

Digital dynamics, press freedom and the burden of regulation in the Nigerian digital space

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ABSTRACT: Digital dynamics, press freedom and the burden of regulation in the Nigerian digital space abstract built on the premise that digital media technologies have brought drastic changes in the mode of communication and information sharing with an existential threat to regulation and press freedom, the study examines digital dynamics, press freedom and the burden of regulation in the Nigerian digital space (N=380), through the theoretical optic of Media Dependency Theory. Specifically, the study examines key attributes of digital dynamics posing resistance to regulation and regulatory measures that will protect the digital rights of citizens and preserve press freedom, and purposively selected respondents, using surveys to collect data. The findings of the study revealed that the continuous becoming of the digital space portends an existential threat to regulation. The study further established that the virtual existence of the digital space poses implicit resistance to regulation. The findings further revealed that to safeguard press freedom, regulation of the digital space will require a multi-stakeholder approach to bring to bear, considering the dynamism of the space. The study, however, established that the proposed 'Anti-Social Media Bill' in Nigeria should be revisited and rechristened: 'Digital Safety Bill' to protect citizens' rights of expression and clampdown on abusers. The study concludes, among others, that key characteristics of digital dynamics, such as flexibility, speed, virality, virtuality, and ubiquity, constitute a clog to regulation in the Nigerian digital space. The study recommends, among others, that relevant agencies of government should come up with a new regulatory body with a clear-cut mandate of safeguarding press freedom and abuse.

Keywords: Burden of regulation, digital dynamics, digital space, press freedom.

INTRODUCTION

The need to strike a balance between digital media regulation and press freedom has become a reoccurring concern in the world over due to the changing dynamics of the new media technologies (Omond *et al.*, 2021). Digital media technologies have brought about significant and continuous changes in the mode of communication and information sharing at both the macro and micro levels across the globe (Gawer, 2014; Helmond, 2015). Collaboratively, Ens *et al.* (2023) argue that these digital technologies, which are computer-mediated, facilitate interaction and content sharing across levels of national, trans-national, and international domains, ranging from many-to-many, one-to-one, or one-to-many as the case may be. In a similar vein, Toft (2019) contends that digital

dynamics with default attributes like interactivity, easy access, anonymity of source, as well as the ability to share information with the speed of light, have provided a leeway for the thriving of press freedom, while also constituting bottlenecks to the regulation of the digital media space, largely due to the inability of the extant media regulations to catch up with the revolutionary wave of the digital media. This, perhaps, informs the position of Omond *et al.* (2021), which poses the all-important question that amidst the lack of clear-cut regulatory provisions to fit the dynamics of digital media, what can the extant regulations governing free speech, media and information outside the domain of the digital media space do?

Similarly, Brinker (2015) argues that the torrent of

information sharing that comes with digital dynamics has defied conventional gravity, thereby complicating regulation with regard to appropriate control mechanisms to deploy, especially such that will not trample on press freedom (Muobuikwu, 2015). Meanwhile, digital dynamics refer to digital flow, which announces a certain trajectory of digital culture that reshapes the socio-political and communication life of the world due to continuous transformation (Dolphin, 2016; Toft, 2019). Also, Toft (2019) argues that digital dynamics have birthed a contemporaneity of communication and interaction patterns in the media ecosystem, which can only require the gatekeepers of the media to update in order to catch up with the realities of the time. According to the scholar, the dizzying speed of transformation of digital technologies has left gatekeepers across the world perplexed amidst seeking adequate ways to man the gates of the digital media space with recourse to press freedom. Similarly, In Nigerian, the digital media space is currently impacted by these significant changes occasioned by digital dynamics, which as though, enhances free expression, posed stiff resistance to regulations; and over time, striking a balance between safeguarding press freedom and addressing potential challenges in the digital media space remains a crucial task in Nigeria. Meanwhile, freedom of the press has been described as one of the canons of a functional democracy as well as the cornerstone by which the progress and development of a society is built (Udofa, 2011).

