
NEW MEDIA AND CRIME CONTROL: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

This study assessed the effect of new media in crime control with emphasis on assessing its challenges and prospects in Uyo Urban. To achieve this, four specific purposes were designed. The study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study consists of all the 1506 police personnel in the five police stations in Uyo Urban out of which a sample of 200 respondents was selected for the study. The study adopted mixed approach consisting of qualitative and quantitative approaches of data collection. Quantitatively, data were collected using questionnaire while qualitative data were collected with semi-structured interview guide. The data collected were analysed based on research questions raised using simple percentage for research question 1 and mean score research question 2, 3 and 4. The results revealed that Facebook was the most utilized new media (68%) for crime control in Uyo Urban closely followed by WhatsApp (53%) and E-mail (44.5%). Also, the results indicate that the extent of utilization of new media in crime control in Uyo Urban by the security personnel (Police Officers) is low. Nevertheless, it was shown that new media has remarkable impact in providing swift avenue for gathering intelligence as well as enhancing the chances of offenders' apprehension among others. However, many factors were categorized as challenging the effectiveness of new media though the major ones were lack of training for the security personnel in the use of new media in crime control followed by lack of approval by the police investigation department for personnel to utilize the platforms for crime control. It is against this backdrop that the researcher recommends security personnel should be routinely trained on the innovativeness and utilization of new media in crime control.

Keywords: *New Media, Crime Control, WhatsApp and Police Personnel*

Introduction

Crime has been one of the prominent social viruses bedeviling the human society. It has formed a prominent anomie that tends to alter the expected public order essential for both economic growth and national development. It is expedient to state that crime as a social anomaly originate from the aggressiveness of human social deviance when rationalization of committing the act meets a conducive opportunity that permits the individual to act in accordance with his/her desire in contrary to the societal norms. Mehran *et al.* (2019) define crime as an act which seems to violate and breach an existing law of a state. This implies that crime is any unlawful act or action that is punishable by law.

Nigeria as a nation is among countries that are faced with undoubtedly the highest level of crime among the comity of nations globally. Famous (2019) reported that in every 10, at least four individuals have been the victim of crime in Nigeria. This underscores the prevalence of crime in Nigeria. Uyo Urban in Akwa Ibom State has not been excluded from the rising crime experienced. For instance, Ministry of Economic Planning and Police Headquarters, Akwa Ibom State Command cited in Akpan, Njoku and Jeremiak (2018) reported that among the local government areas in Akwa Ibom State, Uyo Urban experienced the highest cases of kidnapping followed by robbery and murder in descending order coupled with other cases of rape, assaults, drug intake etcetera. The authors cited a strong relationship between population characteristics and poverty as factors majorly responsible for this crime rate. Nevertheless, the case that this crime rate is mostly prevalent in the urban centres of the State may not be an over exaggeration due to the pressure associated with urbanization as evident in high level of crimes against persons such as assault, homicide and rape; crimes against property such as destruction/damage/vandalism

of property, arson and robbery; and crimes against society such as drug/narcotic violations, drug violation among others. More worrisome is the fact that the area in particular and the nation at large had reportedly been among the worst hit in the cases of crime against individuals, crime against institutions of government, and crime against properties. For instance, cases of insecurity in the country has risen to umpteen time high. These crimes have remarkably imposed debilitating influence on human societal growth and development.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2020) highlighted implications of crime to include but stealing of fuel, corruption, infiltrating business, politics and destabilizing growth and development of any society. In other words, crime undermines governance; as crime makes life miserable, short, harsh, continues to instil fear in people and generate a general sense of insecurity around people. Crime affects the psychological, financial, physical and spiritual well-being of the victims (UNODC, 2020). In any case, crimes affect the socioeconomic activities of man as well as the social cohesion of any society (Woźniakowska, 2013). However, to change the narratives and ensure appropriate measures that guarantee sustainable tranquillity in human society, scholars have promulgated diverse crime control measures that have tenacity to curtail the occurrence of crime, prevent the escalation of crime prevalence or out rightly ensure adequate control of the prevalence of crime in the society.

