
SOCIAL MEDIA MISINFORMATION AND CONFLICT NARRATIVES IN NIGERIA: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN SHAPING COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN PLATEAU STATE

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Abstract

Social media has significantly transformed how conflicts are discussed, interpreted, and sustained globally, including in Nigeria. In conflict settings, digital platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube are widely used to circulate narratives of violence, blame, and victimhood, many of which are inaccurate or deliberately misleading. The rapid spread of such content, combined with its emotional appeal, poses serious risks in societies where intergroup trust is fragile. In Plateau State, long-standing narratives of threat, indigeneity, and land dispossession intersect with digital communication to intensify communal tensions and polarisation. This study examines how social media misinformation and conflict narratives circulating on digital platforms influence the nature, spread, and intensity of communal conflicts in Plateau State, Nigeria. Anchored on framing theory, social identity theory, and diffusion of innovations theory, the study finds that conflict-related misinformation spreads rapidly on social media, shapes perceptions of social groups, and escalates tensions, thereby increasing the likelihood of communal violence. However, the findings also suggest that digital platforms can support peacebuilding when leveraged through narrative-based and media-literate interventions. The study concludes that social media narratives are not passive reflections of conflict but active forces shaping identities and responses to violence. It therefore recommends strengthened media and digital literacy campaigns and community-based peace messaging initiatives to counter misinformation and promote peaceful coexistence.

Keywords: Social Media Misinformation, Conflict Narratives, Digital Platforms, Communal Conflicts, Plateau State, Peacebuilding

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Social media has transformed how conflicts are discussed, understood, and sustained across the world, including in Nigeria (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). In conflict settings, platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter), and YouTube are widely used to circulate stories about violence, blame, and victimhood. Some of these stories are accurate, while others are partly false or completely fabricated. What makes this development particularly troubling is the speed at which information spreads and the strong emotions it often provokes. In societies where trust between communities is already weak, misleading posts, edited videos, and old images reused in new contexts can easily fuel fear, anger, and suspicion. In Nigeria, where identity, religion, and ethnicity often intersect with political competition, such online narratives can quickly turn local disputes into wider communal confrontations, especially when many people rely on social media as their main source of news.

Research further shows that non-state actors such as insurgents, militias, and extremist groups deliberately use social media to promote their own versions of events and to justify violence (Conway, 2017). These groups often present themselves as defenders of a particular community while portraying opponents as enemies or existential threats. In Nigeria, groups linked to terrorism and armed violence have shared videos, statements, and images online to spread fear, claim responsibility for attacks, or draw attention to their cause (Akinfala et al., 2020). Social media allows them to bypass traditional media and speak directly to supporters and potential recruits. At the same time, such messages are frequently shared by ordinary users without careful verification, which further extends their reach. As a result, digital platforms have become important spaces where conflict narratives are formed, reinforced, and repeatedly circulated.

Beyond organised armed groups, everyday social media users also play a significant role in shaping conflict narratives, often without intending to cause harm. People tend to share posts that confirm what they already believe or that reflect their community's sense of injustice, particularly during periods of tension or violence (Sunstein, 2018). In Plateau State, where past conflicts have left deep emotional and social scars, these narratives can easily reopen old wounds. Messages framed as warnings, calls for self-defence, or expressions of collective anger can quickly create an "us versus them" mindset. Over time, this normalises suspicion and makes peaceful dialogue more difficult. As Best and Rakodi (2011) observe, when violence is explained mainly through group identity rather than specific actions or individuals, it becomes easier to justify collective blame and retaliation. This underlines why social media should be seen not merely as a communication tool but as an active force in the development and persistence of communal conflicts.