Statement of problem

Following the ever-evolving nature of the digital media technologies which have transformed the Nigerian media landscape with implicit resistance to regulations, and taken freedom of expression to another level, especially as some Nigerian citizens leverage the imports of these technologies to spread fake news, hate speech, sensationalism, and commit other malicious crimes like defamation and abuse of others' rights, scholars have documented research on the need to regulate the digital media space, whose findings remain inconclusive as it concerns clear-cut regulations that fit the realities of the time. This is especially true, as Coker *et al.* (2022) contend that recent developments in the use of the digital media space by Nigerians have necessitated the need for the regulation of the space. But there have been intense objections from citizens to the proposals of the Federal Government of Nigeria to regulate the space due to apprehensions that such a move will harm press freedom, which may also have an economic impact on Nigeria's already dwindling economy (Coker *et al.*, 2022).

For instance, Arikenbi *et al.* (2022) in their study on *Challenges of Regulating Social Media in Nigeria and its Implications on Freedom of Expression*, found that the dynamic nature of the digital media space remains a

stumbling block to the regulation of the space; and that an attempt to regulate the space will put free speech in dire straits. Similarly, Tsegysu and Kelvin (2021), in their discussion on *Social Media Regulation in a Democratic Nigeria: Challenges and Implication*, established that there is no way an attempt to regulate social media will not amount to infringement of citizens' rights to freedom of expression. As earlier established, this dilemma is perhaps due to a lack of a clear-cut legal framework to mitigate/check the excesses of the digital media space in Nigeria. Therefore, in seeking to regulate the digital media space, the government must seek ways to strike a balance between regulation and press freedom, which is the right of the citizens to freely express their views without restraints (Coker *et al.*, 2022). It is against this backdrop that this paper tends to contribute to the on-going discourse in social media regulation, by explicating digital dynamics, press freedom and the burden of regulation in the Nigerian digital space, through the theoretical prism of Media System Dependency Theory, with the broad objective of determining how digital dynamics hinder regulation in the digital space, and striking a balance between regulation and press freedom.

Objectives of the study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To determine key attributes of digital dynamics posing resistance to regulation in the digital space;
2. To suggest regulatory measures that will protect citizens' digital rights and preserve press freedom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining the concept of digital dynamics

Digital dynamics, as an emerging concept in social science research, has been defined differently by various scholars, with a common denominator of constantly changing the nature of information flow, as well as other workings of the digital media ecosystem. For instance, Dolphin (2016) conceptualises digital dynamics as a disruptive technologically-induced phenomenon which is constantly changing digital information flow and the way digital natives communicate and share information within and across borders in contemporary times. To Toft (2019), the concept heralds a trajectory of digital culture that reshapes business culture, socio-political and socio-economic processes of the world over time. Positing further, the scholar argues that these hanging trajectories occasioned by digital dynamics have successfully redefined patterns of communications, interactions, and information flow in such a fashion that makes it difficult to filter what goes through or control the torrent of information flow in the

digital media space. He further explains that the imports of digital dynamics have offset the media ecosystem, posing the need for media gatekeepers to adapt to the vast changing media landscape to contain the nascence and effervescency of information dissemination in the digital media space.

Corroboratively, Skog (2019) contends that the culture of digital dynamics significantly has tolls on cultural and institutional practices, by causing a drastic change in the way of life and communication patterns across the world, and hindering checks/control, especially as the digital technologies are highly docked in flexibility, interactivity, virtuality, virality, anonymity, pseudonymity, ubiquity, and information overload. According to him, digital dynamics stimulate changes in the socio-technological and interaction elements of the space, thereby constituting transformation that is continuously unfolding and evolving. Digital dynamics bring about a culture of sharing and the rush of clicking (O'Reilly, 2017).

