The Social Media and Consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria: Uses, Potentials and Challenges

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Abstract

The adoption of the Global System of Mobile telecommunication (GSM) by Nigeria in 2001 opened up new vistas of communication on an unprecedented level. This came at a time when the country had just come out of a long period of military dictatorship and once again experimenting with democracy. About twelve years now from the entry of this new channel of mass communication into Nigeria, we are set in this study to discuss its potentials for consolidating democracy and its attendant challenges. This new technology with several social media platforms such as the use of the internet for social networking, blogging, video-sharing (YouTube), tweeting, and photo-sharing (Instagram) has greatly enhanced human communication in the 21th century. Considering the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature of the new media, they have become veritable instruments for the deepening of democratic ideals and processes in terms of information-sharing, monitoring and evaluation of electioneering processes, reduction of tension and anxieties associated with elections, ensuring and even enforcing transparency and accountability to a large extent. The study however, recognises that although social media have their own challenges like susceptibility to abuse and desecration; these can be effectively minimized if not obliterated through proper monitoring and regulatory controls without abridging freedom of expression. It therefore submits that the proper use of social media in fostering and sustaining participatory democracy in Nigeria

in particular and Africa in general in the 21th century has the potential of deepening and consolidating democracy in spite of these teething challenges.

Keywords: Social media, democracy, social networking, election, military dictatorship

Introduction

The media (print and electronic) in Nigeria especially the privately-owned ones have always been strong instruments of sensitisation and mobilization of people towards democracy even in the dark days of brutal military dictatorship (Ajayi, 2007). However, their reach was limited by such factors as government intimidation and harassments, logistics, limited resources and their elitist ownership and control. But with the widening of the communication media space through improved technology information dissemination and sensitisation of people now have a widespread immediacy and more diligent follow up of events. This is as a result of their easy accessibility and availability irrespective of social status. Even with the cheapest mobile phones one can still access some social media platforms at reasonable cost for information, education and entertainment. Fundamentally the media exists as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, social enlightenment and mobilisation. These functions set the media apart as an important factor in the relationship between the government and the governed thereby making them indispensable for good governance, the deepening of democracy, societal growth and development generally.

The emergence of the new social media is a major phenomenon that has transformed the interaction, communication and sharing of information between people throughout the world in the 21st century. It is important to point out here that social media is not a new concept. It has been evolving since the dawn of human interaction. Meanwhile, during the 21th century, there was the emergence of new forms of social media networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, internet service among others. The emergence of these new forms of social media revolutionised many aspects of human communication. Thus, today social media have become a natural part of the everyday lives of people

all over the world. For instance, as at 2010, there were about 4.5 million Facebook users in the world (André-Michel, 2010:3) and this has been increasing rapidly. This development makes social media fantastic tools for communicating with a large audience.

The arrival of these new media platforms have continued to change the way people communicate with each other or one another around the world. For example, mobile phone penetration rates, in particular, have resulted in a plethora of ideas for new media platforms aimed at bridging the information divide between the well-connected and the disconnected (Unwin, 2012:7). In addition, Internet-based communication has equally started to gain importance in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. Both mobile phones and the internet provide exciting new opportunities for one-to-one as well as one-to-many communication. The much reported rapid spread of mobile connectivity and services, as well as different forms of public and shared internet access have allowed a growing number of people who may not have access to a computer or a fixed connection to take part in "the global conversation" (André-Michel, 2010:4).

The use of new social media in politics has continued to grow in many parts of Africa since the 21th century. The role of social media networks such as mobile phones' SMS, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in deepening the democratization of Nigeria in recent times cannot be overemphasized. For example, 2011 alone witnessed a massive use of mobile phones' SMS, Facebook, Twitter in the general elections in Nigeria. The social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are amongst the most visited websites in Nigeria. Due to their participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature, they have become veritable instruments for carrying out election campaigns and other electioneering activities, political engagement and mobilization among others.

It is against this backdrop that this study discusses the new social media and consolidation of democracy in Nigeria with particular emphasis on their potentials and challenges. The study is divided into six parts. The first part is introduction; the second part is the conceptual clarification; the third part deals with the historical perspective on the

evolution of the new social media platforms in Nigeria; the fourth part discusses the role of social media in democratic consolidation in Nigeria; the fifth part looks at the challenges of social media in strengthening democracy; while the sixth part contains the concluding remarks. Concepts and terms that feature prominently in this discourse which need to be clarified are 'Social media', 'social networking', and 'democratic consolidation'.

