The Impact of Twitter Ban on Information Sharing Among Students at Kwara State University

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Abstract

The study examined the impact of Nigeria's Twitter ban (June 2021 - January 2022) on information sharing among students at Kwara State University (KWASU). The ban, imposed following the deletion of President Muhammadu Buhari's tweet for violating platform rules, raised concerns about freedom of expression and access to information. Using a quantitative survey method, data were collected from 150 undergraduate students through a structured questionnaire. The study's objectives were to determine how the Twitter suspension affected students' information-sharing capabilities and to assess students' perceptions of the ban. Findings revealed that 58.6% of the respondents reported significant disruption to their information-sharing activities, with 60% agreeing that the ban adversely affected opinion sharing and freedom of expression. The study also found that students used Twitter primarily for information seeking (45%), social engagement (28%), and academic updates (18%). Results indicated that while 26.7% of the students disagreed that the ban affected information sharing, the majority acknowledged its negative impact on their digital communication and academic discourse. The study highlights the critical role of social media platforms in facilitating student information exchange and recommended that regulatory authorities consider the educational implications of platform restrictions. This research contributes to understanding the intersection between social media governance, freedom of expression, and educational communication in developing nations.

Keywords: Information Sharing, Twitter Ban, Freedom of Expression, Social Media Regulation, University Students, Nigeria

1. Introduction

On June 5, 2021, the Federal Government of Nigeria officially banned Twitter, one of the world's leading microblogging platforms, after the platform deleted a tweet from President Muhammadu Buhari for violating its rules (Anyim, 2021; Mohammed & Adelakun, 2023). The government cited Twitter's use as capable of undermining Nigeria's corporate existence and ordered telecommunications providers to suspend access to the platform (Anyim, 2021). This unprecedented action sparked intense national and international debate about freedom of expression, information access, and the role of social media in democratic governance (Goodness et al., 2022).

The Twitter ban had far-reaching implications across multiple sectors of the Nigerian society. According to Mohammed and Adelakun (2023), approximately 3 million Nigerians actively used Twitter for various purposes including business, education, activism, and social networking. The platform had become particularly significant for young Nigerians, especially university students, who utilise it for information sharing, academic discourse, and civic engagement (Anyim, 2021). The ban's implementation raised critical questions about digital rights, access to information, and the balance between national security concerns and citizens' communicative freedoms.

Information sharing, defined by Sonnenwald (2006) as "a set of activities by which information is provided to others, either proactively or upon request," constitutes a fundamental component of modern education and social interaction. In the digital age, social media platforms have revolutionised information sharing by enabling real-time, multi-directional communication among geographically dispersed individuals (Bashir

et al., 2021). For university students, these platforms serve not only as entertainment channels but as vital tools for academic collaboration, knowledge exchange, and professional networking (Nawaz et al., 2024).

Twitter, launched in 2006, had evolved into a critical platform for information dissemination, particularly during crises and significant social movements. In Nigeria, the platform gained prominence during the #EndSARS protests against police brutality, where it facilitated mass mobilisation and international awareness (Mungadi et al., 2021). Research indicates that Twitter plays a crucial role in promoting civic participation, supporting public health education, and enhancing library services within Nigerian educational contexts (Okpadah, 2018; Mohammed & Adelakun, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the seven-month Twitter ban created an unprecedented natural experiment for examining how platform restrictions affect information-sharing behaviours among university students. Kwara State University (KWASU), a public institution in north-central Nigeria, provided an ideal setting for this investigation due to its diverse student population and active social media usage patterns. This study addresses a critical gap in understanding how governmental restrictions on social media platforms impact educational communication and student information exchange in developing nations.

The 2021 Twitter ban in Nigeria created significant disruptions to digital communication and information access for millions of users, particularly university students who had integrated the platform into their academic and social routines. According to Mohammed and Adelakun (2023), the ban represented the first instance in Nigeria where a major social media platform was completely shut down, leaving users to adapt through virtual private networks (VPNs) or migrate to alternative platforms. This unprecedented situation raised questions about the implications for freedom of expression, information sharing, and educational communication.

