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INFLUENCE OF NEW MEDIA ON THE SECURITY SITUATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines the profound influence of new media on the security situation in Nigeria. With the advent of new media platforms, the dissemination of information has become faster and more widespread than ever before. This paper explores the positive and negative influences of new media on security, including its potential for increasing awareness, facilitating citizen collaboration, and promoting government transparency. It also highlights the challenges posed by misinformation, spread of hate speech, and the use of new media for nefarious activities. This paper sheds light on the multifaceted impacts of new media on Nigeria's security landscape and offers valuable insights on how the negative influence of new media on security can be mitigated in Nigeria. This paper recommends, among others, for a communication strategy for national security; harnessing of the new media for national integration and unity; and the enhancement of citizen engagement and collaboration.

Keywords: New media, Fake news, Disinformation, Misinformation, Security, Nigeria.

Introduction

The influence of new media on the security situation in Nigeria has been both significant and complex. New media, particularly social media platforms, have revolutionized the way information is disseminated, shared, and consumed. While this has brought about positive changes such as increased awareness, citizen engagement, and government transparency, it

has also presented challenges such as the spread of misinformation, amplification of hate speech, and facilitation of criminal activities.

Security challenges have continued to bedevil our country Nigeria. The challenges have become major sources of news and information to the media, both conventional and new. As expected, human security is a primary concern in every society including Nigeria and the media are recognized as one of the agents of social change that promote and defend human rights through their narratives and representations of security issues.

Asema, Onyeka and Comfort (2013) have outlined some principles in media social responsibility theory with the need for the mass media to avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence or civil disorder and the obligations should be achieved by setting high or professional standards of information, truth, objectivity, accuracy and balance. But do these principles tally with the un – regulated new or social media? Granted about the efficacy of the new media and their positives, the negatives include perpetuating cybercrime, pornography, academic fraud and all kinds of insecurity. Terrorists, bandits, kidnappers, abductors and militia groups find favour with new media gadgets and platforms in causing mayhem as would be seen in some of the listed case studies ahead.

According to Center for Democracy and Development (CDD) (2015), one of the positive implications of new media on security in Nigeria is the rapid dissemination of information. New media platforms such as the social media allow for the immediate sharing of news, alerts, and updates, enabling citizens to be quickly informed about security incidents and events. This has facilitated rapid response and crisis management, as individuals can report incidents in real-time, enabling security forces to promptly react.

Furthermore, new media has played a crucial role in increasing awareness and citizen engagement in security matters. Through social media campaigns and hashtags, citizens are mobilized to take action, advocate for change, and hold the government accountable. The #EndSARS movement, for example, gained international attention as activists utilized social media to expose police brutality and demand reform (CDD, 2015).

Olutayo (2019) has averred that government transparency and accountability have also been positively impacted by new media. Social media platforms for example, have provided a space for citizens to voice their concerns, share opinions, and demand transparency from government officials. In response, governments have been pushed to be more accountable, utilizing social media to communicate with citizens, share progress reports, and address security-related issues.

However, there are negative implications of new media on security in Nigeria as well. The rapid spread of misinformation and rumours on social media has contributed to societal tensions and worsened the security situation. False reports and misleading information can easily go viral, creating panic, inciting violence, and hindering effective security responses. The CCD (2015) is of the opinion that new media has amplified hate speech and incitement, exacerbating existing conflicts and promoting violence. Ethnic and religious tensions have

been further fueled by the dissemination of divisive content, leading to communal clashes and increased insecurity.

Moreover, as Akpan and Akpan (2014) have rightly pointed out, new media has also been used as a tool for criminal activities. Cybercrime, online fraud, and recruitment of individuals for extremist ideologies have all been facilitated through social media platforms. These activities pose significant threats to the security and stability of the country. The concern of this paper is therefore to highlight the positive and negative influence of new media on security and how we can mitigate the challenges and harness the opportunities presented by the new media on security in Nigeria.

