



## **Social Media and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria: A Study of Taraba State**

By

**Joseph Manga**

Department of Political Science.

Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria

Tel: +2347032881614, Email:manga7819@gmail.com

&

**Gamboro Bitrus Adi**

Department of Political Science.

Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria

Tel: +2347064840361, Email: gamborobitrusadi@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

The study focused on social media and democratic consolidation in Nigeria with particular reference to Taraba State. It adopted a multi-disciplinary method in gathering and interpreting data as well as other related materials from published books, journals and magazines that are equally related to the topic. The findings from the study revealed that the adoption of social media towards democratic consolidation in Taraba State is yet to be achieved because the relationship between the social media agents and politicians in the state is still saddled with shortcoming or misunderstanding between the two parties. Thus, the study recommended that there should be cordial relationship and functionality between the State and media agencies and that the freedom of the press whether print or electronic should be guaranteed by the state. Media practitioners should equally be dedicated to their work and having the masses in mind instead of their personal interest. It is only in this way that democracy could be consolidated in Taraba State.

**Key words:** Democracy, Democratic consolidation, Social media, Nigeria, Taraba State.

### **Introduction**

The adoption of the Global System of Mobile telecommunication (GSM) by Nigeria in 2001 opened up new vistas of communication on an unprecedented level. This came at a time when the country had just come out of a long period of military dictatorship and once again experimenting with democracy. There is no doubting the fact that this new technology with several social media platforms such as the use of internet for social networking, blogging, video-sharing (YouTube), tweeting, and photo-sharing (Instagram) has greatly enhanced human communication in the 21st century. Considering the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature of the new media, they have become veritable instruments for the deepening of democratic ideals and processes in terms of information sharing, monitoring and evaluation of electioneering processes, reduction of tension and anxieties associated with elections, ensuring and even enforcing transparency and accountability to a large extent.

Ajayi (2007) observe that, the media (print and electronic) in Nigeria especially the privately-owned ones have always been strong instruments of sensitisation and mobilization of people towards democracy even in the dark days of brutal military dictatorship however, their



reach was limited by such factors as government intimidation and harassments, logistics, limited resources and their elitist ownership and control. But with the widening of the communication media space through improved technology information dissemination and sensitisation of people now have a widespread immediacy and more diligent follow up of events. This is as a result of their easy accessibility and availability irrespective of social status. Even with the cheapest mobile phones one can still access some social media platforms at reasonable cost for information, education and entertainment. Fundamentally the media exists as an organ of information sourcing and dissemination, social enlightenment and mobilisation. These functions set the media apart as an important factor in the relationship between the government and the governed thereby making them indispensable for good governance, the deepening of democracy, societal growth and development generally.

André-Michel (2010) Maintained that, the emergence of the new social media is a major phenomenon that has transformed the interaction, communication and sharing of information between people throughout the world in the 21st century. It is important to point out here that social media is not a new concept. It has been evolving since the dawn of human interaction. Meanwhile, during the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was the emergence of new forms of social media networks such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, internet service among others. The emergence of these new forms of social media revolutionised many aspects of human communication. Thus, today social media have become a natural part of the everyday lives of people all over the world. For instance, as at 2010, there were about 4.5 million Facebook users in the world and this has been increasing rapidly. This development makes social media fantastic tools for communicating with large audience.

Unwin (2012) said, the arrival of these new media platforms has continued to change the way people communicate with each other or one another around the world. For example, mobile phone penetration rates, in particular, have resulted in a plethora of ideas for new media platforms aimed at bridging the information divide between the well-connected and the disconnected in addition, Internet-based communication has equally started to gain Importance in Nigeria. Both mobile phones and the internet provide exciting new opportunities for one-to-one as well as one-to-many communication. The much reported rapid spread of mobile connectivity and services, as well as different forms of public and shared internet access have allowed a growing number of people who may not have access to a computer or a fixed connection to take part in the global conversation.

