TECHNOETHICS AND THE CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA CENSORSHIP IN NIGERIA

Columbus N. Ogbujah
&
Judith G. Gwatana
&
Nympha U. Nkama
Department of Philosophy,
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt
nogbujah@yahoo.com
DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.11572.94089

Abstract

Technology and ethics are two very germane instruments that have currently gained the position of most useful aspects of human life and activities. Since antiquity till the present age, mankind has always fabricated tools from nature to satisfy the basic and complex needs for survival and thriving. In similar vein, from the moment homo floresiensis displayed proficiency in the use of simple stone tools, to the flourishing of complex feats as genetic engineering and information technology of the latter part of the last century, norms and ethical standards have always been evaluative tools of human conduct. In our current time, the dialectic of science and technology has assumed paradoxical dimensions, raising serious questions concerning values. Technoethics thus, arose in response to the consistent clamour for a value-laden society that strikes the right balance between technological growth and human progress; to reconcile moral concerns in technological trends. Whilst the exponential growth in social media is embraced by many for its communicative and informative ingenuity, some state actors have approached the evolution with trepidations, and are wont to slam censorship for its seeming infractions. In this study, we shall x-ray the challenges posed by the censorship of the social media in Nigeria, using technoethical tools. We shall, by adopting the analytic and hermeneutic tools of research, highlight the dangers Nigeria faces by remaining under this retrograde action.

Keywords: technoethics, democracy, information technology, censorship, social media.

Introduction

There is no doubt science and technology has been instrumental to development and human civilization. From its humble beginnings in the simple act of

manipulating nature for fire in the stone age, to the most exquisite displays at the Silicon Valley, it has structured the path to human progress. Every facet of life; every stage in human life – from birth to death, is entwined with scientific and technological products such that one could rightly say that we eat, drink, breath, live and die under its watchful gaze.[45] There is no escaping from it in the modern world, as it leads to faster, safer, easier and better ways of encountering reality. However, the story is not all roses and no prickles. There are downsides which now and again blight the amazing array of 'technological harvests.' Columbus Ogbujah underscores this in noting that in all its historical forms, "technology has created new complexities, new challenges, and the need to constantly adjust to the vagaries of new products."[46] Whilst the complexities created would demand training and relearning to catch up with the functionality of new products, the challenges may give rise to new norms / legislations, new infrastructures and new attitudes to cope with the constantly changing realities.

It was inevitable that the exponential growth in technology would birth technoethics—a means of regulating technological activities and usage within societies. As a subfield of ethics, technoethics seeks to resolve all ethical questions that border on technological inventions and use. Its core lies in establishing moral responsibility within the value chain of technological products and use. Schultz accentuates this when he notes that the concern of ethics of technology is with the value or goodness of things and situations, and also with the justness of institutions (both formal and informal).[47] Schultz's asseveration expands the domain of influence of technoethics to, besides providing guiding principles for technological innovations and use, include the actions of regulating institutions. Ethics of technology is equally concerned with the actions of regulating agents.

Within the gamut of technology categorized on the purpose its operation, the information and communication technology stands out; and within the array of information and communication technology, the social media takes the center stage across the world. Indeed, the revolution in social media has transformed the Nigerian society's modes of interaction and information circulation. Most people now depend on social media to keep up with relations, circulate and receive information on happenstances, and to create and advertise contents for

---

[45] C. Ogbujah. "Nature and Importance of History and Philosophy of Science and Technology," in C. Ogbujah (ed.). *History and Philosophy of Science and Technology: A Reader.* (Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers, 2020), 5.
[46] C. Ogbujah. *History and Philosophy of Science and Technology,* p. 5
[47] R. A. Schultz, *Contemporary Issues in Ethics and Information Technology* (U.S.A: IRM Press), 2.

their businesses. Traditional media houses are not left out, as most radio, television and newspaper channels opt for social media platforms for quick, fast and easy dissemination of news. This transformation has pushed up the social media as the most popular and perhaps, the most used platform of communication in the 21st century. However, with the increase in the use comes enormous challenges: it has often been mired in abuses. But government's response to these apparent abuses often ends up in overreach and further abuse. It is in this light that we tend to examine the challenges arising from President Buhari's Twitter ban, and his overall attempt to censor social media in the country.

