
**MEDIA, DEGLOBALISATION AND THE RISE OF NATIONALISM IN A
'COVIDIZED' WORLD: THE CASE OF NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic remains unprecedented in the history of the global health system. It affects every sphere of human endeavours, shutting down human activities and spreading across boundaries within the northern and southern hemispheres. Although the COVID-19 virus is a global health problem, attempting to tackle the pandemic has led to a rising nationalistic consciousness rather than a global approach. As such, territorial protection dominates political discourse and decisions on curbing the spread of the virus, while international collaboration becomes secondary. At the same time, the national media systems, both mainstream and social media, which are at the centre of communication about the virus and attempts to manage and contain it, became a part of the agenda, promoting narratives that cue the government's stance. Using semi-structured interviews as the data collection method, this paper analyzes how deglobalisation and nationalism influence the policies and decisions of the government in Nigeria. The semi-structured interview involves twenty-one participants selected through the purposive sampling method. Interview participants include government officials, policymakers, and top Foreign Affairs Officials involved in managing the COVID-19 pandemic in the country and selected citizens. Findings show that decisions and measures taken by the government, especially during the first and second waves, were influenced by nationalism and the need for territorial protection. Furthermore, findings show that citizens are gradually becoming glocalised with the influence of the media system, including online media.

Keywords: COVID-19, Deglobalizing, Nationalism, Mass media, Glocalisation

1. Introduction

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic remains unprecedented in the history of the global health system. It affects every sphere of human endeavours, shutting down human activities and spreading across boundaries within the northern and southern hemispheres(Belitski et al., 2022; Sarkodie & Owusu, 2021).Furthermore, the scenario at the height of the pandemic reflects a tension between nationalism and globalisation. One side of the argument stresses countries' attempts to protect their territories against transborder virus transmission, considering such efforts more paramount than international collaboration. On the other hand,

the argument recognizes global cooperation and policies for containing the universal virus and is not state-specific(Nossem, 2020).

Although the COVID-19 virus is a global health problem, attempting to tackle the pandemic has led to a rising nationalistic consciousness rather than a global approach(Bieber, 2022). For instance, there was an outcry over what global health experts, including the WHO Director-General, Tedros Ghebreyesus, referred to as vaccine nationalism, where the wealthy nations of the western hemisphere secured a large dosage of COVID 19 vaccines more than they needed, leaving little or inadequate vials of the vaccine for the poorer countries. As such, territorial protection dominates political discourse and decisions on curbing the spread of the virus, while international collaboration becomes secondary. At the same time, the national media systems in different countries, both mainstream and social media, which are at the centre of communication about the virus and attempts to manage and contain it, became a part of the agenda, promoting narratives that cue the government's stance. The Nigerian government closed the borders during the period, banned airlines from specific countries from flying into the country and developed policies that curtailed movements and social relations. These protective measures raised different concerns, considering Nigeria's critical position within the sub-Saharan region.

Furthermore, Nigeria is a significant economic hub in Africa and at the heart of the region's social and economic transactional movements. In addition, the country is a signatory to various bilateral and multilateral agreements promoting freedom of movement and association across boundaries, such as ECOWAS protocols. Hence, the imposed restrictions by the government raised the issue of whether the dynamics of nationalism and deglobalisation shape Nigeria's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper focuses on the Nigerian experience and attempts by the government to localise the pandemic, including the nationalistic consciousness that emerged around the pandemic period.

In doing this, the study deplores the semi-structured interview method for the study and raises an overarching research question.

RQ1: Do the government's measures against the COVID-19 pandemic promote nationalism in Nigeria?

2. COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria

On February 27, 2020, the government officially announced the index case (an Italian who works in Nigeria and is returning from a trip abroad) of COVID-19 in Nigeria (NCDC, 2020). Furthermore, there was much misinformation about the virus during the early COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria. For instance, the prevailing opinion among the citizens was that the virus is primarily a global north issue and does not have any chance of survival in sub-Saharan Africa, of which Nigeria is inclusive due to the climatic condition of the region. Also, as part of the government's proactive mechanisms for managing the pandemic in Nigeria, it entrusted the management of all the issues around the COVID-19 virus to the National Centre for Disease Control. Also, it set up an inter-ministerial committee which serves as an interface between the government and the media. However, the testing and treatment levels of citizens who contracted the virus initially were low due to inadequate health facilities, including laboratories and the novelty nature of the virus, which requires studies to have a good knowledge of the virus.

