

**SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN
NIGERIA: A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN OR JUST
A ONE NIGHT STAND?**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This main focus of this study is the use of social media for political activism in Nigeria. It critically examines the impact of social media on the series of protests organized against the Nigerian government in January 2012. Using those protests, also known as OccupyNigeria as case study, this research employs qualitative approach to interrogate suggestions that social media inspired them and were crucial to their success. The study also asks if social media are viable alternatives to traditional media as channels for political communication. This study has been conducted within the theoretical frameworks of Jurgen Habermas' model of the Public Sphere, Manuel Castells' Network Society and Christian Fuchs' Critical Theory of Social Media. In order to properly explore the research questions, care has been taken to try and deconstruct OccupyNigeria in a way to create an understandable narrative. To make up for the loss of a first hand observation that an ethnographic approach offers, identifying key organisers of the protests of OccupyNigeria was of paramount importance during the course of this study. The results reveal that the protests of OccupyNigeria started as uncoordinated street riots by ordinary Nigerians angered by the subsidy removal that led to higher fuel prices. They suggest that offline and online influencers saw the fuel protests as an opportunity to press the government for much needed reforms not only in the oil sector but also in other areas as well, hence their slogan, 'kill corruption, don't kill Nigerians.' While there was no central organization command, social media appeared to have provided the network for dissemination of information about time and venues of rallies both within and outside Nigeria. The results found too that this network built on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Blogs, and 'managed' by the younger elements in the

movement, amplified what happened on the streets, helped to sustain interest and internationalised the protests by connecting Nigerians in the Diaspora. Also found to have played a crucial role in the overall success of OccupyNigeria was the live streaming of images from the single biggest rally at the Gani Fawehinmi Park, Lagos, by some private television stations. The results also suggest that take-off of the Ojota Rallies was driven by the personalities of activists, music and movie stars brought together by Save Nigeria Group. Their ample grassroots appeal and television, rather than social media, appeared to have been the major factor in making the Ojota Rallies the success they were.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Debate

The increasing adoption of new media of communication continues to attract attention, exciting optimists and pessimists almost in equal measure. New media enables connections in new ways and while its role in development is never in doubt, opinion is divided between techno-optimists like Clay Shirky and techno-pessimists like Evgeny Morozov on the limits of those affordances (Gerbaduo, P., 2012. p.7). Social media have assumed even more prominence in the wake of the Arab Spring and other social movements across the world, where they were believed to have played crucial roles. Contending views, from the limitless optimism of scholars like Shirky and the extreme pessimism of others like Morozov, sometimes can mask the fact that social media are indeed serving some purpose especially in closed societies and newly democratizing countries. The Arab spring and the many other social movements that have surfaced in many other parts of the world have evidently benefited from social media as activists used them in organizing their protests. Regardless of the optimism surrounding those events though, doubts remain about the actual contribution of social media to political change. Philip Seib in his book, 'Real-Time Diplomacy: Politics and Power In the Social Media Era,' notes that 'social media have certainly been influential in the shift towards citizen power, but how influential – whether they play truly deterministic role – in events such as the Arab revolutions is worth exploring.' (2012. p.9). As with the Arab spring, many observers believe that OccupyNigeria was inspired by social media. Those protests bore some resemblance to the Arab revolutions because they were popular and mobilization was carried out by activists combining both offline and online tools.

1.2 Background

Democracies thrive on the strength and quality of their media (McChesney, R.W, 2004). So, the struggle for power often involves the struggle for control of media. Manuel Castells' definition of power as including the ability to influence others 'in ways that favour the empowered actors wills, interests and values' (Castells, 2009, p.10) would suggest that information and the control of the processes of its production and dissemination are worthy of socio-political struggles. Regardless of whether Castells' description of power falls short on what actually constitutes power (Fuchs, C., 2012. p73); information and how it is used have for long been keenly contested for. The traditional media of radio, television and newspapers have been objects of such contests historically, as all power blocs bid to control opinion. Expectedly, the contest is more pronounced in closed societies and newly democratizing countries like Nigeria, where people seek alternative channels of communication once they discover that traditional media have fallen into the control of established power structures.

It is in this context that this research must be understood. As it happened with Arab Spring, where the death on December 17, 2010 of Mohammed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old fruit and vegetable seller, sparked an unrest that soon spread to other countries like Egypt (Seib, P., 2012. p.17), OccupyNigeria began as a result of higher fuel prices when government scrapped a fraudulent subsidy scheme but the remote causes run much deeper. After decades of military rule, Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999 and has since struggled with reforms that could help lock in the gains of that transition. Largely because successive governments have failed to translate the country's huge potential into real socio-economic development to benefit its over 160 billion people, the transition to democratic rule has failed to reassure

Nigerians worried about the state of the nation. The battle to return Nigeria to democratic rule was long and bitter, with politicians, activists and journalists among the casualties. Nigerian newspapers, many of which suffered closures in those decades, were in the frontline of that battle to rescue Nigeria from military rule. Battle-hardened activists, who endured decades of brutal repression from military rulers were quick to return to the trenches soon after 1999 as it became clear that little had changed even with politicians in charge. The ‘power hijack,’ of 2010, during which activists challenged the reluctance of ailing President Umaru Musa Yar A’dua’s kitchen cabinet to transfer power to Vice President Goodluck Jonathan was not only reminiscent of the campaign against the military rule but was a also sober reminder that the battle to save Nigeria was anything but over. Many of the young activists who played prominent roles during the protests of OccupyNigeria were involved in the ‘power hijack’ protests too. This set of activists, armed with new media skills, may well be best suited for the new battles. For one, fuel protests in the past had been brutally crushed (Noble, K.B., 1992) and often failed to achieve meaningful results. Then, there appears to be less appetite on the part of Nigerian newspapers for the kind of sacrifices they made in the struggles against the military. Such is the context in which the protests of OccupyNigeria were organized.

Social media, including platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, appear to have become very useful for political discourse and political activism in Nigeria and were used by organisers of OccupyNigeria. There are everyday signs that Facebook, with 1.06 billion users worldwide out of which 618 million are active daily users (Facebook Inc., 2013) and Twitter with 230 million users who send 500 million tweets everyday (Twitter Inc., 2013) have become very popular amongst Nigerians.

With an estimated population of over 140 million as at the last official census in 2006 (NPC, 2013), Nigeria now has as many as 121 million active phone lines and 57 million phone lines with data connections (NCC, 2013). One recent survey found 73 per cent of all Internet subscribers were active on Facebook while 35 per cent were active on Twitter (BusinessDay, 2013), thereby making them key media for Nigerian who are frustrated with government and governance and who, therefore, take to those platforms daily to make their angers known through texts of all types.

1.3 The Problem

As mentioned already, traditional media, especially newspapers have usually provided good coverage for protests and were relied on by activists even during military rule. Two factors have changed the media market, thereby forcing activists to seek other channels of communication. First, increasingly tight competition at a time of falling circulation means newspapers worry more about revenue and would avoid anything that would hurt their bottom line. Second, ownership of major newspapers are falling into the hands of politicians or their cronies even as many are building media empires. The popularity of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter raises questions, especially when recent estimates put the total daily circulation figures of the 15 biggest national newspapers at just under 300,000 (Ariyibi-Oke, V., 2011). At a time declining newspaper circulation, are social media fast replacing the regular, old, traditional media as an avenue for most day-to-day political discourse and political activism? It is to properly investigate and document this trend, that this study has been undertaken.

The purpose of the study:

The goal of this research is to contribute to knowledge of social media and their uses for activism especially in new democracies like Nigeria. The interest to undertake this research stems from the writer's own interest in media and new fields like social media. Having been a reporter and editor and having observed the internal workings of the old media, there is also an interests to see whether social media will be useful in helping to address observed shortcomings. Ultimately, it is hoped, this research would have succeeded if it contributes to knowledge that helps new democracies like Nigeria achieve more political stability by enhancing good governance.

The objectives of the study:

The main objectives of this research are clearly to: (1) to critically examine and understand the use of social media like Facebook and Twitter for political debates and activism (2) to critically examine and understand whether social media provide realistic alternatives to the traditional media in providing space for political debates and (3) to critically examine and understand what the likely implications for young democracies like Nigeria.

The research questions:

The main research question is to investigate, 'what role, if any, social media can play politics a new democracies like Nigeria?' While traditionally, television had always been the source of political news (Hara, N. 2008), the increasing popularity of platforms like Facebook and Twitter for communicating political messages is worthy of analysis as this research will attempt to do. Also important is the question, 'what is the role, if any, of social media in socio-political protests in Nigeria?' Using

OccupyNigeria as an example, the research will also ask the question, ‘what lessons have Nigerian citizens learnt in protests where social media have played key role in their organisation?’ Lastly, the research will ask the question, ‘what are the similarities and differences between social media and traditional media in providing space for political debates?’

Scope and Limitations:

As can be imagined, social media and their affordances are still unfolding but the focus of this study is restricted to its use to politics. Of primary concern here is the potential applications of social media in a new democracy like Nigeria. To do that, this study had picked the protests of OccupyNigeria as case study and as such, the results in this study may not apply elsewhere. Regardless, this study being one of the first to focus on OccupyNigeria can provide the foundation for further research on other aspects of new media and politics in the country and elsewhere.

