

Digital battlegrounds: Social media, manufactured insecurity and the pan-African imperative of sovereign awakening in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the nexus between social media proliferation and the intensification of insecurity in Nigeria, situating this analysis within a Pan-African framework of sovereign awakening. Drawing on decolonial theory, critical information studies, and African political philosophy, this study argues that social media platforms—principally designed, owned, and algorithmically governed by Western techno-capitalist interests—function as instruments of epistemic destabilisation in Nigeria and across the African continent. The paper examines how disinformation networks, ethnic incitement, and externally amplified narratives have been weaponised to fracture social cohesion, undermine state legitimacy, and perpetuate neo-colonial dependencies in the guise of digital freedom. Deploying a theoretical synthesis of Kwame Nkrumah's consciencism, Frantz Fanon's psychopolitics of colonialism, and contemporary decolonial digital scholarship, the paper proposes that genuine national security in Nigeria cannot be achieved without a corresponding sovereignty of the digital mind—a collective Pan-African reclamation of informational, epistemic, and technological self-determination. The paper concludes that African responses to digital insecurity must transcend reactive security measures and advance toward structural, epistemically grounded alternatives rooted in African value systems, continental solidarity, and sovereign technological infrastructure.

Keywords: Social media; Insecurity; Nigeria; Pan-Africanism; Sovereign awakening; Decoloniality; Epistemic sovereignty; Disinformation; Digital imperialism

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century has inaugurated an era of profound paradox for Africa: while digital technology has opened unprecedented avenues for communication, economic participation, and political mobilisation, it has simultaneously introduced new vectors of destabilisation, manipulation, and what scholars increasingly term 'digital colonialism' (Kwet, 2019). Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation and largest economy, occupies a particularly fraught position within this paradox. With over 109 million internet users and social media penetration exceeding 28% of the population (DataReportal, 2024), Nigeria's digital landscape has become both a site of civic empowerment and a theatre of engineered conflict.

The relationship between social media and insecurity in Nigeria is neither accidental nor simply a function of technological advancement. Rather, it reflects deeper structural continuities with colonialism—a system that historically required the fragmentation of African societies to maintain dominance. Contemporary social media platforms, governed by algorithmic logics designed in Silicon Valley and oriented toward engagement maximisation, reproduce and amplify divisive content with a precision that older colonial media could never achieve. The result is a Nigeria in which ethnic fault lines are routinely electrified, religious tensions are algorithmically stoked, and state

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institutions are systematically delegitimised through coordinated disinformation campaigns that often bear the fingerprints of external actors.

This paper argues that understanding this phenomenon demands more than a technocratic or security-studies lens. It demands what we term a Pan-African sovereign awakening—an epistemically grounded, politically conscious, and culturally rooted African response to the weaponisation of digital space. Drawing on the intellectual traditions of Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, and contemporary African digital scholars, this paper contends that true security—in the deepest sense of collective flourishing and self-determination—is inseparable from sovereignty over the narratives, platforms, and epistemic frameworks through which Africans understand themselves and their world.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 provides a theoretical framework synthesising Pan-African philosophy and decolonial digital theory. Section 3 analyses the structural role of social media platforms as instruments of insecurity in Nigeria. Section 4 examines specific mechanisms of digital destabilisation, including disinformation, ethnic manipulation, and foreign interference. Section 5 articulates the concept of sovereign awakening as a response framework. Section 6 discusses policy and structural implications, and Section 7 offers conclusions.

2. Theoretical Framework: Pan-Africanism, Decoloniality, and the Digital Question

2.1. Nkrumah's Consciencism and the Digital Sphere

Kwame Nkrumah's concept of consciencism—the philosophical mobilisation of African values, traditions, and aspirations as the foundation for a transformed African society—provides an essential starting point for theorising digital sovereignty (Nkrumah, 1964). Nkrumah recognised that colonialism operated not merely through military and economic control but through the systematic assault on African consciousness. The colonial project required Africans to internalise European epistemologies as universal, thereby generating what he termed the 'philosophical consciencism' that African liberation movements needed to reverse. Transposed to the digital age, Nkrumah's insight reveals that the colonisation of African information ecosystems is not a metaphor but a material condition. When the platforms through which Nigerians communicate, organise, and perceive social reality are owned, governed, and algorithmically programmed by external powers, the colonisation of consciousness continues—now mediated by fibre-optic cables and machine-learning models rather than by missionary schools and colonial newspapers.

