



Influence of Social Media Security-Oriented Messages on Raising Security Consciousness of Residents in Awka, Anambra State

Josephine Oluchi Onwugbufor

Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Social Sciences, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State

Corresponding Author: Josephine Oluchi Onwugbufor

sarendratilman@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

In the contemporary digital era, social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools not only for communication but also for shaping public consciousness and behavior. This study investigates the influence of social media security-oriented messages on raising the security consciousness of residents in Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. In light of rising security concerns, particularly in urban and semi-urban centers, understanding how digital communication impacts citizens' security awareness and response behavior is critical. Social media messages often carry timely alerts, preventive tips, and user-generated content about crimes or suspicious activities. This study examines whether such content contributes to shaping a heightened sense of vigilance and proactive security behavior among residents. Grounded in the Social Cognitive Theory, the study adopts a quantitative research design using structured Likert-scale questionnaires administered to a sample of 300 residents of Awka. The research explores three core objectives: to assess the extent of residents' exposure to security-oriented messages on social media; to evaluate the influence of these messages on their personal security behavior; and to determine the perceived credibility and responsiveness to such messages. The study reviews empirical and theoretical literature, including communication, behavior change, and digital media theories, to establish a sound academic framework. Findings from this study are expected to offer valuable insights to policymakers, security agencies, and communication professionals on how social media can be strategically deployed as a security awareness mechanism. Furthermore, it contributes to academic discourse on digital media's role in public safety and behavior change, particularly within the Nigerian socio-cultural context.

INTRODUCTION

Security remains a critical concern in Nigeria, particularly in urban areas that have experienced persistent threats ranging from petty theft to organized criminal activities (Etumnu et al., 2025). The challenges of insecurity have been exacerbated by rapid urbanization, youth unemployment, and weak institutional frameworks for crime prevention (Akinola & Adeoye, 2020). At the same time, the rapid growth of digital technologies and widespread internet penetration have transformed the communication landscape, making social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, and Instagram important tools for information dissemination and public awareness campaigns (Adegbola & Gearhart, 2019).

Social media platforms have increasingly become instrumental in delivering real-time updates, safety tips, and alerts on suspicious activities. Governments, security agencies, and civil society organizations have recognized their strategic value in bridging information gaps, especially in contexts where traditional media lack immediacy and community-specific reach (Udeze & Anike, 2021; Ojebuyi & Fadipe, 2022). Beyond institutional actors, individuals and community networks also play a vital role by sharing firsthand reports and neighborhood watch updates, thereby fostering communal vigilance (Chiluwa & David, 2021). In this sense, social media security-oriented messages not only serve as tools for situational awareness but also encourage behavioral change by motivating residents to adopt security-conscious practices.

However, despite the increasing reliance on social media for security communication, questions remain regarding their actual influence on security consciousness. Do residents merely consume security-oriented messages passively, or do such communications lead to measurable behavioral changes such as heightened vigilance, adoption of safety routines, or collaboration with law enforcement? Moreover, factors such as message credibility, source reliability, and varying levels of digital literacy may determine the effectiveness of these messages (Udoka, 2020). This study, therefore, examines the role of social media in raising security consciousness among residents of Awka, Anambra State. By assessing exposure, perception, and behavioral responses to security-oriented messages, the research contributes to understanding how digital platforms shape public security engagement in a Nigerian urban context. Ultimately, it aims to generate evidence-based insights on how social media can be more effectively harnessed to promote community safety and civic responsibility in the face of rising insecurity.

Problem Statement

The persistent insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in urban centers like Awka, has necessitated more innovative communication approaches to strengthen public safety awareness and preventive behavior. Conventional media outlets often fail to provide timely, localized, and interactive updates, leaving an information vacuum that social media increasingly fills (Okoro & Nwafor, 2022). Through platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and X, users exchange real-time alerts, security advisories, and firsthand reports of ongoing incidents. Despite the ubiquity and speed of these communications, there is

insufficient empirical understanding of their actual influence on the security consciousness and behavior of residents.

