

Mediatizing Security: Examining the efficacy of WhatsApp-Based Communication on the Crime Response Efficiency of the Àmòtẹ̀kùn Corps in Ondo and Ekiti States, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The heightened insecurity in Nigeria necessitated the establishment of the Àmòtẹ̀kùn Corps in the southwestern region. Within this context, it becomes important to examine the role of WhatsApp, a widely adopted communication platform, in supporting the Corps' efforts to address security challenges. Despite its growing relevance, there remains a notable gap in research providing a comprehensive assessment of how the Àmòtẹ̀kùn Corps' use of WhatsApp has contributed to reducing insecurity in the region. Anchored on the Ritual View of Communication theory, this study focused on two southwestern states: Ondo and Ekiti. A case study design was adopted, with interviews serving as the primary data collection instrument. Eleven Àmòtẹ̀kùn officers across different ranks and units participated in the study. Findings indicate that the Corps in both states prefers WhatsApp for internal communication, information dissemination, and grassroots sensitization. The platform also facilitates interaction with local government authorities and landlord associations, enabling prompt feedback and intelligence gathering. Additionally, WhatsApp has been instrumental in disseminating safety and security information to the public. The study concludes that WhatsApp is an effective communication tool for the Àmòtẹ̀kùn Corps at the grassroots level and recommends its continued use as an auxiliary technology to mitigate insecurity.

Keywords: WhatsApp, insecurity, Amotekun corps, social media, Southwest Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The advancement of modern technological tools in the 21st century gave rise to the proliferation of social media use. Meanwhile, the introduction of this type of media vehicle has made the world become a global village with relative ease of effective communication, awareness creation, collaboration, and information sharing through various channels (X – formerly Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and WhatsApp). In addition, Chukwuka, Nwolu, and Onyinye (2021) aver that social media platforms have become indispensable tools for information dissemination, communication, and idea sharing. Therefore, millions of people across Nigeria use social media to engage in discourse and to

share and access information (Anyim, 2021). Hence, the number of social media users globally stood at 4.80 billion as of 2024, while 31.6 million Nigerians are active on social media (Statista, 2024; Ajayi, Akintayo, Akota & Ajayi, 2024). Among these platforms, WhatsApp has emerged as one of the most widely used because of its accessibility and its ability to facilitate instant communication through text, audio, images, and video sharing.

In Nigeria, the increasing use of WhatsApp has extended beyond interpersonal communication to include security-related purposes. Consequently, security agencies in Nigeria, such as the National Security Agency, Nigerian Intelligence Agency, Nigerian Police Force, Western Nigerian Security Network (Operation *Àmòtẹ̀kùn*), among several have also adopted the use of WhatsApp channels and groups to elicit information from the public, disseminate the outcome of investigations, and create awareness on security matters nationally and at the grassroots level. This implies that WhatsApp usage is not limited to organizations, culture and individuals. On this basis, security agencies create different societal groups using WhatsApp to disseminate information to certain categories of the public on trending issues affecting the country.

One prevalent issue in Nigeria is insecurity. Prevalent practical examples in Nigeria's southwestern region in recent times include the kidnapping incidents along the Lagos-Ibadan Expressway in 2023 and 2024, the abduction and killing of traditional rulers and residents in parts of Ondo State in 2024 & 2026, repeated attacks on farmers and rural communities in Oyo and Ogun States between 2023 and 2026, Police brutality-EndSars (2020 & 2026), cases of cult clashes in Lagos and Osun States in 2023 and 2024, and rising incidents of kidnapping and highway robbery reported in Ondo and Ekiti States between 2024 and 2026 and several other incidents dominated major daily discussions on social media platforms within the period.

In response to these prevalent challenges, the Ondo and Ekiti State *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* Corps have increasingly relied on WhatsApp to circulate security alerts, receive intelligence from residents, coordinate responses, and maintain communication with communities at the grassroots level. Therefore, it can be said that WhatsApp have added to the multiplicity of voices across the globe and Nigeria in particular through the creation of WhatsApp groups, WhatsApp channels, WhatsApp communities, among several others. In a unified voice, the public uses WhatsApp to discuss and circulate textual and audio-visual information on the issues affecting quality of life. This is because WhatsApp and every other platform provide users with access to information, sharing of information and engaging in discussion on the information passed.

Notwithstanding, Nsude and Onwe (2017) argue that social media and its various platforms contributed significantly to the fight against insecurity in Nigeria which is within the matrix of media surveillance. Yet still, it is important to note that these security challenges have increased public reliance on digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp for sharing security alerts, reporting suspicious activities, and receiving real-time information from security agencies and community-based security networks such as the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* Corps. This means that due to the prevalence of security challenges in Nigeria in recent times, the WhatsApp platform and its numerous features have created an avenue for reports in audio, text, and video formats to be easily uploaded on status and shared.