1.5 Disposition:

- CHAPTER 2: Literature Review – In this chapter, I have reviewed available work in this field in order set the theoretical framework for the study.
- CHAPTER 3: Methodology – This chapter provides the explanation on the research approach used for this study, the design and why those choices have been made. The chapter also describes the advantages and shortcomings of the adopted method.
- CHAPTER 4: Presentation of Results – This chapter presents the outcome and analysis of the results. It is organized around the main research questions to make the analysis fit into the purpose.
- CHAPTER 5: Discussion and Conclusion – This chapter provides detailed analysis of

the findings of the study and the observations by the researcher.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent developments in the field of communication, especially the emergence of social media have prompted fresh debate as to what the role of the media should be in democratic societies. For two major reasons, the issue of the media's contributions to the strengthening of democracies is a question that simply refuses to go away, captivating not only those involved in the business of collecting, managing and disseminating news but also those in the fields of sociology, political science and media studies. First, while there is suggestion that the process leading to the collapse of authoritarian structures across the world had its roots in the invention of printing (Bogart, L., 1998, p.3), the rapid growth of new media and the media concentration among other recent developments have led to fresh debate about the media and their role in democratic societies. There is some agreement that the role of the press includes, but is not limited to informing, holding the leaders accountable to their actions, and providing a platform for ideas (McQuail, D., 2005, p.89) but the changing pattern of media ownership has so altered the process of news gathering and production as to call to question the long-held beliefs about the effect of political communication on the society. Second, regardless of the disagreement on what the best definition for a democracy is or what media system is the best, there is some evidence to suggest that politicians across the political spectrum do recognize the growing importance of the media and are willing to make the effort to use them for their purposes (Gunther, R and Mughan, A, 2000, pp. 403). Gunther and Mughan (2000) suggest that most of the general assumptions about the relationship between the media and the society are today simply out-modeled. Until now, the assumption amongst a lot of media scholars was that a democratic society was associated with

free media but that an authoritarian regime fosters an unfree press (Gunther, R and Mughan, A, 2000 pp. 5).

While this assumption may have been true in the years after World War II, the collapse of repressive regimes across the world and normative expansion of democratic rule in almost all corners of the globe show that such conventional wisdom was due for fresh look. (Gunther, R and Mughan, A, 2000).

The convergence of new technologies and the affordances they bring further strengthen the arguments for a new look at the role, if any, the media play in democratic societies, not the least because the emergence of the Internet was hailed as possibly the single most important for its democratic potentials (Meikle, G, 2002, pp. 2). The diffusion and impact of convergent media especially in the last decade have raised critical issues and reopened arguments about communication power on the Internet, access and construction of meaning within online communities and these are the issues that this research will attempt to address. Events like the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements, even with the absence of conclusive evidence of the exact contributions of social media, call to question a lot of the assumptions regarding the Internet and the power it is supposed to have in promoting democratic politics.

It is safe to argue that the media belong among institutions that enhance the pluralism and survival of democratic societies. One cannot but agree with those like Gunther and Mughan, who have described the media as the connecting tissue of democracy (2000, pp. 1). The media, according to Margaret Scammell and Holli Semetko, perform informational roles in all democratic societies (2000). Crucially though, as

Scanmmel and Semetko argued, the political structure obtaining in a country does have an influence on media practice. Others like John R. Bittner have also made the same arguments, that political structure could affect the regulatory and operational framework of the media (1989). If the media, as it is claimed, are useful in helping voters come to a decision regarding electoral choices, then it is perhaps the single most important test of real democracy and one against which the performance of the media is to be measured. The question then would be whether the media help people to make informed choices and how they do this?

Without a doubt, the media remain crucial to nurturing politics and democracy. This centrality of the role of the press in politics was very well noted by Ralph Negrine (1994). He notes the rising importance of television as a medium of communication and the fact that the press remains the means by which the public acquires information about the world (Negrine pp. 1) This 'knowledge' and 'perception' of current political and social problems and the means of their resolution, according to him, are derived from the information provided by the press (Negrine pp. 1).

If the media are this central as Negrine argues, another major inference that can be drawn is that any assessment of the performance of the media ought to focus on the kind of access they provide to enable individuals to take the 'right' decisions. Here, the questions would be whether the media allow equal access to everyone, and what determines that access and its control? The German scholar, Jurgen Habermas narrates how, beginning from the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth centuries, mercantile capitalism broke the economic and social hold of the feudal lords on the society as a result of the development of new institutions of public authority

(Habermas, J., 1991 p.32).

The transformation of the public sphere into new realms of sociability, as Habermas describes it, away from the exclusive preserve of the aristocrat, enabling individuals in the society to meet as a public to discuss matters of interest will be useful in this enquiry. In other words, as the sphere described by Habermas served the purpose of public monitoring and criticism of state matters (Habermas, pp. 33), his thesis provides some theoretical foundation for most media analysis of the role of the media and naturally provides the starting point here.

While Habermas' public sphere as represented by the Cofeehouses began to die at the close of the eighteenth century, the culture of debate of issues of public importance that it influenced has survived and continues to be available in contemporary societies, albeit, in a different format from the institutions of the public spheres described by Habermas (pp. 31-43). From what it offers, including space for all shades of opinion to be debated, and to news and analyses of issues of public importance, the mass communication media of today appear to play the same role as the coffeehouses of seventeenth century England.

It could be rightly argued then, that in contemporary societies, the media constitute the public sphere. In fact, in the words of Habermas himself, the print media remain at the core of any media we have now and are a necessary source for maintaining the public sphere (Victor Navasky, 1998 pp. 115).

It would not be out of place to stretch this argument to include social media and new

platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Some researchers have already noted the similarities in the communication made possible online to Habermas' coffeehouses because of the political significance (Agre, P, 1998).

Others have made even more direct connections between Habermas' model and some of the platforms like Facebook. "But just like the original blueprint of Habermas' public sphere, Facebook is a pre-programmed environment that allows for certain interactions, encouraging certain behaviour, communicative acts, and users – thereby excluding certain users, certain semiotic expressions, and communicative acts," Bjarki Valtysson (2012) notes in a paper.

As the phenomena of political activism and organizing around social media is still relatively new, research is scanty but clearly, early works have tended to generally question propriety of platforms like Facebook and Twitter to aid political changes. "The tipping-point momentum in revolutions is not really related to the tools at hand but to political-class dynamics" Miriyam Aouragh (2012) argues but she also notes that new technologies make it easier to organise. Others like Simon Lindgren (2013) have also noted the potential and limitations of platforms like Tweeter in organizing political protests and the fact that while indeed social media can be used to connect and share ideas, they in themselves do not produce revolutions.

If Habermas' model is useful in addressing the question of access, it may not be adequate to address the other areas of focus in this essay – communication power and the construction of meaning in networks as the aim of this research is to investigate the emerging trend to use alternate media channels of the social media by an

increasing number of people. First, in an interview with Navasky, Habermas was quoted as describing himself as old-fashioned and that he believed in “texts rather than oral presentations,” (Navasky, p.115). So, by his own admission, it would appear his theory was formulated more suited for the press or what he called the ‘Gutenberg medium’ (Navasky, p.115). Second, and reinforcing the first point is the obvious inadequacy of the old media theories to address the emergence and growing influence of new media (Lovink, G., p. 77). As Lovink notes, ‘...theory lags behind its subject...’ and ‘...the new media landscape changes so rapidly it makes a slippery object of study...’ (Lovink, G., p.77).

Where Habermas’ theory comes short, Manuel Castells model of the network society does provide a more reliable framework of analysis of the research questions to be addressed in this project. Manuel’s description of ‘a social structure constructed around ... digital networks of communication,’ (Castells p.4) and its mediated impact on power in its various manifestations within the society fills some of the gap identified by people like Lovink (2012). Castell’s model is based on the working hypothesis that ‘the most fundamental form of power lies in the ability to shape the human mind,’ with the ability to build consent seen an essential skill for exercising control. (Castells pp. 4). His model rests on certain assumptions: (i) that power is based on control of communication and information, just as counterpower depends on breaking though such controls (ii) that mass communication is shaped and managed by power relationships, rooted in the business of media and the politics of the state (iii) that as a result of these two assumptions, communication power is at the heart of the structure and dynamics of society (Castells, M., 2009 p.3). In answering the central question of this research, of what role social media can play in politics in new

democracies like Nigeria, Castell's model provides a relatively more useful roadmap to guide through the a critical analysis of the state of the Nigerian media and social-movements like the OccupyNigeria in the convergent media environment.

The Nigerian Media:

Traditionally, Nigerian newspapers have always provided very vibrant political coverage (Dare, O., 2000, pp. 18) and have functioned within the libertarian press theories. It is important to know that the role of the press is well acknowledged by all political systems. The principles of representation, participation and multiple choices, which define democracies, suggest that institutions like the media must exist independently in order to guarantee their long-term existence and performance. Where not too long ago, democracy used to be an 'ideal for many,' in the words of former Secretary General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, it has become a way of life sought by people who believe that the quality of life they deserve can only be guaranteed by a process over which they have some influence (Boutros-Ghali, B, 1998).

The libertarian and the social responsibility theories of the press described in detail in the *Four Theories of the press* (Sibert, pp. 44-45; 75-77) ascribe specific roles to the media, including providing the space for the development of ideas, where what is published is the outcome of a rigorous debate of issues by contending forces.

