

## ECONOMY OF NEWS AND INFORMATION ACCESS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examined the economic decisions and activities that influence communication in its varied forms and processes. Employing causal exploratory research design, while using literature review as a research instrument; the paper analysed the various economic factors impacting communication and outlined benefits that are derivable as the two continued in the mutually symbiotic relationship. It looked at the Information Age and how the place of the economy continues to rise due to globalization and industrialization of communication, socio-cultural, political and security exigencies. The transactional nature of human interaction on several fronts which has made communication key was also analysed. It examined the diverse economic situations that have a direct or indirect impact on communication—the process, channels, infrastructure, ownership and policies etc; and technological advancements that plays greater role in this direction. Hence, the article made the following recommendations, that: the authority should free the media space and allow media pluralism to flourish; efforts at the increment and spread of Internet broadband and infrastructure should be intensified; on the Brown envelope syndrome; media outlets especially in developing societies need to take as important the welfare of journalists; citizens should be motivated to acquire digital communication and digital literacy skills; journalists should engage in investigative journalism to deter the practice of inducement to acquire information.*

**Keywords: Economy, Access, Media, Communication, Digitization.**

### **Introduction**

Humans over time have developed their communication process to the extent that no other species communicates and interacts with the complexity and depth that we do—and the ability to communicate at an advanced level is partly what set human beings apart from the rest of the animal species.

Perhaps, this was why communication scholar, Prof. Olatunji Dare, famously disproved Aristotle's earlier proposition that: "man is by nature a political animal", but rather declaring that: "Communication is the fundamental social process and man in society is not basically a political animal as Aristotle held but a communicating animal..." (Oloyede, 2008). Olatunji reiterated that communication lies in the heart of everything man does—from politics to economy, religion, social interaction etc.

From cave paintings, stone markings, the written word to smoke and fire signals and illuminated manuscripts; humans have developed intricate means to express themselves. But the 20th and 21st centuries have been the era that revolutionized how humans communicate — catapulting man's efforts to share and interact by hundreds of thousands of years in the making; leapfrogging the process with astonishing speed. As it concerns communication; the Internet has come to be man's greatest ally in this age.

Communication for man has always been transactional given in exchange for something — the need to constantly share and receive. Economic activity is hardly said to have been transacted or concluded in the absence of communication — the transaction in itself is a combination of communication processes. As man grow and develop his society and economy, so too do his communication skills, processes and situations increases. And as societies make laws and enact legal provisions to regulate their engagements, one of the fundamental instruments which make positive living possible are the various legislations on the need for people to exercise the freedom to acquire, hold and share information. Several states' laws, regional and international legal instruments made provisions for this protection. On the whole, Communication is a social interaction performed through messages which could be formally delineated as the process of exchange of ideas, facts or symbols between people. Communication, according to Ors (2003, citing Baker, 1990), is a process of establishing a bidirectional mutual relationship realized to reach a desired target or result.

Communication is important to the point that nations, organizations, institutions etc, have whole documents which spell out communication policies. It is also central to government policy drive, that nations put up various gate keeping points to control how information flows within their borders and how citizens interact with the rest of the world. The interactive media has, however, watered down some of these restraints. Even in democratic societies, the effort by the authority to control communication is subtle but occasionally blows to the open.

Meanwhile, economic influence on communication can take varied forms. The activities, processes and policies which control national politics and economy have the biggest influence on the mode, ownership, control, regulation and direction of communication in any given society. In this direction, nations with liberal and democratic tendencies are positioned often to have a communication atmosphere that is free and fair. This is frequently manifested in how the press in such a milieu operates, including ownership, access to information, freedom of expression, media literacy, affirmative action, etc.

As Doyle (2002) agreed, within any free-market economy, the level of resources available for the provision of media will be constrained principally by the size and wealth of that economy, and the propensity of its inhabitants to consume media content. For instance, countries such

as the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Spain etc have more financial muscles to "support the diversity of output and have the ability to keep more media companies in the market as they are there to make a profit".

