

RESEARCH STUDY ON THE

# IMPACT OF THE TWITTER BAN

*in Nigeria on Human Rights Monitoring, Advocacy  
and Creativity*

**ZAINAB ONUH-YAHAYA**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Nigerian government's announcement of the ban on Twitter in June 2021 marked a significant turning point in the country's social media regulation landscape. Twitter, a vital platform for mobilization, advocacy, and activism for Nigerians, had played a pivotal role in facilitating the #EndSARS protests the year before. The protests showed Twitter's ability to enable real-time communication and global activism, particularly among the youth.

But even before the #EndSARS protests, the microblogging platform played (and continues to play) a significant role in activism, advocacy and creativity amongst (young) Nigerians. The ban, which had been implemented in response to perceived national security threats, raised serious concerns regarding freedom of expression, access to information, and the ability to engage in advocacy and creativity online.

Through a combination of interviews, surveys, and policy analysis, this research explores the tangible effects of the Twitter ban on youth human rights defenders, activists and content creators, as well as its broader implications for social media regulation in Nigeria.

The research methodology involves in-depth interviews with human rights defenders, creatives, and social media influencers affected by the ban, gathering testimonials and stories to understand the practical impact. By examining these experiences and perspectives, this study provides insights for potential legislation regulating social media, with a particular emphasis on protecting individuals' rights. In addition to addressing the immediate effects of the ban, this research also looks into the long-term impact on Nigerian Twitter users' expressiveness, thoughts about human rights and freedom of expression, and their usage of the platform two years later.

The findings from this research will contribute to a better understanding of the complex relationship between social media regulation, human rights, and freedom of expression in Nigeria and provide policy recommendations to address the challenges posed by social media regulation in Nigeria.



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# INTRODUCTION



*why write poems about  
freedom in a twitter-  
banned country?  
to remind myself that  
sometimes,  
memory is the only means  
to sustain life.  
& imagination is the most  
prized form of freedom.*

**Hauwa Shaffii Nuhu,**  
*why write poems in a twitter-banned  
country*

A 2021 Africa Fact Check [report](#) reveals that approximately 3 million Nigerians use Twitter. Subsequently, in 2023, Statista [reported](#) that “Twitter users in Nigeria potentially reachable with advertising amounted to around 4.95 million users.” Out of this number, [over 60% are young people.](#)

Twitter, from its inception in Nigeria, is more than a mere social connectivity platform. It is also a space for learning, interaction, intellectual discourse, and activism. For many young Nigerians, it serves as a platform for engaging in discussions on various social issues from local and even global politics and economy to gender equality.

Although the #EndSARS protests in 2020 is regarded as the primary example of digital activism on Twitter in Nigeria, the platform has always been a significant force in organizing and advocacy — In 2014, during the campaign to bring back the abducted Chibok girls by the Boko Haram terrorist group, the [hashtag #BringBackOurGirls](#) gained traction on Twitter, garnering widespread attention from the global community and prompting both local and international intervention.

But, in 2020, [Twitter's role as a platform for digital activism](#) became more prominent because of the part it played in organizing for the #EndSARS protests against police brutality and oppression. The platform was [used by protesters](#) to coordinate, share live updates, give advice, raise funds for the protests, and offer



legal assistance to those arrested. Within a single weekend, the hashtag #EndSARS amassed over 25 million tweets, capturing the interest and support of the global community with calls for the Nigerian government's accountability.

The protests may be said to have brought to

the fore, once again, the Nigerian government's attention to the influence and power of social media in holding them accountable and bringing their misdeeds to the international stage. But, it would not mark the first time the government has felt challenged by social media platforms. Since 2019, plans to regulate social media have been

underway with the introduction of the Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulations Bill 2019, also known as the Anti-Social Media Bill, in the National Assembly. This bill aimed to criminalize the dissemination of false or malicious information through social media, and if enacted, would grant authorities arbitrary powers to shut down parts of the internet and restrict access to social media. There was a strong civil society opposition to the Bill, on the basis that it would impede freedom of speech and press freedom.

In June 2021, following Twitter's decision to remove President Muhammadu Buhari's tweets for violating its policy, the government seized the opportunity to impose a ban on the platform, citing concerns about "activities undermining Nigeria's corporate existence." The ban elicited widespread uproar among Nigerians, including Twitter users, civil society, and activists, who contended that it violated constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of speech, information, and [expression](#). Some Twitter users [circumvented](#) the ban by using VPNs and began the campaign to [#KeptItOn](#), while others opted to permanently leave the platform.

The ban was lifted in January 2022, more than

7 months later. However, the shadow of the Twitter ban persisted, leading to a more cautious approach by users who feared increased monitoring of the platform. They were not wrong and the heightened scrutiny resulted in cases of individuals being wrongfully [targeted](#) because of opinions shared in their tweets. The same year, a Twitter user was [reportedly](#) arrested, brutalized, and charged with cyberstalking at the behest of the [President's wife](#) due to an allegedly insulting tweet directed at her.

