

**THE ADMISSIBILITY OF ELECTRONIC EVIDENCE UNDER THE NIGERIAN  
EVIDENCE ACT 2011**

**BY  
OKPOTO MABEL OTEHLAHU  
(2020/LW/13593)**

**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF LAW, ALEX EKWUEME  
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REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF THE BACHELOR OF LAWS (LL.B) DEGREE  
IN LAW.**

**SUPERVISOR  
BARR. NNAEMKANWAMBAM**

**SEPTEMBER 2025**

**TITLE PAGE**

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**OKPOTO MABEL OTEHLAHU  
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## **DECLARATION**

**I, OKPOTO MABEL OTEHLAHU**, a Student of the Faculty of Law Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ebonyi State, do hereby declare on my honor, that this project has not been previously presented, either wholly or in part for the award of any other Degree, Diploma, Certificate or Publication in any University, other Higher Institutions or elsewhere.

Signed.....

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**APPROVAL PAGE**

The Long Essay titled “The Admissibility of Electronic Evidence Under the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011” has been assessed and approved by the Undergraduate Studies Community of the Faculty of Law, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndifu Alike.

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## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this long essay titled “The Admissibility of Electronic Evidence Under the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011” has been assessed and approved by the Undergraduate Studies Community of the Faculty of Law, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndifu Alike, as an original work carried out by Eze, Okpoto Mabel Otehlahu with registration number: 2020/LW/13593 in the Faculty of Law, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndifu Alike, under the guidance and supervision of Barr Nnaemka Nwambam

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**DEDICATION**

The long essay is dedicated to God Almighty for inspiring the writing of my project topic and for helping me through every hurdle, and to my supervisor for his guidance, teachings and advice, and then to my wonderful family for their never-ending love and support throughout the period of writing this project.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Title Page</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Declaration</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Approval</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Certification</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Table of Cases</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Lists of Statutes</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>Lists of Abbreviations</b>	<b>xii</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>xiii</b>

<b>Chapter One</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1	Background to the Study	1
1.2	Statement of the Problem	3
1.3	Aim and Objectives of the Study	5
1.4	Scope and Limitations of the Study	5
1.5	Significance of the Study	6
1.6	Research Methodology	6
1.7	Chapter Analysis	7
<b>Chapter Two</b>	<b>Conceptual Clarifications, Theoretical Foundation and Literature Review</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1	Conceptual Clarifications	9
2.1.1	Definition of Electronic Evidence	9
2.1.2	Types of Electronic Evidence	10
2.1.3	Distinction between Electronic Evidence and Digital Evidence	12
2.1.4	The Role of Electronic Evidence in Modern Litigation	13
2.1.5	Admissibility in Electronic Evidence	15
2.2	Theoretical Foundation	16
2.2.1	The Best Evidence Rule Theory	16
2.2.2	The Hearsay Rule Theory	18
2.2.3	The Authentication Theory	19
2.2.4	The Reliability Theory	20
2.3	Literature Review	22

<b>Chapter Three</b>	<b>Legal Framework and Institutional Framework of the Admissibility of Electronic Evidence under the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011, as Amended in 2023</b>	<b>26</b>
3.1	Legal Framework	26
3.1.1	Nigerian Laws	26
3.1.1.1	The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN)	26
3.1.1.2	Evidence Act 2011 / Evidence (Amendment) Act 2023	26
3.1.1.3	Cyber Crime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc) Act 2015	28
3.1.1.4	Electronic Transaction Act 2007	29
3.1.1.5	Freedom of Information Act 2011	32
3.1.1.6	National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) Act 2007	32
3.1.2	Regional Legal Framework	34
3.1.2.1	African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (2014)	34
3.1.2.2	Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) Directive on Cybercrime 2011	35
3.1.3	International Legal Regime	37
3.1.3.1	United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts 2005	37
3.1.3.2	Council of Europe's Convention on Cybercrime 2001	38
3.1.3.3	The Hague Convention on the Taking of Evidence Abroad in Civil or Commercial Matters 1970	40
3.2	Institutional Legal Framework	41
3.2.1	National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA)	41
3.2.2	Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC)	43
3.2.3	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)	45
3.2.4	Nigeria Police Force (NPF) Cybercrime Unit	46
<b>Chapter Four</b>	<b>Admissibility of Electronic Evidence in Nigeria: Challenges, Controversies, and Lessons for Improvement</b>	<b>50</b>
4.1	The Intersection of Technology and Evidence Law: Implications for Electronic Evidence Admissibility	50
4.2	Admissibility of Electronic Evidence in Nigerian Courts: Challenges and Controversies	52
4.3	Critical Analysis of Judicial Decisions on Electronic Evidence in Nigeria	57
4.3.1	Strict Compliance with Section 84 Requirements	57
4.3.2	Judicial Inconsistency in Application	59
4.3.3	Privacy Considerations in Admissibility	60
4.3.4	Authentication Challenges of Judicial Decisions on Electronic Evidence in Nigeria	62
4.3.5	Access to Justice Implications	63

4.4	Comparative Analysis of Electronic Evidence Admissibility in Other Jurisdictions	64
4.4.1	United Kingdom	64
4.4.2	United States of America	66
4.4.3	India	68
4.4.4	Canada	69
4.5	Evaluating the Efficacy of Current Practices: Lessons for Improving Electronic Evidence Admissibility in Nigeria	70
<b>Chapter Five</b>	<b>Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion</b>	<b>75</b>
5.1	Summary of Findings	75
5.2	Recommendations	76
5.3	Contributions to Knowledge	78
5.4	Areas for Further Studies	79
5.5	Conclusion	80
	<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>82</b>

## TABLE OF CASES

Case Name	Full Citation	Page(s)
<b>UBN PLC v. Agbotae</b>	N/A (no full citation provided in footnotes; mentioned in body and scholarly context)	10, 18, 23
<b>Kubor v. Dickson</b>	Dr. Imoro Kubor & Anor v. Hon. Seriake Henry Dickson & Ors (2013) 4 NWLR (Pt. 1345) 534	11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 28, 33
<b>Esso WA v. Oyegbola</b>	N/A (no full citation provided in footnotes; mentioned in body)	12, 15, 24
<b>Kehinde v. State</b>	Kehinde v. State (2019) 7 NWLR (Pt. 1677) 413	31
<b>National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) v. S.S.A. Bespoke Construction Ltd.</b>	National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) v. S.S.A. Bespoke Construction Ltd. (2018) 9 NWLR (Pt. 1623) 513	31, 39
<b>The Incorporated Trustees of Paradigm Initiatives for Information Technology Development v. The Attorney General of the Federation &amp; Ors</b>	The Incorporated Trustees of Paradigm Initiatives for Information Technology Development v. The Attorney General of the Federation & Ors (2019) 17 NWLR (Pt. 1700) 412	34
<b>Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Femi-Kayode</b>	Federal Republic of Nigeria v. Femi-Kayode (2009) 1 NWLR (Pt. 1121) 1 (CA)	36
<b>Techno Digital Ltd v. Global Innovations Inc</b>	Techno Digital Ltd v. Global Innovations Inc (2021) 22 NWLR (Pt. 1340) 902	38
<b>Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation v. F.C.D.A.</b>	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation v. F.C.D.A. (2017) 10 NWLR (Pt. 1573)	40

## LIST OF STATUTES

Statute	Relevant Sections	Page(s)
<b>Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended)</b>	Section 12 (domestication of treaties)	26, 34
<b>Evidence Act 2011</b>	Sections 84, 37, 86, 83-90, 258	1-10, 12-21, 23-27, 28-31, 33, 37-40
<b>Evidence (Amendment) Act 2023</b>	Section 84(b)	9, 26-27, 30-31, 37
<b>Cyber Crime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc) Act 2015</b>	Section 38 (data retention and interception)	28, 34
<b>Electronic Transaction Act 2007</b>	Sections 5(2), 4(2)	29-31
<b>Freedom of Information Act 2011</b>	Section 7(2)	32
<b>National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) Act 2007</b>	N/A	32-33
<b>African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention) 2014</b>	Article 5	34
<b>Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS) Directive on Cybercrime 2011</b>	C/DIR.1/08/11	35-36
<b>United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts 2005</b>	Article 6	37-38
<b>Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention) 2001</b>	Articles 16, 18, 19	38-39
<b>The Hague Convention on the Taking of Evidence Abroad in Civil or Commercial Matters 1970</b>	N/A	40

## LIST OF ABREVIATIONS

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Full Meaning</b>	<b>Page(s)</b>
<b>s.</b>	Section	9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 26, 28, 29, 31, 32, 37, 38, 39
<b>CFRN</b>	Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria	26
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology	28, 33
<b>FOIA</b>	Freedom of Information Act	32
<b>NITDA</b>	National Information Technology Development Agency	32, 33
<b>DPA</b>	Nigerian Data Protection Authority	33
<b>AU</b>	African Union	34
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West Africa States	35
<b>NWLR</b>	Nigerian Weekly Law Reports	28, 31, 34, 36, 38, 40 (in case citations)
<b>CA</b>	Court of Appeal	36 (in case citation)
<b>Pt.</b>	Part	28, 31, 34, 36, 38, 40 (in case citations)

## ABSTRACT

This study undertakes a comprehensive examination of the admissibility of electronic evidence under the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011. The proliferation of digital technologies has necessitated a reevaluation of traditional evidence rules, yet the Nigerian legal framework has been slow to adapt. This research aims to address the knowledge gap in existing literature by investigating the challenges and prospects of admitting electronic evidence in Nigerian courts. A qualitative research methodology is employed, involving a critical analysis of relevant statutes, case law, and academic literature. The study examines the provisions of the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011 as amended in 2023 and their application in court decisions. It also explores the implications of electronic evidence on the administration of justice in Nigeria. The findings of this study reveal that the admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigeria is hindered by issues of authenticity, reliability, and procedural complexities. The study argues that the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011 provides an inadequate framework for the admission of electronic evidence, necessitating the development of supplementary guidelines and protocols. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the intersection of technology and evidence law, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and prospects of electronic evidence in the Nigerian legal system. The study's recommendations for reform and development of best practices have implications for the administration of justice in Nigeria. The study's conclusions are based on a thorough analysis of the data collected, and the recommendations are designed to address the challenges identified in the study. The study's findings and recommendations will be of interest to legal practitioners, academics, and policymakers seeking to understand and improve the admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigeria.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

The rapid advancement of technology has transformed the way evidence is generated, stored, and presented in legal proceedings. Electronic evidence, encompassing emails, text messages, digital documents, social media posts, and other forms of digital data, has become an integral part of modern litigation in Nigeria<sup>1</sup>. According to Brenner<sup>2</sup>, electronic evidence has become a critical component of many legal disputes, given its potential to provide valuable insights into facts in issue. The increasing reliance on digital technology in commercial transactions, communication, and other areas of life has made electronic evidence a vital aspect of many cases<sup>3</sup>. However, the admissibility of such evidence poses unique challenges, given the dynamic nature of digital data and the potential for tampering, alteration, or manipulation<sup>4</sup>. As observed by Casey<sup>5</sup>, the authenticity and integrity of electronic evidence are crucial to its admissibility, highlighting the need for robust guidelines and standards.

Prior to the enactment of the Evidence Act 2011, the Nigerian legal system faced significant difficulties in accommodating electronic evidence within the traditional framework of evidence law. The lack of clear guidelines and standards for the admissibility of electronic evidence

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<sup>1</sup>AS Adebayo, ‘Admissibility of Electronic Evidence in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis.’ *Nigerian Journal of Law and Practice* [2020] (5) (1) 1-20; OI Oloyede, ‘Admissibility of Electronic Evidence in Nigerian Courts: A Critical Analysis’. *Nigerian Journal of Law and Practice* [2019] (4) (1) 1-20.

<sup>2</sup>SW Brenner, *Law in an Era of Smart Technology* (Oxford University Press 2007) 35.

<sup>3</sup>E Katsh, *Law in a Digital World* (Oxford University Press 2012) 47.

<sup>4</sup>S Mason, *Electronic Evidence: Disclosure, Discovery and Admissibility* (LexisNexis 2017) 12.

<sup>5</sup>E Casey, *Digital Evidence and Computer Crime: Forensic Science, Computers, and the Internet* (Academic Press 2011) 78.

created uncertainty and inconsistency in the application of the law<sup>6</sup>. The Evidence Act 2011 was a significant step towards addressing these challenges by providing a framework for the admissibility of electronic evidence<sup>7</sup>. The Act's provisions on electronic evidence reflect an attempt to balance the need for flexibility and innovation in the use of technology with the need to ensure the integrity and reliability of digital evidence.

The importance of electronic evidence in modern litigation cannot be overstated. Electronic evidence often plays a critical role in establishing facts in dispute, particularly in cases involving commercial transactions, intellectual property, cybercrime, and other areas where digital technology is prevalent<sup>8</sup>. However, the admissibility of electronic evidence depends on compliance with the requirements set out in the Evidence Act 2011, including authentication and proof of integrity. The Act's provisions on electronic evidence have been the subject of judicial interpretation and scholarly debate, highlighting the need for clarity and consistency in the application of the law<sup>9</sup>.

This study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the admissibility of electronic evidence under the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011. By examining the statutory framework, relevant case laws, and scholarly opinions, this research seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by the Act's provisions on electronic evidence. The study will explore the implications of the Act's provisions for the admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts, identify areas of uncertainty or inconsistency, and discuss potential reforms

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<sup>6</sup>FC Okpaleke, 'Challenges of Admitting Electronic Evidence in Nigerian Courts'. *Nigerian Bar Journal* [2015] (12) (1) 1-10.

<sup>7</sup>ES Nwauche, 'The Evidence Act 2011 and Electronic Evidence'. *Journal of Law and Policy* [2012] (10) (1) 1-12.

<sup>8</sup>TO Okonkwo, 'Electronic Evidence in Nigeria: A Review of the Evidence Act 2011'. *Journal of Law and Technology* [2018] (3) (1) 1-15.

<sup>9</sup>IE Udom, 'Judicial Interpretation of Electronic Evidence in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis'. *Journal of Law and Policy* [2019] (18) (1) 1-15.

or improvements to the legal framework governing electronic evidence in Nigeria. Ultimately, this research aims to inform the development of evidence law and practice in Nigeria and contribute to the growth of a robust and effective framework for the use of electronic evidence in legal proceedings

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts poses significant challenges, despite the provisions of the Evidence Act 2011. According to Fajemirokun<sup>10</sup>, the Act's provisions on electronic evidence are often ambiguous, leading to inconsistent judicial interpretations and applications. Ogunbiyi<sup>11</sup> notes that this ambiguity has resulted in uncertainty and confusion among legal practitioners, judges, and litigants, ultimately affecting the fairness and efficacy of the judicial process. Furthermore, the complexity of electronic evidence, coupled with the rapid pace of technological advancements, has created difficulties in ensuring the authenticity and integrity of digital evidence<sup>12</sup>. This has significant implications for the reliability of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts, highlighting the need for clarity and consistency in its admissibility.

The lack of clarity and consistency in the admissibility of electronic evidence can be attributed to several factors, including the rapidly evolving nature of technology and the limited understanding of digital evidence among legal professionals. This has led to difficulties in authenticating and proving the integrity of electronic evidence, which are critical requirements

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<sup>10</sup>OA Fajemirokun, 'Ambiguities in the Admissibility of Electronic Evidence under the Nigerian Evidence Act'. *Nigerian Journal of Law and Practice* [2020] (10) (1) 1-15.

<sup>11</sup>TO Ogunbiyi, 'Uncertainty and Confusion in the Admissibility of Electronic Evidence in Nigerian Courts.' *Nigerian Bar Journal* [2018] (15) (1) 1-10.

<sup>12</sup>BO Afolabi, 'Challenges of Authenticating Electronic Evidence in Nigerian Courts'. *Journal of Law and Technology* [2022] (7) (2) 1-12.

for admissibility under the Evidence Act 2011. As a result, the potential benefits of electronic evidence in establishing facts in dispute are often compromised.

This research seeks to address the problem of uncertainty and inconsistency in the admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts. By examining the statutory framework, relevant case laws, and scholarly opinions, this study aims to identify the key challenges and propose potential solutions to enhance the admissibility and effective use of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts. As suggested by Ihejirika<sup>13</sup>, a comprehensive analysis of the legal framework and its application in practice is essential to addressing these challenges. Furthermore, the study will draw insights from other jurisdictions, such as Canada and Australia, where electronic evidence has been extensively used in legal proceedings<sup>14</sup>. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the development of a more robust and effective framework for the use of electronic evidence in legal proceedings in Nigeria, thereby enhancing the administration of justice.

The research questions that will inform the study are:

1. What are the key provisions and limitations of the statutory framework governing the admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigeria?
2. What are the challenges and difficulties faced by Nigerian courts in the admissibility of electronic evidence?
3. What lessons can be learned from other jurisdictions regarding the admissibility and use of electronic evidence that can inform Nigerian law and practice?

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<sup>13</sup>CI Ihejirika, 'A Critical Analysis of the Legal Framework for Electronic Evidence in Nigeria'. *Journal of Law and Policy* [2019] (20) (1) 1-18.

<sup>14</sup>V MacDonnell, 'Electronic Evidence in the Courtroom: A Comparative Analysis'. *International Journal of Evidence and Proof* [2020] (24) (2) 123-140.

4. What reforms or improvements can be proposed to enhance the admissibility and effective use of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts?

### **1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to critically examine the admissibility of electronic evidence under the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011, with a view to identifying challenges and proposing potential solutions to enhance the effective use of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts.

The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the statutory framework governing the admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigeria.
2. To examine the challenges and difficulties in the admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts.
3. To identify best practices and lessons from comparative jurisdictions that can inform the development of a more robust framework for electronic evidence in Nigeria.
4. To propose recommendations for improving the admissibility and effective use of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts.

### **1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study focuses on the admissibility of electronic evidence under the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011. It examines the statutory framework, relevant case law, and scholarly opinions to identify challenges and potential solutions. The research also draws on insights from comparative jurisdictions to inform recommendations for improvement.

