

The Role of Media on Democratic Challenges in The Nigeria's 4th Republic, 1999 - 2007

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Abstract

This paper highlights the state of Nigeria and the path to addressing the pitfalls that have over the years shrunk the political space. The political system has been under serious political equations that have consistently threatened the corporate and peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian state. As a result of the above, it questions the essence of the media in protecting democracy in Nigeria, what constitute democratic problems and panacea to be adopted towards ameliorating these challenges. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to explore the dynamics of political waves in Nigeria vis-a-vis promoting and protecting the interest of the masses within the polity. In holistic term, it exposes the negative application of politics as a practice and media efforts towards sensitizing the masses on the import of democracy. This enables us locate the fundamental influence to democratic challenges and the interest behind it. It discovers that both the old media and the new media are trapped in the web and the control of the powerful in the state. The paper therefore calls for the application of freedom of information law in other to reduce the excesses of power dominance coming from the behind the screen operators.

Key words: Democracy, Media, Elite and Information

Introduction

Democracy is cherished as a global practice where public interest is rated supreme. This practice has received a global mantra as the most adorable. In the face of the evolving global practice, many nations have keyed into adopting the practice with the utopia expectation that it solve the problem of mankind. The worrying situation that confronts any state that adopts democratic practice is how to protect it against social conditions. This is where the media is seen as a veritable instrument in protecting and advancing the course and practice of democracy in Nigeria. The mass media have a crucial role to play in democracy. They have been known to make or mar democracy, to promote a regime's programme or bring about its downfall. Imperative to the promotion and sustenance of democracy is the media's independent relationship on one hand and the interdependent relationship between the media and the general public (Balogun, 2015: 56).

Democracy, politics and the media are overlapping concept. They remain inseparable as a mere mention or adoption of one singsong a welcome of the other. The concepts of democracy and politics have wider universal application in a more practical aspect where citizens are recognised in the process of governance. Democratic process are practices and means adopted for the actualization of democratic dispensation and leadership, ranging from formation of political parties, to electoral campaigns, community mobilization, electoral skills, voters registration, contesting elections, voting and contributing to policy making and the process of governance (Yusuf in Yusuf, 2000: 116). For most people, democracy and mass media assume deeper meaning when defined within a broad spectrum of politics. Politics is the struggle for power. The implication is that it is a competition between groups, and/or classes in a society for dominance based on their respective interest and perspectives and the administration or management of their common resources (Dialogue 25, 1993). Laswell in Nnoli (2003:7) states that politics is all about, who gets what, when and how. This shows that politics and democracy are two sides of a coin. In the contemporary world, both require each other to be effective.

In the light of the above, the mass media being an instrument of mass sensitization are burdened (in every state) with the responsibility to protect the masses against the machinations of the political class who use the state as an instrument of personal glorification. Thus, for the mass media to effectively play their role as the watchdogs and promoter of democracy, there is an urgent need for media practitioner to acquire a deep understanding of the people, issues, events and trends in their state and localities. According to Okojie (2014: 24), the mass media must rise above preconceived views and assumptions and be willing to reflect the age-long

journalistic values of accuracy, authenticity, balance and wholeness in news judgement. They should educate, write and inform the people about politics, politicking, democracy, democratic processes and monitor them by holding the government accountable to the people. In our contemporary society, a new brand of media powered by social networks and internet facilities becomes germane in the drive towards promoting democracy otherwise called the new media. Thus, with a combined effort of the old and new media, the basic challenges of democracy are made known to all, especially as it concerns governance in Nigeria. The various cases of democratic reversals with their challenging characteristics are everyday news on social network with the masses ever ready to post online any abuse on democratic process in Nigeria and beyond (Okafor and Okafor, 2015).

To that extent, this paper explores the role of the media in protecting the most cherished practice of 'democracy' owing to the tonic that drives the practice, many nations are keying into the adoption and practice of democracy. The politics and politicking that attend the practice have generated some challenges to the actual adoption of the practice, which were responsible for the various names given to it, like nascent democracy, growing democracy, liberal democracy, third world democracy, etc. At this point, the new media becomes an imperative instrument towards the sensitization of web users which captures a teeming population of the youths. The study, therefore, examines the dynamics of political reality as it concerns media practitioners (both online and offline which involve) in safeguarding citizen's rights and advancing the course of social imperatives in the state.

