BEING SECURITY CONSCIOUS: ANALYSING SOCIAL MEDIA SECURITY-ORIENTED MESSAGES IN CREATING SECURITY ALERTNESS IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: This study investigated the role of social media in creating security alertness in Imo State, Nigeria. The research design for this study was a mixed-methods approach employing survey and content analysis. The data indicated that both Imo State Blog and Imo State New Media Facebook pages featured security-related information but with variable rates. Imo State Blog had 11 security-related postings within one year, whereas Imo State New Media published merely 7 posts over the same period. Also, findings suggested that the majority of people had frequent exposure to security-related posts on social media platforms and were aware of security alertness messages sent through these platforms. It was concluded that social media plays an essential role as a medium for enhancing security alertness and encouraging community safety behaviours within the region.

Introduction

Social media is a fundamental aspect of modern communication, altering the way information is shared and consumed. The widespread presence of technology in modern life has significantly changed the digital environment, leading to a fundamental change in how people engage with material and communicate with one another (Etumnu & Williams-Etumnu, 2023). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as internet-based platforms that facilitate the production and sharing of material created by users. This concept emphasises the interactive aspect of social media, where users are not only passive recipients but active participants in online conversation.

Social media platforms enhance the digital experience by providing a wide range of opportunities for interaction. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram cater to a wide range of interests and objectives. Facebook and Twitter permit relationships across continents, while Instagram allows tales to be shared through photographs and videos (Jumbo et al., 2023; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Additionally, networks such as LinkedIn cater to the professional environment, giving a venue for networking, career promotion, and information exchange among professionals across sectors. The diverse range of platforms exemplifies the complex and varied ways in which people engage and express themselves, promoting the formation of communities, discussions, and partnerships in online environments.

Furthermore, social media surpasses geographical limitations, making communication more accessible to people from all parts of the world and magnifying the voices of individuals from different backgrounds. Through social media, users may engage in discourse, exchange ideas, and mobilize for causes on a global scale, generating a feeling of connection and collective action (Kaplan &Haenlein, 2010). Social media acts as a catalyst for societal change and empowerment by raising awareness about social concerns, organising grassroots movements, and facilitating the sharing of cultural expressions. As such, its effect reverberates well beyond the field of digital communication, infiltrating numerous elements of contemporary life and defining the trajectory of human connection in the digital age.

The relevance of social media surpasses its function in personal networking, as it has grown into a formidable force impacting public conversation on different societal concerns, including security-related matters (Obayi et al., 2024).. In Imo State, like in many locations internationally, the convergence between social media and security concerns is obvious (Macaulay et al., 2021). The advent of social media platforms has offered users with unprecedented channels to express their views, share information, and join in conversations on topics of security. Consequently, the digital world in Imo State has become a thriving arena where security-related subjects are extensively discussed, argued, and distributed among inhabitants (Macaulay et al., 2021).

The proliferation of security-related posts on social media platforms underlines the need for an in-depth research into their nature, impact, and usefulness in establishing community safety practices. From notifications concerning criminal activity to conversations on methods for strengthening public safety, social media acts as a medium for information distribution and collective involvement in security discourse. Understanding the dynamics of security-related discourse on social media within the context of Imo State is crucial for stakeholders, including government agencies, law enforcement entities, and community organizations, to create informed solutions. By

collecting insights into the patterns, topics, and attitudes expressed in security-related postings, stakeholders may modify their methods to harness social media as a tool for boosting security awareness and strengthening public safety activities.

Furthermore, the shifting nature of social media dynamics needs a sophisticated understanding of its implications for security administration in Imo State. As social media continues to grow, so do the techniques adopted by diverse players to leverage these platforms for distributing information, influencing public opinion, and forming narratives on security concerns. Therefore, understanding the interplay between social media dynamics and security discourse in Imo State is vital for modifying governance frameworks, policies, and interventions to effectively handle growing problems and possibilities in the digital age.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increased popularity of social media in conversations around security problems in Imo State, there remains a paucity of empirical study analysing the frequency, nature, and effect of security-related posts on social media platforms within the area. Moreover, the attitudes, understanding, and perceptions of citizens regarding security-related information conveyed through social media platforms remain little studied.

