

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF WHATSAPP GROUP CHATS AND TWITTER AMONG SOCIAL MEDIA USERS FOR SECURITY CONSCIOUSNESS IN POST COVID 19 ERA



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Abstract

This is an analytical study which sought to compare the WhatsApp group chats and Twitter for the purpose of ascertaining the level of security consciousness filtered by these social media platforms' users. The study was anchored on uses and gratifications theory and agenda setting theory, while census study served as the method of study. It was found that respondents were more exposed to WhatsApp than to Twitter, and that majority of the respondents got exposed to security information in the society through WhatsApp group chats. Meanwhile, it was also established that most security information drop first on the Twitter before circulation. It was therefore recommended that audience should develop the interest in going through each video clip on their WhatsApp groups especially at this period of security tension. It was also recommended that Government in conjunction with the service providers should make data subscription cheaper for easy access to video clips with security information by the audience.

Keywords: *Security Consciousness, WhatsApp, Twitter, Information, Comparative Analysis.*

Introduction

Africa at large and Nigeria in particular has been littered with cases of insecurity even amidst COVID-19 pandemic. Cases of attacks on the citizens have been on the rise occasioned by threats to life: in the farms, markets, churches, and even at homes. With the issue of Boko Haram attacks and kidnappings, farmers-herders clashes, continuous disruption of travels occasioned by kidnappings and demands of ransoms, and perpetrated by the bandits, guerilla attacks and killings of the security forces especially the police, the military and the customs service by the unknown gunmen (UGM), Nigeria has according to Liabwuk *et al* (2019), "turned to a refugee camp to its citizens whereby freedom of movement as enshrined in the Constitution is infringed upon". In fact, with these several cases of herdsman activities lately, Mohammed (2018) rated the sins of the cattle herders as same as the activities of the members of the Boko Haram.

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Meanwhile, the rise in information demand, the rate of development in ICTs and the increased popularity and usage of the social media platforms have all aided in security consciousness among the people. Hence, the social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc have all been flooded with social activities, sports related matters, economic activities, political campaigns, cases of insecurity, as the case may be. While Instagram focuses more on social activities with less of security related issues, the Twitter and the WhatsApp have taken the lead in the display of security challenges in the society.

On the importance of the social media, Cooper (2013, p. 1) has this to say:

With its new advancements in electronics technology progressing everyday, its rising popularity in society and its constant continued use with that society, social media become the biggest platform for communication throughout the world...

The end point of the above extract from Cooper (2013) is spreading of information, and this is what the social media stand for, especially the Twitter and the WhatsApp as it concerns security issues in the society. For the purpose of this study, the social media platforms represent the WhatsApp group chats and the Twitter.

Statement of Problem

Different media serve different people differently. In this era of new age, people use mobile phones for different activities depending on their interests: to play games, to browse, to chat, to post pictures, to snap-chat and so on, including whatsapping and tweeting.

However, the increasing cases of Nigeria's level of insecurity may have led to continuous and frequent usage of the Whatsapp group chats and Twitter, for the postings of, viewership and discussions of materials of insecurity at different locations of the society here in Nigeria. These postings of, and discussions on issues bothering on insecurity are mostly featured on the Twitter and WhatsApp group chats (a chatting zone/platform harbouring people of same affiliations, with common goals) as observed. And so, this study is hinged on determining the level of security consciousness derived from these social media platforms by the people as well as which of the platforms that highly gratifies the respondents with security information especially in the post COVID 19 era.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the level of exposure to security information on social media platforms by the respondents.
2. To determine the exposure patterns to security information in the society by the respondents.
3. To ascertain the social media platform that gratifies the respondents more.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on two theories of Mass Communication: Uses and Gratifications theory and Agenda setting theory. The choice of these two theories was based on the topic of the study: comparative analysis of WhatsApp group chats and Twitter among social media users for security consciousness...

Uses and Gratifications Theory

This theory, otherwise known as the utility theory, is rooted in the assumption that the reception of the content of the mass mediated message takes place in anticipation or expectation of some kind of rewards. This expectation according to Agbanu (2013, p. 176), gave rise to the practice of selective exposure aimed at meeting the expectation. According to Defleur (2010, p. 193) cited in Nwabueze and Obiakor (2016), people selectively expose themselves to mass media content, choosing only those messages that would satisfy or gratify their needs.