Crime control as the focus of this assessment deals with the efforts to fight crime in society. It is essentially focused on fighting crime and protecting potential victims (Fagin, 2016) with the aim of serving as deterrence to offenders and potential offenders. The concept of crime control could be regarded as approach to policing the populace to ensure absolute compliance with the laws guiding conduct in the society while punishing offenders. Farrington (1995) highlighted several crime control measures to include enactment of law enforcement and criminal justice law, and utilization of developmental, community and situational prevention approach. In any case, the effectiveness of these crime control strategies nevertheless depends holistically on the proactiveness of the institutions saddled with the responsibilities of controlling crime occurrence and escalation, and the swiftness to adopt innovative approach in controlling the crime in the twenty-first century. In other words, the effectiveness of crime control and prevention is dependent on reliable and valid data on the extent, nature and pattern of crime and victimization in the society (Famous, 2019).

The Twenty first century society has experienced rapid changes in general human behaviour, desires and expectations which in most cases have resulted in the rapid rising level of crimes. The rapidity in the incidence of crime correspondingly requires swift approaches in conducting investigation, accessing information; gathering intelligence; and analysing intelligence towards controlling crime and its associating menace. One of such approaches although has been argued to be very effective is the use of new media.

New media could be regarded as the geometric advancement in the innovativeness surrounding the media in the twenty first century technology era. As part of the media that offer unique understanding of how individual access information, new media are those that are simultaneously integrated and interactive through the use of digital code (Vandijk, 2016). Bennett (2013) refers to new media as emerging information communication technology and applications such as mobile phones, internet, streaming technologies, wireless networks, and the high-quality publishing and information-sharing capacities of the World Wide Web. This implies that new media are information sharing sources with novel applications as well as the technologies that allow original, and innovative ways of performing new tasks.

Agboola (2014) highlighted the high capacity features of the new media to include: possession of most evolved feedback system; possession of multimedia components (which reports events or incidence by cartoons, moving pictures, sound and music); utilization of interest; and ability to involve the audience. These characteristic features of the new media according to the author have made it effective audience penetration, makes information gathering highly portable, personalised and participatory; increases interactive civic messaging that ultimately results in higher level of civic participation; as well as making it possible for anyone to create, modify and share content with others, using relatively simple tools that are often free or inexpensive. In the position of Wolff, McDevitt and Stark (2011), the popularity of new media, its digitalization and interactiveness have make them critical resource of information which law enforcement officials can deploy to disseminate information to the public. Through new media, evidence

such as photographs, status updates, a suspect's location at a certain time, and direct communication to or from a defendant's social media account can be traced and used for the management of major events, obtain intelligence, and conduct investigations (Wolff *et al.*, 2011, LexisNexis Risk Solution, 2014); as well as promoting the principle of community policing (Davis *et al.*, 2014).

In a contrary, several scholars pointed out the negative aspect of the new media to crime generation, occurrence, and escalation. For instance, Rios (2018) indicated that when new media covers criminal violence, it influences the probability that other criminals use similar styles of crimes, but it does not change overall rate of criminal activity. In other words, new media does not trigger crime as suggested by General Aggression Model (promulgated by Dewart, Anderson and Bushman, 2011) but rather enhance the "copycat" effect. In addition, due to the networked nature of new media, any information released by the police through the media can be reshaped or put to new use by anyone participating in the adopted network (LexisNexis Risk Solution, 2014). Worst still, some scholars maintained that most of the information in the new media is uncensored which often resulted in societal fragmentation and displacement of community concern (Agboola, 2014; Mohseni, Latifinia and Afjeh, 2016).

Nevertheless, the contradictory positions of scholars on the potentials of new media may be as a result of the nature of crime; effectiveness of crime control agencies; and the proactiveness of the crime control agencies to be efficient in handling the innovations of the new media in tackling crime. It is premised on this assumption that the study was organized to assess the effect of new media in crime control with emphasis in assessing it challenges and prospect in Uyo Urban.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to assess the effect of new media in crime control with emphasis on assessing it challenges and prospects in Uyo Urban. Specifically, the study sought to:

- i. determine the most utilized new media in crime control in Uyo Urban;
- ii. examine the extent to which new media assists in crime control in Uyo Urban;
- iii. examine the view of the police personnel on the prospect of new media in crime control in Uyo Urban;
- iv. examine the view of police personnel on the challenges of new media in crime control in Uyo Urban.

Scope of the Study

Although there are many kinds of new media, the study focused on the assessment of the effect of new media in crime control with emphasis on assessing it challenges and prospect in Uyo Urban. The study was limited to the aspect of new media such as electronic mail, Google plus, and social networking media applications like the Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, LinkedIn, Yahoo Messenger. The assessment was basically done to examine the most utilized new media in the crime control; examine the extent to which new media assists in crime control; and the views of the police personnel on the prospect of new media in crime control and the challenges of new media in crime control in Uyo Urban.

