



## **NAVIGATING THE TENSION: THE INTERPLAY OF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION, NATIONAL SECURITY, AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN NIGERIA (2011-2024)**

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### **Abstract**

*The relationship between freedom of information, national security, and the rise of social media in Nigeria presents a complex and multifaceted challenge. The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, enacted in 2011, was designed to promote transparency and empower citizens; however, its implementation has faced systemic obstacles, limiting its effectiveness. Simultaneously, increasing national security threats have prompted government restrictions on information flow, often justified by security concerns. The rapid growth of social media has further complicated this landscape, offering opportunities for democratic engagement while also enabling the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and extremist propaganda. This study aims to examine how Nigeria has navigated the intersection of freedom of information and national security from 2011 to 2024. Specifically, it assesses the effectiveness of the FOI Act, the impact of social media on information access and national security, and the extent to which the misuse of information has compromised security. The study employs a qualitative research methodology, including content analysis of policy documents, legislative frameworks, and case studies, alongside interviews with key stakeholders such as government officials, media practitioners, and security experts. Findings indicate that while the FOI Act has enhanced transparency in some areas, its enforcement remains weak due to government resistance, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and concerns over national security. The study recommends a balanced approach that strengthens the implementation of the FOI Act while ensuring that national security concerns are addressed through targeted regulations rather than blanket restrictions.*

**Keywords: Freedom of Information (FOI) Act, National Security, Social Media, Misinformation, Nigeria's Governance.**

### **Introduction**

Information is vital to human development, enabling informed decisions and strategic planning. National security and other developmental activities rely on accurate data related to politics, health, education, and population. Without information, national security is compromised, hindering national progress. Freedom of information fosters transparency, accountability, and citizen empowerment, ensuring public officials remain responsible. Many democratic nations have recognized this right, acknowledging its role in governance (Gewali, 2009; Denedo, 2011). However, freedom of information is not absolute. It must be balanced with national security, privacy, and public order. Anyalebechi (2016) asserts that unrestricted access to sensitive data could jeopardize security, leading to instability. Media practitioners



and social media users often oppose restrictions, advocating for absolute freedom. This debate echoes the libertarian and authoritarian theories of the press. Libertarians like Locke (1988) and Curran & Gurevitch (2000) argue for unrestricted access, while authoritarians such as Hobbes (Skinner, 1990) emphasize regulation to prevent chaos and protect sovereignty.

Social media has significantly impacted information dissemination in Nigeria, offering both opportunities and challenges. While it enhances public discourse and civic engagement, it also facilitates misinformation, hate speech, and extremist recruitment (Theahan & Rollins, 2011). The Nigerian government has responded with regulations such as the Freedom of Information Act (2011) and the proposed social media bill, aiming to balance transparency with security. However, critics argue these measures could suppress free speech and hinder accountability (Enwerem, 2014). Global examples, such as the U.S. Freedom of Information Act and the U.K.'s Official Secrets Act, illustrate attempts to balance information access with national security. In Nigeria, escalating threats from groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP have intensified security concerns, prompting government interventions that sometimes conflict with democratic norms. Social media's role in this dynamic remains controversial, with regulations sparking debates on whether they enhance security or erode freedoms. This study examines Nigeria's social media and freedom of information landscape from 2011 to 2024, analyzing their impact on national security. By assessing the interplay between information freedom and security imperatives, it seeks to inform policies that protect both democratic values and national stability.

## **Conceptual Review**

### **Freedom**

Freedom is a fundamental yet complex concept encompassing personal autonomy, civil rights, and societal liberation. Philosophical discussions on freedom date back to Aristotle (350 BC), who defined it as rational, independent action free from coercion (Miller, 2011). Enlightenment thinkers like John Locke (1689) emphasized natural rights and individual liberties within a social contract, while Immanuel Kant (1784) linked freedom to reason and intellectual independence. Politically, freedom is central to declarations like the U.S. Declaration of Independence, which asserts inalienable rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Existentialist philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre (1995) expanded the idea, emphasizing radical freedom and personal responsibility in shaping one's existence.



Freedom varies across societies, requiring legal protections and institutional support. It underpins human dignity, justice, and equality, allowing individuals to think, act, speak, and write without undue interference, particularly in political contexts.