Evolution and Imports of Ethics of Technology

Although technology has been instrumental to human transformation, its downsides can be a cause for serious worry. The instrument of creation can quickly turn out into an instrument of destruction; of safeguard and conservation into that of dissolution and annihilation. Onuobia laments:

> Today the historical dialectic of science and its development is increasingly assuming paradoxical dimensions; more purposeful and purposeless, more meaningful and bizarre; more useful and destructive; while achievement in the enclave of science have served to prolong life, they have also served to provide resources for the brutal extermination of it… and these raise the question of values in relation to science.[48]

Here, Onuobia captures the palpable potency the use of science and technology has to vacillate between noble and ignoble ends. Despite the tremendous feats in healthcare, education, transportation, electricity, communication, etc., societies still reel from the consequent acts of environmental (air, water and land) pollution, global warming, *infordemic* (mass disinformation through the use of social media), proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and sundry products that expedite death/destruction. Today, in spite of technological breakthroughs, human survival hangs on a precipice, with a looming threat of nuclear war.

All of these issues raise questions of values in relation to technology—which is the domain of philosophy of technology. Coined recently by Ernst Kapp[49] in the late 19th century, "philosophy of technology" — an aspect of philosophy that

---

[48] O. N. Onuobia. History and Philosophy of Science. (Aba, Nigeria: Maiden Educational Pubs., 1991), 23.

[49] The origins of the term 'philosophy of technology' is often located with the publication of Ernst Kapp's book, *Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik - Basic lines of a Philosophy of Technology* (Braunschweig: G. Westermann, 1877).

scrutinizes the nature of technology and its social effects,[50] dates back to classical antiquity. Already in Plato and Aristotle, questions relating to the *art of making things* had been addressed. Even if their philosophies diverged in several respects, both scholars distinguished between *techne* and *episteme* as pertaining to different domains of the world. Hence, besides investigating the origin and nature of technologies, philosophy of technology, in its current form, seeks to examine the impacts of technology on people and their culture; it seeks to engender the right balance between technological growth and human progress, so as to maximize the use of *techne* for the overall material and spiritual wellbeing of humans.

Technoethics or ethics of technology is a subfield of ethics—an integral part of "philosophy of technology"—that aims to resolve issues peculiar to technological innovations and use. Luppicini underscores the importance of this subfield especially where technological advances have a transforming effect on society.[51] He presents an elaborate description of technoethics that highlights the processes involved in the generation and use of technology, intervention policies and conceptual groundings, thus:

> Technoethics is defined as an interdisciplinary field concerned with all ethical aspects of technology within a society shaped by technology. It deals with human processes and practices connected to technology which are becoming embedded within social, political, and moral spheres of life. It also examines social policies and interventions occurring in response to issues generated by technology development and use. This includes critical debates on the responsible use of technology for advancing human interests in society. To this end, it attempts to provide conceptual grounding to clarify the role of technology in relation to those affected by it and to help guide ethical problem-solving and decision making in areas of activity that rely on technology.[52]

Luppicini's thesis, among other things, brings to fore the interdisciplinary nature of the field of technoethics, as it requires the coalescence of efforts of technologists, scientists, ethicists (philosophers) and political administrators. Indeed, the entire citizenry have some role to play since the outcome of debates here will impact on the moral sphere of social life.

---

[50] C. Ogbujah. "Philosophy of Science and Technology." *History and Philosophy of Science and Technology,* p. 75

[51] R. Luppicini, 'The Emerging Field of Technoethics', In R. Luppicini & R. Adell, Eds., *Handbook of Research on Technoethics* (New York: Information Science Reference, 2009), 1.

[52] R. Luppicini, 'The Emerging Field of Technoethics', 4.

Besides, while technological innovations give shape to the direction of society at each time, they are, in turn, shaped by the prevalent ethical climate of society. Luppicipi's description implies that the inventor's moral codes and standards of operation, which is infused in his devices, will be influenced by societal ethical climate, if it must be successful within any such society. Members of society are the end users of every piece of technological equipment. By engaging in critical debates on the responsible use of technology for the advancement of human interest in societies, citizens contribute in the technological process, and in so doing provide the threshold or limit of what is tolerable within societies to prospective inventors. In this wise, technoethics ensures that the owner or inventor and manager of any technological device is held accountable for the outcome of its use. This is the first level of control, which aims to nip in the bud every technological invention with the potential for disrupting social norms.

The second level of control stems from the capacity of technoethics to provide conceptual grounding to clarify the role of technology in human life, and to 'help guide ethical problem-solving and decision making.' This capacity can be demonstrated in sponsoring bills and enacting legislations to criminalize the production and/or excessive or negative use of a piece of technology. Hence, none in the chain of production and distribution (inventors and distributors) can truly absolve themselves from how their products are used. In Bunge's view, the scientist, engineer or manager may well wash his hands but this will not free him from moral duties or social responsibilities, not only as a human being and member of society, but also as a professional.[53]

The third level of control gleaned from Luppicipi's asseveration pertains to the duty of examining social policies and interventions occurring in response to issues generated by technology development and use. With seemingly burgeoning daily innovations that have become the hallmark of this hyper-technological age, comes an increasing capacity for abuse. The explosion in information and communication technology, for instance, has created several social media platforms that provide veritable avenues for people to closely connect with each other. At the same time, these platforms have severally been misused to cause social disharmony. In response, some governments have clamped down heavily on them—censoring their use and applications. Part of the duties of technoethics is to examine the propriety of social policies and governments' interventions in times of perceived breaches. The task is to ensure

---

[53] M. Bunge, 'Towards a Technoethics', *Monist*, 60/1 (1977: 96-107), 98.

Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development
ISSN: 2630-7065 (Print) 2630-7073 (e). Vol. 4 No. 6. 2021
Association for the Promotion of African Studies

adherence to the rule of law/principle of proportionality in criminal administration, in order to forestall government overreach.

Derived from the seminal works of Mario Bunge, the term technoethics was used to describe the duties scientific and technological experts have in crafting ethics within the domain of technology. Bunge recognized the limitation of traditional moral theories in dealing with emergent ethical problems ensuing from technology, and sought for the adaptation of technological tools in the formulation of a new theory of morality.[54] His views corroborate the earlier work of Norman Faramelli that had argued for a general ethics of technology from a Christian theological perspective in what he called *technethics*.[55] In general, expert opinions are divided regarding the conceptualization of responsibility for technological products. On one hand, there is the *neutrality* thesis which, by adopting the functional or instrumental views, claims that technology is an impersonal tool that can be put to good or bad use. The idea is that since technology is merely about making tools, the ethical value of a piece of tool is not dependent on the tool itself, but on its use. In this wise, efforts at curtailing the misuse of a tool of technology should be geared at the end users; at concrete individuals and not on the amoral piece of tool.

On the other, the *value-laden* thesis emphasizes that technology is a socio-cultural and political phenomenon that manifest ethical obligations that are endowed either by the producers or by those who determine how it must be made and used. Technology is understood, in this sense, as a solidified embodiment of cognitive values of *homo sapiens*. It is within this purview that we can question the ethical propriety of technological innovations such as computer viruses, pathogenic viruses, nuclear weapons, and other products that might inhibit employment or cause suffering to sections of the world. These ethical questions would extend also to the ways in which new technologies like cloning, genetic screening, implantation devices, radio-frequency identification (RFID) devices, etc., curtail or expand the power of humans.

Considered judgement shows that besides these, technoethics is concerned with every step in the process of technological innovations: from decisions on what to produce, to the actual products themselves; from products' use/abuse, to government's regulating legislations and censorship. Even though ethical ideals

---

[54] Bunge accentuates his argument for the development of ethics of technology in noting that traditional moral theories "ignored the special problems posed by science and technology." See 'Towards a Technoethics', *Monist,* 60/1 (1977), 101.

[55] N. J. Faramelli. *Technethics: Christian Mission in an Age of Technology.* (New York: Friendship Press, 1971).

Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development
ISSN: 2630-7065 (Print) 2630-7073 (e). Vol. 4 No. 6. 2021
Association for the Promotion of African Studies

can vary from society to society, most liberal societies build their ideals around the intrinsic value of human life and its corresponding inalienable rights. Some of such rights include freedom of expression and association, which have been greatly enhanced by the information and communication technology, especially through the social media. This massive expansion in online communicative tools is undeniably limed with the potent capacity for abuses. In recent times, these abuses have often attracted regulations and censorships that would, at best, be considered as overkills. Thus, the holistic goal of technoethics is to properly guide new advances in technology so that their development, application, and regulations regarding their use do not harm society. It is, as Luppicini notes, to provide insights on ethical dimensions of technological systems and practices for advancing a technological society.[56]

Technoethics and Social Media Censorship in Nigeria

It is preposterous, as the preceding paragraphs indicate, to still hang onto the belief that technological devices are objects that have no inherent good or evil in them until they are applied. The reality of inherently negative prospects manifest in the manufacture of such things as computer or pathogenic viruses, for instance, lends credence to this argument. The functionalists' argument that technology, of its own, does not harm, but its use, seems to simulate the American National Riffles Association's (NRA) *ad nauseam* cliché that 'guns do not kill, but humans'. For them, it is not technology, but its use that causes harm. This often leads to flawed and bulk-passing conclusion that culpability in good or bad technology should rest on the shoulders of the user.

This sort of thinking palpably pales in the face of tools that are specifically designed to scuttle or subvert human exploits. A computer virus, for instance, has no economic or social value except to destroy computer applications. So, does a pathogenic virus created in the laboratory, or any other weapon of mass destruction. As their potential for evil lies within their configurations, their existence opens up questions of responsibility on the part of their inventors. Bunge illuminates this by contending that the technologists, just like anyone else, are personally responsible for whatever they do, both to their organizations and the larger society. They have the duty to 'face, ponder over, and solve' their own moral problems.[57] Thus, ethics of technology consigns culpability not just to the end users, but to the producers as well.

