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# NIGERIA AND THE POLITICS OF EVERYBODY

*Social Media, Idealism, and Activism*



**TOYIN FALOLA**

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*To Gozie and  
Ada Ifesinachukwu,  
in friendship.*





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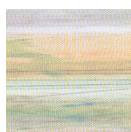


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## SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE



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Studies in the series are anchored in the existing humanistic and the social scientific traditions. Their goal, however, is the identification and elaboration of the strategic place of Africa and its Diaspora in a shifting global world. More specifically, the studies will address gaps and larger needs in the developing scholarship on Africa and the Black World.

The series intends to fill gaps in areas such as African politics, history, law, religion, culture, sociology, literature, philosophy, visual arts, art history, geography, language, health, and social welfare. Given the complex nature of Africa and its Diaspora, and the constantly shifting perspectives prompted by globalization, the series also meets a vital need for scholarship connecting knowledge with events and practices. Reflecting the fact that life in Africa continues to change, especially in the political arena, the series explores issues emanating from racial and ethnic identities, particularly those connected with the ongoing mobilization of ethnic minorities for inclusion and representation.

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# PREFACE



Let me start with a confession. I avoid social media as much as possible. I am not on Facebook. I don't use Twitter or Instagram. I was drawn to mine them for the main purpose of writing this book. I am critical of the abuses they have produced, the lives destroyed by fake news, the destructions by distractions, the abusive language, and the gross disrespect for boundaries. Evidently, several aspects of social media have not helped convince me to be a committed user or even a keen observer; it is becoming a no man's land of chaos and lawlessness, bombarded with uncensored information, fake news, misleading propositions and unnecessary frivolities. Presently, the flexible exploitation of these platforms has raised matters of concern and reaction. In Nigeria, one of the major pit-holes for social media use is that most citizens are not on social media, and only a reasonable number of users have access to the platforms. All these might have contributed to my passive conviction of the necessity of using social media.

My reservations about the use of social media and subscription to its antecedence do not mean that I am oblivious to its emerging necessities and the relevance it has maintained in contemporary societies. Let me insist that I understand the trajectories of technological innovations over the centuries and how small and big inventions have transformed the world. Hence, to say less of social media's prominent role in societal transformation would be a misplaced judgment capable of letting one lose touch with societal realities.

I appreciate the “new world” of rapid communications that has made information pass through borders without delay and in no time. Aside from the rapid spread of information and communication, it adds convenient participation in the communication system, making it a viable tool to garner feedback and create avenues for communication. Global conditions and occurrences, most especially the COVID-19 pandemic, have contributed necessity to the dynamics of social media. The world was shocked at the pandemic outbreak as no initial known vaccine or treatment could adequately cure the virus. This led to the observance of distance and the practice of remote communication systems. This pushed the essence of social media further, and the world relied partly on it to get their daily activities done. The world started wearing more virtual robes with transactions and communications happening offsite. The post-pandemic global society has not been able to wear off the effects of social media and remote approaches to activities, as it sustains its operation after seeing their benefits.

The combination of my skepticism, the dangers and opportunities driven by social media, and the possibilities of its various uses to transform Africa constitutes the driving force of this book. The idiosyncratic construct of social media and its exploitation has positioned it as a double-edged sword capable of cutting forth and back. This attribute, alongside its instrumentality in the Nigerian space and issues, has necessitated my muse for this book. Social media has been a platform for projecting social identities and personal convictions that have taken global dimensions. With access to information and rapid projection of national debacles, social media has raised nationalistic consciousness, no matter the limitation of the possibilities of impacting change. These experimental subjects of engagements on social media forged several notable personalities who see virtue in activism and resolve to demand transformation, development and salvaging of relevant issues. It has touched on core subjects in the discussion trajectories in Nigeria; therefore, one needs to examine its essence and weigh it into social benefits. The book would engage the volatility and viability of these emerging dynamics.

The book is divided into four themes. The first is the context to understand social media in the landscape of Nigeria. What does social media represent for Nigeria? It is important to understand that local contexts and factors provide multiple twists to concepts to acclimatize specific societal peculiarities. Social media is not an exemption; thus, this book tries to put it under such social peculiarities to expose the operationality of social media. The book's first part drives us through these contextual roads that herald particular understandings.

