

Twitter Ban and Economic Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper ‘Twitter ban and economic development in Nigeria’ analytically examined the economic implications of the ban placed on Twitter by the federal government of Nigeria on June 4, 2021. It is obvious how the sudden ban on Twitter has affected internet merchants and networkers who leverage the cyber space for their businesses. While the ban on Twitter may be seen as means of curtailing the excesses with the use of the cyber space, however, the ban has affected well-meaning Nigerians. Against this background, this paper critically examined the economic effects of the ban. Therefore, three research questions and objectives were formulated to aid the study. The study theoretically synthesized Media Ecology Theory (MET) by Marshall McLuhan and Communication act by Niklas Luhmann. The study adopted a desk research methodology; as such data was elicited via secondary sources. A thematic content method of data analysis was used in analyzing the secondary data. The study concludes by making recommendations amongst others; government should reverse the ban on Twitter etc.

1. Introduction

Economic development is the process of improving economic welfare in an economy. Economic development can involve a stronger economy enabling a greater range of social services that improve a nation’s welfare. For example, an undeveloped economy will be primarily based on agriculture and very limited social services such as health care and education. Economic development involves an increase in real incomes, higher life expectancy, lower poverty and a greater provision of basic amenities (Samuel 2019). Economic development is a multifaceted process embracing economic growth, structural changes in the economy, improving the conditions, and quality of life of the population. Various models of economic development are

known. But for all their diversity and national characteristics, there are general patterns and parameters characterizing this process (Mary, 2017). Economic development is a broader concept than economic growth. Development reflects social and economic progress and requires economic growth. Growth is a vital and necessary condition for development, but it is not a sufficient condition as it cannot guarantee development. According to Amartya, (2001), development is about creating freedom for people and removing obstacles to greater freedom. Greater freedom enables people to choose their own destiny. Obstacles to freedom, and hence to development, include poverty, lack of economic opportunities, corruption, poor governance, lack of education and lack of health.

There are several indices that used to determine economic development in a state, amongst other indicators of economic development as opined by Mar, (2017); Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the most widely used tool for assessing a country's economic development. "Gross" means that all production is evaluated regardless of its goals; Gross National Income (GNI) is the aggregate market value of the total volume of final production of goods and services in the economy in one year; Human Development Index: This is a combined indicator characterizing human development in countries and regions of the world that is drawn up by the United Nations Development Programme and is used in the special series of reports of the United Nations (UN); Development of entrepreneurship: The social importance of small business is determined by the massiveness of a group of small proprietors - owners of enterprises and their employees whose total number is one of the most significant qualitative characteristics of the economy of Nigeria.

Not minding the significance of these economic indicators especially entrepreneurship development among small business owners, the Nigerian government suspended the use of Twitter on June 4, 2021 in Nigeria. The official press release gave only a vague justification, citing threats to "Nigeria's corporate existence." When the federal government of Nigeria banned Twitter, it gave no thought to the importance of the platform. All that mattered was the bruised ego of President Muhammadu Buhari, who felt insulted because his tweet in which he had threatened to "treat those misbehaving today in a language they understand" was deleted for violating Twitter's policy and his account temporarily suspended Akinde, (2021).

Chimgozirim, (2021) asserts that Nigeria's decision to suspend Twitter indefinitely could backfire for the government and cost the country economically in terms of new investments into its technology sector. While only a minority of Nigerians use Twitter, they form part of the most vocal and politically active segment of the population. Many young people have used Twitter and other social media recently to organize anti-government protests. And Nigeria has been among the best-performing African countries in attracting investments for technology start-up business. The ban could threaten that status. The shutdown will be hard to enforce. It is also likely to be unpopular. And it could have dire consequences for Nigeria's fragile democratic institutions and Covid-battered economy. The move angered many in the Nigerian government. Information and Culture Minister Lai Mohammed criticized "double standards" and complained that Twitter had not deleted missives from a separatist leader. He also alleged that it supported the 2020 #EndSARS movement against police brutality. The potential that social media could help mobilize such a large, youth-driven protest movement sent shudders throughout the ruling establishment. Officials might hope a ban squelches a growing protest movement against rising insecurity (Janet, 2021).

