are the roles played by social media in the fight against insecurity in Nigeria amidst COVID-19 pandemic?
- ii. What are the factors militating against social media in the fight against insecurity in Nigeria amid COVID-19 pandemic?
- iii. What are the causes and effects of insecurity in Nigeria amidst COVID-19 pandemic?
- iv. What are the useful suggestions on possible ways of curbing insecurity in Nigeria amid and post COVID-19 pandemic?

Significance of the Research Work

This study will be of great importance, as it will provide necessary information on the roles and activities of social media in the fight against insecurity in Nigeria amid COVID-19 pandemic. The work will also provide further research in combating insecurity and banditry effort in Nigeria. The study will be immensely useful for further purposes and for future researches into insecurity in the post COVID-19 pandemic within and outside the country.

Scope of the Study

The work is restricted to the assessment of the activities of social media in the fight against insecurity in the Nigerian state amid COVID-19 pandemic. It will also assess the factors militating against social media in the fight against insecurity in Nigeria. More so, the study will thereafter identify the causes and effects of insecurity in Nigeria amid COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, solutions to insecurity issues in Nigeria will also be sought in the cause of this research.

Insecurity in Nigeria Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic.

The first insecurity challenges amidst COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria is the #EndSARS agitation. On this, Oluwole (2021) observes that “over two weeks, protests organized around #EndSARS, the mass action calling for a complete ban of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police Force,

has rocked cities across Nigeria. Set up in the mid-1990s to combat incidences of armed robbery, SARS has over the years metamorphosed into a force associated with harassment of innocent citizens, extortion at gunpoint, and extrajudicial killings of suspects”. More so, the #EndSARS protests have become a symbol for broader resentment and opened the path for marginalized Nigerian youths to vent bottledup grievances against the government, starting with the excesses of SARS, which the government has failed to address after several promises of reform (Oluwole, 2021).

Ironically, Oluwole (2021) opines that “Miscreants have taken advantage of the security vacuum created by the #EndSARS protest and the annoyance that instigated it”. The attendant action of jail breaks in many states of Nigeria potentially foreshadows dangers for overall security in the country. In addition, simmering separatist tendencies in some regions and any misplaced response by government could create opportunities for such groups to deepen their rhetoric and mobilization. Protesters were however harassed and attacked by security forces and armed thugs in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, and some states. On October 20, social media footage showing men identified as military officers shooting at peaceful protesters in Lagos sparked global outrage. Several people were reportedly killed but the death toll remains uncertain (Adejumo, 2011) in Ojobah et al (2021).

The issue of insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria has been a long issue dating back to 2006 by the so called group named “Boko Haram” which claims to be one of the largest and deadliest militant groups in Africa, and has conducted terrorist attacks on religious, groups, political groups, local police, military and civilians (Ejogba, 2006). However, the mode of operations and consequent attacks committed during this period of corona virus is so rapid and ramped. The number of attacks that has been carried out across different states is so alarming. In the words of the Governor of Maiduguri during an interview, he said “that this attack has become daily for over two weeks since the emergence of the virus”. On the 10th of June, 2020 more than eight-two people were killed and many properties were destroyed Zowo in Gubio district of Borno state. Another attack was carried out where 41 persons were killed in Goni Usmanti of Nganzai local government. Some attacks were carried out in Monguno local government on 13th of June, 2020 killing nine soldiers, three civilian JTF and many government properties were destroyed. There was an attack on Auno village where six soldiers were killed and many missing. Khaddamari, the

headquarters of Jere local government was also under attack where many soldiers' properties were looted and destroyed. Subsequent attack on June, 10 in Gwoza, Borno where another four people were killed. There was also a reprisal attack on Dapchi in which the house of the village head was destroyed and many other houses in the community were set ablaze despite the first attack in which over two hundred female students were abducted. Also, several other attacks in Yobe and Adamawa state leaving many lives and properties destroyed and many displaced people relocated to cities and neighboring states. This also constituted another problems as major schools and other places were converted into IDP camps and increase in the rate of transmission from these IDP camps, for example Katsina recorded 335 cases and 14 death as at 26 of May, 2020. From the records of attacks carried out by this deadly group over this period, it is a matter of necessity for quick and lasting solution to be provided before it goes beyond control this is just to mention but a few among several attacks that has been carried out and still evident till this moment (Abubakar, 2021).