Literature Review

Potentials of New Media in Crime Control

Many approaches exist for the effective control of crime. These approaches as promoted by scholars include:

- i. Crime control by a victim: This according to Roelofse (2011) describes a situation when a potential victim makes changes to the daily work or social routines in order to reduce the opportunity for victimization.
- ii. Crime control by the community: This involves a community taking control of the environment in which they live and taking part in local crime prevention program such as the Neighbourhood Watch program
- iii. Crime control by environmental design: This involves changing the environment to reduce opportunities for crime. Crime control by environmental design involves mechanical control

(e.g., erecting a perimeter fence or wall to keep criminals out) and technological control (e.g., installing a CCTV network for surveillance) (Roelofse, 2011).

- iv. The emphasis of the study was Crime control by the agents of government such as the police: This approach is traditionally carried out by the police through strategic on-the ground operations.

Emphasis of this study was based on the crime control by the police. Police around the world are starting to stray from reactive approaches to more proactive strategies that use crime intelligence to control crime. This is known as intelligence-led policing and it involves using information gathered about criminals and their motives in order to prevent further crime from occurring (Roelofse, 2011). Nevertheless, new media has been argued as serving as the main part of this approach of intelligence gathering. Though this position is not far from the Rosenbaum's inference that crime levels are lower in areas where community members: (1) have a high sense of attachment to the area; (2) take on more responsibility to look after the area; (3) are willing to interfere in abnormal social behaviour that occurs there; and (4) put pressure on other members in the community to do the same. (Rosenbaum cited in Plessis, 2018). Thus, it becomes pertinent to assess the potentials of new media and its effect on crime control by the police.

Many authors offered diverse definitions of what constitute new media. Manovich cited in Friedman and Friedman (2008) defined new media as cultural objects "which use digital computer technology for distribution and exhibition". Rice (2017) describes new media as communication technologies that enable or enhance interaction between users as well as interaction between users and content. It is a broad term that emerged in the later part of the 20th century to encompass the amalgamation of traditional media such as films, images, music, spoken and written word, with the interactive power of computer also called convergence, computer-enabled consumer devices and most importantly the internet (Mitra, 2011).

In generic term, new media is characterized by the attributes of transmitting information by digital bits rather than physical atoms using multimedia components of emerging innovative technologies. These attributes make it possible for new media to:

- i. **Holds the potential to encourage community building:** The participatory nature of new media, as highlighted by Hwang and Kim (2015), proves the media to be a notable facilitator in creating and maintaining effective partnerships and in improving information-sharing among all role-players. As highlighted by van Graan (2016), residential areas suffer the highest concentration of property crime. Therefore, the traditional method of surveillance where the community was the 'eyes and ears' of the police is encouraged in order to obtain sufficient and immediate information on criminal activities, and in this manner profiles pertaining to the causes of and trends in criminal tendencies can be developed (van Graan, 2016). Essentially, such information can be easily shared via new media in order for it to become useable by role-players and effective in addressing and crime prevention.
- ii. **Have high impact with a potentially sensual and compelling interactive experience through the use of spoken words, animation, graphics and video:** Hwang and Kim (2015) explained that, as new media communication methods become more interactive, they allow for people to take collective action in cyberspace. New media thus makes it easier to get a large number of people with different views and opinions regarding a specific matter to all come together. This is because of the universal and interactive features of the new media that promote a participatory culture among its users (Hwang & Kim, 2015).
- iii. **Promote delivery of properly organized and easily understood quality information:** In this case, new media provides detailed evidence on a particular fact through the use of viable picture, and interactive sounds capability to back up crime cases.
- iv. **Provide access to a wide audience allowing everyone to have a voice, to be able to communicate with others and form connections not reliant on physical proximity or mobility:** In an attempt to motivate the use of new media for crime control purposes, Trottier

(2012) explains that the extent to which new media are used by people in their everyday lives has huge potential for the police and police activity. It has also been demonstrated that the police are more exposed than ever through new media to the interactions that take place among people on a local level, and they can use this information to guide their policing activities and they can even use it to arrest suspects for specific crimes.

Peters and Ojedokun (2019) inferred that new media can play an active role in mobilizing support and advancing nationwide and international commitment to crime prevention while distributing information to vast audience at a fast pace. Also, the new media triggers worldwide responses to crime and heightened social awareness and policy formulation for protection of valuable victims (Peter et al., 2019).

