

## DISCOURSES OF POWER, DOMINANCE, AND RESISTANCE IN INTERNET REACTIONS TO TWITTER BAN IN NIGERIA

BY

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### Article History

Received: 18/08/2022

Accepted: 27/08/2022

Published: 29/08/2022

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### Abstract

When the Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari, pronounced the ban on Twitter in the country from June 5<sup>th</sup> 2021, to 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022, there was an outcry among the populace from both within and outside the country. This backlash was mostly felt by internet users who out rightly condemned the move, describing it as a draconian policy of subjugation, harassment, and intimidation of the citizens. It should be noted that the ban on Twitter came as a result of the nationwide protest tagged #EndSars. In this study, we set out to examine from a sociolinguistic perspective the internet reactions to the government policy of the Twitter ban by President Mohammed Buhari. Altogether thirty-six texts were elicited from four media outfits: Aljazeera, BBC and The Guardian Newspaper. Two of the media outfits are foreign while the remaining one is Nigeria-based. The data were codified and labeled as: DATUM 00 -1-8 in Aljazeera news report, DATUM 00-1-8 in BBC news report and DATUM 00-1-13 in The Guardian news report. The analysis was carried out using a Discourse and Critical Discourse analytical approach. The analysis reveals cases of political disenchantments, linguistic labeling, political reverberations of unwanted policies, political intolerance, and ideological projections of ethnic cleavages.

**Key Words:** Discourses, Power, Dominance, Resistance, Internet Reactions, Twitter Ban, Nigeria

### Introduction

The activities that led to the policy of Twitter ban in Nigeria came as a surprise to the Nigerian government. According to (Ebenezer Obadare 2022) “ The #EndSARS protests against police brutality which jerked the country in October 2020 stunned the government precisely because, on one hand, it hardly saw it coming, and, on the other, because it felt outclassed and humiliated by a movement of young people who operated according to a completely different rulebook, leaving the government scrambling. Teargassing and shooting at demonstrators are one thing. Sabotaging their digital apparatus is a different matter. This was the real reason behind the Twitter ban”.

For instance, Nigeria has been sensitive to the need to stay in sync with world events. This quest to stay afloat to current realities led the federal government to appoint a special Assistant on

Digital/New Media Tolu Ogunlesi to head a newly created media team with also the rebranding of the old Federal Ministry of Communications and renamed the Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy. Though symbolic, such moves hardly begin to scratch the surface of the problem, which is that, especially when set against the digital resourcefulness and creativity of civil society, the state seems trapped in an analog reality. In this regard, its struggle to catch up is reminiscent of its failure, thus far, to overhaul challenge to its power from sundry non-state actors. With the Twitter ban and its aftermath, the Nigerian state has just discovered the limits of its power.

The decision to ban Twitter from operating in the country “indefinitely” created tension in both the country and its vast diaspora, particularly its digital constituency. The policy made

Nigerians to become sceptical of the authorities' justification that the ban was necessitated by a need to curtail "the unceasing use of the platform by some people for subversive reasons". Oftentimes, leaders especially those from Africa tend to formulate that do not seem to sit well with their citizenry, as Otor (2018) observes, "Africa needs to take a critical look at policy decisions taken by previous leaders".

Within that period of the ban, Nigerians took their debates and vibrant exchanges to other social platforms and by the time the Nigerian authorities reversed their decision by announcing in the process an apparent deal with Twitter that commits the social media company to "establishing a legal entity in Nigeria in the first quarter of 2022," appointing a "designated country representative to interface with Nigerian authorities," as well as complying with "applicable tax obligations on its operations under Nigerian law"—most Nigerians had either made alternative arrangements or resigned themselves to the possibility that the ban would be in place for the remainder of the Buhari administration.

From the tone of the official announcement suspending the ban, it would seem that the Nigerian government is, on the whole, happy with the concessions it wrested from Twitter. If the true aim of the ban was to limit Twitter's operations as a way of muffling political speech—as opposed to the declared aim of reining in criminal activities—then one may suppose that getting Twitter to agree to "act with a respectful acknowledgment of Nigerian laws and the national culture and history on which such legislation has been built" qualifies as victory.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The ban of twitter usage in Nigeria was officially announced on the 5<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 and it lasted till 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022; within which period the operation of twitter was legally and officially outlawed in the country. The ban occurred after Twitter deleted tweets made by, and temporarily suspended, the Nigerian president [Muhammadu Buhari](#), warning the southeastern people of Nigeria, predominantly Igbo people, of a potential repeat of the 1967 Biafran Civil War due to the ongoing insurgency in Southeastern Nigeria. The Nigerian government claimed that the deletion of the president's tweets factored into their decision, but it was ultimately based on "a litany of problems with the social media platform in Nigeria, where misinformation and fake news spread through it have had real world violent consequences", citing the persistent use of the platform for activities that are capable of undermining Nigeria's corporate existence.

The ban was condemned by Amnesty International, the British, Canadian and Swedish diplomatic missions to Nigeria, as well as the United States and the European Union in a joint statement. Reflecting on the dangers of certain policies in the society, Otor (2019) opines that certain policies are formulated based on "political and economic impositions by the main culture over the subculture but also a reflection of the supremacy of the imperialistic bureaucratic majority over the colonized underprivileged minority" The minister of culture Lai Mohammed stated the ban would be lifted once Twitter submitted

to local licensing, registration and conditions. In June 2021, former U.S. President Donald Trump, who was banned from Twitter months before Nigeria's ban following the 2021 United States Capitol attack, praised the ban in Nigeria.

