ASSESSMENT OF DATA POVERTY ON NEWS CONSUMPTION; THE IMPLICATIONS OF DIGITAL INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA'S DIGITAL COMMUNITY

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Keywords

Data Poverty, Digital inequality, Digital Inclusion, Ecosystem, News

Abstract

Research Problem
Many Nigerians on digital platforms find it economically impossible to expose themselves to myriad of opportunities for news consumption on the internet due to affordability issues otherwise termed as data poverty. This is largely attributed not just to the high cost of data vis a vis the minimum wage obtainable in the country, but to be digitally excluded to real-time news updates, due to low internet connectivity.

Methods/Theory
The study adopted the desktop research method. The study took its theoretical leaning from the diffusion of innovation theory.

Results
Key findings from the study revealed that internet connectivity should function side by side with other social utilities like housing, roads, and electricity. The study was able to reveal that access to internet for low income earners in Nigeria has become a luxury, and that data poverty exacerbates the proliferation of misinformation. The study exposed the role of digital journalism in pay walled subscription which serves to exclude many a data poor citizen from source verification and deep dive journalistic experience.

Conclusion
The study was able to conclude that despite the exponential growth in Nigeria's digital economy, the country's digital public has been marginalized between buoyant individuals who can afford and access

unlimited data on digital platforms and those who have limited option on digital platforms due to data poverty.

Contribution to Knowledge

The research was able to contribute to knowledge by determining that having a network signal does not equate information efficiency on digital platforms.

Recommendation

The study recommended that interventions on data accessibility and integration of all Nigeria's local government areas on state of the art internet infrastructure should no longer be treated as an option. The study also recommended that media organizations should minimize the graphic loads of their digital stories to enhance wider accessibility.

Introduction

Nigeria appears to be grappling with digital inclusivity, where many citizenry either do not have access to data or cannot afford to access certain digital platforms due to inability to afford data. In the contemporary digital age where information is adjudged to be available to all on online platforms, this appears to be a far cry from the ideal in developing nations. Pu and Rupper (2025) aver that the assertion that a well-informed populace is the sine qua non of a healthy democracy has been confronted with an emerging structural impediment in a country like Nigeria. As state of the art newsrooms around the globe deploy the use of data driven technology on digital ecosystems for the processing and transmission of news according to Sen and Das (2025), an exponential part of Nigeria's population is digitally excluded from the global scheme of events. The 50% surge in data tariffs in Nigeria in early 2025 has left a significant portion of the country's demographics in a poverty stricken digital state otherwise conceptualized as data poverty where inability to access latest news on digital platforms has exacerbated the issue. This anomaly has left many individuals in developing nations like Nigeria to be left with no choice but to depend on social media platforms that offer subscription free news updates devoid of hyperlinks for source verification and video feeds for source credibility (Babatunde, &Ayanwale, 2023). This has resulted in exposing many individuals who subscribe to these free news feeds on social media platforms to be vulnerable to misinformation, fake news and deep faked videos generated by artificial intelligence.

The paradigm shift of journalism in the digital era that witnessed the transformation of traditional news dissemination into digital platforms has created a data drive and data dependent reality of news access and news consumption for the 21st century digital public (Gocsei, 2026). This new reality has also propelled the emergence of real-time journalism and real-time source verification. This has left the 21st century digital public with no choice but to depend on their digital devices such as smart phones, tablets, and laptops with internet connectivity for access and consumption of latest news updatesfrom a multiplicity of sources on digital platforms (Basanta, 2025). Conversely, Weston and Vogler (2025) posit that the implication of data poverty in democratic systems denotes the emergence of digital inequality where most individuals with little or no access to data services are systematically

disenfranchised from electoral processes due to digital exclusion. Data poverty serves as a catalyst for the proliferation of low data driven information which has far reaching implications especially in the area of political polarization where fact checking is non-existent.

The research is justified on the need to provide a framework for the development of pragmatic strategies that ensure the inclusivity of demographics that have been digitally excluded from access to data driven information. The research on digital inequality has evolved into a complex state of systemic exclusion. While more individuals in Global South communities are being connected to digital services, the quality of the connection appears to have complicated the problem and broadened the disparity between the information rich and the information poor within these communities (Hasan, & Hakim, 2025). While many in rural communities have access to smart phones, these individuals appear to be suffering from digital illiteracy, and thus, they are inadvertently placed in a vulnerable position of disproportionate value on the services they derive or enjoy from mobile internet facilities. In addition, Aaron and George, (2025) revealed that while many individuals that reside within the Global North communities may use digital services for wealth creation due to high levels of digital literacy prevalent within their communities, many of their counterparts within Global South communities may use these internet facilities for pleasurable purposes such as entertainment and to while away time.

