



Perceived Influence of Social Media on Intelligence Gathering and Information Sharing Among Security Agencies in Enugu State

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Abstract

This study examined the perceived influence of social media on intelligence gathering and information sharing among security agencies in Enugu State. Employing a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 195 security personnel across multiple agencies using a structured questionnaire (SMISOQ). Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to analyze responses based on a four-point Likert scale, with 2.50 as the benchmark for acceptance. Findings revealed that security personnel hold positive perceptions regarding social media's influence on both intelligence gathering and information sharing operations. Respondents perceived social media as enhancing their ability to gather real-time intelligence on criminal activities, identify security threats, and provide valuable investigative leads. Additionally, security personnel perceived social media as facilitating faster inter-agency information sharing, enabling simultaneous dissemination of information, and improving operational coordination. However, concerns were noted regarding advanced analytics capabilities and encryption security for sensitive information. The study concluded that security agencies in Enugu State recognize social media's potential value despite existing technological and infrastructural constraints. Recommendations included establishing formal social media intelligence frameworks, investing in advanced analytics infrastructure, and implementing comprehensive training programs for security personnel.

Keywords: Social Media, Intelligence Gathering, Information Sharing, Security Agencies

Introduction

The exponential growth of social media platforms has fundamentally transformed the landscape of information dissemination, communication, and intelligence gathering worldwide. As of 2024, there are approximately 5.04 billion social media users globally, representing 62.3% of the world's population, with the user base growing by 5.6% annually (Recorded Future, 2024). This unprecedented expansion has created vast repositories of publicly available information that present both opportunities and challenges for security agencies tasked with maintaining public safety and national security. The proliferation of digital communication platforms has necessitated a paradigm shift in how security agencies conduct intelligence operations, moving from traditional surveillance methods to more technologically-driven security frameworks that emphasize continuous monitoring and data analytics (Kwamboka, 2024; Soita & Njoroge, 2023).

Social Media Intelligence (SOCMINT), defined as the process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data from social media platforms to gain actionable insights, has emerged as a critical component of modern security operations (OSINT Industries, 2024). Unlike traditional intelligence gathering methods, SOCMINT enables real-time data collection and analysis, allowing security agencies to monitor activities, track locations, and identify potential threats as they develop. Similarly, the 2017 Manchester attack investigation demonstrated how social media platforms could be monitored to identify disinformation campaigns and track extremist activities in real-time (OSINT Industries, 2024). Recent scholarly work has highlighted the transformative impact of social media on policing and security operations. Fortin, Kentzinger, Delle Donne, and Chopin (2023) observed that while numerous studies have documented the use of social media for public communication, significantly less research has



focused on its application in criminal intelligence and investigation activities. Their research, published in the *Journal of Crime and Justice*, emphasized that social media has become an indispensable tool for law enforcement agencies conducting investigations ranging from fraud and hate crimes to missing persons cases. The study revealed that social media platforms often provide the last link to runaways and missing persons, making them invaluable resources for locating individuals and gathering critical investigative leads.

In the United States context, a 2016 survey conducted by the Urban Institute and the International Association of Chiefs of Police revealed that 91% of law enforcement agencies use social media to notify communities of public safety concerns, 76% use it to solicit crime tips, 72% employ it for monitoring public sentiment, and 70% utilize it for intelligence gathering in investigations (U.S. Congressional Research Service, 2022). These statistics underscore the widespread adoption of social media as a legitimate and effective tool for contemporary security operations. Furthermore, the social media security market, valued at \$1.75 billion in 2022, is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 20.15% to reach \$6.31 billion by 2029, reflecting the increasing recognition of social media's role in security and intelligence operations (Research and Markets, 2024). The African context, particularly Nigeria, presents unique challenges and opportunities for social media-based intelligence gathering. Nigeria faces multifaceted security challenges, including terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal violence, and cybercrime, which have necessitated innovative approaches to intelligence gathering and information sharing among security agencies. A recent study on enhancing security in Nigeria through social media-based crime reporting noted that law enforcement agencies have scarcely addressed how they can leverage social media for providing information, engaging with communities, and gathering intelligence (Kwamboka, 2024). The study emphasized that Nigerian citizens have frequently raised concerns about the efficiency of intelligence gathering and voiced criticism regarding security agencies' perceived shortcomings in employing technology to address insecurity.

