WHAT HOPE FOR DIGITAL BUSINESSES DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA?: AN ASSESSMENT OF ONLINE NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF TWITTER’S SUSPENSION

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Abstract
A recent World Bank report reveals that poverty has been decreasing in all regions of the world with the exception of sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) as more than 45% of countries in the sub-region are off-track from achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) extreme poverty target. Asanga, Boateng & Akamavi (2016). Hoofmann (TRT News, 2021) echoed similar view when he said that Nigeria has the largest number of people in poverty in the world, with the unemployment rate among 15-34-year-old around 35 percent in 2020; adding that: “Twitter is a digital platform that has been a crucial link in the operations of millions of small and medium-sized enterprises; it allows the kind of business that gives consumers options which leads to innovation and better products and services. It was estimated that the nation stands to lose a whopping sum of N650 million monthly if Twitter suspension remains in place. This paper thus explores the suspension of Twitter operations and reactions by Nigerians and the international community; using the content analysis and case study research designs; while agenda-setting and innovation theories served as the study theoretical foundation to examine how innovative communication will foster the pace of economic development which Nigerians genuinely crave for. Study found that all online news content analysed were foreign based newspapers/magazines; 6 representing 66.7% of the entire stories dwelt on abuse of freedom of the press; freedom of expression and human rights issue, while economic and political headlines on the ban were two and one stories representing 22.2% and 11.1% respectively.

Keywords: Communication, Innovative Communication, Media and Human Development

1.0 INTRODUCTION
Communication is the basic foundation of life. It is impossible to think of human existence without communication. Communication fosters freedom of expression, media development, and access to information in line with UNESCO mandate to “promote the free flow of ideas by word and image” (UNESCO, 2021). To achieve its mandate in communication and information, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021) stated that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4,5,8,9,10,11,13,16 and 17) set out in the 2030 Agenda is to achieve sustainable development, with specific attention to social, political and economic mutations of the digital age.

In its effort to establish the enabling environment for freedom expression and media development to grow effectively in Africa, UNESCO mapped out the following:
improve the enabling environment for press freedom; strengthening the safety of journalists;
- strengthening the capacities of media institutions and professionals;
- promoting and strengthening community media as enablers of the free flow of information for development (UNESCO, 2021).

Communication needs as identified by UNESCO (1978) cited in Khalid (2012) in the “New Paradigm) are open dialogue which reflects diversified views and experiences. According to UNESCO, this multi-directional communication flow calls for top down as well as horizontal communication and bottom-up communication. The horizontal communication is across society horizontally – from person to person, village to village and rural to urban. UNESCO further advocates that for participatory rural communication, media should be made available in rural areas. In other words, there should be linkage between development initiative and communication channels (Khalid, 2012).

In regard to the UNESCO mandate, Nwele and Onuorah (2015) see communication as a process of complex attribute vital to maintaining relations between organisations and its publics or between one individual and another, and between a state and its people. The authors view communication as a technical or mechanical process by which information is disseminated from one source to another through the force of velocity and a coordinated instinct.

The important role communication play in the society is better viewed from the recent suspension of the operations of Twitter announced by Nigeria’s Minister of Information and Culture, Chief Lai Muhammed, warranting negative reactions from well-meaning Nigerians, who expressed anger at the development. Fisayo Soyombo, a freelance investigative journalist and ex-editor of The Cable, labeled the government’s decision “shameful”, while human rights lawyer, Clement Nwankwo, said the “unconstitutional” move should be “immediately reversed”. It is estimated that the nation stands to lose a whopping sum of N650 million monthly if the suspension remains in place. Economic experts have argued that this will have a negative impact on the already battered economy plagued by insecurity, unemployment and inflation.

Perhaps, communication has never been more ubiquitous than now. The way and manner humans communicate has never been static; but dynamic. Human development has led to communication innovativeness. For instance, the prehistoric era witnessed humans communicating information using images, characters, sounds, and later music from the sender to the receiver. The weakness of this information flow is that messages communicated by this means did not always reach the intended recipient. Many possibilities have emerged from technical-evolutionary ideas developed for communication and exchange of information (Packt, 2013).
Pre and post-independence era witnessed control of the media by government; especially the broadcast media. It was in 1994 that ex-President Ibrahim Babangida administration deregulated the broadcast media. With the deregulation of the broadcast sphere, the quantum growth in the industry was quite monumental. As at present, Nigeria has 82 AM and 35 FM radio stations and over 96 television stations (Google) (online and off-line) creating employment to an army of unemployed journalists (youths) in the industry.