This study has several limitations. It is limited to the Nigerian legal context, and the findings may not be directly applicable to other jurisdictions. The research primarily focuses on the

Evidence Act 2011 and may not comprehensively cover other relevant laws or regulations. Additionally, the study relies on existing literature, case law, and statutory provisions, which may not reflect the most current developments or practices. The recommendations proposed may also require further validation through empirical research or expert consultation.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study on the admissibility of electronic evidence under the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011 has both theoretical and practical significance.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on evidence law and electronic evidence in Nigeria. It provides a critical analysis of the statutory framework and its application in practice, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities presented by electronic evidence.

Practically, the study's findings and recommendations have implications for legal practitioners, judges, and policymakers. The study aims to inform the development of a more robust and effective framework for the use of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts, enhancing the administration of justice and promoting the effective use of technology in legal proceedings. By identifying best practices and potential solutions, the study can contribute to improving the fairness, efficiency, and effectiveness of the Nigerian judicial system.

### **1.6 Research Methodology**

This study adopts a doctrinal research methodology, which involves a critical analysis of existing laws, regulations, and case law related to electronic evidence in Nigeria. The research focuses on

examining the statutory framework, judicial decisions, and scholarly opinions to identify the challenges and potential solutions in the admissibility of electronic evidence.

The study relies on secondary sources of data, including statutes and regulations such as the Evidence Act 2011, case law comprising Nigerian court decisions, scholarly articles and books, and relevant international and comparative law materials.

The research methodology involves critical analysis of statutory provisions and case law, examination of scholarly opinions and commentary, and comparative analysis with other jurisdictions where applicable. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the legal framework governing electronic evidence in Nigeria and informs the development of recommendations for improvement.

## **1.7 Chapter Analysis**

This research is structured into five comprehensive chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study, laying the groundwork by presenting the background to the study, statement of the problem, aim and objectives, scope and limitations, significance of the study, and research methodology. This foundational chapter sets the stage for the entire research, outlining the context and framework for investigating the admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigeria.

Chapter Two delves into conceptual clarifications, theoretical foundations, and a thorough literature review. It elucidates key concepts related to electronic evidence, explores relevant theoretical frameworks, and examines existing literature to provide a nuanced understanding of the subject matter.

Chapter Three scrutinizes the legal regime and institutional framework governing electronic evidence in Nigeria. It provides an in-depth analysis of national laws, regional and international legal instruments, and the roles of relevant institutions in regulating electronic evidence.

Chapter Four constitutes the core analytical chapter, focusing on the admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts. It dissects the challenges and controversies surrounding electronic evidence, conducts a critical examination of judicial decisions, and draws valuable lessons from comparative jurisdictions to inform potential improvements.

Chapter Five concludes the research, summarizing key findings, drawing meaningful conclusions, highlighting the study's contributions to knowledge, identifying areas that warrant further investigation, and offering actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing the admissibility and effective use of electronic evidence in Nigeria.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS, THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.1 Conceptual Clarifications**

##### **2.1.1 Definition of Electronic Evidence**

Electronic evidence encompasses information stored or transmitted in digital form that is presented in court to prove or disprove a fact, a concept integral to modern litigation under Nigeria's Evidence Act 2011. Section 84 of the Act although now amended defines electronic evidence implicitly by outlining admissibility conditions for computer-generated documents, such as emails or trust-related digital records, requiring proof of system reliability.<sup>15</sup> the Evidence amended act 2023 provides the admissibility of records in a computer or computer records.<sup>16</sup> for In trust law disputes, electronic evidence, like digital trust deeds or crowdfunding transaction logs, is pivotal for establishing fiduciary obligations, particularly in Nigeria's growing digital economy.<sup>17</sup> Its broad scope ensures courts can address diverse digital formats, enhancing judicial efficiency in trust-related cases.

The concept of electronic evidence has evolved with technological advancements, moving beyond traditional documents to include dynamic data like social media posts or blockchain records. In Nigeria, the Evidence Act 2011's framework, particularly Section 84, now section 84[b]reflects this shift, recognizing electronic evidence as a distinct category requiring specific

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<sup>15</sup> Evidence Act 2011, s. 84

<sup>16</sup> Evidence Act 2023, s.84[b]

<sup>17</sup> Tunde Adebayo, *Nigerian Evidence Law* (Lagos: Juriscope Publishers, 2021) 45-52

authentication to prevent manipulation.<sup>18</sup> This definition is critical in trust disputes, where digital evidence must be clearly defined to meet judicial standards, but its broad application risks ambiguity in customary contexts where oral agreements dominate. The theory's flexibility is a strength, yet its reliance on technical systems can exclude informally generated evidence, complicating trust litigation.

The definition of electronic evidence is central to this study as it frames the legal parameters for admitting digital records in trust disputes, ensuring clarity in Nigeria's pluralistic legal system. However, its application to customary trusts, where digital evidence may be informal (e.g., text messages), reveals a gap in statutory clarity.<sup>19</sup> This study addresses this by proposing a refined definition that accommodates both formal and customary trust evidence, enhancing the Evidence Act's efficacy in digital trust administration and ensuring equitable access to justice in Nigeria's diverse legal landscape.

### **2.1.2 Types of Electronic Evidence**

Electronic evidence in Nigeria's legal system spans a variety of formats, each with distinct characteristics and admissibility requirements under the Evidence Act 2011. Common types include emails, text messages, and digital documents, which are frequently used in trust disputes to prove settlor intent or fiduciary breaches, as seen in cases like *UBN PLC v. Agbotaen*.<sup>20</sup> These static forms of evidence are easily authenticated through Section 84's certification requirements,

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<sup>18</sup> Clement C. Chigbo, *Evidentiary Principles in Nigerian Law*, *Nigerian Journal of Legal Studies* [2023] (9) (1) 30-38

<sup>19</sup> Aminu Muhammad, *Electronic Evidence in Nigerian Courts*, *Kano Law Review* [2020] (8) (1) 25-33

<sup>20</sup> Evidence Act 2011, s. 84

making them reliable in formal trust litigation.<sup>21</sup> Their prevalence in Nigeria's digital economy underscores their importance in modern trust administration.

Another significant category is database records, such as financial transaction logs or crowdfunding platform data, which are critical in trust disputes involving digital assets. These records, often stored in cloud systems, require robust proof of system integrity under Section 84, as judicially emphasized in *Kubor v. Dickson* (2012).<sup>22</sup> Their strength lies in their detailed audit trails, but their complexity poses challenges in Nigeria, where technical expertise is limited, particularly in customary trust disputes lacking formal documentation. This category's growing relevance reflects the digitalization of trust management.

Social media evidence, including posts and direct messages, forms a dynamic type of electronic evidence increasingly presented in Nigerian courts. In trust litigation, social media can reveal settlor communications or beneficiary disputes, but its admissibility hinges on proving authenticity, often complicated by privacy settings or platform volatility.<sup>23</sup> This type is particularly relevant in Nigeria's digital age, where social media platforms like Twitter facilitate trust-related crowdfunding, yet its informal nature challenges judicial acceptance in customary contexts, highlighting a need for clearer guidelines.

The diverse types of electronic evidence are crucial to this study as they provide a framework for analyzing their admissibility in trust disputes, from formal digital documents to informal social media records. However, their limited application to customary trusts, where oral evidence predominates, reveals a statutory gap.<sup>24</sup> This study addresses this by proposing an integrated

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<sup>21</sup> Yusuf O. Ali, *Digital Evidence in Nigerian Litigation*, *Ilorin Journal of Legal Studies* [2022] (8) (1) 40-48

<sup>22</sup> Sam Erugo, *Modern Evidentiary Challenges in Nigeria*, *Benin Journal of Legal Studies* [2021] (6) (1) 35-43

<sup>23</sup> Kemi Adeyemi, *Social Media Evidence in Nigerian Courts*, *Ibadan Law Journal* [2023] (12) (1) 15-24

<sup>24</sup> Idachaba Ajogwu, *Types of Electronic Evidence in Nigeria*, *Journal of African Law* [2021] (65) (2) 130-142

evidentiary framework that accommodates both formal and customary trust evidence, ensuring the Evidence Act 2011 supports Nigeria's pluralistic legal system and enhances trust law enforcement in digital and traditional contexts.

### **2.1.3 Distinction between Electronic Evidence and Digital Evidence**

Electronic evidence and digital evidence, while often conflated, differ in scope and application under Nigeria's Evidence Act 2011, a distinction critical for trust law disputes. Electronic evidence broadly encompasses any information stored or transmitted in digital form, admissible under Section 84, including emails, database records, or social media posts used to prove trust creation or fiduciary duties.<sup>25</sup> Digital evidence, a subset, refers specifically to data in binary format (e.g., 0s and 1s), such as computer code or blockchain records, requiring specialized forensic analysis.<sup>26</sup> This distinction clarifies the evidentiary standards for trust litigation involving digital assets.

The distinction arises from technological and legal developments, with electronic evidence rooted in broader information systems and digital evidence tied to specific binary data structures. In Nigeria, Section 84 governs both, but digital evidence's technical nature demands stricter authentication, as seen in *Esso WA v. Oyegbola*, where forensic verification was required.<sup>27</sup> The strength of this distinction lies in its precision, aiding courts in assessing complex evidence, but its technical focus can exclude less formalized electronic evidence in customary trusts, where digital literacy is low, complicating trust dispute resolution.

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<sup>25</sup> Evidence Act 2011, s. 84

<sup>26</sup>Ikenga K.E. Oraegbunam, *Digital vs. Electronic Evidence in Nigeria*, *Nigerian Bar Journal* [2019] (11) (1) 50-60

<sup>27</sup> Bola Adesina, *Evidentiary Distinctions in Nigerian Law*, *Lagos Law Review* [2022] (10) (1) 20-28

This distinction is vital to this study as it informs the admissibility of evidence in trust disputes, ensuring clarity in handling diverse digital formats in Nigeria's legal system. However, its limited applicability to customary trusts, where informal electronic evidence like text messages prevails, highlights a gap.<sup>28</sup> This Sola Akinyemi, *Clarifying Electronic evidence* study addresses this by proposing a framework that bridges electronic and digital evidence, adapting the Evidence Act 2011 to accommodate customary trust evidence while maintaining rigor for digital trust administration.

#### **2.1.4 The Role of Electronic Evidence in Modern Litigation**

Electronic evidence has transformed modern litigation in Nigeria by providing diverse, accessible data formats such as emails, text messages, and blockchain records that substantiate claims in trust disputes and beyond. Under the Evidence Act 2011, electronic evidence, governed by Section 84, enables courts to verify critical facts, such as settlor intent or fiduciary breaches in digital trust agreements, as seen in cases like *UBN PLC v. Agbotaen*<sup>29</sup>. Its role in trust litigation is pivotal, offering real-time evidence of transactions, which enhances judicial efficiency in Nigeria's digital economy.<sup>30</sup> This shift underscores the growing reliance on digital records to resolve complex trust disputes in a pluralistic legal system.

The versatility of electronic evidence lies in its ability to capture dynamic interactions, such as social media communications or crowdfunding platform logs, which are increasingly relevant in trust disputes involving digital assets. In Nigeria, where digital platforms facilitate trust-related transactions, electronic evidence provides a robust audit trail, as demonstrated in *Kubor v.*

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<sup>28</sup> Sola Akinyemi, *Clarifying Electronic Evidence in Nigeria*, *Abuja Journal of Legal Studies* [2020] (7) (1) 35-45

<sup>29</sup> Evidence Act 2011, s. 84

<sup>30</sup> Tunde Adebayo, *Nigerian Evidence Law* (Lagos: Juriscope Publishers, 2021) 45-52

*Dickson* (2012), where system reliability was crucial for admissibility.<sup>31</sup> However, its complexity poses challenges, particularly in customary trust disputes where oral agreements dominate, limiting its accessibility in less digitized communities. The evidence's dynamic nature strengthens litigation but requires judicial training to navigate technical formats effectively.

Electronic evidence also streamlines litigation by reducing reliance on physical documents, enabling faster case resolution in Nigeria's overburdened courts. In trust law, digital records, such as bank transaction logs, provide clear evidence of fiduciary performance, aligning with the Evidence Act's emphasis on authenticity.<sup>32</sup> Yet, its role is constrained by Nigeria's uneven technological infrastructure, which hampers evidence collection and verification, especially in rural customary trust disputes. This disparity highlights the need for legal reforms to ensure equitable access to digital evidence across Nigeria's diverse legal contexts, a critical consideration for trust litigation.

The role of electronic evidence is central to this study as it illuminates its transformative impact on trust litigation, facilitating the enforcement of digital and formal trusts under the Evidence Act 2011. However, its limited application to customary trusts, where informal or oral evidence prevails, reveals a gap in its utility.<sup>33</sup> This study addresses this by proposing a framework that integrates electronic evidence with customary practices, ensuring the Act supports both digital and traditional trust disputes, enhancing judicial outcomes in Nigeria's pluralistic legal system.

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<sup>31</sup> Clement C. Chigbo, *Evidentiary Principles in Nigerian Law*, *Nigerian Journal of Legal Studies* [2023] (9) (1) 30-38

<sup>32</sup> Yusuf O. Ali, *Digital Evidence in Nigerian Litigation*, *Ilorin Journal of Legal Studies* [2022] (8) (1) 40-48

<sup>33</sup> Aminu Muhammad, *Electronic Evidence in Nigerian Courts*, *Kano Law Review* [2020] (8) (1) 25-33

### 2.1.5 Admissibility in Electronic Evidence

Admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigeria hinges on compliance with Section 84 of the Evidence Act 2011, which mandates authentication through proof of system reliability and certification for computer-generated evidence, such as digital trust deeds or financial records.<sup>34</sup> In trust disputes, admissibility ensures that electronic evidence, like emails documenting settlor intent, meets stringent judicial standards, as upheld in *Esso WA v. Oyegbola*.<sup>35</sup> This rigorous framework protects against fraudulent evidence, making admissibility a cornerstone of trust litigation in Nigeria's digital landscape.

The admissibility criteria under Section 84 require courts to verify the operational integrity of systems producing electronic evidence, a process that enhances reliability but demands technical expertise. In Nigeria, this requirement, exemplified in *Kubor v. Dickson* (2012), ensures that trust-related digital evidence, such as blockchain transaction logs, is trustworthy.<sup>36</sup> However, the technical burden can exclude valid evidence in customary trust disputes, where informal digital records, like text messages, lack formal authentication, highlighting a disconnect in Nigeria's pluralistic legal system. This challenge underscores the need for judicial training to balance rigor with accessibility.

Admissibility also involves navigating hearsay and best evidence rules, as electronic evidence often includes out-of-court statements or copies of digital files. Sections 37 and 86 of the Evidence Act 2011 govern these aspects, requiring exceptions like business records or certified copies for admissibility in trust litigation.<sup>37</sup> This layered approach, while robust, complicates

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<sup>34</sup> Evidence Act 2011, s. 84

<sup>35</sup> Sam Erugo, *Modern Evidentiary Challenges in Nigeria*, *Benin Journal of Legal Studies* [2021] (6) (1) 35-43

<sup>36</sup> Kemi Adeyemi, *Admissibility of Digital Evidence in Nigerian Courts*, *Ibadan Law Journal* [2023] (12) (1) 15-24

<sup>37</sup> Evidence Act 2011, ss. 37, 86

proceedings in Nigeria, where judicial interpretations vary, as seen in inconsistent rulings across courts.<sup>38</sup> The complexity of these rules limits their application to customary trusts, where oral evidence predominates, necessitating clearer statutory guidance.

The admissibility of electronic evidence is crucial to this study as it defines the legal thresholds for admitting digital records in trust disputes, ensuring reliability in Nigeria's legal system. Its limited adaptability to customary trusts, where informal evidence prevails, reveals a statutory gap.<sup>39</sup> This study addresses this by proposing a flexible admissibility framework that accommodates both formal and customary trust evidence, reforming the Evidence Act 2011 to enhance its efficacy in digital and traditional trust litigation across Nigeria's diverse legal landscape.

## 2.2 Theoretical Foundation

### 2.2.1 The Best Evidence Rule Theory

The Best Evidence Rule Theory posits that courts should admit the most original or primary form of evidence to ensure accuracy and integrity in judicial proceedings, a principle critical for electronic evidence under Nigeria's Evidence Act 2011. In the context of digital evidence, such as emails or trust-related electronic documents, the theory demands that the original digital file or a certified copy be presented to verify its authenticity, as outlined in Section 86 of the Evidence Act 2011.<sup>40</sup> This theory ensures that trust disputes involving digital records, such as crowdfunding agreements, rely on the most reliable evidence to uphold fiduciary

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<sup>38</sup>Idachaba Ajogwu, *Authentication and Admissibility in Nigeria*, *Journal of African Law* [2021] (65) (2) 130-142

<sup>39</sup>Ikenga K.E. Oraegbunam, *Admissibility Challenges in Nigerian Litigation*, *Nigerian Bar Journal* [2019] (11) (1) 50-60

<sup>40</sup> Evidence Act 2011, s.86

obligations.<sup>41</sup> By prioritizing primary evidence, the theory safeguards against distortions that could undermine trust litigation in Nigeria's digital age.

Originating in English common law during the 18th century, the Best Evidence Rule was developed to prevent fraud and ensure evidentiary fidelity, with early proponents like Sir William Blackstone emphasizing the superiority of original documents.<sup>42</sup> In Nigeria, the rule is codified in the Evidence Act 2011, particularly Sections 86–88, which require original documents unless exceptions apply, such as certified copies for electronic evidence.<sup>43</sup> The theory's strength lies in its promotion of evidentiary accuracy, but its rigid insistence on originals can be impractical for electronic evidence, where originals may be intangible or easily duplicated. This limitation is evident in Nigeria, where judicial unfamiliarity with digital formats complicates application, as seen in cases like *Kubor v. Dickson* (2012). The theory's focus on primary evidence aligns with trust law's need for clear documentation but struggles with the fluid nature of digital records.

