ICTS, Social Media and Participatory Politics in Africa: Mutual Friends or Man-Made Foes

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Abstract: Many communication scholars have described social media as two edged sword. This study was an attempt at analyzing whether ICTs and social media are indeed friends to man-kind or foes to humanity, especially as it concerns their use in politics. Adopting the qualitative research approach, the study which was guided by the philosophies of the social network theory, uses and gratifications theory and gate-keeping theory notes that the use of ICTs and social media is fast becoming a common phenomenon in African politics, especially in the electoral process, evident in recent elections across the continent and beyond. It argues that as far as the doctrine of free flow of information is concerned; the technologies are the right media for political communication. It further contends that ICTs and social media are indeed, technologies with double edges, quick and sharp with positive and negative features. The study recommends greater adoption and use of ICTs and social media in electioneering activities in Africa and establishment of strict monitoring mechanisms to minimize their inherent weaknesses and maximize their intrinsic values in electoral process in the continent. This we believe would go a long way in fostering transparency, accountability, sanity and bring more decorum into the polity.

Key words: Icts · Social Media · Participatory Politics · Africa · Mutual Friends · Man-Made Foes

INTRODUCTION

The discovery of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and social media has greatly enhanced human communication. The new technologies due to the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature have barely made everyone who can use them a mass communicator. This brings to fruition the prediction of Marshal McLuhan in 1964 that the world would someday become a "Global village" where what happens in one part of the world would be known instantly and simultaneously worldwide.

The coming of social media in particular is perhaps the most phenomenal among various platforms of communication made available by the advance in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). The possibilities they have created in human communication and interaction are beyond bounds. By just processing a button today, one can stay right in his bedroom and access information, entertainment, events and enjoy full interaction with the world. Writing on this development, Abubakar [1] observe that the new

media of communication have in no small measure helped the community to be aware of each other. Expounding on this, Adamu [2] writes that:

As the media shrink the world, people will become increasingly involved in one another's lives and as people come to know more about others who were hitherto separated from them by distance, they will form new beneficial relationships.

According to Adelabu [3] Baran's argument is relevant to this discuss as it draws attention to what ICTs and social media are doing in the area of human communication, especially as it concerns the fostering of relations and interaction among people.

Social media are interactive, web-based media. They belong to the new genre of media that focus on social networking, allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends, share personal information, as well as publish their own views on the internet. Adeyanju and Haruna [4] refers to these media as social instruments of communication which are different from the conventional instrument like newspapers. According to him, "They are channels of communication made possible by social

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interactions often among heterogeneous persons". These media he believes lay emphasis on dialogue or two-way-communication among senders and receivers. Adibe [5] agrees with him that social media are media designed to disseminate information through social interaction, using web-based technologies to transform and broadcast media monologues into social dialogues.

In many parts of the world today, individuals, groups, organizations and even nations are taking advantage of the opportunities provided by these technologies and other e-media platforms to mobilize millions of people to support and advance their course. In the political sphere it has become a veritable tool for mobilizing citizens towards active participation in the political process and Democratic projects.

Adibe and Odoemelam [6] observes that the success of President Obama's Presidential campaigns in 2008 and his eventual emergence as first black president of the United States was largely credited to his active use of face-book to mobilize millions of volunteers and voters. This paper examines the use of these technologies in Africa from the participative of ascertaining whether they are indeed beneficial or detrimental in political process in Africa. It analysis experts' views on using both ICTs and social media in fostering free and fair elections and promoting stable and sustainable democracy in the ethno-political-cum-religious crisis-ridden region.

The Problem: ICTs and social media are a formidable force for social engineering and political electioneering. However, despite the importance of these technologies in political mobilization, scholars have always made haste to point out that both ICTs and social media are indeed technologies with double edges, quick and sharp with positive and negative values. The technologies have played both positive and negative roles in the democratic process in Africa in recent time. For instance, their impact in the Arab uprising in North Africa and in the post-election violence in some states of northern Nigeria in 2011 is still fresh in the mind.

Again, the low penetration and access especially in sub-Saharan Africa is still an issue of serious worry. Writing on penetration of new media in Africa, Osuala in Agba [7] writes that:

The diffusion of new technologies in Africa is still at a snail speed such that the gap between the information rich developed countries and African countries continue to increase everyday….. Africa has 13% of world population but only 2% of the world telephone lines and 1% internet connectivity. Consequently, most African countries have not been able to reap the abundant benefits of the global information revolution in many areas of life.

