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Social Media Reportage of Unknown Gunmen Activities and its Influence on Security Challenges

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Abstract: The growing influence of social media across the globe and Nigeria, in particular, is on the increase, and subscriptions to various social media platforms are phenomenally high. Due to the growing influence of social media in Nigeria, many resort to this media of communication to keep abreast of daily happenings across the country. Recently, the South-East region of the country is faced with serious security challenges, often attributed to the activities of unknown gunmen who raid and destroy public infrastructures across the region. This paper employed Technological Determinism theory and agenda-setting theory. Survey research method was used to obtain the primary data. It found that the respondents are exposed to social media reports on activities of the unknown gunmen. Also, the respondents are scared about the activities of unknown gunmen and social media did not contribute to the spike in activities of unknown gunmen in the region. The study also found that Facebook's social media platform reported the activities of unknown gunmen the most. The paper recommends among others that the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should enlighten the people on the need to use social media to promote unity and condemn crime in society. Also, Security Agencies should effectively use social media platforms to create security awareness and consciousness among the people.

Keywords: Social Media, Activities, Influence, Challenges and Security.

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INTRODUCTION

Social Media users across the Globe and Nigeria are on the increase as people adopt the platform for communication, information sharing, and dissemination. The coming of information and Communication Technology has improved over the years making the use of social media user-friendly. The Advent of new technologies has turned the world into a global village and the speed at which information is disseminated far more surpasses that of print and electronic media (Nsude & Onwe, 2017). Social media platforms are internet-enabled which aids information to spread fast more than the traditional media which lacks attributes that social media have. Social media has, of course, redefined the way news is presented in the public and the way people communicate across the world and is a fascinating phenomenon that presents both challenges and opportunities to governments and law enforcement agencies across the spectrum (Beckley, 2018). In Nigeria, social media use is high as studies and statistics have shown that as of the third quarter of 2020, WhatsApp was the most popular social media in Nigeria, the platform was mentioned by 93 percent of internet users aged 16 to 64 years followed by Facebook and YouTube, used respectively by 86 percent and 82 percent of the individuals with access to the internet and in the year 2020, the number of social media users in Nigeria reached roughly 28 million (Varrella, 2021). Another data showing the use of social media was done by the Global State of Digital which states that 98.39 million internet users existed in Nigeria as of January 2018 and

out of these 98.39 million, 54% access the internet daily (Udodiong, 2019; & Okafor & Onyenekwe, 2020).

Every region in Nigeria is battling with insecurity and the level of destruction of lives and properties is alarming and regrettable. In the Northern region, the insurgency has destroyed the economic activities of the region while South West is grappling with the menace of Fulani herdsmen and South East is faced with the deadly activities of unknown gunmen. These challenges have made security pivotal that has culminated in the allocation of the country's resources to the protection of lives and properties (Ndubuisi-Okoro & Anigbuogu, 2019).

The activities of unknown gunmen in Southeast part of Nigeria have taken a dangerous dimension as the mode of operation still baffles the people of the region. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its security arm Eastern Security Network (ESN) has been accused of masterminding the heinous attacks in the region. The Governor of Abia State, Okezie Ikpeazu has urged the Federal government to urgently open talks with IPOB and others as a means of tackling insecurity in the country and the attacks are not far from terrorism meant to frighten the police and make them withdraw from their civic responsibility (Ukpong, 2021). Across the five states of the South East, the Nigeria Police presence is rarely seen or felt due to onslaught by the faceless group whose mission is to destroy the security of the region. These unknown gunmen are on a spree killing the police, military, and naval officers, attacking and burning police

stations and police checkpoints, attack Nigeria Correctional convoys and facilities among others (Chima, 2021). People of the South East are living in fear because of unknown gunmen, destroying the region known for hard work and entrepreneurship. Many believe that the barbaric activities of unknown gunmen started when the commander of Eastern Security Network (ESN) Ikonso was killed in a shootout with security operatives that invaded his residence in Imo State and the leader of IPOB, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu threatened both Federal Government and state government on the death of Ikonso. The exiled leader of IPOB, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu vowed to avenge the death of the ESN unit commander and promised all those who have a hand in his death will pay dearly for it (Njoku & Duruiheoma, 2021). Also, the pan Igbo socio-cultural group Ohanaeze in its statement said that the killing of Ikonso will worsen the already fragile peace we have in the country and South East in particular due to huge followers of IPOB who believe in the doctrine of the group. The apex body categorically described the killing of the top commander of Eastern Security Network Ikonso as a disaster and worsened the tense security situation in the Southeast (Uzodinma, 2021).

