

Social Media Dynamics in Boko Haram's Terrorist Insurgence

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Abstract

This policy brief analyses the use of social media by different groups affected by Boko Haram's terrorist insurgence, including the group itself. The rate, speed, spread and belief which information from social media commands has changed theatres of war and amplified terrorist threats. The Nigerian youth who are the forerunners of social media use in the country have further employed Hashtag (#) Activism for varied causes regarding Boko Haram. This study examines the interlinkages between the use of social media in 'orchestrated data circulation' (for the dissemination of information and propaganda) by both the insurgents and the Nigerian government, and the populace's growing awareness of the power they wield by simply having internet data and a phone which enables them to challenge, counter and refute claims made by the government or security agencies. The populace does all of these by providing verifiable eye-witness accounts shared and made viral on social media. This brief further highlights the hidden enablers of the above interlinkages – Telecommunication Companies (TELCOs) whose role as Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) continues to oscillate between being government collaborators, targets for Boko Haram's terrorist attacks and simply profit-driven enterprises competing for subscribers. As a base for contextual analysis, this study premises that while all parties involved attempt to appropriate social media for their benefits, specific parties such as social media tech companies, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and the populace have impactful roles to play. One of such is ensuring the benefits accrued from the continuous boom of social media are properly harnessed for peace processes and the safeguarding of individual rights to freedom of expression.

Key Findings

1. A major factor enabling the spread of social media in Nigeria is the power it confers on its user. The 'attention economy' as the back-bone of social media consequently fuels

the ‘vanity of the self’ and has led to the popularity of social media influencers who have operationally crafted social media to become opinion shapers.

2. Telecommunication companies (TELCOs) such as MTN, Airtel, Globacom and 9-Mobile have invariably influenced the mechanisms through which social media is available as conflict-impacting tools. They are the social media enablers.
3. Boko Haram, the Nigerian government and the Nigerian populace are the social media profiteers who appropriate the specificities of social media to achieve varied objectives.
4. Hashtag Activism has helped to redirect the perception of Boko Haram’s terrorism and remains an essential part of citizen’s participation in counter-terrorism operations using social media.
5. Social media tech companies and CSOs could utilise existing features and programmes to directly and indirectly mitigate Boko Haram’s insurgent terrorism in Nigeria.

The Social Media Revolution and Its Enablers

Nigeria caught the global internet buzz around 1996. Prior to this, the fastest means of communication was voice calls using non-mobile telephones. The Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC)’s granting of internet broadband operation licenses to about 38 different companies in 1996 marked the beginning of the social media revolution in Africa’s most populous nation. When the companies began operation, internet cafes sprang up in many urban cities including Lagos, Kaduna, Port-Harcourt, Kano and Enugu. At this time, internet based activities comprised instant messaging (IM) using applications such as Yahoo. As more web-based social media applications such as Facebook emerged, internet cafés (or cyber cafés as they are more popularly called) experienced increased traffic with people thronging in to get connected to old friends and meet new ones. The IM options on Facebook increased its versatility as a socialisation and communication tool for many Nigerians. By 1999, Nigeria had about 200,000 internet users.¹

Telecommunication Operators (TELCOs) began operations in 2001 with the launch of GSM services by South African giant MTN and India-owned Bharti Airtel. Since then, according to the NCC, mobile telephone usage has increased exponentially, rising from 8.5 per cent in 2004 to 92.14 per cent in 2014. Nigeria now has Africa’s largest mobile phone market with 167 million connected GSM lines.² MTN and Airtel pioneered broadband internet services which made access to social media applications much easier, more private and better accessible. The number of internet users steadily rose to 4.9m in 2005, 38.3 million in 2010, 82m in 2015 and 98m in 2018.³ After the telecommunications sector became privatised, their continuous competition for subscribers led to the availability of internet access at affordable rates such that, even with an economic recession, Nigerian households could still afford airtime for calls and internet data. The availability of internet data automatically increased the reach and use of social media applications such as Facebook, 2go, WhatsApp,

¹ “Oxford Business Group,” accessed May 12, 2019, <https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/overview/paving-way-reforms-listings-and-infrastructure-support-mobile-growth>

² Jacob, J.Udo and Akpan, I., “Silencing Boko Haram: Mobile Phone Blackout and Counterinsurgency in Nigeria’s Northeast region,” *International Journal of Security and Development* 4, no. 1 (2015): 15.

³ “Internet Live Stats,” accessed May 16, 2019, www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/nigeria/

Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Telegram and other microblogging platforms. Nigeria currently has about 24 million users across all of these social media platforms with Facebook having the highest user/engagement status.