Critical to the effectiveness of social media intelligence is the issue of inter-agency information sharing. Research has consistently identified sparse

collaboration between security agencies and inadequate data sharing as significant impediments to combating insecurity in Nigeria (UK Government Country Report, 2024). Technology experts have emphasized the lack of synergy among various security agencies regarding data sharing, which hampers the overall fight against criminal activities. This challenge is particularly acute in Nigeria, where multiple security agencies, including the Nigeria Police Force, Department of State Services, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, and the Defence Intelligence Agency, operate with overlapping mandates but limited coordination mechanisms.

The theoretical framework for understanding social media's role in security operations draws from Social Network Theory (SNT) and technology adoption models. SNT suggests that network dynamics significantly influence individual behaviors and outcomes, and utilizing Social Network Analysis (SNA), law enforcement agencies can identify key factors affecting crime reporting and intelligence gathering, leading to improved security measures and investigative effectiveness (Long et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2023). This theoretical lens is particularly relevant in understanding how information flows through social networks and how security agencies can leverage these networks for intelligence purposes.

Despite the promising potential of social media for intelligence gathering and information sharing, several challenges persist. Privacy concerns, ethical considerations, and the risk of infringing on civil liberties have generated significant debate about the appropriate boundaries for law enforcement's use of social media (Privacy International, 2024). The systematic targeting of certain ethnic and religious groups, as evidenced in the *Raza v. City of New York* case where the New York Police Department systematically gathered intelligence on Muslim communities through SOCMINT, highlights the potential for abuse when social media surveillance is conducted without adequate oversight and transparency (Privacy International, 2024). Additionally, the proliferation of misinformation, fake accounts, and the challenges of verifying authenticity of information obtained from social media platforms present significant operational obstacles for security agencies.

In Enugu State, Nigeria, security agencies face the dual challenge of addressing traditional security threats while adapting to the digital transformation of criminal



activities. The state's urban centers have experienced increasing incidents of kidnapping, armed robbery, and communal conflicts, necessitating more effective intelligence gathering and inter-agency collaboration. However, empirical research on how security personnel in Enugu State perceive and utilize social media for intelligence gathering and information sharing remains limited. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for developing effective policies, training programs, and technological infrastructure to support social media-based security operations.

The integration of social media into security operations represents more than just technological adoption; it signifies a fundamental shift in how security agencies conceptualize their relationship with information, the public, and other agencies. Effective social media intelligence requires not only technical capabilities and analytical tools but also appropriate policies, trained personnel, and a culture that values information sharing and inter-agency cooperation. As Omand, Bartlett, and Miller (2012) argued in their seminal paper introducing the concept of SOCMINT, technological, analytical, and regulatory changes are necessary before social media can be considered a powerful new form of intelligence.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What is the perceived influence of social media on intelligence gathering among security agencies in Enugu State?
2. What is the perceived influence of social media on information sharing among security agencies in Enugu State?

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The study was conducted in Enugu State, Nigeria. The population comprised all personnel from security agencies operating in Enugu State, including the Nigeria Police Force, Department of State Services (DSS), Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and other relevant security organizations involved in intelligence gathering and information

sharing activities. The study utilized a sample size of 200 respondents selected through purposive sampling technique to ensure participation of security personnel with direct involvement in intelligence gathering and information sharing operations. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Social Media Influence on Security Operations Questionnaire" (SMISOQ), developed by the researchers based on literature review. The questionnaire comprised two clusters: cluster A consisted of 12 items on perceived influence of social media on intelligence gathering, and cluster B contained 13 items on perceived influence of social media on information sharing among security agencies. Items were structured using a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1). The validity of the SMISOQ was established through face validity procedures. The instrument was subjected to expert review by three experts who assessed the relevance, clarity, and appropriateness of the items. Their suggestions and corrections were incorporated into the final version of the instrument. The reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient with 20 security personnel from agencies outside the study area. Reliability coefficients were: Cluster A (0.85) and Cluster B (0.82), with an overall reliability of 0.86, exceeding the 0.70 threshold recommended by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). Data were collected through direct administration of the questionnaire to respondents at their respective security agency offices and operational bases in Enugu State. Out of 200 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 195 were properly completed and returned, representing a 97.5% return rate. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. For both research questions, mean scores and standard deviations were calculated based on the four-point Likert scale. A decision rule was established: mean scores of 2.50 and above indicated positive perception or agreement with the stated influence, while scores below 2.50 indicated negative perception or disagreement. Results are presented in tables for clarity.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the perceived influence of social media on intelligence gathering among security agencies in Enugu State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of Perceived Influence of Social Media on Intelligence Gathering Among Security Agencies in Enugu State

