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Evaluation of Nigerian Government's New Cashless Policy: Insights from Select National Dailies

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ABSTRACT: *The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in a bid to reduce inflation and stabilize the country's economy, introduced cashless policy in 2012. The move became more pronounced following the recent efforts to redesign the country's 200, 500 and 1,000-naira local currency denominations, which resulted in high scarcity of money in circulation. Since then, the initiative has remained a contentious issue. This study appraised the level of success, impacts, challenges and prospects of the policy as reported in select Nigerian national daily newspapers. The study was anchored on the Diffusion of Innovation and Agenda Setting theories, while relying on secondary data, sourced from five Nigerian national daily newspapers. Manifest contents of the editorials/opinions and feature stories contained in the newspapers were analysed. Findings show that absence of appropriate legal/regulatory framework for e-payment; poor epileptic electric supply, illiteracy, lack of financial infrastructure; risk of identity theft and poor service from network providers were among the factors that hamper the success of the cashless policy in Nigeria. The paper holds that cashless society provides safer and more practical alternative means of transacting businesses than over reliance on physical cash, and that the initiative can improve on Nigeria's economy only when well implemented, and calls on the government, financial institutions, network providers, academic institutions and other key stakeholders to work in synergy for a successful cashless economy to be achieved in Nigeria.*

KEY WORDS: cashless policy, newspaper, economy, physical cash, CBN.

INTRODUCTION

A cashless economy according to Elechi & Rufus (2016), is one in which purchases can be made using credit or debit cards or other electronic payment methods instead of carrying real currency as the primary medium of exchange for transactions. Upholding this view, Ezuwore-Obodoekwe, Eyisi, Emengini & Chukwubuzo (2014) note that when there is little or no cash flow in a society, it is said to have a cashless economy or e-payment system. In other words, it simply refers to the financial system's extensive use of computer technology. Examples of such systems include direct debit, electronic funds transfer, mobile payments, multi-function ATMs, internet banking, and a significant rise in point of sale (POS) penetration and usage. With the new system, there will be a variety of payment methods available, including cheques, wire transfers, debit and credit cards, online purchases, and mobile banking. (Ezuwore-Obodoekwe et al 2014).

As the world moves towards a cashless society, the phrase "cashless policy" or "electronic cash" is becoming more common. Cashless policy in the views of Omokugbo & Festus (2020) enables people to make purchases of goods or services without actually exchanging any real money. Although, money still exists, but it mostly takes the form of electronic data. Research has shown that the effectiveness and stability of the financial system as a whole are greatly enhanced by cashless payment and financial instrument systems. Akara & Asekome (2018). Ajayi & Ojo (2006) assert that encouraging a secure, practical, and economical payment system is one of the requirements for the growth of the national economy.

The objective of the Central Bank of Nigeria according to CBN (2011) is to “proactively provide a stable environment for economic development through the effective, efficient, and transparent application of monetary and exchange rate policy and administration of the financial system”. The Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) introduced a cashless policy to reduce money laundering, terrorist funding, and other economic and financial crimes in Nigeria as the financial agent of the Federal Government (Central Bank of Nigeria 2012). Most crucially, the policy intends to meet the criteria of Nigeria's vision 20:20 transformation goal by reducing the quantity of physical cash in circulation and encouraging more electronic-based transactions (Ovat, 2012).

Nigeria just like some other developing countries of the world is on a serious struggle to switch from analog to digital mode of transactions in line with the global best practices. In line with this transition to digital payment mode, Akara & Asekome (2018), posit that due to high level of financial illiteracy, an unreliable power supply, and, to some extent, lack of confidence in electronic payment systems, Nigerian banking transactions have seen a slow pace of technical changes.

Ezuwore-Obodoekwe, Eyisi, Emengini, & Chukwubuzo (2014) note that the search for electronic banking, a byproduct of a cashless policy, which in its usage and application would help to reduce the rate of money circulation and also help to detect and prevent fraud in the financial system, was sparked by the need to improve or, if possible, eliminate stress, problems of long queues, tally numbering, and loss of working hours in the course of bank services.