Banditry in Northwestern Nigeria is gaining another momentum as its environs are becoming Violence Theater and peculiar to that of Boko Haram in the northeast. These issues initially started as local disputes between herders and farmers over access to land which has overtime developed to an issue of national security. The level of rural banditry escalated between 2014 and 2019, but the menace of banditry violence has gained shape as it affects population living in Zamfara and part of its neighboring states like Katsina, Kebbi, and Sokoto, Niger, Benue, Nassarawa and Plateau in North central Nigeria. Due to this, about 21 million people have been exposed to insecurity from activities of bandits by March, 2020, more than 210, 00 people have been internally displaced and more than 35,000 refugees have crossed communal borders to Maradi in Niger Republic. There have been rampaging gangs of armed bandits which engaged in violent acts like attacking, abducting, killing, and robbing villagers and travelers and engaging in cattle rustling. In Zamfara the governor is reported to have said that "nearly five hundred villages and thirteen thousands hectares of land have been devastated, and over 2,835 people were killed between 2013 and 2019". On 27 May, 2020, armed bandits carried out midday attack on five villages which includes Katumi, Masawa, Dan Adua, Garki and Kuzeri in Sabon Birni, Sokoto, killing over 74 peoples. Several attack has been lunch on Fakari before that of June 12 killings by bandit, killings of six people

in Talata Mafara and fifteen people in Maru, all in Zamfara, another twelve civilians were killed in Guma and thirteen (13) in Obi Benue state on May 31st. A Senator in Niger state also cried out over the killing of four police men, some civilians, and also a threat to abduct village head again over 4 million naira ransom in June 2020, several killings in Katsina by bandit which made many indigenes to come out and protest as the killings intensified and government was not on the move to do anything. Plateau state indigenes have also been crying out loud that the killer herdsmen will kill them all before the end of COVID-19 due to their constant stay at home and consequent attacks. It is worrisome that most of the atrocities were carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic as settlers were always home, lack of highways to operate and diverged attention of the government to health issues.

According to Abubakar, (2021), the issues of rape cases and sexual assault have been so rampared over this period despite the fear of transmissions of the virus. Several cases of rape has been reported in which most of the victims are been killed or injured after the assault. The most trending part of the cases is Uwa, followed by that of student named Vera Uwaila that was raped in a church that lost are life to it and that of another student Barakat in Ibadan that was also raped and killed. Another case is that of the hawker that was defiled in Ekiti and also the 18 years Jenifer that was raped by five gang in Kaduna, another 16 years old Tina in Lagos among other several cases that was kept silent and unreported. According to the inspector general of police in an interview he said that “717 issues of rape cases has been reported from January-May 2020”. Amnesty International also wrote to the federal government to declare emergence of rape cases and many other protests by civil-organizations as at 20 June 2020. The Niger state House of Representative signed into law death penalty for any person convicted of rape case. It was asserted that constant staying at home, closures of hotels and hardship led to this menaces of rape cases (Abubakar, 2021).

Robbery and other killings were also carried out within the period. Among them were the attacks in Isanlu Yagba east local government of Kogi state leaving a DPO and seven other police officers dead. Also the killing of Funke Olakuri, daughter of Afenifere leader, communal crisis in Lamurde Adamawa state which led to the death of twenty-three people. Another communal crisis in Onicha, Ebonyi where four people lost their lives, sectarian violence on June 4 in Guma, Benue leading to death of five people, in Bali, Taraba state where

eleven life's were lost, on the 3rd of June 2020, gunmen killed three people in Kajarau, Kaduna state. ISWA fighters also killed six Nigerian soldiers in Konduga, Borno. Abduction in Shiroro, Niger state by gun men on June 1st. Since the corona virus lock down many residents of Lagos and Ogun have been complaining on daily bases of attacks by hoodlums in their various localities Abubakar, (2021). From all these happenings, it is glaring that insecurity amidst the corona virus has been so rampant and worse and has gone out of hand.

