

Implications of Social Media Usage on National Security in North-Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

The significance of national security to the holistic development of a nation makes the subject matter a ubiquitous issue of concern among scholars, stakeholders, security agencies, government at all levels, media practitioners etc. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines social media usage and its implication on national security in North Eastern Nigeria. In order to explore this issue, both theoretical and empirical perspectives were employed. The paper was anchored on the Uses and Gratification theory and Mediamorphosis theory. The study was based on quantitative research approach and the strategy of inquiry was survey design. This automatically makes questionnaire an instrument for data collection. The instrument was distributed to social media users. Based on the data retrieved and the analysis made, findings reveal that the current state of security in North Eastern Nigeria is abysmal. Furthermore, the study revealed that propaganda and dissemination of fake news and hate speech were the core areas which social media platforms facilitate insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria. This makes the study to conclude that there is a nexus between social media usage and insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria. Therefore, the study recommends that social media users should stop spreading fake news and inflammatory messages that may result in violence. Furthermore, government should collaborate with security agencies to monitor social media accounts so as to counter propaganda, hate speech and other hazardous contents.

Keywords: National security, North-Eastern Nigeria, Insecurity, Social Media

Introduction

The social media platforms which can be described as online-based tools and services connecting people, and enabling interaction with each other over the internet play both negative and positive roles in a developing society like Nigeria. This is because these platforms have the potency to promote negative agendas that may have adverse effects on a nation's security architecture (Chukwuere and Onyebukwa, 2018). The United States Army in 2008 reported that social media could be used as a vehicle for malwares so as to cause damage to computers or other mobile terminals like smart phones and tablets. Social media tools such as Twitter and Facebook can be used by terrorist groups to expand networks and not only to spread propaganda, but can also host embedded malicious software links and applications that can corrupt an unsuspecting user's electronic device.

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In light of the above, it is axiomatic to infer that in recent years, the social media platforms are negatively used as tools to disseminate all sorts of malicious contents that are hazardous to the peaceful co-existence of society. Allcott and Gentzkov (2017, p.7), corroborate that the social media platforms are well suited for fake news dissemination. Similarly, Joshua, Andrew, Pablo, Christian, Alexander, Sergey, Dennis and Brendan (2018) aptly capture that the spread of political misinformation and propaganda in online setting is generally considered to have adverse societal consequences. Nsudu and Onwe (2017) substantiate that social networking sites are used by terror groups with dedicated servers and websites to spread their propaganda in their opinion. These terror groups used the social networking sites for recruitment, fund raising, training mechanisms and other forms of cybercrime that has the potency to hamper a nation's security architecture (Chukwuere and Onyebukwa, 2018).

Amidst the recent farmers/herders clashes in almost every part of Nigeria and other insurgent attacks in Nigeria, citizens use that as an opportunity to fabricate information related to these attacks so as to achieve their political, philosophical and religious goals on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp among others. In their view, Virginia and Olanrewaju assert that during cam

paings, political actors and parties rely on rhetoric to spread their beliefs, ideologies and promises of their political parties in order to woo the electorate. Opeibi (2009) corroborates that the political gladiators were at each other's jugular; making inflammatory statements on social media platforms during campaigns and rallies preceding the elections forgetting that political discourse during election campaigns can impact positively or negatively on democratic governance.

Pate (2011) cited in Nwabueze and Ebeze (2013, p.867-868) has identified some ill journalistic practices that may have adverse effects on a nation's security architecture. These include but not limited to; "reporting inter group conflicts out of their fundamental sociological, economic, political and other contexts;" "shallow and episodic coverage;" "total blackout on some groups, individuals or communities;" "use of inflammatory, misleading and sensational headlines to attract sales;" "publishing inflammatory statements against some people or groups as letters to the editor;" "attributing statements by individuals to groups making generalized statements not supported facts," et cetera.

It is unarguable that all the aforementioned ill journalistic practices are common practices on diverse social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the implications of social media usage on national security in north eastern Nigeria.