Positive Influence of New Media on Security

New media, which includes social media, blogs, online news sites, and other digital platforms, has played a significant role in shaping security in Nigeria in recent years. Here are some of the ways new media has impacted security:

i. Information dissemination: New media has made it easier for security agencies to disseminate information to the public. They can now use social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to share updates on ongoing security operations, warn the public about potential threats, and share safety tips.

ii. Crowd sourcing information: Citizens can now use new media to report suspicious activities and security threats to the authorities. Social media platforms have made it easier for citizens to share photos, videos, and other information that can help security agencies in their investigations.

iii. Monitoring security situations: New media has made it easier for security agencies to monitor security situations in real-time. They can now use social media platforms to monitor events and quickly respond to any security threats.

iv. Countering misinformation: New media has also been used to counter misinformation and fake news that can cause panic and insecurity. Security agencies can now use social media platforms to provide accurate information and correct false reports.

v. Instant dissemination of information: New media platforms, such as social media, allow for the rapid dissemination of information to a large number of people. This can be extremely useful in emergency situations, as it enables quick communication and coordination, enhancing security response efforts.

vi Crowd-sourced monitoring: New media allows for real-time reporting and sharing of information by citizens. This can be leveraged for better monitoring of public spaces, reporting suspicious activities, and assisting law enforcement agencies in ensuring public safety.

vii Enhanced situational awareness: With the help of new media, individuals and security agencies can gain access to a wide range of information, including news updates, real-time video footage, and eyewitness accounts. This helps in building situational awareness, facilitating better decision-making, and improving overall security measures.

viii Collaboration and information sharing: New media platforms provide opportunities for collaboration and information sharing among security professionals, researchers, and organizations. This enables the exchange of best practices, the sharing of threat intelligence, and the development of innovative security solutions.

ix Enhanced public engagement: New media allows security agencies to engage with the public in meaningful ways. They can provide safety tips, address concerns, and share updates on security measures, thereby fostering a sense of trust and cooperation between the public and security agencies.

It is important to note that while new media has positive implications for security, it also raises challenges, such as the spread of misinformation. It is crucial to develop strategies to address these challenges effectively.

Negative Influence of New Media on Security

New media, while providing many positive benefits, does also have negative implications on security. Some of these implications are:

i. **Cybersecurity threats:** New media platforms, such as social media and online communication tools, have become a breeding ground for cybercriminals. They can exploit vulnerabilities in systems, steal sensitive information, and launch attacks like phishing, malware, and hacking.

ii. Spread of disinformation: New media has allowed for the rapid dissemination of false information, rumours, and conspiracy theories. This can have significant consequences on public safety and security, as false information can lead to panic, misinformation, and even influence public opinion during critical events.

iii. Privacy concerns: With the increasing use of new media platforms, individuals' personal information is often collected, stored, and analyzed by service providers for various purposes, including targeted advertising. This raises concerns about data privacy, surveillance, and the potential misuse of personal information.

iv. Online harassment and cyberbullying: New media platforms have provided a means for perpetrators to engage in online harassment and cyberbullying. This can have severe emotional and psychological impacts on individuals, leading to negative mental health outcomes and even security threats in extreme cases.

v. Online radicalization and extremism: New media can be exploited by extremist groups to spread their ideologies, recruit members, and plan illicit activities. The anonymous nature of the internet provides a platform for individuals to connect with like-minded individuals, facilitating the spread of radical and dangerous ideas.

vi. Phishing and identity theft: New media has made it easier for cybercriminals to impersonate legitimate organizations and individuals to obtain sensitive information from unsuspecting users. This has led to an increase in phishing attacks and identity theft, putting individuals' financial and personal security at risk.