The activities of unknown gunmen are displayed by people on various social media platforms who share videos and pictures of how they operate. In some of the videos that are shared across social media platforms, people most times were seen hailing unknown gunmen for showing gallantry in public shows of power with security agencies. The unknown gunmen enjoy significant public support despite their reprehensible acts and the danger such acts pose to society (Chima, 2021).

In light of this, the study wants to ascertain social media reportage of activities of unknown gunmen and its influence on security challenges.

Statement of the Problem

Social media use in Nigeria is on the increase as people are subscribing to various platforms for information and communication. The activities of unknown gunmen in Southeast Nigeria have weakened the security of the region and the killing of security personnel and burning of police stations are affecting the region. Social media platforms are used to spread information about the activities of unknown gunmen which influence the security challenges currently in the Southeast. The social freedom of speech associated with SM makes it free for users to generate content at any time and post them online (Chukwuere & Onyebukwa, 2018).

Millions of Nigerians use various social media platforms and people share and upload information on them. The presence of Social Media in Nigeria sometimes threatens the peace and stability of Nigeria and gives rise to security challenges across the country (Chukwuere & Onyebukwa, 2018). Posts on social media platforms showcase the activities of unknown

gunmen in a positive light as people praise them on some of the viral videos. The unknown gunmen enjoy significant public support despite their reprehensible acts and the danger such acts pose to society (Chima, 2021).

Objectives of the Study

- To ascertain if respondents are exposed to social media reports on activities of unknown gunmen.
- To find the perception of respondents on the activities of unknown gunmen.
- To ascertain if social media have contributed to the spike in unknown gunmen attacks.
- To find social media platforms that has contributed to the activities of unknown gunmen.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Technological Determinism Theory

Technology Determinism theory is anchored on the concept that technology drives society and the events daily. The theory was propounded by Canadian scholar Marshal Luhan who predicted that advancement in media technology will turn the world into a global village. Technological Determinism theory portends that given the emergence of the internet and its adoption and relevance in mobilizing people for socio-cultural, economic, and political activities, there is bound to be an impact on the way people behave, interact and communicate (Ezebuenyi et al., 2020). The idea behind the theory is that technology is critical to the advancement of human communication and interaction. The amazing technological revolution, which McLuhan was so fascinated about, has not stood still, same goes for the people that handle the process and what they do (Oliver, 2011; & Okeke et al., 2016).

The activities of unknown gunmen are reported across social media platforms and people access them from anywhere they are. Most times, social media reports about unknown gunmen influence the way people seek and share information on social media platforms. The theory is relevant to the study because social media plays an important role in the manner and way unknown gunmen activities are reported.

Agenda Setting Theory

The tenet of the theory is that the media sets agenda for the public. Propounded by Maxwell Macomb and Donald Shaw in 1992 they believe that the media have the power to influence what people think and consider being important. Agenda setting is a theory of mass communication that describes how the mass media interacts with and affects the public it targets and the core of the theory is the notion that mass media forms the primary interface between the public and the world around them (Leetaru, 2008). Agenda setting theory states that when the media emphasizes an issue by frequently reporting it and also giving it prominence people use it to set the agenda of discussion. Also, the theory explains the power of the media to raise the bar of

importance on an issue, explain the influencing power of the media in the communication process, and understanding the diverse topics in the news.