The Nature and Character of Nigerian Politics

Politics in Nigeria like in any other states is a game to achieve either personal or group interest using state machinery. The attitude towards this struggle for power is determined by various factors that are society based. This has to a large extent placed the state on a negative pedestal in developmental rating. Formation, composition, culture, experiences etc. of Nigeria determine the nature and character of Nigerian politics. Colonial experience played great role in nature and character of the Nigerian state. Colonialism was a business adventure to achieve the interest of the colonial masters not for the interest of the colonized (Rodney, 1972). It had no democratic outlook. It was embedded in force, militancy and violence, suppression of opposition party and indigenous media. It promoted division among the united people and encouraged war among the unfriendly just to accomplish their mission of having the colonized perpetually under their control. Nnoli (2011:11) gave a clear picture of the foundation and

formation of Nigerian state which determines its nature. He asserts Colonial master was not motivated by the desire to replicate in the colony the prevailing democracy in the metropolitan state. Rather, it was motivated by the need to hold down a conquered people, and force them to adopt a new social, economic, political, cultural and in some cases, religious way of life. In the process, it brought domination, oppression, exploitation, injustice and illegitimacy to a head and at the same time in the country. Thus the colonial origin of the Nigerian state ensured that power was the defining attribute of statehood...under the circumstance the colonial state structure was authoritarian, antidemocratic, domineering, exploitative, repressive, unjust and illegitimate. Through forced labour, forced migration, forced education, the undemocratic colonial state ruled the country (Nnoli 2011:30).

Independent politicians adopted this attitude in their dealings with the Nigerian masses. Every apparatus of the state (military, police, judiciary, electoral bodies, bureaucracy etc) became subjected to the whims and caprices of those in power. Power of incumbency became the nature and character of the Nigerian politics. State became might and power centralized. According to Nwagbo and Eze

(2015) —the incumbents always turn the state institutions to be their appendix especially to coax and muzzle the opponents. 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011 elections have shown the militant character of the state —party in power to muscle the populace into submission and ultimately denying the people their voting rights through massive blackmail, rigging, intimidation and brutality. This condition has shown the character of the Nigerian state as a repressive and predatory force over and above its citizens (Tsuwa, 2014).

Sequel to this, Nigerian masses especially the oppositions who also harbour interest to control state power always adopt counter-measures to fight back the state and to tussle power with them, leading to political violence. Tsuwa (2014) describing the situation unveils that —those controlling state power use all government apparatus such as the military, police force, militia group and even electoral officers and media in ensuring that their electoral desire is achieved irrespective of the choice of the electorates... when such situation arises, those who cannot lay hands on machinery of government turn around to recruit able bodies: young men and women who they use as thugs in carrying out their political objectives and resisting aggression on the side of those controlling the governmental machinery. This frustrating situation made Muhammadu Buhari to threaten in 2011 that Nigeria will be made ungovernable if 2011 election is rigged by ruling power (PDP). This has been attributed to the emergence of Boko Haram.

Awowole Brown (2011) illustrated the outcome of electoral violence in 2011 where according to him —officially more than 520 were killed, 165 churches burnt, 53 mosques burnt and 1,442 houses destroyed

Most of the political violence were executed using ethno-religious sentiment and manipulations. Starting from independence tongue and tribe had a lot to play in Nigerian politics. This became evident with the formation of political parties that were regional and ethnic in nature, eg the Egbo Omo Oduadua, Tamiyyar Mutanen Arewa etc leading to suspicion, bitterness and hatred (Madu, 2000). Superficially, Nigerian politics have presented an image of a struggle among the various ethnic groups for a division of national resources. Most Nigerians have come to believe that unless their —own men are in government they are unable to secure those socio-economic amenities that are disbursed by the government (Nnoli, 1978). Nigerian state and politics are characterized with so many other factors like resource control, corruption, Godfatherism, military incursion, ethnic militia, weak opposition, marginalization, election rigging, political instability etc. In the midst of this still, the media is expected to show the light and the way through which Nigerian state can overcome this to march onto a democratic statehood which is the only panacea to national development. It is against this background that we adopt elite theory to articulate practically the role of individuals and groups and their influence on institutional behaviors and responses in determining the political horizon of the state. The proponents include, Pareto, Mosca and Michel.

