Democracy in Retreat: The New Media and Human Rights Dimension to Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The role of the new media in analyzing and monitoring the global pandemic of Covid-19, which reveals at the same time reveals inadequacies of ensuring human rights in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. As an outlet for information gathering and dissemination, the media provided citizens with developments surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic. While identifying the power of media during the pandemic, this paper seeks to examine the human rights perspective of the Nigerian government. It argues that rather than the Nigerian Federal Government promoting the human security associated with the practice of democracy; freedom and liberty, transparency and legitimacy of governance; rule of law, and equity for citizens; settles for authoritarian governance that violates the democratic principles and human rights tenets. Primary data is sourced from social media platforms of television and radio stations; and social media influencers from entertainment and politics. Secondary data is gathered from consultations with journal articles, books, and newspapers. Findings are analyzed using content analysis; needed to blend the objectives of the paper.

1. Introduction

In the world plagued by the pandemic of Corona Virus, popularly referred to as Covid-19, a new tide to the use of social media has gained prominence. Social media, a tool that disseminates information and creates awareness, has proven useful in disseminating and circulating cautionary measures; needed to reduce the spread of the coronavirus. With adequate media use, the world is aware of the coronavirus, its global reach, symptoms, implications, and healthy prevention. Through the media platforms of television, radio, newspapers; and online networking (Nwakpu et al, 2020); citizens are adequately exposed to the dangers of getting infected. While the mortality rate is needed to be controlled, collaborative efforts of sovereigns (Basrur and Kliem, 2021) with international health measures on mitigation through research and development have grown profane.

In the context of achieving a universal interest in a healthy environment, national and international bodies respond to containing the novel coronavirus. On the other attempt of containment, thereby proffering health measures, certain inalienable rights of the people have

been violated. When human rights are universal, interdependent, and peculiar to individuals in a given community, certain restrictions in the exercise of such freedom and opportunities have become a general norm during the pandemic. The Nigerian Government like other sovereigns restricted its citizens in the exercise of freedom; thus, negating the civil responsibilities of respecting, protecting, and fulfilling the rights of the people (International IDEA, 2020). This violation is not limited to a particular region; it cuts across national boundaries.

With the use of media, the Nigerian government disseminated information for public awareness and preparedness against the wide-spreading coronavirus. On one hand, social media revealed the actions of the government in containment and prevention mechanisms (Dan-Nwafor, 2020); it, on the other hand, revealed the inadequacies of a practicing democratic government. Contrary to the pandemic period emphasizing the inputs of a representative government, it portrayed the practice of authoritarian practice of governance system in the country (Eko-Akingbesote; 2021: Obieke et al, 2022). The media is revealed in this paper on two fronts of an instrument of state policy, simultaneously revealing the retreat of democracy. It again identified media as a common voice for the citizen, where grievances are made manifest.

Therefore, this paper is contextualized to capture the retreat of Nigerian democracy, using the human rights perspectives during the Covid-19 pandemic. It provides answers to the question of effectiveness in democratic governance during the pandemic. The paper is divided into sections of conceptual clarification, methodology, and interpretation of findings. Addressing the objectives of the paper is a sub-theme that clarifies the subject matter. Following are the conclusion and recommendations of the study.

2. Conceptual Clarification

2.1. Human Right

Human rights are the inalienable, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated (World Programme for Human Right Education, 2007) privileges accrued to an individual by their citizenship. This implies that individuals born into a specific location, by birth have certain privileges, with no bias to tribe, race, or religion. A common feature of indivisibility and interdependence is inherent in human rights, crossing through all the levels of economic, social, political, and cultural (Chrichton et al, 2015). This is supported by the World Conference on Human Rights,

> All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent, and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally fairly and globally, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional peculiarities and various historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of states, regardless of their political, economic, and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms (World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 1993, Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Paragraph 5).