In the context of this study, the social media users selectively expose themselves to the mass media information that would gratify their curiosity security wise, especially in this period of security threats. The main issue of concern in the society is basically security challenges, and the social media users get exposed to these security issues through the social media platforms. It has to be noted that the propagators of this theory are Blumer and Katz in the year 1974.

Agenda Setting Theory

This theory, as propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972, hinges on the fact that the media, which are the means of communication, set agenda for the public to follow (Asemah 2011, p. 176). The theory according to Asemah (2011), holds that most of the pictures we store in our heads, most of the things we think or worry about, most of the issues we discuss, are based on the things we have read, listened to, or watched in the different mass media.

In the context of this study, the social media platforms set agenda for the users. The agenda as set by these social media platforms are based on security issues, of course with other different issues in the society. Basically, these social media platforms bring up security challenges and these security issues form the different discussions in these social media platforms.

Literature Review

Nigeria Security Architecture and Challenges Within

Nigeria which is a West African country with one of the largest populations of about 203,452,505 people (Global Firepower Index - GFI, 2019), has been bedeviled with several security challenges. These challenges have continued to evolve from one phenomenon to another, ranging from Boko Haram insurgency, Niger Delta militancy, kidnappings by bandits and several other banditry operations, Fulani

herders' activities, and lately the activities of the unknown gunmen (UGM), among other security issues.

Meanwhile, the country has its security bodies, known as armed forces of the federation. They include the Nigerian Army (NA), the Nigerian Navy (NN), the Nigeria Air force (NAF), the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), the State Security Service (SSS) otherwise called the Department of State Security (DSS), the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS), the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), National Intelligence Agency (NIA), the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), and the Private Security Outfits (PSOs) (Ijide, 2020).

Incidentally, these security bodies have been overwhelmed by the several activities of these armed bandits. This is confirmed by the statement of Uzonwanne and Iregbenu (2015, pp. 172-3), that "the failure of security agencies in the country in particular, the failure of the intelligence services to contain the recurring security breaches; these security agencies appear incapable of matching the sophisticatedness of the miscreants. They discharge their duty unprofessionally and unmotivated. One wonders how they can veritably help the Nigerian government in restoring security in the country". They concluded that the current trend of violence is imprinting on the psyche of Nigerians, that the government security apparatus is incapable of guaranteeing the security and safety of its people.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the Nigerian government is quickly losing the grasp of power and authority. This is because the recent happenings in the South East of Nigeria including the continuous killings of the armed forces which started around April, 2021, the various prison breaks both in Imo and Edo States, the burning of several police stations especially in South East, the burning of several INEC offices across the country, the several movements for self actualisation across the entire country, the several warnings and counter warnings - threats and counter threats of different sects in the country involving the herders, the Niger Delta forces, the IPOB/ESN, the Oduduwa people, the Arewa group, the Miyetti Allah group; and also the continuous threats of attacks by the different tribes of the country.

The end point of these security challenges is that the safety of both the government personnel and the citizens is threatened, hence, negotiations become necessarily paramount.

Empirical Studies of Recent Studies on Insecurity and Media Studies

Ujah and Eboh (2006) in their study examined security as an important element of business environment across Nigerian states. The study was of the view that crime and insecurity are bad for business. It also argued that perceptions of security greatly influence business and investment decisions and that adequate emphasis needs to be given to perceptions about security threat in the business environment. The study recognized the security benchmark as comprising of six measures, namely major crimes (crimes with violence); minor crimes (crimes without violence); police

resources, cost and availability; perception of security situation by business enterprises; emergency preparedness and insurance; and security strategies and programmes. These measures reflect different dimensions of the security challenges in the business environment. Each measure is operationalised by a set of indicators, which the study empirically evaluated using verified quantitative data collected from public sector agency or qualitative data obtained through perceptions-based survey of firms. The study observed the continued debate on security about the sharing of responsibility between the federal state and local governments. As such, the study sought to drive public debate on security policies, particularly the question of responsibilities between the three tiers of government in ensuring security.

