

New Media and Democracy: Lessons from the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria

Anthony Egobueze*

Abstract

Democracy provides the opportunity for the people to decide who governs them. It is a government wherein the people have a say in rule-making, implementation, and adjudication and has several pillars. One important tenet of democracy is the media. Therefore, this essay explores how the New Media affected Nigeria's 2015 presidential election. The paper used content analysis as a method of data analysis, adopting secondary data. Findings showed that due to the uncensored nature of messages and videos posted frequently, it sends dangerous signals to the underage users, and this impacts trust in morality, especially in a democratic state. Citizen journalism continues to thrill the internet with defamatory statements and posts just to either gain attention or damage the reputation of a person or a country. The paper, among others, recommends that the censorship of the New Media by the state be abhorred.

Keywords: New media, election in Africa, Nigeria Politics, 2015 elections, social technology

INTRODUCTION

Unarguably, democracy as a form of government, towers above other forms of government, the world over. Abraham Lincoln concisely states that “democracy is the government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” The definition above defines democracy as a people-oriented government. No wonder, most of the thriving nations of the world, namely the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and others, practice this system of government. Conversely, emerging democracies such as those in Africa and some Latin America, as well as Asia like D R Congo, Somalia, Nigeria, Kenya, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, the Philippines, and Cambodia, are more of a process than a destination for democracy. Be it thriving or fragile, the 21st century has witnessed a surge in democratic consolidation. America, the acclaimed best democracy in the world, suffered a pseudo-democratic quake, in the electioneering process that brought President Joe Biden into power. This was a disdainful consequence of former President Donald Trump's refusal to concede victory to Biden, which led to the desecration of the Capitol by hoodlums, believed to be influenced by Trump.

*Author for Correspondence

Anthony Egobueze

E-mail: anthony.egobueze@ust.edu.ng

Scholar, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Science Rivers State University, Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria

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Democracy around the world is being suffocated, strangled, and obliterated. There is recurring erosion in context and setting, and this calls for global attention. While new democracies are becoming very weak and fragile with their governments and the political representatives entrenching institutional decay, especially in resource-constrained environments, older democracies are grappling to ensure the guarantee of equitable and sustainable economic and social development. Determining that “democratic

regimes around the world find themselves besieged by antidemocratic groups that seek to use the electoral arena as a forum to propagandize their causes and mobilize their supporter.” This is the distinctive feature of politics in fragile democracies: there are sharp challenges to democratization due to the destruction of democratic institutions.

Democratization is a transition to more political changes, and a movement in a more democratic direction. The democratic process requires pragmatic nurturing with the necessary ideals and values of democracy. Outside of the following goals and values, such as ideologically motivated political parties, an open and accessible electoral process, and adherence to the rule of law, the underlying structure and framework of democratic sustainability are flawed, impartial judiciary, constitutional limits of regimes, liberty, equality of all, respect for party constitution, impartial electoral commission or body, press freedom, good civil society organizations, freedom of association, responsive representation anchored on accountability, transparency, trustworthiness, and selfless leadership, among others. A close look at the Nigerian political landscape portrays rather gloomy pictures of protracted discordance, especially in party politics and press freedom. This is traceable to the gamut of perennial pervasive and inordinate crave for personal satisfaction, which is adversarial to the collective interests of the political party, party members, and elites, who have assumed the toga of *godfathers* and *godmothers*. These *godfathers* and *godmothers* are moneybags that corruptly enriched themselves from the commonwealth and have become extremely powerful in the political space; thus, they use their influential positions to fund and bankroll the political parties and determine who gets what, when, and how in the polity.

The people’s right to govern themselves and their will have consistently been subverted. The people have been held in chains, their freedoms and liberty held in captivity, due to corruption in the selection process of leaders in Nigeria. The current state of affairs shows a macrocosm of masses afflicted by a microcosm of elites that pauperize and inflict poverty on them, leaving the afflicted to bemoan. Freedom and liberty are the cardinal signposts of a democratic state, and they bring to mind the right of the people not just to choose leaders periodically but also freedom of conscience, association, and belief. Democratic societies have been under severe checks because the citizens are given the leverage to express their thoughts and opinions. Thus, democratization is to encourage free, unrestricted, dyadic communication between the government and the governed. This indicates that democracy promotes communication between the people and the government. The ancient Ekklesia system in Athen, where democracy was forged, gave citizens the right to express their opinions, discomforts, and criticisms any law or act that is unfair and unjust to them and which they consider anachronistic to natural justice. This was rather the first measure of the democratization of ancient Ekklesia in Anthen, as the people were given room to take part in what affected them directly.

