

Keyboard Warriors and the Struggle for Narrative Control on Social Media in Nigeria

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Abstract

Social media in Nigeria has become a contested battleground where keyboard warriors actively manipulate and distort public discourse on critical national issues. This study examined how keyboard warriors contest and shape narrative control on social media in Nigeria between 2014 and 2024. Guided by framing theory, this study adopts a qualitative approach, using case studies of publicly available content from Facebook and X (formerly Twitter). Findings reveal that keyboard warriors' function simultaneously as disruptive forces that amplify polarisation, spread disinformation, and incite ethnic and political tensions, and as strategic communicators who foster civic engagement, demand accountability, and mobilise collective action. Their dual role establishes a central paradox: the same communicative practices that intensify conflict and spread misinformation also enable civic engagement and accountability. The findings extend scholarship on contested online discourse and pinpoint the power struggles that define information flows in contemporary societies

Keywords

Keyboard warriors, narrative control, cyber conflict, framing theory, digital culture, social media

Introduction

Today, what begins as a seemingly innocuous exchange or a deliberate provocation in cyberspace can rapidly escalate into a virtual battleground in which digital platforms are inundated with memes, ethnic slurs, and conspiracy narratives, drawing large numbers of users into hostile online engagements that increasingly intersect with offline realities. Nowhere is this dynamic more apparent than in Nigerian society, where the presence of keyboard warriors has altered the tone and intensity of public debate. In this study, keyboard warriors are conceptualised as digitally active actors who deliberately and persistently engage in online spaces to assert viewpoints, defend collective identities, or challenge opposing positions through provocative, persuasive, or

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confrontational communication (Polipo & Willemsen, 2022; Pam & Umar, 2024). These actors exploit social media to amplify divisions and influence public conversations. Within Nigeria, keyboard warriors operate as informal but recognisable participants in digital discourse, usually acting individually or in loosely connected networks rather than as organised movements, yet with clear awareness of the social and political implications of their online interventions. Even though their activities are dismissed as mere online nuisance, their growing influence warrants serious attention, as they function not as passive observers but as active agents whose online practices contribute to shaping meanings, attitudes, and power relations within Nigeria's contemporary socio-political environment.

In the context of Nigeria's highly fragmented society marked by deep divisions, social media provide both an arena for discourse and conflict. The anonymity offered by social media platforms empowers individuals to adopt aggressive and divisive personas, which has increasingly been exploited to widen rifts in any form of discussion (Akeusola, 2023). These conflicts create cyber threats as these malicious actors exploit social divisions to destabilise institutions and spread fear. For instance, politically motivated keyboard warriors have been known to escalate tensions by disseminating false information that incites violence and undermines trust in governance, thereby effectively turning digital disputes into real-world security risks (Pam & Umar, 2024). Looking at the #EndSARS protests of 2020, where social media emerged as a critical instrument for activism, where support was mobilised for the movement and spread of information about police brutality. Yet, it also became a conduit for disinformation, with keyboard warriors playing a dual role: challenging state narratives while simultaneously spreading falsehoods. Ajaegbu et al. (2022) observed that while digital activists were pivotal in exposing police violence, they were simultaneously countered by individuals who used the same platforms to escalate the conflict through deliberate dissemination of misleading content, which thereby complicated the protest's objectives. At the same time, this manipulation of digital tools during the protests shows how cyber conflict can evolve into targeted cyber attacks designed to disrupt movements and suppress dissent through misinformation campaigns.

The actions of keyboard warriors echo Nigeria's enduring oral traditions of public debate, storytelling, and satire, now reimagined within the digital realm. Historically, Nigerian discourse has thrived on fervent exchanges, usually infused with wit, sarcasm, and incisive critique. These age-old practices have seamlessly transitioned to online platforms, where memes, viral threads, and hashtag movements now function as contemporary substitutes for verbal sparring. However, these digital expressions frequently evolve into destructive forms of engagement (Odigie et al., 2022). In the case of the 2023 presidential race, online factions weaponised regional stereotypes to delegitimise opponents as various groups from different regions harnessed social media to

sway public sentiment and inflame political antagonisms, which showcased how the veil of anonymity empowers users to manipulate digital arenas for personal gain while perpetuating damaging stereotypes. This phenomenon mirrors entrenched societal fissures, with digital clashes serving as a surrogate for lingering disputes over governance, resource allocation, and national identity (Jimada, 2023).

