

Assessment of the Implication of Government Restrictions of Social Media on Freedom of Expression in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study, “Assessment of the implication of government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression” sought to determine the nature of government restriction of social media, establish audience reaction towards government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression. The study was solely anchored on the authoritarian media theory. Using the survey research method, a sample size of 384 respondents were reached using the questionnaire instrument. Notably too, data gathered were analyzed using simple percentages. Findings revealed that there are different forms of government restrictions of social media such as content censorship, social media taxation, user registration and partial or complete ban. Findings further indicated that government restriction of social media impede freedom of expression to a very high extent. The study concluded that government restriction of social media impedes freedom of expression to a very high extent. The study recommended that government at all levels should discontinue from enforcing any of the forms of social media restrictions.

Keywords: Freedom of expression, Social media, Implication of Government restrictions

Introduction

Technological revolution is changing ways people communicate. Some years into the new millennium, that was the year 2004, Facebook did not start operation, and other platforms — Twitter and YouTube were launched into the communication world in 2006 and 2007 respectively (Samur, 2019). The platforms announced their entrants into the world of communication, diffusion and adoption followed immediately making them some of the most social media platforms in modern times. Interestingly, these platforms came with advantages as they transformed the ways people interact, socialize or connect.

Though Marshall McLuhan predicted the emergence of the Internet and the power it will wield (Woollaston, 2017), "no one could have predicted the way the Internet developed, spreading beyond borders to become an accepted (and expected) reality of everyday life" (Paslawsky, 2017, p. 1487). The foregoing reflects the very essence to the speed at which the internet spreads and its acceptance across the globe. Perhaps, one could see it from the angle of the possibilities created by the innovation with regards to communication and information sharing across borders. In 21st century, the internet serves as the link for people from different parts of the world to be in a form of virtual room and communicate. Subsequently, it has increased communication volume as much as it bridges the gap that hitherto existed in the world of communication. The possibility

it affords users has been identified as one of the most interesting aspects of the innovation. According to David and Mariswamy (2014), the rise of the internet as well as the new media has transformed communication between people the world over.

In a world where mediated communication is fast becoming adopted, appreciated and useful, social media has become a driving force in bridging gaps and enabling information sharing. It has transformed society. Quoting Kietzmann et al., (2011), Paslawsky (2017) lend credence that by enabling perpetual communication, social media platforms have transformed society on a micro and macro level. Social media provides people across borders and social divides the opportunity to have effective and affordable communication and more. In the 21st century political landscape, social media present citizens the opportunity to engage their leaders like never before. Coupled with the benefits of a broader form of communication enabled by new media platforms, people now do more and participate more in governance.

However, the abuse of the power of the liberal media spaces is alarming. Anderson and Rainie (2020) provide a better explanation to capture the moment. According to Anderson and Rainie, benefits of the internet have been much celebrated in recent times just as there has been a period of "techlash" where several users have expressed worry that certain actors exploit (for the wrong purpose) opportunities provided the speed, reach and complexity. Interestingly, social media has been identified as platforms that aid terrorism and encourage insecurity across different territories. Biyere (2012) asserts that terrorist groups such as ISIS and many more make use of social media as recruitment and propaganda spreading channels. In Nigeria, Boko Haram is also actively involved in the use of new media platforms in distribution of propaganda content, and the reach is unimaginably wide.

In spite of the numerous benefits of social media and its susceptibility to abuse, the issues surrounding restriction and how it infringes on the rights of people to free expression is a delicate one. There seems to still be genuine concerns about the way Social Media Restriction in on freedom of expression. Biyere (2012) points out that there is a thin line that exists between free speech and misuse of same. According to Biyere (2012), people have also raised questions as to how social media and the freedom of expression that flows with it contribute to ways people "incite violence, spread hate and infringe on the privacy of others.

There is a growing use of social media among Nigerians who found in the platforms, avenues to communicate with one another without little cost when compared to the amount paid to make voice calls. A Data Reportal 2021 report puts social media users in Nigeria at 33 million as of January 2021, (Kemp, 2021). Social media is giving the people the platform to have a voice in government — providing the space for citizens to discuss issues, organise themselves for a common purpose and hold leaders accountable (Chakrabarti, 2018). Further, Chakrabarti avers that social media was referred to as technology for liberation owing to their roles in the Arab spring. Some of the issues highlighted by Chakrabarti as to the question around the effects social media have on democracy are foreign interference, false news, echo chambers, political harassment, unequal participation, and more. Most importantly, social media provide the space and uphold the democratic principle of free expression — and this is where it gets interesting.