### **Concepts of Freedom of Information**

Freedom of information, rooted in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), is recognized as a fundamental human right under international law. Treaties like the ICCPR and the African Charter on Human Rights affirm its importance, emphasizing individuals' rights to access and share information freely. In Nigeria, Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, allowing individuals and the press to receive and disseminate information, though government regulations apply to broadcasting. Historically, journalists in Nigeria have advocated for unrestricted access to public information to promote accountability and transparency (Anyalebechi, 2016). Freedom of information ensures a free flow of information and grants citizens access to government-held records (Omotayo, 2015; Apuke, 2017). It is essential for democracy, enabling public scrutiny and preventing corruption. However, certain information—such as national security details, personal privacy, and sensitive commercial data—may justifiably remain confidential. Despite its significance, Nigeria lagged in adopting freedom of information laws, only enacting the Freedom of Information Act in 2011. Unlike established democracies, it was initially viewed as a luxury. However, access to accurate information is critical for informed decision-making, governance, and societal progress (Media Rights Agenda, 2011).

### **Concepts of Freedom of information Act**

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) in Nigeria was enacted on May 28, 2011, to promote transparency, accountability, and good governance while recognizing the need for certain limitations to protect national security and maintain order. The Act was initially championed by media organizations such as the Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), and Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), who advocated for unrestricted access to government-held information (Anyalebechi, 2016). While often associated with journalists, the Act applies to all Nigerians, regardless of class, tribe, religion, or social status (Anyalebechi, 2016).

The objectives of the Act, as stated in its preamble, include:

1. Increasing public access to government records.
2. Allowing individuals to request information from government institutions.
3. Ensuring transparency while protecting individual privacy.



4. Preserving public records.
5. Protecting whistleblowers in public service (Freedom of Information Act, 2011).

The FOIA establishes a legal framework for citizens to access information, subject to reasonable charges for document duplication and transcription (Anyalebechi, 2016). It defines conditions for requesting information, situations where access may be denied, and the responsibilities of government institutions in providing requested information (Madubuike-Ekwe & Mbadugha, 2018).

Scholars view the FOIA as a legislative extension of the constitutional right to freedom of expression and an essential tool for upholding citizens' right to know (Ezugwu et al., 2013). It enables civil society groups and journalists to investigate and expose corruption, financial mismanagement, and other government malpractices (Denedo, 2011; Gamji & Abdul, 2019). Akor and Oko (2015) highlight that the Act represents a shift from a "need to know" to a "right to know" approach in governance, encouraging active citizenship. According to Zubair (2020), the FOIA facilitates free dissemination, publication, and notification of government actions, reinforcing democratic principles. Despite its potential, the poor implementation of the FOIA has allowed corruption to persist in Nigeria, as many government institutions continue to withhold critical information from the public (Sahara Reporters, 2011). Strengthening the Act's enforcement is crucial for ensuring accountability and exposing corruption across sectors, including financial transactions and power privatization (Apuke, 2017).

However, while the FOIA is a fundamental human right protected by international and regional human rights instruments, it is not absolute (Anyalebechi, 2016). The Act includes exemptions that allow the government to restrict access to information in cases where national security or other sensitive matters are at stake. Balancing transparency with security remains essential to strengthening democracy, combating corruption, and safeguarding national interests in Nigeria.

### **Concepts of Security**

Security is a complex and multifaceted concept that holds different meanings for scholars, policymakers, and individuals worldwide. It is a critical and fragile issue, particularly for nations like Nigeria, where it remains a persistent challenge. At its core, security pertains to the safety and survival of states and their citizens (Degaut, 2015). Singh (2015) defines security as a condition free from perceived threats, encompassing national and international interests. Barry Buzan (1991) describes



security as the pursuit of freedom from threats and the ability of states and societies to maintain their identity and integrity against hostile forces. Similarly, Williams (2008) links security to risk mitigation, particularly threats that endanger survival. These perspectives highlight that security extends beyond physical protection to include economic, environmental, psychological, financial, and societal dimensions. It also involves protection from fear, poverty, oppression, and threats to fundamental beliefs.

