

Need to Bridge the gap between voices and the voting in Times of Elections: Can Social Media be Weapon against Political Apathy in Nigeria?

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Abstract: Nigerians re-embraced democratic governance in 1999 through general elections which were fraught with electoral malpractices. And when subsequent elections were worse and mere product of unimaginable deterioration in the system, many Nigerians out of frustration and protestation decided to turn their back on the nation's electoral and political system. As the situation was compounded by hitherto unfriendly Nigeria media landscape which provided little or opportunity for majority of them to ventilate their anger and protest the fact that their votes no longer counted, they resorted to building a new culture of political apathy. However, with the recent advent of social media as part of the nation's mass media system, it appears that many Nigerians are once again picking interest in the nation's electoral and political system. Available literature show obvious evidence of robust political comments, discussions and debate among Nigerians in times of past elections. With the adoption of analytical research method, the study sought to determine if social media is serving as tool against political apathy among Nigerians. Inferences drawn from the review of secondary data suggest that social media is making many Nigerians re-pick interest in electoral and political programmes and activities of the nation. Secondly, it is inferred that social media is yet to significantly influence many Nigerians to go for actual voting exercise in times of elections, but that social media to high level helps to create awareness in times of elections and politics. Consequently, it is recommended that social media users should be sensitized to imbibe self-regulatory principle and that schools in Nigeria- primary, secondary and tertiary levels should be made to start the teaching and learning of social media use. It will help in making youths in the country responsible social media use.

Key words: Social Media • Political Apathy • Weapon • Voices • Voting

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the advent of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has brought a lot of revolutions, innovations, challenges and changes in our contemporary world. We are now in a mass mediated world chiefly made more realistic by ICTs. Interestingly, the world is not only shrinking into a "global village," McLuhan (1964), as cited by Ezea, Ozibo and Hassan, [1], but, is also becoming more sociable, participatory, democratic and more interactive as generally facilitated by ICTs and internet-based communication platforms collectively referred to as social media. These platforms among others include: Facebook, Twitter, Orkut, Myspace, You Tube, Flickr, 2go, whatsApp, instagram and Blog. As we shall discuss later in this work, each of

the above social media platforms utilizes the internet space to render a unique service to either a specialized group of persons or to the generality of the people who are hooked to the internet, through it.

One of the good things the social media is doing is that it is increasingly bridging the communication gap between the poor and the wealthy in various societies on one hand and it is as well, balancing the lopsidedness of information flow between the developed and the third world countries on the other hand, [2]. Today, the social media has made it possible for both the haves and the have-nots to become more significantly involved in the ever dynamic process of producing and consuming various types of information and communication, such that we are now in the "prosumer era" Baran [3], puts it this way:

As the technology continues to shrink the world, people will become increasingly involved in one another's lives and as people come to know more about others who were hitherto separated from them by distance, they will form new beneficial relationships.

The above statement is simply drawing our attention to the fact that social media platforms have become strong weapons for social mobilization, be it at regional or global level. This is why, Adibe, Odoemelam, Orji-Egwu, Nwankwo and Nweze [5] maintain that:

In many parts of the world today, individuals, groups, organizations and even nations are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by social media and the e-media platforms to mobilize millions of people to support and advance their cause. In the political sphere, it has become a veritable tool for mobilizing citizens towards active participation in the political process and democratic projects.

There is no how these social networking sites cannot serve as avenues for social and political mobilization of the people for participatory democracy, decision making/implementation and governance in general. This is because not only that people are involved, but that millions of inter-connected users can now be engaged in the consumption, production and dissemination of political information. This is increasingly rendering mask-wearing government and company propaganda all over the world ineffective. For instance, Abbott [5] says that as "at 2010, it was estimated that there were some 19.7 million Orkut users in India, which, if combined with the number of Facebook users, gave a figure of 40 million users". Again, the same [5] reports that though in China, Facebook, Orkut and Twitter are included in the list of sites blocked by the Chinese government, Qzone which is a Chinese social networking site has over 40 million users "making it home to the largest socially networked population in the world." But, that was then, [2] now speculates that as at the end of 2013, Facebook boasted 1.23 billion active users worldwide, adding 170 million users in just one year and that 550 million users log on to Facebook daily through their smartphones or tables [3].