Oriahki and Osemwingie (2012) in their study investigated the impact of national security on foreign direct investment in Nigeria using Least Square method. They observed that national security proxy by defense and security vote (annual expenditure on security) crowd out foreign direct investment in Nigeria. Foreign direct investment, as we know, is a vital source of savings for any developing country and thus, an engine for growth, however, it is a paramount source of concern when the FDI is being crowded out and impacted negatively by issues of insecurity as it is the case of Nigeria. To provide solution, the study recommended that the government, the major player in security, should adopt strong policy measures by devising a more holistic approach to tackling the state of insecurity by entrenching the culture of transparency such that funds allocated to the sector (security) are effectively utilized for equipping the security system to meet the 21st century's standard. Also, it recommended that the government should seek technical assistance in the area of intelligence from advanced countries. Finally, the study was of the view that proactive measures be adopted by the government.

With particular focus on Nigeria, Ogbonnaya and Ehigiamusoe (2013) in their study examined the security challenges posed to nation-states by these "violent non-state actors" such as *Boko Haram* and Niger Delta militancy in international politics, especially since September 11, 2001 bombing of the World Trade Centre in the United States. The study adopted descriptive and analytical approaches and found that these two terrorist groups have not only challenged the security of the Nigerian state but also threatened its unity, territoriality and sovereignty. The study therefore, recommended that the Nigerian state and its government involved in national and international security policy making should study and thoroughly understand the operational methodologies and instruments of these terrorist organizations and the threats from them. Furthermore, it recommended the complete overhauling of the security institutions of the Nigerian state in order to meet the current security challenges confronting the state. Finally, the study recommended that the Nigerian state and its government should reach global agreement for cooperation in various areas in order to curtail international crime and terrorism and reduce global insecurity.

Nwozor (2013) in his study examined the Nigerian state caught in the crossfire of national security arising from the insurgency of various rogue groups, most prominent of them is the *Boko Haram* sect. Relying on secondary sources of data, the study interrogated the force theory that underpins Nigeria's security engineering and contended that the continued insecurity in this polity is a demonstration of its ineffectiveness. The study also contended that the proposition by the federal government to grant amnesty to the *Boko Haram* sect is not as simplistic as it seemed, as it transcended the narrow definitional criteria of bartering forgiveness for peace. Hence the study was critical of the proposed amnesty programme of the federal government and advocated a holistic approach that incorporated other issues that are promotive of justice, morality and ethicalness in the polity.

A close observation of the above recent studies; it is obvious that not much work on security issues in the country have the social media linkage especially as it concerns the use of twitter and whatsapp group chats. This is the gap which this study seeks to fill.

Methodology

In this study, the census method of study was employed, which is the study of every unit of the population, while Focus Group Discussion (FGD) served as the technique for data collection. The study focused on the PG students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus, with a total population of one hundred and thirty eight (138). The census method of study was employed based on the fact that the number of the population is significantly not much, and subsequently manageable. Meanwhile, only 78 persons were studied based on accessibility and availability. These 78 persons were studied in seven (7) focus groups of 11 persons each making 6 groups with a group of 12 persons. Meanwhile, the study covered from March to May, 2021 which was the heat of insecurity: kidnappings, banditry and the unknown gun men palaver in the country.

Data Presentation

Research Question one:

What is the level of exposure to security information on social media platforms by the respondents?

From the research conducted, it was found that majority of the PG students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, COOU, Igbariam Campus, get exposed to social media platforms. Some of the respondents said that they frequently use the social media platforms so as to be updated in terms of information around the globe. In a discussion with one of the groups, one of the respondents, said "I basically bought my android phone just because of WhatsApp and Facebook". A male respondent in the same group has this to say, "the social media platforms have really helped me,

and I have really enjoyed them, ranging from the Twitter, WhatsApp, Google play, Facebook, but I am not a fan of Instagram".