In June 2022, the National Information Technology Development Agency, a Federal Government agency mandated to develop, regulate, and advise on information technology, [unveiled](#) a 'Code of Practice for Interactive Computer Service Platforms/Internet Intermediaries.' According to the draft document, prominent platforms such as Twitter and Facebook would be required, upon demand, to provide users or authorized government agencies with information on: a) the rationale behind the popularity of online content and the influential factors or figures behind it, and b) the reasons why users receive specific information on their timelines. Similar to the response to the Anti-Social Media Bill, Nigerians criticized the Code as an attempt to covertly

regulate and monitor social media.

In 2023, Twitter played a significant role in the [Nigerian general elections](#), demonstrating its influence as a platform for diverse political activism. Beyond political campaigning, Twitter was utilized in election monitoring and documentation of various human rights abuses throughout the electoral process. Discussions on issues such as disenfranchisement, bigotry, and reports of human rights violations provided a crucial space for citizens to voice their concerns, share information, and hold political actors accountable. Because of Twitter's real-time nature, rapid dissemination of election-related news and updates contributed to increased awareness of the electoral process among users both within and outside Nigeria.

Later that year, the Nigerian government reintroduced a bill aimed at [regulating digital platforms](#). This proposed legislation aimed to repeal and reenact the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Act, granting the NBC significant powers to regulate social media. Notably, government officials have [recently referred](#) to social media as a '[menace](#)' that requires containment. This renewed effort to regulate



digital platforms highlights the government's growing concern over the influence and impact of social media in shaping public discourse and opinion.

This is articulated by Gbenga Sesan, who said - “[sic] I think two things are happening at the same time – one is that there’s an ongoing conversation about regulation that has been going on for a very long time and this gets triggered with every government reaction. So,

every time the government says ‘we need to regulate social media’ it is in response to some trigger. And there are triggers from time to time... But there’s a second thing happening at the same time, which is global conversations about regulation of big tech. For some countries, these two come together and are sort of confused. And I think that’s what’s happening with Nigeria. So, every time the government has an excuse to say we want to regulate, they lean or sort of piggyback on that global conversation

... But they are two different things that often get mixed up, unfortunately.”

Within this framework, this research investigates the consequences of Nigeria’s Twitter ban on human rights defenders and youth content creators who utilize social media for advocacy, creativity, and the documentation of human rights and provides perspective on the social media regulation landscape in Nigeria.

## The primary objectives of this research are as follows:

To assess the tangible effects of the Twitter ban on youth human rights defenders, activists, and content creators in Nigeria.

To explore the broader implications of the Twitter ban on social media regulation and freedom of expression in Nigeria.

To provide insights and recommendations for policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to address the challenges posed by social media regulation in Nigeria.

## To achieve these objectives, this research addresses the following key research questions:

How has the Twitter ban directly affected the ability of individuals, particularly human rights defenders and content creators, to engage in advocacy, activism, and creative expression on social media?

What are the financial repercussions of the Twitter ban on individuals and organizations that rely on social media platforms for their advocacy and creative work?

How has the Twitter ban impacted freedom of expression, public engagement with human rights issues, and the documentation of human rights abuses in Nigeria?

What are the political implications of the Twitter ban, particularly in terms of increased government scrutiny of online content and the regulation of social media platforms?



# METHODOLOGY



This research primarily employed a qualitative methodology. An evidence-based approach was utilized to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the presented information. The inclusion criteria were tailored to target specific demographics – age, gender, type of creative or advocacy work and geographic spread – ensuring a representative sample.

## 01 Data Collection

Data collection for this research was conducted through two means –

### 1.1 Surveys

Surveys were disseminated through Google Forms and mainly distributed to a Twitter audience of human rights defenders, civil society actors, creatives, content creators and activists. Survey questions were designed based on the research objectives and included both closed-ended and open-ended questions to capture a range of responses. In total, 60 responses

were collected, each offering reflections on similar themes. The survey questions were carefully crafted to narrow the focus of inquiry, addressing specific aspects related to the impact of the Twitter ban. All questions were optional and to preserve the anonymity of respondents, names, emails and other forms of identification were optional. Respondents of both surveys and interviews had options to remain anonymous and/or refuse to answer questions. The questions in the survey were divided into sections on the impact of the ban on advocacy and creativity; financial repercussions; political implications and future possibilities of social media regulation.

### 1.2. In-depth Interviews

Eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to explore their experiences, perspectives on, and responses to the Twitter ban. The interviews were guided by a set of predetermined questions while allowing flexibility for participants to express their views freely. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, via video conferencing, and WhatsApp calls. Some interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Others were written by hand during the interview. The interviewees included two journalists; one researcher; one civil society actor; a digital rights entrepreneur; a lawyer and human rights defender; and two activists.



## 02 Data Analysis

### 2.1. Thematic Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis which involved identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data to find commonalities and differences in participants' experiences and perspectives. Analysis began with familiarization of the data through repeated readings of transcripts, followed by coding of meaningful segments of text. Themes were then developed and refined through a process of comparison and interpretation.