In Awka, security challenges such as burglary, kidnapping, and violent demonstrations highlight the urgent need for effective risk communication strategies. While anecdotal evidence suggests that social media has become a crucial medium for urban residents to remain informed about security threats, it remains unclear whether these digital communications translate into heightened vigilance, adoption of safety routines, or improved cooperation with security agencies (Akinola & Adeoye, 2020). Furthermore, the circulation of misinformation, disinformation, and content from unverified sources poses significant challenges, as it may erode trust and diminish the potential positive impact of security-oriented messages (Ojebuyi & Fadipe, 2022).

This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by critically examining whether and how social media security-oriented messages influence the security consciousness of residents in Awka. By interrogating the extent to which such messages are internalized and acted upon, the research addresses an underexplored dimension of security communication scholarship in Nigeria. Understanding this dynamic is essential for designing more effective public engagement frameworks and digital strategies to strengthen community security and resilience in the digital era.

Objectives of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the influence of social media security-oriented messages on the security consciousness of residents in Awka, Anambra State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Assess the level of exposure of Awka residents to security-oriented messages on social media platforms.
2. Evaluate the perceived credibility of security-oriented messages on social media and how it affects residents' responsiveness and engagement with the content.
3. Examine the extent to which social media security-oriented messages influence the personal security behavior and awareness of residents' responsiveness and engagement with such content.

Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of the study, the following research questions are posed:

1. What is the level of exposure of residents in Awka to security-oriented messages disseminated through social media platforms?
2. How does the perceived credibility of social media security-oriented messages affect residents' responsiveness and engagement with the content?
3. How do social media security-oriented messages influence the security awareness and behavior of residents in Awka?

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on evaluating the influence of social media security-oriented messages on raising security consciousness among residents of Awka, the capital city of Anambra State, Nigeria. Geographically, the research is

limited to urban and peri-urban communities within Awka, which has become increasingly susceptible to varying degrees of insecurity, including theft, armed robbery, cult-related violence, and kidnapping.

By narrowing the study to Awka and focusing on social media as a communication tool, this research provides a concentrated lens through which to understand digital influence on urban security awareness within a Nigerian context.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant on multiple fronts, contributing to academic literature, public policy, and practical communication strategies related to security awareness. In the context of rising insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in urban centers like Awka, understanding how social media can be leveraged as a tool for enhancing public safety is both timely and essential.

From an academic perspective, the study fills an important gap in the interdisciplinary fields of media studies, security communication, and behavioral science. While a growing body of research exists on the role of social media in political mobilization and crisis communication, fewer empirical studies have focused on its specific influence on public security consciousness at the community level (Edewor & Osarumwense, 2021). By investigating the dynamics of message exposure, credibility perception, and behavioral outcomes, the study advances theoretical knowledge on how digital communication fosters or impedes civic action in response to security threats. For communication practitioners, particularly those in public relations, crisis communication, and digital media management, the study offers insights into how security-oriented messages can be designed, structured, and disseminated for maximum public impact. Understanding factors such as message credibility and user trust will help content creators craft more effective and engaging campaigns that encourage proactive security behavior rather than passive consumption.

The findings will also be valuable to policymakers, security agencies, and non-governmental organizations working in the area of public safety. With the proliferation of misinformation and sensationalist content on social media, there is a pressing need for evidence-based strategies to counteract harmful narratives while promoting accurate, actionable security information. This study provides empirical evidence that can inform training programs for digital communication officers within security institutions, as well as community outreach initiatives aimed at improving digital literacy and responsible information sharing. At the grassroots level, the study benefits ordinary residents by promoting awareness of the importance of engaging with credible and timely security content. It emphasizes the role of individual responsibility in ensuring communal safety and offers a framework for understanding how digital behavior translates into real-world safety practices. Overall, the study's outcomes have the potential to influence digital policy, strengthen public engagement, and promote a culture of security consciousness grounded in informed digital communication practices.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) by Albert Bandura (1986) as its theoretical framework. SCT is particularly appropriate for examining the influence of social media security-oriented messages on the behavior and consciousness of individuals within a social setting. The theory posits that human behavior is shaped through a triadic reciprocal interaction of personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences. It emphasizes observational learning, where individuals model behavior after others, especially when they perceive the modeled behavior as rewarding or protective. In the context of this research, social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter serve as the environmental medium through which residents in Awka encounter various forms of security-oriented messages ranging from crime alerts to preventive safety tips. These messages, whether shared by peers, official agencies, or local influencers, act as modeled behaviors. Users are not passive recipients; instead, they interpret, internalize, and may imitate actions observed in digital spaces, such as locking doors earlier, avoiding certain roads, or participating in community watch groups.