However, while these online skirmishes are over and over again dismissed as trivial, they promote aggressive engagement patterns that have broader implications for public discourse, especially in Nigerian society, where public perception is shaped by popular opinion and media narratives (Olabode, 2018); the influence of keyboard warriors cannot be understated. Some of these digital actors are even recruited as influencers by corporate brands and politicians who seek to capitalise on their ability to shape online narratives, as evident in the existence of ‘data boys’ and ‘online content creators’ (Fakeye & Ayoola, 2023; Uwalaka, Amadi & Enyindah, 2025). This trend has blurred ethical boundaries, particularly when corporate interests and political agendas come into play; thus, it sparks a critical question about the role of keyboard warriors in moulding public opinion. While keyboard warriors are frequently labelled as “agents of chaos”, they also hold the potential to act as mediators in online discussions, especially when they foster dialogue and work to counter misinformation. Yet, this more constructive dimension of their influence remains largely overlooked in academic discourse. Despite their undeniable influence, keyboard warriors remain an underexplored subject within the framework of Nigerian cyber conflict. Much of the existing academic focus has gravitated toward broader themes such as cybercrime (Akanle & Shadare, 2020; Ojedokun & Ilori, 2021), platform politics (Ojedokun, 2016; Adeyinka & Ijaiya, 2024), or the role of social media in electoral processes (Alhassan, 2018; Apuke & Tunca, 2018), to mention a few. While these studies provide valuable insights into the operational dynamics of digital platforms, they repeatedly did not consider the nuanced roles keyboard warriors, who influence group dynamics, shape online discourse, and serve as key drivers in the spread of misinformation and promotion of businesses and political agendas. There is also a gap in the literature regarding the dual nature of their influence. Keyboard warriors are not just instigators of conflict; they are also actors who mediate discussions, challenge authority, and even promote positive change in certain contexts. This study therefore addresses these gaps by critically examining how keyboard warriors operate within Nigeria’s social media space. It analyses the strategies through which these digital actors contest, shape, and control narratives, particularly in relation to (mis)information, national identity, politics and governance, and security discourse.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of keyboard warriors remains underexplored, though some studies have examined their roles in various online contexts. Sibai et al. (2014) identified two conflict types in online forums involving keyboard warriors: authentic conflicts, which provoke negative emotions and damage social capital, and performative conflicts, which mimic fights for entertainment and community bonding. Polipo and Willemsen (2022) outlined nine key traits of keyboard warriors, including a commitment to truth, a know-it-all attitude, moral superiority, chronic dissatisfaction, misinterpretation of opposing views, escalation of debates, obsessive argumentation, black-or-white thinking, and eventual distortion of truth into misinformation. Page and Charteris (2021) showed how students misuse feedback systems to engage in cyber aggression, linking it to neoliberal ideologies that commodify education. This behaviour reflects academic contrapower harassment, where students exert control over staff through online hostility. Pam and Umar (2024) found that keyboard warriors on Instagram engage in verbal attacks due to differences in belief, often involving insults, appearance, and career shaming. Their analysis showed aggressive responses to face-threatening acts and frequent use of Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin English, indicating how personal attacks replace civil discourse. Biddle et al. (2024) challenged the assumption that keyboard warriors are trolls that seek only fun, revealing strong links between trolling, political activism, and radicalisation, especially in racially charged discussions.

Keyboard warriors' aggressive tendencies impact broader issues like misinformation and cyberbullying. Ooi et al. (2021) linked mobile cyberbullying to anonymity, which fosters positive attitudes toward aggression and encourages viewing social media as an accessible tool for harassment. Anonymity strengthens the perception that users can act without consequences. Chan (2019), applying Bourdieu's "theory of practice", framed cyberbullying as symbolic violence driven by competition for digital capital, such as likes and visibility. Anonymity, as the most valuable form of capital in this space, allows keyboard warriors to act invincibly, making detection and accountability difficult. Kadri, Omar, and Abdullah (2019) showed that harsh language was more frequent on SK than PM Facebook pages, with violence-related posts triggering the strongest reactions. SK's content included extreme insults and racial slurs, and aggressive comments tended to trigger further aggression, demonstrating how harsh language circulates widely on emotionally charged posts. Mahamed, Omar, and Krauss (2020) explored how youth citizen journalists in Malaysia distinguish themselves from keyboard warriors and cyber troopers by promoting truth and ethical content while condemning fake news and public misinformation. Lastly, Yusuf et al. (2020) found that cyberbullying is increasing among Malaysian children, with keyboard warriors contributing to this issue through intimidation, exclusion, impersonation, and insults. These behaviours heighten the risk of online harm, despite limited instances of sexualised bullying.

Therefore, it can be deduced that current literature sheds light on the disruptive roles of keyboard warriors in online conflict, but it rarely engages with context-specific dynamics relevant to Nigeria. Most studies largely associate keyboard warriorism with anonymity, incivility, and argumentative escalation, which are linked to political polarisation and performative discourse. However, their motivations remain contested, whether rooted in truth-seeking or attention-seeking, and little attention is given to how identity affiliations, particularly ethnic or political ones, shape their behaviour in digitally fragmented societies. There is a notable absence of scholarship examining their influence on governance, national security narratives, and identity politics in the Nigerian digital sphere, which this study seeks to address.

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

Framing Theory provides the most suitable lens for this study, as it explains how issues are constructed, presented, and interpreted within public discourse. The notion of frames was introduced by Gregory Bateson in 1972 as boundaries that shape how communication is interpreted. Goffman (1974), in his work *Frame Analysis*, expanded this idea by showing that individuals use frameworks to organise experiences and give meaning to events. He distinguished between natural frameworks, which interpret occurrences as physical phenomena, and social frameworks, which view them as outcomes of human interaction and intent. Building on this foundation, Entman (1991) argued that framing operates by selecting and emphasising particular aspects of reality while ignoring others, thereby guiding how issues are understood, where responsibility is located, and which solutions appear legitimate. Unlike agenda-setting, which primarily determines what the public should pay attention to, framing goes further by shaping how audiences interpret and evaluate issues (Hallahan, 2008; De Vreese & Lecheler, 2015). In digital contexts, framing becomes especially powerful, as actors strategically deploy narratives, hashtags, images, and memes to attract attention, provoke emotions, and steer debates (Güran & Özarslan, 2022). In this study, Framing Theory is essential for understanding the communicative practices of keyboard warriors in Nigeria's digital environment. Their activities demonstrate the power of frames in drawing attention to specific narratives, amplifying divisions, and legitimising certain viewpoints while marginalising others. This makes framing especially useful for explaining how meanings are produced, contested, and circulated in online spaces where competition for visibility and influence is

