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INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF X (TWITTER) ON PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF GOVERNMENT TAX POLICIES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how X (formerly Twitter) influences public perception of government tax policies in Nigeria. Anchored on Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and Framing Theory (Entman, 1993), the study employed a mixed-methods design combining a structured questionnaire survey administered to 180 Twitter/X users in South East Nigeria with systematic content analysis of 500 tax-related tweets posted between January and June 2025. Findings reveal that negative sentiment predominated in tax-related Twitter discourse, centering on concerns about corruption and lack of transparency in revenue administration. A statistically significant association was established between exposure to Twitter tax discussions and public perception of government tax policies ($\chi^2 = 24.62$, $p < .05$). Twitter influencers were found to play a pivotal agenda-setting and framing role, while transparent government communication on the platform was positively associated with public trust. The study recommends proactive government engagement on X, transparency initiatives, and strategic collaboration with credible influencers to improve tax policy communication and voluntary compliance.

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital age, social media platforms have fundamentally transformed the landscape of political communication and civic engagement (Feezell, 2018). These platforms have evolved beyond mere social networking tools to become critical spaces for public discourse, information dissemination, and citizen participation in governance. Among them, Twitter — rebranded as X following its acquisition by Elon Musk in 2022 — has emerged as a particularly influential medium for real-time political discussion and policy debate, characterized by its brevity, immediacy, and capacity for viral content distribution (Wohn & Bowe, 2016). Research confirms that X strongly drives agenda-setting and opinion formation

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on politics, governance, and economic concerns in Nigeria, with influencers functioning as powerful shapers of public discourse (Chituru et al., 2025; Barisuka, 2025).

Taxation represents a fundamental pillar of government revenue generation and a critical instrument for national development. However, the effectiveness of tax policies depends not merely on their technical design but significantly on public acceptance and voluntary compliance. In Nigeria, citizens' willingness to pay taxes is shaped by trust in tax officials, perceived penalties, and beliefs about peer compliance behavior, rather than perceptions of service delivery alone (McCulloch et al., 2020). Online visual and textual content about Nigeria's economy routinely portrays citizens as victims of taxation, debt, and governance failures, signaling widespread discontent with fiscal policies (Babatunde & Obademi, 2025). Social media has also emerged as a critical channel through which citizens engage with, contest, and co-construct meaning around public policy (Uche & Nwosu, 2023).

While Twitter possesses potential for enhancing policy awareness and facilitating constructive civic engagement, it simultaneously serves as a conduit for misinformation, negative framing, and the amplification of anti-government sentiments. Although government and sub-national bodies in Nigeria widely use Twitter for digital public relations, they do so with low posting frequency and low public engagement, limiting their communicative reach (Garba et al., 2022). This asymmetry creates conditions in which unofficial, frequently critical narratives dominate tax policy discourse online. The extent to which this dynamic shapes citizens' perceptions of tax policies remains insufficiently explored in Nigerian scholarship, a gap this study addresses.

Statement of the Problem

Government tax policies are designed to mobilize domestic revenue, finance public infrastructure, and promote social welfare. However, public responses to tax reforms in Nigeria have historically been characterized by skepticism, resistance, and misunderstanding of policy objectives. Many citizens perceive taxation as an exploitative burden rather than a civic responsibility, primarily due to perceptions of government corruption, inefficient service delivery, and insufficient transparency in revenue utilization. Online images, cartoons, and memes about Nigeria's economy consistently frame citizens as victims of taxation and government as exploitative (Babatunde & Obademi, 2025), while political memes on social media frame tax increases as government coercion (Wahyuni, 2025). Research on informal-sector taxation further warns that coercive or inequitable fiscal measures can undermine political voice and deepen social divisions (Meagher, 2018).