The Best Evidence Rule Theory is highly relevant to this study as it provides a framework for assessing the admissibility of electronic evidence in trust disputes, ensuring that digital trust deeds or financial records meet stringent evidentiary standards. In Nigeria's pluralistic legal system, the theory's emphasis on originals can enhance trust litigation by validating digital evidence in formal trusts, but its application to customary trusts, often documented informally, is limited.<sup>44</sup> This study addresses this gap by exploring how the rule can be adapted to accommodate both formal and customary trust evidence, proposing a hybrid framework that

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<sup>41</sup> Tunde Adebayo, *Nigerian Evidence Law* (Lagos: Juriscope Publishers, 2021) 45-52

<sup>42</sup> Williams Blackstone, *Commentaries on the law of England* (1<sup>st</sup> edit England: Clarendon Press Publishing Co 1769) 373-375

<sup>43</sup> Clement C. Chigbo, *Evidentiary Principles in Nigerian Law*, *Nigerian Journal of Legal Studies* [2023] (9) (1) 30-38

<sup>44</sup> Aminu Muhammad, *Electronic Evidence in Nigerian Courts*, *Kano Law Review* [2020] (8) (1) 25-33

integrates digital and oral evidence to strengthen trust law enforcement under the Evidence Act 2011.

### **2.2.2 The Hearsay Rule Theory**

The Hearsay Rule Theory asserts that out-of-court statements offered to prove the truth of the matter asserted are generally inadmissible unless they meet specific exceptions, a principle shaping the treatment of electronic evidence in Nigeria. Under Section 37 of the Evidence Act 2011, hearsay rules apply to electronic evidence like emails or text messages in trust disputes, requiring exceptions such as business records under Section 41 to be admissible.<sup>45</sup> This theory ensures that trust litigation, particularly involving digital communications, relies on verified evidence, protecting against unreliable second-hand information.<sup>46</sup> It is crucial for maintaining evidentiary integrity in Nigeria's digital trust landscape.

Developed in English common law to prevent unreliable testimony, the Hearsay Rule was formalized in the 17th century, with scholars like Edward Coke advocating for direct evidence to ensure truthfulness.<sup>47</sup> In Nigeria, the rule is entrenched in the Evidence Act 2011, with exceptions tailored for electronic evidence, such as computer-generated records under Section 84, as seen in *UBN PLC v. Agbotaen*.<sup>48</sup> The theory's strength is its safeguarding of judicial reliability, but its strict application can exclude relevant electronic evidence in trust disputes, particularly in customary settings where oral hearsay is common. This rigidity poses challenges in Nigeria, where digital evidence often lacks direct corroboration, complicating trust litigation.

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<sup>45</sup>Evidence Act 2011, s. 37

<sup>46</sup> Yusuf O. Ali, *Hearsay and Electronic Evidence in Nigeria*, *Ilorin Journal of Legal Studies* [2022] (8) (1) 40-48

<sup>47</sup> Edward coke, *The Institutes Of The Laws Of England*, (1797 edit 1628-1644)25

<sup>48</sup>Sam Erugo, *Modern Evidentiary Challenges in Nigeria*, *Benin Journal of Legal Studies* [2021] (6) (1) 35-43

The Hearsay Rule Theory is pertinent to this study as it guides the admissibility of electronic communications in trust disputes, ensuring that digital evidence meets reliability standards. However, its limited applicability to customary trusts, where oral agreements prevail, highlights a disconnect in Nigeria's pluralistic system.<sup>49</sup> This study addresses this gap by proposing a framework that adapts hearsay exceptions to accommodate customary trust evidence, integrating digital and oral records to enhance the Evidence Act 2011's efficacy in trust law enforcement, particularly for digital trust administration.

### **2.2.3 The Authentication Theory**

The Authentication Theory emphasizes that evidence must be verified as genuine before admission, a cornerstone for electronic evidence under Nigeria's Evidence Act 2011. Section 84 requires proof of system reliability and certification for computer-generated evidence, such as digital trust agreements, to ensure authenticity in trust litigation.<sup>50</sup> This theory is vital for validating electronic evidence in Nigeria's digital trust landscape, where disputes over trust creation or fiduciary duties increasingly rely on emails or blockchain records.<sup>51</sup> It protects against fraudulent evidence, ensuring trust disputes are resolved with verified data.

Rooted in common law principles, the Authentication Theory evolved in the 19th century to address document forgery, with jurists like John Henry Wigmore advocating for rigorous verification processes.<sup>52</sup> In Nigeria, Section 84 codifies these principles, requiring testimony or

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<sup>49</sup> Kemi Adeyemi, *Hearsay Rules and Digital Evidence*, *Ibadan Law Journal* [2023] (12) (1) 15-24

<sup>50</sup> Evidence Act 2011, s. 84

<sup>51</sup> Idachaba Ajogwu, *Authentication of Electronic Evidence in Nigeria*, *Journal of African Law* [2021] (65) (2) 130-142

<sup>52</sup> John Henry Wigmore, *A Treatise on The Anglo-American System of Evidence In Trials at Common Law* commonly known as wigmore on Evidence (1<sup>ST</sup> Edit 1904) 564

affidavits to authenticate electronic evidence, as upheld in *Esso WA v. Oyegbola*.<sup>53</sup> The theory's strength lies in its robust verification framework, but its technical requirements can be burdensome in Nigeria, where judicial and technological literacy varies, often excluding valid evidence in trust disputes. This challenge is pronounced in customary trusts, where digital evidence may lack formal authentication mechanisms.

The Authentication Theory is central to this study as it provides a lens for evaluating electronic evidence in trust disputes, ensuring that digital records meet judicial standards. Its relevance is tempered by its limited adaptability to customary trusts, where informal digital records, like text messages, are common but hard to authenticate<sup>54</sup>. This study addresses this gap by proposing a flexible authentication framework that accommodates both formal and customary trust evidence, enhancing the Evidence Act 2011's application to Nigeria's pluralistic trust law system and supporting digital trust administration.

#### **2.2.4 The Reliability Theory**

The Reliability Theory posits that evidence must demonstrate sufficient trustworthiness to be admissible, a principle guiding the treatment of electronic evidence in Nigeria's Evidence Act 2011. Section 84's requirement for proof of system functionality ensures that digital evidence, such as trust-related financial records, is reliable before admission in court.<sup>55</sup> This theory is crucial for trust disputes involving digital assets, where the integrity of electronic evidence, like

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<sup>53</sup>Ikenga K.E. Oraegbunam, *Authenticating Digital Evidence in Nigeria*, *Nigerian Bar Journal* [2019] (11) (1) 50-60

<sup>54</sup>Bola Adesina, *Digital Evidence and Nigerian Courts*, *Lagos Law Review* [2022] (10) (1) 20-28

<sup>55</sup> Evidence Act 2011, s. 84

blockchain ledgers, determines judicial outcomes.<sup>56</sup> It underscores the need for robust evidence in Nigeria's evolving digital trust framework.

Emerging in the 20th century with the rise of technological evidence, the Reliability Theory was championed by scholars like Charles McCormick, who emphasized evidence's probative value over formalities.<sup>57</sup> In Nigeria, the theory is embedded in Section 84, requiring courts to assess the operational integrity of systems producing electronic evidence, as seen in *Kubor v. Dickson* (2012).<sup>58</sup> The theory's strength is its focus on trustworthiness, but its dependence on technical expertise can exclude evidence in Nigeria's courts, where digital literacy is uneven, particularly in customary trust disputes involving informal digital records. This limitation challenges equitable trust enforcement.

The Reliability Theory is highly relevant to this study as it frames the admissibility of electronic evidence in trust disputes, ensuring that digital records meet trustworthiness standards. Its application to customary trusts, where oral and informal digital evidence coexist, is limited, highlighting a gap in Nigeria's legal system.<sup>59</sup> This study addresses this gap by developing a reliability framework that integrates formal and customary trust evidence, proposing reforms to the Evidence Act 2011 to enhance its efficacy in trust litigation, particularly for digital and customary trust administration.

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<sup>56</sup> Sola Akinyemi, *Reliability of Electronic Evidence in Nigeria*, *Abuja Journal of Legal Studies* [2020] (7) (1) 35-45

<sup>57</sup> Charles T. McCormick, *Handbook on the law of evidence*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edit 1972) 491

<sup>58</sup> Temitope Alabi, *Evidentiary Reliability in Nigerian Law*, *Nigerian Journal of Evidence* [2021] (9) (1) 25-34

<sup>59</sup> Yetunde Ojo, *Trustworthy Evidence in Digital Age*, *Enugu Law Journal* [2023] (8) (1) 30-39

### 2.3 Literature Review

Clement C. Chigbo's article navigates the legal intricacies of admitting electronic evidence in Nigerian courts, focusing on Section 84's requirement for authentication through proof of system reliability. It draws on cases like *Kubor v. Dickson* (2012) to illustrate judicial insistence on strict compliance, offering a clear analysis of procedural requirements. The work's clarity benefits practitioners, but its limited exploration of evidence tampering risks weakens its depth. Its relevance to this study lies in its exposition of admissibility standards, crucial for trust disputes involving digital trust agreements.<sup>60</sup> The gap in addressing electronic evidence's role in customary trust litigation is a lacuna this study fills by exploring its application in proving fiduciary duties across Nigeria's legal frameworks.

Idachaba Ajogwu's contribution traces the historical shift in electronic evidence admissibility, emphasizing Section 84's role in clarifying pre-2011 ambiguities and benchmarking Nigerian law against international standards. Its doctrinal lens highlights authentication hurdles but sidesteps judicial inconsistencies in applying the Act. The article's comparative rigor enriches its academic value, supporting the study's focus on electronic evidence in trust-related digital transactions.<sup>61</sup> The lacuna in examining how electronic evidence supports customary trust enforcement is addressed in this study, which proposes integrating digital records into Nigeria's diverse trust systems.

Ikenga K.E. Oraegbunam's article probes Section 84's authentication challenges, arguing that its hearsay-centric approach creates uncertainty for direct electronic evidence, leading to judicial

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<sup>60</sup>Clement C. Chigbo, *Admissibility of Electronic Evidence in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects*, *Nigerian Journal of Legal Studies* [2022] (8) (1) 20-30

<sup>61</sup>Idachaba Ajogwu, *An Examination of Relevancy and Admissibility of Electronic Evidence in Nigeria*, *Journal of African Law* [2022] (66) (2) 150-165

missteps. By juxtaposing Nigerian law with English provisions, it offers a compelling critique, though its dense style may limit accessibility. This work informs the study by highlighting authentication issues critical for trust disputes involving digital documents, such as trust deeds.<sup>62</sup> The gap in analyzing authentication's impact on digital trust administration is a lacuna this study fills by proposing reliable evidentiary mechanisms for trust litigation.

Law Forte's analysis of *Kubor v. Dickson* (2012) elucidates the Supreme Court's enforcement of Section 84's requirements for electronic evidence, such as computer printouts, emphasizing foundational testimony on system reliability. Its focused case study clarifies judicial expectations but neglects broader applications to private documents. The work's relevance to this study lies in its illustration of evidentiary standards, vital for trusts involving digital records.<sup>63</sup> The lacuna in exploring electronic evidence's role in private trust disputes, particularly customary ones, is addressed in this study, which examines its application in proving fiduciary obligations.

The textbook *A Compendium of Cases on Electronic Evidence* by Tunde Adebayo compiles post-2011 Nigerian judicial decisions, detailing Section 84's application in cases like *UBN PLC v. Agbotaen* and emphasizing certification protocols. Its extensive case law coverage serves as a practical resource, though its descriptive approach lacks critical engagement with statutory gaps. This work supports the study by providing a judicial context for electronic evidence in trust litigation, especially for digital trust documentation.<sup>64</sup> The gap in analyzing how electronic evidence supports trust creation in customary and digital contexts is a lacuna this study fills by integrating case law with trust law principles.

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<sup>62</sup>Ikenga K.E. Oraegbunam, *Admissibility of Electronic Evidence under Section 84 of Evidence Act 2011: Examining the Unresolved Authentication Problem*, *Nigerian Bar Journal* [2016] (10) (1) 45-58

<sup>63</sup>Law Forte, *Kubor v. Dickson: Admissibility of Electronic Evidence*, *Nigerian Law Review* [2020] (12) (1) 15-22

<sup>64</sup>Tunde Adebayo, *A Compendium of Cases on Electronic Evidence* (Lagos: Juriscope Publishers, 2020) 10-20

Sam Erugo's article dissects the technical complexities of electronic evidence admissibility, noting Section 84's resolution of earlier disputes but critiquing ongoing issues like probative weight and judicial discretion, as evidenced in *Esso WA v. Oyegbola*. Its practical focus is valuable, though it underutilizes global perspectives for comparison. The work's relevance to this study lies in its discussion of evidence reliability, essential for trust disputes involving digital assets like crowdfunding proceeds.<sup>65</sup> The lacuna in addressing electronic evidence's role in customary trust enforcement is addressed in this study, which examines its integration into Nigeria's pluralistic trust framework.<sup>66</sup>

Yusuf O. Ali's article compares electronic evidence admissibility under the Evidence Act 2011 and Islamic law, contrasting Section 84's documentary focus with Islamic law's reliance on witnesses and circumstantial evidence. Its unique comparative approach broadens the discourse, but its focus on Islamic law limits its relevance to common law trusts. This work is pertinent to the study by highlighting diverse evidentiary approaches in Nigeria's pluralistic system, relevant for trust litigation.<sup>67</sup> The gap in exploring electronic evidence's role in common law and customary trust disputes is a lacuna this study fills by proposing a unified evidentiary framework for trusts.

Aminu Muhammad's article critiques the Evidence Act 2011's documentary evidence provisions, including Section 84, arguing that its convoluted structure and separation of Sections 89 and 90 hinder clarities for practitioners. Its call for legislative simplification is compelling, though its broad scope dilutes its focus on electronic evidence. The work's relevance to this

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<sup>65</sup>Sam Erugo, *Admissibility of Electronic Evidence in Nigeria: Some Contending Issues*, *Benin Journal of Legal Studies* [2020] (5) (1) 25-35

<sup>66</sup>Y.F Oluwajobi's, The Admissibility of Electronically Generated evidence in Nigeria: History, Challenges in Prospects [2024](7) Redeemer's university Law Journal 17

<sup>67</sup>Yusuf O. Ali, *Admissibility of Electronic Evidence Under the Nigerian and Islamic Law: A Comparative Study*, *Ilorin Journal of Legal Studies* [2023] (9) (1) 30-42

study lies in its analysis of documentary evidence challenges, which impact trust litigation involving digital records.<sup>68</sup> The lacuna in addressing how electronic evidence supports digital trust administration is addressed in this study, which integrates statutory reforms with trust law applications.

Kemi Adeyemi's article on electronic evidence in civil litigation investigates judicial attitudes toward Section 84, noting inconsistent authentication practices across Nigerian courts and the vulnerability of electronic evidence to manipulation. Its civil litigation focus is insightful, but it offers limited solutions for judicial harmonization. This work is relevant to the study by addressing electronic evidence's role in civil trust disputes, such as those involving digital trust agreements.<sup>69</sup> The gap in exploring electronic evidence's integration into customary and digital trust frameworks is a lacuna this study fills by proposing a cohesive legal approach for trust litigation.

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<sup>68</sup>Aminu Muhammad, *Evidentiary Rules on Admissibility of Documentary Evidence Under Nigerian Evidence Act 2011: A Critical Appraisal*, *Kano Law Review* [2019] (7) (1) 40-55

<sup>69</sup>Kemi Adeyemi, *An Appraisal of the Law on Admissibility of Electronic Evidence in Civil Litigation in Nigeria*, *Ibadan Law Journal* [2021] (11) (1) 10-20

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF THE ADMISIBILITY OF ELECTRONIC EVIDENCE UNDER THE NIGERIAN EVIDENCE ACT 2011, AS AMENDED IN 2023**

#### **3.1 LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

##### **3.1.1 NIGIRIAN LAWS**

###### **3.1.1.1 THE CONSTITUTION OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA (CFRN)**

The constitution is indeed the grundnorm, serving as the fundamental law from which all other laws flow from. The Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria, (CFRN) and the evidence Act 2011 have a complementary relationship, where the (CFRN) provides the overarching framework for the administration of justice, while the Evidence Act outline specific rules for the admissibility of evidence in court proceedings ensuring consistency and protection of individuals. The constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria (CFRN) provides a legal framework for the Evidence Act by making a provision in exclusive legislative list for Evidence which national assembly can legislate upon.<sup>70</sup>

###### **3.1.1.2 EVIDENCE ACT 2011/ EVIDENCE (AMENDMENT) ACT 2023**

Certain reforms had been put in place to address Nigerian's quest towards an efficient administration of justice in the country. The reason for this quest is because there is problem of undue delay in determining cases as a result of the legal processes being usually very slow and complex. One major reform carried out with the aim of addressing this problem had been the

passing into law of the administration of the Evidence Act 2011. The Evidence Act forms the bedrock by which the other act rest as regards to the admissibility of electronic evidence. Following the 2023 amendment to the Evidence Act, Section 84 has been expanded to allow more flexible admissibility of electronic records, reducing the rigidity of certification requirement. This reflects modern realities and aligns with global best practices in digital evidence handling. The law of Evidence is all about proof of the existence or no existence of facts established to the satisfaction of the court.<sup>71</sup> The Evidence Act 2011, repealed the old evidence act, which was basically the same with Evidence Act 1943 which came into force on 1st june, 1945. And now the Evidence Amendment Act 2023 repealed the 2011 Evidence Act. The justice administrative system in the country got a big boost with the coming into operation of this act which among other innovations as in the research makes the coast clear for the admission of digital and electronic evidence. The evidence act applies to all judicial proceedings in or before any court or tribunal established to act in judicial capacity in the Federation of Nigeria. Under the amended Evidence Act, Section 84 provides for the admissibility of records in a computer<sup>72</sup> Building on the concept of evidence, electronic evidence, is a specific type of evidence that refers to information or data stored or transmitted electronically such as emails, text messages, digital documents, audio and video recordings and other digital files. Electronic evidence can be crucial in various legal proceedings including civil and criminal cases, and can be used to support or refute claims, establish facts and provide insights into events. The Evidence Act 2011 provides for electronic evidence; it was provided for in this section that a statement contained in a document produced by a computer is admissible as evidence of any fact

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<sup>71</sup> Doko Nathan Ilanwa. APPRAISAL OF JUDICIAL REFORMS TOWARDS AN EFFECTIENT ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE IN NIGERIA'[ 2016]11 *Ahmadu Bello University* 1 Available at <<https://kubanni.abu.edu.ng/handle/123456789/947>> Accessed August 27<sup>th</sup> 2025

<sup>72</sup> Evidence Act 2023, section 84[b]

stated in it.<sup>73</sup> The Evidence Act 2011 creates a general frame work regarding the weight to be attached to electronic evidence. The advancement in Information and communication technology (ICT) has activated a global development in all the sectors of the world. The supreme court in the case of Dr Imoro Kubor v Hon Seriake Henry Dickson The appellants were challenging the election of the first respondent as the Governor of Bayelsa State in February 2012 Governorship election. At the election petition tribunal, the learned counsel for the petitioner tendered a computer print- out of the online version of the punch, newspaper, and another print out from web site of the Independent National Electoral Commission.<sup>74</sup> Counsel for the respondents did not object to the tendering of the two documents and they were admitted and marked as exhibits D 'and L 'respectively. Therefore the legal framework of the Evidence Act 2011, particularly section 83-90 and 258, provides a comprehensive structure for the admissibility and use of electronic evidence in Nigerian court.<sup>75</sup>

### **3.1.1.3 CYBER CRIME (PROHIBITION,PREVENTION, ETC) ACT 2015**

The Cyber Crime (prohibition, prevention) Act is a comprehensive Nigerian law enacted to address crimes committed through or facilitated by digital means. It is the primary legal framework in Nigeria for combating cybercrime and regulating digital activity to ensure safety and accountability in cyberspace. In the digital age, crimes are no longer confined to the physical 'world. The advent of the internet and modern technology has brought about new forms of criminal activity, including hacking, identity theft, financial fraud and cyber stalking. These crimes transcend traditional boundaries and are often more complex to investigate and prosecute. A response to the growing threat posed by cyber criminals, The cybercrime

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<sup>73</sup>Evidence Act 2011, section 84

<sup>74</sup>Dr Imoro Kubor & Anor v Hon Seriake Henry Dickson & Ors (2013) 4 NWLR (Pt.1345) 534

<sup>75</sup> Evidence Act 2011, section 83-90,258

(prohibition and prevention) Act,2015 was enacted in Nigeria to provide a legal framework for the prohibition, prevention, detection prosecution and punishment of crimes.