intense. The theory also addresses the paradoxical role of these digital actors, acknowledging that the same communicative strategies may deepen polarisation or, conversely, contribute to civic participation and corrective discourse. In addition, it strengthens the analytical focus of this case study by linking the behaviours of keyboard warriors to broader struggles over narrative control in the digital public sphere. It positions them as strategic agents whose framing choices actively shape socio-political conversations and the trajectory of cyber conflicts in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative methodology, using case study approach, considered appropriate for exploring patterns of digital behaviour in which meaning is socially constructed and best understood through in-depth contextual analysis. The focus was on the activities of keyboard warriors in cyber conflicts in Nigeria between 2014 and 2024, a period marked by several high-profile incidents of online mobilisation, misinformation, and political agitation. Data were drawn entirely from publicly accessible posts and interactions on Facebook and X, two platforms selected for their high user penetration in Nigeria and their role as central arenas for national debates. Purposeful sampling involved tracking hashtags, viral posts, and influential accounts linked to political campaigns, protests, ethnic disputes, and national celebrations. Each selected case was treated as a unit of analysis, and inclusion was based on the content's relevance to cyber conflict or digital mobilisation, while posts that were purely promotional, unrelated to Nigerian discourse, or lacking public visibility were excluded. The analytical process was narrative-driven and thematic. First, posts were reviewed in context to capture the flow of engagement, including replies, quote posts, and cross-platform references. Recurring themes, such as identity-based antagonism, moral grandstanding, or corrective activism were then coded and grouped. Coding was carried out manually, with fact-checks and media reports used to verify events and claims where possible. This approach allowed for a reconstruction of both the immediate and evolving dynamics of each case study. Ethical considerations were addressed by limiting analysis to data already in the public domain, to exclude private or non-consensual data. User identities in screenshots were either anonymised or referenced only when the individual was a public figure whose statements were made in a professional or public capacity. Ethical clearance for the study was obtained in line with established research protocols, and informed consent was not required given the nature of the data.

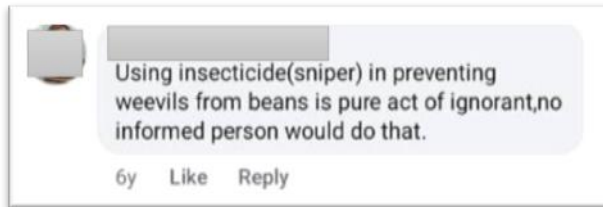
Discussion

This section presents both positive and negative instances across key areas such as keyboard warriors as agents of (mis)information carriers; their role in

shaping national identity; their influence on politics and governance; and their engagement with security discourse.

Keyboard Warriors as Agents of (Mis)information Carriers

Keyboard warriors can surprisingly act as positive agents, as seen in the widespread online reaction following the 2019 Poisoned Beans scare, in which a video that circulated on Facebook and WhatsApp showed Hausa farmers sprinkling insecticide on their beans before they were transported to the southeast of the country, with claims that it was a plot to poison Igbo consumers. Some online users quickly challenged this misinformation and coupled with a few critical voices also acting as keyboard warriors themselves, shared fact-check articles and clarified that the chemicals used were meant for preservation and not poisoning (Hassan & Hitchen, 2020). A user espoused:



Another concerned individual expressed:

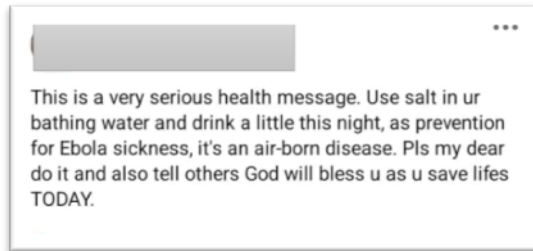


This situation shows that while the platform was misused initially, others used the same tools to fight back against manipulation and therefore justify the position of Rubin (2017) that social media can either serve as an engine of deception or a platform for correction, depending on who holds the louder voice.

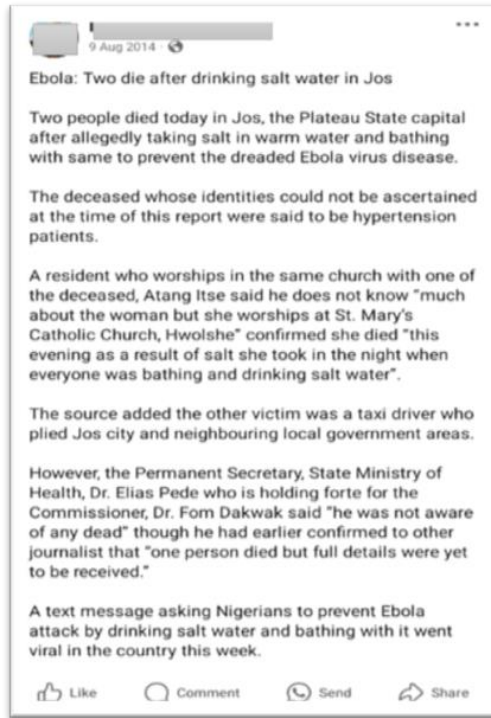
However, such moments of correction are usually overshadowed by the widespread damage that digital manipulation causes, just as seen in the earliest and most alarming cases, which occurred during the 2014 Ebola scare, in which a rumour which was started when a prophet purportedly said that waking up in the dead of night to drink salty water, and also bathing with it, will ensure total immunity from the Ebola virus, went viral in most states of the country and saw a lot of people drinking big cups of salty water and bathing with it. The message, pushed by unnamed keyboard warriors, went viral on WhatsApp and Facebook. A user posted:



