



## The Aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic on the Nigerian Digital Economy Strategy

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### Abstract

*This study conceptually appraised COVID-19 pandemic, digital economy, and shed light on life after COVID-19 in Nigeria. The study used exploratory research design, and used secondary sources for the extraction of relevant information. The findings of the study revealed that in Nigeria, digital economy is relatively young and emerging. It was also revealed that digital economy along with communication has become a ministerial portfolio in Nigeria. More so, it was discovered that, digital economy in Nigeria is comprised of untapped potential that could benefit the nation in the long run. However, the study, found that, digital economy is being confronted with impediments in Nigeria and, post COVID-19 pandemic era might be characterized with upsurge in entrenchment of digital economy. The study concludes that after COVID-19 pandemic, digital economy is essential for meaningful life in Nigeria. Therefore, the study recommends that Nigerian government could encourage business organization in Nigeria to go digital by increasing allocation of fund for the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as well as providing tax incentive to be offered to organizations that embrace digital automation of their operations.*

**Keywords:** COVID-19; Digital Economy; Nigeria; Pandemic; Strategy

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### 1.0 Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic is a global threat, and has led to lockdown in economic space (Duru, 2020; Odutola, 2020; Nwannekanma & Salau, 2020). Record has it that COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the pre-planned spending pattern of Nigerian government, according to Onyedika-Ugoeze (2020) Nigerian government has spent in excess of ₦8.9billion as hazard allowance to health workers during COVID-19. More so, related figures have been spent on health facilities and infrastructures not only at federal level, but, across the states in Nigeria. As COVID-19 pandemic rages in Nigeria, reports on economic indicators have been worrisome, according to Isa (2020) National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) lamented that issues on

food items and services within Nigeria had pushed inflation to 13.22%. Isa (2020) argued that Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has no control over the economic situation in Nigeria as the apex bank was unclear for the possibility of Nigeria recovering from high inflation rate before the end of year 2020. Similarly, Adegbesan (2020) raised a concern that, for seven months, Nigeria's inflation has been on the increase up to 13.22% by August 2020.

According to Akwaja (2020), the president of Association of Telecommunications Companies of Nigeria (ATCON) was emphatic that Nigeria needs \$4bn to implement broadband plan over the next five consecutive years; otherwise Nigeria would continue to rank poor in digital ratings



among the committee of nations. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Transcorp Hotel, lamented that his organization loses nearly N1 billion monthly (Odutola, 2020). Similarly, The Internal Revenue Service (IGR) of Benue State was unfavorably squeezed due to COVID-19 lockdown (Duru, 2020). As a result, in year 2020 it would be hard for Benue State to achieve a close to 59.16% growth in IGR as it did in the immediate past year. Nwannekanma and Salau (2020) stressed that COVID-19 lockdown had broadened wealth and gender inequalities.

In the light of the foregoing, while existing authors resolved that COVID-19 pandemic brought economic disruption and digital concern in Nigeria; existing enquiry do not appraise the roles of digital migration in post COVID-19 pandemic, much less, life after COVID-19 pandemic. The foregoing was identified as a research gap and triggers the researcher to carry out this study with the objective to offer illumination and add to existing body of conceptual knowledge on COVID-19 pandemic, digital economy and life after COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Literature Review**

### **2.1 Covid-19 Pandemic**

Nadeem (2020) identified COVID-19 pandemic, as devastative fast spreading hazard and to human existence. The writer concurred with submissions of other scholars (Akinrujomu, 2020; Omo, 2020; Ozili, 2020; Shereen, Khan, Kazmi, Bashir, & Siddique 2020), in which arguments were presented that Wuhan in China was where coronavirus originated. The author argued that with rapidity by which the epidemic was going transversely around the globe, the human existence is threatened. The author, therefore, contends that studies on Covid-19 pandemic is not exhaustive as at the time of

the author's investigation. Pulse-ng (2020) reported that from the World Health Organization's dashboard on Monday 9th of November, global confirmed cases of Covid-19 was put at 50,030,121, while total death was 1,252,072.