Social media: There is no universal definition of this concept. The concept has been viewed from different perspectives by scholars. Simply put, social media is a collective term that describes the means of communicating and engaging with people. Boyd and Ellison (2007:1) perceive social media as "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system". According to the Australian Electoral Commission (2011), social media can be defined as "online tools and Web sites that facilitate many-to-many communications between users. Specific examples include Facebook and Twitter, but may also include more regional or niche services, and more longstanding collaborative environments such as web-based forums and wikis". More specifically, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) see social media as internet-based applications built on the technological and ideological foundations of Web 2.0. Social Media can equally be called a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting (Cohen, 2009:12). The term "social media" refers to the wide range of internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities. The kinds of internet services commonly associated with social media include blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, Twitter, YouTube and so on (Dewing, 2012:1). The social media technologies provide flexibility, adaptability, usability and customizability. Constantinides and Fountain (2008) opine that the social media is a system that supports the creation of informal users' network facilitating the flow of ideas and knowledge by allowing the effective generation, dissemination, sharing, editing of informational content. In short, social media is primarily used to transmit or share information with a broad audience in a free flowing technologically driven process. This facilitates **social networking** which has been described as a tool and a utility for connecting with others (Stelzner, 2009:4). However more appropriately, social networking is an

act of engagement; as people with common interests associate together and build relationships through community (Hartshorn, 2010) within or outside geo-political divides. This constitutes the prevalent activities that go on in the social media. Thus while the latter is the facilitating conduit or platform; the former is the real activity that ensures its relevance to humanity and society. This brings us to the concept of **democratic consolidation** which can be viewed from different perspectives. Originally, the term "democratic consolidation" is meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune to the threat of authoritarian regression, of building dams against eventual "reverse waves" (Schedler, A. 1998:91). Democratic consolidation practically refers to the institutionalization of democracy, such that it becomes self-sustaining and secure from the threat of authoritarian regression and is considered the ''only game in town'' (Linz & Stepan, 1996:15). Therefore, for the purpose of this discourse, we are looking at democratic consolidation in terms of avoiding democratic breakdown, avoiding democratic erosion and progressive deepening of democracy. From the perspective of avoiding democratic breakdown, consolidating democracy means reducing the probability of its breakdown to the point where we can feel reasonably confident that democracy will persist in the near future. This "classical" meaning of democratic consolidation sees it as regime survival. From the perspective of deepening democracy, two positive versions are discernible. While the first positive version involves completing the democratic transition by travelling from electoral to liberal democracy, the second deals with "continuum of democracy", that is by deepening liberal democracy and pushing it closer to advanced democracy (Schedler, A. 1998:99). From the above definitions, social media, social networking and democratic consolidation have a kind of organic relationship that could service the goals and aspirations of sustainable democratic development if well deployed.

The new social media platforms in Nigeria: the evolutionary process

Historically, media evolvement could be traced from the pre-colonial period up till the post colonial era. Significantly, each epoch is marked by its own distinctive characteristics. While the pre-colonial period involved the use of traditional methods of communication such

as the burning of bush, beating of drums and gongs among others, the colonial and post colonial periods were characterised by the emergence of conventional media of communication such as newspapers, telephone, telegraph, radio and television. Before the advent of new social media platforms like Global System for Mobile communication (GSM), internet, Facebook, twitter, YouTube in Nigeria, these conventional media of communication were made use of in fostering communication. The first recorded effort to formally use the mass media to influence society in Nigeria was by Rev. Henry Townsend. He began the publication of "Iwe Irohin" a bilingual newspaper published in English and Yoruba languages. The objective of the newspaper was to influence the traditional governments he found in Egbaland (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992: 144).

Herbert Macaulay started the first indigenous (Nigerian) newspaper "Daily News" which he used as a weapon in the nationalist struggle. Later in 1937, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe founded the "West African Pilot" which enjoyed mass circulation in Lagos. Azikiwe used the medium to promote serious broad-based anti-colonial mobilization in the country. It is important to point out here that, the working relationship between the media and national politics broke down with the regionalization of Nigeria, leading to the sectionalization of the press. Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the Western region founded the Tribune in Ibadan in 1949 to promote his welfarist doctrines and champion the cause of the "Egbe Omo Oduduwa" a pan-Yoruba ethno-cultural association. And subsequently Zik's *West African Pilot* shed its nationalist's toga and fully embraced the promotion of "Eastern Nigerian" interests. Earlier the Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo" a vernacular newspaper had been set up in Zaria in the 1930s to serve the needs of Hausa speaking groups in Northern Nigeria. But in 1966, the *New Nigeria*n was established in Kaduna by the federal government (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1992:146). This trend continued with the coming of more public radio and television stations as well as the emergence of private newspapers, radio and television stations to serve as watchdog to government and to boost and deepen democracy.

