SOCIAL MEDIA AND NATIONAL SECURITY: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS.

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Abstract
This study offers a descriptive account of the relationship between the social media and national security in some identified countries and Nigeria. The theoretical anchorage of the study is the Uses and Gratification theory. The study critically observed that the social media has long evolved beyond being a mere social platform to satisfying other needs and purposes for which anti-terrorism is paramount since it is observed by proven news stories that terrorists are also infiltrating the social media and hijacking it for nefarious activities averse to national security. Some advanced techniques advocated by security experts through whom the social media networks and other Information and Communication Technologies can be utilized to counter and stem the current waves of national insecurities occasioned by the nefarious activities of Boko Haram were highlighted. Recommendations were offered starting from commendations to the Nigeria’s senate for the passage of the bill for an act to provide for the prohibition and punishment for electronic fraud and crime in all electronic transactions.

INTRODUCTION
The globe’s last few decades have witnessed the web evolve from the limited network used to share bits of information to a global phenomenon offering more information, resources and social connection than ever before in history. One of the most welcomed evolutions in the internet history that speeded up the level of the communication process has been the social media, seen basically as a web-based mode of dialogue that uses a wide array of tools, websites and other application to encourage communication between individuals, corporation, non-profit and other organizations.

Social media actually encompasses many different communication channels, yet the underlying goal of their channels is perceived to be similar which is mostly to encourage communication. Most social media sites focus on a specific type of social engagement. For example, Facebook users are primarily interested in conversations, connections and sharing between both individuals and organizations, so their structure makes this kind of engagement as easy as possible to indulge in.

Users of LinkedIn are more professionally oriented, focusing on business relationships, branding and job-related information, so their structure makes relationship less casual and more businesslike.

Twitter users enjoy sharing, conversing with other users, becoming part of a larger group movement, trend and building reputation and the structure of Twitter lends itself nicely to these goals.

One of the most revolutionary aspects of the social media is that it delivers information for free to wide group of people with little to no lag time behind the actual event. In addition, anyone can push news, information or other resources, which makes anyone with access to the internet a content creator. Content shared through social media has the potential to reach one person or one million people depending on its reach, message and audience. This inadvertently seems to make social media and people who use it just as powerful as the pillar or the gatekeepers of the conventional media such as the newspapers, television and magazines.

The emergence of social media like facebook, Twitter, You Tube, Pinterest, Whatsapp, Blackberry messenger etc have changed the face of media practice, by making information sharing easier, faster and quicker. But, this is not without some demerits. The rapid pace of communication technological innovation over the past three decades that evolved, the social media has provided hope to millions while also creating opportunities to create instability and afforded some the leeway to post as threats to national and global securities. Today, individuals are leveraging the power of information networks to organize movement for freedom and human right.

Meanwhile, hostile nations, criminal groups, terrorists and individuals seek to exploit the very same communication channels and networks to further a variety of national, ideological, remote, extremist and ulterior objectives. To elucidate on this,
Galvin (2013) observes:

The internet age is changing the face of terrorism. Modern terrorism, including Al Shabab are taking advantage of the fruits of 21st century technology. No longer geographically constrained to a particular region or state, terrorists can now rely on modern forms of communication – primarily the internet/social media to reduce and train potential militants. Beyond doubt, social media is quickly becoming a crucial weapon in this communications war. Al Shabab is extremely media savvy and is continuing to utilize social media as a powerful recruitment tool. For the past couple of years, social media has become a vital operating tool for allowing Jihadists to work independently and to plot attacks both here in the United States and across the globe. Websites such as facebook and Twitter allow terrorists to disseminate propaganda to an impressionable age bracket that have the potential to empathize with their cause.

According to Haifa University’s Gabriel Weimann, “the number of terrorist internet sites has increased exponentially over the last decades from less than 100 to more than 4,800, two years ago. As such, the internet has enabled terrorist organizations to research and coordinate attacks, to expand the reach of their propaganda to a global audience, to communicate with ethnic Diasporas and international supporters for their causes.”

Galvin (2013) further opines:

The internet allows terrorist to convey their messages to international audiences with whom it would otherwise be difficult to communicate. Clearly, given the rapid and ever-changing dynamics of the internet age, terrorists have been able to exploit the legal grey area surrounding social media ethics. By taking advantage of this, extremists are given an easy and effective forum through which they can propagate their violent vision.

Regrettably, it is a paradox that the internet and social media, ‘vehicles’ intended to promote the freedom of thought and expressions are increasingly being hijacked by those who actively work to suppress such values.

