Political Participation in the Twittersphere and the Nigerian 2015 and 2019 Presidential Elections: A Cultural Underpinning

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Doctor of Philosophy

under the supervision of
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2020

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that this thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree, in the School of Communication at the University of Technology Sydney.

I also certify that this thesis is wholly my work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

This research is supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program.

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DEDICATION

Dad. For holding my dreams in your heart and reminding me of them.

Mum. For always believing in me and teaching me to do the same.

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Thanks go to:

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Terms	Meanings
AG	Action Group
APC	All Progressive Party
DSS	Department of State Services
EiE	Enough is Enough
ELMO	Election Monitoring data collection and reporting system
GSM	Global System for Mobile
ICT	Information Communication Technology
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
MTN	Mobile Telephone Networks
NCNC	National Council of Nigerian Citizens
NPC	Northern People's Congress
PDP	People's Democratic Party
SMO	Social Movement Organisation
SSS	State Security Service
YIAGA	Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth & Advancement

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ongoing debate about the use of social media as tools of participatory democracy and aims to provide a better understanding of their applicability within a distinctly African context. Specifically, it investigates the role of Twitter as a new tool of political participation in the Nigerian cultural context. It presents the argument that while social media are valuable tools of political participation, the culture in Nigeria's diverse society, including the culture of economic dependency, exerts as much – or more – influence on political participation among the country's citizens.

The study employed a connective ethnographic methodology, juxtaposing netnographic data collection on Twitter with offline interviews and observations of 24 participants, including seven key informants. This use of qualitative methods is significant because Twitter-based studies are predominantly quantitative. In a society imbued with culture such as Nigeria's, a qualitative approach was necessary to excavate underlying factors that influence political communication in the (digital) public sphere. The purpose of using the connective approach was to understand the extent to which online political participation influences offline political activities such as voting.

The findings show that Twitter's contribution to democratisation in Nigeria is not autonomous. Rather, it is inter-dependent on other long-standing factors, such as societal culture and economic power. This finding supports the initial thesis of the study. It argues that Twitter fulfils a distinctive purpose of the public sphere in that it creates a space for critical reasoning that facilitates political change. While this constitutes its elitist status, however, it also makes the microblog a more valuable medium for political discourse than other social media platforms.

The evidence also shows that Twitter offers anonymity, which safeguards users from facing repercussions because of their political views. This is a useful finding in present-day Nigerian society where the government imposes punitive measures on online and offline dissidence. Furthermore, observations of the communication patterns of the three major ethnic groups in the country showed that ethnicity as culture exerts a significant influence on the communication patterns of Nigerians, both online and offline. These findings contribute to the methodological broadening of Twitter-based studies.

In conclusion, the current study supports the call by non-Western researchers for the contextualisation of social media and political studies within societies as opposed to the common superimposition of findings from Western studies to non-Western contexts. Furthermore, it calls for further research that utilises a comparative approach to explore commonalities and evaluate contrasts by applying diverse cultural lenses. It also proposes that a similar study should be undertaken on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, whose userbases are more representative of the Nigerian population. Finally, a mixed-methods study could excavate other themes that influence political participation that have not been explored here.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

When election results are announced and a victor is declared, what determines the outcome? What influences voters' choice of a candidate or political party when they cast their ballot? The removal of the Philippines president Joseph Estrada in 2001, which was fuelled mainly by public protests that were coordinated, in part, through text message forwarding, was the first time that social media were instrumental to the ousting of a national leader (Shirky 2011). This occurred long before the advent of social media platforms as they are known now (Facebook, Twitter, and others), which are designed for singular and multi-nodal communications. Following this, the Arab Spring presented other scenarios in which social media-coordinated political movements resulted in large-scale changes in leadership in several countries, with the leaders in three of the involved countries (Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya) being ousted or resigning (Robinson & Parmentier 2014). These cases, which occurred in non-Western contexts, present instances of social media use for political participation.

Since Barack Obama's success in using social media tools in his 2008 and 2012 presidential campaigns, their use has proliferated in local, national, and global politics. It would seem, then, that Kenterelidou's assertion that 'modern politics are increasingly shaped by the dynamics of public and political communication' remains valid (2005, p. 3). Social media have arguably reshaped modern-day politics by empowering the ordinary citizen to participate, mobilise, choose issues, and set the terms of the elections (Pack & Maxfield 2016). President Obama's victories support this idea, and it is imperative to establish the transferability of this new phenomenon to other contexts. In addition, Donald Trump's use of Twitter during his presidential campaign and throughout his presidency (he tweeted using his personal account as president whereas others in his status use a designated social media team to manage their public relations) has further enforced the use of social media as a political tool that can be implemented in addition to traditional campaign strategies.

Wimmer et al. opine that 'political and civic engagement are cornerstones of a vital democratic system' and that, historically, each generation has believed in and functioned within the confines of its unique characteristics (Wimmer et al. 2018, p. 1). This era is not an exception. On the contrary, media and cultural changes, which seem to occur more now than

ever before, are leading to the emergence of increasingly 'new forms and possibilities' for individuals to participate in the development of society (Wimmer et al. 2018, p. 1). In Nigeria, as in many other cultures (both Western and non-Western), social media have become new gates to the political public sphere, having significant levels of influence as measured in predominantly Western societies.

Rutledge (2013) opines that as powerful as new media tools have become, an effective social media campaign is not based on current technology; it is based on the psychology of social behaviours. This, then, brings up a debate regarding whether social media platforms in and of themselves are sufficient to win elections. Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955) support Rutledge's (2013) argument by engaging with another aspect of participatory politics and opinion-forming through the media. They argue that the media alone are not independent in opinion-forming but are instead part of a two-step process of enforcing and convincing individuals (Katz & Lazarsfeld 1955). They suggest that personal relationships (with family, friends, and colleagues) and other networked relationships – or, as they have been dubbed in the twenty-first century, *social networks* – are key to enforcing media information and ultimately changing people's minds (Shirky 2011).

In non-Western societies, such as are found in Africa, these relationships have stronger implications due to the strength of culture in contributing to the societal structures of communities. African societies, which Nigeria is one of, have long histories of communal integration that influence every aspect of the community. Family networks are tight-knit and have a significant influence on important decisions that their members make, including those related to their political views and party affiliations. Ethnicity and religion play such significant roles in Nigeria's political system that it would be naïve to dismiss these cultural attributes in any discourse about politics in the country. Culture, in this thesis, encompasses the values, beliefs and assumptions, practices, and social behaviours of a group of people (Godfrey 2001). This is significant because culture is intertwined in the political actions, decisions, and ideologies of non-Western societies in ways that are not visible in the West.

In the past, the broadcast media were at the forefront of electoral campaigns; they provided a platform for citizens to obtain information about the candidates and their parties, and they provided the agenda – what the issues for debate were. Today, however, that landscape is fast-changing, and new media – particularly social media such as Twitter – are progressively playing that role for voters. They are increasingly being used to induce and facilitate political

conversation and mobilisation amongst citizens. In addition to playing a role that was formerly played by traditional media, social media have eliminated the intermediary, which was primarily played by traditional media, thus allowing the electorate to engage directly with political candidates. The question is, 'Do they influence offline political participation (e.g. voting), and whom the electorate vote for?' Also, what precise role do they play in the political minefield? Furthermore, are they independent actors, or are there other factors, such as the societal culture, that are as or more significant in the political involvement and decision making of voting citizens?

This research project explores the interplay between social media, politics, and communication within a specific cultural context. Specifically, it investigates the role of Twitter as a tool in modern-day political communication and mobilisation, and how – if at all – it impacts the outcomes of elections. This project examines these possibilities with social media as the tool of political communication, the public sphere for political dialogues, and the converging point and facilitator of multi-nodal networks within which opinions are formed, introduced, and moved. As such, this thesis asks, 'How has Twitter changed political participation in the Nigerian cultural context?'

1.2 Research Context

The Nigerian political landscape has been rife with turbulence for nearly as long as the country has been an independent nation-state. The country has struggled politically and economically, significantly due to government overthrows by the military and subsequent military rule from the mid-sixties to the late nineties. Furthermore, the stringent use of force by the military has curtailed freedoms, especially freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Now on its fourth republican run (the third did not see the light of day), the country seems determined to maintain this fourth democracy, which was hard-won. The question of how democratised is fit for another thesis. However, with the advent of new and social media, there is optimism, particularly amongst young people, that this time, democracy will prevail.

This study takes its contextual frame from Nigeria's presidential elections. It started in the aftermath of the 2015 general elections, which presented itself as an interesting case study for several reasons, including that mentioned in the personal reflection above. It also incidentally, although expectedly, overlapped with the 2019 run in the polls, thereby creating an additional dynamic to the study.

The 2015 election was the first time that Twitter was primarily used as a political communication tool in Nigeria. It was used by politicians, citizens, citizen interest and other civil society groups, government agencies, and the country's independent electoral commission. Although political discourses took place in other social media (e.g. Facebook) during the campaign season and the elections, Twitter seemed to emerge as the most popular platform, with the British magazine *PR Week* dubbing this election as 'Nigeria's Twitter Election' (Moore 2015). Twitter's prominent rise in status during this election and the novel outcome of the election (i.e. the loss of an election by an incumbent president in Nigeria) makes it an excellent case to study, thus resulting in the focus of this research on Twitter's role in that election.

The 2008 United States presidential elections made history for two reasons. First, the country elected its first-ever black president. Second, and arguably of equal significance, Barack Obama's campaign was the first to effectively and successfully harness social media as a critical campaign strategy (Rutledge 2013). Although Twitter was barely a year old at the time Obama announced his candidacy in 2007, it went on to become a vital tool for political engagement and has, over the years, continuously risen to a place of prominence as a political backchannel. In the wake of the American 2016 poll run, however, new issues related to social media and big data use came to the fore that implicated tech giant Facebook and *Cambridge Analytica*, a British political consulting firm, in a scandal that ultimately resulted in the demise of the latter (Chang 2018). This brought into question issues of social media use for political purposes, thus putting them in a predominantly negative light.

1.3 Research Problem

Whilst social media and digital social networks as we know them today are in their second decade of popularity, social networks have existed for as long as humans have existed. People have co-existed in communities with others and formed relationships, both familial and otherwise. The quest for belonging and acceptance within a community has made social structures powerful and, thus, has inadvertently dictated the values and systems of societies. Through social media, what has been existent offline has been transferred to the more open online space. The outcome is that the need to belong and be accepted (and the power that society and culture wield) have become more potent than they were before the Internet and other new technologies.

Wojcik & Hughes (2019, p. 2) describe Twitter as 'a modern public square where many voices discuss, debate and share their views'. It has proven itself to be a suitable platform for social and political communication, evidenced most recently by its continued use by political figures such as American president Donald Trump, who frequently tweets using his personal Twitter account.

Data show that in 2013, the average Twitter user aged between 18 and 34 years old, held at least a bachelor's degree and had no children (Fuchs 2017). The largest group of users (21%) were located in the United States (Fuchs 2017). Seven years later, these figures have not changed. Current data (as of January 2020) show that the average demographic of Twitter users are aged 18 to 34, with people aged 25 to 34 representing the largest demographic of users (DataReportal, We Are Social & Hootsuite 2020a). These figures show Twitter's potential for increasing political participation within this user group.

Murthy (2017) acknowledges that on the whole, Twitter is not representative enough to redress systems of communicative power significantly. Even though it presents new viewpoints, the influence of the represented voices is somewhat limited. He asserts, conversely, that although 'the influence of ordinary people on Twitter is minimal, the medium can potentially be democratising in that it can be thought of like a megaphone that makes public the voices/conversations of any individual or entity' (Murthy 2017, p. 35).

Twitter has features that differentiate it from the more popular Facebook. It is open-spaced, which means that anyone can follow and be followed by anyone without any express consent. This model is different from Facebook's but has also been adopted by other social networking sites such as Instagram. Facebook has also updated its features to include a 'follow' option where a user can follow another without belonging to their friend group. It could be because of its open-spaced feature – the lack of community groups – that Twitter-focused studies are predominantly quantitative and the most textual and automated (Barberá 2015; Barberá et al. 2015; Gökçe et al. 2014; Theocharis et al. 2016; Vaccari & Valeriani 2015; Vaccari et al. 2013). Understandably, these studies do not fully reflect the nuances of individual personalities and choices in the use of this medium.

Qualitative new media studies have primarily utilised interviews and content analyses (See Mutsvairo 2013). Within this niche, ethnographic studies have concentrated on the Internet (or social media) as a virtual world that is separate from the traditional, offline world (Kozinets 2015). Consequently, one goal of this research is to fill this methodological gap by

using a connective approach, which will not only explore online activities but will juxtapose them with offline activities within cultural spheres. This approach is expected to help not only to answer the 'how' question of social media use but also, more importantly, the 'so what' question. That is, what relationships exist, if any, between online and offline political participation.

1.4 Nature of Enquiry

This study engages with global and African views to construct and decipher the connectivity that exists between democracy, the media, and citizens' political participation in the era of digital media and other new communication technologies. It also tackles several theoretical and empirical challenges that are evident in this area (Shinkafi 2016). For example, new technologies have been critiqued within African ICT scholarship, which identify the new opportunities – as well as threats – that they present to media practice and bourgeoning democracies and, hence, their role in society (Loader & Mercea 2012; Mhiripiri & Mutsvairo 2013).

The present research takes on a predominantly empirical approach to this enquiry. This work encompasses secondary research aimed at gaining insight into work already done to identify the gaps therein and original empirical research geared toward answering specific research questions, closing methodological gaps, and contributing to knowledge within the field of online political communication through a non-Western cultural lens. Jürgen Habermas and Manuel Castells' theoretical expositions of the public sphere (Habermas 1989; Habermas 1991) and communication power (Castells 2009) serve as the main theories for the study, and the social network theory is a supplementary theory that supports the examination of Twitter as a political communication tool. Furthermore, the investigation is steeped within a specifically-Nigerian cultural context as a pathway to excavating underlying factors in the use of new communication technologies within non-Western societies that differentiate them from their Western counterparts.

1.41 Aims and Objectives

This research aims to explore the ongoing debate about the use of social media as tools of participatory democracy and understand their applicability within a distinctly African context.