Going by this citation, human right is universal and internationally recognized. There is no individual without access to fundamental human rights. Human right derives strength from the rule of law, with obligations to ensure that such rights are assured to the people (United Nations, 2016). Like every other sovereign in the world, the Nigerian state is obligated to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of its people; and is enjoined to refrain from interfering in the individual enjoyment of the people; thereby protecting individuals from abuse by non-state actors, foreign state agents, and state agents outside of its capacity (Country Report on Human Rights, 2021).

In the attainment of these, states are required to take positive actions to ensure that the fundamental rights of the people are realized (United Nations Human Rights, 2016).

The United Nations (2014) asserts that "human beings will be able to fully develop and use human qualities like intelligence, talent, and conscience to satisfy his or her spiritual or other needs". This implies that the inalienable rights of the people can only be used by the individual to satisfy his desires, not consider others' needs. Human right reflects the standard necessary for people to live with dignity and equality, guaranteeing to people the means to satisfy their basic human needs with the full advantage of every available opportunity (Chrichton et al, 2015; Flower et.al, 2007). The modern human right is traced to the struggles of the end of slavery, genocide, discrimination, and government oppression. Before the contemporary times, the internal affairs of the state are limited to its territory, with no interference from other state entities. This was however challenged in the 20th century, particularly by the actions of Nazi Germany and the atrocities committed during the Second World War (WWII). Atrocities committed during the World War period negate the principle of human dignity and equality (UN General Assembly, 1948).

2.2. Social Media

Edosomwan et al (2011) express their view that social media is not a new concept; it has evolved from the beginning of human interaction. It is a networking mechanism used for communication and business. From an historical development, he affirms that the year 2000 witnessed the emergence of many social networking sites, accessible to share interests in the different aspects of human lives. Social media has evolved over the years to the modern-day variety use of digital media. Going further, he states that the use of the telephone in the 1950s with the use of homemade electronic devices has facilitated unauthorized access to make calls easy. Affirming this is Carton (2009) that social media has made communication easy for humans.

Online sharing of knowledge and information among different groups of people, increases skills in educational institutions (Barauch, 2012). To him, social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. This interaction will achieve a much higher superset beyond communication. In the same vein, there are pros and cons to the use of social media. Aside from the online sharing of knowledge and information, social media can be used as a tool for inference into one's private life. In other words, while it communicates, it exposes one's personal information which can be dangerous. A medium of promotion that contributes to its immediacy, and a healthy and direct relationship between brands and their public in an online environment is social media (Barauch, 2012).

ACCA (2007) from another dimension introduces social media as not necessarily an avenue to relate and meet with people; it is a connecting avenue for family, friends, and acquaintances. It identifies the well-known platforms of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram as a networking tools for connecting with persons whom one ordinarily does not have one-on-one interaction with. Sharing information, videos, and pictures and staying connected with people is a positive advantage of social media. It allows ensuring that society is not compromised at all levels. This implies that the medium of communication does not necessarily ensure interactions with known persons, it again brings together a new community of persons. Manning (2014) conceptualizes social media as new media that supports interaction and participation. The "new media" as referred to in the study is divided into the two stages of broadcast and interactive. In broadcast, media is almost exclusively centralized in one entity and distributes messages to many people. The rise of digital and mobile technologies has made interaction easy on a large scale, birthing a new age for media.

In another view Trottier and Fuchs (2014) theorize social media, by examining what it means to be social; and asking questions about human relations among themselves. Computing systems, web applications, and all forms of social media can be referred to as social. Considered that the storage and transmission of information originate from the constant interaction of persons in society. In all of these definitions, connection; communication, and interaction are vital to social media, which is the new media in the modern era of communication.

2.3. Governance

Governance is defined "as a means the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)" (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2007) This implies that to have governance as a practice, there must exist a structure or organization of decision-making process, involving different actors of the state and non-state, formal and informal; to proffer a workable political practice. As such, there is an organized structure that seeks to establish a civil society. With emphasis, that in the practice of government, there is an outward result of either good or bad governance. Good governance or leadership has the element of a good structure, and is engendered towards effective development; while bad governance is a product of poor organization in government, a threat to possible growth and development in any society.