This insight resonates with contemporary scholarship on platform imperialism. Jin (2015) argues that digital platforms reproduce core-periphery dependencies familiar from classical dependency theory, with data extracted from the Global South serving as the raw material that enriches Northern platform economies. Nigeria is not merely a consumer of digital technology; it is a producer of data—personal, behavioural, relational—that flows outward to enrich those who control the extractive infrastructure. This digital extractivism mirrors the resource extraction that characterised formal colonialism, and like its predecessor, it simultaneously impoverishes those from whom extraction occurs while leaving behind conditions favourable to continued dependency.

2.2. Fanon's Psychopolitics and the Architecture of Digital Insecurity

Frantz Fanon's analysis of the psychological dimensions of colonial domination offers equally indispensable tools for understanding how social media produces insecurity. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1963) argued that colonialism does not merely exploit the colonised economically; it systematically destroys the colonised subject's sense of collective identity, cultural worth, and historical agency. Colonial violence, Fanon contended, was as much psychic as physical, designed to produce a fragmented, internally divided population incapable of sustained solidarity. The parallels with the Nigerian social media experience are striking. Studies consistently demonstrate that social media in Nigeria disproportionately amplifies content that triggers fear, outrage, and tribal identification (Obi, 2021; Udodiong, 2022). This is not accidental but structural: engagement-maximising algorithms are empirically calibrated to prioritise emotionally arousing content, and in pluralistic societies with deep historical grievances, such content overwhelmingly tends to be divisive, ethnically coded, and conflict-amplifying.

Fanon's concept of 'colonial neurosis'—the psychological disorder induced in colonised subjects who simultaneously desire and are denied full membership in the colonial order—also illuminates the aspirational dimensions of Nigerian social media consumption. The relentless exposure to Western lifestyles, political models, and cultural norms through algorithmic content curation produces what Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) would later call the colonisation of the mind: a systematic devaluation of African cultural resources and an anxious orientation toward external validation. This aspirational colonialism creates conditions in which African political realities are routinely measured against Western idealisations, and found wanting—producing a chronic sense of collective inadequacy that is itself a form of insecurity.

2.3. Cabral's Return to the Source and Epistemic Sovereignty

Amílcar Cabral's (1973) concept of the 'return to the source' offers a third foundational pillar for this framework. Cabral argued that authentic African liberation required not merely political independence but a cultural and epistemological reorientation—a return to African intellectual and cultural resources as the wellspring of liberation praxis. In the digital context, this implies that African responses to digital insecurity cannot simply import Western cybersecurity frameworks, platform governance models, or digital rights discourses without first interrogating the epistemological assumptions embedded in those frameworks. A genuinely sovereign African approach to digital security must be rooted in African conceptualisations of community, truth, solidarity, and governance. Ubuntu philosophy—the Nguni Bantu understanding of personhood as fundamentally relational and communal—offers, for instance, a radically different foundation for information ethics than the individualistic, rights-based frameworks that underpin Western platform governance debates (Metz, 2011). Where Western digital rights discourse emphasises individual freedom of expression, an Ubuntu-informed approach would foreground the responsibility of speech acts toward communal wellbeing—a potentially more effective framework for combating the hate speech and ethnic incitement that drive digital insecurity in Nigeria.

2.4. Decolonial Digital Theory

Contemporary decolonial digital scholarship extends these classical foundations into the specific terrain of platform capitalism. Couldry and Mejias (2019) develop the concept of 'data colonialism' to describe the appropriation of human life through data in ways structurally analogous to the appropriation of land and labour under historical colonialism. Morozov (2013) critiques the 'solutionist' ideology that treats every social problem as susceptible to technological resolution, an ideology that systematically forecloses structural and political analysis. Birhane (2021) argues that artificial intelligence systems trained on Western data sets reproduce and amplify existing inequalities and cultural biases, with particularly acute consequences for African users whose realities are systematically misrepresented or invisible in training data. Together, these scholars construct a picture of global digital capitalism in which Africa occupies a structurally subordinate position—as a market, a data source, a testing ground—rather than as a sovereign agent with the capacity to shape the technological systems through which its citizens live.