Theoretical Framework

For proper perspective and guidance of this discourse, the Systems Theory and Technological Determinism theory are utilized. The system theory developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1937), a biologist originated from life sciences, explaining the inter-relationship between organisms within the eco-system as a whole and unified system; hence nothing exists without other elements in the eco-system. It has also been applied in other fields including the area of communication to explain the connectedness of various elements within the communication ecosystem which includes social institutions, processes of communication, information

systems amongst others (McGonagle, 2017). For this study, the Systems Theory explains the relationship between the nation, its communication systems and national security, giving a holistic view of the connectedness of all the elements. Therefore, none of these elements are really isolated from each other as they all play a role; national security impacts communication processes and systems just as much as communication in various social institutions within the society can negatively or positively impact the security of the nation. The systems within a nation also evolve; the media systems within nations are evolving to accommodate citizen journalism since the advent of social media; governments within nations are also finding ways to be present on social media.

Technological Determinism Theory explains the setting of this study. The theory which was propounded by Marshall McLuhan (1964), a Canadian communication scholar, who observed new media technologies in communication, would soon determine social changes, turning the world into a global village (cited in Chinedu-Okeke and Obi, 2016). He believes socio-political, economic and cultural changes are inevitably based on development and diffusion of technology. The Technological Determinism 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 interaction. 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 (Nwabueze, 2017). 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 (Nsude, 2013).

Case Studies

i. #EndSARS Protests on Social Media

In October 2020, Nigerians took to social media platforms, particularly Twitter, to protest against police brutality and the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) unit. The hashtags #EndSARS and #EndPoliceBrutality went viral globally, with Nigerians sharing their personal experiences and demanding justice and reforms.

New Media Influence: Social media played a critical role in mobilizing and organizing the protests. It provided a platform for citizens to voice their concerns, share real-time updates, and coordinate donations and resources. It also facilitated international attention and support for the movement.

Security Situation: The Nigerian government swiftly responded by shutting down social media platforms intermittently during the protests, citing concerns of disseminating false information and inciting violence. This move sparked outrage and further demonstrations both online and offline, highlighting the tension between freedom of speech and national security measures.

ii. Boko Haram Insurgency

Nigeria has faced numerous security challenges, including the rise of Boko Haram and recruitment efforts by extremist groups. New media platforms have played a significant role in radicalization and recruitment. Case studies by scholars such as Salawu and Goodman (2014); Akpan and Akpan (2014) have shown how these groups utilize social media to disseminate pernicious propaganda, recruit followers, and coordinate attacks. This has highlighted the need for improved monitoring and counter-narratives to address this security situation.

iii. Ethnic and Religious Conflicts: The Jos Crises

The Jos crises refer to a series of inter-religious and inter-ethnic clashes that have occurred in Jos, the capital city of Plateau State of Nigeria (Olutayo, 2019). The city has a diverse population made up of various ethnic and religious groups, primarily Christians and Muslims, with the Hausa-Fulani Muslims dominating the northern part of the city and the Berom Christians inhabiting the southern part.

The crises in Jos have deep historical roots, including competition over land, socioeconomic disparities, political marginalization, and religious differences. However, the emergence of new media platforms has played a significant role in exacerbating tensions and fueling violence.

One notable case within the Jos crisis is the 2008 Jos riots. In this instance, a disputed local government election triggered a violent clash between Muslim and Christian youth groups. Social media, specifically platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, were used to spread misinformation, hate speech, and fake news which exacerbate the crises (Olutayo, 2019).

iv: #BringBackOurGirls Campaign

One of the most prominent case studies illustrating the power of new media in Nigeria's security situation is the #BringBackOurGirls campaign. In 2014, the abduction of over 200 schoolgirls by the extremist group Boko Haram sparked international outrage. The campaign, initiated on social media platforms such as Twitter, renamed Z gained significant traction and attracted global attention. The use of new media allowed concerned citizens, activists, and international organizations to mobilize and put pressure on the Nigerian government to take immediate action.

The #BringBackOurGirls campaign demonstrated the potential of new media in raising awareness, fostering solidarity, and pressuring authorities to address security challenges. It showcased the ability of social media platforms to amplify voices, facilitate information

sharing, and mobilize collective action. However, it also exposed the limitations of new media, as the girls were not immediately rescued, and the campaign eventually lost momentum.