Howard (2011) opined government's worry that platforms are providing too much powers to the citizens have since swung into action with attempts at regulating social media in spite of

democratic principles such as free expression, hence the need to examine the challenges and implication of regulating social media. Questions have been raised as what could be the best form of governance that could be administered on the internet in order to curb its abuses. According to Palawsky (2017), commentators have asked questions whether each government in different countries would champion the course of regulating the internet (that is, independently) or whether such efforts will assume an international approach. Further, Palawsky states that the various laws already established by various countries are the main challenge to the quest of developing a comprehensive system of regulation for social media platforms.

Nigeria practices democracy and the citizen's value freedom as they have had a taste of both dictatorial regimes, and democratic administrations in the past. However, with the return to democracy in 1999, free expression has always taken important spaces in intellectual discourse. Attempts to infringe on free expression in Nigeria have always met with stiff opposition. According to Attoh (2016) freedom of expression is regarded as a cornerstone of democracy which ensures the consolidation and development of democracy. In recent times, even in the midst of a democratic administration, free speech has been threatened with different pieces of legislation being put forward by Nigeria's legislative arm of government. It is on this premise that the study examines implications of government restriction of social media on freedom of expression.

Theoretical framework

Authoritarian Media Theory

The authoritarian media theory was propounded by Theodor Adorno and his colleagues from the Frankfurt School in the mid-20th century. The authoritarian media theory suggests that in a society with an authoritarian government, the media is controlled and used as a tool for propaganda and to maintain the government's power and control over the population. This theory assumes that the media is not independent and objective, but rather serves the interests of the ruling elite. It is often associated with the media systems of totalitarian regimes.

Tenets of the Authoritarian Media theory

1. The media is not independent, but rather serves the interests of those in power.
2. The media is used as a tool for propaganda and manipulating public opinion.
3. Journalists and media professionals are often restricted in their reporting and expression by the government or other elites.
4. Media censorship and control is used to maintain political control and limit dissent.

The theory aids the study in explaining why government regulates media. It also helps to understand the role of media in the society, particularly in relation to power and control. It also provides a useful framework for analyzing the media landscape in authoritarian regimes to control the media and the potential consequences of media manipulation in the society

Empirical Reviews

Agada (2021) did a study titled, "Social Media and Government Regulation in Nigeria". The study sought to determine some of the consequences of social media regulation and to find out some of the reasons why government seeks to regulate the social media in Nigeria. The survey research design was used and questionnaire was designed as instrument for data collection. A total of 400 respondents were sampled in the study. Findings from the study revealed that social

media regulation poses a serious threat to freedom of expression. More so, it was discovered that some of the reasons why government seeks to regulate social media is due to the criticisms and backlash it has continued to get.

The study concluded that regulating social media will be dangerous for free speech and expression. The study recommended that social media should not be regulated because it a medium of expression which is recognized by law. This study relates to the present one in that they both seek to find out some of the consequences of social media regulation to the society.

In another study, Sanitas (2021) conducted a study titled, “Social media regulation in a democratic Nigeria: Challenges and Implications”. The objective of the study was to determine the challenges and implications of regulating social media in a democratic Nigeria. The study used the qualitative approach. The study found that though not directly targeted at the media, the social media regulation bill will impact negatively on the power of the media to play their watchdog role and traditional function of providing for the communication and information needs of the public in 21st century. Furthermore, the study found that social media platforms provide alternative means or channels through which the media reaches the people in modern times. The study concluded that the proposed regulation of social media is increasingly turning into a tough task as the implication is the muzzling of free expression, and such moves may inhibit promotion of democratic values of which free speech is chief. The study relates to the current one in view of their striking peculiarities.

Also, Ishaya (2005) *Social Media Regulation: A Hindrance to Smooth Journalistic Practice in Nigeria*. The study sought to find out how social media regulation affects media performance. The study used the research survey design and adopted questionnaire as instrument of data collection. The study found out those social media regulations means the control of social media platforms. The study also found that social media regulation hinders journalistic practice because it provides an avenue for journalists to disseminate news and other information to the public. The study concluded that social media regulation is likely to subdue media articles relating to a negative impression of the government, simply out of vanity than any sort of control. The study recommended that social media should not be restricted because of its negative impact on journalistic practice. This study relates to the current in that they both seek to xray how media regulation hinders journalistic practice.