The first amendment of America’s Constitution is another example of the nexus between democracy and the media, stating inter alias: “Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. Thus, since December 15th, 1791, the bill of rights has been chaired with the first amendment which the freedom of press remains the brainchild of the constitution.

The first amendment emphasizes the true thrust of democracy in the state, as it opens society for every individual to enjoy the dividends of democracy as they can hold their leaders responsible and accountable for their actions. American democracy “depends on informed citizens vigorously debating our choices and then choosing a path forward, but that does not mean we all have to share the same basic reality.” Authentic, objective news sources are essential to our democracy’s ability to communicate the truth.” The old Ekklesia system forms a community of public opinion about social and political reality. The American Bill of Rights anchored on the First Amendment of free press and expression, created an atmosphere and forum for its citizens to comment on the policy of its leaders and the state in general.

The media is key to the propagation of democracy. In a true democracy, all citizens must be given a chance to participate in decision making. To this end, if democracy is about the people making informed choices and participating in the issues that affect them, then the new media is intertwined with the rudiments of sheer democracy; therefore, new media has metamorphosed from social platforms to powerful channels of political poll opinion. In line with the foregoing argument, the new media are media that help in amplifying voices. Additionally, social media platforms lessen the influence of institutions and the elite, enabling a larger public to participate and more interaction.

There is a distinction between the American experience mentioned above and that in Africa. Egobueze observes as follows [1]:

Today, Africa's democracy presents a sinister dictatorship of the executive arm of government, which almost makes the heads of that institution as suzerain, and he or she willingly or unwillingly and wittingly or unwittingly uses the commonwealth as a spoil to the detriment of other organs of government. This weak institutional framework of Africa's polity is a major threat to her democracy and an invitation to authoritarianism, and it accounts for why the African continent is divided in crisis and wallows in abject poverty.

Sunday Times International (2009) [2] clearly captures the statement of His Excellency Barrack Obama, a former President of the United States of America, on Africa's development while on his maiden tour of Africa in Accra, Ghana, where he states, inter alia:

Africa's future is up to Africa. Development depends on good governance. That is the component that has been absent in far too many locations and for a very long time. That adjustment is necessary to realize Africa's full potential. And only Africans are capable of carrying out that duty. Repression can take many different forms, and there are too many countries with issues that force their citizens into poverty. If a nation's officials take advantage of the economy to enrich themselves or if drug traffickers can bribe the police, no nation will prosper. No company wants to set up shop in an area where the government takes 20% of profits or the head of the Port Authority is dishonest. Nobody wants to live in a society where the rule of law is replaced by the rule of violence and corruption. That is not democracy; rather, it is tyranny, and the time has come to put an end to it. Strong institutions, not strongmen, are what Africa needs.

Again, Egobueze [1] observes the following:

The statement above by Obama summarizes Africa's democratic experience as a hubbub journey of tumult and nostalgia. Africa is a continent richly blessed with human, mineral, and agricultural resources, yet it is the poorest of the continents in the world as a result of the bad managerial irresponsibility of strongmen. The continent is characterized by strongmen, rather than strong institutions. The strongmen not only corruptly enrich themselves but also plunder the economies and create monsters in the name of dictators and tyrants as managers of the states. They weaken the legal institutions and make the rule of law very porous and vulnerable to executive control in order to give way to the rule of tyranny, brutality, and bribery as noted by Obama.

The African example is a reflection of Nigeria. Nigeria has strong individuals rather than strong institutions. These individuals dictate what goes on in society. They have personalized the polity to the extent that they have almost snuffed away the breath of the pauperized masses that have been held to submission. They control government institutions, private enterprises, and even the press. This is a complete departure from established norms of good governance.