Moreover, SCT's emphasis on self-efficacy is vital to understanding residents' willingness to act on the security information they consume. If individuals believe they are capable of making a difference, such as by reporting suspicious activity or adjusting routines, they are more likely to engage with the content and adopt protective behaviors. By applying SCT, this study investigates how social learning occurs through digital media and how cognitive evaluations such as perceived credibility and relevance of messages affect behavioral outcomes. This framework offers a lens to analyze how exposure to and interaction with social media security content potentially translate into real-world vigilance, preparedness, and safety practices among residents in Awka.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Concepts

1. Social Media

Social media, as discussed, is part of new technologies that have the capacity to mobilise people for a particular cause. The use of social networks is increasingly central to everyday life in that these platforms have proven to be inevitable as they are tools through which people interact with each other (Obayi et al., 2024).

Social media refers to web-based platforms and applications that enable users to create, share, and interact with content and other users in real time (Matyek et al., 2022). Examples include Facebook, Twitter (now X), WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram. These platforms are increasingly used beyond social interaction for civic engagement, public service announcements, and emergency communication. In Nigeria, social media has become a vital tool for citizens to access and disseminate information due to limited trust in traditional media and frequent gaps in state-led communication (Ojebuyi&Salawu, 2020).

2. Security-Oriented Messages

Security-oriented messages refer to communications that inform, warn, or guide individuals about safety threats and preventive measures. These may include crime alerts, information on suspicious persons or activities, roadblock announcements, protest warnings, or general advice on personal security. Such messages are often issued by official sources (e.g., police, government agencies), community groups, or concerned individuals. On social media, their reach and immediacy can potentially improve public preparedness and responsiveness to threats (Adesina & Adesanya, 2017).

The proliferation of security-related posts on social media platforms underlines the need for in-depth research into their nature, impact, and usefulness in establishing community safety practices. From notifications concerning criminal activity to conversations on methods for strengthening public safety, social media acts as a medium for information distribution and collective involvement in security discourse. Understanding the dynamics of security-related discourse on social media within the context of Imo State is crucial for stakeholders, including government agencies, law enforcement entities, and community organizations, to create informed solutions (Etumnu et al., 2025).

3. Security Consciousness

Security consciousness refers to the awareness and vigilance individuals or groups display toward potential threats to personal and collective safety. It encompasses understanding risks and engaging in preventive or responsive actions such as avoiding unsafe areas and reporting suspicious behavior (Ugwu & Eme, 2022; Idigo, 2022). In contemporary society, social media platforms enhance this awareness by disseminating real-time, community-based security updates, promoting proactive safety behaviors (Idigo & Nwankwo, 2025; Idigo & Osegbue, 2025; Osuchukwu et al., 2025). Thus, heightened security consciousness contributes significantly to public safety and resilience against emerging threats.

4. Digital Communication Behavior

Digital communication behavior refers to the way individuals interact with content shared through digital platforms, encompassing how they consume, interpret, share, or respond to such messages. This behavior is shaped by factors such as media literacy, trust in sources, perceived credibility, emotional response, and peer influence (Anyanwu et al., 2024). In the context of security, users may either become passive recipients of information or active participants in community surveillance and response systems.

5. Message Credibility and Source Trustworthiness

The effectiveness of security messages largely depends on the perceived credibility of the source and the trustworthiness of the information conveyed. According to Egede et al. (2025), credible sources significantly influence how individuals interpret risks and decide on protective actions. When information lacks credibility or contains exaggerations, it can generate unnecessary fear and confusion, while verified and reliable alerts encourage calm and informed responses (Kalu et al., 2025). Furthermore, social media plays a dual role in this

context; it can effectively disseminate timely security information or amplify misinformation that undermines public confidence (Okonkwo & Idigo, 2025; Emegha et al, 2025). Therefore, understanding the intersection between social media communication, message credibility, and security consciousness is crucial in enhancing community safety and fostering proactive responses to threats.