This theory is relevant to this study because the activities of unknown gunmen on social media platforms have set agendas for discussion. The media have placed certain importance on the issue of unknown gunmen by frequent reporting of the issue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Platforms and Insecurity

The world has witnessed an increased use of social media platforms in communication, interaction, and a source of information. Social media are internet-enabled platforms that allow users to interact and communicate. Social media can be regarded as interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests, and other forms of expression through virtual communities and networks (Kietzmann & Kristopher, 2011; Obar & Wildman, 2015; & Okafor & Onyenekwe, 2020). With the rise in new media and digital technologies, interaction has been made easy because of innovations and transformations across social media platforms. Also, (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; & Okafor & Onyenekwe, 2020) sees social media as a group of internet-based applications that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content, and build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0.

Over the years, the growing importance of social media platforms cannot be over-emphasized. Social media have bridged the gap in communication as people can communicate with friends and family members anytime any day. The relevance of social media over the years has enabled users to share information and increase communication among people. (Bhagwat & Goutam, 2013; Okafor & Onyenekwe, 2020) pointed out the benefits of social media to include:

- Facilitate open communication, leading to enhanced information discovery and delivery.
- Target a broad audience, making it a useful and recruitment tool.
- Allow for creative expression in a new medium.
- Bring people with common interests together.
- Guarantee meeting places.
- Enable people to keep in touch with family, carry out professional networking, and stay informed about the world.

Social media platforms in Nigeria stand at 33 million in January 2021 and 104.4 million internet users (Kemp, 2021). There are many social media platforms across the globe but there are platforms that are common in Nigeria. Global Digital Yearbook, 2020; Uzuegbunam, 2020 said that the most used social media and social networking sites in Nigeria by order of dominance include: WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube,

Instagram, Facebook Messenger, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, Pinterest, Skype, TikTok, WeChat, Reddit, Viber, Tumblr and Slack.

Activities of unknown gunmen are on various social media platforms where people irrespective of where they are view, comment, and share such stories. The unknown gunmen enjoy significant public support despite their reprehensible acts and the danger such acts pose to society (Chima, 2021). In some of the viral videos, people were seen praising the activities of unknown gunmen who are destroying public properties and killing our security personnel. No doubt, social media have increased the level of awareness on activities of unknown gunmen considering the importance of the medium. Unlike traditional media, regulating social media is difficult and it leads to the spread of information that threatens peace and security. Social Media cannot be easily controlled or censored from the general public as a result of social freedom and a lack of cyberspace law (Nsudu & Onwe, 2017; & Chukwuere & Onyebukwa, 2018).

IPOB and ESN: An Overview

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a separatist group agitating for self-government for Igbo's who fought the civil war of 1967-1970. It is worthy of note that the Republic of Biafra was a secessionist state which existed during the period of the Civil War in South-Eastern Nigeria between the period of 30 May 1967 and 15 January 1970 which undoubtedly affected economic activities (Nafziger, 1972; & Chukwudi et al., 2019). In 2012, IPOB was formed by Mazi Nnamdi Kanu who felt that the leadership of the Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) has been compromised by the Government of Nigeria. IPOB aims to actualize self-government for the people of Southeast who they believe are not adequately represented at the Federal Government. The group which is under the leadership of Mazi Nnamdi Kanu and his deputy Uche Okafor-Mefor aims at creating an independent state for the people of the old Eastern Region through a referendum (Jacob et al., 2020). The driving motive of IPOB is the civil war that lasted from 30th May 1967 to 15th January 1970 which made the Eastern region secede to the Central Government. Before IPOB commenced its activities in 2012, the leader Mazi Nnamdi Kanu launched an online radio which helped in the dissemination of information about the activities of the secessionist group. With the growing insecurity across Southeastern states, IPOB felt that the government was not doing enough to secure the lives and properties of the people. Eastern Security Network was established in December 2020 to tackle the insecurity in the region by IPOB. According to Nzeagwu (2020) failure of Southeast governors to secure the lives and properties of the Igbo people led to the formation of the Eastern Security Network. In the Southeast region of the country, the armed herdsmen are killing people and destroying their farmlands across the states and farmers