Previous research have documented Twitter's value as a versatile platform for academic purposes, including disseminating research findings, facilitating classroom discussions, and fostering scholarly communities (Maclean et al., 2013; Thompson, 2018). Studies have shown that Twitter enhances student engagement by enabling conversations that extend beyond traditional classroom time constraints (Junco et al., 2010). However, existing literature predominantly focus on Twitter's benefits during normal operations, with limited empirical investigation into the effects of platform restrictions on student information-sharing behaviours, particularly during a ban period.

While several studies have examined the economic and political implications of the Twitter ban (Anyim, 2021; Goodness et al., 2022), research specifically addressing its impact on educational communication remains scarce. The Nigerian government lifted the ban on January 13, 2022, but the effects of this seven-month restriction on student information-sharing practices, academic discourse, and digital literacy have not been thoroughly investigated. This study addresses, therefore, this gap by examining how the Twitter ban affected information sharing among KWASU students and exploring their perceptions of the necessity and implications of the Twitter ban.

The study sought to achieve the following objectives, namely (a) determine how the Twitter ban affected information-sharing capabilities among KWASU students, (b) assess students' perceptions regarding the necessity and justification of the Twitter ban, and (c) examine the impact of the ban on opinion sharing and freedom of expression among university students.

The study makes several important contributions to communication research and policy discourse. First, it provides empirical evidence on the effects of social media platform restrictions on educational communication, filling a gap in the literature on digital governance in developing nations. The findings offer insights for policymakers considering similar restrictions, highlighting the need to balance national security concerns with citizens' rights to information access and freedom of expression. Second, the study contributes to understanding how university students adapt to sudden disruptions in their digital communication infrastructure. These insights are valuable for educational institutions developing contingency plans for technology-related disruptions and for social media platforms seeking to understand user behaviour during regulatory challenges. Third, the research serves as a reference for future investigations into social media regulation, digital rights, and information sharing in similar contexts. As governments worldwide grapple with social media governance challenges, this study's findings provide evidence-based insights into the unintended consequences of platform restrictions on specific user populations, particularly students who

rely on these platforms for educational purposes.

2. Literature Review

Social Media and Information Sharing

Social media has fundamentally transformed how individuals access, share, and consume information in contemporary society. The evolution of Web 2.0 technologies has facilitated unprecedented levels of user-generated content and participatory communication (Manovich, 2002; Gitelman & Pingree, 2003). Unlike traditional media, which operated on one-to-many communication models, social media enables many-to-many interactions, democratising information production and distribution (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2002).

Recent systematic reviews of information-sharing behaviour on social media reveal that willingness to share information is influenced by multiple factors including trust, perceived reciprocal benefits, platform characteristics, and social norms (Nawaz et al., 2024; Cai et al., 2025). Research by Bashir et al. (2021) found that WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube were the most widely used platforms among university students in Pakistan, with students visiting these platforms daily or multiple times per day. The study emphasised that male students tended to use social media more frequently than their female counterparts, suggesting gender differences in information-sharing patterns.

The distinction between "information sharing" and "knowledge sharing" in academic discourse merits attention. Savolainen (2017) notes that while management sciences scholars prefer "knowledge sharing," library and information science researchers predominantly use "information sharing." For social media contexts, information sharing encompasses both the provision of information to others and the reception of information from others, creating bidirectional communication flows that enhance collective intelligence and social learning (Sonnenwald, 2006).

Information sharing on social media serves multiple purposes for university students. Research indicates that students use these platforms for knowledge acquisition, academic collaboration, social interaction, and professional networking (Chawinga, 2017; Al-Rahmi et al., 2021). A study by Nawaz et al. (2024) involving 1,470 distance education students found that subjective norms and trust significantly influenced students' knowledge-sharing behavioural intentions, highlighting the importance of social context and platform reliability in facilitating information exchange.