The new millennium brought in the evolution of new media of communication which include internet, mobile phone, Twitter,

Facebook, YouTube, and other platforms. This new media of communication is popularly known as the new social media. Although the actual date that this new media, most especially mobile telecommunication suffused Nigeria is vague, its development became noticeable since the birth of the Fourth Republic. The adoption of the Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM) by the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2001 revolutionised the system of human communication in the country. No doubt, its emergence has helped to bridge the gap between the connected (urban people) and the disconnected (rural people) in the country. Indeed, the arrival of the new social media has immensely enhanced human communication. The new technology due to its participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature has really made everyone who can use it as a mass communicator. This brings to fruition the prediction of Marshal McLuhan in 1964 that the world would someday become a "global village" where what happens in one part of the world would be known instantly and simultaneously worldwide (Cited by Nisbet, 2008:454). Thus, the development and spread of mobile telephony in Nigeria since 2001, has made the citizenry to become ever more involved or connected with happenings within and outside the country.

Aside mobile communication, other new social media platforms that had penetrated Nigerian society during this new millennium include internet, facebook, twitter among others. The emergence of these new social media platforms, perhaps, are the most phenomenal among various platforms of communication made available by the advance in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The possibilities they have created in human communication and interaction are beyond bounds. These new social media emerged with the advent of the internet and the World Wide Web. They are usually associated with the term "web 2.0" which is used to describe websites that provide opportunity for a user to interact with the sender of a message (Tapscot, 2009).

While Facebook, one of the biggest social platforms was created and introduced in 2004, YouTube, the biggest video sharing website and Twitter, the most popular micro blogging site, were introduced in 2005 and 2006 respectively. These new social media which are derivatives of the internet and World Wide Web are additional boosts to information

exchange between users (Kaplan and Haenlin, 2010). As the internet became more popular since the early 1990s, the websites that allowed users to create and upload content began to appear (OECD, 2007:36). The first social network site (SixDegrees.com) appeared in 1997. From 2002 onward, a large number of social network sites were launched (Dewing, 2010:4). By late 2000s, the new social media not only began to gain widespread acceptance worldwide but also received a great boost with the witnessing of many social networking sites springing up. For example, in November 2012, while facebook announced it had 1 billion users worldwide, with about 5 million users in Nigeria, twitter had an estimated 517 million users (Dewing, 2010:4). This boosted and transformed the interaction of individuals and organizations who share common interest in politics, music, education, movies, and friendship, based on social networking. Among those that were launched are Lunar Storm, six degrees, cyworld, ryze, and Wikipedia. In 2001, fotolog, sky blog and Friendster were launched, and in 2003, MySpace, LinkedIn, last FM, tribe.net, and Hi5, among others. In 2004, popular names like Facebook Harvard, Dogster and Mixi evolved. During 2005, big names like Yahoo!360, YouTube, cyword, and Black planet all emerged (Junco, Heibergert, & Loken, 2011).

It is important to point out here that there are a number of factors that have contributed to this rapid growth in these new social media avenues. These include technological factors such as increased broadband availability, the improvement of software tools and the development of more powerful computers and mobile devices; social factors such as the increasing affordability of computers and growing commercial interest in social sites (OECD, 2007:37). The implication of these factors for the growth of social media participation and democracy in Nigeria since 2000 is discussed below.

Role of the new social media in democratic consolidation in Nigeria: a discourse on its uses and potentials

The role of social media in the democratization process in terms of strengthening Nigeria democracy cannot be overemphasized. This positive relationship is being interrogated here by considering the individuals' attitudes, beliefs and behaviours to democratic governance. It is imperative to point out here that since the birth of modern

democracies, freedom of speech and Press independence has been regarded as crucial and indispensable conditions for the effective functioning of a democratic political system. The demise of authoritarian regimes and spread of democracy in Nigeria and other parts of the world in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, which Samuel Huntington (1991) called 'the third wave of democratisation' has even further increased researchers' interest in the role of social media in facilitating democratic transition and enabling subsequent democratic consolidation (particularly in Africa, Eastern Europe and Latin America) (Štetka, V. & Örnebring, H. 2012: 55). Recent socio-political upheavals in North Africa popularly known as Arab Spring, which resulted in the toppling of some authoritarian leaders are reportedly organised through new communication technologies and social networks (Lim 2012, Youmans & York 2012), thereby reinforcing the belief that social media is a veritable instrument for the establishment and consolidation of democracy.

Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi (2005) and Mattes & Bratton (2007) argue that for non-democratic regimes to transit to democracy, and for young democracies to consolidate and stabilize, a majority of citizens need to be committed to democracy as their preferred form of government through the help of information technologies like the internet. They emphasize that the attitudes of citizens and information technologies are important components of the democratization process. Almond and Verba (1963) describe the Internet as one of the online tools that possesses great democratic potential because it does allow for feedback and encourages the development of ''participant'' citizens. They said that rather than acting as passive receptors of political information, participant citizens are more sophisticated and engage with political information provided to them and subsequently respond or make ''demands'' from it. It is important to note the potential of the Internet, especially when utilized by organizations such as political parties or movements, to promote the formation of ''mass'' public opinion that demands political change within democratizing states. Other scholars who equally emphasize the Internet's capacity to promote political change by serving as a pluralistic media platform include Bratton et al., (2005); Groshek, (2009); Lei, (2011). For instance, Bratton and his colleagues argue that new social media use in

transitioning or emerging democracies ''expands the range of considerations that people bear in forming their political and economic attitudes,'' and promotes democratic citizenship and greater demand for democratic processes and reform (Bratton et al., 2005: 209).

One important major role of this new social media in democratic consolidation could be seen in the area of information circulation during the 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 (2014), 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. Moreover, social media based monitoring shows encouraging signs of robustness concerning information quality and mobility. Findings show that social media remains an effective tool for electoral scrutiny and can help build public trust in the electoral process (Thomas &Michael n.d: 3). The frustration felt by some Nigerians in relation to the high rate of corruption and ineffectiveness of Nigerian governments led them to create a Nigerian pro-democracy group in 2010 known as "Enough is Enough" (EIE) which is geared towards promotion of good governance and public accountability in Nigeria. The group seeks to achieve their objective by mobilizing young Nigerians of voting age (18–35), with an emphasis on the use of social media technologies. Several of the group's leaders are among the best known social media personalities in the country. It orchestrated a major voter education and election monitoring initiative in 2011, dubbed "RSVP" acronym for Register (to vote), Select (your candidates), Vote, and Protect (your vote from fraud). This campaign had a strong presence on social media, and a special Social Media Tracking Center (SMTC) was also established to monitor popular social media platforms for signs of trouble (Asuni and Farris, 2011).

Prompt reporting of incidents through camera-cell/mobile phones, twitter, facebook, YouTube among others is an important role of the new social media in consolidating democracy in Nigeria. For instance, there were several recorded cases of electoral irregularities and malpractices which led to the picking up of some people during the

2011 general election by security operatives. Specifically, an SMTC staff gave a first-hand report he received from a National Youth Service Corps member that worked as a polling officer in the 2011 general election. The worker claimed to have been forced to register under-aged children to vote. He sent several photos of the ineligible voters to the SMTC. A reference was also made to a facebook post of one of the polling officers which read as follows:

> Na wao! This CPC supporters would have killed me yesterday, no see threat oooo. Even after forcing under-aged voters on me they wanted me to give them the remaining ballot paper to thumb print. Thank God for the police and am happy I could stand for God and my nation. To all corps members who stood despite these threats esp. In the north bravo! Nigeria! Our change has come (Kolawole, 2011).

Although the non-prosecution or lack of diligent prosecution of electoral offenders exposed through the social media has been whittling down its influence, the fact remains that the utilisation of the new social media by Nigerians is fulfilling a watchdog role in the electioneering process and this has been boosting the drive towards an increased measure of transparency and checkmating excesses and corruption in the system.