Social media revolutionised the societal, economic and political landscape of Nigeria. More businesses became operational and were driven by their Facebook and Instagram presence, while Twitter became the site for shared and disparate views on politics, sports, activism and social interactions. Nigerians appropriated the use of trends and hashtags to drive discussions on any and every issue, and when Boko Haram's terrorist insurgence emerged in the north east in 2009, social media became an important tool in the hands of the insurgents, the government and security agents, and the Nigerian populace.

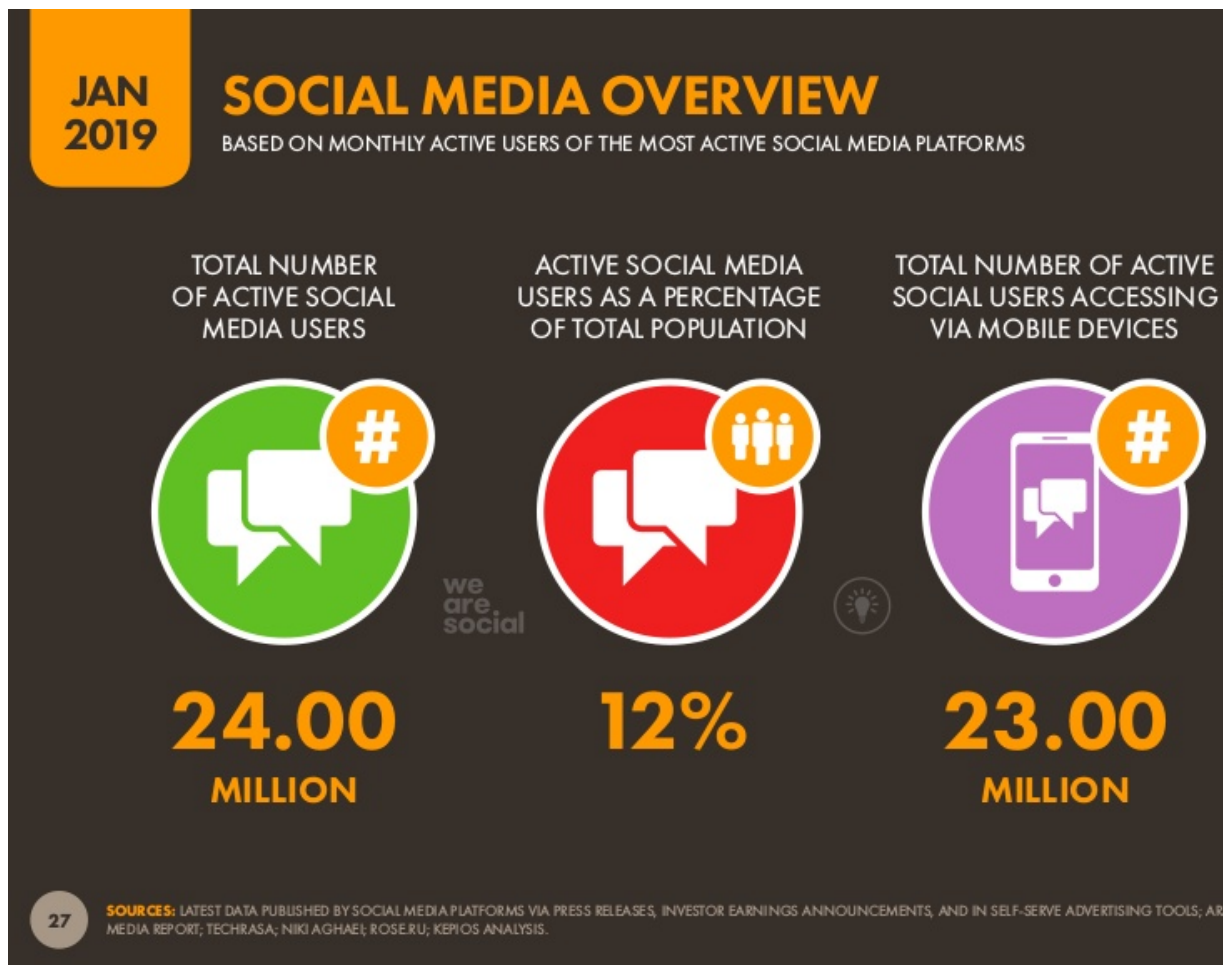


Figure 1. Overview of Nigeria's 2019 Social Media User Status

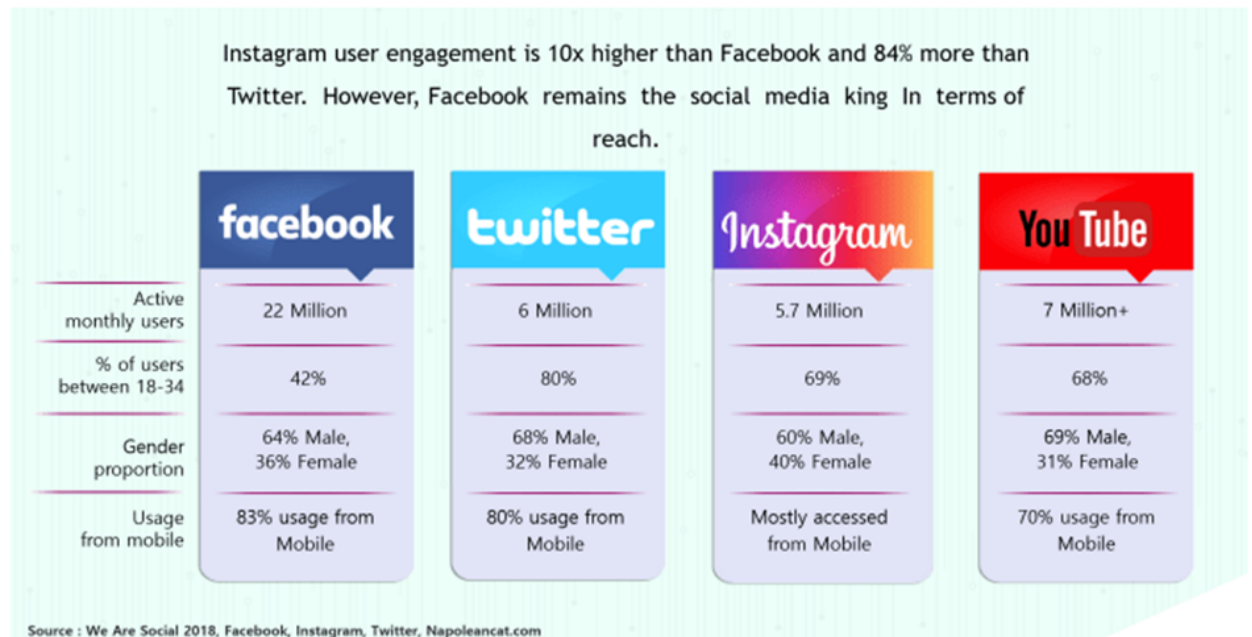


Figure 2. Most Used Social Media Platforms in Nigeria

The Social Media Profiteers

1. Boko Haram

Evolving in 2004 as an insurgent group against societal corruption in governance and extreme poverty in the Kanuri speaking state of Maiduguri, Boko Haram has blended its grievances with its extremely violent Salafi ideology to emerge as one of the world's deadliest Jihadi groups. After the group's foremost leader ((Muhammad Yusuf) was killed during a confrontation with security forces in 2009, Boko Haram (now led by Abubakar Shekau) regrouped and reinvented their tactical approaches to include suicide bombings, prison raids and high-profile kidnappings. At the height of its existence in 2015, Boko Haram