Good governance according to Smith (2007) is defined as an opening policy for establishing a strong determination, where decision-makers after a consensus period in the institution arrive at a specific point of view. This decision is in the context of achieving equality in the economic and political opportunities to ensure a civil society. Therefore, such determination by the policymakers plays an important role in the sharpening and reorganizing of the infrastructure of governing machines. Rahim (2019) cites the World Bank's perception of good governance from the two branches of a political structure of the organization that is directed towards sustainable development; and an outward result of social and economic resources for human development. It affirms that good governance is said only when there is a good structure of government that seeks to ensure the people's development at all levels –social, human, economic, and political- of government.

Moreover, good governance is measured by a dynamic source of providing fruitful results of accountability in the practicing system of government. Through accountability, transparency, effectiveness, and efficiency; a corruption-free practice and the rule of law portray the integrity of the governing mechanism (Rahim, 2019). Good governance cannot be identified with a governing system when the qualities of reliability and accountability are lacking.

2.4. Covid-19

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) reports that in December 2019, a new coronavirus unknown to humans emerged in Wuhan, City of Hubei, China. The new coronavirus belongs to a group of viruses of the family coronaviridae (which infect animals and humans). In the carriers, severe diseases such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) are experienced. Also, in some extreme or serious cases infection leads to pneumonia, acute respiratory syndrome, and sometimes death. It has symptoms that have ultimately ranged from mild cases of infection in the common cold, respiratory symptoms, fever, cough, and shortness of breath to severe and eventual death (Shanmugaraj, et al., 2020).

The Centre for Disease Control (2019) referred to the popular pandemic of Coronavirus, COVID-19, as an illness passed from one person to another, to be caused by a virus.

Coronavirus has its origin in seafood that is traded in live markets (Singhal, 2020). Supporting this view is Xinhua (2020) who stressed that the novel virus has ">95% homology with bat coronavirus, similar with the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus 2 (SARS-CoV)". In this light, is the awareness that the virus has gone "viral", with a universal spread in the world. Their symptoms have been identified with severe illness, which can be asymptomatic in some others i.e. showing no symptoms.

Further, it is impossible to diagnose the virus from the infection, especially during clinical and routine lab tests (Singhal, 2020). COVID-19 is spread through body contact from one person to the other. The spread is possible within six (6) feet or two (2) cm arm length of a carrier of the virus. A major means of spreading the infection is through respiratory droplets of an infected person through coughs, sneezes, or talking. Other means of invented touching sensitive parts of the body -mouth, nose, and eyes- after contact with virus-affected surfaces (CDC, 2019). In the same vein is the precautionary identified measure of preventing the spread of the Coronavirus. Avoiding close contact with people, most especially individuals who have fever and cough, the constant use of alcohol-based hand sanitizer, and proper washing of the hands with soap. In a bid to also curb this spread, timely advice from the world health organization (WHO) is tirelessly working with global experts, government, and partners to rapidly expand scientific knowledge on this virus (WHO, 2020).

However, while combating the COVID-19 virus there is a danger of high magnitude as pathogen exposure, long working hours, psychological distress, fatigue, occupational burnout, stigma, and physical and psychological violence (CDC, 2019). To ensure safety, certain measures are expected of employers and managers in health facilities. This includes; adequate provision of IPC and PPE equipment, and adherence to health and safety guidelines to minimize occupational hazards and risk (WHO, 2020). From another perspective, practicing social distancing is important to curb the virus, Covid-19. By social distance, one remains within the walls of his/her house as long as possible; only to go out when it is extremely necessary or unavoidable. There will be no practice of social distance if a distance of at least 6 feet between individuals is not observed. In instances when outward activities are unavoidable, surfaces or items touched should be disinfected. As much as possible, activities like shopping or banking should be carried out online, thereby reducing the increasing chances of exposure to the Covid-19 virus (CDC, 2019).