According to Akhalume & Ohiokha (2012), a cashless economy is an economic system in which the number of transactions involving cash is kept to a minimal level, and not a complete absence of cash transactions. This implies that in cashless economy, there is usually a scarcity of cash as most of the transactions are done electronically. In their views, Taiwo, Oluwafemi, Afieroho & Agwu (2016), a cashless economy is one in which payments made with credit or debit cards are used for transactions rather than the necessary movement of currency as a medium of exchange or a method of transaction. Ayoola, (2013) avers that cashless economy was put into operation in Nigeria by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in 2012, which was intended to reduce but not to completely eradicate the amount of physical cash in circulation in the economy and promote more electronic-based transactions. Similarly, Yaqub, Bello, Adenuga & Ogundeji (2013) posit that the cashless policy was brought to fore by the CBN in order to encourage the use of electronic payment methods in place of cash. Yaqub et al (2013) observe that cash transactions are easy, but it also makes taxes less transparent and is more expensive to distribute, administer, handle, and process. Yet, the practice of paying with cash is still widespread worldwide, particularly for low-value retail transactions.

Although, cash has been identified to have always played a crucial role in everyday businesses, enabling people to exchange their labour and products for the commodities and services they require without having to engage in time-consuming conversations regarding bartering or swaps. Yet, research has proved that cashless policy is of great importance to economic development. Yaqub et al (2013) agree that there are a lot of benefits for the society due to the absence of cash and the rise of a cashless society. Cobb (2005) affirms that, in addition to their convenience and safety, electronic payments have a wide range of economic advantages. Ezuwore-Obodoekwe et al (2014) posit cashless society has many benefits, including the ability to secure, regulate, and oversee any economy's financial system. Claudia and De Grauwe (2001) emphasize that central banks gradually lose their monopoly position in the provision of liquidity, paired with its ensuing small size, which makes it difficult to manage the short-term interest rates, while evaluating the role of central banks in a cashless society.

Contrarily, Marco & Bandiera (2004) contend that current levels of e-money usage do not constitute a threat to the stability of the financial system and that growing use of cashless banking instruments increases the effectiveness of monetary policy. Similarly, Freedman, 2000; Friedman, 2000; Goodhart, 2000; and Woodford 2000, raise concerns that central banks can lose control over monetary policy if the government does not pursue a responsible fiscal policy with regard to the ongoing discussion regarding the effects of the introduction of e-money on the implementation of monetary policy. In response to this threat, Yaqub, Bello, Adenuga & Ogundeji (2013) aver that central banks might increase regulation or reduce the scope of the financial sectors they should oversee. Bandiera (2004, p. 11) reveals that the number of e-money systems has consistently expanded since 2000.

Although Asia and Africa have seen the quickest growth. Western Europe witnessed around 40% of e-money systems in 2003, down from 50% in 2001. In Finland, Norway, and Italy, new systems were implemented. By the end of 2001, every system in the UK had been phased out. In 2002, new systems were implemented in Russia and the Czech Republic in Central and Eastern Europe. The limited adoption of e-money systems in North America is a result of the widespread use of credit cards for even low-value transactions. E-money systems started early in South America and the Caribbean, but many ended up failing. In Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Venezuela, all systems have been terminated since 2000. A new system was implemented in Brazil in 2002. Asia is where e-money products are most prevalent; there, 21 new systems have been introduced in countries including India, South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore. The current system has significantly increased the number of users in Hong Kong SAR. Eight new systems have been developed in Africa, and none of the pre-existing ones have collapsed.

However, research has proved that the economics of payment instruments may have a significant impact on policy if there is a better knowledge of them. For instance, two recent regulatory cases—the Office of Fair Trading's investigation into MasterCard in the UK and the Australian Central Bank's investigation into MasterCard and Visa—look at whether payment cards are "overused" in a social welfare sense. In short, the regulators contend that while banks offering payment cards provide customers discounted services and loyalty rewards, payment card networks charge retailers "unjustifiably high" costs for accepting payment cards. Garcia-Swartz, Hahn, & Layne-Farrar, (2006).

Statement of problem

As part of the federal government's efforts to reduce inflation and stabilize the country's economy, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) introduced cashless policy in 2012. The move became more pronounced following the recent efforts to redesign 200, 500 and 1,000 naira denominations, which resulted in high scarcity of money in circulation. Long lines become a norm at ATM galleries, where the masses flood the ATMs and bank premises on daily basis, hoping to be the major possible place to get the new naira notes.