Galadima and Goshit [3] posit that democracy, born about 2400 years ago in ancient Greece, was centered on people governing through their collective consent. Gambo (2013) [4] explained that for the people to be able to collectively choose their leaders democratically, they must be knowledgeable on the policies, prospects, and practices of government and politics; therefore, they should be well-

informed to be about to make the right choices. Here lies the essence of the new media. The new media has been able to convey and educate the masses more than the traditional media, even more convenient for them. Mattes and Bratton [5] argue that for any society to transform from a non-democratic dispensation to a democracy and for such a democracy to be institutionalized, the majority of its citizens, especially youths, need to be dedicated to democratic factors through the assistance of information technologies such as the internet.

Nigeria's political landscape has suffered greatly from political conflicts orchestrated by flawed elections. Before the 2015 general election, there were a lot of political brouhaha, which, to all intents and purposes, gave the direction of the possible outcome of the elections. It was a case of an incumbent president trying to consolidate his previous victory by remaining in power and an opposition group led by a powerful retired general from the Nigerian Army with wide grass-roots and fanatical support from folks of his religion, who had made serious attempts to win election as president. It was a rivalry between ethnicity and religion and a personality clash. This viewpoint is supported by Egobueze and Ojirika (2017) [6], who write, among other things, that "ethnicity played a critical role in determining the victor in the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria." According to the results of the presidential election, President Goodluck Jonathan of the PDP, who is from the southern Nigerian state of Bayelsa and is from the South-South geopolitical zone, won in all of the South-South and South-East States.

It is important to note that the election was an epic battle for the soul of Aso Rock, the seat of power of the Nigerian state; indeed, it was a fight of the titans; thus, all the key actors wanted victory at all costs. Consequent on the above, different methodologies, including blackmail, were employed by each of the divides to gain supremacy. The new media was one of the instruments used to wage the infamous and villainous war that catastrophically dampened rather than consolidated democracy in Nigeria. This chapter therefore examines the role new media play in a democracy, especially its impact on democratic consolidation. In interrogating the problem, attention was focused on the 2015 general election in Nigeria.

The Current State of New Media in Democratic Nigeria

Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999 after many years of military despotism. The period of military interregnum presented Nigeria as a country being considered almost as pariah due to the longevity of Military rule in the body politics of the State. The presence of the military in any state's politics depicts despotism and rule in abeyance from democratic traditions. The Legislature, which is the flagship and the cynosure of any democracy, was always sacked, people's liberty hampered, press freedom censored, and civil society organization almost obliterated. That was the situation in Nigeria before the messianic return of the state to democracy. Indeed, under the military junta, press freedom is annihilated and the government draconianly suppressed the people through repressive and obnoxious policies. However, after years of military and civilian turmoil in the country's political trajectory, the traditional media is yet to find its feet towards savoring democracy. The government has used different laws to control and gag the mass media and also coerce them with journalistic censorship, restrict publication, enforce strict finances, and self-censorship, sedition and defamation laws are all means used to paralyze the media. This suppression and intimidation continue to diminish the media even in the current democratic dispensation in Nigeria, as this suppression has almost been institutionalized within the confines of the law. This suppression contravenes the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that guarantees the Right to Freedom and the Press, which states that "every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference" (CFRN). "traditional media of radio, television, and newspapers have often been constrained in their accountability responsibilities due to economic, marketing, and regulatory pressures." Okafor [7] argues that the traditional media has become the most susceptible to political and economic manipulation, which has reduced them to channels that eulogize the government and seek her patronage. Therefore, the citizens have lost faith in the traditional media, as the traditional media has failed to impart the citizen's ideas and information without interference; rather, they are seen to protect the interests of the government in power rather than the people. Given the challenges faced

by the traditional media to effectively undertake its core mandate of undiluted reportage of events, the need for new media became imperative.

The upsurge of the new media has reached a crescendo in Nigeria. Its unrestricted features and wide coverage make it the delight of the citizens because it gives them the opportunity to contribute to nagging issues and discourses that are either of value or repugnant to state policies and programs. The citizens have come to embrace the new media, and this has played a catalytic role in democracy. The new media have emerged as an essential part of today's society and are changing the way people communicate with one another. The conventional means of communication in Nigeria has always been the mass media reporting information to the public and getting feedback either through audio-visual sound for television, audio for radio, and a letter to the editor for newspapers, but with the advent of new media, citizens now create contents, accept comments, and change and edit contents through audio-visual sounds. The new media platforms give citizens the ability to converse and interact interpersonally and globally with the widest outreach. The National Poll (2009) cited in Uzochukwu et al. [8] found in a poll conducted that 22% of teenagers in the country log on to their preferred social media account more than ten times per day, and half of the adolescents also log on to their favorite social media account per day, more than even the teenagers. These mean that the new media is the currently the hub of information and interaction amongst the young citizens of Nigeria. In this direction, it has become an agent for education and a mode for quick information dissemination.