Also, in many parts of Africa where ICTs and social media are in use, they are still mainly an urban affair and use are mostly elitist. Perhaps, the most worrisome of it all is the problem of weak or absence of regulation of the social media in particular as Kidafa, [8] observe that "Regulating traditional media in the face of issues like obscenity, copyright, right to privacy, etc, was upheaval, but have became more difficult with the emergence of social media". The increasing use of social media and other online tools has indeed led to greater privacy challenges. This is to say that with the great potentials of the internet and other digital social media, is included the challenges of monitoring and regulation. The relevance of these authors' observation to this study is that the new found media require some sort of regulation if our society must not fall beyond the short, nasty and brutish clime described in George Orwells' animal farm which according to [9] to propose for the anarchical theory of the media. The theory according to them foresees a society in chaos owing to disorder in seeking, receiving and disseminating of unfettered information.

Literature Review
Theoretical Base: In our quest to adequately reflect the issues involved in this study, three theories have been proposed: Social network theory, Uses and Gratifications theory and Gate-keeping theory.

Social Network Theory: This theory explains the mechanisms by which social interactions can promote or inhibit individual and collective behavior. The theory according to Baran [10] emphasizes the importance of "Social network" which refers to the set of linkages and social relationships between/among members of society. Applied to this study, the theory provides an explanation as to how social media work in fostering social interaction that in turn influence societal action especially in elections, sustenance of democracy and fostering of good governance.

Uses and Gratification Theory: This theory is associated with the works of Chukwu [11]. It belongs to the limited or indirect effect theories of mass communication. The theory according to Eze [12] is concerned with what people do with media instead of what media do to people. The assumption is that people influence the effects media have on them. That is to say that uses and gratification

theory takes a more humanistic approach to media use and effect. It assumes members of the audience are not passive but play active role in interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. The theory suggests that people use media to fulfill specific gratifications. Imoh [13] notes that the main thrust of the theory is that audience members have certain needs which make them to be selectively exposed to, attend to and retain media messages because of the perceived gratifications derivable from such messages. Thus, this theory emphasizes the fact that people are important in the process of communication because they choose content, make meaning and act on that meaning [14].

Applying the uses and gratification theory to this study, users of social media are intentional seekers of such messages. They are able to select and use the technology in ways that suit their purpose. Thus, they as the audience are active and not passive. Similarly, political candidates are also able to select and use media of choice and message content of their choice during electoral campaigns.

Gate-Keeping Theory: This theory was coined by [15] The theory is concerned with the screening of information that are disseminated to the public. The concept of gate-keeping emanates from the understanding that apart from legal restrictions on what is to be published including photographs, the communicator has the moral duty to be socially responsible to his audience in the content of his message. The relevance of this theory to the discourse is hinged on the fact that powerful tools like ICTs and social media should have some sort of monitoring and regulation to forestall the possible abuse especially by minors and the young at heart.

ICTs Defined: ICTS means Information and Communication Technologies. They are modern technologies used in information gathering, processing and dissemination [16]. Writes that ICT deals primarily with the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, project, process, transmit and retrieve information from anywhere and anytime. Thus, Nations [17] describes ICTs as a generic name used to refer to a number of communication hardware adopted in ensuring instantaneous dissemination of information and social values across the globe. They combine telecommunication and computer technologies in relaying, retrieving and storing information, Ndukwe [18] observes that the marriage of computers and telecommunications is

the material force in the new technology of communication. Similarly, Nnadozie [19] explains that the production of the NICTs is predicated on electromagnetism, which is an interface between computer and telecommunication.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, ICTs cover Internet Service provision, telecommunications equipment and services, information technology equipment services, media and broadcasting, libraries and documentation centers, commercial information providers, network based information services and other related information activities.

Efforts have also been made by scholars to distinguish the new technologies from old ones. According to Nwabueze and Nwabueze [20] all communication technologies used prior to the advent of computer some of which include telephone, electronic news gathering camera, analogue radio and television, video text, wireless intercom system etc. belong to the old communication technologies category while the new technologies are either technologically modified versions of the old technologies or all forms of modern technologies which facilitate the gathering> processing, storage and retrieval of communication content or message in new ways. They include the computer, direct broadcast satellite (DBS), digital radio and television systems, Internet, Compact Disc (CD) and Video Compact Disc (VCD) among others.