Methodology

The research method that will be used for this study is the survey method This is because it is simple enough for the respondents whom it is designed for to easily understand the questions and what is required of them. According to Okoro (2001, p. 41), surveys are useful in the measurement of public opinion, attitudes and orientation which are dominant among a population at a particular period. For this reason, surveys are highly useful in the field of social science and indeed in any study area that has to do with human action and practices. This is because it is the most suitable qualitative research procedure capable of eliciting responses needed in finding solutions to the problem. According to Nwosu (2006, p. 69) survey, scientifically examine socio-psychological variables or phenomena in their natural settings describing the relationships that exist among the variables or phenomena so examined within their actual environment and at a defined time-frame. He further stated that survey allows mass communication researchers to measure characteristics, opinions or behavior of a population by

studying a small sample from that group, then generalizing back to the population which is the group under scrutiny.

Sampling Techniques and Data collection

To draw a sample size from the study population, multistage sampling procedure, involving a combination of cluster, purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to provide a relatively equal opportunity for the respondents. The researcher first used cluster sampling technique to divide the population into twelve (12) units of clusters based on the major settlements in Makurdi metropolis. Cluster sampling according to Yates, David and Daren (2008) is a sampling technique where the entire population is divided into groups, or clusters and a random sample of these clusters are selected. The clusters selected were; High level; North Bank; Akpehe; New G.R.A; Old G.R.A; Gboko Road; Kanshio; Wadata; Ankpa Ward; Modern Market; Wurukum and Nyiman.

Having selected twelve (12) units based on the major settlements, the researcher used simple random technique to pick two (2) streets from the twelve (12) major settlements. Simple random sampling technique according to Yates, David and Daren (2008) is a subset of individuals (a sample) chosen from a larger set (a population). Each individual is chosen randomly and entirely by chance, such that each individual has the same probability of being chosen at any stage during the sampling process.

To achieve this random selection therefore, the researcher wrote the names of all the streets of each of the major settlements on separate pieces of papers and labelled them according to their settlements and dropped them separately in twelve (12) jars, blindfolded a research assistant who picked two pieces of paper each randomly from the twelve (12) jars. Thus, twenty-four streets were picked, two (2) each from the twelve settlements. The streets picked were; Ernyi and Yogbo streets from North Bank, Inikpi and Iorkyaa Ako streets from High level, Terwase Agbadu and Akange streets from Gboko road, Doo and Laha streets from Nyiman, Court road and Mzambe street in Akpehe, Aernyi and Atume streets in New G.R.A, Bakut and Gebi streets in Old G.R.A, Adikpo and kuna streets in Wadata, Imande and Torkwase streets in Kanshio, Benue Crescent and Moji streets in Ankpa Ward, Onitsha and Awe streets in Wurukum and Dogo and Ladi streets in Modern Market. This brought the total number of streets selected to twenty-four (24).

After that, the researcher used purposive sampling technique to pick four (4) compounds on each of the streets, two compounds on the right and two compounds on the left after an interval of the seven (7) houses for the study. This brought the total number of compounds selected to ninety-six (96). According to Barbie (2001) a purposive sample, also commonly called a judgmental sample, is one that is selected based on the knowledge of a population and the purpose of the study. The subjects are selected because of some characteristics.

Using purposive sampling technique again, the researcher selected four (4) respondents from each compound selected. The above translated to a total of 384 respondents which the researcher used as representation of the entire population of the study area.

Results and Presentation of Data

Table 1: Demographic details of respondents

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Male	179	47
Female	203	53
Total	382	100
Options	Frequency	Percentage %
18-25	198	52
26-35	106	28
36-50	56	14
50 and above	32	8
Total	382	100
Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Single	231	60
Married	105	27
Divorced	45	11
Total	382	100
Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Primary	75	20
Secondary	87	23
Tertiary	220	57
Total	382	100
Single	218	57
Married	164	43
Total	382	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table one sought to find out the demographic details of respondents. Data from the table reveals that 179 respondents (47%) were males and 203 respondents (53%) were females. This implies that the study was not gender biased. Also, on the age of respondents, 198 (52%) were between the ages of 18-25, 106 (28%) fell within the age bracket of 26-35, 56 respondents representing (14%) were between the age grade of 36-50 and 32 (8%) were between the age limit of 50 and above. 231 respondents (60%) were singles, 105 (27%) were married and 45 (11%) were divorced. Lastly, 75 respondents (20%) attended primary school, 87 (23%) attended secondary school, and 220 (57%) attended tertiary institutions. This implies that the respondents are literate enough to respond to the questionnaire. Lastly, 218 (57%) were singles while 164 (43%) were married.

