

Effects of social media on the conduct of military operations in the nigerian arm...

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Introduction

Over the years, man has evolved different means to communicate with his environment. Early forms of communication included making sounds, use of smoke, drawing, painting and symbols. Primitive hand-delivery of messages, town criers, drums, runners and use of beasts of burden replaced earlier forms of communication. Technological advances piloted other forms of media, which include radio, television and newspapers. Today, the evolution of Internet Communication Technology (ICT) has made the Social Media (SM) one of the most effective means of instantaneous communication. Its strength is the ability of the user to get feedback from the other person as opposed to earlier forms of media, which went only one-way. About 2.62 billion of the 7.1 billion people in the world have access to SM. The SM platforms play a fundamental role in society as billions of people share information of any kind and content.

The SM is a web-based service that allows individuals to construct a profile within a bounded system. It includes all forms of media technologies that offer interactive sharing of information, videos, pictures, text and comments between user on a group or network. The paradigm shift from conventional media to SM cuts across all occupations including various militaries and their conduct of operations. Military operations include all activities conducted by its personnel in peace and war to neutralize threats against the Nation. Personnel of the Nigerian Army (NA) are not foreign to the use of SM as it serves as a means of communication and leisure. The NA operations are affected positively and negatively by personnel use of SM purposes. Some

positive uses of SM include media operations, dissemination of information, and communication with friends and family. The negative implication of social media is adversaries attempt to harness SM platforms of personnel for acquisition of essential elements of information. Others are psychological operations (PSYOPS) and propaganda. The misuse of SM in the NA portends grave danger not only in operations but also to personnel and their families. The consequence of the indiscriminate use of SM by troops is a concern that needs to be addressed. Though measures were initiated to mitigate misuse of SM, only a few successes have been recorded. It is against this backdrop that this paper to proffer solutions to the effects of SM on the conduct of military operations.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest ways of mitigating the negative effects of social media on the conduct of military operations in the NA. The paper will discuss an overview of SM, effects of indiscriminate use of SM and the way forward. It is assumed that the reader has fair knowledge of SM platforms. The paper will be limited to personnel use of SM in Op LAFIYA DOLE from 2016 to date. AIM5. The aim of this paper is to discuss the effects of SM on the conduct of military operations in the NA with a view to making recommendations.

Overview of social media

Rapid technological advancements made in the 20th Century gave rise to the creation of SM with the Internet as an enabler. The first recognizable social media site, Six Degrees, was created in 1997. It enabled uploading of profiles and making friends with other users. In 1999, the first blogging site

was launched, creating a SM sensation that is still popular today. During this period, the Nigerian telecommunication sector was still developing. Only cellular and satellite phones existed with about 425, 000 fixed landlines. The defunct Nigeria Telecommunication (NITEL) was one of the leading suppliers of Internet through radio and optic fibres. Individuals would have to connect internet cables directly to their computers to gain access. There were minimal threats to security emanating from SM as internet and computer devices were not available to all personnel of the NA. There was therefore no need for military concern on SM usage.

After the invention of blogging, SM platforms gained popularity. Sites like My Space and LinkedIn gained prominence in the early 2000s while others like Photobucket and Flickr facilitated online photo sharing. YouTube launched in 2005, creating a new way for people to communicate and share videos across great distances. By 2006, Facebook and Twitter became available to users throughout the world. These sites remain some of the most popular SM platforms on the Internet. Today, there is a tremendous variety of social networking sites, and many of them could be linked to allow comments from one site to another. This creates an environment where users could reach a large audience without sacrificing the intimacy of person-to-person communication. In the Nigerian setting, the Blogging revolution was followed by the Global Services Mobile (GSM) proliferation where mobile phones became commonplace. The estimated total amount of mobile phone users today is over 150 million.

The proliferation of sophisticated GSM phones has changed the nature of SM platforms. Today, every personnel has access to smart phone and tablet technology at affordable prices, backed by cheap data tariffs from mobile operators. This enables effortless utilization of voice, video, data and text, all on one device. Given the abrupt rise in mobile computing, SM platforms exist on almost any mobile phone have continued to soar in subscription. The total number of SM subscribers in Nigeria is estimated at over 84. 3 million. Some of the most subscribed platforms include Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Intsagram. The subscription of NA personnel to SM platforms exposes them to various forms of attack, especially as adversaries attempt to undermine the military operations. The SM is also utilized to disseminate service correspondences, orders and directives amongst others. This brought to the fore the need to regulate personnel use of SM especially for official purposes.

The NA in its bid to regulate the use of SM for official purposes necessitated the creation of the Nigerian Army Wireless Exchange Network (NAWANI). This was part of the Ministry of Defence implementation of the Integrated Strategic Information and Communications Systems aimed at integrating the Networks of the Services. The NAWANI largely failed to meet its objectives as services correspondences were still transmitted over personal and official SM platforms. This was attributed to funding and inadequate ICT infrastructure.

Though personnel have the right of freedom of speech, it was necessary to checkmate indiscriminate use of SM. In 2017, the Defence Headquarters (DHQ) published a policy for the use of SM by members of the Armed Forces. It is opined that the implementation of the document and monitoring of

compliance is inadequate. Some pertinent issues that need clarification include the lack of a monitoring body, unclear directives and punishment for offenders amongst others.