

## **Military Social Media use and Conflict Communication in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Contemporary war and conflict research have often centred on media representation and the relationship between the media and military actors. While this provides insights into the dynamics of contemporary war and conflict, these approaches to mediatised war and conflict fail to engage with how social media enables militaries to communicate directly to their target audience by circumventing legacy media. Consequently, this paper interrogates the military use of social media for national security communication. The discourse creates a research trajectory on Nigeria by investigating the themes from the Nigerian Military social media posts regarding their involvement and progress in the conflicts in Northern Nigeria. Using qualitative content analysis technique, this paper analysed 10,750 posts, comments, and tweets from the Defence Headquarters Nigeria (@DefenceinforNG) Facebook and Twitter pages. Findings showed that social media play a significant role on how the Nigerian Military communicates their involvement and progress in the conflicts in Northern Nigeria. Data further showed that the Nigerian military social media pages are used for deterrence and demoralisation of the insurgents as well as trust building with the Nigerian public. It was, therefore, recommended, among others, that Nigerian military increase their social media use in conflict communication.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Military Social Media, War Communication, Nigerian Military, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

The relationship between the media and the military is fraught with suspicion and unease on both ends. The military is mostly angered from high-profile missteps from the media such as revealing of tactical positions and embellishment of reportage when embedded with a military tactical unit (War-Room, 2019). The media also draw the ire of the military when media coverage is critical of, and embarrasses the military (War-Room, 2019). The latter provokes the military more due to its need to be perceived as

being professional and good for the society. Although, many senior military officers understand that the media is simply playing its fourth and fifth estate roles (Uwalaka & Watkins, 2017, 2018), they still chafe at unfavourable media coverage (War-Room, 2019). However, such coverage is necessary. This watchdog function of the press provides a forum for public transparency, which is vital to the legitimacy and accountability of the military.

The media do not always fulfil their watchdog role. For example, during the 2003 Iraq war, the method in which the United States military and government performed its positive spins and relations about the need for the war with the media, was startling for many, and that damaged the trust in both the media and the military (Limor & Nossek, 2006). The uncritical stance of the media in the gulf war of 1991 as well as the war in Afghanistan show the consequence of complicit media and botched responsibilities. This failure in the part of the media gave rise to a new pattern of military media relations (Limor & Nossek, 2006; War-Room, 2019). The fulcrum of the new model is one of warfare managed and waged, “far from the eyes of the media, essentially deactivating the latter’s ability to act freely” (Limor & Nossek, 2006, p. 484). However, the popularisation of social media platforms upended the foregoing dynamic as citizens can be directly communicated to from a single post or tweet from one eye witness (Jones & Baines, 2013). These new and popular abilities and affordances have forced the military in many countries to devise means and strategies on how to combat this perception shaping and direct communication to the citizens (Roy *et al* 2017; Sethi, 2013; Veerasamy & Labuschagne, 2018).

The military use social media platforms for many things such as: intelligence collection, perception management, building counter narratives, deception, and demoralising adversary forces (Tewari, 2019). Contemporary war and conflict research have often centred on media representation and the relationship between the media and military actors. Studies have focussed on social media role in non-contact warfare (Tewari, 2019) and social media as tools for the military (Sethi, 2013). While these studies provide wonderful insights into the dynamics of contemporary war and conflict, these approaches to mediatised war and conflict fail to engage with how social media enables militaries to shape people’s perception of the military and to communicate directly to their target audience by circumventing legacy media. Consequently, this paper interrogates the military use of social media for national security communication. This study creates a research trajectory of Nigeria by investigating the themes from the Nigerian Military social media posts regarding their involvement and progress in the conflicts in North-eastern Nigeria. This is done by appraising how the military use social media for perception management, building counter narratives, deception, deterring and demoralising adversary forces.