The growing threat of insecurity in Nigeria's southwestern region prompted its state governors to convene, despite political party differences, to form a security

organisation known as the "Western Nigerian Security Network" code-named "*Operation Àmòtẹ̀kùn*". The security outfit was legally launched in Ibadan, Oyo State on January 9, 2020 (Odewale & Lamidi, 2020). The meeting that created *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* and its launch were widely circulated on all social media platforms. *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* is the Yoruba (the language of the region) word for leopard, and it comes with nuanced implications as codename for the region's security outfit. According to Odewale and Lamidi (2020), the leopard symbolises strength, perseverance, ambition, independence, toughness, patience, wisdom, and fearlessness. Hence, *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* was conceived and envisaged to show the same traits in taming insecurity in Southwest Nigeria. The establishment of *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* reflected regional efforts to strengthen local security responses and improve intelligence gathering within communities. Since its establishment, the corps has increasingly relied on digital communication tools, especially WhatsApp, to interact with residents, circulate security alerts, and obtain information from the public. It is against this backdrop that this study examined the use of the WhatsApp platform by the Ekiti and Ondo states *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps in mitigating insecurity in the southwest, Nigeria.

The use of WhatsApp and any other social media platforms by the public has shown that these platforms can be used to drag one another, destroy or promote a common interest. Obun-Andy, Aluko, Abayomi, and Abdulquadir (2021) state that while some researchers find social media relevant in combating insecurity; others find the platforms to be an avenue for crime and fuelling insecurity in the country. Notwithstanding, the roles of *Amotekun* corps in southwest Nigeria to lessen insecurity have been the subject of several studies. Kasturi and Vardhan (2014), Nsude and Onwe (2017), Babale and Nasidi (2019), Odewale and Lamidi (2020), Agbu, Musa and Zhema (2020), Aderayo, Olusola and Orebanjo (2022), have studied Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflicts, insurgencies and instability in Nigeria, criminality and the media, impact of social media and regional security initiatives, security challenges in Nigeria, constitutional legality of the western Nigerian security network, community policing, *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* and the Nigerian Police, roles of the Nigerian armed forces, and several others. However, little attention has been paid to how the Ekiti and Ondo states *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* command uses WhatsApp to lessen insecurity since its establishment in 2020. Therefore, this study examines the efficacy of WhatsApp-based communication on the crime response efficiency of the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* Corps in Ondo and Ekiti States, Nigeria. The objectives of the Study are to find out the preference of the WhatsApp platform by the Ekiti and Ondo states *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* command in mitigating insecurity and examine how the employment of the WhatsApp platform by the Ekiti and Ondo states *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* command has helped mitigate insecurity in Southwestern Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Evolution of social media

Several media scholars and school of thoughts have argued and accepted that one of the major mass media vehicles widely used for fast and effective communication in 21st century is the social media. The 20th century saw the emergence of Web 2.0, which powers social media platforms, and contributed to the progress of technological expertise (Chukwuere & Onyebukwa, 2018). The growth of the technological age brought about the advent of the internet and other digital media platforms which facilitated efficient communication and rapid distribution of information within the global village, where

media, social realities, and publics all coexisted. While there is no consensus on the general emergence of the term 'social media', Bercovoci, (2010) opines that the term was first used in the early 1990s in reference to emerging web-based communication tools that facilitated online interaction.

Mbaeri (2022) defined social media as a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through virtual networks and communities. Logan (2016), states that social media refers to "those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication and involve some form of computing. This implies that social media can summarily be defined as a type of media vehicle that is an effective instrument of communication and information sharing, which has made users become sources of information online through the sharing of ideologies, views, opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives with instant feedback. Social media has various platforms that are embraced by man for effective communication and information sharing. This type of media vehicle, which is not limited to social networks like WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Facebook also include blogs, business networks, collaborative projects, enterprise social networks, forums, microblogs, photo sharing, product/services reviews, social bookmarking, social gaming, and also video sharing and virtual worlds. For this study, the WhatsApp platform will be thoroughly examined for clarification purposes.

Epistemology of WhatsApp and Users' Gratifications

Brian Acton and Jan Koum founded WhatsApp in 2009. It is a cross-platform mobile messaging service that allows users to send messages without paying for SMS. This platform is a free messaging application owned by Meta (previously Facebook). In Nigeria, WhatsApp has been ranked as one of the most used social media platforms with over 8.8 million users who are between the age range of 16-64 years (Statista, 2024). This is also as Opawale and Akinola (2022) found out that WhatsApp is the most used social media platform in southwest of Nigeria. The number of WhatsApp users in Nigeria was forecast to continuously increase between 2024 and 2029 to a total population of 11.8million users. The WhatsApp application is one of the most favored mobile-based applications that can facilitate synchronous communication (Hutchinson, 2020; Yunusa & Bukar, 2022). Notwithstanding, this application platform has numerous features which include; photo and video sharing, WhatsApp channels, messaging, activity status, end-to-end encryption, quick web-links, and many more. That being so, WhatsApp can be defined as a 21st-century application within the social media domain, characterized by textual and audiovisual functionalities that facilitate instant messaging, rapid information dissemination, idea exchange, and conversation among users.

It is also worth noting that WhatsApp provides opportunities for social connection among its users, allowing them to share ideas and experiences in reciprocal relations. The platform, which is also known as WhatsApp Messenger, has become a vital part of many people's daily lives around the world, and it is available on Android and IOS phones. These phones can communicate with one another via phone calls and messages. Because WhatsApp Messenger uses the same internet data plan as for email and web browsing, it is free to message and communicate with friends. WhatsApp has emerged as the world's top messaging network because users can form groups and send unlimited photos, videos, and audio media messages. As of April 2024, WhatsApp is the fourth most popular social media

tool in the world, with over 4 billion members. In the third quarter of 2023, WhatsApp was Nigeria's most popular social media app. It was referenced by more than 95% of internet users in the country aged 16 to 64.