A similar post read:

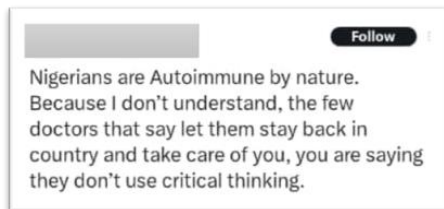


Many individuals followed the advice without verification, which resulted in hospitalisations from salt poisoning. At least twenty persons were hospitalised in various hospitals in Jos, the Plateau State capital, as a result of the excess consumption of salty water (Agba & Abimaje, 2014; *Daily Trust*, 2014). From the perspective of Framing Theory, such narratives exemplify how communicators emphasise selective aspects of reality while excluding counter-evidence, thereby guiding public interpretation toward fear and urgency rather than rational assessment. The danger here was not only in the misinformation itself but also in how rapidly it spread. Another user explained:

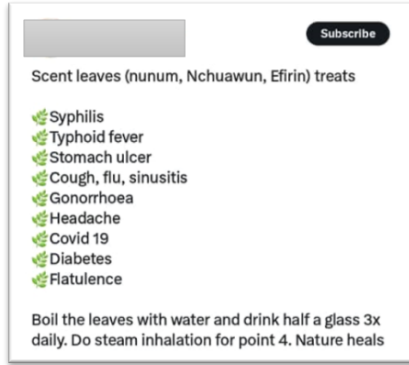


The lack of credible health communication created a vacuum that was quickly filled with baseless remedies. Scholars like Swire-Thompson and Lazer (2020) have claimed that during health emergencies, misinformation thrives where trust in public institutions is low, and this Nigerian example supports that claim. It also reveals how harmful online claims, once accepted as truth, can manifest into physical health crises.

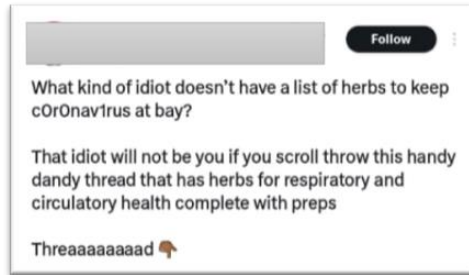
This pattern continued during the COVID-19 pandemic, as there were various claims which emerged across social media platforms that suggest Africans were immune to the virus and that certain herbs could cure it. A user claimed:



A post reads;



Another user posted:



These beliefs, pushed mainly by local influencers and everyday users, turned keyboard warriors with no medical background, significantly weakened public health messaging. People ignored safety protocols, and scepticism towards vaccinations increased (Sadiq, Croucher, & Dutta, 2023). In order to combat the spread of false information, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC) collaborated with UNICEF to launch an interactive chatbot designed to provide vetted and accurate information about COVID-19 (NCDC, 2020), but by then, some damage had been done. This indicates a critical flaw in digital spaces; while corrections may come, they rarely travel as fast or far as the original falsehoods promoted by keyboard warriors. Also, this reflects Entman’s (1993) view that frames highlight and magnify certain attributes of an issue, in this case presenting unverified cures as credible alternatives, which consequently shaped how audiences evaluated the pandemic.

Perhaps one of the most recent irresponsible uses of digital manipulation came in December 2024, when Instagram influencer Victoria Rose (a.k.a. Whoa Vicky) staged a fake kidnapping in Nigeria. With millions of followers, she posted alarming ransom messages that suggested she was abducted. She posted:

I have kidnapped Vicky. She is with me in Nigeria. I am demanding \$1 million for her release (now deleted). Later, she confessed that it was all staged for “fun” and a “prank” (Economic Times, 2024)

Beyond the obvious immaturity of such an act, the broader implication is how one influencer's actions can trivialise genuine issues like kidnapping, which is a real threat in Nigeria. Her stunt not only diverted public attention but also wasted emergency resources, coupled with conflicts between Nigeria and the global internet community, starting from her comment section to other platforms. When high-profile figures misuse their platforms in such a way, it raises concerns about the power imbalance in the digital space, where entertainment sometimes outweighs ethics.

Another deeply troubling instance was in August 2021, when a disinformation campaign by unknown keyboard warriors falsely claimed that 230 Igbo passengers were massacred in Jos, Plateau State. This narrative was propagated through social media, accompanied by images purportedly depicting the alleged incident. However, investigations revealed that these images were unrelated and had been previously used in different contexts. One widely shared photograph of a burning white bus was traced back to a 2016 accident in Zimbabwe, where a bus caught fire en route to South Africa (Alawode, 2021). Another image showing a red bus engulfed in flames (see image below) was from a 2019 incident in Umuahia, Abia State, involving a vehicle belonging to the Young Shall Grow transport company. Also, the photo depicting a crowd amidst smoke was linked to a 2015 riot in Ajaokuta, Kogi State (Igwe, 2021).