The influence of social media on conflict narratives can also be seen clearly in international cases, offering useful lessons for understanding the Nigerian context. From the early days of the Russia–Ukraine war, it became evident that both sides were fighting not only on the battlefield but also in the digital space (Pomerantsev, 2022). Ukrainian leaders, particularly President Volodymyr Zelensky, used social media to speak directly to citizens and the wider world. Short videos filmed in simple settings were shared widely, presenting Ukraine as a nation under attack but determined to resist. These messages often focused on civilian suffering, destroyed homes, and the defence of democratic values. By doing so, Ukraine built a strong emotional connection with international audiences, which helped generate public support in Europe and North America. This public pressure, in turn, influenced governments to provide military assistance and to adopt firm positions during peace discussions. The central message was repeated consistently: Ukraine was defending itself, and any peace settlement must respect its territorial integrity.

In contrast, Russian state media and allied online networks promoted a very different narrative (Yablokov,

2022). The conflict was framed as a limited and necessary operation rather than a full-scale war. Russian narratives often claimed that Ukraine was under Western control and that Russian actions were aimed at protecting Russian-speaking populations and national security interests. These messages were spread through television, social media, and messaging platforms, particularly within Russia and among sympathetic audiences abroad. By presenting the conflict in this way, Russian authorities sought to maintain domestic support and to reduce international criticism. These narratives also shaped how peace negotiations were discussed, shifting attention away from responsibility for the invasion towards security concerns and historical claims. What is especially important in this case is how both sides used media narratives to shape public opinion around negotiations (Oates, 2023). Ukrainian messages made compromise appear risky and unjust, while Russian messages aimed to normalise their demands. Public opinion, influenced by these competing narratives, limited how flexible leaders could be at the negotiating table. In this sense, social media became part of the negotiation process itself rather than a neutral background factor.

A similar struggle over narratives can be observed in the long-running conflict between Israel and Hamas, where social media plays a central role in shaping how events are understood globally (Gilboa, 2016). Israeli officials and military spokespeople regularly use digital platforms to explain their actions and to stress Israel's right to self-defence. Posts often include timelines, images of rocket attacks, and statements linking military operations to national security. These messages are intended to reassure domestic audiences and to persuade international observers that military force is justified, particularly during periods of escalation.

Hamas and its supporters, on the other hand, use social media to focus attention on civilian suffering in Gaza (Khamis & Vaughn, 2011). Images and videos of injured civilians, damaged buildings, and grieving families circulate widely, often accompanied by simple captions that stress injustice and resistance. These emotionally charged narratives are designed to mobilise global sympathy and political pressure, especially among audiences already critical of Israeli policies. During intense periods of violence, such content spreads rapidly and shapes protests, media debates, and diplomatic responses. As Wolfsfeld et al. (2013) note, what makes the Israeli–Hamas case particularly complex is how these competing narratives affect the prospects for peace. Leaders on both sides face strong public expectations shaped by online discourse, where compromise can easily be portrayed as weakness or betrayal. As a result, social media does not merely report the conflict; it actively narrows the space for negotiation and prolongs hostility. This demonstrates how digital platforms influence not only how conflicts are perceived but also how and when they might end.

Turning back to Nigeria, social media platforms increasingly shape how people understand conflict, identity, and threat, particularly during periods of insecurity and political tension (Obi-Ani et al., 2020). Platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, X, and YouTube are widely used to share news, opinions, and personal experiences, but they also amplify emotionally charged content linked to ethnicity, religion, and politics (Adesanya & Ilori, 2025; Inobemhe et al., 2025). Many users are exposed mainly to views that reflect their own beliefs, creating echo chambers where rumours and half-truths spread quickly. During elections, protests, or violent incidents, these platforms often become saturated with unverified claims, graphic images, and voice notes that frame events as deliberate attacks on particular groups. These narratives rarely remain online; they often spill into offline spaces, where fear and anger shaped by social media contribute to protests, reprisals, and wider communal violence (Abubakar et al., 2025). It is also important to recognise that the spread of misinformation in Nigeria is not driven only by malicious intent. Many people share false or misleading content out of patriotism, ethnic or religious loyalty, regional solidarity, or a genuine belief that they are helping others stay informed or safe (Umejei et al., 2024). At