Nevertheless, the previous lessons from the Ebola virus outbreak in Nigeria influenced the prompt surveillance and tracking of infected citizens (Afolabi et al., 2021). As such, community tracing was much more accessible, avoiding a disaster in terms of the rate of infection and mortality. Likewise, the lessons learned from the Ebola outbreak also help information dissemination and management. For instance, the government collaborated with the media to disseminate information on the pandemic to remove the emphasis on fear appeal and instead stress prevention, treatment, and management. An indication of the collaborative effort is the media's dismissal and correction of the initial misconceptions and narratives about the virus being a health problem in the West and the virus's inability to survive the hot weather in Nigeria. Also, the inter-ministerial committee ensured a regular interface between it and the media by presenting facts and figures, including explaining any new developments about the pandemic.

Nigeria has seen many consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have prompted various responses to lessen the effects on different facets of society. Researchers have examined how the epidemic has affected Nigeria's public health, economy, education system, and governance, offering insights into the potential and challenges brought about by the catastrophe. To properly manage the pandemic and stop its spread, it is crucial to understand community behaviours, as demonstrated by the study done by Ilesanmi and Afolabi [51] on attitudes and practices during the COVID-19 pandemic in an urban community in Nigeria. The research highlights the importance of community attitudes and behaviours in tackling the public health emergency. Ozili [52] looked at the pandemic's policy reactions and the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19 in Africa, particularly Nigeria. The study emphasises how important it is to comprehend the socioeconomic ramifications of the pandemic and how well policy interventions might lessen its effects on African nations. The pandemic's effects on Nigeria's stock market performance were examined by Akinbobola et al. [53], who concentrated on essential metrics such as stock market return, volatility, capitalisation, and efficiency. The analysis sheds light on the pandemic's economic effects on Nigeria's financial sector. Eze et al.'s evaluation [54] of the survival tactics employed by micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic provided insight into the adaptability and resilience of companies in overcoming the crisis's economic obstacles.

3. Globalisation, Deglobalisation, Nationalism and Media

The interrelated trends of nationalism, deglobalisation, and globalisation shape international relations and modern societies. This review clarifies the intricate relationships between these ideas and highlights how they affect social structures, politics, and the economy. Globalisation rose to prominence in the international system after the demise of the Cold War era, as did communism and the disintegration of the former USSR into different independent countries. Furthermore, the gradual dominance of the free market economy in the global system, as championed by the United States and its allies, connecting economies that were hitherto on the fringe of the global trading system to the big economies of the

world, also contributed to the ascendancy of globalisation in the international system. Therefore, one may be tempted to assume the definition of globalisation as a simple undertaking, especially from a normative perspective of the term as a form of interconnectedness among nations at different levels. McGrew (1990) defines globalisation as:

multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend the nation states (and by implication the societies) which make up the modern world system. It defines a process through which events, decisions and activities in one part of the world can come to have a significant consequence for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe.

However, as Scholte (2011) pointed out, defining globalisation often leads to an ambiguous description and falls into the trap of operational limits within four prisms: internalisation, liberalisation, universalisation and westernisation. Instead, Scholte (2011) argues for an approach in the definition of globalisation which considers not only the already identified traditions but also the emerging nuances within the international system that characterised the expansion of transplanetary - and more recently, suprataritorial - links between individuals as globalisation. According to this viewpoint, globalisation entails fewer obstacles to cross-border social interactions. Physically, legally, linguistically, culturally, and mentally, people are better equipped to interact with one another wherever they may be on the planet.

In the realm of public health, Barnish et al. (2018) and Muntañer et al. (2011) highlight the importance of politics on social welfare and public health and investigate the relationship between political considerations, welfare regimes, and population health outcomes. These studies highlight the complex relationships between population health, globalisation, and political traditions, underscoring the necessity of all-encompassing strategies to address social issues. In their discussion of transnationalism and globalisation, Tedeschi et al. (2020) highlight the interdependence of nations and continents. The report emphasises how globalisation is spreading and increasing national interconnectedness and interaction. This interconnection significantly impacts the dynamics of global governance and national identities. Furthermore, globalisation is not limited to global economic interdependence

(Dreher et al., 2008). Instead, it is a conception that stresses the interconnectedness of politics, economy, social relations, power relations, and culture across borders. Likewise, globalisation also has its foothold in the mass media. The influence of globalisation on the media system presents a scenario of interdependence between the developing and developed world media systems. The international news flow assumes an imbalance or asymmetric pattern, where the developed world media system dominates the international media system and produces a warped image of third-world countries through stereotyping and negative reportage.