Back home in Nigeria, [4], estimated that over three million Nigerians are now Facebook users just as 60,000 others are on Twitter. Interestingly, Internet World Stats discloses that as at the end of 2016, the number of

Facebook users in Nigeria had increased to 16, 000 000, (www.internetworldstats.com). Infact, it is estimated that about 8.6% of the Nigeria's population use Facebook, with 7.2 million users on daily basis as at the same 2016, (webclick.com.ng/Nigeria-internet-statistics-nigerians-online). The above numbers are in addition to the users of such other networking sites as 2go, whatsapp, as well, as other e-media platforms. However, current trend shows that as at 2016, Nigeria had overtaken other African countries to become Facebook's largest base in Africa with the said 16 million users, (www.cp Africa.com/.../facebook-nigeria/). With the exploits recorded in the use of social media by former President Goodluck Jonathan during the 2011 presidential election in Nigeria the stage became set for the appropriation of the inherent opportunities provided by social networking sites in mobilizing Nigerians for active political participation in replacement of the lingering culture of political apathy occasioned by decades of "militocracy" and electoral malpractices and pervasion in the country.

Statement of the Problem: Nigeria re-embraced democratic governance 1999 after over three decades of military juntas and autocracy. Though the 1999 general elections were fraught with obvious electoral fraud and deficiencies, many Nigerians ignored them because all they had wanted at that time was a non-uniformed president of the Federal Republic. However, when subsequent elections in the country became worse in terms of hitherto unimaginable electoral malpractices and pervasions such that people's votes no longer counted, many Nigerians, particularly, the younger generation out of helplessness and frustration decided to turn their backs on the nation's electoral system and political processes. But, the advent of social media in Nigeria and its subsequent use for electioneering appears to be serving as antidote to the evolving culture of electoral apathy among the people. This is because available empirical works have sought to establish link between social media use and political participation in Nigeria. Social media use for electioneering in Nigeria could be said to have begun in earnest during the 2011 general elections in which Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was believed to have appreciably appropriated social media to promote and win the presidential election. And it is believed that the 2015 general elections in the country witnessed a further boost in social media use for electioneering.

Consequently, this study therefore, seeks to further probe the relationship between social media use and the campaign against electoral apathy among Nigerians.

In other words, the study seeks to determine if social media is a tool for fighting electoral apathy among Nigerians.

Research Objectives: This study seeks to:

- Determine if participation in electoral and political matters through social media use is helping to fight political apathy among Nigerians.
- To verify the level of influence in which social media use is exerting on the nation's electoral and political system.
- To ascertain the nature of the relationship between social media use and Nigeria's electoral and political system.

Research Questions: The study seeks to answer the following questions:

- Is social media use helping to fight against political apathy among Nigerians?
- What level of influence is social media exerting on Nigeria's electoral and political system?
- What is the nature of the relationship between social use and Nigeria's electoral and political system?

Research Method: The discourse is approached from the theoretical point of view. In doing this, descriptive and analytical method was adopted. Descriptive investigation or study is most often interested in explaining the modus operandi and issues surrounding a named subject matter. Wimmer and Dominick (2006)[6], submit that the cardinal difference between descriptive and analytical method of research is that while the later is interested in the causes and consequences of relationships, that is, cause- effect relationships, the former is concerned with comparison and description of the nature of a given phenomenon. [3], agrees with the above notion when he asserts that descriptive research attempts to describe, explain, determine or identify what is, while analytical study tries to give reason as to why it is what it is or how it comes to be what it is.

This method is adopted with a view to exploring the unfolding new world of social networking sites and political participation among Nigerians. The revolutions in the information and communication technology sector have given rise to many issues, challenges, questions and predictions, particularly, as it is now creating new opportunity for more citizens to participate in political activities of their respective nations. This is why the work

at hand is interested in exploring the relationship between, social media and political participation in Nigeria. This being the case, the work becomes an attempt at answering the many questions arising from the expected link between the two interrelating phenomena (social media and political participation). The adoption of descriptive and analytical approach to this study implies that inferences were drawn from the secondary data reviewed and the general implications of these inferences were critically analyzed and discussed.

Literature Review/Results

Politics and Political Participation in Nigeria:

Today, Nigerian politics is for the leftovers, never –do- wells, those who have failed elsewhere, cultists, thugs, touts and fifth columnists..... Politicians, who would rather eliminate their opponents than dialogue, debate or persuade, (Egwu 2006, p. 26)[7].