Ozili (2020) aligned with extant authors that Covid-19 could be traced to China in Wuhan, Hubei Province. The writer, similarly agreed with studies which state, coronavirus was firstly designated "SARS-CoV-2" however, thereafter, same was rechristened coronavirus disease 2019, now being condensed as Covid-19. However, the scholar added, seafood market for live animal was the specific location where novel incident was noted. The preceding claims indicated, manner of coronavirus spread may have been from animals consumed by human being in the said China market. December 1, 2019 was the date documented for the initial occurrence the said virus in Wuhan.

Legit (2020) reported that Nigeria's COVID-19 daily recoveries were initially not as encouraging as expected. Business-day (2020) reported that COVID-19 tests generated huge income for medical labs. According to the reporter, COVID-19 tests earned medical labs, not less than 742 million naira every week. In a report by **Channels Television** (2020), France, placed some departments on COVID-19 high alert. Vanguard (2020) confirmed that Nigerian government has spent nearly 31 billion naira in fighting COVID-19 pandemic. Omo (2020) and, Akinrujomu (2020) respectively reported that COVID-19 pandemic has led to rise in crime, it was mentioned that Nigeria INTERPOL identified two fraudsters who defrauded certain German company to the tune of 14.7 million Euros. In a report by Vanguard (2020) on COVID-19 pandemic, it was established that, mobile



transactions Nigeria through the use of POS has increased significantly.

News Agency of Nigeria (2020) captured Okonjo-Iweala views, in which she commented that World Trade Organization (WTO) could have championed vaccine production to put COVID-19 pandemic at cessation. Deji (2020) mourned a Nigerian University Professor, who died of COVID-19 pandemic, while Zoom lecture was in progress. Abiola (2020) reported that Nigerian Vice President, was of the opinion that vaccine to put COVID-19 pandemic to an end should be made reachable to every nation of the world, when eventually invented. Tribune (2020) worried as Nigeria lost 43 persons to COVID-19 pandemic in single week. Ikeke (2020) reported that Nigerian Medical Association (NMA) specifically advised Nigerian government not to accept any COVID-19 Vaccine, which might be released by Russia. The reason being that, vaccines on COVID-19 pandemic in circulation around the world have not passed performance tests.

According to Shereen, Khan, Kazmi, Bashir, and Siddique (2020), COVID-19 is a much dreaded viral communicable infection. Submissions of Shereen et al. (2020), correspond with those from other researcher. However, said authors, suggest, therapeutic combinations and vaccines need to be developed if COVID-19 must be mitigated. COVID-19 is the acronym assigned to coronavirus disease discovered in year 2019 by World Health Organization (WHO). The disease that metamorphosed to coronavirus was initially observed in China (Ebenso & Otu, 2020). According to Anjorin (2020), World Health Organization delayed proclamation of the said coronavirus disease as pandemic, but, when coronavirus has spread to a total of one hundred and fourteen countries and still counting, then, World

Health Organization declared COVID-19 as pandemic. Ebenso, and Otu (2020) categorizes COVID-19 as transmissible through human respiratory drops, sneezing, aerosols, and coughing. Furthermore, Anjorin (2020), confirms, an Italian who flew into Lagos in February, 2020, was the carrier of COVID-19 to Nigeria. Hence, first case of COVID-19 in Nigeria was documented in Lagos, on 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 2020. Thereafter, government has been implementing phases of lockdown in Nigeria, in an attempt to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the country (Etukudoh, Ejnaka, Olowu, Obeta, Adebowale, & Udoudoh, 2020).