Consequently, there is a compelling need for a systematic inquiry to address these gaps in information and give insights that may drive the creation of successful strategies for harnessing social media in raising security awareness and strengthening community safety practices in Imo State. How successful is security-related posts on social media platforms in enhancing security vigilance among inhabitants of Imo state?

Objectives of the research

The objectives of the study were to:
1. Assess the frequency of security-related postings emerging on social media platforms in Imo State.
2. Analyse the nature of security posts propagated through social media platforms in Imo State.
3. Analysethe knowledge of citizens of Imo state regarding security vigilance messages conveyed through social media platforms.
4. Examinethe attitudes of citizens regarding security-related information acquired via social media.
5. Investigate the perspective of residents towards the usefulness of social media platforms as tools for improving security vigilance and cultivating community safety practices in Imo State.

Conceptual Review
Definition and Examples of Social Media

Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) definition of social media is one that is frequently used. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), social media is a group of web-based applications that enable the creation and sharing of user-generated content and expand upon the conceptual and technological foundations of Web 2.0. Social media has

played a key role in transforming the internet from a platform primarily focused on information transmission or broadcasting to one where the majority of users create their own content, whether it be short videos on YouTube or Facebook status updates, or share content created by others on sites like Digg (Beer 2008; Thelwell, 2009).

Web 2.0 claims that social media are platforms for social interaction that use publishing techniques that are very accessible and scalable. This term includes new media platforms, but it also implies the existence of Facebook and other platforms that are typically associated with social networking. Social media can take many different forms, such as social networks, weblogs, internet forums, and social blogs. The categories of social media, which include social networks, content-sharing websites, content-ranking systems, and geolocation technologies, may be very broad (Kaplan &Haenlein, 2010). They emphasized that people's online social connections are usually based on their offline social connections.

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and MySpace are a few examples. They claim that content-sharing platforms allow users to access, review, and debate content created by professionals and amateurs alike. These consist of Flickr and YouTube. People use the third kind of tools, known as content-sharing tools, to direct other network users to content that they believe is particularly important. It includes websites that create individual profiles, such as Digg.

Effective Use of Social Media for Awareness Creation

Strategies must be developed in order to use social media in campaigns effectively. According to Kietzman et al. (2011), there are five ways to use social media in a campaign. They are: Choose your battles wisely; balance is key; messaging is important; engagement is crucial; and consistency is important. The loss of privacy is one of the main concerns about social media. If you are not careful, your profile details, photo, status updates (brief messages to all of your friends), and comments (your responses to other people's status updates) may reveal too much about you, claims Awake! (Feb, 2012)." Additionally, other information, such as your phone number, date of birth, or email address, may expose you to identity theft, harassment, or bullying. Certain individuals are using social media platforms, including websites, short messaging services, and multi-media services, that transmit altered images, to spread fear, provoke violence, and inspire rebellion, endangering the security of the country.

Social Media, Security and National Defence

At the Open Government and Innovations Conference in Washington, Rutrell (2009) quoted panelists who said, "Social networking tools must be a core part of national defence, harnessing the power of communities of interest to collaborate and share knowledge to address a range of issues from analyzing intelligence data to post-war recovery initiatives." Panelists acknowledged that social media software is used by activists, businesses, governments, and even terrorists and criminals worldwide, and that it cannot be ignored. (Rutrell, 2009).

Review of empirical studies

According to Ogedebe and Babatunde (2012), who wrote about the role of information technology in addressing security issues in Nigeria, security agencies should use well-known social networking sites to disseminate news and community security tactics in order to reach members of the populace who are continuously online and actively producing and disseminating content on their own time. Rüdiger and Mario (2014) conducted a non-representative study on how German police officers use social media for work-related goals. The results showed that perceptions regarding the practical use of social media for policing and prevention purposes differed significantly from those regarding its usefulness for individual police officers and police organizations in general. They suggested that an e-learning course be established in order for the police to be recognized as an open, transparent, and community-focused dialogue partner in digital space. They also suggested gathering empirical data regarding population expectations and how citizens envision a police presence on social media, as well as whether or not it is desired and acceptable.

