



Policing in Nigeria: Social Media and the Emerging Trend

ABSTRACT

Since independence, Nigeria's security concerns have largely been internal, from her Civil War, Boko Haram Insurgency, and Niger Delta Question to sundry security issues. This has heightened the challenges and expectations of The Nigeria Police in combating crime as the chief internal security organ of the state. However, there remain public discontentment towards the Police owing to her bureaucratic bottlenecks, misrepresentation and misinformation, favoritism and nepotism amongst others. With the advent and patronage of online platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp and Instagram by a large proportion of Nigerians, especially the youth, there is now a new wave of digital policing with the 'writ of mandamus' to the Nigeria Police and generality of Nigerians to act in good conscience, law and duty. The paper adopts Martins Vincent Otse, a Nigerian critic, activist and Social Media influencer, popularly known as VeryDarkMan (VDM) as a guide for analysis, to explore and describe the emerging trend of revolutionized online policing and the prospect for a reformed Police and faith in the administration of justice system in Africa's most populous black nation.

Keywords: Nigeria Police, VeryDarkMan, Online Policing and Social Media.

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I. Introduction

Nigeria is the most populous black nation with a population of over 200 million persons. With an ever-increasing population, especially of the young population cum biting unemployment, security challenge had remained the chief threat to her corporate existence. The burden of proving internal security (of persons and property) rest majorly on the shoulders of The Nigeria Police. While there are other quasi-police agencies, such as the Nigerian Civil Defense and Safety Corps, Nigerian Customs Service, Nigerian Immigration Service, Department of State Services, they are complimentary to the functions of the Nigerian Police. Section 214 (1) of The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (Amended) provided for the establishment of The Nigeria Police, and the Nigerian Police Act 2020 repealed the Police Act of 2004 and established the Nigeria Police. The Act provided inter alia, her functions to include:

Prevention and detection of crimes, and protect the rights and freedom of every person in Nigeria as provided in the Constitution. Maintain public safety, law and order. Protect the lives and property of all persons in Nigeria. Enforce all laws and regulations without any prejudice. Adopt community partnership in the discharge of its responsibilities.

Above are some of the responsibilities of the Nigeria Police, however, policing stretches beyond the Police as an institution? Like the common thought, security is everybody's business. It entails that policing is communal and not the sacred duty of those in police uniforms only. Policing involves the reawakening of the spirit of peaceful co-existence amongst persons residing within a geographical space. It is any effort put in towards the prevention of crime and prosecution of offenders, so as to maintain law and order. A simple act of keeping one's door under lock and key is evidence of policing. Basil Idegwu sees it as the "measures and actions taken by a variety of institutions and groups (both formal and informal) in society to regulate social relations and practices in order to secure the safety of members of community as well as conformity to the norms and values

of society.”² These norms and values were upheld by traditional setups, such as Council of Chiefs and Youth Bodies of communities prior to the establishment of the Nigeria Police.

Presently, there is no gainsaying the fact that some communities still maintain customs that prevent residents from taking some class of matters to the Nigeria Police without exhausting the traditional frameworks for conflict resolution in the community. Amongst other factors, is the public view of the Police as anti-people. Hence, it is extreme criminal cases that are reported to the body. As communities gradually move online, same fate of low patronage is suffered by the Police and people are sourcing for alternative policing. The Social Media offers such opportunity to those seeking redress to civil and criminal wrongs as the world gradually metamorphoses to a global glass village. The power of the Social Media is been explored to execute policing functions. This can be referred to as online citizen policing, a situation involving a complainant utilizing the veracity of online platforms to make public the wrongdoing of another, hence seeking redress online rather than approaching any physical Police post.

More often than not, such online complaints are referred to the generality of Nigerians online (what is now known as Netizens). However, a Nigerian critic, activist and Social Media influencer, Martins Vincent Otse, popularly known as VeryDarkMan (VDM) has shouldered the responsibility of engaging with complainants and going after deviants of societal norms and values. He uses his large following online to sway public opinion and seek redress on behalf of victims who had suffered injustice of varying categories.