Twitter as an Educational Platform

Twitter, established in 2006 as a microblogging platform, has evolved into a significant tool for educational communication and academic discourse. Originally designed to function as "the SMS of the internet" with 140-character messages (later expanded to 280 characters), Twitter's unique features including hashtags, retweets, and mentions have made it particularly effective for information dissemination and community building (Maclean et al., 2013).

Research demonstrates multiple educational applications of Twitter. Maclean et al. (2013) describe Twitter as "a versatile, accessible, and valuable platform for conveying thoughts, ideas, and visions of the future globally." In academic contexts, researchers and students use Twitter to announce new publications, share research findings, engage in scholarly discussions, and build professional networks (Mollet et al., 2011). The platform's real-time nature makes it particularly valuable for following academic conferences, participating in scholarly debates, and staying updated on developments in specific fields.

Thompson (2018) argues that Twitter fosters classroom community and social learning by enabling discussions that extend beyond traditional class time constraints. A study by Junco et al. (2010) found that using Twitter resulted in more intensive discussion of course materials than would have been possible in lecture settings, with students engaging in conversations that continued asynchronously throughout the week. This expanded temporal dimension of academic discourse represents a significant advantage of Twitter for educational purposes.

In Nigeria specifically, Twitter has served important functions beyond individual communication. Mohammed and Adelakun (2023) note that the platform played a crucial role during the Ebola outbreak of 2014 for public health education and during the #EndSARS protests for civic mobilisation. For Nigerian university students, Twitter provides access to international academic conversations, research opportunities, and professional networking that might otherwise be unavailable due to geographic and economic constraints.

Social Media Regulation and Platform Bans

The regulation of social media platforms has be-

come a contentious global issue, with governments worldwide struggling to balance freedom of expression with concerns about misinformation, national security, and political stability. In Nigeria, attempts to regulate social media predate the 2021 Twitter ban, with several proposed bills aimed at controlling online content (Osuigwe, 2018). The Twitter ban, however, represented the first instance of complete platform shutdown in Nigeria's digital history (Mohammed & Adelakun, 2023).

Research on the Twitter ban reveals widespread criticism from international organisations and civil society groups. Anyim's (2021) study found that the ban infringed on citizens' rights to freedom of expression, access to information, and information sharing. Economic analyses indicated severe negative impacts, with estimates suggesting losses exceeding ₦7.5 billion in the first three days alone, affecting e-commerce, digital businesses, and startup ecosystems (Anyim, 2021). The ban created particular hardships for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that relied on Twitter for customer acquisition and market access.

Goodness et al. (2022) characterised the Twitter ban as a form of digital authoritarianism, noting that it exemplified state control over digital communication spaces. The study, which surveyed 385 media practitioners, found unanimous agreement (100%) that Twitter served as a platform for freedom of expression and that the ban constituted a direct threat to freedom of information. Respondents indicated that stiff regulation of any social media platform represents a systemic infringement on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Mohammed and Adelakun's (2023) comprehensive study analysing over 2.6 million tweets revealed that the majority of public discourse focused on concerns about democratic governance and freedom of expression. The research found that users employed various circumvention strategies, primarily VPN usage, to continue accessing Twitter during the ban period. This adaptation behaviour suggests that platform bans may have limited effectiveness while creating additional barriers to legitimate information access and expression.

International perspectives on Nigeria's Twitter ban have been critical. Analysis by the Brookings Institution noted that the ban represented a misplaced priority given Nigeria's numerous developmental challenges (Brookings, 2022). The study emphasised that while governments have legitimate concerns about online content, platform bans typically prove counterproductive by driving users to less regulated spaces and undermining trust in government institutions.