In Nigeria, diverse new media technologies exist that could be utilized in crime control. The most commonly utilized new media in Nigeria include Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and WhatsApp (Popoola, 2014). In 2019, another study was conducted assessing the new media mostly utilized by undergraduate students of Nigerian universities, it was found that WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube were prominent new media (Tayo, Adebola and Yahya, 2019). The adoption of these media platform was mainly for information gathering purpose, investigative and surveillance purpose (Peters and Ojedokun, 2019; Varano and Sarasin, 2014; Zeng *et al.*, 2010), and public relations and engagement purpose (Hu and Lovrich, 2019). In terms of crime control, *Erete et al (2014) posited that Facebook, Twitter, Electronic mail (E-mail) and WhatsApp are the new media tools that are largely used by Community Policing Forum (CPF) groups in order to develop communication between CPF response teams and communities, for the purpose of crime awareness, and to promote safety and security. This position was similar to that of Uduma, Nwasum, Abaneme and Icha –Ituma (2020) which indicated that police investigation officers mostly utilized Facebook in tracking and tacking criminal activities*

Smith and Zook, (2011), *Sachdeva and Kumaraguru (2014), Erete et al. (2014) in the aspect of crime control* noted that new communication platform such as social networking sites like Face Book and Twitter are used:

- i. To facilitate superior education.
- ii. Provide easy and alternative communication services.
- iii. Send criminal related information to the police.
- iv. To create crime awareness, and collaboration.
- v. To provides an additional surveillance of the potential offenders which in essence has increased guardianship to the suitable targets of crime.
- vi. Allows quicker reporting of crime and sometimes in real time communication of details about crime and criminal.
- vii. Mobile computing technology
- viii. Improves officers' access to real time data on crime and other events.
- ix. Enhance timely deployment in the community, identify persons, vehicles, places and hence improves both reactive and proactive field work and officers' ability to identify potential threats and risk, locate suspects in criminal investigation, problem solving capabilities and quality of information they may provide to the public (Consolvo, Klasnja, Mc Donald, Landay cited in Wambugu, 2017).

In another perspective, Kavanaugh *et al.* (2012) maintained that when using new media in fighting crime, offenders perceived risks of apprehension was seen high when the victim is in possession of a new media watch. In other words, they lower the cost victims incur reporting crime. Even better is the fact that the media improves the likelihood of photographic images transmission, apprehension, prosecution and conviction (Kavanaugh *et al.*, 2012).

Lindsay *et al.* (2009) did investigate the impact of new media technology on a UK police force and their knowledge on sharing processes. Ethnographic approach to the research was adopted, using a mixed method approach of focus groups, questionnaires, observational 'work shadowing' and interviews with a total of 42 staff involved in a trial of mobile technology. Findings from all methods were consistent and suggested that new media technology has a positive impact on policing and knowledge sharing. There was

a positive impact on knowledge sharing in the course of operational duties. Information and knowledge could be shared more quickly with officers in the field; and new media technology provided a new avenue for keeping each other up to date with events. Similarly, the police organization as a public service can engage their clients through social media platform in a timely and direct manner with relative low costs as noted by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010).

Lafika (2017) explored the attitudes and perceptions of Norwood Community Policing forums (NCPF) response team towards new media platforms as a tool for crime awareness. This study also looked at the utilisation and effectiveness of new media platforms used by the Norwood Community Policing Forum (NCPF) in order to raise crime awareness for the purpose of, assisting the community and the South African Police Service (SAPS), to create a safer environment for all. *The findings* revealed that the utilisation of new media platforms provides alternative means, for crime awareness, to the law enforcement portfolio. New media platforms can assist CPFs and the police in crime investigations and crime awareness initiatives, provided that the platforms are fully exploited for the correct purposes and community members know how to operate the platform/s.

Wambugu (2015) sought to establish application of new media (example: mobile phones applications) by police officers in crime prevention in Central Police Division, Nairobi City County. New media was found to be effective tool in the control of crime in Nairobi Central. New media applications such as Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, emails and short text messages were found through adapted technology acceptance model (TAM) to effectively contribute to crime control based on respondents' perspective. Police effort to use mobile technology was found to have significant effects on crime control

However, in some part of Africa, this new media has not been used effectively in crime control. For instance, a study conducted by Kumbuti (2013) on Nairobi city Kenya police level of technology application in detecting crimes found the new media technology has not been used to improve efficiencies in crime detection. This is supported by Quarshie (2014) study on the Africa countries law enforcement officers' utilization on information communication technology (ICT) in fighting crime which revealed that Africa has not fully taken ICT advantage in crime control.