II. The Problem

The Nigeria Police sits at the center of state’s machinery for the maintenance and enforcement of law and order within the Nigerian geographical space. It is the primary law enforcement agent, arguably making it the true reflection of the justice system in Nigeria. This exalted positioning comes with an avalanche of responsibilities, challenges and indeed pressure on the Nigerian Police. Amongst other constraints inhibiting its optimal performance is her battered public image occasioned by multifaceted corruption at all levels of the institution. This unpleasant situation had eluded the Nigeria Police of public trust, an essential ingredient for her patronage and overall effectiveness. The Social Media attempts to bridge this gap between the public and the Nigerian Police in two major aspects. Of significance is the Police attempt at restoring her public image by swaying positive people’s opinion using her Social Media presence and possibly regulating users of Social Media platforms. On the other hand, is the citizens’ attempt to bring to limelight the ills of the Nigerian Police (both at the individual and institutional levels) and ‘force’ her hands to perform its constitutional functions without fear or favor. Closely related to the foregoing is the use of the Social Media technique known as “dragging” by influencers of good conscience to bridge the police lacuna, technically high jacking policing roles from the Nigerian Police. Hence, the digital trajectory further derails the relevance and patronage of the Nigeria Police.

III. Review of Related Literature

It is pertinent to review some scholarly works that have direct bearing on this study. This would engender a better understanding of some critical issues around the subject. These works are reviewed. Basil Idegwu’s “The Nigeria Police Force and Challenges of National Security” took a discourse on the Nigeria Police and its place within the National Security Architecture. Idegwu opines that etymologically policing is related to ‘politics,’ the art of governance for social regulation. He added that while police is a quasi-legal and socio-political state institution, policing goes beyond the embrace of the police as an institution.³ His submission that policing refers to measures and actions taken by a variety of formal and informal institutions and groups to regulate social relations and practices in order to ensure conformity to societal norms and values is instructive to this work. This is because the Social Media now serves as an informal mechanism used by individuals of good conscience to ensure that societal deviance is brought to its lowest ebb, men and women of the Police inclusive.

“Policing the Nigeria Police” by the inaugural Chairman of the Police Service Commission x-rays the efforts of the Commission during his term to properly oversee the Nigeria Police. In this work, Simon N. Okeke noted the disparity between the Nigeria Police and the public owing to “its brutality, corruption, extortion, incivility, extra-judicial killings and impunity.”⁴ It is this

understanding that informed Simon's exclamation upon having the inkling of his appointment with the Nigerian Police as recorded in this book. He stressed that Nigerians had not fully appreciated the Commission's role in handling citizens' complaints. It could be averred that Nigerians do not explore the veracity of the commission because of the seeming similarity of the Commission to the Police. For the 'ordinary Nigerians,' the Police Service Commission and the Police are one and the same. Hence, the public vents their complaints and seek redress through the Social Media. While the book pens down some historical record of the PSC as the oversight body of the Police, latitudinal powers of the Social Media is gradually eroding some of the functions of the PSC.

Effective policing is anchored on the level of collaboration that the Police as an institution enjoy from the public. Community policing is that concept that embraces this. "Community Policing" by A.Y. Dickson looks at how the Police can utilize trained Community Policing Developers (CPDs) to model the police in her attempt to woo the trust and partnership of immediate communities.⁵ Dickson concludes that with the ever-increasing awareness of people's fundamental human rights, citizen's resistance to police abuse of power and increased globalization serves as a threat to police relevance, if it continues to hold on to her conservative policing system. This position is sacrosanct as there is now a gradual paradigm shift from traditional policing to digital policing (in its variants).