Kudsk (2012) conducted a survey on the potential benefits of social media use for NRENs. The results demonstrated that social media fosters relationships, encourages dialogue, makes it easier and faster for experts to respond to questions, and provides valuable contacts. It is also used for information sharing and feedback gathering, event, service, and product promotion, stakeholder engagement, user support, news event reporting, internal consultation, and information sharing with coworkers. They discovered that people are more interested in short, pertinent information than lengthy reports and social media allowed them to reach people they never knew were interested in them. They recommended that NREN use social media more for their operations.

Lexis Nexis Risk Solution researched the impact of social media on law enforcement in criminal investigations in 2012. The survey method was used. According to the poll, the police use a variety of social media sites to support their investigations. Conceptual Structure The social marketing theory was used in the study. One could consider this theory to be a continuation of the dissemination and persuasion theories. It has a well-defined strategy for raising audience awareness of the campaign's topic; it closely considers audience segmentation and targeting; it develops reinforcement techniques as a crucial part of the information design; it places significance on the development of images and impressions; and, beyond raising individual awareness, it moves on to pique interest, which should result in information-seeking about the campaign's topic.

Methodology

The research design for this study was a mixed-methods approach employing survey and content analysis. The survey population of the research consisted inhabitants of Imo State, projected to be roughly 6,743,545 based on a geometric population projection formula with a growth rate of 2.5%. The sample size for the quantitative survey component was estimated using a confidence level of 95% and a 5% error level, resulting in a sample size of 385 respondents. The samplingapproaches adopted included multi-stage sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive selection to guarantee appropriate representation and variety within the research sample.

Data were obtained by physical copies given in chosen regions within Owerri, Orlu, and Okigwe. The study instrument adopted for data collection was a questionnaire designed to gather both demographic information and psychographic data relevant to residents' awareness, beliefs, and behaviours surrounding security communication on social media. To verify the validity of the research instrument, specialists in the field of communication assessed the questionnaire, offering input to ensure alignment with the study goals. Reliability assessment of the questionnaire was undertaken utilising the test-retest technique, resulting in a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.84, indicating excellent reliability.

Method of data analysis comprised mean analysis for demographic and psychographic data received from the survey. In parallel, content analysis was undertaken on postings from two Facebook sites exclusively connected to Imo State. A systematic strategy was adopted to gather postings over a predetermined period, and a coding scheme was devised to characterise the nature and content of security-related posts. Quantitative analysis includes determining frequencies and percentages of different post categories.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Frequency of security alertness post on social media

Type of Post	Imo State Blog	Imo State New Media
Image	6 (54.6%)	3 (42.86%)
Text	3 (27.3%)	2 (28.57%)
Video	2 (18.2%)	2 (28.57%)
Total	*11 (100%)*	*7 (100%)*

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 1 shows the frequency of security-relatedpostson Imo State Blog and Imo State New Media Facebook pages. The chart demonstrates that Imo State Blog had 11 articles relating to security during one year, but Imo State New Media, a government-orientated Facebook page had merely 7 posts. Posts with images dominate the content shared on both pages, comprising approximately 54.6% on the "Imo State Blog" and 42.86% on "Imo State New Media." Following posts with images, text-only posts are the second most common format, with "Imo State Blog" featuring 27.3% and "Imo State New Media" 28.57%. Video postings, while less common than text and picture posts, nonetheless contribute considerably, with "Imo State Blog" at 18.2% and "Imo State New Media" at 28.57%. In as much as the frequency of coverage of security concerns seems to be quite low, it is vital to remember that both platforms efficiently employ numerous content types to effectively disseminate security-related information on social media platforms.