V: Spread of Fake News and Hate Speech

While new media platforms have the potential to enhance security, they also present significant challenges. The spread of fake news and hate speech through social media has become a growing concern in Nigeria. Misinformation and incendiary content can exacerbate existing security issues, fuel interethnic tensions, and incite violence.

For instance, during the 2019 general elections, false information circulated on social media platforms, leading to widespread panic and violence in some regions. The dissemination of fake news can undermine trust in institutions, hinder security efforts, and contribute to social unrest. Therefore, it is crucial to address the negative impact of new media on security by promoting media literacy, fact-checking, and responsible online behavior.

Mitigating Challenges and Harnessing Opportunities

Mitigating the negative influence and harnessing the opportunities of new media on security requires a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders. Here are some strategies that can help in this regard:-

i. Strengthen Digital Literacy: Promote digital literacy programmes that educate individuals about critically evaluating information, recognizing and countering misinformation and hate speech, and understanding the potential consequences of their online actions. This will empower users to be responsible consumers and contributors of information on new media platforms.

ii. Foster Collaboration between Platforms and Authorities: Encourage collaboration between new media platforms and security authorities to develop mechanisms for reporting and addressing hate speech, extremist content, and cyberbullying promptly. Implementing stricter policies against the spread of harmful or illegal content can help mitigate security risks posed by new media.

iii. Enhance Media Regulation: Develop and enforce appropriate regulations that strike a balance between protecting freedom of speech and ensuring responsible use of new media. Regulations should address issues like hate speech, incitement to violence, and the spread of misinformation, while respecting individual rights and liberties.

iv. Encourage Positive Online Narratives: Promote the creation and dissemination of positive narratives online to counter hate speech and extremism. This can involve supporting campaigns and initiatives that encourage unity, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among diverse groups.

v. Collaborate with Civil Society Organizations: Partner with civil society organizations working on peacebuilding and conflict resolution to leverage the potential of new media for spreading messages of peace, fostering dialogue, and promoting understanding across different communities.

vi. Strengthen Cybersecurity Measures: Invest in robust cybersecurity measures to protect individuals, organizations, and critical infrastructure from cyber threats. This includes

educating individuals and organizations about online security best practices, implementing strong passwords and encryption, and monitoring suspicious online activities.

vii. Promote Ethical Use of Artificial Intelligence: Encourage the development and use of ethical AI systems that can help identify and counteract harmful content, detect potential security risks, and enhance the security of new media platforms.

viii. Engage in Multistakeholder Dialogue: Facilitate conversations and collaboration between government, technology companies, civil society organizations, and academia to discuss the evolving challenges and opportunities of new media on security. Sharing knowledge and insights can lead to more effective strategies and policies. By adopting a comprehensive and collaborative approach, it is possible to mitigate the negative impacts of new media on security while harnessing its potential for positive change and constructive dialogue.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the influence of new media on the security situation in Nigeria is undeniable. While it has brought about positive changes such as increased awareness, citizen engagement, and government transparency, it has also presented challenges in the form of misinformation, hate speech, and criminal activities. By understanding these dynamics and implementing strategies to address them, Nigeria can harness the potential of new media while safeguarding its security and stability.

Admittedly, the new media discourses involve shared groups' "poisoned perceptions". This is quite disturbing because of the hatred and polarization that religious and ethnic sensitivities can generate and nurture.

Recommendations

i. There is the need for a communication strategy for national security. All tiers of government and security agencies must take proactive steps in tackling issues bothering on security as the issue of security has come to stay and we must find a way of being proactive rather than reactive.
ii. State operators should harness the potentials of the new media for national integration and unity rather than taking a cursory look at its operations and utilization.
iii. Government at all levels must encourage and enhance citizen engagement through mobilization to accept, own, support and the sustenance of national security. The time is rife for government to communicate appropriately with the people and at the same time listen to them.

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