In terms of corruption, the new media has become a watchdog against the corrupt practices of the government. New media is now the most verifiable channel to contribute to the issues that affect society and cause change by creating awareness and disseminating information as it happens. "Reporting, for example, may prompt public bodies to launch formal investigations into allegations of corruption." The new media has become the heart of constant reportage and information. Information gets to the new media before it could get to the mainstream media due to the presence of eyewitnesses who are able to pass the information directly as it happened, rather than wait to the story cover by the mainstream media, which could be regarded as citizen journalism. A recent example of the impact of the new media on the polity was the incident that took place in May 2019, where a serving senator that allegedly maltreated and abused a Nigerian lady in a sex toy mall was dragged on social media through a video clip showing the assault. The new media was able to expose the indecent attitude of the senator thereby forcing the law enforcement agencies to ensure that the senator paid for his offence. The new media, especially Facebook and Twitter, can be used in conduct offline demonstrations against corrupt government actors, as they did during the Arab Spring in 2011. This is not far-fetched in Nigeria, as the new media has succeeded in initiating protests that caused notable change in society, "as netizens-led initiatives facilitated the mobilization of online public opinion that forced the Federal government to intervene to redress acts of lower level malfeasance." Social media is now a propeller that stimulates agitations within the country and also among Nigerians in Diaspora, as well as "routinely uncover corruption, help solve social problems, and even pressure state officials to change policy [9]. This was evident in the October 2020 EndSars protest that led to the proscription of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). The 2012 fuel subsidy protest succeeded in forcing the government to reverse the subsidy. The issue of "*Bring Back Our Girls*," a protest in Nigeria over the kidnapping of 300 Chibok girls by the terrorist group *Boko Haram*, would not have been able to gain the attention of the UN and the U.S. government if not for the large clamor and protest sparked by the new media. The protest, which lasted for four days (Monday, 9 to Friday, January 13, 2012) was an offshoot of social media that gave the masses the ability to coerce the government to do what they wanted.

The state of the new media in democracy in Nigeria is thus: "Social media such as Facebook, Google Plus, Twitter, blogs, and chat rooms are increasingly playing the role of the public sphere where public issues are debated outside the control and dominance of government." This align with the foregoing as they posit that, social media has uncovered fresh promises for the mass to connect with each other and their representatives in politics, through which they contribute inclusively and broadly in every political

process. This means that social media in the current democratic dispensation has encouraged political participation, awareness, and contribution. Further to this, Agbedo [10] reveals that the new media has raised “a sudden socio-political awakening of Nigerians for participatory democracy, one that predisposed them to appreciate the fact that power belongs to them and that those who hold positions of authority do so on behalf of the people and must of necessity remain accountable to the people.” It is pertinent to note that before the advent of social media in Nigeria, certain groups of people, especially the youth, lacked political understanding and therefore played stooges to politicians with little participation. But with the new media revolution, political education has increased, and the masses are lurking around for political information. Accordingly, ITU (2013) argues that Africa’s internet penetration stands at 63% and Nigeria has the highest penetration ratio in the continent, which goes a long way to explain the high political participation of the masses in electioneering. Importantly, Amaefule [11], citing the former Minister for Communication, Adebayo Shittu, in a workshop on “Social Media and Good Governance” organized by the Ministry in Abuja, opines that the Minister contends that about 75% of Nigeria’s population that use the Internet are on social media. The government would not limit Nigerians’ access to social media solely on the basis that it might be used to express views critical of the government. Similarly, it is estimated that Nigeria has an increasing number of 55 million new media users, with a percentage increasing by the day at about 33%. Consequent to this, the elections held in Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999 have enjoyed more patronage and participation from Nigerians than other prior elections, especially the 2015 and 2019 general elections.

