The Role of Social Media in Future Elections in the 21st Century Africa

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Abstract

This paper looks at the role of social media, a new technology based on web. 2.0 revolution, in future elections in 21st century Africa. Using descriptive research method, the paper contends that much could be achieved in applying the social media in future elections in the 21st century Africa. To establish a balance, the study equally looks at the prospects and problems of social media usage in elections in Africa. Based on available evidence from the materials reviewed, the paper concludes that much credibility has been sustained in current elections in Africa through the aid of social media as all election related events are followed up through citizen journalism, in which youth activism has in no small measure enhanced. Based on this, it was recommended that more citizens should be provided access to the internet.

Key words: Africa, Democracy, Elections and Social Media.

Introduction

The great events of American war of independence (1775-1776) that led to the emergence of the United States of American (4 July 1776) and French Revolution (1789-1799) gave fillip to sovereignty of people rooted in self-determination and self-ruled. Basically, the two events broke the spear of colonialism, and gave birth to the logic of democracy. David Armitage commenting on the effect of American Declaration of independence observed thus:

> The American Revolution was the first outbreak of sovereignty that has swept the world in the centuries since 1776. Its influence spread first to the low countries and then to the Caribbean, Spanish American, the Balkans, West Africans, and the Central Europe in the decades up to 1848. Declarations of independence were among the primary symptoms of this contagion of sovereignty.

The wording of the declaration of Independence contains the rationale of democracy "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Although the French had independence earlier than the United States of American, absolute monarchism which they practiced shrunk the scope of liberties of their people. Encouraged by the spirit of enlightenment, French Revolution led to the abolition of French Monarchy, and established in its stead a secular and democratic republic. The theocratic monarchies that preceded democracy prioritized divine rights of kings, of which the view of king James 1 of England is on point to buttress the inclination: "Even if a king is wicked, it means God has sent him as a punishment for people's sins, and it is unlawful to shake off the burden which God has laid upon them. Patience, earnest prayer and amendment of their lives, are the only lawful means to move God to relieve them of that heavy curse" (Appadorai, 2004). In monarchy, deposing a despotic monarchy is seen as sin against God; infamy of a sort. But, with the power of ballot in a democracy, the edifice of anti-people government is pulled down. Democracy remains the best form of government in the comity of all other forms practiced earlier.

Democracy did not reach down to us in Africa without cost. In Africa, it took several centuries before sovereignty was won across the African states starting not too long before the 1950s. The subjugation of African by European colonizers came after the African population had been decimated through slave trade was sacrilegiously established on the conference table at the Berlin in 1884-5, whereupon, the entire continent of Africa was balkanized to satisfy the European colonial expansionism. The invidious partition lumped together many heterogeneous African nation states, which remains the core of the internecine post independence conflicts consuming greater part of the African continent.

The true independence of Africa is to be traced to the era before colonial invasion. But the modern African political independence is traceable to the event that succeeded African nationalist movements led by Africans elites who had their education overseas, and the returnee combatants from world wars 1 and 11, who after all noticed that despite the apparent mythical aura of a European, that he remained a human person vulnerable to the bullet of an African combatant. These elites and returnee combatants also obtained information that the treaty of self determination ratified by European colonialists extended to the African colonies. Through dogged determination, these nationalists won independence over time for the African states, making possible the current sovereignty of 54 independent African states.

Democracy remains the bastion for the continued self-ruled of African states. Today, the prospects of good governance are great for African, since through it, would the expectations of development be hinged. But the world has so changed. Digital revolution has given birth to new means of social communication. The new media with its arm of social media is affecting every sector of our lives. Elections in Africa cannot be completely shielded from the effects of the social media.

Elections remain the formal means of ensuring transition from one republic to another. Despite clashes of war in many African states, the fledgling democracy in place in Africa has continued to be sustained. Elections will continue to hold in Africa, and it is the interest of this paper to look at the role of social media, a new technology based on web. 2.0 revolution in future elections in 21st century Africa.

Clarification Concepts

Before the main discussion on the subject matter, we shall set a benchmark understanding of the composite concepts in our discourse.

21st Century Africa: Represents a clear case of two faces turned to different directions. It is cut in a dilemma. While one's face is spattered with heavy droplets of bloody armed conflict, the other beams of pleasant smile of hope. As of 2013, approximately 1.07 billion people were living in 54 different countries in Africa (Wikipedia). Following the independence of African countries during the 20th century, economic, political and social upheaval consumed much of the continent.

