



Youth and New Media Technologies in Africa: Content Analysis of Online Youth Participation in Nigeria's 2015 Election

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Abstract

For nations with fledgling democracies, social media poses a distinctly unique challenge because of the intense passions aroused by the electoral process. This paper is a content analysis of social media as it is used by young Nigerians engaged with the past presidential election. The focus is chiefly upon Twitter and Facebook, in large part because of their spontaneous and informal nature. Social media is shown to be an excellent leveling device for allowing young Nigerians to express their thoughts and feelings; however, it is far less evident that social media allowed them to organize in a concerted, coherent and massive fashion against the political establishment in 2015. The paper also finds that Twitter seems to allow for more rancorous debate from users, while Facebook allows for more considered and (relatively speaking) more nuanced responses. The youth of Nigeria may struggle, in that respect, to make full use of the digital media as an instrument for amplifying the power and efficacy of incipient ground-up social movements. Ultimately, the digital media appears to be a boon for youth, not least of all because of their relative sophistication using it, but there must be steps taken to find means of using the social media for building the infrastructure of new political movements; it is not enough to simply use the social media as a sounding board.

world to announce their presence in the national political process and discourse. Muhammad Buhari's close (and contentious) victory on March 28 2015. In particular, it is worthwhile to look at Facebook groups, and Twitter hash tags and handles, to get a sense of how the social media was used to articulate political points, rally supporters, and highlight grievances (or commendations) for the political elite. At the same time, it is vitally important to look at the relationship between the new social media and the journalistic profession. Without question, young people in Nigeria, as in many countries, work diligently to use the new media as a tool or heuristic for representation. When denied access to conventional media modalities – television, newspaper, radio – then the alternative is to use the interconnected fibers of the internet to reach out to a larger, sophisticated audience in an effort to change the political process from without. It can occasionally be a struggle, this relationship between the new media and the new voter - in no small part because of the somewhat rancorous nature of online debate and discourse - but it is a relationship that (as Nigeria shows) ultimately enriches both. Without the new media technologies of the 21st century, a great many voices would otherwise go unheard.

The key to understanding the invigorating political discourse that took hold of the social media in Nigeria (and within the Nigerian diaspora) requires looking at the events in the Arab World in 2011 and thereafter. The Arab Spring showed how social media could be used as a catalyst for change. While the new media may not have the institutional weight and established channels as older communication modalities, it is more accessible, inclusive and removes the characteristic barriers that keep young people from asserting themselves in the political process. Instead of having to take out a full-page ad delineating one's disgust for a career politician, one can alternately focus on connecting with others via Twitter and Facebook. Anyone with even a scintilla of media or internet sophistication can do so, and it allows viable political groups to emerge that would otherwise never coalesce. Of course, it must also be noted that change requires more than people meeting on the internet; it must be backed up by the institutional, bureaucratic, political and programmatic change.

Keywords

Sounding board; Media technologies; Content analysis; Youth participation; Democracies; Social media

Introduction

The ensuing paper is a content analysis of youth participation in Nigeria. It focuses attention upon the last presidential election and the manner in which Nigerian youth employed the new media technologies of the contemporary

Given the regrettable return of Muhammadu Buhari to the seat of power, it is enough to argue that internet dialogue and engagement does not always lead to substantive change that sweeps out the barnacles of the past. The new technologies should be seen as a start; they are the implements that engage people on the margins of the political process. The next step, once engaged, is to insinuate into the bureaucratic or legislative fabric of society – through think tanks, lobbying efforts, constituency organizations, political activism – so that the grand awakening can be accompanied by actual material change. In the final analysis, a content analysis of youth participation in Nigeria finds a surprisingly well-versed and sophisticated youth cohort that recognizes the need to be engaged and to consider new ideas and why certain failings have habitually occurred within the Nigerian context. However, since the state apparatus can also easily control and manipulate social media technologies to articulate its own message or to impose itself upon the populace, efforts at positive change must involve multiple modalities which should include social media as well as some of the tactics suggested above. Absent this, Nigerian youth will not affect the outcome they desire.