Democratizing Nigeria: Challenges in the New Millennium

Presently, Nigeria has embraced the democratic option for the greater development of our people and nation. It has ushered in the enthronement of the democratic process characterized by the existence of the three arms of government, regular elections, increased citizen's participation in public affairs, founding of democratic structures like political parties and an active civil society sector, among others. However, this is not to suggest that the present democratic experimentation is totally healthy. Therefore, democratization process in Nigeria has been posed with some numerous challenges in the new millennium among which are;

Lack of Free, Fair and Credible Democratic Election

This is one of the major challenges of the Nigerian state in the present millennium. The current democratic enterprise has produced a self-style imposed and deceptive leaders, who had ascended into the leadership of the people through irregular and unpopular elections in Nigeria. Former Lagos state Governor, Bola Tinubu (2009) contended that —Holding free, fair and

credible elections is the greatest challenge or perhaps threat, if I must be blunt, to the Fourth Republic. Consequently, electoral fraud poses a major challenge to democracy in Nigeria and by implication, poses threat to the security of the nation. Electoral fraud desecrates the sanctity of democracy and weakens its capacity as an instrument for the mobilization of national, human and material resources for the development of the people and the state. It affects effective citizens' participation in politics and governance due to associated violence, menace, maiming, ballot box snatching, falsification of results and other unwarranted abuses.

Corruption

The institutionalization of corrupt culture in all spheres of public activities is one of the major challenges to survival of democracy in Nigeria. The systematic reconstruction of leadership from trust to reflection of personal interest of repository of state power is corruption by all definitions. Consequently, resources meant for developments are redirected to service unjustifiable security budgets of the self-styled first families. Apart from these wastage, the conduct of leadership in managing scarce resources has been responsible for national instability. 55 public servants and political office holders were alleged to have embezzled N1.3 trillion in seven years (the Guardian, Jan 19, 2016). Likewise a former Security Adviser to former President Goodluck Jonathan was accused of making about \$1.2 billion meant to fight terrorist group (Boko Haram) that terrorizes North-Eastern part of Nigeria. Corruption has dominated our national psyche so much so that it looks unusual to stand against it. Loimeier (2003) argues that corrupt and power hungry politicians, who hijacked votes and self imposed leaders, declare billions of fictitious amounts of naira as assets only to be recouped as investments through falsification and over pricing of contracts awards, in spite of the existence of framework of due process and diligence in contract awards and procurements.

Looting of public treasury has inflicted colossal damage to collective psyche of unity. In every segments of the National political community, statistics indicated the domestication of poverty, hunger and youth unemployment through discredited Poverty Eradication or Empowerment Programs which are mere conduits for siphoning national wealth. The rate of citizens surviving beyond poverty margin is quite outrageous but government continues giving lip service to this social menace. All the corruption fighting agencies established in the early 2000 like EFCC and ICPC have done little or nothing in this respect rather have turned to ruling class instrument of witch hunting perceived political enemies. More worrisome to this is that officials of the agencies have by themselves become corrupt. Recently President Buhari sacked the chairman

of EFCC – Ibrahim Lamorde - and was arraigned for corrupt practice of tune of N1 trillion in a country of classical poverty (Bettina, 2009)