Plessis (2018) determined which WhatsApp practices could be regarded as the most effective for use by communities to enhance community-based crime prevention efforts in the area of study. It is argued that this information could inform a set of guidelines for the use of WhatsApp in crime prevention that could be utilised by the various communities in the area of study, and even beyond the demographic borders of the Highway Area. The findings of this study show that WhatsApp is attractive for crime prevention purposes because it has improved the way in which communities can communicate with a broader audience in a much quicker fashion than before. This enhances crime response rates and curbs further instances of crime. The findings of this study also highlighted areas in which WhatsApp use can be carefully regulated to ensure it's most effective and lawful use in crime control and prevention. This research was conducted in the Highway Area in KwaZulu-Natal. In this area, communities are increasingly using WhatsApp for crime prevention purposes, and role-players (e.g. the SAPS, private security companies, emergency services etc.) operating in this area are becoming more active on community-driven WhatsApp groups in order to assist with resources for crime prevention and responses to emergency situations.

Nevertheless, the reason for adopting new media by police for surveillance and crime prevention is predicated on the information era that is 'data-driven', 'intelligence-led', and 'technologically mediated' (Walsh and O'Connor, 2019). The avalanche of information flow on everyday life on social media offers permanent, searchable platforms and archives for law enforcement agencies to scrutinise private details of suspects; assist in clearing cases where culprits or criminals have carelessly and illogically bragged about or documented their exploits online (Sandberg and Ugelvik, 2016); and provide fresh justification for offline interventions (Brunty and Helenek, 2014). However, whether the status quo in the personnel utilization of new media in the crime control has met it utmost potentials tends to be far from being achieved as evident in the rising level of criminality in Uyo Urban. If not, what could be the possible challenges?

Challenges of New Media in Crime Control

Meyer and van Graan (2011) highlight that very little information on crime is generated by the police themselves, and that the public generally report a massive 97% of the information that the police need in order to solve crimes. This may not be unconnected with the fact that the population of Nigerians that utilized the new media outnumbered that of the police officers.

New media as one of the pivotal sources of people's knowledge of crime or understanding about crime for effective crime control has its own challenges. Diverse opinions have been promoted as major challenges of new media in the area of crime control.

LexisNexis Risk Solution (2014) reported issue of inconsistency in the usage of the new media resulting from the personnel not being dedicated to oversee their usage. This was reported to have resulted from the fact that only few agencies of government adopted formal training of their personnel in this direction. Meanwhile, Lefika (2017) highlighted the challenges of new media to include:

- i. Limitation in the knowledge base of the people. In other words, new media is accessible to those who are actively involved in internet surfing.
- ii. Inconsistency and often times inaccuracy in the information shared. To this end, the accuracy of information is also a concern as people sometimes post misleading information or simply information which may be trending on new media, but is not entirely true.
- iii. Miscommunication, interpretation, and misrepresentation of cases and facts which may ultimately result in the violation of rights.
- iv. The system could be used by criminals to reshape information as though emanating from appropriate authority with the aim of defrauding people.

Similarly, Walsh and O'Connor (2019) argued that adopting social media for surveillance and intelligence gathering would pose legal and ethical questions about the privacy of individuals and if citizens could be tracked or spied on based on acts they have not yet and may never commit. Nevertheless, Uduma et al (2020) summarized the challenges inhibiting utilization of new media by the Nigerian Police to include majorly:

- i. Lack of adequate human resources and expertise: This becomes more worrisome as criminals utilizing new media are becoming more sophisticated by using more advanced technology. As such if police officers do not undergoing the best possible training, their expertise in crime control using new media will be ineffective.
- ii. Lack of financial resources: Poor funding of the police force hinders the effectiveness of the officers in utilizing new media in crime control. This is given the fact that investigation through new media is capital intensive because it requires acquisition of hardware facilities and latest modern technological devices.
- iii. High possibility of leaking information about ongoing investigation in the process of keeping the public abreast of information on suspected criminals.
- iv. The issues of privacy, ethical and legal implications of spying and monitoring the online activities of the public emerged as one of the challenges inhibiting the effective and efficient deployment of social media for crime detection and prevention.