The deletion of Buhari's tweet also came on the heels of Twitter's April 2021 announcement that it would be setting up its first African office in Accra, not Lagos. In its justification, Twitter cited Ghana's support for "free speech, online freedom, and the open internet." The choice came despite the fact that Nigeria probably has more Twitter users than Ghana. Nigerians also have plenty of other digital options to share opinions and information, from the popular WhatsApp to the Indian micro blogging service Koo, which quickly announced plans to expand into the country. Shortly after the ban went into effect, traffic to the site was blocked on leading local mobile networks like MTN, Globacom, Airtel and 9mobile, though access was still possible through some internet service providers. Nigeria's attorney general, Abubakar Malami, promised to prosecute those violating the ban. But the extent to which the ban will stop Nigerians who want to use the platform from doing so is open to question. Targeting users for punishment would be a gargantuan and costly task. It might also not be technologically feasible (Jeffrey, 2021).

Beyond being an annoyance, this could significantly hamper economic productivity. Nigeria's economy and even government have become increasingly reliant on digital media. Some noted the irony that the government announced its ban on Twitter with a tweet. NetBlocks, which tracks internet governance, estimated that each day of the Twitter shutdown will cost the Nigerian economy over 2 billion naira (\$6 million). Within hours, internet searches for "VPNs" virtual private networks, which allow users to disguise their online identity and evade country-specific limits surged across the country. Multiple videos appeared on YouTube, explaining the ins and outs of VPNs to Twitter-hungry Nigerians. The widespread use of VPNs would come at significant costs. Poorer Nigerians are likely turn to free VPNs instead of fee-based ones that are more secure. This will expose them to data theft and other forms of hacking (Janet, et al 2021). Digital media are essential for information exchange, marketing, customer service, and remote work, especially during public health and safety emergencies. Shutdowns can slow commerce, cut productivity and ultimately cost jobs. In the longer term, the ban even if only brief could seriously harm Nigeria's ability to attract investment to its otherwise-promising digital economy. Investors may turn to markets without the threat of sudden regulatory disruptions to the digital economy. In other words, Twitter's choice of Ghana would only be the beginning.

Kalu, (2021), during the #EndSARS protests against police brutality, oppression, and extrajudicial arrests and killings which were held across various states in Nigeria and the diaspora in October 2020, Twitter amplified the hashtag, which quickly gained traction and trended across multiple countries, with CEO Jack Dorsey sharing donation links to funding the protests across Nigeria. This, afterwards, prompted a discourse on regulating social media by Lai Mohammed Nigeria's minister of information and culture and some northern governors. Twitter has been at the forefront of the Nigerian social media revolution. It has a large number of young users, unhindered from airing their opinions. It was especially critical in organizing and crowd funding for the #EndSARS protests in October 2020. That may be why the government was quick to impose a ban on the slightest provocation. For young Nigerians, Twitter is not just a platform for organizing or calling out bad governance and stifling policies. Twitter has revolutionized business in Nigeria from customer service to job creation facilitating the ease of doing business a campaign promise of the Buhari administration itself. Many small business owners in Nigeria operate on Twitter, either through targeted ads or organic engagement. In a

country which ranks second in global unemployment, with an estimated 13 million young unemployed people, methods such as these are literal means of sustenance and livelihood.

It should be noted that this is not the first time the president Muhammadu Buhari led administration is staging a ban on cyber issues. On February 2021, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) ban the use of crypto currency in Nigeria such as Bitcoin, Dogecoin, Ethereum just like India, Iran, and China ban crypto trading (bbc.com). This also generated several concerns from different quarters of the country as many crypto traders could not make transactions with Luno, Qiudax, Binance, BuyCoins, BlockVila, Remitino etc (BBC 2021).