Preliminary Literature Review

Much of the research examines the relationship between new media technologies. This paper departs from that effort to look at the relationship of Nigerian youths to the new media and the struggle of such youth for representations. Some scholars argue, at least in light of recent populist movements to correct the abuse of power and issues of oppression and inequality, that social media networks have been utilized within the context of Nigeria to achieve some measure of socio-political reform. Virtual communities have thus become, in the Nigerian context, vehicles for self-determination, in effect [1]. As the rest of this research paper will show, the data is somewhat more ambivalent about this finding when the most recent presidential election in Nigeria is taken into account.

In any event, there is a definite sense that many young Nigerians are forsaking the conventional media for social media. Much of this appears tied to concerns about the electoral process in the country and reflects how the new media is seen as more dependable than the old media at holding accountable the Nigerian electoral commission and any political actors who might attempt to bend or manipulate the voting process for their own gain [2]. The sharp criticisms of the political process in Nigeria on social media, revealed later in this paper, seem to support the idea of social media serving to hold accountable the process by which leaders are selected.

Proceeding onwards, Sackeyfio [3] states that the locus of state power is being undermined by the encroach of social media. Interconnectedness has sparked fears about the state power being attenuated and Nigeria has become one of the theatres of battle between pre-existing nodes of power and the demand for new representation and for grassroots, collective action against patronage and entrenched interests.

While the evidence is not overwhelming, and while the study of politicized social media in Nigeria remains nascent, there is a growing conviction that it lies at the heart of online activism in the country [4].

Contrary to the findings of the subsequent interview portion of this study, at least one study of recent vintage argues that there is no connection between internet use and political cognition and orientation; in other words, those who use the internet to glean information on political events in the country are not (as a consequence of this) appreciably more motivated than others to take action against or for institutions or political actors. There is, it is argued, a stronger relationship between newspaper reading and political engagement [5]. Fascinatingly, another study, this one a phenomenological study, maintains that convergence between the new media and the old media will lead, in the matter of Nigeria, to greater support for, and the realization of, effective democratic governance [6]. When these divergent viewpoints are considered, it is enough to conclude that many in the scholarly community are still unsure as to how the new media will reformulate the political process in Nigeria in an age when the old media is still dominated by institutionalized elites with the capacity to project power and influence.

Despite uncertainty as to what the final outcome will be, at least some scholars are optimistic that the social media constellation can invigorate the Nigerian diaspora to influence and shape political events back home. Removed at last from being passive receptacles of mainstream media and government propaganda and spin, those in the “Nigerian digital diaspora” can be discerning consumers and producers of new informational resources that guide positive, material change [7]. Although many posters on social media do not identify themselves as members of the Nigerian diaspora, it is undoubtedly true that a great many took to social media in the lead-up to the March 28, 2015, presidential election to express their positions vis-à-vis the parties. And this – along with their continued investment in Nigerian affairs – is something to be wished in light of the mounting potential of social media to serve as valuable auxiliary tools in the battle to heal schisms and to create lasting peace in fractured parts of the world [8].

All in all, the new media is a means for giving idealistic young people a chance at representation, a chance to possibly heal their homeland (or even the world beyond its doors), and a chance to be heard. But it remains to be seen if Nigeria will take the right course and social media will become a healing instrument or a cause of further division and declension.

The Methodology

The methodology for this study encompasses a textual analysis of online materials (data) drawn from the corpus of social media chatter occurring in the lead-up and immediate aftermath of the recent presidential election. It is accompanied by empirical data culled from interviews with those who were (and remain) particularly active or vigorous in asserting their claims and preferences. Specific categories were created (with accompanying color codes) and words

were subsequently examined to see if they fit within one of these categories. For instance, some words might be “aggressive” in tone, and thus fit under that typology. Other words might reflect support for domestic politics as usual – be “conservative”, in effect – and thus be emblematic of those seeking to maintain the current status quo. Still others might be dedicated to change and fit under a broad typology stressing “democratic renewal”, “inclusiveness”, or simply “change”. When words or phrases were identified as fitting less than one particular umbrella (category) or another, they were assigned to the appropriate category with its corresponding color code. Ultimately, the objective in conducting this textual analysis was to illuminate the broad trends and patterns in the online data to gain a representative insight into how Nigerian youth were moving, how they felt (and might still feel now) and where the future of Nigerian democracy, and youth participating in the political process, appear headed. The colour codes and categories comprising the textual analysis of the online materials can be found situated in the appendix to this paper.