The first chapter of this book raises the major issues of the relevance of social media in Nigeria and its interaction with global, social and political engagements and issues. Undoubtedly, social media has opened space for global interactions, political engagement, and participation. Political criticism, opinions, and analyses have be-

come some of the subjects of critical discussion that have a concerning effect on the state of the nation. Policies and social trends engagements gain momentum in Nigeria, attracting public and governmental reactions that might not be necessarily satisfying. In 2020, the #EndSARS protest and other demonstrations emerged from incitements from social media influencers based on national conditions. The protest took both physical and online demonstrations that gained international attention. Further inquiries would be channeled toward cultural and social interactions and their societal implications. Chapter one aim to establish how the nation fares in what can be considered a global village and its effect on the country in contemporary time.

We have seen how the new media has been relevant in society and how it affects the situations of the state. The frivolous vulnerabilities and negative undermines of some social principles can also not be forgotten. While the citizens of Nigeria, especially the youth, could use it to express themselves, it also contributed to the violence and destruction that followed the #EndSARS protests. Whether the destructions were made worse by the citizens or the government is not the context, but the fact that there was glorified jungle justice with no basis, puts the social media heralded them on trial. It has also undermined sensitive issues and unnecessarily aggravated national conditions threatening the state. If it threatens the state, how does the state respond to it? This is the core of chapter two, which discusses the government's reactions to the threats emanating from the platforms and regulations put in place to check them.

Buhari's administration became hard on social media, increasing its wish to censor and exhibiting some hostility, using its volatility and vulnerability as justifications. On the 5th of June 2021, Buhari's government banned Twitter, following the post #EndSARS realization of social media tendencies and ability to promote decadence. The ban lasted over seven months and was called off in January 2022 after the government stated that the company had complied with its conditions. The government's reactions to social media did not start in 2021; the chapter intends to examine the government's riposte and the legislative attempts to control social media. Different bills, including the Hate Speech Bill and their implications, reactions and justifications, were examined to see how they were intended to keep social media in context and control. Chapter two also examines the instrumentality of social media to both citizens and the government, especially how the Nigerian government has deployed it toward national issues, including the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. This instrumentality also projects the future of government exploration of the platforms in policy formation and feedback.

In chapter three, I interjected myself into the contents of social media by concentrating on the USA-Africa Dialogue which I created decades ago. Back then, one thing that social media did not have enough space for is intellectualism and a platform for cerebral engagements. I will accept that there are intellectuals who have used

these platforms for analytical discussions, but the generality of these platforms are more socially inclined than intellectual. I took this as an opportunity to create a space for intellectual discussions and conversations within the complexity of social media. This informed the projection of the USA-Africa Dialogue Series for scholars of several specialties to discuss and suggest solutions to issues that revolve around Africa and the rest of the world. I would not say that the conversations are perfect, but there has been considerable progress in the projection of knowledge and identification of recommendable solutions by the participants. Chapter three analyzes the trajectories of these discussions, their positions on African matters, Nigerian situations, the conditions of Nigerian higher education, conversation on democratic practices and how they affect Nigeria.

In the second segment, I discuss some of the major issues that have garnered attention globally and locally and their contextualization in Nigerian societies. The world evolves, and Nigeria evolves around it, immersing itself into the core of those issues heralded by local occurrences and imported incitement of similar issues. I discuss the issues that have emerged on social media and gained users' attention. This is also done online with the effect of these discussions on society and how people react to them both online and offline.

The fourth chapter tries to project how social media interacts with the subject of corruption, which has proven difficult to find solutions to and its effect on the citizens. Corruption in Nigeria has become one of the many roots of Nigerian societal problems, and chapter four engages the effect of this root on society, including the people's general reactions. Transparency International ranks Nigeria as the 26th most corrupt country out of 180 countries. With corruption embroiled in the country's many problems, the citizens are tortured, making them express themselves with rage and anger. Citizens have used social media to criticize and express their concerns. The fourth chapter further questions the structure of these conversations and how their trajectories have progressed. It asks whether these expressions of their agonies have had any effect.