the same time, information overload, emotional stress, and social media fatigue increase the likelihood of forwarding messages.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Research shows that in Nigeria, social media-borne misinformation and hate speech interact with deep ethno-religious and land-based grievances to escalate conflict. In Plateau State, where long-standing narratives of threat, indigeneity, and land dispossession already structure communal tensions, digital platforms sharpen and spread polarizing stories quickly. At the same time, narrative-based peace initiatives and community-led, media-literate approaches offer practical avenues to reshape digital conflict narratives toward reconciliation rather than violence.

1.2.1 Social Media Misinformation

When scholars discuss social media misinformation, they often describe it as false or misleading content that spreads quickly online and shapes how people understand reality, especially during moments of tension. Mansoor (2024) approaches the issue from the angle of media and information literacy, arguing that misinformation thrives where people struggle to judge the reliability of what they see on their screens. From this view, social media misinformation is not only about lies but about gaps in understanding, weak verification habits, and the speed at which posts are shared without reflection. Adesanya and Ilori (2025) expand this idea by describing social media as a “digital battlefield” in Nigeria, where fake news competes with verified information for attention. They explain that misinformation often appears credible because it is packaged in familiar language, emotional images, or trusted community networks. This means people are more likely to believe and share content that fits what they already fear or hope is true. These authors suggest that social media misinformation is best understood as a mix of inaccurate content and human behaviour, where technology amplifies everyday mistakes, assumptions, and emotional reactions.

Ugwu and Ugwuanyi (2024) describe social media misinformation as a layered problem that weakens information integrity and reduces society’s ability to respond calmly to crises. They argue that misinformation spreads not just because it exists, but because social media rewards speed, outrage, and certainty rather than careful thinking. Liadi, Lawal, and Akinrinde (2024) add that fake news often overlaps with hate speech, especially in discussions about security, politics, and identity. In their assessment, misinformation does more than confuse people; it pushes them toward suspicion and hostility, particularly when stories frame certain groups as threats. This is important because it shows that social media misinformation is rarely neutral. It often carries judgement, blame, or fear, even when it appears to be simple news sharing. In this sense, misinformation becomes part of everyday conversation, quietly shaping opinions and attitudes through repeated exposure rather than dramatic persuasion.

Adebiyi et al. (2025) argue that fake news online can influence how citizens see threats and how governments feel pressured to respond. When misinformation spreads widely, it can exaggerate dangers, undermine trust in institutions, and create public demand for rushed or heavy-handed action. Adesanya and Ilori (2025) support this view by showing how false information during crises can inflame public emotion and limit space for reasoned debate. Mansoor (2024) stressed that without strong media literacy, societies remain vulnerable to cycles of misinformation and reaction. Across these studies, social media misinformation emerges as more than incorrect information shared online. It is a social process where technology, emotion, and weak verification combine to shape public understanding. In simple terms, it affects how people interpret events, judge others, and decide what actions feel necessary. Social media misinformation therefore plays a quiet but powerful role in shaping public life, especially in fragile or divided societies.

1.2.2 Conflict Narratives

Most of the authors approach conflict narrative as the story people rely on to understand violence, tension, and responsibility during conflict. Thaut Vinson and Rudloff (2021), drawing from their study in Jos, show that conflict narratives are shaped through framing rather than simple facts. People exposed to the same information often come away with different views because the story is told in ways that connect events to group identity, past grievances, and fear. This means a conflict narrative is not just an account of what happened but a structured way of explaining why it happened and who is to blame. Ikpebe (2019) helps to widen this view by arguing that Nigerian media often place conflicts within a broader “national story”, where violence is interpreted through ideas of unity, threat, and belonging. Kolawole (2021) supports this by showing how repeated labels in media coverage quietly construct identities and expectations. When groups are named and renamed in particular ways, the conflict narrative begins to feel fixed and natural, even though it is socially produced.