controlled areas in Nigeria's northeast that were the size of Belgium. They also spread their attacks and sphere of influence beyond Nigeria to Mayo Tsanaga and Mayo Sava in Northern Cameroon, Nguimi in the north of Niger's Diffa region and Ngouboua in Chad. In 2014, the group abducted over 250 school girls in the town of Chibok in Borno state, a move which teleported it to the ranks of global jihadi organisations such as IS and Al Qaeda. In fact, the use of kidnapping and other carefully orchestrated bombings of both soft and hard targets were the results of Boko Haram's contact with top Jihadi organisations such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and the Islamic State.⁴ A break-out faction of Boko Haram is the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) led by Mohammed Yusuf's son, Albarnawi. This faction

⁴ Campbell, John. "Nigerian Security Tracker." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Last modified July 1, 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>.

is reportedly deadlier, overrunning military bases in the northeast with impunity. ISWAP was also responsible for the February 2018 abduction of about 100 girls from their school in Dapchi, Yobe state. All but one of these girls has fortunately been returned by the insurgents. According to the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker, Boko Haram's terrorism (and by extension ISWAP's) has killed 27,414 from May 2011 to January 2019. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees estimates the number of refugees and internally displaced persons from Boko Haram's activities to be over 2.2 million people, with the displaced scattered across ill-equipped, mostly unhygienic and improperly managed camps across Nigeria, Cameroon and Niger.⁵