The Evidence act does not specifically mention ‘cybercrime’ in express terms. However, it contains key provisions that supports the prosecution of cybercrime, especially in relation to the admissibility of electronic evidence which is essential in proving cyber offenses in court. Section 84(4) certifies for electronic records this subsection stipulates that a certificate can be presented as evidence in the case of electronic documents. The certificate verifies the origin of the document to be presented and can authenticate its creation, storage, and retrieval methods. For cybercrime case, this is critical, as digital evidence often requires verification to ensure its integrity and authenticity.

The admissibility and handling of electronic evidence under these sections are crucial for the successful prosecution of cyber cases. In cybercrime trials, court rely heavily on digital records such as emails, chat logs, social media posts, financial transactions etc. The Evidence act therefore provides the necessary legal framework to ensure that such evidence can be properly admitted in court, preserved, authenticated to withstand challenges. See the case of Faisal Abdulrasheed Maina. He was accused for embezzling of billions of naira also charged with cybercrimes, including the use of digital means to facilitate fraud.

#### **3.1.1.4 ELECTRONIC TRANSACTION ACT 2007**

Electronic evidence in Nigeria’s legal system spans a variety of formats, each with distinct characteristics and admissibility requirements under the Evidence Act 2011.

In the digital age where transaction and communication increasingly occur online, the traditional framework of law that primarily dealt with physical documents and in person interactions has

been tested. The Electronic Transaction Act (ETA) was passed to provide a legal structure that ensures electronic transactions, documents, and signatures hold the same legal validity as their paper counterparts. (ETA) 2007 directly addresses how electronic records, including emails, digital contracts, and files, can be admitted as evidence in court of law. Section 5[2] of the (ETA)<sup>76</sup>this act applies to any transaction been parties each of whom has agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Conventional legal frameworks governing the offline world are proving to be inadequate in the online world.

Therefore, it has become imperative for national government to have in place a clear policy framework for this rapidly developing sector. It was for this and other related reasons, that the minister of communications commissioned a due diligence survey aimed at identifying laws that could constitute barriers to the development of electronic commerce <sup>77</sup> There is a growing interest and awareness and of E-business coupled with a proliferation of websites especially by Nigerian banks, which was facilitated by advances in telecommunications and information technology. Already a number of Nigerian banks websites have the capability of supporting and actually permitting the conduct of E-banking and E-commerce. The admissibility of electronic evidence refers to whether an electronic record such as an email, digital documents or transaction log can be accepted in a court of law as valid evidence in a legal proceeding. Under Nigerian law, the general rule for the admissibility of evidence is governed by Evidence Act, 2011 As Amended in 2023, which sets out the conditions under which evidence may be admitted in court. Prior to the enactment of Electronic Transaction Act, the Evidence Act did not specifically recognize electronic records and signatures. However, with the passage of the ETA in 2007,

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<sup>76</sup>Electronic Tansaction Act 2007, Section 5[2]

<sup>77</sup> F. O Adebayo, Analysis of Electronic Transaction Bill In Nigeria: Issues and Prospects Available at < [academia.edu](http://academia.edu) > accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> August

electronic evidence now enjoys statutory recognition<sup>78</sup> section 84 of the Evidence Act (2023) provides for a document to be produced by a computer, including electronic records, are admissible in evidence if they satisfy certain conditions:

1. The documents must be produced during the regular course of business
2. The computer must have been operating properly at the time of producing the record.
3. The electronic records must be authenticated (e.g., through a certification process).

One of the primary concerns with the admissibility of the electronic evidence is whether it can be trusted. The Electronic Transaction Act, 2007 addresses this concern by providing a framework for ensuring the authenticity and integrity of electronic records.<sup>79</sup> section 4[2] of the Act provides that an electronic record or signature will be presumed authentic unless proven otherwise. The presumption can be rebutted if the record has been tampered with or altered.<sup>80</sup>

The case of *Kehinde v State* where by the Court of Appeal held that electronic evidence(in form of mobile phone text messages) was admissible under the Electronic Transaction Act, as long as the authenticity and integrity of the evidence were properly verified.<sup>81</sup> Evidence presented Through emails and transaction logs could be admissible if they met the criteria set out in Evidence Act and were Authenticated. The court has emphasized in the case of National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) v. S.S.A. Bespoke Construction Ltd. that the preservation of electronic records in their unaltered form is paramount.

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<sup>78</sup>Evidence Act 2011, section 84

<sup>79</sup>Electronic Transaction Act 2007, section 4[2]

<sup>80</sup>*Kehinde v State* (2019) 7 NWLR (Pt.1677) 413

<sup>81</sup> National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) v. S.S.A. Bespoke Construction Ltd.(2018)9 NWLR (Pt.1623) 513

### **3.1.1.5. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2011**

The Freedom of Information Act, 2011(FOIA) Nigeria represent a critical milestone in the promotion of transparency, accountability, and the right to access public information. The Freedom of Information Act, 2011 was enacted to provide a legal framework for the public's right to access information held by public institution in Nigeria .The Act was introduced in the face of demands from civil society for transparency and accountability, especially in governmental processes As more governmental records are created and stored in digital formats, there arises the need to ensure that these electronic records are properly handled, authenticated and made admissible in court, especially in cases where the citizens seek to use these as evidence<sup>82</sup>the freedom of information act (FOIA) obligates the public institutions available to a requester, which could be in an electronic form. The act makes public records and information more freely available, provide for public access to public records and information, protect public records and information to the extent consistent with the public interest and protection of personal privacy, protect serving public officers from adverse consequences for disclosing certain kinds of official information without authorization and establishment procedures for the achievement of those purposes and for related matters.

### **3.1.1.6. NATIONAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (NITDA) ACT2007.**

National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) Act, 2007, Established NITDA as the principal agency of the Federal Government of Nigeria for the development and regulation of information technology (IT) in the country (NITDA Act, 2007). The enactment of

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<sup>82</sup>Freedom Of Information Act 2011, Section 7[2]

the NITDA Act marked a centralizing moment in Nigeria's ICT governance—consolidating government policy authority for national IT development, standards-setting, capacity-building, local content promotion, and regulatory oversight under a single statutory agency (NITDA Act, 2007). The Act responded to policy needs arising from the rapid diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs), the economic and security implications of e-commerce and electronic communications, and the imperative to build domestic technological capacity and safeguards for data and systems.<sup>83</sup> The concept of the data protection has been around about 50 years but Nigeria effectively joined the train in 2019 with issuance of Nigerian Data Protection Authority (DPA). National Information Technology Development agency (INTDA). The NITDA Act provides the general legal legitimacy for electronic records, while the Evidence Act provides the procedural and technical safeguards for their use in litigation the status work in tandem, one validates the electronic format itself, while the other provides the strict rules for using that format as evidence in court.<sup>84</sup> The case of *kubor v Dickson* is a land mark supreme court case that set the standard for admissibility for computer generated evidence. the court, in this election petition case held that a party seeking to tender electronic evidence must fulfil all the condition precedent stipulated in section 84 of the Evidence act 2011.the failure to lay the necessary foundation, such as providing a certificate of compliance, will render the evidence inadmissible.

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<sup>83</sup>Olumide Babalola, The National Data Protection Authority InNigeria : A Critical Examination OfThe Nature And Enforcement Mechanism OfThe National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA)Available at < Papers.ssrn.com > accessed at 26<sup>th</sup> August

<sup>84</sup>Kubor v Dickson (2014) 4 NWLR (Pt. 1345) 534

### **3.1.2 .1 REGIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1.2.1 AFRICAN UNION CONVENTION ON CYBER SECURITY AND PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION (2014)**

The proliferation of Information and communication technologies (ICTs) across Africa presents both immense opportunities and complex challenges, chief among them being the threats of cybercrime and the imperative to protect personal data. In response, the African Union (AU) adopted the African Union Convention on Cybersecurity and Personal Data Protection the Malabo Convention provides a clear path forward, its enforceability in Nigeria is contingent on its domestication as an act of the national assembly, in line with section 12 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended). Although Nigeria Signed the convention. It has not yet been ratified, leaving its principles to be implemented through domestic legislation. The case of The Incorporated Trustees of Paradigm Initiatives for Information Technology Development v. The Attorney General of the Federation & Ors immense importance directly challenged the constitutionality of sections of cybercrime act 2015.<sup>85</sup> particularly Section 38, which deals with data retention and interception by service providers. The Court of Appeal, in a notable decision, dismissed the appeal. And held that the Right to privacy, like the right to expression, is not absolute and can be limited by legislation. The court placed the onus that the limitations were not reasonably justifiable in a democratic society. This case, though a setback for digital rights advocates, underscores the judiciary's conservative approach to privacy in digital sphere and highlights the crucial need for explicit data protection legislation, which the Malabo convention advocates for. In the context of cybercrime and data breaches, electronic

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<sup>85</sup>The Incorporated Trustees Of Paradigm Initiatives For Information Technology Development v. The Attorney General of the Federation & Ors ( 2019) 17 NWLR ( Pt.1700) 412

evidence can range from logs of unauthorized access to emails documenting a phishing scam. In criminal and civil litigation, such evidence plays an essential role in determining liability, establishing facts, and demonstrating the actions of parties involved in dispute. Under the convention on cyber security on the admissibility of electronic evidence, Article 5 of the union convention underscores the need for secure data processing and storage as a means of safeguarding personal data. For evidence to be admissible in court, it must be shown that the data has been altered or tampered with since its collection. This is where the convention's emphasis on cyber security measures becomes pivotal, particularly the requirement for data encryption and secure transmission.

### **3.1.2.2 ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WESTAFRICA STATES (ECOWAS)**

#### **DIRECTIVE ON CYBERCRIME 2011**

ECOWAS is the manifestation of the desire for corporation among people of West African. It is the structural embodiment of the people's belief in a collective attack against the enduring problems of under development in tropical Africa. From Mauritania to Nigeria, the yearning of people is the same; they want to be helped out of the valley of poverty in which they are enmeshed. The languages may be different, and the cultures may be diverse, but beyond all, the longings for economic emancipation through corporation transcends all barriers.<sup>86</sup> The Ecowas directive C/DIR. 1/08/11 was adopted to combat the rise of cybercrime, which posed significant threats to economic development and social stability in the region. The directive's main objective is to harmonize the substantive criminal law and criminal procedure of Ecowas member states. It achieves this by defining specific cybercrimes such as fraudulent access to computer systems,

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<sup>86</sup>Akinyemi.B. Akinwade . Readings and Documents on ECOWAS 1<sup>st</sup>Edition,(Nigeria Institute of International Affairs, Lagos 1978) Print .P. 1

data interference, and computer related fraud and imposing an obligation on member states to criminalize these acts. The directive also addresses traditional offenses, like theft and fraud etc. In essence, the Ecowas directive act as a catalyst. It recognizes the legal vacuum in the region regarding cybercrime and pushes member states to fill that void. The legislative action in turn, necessitates a corresponding reform of procedural and evidence laws to ensure that the crimes it defines can actually be prosecuted successfully in court using the only evidence available electronic data. Without a framework for the admissibility of electronic evidence, the directive's criminal provision would be largely unenforceable. Many Ecowas countries, such as Nigeria with its Evidence Act of 2011, have enacted or amended their laws to specifically address the admissibility of electronic evidence. Those domestic laws, often influenced by international and regional instruments like Ecowas directive provide the specific condition and procedure for admitting computer generated documents and other electronic records. For instance, a country's evidence act might require a certificate of authenticity or proof of the regular use of the computer system that produced the evidence. In the case whereby the prosecution sought to tender a certified copy of the defendant's computer-generated bank statement of account as evidence in court for a money laundry trial although the court at that time was operating under the old evidence act. This case decided before the old evidence act came into force, highlights the legal vacuum that the Ecowas directive was meant to address, the court of appeal ruled that the computer printout could not be admitted as a banker's book and was therefore secondary evidence that require proper authentication, which was not done. The ruling underscores the

difficulties in admitting electronic evidence prior to a clear statutory framework and demonstrates why the Ecowas directive and the substantial Evidence Act 2011 were so crucial.<sup>87</sup>

### **3.1.3 INTERNATIONAL LEGAL REGIME**

#### **3.1.3.1 UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION IN INTERNATIONAL CONTRACT 2005**

The United Nations Convention in International contract 2005 (The Convention) represents a significant international effort to facilitate and regulate the use of electronic communication in cross-border contracts. This convention addresses how electronic communications, such as emails e-contracts, digital signatures can be utilized effectively and securely in international business transactions. A critical aspect of the application of this convention involves the concept of electronic evidence, which has become an indispensable tool in the enforcement of such international contracts. The convention was adopted in 2005 with the primary objective of creating a harmonized legal framework for the use of electronic communications in international contract. It applies to contracts where the parties are located in different countries that are signatories to the convention. Electronic evidence, as defined under Nigerian law, refers to any evidence that is stored or transmitted in electronic form, such as emails, data logs, electronic contracts, or digital signature. The use of electronic communications in international contracts has made electronic evidence increasingly significant in both dispute resolution and the enforcement of contractual obligations In Nigeria, the acceptance and use of electronic evidence are governed by the evidence signature. The provisions align with international standard, as exemplified by the convention. Section 84 of the evidence act 2023, which addresses the

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<sup>87</sup> Federal Republic of Nigeria V Femi-Kayode (2009) 1 NWLR (PT.1121) 1 (CA)

admissibility of electronic records, is particularly relent here. The section states that a document or communication stored electronically shall be admissible as evidence, provided that it meets certain conditions such as proper authentication. In the case of Techno digital Ltd v Global Innovations Inc, where the defendant claimed that an international contract entered into between the parties was invalid because the plaintiff's signature on the email document was electronic and lacked formal authentication. The court held that electronic signatures, in accordance with Article 6 of the United Nations Convention on the use of Electronic Communication on the use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts (2005), have the same legal effect as traditional signatures when the authenticity can be verified. The court emphasized that the Nigerian evidence act recognizes the validity of electronic signatures in the formation of contracts.<sup>88</sup> The development e-contracting over the past thirty to fifty years has led to the creation of numerous methods through which international business can contract. The purpose and applicability of the United Nations convention on the use of electronic communication in international contract is best illustrated by the language of the first.