### **Concept of National Security**

National security has gained global attention, particularly in Nigeria, due to persistent security challenges. Traditionally, it was viewed through a militaristic lens, focusing on self-defense, military strength, and strategic interests. Scholars such as Ray (1987), Hartmann (1983), and Brennan (1961) reinforced this narrow perspective, emphasizing national defense and state security. However, critiques emerged against this limited view. Zeitel-Bank and Tat (2014) argued that focusing solely on military defense neglects economic stability, social cohesion, and environmental protection. Asad (2007) and Igbogo (2015) highlighted the evolution of national security, incorporating socioeconomic, cultural, and developmental factors. McNamara (1968) linked security to development, asserting that military power alone cannot ensure stability if citizens face poverty and deprivation.

Scholars like Subrahmanyam (1972) and Al-Marshat (1985) expanded the definition to include industrialization, social justice, and psychological well-being. Omotola (2006) and Onuoha (2008) emphasized national security as freedom from threats across economic, social, and political domains. Ali (2013) and Peterside (2018) stressed the protection of human life, resources, and national interests, including natural disasters and economic crises.

Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) and Mofolorunsho et al. (2019) underscored national security's multidimensional nature, integrating political, economic, and social stability. Yenor (1985) and Singh (2015) emphasized the interdependence of security and development, warning against over-prioritizing military strength at the expense of economic and social factors. Holmes (2014) and Chandra & Bhonsle (2015) advocated for a holistic approach, encompassing cybersecurity, environmental security, and human security. Overall, national security has evolved from a purely militaristic concept to a comprehensive framework incorporating economic, social, political, and environmental dimensions. This broader perspective is essential for addressing Nigeria's complex security challenges.



## Concept of Social Media

The 21st century has witnessed a transformation in communication, largely driven by Web 2.0, which powers social media platforms (Chukwukere & Onyebukwa, 2018). Social media has revolutionized access to information by enabling real-time interaction, content sharing, and knowledge dissemination (Adibe, 2012). It serves as a powerful tool for self-expression, networking, and engagement, allowing individuals to connect, publish content, and form online communities (Trottier & Fuchs, 2014; Lutkevich & Wigmore, 2021). Social media has become an integral part of daily life, influencing global interconnectedness and promoting freedom of expression (Sawyer & Chen, 2012). Additionally, its impact extends across social, economic, cultural, and political domains (Eze, 2018). Platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram provide spaces for communication, activism, and information exchange (Tamayo, 2015).

In Nigeria, social media gained prominence in the mid-2000s with platforms like Facebook, initially used for personal interactions (Brown, 2018). Increased mobile internet access and affordable smartphones fueled its expansion, making it accessible across urban and rural areas (Tseguyu, 2021). By 2011, social media had become a crucial tool for political engagement, with platforms like Twitter and Facebook influencing election discourse (The Guardian Nigeria, 2015). Between 2016 and 2019, platforms like Instagram and WhatsApp further expanded social media's reach, playing a vital role in political activism and business marketing (BusinessDay, 2021).

By 2024, Nigeria had approximately 36.75 million social media users, representing 16.2% of its population, with internet penetration at 45.5% (Datareportal, 2024). Despite its benefits, social media in Nigeria has faced challenges such as misinformation, hate speech, and fake news, often fueling ethnic and religious tensions (Premium Times Nigeria, 2021). Consequently, government interventions, including proposed regulations, have sparked debates on balancing freedom of expression with responsible social media use. Authorities argue that unchecked social media use could exacerbate Nigeria's already polarized society, leading to calls for stricter oversight (Techpoint Africa, 2021).

Looking ahead, social media in Nigeria is expected to continue evolving, incorporating innovations like live video streaming, augmented reality, and e-commerce integration (Techpoint Africa, 2021). As its influence grows, the debate over its regulation and impact on national security will likely remain a central issue in Nigeria's digital landscape.



### **Abuse of Access to Information and National Security in Nigeria**

Access to information is essential for transparency and accountability, but its abuse can compromise national security. In Nigeria, the misuse of sensitive security information has enabled terrorist groups like Boko Haram to anticipate military strategies, evade capture, and launch attacks. Cases include the 2014 leak of military operations in Sambisa Forest, the 2015 betrayal of operational plans by insiders, and the 2016 exposure of a raid in Kano, all of which undermined counter-terrorism efforts. Social media posts by soldiers and civilians have also revealed troop movements, aiding insurgents. During the Chibok Girls rescue efforts, unverified social media reports risked alerting kidnappers. Similarly, in 2018, leaked counter-terrorism plans compromised operations. Terrorists have exploited weaknesses in information security, with groups like Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb influencing Nigerian military strategies through social media.