Theoretical Blueprint of the Challenges and Prospect of New Media in Crime Control

The study was based on the Broken Windows Theory propounded by Wilson and Kelling (1982) which stipulates that when the crime rate has gone up, people are afraid of being violently attacked by someone else; and are also fearful of other disorderly people, which could make their experiences out on the streets unpleasant and may indicate to them that crime is on the rise. The presence of such disorders in a community is argued to signal to others that disorder is tolerated in that community, which can encourage more serious crimes. Essentially, it is the weakened informal social control in a community that has allowed for disorder to be left unchecked and that has led to increasing crime levels.

The broken windows theory is premised on the notion that weakened informal social control ultimately leads to crime, but that crime can be prevented by enforcing informal social control within a community. As discussed above, when residents within a community perceive disorder to be present and/or

crime to be on the increase, they naturally begin to worry about their personal safety in the community and withdraw from public spaces or move out of the area as a result.

Therefore, this study was premised on the assumption that if new media is used effectively among members of a police force, the communities do not need to worry about their personal safety when engaging in crime prevention as they can do so on their phones whilst remaining in a safe space. In other words, individuals can use new media platforms wherever they are as long as they have access to the Internet. Therefore, residents no longer need to physically participate in crime prevention on the streets as they can do so through observation and use their phones to share information from wherever they are. This makes soliciting and sustaining public participation in crime prevention much easier because most people have phones and use new media. Therefore, they will be more willing to participate in crime control because they can easily do so whilst not compromising their personal safety. Worthy of note is the fact that informal social control is strengthened if there is social cohesion within a community, and this is achieved with regular social interaction amongst community members who use new media applications. In the context of this study, social interaction is increased by using new media because several hundred residents within a community can interact with one another and the police for a prolonged time on diverse new media groups. Through this interaction, which generally occurs daily, community members become more familiar with one another and are closer to the police and are able to establish rules or acceptable standards of social behaviour that are allowed in their community and determine what disorderly behaviours will not be allowed. Community members can thus share reports on the new media groups if they have seen any disorderly behaviour in the community so that relevant authorities such as police officers can immediately address their concern so as to prevent further instances of criminal behaviour. This practice will ensure that perceptions of disorder are managed and that levels of fear of crime are reduced because the community members can actively partake in order-maintenance and crime prevention without making themselves feel vulnerable.

Proponents of the broken windows theory state that residents in a community often like to engage with police members who operate in their area to share their concerns about threats that are perceived in the community. This interaction may them the sense that they have done something about a problem in the community. This can be done in the ways described above. Nevertheless, whether the police have been responding to the engagements of crime control via the new media is a source of concern for this study.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a survey research design. The survey design is suitable for the study because it focuses on people and vital facts about their opinion and assisted the researcher in analysing the perception or personnel on the effect of new media in crime control.

Area of the Study

The study was carried out within Uyo urban in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Uyo urban is the capital of Akwa Ibom State. Uyo urban comprises of Uyo Local Government Area and part of Itu, Ibiono Ibom, Etinan, Ibesikpo Asutan and Uruan Local Government Areas. Uyo urban is bounded in the North by Uruan Local Government Area, on the East by Etinan, Ibiono and Itu on the South, and Ibesikpo Asutan Local Government Area on the West.

Uyo urban has experienced geometric increase in terms of population due to the availability of basic infrastructural development and the fact that it serves as the seat of power for the Government of Akwa Ibom State. This geometric progression in population may have constituted a viable avenue for diverse pressure-prone experiences which have may exposed individuals to committing crime or being a victim of crime as evident in the increasing of murder cases, kidnapping, armed robbery; cultism, rape, assault, and attempted murder cases among others.

In any case, in an effort to curtail the incessant cases of crimes in Uyo Urban, the Government deemed it fit to establish five police points alongside other public security organizations like Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps and the Nigerian Army Barracks. Also the area (Uyo Urban) has clear access to diverse telecommunication networks and internet facilities which make new media system

accessible to all. The choice of Uyo Urban emanates from the researcher's proximity to the area coupled with the report of the police Headquarters (2013) that Uyo urban has the highest level of crime among the local government areas in Akwa Ibom State. Thus, the information obtained in this study may be used to generalized the status quo of the effect of new media in Akwa Ibom State.