The above picture has been the bane of Nigerian politics. Unfortunately, the likes of the former president Olusegun Obasanjo would always be bold in telling the world that Nigerians are still “learning to practice and implement the ideals, fundamental principles and tenets of democracy,” (Nwankwo, 2012, p. 24)[8]. To add salt to the people's injury, those fanning the embers of faked democracy in Nigeria posit that it has taken such developed democracy as America two hundred years (200 years) to get to where there are today, the politicians in Nigeria and their praise-singers perpetrate and perpetuate a lot of electoral malpractices and political crimes, all in the name of learning democracy, (Adegoke & Udeagwu, 2013)[7]. Consequently, Nwankwo (2012, p. 26),[8] declares that Nigerians are not actually celebrating the advent of democracy, but are “only celebrating the fact that uniformed army officers are not in the saddle of powers again”.

The fact is that Nigeria is gradually evolving a dangerous and retrogressive political culture that thrives in appointive election which tantamount to complete usurpation of the power of the electorate. Experiences and observations point to the fact, that our case has always been that of “madness called elections” in Nigeria, (Odey 2003, Odey, 2007)[10]. Elections at different levels of governance in Nigeria are held for formality sake. [8], in a newspaper feature titled, “whiter progressive politics in Nigeria,” *National Guide* of September 27, p.12, further paints the picture of the situation thus:

Today politics in our embattled nation seems to be graduating from one misfortune to another; we have been witnesses to fatal rioting consequent upon glaring electoral malpractices. Such riot have killed and maimed thousands of people and destroyed property worth billions of naira. This is in addition to the renewed strategy of cold blood murder and (kidnap) of political opponents. Hence, the likes of Dr. Ayo Darmola, Funsho Williams, Chief Bola Ige, Dr. Layi Balogun, Chief Asari Dikibo, Hon. Sunday Ugwu, Mr. Victor Nwankwo, Prof. Chimere Ikoku, Chief Harry Marshal, Barr. and Mrs. Bannabas Igwe, Alhaji Isyaku among others, have been sent out of the muddy Nigeria politics to the world beyond.

With this dangerous trend coupled with the emerging cancerous problem of god- fatherism in our stifled political landmarks, “one stands no ground to blame millions of Nigerians who have decided to turn their back on the country’s electoral process,” [8]. These are beside the argument of the critics of conventional media in Nigeria, such as [3], [5] and Fallows (1996) as cited in Adibe, *et al* (2013, p.65), that conventional media “only allow voters access to paid political propaganda containing only meaningless slogans, making them disinterested and cynical about politics”

They argue that there is absence of serious debate in the conventional media that could make people to learn the substance of issue and policy proposal, as well as, related arguments and that, this disallows citizens from participating in political discourse, [4].

It is against this backdrop that social analysts, political activist, academics, among other, have called for a change to give room for more political participation in Nigeria nay Africa at large. Political participation is the exact opposite of political apathy. It refers to the various mechanisms through which members of the public express their political views and / or exercise their influence on the political process,[11]. In the words of [4], it includes the public involvement of significant number of citizens in such activities as:

Political discourse, campaigns, voter registration, actual voting, writing and signing petitions, civil protests, joining interest groups, political advocacy, monitoring violation of electoral process such as frauds, rigging, intimidation, violence, monetary inducement, underage voting etc.

On the other hand, political participation also involves the gradual emergence of an opportune era where increased use of the now converged global media space is providing means for critiquing and challenging authoritarian practices and tendencies in many political systems and processes. Political participation within the Nigerian political system would include: challenging the dreaded manipulative, autocratic and greed- infested authorities and powers of the so- called god- fathers. It should also include critiquing and challenging the powers of incumbency, attacking imposition of candidates for political offices and criticizing of ungodly decisions, policies and arrogance by the so- called political leaders. The maltreatment meted to a widow by the then Governor of Edo State, Comrade Adams Oshiomhole in 2015 and the reactions of Nigerians and the entire World through the social media platforms is a ready example of what we consider as being part of our envisaged political participation. For [4] as cited in Holt, [5]. a core assumption is that, “in a democracy, people should follow news an current affairs, because political participation is sine qua non for the entrenchment of the genuine ideals and principles of democracy. It is not just the much touted ideal of one man, one vote in Nigeria of the then administration of Dr Goodluck Jonathan. Participatory democracy should involve more progressive approach to the acquisition and utilization of political powers. It should be a matter of “civility, sanity, social responsibility, genuine legitimacy and people oriented representations”, [8]. The question is what can the social media do to engender this lofty ideal?