Economic Mismanagement

The great hope and expectations that greeted the return to civil rule in May 1999 may not be unconnected with the desire for an improved economy which in turn will guarantee a change in the quality of lives of mass of the populace. The long military rule and the attendant poverty, hardship and an unprecedented level of corruption have brought Nigerians to a hopeless and helpless situation such that the mistakes of the Abdulsalam transition programme were never sources of concern. But it is sad to observe that peoples' expectations of a better hope and opportunities have long been dashed even before the expiration of the second term in office of President Olusegun Obasanjo. It was expected that in the Fourth Republic especially between 1999-2007 Nigerians per capita income would increase tremendously, production diversified away from oil, poverty reduced to the barest minimum, economic opportunities provided for self-development while at the same time ensure environmental sustainability(Ajayi, 2015). Available statistics showed that these expectations were mere wishful thinking given the way and manner Nigerian economy was managed during the period under review. Given the abundance of both human and material resources, it is incontrovertible that Nigeria is the toast of many nations and a business haven for many investors, but sustained poor political governance which hindered any meaningful economic development. A perceptive observer notes thus: No doubt, Nigeria is potentially Africa's largest economy. Every year, the country produces over 200,000 graduates of tertiary institutions (including 93 universities both public and private ones), has the 6th largest gas reserves in the world, tenth largest oil producer; with abundant but largely untapped natural resources- gold, limestone, among others and with 60 percent of its arable land lying fallow (Ojo:2009;209).

With this staggering revelation Nigeria indeed has no business being poor. Despite the abundance of human and material deposits in the most populous black nation of the world, the country and its people still wallop in abject poverty manifesting greatly in high levels of unemployment, falling health and educational standards and poor economic financing. The lingering poverty problem can not be dissociated from poor economic management and absence of transparency and accountability in government

Godfatherism

Political godfatherism hinders the success of our democracy. At first, Nigeria had ideological godfathers who offered leadership ideas and expertise which they shared with their brilliant proteges. Their vision was based on enforcing a philosophy of governance for the purpose of development. In recent times, and in the wake of our modern democracy, godfathers are politically clueless set of people lacking the wisdom and ideas to impart. These new godfathers assume their positions because of their enormous wealth. They perpetuate the evil in their business oriented mindset by "investing" into politics and expecting a return of "profit". At the detriment of the citizenry, they rely on unscrupulous means to satisfy their excessive thirst which is almost insatiable. Some of such debased godfathers and their sons are: Chief Chris Ubah - Dr. Chris Ngige, Dr. Olusola Saraki - Alhaji Mohammed Lawal, Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu - Alhaji Rasheed Ladoja, Sir Emeka Offor - Dr. Chinwoke Mbadinuju. In the words of Paul Ogugua, "the only contribution which this class of godfathers has made to our democracy includes the emergence of such citizens that prefer money to their conscience" (<http://www.news24.com.ng/>).

Insecurity

The poor management of the security situation may have been provoked by unanticipated panic of leadership. The reduction of the concept of national security to mobilization of force to embark on rampage by destruction of lives and properties of innocent citizen defeats the essence. The imperative of effective security measures must crystallized into intelligence networking consolidated within the good will of citizenry which in turn define the scope of engagements. There must be collaboration between the security system and the community as basis of confronting any security challenge; anything below this margin will tilt the balance in favour of insurgency. The excesses of security agencies in handling challenges leaves much to be desired whether war has been declared on the country by its own security service. Nauseating reports of extra judicial massacre by those engaged to restore normalcy has completely destroyed the confidence of Nigerians. This despicable scenario had generated trauma of been under siege in the flash point zones.

Poverty and Unemployment

The essence of leadership in any social context is improvement of welfare of members of the society. Of utmost Significance is protection of lives and properties, creation of conducive environment to facilitate wealth creation. Over the years there has been deliberate neglect or lip service attention to these issues; consequently, it has impoverished the citizenry that exposed

them to easy manipulation for violent culture. Indeed, the current security challenges can be factored within this theory. People are so poor that what to eat as human beings are insurmountable hurdles. To demonstrate, Nigeria unemployment rate was recorded at 12.1% in March quarter of 2016, up from 10.4% in the fourth quarter of 2015, reaching its highest since December 2009 and 52% of Nigerians live on Less than a dollar in a day whereas 50% are unemployed (Odewale, 2015).

