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on Extremism & Technology

The “Webification” of Jihadism: Trends in the Use of Online Platforms, Before and After Attacks by Violent Extremists in Nigeria

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Executive Summary

GNET is a special project delivered by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College London.

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Executive Summary

Violent extremist organisations (VEOs) use social media platforms to promote extremist content and coordinate agendas. The use of digital platforms to disseminate information and coordinate activities by VEOs in Nigeria has grown considerably in recent years. This report analyses the adoption of social media before and after attacks by Boko Haram, Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) and Ansaru.

In the post-attack environment, Boko Haram, ISWAP and Ansaru use platforms to claim responsibility and display their strengths against the state’s security forces. By demonstrating their capacity to attack state security forces, the three groups aim to erode the public’s confidence in the state military’s capacity to safeguard national security.

The key findings of this report are as follows:

1. Boko Haram, ISWAP and Ansaru previously leveraged popular social media platforms, including YouTube, Facebook, Telegram and Instagram. These platforms were used to promote propaganda and create awareness regarding upcoming attacks. However, all three groups have now had their use of these platforms restricted or banned.
2. ISWAP has switched to using WhatsApp as a secure platform for communication before, during and after attacks. Rocket.Chat and Telegram have also been instrumental in ISWAP’s information dissemination.
3. Boko Haram uses Telegram to share its activities in the pre-attack and post-attack environments.
4. Ansaru has yet to appear on social media platforms due to its underground activities, which are hard to monitor.
5. The recent acquisition of high-speed satellite internet has enhanced ISWAP’s communication with its audience and enabled coordinated attacks.

Combating the exploitation of social media platform by VEOs requires a multidimensional approach. Effective collaboration with technology companies becomes imperative to identify extremist content. Building technological infrastructure for the state requires synergistic collaboration with the military and intelligence agencies to enable the removal of extremism from social media platforms. Devising multilingual and specialised algorithms to detect coded extremism messages and audio-visual content is essential for effective counter-extremism digital architecture. Investing in current technology through research and algorithm development must be prioritised to identify violent extremist content in Nigeria and beyond.



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