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THE NEW MEDIA AND DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION IN NIGERIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

*[*1]Egbo Steve and [2]Chibuike Emmanuel Madubuegwu

[1]Executive Director Administration and Training, Nigeria Television Authority, NTA
[2]Doctoral Candidate, Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikwe University Awka, Nigeria

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The Arab spring that swept across Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Bahrain to Syria is arguably facilitated by the New Media technologies in deference to popular sovereignty against tyranny and authoritarian regimes. Similarly, the emerging trend of reliance on globalized channels of communication in developing and democratizing economies accentuated the thrust of this paper. In other words, this paper examined the criticality of the New Media in consolidating Nigeria's democracy. The discourse also illuminated the essence of the theory of political cybernetics to further establish the relevance of the Media in the democratization of the political system. It is therefore opined that New Media is critical for the sustenance of Nigeria's fledgling democracy.

INTRODUCTION

The New Media Technology has drastically changed the world. Today, the world has become a global village due to the rapid advancement in Information Communication Technology (ICT) and the proliferation of online channels of social interactions. Hence, the advancing radius of the new digital media had enormously influenced the social, economic and political processes of developing and industrialized economies of the world.

Riaz (2010:162) succinctly states:

> Today, we are living in a digital world where new media technology has changed the world. We all have been heavily influenced by new media technology. We all use internet for information and connection purposes. The advent of internet has drastically changed our lifestyles. Websites like twitter and YouTube are playing a big role in global connection between individuals and communities. We can upload our pictures and videos on different websites and share them with others. Even the use of

mobile phones has become very much popular in our lives. Facebook is one of the most important platforms for social interaction between people world-wide. The geographical distances are being replaced with social interactions. This is all because of the revolution of new media technology where almost all kinds of people can equally be a part of the global communication.

Invariably, the euphoria of the new media technology permeates every facet of national life including politics which underscored the imperative of political communication. In this vein, Barner, (2011) embellished the affinity between politics and media to indicate that media and politics are in a tense relationship in a functioning democracy. Despite their divergent missions, it is a symbolic correlation. Political forces turn to the public to motivate their actions to campaign for their ideas and to win people's trust. The media in turn have to inform people about politics and to exercise control over politicians when the latter perform their duties. They need each other and at the same time, they benefit from each other. Without access to current affairs, the media would be deprived of topics to cover, and without the media, politicians would hardly find a way to the people. Political Communication is therefore instrumental to civic enlightenment, formation of political values and belief and participatory politics. Similarly, Lucian Pye (1963) points out that there is a 'peculiarly

*Corresponding author: **Egbo Steve,**
Executive Director Administration and Training, Nigeria Television Authority, NTA.

intimate relationship between the political process and the communication process'. In the same vein, Harold Lasswell (1969) itemizes three functions performed by the mass media, namely surveillance of the world to report on-going events, interpretation of the meaning of events, and socialization of individuals into their cultural setting. In democratic and democratizing countries, the media influence our perceptions, orientations and reactions towards politics and governance. Furthermore, the spread of values of liberal democracy, the heightening enthusiasm of people on issues of public interest and resentment of despotic tendencies are undoubtedly facilitated by the media technologies. Thus, the New Media technology espoused the values of freedom and choice which represent the hallmark of liberal democracies.

Accordingly, Payne and Nassar (2003) indicate that democratic societies emphasize the political equality of all citizens and guarantee that their fundamental rights and freedom are not only protected but viewed as sacred. People's democracy have the right to freely express their ideas, to offer dissenting opinions; to be left alone, to form and join political, social, economic and other organizations. However, Nigeria as a democratizing polity is constrained with certain irregularities that emanate from uncivilized attitude and behaviour of its political elites and citizens, which, arguably accentuates the essence of consolidating on democratic values in our governance and politics. In this discourse, the researchers explored the imperatives of the new media toward democratic consolidation in Nigeria. This paper is divided into five sections. The First section expatiated on the essence of the New Media in democratic societies; the second conceptualized terms relevant to this discourse; the third section established the appropriate theory of this discourse; the fourth section analyzed the nexus between New Media and democratic consolidation from Nigeria's perspective and the fifth section summarized and made appropriate recommendations.

Conceptualization of Terms

It is germane to conceptualize terms relevant to the analysis of this discourse.