André-Michel (2010) the use of new social media in politics has continued to grow in many parts of Africa since the 21st century. The role of social media networks such as mobile phones' SMS, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in deepening the democratization of Nigeria in recent times cannot be overemphasized. For example, 2011 alone witnessed a massive use of mobile phones' SMS, Facebook and Twitter in the general elections in Nigeria. The social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are amongst the most visited websites in Nigeria. Due to their participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature, they have become veritable



instruments for carrying out election campaigns and other electioneering activities, political engagement and mobilization among others.

Since the inception of democratic administration in Taraba State, in 1992, the role of social media was unique in consolidating democratic administration in the State. For instance, media focused on the empowerment of individual citizens and promote democratic ideals through the spread of information. It also does not only investigate, monitor, and exposed government's inefficiencies and corruptions. But also assumes some of its responsibilities especially when the latter fails.

Although some Taraba citizens tends to agree that the principle of democratic consolidation in the state was inevitable because they have witness four democratic and civilian administrations which they claim has been quite efficient. Others were of the contrary views by agitating that, the State is yet to fulfil its democratic aim of self-determination. Some tends to blame the media for not meeting up their aim and objectives. Thus, there is a serious gap between the social media and its usage by Taraba people with considerable effect on democratic consolidation in the State.

### **Statement of Problem**

It is a clear assertion that democracy is a philosophy that is based on the principle of self-determination. It therefore, has the capability to ensure popular participation, freedom of political action and to draw upon the talents of the greatest numbers in the polity for the promotion and satisfaction of common interests. Basically, inclusion in power means collusion in its benefit. However, the basic problem of this study is the non-recognition of the power of the social media as a tool for democratic consolidation as both the government and people of Taraba tends to rely only on the conventional media in their pursuit of democratic ideals in the state.

Similarly, in Taraba State, there are still arguments by citizens that the principles and benefits of democracy is yet to be attained and cannot be achieved without the power of the press. If the social media is said to have failed in consolidating democracy in Taraba State, the questions that needs effective answers are: what has been the role of social media in consolidating democracy since its inception in Taraba State? What were the problems faced by the social media in consolidating democracy in the state? What were the relationship between the media and politicians in respect of instituting a democratic administration? This study attempts to answer these questions by examining and analysing the role of social media in the consolidation of democracy in Taraba State. It will also highlight the relationship between social media, the mass media and political development in the State.

### **Conceptual Review**

#### **Social Media**

There is no universal definition of this concept. However, the concept has been viewed by Boyd and Ellison (2007) as "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system. According to the Australian Electoral Commission (2011), social media can be defined as "online tools and Web sites that facilitate many-to-many communications between users. Specific examples include Facebook and Twitter, but may also



include more regional or niche services and more longstanding Collaborative environments such as web-based forums and wikis. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) see social media as internet-based applications built on the technological and ideological foundations of Web. Social Media can equally be called a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting. Cohen, (2009) the term “social media” refers to the wide range of internet-based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchanges, contribute user-created content, or join online communities.

The first social media based on web was Geocities in 1994, theglobe.com in 1995 and Classmates.com which began operation in 1995. Company of Friends was the next online network offered by Fast Company Business Magazine launched in 1997 and introduced business networking on the Internet. Other sites have followed them soon after, including Sixdegrees.com which established in 1997, then Epinions.com as a circle of trust in 1999 followed by European Equivalents Ciao, Dooyoo and ToLuna.

Many of early social media tried to bring people together and facilitate connections by chat rooms while enabled users to share personal information and ideas via personal web pages. The newer generation of social media web sites began to flourish with the emergence of Make out club in 2000, however from 2002, online social media began to appear based on web 2.0 technology. The new form of online social networks which is commonly used in online communities, became particularly popular in 2002 and flourished with the advent of the web site called Friendster. Friendster is using the social media model called "circle of friends" which developed by the British computer scientist Jonathan Bishop. The popularity of social media web sites has grown rapidly, so much so that in 2006, Myspace has had a higher rate of visited pages than the search engine “Google”.