In late June 2021, Twitter announced it would enter talks with the Nigerian government over the platform's suspension. On 15 September 2021, The Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed said the Nigerian government will lift the ban on Twitter in a 'few days.' The Minister said Twitter gave a progress report of their talks with them, adding that it has been productive and quite respectful. On October 1 2021, President Muhammadu Buhari in his Independence day broadcast said Twitter must meet the Nigerian government's five conditions before the suspension of the social media platform will be lifted. The conditions are Respect for national security and cohesion; registration, physical presence, and representation in Nigeria; fair taxation; dispute resolution; local content.

## DISCOURSE

This study is deeply rooted in the principles of power enactment from the Foucaultian perspective. Michael Foucault challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of 'episodic' or 'sovereign' acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. According to him, 'Power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' (Foucault 1998: 63). He rather sees the deployment of power as 'metapower' or 'regime of truth' that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation. Foucault uses the term 'power/knowledge' to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and 'truth':

'Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true' (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991).

Foucault (1991) sees the above process as "the result of scientific discourse and institutions that are reinforced (and redefined) constantly through the education system, the media, and the flux of political and economic ideologies". In this sense, the 'battle for truth' is not for some absolute truth that can be discovered and accepted but is a battle about 'the rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power are attached to the true'... a battle about 'the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays'(Foucault, in Rabinow 1991). Foucault is of the view that the enactment of power is not just a negative, coercive, or repressive thing that forces us to do things against our

wishes, but can also be a necessary, productive, and positive force in society (Gaventa 2003: 2):

‘We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production’ (Foucault 1991: 194).

Also, commenting on the role of language in discursive strategies, Otorá (2022:3) observes that:

“Language and communication can be manipulated to control events in human interactions. They can be used to soothe cries, with the view to neutralizing or resolving conflict status quo or otherwise. This twin function can also be manipulated to escalate a crisis or conflict situation, to cause dissension, discontent, disorientation, agitation or even destabilization of an otherwise calm atmosphere and disposition typical of peace and harmony. This double-edged sword paradox of language and communication is that they can be skewed to strengthen good neighbourliness as well as cut to destroy harmonious relationships between communities or states” (2022:3)

The implication of all of these is that in democratic settings, the enactment of power can be seen as major source of social discipline and conformity; a process that was fascinated by Foucault’s mechanisms of prison surveillance, school discipline, systems for the administration and control of populations, and the promotion of norms about bodily conduct. According to him, disciplinary and bio-power create a ‘discursive practice’ or a body of knowledge and behaviour that defines what is normal, acceptable, deviant, etc. – but it is a discursive practice that is nonetheless in constant flux (Foucault 1991).

## DISCOURSE PRACTICE AS AN ENACTMENT OF POWER

Commenting on the role of discourse, Ebim (2017) argues that “Critical Discourse analysts are interested in both details of the text itself and the broader social, political, and cultural functions of media discourse to determine other layers of meaning” this therefore means that discourse plays a significant role in shapping events in the society. According to Foucault and quoted by (Diamond and Quinby, 1988:185) constitutes:

ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and

producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern (Weedon, 1987, p. 108). ... a form of power that circulates in the social field and can attach to strategies of domination as well as those of resistance

From the above, one can say that the works of Foucault are imbued with an attention to history, not in the traditional sense of the word but in attending to what he has variously termed the ‘archaeology’ or ‘genealogy’ of knowledge production as Okune (2011) observes “works of such nature are products of historical circumstances that gave a voice to those who suffer racial discrimination because of their skin colour. For him, knowledge systems primarily inform the thinking during certain periods of history: a different one being said to dominate each epistemological age), and the social context in which certain knowledges and practices emerged as permissible and desirable or changed. In his view knowledge is inextricably connected to power, such that they are often written as power/knowledge.

Foucault charts the transition from a top-down form of social control in the form of physical coercion meted out by the sovereign to a more diffuse and insidious form of social surveillance and process of ‘normalisation’. Power, in Weedon’s (1987) interpretation of Foucault is: *a dynamic of control and lack of control between discourses and the subjects, constituted by discourses, who are their agents. Power is exercised within discourses in the ways in which they constitute and govern individual subjects (p. 113)*. Foucault’s focus is upon questions of how some discourses have shaped and created meaning systems that have gained the status and currency of ‘truth’ and dominate how we define and organize both ourselves and our social world, whilst other alternative discourses are marginalised and subjugated, yet potentially ‘offer’ sites where hegemonic practices can be contested, challenged, and ‘resisted’. He has looked specifically at the social construction of madness, punishment, and sexuality.

Foucault developed the concept of the ‘discursive field’ as part of his attempt to understand the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power. Discursive fields, such as the law or the family, contain several competing and contradictory discourses with varying degrees of power to give meaning to and organize social institutions and processes. They also ‘offer’ a range of modes of subjectivity (Weedon, 1987:35). Foucault argues though, in *The Order of Discourse*, that the ‘will to truth’ is the major system of exclusion that forges discourse and which ‘tends to exert a sort of pressure and something like a power of constraint on other discourses’, (1970, cited in Shapiro 1984:113-4). Thus, there are both discourses that constrain the production of knowledge, dissent, and difference and some that enable ‘new’ knowledges and difference(s).

## CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse through the instrumentality of semiotics, “predominantly enquires into the ways through which meaning is created rather than simply investigating what it is, in the belief that meaning is

not obviously stated, it often exists latently and waits to be disclosed, analysed, and read. This study therefore focuses on the analysis of pictorials elicited from a crisis, from a purely linguistic perspective". (Ebim 2019:5). CDA therefore "systematically explores often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles overpower' (Fairclough 1995: 132). This means that texts, language, communication should always be considered in their social context, they both shape and are informed by wider processes within society. This implies that texts do not merely passively report upon the world, but they imbue it with meaning, fabricate it, shape perspectives, and call the world into being. The broad term discourse can be employed in these circumstances as it refers to the various ways in which communication between people is achieved. Discourse can be considered as an 'active relation to reality' (Fairclough 1992:41). Fairclough (2003:26) has delineated three characteristics of discourse which describe its operation within social life, as 'part of the action.' These are:

- A. Genres (ways of acting)
- B. Discourses (ways of representing)
- C. Styles (ways of being)

The way in which interlocutors are able to manipulate and frame discourse is termed 'Genres'. Instances of genres are church sermons, interviews and political speeches. The significance of Genres is that they provide a framework for an audience to comprehend discourse, though evidently due to this quality, 'genres' can be the locus of power, domination, and resistance. 'Discourses/representation' is crucial in assessing the means by which apparently similar aspects of the world can be appreciated and understood from different perspectives or positions. Finally, 'styles' are the ways in which discourse is used to constitute a sense of being and identity, how identification is located through the application and manner of particular discourses.

Ebim (2021) opines that "Critical Discourse Analysis which focuses on power and ideological projections...is relevant in its socio-political concern to reveal inequalities of power, while its standard approach to textual analysis is interested in the details of texts such as the socio-political and cultural functions of discourse capable of determining other layers of meaning. CDA, therefore, is a veritable linguistic tool for studying texts such as Achebe's TFA, to reveal the inequalities expressed in the narrative processes as deployed in the no"

On the other hand, "Discourse" is a means of *being* and *doing* and the way this specific practice is understood and interpreted is demonstrative of a further three analytical elements of study: production, form, and reception. The structure and relationship of these three and their interplay through political and cultural concerns develop the myriad of social effects of discourse (Fairclough 2003:11). This social effect is dependent upon the audience accessing, comprehending, using, and resisting this discourse.

Within society certain discourses are more powerful than others. This is not to deny the power of agency within the reception of discourse, rather it reveals the subtle means by which agents make themselves into subjects through discursive features. An obvious example would be the government or legal codes which prescribe the boundaries of operation in everyday life. There are however more subtle domineering discourses which function to maintain perceptions and attitudes. These may operate on a subtle level; van Dijk (1991) for instance examined the racist discourses which operated within the British press. By practising certain modes of exclusionary discourse, particularly the use of pronouns, 'we', 'us', 'them', newspapers in Britain were shown to participate and propagate in a discourse of a dominating, white, overwhelming middle-class Britain.

Critical discourse analysis therefore examines the form, structure, and content of discourse, from the grammar and wording employed in its creation to its reception and interpretation by a wider audience. The employment of verbs, pronouns and nouns within discourse is as much part of this analysis as the assessment of the content and tone of the discourse. The methodology facilitates an assessment based upon more than simple quotations but upon what the discourse is doing and what it is being asked to do in its production, dissemination, and consumption.

**DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

The data presented for analysis in this segment of the paper is elicited from three media platforms. The media outfits are Aljazeera, BBC, and The Guardian Newspaper. All the three media outlets were utilized through their online versions. The data were generated, codified, and labeled before being subjected to the analysis as presented below. The data is presented in a tabular form with the leading headline of the labeled as DATUM 00 whereas, the reactions to the news item are labeled as DATUM 1 to the last numbering in that order.

**TABLE 1 DATA FROM ALJAZEERA**

S/No	Data	Linguistic Interpretation	Linguistic Implication
DATUM 00	The Nigerian government announced the suspension of Twitter's operations in the country indefinitely over "the persistent use of the platform for activities that we capable of undermining Nigeria's corporate existence".	The ban as announced by the Nigerian federal government is "indefinite" as a result of "abuse" and "misuse" of the	A total rejection of the platform by a privileged few who find themselves on the corridors of power.

