Chapter 24
Of New Media Influence on Social and Political Change in Africa: Introspects, Retrospectives and Futuristic Challenges

Anthony A. Olorunnisola
The Pennsylvania State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This summative chapter synthesizes a few of the 26 contributors’ solo and interconnected presentations and lays out the ideas and propositions therein in a way that a single author of a book would have done. To achieve these objectives the chapter draws readers’ attention to the conceptual and practical evidences that scholars—whose joint efforts have helped us put this book together—employed in their treatment of a hydra-headed issue with multi-dimensional questions. The intent is to present readers with some, of many possible dimensions, from which to appraise the chapters in this book. To this end, thematic categories are employed and efforts made to underscore consistencies and inconsistencies between authors’ propositions. The chapter also includes suggestions of areas needing further inquiries as those pointers may help scholars sustain an ongoing conversation about the evolving issues addressed in this volume.

INTRODUCTION

It is atypical for an edited volume to include a summative chapter. Nonetheless, there is value in such an addition to this novel collection which takes a pan-African approach to the review of the influences of ‘old’ (i.e., newspapers, radio, television) and ‘new’ (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and blogs) media on social and political change. Previous efforts by communications, media studies and political science scholars, in particular those focused on political communication, weighed
the intersections between media and political (or democratic) change in Africa. Until very recently, examinations of the communications dimension to socio-political transformations had focused principally on ‘old’ media in single or a few assortments of African countries.

This volume comes against the background of Africa-based social and political movements, many of which, for the first time and thanks to advancements of information and communications technology (ICT), commanded simultaneously the attention of citizens of host countries at home and in the Diasporas as well as gripped the focus of observers in the international community for several weeks. Those tumultuous events, especially variants that occurred in Egypt and other North African countries, motivated academic and non-academic conversations about the clout of the contemporary African state, the fluidity of political power and the import of ‘new’ vis-à-vis ‘old’ media in the equation. Of necessity, the developments deserve thorough and ongoing scholarly examination and undoubtedly the review of strategies employed by stakeholders in host nations as well as the rationale for the interventions (or non-interference) of the committee of nations (Olorunnisola, 1996). Academic-oriented research should not dissuade but join conversations and debates held on platforms of governmental, intergovernmental, non-governmental organizations, cross-sections of the civil society and by media practitioners in and outside of the public sector. Notably, there have been multifarious attempts by many scholars and stakeholders across the globe to assess and understand these developments, so much so that no single issue—since the debate surrounding the new world information and communication order—has commanded the concentrated attention of the global academic and non-academic community as the incursion of ‘new’ media into social and political movements. The role of the academy in these conversations and debates should, however, be more than summative. We are hopeful that this volume—with the many dimensions from which authors have critically appraised these developments—contributes to filling some of the noted analytical gaps.

A book that joins the conversations and debates—about an epochal issue in which Africa uncharacteristically occupies center-stage position—especially in the aftermath of Egypt’s 2011 uprising should bring critical academic examination to the positive and negative claims that commentators throw up. Such a book will do well to explore the particular roles of ‘new’ media and the likelihood that they have supplanted ‘old’ media and now occupy paramount positions in the evolution of social and political movements in Africa and, possibly, elsewhere in the world. Such a book should also review the controversies and the often hyperbolic transpositions of credits, not to activists physically involved in the movements, but to the new media that they employ. This latter sentiment has become evident in descriptive coinages that include Facebook Revolution and Twitter Revolution. As such, the primary challenge that this book faces is whether or not contributors addressed foregoing phenomenon among crucial issues and posed the questions germane to such an important and timely subject at a momentous period in Africa’s political life when multiple countries on the continent appear to be entering another wave—perhaps the fourth—of transformations. In addition, it is essential that such a book includes explanations for the limitations of social and political uprisings to countries in North Africa. In other words, why did the social and political movements in North African countries not have bandwagon effects on activists in countries in the Southern, Eastern and Western corners of Africa? Are Africans’ desires for termination of sit-tight rulers and for installation of representative political systems limited to North Africa? Though the lines between summation and critical analysis of this book’s offer may blur in a few places in this concluding chapter, it is es-