### **Background of the Study: The Boko Haram Conflict in Nigeria**

Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad colloquially known as Boko Haram is an extremist Islamic Sect in Nigeria. The sect will be referred to as "Boko Haram" in this study for its popularity and brevity. Boko Haram originated from a group of radical Islamist youths who worshipped at the Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri. In 2002, the group declared the city of Maiduguri and the Islamic institution to be excruciatingly immoral and inveterate. The group with the veneer of rostering true Islamic tenets and beliefs, pronounced that it was embarking on hijra—a withdrawal along the lines of the Prophet Muhammad's withdrawal from Mecca to Medina (Walker, 2012). The group moved from Maiduguri to Kanama in Yobe State and established a separatist community run on hard-line Islamic principles (Walker, 2012). Their leader at the time was Mohammed Ali. He had espoused views critical of the Nigerian state and embraced ideology that called for "true" Islamic law with the aim to build a more perfect society away from the corrupt establishment (Walker, 2012).

The nickname, "Boko Haram" has been found to have come from the Hausa speaking people of Maiduguri as a negative stereotype to its members (Anyanwu, 2017; Warner & Lizzo, 2021). Boko Haram has been argued to translate as western education or norms are forbidden (Warner & Lizzo, 2021). The group violently advocates for radical social and educational reforms throughout Nigeria (Bello, 2021). They want to eliminate any western influence and to replace western education and norms with 'undiluted' Islamic laws and methods that are in lockstep in appearance and interpretation with shari'ah (Bello, 2021).

Mohammed Ali, Boko Haram's founding leader was killed in a siege at its Mosque by the Nigerian Army. The death of Ali and the siege birthed Boko Haram to the media. Thus, the group gained press attention in Nigeria and interest from the U.S. Embassy in Nigeria because they were called, "the Nigerian Taliban" (Walker, 2012, p. 3). After the killing of Mohammed Ali and the increased scrutiny from the press, the group went underground and returned to Maiduguri when the media scrutiny had waned. The group came into the attention of the authorities again due to a clash with the authorities in July of 2009 when Boko Haram shot at the police who had stopped them in a routine check in Maiduguri. The event led to the arrest and killing of members of the Nigerian Taliban—Boko Haram, including their new leader, Mohammed Yusuf and his father in law (Walker, 2012).

Since the siege that led to the death of Mohammed Yusuf, Nigeria has been peppered with terrorist acts. The group has destabilised many cities in Northern Nigeria including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (Bello, 2021; Walker, 2012; Warner & Lizzo, 2021). They have kidnapped school children (e.g. Chibok school girls), bombed places such as Eagle Square Abuja, UN building in Abuja, Churches, Mosques and markets (Bello, 2021). With increased pressure on the Nigerian Military, and the continuous attacks on both Nigerians and military personnel, the military needed to show Nigerians that they are 'winning' the war against the insurgents. The military attempts to do this by providing information to Nigerians via their social media

handles, especially their Facebook and Twitter pages. The current study is conceived to appraise Nigerian military use of social media for security communication by analysing the tactics deployed by the Nigerian military to shape the perceptions of Nigerians and cultivating the support of Nigerians.

### **Research Questions**

This paper sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the frequency of tweets and posts from the (@DefenceinforNG twitter handle and Facebook page between January 1, 2020, to June 1, 2021, regarding their fight against Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria?
2. What are the themes from (@DefenceinforNG Twitter and Facebook contents from January 1, 2020, to June 1, 2021, regarding their fight against Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria?
3. What are themes from the reactions of Nigerians to the posts from (@DefenceinforNG Twitter and Facebook postings from January 1, 2020, to June 1, 2021, regarding their fight against Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria?