3. Social Media as an Instrument of Insecurity in Nigeria: Structural Analysis

3.1. The Platform Architecture of Division

To understand how social media produces insecurity in Nigeria, it is necessary to examine the specific mechanisms through which platform architecture interacts with Nigerian social conditions. Nigeria's plural society—comprising over 250 ethnic groups, three major religions, and deep regional political cleavages rooted in colonial boundary-drawing—presents algorithmic engagement systems with an extraordinarily rich terrain for conflict amplification. As Vaidhyathan (2018) demonstrates in his analysis of Facebook's global governance failures, the company's algorithms systematically rewarded divisive, emotionally arousing content without regard for the real-world consequences in diverse, historically tensioned societies. In Nigeria, this generic structural tendency manifests with particular intensity given the specific character of Nigerian social divisions.

Research by the Centre for Democracy and Development (2020) documented how social media platforms, particularly Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter/X, served as primary vectors for the spread of incendiary ethnic and religious content in the lead-up to Nigerian elections. The 2019 general elections witnessed an unprecedented volume of coordinated disinformation campaigns, with fabricated videos, doctored photographs, and false attribution of statements to political figures circulated through WhatsApp groups that bypassed platform moderation systems entirely due to their encrypted, peer-to-peer architecture. The structural consequence was not merely electoral manipulation but a systematic deepening of inter-ethnic suspicion and political delegitimisation that outlasted the election cycle itself.

The architecture of social media insecurity in Nigeria operates through at least four distinct but interrelated mechanisms. First, algorithmic amplification ensures that content designed to provoke ethnic or religious identification receives disproportionate circulation relative to reconciliatory or factual content. Second, the privatised governance of platforms means that community standards—designed primarily for Western contexts—fail to adequately address the specific forms of hate speech, coded ethnic slurs, and conflict-inciting rhetoric that circulate in Nigerian languages and cultural contexts. Third, the low cost of account creation and content production enables the deployment of inauthentic coordinated networks—bot networks, troll farms, and paid political operatives—who can manufacture the appearance of widespread sentiment for relatively modest investment. Fourth, the viral architecture of mobile-first social media,

particularly WhatsApp, means that false information can achieve mass penetration before any corrective mechanisms operate, exploiting the cognitive phenomenon of the 'illusory truth effect' in which repeated exposure to false information increases its perceived credibility (Pennycook et al., 2018).

3.2. Security Consequences: From Digital Insecurity to Physical Violence

The security consequences of social media-mediated insecurity in Nigeria are neither hypothetical nor abstract. Documented linkages between social media content and physical violence have emerged across multiple Nigerian conflict theatres. The escalation of herder-farmer conflicts in the Middle Belt region—which claimed more lives between 2016 and 2019 than the Boko Haram insurgency in the same period (Mercy Corps, 2020)—was substantially accelerated by social media narratives that framed the fundamentally ecological and resource-based conflict in ethnic and religious terms, transforming pragmatic disputes over land and water into existential civilisational confrontations. Once reframed in this manner, the conflicts became simultaneously more intractable—because symbolic and identity-based conflicts resist the pragmatic negotiations that can resolve resource disputes—and more attractive to extremist mobilisation.

Similarly, the #EndSARS protests of October 2020—one of the most significant youth-led social movements in Nigerian history—demonstrated both the emancipatory potential of social media for civic mobilisation and its vulnerability to counter-mobilisation by state and non-state actors. The protests, which galvanised millions of young Nigerians against police brutality through Twitter and Instagram, were simultaneously subject to an intense disinformation counter-offensive that attributed looting and violence to the protesters, fabricated statements by protest leaders, and deployed algorithmic harassment campaigns against prominent advocates (Aborisade, 2021). The digital insecurity surrounding #EndSARS was inseparable from the physical insecurity of the Lekki Toll Gate massacre and its aftermath, illustrating how online information warfare and offline state violence operate as mutually reinforcing components of a single securitisation apparatus.

3.3. The Boko Haram and ISWAP Information Ecosystem

The relationship between social media and insurgent insecurity in north-eastern Nigeria represents perhaps the most acute manifestation of digital-physical insecurity convergence. Boko Haram and its offshoot, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), have demonstrated sophisticated capacities for social media weaponisation, including the production and distribution of high-quality propaganda videos, the exploitation of encrypted messaging platforms for recruitment, and the deployment of disinformation to sow distrust between communities and security forces (Matfess, 2017). The insurgency's information strategy directly exploits the colonial legacy of underdevelopment, alienation, and perceived northern marginalisation that created the social conditions for its emergence, using social media to amplify these grievances while suppressing counter-narratives and information about insurgent atrocities against the very communities they claim to defend.