Problem Statement

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has struggled with myriad of insecurity related issues which manifest in form of ethno-political and religious conflicts (Adamu and Ochaeni, 2016). Similarly Chukwuere and Onyebukwa (2018) substantiate that the contemporary Nigerian security challenges stem from a plethora of national queries bordering on ethnic, religious,

socio-political and cultural issues. In recent years, insecurity in contemporary Nigerian setting is most often than not associated with the Boko Haram uprising, farmers/herdsmen clashes, and kidnapping among others. Ileonikhena (2015) affirms that words like Boko Haram, Kidnapping, and ethno-religious crisis are brand used word in highlighting the nature of insecurity peculiar to Nigeria among other nations. Ileonikhena further notes that despite the complex nature of insecurity in Nigeria, through consistent, meaningful and responsible coverage of the acts that breed insecurity in the country, the media can sensitize the public against such act. Chukwuere and Onyebukwa (2018) found that Nigeria's security climate is very poor and that social media is a threat to Nigeria's national security. Furthermore, the study found that respondents were uncertain whether Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have increased insecurity in the northern and south-eastern parts of Nigeria and many more.

Similarly, Kimutai (2014) establishes that terrorist groups take advantage of Social Media to communicate with cyber-crime groups and to coordinate along with them fundraising activities carried out in part or completely on the Internet. The study further unearthed that community criminal organizations like Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), '*Mungiki*' and '*Sungusungu*' use social media as a tool to recruit, communicate, spread propaganda and radicalization to a great extent. The major concern is how constructive and intellectual are these findings? And how certain are we that social media platforms facilitate security challenges? It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the implications of social media usage on national security in north eastern Nigeria.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine the Social Media usage and its implication on national security in North-Eastern Nigeria. To this end, three (3) specific objectives are considered as follows:

- i. To identify the nexus between social media use and insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria;
- ii. To ascertain how social media facilitates insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria;
- iii. To identify the most frequent social media use for the spread of insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

The phrase "national security" has no universally accepted meaning as a result of its multifaceted nature. Notwithstanding, national security can holistically be described as the absolute safety of a nation against any form of jeopardy; that is to say, national security is the backbone of every democratic society. In other words, no matter how blessed and endowed a nation maybe, if it has security issues, such nation has a greater tendency of crumbling. This makes "national security" a subject of interest among scholars (Olayiwolam, 2013).

Bamidele (2012) states that national security should be seen, in the sense of protection of the polity through ensuring that the national interest is known, sustained, promoted and preserved. Conversely, Jordan and Taylor (1981) cited in Olayiwolam, (2013) assert that

national security has a more extensive meaning than protection from physical harm; it also implies “protection, through a variety of means, of vital economic and political interests, the loss of which could threaten fundamental values and the vitality of the state.”

From the above definitions, it is therefore apt to infer that national security is the absolute safety of a nation against any form of threat. It is also imperative to note that national security is not only limited or restricted to physical security but also include economic security, infrastructural security, and political security among others. Notwithstanding, this study is aimed at focusing on the physical security which has a nexus with other dimensions of national security.

Empirical Review

Chukwuere and Onyebukwa (2018) establish in their study that Nigeria’s security climate is very poor and that social media is a threat to Nigeria’s national security. Furthermore, the study found that respondents were uncertain whether Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have increased insecurity in the Northern and South-Eastern parts of Nigeria and many more. In a similar study, Kimutai (2014) found that terrorist groups take advantage of social media to communicate with cyber-crime groups and to coordinate along with them fundraising activities carried out in part or completely on the Internet. The study further revealed that community criminal organizations like Mombasa Republican Council (MRC), ‘*Mungiki*’ and ‘*Sungusungu*’ use social media as a tool to recruit, communicate, Spread propaganda and radicalization to a great extent.

A documentary analysis by Cuman (2012) on the extent to which social networks such as the Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and weblogs played in facilitating uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia and Syria showed that the usage and growth of social media in the Arab region played a great role in mass mobilization of protestors, empowerment, shaping of opinions and influencing change. Alakali, Faga, and Mbursa, (2017) conducted a study titled “Audience Perception of Hate Speech and Foul Language in the Social Media in Nigeria: Implications for Morality.” The researchers used survey research methodology to sample 384 respondents using questionnaire and focus group discussion as instruments for data collection. Findings from the research indicated that promoting hate speech and foul language on social media have moral and legal consequences on the society and journalism practice. Findings also showed that although the respondents understood that hate speech and foul language attract legal consequences, they did not know what obligations are created by law against perpetrators of hate speech and foul language in Nigeria. Based on the empirical literature reviewed, it is apt to deduce that social media facilitates insecurity through dissemination of malicious content such as propaganda, fake news, hate speech etc.