### **Mediatization: The Reverse Influence**

Though the economy influences communications; another dimension—mediatization or medialization is the reverse role in the process of communication impacting the economy. This is important to be considered on account that as the economy impacts communication so too is concomitant feedback in the process. The mediatization process involves the mass media influencing other sectors of society such as politics, business, culture, entertainment, sport, religion, education, etc (Couldry & Hepp, 2013). The process is often understood as a change or a trend, similar to globalization and modernization—here, the mass media is subsumed to an increasing degree into societal sectors and actors such as political players, opinion leaders, business organizations, civil society organizations etc. These other entities or sectors are mandated on account of the importance of mass media to adapt their communication mode or form to suits the needs and preferences of the media. This means people or organizations who need to use the media to reach a larger audience would have to adapt and make their messages and communication style attractive to the press (Hepp et al, 2015).

### **Digitization, Convergence and New Technologies**

In the era of digitization, communication and data transmission from one point to the other with the aid of new technologies has been directly linked to a nation's economy. For instance, the greater digitization a nation can assume, the greater its economic advancement as displayed in an increased GDP per capita, or gross domestic product per person. A 2018 Economic Impact of Digital report in the United States asserts that a 10% increase in digital communication via improved internet penetration can lead to a 0.9-1.5% point increase in GDP in the United States and the European Union (Toader et al., 2018).

Digitization has in many ways extended the boundaries of communication via radio and television transmission with new technologies that have reinvented and revolutionized mobile telephony, providing computer software and programming that have heralded new frontiers, pushing the limits of communication than any other innovation have ever done in human history. Digitization has also been instrumental to the improvement in digital advertising, video gaming, podcasting, blogging etc.

Media convergence on the other hand involves the interconnection of information and communications technologies, computer networks, and media content. The phenomena are the "three C's"—content, computing and communication. Moreover, media convergence which has five major elements—(technological, industrial, social, textual, and political) is a direct result of the digitization of media content and the popularity the Internet has assumed. Media convergence transforms established industries, services, and work practices and enables entirely new forms of content to emerge (Flew, 2017).

Digital convergence which is also known as technological convergence is the new phenomenon where inherently unrelated technologies become closely integrated and unified

as they develop and advance in data gathering, processing and transmission procedure. The technological dimension of convergence is mostly appreciated by looking at digital devices, the worldwide web, smart watches, telephones, smart televisions, computers, and social media platforms which began as separate and mostly unrelated technologies, but have now assembled diversely and interconnected as parts of telecommunication and mass media, accompanied with common elements of digital electronics and software: giving billions of people access to these media content that was at a time available on only specific media such as print media and broadcast channels. According to Roco (2002), convergence is a deep integration of knowledge, tools, and all relevant activities of human activity for a common goal, to allow society to answer new questions, to change the respective or social ecosystem. "Such changes in the respective ecosystem open new trends, pathways, and opportunities in the following divergent phase of the process."

The concentration of media ownership is another level of convergence whereby progressively fewer individuals or organizations have continued to take control of the mass media space. But the Internet is taking away this business practice, as small players with limited resources can now host news websites with similar technical specifications as the big players since the competition has shifted from size to content. Since contemporary research has shown increasing levels of consolidation, what many big media industry players could do to maintain their hold on the marketplace is to buy up the upstarts and firm up the consolidation. Ainger (2001) has however argued that concentration of media ownership is a challenge and not totally an advantage for contemporary media and society.

German journalist and author, Johannes von Dohnanyi, had in a 2003 report published by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media, posited that market concentration among media needed to be closely monitored on account that Horizontal concentration may cause dangers to media pluralism and diversity while arguing that vertical concentration may result in entry barriers for new competitors.

Capitalism and neoliberal deregulation policies, which is a market-driven approach are pushing media concentration—argued Robert McChesney, who said that the concentration of media ownership is an aftermath of the shift to deregulation which in effect removes governmental blockades while allowing for the commercial exploitation of media. McChesney asserted that media firms are motivated to go into mergers to increase profit margins, risk and maintain a competitive edge. He however concluded by pointing out that contrary to the champions of deregulation; instead "cultural trade barriers and regulations harm consumers and domestic support in form of subsidies and hinders countries to develop their own strong media firms. The opening of borders is more beneficial to countries than maintaining protectionist regulations" (McChesney, 2011).