On his part, Brinker (2015) articulated five digital dynamics that inform the transformative power of the digital media space to include, adaptability, speed, adjacency, scale, and precision. The scholar sees adaptability as the greatest mystery of the digital space due to the ease with which it changes content and information modes, which has no match in the real world, considering the fact that social norms and control strategies are rooted in the inflexible concepts of the physical world. By speed, the scholar posits that the Internet moves with an astonishing speed that equals to the speed of light, birthing new patterns of human interaction and spreading information across trans-border and heterogeneous audiences within minutes. He further posits that the adjacency of the digital dynamics, especially with the technological architecture of hyperlinks, has made access to the digital ecosystem just a click away. The scholar, however, contends that the scale at which the digital world moves has no parallel with conventional gravity, considering the ubiquitous nature of content which travels from a few to millions, thereby putting some implicit constraints to regulation in the digital media space.

Digital media space, press freedom, and the burden of regulation in Nigeria

The concept of digital media space is embedded in digital technologies that facilitate social interactions and connection between individuals across levels, which would practically be impossible in the real world, while introducing nascent modes of digital orientation (Baptista *et al.*, 2020; Gawer, 2014; Helmond, 2015). Accordingly, Ngai *et al.* (2015) categorise digital media space according to their functionalities as: Media sharing sites (YouTube and Instagram); enable individuals to share audio-visual content online with others, Microblogs (Twitter); used for

posting short text and pictures, Social bookmarking sites; facilitate the referencing and organising digital contents via tags so as to share with others online. Virtual communities; enable the sharing of content/ideas via interactive tools. Social networking sites (Facebook and LinkedIn); connect and facilitate relationship-building among people who may have common interests. Considering the interaction opportunities the digital media space has provided, to ensure good use of the space, there is a need for some form of regulation (Adam *et al.*, 2022; Ghazawneh and Henfridsson, 2013; Thies *et al.*, 2018; Wareham *et al.*, 2014).

In the same token, Ackerman (2018) identifies several key technological drivers, which have reconfigured the spectrum of communication and information sharing on the digital media space to include: decentralisation, collaboration, co-creation, and continuous becoming. According to the scholar, by decentralisation, the digital media space allows users to establish network platforms and connects them to the information superhighway (Internet), which can be visible and accessible with just a click, anywhere in the world. He further argues that the digital media space makes communication among users easy and at a low cost. The scholar explains that in the wake of this differential and pluralistic nature of the digital media space, the power of centralised institutions like the media and regulators is waning, breeding a new wave of behaviour and human interaction. On the other hand, the scholar posits that digital media space makes collaboration and the co-creation of content possible on a large scale and across far-flung demographics. Furthermore, he argues that the digital media space infrastructure is such that it is constantly changing with several news websites sprouting daily, while at the same time keeping existing ones updated.

From the point of view of Ackerman, it can be noted that the digital media space is overly dynamic to the extent that it gets regulators perplexed on the measures to take in entrenching control because, while trying to deal with one aspect of the digital media space, another aspect springs up, making it complex for regulations, as though regulators cannot summarily regulate the space in order not to cut in on press freedom.

Conversely, in defining press freedom, Apuke (2017) opines that there is no one way to the definition of press freedom. According to him, the term announces the rights of the media to communicate and disseminate information to the public without fear or favour, as well as the rights to comment on and/or criticize the policies of government or hold differing opinions and communicate same at will. Similarly, Ekwunife *et al.* (2023) opine that press freedom is an offshoot of freedom of speech, which is the fundamental human right of citizens to air their views in whatever capacity on any issue, inasmuch as such rights do not abuse the rights of others. Press freedom, therefore, explains the inalienable rights of the press to access and share information devoid of interference.