The emergence of data driven economies and digital democracy has substantiated the movement for data justice and adjudging accessibility to data services as a right for any digitally driven ecosystem. Most scholars within this framework aver that high speed internet connectivity should function alongside the broader framework of social structures and public utilities such as schools, hospitals and roads (Liang &Tiung, 2025). This has brought to bear the need for developing nations within Global South communities such as Nigeria to develop niche AI frameworks in order to avoid data imperialism from the Global North. As a result, it has become imperative that the Federal Government of Nigeria makes pragmatic effort to ensure that digital services serve to breach the rural urban connectivity divide in order to eliminate any form of exclusion in the digital space that will serve to marginalize some demographics within the country's digital ecosystem (Babatunde, &Ayanwale, 2023).

The research intends to examine the implication of data poverty on news consumption in Nigeria's growing digital citizenry. It also seeks to exact the attendant consequences on how interpretations are subsumed in the broader framework of rural urban digital divides. These implications could prove to have fare reaching effects on accessibility to data services and how low data services could serve as a digression to news consumptions devoid of hyperlinks and video integration. These immersive experiences as opposed to high speed data services that provide multimedia integration in news consumptions could create distinctions between the information rich and information poor due to inaccessibility and unaffordability to data services.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the evolution of Nigeria's traditional media into digital ecosystems to gain global relevance, internet connectivity appears not be available to a lot of individuals within Nigeria's geographical landscape due to poverty in data services. In the context of Nigeria's pragmatic efforts to migrate into a digital environment in governance, elections, agriculture and

information transmission, there appears to be a glaring disconnect between information dissemination on digital platforms and access to data in terms of affordability in cost. Nabi and Ferdous (2025) believe that this apparent inequality in accessibility and affordability of data and internet services facilities in information communication infrastructure has established a rural urban divide between information rich individuals in urban centres and information poor individuals in rural areas and areas with low income earners. This condition has succeeded in excluding a chunk of Nigeria's population from active participation in national discussions on digital media platforms due to inaccessibility to internet services or high cost of data.

Conversely, when a digital ecosystem is cluttered with real-time news updates with high speed data applications and internet connectivity, individuals without access to data due to affordability issues are often isolated from the digital community and left at the mercy of obsolete and less credible information sources (Liang, &Tiung, 2025). When access to real-time news on digital platforms is determined by data on the internet due to the new world order of the digital age, the media's responsibility as the watchdog of the society may be truncated and left at the mercy of unprofessional information merchants. The research set out to determine how affordability of data to access real-time news on digital platforms can impact on the attitudes and behavioural patterns of information savvy individuals in Nigeria as a developing nation in the Global Southand its attendant impact on digital and media literacy.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the research is to breach the divide between data poverty and citizen engagement on digital platforms within the broader framework of Nigeria, where the cost of data in juxtaposition to the average living standard and cost of living appear to be disparate. This would be achieved as follows:

1. To examine the correlation between data affordability and access to news on digital platforms in order to exact the average cost of data for disparate income earners in Nigeria.
2. To assess how penchant for news is constrained by affordability of data to surf the internet in order to comprehend how access to data impacts on the visibility of news stories on digital platforms in Nigeria.
3. To evaluate the nexus between data poverty and misinformation on digital platforms in Nigeria.
4. To exact the role of digital journalism on information exclusion in Nigeria's digital ecosystem.

Conceptual Clarifications

Data Poverty

In the modern digital age where access to information has so many attendant implications and power prospects, a new trend has emerged which has been perceived as a form of social, economic and information exclusion (Asanov, &Madiyarova, 2025). This is otherwise conceptualized as data poverty. The concept denotes the extant cost of data in Global South countries like Nigeria, where most individuals in the urban and rural areas have limited access to internet facilities due to their inability to afford data in order to actively participate in the digital community. The concept according to Maulani and Eko, (2025) does not infer the lack of access to internet facilities and services, but it simply denotes that individuals are adjudged to be data-

poor when their participation in the digital community is limited by their inability to afford data vis a vis their monthly income or when such individuals are limited by low speed internet connectivity such as 2G or 3G networks which are currently outdated.