Understanding the Old and New Media

This section addresses a contending issue in the media practice for the social divide it has created. It has remained a subject of discourse among scholars and media practitioners. It borders on what constitute the old and new media. In a common parlance old media or traditional media is the media in existence before the arrival of the internet, such as newspapers, books, television, and cinema. In other words, Traditional media or old media include print media such as books, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, scholarly journals, pamphlets, fliers, broadsides, billboards, etc. Other traditional media are the electronic media such as radio, television, movies, CDs and DVDs, digital still photography, video recordings, audio recordings, interactive video games, etc. From the logical explanation of the above on old media, clarity has been given. On the other hand, what is new media? We may begin answering this question by listing the categories commonly discussed under this topic in the popular press: the Internet, Web sites, computer multimedia, computer games, CDROMs and DVD, virtual reality. By and large, the popular understanding of new media identifies it with the use of a computer for distribution and exhibition rather than production. Accordingly, texts distributed on a computer (Web sites and electronic books) are considered to be new media, whereas texts distributed on paper are not (Manovich, 2014). To that extent, what really constitute new media?

According to Bailey and Barbara (2015) new media entails,
...a broad term in media studies that emerged in the latter part of the 20th century. For example, new media holds out a possibility of on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, creative participation and community formation around the media content. Another important promise of new media is the "democratization" of the creation, publishing, distribution and consumption of media content. What distinguishes new media from traditional media is the digitizing of content into bits. There is also a dynamic aspect of content production which can be done in real time, but these offerings lack standards and have yet to gain traction.

Nevertheless, in seeking a definition of —New Media we need some basic tenets that can help us get a better positive understanding of what New Media is beyond what New Media is not. New media can be characterized by the variegated use of images, words, and sounds. These networks of images, sounds, and text data are different from old media formats such as hardcopy newspapers because of the nesting characteristic.

On a Similar note, photographs that are put on a CD-ROM and require a computer to be viewed are considered new media; the same photographs printed in a book are not. Do the above sufficiently present a meaningful understanding of the two on the grounds that one has to understand the effects of computerization on culture as a whole? In other words, there is no reason to privilege the computer as a machine for the exhibition and distribution of media over the computer as a tool for media production or as a media storage device. All have the same potential to change existing cultural languages and all have the same potential to leave culture as it is.

On the political scene, the media have provided dual responsibilities to both the elite and the masses. In every election, malicious and computer photo shop are employed as a veritable instrument to stir up campaign of calumny against opponents. Lots of people resort to praise singing, even when their services are not needed. Ake (1996) also stated that people subject themselves to serve politicians even when they do not want to exploit us, we subject ourselves to their whims and caprices. The implication is that we aid the power holders and politics to exploit us through the new media in our look out for pittance. This is also very dangerous to democratic consolidation in Nigeria.

The Role of the Media in Promoting Democracy in Nigeria

The Universal Declaration of Human rights of 1948 recognises the right of everyone to 'seek, receive and impart information through any media and regardless of frontier'. Expanding on this principle, independent press representatives from Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa met in Tailloires, France in 1983 and declared as follows;

- The right to know, to inform and be informed, is a fundamental human right, it is not subject to qualifications or restrictions by government or international bodies.
- The function of a free press is to serve this right of the people to know. Restrictions on press freedom are restriction on people's freedom.

- A free press also serve the nation by promoting open discussion of the issue facing the nation's people. To curtail free and open reporting for whatever stated purpose – national unity, national interest or national development – is to deny the people participation in decision affecting their destiny.
- All people are entitled to a free press. There is no nation which is insufficiently developed or its citizens unready for a free press.

Speaking further, Yusuf (2000: 119) supported the above by saying that Nigeria media practitioners met and outlined the specific functions the media must perform to promote democracy. They include the following:

- To convey information to the people with a view to letting them, know how the mandate they gave their representatives is being discharged;
- To provide a forum through which the governed could then react to government policies and activities;
- To provide such analysis as would enable the people to secure an adequate understanding and background to events;
- To assist in the articulation and pursuit of the national interest;
- To help strengthen the economic, social and political fabric of the nation;
- To provide informed criticism and viable alternatives to public policies
- To monitor the performance of government with a view to preventing deviation from expressly stated objectives;
- To provide the medium for transmitting knowledge and for educating the populace;
- To function as an agent of modernization; and
- To assist in setting agenda of priorities in the social, cultural, political and economic development of the nation.