In light of these aims, this study outlines the following objectives:

1. To examine current practices and uses of social media in Nigeria, framed within electoral studies as test cases. The goal is to gain insight into the roles of these media and the role that culture plays in their utilisation in a distinctly non-Western society.
2. To ascertain what relationships, if any, exist between online political activities and offline activities. The goal is to understand the degree to which democratic development can be attributed to these new media within the examined context.

1.42 Research Questions

The overarching question that this research seeks to answer is as follows.

How has Twitter contributed to a change in political participation within the Nigerian cultural context?

This research seeks to answer this question within the context of social media use in presidential elections. This question is subsumed in and examined through the lens of Nigeria's societal culture. It is broken down into further sub-questions (SQs):

SQ_1: How is Twitter used as a tool for political participation within the Nigerian context through the case study of the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections?

SQ_2: How and to what extent do cultural beliefs, practices, and behaviours influence the political decisions of the Nigerian electorate?

SQ_3: What relationships exist between online political activities and offline realities and outcomes?

This research argues the following:

A_1: Twitter contributes to increased political participation among young, educated Nigerians.

A_2: The culture of economic dependency that is inherent in Nigeria influences political decisions.

1.5 Limitations and Delimitations

While the goal of the present study is to contribute to African scholarship, the scope of this study is limited to Nigeria. This limitation, however, is justifiably advantageous beyond Nigeria because of the country's position in Africa's political and economic structure. The similarity in cultures between African states, especially those in West Africa (within which Nigeria is situated), and the collaborative political ventures and exchanges that exist in the

region's political landscape suggest that the outcomes in this work are relevant and transferable to those societies.

Also, this research was limited to predominantly urban Nigeria by design and due to resource constraints. This limitation, however, is also justifiable considering evidence from the statistics of Twitter users as highlighted earlier.

1.6 Justification

Nigeria has a turbulent democratic history as well as a history of institutional and societal corruption, which has stigmatised the leading African state before the world. Therefore, this research aims to decipher whether new media tools, which surged in tandem with the growth of the country's fourth republic, are an answer to the political dilemmas that persist in the country. According to Curran (2011, p. 136), 'the offline world influences the online world – in particular, its content and use – more than the other way around.' This thesis seeks to understand whether this mode of influence is still the case a decade later or whether strides in equitable interconnectivity have been made between the two spheres.

1.7 Contribution to Knowledge

This study examines the first-of-its-kind phenomenon in one of Africa's most influential States. The 2015 presidential election marked the first time in Nigeria's democratic history that an incumbent president lost the election to a challenger. Now in the twenty-first year and the sixth presidential cycle of its fourth republic, Nigeria's political system has been run predominantly by ex-military generals or persons with strong ties to the military, and the question of legitimacy has remained in the minds of citizens. The 2015 election result showed good faith that the people indeed have power over the decision of who gets the premier office in the nation.

Considering Nigeria's positionality within the African continent, the 2015 electoral outcome bears potential significance for the use of social media as political tools within the wider continental space. Therefore, this study would allow transferable inferences and lessons to be drawn from this unique experience. Furthermore, it will provide a cultural context for the study of social-media-mediated communication within Africa.

This is a cross-disciplinary research work that encompasses politics, communication, media, sociology, and anthropology. This cross-disciplinary approach is crucial to obtaining a

holistic representation of social media's role within the political public sphere by obtaining different disciplinary perspectives through its discourse. The design and methodology will also contribute to Twitter-based studies by creating a niche.

1.8 A Grammar of Twitter

Just as grammars of language describe how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts, our visual 'grammar' will explain how people, places and things combine to form visual 'statements' of greater or lesser complexity and extension (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006, p. 1).

Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) suggest that visual images tell grammatical stories in the same way that texts do. While Twitter was exclusively textual at its inception, it has, incorporated visual components – including photographic and audio-visual elements – to its structure over time. In a world where images are increasingly being preferred to text, it is essential to establish interpretations of grammatical features that are used to describe both graphical and textual matter.

This section describes the grammatical architecture and language of Twitter – words that are used to describe the Twitter interface and the different elements that contribute to the user experience on the microblogging platform and action words that describe Twitter-specific actions. Some of these words are everyday words that have Twitter-specific meanings or social media-specific meanings, and others are unique words that have been created to enhance the user experience. The latter are usually applicable only to Twitter and, when used, are implied to refer to actions or features related to the platform.

1.81 An Architecture of Twitter

'Twitter is an online social networking service that enables users to send short 280-character messages called tweets' (Clement 2020) or, as the company describes itself, 'Twitter is what's happening in the world and what people are talking about right now' (Twitter Inc 2020). It currently ranks among the top 20 social networks worldwide with 340 million active users as of January 2020 (DataReportal, We Are Social & Hootsuite 2020b). Activity on Twitter tends to spike during events (Clement 2020) due to its live-tweeting feature, which allows people to talk about events as they happen. This is a feature that the company has used to describe itself. Initially intended to be a short messaging service, the microblog is famous for its character

limit on posts, which rose from 140 to 280 in 2017 (Larson 2017), allowing users to share messages with short bursts of information.

The list of architectural terms below is not exhaustive. The terms provided here are those that bear some relevance to this thesis.

Architectural Terms

Term	Meaning
Handle	The username of a Twitter account, preceded by the '*at*' symbol ('@'), for example, @username. This is used to create a unique URL for each Twitter account (preceded by twitter.com) and can be changed at any time.
Verified account	If an account is verified on Twitter, it means that Twitter has certified the identity of the account owner (i.e. that the user is who they say they are. This is usually shown by a tick sign (called a "badge") next to the account name. An account can be verified only by Twitter, and the company applies the badge to the account itself. Twitter may verify an account that is believed to be of public interest, for example, accounts belonging to users engaged in politics, entertainment, journalism, and other key areas.
Tweet (noun)	A message of up to 280 characters (including spaces) shared on a user's wall.
Thread	A continuum of short messages shared as a continuation of a conversation started by one initial tweet.
Followers	A group of Twitter users who follow another user's account.
Following	This shows the number of Twitter accounts a user follows.
Hashtag	A hashtag usually refers to a topic on Twitter. A hashtag can be a keyword or phrase, and the '#' symbol precedes it. It is used to highlight what a post or an ongoing conversation is about. For example, #SuperBowl will show a list of conversations about the Super Bowl. The hashtag was a unique Twitter feature that allowed anyone to follow a conversation by searching for the hashtag and seeing all tweets that are included that hashtag. It is now used across several social media platforms.
Profile	A person's Twitter profile gives other users basic information about their account. It gives the account name, Twitter handle, and the user's location. It also shows when the user joined Twitter (the month and year when the account was opened), the number of followers they have, the number of accounts they are following, and how many tweets they have shared in the lifetime of their account.

Newsfeed	This is found on the landing page of a user's account. It shows a digest of news (tweets) from the accounts you follow.
Twittersphere	All the people who tweet (also called the *Twittosphere* or *Twitosphere*).

Table 1.1 Twitter Architectural Terms
Adapted from Walker (2019); Twitter (2020)

1.82 A Language of Twitter Use

Like its counterparts (e.g. Facebook), Twitter has its unique dictionary of terms that are used to explain actions that are unique to the platform. The language terms below do not represent the entirety of Twitter vocabulary. The table below includes only those terms that have some relevance to this thesis.

Language Terms

Tweet (verb)	To share a message of up to 280 characters (including spaces) on your or another user's wall.
Reply	Replying on Twitter means responding to a tweet with a comment, usually with the person's @username at the start of the message.
Retweet	When a user shares (or forwards] another user's tweet to their own network. This usually means the person found the item valuable, though it does not necessarily mean that they agree with the content.
Follow	If you follow someone, you are their follower. You can see their Twitter activities and retweet, reply, like, or share their tweets.
Like	A feature that appears beneath a Twitter activity (a tweet, video, photo, reply, or anything else). A *like* is indicated by a heart-shaped symbol and allows users to let others know they appreciate the content.

Table 1.2 Twitter Language Terms
Adapted from Walker (2019)

1.9 Thesis Outline

This thesis comprises seven chapters (not counting the introductory and concluding chapters). Chapter 1 introduces the study. It gives an overview of the origin of the study by providing a quick introduction of the case study outcome and the contextual background of social media and political communication studies. It also outlines the research problem, aim, objectives, research questions, the justification of the study, and its intended contributions.

Chapter 2 presents background information about the case study context (i.e. Nigeria). It provides a historical perspective of the country's political, media, and societal experiences, as

well as the challenges it has faced. This positions the study appropriately as a product of the past and a hopeful solution for the future.

Chapter 3 is a review of extant literature and is divided into two sections. Section one investigates historical studies on social media in politics (first in Western contexts and then in non-Western contexts), to decipher what has been done and what knowledge gaps still exist. Section two critiques specific aspects of Western- and non-Western digital media and political studies that are relevant to the present study.

Chapter 4 presents the theoretical framework of the study. Two main theories are explored here – the public sphere (Habermas 1989; Habermas 1991; Habermas, Lennox & Lennox 1974) and communication power (Castells 2009) theories – with social network theory serving as a sub theory that frames the study. The role of social media in elections is tested through the frames of these theories within the Nigerian context.

Chapter 5 discusses the methodology of this study. It outlines the strategies, methods, and techniques used to collect and analyse the empirical data in the research. It also presents justifications for the methods used, the limitations and delimitations of the study, and the ethical considerations of the study.

Chapters 6 and 7 present the findings and their analysis using two frames. Chapter 6 explores the uses and roles of social media in Nigeria through the lens of presidential elections. Meanwhile, Chapter 7 explores the influence of culture in social media and politics in the country. Issues of power and related dynamics are analysed here.

Chapter 8 discusses the findings presented in the previous two chapters within the frames of the theories and literature discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 and responds to the research questions.

The final section of this thesis presents the conclusions of and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

The introductory chapter of this thesis provided a synopsis of the entire research, mapped out the origin of the study, explained the key points and research questions, and provided a chapter-by-chapter outline. The current chapter reviews pertinent aspects of the Nigerian political and media landscapes, beginning with a historical background of the country's post-colonial political development, the evolution of the press through civil governance in the 1960s, military coups and military rule from the '70s to the '90s, and the return to democracy in the new millennium. It then continues with a description of the Nigerian culture, focusing on the religious and ethnic dynamics of the country and how they intersect; influence society's cultures, norms, and traditions; and fuse to influence the political and media fabrics of the nation.

2.2 Nigeria's Political Evolution and the Republics

Nigeria's political origins are similar to those of most of Africa, as all but one of the continent's countries were colonised by European powers, including the British, French, and the Portuguese (Iweriebor 2011). Like some other African countries that resumed self-governance in the wake of their independence from colonial rule, Nigeria experienced its share of political upheaval, having been stuck in a battle between military and democratic governance for decades (May 1984). Over half of its nearly 60-year post-colonisation period was spent under military regimes. During this period, there were ten recorded coup plots, which included both military-military overthrows and military-civilian overthrows (Ejiogu 2007). Some of the military takeovers resulted in the assassination of the incumbent leader – both civilian and military – whilst in many cases, the coups were bloodless and saw power relinquished peacefully by the incumbent (BBC News 2017; Kalejaiye 2009; Ogbeidi 2012).

Altogether, Nigeria has had four republics, with the first three lasting from less than a year (marked by Babangida's annulment of the June 12 elections in 1993) to just over four years (Shagari's presidency) (Campbell 2019). These republics are outlined below.

2.21 *The 1st Republic*

Following the adoption of a new constitution by the legislature, Nigeria ceased to be a Commonwealth realm and became a republic in 1963, three years after gaining independence from Britain (The Commonwealth 2018). It ran a parliamentary system of government led by a Prime Minister, modelled after the British parliamentary system. Tafawa Balewa, who was prime minister, also served in the same office under British-appointed Governor-Generals Sir James Robertson and Nnamdi Azikiwe (Herskovits 1979), during the period of transition from the country's independence in 1960 until it became a republic. Azikiwe, who was popularly known as Zik, became the first and only non-executive President of Nigeria from 1963 to 1966 (Herskovits 1979; Ogbeidi 2012).

In what was later called an intervention, however, this civilian government was ousted by the military, who took power in 1966 claiming that the civilians were not doing a good job (Embassy of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 2018). Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi became the first military head of state of Nigeria (Siollun 2016).

2.22 *The 2nd Republic*

General Olusegun Obasanjo became head of state following the assassination of his predecessor, General Murtala Mohammed, in 1976. He immediately initiated the process to return the nation to democratic governance and terminate military rule (Herskovits 1979). As part of the transition process, a constituent assembly was elected, and the political ban was lifted (Diamond 1987). Also, the previously established Westminster-style governance was jettisoned in favour of the American presidential system based on a new constitution drawn by the Assembly, which was published in 1978 (Herskovits 1979).

This constitutional overhaul was brought about by the decision for then-military Head of State General Olusegun Obasanjo to relinquish power to a democratically elected government in what was called 'a change of government as smooth as in a Western democracy' (Herskovits 1979, p. 314). General elections were held in 1979, and Alhaji Shehu Shagari emerged as the victor (Campbell 2019). He also became the first democratically elected executive president of the country (The Commonwealth 2018). General Obasanjo then peacefully handed over power to civil rule, making him the first military ruler of the country to do so.

President Shagari became the first president and commander-in-chief of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1979. He served a full first term of four years and was re-elected for a second term in what was called a landslide victory in 1983, thus securing his party the majority of seats in the Assembly (Campbell 2019). However, there was agitation over widespread vote-rigging, resulting in legal battles over the results (Campbell 2019).

In December of 1983, the military returned to power three months into Shagari's second tenure through a coup that overthrew the incumbent and instated General Muhammadu Buhari as the new leader (Campbell 2019). General Buhari indicted the overthrown government on counts of corruption and administrative incompetence (Ekwe-Ekwe 1985). The military also reinstated the previous ban on all political activities (Graf 1985). Subsequently, in a coup that was dubbed 'the IMF coup', Buhari's government was overthrown by General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, popularly known as IBB, in 1985 citing misuse of power, violation of human rights, and poor management of the country's worsening economic crisis (Emeagwali 2008, p. 13).