### 2.2. Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data from surveys were analyzed using statistical techniques, such as descriptive statistics and inferential analysis. This analysis provided numerical summaries and comparisons of survey responses.





### 03 Participant Selection

Participants were purposefully selected to ensure representation from various categories of stakeholders, including human rights defenders, activists, youth content creators, civil society and influencers who had experienced the Twitter ban. Efforts were made to ensure diversity in terms of gender, geographical location, socio-economic background, and types of advocacy or creative work.

### 04 Reporting

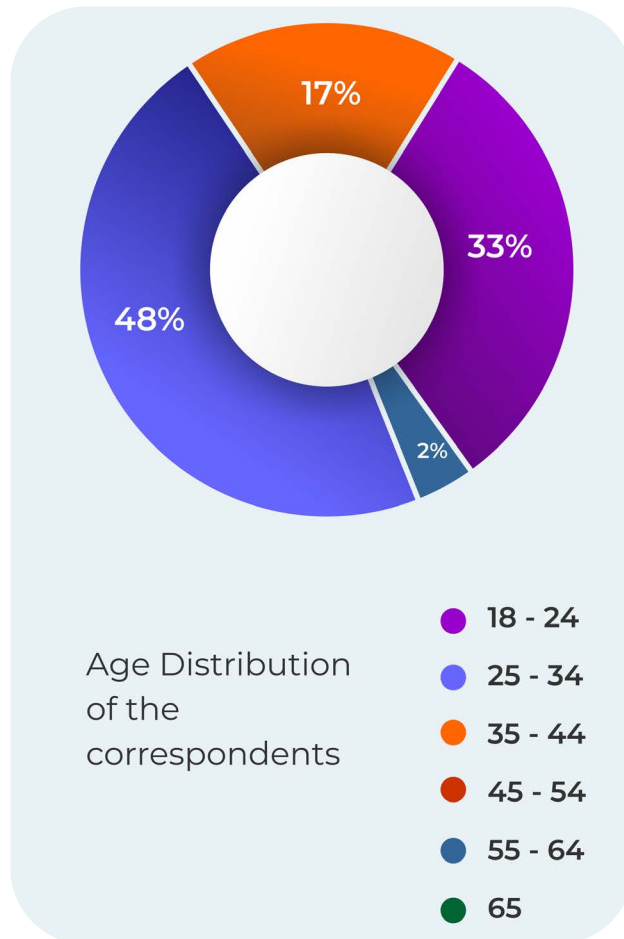
The research findings are reported transparently and comprehensively in this research report, adhering to the principles of clarity, coherence, and accuracy. Visual aids such as tables, charts, and quotations have been used to enhance the presentation of findings.

# FINDINGS



## 01 Age Distribution

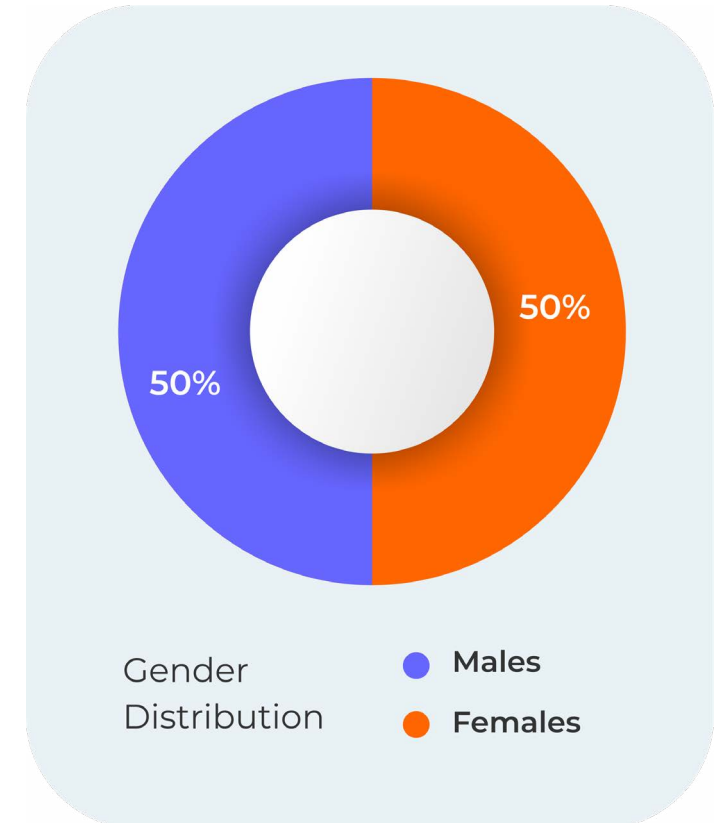
The chart below shows the different age brackets that participated in the survey.