### **Advertising and Communication**

The media has some support mechanisms that assist in its content production and transmission process. Mechanisms such as marketing, advertising, subscription revenues etc are essential as prop up for media organizations. These systems of defence are the media lifeblood and they influence which content is or is not published, and the nature of the

commodity (news/information). This, in essence, is an intriguing interrelation between media content, the audience and advertisers (Havens & Lotz, 2012).

Advertising has a great influence on communication as advertisers who campaigns in the media are important gatekeepers in the communication process. The influence of advertising is enormous as various studies have shown its impact on the consumers of media content. Advertisers set the agenda with the content of their campaigns and at other times, through the influence they exert on editorial content, advertisers determine to a large extent what media content is and what is on the frame of reference of those exposed to the media. Advertising revenues are the lifeblood of every media outfit. Therefore, no media organizations desirous of staying afloat in the media industry and marketing environment take for granted the angle of advertisement.

As opined by Barwise & Picard (2015), the economic mechanisms that influence the mass media are quite complex because commercial mass media are competing in many different markets at the same time. The competition for consumers includes readers, listeners and viewers while competing for advertisers and sponsors. There is also the competition for investors, access to information sources, such as politicians, experts, content providers and access rights, etc. All of these publics eventually have some economic influence one way or the other on media offering and what comes to the audience at the end of the day.

In addition, because the mass media depends on advertising revenue, this is forcing commercial media to target audiences that are the target market of the advertisers. On this account, they would blacklist any controversial content and issues that are not on the agenda of advertisers. This competition for access to politicians and other important news sources can enable these sources to manipulate the media by providing selective information and by favouring those media that give them positive coverage (Napoli & Philip, 2003). Some scholars (Wurff & Cuilenburg, 2001) have argued that commercial mass media are engaged in the competition for a limited supply of advertising revenue and that the more media outfits that advertisement, the lower the cost of advertising, and the less income each company has for covering the fixed costs of producing content. "Free competition in a media market with many competitors can lead to a ruinous competition where the revenue for each company is barely enough to produce content of the lowest possible quality".

### **Globalization and Communication**

The world is now a global village where an event in one corner of the globe triggers effects at several parts. Because of globalization, access to information has increased while the cost of making information available has been brought low. Through globalization, economies of several nations and not just friendly ones have been positively impacted via the exchange of ideas, technology and technical know-how. Communication has equally taken advantage of this exchange in this direction— globalization has increased communication and interaction among countries, especially in terms of the export of new technologies and the knowledge behind them, leading to the developments of these nations in many aspects.

### **Government Policies and Regulation**

Another essential aspect of the media process is government policy and regulation of the media in terms of Media Pluralism which affects how the industry serves society and carries out its role. Regulation of the press is a common phenomenon in every modern society with government—democratic, fascist, socialist or authoritarian. It takes the form of policies, laws or enactment which are put in place by the authority to monitor press activity. Industry players may frown at certain regulatory efforts of the government; but regulation is necessary as it helps to maintain the social order that in its absence, players with more wherewithals are likely to engage in unethical practice or competition, thereby driving out smaller players.

At times, however, regulations could portend a negative signal for access to information. Some overzealous or autocratic government could put spanners in the works of access to free, fair and balanced information through the clampdown on freedom of expression. For instance, the Nigerian government, for the better parts of 2021 banned the operation of the micro-blogging platform Twitter in the country. Between 5 June 2021 and 13 January 2022, Twitter was officially axed in the most populous black nation. The authority claimed the social networking platform was becoming overzealous and that it was giving dissidents unfettered access to spread hate, fake news, and misinformation inciting citizens against the government; when in fact, the government was crossed on account that Twitter had deleted a tweet by Nigeria's president Mr. Muhammadu Buhari (Paquette, 2021).

During the ban where telecommunication service providers blocked access to Twitter, Nigerians were forced to circumvent the directive by using VPN software applications to gain access (Oluocha, 2021). Several nations condemned the ban including Amnesty International, the British, Swedish, France and Canadian diplomatic missions to Nigeria. The United States and the European Union also made a joint statement in solidarity with the Nigerian people's right to freedom of information.

