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# BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE: IS NIGERIA GEARED TO ELIMINATING THE TECHNOLOGICAL GULF?

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## Abstract

The prevalence of disparity in acquisition and application of information and communication technology which is a manifestation of social inequality at various levels of global strata, has enormously hindered the even development of the society. This phenomenon often to a level of gulf, especially between developed/industrialised and developing nations and even within poor countries' urban and rural areas, portend inhibiting factors detrimental to the sustainable growth of these nations. Such discrepancies are occasioned by differences in income, race, age, gender, among other numerous factors. This study aimed at the exploration of the key factors infringing the bridging of the gap through digitalisation and enhanced sustainable development. The study applied qualitative method in which empirical secondary data were used and was anchored on Technological Determinism, Diffusion of Innovations theories, and Information Gap model. It revealed that inadequate accessibility, wrong government policies, among others, were responsible, even as the gap continues to increase the level of underdevelopment in the affected nations like Nigeria. It, therefore, recommended, among others, that government should change its poor disposition towards technology utilisation to create conducive atmosphere through proactive policies for massive accessibility to modern information and communication technology, especially among youth for capacity building.

**Key Words:** Development, Digital divide, ICTs, Social media, Technological gulf

## Introduction

The emergence of information and communication technology is seen as a huge relief as it was expected to provide solution to the yawning digital gap between various strata of the societal demographics and regions. Yet, it is often questionable if the mere availability of these gadgets directly translates to their providing the needed respite for concretely filling the existing digital void. Since it came into public front burner in 1990s, digital divide has generated a lot of heat, not surprising as it directly hinges on social, economic and political issues affecting all facets of the globe, according to Crandall (2001); Srinuan and Bohlin (2011), Badiuzzaman and Rahman (2021) and Reddy, Arunacham, Tongia, Subrahmanian & Balakrishnan (2004). That was a period the incredible gap between developed and developing nations seemed to have clearly dawned on the latter. As solution, they then clamoured for what they regarded as transfer of technology from the industrialised countries, an elusive quest that never materialised. The highly celebrated capacity of information and communication technology in accelerating the cause of growth and development is seemingly being truncated by the prevalence of disparities in their adoption and utilisation among people of different backgrounds, according to Billon, Marco and Lera-Lopez (2009), Mutula (2008) and Várallyai, Herdon and Botos (2015). Accordingly, it is raising serious concerns among international organisations, policy makers and researchers. It as well diminishes the gains of ICT application for social and economic emancipation, growth and development among nations and dims the dream of ever narrowing the gap between the rich and poor. In fact, studies have shown that the digital disparity is fuelling social inequality, especially in poor countries, (Ugboma, 2012; Srinuan & Bohlin, 2011; OECD, 2001).

Some experts have argued that though the digital gap exists and exacerbates inequality, it would with time fizzle out. However, contrary to that notion, it has been shown that instead of abating, it persists, (Mason & Hacker, 2003). Even in cases where there is the availability of these technologies, the opportunity for taking advantage of them through accessibility and utilisation are not the same for some regions, demographics, among others. Arguing this further, OECD (2001) succinctly describes digital divide as:

> …the gap between individuals, households, businesses, and geographic areas at different socio-economic levels with regard both to their opportunities to access information and communication technologies (ICTs) and to their use of the Internet for a wide variety of activities. The digital divide reflects various differences among and within countries. The ability of individuals and businesses to take advantage of the Internet varies significantly across the OECD area as well as between OECD and non-member countries. Access to basic telecommunications infrastructures is fundamental to any consideration of the issue, as it precedes and is more widely available than access to and use of the Internet. (p. 4)

While some see the controversy as mere rhetoric, others view it as a serious issue (Mason & Hacker, 2003), since it directly and indirectly affects both individuals and the entire society. The gap exists between nations and regions. For example, the rich industrialised West – America, Europe and parts of Asia like Japan, Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia are more economically and technologically endowed than countries in Africa, Latin America, and some parts of Middle East. The main issue here is accessibility. The divide can also be seen within nations as one part of a country (for instance, urban and rural areas) can be better equipped socio-economically than others. Available statistics (NBS, 2021) show that the rate of poverty is not even across the geopolitical zones of Nigeria, for instance.