Review of Empirical Studies

Adebayo and Ogunlade (2021) conducted a comprehensive study on the role of social media in enhancing public security awareness among residents of Lagos, Nigeria. The study was driven by concerns over rising insecurity in Nigeria's commercial capital and aimed to understand the extent to which citizens rely on social media for safety-related information. Using a survey methodology, the researchers collected data from 400 respondents selected through stratified random sampling across various districts of Lagos. The study utilized a structured questionnaire to gather responses on exposure to security-oriented messages, perceived credibility of such messages, and reported behavior changes. The findings revealed that a significant majority (78%) of respondents had received security-related updates via social media platforms, primarily WhatsApp and Twitter. These updates included information on road closures due to protests, warnings about robbery hotspots, and alerts regarding criminal activities in real-time. Furthermore, 64% of the participants admitted to modifying their daily routines based on information received through social media. For instance, avoiding certain areas at night or increasing their use of private transportation based on crime alerts. This study is particularly relevant to the Awka context, as it underscores how urban residents increasingly depend on informal digital networks for their security needs. It supports the premise that social media has the potential to significantly shape security consciousness, provided the messages are credible and well-targeted. This study is similar in the area of methodology, however differs in area scope, and this study under review focused only on WhatsApp and Twitter, while the present study looks at more social media platforms other than WhatsApp and Twitter.

However, Nwokedi and Uzochukwu (2020) explored the effect of digital media platforms on awareness and engagement with community policing initiatives in southeastern Nigeria, focusing specifically on Enugu and Anambra States. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study surveyed 350 participants and conducted interviews with community leaders and police officers. The researchers sought to understand how residents perceived security messages disseminated via Facebook, WhatsApp, and SMS broadcast groups. Findings revealed that over 70% of respondents had received community policing-related updates on social media, including patrol schedules, hotlines for emergency contact, and notices about town hall meetings. The majority (66%) believed these updates increased their sense of inclusion in local security matters. Importantly, participants indicated that their willingness to report crimes improved due to the informal and accessible nature of social media messaging, in contrast to the bureaucratic hurdles faced in conventional channels. The relevance to the present study lies in its demonstration that

community engagement and responsiveness are significantly shaped by digital communication tools. It also affirms the importance of trust and source credibility—key constructs being explored in the context of Awka residents. This study differs in methodology as it employed a mixed method in addressing the research concern, while the current study used a survey to provide answers to the problem.

Similarly, Bashir and Sulaiman (2021) explored how Nigerian youth engage with security-related discourse on Twitter, with particular focus on the insurgency and banditry in northern states such as Kaduna, Zamfara, and Borno. The study used content analysis of 2,000 tweets and conducted an online survey of 500 Twitter users aged 18–35. The study revealed that youth often used Twitter hashtags such as #SecureNorth and #EndBanditry to express frustration, mobilize support, and share updates on violence and government responses. About 61% of respondents stated that Twitter was their main source of security information, and 73% claimed that the tweets influenced how and where they moved, especially during periods of conflict. The researchers noted that youth displayed a high level of agency in using Twitter not only as consumers of security news but also as producers of security narratives. However, misinformation and unverified reports were again cited as challenges, often leading to confusion and contradictory interpretations of events. The study's relevance to the current research lies in its emphasis on user-generated content, trust in peer communication, and behavioral outcomes. In Awka, a similar dynamic may exist, particularly among young social media users who shape and respond to local security discourses. It suggests that platforms like Twitter can function as spaces of civic participation and informal public safety advocacy. This study differs in methodology as it employed content analysis in addressing the research concern, while the current study used a survey to provide answers to the problem. Again, the area and thematic scope differ from the present study.

In the same vein, Fagbohun and Oyedele (2022) conducted a study to analyze how residents of Ibadan responded to security-related WhatsApp broadcasts. With 320 respondents surveyed across three local government areas, the study assessed message reception, verification habits, and perceived usefulness. It was found that WhatsApp was the most utilized platform for disseminating security warnings and crime updates, especially in informal community groups. About 68% of respondents had acted on at least one security message in the previous six months examples included staying indoors during protests, avoiding certain roads due to robbery reports, and warning others through re-broadcasts. While the reach of WhatsApp messages was impressive, the authors noted a glaring lack of fact-checking mechanisms. Only 24% of users confirmed they verified the messages before acting on them. Still, the trust placed in messages from known sources (family, friends, and local leaders) was remarkably high. The study concluded that WhatsApp has great potential for grassroots security communication if supported by digital education initiatives and collaborations with official bodies. This study aligns with the present research's objective of examining the behavioral effects of

social media security messages. It offers specific insights into how users engage with message content and how interpersonal trust mediates message reception and action—factors that are crucial for understanding social media's influence in Awka. However, this study differs in the area of thematic approach as it focuses only on WhatsApp, while this current study focuses on WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter (now X) y Facebook.