Conversely, Coker *et al.* (2022) opine that the move to regulate social media began in 2019, with the introduction of the 'Social Media Bill' by the National Assembly, geared toward controlling the spread of fake news, falsehood, and malicious content on social media. According to them, as though the 'Social Media Bill' christened: Anti-Social Media Bill, scaled through second reading at the floor of the National Assembly of Nigeria, it was meted with stiff resistance by many Nigerians, who believe the bill will be inimical to freedom of expression as well as press freedom. They further state that the sentiment and outcry that trailed the announcement of the bill caused a tremendous pushback, which necessitated the government to rescind their plans to further the bill. Also, Coker *et al.*, explains that another attempt aimed at regulating social media was spear-headed by the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC), where the commission in 2021, banked on the provisions of the Section 2, subsection 1b of the Act establishing it, which states that: "The Commission shall have the responsibility of receiving, processing, and considering applications for the establishment, ownership or operation of Radio and Television Stations including Cable Television services, Direct Satellite Broadcast and any medium of broadcasting", advertised on National Dailies requesting online platforms domiciled in Nigeria to come forward and register to obtain license to operate. This was again, resisted by the Media Rights Agenda (MRA), when it filed a suit at the Federal High Court, Abuja, challenging the legality or otherwise, of the NBC to regulate and/or licensed online platforms before they can operate in Nigeria, which it argued was outside the purview of the commission (Coker *et al.*, 2022).

Equally, Jaiyeola (2022) report that the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), an agency of the Federal Government of Nigeria, saddled with the responsible to develop regulate and offer expert advice on information technology, came up with a 'Code of Practice for Interactive Computer Service Platforms' in 2022, which sought to put in place best practices that would render the digital media landscape safe and free for all Nigerians, with the motive of curtailing the prevalence of harmful online contents such as fake news, hate speech, misinformation and disinformation. According to him, this initiative was resisted by Nigerians who saw the move as an attempt to spy on their social media use as well as gag the free press. These, and many other attempts by the Nigerian Government, aimed at regulating the digital media space have always hit the rock owing to citizens' fear that such will deny them of their fundamental rights of expression. Meanwhile, Coker *et al.* (2022) state that while Nigeria is stuck with the burden of digital media regulation, countries around the world are making significant progress in transitioning from self-regulation to government/policy-oriented regulation of the digital media space. This, according to them, is especially true as the United Kingdom recently proposed an 'Online Safety Bill'

with the intent to put in place a new regulatory framework that will protect the rights of her citizens online. In a similar vein, they opine that the United States of America is in the process of establishing a fit-for-all regulation, while Germany has already put in place a law known as the Network Enforcement Act to control the tendencies of digital media infractions.

Theoretical framework

Media system dependency theory

The study anchored on the Media System Dependency Theory (MSD) in understanding how digital dynamics poses hindrances to regulation of the digital space, vis-à-vis the levels of information flow from macro to macro, or macro to micro audiences and vice versa, which is characteristic of the digital media space. Grounded in classical sociology, Media System Dependency Theory, as propounded by Ball-Rokeach and Defleur (1976), states that the relationship between the media and audiences should be looked at from the perspective of macro social systems. Explaining further, Ognyanova and Ball-Rokeach (2012) argue that the theory is concerned with building interrelations across macro social systems by bringing together the mass media and their audiences in understanding the effect of the media on these audiences. In buttressing this, Ball-Rokeach and Defleur (1976) state that the core of Media System Dependency is hinged on the hypothesis that, the more audiences look up to the media to meet certain information needs, the more vital the media become in the life of those audiences, and therefore, the more impact the media will have on such audiences. The theory establishes three-way resource-dependency relations with individuals (micro-level), institutions, and other social systems (macro-level) at the other end (Ball-Rokeach, 1985).

By Micro-level, Ball-Rokeach (1985) explains the focus here is on the relationship between audiences and the media, by evaluating the motivations behind audiences' media use. According to the scholar, the want of meeting certain goals that encompass needs inform the motivation behind the use individuals put the media to at a given time, which in turn affect media behaviour. In her perspective, she describes goals in this context as the key indicator of audience motivation, while needs as rational and irrational motives behind audiences' use of the media, which the latter is the bedrock of irrationalities and other infractions that occur within the media circle. On the other hand, macro-level dependency establishes that the interrelationships between the media and other social systems to a large extent, shape what become of media contents and how these media contents are delivered to the audience, as well as define the extent to which people use the media (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur, 1979).