Before the advent of social media, Boko Haram communicated its ideologies and standpoints to the public by sharing videos and pamphlets of Muhammad Yusuf's preaching to journalists and the general populace. The group also relied on the 'simultaneity' of mobile communications to coordinate attacks and activate cell members based at locations proximal to the target.⁶ This use of mobile communication for coordination of attacks had led the Nigerian military to institute a mobile phone blackout in May 2013 in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, a move Boko Haram responded to by bombing telecommunication base stations believed to provide Nigerian security forces with call logs and call location of its members. With the advent of social media, Boko Haram embraced its resistance to control, high interactivity, ease of use, suitability for visual content and lack of mediating influence.⁷ All of these made social media platforms ideal for the group's 'terrorpenuering' activities. While sophisticated terror groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda use social media platforms for recruitment purposes, Boko Haram and ISWAP have been a bit less successful with direct recruitments using social media. Unlike other groups who recruit using telegram and other social media apps, BH and ISWAP rely more on face-to-face, physical recruitment tactics because most of the areas where they operate and need recruits are inhabited by a population with low levels of formal and mobile literacy. However they still use social media for various activities such as:

Claiming Responsibility for Terrorist Attacks: As soon as Boko Haram mastered the use of social media platforms, the group claimed responsibility for attacks and showed proofs of certain attacks with videos on YouTube. These videos were recorded with the well-known terrorist regalia and insignia: flags at the background, jihadists dressed in military camouflage, holding guns with their faces covered. Proof of attacks was demonstrated in the form of captured soldiers, weapons or logistic vehicles. Boko Haram and ISWAP also shared live videos of their attacks especially on military bases, chronicling how such bases were overrun, looted and burnt. Other videos shared were for bargaining chips, such as the proof of life video for the abducted Chibok girls. In claiming responsibility for attacks, Boko Haram also sometimes talks about the reasons for such attacks and in certain cases reveals potential targets. The languages used in these videos include Hausa, Arabic, English and Kanuri.

⁵ Abdulazeez, Medinat. "A Study of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons from Boko Haram's Insurgency", Unpublished Doctoral Thesis.

⁶ Udo and Akpan, "Silencing Boko Haram", 4.

⁷ Ette. Mercy and Joe. Sarah, "Rival Visions of Reality': An analysis of the framing of Boko Haram in Nigerian Newspapers and Twitter," *War & Conflict* 11 no. 4 (2018): 394.

Communicating with/Updating Cell Members and Sympathisers: Contextual analysis of Boko Haram's YouTube videos demonstrates the group's use of these videos as a means of passing information to members scattered across their operational cells. In a video to claim responsibility for an attack on Giwa military barracks in 2014, Shekau states: "Brethren, wherever you are, I pray this meets you well. I give you the go ahead, whether you are two or three, take up your weapons and start killing them... kill kill kill, slaughter them, spare the old, women, children, the mentally unstable and those who repent. All those who refuse Allah kill..... Kill kill and kill. That is the information for today".⁸ In another video shared after Nigerian military forces claimed to have killed him in a shoot-out, Shekau tells his followers that he is alive and the work of securing the caliphate is still on-going.

Spreading Propaganda: On YouTube and Facebook, Boko Haram share videos of daily life in their camps and captured territories. The aim is to communicate a sense of communal living showing obscured faces of wives and children carrying out 'everyday chores'. They also utilise such videos to show the efficient application of Islamic law (Sharia) in captured territories, showing women wearing hijabs, offenders for crimes being punished with flogging or in extreme cases, beheadings. Videos of captured soldiers and other prisoners being beheaded or shot are also shared. All of these demonstrate the group's dominance in its captured territories while simultaneously instilling fear in the Nigerian populace. Boko Haram's propaganda videos are also used as jurisprudential contests, where verses of the Quran are applied to condemn democracy and corruption in Nigeria.

Boko Haram and ISWAP's use of social media became more sophisticated with both groups' association with the Islamic State. Since it was named as the IS's West African representative in 2015, ISWAP has set up its own media department, termed the Media Office of West Africa Province; it has made greater use of YouTube and Twitter (e.g. establishing its own Arabic Twitter account @Al Urwah al-Wuthqa, in 2015); and it has improved the quality of its videos distributed via these platforms.⁹ On June 10 2019, the Nigerian army announced that they had killed nine ISWAP social media personalities known for promoting the group's online media propaganda in its quest to maintain a virtual caliphate. It remains to be seen how the deaths of these nine personalities will influence the hold and use of social media by ISWAP.

⁸ Abidemi. Olabode S., "A Preliminary Overview of ICT Use in the Boko Haram conflict: A Cyberconflict Perspective," *Contemporary Voices* 1 no. 1 (2018): 43.

