

**Social Media as People's Power:
A Textual Analysis of the January 2012 Anti-Fuel Subsidy
Removal Protest in Nigeria**

Wilfred Oritsesan Olley

University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State

And

Daniel Ofomegbe Ekhareafu

University of Benin, Benin City

Abstract

The groundswell polemics characterising the discourse of social media and their impact cannot be complete without articulating how social media tools are beginning to shape and change the course of governance in today's world. The Nigerian government tested the people's power through the social media when it announced the removal of fuel subsidy on the 1st of January 2012. This policy was greeted with citizen's reactions, which spread like a harmattan fire demanding for a total reversal of the government's unpopular policy. This study assesses the use of the social media tools as reactionary tools by Nigerians during the anti-subsidy removal protest. The study adopts a textual analysis design that involves the analysis of multiple levels of signs, symbols and other signifiers in a text. It assesses the impact of social media tools on the protest and protesters, while also examining some of the reactionary messages distributed by Nigerians especially on *Facebook* and *Twitter*. The study concludes that the social media have become a powerful platform for communication in Nigeria and will continue to be

as they guarantee the freedom of expression of the people and enable them to become active participants in the democratic and governance processes.

Keywords: Social media, Protests, Fuel subsidy, Democracy, Power