### **Brown Envelope and Journalist's Self-censorship**

Editors, reporters and writers employed by media outfits and engaged in the process of news gathering, production and dissemination are mandated to adhere to laid down editorial code of ethics and guide as prescribed by the journalistic ethical standard. It should not be in doubt that journalists pledge to maintain honesty, accuracy integrity, balance, thoroughness and fairness in the discharge of their reportorial duties. Opinions, it is said, are free—and facts are sacred. However, it is noticed that certain newsmen have allowed the love of lucre to control and determine where, what and when their gate keeping role should lead. The phenomenon of the Brown envelope has had a tremendous negative impact on the trade of propagating the truth—reporting events as they are or have happened as journalists engaged in the act oftentimes self-censor and prevents fair, accurate and balanced reports from getting to the public.

Brown envelope practice happens when newsmen allow monetary inducement make them thwart editorial ethics and write positive or negative stories or kill a story that is favourable or unfavourable to a patron. Its origin is situated in cash inducements hidden in brown envelopes and offered to journalists during media proceedings. The practice is a global phenomenon as other variants are infamously named Envelope journalism, white envelope

journalism, envelopmental journalism, red envelope journalism etc. While brown envelope journalism is the common name in English-speaking countries; other envelope variants are mostly used in Asia, the Philippines, China, Korea, India, and Indonesia. On account of new technologies, innovation and the electronic transfer of monetary inducement to newsmen's bank accounts—the term ATM journalism has recently been added.

The term "brown envelope" was first coined in 1994 in the United Kingdom by The Guardian newspaper, when a political scandal involving the owner of Harrods department store, Mohamed Al-Fayed, who was alleged to have paid a Member of Parliament in the House of Commons to ask a question using a brown-coloured envelope for the transaction (Hencke, 1994; Brislin, 1997; Wombat, 2006).

Eke, (2014) had argued that the Impact of brown envelope journalism creates "a shift in journalism from being a fourth estate to a publicity-seeking outlet is available to the highest bidder; integrity, objectivity and balance are weakened as a result and news is commercialized." With this kind of practice, truth is sacrificed on the altar of greed, while vital information the society is supposed to be availed with so that citizens can make a profitable decision are either presented as disinformation or permanently buried. This weakens journalistic practice, erode audience confidence in the process and permanent damages are at times incurred.

It has been contended that the reason why brown envelope journalism persists may be due to the poor remuneration of journalists, especially in developing economies. For instance, Nwaubani (2015) and Oshunkeye (2016) have maintained that in Nigeria, journalists are owed several months of salary and some media houses do not get workers paid on time therefore, media top bosses sometimes rationalize the failure by asking reporters to use the media brand to earn emolument.

Moreover, the Nigeria Union of Journalists frowns at the practice and have set out in its Code of Conduct for Journalists what is expected when it comes to newsgathering.

### **Cost of Access to Communication**

The question at this point is: what is the cost of access to information? The answer lies in taking a look at the rapidly changing world, where affairs in varied forms and considerations move at a fast pace. Access to information is the reach to which an individual can learn, become informed and acquire data from a source pertinent to his inquiry. Access to information also includes the propensity for the individual to be featured in the media and be able to contribute content via available means provided by the outlet.

The race against time is to meet up and not be left or lag in the information age as the audience navigates cyberspace to solve life's existential issues. To begin with, certain information has always been considered exclusive and are reserved for people with privilege or special access. In addition, access to information has never really been free—a price tag is usually attached. People who read newspapers or magazines or books before and after the advent of the Internet pay. Though tons of information on the Internet can be said to be free and accessible; yet, access to this information either via mobile or computer devices comes with a price. The

first is the cost of those devices and the financial wherewithal of the individual to be able to keep up with the ever-evolving and constantly updated hardware and software that powers them. Again, there is still an obvious digital divide in this era; access to telecommunication networks in some parts of the globe via Internet data subscription is still very high and the spread of fixed broadband subscriptions refers to as fixed subscriptions to high-speed access to the public Internet is very low.

However, Michael Buckland submitted that there are six types of barriers that could serve as blocks to access to information. He identified these as Identification of the source, Cognitive access, Availability of the source, Price of the user, Cost to the provider, and Acceptability.

