

Imperatives of Social Media in Curbing Insecurity in Taraba State: A Study of Select Semi-Urban and Rural Areas in Taraba State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The mainstream media have been grossly inhibited in playing their surveillance role in the society due to several factors ranging from ownership interest and censorship among others which have mitigated their impact in curbing insecurity in Nigeria thereby giving rise to social media as alternative platform. The study was anchored on Disruptive technology theory while in-depth interview was used to serve as the research design to elicit data from thirty (30) participants from three local government areas of the Taraba State. This study examines the imperatives of social media in curbing insecurity in select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State, Nigeria. Among other things, the study ascertains residents' level of awareness on the social media usage for reporting security threats as well as examining the impact of residents' social media usage on security alertness in the select semi-urban and rural areas in the state. As per the findings of the study, the social media usage for reporting security threats has gained popularity within the select semi-urban and rural areas as a result of the penetration and proliferation of social media platforms within those localities. The study concluded that the multifarious potentials of the social media can be maximised to boost security reporting in Nigeria's semi-urban and rural areas that are fast

becoming the epicenter for multi-dimensional forms of insecurity. Among other things, it was recommended that there is the need for collaboration between the relevant security stakeholders and the media to create awareness in the rural communities on how to use social media constructively for security reporting with facts and actualities.

Keywords: social media, insecurity, imperatives, curbing, crime reporting

INTRODUCTION

Insecurity has become a global imbroglio that seems to defy concerted efforts made to stem its tide the world over, particularly in developing nations where its negative impacts are far reaching due to nebulous containment measures, policies, and strategies. Consequently, at the global scene, security-conscious economies are re-inventing strategies to eradicate this menace so as to enhance the safety of citizens' lives and properties. This is because the overall development of every nation is highly dependent on the life security and properties of its public (Ogedebe & Jacob, 2012). Hence, the need to prioritise national security at all cost in order to stem the tidal waves of insecurity that are constantly raging.

However, manifestations of insecurity differ from nation to nation. While developed countries are grappling with territorial security threats, arms proliferation, gangs shootouts, high profile assassinations, terrorists' attacks, mass shootings, among others, developing country like Nigeria is struggling with Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, separatist agitations,

unknown gunmen attacks, herders-farmers clashes, and kidnappings (Offiong et al., 2021; Ogedebe & Jacob, 2012). The crescendo in the spate of insecurity in Nigeria is alarming and therefore, demands the application of modern strategies and technologies to find lasting solutions (Offiong et al., 2021). One of the modern technologies with enormous potentials that can be harnessed to curb insecurity is social media.

Social media usage has permeated the 21st century society thereby becoming common place among all groups; the young and old, rich and poor, literate and non-literate, and found in both urban and rural areas (Data Reportal, 2023). The multifaceted possibilities of these media platforms have made them popular and pervasive in every facet of human endeavor. Being an ever-evolving media, diverse definitions abound in extant literature on what social media platforms are. Social media is conglomeration of computer-based technologies which are used for easy online communication, interaction and collaboration.

As veritable tools for the surveillance of environment, social media have been used over time to cover and share on-the-spot happenings, most especially crime scenes and other security-related threats by journalists and ordinary members of society often referred to as citizen journalists. Banigo and Obong (2023) note that the real-time happenings covered by citizen journalists often help in following up on development of events in society. This real-time information sharing on security-related threats and happenings have led to speedy intervention of security operatives in busting crime, averting security-related threats as well as keeping the public abreast on happenings that pose threat to their lives and properties.

With the potential to share textual and audio-visual information and the attendant virality that comes with such process at the speed of light, social media have gained widespread popularity among Nigerians. These attributes make social media one of the most potent and suitable modern strategies, innovations, and technologies for curbing insecurity in the 21st century (Fajemirokun, 2025). Santas et al. (2023) buttressed this position by urging that, if social media are properly harnessed in the 21st century, they can serve as “medicine to cure all ills” of society. More so, extant literature is replete with shreds of empirical evidence on the perceived effectiveness of social media for mass mobilisation and socio-political activism in the fight against insecurity (Aderogba & Alatise, 2025). These shreds of empirical evidence accentuate the criticality of social media in security reporting, thereby curbing security challenges in Nigeria.