WhatsApp has faced criticism for allowing misinformation to proliferate on its network. In one especially heinous example, rumors of child abduction proliferated on Indian WhatsApp networks. Lynch mobs seeking vengeance murdered at least 18 people who were identified as abductors. WhatsApp was also criticized for enabling the spread of false information concerning COVID-19 (Britanica.com). Literature also presents studies conducted specifically on WhatsApp as a frequently used social media tool. These studies have examined the integration of WhatsApp for academic purposes (Gallardo, Marqués & Bullen, 2015; So, 2016); WhatsApp as a supporting tool for parents of children with autism (Cole, Kharwa, Khumalo, Reinle & Karrim, 2017); and WhatsApp for assessment in language education (Guler, 2017; Samaie, Nejad & Qaracholloo, 2018).

Although WhatsApp is utilized in 180 countries, some governments have taken a stand against it. Longer-term bans are primarily motivated by anti-American or anti-Western sentiment, although shorter bans are sometimes issued during times of crisis, when governments cut down communication to prevent demonstrators from using the app. Since 2017, China has completely restricted the use of the app. Iran has also prohibited the usage of WhatsApp, citing allegations of Zionism by Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg. WhatsApp is a popular internet-based communication tool supporting texting as well as audio and video messages for cultural interaction in the global sense (Tulgar, 2019). As the world is becoming a global village, it has become a necessity for world citizens to interact with each other through cultural sharing.

Insecurity

To put it simply, insecurity is a challenge to humans' existential mode. According to Ewetan (2014), insecurity is "the absence of defense; uncertainty; risk; hazard; and safety." Insecurity, according to Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Walter (2014), is the condition of being vulnerable to all types of terrorism, threat, risk, molestation, bullying, and harassment. It eventually develops into a never-ending social issue (Ugwu & Abah, 2020). Beland (2005) states that insecurity entails a lack of protection from crime (being unsafe) and a lack of freedom from psychological harm (unprotected from emotional stress resulting from a paucity of assurance that an individual is accepted, has opportunity and choices to fulfill his or her own potentials, including freedom from fear).

The advancement in technology, which led to the invention of new media (social media) has made today's world be labelled a "global village". This global village has become a village of "internecine skirmish", which means that the earth has become an insecure place for humans to have a lifecycle of peaceful existence due to threats on many fronts. The world population is currently put at around 8.2 billion (World Population Prospects, 2024). However, the world death rate from 1950 to 2022 shows that over 69 million people die yearly due to one form of insecurity or another (World Population Prospects, 2022). Insecurity has caused an upsurge in nuclear weapons proliferation in the world (Federation of American Scientists, 2022).

Globally, the world is struggling to address a confluence of unprecedented and catastrophic global issues. Extreme levels of humanitarian need, displacement, and extreme poverty are concentrated in countries on the United Nations Emergency Watchlist due to conflict and climate change. These factors are also impeding progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals, a set of 17 goals intended to end global poverty and promote prosperity. Of the 110 million people who have been forcibly displaced worldwide, 75 percent come from nations that are on the Watchlist, regardless of whether the people have crossed borders or stayed in their country of origin (International Rescue Committee, 2024).

In Africa, increased social and political turmoil is fueling the return of military coups. This ultimately results in increased insecurity. In recent times, coups have occurred in Mali, Sudan, Niger, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Myanmar. In Sub-Saharan Africa, insecurity remains a serious threat as countries such as Nigeria, Niger, Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burkina Faso, among others recorded 48% of total global deaths from insecurity (Global Terrorism Index, 2022). This means that due to data from verified social media websites, attacks in African countries have declined significantly, dropping by 68% in 2021 from the peak in 2018.

Insecurity in Nigeria can also be traced back to the Fulani-Yoruba civil war or Yoruba Revolutionary war, which was started due to the conflict exacerbated by a Muslim slave rebellion in Ilorin led by a Fulani Muslim cleric known as Shehu Alimi. Several conflicts arose in Yoruba-speaking areas between 1789-1880 as compatriots of Fulani extraction taunted the southwest region to war. Thus, the present crisis is believed to be a follow-up as Fulani herdsmen engage in banditry, kidnapping, and killing, especially on roads and farmlands in the southwest region of Nigeria. Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, a corrupt political and economic system has birthed one crisis or another, such as the 1963 political crisis and several military coups. The 1966 coup and the bloody civil war that followed are unarguably the ugly cornerstone for the insecurity experienced today in Nigeria. Regarding insecurity, Nigeria has earned notoriety for the following: Boko Haram/ISWAP insurgency, civil unrest, Fulani herdsmen and farmers conflicts, banditry, kidnapping for ransom, assault and murder, Niger Delta militancy, ethno-religious crises, etc. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC, 2022), the five major insecurity issues bedeviling Nigeria are jihadism, farmers-herdsmen clashes, banditry and kidnapping, separatist agitation and insurgency, and oil militancy. The ugly situation has created a situation of palpable fear and damaged the image of the country in the community of nations.

