

## **Analysis of the Impact of Twitter on National Security in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*In recent years, Nigeria has faced growing insecurity characterized by issues like the Boko Haram insurgency, farmers'/herdsmen clashes, separatist movements, and kidnappings. This study addresses the ongoing debate over the causes of this insecurity, with the government often blaming social media platforms, particularly x (formerly Twitter), while citizens argue that it stems from lack of effective leadership. The primary objective of this research is to investigate the relationship between social media, specifically Twitter, and Nigeria's national insecurity. By examining the usage patterns of social media and their implications for national security, this study aims to provide insight into how social media contributes to insecurity and suggest mechanisms for the Nigerian government to address security challenges arising from these platforms. The outcome of this study will assist policymakers, media and communication scholars as well as media consumers in making decisions. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data is collected through questionnaire targeting social media users, specifically Twitter subscribers. Secondary data is drawn from published literature, internet sources, and documents related to the impact of social media on national security. Data is presented in a simple table and analysis of data done beneath each table. Based on analysis of questionnaire responses, a key finding of this study is that positive use of Twitter promotes security while negative use of the platform promotes insecurity. Consequently, this study recommends that government agencies, private organisations and individuals who promote good causes should maintain presence and be active on Twitter with the intention of propagating good causes as well as monitoring and countering any negative influence of misguided Twitter users.*

**Key words: twitter, security, insecurity, networking, social media**

### **Introduction**

Due to heightened insecurity in Nigeria, debate is ongoing on identifying the causes of national insecurity. The Federal Government in its bid to stem insecurity in Nigeria proscribed the use of Twitter in Nigeria on Friday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021 (Princewill and Busari, 2021). In a public hearing in Nigeria's Senate later in the same month, the then Nigeria's Information and Culture Minister, Lai

Mohammed, explained to the Legislators the reasons why the Government banned Twitter in Nigeria as follows:

“It is true that on the 4th of June, the Federal Government suspended the operations of Twitter indefinitely in Nigeria and the reasons we gave for this suspension was because Twitter has made its platform a platform of choice for people who are promoting activities to destabilise Nigeria. The only reason why we suspended the operation of Twitter was because it was promoting disunity in Nigeria and therefore became a national security risk. Nigerian Tribune (June, 2021).

Mr. Mohammed’s invitation to the National Assembly Public Hearing for the explanations followed a deluge of criticism from both private individuals and leaders of professional bodies in Nigeria who believed that the Federal Government’s action on Twitter was misplaced and uncalled for. For instance, the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) disapproved the government’s decision and asked that it should be “reversed immediately or face legal action for breaching the fundamental right of Nigerians to freely express their constitutionally guaranteed opinions through that medium”, the then NBA President, Olumide Akpata twitted using his Twitter handle @OlumideAkpata few hours before the ban came into effect. In a similar move, a Lagos-based civil society group, Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) also disagreed with the Nigerian Government and also vowed to drag the Nigerian government to court over the ban.

At the time of the ban, most Government offices and top functionaries had and maintained Twitter accounts through which they communicated and disseminated information towards the administration of their respective offices. In fact, the Nigerian Government used the Twitter platform @NigeriaGov to announce the Twitter ban. Similarly, the debate on the impact of Twitter on Nigeria’s security generated international conversation. The ECOWAS Court, Amnesty International, the Embassy of Sweden in Nigeria, as well as the British and Canadian missions in the country spoke up against Twitter’s suspension by Nigerian authorities. They all highlighted the importance of freedom of speech for Nigerians and maintained that responsible individuals and organisations who depend on Twitter for their daily operations would have suffered and impacted negatively as a result of the ban, according to Princewill and Busari, 2021.

The Problem of this study stems from the cacophony of voices on the impact of Twitter on national insecurity. These accusations and counter-accusations compound the issue of insecurity in the country and calls for the need to investigate the real causes of insecurity in Nigeria to enable the government and its agencies deal with them. The aim and objective of this study is therefore to establish the claims or redirect the blame on Twitter for promoting insecurity in Nigeria. The outcome of this study will assist policymakers on taking decisions concerning the use of Twitter in Nigeria and also guide the social media users, media practitioners, media and communications scholars as well as media consumers on the relationship between Twitter usage and national security.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is built on the Uses and Gratification theory, which according to Mohammed (2015), was propounded by Blumer and Katz's in 1970. The theory explains why people actively engage with some particular media outlets and contents. The theory says that users proactively search for media platforms that will not only meet their needs but enhance their 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.