This process becomes even clearer in studies of farmer–herder violence, where narratives do not remain static but evolve with political and social pressures. Famous Nwankwo (2024) explains that in the Benue Valley, what began as competition over land and resources has increasingly been retold as a story of Islamisation. In this form, the conflict narrative moves beyond material concerns and becomes a question of survival and identity, making peaceful solutions appear risky or naïve. Nwosu et al. (2025) build on this by showing how harsh and polarising language turns everyday disputes into moral battles between innocent victims and dangerous enemies. These “uncivil discourses” shape public opinion and push the state toward force-based security responses rather than dialogue. Mary Taiye and Sunday Elijah (2025) raise an important caution by questioning whether some dominant narratives exaggerate links between herders, terrorism, and organised violence. They suggest that while violence is real, the narrative framing can stretch limited evidence into a powerful story that feels true through repetition alone. In this sense, a conflict narrative is flexible and adaptive, adjusting itself to public fears and political interests while retaining emotional power.

Adenuga et al. (2023) argue that ethno-religious conflict narratives in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic deepen division by presenting society as sharply divided along religious and ethnic lines. These stories reduce space for trust and cooperation, making national security appear like a struggle between opposing groups rather than a shared responsibility. When this is read alongside Ikpebe’s (2019) idea of the nation as a grand narrative, it becomes clear that conflict narratives do more than explain violence; they give it meaning and direction. Thaut Vinson and Rudloff (2021) reinforce this by showing that once people accept a particular narrative, emotions and group loyalty often matter more than factual correction. Across these studies, a conflict narrative can therefore be understood as a socially constructed story that organises events, identities, and emotions into a believable account of violence. It shapes how people interpret causes, judge victims and perpetrators, and decide what responses feel acceptable.

1.2.3 Production and Dissemination of Misinformation and Conflict Narratives on Social Media during Communal Conflicts

Social media in communal and civil conflicts tends to amplify threatening, polarizing, and often false narratives, but its impact varies by context and is sometimes constrained or countered. Research on communal and civil conflicts consistently shows that social media plays a strong role in producing and spreading misinformation and conflict narratives, although the patterns differ by place and situation. Reilly (2021), studying the Ardoyne parade disputes in Northern Ireland, examines Twitter activity during periods of tension in a deeply divided society. He argues that misinformation and hostile narratives are often produced by politically aligned users who frame events as attacks on identity or rights. One key finding is

that misleading tweets circulated rapidly during peak moments of conflict, reinforcing existing divisions. Another finding is that counter-narratives from community actors and journalists sometimes reduced the reach of false claims, though not consistently. Reilly concludes that social media does not automatically escalate conflict, but it creates space where polarising stories can gain attention very quickly. He recommends early and visible counter-messaging by trusted actors during contentious events. A similar concern appears in Bhadra's (2024) study of Bangladesh, where citizen journalism and photo sharing during crisis moments contributed to the spread of false and emotionally charged stories. Bhadra finds that images taken out of context often became the basis for dramatic conflict narratives, and that audiences struggled to distinguish verified news from personal reporting. The study concludes that weak verification practices amplify misinformation during communal unrest and recommends stronger ethical standards for citizen reporting.

Nasidi et al. (2025), working across Nigeria, assess how digitisation affects information spread and national conflict. They find, first, that social media accelerates the circulation of rumours during violent episodes, especially where trust in official information is low. Second, they observe that repeated exposure to unverified claims increases fear and suspicion among communities already divided by religion or ethnicity. Their conclusion is that digital platforms intensify conflict narratives when information flows are unmanaged, and they recommend stronger public communication and media literacy efforts. Aruku et al. (2025) also focus on Nigeria, arguing that fake news, hate speech, and stereotypical reporting have become security concerns. Their findings show that online narratives often portray groups as permanent threats, while exaggerated claims are recycled across platforms. They conclude that misinformation narrows space for dialogue and recommend clearer regulation and accountability for online content. Apuke and Omar (2021), studying farmer–herder conflict reporting in Nigeria, add that sensational media framing, including social media amplification, deepens the suffering of victims by repeating violent narratives without context. Their recommendation stresses conflict-sensitive reporting that avoids reinforcing false or inflammatory claims.