The ability to harness the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is increasingly at the heart of competitiveness and sustainable growth of many nations. Other continents and nations of the world such as Europe, Asia, Middle East, North America and some countries in Africa are taking proactive steps at checkmating threats to their national security by keying into the revolutions in the information and communication technologies. For some couple of years now, Nigeria has been faced with severe security challenges that have threatened the very existence and continued unity of the nation. Places of worship either attacked or bombed by the dreaded terrorist group, Boko Haram. Countless thousands of lives including innocent school children have been wasted; the recent being the nefarious calculated attacks of the Fulani herdsmen in various parts of the country. It is in this midst of such complexities that a nagging question may be posited, is the social media a threat to national security?

This study would attempt a descriptive account into the relationship between the social media and national security. Efforts will be focused at streamlining the issues, challenges and prospects inherent in the advance recorded so far in the social media in relation to national security. Instances imbedded in this field would be drawn from countries around the world and refocused in Nigeria to chart a way forward to the national security challenges.

Explication of Key Concepts

National Security

Oladele (2013) defined national security as the ability of states to ward off all forms of threat to the survival and sustenance of a state and its people as well as the ability of a state to protect its legitimate interests with all measures including war. He further explained that it is any measure aimed at balancing all instruments of foreign policy particularly in terms of arms, diplomacy, and information, economics and other measures of foreign and domestic’s policy.

National security also is the ability to preserve the nation’s physical integrity and territory; to maintain its economic relations with the rest of the world on reasonable terms; to preserve its nature, institutions and governance from disruption from outside; and to control its borders (Brown, 2010).

However, Waltrand and Morals (1993) argued that national securities have been defined by defence specialists as first from the narrow perspective as the protection of a nation’s people and territories from physical attack and second, the more extensive concept of the protection of political power to the fundamental values of the state.

Additionally, Okenyodo (2013), submitted that in Nigeria, our working definition of National Security is the maintenance of the survival and prosperity of the state and its institutions through the use of economic, military, political and other powers. A nation’s security architecture is designed to protect its
people, its communities, its institutions, its reputations, its territorial integrity etc. Corroborating this further, Okenyodo (2013), further explained that in reaction to the changing needs of society and as has become the norm internationally, Nigeria’s security infrastructure has grown beyond traditional elements such as Police, Armed force, Customs and Immigration activities to include such government entities and activities as NAFDAC, the protection of our pipelines and oil installations, anti – fraud and anti – counterfeit activities, our work against human trafficking, maritime security, counter terrorism, aviation security etc.

Social Media

According to Ward (2008) Social media is a type of online media that expedites conversation as opposed to traditional media which deliver content but does allow readers, viewers and listeners to participate in the creation or development of the content.

To Heathfield (2009), Social media are tools and platforms that people use to publish content and interact socially online. User generated contents include: conversation, articles, images, pictures, recipes and anything that an individual might share with others in their daily lives.

Meanwhile, Idumange (2012) was more explicit in his definition that social media or new media refers to the publication and dissemination of media content such as text, images and videos through online social interaction via highly accessible and scalable publishing platforms such as websites, social networking sites, blogs and media aggregators.

Theoretical Framework

Uses and Gratification Theory

This work is anchored on the Uses and Gratification theory. Actually researchers studying new technology have found Uses and Gratifications to be quite helpful in studying a wide range of new media of which the social media contends. This theory which is also called Utility theory, seeks to explain what function a particular kind of media content serves in a particular circumstance.

Asemah (2011) submits that the theory seeks to investigate what people do with communication content instead of what the content does to them. Uses and gratification theory emphasizes motives and the self – perceived needs of audience members. (p. 170)

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974), in Asemah (2011) argued that different people can use the same communication message for different purposes. The same media content may gratify different needs for different individuals. There is not only one way that people use media content, there are many reasons for using the media as there are users.(p 170)

Ruggiero (2000, p.3) identified three characteristics of computer- mediated mass communication that “offers a vast continuum of communication behaviors” for Uses and Gratification researchers to examine;

Interactivity significantly strengthens the core notion of active user because interactivity in mass communication has long been considered the degree to which participants in the communication process have control over and can change roles in their mutual discourse (p.15) Demassification is the ability of the media user to select from a wide menu… Unlike traditional mass media, new media like the internet provide selectivity characteristics that allow individuals to tailor messages to their needs

Asychroneity means that mediated messages may be staggered in time. Senders and receivers of electronic messages can read mail at different times and still interact at their convenience. It also means the ability of an individual to send, receive, save or retrieve messages at his or her convenience (Ruggiero, p.16).