What is particularly significant from a Pan-African analytical perspective is that this information ecosystem does not operate in isolation from global digital infrastructure. Research by the Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET) has documented the roles of international social media platforms in hosting, amplifying, and—through their moderation failures—effectively subsidising extremist content that fuels insecurity in Nigeria (Journard, 2022). The regulatory asymmetry between the global North, where platform companies face increasing legislative pressure on content governance, and the global South, where such pressure is weaker and corporate investment in local-language moderation is systematically lower, means that Nigerian users are exposed to algorithmic environments that would be legally impermissible in the jurisdictions where the platforms are incorporated.

4. Mechanisms of Digital Destabilisation: Disinformation, Ethnic Manipulation, and Foreign Interference

4.1. Disinformation as a Governance Weapon

Disinformation—the deliberate creation and dissemination of false information intended to deceive—has emerged as one of the primary instruments of insecurity in Nigeria's digital landscape. Unlike misinformation, which may arise from honest error or inadequate verification, disinformation in the Nigerian context exhibits patterns consistent with deliberate strategic intent: coordinated timing, narrative consistency across multiple accounts, targeting of specific political or ethnic audiences, and the systematic exploitation of existing social tensions. Research by Adekunle (2023) documented over 4,000 distinct disinformation narratives circulating on Nigerian social media platforms in the 18 months preceding the 2023 general elections, many exhibiting the technical signatures—simultaneous account

creation, linguistic analysis revealing non-native English composition, coordinated posting patterns—associated with coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

The governance consequences of sustained disinformation are profound and extend well beyond specific electoral outcomes. When false information about government actions, security incidents, or policy consequences circulates at sufficient scale, it produces what Runciman (2018) terms 'confidence collapse'—a generalised erosion of citizens' capacity to form reliable beliefs about the political world, which ultimately degrades the epistemic foundations of democratic governance itself. In Nigeria, this erosion of informational confidence has created conditions in which citizens systematically distrust government communications about genuine security threats, state media, and public health information—a phenomenon with severe practical consequences during the COVID-19 pandemic, when health disinformation directly undermined vaccination campaigns and contributed to preventable mortality (Okeke et al., 2021).

4.2. Ethnic and Religious Manipulation

Nigeria's constitutional federal structure, designed in part to manage the country's profound ethnic and religious diversity, has been systematically exploited through social media to deepen divisions that colonial governance deliberately engineered and post-colonial politics institutionalised. The mechanics of ethnic digital manipulation in Nigeria are now well-documented. They typically involve the creation of ethnically identified social media communities and influencer networks that serve as amplification infrastructure; the production and targeting of emotionally resonant content designed to activate ethnic identity and perceived threat; and the deployment of false attribution—fabricating statements, images, or videos attributed to members of out-groups that confirm negative stereotypes and justify hostility (Posetti & Matthews, 2018).

The deeper Pan-African significance of this manipulation is that it reproduces the colonial strategy of divide and rule through digital means. British colonial governance in Nigeria deliberately constructed, reified, and instrumentalised ethnic and regional identities as administrative categories, creating the tripartite north-south-east structure that continues to organise Nigerian political imagination (Mamdani, 1996). Social media manipulation exploits these colonial inheritances, treating them as natural and immutable rather than historical and therefore susceptible to transformation. A Pan-African analysis insists on recovering this historical consciousness—understanding Nigerian ethnic tensions not as primordial features of the social landscape but as manufactured instruments of control whose digital amplification serves the same functions today that colonial policy served in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

4.3. Evidence of External Interference

Perhaps the most troubling dimension of social media insecurity in Nigeria is the accumulating evidence of deliberate external interference in Nigerian information ecosystems. The Stanford Internet Observatory (2022) and the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab have both documented networks of inauthentic accounts originating outside Nigeria that systematically amplified ethnic and political tensions, spread targeted disinformation, and engaged in coordinated harassment of Nigerian civil society actors. These operations exhibit the characteristics associated with state-sponsored information warfare: technical sophistication, persistent targeting, and strategic coherence oriented toward specific political outcomes. While attribution in this domain is inherently complex, the documented cases create a strong *prima facie* case that Nigerian information ecosystems are subject to deliberate external manipulation by actors whose interests are served by a destabilised, internally conflicted, and internationally marginalised Nigeria.