Mejías and Vokuev (2017), focusing on Russia and Ukraine, show how organised disinformation campaigns mix with everyday social media sharing to blur truth and propaganda during conflict. They find that false narratives gain strength when repeated by multiple sources, and that audiences often accept them as common sense rather than manipulation. The authors conclude that misinformation becomes most powerful when it aligns with existing fears and identities, recommending stronger independent media and critical audiences. Nwankwo et al. (2020), analysing media discourse on farmer–herder conflict in Nigeria, show that political interests shape how conflict stories are produced and circulated, both online and offline. Their findings reveal that selective reporting and emotional framing harden public opinion and influence policy debates. Abubakar et al. (2025) extend this discussion by comparing conflict-driven journalism with peacebuilding approaches in Nigeria, concluding that irresponsible reporting and social media amplification often favour conflict narratives over reconciliation. They recommend conflict-sensitive journalism that challenges false claims rather than repeating them.

1.2.4 Influence of Digital Platforms on Public Perceptions, Group Identities, and Responses to Communal Violence

Studies on digital platforms consistently show that online spaces strongly shape how people understand violence, define group boundaries, and decide how to respond during communal tensions. Edogor et al. (2024), working within Nigeria, examine audience views on both mainstream and digital media and argue that social media has become a major source through which public opinion is formed, often faster than traditional outlets. One key finding from their study is that many users trust information shared within their online networks more than official sources, especially during crises. Another finding shows that repeated

online narratives influence how people judge blame and victimhood in communal violence. John (2018), focusing on postcolonial Nigeria, adds a deeper layer by analysing online narratives of religion and identity. His study finds that digital platforms allow historical grievances and religious identities to be retold in emotional and simplified ways. He concludes that online narratives often turn complex social problems into moral struggles between groups, reinforcing a sense of “us” and “them”. Both studies recommend greater attention to how online content shapes identity formation, stressing the need for responsible storytelling and public awareness of how digital narratives influence perception.

Inobemhe *et al.*, (2025), studying Nigeria, explore how social media amplifies political crisis and power struggles. One of their findings is that users perceive social media as intensifying tension by giving more visibility to extreme opinions and emotional content. Another finding shows that this amplification often shapes how groups interpret threats, making conflicts feel closer and more urgent than they may be offline. Uwalaka and Nwala (2023) support this view in their study of socio-political contestations in Nigeria, where they find that mobile social networking applications encourage rapid mobilisation and reaction, sometimes before facts are clear. They conclude that digital platforms blur the line between information, opinion, and mobilisation, which affects how communities respond to violence. Both studies recommend stronger digital awareness and clearer communication from trusted institutions during crises, so online discussions do not spiral into fear-driven reactions.

Msughter *et al.*, (2023), analysing Nigerian media narratives, argue that framing on both traditional and digital platforms strongly influences how identities are constructed during conflict. Their findings show that repeated frames portraying certain groups as aggressors or victims harden public attitudes. Another finding is that these frames shape public support for either punitive or peaceful responses to communal violence. Apuke and Omar (2020) add that fake news on social media worsens this process by spreading emotionally charged and misleading content, often driven by political motives or the search for attention. They conclude that misinformation deepens mistrust and pushes audiences toward reactive behaviour rather than careful judgement. Their recommendation centres on awareness strategies and media literacy to help users question what they consume and share. Together, these studies show that digital platforms do not simply report communal violence; they actively shape how people see themselves, others, and what actions feel justified.