3. Research Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative approach. Data is gathered using secondary sources from social media outlets of newspapers and television; covering government formulations, political decisions; and details on the Covid-19 pandemic. Likewise, journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and internet sources are consulted. The data is interpreted and analyzed based on content and descriptive method. This is guided and analyzed according to the objective of the paper.

4. In the Practice of Democracy: Character and Dimension of African Leadership

Leadership in the African context according to Masango (2002) is perceived by the developed countries as ineffective, undermining their democracies. African counties are recognized to be plagued "with corruption, dictatorship, military coups, rebellious leaders, greediness, misuse of power, incompetent leadership, political as well as ineffective leaders who undermine their democracies" (Masango, 2002; Adejinmi, 2005; Ejimabo et al, 2013). This description of African leadership qualifies the typical practice of contemporary leadership and governance system in Nigeria. (Olu-Adeyemi, 2012; Oke, 2005). Contrary to these qualities of leadership

and governance, an African leader is a servant to a clan or tribe, chosen by his people to represent their interests (Keonane, 2018; Alidu, 2023).

Supported is Mbiti's (1997) position of African leaders, "they formulated religious beliefs, they observed religious ceremonies and rituals, they told proverbs and myths which carried religious meanings, and they evolved laws and customs which safeguarded the life of the individual and his community or villagers". These leaders knew who they were and how to react in certain situations; that ensured benefits or disadvantages to their community. In difficult circumstances, the leaders have the responsibility to take certain decisions that will ensure an overall good for the people. Leadership is "earned consistently by demonstrating competency, passion, justice, and wholeness" (Masango, 2002; Adewale, 2020). While some literature gives credit to African precolonial leadership, Igboin (2016) stressed that some leaders in pre-colonial times were less upright in their duties and obligations to citizens; portraying similar characteristics even in post-colonial times.

Attempting leadership from its historical background, and being particular about the African style of leadership before independence (Honig, 2019); it is crystal clear that leadership as it is now practiced has a different path of delivering responsibilities to citizens in contemporary times (Van Wyk, 2007, Africa Report, 2021). With a general function of shared responsibility, leadership is not restricted to an individual but a group of persons working together to ensure collective good. This practice identifies with the contemporary practice of leadership, as all organs of government work interdependently. Going by Bolden and Kirk's (2009) categories of essentialist, relational, critical, and constructionist perceptions of leadership, a broad understanding of the nature and character of a leader is explained. The essentialist perception of leadership identifies a leader with an obligation to his followers (Bass, 1985); the relational argues that leadership resides not with the leader but the relationship with others (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

Leadership is essential when there are followers to interact and assure obligations of achievement of political objectives. The critical aspect of leadership explains the underlying dynamics between power and politics within an organization (Gemill and Oakley, 1992); and the constructionist draws the attention of leaders to the notion of sense-making and development as a means by which participant reframe their understanding (Ospina and Sorenson, 2006). It implies that the ability to understand the predicaments of the people and address them to achieve social development is the ideal responsibility of a leader. While a dominant concern is the inquiring about the nature and character of a leader in a democratic setting; Nigeria today has a fallout in the demonstration of credible governance (Anekwe, 2020; Oni et al, 2019; Lawal et al, 2012; Onigbude, 2007). A recurring challenge that confronts democracy in the contemporary Nigerian state is leadership. This is such that ethical considerations have gotten less attention in politics (Oni et al, 2019). Despite gaining independence, effective Nigerian leadership in the twenty-first century is in crisis; thereby affecting the quality of its progress and development at all levels. Performance and quality of leadership in delivering the tenets of democracy to the electorate is an important concern for evaluation. While in some instances, the response of the Nigerian government to the ravaging covid-19 pandemic portrayed weakness and inadequacies, in responding to the immediate needs of the nation (Dixit et al, 2020); it on the other hand, demonstrated active policy implementations to the pandemic (Abdullahi, 2022).