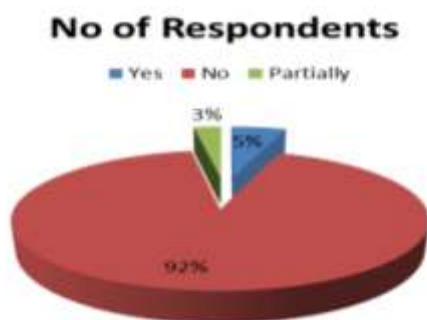
are afraid to do their farming. Although the government has promised to look into the matter and bring lasting solutions, the killing has continued unabated. Duerksen (2021) said that ESN seems more focused on mobilizing grievances against Fulani herders than advocating for autonomy in the region and ESN has declared that it will enforce a ban on grazing in the South East, stoking anti-Fulani sentiment. Currently, the reason behind the setting up of ESN is still facing the region

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the survey research method and the reason lies in the strength of survey research to allow the researchers to select from a sample of the entire population. (Asemah et al., 2012) defined a survey as an empirical study that a questionnaire or interviews to discover descriptive characteristics of a phenomenon. Also, it enabled the researchers, to deal with the characteristics of the chosen set of people whose opinions, behavior, and attitudes are essential for the collection of information required in the study. The Survey will enable the researchers to ascertain if respondents are exposed to social media reports on activities of unknown gunmen, find the perception of respondents on the activities of unknown gunmen, ascertain if social media have contributed to spike in unknown gunmen attacks, and find social media platforms that have contributed to the activities of unknown gunmen. The Population of the study was drawn from a group in Facebook named Igboist Facebook group created by Maria Ude Nwachi with group members of 205000 as of 8th June 2021. The sample size of 399 was drawn from the population using the Taro Yamani formula. Copy of the questionnaire was shared on the page Igboist Facebook and the questionnaire was distributed online using the google form. A total of 380 copies of the questionnaire were filled and submitted online. Data generated were analyzed using simple percentage tables and charts for easy understanding.

Table 1. Gender of Respondents

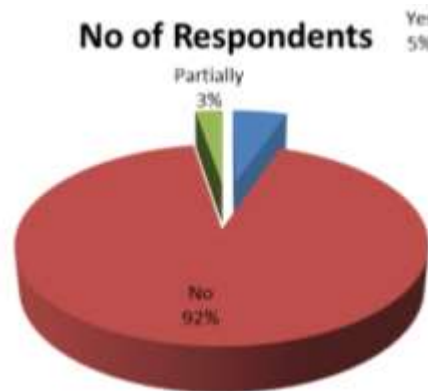
Gender	No of Respondents	Percentage
Male	120	32
Female	260	68
Total	380	100



Data from Table 1 indicates that female respondents formed majority the respondents with 68 percent. Followed by the male respondents with 32 percent.

Table 2. Age of Respondents

Classification	No of Respondents	Percentage
18-25	95	25
26-33	100	26
34-41	120	31
50 years and above	65	17
Total	380	100



From Table 2, respondents within the age range of 34-41 are the majority of the respondents with 31 percent. The age range of 26-33 with 26 percent. Also, respondents within the age range of 18-25 formed 25 percent. Finally, respondents within the age range of 50 years and above with 17 percent.

Table 3. Educational Qualification

Qualifications	No of Respondents	Percentage
SSCE	45	12
OND	30	8
HND	20	5
Bachelors	200	53
Masters	85	22
Doctorate	0	0
Total	380	100

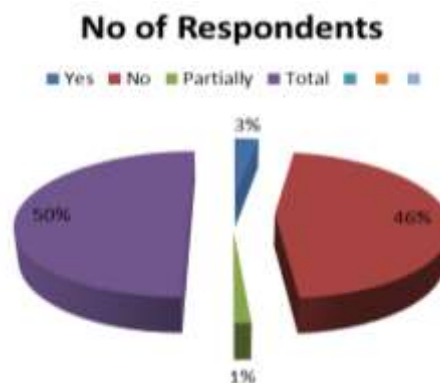


Table 3 shows that respondents with bachelor's degrees have the highest number with 53 percent. It was followed by respondents with a master's degree with 22 percent, then respondents with SSCE 12 percent, OND Degree with 8 percent, and HND with 5 percent.