## **2.2 Digital Economy**

The Nigerian sitting president, on October 17, 2019, renamed Federal Ministry of Information and communication, as, Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital economy. Emwanta and Nwalo (2013) viewed digital economy as being dependent on computer literacy. The authors argued that until computer literacy gains ground and the use of electronic resources by undergraduate students in Nigerian universities attain full blown growth, digital benefit might be evasive in the nation, Nigeria. Similarly, Khosrow-Pour (2015) contended that mastery of information science and technology, must precede realization of digital economy gains. Ifijeh, Iwu-James and Adebayo (2016) considered digital economy as that whose foundation has to be traced to good use and application library resources. However, said authors lamented low level of digital inclusion and sustainable development in Nigeria. The authors advocates that, Libraries should play significant role in enlightenment on digital knowledge accessibility in Nigeria. Tang and Chaw (2016) argued that blending



environment with reality can only be achieved through digital literacy. Similarly, Orshi (2016) contended that educational trainers need to be digitally inclined, if Nigeria must succeed in raising team of digitally oriented professionals in Nigeria.

Osiakwan (2017) postulated that some African countries, namely Kenya, Ivory-Coast, Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa can become developed before long, through diligent migration to digital economy. Chan, Churchill and Chiu (2017) reasoned that educational foundation is inevitable for attainment of digital literacy in any society. Adamu, Umar and Buba (2017) claimed that digital embracement is nascent in Nigeria. The authors further argued, digital knowledge acquisition is required for stirring entrepreneurial potential and mitigating spate of graduates' unemployment in Nigeria. Adeoye and Adeoye (2017) contended that digital literacy skills should be encouraged, right from cradle up to university level in Nigeria. Odu and Omosigho (2017) postulated that digital literacy may ever remain elusive in Nigerian, except digital library is given a deserving concentration. CBN (2017) advocated for digital economy with the argument that it would enhance financial inclusion within Nigerian economic space. Adamu, Umar, and Buba (2017) interpreted digital economy as derivative capable of solving unemployment surge in Nigeria. The writers contended that digital economy encourages paradigm shift toward vocational and technology education in Nigeria.

IMF (2018) argued in a staff report, the whole essence of digital economy will be defeated, except it is measureable. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2018) in portray of concern, harnessed references which serve as comprehensive outline on digital savvy and indicator worldwide. Omosekejimi,

Brume-Ezewu, Brume-Ezewu, Nwobu and Nweke (2018) advocated the entrenchment of information and communication technology, more so, digital literacy skills. The authors submitted that apparatus for resourceful training in Nigerian educational institutions should be put in place. Ajah and Chigozie-Okwum (2019) examined the prospects of information and communication technology, most especially as relating to development and digital growth of Nigeria. Graham (2019) carried out investigation into world economy, and reported that digital economies at global level can be described as marginal. Ndubuisi (2019) appraised the concerns of the World Bank, in which the body certain modifications considered relevant for the realization of desired digital economy in Nigeria. The foregoing was shared by Nnabugwu (2020) who conceded that the digital economy in Nigerian has to be built on five essential mainstays, as postulated by World Bank Group (2019).

Yazon, Ang-Manaig, Buama and Tesoro (2019) advocated that digital literacy and digital competence could greatly enhance productivity and make life meaningful. Adebumiti (2020) argued that Nigeria trajectory to improve economy in digital dimensions. Azeez (2020) contended that COVID-19 lockdown, provided ground to put its might to test as relating to digital economy. **Chimezie (2020)** lamented that the implantation of digital economy plan in Nigeria is being engulfed in crises. Ewing, Chevrolier, Leenderste, Quigless and Verghese (2012) argued that much ground still remained uncovered as far as Information and Communication Technology (ICT) competitiveness is concerned in African continent. Jenrade (2020) bewailed the elusiveness of digital financial literacy in Nigeria. The writer posited that in Post-COVID pandemic season, the



trend should determinedly mitigated. According to Nwokedi (2020) without intentional commitment to digital inclusion, attainment of sustainable development goals in Nigeria may never become a success story. Zubairu, Oyefolahan, Babakano, Etuk and Mohammed (2020) argued that electronic readiness in Nigeria is a precondition for the takeoff in digital economy.