---

[56] R. Luppicini. *Technoethics and the Evolving Knowledge of Society*. (Hershey: Idea Group Publishing, 2010).

[57] M. Bunge, 'Towards a Technoethics', 96.

Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development
ISSN: 2630-7065 (Print) 2630-7073 (e). Vol. 4 No. 6. 2021
Association for the Promotion of African Studies

In regard to internet technology, technoethics is concerned with the modes of use put into place by the owner or programmer of any platform in the world wide web. From Luppicini's work, we see that, the Internet Architecture Board (IAB) in 1989 made policies intended to regulate the ethical use of the internet. These guidelines commonly referred to as netiquette (internet etiquette) cover procedures for basic online behaviours such as posting messages and maintaining civility in discussions. They also cover basic questions as:

> How do we deal with Internet abuse and misuse such as piracy, pornography, and hate speech? Who should have access to the Internet and who should be in control? How should we protect young Internet users from unnecessary risks derived from Internet use? What are the ethical responsibilities of Internet researchers to research participants?, and What are the ethical responsibilities of Internet researchers to protect the identity and confidentiality of data derived from the Internet?[58]

Besides these, netiquette prohibits unauthorized access to Internet resources, disruption of the intended use of the Internet, and compromising of the integrity of computer-based information.[59] These go to show that there are standards to be met by both software developers/programmers and internet researchers/users. Both have a moral duty of ensuring the social health of the society, and as such, must admit culpability in regard to their productions and/or use.

When we juxtapose an unbiased hermeneutics of these information with the general social media censorship in Nigeria, and the Twitter ban in particular, we would better appreciate the level of absurdity / inanity in government's actions. Overall, there are perhaps, one of two conditions which can potentially warrant the proscription of a social medial platform. The first is when the owner or programmer does not adhere to principles required for their application to function within the internet space. The second is when users of a platform in a society (like Nigeria), with evidential proof, petition their leaders against serious infractions of such an application against their social norms. Besides these, any other attempt at proscription would seem bizarre, and can only amount to a macabre dance at the theatre of the absurd.

Aside that none of these conditions was present for the blanket ban which the presidency of Buhari imposed on Twitter in Nigeria, the manner of its

---

[58] R. Luppicini, 'The Emerging Field of Technoethics', 9-10.
[59] Internet Architecture Board. (1989), cited in R. Luppicini, 'The Emerging Field of Technoethics' In R. Luppicini & R. Adell, Eds., *Handbook of Research on Technoethics* (New York: Information Science Reference, 2009), 9.

Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development
ISSN: 2630-7065 (Print) 2630-7073 (e). Vol. 4 No. 6. 2021
Association for the Promotion of African Studies

proscription is adjudged to be greatly faulty. While admitting the possibility of hinging the ban unto one or two of the permissible grounds of limitation under section 45 of the Nigerian constitution, Akintayo emphasizes that an "examination of the facts surrounding the ban show that, at the very least, the ban fails the test of legality."[60] He goes on to buttress this illegality thesis by noting that instead of following the procedure of the rule of general application as stipulated by extant laws in the 1999 Constitution, the ban was announced by the nation's Information Minister at a press conference.[61] This then shows that the act of proscribing Twitter use in Nigeria is ultra vires, and was done in bad faith.

The friction between the microblogging and social networking firm – Twitter and the Buhari regime effectuated with the deletion of President Buhari's vailed threat to a potential repeat of the 1967-70 carnage in the eastern part of the country in response to the people's clamour for self-governance. As this was in breach of Twitter rules, thousands of users immediately flagged it as inciting violence, to which Twitter responded by deleting the post on 2 June, 2021.[62] In a swift retaliatory measure, the government proscribed the use of Twitter facility in the country, threatening prosecution to anyone found flouting the order. Reacting to queries and condemnations, government claimed that although the deletion of the President's tweets factored into the indefinite suspension of Twitter operations in the country, the decision 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."[63] Up till now, the Ministry of Information has not been able to articulate cogent and verifiable reasons for the heavy clampdown on Twitter use. The sketchy details in the Ministry's official Twitter handle only referenced unspecified activities on the social media platform that were deemed "capable of undermining Nigeria's corporate existence."[64]

---

[60] A. Akintayo, "Nigeria's Decision to Ban Twitter has no Legal Basis. Here's Why", *The Conversations* (June 24, 2021), 1, https://theconversation.com/nigerias-decision-to-ban-twitter-has-no-legal-basis-heres-why-163023

[61] A. Akintayo, "Nigeria's Decision to Ban Twitter has no Legal Basis. Here's Why",

[62] R. Maclean. "Nigeria Bans Twitter After President's Tweet Is Deleted". *The New York Times.* (5 June 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/05/world/africa/nigeria-twitter-president.html, accessed 9 December 2021.