2.23 The 3rd Republic

General Ibrahim Babangida promised to end military rule in 1990 (Noble 1993). He lifted the ban on political activities in 1989 and drafted a new constitution but subsequently pushed back the return to civil rule from 1990 to 1993 (Noble 1993; Pacheco 1991). Elections were scheduled at all levels – some were held while others, including the presidential election, were rescheduled (Pacheco 1991). Due to presiding political unrest, the presidential election was not held until 12 June 1993, and Moshood Abiola, a southerner, emerged victorious, having won the majority votes (Campbell 2019).

Five days later, General Babangida suspended the election results and subsequently annulled them, causing an outcry among the national and international community (Noble 1993). Britain, for example, withdrew financial and military aid from the country (Dowden 1993). Not long after, in August of the same year, IBB transferred power to an interim civilian leadership, with Mr Ernest Shonekan serving as the head of the national government (Emeagwali 2008). Political turmoil ensued in the country, which the military decided that Shonekan was unable to manage. Thus, in November 1993, Minister of Defence General Sani Abacha quietly overthrew the interim government and assumed the office of the President of the Federal

Republic of Nigeria (Emeagwali 2008). The military was back in power, and the third democratic republic of Nigeria ended before it began.

General Sani Abacha's governance was marred by human rights abuse and the imprisonment of perceived challengers. Two notable political prisoners were president-elect Abiola, who declared himself president in June 1994 and then went into hiding (Reuters 1998), and former military president Olusegun Obasanjo. The latter was accused of participating in a coup plot against General Abacha and was sentenced to death but later had his sentence reduced to 30 years' imprisonment (Amnesty International 2000).

General Abacha announced that elections would be held in the summer of 1998 but then allegedly forced the five political parties, which had been formed in preparations for the polls, into naming him the sole presidential candidate (Rupert 1998b). In June of 1998, he died in his sleep (Rupert 1998a) and General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who was the chief of defence staff, succeeded him (Anonymous 1998).

Upon his ascension, the new head of state immediately initiated the transition process to return the country to democratic leadership (United Nations 1998). He lifted the ban on political activities, released political prisoners, and published a new constitution, which was a revision of the second republic constitution that adopted the American style of governance (United States Department of State 2000).

Interestingly, of all the military heads of states and presidents that Nigeria had during its days of courting the military, General Abubakar is the only living ex-military president who has not demonstrated an interest in returning to the highest office of the country.

2.24 The 4th Republic

After three failed attempts at civil governance and the succession of military-led administrations, Nigeria began her fourth democratic journey when then-military-president, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, convened general elections for the executive and legislative arms of government between December 1998 and April 1999 (The Commonwealth 2018). The new parliament adopted a new constitution that provided for multiparty elections in May 1999, and the military transferred power to a democratically elected president after elections that were closely and widely monitored by the international community, also in May 1999 (The Commonwealth 2018).

Thus, former military head of state and former political prisoner General Olusegun Obasanjo became the first president of Nigeria’s fourth republic (Olori & Oyo 1999). Nigeria is now on its longest republican journey, with over 20 years of democratic governance under its belt, and the military returned to the barracks. With the 1999 transition, the Nigerian State regained the goodwill of the international community, the remains of which had been lost during General Sani Abacha’s regime (Ajayi et al. 2018).

Since then, Nigeria has had five complete presidential terms, with each term being four years and the president having the option to run for one more term, in accordance with the constitution. President Obasanjo served two terms and attempted to constitute a third term through proposed amendments to the constitution (Soares 2006). However, there was national media outcry over this, and the proposal did not receive ascendancy in the House of Assembly (Soares 2006). A sixth election was carried out in February of 2019, starting a new four-year cycle. It seems that democracy has sunk deeper roots this time and is here to stay for good, although it is not without unique challenges.

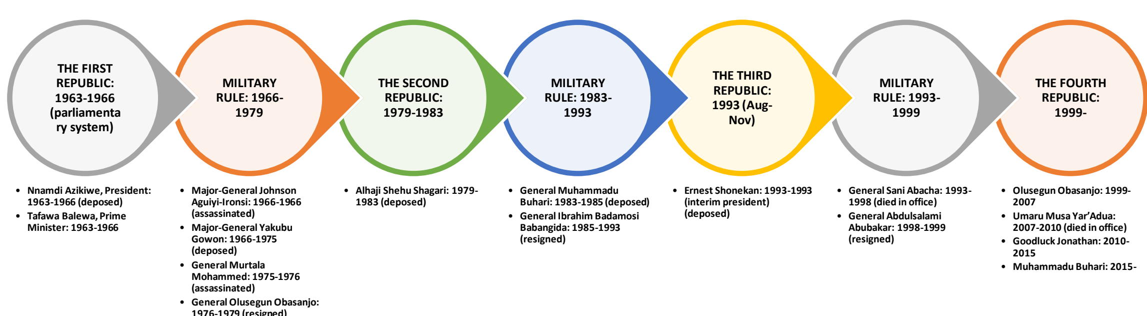


Figure 2.1 Nigeria’s democratic history in a snapshot
Source: Author

2.3 Nigeria’s Media Evolution

The Nigerian media are especially famous for their contribution to significant societal issues and social changes, spanning across colonial to post-colonial times, and are credited with being credible agents of politically transformative discourses (Kperogi 2016). Freedom of the press and freedom of speech became unattainable when military coups became the benchmark of the Nigerian society, and the fight to restore these rights in the country was a hard-won battle after decades of military rule within the African state (HRW 2000). The notion that this battle has been won is also arguable considering the current political climate.

It is safe to say that in the Nigerian case, the fundamentality of these rights was determined relative to who was in power. After lifting the ban on newspapers that was instated during the civilian regime, the head of the military government, Major-General Yakubu Gowon, signed a decree that gave the government authority to restrict the circulation of publications it deemed detrimental to the federal government or any state government (Oreh 1976). This was soon followed by the forceful purchase of controlling shares of the *Daily Times* and the *New Nigerian*, two of the most influential newspapers in the country (Ciboh 2004). Naturally, this meant that propaganda abounded in the media, as there was little alternative to the news (Seng & Hunt 1986).

Ranked as partly free by Freedom House (2019), Nigeria's press and media are still fighting for complete freedom in a war that now includes digital media. Unfortunately, a lot of the progress that has been made since the transition to democratic leadership in 1999 (marked by the lift on embargoes on private news media and soon evidenced by a massive proliferation of private radio and television broadcast stations) seems to have been grossly undermined since 2015. One piece of evidence of this is the increasing targeting of vocal citizen-activists who are critical of the government (Busari & Adebayo 2019). In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of arrests made by the government on persons who have voiced opposition to or dissatisfaction with the incumbent leadership (Busari & Adebayo 2019; Human Rights Watch 2019).

2.4 Nigeria's Internet Evolution

When Tim Bernes-Lee created the first-ever website (pictured below), he was simply looking to create a log for activities so that they could be accessible from any computer that his team logged into. The goal was to create a seamless working process through the cloud-based storage of information, not to facilitate social interactivity (World Wide Web Foundation n.d.). Similarly, when the Internet was first established, the goal was to enhance military communication, particularly in war situations, by shortening information travel time regardless of distance (Naughton 2016).

Decades later, however, these two forces have fused to create interactive solutions that have not only brought the globe to people's fingertips but also enabled interactions that may otherwise not have existed. The Internet and the World Wide Web have contributed to the reduction of the world as we know it into one global village.

Figure 2.2 Recreated page of the first website created by Bernes-Lee in 1989
Source: CERN (2019)

2.5 Internet Penetration and Access in Nigeria

Mobile Internet access has risen globally following the introduction of smartphones, with evidence showing that mobile Internet access rose from 4% in 2007 to 62% by 2017 and up to nearly 70% by 2018 (International Telecommunication Union 2018a; Willems 2020). In developing countries, these figures rose from 0.8% to 61% between 2007 and 2018 (International Telecommunication Union 2018a). Smartphones have significantly contributed to this rise in the Internet penetration rate in the Global South, with a significant portion of the population in these societies relying heavily upon them for access to the Internet (Willems 2020).

In Nigeria, the history of Internet penetration dates to the turn of the millennium, when the multinational South African telecommunications company, MTN, came into the country. For the first few years, owning a mobile phone was considered elitist; it was not affordable for the financially disadvantaged. At the time, mobile phones and sim cards were package deals, and a sim card cost as much as a mobile phone.

The percentage of Internet users in Nigeria has increased from 26% in 2016 (Central Intelligence Agency 2019) to 56% in 2019 (Statista 2019a), including Internet access via mobiles and computers. This represents an increase of over 100% in just three years, making the country one of the fastest-growing countries in Africa in terms of Internet use. Nigeria now has the largest population of Internet users in Africa and the 14th largest globally. Mobile phone subscriptions in Nigeria are at 76%, representing one of the highest Internet penetration rates in Africa,

As of December 2018, the Nigerian telecommunications sector was a 2.2 trillion naira (6 billion USD) sector, with global system for mobile (GSM) communications being its highest-grossing source of revenue, bringing in nearly 80% of that figure (Nigerian Communications Commission 2019a). This contribution rose to 99.7% contr by the end of October 2019 (Nigerian Communications Commission 2020).

According to the International Telecommunication Union (2018b) latest report on the information society, nearly four out of five households in Nigeria had mobile phones in 2015, which means that almost 80% of the population are potentially connected to the Internet. Recent statistics show that there has been a massive surge in teledensity – the number of mobile telephone subscriptions per 100 individuals – in Nigeria, between 2002 and 2018. Where teledensity was at 1.89% in 2002, figures for 2018 show a teledensity of 123.5% (See Figure 2.3). In other words, more than 20% of the population have two mobile phones.

Considering that this teledensity statistic is measured based on the entire population of the country (including children who generally do not have mobile devices), the data shows that the average adult in Nigeria owns two mobile phones. This is the case for several reasons:

1. People choose to have separate mobile phones for personal use and work.
2. Due to prevalent inconsistent connectivity issues, the average adult Nigerian has two mobile phones with two different mobile network sims or dual-sim mobile phones. That way, if one network has poor connectivity, they can switch to the other without losing connectivity completely (Odikayor et al. 2012).
3. Landline connectivity in Nigeria is on a constant decline, with about 114,000 active connections as of December 2018 (Nigerian Communications Commission 2019a). As a result, parents will purchase at least one extra mobile phone for their homes so that they can maintain contact with their children or nannies when they are away.

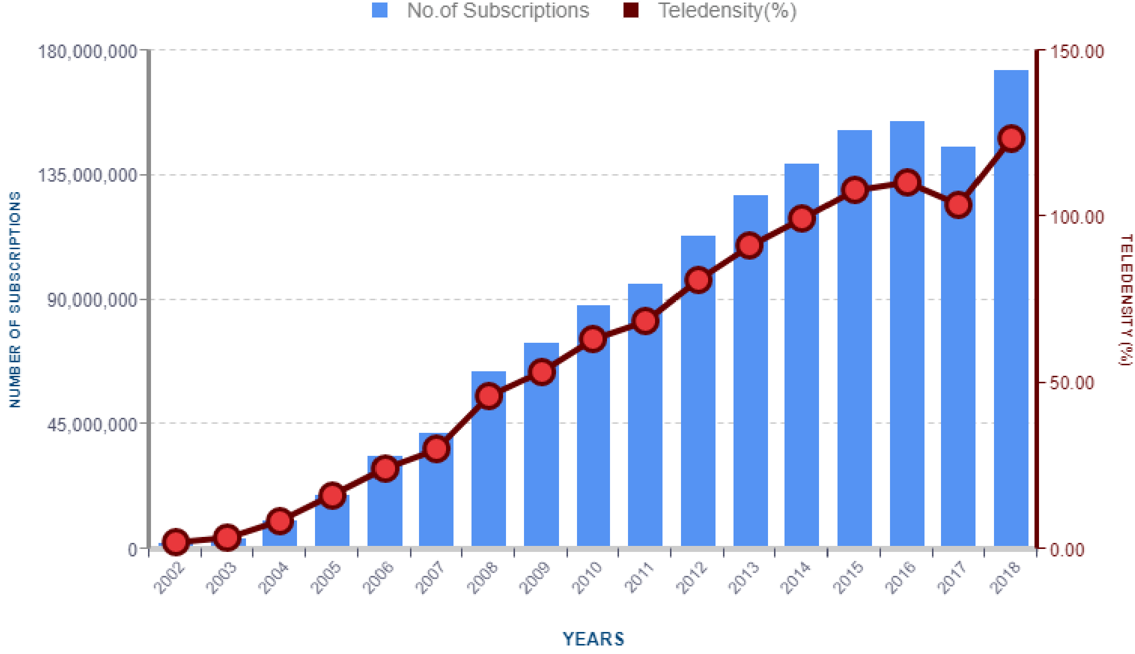


Figure 2.3 Telephony Subscriber Teledensity
Source: (Nigerian Communications Commission 2019b)

2.6 The Social Media Evolution

The first wave of social media penetration in Nigeria came during the early 2000s, enabling people to make social connections via Internet chatrooms. As of 2008, MySpace was the third-largest social networking site, behind Blogger and Facebook, and hi5, a social network like Facebook, was ranked eighth (Schonfeld 2009). Facebook came to Nigeria quickly, and as of 2016, more people used Facebook in Nigeria than anywhere else in Africa (Kazeem 2016).

Mobile phones are the most viable means of social networking in Nigeria. The majority of Internet users in the country do not own a computer, but the average adult in Nigeria owns two mobile phones, often serviced by two different mobile networks (Odikayor et al. 2012). The telecommunications giants in Nigeria – MTN, Globacom, and Airtel – are notorious for not having reliable connectivity in all parts of the country (Odikayor et al. 2012). As a result, mobile phone users subscribe to more than one network to mitigate any possible loss of connectivity from one network provider.

2.7 A Look at the Economy

Africa has more than its fair share of political, economic, and other issues, as well as ‘poor administration, corruption, war and terrorism’ (Nwosu 2019, p. 2). Such problems have only contributed to the magnification of the issues that plague the continent. Kharas, Hamel & Hofer (2018) report that ‘Africans account for about two-thirds of the world’s extreme poor’, and current trends show a consistent incline in the poverty level. Between April and October 2019, there was a 0.5% increase in the population living in poverty on the continent (see Figures 2.4 & 2.5). While other regions of the world had average poverty rates of below 13% in 2018, Africa’s average was about 41% (The World Bank 2018).