This is interpreted as:

- The majority of respondents fall within the age range of 25 - 34, comprising approximately 48.3% of the total responses.
- The next largest group is respondents aged 18 - 24, making up approximately 33.33% of the total responses.
- A smaller portion of respondents are in the age ranges of 35 - 44 and 55 - 64, accounting for approximately 16.7% and 1% of the total responses, respectively.

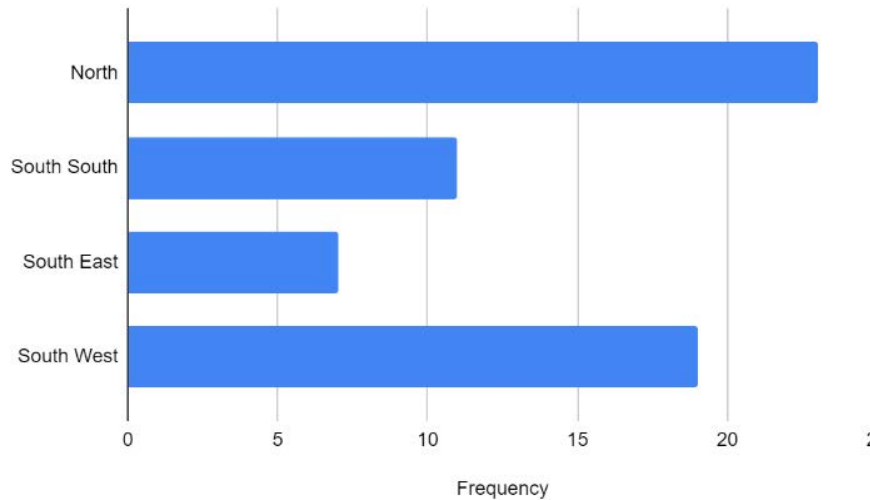
## 02 Gender



The gender distribution among respondents is relatively balanced, with females comprising approximately 50% of the total responses and males comprising approximately 50%.

### 03 Geographical Spread

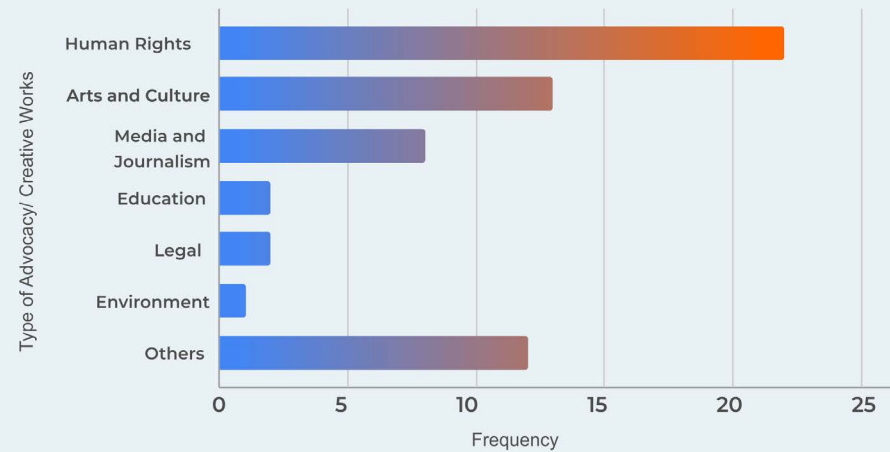
Frequency vs. Region



23 responses came from the North (including the North Central, Northeast and Northwest); 11 responses were from the South-South; 7 responses from the Southeast; and, 19 responses from the Southwest.

### 04 Frequently Occurring Creative and Advocacy Work

Type of Advocacy/ Creative Works vs Frequency



- **Human Rights Advocacy:** This category includes all responses related to human rights advocacy, legal advocacy, gender equality advocacy, advocacy against gender-based violence (GBV), advocacy for civic space rights, and advocacy for minority rights.
- **Arts and Culture:** This category includes responses related to various forms of artistic expression, such as painting, photography, visual arts, literary arts, filmmaking (documentary), artistic activism, and cultural preservation advocacy.

## 05 Thematic Analysis

Five themes emerged in the analyses and describe the experiences of various actors and users impacted by the Twitter ban. Each of these themes is illustrated with some direct quotes by respondents in the survey –

### ***i. Impact on Advocacy:***

Respondents highlighted limitations on outreach, hindered communication with stakeholders, and suppression of freedom of speech.

An entry stated -



*“At the time, my organization, Network of University Legal Aid Institutions, was running a Justice Education Nigeria campaign online. With the ban, we couldn’t post or share information on Twitter (now X) and that meant that there was a percentage of our audience to whom the information might be beneficial that we couldn’t reach...”*

Another respondent stated -



*“Reach is important in advocacy and journalism. The lack of reach for both victims and people trying to help them was very problematic...”*

- **Media and Journalism:** This category includes responses related to journalism, photojournalism, digital media, social media content creation, documentary filmmaking, nonfiction storytelling, and media and journalism advocacy.
- **Health and Environmental Advocacy:** This category includes responses related to health advocacy, environmental advocacy, public health initiatives, and advocacy for improved healthcare and environmental policies.
- **Education Advocacy:** This category includes responses related to advocacy for education, educational initiatives, and promoting awareness about specific education-related issues.
- **Technology and Digital Activism:** This category includes responses related to technology advocacy, digital activism, advocacy through technology platforms, and advocacy for digital rights.
- **Other Forms of Creative Expression:** This category includes responses related to fashion, food, and advocacy through personal expression and creativity.