When we talk of social media, we mean those Internet-based tools and services that allow users to engage with each other, generate content, distribute, and search for information online. In other words, the social media are interactive web-based media platforms that offer citizens opportunity and place to connect, share opinions, experiences, views, contacts, knowledge, expertise, as well as other things like job and career tips. They belong to a new genre of media that focuses on social networking allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends and share information with greater freedom as well as publish their views on issues on the World Wide Web. Chatora (2012) observes that it is this interactive or collaborative nature of these tools that makes them social.

Mayfield describes these media as “online platforms that promote participation, openness, conversation and connectedness”. Nation, sees them as “social instruments of communication which are different from the conventional instruments like newspapers or magazines. They are online content, created by people using highly accessible and scalable publishing technologies to disseminate information across geographical boundaries, providing interaction among people. They support democratization of knowledge and information, thereby making the people both information producers and consumers.

Social media emerged with the advent of the internet and the World Wide Web. They are usually associated with the term “web 2.0” which is used to describe websites that provide opportunity for a user to interact with the sender of a message. Nwabueze (2010) observes that “Web 2.0” refers to the state of the web from 2004 till date; a period when interactive websites emerged as



opposed to “web1.0” which describes the state of the web prior to 2004. Web-based communities, social networking sites video-sharing sites, Wikis, and blogs, are among examples of web 2.0 sites.

In addition, Social media refers to online media that facilitates communication through the use of feedback engaging the users active in the generation and improvement of the content, it is opposed to the traditional media, which delivers content but doesn't allow the users to modify the content. In their reasoning, social media was divided into several dimensions which include: blogs (individual/community), collaborative project sites, virtual worlds (social/game) and social networking sites. These virtual social worlds could be utilized for social media advertising. Possessing all these outlined characteristic features and even more, Facebook therefore is a good example of a social media. Social media in general has been through some form of transformation over the past decade and since then the traditional media is gradually being replaced with social media networks. As a result of the emergence of web 2.0 technologies, social networking websites such as Facebook are readily accessible and provide the users with connection to virtually everyone around the globe. Now people spend more time on the social media communicating through social platforms like Facebook and inadvertently leaving the traces of their contacts, which are readily available to the managers of these social media.

In addition, the role of the Nigerian social media in actualizing democracy cannot be overemphasized. The annulment of June 12, 1993 election by General Ibrahim Babangida’s regime tested the effectiveness and strength of the media. Media houses and journalists were able to sensitize the masses about the evils been perpetuated by the military and the elites who supported the annulment of the 1993 election considered being one of the freest and fairest polls ever seen in Nigeria. The Nigerian social media made the Babangida regime become unpopular and eventually Babangida bowed to pressure by stepping aside on August 27, 1993. All through the Abacha years, the Nigerian social media launched sustained attacks on his antidemocratic actions. General Abacha incarcerated MKO Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the 1993 presidential election on June 24, 1994. In order to discredit the Sani Abacha regime, the media engaged in extensive reportage and publication of anti-military news and articles. The constant flow of information supplied by the media about the misrule of the military regime and the need for democratic rule proved decisive in the mobilization of the civil society as well as the international community to pressurize the military government to relinquish power (Ngara and Esebonu, 2012).

The activities of Civil Liberties Organization (CLO); Constitution Rights Project (CRP), Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADL), National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), Campaign for Democracy (CD) and the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) exposed the regime of

Abacha in a bad light due to its poor human rights records (Obi, 2000).