### **Literature Review**

Twitter, which was rebranded X by its new Chief Executive Officer, Elon Musk, on July 31, 2023 is one of the most prominent social media platforms in Nigeria, Amnesty International (2021) confirms. Others include Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok and Thread. They can be described as online-based tools and services connecting people, and enabling interaction with each other over the internet. Although major news outlets in June 2021 reported that there are about 40 million Nigerian Twitter users, further studies by Check Africa in 2023 have shown that there might be much less number, about three million. Whether the number of Nigerian Twitter users is 40 million or 20 million or even three million, the fact remains that Twitter is regarded as a powerful communication tool due to its special features such as support for anonymity and short messaging of not more than 280 words per post for subscribers outside the United States (Reimann, 2023), Twitter comes across as an important communication tool to all classes of people in the society. And as a result of its users' diversity, Twitter is prone to be used to promote both negative

and positive agendas. In line with the above thoughts, Chukwukere and Onyebuwa, (2018) argue that social media, particularly Twitter could generate adverse effects on a nation's security architecture. The opinions expressed by Chukwukere and Onyebuwa come as a result of critical evaluation of Twitter features mentioned above. On the flip side, Anne Buckland (2021) lists positive uses of social media platforms, noting that the government and its agencies could depend on social media to promote their causes. Buckland's perspective is also potent in Nigeria where most government agencies and top functionaries operate on Twitter. Government and private institutions release press statements on Twitter, the same way individuals who operate legitimate businesses leverage the potential of Twitter platform.

The positive uses of the Twitter platform in Nigeria notwithstanding, the Nigerian government especially between 2019 and 2023 made cases against social media, particularly, Twitter. British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) correspondent, Nduka Orjinmo on June 5, 2021 wrote that the Nigerian government had for a while toyed with regulating the social media space. Before the eventual ban of Twitter in June 2021, the then Information and Culture Minister, Lai Mohammed, had led a delegation of government functionaries on visits to media organization where he expressed worry that social media was fueling divisive sentiments in Nigeria. Early in 2019, the Government of former President Muhammadu Buhari prepared a bill titled: The Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill 2019, otherwise known as the Social Media Bill, and forwarded to the Senate for legislative action. According to Tonye Bakare (2020), the Bill if passed, was to give sweeping power to the government to clamp down on critics and also shut down the internet. The bill, sponsored by Senator Muhammad Sani Musa of the ruling All Progressives Congress, passed the first and second readings on November 5 and 20 respectively. The Guardian newspaper of Nigeria received an official copy of the bill on November 24. (Bakare, 2020). The existence of the Social Media Bill, though not passed into law as at the time the Federal Government proscribed Twitter in June 2021 might have given impetus to the Twitter ban. The Nigerian government is not alone, however on expressing negative implications of Twitter usage. 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 platforms such as Twitter and Facebook can be used as tools by terrorist groups to expand their networks. These platforms can be used not only to spread propaganda, but also to host embedded malicious software links and applications that can corrupt an unsuspecting user's

electronic device. Similarly, Allcott and Gentzkov (2017), corroborate that Twitter is well suited for fake news dissemination. 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.

Twitter is one of the most used social media platforms, according to BBC to a BBC in June 2021. From 2017, users can post a maximum of 280 characters. It used to be a maximum of 140 characters before November 2017. Compared to other social media platforms, Twitter connects its users through currently exciting topics and the conversation, more than through friendship and close networks as platforms such as Facebook does. Twitter provides a platform for businesses to monitor their customers' discussion regarding, for example, company activities. Amidst the recent security issues in Nigeria such as farmers/herdsmen clashes and political activities in almost every part of the country, Boko Haram activities, Banditry and separatist movements, interested and ill-informed citizens use that as an opportunity to fabricate sensational information related to these attacks to achieve their political, philosophical and religious goals on social media platforms like Twitter and the likes.

In the same vein Pate (2011) cited in Nwabueze and Ebeze (2013) identifies some ill social media-based journalistic practices that 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.

### **Scenarios of Positive and Negative Uses of Twitter in Nigeria**

A scenario of negative use of the Twitter in Nigeria was captured by HumAngle (2021) in research on the crisis between farmers and herders in parts of Nigeria. Kabir (2021) holds that the crisis fundamentally was a land-use contest but that it was fast sharpening ethnic, regional, and religious polarisation due to weaving destructive conspiracy narratives and fake news on social media. Kabir notes that social media users misguidedly distort images to appear real and use such images to