		platform	
<b>DATUM 1</b>	'Fisayo Soyombo, freelance investigative journalist and ex-editor of The Cable, labelled the government's decision "shameful", while human rights lawyer Clement Nwankwo said the "unconstitutional" move should be "immediately reversed".	Fisayo soyombo views the ban from a moral point of view whereas the lawyer views it from the periscope of law.	An act of immorality and un-constitutionalism.
<b>DATUM 2</b>	'Gbenga Sesan, executive director of Paradigm Initiative, a pan-African social enterprise working on digital inclusion and digital rights, said the move "will only end in disgrace" and urged users to download a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to retain access.	For Gbenga Sesan it is a total disgrace and an avenue for an alternative platform	An exploration of possible alternatives in the face of tyranny,
<b>DATUM 3</b>	Blogger and political commentator Japheth Omojuwa dubbed the "disaster" as coming from the "Federal Ministry of Emotional & Irrational Reactions".	Here the government is described as emotional and unreasonable.	The blogger and political commentator can be described as "frustrated" due to the policy hence the use of "unprintable" linguistic items.
<b>DATUM 4</b>	Meanwhile, Amnesty International's Nigeria branch condemned the move and called on authorities to "immediately reverse the unlawful suspension and other plans to gag the media, repress the civic space, and undermine Nigerians' human rights".	Amnesty international calls its "gagging" an attempt to cajole the media and demands an immediate reversal of the policy.	The focus here is on "human rights" that would be undermined as a result of the policy. This is a total rejection of the policy
<b>DATUM 5</b>	"I thought it [Twitter's suspension] was a joke," said 24-year-old Alumona, who now uses Twitter through a VPN. "I didn't expect the government to go so low. Twitter is like my newspaper. Whenever I want to check what's happening in the country, I refresh my timeline. Sadly, when I woke up on Saturday, my homepage wasn't loading."	The 24-year-old has already found another avenue of carrying out his internet business. For this user, the policy was thought to be a joke and the action of government is condescending.	The age here is also reflective of ignorance; the attempt to refresh the page was a denial of the implementation of the policy.
<b>DATUM 6</b>	Joachim MacEbong, a senior analyst at Lagos-based political-risk analysis firm SBM Intelligence. told Al Jazeera. "They are showing that they are prepared to clamp down on democratic freedom. The next two years are going to be difficult."	A demonstration of political tyranny and a prediction of doomsday in the coming two years.	This again is media gagging and a total denial of the policy.
<b>DATUM 7</b>	Twitter's decision to choose Ghana over Nigeria was evident in a statement where the organization described Ghana "as a champion for democracy, a supporter of free speech, online freedom, and the Open Internet". "It's not even been two months that Twitter opened its Ghanaian headquarters and they have been proven right," said MacEbong. "This ban will keep investors away. Global tech companies that want to have a presence in Africa are likely to look at a place like Ghana rather than a place	This is a destruction of the economy. The relocation to a neighboring country, Ghana which is described  "As a champion for democracy, a supporter of free	An economic view of the policy and an endorsement of Ghana as the amalgam of African democracy.

	like Nigeria.”	speech, online freedom, and the Open Internet” is a slap on the Nigerian government.	
<b>DATUM 8</b>	Gbenga Sesan, “the suspension of Twitter sends the wrong signal to foreign investors, small businesses using Twitter as a source of livelihood in Nigeria will be affected. “Businesses in Nigeria use digital media to reach customers, expose their brands and communicate with various stakeholders.	The policy is an act of economic sabotage, an indication of primitivity and a return to the stone age.	A total rejection of the policy, an endorsement of primitivity and a reversal of the democratic gains so far.

**DISCUSSION**

Table 1 above summarizes everything about the ban of twitter in Nigeria as reported in Aljazeera news outlet. DATUM 00 captures the main point of the news, inclusive of the lead, the headline and the first sentence of the reportage whereas the other items are representative of the responses to the news. DATUM 00 says “The Nigerian government announced the suspension of Twitter’s operations in the country indefinitely over “the persistent use of the platform for activities that we capable of undermining Nigeria’s corporate existence”. The semanticity and lexical choices adopted by the government representative in announcing the ban such as “indefinite” because of “abuse” and “misuse” of the platform portray a total rejection of the platform by a privileged few who find themselves on the corridors of power. The response of Fisayo soyombo in DATUM 1 is symbolic of a point of view whereas the lawyer views it from the periscope of law, as an act of immorality and un-constitutionalism. In DATUM 2 For Gbenga Sesan the ban is a total disgrace and an avenue for an alternative platform, symbolising an exploration of possible alternatives in the face of tyranny. In DATUM 3, the government is emotional and unreasonable. The blogger and political commentator can be described as “frustrated” due to the policy proscribing the use of twitter. The respondent makes use of “unprintable” linguistic items. The Amnesty international in DATUM 4 describes the ban

as form of media “gagging” as an attempt to cajole the media and demands an immediate reversal of the policy. This respondent views the ban from the perspective of “human rights violation”. in DATUM 5 a 24-year-old Nigerian (twitter user) is said to have found another avenue of carrying out his internet business. For this user, the policy was thought to be a joke and the action of government is condescending. The age here is also reflective of ignorance; the attempt to refresh the page was a denial of the implementation of the policy. DATUM 6 describes the policy as a clear demonstration of political tyranny and a prediction of doomsday in the coming two years of the life of the Buhari administration; describing the policy as a form of “media gagging”. Again, the respondent totally rejects it and calls for a reversal. The respondent in DATUM 7 views the policy as more or less a destruction of the economy; hence the “relocation of twitter to a neighbouring west African country, Ghana while describing Ghana as “a champion for democracy, a supporter of free speech, online freedom, and the Open Internet” is a slap on the Nigerian government. An economic view of the policy and an endorsement of Ghana as the amalgam of African democracy. Lastly, in DATUM 8 the policy is described as “an act of economic sabotage, an indication of primitivity and a return to the stone age”. With the above deployment of linguistic resources, the respondent calls for a total rejection of the policy, describing it as “endorsement of primitivity and a reversal of the democratic gains so far”.