Digital Inequality

As opposes to data poverty which is anchored on economic limitations, digital inequality is premised on a broader concept. It is predicated on the framework that depicts the unequal distribution of information communication technology infrastructure prevalent in developing Global South nations like Nigeria. Zhang (2025) avers that the concept depicts the distinction between communities with access to latest internet connections such as 5G networks and other urban or rural communities struggling with 3G or 2G networks. Gena, and Wismadewi (2025) believe that the concept also elucidates the disparity in digital skills acquisition such as digital literacy skills. This could range from the ability of individuals to use digital applications for economic and information empowerment and media literacy skills which harps on the ability of individuals to know how to access, evaluate and determine the credibility of information on digital platforms via source verification and digital forensics (Bergantino, & Fusco, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

The research adopted the Diffusion of Innovation Theory and the Media Dependency Theory.

The Diffusion of Innovation Theory

The theory was created by Everett M. Rogers in 2003 in order to depict the evolution and integration of agricultural innovations into the digital ecosystem. The theory was developed on the assumption that a new information is not limited to purchase and distribution, but that new ideas were products of social procedures where individuals share information via networks (Singh, & Artur, 2025). The theory also assumes that a new idea propels individuals into a state of trepidation and that people who source for new information to exterminate their trepidation have the discretion of deciding whether their decision to adopt new ideas and information is worth the struggle (Indra, &Alila, 2025). In addition, the theory succinctly assumes that the success of an innovation is highly dependent on perception, communication, and the processes of decision making and the nature of the social reality of the individuals adopting the innovation (Maharati, &Nahid, 2025).

In relation to research on data poverty and news consumption, the theory speaks to the nature of Nigeria's digital ecosystem inundated by the country's social reality of culture and information communication structure deficit. The theory fits into Nigeria's digital condition by depicting how data poverty serves as a hindrance for access to new ideas and innovations and the abundant opportunities on digital platforms to adopt new ideas and opportunities.

The Media Dependency Theory

The theory was created by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1976. The theory according to Liu (2026) was created out of the need to meet up with the emerging reality of sophisticated social systems that characterized the new emerging digital society. As new information technology infrastructures were emerging, many individuals within the society became less dependent on word of mouth information but became more gravitated to information from the mass media (Okocah, &Obiorah, 2025). The theory assumes that the mass media does not exist in isolation, but that

the media is a compendium of interconnected relationship between social systems, economic systems and media audiences. The theory further assumes that the more individual information needs are gratified through a medium, the more dependent such individuals confer on that medium. In addition, the theory further assumes that such dependency may not be consistent but subject to change when the need arises (Ding, 2025).

The theory speaks to the context of the research in the sense that data poverty could enhance a coerced dependency on available, affordable digital platforms for access to news and consumption of same. When options to alternative digital platforms for access to news is limited due to affordability issues, dependence on the affordable one (s) becomes imminent, and opens a flood gate of vulnerability to misinformation and manipulation.

Methodology

The research adopted the desktop research method. The method is premised on the gleaning of secondary data for harmonization of thoughts in literature works published by scholars in order to synthesize same and present a logical perspective of a thematic study (Bazmi, 2025). The aim of the research method is to transform secondary literature works into contextual denotations that speaks to the nuances of a qualitative study. The method is structured on identification of an area of study to the collection of data from secondary data and filtering same by determining the credibility of the adopted literature, the possible bias inherent from interpretations given and ensuring that logical inferences are developed in order to address the identified problem.

Consequently, the research was able to adopt secondary data from online literature works of scholars who have published their thoughts on a similar subject matter related to the research, These thoughts and inferences were examined and drawing comparisons, contrasts and juxtaposition of views in order to address that research problem and do justice to the research objectives in a manner that bespeaks scholarly ratification.

Review of Related Literature and Discussions

The Correlation between Data affordability and access to News on Digital Platforms

The emergence of the digital era has asserted that access to information on digital platforms is no longer a matter of convenience, but a matter of necessity. This consolidates the allusion of Singh (2026) who asserts that systemic accessibility and affordability of data serves as a leverage that distinguishes the informed from individuals adjudged to be suffering from information poverty. The digital age has also enabled the delivery of news from online streaming services. This new reality has positioned internet data into a matter of consequential social utility alongside housing, roads and electricity (Sabardila, &Markhamah, 2025). In a developing country like Nigeria where data is expensive in juxtaposition to minimum wage, access to news on digital platforms has become an activity of luxury. Nathan and Ikechukwu, (2024) buttressed that individuals are left with no options in Global South countries but to manage their data plans by limiting their options for news on the internet at the detriment of source verification from other online news sources. This has translated into a “toll road” effect, where news from digital sources is more readily available to economically advantaged individuals who can

actively engage in public discussions due to affordability issues.