Besides, among demographic and gender groups, some disparities also exist (Ugboma, 2012; *A Nation Online*, 2002; Gaziano, 1995). Factors like level of education, knowledge, skills, quality and level of technology appreciation/application additionally play key roles. Therefore, even among members of the same family, the gap could still exist determined by their gender, age, level of education, social and economic backgrounds, among others.

To what extent does the prevalence of the various platforms of information and communication technology go in minimising digital divide and hence, ameliorating the consequences of the disparity while applying the numerous platforms of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to enhance the country's developmental strides? Attempting to provide answers to these questions is the task before this study.

**Conceptual Clarifications**

For clarity in the appreciation of the key themes of the topic, this further conceptual amplification suffices:

***Digital Divide***

Digital divide describes the gap between different regions, demographics and other strata of the society in their access and utilisation of modern information and communication technology. This became an issue of public concern in the 1990s as researchers, policy makers and international organisations show serious concern about the social, economic, and political issues affecting all facets of the globe. Responsible governments are frantic trying to address the challenges raised by the divide. They see the resolution as a key factor in creating an enabling environment for handling series of other problems like poverty, unemployment, criminality and insecurity.

***Disruptive Factors***

These are the restrictive forces impinging the effective and resourceful application of information and communication technologies for national development. They are the influential elements that constitute cogs in the wheel of making, for instance, Nigeria an ICT hub for West Africa, if not the entire continent. Although, poor economic environment would readily come to mind, the major factor is likely to be government policy, attitude or disposition towards the subject. Certainly, even if every other issue is addressed, until the government enunciates effective, functional and impactful ICT policy and assiduously addresses it, the country would still be in the woods.

***Information and Communication Technology (ICT)***

The gadgets, appliances, equipment and tools which are the results of the practical application of science and used for the facilitation of effective communication and other variety of purposes. ICT or digital technology has come a long way in improving man's welfare and wellbeing, by promoting interactivity, instantaneous communication and aiding improvement in all spheres of human endeavour. Among them are the internet, computer, smartphone, etc.

***Sustainable Development***

Sustainable development entails the exploration and recognition of deliberate and enduring choices, selecting the most promising and determining how resources will be allocated across organisations to achieve set objectives. It is in this vein that Dyson, Bryant, Morecroft and O'Brien (2009) state that "The strategic development process is defined here to embrace the management processes that inform, shape and support the strategic decisions confronting an organisation". Similarly, Zepsa and Ribickisb (2015) look at strategic development from the point of view of using tactical and calculated processes to achieve corporate and organisational goals.

**Research Questions**

Providing answers to the following questions guided the study:

1. Does digital divide exist in Nigeria?
2. Has digital divide any negative impact on the Nigerian society?
3. Have social media the capacity to bridge the prevalent digital gap in Nigeria?

**Theoretical Framework**

To properly situate the study, the following theories and model were applied:

***Technological Determinism theory***

The proponent, Marshall McLuhan, states that the transformational changes brought by the entrant of new technologies are accompanied by historical developments through their obvious and sometimes subtle influences. According to Nwodu (2004, p. 73), the theory states "…that changes in communication modes largely determine the course of history". Some critics have, however, attacked the theory countering its position on the effects of technology/media on the society. Yet, others note that beyond television, the internet and other digital media have revolutionised communication and shown that not only the content, but also the medium is the message. The world is miniaturised, in addition to their instantaneous effect, convergence, interactivity and other attributes. Everything is changed forever. Technologies have brought tremendous irresistible grip on the society and specifically on their users, thus, justifying the relevance of the theory to this study. It is these their effects on the society that dictate the much talked-about visible gaps among the users (Badiuzzaman & Rahman, 2021).