With specific regards to the interview, it comprised a cross-section of persons in Abuja, Nigeria. These men and women were asked questions pertaining to their use of social media and how they exploited it to express their sentiments towards the state or towards current politics in Nigeria. As a rule, the interviews were open-ended and informal and conducted in locations within which all of the respondents felt at ease and could speak freely. The interview should serve as an interstitial element that adds context and depth to the findings of the comprehensive textual analysis; in fact, it should reinforce some significant trends while also calling into question broad generalizations which are unsupported by fact.

Results

The data to be analyzed is data culled from social media sources – Twitter and Facebook most of all. Some of this data, necessarily, will be the content placed online by engaged journalists or members of various media outlets. However, one of the things which become apparent is that there are many transient actors in the social media universe who evidently use different hashtags, different pseudonyms, and different accounts to make their points. Nonetheless, the words, the phrases, and the context in which those words and phrases are utilized, are rather unambiguous. Defining (via colour coding) the data by identifying specific words/phrases with clear connotative and denotative meanings is the best way of ascertaining what is unfolding in the social media, and the extent to which uniformity prevails – or outliers abound. Inferentially, the data manifests evidence that many people in Nigeria, be they journalists or interested students, have deep misgivings about the legitimacy of the political process. This does not bode well for the future comity of political elections in Nigeria down the road.

Twitter

The content found on Twitter manifests evidence of deep ideological divides within Nigeria in the sense that, while Jonathan clearly had his supporters, the young professionals and tech-savvy youth of Nigeria manifestly wanted him gone. In ascertaining the general sentiment towards Goodluck Jonathan, and the appetite of young Nigerians for change, it was easiest to do a keyword search of the 2015 Nigerian election on Twitter. Such a search brought up a long list of results with many different tweets appearing that almost invariably revolved around disillusionment with Nigeria’s leaders, disillusionment with the electoral process (primarily, it’s inability to evade corruption and issues such as ballot-box stuffing), and frustration over the Nigerian people’s incapacity to affect positive change in the face of obstructions caused by an oblivious, ignorant and (sadly) frequently disingenuous political elite [9-15]. Out of the many tweets that underscored the tensions and conflicts within Nigeria prior to, and following, the March 28 election, a few particularly evocative ones have been singled out as representative of the feelings expressed by young Nigerians using Twitter as an outlet and heuristic device. They are duly presented below.

In the weeks leading up to the March 28 election, the battle lines were clearly drawn, with Nigeria’s faltering currency and struggling economy tied to the man himself. A prolific gentleman named Yadamah Mandara, wrote in a March 1, 2015, Twitter entry that “Nigerians are driving to the election without fuel, but we are told Nigeria is transformed. Nigerians have decided to march, anyways”. Mandara’s comments seem to capture (though with considerably less venom) the sentiments of many idealistic Nigerians: Nigeria is a nation of great promise, but poor leadership has enervated the country and depleted its resources and vitality. Beyond that, his twitter comment is clearly aimed at then-President, Goodluck Jonathan, and ostensibly at Jonathan’s allegedly poor handling of the nation’s economy. His sly twitter commentary is a vivid reminder of the desire for change that swept through many parts of Nigeria – a desire for change ineluctably captured by social media – as Jonathan’s tenure as President came to its end.