Beyond terrorism, misinformation on social media has inflamed ethnic conflicts, such as the Fulani herdsman-farmer crisis, by spreading false reports that incite violence. The #EndSARS protests (2020) saw exaggerated casualty claims fueling unrest. During health crises like the 2014 Ebola outbreak and COVID-19 pandemic, false cures and conspiracy theories caused harm. Election periods have also been affected, with misinformation in 2019 and 2023 leading to political tension.

Cybersecurity breaches further threaten national security, as seen in the 2024 exposure of 100 million Nigerians' National Identification Numbers (NIN). Weak cyber defenses make critical infrastructure vulnerable to attacks. Corruption thrives when officials misuse privileged information for personal gain, eroding public trust. Cyberbullying and harassment, particularly against activists and journalists, have also destabilized Nigeria's socio-political landscape. During the EndSARS movement, online threats and false accusations aimed at protest leaders discouraged activism and undermined national stability. To mitigate these threats, Nigeria needs stringent information security policies, robust cybersecurity measures, and better regulation of social media. While access to information is vital, its abuse—especially through misinformation, leaks, and cyber threats—poses a significant danger to national security.

### **Freedom of Information Act and National Security in Nigeria**

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act plays a crucial role in promoting transparency and accountability in Nigeria. However, its implementation presents significant challenges, particularly in relation to national security. Several empirical studies have



examined the Act's effectiveness, highlighting both its benefits and obstacles. Asadu and Ozioko (2020) argue that access to information enables citizens to hold leaders accountable, thereby fostering transparency and responsible governance. However, challenges such as non-disclosure of certain information and low public awareness hinder the Act's full potential. To address these issues, they recommend reviewing specific provisions of the Act, increasing public enlightenment, and ensuring strict compliance. Similarly, Madubuike-Ekwe and Mbadugha (2018) examine the FOI Act's impact since its enactment, noting that while it empowers citizens to demand information from government agencies, its implementation is often obstructed by government resistance and conflicting judicial rulings. They emphasize that political will is crucial to ensuring the law achieves its objectives.

Duru and Ezeh (2018) highlight that the FOI Act is essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and economic development. However, they stress that robust enforcement is necessary to prevent corruption and mismanagement in public office. Ezugwu et al. (2013) further argue that there is a significant gap between the enactment of the FOI Act and its actual implementation. They identify conflicting laws, such as the Official Secrets Act, as major barriers and recommend their repeal to eliminate legal obstacles that hinder access to information. Similarly, Ugudu (2022) finds that the FOI Act has been instrumental in exposing corruption and promoting accountability. However, legal conflicts and weak enforcement mechanisms continue to undermine its effectiveness. He suggests that the Legal Aid Council should assist citizens in FOI-related cases, though this may lead to an overlap of responsibilities already assigned to the Nigerian courts.

Teniola et al. (2021) examine the first decade of the FOI Act's implementation and identify factors such as government secrecy, bureaucratic hurdles, poor record-keeping, and lack of enforcement mechanisms as key challenges. They recommend intensifying public awareness campaigns and adopting a pragmatic approach by stakeholders to address these issues. Overall, while the FOI Act has the potential to strengthen democracy, enhance transparency, and combat corruption, its effectiveness depends on a balanced approach that ensures accountability without compromising national security. Rather than repealing the Act, stakeholders should focus on constructive dialogue and legal amendments to address ambiguities, enhance enforcement mechanisms, and align its provisions with constitutional principles. By fostering open discussions and collaborative efforts, the FOI Act can be strengthened to better serve its intended purpose while safeguarding national interests.



## **Impacts of Social Media on Freedom of Information and National Security in Nigeria**

Social media has significantly influenced freedom of information and national security in Nigeria, shaping public discourse, political engagement, and activism while also posing serious risks. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have facilitated civic participation and amplified marginalized voices, yet they have also enabled misinformation, hate speech, radicalization, and security threats. Several studies have analyzed these dynamics. Dahiru and Mohammad (2021) found that the misuse of new media has contributed to security threats in Nigeria, advocating for strategic communication and conflict-sensitive reporting. Okoro and Nwafor (2013) examined social media's role in Nigeria's 2011 elections, revealing its potential for political engagement but also its exploitation for spreading hate speech and inciting violence. Similarly, Erubami (2020) and Ekwueme & Folarin (2018) highlighted how social media has increased political awareness while also fueling tensions. Chiamogu et al. (2021) explored its role in mobilizing protests, noting both its power in activism and the security risks it poses.