Since 2009, Nigeria has been the hotbed of bloody insurgency waged by Boko Haram sect against the Nigerian state. Sharing links with other global terrorist networks, such as Al-Qaeda and Al-Shaba, Boko Haram sect repudiates Western education and its influence, and also struggles to Islamize Nigeria. Recently, the Nigerian military has recorded enormous success in countering the terrorist group leading to the recovery of several communities in the group's enclave in North East of the country, and are in place to assault the capital, Bangui since 2012 till date. Congo war has lasted since 1998 till date. The latest fighting in the eastern part involves a rebel group known as the March 23 Movement, codenamed M23 led by Bosco Ntaganda, and covertly supported by Uganda and Rwanda. Since the gruesome killing of Muarmmar Gaddafi on 20 October, 2011 during the revolutionary war animated by Arab spring, Libya has been roiling in civil uprising. Lord's Resistance Army insurgency which started in Uganda since 1987 till present has spread across South Sudan, Congo, Uganda and Central African Republic. This insurgent group led by Warlord Joseph Kony has left in its wake enormous casualties both in human and material capitals. Northern Mali conflict which began since 2012 took off initially as a conflict between Mali government and Tuareg ethnic group. This crisis has been hijacked by Al-Qaeda affiliated Islamists to foment the Islamization of Northern Mali. Somali civil war has been raging since 1991 till date. The latest stage of this war pits the weak central government against Al-Qaeda affiliated Al-Shabab rebels. South Sudan-Sudan border conflict still ongoing since 2012 has put the region on and off war for resource control (Kohn, 1986 in historyguy.com, 2013). The foregoing represents the simmering basket-case of conflict situation that 21st century African enclave.

However, on a happy note, for over a decade, Sub-Saharan African has been experiencing relatively rapid economic growth, averaging about 5 percent a year. Engineering this growth is the information and communications technology (ICT) revolution in Africa, with over 80 percent of urban Africans with access to cell phones. Thanks to economic growth, poverty has been declining, with the absolute number of people living on less than $1.25 a day falling (by about 9 million) for the first time in history (World Bank, 2012/2013).

A central question is why Africa is doing so much better today than it was, say, 20 years ago? The answer includes several factors, such as debt relief, increased aid, high commodity prices and improved macro-economic policies. These policies are the result of decisions by African policy makers who, in turn, are increasingly

accountable to their citizens. And an informed citizenry is better able to hold its leaders to account (World Bank 2012/2013).

Africa as of today remains the world's second-largest and second-most populous continent. At about 30.2 million km^2 (11.7 million sq mi) including adjacent islands, it covers six percent of Earth's total surface area and 20.4 percent of its total land area. With 1.07 billion people as of 2013, it accounts for about 15% of the world's human population. It has 54 fully recognized sovereign states ("countries"), nine territories and two de facto independent states with limited or no recognition. Africa has GDP of US$2.39 trillion as at 2013 (Wikipedia).

So, Africa remains a continent of hope. Only through sustainable democratization of the continent would much better development indicators be realized. To this end, good governance, and leadership accountability remain sacrosanct. In realization of this, democratic elections must be encouraged and consolidated.

Election: For the purpose of this essay, election is a formal decision-making process by which a population chooses an individual(s) to hold public offices(s) (Encyclopedia Britanica online, 2015). Election has been the usual mechanism by which modern representative democracy has operated since the 17th century (Encyclopedia Britanica online, 2015). Election may fill offices in the legislature, sometimes in the executive and judiciary, and for regional and local government. This process is also used in many other private and business organizations, from clubs to voluntary associations and corporations (Wikipedia). For our purpose here, election is taken from its formal sense as mechanism for transition from one democratically elected government to another.

Social Media

The 21st Century Africa is also implicated in the global internet and digital revolution. This situation has given rise to a possibility of emergence in the future of an internet continent. This is because, almost close to two billion world's population inhabits in the internet space. There is the speculation that four man-hours of average internet user is spent surfing the web. Hence, we now have cybercitizens regulated by informal rules of engagement in internet usage. The internet revolution has thus given rise the new media, which is a variant of the traditional media of television, newspapers and other print media mechanism. The new media has a social face, in which virtual interactivity between users take place. Social media as at today affects virtually all sectors of life in Africa.