The global economic crisis witnessed over a decade ago and the biting, damaging recession experienced across the globe signalled a gradual process of deglobalisation and the resurrection of nationalism. Some of these fallouts can be seen in the perennial trade disputes between China and the United States, in which China embraced protectionism in its trade and monetary policies (Abdal & Ferreira, 2021). At the same time, the United States pulled out of some international treaties, including the multilateral agreement on global warming and reduction. Bello (2009) describes deglobalisation as a process where all decisions relating to the economy and other aspects of human activities are taken at a local level close to and will benefit directly from such decisions. Also, deglobalisation is a reaction against globalisation (Kim et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is also impacting the deglobalisation of the international system. The different measures put in place by countries to control the pandemic and the initial monopoly of vaccine production and distribution all point to the gradual dismantling of globalisation and the entrenchment of nationalism. Bieber (2022) explores the concept of exclusionary nationalism and argues that the COVID-19 pandemic has increased nationalism among countries, especially in the global North. Gong et al. (2022) investigate the processes of deglobalisation and regionalisation relating to the reorganisation of global value chains and production networks. The study draws attention to the dynamic character of globalisation and its effects on national and regional economies, highlighting the complexity of modern global economic systems. Reis et al. and Dabić et al. (2020) analyze globalisation in international business research, emphasising the increase in scepticism against it. The study emphasises how sovereignty, politics, and economy are changing in the

context of globalisation, highlighting the necessity of critically evaluating the effects of interconnection worldwide.

The complex terrain that results from the intersection of nationalism, globalisation, globalisation, and mass media shapes public perceptions, identities, and societal structures. The complex relationships between these ideas have been studied by academics, who have also shone insight into how politics, economics, and social dynamics are affected. In-depth analyses of how the media shapes public expectations and views during crises and economic downturns are provided by Boomgaarden et al. (2011) and Mutz (1992). These studies demonstrate how national narratives and citizens' perspectives on the economy can be shaped by media coverage of international events and economic crises. How the media presents such incidents can influence public opinion and aid in forming national identities. In discussing the depoliticisation of personal experiences through mass media, Rochyadi-Reetz et al. (2019) highlight how media narratives can affect people's perceptions of political issues and personal experiences. This depoliticisation may impact the development of communal identities and national discourse. Oberländer et al. (2017) and Amin et al (2022) examine media framing of renewable energies and regional health trends in the context of global interconnection, delving deeper into the processes of globalisation and deglobalisation. These studies highlight how the media shapes national health and sustainability trends and public conversation on international issues. Additionally, Bust et al. (2023) examine how media exposure and framing impact national identity and policy processes. These studies show how popular perceptions of national concerns, political engagement, and policy formation can be influenced by media representations, which in turn can shape national narratives and identities.

The body of research on nationalism, globalisation, deglobalisation, and mass media emphasises the complex connections between these ideas and how they affect national identities, public discourse, and social structures. Researchers can learn more about how media dynamics interact with national and international trends to shape collective identities and social responses by investigating how the media shapes perceptions, frames stories, and affects public mood.

Nigerian Media and Globalisation

Globalisation's impact on Nigerian media is a complex phenomenon that interacts with societal institutions, cultural values, and national identity. Researchers have investigated how globalisation has affected Nigerian media dynamics, providing insight into how audience views, cultural representations, and media content are all influenced by global interconnectedness. Swinnen and Francken (2006) and Dumbili and Henderson (2017) explore how the media shapes public attitudes and actions in the context of globalisation. These studies demonstrate how attitudes towards commerce, health, and alcohol usage are influenced by worldwide trends reflected in Nigerian media coverage. The way the media presents international events and cultural customs can influence public opinion and mould national narratives. Omenuga et al. (2016) and Endong (2021) explored how globalisation has affected Nigerian media and society on a cultural level. These studies examine the ways in which changes in cultural values and identities are reflected in media production, content, and audience reception because of globalisation. Cultural norms have been redefined, and globalised narratives have been promoted in Nigerian media due to the globalisation of media practices and content.