On September 13, 2021, Punch online News reported that the Twitter ban in Nigeria has extended to 100 days and in that time frame the nation has lost N247.61bn.). Consequently, telecommunications on June 5 blocked access to Twitter after receiving a directive by the Nigerian Communications Commission. On this, the Association of Licensed Telecommunications Operators of Nigeria had said, “We, The Association of Licensed Telecommunication Operators of Nigeria wish to confirm that our members have received formal instructions from the Nigerian Communications Commission, the industry regulator, to suspend access to Twitter. “ALTON has conducted a robust assessment of the directive in accordance with internationally accepted principles.” According to the NetBlocks Cost of Shutdown Tool, the blockade costs Nigeria’s economy N103.17m (\$250,600) every hour. It has been 2,400 hours since the FG banned Twitter.

Fareeda, (2021). In a study “The Twitter ban and e-commerce in Nigeria” asserts that, the ban is certainly taking a toll on e-commerce, and is making things even harder for many young Nigerians who have leveraged technology for their economic empowerment in significant ways.” says Fareeda Abdulkareem, a McHenry Fellow at Georgetown University. She said that the ban reflects a clear trend of the government making attempts to heavily regulate sectors that are central to the country’s digital economy. Tech, she says, is now responsible for contributing to more than 10 percent of the country’s GDP.

Akinde, (2021). ‘The Twitter ban and foreign investment in Nigeria’ made it clear in his study that the restrictions placed on the use of Twitter send a clear message that this is not a safe country for foreign investments. It worsens Nigeria’s reputation as an increasingly volatile political environment, which Nigeria is proving to be. Investors will simply choose Nigeria’s neighbor Ghana, as Twitter has done, or South Africa’s relatively stable economy.

Chidi, (2021) Opines that. “Foreign investors always pay critical attention to the policy leanings of governments prior to making an investment,” says Chidi, a Nigerian corporate lawyer, “These policies drive macroeconomics variables such as inflation, exchange rate, political stability, fiscal deficit, unemployment, etc., and these variables ultimately affect the general performance of an economy and the ability of businesses to thrive.”

Kunle, (2021) posits in his review ‘tech start-ups and twitter ban: impacts and solutions’ that one of the bigger impacts of the Twitter ban could be difficulty in accessing funding for Nigerian tech start-ups. “The Twitter ban demonstrates two things: That the rule of law is very weak in Nigeria; and that no business is safe as you are one government policy away from your business being denigrated. We’ve seen it happen with cryptocurrency.” “International investors are

looking closely at Nigeria because it is a very attractive investment hub,” says Kunle, a tech enthusiast who asked to use a pseudonym due to his company’s press policies, citing Nigeria’s fintech company Flutterwave, which recently secured \$170 million from international investors after a Series C round and is currently valued at over \$1 billion, “But these investors are also looking at government policies.”

On same vein, Odoemenam (2021) in his study ‘Implications of Twitter ban in Nigeria’ he concludes that “the ban sends a message of regulatory uncertainty and executive rascality to investors; two factors that discourage investors from making investment decisions. With Nigerians and Nigerian businesses still recovering from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, this ban will further stifle the operation of many businesses that rely heavily on digital media for information exchange, marketing, customer service, and remote work.”

Vera (2021) in her study of Twitter ban and covid-19 restrictions in Nigerian banks found out that; “The ban on Twitter affects customers as much as it affects vendors and companies,” a customer service representative in a Nigerian bank who also asked to use a pseudonym. “In keeping with the COVID restrictions, customers have to wait for a longer period of time before accessing in-bank services. But for lots of social media users, tweeting at a bank does the trick. With this option being cut off, customers would have to tailor their complaints through other channels, and this means that those channels are going to get swamped, leading to a longer wait time.”

Jack (2021) 'Twitter ban and freedom of the press in Nigeria' asserts that Nigeria’s ban on Twitter fails to appreciate its current economic situation “With the state of its economy, Nigeria should be prioritizing policies that would drive economic recovery and not on internet firewalls to stifle free speech. We are a third-world economy battling with high levels of insecurity, youth unemployment, a dwindling economy, and political instability. Our realities are completely different from a country like China.”