Social media are computer-mediated tools that allow people to create, share or exchange information, ideas, and pictures/videos in virtual communities and networks. Social media is defined as "a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content"(Kaplan and Haenlein,2010,p.61 in Wikipedia). Furthermore, social media depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. They introduce substantial and pervasive changes to communication between business, organizations, communities, individuals (Jan and Hermkens, 2011 in Wikipedia).

We shall now discuss the linkages between the above clarified concepts, and through analysis speculate on the implication of social media on future elections in the 21st century Africa.

Future Election in 21st Century Africa and the Social Media

Democracy was of Athenian origin. Decisions on matters public concerns were made by adults of aristocratic status at a public theatre. The influence of philosophers of enlightenment broadened the perspective of democracy, thus bringing the dimension of universal adult suffrage, in which eligibility to vote was given an age threshold of about 18 years. This was given constitutional backing in almost all the existing sovereignties. The modern "election", which consists of public elections of government officials, did not emerge until the beginning of the 17th century when the idea of representative government took hold in North America and Europe (Encyclopedia Britanica Online). Inclusion of women in the contemplation of universal adult suffrage received great boost from civil rights Movements in America. Apart from few Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden, that allowed women to vote as early as 1900s, very few sovereign nations reflected such mirror of acceptable application. Moderate feminism has also given greater impetus to affirmative action on women participation in politics. The existing protocols on this mandate made allowance of 35% affirmative action to women. These incidents have encouraged democracy.

Generally speaking, only in representative democracy were elections permissible. Prior to emergence and consolidation of democracy through the rule of law, monarchies and rule of principalities with trappings of aristocracy held sway. But, democracy which was won through revolutionary struggles across the globe, entrusted the responsibilities of governance on the people, from whom legitimacy was conferred on the government.

Much of African countries fell under the dominion of European colonies up until the 1960's when the wave of independence swept across Africa, and other third world countries, signalling the dethronement of the old order of colonial administration, thereby ushering in self-rule. But due to the remaining vestige of imperialism, occasioned by the former colonial masters, and the contiguous imbalance of trade encouraged by lopsided globalization, many African states remain a theatre of the absurd, where principles are maintained only in the breach. True democratization of the African states, has been on and off, with enormous casualties to its basic rules.

Nonetheless, elections have continued to hold in many African states with complaints of sundry wrongs trailing them. Very recently, Ghana and South Africa have demonstrated the capability of holding, free and credible elections. Other countries have put certain mechanisms of control on elections to make them wholesomely acceptable guided by standard best practices. Nigeria, the most populous black nation in the world has promised the readiness through her election management agency, the Independent National Election Commission (INEC) with the Card Reader novelty to conduct free, fair and credible elections by 2015. With minor allegations of irregularities the election has successfully come and gone. However, our concern is not on immediate elections in Africa, but about the future ones in the light of tremendous innovations in the internet sector. In this regard, our searchlight is beamed on the Social Media, to consider the interplay between future elections in Africa and the Social media.

Every election is expected to be an improvement on the past ones. Prior to the invention of the internet, which has been the backbone for online virtual interaction, the Gutenberg miracle of the print media and the innovation of television cable networks served as media of mass communication. But today, both distance and aloofness of the traditional media of communication have been successfully abridged by the internet, in which information flow has assumed greater speed in dissemination. The social media platform of the new media is thus the modern day Areopagus, in which the whole world has been brought into an almost homogenous hamlet of unhindered interactivity.

The rise of new media has increased communication between people all over the world and the internet. This has about an era of citizen journalism. It has allowed people to express themselves through blogs, websites, videos, pictures, and other user generated media. The social media is a typical expression of the new media. The Social media radically break the connection between physical place and social place, making physical location much less significant for our social relationships (croteau and Hoynes, 2013:311). The significance of the social media overlaps with the import of the New Media, which according to Neuman as cited in (croteau and Hoynes, 2003:323), include, but not limited to these:

- Alter the meaning of geographic distance.
- Allow for a huge increase in the volume of communication
- Provide the possibility of increasing the speed of communication.
- Provide opportunities for interactive communication.
- Allow forms of communication that were previously separate to overlap and interconnect.

