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Social Media Utilization for Policing and Crime Prevention in Lagos, Nigeria

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The benefits embedded in the use of social media for policing and law enforcement are increasingly becoming recognized globally. Despite the growing popularity of social media in Nigeria, empirical information on the disposition of police personnel toward their adoption for policing and crime investigation are generally scarce. Therefore, this study investigated the use of social media for policing and crime prevention among 122 police officers serving at the headquarters of the Lagos State Police Command. The research design was descriptive and cross-sectional. Survey questionnaire and key informant interview methods were employed for data collection. Results indicated that respondents were generally positively disposed toward the adoption of social media for policing and crime prevention (χ^2 =13.68;
p > .05). Although social media platforms were being used for different police duties, 47.0% of the respondents identified intelligence gathering as the major purpose for which they were being used. The majority of the officers (77.2%) claimed that they had not been exposed to any form of training regarding social media usage for policing. It is pertinent for the Nigeria Police Force to professionally train its officers on the use of social media platforms for policing and law enforcement.

Keywords: *social media, policing, police personnel, Lagos State Police Command, Nigeria*

Introduction

The promise that social media platforms use holds for policing and law enforcement duties is increasingly being recognized globally (Bartlett, Miller, Crump, & Middleton, 2013; Davis, Alves, & Sklansky, 2014; Stuart, 2013; Commissioner for Law Enforcement Data Security, 2013). Although technology has always been an integral component of police operations and strategies (Tapia & Sawyer, 2005; Welsh & Farrington, 2007), social media tools constitute a group of information and communication technology (ICT) resource that has recently been impacting law enforcement practice in many countries (Chermak & Weiss, 2005; Crump, 2011; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015; Schneider, 2016; Van De Velde, Meijer, & Homburg, 2015).

The Nigeria Police Force is the law enforcement agency primarily charged with the responsibility of maintaining law and order, as well as preventing and detecting crime. Despite this organization's successive drives toward crime detection and control, its overall performance is still generally on the average as the nation still consistently experiences different forms of violent crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, homicide, and rape, among others (Adegbamigbe, 2008; Ikuomola, 2011; Otu, 2010).

Social media platforms are a major technological resource that the Nigeria Police Force can systematically leverage upon to improve its overall efficiency and output. A strategic incorporation of social media into policing and law enforcement operations is not only capable of helping to adequately address certain forms of virtual and offline crimes, they can also serve as important means for improving the public image of the

police, and for upholding professional ethical conducts among police personnel (Meijer & Thaens, 2013; Ruddell & Jones, 2013). Equally, the fact that social media are also becoming veritable tools in the hands of cyber criminals in Nigeria (Aileru, 2016; Akor, 2017) makes it expedient for police officials to get accustomed to their workings.

Although the Nigeria Police Force already has some designated social media accounts such as Facebook and Twitter, it is imperative for the organization to formally train and educate its personnel on the use and benefits of social media for policing. Furthermore, despite the growing popularity of social media in Nigeria, empirical information on the disposition of police personnel toward these ICT resources and the extent of their adoption for policing and crime investigation are generally scarce. Hence, there is the need for a study of this nature. Specifically, the study was conducted at the Lagos State Command of the Nigeria Police Force, and the following research questions were raised:

> *Research Question 1:* What social media platforms are being utilized for policing and law enforcement by personnel of the Lagos State Police Command (LSPC)?
> *Research Question 2:* Which areas of policing and law enforcement are social media being used by the LSPC?
> *Research Question 3:* To what extent has social media adoption been advantageous to the LSPC?
> *Research Question 4:* What are the challenges that social media ubiquity posed to policing and crime investigation in Nigeria?