⁹ Cox. Kate, Marcellino. Williams, Bellasio. Jacopo and Ward. Antonia, "Social media in Africa, a Double-edged Sword for Security and Development Research" *UNDP 23*, [//www.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/Reports/UNDP-RAND-Social-Media-Africa-Research-Report_final_3%20Oct.pdf](http://www.undp.org/content/dam/rba/docs/Reports/UNDP-RAND-Social-Media-Africa-Research-Report_final_3%20Oct.pdf)



Figure 3. Iswap's propaganda video after an attack on a military base in Borno

2. The Nigerian Military and Political Apparatus

To counter Boko Haram's terrorist insurgence, the Nigerian government employs the might of its military. At various periods in the fight, the Nigerian military has been aided by the Nigerian Police Force and other national security agencies in a collaborative operational outfit known as the Joint Task Force (JTF). The JTF has also been assisted by the African Union instituted Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) comprising troops from Niger, Benin, Chad, and Nigeria. The Nigerian government and its military adopted social media for diversified purposes and in distinct contexts within the framework of counter-terrorism measures against Boko Haram. More often than not, both the government and the security agents align their positions and postures especially regarding information disseminated on social media. Consequently, in the context of Boko Haram, the Nigerian government and its security apparatus are one and the same in the eyes of the Nigerian populace. Social media dynamics for the military have ranged from being used as an information/propaganda avenue, to being employed by disgruntled elements as a tool to channel grievances.

Information/Propaganda Sharing: The headquarters of the Nigerian army has both a Facebook and a Twitter Handle (@HQNigerianArmy) with about 570,000 followers. Amongst other news, these accounts are designed to chronicle the military's counter-insurgency operations such as pictures of insurgents killed and captured, triumphant overruns of insurgent bases, recovery of arms and ammunitions, rescue operations for women and children, and so on. These handles rarely share news about military losses or fatalities suffered in counter-insurgency operations. Accounts rendered from the handles present the

Nigerian military and its apparatuses as 'on-top' of the insurgency even though the concrete insecurity situation in areas affected by Boko Haram belie these assertions. Although legacy media outfits quote press releases from the army's social media accounts for official documentation, many analysts do not rely on the military's 'one-sided', 'consistently winning' renditions of events on the ground. The army's culture of classifying relevant information has further made it impossible to verify the veracity of information shared on these social media handles. The fact that the Nigerian government substantially re-echoes the army's version of events especially in regards to casualty numbers on the side of the army has cast further aspersions on the use of information garnered from the army's social media platforms.

Channeling of Grievances: Quite unexpectedly, and also through social media, the populace was gifted with information which the army would rather not share. Soldiers and army officers have taken to their Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts to send picture and video records of their counter-insurgency experiences to their families, friends and social media followers. From these records, evidence emerges of an acute lack of effective weaponry to combat Boko Haram, lack of adequate welfare for soldiers on the battle front, low-morale in troops due to non-payment of salaries, entitlement and allowances, non-granting of leave and unending deployment to conflict areas, maltreatment by senior military officers who were directly and indirectly accused of corruption, nepotism, funds diversion and collusion with insurgents. The rumblings in security ranks have resulted in soldiers mutinying against superiors (July 2014, 2017 and December 2018). Some of these mutinies and revolts were also captured and posted on social media by the soldiers or their family/friends. Also, the death of a soldier or an officer on the battlefield becomes known to family members and the public almost immediately it occurs because military colleagues usually take to their social media accounts to 'mourn their fallen comrade' with eulogies and grieving words. Most times, such eulogising posts become public well before the Nigerian military acknowledges attacks in which the death occurs, or officially sends a writ to notify the family of the dead.

The use of social media by 'rogue soldiers' became such a thorn in the military's flesh that in August 2018, the Nigerian Chief of Army Staff issued a statement to address the issue:

"It is very unfortunate and unprofessional for example for service personnel to resort to social media to disclose classified information or express grievances when the Nigerian Army has well established channels for addressing complaints. It is equally saddening to find operational incidents and occurrences including gory pictures involving own personnel's and equipment being circulated on social media by troops to the embarrassment of the service and affected families."¹⁰

¹⁰ Maina Maina, "Boko Haram: Buratai Blames Social Media for Endless War," *Daily Post*, August 17, 2017, Maina Maina, <https://dailypost.ng/2017/08/17/boko-haram-buratai-blames-social-media-endless-war/>



Figure 4. Tweet showing soldier deserting theatre of war

The Army further claimed that the wrong use of social media by soldiers had exposed some of its operations to the insurgents and put the lives of troops in danger.¹¹ Although many observers applaud the alternative measures used by soldiers to bring their situation to the front-burners of national discourse, there are also fears that making such matters public through social media exposes weaknesses which insurgents could (and have) capitalise on. This does not however justify the inactions of the Nigerian government and military service chiefs in the provision of better equipment and welfare for troops.