### **2.3 Strategic Appraisal of Nigerian Digital Economy**

Findings from this study revealed that digital economy is a policy of the Federal Government of Nigeria, under the auspices of the Honourable Minister, Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy. The Ministry was accordingly redesigned on October 17, 2019; by the Nigeria's seating president. According to Media-Team (2020) there exists eight strategic policy dimensions, intended to uphold digital economy in Nigeria. Those dimension constitute strategic policy focus spanning a period of six years (2020-2025). The expectations of Nigeria's Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy are mirrored in the eight strategic policy dimensions.

Furthermore, according to Ameh-news (2020) eight columns of the strategic policy were identified, number one, "Developmental Regulation", it is meant to promote and supports development of culture of digital economy awareness and compliance. More so, for guiding various electronic communication model to fast rack entrepreneurs compliance. Number two strategic policy dimensions is "Digital Literacy and Skills" which is aimed at facilitation inclusive training. Such that could close gaps. Regardless of place, age and gender. The number three strategic policy dimension is "Solid Infrastructure"

meant to be characterized by acquisition, establishment and expansion of broadband. By way of target, first quarter of 2020 was anticipated as the time for significant realization of broadband in Nigeria.

The number four strategic policy dimension is "Service Infrastructure" whose objective is to facilitate digitization of undertakings. Such that e-businesses (e-entertainment, e-health, e-learning, e-agriculture, e-ticket booking, e-banking, and so on) can run smoothly. In other words, the fourth strategic policy dimension is targeted at steady gradual migration of Nigerian business to automation, most especially in term of service delivery. Also, the intention behind the strategic dimension is to facilitate improvement in the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), due to effective implementation of automation by Nigerian entrepreneurs. The number five strategic policy dimension is "Promotion of Digital Services". The objective of the fifth strategic policy dimension is to facilitate upsurge in digitization of value adding activities in Nigerian businesses.

More so, number six strategic my policy dimension on Nigeria's digital economy is "Software Infrastructure". Objective of the sixth strategic policy dimension is to ensure institutionalization of cyber security. Insecurity of activities within cyberspace could frustrate entrenchment of digital economy. Number seven strategic policy dimension on digital economy in Nigeria is "Digital Society and Emerging Technologies". The said strategic policy dimension is intellectualized so as to encourage the creation of a pool of start-up entrepreneurs to power the Nigerian economy and mitigate unemployment. The objective is also to raise an army of innovative youth, create platform for invention and encourage talent development.





Number eight, which is the last strategic policy dimension is “Indigenous Content Development and Adoption”. Objective is to encourage home grown technology in driving Nigerian economy.

Apparently, time line in the strategic policy framework, in which broadband was expected to have significantly been procured in Nigeria, was hijacked by occurrence COVID-19 Lockdown. As a result, economic activities in Nigeria were practically inhibited.

### **Methodology**

For this conceptual study, exploratory research design was adopted. Existing academic investigations on the variables of this study are scanty and there were inadequate extant academic publications on the topic of the research. Therefore, the study relied on secondary sources of data, such as (electronic and print media reports, documented interview with the stakeholders by the media, archives of press conferences, media interactions, e-libraries, internet resources, academic articles, & newspapers).

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study concludes that occurrence of COVID-19 pandemic occasioned imposition of lockdown, which in turn hindered the implementation strategic policy dimension, aimed at procurement of broadband in the first quarter of year 2020 (Ameh-news 2020, Media-Team 2020). However, COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown that followed constituted evidence that life after COVID-19 pandemic should consider migration toward digital economy. In other words, migration to digital economy is not a lesson learnt from COVID-19 lockdown, but, a way of life to be institutionalized.

The study recommend that digital economy should be institutionalized in every sector and industry in Nigeria. Institutionalization of digital economy could serve as strategy

against external threat that might arise in either near or remote future. With digital economy, organizations could accumulate strength to explore opportunities underlining imposition of lockdown. In the light of the foregoing, it is essential that both individuals and organizations embrace automation, electronic awareness, electronic readiness and digital literacy in all ramifications.

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