It would appear that the Nigerian media have traditionally functioned well within these theories. From their modest start with *Iwe Irohin* in 1859, the Nigerian press have acquired a reputation for robust and sometimes radical reporting that is feared

and revered by the political and business classes. They have come a long way, from over fourteen decades ago, when the first set of newspapers were owned and exclusively operated by European settlers (Akinfeleye, R 2003).

But even then, the *Iwe Irohin*, established in Abeokuta by Reverend Henry Townsend, a British missionary of the Anglican Church, managed to earn the reprimand of the British Colonial Office, for, according, to Fred Omu (1996), devoting its pages to ‘campaigns of a purely political nature’. The entry of Nigerians into the newspaper business coincided with and actually contributed to the rise of nationalism. According to Omu (1996, pp. 2) the concern of the early practitioners and the emerging educated elite was not just that the people should acquire education but that this should form the basis for a vibrant public opinion that the colonial government could not ignore.

Media historians often point to the 1950s as the beginning of the decline in pursuit of a common objective. With the common enemy, the colonial authority gone, attention shifted to what to do with the Nigeria inherited from them. This division was very well captured by Omu in this way: ‘The differences of ideas and approaches evidently expressed themselves in regional group and ethnic actions, which were obstacles in any effort to reconcile interests and harmonise objectives’ (1996, pp. 10). This situation, according to Omu, was compounded by the emergence of government owned newspapers in the 60s, meaning they had to operate under limited editorial freedom. Be that as it may, the Nigerian press has done very well, considering the odds stacked against, with the Lagos-based newspapers and magazines regarded as one of the most vibrant in Africa South of the Sahara. A lot of the credit, it has to be said, goes to the private-owned newspapers that were established in the early 80s. The

establishment of the *Guardian* in 1983 and the *Newswatch* two years later, no doubt, went a long way in restoring enterprise and dynamism into the newspaper business in Nigeria but equally important was the entry into the profession, of University graduates from different backgrounds. Beginning with the *Guardian* and the *Newswatch*, and much later, the *Concord Group* and *The Punch*, it has been proven that it is possible to run a profitable newspaper business in the country, attracting and retaining good professionals. The result is that the newspapers of today, especially those that are private owned, are of a relatively better quality.

In terms of packaging, the Nigerian press appears to place more emphasis on political and crime stories with extensive and prominent space devoted to them in that order. Business stories were, until the entry of *ThisDay*, considered as having little commercial value and therefore received background treatment. In Nigeria, it would safe then to argue that political news and crime stories sell better. It is a fact that Olatunji Dare (2000, p.17) noted in a paper published to commemorate the 140th anniversary of the Nigerian press. According to Dare, while the *Daily Times*, established in 1926, declared that it would maintain a detached attitude towards local politics, the subject ‘was the staple and indeed the *raison d’etre* of its contemporaries’.

Apart from the commercial value of playing up political stories, quite a lot of newspapers like the *Tribune Group* had politician owners. And as Dare noted, ‘a distinctive feature of the press in Nigerian before independence was that it was almost entirely owned and controlled by individuals or political parties’ (2000, p.17). Independence only increased the tempo of political reporting, even if the quality of

what was being published was questionable. Dare captures the mood at the time very well:

The Morning Post, established by the Federal Government in 1961

rarely saw anything wrong with any policy or action of its owners.

The Nigerian Citizen, owned by the government Of Northern

Nigeria, regarded as its mission to defend its proprietors as well as

the political party that held power in the region, the NPC. In the West,

The Tribune and the Daily Express championed the cause of the

opposition Action Group while ceaselessly attacking the Federal

Government

So, traditionally, Nigerian newspapers have always provided very vibrant political coverage as the description by Dare (2000, pp. 18) shows even though evidence elsewhere suggests that television had always been the source of political news (Hara, N. 2008). That tradition in Nigeria has survived and is perhaps now only driven by other motivations as well, including but not limited to ownership concentration and increasingly powerful commercialism.

While Nigeria boasts a robust press with a long history of political reporting, the same cannot be said of the electronic media, which was until recently an exclusive preserve of government and is still heavily regulated. Private ownership is now allowed under reforms by the military in 1992 but government remains the dominant player. ‘State-owned stations are the main providers of radio and television news, but there are several privately owned providers, mostly regional, and none with national coverage, other than via satellite,’ a recent study reported (Akoh, B., et al., 2012. p.14). The same study cited International Telecommunications Union figures to show that only

40 percent of Nigerian households have access to television though radio remains by far the predominant media.

Emerging Trend:

A recent trend that has emerged and one that by no means has altered the media landscape in Nigeria, is the increasing number of those who use digital media. Social media including platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, Yahoo Groups and other listservs appear to have become very useful for political discourse and political activism in Nigeria. The convergent media and their affordances appear to be well suited to Nigerians who are in search of channels of expression.

Social media as some have noted, have been widely adopted because of the unique features allowing users to link up directly with each other, making, remaking and sharing text with those they choose (Meikle, G and Young, S., 2012). Others have noted the empowerment of users in new ways because the new convergent media environment has given users on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube power to determine how to operate, turning them from mere passive consumers of media to active producers (Rosen, J., 2012). For others, it is the making of meaning from even the ordinary chatter that attracts users. The status updates, the likes and the sometimes, meaningless chatter all serve a need when shared and the connect users, helping to create a networked community in a mediated public sphere, they note (Thompson, J. 1995).

Regardless of what the attraction is, available evidence is that an increasing number of Nigerians are turning to social media to express themselves. For the purpose of this

study, the description of social media by Graham and Young would suffice. In their book, 'Media convergence: Networked digital media in everyday life, the authors describe social media as being distinguishable by their abilities to allow users to (1) create a profile (2) add contacts (3) interact with those contacts and (4) enable communication that blurs the line between personal communication and the broadcast model (Meikle, G., and Young, S., 2012. pp. 61). So, social media for this study would include platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and others like the Yahoo Groups.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction: To recap it then, the main objectives of this research are to: (1) to critically examine and understand the use of social media like Facebook and Twitter for political debates and activism (2) to critically examine and understand whether the social media are realistic alternatives to the traditional media in providing space for political debates and (3) to critically examine and understand what the likely implications for young democracies like Nigeria.

The research questions: Using OccupyNigeria as the basis of analysis, the main research question is to investigate, ‘what role, if any, social media can play in the politics in new democracies like Nigeria?’ The potential of television in providing political news is already noted (Hara, N. 2008) but the increasing popularity of platforms like Facebook and Twitter for communicating political messages and the suggestion that OccupyNigeria was successful, as a result (Vlam, P., 2012) is worthy of analysis as this research sets out to do.

Also important is the question, ‘what is the role, if any, of social media in protests in Nigeria?’ One of the main questions of this study is ‘what lessons have Nigerian citizens learnt in protests like OccupyNigeria, where social media is believed to have played a major role in its organization?’

The participatory culture of the new environment in which making and sharing is at the very heart of it appears to have conferred certain power on the users but the critically looks at the question: ‘what are the similarities and differences between social media and traditional media in providing space for political debates?’

Accordingly, this study is grounded in the qualitative research tradition, with the primary data sourced from interviews with organisers of those series of protests in January 2012 against the Nigerian government that have come to be known as OccupyNigeria. The protests as mentioned earlier, followed government's decision to withdraw subsidy on fuel, leading to price increases from \$0.40 to \$0.93 (Economist, 2012) as a result of which Nigeria's major cities were shut down and economic activities were paralysed (Parker, G., 2012 Time). In this section, the methodological approach for the study is explained in detail, the idea being to justify why this approach was considered best for this effort. This chapter also explains the sampling process, the focus and limitations of the research, the data collection process, ethical issues involved, challenges encountered in the course of this study as well how they were resolved.

Selecting the right research framework for social media and cultural studies and matching them to operational methods is a crucial phase of the process of inquiry. Accordingly, deciding on the right research approach usually is critical in studies of this nature, with philosophical assumptions, procedure of inquiry and specific methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation all contributing to the final choice (Cresswell, J.W 2014. pp. 3). Also key in the final decision of the right research approach, Cresswell notes, is the nature of the research problem, 'or issue being addressed, the researchers' experiences; and the audiences of the study.' (Cresswell, 2014. pp. 3).

Methods and Justification: Qualitative research, the approach taken by this study and within whose broad boundaries case studies exist, allows ‘in-depth studies about a broad array of topics,’ (Robert Yin’s (2011. p.7). This approach is useful for the researcher who is seeking to ‘establish the meaning of phenomenon from the views of participants,’ (Cresswell, J.W., 2014. p.19). This, Cresswell says, involves ‘identifying a culture-sharing group and studying how it develops shared patterns of behaviour over time (Cresswell, J.W., 2014. p.19). To get some sense of what possibilities abound within this approach, Yin describes five features of qualitative research to include (i) studying the meaning of people’s lives, under real world conditions (ii) representing the views and perspectives of the people or participants in a study (iii) covering the contextual conditions within which people live (iv) contributing insights into or emerging concepts that may help to explain human special behavior and (v) striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone (Yin, R., p.7). Going on to list ten variants of qualitative research, including action research, case study, ethnography and ethnomethodology among others, Yin suggests two ways of mediating what he calls a ‘mosaic of orientations as well as methodological choices.’ (2011, p.17). The first way, he suggests, is to ‘explicitly recognize any methodological choices,’ and indicate the researchers ‘sensitivity about their opportunities, constraints, and philosophical underpinnings’, while the second for which he cites Phillips (1990 p.35) is to “assume that ‘all types of inquiry, insofar as the goal is to reach credible conclusions have and underlying epistemological similarity” (Yin, p.19).