The analysis of the potential contributions of social media to policing has been an important subject of discourse among scholars. Schneider (2016) asserted that contrary to what obtained in the past, members of the public, to some degree, now expect an online police presence. Davis et al. (2014) submit that social media offer opportunity for law enforcement agencies to promote the principle of community policing. Equally, these scholars assert that the scope and speed of social media make them a veritable avenue through which police departments can get information across to the public. Moreover, Bartlett et al. (2013) articulate that social media enable the police to engage and involve the public in a new and potentially transformative ways. To Wolff, McDevitt, and Stark (2011), the popularity of Facebook and Twitter make them a critical resource of information which law enforcement officials can immediately deploy to disseminate information to the public and the media. In a similar vein, Denef, Bayerl, and Kapstein (2013) posit that social media can be beneficial to the Police because they can be used to support their primary functions involving crime investigations and prevention, and they can also offer a faster and more direct mode of communication between the police and the public. Equally, Wolff et al. (2011) identified the types of evidence that can be derived from social media platforms to include photographs, status updates, a person's location at a certain time, and direct communications to or from a defendant's social media account. Furthermore, Slttoday.com (2013) stresses the fact that law enforcement personnel now need to understand the concept and functions of social media because criminals are increasingly using these tools to instigate and conduct illegal activities.

However, Davis et al. (2014) pointed out that police officers need to understand and respect the nature of social media primarily because these technological resources have their own logic, norms, and culture. LexisNexis Risk Solutions (2014) observed that in spite of the frequent use of social media by law enforcement officials, only a few agencies have adopted formal training and policies or have dedicated staff in place to oversee their usage, which often constitutes barriers to their consistent use and broad application. In their article, Gil-García and Pardo (2005) observed that police departments may lack interest or experience barriers to social networking initiatives that are related to e-government challenges such as organizational and managerial challenges (resistance to change), and legal challenges (the questioning of the official communication status of social media messages). Also, LexisNexis Risk Solutions (2014) cautioned that due to the networked nature of social media, any information released by the police through the social media can be quickly reshaped or put to new uses by anyone participating in the adopted network. In addition, the Derbyshire Constabulary (2017) said that social media may cause police officers and staff to inadvertently disclose personal information, operational material and tactics. Equally, Davis et al. (2014) opined that a

growing number of police departments have promulgated rules regarding how officers should present themselves on social media.

In a 2012 survey conducted by the International Association of Chiefs of Police on the use of social media, it was revealed that 94% of the 800 law enforcement agencies sampled confirmed that they were using public social networking in some ways, and 56% of those not using it declared that they were considering its adoption in the near future (Koren, 2015). Also, Murphy and Fonticella (2013) indicated that the New York Police Department has a unit that mines data on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites for evidence of crimes and potential criminal activity. Similarly, Finlayson and Kelly (2015) said that Australian police organizations are increasingly using social media to meet their community policing objectives and supplement existing traditional programs such as Neighborhood Watch. Furthermore, the Police Executive Research Forum (2013) in its report titled *Social Media and Tactical Considerations for Law Enforcement* suggested that law enforcement can use social media to reach the public, manage major events, obtain intelligence, and conduct investigations. Against this background, this study investigated the use of social media for policing and crime investigation in Lagos, Nigeria.

Research Setting and Study Population

This study was conducted at the headquarters of the LSPC located in Ikeja. This police command is the branch of the Nigeria Police Force that is primarily charged with the responsibility of crime prevention and law enforcement in Lagos State. This command is under a commissioner of police, who is supported by nine assistant commissioners. The selection of the headquarters of the LSPC was deemed appropriate for this study because it houses various investigative departments that can provide useful insights into the adoption of social media for law enforcement and crime prevention. The population of study comprises both male and female police officials serving in the State Intelligence Bureau, the Public Complaint Bureau, the Administrative Department, the Criminal Investigation Department, the Department of Operations, the X-Squad, and the General Duty Department.