The New Media

The term ''New Media'' is a derivative of the concept of media which represents the channels of communication. The word 'media', the plural of medium, have been used as a singular collective term as in the media (Williams 1976:169). In other words, medium is a means or channel through which people send and receive information. We make reference to Newspapers, Magazines, Television and Radio. When a large number of people become influenced by the information transmitted by the channels of communication then it is referred to as the Mass Media. Then, how the media become ''new'' and what they represent obviously elicit diverse explanations. Hence, the concept of New Media is replete with ambiguities, nebulous and exacerbates divergent conceptual interpretation among Media scholars and practitioners. To some, the New Media refers to the online channels of communication or the internet while othersview it as digitalized channels ofimaging, virtual platforms, wikis, podcasts, blogs etc. More succinctly, Lister *et al* (2009:12) highlighted the following conceptualizations of the New Media.

New Textual Experiences: New kinds of genre and textual form, entertainment, pleasure and patterns of media consumption (computer games, simulations, special effects cinema).

Newways of representing the world: Media which (sic) in way that are not always clearly defined, offer new representational possibilities and experiences (immersive virtual environments, screen-based interactive multimedia).

New relationship between subjects (users and consumers) and media technologies: changes in the use and reception of image and communication media in everyday life and in the meanings that are invested in media technologies.

New experiences of relationship between embodiment, identity and community: it implied shifts in the personal and social experience of time, space and place (on both local and global scales) which have implications for the ways in which we express ourselves and our place in the world.

New conceptions of the biological body's relationship to technological media: it implied challenge to received distinctions between the human and artificial, nature and technology, body and (media) technology, prostheses, the real and the virtual.

New patterns of organization and production: it implied wider realignment and integrations in media culture, industry, economy, access ownership and regulation. It is therefore instructive to note that the emergence of the new media is undoubtedlya paradigm shift from modernity to post modernity driven by innovative digitization of media technologies and relation. The New Media is hypertextual, visual digital, networked and stimulating.

Democracy and Democratic Consolidation

The concept of democracy denotes principles and systems that accord supremacy and relevance to people's preference in governance and politics. As a principle, it expresses liberty, equality and tolerance and, as a system, it is a people-driven government. In the literature of Political Science "democracy" as a term is used in three senses as remarked by Odock (2006,):

In the first sense, democracy is used to describe a system of government in which ultimate power (or sovereignty) rests with the people against other forms of government in which the final decision-making power rests with an individual (monarchy) or with a small member (aristocracy). In the second sense, the term democracy is used to describe a system of government in which the powers of government are divided amongst different institutions such that some institutions are responsible for making laws, while others are responsible for executing laws and yet a third institution may be responsible for mediating or adjudicating in disputes between individuals or groups who violate the laws of the land. Finally, democracy can be discussed in terms of the procedures by which a political system is governed. In most democracies, an essential procedure by which most essential decisions are taken is to subject them either to a popular election, a plebiscite or a referendum. To this end, a country's democracy is assessed from the perspectives of the operational system and institutional roles of the government and the political process.

Nigeria's democracy is immersed with limitations which reflect substantially on its system, institutions and procedure. Hence, political corruption, unresponsive governance (at the levels of federal, state and local administrations), institutional dsyfunctionality, murky party politics and electoral irregularities portend that Nigeria is still democratizing and yet not consolidated. This essentially underscored the expediency of democratic consolidation which is literally polemical among scholars of political science. A careful perusal of the extant literature on democratic consolidation will reveal that the term implies series of continuous actions and changes geared toward the replacement of an existing system of authoritarian and undemocratic rule (Yagboyaju, 2007). A cursory assessment of this definition obviously showed that democratic consolidation is a transitional process but failed to highlight the specificities of democratic consolidation. In this vein, Asiwaju (2000) asserted that democratic consolidation was the internalization of democratic culture and institutionalization of democratic best process and by that has successfully embarked upon a democratic transition. Pertinently, democratic consolidation is an identifiable phase in the transition from authoritarian rule to civil rule and by extension democratic system that are germane andfundamental to the establishment and enthronement of a stable, institutional and enduring democracy (Oni, 2014). Aptly, the following conditions are germane for democratic conditions in the Nigeria polity.