Population and Sampling Technique

The population of the study consists of all the 1506 police personnel in the five police stations in Uyo Urban (Police Headquarters, Ikot Akpan Abia; Idoro Road Station; D-Division; C-Division; and Ewet Housing Police Stations) (Source: Office of the Public Relation Officer, 2023).

Sample of 200 respondents were selected from the population of personnel in the five stations in Uyo Urban using simple random sampling technique. That is, in each of the stations, 40 personnel were randomly selected from the investigation department for the study. Thus, resulting in the selection of 200 sampled respondents.

Method of Data Collection

The study adopted mixed approach consisting of qualitative and quantitative approaches of data collection. Quantitatively, data were collected using questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire entitled: "New Media and Crime Control Scale (N-MCCS)" was used to gather data from the respondents. This research instrument was designed in four clusters. The first cluster highlighted list of new media utilized in Uyo Urban. Cluster two presented items on the extent new media assists in crime control. While clusters 3 and 4 provided items for the assessment of the views of the personnel on the prospect and challenges of new media in crime control respectively. Qualitatively, the study adopted semi-structured interviews as format to aid free-flowing discussions and conversations with the essence of getting a deeper understanding of different key issues of the study.

The data were collected after due permission was sought from the Police Investigation Officer in charge of the investigation department in each of the five police stations in Uyo urban. A detailed explanation of the essence of the study was tendered to the PIO-investigation who later briefed other personnel before the administration of the instrument (NMCCS). To gather the quantitative data, the questionnaires were administered on the personnel in the department of investigation in the five sampled stations using instant retrieval approach for easy coverage of the study area. The valid return rate was 100 percent.

Also, the qualitative data were derived from the five PIOs in the five police stations located in Uyo Urban directly using the semi-structured interview guide. Each interview session lasted approximately 10 minutes on average and was audio recorded. These interviews recorded were subsequently transcribed, and responses to the interviews were analysed using the thematic analysis approach which involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within a data corpus. The data collected were analysed based on research questions raised using simple percentage for research question 1 and mean score research question 2, 3 and 4.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One: What are the most utilized new media in the crime control in Uyo Urban:

Table 1: Percent Scores of New Media most utilized in Uyo Urban (N=200)

New Media	Tally	Percent Scores (%)
Email	89	44.5
WhatsApp	106	53
Google Plus	2	1
Instagram	4	2
Twitter	11	5.5
YouTube	1	0.5
Facebook	136	68
Yahoo Messenger	10	5
Linkedin	6	3

(Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2023)

The analysis of the research question one in Table 1 indicates that majority of respondents mostly utilized Facebook (68%) for crime control in Uyo Urban. This was closely followed by WhatsApp (53%) and E-mail (44.5%). The utilization of Facebook by the majority may emanate from the wider audience penetration capacity it has over the rest of choice new media. The finding is supported by the position and the study of Erete *et al.* (2014) which revealed that Facebook, Twitter, Electronic mail (E-mail) and WhatsApp are the new media tools that are largely used by Community Policing Forum (CPF) groups in order to develop communication between CPF response teams and communities, for the purpose of crime awareness, and to promote safety and security. This position was similar to that of Uduma, Nwasum, Abaneme and Icha –Ituma (2020) which indicated that police investigation officers mostly utilized Facebook in tracking and tacking criminal activities

Research Question Two: What is the extent to which new media assists in crime control in Uyo Urban?

Table 2: Mean scores on the extent New Media assists in Crime Control in Uyo Urban (N=200)

Items	Mean scores	Remarks
<i>New media encourages personnel in...</i>		
Gathering intelligence	3.10	High Extent
Screening likelihood of individuals engaging in criminal activities	2.21	Low Extent
Mounting surveillance	2.50	Low Extent
Creating awareness on the safety and security tips to the public	2.23	Low Extent
Apprehending offenders/criminals	2.46	Low Extent
Total	2.50	Low Extent

(Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2023)

Table 2 answered the research question two raised. It was revealed that the extent of utilization of new media in crime control in Uyo Urban by the security personnel (Police Officers) is low. The results indicated that the personnel to a high extent utilized the new media to gather intelligence when need arises. However, the low extent in the generality of usage of new media in crime control may be linked with not adopting the new media in screening likelihood of the individuals engaging in criminal activities; mounting surveillance, poor funding of police force, and creating awareness of crime to the Police. The findings align with Kumbuti (2013) study on Nairobi city Kenya police level of technology application in detecting crimes which found that the new media technology has low effectiveness in improving efficiencies in crime detection. This is supported by Quarshie (2014) study on the Africa countries law enforcement officers' utilization on information communication technology (ICT) in fighting crime which revealed that Africa has not fully taken ICT advantage in crime control.