Insecurity has not only affected the civilians, but the prevalence of insecurity also shows that non-state actors killed at least 65 police officers in the first half of 2024 (January-June), as the security situation in Nigeria continues to get worse. Aside from the slain law enforcement officers, at least 92 other security operatives were killed in the same period. These include 81 soldiers, two correctional service officials, two NDLEA officers, five officers of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps, and two Federal Road Safety Corp. (Premium Times 2023). Over 2,336 people were killed in various violent attacks within the first three months of 2024 in Nigeria, as Zamfara (439 deaths), Borno (437 deaths), Kastina (362 deaths), and Benue (221 deaths) topped the list (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2024 and International Centre for Investigative Reporting, 2024). The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), in collaboration with the Ministry of

Defense, rolled out different strategies to combat insecurity, with the training of personnel, financial empowerment of the military, and delivery of machinery with several assurances from the government, both at the federal level and state level, to tackle insecurity. But the ugly situation did not abate as daily occurrences are being covered and under-reported by the media. Accordingly, the International Rescue Committee (IRC, July 2022) warned that more than 3 million people may die without international funding for the fight against insecurity.

Cases of insecurity and deadly attacks have increased as there appears to be no end in sight. In the southwest region, there was a brutal attack on the Catholic Church in Owo, Ondo State, on June 5, 2022, which caused at least 40 deaths, though there are claims that the death toll may be as high as 80. Oyo State, reputed as a home of peace, harmony, and unity, has been turned into a place of fear due to the menace of insecurity and criminal activities. Bandits suspected to be Fulani herders invaded Igangan town, Oyo State, killing about 50 villagers on June 5, 2021. The killing and destruction sparked a nationwide outrage and condemnation.

The Surveillance and Correlation functions of the WhatsApp platform in mitigating Insecurity

The surveillance and correlation functions of WhatsApp are at the core of mobilization against acts of insecurity. In society, WhatsApp can also be used successfully to carry out the roles of correlation and surveillance. This means that WhatsApp's correlation function helps connect news and diverse societal happenings to people's lives and environments through its features such as "WhatsApp channels, communities", while its surveillance role can swiftly supply information to a receiver, a group, community, or societal groups on the platform for opinion molding and attitude adoption. This can be accomplished by interpreting and explaining how events affect the environment and the way of life for most people, including the effects of actions that encourage social unrest. It is expected that through effective information, society would gradually turn against such acts. Osadolor (2001) cited in Orhewere and Kur (2004) writes that the most critical role of the media should be in helping to prevent or at least attenuate the severity of conflicts.

WhatsApp disseminated messages, Fake news, and Insecurity

According to Nwankwo and Okolie (2016), cited in Ugwu, Ekwueme & Nzekwe (2018), in their research work, Crime Reporting in Nigeria found that most of the key factors that inhibit effective crime reporting in Nigeria include the following: lack of faith in the Nigerian police force, fear of retaliation, closeness with perpetrators of crime, illiteracy, and poverty. The research reveals that the more economically and financially stable individuals are more likely to have security numbers and will use them to contact the police when crime occurs than the poorer ones, who may not even have these security numbers at hand, and who will be very reluctant to contact the police in case of crime.

The use of the WhatsApp platform in the present 21st century has allowed the government, security agencies, and also the public to always be proactive and carry out the act of surveillance in protecting their lives, properties and their environment. This is because WhatsApp users know their communities better, and any report(s) of suspicious behavior or activity could lead to actionable intelligence leading to the disruption of

attacks. Through the use of the WhatsApp platform, fake news can be disseminated due to the absence of gatekeepers who filter the messages or content being shared across various groups and communities on the platform. This further led to the Nigerian government regulating social media. According to Adeyemi and Obun (2022), nothing seems to threaten the peace and tranquility of the Nigerian State like the menace of fake news because it has emerged as the propeller to the forces that engender insecurity. Over time, Nigeria's security has been threatened by unscrupulous citizens, leaders, community crises, religious crises, bad governance, disunity, terrorism, and, most recently, fake news (Wilson & Umar, 2019). Fake news on WhatsApp becomes viral as the active users of WhatsApp receive any information disseminated to them immediately. This act has become more intense in recent times because of widespread internet use and low-cost access to WhatsApp channels.

With modern technologies such as the WhatsApp platform, citizens have been empowered to take part in crime reporting, crime exposure, and the fight against crime. However, armed with the knowledge of these numerous security problems, the security agents recently embarked on media campaigns for police/public collaboration to facilitate crime reporting and investigations. This desired synergy between the community and the security agents is built upon mobile technologies and contacts like mobile phones and computer systems, where applications such as WhatsApp can be installed and used for communication and information sharing. Some of these security media programmes in Nigeria include the following: If You See Something, Say Something (aired in NTA); Know Your Neighbor Now (in NTA); Whistle Blowing Policy (Federal government anti-corruption policy). Also, most of the thirty-six states in Nigeria have their own security media campaigns, while the southwest social media campaign gave birth to the Western Nigerian Security Network (WNSN) codenamed "*Operation Àmòtẹ̀kùn*".