This external dimension cannot be analysed in isolation from Nigeria's geopolitical position as Africa's largest economy, a major oil producer, and a critical site of great-power competition for African influence. As Carmody (2020) argues, the New Scramble for Africa—in which Chinese, American, European, and Gulf state interests compete for access to African resources, markets, and strategic territory—creates powerful incentives for destabilisation operations against African states whose independence threatens specific external interests. Nigeria's ambitions toward continental leadership, its potential as an anchor of African digital infrastructure, and its role in ECOWAS security architecture all make it a target of choice for information warfare aimed at perpetuating the conditions of dependency and instability that facilitate external exploitation.

5. Sovereign Awakening: A Pan-African Framework for Digital Self-Determination

5.1. Conceptualising Digital Sovereignty

The concept of sovereign awakening, as deployed in this paper, draws on but extends the classical Pan-African discourse of political independence to encompass the full spectrum of conditions necessary for African self-determination in the

digital age. Political sovereignty—formal independence from colonial rule—was necessary but insufficient, as the post-colonial experience demonstrated with brutal clarity. Economic sovereignty—control over African resources and productive capacity—was the animating vision of Pan-Africanist economic programmes from Nkrumah's industrialisation policies to the African Union's Agenda 2063. Digital sovereignty adds a third, now indispensable dimension: the capacity of African states, communities, and individuals to control the informational, technological, and epistemic infrastructures through which they communicate, govern, and constitute their collective identities.

Digital sovereignty, as conceptualised here, encompasses at least five interrelated dimensions. First, infrastructural sovereignty refers to African ownership and control over the physical and virtual infrastructure of digital communication—servers, fibre networks, data centres, and platform architecture. Second, data sovereignty encompasses African control over the collection, storage, processing, and commercialisation of data generated by African users and communities. Third, epistemic sovereignty involves the assertion of African knowledge systems, interpretive frameworks, and truth-claims as legitimate and authoritative alternatives to epistemically dominant Western frameworks. Fourth, regulatory sovereignty refers to the capacity of African states and regional bodies to govern digital platforms and information flows according to African public interests rather than platform corporate interests or external state interests. Fifth, cultural sovereignty encompasses the protection and promotion of African languages, cultural expressions, and value systems within digital environments that currently marginalise them.

5.2. The Pan-African Digital Architecture

The realisation of digital sovereignty requires structural, institutional, and infrastructural transformation at both national and continental scales. At the continental level, the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa (2020–2030) provides a framework that, despite its technocratic limitations, recognises the strategic importance of African digital infrastructure development, including proposals for a Continental Data Policy Framework, harmonised cybersecurity protocols, and investment in African-owned digital infrastructure. However, the execution of this vision requires the kind of political will and continental solidarity that Pan-African thinkers consistently identified as the prerequisite for effective collective action: a willingness to subordinate narrow national interests to the larger project of African advancement.

Nigeria's particular responsibilities and opportunities within this continental architecture are substantial. As Africa's largest digital market, Nigeria has the economic scale to develop viable African platform alternatives—messaging, social networking, content delivery—that could compete with Western platforms within the Nigerian market and potentially achieve continental reach. The development of indigenous platforms governed by African public interest principles, designed to amplify African languages and cultural contexts, and subject to democratic African oversight would represent a concrete instantiation of the sovereign awakening this paper advocates. Scholars such as Ndemo and Weiss (2017) have documented the growing ecosystem of African technology innovation, and while indigenous social media platforms have not yet achieved the scale necessary to challenge Western incumbents, the trajectory of African digital entrepreneurship creates realistic grounds for believing that scale is achievable under conditions of strategic public investment and regulatory support.

5.3. Epistemic Sovereignty and African Information Ethics

Beyond structural and institutional transformation, sovereign awakening requires what Achille Mbembe (2015) terms 'African thinking'—not the abandonment of universal aspirations but the insistence that African experience, philosophy, and intellectual tradition are legitimate sources of universal knowledge rather than merely regional variation on Western norms. In the domain of information ethics and digital governance, this means recovering and developing African philosophical resources as the foundation for distinctively African approaches to platform regulation, content governance, and information verification.