Table 2: Nature of security postson social media

Types	Imo State Blog	Imo State New Media
Crime Alerts	3 (27.27%)	2 (28.57%)
Safety Tips	4 (36.36%)	2 (28.57%)
News Reports	4 (36.36%)	3 (42.86%)
Total	*11 (100%)*	*7 (100%)*

Tone of the Post	Imo State Blog	Imo State New Media
Informative	5 (45.45%)	4 (57.14%)
Alarming	3 (27.27%)	2 (28.57%)
Reassuring	3 (27.27%)	1 (14.29%)
Total	*11 (100%)*	*7 (100%)*
Source of the Post	**Imo State Blog**	**Imo State New Media**
Official Authority	4 (36.36%)	2 (28.57%)
News Outlet	4 (36.36%)	3 (42.86%)
Citizen Report	3 (27.27%)	2 (28.57%)
Total	*11 (100%)*	*7 (100%)*
Topic of the Post	**Imo State Blog**	**Imo State New Media**
Theft	3 (27.27%)	2 (28.57%)
Vandalism	2 (18.18%)	1 (14.29%)
Community Events	6 (54.55%)	4 (57.14%)
Total	*11 (100%)*	*7 (100%)*

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 2 shows the type of security posts on social media sites. The table reveals that safety tips and news reports constitute significant portions of the posts shared on both platforms, comprising approximately 36.36% each on "Imo State Blog" and 28.57% safety tips and 42.86% news reports on "Imo State New Media." These percentages underscore the platforms' emphasis on providing informative and current security-related information to their audiences.

Furthermore, the study emphasises disparities in the tone of security articles, with "Imo State Blog" giving a more balanced approach between warning and reassuring tones. Informative messages dominate both channels, with around 45.45% on "Imo State Blog" and 57.14% on "Imo State New Media," while worrying tones are significantly lower at 27.27% and 28.57%, respectively. These percentages represent the platforms' attempts to transmit information in a manner that informs and engages residents while also addressing any issues or risks.

Additionally, the source of security installations has a key impact in moulding citizens' opinions and behaviours. Both official authorities and news outlets are important sources on both platforms, with "Imo State Blog" including 36.36% official authority posts and 36.36% news outlet posts, and "Imo State New Media" consisting 28.57% official authority posts and 42.86% news outlet posts. Approximately 54.55% of postings on "Imo State Blog" and 57.14% on "Imo State New Media" focus on community activities, emphasising the platforms' attempts to increase community involvement and participation in security programmes. Meanwhile, theft-related postings represent 27.27% on "Imo State Blog" and 28.57% on "Imo State New Media," demonstrating a need for heightened awareness and preventative actions against criminal activities in the community.

Table 3: Awareness of residents of Imo State regarding security alertness messages disseminated through social media platforms

Questions	Response	Frequency	Percentage
How often do you come across security-related posts on social media?			
	Very frequently	123	32.3%
	Frequently	98	25.7%
	Occasionally	79	20.7%
	Rarely	54	14.2%
	Never	27	7.1%
	Total	381	100%
Are you aware of security alertness messages disseminated through social media platforms in Imo State?			
	Yes	297	78.0%
	No	84	22.0%
	Total	381	100%
How do you usually access security-related information on social media?			
	Through official pages/accounts	154	40.4%
	Through news sources	87	22.8%
	Through community groups/pages	71	18.6%
	Through personal connections/contacts	43	11.3%
	Other (please specify)	26	6.8%
	Total	381	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 3 demonstrates that the majority of respondents (32.3%) reported coming across security-related postings on social media very frequently, followed by frequently (25.7%) and rarely (20.7%). A lower share reported seldom (14.2%) or never (7.1%) encountering such messages. This shows a considerable degree of exposure to security-related material on social media platforms among inhabitants. Also, the majority of respondents (78.0%) stated being aware of security vigilance messages sent through social media platforms in Imo State, while a minority (22.0%) claimed not being aware. This high degree of knowledge suggests the potential usefulness of social media platforms in reaching citizens with security-related information. The chart demonstrates that the most popular method respondents get security-related material on social media is through official pages/accounts (40.4%), followed by news sources (22.8%) and community groups/pages (18.6%). This shows that government channels and news sources play key roles in distributing security-related information on social media platforms.