With the above studies on Twitter ban in Nigeria, it was discovered to our limited knowledge that no author has looked at the interplay of Twitter and economic development in Nigeria; therefore, this study is determined to fill the gap in knowledge by studying Twitter ban and economic development in Nigeria. Thus, the following research questions were raised to aid our study; what are the economic implications of Twitter ban in Nigeria? What are the problems associated with the use of virtual private network (VPN) amidst Twitter ban in Nigeria? And what are the solutions to safe usage of virtual private network (VPN) during the period of Twitter ban in Nigeria? Deducing from these research questions, the study has the following specific objectives; to examine the economic implications of Twitter ban in Nigeria, to investigate the problems associated with the use of virtual private network (VPN) in the midst of Twitter in Nigeria, and to examine the solutions to safe usage of virtual private network (VPN) during the period of Twitter ban in Nigeria.

It should be noted however, that on the 1st of October, 2021, the president via a live broadcast gave conditional lifting of the ban on Twitter after 118 days which is approximately four months of the ban (June 4th – October 1st, 2021). This was contained in Punch online News as reported “The President, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (retd.), on Friday, said he had directed a conditional lifting of the ban placed on the operations of the micro blogging site, Twitter, in

Nigeria in June. Buhari disclosed this in his nationwide broadcast to Nigerians to mark the nation's 61st independence. He described the social media as a very useful platform but regretted that some users have misused the platform to organise, coordinate, and execute criminal activities, propagate fake news, and promote ethnic and religious sentiments. The President said, "Social media is a very useful platform that has enabled millions of Nigerians to connect with loved ones, promote their businesses, socialise, and access news and other information. "However, recent events have shown that the platform is not just an innocuous platform for information dissemination. "Rather some users have misused the platform to organise, coordinate, and execute criminal activities, propagate fake news, and promote ethnic and religious sentiments. "To address these negative trends, the Federal Government of Nigeria suspended the operations of Twitter in Nigeria on June 5, 2021 to allow the Government put measures in place to address these challenges. "Following the suspension of Twitter operations, Twitter Inc. reached out to the Federal Government of Nigeria to resolve the impasse. Subsequently, I constituted a Presidential Committee to engage Twitter to explore the possibility of resolving the issue. "The Committee, along with its Technical Team, has engaged with Twitter and have addressed a number of key issues. These are National Security and Cohesion; Registration, Physical presence and Representation; Fair Taxation; Dispute Resolution; and Local Content. "Following the extensive engagements, the issues are being addressed and I have directed that the suspension be lifted but only if the conditions are met to allow our citizens continue the use of the platform for business and positive engagements. "As a country, we are committed to ensuring that digital companies use their platform to enhance the lives of our citizens, respect Nigeria's sovereignty, cultural values and promote online safety." (Buhari orders conditional lifting of Twitter ban (punchng.com)

This study is centered on Twitter ban and its implications on the economy of Nigeria. Nigeria has a total of 211,573,700 according World population review (2021). Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the World. Twitter ranked 61.4% of the social media usage in Nigeria as reported by statista (2020). This analysis showed that about 21 million Nigerians are using Twitter in Nigeria. This centred on key places where the ban on twitter affects mostly; Lagos, Rivers, Kano, Kadunna, Abia states including the federal capital territory (Abuja). The study will be of great significance to the government, Twitter users, students, administrators, entrepreneurs etc if the recommendations are followed strictly.

Theoretical Consideration

This study theoretically synthesized Media Ecology Theory (MET) by Marshall McLuhan propounded (1994), and Niklas Luhmann Communication Act from his system theory (2000). The theory aims to understand the social impact of technology and communication (McLuhan, 1964). MET claims that media acts directly to shape and organize culture. Media ecology, or the study of how media and communication processes influence human perception, feeling, understanding, and value, is focused around communication studies (Parameswaran, 2008). Marshall McLuhan (1964) understood the influence of technologies including clocks, radios, television, movies, and games. He focused on defining the relationship between technology and members of a specific culture. He noted that electronic media have revolutionized society, and society quickly become reliant on these communication technologies. McLuhan felt that it was almost impossible to find a society unaffected by electronic media. As society has evolved, its

technology has also evolved. From the first books published to the internet, society has both been affected by, and in turn affected, media. The rules of media set forth by MET enhancement, obsolescence, retrieval and reversal show how technology affects communication through the development of new technology. MET focuses on the idea that society cannot escape the influence of technology and that technology will forever remain central to almost every action in modern life.