Table 4. The social media App that respondents visit the most

Social media	No of Respondents	Percentage
Facebook	30	8
Twitter	150	39
WhatsApp	200	53
Total	380	100

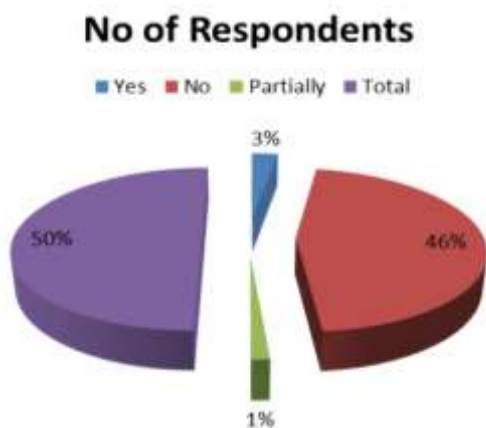


Table 5 indicates the social media app that respondents visit the most, WhatsApp social media app has 53 percent, followed by Twitter with 39 percent and Facebook with 8 percent.

Table 5. Frequency of Social Media use

Frequency	No of Respondents	Percentage
Sometimes	30	8
Often	150	39
Never	0	0
Always	200	53
Total	380	100

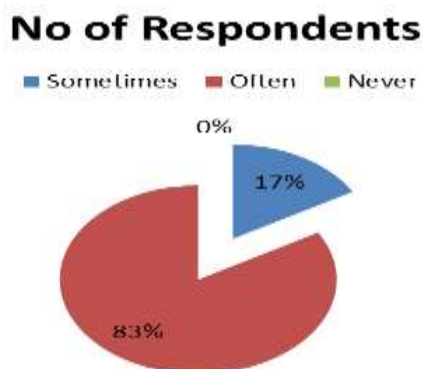
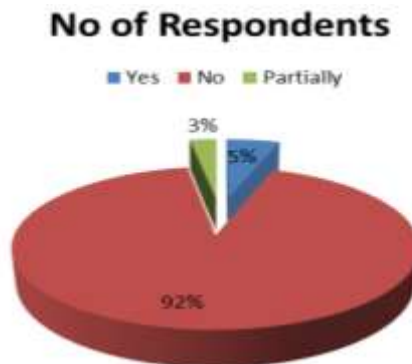


Table 6 shows the frequency of social media use, 53 respondents said that they always use social media, followed by 39 percent of the respondents that use

social media often. The respondents that use social media sometimes were 8 percent.

Table 6. If respondents know about the recent unknown gunmen attacks in South-East

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	380	100
No	0	0
Total	380	100



In Table 6, all the respondents said they know about the unknown gunmen attacks in South-East. It was represented with 100 percent.

Table 7. If respondents read stories on unknown gunmen on social media platforms

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	380	100
No	0	0
Total	380	100

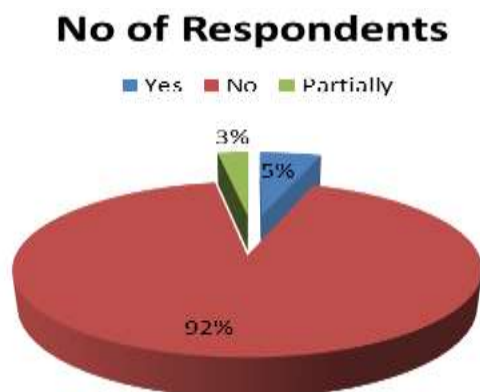


Table 7 indicates that all respondents read stories about unknown gunmen on social media platforms. It was represented with 100 percent.