Table 4: Attitudes of residents towards security-related information received via social media

Do you consider security-related information shared on social media platforms to be credible?			
	Yes, very credible	127	33.3%
	Somewhat credible	146	38.3%
	Not very credible	61	16.0%
	Not credible at all	47	12.4%
	Total	381	100%

How do you feel when you come across security-related posts on social media?			
	Reassured	118	31.0%
	Concerned	147	38.6%
	Indifferent	69	18.1%
	Other (please specify)	47	12.4%
	Total	381	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 4 reveals that a high majority of respondents stated viewing security-related information provided on social media platforms to be reliable, with 33.3% finding it extremely credible and 38.3% finding it somewhat credible. However, a considerable majority (28.4%) voiced varied degrees of cynicism, with 16.0% believing it not very believable and 12.4% not credible at all. While a considerable minority reported feeling frightened (38.6%) when coming across security-related posts, others reported feeling relieved (31.0%) or indifferent (18.1%). Additionally, several respondents offered other stated emotions (12.4%), showing a varied spectrum of reactions.

Table 5: Perception of residents towards the effectiveness of social media platforms in promoting security alertness in Imo State

To what extent do you think that social media messages been effective in raising more security alert?			
	Very high extent	73	19.2%
	High extent	102	26.8%
	Neutral	85	22.3%
	Low extent	64	16.8%
	Very low extent	57	15.0%
	Total	381	100%
Do you believe that social media platforms contribute positively to promoting security awareness in Imo State?			
	Strongly agree	112	29.4%
	Agree	136	35.7%
	Neutral	72	18.9%
	Disagree	41	10.8%
	Strongly disagree	20	5.2%
	Total	381	100%
Have you ever taken any action based on security-related information you encountered on social media?			
	Yes, frequently	126	33.1%
	Yes, occasionally	140	36.8%
	No, rarely	59	15.5%
	No, never	56	14.7%
	Total	381	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 5 reveals that respondents saw varied levels of efficiency in social media messaging in making them more security attentive. While 19.2% indicated high or very high (26.8%) levels of efficacy, others reported neutral (22.3%), low (16.8%), or very low (15.0%) levels of effectiveness. The majority of respondents indicated good

thoughts regarding the impact of social media platforms to boosting security awareness in Imo State, with 29.4% strongly agreeing and 35.7% agreeing. However, a considerable number voiced indifferent (18.9%), disagreeing (10.8%), or strongly disagreeing (5.2%) opinions. While a considerable number reported acting, either regularly (33.1%) or occasionally (36.8%), others reported seldom (15.5%) or never (14.7%) taking any action based on such information. Responses to the question reveal various levels of involvement with security-related material on social media.

Discussion of Findings

The frequency of security-related posts on social media platforms in Imo State was analysed using Table 1. The data indicated that both Imo State Blog and Imo State New Media Facebook pages featured security-related information but with variable rates. Imo State Blog had 11 security-related postings within one year, whereas Imo State New Media published merely 7 posts over the same period. Notably, postings with photos were the most common format on both platforms, followed by text and video posts. This conclusion agrees with earlier research revealing the prominence of visual material, such as photographs and videos, in social media posts due to their greater engagement rates and efficacy in delivering information (Huang et al., 2016; Kaplan &Haenlein, 2010). However, the comparatively low frequency of security-related posts on both platforms highlights a possible gap in harnessing social media for spreading security information efficiently.

Table 2 gave insights into the features and themes of security postings on social media sites. The data revealed that safety recommendations and news updates were important themes on both Imo State Blog and Imo State New Media, underlining the platforms' commitment on delivering useful and current security-related information to their users. Additionally, the tone of the messages varied, with a mix between informational, scary, and soothing tones. This conclusion corresponds with prior work highlighting the significance of offering useful and varied information to engage social media users successfully (Chadwick, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018). However, the dominance of community activities as a topic of posts shows a possible need for diversification to cover other security-related concerns, such as theft and vandalism, more completely.