From the works of Luhmann in his theory of society, the social world is constituted through communication and through communication only. It is, in this sense, a world of communication. Only communication relates to communication. While this may sound somewhat trivial at first, it is in fact a quite radical move, as it excludes people from social systems. In a conceptual if not always practically consequential move away from sender–receiver models of communication, Luhmann dispenses with the idea that the generation of social meaning is dependent on meaning being generated and understood by people (Luhmann 1984). Luhmann defined communication explicitly as the unity of information, message, and understanding; by taking the communication of information and its reception as a single albeit complex unity, the concept of "meaning" could be made constitutive of his idea of a social system (Albert et al 2013).

In synthesizing these theories, it is clear that Nigerians are affected by the revolutionized media and cannot escape from its influence. Government should understand that placing a ban on the use of technology is not a solution to the use of media, as technology will forever remain central in modern life. Conceptualizing from Luhmann's theory, politics is one among many of society's function systems. The fact that it provides society the capacity to arrive at collectively binding decisions does not give it a place somehow "above" other function systems (as, for example, the economic system or the legal system), or a place at the "center" of society. Noting also that the social world is constituted through communication and communication only, we saw Nigerians searching for virtual private networks (VPN) to enable them use Twitter without a trace by the Nigerian government in order to communicate. This shows how media is a central action in modern life, and also shows that the social world is indeed constituted by communication.

This study is a qualitative research with the use of desk research methodology. Data was sourced from secondary sources through the internet, journals, books and reviews. Thematic method of data analysis was used to analyze the qualitative information in visible form from the reviews.

2. Conceptual Clarification

Twitter: This is an American free networking microblogging service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called 'tweets' and follow other user's tweets by using multiple platforms and devices. The service is provided by Twitter Inc., a corporation based in San Francisco, California with more than 25 offices around the world. (Techtarget 2015). Twitter is founded by Jack Dorsey (CEO), Noah Glass, Biz Stone and Evan Williams in 2006 with Omid Kordestani as its executive chairman.

Twitter, Inc.



Source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter>

Why use Twitter?

Twitter has become increasingly popular with academics as well as students, policymakers, politicians and the general public. Many users struggled to understand what Twitter is and how they could use it, but it has now become the social media platform of choice for many. The snappy nature of tweets means that Twitter is widely used by smartphone users who don't want to read long content items on-screen.

Twitter allows you to:

- easily promote your research, for example by providing links to your blog stories, journal articles and news items
- reach a large number of people quickly through tweets and retweets
- follow the work of other experts in your field
- build relationships with experts and other followers
- keep up-to-date with the latest news and developments, and share it with others instantly
- reach new audiences
- seek feedback about your work and give feedback to others
- follow and contribute to discussions on events, for example conferences that you can't attend in person
- express who you are as a person.

Examples of things you can tweet

- Details of new publications or resources you've produced
- News items that feature your research
- Links to any blog posts you've written
- Thoughts on conferences you attend
- Questions to invite feedback
- Interesting news items you've found
- Interesting photographs
- Replies to other people's tweets
- Retweets of other people's tweets

Source: <https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/social-media/twitter/what-is-twitter/>

Economic development: This is the process by which the economic well-being a quality of life of a nation and individuals are improved according to targeted goals and objectives (Samuel, 2019).

Whereas economic development is a policy intervention aiming to improve the well-being of people, economic growth, is the increase per capita on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of a nation (Okedi, 2013).

Indicators of economic development

There are several indices that can be used to determine the economic development of a nation. We shall examine some these indicators as asserted b Mary, (2017).

- Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is the most widely used tool for assessing a country's economic development. "Gross" means that all production is evaluated regardless of its goals. It can be directed to immediate consumption, investment in new fixed assets or to replace impaired fixed assets. "Domestic" refers to the territory of the country. There are many ways to measure GDP. Usually, the following formula is used for this: $GDP = \text{consumer spending} + \text{gross investment} + \text{public expenditure} + (\text{export} - \text{import})$. Most often, GDP is measured on a quarterly basis or per year. Based on the prevailing factors in the economy, central banks and other institutions lower or increase the forecasts of its growth. To assess the quality of life, the GDP per capita (per inhabitant of the country) is usually used.
- Gross National Income (GNI) is the aggregate market value of the total volume of final production of goods and services in the economy in one year. The final means are purchased for direct use and not for resale or further processing GNI is the best and most affordable indicator of the health of the economy and the quality of life of the population. In the calculation of GNI, non-productive transactions are excluded: financial (state and private transfer payments, operations with securities) and sale of second-hand goods. GNI is determined by summing up all the income received from the production in the given year. Methods of calculating GNI: $GNI = \text{consumer spending of households} + \text{investment costs of business} + \text{government purchases of goods and services} + \text{expenses of foreigners}$; $GNI = \text{expenses and payments not related to the payment of income} + \text{wages} + \text{rental payments} + \text{interest} + \text{profit}$.
- Improving the living standard: The standard of living is one of the most important economic indicators of development. Under the standard of living is the provision of the population with the necessary material goods and services, the adequate level of their consumption and the degree of satisfaction of reasonable (rational) needs. The well-being is also considered so. The monetary valuation of the goods and services actually consumed in the average household within a certain period of time and corresponding to a certain level of satisfaction of needs is the cost of living.
- Branch structure of the economy: There are "primary", "secondary", and "tertiary" sectors of the economy. This indicator is determined by the structure of GNI or the structure of employment of economically active population. In the more developed countries, the

service sector prevails, while in the less developed ones - agriculture or the mining industry. A high proportion of people employed in agriculture indicate that a significant part of the population produces food only for their own consumption. On the contrary, the low share of citizens employed in agriculture area indicates its high efficiency - a small number of farmers satisfy the needs of the rest of society or the country does not produce food in general but buys it by selling oil or high-tech products. In more developed countries, there is a trend of job growth in the tertiary sector of the economy and a decline in industrial employment.

- Inflation level: Among the causes that affect inflation, there are money emission, trade union activities aimed at increasing the wages of employees, imperfect competition in the market among manufacturers, and many others. Limitation of inflation in modern market conditions is necessary, not only to protect the economy from overheating but also to prevent the deterioration of the economic situation in the conditions of recession or crisis.
- Human Development Index This is a combined indicator characterizing human development in countries and regions of the world that is drawn up by the United Nations Development Programme and is used in the special series of reports of the United Nations (UN).
- Development of entrepreneurship: The social importance of small business is determined by the massiveness of a group of small proprietors - owners of enterprises and their employees whose total number is one of the most significant qualitative characteristics of the economy of Nigeria. It is this group of the active population that serves the bulk of consumers, produces a complex level of products and services in accordance with rapidly changing market requirements. The development of small business in Nigeria contributes to the gradual creation of a broad stratum of small owners independently providing their own well-being and a decent standard of living.

3. Results/Discussion

i. Economic implications of Twitter ban in Nigeria

The Twitter ban could affect the country's economy. Consequently, investor confidence would weaken, and there'd be a negative impact on development. A 2016 World Bank study found a correlation between increased broadband penetration and an increase in per capita GDP. In addition, Internet or social media shutdowns cost sub-Saharan countries \$237.4 million in 2020. We will examine how this ban could affect Nigeria's economy as asserted by (Chigozerim 2021).

