ABSTRACT
There is no doubt that social media remains the most phenomenal among various platforms of communication in the 21st century. Its arrival has not only enhanced human communication but has also greatly transformed the ways in which many people share information. Hence, this study interrogates the role of social media in the political transformation of Nigeria. It argues that the importance of social media on political transformation in terms of political engagement, participatory politics, political communication, political mobilization and political electioneering which are vital in deepening and strengthening democracy cannot be overemphasized. The study equally recognizes that the effects that the emergence of social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter or YouTube as well as blogging environments and online discussion fora, have had on political processes in Africa in particular and the world in general remain controversial. It, therefore, concludes that social media remains a veritable instrument for political transformation in a democratic society.

Keywords: Social Media, Communication, Democracy, Political Transformation and Nigeria

INTRODUCTION
The world of communication has been revolutionized since the beginning of the 21st century owing to the arrival of internet as well as other social networking sites. There is no doubt that social networking sites and other internet features have brought a radical qualitative change in communication, not only in terms of access to information for the masses but also control over information generation. Thus, the arrival of social media tools like Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Flickr, Twitter and Wikipedia (also called Web 2.0 tools) have facilitated greater participation of various sections of world populace in the democratization process. For instance, it is imperative to ask these pertinent questions: What do demonstrations on city streets in the Philippines in 2001, the election of Barack Obama as President of
the United States in 2008, revocation of the results of the fraudulent elections in Moldavia in 2009, the M-15 movement with their camps and demonstrations in Spain in 2011, the so-called “Arab Spring” in the Middle East in early 2011, and the “Occupy Wall Street” movement that started in New York, also in 2011, all have in common? The answer is that they have all used social media tools to aid organise such protests and mobilise their responsible agents. They all greatly exploited social media platform to establish communication networks and move towards their objectives.

The influence of social media is immense on the society and people. The exchange of information through the social media tools are both intra-regional and global in terms of the nature of issues they involve. These exchanges of information through social networking sites have created a new wave of activism particularly among youth on multiplicity of political issues. Therefore, today’s social media have helped make real the idea of a “global village” which was first put forward by communications theorist Marshall McLuhan in the 1960s (See Suomen, 2012:5), and suggestion of the claim of a “flat world” by twenty-first century essayist Thomas L. Friedman. Friedman argues that, personal computers and the speed of the optic cable in the transfer of information have marked the modern revolution and almost removed the limitations of time and space (Friedman, 2007:4).

The Internet and its tools of social media have been heralded as instrumental in facilitating political transformation in any democratic society. These are noticeable in developed countries like the United States, United Kingdom among others where social media tools are used for creating political awareness as well as for political participation, mobilisation and engagement. Hence, the role of social media and networking as a tool for political transformation towards regime change and other democratic process cannot be overemphasized. As argued by Morozov, some political pundits, academics and journalists have embraced social media as an undeniable force for good, claiming that, “democracy is just a tweet away;” (Morozov, 2011:37). Similarly, Wael Ghonim, an Egyptian Google executive, cited by Hofheinz (2011) famously said, “If you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet.” (Hofheinz, 2011:17).

This study is divided into five parts. The first part is introduction; the second part is the conceptual clarification of major terms; the third part deals with the historical evolution and development of social media in Nigeria; the fourth part discusses the role of social media in the political transformation of Nigeria; the fifth part is the concluding remarks.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF MAJOR TERMS

Social Media: Social media is a multi-dimensional concept which has been viewed by scholars from different perspectives. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines social media as “forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and blogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos).” According to Dewing, social media is a wide range of internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities. Among these kinds of internet services that are commonly associated with social media
include blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, Twitter, YouTube and so on (Dewing, 2012:1). Sanastokeskus (2010) posits that social media are new information network and information technology using a form of communication utilising interactive and user-produced content, and interpersonal relationships are created and maintained (Sanastokeskus, 2010:4). In another dimension, Alex Newson and others viewed social media networks (SMNs) as a subset of ICTs and thus define it as online tools and utilities that allow communication of information online and participation and collaboration (Alex Newson, et al, 2008:3). Chebib & Sohail (2011) argue that social media tools are websites that interact with the users, while giving them information. Eysenbach identified at least five major features of social media. They include; Social networking and social interaction, participation, the use of different providers (e.g. search engines, blog spaces), openness and collaboration (between both users and user groups) (Eysenbach, 2008:22)

It can, therefore, be deduced from the above definitions that social media involves the use of different tools of communication which results in mass participation, communication, interaction, engagement and mobilisation of many people. Thus, our discussion will centre on most widely and effectively used social media networks (SMNs) like internet Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogging and mobile phones.