Àmòtẹ̀kùn

Àmòtẹ̀kùn is a local security outfit created by the Southwest Governors of Nigeria to combat kidnapping, murder, and other crimes in the region. Due to these persistent criminal actions, the Western Nigerian Security Network, also known as Operation *Àmòtẹ̀kùn*, was established in the region. *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* is a cooperative security patrol that supports police work. The security outfit was formed in response to the necessity to ensure the safety and well-being of the local populace. *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* aims to bring law enforcement closer to the residents of its mandate areas. *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* was born at a Southwest Governors' meeting because of the constant rise in insecurity in the region. Following the security meeting, the Western Nigeria Governors' Forum (WNGF), which is made up of the six governors in the region – Oyo, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Ekiti, and Ondo States, decided to establish a unified security force. The outfit was finally unveiled at a formal event held at the Government House, Ibadan (Yahaya & Bello, 2020).

Three of the Governors in the persons of Kayode Fayemi (Ekiti State), Rotimi Akeredolu (Ondo State), and Seyi Makinde, the host Governor (Oyo State), were in attendance. However, more striking is the open hands with which Nigerians, especially southerners and the Yoruba of the Southwest, embraced the concept. The southwest region has been primarily the pacesetter in most of the developmental strides recorded in Nigeria across the political, social, and economic spectrum. Therefore, the bandwagon effect of the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* initiative in Nigeria was just a matter of time before taking effect. It is worth noting that if the Nigerian government had made far-reaching moves to curb the tide of

insecurity after the outcry that birthed *Àmòtẹ̀kùn*, then the initiative would have been a one-off occurrence. But as it stands, the worsening security situation across Nigeria has catalyzed the replication of the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* concept amongst the ethnic nationalities represented in the various regions of the country. This has sparked a regionalized race to establish paramilitary security outfits, reminiscent of the arms race of the Cold War period.

Theoretical framework

The theory adopted for this study is the Ritual View of Communication Theory. The ritual view of communication theory was propounded by James W. Carey in 1975. This theory enables the representation, adaptation, and sharing of beliefs that allow for the development of a particular society, maintaining and keeping society alive by being aware of trending issues through information dissemination and reproducing it over time. Today's community has moved online because of technological advancements. In this way, it is generally acknowledged that WhatsApp use has strengthened community bonds by connecting members to shared norms, values, experiences, and views. WhatsApp users represent an online mass community who can be added to a group through their mobile numbers, where audio-video materials are broadcast for public consumption and incomplete perspectives of the social environment are gathered, portrayed, and later confirmed by others.

Several scholars have argued over the theoretical underpinnings of this theory. Sen (2016) argues that rituals can be seen as a kind of upward sedimentation, emerging from a sea of conversation to be solidified into the material known as sociality. Rituals are significant because they establish the kinds of relationships that serve as the foundation for social order. Carey (1989) argues that the important part of a newspaper is not the actual news but the fact that it is delivered every day. The WhatsApp platform has given room for the public to be aware of events happening around them and discuss issues through comments and feedback. In this perspective, communication is the representation of our shared beliefs and "it constructs and maintains an ordered and meaningful cultural world" (Carey 1989; Yang, 2020). This ritual view of communication emphasizes "sharing," "participation," and "association" as qualities of communication. Communication as a ritualistic practice is responsible for creating social reality and helps to bridge the gap between the audience and society.

In relation to this study, the ritual view of communication views WhatsApp as a platform where anyone can upload any form of social reality, such as *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* activities and insecurity issues. What is uploaded can consist of ideas and daily back-and-forth ritual, while the online community maintains that reality by acknowledging and discussing the matter with each other in a group section, which is one of the features of the WhatsApp platform.

METHODS

The study adopted the case study research design, while the interview guide served as an instrument for data collection. This design was principally aimed at examining Ekiti and Ondo states *Àmòtẹ̀kùn's* WhatsApp use in mitigating insecurity in southwest, Nigeria. The interview was carried out with the operatives of Ekiti and Ondo states Western Nigerian Security Network (*Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps) since it is a corporate body set up by the

southwestern region governors and firmly backed by the state law. The population of the study comprised 11 (eleven) *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* officers drawn from different ranks and operational units in Ondo and Ekiti States. The participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the operations and communication activities of the corps, particularly their engagement with WhatsApp for information dissemination, intelligence gathering, and public interaction. The study used these specific numbers of interviewees since the case study did not require a huge representation of the population under consideration, and the selected *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps provided firsthand knowledge and information that were extremely beneficial to the study. Data collected through the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The interview responses were transcribed, carefully read, and coded according to recurring patterns and ideas relevant to the study objectives. During the coding process, related responses were grouped into themes. The first theme, WhatsApp preferences, has two subthemes: factors and information. The second theme, WhatsApp enhancement of mitigating insecurity by *Àmòtẹ̀kùn*, also has two subthemes: feedback and effectiveness. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study adopted member checking and peer review techniques. Some participants were allowed to review aspects of their responses to confirm accuracy and clarity of interpretation. In addition, the researchers discussed the coding categories and thematic interpretations with colleagues knowledgeable in media and security studies to minimise bias and strengthen the reliability of the analysis. The study covered the period when *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* was established in 2020 and when this study was carried out.

Overview of the Interview Conducted with the Ekiti and Ondo States Àmòtẹ̀kùn Corps

The Ekiti State *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* Command was established on October 19th, 2020, and headed by Mr I.O. Adewa, a retired Brigadier General. The command is located at Trade Fair Complex, beside Fountain Hotel, Ado-Ekiti. The researcher met with the Chief Operations Officer of the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps, who provided the researcher with 5 (five) officers to participate in the scheduled interview.