Choundhury (2011) posits that the Media play an important role in development -innovative, communication through circulation of knowledge, providing forum for discussion of issues, teach ideas, skills for a better life and create a base of consensus for stability of the state. Choundhury argued that the mass media technology should be extensively and tactfully used for development purposes; that is, used as a weapon in the hands of government for positive developmental purpose. The relationship between the media and society has always been there. This paper therefore examined innovative communication, media and human development using the government suspension or ban on Twitter as a case in point.

1.1 Objectives of the study
The general objectives of this study is to examine how Twitter as an innovative means of communicating can aid businesses and therefore improve human development in Nigeria. Specific objectives include:

(i) To examine the extent online newspapers gave coverage to the Twitter suspension/ban in regards to businesses and human development in Nigeria.
(ii) To assess the headline caption of online newspapers coverage of the Twitter suspension/ban in Nigeria.
(iii) To determine the effect of Twitter suspension/ban on digital businesses in Nigeria.
(iv) To analyze the impact of Twitter suspension/ban on human development in Nigeria.

2.1 Conceptual framework
Communication
Meaningful communication is about getting information out to particular audience, listening to their feedback and responding appropriately (Nag, 2011). This view has for long time been canvassed by sociologists, psychologists, economists and communication experts who are of the opinion that the proper use of communication can foster the pace and process of development. Nag (2011) further sees communication as the interaction between two individuals or within a group or a community or a nation. In the words of Patil (2011) “communication is used as empowerment tool for developing society…..to facilitate the participation of people in development activities”. This urge for communication is a primary one and in our contemporary civilization a necessity for survival (Ksha, n:d). To communicate means to give life to symbols, words and relationships (Onabajo & Okunade, 2020). The authors stated that we live in a time when communication systems are evolving rapidly.
The word Innovative attached after the communication has been defined by scholars, experts, leaders, economists, technologists, scientists, media gurus and others. However, Barack Obama (n.d) cited in Odion (2020), states that “innovation is the creation of something that improves the way we live our lives”. In the opinion of Drucker (n.d) cited in Odion (2020), sees “innovation as a creation of [a new device or process] resulting from study and experimentation; the creation of something for the first time; introducing something new”. Rogers (2003) however see it as “an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adaption”.

MEDIA
The mass media are the vehicles that carry messages to large audiences. They are so pervasive in modern life that many people do not even notice their influences. In an ideal situation, the mass media is instituted to be among others charged with responsibilities to educate, mobilize and serve as a development agent (Alamai and Ibrahim, 2014). Amobi (2011) cited in Nwanne (2014) notes:

In the past two decades or thereabout, there has been tremendous improvement in the quality and availability of different media. The massive expansion in communication possibilities, especially through e-mails, social media and others has meant that the Nigerian youth has various media choices. In fact, many persons now see the youths of today as being over exposed to the media, with often unsavory consequences. The youths are so close to the mass media to the extent that many of them are now seen as “digital natives”.

McQuail (2010) describes mass media as the organized means of communicating openly and at a distance to many receivers within a short space of time. As noted by Egbon (1995) cited in Daramola (2005) the media possess the power to work within a political system or work against it, adding that the media system can oil and ease the economic wheel of a country or bring them to a grinding halt and at the same time media can be used to maintain social equilibrium, facilitate change or to seek radical alternatives. In rationalizing mass media and innovation, Ajibade (2020) argued that effective communication practices are very necessary in driving business processes (BP), innovation, and value. He stated that active communication practices are required for sharing business innovation with clients and shareholders.

Functions of the Mass Media
According to McNelly (1968) cited in Ndolo (2004) there exists paradigm of four stages or points of view which have emerged with reference to mass media role in development, thus:

- Null Position: holds that the mass media have no role in national development. Rather emphasis is placed on literacy, education or on economics.
Enthusiastic Position: held by UNESCO and some academics, assigns the mass media a decisive role not only in national development, but in bringing about peace and stability.

Cautions Position: cautions that mass communication is not omnipotent and that a multitude of social and cultural factors serve to mediate or even nullify the impact of the mass media.

Pragmatic Position: the “Try and see if it works” position. This leaves open the possibility of not media impact, a limited impact, or a heavy impact depending on circumstances.

In furtherance to the role mass media play in the society, Nwankwo, et al (1984) cited in Ndolo (2004) argue that the media are essential to the effective functioning of each of the four major sectors of any society as follows:

- The economic and technological sector which adapts the society to its physical or natural environment;
- The political sector with power to formulate and implement public policy;
- The legal and administrative sector which coordinates the activities of the other sectors, and;
- The cultural sector which socializes individuals into the society’s ideological and value process.