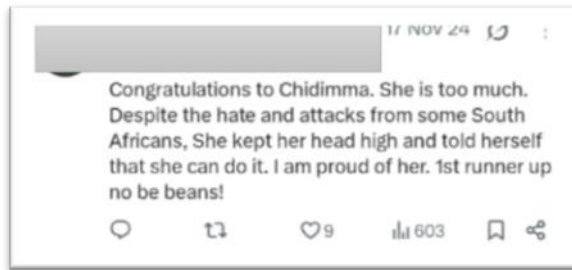
Source: (Igwe, 2021)

The purpose of such digital manipulation was to use the emotional language, hashtags, and recycled visuals to fuel ethnic tensions that transcend both online

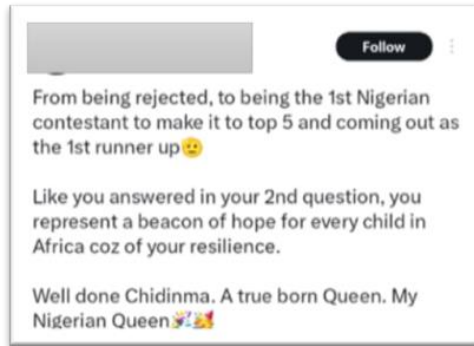
and physical spaces. Though eventually debunked, it already created tension online, as members of the ethnic groups involved already started to threaten and attack each other online.

Keyboard Warriors and National Identity

The contributions of keyboard warriors also include consistent promotion of national pride, particularly through the celebration of collective achievements. A strong case of national unity was seen in how Nigerians reacted to Chidimma Adetshina's success at the Miss Universe pageant. She was born in Soweto, South Africa, to a Nigerian father and a Mozambican mother and first entered the Miss South Africa contest. But she dropped out after her mother was accused of identity theft, which brought questions about Adetshina's nationality. Later, she was invited to join Miss Universe Nigeria, which she won, and proceeded to represent Nigeria at Miss Universe Africa (Ogunbiyi, 2024). Within Nigeria, her win caused mixed reactions online, as some Nigerians supported her as a symbol of unity, while others questioned if it was fair since she did not begin with Nigeria (Njoku, 2024). Externally, this situation led to online conflict between Nigerians and South Africans. Some South Africans were upset she represented Nigeria after leaving their pageant, but Nigerians defended her by affirming her Nigerian roots. The back-and-forth online turned into a cyber conflict, and this showed how strong the rivalry between both countries is (African Voice, 2024). Both within Nigeria and against South Africa, keyboard warriors were instrumental in promoting what was national pride across digital platforms. They shared strong opinions and helped push the issue into the spotlight. A post of Nigerian X user reads;



An influencer expressed:



Despite the controversies surrounding her national background, they rallied behind her as a way to show not only unity but also the power of digital voices in shaping public narratives. This digital support aligns with the concept of imagined communities, where people feel connected to others they may never meet, particularly through shared symbols of national pride (Anderson, 2006; Tikumah, 2024), and such reactions show how online communities can shape a unifying identity through celebratory expressions.

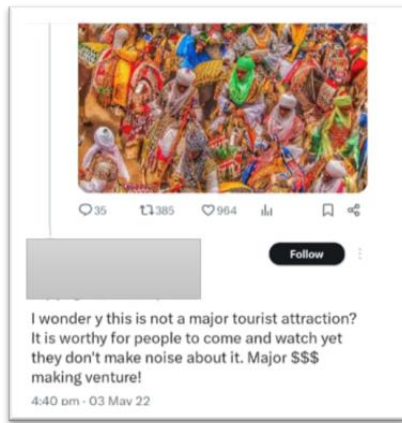
In another instance, the Jollof Wars between Nigeria and Ghana, though humorous and light-hearted, became a subtle channel for keyboard warriors to express pan-African solidarity. What began as a debate over food extended into a symbolic space for discussing post-colonial legacies and regional unity. The Jollof Wars, a playful rivalry over who makes the best jollof rice, has become a prominent topic on social media platforms. This debate, while centred on culinary preferences, has evolved into a broader conversation that reflects cultural pride and unity among West Africans. The hashtag #JollofWars has been widely used on African Twitter, serving as a digital space for these discussions (Duncan, 2016).

A Nigerian user posted:

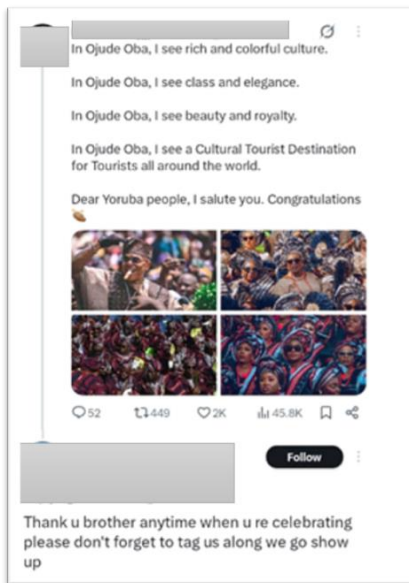


This capacity of keyboard warriors to repurpose trivial debates into platforms for unity is consistent with the use of cultural frames, where everyday expressions are elevated into symbolic markers of unity, thus reinforcing shared narratives across diverse groups.