This theory is relevant to this work since it explains that internet usage has both extended and challenged the uses and gratification approach to understanding media attendance by discovering new gratifications and introducing new explanatory variables. The assumption derivable from the theory to this study is that as people use the social media, the gratification they elicit will depend on the aspect of the web they explore. Academics may use the internet more for research just as youths and fun seekers use the social media to gratify their needs and desires, thus, other social media users may in using this media, satisfy a need of theirs which may serve a purpose contrary to the national security of a nation.

An Overview of Social Media and National Security in other Countries.

A delicate relationship seems to exist between some users of social media and national security to the extent that the social media may probably be reconsidered if it posits a threat to national security.
In the United States, reported news in Reuters (2013) revealed that hackers from the Syrian Electronic Arm undertook several high – profile hacking attempts among which a pillar of tweets from the then President Obama’s account were hacked and redirected to You Tube. This received banner headline titled “Syrian hackers hit Obama – link Twitter, facebook account”. In September of the same 2013, the hackers struck a recruiting website of the United States, leading to an exclusive warning by the Federal Bureau of Intelligence (FBI) to entire nation that this group of Syrian hackers might intensify its internet attacks as the US weighed a military strike against Syrian in response to an alleged chemical weapons attack by the Syrian government against its people.

A former high ranking United States Intelligence official had his private conversations published on Twitter by an activist who overhead him on a train. In some cases, however, Twitter and other social media sites can be sources of bad reporting and inaccurate “scoops” delivered without vetting, adding to the confusing of already complicated and murky news stories (Washington post, 2013). Moreover, the Arab Spring encounters proved that the social media could be a powerful tool for change, altering the course of political movement and even helping to topple entrenched regimes. The Egyptian uprising particularly among the other Arab Spring was reported to have emanated from an Egyptian Wael Ghonim who created a page on Facebook in December 2010 entitled “we are khaled said” and later on, this page sparked large scale of protest movement which culminated in the overthrow of president Hosni Mubarak after two months.

Meclan (2014) cited the case of Colleen LaRose or the so – called ‘Jihad Jane’ as an extended example of how Islamists used the internet to communicate, spread their message of violence and reach new recruits. Even more, the news of the Kenyan Westgate Mall massacre of September 2013, unveiled that the Somali Militants used a Twitter handle to churn out messages goading Kenya authorizes and claiming responsibility for the attack that gunned down 67 citizens of the world in Kenya. These reported and recorded facts point to the fact that even when the social media gratify the need and desire of the users in the positive sense; it is increasingly being hijacked by terrorists.

Social Media: A tool for National Security Monitoring and Analysis Efforts in other Countries.

Conversely, the social media has been effectively utilized as a supplement to military offensives. In news report on the Kenyan army invasion of Somalia, the military turned to twitter to get out the words to innocent Somalis to get out of the way. Major Emmanuel Chirchir, the Kenyan Army’s spokesman used twitter to give progress updates about their incursion and at times used twitter to name certain towns the army would hit in hopes of protecting citizens. Further reports showed that the United States of America, Europe, Asia, Meddle East and Africa are taking proactive steps at checkmating threats to their national security by latching onto revolutions in the Information and Communication Technologies (Punch, 2014).

National Security Journalism Initiative (2014) recorded that, for the United States National Security Community, social media and the broader field of social network analysis offers something else: the opportunity to predict and perhaps even influence future international events.

Certain case studies recorded in the above cited work would therefore be summarized to elucidate the point therefore stated.

Connecting the U.S 9/11 Hijackers

While ideally, government officials and researcher would like to use social network analysis to help stop terrorist attacks, one of the most well known analysis was conducted retroactively on the 9/11 Terrorist network.

Valdes Krebs conducted the first open source social network analysis of the 9/11 hijackers, using news reports to piece together the relationships among the various terrorist. The study provided a window into understanding why the 9/11 hijackers proved so hard to detect ahead of time and paved the way for later social network analysis work, such that was used in the U.S army capture of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

The Capture of Saddam Hussein.

After the U.S led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Baathist regime headed by Saddam Hussein quickly collapsed. However, finding Saddam, who was believed to be directing a rising insurgency against coalition forces proved difficult.

At first, U.S forces concentrated on rounding up key members of the former Iraq government officials who were highlighted on the famous playing cards put together by the Defence Intelligence Agency. That Strategy did not work.
In ‘slate’, Wilson detailed how U.S Army Intelligence analyst used social network analysis techniques to map Saddam’s network, eventually identifying key families from Saddam’s hometown of Tikrit. That eventually led them to a key individual, called the “Fat man” who gave up Saddam’s hiding place.