Nigeria media have played critical roles in nation building. Little wonder Marshall McLuhan said that the media extend man’s senses; that their capacity is so great that the structure of society is fundamentally altered by their existence.

DEVELOPMENT
Development entails internally self-generated effort towards continuous positive change by the use of resources to create wealth in terms of individual and societal needs without jeopardizing the chances of future generations in realizing their needs (Ukonu, 2004). Rodney (1912) cited in Ukonu (2004) writes:

- Development in human society is a many sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. The achievement of any of those aspects of personal development is very much tied in with the state of the society as a whole.

It is touted that Nigeria has not made some appreciable headway in socio-economic terms in recent years; the human capital development is said to be weak; while the country is ranked 152 out of 157 countries in the World Bank’s 2018 Human Capital Index (World Bank Group,
2019). Government’s initiatives intending to expand ICT infrastructure according to the World Bank Group report stated that the National Broadband Policy (2013-2018) recognizes the positive linkages between increased broadband penetration and GDP growth. According to the World Bank Group report indicates that large pockets of Nigeria’s population still live in poverty, without adequate access to basic services, and they could benefit from more inclusive development policies.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL MEDIA AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
Kietzmann, et al., (2011) cited in Alhamami & Hashim (2020) observed that there are several definitions of social media as various people understand and use it differently. Kaplan and Hoenlein’s (2010) define social media as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content”. Sahu (2013) and Shaw (2007) cited Ojiakor-Umenze, et al., (2020) added that social media is a group of internet based applications that builds on ideological and technological foundations, and that allow the creation and exchange of user created content. It is clear that the social media- Twitter as a user generated content used by many Nigerian youths to create awareness of their businesses online. The social media serves two purposes for SMEs- to advertise the businesses online and to serve customers at the point of decision and action point.

Daniel Lerner (1958) in Choudhury (2011) sees the relationship between developments and the mass media as: “the greater the communication facilities, the greater or even faster is modernization”. Communication facilities here refer to the innovativeness of the communication media and channel. Innovation in communication has led to the terms- traditional and new media. In this relationship between social media use and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) growth has been a subject of interest for researchers and practitioners in this area, previous empirical studies have reported mixed findings (Simpson, et al., 2006) cited in Gekombe, Tumsifu & Jani (2019, p.).

2.1 EMPIRICAL REVIEW
Asanga, Boateng & Akamavi (2016) studied Mobile Phone Innovation and Inclusive Human Development: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa. This paper investigated the effects of mobile phone technology, knowledge creation and diffusion on inclusive human development in 49 SSA countries for the period 2000-2012 using Tobit model. The study found that mobile phone penetration in SSA is pivotal to sustainable and inclusive human development irrespective of the country’s level of income, legal origins, religious orientation and the state of the nation. However, the pupil-teacher ratio exerts a negative influence on inclusive human development. The net effects of interactions between the mobile phone and knowledge diffusion variables are positive.

A study by Ejemeyovwi1, Osabuohien, Johnson &Bowale (2019) found that Internet usage, innovation and their interaction have significant and positive relationship with human
development. Furthermore, the study unbundles the ECOWAS countries and finds that countries like Cape Verde had positive significant coefficient for the three cases examined, the results for some ECOWAS members were not significant, while few had significant negative results, which did not have influence on the overall result.

In a study by a study by Gekombe, Tumsifu and Jani (2019) examined the social media use among small and medium enterprises: a case of fashion industry growth. The study surveyed 394 owner-managers of fashion SMEs from Nairobi and Kiambu countries using structured questionnaire; and multivariate analysis through structural equations modeling. The study observed that social identity and perceived ease of use bore significant influence on the usage of social media whereas perceived usefulness showed no significance in influencing owner-managers’ intention to use social media. The study added that the use of social media on the other hand had a significant influence on SME growth; thus, social media usage is considered useful in business but there is no motivation towards usage by the owner-managers.

A study by Ainin, et al (2015) looked at the factors influencing the use of social media by SMEs and its performance outcomes. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the factors that influence Facebook usage among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). In addition, it examined the impact of Facebook usage on financial and non-financial performance of the SMEs. The study revealed that Facebook usage has a very strong positive impact on organization’s performance both financial and non-financial. The study found that Facebook usage has a strong positive impact on performance of the organizations in terms of increase in sales transactions, sales volume, sales enquires and number of customers. Facebook usage also has a positive impact on non-financial performance of the organization.