Thus, social media has enabled us to witness the evolution of a universal interconnected network of audio, video, and electronic text communications that will blur the distinction between interpersonal and mass communication and between public and private communication (Neuman, 1991 in Croteau and Hoynes, 2013:322). Notable genres of Social Media include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Whatsapp, YouTube et cetera. According to Heider (1946), all media networks, especially the ones that are social-media dependent, have a high turnover of information, but Twitter stands out. It ranks as the 'fastest' social media platform. The short message length of micro-blogging communication to be short and quick. The relevance of social media in elections cannot, therefore, be overemphasized. A 2014 study showed that 62% of web users turn to Facebook to find political news (journalism.org, 2014). Research shows that Facebook far surpasses other social media sites, such as You Tube and Twitter, as a source for news about politics and government. In part, this stems from Facebook's broad reach; it is by far the largest social media platform (Mitchell, Gottfried, Kiley and Masta, 2014). Thus, the advent of social media has opened up new ways for people with similar interests to find, share and talk about news including news about politics-with friends and colleagues.

We shall now look at the merits and demerits of the use of Social Media in elections in the 21st century Africa.

THE PROS

Elections are potent instrument of socio-political ordering. Elections when properly organized grant the people the sovereignty in choosing leaders with people-oriented manifestoes for sustainable development. Elections enable the people to make their leaders accountable. Democracy is as yet young in Africa, compared to other old democracies of North America and Europe. Sustainable democracy is required more in Africa than other continents. The huge development deficits bogging the sub-Saharan Africa could only be mitigated through the enthronement of standard democratic principle. Increased jobs, wealth, security and general wellbeing can only come through in Africa by the means of popular elected democratic government.

Political campaigns by constitutionally recognized political parties in any republic, voter education and sensitization by the electoral management agencies, churches, civil society organizations, development agencies, stakeholders et cetera foster proper electoral conduct. All o these call for mass mobilization using all communication interfaces that guarantee mass appeal. And in this era of internet revolution, the above mentioned social media platforms remain indispensable for mass communication. The internet is now a core element of modern political campaigns. Social media activism has encouraged this endeavour. They enable faster communications by citizen movements and deliver a message to a large audience. Apart from the fact that these internet technologies are used for cause-related fund raising, lobbying volunteering community building, and organizing they are used by individual political candidates who use the internet to promote their election campaign (Wikipedia source). In this direction, social media platforms are used to convey campaign messages, which contain ideas that candidates want to share with voters. The message often consists of several talking points about policy issues (Wikipedia source).these issues often engage the attention of the younger generation, who are the more active users of the internet.

Africa is largely a youth populated continent. The youth form the bulk of eligible voters in Africa. And social media platforms are mostly in use among the youth than the older people. In this wise, any politician or political party that despises the social media platforms as outreach channels to the youth voters does so to his/its political peril. The social media has remained incredibly successful at reaching the younger population, while helping all populations organize and promote action. Due to the speedy traffic of information across social media platforms due to their popularity among the youth population, politicians and political parties in Africa cannot neglect the social media for marketing and for dialogue with voters. Facebook was the primary platform for marketing, and twitter was for more continuous dialogue (Enli and Eli, 2013, in Wikipedia).

The social media will be useful in causing major political changes in Africa in the 21st century and beyond. For example, in 2011 Egyptians used Facebook, Twitter and You Tube as a means to communicate and organize demonstrations and rallies to overthrow President Hosini Mubarak. Statistics show that during this time the rate of Tweets from Egypt increased from 2,300 to 230,000 per day and the top 23 protest videos on you tube had approximately 5.5 million views (http://www.washington.edu/news/2011/09/12/new-study-quantifies-use-of-social-media-in-arab-spring/). This has a lot of implication for the existing anti-people governments in Africa, and sit-tight leaders who do not want changes in their sovereignties. Signifying the importance of internet political campaigning, Barack Obama's presidential campaign relied heavily on social media, and new media channels to engage voters, recruit campaign volunteers and arise campaign funds. The campaign brought the spotlight on the importance of using internet in new age political campaigning by utilizing various forms of social media and new media (including Facebook, you tube and a custom generated social engine) to reach new target populations. The campaign's social website, my.barackobama.com, utilized a low cost and efficient method of mobilizing voters and increasing participation among various voter population (Lyons, 2008-11-22, Wikipedia source). The above description is the way to go for elections in the 21st century Africa. Social media serving as a tool for political change is a direct consequence of the fact that public sense of shared grievance and potential for change can develop rapidly (Howard, 2011). Before the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, many citizens aggrieved by what is termed poor performance of the ruling people's Democratic Party (PDP) rooted for change via the social media to accentuate the change slogan of the opposition All progressive Congress (APC). The outcome of the election altered political calculus in Africa where incumbent governments normally rigged out opposition parties using all forms of subtle mechanisms. But the currency of social media is already causing a shift of emphasis, since any electoral fraud could be easily disseminated on the social media platforms. Such checks and balances brought about by the use of social media are potent enough to cause political change, and if undermined could give rise to political upheaval.