According to Nwodu [21] the term 'new' as it concerns information and communication technologies simply denotes that even though man has been communicating' and receiving information from the time the world was created, the present period makes him do what he has been doing in a manner unequalled by any period in all his history.

Nyekwere [22] in Nwosu and Soola writes that the term 'New' is confusing because it misleads people to think that early technological inventions relating to telecommunications like radio, television, film etc are not new. Duru and Oraka writing on the same issue note that the new technology could be explained as meaning that the nature of the media of communication is changing to encompass more specialized media. In *the* past we could think of newspapers, magazines and books we could as well think of radio and television broadcasting; but today we tune electronic edition of newspapers, journals and other written materials... this gives the new technology its distinct advantages.

From the foregoing views of scholars, it is clear that there have been changes in the nature, features and functions of these technologies, the new technologies being an improvement on the old one and therefore no longer the same.

Indeed, there are so many things new about the new technologies when compared with the old ones. They are therefore truly new technologies. There is always a great improvement in the new technologies. The new technologies guarantee greater speed, greater reach, clearer vision, quality output, better reception and have capacities for two-way flow of information.

Odoemelam and Adibe [23] thus defines information and communication technologies simply as communication gadgets or facilities which improve/enhance the manner in which message is shared, relayed, disseminated, preserved and recalled for meaningful communication purposes.

Social Media: A Conceptual Overview: 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 which allows users to express themselves, interact with friends and share information with freedom as well as publish their views on issues on the World Wide Web. Okoro and Nwafor [24] describes these media as "Online media that promote participation, openness, conversation and connectedness". Okoro [25] 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 a scalable publishing technology to disseminate information across geographical boundaries, providing interaction among people. It supports demonstration of knowledge and information, thereby making the people both information producers and consumers. This feature of making the people information producers and consumers is one of the distinguishing features of social media from traditional mass media that only make the people consumers only [26].

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. According [27] "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 [28].

Adamu [2] observes that social media has created online platforms that serve as a new "Political capital" where people resort to and participate in a political discourse. Nwabueze and Nwabueze [20] therefore, emphasize that social media has become a main source of personal orientation, anonymous, interactivities and social community on variety of issues that involves politics and political discourse. Social media has the capacity of boosting participation because of its openness, conversation nature, connectedness and textual and audio-visual characteristics appeal [5, 6].

Electioneering and Democracy in Africa: ICTs and Social Media Role: Election, which represents a modern and universally accepted process through which individuals are openly and methodically chosen to represent a body or community in a larger entity or government, is one of the cardinal features of democracy [9].

Elections are properly regarded as the central institution of democratic government. This is because in democracy, the authority of the government derives solely from the consent of the governed. A democratic election would characteristically be competitive, periodic, inclusive definitive and free and fair [11]. To consolidate electoral democracy in Nigeria, Agba [7] suggest the raising of public consciousness through advocacy, especially regarding ballot monitoring and protection.

Former INEC Chairman, Professor Maurice Iwu Notes that the important issues of curbing violence in elections, the need to control the influence of money in elections, addressing mindsets of Nigerians on elections, enhancing women participation in the electoral process and the role of the media in the making or unmaking of elections, all constitute vital aspects of the environment of election.

Democracy is widely acknowledged as the best form of government. One of its major characteristics is periodic elections. Events that culminate in elections are generally referred to as electioneering. Social media as we earlier observed are interactive web-based media platforms that offer users opportunity to express themselves, interact with others and share information with freedom as well as publish their views on issues on the world-web. Before the advent of the new media, political campaigns and other electioneering activities blossomed in the traditional media. But the arrival of new media and lately social interactive media has greatly affected the way the game of politics is played and many democracies across the globe are also affected.

Since 2008 when Barack Obama broke new ground by using social media in his political campaigns in ways never seen before, many politicians have toed along this line. In Africa, President Goodluck Jonathan of Nigeria quickly comes to mind. Jonathan on Wednesday, September 15, 2010 took the extraordinary step of announcing his bid for the highest political office in the land on Facebook. He informed his 217, 000 fans on the world's most popular networking platform of his intent: twenty-four hours later, 4, 000 more fans joined his page. By the day of the election, on 16 April 2011, he had over half a million followers [22] In addition to the approximately 3 million registered Nigerians on Facebook and 60, 000 on Twitter, almost every institution involved in Nigeria's elections conducted an aggressive social networking outreach, including the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Political parties, candidates, media houses, civil society groups and even the police.