Studies on electioneering campaigns, such as those by Apuke & Tunca (2018) and Chinedu-Okeke et al. (2016), emphasized social media's impact on voter mobilization but warned of its potential for character assassination and political violence. Meanwhile, Okocha & Faloseyi (2024) examined digital media's role in amplifying minority voices, recommending digital literacy programs to improve access and responsible engagement. Notable social media movements, including #EndSARS, #BringBackOurGirls, and #SayNoToSocialMediaBill, illustrate both the benefits and risks of social media activism. While these movements have driven accountability and social change, they have also contributed to unrest and government crackdowns. Beyond activism, social media has also shaped political discourse and security. Studies by Idi & Apuke (2020) and Usman et al. (2020) found that while social media pressures politicians toward accountability, discussions often lack objectivity and foster hostility. Hashtag-driven campaigns have held officials accountable but also heightened tensions. The spread of misinformation remains a major challenge, as highlighted by Etumnu (2021) and Ahmed & Msughter (2022), who examined how fake news fueled panic during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hate speech and cybercrime are additional concerns. Researchers like Idowu & Maikano (2021) and Nwaoke & Uzoagba (2021) have linked social media to increased ethnic and religious tensions. Furthermore, extremist groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP exploit social media for propaganda, recruitment, and attack coordination,



worsening Nigeria's security situation. Hate speech has particularly fueled violence and political instability, with inflammatory rhetoric from political figures and groups exacerbating ethnic and religious divisions. Notable incidents include post-election violence in 2011, IPOB's election boycott call in 2017, and the Arewa Youths' "quit notice" to Igbos. Studies show that such rhetoric has led to displacement, destruction, and governance challenges. Efforts to curb hate speech and misinformation have included legislative measures and public awareness campaigns. However, enforcement remains difficult, as politicians often exploit these issues for personal gain. The government has sometimes resorted to censorship, raising concerns about freedom of speech.

Social media plays a dual role in Nigeria—enhancing democratic participation and activism while also facilitating misinformation, hate speech, and security risks. Scholars recommend stronger regulations, digital literacy programs, and responsible journalism to mitigate these challenges while preserving the positive aspects of social media.

### **Comparative Studies from other Countries**

Different nations have adopted diverse approaches to managing access to information, with some prioritizing openness and accountability while others emphasize control and censorship. In South Africa, the Constitution guarantees the right to access information while also allowing exemptions for national security, defense, and public safety. The Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA), which is equivalent to Nigeria's Freedom of Information Act, regulates public access to information, enabling citizens to request information from both public and private institutions, subject to restrictions on sensitive matters. South Africa also has a well-defined classification and declassification system for sensitive information, with independent oversight mechanisms such as the South African Human Rights Commission **and the** Public Protector, both of which investigate complaints related to information access and national security. Courts also play a crucial role in reviewing decisions on access to information, ensuring that the balance between transparency and security is maintained. Nigeria can learn from South Africa by establishing a constitutional framework that protects access to information while defining clear exceptions for national security. Additionally, implementing a classification and declassification system, strengthening independent oversight institutions, and ensuring judicial review of decisions would enhance transparency while safeguarding national security.



Similarly, **India's** Right to Information Act (RTI) 2005 provides citizens with access to government-held information, with exemptions covering national security-related institutions such as the Intelligence Bureau, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and the defense forces. However, a key feature of India's model is the public interest override, which allows for the disclosure of even exempted information if deemed necessary for the public good, subject to judicial review. Furthermore, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) is tasked with investigating corruption cases, including those related to national security, ensuring that classified information is handled transparently. Nigeria can adopt aspects of India's approach by enacting a comprehensive FOI law with well-defined exemptions, establishing independent institutions to investigate corruption and oversee classified information, and incorporating a public interest override provision to ensure that exemptions are not misused.