Table 2: Respondents awareness on the nature of government restrictions of Social Media

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	382	100
No	---	---
Total	382	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table two sought to find out respondent awareness on the nature of government restrictions of social media. Evidently, all the 382 respondents representing (100%) noted that they are aware of

the nature of government restrictions of social media. This implies that respondents are aware of the nature of government restrictions of social media as revealed by an absolute majority of 100 respondents representing (100%).

Table 3: Nature of government restrictions of social media

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Content censorship	74	19
Social media taxation	114	30
User registration	57	15
Partial or complete ban	137	36
All of the above	8	2
Total	382	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table three sought to ascertain the nature of government restrictions of social media. Evidently, 74 (19%) noted that content censorship is one of the forms of government restrictions of social media. 114 (30%) agreed that another nature of government restriction of social media is social media taxation, 57 (15%) opined that user registration is another form of government restrictions of social media while 137 (36%) affirmed that partial or complete ban is yet another form of government restrictions of social media and 8 (2%) said that the nature of government restrictions of social media includes content censorship, social media taxation, user registration and partial or complete ban. This implies that there are different forms of government restrictions of social media as revealed by a marginal majority of 137 (36%).

Table 4: Respondent awareness on the audience reaction towards government restriction of social media

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	382	100
No	---	---
Total	382	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table four sought to establish whether respondents are aware of audience reaction towards government restriction of social media. Evidently, all the 382 respondents (100%) agreed that they are aware of the audience reaction towards government restriction of social media. This implies that respondents know the audience reaction towards government restriction of social media as indicated by an absolute majority of 382 (100%).

Table 5: Audience reaction towards government restriction of social media

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Protests	115	30
Compliance and acceptance	54	14
Circumvention and resistance	156	41
Apathy and disengagement	46	12
All of the above	11	3
Total	382	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table five sought to establish the audience perception towards government restrictions of social media. From the table, it was revealed that 115 (30%) noted that the audience reacted by protesting, 54 (14%) agreed that the audience reacted by complying and acceptance, 156 (41%) affirmed that the audience reacted by circumvention and resistance and 46 (12%) agreed that the audience reacted by apathy and disengagement. Meanwhile, 11 (3%) opined that the audience reaction towards government restrictions of social media included protests, compliance and acceptance, circumvention and resistance and apathy and disengagement. This implies that respondents reacted differently towards government restrictions of social media as shown by a marginal majority of 156 (41%).

Table 6: Respondents awareness on the extent government restrictions of social media impeded freedom of expression

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	373	97
No	9	3
Total	382	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table six sought to find out whether respondents know the extent to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression. Data from the table revealed that 373 respondents (97%) agreed that they know the extent to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression while 9 (3%) said they do not the extent to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression. This implies that respondents are aware of the extent to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression as shown by 373 respondents representing (97%).

Table 7: Extent government restrictions of social media impeded freedom of expression

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Very high	188	49
High	162	42
Low	32	8
Total	382	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table seven sought to establish the extent to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression. From the table, it was evident that 188 (49%) said government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression to a very high extent, 162 (42%) opined that government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression to a high extent while 32 (8%) said that government restrictions of social media impede freedom of expression to a low extent. This implies that government restrictions of social media impede freedom of expression to a very high extent as shown by a marginal majority of 188 (49%).

Table 8: Respondents awareness on the consequences of government restriction of social media

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	382	100
No	--	--
Total	382	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table eight sought to find out if respondents are aware of the consequences of government restriction of social media. Data from the table showed that all the 382 respondents (100%) said they are aware of the consequences of government restrictions of social media. This implies that respondents are aware of the consequences of government restrictions of social media as revealed by an absolute majority of 382 respondents representing (100%).