### **The Military and the Media**

The military involvement in and use of media has advanced substantially in the last two decades, and coverage of military activity, often in relation to conflicts and their aftermath have significantly increased as well (Corner & Parry, 2017). In a volume of studies that attempted to understand the connections regarding ways in which public perceptions of the military are constructed in the media and about the tensions at work in that construction and its shift in evaluation, Corner & Parry (2017) noted that military mediations have always had a strong element of the covert and deceptive about them, and that media circulations have modified their forms instead of considerably altering their underlying motives. However, they did argue that a complex relationship has emerged between the military and the publics. According to them, a relatively simple approval for military action or preparation for it, in specific instances and of the scale, nature and management of this action, are less found. This is because there is repeatedly a more nervous, puzzled facet to public perceptions, “an interest in knowing more about the background to ‘success’ and ‘failure’ than was previously thought useful or desirable” (Corner & Parry, 2017, p. 4). The foregoing buttresses the importance of the media to the military and their tenuous and fragile relationship in one hand, and the peoples’ renewed suspicion of the military.

The relationship between the U.S. military and the U.S. media in America is one of shifts and turns. The air was over Kosovo in 1999 renewed the disagreement between the U.S military and the news media in the U.S. This grudge is generally believed to have been a steady undertone of the media-military relations since the Vietnam war. It has been argued that the events of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent declaration by President George W. Bush of a “War on Terror” drove the feud underground (Porch, 2002). The media was criticised for their uncritical reporting

and failure to competently carry out their watchdog duties during the Iraqi war (Calabrese, 2005; Dudge, 2006; Kalantari, 2020; Kumar, 2006). But the media began to second-guess the military after they (the media) received unsavoury review (Porch, 2002).

There is a consensus that a corporative working relationship between the press and the military is important as such relationship will help the press fulfil its fourth estate role while giving the military the visibility and legitimacy that they yearn and needs. However, that the media and military need to work in a corporative manner do not mean that the media should engage in slavish reportage. The media should still be able to criticise the military without looked at as anti-military. The wrangling has always been there. The relationship between the media and the military did not suddenly collapse, animosity between the two is as old as the foundations of countries (Porch, 2002). In a study appraising the relationship between the media and the military, Le (2016) found that while the media coverage during the Vietnam significantly contributed to American public opinion, media coverage was not the sole factor of significant

Awider media-military relationship regarding media reportage and framing of the military and veterans' studies have pointed to how the media frame and present the military in good stead. The military in such media coverages are seen as brave, gallant and heroes (Corner & Parry, 2017). This valour frame causes the media to miss and sometimes mis-report negative stories as though, they are positive. Study has pointed to how the bio-political imperative of managing lives is visually expressed through aesthetic of trauma where "war" on migrants is represented both as an intimate experience of sorrow and as a public act of peacekeeping (Musarò, 2017). In their study, Saber & Webber (2017) have described how dissidents or adversary militaries have started using the media to disseminate their values. However, while the dissident warriors and producers' aim is to challenge dominant political frameworks, the design limitations undermine perception of the real possibilities of resistance (Saber & Webber, 2017). In a heart-warming study, Parry & Thumim (2017) evaluated military veteran's reaction to variety of media genres and to discuss how they correspond to their experience. They found that discussions prompted by media materials revealed complexities and ambiguities in both the evaluations of generic properties and affective responses. They concluded that "mediated military experience can be understood as a way to share in an otherwise blocked of environment, and engender pride and empathy among the public" (Parry & Thumim, 2017, p. 29).

The relationship between the press and the military in Nigeria is even more problematic. Historically, the military despises the press in Nigeria and made laws (during military regimes) that curtailed press freedom and punished brave journalists that continued that reportage (Adeniyi, 2016; Amadi, 2006; Uwalaka, 2015a, 2017). This relationship has improved since Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999. The press in Nigeria has always not carried out their watchdog function effectively in Nigeria and there still appears a chilling effect from their battles with the authorities

and the military. However, there is a move towards accountability in Nigeria. The greater accountability has come from citizen journalists in Nigeria (Uwalaka, 2019). Nigerian military's use of social media may not be unrelated to this increasing importance of social media platforms and its users in Nigeria.