Consequently, the prevalent hike in the cost of data in a developing country like Nigeria does not signify a reduction in news consumption. Petros, (2025) believes that the anomaly only leads to the limitation of online news sources, especially as more individuals depend on social media platforms that offer free data access to textual contents, devoid of multimedia integration of video, and graphics made only available upon data subscription. This condition gravitates a lot of individuals towards secondary news sources and heightens the proliferation of fake news. When individuals find it difficult to consistently access online data services due to inability to afford data consistently, it depletes their abilities to actively engage in democratic processes and engagements on the digital ecosystem (Sunmola, 2024). A research from Reuters Institute and Data Reportal revealed an exponential gap in online citizen participation due to economic conditions that stifle the ability of citizens in developing nations to access news online as a result of inability to afford data consistently (Hadi, &Lesmana, 2025). This glaring correlation depicts that exorbitant cost of data can inadvertently lead to digital censorship established not by legislation but by economic conditions. In order to enhance an informed and engaged citizenry, the narrative must go beyond provision of information communication technology infrastructure to the provision of accessible and affordable data services for the digital community in the digital age.

The Impact of Constraints on Data affordability on the Visibility of News Stories on Digital Platforms

The correlation of data affordability on news visibility is salient and indelible on the way news is perceived and interpreted by media audiences. It is the most important factor of accessibility to digital platforms for news consumption. Lamot, and Paulussen (2024) believe that while the virtual world has democratized the dissemination of news on digital ecosystems, the cost implication needed to access news on digital platforms and devices has served as an indirect method of digital news exclusion for so many today. When data is not affordable for individuals, it automatically becomes a luxury for the economically buoyant members of the society (Tatiana, 2025). For many in developing nations like Nigeria, access to news on the internet and social media has become an economic calculation that must be prioritized at every click on a news hyperlink when affordability of data supersedes their average minimum wage. This condition according to Deni and Titin (2025) inadvertently makes data to become a scarce commodity whose availability is highly dependent on economic privileges. In such a condition, the first victim of these digital exclusive tactics on economically disadvantaged individuals is news documentaries that are often immersed in multimedia integration (Fathan, &Kunto, 2025). In addition, investigative stories on the internet also with multimedia convergence experienced a reduction in visibility for many suffering from data poverty due to their high penchant for free social media services often anchored on textual information only.

In addition, due to affordability issues, most individuals suffering from data poverty who are often limited to single social media platforms due to limited choices are left with no option but to depend on news information shared on those same platforms without having a choice of multiplicity perspectives from other social media platforms and internet websites (Tatiana, 2025). Some of the attendant repercussions that might come out of these aberrationsis the issue of the

proliferation of misinformation and fake news that might serve to becloud the judgement of such individuals. Conversely,Gunawan, and Arni, (2025) were of the opinion that if individuals avoid playing a video attached to a news story due to the way it might make them to spend more on data, the algorithm used in the transmission of the news story denotes such as a display of lack of interest on engagement ratings. The situation also serves to digitally exclude a lot of individuals from deep dive journalism experiences where investigative stories are given extensive multimedia narratives for contextual understanding.Bukelew, and Crowe (2024) emphasized that the enhancement of news visibility on digital platforms is also highly dependent on the activities of major media organizations when their digital contents are optimized for easy accessibility to individuals suffering from data poverty in order to guarantee holistic visibility in all strata of the society. The inability to checkmates these aforementioned attendant anomalies in visibility constraints resulting from data poverty could lead to a state of media hegemony and the marginalization of subaltern stories from global discussions.

The nexus between data poverty and misinformation on digital platforms in Nigeria

Data poverty fertilizes the ground for misinformation where individuals with scarce resources are more vulnerable to falsified stories and fake news. Yitong (2025) believes that data poverty is not implicitly limited to access to internet connection as stated earlier, but the quality, cost and consistency of internet access. When individuals are limited to data as a result of paucity of funds, they are often exposed to all forms of information vulnerabilities such as propaganda, sentiment cluttered perspectives and nepotistic standpoints. Most individuals on digital platforms with limited funds for data usually view sentiment ridden headlines without accessing the hyperlink to get a full perspective of stories (Manoj, 2025). This results to misinterpretation of stories due to headline baiting and the proliferation of assumptions about sensational headlines. Data poverty from the view of Peter (2025) has been recently associated with the absence of digital independence. This happens when individuals with limited finances to purchase data frequent the internet on short term basis devoid of the digital independence to detect deep faked videos and the metadata of online news. This condition subjects most internet users especially in Nigeria to a constant state of anxiety that limits their abilities for source verification and the development of media literacy skills.