With the response from some of the respondents, it became evident that the level of exposure to social media platforms is very high. This was stemmed from the statement of yet another respondent who said that "if not for social media platforms, I would not have any need for an android phone. I use the platforms to get most of the information on the happenings in the society; and I also use the social media platforms in place of the TV, this is because, most of the information on TV are posted on some of the WhatsApp group chats where I belong". The above statement reveals that some of the respondents get to know about certain news and information on TV through the social media platforms.

More still, it was found that majority of the respondents prefer the social media platforms to the traditional media of communication. This is as a result of the statement as made by a respondent in another FGD (2nd group), "I barely buy newspapers these, and I hardly watch the TV again. This is because, most WhatsApp group chats have on daily basis, the newspaper headlines, and TV messages are as well posted to most WhatsApp statuses and group chats".

Foregoing, it is conclusively evident that the level of exposure to the social media platforms by the respondents is very high.

Furthermore, the conclusion of Berelson's study (cited in Asemah, 2011, p. 171) was that the society use the media to satisfy their purposes. This entails that different people go for different information that are capable of gratifying their different needs and interests. Given this, one of the respondents during one of the sessions (3rd group) said that, "the situation of the country is very disheartening security wise, so I peruse every video clip I see on WhatsApp or Twitter so as to be up to date with the security information within the society".

The above statement suggests that most people primarily get exposed to only video clips with security issues, and paying less attention to those other video materials with no security information. This is evident in his words, "any video clip I open, and find out they are not having security information, I delete them immediately". Yet another respondent in another FGD (4th group) has this to say, that "most information within this time ought to be viewed especially now that things are worsening, and I do just that, as much as possible". These statements from some of the respondents give a clear evidence to the fact that majority of the respondents get exposed to security information through the social media platforms.

The above statement was reinforced by the statement of another female respondent in yet another session during the study, in her statement, "I get most of the information about COVID-19 and Unknown gunmen through the WhatsApp group chats, and I learn the new tactics of the kidnappers and so many other things happening around". Therefore, it is evident that majority of the respondents get exposed to security information on social media platforms.

Research Question Two:

What are the exposure patterns to security information in the society by the respondents?

There are many different ways of getting exposed to security information in the society. This is because, the media play the role of information, education and entertainment as well as other related functions. To the pattern of exposure to security information, one of the respondents in the sixth session during the course of this study has this to say, "there are so many ways I learn about security information in the society, ranging from the blogs, Twitter, WhatsApp and television". This statement becomes more credible with the view of McQuail (1994) cited in Asemah (2011), that all individuals have their various reasons for using the media and they are always seeking the media that have the ability to satisfy their needs. This statement simply shows that people seek the particular media that give them what they desire.

Practically, most respondents regularly use the media that satisfy their needs. In his words, another respondent in the last session during the study said that "most information about Fulani herders' activities, kidnappings by the bandits, the various guerilla attacks on the security forces and burning of the police stations and INEC offices are made available on the WhatsApp group chats". Another respondent in the same (7th) session also said that "I hardly watch the TV again these days, most TV stations are biased and afraid to speak the truth, so I use my phone to know the things I want to know about".

Hence, the majority of the respondents, it was found, get exposed to security information in the society through their phones, some on WhatsApp and other social media platforms. This, it has to be noted, does not take away the fact that some still get exposed to security information through the traditional media channels especially the television. The import is that different things work for different people.

Research Question Three:

What is the social media platform that gratifies the respondents more?

As already pointed out that all individuals have their various reasons for using the media, (McQuail 1994 in Asemah, 2011), it becomes necessarily important to discover the social media platform that gratifies the respondents. In a FGD in one of the sessions, one of the respondents, said that "the Twitter gives firsthand information". He continued that "the Twitter gives information first before the other platforms including the WhatsApp, through which eventually the information as gathered through the twitter is circulated to the audience". This statement was clarified when another discussant in another of the sessions said that "the Twitter is 'all weather' platform because, a user can be following different communicants on twitter like the armed forces the police, the army, who release information on twitter as they happen, also different media channels too, but this user can only be communicating on WhatsApp with friends on his contact list".