### **Social Media and the Military**

This review will assess how the military use social media platforms. The review will highlight studies in this area and delineate how they relate to the current study. Earlier we discussed the fragile relationship between the military and the press in Nigeria. Like was highlighted, that weak relationship as a result of the brutalisation and censorship of the press in Nigeria (Uwalaka, 2015b), the relationship is in a cautious and suspicious mend. However, the diffusion and popularity of social media has caught the gaze of the Nigerian military much like the rest of the world. The race on control of reality as was as perception enhancement has forced the military to strategically use social media to accomplish some of their wishes with the media.

Military personnel like the rest of the world use social media platforms for mundane activities such as the building of cultural identity. It has been noted that the convolutions, mediatory practices and mundane social media rituals that military personnel employ resonate widely with youth and digital cultures (Maltby & Thornham, 2016). Social media by its unique features attract and tempts the military. For example, social media platforms enable people to engage in ways not envisage before, help set agenda and build public opinion, social media platforms helps coordinate collective and connective actions and even used for propaganda guerrilla warfare (Tewari, 2019). For example, a study that explored the social media postings of Israel Defence Forces soldiers, showed that their social media activity highlights the quotidian aspects of the military life in ways that reverberate "beyond the strictly ideological or political facets of the services" (Stern & Shalom, 2021, p. 343). This reveals that the military and its personnel in most cases use social media like everyone else, not for sophisticated things always but for some simple and mundane things like sharing relationships, connecting with friends, and creating cultural identities.

According to Jones & Baines (2013), social media platforms are altering the way information is shared worldwide in new and unpredictable way. They concluded that in the social media operating ecosystem, that military chiefs and influencers should be willing to relinquish control, adjust their thinking and adopt a process of constructive engagement (Jones & Baines, 2013). Constructive engagement has the capability of maintaining control and helping reduce the risk of loss of control in the military. One other thing is the privacy of both the military as an organisation and her individual personnel. The use of social media has an adverse and risky effect of exposing sources and methods. A study that evaluated how information aggregation helps surveillance technologies in counter-terrorism argued that social media exposes service members location and invades their privacy (Henschke, 2021).

Even more important in the military and media relationship is perception management and creation of narratives. These can aptly be carried out through social media. As a potent cognitive weapon, social media can be used to shape views and sway opinion (Veerasingam & Labuschagne, 2018). It has been argued that social media can be used for perception management. This is because of its speed, accessibility, reach and ease of use. As a result of the foregoing, it can be asserted that social media can effortlessly manipulate ideas, shape views and swing opinions (Veerasingam & Labuschagne, 2018).

Using social media to communicate war and control narratives as to which part is the offender has only increased as well as potentially deployed by militaries around the world. In this context, social media is not only used to control the narratives but also used to praise and confer gallantry commemorations to their military personnel. For example, in their study that analysed the state of information warfare on Twittersphere between India and Pakistan in the wake of Pulwama attack in Kashmir region and the subsequent retaliatory strike by Indian forces inside Pakistan, Hussain *et al* (2021) found that contributors from the two countries mainly posted on their own hashtag and did not engage in counter-arguments with contributors from other country. This lack of counter-arguments resulted in overwhelming support for the two countries in their own assorted hashtag and outright criticism in the hashtags originating from the other country (Hussain *et al* 2021). This result reveals those social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are now used to engage with ordinary citizens and make the non-military citizen as warrior or 'keyboard warrior' fighting for their national defence online, shaping narratives relating to their war and inducing sympathy from neutral observers while praising their forces for the military (kinetic) finesse. In this instance, the non-military citizens became influence peddlers and 'online warriors' for the good of their countries.