This researcher has taken the first approach, with the recognition from the outset, that a case study method was the best choice for the kind of study proposed. As the focus

of this study is a series of protests organized by a combination of labour unions, activists, politicians and ordinary Nigerians against the government of Nigeria more than thirty months ago, the case study approach was considered most suitable. This method, according to Andrew Bennet (2004. p.21) is suitable for investigating ‘a well-defined aspect of a historical happening.’ While the OccupyNigeria protests of January 2012 are the general field of enquiry, the aspect of this ‘slice’ of Nigerian history that is the object of inquiry here is primarily the use of social media in organizing those protests and the implications for politics in the country.

Case studies, according to Bennet (2004. p.29) allow theories to be tested while setting out to provide a historical explanation of certain events and trying to define them in terms of their contribution to the outcome. Using theories and causal mechanisms, Bennet notes, also allows a thorough interrogation of the main stages along the process (Bennett 2004: 21). The method also allows ‘in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals’ with cases usually bounded by time and activity (Cresswell, J.W. 2014 p.15). The method, Yin (2008) notes, is preferable ‘in examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated.’ She adds that the method, while it uses similar techniques as history, adds other useful ones such as ‘direct observation of the events being studied and interviews of the persons involved in the events.’ However, this study had been conducted with the weaknesses of the case study as a research method kept well in sight. Among other limitations of this method, John Gerring (2007) notes that (i) the concept depends ‘upon the particular proposition that one has in mind, a proposition that may change through time,’ (ii) ‘... the boundaries of a case are sometimes – despite the researcher’s best efforts – open-ended.’ (iii) they are ‘usually

build upon a variety of covariational evidence and (iv) they suffer from ‘an insufficient appreciation of the methodological trade-offs that this method calls forth.

Like every protest movement, OccupyNigeria brought together activists, civil society groups, and politicians, united in their opposition to government policies and to answer the main research questions, qualitative interviews were conducted with some of the key actors. Of qualitative interviews, Lindlof and Taylor (2011. p.173) have this to say: “[Qualitative] Interviews are particularly suited to understanding the social actor’s experience, knowledge, and worldviews.” As the focus of this study is to deconstruct the events of January 2012, with the intention to find out actions taken over 30 months ago, the qualitative interview was considered the best option. The questions for the interview were semi structured. The benefits in this approach are two-fold: It allows the activists the freedom to answer as they deemed fit while at the same time allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions or to ask for clarifications.

As one of the objectives of this research is to critically examine the impact of social media on the politics of Nigeria, with the protests of OccupyNigeria as the case study, the study would have benefited from access to actual data of communication during the period of the protests on such social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. However, two problems were encountered in the course of this study. First, such historical actual data was impossible to retrieve on Twitter. Most communication on Twitter was organised around the hastag: #OccupyNigeria with @OccupyNigeria one of the many handles, but all the conversation warehoused under the hashtag, #OccupyNigeria remain out of reach for technical reasons. Second and perhaps more

telling, following initial analysis of the data collected, it is obvious that there was no single Twitter account for the movement. So, apart from @OccupyNigeria, there were other variants of the Twitter handle like @occupynigeria and @occupy Nigeria, which appears to confirm some of the findings in this study to the effect that the movement was loosely connected and that many activists and groups took to the social media to contribute in whatever way they could. The same pattern was observed on Facebook, the other major social media platform that was cited by the activists interviewed, with many pages using variants of the name: OccupyNigeria available and active.

Content analysis of these selected social media accounts were considered but discounted because it was impossible to determine what direct roles their owners played in organizing the protests. Quite tellingly, none of the activists selected for interview for this study claimed ownership of any of the selected accounts and they equally said they were unaware of any official OccupyNigeria accounts either on Twitter or on Facebook.

Limitations: This study is a critical inquiry into the role social media in organizing the protests of OccupyNigeria rather than a study of the movement as a whole. The study was motivated by the long-standing interest of this researcher in the role of the media in Nigerian politics. The shifting landscape of media business means the social media are now more prominent and popular amongst Nigerians, leading to suggestions that OccupyNigeria was successful as a result. It is to test this claim that this study limited its scope of its inquiry to the organisation of the protests of OccupyNigeria by selecting activists directly involved, rather than a quantitative

survey of users of social media in Nigeria.

Sampling and Selection: The interviewees for this study have been carefully selected in accordance with acceptable norms. Accordingly, in the judgment of this researcher, the thirteen (13) activists selected here are all relevant in that they all played key roles in the organization of the protests of OccupyNigeria. The only consideration in the selection of these interviewees were (i) whether or not they were involved in organizing any aspect of the protests of OccupyNigeria and (ii) how central to the organization of the protests were their contributions. From an initial list of twenty-two possible interviewees, the thirteen whose interviews provide the main data for this study were finally selected using these two criteria. To establish their level of involvement, media reports of the protests were analysed, from which the initial list of twenty-two (22) activists representing different organisations were collected. Using the researchers contacts within the Nigerian media, contact was established with some of the activists and the initial list was discussed with senior editors whose media houses covered the protests before it was then further pruned to eighteen (18) activists. Access to the activists was made possible with the support of one of such senior media contacts, who played a key role in the organization of the OccupyNigeria. In arriving at this final list, names of activists and their roles were crosschecked with different sources to confirm their suitability for this this study. Eleven (11) of the interviews were conducted one-on-one, while two (2) were conducted by phone. All the interviews were conducted between May 29, 2014 and July 17, 2014 during a data collection trip to Nigeria.

Focusing On Ojota Rally: OccupyNigeria may have involved diverse unions and

activists who were responsible for organizing possibly hundreds of rallies across major towns in within and outside Nigeria. However, for the one week during which it lasted, the series of rallies at the Gani Fawehinmi Park in Lagos, Nigeria, otherwise known as the Ojota Rallies became perhaps the single, most potent symbol of OccupyNigeria. For the size of the crowd that gathered at the Ojota Rallies (See Appendices) and the impact they made even when negotiations between protesters and the government began, this was selected, as representative of the other protests and the focal point of the analysis. For this obvious reason as well, all the thirteen interviewees were involved in one way or the other in organizing the Ojota Rallies.

Ethical Issues: In collecting the data for this research, care was taken to observe all required ethical norms for a study of this type. Every one of the interviewees for the research was clearly informed of the purpose of the study and accordingly briefed on the intended use of the data collected. All the participants were willing to be interviewed once they were convinced of the researchers intention and following the declaration that full confidentiality would be accorded as is standard in a study of this nature. Once these assurances were given and regardless of the fact that they were discussing their roles in a protest that shut down Nigeria for a week, the participants were willing to answer all the questions. Aside one interviewee demanded that some of his comments on Nigerian newspapers, to the effect that cash-for-stories was a major problem, be not placed on record, every other participant in the interview agreed to answer all questions and were willing to be recorded on an audio tape recorder. The interviews were conducted mostly in the offices of the participants; with one conducted in a car as the activists made his way in between meetings with some top government officials and another conducted in the premises of a Lagos-based

television station where an activist had just finished participating in a live programme.

Challenges: This being the first study of its kind focused on OccupyNigeria, conducting this research was as exciting as it was challenging. Two main challenges experienced are worth mentioning. First, there was no existing study on OccupyNigeria and therefore no reference point of any type. The researcher had to rely on his journalistic background to negotiate Nigeria's complex politics. Tracking down the activists was another major challenge. Some were understandably wary of meeting with the researcher at a time when elections in Ekiti and Osun, two states in South Western Nigeria, were close at hand and when security forces were on the trail of some activists. Those two elections were battlegrounds, pitting the ruling government against progressive forces against each other. Some of the activists were also involved in the national conference then holding in Abuja and had very little time to spare. As a whole there was a deliberate effort to keep all the respondents' details in confidence. Consent of all the participants were sought for their real names to be used in the belief that this would add to the quality of the data used.

As noted already, the researchers own background as a journalist was helpful both in making the first contacts with the activists. So too did his understanding of the media in making sense of the data collected. However, conscious effort was required not to allow those same advantages to becloud the critical analysis of the data. As a newspaper journalist with a bias for the print media, two instances of conscious effort to ensure correct interpretation of the data are worth noting. First, the findings on television's impact on OccupyNigeria came as a new insight because until now, it had failed to match newspapers in terms of any significant contribution to political

reporting in Nigeria Then, after reviewing the findings, the researcher is coming away with a more realistic opinion on the potentials of social media to affect politics in any serious way, at least for now.

Summary: This study, of a particular aspect of an event that took place over thirty (30) months before could only have been achieved through a case study method and this was the reason for the choice here. However, care has been taken to address some of the concerns with the method. One of those concerns, according to Yin (2008) is failure to by researchers to follow systematic procedures, thereby allowing ‘equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions.’ Until the actual data collection began, this researcher, like many within and outside Nigeria, also believed that OccupyNigeria was successful because social media was used in organizing the protests. Evidence from the outset suggested those assessments were wrong and therefore immediately discarded. The weight of evidence in the interviews with organisers of those protests could not sustain the initial beliefs and this would be explained in detail in the section discussing the data results.