Causes of Insecurity in Nigeria amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

The discontent among youths was already simmering given the economic crisis sparked by the fall in global oil demand (and compounded by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic), institutionalized corruption, and state profligacy that have drawn more Nigerians into poverty. The foregoing coincided with eight months of closure of educational institutions due to strike held by University lecturers, leaving many young people alienated and angry. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, as of the second quarter of 2020, the unemployment rate in Nigeria stood at a staggering 27.1 percent and the underemployment rate at 28.6 percent. Of the 21.7 million unemployed, young people (aged 15 to 34) account for a whopping 34.9 percent. They also account for 28.2 percent of the 22.9 million underemployed Nigerians.

Worsening economic conditions and bleak projections for the future have only fanned the flames. The country has barely recovered from the economic recession that started 2016, when President Buhari called on Nigerians to brace for another recession. Youths were already incensed by reports of high-level elite's corruption, galloping inflation, and unprecedented levels of unemployment, and now the government has announced increase in the price of fuel and electricity tariff. So many opinions have been aired on the present epoch of disorderliness plaguing the front of the Nigeria state (John, 2020).

These opinions, though diversified, highlight that Nigeria is a lawless state, thus, is at the point of tumbling; which demands international attention. For instance, a former United States Ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, and a former Director with Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, Prof. Robert Rothberg, said it is time for the US to acknowledge that Nigeria is a failed state in the light of the many challenges plaguing the country. In an article titled, 'The Giant of Africa is Failing' which was published in the

May/June edition of 'Foreign Affairs' magazine, also argued that every part of Nigeria now faces insecurity which threatens the nation's corporate existence.

Concept of Social Media

Social Media is an online platform which people use to build social networks or social relations with other people who share similar personal or career interests, activities, backgrounds or real-life connections (Akram & Kumar, 2017). Social media consists of computer-based technologies for easy communication, interaction and collaboration. They are digitally mediated communication softwares that enable users to create, share and view contents in publicly networked one-to-one, one-to-many, and/or many-to-many communications (Hopkins, 2017). The low cost and accessibility of new social media devices according to Akram and Kumar (2017) also allowed more options for media consumption than ever before and so instead of a few new outlets, individuals now have the ability to seek information from several sources and to dialogue with others though message forum about the information's posted (Akram & Kumar, 2017).

All social media involve some sorts of social platforms, whether that be mobile or stationary. Against this backdrop, John (2020) views that “not everything that is digital, however, is necessarily social media”.

Popular Social Media Tools and Platforms:

- i Blogs: It is a platform for casual dialogue and discussions on a specific topic or opinion.
- ii Facebook: The world's largest social network, with more than 1.55 billion monthly active users (as of the third quarter of 2015). Users create a personal profile, add other users as friends, and exchange messages, including status updates. Brands create pages and Facebook users can “like” brands' pages.
- iii Twitter: A social networking/micro-blogging platform that allows groups and individuals to stay connected through the exchange of short status messages (140 character limit).
- iv YouTube/Vimeo: Video hosting and watching websites.
- v Flickr: An image and video hosting website and online community. Photos can be shared on Facebook and Twitter and other social networking sites.

- vi Instagram: A free photo and video sharing app that allows users to apply digital filters, frames and special effects to their photos and then share them on a variety of social networking sites.
- vii LinkedIn: A place where group of professionals with similar areas of interest can share information and participate in conversations.