Another prominent member of the Twitter-sphere during the lead-up to the election was a gentleman named Eguando Tone Jeff. In a particularly biting tweet dated March 11, 2015, Tone Jeff reminded his audience that Goodluck Jonathan did not want a March 28 election in his restive desire to retain power. Tone Jeff was critical of this, and also took the time to offer his thoughts on the looming menace of a police strike as the election date came into view [16]. His tweets, coupled with the tweets of others, as captured in an inventory of tweets pertaining to the March, 2015 election, suggest a comprehensive mood of distaste for the unpopular Jonathan and a fervent wish that proper electoral processes – as opposed to backroom machinations – would prevail on election day and give the country a genuinely effective and legitimate leader. More than anything else, the tweets emanating from this individual and another engaged commentator on Twitter, reflect a basic idealism that seems to

be endemic to relatively young professionals or political activists within the country: there is recognition that change is needed, that change is possible, and that the efforts of incumbents to arrest change (and to thwart the democratic process) can be halted.

The social media content, when analyzed thoroughly, seems to capture a general sense that many Nigerians were fearful about the stability of their political process and about the institutions undergirding it. An organization called “A Godsent Foundation” tweeted out its concerns about possible warfare and bellicosity unfolding as the March 28 election drew near. Its twitter remarks are almost poignant: “Pls retweet for a peaceful election this March in Nigeria for the shake (sic) of our future” [15]. While the change was clearly desired in the weeks preceding the election, many tweets and twitter feed evidently sounded this same general theme: Nigeria was (and is) a great nation that has been confounded by poor leadership and political violence for too long. Such tweets reveal how the social media was used to educate people about both the political stakes, about the platforms of the contenders, and also about why non-violence was (and remains) the best answer.

Since Twitter is a technology medium dominated by young people, it is clear that many of the sentiments expressed by the politically active and engaged in the country will be sentiments that demand institutional reform, more responsive governance, and better bureaucratic leadership; it is also equally true that such young men and women will have little patience for the clientelism and crony politics that have typified Nigeria at times in the past. However, sober observers were quick to note, in the weeks preceding the March 28 election, that Buhari’s APC could hardly call itself a fount of integrity with regards to several of its claims about bolstering the infrastructure, economy and living conditions of Nigeria. A frequent online tweeter, Idris Oluwadare Aliu, referenced an article by AFRICA CHECK in which several of Buhari’s claims, and those of leading lieutenants, were shown to be false vis-à-vis the efficacy of APC in raising living standards in regions under APC dominion [17]. It is not clear that Oluwadare Aliu is a proponent of the ancient regime in Nigeria, but it seems likely that he is one of those young people engaged with the political process which is not reflexively in favour of change for the sake of change. Removing one trouble-plagued administration or regime, only to replace it with one perhaps careless with the truth, is not something that will aid the people of Nigeria. Using Twitter as a heuristic for educating his followers about some of APC’s sins, Oluwadare Aliu shows the manner in which the new media technologies democratize information and break down the monolithic narratives foisted upon the electorate by-election campaigns. Youth participation in the most recent Nigerian election very much centered around young people (or young professionals and graduate students) using the social media to articulate their perspectives, to take to task fatuous claims by the leading politicians, and using the internet as a way to network (predominantly via re-tweets) with other young people who might be persuaded to see things their way.

The Twitter content in the weeks before the election was almost uniformly in favour of Goodluck Jonathan being ousted from power; it was exceptionally difficult to find any hashtags or handles on the Twitterscape that were prepared to speak well of Jonathan or of his administration and allies within the upper reaches of the bureaucracy or legal structure. After the victory of March 28 was won, however, the criticism of government practices in Nigeria did not end – a good indication that the young men and women using Twitter to expound on their feelings towards politics in Nigeria were motivated by non-partisan idealism and by broad principles that extended far beyond party platforms. One rather acerbic individual, with the twitter handle, “Solopenja”, uses decisively aggressive language in describing how Buhari’s APC is drifting the nation into “chaos” in the aftermath of the March 28 election. In a similar vein, the individual in question attacks APC’s apparent “insatiable penchant” for “interfering” in the role of the courts as adjudicative bodies [12].