DATA PRESENTATION

Introduction: This study is a critical review of the role of social media in the protests of January 2012, otherwise known as OccupyNigeria and an ethnographic method would have been the most suitable. Such a method, with the researcher on hand to collect data as the events unfold before him sure has its own merits. Regardless, in order to make up for the loss of the chance that such close observation as the ethnographic method provides, this study has relied on data collected from interviewing activists involved in organizing the protests of OccupyNigeria. In an attempt to piece together the story of the protests, getting access inside the movement was the first task and perhaps the single most critical key to the overall outcome of the study. This section presents a critical analysis of the impact of social media in the protests of OccupyNigeria. The section will attempt to make meaning of about 30,000 words of text collected during interviews conducted by this researcher during his data collections trip to Nigeria.

As already clearly stated, the research questions are: (i) what is the role of social media in the politics of Nigeria? (ii) what is the role, if any, of social media in protests in Nigeria? (iii) what lessons have Nigerian citizens learnt in protests like OccupyNigeria, where social media is believed to have played a major role in its organization? and (iv) what are the similarities and differences between social media and traditional media in providing space for political debates? In trying to answer these, this analysis is divided into four sections designed to deconstruct the events of January 2012 in a way to help answer the research questions.

Acting on the advice of the editor of a national newspaper, where this researcher had

worked, I sought and found Biodun Sowumi, activist and journalist, who was right at the centre of the OccupyNigeria protests. His inside knowledge and understanding of the events of January 2012 were useful, first in trimming the list of prospective participants in the interview for this study and in providing the links, without which it would have been more difficult to get them to agree to be interviewed. He agreed to be interviewed and provided the useful, links to the other activists who worked under the platform of the Save Nigeria Group (SNG) and who equally played key roles during the protests. Yinka Odumakin, Segun Bakare, Biodun Komolafe, Dayo Ogunlana, Remi Omowaiye and Mallam Moyo Jaji, all willingly agreed to participate in the recorded interviews, while Tolu Ogunlesi, Eggheader Odewale, Japheth Omojuwa, Rasaan Olokoba, were recruited following initial analysis of media reports of the protests. Their roles in the movement were confirmed in the interviews with other activists. Omoaholo Omokhalen, Director, Research and Mobilisation at SNG agreed to be interviewed during a meeting with Segun Bakare, son of one of the conveners of SNG, Pastor Tunde Bakare. Yemi Adamolekun, Executive Director, Enough Is Enough (Nigeria); agreed to be interviewed after Ogunlesi, also involved in EIE (Nigeria); provided the link. All the participants were asked the same set of open-ended questions (sample included in the appendices), which allowed room for clarifications and follow-up questions where it was necessary.

Social media and Nigerian politics: All the activists were asked to describe how they use social media both before and during OccupyNigeria, the idea being to get them to say what kinds of things they do on platforms like Facebook and Twitter. They were also asked how often they use the platforms? How much time they spend online? And how much of their time online is directly related to political engagement

as against purely social engagements? There is overwhelming evidence from the data collected that all the activists consider social media key in the politics of Nigeria, with all but one of them maintaining a daily presence online. Regarding how much time they spend on the social media, an overwhelming 92 per cent or 12 of 13 activists are active online as well as offline, with many of those involved spending anything between 2 hours to 8 hours daily on different social media platforms. The favourite platforms, the data revealed, are Facebook, Twitter and the Yahoo Listserv: NaijaPolitics and OmoOodua, with eleven of them (84%) using Facebook everyday, eight (61%) using Twitter actively everyday and five (38%) maintaining active presence on the Yahoo Groups. Omojuwa maintains his own Blog (omojuwa.org), which is one of the most popular in Nigeria. The data also revealed that writing, commenting, sharing stories or pictures to amplify issues or causes are the most cited things that the activists do on the platforms. Participants cited political education and good governance as their goals. All the activists interviewed evidently consider social media powerful enough as a tool for influencing politics and eight of them (61%) spend between 90 to 100% of their time online on activism.

Social media and protests: To answer the question on what impact social media has on protests in Nigeria, participants in this study were asked to describe their roles in OccupyNigeria and to specify whether or not they were involved in both offline and online activities. They were also asked to say which of the two levels of engagement they considered more important in terms of contributing to the success of OccupyNigeria. All participants confirmed they were involved either in some form of offline (meetings, mobilization, rallies) and online (tweeting, sharing of information on social media, especially of details of rallies in Lagos and other cities during the

protests) activities during the protests. Eleven (84%) of the activists used social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yahoo Listservs) before and during the protests as platform to promote the cause. Dayo Ogunlana, who was on the security committee for the Ojota Rallies, was an exception. Understandably, as Secretary General of the militant Coalition of Self Determination Groups (COSEG), he believes social media are not effective in moving people out onto the streets. ‘We believed and we still believe that going on the street is the solution to the decadence and problems in Nigeria,’ he says (Ogundana, D., 2014).

However, most of the activists believe that social media played a complementary role to offline engagements in making OccupyNigeria a success. Eight or an overwhelming 61% of the activists interviewed described both the offline activities and the social media as ‘mutually inclusive.’ They agreed that mobilizing people onto the streets remains the best form of protest but that social media now enables activists to reach more people and amplify what is happening at rallies. ‘The old tools are still important so it is a complement. It helps you to reach more people, it helps you to reach across borders,’ Omojuwa (2014) said, citing the #BringBackOurGirls campaign that brought the case of the schoolgirls kidnapped by Islamist militant group, Boko Haram as example. Just two activists or 15% of those interviewed believe social media was by far more important in contributing to the success of OccupyNigeria. Journalist and activist, Ogunlesi stands alone in his belief that ‘social media is what made a significance difference... .’ ‘What social media has done is allow ordinary people like an access into the whole culture of activism,’ he adds (2014). Four activists (30%) believe offline activities were by far more crucial. In addition to Dayo Ogunlana, (2014) who believes that social media is rather elitist and

that those hardest hit by government policies are usually more willing to march, the others: Yinka Odumakin, Segun Bakare and Omoaholo Omokhalen (2014) the personalities of the arrowheads of OccupyNigeria as the main reason for its success. ‘Of course the online activities played a role in sensitizing people who are online really and it was the initial channel through which grievances were expressed,’ Omoakhalen (2014) says, but was quick to add: ‘But as far as the epicentre of that protest is concerned, which we all know was at Ojota rally, Gani Fawehinmi Park, social media did not do much in terms of galvanization, in terms of mobilization, in terms of bringing people to the ground.’ Segun Bakare (2014) shares his views, insisting that the drawing power of the protest leaders was the reason it succeeded in the way it did. ‘SNG Ojota protest was more so offline because the people involved in those offline meetings were people that had grassroots supports,’ he said. Yinka Odumakin (2014), who alongside Pastor Bakare and Biodun Sowumi was one of the faces of the Ojota Rallies, also echoed those sentiments, insisting: ‘the online community as large as it is, you can’t bring them together physically.’

Lessons learnt: OccupyNigeria was a different kind of anti-government protest and the data collected shows four major points on which most of the participants agree as being useful lessons. First, all the activists believe that offline and online mobilization are crucial to organizing protests and that getting people to march requires more of face-to-face communication. Yemi Adamolekun, whose group, EIE (Nigeria), sees technology as tool for mobilizing 18-35 year olds is clear in her assessment: ‘We’ve seen that in subsequent sort of activism, if you do things and your call is solely online, the rate of response is much lower,’ (2014) adding that participation usually improves when events offline are communicated through social media. Second, there is a

general belief amongst activists sampled, that social media helped to amplify and sustain whatever happened offline. ‘We also used the social media to explain in simple terms to our people to see the reason why they have to be part of the struggle,’ Remi Omowaiye, who was instrumental to organizing some of the protests outside Lagos says. ‘What sustained the protest was the social media,’ he adds (Omowaiye, R., 2014). Politician and public affairs commentator, Mallam Moyo Jaji (2014), believes the mass engagement that made OccupyNigeria a success is traceable to the activities of ‘bloggers,’ on platforms like Facebook and Twitter. He cited the protests that followed the annulment of the 1993 presidential elections and how many protesters were killed as the then military ruler, Sani Abacha ordered a crackdown, explaining that social media presents an equally potent tool for activism (Jaji, M.M., 2014)). Third, some of the activists polled noted the fact that social media was useful in taking the protests out of the control of much-distrusted Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and the Trade Union Congress (TUC), and thereby making it difficult for them to cut deals with the government. Yinka Odumakin and Tolu Ogunlesi stress (2014) this point and note that without social media, it would have been impossible to sustain the protest for the entire week. ‘If you talk to those who were active in the Labour that time, they will not speak well of Ojota, because Ojota became a problem for them,’ Odumakin (2014) said.