The hunt for Osama bin Laden.

Wilson (2010) who detailed the capture of Saddam Hussein using social network analysis argued that the same process likely could not be used to find Osama bin laden because Al Qaeda in recent years are no longer a network in the pure sense, but rather a collection of loosely affiliated groups. Yet a little over a year of the above statement, Osama Bin Laden was located through tracking an associate. Network theorists noted that he was found on a classic principle of social network analysis.

Finding the Improvised Explosive Device (IED)

After the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the U.S military quickly went from fighting a conventional military force to battling a rising insurgency, whose weapon of device was the improved explosive device or IED. Military officials quickly learnt that trying stemming the proliferation of IEDs required more than simply finding and defusing the road side bombs, they needed to understand and dismantle the network of people that enables them. In many cases, tracking down that network required understanding the connection between hundreds of people form key leaders who financed the IED networks down to the person who actually placed the bomb on the side of the road.

“Attack the network” became the official slogan of the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization which used social network analysis to help track down members of insurgent cells. In 2010, Micheal Qates, then the head of the Pentagon’s bomb fighting task force said that social network analysis programmes were used to track down the Improved Explosive Device Cells.

An overview of the case studies from United States and Kenya experience tend to elucidate the fact that the social media has served and would still continue to serve as a tool for national security monitoring and analysis.


Nigeria has come of age in the usage of the social media as (Adibe et al, 2013) confirmed. However, Douglas (2014) made the study more explicit:

According to Africa practice in Nigeria, the mobile chat apps with the most users are:

- Eskimi, which consist of jobs, music, chat, fan clubs and forums and has over 10 million users in Nigeria.
- 2go, which allows users to connect with friends and meet new people, has close to 10 million users.
- WhatsApp, a cross-platform mobile messaging app with over 5 million users.
- Blackberry Messenger BBM, another mobile chat platform with a large user base, with Nigeria estimated to have over 2 million users.

The practice of social media usage is therefore a welcome culture that has fast being entrenched in the society. The social media has permeated virtually every political cum social cultural facet of the country, individuals, groups, companies, organizations, traditional institutions, political parties, government and even the religious associated are all making active usage of the social media in Nigeria. However, what leaves soar taste in the mouth is the national security challenges Nigeria is currently bedeviled with and how this could be overly or covertly connected to the social media in Nigeria. In the past decade now, Nigeria has faced and is currently facing severe security challenges perpetuated by the terrorist group Boko Haram. Places of worship have been desecrated, homes, media house, national and international institutions have been bombed and lives have been wasted, the most recent being the nefarious acts of Fulani herdsmen.

There are strong indications that members of the Somaliland Militant Sect, Al – Shabab, aided Boko Haram militants in carrying out the attack on Nyanya Motor Park in 14th April 2014. The Punch investigations also revealed that Al – Shabab, which has strong links with Al – Qaeda had moved from providing technical assistance to Boko Haram to fighting alongside insurgents in some parts of the North – East (The Punch, 2014).

The United Kingdom Daily star had quoted security sources as saying that a British – born Al Shabab operative, Samantha Lewthwaite might have had a hand in the Nyanya attack to avenge the killing of Al – Shabab’s terror Makaburi. Boko Haram had boasted that it was merging with Al – Shabab and Al – Qaeda, to form an impregnable terror network.

The Punch (2014) further reported and quoted the United States African commander, Gen.Carter Ham as saying that terror groups like Boko Haram, Al – Shabab and Al – Qaeda were joining forces to carry out coordinated attacks on Africa. The group were said to be sharing funds, explosives and having training
sessions. Aside from just the latest bombing, there have been other coordinated attacks by this group in most parts of the North – East and other parts of the country.


The former Nigerian Senate president David Mark was quoted in the Daily Independent (2012) that he called for measures to check the negative tendencies of the social media to respect national security values and encourage patriotism. Mark further averred that this has become imperative in view of the absolute freedom being enjoyed by social media now. To him, the social media has become a threat to the ethics of media practice and good governance because of its accessibility and absolute freedom.

Galvin (2013) further revealed that Al–Shabab which has been directly linked to Boko Haram terrorist uses Twitter for terrorism. A pointer that in deed the 21st century terrorist group such as Boko Haram are in use of the social media for their information and communication needs and other ulterior purposes. It cannot be over looked that the Boko Haram shares pictures on YouTube, send messages through unauthorized websites, make calls ceaselessly and exchanged contacts and alert with other ancillary groups and fellow terrorist gangs. It is therefore heartwarming that the Nigerian senate has passed the cybercrime Bill into an Act to be fully enforced in the country.