Further studies in this area by Lakshmi, Mahboob &Chouhary (2017) carried out a study on impact of social media on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in the Arab world. According to the review adopted by the study, there exists between unique relationship between the social and SMEs in social, political, religious or cultural and economic spheres.

A study by Wardati and Mahendrawathi (2019) assessed the impact of social media usage on the sales process in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs): A systematic literature review. The study was aimed at conducting an analysis of the impact of social media usage on the sales process in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The results of the study showed impacts of social use mostly related to customers, stakeholders, business partners and competitors.

Alhamami & Hashim (2020) carried out a study on social media adaption in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) context: literature review. The study revealed that researchers and developers are provided with appealing opportunities to further develop new strategy applications through a comprehensive discussion of the importance of social media and its benefits into various SMEs aspects.
2.2 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS
This study is anchored on the Agenda Setting and Innovation Theories. Agenda setting theory was first developed by two Professors, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in the Chapel Hill study they carried out in 1968. Empirical evidences proved that agenda setting has the ability to transfer the media issue salience to the public, however, the intensity and effectiveness is based on the environment such as the activity on social media and the level of media literacy of the society concerned. Severin and Tankard (1979) cited in Ogbonna (2016) view the agenda setting theory as “the capability of the mass media to select and emphasize certain issues and thereby cause those issues to be perceived as important to the public”. According to Ate (2008), the media can set agenda or ascribe importance to an issue through:

- The quality/frequency of reporting
- The prominence given to the report
- The degree of interest generated in the reports and
- Cumulative media-specific effects over time

The theory suggests that the online newspapers brought the matter to the front burner on online newspapers in Nigeria. The question then becomes the frequency, prominence, degree of interest generated by it and perhaps the cumulative effects of this coverage over time.

Innovation theory is the adoption of new technology at an organizational level. Rogers (1995) see innovation as a success when it is accepted and integrated into the organization. Organizational adoption Heverin & Zach (2012) occurs in two stages: initiation and completion (Zaltan, Duncan & Holbek, 1973). According to Heverin & Zach (2012), in the initiation stage, the organization becomes aware of the innovation, develops an attitude about the innovation, and evaluates the innovation. In the completion stage, the organization decides to acquire the innovation and use it.

3.0 METHODOLOGY
Research Design
The study adopted the quantitative and qualitative content analysis to show the coverage of issues on the narrative of Twitter ‘suspension’ in Nigeria and the reactions that trailed it in Nigeria’s online newspapers. The above method is triangulated with the case study design. A case study design comes from the tradition of psychological and medical research where it is applied in the detailed analysis of an individual in order to understand the dynamics of pathology of given disease (Agbonifoh and Yomere, 1999). According to Agbonifoh and Yomere the case study suggests that by developing an in-depth understanding of one case, we can also explain and understand how other similar cases occur. According to Agba, Okonkwo & Ozor, (2018), case study is a research that investigates a selected representation or samples of an entire population (or phenomenon) often to generalize conclusions for whole population.
The study population based on content analysis is the entire online newspaper that carried the story on Twitter ban from June 1, 2021 to June 26, 2012; the sample size is stories on the Twitter suspension which includes (news, features, articles, editorials, opinions etc) in Nigeria. Unit of analysis includes name of the online newspaper and title of story or article.

In the case study research design, two cases were examined by this study. First online newspaper examined is the TNT news/magazine titled: Why has Nigeria pulled the plug on Twitter? The second newspaper is titled: Twitter’s operations are suspended in Nigeria carried by the Wall Street Journal.

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Data Presentation

Fig 1: Shows the online newspapers

Fig 1 shows that a total of nine online newspapers that carried the story on the ban of Twitter operations in Nigeria were assessed based on its impact on businesses especially on economy in Nigeria. It could be observed from the table that most online newspaper stories on the ban were between one and two stories which represents 11.1% and 22.2% respectively; and the publications are mostly foreign owned newspapers/magazines.
Table two shows that more than half of the online newspaper story headlines on the Twitter ban six (6) which represents 66.7% of the entire stories dwelt on abuse of freedom of the press; freedom of expression and human rights issue while economic and political headlines on the ban were two and one stories representing 11.1% and 22.2% respectively.

CASE STUDY ONE (TRT News/Magazine online): WHY HAS NIGERIA PULLED THE PLUG ON TWITTER?

In the analysis of the TRT online newspaper:

Over the years, digital platforms have become a safe haven for young people in Nigeria where, away from harsh economic realities and mismanagement, they promote their businesses, build connections, find jobs and freely express their political views.