Theoretical Framework

This study is built on two theoretical foundations- the uses and gratifications theory and mediamorphosis theory. According to Mohammed (2015), uses and gratification theory was theorized by Blumer and Katz’s in 1970. The theory explains that people actively seek

particular media outlets and content. The theory refers to how users proactively search for media that will not only meet their needs but enhance knowledge, social interaction and diversion. To put it in another way, the theory was built on the premise that people use or expose themselves to media outlets as a result of the benefits they obtain from such outlets.

When the uses and gratifications theory was propounded, it was applied to the traditional media. Notwithstanding, the theory still remains relevant even in the present new media age. Suffice to say that there is a nexus between the uses and gratifications theory and this study because people (including the terrorists) use the social media platforms to gratify their political, social, religious or philosophical needs. Notwithstanding, some of these needs could be hazardous to a nation's security architecture as the social media platform has no or less censorship.

Conversely, mediamorphosis theory was built on the assumption that communication needs (most especially, if such needs are not satisfied) have the potency to alter the means and channels of communication. Fildler (1997) cited in Alakali, Faga, and Mbursa, (2017) argues that media do not arise spontaneously and independently; rather, they emerge gradually from the metamorphosis of older media. This emergence results from the perceived deficiencies of the older media and denials of opportunities to citizens and their pressing need for participation in the communication process. It is, therefore, apt to infer that the failure of the traditional media to holistically gratify the communication needs of its audience brought about the invention of the new media platforms. The nexus between this study and the mediamorphosis theory is that the inability of the traditional media such as radio, television, newspaper among others to freely allow citizens to disseminate information as well as interact interpersonally or in group, encouraged the invention and usage of the new media which is often used by users to disseminate diverse messages including fake news, hate speech and other malicious content that are inimical to the society and are capable of hampering the security architecture of a nation.

Methodology

This study employs survey design, using questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire were distributed electronically to social media users through Facebook, Titter and WhatsApp while others were distributed through email. Three hundred (300) questionnaire items were distributed to six states that make up the North Eastern part of Nigeria. The states are: Adamawa with a population of (4,248,436), Gombe (3,256,962), Bauchi (6,537,314), Taraba (3,066,834), Borno (5,680,183) and Yobe (3,294,137). Due to the large number of the population coupled with financial constraints, the researchers' conveniently distributed 50 questionnaires in each of the states and 298 were correctly filled and retrieved. The questionnaires were distributed from 6th September to 2nd November, 2018. The retrieved questionnaires were analyzed in simple percentages and presented in tables and charts.

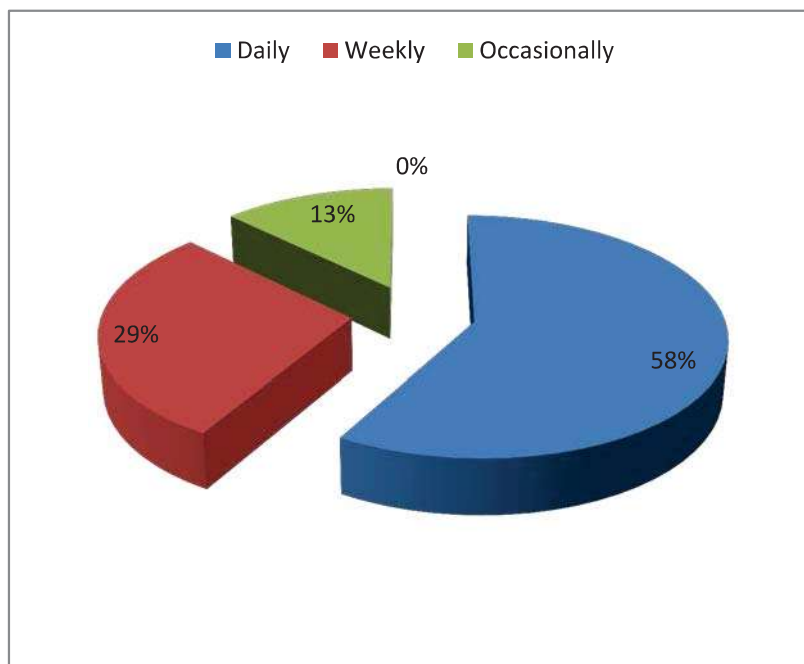
Data Presentation and Analysis

Respondents' Demography

Gender	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
	Male	165	55
	Female	133	45
	Total	298	100
Age	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
	18-30	180	60
	31-40	89	30
	41 and above	29	10
	Total	298	100

The demographic data collected revealed that 165 respondents representing 55% were male while 133 respondents representing 45% were female. The data also revealed that 180 respondents (60%) were within the age 18-30 years whereas 89 respondents (30%) fall within 31-40 years. Finally, 29 respondents (10%) were within the age 41 years and above.