**Social Networking:** The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines networking as “the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions. Stelzner sees social networking as a tool and a utility for connecting with others (Stelzner, 2009:4). Social networking is an act of engagement by which people with common interests associate together and build relationships through community (Hartshorn, 2010).

**Political Transformation:** Encarta dictionary 2009 defines transformation as a complete change, usually into something with an improved appearance or usefulness. Transformation also means complete change in the methods of doing things. In this discourse, we are looking at political transformation as changes in political processes such as methods of campaigning, mobilising electorate, electioneering, debating or discussing political issues via social media networks.

**The Evolution and Development of Social Media in Nigeria**

From the historical perspective, the evolution of media could be traced to the pre-colonial period. During the pre-colonial period, the medium of communication included the use of traditional methods such as bush burning, blowing of trumpet, beating of drum and gong so on (Falola, et al, 1989:129). Meanwhile, in the colonial and post colonial periods, there was the emergence of modern means of communication among which were newspapers, telephone, telegraph, radio and television. Prior to the advent of new social media platforms such as internet, Facebook, twitter, YouTube in Nigeria, these initial modern means of communication, popularly referred to as conventional media of communication were made use of by the people. It is important to note that, the first recorded effort to formally use the mass media to influence Nigerian society was made by Rev. Henry Townsend. He started the publication of a newspaper called the “Iwe Irohin”. This was a bilingual newspaper published in both
English and Yoruba languages. The main objective of the newspaper was to influence the traditional governments found in Egbaland as well as to educate people in order to convert them into Christianity (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992:144).

Thus, from the late 1930s, several indigenous Nigerian newspapers were founded, majorly by the Nigerian nationalists. For example, Herbert Macaulay started the first indigenous (Nigerian) newspaper in the country known as “Daily News”, which he used as a political weapon during the nationalist struggle (Imoh, 2013:47). Also, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (who became the first indigenous Governor-General in 1960 and the President of Nigeria in 1963) founded the “West African Pilot” in 1937. This newspaper, which was said to have enjoyed mass circulation, was used to promote serious broad-based anti-colonial mobilization in the country (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1992:146). In 1949, Chief Obafemi Awolowo (who became the first Premier of the Western Region in 1954) equally founded the Tribune in Ibadan, which he used to promote his welfarist doctrines and as well to champion the cause of the “Egbe Omo Oduduwa” a pan-Yoruba ethno-cultural association that later metamorphosed into a political party known as the Action Group in 1950 (Abimbola and Adesote, 2012:250. Also, the Zik’s West African Pilot emerged in Eastern Nigeria in the 1950s purposely for the promotion of “Eastern Nigerian” interests (Imoh, 2013:48). In the Northern Nigeria, the Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo” a vernacular newspaper was established in Zaria in the 1930s for the purpose of meeting the needs of Hausa speaking groups. Also, in 1966, another newspaper known as the “New Nigeria” was established in Kaduna by the federal government (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1992:146).

Social networks have evolved over the years to the 21st century variety which uses digital media. Thus, social media cannot be said to be new. Social media did not start with the computer but rather the telephone. During the 1950s, phone phreaking, the term used for the rogue searching of the telephone network, began. This process was accomplished through the use of homemade electronic devices that facilitated unauthorized access to the telephone system to make free calls (Borders, 2010:4). Rimskii (2011) and Ritholz (2010) in their different writings argued that the internet was not available to the public until 1991. Ritholz (2010) posited that many social networking sites were created in the 1990s. Some of the social networking sites that were created during this period were Six Degrees, BlackPlanet, Asian Avenue, and MoveOn. They have been online niche social sites where people can interact, including sites for public policy advocacy and a social network based on a web of contacts model. In addition, blogging services such as Blogger and Epinions were created. (Ritholz, 2010).