The military's need to communicate to the people is vital in today's media landscape. This is more crucial in countries such as Nigeria where the military have historically repressed the press and the people and the prevalence of fake news in social media today (Adeniyi, 2016; Uwalaka, 2015b; Uwalaka *et al* 2021). Thus, the Nigerian military use of social media to disseminate information and informing Nigerians regarding their fight against the Boko Haram is understandable. One key unknown is what the military postings and tweets on their Twitter and Facebook pages tell of the Nigerian military's motivations for using these platforms and the tactics that they have adopted.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on the uses and gratifications theory and technological determinism theory. U & G theory is a method to comprehend the reason and how people vigorously pursue certain media to satisfy specific needs. Uses and gratifications theory states that people actively select and use media to satisfy individual needs (Katz *et al* 1973; Sheldon *et al* 2021). Uses and gratifications studies

regarding social media have shown a wide-ranging scale of hitherto unknown gratifications. This research focuses on Nigerian military use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

Technological determinism is a term used to imply the predictive power of technology in the development of the society. This term is argued to have come from an American sociologists and economists, Thorstein Veblen (Friedman, 2000) and was further studied by John Dewey. Technological determinism assumes that technology plays a vital role in human lives and that technological advancements determine the development of the social structure and cultural values of the society (Adler, 2012; Papageorgiou & Michaelides, 2016). In the context of this study, innovations in social media platforms can be argued to have brought about changes in military communication practices in Nigeria and around the world. These technological innovations and diffusion imbue the military with strategic communication skills that they harness to communication in a conflict situation.

### **Methods**

This study reports on the tweets and posts from this period by scraping all the tweets and Facebook posts from the Nigerian military between January of 2020 and June of 2021. This means that the universe of tweets within this period was collected and analysed while all the responses in the forms of replies and comments were also analysed. This study analysed 10,750 posts and tweets from Defence Headquarters Nigeria's (@DefenceinforNG) Facebook and Twitter pages. These posts, and tweets were collected between January 1, 2020, to June 1, 2021. The Defence Headquarters in Nigeria is the coordinating body of Nigeria military and supervises the activities of all the different commands such as the Nigerian Navy, the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Airforce. Posts and tweets were scraped using Netlytic. These posts and tweets were subsequently imported first into an excel and then transferred to an NVivo 12 Pro for analysis. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software that helps the researcher come up with themes and other relevant trends as well as graphs in a qualitative data.

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis technique and specifically utilised social media network analytics. This is the art and science of extracting, constructing, analysing, and understanding social networks. The researchers analysed tweets and retweets as well as Facebook posts and comments from the Nigerian military Facebook page and Twitter handles "@DefenceinforNG" to determine the number of tweets and retweets as well as Facebook posts and comments about the Nigerian Military social media posts regarding their involvement and progress in their conflicts with Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria between January and June of 2021.

### **Results**

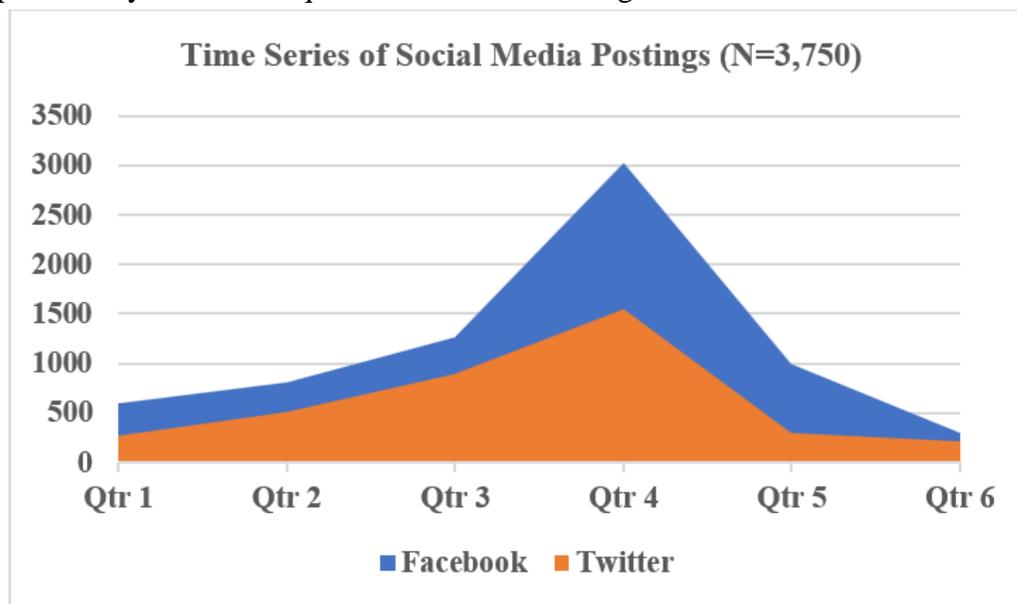
Social media contents from Facebook and Twitter relating to Defence Headquarters Nigeria ((@DefenceinforNG) were analysed to understand themes from the Nigerian