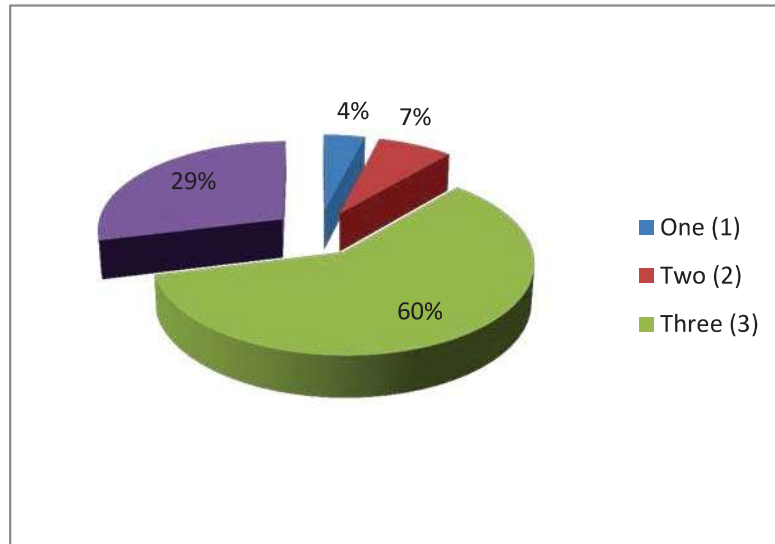
Figure 1: Respondents' Social Media Usage



Source: Electronic Survey, 2018

From figure 1 above, 58% of respondents said they use social media on daily basis, 29% unravelled that they use social media weekly meanwhile 13% said they use social media occasionally. This implies that majority of the respondents exposed themselves to social media networks on a daily basis.

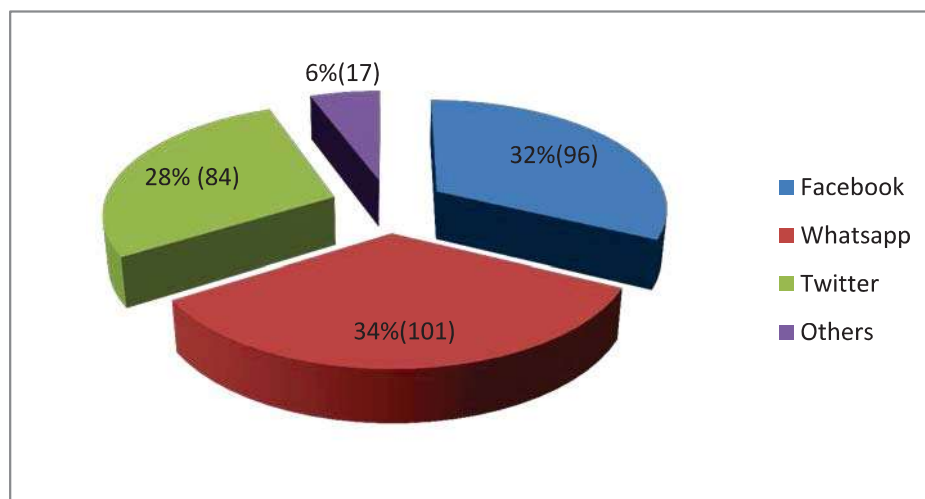
Figure 2: Respondents' Social Media Account(s)



Source: Electronic Survey, 2018

Figure 2 above, 12 respondents representing 4% said they have one social media account while 22 respondents representing 7% said they have two. Similarly 178 respondents representing 60% and 86 respondents representing 29% said they have three and more than three social media accounts respectively. This implies that majority of the respondents have either three or more social media accounts. It is, therefore, apt to infer that these respondents are equipped with wealth of experience on different social media platforms to provide the researchers with relevant and adequate information needed for analysis.