Social Media as Tool for Political Participation in Nigeria: Before delving into what the social media can do for the enhancement of political participation in Nigeria, let us first of all, look at what the social media is. According to [11], “social media are internet sites where people interact freely, sharing and discussing information about lives, using a multimedia mix of personal text and varied audio-visual signals to create, share and exchange communication contents delivered in form of pictures, videos, text messages, drawings etc, in a speed that was never imagined by the mortal man. This is made possible by the ever- evolving internet technology. As enumerated earlier, these social network sites among others include: facebook, myspace, Twitter, YouTube, flicker, wordpress, Blogger, Linkeding, Tyepad, Live Journal, Wikipedia, Wetpain, wikidot, second life, DeliIcios, Digg, Reddit, Lulu, Orkut, Skype, Hi5, Whats App, 2go, instagram Ozone etc.

[12], quote [3], as saying that social media are “Web-based tools and services that allow users to create, share, rate and search for content and information without having to log into any specific portal sites or portal destination.” For [7], social media is a group of “internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content”.

It should be noted, social media is recording technical advances in a rapid manner. And that each platform launched is marked by some technical uniqueness and differences. In short, [7], note that there are six types of social media, namely: collaborative project, Blogs, content communities, social network sites, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds. Accordingly, [7], maintain that there two major technical concepts that are associated with the concept of social media. These are web 2.0 and User Generated Content (UGC). To them, web 2.0 is an improvement on web 1.0. In their worlds:

Web 2.0 is a term used to describe a new way in which software developers and end-users started to utilize the world wide web; that is a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals (as done in the era of web 1.0), but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion. While applications such as personal web pages, Encyclopedia Britannica online and the idea of content publishing belong to the era of web 1.0, they are replaced by blogs, wikis and collaborative projects in web 2.0... when web 2.0 represents the ideological and technological foundation. User Generated Content (UGC) can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of social media, (p. 61).

As the technical differences among the above six types of social media is not our concern in this work, it suffices to opine that they are all veritable tools for inducing political participation among Nigerians,[9]. However, it is important to note that some social media platforms are more suitable for use in political mobilization than the others. For example, whereas such collaborative projects as exemplified by online encyclopedia, Wikipedia, etc, may not be very suitable for political mobilization, such other virtual content communities eg. YouTube, Flickr etc. and social networking sites as: Facebook, Myspace, Twitter and instagram are simply wonderful as platforms for political participation. [4], refer to [6], as

saying that “Barack Obama was the first to penetrate the social media space “especially Facebook for his electoral campaign in 2008 in a way never equaled by anyone for any purpose in human history”. Since then, various political activists, politicians and political parties in Nigeria, Africa and the world have continued to appropriate the potentials of the social media for political campaigns, mobilization and activities. In Nigeria, the case of former President Goodluck Jonathan suffices. He had in Sept. 15th, 2010 announced his interest in contesting for the presidential election on his Facebook account. His initial fans were 217,000 and twenty-four hours after the declaration of interest, 4,000 fans were said to have joined his page. By the day of the election, he had made more than half a million Facebook friends. Candidates of other political parties during the elections also appropriated the potentials of social networking sites for their campaigns and manifestos. It is equally interesting to note that many of the institutions involved in the conduct of the election, such as, Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, security agencies, civil society groups etc all harnessed the powers of the social media in mobilizing for the election. Such other interest groups as Reclaim Naija, WangoNet, Clamour For Continuity Initiative, (CIC), *Enough is Enough Nigeria* etc all used social media platforms to send and receive pictures, videos, text messages, voicemails on the trends and development during the elections. Media houses such as Channels TV, AIT, Punch Newspaper and others were not left out in the application of social media in the reportage of the said elections. DPI (2012) sums it up by saying that there will be increases interface between democracy and new media in Nigeria’s subsequent elections. [13] impliedly corroborates the above opinion when she posits that social media is increasingly becoming a dependable tool of development in the contemporary world.

Available record has it that 97% of social media users who participated in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria were armed with smartphones, Ipad and android tablets which enabled them to upload and instantly send and gather feedback through, videos, pictures and text cum voice messages about the elections, (www.financialnigeria.com/facebook-records-16-million-active-users-in-nigeria-news-344.html). All these paved ways for many people within and outside Nigeria to be part and parcel of the election process. The result is that many people across the world acclaim that the 2011 and the 2015 presidential elections in Nigeria were the freest and fairest in the annals of the nation. The social media also played key role during the protest by Nigerians

against removal of petroleum product subsidy by the then government of President Goodluck Jonathan. The fact that social media is gradually rekindling and re-building the damaged interest of many Nigerians in the nation's electoral and political processes is captured by some recent works. For instances, Oyenuga [14], in a study titled: "social media participation and pollution of the 2015 general elections in Nigeria," reports that social media became more potent tool and even more lethal weapons during the 2015 general elections in the country.