Conversely, considering the unique attributes of the

digital media space, which make content and information flow abundant and participatory, the process of mediation becomes difficult especially as there is an increasing rate in the use of digital media by young people, who have accorded themselves the status of content creators and disseminators, thereby, blurring the lines between trained content creators and quacks in the information and communication industry in contemporary times (Cho, 2009). This, perhaps, informs the argument that the communication ecosystem has transitioned in the era of new media technologies, as the digital media space allows individual users to actively create and share information at a very high speed with others, rather than passively banking on institutional media to disseminate such information (Joo-Young *et al.*, 2012). In view of the preceding arguments, it can be noted that the emergence of digital media has established a new wave of media dependency known as new media dependency, which announces a departure from institutional information dissemination to an era of cross-level information creation and dissemination.

Concordantly, the workings of digital media space have crossed these levels of information creation and sharing and displaced the time-bound factor of the conventional media, in that users are able to generate content (at the micro-level), and share to a wider audience (at the macro-level), or vice versa, thus creating the flexibility or the possibility of moving information across levels with a profound velocity (Joo-Young *et al.*, 2012). Generally, Matei (2010) states that Media System Dependency Theory establishes a framework of relationships by which information flow in a social system, whereas in the digital media space, the power to create and share information rest on the connection between the source of information and the receiver, rather than in specific hands, which is consistent with media system dependency hypothesis. According to the scholar, away from the micro-to-macro approach of the conventional media, digital media's macro-to-macro nature makes it almost impossible to know who says what; identify the original creators of content and those behind the spread of certain messages online. Therefore, considering the gap this study intends to fill, which is to examine digital dynamics, press freedom and the burden of regulation in the digital space, this theory is relevant to this study as it explains how digital dynamics has shaped information flow by making everyone creators and disseminators of information, which may affect regulation and harm other people's rights to freely express their views.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a cross-sectional design and sampled respondents who comprised veteran journalists, practicing journalists, and journalists in the academic, in Kwara State, selected on the basis of their experience in media

practice and issues in regulation of the digital media space. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula, 380 of them were selected, while Probability Proportionate to Size (PPS) as a type of stratified sampling was used to divide the respondents according to their strata, which helped the researcher to distribute the questionnaire in line with the respondents' respective size of population. Then, the researcher randomly selected five Departments of Mass Communication out of the seven functional tertiary institutions offering Mass Communication in Kwara State. Also, the study purposively selected practicing and veteran journalists. Following the list of Journalists in academics, practicing journalists, and veteran journalists obtained from their respective departments and Desk Officers. The researcher then developed a sampling frame and used a systematic random sampling technique to select respondents from the lists, using the *n*th number. The study obtained data on respondents' demographic profiles, key attributes of digital dynamics posing resistance to regulation in the digital space, and regulatory measures that will protect citizens' digital rights and preserve press freedom. Survey data from the field were analysed using SPSS version 25.0 after a thorough screening of the collected data to avoid multicollinearity.

Measures

Key attributes of digital dynamics posing resistance to regulation in the digital space

This was measured on a five-point Likert scale (1=Never and 5=Always). The items used in measuring this construct were developed by the researcher from the strength of the literature. Statements measured are, "The flexible nature of the digital space makes it difficult for regulation", "The virality and speed at which information travels in the digital space constitute a clog to regulation", "The virtual existence of the digital space poses implicit resistance to regulation", "The ubiquitous nature of the digital space negates appropriate regulation", "The continuous becoming of the digital space poses existential threat to regulation".