In fact, social media has gained global recognition as revolutionary tools for effecting drastic changes. This is especially true of the facebook and twitter platforms which have been facilitating massive communication online on an unprecedented large scale. Apart from their catalytic role in the uprisings in the Arab world (Arab Spring) which culminated in the enthronement of democracy in Tunisia and Egypt, they also assisted profoundly in exposing and spreading details of the evil of the government of Turkey as a result of which their usage was temporarily banned there (Chikero, 2014). Even in Nigeria presently, corrupt and inept government functionaries are becoming apprehensive of the social media because of its expository and infectious nature. We agree with Chikero that, "What a corrupt nation needs is just a powerful platform where citizens can uninterruptedly communicate their common experiences, share ideas on the way out..." (Chikero, 2014). This realisation has generated much interest in the social media especially by the youth most of whom see themselves as

'victims' of poor governance and corruption. It is hardly surprising therefore that they are at the vanguard of using twitter and facebook for information sharing on corruption and bad governance.

One other important area of consolidating Nigerian democracy through the aid of new social media is to defuse tension and reduce the incidence of post electoral violence through prompt release of election results. It has been argued that the greater availability of prompt information on new social media on Election Day has done much to mitigate tension and post election violence. 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 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 platforms now give 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. Thus, it advances 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 (Kenneth, Odoemelam, and Chibuwe, 2012:10-13).

The new social media platforms are also indispensable tools of sensitisation and conscientization in advancing political engagement and mobilization. The challenge of voter apathy which was experienced during the 2011 general elections in some parts of the country can be averted in future elections through the optimal utilisation of new social media platforms. Governments at all levels through its agencies and the politicians can spread political messages directly to citizens' mobile phones to encourage them to vote in particular ways. The ubiquitous

access of these online devices has a democratizing effect as they offer citizens opportunities of full engagement in the political process. The implication of the emergence of these media platforms is that voters/electorates have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages, but also creators of the messages. Owing to the positive effect of these new media platforms, Nigerian politicians can take full advantage of this instant form of communication to reach the masses with the aim of assessing the political atmosphere before venturing into the campaign. Social media could be a tool to assess the popularity of a candidate especially by the young people. Social media also provides politicians with the opportunity to be free with and accessible to the general public. Abubukar (2011) observes that social media has created online platforms that serve as a new "political capital" where people resort to and participate in a political discourse. Kweon and Kim (2010) therefore, emphasize that social media has become a main source of personal orientation, anonymous interactivities and social community on variety of issues that involve politics and political discourse. Social media therefore has the capacity of boosting participation because of its openness, interactive nature, connectedness, textual and audio-visual characteristics appeal (Mayfield, 2010 and Bradley, 2009).

The challenges of social media in strengthening democracy in Nigeria

In spite of the huge potentials of the new social media for consolidating democracy, they equally have their challenges. The new social media platforms can be misused in disseminating unfiltered/ unverified information and rumours which are inimical to strengthening democracy. The increasing use of social media and other online tools has indeed led to greater privacy challenges. This is to say that with the great potentials of the internet and other digital social media platforms, is included the challenges of monitoring and regulation. Obviously, the new social media require some sort of regulation if our society is not to degenerate into a state of anarchy (Ekwe, et al, 2011).

Social media despite its numerous advantages in fostering politics, democracy and good governance is also a very volatile platform to trend politics. A viral video of immoral conduct or lurid sex photos

can instantly infect a political campaign or career, dooming it to untimely termination. Anonymity of sources makes it difficult for strict regulation, monitoring and prosecution of illicit acts. This makes it a vulnerable instrument for perpetuating fraudulent acts and it also promotes piracy. This is partly because the question of copyright and intellectual property are more complex and difficult to define and even more difficult to regulate online. Similarly, images and sounds can be digitally manipulated, so truth and reality are difficult to ascertain. Social media is addictive in nature, making work/life balance hard to achieve. With the new technologies, users get more than they bargain for because of their information overload and social network overload. There is also the problem of continuous partial attention which removes social media users from the real world.

Another challenge is the issue of relatively low penetration and access in the country. Writing on penetration of new media in Africa Osuala, in Adibe and Odoemelam (2011) notes that:

> the diffusion of new technologies in Africa is still at a snail speed such that the gap between the information rich developed countries and African countries continue to increase everyday….. Africa has 13% of world population but only 2% of the world telephone lines and 1% internet connectivity. Consequently, most African countries have not been able to reap the abundant benefits of the global information revolution in many areas of life.

The picture painted above is still largely unchanged, three years after. Again, in many parts of Nigeria where social media (such as internet, twitter, facebook) is in use, it is still mainly an urban affair and mostly elitist. Perhaps, the most worrisome of it all is the problem of weak or absent regulation of the technology. Kidafa, Odoemelam and Elechi (2011) observe that "regulating traditional media in the face of issues like obscenity, copyright, right to privacy, was upheaval (sic), but have become more difficult with the emergence of social media". How to effect censorship without being seen as abridging rights and derailing democracy is a dilemma for the politicians and government officials.