The dictatorial regime of General Abacha clamped down on several media houses and went as far as putting several seasoned journalists in jail. In 1993, 70,000 copies of *Tell* magazine, 50 copies of *Tempo*, 50 copies of the first edition of *The News* and thousands of copies of *The Sunday Magazine* were seized by security agents (Ajebode, 2010). Likewise, the publisher of



Razor Magazine, Mr. Moshood Fayewimo, Tony Irolade and Alex Kaba of the News/Tempo were also arrested and detained at different times, while others like Chris Anyanwu, publisher of The Sunday Magazine, Kunle Ajibade, executive editor of The News Magazine, George Mba of Tell magazine and Ben Charles Obi of Classique were sentenced by a secret military tribunal to various jail terms over alleged involvement in the 1995 phantom coup (Malaolu, 2004:22). Top notch media outfits such as *Tell*, *The News* and Radio *Kudirat* had to publish and operate from unknown locations to avoid arrest and seizure of publications by coercive state agents. As espoused by Olukotun, the guerilla styled media worked effectively by exposing government's secrets and challenging the authoritarian regime of Abacha (Key 2004:17).

The sudden demise of General Abacha on June 8, 1998 brought a sigh of relief on Nigerians especially the civil society organizations and the mass media. With the exit of Abacha, the Nigeria media did not relent in advocating for the return to civil rule. The doggedness of the mass media paid off as Abacha's successor, General Abdulasalami Abubakar released several media practitioners, human rights activists, members of civil society organizations and individuals who were perceived to have been enemies of the late Head of State. Eventually, General Obasanjo (retd), who was accused and jailed by Abacha in 1995 for allegedly conspiring to oust him from power, was voted as the democratically elected President of Nigeria in 1999. Obasanjo's emergence as President from the same geo-political zone (Ogun state) as the late MKO Abiola was widely supported by the mass media as a bold move in fostering national integration after the dark episodes Nigeria passed through under the Babangida and Abacha years in power.

### Democracy

Wikipedia (2017) defined democracy as a system of government in which the citizens exercise power directly or elect representatives from among them to form a governing body. It is sometimes referred to as rule of the majority. Gunther and Puhle, (1995) described democracy as people's rule or rule by the people. The authors see democracy as one of the abiding legacies of the ancient Greek civilization in the contemporary world and observed that the practice of democracy in its original form originated in Greece. This is not without any prejudice to the notion that comparable practices of democracy thrived in other places, even in Africa prior to written history.

Democracy exists where the principal leaders of a political system are selected by a competitive election in which the bulk of the population has the opportunity to participate. Implicit in the definition is the notion of election as a fundamental element of democracy. It equates democracy to election and the electoral processes in which the power of decision and choice rests with the people. Democracy to him revolves around the selective processes through which leaders emerge and ascend to power. Today, democracy is considered as the most desirable form of government and man's best idea on earth for governance. Under this system of government, authority is rooted in the consent of the people, that is, in the belief that people have the right to run or at least to choose their government.

All known democracies have some sort of shortfall because of their failure to exercise in practical terms the characteristics and demands of true democracy. They compel their citizens to



do things that they would rather avoid or not prefer to do, such as paying taxes, observing curfew, serving in the military, driving at or under the speed limit, not drinking alcohol before a certain age, and so on. Democracies impose clear, legally established limits to what elected officials can do. All participants in the system must obey the rules regarding such principles as; open, free and fair elections, one person one vote, and acceptance of majority decisions while respecting a minorities' right to dissent.

### **Democratic Consolidation**

Democratic consolidation is meant to describe the challenge of making new democracies secure, of extending their life expectancy beyond the short term, of making them immune to the threat of authoritarian regression, of building dams against eventual reverse waves. To Schedler (1998) democratic consolidation practically refers to the institutionalization of democracy, such that it becomes self-sustaining and secure from the threat of authoritarian regression and is considered the "only game in town."

Linz & Stepan (1996) sees democratic consolidation in terms of avoiding democratic breakdown, avoiding democratic erosion and progressive deepening of democracy. From the perspective of avoiding democratic breakdown, consolidating democracy means reducing the probability of its breakdown to the point where we can feel reasonably confident that democracy will persist in the near future. This "classical" meaning of democratic consolidation sees it as regime survival. From the perspective of deepening democracy, two positive versions are discernible. While the first positive version involves completing the democratic transition by travelling from electoral to liberal democracy, the second deals with "continuum of democracy", that is by deepening liberal democracy and pushing it closer to advanced democracy. Schedler (1998) maintained that, social media, social networking and democratic consolidation have a kind of organic relationship that could service the goals and aspirations of sustainable democratic development if well employed.