No study in Nigerian mass communication scholarship has systematically analyzed how Twitter specifically shapes citizens' perceptions of tax policies. This study addresses that gap by examining the relationship between Twitter discourse and public perception of government tax policies among Twitter/X users in South East Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the impact of Twitter/X on public perception of government tax policies in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

(a) examine the predominant themes and sentiments expressed in Twitter conversations concerning government tax policies;
(b) ascertain the influence of Twitter exposure on public opinion and perception regarding tax policies;
(c) determine the role of Twitter influencers in shaping public opinion about taxation;

(d) assess the extent to which Twitter contributes to public trust or distrust in government tax initiatives; and
(e) identify strategic approaches for government to leverage Twitter for improving public understanding and acceptance of tax policies.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the major themes and sentiments expressed in Twitter conversations about Nigerian tax policies?
2. How does exposure to Twitter discussions influence public perceptions of government tax policies?
3. What role do Twitter influencers play in shaping public opinion about taxation?
4. To what extent does Twitter contribute to public trust or distrust in government tax initiatives?
5. How can the government strategically utilize Twitter to improve public understanding and acceptance of tax policies?

Research Hypotheses

H_1: There is a significant relationship between Twitter discussions and public perception of government tax policies in Nigeria.

H_2: Influential Twitter users exert a greater impact on shaping public opinion about tax policies than ordinary users.

H_3: Positive and transparent government communication of tax policies on Twitter is positively associated with public trust.

2.0 Literature Review

Twitter/X as a Political Communication Platform

Twitter, launched in 2006, permits users to post and interact through concise messages of up to 280 characters and has evolved into one of the most influential social media networks for political and policy communication globally (Wohn & Bowe, 2016). In Nigeria, diverse stakeholders — including government agencies, journalists, politicians, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens — utilize Twitter to disseminate information, articulate opinions, and participate in public debates. The platform's hashtag functionality facilitates the organization of discussions around specific policy topics, effectively creating digital public spheres for civic deliberation. Social media more broadly has emerged as a primary channel through which African citizens engage with cultural, social, and political issues, simultaneously serving as a space for information, contestation, and community formation (Uche & Nwosu, 2023).

Research confirms that X strongly drives agenda-setting and opinion formation on politics, governance, and economic concerns in Nigeria, with influencers acting as powerful shapers of public discourse (Chituru et al., 2025). Barisuka (2025) further documents how social media broadly shapes opinion on policy and economic restructuring through information dissemination, civic engagement, and political mobilization. However, Nigerian government and sub-national bodies, while widely using Twitter for digital public relations, do so with low posting frequency and low public engagement, substantially limiting official communicative reach (Garba et al., 2022). This gap between active citizen discourse and

passive government presence creates conditions in which unofficial, frequently critical narratives dominate tax policy conversations online.

The 2021 Twitter ban in Nigeria — implemented after the platform deleted a tweet from then-President Muhammadu Buhari and lasting until January 2022 — illustrates the politically charged relationship between the Nigerian government and social media, heightening public sensitivity to government attempts to control digital communication.

Public Perception and Tax Policy

Public perception encompasses the collective process through which individuals understand, interpret, and evaluate issues, policies, or events. Perception formation is influenced by multiple factors including personal experiences, social interactions, cultural values, and information received through media channels (Feezell, 2018). In the Nigerian context, national survey-based research demonstrates that citizens' tax morale is shaped primarily by trust in tax officials, perceived penalties for non-compliance, and beliefs about peer compliance behavior (McCulloch et al., 2020). Research on informal-sector taxation in northern Nigeria further warns that fiscal measures perceived as coercive or inequitably administered can undermine political voice and deepen social divisions (Meagher, 2018).