The new media has also given the masses the opportunity to create a niche for themselves and control businesses on their own, which in turn has a positive impact on the economy of the country. The new media has become a relevant force for companies to find and recruit quality talent. The small and medium enterprises suffer from insufficient funds in Nigeria, therefore, significant progress can be achieved if investment and employment are done at low cost, and this is what the new media offer to Nigerians, as it creates opportunities like advertising, trading, designing, and management. Blogging is an example of self-employment created by the new media, as they utilize the tenets of communicative technology to create features, news, articles, and other information that comes with audio-visual appeals and make huge amounts of money from subscriptions and other voluntary donations. Amadi et al. [12] revealed that through the creation of official pages and groups for reality shows like Big Brother Naija, some Nigerians have been made very rich. Notable Nigerian bloggers such as Chude Jideonwu, Linda Ikeji, Alex Nwankwo, and Judith Audu to name but a few, have become millionaires through the new media. As side making and creating employment for the masses, the new media has conferred status on the masses as means of social influencers and figure through reality shows. Politicians have seen the new media as a means to sell themselves to the public; thus, most of them have advisers and assistance on social media. This no doubt means that the new media is making meaningful contributions to democracy, job creation, and the socioeconomic development of many Nigerians. Indeed, democracy has been highly consolidated in Nigeria due to the current upsurge of new media, as it continues to give the people the power to freedom of expression, a dividend of democracy through which citizens journalism has uncovered areas that the government has ignored, increased political participation and education, interaction between the government and the governed, attacked on corrupt and ill-fated practices of the leaders and its citizens, created employment, and enhanced socio-economic development. Finally, it has influenced the government to cut the necessary corners in order to win legitimacy and the trust of the citizens.

The Impact of New Media on the 2015 Presidential Election in Nigeria

One of the significant roles played by the media in any society is its watchdog status as the “eye” through which the masses see what happens in society, especially the state. The media acts as the ‘ear’ that hears whatever happens in society, the skin that feels what happens in the body, the nose that smells whatever happens in the locality, the “mouth” that speaks for the people, and a medium through which the masses communicate most often with their leaders, wherein they make requests and receive

feedback from the leaders, especially the elected officers, namely the legislators and the chief executives, namely the presidents/his vice president, the governor or the deputy, and the chairman or the deputy. Succinctly put, the media is the sense organs of the society and an embodiment of different activities in the society like education, advertisement, information, entertainment, and linkage of parts in the society. The media played a pivotal role in the 2015 general election in Nigeria.

The 2015 General Election presented a litmus test for the experimentation of the efficacy of the new media in democracy in Nigeria. It was a moment that changed the political trajectory of the country and showed the power of the pen over the sword; this flows with the old adage that the *pen is mightier than the sword*. The huge success of the 2015 general election came as a surprise to Nigerians and international observers, considering the political and security decadence in which the elections were conducted. Explaining that, ever since the advent of independence in 1960, the country has conducted nine general elections, along with several regional and sub-national elections. Among these nine elections, only three were held by military powers that handed on powers to civilians in a bid to consolidate democracy. The six other elections prior to the 2019 election came under serious criticism, but the 2015 election proved different. Civilian elections have always recorded outright victories by the incumbent party, as in the 1964, 1984, 2003, and 2007 elections. This was also evident in the last election held in 2019. Agbaje and Adejumbi [13] posit that among all the elections conducted in Nigeria, the elections held by the ruling civilian regime have been the most controversial.

The March 28th, 2015 Presidential election was successful despite the shortcomings recorded in some polling units across the States due to the untimely arrival of electoral materials, malfunctioning smart cards, teeming ethnic and religious group violence, the rescheduling of elections from February to March 2015, and the election marking the victory of an opposition party for the first time. This Orji (2015) [14] describes as a boost to the country to attain “inter-party alternation of the Presidency for the first time in her electoral history” (p. 74).

The success of the 2015 general election cannot be emphasized without mentioning the significant role played in the new media’s reporting of the electioneering process. Right from the campaign stages to the voting proper, to the collation stage, and the announcing of results, the new media kept the masses abreast of information relevant to the election. Bandipo [15] reveals that the new media is an indispensable factor for all political actors: the electorates, the candidates, the political parties, the civil society, and the election umpires. Bandipo [15] avers that, as of 2015, Nigeria was Africa’s leading internet and new media subscriber, which means that, most of the issues that took place in the elections were based on the internet and communicative technologies. During the beginning and twilight of campaigns, most of the political parties that participated in the elections realized that focusing campaigns from one location to another in the six geopolitical zones was not enough; therefore, they started robust campaigns on the new media. Consequent to this, the electorate was able to measure the chances of the two leading political parties, as they were able to sit in the comfort of their home and connect to their favorite political parties with their smart phones and gadgets, commenting and cheering their key candidates. This in turn reduced the risk of stampedes and unforeseen campaign conflicts that have continued to ravage political campaigns in Nigeria.