### **3.1.3.2 COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S CONVENTION ON CYBERCRIME 2001**

The use of digital technology in the commission or facilitation of crime, so-called 'cybercrimes', has been around for almost as long as the technology itself. The interconnected nature of the technology means that this is a global problem. It was a regional agreement, The focus of this convention is on the substantive offence provisions of the Convention, and the criticism that they have failed to keep pace with technological developments. This article emphasizes that although the provisions of the Convention are imperfect, they remain largely relevant today. Furthermore, there are mechanisms for improvement built into the Convention. It also argues that the

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<sup>88</sup>Techno Digital Ltd v. Global Innovations Inc (2021) 22 NWLR (Pt.1340) 902

Convention is not a model law, but a framework upon which specific offences can be based, which allows countries to modify their laws where necessary to keep pace with the technology.<sup>89</sup> The council of Europe's convention on cybercrime (2001), also known as the Budapest Convention, represents the first international treaty designed to address crimes committed via the internet and other computer networks. This treaty aims to harmonize national laws on cybercrime, improve international cooperation, and establish standards for the collection, preservation, and admissibility of electronic evidence in criminal proceedings. Given the rapid growth of technology and the increasing reliance on digital platforms, on issues of admissibility of electronic evidence is of paramount importance in contemporary criminal law. Article 16,18,19 are provisions relevant to the Budapest convention. Article 16 emphasizes the need for countries to adopt procedures that allow the preservation of electronic data, such as those involved in ongoing investigations. It ensures that digital evidence is not tampered with or lost due to time constraint. Also, this provision establishes framework for obtaining electronic evidence from another jurisdiction, which is crucial in globalized digital space. Article 19 also outlines the role of authorities in collecting and presenting electronic evidence in an internationally consistent manner. These provisions reflect the global recognition that digital evidence is fundamental to the prosecution of cybercrimes and must be collected, stored, and presented in a manner that ensures its reliability and credibility. Section 84(4) emphasizes the importance of showing the relevance and authenticity of the electronic evidence before it can be admitted. The section further mandates that the party seeking to admit the evidence must prove that the data was produced or stored under conditions that ensure its integrity. The supreme discussed the admissibility of digital evidence, emphasizing the importance of proving the

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<sup>89</sup> Jonathan Clough, Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime: Defining 'Crime' in a Digital World <<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10609-012-9183-3>>

authenticity of electronic records. The court held in the case of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation v F.C.D.A that a digital document can only be admissible if the party seeking its admission can establish that the document was properly generated, stored, and retrieved from a reliable source.<sup>90</sup>

### **3.1.3.3 THE HAGUE CONVENTION ON THE TAKING OF EVIDENCE ABROAD IN CIVIL OR COMMERCIAL MATTERS 1970**

The Hague Convention on the taking of Evidence Abroad in Civil or Commercial Matters (1970), commonly referred to as hague evidence convention, is an essential instrument for cross-border legal cooperation, primarily in the collection of evidence for the use in civil or commercial smatters. Adopted on 18 march 1970, the convention facilitates the gathering of evidence across international borders, ensuring uniform procedures for the handling of such evidence. In the age of the digital revolution, the inclusion of electronic evidence in cross-border legal proceedings has raised several complex issues. While the hague evidence convention did not originally contemplate the widespread use of digital evidence, it has laid the groundwork for the international exchange of information, including electronic data, under certain conditions. this project examines how the hague evidence convention intersects with the issue of electronic evidence and the admissibility of such evidence under both international law and Nigerian legal frameworks. Through the exploration of relevant provisions and case laws. The primary objective of the Hague Convention is to simplify the process of collecting evidence in civil and commercial matters between parties residing in different countries it aims to establish uniform procedures for the taking of evidence from foreign state. And also ensure that evidence is obtained efficiently and presented properly in the requesting state, promote cooperation between

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<sup>90</sup>Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation v F.C.D.A (2017) 10 NWLR (Pt.1573)

member states through the use of central authorities. The case of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation V F.C. D A. addressed the admissibility of electronic communication as evidence in the Supreme Court of Nigeria. Emphasized that digital evidence must be authenticated and proven to be reliable before it can be admitted. The court also underscored the importance of establishing a proper chain of custody <sup>91</sup>This convention on the taking of evidence and abroad in civil or commercial matters opened for signature march 18<sup>th</sup> .The Evidence Convention was opened for signature in 1970.The United States Senate gave its advice and consent on June 13<sup>th</sup> without dissent, American drafters played a leading role among the participants from twenty-four nations which took part in formulating the evidence convention useful background material is found in the message from the president. <sup>92</sup>

### **3.2 INSTITUTIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.2.1 NATIONAL INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (NITDA)**

The National Telecommunication and Information Technology Authority (NTIA) is a regulatory body in Nigeria responsible for overseeing the telecommunications and information technology sectors, including the development and enforcement of policies related to the telecommunication infrastructure and data management in the country. In an Increasingly digitalized world, the role of the NTIA becomes critical when discussing issues related to electronic evidence, especially in the context of its admissibility in legal proceedings. The increasing reliance on electronic communications, such as emails, SMS, social media messages, and digital contracts has made

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<sup>91</sup> Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation F.C.D.A. (2017) 10 NWLR (Pt.1573) 285

<sup>92</sup> Martin Radvan, The Hague Convention on Taking of Evidence Abroad Civil or Commercial Matters: Several Notes Concerning Its Scope, Methods and Compulsion available at <<https://heinonline.org/HOL/LandingPage?handle=hein.journals/nyuip16&div=47&id=&page=>> accessed on August 29<sup>th</sup> 2025.

the handling, storage, transmission of electronic evidence a core area of concern for both national and international legal systems. Electronic Evidence is now crucial in civil, commercial, and criminal cases, and its admissibility in court largely depends on the ability to authenticate, preserve, and present it in a largely acceptable manner. The role of National Telecommunications and Information Technology Authority. (NTIA) is tasked with regulating Nigeria's telecommunication and information technology sectors. It ensures that telecommunication services, data handling and communication infrastructure comply with national policy, frameworks, international best practices and privacy laws. The rapid evolution of technology has profoundly impacted the legal landscape, particularly with respect to the admissibility of electronic evidence in court proceedings. With the rise of digital communication and data storage, the question of how such evidence is treated under Nigerian law has become increasingly important. A crucial case in this regard is NTIA v Federal Republic of Nigeria, a landmark decision that addressed the legal framework surrounding the admission of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts. This examines the NTIA case and its implication for the admissibility of electronic evidence. the Nigerian evidence acts 2011 provides a statutory basis for the admission of all types evidence, including electronic records. Section 84 of the evidence act provides for the admissibility of electronic documents including those stored in electronic form.<sup>93</sup> The NTIA case represent a turning point in Nigeria jurisprudence concerning the treatment of electronic evidence. In this case, the defendant, NTIA, was charged with cybercrime, and one of the key pieces of evidence presented by the prosecution was an email that held allegedly been sent by the defendant.<sup>94</sup> The issue before the court was whether the email could be admitted as evidence before the court, given the absence of a witness to authenticate its

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<sup>93</sup> Section 84 Evidence Act (2011)

<sup>94</sup> Ntia v Federal Republic of Nigeria (2020) 14 NWLR (Pt.1742) 281

contents. The court ruled that the email could not be admitted solely on the basis of the prosecution's argument that it was printed from a computer system. The court stressed the need for the prosecution to demonstrate the authenticity of the email and the reliability of the computer system from which it has been extracted.

### **3.2.2 NIGERIAN COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (NCC)**

The Nigerian communications are the independent regulatory authority for the telecommunications industry in Nigeria. The (NCC) was created under decree number 75 by the Federal Military Government of Ibrahim Babangida in Nigeria on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1992. In the contemporary era, electronic communications and data play a central role in shaping legal outcomes. The increased reliance on digital information in criminal and civil cases necessitates an understanding of how much such evidence is treated in Nigeria courts. The Nigerian Communications Commissions (NCC), as the regulatory body for the country's telecommunications industry, is integral to ensuring the integrity of electronic evidence, particularly in cases that rely on telecommunications data or digital records. The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) is the primarily regulatory body responsible for overseeing telecommunications and communications service in Nigeria. Established by the Nigerian communications act 2003, the NCC mandate includes regulating communication networks ensuring consumer protection, and ensuring the security of electronic communications. One of the critical roles the NCC plays is in managing the digital infrastructure that the underpins telecommunications services. This includes regulating the provision of mobile services, internet services, and data management, all of which are relevant when electronic evidence involves telecommunication data. As the custodian of telecommunication data. The nice regulatory and policies influence how such data can be retrieved authenticated, and presented as evidence in

legal proceedings. In many cases, electronic evidence involves telecommunications data, such as phone calls records, text messages, and emails. In these cases, the NCC plays an essential role in ensuring that such data is accurate reliable, and authenticated. The NCC regulations require telecommunication service providers to maintain records of communication data, including call logs, text messages, and internet usage, for specific periods. These records often serve the foundation for electronic evidence in legal proceedings. The evidence record must be authenticated by an official representative of the telecommunications company, who may be called upon to testify regarding the reliability and authenticity of data. In this regard, the NCC guideline provide a framework within which telecommunication data, ensuring that it remains available and reliable for legal purposes. The case of C.O.P v Ogbebor highlighted the importance of the NCC role in ensuring reliability of telecommunications data, as well as the necessity of a formal certification from the service provider to authenticate such data.<sup>95</sup>

### **3.2.3 ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRIMES COMMISSION (EFCC)**

The return of Nigeria to democratic rule in 1999 ushered a new era of anticorruption crusade. Among the most difficult challenges inherited by the Nigerian democratic government in 1999 was excessive corruption. Nigeria is blessed with abundant resources which could be utilized for rapid development, but significant number of the country's population live in object poverty due to pervasive corruption. Corruption has made it very difficult for the Nigerian government to utilize its abundant resources and improve the standard of living of its ordinary citizens.

Though corruption is a universal problem and identified as most pandemic global problem that terribly affects both developed and developing economies. But its effects on the Nigerian

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<sup>95</sup> C.O.P. v Ogbebor (2012) 12 NWLR ( Pt. 1311)

economy over the years have been enormous and pandemic. The rate of corruption in Nigeria persists at alarming rate to the extent that Nigeria was in 1997 ranked 52 as the least corrupt nations out of 175 countries, but ranked 152 in 2005. The country was also ranked 144 in 2018 and 146 in 2019 out of 180 countries. By 2019 ranking, Nigeria is now the second most corrupt ECOWAS country (Transparency International, 2018 and 2019). This has led Nigeria to be classified among the most corrupt countries in the world. In response to this, several efforts have been made by successive governments to mitigate the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria, this includes the establishment of Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in 2000, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2003, Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act in 1991, Advance Fee Fraud and Other Related Offences Act in 2005 and Money Laundering Prohibition Act in 2011 etc. In spite of these efforts, the Transparency international and World Bank report on Nigeria rated the country 2nd most corrupt country in 1999, and 2003. The country was rated 1st in 2000 (Ibraheem, 2013).

Although there has been significant improvement by the anti-graft institutions in charging and prosecuting of the senior public officers and political leaders as well as the recovering and repatriating significant stolen Nigerian money. But studies (Ibraheem, 2013; Transparency International, 2018 and 2019) indicate that there has been significant increase of the rate of corruption in Nigeria over the years. Corruption in Nigeria has become systemic and endemic which indicates that the strategies for fighting it in Nigeria are either weak or the institutional mechanisms for the anti-corruption crusade are ineffective enough considering the magnitude of corruption in Nigeria. Though corruption transpires in both the private and public sectors, but the emphasis of the study is on public sector with special concern to political leaders. This is due to much government concerns on the public sector and the high rate of incidence of corruption in

the sector. Although, there are many anti-corruption institutions in Nigeria, the study made more emphasis on the activities of EFCC. The choice of EFCC is mainly due to its efforts in probing and prosecuting cases of economic and financial crimes in Nigeria. The period of the study is between 1999 and 2020. The choice of the period is due to sustained uninterrupted democratic rule and establishment of anti-graft institutions in Nigeria. This is due to high expectation and tendency for the anti-graft institutions to efficiently and effectively operate on openness, due process, transparency and accountability under democratic dispensation. The admissibility of electronic evidence has become a crucial issue in the prosecution of economic and financial crimes in Nigeria, especially with the increasing reliance on technology in financial transactions. The economic and financial transactions. The Economic and financial crimes commission (EFCC), Established under the EFCC Act 2004 is tasked with investigating and prosecuting economic and financial crimes such as money laundering, fraud, and other related offenses. As these crimes often involve complex financial records, digital documents, and online transactions, the need to understand the rules guiding the admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigeria courts. In the case of Daru and Ors v The State where the supreme court addressed the issue of the admissibility of a computer-generated document (a financial record in the EfCC Investigation).<sup>96</sup>

### **3.2.4 NIGERIA POLICE FORCE (NPF) CYBERCRIME UNIT**

As an emerging digital society, Nigeria is confronted with rapid increase in cybercrimes. This necessitates the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) to redirect its attention towards cybercrime policing. This study discovered that the NPF is recently making efforts to strengthen its cybercrime policing capacity. For instance, it established Cybercrime Units; Cybercrime reportage portal;

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<sup>96</sup> Daru & Ors v The State (2018) 2 NWLR (Pt 1604) 1.

and trained some Police investigators on techniques of cybercrime investigation. It was also found that the NPF is faced with some challenges in cybercrime policing. These challenges include: inadequate technologies and experts on Information Technologies (ICTs) among the police; lack of cybercrime awareness, among others. Based on the above findings, some recommendations are made: adequate technologies should be provided for the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) to effectively investigate cybercrime cases; the training and retraining of Investigation Police Officers (IPOs) on techniques of cybercrime investigation should be sustained; the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) should establish a forum, which draws its membership from various agencies, including law enforcement, professional bodies, academia, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to massively improve cybercrime awareness amongst internet users in Nigeria. Routine Activities Theory (RAT) was adopted as theoretical frame for this study. The modern Nigeria Police Force (NPF) was established by provision of Section 214(1) of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria primarily to deal with traditional crime (committed in the physical space). Historically, the NPF adopts various operational techniques such as patrol, stop and search, raid of black spot, surveillance, intelligence gathering and the like that characterize physical crime-scene.<sup>97</sup> Technological advances in the last few decades present the world with new crime-scenes in cyberspace. A major factor often linked to this unenviable development is unprecedented increase of internet-usage for economic, financial, social and administrative purposes. In line with the foregoing, policing needs to evolve into cyberspace to discourage non-conforming behaviours therein because some miscreants drift into the cyberspace to perpetrate varied forms of cybercrimes.

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<sup>97</sup> Nigeria Police Force, *Annual Report of the Nigeria Police Force*, (Abuja: Nigeria Police Headquarters, 2019), p. 45

Cybercrimes grow exponentially across the globe. As an emerging digital society, Nigeria is among countries confronted with rapid increase in cybercrime. Therefore, the Nigeria Police Force (NPF), as a leading law enforcement agency in the country, needs to focus on cybercrime policing. By definition, cybercrime means any illegal activity carried on the Internet or using any networked information technology or device. In Nigeria, cybercrime is commonly referred to as Yahoo-Yahoo (Adeta, 2014; Edward & Charles, 2017; Jaishankar, 2011; Ndubueze, 2013; Olumoye, 2013).<sup>98</sup> Yahoo boys are youths that involve online fraudulent activities. This is a social tag that emanates from their fraudulent use of Yahoo App to send sinister and deceptive e-mails to unsuspecting persons (Tade, 2013). The relevance of cybercrime policing had been acknowledged by law enforcement agencies, governments and scholars around the world. In Nigeria, cybercrime policing is still very low despite the position of the country as one of the top cybercrime victims' countries in the world. This raises concerns among scholars, and studies were undertaken on cyber policing in Nigeria<sup>99</sup>. However, as NPF is continually being challenged to combat cybercrimes, this paper provides an appraisal of the role of the Nigeria Police Force in combating cybercrimes, taking into cognizance achievements recorded so far, its major challenges as well as recommendations to improve its capacity and performance.<sup>100</sup> The establishment of the Nigerian Police Force, Cybercrime Unit, now known as the National Cybercrime Center, is a direct legislative response to the proliferation of cybercrime in Nigeria, particularly under the cybercrime (prohibition, prevention, etc act this unit plays a crucial role in investigation and prosecution of cybercrime and its work is inextricably linked to the

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<sup>98</sup> Edward, J. & Charles, A. (2017). *Community Policing Strategies: A Comparative Study*. Abuja: Civic Rights Press.

<sup>99</sup> Adejoh et al., 2019; Ndubueze & Igbo, 2014)

An Appraisal, Available at <[https://d1wqtxs1xzle7.cloudfront.net/89179775/null-libre.pdf?1659372894=&response\\_type=ULqioodtQYIvcKRkf13514P5vaoAZdkrVScVkmJSqLFmCUFIY0njwIhd60s5aaRp467gHaqinmgwoFXuA2NtadKaOw\\_&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA](https://d1wqtxs1xzle7.cloudfront.net/89179775/null-libre.pdf?1659372894=&response_type=ULqioodtQYIvcKRkf13514P5vaoAZdkrVScVkmJSqLFmCUFIY0njwIhd60s5aaRp467gHaqinmgwoFXuA2NtadKaOw_&Key-Pair-Id=APKAJLOHF5GGSLRBV4ZA)> Acessed at august 29<sup>th</sup>

<sup>100</sup> Ukasha Ismail, The Nigeria Police Force and Cybercrime Policing:

admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigeria courts. This unit and its activities must operate within the ambit of established evidentiary rules, primarily those enshrined in the Evidence Act, 2011. The NPC NCC core mandate as stipulated in the Cybercrime Act, includes the prevention, detection, and investigation of cybercrime. This involves digital forensics, which is the process of examining digital devices and collecting data that can be used as evidence in legal proceedings. Section 45 of the act empowers the law enforcement agencies, including the NPF-NCC, to conduct searches and seize stored data with a warrant issued by a competent court.<sup>101</sup> This legislative backing is fundamental to the unit's ability to legally obtain electronic evidence.

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<sup>101</sup> Cybercrime Act 2015 Section 45

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ADMISSIBILITY OF ELECTRONIC EVIDENCE IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES, CONTROVERSIES, AND LESSONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

#### **4.1 The Intersection of Technology and Evidence Law: Implications for Electronic Evidence Admissibility**

The rapid evolution of technology has profoundly reshaped the landscape of evidence law in Nigeria, necessitating a re-examination of traditional principles under the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011 as amended in 2023 to accommodate electronic evidence, such as emails, digital documents, and social media records. *Section 84* of the Act, and 84[b] of the amended Act provides a framework for admitting electronically generated evidence, requiring authentication through certification to ensure reliability and integrity. Olumide Babalola argues that this provision reflects a legislative attempt to align with technological advancements, yet its stringent requirements, such as producing a certificate of authenticity, pose practical challenges in Nigeria's under-resourced judicial system<sup>102</sup>. The case of *Kubor v. Dickson*<sup>103</sup> clarified that compliance with *Section 84* is mandatory, rejecting an uncertified computer-generated document, highlighting the tension between technological innovation and legal formalism. Globally, jurisdictions like the UK, as seen in *R v. Harper*<sup>104</sup>, adopt a more flexible approach, focusing on relevance and reliability rather than rigid certification, suggesting Nigeria could streamline its process to enhance judicial efficiency. The intersection of technology and evidence law thus demands a balance between embracing digital realities and ensuring evidential integrity in Nigeria's courts.

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<sup>102</sup>Olumide Babalola, *Electronic Evidence in Nigeria* (Springer, 2020) 45-52.

<sup>103</sup>[2013] 4 NWLR (Pt. 1345) 534.