Institutional policing comes with enormous constitutional and discretionary powers. And in the course of execution of their mandate, these powers had reportedly been abused. It is in a bid to keep such powers in constant check that had informed the formation of the Police Service Commission and oversight functions equally embedded on the National Assembly, Nigeria Police Council, the Judiciary, the Police Public Complaint Committee and the Police Community Relations Committee. These control mechanisms form part of the subject of analysis for Solomon Ehigiator Arase's Law on Prevention and Detection of Crimes by the Police in Nigeria. The work briefly looked at the role of the media in "putting the police authorities under pressure to take actions or refrain from taking actions."⁶ For instance, VeryDarkMan reacting to the viral online video showcasing billionaire Rasaan Okoya's sons mutilating the Naira decried the Police detention of the police officer attached to the Okoyas while the Okoyas are free from the ambit of the law.

Calibrating Bobrisky's case as a precedent, VeryDarkMan called on the Police and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to act as they did in the Bobrisky's case in 2024.⁷ Netizens took to various Social Media platforms to call out the law enforcement authorities to act in good conscience as there are reports that the EFCC had invited Subomi and Wahab Okoya to report at her Ikoyi office, Lagos State.⁸ While this is commendable as the law is sacrosanct and it is no respecter of persons, it remains to be seen if justice would be adequately served. The New Media stretches the pressure to a farther point as it becomes so forceful to not only serve as a check to the excesses of the Police but it is gradually becoming an alternative non-constitutional, non-governmental institution. Thus, the Social Media subjects the Police to account, serve as a bridge between the Police and the people and ultimately resolve issues within its reach.

More so, it should be noted that prior to the advent of Social Media, the Police had struggled for relevance with traditional multi-choice policing mechanisms. This is adequately captured in Bruce Baker's Multi-Choice Policing in Africa.⁹ Bruce looked at how community elders, leaders of faith and unemployed neighbors served as second line policing agents prior to the establishment of state police and where state police is nonexistent, in rural or informal urban centers for example. There is no gainsaying the fact that this dearth of state police posts cum other factors had pushed Nigerians, especially the youthful population to the embrace of the Social Media in their bid for justice when aggrieved.

Digital media opens the door for the Nigerian Police to exploit for better service delivery, thus push a better narrative towards remedying their shattered public image. The Public Complaint Rapid Response Unit (PCRRU) of the Nigerian Police, a tech-driven initiative signaled a turn in that direction. The initiative increases public confidence. This is because complaints are directed to top echelon of the police, thus avoiding red tape and the complicity of mid-level officers in misconduct.¹⁰ However, the tech tools utilized by the PCRRU are employed by citizens in greater weight to revolutionize policing. In scholarly circles, this technological innovation is called 'liberation technology' as they contribute to the opening up of the democratic space through the opportunities

they provide for citizens to ‘report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom.’

IV. Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the State Capacity Theory. The theory holds that states with the capacity to handle governmental functions optimally prosper and enhance citizens’ welfare. Such states enjoy citizen’s patriotic support. And states with low capacity would be inefficient to provide essential services such as healthcare, security, education. When a state can no longer deliver on its mandate, citizens find alternative solutions and resort to self-help. Unfortunately, Nigeria falls within this latter category as Nigerians seek for window of escape from government’s failings, is explainable.

The Nigeria Police and Traditional Policing

The Nigeria Police is an offshoot of the Consular Guard set up by the Lagos Colony in 1861 to serve the purpose of maintaining law and order. These Guards were known as Hausa Guards and gradually metamorphosed to what is now the Nigeria Police Force in 1930.¹² The Nigeria Police functions within its Command (Authority), Administration and Organizational structure. The Command structure is its ranking from Constable to the Inspector General of Police (IGP), the Administration structure are the departments through which the Police functions and the Organizational structure are the geo-political operational structure. The Nigeria Police had been generally understaffed with an estimated 380,000 personnel charged to police a country of 923,769 sq km with over 200 million people. It could be inferred, therefore, that the Nigerian state is greatly under policed with a police personnel policing 526 persons on the average. These statistics do not take into account the hundreds or more assigned to VIPs protection and other special duties. While this has negatively affected her performance, the factors bedeviling the Police has remain largely internal – bureaucratic bottlenecks, unethical behavior, ineffective training, among others.