3. The Citizenry

Influencers and Opinion Shapers: The democratising potential and accessibility of social media presents it as a crucial apparatus adopted and mechanised to suit diverse uses in the hands of the Nigerian populace. Before its advent, legacy media (newspapers, radio and television) were the gate-keepers of information which meant that information was circulated with all the inherent filters and restrictions accompanying media outfits. With

¹¹Molly Kilete, "Boko Haram: Again, Army Cautions Troops on Indiscriminate Use of Social Media," *Sun News Online*, August 26, 2018, <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/boko-haram-again-army-cautions-troops-on-indiscriminate-use-of-social-media/>

social media, such limitations are close to non-existent as long as the advisories of tech companies (which are less stringent) are abided by. Thus, with a Twitter, Facebook or Instagram account, eye-witness accounts of terrorist acts and aftermaths of terrorist attacks are shared generating 'trending' conversations. A tweet can make the tweeter 'popular' in seconds with thousands of retweets, likes, and engaging comments. The 'attention economy' as the back-bone of social media fuels the popularity of social media 'influencers' who have operationally crafted social media to become opinion shapers, and whose positions continue to influence the dynamics of Boko Haram in Nigeria. One such opinion shaper is Ahmed Salkida. He is the only journalist known to have had direct contact with Muhammad Yusuf and Boko Haram. His twitter feeds contain regular updates with 'insider' information about Boko Haram attacks and activities. Salkida had also shared the proof of life video for the abducted Chibok girls.

Eyewitness accounts of terrorist activities and insider information shared on social media by both users and influencers have become so influential that legacy media contemporarily look to social media for breaking news. They help to bridge the information gap especially on the activities of terrorists and keep the public not only updated but also alert.¹² Both also help to verify information shared by both the military and the government.

Citizen's Use of Hashtag Activism: The Nigerian populace has also adopted the social media 'hashtag' as a digital activism vanguard for participation, persuasion and pressure. Hashtag activism denotes "political participation, activities and protests organised on digital networks with groups involved sharing a common political attribute that includes the struggle for 'reform or revolution' with state, non-state players and emergent socio-political establishments."¹³ A hashtag is a type of metadata tag used in social networks to allow users to apply dynamic, user-generated tagging which makes it possible for other users to easily find messages with a specific theme or content.¹⁴ Since its first use on Twitter in 2007, the hashtag has spread to other social media and is used as a means for people to highlight new information, draw attention to issues or find others who share their viewpoint.¹⁵

In the context of the ongoing Boko Haram terrorist insurgency, hashtag activism especially on Twitter and Facebook has been adopted by the populace to pressurise the Nigerian government to act (for example using #BringBackOurGirls and the #DapchiGirls to call for the release of the abducted Chibok and Dapchi girls). The #BringBackOurGirls campaign garnered 3.3 million tweets with celebrities such as Michelle Obama also tweeting to support the cause. It also helped put pressure on the government to focus on ensuring accountability, making sure that all the girls abducted by Boko Haram are safely rescued and reunited with their families.¹⁶

¹² Ette and Joe, "Rival Visions of Reality," 402.

¹³ Igodo, Cynthia, "The Power of Social Media Nigeria's Changing Feminist Movement," *Republic*, March 1, 2019, <https://www.republic.com.ng/vol3-no1/the-power-of-social-media/>

¹⁴ Igodo, "The Power of Social Media."

¹⁵ Igodo, "The Power of Social Media."

¹⁶ Sadighi, Darius, "How Hashtag Activism Helped Raise Awareness About Boko Haram," *Teen Vogue*, May 12, 2017, <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/hashtag-activism-raise-awareness-boko-haram>



Figure 5. #BringBackOurGirls campaign

Hashtag activism is also used to refute and counter the claims of security agents. In the case of Boko Haram's attack on the army base in Metele, Borno state, on November 18, 2018, the army did not put out an official report immediately after the attack, and when they did, casualty figures on its side were grossly under-reported. A video surfaced afterwards on social media which revealed the horrendous overrun of the military base with bodies of dead troops. The voices in the background (believed to be soldiers who escaped the attack) estimated the dead to be over a hundred. The hashtag #Metele began to trend immediately refuting earlier figures shared by the military. The army issued a statement five days later in damage control but its inability to give specific responses on aspects of the attack only served to further discredit its claims.