***Diffusion of Innovations theory***

The theory is credited to Rogers (1986). It stipulates that as pioneering systems of technology debut, they are not immediately accepted by everyone. However, as their popularity and usage by early adopters grow, the innovations receive wider acceptability and adoption. The position of the concept has been backed by some scholars like Compaine (2001), Crandall (2000) and McQuail (2005). Specifically, Compaine (2001) insists that with the continuous patronage and application of the innovations by the well to do, market forces would bring down the prices, thereby inevitably making them more affordable, hence increasing their adoption, usage and penetration. Still, subsequent emergent technologies are not adopted *enmass* as is the case with earlier ones.

The assumption is that the divide is a natural phenomenon that would with time fizzle out. Yet, rather than disappearing, it is escalating as many studies have proved. Indeed, the practical reality in Nigeria is that the gap is widening and perhaps may be here to stay. With its resurgence, thus, the solution is to adapt some measures with which to ameliorate the ugly implications of the divide.

***Knowledge Gap model***

It was Tichenor, Donohue and Olien that formulated the Knowledge Gap hypothesis in 1970. They are of the view that there is knowledge/information gap about the usage of adopted technologies between people with higher socio-economic status and already well informed, on one hand, and those who do not possess such qualities, on the other hand. By implication, there must be some existing gap in knowledge among the affluent who can afford the ownership of these technologies and perhaps educated enough to access information from them and the have nots who do not possess nor access them. According to Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien (1970), the highly educated derived more knowledge and information from the mass media: television and newspapers than the lesser educated ones. In this vein, Mason and Hacker (2003, p. 46) cites Rogers (1986) as stating that "…the rapid evolution of technology may serve to increase existing information gaps. In essence, those who have been using the Internet are developing an increasingly sophisticated set of information seeking and processing skills and gaps between these advanced users and the late adopters who possess only basic skills are likely to expand". Certainly, the gap is not only prevalent, but also persistent and increasing to gulf (Gaziano, 1995; *A Nation Online,* 2002).

**Characteristics of the Divide and Nigeria's Precarious Position**

The dilemma and obvious quagmire facing scholars, researchers, and policy makers, perhaps, emanate from their believing that failure to stem the tide of digital disparity would, no doubt, exacerbate the current global inequality. Although series of measures exist at international, regional and national levels aimed at decreasing the escalating gulf between the haves and have nots, evidence show that the result is not only minimal, but also not far reaching. We had the

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Okot-Uma, 2002; Murelli, 2002, and Chetty, 2005), as cited by Ugoma (2012) and its other variants, NEPAD, NEEDs, among others, to no avail.

The concern is that should the gap persist, it would further weaken every measure already put in place to resuscitate the fledgling global economy and additionally deepen the existing crises. To these agitated minds, the strategic and catalytic position of the digital media in the lives of every individual, organisation and nation's socio-engineering, transformation and development is not in doubt, hence the current level of digital exclusion should be quickly tackled to lessen the consequential socio-economic inequality, poverty, unemployment and criminalities resulting from it and badly battering and devastating all facets of the global system.

Mason and Hacker (2003) buttress the certainty of the prevalence the gap while noting series of studies carried out over time by U.S. National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) 2002, among them *A Nation Online* (2002), *Falling Through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion* (2001) and another *A Nation Online* (2002). Their research revealed that obvious disparity among the different races, social and economic strata in the United States in their access and usage of information and communication technology, though the United States is an economic, industrial, and educational endowed nation.

But in what areas is this gap most noticeable? Available data from various studies done by researchers point to the divergency of opinions as to the kinds or categories of the disparity of digital technology. For one, Ugoma (2012, p. 2) attributes to Reddy, Arunacham, Tongia, Subrahmanian, and Balakrishnan (2004) the following as the existing types of digital gaps:

1. Infrastructural divide
2. Access divide
3. Literacy divide
4. Language divide
5. Information and knowledge divide
6. Job divide
7. Healthcare divide
8. Entertainment divide and
9. Demographic divide.

In the same vein, Mutula (2008) identifies four categories of digital divide to include:

***Social divide***: This may be seen through cultural factors that result into disparities in access to and effective use of various digital technologies between countries and within countries

***Economic divide:*** This relates to factors such as poverty and monetary constraints that make it more possible for some communities than others to have access to make effective use of digital technologies

***Linguistic divide***: This arises when the language of digital technology or the content within the technology is foreign to certain communities, while it is familiar to other communities

***Content divide:*** This refers to gaps that exist between communities on account of inappropriate knowledge contained or flowing through digital technologies that certain communities cannot use, because it is created without their needs been taken into consideration.