[63] "Nigeria's Twitter ban: Government orders prosecution of violators". *BBC News*. (6 June 2021), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57368535, accessed 9 December 2021.

[64] E. Okogba. Breaking: FG announces suspension of Twitter in Nigeria via Twitter. *Vanguard.* (June 4, 2021), https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/06/breaking-fg-announces-suspension-of-twitter-in-nigeria-via-twitter/, accessed 9 December 2021.

Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development
ISSN: 2630-7065 (Print) 2630-7073 (e). Vol. 4 No. 6. 2021
Association for the Promotion of African Studies

As expected, government's action was greeted with lots of condemnation, ranging from concerted individuals to nations and corporate organisations such as the Amnesty International, and the British, Swedish and Canadian missions in Nigeria. Two local organizations – the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) and the Nigerian Bar Association threatened to institute legal actions against the régime. To have latched on largely "unspecified activities" for the ban, and subsequently ordering for the regulation of social media platforms betrayed government's ploy to monitor, control and in some respects, hinder the flow of information that does not fit in to its political interest. This has been the obsession of Buhari's regime since it came into power in 2015. A mania that was deftly roused by the role Twitter played in the epoch-making #*EndSars* anti-police brutality protests of 2020. It was a matter of time for the sledgehammer to come. Government was looking for an excuse, and the deletion of the President's tweet provided the opportunity. Ogbujah and Jaja note:

> A palpable suspicion is that the Twitter ban was primarily enforced to disarm Nigerian youths from using the platform as a tool for protest. Tying it to the pulling down of @MBuhari Twitter account was only a ruse. Not long ago, President Donald Trump's account was also suspended for violating Twitter guidelines, but his reaction was not to limit the freedom of the American people. Any policy that stifles information flow in a polity is retrograde, and does not portend well for societal development.[65]

The indefinite suspension of Twitter operations is but a sinister move among the regime's manifold methods of stifling dissent to its oft obnoxious policies.

In the light of technoethics, an inclusive evaluation of government's imbroglio with Twitter reveals perhaps, more questions than answers. As shown above, producers / programmers of tech tools have the moral duty to protect the public and users from abuse, and to maintain technical standards. To effectuate this, they usually provide guidelines for use in the manner of 'Terms and Condition' (T&C), and request users to report / tag breaches. Serious infractions are often meted with sanctions. This holds sway for all social media platforms, whether Facebook or Twitter or Instagram, etc., and constitutes a means of checks and control. A breach of T&C doesn't necessarily mean a breach in technoethics. T&C of a product are optional, and bind only those who subscribe to the product;

---

[65] C.N. Ogbujah and I.R. Jaja. "Arrogance of Power: Bane to the Development of the Nigerian State." *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 4 (5), (2021), 247.

while technoethics deals with evaluating ethical issues that arise from technological innovations, and has universal applicability.

By deleting the President's 'civil war' tweet for potentially inciting violence, Twitter not only displayed forthrightness in following through the organization's 'terms and conditions', but acted responsibly by averting potential catastrophic trolls that would have ensured from the tweet. As it did to President Trump's tweets and account, Twitter usually pulls down any account that is used to promote fake news, hate speech or incite violence. If, for instance, there were prior abuses by some individuals, as the regime alleges, the considered action for government would have been to query the organization with substantive proofs, and perhaps, temporarily suspend it, if their legitimate concerns were not assuaged. This would have given inventors of this application the opportunity to be accountable for the use of their creation, as demanded by technoethics. But this was not the case. Ironically, Twitter was banned for doing its techno-ethical job in protecting society from materials capable of causing public harm. The owner took responsibility for the problem his platform had enabled, namely—hate and derisive speech from the Nigerian president, which was brought to his notice through numerous reports of other users. Yet he was punished. On this account, one is inclined to say that the ban was callous, spiteful and unreasonable, as it amounts to gross abuse of power—punishing someone for doing what is required of them by their terms and conditions (T&C) of operation.

Consequences of Social Media Censorship in Nigeria

Censorship is an age-long issue that has characterized political economies through the centuries. All nations, cultures, creeds and corporate organisations regard some acts or their propagation as wrongful, harmful, insensitive, or inconvenient, and in consequence establish limits as to what can be communicated. Even the freest of all societies create inhibitions with regard to access and publication of classified information, or materials deemed harmful for public consumption. The reason for such censorship can range from moral to military, religious to political or corporate.