Table 9: Consequences of government restriction of social media

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Limitation of free speech	128	33
Damage to international reputation	117	30
Increased govt control	56	14
Economic impact	73	19
All of the above	8	2
Total	382	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The objective of table nine is to find out the consequences of government restrictions of social media. Evidently, 128 (33%) said that limitation of free speech is one of the consequences of government restrictions of social media, 117 (30%) agreed that one of the consequences of government restrictions of social media is damage to international reputation, 56 (14%) opined that increased government control is another consequence of government restriction of social media and 73 (19%) affirmed that economic impact is yet another consequences of government restrictions of social media. also, 8 (2%) noted that the consequences of government restrictions of social media include damage to international reputation. This implies that government restrictions of social media have consequences as revealed by a marginal majority of 128 (33%).

Table 10: Extent the consequences impeded on freedom of expression

Options	Frequency	Percentage %
Very high	187	49
High	156	41
Low	39	10
Total	382	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table ten sought to determine the extent the consequences impeded on freedom of expression. Evidently, 187 (49%) said that the consequence impeded on freedom of expression to a very high extent, 156 (41%) noted that the consequence has impeded on freedom of expression to a high extent and 39 (10%) affirmed that consequence has impeded on freedom of expression to a small extent. This implies the consequence has impeded on freedom of expression to a very high extent as indicated by a marginal majority of 187 respondents representing (49%).

Research Question One: What is the nature of government restriction of social media?

In answering this research question, table 3 provided the answer. Evidently, it was shown that there are different forms of government restrictions of social media such as content censorship, social media taxation, user registration and partial or complete ban. This was affirmed by a marginal majority of 137 (36%).

Research Question Two: What is the audience reaction towards government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression?

Table five was instrumental in answering this research question. From the table, it was revealed that 115 (30%) noted that the audience reacted by protesting, 54 (14%) agreed that the audience reacted by complying and acceptance, 156 (41%) affirmed that the audience reacted by circumvention and resistance and 46 (12%) agreed that the audience reacted by apathy and disengagement. Meanwhile, 11 (3%) opined that the audience reaction towards government restrictions of social media included protests, compliance and acceptance, circumvention and resistance and apathy and disengagement. This implies that respondents reacted differently towards government restrictions of social media as shown by a marginal majority of 156 (41%).

Research Question Three: To what extent do government restrictions of social media impede freedom of expression?

Table was consulted in answering this research question. From the table, it was evident that 188 (49%) said government restrictions of social media impede freedom of expression to a very high extent, 162 (42%) opined that government restrictions of social media impede freedom of expression to a high extent while 32 (8%) agreed that government restrictions of social media impede freedom of expression to a small extent. This implies that government restrictions of social media impede freedom of expression to a very high extent as shown by a marginal majority of 188 (49%).

Research Question Four: What are the consequences of government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression?

Tables 9 and 10 were consulted in answering this research question. Evidently, government restriction of social media has some consequences which includes damage to international reputation, economic impact, limitation to free speech and increases government control. This implies that government restrictions of social media have consequences as revealed by a marginal majority of 128 (33%).

Data from table 10 showed that 187 (49%) said that the consequence impeded on freedom of expression to a very high extent, 156 (41%) noted that the consequence has impeded on freedom of expression to a high extent and 39 (10%) affirmed that consequence has impeded on freedom of expression to a small extent. This implies the consequence has impeded on freedom of expression to a very high extent as indicated by a marginal majority of 187 respondents representing (49%).

Discussion of Findings

This study, “Assessment of the implication of government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression” sought to determine the nature of government restriction of social media, establish audience reaction towards government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression, ascertain the level to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression and to find out the consequences of government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression.

Objective one sought to determine the nature of government restriction of social media. Findings revealed that there are different forms of government restrictions of social media such as content censorship, social media taxation, user registration and partial or complete ban. These findings were supported by table 3. It was shown by the data from the table that 74 (19%) noted that content censorship is one of the forms of government restrictions of social media. (30%) agreed that another nature of government restriction of social media is social media taxation, (15%) opined that user registration is another form of government restriction of social media while (36%) affirmed that partial or complete ban is yet another form of government restriction of social media and 8 (2%) said that the nature of government restrictions of social media includes content censorship, social media taxation, user registration and partial or complete ban. This implies that there are different forms of government restrictions of social media as revealed by a marginal majority of (36%).