Although, another means of getting the notes into the hands of the general public is through agent bankers or PoS merchants, but in most cases, the PoS operators are left without physical cash and where the money is available, the masses are usually challenged with the problem of paying their exorbitant charges of about 30 to 40 percent of their withdrawals, which was perceived by many as money buying, hence, subjecting the masses to an untold hardship.

Consequently, the initiative has remained a contentious issue since it was introduced into the country, as there have been series of protests and scholarly arguments against or in favour of the new monetary policy. The arguments have always been hinged on the possibility of achieving a successful cashless economy in Nigerian society, and its contributions to the economic development and the general wellbeing of the masses. This has motivated the researcher to embark on this research work, using secondary data sourced from five Nigerian national daily newspapers to determine the level of success, impacts, challenges and prospects of the cashless policy in Nigeria.

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Objective of the study

Against all odds, the study seeks to examine the workability and the impacts of CBN cashless policy on the country's economy and its contributions to the general wellbeing of the Nigerian populace. Specifically, the study seeks:

1. To review people's view points and opinions on cashless policy in Nigeria from Nigeria's newspaper records.
2. To appraise the level of success of cashless policy in Nigeria.
3. To examine the impacts of cashless policy on Nigerians and the country's economy.
4. To determine the challenges of cashless policy in Nigeria.
5. To proffer suggestions on how to achieve more successful and favourable cashless economy in Nigeria.

Issues/prospects in Nigeria's Cashless Policy

Research has shown that a lot of financial infrastructure, electronic facilities, adequate power supply, internet connectivities and experienced manpower are some of the necessary tools for the cashless economy to function well in any given society. Available records have indicated that successful implementation of cashless policy in Nigeria remains a quagmire, as Nigerians are yet to see indicators for smooth transition to that digitalization. Nwaolisa & Kasie (2012) posit that inadequate network and connectivity, which frequently cause multiple debits from consumers' accounts, exorbitant transaction charges, as well as security and technological issues, are some of the obstacles that the recent migration is still facing. Taiwo, Oluwafemi, Afieroho, & Agwu (2016) observe that these are some of the reason why many analysts doubt Nigeria's readiness for a cashless economy. The authors note some of the issues with Nigeria's e-payment system to include the following:

1. No explicit law has been passed to govern e-payments.
2. Although, the policy is properly supervised in Lagos and Abuja, but not to the same degree in other states.
3. The monetary limitations do not benefit the wealthy Nigerians who regularly do business above the allotted amounts.
4. Due to Nigeria's epileptic power supply, banks must bear over expenses and even transferring services are likely to be more expensive for users.
5. In Nigeria, the majority of bank offices in rural areas lack ATMs and PoS for cashless services.
6. Lack of qualified personnel to handle various pieces of equipment and to carry out repairs as needed.
7. Low level of acceptability, as majority of people don't seem to trust these alternative payment methods, especially those who have previously lost their money through these methods.

According to the Central Bank of Nigeria - CBN (2011), a well-functioning e-payment system has been acknowledged to have much relevance on the financial stability, monetary policy, and overall economic activities of a country. However Taiwo et al (2016), aver that the cashless policy, which was adopted in Nigeria in June 2012, has created a burden for uneducated, the underprivileged, and non-exposed traders. Verifiable records as claimed by Adekoya (2011), cited in Ikpefan & Omankhanle (2012) revealed that the informal sector controls a sizable quantity of liquidity and cash in circulation. Even with the greatest of intentions, the move is undermined by a sizable population that is barely literate and an economy that lacks social institutions to support such policies at this time. Ikpefan & Omankhanle (2012).

Research has proved that despite its many advantages, cashless policy has setbacks that exist even in industrialized nations. In addition to having certain negative consequences on those living in rural regions, the introduction of the cashless policy has resulted in unauthorized access to clients' accounts, non-traceable embezzlement by bank staff, unreliable internet bank websites, and smart card cloning in Nigeria. Taiwo et al (2016). The fact that Nigeria is a cash-based nation means that individuals are used to using cashing for the majority of their transactions.