Additionally, the effects of globalisation on audience views and cultural representations in Nigerian media are examined by Badru et al. (2022) and Effiong (2018). These studies look at how audiences' reactions to media material and the localisation of cultural products in a globalised environment are affected by globalisation. Global narratives and multicultural influences are spread through Nigerian media, which indicates the interconnectedness of today's media environments. For instance, Oyebanji (2023) explores how non-heterosexual sexualities are legitimised in Nigerian news reporting, emphasising how the media contributes to the continuation of violence against marginalised communities. This demonstrates the power of media narratives to shape public opinion and aid in forming national identity. Elega et al. (2023) examine the effects of Nigeria's Twitter ban and issue a cautionary tale about the rise of digital dictatorship. Their research emphasises how social media is critical in influencing political engagement and public discourse, both essential for developing a sense of identity and national cohesion. Usua and Ijah (2023) go into more

detail about how social media influencers have shaped Nigeria's reputation internationally, highlighting the significance of digital communication on the country's perception and image. Mande et al.'s (2022) study of Nigerian teenagers' preferences for social media content and political engagement sheds light on how digital platforms affect civic engagement and national debate. Their findings highlight the significance of comprehending how media content influences public attitudes and behaviours, which are critical for promoting pride and unity in the country.

Additionally, Nwaolikpe (2018) investigates mass media's function in advancing a country, concentrating on the actions of Nigeria's "baby factory." This study emphasises the impact of the media on societal concerns and how it affects the advancement and cohesiveness of the country. In order to strengthen social growth and promote a shared national identity, it is imperative to comprehend how such significant problems are portrayed in the media. To sum up, research on Nigerian mass media and nationalism emphasises how important the media is in forming public opinion, defining national identity, and promoting social cohesiveness. Researchers can learn more about how the media shapes national identity and fosters a common feeling of belonging among varied Nigerian people by analysing the effects of media narratives, social media dynamics, and communication tactics.

The remaining parts of the paper explain the methodological approach to the research and the study's findings

4. Method

The qualitative methodological approach was adopted for the study. As a result, the researchers employed the semi-structured interview method. One of the justifications for using the semi-structured interview method for the study is that prior studies related to this paper's theme in Nigeria are scanty. Therefore, the researchers argued that the method would provide a suitable methodological plank for an exploratory study. Likewise, the semi-structured interview method allows for probing deeper into an interviewee's oeuvre of knowledge on a study theme to obtain robust feedback/data. Accordingly, 21 participants were included in the interview session, which was conducted over three months from

December 2021 to February 2022. The participants for the study were recruited through the purposive sampling method.

Also, the sample size for the study was arrived at by applying the saturation method during the interview sessions. We applied the saturation method when we observed that subsequent responses after the 21 people interviewed did not yield any new angle of information to the interview data already collected. The interview data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. The interview data was coded into themes using the inductive approach. As a result, the themes identified emerged without the influence of any prior or existing themes related to the subject of inquiry.

5. Findings and discussion

The data analysis findings discussed in this section answer the research question raised for the study. The emerging thematic categories from the interview data are highlighted and discussed below.

Protection of National Interest

There was a recurring agreement among the government officials interviewed in the study that decisions and policies taken by the government during the pandemic were influenced by the need to protect the national interest, and every other consideration was secondary. For example, an official of the government who participated in the study interview sessions says: Yes, I know that COVID-19 is a global problem. However, whatever policies we put in place were done to protect our citizens and economy. Our interest as a country takes priority over any other considerations.

Another interviewed official explained that:

For us, COVID-19 threatens national security, and we have to treat it as such. Shutting our borders and closing airspace is something any responsible government should do, or do you want a situation where our people die from a disease we do not have the know-how or capacity to manage? So the best thing to do is what we did by closing our territory to protect our people.

The position of the Nigerian Government corroborated this. For instance, the Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, while lamenting the growing nationalism on COVID-19 vaccines worldwide, noted that "vaccine nationalism has heightened the inequality and inequity in the global vaccine distribution system." At the celebration of the 44th edition of the United Nations World Tourism Day 2021 in Kebbi State, Nigeria, the Minister further accused the rich world of discrimination against the poor countries, a case that may lead to increased nationalism from both ends. In his words,

Today, rich countries are able to procure vaccines for their own citizens through a direct agreement with pharmaceutical companies, while low and middle-income countries are lagging, unable to act as speedily as rich countries in securing the quantity of vaccines they need or unable to afford to pay for any at all. So, while some rich countries are already talking of third booster shots, many low and middle-income countries have not even given the first shot to their citizens. Added to this is the restriction placed on the citizens from certain countries by the rich nations. These restrictions are made possible by the use of vaccine passports, as well as the low level of vaccination in low and middle-income countries due to vaccine nationalism, such that rich countries mop up available vaccines, hence subduing all the efforts put into restarting tourism. (Diamond, 2021).