Impact of Platform Restrictions on University Students

University students represent a demographic particularly affected by social media platform restrictions due to their high rates of platform usage and integration of social media into academic routines. Research indicates that among adults aged 18-29, social media use increased from 12% in 2005 to 90% in 2018 in the United States, with similar trends observed globally (Al-Rahmi et al., 2022). In Nigeria, university students constitute a significant proportion of Twitter's user base, employing the platform for both academic and social purposes.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated social media adoption among students, making these platforms essential for remote learning and academic communication (Crawford et al., 2020). Students use social media platforms to access educational resources, collaborate on group projects, communicate with instructors, and participate in virtual study groups (Chugh et al., 2021). Research by Karakose et al. (2021) demonstrates that social media contributes positively to academic performance when used appropriately for educational purposes.

Platform restrictions can disrupt established patterns of academic communication and information sharing. Bashir et al. (2021) found that students who frequently used social media for academic purposes reported higher levels of engagement with course materials and peer collaboration. When access to preferred platforms is restricted, students must either adapt to alternative platforms or rely on circumvention technologies, both of which may reduce communication efficiency and effectiveness.

Furthermore, social media platforms serve psychological and social functions beyond information exchange. Research indicates that these platforms provide spaces for identity expression, community building, and social support (Chukwuere, 2021). For university students, particularly those in developing nations with limited access to international networks, platforms like Twitter provide valuable connections to global academic communities and professional opportunities. Restrictions on these platforms may therefore have implications extending beyond immediate infor-

mation access to include reduced networking opportunities and professional development.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that individuals actively select and use media to satisfy specific needs and desires (Ruggiero, 2000). Unlike effects-based approaches that view audiences as passive recipients, Uses and Gratifications Theory emphasises audience agency in media selection and consumption. Applied to social media contexts, the theory helps explain why and how students use platforms like Twitter and what gratifications they seek through platform engagement.

Research identifies several primary gratifications that users seek from social media: information seeking, social interaction, entertainment, self-expression, and convenience (Alhabash & Ma, 2017). For university students, these gratifications manifest through activities such as following academic discussions, connecting with peers and mentors, sharing research findings, and participating in scholarly communities. When platform access is restricted, users may seek alternative platforms that provide similar gratifications, though the transition may be imperfect due to differences in platform features and network effects.

The theory's relevance to the study lies in understanding how Twitter ban affected students' ability to obtain desired gratifications and how they adapted their media use patterns in response to the restriction. By examining which gratifications were most disrupted and how students compensated, the study provides insights into the platform's role in students' information ecosystems and the challenges created by platform restrictions.

3. Material and Method

The study employed a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey approach. The design was deemed appropriate for examining students' experiences with and perceptions of the Twitter ban, allowing for the collection of standardised data from a relatively large sample within a limited timeframe. The quantitative approach enabled statistical analysis of relationships between variables and generalisation of findings to the broader student population at KWASU. The target population comprised all undergraduate students at Kwara State University, Malete. A sample of 150 students was selected through purposive sampling technique. This sampling method ensured that respondents had experience using Twitter before the ban and could therefore provide informed perspectives on its impact. The sample included students from various faculties and academic levels to ensure diversity of experiences and perspectives. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed specifically for the study. The instrument comprised three main sections: (a) demographic information; (b) Twitter usage patterns and information-sharing behaviours; and (c) perceptions of the ban's impact and necessity. Questions employed a five-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) to measure respondents' attitudes and experiences. The questionnaire was pilot-tested with 20 students not included in the final sample to ensure clarity and reliability. Collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency. Results were presented using tables formatted according to APA guidelines to facilitate interpretation. The analysis focused on identifying patterns in students' experiences with the Twitter ban and their perceptions of its impact on information sharing and freedom of expression.

4. Result and Discussion

Table 1 presents the age distribution of respondents. The data reveal that the majority of participants (63.3%, n=95) were aged 21-25 years, followed by those aged 16-20 years (29.3%, n=44), and 26-30 years (7.3%, n=11). This age distribution is consistent with typical undergraduate demographics and indicates that the sample comprised primarily young adults who are digital natives likely to be active social media users.