In addition, the online newspaper added that:

Nigeria has the largest number of people in poverty in the world, with the unemployment rate among 15-34 year-olds around 35 percent in 2020. To escape this harsh reality, young Nigerians connect, conduct businesses, find employment and start their careers through social media.
CASE STUDY TWO (The Wall Street Journal online): TWITTER’S OPERATIONS ARE SUSPENDED IN NIGERIA

The Wall Street Journal on its part was brief in the economic implication of the Twitter ban in Nigeria as it stated that:

Twitter became an escape valve for public frustration, in a country where half the population is under 18 and unemployment is rampant.

4.1 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study investigated innovative communication, media and human development based on the issue of Twitter ban or suspension in Nigeria. It is observed that (Fig 1) objective one: examined the extent online newspapers reported the Twitter suspension in relations to human development in Nigeria. Study showed that under a month the analysis was carried out, only nine online newspapers covered the Twitter suspension by the Nigerian government. This means that an estimated two stories per week were reported by the online newspapers within the period under review. The level at which the online media reported the suspension is quite inadequate on an issue that involves communication, human and political rights/freedom of information and digital businesses. An interesting revelation by the study is that majority of the online newspapers were not even the regular online newspapers found within Nigerian borders. It may therefore be rationalized that online newspapers in Nigeria may have been intimidated by the government high-handedness in dealing with the media. It could be recalled that some media houses have been ‘threatened’ by government in the past.

In assessing the second objective: headline caption of online newspapers coverage of the Twitter suspension/ban in Nigeria. The bar (Fig 2) shows that two of the headlines representing 22.2% of the total nine headlines dwelt on economic aspect of the Twitter suspension or ban in Nigeria on its headlines. As expected, however, six headlines representing 67% out of the nine online newspaper headlines showed various titles of abuse of freedom of press, expression and human rights. It then means that the ban or suspension of Twitter as being a media issue, as people see it as a means to muzzle the press. Thus, it was not a surprise for most of the online newspapers headline to focus on issues of media or press freedom.

In the assessment of the third and fourth research objectives: to determine the effect of Twitter suspension/ban on digital businesses; and to analyze the impact of Twitter suspension/ban on human development in Nigeria. From case studies one and two; shows that majority of Nigerians promote their businesses, build connections, find jobs and freely express their political views, find employment and start their careers through social or digital media. The case studies observed is in tandem with that of Gekombe, Tumsifu and Jani (2019) that the use of social media has a significant influence towards the growth of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Previous studies argued that there is a positive relationship between perceived ease of use with acceptance of information (Thong et al., 2004) cited in Gekombe,
Tumsifu and Jani (2019). Social media (Twitter) is therefore seen as an emerging technology that can be used as a strategic business tool for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) based on a study conducted in Kenya and around the world. This finding is supported by that of Ainin, et al (2015) that Facebook usage has a strong positive impact on performance of the organizations in terms of increase in sales transactions, sales volume, sales enquires and number of customers. In addition, finding is supported by Lakshmi, Mahboob & Chouhary (2017) that there exists unique relationship between the social media and SMEs in social, political, religious or cultural and economic spheres.

The second arm of the research objective is to analyze the impact of Twitter suspension/ban on human development in Nigeria. Objectives three and four share similarities as the use of social media by SMEs and business will definitely lead to human development. To this end, study shows that findings of this study follows similar research by Ejemeyovwi1(2019) that Internet usage, innovation and their interaction have significant and positive relationship with human development. Present study is also supported by Asanga, Boateng & Akamavi (2016) that mobile phone penetration in SSA is pivotal to sustainable and inclusive human development irrespective of the country’s level of income, legal origins, religious orientation and the state of the nation.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS
In conclusion, this research paper has assessed newspaper coverage of Twitter’s suspension in Nigeria- what hope for digital businesses development? The study objectives and findings showed that within the period under review, nine online stories on the Twitter suspension or ban by the government were covered by the newspapers. Similarly, of the nine online stories carried by the newspapers, six representing 67% dwelt on various frames of abuse of the freedom of the press, expression and human rights, while two of the stories representing 22.2% dealt with economic and human development issues as reported by the online newspapers. Since economic development cannot be separated from successful social media businesses, it therefore, means that innovative communication through the use of social media would automatically lead to human development. Study recommends that a conducive environment should be created for businesses in the social media or internet and government should un-ban Twitter usage and encourages various forms of online businesses in Nigeria.

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