Chalita and Bohlin (2011, p. 6) examine the concept from another prism pointing out that: "The gap in access could also be understood as a phenomenon with three distinct aspects, including a global divide (referring to ICT disparities between countries), a social divide (referring to the gap in access to ICT between different sections of a nation's society) and a democratic divide (referring to the difference between those who do and those who do not use the variety of digital means to engage in public life)". No doubt, this is a contentious issue with divergent solutional approaches.

Another classification of those who bear the brunt of the technology gap, termed 'four "at risk" groups' include: (females, persons aged over 50 years old, persons with limited formal education and persons receiving a low income); socio-demographic factors such as income, gender, race,

ethnicity, education, age, and location, as well as the institution; socio-economic status, skills, geography and education.

Whatever position anyone takes on the categorisation of the digital gulf, one thing certain and obvious is that they have far reaching negative consequences on everyone irrespective of the nationality, race, demography, religious or political inclination. Thus, very crucial is finding immediate solution to it to stop the further degeneration of the prevailing global and national challenges it occasioned from continuation.

The dire situation some nations like Nigeria find themselves in the digital divide imbroglio results from absence of formidable technological foundation and strong institutional framework for chatting the way forward for the country's technological development (Ugboma, 2012). Although countries that were at par with Nigeria in terms of development and gained political independence at the same time with her, such as Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia, have made giant strides economically, socially, politically and technologically, Nigeria is still a neophyte, a crippling giant and a nation of unimaginable uncertainty. It gropes in and grapples with high rate of poverty, unemployment, factories of below-capacity productive capacity and one of the lowest public power supplies – intermittent collapsing of the national grid, among other abysmal socio-economic indexes. Of course, while some of these challenges are what adequate digital network system could assist to address, it is not the case as there is no credible arrangement for its effective and functional take off.

Therefore, globally, and regionally, Nigeria is behind its peers technologically. This adds to the geographical differences in terms of technological accessibility and application induced by social and economic inequalities between the geopolitical zones of the country and extreme impoverishment caused by unpatriotic political elite, who rather than championing the development of the country, somewhat, concertedly undermine it. For instance, its educational system is diluted by poor funding, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient manpower and poor staff welfare. These culminate in poor quality and low standard of the output (NUC, 2021).

Perhaps, one of the known efforts towards laying a concrete foundation for Nigeria self-sufficiency in information and communication was government establishment of the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in 2001. According to Ugboma (2012) the aim was to put Nigeria in the forefront in information and communication technology in Africa and as well bridge the digital divide. The Nigerian National Policy for Information Technology (2001) details the agency's set achievable goals as follows:

1. To ensure that information technology resources are readily available to promote efficient national development.
2. To guarantee that the country benefits maximally and contributes meaningfully by providing the global solutions to the challenges of the information age.
3. To empower Nigerians to participate in software and IT development.
4. To encourage local production and manufacture of IT components in a competitive manner.
5. To improve accessibility to public administration for all citizens, bringing transparency to government processes.
6. To establish and develop IT infrastructure and maximize its use nationwide.
7. To improve judiciary procedures and enhance the dispensation of justice.
8. To improve food production and food security.
9. To improve healthcare delivery systems nationwide.
10. To promote tourism and Nigerian arts and culture.
11. To enhance planning mechanism and forecasting for the development of local infrastructure.
12. To enhance the effectiveness of environmental monitoring and control systems.
13. To re-engineer and improve urban and rural development schemes.
14. To empower children, women and the disabled by providing special programs for the acquisition of IT skills.
15. To empower by the youth with IT skills and prepare them for global competitiveness.