According to him, there were myriad of releases in the form of videos, voice notes, headlines and broadcast that made and even, tended to mar the elections. He buttresses his position by drawing attention to the many hate messages and video clips the social media against the presidential candidatures of Gen, Mohammadu Buhari of APC and Dr. Goodluck Jonathan of the then ruling PDP. To further show how social media enhanced the participation of many more Nigerians in the 2015 elections, [14] presents the statistical table below:

Compilation of INEC Results, Social Media Results and percentages of Predicted Outcome of the 2015 Presidential Poll

States in Nigeria	Inec Results in Figures		Social Media Results in Figures		Inec Results (%)		Social Prediction (%)	
	APC	PDP	APC	PDP	APC	PDP	APC	PDP
Abia	13,394	368,303	13,394	368,303	13%	83%	25%	75%
Adamawa	374,701	251,664	374,701	251,664	52%	35%	55%	45%
Akwaiabom	58,411	953,304	58,411	953,304	52%	88%	22%	78%
Anambra	19,926	660,762	17,929	666,000	3%	85%	N/A	N/A
Bauchi	931,598	86,085	931,598	86,085	85%	7%	75%	25%
Bayelsa	5,194	361,209	5,194	361,209	1%	93%	10%	90%
Benue	373,961	303,737	737,961	303,737	50%	40%	70%	30%
Borno	493,543	25,640	473,543	25,640	86%	4%	90%	10%
Cross-River	28,368	414,863	28,368	414,863	5%	82%	23%	77%
Delta	48,910	1,211,405	48,910	1,211,405	31%	89%	25%	75%
Ebonyi	48,910	323,653	19,518	323,653	5%	76%	N/A	N/A
Edo	208,469	286,869	208,469	286,869	34%	47%	55%	45%
Ekiti	120,331	176,466	102,560	151,124	37%	54%	55%	45%
Enugu	120,157	553,003	14,157	553,003	2%	89%	20%	80%
Gombe	361,253	559,185	381,245	95,873	70%	18%	75%	25%
Imo	133,253	559,185	133,253	559,185	16%	69%	70%	30%
Jigawa	885,988	142,904	885,988	142,904	76%	12%	90%	10%
Kaduna	1,127,760	484,085	1,127,760	484,085	64%	27%	60%	40%
Kano	1,903,999	215,779	1,903,999	215,779	80%	29%	90%	10%
Katsina	1,345,441	98,937	1,345,441	98,937	85%	16%	90%	10%
Kebbi	567,883	100,972	567,883	100,972	71%	34%	87%	13%
Kogi	264,851	149,987	264,851	144,987	55%	31%	45%	55%
Kwaara	302,146	132,602	302,146	132,602	61%	27%	85%	15%
Lagos	792,460	632,327	686,924	533,735	47%	57%	90%	10%
Nasarawa	236,838	273,460	236,838	273,460	42%	48%	65%	35%
Niger	657,678	149,222	657,678	149,222	70%	15%	89%	15%
Ogun	308,290	207,950	308,290	207,950	51%	34%	85%	15%
Ondo	299,889	251,368	299,889	251,368	48%	40%	40%	60%
Osun	383,603	249,929	383,603	249,929	56%	36%	70%	30%
Oyo	528,620	303,376	528,620	303,376	49%	28%	70%	30%
Plateau	429,140	549,616	429,140	549,616	39%	51%	65%	35%
Rivers	69,238	1,487,075	69,238	1,487,075	4%	90%	65%	35%
Sokoto	671,926	152,199	671,926	152,199	67%	15%	88%	12%
Taraba	261,326	310,800	261,326	310,800	40%	48%	65%	35%
Yobe	446,265	25,526	446,265	25,526	85%	4%	92%	8%
Zamfara	612,202	144,833	612,202	144,833	69%	16%	80%	20%
FCT	146,399	157,195	146,399	157,195	16%	45%	55%	45%

Source: Oyenuga (2015)

In another study entitled: “social media for election communication and monitoring in Nigeria,” [5], disclose that research evidence showed that over the period 18 March – 22 April, 2015, Twitter recorded 13.6 million tweets posted from 1.38 million users of which 12.4 million were about the Nigerian elections; and it is believed that 2.91 of these tweets were posted by Nigerians. They also reported that 216,000 unique users of Facebook posted about 383,000 comments about the elections over the same period.