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Social media platforms provide real-time information that aids intelligence gathering operations.	3.18	0.87	Agree
2	Monitoring social media helps our agency identify potential security threats in Enugu State.	3.24	0.82	Agree
3	Social media enables us to gather intelligence on criminal activities and suspicious movements.	3.31	0.79	Agree
4	Information from social media platforms has improved our ability to prevent crimes.	3.05	0.91	Agree
5	Social media analytics tools help us track and analyze patterns of criminal behavior.	2.89	0.96	Agree
6	Public posts on social media provide valuable leads for security investigations.	3.27	0.84	Agree
7	Social media has enhanced our capability to gather intelligence about public sentiment and concerns.	3.15	0.88	Agree
8	Our agency uses social media to collect information about emerging security challenges.	3.09	0.89	Agree
9	Social media platforms help us identify locations of criminal activities through geolocation features.	2.97	0.94	Agree
10	Information gathered from social media has led to successful security operations.	3.12	0.86	Agree
11	Social media has reduced the time required to gather intelligence on security matters.	3.22	0.81	Agree
12	User-generated content on social media provides actionable intelligence for security operations.	3.08	0.90	Agree
Grand Mean		3.13	0.87	Agree

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation analysis of the perceived influence of social media on intelligence gathering among security agencies in Enugu State. The mean values of items 1 through 12, which are 3.18, 3.24, 3.31, 3.05, 2.89, 3.27, 3.15, 3.09, 2.97, 3.12, 3.22, and 3.08 respectively, are all above the 2.50 benchmark for acceptance. Specifically, security personnel perceive that social media platforms provide real-time information that aids intelligence gathering operations, help identify potential security threats in Enugu State, enable gathering of intelligence on criminal activities and suspicious movements, improve the ability to prevent crimes, facilitate tracking and analysis of patterns of criminal behavior

through analytics tools, provide valuable leads for security investigations through public posts, enhance capability to gather intelligence about public sentiment and concerns, help collect information about emerging security challenges, assist in identifying locations of criminal activities through geolocation features, lead to successful security operations, reduce the time required to gather intelligence on security matters, and provide actionable intelligence through user-generated content. The grand mean of 3.13, which is substantially above the benchmark of 2.50, indicates that security agencies in Enugu State generally perceive social media as having a positive and significant influence on intelligence gathering operations.



Research Question 2: What is the perceived influence of social media on information sharing among security agencies in Enugu State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis of Perceived Influence of Social Media on Information Sharing Among Security Agencies in Enugu State

S/N	Item Statements	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Social media facilitates quick sharing of security information among different security agencies.	3.26	0.83	Agree
2	Our agency uses social media platforms to share crime alerts with other security agencies.	3.14	0.89	Agree
3	Social media has improved coordination between our agency and other security organizations.	3.19	0.85	Agree
4	Information sharing through social media has enhanced inter-agency collaboration in Enugu State.	3.11	0.88	Agree
5	Social media enables simultaneous dissemination of security information to multiple agencies.	3.29	0.80	Agree
6	Encrypted messaging applications on social media ensure secure information sharing among agencies.	2.87	0.98	Agree
7	Social media platforms have reduced delays in sharing critical security information.	3.23	0.84	Agree
8	Our agency uses social media to share situational reports with partner security organizations.	3.05	0.92	Agree
9	Social media has made it easier to share visual evidence (photos/videos) with other agencies.	3.34	0.77	Agree
10	Information sharing via social media has improved our response time to security incidents.	3.17	0.86	Agree
11	Social media enhances information sharing between security agencies and the public.	3.08	0.90	Agree
12	Our agency benefits from security information shared by other agencies through social media.	3.21	0.82	Agree
13	Social media has created a more connected network of security agencies in Enugu State.	3.15	0.87	Agree
Grand Mean		3.16	0.86	Agree