Moreover, compared to social media, Nigeria’s mainstream traditional mass media are urban-centred in philosophy, orientation, reach, and operationalisation thereby decimating the semi-urban and rural areas from their daily offerings and social services (Imoh, 2013; Santas, 2015; Obong & Senam, 2024; Ukpabio & Obong, 2023). Where and when issues from semi-urban and rural areas are reported, they are most times not given adequate coverage and reportage. This therefore, makes it difficult for the voices of the people in the rural areas to be heard even in the face of life-threatening situations, thereby robbing them of the avenue, platform or opportunity to tell their stories to the world. The under-reportage of insecurity by the traditional mass media in the rural areas has made insecurity in such places to thrive unabated. In the recent time, Nigeria’s rural and semi-urban areas are gradually becoming the epicenter of multi-

dimensional forms of insecurity (*This Day*, 2022). Given the potency of the social media in providing access and platform to ordinary citizens for speedy mass mobilisation without restriction and their impact on crime reporting, it is expedient to investigate audiences' awareness of the utilisation of social media in reporting security threats with evidence and to also appraise the impact of social media on the security consciousness of residents of semi-urban and rural areas. It is against this premise that this study seeks to examine the imperatives of social media in curbing insecurity in semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba.

Social Media

The concept of social media has been given nuanced perspectives by different scholars across the globe. As an ever-evolving media, the definition also keeps evolving over time to incorporate the multifaceted potentials been introduced regularly. As mentioned by Obi-Ani et al. (2020), social media is the collection of websites that allow for mass interaction, conversation and sharing among people on networks. This clearly depicts the ability of the social media to connect large number of users to share information in diverse forms via the internet. These platforms include but not limited to Facebook, X, WhatsApp, Instagram, Tiktok, YouTube, Telegram, Wechat, Badoo, Snapchat, among others. Putting the different perspectives together, social media can be defined as the conglomeration of diverse internet-enabled platforms which connect users across different locations to share messages in forms of texts, audios, audio-visuals, animations, multimedia among others.

Kaplan and Haenlin (2010) categorized social media into six different classifications on the basis of certain shared features such as Blogs, Social Networking Sites (SNS), Partnership and collaboration Plans, Content Communities, Virtual Social, and Virtual Game Worlds. These platforms are further categorised into web 1.0 and web 2.0 due to some striking differences in the attributes they possess. Whereas others allow for two-way communication and sharing of information and feedback which are referred to as web 2.0, others only allow for viewing of information shared without having a direct provision for feedback and are therefore referred to web 1.0. The aforementioned classifications of social media differ from one author to another depending on the author's perspective, available platforms in the author's environment and the inherent features of the social media platforms (Kaplan & Haenlin, 2010; Biteable, 2018).

Insecurity

Definition of insecurity can take different forms depending on prevailing factors and environment. Insecurity is simply referred to as absence of security. It is a situation that poses threat to safety of lives and property. That is, insecurity is a situation in which citizens are vulnerable to circumstances that pose threats to their lives and means of livelihood, prone to bodily harm, diseases, unemployment, and human rights violations wherever they may find themselves within a sovereign nation. Onoja (2014) define insecurity is peoples' relative feeling of the presence of economic, political, social, cultural and psychological fear.

Insecurity is the state of being subject in every respect to terror, threat, risk, molestation, bullying, harassment, etc. It is state of unrest and vulnerability that is often characterised by chaos, fear, danger, threat to life and property. According to the Encarta dictionary (2009) as quoted in Zubairu (2020), insecurity is the state of being unsafe or insecure or a state of mind characterised by self-doubt and vulnerability. It can be anything from childhood, disturbing situations, mistreatment, and individual fears. Insecurity takes nuanced dimensions a different level and in different situations.