An entry stated -



*“I make use of Twitter to mobilize support for campaigns against discriminatory legislation. The ban disrupts my group’s communication channels, slowing down efforts to rally public support, engage with lawmakers, and coordinate legal challenges, affecting the group’s overall impact on human rights advocacy.”*

## **ii. Financial Repercussions:**

Respondents cited financial implications stemming from the Twitter ban, such as loss of clients, decreased visibility for businesses, and reduced support for advocacy initiatives.

A respondent stated -



*“... It made me lose customers because that was the period I was working on the visibility for my business. I was beginning to get recognized when the ban came about, and up until now, I haven’t geared enough zeal to go back...”*

Another respondent, on the financial impact of the ban -



*“Fewer people were reached during the period as a lot of people couldn’t afford or just didn’t want to go through downloading VPNs. Brands that helped amplify our voices also had to abandon Twitter that time...”*

Another respondent stated -



*“The ban hindered my ability to reach potential clients which resulted in a decline in financial support for my advocacy initiatives.”*

## **iii. Freedom of Expression:**

Many respondents noted changes in public engagement with human rights issues post-ban, including increased fear of arrest, limitations on free speech and expression, and difficulties in holding the government accountable for human rights violations.

The Twitter ban has raised concerns about freedom of expression and access to information. It has limited the public’s ability to engage on human rights issues through a widely used platform, potentially hindering open dialogue and the sharing of information on such matters.

Another respondent stated -



*“The public is now more wary about the things they say or express on Twitter. There is a limit to the issues that can be freely discussed on Twitter.”*

An entry stated -



*“The ban has made it more difficult for citizens to report human rights violations and hold the government accountable...”*

Because the Twitter ban also limited freedom of speech, there was considerable hindrance in outreach efforts, and which impeded on journalists’ access to information.



*“At the time of the Twitter ban, I was involved in an online campaign to enlighten people on their civic and political rights including the right to freedom of expression. After the Twitter ban, I stopped tweeting and that impacted the reach of the campaign and people’s reception of the message.”*

A respondent stated -



*“As part of my work, I often need to use social media to find sources for my stories. If people are afraid of speaking up for fear of arrest, they will be unwilling to engage my media requests. My tweets or callouts, could also give the government an idea of what I’m writing about and put me at risk.”*

An entry from a human rights activist also stated -



*“As a human rights advocate in Nigeria, I rely on Twitter to express opinions, share information, and engage with the community on issues related to human rights abuses ... The Twitter ban restricted my ability to freely express my views and engage in open dialogue, ... suppressing freedom of speech”*

#### **iv. Political Implications/Increased Government Scrutiny:**

The consensus among respondents indicates heightened government scrutiny of online content post-ban, raising concerns about censorship, surveillance, and reprisals against dissenting voices.

An entry stated -



*“People are more cautious of what they say now on Twitter because there’s now a risk of censorship and retaliation.”*

An entry from a respondent illustrates vividly how Twitter users exercise caution and urge others to exercise a level of caution when broaching sensitive topics.



*“Whenever someone points out something considered unfair, they are quick to caution them that Twitter will soon be taken back...”*

A respondent who regularly interacts with the political sphere stated thus -



*“...People have become disenchanted with the idea of having enforceable human rights in Nigeria. My interaction with people at campaigns has revealed this...”*

A respondent stated -



*“There is fear of unconstitutional arrest and torture. Activists fear that they may lose their freedom of movement due to unnecessary arrest and police victimization.”*

## **v. Challenges to Creative Expression and Engagement:**

The Twitter ban also posed challenges to creative expression and audience for content creators.

A content creator described -



*“As a content creator, sometimes I do some interactive polls and quizzes on my Twitter to engage the audience in discussions... The Twitter ban disrupted these interactive initiatives, reducing my ability to foster dialogue and awareness around human rights issues through innovative digital media strategies.”*

Similarly, a fashion designer explained how the ban restricted creative expression -



*“As a fashion designer whose speciality is in creating clothing with messages promoting diversity, inclusivity, and body positivity, Twitter is used to showcase my work, and my designs, connect with a global audience, and engage in conversations about the intersection of fashion and human rights. As a designer, the Twitter ban limited my reach, hindering the ability to spread messages of empowerment through fashion...”*

A photojournalist stated -



*“As a photojournalist, I use Twitter a lot to share behind-the-scenes insights, engage with followers, and promote exhibitions highlighting marginalized communities. But the ban disrupted my connection with an audience ...”*