The above statement reveals the truth about Twitter app and WhatsApp messenger, that a social media user can be following the Presidency on twitter, thereby getting exposed to certain information as they are dropped. On the other hand, the user of WhatsApp can get exposed to those information only when the information on twitter has been filtered into the WhatsApp group chats.

This was made concrete when yet another respondent has this to say, "the WhatsApp group chats make the journey of security information easier, but the Twitter gives the information promptly and in time". The conclusion from the above statements show that security information drops first on twitter before circulating in the WhatsApp group chats. Therefore, the Twitter, followed by the WhatsApp, gratifies the social media users.

Discussion of Findings

This study is a qualitative research which focused on the comparative analysis of WhatsApp group chats and Twitter for security awareness among the users of the social media platforms. From the data so collected and presented, it could be deduced that certain factors are responsible for determining audience exposure to the mass media (social media platforms) as expressed by Nwabueze (2014, p. 63). Some of these factors as listed by Ekanem (2006, p. 39) are education, age, occupation, income, social status etc. It was evident that these factors had one effect or another on these users of social media platforms.

The implication is that some of these factors, (specifically income and social status) must have necessitated the purchase of android phones by these social media users, and that exposure to these social media platforms by these users is also as a result of these same factors. This favours the study when it was found that majority of the respondents are exclusively exposed to social media platforms, some of whom their purchase of phones was basically for this reason.

Meanwhile, national security according to Ebeh (2015) is the protection of national survival; if the national survival is threatened, it becomes a national security issue. Hence, the respondents in this study have issue of survival, no wonder their exposure to security information on social media platforms is very high. This was concretised by the lamentation of Folarin (2019) about the spate of insecurity in Nigeria for the past four years (and more), particularly during the President Muhammadu Buhari Administration in the country. Consequently, the respondents get exposed to security information on these social media platforms for safety and survival.

Again, the attributes of the new media as highlighted by Nwabueze (2009, p. 149) which are interactiveness, interconnectedness, multiplicity, delocatedness, variety, depth, context, immediacy, expansion etc, have evidently accounted for the reason behind the usage of the social media platforms more than the traditional media channels especially for exposure to security information in the society...

More so, low income earning according to Nwabueze (2014, p. 67) determines exposure to particular media of communication. The implication of this is that people tend to get exposed to certain media based on their income level. No wonder majority of the respondents get exposed to security information in the society through the social media platforms, which is attributed to be less expensive, has the attribute of "on the go", and the attribute of immediacy; unlike the traditional media channels which are more expensive, and more stressful to get exposed to.

Finally, Twitter has recently become one of the most important media for information diffusion in the digital world (Ortega, 2017). On this platform according to Ortega, users can spread their ideas and opinions, promote their results and debate with millions of users just using short and direct messages. The above statement reveals the truth about Twitter and WhatsApp, as it is evident that one's WhatsApp friends are limited to those in one's contact list, while one's twitter friends are very unlimited, as many as one's followers and the followed. This is definitely the reason why some of the respondents enjoy the Twitter app more than they enjoy the WhatsApp messenger, though majority of them still prefer the WhatsApp group chats to Twitter.

Conclusion

The findings of this study have provided a build-up on related studies as well as opened up new areas for further studies. Information (security information and otherwise) on WhatsApp and Twitter is as important as WhatsApp messenger and Twitter app themselves. The study concluded that the level of exposure to social media platforms by the respondents is very high because of the current age, age of the new media. The study also concluded that security awareness among the users of social media platforms is extremely high. This is as a result of the current level of insecurity in the country. The study also concluded exposure to security information in the society by the respondents is basically through more of the social media platforms and less of the traditional media channels. It finally concluded that security information drops first on twitter before circulating in the WhatsApp group chats, thereby, providing more gratifications on twitter than on WhatsApp.

However, the study recommends that people should develop the interest of getting exposed to various information through the different media of communication especially at these perilous times. Also, that people should learn the habit of "forwarded as received", especially as it concerns these sensitive information; and very importantly, it was recommended that the service providers should in conjunction with the government make cheaper the data rates so as to allow easier exposure to information by the audience for safety reasons since data is life.

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