A further inquiry reveals that the individual behind the twitter account is named Solomon Apenja [13]. It immediately becomes apparent that he is committed to political change in the country, and that the change he envisages is fundamental structural change. Social media, clearly, is his way of networking with like-minded young professionals. Of particular note, he wants to see a devolution of powers and fiscal federalism – two things which have not happened under Buhari’s APC. His tweets are larded with references to restructuring the country and he is severely critical of complaints by political figures about the “abusive” use of the courts in a democracy; in this case, he cites OBJ and PMB as being classic malcontents, while stressing that “Civilians UMY/GEJ respected rule of law” [13]. In brief, the new media technologies arising from the IT revolution of the early 2000s have provided modalities of representation for the likes of Solomon Apenja. Apenja may not be a journalist, but he is certainly a provocative voice eager to shine light on what he sees as the challenges holding Nigeria back from greatness. The content of his remarks also manifests a keen interest in legal principles and ideals, thus suggesting that he is quite possibly a graduate student who has studied law, or a young intellectual who is aware of the ideological, jurisprudential, and cosmological issues confounding the Nigerian state.

The twitter stream after March 28 was – and evidently remains – littered with comments that largely echo the desire of young people before the election for something different. Once more, it is vital to return to the inventory of tweets furnished by the original keyword search pertaining to the March 2015 Nigerian election. Post-election, many young people in Nigeria saw the social media as a tool for expressing, vigorously, their delight at change. Taiwo Ajakaye, for instance, is captured jubilantly proclaiming that Nigeria is now ready to take her place among the nations [11]. Akinlade Ayodele writes that Jonathan couldn’t find salvation in the courts or in postponement; his political demise is a source of delight for this twitter contributor [14]. Another contributor of note, an attorney who declines to use his real name, favouring a business moniker, contends that APC has moved on from March to make Nigeria better – except for El Rufai, who is

apparently still stuck in campaign mode [18]. A last broadside fired at the outgoing Jonathan comes from a young gentleman named Ibrahim Haidara; he takes to Twitter to denounce GEJ and Jonathan for political kidnapping under the leadership of the former [9]. For young people in Nigeria, finding political representation on Twitter has meant using Twitter as the organ through which they assail the self-proclaimed political masters, present their case for change, or consolidate/reaffirm their partisan convictions. It is quite remarkable how few PDP and Goodluck Jonathan supporters can be found.

Facebook

It passes, almost without comment, that social media is the haunt, predominantly, of those who are young, connected, wedded to the internet because of the convenience and instantaneous information flow it affords, and because the barriers which keep them out of the mainstream, institutionalized media are not to be found on social media. Given that youthful Nigerians seeking to express and represent themselves on Twitter are overwhelmingly change-oriented, discovering social media users who might look back fondly on Goodluck Jonathan are few and far between. But a few Facebook groups do exist which evince some support for the fallen Jonathan. By examining them, one can see that Facebook is the social media tool which appears to be most efficacious at allowing young people (or people of any age) who happen to be of different, and unpopular, persuasions and political orientations to express their views with a potentially far less rancorous reception than they might receive on Twitter.

To get started, A keyword search of the 2015 Nigerian Election on Facebook reveals a non-profit organization called "Nigerians in Asia Support Goodluck Jonathan". However, this Facebook page has only 1327 likes [19]. Another Facebook page, "Northern Nigerians for Jonathan/Sambo", is an NNJS government website which has a mere 746 likes [20]. But the latter Facebook page is quite interesting insofar as it is very vehement in its partisanship and strikes a bold stance in favour of Jonathan and his troupe of associates and colleagues that is not found on Twitter or, indeed, on any other social media forum this writer has encountered. And, perhaps every bit as impressively, the NNJS Facebook page has not been bombarded with virulent retorts from APC supporters or disgruntled Jonathan supporters. But is the tone of the page which leaps out as conspicuously as anything else.