Ali and Garba (2021), in their study, examined how social media platforms have been utilized for counter-terrorism communication across the Lake Chad region, including northeastern Nigeria. Using both content analysis and key informant interviews, the researchers evaluated the effectiveness of digital campaigns by military and civil society actors in discouraging recruitment into terrorist groups and promoting community vigilance. The study found that Twitter and Facebook were primarily used by military spokespersons and regional governments to share updates, warnings, and tips on identifying radicalization. Approximately 65% of respondents acknowledged receiving such messages. However, only 39% claimed to engage with the content by sharing, commenting, or taking specific actions based on the information. The effectiveness of the messages was influenced by the source of communication; posts from verified military handles or well-known NGOs were more likely to be trusted and acted upon than anonymous or politically affiliated accounts. The researchers also emphasized the role of language and localization of content; messages in local dialects and culturally relevant formats were more impactful. This study is relevant to the present research as it underscores the significance of message source, clarity, and cultural context in shaping public response to security-oriented messages. Though focused on terrorism, the findings can inform local-level strategies in Awka for increasing digital engagement with credible safety content. The study differs in area scope. In another development, Eze and Ibeh (2020) explored the role of media literacy in improving the public's capacity to critically assess and respond to security information shared via social media. The study used a quasi-experimental design involving two groups of university students in Enugu. One group received a digital literacy intervention over four weeks, while the control group did not. Both groups were then surveyed regarding their responses to a set of real and fake security posts circulating on social media. The results indicated that students who received the intervention were significantly more likely to identify fake or exaggerated security posts and to refrain from sharing unverified information. They also showed higher levels of selective engagement, preferring to act on information from credible sources such as verified media houses or official government handles. The study highlighted the crucial role media literacy plays in enhancing the responsible consumption and dissemination of security information. Participants in the control group admitted to acting on fear-based or emotionally charged content without verifying its authenticity. This research offers critical insights for the Awka study, particularly regarding the third research objective on message credibility and response behavior. It suggests that educational interventions and critical thinking skills may enhance security consciousness by reducing the spread of

misinformation and fostering informed digital engagement. This study is similar in the area of security issues, though it differs in methodology as it employed a quasi-experimental design in addressing the research concern, while the current study used a survey to provide answers to the problem.

Furthermore, Chukwu and Nnadi (2021) examined the impact of social media on urban dwellers' perception of risk and security in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Drawing on survey data from 380 residents, the study measured how exposure to crime-related content on social platforms shaped residents' sense of safety and behavioral adaptations. The study found that frequent exposure to violent imagery or security reports, such as videos of robberies or kidnapping cases, led to heightened feelings of vulnerability and fear among respondents. This, in turn, influenced behaviors such as avoiding nightlife, installing home security gadgets, and modifying daily routes. Interestingly, the researchers found that even when messages were not officially verified, the emotional weight and visual content often made them believable. The fear induced by these messages, while increasing personal caution, sometimes contributed to a general sense of anxiety and distrust in the public space. The study is relevant for examining how social media not only informs but also emotionally shapes users' security consciousness. For the current study in Awka, this research supports the notion that emotional responses to security messages play a key role in behavior change, regardless of message authenticity. The study differs in area scope. However, similar to the area of security as both studies focused on security issues.