Chapter five of this book is a way of engaging a historical problem the country has faced. Secession and agitations against marginalization have been problems that constantly threaten Nigerian unity. The country was thrown into chaos when it witnessed outright secession confrontations that led to the 1967 Nigerian Civil War that claimed lives and properties. These problems have not left the consciousness of Nigerians, and with emerging problems in the society, agitators and secession apologists have found more justifications for their claims. Top of these secessionist demands has been the agitations for Biafra and Yoruba Nation. Social media has indeed participated in advancing these arguments by creating explorable options to extend these sentiments across the country. I discuss suggested solutions by looking into the applicability of restructuring and the secession campaigns.



I am fascinated by how Nigerian society evolves and how cultural diffusions have changed the country's social constructs. One such idea is the change in women's societal identification and roles. Culturally, women were expected not to take very socially engaging roles, positions and interactions and to be submissive to their husbands and men. Although these limitations may vary depending on society and convictions, there is a higher tendency to generally position males above the female gender. The global community has witnessed the heralding of expressive feminist campaigns, sensitizations and consciousness. These movements have been attracting considerable achievements, with social changes occurring in several societies, especially in Europe. In a country with relatively sentimental cultures that do not provide too willing environments for female potential and enjoyment of full freedom, there is concerning resistance pulled up by the society and its agencies. Chapter six of this book discusses feminist campaigns and consciousness in Nigeria and the societal reactions to these phenomena.

Chapter seven explores further injections of these global phenomena into society, some of which are the country's redefinitions of sexual identities and sexuality. Homosexuality and other forms of sexuality have gained the attention of contemporary global societies with cultures adjusting to them. African societies have historical convictions on sexuality that might not easily conform to new social dynamics. Hence, the public expression of new forms of sexuality might meet hostile public reactions. Without going into justifications around the acceptability of these identities, I discuss what public reactions and sentiments to these issues look like in line with the social exploration of social media.

The issue of sexuality in Nigeria is still a subject of public discussion with the impact of international influence and persuasion toward acceptance. This discussion extends toward queer people and how society appreciates them. I discuss the development of queer literature and social interactions with them, especially through social media. "GraceLand" by Chris Abani and other literature have introduced queer personalities and non-conventional sexual identities into mainstream Nigerian literature. The effect of these pieces, societal reactions and acceptability of queer-themed literature formed the core ideas of chapter eight.

Today, the vast majority of social media users in Nigeria are the youth who, by their nature, are inclined to opportunities offered by it. Youth participation in social and political matters has formed the core of social media usage in Nigeria. It is a way to express opinions, talents, and conversations around any subject of interest and criticism. The youth population has become an integral part of social media, as the group seems to form the sustaining forces of many platforms. Exploring the relationship between youth participation and social media constitutes the messages outlined in chapter nine of this book.

Youth participation on social media has allowed the growth of momentum to herald pressure on the government and persuade them to submit to the people's wide opinions and feedback. It has been a form to commence and incite actions that include demonstrations. An evidential height of these expressions was the 2020 #End-SARS protest against police brutality. Social media allows the youth to find their voice and pass information about their experience with the police and other problems militating against the peaceful existence of the citizens. It has been a pseudo-meeting point where the youth aggregate their voices to resist unfavorable policies and conditions of the nation. Seeing the need to explore these resistances, the impact of #End-SARS and the future possibility, I dedicated chapter ten to discussing messages the society needs to learn from these phenomena as reasonable expectations.

The third part of this book is based on some of the major contributors. My intention is not to exclude some major individuals but to pick some with aggregative perspectives, which explains the omission of several major names. Those represented as individual contributors speak on many of the issues discussed in the book's second part. The individuals examined in this part have been able to critically examine policies, and social issues, alongside emerging points of discussion in society. They are appropriate because of their continuous reasonable maximization of social media dynamics.