Methodology

This study was descriptive and cross-sectional in design. It involved the triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Specifically, 120 copies of a semistructured questionnaire that largely contained open-ended questions were administered on police officers serving in the previously identified departments at the headquarters of the LSPC. Apart from questions on the sociodemographic profiles of the respondent that were essentially close ended, most of the questions contained in the other sections of the questionnaire were open ended and constructed in the following pattern:

(1) What is your view on the adoption of social media for policing and law enforcement by your police command?
(2) In which area of law enforcement is the LSPC deploying social media tools?
(3) Based on your previous work experiences, what is your view on the utilization of social media as a tool for crime investigation?
(4) What are the challenges associated with social media utilization for policing and law enforcement in Lagos State?
(5a) Are there training programs specifically designed for police officers on the adoption of social media platforms for policing and crime investigation?
    (5b) If yes, how often are these training programs organized?
    (5c) If no, give reason(s) why there is no training program on social media utilization for policing and crime investigation?.

Furthermore, two key informant interviews were conducted with police officials occupying strategic positions in the crime investigation and public relations units of the command. The validity and reliability of the research instruments were ascertained and adjudged okay by the researcher's supervisor after an initial mock pretest was done on two officers of the LSPC. For the purpose of sample size determination, the total enumeration of all the 122 police officers serving at the headquarters of the police command was done. This approach was considered apt because of the relatively small number of police officers serving at the police command.

With regard to the sampling of the respondents, the proportionate stratified sampling technique was employed for the selection of police officials across the existing seven departments at the headquarters of the LSPC, while the two police personnel interviewed were purposively selected. A major challenge experienced during the fieldwork was the negative posture of most of the police officers toward granting an oral interview. Although the initial plan was to interview the head of each department, this approach was not accepted. Rather, the researchers were formally introduced to two officers identified as officially designated to handle such research inquiries. Similarly, there were some questions contained in the administered questionnaires that were considered "too sensitive and intruding" by some of the officers, and consequently left unanswered. In spite of this initial setback, the study came up with some illuminating findings. For the purpose of data handling and processing, SPSS Version 20 was employed for the analysis of the quantitative data. Analyses were done at the univariate and bivariate levels. The process involved the use of frequency distribution, simple percentages, cross-tabulation, and chi-square statistics. Moreover, the qualitative data generated with the aid of a tape recorder were manually processed through content analysis involving ethnographic summary and the narrative technique of reporting. Content analysis was employed to explore and interpret the emerging patterns in the collected data, while ethnographic summary was used to enhance the quality of the interpreted data. Furthermore, this study adhered strictly to the international ethical standard for social research. Written permission was sought from the office of the Lagos State Commissioner of Police, and approval was granted before the commencement of data collection. Also, respondents' participation in this study was purely voluntary; their rights and integrity were protected by keeping confidential the information given and by making anonymous their identities. Also, their participation in the research did not expose them to any form of harm.

Results

The discussion and interpretation of the major findings that emanated from the study is the central concern of this section. These results are presented and discussed as related to the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, social media account ownership among police officers and its purpose, the types of social media used for policing and crime investigation, the dispositions of officers toward social media usage for policing by departments, respondents' views on social media usefulness by year of service, the areas of policing where social media tools are being used, the existence of training programs for police officials on social media use for policing, and the challenges associated with social media use for policing.

Respondents' Sociodemographic Profile

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the police officials covered in this study.

Table 1. *Sociodemographic Profile of the Respondents*

Characteristic	*n*	%
Sex		
Female	24	21.0
Male	91	79.0
Total	115	100.0
Age, years		
18–28	2	1.7
29–39	47	39.8
40–50	61	51.7
51–60	8	6.8
Total	118	100.0
Marital status		
Single	10	8.5
Married	103	87.3
Divorced	5	4.2
Total	118	100.0
Educational qualification		
Senior Secondary Certificate Examination	5	4.4
Police College Certificate	3	2.6
Ordinary National Diploma	6	5.2
Higher National Diploma	32	27.8
Bachelor's degree	65	56.5
Master's degree	4	3.5
Total	115	100.0
Department		
Administrative department	18	16.7
Department of operations	17	15.7
General duty	19	17.6
Investigation	20	18.5
Public Complaint Bureau	21	19.4
State Intelligence Bureau	13	12.0
X-Squad	12	11.1
Total	108	100.0
Years in service		
<10	17	14.2
10–19	62	51.7
20–29	34	28.3
≥30	7	5.8
Total	118	100.0