16. To integrate IT into the mainstream of education and training.
17. To create IT awareness and ensure universal access to promote IT diffusion in all sectors of our national life.
18. To create an enabling environment and facilitate private sector (national and multinational) investment in the It sector
19. To stimulate the private sector to become the driving force for IT creativity and enhanced productivity and competitiveness.
20. To encourage government and private sector joint venture allocation.
21. To enhance national security and law enforcement.
22. To endeavour to bring the defence and law enforcement agencies in line with accepted best practices in the national interest.
23. To promote legislation (Bill and Acts) for the protection of on-line business transactions, privacy, and security.
24. To establish new multi-faceted IT institutions as centres of excellence to ensure Nigeria's competitiveness in international markets.
25. To develop human capital with emphasis on creating and supporting a knowledge-based society.
26. To create Special incentive programs (SIPs) to induce investment in the IT sector.
27. To generate additional foreign exchange earnings through expanded indigenous IT products and services.
28. To strengthen National identity and unity.
29. To build mass pool of IT literate manpower using NYSC, NDE and other platforms as "train the trainer" scheme (TTT) for capacity building.
30. To set up advisory standard for education, working practice and industry. (Nigerian National Policy for Information Technology, 2001).

The policy guidelines claim of the establishment of some institutional strategies to actualise these lofty and ambitious objectives, among them:

Establishment of a coordinated program for the development of a national Information Infrastructure (NII), State Information Infrastructure(SII) and local Information Infrastructure (LII), backbone through VSAT, fibre optic networks, high speed gateways and broad band technologies; Providing adequate connectivity to the Global Information Infrastructure (GII); Addressing open standards for further liberalization and the fiscal measures including incentives to substantially improve telephone tele density and make IT more affordable to the citizenry, and Establishing IT parks as incubating centres for the development of software applications at national, state and local government levels.(Nigerian National Policy for Information Technology, 2001).

The present state of information and communication technology and indeed the prevailing digital gap in Nigeria clearly underscores the total failure of whatever policy the government enunciated in the sector. The information and communication policy have very little or nothing to show as its achievement since its inception in 2001, despite its rosy prescriptions. The poor rating of the country in virtually all areas of human development, especially in the areas of poverty, unemployment, criminality and insecurity, all avenues the effective deployment of technology would have been the solution, points to Nigeria's backwardness in the critical sector. Thus, something needs to be done.

**Overcoming the Obstructive Factors Through the Resolution of the Digital Gap**

Contemporary global system is engrossed in a nose-diving economy occasioned by the cumulative effects of COVID-19 pandemic and the scourge of climate change. Among the obvious consequences is many nations being unable to finance its activities and policies, industries producing at low capacity, large scale of unemployment and high rate of criminality and insecurity. Indeed, the world is in such a mess only urgent, concerted and collective solution can address. To attain the feat, bridging the digital divide is very imperative and more urgent than

ever. This stems from the fact that the impasse impinges on all facets of every nation's socio-economic and political policies and programmes. Thus, resolving it would unleash numerous benefits that would positively impact on individuals, groups, organisations and nations as the eliminate most of the existing challenges most nations are currently facing.

Mason and Hacker (2003) also cite NTIA (2002), Tranter and Willis (2002), Hacker & Steiner (2001), Bikson and Panis (1995), Katz and Aspden (1997) and Kiesler, Kraut, Mukhopadhyay and Scherlis (1997) as observing that the utilisation of the internet, computers and other technological appliances is motivated by these tools providing the users with more accurate information and inputs on variety of issues including advertised goods and services, healthcare products, job opportunities, financial transactions, news, weather, and sports, besides the social benefit of frequent communication with others, consolidation of relationships and enhancing economic/productive opportunities. Yet, another crucial advantage of access and usage if information and communication technology is their enabling the users to participate more proactively in civil matters. Johnson (2003, p. 3) justifies this when he notes that "The Internet can give power to the less powerful and it can increase the power of the already powerful. It all depends on who uses the Internet and how".

When available and easily accessible, digital technologies immeasurable go miles in bridging the social, economic and political gaps between today's haves and half nots, since studies indicate that, rather than abating, the gap is widening (Mason & Hacker (2003), despite the claim of some scholars. Information and communication technologies are strategic and catalytic instruments for empowerment, transformation and social engineering (Aliede & Ogodo, 2018; Folarin, 2013). This, Korupp and Szydlik (2005) affirm when they observe that "Our own research confirms these findings. Between 1979- and 1998-income levels became positively influenced using computers at work". On their part, Mason and Hacker (2003) and van Dijk (1999) claim that enhanced accessibility and application of these technologies strengthen the societal influence and power of the users, as Keane (2000) is of the view that their usage positively impacts on the society. It is, thus, proven that they impact positively on the users and the society.