The Ondo State *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps is headed by Chief Adetunji Adeleye, a retired Deputy Commandant General of Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps. Ondo State *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps was legally established in March 2020 by Governor Rotimi Akeredolu. The researcher met directly with the Commandant-General of the Ondo State *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps at the state headquarters located around the Ondo State Government House. The Commandant-General allowed the interview to take place and ensured that the researcher was given all the necessary assistance for a successful interview. The Commandant-General also directed the researcher to the office of the second in command (2ic) to the Commandant-General of the Ondo state *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps. The researcher was further assisted with six (6) officers of the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps who provided valuable information needed for this study. The researcher also met with the Public Relations Officer of the Ondo State *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps, who guided him on the set of officers from whom to gather the necessary information required for the study.

This allowed the researcher to effectively carry out the interview with *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* officers in the two selected southwestern states. The officers use and adopt WhatsApp for security purposes within the confines of the Western Nigerian Security Network (*Operation Àmòtẹ̀kùn*). To maintain confidentiality as promised, the respondents were coded as

Informant 1 to 11. The researcher also promised the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* officers that their recorded voices would only be used for this study. To ensure accuracy, the researcher took the personal responsibility of transcribing the 11 interviews from the two states.

Thematic Analysis

A thematic method of analysis was used for analysing the semi-structured interviews conducted. This was done by extracting relevant themes from interviews that addressed the objectives of this study. The first theme, WhatsApp preferences, has two subthemes: factors, and information. The second theme, WhatsApp enhancement of mitigating insecurity by *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* also has two subthemes: feedback, and effectiveness.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1. Details of Interviewed *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* Officers

S/N	NAME	GENDER	UNIT/RANK	STATE	REGION
1.	Informant 1	Male	(2iC) Second in Command to the Commandant General of Ondo State <i>Àmòtẹ̀kùn</i> corps	Ondo	Southwest
2.	Informant 2	Female	Superintendent <i>Àmòtẹ̀kùn</i>	of Ondo	Southwest
3.	Informant 3	Male	Superintendent <i>Àmòtẹ̀kùn</i> Intelligence Department/Unit	of Ondo from	Southwest
4.	Informant 4	Male	Inspector and orderly to the (2ic) Second in Command	Ondo	Southwest
5.	Informant 5	Male	Head of CIC (Crime Intake Centre)	Ondo	Southwest
6.	Informant 6	Male	Public Relations Officer (PRO) of Ondo State <i>Àmòtẹ̀kùn</i> corps	Ondo	Southwest
7.	Informant 7	Male	Corps Intelligent Officer	Ekiti	Southwest
8.	Informant 8	Male	Drill Instructor	Ekiti	Southwest
9.	Informant 9	Female	Training Department Administrative Officer	Ekiti	Southwest
10.	Informant 10	Male	<i>Àmòtẹ̀kùn</i> Corps Script Editor	Ekiti	Southwest
11.	Informant 11	Male	<i>Àmòtẹ̀kùn</i> Corps Provost Marshall	Ekiti	Southwest

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

Table 1 shows that the 11 categories of *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* officers interviewed are of different ranks and belong to different units. The table further reveals the background of the 11 informants, as they are from the two selected states of Ondo and Ekiti. The table shows that there are more males than females, as a total of nine (9) males were interviewed compared to 2 females. The disparity is explained by the fact that more males were readily available for the interview.

In providing answers to objective one, two themes were employed. The themes are; factors for WhatsApp preference and information passed with preferred WhatsApp platform.

Factor for WhatsApp Preference

Based on the findings generated for the factors that make *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* officers of the Western Nigerian Security Network use their preferred social media platforms, this study explored the reason behind the usage of social media platforms by the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* officers and why they prefer to use WhatsApp among other platform(s). Factors such as in-house information dissemination, and grassroots initiative/enlightenment were buttressed by the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* officers.

In Ondo State, the participants all agreed that;

The Ondo State Àmòtẹ̀kùn Corps communicates with the public through WhatsApp, and they also communicate internally across the local government areas through radio broadcasting and the website, which is www.ondostateamotekun.com. If the command wants to send a message to the coordinators, they send it through WhatsApp or use the walkie-talkie. They also revealed that the command has not been dealing with Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, and there is no reason except if the public posts things on Facebook. But internally, we do not use Facebook and others

Furthermore, Informant 3, who is a Superintendent of *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* in the Intelligence Department of Ondo State Command, explained that:

The fact is that through the media, we disseminate information to commuters or users on phone or WhatsApp to the people at the grassroots to let them know when we carry out periodic patrols. This is done to effectively checkmate the activities of criminals who use cars or motorcycles at night to commit heinous crimes.

In Ekiti State, Informant 8 who is a drill instructor stated that:

We only use WhatsApp. Since the day Àmòtẹ̀kùn corps started, we decided to open a WhatsApp platform right in the camp to communicate amongst ourselves, and to get information out there. We are trying to get something like a website and from the information that we gathered from our commander, they are still working on it. By the time they are done, it will be accessible to the whole world. We also use the WhatsApp platform to communicate with the head of local governments and landlords' association, wherein we send urgent information for delivery to the people

Informant 10 also added that:

If there is any information that we gathered on suspects, we post it in our WhatsApp group for all to see. Our WhatsApp platform is also for internal communication, and we use it to communicate with the local government chairmen and the LCDAs in the state.