The sex distribution of the respondents as contained in Table 1 indicates that 79% were men and 21% were women. Also, respondents who were within the age range of 40–50 constituted 51.7%, followed by those whose age fell in the category of 29–39 (39.8%). Fewer than 7% were over 51 years of age. Most of the officers were married (87%), few were single (9%), and the remainder were divorced (4%). With regard to the respondents' education, 56.5% had earned a bachelor's degree, 27.8% had earned a Higher National Diploma certificate, 5.2% had earned an Ordinary National Diploma, 4.4% had passed the Senior School Certificate Examination, 3.5% had earned a master's degree, and 2.6% had earned a Police College Certificate. Of the respondents, 19.4% served in the Public Complaint Bureau, 18.5% served in the Crime Investigation Department, 17.6% in the General Duty Department, 16.7% in the Administrative Department, 15.7% in the Department of Operations, 12.0% in the State Intelligence Bureau, and 11.1% in the X-Squad. Finally, 51.7% had been in the police service for 10–19 years, 28.3% had served for 20–29 years, 14.2% had served for 10 years or fewer, and 5.8% had been police officers for at least 30 years.

Reasons Why Officials of the Lagos State Police Command Use Social Media

The distribution of the respondents according to ownership of social media account(s) and the purpose for which they were being used revealed that out of the 111 police personnel who confirmed owning social media account(s), 67.6% claimed they were being used for both personal and professional purposes, 24.3% maintained that their social media accounts were being solely subjected to personal use, and 8.1% submitted that their social media use was exclusively professional.

Preferred Social Media Platforms for Policing and Crime Investigation

Information was sought on the types of social media platforms being used for policing and crime investigation in Lagos for the purpose of understanding the disposition of personnel of the Nigeria Police Force toward this new ICT resource. The distribution of the respondents' responses is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Types of Social Media Platforms Used for Policing and Crime Investigation*

Platforms	*n*	%
Facebook and WhatsApp	44	36.67
Instagram and Twitter	20	16.67
Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube	56	46.66
Total	120	100.00

As evident in Table 2, all the police officers confirmed that certain social media platforms were being used for police operation and crime investigation. Specifically, 36.67% mentioned Facebook and WhatsApp as the platforms they were using for policing and crime investigation, 16.67% said they used Instagram and Twitter, and 46.67% said they used Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, and YouTube. Similarly, the outcome of the key informant interviews conducted corroborated the quantitative data.

Informant 1 (male police personnel at LSPC headquarters) said, "We [LSPC] use all the available social media platforms. We are on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram. We even own a website and a blog." Informant 2 (male police personnel at LSPC headquarters with 8 years of service) said, "We use Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram and all the other available social media platforms out there for our operations."

It can be drawn from these quantitative and qualitative results that different social media tools, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, were being used for policing and crime investigation by police officers working at the headquarters of the LSPC. Indeed, these are the most popular social networking sites in Nigeria (Ibrahim, 2013; Nwabasha, 2015; Ojedokun, 2016).

Area(s) of Law Enforcement Where Social Media Are Being Used

Social media resources can assist law enforcement officers in a number of ways in fulfilling their responsibilities (Crump, 2011; Davis et al., 2014). Therefore, investigation was conducted into the areas of policing for which social media tools were being used by police officials serving at the headquarters of the LSPC. Table 3 shows that social media platforms were being used for multiple purposes by the personnel of the police command. The breakdown of their responses indicates that 47.0% said that they were using social media tools for intelligence gathering, 23.3% claimed they were using them for criminal detection, and 20% stated that they were employing social media tools for crime investigation. Furthermore, 10% said that dissemination of crime prevention tips was the major purpose for which social media resources were being used.

The result of the survey was also reflected in the key informant interviews. Informant 1 said,

> Through the "see something say something agendum" of our agency, many people have been able to come forward with relevant information which has helped the police to do its work. Members of public are also helping to keep the police in check as social media platforms have made it easy and possible for civilians to voice out their observed shortcomings concerning the police.