Elechi & Rufus (2016) identified some of the challenges of cashless policy to include unfriendly attitudes of the banks towards their customers; lack of confidence in security measures; absence of appropriate legal and regulatory framework for e-payment; economic and political instability in neighbourig nations; poor electric power supply**;** lack of financial infrastructure and risk of identity theft. Odior & Banuso, (2012) uphold that the availability of adequate and functional infrastructure, particularly electricity, coordination of fiscal and monetary policy, regular evaluation of the performance of cashless banking channels, consideration of the current state and structure of the economy, redesign of the monetary policy framework, and increased efforts to promote economic growth while controlling inflation should all be taken into account for effective cashless implementation in Nigeria.

Newspaper reports of cashless policy in Nigeria

Tribune newspaper of 6th March, 2023, in her editorial, "Navigating the murky waters of cashless policy", observed that the country may have been neck-deep in a cashless economy for a long time prior to the naira redesign program which was unknown to many Nigerians. The paper disclosed that the various Point of Sales (PoS) operators scattered across the country, e-naira, Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), and other electronic payment channels are recognized ways of doing businesses without using or exchanging physical cash, and that before the introduction of the naira redesign policy, these payment methods that lowered the risk of carrying huge amounts of cash were already in use and widely accepted.

Daily Sun of 31st January 2023, in its feature story, holds that cashless policies open up more opportunities to promote financial inclusion, as economic agents (households and enterprises) in a nation interact through the usage of payments via various conduits and instruments. With the help of plastic cards, cashless transactions expand the pull payments and deposits made through PoS terminals, automated machines, mobile applications, and other internet channels. In a telephone conversation with Daily Sun, Chiazor Victor, Head of Research at FSL Securities, expressed his satisfaction with the CBN's efforts to uphold monetary and price stability, among other benefits of the cashless policy in Nigeria.

"Redesigning the naira comes with some advantages as it is going to help the CBN manage excess liquidity that has been outside its control which when achieved should slightly slow the surge in inflation", Chiazor said. Similarly, according to Daily Sun reports, Prof. Uche Uwaleke, professor of Finance and Capital Markets at Nasarawa State University, Keffi, the CBN's actions will boost financial inclusion, as Nigerians are forced to accept alternative channels of payment.

The paper reports that in comparison to the N48 billion in PoS transactions in 2012, Nigeria now have N6 trillion while electronic transfer increased by 7,000% from N3 trillion in 2012 to N300 trillion as of October 2022, whereas mobile phone penetration in Nigeria, which the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) estimates to be at 152 million, is another addition to the cashless policy. As reported in the paper, the monetary policy committee (MPC) of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) recently stated that the bank's multiple policy interventions have resulted in a fall in inflation following months of an upswing in the headline index. Therefore it is safe to assume that the intervention has recorded a huge success.

According to Tribune feature story of 6th March, 2023, Mr. Emefiele pointed out that currency management has recently encountered a number of difficult problems that have only increased in scope and sophistication, with resulting unforeseen effects on the CBN's and the nation's credibility. Among the difficulties listed by Mr. Emefiele includes: the widespread hoarding of banknotes by some members of the general public, as evidenced by statistics which showed that more than 80% of the currency in circulation is not stored in commercial banks' vaults; the growing lack of clean and suitable banknotes, which has a negative impact on public perception of the CBN and raises the risk to financial stability; and the growing ease and danger of counterfeiting, as indicated by various security reports.

The CBN Governor continued to defend the need for the exercise, by pointing out how recent developments in photographic and printing technology have made counterfeiting substantially easier. He claimed that the CBN had witnessed an increase in counterfeiting in recent years, particularly for banknotes with high denominations like the N500 and N1,000, adding that the naira has not undergone a redesign in the past 20 years, despite it being a global best practice for central banks to redesign, create, and circulate new local legal money every 5 to 8 years. According to Mr. Emefiele, "the Management of the CBN requested and received President Muhammadu Buhari's approval to redesign, produce, and circulate new series of banknotes at the N200, N500, and N1,000 levels in view of these trends, issues, and facts, in accordance with Sections 19, Subsections A and B of the CBN Act 2007. Although praiseworthy, the cashless program has a number of growing pains, including a shortage of the new naira notes".