Looking at the figures, the abysmal state of the continent is apparent, and the fallout from the plaguing economic crisis signifies a level of financial dependency that is proportionate to its poverty indices and supersedes the rest of the world altogether.

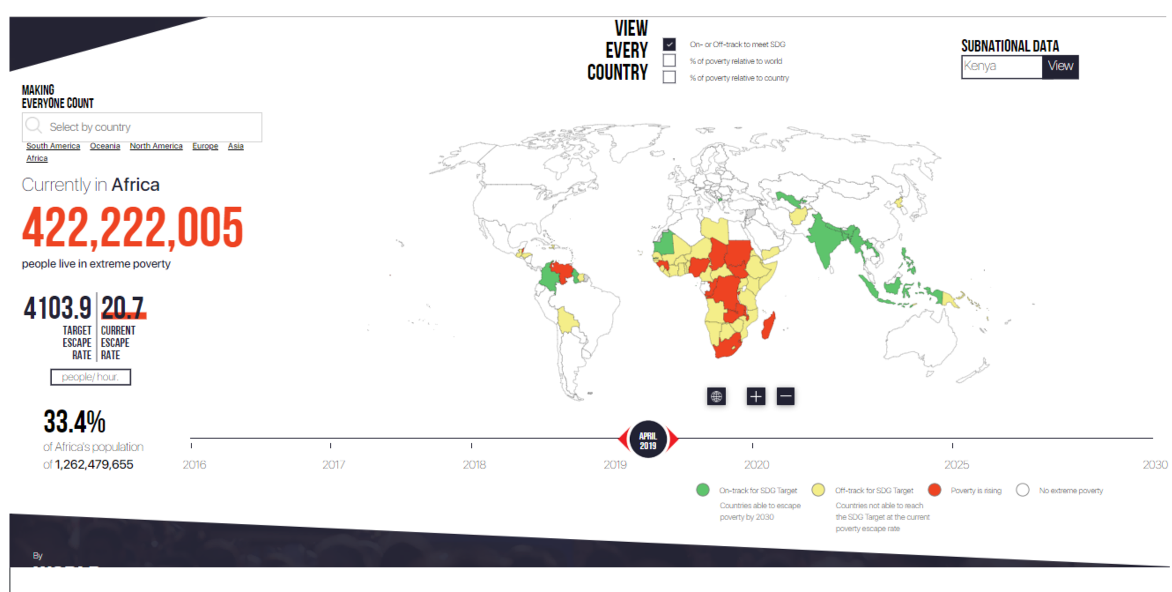


Figure 2.4 Africa’s poverty position relative to the world as of April 2019
Source: World Data Lab (2019b)

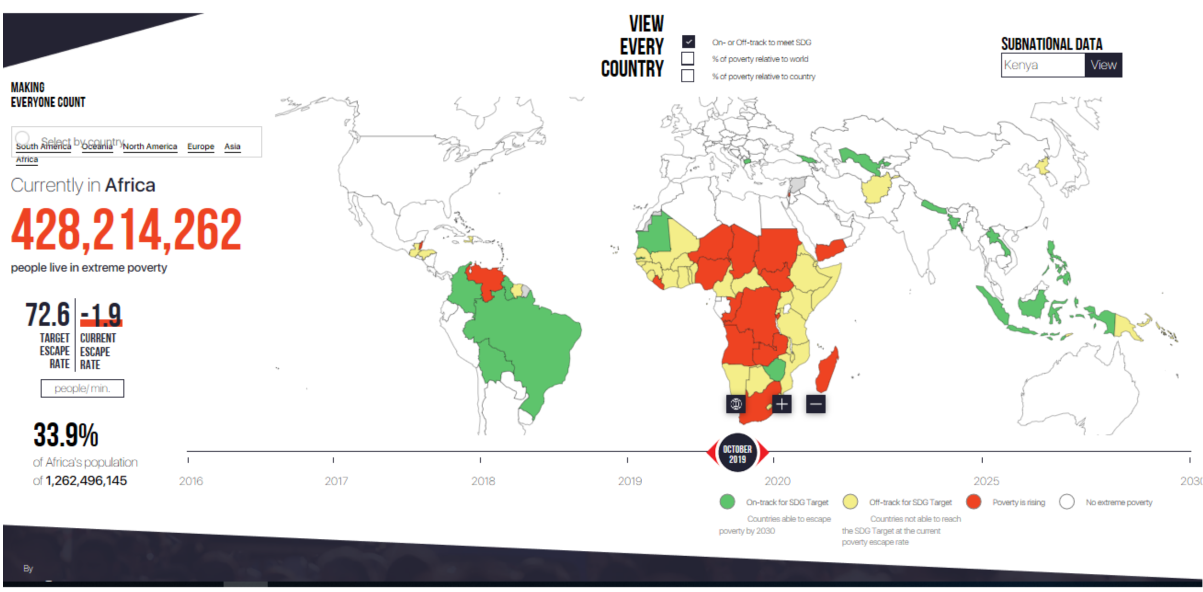


Figure 2.5 Africa's poverty position relative to the world as of October 2019
Source: World Data Lab (2019a)

Nigeria's figures for these statistics are equally staggering. The 2015 US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reports estimate that the total dependency ratio in Nigeria is 88.2 and that the potential support ratio is 19.4 (Central Intelligence Agency 2019). This means that the proportion of support to dependency in the country is roughly 1:4. The figures provided by the CIA are indicative of children aged 0-14 as well as the elderly population aged 65 and above. If the fertility rate in the country is 5.5, then in a family with two working parents, on average, each person with earning power will support at least one other adult in addition to the children. With poverty at an all-time low and given the country's history of economic dependency, it is no surprise that a discussion on the political progress of the country must involve a discussion of economics.

2.8 Cultural Dynamics in the Nigerian Society

Nigerian society is diverse in several ways, and two primary characteristics frame this societal diversity: religion and ethnicity. These two factors are also the mainframes that shape the polity seen in the country. Hence, it would be amiss to facilitate a discourse of Nigeria's politics without acknowledging these two vital factors – or forces – that drive its existence. That is why this thesis rests on a cultural backbone.

This section discusses the religious and ethnic make-up of Nigeria. It highlights the geographical locations and influences of religion in the north and south of the country. It also introduces the three most populous ethnic groups in the country and discusses their geographical positioning, as well as their associated stereotypes. The goal of this discussion is to elaborate on the complexities of the country, thereby laying a foundation for a thesis that argues that culture plays a vital role in the polity of a culturally diverse African state.

2.81 Nigeria's Religious Character

'Nigeria is one of the most religious countries in the world' (Legit.ng 2017). Religion in the country predates colonialism, with traditional beliefs rife across the different communities that eventually amalgamated into one (Kitause & Achunike 2013). Some of these African traditional religions are still being practised in Nigeria today to a variety of degrees, and they bear influence on the societal culture. However, Islam and Christianity, which are foreign religions, have become the predominant practices in Nigerian society, and they significantly influence the country's political culture. These foreign religions came to Nigeria from jihadists in the north and Portuguese Christians in the south (Kitause & Achunike 2013). As a result, the country comprises a hybrid of the two religions.

The map below shows the religious distribution across all states, with the north being predominantly Muslim and operating under the Sharia law (the Muslim religious law) and the south being predominantly Christian – although a proportion of the south-western states have significant Muslim populations. According to the US CIA's *World Factbook* 2018 estimate, the Nigerian population is 53.5% Muslim, 45.9% Christian, and 0.6% other religions (Central Intelligence Agency 2019). In other words, the Muslim and Christian religions are dominant. This diversity is reflected strongly in the politics within the country, enforced even further by the corresponding ethnic diversity, which significantly corresponds with the religious divide.

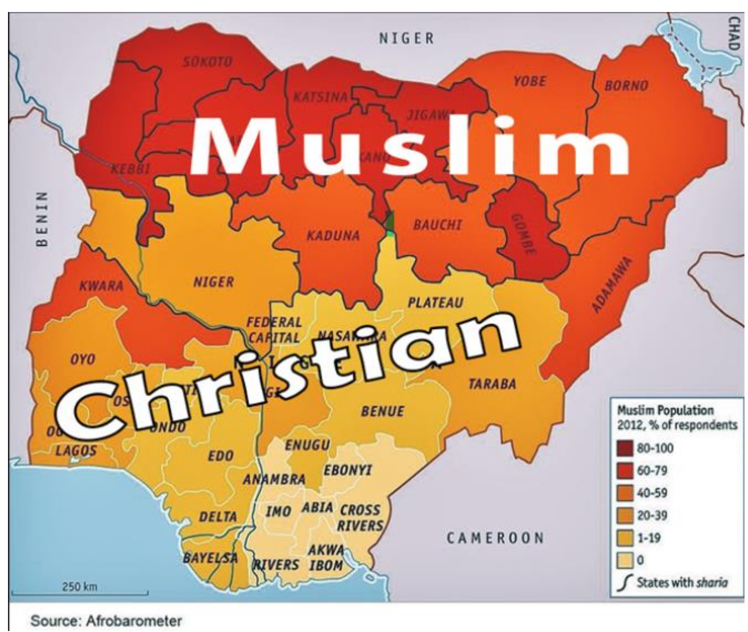


Figure 2.6 Map of Nigeria showing its religious divide
Source: Lower Niger Congress USA (2019)

For decades, there have been periodic religious crises in the country. These crises usually originate from the north. They involve Igbos (who are predominantly Christians) and Hausa-Fulanis (who are mostly Muslims) and result in many deaths and other losses. In the past two decades, these conflicts have caused the mass migration of Igbos back to the southeast, where they rebuild from scratch after losing their homes and businesses in the north. In some cases, the Igbos have retaliated in the southeast against the Hausa-Fulanis who make their homes there.

2.82 Nigeria's Ethnic Character

What is known as Nigeria today was initially called the Southern Nigeria Protectorate and the Northern Nigeria Protectorate, which were merged by the British to become one country in the early twentieth century (Vaughan 2016). Nigeria is an amalgamation of kingdoms and communities that were conquered, colonised, and governed by the British and united into one country in 1914 (Vaughan 2016). It boasts 400-500 different languages and many more dialects, which are derived from the diverse ethnicities that make up its people (Njoku, Amadi & Ukaegbu 2018; Study.com 2019). There are three major languages and ethnic groups in the country: Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba (Study.com 2019). They are also the three recognised official languages in Nigeria that are included in the school curriculum in addition to English.

To compensate for the diversity in languages within the country, English is the national language and the language of government.

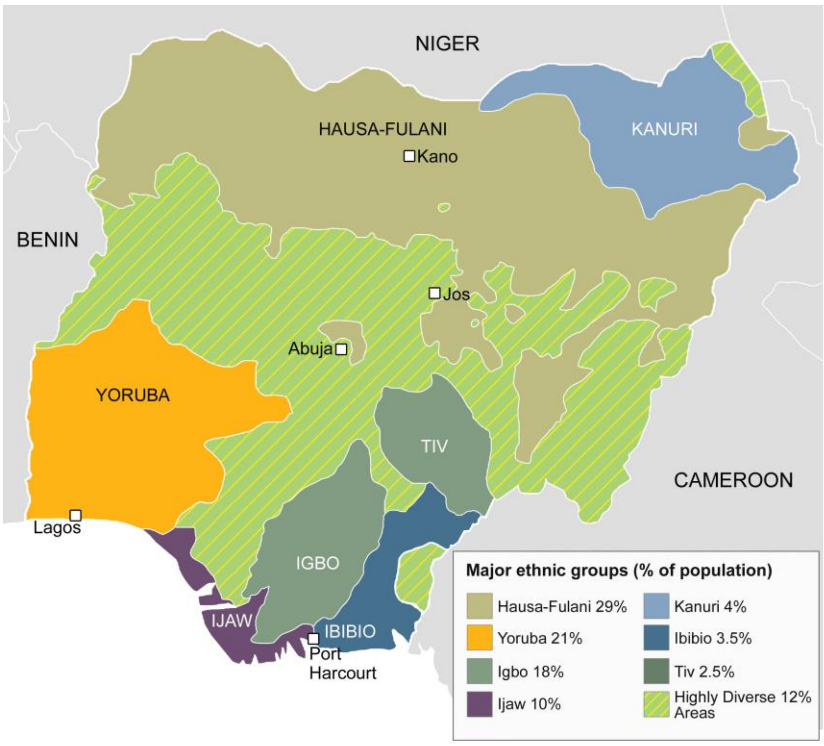


Figure 2.7 Map of Nigeria showing its ethnic diversity
Source: Kwaja (2011)

Hausa-Fulanis of the North

The northern region of Nigeria is populated predominantly by the Hausa-Fulanis, who speak Hausa and Fulani (and variations of these two languages) across communities (Sabiu, Zainol & Abdullahi 2018). The Hausas are traditionally cattle farmers and nomads, often rearing cattle and travelling with their herds across the country. In recent times, this practice has caused ethnic clashes and has resulted in the loss of lives due to the unauthorised use of farmland by pastoralists in other ethnic communities (Arowosegbe 2019). This ethnic group has the largest population in Nigeria (Sabiu, Zainol & Abdullahi 2018), a fact that historically gave them the majority representation in the Nigerian parliament and subsequently led to the election of the first Prime Minister, Tafawa Balewa, by the north on independence (Jackson 1972; Metz 1991). As a result, this group of people are stereotyped as having leadership dominance in the country's politics (Mustapha 2005). To the extent that this stereotype holds, it has been the source of the majority of election-related violence in the country, which has occurred whenever

their preferred candidate – determined by ethnicity – has lost the presidential election since the outset of the fourth republic (Human Rights Watch 2011).

Igbos of the Southeast

The southeast region is populated predominantly by Igbos, who speak the Igbo language and its variations across communities (Mustapha 2005). The Igbos are traditionally enterprising (Igwe et al. 2018), are predominantly Christians, and are generally well-educated. They often migrate to cities in search of a better life but maintain strong ties to their country homes, often returning for holiday celebrations such as Christmas, as well as traditional festivals, such as the *New Yam Festival*, which is a harvest celebration (Chukwuezi 2001). The Igbos, also sometimes called Biafrans, were primarily affected during the Nigeria-Biafra war of 1967-1970 because the war emanated from their desire for emancipation from the Nigerian state (Julius-Adeoye 2017). There were many civilian casualties amongst this tribe during the war. Furthermore, in post-war Nigeria, each Igbo man who had a bank account before the war was given only NG£20 (twenty Nigerian pounds) to rebuild, regardless of their financial worth and bank balance before the war (Lodge 2018). Consequently, the Igbos are also considered a resilient group due to their demonstrated ability to rebuild from nothing despite marginalisation.