promote their agenda. On the other hand, a scenario of positive uses of Twitter is culled from the Twitter handle of the Federal Government of Nigeria @NigeriaGov from where the Federal Government releases quick information to the general public. The Twitter handle as at October 5, 2023, has 2.1 million followers. This means that it speaks directly to about 2.1 million persons or groups with a single post. In the night of October 2, 2023, at about 11:28 PM, immediately after the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC) reached a truce with Federal Government negotiators to avert the labour unions' strike on October 3, 2023, the Federal Government through this Twitter handle announced the suspension of the planned strike. Other media platforms picked the story and quoted the Twitter handle as the source. The Federal Government Tweeted: "FG, Organised Labour (NLC, TUC) reach agreement to avert strike action scheduled for October 3, 2023. Details will be communicated later". And it attached a photo taken during the negotiation. Within a short time, the story went viral and clarified the status of the proposed labour strike. It would have been cumbersome for the traditional media to respond to the urgency of the story the way Twitter did. This scenario applies to most government agencies, private organisations and individuals who conduct legitimate businesses on daily basis.

- Kabir notes that while most of the herders can be said to be Muslim-Fulani, who are traditionally nomadics, the farmers are often found across Christian denominations of various ethnic groups; some of the problems identified are related to land and water use, obstruction of traditional migration routes, livestock theft, and crop damage. Explaining further on the causes of the farmers/herdsmen clashes, a 2017 report by the International Crisis Group notes that following desertification degradation of pastures by droughts across Nigeria's far-northern Sahelian belt, large numbers of herders were forced to migrate southwards in search of grassland and water for their herds. Secondly, insecurity in many northern states also prompted increasing numbers of herdsmen to migrate to the south. This herdsmen migration created the scenario where the farmers in the southern parts fought to protect their farm crops while the herdsmen from the northern part fought to secure pastures for their cattle. Amnesty International report published in 2018 notes that about 3,641 persons were killed in various farmers-herders clashes between January 2016 and October 2018; and that no fewer than 406 people were injured and 182,530 persons displaced following the destruction of 5,000 houses in various states across Nigeria. Similar research published in May 2021, by France 24, a French state-owned international news

television network based in Paris notes that clashes between farmers and herders in Nigeria have killed more than 10,000 people in the past decade and displaced 300,000.

Another negative scenario a point in Nigeria when a video clip of former President Muhammadu Buhari emerged online purportedly justifying herders attack in Benue. The presidency denied the clip but it was after it had traveled wide. A short video report by Root TV in late January, 2020 claimed that “Nigerian Government was offering Herdsmen N100 Billion so they can stop criminal activities.” The video was shared by many social media influencers. Africa Check later ran a check on this and its findings revealed that the video was first recorded in 2019 and was even debunked then.

Speaking on the way forward, Kabir urged the media to continue to fact check stories and sort fact from fiction. “Whenever something is going viral, the media needs to verify and let people know the actual truth. The issue of the farmer-herder crisis may not end for now until the government lays the perfect template but we can reduce the crisis that comes out of it through responsible reporting from the media and fact checking some of the viral stuff online”, Kabir (2021). In the foregoing scenarios, the Twitter is only being used negatively by misguided users to perpetrate their selfish interest while the positive tendencies of the Twitter platform are overlooked. The story would have been different if the potential powers of Twitter was positively utilized.

### **What National Security Entails**

National security is described as the capability of the state in catering for the defense and protection of its people (Makinda, 1998). National Security entails the nation’s effort and strategies in protecting its states and its citizens against national crisis through power projections such as military power and economic might (Momoh, 2016). The opposite of national security is national insecurity which is described as the presence of threats that endanger human rights and freedom, liberty to life, movement and the right to free expression (Momoh, 2016). Ali (2013) explains that it borders on any incidence compromising the welfare and existence of the citizens of a nation and it is aimed at securing favourable living conditions for every member of the nation.

In pursuance of the above, every government makes effort to ensure state security. In Nigeria it is enshrined in Chapter Two of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Section 14, Sub-section 2b which states that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government. This provision is a critical part of the Fundamental Objectives and Directive

Principles of State Policy. This is so because the security of every nation is vital for the survival and growth of its political, social and economic system. Therefore, security or lack of it is a primary concern of the government. However, often, for socio-political and economic advantages, governments' detractors within and outside the governments and polities use various mechanisms, including negative communication, to subvert the effort of the government or unearth perceived weaknesses of the government. In response to that, governments, its agencies and well-meaning individuals make efforts to promote security or fight insecurity in various forms.

The following are aspects of national security, according to Kim Holmes (2014) and it is important to note that the absence of them are also the aspects of national insecurity: political security, economic security, energy and natural resources security, homeland or internal security, cybersecurity, human security, environmental security and culture and identity security.