Nnadozie [19] observed that during the elections in Nigeria, many Nigerians were armed with their blackberries and Twitter feeds. According them, a 33 year-old IT consultant and activist Gbenga was one of such Nigerians. His team had designed a smart phone application called Revoda which allowed voters to instantly upload reports of delayed voting materials and intimidating gangs at their local polling stations to their database; a daily summary was then sent to Nigerian election officials and Western observers as well as posted on their Revoda website; this allowed many people within and outside Nigeria to follow the process. Photos, pictures, details and videos from polling stations were quickly uploaded to Facebook and YouTube. Writing further, Eze [12] quote Gbenga in *the Punch* of 17th April, 2011 as saying:

We've got one Blackberry Video of a policeman who was evidently drunk and intimidating people ……. For those who want to go to court, they have got a lot of evidence.

There was another group, "Reclaim Naija" who used text messages and e-mail reports to compile a live online map of trouble spots. There were also "Twitter activists" whose job was to look out for rigging and spread warning about bombings at polling stations. Agba [7] observed that this massive use of social media cumulated in the success of the election acclaimed the freest and fairest in the history of the country.

In South Africa 2009 general elections, Jacob Zuma of the ANC also officially confirmed his presence on Twitter, though he was relatively late compared with the micro-blogging site that his rival Helen Zille of the DA party had been using for a long time. Fleming, a social media consultant for Afro social media told "News 24" that "It appeared the DA modeled their campaign on US President Barack Obama's successful social media campaign".

During the uprising in Egypt, people relied heavily on the internet for unfettered opinion. Although Egypt has many open, independent television channels and newspapers, there were always "Red lines' that one could go beyond, but online, there were no 'red line' at all. Everybody was free to say what they wanted. Not surprisingly, local news and commentary blossomed on all estimated 40, 000 blogs [1].

In Tunisia where the uprising began, Facebook is also popular. Although the Zine EI Abine Ben Ali led government hacked into Facebook and tried to steal passwords, the networks of people dissatisfied with his government still grew. Adelabu [3] believes that "Not only were these networks useful for information, but that they helped give people a sense of collective identity" [6] add that cell-phone networks greatly aided communication during the protests in Tunisia as almost everyone has a cell-phone. With political blogs, Facebook pages, cell-phone SMS, protests were easy to organize. Thus [8] contends that social media played a huge role in accelerating the uprising by constantly organizing protests, giving out information on the situation and putting pressure on Washington to act.

In the recent referendum in Sudan, social media was used as never before in such decision in any part of the African continent. These practical examples show that ICTs and social media indeed play important role in recent political activities in Africa.

Using ICTs and Social Media in Politics: the Positive Perspectives: Politics have evolved in recent decade with the advent of new technologies. Information sharing has become instant and especially with the advent of social media. Facebook was not introduced until 2004, YouTube 2005 and Twitter, 2006. The coming of these technologies brought new trend in election campaign. The Facebook which is the most popular allows campaigners to send out mass messages, post pictures and videos and interact with the public; Twitter, which is used to send short and targeted messages to thousands of followers and to interact with others; YouTube is used to post campaign videos; and Flickr, to post campaign pictures. These platforms now give electorates a competitive voice.

The ubiquitous access of these online devices has a democratizing effect as they offer citizens opportunities for more fully engagement in the political process. This means that voters have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages; they are now creators of the messages. Writing on this development, Anaeto *et al.* [9] in his paper "Life in the Age of Self-Assembling message" observes that:

The value of the communication experience has undergone a sea-change; from the need to share it, to the need to share in it. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and social media in particular have brought power back to the people; with it, established authorities are now undermined and users are now the expert.

This implies that people can now consume media as wanted and needed rather than allowing media producers to schedule consumption time and content. A person can now communicate to anywhere from any place at any time. Again, using social media is less expensive than the outrageous political advertisements on the older media. The new media is flexible, accessible and affordable. It promotes democratization of media, alters the meaning of geographic distance and allows for increase in the volume and speed communication. It is portable due to the mobile nature; it is interactive and open to all.