Military social media posts regarding their involvement and progress in the Boko Haram conflict in Northern Nigeria.

**RQ1: Frequency of Tweets and Posts**

Of the 10,750 posts, comments, tweets, and replies, 7,000 are Facebook posts and comments while 3,750 are tweets and retweets. From the 7,000 posts and comments, 2,000 are Facebook posts from the military while 5,000 are comments responding to the posts. Also, out of the 3,750 tweets and retweets, 1,750 are tweets from the military while 2,000 are retweets from Nigerian Twitter users.

From the Time Series (Figure 1) below, third and fourth quarters are the quarters with the most posts and tweets out of the six quarters under examination. In the fourth quarter (October to December 2020), the military posted 3,023 posts on Facebook and 1,552 tweets about their involvement in the fight against Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria. This period witnessed the highest frequency of posts and tweet. During this period, the military ramped up their bombardment of the terrorist hideouts in Northern Nigeria. In terms of the frequency of most posts and tweets, the fourth quarter is followed by quarter three with 1,263 Facebook posts and 900 tweets respectively. Quarters five and two have 1,000 and 810 Facebook posts and 300 and 515 tweets respectively. Other quarters (1 and 6) have 600 and 304 Facebook posts and 275 and 210 tweets. These results and time series show that the Nigerian military significantly tweets and posts frequently on Facebook regarding their actions in Northern Nigeria, particularly when inadequate infrastructure in Nigeria is factored into the result.



**Figure 1. Nigerian military social media postings in quarters**

**RQ2: What are the Themes from the Posts and Tweets?**

As shown in table 1, results indicate that the Nigerian military social media pages are used for deterrence, providing information and enlightenment, demoralising Boko Haram fighters, trust building with the public and providing clarifications on their actions. Posts and tweets meant to deter and demoralise the Boko Haram terrorists constitute many of the posts and tweets from the Nigerian military posts regarding their actions in the fight against Boko Haram. Posts crafted to deter the insurgents comprised of above 35% of the Facebook posts and 46% of the tweets. Furthermore, posts and tweets about demoralising Boko Haram accounted for over 25% of Facebook posts and 23% of tweets. Trust building with Nigerians consists of about 15% of Facebook posts and 17% of tweets. The theme of information and enlightenment counts for about 10% posts on Facebook and 5% tweets. These results show that the themes from the military social media pages were mainly to demoralise, deter and build trust between the people and the military that serve them.

**Table 1. Themes from the Military Social Media Posts**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Facebook (%)</b>	<b>Twitter (%)</b>
Information/Enlightenment	211 (10)	88 (5)
Deterrence	708 (35.5)	800 (46)
Demoralising Boko Haram	500 (25)	400 (23)
Trust Building with Nigerians	300 (15)	302 (17)
Clarification	180 (9)	100 (6)
Others	101 (5.5)	60 (3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,000 (100)</b>	<b>1,750 (100)</b>

**RQ3: What are the Themes from Peoples' Reactions to Military Social Media Posts**

According to table 2 below, majority of the posts and tweets analysed are Facebook comments and replies from Nigerians. Facebook comments and replies were overwhelmingly positive towards the military with over 70% of Facebook commenters either interceding or praising the Nigerian military. This excessive prayers in support of the Nigerian military and paean showered the Nigerian military in their comment section is unexpected and frankly astonishing. From the results, 50% of Facebook commenters and 24% of retweets interceded for the military and wished the military luck. For example, a Facebook user commenting on one of the posts said, "may Allah continue to help our gallant troops for a peaceful Nigeria". Another user wrote, "I really appreciate your efforts. God will reward and crown your efforts". Another Facebook user prayed that, "God continue to protect our Army. Amen."