- Internalization of values of civility, patriotism, constitutionalism and tolerance in the face of provocation and hostilities.
- Political enthusiastic and participatory citizenry and, strengthening the process and networks of social interactions among the ethnic nationalities through legislations, inter faith forums and ethno–cultural festivities.
- Strengthen awareness, expression and protection of human rights against violations and abuses.
- Reform anti-graft and security agencies for efficient services.
- Accountable and responsive legislative, administrative and judicial arms whose decisions, process and actions are regulated by the constitution.
- Transparent and prudent management of state resources in deference to public plights and expectations.
- A national code of conduct that entrenches democratic culture, sense of responsibility and the attitude of probity in the discharge of public duties.
- Inclusive and participatory decision-making channels that will facilitate the formulation and implementation of public policies that reflect public interests and development priorities.
- Reform and revamp National Orientation Agency and strengthen its capacity for intense enlightenment and advocacy on policies and programmes of the government.
- Judicial reform and independence that ensures the unbiased administration of justice and the respect to the rulings of the courts.
- An Independent and credible election management body. Competitive and participatory political process.

Emphatically, the process of democratic consolidation has arguably driven by communication of requisite values and norms viably transmitted by the channels of the New Media

Technologies. Thus, this discourse shall explore the imperatives of the New Media Technologies in responding to the exigencies of democratic consolidation.

Theoretical Framework

The expediency of the Mass Media as the fourth estate of the realm indicates the relevance of the nexus between communication and politics. In this trend, Heywood (2007, p.231) noted:

Communication lies at the heart of politics. Rulers, even in authoritarian states, communicate with their people in order to build up at least a semblance of legitimacy. In democratic states, sophisticated and complex process of communication operate through activities such as campaigning, polling focus-group consultation and general politics of persuasion. Indeed, democracy itself may be seen as a form of political communication in that it involves the on-going negotiation of popular consent between government and the people. It is therefore essential to note a political communication model is the appropriate conceptual framework to analyze the importance of the new media technologies in advancing Nigeria's institutional and procedural democracies. Thus, the model systematically analyses the occurrences, dynamics and trends of roles and interactions between the political system structures from the perspective of communication process. As a concept, political communication relates to the communication of knowledge, values and attitudes. The processes of socialization, participation and recruitment are dependent upon it as the political activity of the individual is determined by the process of political communication (Hara, Das and Choudhury, 1997). In this regard, political culture, political socialization and political participation are functions of political communication. Subsequently, political communication alternatively known as political cybernetics is a hybrid model developed by American behavioral political scientist, Karl Deutsch to establish an empirical analysis of the political system from the perspective of interpenetration and reciprocal influences between structures and behaviour. Establishing the etymological foundation of political communication, Johari (2005) writes:

In keeping with the tradition of borrowing perspectives and frames of references extensively from other branches of knowledge whether belonging to social or natural sciences, a good number of empirical political scientists like Karl Deutsch in particular have developed a new approach in the discipline of comparative politics whereby the analysis of political phenomenon is made on the basis of communication and control system.

Hara- Das and Choudhury (1997) went further to identify the communication structures of the political system:

- Informal face to face contacts
- Traditional social structures relating to family or religious groups relationship.
- Political input structures such as interest groups, pressure groups, trade unions and political parties.
- Political output structures such as legislature and bureaucracies and the mass media.

Hence, the relevance of political communication model in political analysis is obvious in the following assumptions:

1. Political Communication is one of the identifiable functions of the political system. It disseminates politically relevant information to the structures of the political system.
2. In a political system, there are networks of communication that facilitate the reciprocal interaction between the input and output structures of the political system.
3. The output in form of decisions and legislations are facilitated by communication in response to the information that flows from the input structures of the political system. Expectedly, the streams of responses from the political environment to the political system are communicated by the media, interest articulation and interest aggregation structures of the political system.
4. The development, integration and persistence of the political system are functions of communication. Thus, the functions are performed by the means of communication and increases interconnection between the sub-systems and are enhanced by the process of communication.
5. The character and dynamics of political system structures and process are informed by political behaviour whose orientation, occurrences and outcome are shaped by political communication.
6. In every political system, the receptors or reception system reject, restrains, accept, evaluates and processes stream of responses that emanate from the political environment.

This is further illustrated in the diagram below.