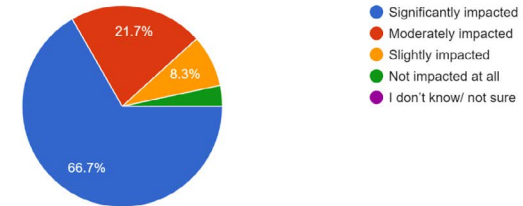
An artist said -



*“The Twitter ban affected me because I employ Twitter to showcase my artwork addressing social justice issues. The ban hindered the ability to share new pieces, engage with followers, and participate in online art communities.”*

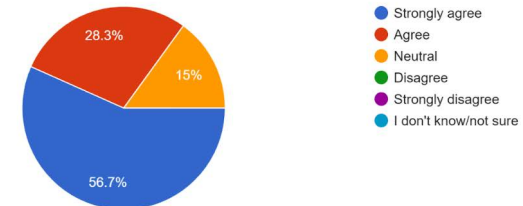
How did the Twitter ban directly affect your human rights advocacy or creative expression on social media?

60 responses



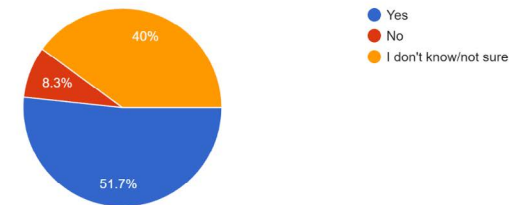
The shutdown of (any) social media platform(s) impact my ability to make money and fund my work as a creator/artist/activist

60 responses



Have you noticed changes in public awareness or engagement with human rights issues since the Twitter ban?

60 responses



## 06 Structured Interviews

The in-depth structured interviews revealed several prominent themes on the impact of the Twitter ban. Participants emphasized the role of Twitter in documenting human rights abuses, particularly instances of police brutality,

and highlighted its significance as a platform for raising awareness and seeking help in cases of abuse.

The interviews also highlighted Twitter's function

as a means of holding government and public officials accountable. Participants described how the platform facilitated direct communication with authorities and served as a platform for public scrutiny of official actions. A prevalent theme



also emerged regarding the implications of the ban on freedom of expression as interviewees expressed concerns about the stifling effect of the ban on open dialogue and the suppression of dissenting opinions and voices.

## i. Documentation of Human Rights Abuses

In 2012, Ada Iloanya's brother was arrested and handed over to officers of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). He was neither seen nor heard from again. Since 2019, Iloanya has been an activist against police brutality, with Twitter as her primary digital activism base. In 2020, his story and countless others spurred protesters as they called on the Nigerian government to #EndSARS.

"I have always been advocating against police brutality trying to get justice for my brother. And over the years, I've had resounding silence until I put out the tweet on Twitter in 2019. That was the first time people even paid attention to the conversation. And then, in 2020 and subsequently, people are listening and trying to help," Iloanya said.

Ridwan Oke, a human rights lawyer who played an active role in providing legal aid services during the #EndSARS protests and for victims of police brutality emphasized the importance of Twitter in documenting occurrences of police brutality – "If you want to check for tweets about police brutality and abuse that occurred in 2015 or 2014, you can still find them on Twitter unless they've been deleted. Similarly, most events from the 2020 protests remain accessible unless removed by the posters," he said. "Twitter remains a vital platform for seeking help when discussing personal issues like abuse. Police Public Relations Officers (PPROs) are particularly active on Twitter because they recognize it as a hotspot for negative publicity. Nigerians often turn to Twitter to highlight police misconduct, knowing that trending topics prompt police action. PPROs use Twitter for damage control and to address viral cases ... They are less active on other platforms where issues with law enforcement are less prevalent. The pressure on police via Twitter is evident in instances where viral videos showcasing police misconduct would garner serious attention on Twitter compared to platforms like Instagram where reactions might be more casual," Oke revealed.

Responses on this theme indicate that the Twitter ban hindered the ability of individuals and organizations to report and disseminate information about human rights violations in real time. This restriction limited the visibility of abuses both domestically and globally, and made it more challenging for activists, journalists, and human rights defenders to raise awareness, mobilize support, and hold perpetrators accountable. Additionally, respondents observed that the ban created a climate of censorship and fear, further discouraging the documentation and reporting of human rights abuses.

## ii. Advocacy and Activism

Twitter serves as an important platform for mobilization, organization, and dissemination of information for activists and advocacy groups. By restricting access to Twitter, respondents agreed that the government severely curtailed the ability of these groups to communicate, coordinate, and amplify their messages.

In 2023, Iloanya staged a one-person protest in Abuja and used her social media to amplify her message. Her retweeted tweets reached

the member representing her constituency at the National Assembly who took up the case and helped Iloanya submit her petition to the Public Petition Committee of the National Assembly of the House of Representatives, where the case currently is.

“She [the member, House of Representatives] sent me a DM, and that was how the conversation happened. It’s clear: Twitter has become an invaluable tool for my advocacy efforts,” Iloanya said.