Nigerians also praised the military with about 20% comments and 20% retweets showering the Nigerian military with encomium. For example, A Facebook user elated with the military performance praised the military for a "job well done." He gave kudos to the Nigeria military and encouraged them to "take the war to the hide outs of the

Boko Haram” and cause the insurgents to be defensive rather than, “wait for them to launch attacks.” Another lauded the military’s campaigns as “fantastic” and encouraged the soldiers to keep flooding social media platforms with photographs “to showcase how you are inflicting injures and death on Boko Haram insurgents”. Finally, another Facebook users said, “a big thank you to our soldiers. Our heartfelt condolences to the family of the soldiers that lost his life in the encounter and wishing the injured quick recovery.” Nigerian’s overwhelming supported the Nigerian military in the comment section.

Many comments and retweets appeared to trust the military, especially when it comes to the nullification of the Boko haram threat. However, there are few cases of disappointment with military tactics and even some that distrust the military. A Twitter user in a reply appeared perplexed with the military tactics. The user asked, “I still don’t understand NA’s strategy. Why target some buildings instead of leveling up the whole ... place?” Another said, “all these because a UN helicopter was shut down? Lives and properties have been destroyed over the years and no reasonable response from the Nigerian Army.” Some users, however, fact checked others’ erroneous replies. One of such was when a Twitter user explained to another user why the military conducts airstrikes. The user explained, “I believe the strategy by the Nigerian Airforce is to acquire credible Intel on high value targets then bomb it. NB: those bombings are what #BokoHaram #ISWAP fear the most.”

**Table 2: Themes from Users’ Reactions to Military Social Media Posts in Nigeria**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Facebook (%)</b>	<b>Twitter (%)</b>
Interceding for the military	2,500 (50)	484 (24)
Praising the military	1,013 (20)	402 (20)
Distrustful of the military	130 (2.4)	300 (15)
Disappointed with Military tactics	40 (0.8)	200 (10)
Trusting the military	1,127 (23)	590 (30)
Others	190 (3.8)	24 (1))
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,000 (100)</b>	<b>2,000 (100)</b>

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study interrogates the Nigerian military use of social media for national security communication by investigating the themes from the military’s social media posts regarding their involvement and progress in the war against Boko Haram. Data revealed that social media platforms play significant role on how the Nigerian military communicates their involvement and progress in their war against Boko Haram. Findings showed that the Nigerian military frequently posts and tweets their progress in the war against terrorism in Nigeria. Data indicate that the frequency and valence of

posts and tweets are even more significant when infrastructural problems in Nigeria are considered.

Furthermore, results indicated that the Nigerian military social media pages are used for deterrence, demoralisation, information and enlightenment, trust building and clarifications of their actions among others. Among these themes, demoralising and deterring Boko haram are significantly pursued by the military's posts and tweets as well as trust building with the public. This result confirms and supports findings from other studies. For example, it has been reported that a group from Israel used social media platform (Facebook), to delegitimise Hamas and in building trust and positive perception about the Israeli soldier (Yarchi *et al* 2017), and social media have been noted to provide global medium through which the military can engage in a debate as this dialog can promote the interchange of idea and emerging topic discussion (Corner & Parry, 2017; Veerasamy & Labuschagne, 2018). Findings from this study have shown that the Nigerian military is not only reaping a positive image and trust from the public from their postings, but also receiving love, praise, and prayers for success. The military in Nigeria has used their social media postings to construct an overwhelming positive image.