Chapter eleven is dedicated to discussions on the pursuit and expression of knowledge by the late Pius Adesanmi and contextualizing his prompt reactions to issues affecting Nigeria and Nigerians. He has been able to pass his messages and analyses through publications and social media handles; he was revered for his understanding of issues and insightful comments and recommendations. He connected the past and present generations in propelling Pan-Africanism by tearing down the neo-colonial and ineffective features of the government and its parastatals through publications and comments on social media. He was a familiar face for the youth in their engagements with the government and did well to connect intellectualism to discussions. The death of Adesanmi is an occurrence that saddens me at the mention of his name, but his contributions will never let his name be forgotten. Hence, the wisdom and body of knowledge of Adesanmi, in line with society and social media, is discussed in chapter eleven.

Aside from Pius Adesanmi, I added another brilliant mind, Ayo Olukotun, who has been remarkable in his analytical skills and projections of his opinions about the country. Chapters Twelve and Thirteen examine the projections of Ayo Olukotun's ideas on national dimensions and the threatening conditions of the country. His opinions became important subjects as they were formed from his understanding of democracy and certain threats to its practice in the country. His ideologies about Nigerian democratic practices engage political occurrences since 1993 and the country's current conditions in line with governmental reactions. As a person inclined to

freedom of the press and media, the impacts of his contributions, especially within the phase of social media dynamics, became important, and I consider it an appropriate point of discussion.

Chapter fourteen points out the scholarly instincts of Abimbola Adelokun in her assessment of Nigerian situations using the instrumentalities of columns, blogs, publications and social media by which she establishes her positions on how the nation can be remade and rebuilt. Her unique approach to issues in line with contexts filled with societal incidences is worthy of intellectual discussion. The chapter tries to find an answer to understanding what she has been saying about Nigeria, the context in which she says it, and her understanding of the remaking of Nigerian society, helping us relate to her stance better. Adelokun is fascinated by the exploitation of religious practices, the contemporary issues in society and conversations around the media, which makes her fit into a discussion of social media trajectories.

While conceptualizing this book, I realized that understanding different narratives about Nigeria and its projected future opens one's worldview about the situations and makes one see them from different perspectives. In this sense, I decided to plug into Bamidele Ademola-Olateju's narrations of the nation's state and her projections of the Nigerian future without being oblivious to present predicaments. She has been providing these narrations, analyses and contextualizing Nigerian situations for years with a notable medium of contributions through the Premium Times since 2003. She relates Nigeria to its economic travails and social and political incidents in line with their effects on the Nigerian population. Her narrations of the Nigerian situations as ordinary citizens and her progression into active politics make her narratives important for discussion for the sake of perspectives. Thus, chapter fifteen of this book is dedicated to analyzing those narratives.

Chapter sixteen examines Gloria Emeagwali's approaches to issues that cut across African indigenous societies and how they relate to other diversities. Her conversations circle the exploration of indigenous and African knowledge in line with societal concerns. She has been able to plug African epistemology into diverse areas of endeavors, including scientific inquiries. She is particular about the interconnectedness of African societies, histories and cultures, and as a result, her thoughts are crucial for scholarly examinations.

While many scholars might not be very disposed to the use of social media for societal discussions and intellectual engagements because of its limitations and vulnerabilities, Farooq Kperogi seems to be one that intentionally exploits social media with an impressive engagement of the public. My interest in helping understand and analyze his political criticism and opinions made me dedicate Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen to lay a foundation for further engagements of his opinions on Nigerian politics and elections. Kperogi has been particular about the current Nigerian government and situations, and his opinions on recent policies have generated interest.

His recent publication, *Digital Dissidence and Social Media Censorship in Africa*, manifests his convictions about social media, its instrumentality and its interaction with the government. Chapter seventeen is specifically channeled toward his particular views on two Nigerian Presidents, while chapter eighteen gives insight into his understanding and expectations of the 2023 elections.

The nineteenth chapter depicts my interest in engaging the opinions of Moses Ochonu under scrutiny in the view of the University system and how Nigerian peculiarities and problems affect it. Ochonu, inclined toward modern African history, has been able to relate contemporary matters with the African systems, including the educational sectors. His ability to relate the contemporary African and Nigerian occurrence and their historical events and developments have given him insight into understanding the current situations. This helped me develop the conviction to put his discussions into perspective and juxtapose them with the Nigerian state, the university system, and corruption.