### **Social Media and Democratic Consolidation: The Linkage**

The relationship between democracy and the social media has been a regular topic of discussion ever since the emergence of liberal democratic theory. In modern societies, it is impossible to talk intelligently about democracy without considering the role played by print and electronic media in disseminating political messages to the public. Especially following the creation of electronic media in the twentieth century, the connections between democracy, political campaigns, public opinion, and journalistic practices have become the focus of great attention and anxiety among communication scholars.

The politically oriented public sphere is fundamentally linked to the development of the media. This is because social media became not only reporters of news but shapers of public opinion. He further observed that, as newspapers became increasingly dependent on commercial advertising for support, economic considerations meant that newspaper editorial policy and journalistic practice could also be influenced by those who controlled financial resources. The result is that, wealthy individuals or those who control wealth have more influence over public



opinion and ultimately over what policies are changed than do members of the lower and middle classes.

Other scholars also have worried that, in addition to the economic forces that might distort public debate, the heavy reliance of the modern media on governmental sources of information might lead in some cases to less scrutiny and criticism of governmental policies. Further complicating the relationship between democracy and the media has been the emergence of computer-based interactive media, including the internet, and other new technologies, such as facsimile machines. New media forms provide ordinary people with unparalleled opportunities to distribute information quickly and inexpensively to large numbers of their fellow citizens. The democracy potential of such new media is sometimes described as being a way to compensate for the ownership of traditional media forms example newspapers by fewer and large corporations, given the concern that this trend to media monopolies' has or will reduce the diversity of opinions that are expressed in established media.

### **Structural- Functionalist Theory: A Framework of Analysis**

This study adopts the structural- functionalist theory as its framework of analysis. According to Almond and Verba (1969), structural-functionalist approach is relevant in this context and provides a more comprehensive theoretical framework for the analysis of social media and democratic consolidation. It is a theory which aims at providing a consistent and integrated theory from which can be derived explanatory hypotheses relevant to all aspect of political and media system.

According to Almond and Verba's structural-functional analysis, all political system must perform certain requisite functions and, by comparison, one must identify which structure performs. Almond and Verba's structural-functional theory describes societal reality largely in terms of structures, processes, mechanisms and functions. In this model the parts and pieces of an organism contribute to the functioning of the organism as an entity. Thus, the role of social media toward democratic consolidation is very imperative. The functionalist tradition postulates the social systems meet certain needs and suggests that there are functional imperatives that must be met in order for a group to survive and one of such need is the medium of effective communication.

The theory also defines function as the satisfaction of a need. Lim (2012) claimed that the rules of conduct within a society lead to a social structure consisting of defined roles that are coordinated by these rule. As these rules are enacted, they contribute to maintaining the social structure. This alignment of social relations is critical for the survival of the society. Society can, therefore, be viewed as system of mutually interdependent parts (Lim, 2012), thus, a change in one segment of the culture of a society result in corresponding changes in other segment of the culture of that society. This simple model of a socio-cultural system established on the mechanisms structures of the human body can indicates the place of a particular element of culture or social institution with respect to other elements in the system. Thus, no custom or institution exists within a vacuum. Charles-Worth (1968) identified certain characteristics features embodied in the structural-functionalism approach. These include: An emphasis on the whole system as the unit of analysis.





The idea of structural-functionalist approach in political science represents a vast improvement over the then prevailing principle of democratic consolidation. Almond and Verba (1969) outlined an approach to understanding political system that took into account not only their structural components (institutions) but also their functions within the system as a whole. Thus, instead of focusing on such concepts as institution, organization, or group, Almond and Verba turned to “role and structures”.