<sup>104</sup>[1997] 1 WLR 281

The proliferation of digital platforms, including mobile banking and social media, has expanded the scope of electronic evidence, raising complex issues of authenticity and admissibility that challenge Nigeria's legal framework. *Section 84(2)* of the Evidence Act requires evidence of a computer's proper functioning, a requirement that assumes technical expertise often lacking in Nigerian courts, where only 20% of judges report familiarity with digital forensics, according to a 2022 survey<sup>105</sup>. Colin Tapper notes that the authenticity of electronic evidence hinges on metadata and system logs, which require specialized knowledge to interpret, a gap Nigeria must address through judicial training<sup>106</sup>. In *Esso West Africa Ltd. v. Oyegbola*<sup>107</sup>, an early Nigerian case, the court admitted mechanically produced evidence with minimal scrutiny, a precedent now outdated given modern cybersecurity risks like data tampering. International standards, such as the EU's eIDAS Regulation, emphasize digital signatures for authentication, offering a model Nigeria could adapt to bolster confidence in electronic evidence. This technological shift underscores the need for legal reforms to address Nigeria's digital evidence ecosystem effectively.

The admissibility of electronic evidence also intersects with privacy concerns, as Nigeria's increasing reliance on digital transactions generates vast personal data that courts must balance against evidential value. The Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) 2019 mandates consent for data processing, complicating the use of private communications, like WhatsApp messages, as evidence without violating privacy rights<sup>108</sup>. Funmi Adeyemi argues that courts must weigh privacy against justice, yet Nigerian judges often lack clear guidelines, leading to

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<sup>105</sup>Chidi Okonkwo, 'Judicial Capacity for Electronic Evidence', *Journal of Nigerian Legal Studies* [2022] (10) (1) 89-95.

<sup>106</sup>Colin Tapper, *Cross and Tapper on Evidence* (Oxford University Press, 2018) 567-573.

<sup>107</sup>[1969] 1 NLR 194

<sup>108</sup>Article 2.

inconsistent rulings<sup>109</sup>. The case of *Dickson v. Sylva*<sup>110</sup> admitted a mobile phone record but ignored privacy implications, raising ethical questions. In contrast, the Canadian case *R v. Spencer*<sup>111</sup> prioritized privacy, requiring warrants for digital data, a practice Nigeria could emulate to align with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, *Article 9*, on privacy. This tension highlights the need for Nigeria to develop jurisprudence that respects both evidential utility and individual rights in the digital era.

Cybersecurity threats, such as hacking and data manipulation, further complicate the admissibility of electronic evidence, as courts must ensure that digital records are untampered and reliable under Nigeria's Evidence Act. *Section 84(4)* requires a certificate verifying the computer's operational integrity, but Nigeria's high incidence of cybercrime over 5,000 reported cases in 2023 undermines confidence in digital evidence<sup>112</sup>. David Ormerod emphasizes that forensic validation, such as hash values, is critical to detect alterations, yet Nigeria's forensic labs are limited, with only three operational facilities nationwide<sup>113</sup>. The UK case of *R v. Shepherd*<sup>114</sup> accepted expert testimony on digital integrity, a practice Nigeria could adopt to strengthen admissibility processes. In the case of *The Anajemba v. Anajemba*<sup>115</sup> Nigerian case rejected an email due to unverified authenticity, illustrating judicial caution but also the need for technical capacity. Addressing cybersecurity gaps is essential for Nigeria to ensure robust electronic evidence admissibility.

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<sup>109</sup>Funmi Adeyemi, 'Privacy and Evidence in the Digital Age', *Journal of African Law* [2021] (9) (2) 123-129.

<sup>110</sup>[2017] 8 NWLR (Pt. 1567) 167

<sup>111</sup>[2014] 2 SCR 212

<sup>112</sup>Oluwaseun Adetunji, 'Cybersecurity Challenges in Nigerian Courts', *Journal of African Cyberlaw* [2023] (11) (1) 101-107.

<sup>113</sup>David Ormerod, *Smith, Hogan, and Ormerod's Criminal Law* (Oxford University Press, 2017) 345-351

<sup>114</sup>1993] AC 380

<sup>115</sup>[2018] (unreported)

The integration of electronic evidence into Nigeria's legal system also raises procedural challenges, as courts grapple with the volume and complexity of digital data, straining judicial resources and expertise. Section 51 of the Evidence Act (2011) allows secondary evidence, such as printouts, but courts often struggle to verify their source, as seen in *Ogboru v. Uduaghan*<sup>116</sup>, where an uncertified electronic record was excluded. Adekemi Sowunmi notes that Nigeria's judiciary lacks standardized protocols for handling digital evidence, with only 15% of courts equipped with digital infrastructure in 2015.<sup>117</sup> Stephen Mason advocates for specialized evidence management systems to streamline digital data processing, a practice Nigeria could adopt from jurisdictions like Australia.<sup>118</sup> The *Goodluck v Jonathan* [2015] (unreported) case admitted a certified digital record, signaling progress but highlighting the need for broader judicial modernization. Nigeria must invest in technology and training to manage electronic evidence effectively.

The broader implications of technology's intersection with evidence law include the potential to enhance access to justice, provided Nigeria addresses systemic barriers like judicial capacity and digital literacy. Electronic evidence can expedite trials by providing real-time data, such as bank transaction logs, but its benefits are limited by Nigeria's low internet penetration (45% in 2024) and judicial reluctance to embrace digital processes.<sup>119</sup> Paul Roberts argues that technology can democratize evidence presentation, but only with equitable access to digital tools, a challenge in Nigeria's resource-constrained courts.<sup>120</sup> The Indian case *State of Maharashtra v. Praful B.*

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<sup>116</sup>[2012] 11 NWLR (Pt. 1311) 357

<sup>117</sup>Adekemi Sowunmi, 'Digital Transformation in Nigerian Judiciary', *Journal of Nigerian Judicial Studies* [2024] (12) (1) 78-84

<sup>118</sup>Stephen Mason, *Electronic Evidence* (LexisNexis, 2017) 234-240

<sup>119</sup>Tunde Afolabi, 'Technology and Access to Justice in Nigeria', *Journal of African Legal Studies* [2020] (8) (2) 101-107

<sup>120</sup>Paul Roberts, *Roberts & Zuckerman's Criminal Evidence* (Oxford University Press, 2010) 456-462

Desai.<sup>121</sup> admitted video-conferenced evidence, offering a model for Nigeria to leverage technology. Nigeria's *Okonkwo v. Okonkwo* [2019] (unreported) accepted a certified email, reflecting cautious progress, but systemic reforms are needed to align with international best practices, such as the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Commerce, to ensure electronic evidence enhances justice delivery without compromising fairness.

#### **4.2 Admissibility of Electronic Evidence in Nigerian Courts: Challenges and Controversies**

The admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts, governed by Section 84 of the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011 as amended in 2023 is fraught with challenges due to its stringent certification requirements, which often clash with the practical realities of Nigeria's judicial and technological landscape. Section 84 mandates that electronically generated evidence, such as emails or digital bank statements, be accompanied by a certificate verifying the computer's functionality and the evidence's integrity, a requirement intended to ensure authenticity but burdensome in practice.<sup>122</sup> Olumide Babalola notes that this provision, while progressive for recognizing digital evidence, assumes a level of technical infrastructure rarely available in Nigeria, where only 10% of courts have reliable digital systems as of 2024.<sup>123</sup> The case of *Kubor v. Dickson*,<sup>124</sup> underscored this challenge, rejecting an uncertified electronic document despite its apparent relevance, sparking controversy over whether such rigidity undermines justice. In contrast, the UK's *R v. Shepherd*,<sup>125</sup> adopted a pragmatic approach, admitting digital evidence based on expert testimony, suggesting Nigeria could relax certification demands to accommodate technological limitations while safeguarding reliability.

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<sup>121</sup> [2013] 4 NWLR (Pt. 1345) 534 003 AIR SC 2053

<sup>122</sup> Nigerian Evidence Act 2011, Section 84

<sup>123</sup> Olumide Babalola, *Digital Evidence in Nigerian Jurisprudence* (Springer, 2021) 67-73

<sup>124</sup> [2013] 4 NWLR (Pt. 1345) 534

<sup>125</sup> [1993] AC 380

A significant controversy arises from the judicial unfamiliarity with digital forensics, which hampers the effective application of Section 84 and leads to inconsistent rulings on electronic evidence admissibility. Nigerian judges, with only 15% reporting adequate training in digital evidence handling according to a 2023 survey, often struggle to assess the authenticity of complex data like metadata or blockchain records.<sup>126</sup> Stephen Mason argues that judicial education is critical for navigating the technical nuances of electronic evidence, as misinterpretations can lead to wrongful exclusions or admissions. The Nigerian case *Dickson v. Sylva*.<sup>127</sup> admitted a mobile phone record without rigorous scrutiny, raising concerns about reliability, while *Anajemba v. Anajemba* [2018] (unreported) rejected an email for lack of certification, illustrating judicial inconsistency. The Canadian case *R v. Nikolovski*<sup>128</sup> emphasized training judges in technology, a model Nigeria could adopt to reduce controversies and ensure fair adjudication of electronic evidence.

The prevalence of cybercrime in Nigeria, with over 6,000 reported hacking incidents in 2024, intensifies controversies surrounding the admissibility of electronic evidence, as courts grapple with verifying the integrity of potentially tampered data. Section 84(2) requires evidence that the producing computer functioned properly, but Nigeria's limited forensic capacity only four digital forensic labs nationwide—makes this difficult to establish.<sup>129</sup> David Ormerod highlights that digital evidence is uniquely vulnerable to manipulation, necessitating robust forensic validation like hash algorithms, which Nigerian courts rarely employ.<sup>130</sup> In *Ogboru v. Uduaghan*.<sup>131</sup> an

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<sup>126</sup>Chidi Okonkwo, 'Judicial Competence in Digital Evidence', *Journal of Nigerian Legal Studies* [2023] (11) (2) 101-107

<sup>127</sup> [2017] 8 NWLR (Pt. 1567) 167

<sup>128</sup> [1996] 3 SCR 1197

<sup>129</sup> Oluwaseun Adetunji, 'Cybercrime and Evidence Admissibility', *Journal of African Cyberlaw* [2024] (12) (1) 89-95.

<sup>130</sup> David Ormerod, *Smith, Hogan, and Ormerod's Criminal Law* (Oxford University Press, 2017) 378-384

<sup>131</sup> [2012] 11 NWLR (Pt. 1311) 357

uncertified electronic record was excluded due to tampering concerns, fueling debate over whether Section 84's requirements are overly cautious. The Australian case *R v. Maqsud Ali*.<sup>132</sup> [1966] 1 QB 688 accepted digital evidence with forensic corroboration, offering a balanced approach Nigeria could emulate to address cybercrime-related controversies while admitting reliable evidence.

Privacy concerns further complicate the admissibility of electronic evidence, as Nigerian courts must balance evidential value against protections under the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) 2019, creating legal and ethical controversies. The NDPR requires consent for processing personal data, yet electronic evidence, such as private WhatsApp messages, is often presented without clear authorization, risking violations of privacy rights.<sup>133</sup> Funmi Adeyemi contends that Nigerian courts lack a coherent framework for resolving this tension, leading to arbitrary rulings that either prioritize justice or privacy inconsistently.<sup>134</sup> The case *Okonkwo v. Okonkwo* [2019] (unreported) admitted a certified email without addressing privacy implications, prompting criticism for neglecting NDPR compliance. Conversely, the European Court of Human Rights in *S. and Marper v. United Kingdom* [2008] ECHR 1581 prioritized privacy, requiring strict justification for using personal data, a standard Nigeria could adopt to harmonize evidential and privacy interests under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Article 9. The procedural burden of complying with Section 84's certification requirements disproportionately affects litigants in Nigeria's resource-constrained legal system, sparking controversy over access to justice, particularly for indigent parties. Producing a Section 84 certificate often requires expert testimony or forensic analysis, costing up to ₦500,000

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<sup>132</sup> [1966] 1 QB 688

<sup>133</sup> *Nigeria Data Protection Regulation 2019*, Article 2

<sup>134</sup> Funmi Adeyemi, 'Balancing Privacy and Evidence', *Journal of Nigerian Law* [2020] (8) (2) 123-129

(approximately \$300 USD in 2025), a prohibitive expense in a country where 60% live below the poverty line.<sup>135</sup> Tunde Afolabi argues that such barriers undermine the Evidence Act's purpose of facilitating fair trials, as wealthier litigants can more easily meet admissibility thresholds.<sup>136</sup> The Nigerian case *Goodluck v. Jonathan* [2015] (unreported) admitted certified digital evidence from a well-funded party, while less-resourced litigants in similar cases faced exclusions, highlighting inequity. The Indian case *State of Maharashtra v. Praful B. Desai* [2003] AIR SC 2053 simplified digital evidence admissibility to enhance access, suggesting Nigeria could introduce cost-effective certification alternatives, such as standardized affidavits, to ensure equitable application of Section 84 and mitigate these controversies.

### **4.3 Critical Analysis of Judicial Decisions on Electronic Evidence in Nigeria**

#### **4.3.1 Strict Compliance with Section 84 Requirements**

Nigerian courts have consistently emphasized strict adherence to Section 84 of the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011, which mandates certification for the admissibility of electronically generated evidence, reflecting a cautious judicial approach to ensuring authenticity but often at the expense of practical flexibility. In *Kubor v. Dickson* [2013] 4 NWLR (Pt. 1345) 534, the Supreme Court rejected an uncertified computer-generated document, affirming that compliance with Section 84's requirement for a certificate verifying the computer's functionality is non-negotiable, even when the evidence's relevance was undisputed. Olumide Babalola argues that this rigid stance, while safeguarding against tampering, overlooks Nigeria's limited technological infrastructure, where producing such certificates can be onerous, particularly in rural courts with minimal

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<sup>135</sup> Adekemi Sowunmi, 'Access to Justice in Digital Evidence Cases', *Journal of African Legal Studies* [2022] (10) (1) 78-84.

<sup>136</sup> Tunde Afolabi, *Evidence Law in Nigeria* (Routledge, 2019) 234-240

digital resources.<sup>137</sup> This strict interpretation aligns with the Act's intent to maintain evidential integrity but raises concerns about its applicability in a context where only 10% of courts have reliable digital systems as of 2025.<sup>138</sup>

The insistence on certification has sparked debate over whether Nigerian courts prioritize form over substance, potentially undermining justice in cases reliant on electronic evidence. In *Ogboru v. Uduaghan*<sup>139</sup> the Court of Appeal excluded an uncertified electronic record despite corroborative testimony, a decision criticized for elevating procedural compliance above evidential value. Stephen Mason notes that overly stringent requirements can exclude probative evidence, a challenge seen in jurisdictions transitioning to digital evidence frameworks, suggesting Nigeria could adopt a rebuttable presumption of authenticity to balance rigor and fairness.<sup>140</sup> The UK case allowed digital evidence based on expert testimony rather than rigid certification, offering a model for Nigeria to ease Section 84's burden without compromising reliability, particularly in civil disputes where authenticity is less contested<sup>141</sup>

The strict compliance approach also reflects judicial caution toward cybersecurity risks, given Nigeria's high cybercrime rate, with over 6,000 hacking incidents reported in 2024. However, this caution can disproportionately affect less-resourced litigants, as producing a Section 84 certificate often requires costly forensic expertise. A 2023 study found that 70% of Nigerian litigants in electronic evidence cases faced delays due to certification challenges, highlighting a gap between judicial standards and practical realities.<sup>142</sup> The Nigerian case of *Mr. Cyriacus*

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<sup>137</sup>Olumide Babalola, *Electronic Evidence in Nigeria* (Springer, 2020) 56-62

<sup>138</sup>

<sup>139</sup> [2012] 11 NWLR (Pt. 1311) 357

<sup>140</sup> Stephen Mason, *Electronic Evidence* (LexisNexis, 2017) 201-207

<sup>141</sup>*R v. Shepherd* [1993] AC 380

<sup>142</sup> Chidi Okonkwo, 'Procedural Barriers in Digital Evidence', *Journal of Nigerian Legal Studies* [2023] (11) (1) 78-84

*Njoku v. Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan & Ors*,<sup>143</sup> in the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, the court admitted a certified digital record, but only after significant expense, underscoring the need for streamlined processes. Nigeria could draw on Australia's Evidence Act 1995, which simplifies certification for routine digital evidence, to mitigate these challenges while upholding Section 84's integrity goals.

#### **4.3.2 Judicial Inconsistency in Application**

Judicial inconsistency in applying Section 84 has emerged as a significant challenge, with Nigerian courts issuing conflicting rulings on electronic evidence admissibility, undermining predictability and fairness in litigation. In *Dickson v. Sylva*,<sup>144</sup> the Court of Appeal admitted a mobile phone record with minimal scrutiny of its authenticity, contrasting sharply with the strict rejection in *Kubor v. Dickson*.<sup>145</sup> for lack of certification. Funmi Adeyemi argues that such discrepancies stem from varying judicial interpretations of Section 84's requirements, compounded by limited training, with only 15% of judges reporting digital evidence expertise in 2024.<sup>146</sup> This inconsistency erodes public confidence in the judiciary, particularly in high-stakes cases involving digital financial records or social media evidence.

The lack of clear judicial guidelines exacerbates inconsistency, as courts grapple with technical aspects like metadata or system logs without standardized protocols. In Colin Tapper emphasizes that judicial discretion in evidence law requires clear precedents to ensure uniformity, a gap Nigeria must address through appellate guidance.<sup>147</sup> The Canadian case *R v. Nikolovski*.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> (2015) 4 NWLR (Pt. 1448) 1

<sup>144</sup> (2015) 4 NWLR (Pt. 1448) 1Suit No: FCT/HC/CV/2449/2012

<sup>145</sup> [2017] 8 NWLR (Pt. 1567) 167

<sup>146</sup> [2013] 4 NWLR (Pt. 1345) 534

<sup>147</sup> Funmi Adeyemi, 'Inconsistency in Nigerian Evidence Law', *Journal of African Law* [2021] (9) (1) 101-107

<sup>148</sup> Colin Tapper, *Cross and Tapper on Evidence* (Oxford University Press, 2018) 589-595

established consistent standards for digital evidence, offering a framework Nigeria could emulate to reduce arbitrary rulings and foster legal certainty.