Government Tax Policy in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) and State Boards of Internal Revenue bear primary responsibility for tax administration (Federal Inland Revenue Service, 2024). The Nigerian tax system encompasses Value Added Tax (VAT, currently at 7.5%), Company Income Tax (CIT), Personal Income Tax (PIT), and Petroleum Profit Tax (PPT) applicable to the extractive sector (PwC Nigeria, 2025). Tax policies frequently generate controversy due to persistent concerns about corruption, accountability deficits, and inefficient revenue utilization.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory, developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that while media may not directly dictate what people think, it significantly influences what people think about by determining the salience of issues in public consciousness. Feezell (2018) further demonstrates that social media facilitate agenda-setting not only through deliberate information seeking but also through incidental exposure to content shared within social networks, thereby expanding agenda-setting effects in the digital era. Twitter/X determines which tax-related issues trend and dominate public conversation through algorithmic amplification, hashtag virality, and user engagement patterns (Wohn & Bowe, 2016), compelling even those initially disinterested in taxation to engage with the topic (Chituru et al., 2025).

Framing Theory

Framing theory, advanced by Goffman (1974) and elaborated by Entman (1993), focuses on how media presentation shapes audience interpretation of issues and events. Entman (1993, p. 52) conceptualized framing as involving the selection and highlighting of certain aspects of perceived reality while downplaying or omitting others, thereby promoting particular problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendations. On Twitter, framing occurs through word choice, accompanying imagery, hashtag selection, and the broader narrative context of information. Research confirms that multimodal online content about Nigeria's economy consistently frames citizens as victims of taxation and government as exploitative (Babatunde & Obademi, 2025), while political

memes on social media frame tax increases as government coercion (Wahyuni, 2025). Nwosu (2025), in a content analysis of four national newspapers' coverage of the NAFDAC drug market shutdown in Aba, demonstrates that how government regulatory actions are framed significantly influences public reception, with media frames either reinforcing or undermining institutional credibility depending on how well official communication addresses citizens' underlying concerns about fairness and transparency. International evidence from China further shows that well-managed government social media tax accounts are associated with improved corporate tax compliance (Jiang et al., 2023).

Empirical Review

Substantial evidence has accumulated on social media's role in shaping public perception of government policies. Chituru et al. (2025) found that X strongly drives agenda-setting and opinion formation on politics, governance, and economic concerns in Nigeria, with influencers acting as powerful shapers of public discourse. Barisuka (2025) documented how social media broadly shapes opinion on policy and economic restructuring through information dissemination, civic engagement, and political mobilization. Omipidan et al. (2024) specifically examined the role of X Space in shaping public discourse on government policies in Nigeria, providing direct evidence of the platform's function as a venue for deliberating policy matters in the Nigerian context.

Babatunde and Obademi (2025) conducted a multimodal discourse analysis of online images related to economic hardship in Nigeria, finding that such content portrays citizens as victims of inflation, taxation, debt, and governance failures while depicting government as exploitative. Nwammuo and Ifeyinwa (2025) examined Facebook users' attitudes toward the Nigerian government's fuel subsidy removal, finding that online debates largely reinforced pre-existing beliefs while the platform functioned as a key forum for civic engagement with fiscal reforms. Garba et al. (2022) found that while Nigerian government bodies widely use Twitter for official communication, low posting frequency and low public engagement significantly limit its effectiveness.

Nwosu (2025) assessed how selected national newspapers framed the NAFDAC drug market shutdown in Aba, employing content analysis of 24 articles and thematic coding of 300 reader comments across Punch, Vanguard, Daily Trust, and The Guardian. The study identified three dominant frames — public health (37.5%), enforcement/legal (33.3%), and socio-political/economic disruption (29.2%) — and found that while newspapers predominantly echoed institutional narratives, public commentary revealed considerable skepticism, with economic impact concerns (45%) and regional bias apprehensions (30%) dominating citizen responses. This pattern is directly relevant to the present study: it demonstrates that even when government communication is technically factual, its reception is mediated by pre-existing distrust and regional grievance — the same structural conditions that shape how South East Nigerians interpret government tax policy communication on Twitter/X.