Keyboard warriors have also been instrumental in amplifying the visibility of cultural diversity, which is evident in contents shared about traditional festivals, indigenous languages, and cultural artefacts. They help to preserve and promote Nigeria’s heritage. This form of cultural activism reinforces the importance of inclusive national narratives. A post on Dubar Festival reads;

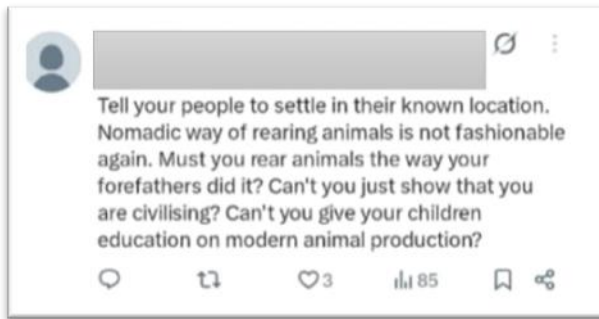


Another post on Ojude Oba:



The above posts celebrating the Durbar festival in the north, the Ojude Oba in the southwest, and there are also many others like the Igbo New Yam Festival in the southeast, all of which show cultural richness and also suggest a broader sense of belonging for different ethnic groups within Nigeria. This supports the position of Bamidele (2015) on the need for national identities to accommodate internal differences.

However, while these cases suggest that keyboard warriors can serve as agents of unity on the same platforms that provide fertile ground for narratives that challenge or even fracture national identity. The idea of Fulani domination has been strongly pushed online by keyboard warriors, especially those from ethno-nationalist groups. These actors use Facebook and Twitter to share emotional posts that paint the Fulani as oppressors, which makes old ethnic tensions worse. A big example was the debate around the proposed Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlements. A post read:



Another user's opinion:

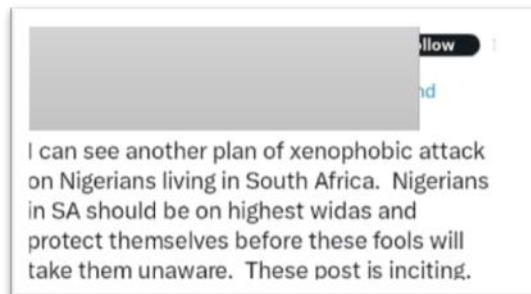


More supporting opinions:

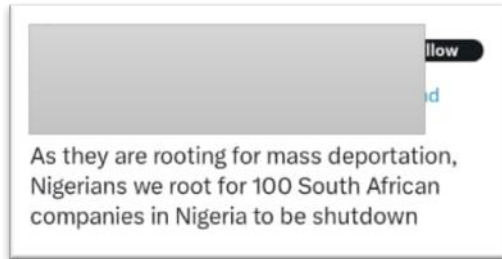


The hashtag #SayNoToRUGA became popular as people used it to show their fears about Fulani expansion and control. The online talks became toxic and focused on ethnic issues, showing how deeply some people fear that the Fulani tribe is trying to take over (Ajetunmobi et al., 2024). Though such narratives are usually unverified or outright false, they gain rapid traction due to the influence of keyboard warriors.

In another incident in 2019, xenophobic attacks happened in South Africa, where foreign-owned shops were destroyed and people were harmed. When Nigerians heard about it, especially through social media, many got angry and unknown Keyboard warriors began sharing upsetting videos, some of which were old or fake, to send strong and emotional messages online. A post reads'



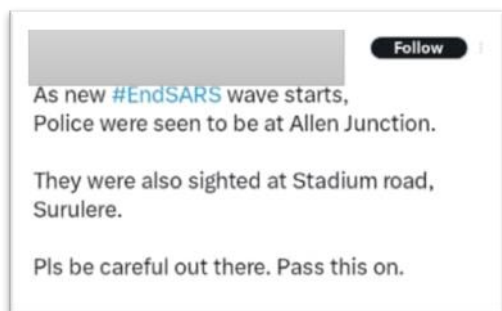
Another in support:



These posts increased tension and pushed people in Nigeria to protest. Soon, retaliatory attacks started. South African businesses in Nigeria, like Shoprite in Lagos and MTN offices in Ibadan, Lagos and Uyo, were attacked and damaged (Abayomi, 2019). These responses, driven by hashtags, viral tweets, and angry comments, gave Nigeria a bad image internationally. Instead of helping, the attacks made things worse and damaged local businesses. This shows how keyboard warriors can intensify existing conflicts by spreading harmful content and how retaliatory violence only harms a country's reputation and peace.

Keyboard Warriors in Politics and Governance

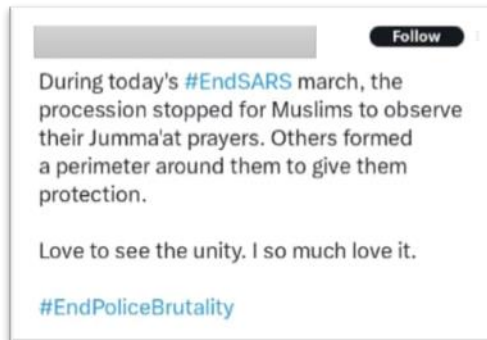
The activities of keyboard warriors extend beyond in-group and intragroup activities; they consistently pick and make cases for themselves in politics and governance, whether relevant or not. However, while the motive of drawing attention is present, such picks are equally two ways: (1) for development orientation, usually in the form of condemnation, and (2) excessively and irrelevantly constituting online nuisance to distract the public. Looking at the positive engagement by keyboard warriors, the early period #EndSARS movement in 2020 was one in which they were not just online commentators but became key actors in political mobilisation. A guiding post goes:



A post reads:



Another post;