Research Question Three: What are the personnel views on the prospect of new media in crime control in Uyo Urban?

Table 3: Respondents' Views on the Prospect of New Media in Crime Control in Uyo Urban (N=200)

Items	Mean scores	Remarks
<i>The likelihood of new media in ...</i>		
Providing quality and requisite detailed intelligence for effective investigation	3.16	High Extent
Providing viable collaboration between the police and the public	3.32	High Extent
Providing swift avenue for gathering intelligence	3.76	High Extent
Promoting accuracy in analysing intelligence	3.10	High Extent
Encouraging the chances of offenders' apprehension	4.21	High Extent
Total	3.51	High Extent

(Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2023)

Table 3 indicates the respondents' views on the prospects of new media in crime control in Uyo Urban. Arising from the analysis of the research question 3 raised, it revealed that new media to a very high extent assists in providing swift avenue for gathering intelligence as well as enhancing the chances of offenders' apprehension. Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that to a high extent, the new media has the potentials of providing quality and requisite detail intelligence for effective investigation; providing viable collaboration between the police and the public; as well as promoting accuracy in analysing

intelligence. All these attributes and prospects of new media surveyed from the respondents corroborate these of the study done by Plessis (2018) which indicated that new media enhance crime response rates and curb further instances of crime. This was similar to the findings of Smith and Zook, (2011), Sachdeva and Kumaraguru (2014), Erete, Miller and Lewis (2014) that new media assist in providing swift avenue for gathering intelligence as well as enhancing the chances of offenders' apprehension.

Research Question 4: What are the personnel views on the challenges of new media in crime control in Uyo Urban?

Table 4: Respondents' Views on the Challenges of New Media in Crime Control in Uyo Urban (N=200)

Items	Mean scores	Remarks
<i>The perceived challenges of new media emanates from ...</i>		
Accessibility by larger population of the people.	2.16	Low Extent
All time accuracy of the information posted.	2.09	Low Extent
Misrepresentation of most of the posts.	3.63	High Extent
Lack of security personnel training on the utilization of new media in crime control.	3.96	High Extent
Lack of approval by the police investigation department for personnel to utilized the platforms for crime control.	3.78	High Extent

(Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2023)

Analysis in Table 4 provides mean evidence of respondents' viewed challenges associating with new media in crime control in Uyo Urban. The results of the analysis according to the research question 4 raised, has shown that lack of training for the security personnel in the use of new media in crime control followed by lack of approval by the police investigation department for personnel to utilize the platforms for crime control, constitute prominent challenges to the effectiveness of new media in crime control. These were closely followed by the reshaping and misinterpretation of safety and security posts.

The findings as derived in the analysis supported Uduma et al's (2020) positions that major challenges inhibiting utilization of new media by the Nigerian Police include lack of adequate human resources and expertise which often resulted from the police authority not adopting in absolutism the sophistication of the new media.

Conclusion

The understanding deduced from this study informs the fact that new media mostly utilized by the police in crime control in Uyo Urban are the social media networking sites (Facebook and WhatsApp) and electronic mails (Gmail and Yahooemail). Although with serious challenges of the security personnel not having requisite knowledge on the utilization of new media in crime control, and the authority not approving absolute utilization of the new media platforms in crime control, the new media has been viewed to have remarkable prospect of quality intelligence for effective investigation when properly utilized; create active participation and collaboration of the public in crime control; and can enhance accuracy in analysing intelligence for swift apprehension.

However, in spite the potency of new media in crime control, the challenges prominently bedevilling its utilization have made the extent to which new media assist in crime control in Uyo Urban low. The implication therefore is that although the prospects of new media are remarkable, the current status in their effect in assisting crime control by the police is low

Recommendations

It is against this backdrop of the analysed data that the following recommendations are made:

- i. Security personnel should be routinely trained on the innovativeness and utilization of new media in crime control. This will enhance their effectiveness in mounting surveillance on would-be offenders; screening individuals with likelihood of engaging in criminal activities; and gathering intelligence for crime suppression.
- ii. Public security organization should adopt absolutely the utilization of new media as emerging innovation for crime control. By this it means establishing a functional unit in ensuring efficiency and consistency in screening crime-prone posts.

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