Findings reveal that the Nigerian public are supportive of the military and perceive the Nigerian military in a positive light when it comes to their fight against the Boko haram sect. This result extends the findings in a similar study, where it was revealed that members of a country that are engaged in a war always root for the military and usually discuss their valour in glowing words (Hussain *et al* 2021). This study found that the Nigerian public praised and interceded for the Nigerian military. While it is true that there were some who did not trust the military, an awe-inspiring number of commenters trusted the military and sang the Nigerian military's praises and a remarkable and astonishing love for the military. The results of this study have clearly outlined why the Nigerian military utilises social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter for their national security communication. The results revealed that the military uses these platforms as a means of not just building trust with the populace but also as a medium and means of instilling fear in the heart of their enemies. This study has proven that the Nigerian military is reaping huge fruit from their uses and gratifications for using social media platforms for their national security communication.

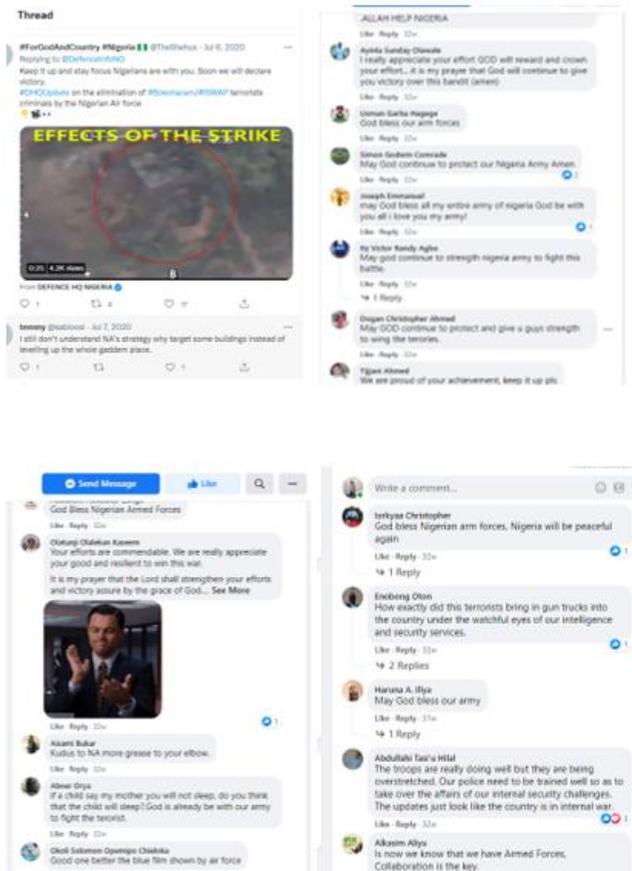


Figure 2: Sample Tweets and Facebook Posts

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this study was to evaluate the uses and gratifications for the Nigerian military use of social media for national security communication. This study analysed 10,750 Facebook posts and comments and tweets and retweets (replies) from the Nigerian military via @DefenceinforNG (Defence Headquarters Nigeria). This study found that that social media plays a significant role on how the Nigerian military communicates their involvement in the war against Boko Haram. The study further uncovered that the Nigerian military social media pages in @DefenceinforNG are used to deter and demoralise Boko Haram terrorists in one hand, as well as building positive perceptions of the military with the Nigerian public on the other. The study also discovered that the uses and gratifications of the Nigerian military using social media is working as Nigerians have glowing perception of the Nigerian military when it comes to the military’s fights against Boko Haram from the comments and retweets regardless of the ethnicity of the Facebook commentator or Twitter user.

Based on these inspiring findings, the researchers recommend that Nigerian military should increase their social media communication by creatively wording their posts and tweets to reduce the monotony of the press release system. Communication scholars should also consider studying military social media use for war and conflict communication to enrich the literature and provide robust results in the military and media communication literature.

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