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation analysis of the perceived influence of social media on information sharing among security agencies in Enugu State. The mean values of items 1 through 13, which are 3.26, 3.14, 3.19, 3.11, 3.29, 2.87, 3.23, 3.05, 3.34, 3.17, 3.08, 3.21, and 3.15 respectively, are all above the 2.50 benchmark for acceptance. Specifically, security personnel perceive that social media facilitates quick sharing of security information among different security agencies, is used to share crime alerts with other security agencies, has improved coordination between their agency and other security organizations, has enhanced inter-agency collaboration in Enugu State, enables simultaneous dissemination of security information to multiple

agencies, ensures secure information sharing through encrypted messaging applications, has reduced delays in sharing critical security information, is used to share situational reports with partner security organizations, has made it easier to share visual evidence such as photos and videos with other agencies, has improved response time to security incidents, enhances information sharing between security agencies and the public, provides benefits through information shared by other agencies, and has created a more connected network of security agencies in Enugu State. The grand mean of 3.16, which is substantially above the benchmark of 2.50, indicates that security agencies in Enugu State generally perceive social media as having a positive

and significant influence on information sharing operations.

Discussion

The findings revealed that security personnel in Enugu State hold positive perceptions regarding social media's influence on intelligence gathering operations and view these platforms favorably as tools for modern security operations. Respondents expressed strong agreement that social media enables them to gather intelligence on criminal activities and suspicious movements, with this item receiving the highest agreement among all intelligence gathering dimensions. They perceive social media platforms as providing real-time information that aids intelligence operations, helping to identify potential security threats in Enugu State. Security personnel also believe that monitoring social media improves their ability to prevent crimes and that information from these platforms has led to successful security operations. This positive perception suggests a readiness among security agencies to embrace technology-based intelligence solutions despite infrastructural and resource constraints. The finding indicates that security personnel recognize the potential benefits of social media technologies and are willing to integrate them into their intelligence gathering efforts.

Furthermore, security personnel perceive social media as reducing the time required to gather intelligence on security matters, which is particularly significant given the operational challenges that characterize security work in Nigerian states. They believe that public posts on social media provide valuable leads for security investigations and that social media has enhanced their capability to gather intelligence about public sentiment and concerns. The perception that user-generated content provides actionable intelligence demonstrates that security personnel associate social media monitoring with operational effectiveness and improved security outcomes. Security personnel also indicated that their agencies use social media to collect information about emerging security challenges and that geolocation features help identify locations of criminal activities. This collective positive perception creates a favorable environment for the adoption and scaling of social media intelligence interventions in Nigerian security operations. The favorable disposition toward social media for intelligence gathering suggests that security personnel are not resistant to technological innovations but rather view

them as valuable tools that can address intelligence gaps created by inadequate traditional surveillance infrastructure in their operational areas.

In alignment, Fortin et al. (2023) reported that law enforcement agencies internationally demonstrated favorable attitudes toward social media technologies when integrated into criminal intelligence and investigation activities, emphasizing that social media has become indispensable for gathering investigative leads. Similarly, the U.S. Congressional Research Service (2022) found that 70% of American law enforcement agencies use social media for intelligence gathering in investigations, expressing optimism about its potential to enhance security operations. Kwamboka (2024) also noted growing recognition among African security agencies of social media's potential for crime reporting and intelligence gathering, though implementation remains limited.

However, in contrast, the Brennan Center for Justice (2024) reported that there is little evidence social media monitoring advances security objectives, with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's pilot programs showing mixed results regarding their helpfulness in identifying threats. This divergence may be attributed to varying levels of analytical sophistication and infrastructure available to different security agencies, with basic social media access providing immediate benefits while advanced analytical applications require substantial technical capacity. Privacy International (2024) also raised concerns about social media intelligence effectiveness, noting challenges with information verification, misinformation proliferation, and the risk of pursuing false leads generated through unverified social media content. The difference between overwhelmingly positive perceptions in this study and more cautious assessments in some international literature may reflect that Nigerian security personnel are comparing social media against less effective traditional methods rather than against sophisticated intelligence systems available in developed countries.

The findings revealed that security personnel in Enugu State hold positive perceptions regarding social media's influence on information sharing among security agencies and view these platforms favorably as tools for inter-agency collaboration. Respondents expressed strongest agreement that social media has made it easier to share visual evidence such as photos and videos with other agencies, with this item receiving the highest agreement among all information



sharing dimensions. They perceive social media as enabling simultaneous dissemination of security information to multiple agencies and facilitating quick sharing of security information among different agencies. Security personnel also believe that social media has reduced delays in sharing critical security information and that their agencies use these platforms to share crime alerts and situational reports with partner organizations. This positive perception suggests recognition among security agencies of social media's potential to overcome traditional barriers to inter-agency collaboration. The finding indicates that security personnel view social media as addressing long-standing coordination challenges in Nigerian security operations.