Social Media and National Security in Nigeria: Prospects:
As Nigeria continues to grapple with the security challenges occasioned majorly by the terrorist group Boko Haram, the needed solution or succor may not still be farfetched from the social media network as is witnessed in the case studies from the United States and Kenya previously reviewed in this study. Okauru (2012) asserts:
recently, ICT has been widely identified as a major tool to combat issues of national security. As the nation continues to face national security challenges, it is critical to embrace a digital transformation process that will help in tackling the national security challenges. Deploying ICT in certain aspect of the national transformation agenda and the ICT policy of the nation will play a vital role in combating the current national challenges.
Therefore, those areas that the social media would play critical role in ensuring maximum security in Nigeria as explained by experts will be summarized:

Surveillance
Computer surveillance involving the monitoring of data and traffic, example, phone calls and broad band internet traffic (emails, web traffic, instant messaging etc) are required to be available for unimpeded real time monitoring by Federal law enforcement agencies. So many forms and technologies can be used such as surveillance cameras, social network analysis, biometric surveillance, data mining and profiling, corporate surveillance and satellite imagery.

Intelligence Gathering
The information and communication technology tools are to be used to engage in acquiring information that has the potential to enhance national security. The internet in partnership with other media will also be used in gathering relevant information to assist in the nation’s security efforts.

Public Enlightenment
Sensitization and advocacy on security enlightenment issues using information and communication technology will play significant role in tackling insecurity. An example is using social media network to make public announcement and awareness.

Emergency Response
The utilization of information and communication technology to tackle national security has a number of potentials and could well be the needed solution to current and future security challenges. This would be maximized in the deployment of ambulances in the location of victims using technologies such as radar and satellite.

Communication
Intercepting communication between and within terror groups and enhancing interaction within security agencies can be achieved through the deployment of information and communication technology. A number of gadgets and technologies are used in communication and exercising the role and ethics of those technologies will help in tagging and tracking information that is communicated using a certain device. Also in ethics of information technology, every electronic device developed has a unique identification number that makes the device electronically traceable. Those systems could be deployed positively for the interest of national security.

Coordination
Security agencies can minimize duplication of efforts, guard the miss handling of information as well as enhance information sharing among them for a better management of national security through information and communication technology. This will involve pulling the national data into a coordinated and centralized database as a proactive means of combating insecurity.

Conclusion
The social media no doubt remains a 21st century innovation that has indeed expanded the frontiers of information dissemination and broadened the spectrum of feedback in the communication process. Even though obnoxious elements such as terrorist groups have tried to thwart its noble purposes; the positive inventions in security that have converted the social network analysis as complementary tool for nipping insecurity and counter terrorism are advances in social media usage that are globally acclaimed. Nigeria should borrow a leaf from the advanced countries to maximize to the utmost the top security potentials lying hidden in the social media networks, so as to reap the dividends that others who explored the social media for national security have benefited.

Abuses may still persist but regulations and further updating will remain inevitable. Hence, to curtail this, certain recommendations would be proffered.

Recommendations
It is heartwarming to learn that the Nigerian Joint Senate Committee on Judiciary, Human rights and legal matter, drugs, Narcotics and Financial Crimes has passed a bill into Act that borders on the misuse of the social media against the national security. Such Act is commendable and highly recommended. The Act in Section 13 sub section 3 reads: “Anyone who intentionally propagated false information that could threaten the security of the country or that is capable of inciting the general public against the government through electronic message shall be guilty of an offence and conviction shall be sentenced to 7 years imprisonment or 5 million naira fines.” The law will serve as a check on social media abuse against the security of the country.

The federal government should mandate its communications and technology regulatory agencies such as the National Communications Commission to broaden their regulatory and surveillance functions over the telecommunication networks and services providers in other to ensure that loop holes are not created through which terrorist can infiltrate the nation’s communication space.

The new social networking tools are spurring a revolution in national thinking that go beyond mere Facebook and Twitter; therefore the Nigeria Security Intelligence Agencies such as the State Security Services (SSS), National Intelligence Agency (NIA) and other defence operatives should embrace the 21st century intelligence gathering that are inbuilt in the field of social network analysis, network science and other ICT enabled tools to track security information, predict, analyze and stem terrorist threats against the nation.

The National Orientation Agency (NOA) is to embark on massive grass root, regional and national campaigns, awareness and re-orientation aimed at sensitizing the Nigerian populace on the appropriate use of the social media platforms and avenues through which such media will be utilized to assist the security agencies with reports and alerts.
References