Lastly, Ibrahim and Yusuf (2022) explored how digital tools, especially social media groups, are used to coordinate neighborhood watch activities in Abuja. The study utilized in-depth interviews with 30 members of gated communities and estate associations, along with a review of archived digital communication threads. The findings revealed that WhatsApp groups were the most commonly used platforms for sharing real-time security updates, reporting suspicious activities, and issuing collective safety warnings. Some groups included liaison officers from the police force, enhancing their efficiency and credibility. Group admins played an essential role in moderating content and ensuring only verified information was circulated. Respondents testified that participation in such digital networks significantly enhanced their sense of control and security. In addition, users reported higher trust in messages shared within such curated groups than in public social media posts. This study is highly relevant to the current research because it demonstrates how digital micro-communities can become structured systems of mutual security surveillance and response. It provides an effective model that could be explored or recommended in the context of Awka's urban neighborhoods, particularly in promoting community-based security consciousness. This study differs in the area of methodology but is similar in thematic scope, as both focus on social media and security issues. All these studies reviewed provided insights into security issues and social media usage in relation to security. However, some are related in terms of thematic scope, while some are different in the area of methodological approach.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodological approach adopted for the study. It outlines the research design, area, and population of the study, sampling procedure and sample size, research instrument, data collection method, validity and reliability of the instrument, and data analysis techniques. These methodological choices are aligned with the research objectives and are structured to ensure credibility, reliability, and validity.

Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative survey research design. This design is considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection of measurable data from a large group of respondents, allowing the researcher to analyze patterns of perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors statistically (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey approach also provides flexibility in distributing questionnaires both online and physically, making it suitable for exploring how social media security-oriented messages influence residents' security consciousness.

Area of the Study

The study area is Awka, the capital city of Anambra State, Nigeria. Awka has an estimated population of 301,657 residents according to the National Population Commission (NPC, 2020). As a rapidly developing urban center, it faces notable security challenges, including robbery, cultism, and political unrest, while simultaneously serving as a digital hub with high internet penetration and social media engagement (NCC, 2021). These characteristics make Awka a strategic location for investigating how social media shapes security awareness.

Population of the Study

The target population for this study comprises all residents of Awka aged 18 years and above who actively use social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (X), and Instagram. This demographic is selected because adults are more likely to engage in community decision-making, access news through social media, and participate in security-related conversations (Statista, 2022).

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Given the study's large population, it is impractical to investigate all residents. Therefore, a sample size of 300 respondents was determined, which is adequate for survey research within urban populations (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique, implemented as follows:

- Stage One – Stratification of the Study Area: Awka was stratified into three major districts: Amawbia, Ifite, and Okpuno. This stratification ensures geographical coverage and minimizes sampling bias (Etikan & Bala, 2017).
- Stage Two – Identification of Social Media-Active Residents: Within each district, respondents were purposively identified through community-based online forums such as WhatsApp residents' groups, Facebook neighborhood pages, and university student associations. This step was

necessary to isolate individuals who are active social media users – the core population of interest.

- Stage Three – Random Selection of Respondents: From the identified pool of social media-active residents, simple random sampling was applied within each stratum. Equal allocation was used to ensure that each district contributed approximately 100 respondents, proportionately spread across gender and age categories. Randomization minimized researcher bias and increased the representativeness of the sample.
- Stage Four – Adjustment for Accessibility: Both online (via Google Forms distributed in groups) and offline (via field assistants in markets, schools, churches, and offices) approaches were used to reach respondents. This hybrid approach ensured inclusion of both digitally-savvy and less digitally-engaged populations.

Research Instrument

The main instrument for data collection was a structured, self-administered questionnaire designed on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire was developed based on a literature review and the study's objectives. It consisted of sections on demographic information, exposure to social media security-oriented messages, and perceived changes in security consciousness.

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by two experts in communication studies and survey methodology. A pilot test involving 30 respondents outside the main sample was conducted. Feedback from the pilot led to refinement in the wording and structure of some items. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.82, which indicates strong internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Method of Data Collection

Data collection was carried out using a hybrid approach: Online distribution through WhatsApp, Facebook, and Telegram groups using Google Forms; Physical distribution in selected public spaces. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest participation.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were coded and analyzed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize demographic characteristics and responses. Inferential statistics, including chi-square and correlation analysis, were employed to test relationships between exposure to social media security-oriented messages and levels of security consciousness. Findings were interpreted in line with the research questions and theoretical framework guiding the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1. Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n=300)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	134	44.7%
	Female	166	55.3%
Age Range	18-25	112	37.3%
	26-35	96	32%
	36-45	58	19.3%
	46 years & above	34	11.3%
Education	Secondary	39	13%
	Tertiary	207	69%
	Postgraduate	54	18%
Social Media Usage	<1hour/day	42	14%
	1--3hrs/day	119	39.7%
	4-6hrs/day	87	29%
	>6hrs/day	53	17.3%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

RQ.1: To what extent are residents of Awka exposed to security-oriented messages on social media?