Yorubas of the Southwest

The southwest region is populated predominantly by the Yorubas, who speak Yoruba as their primary language, with varying dialects (Mustapha 2005). They are considered the most educated Nigerian ethnic group, mostly due to the influence of the British who chose Lagos, a south-western colony, as the seat of their administration. While the Yorubas had their own traditional gods on the one hand and Islam had already penetrated the region on the other hand, Christianity permeated the region alongside the development of a modern economy, starting with the Portuguese, and then the British (Ogunbado 2012). As a result, there remains a significant Muslim population in the region, and, thus, Yorubaland is reflective of the Nigerian religious amalgam.

Ethnic Stereotypes and Conflicts

It is important to note that many of these stereotypical descriptions are informal, not necessarily documented, and are simply passed on through cultural experiences and historical accounts. Hausa-Fulanis are stereotyped as having a deep sense of loyalty to people and institutions than the other two major tribes have. They are also generally considered as having a quiet disposition, especially the women. This stereotype, to the extent that it is true, is assumed a

result of the Muslim religion that runs deep in the roots of the people and the requirements it places on followers of Muhammad the prophet, as well as religious and cultural restrictions on women. The religious and tribal conflicts between the major ethnic groups originated from the north and sometimes spread to the south. However, the majority of the casualties suffered were in the north.

Stereotypical claims are that the Igbos and Yorubas are more vocal and more likely to challenge authority than the Hausa-Fulanis. To the degree that this is true, evidence can be traced back to British colonial rule, when the southerners increasingly demanded more political representation in the British colony. Furthermore, cultural norms of respect and authority that exist within these ethnicities are more likely to be challenged in the south than in the north. Considering that Western education and Christianity progressed faster in the south than in the north, as remains the case today, this stereotype is also thought to be influenced by the West.

2.83 Diversity: Pro or Con of Nigerian Society?

Whereas diversity might be considered an advantage in some countries, this has not been the case throughout Nigerian history. The ethnic and religious diversities in the country have been a primary cause of the societal divide that has permeated the entire ecosystem in the country, including the civil service and politics. Even inter-ethnic marriages only began to be more widely accepted at the turn of the century where, in the past, they were strongly frowned upon by the different ethnic groups. Inter-religious marriages are also rare, occurring more in the southwest, which, as already described, has a mixed religious population.

2.84 Religion, Ethnicity, and Political Dynamics in Nigeria

The Nigerian political party system has historical factions, drawn along the lines of religion and ethnicity. The first political parties were the Northern People's Congress (NPC), the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), and the Action Group (AG) (Metz 1991). These three parties were formed in anticipation of independence and reflected the ethnic divide explicitly, with the NPC representing the interests of the Hausa-Fulanis, the NCNC representing the interests of the Igbos, and the AG representing the interests of the Yorubas (Jackson 1972).

This practice of ethnic representation has dominated the political system even today. Political parties reflect ethnic divides, although this is becoming less common now (Ross 2015). However, citizens' party allegiances and voting choices traditionally reflect these ethnic and religious divides. For example, in a presidential election, a Hausa-Fulani, Muslim man will vote for a candidate that shared their ethnoreligious characteristics (Ruby & Shah 2007). In practice, the average Igbo, who is Christian, will vote PDP, which they consider an Igbo-friendly party; meanwhile, the average Hausa, who is Muslim, will vote APC for similar reasons (Ruby & Shah 2007).

2.9 The 2015 Elections and Underlying Issues

Nigeria's 2015 presidential election was a monumental and pivotal one in the country's history. It was the first election in the country's democratic history, where the incumbent lost the election to the challenger (Moore 2015). While this may be considered typical in other democratic societies, this was a historical outcome in Nigeria that depicted a new political trajectory for the nation. It demonstrated that the voice of the citizen mattered – a concept that the majority had been disillusioned about until then. This outcome was not only significant for Nigeria but also for Africa as a continent. Due to the country's position in the continent's political economy, this outcome also bore significance for the political future of Africa, which has endured its fair share of colonial rule and post-colonial regimes rife with democratic autocracy, corruption, and political and economic stagnancy (Moore 2015). A significant aspect of the aftermath of Nigeria's elections was the beginning of what seemed like a trend occurring amongst neighbouring countries.

In Africa, it is difficult for an incumbent president to lose a re-election bid due to the limitless resources at their disposal. While Nigeria was not the first West African country where an incumbent lost re-election to a challenger, it is arguably the most significant. The first occurrence of this kind in democratic West Africa involved Senegal's Abdoulaye Wade, who lost the 2012 election to the opposition (Emmanuel 2016). However, following the Nigerian 2015 electoral outcome, a series of replications occurred with incumbent parties losing an election or a president's re-election to office in neighbouring countries, such as Ghana (Ellis 2016) and The Gambia (Barry & Searcey 2016) in 2016, Sierra Leone (Al Jazeera 2018) and Liberia (Levinson 2018) in 2018, and Guinea-Bissau (Tasamba 2019) in 2019. However, in the Ghanaian case, this was not the first time an incumbent party had lost to the opposition – it

was, in fact, the third time, following defeats by opposition parties in 2000 and 2008 (Ayee 2017). Nevertheless, it was the first time an incumbent president had lost re-election.

Every election, the media fulfil their agenda-setting role by helping citizens and politicians decide what the issues are during the campaign. However, like Andra Brichacek aptly states, 'recent shifts in the media landscape have changed how the press interacts with candidates, campaigns and the voting public' (Brichacek n.d.). Social media have contributed to mediatise electoral discourse further, reducing the agenda-setting role from the fourth estate (i.e. the media, who are the initial role bearers) and giving citizens more power to decide the issues of an election. With the international community lauding the groundbreaking outcome of Nigeria's 2015 polls, it is crucial to understand the key issues of that election. 'Jonathan's time in office [had] been troubled by a weak economy, high corruption, and a badly worsening conflict with the Boko Haram extremist group' (Lee 2015). Therefore, these issues translated to the three key election issues – namely insecurity, corruption, the economy, and (most importantly of all) insecurity.

2.91 Nigeria's Security Dilemma

One malignant problem that has plagued the Nigerian society for decades is that of insecurity (Osumah 2013). With a burgeoning unemployment rate, resulting in the production of employable graduates and other skilled force with a low rate of employment, the country has been ridden with insecurity, which has only increased through the decades.

Nigeria's security issues have been the focus of the international community in recent decades, particularly since the nineties due to the insurgencies in the Niger-Delta area targeted at foreign oil-mining companies that dominate the area (Paki & Ebienfa 2011). The debilitation of oil-mined communities in the region, which have largely remained underdeveloped due to unsatisfactory corporate social responsibility activities by beneficiary companies, have led to the rise of youth who have taken to alternative ways of getting retribution (Akpan 2010).

The kidnapping of expat workers for ransom and oil bunkering are some of the measures that have been taken by individuals and groups that have felt disenfranchised (Akpan 2010). Different attempts made by the government to mediate the region's instability have remained largely unfruitful to date. In addition to the issues in the Niger-Delta region, kidnapping and armed robberies have escalated in different parts of the country. These, in many cases, happen in daylight. For example, traffic jams in Lagos State have become a hub of

criminal activity, with gangs going into traffic, smashing vehicle windows, and demanding valuables from drivers and passengers.

Historically, however, Nigeria seems to have a recurring record of violent crimes, dating as far back as 1918 – a mere four years after the northern regions of the British colonies were amalgamated to what is now known as the Nigerian state. Some notable ones are 'the Egba Uprising in 1918, the Aba Women's Riots in 1929…the Kano Riots in 1953,' and the 12-day revolution by the Niger Delta Vigilante in 1966 (Osumah 2013, p. 537). The Nigeria-Biafra civil war of 1967 to 1970, which has unfortunately been left out of the history curriculum in the country's school system, is perhaps one of the most notable ones because it outright threatened the unity of the Nigerian state. Others include the "religiously-inspired" Maitatsine riots of the eighties (Harvard Divinity School n.d.), the anti-Sharia riots in Kaduna and corresponding reprisals in Aba in 2000, and many other crises throughout the country from the 1990s to the early 2000s (Osumah 2013).

The current insecurity climate has been escalated only by an insurgency group, called *Boko Haram*, that has wreaked havoc, causing the decimation of civilian lives and homes and, consequently, the displacement of millions of Nigerians. This organisation, which claims to fight against western education, among other things, have since been placed on the international terrorist watch group.

2.92 Boko Haram: Insurgency in Northeast Nigeria

The term *Boko Haram* is an amalgamation of the Hausa word *boko*, which means "Western education" and the Arabic word *haram,* which means, "forbidden." Hence, the term means 'Western education is forbidden' (BBC News 2016). Boko Haram was formed in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf, a member and preacher of the Izala sect of Islam who 'began to radicalise his discourse to reject all secular aspects of Nigerian society' (Stanford University CISAC Last modified 2018). Aptly named, as it would seem at first, the group began as an institution for Muslim children, targeted at the poor and set to reportedly radicalise them by teaching them to reject secular society (BBC News 2016). The group quickly began to engage in violence when it conducted its first attack and occupied police stations in Yobe State in 2003 (Stanford University CISAC Last modified 2018). This attack subsequently escalated into more attacks in nearby communities (Walker 2012).

It was not until 2009, however, that Boko Haram became widely known, following the death of the founder and leader, Yusuf, at the hands of counterforces (BBC News 2016). Uprisings started in Bauchi and proliferated into the neighbouring states of Kano, Yobe, and Borno (Walker 2012). At that time, the group became more politically focused and engaged in conflicts with the Nigerian government. They sought to instate a country-wide Islamic caliphate and establish the Sharia law, which is a law based on Islamic teachings and way of life that already existed in several Muslim-populated states in the country (Walker 2012).

The group has mostly concentrated its attacks in northeast Nigeria and seems to have predominantly targeted security agencies such as the police. Nevertheless, it has also targeted the federal capital several times, including the bombings of the police headquarters (Al Jazeera 2011) and the United Nations building (Ero 2011) in Abuja. Although presumably religion-centric and consequently ethnicity-centric in its operations, its consistent attacks on rural communities in the northeast suggest that its trajectory may not be as focused on religion and ethnicity as initially assumed. This is because the northeast is a predominantly Muslim and Hausa-Fulani region. Also, although Nigeria has always had a potent religious and ethnic divide, this has been heightened by the terrorist group's activities, which have consequently impacted its political culture and climate.

Perhaps the most notorious act of terrorism attributed to Boko Haram to date is the abduction of 276 girls in April 2014. The *Chibok girls*, as they came to be called, were female students abducted at night from a boarding secondary school in Chibok village of Borno state (CNN Library 2019). This incident, the government's attempt to initially dismiss it as a rumour, its subsequent effort to downplay the gravity of the situation, and the perceived inactiveness of the government in the now-escalated insecurity situation sparked national outrage and the beginning of a hashtag campaign, *#BringBackOurGirls*. The campaign very quickly became a global movement involving high-profile celebrities such as Pakistani rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, American former First Lady Michelle Obama, as well as several Hollywood stars.

Figure 2.8 Michelle Obama & Malala Yousafzai join the #BringBackOurGirls campaign
Source: Saul (2015)

This incident and the ensuing State of Emergency in many states, the underlying Boko Haram situation, the government's perceived inability to contain it, and the general state of insecurity in the nation became the key issues of the 2015 elections, which occurred just at the peak of the insecurity crisis. At that point, Nigerians had become disillusioned by the government and their responses to these crises.

2.93 Nigeria's Corrupt Institutions

According to *Transparency International*, Nigeria ranks 144th of 180 countries in the corruption perceptions index of 2018, with a score of 27 out of 100 (with lower numbers indicating more corruption). This has been the country's average score over the past eight years (Transparency International 2018b), making Nigeria places the 33rd most corrupt country in the world (tied with Comoros, Guatemala, Kenya, and Mauritania).

According to *Transparency International*, corruption in politics and government goes beyond election rigging due to private agendas, which cause individuals or organisations to skew voting results, make or receive large unlawful donations to electoral campaigns, and buy votes. While those are significant and valid interpretations of political corruption, there is more to it. It also encompasses the basing of policies on private interest instead of public interest to benefit big money funders, the siphoning of public funds and other resources to personal

accounts, and an outright move away from good governance practices (Transparency International 2018a).

Corruption in the Nigerian ecosystem dates as far back as the intrusion of the military in governance, which sparked a trend of dictatorship without accountability (Sadiq & Abdullahi 2013). As already mentioned, freedoms were abused (Graf 1985). Within that autocratic society, dissidents (or anyone with the slightest suspicion of opposition to the government cast on them) were jailed or assassinated, such as was the case for journalist Dele Giwa in 1986 (Agbese 2009). The military amassed personal wealth from the country's coffers (Diamond 1991). Unfortunately, this trend continued unabated when the country returned to civil leadership (Benedict 2019; Ogbeidi 2012).

Corruption in Nigeria can be traced to different facets of the society, with the political system and the public service being at the fore (Sadiq & Abdullahi 2013). Nepotism and godfatherism have become commonplace, and it seems that opportunities circulate among a select few or those with the right "connections." The political climate is such that the exchange and distribution of amongst those elected to office go unchecked, evidenced by sudden lifestyle changes for such persons, while civic duties are left undone.

The public service has also dilapidated through the decades, with government employees being continually accused of corruption in the workplace. Hence, for the ordinary citizen, access to public services has a price tag attached to it in most cases, as the civil servant would expect to be bribed before performing their regular duties. In practical terms, and in the reality of the everyday Nigerian, this means that access to essential services comes at a personal financial cost and is a frustrating and excessively time-consuming experience.