Notably, the verbiage and adjectives used by the Northern Nigerians for Jonathan/Sambo, are assertively, almost recklessly, bold. In the November 7 entry, it clearly shows its disdain for the manner in which PDP (or some within the party) treated Jonathan in the aftermath of the turbulent March election. Chiefly, it derides the PDP as needlessly hectoring President Buhari as he battles corruption and tries to assuage foreign fears about political corruption in Nigeria. Furthermore, it goes one step further to denounce PDP spokesperson, Olisa Metuh, as nothing more than a "mouthpiece". The implication is clear: Facebook, much more so than Twitter, is a platform for those individuals – they

appear to be an eclectic collection of young and old – who liked Jonathan and who found his leadership consonant with their aspirations and with their political and ideological leanings. Those who stood athwart Jonathan and turned on him after the election, are clearly traitors who no longer warrant the usual courtesy and respect. This researcher has not found any corner of Twitter where supporters of the deposed Jonathan-led PDP regime can be as forthright as they are on Facebook.

Oddly enough, in light of what has been described in the paragraph above, Facebook seems a more reflective space than Twitter, and its narrative and expository predilections offer greater insight into the true feelings of people engaged in the Nigerian political system. Because it is, young Nigerians struggling to be heard, and struggling to find effective ways of using social media to rally support for their beliefs and positions, have been able to use it as an organ for their impassioned pleas. One of the most evocative and impressive is a lengthy Facebook post by Terfa Naswem, a sound engineer, entrepreneur, and recording artist who is keenly interested in the state of Nigerian political affairs.

Naswem [21] wrote in late 2014 that he found the battle against political corruption in Nigeria to be waning under Goodluck Jonathan's watch. Former president, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, may have been a Muslim from Katsina State, but he was also seen as a capable leader who had a systematic plan in place for creating wealth in Nigeria, for bolstering education, and for educational reform. His death left a vacuum that was filled by Jonathan and by his perceived cronyism and nepotism. A young person industriously seeking representation would clearly not be able to pen an article of this force and length in almost any mainstream publication in contemporary Nigeria in 2014. Comparably, he or she would have no means available to excoriate Jonathan at length on radio or on television because of the considerable resources such would demand. Facebook, however censorious it might appear at times, is a significant social media platform that gives youthful Nigerians like Terfa Naswem a chance to be heard and to connect with others. Interestingly, Naswem's monologue was liked by 28 people (admittedly, a small number) and at least a couple of equally young men did post on his Facebook page in solid.

Many of the pages on Facebook which deal with the Nigerian election of 2015 are government or NGO-sponsored and constructed pages. Whereas it is rather easy to come across individual tweets – or a stream of tweets – from Nigerian young people on Twitter expressing disdain or excitement about the political process and the primary protagonists in the political fray (especially in the months enveloping a tense federal election), it is rather more difficult to do so on Facebook; a keyword search does not furnish nearly as much content. But some important posts do emerge.

For one thing, perhaps in keeping with the relatively more analytical, expository, and reflective nature of Facebook, the comments from individual Nigerians on the 2015 elections suggests a comparatively more generalized desire for conciliation. This might be due to the fact that, however much

young people might sometimes find social media to be clumsy, or inept, or not as efficacious as they would like in terms of stitching together a broad coalition of supporters for a greater cause, Facebook at least grants them the space to express their own personal thoughts with thoroughness and passion. In that vein, one of the most poignant and impressive posts came from John Agbaji on the eve of the election when he simply stated: "O Lord, give us leaders that can guarantee us peaceful living" [22]. Although the post went largely unnoticed in the broad scheme of things, a post on the same page from another young Nigerian, Cerue Sieh, echoed the generous sentiment, expressing hope that "Lord Jesus Christ" would choose the right person for Nigeria [23]. New media technologies may yet lack the institutional heft of mainstream media modalities, but they do give a voice to those formerly unrepresented. In that regard, they are a meaningful first step towards change.

For the most part, the Facebook posts made regarding the 2015 Nigerian election seem to involve comparatively fewer young people; when juxtaposed alongside Twitter, it does appear as though Facebook has a relatively older demographic of men and women commenting on affairs in Nigerian politics. Moreover, those who do post on Facebook rarely go to the lengths of Terfa Naswem; while more space is granted to those who wish to pen lengthy expositions of their political faith, a surprisingly large amount of what appears on Facebook pages pertaining to the 2015 Nigerian election are short comments by readers to reposts of media articles appearing somewhere else on the internet, or directions on the part of some readers urging others to explore links to articles which examine political issues in greater depth. A prominent example of this is the Naij.com Facebook homepage.