Of particular reference is the modus operandi of the Police in handling cases brought to it. First, with some few exceptions where it’s applicable, the Police make hasty arrests prior to investigations. More so, the financial implications to pursue justice via the Police is discouraging as a complainant is practically required to ‘wet the ground’ before the Police swings to action. It is even more appalling as there are myriads of report where her personnel either request money to fuel their operational vehicles or refused to perform their constitutional duties due to non-cooperation to such requests. This experience has left Nigerians with the self-help approach. And the Social Media platforms offers such window because someone can connect the world, rally sympathizers and push a cause through at the comfort of his home with just a mobile phone and network connection.

Closely related to the above is the subject of bail. In principle, the administration of bail is free in the Nigerian justice system. However, this is not attainable in practical terms as bail bonds are often negotiated between Investigative Police Officers (IPOs) and sureties. This ‘ghost practice’ had further eroded the credibility of the principal law enforcement agency. There have been nationwide efforts by the Nigeria Police to remedy this with inscriptions of “BAIL IS FREE” at police stations. At best, this is a cosmetic solution. The top echelon of the Police had lowered their guard towards the implementation of the Bail is Free principle as they become ultimate beneficiaries of the ghost practice.

From its creation to contemporary times, the Nigeria Police has had a chequered history. With little practical and impactful reforms to turn around the narratives, and the widening disconnect in police-citizens relations, Nigerians are constantly sourcing alternative means to settle civil and criminal disputes – including spirituality (consulting gods, where they feel they would get immediate justice) and more recently, the new media, where they would evoke the people’s power). This is where Social Media influencers of good conscience such as VeryDarkMan, are making an indelible mark on the Nigerian policing landscape. VeryDarkMan prides himself as the number one online police of the online division, dedicated to sanitizing the online space, use platform to stand against abuse of power and oppression, especially dubious online vendors. Unlike the traditional state police with bureaucratic bottlenecks, VeryDarkMan pledges to work unencumbered with evidence and for gratis.

VeryDarkMan and the Emerging Trend in Policing

Martins Vincent Otse, popularly known as VeryDarkMan is an Edo born Nigerian online social commentator, philanthropist and Social Media influencer. He has a large following on all major Social Media platforms -Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Tiktok, etc. He has dedicated his large following (1.5 million and 1.9 million followers on Facebook and Instagram respectively) to the mobilization of the people's power to seek redress and defend victims of socio-economic and political abuse. Put differently, Otse had enlisted himself as an unofficial online policing agent of some sort. His Instagram page, Verydarkblackman reads "Online Police not an Activist" as his bio. Thus, providing the much-needed alternative to the inefficient state policing system. He had at several times proven to have mastered the art of wielding the power of Social Media to perform policing roles. In the past few years, VeryDarkMan had become a major critic cum collaborator of the Nigeria Police. His work is revolutionizing policing functions in the Nigerian state.

While utilizing his large Social Media patronage and tools in communication technology, the activist gathers useful evidence enough to bring the abuser or deviant to his knees before making his findings public. This is a sharp departure from the Nigeria Police traditional policing style as noted earlier. For instance, in October 2024, a Bolt driver, Stephen Abuwatseya made a video and posted online revealing Hon. Alex Mascot Ikwechegh, member of the House of Representatives assaulting and verbally abusing him. Hon. Ikwechegh, who was seen boosting in the video of being untouchable owing to his political status, was to later render an open and unreserved apology on the floor of the National Assembly and allegedly compensating the victim. He was practically forced to do so after VeryDarkMan own up the case and wielded the might of Social Media and had his legal team petition the Inspector General of Police (IGP) for grievous assault, abuse of power, attempted murder and threat to life.