However, Vartanova and Gladkova (2019, p. 193), while asserting the overwhelming influence of digital technology in future economy, democracy, empowerment and culture, draw attention to what they regard "…as controversial issues of digital realities, such as information security in business and the media, public and private domains, network surveillance, information abundance, the rise of digital consumption and so on". Of course, as fearfully expressed, cybercrime, hate speech and fake news are among the digital threats facing humanity today. For instance, the spate of cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure in many industrial nations like the United States of America is alarming. In Nigeria, the spate of the nefarious activities of cyber-criminals like the so-called Yahoo Boys pose serious threat to the economy, *RoyalNews.com.* Fortunately, nonetheless their overwhelming negative influence, efforts are on to contain them.

Moreover, and importantly, the undesirable effects of ICTs do not in any way outweigh their positive values. For example, Sorj (2008) outlines more areas modern information and communication technology are beneficial to man to include: e-communication, e-education, e-science and technology, e-health, e-government, and social content. Specifically, the case of education is obvious and clear. With ICTs, not only is the quality and standard of education improved, but also provides enormous opportunities for mass education even for vulnerable groups like the less privileged, low-income earners, IDPs and others disadvantaged by distance. According to Aliede and Onwubere (2018), the effective application of ICTs in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode of education as is the case in the National Open University of Nigeria goes a long way to solving the inherent challenges facing the educational sector.

Ugboma (2012) quotes Mutula (2008) as further enumerating the following as the gains derivable from abridging the discrepancies of the divide:

1. Employment and economic growth: Bridging the digital divide by the deployment of ICTs offers the potential for commercial use by local entrepreneurs which may generate

employment and economic growth. The entire gamut of the ICT sector can provide better paid skilled employment.

2. Promote e-governance and e-commerce: The effective integration of ICT into the society can promote e-governance with its associated benefits of timeliness. The integration of ICT in the financial sector is a key factor for economic sustainability and improved social conditions.
3. Promoting academic excellence: Access to technology driven instructional resources offers access to a wide range of information and the effective use of the knowledge gained through such use increases improvement at all levels.
4. Bridging the digital divide can significantly contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Africa.
5. Education: The application of ICT based platforms such as e-learning, can go a long way in solving some of the problems of shortage of teachers and the physical infrastructure at all levels of the education spectrum in most Africa countries because ICTs can reach many people spread across vast geographical areas.
6. Health: Bridging the digital divide would enhance ICT based health delivery systems. Public health campaigns and basic hygiene can be more effectively delivered and accesses by all citizens including those in rural areas.
7. Eradication of extreme poverty: The provision of telephony services (both fixed and mobile) as well as internet services occasioned by bridging the digital divide would create new opportunities for employment for many households. It has been discovered that the introduction of mobile phones had led to employment opportunities as well as boost small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Bridging the digital divide will help to fight against poverty in the agricultural sector by providing timely information to peasant farmers in areas such as weather patterns and forecasting. (Ugboma, 2012, p. 3-4).

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study explored, through descriptive analysis, the prevalence of digital divide and how to minimise the negative effects of the technological gap by identifying the inherent obstructive factors to enable the application of information and communication technology for development. Qualitative method was used in generating the empirical secondary data. The theories and hypothesis applied as the theoretical bases of the study confirmed the position of the thesis that digital divide undermines national development. As well, the sourced literature glaringly points to the prevalence of the gap in both developed/industrialised as well as in developing nations, categorizable in many ways, often based on the angle from which each researcher examines the crisis. Both the literature and theoretical frameworks provided sufficient validation of the assumption as well as the objectives and also answered the research questions. First, that the ICT instruments are veritable tools for transforming the socio-economic and political fortunes of the society. Also, that there is the existence of the divide at various levels, globally, regionally, nationally and demographically. The gap, thus, creates or necessitates non-uniformity in their accessibility and acquisition due to inequality in the opportunity for potential users to access and acquire the essential technologies.