Social media as a viable alternative: To address the last research question, all the activists polled were asked whether given their experience in organizing OccupyNigeria, they consider social media a viable alternative to traditional media of radio, television and newspaper. All participants acknowledged the affordances of social media including the fact that it reaches more people, allows users more control

over their message and is relatively more difficult to censor. Six (46%) believe social media provide viable alternatives to the traditional media while seven (53%) believe it in spite of the useful features, they are additional tools to be used as complements to traditional media. ‘I think that, unlike in the past when we didn’t have social media,... it would have been possible for instance in the days when we had just traditional media, for them to blank us out,’ Yinka Odumakin (2014) said, adding, ‘you can’t do that again because every citizen now is a reporter.’(Odumakin, Y., 2014). Blogger Omojuwa paints a vivid picture of the power of social media to reach more people and in doing so, raises an issue that Nigerian newspaper publishers are usually unwilling to discuss. ‘Social media may actually be reaching more people by now,’ he said, adding that no newspaper in Nigeria circulates 150,000 per day (Omojuwa, 2014). He notes that just a few activists – judging by the number of their followership might be reaching more people everyday. ‘If you combine the Twitter handle of four major activists in Nigeria in terms of number of followers, they reach collectively, directly, by counting their number of their followers, they reach about 250,000 people,’ he notes (Omojuwa, 2014). He also explains further: “Do not forget that that is not their reach, their reach is more than their number of followers, their reach includes retweets to the people that are not following them. So collectively, these four are reaching millions of people every day,’ he notes (Omojuwa 2014). While acknowledging the impact of social media, Omoalolo Omokhalen insists that issues of access to the social media limit its overall viability as an alternative to traditional media. ‘How many people really are active or reachable on Facebook and Twitter and also other social media platforms,’ he asked rhetorically? (Omokhalen, O., 2014). For Remi Omowaiye, social media provide alternatives for his political communication. ‘For me it’s easier, it is faster, it is un-regulated and for the kind of people I want to

reach out to, I think it is the best platform for me to reach out to them,' he says (Omowaiye, R., 2014). On his part, Segun Bakare believes social media complement rather than replace traditional media. I think if they add, they add a little because there are some people you cannot reach without social media,' he says (2014). Tolu Ogunlesi, whose work has appeared on the UK's Guardian newspaper, says for all its impact, social media still rely on traditional media helping to amplify what they do. "There are lots of causes that are on social media that don't gain wider attention until traditional media picks it up,' he says (2014). On her part, EIE (Nigeria's) Yemi Adamolekun strongly believes that social media are viable alternatives to traditional media for political mobilization and she cites government's reaction in the aftermath of OccupyNigeria as evidence. 'I think the best testament to that is the way government has responded. We have heard either from the Senate President, Mr. President's office, The Presidency, talking differently about curtailing social media, censoring social media,' she says, adding: 'So there is a sense that they get about the social media is powerful. There is a sense that they get that social media can change opinions because you also realize that it is a platform that people from outside see.' (Adamolekun, Y., 2014). On his part, Yinka Odumakin believes that social media have democratized the media practices in the sense that they 'are not easily censored.' 'I think, they are powerful platforms, which we have got and which must be encouraged, nurtured,' he states (Odumakin, 2014).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction: This study is an attempt to determine the impact of social media on Nigerian politics. In doing this, the study has picked the OccupyNigeria as a case study, to try and test the claims that social media made the protests successful. The paper also set out to critically examine the viability of social media as alternative channel for political discourse. The series of protests now known as OccupyNigeria must be properly understood in context of other forces that were at play and which all in different ways significantly affected the outcome of the protests.

Ojota Rallies and Other Protests: While many see the Ojota Rallies as the focal point for OccupyNigeria, there were indeed in the words of some of the activists, probably hundreds of other protests held within and outside Nigeria (Adamolekun and Eggheader, 2014)). Spontaneous protests broke out immediately the Federal Government announced on January 1, 2014 that fuel subsidy had been removed (BBC, 2012). On Monday January 2, 2014, protesters in Lokoja, Kogi State blocked the highway leading to Abuja, the Nigerian Federal Capital. That week, many more protests were reported in other major Nigerian cities (BBC, 2012). Fuel protests in themselves are nothing new in Africa's largest oil producer where bitter disputes over the propriety of importing fuel rather than fixing ailing refineries have always pitted activists and labour unions against the government (Noble, K. B, 1992). Nigerians, majority of whom live on \$1 a day and were, therefore, the hardest hit by the subsidy removal were willing to show their opposition to the subsidy removal by going onto the streets (Ogundana and Ogunlesi, 2014). Of the protests, Ogunlesi said they stood

out because the subsidy removal represented a tax on the people (2014). “Even for the least educated people, it was clear. Where you are using N600 to fill a 10-litre Jerry can before, now that same N600 was getting you only six litres,” said (2014). Even when the general strikes began a week after spontaneous protests broke out, the early callers at the Ojota Rallies were poor, ordinary Nigerians (Bakare, S., 2014). ‘I noticed during the rallies, initially it wasn’t people you would necessarily say are either graduates, employed, he said’.

You wouldn’t say they were the middle class, they were really discontent Nigerians, what we decided to call the real Nigerians.

The people that the fuel subsidy removal affected directly ..., so the market people, the immediate community, the Ojota community, a lot of people, those were the people that turned out the most, initially (Bakare, S., 2014).

If as the evidence suggests, people took to the streets on their own, can social media be said to have been the reason why the protests were that successful? How is the success measured? Those who posit that OccupyNigeria succeeded because of social media may have been influenced by Henry Jenkins’ model of participatory culture, which as Christian Fuchs critique notes, completely ignores participatory democracy and its ‘political, political and cultural dimensions’ (Fuchs, C., 2013. p.55). The notion of OccupyNigeria was of a social movement birthed online and drew participation from ordinary Nigerians but the weight of the evidence collected during the course of this research does not support this. There is reason to believe that many Nigerians, angered that they would have to pay more for fuel as a result of the removal of subsidy took to the streets to protest spontaneously. It also appears that the initial protests in the first week beginning from January 2 were by people with no

direct connection to Save Nigeria Group, which provided the platform for the Ojota Rallies or to organized labour. The evidence suggests that whatever coordination, offline or online only came a week later when general nationwide strikes were called by labour and when SNG had set up the platform for the Ojota Rallies. ‘People had protests in every corner, barricading streets and all of those must be considered to be in aggregation of what happened during the OccupyNigeria protest,’ Eggheader said (2014).

Combined Forces: Fuchs (2012 pp. 85) already makes the valid point that the ‘media are not the only factors that influence the conditions of protest ...’ The protests of OccupyNigeria must also be seen as the coming together of disparate forces, only united in their call for good governance and opposition to the government of President Goodluck Jonathan, rather than a movement that grew from the Internet. As mentioned already, spontaneous riots broke out immediately the announcement for the removal of fuel subsidy was made on January 1, 2012. The protests may have been started by ordinary Nigerians but this study reveals that what followed and what is now known as OccupyNigeria was made possible because activists, labour unions, civil society groups, politicians and other prominent Nigerians joined forces to protest the subsidy removal (Odewale, E., 2014). For many of the CSOs, mobilization and preparations for action in the event of a rumoured removal of fuel subsidies materializing, began in the Fall of 2011. For instance, EIE (Nigeria), under the leadership of Yemi Adamolekun began consultations months before the government’s announcement. ‘I had some stakeholder meetings with people in the sector and people in government and then sort of started mapping out a plan of what we would do if it was removed,’ Adamolekun said during an interview held in her Ikeja, Lagos office

(2014). Aside EIE (Nigeria), there were also many other CSOs involved in including Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), the United Action for Democracy (UAD), the Campaign for Democracy and Human Rights and Centre for Democracy and Development (Eggheader, O., 2014). For many of the groups, the common interest appeared to have been halting decay in government rather than just the reversal of the decision of fuel subsidy removal. EIE, where Adamolekun, Omojuwa and Ogunlesi were actively involved, for instance, was formed in 2010 during the struggle to force loyalists of then ailing President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to allow a constitutional transfer of power to his Vice, Goodluck Jonathan. The SNG, convened by Pastor Bakare and Yinka Odumakin in January 2010 has a similar history to that of the EIE (Nigeria). The G-63, a movement that started online, with Odumakin and Mallam Nasir El-Rufai as key players, was also involved in what some of the activists call the 'power hijack' struggles (Omokhalen, O., 2014) and provided the base for the SNG (Odumakin, Y., 2014).

By its own description, SNG is a 'political society organisation' (SNG, 2014) and has battled an internal crisis because of the alleged political interests of some of its leaders including Pastor Bakare and El-Rufai (Akinsuyi, Y., 2011). Regardless of that crisis, SNG and the Ojota Rallies, for which it set up a platform was by all accounts the focal point of the protests of OccupyNigeria. With Pastor Bakare, Odumakin and Sowumi working as arrowheads, SNG erected the platform in Ojota (Odumakin, 2014), invited many other groups and held daily meetings where activities for each day was reviewed and plans for the next day made (Adamolekun, Bakare, 2014). This study also reveals that the SNG platform at Ojota was boosted by the decision of the two main umbrella labour organisations, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) and

the Trade Union Congress (TUC) to call a general workers' strike (Olokoba and Eggheader, 2014). "NLC had called the strike, so either you like it or not, you should be part of that protest so it was symbolic and unique and it had serious effect," Olokoba said (2014). Labour's decision, meant its more powerful unions, commercial transport operators and oil sector workers had to withdraw their services, forcing businesses and government offices to shut down for the period (Eggheader, O., 2014). The sit-at-home, he says, enabled many Nigerians who would probably not have attended the rallies to do so. 'It was because the government was shut down and that is why I also acknowledge the role the NLC played in ensuring that the mass rallies kicked off on the streets, because if NLC did not declare strike action, I don't think the different street protests would have been as successful as they were' (Eggheader, O., 2014)