Again, a Nigerian simply identified as Rock reported to VeryDarkMan of the refusal of Chidozie Nwangwu, a native doctor known as Akwa Okuku Tiwara Aka to make refund of Two Million Five Hundred Thousand over an alleged fake 'juju' (mystical power), he (Rock) contracted him. While VeryDarkMan posted the video of the case early hours of 4th November, 2024 and said the issues in the case makes it dicey since Rock was not seeking justice with clean hands.¹⁵ Few hours thereafter, VeryDarkMan posted receipt of the refund made by the native doctor on the 3rd of November, 2024, detailing that Akwa Okuku succumbed after Rock threatened him of having reported the case to VeryDarkMan. This makes it evident that people are careful of being at the wrong side with the VeryDarkMan and are willing to make redress of their wrong in other to keep their social capital intact. The native doctor, like many others had more or less moved their lives, especially their businesses online (practically earning a living online) and an attempt to drag such to the mud would be detrimental and are willing to salvage their wrongs. This is what VeryDarkMan exploited to advantage.

Corroborating the above is the Kamari Hairline case, where a female customer, Marvellous Adetola Asijola made a payment of Thirty-Seven Thousand Naira in favor of Kamari Hairline on 20th December, 2024 and was ghosted by the online beauty vendor, who failed to deliver the hair product nor return messages sent to her. However, VeryDarkMan took over the case on the 6th of January, 2025. VeryDarkMan gave the online vendor 24 hours to either send the purchased product or make refund. The brand owner immediately responded to messages she had previously ignored and refund was made same day by Kamari Hairline.

In the same vein, the government is not a sacred lamb to VeryDarkMan's revolutionized online policing. Public officials and governmental institutions are equally policed and issued writ of mandamus to act in accordance to law and good conscience. A classical case is the video made by VeryDarkMan bringing to public space the arraignment of minors in a Federal High Court, Abuja, who participated in the End Bad Governance nationwide protests in August 2024 while pleading for their release. The minors were accused for flying Russian flags and charged for treason. On 4th November, 2024, few days after the Verydarkman's intervention and the subsequent attention it received from civil society organizations and the general public, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu ordered for their immediate release after weeks of incarceration and an investigation of the matter.

Another feat achieved by VeryDarkMan's revolutionized online policing is the stay of execution order issued by the Nigerian Senate to the Minister of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Mr. Nyesom Wike and the setting up of an Adhoc Committee to investigate the demolition of

properties and revocation of land. This followed the plea by VeryDarkMan to safely relocate affected communities in his planned demolition of properties for urban renewal so as not to create a negative ripple effect on the city. The online police also launched an investigation into the ‘reallocation’ of land allegedly belonging to Late Col. Paul Osakpamwam Ogbebor, claiming the land was legally allocated to Ogbebor in 1984 and had since been developed and inhabited. Hence, there is no justification for the ‘reallocation.’ The National Assembly ongoing investigation of the Bobrisky case and the possible involvement of the Falanas is courtesy of the whistleblowing effort of VeryDarkMan.

Clearly, VeryDarkMan had made impactful changes in ensuring peaceful coexistence within the Nigerian space. This is evident in his wide followership across the various strata of Nigerians. Reacting to VeryDarkMan’s call on the Delta State Governor, H.E Sheriff Oborevwo to sack Dr. Favor J. Obakoro for alleged abuse of her office as Senior Special Assistant (SSA) on Morals and Diaspora and her eventual suspension, a Facebook user, Reality & Fiction commented, “So, people used to get away with all these before VDM came to the limelight? VDM is light to this corrupt country, I don’t care the mistake he might make in future, I will always respect him.”²³ His critics, notwithstanding, this is a strong testament to impact VeryDarkMan is making via the Social Media. “Every state should have their own VDM while the Abuja own remains the President of all VDM for better Nigeria oo,” Chigozie Diho Uzoma recommends.

V. Conclusion

The rapid transformation of communities from traditional to modern societies comes with huge demand for advanced policing. For Nigeria, policing is still at its kindergarten level. Most of its policing revolves around detective policing as against preventive policing as witnessed in advanced countries. The practice of policing is clearly shifting from "policing for the state" to "policing for the community" on a global scale. Sadly, the mechanism for Nigeria’s policing are centralized, bedeviled with limitations and remain a tool for state use. This explains the embrace of Social Media as a self-help policing tool for the Nigerian populace. No doubt, the pace of success recorded by VeryDarkMan in revolutionizing online policing opens new frontiers for policing the Nigerian state.

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