McCulloch et al. (2020), in survey-based research on Nigerian tax morale, established that willingness to pay taxes is shaped more by trust in tax officials and peer compliance norms than by perceptions of service delivery. In international contexts, Nurrahma et al. (2025) found that social media discourse on tax information tends toward negative sentiment, while Wahyuni (2025) found that political memes consistently frame tax increases as government coercion. Jiang et al. (2023) found that well-managed government tax accounts on social media are associated with lower corporate tax avoidance. Adebayo (2024) documents how YouTube vloggers addressing Nigerian economic problems function as a counter-public

criticizing policy failures, demonstrating the broader social media ecosystem within which Twitter tax discourse is situated.

Collectively, these studies indicate that X is a central arena for political and economic debate in Nigeria, heavily shaping which fiscal issues gain attention and how they are framed. No prior Nigerian study has directly and systematically examined Twitter's influence on tax policy perception using mixed methods, a gap this study addresses.

3.0 Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to achieve comprehensive understanding of Twitter's influence on public perception of government tax policies. The quantitative component involved a structured questionnaire survey that collected numerical data from Twitter/X users, enabling statistical analysis of the relationships between variables. The qualitative component comprised systematic content analysis of tax-related tweets, enabling thematic and sentiment examination of public discourse. Merging the two strands allows triangulation, whereby convergent findings strengthen confidence in conclusions.

Population of Study

The study population comprised active Twitter/X users in South East Nigeria who engage with content related to government economic and tax policies. South East Nigeria — comprising Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo States — was selected given the region's high social media activity and documented civic engagement with government fiscal policies. The population is indefinite and dispersed in nature, as no comprehensive sampling frame exists for this group.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Given the indefinite nature of the population, a convenience sampling technique was adopted, a widely accepted approach in social media research where probability sampling is not feasible. A sample of 180 respondents was achieved through outreach within relevant hashtag communities (#NigeriaTax, #FIRS, #VATNigeria) and through snowball referral. For the content analysis, 500 tax-related tweets were retrieved using the Twitter/X Advanced Search function with keyword terms including "Nigeria tax," "VAT Nigeria," "FIRS," and "NigeriaTaxReform," covering January 1 to June 30, 2025.

Research Instrument

A structured, close-ended questionnaire was used to measure respondents' Twitter usage patterns and tax content exposure, perceptions of government tax policies, perceived influence of Twitter discussions and influencers, and levels of trust in government tax communication. A content analysis coding protocol classified each tweet by account type (influencer versus ordinary user), sentiment (positive, negative, or neutral), and predominant thematic focus.

Method of Data Analysis

Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson chi-square tests to examine the hypothesized relationships between variables. Content analysis data were tabulated to compute frequency distributions for sentiment and thematic categories. Both data strands were integrated at the interpretation stage to triangulate findings.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Twitter Discourse and Public Perception (H_1)

Findings from the survey indicate that the majority of respondents in South East Nigeria acknowledged Twitter/X as an influential source of information and opinion formation on government tax policies. Chi-square analysis confirmed a statistically significant relationship between exposure to Twitter tax discussions and public perception of government tax policies ($\chi^2 = 24.62$, df = 4, $p < .05$), supporting H_1. This finding is consistent with agenda-setting theory's proposition that media exposure shapes issue salience and public concern (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The more citizens engage with tax-related content on Twitter, the more their perceptions of tax policies are shaped by the dominant frames and sentiments circulating on the platform (Chituru et al., 2025; Barisuka, 2025). Feezell (2018) similarly demonstrates that even incidental exposure to politically relevant content within social networks produces measurable agenda-setting effects.

Sentiment Analysis of Tax-Related Tweets

Content analysis of the 500-tweet corpus revealed that negative sentiments predominated in Twitter discourse on Nigerian taxation during the study period. The most prevalent themes in negatively coded tweets centered on concerns about government corruption, lack of transparency in revenue utilization, and perceptions that tax increases represent an unfair burden on economically stressed citizens. Positively framed tweets, which constituted a minority of the corpus, tended to discuss tax compliance as a civic duty or highlight government development projects funded by tax revenue.