A politician can take advantage of this instant form of communication to reach the masses with the aim of assessing the political atmosphere before venturing into the campaign. Social media is perhaps the best tool to assess the popularity of a candidate especially by the young people and craft the best language to use as a campaign slogan. Social media also provides a politician with the opportunity to be informally free with the public. This free connection through social media helps politicians to communicate their humour, indicating their approachability and accessibility to the public.

With social media, politicians appeal to citizens; it makes them seem more personable and gives them advantage of keeping in constant contact with their supporters. Social media grants many people the chance to participate actively and get involved fully in the political discourse by adding their voices on issues posted on the social media sites. Thus, it advances the tenet of participatory democracy that sees media as a debate avenue and aid in tremendously actualizing public-sphere journalism. It affords electorates a friendlier avenue of assessing candidates for political offices and promoting transparency in governance.

Baran [10] gave the merits of these technologies in politics to include among others:

- People can consume some media as wanted and needed rather than allowing media producers to schedule consumption time and contents.
- A person can now communicate to anywhere, from anywhere, from anyplace at anytime.
- Individuals can now be producers of media instead of consumers of media contents.
- The new technologies enable participation by groups previously neglected by media e.g. the blind, the handicapped, etc; users can now participate anonymously which leads to less prejudices.
- Production and post-production are now less expensive than in older media and allows unlimited possibilities of a altering contents (e.g. through digital editing)
- New communication technologies allow for more user control in the creation of contents.

The above goes to show that in spite of the threats associated with social media use in politics in Africa, the opportunities it has created are quite enormous. With it, information sharing is greatly enhanced as everyone can now create his own messages. This means that the sit-down- and watch audience is now a relic of the past. It has become a virile instrument for political campaigns and a useful platform for helping citizens engage with their elected officials and governments. It provides opportunity for politicians to reach citizens quickly and at low cost. It has the capacity of boosting participation because of its openness, conversation and connectedness. This offers all citizens opportunities for participation, interactivity and creativity. This feature in particular gives the electorates competitive voice, thus, offering representative democracy at its best. This means that whether the messages are texted, tweeted posted or pinned, citizens' voice now matters. Again, volume and speed of communication is now greatly enhanced. It Provides opportunities for interactive communication and promotes democratization of media and communication process. It facilitates more transparency in governance. They are highly accessible, affordable and portable. Social media has the power to quickly move ideas from the grassroots to the forefront of public discourse. It enables citizens to interact more quickly and directly than ever and at the same time saving time and money. With it, election result could be released faster and more accurately. Also, it could help in reducing political rallies which in most cases result in violent clashes with opponents. It reduces election malpractices as voters can mass communicate results of each pooling unit to reduce possibility of falsification of figures.

ICTs and Social Media in Politics: the Threats: Social media despite its numerous advantages in fostering politics, democracy and good governance has its downsides. To start with, it is a very volatile platform to trend politics. Agreeing with this, Adibe [5] observed that during the 2011 electioneering period, Facebook and GSM-SMS were used to disseminate provocative and incisive messages that eventually contributed in the post-election violence in some states of Northern Nigeria. Nnadozie [19] presented some of such messages in the table below:

Message	Source of Message	Date Circulated
"Do not vote for a Muslim president. Muslims have ruled the Country for long...Christians in Nigeria must determine who the president of their country becomes. We have taken the back seat and allowed the Muslims to rule the Country for long due to disunity in the church"	Forwarded by CONCERNED CITIZEN (www.iiiggrianfilms.com) accessed 01/01/2011	1st JANUARY, 2011
Message	Source of Message	Date Circulated
A good Christian can never vote for a Muslim this 201 1 election because a Muslim is a great enemy to Christian for that they will never smell this presidential seat for the next 20years. This is a Sunday message given to all Christians in Nigeria by Rev. Chukwuma Nwabara of living faith church kubwa Abuja. Pis forward 2 Muslim brothers & sisters to register & vote for Muslim.	Forwarded Message	25th JANUARY, 20II
Message	Source of Message	Date Circulated
We call on all Christians to ensure that their votes count in the forthcoming' elections. It is time for the son of God to dominate the land. All to note that we believe victory. for Jonathan and Nigeria will be a nation 'under the rule of our lord Jesus Christ.	Coalition of Christian Politicians	10th FEBUARY, 2011
Message	Source of Message	Date Circulated
It is the Igbos who need Buhari and not 'the other way round. The' presidency is not a do or die to Buhari. If he wins good luck to Nigeria, if he loses bad luck to Nigeria and Igbos should forget the Northern votes forget for a long time. In the current voters registration the North has 33million voters.	Forwarded Message	11th MARCH, 2011
Message	Source of Message	Date Circulated
Muslim brother, vote Sha'aban of ACN for Governor bcps CPC candidate, Hanina is not a Hausa Muslim him & his running mate, J D Ephraim are from southern Kaduna.	Muslim League	23rd April, 2011
Message	Source of Message	Date Circulated
My beloved Muslim Umraa, please vote the incorruptible' Alhaji Abufaakar Balarabe Musa of PRP for Kaduna state Governor, for justice and fairness.	Muslim Brothers	24th April, 2011