Emetumah [16] asserts that the new media shaped the opinion, thoughts, and initiatives of the electorates in the 2015 general election by setting agendas and increasing political awareness, especially among the youth, which caused the huge victory by the opposition party, the All Progressives Party (APC), against the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). The electorate was informed on a daily basis and was left to make their opinion known by sharing their views with millions within and outside the country. The merging of the opposition’s parties built so much more force on social media that the needed change was possible to overthrow the 13-year reign of one political party, the PDC. The Department for International Development (2009) [17] in its reviews of the election observes thus: “We found that Twitter was ten times more active over the election period than at normal times. We generated

12.4 million tweets about the election over the period; and these tweets tended to be divided into reportage.” This means that the masses were well informed, and they were interested in the election more than any election in the country because the new media gave them the opportunity to evaluate the candidates.

The new media also impacted the candidates, who utilized different new media platforms to converse for votes, win the interest of the masses, and encourage their fans and followers to believe in them, thereby reducing the apathy that once characterized the political space. In 2015, the presidential candidates engaged millions on social media; however, in 2011, the new media ruined the chances of Congress and the candidate of Progressives Change (CPC) Muhammed Buhari, becoming the President of Nigeria. Then the new media appeared to be more sensitive and interested in the victory of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. Muhammed Buhari was seen as a person with a rigid personality, an old-fashioned ex-military dictator, and not a crusader of democracy. He had scuttled the democratic experience in 1983 as a military dictator. The table turned in 2015 in favor of Buhari because the victorious Jonathan in the 2011 Presidential election attempted to remove subsidies on petroleum products in January 2012 and also because the release of the charges against ex-Bayelsa State Governor Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, who was convicted for huge money laundering in London. Also, the upsurge of the terrorist group in the North, especially the North-East, the killing and kidnapping of people, especially the most controversial kidnapping of the 300 Chibok girls, increased the apprehension of the people. Furthermore, the corrupt allegations against prominent ministers in Jonathan’s cabinet and his pro-corruption statements continued to bring his administration under severe scrutiny in the new media. In fact, all these factors exacerbated the uproar on social media, which led to the loss of fate Jonathan and increased love for Buhari. Disenchanted with the style of leadership of Jonathan, aggrieved Nigerians used the new media to poison, defame, and infamously de-market the then President. All these misdeeds of Jonathan’s administration were an advantage for the leading opposition political parties to merge in 2013, forming the All Progressive Congress (APC). The campaign promises of the new emerging parties were the issues that raised and activated the interest of the new media, especially the promised war against terrorism, corruption, unemployment, and infrastructural development, good governance, and restoration of democratic values, which were all the bane of the Jonathan’s PDP. The sudden postponement of the election from February to March began to raise concerns in the new media about the perceived insincerity of the PDP government’s conduct of elections. This made the election highly anticipated, drawing the attention of the masses at home and abroad and even the international community.

Intriguingly, no sooner had the election ended than results began to emerge from the new media platforms, even before they were collated by the electoral umpire. The results that were released and viewed by the new media modes skewed skeptically towards the possible survival of the then ruling party, the PDP. But when the results began to emerge from the collation centers in different states and local governments, the tally was not similar to the result forecasted by the new media. This meant that the new media was able to sense the results, compile them, and reduce the tension among the masses, who were anticipating of the consolidation of the victory of the then-ruling government. The fact that the rumors and grapevine about the result made it clear that the APC had won the election prior to the official announcement. Based on the results alleged in the new media modes, the PDP then alleged that the new media has been hijacked by the APC to post fake news and information; thus, the PDP advised the masses to disregard these rumors. Albeit, it is imperative to note that there was no significant difference between the results announced by INEC and those that trended on new media. The results on social media dissuaded desperate Nigerian politicians from infiltrating the election process. It also made it difficult for electoral officers and returning officers to alter results. “All through the process of the election, every citizen equipped with a mobile phone was an observer/reporter, ready to raise alarm to the virtual world/online community on any trace of malpractice or suspicion at any point in the election.