Instead of a government existing to preserve the lives of humans and properties (Awofose and Irabor, 2020); during the pandemic, Nigeria's effectiveness and sustainability of its democratic governance lacks credible public trust (Odima, 2020) as opinions are directed toward diversion of public funds to private pockets. Contrary to ensuring human rights, abuses have been

inevitable by the government; further delimiting the potency of democratic governance (National Human Rights Commission, 2020; Amnesty International, 2020). Therefore, going by the African perspectives on contemporary democratic governance; sustaining effectiveness is compromised in the demonstration of leadership. Notably, leadership in contemporary times is intertwined with human rights, and obligations of respect, protection, and fulfillment are necessary for governance (Council of Europe, 2022).

5. Social Media on the Human Rights Perspective: Government and Citizen during the Covid-19 Pandemic

In the attainment of the fundamental human rights of citizens, the Nigerian government has a constitutional responsibility to the people (Nigerian Constitution, 1999); but in the process of achieving these obligations, certain rights are been violated. With ongoing security challenges in the Northeast, Covid-19 serves to aggravate the country's poor levels of security and health position. Even when there is an increase of infected victims in isolation centers, Nigerians believed that the coronavirus is a hoax (Adegoke, 2020; Sahara Reporter, 2020). Plagued by covid-19, and given consideration to the Boko Haram insurgency, Nigeria had two challenges threatening the survival of the state; and the security of the people.

The instrument of social media used by the government to disseminate information, thereby giving updates on health measures; birthed distrust of fake results in the public (Nwalaka, 2022; Ahmed and Msughter, 2022; Nasir et al, 2020).

> In Nigeria, there is a growing number of false information online as regards Covid-19During this period of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government (NCDC) also used the media platform to pass updates on the state of the country's state of health as regards the spread of the flu. This led to the creation of fake accounts related to the NCDC (Ahmed and Msughter, 2022).

Providing such information without valid evidence, created an excuse for the ingenuity of the existing coronavirus (Premium Times, 2020). Contrary to the disseminated information by the Federal Government, Anadolu Agency (2020) reports that the average number of daily Covid-19 patients on a daily routine in the first week of January 2021 is much higher than that of the last week in December 2020. This shows a discrepancy in the result provided to the public through the media outlets. In the ongoing pandemic, which has affected over 200 countries in the world, with the inclusion of Nigeria; there has been an increase in the affected victims but many deaths unreported (Chatham House, 2020). Citing Adepoju (2020), 'the absence of accurate data in Nigeria aided and limited the ability of the government to tackle the virus. Not only is this an impediment, but the "politicization of the pandemic and a lack of interinstitutional and public collaboration are also key challenges" in Nigeria's Covid-19 (Adepoju, 2020). Although the Nigerian government took necessary steps of containment, its accountability and transparency in the implementation of such policies are debatable (Monday, 2022; SPARC Africa, 2021); thereby giving much emphasizing its already-dominant challenge of governance and political leadership (Yagboyaju and Akinola, 2019).

Despite the Nigerian government adopting health measures on containing the spread of coronavirus, it failed to establish sustainable health capacity that guarantees security (Ibrahim et al, 2020). While the government seeks to adhere to WHO (2020) guidelines for containing the virus, it has no organized healthcare facilities. With the unbearable economic consequences of the lockdown in the country, it was expedient that the government announced a phased and gradual easing of the lockdown. However, in the unplanned phase lifting of the lockdown, the lacuna of government for preventing future reoccurrence was identified. Perhaps there is an

established, equipped, and well-developed healthcare service in the nation, and the virus will be well prevented with adequate workers (Ibrahim et al, 2020).