Causes of insecurity are as many as the cases could be. They include but not limited to religious and ethnic differences, boundary dispute, power tussle, stiff competition over scarce resources, unemployment, illiteracy, poverty, corruption, marginalisation, poor and inept leadership among others (Adegbami, 2013; Onoja, 2014; Zubairu, 2020). In Nigeria for instance, the corporate existence of the country has been threatened by insecurity in varying dimensions across the different regions of the country. Manifestation of insecurity in Nigeria is seen in Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, banditry in the northwest, separatist agitations and unknown gunmen attack in the southeast, ethno-religious crises, herders-farmers crisis, kidnapping which was formerly common in south west, south-south and southeast has now become a nationwide challenge. The intractable and multidimensional nature of Nigeria's insecurity demands that all hands should be on deck to find a lasting solution.

Social Media and Insecurity in Nigeria

The advent of social media just like every other media came with both functional and dysfunctional roles in the society. Social media have been used by terrorists' groups to advance their propaganda in order to increase fear and insecurity. In addition to that, citizen journalists have also misused the social media to spread hate speech and fake news thereby increasing tension and insecurity. In spite of these misuse and anomalies, further researches have shown that same social media platforms can be properly harnessed to counter terrorist propaganda, combat crime and improve security in the nation (Nsudu & Onwe, 2017). Through real time security reports with video and pictorial evidence, crime activities and insecurity can be easily tracked and reduced to barest minimum through the constructive use of the social media (Nsudu & Onwe, 2017; Chukwuere & Onyebuka, 2018).

In their study, Nsudu and Onwe (2017), further stated that social media have been used to report and combat terrorism, human trafficking and other forms of crimes in developed countries which is an indication that if social media are properly used, same can be appropriated in Nigeria. Through responsible, meaningful and on time coverage of acts that increases the insecurity in Nigeria, the media can aware the public against such issues of insecurity. It will not only attract attention towards the need to address such problems but also raise consciousness on the need to fight insecurity (Agbasimelo et al., 2022). This clearly reveals that social media provide another platform to boost data journalism so as to be used in exposing security threats in the society. According to Ihechu et al. (2021),

regardless the negative content that characterise the social media, they are still the source of integration, mobilisation, education, information, socialisation, and so on.

Through social media hashtags, posts, tweets and re-tweets and even comment sections, some groups, NGOs and individuals have carried out mass protest against unfavourable government policies and actions as witnessed during ENDSARS protest in Nigeria. More so, civil society organisations and human right activists have equally harnessed the power of the social media to champion campaigns against human right abuses like extra judicial killings, rape, human trafficking and police brutality (Agbasimelo et al., 2022; Santas et al., 2023).

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that the positive impacts of social media outweigh the negative benefits as evidenced in extant literature (Chukwuere & Onyebuka, 2018; Nsudu & Onwe, 2017). Due to the ability of social media to connect billion of users the world over, it has become an effective platform for mass mobilisation towards developmental projects and various campaigns in the society (Shem & Asicus, 2023). The immediacy with which information can be generated and shared on social media platforms make them more viable tools for surveillance of the environment towards raising alarm over life threatening events and to also mobilize people to ward off security attacks where possible. In addition to that, the ability of some social media platforms to cover live videos and take live photographs of happenings avail reporting the possibility of security evidences.

More so, the freedom and accessibility users enjoy online afford them the opportunity to easily report security threats and unrest with evidences without the normal restriction that characterise the mainstream media. Chukwuka et al. (2021) revealed that information about several happenings hardly get to the public domain. Nikade et al. (2019) averred that there is gross inequality in the coverage and reportage of development news in rural areas. The mass media focus more on the coverage and reportage of issues in urban areas while neglecting or paying less attention to similar or even more salient issues in rural areas. The conventional media of radio and television hardly report such cases because of the nature and structure of media ownership in the country. Again, the media is constrained by the now usual “threats” from regulatory authorities who issue guidelines and letters every now and then. Due to this censorship and bureaucracy that surround traditional media platforms, social media stand to be the last most potent resort for security reporting in most particularly semi-urban and rural areas who hardly enjoy adequate media coverage. However, with social media today, in just a click with a video, audio or written message, users can go live for the world to hear their story without any restriction and undue censorship.