In contrast, China has one of the most restrictive social media regulations globally, enforced through the Great Firewall, which blocks access to foreign social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The Chinese government exercises strict control over information, requiring social media companies to comply with state directives, censor sensitive content, and store user data within the country (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). Unlike South Africa and India, China does not have a comprehensive FOI law, and access to information is heavily restricted, particularly on issues related to national security. The State Secrets Law criminalizes the disclosure of classified information, while the Cybersecurity Law mandates that internet companies cooperate with authorities on national security matters. China also conducts national security reviews on investments, technologies, and projects to ensure alignment with national interests. While Nigeria can take lessons from China by establishing a robust cybersecurity framework and national security review processes, it must be cautious of the excessive restrictions and lack of transparency in China's approach. Overemphasis on secrecy can undermine accountability, democratic governance, and citizens' rights to information.

The United States, on the other hand, has a more structured and transparent approach to FOI and national security. The U.S. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) establishes a well-defined classification system for sensitive information, with clear guidelines for categorization and declassification. FOIA includes exemptions for national security, defense, and foreign policy matters, but these exemptions are subject to judicial review. Additionally, the U.S. has a formal declassification process, ensuring that previously classified information is periodically reviewed and released



when appropriate. Independent agencies, such as the National Security Archive, advocate for government transparency and play a key role in holding authorities accountable. Decisions related to FOIA exemptions and national security are reviewed by courts, ensuring a balance between transparency and security (The USA Patriot, 2001). Nigerian policymakers can learn from the U.S. by implementing a clear classification system for sensitive information, developing a formal declassification process, encouraging independent oversight of government secrecy, and ensuring that judicial review mechanisms prevent the abuse of national security exemptions.

These international examples illustrate the diverse approaches to balancing transparency and national security. While some nations, like South Africa, India, and the United States, focus on protecting citizens' right to information with structured exemptions, China prioritizes strict government control and censorship. Nigeria must adopt a balanced approach, ensuring that national security is protected while upholding transparency and accountability. Although international and national laws allow restrictions on FOI for security reasons, such limitations must be necessary, proportionate, and not used as a blanket excuse to suppress public discourse. Governments should recognize that restricting all discussions on national security contradicts international standards, which only permit limitations when expressions pose a genuine and imminent threat to national security (Article 19). By learning from these global models, Nigeria can create an effective FOI framework that strengthens democratic governance while safeguarding national security.

## **Methodology**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Social Responsibility Theory, developed by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1963), emerged in response to the limitations of the libertarian theory, which granted the press unrestricted freedom without accountability. Rooted in the Hutchins Commission's report, *A Free and Responsible Press* (1947), the theory asserts that while the press should enjoy freedom, it must exercise it responsibly by balancing transparency, accountability, and national security concerns. If the media fails in its duty, the government may intervene through regulation (Bittner, 1989). The theory underscores that the press has the right to critique the government but must also uphold democracy by providing accurate information and serving the public interest (Okunna & Omenuga, 2012).

The Social Responsibility Theory is based on key assumptions outlined by McQuail (1987). It emphasizes promoting transparency and accountability by advocating for



access to government records through policies like the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). It also recognizes the need to balance national security with public access to information, requiring media discretion in reporting sensitive security issues. The theory highlights the media's role in facilitating informed public discourse, ensuring government accountability through investigative journalism, and protecting civil liberties by exposing abuses of power. Additionally, it views media as a public trust, expecting it to operate in the public interest while supporting democratic processes through diverse viewpoints and open debate. The theory also assumes that an informed citizenry is crucial for democracy, that media should serve as a watchdog against corruption, and that ethical responsibility, fairness, and accuracy should guide journalistic practices.

In Nigeria, the theory influences media practices, as seen in disclaimers on television programs and films, particularly in Nollywood, which were absent two decades ago. It also holds that the press cannot violate privacy rights under the guise of freedom, a principle that extends to individuals' responsibility in disseminating accurate information. By upholding these values, the Social Responsibility Theory ensures that both media organizations and individuals contribute to a transparent, accountable, and democratic society while safeguarding national security and civil liberties.