Generally, social media received a great boost in the year 2000. The year which not only marked the beginning of a new millennium but also witnessed the springing up or launching of many social networking sites such as LunarStorm, six degrees, cyworld, ryze, and Wikipedia. These social networking sites greatly transformed the interaction among people as well as and organizations who mostly share common interest in music, education, movies, and friendship. For example, with the launching of fotolog, sky blog and Friendster in 2001; MySpace, LinkedIn,
lastFM, tribe.net, Hi5 in 2003, as well as the evolvement of Facebook Harvard, Dogster and Mixi in 2004 and the emergence of Yahoo!360, YouTube, cyword, and Black planet in 2005, effective communication and interaction was unprecedented (Eysenbach, 2008:22).

The creation of new forms of digital social media, especially internet, mobile phone, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and other platforms during the first decade of the 21st century has transformed the ways in which many Nigerian peoples communicate and share information. For instance, although the actual date when the mobile telecommunication spread across Nigeria is vague, its development became known since the birth of the Fourth Republic in 1999. Importantly, the adoption of the Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM) by the then government of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2001, no doubt has revolutionised the system of human communication in the country. Its emergence has helped to bridge the gap between the connected (urban people) and the disconnected (rural people) in the country. Indeed, the development and spread of mobile telephony in Nigeria since 2001, has made the citizenry to become ever more involved or connected with happenings within and outside the country.

Beside mobile communication, other 21st century social media networks that had penetrated Nigerian society include internet, facebook, twitter, YouTube among others. Facebook, a social networking website which was launched in February 2004, was founded by Mark Zuckerberg when he was a student at Harvard. Initially, when the site was launched, it was restricted to Harvard students only. Later, privilege was extended to high school students and later to everyone that is 13 years or older (Boyd, 2007:5). As of July 2010, Facebook has more than 500 million active users. In January 2009, it was ranked as the most used social network worldwide. Also, in May 2010, Google announced that more people visited Facebook than any other website in the world. It declares that this was discovered from findings on 1,000 sites across the world. (TIMES, 2010:1). For example, in November 2012, while Facebook announced it had 1 billion users worldwide, with about 5 million users in Nigeria, twitter had an estimated 517 million users (Dewing, 2010:4). YouTube, the biggest video sharing website and Twitter, the most popular micro blogging site, were introduced in 2005 and 2006 respectively. For instance, YouTube which was founded in 2005, is the world's most popular online video community, where millions of people can discover, watch and share originally-created videos (Edosomwan, et al. 2011:5). YouTube provides a forum for people to connect, inform, and inspire others across the globe and acts as a major distribution platform for original content creators and advertisers, large and small. YouTube is based in San Bruno, California and uses Adobe Flash Video technology to display a wide variety of user-generated video content, including movie clips, TV clips, and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging and short original videos. In November 2006, within a year of its launch, YouTube was purchased by Google Inc. in one of the most talked-about acquisitions to date. YouTube has entered into a number of partnership relations with content providers such as British Broadcasting Corporation, Universal Music Group, Sony Music Group, Warner Music Group, The Sundance Channel and many others (Edosomwan, et al. 2011:5). YouTube which
offered the public a beta site of the site in May 2005, six months before the official launch in November 2005 grew rapidly, and in July 2006, the company announced that more than 65,000 new videos were being uploaded every day, and that the site was receiving 100 million video views per day (Edosomwan, S, et al. 2011:6).

Twitter is a free, Internet-based microblogging service, on which users can send short, 140-character messages to each other. Its use is based on quick exchanges of thoughts and information between friends, acquaintances, and all the users of the Twitter platform. Twitter messages are most commonly called “tweets”. These tweets form a current of messages that are followed in chronological order from a computer screen or some other screen, like that of a cell phone (Suomen, 2012:9). In conversations concerning society, Twitter remains an interesting vessel, because its messaging form is very compact. Conover et al (2011) argued that political messaging and conversation could be more heated and critical in twitter than in other social media platforms. This shows that twitter can be used for active political discussion. Tumasjan et al (2010) also posited that Twitter can be used to influence voting behaviour. According to Dewing, twitter had an estimated 517 million users worldwide (Nigeria inclusive) as at November 2012 (Dewing, 2010:4).

It is imperative to point out here that social media’s quick development in Nigeria in particular and worldwide in general into an important way of influencing society is part of the advancement of information and communication technologies in the 21st century. The first noteworthy trend which has been the evolution of the Internet popularly referred to as “Web 2.0” was immediately followed by the quick development of mobile technology and different mobile terminals that invariably facilitated the creation and use of social media. It is against this background of the overview of the evolution and development of social media in Nigeria that the next part of this paper examines the role of social media in the political transformation of Nigeria.