To be specific, the Naij.com Facebook page features a lengthy roster of links connecting readers to Naij.com columns which expand upon Buhari's most recent cabinet appointments and his proposed policies and programmatic reforms. Quite often, viewers will leave remarks below these stories, and some of the best to come from disgruntled young Nigerians who wonder aloud if any elected official selected by the people will ever act in a forthright and honest fashion when in office [24]. One particularly humorous comment on a Naij.com story posted on the Facebook page comes from a young Nigerian man named Ernest Elewa, who – when trying to figure out why Buhari selected one individual over another for a leading cabinet post – simply asked rhetorically: "Don't tell me Fashola committed more funds in ur campaign than Amaechi" [25]. The wry humour of the line thinly masks the disgust and frustration many young Nigerians feel towards a political process in which politicians use the apparatus of the state to funnel wealth into their own private coffers. Those outsiders seeking to be insiders must play the game as others have before them or risk being cut off from lucrative contracts, special consideration when laws are being formulated, or from having the ear of leading cabinet ministers when a range of issues – from subsidies to tax exemptions – are being weighed at the highest levels.

On balance, save for a few pockets of resistance, the social media of Nigeria did not favor Jonathan, and did not look kindly on his time in power; Facebook is clearly no exception. But it comes as a surprise the great number of Nigerian young people – particularly Nigerian young men and women in their 20s or early 30s, with their careers beginning to blossom – who are actually comparatively less interested in casting stones at Jonathan as he retreats into the rear-view mirror, than they are interested in seeing to it that the country reaches its full potential. A poster on the Naij.com Facebook page, a gentleman named Idahota Duke, seems to summarize the sentiments of the coming generation who want adequate representation, opportunity, and a chance to reformulate social and political institutions so that they actually work for the Nigerian people and not only for hand-picked apparatchiks or political elites. As Duke writes, "Almighty God, use all this new ministers to make Nigeria go forward the way you used Moses to make the people of Israelite out of the land of Egypt (sic) in the name of Jesus. Nigeria from onward, go forward by fire by force IJN" [26]. The social media may frequently be discordant and uncomely, but it gives passionate and caring young adults a chance to be heard, and even to drive the narrative. That cannot be under-estimated.

The Interviews and What They Yield

Finally, one must turn briefly to the informal, open-ended interviews consulted as part of this study. The results of the interview series, culled from a cross-section of politically engaged persons on Abuja, Nigeria, reveal that many students prefer social media and online news to print media. This may very well have something to do with the fact that print media is "old" media in which gate-keepers serve as the self-appointed arbiters of what information is made available to the public, and what information is kept hidden from view. The social media, as many respondents attest, is an open forum that allows for interaction, participation, active engagement, and the formulation of new alliances and groups that can challenge the meta-narratives of the elites [27]. All of the respondents emphasizes the remarkably quick, if not instantaneous, manner in which social media deliver new developments. Print media might require 24 hours to respond to a developing story; by contrast, Twitter and Facebook can be picking apart the constituent parts and unfolding layers of a new development for many hours before the conventional news has even picked up new events.

Another manifest benefit of the new media technologies is that they do not obligate parties to litter their homes with hard copies or obligate them to make purchases of news materials that, over time, can actually come to an appreciable sum of money (especially in Nigeria). Anyone with internet access – anywhere that access may be found – can scan Facebook as a follower of a group or journalist (or particularly impassioned individual) and find out the latest developments as they are trending or unfolding. The two main points noted in the sentences above reappeared on multiple occasions in the interviews this researcher conducted. It would appear that the new social media or communications technologies of the

21st century mitigate or diminish the need for regular investment in hard copy print materials while giving all individuals an opportunity to connect with new information immediately.