In the moral sphere, for instance, the distribution of child pornography as well as the use of obscene or certain words to describe gender and race, are currently outlawed in the United States and most of the Western world. In religion, we can't easily forget the 1989 *fatwa* (death sentence) which the Iranian Islamic Leader Ayatollah Khomeini placed on Salman Rushdie, the author of *The Satanic Verses*, and the ban placed on the novel for supposed blasphemy. Indeed, no

Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development
ISSN: 2630-7065 (Print) 2630-7073 (e). Vol. 4 No. 6. 2021
Association for the Promotion of African Studies

nation would idly fold her arms while the liberal media reveals her military tactics to her enemies in times of war. But ironically, the postmodernist subjective culture which benefited immensely from the Free Speech movement, has become a specter to tolerance and an ardent promoter of ideological conformity, especially within college campuses. Now and again, people are disinvited from commencement speeches or shut down by protester because of their ideological views. In his essay, "Intellectual Censorship in Liberalism: Ethical Concerns," Ogbujah decries the tyranny of left-liberalism and demonstrates how it threatens the very foundation of liberal democracies. When the academes, which should be the bastion of liberty, now engaged in censorship of ideas, the democratic ambience that yields renaissance is constricted. Ogbujah voices concern over the harm which this "illiberal attempt to close the democratic space" has had on the wider society.[66]

Thus, in varying measures, censorship has factually mired social communication at all times and in all cultures. Since its inception in 2015, this administration has sulked on its vulnerability to the enormous powers wielded by the social media tech giants – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, etc., and has sought for ways to censor them. The 2020 galvanization of the #*EndSars* movement by Twitter, and subsequent deletion of President Buhari's 'civil war' tweets, provided the pretext for the crackdown on Twitter. As the proposed draconic social media bill failed at the parliament due to public outcry, government now seeks to amend the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission's (NBC) Act in order to empower the agency to effectively censor social media. Our focus here is to highlight the implications which such censorship has had on Nigeria and Nigerians. We shall attempt to *thematize* the repercussions in relation to rights issues, the rule of law, the economy, and the political sectors of society.

As a signatory to the Optional Protocols for UN Human Rights Conventions, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, Nigeria commits herself to the promotion of basic human rights, which include the right to freedom of speech and association. Although freedom without responsibility is license, an open society with freedom of speech, in Karl Popper's ideation,[67] paves way for people to earnestly express their views for societal development. When people abuse the right to free speech and step beyond boundaries, they are to be

---

[66] C.N. Ogbujah. "Intellectual Censorship in Liberalism: Ethical Concerns." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, XXXI*, (1/2), (2019), 103.

[67] Karl Popper insisted that political freedoms and human rights constitute the foundation of an open society. See K. Popper. *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 2011 [1945]).

Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development
ISSN: 2630-7065 (Print) 2630-7073 (e). Vol. 4 No. 6. 2021
Association for the Promotion of African Studies

personally held accountable. You do not go about banning the medium and punishing the whole nation for the supposed infraction of an individual or group. Such a ban stifles communication and constricts the citizens' ability to associate with one another as provided for in law. This, perhaps, explains why Twitter took its African office to Ghana, despite having more users in Nigeria, as Ghana is viewed as a supporter of free speech, online freedom, and open internet.[68]

Besides infringing on the fundamental human rights of Nigerians, the Twitter clampdown reveals a deeper fault line in the regime's abhorrence for the rule of law. Democratic governance is characterized by the rule of law. The rule of law, as Ogbujah asseverates, "is the groundwork upon which a nation exists, persists and thrives. Without it, the cartilage binding society disintegrates, giving rein to anarchy…."[69] Whilst the goodness or badness of laws depends, as Aristotle notes, on the State's constitution,[70] true forms of government will of necessity be guided by the rule of just laws, and perverted forms by unjust laws or abuse of power. Thus, whilst Twitter clampdown, on one hand, is an affront to the basic right of choice of Nigerian citizens, its manner of effectuation, on the other, is a palpable display of 'arrogance of power' that jettisons the rule of law; it is a minuscule display of this regime's reign of impunity. In his interview with Chutel, a tech enthusiast – Kunle, notes: "The Twitter ban demonstrates two things: That the rule of law is very weak in Nigeria; and that no business is safe as you are one government policy away from your business being denigrated. We've seen it happen with cryptocurrency".[71] Kunle's deposition aligns with our earlier thesis on the legality of the ban. An unstable business environment is, of course, a disincentive to investors. A nation that is run on the whims of an individual rather than on the 'rule of law', is bound to flounder. One needs not go further to fathom the cause of low Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) and political instability in the country.