The new media is ubiquitous in society, and this increased accessibility during the election. The new media formed an arsenal of hashtags for politicians and supporters such as #MeetGej, #Febuhari, #Marchoutjonathan, #WhyiwillvoteGEJ, #GMB15, #LagosForYou and #iHavedecided and also gave

mediums to civil society organization to campaign for free and fair election such as #NigeriaDecides, #Nigeria2015, #PledgetoVote, #MyPVCnow, #GoVote, #VoteNotFight. These hashtags were stimulators that resurrected the dead interest of the masses in the virtual world and beyond to vote and follow the election. Through the new media, the citizens were connected to the INEC situation room, from where results were released.

The impact of the new media on the 2015 elections cannot be overemphasized. They acted as the fourth estate of the realm, the watchdog of the election and the senses of society during and after the election. After conceding victory to the emerging President elect, Buhari, by the defeated President, the new media began to preach peace and unity in the country, eulogizing President Jonathan's courage. The new media painted President Jonathan as a hero of democracy, quelling all cultural and sentimental agitation built in the course of the election.

Challenges of New Media in 2015 Nigeria's Democratic Experience

Despite the huge promises and benefits that the new media presents to Nigeria, there are still some limitations that impact society. Due to the uncensored nature of messages and videos posted frequently, it sends dangerous signals to the underage users, and this affects trust in morality, especially in a democratic state. Citizen journalism continues to thrill the internet with defamatory statements and posts just to either gain attention or damage the reputation of a person or a country. Citizen journalists are amateur journalists that have little or no journalist training on how to cover and verify news stories before sending them across to the public. "The 2015 election, in the name of protecting one's preference for a party on social media, turned into a theatre of hate speeches and campaigns colored in a form that defied logic and common sense."

The same tool of the new media that is used to inform and educate the masses about the election was used to stir intra- and inter-party squabbles. Social media is the hub of uncensored and unverified information that is inimical to democracy. The new media is free and unrestricted; therefore, the place of the new media as a channel for social responsibility is not guaranteed. This could lead to discord in the society. The activities of the herdsmen banditry have been hijacked and used by netizens as a means of spreading misinformation, thereby infusing fear and tension in society. News like this has implications for security and underscores the essence of the state's to protect lives and properties.

Adeyanju and Haruna [18] posit that one of the banes of social media on democracy is the carnage that took place in Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Adamawa, Kano, Katsina, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, and Zamfara during the 2011 general election. This death was triggered by the new media and its unfiltered information. The new media is also responsible for triggering cultural and ethnic disputes, because, over the years, a series of conflicts have existed between ethnic groups against ethnic groups, religion groups against religion groups, and one party against another.

In their examination of the spike in hate speech and derogatory remarks during the 2015 general election, Ibrahim et al. [19] found that the broadcast media and new media are the transmitters and routes of hate speech. The inveterate issue of this explosion is inherent in the fact that there is a tripartite divide between the North, South, East, and West, but this division has become more toxic towards each other following the instrumentality of the new media. This could be seen in the huge role the new media is playing in the ongoing attempt of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) to seek secession through inter-ethnic conflict and mayhem. The new media platforms are used to propagate issues against unity and progress in the country, thereby, threatening the fragility of the democracy of Nigeria. "Social media users grossly abused the freedom of information offered through the medium in Nigeria's 2015 general election period. The two leading political parties (APC and PDP) accused themselves of spreading false information on social media using their followers."

With constant threats to morality, the new media is poised to impact democracy in Nigeria both positively and negatively. Intellectual properties are at risk in the virtual world, as copyright laws can

barely bring such culprits to book. Besides the intellectual property that was stolen from the new media platforms, the platform is also used for cybercrime, which is a medium for internet fraud and money laundering. Some of the people who laundered money were bigwigs in the two leading political parties that sponsored some of the party activities. Nigeria is at the eye of the storm when it comes to the new media malfeasance, as the media continues to foster and accelerate especially technological advancement.