Benefit of Social Media to the Society

Social Media as trend of communication and sharing of ideas, possesses inherent and cordial benefit to the people and the society at large. Many business organizations according to Mohammed (2019) are on social media today to engage with their users, and audiences to promote their business. Appearance on social media for business generates a significant impact on their product and services. Social Media helps the business organizations to improve their brands in numbers of ways and get with a genuine audience (Hopkin, 2017). Let's say we are looking to buy a new TV, we are interested in a particular brand and model, even stumbling upon a slick banner ad that told all the astonishing features of the TV, while quoting Luna (2018), Mohammed (2019) asserts that “who would we believe, the ad, or our friend? The proliferation of internet data and the influence of social media has given the consumer a power they've never had in all of consumer history”.

Another social media benefits according to Mohammed (2019) is insight and market intelligence. Social media according to Mohammed is an easy way to learn about our audience, and it is also less expensive than traditional market research methods such as surveys and focus groups. You can use social media to gain vital information on competitors, who they are, what content they are sharing, what their customers are saying about them, and so on. Social media intelligence can help firms track brand health and market structure and can even provide a leading indicator of shifts in consumer sentiment (Mohammed, 2019).

Negative Effects of Social Media to the Society

According to Mohammed (2019), there are several concerns assessed in this research related to social media usage in society around the world. Privacy is the number one concerns of social media and the internet through many ill-usage. Based on this, Palfrey (2010), in Mohammed (2019), asserts that the inappropriate use of technology, absence of privacy, sharing of private data, and

dropping testimony on user sites, vulnerable teenagers for threats and notable hazard. The hacker can reach data of users that the user leaves on the sites browsers continuously this allows the hacker to be able to get the registry data from one site to enforce threats.

Still on this, Laun (2018) in Mohammed (2019) aver that “the social media users now have the power to inform and educate themselves. If the average Facebook user has 250 friends, posting a product or service review to those friends and getting just one re-post from them, spreads that review to 62,500 people. One more re-post from those people reached 15.6 million people in only two re-posts for free. Based on this, wrong product or service review can negatively and significantly affect business organizations. The idea that consumer backlash could force the company to change policy because if reach was historically exclusive to instances that caught national news attention (Joshua and Chijoke, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

To understand how the mass media could play meaningful role in combating insecurity in Nigeria amidst COVID-19 pandemic would require a theoretical explanation. This is because mass communication theories according to Chinenye and Emelda (2013) explain the likely effect of mass communication process in the society. This interrogation is anchored on agenda setting theory. The agenda setting basically states that the media, through frequent coverage of issues determine what the dominant discussion would be. The theory according to McQuail (2008) as quoted by Pate (2012), in Chinenye and Emelda (2013) says the media may not tell us what to think, but they divert our minds to what to think about.

By frequently reporting certain issues, the media according to Chinenye and Emelda (2013) in Ojobah et al (2021), move those issues from press agenda to public agenda. Through frequent, meaningful and responsible coverage of acts that breed insecurity in Nigeria, the media can sensitize the public against it. Frequent discussions on issues of insecurity according to Chinenye and Emelda will not just attention to the need to address such problems but also raise consciousness on the need to drama combat insecurity.

Methodology

This research work employed the case study and content analysis research approaches of the qualitative research method. It involves explaining the issue,

describing, analyzing and interpreting data on the analysis of the impact of Social Media on insecurity challenges amidst COVID-19 pandemic period. It is qualitative because it deals with the analysis of the cause and effects of insecurity challenges and descriptive because it involves the use of ideas to describe and analyze the role of Social Media in the fight against insecurity challenges in Nigeria. To achieve this, the study employed the primary and secondary sources. The primary source is the researchers' ideas concerning the causes and effects of insecurity in the Nigerian society amidst COVID-19 pandemic, while the secondary source includes materials from the institutional publications, articles, journals, text books, internets, research materials, among others.