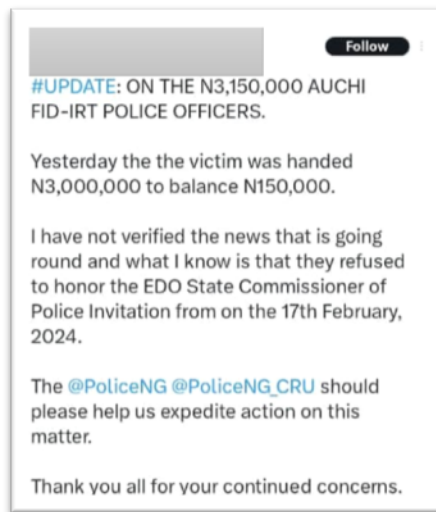


They were instrumental in real-time updates, sharing of evidence of police brutality, and crowd coordination. This was achieved through posts that invited citizens to join peaceful protests and donate supplies for the movement to gain momentum (Dark, 2020; Ojedokun, Ogunleye, & Aderinto, 2021). Although the protest eventually escalated and could not be controlled by the initial mobilisers, it still depicts positive engagement for development causes and also validates the view of Bansal and Shreelakshmi (2024) that digital activism can empower youth populations to mobilise for development causes, especially when conventional political channels are unresponsive. In this sense, keyboard warriors served as digital organisers who converted frustration into political pressure.

Similarly, the #OpenNASS campaign in 2019 demonstrated how keyboard warriors could push for transparency in governance as actors on X (formally Twitter) used infographics and data-driven threads to expose the Nigerian National Assembly's opaque budgeting system. Several posts forced the former President of the Senate, Bukola Saraki, to released details of National Assembly's 2018 budget in public domain in April 2019. The total budget was

₦139.5 billion, with allocations including ₦35.58 billion for the Senate and ₦57.4 billion for the House of Representatives, in contrast to poorly funded hospitals, which triggered public debates and forced legislators to publicly justify their spending (Aderole, 2019). Unlike traditional civil society organisations that rely on formal petitions and advocacy meetings, these keyboard warriors used concise digital content to incite mass outrage. It suggests a shift in the tools of accountability, where viral posts can now generate more immediate pressure than structured advocacy. This also reflects the use of accountability frames, where emphasis on transparency and fairness shaped public evaluation of political institutions.

In a more recent example from February 2024, human rights activist Harrison Gwamnishu utilised social media platforms to expose alleged misconduct by officers from the Force Criminal Investigation Department (FCID). He reported that these officers extorted ₦3.15 million from a Nigerian national in Auchi, Edo State. Gwamnishu detailed that the victim was detained, coerced into transferring funds, and subjected to threats, including potential detention in Abuja if he failed to comply (Imukudo, 2024). One of his post reads;

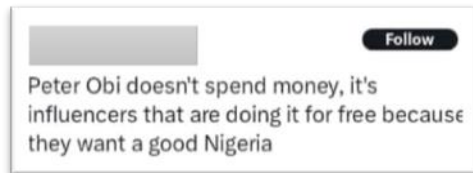


This incident extended the watchdog function of keyboard warriors to individual justice cases, especially where institutional redress is either slow or compromised. As such, it reflects the argument by Ortiz et al. (2019) that digital platforms offer marginalised voices new leverage to highlight abuse of power, even outside formal politics.

However, not all engagements by keyboard warriors have been positive, as seen in the cyber conflict surrounding Nigeria's 2023 presidential election, in which, rather than informing the public and encouraging participation, many keyboard warriors acted as partisan agitators in the form of supporters of any political party (typical of the Labour Party) to spread exaggerated claims and incite hatred (especially against the All Progressive Congress). In fact, there were false claims of election rigging in Lagos that were later discredited by original results released by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) but had already triggered offline violence (Nwonwu & Tukur, 2023). A user posted:



Another in support:



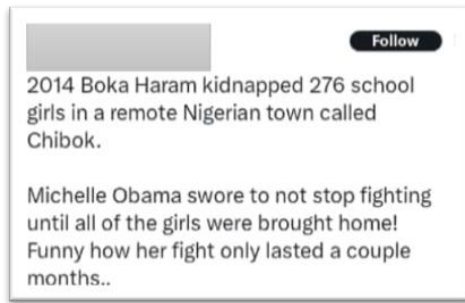
A closely related instance is the online feud between Omoyele Sowore and APC supporters. Here, the focus of keyboard warriors shifted from issue-based politics to personal attacks. Sowore's critique of Bola Tinubu's integrity was met with derogatory memes and threats which turned political discourse into a verbal battlefield. He accused Tinubu of implementing anti-people policies, particularly regarding the removal of fuel subsidies, suggesting that the president's decisions disproportionately affected the impoverished population (Ugwu, 2024). He wrote:



This kind of online hostility tends to erode the seriousness of political conversation and is a way to replace debates about policy or reform with emotional outbursts and identity-based insults.