While expressing the importance of Twitter to his work as a journalist, Muhammed Akinyemi expressed a similar view – “As a journalist, media isolation creates a barrier to communication. I probably never have had to save the contact number of a police commissioner – if something were happening and I needed to talk to a police PRO, I go on Twitter and @ them. Twitter has always served as a vital platform for contacting public officials, sharing information, and holding authorities accountable. For instance, during my friend’s recent arrest, I maintained an active thread on Twitter, tagging relevant officials until he was released. This public exposure often compels swift action.”

Akinyemi believes that Twitter has evolved into a hybrid of traditional media platforms like newspapers and TV. It is a crucial tool for accessing real-time information, making it nearly indispensable. “The platform remains essential



for advocacy, especially in regions like the Global South where traditional media is often influenced by politicians and propaganda. And unlike traditional media, Twitter allows for more freedom of expression without the fear of censorship. This unrestricted platform facilitates global conversations and activism, as seen during movements like #EndSARS where we saw international celebrities and even Twitter's then-CEO, Jack Dorsey, engaged in these discussions, amplifying their impact.”

### iii. Implication on Freedom of Expression and Political Participation

The ban also undermined freedom of expression and stifled dissent, hindering the ability of activists to raise awareness about social issues, mobilize support for causes, and hold those in power accountable.

But most importantly, the aftermath of the ban created a climate of fear and uncertainty among activists, who now face increased risks of censorship, harassment, and persecution for

speaking out against injustices.

Angel Nduka-Nwosu, a journalist, poet and feminist activist stated – “Twitter is where I connect with like-minded individuals, not only for activism but also for opportunities. The ban sparked fear and concern because if they could target dissenters, it meant anyone expressing views against the status quo could be next. As someone vocal about gender issues and police brutality, that made me feel vulnerable. The ban seemed to embolden misogynists, sending a message that silencing dissent is acceptable. Women used Twitter to share stories, seek justice, and receive support. However, during the ban, there was a shift in attitudes. Some users began to dismiss women's issues, suggesting they were trivial compared to the challenges of using VPNs. This pushed women's concerns to the background, as people prioritized entertainment and light-hearted discussions over serious issues like gender-based violence. It was disheartening to see women's voices marginalized further during a time of already heightened vulnerability.”

For Iloanya, there is a growing fear that Twitter is no longer a reliable platform for expression.

“The safety and confidence we had using Twitter is no longer there – this has affected even people in the advocacy space who are now scared that their organizations may be targeted if they say certain things,” she said. “This apprehension also extends to professionals, who are now asking if their Twitter activity could be held against them.”

Akinyemi also expressed that he has generally become more cautious in his language and approach on Twitter – “Before posting, I ensure information is validated from credible sources. When discussing politicians, I avoid mentioning those currently in power to mitigate risks... I have also preemptively blocked some accounts to minimize the possibility of my tweets reaching the wrong quarters.”

Sesan highlighted what the ban's implication meant for engaging in civic conversations when he said - “There's a heightened sense of self-censorship. There are people who would never come back to Twitter. Who probably got into more trouble than the rest of us. Some people were added to the travel ban list ... So there is a physical departure from Twitter and there is also a thematic departure –in the sense that people no longer talk about politics and just tweet about



global scandal(s)... Once Nigeria is involved, they don't talk about it .”

Nduka-Nwosu said – “Essentially, the ban serves as a warning: if you speak out against those in power, you'll be targeted, along with your family members, and may face violence. This is particularly frightening for me and other activists. Nigeria lacks a strong opposition party, and witnessing young activists being vilified and targeted can breed political apathy among the youth. It makes them question the value of speaking out when dedicated activists are subjected to such treatment. Instead, they may opt to focus solely on survival, prioritizing their well-being over political engagement.”



## 07 Discussion



*“[sic] We are in the social media era ... most youth I know have more strength behind their keypads ... So cutting them off this accessible channel will only mean their non-participation...” (Survey Respondent)*

The research findings show the importance of social media platforms, particularly Twitter, on advocacy, activism, and government accountability within the Nigerian context.

Social media platforms in Nigeria have emerged as critical instruments embraced by various societal segments, including dissidents, opposition groups, and marginalized communities. This widespread usage demonstrates the platforms' significance in facilitating public discourse and amplifying voices that challenge prevailing power structures.

Findings from this research highlight the impact of the Twitter ban on internet users in Nigeria, indicating a heightened sense of caution and fear

among users. Fear of government surveillance, censorship, or legal repercussions has led individuals to self-censor their online activities, limiting their ability to freely express opinions, share information, and engage in political discourse. Furthermore, the reduction in citizen expression has implications for democratic participation and governance.

This research acknowledges that the aftermath of the Nigerian government's ban on Twitter in 2021 serves as a relevant case study in understanding the complex dynamics between state regulation and online expression. The ban, initiated by the Buhari-led administration, lacked a legal framework to support its enforcement, yet prompted widespread apprehension among Twitter users who became more cautious in their online interactions and usage patterns years after its occurrence.