Perhaps, the most manifest woes are on the economy. The Twitter ban, for instance, has had catastrophic impacts on businesses that rely on its services for transactions and survival. In an era of lockdowns and enforced social distancing

---

[68] Z. Onu-Yahaya, *Nigeria's Twitter Ban is an Economic Disaster in the Making* (Nigeria: FP News, 2021), 3, https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/17/nigeria-twitter-ban-economic-disaster/

[69] C.N. Ogbujah. "Philosophy: A Pathway to System-Building in a Fractured Nation." *Philosophy and Praxis, 10* (1), (2020), 15.

[70] Aristotle. *The Politics*, translated by Thomas Sinclair, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), III, 11, 1282a 8-14.

[71] L. Chutel, *Nigeria's Twitter Ban Has a Lesson for Big Tech*, (Nigeria: FP News, 2021), 4, https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/17/nigeria-twitter-ban-economic-disaster/.

Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development
ISSN: 2630-7065 (Print) 2630-7073 (e). Vol. 4 No. 6. 2021
Association for the Promotion of African Studies

occasioned by Covid-19 pandemic, lots of Nigerian youths utilize Twitter platform as an alternate means of connecting with customers and building revenue. A *Financial Times* report once shows that Nigeria boasts of the largest number of startups in the Africa tech ecosystem and most of these startups use Twitter to attract investment.[72] With its proscription, such hordes of people are disconnected from their source of livelihood, and thrown into the already saturated jobless market. Thus, for an impudent and indiscreet arrogant act of a leader, a horde of youths are rendered unemployed and unproductive in a battered economy.[73]

Using different metrics, several experts have released mind-boggling figures of financial loss to the economy. In the account of Akinyoade:

> The economic impact of Twitter ban is one that has been enormous on Nigeria. Three days after the twitter ban in Nigeria, the A4AI (Alliance for Affordable Internet) put Nigeria's economic loss at $1.2b. A watchdog organization, Netblocks, also remarked that each hour of the Nigerian government's decision cost $250,000 (N102.5 million), bringing the daily loss to N2.5 billion[74].

For government not to care about such humongous loss to an economy battling with recession and double digit inflation, is to say the least, criminal. It simply shows the limitless level to which hegemons can go in pursuit of their personalized interests. No wonder Nigeria is the poverty capital of the world, and stacked at the lower rungs of the Human Development Index.

Another significant blip with Twitter ban is the negative effect on communication in a technologically advancing globe, which has the potential to stagnate political growth. Given the ease of use and far reaching impacts of the social media, the oft-marginalized groups in societies have suddenly begun to find their voices. Its diffusion in everyday lives increases visibility to social, ethical, environmental, and political ills of society, and in effect, elevates it to some sort of ombudsman for good governance. In *The New York Times'* essay titled, "Social Media's Globe-Shaking Power", Farhad Manjoo mulls how with the election of President Trump, "social networks are helping to fundamentally

---

[72] A. Akinyoade, *Twitter Ban: The Ripple Effect,* (Nigeria: The Guardian Life, 2021), https://guardian.ng/life/twitter-ban-the-ripple-effect/, 13.

[73] C.N. Ogbujah and I.R. Jaja. "Arrogance of Power," 247.

[74] A. Akinyoade, Twitter Ban: The Ripple Effect*,* 11.

Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development
ISSN: 2630-7065 (Print) 2630-7073 (e). Vol. 4 No. 6. 2021
Association for the Promotion of African Studies

rewire human society."[75] And within the social networks, Twitter is rated a revolutionary e-platform that connects the world with ease. It has increasingly played important roles in electoral politics, and was instrumental to the successful organization of the 2020 *#EndSars, #EndPoliceBrutality* movements in Nigeria. With its ban and overall censorship of the social media, the wheel of Nigeria's trudge to liberal democracy has become cloggy.

Conclusion

In the preceding pages, we acknowledged the overall invaluable contributions of technological innovations to human growth. We admitted the specific patent imports in the ease of access to information and communication afforded by the social media. Nonetheless, we accepted that because of the undeniably potent capacity of the massive expansion in online communicative tools for abuses, there is need for regulations. Recently, these abuses have, unfortunately attracted disproportionate regulations and censorships. Technoethics attempts to guide new advances in technology so that their development, application, and regulations regarding their use do not harm society.

Considered opinion shows that besides the ethical culpability of both producers and users of technological tools, ethics of technology ensures that governments and regulating bodies bear moral responsibility for their censorship. There is no gainsaying that freedom of speech and freedom of the press are some of the hallmarks of democracy. Being, as the Victorian writer Thomas Carlyle calls it, the 'Fourth Estate of the Realm',[76] the press, and indeed, the social media, should be well guided and guarded to promote good governance. Any policy that stifles information flow in a polity is retrograde, and does not portend well for democratic growth and societal advancement. This, we have demonstrated above, and for this we are at odds with President Buhari's Twitter ban and other draconian measures envisioned to smoother information and communication channels.