Furthermore, Anthony Akinola became another person of interest whose lines of thought along the lines of unity and objectivity formed the basis of my discussion in chapter twenty. Akinola has been making his opinions about the nation's state known for years, and his views have always been relevant to social issues with a touch of detribalized stance.

Victor Asemota's positions on the relevance and applicability of technology and modern social requirements are discussed in chapter twenty-one. The trajectories of his opinions and subscription to the importance of technology have been relevant to social media as a subject matter that affects society and thus makes them worthy of intellectual scrutiny. To end the second part of the book and analysis of the thoughts of some individuals whose opinions have been relevant on subjects affecting the country and Africa vis-à-vis the peculiarities of social media, I placed the contributions of Jibrin Ibrahim on Nigerian politics and how he projects its influence on the society in chapter twenty-two.

The fourth part is a three-part conclusion; the first, chapter twenty-three, is a critique of the Nigerian situation, how social media has impacted a failing Nigeria, and the possibility of a renewed country. I provide a link between current situations and a possible imagined future, in addition to the factors that might threaten national expectations. I also put certain contributors, especially those already mentioned, on a scale of influence to see whether all their opinions could change much of Nigerian political and democratic practices. The endeavor in chapter twenty-three suggests the possible negative and positive images of Nigeria's future with factors that could lead to individual results. The second part of the conclusion, chapter twenty-four, is an overall assessment of the possibilities and limits of the power of social media warriors. The chapter examines their roles along the line of political participation hierarchies and the limitation of their influence. Chapter twenty-five, the last

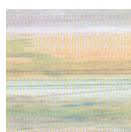
chapter, tries to balance the arguments by introducing perspectives from the angle of those criticized by the above contributors, examining the strength of previous arguments and positions and creating balance to allow objectivity and varieties of vantage points.

Social media is a contemporary reality that we all must adjust to. It is one of the contemporary commuters of globalization that defines recent social constructions. The realities of social media, whether positive or negative, cannot be ignored without negative consequences. This reality informed the discussions this book raises about its influence on identity, motivation for nationalism, and platform for active engagements. I also discuss the consequential possibilities and disguised limitations of social media and those that utilize it.

This manuscript was completed in 2022 when President Buhari was in power. While all the main themes and issues remain, personalities in power have changed in many instances. Many people in power had either lost their re-election bids or were replaced by others. Thus, the present tense applies as of the time of writing.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



The title of this book is based on the assumption that people have become the media in their own right. They control the news! They dwell on the most important issues in their society: misinformation, democracy, injustice, corruption, “tribalism,” disunity, poverty, education, religion, insecurity, politics, and major events. Social media provides freedom to say anything at any time and from anywhere, including verifiable and unverifiable information turning everyone into their own journalists and audience simultaneously. The emerging issues from social media paraphernalia often spread like wildfire with the government’s limited capacity to censor them. It has become a reality and a factor instrumental to social and ideological formation. If one dedicates time to following these trends and conversations, one will realize the large ocean of themes that affect the national and global state.

This book is about how social media has impacted the democratic space, allowing everybody with access to become a voice, create their agency, and promote them as they wish. There is a diversity of ownership on small and big platforms, creating a community of various interests. One cannot deny that issues relating to identity, diversity, politics, cultural diffusion, and equality are themes often attributable to the practice of democracy in the world. The preponderance of globalization processes has propagated these themes. As the contemporary chief tool of globalization, social me-

dia has also not withdrawn from creating engagements and conversations around them. Seeing the importance of these themes to democratic practice and their reenactment by social media, one cannot help but inquire to understand the relationship between them.

The themes, engagements, and how social issues are affected by this new reality cannot be possible without those, including Vinton Cerf and Bob Kahn, that contributed to the creation of the internet communication protocols upon which the logic and details of the social media are created today. They have shown the unimaginable level of exploration of the human mind and remind us that there is certainly space for new inventions that would change the face of the world. While they have created these possibilities, one must also appreciate those who have created social media communities with them, bringing the world closer to global citizenship. Mark Zuckerberg, Jack Dorsey, Mimi Kalinda, Zhang Yiming, Alexis Ohanian, the Durovs and their colleagues, and other creators of social media platforms must be appreciated for creating spaces to engage the world.