Vehemently, most social media platforms that share updates on news are mostly aimed at creating engagements for their social media handles. Most times, according to Umeh, and Alisigwe (2025) engagement saturated information elicits extreme reactions of either fear, excitement, anger and anxiety, owing to the fact that news created for engagement purposes serves as a financial boost for proprietors of such handles who make more money when they generate traffic on their platforms due to the nature of their news content. This can eventually lead to misconceptions in online policy engagements on national issues and can disproportionately entice individuals with limited exposure to online activities due to data poverty to exacerbate conflicting perceptions and perspectives and demean the credibility of scientific journalistic research in an atmosphere that is devoid of multiplicity in options for source verification often experienced in data poverty stricken countries like Nigeria.

Regardless of the fact that Nigeria boasts of having the most affordable data rates in Africa,

when juxtaposed with the UN recommendation that a gigabyte of data should not go beyond 2% of an individuals' monthly income, the data cost in Nigerian currently is at 4.2% of per capita average monthly income when juxtaposed with the country's minimum wage (Abuoro, 2025). In addition, the quality of digital infrastructure in Nigeria remains an issues of concern. This serves to escalate the rate of digital poverty too. Most Nigerians still rely on 2G and 3G networks in rural areas, while their urban counterparts in cities like Lagos and Abuja are enjoying 5G network coverage(Umeh, &Alisigwe 2025). Consequently, the poverty rate in Nigeria especially in the North- East, and North-West is beyond 70% which has a direct impact on digital infrastructure and availability of network masts (Abuoro, 2025).

The role of Digital Journalism on Information Exclusion in Nigeria's Digital Ecosystem

At the inception of the 21st century, the emergence of digital journalism was welcomed as new development that will serve to democratize news consumption by eliminating gatekeepers characterized by traditional media and make news available to every individual online (Farid, 2023). Conversely,Bijith (2025) posit that this development has also introduced some complications and has served to digitally exclude some set of people with limited resources, otherwise identified as data poor public by the introduction of pay walled stories. These are online pages that can only be accessed via the payment of subscriptions and not just using data to surf such information online (Mambetirzaeva, 2026). This reality has also broached the issue of affordability for information verification and has eventually served to exclude those suffering from data poverty from accessing deep investigative stories that have been pay walled and made available to only the information rich on digital platforms. This has turned factual information into a luxury available for only buoyant internet users. In addition, another exclusive technique brought into play by the emergence of digital journalism is the introduction of search engines where news contents are digitally summarized devoid of context and investigative nuances provided by journalist (Souza, 2025). This reality has resulted into the projection of news interpretation from the perspective of Global North countries and results in the dominance of Global South perspectives resulting into digital exclusion and data poverty.

Conclusion

The study was able to prove that despite the exponential growth in Nigeria's digital economy, the country's digital public has been marginalized between buoyant individuals who can afford and access unlimited data on digital platforms and those who have limited option on digital platforms due to data poverty. The research was also able to establish that some urban settlements in Nigeria enjoy unlimited data access with high end mobile network technology such as 5G network while some urban and rural settlements are left struggling with 3G and 4G networks. The research was able to substantiate that data poverty is not limited to opportunities in internet connections only, but is also predicated on the quality of news information available to individuals on digital platforms. When people have limited opportunities on digital platforms due to affordability issues, the ability of the media to provide information on current happenings of national events and the facilitation of national discussion is truncated. Data poverty has been identified to enhancement digital censorship.

Recommendations

The research hereby proffers the following recommendations:

1. There must be a decisive effort by the Nigerian government to provide interventions on data accessibility in order to provide unlimited access for Nigerians on digital platforms for the enrichment of national discourse.
2. Efforts should be made for the integration of all the 774 local governments in Nigeria for the upgrading of network infrastructure from 4G to 5G to function alongside the broader framework of other social amenities such as schools, hospitals and roads.
3. Media organizations within Nigeria should make concerted efforts towards minimizing the load of their news content on digital platforms in order to make their news contents data friendly for low budget data users.
4. The research recommends that Nigerian Scholars should broaden the scope of their research on digital inclusion in order to fashion out ways of making digital news readily available to low income earners.

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