The paper posits that despite the CBN's order that each customer should only be paid a maximum of N20,000.00 over the counter, many people were unable to withdraw their money because a lot of ATMs were unable to dispense cash as a result of dishonest bank employees. Also, the banks refused to put new notes in their ATMs while those that put money in their ATMs attracted hordes of people who lined up every day to withdraw cash. Similarly, the PoS operators turned into a pain in the people's sides due to their outrageous fees for each withdrawal. So, due to the public's inability to obtain money for their fundamental requirements, they were put through unimaginable hardship. The claim that arbitrary cash collection will reduce inflation and improve the efficiency of monetary policy is unsupported by the data at hand. It was also revealed that about N15 trillion has been mopped up with the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR). According to Dr. Muda Yusuf, Director of the Centre for the Promotion of Private Enterprise (CPPE), as reported by the Nigerian Tribune, the N22 trillion in ways and means finances of the CBN pose a greater threat to the effectiveness of monetary policy and inflation.

The paper notes that in view of the challenges posed by the new monetary policy, the governments of Kaduna, Kogi, and Zamfara have brought the Federal government to the Supreme Court, asking for a restraining order to prevent the full implementation of the CBN's naira redesign policy. They are concerned about the consequences the policy was having on the citizens of their states which other states of the federation later joined either by supporting or opposing the program.

The Supreme Court later ruled that President Muhammadu Buhari had violated the Constitution of the Federation by giving orders for the Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN, to redesign the Naira. The Supreme Court declared the Federal Government's cashless and naira re-design policies to be invalid and an affront to the 1999 Constitution. The court also ruled that by depriving the people of ownership and access to their money, the President's illegal use of executive powers caused them unheard-of economic misery. The paper disclosed that following the rulings, many economists praised the Supreme Court's decision to recognize the old naira notes as legal tender. According to their opinions, the rulings of the Supreme Court will help boost economic activity and lessen the current hardships that Nigerians are facing as a result of the policy. They also noted that the period up until December 31, 2023 gives the CBN an opportunity to review the policy and improve its implementation without causing economic distortions. Another source also claimed that the entire effort caused unnecessary economic disturbance, especially among the most vulnerable sectors of the economy.

The Guardian newspaper in her editorial publication of 20th February, 2023, titled "Nigeria's Cashless Policy: A significant opportunity for growth" holds that although ambitious, the idea of a cashless society has the potential to benefit the nation and its citizens in a number of ways if properly implemented, stressing that the government, corporations, and society at large are all significantly impacted by these changes in the financial landscape. The paper observes that conventional method of conducting business is no longer practical, as the world depends more and more on technology, adding that a cashless society provides a safer and more practical alternatives of transacting businesses than the physical cash, as there are many advantages, including quicker transactions and lower expenses and hazards connected with using actual currency, like theft and fraud.

"In the past, a cashless society was not an entirely new concept. However, with digital technology, it is now more achievable than ever. Electronic fund transfers, mobile payment apps, and digital wallets are now part of our everyday lives, and Nigeria is no exception. With the Cashless Policy, the country is on a path to become a cashless or cash-lite economy, and this presents an unprecedented opportunity for digital payment providers".

A crucial turning point in this journey was the CBN's 2012 digital payments mandate. The mandate required financial institutions to promote digital payments among their clients, boost their investments in digital payment infrastructure, and collaborate with the CBN to create robust regulatory frameworks. The paper holds that the objectives of this program were to modernize the financial industry, increase transparency, and boost economic efficiency. The result was a number of successes for the nation, including the growth of financial access points like Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), Point of Sale (PoS) terminals, mobile cash (mCash) facilities, as well as the spread of e-payment platforms and a significant rise in the use of electronic channels.

Punch newspaper report of 21st February, 2023, captioned "Cashless policy reducing trust in banks – Fintech Association", while comparing Nigeria to what occurred in India in November 2016, the Fintech Association of Nigeria noted that the CBN's policy made it nearly impossible for Indians to access their money for a prolonged period of time, leading to numerous controversies, a decline in public confidence in the Indian government, and a generalized negative economic impact. It claimed that the failure of India's cashless policy was due to a failure to appropriately address the difficulties and concerns of the populace, including their preferences, economic development, and technical innovations.