Citizens Redirecting Boko Haram Conversations: Because it opens the door to more direct and effective communication between Nigerians and their government, social media is considered to be a form of citizen's participation in security operations.¹⁷ It has been used by Nigerians to redirect the conversation on certain aspects of the Boko Haram conflict. An example is the ongoing Twitter campaign about Leah Sharibu. She was the only girl not released by insurgents following the Dapchi abductions in February 2018 because she refused to renounce her Christian faith. Every May 16 (Leah's birthday) since her kidnap, social media users put up her pictures on their handles to keep her abduction on the front burner of political discourse and pressure the Nigerian government into securing her release. Social media has also been used to redirect the conversation on Boko Haram to human rights abuses and extra judicial killings committed by the Nigerian military. Video footage of the killings, beatings and maiming perpetrated by security forces against suspected Boko Haram extremists became widespread on social networks. Amnesty International has also published a report which is a collection from eyewitnesses and likely

¹⁷ Sadighi. "How Hashtag Activism Helped Rase Awareness."

perpetrators, captured mainly on cell phones and shared between individuals or on social media.¹⁸ In the Boko Haram context thus, the citizenry are no longer docile but have assumed the role of game changers,¹⁹ revolutionising fact-finding and opening up new horizons for discourses on Boko Haram's terrorist insurgency.

Re-Influencing Social Media Dynamics in Boko Haram's Terrorist Insurgence: The Role of Tech Companies and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

1. Tech Companies Should Collaborate with Youth-Oriented Clerics: Nigeria's youthful population, among the biggest in the world, is acclaimed as one of the best users of social media to influence political, economic and social change. A host of successful

social media campaign trails (#OccupyNigeria, #NotTooYoungToRun, #EndSARS and #ArewaMeToo) demonstrate the tenacity they apply to digital activism and the enterprising nature of their online battles. These campaigns and the changing responses they have generated have proven that the Nigerian government has also embraced social

media as a lens to understanding the pulse of the populace. Not just the government, but the world also pays attention to Nigeria's youth-driven social media scene. Consequently, tech companies need to recognise and utilise the already budding activism landscape in positively influencing Boko Haram's terrorist dynamics. A major way to do this is to employ social media activism to spread counter-Islamic ideologies. The emergence of Boko Haram's terrorist brand was built on the ability to make the group's brand of Salafism seem superior and a lot of youths confessed that they came into contact with Boko Haram's radicalisation agents in universities, including Bayero University in Kano, Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria²⁰ and the University of Maiduguri in Borno state. A major way to counter Boko Haram's terrorism thus would involve discrediting the group's ideological motivation and its power to motivate thousands of young supporters to kill and maim in the name of jihad. Tech companies can collaborate with identified, youth-oriented, moderate Islamic clerics and social media influencers who can use their social media standing to carry out youth-focused community-based orientation

programmes in universities and institutions of higher learning. Such clerics should be influential, with the ability to affect larger public opinion, and the goals would be to counter extremist agendas, radical interpretations of Islamic religion, and other elements in the ideology of terrorist violence.²¹ Islamic scholars with contemporary/secular world outlooks that fit this role include Mufti Ismail Menks, Yusuf Estes, Nouman Ali Khan and Muhammed Salah.

¹⁸ Koettl. Christopher, "How Technology Helped us Expose War Crimes in Nigeria," June 4, 2015, *Amnesty International*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/06/how-technology-helped-us-expose-war-crimes-in-nigeria/>

¹⁹ Koettl. How Technology helped us Expose War Crimes in Nigeria."

²⁰ Personal Interview with Yushau, (Former BUK Student, Kaduna), June 12, 2014).

²¹ Campbell. Kurt and Weitz. Richard, "Non-Military Strategies for Countering Islamist Terrorism: Lessons Learned from Past Counterinsurgencies" *Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs*, (2006): 17.