The knowledge of citizens about security vigilance messages on social media platforms was studied in Table 3. The findings suggested that the majority of people had frequent exposure to security-related posts on social media platforms and were aware of security alertness messages sent through these platforms. Moreover, official pages/accounts and news sources were the key ways via which citizens got security-related information. These findings reflect earlier studies demonstrating the impact of social media in promoting awareness and spreading information to a large audience (Nienstedt& Flint, 2017; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). However, the presence of a minority who were not aware of security vigilance messages implies a need for focused efforts to reach all sectors of the community efficiently.

Table 4 gave insights into the opinions of citizens regarding security-related information obtained via social media. The research found that a considerable number of residents deemed security-related information provided on social media sites to be genuine. However, there were various emotional responses to security-related

messages, with some people feeling anxious while others felt relieved or disinterested. These findings are consistent with past research suggesting that social media users view content differently based on many characteristics, including legitimacy and emotional responses (Flanagin& Metzger, 2013; Sundar et al., 2008). However, the prevalence of scepticism towards the legitimacy of information shows a need for methods to promote transparency and trustworthiness in sharing security-related information on social media.

The perspective of inhabitants regarding the efficiency of social media platforms in enhancing security preparedness was studied in Table 5. The statistics demonstrated various levels of efficiency ascribed to social media messaging in enhancing security vigilance among locals. While a considerable majority agreed that social media sites help favourably to improvesecurity awareness, there were also neutral and dissident opinions. These findings correlate with recent studies showing the potential of social media to boost security awareness and community participation (Ghannam, 2011; Trottier, 2012). However, the prevalence of differing perspectives underlines the significance of tackling difficulties such as disinformation and digital divides to optimise the usefulness of social media platforms in increasing security preparedness.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has offered an in-depth study of the connection between social media discussion and security-related issues in Imo State. By evaluating the frequency, nature, and effect of security-related posts on various social media platforms, as well as exploring the attitudes and opinions of people towards the content, useful insights have been acquired. The findings show the essential role that social media plays as a medium for enhancing security alertness and encouraging community safety behaviours within the region. Through the broadcast of timely information and the encouragement of public conversation, social media platforms serve as crucial conduits for boosting awareness about security issues and distributing preventive actions to citizens.

Furthermore, the study suggests opportunities for improvement in harnessing social media to boost security results in Imo State. Strategies to assure the authenticity and dependability of security-related material, stimulate community involvement, and increase coordination between law enforcement agencies and social media players emerge as essential goals. Moving ahead, continual review and refining of social media interventions will be crucial to adapt to emerging security concerns and harness the full potential of these platforms in securing communities and promoting public safety.

Recommendations

This study recommends that:

1. Government alone cannot solve the security issue that is why they should collaborate with security agencies and stakeholders. The stakeholders should be invited at government security meetings where ideas on how security issues can be tackled will be shared among themselves with top security experts before communicating or educating the people through any viable communication platforms about security threats and measures to take to stay safe within their immediate environment and beyond.

2. The government and security agencies should work closely with fact-checking organization at all times as this will help in verifying and moderating security-related contents on social media. Why they need to do this, is because social media is free space where anyone can post anything that can cause security tension. So by working closely with this fact-checking orgainisation the government and security agencies will be vigilant and a step ahead in monitoring the social media platforms against security threat messages.

3. Several community organisations and law enforcement agencies should use their social media platforms as a forum for public discussion about security threats or concerns and in turn these security experts should use same forum to share experts' safety tips. With this, people will be arm with the best security and safety tips at all time in order to stay alert and safe

4. There should be an organised sensitisation by the government and security stakeholders of the people on the need to maintain positive attitude towards security messages especially the ones coming from credible sources as this will help them stay updated on security measures that need to be taken to enable them stay safe especially in time of security emergencies.

5. Government, security agencies should sponsor researches on social media and security as this will give detail insight on how social media can be used to address security concerns. Also, there is need for government and other security stakeholders to collaborate with social media owners so as to evaluate security discourse on social media, using data analytics to gain insights into emerging trends and public perceptions as it concerns security and safety.

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Conflict of Interests
The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards
The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.