Agada (2020) corroborated these findings when he noted that the Nigerian government has also been known to use censorship and surveillance to limit freedom of expression, and journalists and other members of the press have been subjected to harassment and intimidation. Despite these challenges, civil society organizations and the media remain active and vocal in Nigeria, and there is a vibrant public discourse on a wide range of issues. Objective two sought to establish audience reaction towards government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression. Findings indicated that respondents reacted differently towards government restrictions of social media. Tables 4 and 5 supported these findings. Data from table 4 showed that all the respondents (100%) agreed that they are aware of the audience reaction towards government restriction of social media. This implies that respondents know the audience reaction towards government restriction of social media as indicated by an absolute majority of 382 (100%).

From 5 table, it was revealed that (30%) noted that the audience reacted by protesting, 54 (14%) agreed that the audience reacted by complying and acceptance, (41%) affirmed that the audience reacted by circumvention and resistance and 46 (12%) agreed that the audience reacted by apathy and disengagement. Meanwhile, (3%) opined that the audience reaction towards government restrictions of social media included protests, compliance and acceptance, circumvention and resistance and apathy and disengagement. This implies that respondents reacted differently towards government restrictions of social media.

In supporting this view, Attoh (2016) observed that suppressing freedom of expression through legislative bills will create a situation of chaos, as it could lead to massive nationwide protests and even riots. Objective three sought to ascertain the level to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression. Findings revealed that government restriction of social media impede freedom of expression to a very high extent. This was supported by tables 6

and 7 Data from table 6 revealed that respondents (97%) agreed that they know the extent to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression while (3%) said they do not the extent to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression. This implies that respondents are aware of the extent to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression as shown by respondents representing (97%).

From table 7, it was evident that (49%) said government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression to a very high extent, (42%) opined that government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression to a high extent while 32 (8%) agreed that government restrictions of social media impede freedom of expression to a small extent. This implies that government restrictions of social media impede freedom of expression to a very high extent as shown by a marginal majority of (49%). Egbunike, (2020) supported these findings when he noted that that though the social media regulation bill (based on surface understanding) is aimed at curbing the spread of falsehood on online platforms, as well fake news and outright misinformation, it appears that the real intention behind the bill is to eliminate free expression, and criticisms of any form.

Objective four sought to find out the consequences of government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression. From the findings, it was evident that government restriction of social media has some consequences which includes damage to international reputation, economic impact, limitation to free speech and increases government control. This implies that government restrictions of social media have consequences as revealed by a marginal majority of (33%). Data from table 10 showed (49%) said that the consequence impeded on freedom of expression to a very high extent, (41%) noted that the consequence has impeded on freedom of expression to a high extent and (10%) affirmed that consequence has impeded on freedom of expression to a low extent. This implies the consequence has impeded on freedom of expression to a very high extent as indicated by a marginal majority of respondents representing (49%).

In supporting these findings, Muller (2014) affirmed that regulating social media in a democratic setting portrays a serious threat to free speech, as it clearly goes against the laws that gives liberty to individuals to freely make public their expressions, beliefs, intents and desires concerning issues bothering them and their community

Conclusion

This study, “Assessment of the implication of government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression” sought to determine the nature of government restriction of social media, establish audience reaction towards government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression, ascertain the level to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression and to find out the consequences of government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression. Findings on the nature of government restriction of social media revealed that there are different forms of government restrictions of social media such as content censorship, social media taxation, user registration and partial or complete ban. Findings on the audience reaction towards government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression indicated that respondents reacted differently towards government restrictions of social media.

Findings on the level to which government restrictions of social media impedes freedom of expression revealed that government restriction of social media impede freedom of expression to a very high extent. Findings on the consequences of government restrictions of social media on freedom of expression showed that government restriction of social media has some consequences which includes damage to international reputation, economic impact, limitation to free speech and increases government control. The study concluded that forms of government restrictions of social media impeded freedom of expression. It was also concluded that government restriction of social media impedes freedom of expression to a very high extent. Lastly, the study concluded that restriction of social media portrays negative consequences.

Recommendations

In view of the findings from this study, these recommends the following;

- i. Government at all levels should discontinue from enforcing any of the forms of social media restrictions.
- ii. Citizens should do well to stand firm against government restriction on freedom of speech by way of protesting and reaching out to other civil society organization to call government attention whenever restrictions are made.
- iii. Because government restriction of social media limits free speech, key players in the media industry should apply pressure on the government not to stifle the press.
- iv. Further studies on the effect of government restriction of social media should be sponsored and carried out.

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