Informant 2 put it this way:

> The fact that social media platforms have made things easy for people through easy flow of information also makes it easy for them now to record and report professional misconducts of police officials. Hence, police officers have begun to learn to conduct themselves more professionally in the public.

It is clear from the quantitative results that social media platforms were being employed by personnel of the Nigeria Police Force to perform some core law enforcement functions, such as intelligence gathering, criminal detection, crime investigation, and information dissemination to the public. Equally, an important inference that can be made from the key informant interviews is that social media tools are also being employed by members of the public not only for providing useful information that can aid the police in crime fighting and enforcement of the law, but also for reporting cases of police personnel professional misconducts.

Disposition of Officers Toward Social Media Usage for Policing

The police personnel that participated in this study belonged to different departments. Therefore, it was considered important to investigate whether this has any influence on their inclination toward social media use for policing. Table 4 contains the distribution of respondents' opinions by department.

Table 3. *Disposition Toward Social Media Usage for Policing by Department*

		Disposition		
Department	**N**	**Positive, *n* (%)**	**Negative, *n* (%)**	**Indifferent, *n* (%)**
Administrative	18	13 (72.2%)	4 (22.2%)	1 (5.6%)
Operations	15	12 (80.0%)	3 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)
General Duty	17	17 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Investigation	19	13 (68.4%)	4 (21.1%)	2 (10.5%)
Public Complaint Bureau	17	13 (76.5%)	3 (17.6%)	1 (5.9%)
Intelligence Bureau	9	9 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
X-Squad	12	8 (66.7%)	4 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)

Note. χ^2 =13.68; *p* = .007; *df* = 12.

As evident in Table 3, the majority of the officers across all the seven departments were positively disposed toward social media usage for policing. The majority of officers (72.2%) working in the Administrative Department said they favored the use of social media for policing, whereas 22.2% did not. Similarly, 80.0% of those in the Department of Operations embraced the use of social media platforms for policing. All the police personnel stationed at the General Duty Department and Intelligence Bureau asserted that they were

positively disposed toward the use of social media platforms for policing. Additionally, most of the police officers belonging to the Investigation Department (68.4%) and Public Complaint Bureau (76.5%) affirmed that they were favorably disposed to the deployment of social media tools for policing. Furthermore, the observed similarity in the opinions of the respondents also reflected in the nonsignificant value of the chi-square analysis (χ^2 = 13.68; *p* > .05).

Views of the Respondents on the Usefulness of Social Media

Job-related experience is among the most important factors influencing employees' work efficiency and service delivery capacity (McDaniel, Schmidt, & Hunter, 1988). Therefore, it is important to compare the views of the respondents on the usefulness of social media for policing and crime investigation according to their number of years in the police service.

Table 4. *Usefulness of Social Media for Policing by Years of Service*

	Social Media Usefulness for Policing		
Years in Service	**Not useful**	**Useful**	**Useful, But There Are Better Tools**
<10	0 (0.0%)	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.7%)
10–19	1 (1.9%)	39 (73.5%)	13 (24.5%)
20–29	5 (17.9%)	20 (71.4%)	3 (10.7%)
≥30	1 (16.7%)	5 (83.3%)	0 (0.0%)

Note. χ^2 =13.92; *p* = .011; *df* = 6.

Table 4 indicates that although the majority of the respondents (73.5%) considered social media platforms to be useful tools for policing and crime investigation, there is a connection between respondents' number of years of service in the police force and the views they held. For officers with fewer than 10 years in the police service, none thought social media platforms were not useful, and for all the respondents with fewer than 20 years (*n* = 68), only 1 (~1.5%) suggested that social media tools were not useful. Similarly, the majority of the two remaining age categories of 20–29 years (71.4%) and 30 and above (83.3%) affirmed the usefulness of social media for policing. Nevertheless, a larger proportion (24.5%) of those who had been serving in the police for 10–19 years thought there were better technological devices that could be used for police work. The position of this particular cohort was likely to have been informed by their years of experience and their familiarity with other policing techniques. Furthermore, the pattern of respondents' opinions was demonstrated in the significant value of the chi-square statistics (χ^2 = 13.92; *p* < .05).