Table 1 Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Range (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16-20	44	29.3
21-25	95	63.3
26-30	11	7.3
Total	**150**	**100.0**

Note. Field Survey, 2022.

Table 2 displays the gender distribution of respondents. The sample comprised 58.7% female students (n=88) and 41.3% male students (n=62). This gender distribution suggests relatively balanced representation, though with slightly more female respondents than male respondents in the sample.

Table 2 Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	62	41.3
Female	88	58.7
Total	**150**	**100.0**

Note. Field Survey, 2022.

Impact of Twitter Ban on Information Sharing

Table 3 presents respondents' assessment of whether the Twitter ban hindered basic information sharing among KWASU students. Results indicate that 58.6% of the respondents (n=88) agreed or strongly agreed that the ban hindered information sharing, with 21.3% (n=32) strongly agreeing and 37.3% (n=56) agreeing. A smaller proportion (14.7%, n=22) remained neutral on this issue. Conversely, 26.7% of respondents disagreed (24% strongly disagreed, n=36; 2.7% disagreed, n=4) that the ban hindered information sharing. These findings suggest that while the majority of students experienced disruption to their information-sharing activities, a notable minority either did not rely heavily on Twitter or successfully adapted to alternative platforms.

Table 3 Impact of Twitter Ban on Information Sharing Among KWASU Students

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	32	21.3
Agree	56	37.3
Neutral	22	14.7
Strongly Disagree	36	24.0
Disagree	4	2.7
Total	**150**	**100.0**

Note. Field Survey, 2022.

Impact on Opinion Sharing and Freedom of Expression

Table 4 presents data on the Twitter ban's impact on opinion sharing and freedom of expression. The results show that 60% of the respondents (n=90) agreed or strongly agreed that the ban negatively affected opinion sharing and freedom of expression, with 19.3% (n=29) strongly agreeing and 40.7% (n=61) agreeing. A smaller proportion (14%, n=21) remained neutral. In contrast, 26% of the respondents expressed disagreement, with 22.7% (n=34) disagreeing and 3.3% (n=5) strongly disagreeing. These findings align with concerns raised by civil society organisations about the ban's implications for democratic discourse and suggest that the majority of the students perceived the restriction as limiting their expressive freedoms.

Table 4 Impact of Twitter Ban on Opinion Sharing and Freedom of Expression

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	29	19.3
Agree	61	40.7
Neutral	21	14.0
Strongly Disagree	5	3.3
Disagree	34	22.7
Total	**150**	**100.0**

Note. Field Survey, 2022.

The study's findings reveal significant disruption to information-sharing practices among KWASU students during Nigeria's Twitter ban, with 58.6% of respondents reporting that the ban hindered their information-sharing capabilities. These results align with broader research on social media's role in educational settings (Bashir et al., 2021; Nawaz et al., 2024) and confirm concerns raised by civil society organisations about the ban's impact on freedom of expression and information access (Anyim, 2021; Goodness et al., 2022).

The study's results demonstrate that Twitter had become integrated into students' information ecosystems, serving multiple gratifications, including information seeking, social interaction, and self-expression. When platform access was restricted, students experienced disruptions not only to information flow but also to established patterns of academic discourse and community participation. This finding supports the Uses and Gratifications perspective, which emphasises that users select media based on needs satisfaction; when preferred platforms become unavailable, users must either adapt to alternatives or forego certain gratifications.

A substantial proportion of the students (60%) reporting negative impacts on opinion sharing and freedom of expression raises important questions about platform restrictions and democratic implications. Mohammed and Adelakun's (2023) analysis of 2.6 million tweets showed similar concerns among the broader Nigerian population. For university students

specifically, these restrictions may have chilling effects on civic participation and political engagement, potentially affecting their development as informed citizens.