A Movement Led By Influencers: Paolo Gerbaudo in his critique of 'Horizontalists,' notes that the leaderless structure they favour does not really work well for social movements (Gerbaudo p.134-135). Results obtained from this study appear to align with this critique as they suggest that OccupyNigeria was as much to do with personalities that with any other thing. In its second week, starting from January 9, the protests began to show some sense of coordination. Offline, the decision of the SNG to 'do something' about government's policy led to a meeting held on January 3, 2014, which had in attendance leaders of the group as well as Nigerian music stars like King Wasiu Ayinde Marshal, Femi Kuti, Seun Kuti, Ras Kimono and 9ice (Odumakin, 2014). That meeting agreed to start rallies on Monday January 9, 2014 and for symbolic reasons, the Freedom Park at Ojota, named after late activist, Gani Fawehinmi was picked as the end point for all marches (Olokoba,

2014). The 'key players' in SNG like Yinka Odumakin, Dr. Joe, a Yinka Odumakin, Biodun Sowumi, Pastor Bakare, Seun Kuti and Femi Kuti may not be as prominent as other Nigerians in terms of their engagement on social media but they have large followership that was called upon for the rallies (Bakare, Onokhalen, 2014). 'Those were the people that are able to bring their grassroots to the rally. They are the key influencers that played a huge role in bringing people together to the rallies' (Bakare, 2014)

Drawing on the power of SNG leaders to attract people, the Ojota Rallies became a platform for music and Nollywood stars to voice their support for the cause as they took turns to perform and speak everyday (Sowumi). The results showed that 61% of the participants believed that both offline and online activities complemented each other but that does not necessarily account for or help to explain the roles of influencers on both sides. Just as Pastor Bakare and his team at the SNG brought some credibility and followership to the rallies, some Nigerians on social media did the same online. Yinka Odumakin acknowledged the role of a group of young generation of Nigerians, who came on board the SNG platform with new dimensions to the struggle. Yemi Adamolekun's EIE (Nigeria), which believes in the power of technology to mobilise young Nigerians, appeared to have played a key role in this regard. Adamolekun, Omojuwa, Ogunlesi, Eggheader and El-Rufai were already prominent on social media and used their influence to promote the cause (Bakare, 2014). There is suggestion that the online influencers saw Ojota Rallies as a big platform to leverage on (Bakare, 2014) but the combination of these offline influencers like Pastor Bakare, Yinka Odunmakin and others in the SNG; and the online influencers like Adamolekun, Omojuwa and El-Rufai regardless of which side

benefited more, appeared to helped the protests a great deal. The Ojota Rallies, profiting from the drawing power of prominent Nigerians became something of a model, as that pattern was successfully repeated at Falomo, another part of Lagos, where the likes of Pat Utomi, Kola Oyeneyin and Fola Adeola addressed protesters. Of that strategy, Sleeves-Up, which also works to mobilise young Nigerians to take steps to solving the country's problems said: 'This protest ran concurrently with the Occupy Nigeria protests at Ojota. For five days, and for the first time in the history of Nigeria, the middle and upper class of Ikoyi, Victoria Island and Lekki came out in thousands to make their voices heard.' (Sleeves-Up, 2014)

Television Comes Of Age: Commercial broadcasting has a relatively shorter history compared with print media in Nigeria. Nigerian newspapers have a history dating back to 1859, much of it dedicated to robust reporting of governments and their actions. On the other hand, broadcasting was predominantly government owned until 1992 when the then military government deregulated the market (MRA and Article 19, 2014). Regardless of the deregulation, ownership is still skewed in favour of governments. As at the end of March 2014, forty-five televisions belonged to the Federal Government while thirty-seven (37) belonged to states, while the Federal Government owned forty-two (42) radio stations and the states forty-one (41). This is against fifteen (15) private televisions stations and twenty-five (25) radio stations (NBC 2014). Expectedly, the government owned stations are usually less critical in their reporting of official activities, angering and alienating many Nigerians in process. Private broadcasters, without government funding and having to operate in a relatively more regulated media environment are filling the vacuum though, with more critical reporting. Many of the activists polled acknowledged the potency of

television in political communication but note drawbacks like poor power supply and censorship (Mallam Jaji, Omokhalen, Omowaiye, 2014). However, commercial broadcasting appeared to have come of age during OccupyNigeria, providing robust reporting that was ignored by government television network, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). Private-owned stations, TVC and Channels provide live daily coverage of the Ojota Rallies and in doing so, appeared to have encouraged many other people to join. “I think it was a TV thing, if anything spread it, it was TV,” Segun Bakare said, adding, ‘it was what ... people saw people out there and they all joined in.’ (Bakare, 2014) This was in addition to appearances on live morning shows by activists including Biodun Sowumi and Mallam Moyo Jaji. The live coverage of the rallies in Ojota by some of the private stations and the blackout of the same by NTA prompted protests against the government station by angry activists, who demanded fair and balanced reporting of the subsidy removal (Keita, M., (2012). So powerful were the live images from the Ojota Rallies that the government had to move in troops when the rallies broke up for the weekend after five days of protests (Odumakin, 2014). Just like social media were being used in promoting protests of this nature, it was the first time such images would be showing live on television but only few have acknowledged its impact on the success of the protest. Such is the novelty and the potential impact of this kind of media coverage of protests in Nigeria that some of the social media activists are saying that ‘this revolution shall be televised.’. As farfetched as that might sound, there are good grounds to believe that organisers of future protests would deploy resources to television as much as much as they would to social media.

Loose Network, Same Message: As already noted, OccupyNigeria movement is a

series of protests organized both within and outside the country. It also useful to remember that protests broke out spontaneously across the country after government's withdrawal of fuel subsidy with Ojota representing the single biggest platform and that as noted earlier, the protests owed a lot to the drawing power of influencers offline and online, their contribution being installing order to the expression of anger against the Federal Government. SNG's Ojota Rallies started a week after protests had broken out in the country and some of its organisers considered the platform as clearly separate from OccupyNigeria. 'The people that were online already prior to the starting of the Ojota rally, felt had something bigger that they could latch on to. So a lot more people now came together to say okay, since this now has a big platform and a big following, let's all now say OccupyNigeria but we weren't OccupyNigeria. OccupyNigeria started before SNG decided to go to Ojota' (Bakare, 2014)

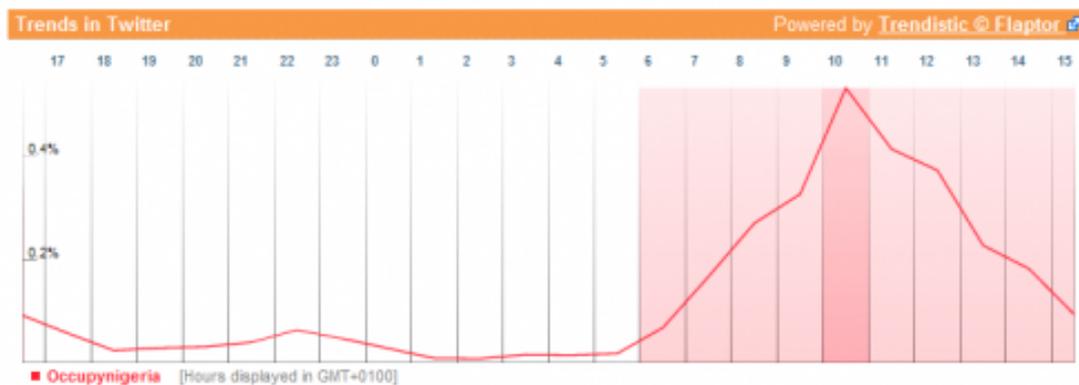
The opportunity to pressure the government of Goodluck Jonathan for much needed reforms appeared to have welded the relatively older (offline) generation and the younger (online) generation in a powerful alignment that was managed by a loose network. Omojuwa, regarded as one of the most influential of his generation on social media, was involved in both the setting up and maintaining that network. He cites a Twitter conversation amongst young Nigerians as the beginning of OccupyNigeria with the focus of discussion being whether the tactic could be adopted as a model for protest. 'The conversation was not organized, it was just people having a conversation. And then I sent out email to some young people on how we needed to have ourselves organized and really get this thing done. In that email, we were more or less planning on what we could do if the government went ahead to increase the fuel prices' (Omojuwa, 2014).

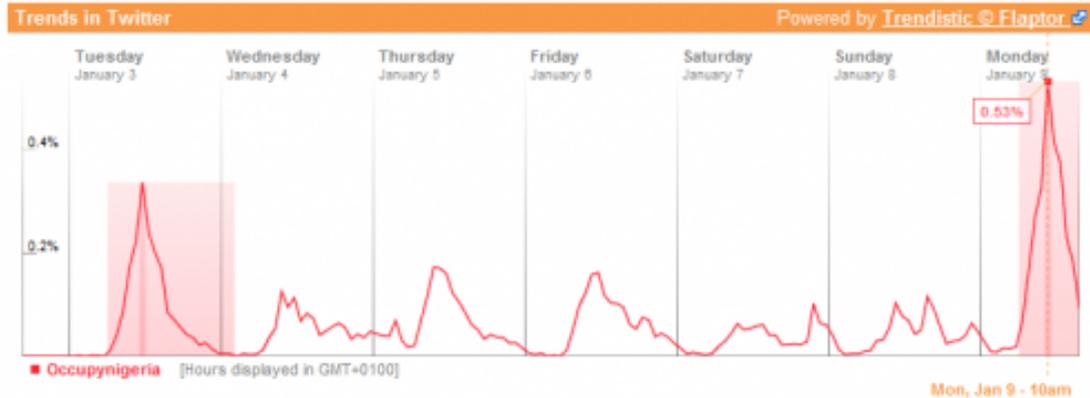
That group, which also included many of the activists with EIE (Nigeria), were planning for April 2012, assuming that that was the time the government would remove fuel subsidies but were forced into action four months early. ‘By the time they did it in January, we had got to a certain level of preparation. So we met in Lagos, we had several email exchanges (Omojuwa, 2014).