Regulatory measures that will protect citizens' digital rights and preserve press freedom

This measured the regulatory measures that will protect citizens' digital rights and preserve press freedom in the digital space on a five-point Likert scale, where 1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree. Items used in measuring this construct were adapted from Ofem (2022) to suit the current study. Items measured include, "Establishing digital rights law will help protect press freedom and guard against abuse of the Nigerian digital space", "Regulators and digital media operators should synergise to devise

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age (in years)		
25-45	273	71.8
46-66	107	28.2
Total (M=40.69, SD=10.18, Min=25, Max=66)	380	100.0
Occupation		
Veteran Journalist	79	20.8
Practicing Journalist	146	38.4
Journalist in the Academic	155	40.8
Total	380	100.0
Length of experience		
1-6years	108	28.4
7-11years	151	39.7
12years and above	121	31.8
Total	380	100.0

control to govern access and activity that will not hinder press freedom, but centrally censor offensive post", "Extant regulations should be extended to the digital space and decentralised to fit the ubiquitous nature of the digital space", "There should be internal reactive mechanism by digital media operators via sanctioning posts that abuse press freedom", "The proposed 'Anti-Social Media Bill' should be revisited and rechristened: 'Digital Safety Bill', to protect citizens' rights of expression and clampdown on abusers", "To safeguard press freedom, regulation of the digital space will require a multi-stakeholder approach to bring to bear, considering the dynamism of the space", "There is need to establish a new regulatory body with clear-defined roles to include, safeguarding press freedom and control of the digital space's excesses".

FINDINGS

The study investigates digital dynamics, press freedom, and the burden of regulation in Nigeria's digital space. The data collected on the constructs (Key Attributes of Digital Dynamics Posing Resistance to Regulation in the Digital Space and Regulatory Measures that will Protect Citizens' Digital Rights and Preserve Press Freedom) were analysed descriptively using mean and standard deviations.

Respondents' demographics

On average, respondents in this study are forty-six years old (M=40.69, SD=10.18), 25 and 66 years being the minimum and maximum age, respectively. Specifically, seven in ten (71.8%) of the respondents are between 25

and 45 years, while 28.2% of them are between 46 and 66 years of age. Equally, 40.8% of them are journalists in the academic field; 38.4% represented practicing journalists, while veteran journalists came last with 20.8%. Moreso, 39.7% of the respondents possess 7 to 11 years length of experience; 12 years and above length of experience (31.8%); and 1 to 6 years length of experience came third with 28.4%. These demographic variables of the respondents, though purposively selected, provided a fair representation of the population and added credence to the study (See Table 1).

Table 2 presents the reliability of constructs from pre-field and post-field studies. The pilot study's result showed Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of .811 and .893, which are within the benchmark of recommended standards. This result indicated a 95% confidence level, which the researcher relied on before proceeding to the field. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of the final study fall within the acceptable threshold of 0.888 and 0.964 reliability index, respectively.

Descriptive statistics of the constructs

Table 3 shows key attributes of digital dynamics posing resistance to regulation in the digital space. Generally, respondents admitted that these identified attributes of digital dynamics often pose resistance to regulation in the digital space (M=3.60, SD=1.19). Specifically, they claimed that the continuous becoming of the digital space often poses existential threat to regulation (M=3.67, SD=1.21); the virality and speed at which information travels in the digital space constitute a clog to regulation (M=3.61, SD=1.10); and the ubiquitous nature of the digital space negates appropriate regulation (M=3.65, SD=1.17). This high level of agreement among respondents implied

Table 2. Reliability of constructs (Reliability tests).

Constructs	No. of items	Pilot study		Final study	
		N	Alpha	N	Alpha
Key attributes of digital dynamics	5	40	0.811	380	0.888
Regulatory Measures	7	40	0.893	380	0.964

Table 3. Key attributes of digital dynamics posing resistance to regulation.