Table 2. Respondents' Views on Exposure to Security-Oriented Media Messages

ITEM STATEMENT	SD	D	A	SA	\bar{X}	Decision
I frequently come across security-related messages on social media.	8	21	161	110	3.2	Accepted
I follow pages/groups that post security updates in my area.	27	46	147	80	2.9	Accepted
I usually pay attention to posts warning about threats.	14	35	155	96	3.1	Accepted
I actively share security-related messages	31	56	138	75	2.8	Accepted
I often receive alerts from WhatsApp/Facebook/Twitter groups.	18	29	159	94	3.1	Accepted
Average Mean					3.0	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Decision rule: Given that the benchmark of a 4-point Likert scale is stated at 2.5, this means that when the calculated mean is above 2.5, then the item in question is accepted. However, if the calculated mean is below 2.5, then the item is rejected.

The responses reveal a high level of exposure to security-oriented messages among residents, with a cumulative mean score of 3.0. This suggests social media is a major channel through which security information is disseminated in Awka.

RQ.2: How Credible do Residents Perceive Social Media Security-Oriented Messages?

Table 3. Respondents' Views on the Credibility of Security-Oriented Media Messages

ITEM STATEMENT	SD	D	A	SA	\bar{X}	Decision
I believe most security messages on social media are reliable	29	63	138	70	2.8	Accepted
I trust posts by verified influencers and security agencies	14	32	153	101	3.1	Accepted
I ignore some security posts due to doubts about authenticity.	28	39	147	86	2.9	Accepted
I verify security messages before acting or sharing	19	41	148	922	3.0	Accepted
I consider the source before trusting a security-related post.	16	29	164	91	3.1	Accepted
Average Mean					2.9	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

With a cumulative mean score of 2.9, respondents generally perceive social media security content as moderately credible, especially when posted by verified or official sources. However, skepticism exists, particularly for unverified or anonymous posts.

RQ.3: To What Extent Do Social Media Security Messages Influence the Security Consciousness of Residents in Awka?

Table 4. Respondents' Views on Influence of Security-Oriented Media Messages

ITEM STATEMENT	SD	D	A	SA	\bar{X}	Decision
Social media messages help me avoid risky places	9	18	161	112	3.2	Accepted
I've changed my routine due to information from social media	17	31	149	103	3.1	Accepted
I feel more alert about security because of the updates I read online	10	26	160	104	3.1	Accepted
I advise others based on what I read in security posts.	13	33	158	96	3.1	Accepted
Social media contributes to public safety in my community	11	21	157	111	3.2	Accepted
Average Mean					3.1	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

With a mean score of 3.1, the analysis indicates a strong influence of social media messages on the security consciousness and behavior of Awka residents. Many respondents reported adjusting their routines and sharing information with others, reflecting increased vigilance.

General Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study underscore the significant role social media plays in enhancing security consciousness among residents of Awka, Anambra State. In addressing the research questions, the analysis demonstrates a robust relationship between social media exposure, message credibility, and

behavioral change among users in the context of personal and communal security.

Firstly, data analysis reveals that a majority of respondents are highly exposed to security-oriented messages on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter. The mean score of 3.0 on a 4-point scale indicates that these platforms serve as primary channels for disseminating timely and relevant security information. This finding is consistent with the empirical study by Ede et al. (2020), which found that social media has overtaken traditional media in speed and reach of security alerts among urban Nigerians. Similarly, Okoro and Odoemelam (2014) argued that digital platforms have become the “first responders” to incidents such as road blockades, armed robbery, or violent protests, often alerting citizens before official agencies do.