Source: Adeyaju and Harana (2011 :530-531)

From the table above, it is obvious that indeed, ICTs and social media are volatile platform for politics. This goes to show that technologies portend huge threats to Africa and her fledgling democracies.

Furthermore, the massive use of the technologies could result in loss of national sovereignty. It could also enhance cultural imperialism. The experience from social media use in Nigeria's 2011 general elections and the violence that precipitated the announcement of result as well as the drama witnessed in the Arab uprising in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya shows that social media is a very volatile platform to trend politics. Again, social media may be leading to the erosion of African values. Poor telecommunication networks in most parts of Africa, resulting in low level of internet usage is also a serious bottleneck. Inability to regulate and monitor the technology is a threat. High rate of illiteracy is still a major

challenge to social media use in Africa. Lack of basic infrastructure such as stable power still threatens the use of the new technology. Poverty, corruption and political instability in many African countries is still a major threat to their penetration. Threat of online terrorism (Cyber terrorism) is still a major challenge.

Again, a viral video or sex photo can instantly infect a political campaign or career, dooming it to a lingering or mercifully rapid death. Also, anonymity of sources makes it difficult for strict regulation, monitoring and prosecution of illicit acts. This makes it a vulnerable instrument for perpetuating fraudulent acts. It also promotes piracy. This is partly because the question of copyright and intellectual property is more complex and difficult to define and even more difficult to regulate online. Similarly, images and sounds can be digitally manipulated, so truth and reality are difficult to ascertain. Social media is

addictive in nature, making work/life balance hard to achieve. With the new technologies, we get more than we bargain because of their information overload and social network overload. There is also the problem of continuous partial attention which removes us from the real world. Again, the rural population is still largely excluded from this trend as the technological backwardness in most African countries has restricted the World Wide Web's accessibility to cities, thereby shutting out the rural areas which constitute the greater land area and population of the masses.

Another problem related to accessibility and affordability is epileptic power supply; these technologies depend on power of which supply is still irregular in most part of Africa today.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have attempted to analyze whether ICTs and social media are indeed friends to man-kind or foes to humanity, especially as it concerns their use in politics.

We have demonstrated that the use of ICTs and social media is fast becoming a common phenomenon in African politics, especially in the electoral process. This is evident from both local and general elections in several countries in the continent in the last few years and in the recent political developments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. We argue that as far as the doctrine of free flow of information is concerned; the technologies are the right media. However, we did not fail to warn too, that ICTs and social media are indeed a technologies with double edges, quick and sharp with positive and negative values. Be that as it may, the fact that they have so numerous potentials that could be tapped to improve the game of politics, enhance the virtues of democracy and foster good governance and political stability in the volatile African continent calls for full embrace of the technologies. To this effect, the study recommends government provision of a more conducive environment to foster penetration of ICTs and social media and guarantee greater access to the technologies.

The study also brought to the fore the problem of weak or no regulation of the new technologies. To this challenge, the study suggests urgent review of media laws to address the technicalities involved in the newer technologies and that regulatory bodies should think of policy sub-sections on different types of media such as Facebook, blogging and Twitter.

In the final analysis, the study strongly recommends greater adoption and use of ICTs and social media in electioneering activities in Africa and establishment of strict monitoring mechanisms to minimize their inherent weaknesses and maximize their intrinsic values in electoral process in the continent. This we believe would go a long way in fostering transparency, accountability, sanity and bring more decorum into the polity.

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