Africa and Nigeria must be encouraged to continue their paths to technological advancement and innovation that will continue to show the potential of the continents. The world has witnessed brilliant African minds that have established themselves in the technology industry, and as a result, the continent and Nigeria must learn to understand that if there will be a desired future where African countries can compete technologically with established non-African countries, deliberate investments and creating an appropriate trajectory will make the youth, institutions, and universities become leaders in the tech industry.

It would be sheer ignorance to ask if anything good can come from social media platforms, seeing their volatility and vulnerability. Social media platforms are two-edged swords capable of contributing valuably and worsening societal issues. Within these flexibilities, some individuals have found it worth putting the platforms to good use, engaging Nigerian citizens and creating needed sensitization. When the usual expectation of social media usage in many places is frivolity, it is important to appreciate those that do otherwise. This has made it possible to gather sources for this work and create the right understanding of themes as they affect the nation. The past activities and opinions of certain individuals through news and social media platforms have become sources of reformation for social media conversations. These people and their thousands of followers have been able to use the platforms to engage the citizens on issues affecting Nigerian democracy and the nation-state. It is through the lenses of their opinions that this writer has examined relevant themes to contemporary Nigerian society. These people and others that have resolved to utilize the platform for societal transformation are contributing to the contemporary positive history of social media, and they must be appreciated.



The individuals spotlighted in this book have come to be because of their years of social and political contributions and advancement of development and progressive discussions in the country. This book would not be possible without their deliberate attention to and for social issues. The late Pius Adesanmi must be appreciated for wise analyses and forecasts of the Nigerian future. If Nigerians and their leaders apply some of his recommendations and heed some of his warnings, it is sure that the country's conditions would be better than this. Ayo Olukotun's views have allowed society to see the political makeup of the nation. Abimbola Adelakun must be appreciated for her commitment to the hope of a better Nigeria and how the nation can be remade. Bamidele Ademola-Olateju's analyses of national issues and occurrences have allowed this book to stretch to many fronts in Nigerian political atmospheres. Farooq Kperogi's insistence on addressing issues related to freedom of the media and political equities and Victor Asemota's technological understandings added flesh to the social media context intended in this book. Jibrin Ibrahim, Gloria Emeagwali, and Moses Ochonu's critical evaluation of historical and political developments and the university system in the country opened remarkable lines of thought for great discussions. All of the above individuals have unknowingly been writing their legacies.

I appreciate every individual who has assisted in one way or another in writing this book. Those that I interviewed on the streets, streams of WhatsApp messages from known and unknown people, forwarded messages from Facebook, Twitter posts and commentaries, the USA-Africa Dialogue, those who unknowingly broadened my ideas, etc. These contributions formed important parts of this book.

I must also laud the commitments of my readers, critics, and those who often anticipate releasing my thoughts and anticipations. What you learn, your reactions to new knowledge, and the criticisms you take, make you members of the "wisdom of crowds," as James Surowiecki put it in *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies, and Nations*. The "wisdom of crowds" from Bola Dauda, Michael Oladejo Afolayan, Olusegun Akeju, Peter M. J. Gross, Simi Hassam, Kareem Shamusudeen, Adebukola Bassey, Theophilus Alawonde, Oluwafunminiyi Raheem, Wale Ghazal, Segun Olopade, Pankthi Dhagia, Medinat Malefakis, Tayo Keyede and many more shows, among other things, that truth is not neutral: facts can be manipulated; the context of facts may be wrong or right; ideas can come from multiple sources; the old and the youth can combine for productive work. In proofreading the manuscript, I owe a debt of gratitude to many people: Adebukola Bassey, Sati Fwatshak, Samuel Oloruntoba, Olajumoke Jacob-Haliso, Samson Ijaola, Olushola Richards, Yahaya Halidu, Victor Angba, Raheem Oluwafunminiyi, Damilare Bello, Yombo Raji-Oyelade, Daniel

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I thank you all—whether you are an idea generator, an idea discussant, an idea critic, or an idea user—many have traveled with me on a long journey for a book based on reading over a million pages and items and one that took three years to complete. I would be the first to admit that it is ready for a revised edition!

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