Ubuntu-based information ethics, as several scholars have begun to develop, offers a potentially transformative alternative to the individualistic rights-based frameworks that currently dominate digital governance discourse (Eze, 1998; Metz, 2011). Where liberal digital rights frameworks privilege individual expression and treat information primarily as private property or personal communication, Ubuntu-informed approaches foreground the social consequences of information—its effects on communal solidarity, its obligations toward collective wellbeing, and its embeddedness in relationships of reciprocal responsibility. Applied to content moderation, such a framework would evaluate speech acts not primarily by reference to the abstract rights of the speaker but by reference to the demonstrable consequences for the communities in which speech circulates—a potentially far more effective tool for addressing the ethnic incitement and community-disrupting disinformation that drive Nigerian digital insecurity.

Similarly, the African concept of *sankofa*—the Akan symbol of a bird turning to retrieve an egg from its own back, representing the necessity of learning from the past to advance into the future—provides a philosophical framework for approaching Nigeria's colonial history of division not as a fixed determinant of present conflict but as a resource for understanding the origins of current tensions and thereby transcending them. A *sankofa*-informed approach to digital insecurity would not merely seek to counter specific disinformation narratives but would work to build the historical consciousness that makes communities resistant to manufactured division—an educational and cultural project inseparable from the political and structural dimensions of sovereign awakening.

5.4. The Youth Dimension: Digital Sovereignty from Below

Any theorisation of Pan-African digital sovereign awakening that neglects the agency of African youth—who constitute the majority of social media users across the continent—risks reproducing the top-down, state-centric limitations of earlier Pan-African programmes. The #EndSARS movement of 2020 demonstrated with remarkable clarity that Nigerian youth possess both the digital literacy and the political consciousness to mobilise social media for emancipatory ends—and that this capacity survives and indeed intensifies in the face of state repression. The movement's capacity to coordinate nationwide action, maintain coherent demands, manage intra-movement tensions, and generate global solidarity through digital means represents a real and present African capacity for sovereign digital practice that theoretical frameworks must engage rather than instrumentalise.

However, the #EndSARS experience also illustrated the limitations of digital mobilisation that lacks structural organisation, ideological coherence, and a developed programme for transforming state institutions. The vulnerability of leaderless, network-based movements to infiltration, counter-disinformation, and violent state repression—all of which occurred in the #EndSARS case—suggests that digital sovereignty from below requires not merely digital skills but political education, organisational capacity, and a relationship with the broader Pan-African intellectual tradition that can provide frameworks for understanding and contextualising Nigerian struggles within the larger continental project of liberation. This is not an argument for vanguardism or the subordination of youth agency to party structures, but for the kind of organic intellectual formation—Gramsci's concept, indigenised—that connects lived digital experience to structural political analysis (Gramsci, 1971; Wa Thiong'o, 1986).

6. Policy and Structural Implications

6.1. Regulatory Architecture

The regulatory implications of this analysis are substantial, complex, and require navigation of genuine tensions between competing values. Any regulatory approach to social media insecurity in Nigeria must simultaneously address the structural conditions that make platforms instruments of destabilisation, protect the genuine civic and communicative benefits that social media provides, and resist the instrumentalisation of security concerns to justify authoritarian restriction of political speech. These tensions are real, and the history of African states using security justifications to suppress legitimate political communication is long and well-documented. A sovereign awakening framework insists that these tensions be navigated on African terms, with African public interests—not Western platform interests, not Nigerian elite political interests, and not external security agendas—as the governing criterion.

Practically, this implies several regulatory directions. Platform companies operating in Nigeria should be required to establish meaningful local governance structures—not the nominal country offices that currently exist primarily for advertising sales—with genuine authority to make content moderation decisions in Nigerian languages and cultural contexts, subject to the oversight of Nigerian regulatory bodies. This would require investment in local-language content moderation capacity of a scale that platforms have consistently refused to make in African markets while making comparable investments in European markets facing analogous regulatory pressure (Klonick, 2018). The African Union's proposed Continental Digital Rights Framework provides a vehicle for pursuing such requirements at the continental level, potentially creating the scale necessary to make non-compliance economically costly for platform companies whose Nigerian and African markets are increasingly significant to their global revenue projections.