2.94 Nigeria's Dwindling Economy

Nigeria's inflation rate has risen over the last four months and was 11.98% as of December 2019 (Ojekunle 2020). Although these are recent statistics, the situation was not much different in 2015, as the country's economy was plummeting, following a continuous downward spiral in oil prices (Wallis & Blas 2014). Even though this was a national cause for concern, it was especially worrisome for many considering the amount of work and progress that had been made economically since the return to democratic rule (Brannon 2019).

As a primary focus of his administration, President Obasanjo had worked to relieve the nation of all foreign debt during his eight years in office (Sharkdam & Agbalajobi 2012). The majority of these debts were forgiven, and others were paid off (Center for Global Development n.d.; Dijkstra 2013). Due to the economic reforms put in place by the Obasanjo administration, inflation was at 5.4%, the lowest it had been since 1972 (Macrotrends 2020), by the end of his eight-year term in office in 2007. Thus, plummeting back into debt and the worsening of the economic situation was unacceptable for the current regime of that time. Furthermore, following the drop in oil prices, the Nigerian currency, the naira (₦), which had been on a steady decline against the dollar for decades, was further devalued in 2014 by over 30% (Wallis & Blas 2014).

At this time, the labour market was rife with unemployed youth, many of whom were inadequately skilled for the job market due to the failing education infrastructure in the country. Therefore, the country plunged further into decline due to insufficient income generation and the increasing economic dependency on very few income sources. While the nation is home to some of the world's wealthiest people, the overall average income reflects the actual earning power within the state, which is abysmally low (Udeogu 2019). Altogether, the Nigerian economic landscape was in poor shape, and citizens wanted a change. The opposition recognised this, hence their 'change' campaign slogan (Adekoya 2015).

2.10 The 2019 Election

The Nigerian polity still has uncertainties even after two decades of democratic governance. History repeated itself with the postponement of the long-anticipated 2019 general elections (Soyombo 2019). The presidential and legislative elections were postponed by one week, just as had happened during the 2011 and 2015 general elections (Soyombo 2019). What made the recent postponement even more concerning was that the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), which is the autonomous body responsible for electoral activities in the country, delayed its announcement of the postponement until just hours before the polls were to open (BBC News 2019). This delay made the decision even more suspicious, mainly because the same commission had broadcast its readiness through the week leading up to Election Day (Kazeem & Adegoke 2019).

The economic impact of the postponement and the loss of credibility it brought to the commission among Nigerian citizenry and the international community – some of which had

representatives in the country to observe the elections – questioned the reliability of the political process in the country (Abayomi & Osimen ; Adeleke 2019).

2.11 Summary

This chapter presented pertinent insights into the Nigerian state that helped contextualise the research and the issues that are discussed within. It introduced Nigeria's political journey starting from her independence in 1960 and traced the very turbulent political history of the nation through military coups and overthrows, attempts at democracy, and plunges back into military dictatorship.

This chapter also depicted an unfortunate period of media stifling, the stifling of other personal and media freedoms, and bans on all civil society activities. As the media evolved into a state-owned estate, corruption rose in response to the lack of credible, independent watchdogs, appropriate checks and balances, and a proper separation of powers since the military controlled everything.

This chapter also discussed certain critical aspects of Nigerian society: the cultural dynamics that play pertinent roles in the political system, as well as religion and ethnicity. The purpose of this discussion was to set the contextual limitations of the study and to guide comprehension of the issues that will be discussed in later chapters.

Finally, the chapter introduced the 2015 presidential election, which is the primary test case for the study, highlighting the critical issues upon which that election was built and contested, which had strong bearings on the outcome. It also mentioned the 2019 elections, which, although they occurred after the fieldwork in Nigeria, offer an insight to the online data collection exercise that was carried out before, during, and right after the presidential elections that year.

The next chapter will introduce the theories that contextualise this study and within which the empirical data will be analysed.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets the scene for this research work by exploring existing literature about social media, communication, and politics, as well as establishing their intersections as they relate to this research. It is divided into two sections. The first section is an overview of existing empirical research on democracy, political participation, and social media that highlights Western and non-Western studies separately. The second section examines critical discourse around social media using three lenses – namely the rest of the world, Africa, and Nigeria. First, this section identifies the distinctive features of social media and their use in the rest of the world – particularly in the West – and in Africa, using culture as the theme of the discourse. Subsequently, with Nigeria as a focal point, it identifies any additional distinctive features between the rest of Africa and Nigeria.

The goal of this chapter is to discuss existing scholarly literature that has lent itself to scrutiny by collating it in thematic sections that amplify the relevance of this work. The ultimate goal is for this work to help define the focus of this research by identifying what has been done in previous research and what gaps exist. Therefore, this chapter answers the following questions: What has been done so far? Where is there a gap in the existing literature? How will this thesis fill this gap? These questions will help position this thesis to respond to the research question in this thesis: *How has Twitter changed political participation in the Nigerian cultural context?*

3.11 Defining Social Media

Scholarly definitions of social media vary in terms of the depth and scope of technologies that are classified as media and considered social. Fuchs explores the definition of the term by asking, 'What is social about social media?' He argues that understanding the concept of social media requires first having 'a theoretical understanding of what it means to be social' (Fuchs 2017, p. 62). He reintroduces various social concepts, such as social fact by Durkheim (2014), social action by Weber (1978), and community and society (Gemeinschaft & Gesellschaft) by Tönnies, Harris & Hollis (2001).

Scholars have adopted different definitions and descriptions of social media. Some of these are as follows:

- Social media 'increase our ability to share, to co-operate with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutional institutions and organisations' (Shirky 2008, pp. 20-1). Shirky's definition draws from the perspective of individuals and organisations that use social media as tools for mobilisation, collaboration, and social action.
- van Dijck defines social media as connective media that are interconnected in and of themselves and facilitate community building and interconnectivity through participation and collaboration (2013). His definition stems from the idea that social media are 'facilitators or enhancers of human networks that promote connectedness as a social value' (p. 11). He argues that the word 'social' suggests that media facilitate communal activities and that other concepts like *participation* and *collaboration* add new meaning to the term. He further proposes a change of name from 'social media' to 'connective media' (p. 13).

3.12 What is Social about Social Media?

Media are channels of communication that allow diverse levels of interaction. With traditional media, this interaction was predominantly top-down, with most voices marginalised or censored, with only a select privileged few having access to getting their messages out. This began to gradually change, with broadcast media, for example, having discussion shows on which citizens could call in and air their viewpoints. The print media also began columns, such as *Letter to the Editor*, to provide opportunities for engagement with their audiences. What we now call social media has changed this landscape by allowing more access to the everyday media consumer and transitioning them to being not just media consumers but producers as well.

In his quest to find the social in social media, Fuchs defines media not as technologies, but as 'techno-social systems' having technological artefacts that contain human social activities and helping produce and diffuse knowledge that stems from the social activities for consumption (2017, p. 39). This cycle is sustained by the interaction between the technological and social levels of the media. van Dijck supports this notion of investigating the *social* aspect

of social media, although he examines it as more of a sociological concept and emphasises the interconnectivity that it facilitates. To both of them, social media are channels.

3.2 Empirical Research on Democracy, Political Participation, and Social Media

Once used only to describe computer networks that helped to decentralise information and communication transmission, the term 'Internet' is now an all-encompassing term that covers an array of technologies with their associated 'devices, capacities, uses and social spaces.' The Internet is also 'a social phenomenon, a tool, and also a field site for research' (Markham & Buchanan 2012, p. 3), with diverse models and designs to its spaces and tools, encompassing blogs, microblogs, social networks, and other virtual communities (Zhao 2016).

In this research, the Internet is both a tool (of political engagement) and a place or space (for political engagement). The increasing use of social media to meet different communication, collaboration, and mobilisation needs has caused a surge in empirical and alternative social science and cross-disciplinary research in a bid to expand the comprehension of various aspects of their use. Social media research is arguably one of the areas with the highest counts of multi-disciplinary, cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary foci and methods of research. For social scientists – and specifically, political and communication scientists – the field or space is rife with empirical data to be harvested for analysis that can lead to increased, substantive theoretical comprehension of the social media phenomenon.

This section identifies the different aspects of social media in relation to political participation that have been examined empirically, categorised from Western and non-Western perspectives.

3.21 Western Cases of Democracy, Political Participation, and Social Media

Western studies of social media and political participation date much earlier than their non-Western counterparts, and this is understandable considering that most of the new technologies that power them were first developed in the West. Although ideas for a wireless system date as far back as the early 1900s, the Internet came into being in the 1960s, and studies on the Internet followed soon afterwards. Early records of Internet studies emerged in the 1980s, and these were predictably focused on the technical aspects of the new technology, such as protocols and security (Clark 1988; Mogul & Pastel 1985; Spafford 1989). As the new technology became

more mainstream in its use, further studies began to emerge with more diversification of focus. Internet studies soon became commonplace in diverse disciplines. Today, Internet studies permeate fields including economics, politics, media, communication, cultural and social studies, business, psychology, computer studies, library and information sciences, and engineering, with the initial surge in related studies occurring at the turn of the century (Peng et al. 2013). With new forms of technology being developed in the wake of the Internet, Internet-related studies have now expanded and become niched at the same time to include digital and social media.

Just like the Internet, social media use and studies originated in the West before permeating other non-Western societies/civilisations, and their role in politics and political discourse has been the focus of many social science researchers. Western scholarship on social media use in political participation is predominantly based in the US, followed by the UK and Germany by a significant margin, and the studies are mostly quantitative. In the UK, Gibson, Lusoli & Ward (2005) tested the mobilisation thesis of Internet effects on the political participation of individuals.

The Internet is increasing the population of politically active individuals through its ability to reach groups that are significantly less active in traditional, offline forms of political participation. These findings of Gibson, Lusoli & Ward (2005) contradict what Resnick (1997) calls the normalisation effect or thesis of Internet use. This normalisation effect claims that the Internet is simply a mirror of offline realities and will only lead to 'a further narrowing of the pool of politically active citizens by reinforcing existing levels of engagement' (Gibson, Lusoli & Ward 2005, p. 562). The normalisation argument is also supported by other research, such as that by Vesnic-Alujevic (2013) (also see Kluver et al. 2007; Margolis & Resnick 2000; Xenos & Foot 2005). This thesis investigates whether offline realities are a mirror of online activities, whether online activities are proactive or reactive to activities in offline spaces, or whether the two worlds have melded to become the same.

Young people's digital media use and political participation are at the core of the majority of new media and politics studies (Maher & Earl 2019; Towner 2013). This is understandable given that people of this generation were either born in the era of these new types of media or grew up with them. Digital participation is, in essence, part of their everyday lives (Edwards 2015). Digital media have become integral to mobilisation, and although they facilitate traditional paths and offer new pathways to participation amongst young adults,

network ties such as friends and family are still valuable to them (Maher & Earl 2019). Furthermore, among users of digital media, interactive media, such as campaign websites, social media, and blogs, are more effective at facilitating offline political engagement than non-interactive media like online newspapers and news network websites (Towner 2013). Thus, in reality, online and offline networks are both valuable to political participation.

Contrasts exist for how youths utilise digital media for political participation and the outcomes of their use. For example, while digital participation is a means for facilitating political participation offline in the UK, it serves as the end in itself in Australia (Edwards 2015). Although this Australian perspective, peculiar as it is, can be attributed to the mandatory voting system applicable in the country, it causes doubt about the effectiveness of such an approach. If voting is the only form of offline political participation expected and demanded of youths, then there is a possible loss of the value that can be had through other forms of political engagement by youths outside of the polls.

3.22 Non-Western Cases of Democracy, Political Participation, and Social Media

Western scholarship often enjoys privileges that non-Western scholarship does not. For example, a piece of published research from the West can get away with a more generalised, less contextualised title, whereas an article from elsewhere is expected to specify the context within the study in its title to avoid being considered misleading or incomplete (Gagliardone 2020). This Eurocentrism suggests an undermining and devaluing of scholarship originating from non-Western regions and needs a redress. Having a plethora of social media scholarship that is situated within non-Western contexts is critical to non-Western researchers, and there is a significance in highlighting this scholarship. Considering that this research argues for and explores a non-Western perspective, it is expedient to explore what has already been done as a way of creating a scholarly foundation for the thesis. Fortunately, there is a plethora of Afrocentric scholarship in the field. For example, Mutsvairo & Rønning (2020) note several studies that have explored the relationship between social media and politics in Africa, including countries such as Zimbabwe, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa, and Central Africa. Their list is by no means exhaustive, and a goal of this thesis is to contribute to the existing literature focused on the continent.

The Arab Spring put Africa and the Middle East on a new social media map by demonstrating the inherent potentials that they possess. The movement not only sparked

massive protests and political changes in Arab countries – several countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region – it also became a springboard for extensive empirical investigations into social media use in non-Western contexts. Khondker (2011) argues that new media were critical in sparking the social revolution that took place within that region, which spanned two years. Moreover, Bebawi (2014) discusses their positionality as the new public sphere and the power relations at play between mainstream and alternative media within that mediated space.

Although other favourable factors – social and political – were decidedly necessary for such a movement to arise, it was evident that social media were a key ingredient required to facilitate a movement that spread across several nations with record successes. Some, however, contest these claims. Musa (2019, p. 65) challenges the notion that social media, such as the likes of Twitter and Facebook, are 'central to liberation and social change.' He argues that discourse that promotes this ideology is liberalist and obfuscates the facts, particularly the capitalist structures that it enhances, suggesting that there is a need to critique the institutional frameworks of ICTs in search of other nodes of liberation.

Matsilele (2019) conducted a qualitative netnographic study on social media dissidence in Zimbabwe during the last years of the Mugabe presidency. His thesis explored Facebook and Twitter as two primary sites of dissidence and social media activism in Zimbabwe to see how dissidents used these media platforms and how the Mugabe-led autocratic government responded to them (Matsilele 2019). He argues that social media have increased the complexity of dissidence and that the same tools that dissidents use to challenge the government can be used by their adversaries to attack them (Matsilele 2019). In other words, social media are free for all and not restricted to any particular groupings.