### **Methodology**

This study used Quantitative method of data gathering which is primarily creating and administering a questionnaire instrument on a sampled population of 289 Twitter subscribers drawn from the Northern part of the country (Abuja) and Southern part of the country (Lagos). It also involved gathering and analysing the responses in order to arrive at a popular opinion. The choice of respondents was gender, age and educational background sensitive. This was done to ensure that the views of all demographic sides of the Nigerian population is taken into consideration. The research questions tested the claims that Twitter is the cause of the heightened insecurity in Nigeria and that Twitter is not the cause of the heightened insecurity in Nigeria. Other research questions were drawn from above claims. The questionnaire had two parts. The first part was intended to elicit information about the sex, educational category and profession of respondents. The other part of the questionnaire contained questions designed to satisfy the research problem. Responses research questions were mostly on a four-point Linkert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly, disagree and undecided. This choice of the Linkert Scale was to give every respondent the opportunity to express themselves in the order of the intensity of their answers. Data presentation was done on a table. This was followed by analysis of responses. Research findings summary, conclusion and recommendations were drawn from the popular views of the respondents which corroborated views earlier discussed in the literature review. A limitation or bias of this study methodology is that a sample of 289 respondents may not speak to the Nigerian



Twitter users population which was put at 4.95 million according Simon Kemp (2023). However, attempts have been made to bridge this bias through objective sampling.

### Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings

Below is the presentation of data in tables and pie charts. Data analysis comes beneath each chart except for the three demographic/biodata tables which were analysed together.

#### Demographic/Biodata Analysis

**Table 1 Gender Classification of Respondents**

	Frequency	Frequency Percent	Valid Percentage
Valid Male	146	51.0	51.0
Valid Female	140	48.0	48.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>99.0</b>	<b>99.0</b>
Missing System	3	1.0	
Total	289	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2022

**Table 2 Age Classification of Respondents**

	Frequency	Frequency Percentage	Valid Percentage
Valid 18-25	38	13.1	13.3
Valid 26-36	76	26.3	26.6
Valid 37-47	110	38.1	38.5
Valid 48- and above	62	21.5	21.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>99.0</b>	<b>99.0</b>
Missing System	3	1.0	
Total	289	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, 2022

**Table 4.1 Academic Qualification Classification of Respondents**

	Frequency	Frequency Percentage	Valid Percentage
SSCE	73	25.3	25.5
Degree	130	45.0	45.5
Valid Masters	72	24.9	25.2
Doctorate	11	3.8	3.8
Total	286	99.0	99.0
Missing System	3	1.0	
Total	289	100.0	

**Source: Field Survey, 2021**

The demographic/biodata analysis of respondents shows that 146 (51%) of the respondents were male, while females are 140 (48%). This is an indication that both genders were involved in this study and thus the finding of the study did not suffer from gender bias. Respondents between 37 and 47 years, representing 38 percent, participated more in the study, followed by 26–36 years, representing 27 percent. This shows that the majority of the participants are young adults who engage more on social media particularly Twitter, for different activities. Also, findings show that 73 (25.3%) are SSCE holders, 130 (46%) hold first degrees, 72 (25%) master's degree and 11 (4%) hold doctorate degrees. The findings show that the majority of the respondents are first degree holders, which proves that most of them have higher tertiary education.

The following questions, represented as claims were tested as presented below:

**The use of Twitter in Nigeria is the cause of increased insecurity in the country**

	Frequency	Frequency Percentage	Valid Percent
Strongly Disagree	172	59.5	60.1
Valid Undecided	59	20.4	20.6
Strongly Agree	55	19.0	19.2
Total	286	99.0	100.0
Missing System	3	1.0	
Total	289	100.0	

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

This research question seeks to investigate if participants agree that the use of Twitter impacts solely negatively on national security. Majority of the respondents strongly disagrees (172, 60 %); (59, 21%) were undecided while (55,19%) strongly agree. This is similar with the result published by Ngige et al. (2016), which argues that although terrorist and other criminal groups use social media to pass their information, the security agencies also use the social media to pass information. Twitter is therefore only a reflection of the poor state of security architecture. If the security agents could make the most of Twitter, the negative influence of the terrorists will be overwhelmed.

**The present state of Nigeria’s national security deplorable**

	Frequency	Frequency Percent	Valid Percentage
Disagree	32	11.1	11.2
Undecided	12	4.2	4.2
Valid Agree	36	12.5	12.6
Strongly Agree	206	71.3	72.0
Total	286	99.0	100.0
Missing System	3	1.0	
Total	289	100.0	

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

This question seeks to know if participants agree that there is heightened insecurity in Nigeria. Responses show that security threats remain a major challenge affecting peace and unity in Nigeria in the 21st century. 72 percent of the respondents strongly agree that Nigeria’s security is deplorable. This is line with the study conducted by Nsudu and Onwe (2017). 4.2 percent of respondents are undecided.