Research Objectives

The broad objective of this study is to examine the imperatives of social media in curbing insecurity in semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State. The specific objectives are to:

- ascertain residents' level of awareness on social media usage in reporting security threats in the select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State;
- determine the impact of residents' social media-use on security alertness in the select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State;
- establish the critical roles of social media-use in crime and security reporting in the select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State; and
- identify the possible ways that residents consider the use of social media as helpful in improving security in the select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State.

Research Questions

Following are the research questions of the study:

RQ1. What is the residents' level of awareness on the use of social media in reporting security threats in the select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State?

RQ2. What is the impact of residents' social media-use on security alertness in the select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State?

RQ3. What are the critical roles of social media-use in crime and security reporting in the select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State?

RQ4. What are the possible ways that residents consider the use of social media as helpful in improving security in the select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted on the concept of social media and their impact on national security. Whereas some of the studies reveal a positive relationship between social media and insecurity, others indicate vice versa. The study of Chukwuka et al. (2021) found that social media users spread fake information on social media in a greed to gain more followers; also, people do not un-follow social media platforms for reporting fake stories or news. The spread of fake news on social media creates panic and tension when it is shared rapidly by multiple audience. The researchers recommend that Government and security agencies should utilise social media to create security awareness to guide the public about security challenges and how it reacts on it.

Agbasimelo et al. (2022) carried out a study using qualitative approach examining the correlation between the media and insecurity in Nigeria, the study found out that new media has increased social and political interactions through WhatsApp, Facebook, X, and other platforms. The study also revealed that social networking platforms are used by terrorist groups to spread propaganda. These groups use the medium for different forms of cybercrimes i.e., recruitment, fund raising, training mechanisms etc.

In the same vein, Ayih et al. (2020) investigated revealed that on social media platforms, propaganda, dissemination of fake news and hate speech were the main areas which are facilitates insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria. The study concludes that there is a link between social media

usage and insecurity in North Eastern Nigeria. Therefore, the study recommends social media users to stop spreading fake news and inflammatory messages that may provoke the violence. Furthermore, government should collaborate with security agencies to monitor social media accounts in order to counter propaganda, hate speech and other hazardous contents.

Ogedebe and Jacob (2012) investigated how security agencies and their strategy guarantee internal security in Nigeria. Do these agencies have proper Information Technology Infrastructure in place for the purpose of information gathering, sharing and dissemination? Do they have adequate surveillance equipment? Information technology (IT) will play a critical role in strengthening Nigeria's National security against potential future attacks. Findings from the study indicate that Information Technology will help the nation to identify potential threats, share information more readily, provide mechanisms to protect the Nation, and develop response capabilities. The use of Emergency Communication Systems, GPS-enabled devices, Social Networking Tools, emergency operation centers (EOCs), Intelligent Monitoring systems, Data Mining and Database Tracking systems and Information Sharing will greatly improve the ability of the security agencies to combat security challenges in Nigeria.

Furthermore, Chukwuere and Onyebuka (2018) did a study on *The Impacts of Social Media on National Security: A View from the Northern and South-Eastern Region of Nigeria*. The study found out that Social Media platforms are used in advancing social and national insecurity, such as the situation in the northern and south-eastern parts of Nigeria. For some

years now, terrorism and propaganda have engulfed the northern part of Nigeria by insurgent groups while separatist groups have also carried out demonstrations in the south-east. Each of these groups is using various kinds of online media to propagate their agenda, and the general public also uses SM platforms to escalate this propaganda, which sometimes is fake news. However, there is no comprehensive study on the role of SM towards the challenges of insecurity confronting the northern and south-eastern regions of Nigeria. The study deployed a quantitative research method through online questionnaires to determine the impacts of Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp as SM tools on the security challenges confronting the northern and south-eastern parts of Nigeria. Findings revealed that Nigeria's security climate is very poor, Social Media do not constitute any threat to Nigeria national security, the participants are uncertain whether Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp have increased insecurity in the northern and south-eastern parts of Nigeria and many more.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

Disruptive Technology Theory

Disruptive Technology Theory was propounded by Clayton Christensen in 1997 to explain how the tendency of innovation can challenge and alter the values and modes of operation that have defined a given activity (Chukwuka et al., 2021). Disruptive technology calls for a change in the way we look at market failures and the impact of new technologies (Terry, 2020).