Valenzuela (2013) had previously explored a similar idea in Chile. His work focused on the relationship between social media use and increased protest behaviour of citizens. He found that opinion expression and activism were crucial uses of social media and that the frequency of social media use was positively related to protest behaviour. The quantitative data of the mixed methods study were limited in their constraints to self-reports, which could not be verified, but this was mediated with qualitative interviews. Although another critique of his research is that samples were taken only from urban dwellings and, therefore, not entirely representative of Chile's population, this can easily be defended, considering that social movements historically began in urban dwellings. Furthermore, social media users are

predominantly urban dwellers. On the other hand, the study filled a sampling gap by sampling general populations instead of just subsets, which is a common feature of social media studies, as shown by the discourse in this chapter.

In a similar vein to Valenzuela (2013) and Matsilele (2019), a recent study by Bosch, Mare & Ncube (2020) investigated Facebook use as a platform for political discourse in Zimbabwe and Kenya. Their research shares some similarities and contrasts to this one. Both studies use Habermas' public sphere theory as a framework, and they both utilise two test cases. The differences include the choice of platforms to study, as well as the case study models. While Bosch, Admire, & Ncube (2020) explored Facebook use within two separate African states as case studies, the present study explores Twitter use within two events in one African state as case studies. Another distinctive feature of both studies is their focus. While the former conducted a study of prominent politicians' Facebook pages, the current research moves away from politicians to explore citizen-centred communication on Twitter.

Abubakar (2012), Chinedu-Okeke & Obi (2016), and Dunu (2018) investigated social media use in the electioneering processes in Nigeria. While the work by Chinedu-Okeke & Obi focused on youth engagement and involvement via social media using an empirical approach, Dunu's study summarised and analysed the existing literature on social media power in political communication and citizen participation in general. Its focus encompassed civil societies, the local Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), political parties, and citizens. Both studies acknowledged the power of social media to consolidate democracy in Nigeria by promoting democratic citizenship.

Social media have increased political participation by returning the power of accountability to citizens and giving them the voice to demand it of politicians and the government. Furthermore, Chinedu-Okeke & Obi (2016) also noted that social media are the new lenses of journalistic outputs. They have not only revolutionised democracy; they have also revolutionised journalism as well, although whether this change is welcome to journalism or not is an entirely different debate (Bebawi (2014) provides an in-depth discussion on these changes to journalism, particularly how social alternative media journalists have become empowered through their usage of social media). As Dunu (2018) explained, there is a heightened prevalence of fake news and hate speech on social media platforms, demonstrating that the effects of social media are not all positive. The current thesis also explores these latter

observations as it delves into the different roles that social media play as part of political processes.

Perhaps one non-Western study that very closely parallels the study in this thesis, arguably more so than the study by Bosch, Mare & Ncube (2020), is that by Smyth & Best (2013). They presented a dual case study of the role of social media in elections. Like this study, they examined Twitter's role in the West African context. The primary difference between their research and this present study is that theirs was on a cross-national scale, as they explored Nigerian and Liberian elections. Their investigation revealed that social media help overcome information scarcity during election periods, thereby increasing transparency and reducing tension. They also found that social media can be effective tools for 'election scrutiny' and increased 'trust in the electoral process' (p. 133), given sufficient civil-society coordination.

This finding inspired the current study to explore further the use of social media as election tools by civil society. With so much focus of local and international civil society on elections in Africa, particularly Nigeria, this study considers it necessary to investigate their own responses to social media as election tools. Their methodology outlines a model for this one to build upon through their use of semi-structured interviews. Since their study was on the 2011 elections in both countries, it is evident that there have been a lot of changes over the past eight years, as social media use in elections has evolved exponentially. Thus, the present research aims to fill the gap by studying Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 general elections. Furthermore, this research seeks to explore the relationship between culture and social media use. Also, where they have sampled experts only, this research investigates the use of these new technologies by citizens.

An earlier study of Nigeria's first use of social media in elections was done by Abubakar (2012). He used public sphere theory to examine the role of social media in enhancing the political participation of the Nigerian electorate during the general election of 2011. His study was a thematic analysis of the Facebook pages and blogs of the three most prominent presidential candidates in that election round. He found increased citizen participation in political discourse, which occurred through Facebook and blogs. Abubakar (2012) also found ethnoreligious lines in the online discourse, which attests to the ethnoreligious factors that are characteristic of Nigerian politics. Although the study did not

delve deeply into the emerging themes, it provided an overview of their emergence in political discourse and attempts at politician-citizen dialogue.

Several scholars have focused their studies on youth political engagement via social media. Uzuegbunam & Azikiwe (2015), Ojebuyi & Salawu (2018), and Ahmad, Alvi & Ittefaq (2019) investigated university students' use of social media in Nigeria, South Africa, and Pakistan, respectively. All three studies employed a predominantly quantitative approach in their study of youths' use of social media as alternative public spheres for civic engagement and agenda setting. The Nigerian study showed that students had no civic use for social media other than for trivial pursuits, such as socialising (Uzuegbunam & Azikiwe 2015). The South African and Pakistani studies, however, found that a majority of the student participants used social media beyond social purposes as means of information gathering and political participation both online and offline (Ahmad, Alvi & Ittefaq 2019; Ojebuyi & Salawu 2018).

The Nigerian study above yielded results that are non-conformist with general trends of youth political participation and activism. Since the location of the study institution is not mentioned, one can only wonder whether the sample was collected from a university in a rural or urban area. It is known that online political participation is more common amongst urban dwellers, and the Pakistani study (Ahmad, Alvi & Ittefaq 2019) demonstrated this. Another study that presents similar findings of youth political apathy on social media as that of Uzuegbunam & Azikiwe is that of Salman & Saad (2015), whose research was on Malaysian youth. Chan-Meetoo & Rathacharen (2011) explored young adults' use of social networks as tools of engagement in daily life.

Lim's (2013) qualitative study delved into vlogging in youth activism. Her research examined the increasing popularity of video-sharing websites in Malaysia and how they are used to facilitate discourse and activism towards social and political change. She found that vlogs not only encourage a culture of participation but that they are also ideal platforms for raising, expanding, and disseminating taboo issues, with the end goal of going beyond cultural consumption to increase civic consciousness (Lim 2013). This also resonates well with the current Nigerian study where culture disallows the open discussion of certain issues, which, similar to the Malaysian experience, are labelled taboo topics.

Maamari & Zein (2013) situated their quantitative study across 12 different regions in Lebanon in the wake of the Arab Spring to examine the perception of Lebanese youths' pervasive use of social media in the political arena, especially in elections and voting. They

found that although there was high use of web-based tools, there were issues of transparency and two-way communication with politicians and their unwillingness to declare their agendas. Although the study had a sample size of over 3,500, it paints only a statistical picture due to the quantitative method they employed and does not investigate the themes uncovered in the survey the way that a qualitative study could have.

Other examples of non-Western, youth-centric scholarship include a study by Seongyi & Woo-Young (2010), whose focus on political participation amongst teenagers in Korea revealed that female teenagers are more aggressive in their political involvement than their male counterparts. Scherman, Arriagada & Valenzuela (2015) investigated the role of social media in urban youths' environmental protests in Chile, Lee (2018) and Vong & Hok (2018) studied youth dissidence in Cambodia, and Xu et al. (2019) examined the relationship between social media competence and digital citizenship among college students in China.

Zhang & Lin (2018) are two among several researchers whose work has focused on the links between partisan membership and social media use. Their dual case study of Hong Kong and Taipei found that 'organisational membership moderates the relationship between social media use and political behaviours differently in Hong Kong and Taipei' (2018, p. 273). In Hong Kong, social media use had a more considerable impact on behaviour with individuals who had higher levels of membership. In contrast, in Taipei, the impact was higher with people of lower membership levels. Amongst the things that Tang & Lee (2013) explored in their student survey was how direct social media contact with political actors – politicians, political activists, government officials, or political commentators – influenced young people's online and offline political behaviour. They found a direct positive correlation between the two.

A similar study by Chan (2018) revealed positive associations between partisan strength and social media use during electoral campaigns in Hong Kong. However, such associations were significant only when there was strong partisanship and when one's political position agreed with the majority in one's social networks. This outcome is consistent with the dual case study by Zhang & Lin (2018) and demonstrates that perhaps there is significant consistency in Hong Kong's social and/or political culture that accounts for it.

Kumar & Thapa (2014) studied the role that social media have played in creating new ways for civil society movements in India to facilitate public discourse on different social and political issues. The conclusion from their study is another demonstration of different levels of penetration and perceptions on the relevance of social media with regard to culture. They found

that social media are yet to emerge as definitive force multipliers for civil society movements in India.

While the inference can be drawn that the study was conducted half a decade ago, similar studies in non-Western contexts (discussed above), which were carried out at around the same time, show that penetration was at different levels/stages for different societies. This observation also helps to eliminate the generalisation of outcomes in Western societies to their non-Western counterparts, as there are other factors inherent in these societies – especially non-Western societies – that affect the overall perception, penetration, and outcomes of new technologies use for political and civic engagement. It also supports the argument of scholars, such as Willems (2014), who argue for an understanding of non-Western societies according to their own merits instead of the notorious practice of undermining non-Western scholarship unless they are connected to the West.

Zhao & Lin (2019) conducted a recent case study of the 2017 Hong Kong Chief Executive election to examine how and to what extent social media users interpret the use of forwarding as political participation. Using Weibo as the social network of interest, they found that the Chinese used forwarding as a strategic social media tool for information sharing, which, for them, was a metaphor for expressing civic involvement. *Forwarding*. *Sharing*. *Retweeting*. These are all different words for the same idea according to different social media platforms.

3.23 Recap of Empirical Studies

This section examines existing empirical research on democracy, political participation, and social media in Western and non-Western societies. The literature demonstrates that youths are a demographic that has been well-researched to understand their use of social media and how, if at all, their social media activities influence their online and (especially) their offline political participation. Results have shown that there are mixed opinions on youths' effective use of social media for political participation, with the negative opinions outweighing the positive ones. Also, to a lesser degree, attitudes were divided based on the social and political situations in different countries, and young people were dissuaded from digital political participation by the fear of victimisation and other forms of retribution. In addition, youths in volatile or less democratically stable societies were more inclined to politically participate on social media, although they applied self-censoring to mitigate the possible backlash.

3.3 Critical Discourse on Social Media

This section examines the emerging critical discourse on social media in society, with a specific focus on Twitter and politics. It acknowledges that the majority of the present scholarship concedes that social media have an impact on society. It then proceeds to dissect the type(s) of impact – whether favourable (positive) or unfavourable (negative), as alluded by scholars. The discourse then turns to social media and political participation and explores these terms with three different lenses, namely the rest of the world, Africa, and Nigeria. Social movements are a key focus in this section. Here, they are first acknowledged as forms of political participation. Then it is discussed how social media – and Twitter in particular – have emerged as tools and spaces of political participation.

3.31 Social Media Impacts and Arguments

Nearly 25 years since American astronomer Clifford Stoll debunked the myth of the online world, there is still an argument about whether or not the Internet has any impact. In an article published in *Newsweek*, Stoll (1995) argued that there would be no e-books, online shopping, e-banking, or e-business and that the push for computerised education in schools was irrelevant. He stated in no uncertain terms that the predictions for these things were mere fantasies of utopia. Today, what was a myth 25 years ago is the only reality that some young people have ever known.

Gladwell (2011) stirs Stoll's discourse by questioning whether the Internet, particularly social media, did indeed solve a problem in the political landscape. Although his thoughts are nearly a decade dated and the stance has evolved over time with the help of research, there are still substantial arguments about the effectiveness of the Internet, especially social media, in society. Not only have all of the things Stoll (1995) debunked been validated, for some, the majority of their lives are lived online (shopping, banking, education and business, to name a few activities). Governments have also adopted e-governance, and e-democracy is now commonplace, especially within democratised societies.

Gladwell (2011) and Shirky (2011) lean on opposite ends of the spectrum for the argument about the power of social media. Shirky's argument, to which Gladwell responds, acknowledges the effectiveness of text messaging in protest mobilisation as early as 2001, and later, the use of social media to organise and mobilise protests in different parts of the world,

some being effective, while others not quite so (Shirky 2011). He argues that there is no single, predetermined outcome to their use, and as a result, it is easy to misinterpret their effect on political action to a lack thereof when a linear approach is used. Gladwell's argument in response is that 'just because innovations in communications technology happen does not mean that they matter' (Gladwell 2011, p. 153). He advocates that innovations must solve a pre-existing problem to make a real difference. The limitation of this position is that it fails to acknowledge the problems that are prevalent in relatively new democracies, such as those that can be found in the majority of Africa's democratised states.

Although there is an ongoing debate on the legitimacy of the effectiveness of social media as political tools, recent developments following the US's 2016 elections and the connected *Cambridge Analytica* scandal (Chang 2018; Ekdale & Tully 2019) have contributed heavily to the discourse. They have struck out the possible argument that social media are ineffective political tools, with reports of *Cambridge Analytica's* involvement in country elections and the resulting effect fuelling these arguments (Chang 2018). While the US has been widely implicated in the scandal, evidence suggests that the now erstwhile company also infiltrated elections in non-Western states, such as Kenya and Nigeria (Ekdale & Tully 2019; Ukpong 2019).

Furthermore, there has been an exponential increase in their use as election tools over the past decade. The first attempt to use them in the US was in the 2004 elections, and although their usefulness was noted at the time, it was not until the 2008 elections that their full potential as political tools was truly explored and their full capacity realised. Since then, they have been utilised increasingly as tried and true election tools, and many democratic countries, including the UK (in the 2010, 2015, 2017 and 2019 elections, as well as the 2016 Brexit vote), Italy (in the 2013 elections and onwards), and the US (in the 2016 elections), have embraced them as tools for campaigning for the vote of the people. Non-Western countries have not been left out either, with countries such as India, Kenya and South Africa reporting high uses of social media during election campaigns. In this category, Nigeria also identifies as a social media user. The first use was in 2011, and social media were used subsequently – and to higher degrees – in the 2015 and 2019 elections.

Positive Impact of Social Media

The majority of research supports the notion that the Internet, with its portfolio of new technologies that include social media, has a positive impact on society, reaching various

aspects, including the economy and politics. Evidence of this can be seen by observing companies such as Amazon and eBay on a large scale and numerous small-scale online businesses, as well as the modifications in lifestyles for people everywhere. The reality that people can purchase everything they need from the couch in their homes, including groceries, is a testament to that. With the influx of social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and Pinterest, the economic capacities of individuals and corporations have also increased due to the greater visibility that these sites afford them. This is especially true in developing countries where employment levels are low and there is an ever-increasing need for diversification of income sources. The question, therefore, is not whether they have any impact; rather, it is whether they have a positive or negative impact. The response to this question is rather relative to the positionality of the respondent, and this section highlights some positive and negative impacts.