Therefore, for the media to be efficient in performance, they must have unfettered access to information and also enable the citizens to become content producers. This is what the new media represents.

Democratizing the State through the Media

Understanding the enormous powers of the media is needful in democratization of developing state like Nigeria. The media in Nigerian environments are to re-engage the core ideologies and objectives of its profession, as practicable in developed societies. First among this is Agenda Setting. This has to do with the power of the media to determine, influence and guide topics for

political debates and discussion on public policies and issues of concern before, during and after electoral process (Mmadubuobi et al, 2015). At this point, the ability of the media (both traditional and new) to formulate public opinion by defining the boundaries within which people think about and discuss political issues is unquantifiable. Nigerian democracy is bedeviled by ethnic, religious, tribal and etc. politics which hinders the ideals and values of democracy. The mass media have the function of integrating ethnic, religious, political and other variables that divide Nigerian people both nationally and otherwise by setting and promoting agenda for national integration and growth, only upon which democracy can survive because democracy cannot thrive in a crisis ridden society.

Second on this, is mobilization and information. Most of the information the people possess whether wrongly or rightly is mostly derived from the media (print, electronic). This information is the core factor that determines the direction of the people and stance they take in public issues. Traditionally, —the role of the mass media is to inform, educate, and entertain members of the society. —It is also expected to propagate the cultural heritage of the people (Sobowale, 2002). But Media in Nigeria have shown the penchant for ethnic affiliation, secretly or openly which does not help democratization process rather promote violence and chaos. Orhewere (2003) in Ocholi (2003) maintains that —the Nigerian media in the past did not show enough commitment to professional ethic therefore contributed to electoral crisis in western Nigeria in 1965 and subsequent elections.

Furthermore, the new media have a great role to play in influencing and contributing towards democratization process in view of its usage in the contemporary political dispensation. Larger percentage of our population have access to and are also consciously connected to social media for ideas and news sharing, information and entertainment, etc. Information sharing has become instant, vivid and comprehensive in social media (Bettina, 2009). For example, while the facebook which is the most popular among the new social media allows campaigners to send out mass messages, post pictures, videos and interact with the public; twitter is used to send short and targeted messages to thousands of followers and to interact with others. YouTube is used to post campaign videos. These new social media should be a platforms that gives the electorate a competitive voice. With social media, politicians appeal to citizens; it makes them seem more personable and gives them advantage of keeping in constant touch with their supporters. Social media grants many people the chance to participate actively and get fully

involved in the political discourse by adding their voices to issues posted on the social media sites. Kenneth, Odoemelam, and Chibuwe, (2012:10-13), argue that it promoted the frontiers of participatory democracy as a debate avenue and an indispensable aid in actualizing public sphere journalism. It affords electorates a friendlier avenue of assessing candidates for political offices and promoting transparency in governance. These represent the strength of the new social media. Therefore, politics have taken a new dimension in recent times with the advent of the new technologies. It has become a voice to the voiceless, oppressed, and marginalized and opposition whom may not have access, capacity to conventional media or deprived access to it by the incumbent government. In 2011 and 2015 elections social media actually played great roles in educating and mobilizing electorates without any act of breach or doctoring of content of information intending to pass across as conventional media do in its censorship ethics. Social media like Sahara Reporters, naija.Com, Facebook, Whatsapp, Imo, Viber, Twitter, YouTube, etc in recent times in Nigeria like other countries have become instruments of mobilization for demonstrations, agitations and freedom. In this case enlarging the coast of democracy through participation, transparency, accountability, enlightenment, etc (Asuni and Farris 2011; Thomas & Michael; and Ojo in Ajaye and Adesotu 2015).