The major assumption of the theory is the tendency of new innovation to challenge and alter the values and modus operandi that have defined a given activity. In other words, it is a piece of technology that tends to redefine the existing philosophy and strategy underpinning a given endeavour or business (Chukwukaet al.,2021). Critics averred the theory is unsupported and attacked the authenticity of Christianson's claims (Chieh et al., 2015; Terry, 2020). Be that as it may, the criticisms against the theory do not refute how innovations like social media are redefining information reception and dissemination in the society.

The advent of social media as 21st century modern technology has disrupted the pattern and operation of media globally. This development has revolutionised the use of the media by breaking government/elite's hegemony of the media to allow for ordinary members of the society to generate and share information in multimedia format and to be received across distance without any restriction. These multifaceted possibilities have provided the social media the latitude to be harnessed for security reporting in semi-urban and rural areas who do not enjoy adequate coverage of the conventional media.

Disruptive Technology Theory effectively validates the study's argument by explaining the decline of mainstream media's surveillance effectiveness in rural security contexts and the corresponding rise of social media as a transformative alternative with manifold potentials to fill up the vacuum inherent in the mainstream media's pattern of urban-focused security reporting. The theory posits that social media's disruptive qualities are not merely technological but socio-communicative, enabling

community participation, rapid information exchange, and enhanced security governance in Nigeria's semi-urban and rural areas that are often underreported in the mainstream media.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The In-depth interview was adopted to find answers to the questions of this study. This method provides deeper insight about audience's knowledge on the subject under investigation (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). In addition, qualitative techniques like in-depth interview increase the depth of understanding of the phenomenon being examined through the unraveling of the participants' knowledge and perspectives (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

An in-depth interview was conducted with stakeholders of the select rural and semi-urban areas in Taraba State. This study covers Takum, Gassol, and Karim Lamido Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Taraba State. The areas selected for this study were chosen because of the recent spate of insecurity in the areas which make them suitable for the purpose of this study. Convenience sampling and point of saturation techniques were used to determine the interview respondents. Convenience sampling was used to interview only participants who were willing to respond to the interview questions and do also have minimum understanding and experience on the issue under investigation. The researchers conducted interviews until they reached point of data saturation after interviewing 30 participants, with at least 10 from each of the LGAs of the selected semi-urban and rural areas. Essentially, this connotes that, on the basis of the data that have been collected or analysed hitherto, further data collection and or analysis are

unnecessary as it can only bring about repetition of already collected data. Saunders et al. (2017) stated that saturation has gained traction and approval as a methodological principle in qualitative research. Auris and Restream were used to transcribe the interview data which were further verified manually using the audio records. The aforementioned tools are artificial intelligence tools used for transcription with high level of digital precision thereby reducing errors that might arise from human bias. The research data collected were analysed thematically in line with the objective of the study.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The interview data collected from the field are presented and further interpreted in line with the objectives of the study. In-depth interview was conducted to elicit qualitative data from the participants of the study. A total of thirty (30) participants were interviewed across Takum, Karim Lamido, and Gassol LGAs in Taraba State which constitute the select urban and semi-urban areas of the state that experienced different cases of insecurity in recent times. Names and other personal biodata of the respondents were not included in the study. Saunders et al. (2014) stated that many official ethics guidelines recommended disguising and/or anonymising the personal identities of research participants as a default position in qualitative research. In line with the aforementioned, the respondents were codified in the study using Participants 1 to 30 (P1 to P-30). The questions asked were crafted in line with the research questions for the study and presented thus:

What is the residents' Level of awareness on the use of Social Media in reporting security threats in the select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State?