The Prospects of New Media in Nigeria's Democracy

The new media continues to open doors of restricted barricades in the manacles of Nigeria's democracy, with new platforms advancing from time to time. Cyberspace is agog with ample opportunities for developing societies like Nigeria due to the increased interest and patronage generated by such societies. In a democracy, the prospect of the new media is enormous, and it would continue to thrive, because people's voices are heard no matter where and when the information is passed across, even in authoritarian regimes where the people's right to liberty is subverted and they are highly intimidated. The new media's productivity may continue without lagging due to its ability to further explode and virally produce opportunities and enablers that galvanize people to development. In this sense, it has become an indispensable tool for mobilizing citizens towards active participation in the democratic process. The potential of new media would trigger Nigeria to a point where the local and marginalized people in the communities would be able to defend democracy and its ideals. The farmers in the villages and hinterlands could also make their voices heard because the new media is not limited by space, time, or location.

It would give the poor masses the ability to participate fully in matters that affect them, especially with the current marginalization of the local government system in Nigeria. The new media would be the catalyst used to galvanize the people to seek justice and hold the state to submission for her inactions that have led to oppression policies that subvert the rights of the people by a macrocosm elite in society, who are not even up to five% of the population of Nigeria. Also, the new media would contribute to poverty reduction as it would allow small and medium scale enterprises to flourish in rural communities, and the country would become a market for internet-based businesses. Economic growth in Nigeria would be advertised, and new markets would thrive through the new media revolution, which would encourage the wide spread of innovative ideas that would stimulate development. Indeed, crimes and criminalities thrive in Nigeria because most Nigerians have been idle, but the new media age has increased awareness, which has reduced docility among the people. The youths have been willing tools for electoral crimes like voter intimidation, ballot box snatching, thuggery, kidnapping of perceived opponents, and killing, to name but a few, because they have been idle. The *idle mind, they say, is the devil's workshop*. This state of affairs is beginning to change, because the new media platforms have provided panaceas for socioeconomic development and employment for the teaming army of youths.

In politics, the prospect of the new media is enveloping all political spheres; for example, in the 2015 presidential and indeed general elections, the INEC utilized the official sites of both traditional and new media for the dissemination of information to the public. The candidates, political parties, and governments have official social media platforms that consistently convey information to the public. This goes a long way towards explaining that the new media has taken a stack on Nigeria's democracy. In no distant time, Nigeria's democracy would be determined not with the ballot paper, but through electronic voting achieved through the internet space, just like in our neighboring country Ghana and the acclaimed best democracy, America. This would mean entrusting netizens with the right to vote anywhere in the world, because it is more obvious that the huge distance, time, space, and geographical hitches have disenfranchised Nigerians from partaking in elections [20].

Concluding Remarks

Democracy is a government directed by the people; therefore, the people rule and dictate what goes on in the political arena. They also determine who gets what, when, and how, as well as how values are authoritatively allocated in society. A good democracy institutionalizes liberty and freedoms, and these

govern the political space. The 2015 presidential election held in Nigeria came with its challenges and left indelible marks in the sands of time. The lessons to be learnt from the election are enormous, but the precedent set by the exiting President His Excellency Goodluck Jonathan, remains a point of reference for democratic consolidation in fragile democracies like Nigeria. Dr. Jonathan consistently maintained that his ambition was not worth the blood of any Nigerian. He demonstrated that through the call he made to the emerging victorious candidate of the APC that was to succeed him, General Buhari. This call was the icing that stabilized an already agitated and boiling society, sitting on a gun that was waiting to explode. The call was not only timely but epochal, and it was quickly circulated by the new media, and the supporters of Dr. Jonathan retreated to their shells. That was indeed a victory for democracy.

The new media has come to stay in Nigeria, it provides the citizens with the opportunity to mirror society and explore what the government is doing, how it is doing it, and its overall impacts on the people. Like the global trend, elections are moving from the analog to electronic voting modes. Nigeria will soon catch up with the trend, and the new media provides the space for the actualization of this ideal. Through this, true victory would be determined through the ballots, and votes would count. It would also eliminate the meddlesomeness of the judiciary, which grants victory to the highest bidder. The new media platforms would facilitate campaigns, which would reduce the incidence of electoral violence and other related conflicts. The new media is interactive and builds communities of minds that raise consciousness among the masses, especially the youth, who are more internet-skilled; therefore, soon every political activity or public activity would be practiced as “cyber politics.” Nigerians should get ready for the new revolution orchestrated through the new media; this would get rid of most of the odds against democracy. Both the young and the old should embrace this Renaissance. To achieve all these, censorship of the new media by the state should be abhorred.

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