**TABLE 2 DATA FROM BBC**

S/No	Data	Linguistic Interpretation	Linguistic Implication
<b>DATUM 00</b>	Nigeria's Twitter ban: The people risking arrest to tweet: <b>Many Nigerians have been continuing to tweet in defiance of government threats to arrest and prosecute anyone violating the ban it imposed on Twitter.</b> They are using Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to bypass the ban after telecommunications companies heeded the government's directive and blocked the micro-blogging site.	This a threat to the people. For those who chose the alternate platform, the government had already started monitoring them.	A tool aimed at gagging the media without any constitutional backing.
<b>DATUM 1</b>	"Guess what? The only people who have been muted right now appear to be the government themselves. Yes, some businesses are not tweeting because clearly, they do not want to be punished, but the citizens they were trying to proscribe are still tweeting," he told the BBC. The ban was announced on Friday after the government alleged that the	The policy is described as a tool against the government. This is because younger people can always find a way around their problem.	Most people in government are analogue hence their inability to navigate the delicate internet routes.

	micro-blogging site was being used to undermine "Nigeria's corporate existence" through the spreading of fake news that have "violent consequences".		
<b>DATUM 2</b>	It drew an angry reaction from many Nigerians and Western powers who saw it as a threat to civil liberties, but the government was unrepentant, leaving Twitter officially blocked in Africa's most populous state. So, can you be arrested for tweeting in Nigeria? Some legal experts say they are unaware of any law which makes it illegal to tweet, but others say police can arrest alleged violators because of the sweeping powers given to them under national security legislation.	Not only Nigerians but also world powers were angry at the "primitive" policy. Even at the time of the enactment of the policy, there was no law in the country to back up the illegal policy of the government.	The constitutionality of the policy is suspect. The questionable nature of its deployment and implementation is also suspect. The policy seems to project the government as an unlawful one.
<b>DATUM 3</b>	Police in Nigeria have been repeatedly accused of being heavy-handed. For his part, Nigeria's Attorney General Abubakar Malami has been coy, saying people will know what offence they have committed only when they are arraigned in court. The government has not spoken of any arrests, but there are unconfirmed reports of people being stopped and their phones searched for the Twitter app in some parts of Nigeria. Normally, Twitter is the main platform to break news of arrests and to rally public support against security force action.	The policy is described as an empowerment of the already overzealous police force to violate human rights in the country.	The reaction here portrays the country as a lawless one where security operatives are over empowered to carry out illegal functions such as harassment of the people and intimidation.
<b>DATUM 3</b>	Now there are fears that people could be detained without anyone knowing. To make things worse, the courts have been crippled by a workers' strike so people may languish in police cells for a long time. The strike also makes it difficult for the Nigeria Bar Association - the body representing the legal profession - to go to court in a bid to reverse the ban. It has described the ban as lacking legal basis and aimed at depriving Nigerians of their right to freedom of expression.	Again, illegal detention rears its ugly head as one of the fallouts of the policy. The policy came at a time that workers were on strike making it impossible for the lawyers to challenge it in court.	As unconstitutional as the policy seems, the malfunctioning government machineries makes it impossible for judicial interpretation.
<b>DATUM 4</b>	However, a group of human rights organizations says it has <b>filed a case with a West African regional court describing the ban as "unlawful"</b> . Are prominent people defying the ban? Yes, especially in the opposition - such as Oyo state Governor Seyi Makinde, who belongs to the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and has been a vocal critic of the ban. However, Kaduna state governor and President Buhari's right-hand man, Nasir El-Rufai on Monday retweeted a Russian publication that praised Nigeria's suspension of Twitter. Reputable Nigerian newspapers like The Punch, Daily Trust, and The Guardian, all of which have online versions, have also continued to tweet. This is probably because the internet is not regulated in Nigeria, so the newspapers have no government agency watching over them.	The policy got politicized even as the opposition political party in the country openly criticized it. A group of lawyers also approached the courts for judicial interpretation even as the president and the Kaduna state government who is described as "the president's right-hand man" tweeted on the banned platform.	This is a justification for those who describe the policy as "unconstitutional" and "unlawful". A government that bans a product with a policy is seen breaking its own law. It's the height of an irony in a democratic setting.
<b>DATUM 5</b>	The government has been accused of curbing media freedom. In contrast, radio and television stations have a regulator, the National Broadcasting Commission, which warned them that failure to deactivate their Twitter accounts would be viewed as an unpatriotic act. It also says that journalists should not use Twitter to gather information.	Media gagging consistently occurs in this reportage.	The lack of a regulatory body to take charge of the social media at the time and the government policy of clamping down on the

	Some leading radio stations like Radio Now FM in Lagos and Daar Communications are complying with the directive but say they will challenge it. The ban has also affected the BBC which has dozens of journalists in Nigeria. "BBC journalists in Nigeria are continuing to reach audiences on Twitter with news stories published via the BBC Africa and BBC World Twitter accounts," the UK-headquartered broadcaster said in a statement.		users of twitter is an act of lawlessness from a sitting government.
<b>DATUM 6</b>	Many pastors of Nigeria's mega-churches - like The Redeemed Christian Church of God and the Deeper Life Bible Church - have also been tweeting, though it is unclear whether they are doing it from Nigeria or from their offices abroad. "The Redeemed Christian Church of God is domiciled in more than 170 Nations & Territories. The tweets here are in accordance to Article 19 of the UN universal declaration of Human Rights," the church's head Pastor Enoch Adeboye said in a <b>pinned tweet</b> on Monday.	This implies that twitter as it was used in Nigeria prior to it being banned, was also for sermonic businesses. Nigeria is a multireligious society and almost all the pastors are internet savvy. The ban by the federal government therefore affected church activities as exemplified in the media report.	The ban is not only an infraction on the human rights of the Nigerian users of the app but also on the modus operandi of church organizations.
<b>DATUM 7</b>	<b>NetBlocks, a global internet monitor</b> , says Nigeria is losing about \$250,000 (£176,000) each hour the ban is in place and analysts say this ban may further weaken the economy and increase the already high unemployment levels for young people. Twitter is popular with many Nigerians, the platform has been used to raise funds for the sick, summon ambulances, help locate missing people and has been a source of livelihood for many of the country's young people. It has also been a powerful mobilizing tool, with activists using it to rally support during last year's protests against police brutality under the hashtag #EndSars, which gained global attention and were backed by <b>superstars such as Rihanna, Kanye West and boxer Anthony Joshua</b> . Why was the ban imposed? Those #EndSARS protests certainly did not endear Twitter to the Nigerian authorities. Twitter boss Jack Dorsey encouraged donations to one of the leading group of protests organizers and a special emoji created for the demonstrations went viral.	Economically, the ban of twitter has adverse effects on the nation's economy.	The implication is that the ban can further weaken the already fragile economy of Nigeria. Those in authority only consider the security implication of the "mis-use" of the app without exploring the economic effect of the policy.