Buckland said Identification means a suitable source for information need to be identified, which could be indicative of access in terms of documentation, classification, indexing, bibliography and information retrieval. Cognitive Access indicates that the moment physical access to a suitable source has been located, sufficient expertise by the user to understand the information is a necessary condition for successful access. He classified Availability to mean the ability of the inquirer to inspect the source or make a copy of it.

In addition, Price to The User denotes what price the user must pay to access the information—and the cost according to him may include, but is not limited to money. There could also be a 'Cost to The Provider', as "not all expenditure of money and effort is borne by the inquirer, least of all in archive and library services which are traditionally free, in the sense that monetary charges are not usually made." And lastly, Buckland concluded that Acceptability denotes two related issues: "First, inquirers may be reluctant to accept a particular source as credible, regarding it with suspicion as having inadequate "cognitive authority". Second, the inquirer may be unwilling to accept the evidence of the source because it is unwelcome in what it signifies and conflicts with other beliefs, a matter of cognitive dissonance" (Buckland, 1991).

### **Access and Mobile Connectivity**

In the information age, mobile Internet connectivity has an impact on expanding information access. As a necessary condition, there can be no access without Internet access. Worldwide, as an increasing number of users get connected to the mobile Internet, so too do service providers continue to expand infrastructure to meet up with the need. In a GSM Association 2017 report, it was stated that the number of unique mobile cellular subscriptions increased from 3.89 billion in 2012 to 4.83 billion in 2016—covering two-thirds of the world's population and more than 50% of these subscriptions happened in Asia and the Pacific. The report said that the number of subscriptions was predicted to rise to 5.69 billion users in 2020.

### **Zero-rating and Internet Connectivity**

Though the cost of Internet connectivity keeps going down in some parts of the world, a vast number of citizens around the world still have a hard time getting online due to mobile connectivity costs. The answer and cost to telecommunication service providers is the strategy to open up certain aspects of their broadband to enable free access to the Internet—the birth is that of Zero-rating. This is the practice where Internet providers avail users of free connectivity to access specific content or applications for free. As much as this practice has



'alleviated Internet connectivity poverty', critics have described 'the solution' as creating a two-tiered internet.

**Equal Rating:** To address the controversy, Galpaya (2017) has submitted that an alternative model is being experimented with—a concept he described as 'equal rating', "and is being tested in experiments by Mozilla and Orange in Africa." Equal rating is a concept fashioned out to prevent prioritization of one type of content and "zero-rates all content up to a specified data cap." A 2015 study spearheaded by the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) in eight countries found that zero-rated data plans exist in every country. Another study, covering Kenya, Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria suggests that Wikipedia Zero and Facebook's Free Basics were the most commonly zero-rated content (Gillwal, et al, 2016). The mobile browser, Opera, equally has an ongoing programme where users are given free 50 megabytes of daily data. This can be used to access certain pages and applications.

Looking at Africa in the context of Internet penetration, access and infrastructure expansion; a consortium of investors in June of 2021, launched the Africa Coast to Europe (ACE) submarine cable which links France to South Africa and also connects 10 other African countries—including Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana etc. The 17,000km-long cable which is a \$700m investment by the 20-member consortium included the French group Orange, which singlehandedly contributed \$250m.

Writing for The Africa Report, Solène Benhaddou, stated that notwithstanding the positive development of undersea cables connecting the continent; "only 29% of Africans have access to the internet compared to 45% of people in Asia, according to the latest report published by the Alliance for Affordable Internet (A4AI) in December 2020."

The article reported that in 2020, in the European Union (EU), the price of a gigabyte of data was \$3.5 against \$4.1 in 2018. In Africa, however, an average price of the same mobile data was more than \$5 compared to almost \$7 in 2018—a drop of 28% (Benhaddou, 2021).

As regards global outlook, as of January 2021, there were 4.66 billion active internet users worldwide—59.5% of the global population, submitted Johnson (2021) in a Statista report—"of this, 92.6% (4.32 billion) accessed the internet via mobile devices." According to the data, Northern Europe ranks first with a 95% Internet penetration. As of the time of the report, the countries which rank highest with Internet penetration rate were Denmark, the UAE and South Korea. At the bottom of that scale of the spectrum was North Korea which had zero online penetration. Available data observed suggests that Asia, as of 2019, among the global regions, had the largest number of online users, standing at over 2.3 billion—while Europe was ranked second with about 728 million Internet users. Conclusively, the United States, China and India top the list of all countries in terms of Internet penetration.