No.	Key attributes	Level of agreement* (%)					M	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	The flexible nature of the digital space makes it difficult for regulation	12.1	10.5	16.3	39.7	21.3	3.48	1.27
2	The virality and speed at which information travels in the digital space constitute a clog to regulation	8.7	10.5	14.7	43.2	22.9	3.61	1.10
3	The virtual existence of the digital space poses implicit resistance to regulation	8.9	12.1	12.9	43.9	22.1	3.58	1.21
4	The ubiquitous nature of the digital space negates appropriate regulation	7.4	11.1	15.3	42.1	24.2	3.65	1.17
5	The continuous becoming of the digital space poses existential threat to regulation.	7.6	11.8	13.7	39.7	27.1	3.67	1.21
Total							3.60	1.19

Table 4. Regulatory measures that will protect citizens' digital rights and preserve press freedom.

No.	Regulatory measures	Level of agreement* (%)					M	SD
		1	2	3	4	5		
1	Establishing digital rights law will help protect press freedom and guard against abuse of the Nigerian digital space	7.1	8.4	11.6	47.4	25.5	3.76	1.14
2	Regulators and digital media operators should synergise to devise control to govern access and activity that will not hinder press freedom, but centrally censor offensive post	7.6	8.9	13.7	43.7	26.1	3.72	1.17
3	Extant regulations should be extended to the digital space and decentralised to fit the ubiquitous nature of the digital space	6.8	9.2	14.7	43.7	25.5	3.72	1.15
4	There should be internal reactive mechanism by digital media operators via sanctioning posts that abuse press freedom	6.8	8.9	9.5	49.5	25.3	3.77	1.13
5	The proposed 'Anti-Social Media Bill' should be revisited and rechristened: 'Digital Safety Bill', to protect citizens' rights of expression and clampdown on abusers	6.3	7.1	11.6	47.1	27.9	3.83	1.11
6	To safeguard press freedom, regulation of the digital space will require a multi-stakeholder approach to bring to bear, considering the dynamism of the space	7.1	6.6	10.5	48.7	27.1	3.82	1.12
7	There is need to establish a new regulatory body with clear-defined roles to include, safeguarding press freedom and control of the digital space's excesses	6.8	6.8	10.5	45.3	30.5	3.86	1.13
Total							3.24	1.14

that the key attributes of the digital dynamics, as identified in this study, pose an existential threat to the regulation of the digital space in Nigeria.

Table 4 presents regulatory measures that will protect

citizens' digital rights and preserve press freedom in the Nigerian digital space. On the aggregate, respondents agreed that the suggested regulatory measures will help protect citizens' digital rights and preserve press freedom

($M=3.24$, $SD=1.14$). Specifically, they agreed that there is need to establish a new regulatory body with clear-defined roles to include, safeguarding press freedom and control of the digital space's excesses ($M=3.86$, $SD=1.13$); the proposed 'Anti-Social Media Bill' should be revisited and rechristened: 'Digital Safety Bill', to protect citizens' rights of expression and clampdown on abusers ($M=3.83$, $SD=1.11$); and to safeguard press freedom, regulation of the digital space will require a multi-stakeholder approach to bring to bear, considering the dynamism of the space ($M=3.82$, $SD=1.12$). The respondents' high level of agreement implied that these suggested regulatory measures will help to strike a balance between regulation of the Nigerian digital space and press freedom.

DISCUSSION

The study discusses digital dynamics, press freedom, and the burden of regulation in the Nigerian digital space with a view to finding out the key attributes of digital dynamics constituting a clog in the wheel of progress of appropriate regulation, as well as suggests regulatory measures that will preserve press freedom. The findings revealed that the continuous becoming of the digital space portends an existential threat to regulation. The study further established that the virtual existence of the digital space poses implicit resistance to regulation. Also, respondents admitted that the ubiquitous nature of digital space negates appropriate regulation. Nonetheless, the study revealed that the flexible nature, the virality, and the speed of information dissemination in the digital space constitute a clog that hinders regulation.