Outside the shores of Nigerian elections and electoral process, the social media platforms have been utilized to mobilize people for elections in many other countries of the world. Apart from the massive use of the sites for elections in the developed nations, such African nations as Zambia, Tunisia and Egypt have all tasted the power of social media in the mobilization of citizens for the enthronement of democratic governance. [4], defer to [11] as saying that during the 2011 general elections in Zambia and in particular, the presidential election held in September, civil society and interest group employed social networking sites of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter to send and gather feedback on the developments in the elections. Such websites as Bantu watch utilized Facebook, Twitter etc to encourage Zambians to engage on online reportage of election-related cases such as hate speeches, violence, corruption and violation of electoral guidelines and law. In Tunisia, one Mohammed Bouazizi who resorted to street trading because there was no job after many years of graduation from school, had a harsh encounter with Tunisian security agent and his frustration got to its peak and he set himself ablaze. Through the instrumentality of the social media, the picture and the video coverage of the incident was disseminated to the world and the result is the Tunisian uprising, which later sacked the 23-year old regime of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Twitter, Facebook, Blogs etc were used to galvanize the support and cooperation of the people of Tunisia who uncontrollably demonstrated against what they tagged corruption among government officials, inequality, gagging of the press and pervasive joblessness in the country.

On January 25th, 2011, Egyptian took the streets in protest against the 30-year rule of President Hosni Mubarak. The ring leaders and supporters of the protest used social media- pictures, messages, videos etc to mobilize themselves on where to assemble, how to tackle security agencies and the lines of actions to be taken at

each stage. At the end, Hosni Mubarak bowed out of power. This gave room to the general election that bought the candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood- Mohammed Morsi as the new Egyptian President. The same thing happened in Libya leading to the exit of Muammar Gaddafi. It is interesting to note that in each of the countries, government had to no avail attempted to censor, gag or block the activities of bloggers and activists on the social networking sites. But it suffices to opine that the social media platforms are simply too pervasive, penetrative and dynamic to be completely blocked for the purpose of preventing users across the globe from using it for political mobilization.

For the fact that it is certain that social media platforms were utilized during the 2011 and 2015 general elections in Nigeria, during the protest against infamous fuel pump price increment by the then Goodluck Jonathan administration, in the campaign to bring back the kidnapped Nigerian Chibok girls, in forcing the then Governor of Edo State, Comrade Adams Oshimhole to show remorse and compensate the widow he abused as he discharged his official duty, in commenting for and against President Mohammadu Buhari’s leadership style and health condition and influencing many other issues relating to the nation’s current democratic governance, we are inclined to believe that it is safe to say that social media is gradually becoming a potent tool for fighting political apathy among many Nigerians, particularly, the young adults and youths.

Issues and Challenges in the Use of Social Media for Mobilization: As long as one appreciates the utilization of social media for political mobilization as highlighted above, one is still worried that this new media has the propensity of spreading protests, riots and agitations on national, regional and international levels. Conventional media at whatever level of mass communication has internal mechanism for editing and gatekeeping the contents that are relayed to the audiences, but the social media when not blocked can relay any type of content to the users. Pictures, messages and videos no matter how immoral and disgusting are sent out to Facebook pages, YouTube, Twitter etc to the millions of people who are hooked to them. Voice messages that are incisive are equally disseminated unedited. All these have the capacities of igniting riots and protestations which usually ends in the destruction of lives and property. The Arab Spring is a ready case at hand. Considering the

potentiality of the social media in globalizing riots and protests, [13], raise a poser, asking to know if it is now from “Arab Spring to Africa spring?” This is because the crisis which began in Tunisia, later spread to Egypt, Libya, Zambia and Algeria. Such other countries as: Mali, Sudan and Morocco narrowly escaped being victims of the conflagration dubbed the “Arab Spring”. In Uganda, Angola and Cameroon, some citizens attempted a regeneration of the Arab Spring but for the quick intervention of their security agencies, social media censorship and other measures, they would have been singing a different song all together by now. The crux of the matter is that the simultaneity with which the protests spread may not have been a matter of a coincidence, but may have been facilitated by the use of social media which is always the galvanizing platform during the planning and execution of each of these protests”. [5], notes that in apprehension of the havoc that Facebook is capable of causing, the Chinese government blocked the sites and established her domestic site known as Orkut which is more strictly monitored. To handle these challenges, Okafor, Ebenezer & Chukwuemeka [14] suggest systematic for regulations of social media use in Nigeria. As the issue of regulation of social media has always generated heated debate, we shall play safe by not joining the debate in this work.