This finding echoes previous findings on the growing exclusionary nationalism among nations (Abdal & Ferreira, 2021; Arase, 2020; Bieber, 2022). Although exclusionary nationalism is not new and is sometimes exhibited by the media system of a country or even in an ethnic discourse (Bieber, 2022), its saliency as a factor in the protection of national interest is on the rise.

Centralised news source for issues around COVID-19

The results of the interview data also showed that the Nigerian government centralised the information dissemination mechanism around the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the government made the news organizations consider the information released from the National Centre For Disease Control – a federal government agency responsible for the

management of the pandemic, in conjunction with the Presidential Task Force On COVID-19, as the only authentic information on the pandemic as it relates to Nigeria.

A journalist interviewed explained that:

As reporters, we were asked to consider information from the PTF as the only authentic source of information about COVID-19 in Nigeria. Although, my news organisation do report issues around COVID-19, which are not from the PTF, especially from the isolation centres. You dare not report any figure on the number of infections contrary to the government's, or your organisation will be sanctioned.

The government's action of controlling information flow around the COVID-19 pandemic is related to an argument that adopting a command-and-control information model during a health disaster is paramount (Greer et al., 2020). With the proliferation of media outlets, including traditional and online media, its attendants' quests for advertising revenue, and increased traffic resulting in misinformation and disinformation, it is crucial to regulate the news and information system. As explained by one of the interviewees, who is a government official:

It was a step in the right direction for the government to regulate official information on the pandemic. Even with these measures in place, you can imagine the amount of fake news flying around the country. Some of these have even led to some taking traditional medicines that sent them to their early graves.

Emerging glocalised citizens

Most of the interviewed participants believed that their lengthy stay at home due to the lockdown and social distancing made them interact more with various media outlets, including social media. The increased use of different media platforms, especially the internet, enabled some who reside in Nigeria to navigate the world by studying or participating in one form of program. For example, one of the interview participants in his late twenties explained:

Although I do not pray for any pandemic again, the period was a blessing for me as I participated in and completed courses online and made friends online. In fact, I have played games online with friends in other countries.

Another interview participant explained that:

I am a businessman, and the pandemic lockdown has made me utilize the internet more than ever. In fact, I am into local fabrics, but I can tell you that even with the local nature of my clothing materials, I have been able to trade internationally through the internet, and customers appreciate what I sell.

The evidence of glocalisation presented by citizens in Nigeria due to COVID-19 resonates with Terranova's (2020) arguments that the various governments' various protectionist regimes worldwide are fuelling glocalism and gradually making the practice a new normal.

Conclusion

The abovementioned themes indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic made people think of themselves first before others, a case of self-preservation. This also made the citizens support their government's nationalistic approach to stemming and controlling the disease. The idea is if we (the citizens) can submit our freedoms, including that of movement, association and even religion, towards the common goals, how much more 'foreigners.' In addition, the citizens believed that Nigeria's government delayed closing the border, blaming it for the first case noted in Nigeria, which was 'brought in by an Italian. This can be said even to raise the nationalistic opinion of the citizens. In addition, the fact that some countries monopolised the vaccine when it was eventually produced and decided what quantity goes to what country and at what time; the government's instinct was to deglobalise and start encouraging the pharmaceutical manufacturers in the country to produce a locally effective remedy to the situation.

In the labyrinth of these, the media took a cue from the citizens and encouraged the government to toe the line of nationalism. The media supported and gave some prominence to why local solutions must be considered to address the pandemic. It also revived the old

argument of "we versus them" and reinvigorated the search for economic and, in this case, health independence between Africa, championed by Nigeria and the other parts of the world, particularly the West and China. The dust of nationalism and deglobalisation raised by the pandemic in the media (both mainstream and social) may take a long time to settle and may lead to increased nationalism and deglobalisation.

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