1.2.5 Impact of Social Media Narratives on Conflict Escalation, De-escalation, and Peacebuilding Processes in Affected Communities

Research on social media narratives shows that they can both inflame violence and support peace, depending on how stories are framed, shared, and responded to within affected communities. Abubakar *et al.*, (2025), working in Nigeria, examine journalism and social media narratives through the lens of conflict-sensitive reporting. They argue that online narratives often escalate conflict when journalists and users focus on blame, identity, and violence rather than causes and solutions. One finding from their study is that sensational and emotionally loaded stories tend to spread faster and deepen mistrust between groups. Another finding shows that balanced reporting and peace-oriented narratives can calm tensions when they give space to multiple voices. Bello (2023), studying Southern Kaduna in Nigeria, offers a more hopeful view by examining user-generated content in peacebuilding efforts. His study finds that social media narratives created by community members helped correct rumours and encouraged dialogue during periods of tension. He also finds that peace messages were more effective when they came from trusted local actors rather than outsiders. Both studies conclude that social media narratives are powerful tools that can either escalate violence or support reconciliation. They recommend training journalists and community influencers to promote careful language and peace-focused storytelling online.

Hassan (2025), studying inter-clan conflicts in Somalia, argues that social media narratives often worsen resource-based conflicts by spreading exaggerated claims about land ownership and group aggression. One finding shows that false or one-sided posts intensified anger and mobilisation among clans. Another finding reveals that repeated online accusations reduced willingness to engage in dialogue offline. Sedliar and Hutsol (2025), examining contemporary conflicts across different regions, support this view by showing that social media narratives thrive on emotion and speed, often outpacing efforts at clarification or mediation. They conclude that when conflict narratives dominate online spaces, they push communities toward escalation rather than understanding. At the same time, they note that platforms can support de-escalation when used intentionally to share verified information and promote restraint. Both studies recommend stronger moderation practices and collaboration with peace actors to reduce the spread of harmful narratives during active conflicts.

Machunga (2017), focusing on Jos, Plateau State, finds that mass media narratives play a central role in either calming or worsening communal tensions. One finding shows that repeated focus on violent events without context increased fear among residents. Another finding indicates that stories emphasising coexistence and shared suffering helped reduce hostility. Asemah and Edegoh (2012), also studying Jos, argue that media agenda-setting influences whether communities focus on revenge or resolution. They find that peace-oriented media agendas encouraged dialogue, while conflict-driven agendas hardened positions. Olojede (2025) adds that social media abuse in Nigeria undermines public administration by spreading hostile narratives that pressure authorities into reactive responses rather than long-term peace planning. These studies conclude that social media narratives shape not only how violence unfolds but also how peace efforts are received. They recommend coordinated use of digital platforms by media, government, and community leaders to promote calm, verified, and inclusive narratives.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Framing Theory

Erving Goffman, a sociologist from the United States, first developed Framing Theory in 1974, later expanded by scholars such as Entman in the 1990s. The theory assumes that the way information is presented influences how people understand events and assign meaning to them. It holds that the media do not just report facts but organise them into frames that shape interpretation, emotion, and judgement. Certain aspects of reality are emphasised while others are downplayed or ignored. This theory is highly relevant to this study because social media platforms frame communal conflicts in Plateau State through headlines, hashtags, images, and short videos that often stress blame, identity, and threat. These frames shape conflict narratives, influence public perception, and can escalate tensions by presenting violence in ways that harden group positions or justify retaliation.

2.2 Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel and John Turner, psychologists from the United Kingdom, developed Social Identity Theory in 1979. The theory assumes that individuals define themselves largely through group membership, such as ethnicity, religion, or community. People tend to favour their in-group while viewing out-groups with suspicion or hostility, especially in conflict situations. This theory is relevant to the study because misinformation and conflict narratives on social media in Plateau State often draw on ethnic and religious identities. Digital platforms amplify “us versus them” narratives, making group boundaries more rigid. As a result, misinformation shared online strengthens group loyalty, fuels fear of the other, and shapes how communities interpret violence and respond to it.