Nexus of Social Media and Insecurity in Nigeria

Social media has really contributed so much in tracking perpetrators of crimes in the Nigerian state amidst COVID-19 pandemic period. Examples of such perpetrators of crime include kidnappers, armed robbers, rapists, assassins, among others. We are responsive that one arena where the social media has continued to employ right from its assumption within the matrix of media surveillance is in relation to security, thus has contributed towards combating of terrorism. (Ojobah, et al, 2021).

Also, social media platforms are used in advancing social and national insecurity, such as the situation in the northern and south-eastern parts of Nigeria. For some years now, terrorism and kidnapping have engulfed the northern part of Nigeria by insurgent groups while separatist groups have also carried out demonstrations in the south-east (Chinenye and Emelda, 2013). Each of these groups is using various kinds of online media to propagate their agenda. Through the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter, the heinous activities by these unpatriotic sects (Bokoharam) in the northern region are reported and the governments of all level are usually aware of the daily happenings in the region.

The kidnapping of the Chibok School girls 7 years ago, 140 students of Baptist High School in Kaduna, July 5, 2021, over 100 Islamic Seminary students kidnapped in May 30, 2021 in Niger State and other kidnapping activities were made known to the general public through the use of Social Media. It is also through the reportage of social media that it was discovered that the hideout of the dreaded Boko Haram sect is Sambisa Forest. More so, the recent Fulani

Herdsmen and farmers clashes in more than fifteen (15) states in Nigeria were daily reported, which creates awareness to the general public.

The #EndSARS demonstration in many of Nigerian cities by angry youths were captured and made known to the general public through the social media and the heinous killings of over twenty five (25) youths in Lekki Toll Gate was captured and immediately circulated through social media platforms even when cameras at the Toll Gate were removed to avoid traces of such activities (Kenneth, 2020 in Ojobah, et al, 2021).

In addition, the malicious attacks on police stations and killing of police and military officials in the Nigerian state by unidentified gunmen that has threatened the peace and harmony of the Nigerian state amidst COVID-19 pandemic were captured by secret viewers who ultimately shared through social media, and was subsequently and officially made known through television and radio broadcast.

Recently, the secessionist activism by the members of the Indigenous People of Biafra and the Oduduwa republic agitators were also made known to the general public through elements of social media. The response by the state government of the affected states and the central government was also made known through social media. Most times, the government may not be at peace with the social media when the general public uses Social Media platforms to escalate propagandas, which sometimes is fake news (Joshua and Chijioke, 2018, in Ojobah, et al, 2021)

Conclusion

From the study, it is pertinent to deduce unequivocally that social media platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and other communication gadgets have distinctively assisted towards capturing and disseminating of crucial information as it concerns conflicts, agitations, and general insecurity in the Nigerian state. With the use of the above platforms, first hand information of insecurity activities in Nigerian states amidst COVID-19 pandemic are shared to the general public even before journalist or television and radio representatives would arrive to capture the event. This is so because the sharers of these lucrative first hand information are victims of insecurity. Most of the sharers also lost their lives after sharing such important post, while some, out of fear, in their hideout, document and share immediately to the general public. The reason for such post is for security assistance and most

times, they get rescued by the police or military personnel, while on few occasions, the assistance that they crave for, never comes or comes few hours after the deal is done.

Recommendations

In an attempt to proffer to solution to the lingering challenges of insecurity in Nigeria amidst Covid-19 pandemic. The following recommendations were made through this study. From the study, the following recommendations are suggested.

- i. This paper insists that the social media houses should be empowered and protected as that would increase confidence in the discharge of duty.
- ii. Social Media laws should be established by the Federal Government to monitor the activities of social media users to avoid fake news reportage.
- iii. Social satellites should be enhanced to accommodate live broadcasts of events in the Nigerian society.
- iv. Government should provide more security personnel to the affected areas disturbed by insurgency and if possible, set up military base at the affected or most vulnerable locations for a long period of time because their presence in large numbers will force the terrorist to flee from those locations.

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