The social media shall help in fostering election-related information dissemination in 21st century Africa both now and in the future. The social media phenomena allow for political information true or not, to spread quickly and easily among peer networks. Today, social media sites are encouraging political involvement by uniting like-minded people, reminding users to vote in elections, and analysing users' political affiliation data to find cultural similarities and differences (http://www.facebook.com/notes/facebook-data-science/politics-and-culture-on-facebook-in-the-2014-midterm-elections/1015298396348859).

Social Media platforms form veritable channels for voter education and sensitization. Stakeholders in the electoral processes can easily feed social media users with information regarding the duties, responsibilities and constitutional obligations of the electorate towards ensuring quality election outcome. According to Halpern and Gibbs (2013),"although social media may not provide a forum for intensive or in-depth policy debate, it nevertheless provides a deliberative space to discuss and encourage political participation, both directly and indirectly". This will go a long way in building e-grassroots mobilization for consolidation of democracy in Africa. The possibility of e-elections in Africa in no distant future is conceivable, and by that time, all electoral processes will be carried on the internet backbone. Based on the foregoing propositions, locating all eligible African voters within a customized social media election or politics platform will be inevitable. Soon in Africa with increased internet penetration, electioneering pulse could easily be calibrated on social media platforms. This will enable elections to be won or lost by politicians or political on the social media networks through pollsters. The end of voter education and sensitization is right voting decisions on the part of the electorate.

The avenue created by social media in the sustenance of active participation in all electoral processes will in the long run, converge the African electorate into an e-interactive platform, through which robust debate and activism towards consolidation of democracy will ensue. The social media will remain a good instrument in engendering popular election outcome in Africa. However, whatever is useful could easily be abused. We shall hereunder identify the flipside of the social media as they pertain to futures elections 21st Century Africa.

THE CONS

While an internet continent is conceivable as over 2 billion people already inhabit the internet space, the virtual community is increasing alienating people. On the Facebook for instance, a user could have over 1000 friends, in which very few are known to the person. Due to the depersonalization of social media users, the possibility of fraud related activities on the social media is very high.

The social media has given virtual spaces for certain notable politicians and other juridic entities to be impersonated. This allows some unidentifiable persons to post comments that are entirely injuriously to the practice of democracy. This scenario is more unfortunate in Africa where the basic infrastructure for identification of social media users is not available. There is thus no mirror of accepted usage of social media in promoting democracy as no checks and balances are put on certain posts that social media users host on various social media community unhindered. Due to security laxity of some social media platforms, inauthentic and unverifiable claims are fed to the general public uncensored. This is why certain climes prohibit the use of some social media within their shores.

It happened once upon a time in Nigeria during the region of Ebola virus that a group of friends contrived and circulated wrong information on the cure of the dreaded virus, urging the public to bath with a mixture of salt and water. The information went viral on the social and media, leading to heavy casualties. In the same way, social media platforms could be hijacked by social and media miscreants to foment crises. The possibility of a political party raising uncensored allegations against another party to win support of unsuspecting electorate could be imagined.

Once this form of vendetta is not corrected, counter allegations could mount, which can likely lead to physical altercations amongst the supporters of feuding political parties. Actions like those could lead to pre and post electoral violence, which on all fronts is detrimental to the growth of democracy enabled only through violent-free, credible, fair elections. We already mentioned that social media were applied in organising demonstrations during the Arab spring. They are still being used in many countries to organise pre/post election violence. Africa cannot be completely inoculated against such shortfalls if proper control mechanisms are not applied to curb such activities.

The fact that content validity or authenticity of posts on social media platforms remains far from being realized, the use of social media in future elections in 21st Century Africa remains a very big challenge. However, the

gains of it outweighs the identifiable snags, and when properly managed would bring a lot of success to sustainable democratization of Africa.