Figure 3: Social Media Networks Mostly Use by the Respondents

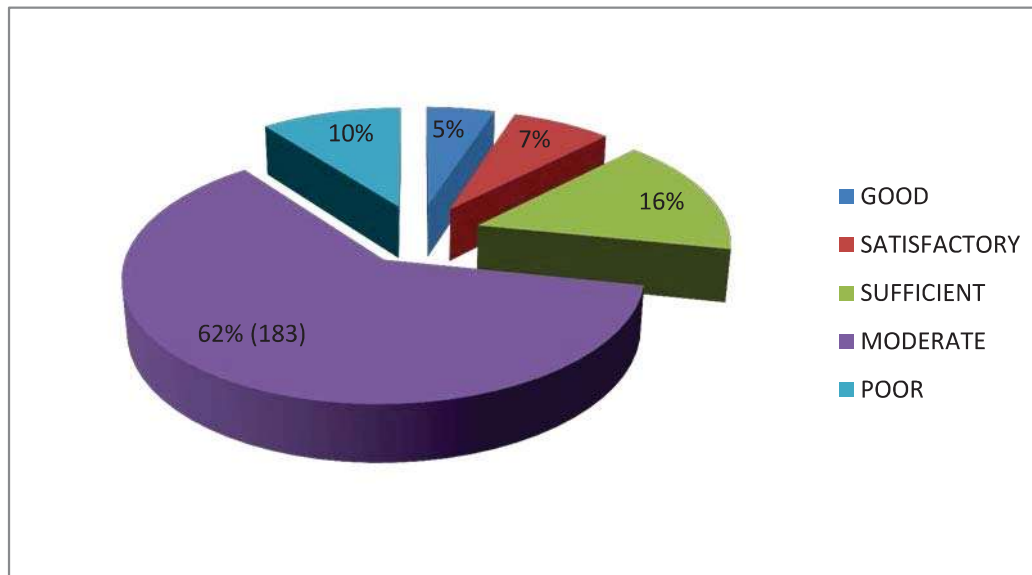


Source: Electronic Survey, 2018

Figure 3 above shows that 96 respondents representing 32% said they use Facebook often while 101 respondents representing 34% said they use WhatsApp. Conversely, 84 respondents representing 28% said they often use Twitter while 17 respondents said they habitually use

other social media networks. This connotes that the majority of the respondents habitually use WhatsApp and Facebook while few of them use Twitter and other social media. Suffice it to say that Facebook and WhatsApp are social media platforms mostly used for spreading information either maliciously or otherwise.

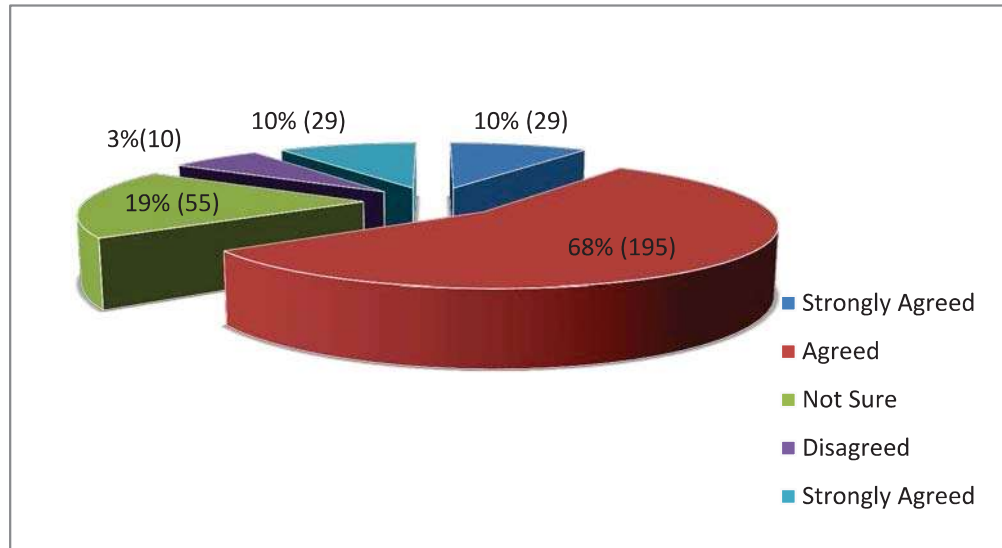
Figure 4: State of Security in North Eastern Nigeria



Source: Electronic Survey, 2018

Figure 4 above seeks to find out the current state of security in North Eastern Nigeria. In response, 15 respondents representing 10% were of the opinion that the state of security in North Eastern Nigeria is good while 22 respondents representing 7% felt it is satisfactory. Similarly, 47 respondents representing 16% said it is sufficient. On the contrary, 183 respondents representing 62% and 31 respondents representing 10% said it is moderate and poor respectively. This implies that the state of security in North-eastern Nigeria is not good.