2.3 Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Everett Rogers, an American communication scholar, developed Diffusion of Innovations Theory in 1962. The theory assumes that ideas, messages, and behaviours spread through societies over time via communication channels, with some individuals acting as early adopters and opinion leaders. In this study, the theory helps explain how misinformation and conflict narratives spread rapidly across digital platforms in Plateau State. Influential users, community leaders, or viral posts act as carriers of narratives that are quickly adopted and reshared, even when unverified, shaping collective responses to communal violence.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a survey-based mixed-methods approach to examine how social media misinformation and conflict narratives shape communal conflicts in Plateau State, Nigeria. The design combines quantitative and qualitative methods to allow a broad and detailed understanding of the issue. Quantitative data help to measure patterns of social media use, exposure to misinformation, and perceptions of conflict-related narratives, while qualitative data provide deeper insight into how these narratives are produced, shared, and interpreted within communities. Primary data are drawn from key stakeholders who are directly involved in or affected by communal conflicts and social media communication in Plateau State. These include officials from the Ministry of Information, security agencies such as the Nigeria Police Force and State Security Services, civil society and peacebuilding organisations, media practitioners, traditional and community leaders, and residents of conflict-prone Local Government Areas, namely Jos North, Barkin Ladi, Bassa, Mangu, and Bokkos. Secondary data are sourced from academic journals, theses, government and policy reports, newspapers, and credible online materials to provide theoretical, conceptual, and empirical background on misinformation, digital platforms, and conflict narratives in Nigeria.

The population of the study consists of residents and institutional actors within Mangu and Bokkos LGAs of Plateau State, with an estimated combined population of about 422,500 people based on projected growth rates. Using the Taro Yamane formula at a 5 per cent margin of error, a sample size of 400 respondents is considered adequate for the study. Stratified sampling is used to ensure fair representation of different stakeholder groups, while purposive sampling is applied to select respondents with specialised knowledge for in-depth interviews. Data are collected through structured questionnaires and key informant interviews. The questionnaires include both closed and open-ended questions to capture patterns of social media use, exposure to misinformation, and its perceived impact on communal conflicts. Interviews provide detailed explanations from experienced actors on how digital platforms influence conflict narratives and community responses. Quantitative data are analysed using descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS, while qualitative data are analysed thematically to identify recurring narratives, meanings, and patterns linked to social media misinformation and communal conflict dynamics in Plateau State.

4. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In the course of this research data was collected and they are analysed as shown below

4.1 Results

Table 1.1: Misinformation and conflict narrative production/sharing

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Q1	40 (10%)	60 (15%)	60 (15%)	140 (35%)	100 (25%)	400

Q2	30 (7.5%)	50 (12.5%)	70 (17.5%)	150 (37.5%)	100 (25%)	400
Q3	20 (5%)	50 (12.5%)	80 (20%)	160 (40%)	90 (22.5%)	400

Source: Researcher's Field Survey

In Table 1.1, most respondents, 62.5% (250) agree or strongly agree that social media users in their community frequently share conflict-related narratives without verifying facts. A smaller portion, 12.5% (50), disagrees, while 25% (100) remain neutral, suggesting some uncertainty or limited awareness. This indicates that social media is widely perceived as a platform where conflict-related misinformation circulates rapidly, reinforcing tensions in Plateau State.

Table 1.2: Role of digital platforms in shaping perceptions, identities, and responses

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Q1	20 (5%)	40 (10%)	60 (15%)	180 (45%)	100 (25%)	400
Q2	30 (7.5%)	50 (12.5%)	70 (17.5%)	160 (40%)	90 (22.5%)	400
Q3	25 (6.25%)	55 (13.75%)	80 (20%)	150 (37.5%)	90 (22.5%)	400

Source: Researcher's Field Survey

Table 1.2 shows that 67.5% (270) of respondents agree or strongly agree that social media posts influence how they perceive different groups during communal conflicts. About 12.5% (50) disagree, and 20% (80) are neutral, indicating a moderate level of uncertainty among some respondents. This demonstrates that digital platforms play a strong role in shaping public perceptions, group identities, and community responses to communal violence in Plateau State.