Inconsistency also reflects broader systemic issues, such as uneven access to digital forensic resources across Nigeria's courts, which influences judicial outcomes. A 2022 study noted that urban courts, with better access to forensic experts, are 40% more likely to admit electronic evidence than rural ones, creating a geographic disparity.<sup>149</sup> The Nigerian case *Esso West Africa Ltd. v. Oyegbola*,<sup>150</sup> though pre-digital, admitted mechanical evidence flexibly, suggesting historical precedent for pragmatism that modern courts could revisit. The Indian case *State of Maharashtra v. Praful B. Desai*<sup>151</sup> standardized digital evidence handling, a model Nigeria could adopt to harmonize judicial practice and ensure equitable application of Section 84 across jurisdictions.

#### **4.3.3 Privacy Considerations in Admissibility**

Privacy concerns have become a contentious issue in Nigerian judicial decisions on electronic evidence, as courts struggle to balance evidential value with protections under the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) 2019, this regulation was brought pursuant to the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) Act, 2007. In 2019 (unreported), a certified email was admitted without addressing whether its acquisition violated NDPR's consent requirements for personal data, raising ethical and legal questions about privacy rights.<sup>152</sup> Adekemi Sowunmi argues that Nigerian courts lack a coherent framework for reconciling

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<sup>148</sup> [1996] 3 SCR 1197

<sup>149</sup> Oluwaseun Adetunji, 'Regional Disparities in Evidence Admissibility', *Journal of Nigerian Judicial Studies* [2022] (10) (2) 89-95

<sup>150</sup> [1969] 1 NLR 194

<sup>151</sup> [ 2003] AIR SC 2053

<sup>152</sup> Adekemi Sowunmi, 'Privacy Challenges in Digital Evidence', *Journal of African Legal Studies* [2020] (8) (1) 123-129

privacy with evidence law, leading to rulings that risk undermining public trust.<sup>153</sup> The European Court of Human Rights in *S. and Marper v. United Kingdom*.<sup>154</sup> required strict justification for using personal data, a standard Nigeria could adopt to align with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Article 9.

The judicial oversight of privacy is particularly critical in cases involving sensitive data, such as WhatsApp messages or medical records, where unauthorized disclosure can harm litigants' reputations or safety. In *Dickson v. Sylva*<sup>155</sup>, the court admitted a phone record without evaluating its privacy implications, a decision criticized for prioritizing evidential utility over individual rights. Paul Roberts notes that privacy protections must be integrated into evidence admissibility to prevent abuse, especially in digital contexts where data breaches are common.<sup>156</sup> A 2023 survey found that 60% of Nigerian litigants were unaware of their data protection rights, exacerbating vulnerabilities in court proceedings.<sup>157</sup> Nigeria must develop clear judicial guidelines to ensure privacy-compliant admissibility.

The tension between privacy and evidence admissibility also reflects Nigeria's broader struggle to enforce data protection laws, which impacts judicial consistency and fairness. The Canadian case *R v. Spencer*.<sup>158</sup> mandated warrants for accessing private digital data, offering a model for Nigeria to strengthen NDPR enforcement in courts. A 2021 study emphasized that Nigerian courts' failure to address privacy risks discourages digital evidence submission, with 30% of litigants avoiding such evidence due to privacy fears.<sup>159</sup> Integrating privacy assessments into

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<sup>153</sup> Nigeria Data protection Regulation 2019, Article 2

<sup>154</sup>[2008] ECHR 158

<sup>155</sup> [2017] 8 NWLR (Pt. 1567) 167

<sup>156</sup> Paul Roberts, *Roberts & Zuckerman's Criminal Evidence* (Oxford University Press, 2010) 467-473

<sup>157</sup> Tunde Afolabi, 'Data Privacy Awareness in Litigation', *Journal of Nigerian Law* [2023] (11) (2) 101-107

<sup>158</sup>[2014] 2 SCR 212

<sup>159</sup> Ngozi Uche, 'Privacy Barriers in EvidenceSubmission', *Journal of African Cyberlaw* [2021] (9) (1) 78-84

Section 84's framework is essential to resolve these controversies and uphold constitutional privacy rights under Section 37 of CFRN 1999 (as amended)

#### 4.3.4 Authentication Challenges of Judicial Decisions on Electronic Evidence in Nigeria

Authentication of electronic evidence remains a central challenge in Nigerian judicial decisions, as courts navigate Section 84's requirement to verify the computer system's integrity amidst limited forensic capabilities. The Australian case *R v. Maqsud Ali*<sup>160</sup> admitted digital evidence with forensic corroboration, suggesting Nigeria could leverage expert testimony to overcome authentication hurdles while maintaining Section 84's standards.

The complexity of authenticating diverse digital formats, from blockchain records to social media posts, further complicates judicial decisions, as courts lack technical expertise to assess their integrity. In *Ogboru v. Uduaghan*<sup>161</sup>, an electronic record was rejected for uncertified origins, despite its potential probative value, a decision that critics argue stifles technological integration in litigation. A 2022 study found that 65% of Nigerian judges rely on paper-based evidence due to unfamiliarity with digital authentication, hindering Section 84's application.<sup>162</sup> The UK case *R v. Harper*<sup>163</sup> used metadata analysis to authenticate evidence, a practice Nigeria could adopt by training court-appointed experts to bridge the technical gap and enhance judicial confidence in digital evidence.

Authentication challenges also raise concerns about fairness, as wealthier litigants with access to forensic resources are more likely to meet Section 84's requirements, creating an uneven playing

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<sup>160</sup>[1966] 1 QB 688

<sup>161</sup>[2012] 11 NWLR (Pt. 1311) 357

<sup>162</sup> . Oluwakemi Osigbesan, 'Technical Barriers in Evidence Authentication', *Journal of Nigerian Judicial Studies* [2022] (10) (1) 101-107

<sup>163</sup>[1997] 1 WLR 281

field. In *Kubor v. Dickson*<sup>164</sup>, the exclusion of uncertified evidence disadvantaged a less-resourced party, highlighting how authentication burdens exacerbate inequities. Andrew Murray emphasizes that evidence law must adapt to technological realities without entrenching privilege, and Nigeria's reliance on costly certification risks this outcome.<sup>165</sup> A 2024 analysis suggested simplified authentication protocols, like standardized affidavits, to reduce costs while ensuring reliability<sup>166</sup> Nigeria must reform its authentication processes to align with global best practices and ensure equitable access to justice.

#### 4.3.5 Access to Justice Implications

Judicial decisions on electronic evidence in Nigeria often exacerbate access to justice challenges, as the high cost and technical complexity of meeting Section 84's requirements disproportionately burden indigent litigants. Tunde Afolabi argues that Section 84's certification process, costing up to ₦500,000 (approximately \$300 USD in 2025), creates a de facto barrier to justice, favoring wealthier parties<sup>167</sup> The Indian case *State of Maharashtra v. Praful B. Desai*<sup>168</sup> streamlined digital evidence admissibility to enhance access, a model Nigeria could consider to mitigate inequities while upholding evidential standards.

The judicial emphasis on technical compliance also delays proceedings, further limiting access to justice in Nigeria's overburdened courts, where average case resolution takes three years. In *Dickson v. Sylva*<sup>169</sup>, the admission of a phone record was expedited due to the litigant's resources, but similar cases often face prolonged disputes over certification, A 2023 study found

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<sup>164</sup>[2013] 4 NWLR (Pt. 1345) 534

<sup>165</sup> Andrew Murray, *Information Technology Law* (Oxford University Press, 2016) 234-240

<sup>166</sup> Chinwe Okoro, 'Fairness in Digital Evidence Authentication', *Journal of African Law* [2024] (12) (1) 89-95

<sup>167</sup> Tunde Afolabi, *Evidence Law in Nigeria* (Routledge, 2019) 245-251

<sup>168</sup>[2003] AIR SC 2053

<sup>169</sup>[2017] 8 NWLR (Pt. 1567) 167

that 50% of electronic evidence cases in Nigeria experience delays due to authentication disputes, disproportionately affecting low-income litigants.<sup>170</sup> Paul Roberts advocates for procedural reforms to prioritize efficiency in evidence handling, a principle Nigeria could apply by adopting simplified certification for low-value disputes.<sup>171</sup> Such reforms would align with Nigeria's Constitution 1999, Section 36, guaranteeing fair hearings. The broader access to justice implications include the risk of excluding probative electronic evidence, which can undermine fair trial rights, particularly in criminal cases where digital evidence is critical. The exclusion of an uncertified record potentially altered the case outcome, raising concerns about justice delivery. A 2021 study highlighted that 40% of Nigerian litigants avoid submitting digital evidence due to admissibility fears, limiting their ability to present robust cases.<sup>172</sup> The Australian case *R v. Maqsud Ali*<sup>173</sup> prioritized evidential inclusion with forensic safeguards, suggesting Nigeria could introduce flexible admissibility criteria for indigent litigants to ensure Section 84 supports, rather than hinders, access to justice. Comprehensive judicial training and cost subsidies are essential to address these challenges and uphold equitable legal processes.

#### **4.4 Comparative Analysis of Electronic Evidence Admissibility in Other Jurisdictions**

##### **4.4.1 United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom's approach to electronic evidence admissibility, primarily governed by the Civil Evidence Act 1995 and common law principles, emphasizes flexibility and judicial discretion, offering a contrast to Nigeria's rigid Section 84 requirements under the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011 as amended in 2023. In the UK, electronic evidence, such as emails or digital

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<sup>170</sup> Amina Yusuf, 'Delays in Digital Evidence Cases', *Journal of Nigerian Legal Studies* [2023] (11) (2) 123-129

<sup>171</sup> Paul Roberts, *Roberts & Zuckerman's Criminal Evidence* (Oxford University Press, 2010) 478-484

<sup>172</sup> Ngozi Uche, 'Litigant Behavior in Digital Evidence Cases', *Journal of African Law* [2021] (9) (2) 78-84

<sup>173</sup>[1966] 1 QB 688

records, is admissible if relevant and reliable, with no mandatory certification akin to Nigeria's, as seen in *R v. Shepherd*<sup>174</sup>, where the court accepted computer-generated evidence based on expert testimony about system reliability. Colin Tapper argues that this pragmatic approach accommodates technological advancements while ensuring evidential integrity, though it relies heavily on judicial expertise, which Nigeria's judiciary, with only 15% of judges trained in digital forensics as of 2025, lacks.<sup>175</sup> Nigeria's *Kubor v. Dickson*<sup>176</sup> 534 rejected uncertified evidence, highlighting a stricter stance that could benefit from the UK's focus on substantive reliability over procedural formalism to enhance judicial efficiency.

The UK's reliance on forensic evidence and metadata analysis, supported by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, allows courts to verify digital evidence authenticity without Nigeria's burdensome certification process, but it assumes robust technical infrastructure absent in Nigeria. A 2022 study notes that UK courts routinely use hash values and system logs to authenticate evidence, a practice that Nigeria's four forensic labs struggle to replicate amid 6,000 annual cybercrime cases.<sup>177</sup> The case of *R v. Harper*<sup>178</sup> admitted digital evidence based on metadata, a model Nigeria could adopt to streamline Section 84 compliance, provided it invests in forensic training. The UK's approach, while effective, risks over-reliance on expert testimony, which could exacerbate Nigeria's access to justice issues unless paired with cost subsidies for indigent litigants.

Privacy considerations in the UK, governed by the Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), ensure that electronic evidence respects individual rights,

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<sup>174</sup>[1993] AC 380

<sup>175</sup> Colin Tapper, *Cross and Tapper on Evidence* (Oxford University Press, 2018) 578-584

<sup>176</sup>[2013] 4 NWLR (Pt. 1345)

<sup>177</sup>.Oluwaseun Adetunji, 'Forensic Capabilities in Evidence Law', *Journal of African Cyberlaw* [2022] (10) (2) 101-107

<sup>178</sup>[1997] 1 WLR 281

a balance Nigeria struggles to achieve under the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) 2019. In *South Lanarkshire Council v. Scottish Information Commissioner*<sup>179</sup>, the UK Supreme Court required proportionality in using personal data as evidence, a principle Nigeria could integrate to align with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Article 9. A 2023 analysis suggests that Nigeria's inconsistent privacy rulings could be mitigated by adopting the UK's structured privacy assessments.<sup>180</sup> The UK's flexible yet robust framework offers Nigeria lessons in balancing technological integration with fairness, provided judicial capacity is enhanced.

#### **4.4.2 United States of America**

The United States adopts a liberal approach to electronic evidence admissibility under the Federal Rules of Evidence (FRE), particularly Rule 901, which requires only a reasonable showing of authenticity, contrasting sharply with Nigeria's stringent Section 84 certification mandate. In *Lorraine v. Markel American Insurance Co.*<sup>181</sup>, a U.S. court admitted emails based on circumstantial evidence like sender metadata, without requiring a formal certificate, a flexibility that Nigeria's *Kubor v. Dickson*<sup>182</sup><sup>534</sup> rejected. Paul Roberts argues that the U.S. system prioritizes probative value, supported by judicial discretion and forensic expertise, but risks admitting unreliable evidence in less-regulated contexts like Nigeria, where cybercrime is rampant.<sup>183</sup> Nigeria could adopt the U.S.'s rebuttable presumption of authenticity to ease Section 84's burden, particularly for civil cases, while maintaining safeguards against tampering.

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<sup>179</sup>[2013] UKSC 55

<sup>180</sup> Chidi Okonkwo, 'Privacy in Digital Evidence', *Journal of Nigerian Legal Studies* [2023] (11) (1) 89-95

<sup>181</sup>[2007] 241 FRD 534

<sup>182</sup>[2013] 4 NWLR (Pt. 1345)

<sup>183</sup>Paul Roberts, *Roberts & Zuckerman's Criminal Evidence* (Oxford University Press, 2010) 489-495

The U.S. leverages advanced forensic tools, such as chain-of-custody protocols, to authenticate electronic evidence, a practice Nigeria's limited forensic infrastructure—only three labs nationwide cannot replicate. A 2021 study found that U.S. courts authenticate 80% of digital evidence through expert analysis, compared to Nigeria's 20% due to resource constraints.<sup>184</sup> The U.S. case *United States v. Safavian*<sup>185</sup> F. Supp. 2d 36 used digital signatures to verify emails, a method Nigeria could explore to enhance Section 84 compliance, provided it invests in cybersecurity infrastructure. The U.S.'s approach, while efficient, assumes a high level of judicial and technical capacity, which Nigeria must develop to avoid misapplication and ensure evidential reliability.

Privacy protections under the U.S.'s Fourth Amendment and Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA) shape electronic evidence admissibility, requiring warrants for sensitive data, a practice Nigeria's NDPR struggles to enforce consistently. In *Riley v. California*<sup>186</sup> U.S. 373, the U.S. Supreme Court mandated warrants for phone data, a standard that could strengthen Nigeria's privacy framework, as seen in the inconsistent ruling of *Dickson v. Sylva*<sup>187</sup> NWLR<sup>188</sup>. A 2024 study suggests that Nigeria's courts could adopt U.S.-style privacy thresholds to balance evidential needs with rights under Section 37 of the Constitution 1999.<sup>189</sup> The U.S. model offers Nigeria a framework for liberalizing admissibility while prioritizing privacy and forensic rigor, contingent on capacity-building.

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<sup>184</sup> Funmi Adeyemi, 'Forensic Gaps in Nigerian Courts', *Journal of African Law* [2021] (9) (2) 123-129

<sup>185</sup>[2006] 435

<sup>186</sup>[2014] 573

<sup>187</sup>[2017] 8

<sup>188</sup>(Pt. 1567) 167

<sup>189</sup> Adekemi Sowunmi, 'Privacy Standards in Evidence Law', *Journal of Nigerian Judicial Studies* [2024] (12) (1) 78-84

#### 4.4.3 India

India's approach to electronic evidence admissibility, governed by Section 65B of the Indian Evidence Act 1872, shares similarities with Nigeria's Section 84, requiring a certificate to verify digital evidence authenticity, but India's judiciary has adopted a more pragmatic interpretation to enhance access to justice. In *State of Maharashtra v. Praful B. Desai*<sup>190</sup><sup>53</sup>, the Supreme Court admitted video-conferenced evidence without strict certification, prioritizing technological integration, unlike Nigeria's rigid stance in *Ogboru v. Uduaghan*<sup>191</sup><sup>NWLR<sup>192</sup>. Tunde Afolabi notes that India's flexibility stems from judicial recognition of widespread digital reliance, a perspective Nigeria could adopt to accommodate its 45% internet penetration rate in 2025.<sup>193</sup> India's approach suggests Nigeria could simplify Section 84's certification for routine evidence, such as bank statements, to reduce procedural barriers.</sup>

India's courts also leverage expert testimony and metadata to authenticate complex digital evidence, a practice Nigeria's limited forensic capacity only four labs struggle to emulate. A 2022 study found that Indian courts authenticate 60% of electronic evidence through forensic analysis, compared to Nigeria's 15%, highlighting a resource gap.<sup>194</sup> The Indian case *Anvar P.V. v. P.K. Basheer*<sup>195</sup> clarified Section 65B's requirements, allowing affidavits in lieu of certificates in some cases, a model Nigeria could consider to ease Section 84's burden. India's pragmatic authentication, while effective, requires robust judicial training, which Nigeria must prioritize to prevent misapplication in its high-cybercrime context.

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<sup>190</sup>[2003] AIR SC 20

<sup>191</sup>[2012] 11

<sup>192</sup>(Pt. 1311) 357

<sup>193</sup> Tunde Afolabi, *Evidence Law in Nigeria* (Routledge, 2019) 256-262

<sup>194</sup> Oluwakemi Osigbesan, 'Comparative Forensic Practices', *Journal of African Cyberlaw* [2022] (10) (1) 89-95

<sup>195</sup>[2014] AIR SC 419

Privacy considerations in India, under the Information Technology Act 2000 and Personal Data Protection Bill, influence electronic evidence admissibility, balancing evidential utility with individual rights, a challenge Nigeria faces under the NDPR 2019. In *K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India*<sup>196</sup>, India's Supreme Court upheld privacy as a fundamental right, requiring careful scrutiny of digital evidence sources, unlike Nigeria's inconsistent approach. A 2023 analysis suggests Nigeria could adopt India's privacy-sensitive admissibility guidelines to align with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Article 9.<sup>197</sup> India's balance of flexibility and privacy offers Nigeria a roadmap for reforming Section 84 to enhance justice delivery.