While analyzing the use of social media in Nigerian election Yetunde (2015) argues that Nigerians especially the youth used the social media platform to discuss political issues, get vital information about political parties and candidates. But beyond using the medium during electioneering campaigns, users continued to use the platform to discuss and monitor the process of the presidential election. The online tools have been agog with discussions, arguments and sometimes criticisms between political parties and supporters. On the day of presidential election, hitches faced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) were announced on social media tools as soon as they happened. For instance, the card reader challenges, late arrival of materials were reported by online newspapers, blog and even individuals via whatsapp. Prior to then, outside Nigeria, the social media is believed to have contributed to the electoral success of Barrack Obama in 2008 US election.

According to Yentunde (2015) in a research titled —How New Media Has Revolutionized Electoral Politics in the United States, Elise Aronson informs that Obama had 350,522 Myspace friends compared to McCain's 48,251 as March 14, 2008, 30 percent of all internet users visited the Obama/Biden campaign website, while 21 percent visited McCain/Palin site. On twitter, Obama had 118,107 followers, while McCain had only 4,942 followers. On facebook 2million users signed on as Obama/Biden supporter as against McCain's 600,000 supporters. Similarly

Obama led in the blogosphere with 500 million blog posts mentioning Obama between convention and Election Day whereas, only 150 million mentioned McCain. What this implies is that Obama dominated the social networking sites and had a greater online presence than his rivals. The existence of social media has brought consciousness, carefulness, civility and even fear among public office holders. Social media has helped in consolidating democracy in various democratic countries of the world by serving as a watch-dog on the governments and politicians. In North Carolina an internet research institute published early 2013 asserts that about 6.7 million people blog on the blogging websites while another 12 million blog using their social networks. By the end of 2013, it is projected that 128 million people will be blog readers (Uzochukwu and Emmanuel, 2015). Conventional media industry has ventured into using some of the platforms of the new media as a source of generating news from the people as it occurs in their local environment. With this rich advantage and effect of social media, it becomes a vital tools for democratization process through quick dissemination of information and participation by the large population of the people especially the literate ones.

Regrettably though, new media has its own challenges which should be well guided through proper sensitization of citizens to avoid its abuse. It has turned out to be an instrument of calumny against political interest. The house of Senate recently (2020) initiated a bill to punish anyone who is found guilty of spreading defamatory information through the social media against anybody especially the house of senate. This appears as a move to checkmate its excesses but can still be construed to be another move to deprive the citizenry the right to criticize government and express their views through the new media. Obviously it is tantamount to political underdevelopment of the mass of Nigerians in the 21st Century of technological interactions.

Setting a New Precedence through the Media

The mass media are often referred to as the fourth branch of government because of the power they wield and the oversight function they exercise. The media's key role in democratic governance has been recognized since the late 17th century, and remains a fundamental principle of modern day democratic theory and practices.

Traditionally, the role of the mass media is to inform, educate, and entertain members of the society. It is also expected to propagate the cultural heritage of the people. The role of the mass media in creating political awareness, cultural heritage of the people is no doubt germane. The role of the mass media in creating political awareness, engendering empathy and mobilizing

people for social change had also been recognized (Sobowale, 2002: 271-280.). The mass media has combined both human and non-human resources to ease the flow and sharing of information in the society. The development of new technologies has in one way or the other influence the development of the mass media. This is because many designed equipments have been discovered to expand and change the way and form through which we communicate with one another. In fact, it has made McLuhan's prediction of a global village become more real. The cyber space is one of such technological innovations. It is an off-shoot of cybernetics: the science of communications and control systems in machines and living. The innovations in technology have led to the designing and use of software and hardware like the —World Wide Web and digital satellites to increase the speed of interactivity among individuals and nations of the world. The term "cyberspace" stands for the global network of interdependent information technology infrastructures, telecommunications networks and computer processing systems. As a social platform, individuals can interact, exchange ideas, share information, provide social support, conduct business, direct actions, create artistic media, play games, engage in political discussion, and so on, using this global network. The term has become a conventional means to describe anything associated with the Internet and the diverse Internet culture.