## DISCUSSION

Table 2 above contains news report from the BBC website on the policy of twitter ban in Nigeria. Unlike the Aljazeera news which captures a lot of internet users' reactions, the BBC news is more of an analysis of the policy and its effects on the economy of the nation, Nigeria. DATUM 00 captures the main headline, the lead and the first sentence of the news report. It succinctly says "Nigeria's Twitter ban: The people risking arrest to tweet: Many Nigerians have been continuing to tweet in defiance of government threats to arrest and prosecute anyone violating the ban it imposed on Twitter.

That users resorted to the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) to bypass the ban after telecommunications companies heeded the

government's directive and blocked the micro-blogging site" is clearly a threat to the people especially those who chose the alternate platform, the government had already started monitoring them. That policy is rather described as a tool aimed at gagging the media without any constitutional backing. In DATUM 1 the policy is described as a tool against the government. This is because younger people can always find a way around their problem. Most people in government are described as analogue hence their inability to navigate the delicate internet routes. In DATUM 2 we notice that not only Nigerians but also world powers were angry at the "primitive" policy. Even at the time of the enactment of the policy, there was no law in the country to back up the illegal policy of the government. The constitutionality of the policy is suspect. The questionable nature of its deployment and implementation is also suspect. The policy seems to project the government as an



unlawful one because even government were caught using twitter after its purported ban. In DATUM 3 the policy is described as an empowerment of the already overzealous police force to violate human rights in the country. The reaction here portrays the country as a lawless one where security operatives are over empowered to carry out illegal functions such as harassment of the people and intimidation. DATUM 4 again portrays the policy as an enhancement of illegal detention activity, a situation which rears its ugly head as one of the fallouts of the policy coming at a time that workers were on strike making it impossible for the lawyers to challenge it in court. As unconstitutional as the policy seems, the malfunctioning government machineries makes it impossible for judicial interpretation. Whereas in DATUM 5 the policy got politicized even as the opposition political party in the country openly criticized it. A group of lawyers also approached the courts for judicial interpretation even as the president and the Kaduna state government who is described as “the president’s right-hand man” tweeted on the banned platform. This is a justification for those who describe the policy as “unconstitutional” and “unlawful”. A government that bans a product with a policy is seen

breaking its own law. It’s the height of an irony in a democratic setting. In DATUM 6 we again see media gagging consistently occurring in this reportage. The lack of a regulatory body to take charge of the social media at the time and the government policy of clamping down on the users of twitter is an act of lawlessness from a sitting government is revealed. DATUM 7 implies that twitter as it was used in Nigeria prior to it being banned, was also for sermonic businesses. Nigeria is a multireligious society and almost all the pastors are internet savvy. The ban by the federal government therefore affected church activities as exemplified in the media report. The ban is not only an infraction on the human rights of the Nigerian users of the app but also on the modus operandi of church organizations. DATUM 8 signifies the economic implication of the policy, here the ban of twitter has adverse effects on the nation’s economy. The implication is that the ban can further weaken the already fragile economy of Nigeria. Those in authority only consider the security implication of the “mis-use” of the app without exploring the economic effect of the policy.

**DATA FROM THE GAURDIAN NEWSPAPER-NIGERIA**

S/No	Data	Linguistic Interpretation	Linguistic Implication
<b>DATUM 00</b>	<b>Nigerians react to FG suspension of Twitter.</b> Nigerians on Twitter are reacting to the indefinite suspension of Twitter operations in the country. Nigeria’s information and culture minister Lai Mohammed announced Twitter’s suspension in a statement by his media aide Segun Adeyemi. The statement announcing Twitter’s ban was also published on Twitter via Nigeria’s Ministry of Information and Culture’s handle.	The irony of the ban of twitter in Nigeria is that the ban itself was announced on the twitter handle of the minister of information. More so, Nigerians immediately took to their own handles to express their displeasure with the policy.	The announcement of the ban is highly ironical. The displeasure that greeted the policy is an endorsement of the app in the country and the non-consultative attitude of the government without recourse to the implications of the policy.
<b>DATUM 1</b>	Banning @Twitter violates S. 22 & 39 of the 1999 Constitution. Twitter seems to be the only medium through which we hold the reckless regime of Buhari responsible. We will resist the attempts to ban Twitter in Nigeria. — FESTUS OGUN (@mrfestusogun) June 4, 2021	This twitter user tries to justify the government policy through his use of language. Lexical items such as “irresponsible” regime clearly demonstrates the use of uncoached language by users of the app.	The choice of language is implicative of a non-regulated app where linguistic choices are “carelessly deployed.
<b>DATUM 2</b>	Does President Buhari and the federal government know how much young Nigerians make on social media platforms like Twitter daily? Does Lai Mohammed know the number of jobs being sustained by Twitter in Nigeria ? What is wrong with these people? — Dr. Dípò Awójídé,	Rhetorically, this user enquires to know if the government is aware of the economic implications of the	This exposes the plight of most unemployed Nigerians who rely on the app for their sustenance.