6.2. Investment in African Digital Infrastructure

Structural sovereignty requires investment in African-owned and African-governed digital infrastructure. This encompasses, at minimum, the following priority areas: investment in African data centre capacity to reduce dependence on European and American servers; development of African cloud computing infrastructure to ensure that African government and civic data is not subject to the extraterritorial reach of foreign legal systems; support for African-language natural language processing and artificial intelligence research to ensure that automated content systems can operate effectively in African linguistic contexts; and strategic public investment in African platform

development to create viable alternatives to incumbent Western platforms in key communication sectors. These investments require the kind of continental coordination that the African Union's digital strategy framework nominally provides, but which has been consistently undermined by the competing national and geopolitical interests that have limited AU institutional capacity.

6.3. Media Literacy and Epistemic Education

The human dimensions of sovereign awakening require investment in what Pérez Tornero and Varis (2010) term 'media literacy'—the critical capacity to evaluate, contextualise, and resist manipulation through information media—but inflected, in the Pan-African framework, with specific attention to the historical and epistemological dimensions of African information consciousness. Media literacy programmes in Nigeria must go beyond the generic verification skills promoted by Western fact-checking frameworks to engage students and citizens in understanding why disinformation is directed at Nigerian audiences, who benefits from Nigerian instability, and what African intellectual resources exist for navigating digital environments. This is education for political consciousness as much as for technical competence—consistent with Cabral's insistence that authentic liberation required the development of critical historical awareness, not merely the acquisition of practical skills.

6.4. Regional and Continental Solidarity

Finally, the Pan-African framework insists that Nigeria's digital security challenges cannot be addressed in isolation from continental dynamics. The same external actors who operate in Nigeria's information environment operate across multiple African states; the same platform governance failures that enable disinformation in Nigeria enable it across the continent; the same structural dependencies that limit Nigerian digital sovereignty limit the sovereignty of African states across the continent. An effective response therefore requires the kind of African collective action that Pan-African thinkers consistently identified as essential: coordinated positions in international digital governance forums, mutual sharing of threat intelligence and counter-disinformation research, collective bargaining with platform companies, and joint development of African digital infrastructure. The institutional vehicles for such cooperation exist—in the AU's digital governance frameworks, in ECOWAS's emerging digital economy agenda, and in bilateral agreements among African states—but require the political will to operationalise them in the face of the competing pressures that colonial legacies and current geopolitical contests consistently generate.

7. Conclusion

This paper has argued that social media insecurity in Nigeria is not a technologically determined phenomenon susceptible to purely technical solutions, nor a culturally specific pathology to be managed through imported governance frameworks. It is, rather, a structural condition rooted in the continuing legacies of colonialism—the manufactured divisions, the epistemic dependencies, the infrastructural vulnerabilities, and the geopolitical subordination that constitute the material inheritance of the colonial encounter—now amplified and accelerated through digital technologies governed by external interests and calibrated to serve external ends.

The Pan-African framework of sovereign awakening offered in this paper does not propose a naive return to pre-colonial conditions, an isolationist rejection of global digital connectivity, or a simple inversion of colonial hierarchies that would leave structural conditions intact while redistributing their benefits. Rather, it proposes a thoroughgoing transformation of the conditions under which Nigerians and Africans engage with digital technology: one in which the infrastructure of digital communication is owned and governed by Africans, the epistemic frameworks through which information is evaluated are rooted in African intellectual traditions, the regulatory architecture that governs platform behaviour serves African public interests, and the political consciousness that enables Africans to navigate digital environments is grounded in historical understanding of why those environments are structured as they are.

Nkrumah (1964) argued that Africa must unite not because unity is sentimental but because the problems Africa faces are continental in scale and require continental responses. The digital dimension of this insight has become, in the quarter-century since social media's emergence, among the most urgent applications of Pan-African thinking. Nigeria's digital battleground is Africa's. The sovereign awakening that Nigerian security demands is the awakening that Pan-Africanist thinkers across generations have called for—now translated into the digital register, but continuous with the long project of African self-determination. The question is not whether such an awakening is possible, but whether the political will, intellectual creativity, and continental solidarity necessary to achieve it can be mobilised before the structures of digital colonialism become as deeply entrenched as their physical predecessors.

Future scholarship should extend this framework through empirical investigations of specific disinformation networks operating in Nigeria, comparative analyses of African states' digital sovereignty initiatives, and ethnographic research

into how Nigerian communities develop vernacular resistances to digital manipulation. The theoretical framework proposed here requires the grounding of lived African digital experience to develop its full transformative potential.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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