In the aftermath of the Twitter ban, the Nigerian government has continued to explore regulatory measures aimed at controlling social media platforms. Proposals for legislation granting

authorities greater powers to regulate online content have raised alarm among civil society organizations and digital rights advocates, who argue that such measures could further stifle freedom of expression and democratic participation.

This study and responses by user participants clearly identifies the potential implications of such regulations on the work of human rights defenders, activists and content creators, exploring how these groups navigate evolving legal landscapes while continuing to leverage social media for advocacy and creative expression.

A content creator respondent to the survey stated - “Since the Twitter ban, I have been more focused on building a community on other social media platforms like TikTok.”

To explore the phenomenon of young people switching social networks as a result of censorship, this research examined the broader impact of the Twitter ban on alternative platforms like

TikTok which has a large number of young users and found that the platform is also a subject to scrutiny by government and quasi-governmental authorities. In 2022, it was [reported](#) that the Kano State Hisbah and Censorship Board, a state-funded agency responsible for enforcing Sharia law, have been actively involved in efforts to regulate TikTok, citing concerns about what they perceive as "immorality" within the Muslim community in the state. Two years later, in 2024, the Hisbah [reportedly](#) arrested TikTokers and sought to apprehend more TikTok skit creators for allegedly sharing vulgar skit videos on their TikTok and other social media profiles, actions that the board claims contradict its established laws.

Looking forward, the Nigerian government's exploration of regulatory measures aimed at controlling social media platforms presents new challenges and uncertainties for online expression and activism. The potential introduction of formal social media regulation could establish legal mechanisms for penalizing noncompliance, heightening concerns about censorship and governmental overreach.

In response, proactive engagement and resistance

is crucial. Sesan emphasizes the importance of pushing back against discussions of social media clampdowns, advocating for proactive defence strategies to safeguard digital rights. "[sic] I believe the best defence is offence. By that, I mean, we need to exert pressure on the government. Whenever you hear discussions about clamping down on social media, speak out and oppose it. Because the truth is, they are testing the waters. Every time they initiate such discussions, it's a test. If there's significant pushback, they tend to ease off," he said. "However, if there is no resistance, you might suddenly find out that a legislator has sponsored a new bill on social media regulation, and it's already progressed to the second reading without much notice. We need to act proactively."

## 08 Study Limitations

There are a few limitations to the study. First, a nonprobability purposive sampling technique was used. As such, the reflections of the lived experiences of the participants reflect their experiences only and the results may not be generalizable to a larger population of Twitter users.

Secondly, while data triangulation was conducted through informal observations on Twitter, analysis, and in-depth interviews to enhance data validity, it is important to acknowledge the potential for participants to provide inaccurate or false information.

Another notable limitation is that, despite concerted efforts to arrange in-depth interviews with certain target participants, particularly content creators, unavailability and scheduling conflicts meant that their views were not thoroughly reflected. As a result, the research only relies on data from content creators who completed the survey.

# RECOMMENDATIONS



Based on the research findings, the following concrete recommendations are proposed for policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders:

## Transparency and Inclusivity in Policy Formulation

Policies should be formulated to uphold freedom of expression as a fundamental human right and ensure that social media regulations do not unduly restrict individuals' ability to express themselves online. Regulations should be narrowly tailored to achieve legitimate objectives such as national security or public safety, while minimizing the impact on freedom of expression.

Policymakers should also work towards developing comprehensive legal frameworks that safeguard freedom of expression, freedom to access information, and digital rights while addressing legitimate concerns regarding harmful content or the spread of misinformation. These frameworks should be developed through transparent and inclusive processes, involving input from stakeholders, including civil society organizations, human rights defenders, and tech companies and experts.

## Civil Society Involvement

Civil society plays a critical role in monitoring government actions, raising awareness about human rights violations, and advocating for policy

reforms. Additionally, civil society organizations are instrumental in pushing back against censorship, oppressive policies, and legislation that threaten the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens.

## Creation of Digital Literacy Programs

By enhancing digital literacy, individuals can better protect themselves from online threats and contribute to a more informed and empowered digital society. These programs should be tailored to address the specific challenges posed by social media regulations and accessible to all members of society, particularly minoritized groups and communities who are disproportionately affected by shutdowns and censorship.

Additionally, law enforcement agencies, judicial bodies and quasi-government agencies (like the Hisbah) should be trained and equipped with resources on digital rights to enable them to handle digital evidence effectively and fairly in cases involving online expression.

## International Cooperation

Nigeria should actively participate in the global dialogue surrounding the mitigation of misinformation, disinformation, cyberbullying, and other social media challenges by engaging in the exchange of best practices among governments and tech companies worldwide. This engagement will enable the government to address cross-border issues related to social media regulation effectively without infringing on freedom of expression

and the right to access information as they have previously done. Also, collaboration with regional and international human rights mechanisms is essential to uphold global standards of freedom of expression and digital rights.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their anonymity and confidentiality were assured throughout the research process. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