Deutsch's Political Communication Model
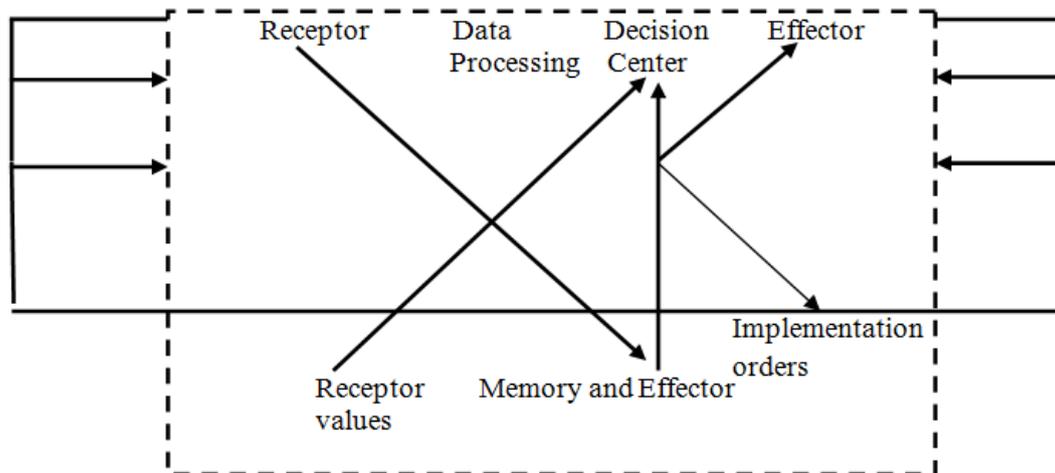
Source: Johari (2005,p.143)

Inspite of its relevance and popularity among behavioural scholars, Hara-Das and Choudhury (1997) pointed out the limitations of political communication model:

However the Communication theory of Deutsch suffers from many shortcomings. One of the lapses of the theory is that it views decision making as a process and does not put emphasis on the results of decisions. Instead of putting emphasis on the substance of the information, it focuses on the flow of information and on the nature of various structures which shape the flow. Deutsch has put too much emphasis on quantification and the variables which are amenable to this process, but he forgets that politics is too complicated a

phenomenon and it is not possible to explain everything in terms of quantified data. Human behaviour is highly complex and very often unpredictable and the attempt made by the communication theory to explain it in terms of the principles of engineering appears highly mechanistic in nature. It is not possible to apply models taken from engineering to political science in all cases. It may also be pointed out that model building has become a futile intellectual exercise in terms of meeting human requirements or the analysis of human behaviour. In this discourse, it is argued that the emergence of the New Media is unprecedented and represents technological advancement in mass media channels which had enhanced citizen's partisan awareness, enthusiasm and participation that stimulates institutional effectiveness and responsiveness in governance. It is therefore established that the consolidation of democracy in Nigeria begins from the citizen's enthusiasm, responsiveness of political and administrative structures of governance and the democratic political process largely stimulated and influenced by the new media technologies.

The New Media and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: The traditional and digital media play critical roles in governance and the political development of a country. In democracies, citizens exercise the liberty of information, discussion and preferences which are effectively communicated through media channels. Accordingly, McNair (2011) suggests five functions of the communication media in an ideal-type democratic societies:

1. First, they must inform citizens of what is happening around them (what we may call the surveillance or monitoring functions of the media).
2. Second, they must educate us to the meaning and significance of the "facts" (The importance of this function explains the seriousness with which journalists protect their objectivity, since their value as educators presumes a professional detachment from the issues being analyzed).
3. Third, the media must provide a platform for public political discourse, facilitating the function of public opinion and the feeding that opinion back to the public from whence it comes.
4. The fourth function of the media is to give publicity to governmental and political institutions. The watch dog

role of journalism, exemplified by the performance of the US media during the Watergate scandal.
5. Finally, the media in democratic societies serve as a channel for the advocacy of political viewpoints.

Invariably, the evolution of the New Media entrenches speed and wider horizon of reception and interactions among individuals, groups and nationalities. The digital, computerized and networked information and communication technologies are visible and functional in Nigeria's political process with reference to the 2015 general elections. Thus, the 2015 General election marked the new dawn of the e-campaign technologies in Nigeria's electioneering process. The social media networks (Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, Flicker, Google groups, YouTube) were awash with slogans, comments, debates, images, sounds and even abuses for or against the presidential candidates of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and All Progressive Congress (APC). It was really intriguing and exciting serving as a platform for partisan awareness and expression which shape and determine the trends of voting behaviour. Adversely, it also expresses divisive comments, defamatory remarks, religious bigotry and ethnic chauvinism which incited apprehension and violence before the elections. However, the relevance of the online media cannot be underestimated with regard to its intensity and spread in comparison to the conventional mass media channels. In this regard, Riaz (2010) equally indicates that the New Media technologies are playing a pivotal role in the societies where media is not free. Newspaper can be banned, Radio and TV can be banned but internet cannot be banned, blogs and Facebook cannot be abandoned, mobile phone message cannot be stopped by the government.