According to the World Health Organization on global health measures, it states that;

> All countries should be prepared for containment, including active surveillance, early detention, isolation, case management, contact tracing, and prevention of onward spread of 2019-nCoV infection, and to share full data with WHO (World Health Organization, 2020).

Going by this assertion as declared by the WHO on global measures and response to the pandemic, the Nigerian government has a low preparedness and response level (Linz, 2020). This is affirmed in the nation's response of investment in a fund of US$ 27 million to the Nigerian Centre of Disease Control (NCDC) to strengthen laboratory testing and isolation capacity (IMF, 2020) was imminent. Bolu et al (2020) relate that there was a coordinated Presidential Task Force (PTF) to work closely with the NCDC in coordinating, and overseeing the containment; thereby mitigating the impact of the spread. In 2017, Nigeria in the World Health Organization Joint External Evaluation is ranked poor in the level of health preparedness, prevention, and response. Likewise, in health risk prevention, Nigeria scored a total point of 1.9 out of 15, 2.6 out of 13 in the detection of new risks, and 1.5 out of 20 ineffective responses to health risks (WHO, 2017). Before the pandemic, the healthcare system had become a cankerworm, prevalent in brain drain syndrome, poor insurance scheme, and lacked adequate workers'; which contributed to the increased mortality rate during the pandemic (Dzobo et al, 2020). Until there is a revamp in the drooling healthcare system, the government's preparedness to deliver democratic responsibility of protection is an illusion.

> Nigeria's healthcare system is plagued with chronic underfunding and limited infrastructure. The government repeatedly falls short of its 2001 commitment under the Abuja Declaration to spend at least 15 percent of its budget on health. In 2018, only 3.9 percent was allocated and in 2020, this marginal increased to 4.5 percent (World Health Organization, 2020).

Democratic dividends which ought to ensure good healthcare service for citizens was not sustainable in a country that has attention given to a good and democratic governance system (Ozoigbo, 2017). For instance, relapse to the poor nature of health capacity and facilities, the Nigerian government acquired 100 more ventilators to the already 350 ventilators and 350 ICU beds for its entire population (Dixit et al, 2020). By providing this amid the pandemic, preparedness and efficiency were not demonstrated by the government. Nevertheless, by providing this equipment more lives are protected from contracting the virus, and mortality is reduced to the barest minimum. Nigeria like other countries maintained social distance as a preventive measure. Ogundele (2020) identifies social distancing, maintaining personal hygiene, instituting bans in public and social gatherings, and closure of air and land borders to travelers (Andam et al, 2020) as a responsive act of the government to fulfill its obligations of human rights. A salient question that gains relevance in the effective measure of containment, is what alternative(s) are provided to ensure survival in Nigeria?

During this period, the moral obligation to serve the people was misused (Amadasun, 2020). Covid-19 palliatives which ought to be evenly distributed among the citizen raises questions of transparency and accountability of the government (Obieke et al, 2020); the sharing processes of necessary relief materials, are assumed to be politicized (Eranga, 2020). Evidence of such actions through social media outlets creates a concern of distrust against the supposed representatives of the people. With the plights of the masses, who are direct recipients of the negative impacts of the coronavirus (Akoje, 2021); good governance and democratic principles

have not been demonstrated. The Nigerian government has not been ethical in the hoarding of relief materials needed by the public. The media, an outlet for communication portrayed evidence of retreat in democratic governance.

Nigerian enacted policies that eroded democracy and human rights during the pandemic. This period exposed the eroded democracy, which raised new challenges at the expense of citizens' human rights and civil liberty (Eko-Akingbesote, 2021). While containment measures were necessary and expedient; like social distancing, the government through its institutions engaged in arbitrary arrest, torture, and extra-judicial killings of citizens (International IDEA, 2020). Nigeria like other African countries has used containment measures to sabotage citizens' peaceful protest and threaten opposition leaders, journalists, and activists (International IDEA, 2020). Conscious restriction of association, assembly, expression, and violation of women and girls by security agents disrupted the democratic administration; to adopt an authoritarian rule of governance. The government undermined critical political institutions, and silenced critics and journalists; while at the same time engaging in power abuse (Freedom House, 2020).