Meanwhile, [5] as cited in [13], submit that the social media at ease allows the audience to gain knowledge of online information about things happening in distant land and that this is capable of making them more disconnected from others in their communities. [13]also defer to [11] as expressing worriedness that the new media would expand the information gap between the haves and the have-nots. All these challenges and more are in addition to some pertinent issues surrounding the increased use of the social media today’s world. In summary, these issues can be itemized as follows:

Regulatory Issues: It is still very difficult to regulate the contents of the social media. Obscene materials are easily disseminated, copyright is always breached, right to privacy is violated etc. The issue is not that regulatory measures are not taken by government and sites owners, but that some ICTs experts and social media activities find ways of circumventing social media regulatory measures. Abbott (2012, pp: 347), says, it seems therefore that, despite most powerful algorithms and filtering technologies, imaginative users will always find ways to circumvent the censors”.

Orchestration of Moral Panic: It is feared that the social media is promoting the occurrence of such things are gangsterism, pornography, drug abuse, rape, indecent dressing and other moral issues.

Promotion of Violence: The Arab Spring and its attendant re-echo in other parts of Africa is a ready example of how social media can easily promote violence, crime and increase security challenges to governments of the nations of the world.

Threat to Sovereignty of Nations: Social media promotes social interactions, linkages and interdependence among citizens of different nations. The consequence of these relationships could be positive or negative. For instance, when crisis within a nation is fanned and induced by people outside the embattled nation, it is always more difficult to handle. The Boko Haram Saga in Northern Nigeria is a ready case.

Moreso, the application of the social media for various activities and particularly, for political participation in Nigeria is challenged by the following:

Illiteracy: It is estimated that more than 60% of Nigerians are not literate enough to effectively participate in social media communication. It takes somewhat technical knowledge of the use of such things as smart phones, personal computer (PC) and internet surfing for one to actively participate in the business of social net workings. This technical know-how is generally enhanced by some levels of literacy. So many GSM phones users particularly in the rural parts of Nigeria do not know that apart from calling and receiving calls and text messages, that the phones in their hands can be used to connect the entire world for several purposes.

Poverty: Many people in Nigeria are too poor economically to afford even the cheapest handset in the market let alone the purchase and recharge of smart phones that are designed for social media businesses.

Epileptic Power Supply: Nigeria is still grappling with the problem of power supply; regrettably, the new technology for social media heavily depends on power supply.

Internet Network Problem: Nigeria is yet to stabilize the acquired internet service technology. As such, it is sometimes difficult to get hooked online for quick and effective social media communication.

Addiction to social Networking: Some Nigerian youths and others across the globe have become addicted to internet surfing and social networking that they can no longer be engaged in more productive endeavor. As a result, the aggregate labour force of the country is reducing in an increasing manner. Also, researches are on-going to determine the correlation between Nigerian University undergraduates' use of social media and their academic performances. Unconfirmed observation has it that many undergraduates waste a lot of their study period for blogging and frivolous online communications.

Theoretical Framework: Two theoretical constructs informed the bulk of the review above. They are: technological and democratic participant theories. Technological determinism theory was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s. According to him, it is a reductionist theory that presumes that technology drives the advancement of the socio- cultural life of the world. The major assumptions of the theory among others are that (1) invention in communication technology brings about cultural change among the people, (2) changes in communication modes and channels shape and re-shape human life and (3) man shapes technology as technology in turn shapes the way man thinks, feels and acts, [4]. According to Baran & Davis [15], McLuhan believes that the "medium is the message." This implies that technology brings about changes in the people's culture and that the communication channels are the primary cause of cultural shift in the lives of the people.

Situating the postulations of this theory to our study, one would therefore be inclined to believe that the new avenues offered by social media for people to ventilate their feelings and opinions about the ailing Nigerian electoral and political system is ordinarily causing a kind of cultural change from apathy to political and electoral activism.