In applying the structural functionalist theory to this study, it is realizable that the social media is one of the structures that perform roles that could shape the performance of the system, in this case, the political system which is saddled with the responsibility of managing and consolidating democracy in not only Taraba state but in Nigeria at large. It is equally pertinent to understand the social media as being part and parcel of the larger political system with the responsibility of contributing its quota to the overall effective functioning of the political system. This means that the abdication of its role as a societal watchdog will negatively affect the pursuit of democratic ideals by the larger political system.

### **The Social Media and Democratic Consolidation in Taraba State**

Democracy has become the most dominant political movement in the world today. The Popularity of this political practice has been a worldwide trend over the years. In effect, by the second half of the 20th century, most independent states in the world had a government that embodied some of the tenets of democracy. Taraba state assumed a new governance status in 1991 following its creation and emergence as a state in Nigeria. At its inception, the state was led by the military but military dictatorship was replaced by representative democracy in 1999 when Nigeria returned to civil governance after many years of military leadership. The advent of democracy brought with it hopes and aspirations of good governance, prosperity and sustainable development all of which has become a mirage several years after the country’s return to democracy.

The source and nature of transition in 1991 was later found to constitute threat to the foundation of democracy and obliterates the efforts at consolidating democracy. Since restoration of democratic rule in Taraba, change of government has been orderly while elections have been periodic. Between 1999 and 2023 six different civilian administrations have emerged and there have been four successive transitions from one civilian government to another. This began in 1992 during the Babangida’s government democratic experiment. Social media is simply the medium by which individuals, group, or society presents their thought or feelings in respect of their problem which may involves political participation, self-determination, economic determination and other socio-cultural problems. Such feelings either presented in written form, broadcast, and other computer gargets and channel such as Facebook, twitter etc. Social media is also one of the businesses in the society which does not perform entirely as a commercial enterprise. It performs and operates as either a support to and or watchdog of government functionality. It is only in this manner that the principle of democracy can be consolidated.

In another sense, Balking, (1998) categorised the role of social media in to three: firstly, social media helps people understand the operations of government. Secondly, social media



encouraged political participations that guarantee decision making, and thirdly, social media holds government officials accountable. The medium by which the government and the citizen will arrive at a unanimous decision towards achieving its aim and objectives is the effective use of the social media. Therefore, both sides need each other in the process of democratic consolidation.

For instance, is clear about the participative role of media in making decisions. Media organisations should always maintain impartiality in most political and governmental issues. There would always be a point where media should take a strong stance thereby manifesting its concern for the public. The media should take a stand and create a venue for public discourse which is purposely promoted in order to create noises and loud dissents. Editorials and opinion columns and pages in newspapers are some of the ways by which the heart of the media company is reflected. These convey the stance of the media organization as regards a particular issue or political concern.

Sometimes, this stance contradicts that of the government and it most usually contributes to the furtherance and expansion of discourses amongst members of the public, the academia, industry players, politicians, government officials and other stakeholders. When these discourses are already widespread, loud and often times gone viral, the government is compelled not to maintain a blind eye but to take them into consideration. By this, the media becomes a part of the dynamics of political and democratic decision-making.

The above role has been undertaken by the social media in Taraba State which in all fairness has been up and doing in setting the agenda for political discourse and in the process keep government in check from abuse of office and other forms of misdemeanour. In Taraba State there is also great awareness of its citizens in the use of social media which has served as a monitoring tool for the activities of government and as well aid the growth and development of democracy in the state.

There is also the fact that the social media opens the life of government officials in the state to public scrutiny and in the process enables the monitoring of their activities and as well restraint them from committing infractions against the state. Public officers in Taraba State have come to realize the power and efficacy of social media in exposing corrupt practices and have somehow aid their conduct in the public space. So, it is stating the obvious that the social media has strongly supported the delivery of not only good governance in the state but the delivery of the dividend of democracy to the good people of the state.