Respondents to the series of interviews also underscored that social media is participatory; its very nature demands that people make comments, engage with the news, make new friends and alliances. It is a place, numerous interview subjects opine, for people participate as fully-fledged citizens in democratic governance. In effect, it is a digital town hall or meeting place that gets individuals to discuss the issues that matter most to them. Suffice it to say, most young Nigerians – most Nigerians in general – do not have the luxury of sitting in on editorial board meetings or working with senior staff to ascertain what is newsworthy and what is not. In that regard, no other contemporary tool gives ordinary citizens as much control over the news cycle – and over the campaign narrative – as contemporary social media does. The new technology, most plainly, is a vital and vigorous tool for getting people to care about politics and to make their own imprint on the process. It may have infelicities; given the internecine squabbles and lack of comity found in much of its discourse, but it is an organ that may be accessed by almost anyone.

Discussion

The pages above unmistakably reveal that social media, the new media technologies and modalities of the new millennium, are important to young Nigerians interested in the political process. They serve as tools for educating others; they serve as a means of bringing together like-minded persons in pursuit of the implementation of a political agenda; and they serve as a means for coalescing support (or opposition) and emboldening those on the margins to become active, engaged citizens. More often than not, young people are the voices of change, demanding a re-orientation of the political process that calls for more inclusiveness, more diversity, and for more participation from those who are not in the uppermost echelons of power. Overall, the people who use social media the most are, quite commonly, the ones most disenchanted with how the political process has been bowdlerized and perverted by avaricious or licentious politicians.

There is, when one engages and deconstructs the online content, textual evidence of some pertinent, enduring trends: young people want a voice; they appear idealistically committed to the rule of law and to general equality for one and for all; they seem warmly supportive of human rights; they want an end to cronyism and nepotism and desire opportunities for all; and they want their nation to join the vanguard of nations seemingly concerned not only with social justice and equality, but with progress and material well-being. It would definitely appear that those supportive of the previous regime, including those ensconced in the corridors of power within the media institutions of the land, are less interested in high ideals and more interested in maintaining the status quo. As much as anything, the new media reflects a significant intergenerational divide (though it is most conspicuous in the case of Twitter) that cleaves Nigeria into at

least two main groups: those who are young and who want their politics (more or less) to be as participative and interactive and inclusive as their modern-day social media; and those older citizens, clinging (for the most part) to the older media, who want the political institutions with which they grew up – and which may have even served them well – to be perpetuated into the future. In the end, to the extent they are the future, it seems inescapable that the youth of Nigeria will eventually prevail, as long as they avoid cynicism and defeatism.

Conclusions

The preceding paper has been a content analysis of youth participation in Nigeria. Specifically, it has looked at how youth have used social media – Twitter and Facebook being the dominant forums – to express their sentiments, their high ideals, their preoccupations about the future, and their positions on the warring candidates and parties (in this case, PDP and APC). Much of the scholarship, historically, has focused on new media technologies and what they mean for journalists; unfortunately, far less attention has been devoted to looking at the relationship of Nigerian youths to the new media and the struggles of the former for adequate representation. There are arguments that social media initiates or precipitates change; others, of course, are far less certain of this. What is certainly true, though, is that social media allows young people to aggressively and proactively connect with one another during elections. By so doing, they exchange ideas, commingle, support one another, and reinforce each other during difficult periods. Because of their relatively informal nature, Twitter and Facebook seem like excellent areas to excavate in pursuit of evidence or knowledge about the true feelings of young Nigerians and what they are doing to change their situation. While there is scant evidence of a general youth uprising on these social media platforms, both were effectively utilized by young people to convey their generational angst at how poorly the state has managed the affairs of the nation. For them, and for those who will follow them, the focus will inevitably be upon using the democratic, egalitarian, participative and interactive features of the new social media to instantaneously distribute news, information, strategic advice, and logistical support. The old media, comparatively slow, will not be able to do anything at all like this because it has never shown the capacity to do so. Moving forward, Nigerian youths will use social media as a political instrument more and more comprehensively and effectively. Those older politicians, who want to remain wedded to the past, will invariably find themselves marginalized and diminished.

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