Democratic participant theory in a similar manner believes that there are certain monopolistic tendencies in the conventional media system which must be conquered to make the system more accessible and participatory. The theory emerged in the 1960s. According to [15], it posits that there is democratic and professional hegemony; and strong spirit of commercialism in the media which should be removed for the system to be more democratic, participatory and easily accessible to all shades of opinions. Some of the major assumptions of the theory are that the press ought to be pluralistic and decentralized to accommodate all variegated opinions and

voices, the right to information, expression and technology should be promoted and the media self regulation should be adopted and promoted.

All these postulations are at the epicenter of social media use. In line with the theory, social media use has liberalized access to produce and consume information and communication contents in divergent forms. As such, all manners of text, voice, picture and video oriented information and communication bombard social media users especially in times of elections. Consequently, complaints about denials of access to communication and information during times of elections are drastically reducing. This perhaps, is helping to wage war against political apathy among Nigerians.

The Prospects: In their study, Holt, Shehata, Strmback, Ljungberg [16] conclude that the use of social media for political purpose serve as a leveler of political interest and participation between younger and older citizens. This finding is a good tiding to us in Nigeria where observation has shown that the younger people are even more politically apathetic than the older people. This implies that social media has great prospect in Nigeria since with it, millions of Nigerian youths can be motivated to participate in the nation's political process.

Again, with over 140 million people, there is great prospect in the use of social media for political purpose in the nearest future in Nigeria. The more such challenges as poverty, illiteracy, epileptic power supply etc, are conquered, the more the number of old and young Nigerians who would be hooked to social network sites. A time will come, when majority of Nigerians will be communicated through the social media.

Moreover, there is this world wide crave for democracy and freedom of information. Fortunately, social media platforms are becoming veritable avenues for the enthronement of democratic governance and enforcement of freedom of information. This coupled with the irreversible process of globalization implies that no country, not even Nigeria, can afford to hook-off from the social media. It is our belief that the social networking sites have the potentials and can serve as a veritable means for eliminating political apathy among Nigerians.

Major Inferences Drawn from the Review: The analysis of the review above presents one with a number of inferences in line with the research objectives and questions of this work. First, social media platforms in reality are rekindling and boosting public interest,

discussion and debate on electoral and political issues as revealed by studies on the 2011 and 2015 general elections in Nigeria, secondly, studies are yet to show significant level of social media influences on voting decision and actual participation in voting exercises by Nigerians and thirdly, social media in Nigeria influences electoral and political issues on the level of massive awareness creation.

The implication of these inferences is that social media by stimulating massive awareness, discussions, debates and comments on past elections in Nigeria is helping to fight political apathy among many Nigerians, particularly, among the young adults.

CONCLUSION

The concept of social networking occasioned by the technological revolution in the communication industry is an unfolding phenomenon with great potentialities. The fundamental thrust of the social media is the expansion of the scope of man's desire to inform and be informed in the most cost effective manner. Interestingly, information and communication is at the epicenter of human existence. Perhaps, this is why social media is fast becoming relevant in almost every business of life. Business organizations are now using social media to advertise and reach out to their target publics/ customers and clients with a view to increasing productivity and profitability. Churches and charitable organizations are not left out in the use of social media in doing their peculiar business. In this discourse, we have explored and advocated for the use of social media as weapon for fighting political apathy among Nigerians.

However, all that glitters is not gold. There are challenges and issues which are associated with the use of social networking sites. "Using social media is not an easy task and may require new ways of thinking but the potential gains are far from being negligible", [13]. One of these challenges is the issue of regulation and checkmating of content for the purpose of sanity.

Recommendations: It is our belief that all hands will be on deck in the effort to find ways of minimizing the challenges that are inherent in the use of social media. Hence, it is recommended that:

- Users should define their communication objective(s): It is not proper to wander into the expansive world of social media without target communication goals which will serve as compass to direct the course of the on-line communication.

- Social media users should be sensitized to imbibe self-regulatory principle. Schools in Nigeria- primary, secondary and tertiary levels should be made to start the teaching and learning of social media use. It will help in making youths in the country responsible social media use.
- Multi-media campaign on responsible social media use should be used to mobilize and educate Nigerians on the dangers of irresponsible use of the social networking sites.
- Nigerian Government should as a matter of urgency stabilize the issue of network challenges; such other issues as epileptic power supply and rural electrification should also be given the required attention. It will also be profitable if government finds way of reducing the cost of acquiring and recharging of smart phones, Ipad, tablets and other e-media devices which are the technological base for social media operation and functionality.

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