In consolidating democracy Relly (2012) maintained that, the media does not only investigate, monitor, and expose government's inefficiencies and corruptions but also assumes some of its responsibilities especially when government fails. There are two indications of a failed government. These are: vital institutions are no longer functioning as they used to and majority of the populace no longer trust the government institutions and failure in the side of media in monitoring and reporting such shortcoming of the government institutions. Similarly, Yeoh (2011) opined that, the media has assumed the role of social services, providing free access to telecommunications, rescuing victims, feeding people, organising fund-raising and all other needed services it has deemed necessary to offer. Media organisations also facilitate calls for



international aids, which could lead to an influx of donations in various forms from foreign governments and international donor agencies.

As a matter of fact, there are several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Taraba State which is part of the North East with records of insurgent activities particularly by the Boko Haram sect. These organizations have been at the fore front of rendering help to the numerous displaced persons and even refugees. The social media is also partnering with these NGOs and aid in reporting their activities as well as calls for the protection of the aid and humanitarian workers in the region. At best, social media influences government, serves as a check on governmental activities, demand transparency and accountability in the management of the resources of the state.

### **Factors Militating Against Social Media Efforts at Democratic Consolidation in Taraba State**

Elections in Taraba have been characterized by monumental irregularities and malpractices which magnitude increases with every election. Even though Taraba has experienced over ten years of uninterrupted democratic practice there are various challenges confronting democratic practice, consolidation and good governance in the state. Therefore, as far as ordinary Taraba people are concerned, democracy is not for them, but for the politicians and their cronies. The masses are yet to reap any dividend of democracy in the state.

In Taraba, the government is not accountable to the people, it seems like there is a divide between what goes on in government and what is being reported to the citizens in the social media space. According to Okoye (2005), there is no transparent system where the public is allowed to participate in policy formation and have a say in how these policies should be implemented. Taraba has a large amount of natural resources but lacks proper accountability measures. In part, this could be due to a lack of connective infrastructure like roads, internet access and electricity which service delivery and social accountability systems depend on. This lack of infrastructure is caused by poor resource management by government.

Taraba has substantial natural resources to accommodate its expanding population but only a few people in the state have access to the money generated from the resources. A large Proportion of the citizens are living below poverty line amidst the massive wealth in the state. Thus, most public officers in the state are out to embezzle government funds as a means of providing for their retirement having known that their pension will not take them anywhere at retirement.

However, one of the major limiting factors of democratic consolidation in Taraba is the lack of strong government agencies to enforce laws and rules as sternly as they need to. This creates an opportunity for public officials to embezzle funds without fear of repercussion or punishment. Taraba is degenerating into a society without a discernible legalistic framework for law enforcement agencies or judicial system. In Taraba, anyone that is favoured in political patronage can basically get away with most crimes, and some of these crimes involve money laundering, uncontrollable theft of government money and other illegal crimes (Ogundiya, 2009).



Another major challenge and threat to democratic consolidation in Nigeria and precisely in Taraba is corruption. Transparency International in 2004 projected Nigeria as the 2nd most corrupt country in the world (132nd out of 133 countries surveyed) (Akinwumi, 2004). Taraba is also one of the most corrupt state in Nigeria. It has been argued that the war on graft has been difficult to win because the act is perpetrated by policy makers themselves. Oko (2008) observes that nothing enervates democracy more than corruption. It not only distorts governance but also provides perverse incentives for dysfunctional behaviour as well as diminishes the quality of life of the citizens by diverting funds for social services into private pockets.

For there to be democratic consolidation in Taraba State, the politics god-fatherism must be completely eradicated. God-fatherism is a hindrance to democratic consolidation. God-fatherism has been identified as a major cause of political violence and corruption since the return of democracy in 1999. According to Ogundiya (2009), god-fatherism is both a symptom and a cause of the violence and corruption that together permeates the political process in Taraba. Many public officials are indebted to their political godfathers because of their rise in politics and they are expected to repay the debt during their stay in office. The implication of this is draining the meagre resources which could have been used to address the basic problems of the masses. God-fatherism has frustrated the democratic process by retarding the selection of credible leaders, thereby jeopardizing democratic consolidation in the country.