Challenges That Social Media Ubiquity Posed to Policing and Crime Investigation

Social media platforms are a relatively new ICT resource that have gained wide acceptance among different demographic groups in Nigeria (Aileru, 2016; Ojedokun, 2016). Thus, it was deemed essential to investigate the perspectives of personnel of the Nigeria Police Force on how their rising popularity among Nigerians is impacting policing and law enforcement. The largest single group of the police personnel (43.3%) mentioned unwarranted public criticisms of police officers as the major challenge that the popularity of social media is posing to the Nigeria Police Force, while 30% mentioned that social media is facilitating the circulation of false information on the Nigerian cyberspace. Also, 26.7% of the respondents stated that the ubiquitous nature of social media platforms in Nigeria is leading to public interference in police investigations.

Furthermore, the remarks of the respondents covered in the key informant interviews conducted further corroborated the result of the survey. Informant 1 said,

> Social media has helped the police to a large extent as criminals have been apprehended through this means. However, it is not all police officers that are aware of them or can use them. It is also important to say that social media have also become an avenue for criminals too.

Informant 2 described the situation this way: "Social media have been helpful tools to an extent, but they are not entirely trustworthy or reliable tools. Therefore, their contributions in the areas of policing and crime prevention are rather limited."

It can be deduced from this finding that police personnel believed that despite the advantages embedded in social media platforms, their use by members of the public can occasionally impact negatively on police performance if not properly managed. Specifically, the major challenges that the ubiquity of social media posed to policing and law enforcement in Nigeria were aiding the circulation of false information in the cyberspace, facilitating the dissemination of sensitive information that could jeopardize police investigation by some crime witnesses, serving as a tool for crime perpetration, and inability of some police personnel to use them.

Existence of Training Program for Officers on the Use of Social Media for Policing

The analysis of data on the existence of formally designed programs specifically modeled toward the training of police officers on the use of social media for policing and law enforcement was also conducted. The total 101 police personnel who answered the question on the existence of programs specifically designed by the Nigeria Police Force to train its personnel on the use of social media platforms for policing, 77.2% claimed there was no form of training program put in place for them by their management, whereas the other 22.8% said that they had received some form of training regarding the adoption of social media for policing and law enforcement.

Furthermore, in one of the key informant interviews, a similar view was expressed by Informant 1 concerning the existence of training programs on the use of social media for police operation:

> There is an information and communication technology (ICT) school in Ogun state which I attended in 2009. However, with regard to the agency [Nigeria Police Force] organizing a training program for personnel on the use of social media, there is none. I think this could be as a result of lack of fund and inadequate support from the government.

Informant 2 said,

> Although we use social media platforms, however, there is no department designated specifically for social media supervision. There are also no training programs that I am aware of, but we [Nigeria Police Force] have an ICT school in Ogun State. However, whether the training of personnel on the use of social media for policing has now been added to the curriculum is something that I do not know about

From these findings, it can be inferred that in spite of the fact that some social media resources are being adopted for policing and crime investigation in Lagos, the police management has yet to put in place concrete framework through which its officers can be trained on the effective use of these technological tools for policing and crime prevention duties. Generally, the data yielded by both the quantitative and qualitative methods indicate that most of the police officers lacked formal training on the use of social media.

Discussion

With regard to social media ownership and the purpose for which they were being used, findings revealed that most of the police officers serving at the headquarters of the LSPC were not only familiar with social media tools, but were making use of them for their private affairs and as part of their policing strategies.

These findings align with those of Goldsmith (2015) that most police officials are now using social media on their mobile phones as a means of communication. Also, analyses on the types of social media being employed for policing and crime investigation at the LSPC headquarters showed that Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube were the platforms being used. The implication of this finding is that personnel of the Nigeria Police Force have recognized the potential benefits embedded in social media resources and are also positively disposed toward exploring them for some of their operations. This finding corroborates the belief Meijer and Thaens (2013) that police departments in most countries are acknowledging the potential of social media and experimenting with them.