### **Application of the Theory to the Study**

The Social Responsibility Theory is central to this study as it highlights the need for both the media and individuals to exercise caution and responsibility while enjoying their freedom. In Nigeria, both the press and citizens must understand that freedom of information comes with obligations. With the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), the media has a duty to responsibly fulfill its role in mass communication while prioritizing public interest and national security. Failure to do so can lead to the spread of hate speech, fake news, and escalating ethno-religious tensions, as seen in past incidents such as the Danish newspaper's defamation of Prophet Muhammad and the riots that followed in Nigeria, as well as the dissemination of violent images in Plateau State that fueled further conflict in Jos. These cases illustrate that freedom of information does not mean unrestricted access and dissemination but rather a responsible approach to information sharing.

The theory provides a framework for balancing the public's right to information with national security interests. It underscores the role of media in promoting transparency, holding government institutions accountable, and shaping public discourse through accurate and balanced reporting. By utilizing FOIA responsibly,



media organizations enable citizens to engage in informed discussions on national security and government policies. However, the theory also recognizes that certain sensitive information must be protected to avoid jeopardizing security operations or endangering lives. Thus, while media outlets play a crucial role in advocating for transparency and accountability, they must also exercise discretion in reporting on security matters. At its core, the Social Responsibility Theory upholds democratic values such as freedom of speech, transparency, and access to information. It ensures that while citizens are informed and empowered to participate in governance, national security concerns are not compromised. By promoting responsible journalism, the theory provides a necessary balance between freedom of information and security, making it highly relevant to this study.

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). While surveys provided structured data collection, interviews and FGDs allowed for deeper insights from security agents, media practitioners, and social media users. This approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the research problem by balancing the strengths and limitations of each method.

#### Method of Data Collection

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was collected through:

- **Questionnaires:** Distributed to security agents, media practitioners, and selected social media users in Enugu State capital. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, and 392 were retrieved.
- **Interviews:** Conducted with heads of security agencies and media organizations.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Engaged participants with experience in the subject matter for in-depth discussions.

Secondary data was obtained through documentary sources such as journal articles, textbooks, and online materials.

#### Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative techniques:

- **Descriptive statistics (frequency tables and percentages)** were used to answer research questions.
- **Chi-square ( $X^2$ ) tests** examined relationships between freedom of information and national security in Nigeria.



- **Thematic analysis** was applied to qualitative data from interviews and FGDs.

### Population and Sample Size

The study focused on Enugu State capital, with a population of 4,069,000, including security agents, media practitioners, and social media users. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's formula, resulting in 400 respondents selected through random and purposive sampling techniques to ensure representativeness. This methodology ensured a well-rounded approach to understanding the impact of the Freedom of Information Act on national security in Nigeria.

### The abuse of access to information has no significant effect on national security in Nigeria.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
SA	50	12.7%
A	40	10.2%
D	130	33.2%
SD	172	43.9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100%</b>

Field Work, 2025.

The table above indicates that 50 respondents representing 12.7% of the sampled population strongly agreed that the abuse of access to information has no significant effect on national security in Nigeria, while 40 respondents representing 10.2% of the population simply agreed. Conversely, 130 respondents representing 33.2% of the sampled population strongly disagreed that the abuse of access to information has no significant effect on national security in Nigeria; while 172 of the population representing 43.9% simply disagreed with the statement. Generally, a total of 90 respondents representing 22.9 of the population agreed that the abuse of access to information has no significant effect on national security in Nigeria; while 302 representing 77.1% generally disagreed with the statement. Therefore, the results in above table indicate that the abuse of access to information has significant effect on national security in Nigeria.

Both quantitative and qualitative data generated in this study reveal that abuse of access to information has significant effect on and national security in Nigeria. By this finding and result, the study therefore rejects the null hypothesis which states that the abuse of access to information does not compromise national security in Nigeria, and accept the alternative hypothesis, which states that abuse of access to



information has compromised national security in Nigeria. Thus, from the data obtained through the empirical literature review, the questionnaires, the structured interviews, the focus group discussion and from other secondary sources, it is quite obvious that access to information has significant negative effect on national security in Nigeria. In other words, the study submits that abuse of access to information compromises national security in Nigeria.

**The Implementation of Freedom of Information Act has no significant impact on national security in Nigeria.**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
SA	6	1.53
A	6	1.53
D	180	45.92
SD	200	51.02
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Field Work, 2025**

The table above shows that 6 respondents representing 1.53% of the population strongly agreed that the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act has no significant impact on national security in Nigeria. 6 respondents representing 1.53% agreed with the statement, while 180 respondents representing 45.92% disagreed. 200 respondents representing 51.02% strongly disagreed with the statement. In other words, a total of 380 respondents representing 96.9% - almost the whole population - disagreed with the statement, while only 12 respondents representing only 3.1% agreed with the statement. This confirms that the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act has significant impact on national security in Nigeria.