**Nigerian security agencies can harvest information from Twitter regarding the activities of anti-social groups such as Boko Haram, terrorists, bandits and separatists**

Response	Frequency	Frequency Percentage	Valid Percentage
Disagree	46	15.9	16.1
Undecided	19	6.6	6.6
Valid Agree	11	3.8	3.8
Strongly Agree	210	72.7	73.4
Total	286	99.0	100.0
Missing System	3	1.0	
Total	289	100.0	

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

This question aims to understand if Nigerian security operatives such as the military and police are exposed to information regarding the activities of anti-social groups through Twitter. The findings show that 210 (73 percent) of the respondents strongly agree with the claim that social media platforms can feed information to security agents on the activities and events of Boko Haram. This is in line with Walker (2012) thoughts who suggests that Nigeria's security agents or services can employ a number of strategies and tactics to counter and the activities Boko Haram and other anti-social groups on the social media particularly, Twitter. Such strategies include harvesting useful information about the operations of these negative groups through Twitter and acting on the information.

**Twitter contributes positively to the society depending on the user interest**

	Frequency	Frequency Percentage	Valid Percentage
Valid Strongly Disagree	42	14.5	14.7
Valid Agree	20	6.9	7.0
Valid Strongly Agree	224	77.5	78.3
Valid Total	286	99.0	100.0
Missing System	3	1.0	
Total	289	100.0	

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

This question seeks to determine whether Twitter contributes towards the advancement of the society. 224 (78%) of the participants believe that Twitter contributes positively towards the advancement of the society depending on the user interest; this is irrespective of the negative results emanating from negative interest of the user. These responses agree with the position of the HumAngle (2021) report on farmers/herdsmen clashes in parts of Nigeria as earlier discussed in this study.

**What mechanisms do you think should be deployed by the Nigerian government in curbing security challenges emanating from social networking sites?**

	Frequency	Frequency Percentage	Valid Percentage
Public Diplomacy	93	32.2	32.5
Online Surveillance	169	58.5	59.1
Information Sharing	24	8.3	8.4
Total	286	99.0	100.0
Missing System	3	1.0	
Total	289	100.0	

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

The question is aimed at determining suggesting to governments or policy makers on the best mechanism they could deploy to curb negative influences of anti-social groups on social media, particularly, Twitter. Highest number of responses (59%) suggest the use of online surveillance for Nigerian security agents in getting information and combating social media threats to social and national security. 33 percent of the respondents suggest the use of public diplomacy while 8 percent suggest information sharing. Low votes for information sharing might have been as a result of the belief that the anti-social groups could spin a counter attack using the information shared by the security agents.

### **Conclusion**

Some Twitter users have used the platform to pursue their personal interests. They sometimes engage in spreading falsehood and negative information to achieve their objectives. This negative use of the Twitter has amplified tension and security threats among citizens of Nigeria. On the flipside, other Twitter users have engaged the platform towards achieving their modest and legitimate interests. This is the summary of responses from the question seeking to determine if Twitter contributes positively to the society depending on the user interest. Consequently, responses show that individuals and organisations who are promoting good causes also use the

Twitter platform. Therefore, it does not hold water to argue that all negative influences on the society come from the Twitter; positive influences also come from the Twitter. For instance, responses from question three indicate that Nigerian security agents and agencies also use Twitter. Ultimately, responses from question one indicate that the increase in insecurity in Nigeria cannot be blamed on solely Twitter but rather on misguided citizens who make negative use of Twitter platform to achieve their selfish destructive agenda. It is worthy of note that positive use of social media, particularly, Twitter provides positive impacts on the society while negative use of the platforms engenders negative outcome, including national security.

### **Recommendations.**

Flowing from above findings, the study recommends as follows:

1. that all government agencies especially security agencies should be present and active on Twitter with the intention of monitoring and countering any negative information which might be passed on the platform by misguided individuals.
2. The Nigerian government and its security agents should implement effective enlightenment programmes to educate the public on how to be responsible while using social media platforms.
3. The current effort of the government to register online businesses in Nigeria for tax purpose is commendable and should be extended to social media platforms, particularly Twitter, for the purpose of monitoring security threats emanating from the usage.
4. Nigerian government should encourage Twitter to built-in censorship technique(s) to the platform to check the spread of fake news, negative propaganda, violence, immoral contents among others.
5. Governments should encourage Twitter to enforce that all Twitter users must have verifiable identities and location before signing-up on the platform.

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