The Fintech association said, "One thing is clear. When adopting a cashless policy (or any other policy for that matter), it is more important to have a customer-centric approach rather than a technical one, as the success of a cashless policy is directly linked to the incentives offered to encourage mainstream adoption". The association asserts that, contrary to what is currently happening in the nation, a cashless policy should lead to improved simplicity and convenience of payments. It stated, "Challenges with execution may be leading to the erosion of trust in the banking system, with merchants asking for cash payments despite empty ATMs, digital channels increasingly overwhelmed, and PoS charges increasing towards 50 percent".

Business Day newspaper report of 23rd February, 2023 in an opinion piece, titled "Naira scarcity frustrates Nigerians", which was written by Eniola Olatunji, posits that as difficulties persist with electronic alternatives to the cashless policy, Nigerians are growing more and more irate amid the lack of money in circulation. The failure of alternatives like the Point of Sale (PoS), Unstructured

Supplementary Service Data (USSD), and bank apps platforms has left many Nigerians stranded while the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) continues to push for the policy.
The paper observed that many aspects of peoples' daily lives have been hampered by their inability to complete these transactions, leaving their most fundamental needs unmet, adding that some people have lost money as a result of the failure of these deals. It was uncovered that a Corporate Strategy Consultant, Nonye Omomemi discussed the issue on Twitter by tweeting, "No withdrawals/cash, no transfer, failed POS, failed USSD". Many people worry that the online payment infrastructure cannot handle the volume of transactions it is currently handling. In its most recent report, "Cashless Economy on Steroids," the Fintech Association of Nigeria (FintechNGR) stated that "for a cashless policy to be successful, it has to do two things: offer incentives to encourage mainstream adoption and ensure that the current IT infrastructure has the capacity to handle the increase in transaction volumes".

Theoretical framework

The study was anchored on the Diffusion of innovations theory. This theory explains how people make decisions and adopt new, inventive ideas in the society. The theory was popularized by professor of communication studies, Everett Rogers in his book first published in 1962. Diffusion of innovations theory aims to explain how, why, and how quickly new ideas and technologies spread. According to Rogers, the process of diffusion is how an innovation spreads through time among the members of a social system. The five-step process by which a specific user chooses to accept an innovation is referred to as the diffusion of innovation model.

Rogers suggested four components for the diffusion of innovations, including: The first step, knowledge, describes the moment when a user first learns about an innovation and may do some study on how it works. The second step, persuasion, occurs when a user has done enough research to form an opinion on the innovation. The user will choose whether or not to adopt the innovation in step three, decision. At the implementation stage, a user will put the new invention to use and assess how it helps them reach their objectives. The user will assess whether or not the decision to employ the innovation was successful in step four, confirmation.

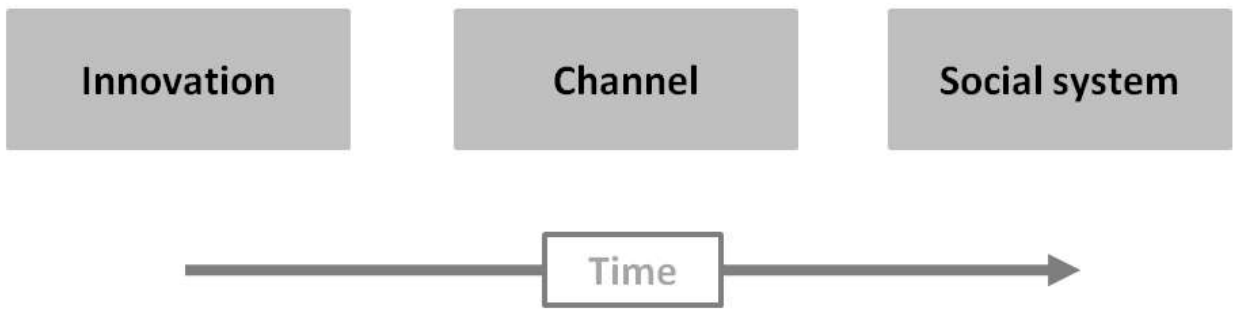
The theory posits that in order to achieve development and sustainability, innovations should be widely adopted, wherever the idea was used in practice, the culture's capacity for adaptation was very important. Rogers outlined four components for the diffusion of innovations. They are as follows:

1. **Innovations:** innovations are things that people perceive as novel, such as ideas, practices, or products. It could also be a drive to try something new or effect societal change.
2. **Communication channel:** The diffusion process involves channels of communication such as interpersonal and mainstream media. The communication channels are used to transfer messages from one person to another. Communication is the primary means by which innovations spread

among individuals. It can come in many different forms, such as word-of-mouth, SMS, various literary forms, etc.