Amid citizens violating the laws of total lockdown and social distancing, National Human Rights Commission (2020) reports that 'Nigerian security forces killed more people than the coronavirus itself. 18 Nigerians were killed by the security forces within two weeks of lockdown; as compared to the record of 12 deaths by the coronavirus within the same period. Again, Human Right Report (2020) highlights that between 31 March to 13 April 2020; a total of 105 complaints were received in 24 states out of the 36 states. The response of the Nigerian government through its specialized institutions, revealed that of an authoritarian leadership. Citizens are interested in ensuring were met with more difficult situations. Nigeria used the Covid-19 measures to harass, illegally arrest and jail journalists, suppress critics of the coronavirus management, and silence whistle-blowers covering the outbreak (Amnesty International, 2020).

> Nigeria police force, the Nigeria Army, and Nigeria Correctional Service were responsible for the highest cases of human rights violations during the Covid-19 lockdown and movement restriction (Amnesty International, 2020: NHRC, 2020).

6. Assessment of Accountability and Transparency in Nigeria's Covid-19 Experience

Towards such containment, Amnesty International compels that, to contain the virus;

> The Nigerian Government should ensure that its response to the COVID-19 pandemic is rooted in respect for human rights by ensuring access to standard health care, clean water, and other necessities to the most vulnerable communities (Amnesty International, 2020).

Ensuring that the people's human right is not violated must be vocal and not overlooked by the Nigerian government, thereby safeguarding the prisoners, Internally Displaced Persons and marginalized or vulnerable communities should be treated with priority. This is to achieve the benefits of their inalienable human rights regardless of their situations. Given the required health measure of global distance, the world had come to a halt (KPMG, 2020). The virus which has extended beyond its origin into other nations reduced trans-border trade. That is like other sovereigns who were negatively impacted by the pandemic the most affected during the lockdown are workers in manufacturing companies, construction companies, transportation, storage, and cargo handling companies; hotels, catering and food services, domestic workers, and other personal services were restricted in operation and delivery of goods and services came to a halt (Andam et al, 2020). If this is the case, how did the government address this

challenge? Also, in the attempts of such positive measures, what is the extent of effectiveness and efficiency of national measures?

Transparency and accountability in good democratic governance breed an issue of mistrust and incompetence of the Nigerian government to its citizens during the pandemic (Abubakar, 2020). While Nigeria lacked a credible framework of funds donations and allocations; disbursement, and palliative distribution processes, it lacked openness in its governing processes. There is ineffective coordination and inconsistency in the implementation of socio-economic measures during the pandemic. Citing that;

> continuous mismanagement of palliative items and funds earmarked for the COVID-19 response has created a wider gap between the rich and the poor where the vulnerable and marginalized are denied access to the palliative items that rightfully belong to them (Olawoyin, 2021).

Similarly, Obiezu (2020) reports that government-owned warehouses were looted by Nigerians in an Endsars protest. The palliative that was needed by the vulnerable and poor; which was not well distributed gave impetus to looting palliatives that are hoarded by states. As a practicing system government, the interest of the people ought to be the primary goal of authorities, rather than the vulnerable remaining more vulnerable and the rich becoming richer (Oke, 2016). In response to the perceived notion of self-interest by state authorities in the distribution of covid-19 palliatives, is the response from the Nigerian Governors Forum that the looted items in some states were held for the vulnerable.