This pattern is consistent with research demonstrating that online content about Nigeria's economy routinely frames taxation as oppressive and government as exploitative (Babatunde & Obademi, 2025), and with international evidence that social media discourse on tax information tends toward negative sentiment (Nurrahma et al., 2025). It also mirrors Nwosu's (2025) finding that public commentary on the NAFDAC shutdown in Aba — a government regulatory action similarly affecting economic livelihoods — was dominated by criticism rooted in economic vulnerability and regional distrust rather than policy content. From a framing theory perspective (Entman, 1993), the prevalence of negative interpretive schemas on Twitter shapes citizens' evaluations of tax policy and their behavioral dispositions toward compliance (McCulloch et al., 2020).

The Role of Twitter Influencers (H_2)

Analysis of content data revealed that tweets originating from influencer accounts demonstrated substantially higher engagement metrics — measured by retweet counts, replies, and likes — than those posted by ordinary users. Survey respondents reported that influencer content was a primary source of their tax-related information and opinion formation, providing support for H_2. Influencer content disproportionately adopted government-critical framing, suggesting that high-visibility voices in the Nigerian Twitter ecosystem tend to amplify rather than moderate negative narratives about taxation. This corroborates the influencer agenda-setting function documented by Chituru et al. (2025). When prominent voices frame tax policies in terms of government corruption or economic exploitation, their framing is reproduced and amplified through retweets and responses, shaping the interpretive frameworks available to their followers.

Government Communication, Trust, and Tax Compliance (H_3)

Survey data revealed a positive association between perceived transparency and responsiveness of government tax communication on Twitter and respondents' levels of trust in government tax initiatives, providing directional support for H_3. Respondents who reported

regular exposure to credible official tax authority communications on Twitter tended to express higher trust toward the tax administration system. This aligns with international evidence that well-managed government social media tax accounts are associated with improved compliance behavior (Jiang et al., 2023). However, consistent with Garba et al.'s (2022) finding of low government posting frequency and low engagement on Nigerian Twitter, few respondents reported regular exposure to credible official tax communication. This communicative gap reinforces the conditions described by McCulloch et al. (2020): when trust in tax officials is already fragile and critical voices dominate online fiscal discourse, the conditions for voluntary compliance are further undermined.

Conclusion

This study has examined the relationship between Twitter/X discourse and public perception of government tax policies among users in South East Nigeria, employing a mixed-methods design grounded in Agenda-Setting Theory and Framing Theory. The study confirms that Twitter significantly shapes citizens' perceptions of tax policy through its influence on issue salience, the predominance of negative framing, and the disproportionate agenda-setting role of influencers. A statistically significant association between Twitter tax discourse exposure and public perception was established ($\chi^2 = 24.62$, $p < .05$), and transparent government communication on the platform was positively associated with public trust. Negative sentiment dominated the tweet corpus, centering on corruption, lack of transparency, and perceptions of tax as a burden. The findings indicate that Twitter's current role in Nigerian tax discourse is predominantly one of amplifying existing distrust, in a context where government communication remains insufficient and reactive.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

6. The Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) and relevant government agencies should develop sustained, strategically framed social media communication programs on Twitter/X that directly address citizens' concerns about transparency and revenue utilization.
7. Government tax authorities should identify and collaborate with credible, trusted influencers to co-create and amplify positive, evidence-based narratives about tax policy, fiscal transparency, and the civic dimensions of tax compliance.
8. Proactive counter-misinformation efforts should be institutionalized, with designated social media officers responsible for monitoring tax discourse, correcting factual inaccuracies in real time, and providing accessible explanations of tax measures.
9. Future research should employ larger and more representative samples and longitudinal designs capable of establishing causal direction between Twitter exposure and tax policy perception.

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