Influencers: An influencer is someone who has the power to affect the purchasing decisions of others because of his/her relationship, position or knowledge. Over the past few years, the influencer marketing space in Nigeria has grown so much that almost anyone with dedicated followers could snag deals with organizations looking to extend their reach. Twitter is the primary platform for most organizations. While the organizations that work with them can easily use other channels for their marketing activities, it could be harder for them to do the same. Also, while they may be able to afford VPN services, their followers who keep them in business may be unable or reluctant to do so. Either way, this does not end well for these influencers and to the economic development because there is reduction of income and low human quality index. This set of persons is found more in Lagos State.

Freelancers: A freelancer is a person who works as a writer, designer, performer and who works for himself rather than working for a one company all day. Though, freelancers take up contract work for companies and organizations. The increase in Internet penetration has increased the number of people making a living off the Internet, specifically social media. From social media managers to content creators and product photographers, thousands of Nigerians have created careers off these platforms. This ban puts their sources of livelihood at risk. Owing to the fact that living standard of people is an indicator of economic development; the ban will definitely affect the economic development in Nigeria. We have greater number of freelancers in Lagos and Rivers States.

Startups: A startup is a business venture founded by one or more entrepreneurs to develop a unique product or service and bring it to market. Nigeria's startup scene has experienced tremendous growth in a short time, with \$3,77.4 million raised in 2019, although that figure fell to \$120.6 million in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic. This has resulted in jobs for a significant number of people and revenue in the form of taxes for the government. However, this ban puts all of that at risk. For most startups, their businesses depend, in some part, on social media. Without access to social media to run marketing campaigns or build relationships with their customers, business would take a hit. Applications that are built using Twitter Application Programming Interface (APIs) are also affected. While these businesses would find ways to innovate around the ban, their users may not. Political stability is one of the factors that investors consider while making investment decisions. By banning Twitter and directing the NBC to start licensing "over the top" (OTT) services in the country, investors are not likely to jump at the opportunity of investing in Nigerian startups depriving the country of much-needed investments. We can find more of these start-ups in Abia State.

Merchants: Small and medium enterprises are vital to the growth of any economy, frequently providing as much as 60-70% of the economy with jobs. Numbering about 117.4 million, SMEs in Nigeria contribute 48% of national GDP, account for 96% of businesses, and 84% of employment. Many SMEs have leveraged the Internet, especially social media, for business activities such as marketing and customer service. The number of vendors on Twitter is a testament to this. While these businesses could move to other platforms, their posts might not gain as much engagement as Twitter provides and there are no assurances that a ban on other social media platforms would not follow. The fact that entrepreneurial development is a key indicator of economic development, the ban on twitter poses a threat to that development which in turn affects economic development. These small and medium enterprises are more renounced in Kano and Kaduna States.

ii. **Problems associated with the use of virtual private network (VPN) in the midst of Twitter ban in Nigeria**

VPN stands for "Virtual Private Network." You can think of it as a service that disguises your online identity to make it harder for a third party to track your activities or steal your data. After Nigeria's government suspended Twitter indefinitely the term, 'VPN' gained ascendancy in popular vocabulary as Nigerians considered ways to get around the ban. Still, many are in the dark about what VPN is and whether it portends any form of danger to their online activities. VPNs provide several features that can keep you safe online, the most important of which are encryption and two-factor authentication. Together, these features keep your online footprints

and activities private, inaccessible to even your Internet Service Provider (ISP). However, as much as VPNs are beneficial in securing online data, there are still certain risks associated with using them as highlighted by (Janet 2021).

Logging policies: If you use a VPN provider that stores data logs, the information about what you do on the web can easily be tracked, which defeats the purpose of using VPN for privacy sake because you no longer have control over your data.

Data leaks: Free VPNs are not totally free because they still need a way to earn revenue, and most times, this revenue is earned from either selling user data to third parties or sending you spam ads without your permission. A study showed that 72% of free VPNs embedded third-party trackers in their software. These trackers are used to gather data on your online activity.

All devices are not automatically protected: A user who has a VPN installed only on his/her phone or PC, which is the only device that gets protected. If you have more than one device that you'd like to protect, you can either download VPNs on each of the devices or install a VPN router.