Consequently, workers who depended on their daily returns from business became more vulnerable and poorer, with the obvious impossibility to access their daily necessities. The Nigerian government initiated the Central Bank of Nigeria Stimulus Package, offering a credit of 130 million dollars loan to finance and provide relief materials to business enterprises and households (Igbinoba, 2020). However, as against the perceived notion of salvaging the already bad situation, the loan attracts interest and collateral from the already poor people that needed an escape from poverty. Also, electronic cash transfer payment of twenty thousand (N20,000) naira to the people registered in the National Social Register (Bill, 2020; Dixit et al, 2020; National Assembly, 2020) portrays a good motive to savage the poverty in the country. However, in a country that has a poor national management system, reaching out to the general public will be a mirage, particularly to illiterates who are not registered with the National Social Register and have little or no knowledge about electronic payment.

While there is a projection of a democratic dividend of public good to the citizens, offered benefits of the Federal government loan trap the people in poverty (Human Rights Watch, 2020), with cash transfers to the poor and vulnerable, was received by a fraction of the people.

> These payments are likely to reach a fraction of Nigerians who need economic assistance, …..The government's failure to disclose any key details of the cash transfer program has also cast doubt on how many people it includes and who will benefit (Human Right Watch, 2020).

Rather than make policies with little or no implementation and evaluation strategies (agencies), the Federal Government required alternatives that will benefit the general public; especially during the negative socio-economic impacts of Covid-19. The obligation to respect, protect and fulfill the people's fundamental human rights should be considered germane, reflecting dignity and equality in its policy decisions (Chrichton, et al, 2015, United Nations Human Rights, 2016). There is no gainsaying that Covid-19 revealed gaps in effectiveness and efficiency in leadership, identified violations of the human rights of citizens, and showed social media, that is, new media as a tool of awareness through communication to the people.

While the government seeks to improve health measures to stem the spread of the virus, it negatively infringed on the freedom and benefits of the people. The spread of Covid-19 has had negative effects on the development of the Nigerian government at all levels, especially in the sectors of health, economic, political, and social (Dan-Nwanfor, 2020; Onyekwena and Ekeruche, 2020; Balana, et al, 2020). Although needed for future consideration, the leadership of the Nigerian government has proven readiness to address the epidemic, and the negative outputs in health and measures need to be addressed appropriately.

7. Conclusion

The study reveals that Covid-19 is a necessary evil that must be contained. It reveals that Nigeria in its governance process has not fulfilled the tenets of its democratic system, especially during the covid-19 pandemic. While it has been taking different measures in its containment health measures, it has adopted authoritarian practices through its institutions. While the gaps in democratic governing have become pronounced through social media outlets during the pandemic, the instrument and power of media in information dissemination cannot be overlooked. In the retreat of democracy, social media on one hand served as a tool used by the Nigerian government to deliver and communicate health developments to the people; and it has on the other become an avenue used by the citizens to identify, monitor and address retreats of democratic governance.

While the study identifies formulations of positive measures towards the citizens in the pandemic – the alleviation of poverty in the period of lockdown, and implementation of strategic measures- a lacuna emphasizes the public citizens as recipients of policies. The paper therefore concludes that, although the duties of the Nigerian Government in protecting human lives during the period of Covid-19 are germane; preparedness and active reactions, especially in a challenging situation such as Covid-19 lack effective implementation. This is because government reactions during the pandemic provoke and violate the people's inalienable rights.

8. Recommendation

The paper recommends that;

1. Nigerian Government must ensure that preparedness is key in its policy measures. This is such that a proactive measure, especially in health, must be adequately ensured.
2. Equality and dignity of human rights must not be overlooked in the policy decision of the Nigerian government. As such, the integrity of leadership to its followers will not be compromised
3. Adopt alternative measures in technological know-how. In a fast-growing world, technology must not be relegated but given preference in all aspects of human lives.
4. Ensure a comprehensive and well-managed national information system. This will ensure accuracy in gathering data on nationals in the country.
5. Ascertain implementation and follow-up through monitored, specialized agencies in policy decisions must be properly administered in governance.
6. Transparency, competency, and diligence must be adopted as criteria for public offices and political roles.

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