These statistics according to ITU, the UN Specialized Agency for ICTs, indicates that an estimated 37% of the world's population or 2.9 billion people are yet to have a presence on the Internet. It said a large number of these 'digitally excluded' are burdened by formidable challenges like illiteracy, lack of digital skills, poverty, limited access to electricity and awareness.

In 2021, UNESCO released "The State of Broadband" report, which is a unique worldwide summary of broadband network access and affordability, measuring country-by-country data broadband access against four key targets defined by the 60-member Broadband Commission in 2011. In terms of household broadband penetration, the report stated that "South Korea continues to have the world's highest at over 97%. Switzerland leads the world in fixed broadband subscriptions per capita, at over 40%. By comparison, the US ranks 24th in terms of household broadband penetration, and 20th in the world for fixed broadband subscriptions per capita, just behind Finland and ahead of Japan."

It concluded that in terms of Internet use, about 70 countries now have more than 50% of its population online. The top ten countries for Internet use according to the data are all located in Europe, except for New Zealand which occupied the 8th position and Qatar at the 10th place.

### **Information Source(s) and Monetary Inducement**

Another factor with economic implications for communication is the practice by some media outlets or journalists to financially induce news sources to gather information. The quest to be first to break the news or get exclusive stories have had journalists throw to the trash can journalistic ethos which demands that information should be gathered through ethically acceptable mode, leading to fair, accurate and balanced reportage. Agreed that journalism, to some extent, is capitalistic and returns on investment are expected. Social responsibility values (universal principles of human rights, democracy, justice, equity, peace and international understanding) demands that the public should be properly informed, with newsmen engaging in the studious search for the truth via interviews, phone calls, emails and sometimes investigative journalism, which entails the reporter making a serious personal sacrifice.

The Nigeria Union of Journalists agreed with their Irish and Uk counterparts in the Code Of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists when it states that a journalist should strive to employ open and honest means in the gathering of information. It said exceptional methods may only be employed when the public interest is at stake.

Again, Mike Farrell writing for the Society of Professionals Journalists, (SJP), christened the practice, 'chequebook journalism' which he says threatens to corrupt the newsgathering and reporting roles of the media. "Because journalism—accurate and credible news—is so essential to the maintenance of a democracy, chequebook journalism is not only unethical, it threatens to undermine journalism and damage democracy."

### **Influence of Ownership and Literacy**

Even though new technologies have made communication pervasive, easy and affordable, the access to these technologies and the knowledge and skills to use them is still limited among a large number of people. Knowledge is important as the possession or lack of it could come at an economic cost—i.e, depending on the side of the divide one falls. The knowledge and skills required to navigate new technologies in the digital age is the currency that currently drives a large part of the global economy. Hence, access to information and the ability to navigate the ever-increasing digital space is essential to communication.

The Internet and telecommunication are expanding at a fast rate, and every country—especially developing ones are not catching up with the constant changes. The digital divide is not only unequal among nations but even within a nation and among individuals. As technology expands so too do the devices, gadgets which drives the process. High-end computers and mobile smartphones are the twin gadgets that drives new technologies today and not every person can keep up with the constantly changing software and hardware that powers them in terms of cost, skills and knowledge. The lack of these, invariably impacts how the individual or society can compete in the rapidly moving communication eco-space.

Of the cost, skill and knowledge that gives access to new technologies that aid communication—skills are of paramount importance. Digital communication skills or its elevated cousin, digital literacy skills means the individuals availed with all the leverage to take full advantage of the digital process to improve life, business, social interaction, education and career. With the interactive media driving most human activities; through knowledge of divergent platforms, users and data analytics, a user can effectively communicate ideas to the public. Individuals with digital literacy skills can create and increase awareness about a brand or business on interactive platforms like Facebook, YouTube or Instagram with content targeted at a specific audience. While using analytics and data to analyze audience behaviour and predict the effectiveness of their communication—it can be seen that social media platforms can be used beyond just social interaction.