Both quantitative and qualitative data generated in this study reveal that the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act has significant impacts on national security in Nigeria. By this finding and results, the study therefore rejects the null hypothesis which states that the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act has no significant impacts on national security in Nigeria, and accept the alternative hypothesis, which states that the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act has significant impacts on national security in Nigeria Thus, from the data obtained through the empirical literature review, the structured interviews, the focus group discussion and from secondary sources, it is quite obvious that the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act has significant impacts on national security in



Nigeria. In other words, the study submits that the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act indeed has significant impacts on national security in Nigeria.

**Freedom of information does not enhance national security in Nigeria.**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
SA	21	5.35
A	33	8.42
D	138	35.2
SD	200	51.02
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Work, 2025

The table above shows that 21 respondents representing 5.35% of the population strongly agreed that freedom of information does not enhance national security in Nigeria. 33 respondents representing 8.42% simply agreed. 138 respondents representing 35.2% disagreed with the statement, while 200 respondents representing 51.02% strongly disagreed. Hence, the table above shows that 338 respondents representing 86.22% of the population disagreed with the statement, while only 54 respondents representing 13.8% agreed with the statement. This means that freedom of information indeed enhances national security in Nigeria.

Both quantitative and qualitative data generated in this study reveal that social media has significant effect on freedom of information and national security in Nigeria. By this finding and result, the study therefore rejects the null hypothesis which states that social media has no significant impacts on freedom of information and national security in Nigeria, and accept the alternative hypothesis, which states that social media has significant impacts on both freedom of information and national security in Nigeria. Thus, the study concludes that that social media has significant effect on both freedom of information and national security in Nigeria.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the study recommended the following practical guidelines for balancing FOI with national security in Nigeria:

**1. Implementation of a National Information Security Policy**

The Nigerian government should develop and enforce a comprehensive national information security policy to regulate the handling of sensitive information. This policy should include guidelines for information classification, access control measures, and protocols for securing national security data. This will



help mitigate the abuse of access to information and prevent unauthorized disclosures that compromise national security.

2. **Establishment of an Independent Information Commission**

To ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), **an** independent information commission should be established. This body should oversee information requests, ensure compliance with the Act, and balance the public's right to access information with national security interests.

3. **Development of Guidelines for Social Media Usage**

Given the growing influence of social media on freedom of information and national security, the government should develop **clear guidelines** for social media usage by government officials, security agencies, and citizens. These guidelines should focus on preventing the spread of misinformation, curbing the dissemination of extremist content, and ensuring responsible online communication without infringing on digital rights.

4. **Enhancement of Cybersecurity Measures**

Strengthening cybersecurity infrastructure is essential to prevent hacking, cyber-attacks, and the unauthorized release of sensitive information that could endanger national security. This includes investing in advanced cybersecurity technology, training personnel, and enforcing stricter cybercrime laws.

5. **Public Education and Awareness**

There should be nationwide public education campaigns to raise awareness about the responsible use of social media, the dangers of misinformation, and the need for fact-checking before sharing information. This will help curb the misuse of information and promote responsible digital citizenship.

6. **Regular Review and Update of Laws and Policies**

To keep pace with the evolving digital landscape, the Freedom of Information Act and national security laws should be periodically reviewed and updated. This will ensure that the legal framework remains relevant, effective, and capable of addressing emerging challenges in information access and security.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study reveals that social media has transformed the landscape of freedom of information and national security in Nigeria from 2011 to 2024. While



social media has enhanced freedom of information, transparency, and accountability, it also poses significant challenges to national security, including the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and extremist content. The findings highlight the need for a balanced approach that reconciles the benefits of social media with the risks to national security. Eradicating corruption, implementing robust information security measures, and promoting social media literacy and responsible usage are crucial in achieving this balance. Ultimately, the study recommends a multi-stakeholder approach involving government, civil society, and social media platforms to ensure that social media is harnessed to promote freedom of information, transparency, and national security in Nigeria.

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