	FHEA (@OgbeniDipo) June 4, 2021	policy.	
<b>DATUM 3</b>	If they want us to take this Twitter in Nigeria suspension serious, Buhari, Bashir, Femi Adesina, Lai Mohammed, and the rest of the gang should first deactivate their account, then we will know that they mean business. — Dr PamPam   Omo Iya Ologi (@UnclePamilerin) June 4, 2021	For the fact that those who banned the use of the app did not deactivate their own account is worrisome.	This implies a momentary suspension because the president and his ministers did not deactivate their own accounts before announcing the ban. The choice of words by this user is also worrisome, without recourse to the authorities being addressed.
<b>DATUM 4</b>	The banning of Twitter in Nigeria will send a message to the tech ecosystem in Silicon Valley. This might also affect the “friendly place to do business” indices. — ‘Tunde Omotoye (@TundeTASH) June 4, 2021	For this user, the ban exposes the primitivity of the Nigerian government.	How it relates to the “ecosystem” is a tragic reflection of destruction by an insensitive government.
<b>DATUM 5</b>	Let me understand; So, for removing a tweet that threatened genocide against a people, the Buhari’s govt decided to suspend the operations of @Twitter in Nigeria? So, the President isn’t sorry about the unfortunate tweet? — Henry Shield (@henryshield) June 4, 2021	This user expects the president to reflect on his own tweet that created the uproar leading to the removal of the president’s text rather than ban the use of the app.	The same level of insubordination expressed by the government as a reason the ban is reflected in this tweet. The deployment of linguistic items as found here can cause disaffection in the government circles.
<b>DATUM 6</b>	If Nigerians don’t come out in millions and put a stop to all this madness in our society, we will only have ourselves to blame. Banning Twitter in Nigeria should be a wakeup call to every one of us. We can’t keep on living like slaves in our country in 2021. Enough is Enough— OLUOMO OF DERBY (@Oluomoofderby) June 4, 2021	The app was banned because of the #Endsars protest in the country. Here again this writer is calling for another protest to condemn the policy.	The language is harsh and constitutes a form of provocation.
<b>DATUM 7</b>	As FG has suspended Twitter in Nigeria, the best thing is for Jack to remove verifications from all government officials and suspend all of them because they have been using twitter to make all their announcements since. This drama go sweet with Bigi Tropical and Kulikuli— alman (@NotJustSalmanPR) June 4, 2021	This writer views the policy as a form of blackmail on the part of the same government that uses the same platform to carry out its activities.	The text is a pointer to the repercussion of the policy which deemed to have adverse effects on government administrative functions.
<b>DATUM 8</b>	a social media widely used by Nigerians to exercise their human rights, including their rights to freedom of expression and access to information. #TwitterBan — Amnesty International Nigeria (@AmnestyNigeria) June 4, 2021	A call for reflection on the implication of shutting out the population of the country that makes use of the platform.	This is an outright condemnation of the policy by amnesty international.
<b>DATUM 9</b>	FG quickly held a meeting cos of Twitter but can’t do the same to tackle terrorism in Nigeria? What a shameless govt. — Daniel Regha (@DanielRegha) June 4, 2021	The hast with which the government rushed to hold a	This calls for concern as the policy brings out the government from its shell to

		meeting banning the app is worrisome.	hold a meeting despite its reluctance in doing so in the face of terrorism
<b>DATUM 10</b>	If the Nigerian government have its way, it'll cut out the tongue of every Nigerian. Just because Twitter allows equality for everyone, they are pained and want to suspend Twitter in Nigeria.?? Clowns. — OMO NAIJA (@Cele__Audu) June 4, 2021	This is an expression of disgust with the government.	A reflection of the government attempt to silence the citizenry as metaphorically represented in the "cutting of tongue" of everyone.
<b>DATUM 11</b>	Now I see why Jack chose to place the Headquarter in Ghana instead of Nigeria, A country where the leaders don't practice democracy? Jack successfully dodged a bullet. — Shola (@thedopejayy) June 4, 2021	This is a justification of the decision of the owner of the app to relocate its headquarters to Ghana a neighbouring west African country.	The expression "dodging of a bullet" is a metaphoric representation of a country whose policies are aimed at destroying the economy and small businesses.
<b>DATUM 12</b>	Hopefully, this isn't my last tweet. #Smile— Atiku Abubakar (@atiku) June 4, 2021	The former vice president of Nigeria ironically hopes that he also will not be shut out of the internet with the government policy.	A symbol of dejection, neglect of the highly placed and a clamp down on the citizenry.
<b>DATUM 13</b>	What do you expect in a country that has a primitive mind like Lai Mohammed as the Minister of Information. When Rwanda has Paula Ingabire, a 38-year-old young woman as its Minister of ICT and Innovation. pic.twitter.com/DXRiedY2XW— Ayemojubar (@ayemojubar) June 4, 2021	This tweet questions the age and intelligent quotient of African leaders.	The lack computer knowledge among African leaders is called to question because even the minister of information is hardly well informed.