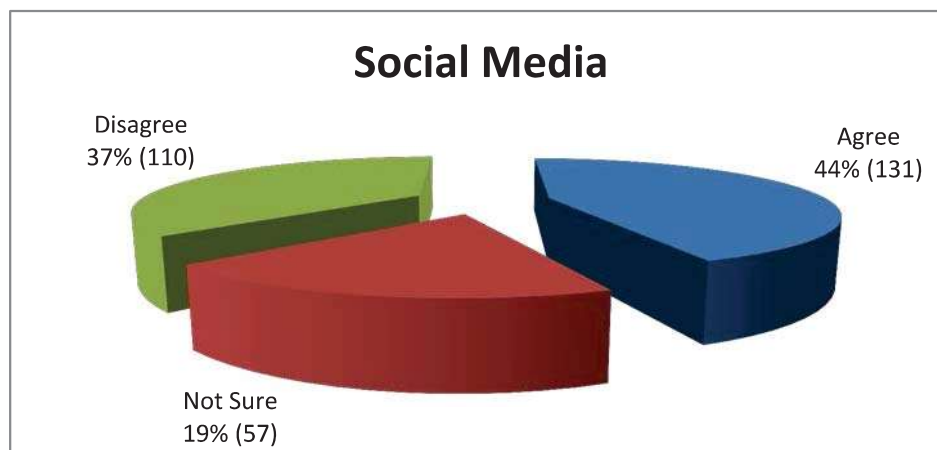
Figure 5: Threat of Social Media Platforms



Source: Electronic Survey, 2018

The data in Figure 5 above reveal that 29 respondents representing 10% strongly agreed that social media platforms threaten the security architecture in North Eastern Nigeria. 195 respondents representing 68% strongly agreed, 55 respondents representing 19% were uncertain. On the contrary, 10 respondents representing 3% disagreed and 10 strongly disagreed. This implies that there is a nexus between insecurity and social media in North-eastern Nigeria.

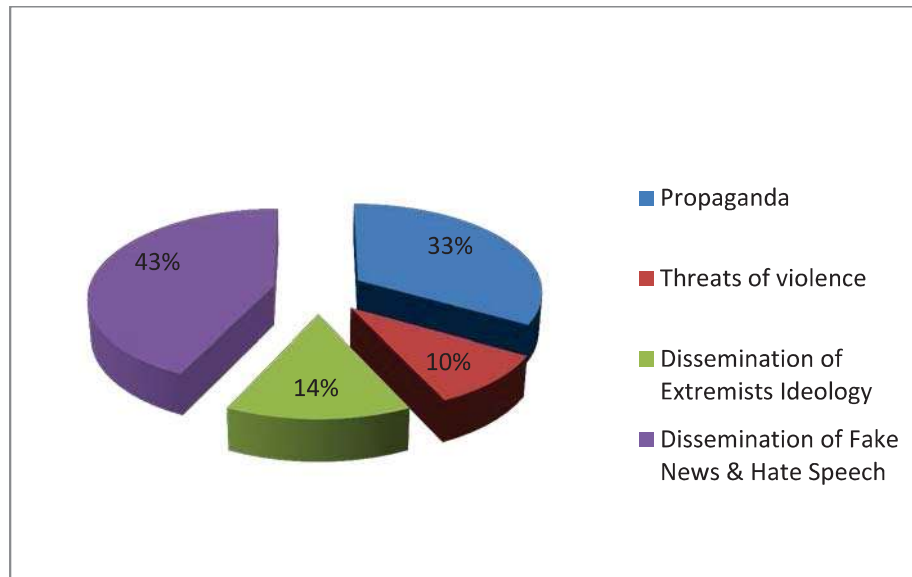
Figure 6: Respondents Perception on Social Media Platforms and Insecurity



Source: Electronic Survey, 2018

In figure 6 above, 131 respondents representing 44% agreed that Social media platforms have increased insecurity in the North Eastern Nigeria while 110 respondents representing 37% disagreed. On the other hand, 57 respondents were not sure. By implication, one could deduce that social media platforms serve as catalyst to the current insecurity issues in North Eastern Nigeria.