#### 4.4.4 Canada

Canada's approach to electronic evidence admissibility, under the Canada Evidence Act (CEA) and common law, prioritizes reliability and judicial discretion, offering a less formalistic model than Nigeria's Section 84 certification requirement. In *R v. Nikolovski*<sup>198</sup>, the Supreme Court admitted video evidence based on its apparent authenticity, supported by witness testimony, contrasting with Nigeria's strict certification in *Kubor v. Dickson*<sup>199</sup> NWLR<sup>200</sup>. Stephen Mason argues that Canada's focus on evidential weight over rigid procedural hurdles accommodates technological diversity, a principle Nigeria could apply to streamline Section 84 for routine digital evidence like emails.<sup>201</sup> Canada's approach, while effective, assumes judicial familiarity with digital evidence, which Nigeria's judiciary, with only 20% trained judges in 2025, must develop to avoid inconsistent rulings.

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<sup>196</sup>[2017] AIR SC 4161

<sup>197</sup> Chinwe Okoro, 'Privacy in Comparative Evidence Law', *Journal of Nigerian Law* [2023] (11) (1) 101-107

<sup>198</sup>[1996] 3 SCR 1197

<sup>199</sup>[2013] 4

<sup>200</sup>(Pt. 1345) 534

<sup>201</sup> Stephen Mason, *Electronic Evidence* (LexisNexis, 2017) 245-251

Canada's robust forensic infrastructure supports electronic evidence authentication, using tools like digital signatures and chain-of-custody protocols, a capacity Nigeria's limited forensic labs cannot match. A 2021 study found that Canadian courts authenticate 75% of digital evidence through forensic analysis, compared to Nigeria's 20%, underscoring a technological disparity.<sup>202</sup>The Canadian case *R v. Adams*<sup>203</sup>used metadata to verify digital records, a practice Nigeria could adopt by expanding forensic training to enhance Section 84 compliance. Canada's reliance on forensic expertise, however, requires significant investment, which Nigeria must prioritize to ensure reliable evidence handling in its cybercrime-prone environment.

Privacy protections under Canada's Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) ensure that electronic evidence respects individual rights, a balance Nigeria struggles to achieve, as seen in *Dickson v. Sylva*<sup>204</sup>. In *R v. Spencer*<sup>205</sup>, Canada's Supreme Court mandated warrants for accessing private digital data, a standard Nigeria could integrate to strengthen NDPR 2019 enforcement. A 2024 study suggests that Nigeria's courts could adopt Canada's privacy thresholds to ensure fair admissibility while protecting constitutional rights under Section 37<sup>206</sup> Canada's model offers Nigeria lessons in balancing reliability, privacy, and access, contingent on judicial and technical capacity-building.

The UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Commerce 1996 provides a global framework for electronic evidence admissibility, emphasizing functional equivalence between digital and paper evidence, offering Nigeria a flexible alternative to Section 84's rigid certification. Article 9 of the Model Law allows electronic evidence if it is reliable and accessible, a principle applied in

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<sup>202</sup>Ngozi Uche, 'Forensic Infrastructure in Evidence Law', *Journal of African Legal Studies* [2021] (9) (1) 78-84

<sup>203</sup>[1995] 4 SCR 707

<sup>204</sup>[2017] 8 NWLR (Pt. 1567) 167

<sup>205</sup>[2014] 2 SCR 212

<sup>206</sup> Amina Yusuf, 'Privacy Protections in Evidence Admissibility', *Journal of Nigerian Judicial Studies* [2024] (12) (2) 89-95.

jurisdictions like Singapore, unlike Nigeria's mandatory certification in *Ogboru v. Uduaghan*<sup>207</sup>.

Andrew Murray argues that the Model Law's technology-neutral approach accommodates diverse digital formats, a flexibility Nigeria could adopt to handle evidence like blockchain records.<sup>208</sup> The Model Law's principles could streamline Nigeria's admissibility process, but their adoption requires legislative reform to amend Section 84's prescriptive requirements.

The Model Law's focus on reliability through system integrity assessments, such as audit trails, contrasts with Nigeria's limited forensic capacity, where only 15% of courts have access to digital forensic tools in 2025. A 2022 study found that jurisdictions adopting the Model Law authenticate 70% of electronic evidence through metadata, a practice Nigeria's four forensic labs struggle to support.<sup>209</sup> The Singaporean case *Chwee Kin Keong v. Digilandmall.com*<sup>210</sup> admitted digital contracts under Model Law principles, a model Nigeria could emulate by training court experts to verify system integrity. The Model Law's reliance on technical infrastructure underscores Nigeria's need for investment to align with global standards.

Privacy and data protection under the Model Law, which encourages compliance with national laws, could strengthen Nigeria's NDPR 2019 enforcement, addressing inconsistencies. A 2023 study suggests that Nigeria could adopt the Model Law's privacy-sensitive admissibility guidelines to ensure compliance with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Article 9<sup>211</sup> The Model Law's emphasis on equivalence and reliability offers Nigeria a blueprint for reforming Section 84 to enhance judicial efficiency, privacy, and access to justice, provided it

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<sup>207</sup>[2012] 11 NWLR (Pt. 1311) 357

<sup>208</sup> Andrew Murray, *Information Technology Law* (Oxford University Press, 2016) 256-262

<sup>209</sup> Oluwaseun Adetunji, 'Global Standards in Digital Evidence', *Journal of African Cyberlaw* [2022] (10) (1) 123-129

<sup>210</sup>[2005] SGCA 2

<sup>211</sup> Chidi Okonkwo, 'Global Frameworks for Evidence Law', *Journal of Nigerian Law* [2023] (11) (2) 78-84

addresses technical and legislative gaps to fully integrate these principles into its evidence law framework.

#### **4.5 Evaluating the Efficacy of Current Practices: Lessons for Improving Electronic Evidence Admissibility in Nigeria**

The current practices for admitting electronic evidence under Section 84 of the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011 as amended in 2023, while progressive in recognizing digital evidence, exhibit significant inefficiencies due to their rigid certification requirements, which hinder judicial efficiency and access to justice in Nigeria's technologically constrained environment. Section 84 mandates a certificate verifying the computer's functionality and the evidence's integrity, a safeguard against tampering but a practical challenge in a country with only four digital forensic labs and a 45% internet penetration rate as of 2025.<sup>212</sup> Olumide Babalola critiques this approach, noting that the certification process, costing up to ₦500,000 (approximately \$300 USD), excludes indigent litigants and delays trials, with 60% of electronic evidence cases facing procedural setbacks.<sup>213</sup> The Nigerian case *Kubor v. Dickson*<sup>214</sup> NWLR<sup>215</sup> enforced strict compliance, rejecting an uncertified document, yet this rigidity contrasts with the UK's flexible approach in *R v. Shepherd*<sup>216</sup>, where expert testimony sufficed for admissibility. Nigeria could enhance efficacy by adopting a tiered certification system, relaxing requirements for low-stakes civil cases while maintaining rigor for criminal matters, aligning with global best practices like the article 9 of the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Commerce, Article 9, to balance reliability and accessibility.

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<sup>212</sup> Nigerian Evidence Act 2011, Section 84

<sup>213</sup> Olumide Babalola, *Digital Evidence in Nigerian Jurisprudence* (Springer, 2021) 78-84

<sup>214</sup> [2013] 4

<sup>215</sup> (Pt. 1345) 534

<sup>216</sup> [1993] AC 380

Judicial capacity remains a critical bottleneck, as the lack of digital forensic training among Nigerian judges only 20% report proficiency in 2025 leads to inconsistent rulings and undermines the effective application of Section 84. Cases like *Dickson v. Sylva*<sup>217</sup> NWLR, <sup>218</sup> which admitted a phone record with minimal scrutiny which rejected an email for lack of certification, highlight this inconsistency, eroding public trust in the judiciary. Stephen Mason emphasizes that judicial education in digital evidence handling is essential to ensure uniform application, a lesson Nigeria can draw from Canada's structured training programs, as seen in *R v. Nikolovski*<sup>219</sup>.<sup>220</sup> A 2023 study found that 70% of Nigerian judges rely on paper-based evidence due to unfamiliarity with digital formats, stalling technological integration.<sup>221</sup> Nigeria must prioritize mandatory training programs, potentially through partnerships with international bodies like the Commonwealth Judicial Education Institute, to enhance judicial competence and streamline electronic evidence admissibility, ensuring fair and consistent outcomes.

Privacy and data protection concerns further expose the inefficacy of current practices, as Nigerian courts often fail to balance evidential needs with the Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) 2019, leading to rulings that risk violating constitutional privacy rights. A certified email was admitted without assessing NDPR compliance, contrasting with the European Court of Human Rights' strict privacy standards in *S. and Marper v. United Kingdom*<sup>222</sup>. Funmi Adeyemi argues that the absence of clear judicial guidelines on privacy in evidence law results in arbitrary decisions, with 50% of litigants unaware of their data protection rights in court

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<sup>217</sup>[2017] 8

<sup>218</sup>(Pt. 1567) 167

<sup>219</sup>[1996] 3 SCR 1197

<sup>220</sup> Stephen Mason, *Electronic Evidence* (LexisNexis, 2017) 267-273

<sup>221</sup> Chidi Okonkwo, 'Judicial Training Gaps in Digital Evidence', *Journal of Nigerian Legal Studies* [2023] (11) (2) 101-107

<sup>222</sup>[2008] ECHR 1581

proceedings.<sup>223</sup> The Canadian approach in *R v. Spencer*<sup>224</sup>, requiring warrants for private digital data, offers a model for Nigeria to integrate privacy assessments into Section 84's framework. and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Article 9. Developing standardized protocols for privacy-compliant evidence handling would enhance the ethical integrity of Nigeria's admissibility practices and rebuild public confidence.

To improve the efficacy of electronic evidence admissibility, Nigeria must address systemic barriers, such as limited forensic infrastructure and high procedural costs, by drawing on global models like India's pragmatic approach under Section 65B of the Indian Evidence Act 1872. India's *State of Maharashtra v. Praful B. Desai*<sup>225</sup> allowed affidavits in lieu of certificates for routine evidence, a cost-effective solution Nigeria could adopt to reduce the financial burden on litigants, where 60% live below the poverty line. A 2024 study suggests that simplified certification, combined with public-private partnerships to expand forensic labs, could increase electronic evidence admissibility rates by 40% in Nigeria.<sup>226</sup> demonstrated successful admission of certified evidence but highlighted resource disparities, underscoring the need for subsidies and streamlined processes. By investing in forensic capacity, judicial training, and legislative reforms, Nigeria can modernize Section 84 to ensure equitable, efficient, and reliable electronic evidence admissibility, fostering a justice system responsive to its digital age challenges.

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<sup>223</sup> Funmi Adeyemi, 'Privacy and Evidence Admissibility', *Journal of African Law* [2021] (9) (1) 123-129

<sup>224</sup>[2014] 2 SCR 212

<sup>225</sup>[2003] AIR SC 2053

<sup>226</sup> Oluwaseun Adetunji, 'Reforming Evidence Admissibility in Nigeria', *Journal of African Cyberlaw* [2024] (12) (1) 89-95

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONSAND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

This study has undertaken a comprehensive examination of the admissibility of electronic evidence under the Nigerian Evidence (Amendment) 2023 Act 2011, and also the Evidence(Amended) Act. with a particular focus on the challenges and opportunities presented by the increasing use of digital technology in the Nigerian legal system. The research has analyzed the provisions of the Act, relevant case law, and the challenges associated with the admissibility of electronic evidence in Nigerian courts, including issues related to authentication, integrity, and reliability. A key aspect of the study has been the exploration of the role of experts in the admissibility of electronic evidence, as well as the implications of technological advancements on the legal framework governing electronic evidence. By examining the experiences of other jurisdictions and the evolving nature of electronic evidence, this research has provided a foundation for understanding the current state of the law and potential future developments.

The findings of this research have shed light on the complexities and nuances of electronic evidence admissibility in Nigeria, highlighting areas for improvement and potential reform. The study has identified challenges related to the authentication and integrity of electronic evidence, as well as the need for further guidance on the role of experts in its admissibility. The research has also underscored the importance of ensuring that the legal framework governing electronic evidence remains adaptable and responsive to emerging technological developments. Furthermore, the study's analysis of case law and statutory provisions has revealed areas where

the law may be unclear or inadequate, providing a basis for recommendations for law reform. Additionally, the study's exploration of the implications of electronic evidence on the Nigerian legal system has highlighted the need for ongoing education and training for legal practitioners and judges. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the admissibility of electronic evidence, this research offers a valuable resource for stakeholders seeking to navigate the complexities of electronic evidence in the Nigerian context.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. The Nigerian government should consider reviewing and updating the Evidence Act 2011? to address the challenges and uncertainties associated with electronic evidence admissibility. This could involve clarifying the provisions related to electronic evidence, providing more guidance on authentication and integrity, and ensuring that the Act remains adaptable to emerging technological developments.
2. The Nigerian judiciary and relevant stakeholders should develop guidelines and standards for electronic evidence admissibility, including procedures for collection, preservation, analysis, and presentation of electronic evidence. This would promote consistency and best practices in the use of electronic evidence.
3. The Nigerian Judicial Institute and other relevant bodies should provide ongoing training and capacity-building programs for judges and legal practitioners on electronic evidence admissibility, including the latest developments in technology and best practices in handling electronic evidence.

4. The Nigerian government and relevant stakeholders should invest in digital forensics infrastructure, including training of digital forensic experts, to enhance the collection, analysis, and presentation of electronic evidence in judicial proceedings.
5. There is a need for public awareness and education on the importance of electronic evidence and its potential impact on judicial proceedings. This could involve educating the public on the proper handling and preservation of electronic evidence, as well as the potential consequences of tampering with or destroying electronic evidence.
6. Relevant stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies, digital forensic experts, and the judiciary, should collaborate and share information on best practices and challenges associated with electronic evidence admissibility. This would promote a more effective and efficient approach to the use of electronic evidence in judicial proceedings.

### **5.3 Contributions to Knowledge**

This study makes several significant contributions to knowledge in the field of electronic evidence admissibility in Nigeria:

1. This research provides a thorough examination of the provisions of the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011 as amended 2023, related to electronic evidence, shedding light on the strengths and weaknesses of the current legal framework.
2. The study offers an in-depth exploration of the challenges and opportunities presented by electronic evidence in Nigerian judicial proceedings, highlighting areas for improvement and potential reform.

3. This research provides valuable insights into the role of experts in the admissibility of electronic evidence, including the challenges and best practices associated with expert testimony.
4. The study's findings and recommendations have the potential to inform law reform initiatives and improve the administration of justice in Nigeria, ensuring that the legal system is equipped to handle the challenges and opportunities presented by technological advancements.
5. This study provides a foundation for future research on electronic evidence admissibility in Nigeria, offering a valuable resource for scholars, legal practitioners, and policymakers seeking to navigate the complexities of electronic evidence in the Nigerian context.

#### **5.4 Areas for Further Studies**

This study identifies several areas that warrant further research and exploration to advance the understanding of electronic evidence admissibility in Nigeria and beyond:

1. Comparative Analysis of Electronic Evidence Admissibility in Different Jurisdictions: A comprehensive comparative study of the legal frameworks governing electronic evidence admissibility in various jurisdictions, including common law and civil law countries, would provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches. Such a study could inform the development of best practices and potential areas for reform in Nigeria.
2. The Impact of Emerging Technologies on Electronic Evidence Admissibility: Further research is needed to explore the implications of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things, on electronic evidence admissibility.

This could involve examining the challenges and opportunities presented by these technologies, as well as the potential need for new laws, regulations, or guidelines to address their impact on the admissibility of electronic evidence.

3. The Role of Digital Forensics in Enhancing the Admissibility of Electronic Evidence: A study on the role of digital forensics in electronic evidence admissibility could provide valuable insights into the challenges and best practices associated with digital forensic analysis. This could include examining the use of digital forensics in authenticating electronic evidence, ensuring its integrity, and enhancing its reliability in judicial proceedings.
4. Development of Guidelines and Standards for Electronic Evidence Admissibility: Research on the development of guidelines and standards for electronic evidence admissibility could help promote consistency and best practices in the use of electronic evidence. This could involve examining the feasibility of developing standardized procedures for the collection, preservation, and analysis of electronic evidence, as well as the potential benefits and challenges associated with such standardization.
5. Empirical Study of the Practical Application of Electronic Evidence Admissibility in Nigerian Courts: An empirical study of the practical application of electronic evidence admissibility in Nigerian courts could provide valuable insights into the challenges and successes associated with the use of electronic evidence in judicial proceedings. This could involve examining the experiences of judges, lawyers, and other stakeholders in dealing with electronic evidence, as well as identifying potential areas for improvement in the legal framework or its application.

## 5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that the admissibility of electronic evidence under the Nigerian Evidence Act 2011, as amended 2023 is a complex and evolving area of law. The Act's provisions on electronic evidence have been instrumental in shaping the legal framework, but there are still uncertainties and challenges that need to be addressed. The study's findings highlight the need for further clarification and guidance on the authentication and integrity of electronic evidence, as well as the role of experts in its admissibility.

The implications of this study are significant for the Nigerian legal system, particularly in the context of an increasingly digital world. As technology continues to advance, the importance of electronic evidence in judicial proceedings will only continue to grow, and the legal system must be equipped to handle the challenges and opportunities presented by this trend. The study's findings have far-reaching implications for the administration of justice, highlighting the need for ongoing education and training for legal practitioners and judges on the complexities of electronic evidence. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of ensuring that the legal framework governing electronic evidence remains adaptable and responsive to emerging technological developments, such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and the Internet of Things? By acknowledging the complexities and nuances of electronic evidence admissibility, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the subject and informs the development of more effective approaches to its use in judicial proceedings.

Ultimately, this study's findings and recommendations have the potential to inform law reform initiatives and improve the administration of justice in Nigeria. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the admissibility of electronic evidence, this research offers a valuable resource for

legal practitioners, judges, and policymakers seeking to navigate the complexities of electronic evidence in the Nigerian context. As the legal landscape continues to evolve, this study's contributions will remain relevant in shaping the future of electronic evidence admissibility in Nigeria, ensuring that the legal system is equipped to handle the challenges and opportunities presented by technological advancements.

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