Another issue bedevilling the ability of the social media to contribute to democratic consolidation in the State is the role of some media agents on the primary election of candidates. Here media professionals tend to pay greater attention to best-known candidates and to put great importance on performance in a few early primaries or caucuses means that the choices of those professionals may have an enormous effect on the outcome of the campaign. In such issues, even when media outlets talk about such related issues, those issues may concern campaign issues of the dignity of the candidate rather than policy issues such as income generation, tax etc. Another complaint is that some electronic media such as Facebook, television, etc. address a diverse mass audience that discourages candidates from taking any meaningful decision for fear of alienating some voters. As a result of the above observations, scholars concluded that the media have not met their obligations to the public by providing relevant information about the public policies that are preferred by different candidates.

In the State it was equally observed that, the primary source of political information for most people is a passive medium designed for personal entertainment rather than encouraging political action and a sense of civic responsibility. For instance, the State media channels are more of pawn in the hands of the executive with which they propagate their personal issues that are less important to the state. Thus only the exceptional individuals are inspired by few social media to take an active and personal interest in politics, let alone in political campaigns and other political activities.

### **Social Media and Democratic Consolidation in Taraba State: The Way Forward**

For democracy to be consolidated in Taraba State there must be respect for laws embodied in the Constitution. A clear statement that is interpreted by an independent judiciary and strengthened by the legal culture in the civil society must be in place. According to Linz and Stepan (1996), to



sustain rule of law, the state needs compulsory taxation to be able to pay for the police, judges and other basic services. If the rights of citizens are not respected, or if their basic entitlements are not guaranteed, then the prospect for democratic consolidation becomes non-existent. The social media have a duty to perform here by both educating the populace on their rights and obligations and as well hold government to account.

Taraba's political arena includes core institutions of the society such as political parties, elections, electoral rules, legislatures etc. These institutions need to be effectively harnessed and mobilized by the media in order for them to be awake to their duties. In recent times, the political arena has lost public confidence. This is because, the country has been faced with elections and electioneering processes which has yielded little or no democratic gains. Political actors who make vague and unfulfilled campaign promises must be reminded by the social media and made to face the full wrath of the people by denying them votes in subsequent elections. The social media must liaise with civil society organizations in creating awareness for the need to hold government and public officers to account. This much was emphasized by Linz and Stepan (1996) in their analysis of the importance of a stabilized political society and the role of civil society by asserting that civil society performs the function of mobilization and help in pushing political transition which often results in democratic consolidation.

Civil society groups consist of social movements such as religious groups, associations, trade unions, journalists etc. The reason for recognizing the civil society as an important organ of society is for its capability to mobilize the opposition, as seen in many countries in Eastern Europe. However, it is not only organizations that play an important role in the civil society, but also the ordinary citizens. For democratic consolidation to be attained in Taraba State, the role of civil society groups must be acknowledged and recognized as an integral part of the media and agents of mobilization.

## Conclusion

This paper examined the role of social media in democratic consolidation in Taraba State. It discussed ways and means adopted by the social media in the democratic space as well as the factors militating against democratic consolidation and its attainment. From the analysis, the two main concepts which formed the bed rock of the study i.e. democracy and democratic consolidation were also analyzed. There is no doubt that Taraba State is not yet democratically consolidated. In fact, democratic practice in Taraba State is still at its lowest ebb with little or nothing to show for democratic advancement and no delivery of the dividends of democracy. Dividends of democracy in this regard remains political representativeness, enthronement of civil and political rights, public accountability, peaceful co-existence of different peoples and ethnic groups, freedom of association and speech, rule of law among others. The only means of restoring hope to the people of Taraba is the provision of visible elements of democratic consolidation such as the presence of vibrant press, independent judiciary, budding civil society as well as acceptance of elections as a means of choosing political leaders without undue interference from godfathers.



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#### **About the Authors**

**Joseph Manga** is a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria.

**Gamboro Bitrus Adi** is a PhD student in the Department of Political Science, Federal University Wukari, Taraba State, Nigeria.