Table 8. Respondents' reaction to social media stories on the attacks

Reaction	No of Respondents	Percentage
Indifferent	0	0
Scared	340	89
Angry	40	11
Excited	0	0
Total	380	100

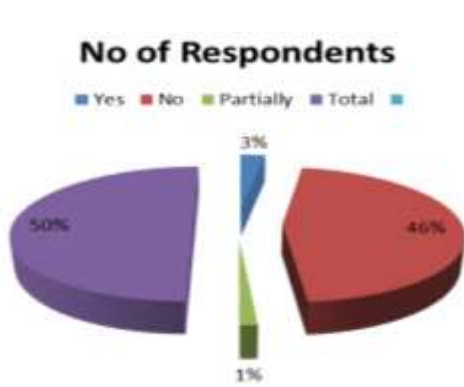


Table 8 indicates respondents' reaction to social media on attacks, 89 percent of respondents that social media stories on the attacks scared them, while 11 percent said that were angry with social media stories on the attacks. No respondents indicated that the stories made them indifferent and excited.

Table 9. If social media have increased the frequency of unknown gunmen attacks in South-East

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	50	13
No	320	84
Not Sure	10	3
Total	380	100

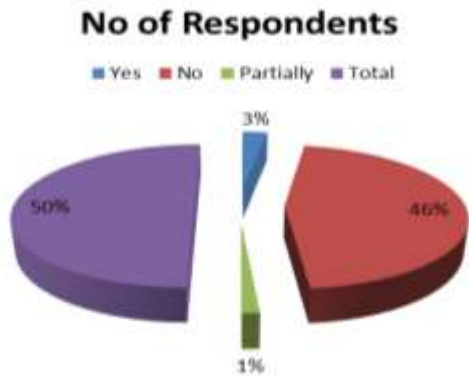


Table 9 show that 84 percent of respondents said that social media did not increase the frequency of unknown gunmen attacks in South-East. It was followed by 13 percent that affirmed that social media increased the frequency of unknown gunmen attacks. Then, 10 percent said that they are not sure if social media increased the frequency of social media attacks.

Table 10. If public admiration of unknown gunmen on social media increases the attacks

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	30	8
No	350	92
Total	380	100

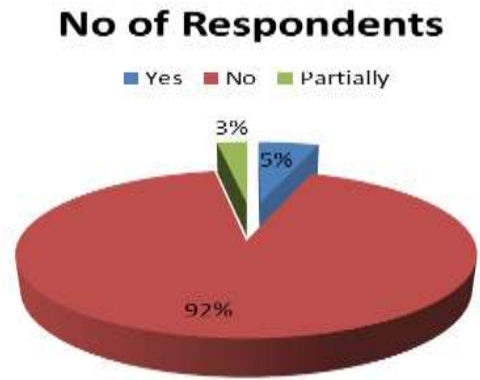


Table 10 indicates if public admiration of unknown gunmen on social media increases the attacks, 92 percent said public admiration on social media did not increase the attacks, while 8 percent said public admiration increased the attacks.

Table 11. Social Media platforms that reports the attack the most

Social media platform	No of Respondents	Percentage
WhatsApp	50	79
Facebook	300	13
Twitter	30	8
Total	380	100

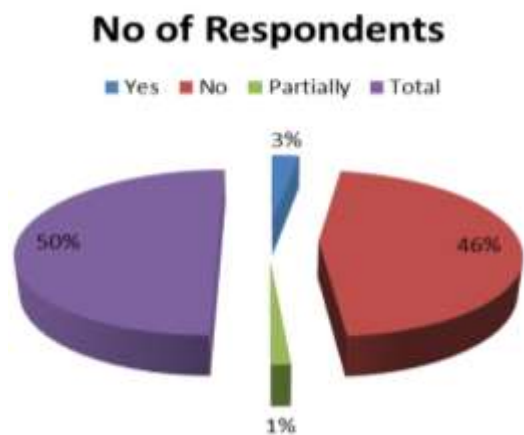


Table 11 shows the social media platforms that report the attack the most. WhatsApp came with 79 percent of the social media that reports the attack the most, followed by Facebook with 13 percent and Twitter with 8 percent.