Interestingly, Nigerian youths (between 18-35 years) constitute 80% of over 50 million users of social media networks. This is quite impressive in consideration of the strategic importance of this vulnerable number to our national development. It is therefore imperative to inculcate the values of patriotism and self-reliance in these young minds through government's enlightenment and empowerment programmes through the New Media in synergy with the established private media agencies and civil society organizations. Subsequently, the federal government's media establishments have in recent times introduced new media equipment for effective reportage, education and information. For instance, the Nigerian Television Authority, NTA, makes use of video conferencing to educate and inform Nigerians on issues of national importance. Hence, video conferencing is a New Media technology that facilitates live discussions between groups and individuals in different locations through electronically linked telephones and radio screen. A situation where these persons can see and talk to each other from the convenience of their conference centers. In addition, the National Assembly and, the Federal Government's Ministries, Agencies and Departments operate official internet websites (www/org), yahoo emails and Facebook accounts which serve as informative and communicative network. In credence to this development, the past administration of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan created the Office of Special Senior Assistant to the President on ICT which is presently upgraded to the Federal Ministry of ICTby the present Buhari's government accentuating the relevance of the New Media in governance, administration and development of Nigeria. Furthermore, it is heart-warming that the conventional channels of information and communication are susceptible to the euphoria of the

New Media to reach a wider audience of the Nigeria populace particularly the millions of Nigerian youths. Beyond the media institutions of the government, the National Orientation Agency, (NOA), and the Voter Education Unit/Department of Independent National Electoral Commission, (INEC) also play crucial roles in civic sensitization and advocacy. Though, we are yet to see concerted efforts of these agencies to activate the mechanism of the New Media to better inform, educate and enlighten Nigerians on issues of national interests and the political process. In advanced democracies, the new media technologies are efficiently explored to mobilize and sensitize the electorate to participate in the elections. For instance, the e-campaign of the American President, Barack Obama during the 2008 presidential election was unprecedented and underscored the dawn of the new media technologies in the electoral process. In Nigeria's party politics, the global trend of the New Media is still at its infancy with reference to poor awareness culture of our politicians and political parties toward the essence of the social media networks to mobilize the electorate. Hence, it is fundamental for political mobilization and participation. However, the process had begun with the enthusiasm of Nigeria's productive population and, there is high optimism that the New Media communication channels shall feature prominently among the ruling APC, PDP and other opposition political parties during the 2019 electioneering process. Pertinently, the present Buhari's Presidency should activate measures to explore the gains of the New Media to inform and educate Nigerians on the essence and targets of the "Change Agenda". This is critical to the success of this administration and places enormous responsibility on the shoulders of the Ministry of Information and Culture in synergy with other relevant institutions and agencies.

However, the revolution of the digitized media technologies in our national life is however constrained by the following impediments:

- Poor level of ICT awareness especially among millions of adult Nigerians.
- The failure of successive administrations to encourage the use of New Media in public service through policy frameworks and infrastructures.
- The awareness and advocacy on the imperatives of the New Media is still very poor.
- Poverty and hunger are fundamental challenges militating against the use of the New Media.
- Nigeria's rural communities are fraught with poverty and widespread illiteracy which undermine the use of the New Media for partisan awareness and mobilization.

Concluding Remarks

Basically, the New Media is critical to national development in Nigeria. It remains fundamental to governance and the political process. The social media networks create awareness on public policies, provide platforms for assessment of policy outcomes, avenue for expression and enthusiasm and viable instrument of partisan mobilization. The federal government through the media bureaucratic institutions and private sector should explore effectively the channels of the social media platforms to promote the values of patriotism and national cohesion against centrifugal tendencies among millions of Nigerian youths in the various parts of the federation.

In addition, the following measures are essential to the growing trend of the New Media in Nigeria:

1. The proactiveness of the ICT Ministry and establishment of specialized online regulative body to exert control on social media networks.
2. Synergy between the Ministries of Information and ICT and other relevant institutions in promoting the use of the New Media for national development in government's MDAs.
3. A National Summit on the New Media to provide an avenue for scholars and practitioners to exchange ideas, experiences and ways to explore the gains of theNew Media technologies to national development.
4. Consistent education and advocacy on ICT and online communication from professional and Civil Media Organizations.
5. Enabling legislations and policy frameworks on New Media.
6. Political Parties, Independent National Electoral Commission and National Orientation Agency should activate the New Media channels to strengthen ties with the electorate and Nigerians.
7. Teachers, pupils and students at both Urban and rural areas should be exposed to ICT.
8. The federal government's media regulative body such as Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria, (BON) equally has a key role to play in promoting the culture of the New Media.

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