Towards a Sustainable Approach in the Use of Social Media in Future Elections In 21st Century Africa

All social media have high rate of turnover of information. The implication is that while it takes a day for reaction to communicate cycle by traditional newspaper, the affected entities react to information on social media in matter of hours or minutes. Pfeffer, Zorbach, Carley (2013) commenting on the usefulness of the social media observed that in the case of highly attractive information, many people can be reached within short period of time. This can result in a temporal dominance of a single topic that, consequently, leads to a large volume of communication. Speed and volume is the first factor identified as relevant for opinion building in social media. Due to the high number of connected neighbours and local clustering (Watts and Strogatz, 1998), information echoes to a social media user from different directions of his or her social network, creating the impression of everybody talking about the same topics or having the same opinion (Pfeffer and Carley,2011). The above narrative is true for politics, where blocs of issues are transacted all the time. Africa of the 21st century is already implicated in the fast growing internet industry, which has encouraged citizen journalism on the social media as a compliment to the traditional media platforms. This citizen journalism affects electioneering.

However, Africa remains a weeping child in terms of internet penetration. Spang-Hanseen (2006) citing Association of Progressive (APC) argues that:

> The internet is a global public space that should be open and accessible to all on a non-discriminatory basis. The internet, therefore, must be seen as a global public infrastructure. In this regard, we recognize the internet to be a global public good related to the concept of the common heritage of humanity and access to it is in the public interest, and must be provided as a global commitment to equality.

The above commitment is the ideal, but far too many African citizens are not provided with internet infrastructure. To this end, Kofi Annan during the world summit on the information society (WSIS) in Tunis, Tunisia between November 16-18, 2015 made bold to say that, "for far too many people, the gains of the internet remain out of reach. There is a tremendous yearning, not for technology per se, but for what technology can make possible". He urged the summit members to make necessary preparations and take the first steps towards the accomplishment of a society where all people have equal access to information.

The fact remains that African is contemplated in the context of Annan's prayer. Internet penetration remains low in Africa due to low investment in internet backbone infrastructure. Without the internet, subscription to host networks will be abysmally low and slow in operation. A cursory look at the state of internet use in Africa reveals that as at 2013, internet use in Africa averaged 16% of its about 1.07 billion population, as against 75% in Europe. Internet availability makes host density high. Average host density in the world as at 2013 required 72 hosts per 1000 inhabitants. At the same time African has a total of 6027 internet hosts, which is of low percentage significance to the total African population. Out of the total hosts, almost 90% were in just three countries, south Africa, Morrocco and Egypt. Nigeria with the largest population in African, which is about 155 million had one third of hosts found in Liechtenstein with its 35,000 inhabitants (Wikipedia source).

If the above deficit is not normalized, the use of social media in future elections in the 21st Century Africa will remain an uphill task. Urgent multi-national attention must be given to this concern for the full launch of Africa into the internet and digital space for functional and affordable application and utilization of the social media in election processes.

When the above initiative is realized, actions must be furthered to ensured that home grown Africa-for-Africa social app dedicated to elections is configured as a platform for interactivity on election related issues on the continent. Such app could be Africa Elections App, which must take into consideration the unique African circumstances, with adaption of all features and attributes of various social media apps. To ensure authenticity of both contents and users, the usage of the app must be through quality security checks in which biometrics must included. Country locations and African generated Internet Protocol(IP) Address must be adopted to ensure proper governance on the use of the app for elections. This platform will allow any election related issues and events in any part of Africa to resonate across other states on the continent. In this, African Union must adopt

legislation, Social Media Act, to control the use of such home grown election app, which must be demonsticated through national legislation, to enhance sustainable democratization of the African continent in the 21st Century.

In the interim, law enforcement agencies must have special units for intervention in the use of social media in elections to ensure that abuses from their use could be assuaged. This will ensure that priority is accorded to sustainability of electoral processes in African towards entrenching democracy, than their application to foster election related violence.

Conclusion

The world is currently linked in an inseparable way by means of the internet. Newer innovations are taking place on the internet. The generation of the new media through the internet platform is one of these novelties. The new media through its social media arm has surpassed the appeal of the traditional media.

This essay contends that much could be achieved in applying the social media in future elections in the 21st Century Africa. Much credibility has been sustained in current elections in Africa through the aid of social media as all election related events are followed up through citizen journalism, in which youth activism has in no small measure enhanced. Those events are easily uploaded on the social media through a tap on either mobile telephony data and/or other internet interfaces. The benefits of the social media in election given their speed, reach and facility far outweighs the identical flipsides. Part of what could be done to mitigate the negative aspects of social media use in elections is the codification of Social Media Act backed by a continental legislation, and domestication of same in all the sovereign states of Africa.

However, the realization of the above objective of applying the gains of the social media in future elections in 21st Century Africa will be greatly impeded should the current stock of poor internet penetration both in the cities or hinterlands of Africa remain unchanged. All hands must be on deck to reverse this trend.

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