2. **Tech Companies Should Align their Vanguard Activities to Terrorism Prevention.** The annual Social Media Week (SMW) is held in Lagos. Planned for participants to inspire, connect and engage, SMW brings together social media users and enthusiasts from fashion, entertainment, business, travel and politics. Various issues have been discussed in the SMW panels including but not limited to how to succeed in the music industry, the impact of social media during elections and the benefits of having mentors. SMW has however focused on zero issues regarding radicalisation or violent extremism. Because SMW is driven by the youth population, such ventures are crucial to the fight against terrorist insurgence. During SMW 2019, YouTube announced their sponsorship of Nollywood series *Ayetoro Town* by Funke Akindele Bello. Tech companies can thus utilise the leverage which the entertainment industry has on social interactions to increase awareness about the deceitful tactics terrorist groups use to recruit new members and the impact of violent extremism on Nigerian communities.
3. **Governments and Tech Companies Can Collaborate with Organisations Working on Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism (P/CVE):** This is another viable tool to positively influencing Boko Haram's terrorism dynamics and impact peace processes. UNICEF recruited Snapchat users to launch a campaign designed to raise awareness of the horrific impact of the Boko Haram crisis in Nigeria on children, with Snapchat members redrawing the pictures by some of the children forced to flee their homes. The campaign is designed to equate the transient nature of Snapchat content, which sees pictures and messages disappearing shortly after they are sent, with the notion of the childhoods of victims disappearing.²² Other tech companies can highlight specific aspects of the conflict using features of their applications like Google does with historical events on its search engine. Facebook also shares an anniversary update with its users. This feature can be used to share reminders on important Boko Haram related tragic events that need to be kept alive such as the abduction of Leah Sharibu and other Chibok girls yet to be released.
4. **Tech Companies Should Promote Post-Boko Haram Peace Processes by Blocking Disinformation:** Tech companies and civil society could work together to curb the use of social media to spread fake, unsubstantiated news about Boko Haram activities. Tech companies need to do more in terms of blocking the ceaseless sharing of messages especially in ethnically/religiously sensitive, crisis-prone areas. In India for instance, following a spate of lynching that was allegedly sparked by fake videos shared on WhatsApp, the app took steps, including letting users know when a message had been forwarded and not written by the sender. This has also been introduced in Nigeria and would hopefully have the effect of preventing the spread of unverified news. However, tech companies could go beyond this to actually flag messages that have been shared a little too consistently, and notify the recipient of the number of times such a message has been forwarded to different users before the current recipient received it. This would not only arouse a sense of warning to the user, but will also cast doubts on the origin, accuracy and authenticity of the forwarded message. This mechanism could apply to platforms with closed user messaging such as WhatsApp and Facebook.

²² "UNICEF," accessed April 2, 2019, <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/unicef-snapchat-highlight- plight-children-affected-boko-haram-conflict-nigeria/1342719>

5. **CSOs Need to Develop Social Media Campaigns with the Right Strategy and Templates:** CSOs in Nigeria have acted as conscience tools against political, economic and media struggles in Nigeria. Enough is Enough (EiE), Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement (YIAGA), and Alliance for Credible Elections are some of the prominent CSOs who have advocated for political changes in the country. In May 2016, Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) was also a vibrant voice against the Nigerian's government attempts to limit online freedom of expression through the 'Social Media Bill'. The bill if passed intended to "Prohibit Frivolous Petitions and Other Matters Connected Therewith" and included up to two years in prison, or a fine of \$10,000, or both, for anyone posting an "abusive statement" via text message, Twitter, WhatsApp, or any other form of social media.²³ Various social media campaigns including the twitter hashtag #NoToSocialMediaBill helped in putting pressure on the Nigerian senate to redact the bill. The CLEEN Foundation (which deals with security and accessible justice), Twitter and Instagram, for example, could be used as a platform for education where information shared for hashtag activism are meaningfully relevant to existing contexts, contain historical analogies and are professionally well researched for public consumption. This would broaden the use of social media not just for socialisation but for mindset reorientation needed in the post-Boko Haram's societal reintegration and rehabilitation phase. CSOs should more importantly help take social media campaigns offline through activities such as lobbying and focus group discussions.²⁴ This would help concretise actions already theorised on social media and bring pragmatic actions to bear in the lives of those affected by Boko Haram's terrorist insurgency.

Conclusion

The popularity of social media in Nigeria and the youth population who drive its use are the major reasons why it is a veritable tool for countering violent extremism and consolidating peace processes. Boko Haram's use of social media for recruitment is contemporarily not sophisticated enough but the contacts and connection which ISWAP enjoys with the Islamic State can change this trend. Before this happens, tech companies could maximise social media usage through social media influencers and flagship activities like the SMW to re-orient youth values and spread counter-terrorist narratives. CSOs could take social media activism offline to connect with relevant stakeholders and ensure that necessary legislation that fulfills social media hashtag activism are passed. With all of these, it is possible to ensure that Boko Haram's terrorist insurgency loses the backbone of its existence: followers and sympathisers.

²³ Kermeliotis, Teo, "Proposed Social Media Bill Under Fire in Nigeria," *Aljazeera*, December 5, 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/12/proposed-social-media-bill-fire-nigeria-151204211513621.html>

²⁴ Gibson, Megan, "Can A Social Media Campaign Really #BringBackOurGirls?," *Time*, May 7, 2014. <http://time.com/90693/bringbackourgirls-nigeria-boko-haram/>

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