Furthermore, security personnel perceive social media as improving coordination between their agency and other security organizations and enhancing inter-agency collaboration in Enugu State. They believe that information sharing via social media has improved response time to security incidents and that social media has created a more connected network of security agencies in the state. Security personnel also indicated that their agencies benefit from security information shared by other agencies through social media platforms and that these platforms enhance information sharing between security agencies and the public. The willingness of respondents to acknowledge benefits from information received from other agencies indicates not only recognition of social media's communication value but also acceptance of reciprocal information exchange principles. This collective positive perception creates a favorable environment for developing more formalized inter-agency collaboration mechanisms using social media technologies. The favorable disposition toward social media for information sharing suggests that security personnel view these platforms as valuable tools that can address coordination gaps created by inadequate traditional communication infrastructure and historical inter-agency rivalry.

In alignment, the U.S. Congressional Research Service (2022) reported that 91% of law enforcement agencies use social media to notify communities of public safety concerns and 76% use it to solicit crime tips, demonstrating widespread acceptance of social media for security communication. The study noted that social media platforms facilitate rapid information exchange that enhances inter-agency coordination. Long et al. (2023) emphasized that Social Network

Theory supports the use of digital platforms for improving information flow among security organizations, leading to improved investigative effectiveness. The OSINT Industries (2024) report highlighted that real-time information sharing through social media proved crucial in several international security operations, including coordinated responses to the 2017 Manchester attack investigation.

The finding that visual evidence sharing received strongest agreement aligns with research by the Global Justice Information Sharing Initiative (2013), which noted that multimedia content on social media provides immediate context that text-based reports cannot match, making visual evidence particularly valuable for rapid inter-agency communication. Similarly, Trottier (2015) found that law enforcement agencies increasingly rely on visual social media content for coordination because images and videos reduce interpretation ambiguity common in text-based intelligence reports.

However, in contrast, the UK Government Report (2024) specifically identified sparse collaboration between Nigerian security agencies regarding data sharing as a major impediment to addressing insecurity, noting that technology experts emphasize lack of synergy among agencies. This suggests that despite positive perceptions, significant barriers to effective information sharing may persist in practice. Obasi (2022) also documented that institutional rivalry and territorial behavior among Nigerian security agencies continue to hinder collaboration, indicating that technological solutions alone may not overcome deeply embedded organizational culture issues. Privacy International (2024) raised concerns about social media information sharing, noting that rushed information exchange without proper verification protocols can lead to operational failures and human rights violations.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concluded that security personnel recognize social media as valuable for enhancing intelligence gathering capabilities and facilitating inter-agency information sharing. However, these positive perceptions exist alongside acknowledged gaps in advanced analytical capabilities and security infrastructure. The findings suggest that Nigerian security agencies are in early stages of social media intelligence adoption, successfully leveraging basic applications while facing challenges in



implementing sophisticated analytical tools. These results provide a foundation for developing policies, training programs, and infrastructure investments to maximize social media's contribution to security operations while addressing identified vulnerabilities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommended that:

1. Security agencies should develop comprehensive policies governing social media use for intelligence and information sharing, addressing ethical guidelines, privacy protections, verification protocols, inter-agency coordination procedures, and secure information handling. These policies must balance operational effectiveness with civil liberties protection and should be developed collaboratively across agencies to ensure consistency and facilitate cooperation.
2. Government should prioritize acquisition of sophisticated social media analytics software capable of pattern recognition, sentiment analysis, and network mapping, alongside secure encrypted communication platforms for sensitive information sharing. This investment should include establishing dedicated social media intelligence units staffed with trained specialists and developing inter-agency platforms for secure, real-time collaboration.
3. Mandatory training should be institutionalized for all security personnel involved in intelligence operations, covering technical skills in social media platforms and analytical tools, information verification and misinformation identification, legal and ethical considerations, open-source intelligence techniques, inter-agency collaboration protocols, and operational security maintenance. Advanced specialized training should be provided for designated unit leaders, with regular updates reflecting technological advances and evolving best practices.

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