Findings regarding the areas of law enforcement for which social media tools are being used in Lagos indicated that they were being used for multiple purposes such as intelligence gathering, criminal detection, crime investigation, and information dissemination to the public. Moreover, members of the public are also employing social media tools to report crime incidents and cases of police professional misconducts to the police authority. From these results, it can be deduced that police officers serving at the LSPC headquarters are making use of the opportunities presented by social media tools to improve their overall operations and strategies. Similarly, these technological resources are also becoming useful to members of the public, not only for reporting their concerns to police authority, but for also demanding police accountability. This result supports the submission of Denef et al. (2013) that social media can be beneficial to the police because they can be used to support their primary functions, which include crime investigations and prevention. They can also offer a faster and more direct mode of communication between the police and the public. Also, it corroborates the position of Lieberman, Koetzle, and Sakiyama (2013) that the rapid adoption of social networking tools by police departments is due to a number of perceived benefits associated with them.

Regarding police officers' disposition toward social media usage for policing and crime investigation, findings revealed that respondents were generally positively disposed toward their adoption regardless of the department in which they belonged (χ^2 =13.68; p > .05). The implication of this finding is that police personnel serving at the LSPC headquarters are willing to adapt social media tools into their overall policing strategies. This finding is in line with the position of Bartlett et al. (2013) that police interest in and use of social media is rapidly increasing. Furthermore, although the views of officers on the usefulness of social media for policing and crime investigation varied by the number of years in police service (χ^2 = 13.92; p < .05), the majority of the respondents (73.5%) across all the cohorts considered social media to be useful tools for policing and crime investigation. With regard to the challenges the prevalence of social media poses to policing and crime investigation in Nigeria, respondents claimed that the popularity of social media tools among Nigerians is aiding the circulation of false information in the cyberspace, facilitating the dissemination of sensitive information that could jeopardize police investigation by some crime witnesses, and serving as a tool for crime perpetration. The LexisNexis Risk Solutions (2014) has equally articulated that the networked nature of social media platforms makes any information released through them by the police at the risk of being reshaped or used for a selfish gain by anyone participating in the adopted network. Nonetheless, the claim by some police officers that social media tools do expose the police to some "unwarranted" criticisms by members of the public may be due to the fact that they are not yet accustomed to the scrutiny opportunity which social media offers members of the public to engage and expose the inefficiency of government agencies, and the professional misconducts of public servants. Indeed, different cases of proven professional misconducts of police officers in Nigeria have been exposed via social media resources in recent times (Ezeobi, 2017; Usman, 2018).

Finally, findings regarding the training of police officers on the utilization of social media for policing and crime investigation revealed that the police management is yet to put in place any concrete framework through which its officers can be trained on the effective use of these technological tools for policing and crime prevention duties. The implication of this finding is that this lack of training may not only inhibit police officers' optimal use of this ICT resource, but may also work at cross-purpose because untrained personnel using social media can unintentionally compromise their agency's operation. This result corroborates the

position of LexisNexis Risk Solutions (2014) that in spite of the frequent use of social media by law enforcement officials, few agencies have adopted formal training and policies or have dedicated staffers in place to oversee their usage, constituting barriers to their consistent and broad application.

Limitations of the Study and Suggestion for Future Research

The limitation of this study is the relatively small number of police personnel (*N* = 122) from which data were principally elicited. Thus, the relatively small size of the sampled respondents may make it difficult to generalize the yielded results. Also, the fact that a number of questions considered too sensitive and intruding were left unanswered by some police officers is also a shortcoming. Future research in this area should expand the size of their study population and their scope by involving police officers from other police commands in Nigeria.