Speed issues: VPN slows down your connection speed and can also slow down the overall productivity of your smartphone depending on the service. This can be quite frustrating.

Jurisdiction: Another problem with the use of VPN is the country where your VPN is located affects how secure your VPN is. For instance, if your VPN is located in a country whose government has data retention laws, the VPN might be forced to store your information in secret or if some apps you use are restricted in certain countries, you will also be affected even if you are not there. For example, Binance is banned in the US so if your VPN is set to any US state, your account will be banned. Also, it does not matter what the VPN's policy is, your data can still be shared.

iii. Solutions to safe usage of virtual private network (VPN) during the period of Twitter ban in Nigeria

Following the indefinite suspension of Twitter by the Nigerian government, the question on people's mind is how to bypass these restrictions and still access Twitter in case of a major internet shutdown in the future. A Virtual Private Network (VPN) allows you to create a secure connection to another network over the Internet by hiding your traffic from being seen by others. It basically connects your PC, smartphone, or tablet to another server and allows you to browse the internet. The following are secured means of using VPN as asserted by (Janet, 2021).

ExpressVPN: Express VPN is engineered to protect your privacy and safety. You can go online safely with blazing-fast speed in just a few taps. You can connect to 3,000+ VPN servers in 160 locations in 94 countries. The platform doesn't collect activity logs or connection logs it's been independently audited to ensure your protection. The app is available on playstore and has over 10M+ downloads. Pricing starts at \$6.67 per month.

Tor (The onion network): Tor (The onion network) gives its users the ability to use the internet with as much privacy as possible by routing traffic through multiple servers and encrypting it

each step of the way. You can download the browser to your pc or download the app on playstore. Tor is open source and free to use.

NordVPN: NordVPN is the best VPN if you're looking for peace of mind when on public Wi-Fi. It allows you to securely access personal information or work files, encrypt your internet connection, and keep your browsing history private. You can choose from over 5400 Nord VPN servers in 59 countries and enjoy the fastest VPN experience. The pricing starts at \$3.71 per month. Nordvpn has over 10M+ downloads on playstore.

Windscribe: Windscribe VPN is a tool that secures Wi-Fi and helps you safeguard your privacy online. It's free to use and offers up to 10GB of bandwidth per month. You can use it on your iPhone, iPad, Mac or Windows PC, or as a browser add-on for Chrome, Firefox and Opera. The app gives you access to servers in 10 countries including the US, Canada and the UK. It has over 5M+ downloads on playstore.

4. Conclusion/Recommendations

The study has exhaustively analyzed the economic implications of Twitter ban in Nigeria. The three research questions that were raised were analyzed using content analysis. It was discovered that the ban on Twitter affects influencer marketers, freelancers, merchants etc. The effect on these sections in turn affect livelihood, threaten jobs, and affect the country's economic development at large. The ban on Twitter makes users to source for alternatives to continue their businesses using the platform; this introduced them to the use of virtual private network (VPN). The risks and dangers involved in using VPN were also analyzed such as jurisdiction, speed issues, data leaks etc. The study as analyzed the solutions to a safer use of VPN by analyzing some VPN providers such as ExpressVPN, NordVPN etc.

The following recommendations were put forth;

- The federal government should as a matter of urgency remove all restrictions and pronounce unconditional lift of the ban on twitter so as to allow influencers, freelancers, small scale business owners to continue with their businesses online that could uphold economic development as the ban is having dire consequences on jobs, businesses, and standard of living even the reputation of the country is as take in the international community for fighting against free speech and freedom of the press.
- In an attempt to bypass the Twitter ban thereby opting for virtual private network (VPN), users should be aware of the dangers in using VPNs. Despite the challenges involved in the ban on Twitter, users should leverage other platforms for the advisement of their businesses, companies and products.
- Users of Twitter should opt for secured virtual private network (VPN). If you really want better protection online, avoid free VPNs. Go for paid VPNs as they offer better security and user experience. Choose paid VPNs that prevent Internet Protocol (IP) address disclosure and do not collect data logs that users share on it.

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