3. **Time:** This term describes how long it takes for a society's citizens to accept new developments. It is the amount of time people need to adjust to new concepts. For instance, think of how long it took for consumers to adopt mobile phones once they were first brought to the market.

4. **Social System:** The term "social system" refers to all the different elements that make up society, including religion, institutions, and social groups. In order words, social system is a network of interconnected individuals working together to solve problems and achieve a common objective.



According to Dearing & Cox (2018) When someone learns about an innovation they believe could have significant effects on them or the people they serve, they frequently become unsure of how to react, which prompts them to look for more information so they can decide whether the innovation's merits worth further investigation. Each innovation's set of benefits and drawbacks, or attributes, the characteristics of adopters, especially potential adopters' perceptions of opinion leaders' reactions, or social influence, and the larger social and political context, including the importance of issues related to the innovation, how proponents and opponents frame the meaning of the innovation, and the timing of its introduction are frequently effective explanations for diffusion or the lack thereof. (Dearing & Cox (2018). According to a review of recent research on this topic, the authors opine that epidemiologic framework can be used to identify and categorize the elements influencing the spread of policy innovations across jurisdictions. Scholars that are interested in how changes in the political environment promote policy spread have focused on how state proximity, media agenda framing, and public opinion impact patterns of diffusion. (Dearing & Cox (2018).

Diffusion of innovations theory was considered apt for this study because it provides insights on the implementation and acceptance of the CBN cashless policy in Nigeria. As a new idea that finds itself in public domain, the theory can help the CBN to carry out the needed research and as well, evaluate the progress reports of the policy acceptance among the members of Nigerian populace.

Agenda Setting Theory:

Agenda Setting Theory is a theory that discusses on how the mass media influence certain issues as a public agenda. The public agenda is the main focus or prime issue which members of the society or public are concerned about. The Agenda Setting Theory was proposed by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. This theory elaborates the connection in terms of relationships between the emphasis that the mass media put on an issue and the media audiences or the public's reactions or attributes to such issue. Over the years, researchers on agenda setting role of the mass media have given emphasis on more important issues such as: (a) Who is responsible in setting the mass media's agenda? (b) What are the mass media's agendas? and (c) How far can the mass media influence or frame the public agenda?

Research has revealed that Agenda Setting Theory begins as an explanation on how the mass media affects to change the pattern in political behaviours during elections. Subsequently, the theory has inspired and developed hundreds of later explorations on how the mass media prime and frame issues for their audiences. Not only limited to such, the discussion also covers on how the mass media paint a particular event for their media audiences. Therefore, the mass media can be considered to be effective in shaping public opinion and agenda. That is to say that the mass media has the power to contribute or influence the audience's perceptions, values, focus and priorities. With such influence from the mass media, the audience tend to form their own opinion or focus on those issues that are considered as worthy of inclusion by the agenda setters. Relating this theory to the study, the prominence that the mass media give to family planning has the power to influence the couples to either accept or reject the practice of family planning. That is to say that the emphasis the media placed on CBN cashless policy has a long way to go in determining its success in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted qualitative research method. Qualitative method is used to understand words, ideas and experiences. It can be used to interpret data that were collected from open-ended survey/interviews, literature reviews, case studies, ethnographies and other sources that use text rather than numbers.

The study relied on documentary information gathered from five Nigerian national daily newspapers, while employing a convenience sampling technique to select the five newspapers (Tribune, Daily Sun, The Guardian, Punch and Business Day newspaper) based on some factors that were considered as inclusion criteria. Among which, include that the paper must be a Nigerian national newspaper, excluding local tabloids; the newspaper must have been registered in Nigeria and must have been in operation for up to five years; all the data that were selected must be current and related to cashless policy. The reason for choosing those five newspapers was based on the belief that each of the papers as a legal entity can stick to the legal and ethical guidelines, including verification of facts, accurate and unbiased reports in the course of their professional duties.