The younger elements, including Yemi Adamolekun, who was invited to SNG’s meeting in Lagos; Omojuwa, who marched in Abuja and attended the Ojota Rallies, played crucial roles in shaping the narrative on social media. The SNG had agreed that the central message at the rallies should be, ‘kill corruption, don’t kill Nigeria,’ and getting that out across to protesters was down to the younger elements like Segun Bakare who helped create some of the images used to identify the protests and which were promoted on branded T-Shirts and elsewhere (Odumakin, 2014). That central message was widely circulated by all the activists who had prominent presence on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Twitter especially became useful for this purpose

I was helping to coordinate the protesters across the country and all over the world and also connecting people to venues, connecting people to themselves, in terms of if you are protesting in Johannesburg, letting you know that there are other people in Johannesburg, sending their Twitter handles out, posting what the talking point are on my Blog, omojuwa.org, hashtagging locations, along with the general hashtag: #OccupyNigeria (Omojuwa, 2014).

The hashtag, #OccupyNigeria, became the rallying point for all the protests held in major cities in Nigeria and those that were organized in major cities across the world, which mostly targeted Nigerian embassies. ‘We have something like group announcement of what activities that were going to be held in what part of the country. So we always produced a schedule. And anybody in that city who wanted to join would be able to join’ (Eggheader, 2014). It made it easy for activists and protesters to share information, plans and live updates to mobilise for the cause. With it, it became easy to connect other protesters in other parts of the world. ‘I was also involved in information dissemination to those who are out aside the country. For instance, I knew how I triggered the protest in Kiev, Ukraine. There was a protest in front of the Nigerian Embassy in Ukraine, the Nigerian Embassy in Poland. I was instrumental in organizing those ones’ (Eggheader, 2014). As mentioned earlier, data for Twitter use for the period of the protests were impossible to collect but the following graphs published on a Technology Blog is an indication of the popularity of the #OccupyNigeria hashtag during the protests (Okezie, Loy, 2012).





Source: Techloy

So, regardless of where it was organized, Ojota, Lagos; Dundas Square (Dunda/Young), Downtown Toronto; Jubile Park Sunnyside, By Troy & Esselen Street, Pretoria; the corner of 44th and 2nd Avenue (Kudirat Corner), New York; or in front of the Nigerian Embassy, Avenue de Tervuren, Brussels, the message was the same, ‘kill corruption, don’t kill Nigerians,’ and the channel used for amplifying that message and sustaining it was the virtual network created by the young generation of Nigerian activists on social media around the hashtag, OccupyNigeria. Regardless of the attractions of this arrangement and the gains believed to have accrued though, two questions stand out. First the political economy of the platforms ensures the real power resides in the hands of corporations and governments who control the resources (Fuchs), and second, even with their acclaimed popular adoption, social media still remains largely elitist in a society like Nigeria (Ogunlana, Omokhalen). In this regard, can the popular held belief that OccupyNigeria was a social media movement stand?

People’s Power Prevails But Government Wins: It has been variously described as the week that shook Nigeria (Olokoba, 2014) and hailed by many as Nigerian version

of the Arab Spring. Such was the pressure on the Federal Government that President Jonathan reversed the price increases that resulted from the subsidy removal even though it was still above the pre-January 1, 2012 level (Nossiter, A., 2012). So, just what are the gains of OccupyNigeria? The answer is sure to vary depending on which activist you speak with (Premium Times, 2013). One possible reason is the fact that OccupyNigeria composed of loosely connected protests organized by disparate groups and individuals, who obviously had different expectations. OccupyNigeria was different from previous protests because activists were inspired by events in other parts of the world like Occupy Wall Street and the Arab Spring where social offline and online mobilization came together to fight governments and policies (Schechter, D., 2012), but the outcome was no different. Leaders of the movement appeared to have been suspicious of the NLC and were not involved in the negotiations with government.

The curious decision of the leaders of the SNG leaders to disperse for the weekend and reconvene on Monday January 16 did not go down with all parties concerned (Adamolekun, Y., 2014) and appeared to have handed a much-needed initiative to government, which was able to move troops to seize the Gani Fawehinmi Park and as a result prevent the protesters from regrouping on the morning of Monday January 16, 2012. SNG leaders insist that the decision was taken in the best interest of the people as they had information about the government's decision to deploy troops (Odumakin, Y., 2014). Governments had in the past deployed troops to crush protests and this ought not to have come as a surprise and some of the activists had expressed their hesitation about going to the park with bandsmen, and making it look like a carnival (Jaji. M.M., 2014). The apparent failure of OccupyNigeria is acknowledged by

Omoyele Sowore, publisher of groundbreaking online paper, Sahara Reporters: “For its size, its failure to compel any serious measures to curb the culture of impunity and corruption in Nigeria is significant (Sowore, O., 2013). Part of the reason for that failure, according to Sowore, in an analysis for CNN website, is the lack of proper structure and he is right. Some of the young elements who took part in the protests saw Ojota Rallies as a mighty opportunity but when the owners of that platform decided to break up, they had no back-up plan. So, it looks like OccupyNigeria revealed potentials for mobilizing ordinary Nigerians against poor governments but on this occasion, it won’t be too far from the truth to say that peoples power prevailed but government won the battle in the end.

Social Media And Politics: So, to go back to the main focus of this study, what is the impact of social media on Nigerian politics? Are social media viable alternatives in providing the space for political discourse? Regardless of the euphoria that the Arab Spring brought with it, there is some consensus of opinion that media do not ‘create revolutions; people with courage do’ (Seib, P, 2012. p.41). Modern media, though, have been useful in allowing social movements to communicate, organize their actions and mobilise their constituencies (Gerbaudo, P, 2012. p.4) and that is confirmed by the result of this study. However, as Gerbaudo also finds in the case of the Egyptian revolution, social media’s role in protests is never exhaustive and must be considered along with the other complex forces (2012. p.75).

CONCLUSION:

As the results of this study has shown, OccupyNigeria may have been reported and amplified using social media, the protests themselves were triggered by government

policy while mass rallies relied on the drawing power of influencers to get them going. As such, the suggestions that social media inspired OccupyNigeria cannot be sustained. Castells descriptions of the power of networks (2007. p.12), already questioned in similar studies of other social movements (Fuchs, C., 2013 p.85-86), cannot conveniently account for the events of January 2012 that we now know as OccupyNigeria. The model favoured by the network society, with no strong leadership and which Gerbaudo's study of three social movements confirmed is limiting, was visibly in operation during the last protests (pp. 135). Such 'liquid organising' as he describes them puts everyone in charge and no one in control. Seib's statements that 'media do not create revolutions, people with courage do,' (pp.41) again rings true here. Just what would have been the result if organisers of the Ojota Rallies had elected to occupy the Gani Fawehinmi Park onto the end? Just what would have been if the younger elements, who did not favor the decision to break for the weekend had power to veto that decision? Just what would have been if the organisers had listened to the voices of some of the activists that Ojota resembled a carnival more than the start of a revolution? As the findings suggest, many protesters were willing to continue and indeed went back after the weekend break only to be prevented from accessing the Park (Komolafe, B., 2014). These questions are better left for further studies. The focus here has been to examine the contributions of social media to OccupyNigeria and see whether they present a viable alternative to traditional media as a channel of political communication. Beyond the euphoria of using new media to organize protests against the government, there is little evidence of any real success from OccupyNigeria. Like a newly married couple, quick to praise each other, optimists point to the #BringBackOurGirls campaign as a sign of success in using social media for political activism and positive change. As this study is

being concluded though and more that 130 days after the girls were first seized they remain missing, the only gains being the images of prominent leaders at home and abroad holding up the signs calling for their release. People may be too real to ignore (Budde, Paul) but the real extent of the transformative power of the Internet appears to remain largely in the realms of guesswork. Cases like Governor Adams Oshiomhole of Edo state who was forced to recant his insult on widow and then offer her a government job after the video of the encounter surfaced on the Internet (The Post, 2013) looks like motion without movement. No doubt such incidents would, otherwise, have gone unnoticed but whether using social media to expose such incidents would produce the kind of radical changes that Nigerians want and how soon this can happen remains to be seen. Perhaps the best judgment of the fleeting nature of the power of social media as a tool for political activism came just months after OccupyNigeria ended. As a government audit revealed massive fraud in the subsidy scheme there were calls by some for protests on the scale of OccupyNigeria, to force government to try indicted firms and individuals. That the call for protests went unheeded is suggestive of the absence of the variables cited in this study as inspiring and contributing to the success of OccupyNigeria. It might be too harsh to describe this union between activists and social media as a one-night stand but it is surely not looking like a marriage made in heaven either. On the evidence of the findings in this study, there is every reason to believe that this is nothing more than a marriage of convenience.

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