Table 12. How respondents described the angle / tone of reportage

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Objective	250	66
Biased	130	34
Total	380	100

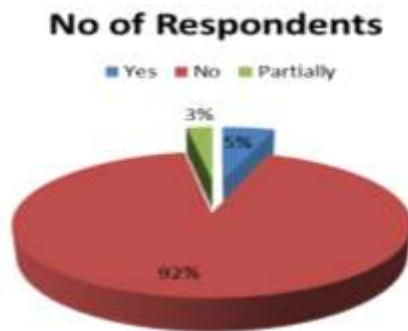


Table 12 indicates how respondents described the angle/tone of reportage. Sixty-six percent of the respondents believed the reportage to be objective while 34 percent of the respondents said it was biased.

Table 13. If social media should be regulated during conflicts

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	20	5
No	350	92
Partially	10	3
Total	380	100

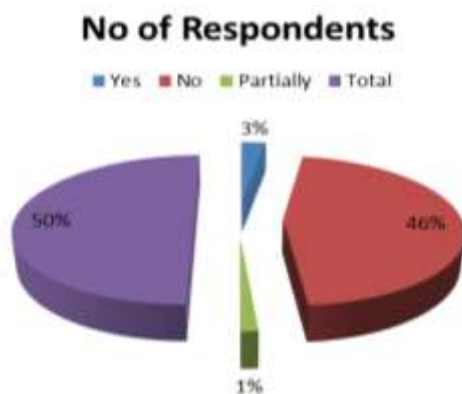


Table 13, 92 percent of the respondents said that social media should not be regulated during conflicts while 5 percent believe that social media should be regulated. Than 3 percent of the respondents said social media should be regulated partially.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the research questions posed, the following findings were made;

- The first research question, which sought to ascertain if respondents are exposed to social media reports on activities of unknown gunmen it found that respondents are exposed to social media reports on activities of unknown gunmen. The finding is an indication that the number of social media users is increasing daily and it supports what (Kemp, 2021) said ‘Social media platforms in Nigeria stands at 33 million in January 2021 and 104.4 million internet users.

- The second research question which sought to find the perception of respondents on the activities of unknown gunmen, the study found that respondents are scared and angry about the activities of unknown gunmen. It supports the position of (Ukpong, 2021) that the Federal government should urgently open talks with IPOB and others as a means of tackling insecurity in the country and the attacks are not far from terrorism meant to frighten the police and make them withdraw from their civic responsibility.
- Thirdly, the research sought to ascertain if social media have contributed to spike in unknown gunmen attack, it found that social media did not increase the spike or rate of attack by unknown gunmen. This confirms the position of (Bhagwat & Goutam, 2013; & Okafor & Onyenekwe, 2020) on the importance of social media that the social media enables people to keep in touch with family, carry out professional networking and stay informed about the world, and allows for creative expression in a new medium. This is an indication that social media have positive attributes that helps society in advancing and solving certain problems.

Finally, the research question that wants to ascertain social media platforms that have contributed to the activities of unknown gunmen, the study found that Facebook social media platform contributed more to the various report on the activities of unknown gunmen. This affirms (Global Digital Yearbook, 2020; & Uzuegbunam, 2020) that Facebook is among the most used social media and social networking sites in Nigeria by order of dominance.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, the researchers concluded that the respondents are exposed to social media reports about unknown gunmen. It revealed that all the respondents use social media platforms and this affirms the phenomenal growth of social media in Nigeria. Also the study shows that the respondents have read stories about the unknown gunmen on social media.

Furthermore, the respondents are scared and angry about the activities of unknown gunmen ravaging the South-East region of the country, and the majority of the respondents believed that social media did not increase the frequency of unknown gunmen attacks in the South East. The researchers found that public admiration of unknown gunmen on social media platforms did not increase the attacks.

The study also discovered that WhatsApp social media app reported the activities of unknown gunmen the most and the respondents believe that social media should not be regulated although many believed the angle of reportage on unknown gunmen to be objective.

Recommendations

From the data gathered, the researchers recommend the following:

- Security Agencies should effectively use social media platforms to create security awareness and consciousness among the people.
- The Government and Facebook Company should liaise on how to regulate posts that bothers security and security agencies.
- National Orientation Agency should enlighten the people on the need to use social media to promote unity and condemn crime in society.

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