Bibliography

---

[75] F. Manjoo. "Social Media's Globe-Shaking Power." *The New York Times*, (Nov. 17, 2016), Sec. B, 1. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/17/technology/social-medias-globe-shaking-power.html

[76] By calling the press the 'Fourth Estate of the Realm', Thomas Carlyle meant that it acted as a sort of watchdog of the constitution and, as such, formed a vital part of the process of sustaining and deepening democratic governance. See K. Newton. The Mass Media: Fourth Estate or Fifth Column? In: Pyper R. & Robins L. (eds) *Governing the UK in the 1990s*. (London: Palgrave, 1995), 155-227.

Akintayo, A., 'Nigeria's Decision to Ban Twitter has no Legal Basis. Here's Why', *The Conversations* (June 24, 2021), https://theconversation.com/nigerias-decision-to-ban-twitter-has-no-legal-basis-heres-why-163023

Akinyoade, A., *Twitter Ban: The Ripple Effect* (Nigeria: The Guardian Life, 2021), https://guardian.ng/life/twitter-ban-the-ripple-effect/

Aristotle. *The Politics*, translated by Thomas Sinclair, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962).

Ban Of Twitter, *WIKIPEDIA* (2021), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ban_of_Twitter_in_Nigeria , accessed 15 July, 2021.

Blackburn, S., *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Bunge, M., 'Towards a Technoethics', *Monist,* 60/1 (1977), 96-107, sci-hub.se/10. 5840/monist197760134

Chutel, L., *Nigeria's Twitter Ban Has a Lesson for Big Tech* (Nigeria: FP News, 2021), https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/17/nigeria-twitter-ban-economic-disaster/

Faramelli, N. J. *Technethics: Christian Mission in an Age of Technology.* (New York: Friendship Press, 1971).

Heller, P.B., 'Technoethics: The Dilemma of Doing the Right Moral Thing in Technology Applications', *International Journal of Technoethics*, 3(1), 14-27 (January-March 2012), 14-27.

Kapp, E. *Basic lines of a Philosophy of Technology* (Braunschweig: G. Westermann, 1877).

Luppicini, R., 'The Emerging Field of Technoethics', in R. Luppicini & R. Adell, Eds., *Handbook of Research on Technoethics* (New York: Information Science Reference, 2009).

Luppicini, R. *Technoethics and the Evolving Knowledge of Society.* (Hershey: Idea Group Publishing, 2010).

Maclean, R. "Nigeria Bans Twitter After President's Tweet Is Deleted". *The New York Times.* (5 June 2021), https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/05/world/africa/nigeria-twitter-president.html, accessed 9 December 2021.

Manjoo, F. "Social Media's Globe-Shaking Power." *The New York Times*, (Nov. 17, 2016).

https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/17/technology/social-medias-globe-shaking-power.html

Newton, K. The Mass Media: Fourth Estate or Fifth Column? In: Pyper R. & Robins L. (eds) *Governing the UK in the 1990s*. (London: Palgrave, 1995).

"Nigeria's Twitter ban: Government orders prosecution of violators". *BBC News*. (6 June 2021), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-57368535, accessed 9 December 2021.

Ogbujah, C.N. "Philosophy: A Pathway to System-Building in a Fractured Nation." *Philosophy and Praxis, 10* (1), (2020), 7-24.

Ogbujah, C.N. (ed.). *History and Philosophy of Science and Technology: A Reader*. (Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers, 2020).

Ogbujah, C.N. "Intellectual Censorship in Liberalism: Ethical Concerns." *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, XXXI*, 1/2, (2019)), 93-107.

Ogbujah, C.N. and Jaja, I.R. "Arrogance of Power: Bane to the Development of the Nigerian State." *Journal of African Studies and Sustainable Development*, 4 (5), (2021), 234-252.

Okogba, E. "Breaking: FG announces suspension of Twitter in Nigeria via Twitter." *Vanguard.* (June 4, 2021), https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/06/breaking-fg-announces-suspension-of-twitter-in-nigeria-via-twitter/, accessed 9 December 2021.

Onuobia, O.N. *History and Philosophy of Science.* (Aba, Nigeria: Maiden Educational Pubs., 1991).

Onu-Yahaya, Z., *Nigeria's Twitter Ban is an Economic Disaster in the Making* (Nigeria: FP News, 2021), https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/17/nigeria-twitter-ban-economic-disaster/

Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Oxfordshire, England: Routledge, 2011 [1945]).

Schultz, R. A., *Contemporary Issues in Ethics and Information Technology* (U.S.A : IRM Press, 2006).