The study found out that majority of the participants were aware of the use of social media in reporting security threats in their localities. This shows that the use of social media in reporting security threats has gained popularity even within semi-urban and rural areas as a result of the penetration and proliferation of social media platforms within those localities. In addition to that, some of the participants confirmed using social media to report incidences of security threats in their communities. One of the participants stated that:

Yes, I've used social media to report a security threat in my community, especially during the 2023 presidential election. In Many Ward, Takum Local Government Area, Taraba State, we witnessed a concerning incident in the Angwan Abuja area. Some thugs tried to disrupt the voting process by attempting to snatch ballot papers(P6).

Another participant added, "Yes, we have used social media to report a security situation in our area. It was successfully done and we have seen the result" (P15).

This alludes to the fact that people in both urban and rural areas are seeing the potential of utilising social media to report security threats using pictures and videos as evidence to substantiate their post and attract attention of relevant authorities. This awareness is important to instill in the residents the consciousness of using the social media to enhance the

security of their lives and properties. Ignorance of the multifarious potentials of the social media, particularly amidst security threat, can make semi-urban and rural areas who do not enjoy adequate coverage of the mainstream media to be alienated from receiving security attention from relevant quarters. Conversely, another respondent stated thus:

No, I've not used my social media platforms to report crime scenes but, Social media has been one of the fastest means of reporting crimes in this 21st century, many people has(sic) utilised their social media platforms to report crimes scenes and it will result to immediate response from the government agencies (P7).

This shows that some persons are aware of the potentials of social media in reporting security threat but are not utilising it for reasons known to them. However, the study shows that majority of the participants utilise social media to report security threats in their community and only few have not used social media for that purpose previously.

The findings of the current study contrast with the findings of Agbasimelo et al. (2022) whose study revealed that social networking sites are used by terrorist groups with dedicated servers and websites to spread propaganda, they use the medium for recruitment, fund raising, training mechanisms and other forms of cybercrimes. This suggests that the knowledge and awareness Nigerians have is that social media are serving as tools used by insurgents to advance their propaganda in driving home their sinister intentions. There is the need for a paradigm shift for users to realise that social media in themselves portend no harm but however, can be used by opportunists for either good or bad purposes. This awareness will enhance

the use of social media for whistle blowing over security threats and/criminal activities to secure timely intervention.

On the other hand, Aderogba and Alatisè (2025) discovered in their study that an overwhelming majority of the audience are aware of the use of social media to report incidences of insecurity in their locality. This supports the findings of the current study and it has also accentuated the fact that social media platforms are gaining widespread momentum as veritable tools for reporting cases of insecurity particularly in places where accessing the mainstream media is either difficult and or expensive. This awareness is crucial as it serves as a precursor to the people's utilisation of the social media to their advantage in terms of security reporting to attract swift intervention of relevant authorities.

What is the impact of Residents' Social Media-use on security alertness in the Select Semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State?

Having ascertained the participants' awareness of the use of social media for reporting security threat in their communities, it becomes necessary to examine the impact that social media usage exert on the security alertness and consciousness in the select semi-urban and rural areas in the state. Findings from the study revealed that the use of social media to report security threats and raising alarm during security tension has attracted prompt attention and intervention of relevant authorities to the concerned communities. A participant alludes thus:

My friends...and I were nearby and saw what was happening. We quickly took photos of the thugs and their actions as evidence.

Right away, we posted the images and details of the incident live on our Manya Facebook group page to alert the community. Our quick response through social media brought the situation to the attention of local vigilante groups and nearby police officers, who arrived to secure the area and prevent further disruption. This incident highlights the powerful role social media can play in enhancing security within the community. By using social media responsibly, we were able to mobilize assistance quickly, protecting our voting rights and helping maintain peace during a crucial time (P17)

Apparently, reporting incidences of crime and/or threats through social media opens up vistas of opportunities to enhance safety of lives and properties and engenders prompt intervention of relevant authorities to arrest the situation. Majority of the respondents in Takum LGA stated that social media was instrumental in reducing the crescendo in the spate of insecurity in their communities. As a result of the posts, they made on the recurring cases of insecurity in Takum, specifically along Ussa road, the government intervened by mounting security checkpoints, thereby reducing the level of insecurity in the area.