It is also important to reflect on the ways that ICTs are actually being used to counter democratic processes, because so doing can help develop understanding of the policies that need to be in place to resist such actions. There is increasing understanding that it is not just companies and governments that can use social media for negative purposes, and that individuals and small groups could use it for bullying, digital 'monstering', or violent actions, not to talk of fraudulent or criminal activities (419 in local parlance). It is now becoming increasingly clear by the day that the social media 'revolution' is irresistible and so conventional wisdom is that governments and interest groups would have to seek accommodation within the new dispensation. This development must have informed the Nigerian government's promotion of e-government through the establishment of a Ministry of Communication Technology to drive this initiative by deploying ICT to enhance transparency, efficiency, productivity and citizen engagement (Aginam, 2014). Two flagship projects – Government Service Portal (GSP) and Government Contact Centre (GCC) have been initiated to achieve the following objectives:

   i.   Deploying GSP to create a single point of entry to Federal Government Services;

   ii.   Enhancing accountability and improving the delivery and quality of public services through technology-enabled civic engagement (Mobile Technology, Facebook, Twitter, Interactive Mapping, Bloggs, wiki etc);

   iii.   Transforming government processes to increase public administration efficiency;

   iv.   Increasing end-user productivity by integrating many different services or data access paths of ministries, departments and agencies (MDA); and,

   v.   Facilitating efficient response to citizens through the Government Contact Centers (GCC) being set up in the six geo-political zones of the country (Aginam, 2014).

So far 10 government processes from the Federal Ministries of Education; Health; Agriculture; Industry, Trade and Investments; and Communication Technology have been automated while the pre-incorporation and post-incorporation processes of the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and online payment on the Government Service

Portal are currently being automated (Aginam, 2014). Furthermore many top government officials, including the President, now have websites and do interact with people on facebook and twitter either directly or through their assistants. Without doubt, these efforts must have assisted Nigeria's upward movement in the 2014 UN e-government ranking from 162 in 2012 to 141 out of 193 countries (Aginam, 2014). These are positive developments in the direction of good governance and democratic consolidation.

The press is also not left out of this latest 'craze'. Not only does Nigeria now have many newspapers, magazines and radio stations online, journalists are now regularly exposed to ICT-based capacity development programs. For instance in April 2014, a 2-day Editors Lab Hackdays workshop sponsored by Google was organised by Global Editors Network (GEN) in conjunction with Vanguard Newspapers (Arenyeka, 2014). Participants were taken through some fundamentals of Google applications like Google search, display ads, knowledge panel, modifiers, conversion, Google scholar, Google translate, Google trends, YouTube, Google maps, and Google streaming before they were directed to develop digital tools for journalists on the theme: "New ways to cover elections online and through social media" (Arenyeka, 2014). This was informed by the belief that new social media tools would play a significant role in changing age-old election habits. According to Arenyeka (2014) "it appears that the 2015 election bug seems to have caught not just Nigerian politicians but journalists as well who are preparing ahead to give unprecedented reportage to ensure free, fair and transparent elections through the innovative use of social media". This is a healthy development for sustainable democracy in the country.

Conclusion

The foregoing discourse has established the potential of the new social media platforms for the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria. The study established the fact that in spite of the challenges of social media, it represents a veritable avenue for political change by socializing citizens into the political beliefs required for democratic citizenship, and thereby promote sustainable democracy. It argued that the widespread use of the Internet for social networking, blogging,

video-sharing and tweeting has a functional relationship with participatory democracy. We are also in total agreement with Bonin (2013) that the new social media platforms are the newest lenses through which we are experiencing the products of journalism. They facilitate online communities created by readers, listeners and viewers to discuss issues, have their voices heard, and get feedback in record time. The fact that social media is a supportive avenue for sharing views and opinions and discussing political life in the country implies that the social media can play an important role in deepening democracy, if conscientiously and patriotically utilised for that purpose. However, in practical terms there is a need to translate the "rantings" on the social media to concrete impactful actions that could checkmate anti-democratic tendencies. This may not be long in coming given the rapidly evolving synergy between right campaigners/activists, journalists and the expanding tribe of social media enthusiasts. However a populist leader who can rally pro-democracy groups, embrace and coordinate genuine social media operations to put the government on its toes is needed to safeguard and consolidate Nigeria's fledgling democracy.

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