Secondly, the credibility of social media messages was moderately rated by respondents (mean score: 2.9), suggesting that while users trust verified and official accounts, there is caution toward user-generated content. This aligns with the findings of Ayoola (2021), who noted that while digital messages can shape perception and decision-making, skepticism persists due to misinformation. Respondents in this study frequently reported verifying messages before taking action, indicating a growing digital literacy and critical engagement with content. This is also in line with the assumptions of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, which suggests that people who are personally involved in an issue (such as safety) are more likely to process messages centrally, examining credibility and logical consistency.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the study establishes that social media security messages significantly influence security behavior and consciousness (mean score: 3.18). Many residents reported avoiding risky areas, changing routines, and becoming more alert based on updates seen online. This is supported by empirical studies such as that of Ojebuyi and Salawu (2020), who observed that social media messages can spark “preventive behavior” in high-risk communities. The influence of these messages goes beyond awareness, actively shaping day-to-day choices and interactions, which aligns with the Social Cognitive Theory. This theory posits that people learn and model behaviors based on observation and the outcomes they see associated with those behaviors in this case, from peers or influencers sharing security experiences.

When compared to traditional media, social media provides interactivity, immediacy, and community-driven content, which fosters a more participatory approach to local security. The theoretical and empirical underpinnings affirm that the influence is both cognitive and behavioral – users not only become aware but also translate that awareness into tangible action. In conclusion, the study confirms that in an environment like Awka, where formal security infrastructures may be stretched or slow to respond, social media fills an essential communication and mobilization gap. Residents are not only receiving information but also acting upon it, driven by trust in sources and personal experiences. Therefore, social media is not just an alternative

communication tool; it is becoming central to the security culture of urban populations in Nigeria.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study investigated the influence of social media security-oriented messages on raising security consciousness among residents in Awka, Anambra State. The findings from the survey of 300 respondents revealed that social media platforms play a significant role in enhancing residents' awareness and alertness to security-related issues. With the widespread adoption of mobile technology and internet connectivity, platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter have become critical tools for real-time security communication. The study found a high level of exposure to security messages among residents, demonstrating that social media has become a regular part of their information consumption habits. Furthermore, although a degree of skepticism exists, especially toward unverified sources, most residents perceived security messages as credible when shared by reputable individuals or organizations. This reflects growing digital maturity and selective trust in online environments.

More importantly, the findings confirmed that these messages significantly influence behavioural changes in users, including avoiding dangerous areas, altering daily routines, and advising others—indicating that social media has moved beyond being an information tool to a driver of practical, preventive action. The theoretical frameworks underpinning this research, particularly Social Cognitive Theory and the Elaboration Likelihood Model, provided a lens through which to interpret how individuals process, assess, and act on security-related messages. Together with supporting empirical evidence, this study affirms that social media is a powerful instrument for promoting community-based security consciousness. Thus, fostering responsible digital communication and enhancing media literacy will further improve the credibility and effectiveness of social media as a tool for promoting security awareness in urban communities like Awka.

Based on the objectives and findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Community Awareness through Official Social Media Channels:** In line with the first objective—assessing exposure to security messages—it is recommended that local law enforcement agencies, community leaders, and relevant NGOs in Awka establish and maintain active, verified social media channels for sharing timely and localized security information. Regular updates, alerts, and preventive tips should be disseminated to increase exposure and engagement among residents.
2. **Promote Digital Literacy and Critical Evaluation Skills:** To address the second objective—understanding how messages influence behaviour, there is a need to educate the public on how to assess the credibility of online security information. Workshops, community outreaches, and online campaigns should be organized to teach residents how to verify sources, avoid misinformation, and responsibly share security content.

This would enhance critical consumption and informed behavioural responses.

3. **Build Trust Through Collaboration with Influencers and Trusted Voices:** In line with the third objective—evaluating perceived credibility, security agencies and organizations should collaborate with local social media influencers, respected journalists, and community stakeholders to communicate verified security messages. When trusted voices disseminate content, it increases credibility and boosts public responsiveness.
4. **Encourage Two-Way Communication and Feedback Loops:** social media should not be used merely for broadcasting messages. Authorities and community groups should encourage feedback, allow reporting of incidents, and respond promptly to questions and reports. This enhances interactivity, trust, and the sense of collective responsibility for safety.
5. **Institutionalize Social Media Use in Community Security Planning:** Finally, integrating social media communication strategies into formal community policing and safety frameworks will institutionalize its role in public security. This ensures continuity, monitoring, and accountability, especially in rapidly growing urban centers like Awka.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations, so further research on this topic is still needed.

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