The finding that social media usage has resulted in timely intervention by security agents further reinforces the disruptive impact of these platforms. Disruptive Technology Theory emphasises not only replacement but also functional superiority in specific contexts. Social media's immediacy, interactivity, and user-generated content capabilities enhance community-level surveillance and alertness more efficiently than delayed or censored

traditional media reports. This supports the study's conclusion that social media enhances security alertness and responsiveness in vulnerable communities.

One of the participants also stated that; "That has been very paramount in these our days, because for some informations (sic) to be gotten from the grassroots in these our days it is done by the use of social media" (P24).

Suffice it to say that the social media provide avenues that can be harnessed to flatten the curve of insecurity in Nigeria if properly harnessed. This position is in tandem with Aderogba and Alatisè (2025) Ogedebe and Jacob's(2012), whose findings revealed that Information Technology will help the nation to identify potential threats, share information more readily, provide mechanisms to protect the nation, and develop response capabilities. Also, owing to poor policing and/or near absence of security personnel in most of Nigeria's rural areas, social media vigilantism is fast gaining traction and becoming an alternative to mitigate the growing security issues in rural and semi-urban areas (Fajemirokun, 2025). In addition to that, the use of emergency communication systems, GPS-enabled devices, sharing of live locations of places under security threats via social networking tools, Emergency Operation Centres (EOCs), intelligent monitoring systems, data mining, database tracking systems, and intelligence sharing will greatly improve the ability of the security agencies to combat security challenges in Nigeria.

What are the critical roles of Social Media in crime and security reporting in the select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State?

Another participant added that, sometimes, certain security-related information gets to them at the grassroots via posts on different social media platforms. This underscores the primacy of social media platforms as the fifth estate of the realm and therefore instrumental in bridging the communication gap that mainstream media elitism creates. A participant who is a security personnel opined that they use social media to communicate among themselves in order to be on the alert and to keep others abreast on what to do. Furthermore, one of the participants said that:

The use of social media in reporting security issues can be more effective than traditional methods as it allows feedback from the general public. When adopted can bring about quick response to threats and promote peace in our society(P2).

Another participant added thus:

Video camera was used to capture what happened in our, community. So, the social media is good....the digital coverage from the local government was sent and capture (sic) what is happening in Gomu community at that time...government intervene on it and try to compensate the both sides of the Fulani and the Gomu community(P22).

It is apposite to note that social media platforms are playing the correlation, mainstreaming, and surveillance (watch dogs) roles in the select communities with regards to keeping insecurity on check. These

advantageous roles can be harnessed to beam security searchlight on the happenings in the society thereby compelling the attention of relevant authorities to act. This situation has resulted in mitigating the rate of insecurity in the select semi-urban and rural areas which have been prone to security attacks.

Another participant stated that, “When attention is given to the post on insecurity, government will come to the help of the masses and the use of social media to report security threat is helpful” (P28).

From the participant’s submission, it could be deduced that insecurity thrives unabated in the atmosphere of silence where cases of insecurity are either totally not reported or they are under-reported. This explains why the rate of insecurity in semi-urban and rural areas are likely to drop when they are adequately covered and reported with facts and pictorial evidence through social media platforms. This corroborates the findings in Nsudu and Onwe (2017) study which revealed that social media have been used to combat terrorism, human trafficking, and other forms of crimes in developed countries which is an indication that if social media are properly used, same can be appropriated in Nigeria. This is also in line with the position of Santas et al. (2023) who stated that social media can be used to serve as a cure for every ailment in the society if properly harnessed.