## DISCUSSION

The data in table 3 as presented above and as captured in this analysis is from the Guardian newspaper in Nigeria. DATUM 00 captures the major item in the news as can be seen here: "Nigerians react to FG suspension of Twitter. Nigerians on Twitter are reacting to the indefinite suspension of Twitter operations in the country. Nigeria's information and culture minister Lai Mohammed announced Twitter's suspension in a statement by his media aide Segun Adeyemi". It is ironical and quite unfortunate that the statement announcing Twitter's ban was also published on Twitter via Nigeria's Ministry of Information and Culture's twitter handle. The irony of the ban of twitter in Nigeria is that the ban itself was announced on the twitter handle of the minister of information. More so, Nigerians immediately took to their own handles to express their displeasure with the policy. The announcement of the ban is highly ironical. The displeasure that greeted the policy is an endorsement of the app in the country and the non-consultative attitude of the government without recourse to the implications of the policy. In DATUM 1 the twitter user tries to justify the government policy through his use of language. Lexical

items such as "irresponsible" regime clearly demonstrates the use of uncoached language by users of the app. The choice of language is implicative of a non-regulated app where linguistic choices are "carelessly deployed. DATUM 2 Rhetorically, this user enquires to know if the government is aware of the economic implications of the policy. This exposes the plight of most unemployed Nigerians who rely on the app for their sustenance. This is reflected in DATUM 3 for the fact that those who banned the use of the app did not deactivate their own account is worrisome. This implies a momentary suspension since the president and his ministers did not deactivate their own accounts before announcing the ban. The choice of words by this user is also worrisome, without recourse to the authorities being addressed. The respondent in DATUM 4 says the ban exposes the primitivity of the Nigerian government. How it relates to the "ecosystem" is a tragic reflection of destruction by an insensitive government. In DATUM 5 this user expects the president to reflect on his own tweet that created the uproar leading to the removal of the president's text rather than ban the use of the app. The same level of insubordination expressed by the government as a reason for the ban is reflected in this tweet. The deployment of linguistic items as found here can cause disaffection in the government circles. In DATUM 6 the app was banned

because of the #Endsars protest in the country. Here again this writer is calling for another protest to condemn the policy. The language is harsh and constitutes a form of provocation. However, the respondent in DATUM 7 views the policy as a form of blackmail on the part of the same government that uses the same platform to carry out its activities. The text is a pointer to the repercussion of the policy which deemed to have adverse effects on government administrative functions. DATUM 8 signifies a call for reflection on the implication of shutting out the population of the country that makes use of the platform. This is an outright condemnation of the policy by amnesty international. DATUM 9 presents the hast with which the government rushed to hold a meeting banning the app as worrisome. This calls for concern as the policy brings out the government from its shell to hold a meeting despite its reluctance in doing so in the face of terrorism. DATUM 10 is an expression of disgust with the government; a reflection of the government attempt to silence the citizenry as metaphorically represented in the “cutting of tongue” of everyone. Again DATUM 11 reveals a justification of the decision of the owner of the app to relocate its headquarters to Ghana a neighbouring west African country. The expression “dodging of a bullet” is a metaphoric representation of a country whose policies are aimed at destroying the economy and small businesses. The effect of the policy is also on the reaction of the political class. For instance, DATUM 12 shows the former vice president of Nigeria ironically hoping that he also will not be shut out of the internet with the government policy. A symbol of dejection, neglect of the highly placed and a clamp down on the citizenry. Lastly, the tweet in DATUM 13 questions the age and intelligent quotient of African leaders. They are portrayed as lacking computer knowledge because even the minister of information is described as someone who is hardly well informed in computer knowledge.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The semanticity and lexical choices adopted by the government representative in announcing the ban such as “indefinite” because of “abuse” and “misuse” of the platform portray a total rejection of the platform by a privileged few who find themselves on the corridors of power. All the respondents describe the ban as an act of immorality and un-constitutionalism. The semblance in the reactions of the respondents is what Okune (2006) describes as “no text is totally independent of the influence of other texts. Respondents therefore made use of “unprintable” linguistic items while espousing it as infringement on their “human rights violation”. The policy is also described as “an act of economic sabotage, an indication of primitivity and a return to the stone age”. With this deployment of linguistic resources, the respondent calls for a total rejection of the policy, describing it as “endorsement of primitivity and a reversal of the democratic gains so far”. The policy is rather described as a tool aimed at gagging the media without any constitutional backing. The constitutionality of the policy is suspect. The questionable nature of its deployment and implementation is also suspect. The policy seems to project the government as an unlawful one because even government were caught using twitter after its purported ban. Twitter as it was used in Nigeria prior to its ban, was also for sermonic businesses.

Nigeria is a multireligious society and almost all the pastors are internet savvy. The ban by therefore affected church activities as exemplified in the media report. The ban is not only an infraction on the human rights of the Nigerian users of the app but also on the modus operandi of church organizations which is portrayed as having adverse effects on the economy of the country. It shows the irony with which Nigerian authorities operate with a non-consultative attitude without recourse to the implications of their actions.

The lexical items deployed by the respondents in rejection of the policy show the level of anger and animosity in the minds of the citizens. That the president and his ministers did not deactivate their own accounts before announcing the ban is a demonstration of the level of lawlessness among the ruling class. the hast with which the government rushed to hold a meeting banning the app calls for concern as the policy brings out the government from its shell to hold a meeting despite its reluctance in doing so in the face of terrorism and insecurity. That the owners of the app relocated to Ghana portrays Nigeria as a hostile environment for business transactions. This is reflected in “dodging of a bullet” being a metaphoric representation of a country whose policies are aimed at destroying the economy and small businesses.

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