LESSONS FROM THE ADVANCED DEMOCRACIES

The place of social media in the political transformation of Nigerian democracy in the ongoing Fourth Republic cannot be overemphasized. This study acknowledged the fact that though social media has its own negative consequences in relation to political processes, its positive impact in terms of political engagement, active political participation and awareness and political mobilisation in the establishment, development, strengthening and deepening of liberal democracy outweighed the negative impact. Therefore, our major focus here is to interrogate the positive impact of social media in the political transformation of Nigeria. The positive relationship between social media and political transformation in a democratic society like Nigeria in the 21st century has been argued by some scholars. For example, as Vgeny Morozov succinctly puts: the challenge of anyone analyzing how the Internet may affect the overall effectiveness of political activism, is first, to determine the kind of qualities and activities that are essential to the success of the democratic struggle in a particular country or context and second, to understand how a particular medium of campaigning or
facilitating collective action affects those qualities and activities (Morozov, 2011:198).

The above submission of Morozow's effect of social media on political process depends on the quality and practice of democracy in a particular society.

With respect to Nigeria in particular, though democracy has come to stay considering various democratic consolidations that have been witnessed since 1999 up till 2014, one cannot categorically say that democracy has actually been firmly entrenched in the country especially considering the way it is being practised. No doubt, Nigerian democracy still lacks some basic tenets of an ideal democracy such as ideology, manifesto, discipline and internal democracy. Thus, the best way to describe Nigerian democracy is that it is still nascent, but can be deepened and strengthened through the social media networks. Most developed countries like the United States of America, United Kingdom, as well as others like Spain, Italy, and Ghana among others have adopted new social media networks for the purpose of strengthening their democracy. Significantly, since the birth of modern democracies, freedom of speech and independence of media has been regarded as crucial and indispensable conditions for the effective functioning of a democratic political system.

Political electioneering (especially political campaign) is one of the major areas that need transformation in the Nigerian democracy. Public media campaigns constitute some main forms of co-ordinated action in a democratic society. These political movements which the military calls “shared awareness” can be properly propagated through the social media networks (Shirky, 2011:4). The first realisation that these powerful technologies could be harnessed for political purposes came in the United States. Presidential contender Howard Dean used blogs and emerging social media software, like meetup.com, in 2004 to engage supporters and raise money for his ultimately unsuccessful campaign. His web-savvy adviser Joe Trippi later declared: There is only one tool, one platform, one medium that allows the American people to take their government back, and that's the internet (Newman, 2011:5). Harfous described Barack Obama’s 2008 US presidential campaign as the first electoral campaign in which the use of social media had a decisive impact. The core of the web-based campaign was a well-designed, versatile and dynamic website, “my.barackobama.com” (Newman, 2011:5).

The influence of the Obama campaign through the effective use of social media between 2007 and 2008 made political parties in the United Kingdom (UK) in a bid up to the 2010 election to really sit up. In order to internalise the new media form of political electioneering, all the UK political parties spent time in the US studying these techniques. They hired some of Obama's former campaign advisers to help draw up and implement their social media and digital strategies. In an early sign of emerging digital strategies, David Cameron (who later emerged as the current Prime Minister) set up MyConservatives.com, a website to empower supporters by giving them the contacts and tools to campaign on their own. Labour did the same and all parties lined up Facebook fan pages and briefed parliamentary candidates on how to make the most of Twitter. Together with the TV
debates, politicians were hopeful that social media would increase their ability to talk directly to voters without the bothersome intervention of the traditional media (Newman, 2011:6-7). This is why the 2010 UK election was billed as the internet election, the social media election – with much attention focused on how campaigners, commentators and voters would respond to ground-breaking digital campaigns. It has arguably been said that the 2010 UK election did mark another significant milestone in the onward march of the internet, with unprecedented levels of participation and new techniques providing extra layers of information, context and real-time feedback (which complemented and enriched more traditional forms of media), as a new form of political transformation in deepening democracy (Shirky, 2011:6).