In this age of technology, social media can be used for surveillance in semi-urban and rural areas and to also facilitate speedy dissemination of relevant security information among members of a community. In addition to that, communities can take advantage of the presence of security agencies and government authorities online to draw their attention to

distress situations for prompt intervention. In consonance to this, Abimbade (2022) stated that social media has the capacity to spread textual and audio-visual information quickly and widely, producing viral attention that can translate into on-the-ground action. This is to say that the social media platforms have become partners in progress with the Nigerian security agencies in curbing the rate of crime in Nigeria particularly in regions and where the traditional media coverage is poor.

What are the possible ways of using Social Media to improve security in the select semi-urban and rural areas in Taraba State?

This research objective sought to identify possible ways that participants/respondents think that using social media in security context can improve the security architecture or approaches in the select semi-urban and rural areas in the state. The study found out that social media platforms have become veritable means of using social media to boost security in the study area through prompt security alert. There is the need to therefore harness these platforms to mitigate the spate of insecurity in the areas that are most vulnerable owing to their isolation from basic amenities as well as shortage of security personnel in such areas. The participants of the study suggested that security personnel should utilise social media platforms to respond distress calls and messages that might be posted there whenever occasion demands. A participant suggested thus:

I think one of the best important things to be done is for the security agency to have their own social media platforms and even develop a lot of applications that will make it easy for your [sic] information to fly. So that's creating jingles and warning tips that

people can read even when they are going through their social media that can help them most especially in terms of danger. Things like this can be of help if the security will arise and even, educate themselves on the use of social media (P18)

Similar to the above response, one of the participants added thus;

In a situation whereby individuals upload information about security threat in their local areas and indicate to which people in authority to take action (P30).

In order to make the most of social media in curbing the ever-growing spate of insecurity in semi-urban and rural areas which have become the epicenter of all sorts of insecurity in Nigeria, the participants stressed the need for people under security threats to raise alarm to appropriate authorities and for security agencies to be active on their social media handles so as to be able to respond to distress calls and social media “tags and hashtags” that will require their prompt intervention to life-threatening circumstances. Some of the participants also emphasised the need for more persons in the community to embrace the use of social media in reporting security threats and crime using multimedia approaches. However, on this, as they have noted can only be possible if there is a security sensitisation on the mainstream media or at community levels that will orient the people at the grassroots on how to use the social media platforms judiciously to curb the crescendo of insecurity in Nigeria, particularly, in the semi-urban and rural areas that are vulnerable and defenseless during such attacks. This aligns with the position of (CERC, 2014), who also recommended, among other things, that Government and security agencies should utilise

social media to create security awareness among members of the public on how best to react to security challenges.

The study's finding that mainstream media have been inhibited by ownership interests, censorship, and structural constraints aligns directly with the core assumption of Disruptive Technology Theory that incumbent systems often fail to serve marginalized or low-priority users effectively. In this context, rural and semi-urban communities represent underserved audiences whose security concerns are inadequately covered by traditional media. Social media platforms emerge as disruptive technologies by bypassing editorial gatekeeping, institutional control, and geographical limitations, thereby offering residents a direct channel for reporting security threats in real time.

CONCLUSION

The inference that can be deduced from the findings of this study is that social media present avalanche of opportunities to be harnessed, particularly, in curbing insecurity in semi-urban and rural areas by raising alarm over security threats and tagging relevant authorities to issues of concern in underserved areas. The multifarious potentials of the social media can be maximised to boost security reporting in Nigeria's semi-urban and rural areas that are fast becoming the epicentre for multi-dimensional forms of insecurity. Consequently, achieving this all-important and herculean task will require that both the people in those communities and relevant authorities take security reporting via social

media more seriously to open up new and more vistas for curbing the spate of insecurity in Nigeria.

Recommendations

- i. There is the need for collaboration between the relevant security stakeholders and the media to create awareness in the rural communities on how to use social media constructively for security reporting with facts and actualities.
- ii. Security agencies and other governmental bodies concerned should have standby personnel who responds promptly to distress calls and messages online the same way it is done offline.
- iii. Ministry of Defence and Police Affairs should make it mandatory for security agencies to have functional and active online presence on different social media platforms.
- iv. Nigerian policy makers should make and/or implement policies that checkmate the use of social media to perpetrate criminal activities.

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