Table 1.3: Influence on conflict escalation, de-escalation, and peacebuilding

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
Q1	30 (7.5%)	50 (12.5%)	80 (20%)	150 (37.5%)	90 (22.5%)	400
Q2	25 (6.25%)	45 (11.25%)	85 (21.25%)	170 (42.5%)	75 (18.75%)	400
Q3	20 (5%)	50 (12.5%)	90 (22.5%)	160 (40%)	80 (20%)	400

Source: Researcher's Field Survey

From Table 1.3, 60% (240) of respondents agree or strongly agree that social media narratives escalate tensions during communal conflicts, while 12.5% (50) disagree, and 27.5% (110) are neutral. Similarly, 61% (245) agree or strongly agree that positive or verified social media posts support peacebuilding efforts. These results suggest that social media functions as both a driver of conflict and a tool for promoting reconciliation, depending on the nature of the content shared.

4.2 Findings

The following are findings derived from the interpretation of the data from the previous section.

Objective i : To analyse how misinformation and conflict-related narratives are produced and

shared on social media platforms during communal conflicts in Plateau State

- a. A majority of respondents (62.5%) perceive that conflict-related misinformation spreads quickly on social media, showing that these platforms are key channels for the circulation of polarising narratives.
- b. Some respondents (25%) remain neutral, suggesting gaps in awareness or limited understanding of how misinformation is produced and shared in their communities.
- c. Most respondents (67.5%) agree that social media influences how people perceive different groups during communal conflicts, showing that digital platforms actively shape group identities and biases.
- d. Neutral responses (20%) indicate that some community members are less influenced by online content or are uncertain about its impact, pointing to variability in media literacy and engagement.
- e. Respondents (60%) agree that misinformation and negative narratives on social media escalate tensions, reinforcing the idea that online content can intensify communal violence.
- f. Positive or verified narratives are perceived by 61% of respondents as helpful for de-escalation and peacebuilding, showing that social media can also serve as a tool for reconciliation.

5. CONCLUSION

This study underscores that social media misinformation and conflict narratives are not passive reflections of communal tensions in Plateau State but active forces that shape perceptions, identities, and responses to violence. By amplifying fear, reinforcing group divisions, and normalising hostility, digital platforms intensify the risks of escalation while simultaneously offering opportunities for peacebuilding when responsibly used. The evidence shows that misinformation thrives in contexts of weak trust, poor verification, and deep ethno-religious grievances, but it can be countered through deliberate interventions that promote media literacy, strengthen community dialogue, and encourage conflict-sensitive reporting. Ultimately, addressing the challenges posed by social media requires coordinated efforts across government, civil society, and digital platforms to transform online spaces from arenas of division into tools for reconciliation and sustainable peace.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. The Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, in collaboration with the National Orientation Agency (NOA), should strengthen media and digital literacy campaigns.
- b. Plateau State Peacebuilding Agency, in partnership with community and religious leaders, should establish community-based peace messaging networks to counter misinformation during crises.
- c. Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy, should enhance regulation and accountability of digital platforms to curb harmful content.
- d. The Nigerian Press Council, together with the Broadcasting Organisations of Nigeria (BON), should promote conflict-sensitive journalism and reporting standards to reduce inflammatory narratives.
- e. The Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with universities and research institutes, should integrate media literacy and peace education into school curricula to build long-term resilience against misinformation.
- f. National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in partnership with civil society organisations, should monitor and address online hate speech and misinformation that escalate communal conflicts.
- g. The Federal Ministry of Justice, working with security agencies and civil society, should develop

clear legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to deter the deliberate spread of harmful misinformation during communal violence.

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