These findings are in agreement with Skog (2019) who posit that digital dynamics significantly has tolls on cultural and institutional practices, by bringing changes in the way of life and communication patterns of people, which in some ways, hinders regulation, more so as the digital space are highly docked in flexibility, interactivity, virtuality, virality, anonymity, pseudonymity, ubiquity, and information overload. The scholar further contends that digital dynamics stimulate changes in the socio-technological and interaction elements of the space, thereby, constituting transformation that is continuously unfolding and evolving. Also, the findings validate Brinker's (2015) argument that the rate at which digital dynamics transforms content and information modes has no match in the real world, taking into consideration that social norms and regulatory strategies are rooted in the inflexible concepts of the physical world. The scholar further argues that the speed at which the digital world moves has no parallel with conventional gravity, with regards to the ubiquitous nature of content which travels from a few to millions, thereby putting some implicit constraints to regulation in the digital media space. Similarly, from the perspective Media Dependency Theory, the findings support Cho (2009) argument that considering the

uniqueness of digital technologies, which make content and information flow abundant and participatory, the process of mediation becomes difficult especially as there is an increasing rate in the use of digital media by young people, who have accorded themselves the status of content creators and disseminators, thereby, blurring the lines between trained content creators and quacks in the information and communication industry in contemporary times.

On the regulatory measures to be taken to protect the digital rights of citizens and press freedom, the respondents suggest that there is a need to establish a new regulatory body with clear-defined roles to include, safeguarding press freedom and control of the digital space's excesses. The findings of the study further established that to safeguard press freedom, regulation of the digital space will require a multi-stakeholder approach to bring to bear, considering the dynamism of the space. Respondents revealed that the proposed 'Anti-Social Media Bill' in Nigeria should be revisited and rechristened: 'Digital Safety Bill', to protect citizens' rights of expression and clampdown on abusers. The study, however, revealed that extant regulations should be extended to the digital space and decentralised to fit the ubiquitous nature of the digital space and that there should be an internal reactive mechanism by digital media operators via sanctioning posts that abuse press freedom. These findings are in line with Coker *et al.* (2022) apposition that Nigeria should emulate the rest of the world like the United Kingdom, United States, and Germany etc., who are making significant progress in transitioning from self-regulation to government/policy-oriented regulation by putting in place a fit-for-all regulatory framework that will protect citizens' rights, press freedom and clamp down on abusers of the digital media space.

Conclusion

The study underscores digital dynamics, press freedom, and the burden of regulation in the digital media space in Nigeria. The study was premised on the contending arguments that digital technologies pose a kind of Trojan horse differential implicit resistance to regulation occasioned by digital dynamics, and the dilemma of striking a balance between regulation of the digital space and press freedom in Nigeria. The study concludes that the continuous becoming of the digital space often poses an existential threat to regulation. Also, the study concludes that the vitality and speed at which information travels in the digital space constitute a clog to regulation, and that the ubiquitous nature of the digital space negates appropriate regulation. Based on these findings, there is a need to establish a new regulatory body with clear-defined roles to include, safeguarding press freedom and control of the digital space's excesses. More so, the study concludes that the proposed 'Anti-Social Media Bill' in

Nigeria should be reviewed and renamed as, 'Digital Safety Bill', to protect citizens' digital rights of expression and clampdown on abusers, and that to safeguard press freedom, regulation of the digital space will require a multi-stakeholder approach to bring to bear, considering the dynamism of the space.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the study recommends that relevant agencies of government should come up with a new regulatory agency with the clear-cut mandate of safeguarding press freedom and weeding off tendencies of abuse in the digital space. The study further recommends that to succeed in striking a balance between regulation of the digital space and press freedom, the government should consider a multi-stakeholder approach, where inputs will be sought and harmonised from all concerned stakeholders. Also, the study recommends that the Anti Social Media Bill' should be rechristened 'Digital Safety Bill', to provide room for the protection of citizens' digital rights of expression and clampdown on abusers of the digital space. Finally, the study recommends that considering the ubiquitous nature of the digital space, the vitality and the speed at which information travels in the space, extant regulations should be reviewed to match the reality of the time.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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