However, in spite of the identified limitations, police officers serving at the LSPC headquarters are typical of the personnel of the Nigeria Police Force in terms of composition, hierarchical distribution, and departments. Thus, their submissions as revealed in this study provided significant insights into the attitude and dispositions of the officials of the Nigeria Police Force toward social media adoption for policing and crime investigation in Nigeria. The findings generated by this study can also prove useful to the authority of the Nigeria Police Force in the formulation of strategic measures and practical policy regarding the use of social media by police officials.

Conclusion

The central concern of this descriptive study was to investigate social media use for policing and crime investigation in Lagos. Different types of social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube) were being used for police operation by personnel of the Nigeria Police Force serving at the headquarters of LSPC. Also, intelligence gathering, crime investigation, crime detection, and dissemination of crime prevention tips were the major areas of policing for which social media were used in Lagos. Although social media platforms were adjudged to be useful for police operations, however, there is no officially recognized framework through which police officials using them were trained for their use.

A strategic incorporation of social media tools into policing operation is capable of improving the performance of the Nigeria Police Force. Therefore, the following recommendations are useful steps toward encouraging police officials to fully embrace them. First, there is a need for the management of the Nigeria Police Force to strategically design a framework through which its personnel can be professionally trained on the efficient and effective ways of using social media resources for law enforcement duties. This step can help the Nigeria Police Force achieve its goal of becoming a more efficient and result-oriented police organization. Second, it is also important for the Nigeria Police Force to officially formulate agency-backed policy regarding police personnel adoption and use of social media tools for law enforcement and crime investigation. The formulation of a standing policy providing police officers with practical guidelines and useful information regarding the deployment of social media for official assignments would go a long way in regulating their online conducts. Also, the Nigeria Police Force should design strategic measures through which police–citizen engagement and communication via social media platforms can be widely entrenched and embraced in Nigeria. This can promote the police–citizen relationship, ultimately enabling police officials to effectively enforce laws.

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[*Appendix follows*]

Appendix

Questionnaire on Social Media Utilization for Policing and Crime Prevention in Lagos, Nigeria

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is designed to elicit information on the research topic titled **Social Media Utilization for Policing and Crime Prevention in Lagos, Nigeria**. I hereby humbly request for your co-operation as your responses will be solely used for academic purposes. Information provided will be treated with utmost confidentiality. Sincere and honest responses will be greatly appreciated as they would enhance the quality and credibility of this project.

Thank you.

Instruction: Please tick corresponding boxes to your choice of answer, and provide appropriate answers to the open-ended questions.

Section A

Sociodemographic Profile of Respondent

Please tick ( ) as appropriate:

1. Sex: Male ( ) Female ( )

2. Age: 18–28 ( ) 29–39 ( ) 40–50 ( ) 51–60 ( ) 61–70 ( )

3. Ethnic group: Hausa ( ) Yoruba ( ) Igbo ( ) Others ( )

4. Religion: Islam ( ) Christianity ( ) Others ( )

5. Marital Status: Single ( ) Married ( ) Divorced ( ) Others _____

6. Educational Qualification: Senior secondary school ( ) Police College ( )
Ordinary National Diploma ( ) Higher National Diploma ( ) Bachelor's degree ( )
Master's degree ( ) Doctoral degree ( )

7. Department: _____

8. Number of years in service: _____

Section B

Social Media Utilization for Policing And Crime Prevention

9. Are you an account holder of social media platforms? Yes [ ] No [ ]

9b. If yes, what purpose do you use your social media account(s) for?

Personal Use [ ] Work Purpose [ ] Both [ ]

10. What types of social media platforms are being utilized by the Lagos State Police   Command for policing and crime investigation?

_____

11. What is your view on the adoption of social media for policing and law enforcement by your Police Command?

_____

12. Which area of law enforcement is the Lagos State Police Command deploying social media tools?

_____

13. Based on your previous work experiences, what is your view on the utilization of social media as a tool for crime investigation?

_____

14. What are the major challenges associated with social media utilization for policing and crime investigation in Lagos State?

_____

15a. Are there training programs specifically designed for police officers on the adoption of social media platforms for policing and crime investigation? Yes [ ]   No [ ]

15b. If yes, how often are these training programs organized?

_____

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