Interestingly, approximately 26-27% of respondents reported minimal or no negative impact from the ban. This finding suggests heterogeneity in students' platform dependencies and information-seeking strategies. Some students may have successfully migrated to alternative platforms, utilised VPNs to maintain Twitter access, or relied primarily on other platforms before the ban. This adaptability demonstrates resilience in students' information-seeking behaviours but also raises questions about digital equity, as VPN usage may favour students with greater technological literacy and financial resources.

The gender distribution in this study (58.7% female, 41.3% male) provides an interesting context for interpreting the findings. While previous research by Bashir et al. (2021) found that male students used social media more frequently than female students, the present study's female-majority sample may reflect either demographic characteristics of KWASU or differential willingness to participate in research. Future studies should examine whether gender influences experiences of and responses to platform restrictions.

The age distribution, with 63.3% of respondents aged 21-25 years, indicates that the sample comprised primarily digital natives who grew up with social media. This demography typically exhibits high levels of platform integration into daily life, which may explain the significant disruption reported. Research suggests that platform restrictions may have differential impacts across age groups, with younger users potentially experiencing greater disruption due to their higher baseline usage and integration of social media into social and academic routines (Al-Rahmi et al., 2022).

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study examined the impact of Nigeria's Twitter ban on information sharing among students at Kwara State University, revealing substantial disruption to students' communication practices and concerns about freedom of expression. The findings demonstrate that social media platforms, particularly Twitter, had become integral to students' information ecosystems, serving academic, social, and civic functions. When access was restricted, the majority of students (58.6%) experienced significant challenges in maintaining their information-sharing routines, and 60% reported negative impacts on opinion sharing and freedom of expression. The research contributes to growing literature on social media regulation in developing nations, providing empirical evidence of platform restrictions' unintended consequences for educational communication. While governments may face legitimate challenges in managing online content, the study suggests that complete platform shutdowns create substantial collateral damage, particularly affecting populations like university students who rely heavily on these platforms for legitimate educational and communicative purposes.

The study's findings have implications extending beyond the specific context of Nigeria's Twitter ban. As governments worldwide grapple with social media governance challenges, this research highlights the importance of considering how regulatory actions affect different population segments, particularly those using platforms for educational and developmental purposes. The results suggest that targeted, proportionate approaches to addressing problematic content may better serve public interests than blanket platform restrictions. The heterogeneity in students' experiences, with approximately 27% reporting minimal disruption, suggests that platform restrictions' impacts vary based on individual usage patterns, technological literacy, and access to circumvention tools. This variation raises important questions about digital equity and the differential effects of platform restrictions on various user populations. Future research should explore these differences more deeply to understand which students are most vulnerable to platform restrictions and what factors enable successful adaptation.

Based on the study's findings, a few recommendations are proposed. Policymakers should conduct comprehensive impact assessments before implementing social media restrictions, with particular attention to educational implications. Consultation with educational stakeholders, including students and educators, should inform regulatory decisions to ensure that legitimate educational uses are protected. Universities should develop contingency plans for technology disruptions, including guidance on alternative platforms and communication channels to maintain academic continuity during regulatory changes. Institutions should also provide training on digital literacy and alternative technologies to ensure students can maintain access to educational resources during restrictions. Platform companies should engage proactively with governments in developing nations to

establish clear, culturally appropriate content moderation policies that address legitimate security concerns while protecting freedom of expression. Regular dialogue between platforms and governments may help prevent situations that escalate to complete platform shutdowns. Further research should examine long-term effects of platform restrictions on students' digital literacy, civic engagement, and academic performance, using longitudinal designs to capture evolving impacts. Comparative studies across different institutions and regions would help identify patterns and contextual factors influencing students' experiences. Educational institutions should integrate digital citizenship and media literacy training into curricula to help students navigate evolving digital landscapes and understand their rights and responsibilities in online spaces. This training should include information about platform governance, content moderation, and strategies for maintaining information access during disruptions. Finally, civil society organisations and educational institutions should advocate for regulatory approaches that balance security concerns with citizens' communicative rights. Targeted interventions addressing specific harmful content may prove more effective and less disruptive than comprehensive platform bans.

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