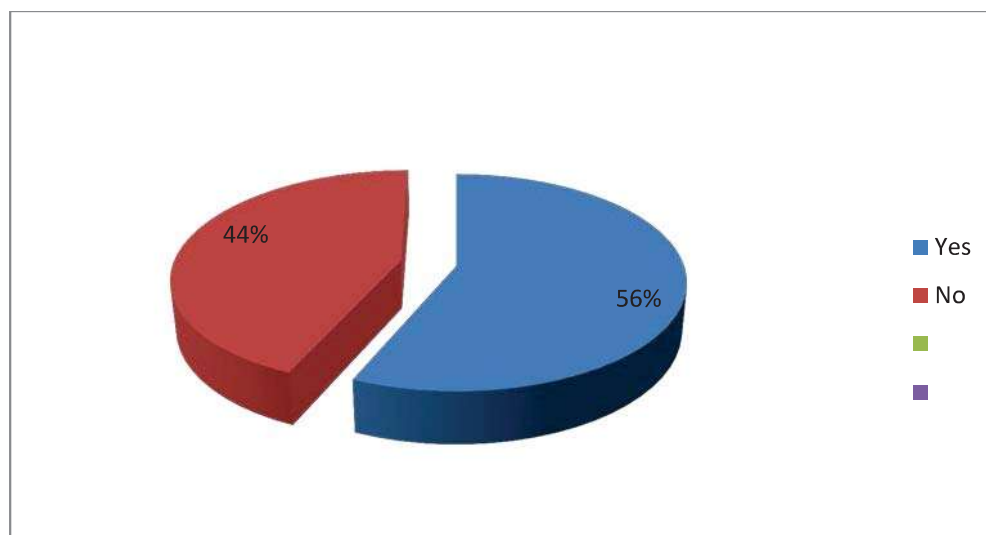
Figure 7: Areas which Social Media Platforms Facilitate Insecurity



Source: Electronic Survey, 2018

Figure 7 above seeks to find out the areas which social media facilitates insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria. In response, 99 respondents representing 33% were of the opinion that one of these areas is propaganda while 29 respondents representing 10% felt it is threat of violence. Similarly, 42 respondents representing 14% said it is dissemination of extremists 'ideologies. Conversely, 128 respondents representing 43% said it is dissemination of fake news and hate speech. This implies that propaganda, dissemination of fake news and hate speech are the core areas which social media platforms facilitate insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria.

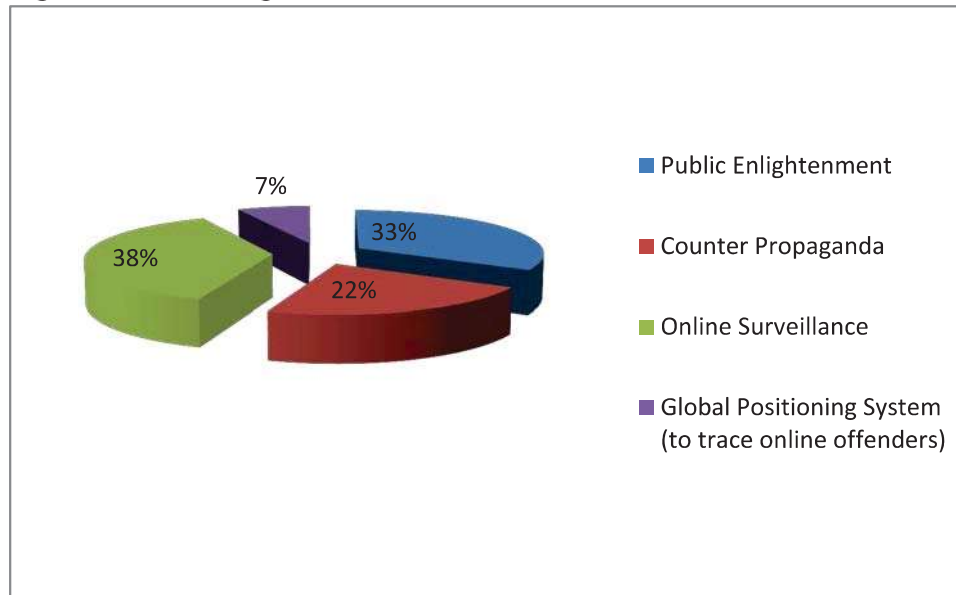
Figure 8: Nigerian Security Agencies and Sensitive information on Social Media



Source: Electronic Survey, 2018

The data in Figure 8 above show 168 respondents representing 56% concurred that there are incidences when the Nigerian Security Agencies unintentionally disclose sensitive security information on social media platforms. On the contrary 130 respondents representing 44% debunked the former claim.