More importantly, the Nigerian politics also needs transformation in the area of combating election fraud. There is doubt that Nigerian elections over the years were characterized by different forms of electoral fraud, malpractices, irregularities and manipulation. With respect to the Fourth Republic, various elections that had been conducted between 1999 and 2011 in the country were marred with different cases of electoral irregularities and had resulted in several cases of electoral violence (which had led to the killing and displacement of many innocent lives) (Adesote and Abimbola, 2014:144). The emergence of new social and digital media such as the use mobile telephony can help in monitoring elections as well as combating election fraud. For example, countries like Ghana, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Korea, Kuwait, the Philippines, Sierra Leone, Spain, and the United States among others have recorded tremendous political progress in the use of mobile telephony and SMS and Internet tools such as Listservs, blogs, meetup.com (Newman, 2011:8). For instance, cell phones have been used in two notable recent instances to combat election fraud, and as political organizing tools. Zuckerman (2004) cited Ghana and the United States as examples of countries where cell phones were used to combat election fraud. He even argued that the last Ghana election "went considerably more smoothly than the last US national election due to the use of cell phones and radio to report voting fraud" (Zuckerman 2004:9). This was because people at polling places used their mobiles to report fraud accusations to local radio stations.

Social media increases political engagement and as well contributes immensely to higher turnout during elections. This is a major political transformation needed in Nigerian election that is characterized by voter apathy. This is particularly common among the young people. Although there are many factors responsible for this problem, among which includes, failure of good governance, biased electoral umpire, ineffective electoral system, and so on, this problem can be stemmed through the use of social media for political engagement. For example, in the UK where social media had been adopted for political engagement, evidences showed that young people used social media to engage in political discussion and debate. It was revealed that one in four posted election related comments through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter in a bid up to the 2010 election, about 81% felt engaged in the election, the highest of any demographic group (YouGov for Orange, 2010). Roussel cited by (Newman, 2011:2) has this to say about social and digital
media which make a real difference during electioneering process: It was the main vehicle by which young people exchanged information, and used digital media to make fundamental decisions about who they were going to vote for and it had fundamental impact. Only now is data surfacing which shows strong traffic figures, very strong usage of tools and share functionality. Social media really was the undercurrent of this election.

Political mobilisation, active citizens' participation and voting decisions are major areas of political transformation that can be enhanced by full adoption of social media. It is imperative to emphasize here that the power of social media to affect society politically is based exclusively on its social aspects, that is, interaction and participation. For example, in several different studies of citizen voting habits - ever since the classic Lazarsfeld investigation in the 1940s as cited by Shirky (2011), results have shown that voting decisions are not usually based on one-step communication (traditional media), but more noteworthy by two-step communication (social media), which means conversation with opinion leaders, colleagues, friends and acquaintances who can either consolidate or weaken the voter's opinion (Shirky, 2011:30). Evidences from other countries of that world revealed that adoption of social media in deepening democracy played major significant role in political mobilization and voting decisions. In the Finnish parliamentary election of 2011, Suomen (2012) reported that the True Finns were the first party in Finland to succeed in using social media to mobilise their supporters. Also, in the 2007 election in France, the centre-right UMP party's Nicolas Sarkozy was said to have scored a decisive victory over the opposing socialist candidate Ségolène Royal for the French presidency through the aid of social media (Baygert, 2007:5). He said that social media had a strong influence on the outcome of the election of which over 40% of Internet users reported that conversations and other activities on the Internet had an effect on their voting decisions (Baygert, 2007:5). This shows that social software helped political parties organise their activists more efficiently.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The foregoing discourse has examined social media and political transformation of Nigerian democracy through inferences from other developed and developing countries that had embraced social media in their political process. The regime change and the establishment of and match towards democracy in some North Africa countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Libya among others where autocratic governments had thrived for so long were made possible through the social media networks and internet. Even though revolutions were toppling governments long before Facebook and Twitter, and even though social media-coordinated political expression has not always led to regime change (like that of the 2009 Iranian election protests (Browning, 2013:65), the Arab Spring has provided perhaps the clearest examples of how the power of social media platforms can be harnessed as a tool for political transformation, mobilisation, organization and expression. Although social media has its own shortcomings, social networking sites remain core tools of communication in deepening and strengthening liberal democracy in the 21st century. Even, journalists and broadcasters have normalised their use of social media tools
like live blogs, twitter and facebook as source materials, filtering the best for a mass audience. Social media and internet activity have continued to provide new routes to transparency during election, thereby helping to not only reduce the challenge of electoral malpractices but also electoral violence. Its contribution towards improving the way in which politicians and the media in general are held to account, contributing to a new and more open political climate cannot be overemphasized.

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