Data collection and analysis

Information generated from five Nigerian national daily newspapers were carefully reviewed, analyzed and presented qualitatively. The secondary data later formed the basis for making conclusions and recommendations, since the selected newspapers were able to provide clear and valid insights into the subject matter, highlighting the level of success, impacts, challenges and way forward towards achieving a favourable and successful cashless economy in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

Findings of the study revealed that although, some people in Nigeria view the CBN cashless policy as a right step towards economic stability in Nigeria, others see it as a policy that is not worth implementing, in view of the challenges it poses to average Nigerians. Review of Nigerian newspapers shows that a lot have been said about the cashless policy. The Federal Government's cashless initiative, led by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), is still one of the most widely discussed initiatives in Nigeria, perhaps second to the 2023 Presidential elections.

Perhaps many Nigerians are unaware of the fact that the country has been well entrenched in a cashless economy for a long time prior to the Naira redesign program, as succinctly observed by The Tribune newspaper opinion piece of 6th March, 2023. Similarly, The Guardian newspaper in her editorial publication of 20th February, 2023 upholds that despite the current shortage of naira in circulation, Nigerians are subscribing to other payment methods. Daily Sun of 31st January 2023 also revealed that in comparison to the N48 billion in POS transactions in 2012, Nigeria now have N6 trillion while electronic transfer has increased from N3 trillion in 2012 to N300 trillion as of October 2022 whereas mobile phone penetration in Nigeria, which the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) estimates to be at 152 million, is another credit to the success of the cashless policy. This indicates that cashless policy is gradually gaining ground in Nigeria.

Available data from newspaper records imply that in comparison of Nigeria's cashless policy to what occurred in India in November 2016, the Fintech Association of Nigeria noted that the cashless policy made it nearly impossible for Indians to access their money for a prolonged period of time, leading to a lot of controversies, lack of public confidence in the Indian government, and a generalized negative economic impacts. The failure of India's cashless policy was attributed to inability of the government to appropriately address the difficulties and concerns of the populace, including their preferences, economic development, and technical innovations. Newspaper reports suggest that the ability of firms to conduct business and accept payments online should be guaranteed by payment solution providers, banks, and other financial institutions.

It was discovered that cashless policy if well implemented, will have positive impacts on the economic development of Nigeria. According to Prof. Uche Uwaleke of Finance and Capital Markets Department, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, as reported in the newspaper, the CBN's actions will boost financial inclusion as Nigerians are forced to accept alternative channels of payment. Newspaper reports indicate that cashless policy opens up more opportunities to promote financial inclusion, as economic agents (households and enterprises) in a nation interact through the usage of payments via various conduits and instruments.

Documentary evidence has proved that the CBN cashless policy is not only beneficial to the government or corporations, but also that the society at large is significantly impacted by these changes in the financial landscape. That is to say that the conventional method of conducting business is no longer practical, as the world has gradually become a global village, where people depend more and more on technology for that digital switch over. It has been established that a cashless society provides a safer and more practical alternative of business transactions than over dependence on physical cash.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that cashless policy is gradually gaining ground in Nigeria. Cashless society provides a safer and more practical alternative means of transacting businesses than over reliance on physical cash. Absence of appropriate legal/regulatory framework for e-payment; poor electric power supply**;** illiteracy, lack of financial infrastructure; risk of identity theft and poor network service were among the factors affecting the success of cashless policy in Nigeria. Cashless policy if well implemented will impact positively to the economic development of Nigeria. The government, banks, network providers, academic institutions and other stakeholders must work in synergy if a successful cashless economy must be achieved in Nigeria.

Limitations of the study and suggestions for further studies

Although, national newspapers are believed to have better understanding of cashless policy in Nigeria, yet relying completely on secondary data for making conclusions and recommendations act as the major limitation of this study, since the information contained in those selected newspapers may either be under reported or blown out of proportion.

Again, incidences, ideas, opinions or viewpoints that were shared or published which were believed to be the actual case of cashless policy in Nigeria could just an infinitesimal of the actual reality of the subject matter. It is therefore suggested that the use of survey and in-depth interview methods be employed in further research so as to gather the opinions and reactions of the Nigerian populace directly from the primary sources.

Furthermore, the study also suggested that a quantitative research be carried out in this area of study as a follow up study to investigate the extent to which the Nigerian newspapers report the CBN cashless policy for better understanding of the initiative by the average Nigerians.

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