Figure 9: Strategies to surmount the adverse use of social media platforms



Source: Electronic Survey, 2018

Figure 9 above contain possible solution to the adverse effect of social media on national security. In response, 99 respondents were of the opinion that this menace can be surmounted via public enlightenment, while 66 respondents suggested counter propaganda. 112 respondents felt Online Surveillance is the only remedy while 21 respondents felt the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) would aid in surmounting the problem.

Discussion of Findings

Avalanche of issues were raised and uncovered in the course of this study. These are manifest from the responses to the research questions by the respondents which formed the basis of the study.

Research Objective 1: To identify the nexus between social media use and insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria;

Based on the data retrieved and the analysis made, it is apt to infer that the current state of insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria is abysmal. The above finding coincides with that of Chukwuere and Onyebukwa (2018) where they found that the state of Nigeria's national security is very poor. In the same vein, findings of this study also revealed that there is a nexus between social media platforms and insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria. The study unravelled that precisely 195 respondents representing 68% strongly agreed that social media platforms threatened the security architecture in North Eastern Nigeria. By implication, this

connotes that social media platforms serve as catalysts that facilitate insecurity. This revelation substantiates Allcott and Gentzkov's (2017) affirmation that the social media platforms are well suited for fake news dissemination. Similarly, Nsudu and Onwe's (2017) findings also revealed that social networking sites are used by terrorist groups with dedicated servers and websites to spread propaganda.

Research Objective 2: To ascertain how social media facilitates insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria;

Exploring the areas which social media facilitate insecurity, the study revealed that 99 respondents representing 33% were of the opinion that one of these areas is propaganda while 29 respondents representing 10% felt it is threat of violence. Similarly, 42 respondents representing 14% said it is dissemination of extremists' ideologies. Conversely, 128 respondents representing 43% said the platforms disseminate fake news and hate Speech. This implies that propaganda and dissemination of fake news and hate speech are the core areas which social media platforms facilitate insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria. The above finding relates with that of Kimutai (2014), where the researcher discovered that criminals use social media platforms as tools to communicate, spread propaganda and radicalization to a great extent.

Research Objective 3: To identify the most used social media platform by respondents for the spread of insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria

In identifying the most frequently used social media platform for spreading insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria, Figure 3, revealed that 96 respondents representing 32% identified said Facebook is one of the social media platform that is frequently used in spreading insecurity related subjects while 101 respondents representing 34% said it's Whatsapp. Conversely, 84 respondents representing 28% identified Twitter while 17 respondents said all the social media platforms frequently aid in spreading insecurity in the North Eastern part of Nigeria. According to Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD) (2015) about 70% percent of the people disseminating malicious content on the Nigerian social media use either Facebook or WhatsApp to achieve their heinous act either consciously or unconsciously. This implies that malicious contents that have the potency of spreading are insecurity in North Eastern part of Nigeria are found on either Facebook or WhatsApp.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that the social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp etc. are carriers of fake news and inflammatory messages that have the potency to hamper with the security architecture of Nigeria as a nation; this implies that malicious contents on social media platforms are catalysts that spread insecurity and incessant fear among citizens. Therefore, there is need for social media users, government and security agencies to do the needful so as to minimize the rate of inflammatory messages on social media platforms.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, the following recommendations are made;

1. Social media users should stop spreading fake news and inflammatory messages that may result in violence.
2. There is the need for the government and other relevant agencies to have active social media accounts so as to counter propaganda, hates speech and other dangerous contents that have the potency to adversely affect the security architecture of the nation.
3. The mainstream media in collaboration with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should enlighten citizens on the adverse effect of fake news, propaganda and malicious content on social media platforms. This can be achieved through consistent campaign.
4. Owners of social media accounts that spread inflammatory contents should be traced and relevant actions be taken by the security agencies.
5. The government should commit human and financial capital on research in the area of social media usage and national security. The above would help in coming up with a framework that would help eliminate or rather minimize the rate of inflammatory contents on social media platforms.

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