Informant 7 from Ekiti state also added that:

The problem with Facebook is hacking, and there are some things you cannot post on Facebook because the space is volatile. For WhatsApp, if you are not in someone's group, you cannot have access to them, and only those who are concerned have access to the information. This is why WhatsApp is preferred over Facebook or any other social media platform.

Informant 8, a Drill Instructor in the Ekiti State Command, further revealed that:

We use WhatsApp. Apart from using the platform for internal communication, we also use it to communicate with the landlord associations and local government heads across the state. They help us to disseminate information to their wards, and we answer them anytime they need us.

Information passed with the preferred WhatsApp platform

In Ondo state, Informant 3 stated that:

We disseminate information to commuters about the time that we carry out periodic patrols to effectively checkmate the activities of criminals who use cars or motorcycles to commit crimes at night. This mitigates the use of motorcycles or vehicles to commit crimes at odd hours. For the people at home as my commander said, we disseminate information through WhatsApp to all other divisional officers, area commanders, the local government chairmen and the LCDAs. We also give timely information on patrols and create awareness on security. The Àmòtékùn corps often get valuable security information by these means.

Informant 5 from Ondo State Command also added that:

We also attend community meetings with the community leaders by informing them earlier through WhatsApp of the time when and location for the meeting. Each local government leader has representatives that attend these community meetings, and we use that opportunity to disseminate information relating to personal and home security.

In Ekiti state, Informant 10 revealed that:

If we have any information on suspects who were arrested, we relay it to the Governor through the Special Adviser on Security. But now, we do not relate any information to the public through Facebook and Twitter except through WhatsApp. If we have any information on suspects, we normally post it on our WhatsApp platform for all to see.

In Ekiti State, Informant 11, who is the Corps Provost Marshal of the *Àmòtékùn* Corps, Ekiti State Command stated that:

Yes, we do give out safety tips. For example, by 8-9 pm, we demand that all bike (Okada) riders close work. In the process of working around 9:30 and 10:30 pm, we noticed that it caused crowding, and we caught someone using his bike (Okada) to steal cement bags at night. We tell the people not to move around at night or ride a bike once it is 10 pm. So, these are some of the things we discuss with the people.

Informant 8, who is a Drill Instructor in the Ekiti State Command, added that:

*We tell people to alert the security agents about any suspicious movement around them. We also tell the landlords during meetings to be alert. We sometimes go on radio stations to sensitize the public and give out our numbers. The public is told to call the numbers at times of distress or emergency. Although the public fears the *Àmòtékùn* corps because they believe that we use charms, it is just God.*

Informant 9, who is a Training Department Administrative Officer in the Ekiti State Command, noted that:

We go for training and train people, especially the personnel on fire incidents. Last year (2023), a woman fell into the well, and we rescued her. So, we are also trained to assist in unusual situations. We visit different local governments and schools to train the people on what to do when confronted with unusual situations. We have weekly situation reports, which are reported to the governor. We also have a WhatsApp platform through which we disseminate information. However, information and messages are usually transmitted through the daily situation report (sit-rep) here in Ekiti State.

In providing answers to the second research objective, two sub-themes were employed. They are: feedback and effectiveness.

Feedback

In Ekiti State, Informant 7 explained that:

*We do get inquiries and feedback from local government heads or landlord associations across the state through WhatsApp and any information we post on our group. If there is any situation on ground, we call on our corps commandant to talk to them. For example, the case at Eda-Oniyò area where someone was killed by invaders from Obo, Kwara State. The report is with the governor after our commandant briefed him. We got feedback that the Commissioner of Police was there with a brigadier general to plead for peace between the warring parties. So, these are the areas we get feedback from. When the public sees us (*Àmòtékùn*), they greet and appreciate us.*

In Ondo State, Informant 1 also explained that:

If the former existing security agencies have been doing their job diligently, there would be no need for Àmòtẹ̀kùn. It should be mentioned that Àmòtẹ̀kùn is doing something entirely different from what others are doing. So, we do not need commendation, as I know people are commending us, and that serves as added motivation. People don't physically need to thank us because we read about public commendations on platforms. And if they want to commend us by monetary donation, there is a general account of Àmòtẹ̀kùn corps to which donations can be sent. Across local governments and other areas where Àmòtẹ̀kùn has extended to, people sometimes appreciate us by posting our activities online. For example, there was a case of a kidnapping in Akure, and we apprehended a suspect who was about to kidnap a girl of 8 years. The people who witnessed the scene shared it on social media, and some people in the diaspora appreciated us.

Effectiveness

Regarding the use of WhatsApp platform and its effectiveness, some of the interviewed Àmòtẹ̀kùn officers noted that the placement of information and security tips shared via WhatsApp platform and has produced good results. On the question: "Can you briefly explain how the use of WhatsApp has helped the Àmòtẹ̀kùn corps in mitigating insecurity in Southwest Nigeria?",

Informant 8, who is a Drill Instructor in the Ekiti State Command, added that:

Through the use of WhatsApp and posts shared on the platform, people have been alerting the security agents about any suspicious movement around them. We also tell the landlords during meetings to be alert. Apart from what they post on WhatsApp and information sent to us, we sometimes go on radio stations to sensitize the public and give out our numbers. The public is told to call or chat with the numbers on WhatsApp at times of distress or emergency. Although the public fears the Àmòtẹ̀kùn corps because they believe that we use charms, it is just God.