Keyboard Warriors and Security Discourse

Security is everyone's concern, but consciousness and reaction to security issues differ. Cyberspace can be both instrumental and otherwise depending on carriers of information, how it is conveyed, the goal and the target audience. There have been significant instances where keyboard warriors acted as catalysts for positive change in security discourse. The #BringBackOurGirls (BBOG) movement, which began in 2014 after Boko Haram abducted 276 Chibok schoolgirls, exemplifies this power. The campaign began in April 2014 following the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok by Boko Haram. The hashtag was first used by Ibrahim M. Abdullahi, a Nigerian lawyer, inspired by a speech from former Minister of Education Oby Ezekwesili. Oby Ezekwesili and Aisha Yesufu later became prominent leaders and co-conveners of the movement, with other lead faces being Bukky Shonibare and Hadiza Bala Usman. Within weeks, the movement trended globally, drawing endorsements from figures like Michelle Obama and Malala Yousafzai and forcing international bodies like the UN Security Council to intervene (Olorok, 2016; United Nations, 2018; Adebisi, 2020). A post confirming international support:



The activities of keyboard warriors on this movement continue today, and it has become a movement for the security and well-being of girls in the country. Scholars such as Milan and Hintz (2013) have argued that networked movements usually succeed in penetrating institutional frameworks when they speak in one collective voice, and the BBOG movement corroborates such an argument. As a result of the online advocacy, the government was compelled to allocate more resources to school protection, which also validates the idea that social media activism, when strategic, can influence state policy (Milan & Hintz, 2013). Here, framing theory helps to explain how the campaign's effectiveness stemmed from constructing a shared interpretive lens that emphasised urgency, victimhood, and collective responsibility, thereby sustaining public attention and pressuring institutions.

Furthermore, the Nigerian military has started to recognise the positive role that so-called "keyboard warriors" can play in national security, as seen during the 31st edition of the Social Media Influencers Seminar held on January 31, 2024, in Ilorin, Kwara State. At the event, Major General Bamidele Alabi, who is the General Officer Commanding 2 Division of the Nigerian Army, spoke about how social media influencers and bloggers are important allies in spreading truthful information and promoting peaceful coexistence. He described them as "credible stakeholders in national development and partners in progress" (Vanguard, 2024). The post of a popular content creator reads:



This shows that the military are beginning to accept that digital activists can help shape positive narratives, counter fake news, and support security awareness campaigns. The move to recognise these online voices is also an indication that the army is making it clear that social media is not just for entertainment but can also be used for promoting national unity and safety (Nigerian Army, 2024). This official support gives more value to the work of keyboard warriors and proves that when used wisely, online platforms can contribute meaningfully to the country’s peace and security. This echoes the application of constructive frames, where narratives are structured around collaboration and national unity, which position digital actors as stakeholders in security discourse. Hence, when keyboard warriors contribute responsibly, they become partners in nation-building rather than distractions.

However, this same digital sphere also exposes a darker dimension, as keyboard warriors have contributed to the escalation of insecurity through sensationalism and the exploitation of ethnic divisions. Looking at the violent clashes in Plateau State in June 2018, a period marked by serious tension, instead of helping the situation, many keyboard warriors shared false information and shocking images across different platforms. They acted without verifying facts and falsely claimed that certain ethnic groups were carrying out massacres. These types of online actions caused panic, anger, and division among Nigerians. A user claimed:



Another post revealed:



According to a BBC report, the Nigerian police said that the fake stories and images on social media made the violence even worse and were a major reason why more people were killed during the crisis. The public relations officer at the Plateau State police said, “*Because of those images, roads were blocked. People died. Fake news on Facebook is killing people*” (BBC, 2018). This shows that when keyboard warriors post harmful or emotional content online, it can actually lead to real-world violence because their actions have consequences far beyond cyberspace. What makes this even more dangerous is how fast people react to social media posts without checking if they are true. Sometimes these posts are shared so quickly that people do not even get time to think. The keyboard warriors behind them aim to stir up emotions rather than promote peace. This behaviour supports an aspect of what experts like Suler (2004) called “online disinhibition”, which means people behave more recklessly online than they would in real life. This reckless freedom gives them power to influence others negatively, especially in a country already struggling with ethnic and religious tensions. So, while keyboard warriors can be forces for good, they can also become serious threats to national peace and unity when they misuse their online platforms. Through this lens, security debates are revealed as struggles over competing frames, where the power to define events determines whether digital engagement promotes stability or escalates violence.

Conclusion

This study examined how keyboard warriors operate within Nigeria’s social media space. It analyses the strategies through which these digital actors contest, shape, and control narratives, particularly in relation to (mis)information, national identity, politics and governance, and security discourse. It established that these actors, although they are not usually anonymous, possess disruptive voices and play a central role in shaping narratives that both reflect and reinforce broader socio-political tensions. Their engagement with misinformation, activism, identity, and politics confirms that keyboard warriors act as both dividers and agents of civic engagement. The motivations behind their actions are rooted in group-based identities, emotional investment, and the structural affordances of social media platforms, all of which contribute to the polarisation of online discourse. While their activities raise concerns about digital aggression and information disorder, they also provide understanding of emerging forms of citizen participation and the reconfiguration of public debate in the digital age. As such, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital culture in the Global South and calls for further research into the governance, regulation, and social impact of online identities in fragmented societies.

Limitations of the Research

While this study provides valuable understanding of the role of keyboard warriors in Nigeria's cyber conflicts, it is limited by its reliance on publicly accessible content from Facebook and X, which excludes private interactions and conversations on encrypted platforms where significant mobilisation and misinformation may also occur. The case study approach, though effective for capturing depth, restricts generalisability to broader contexts beyond the selected cases. Furthermore, manual coding, despite efforts at verification through fact-checks and media sources, remains subjective to researcher interpretation, which may influence how themes are identified and categorised. These limitations show the interpretive nature of the findings and highlight the need for caution in extrapolating beyond the studied cases.

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