In as much as new media or social media has some negative consequences, it has helped in the promotion of democratic values in Nigeria. Social media has helped in consolidating democracy in various democratic countries of the world by serving as a watch-dog on the governments and politicians. The press, according to Akinfeleye (2003) is to watch-dog, check-on-to uncover and never to cover up corruption and/or wrong doings by the other three estates. They are also to monitor governance and make the other three estates accountable to people at all times. The role of media is important as feedback, exposure, and conduit mechanism in all countries. Most citizens receive their information about what is going on in the government, and how it affects them, through the filter of the media. Therefore, politics has taken a new dimension in recent times with the advent of the new technologies. Information sharing has become instant, vivid and comprehensive (Bettina, 2009). For example, while the facebook which is the most popular among the new social media allows campaigners to send out mass messages, post pictures, videos and interact with the public; twitter is used to send short and targeted messages to thousands of followers and to interact with others. YouTube is used to post campaign videos. These new social media should be a platform that gives the electorates a

competitive voice. With social media, politicians appeal to citizens; it makes them seem more personable and gives them advantage of keeping in constant touch with their supporters. Social media grants many people the chance to participate actively and get fully involved in the political discourse by adding their voices to issues posted on the social media sites. However, Kenneth, Odoemelam, and Chibuwe, (2012:10-13), argue that it promoted the frontiers of participatory democracy as a debate avenue and an indispensable aid in actualizing public sphere journalism. It affords electorates a friendlier avenue of assessing candidates for political offices and promoting transparency in governance. These represent the strength of the new social media. Former President of Nigeria, Dr. Ebele Jonathan used facebook platform in his first electoral contest as the President and so many Nigerians were happy seeing a president care about his subjects for the first time. In United States, Condoleezza Rice the former US Secretary of state developed what today is called facebook diplomacy and majority of the world leaders are buying into it.

Another important and major role played by social media in democratic consolidation could be seen in the area of information circulation during electioneering process. From available data collected from the interviews which were conducted on the role of new social media on democratic consolidation in Nigeria (especially with respect to 2011 general election) by Ojo in Ajaye and Adesotu (2015), majority of respondents submitted that social media has helped to overcome previous scarcity of information during the electioneering process, leading to increased transparency and reduced tension. Findings show that social media remains an effective tool for electoral scrutiny and can help build public trust in the electoral process (Thomas and Michael in Ajaye and Adesotu, 2015). What is the reality in Nigeria? In view to actualize the potentials of information dissemination, a voter education and election monitoring initiative in 2011 was created, and it was popularly called —RSVP| acronym for Register (to vote), Select (your candidates), Vote (your candidate), and Protect (your vote from fraud). This campaign had a strong presence on social media, and a special Social Media Tracking Centre (SMTC) was also established to monitor popular social media platforms for signs of trouble (Asuni and Farris, 2011).

Conclusion

In sum, it is obvious that democracy in Nigeria is bedevilled by the nature and character of the state which tilts the political pendulum in favour of a group. The paper discovers that instead of the media to be seen playing vital role in promoting the essence of democracy in Nigeria,

the frontier was refocused and extended towards advancing the course of the elites. It became imperative also to note that the old media have remained a vital political tool in the hands of power holders whose interest they represent. On the part of the new media, some of the old anomalies are becoming visible as a result of the fact that with the advent of hi-tech gadgets anyone can access situations and events easily and upload for the world to see and comment. The implication of this is that it has kept the traditional media practitioners on their toes in ensuring objective reporting in most cases. This development on its own will go a long way in aiding democratic promotion and protection over time.

Recommendations

Therefore, it is the recommendation of this paper that more effort should be made by Nigerians in protecting our democracy since the new media has empowered all (individual journalism) to be stakeholders in ensuring access to objective reports. This can also be made possible if Nigerian government and security operatives will step up their combatant skill in promoting security in the state. It worked in developed states and we can make it work here. Moreover, It is necessary that Federal Government reappraises the impact of engagements of the military in internal security operations otherwise the consequences on national cohesion will be great. On the control of the new media in a democratic system, we also recommend value re-orientation, spirit of patriotism and establishment of special tribunal to address the use and abuse of new media in a democratic system.

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