### **Economics of Security and Safety on the Digital Space**

Human lives in several parts are now automated—from new technologies powering home appliances, to embedded applications taking charge of innumerable everyday engagement—not to mention the ubiquitous social interactive platforms. In tens of hundreds of these life-changing applications, to ensure firewall security, users are expected to create and recall not just a single password that would cut across all of the platforms, but several passwords with a combination of alphanumeric sequences. The task can be an uphill one—only with some level of digital skills can an individual successfully function in cyberspace. With the ready availability of information and people's lives being virtually (literally) displayed on the Internet and interactive media—security becomes a key issue.

Hacking, phishing, account hijack and online scam are some of the prices netizens have to pay as they seek information, engage in business or social interaction on the Internet. These online frauds hurt people on several fronts when their accounts on the web or social media are either hijacked or compromised. To begin with, phishing is a Cybercrime, a type of social engineering attack in which cybercriminals trick victims into turning over sensitive personal or business information or installing malware—in form of fake, spoofed or otherwise deceptive communication. Criminals entice the victims via malicious emails that seem to have emanated from trusted senders, through viperous email attachments and malicious links to websites that have been cloned from legitimate ones.

Following this, are propaganda web pages or accounts created on social media to prosecute certain malicious or heinous objectives? Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok and Twitter have been the main breeding and execution grounds for this level of mass involvement which often

creates nothing but disinformation, misinformation or target specific vulnerable groups, organizations, corporations, governments or even individuals.

Aljazeera (2021), reported that Twitter removed about 3,465 accounts operating as “state-backed information operations” that it was linked to six countries: China, Mexico, Russia, Tanzania, Uganda and Venezuela which was being used by these countries, either to target certain endangered groups or to achieve some political goals. According to Aljazeera, most of the sanctioned profiles, about 2,048 were “amplified Chinese Communist Party narratives related to the treatment of Uighurs in Xinjiang province, while another 112 accounts were connected to 'Changyu Culture' a private company backed by the Xinjiang regional government.”

As people leave digital footprints as they navigate cyberspace, the only failsafe to preventing security breach of their privacy and sensitive information is good knowledge acquired as digital skills. Digital literacy skills give people the edge to use new technological devices and the internet responsibly and be on the safe side so they do not run into security troubles or fall victims to cyber fraudsters masquerading as dealers with genuine offers.

### **Conclusion/Recommendations**

Economy and communication are two mutually inclusive concepts that share a symbiotic and somewhat antagonistic relationship. By this, it is meant that the interrelationship between the two is at the same time positive and negative. The economic activities which drives the economy, whether at the individual, communal, regional or global scale can hardly be separated from the intricacies involved in communication. On the other hand, communication at any of these levels cannot also take place if factors that drive the economy are not called to play in the process. Whether through interpersonal communication by telephone calls, interactive media chat or emails—there is always an economic cost that enables that engagement; from the device involved to the medium or channel used—a price is often tagged. As essential as communication is to human engagement, society is constantly on the quest to create an enabling environment for free, fair and unrestricted communication, whether between individuals, the larger community or across state borders. Economic factors which impinge on communication are mostly man-made.

These multiple influences and factors have been articulated here while highlighting the intricacies, impediments and effects on the communication engagement. The recommendations are therefore suggested as a way to improve the positive aspects of economic Influence on communication:

1. People in government should free the media space and allow Media Pluralism to flourish as this will avail citizens unhindered access to communication in all facets. The world, in this age, should see fewer episodes of the Nigeria Twitter ban.
2. Efforts at the increment and spread of Internet broadband and infrastructure should be intensified to accelerate Internet penetration to hard-reach areas.
3. On the brown envelope syndrome; media outlets, especially in developing societies need to take as important the welfare of journalists. Salaries and emoluments need to

be paid as at when due and newsmen should be tasked with upholding journalistic values and ethics.

4. Though advertising remain the lifeblood of media outlets; media organizations should try and divorce themselves from the apron strings of advertisers and sponsors, as this will reduce their (advertisers) overbearing influence on editorial content.
5. In order to adequately navigate cyberspace and function properly in the digital age, citizens should be motivated to acquire digital communication and digital literacy skills.
6. Journalists should engage in investigative journalism which is the hallmark of information dissemination so as to deter the unwholesome practice of inducement to acquire information.

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