In any case, the divide is generally conspicuous in such areas like infrastructural, access, education, information and knowledge, demography and job opportunities. Another way it is categorizable is social, economic, linguistic and content divides. But more broadly, it can be grouped into global - ICT technology gaps between countries; social - the divide in access to ICT between different sections of a country; and democratic - the difference between those who do and those who do not use diverse digital technology in their day-to-day activities.

Among those who are identified to suffer most from the effects of the divide are: females, those above the age of 50 years, people who are poorly educated and low-income earners. It can also be looked at from the point of view of demographic factors like income,

gender, race, ethnicity, education, age and geographical location, as well as socio-economic status such as skills, geography and educational background.

The study certainly shows that the technological disparity is real. Consequently, it provides evidence that a lot of differences exist in any place or society where the divide is eliminated and ICTs provide sufficient enabling environment for meeting the social, economic, political and other needs of the people. Indeed, it is almost unanimous that multiplicity of benefits accrues to a nation where these diversities or discrepancies are eradicated. Among the obvious known advantages are provision of socio-economic infrastructure; promotion of economic growth by affording the masses access to large markets; aiding good governance; cheapening the cost and heightening the quality of education; improving healthcare system and social welfare; eliminating poverty through massive aid to economic and other productive activities like entrepreneurship and advertising; boosting of political communication, socialisation and participation; provision of security in the system and stimulating improved general wellbeing of the masses by affording them social services like news, advertising and entertainment.

Yet, the above lofty benefits are only possible if the existing technological gaps among the various strata in the society are assiduously eliminated. Although a variety of factors have been identified as the causes of the divide in developing countries, Nigeria's case is mainly traceable to what can be regarded as self-inflicted crisis as exemplified by ban on Twitter (Akingbulu, 2021) and poor economic conditions, compounded by consistent poor government attitude on ICT policy. Accordingly, endurable solution to the quagmire is the diligent implementation of the nation's ICT policy, an already articulated strategic blueprint whose major impediment is the absence of its sincere and concerted execution. If done, the policy has the potential of changing the current situation.

The study's findings are in tandem with the propositions of the applied theories and model (Technological Determinism, Diffusion of Innovation and Knowledge Gap model) by proving that the gap exists in Nigeria, the technologies engender transformational influences on the users and that the effects will persistently spread among the people. In addition, the reviewed literature gave insight into the numerous negative consequences of the digital gap, while it is revealed that though the efficacies of the social media and other technological tools, if effectively used are not doubtful, the goal is yet to be achieved in Nigeria. Therefore, the research questions posed by the study were responded to. The study, thus makes modest contribution to knowledge by adding to the existing literature on the subject. It has equally more specifically spelt out the situation of the digital gap in Nigeria by pointing out the country's peculiarities, as well as the areas of similarities and distinctions from other climes.

To this effect, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Adequate provision of information and communication technological resources through local production and reduced cost of their acquisition to ensure availability to the masses.
2. Provision of improved and unrestricted accessibility to digital technology for the citizenry.
3. Massive creation of awareness, enlightenment, and reorientation of the masses on the uses and benefits of ICT infrastructure as the basis of human capacity building.
4. Effective deployment of ICTs in such critical and requisite areas like agricultural production, healthcare delivery, tourism, showcasing of arts and culture, improved environmental surveillance, urban and national development, and national security.
5. Empowering the youth to acquire technological skills, knowledge, and creativity for enhanced human capacity.
6. Creating enabling environment for functional private sector investment/participation and joint venture in ICT infrastructural development.
7. Integrating ICT into Nigeria's educational and vocational training curricula and programmes.
8. Assisting vulnerable groups like women, children, the disabled and IDPs to have access to and make it easy for them to acquire the technological gadgets.
9. Provision of necessary legislations to protect online businesses, privacy and security.

10. Extension of this study to other related areas like examining the impact of the divide on specific geographic areas, demographic segments, among others.

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