In Ekiti State, Informant 11, who is the Corps Provost Marshal of the Àmòtẹ̀kùn Corps, Ekiti State Command stated that:

We have been able to effectively share security tips on our various WhatsApp group to the local government chairmen and LCDAs. Yes, we do give out safety tips. For example, by 8-9 pm in the night, we demand that all bike (Okada) riders close work. In the process of working around 9:30 and 10:30 pm, we notice that it caused crowding and we have caught someone using his bike (Okada) to steal cement bags in the night. We tell the people not to move around at night or ride a bike once it is 10pm. So, these are some of the things we discuss with the people.

Informant 3, who is a Superintendent of Àmòtẹ̀kùn in the Intelligence Department, Ondo State Command stated that:

The fact is that through the use of WhatsApp, we disseminate information to commuters and others regarding the time that we carry out patrols to effectively checkmate the activities of those who use car or motorcycle to commit crimes at night.

This has effectively mitigated to a large extent the use of motorcycles or vehicles to commit nighttime crimes.

Informant 3, who is a Superintendent of *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* in the Intelligence Department of Ondo State Command, explained that:

The fact is that through the media, we disseminate information to commuters or users on phone or WhatsApp to let them know when we carry out periodic patrols. This is done to effectively checkmate the activities of criminals who use cars or motorcycles at night to commit heinous crimes.

DISCUSSIONS

The study finds that *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* in the two selected states utilise WhatsApp. This finding on WhatsApp being the most used social media platform *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* in the three states, as well as the fact that most respondents use the WhatsApp platform, is consistent with the findings of Opawale and Akionla 2022, who discovered that "WhatsApp is the most used social media platform in Southwest Nigeria". Based on grassroots security initiatives and enlightenment, and in-house information dissemination, the study identifies the preferred WhatsApp platform of *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* in Ekiti and Ondo states. Although the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps is founded to combat heightened insecurity as indicated by its motto: "Zero Tolerance to Crime," it is consistent with the position of Onah, Aduma, and Eze (2023) that "regional security organizations are the antidote to insecurity in Nigeria".

In addition, the study finds that in Ondo State, the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* officers use WhatsApp to communicate internally across the local government areas, while in Ekiti State, the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* officers use the WhatsApp platform for internal communication and also to communicate with the head of local governments and landlords' association, who further disseminate information to their wards. The study finds that the information passed through WhatsApp platform by the Ondo state command entails disseminating information to commuters about the time they are to carry out periodic patrols to effectively checkmate the activities of criminals who use cars or motorcycles to commit crimes at night. This mitigates the use of motorcycles or vehicles to commit crimes at odd hours. In Ekiti state, any information on suspects is posted on their WhatsApp platform for all to see. The command also give out security safety tips on their platforms such as by 8-9 pm in the night, we demand that all bike (Okada) riders close work. The command also informs the people to alert the security agents about any suspicious movement around them. This finding is in line with James W. Carey's ritual view of communication theory which explains the representation, adaptation, and sharing of beliefs that allow for the development of a particular society and maintaining and keeping society alive by being aware of issues happening in the society through information dissemination and its reproduction over time.

The study finds that the employment of WhatsApp platform by the Ekiti and Ondo states *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* command has helped mitigate insecurity in Southwestern Nigeria through getting inquiries and feedback from local government heads or landlord associations across the state. This finding is also in line with the findings of Chukwuere and Onyebukwa (2018), and Abdullahi and Abdul-Qadir, (2019) which reveal that the use of social media platforms has been an effective medium of drawing support for people in an emergency. In the area of effectiveness, the study finds that the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* officers explained were able to

inform the public to always alert the corps command of any suspicious activities through calling or chatting up the command. The study further reveals that the corps command has been able to effectively share security tips on our various WhatsApp group to the local government chairmen and LCDAs. Safety tips such as “locking doors and not removing the keys, if you see something say something, installation and use of security lights in the compound at night, availability of patrol vehicles in strategic places, no keeping of late nights, no driving of motorcycles after 10 pm, among several others. This has effectively mitigated to a large extent the use of motorcycles or vehicles to commit nighttime crimes. Since the public is in full support of the creation and establishment of the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps, information and public communication should be shared through social media platforms. In support of this assertion, Guanah and Seigha (2022) reveal that regarding security-related matters, more Nigerians support the formation of *Àmòtẹ̀kùn*.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the Ekiti and Ondo states *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps use WhatsApp for internal communication and grassroots initiative. This means that WhatsApp is used to effectively communicate and disseminate information with the public through their local government association and LCDAs. The study concluded that the corps command use WhatsApp to pass information on safety security tips internally and to the public. This study offers some recommendations. First, The use of WhatsApp in mitigating insecurity at the grassroots level by the *Àmòtẹ̀kùn* corps should be encouraged as an auxiliary technology. Second, Since WhatsApp is the most used platform in southwestern region, the adoption of WhatsApp should be utilized for timely dissemination of verified information. Third, If residents can be provided with modern digital tools per household, security agencies will be able to respond fast(er) to distress situations and share important security information to the people at the grassroots level.

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