Although they advise caution when lauding the capabilities of social media in institutionalising citizen-centred, participatory democracy, Loader & Mercea (2012) acknowledge that they have positively impacted participatory democracy. Perhaps the most obvious impact of social media on democratic politics is that they have forced a transition from traditional democratic practices by displacing the location of the public discourse from mainstream media to online media, such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook. By doing so, they have enabled the citizen to circumvent the gatekeeping role of traditional media (Everbach, Clark & Nisbett 2018; Ismail, Torosyan & Tully 2019), empowered them more, and provided tools for easier government and corporate monitoring and accountability measures.

The infamous Snowden whistleblowing leak is just one incident that points to the possibilities, both for collaborative information sharing and for government monitoring measures. More recently, while the *Cambridge Analytica* scandal points to the possibilities (albeit negative) of new media, particularly big data usage by big corporations, it also demonstrates that accountability measures are more dire and swift. Social media have also become effective election monitoring tools (Shinkafi (2016), which are critical in Africa where democracies and elections are still ridden with corruption and malpractice.

Social media, alongside blogs, have also been associated with offline political engagement through their facilitation of interaction and more so than non-interactive online media, such as news sites (Towner 2013). In other words, the interaction exchanged by individuals online, even through what Valeriani & Vaccari term ‘accidental exposure’ (p.

1870), influences their political experiences and makes them seek other forms of participation. This is particularly significant in the feminist movement (Schuster 2013), amongst young adults (Yamamoto, Kushin & Dalisay 2015), and amongst citizens who are usually uninterested in politics (Valeriani & Vaccari 2016).

The inclusion of the digital has made the organisation and mobilisation of social movements more effective across the spectrum from seasoned activists to citizens committed to a single cause. While social movements are considered a form of political participation, they take a distinctive form apart from other participatory forms due to their highly structured and organised form. This form of participation usually involves a group of people or organisations fighting for or against a particular issue with the goal of influencing and/or effecting social and policy change. Their activities, while political by nature, are not usually linked to elections, although they are usually primarily targeted to elected politicians (in democratised societies) with the power to effect the desired changes.

There will be further discussion on social movements later in this chapter.

Negative Impact of Social Media

Although many scholars concede that social media have some impact on society in general and, relative to the focus of this study, on politics, not all agree that the impact is positive. Indeed, there are several who argue that social media have played negative roles in society, with reference to political participation in democratised societies. The rest of this section highlights some of the negative impacts and influences of social media on society.

The prevalence of fake news has become a major point of discourse that has generated a significant amount of scholarship in media and politics globally, especially in North America – specifically the US – and in Europe in recent years. This has been sparked by debates about the role of fake news in the US presidential election in 2016, including Donald Trump's preferred use of the term to discredit any claims that he received support from the Russian government during his campaigns (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales 2019).

Although its popularity is still skewed to the West, fake news has also become a dilemma for non-Western states. Funke (2018) shared the outcome of a Nigerian study that showed that about one-third of Nigerians admitted to having shared political news that turned out to be fake. An example of this occurred during the Ebola crisis, when false information that saltwater was a cure for the disease spread on WhatsApp (Neporent 2014).

According to van der Linden, Panagopoulos & Roozenbeek (2020, p. 461), 'the Internet and social media are proving to be particularly fertile soil for fake news.' Even though Facebook has been a harbinger of fake news on the Internet, WhatsApp, which has quickly become the number one form of social media for Nigerians, has become its major mode of delivery in the country (Cheeseman 2019; Hitchen et al. 2019). The public opinion poll conducted in Nigeria in 2018 showed that 67% of citizens believe that new media, especially social media and blogs, are the primary conduits of fake news in the country (APA News 2018). The survey firm that investigated this, NOIPolls, reported that social media users want to be the first to share news stories among their social networks, resulting in a lack of scrutiny before sharing news stories (APA News 2018). This result is unsurprising, albeit unsettling, considering that the volatility of some messages has the capacity to cause civil unrest, especially in a country with a history and prevalence of violence triggered by ethnic, religious, and other factors.

Wasserman (2020) points out that there is a lack of consensus among scholars about what should be included under the umbrella of fake news. As recently as the 2000s, the term 'fake news' was previously perceived in a positive light when applied to satirical television shows, which were popular for demonstrating how news stories can be given different interpretations and contexts than those originally ascribed to them by mainstream media (Borden & Tew 2007).

Concerns about misinformation and disinformation become compounded in the lead-up to elections due to the history of electoral violence that is especially perpetuated during this time. Tully, Vraga & Bode (2020) conducted two experiments using health issues – genetically modified foods and the flu vaccine – in which they tested tweets targeted at mitigating the impact of misinformation and boosting the perception of the masses regarding their news and media literacy levels. They concluded from the study that 'news literacy messages are able to alter misinformation perceptions' and suggested that the approach to combating the proliferation of fake news should be the use of tailored, multiple messages that are targeted and action-oriented (Tully, Vraga & Bode 2020, p. 23).

According to Dubois & Blank (2018, p. 729), 'the idea of an "echo chamber" in politics is a metaphorical way to describe a situation where only certain ideas, information and beliefs are shared.' Recently, scholars have questioned the existence of echo chambers in social media spaces (Barberá et al. 2015; Dubois & Blank 2018; Guo, Rohde & Wu 2018; Harris & Harrigan

2015; Jacobson, Myung & Johnson 2016; Justwan et al. 2018; Vaccari et al. 2016), considering how contrarian to the social media model such tribalistic and usually intolerant spaces are.

Despite the assumed social media model, it is easy to see how social media can become community-based spaces in which opposing views are neither allowed nor tolerated. Although Facebook's model makes it particularly notorious for this, there is also the possibility for echo chambers to exist in open platforms such as Twitter. Facebook's closed groups makes it subject to this criticism, because they are only penetrable after undergoing scrutiny that sometimes includes a written interview and an agreement to meet the rules or guidelines of such groups. Interestingly, a recent study by Skjerdal & Gebru (2020) found that no echo chamber effect was detected on Facebook when used as a primary communication channel during civil unrest in Ethiopia, despite traditional government control of communication.

A determining factor of the existence of echo chambers on Twitter, as Vaccari et al. (2016) found, is to study what kinds of networks individuals engage with on social media. In their investigation of the circumstances under which people who use Twitter for political talk would engage with supportive, oppositional, and mixed political networks, they found that the greatest proportion of social media exchanges involve interactions among individuals who share the same ideologies. They inferred that the more one posts and reads political messages on social media, the more likely one is to encounter supportive networks. Thus, in a space where people go to seek diversity, homogeneous views once again converge to somewhat ascribe credibility, in spite of evolutionary leaps, to Resnick's (1997) normalisation thesis.

Discerning Motives for Political Participation

Motives for online activities are not always clear-cut, as with any kind of activity, and more so when such activities are politically driven. In examining 'political participation' by individuals, it is not always easy to know if they are, in reality, choosing to participate politically or if they have ulterior motives. As Mutsvairo & Harris (2016) reported regarding the *Umbrella Movement* protests in Hong Kong, when a university professor asked a group of students who took part in the protest if they were registered to vote, the majority said no. This was followed by him asking, 'So why are you protesting for universal suffrage?' There is no way to know for certain whether people engaging in political activity have political engagement as their primary motive or not without asking them, and this dilemma is even more visible on social media where anonymity is commonplace with the ease of accessibility and media production and where there are a plethora of voices looking to be heard. As a result, as Mutsvairo & Harris

state, 'political participation within this new era of digital convergence is…questionable' (p. 223).

Leyva (2017) takes this scepticism further in his quantitative exploration of how UK millennials' social media consumption patterns relate to their level of political participation. His findings indicated that although there was a high frequency in social media consumption, there was no strong relative political impact, except amongst individuals of upper socioeconomic status and who had had early political exposure. Rather, there was a stronger association with slacktivism, which some might argue that social media facilitate effectively and which indicates no real engagement of slacktivists with identified issues.

Interestingly, Leyva's findings contradict those of Moffett & Rice (2018), who carried out a somewhat similar study in the US just before the 2016 presidential election. In their survey of college undergraduates, they found that students who engaged in politically motivated social media activity were more likely to engage politically online and express views for or against a candidate. Moffett & Rice 'demonstrate that political uses of social media have real-world consequences for college students' political expression, making them more likely to use their voice both online and offline' (p. 433), thereby countering the position that young adults' use of social media is slacktivist.

It is hard to say what factors account for the differences in the outcomes of the two studies, but the first factor that comes to mind is the demographics. The UK and the US represent completely different geographic and political environments, with their democratic systems – parliamentary and presidential systems, respectively – being the most obvious difference. Although the politics are party-oriented in both countries, it is more so in the UK where votes usually go to a party and not to a single candidate. While votes are usually party-favoured in the US, in many instances, individuals will still vote for a candidate rather than their party. This contrast of party versus candidate political focus between the two countries possibly accounts for young people's – particularly university students' – political apathy, which is more in the UK (Leyva 2017) than in the US (Moffett & Rice 2018).

While both studies sampled university undergraduates, the UK sample was inadequately representative of British youth in tertiary education, with all 271 participants being from universities (with 63% of them coming from one university) (Leyva 2017). This does not account for the large population of British youth who undertake alternative tertiary studies, such as college (different from college in the US, a UK college is a halfway point

between secondary school and university). Although the American sample was larger, it could still be said to be proportional to the British sample considering the ratio of the British population to its American counterpart.

Perhaps the most surprising similarity between the two studies that makes the disparity in their contrasting findings interesting is timing. The American study data were collected just before the 2016 presidential election. Since it is election season, politics is high on everyone's agenda, even those who are usually politically apathetic, and this may have influenced participants' responses, considering that the election would be foremost in their minds and they may have come into contact with more political content online than usual. Similarly, the British study collected data during the 2015 general election, which would have also brought politics and elections to the forefront of online and offline discourse.

Social Media: The Cure for Political Apathy?

The problem of political apathy, particularly among youths, is not limited to the US and Europe; it is a problem shared by many Western societies, and in Jamaica, Waller (2013) tried to find a cure for this problem among youths with the use of Facebook. His study found, however, that although Facebook is effective as a political tool, it is only valuable to youths who are already politically active offline and is ineffective at driving the engagement of youths who already share apathy (Waller 2013). Waller (2013) also suggested that victimisation is the primary reason why youths are disengaged from politics. In similar comparison of the previous studies of the US and the UK (Leyva 2017; Moffett & Rice 2018), another study, which focused on Israeli youths' use of Facebook, found that the opposite was the case in Israel in comparison to Jamaica. While Waller's (2013) study found that Jamaican youth were deterred by the fear of victimisation, young Israelis used Facebook for political expression despite their awareness of the social risks in doing so (Mor, Kligler-Vilenchik & Maoz 2015).

3.32 Social Movements

Late-twentieth-century researchers decried the absence of methodical and comprehensive explanations regarding the role that social movements play in changing social, cultural and political movements (Burstein, Einwohner & Hollander 1995; Giugni 1999; Tarrow 1993, 1998), even though there was a consensual emphasis on their importance for facilitating social transformation (Giugni 1999). Historical records of the politically motivated activities, now called social movements, date back as early as the eighteenth century (Tilly & Wood 2013),

although it is safe to say that these movements have been in existence for as long as humans have lived in communities.

There has been confusion about the definition and composition of the term *social movement*, and to date, no singular consensus has been reached. Earlier scholars, such as Wilkinson (1971), McCarthy & Zald (1973; 1977), and Tilly (1977), had difficulty in crafting a universal definition for the term, and there have been differing definitions, offering different perspectives of the term. The question of what constitutes a social movement meets with fluidity in attempts to answer it, and with the addition of the digital to the social, it has become even more difficult to confine the term to any specific definitive constraints. As Small (1897) put it, 'social movement on the whole seems at best a tuning of the orchestra' (p. 340).

The following are a few definitions given by early analysts of social movements.

- **McCarthy & Zald**

McCarthy & Zald (1973; 1977) proffer two definitions of social movements that, while not completely different, focus on different elements. One definition is that 'social movements are voluntary collectivities that people support in order to effect changes in society' (1973, p. 2). Their second definition, offered years later, is that a social movement is 'a set of opinions and beliefs in a population which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society' (1977, p. 1217). At first glance, their definitions suggest that social movement activities are grassroots-driven and do not clearly account for the organisational elements that go into such activities, nor for the role of social movement organisations (SMOs), which are often drivers of social movement activities. However, McCarthy & Zald also demonstrate their belief in the need for experienced leadership and collaboration between individuals with political experience and strong organisations with the necessary professional portfolio to jointly achieve success (1973; 1977). Furthermore, they acknowledge that although social movements are population-driven, they are susceptible to 'countermovements' (1977, p. 1218), meaning that opposition from other subsets of the population who collectively disagree with the opinions and beliefs of an ongoing movement. An example of this is the pro-life and pro-choice movements.

- **Wilkinson**

An earlier definition of the term by Wilkinson highlights the volatility that is often typical of social movements. He defines a social movement as 'a deliberate collective endeavour to promote change in any direction and by any means, not excluding violence, illegality,

revolution or withdrawal into "utopian" community' (1971, p. 27). Often, movements that are initiated by the populace are met with some degree of violence. Such violence may originate from the movement itself, a countermovement, or the authorities, depending on the kind of society in which it takes place. Here, it is easy to see that culture plays a role in the outcomes of the activities, and the elements are usually descriptive of the cultural context. Like McCarthy & Zald (1977), Wilkinson acknowledges the pertinent role of the members or followers of a movement as the lifeblood of its success.

The problem with Wilkinson's view of social movements, however, is especially the inclusion of illegalities towards the achievement of a movement's objectives. This move away from commonly accepted notions of social movements suggests the inclusion of such activities such as the so-called IS state movement and Al Qaeda as social movements. Such an inclusive definition could spark a different set of arguments of acceptability or rejection. Based on commonly used definitions, the term *social movement* suggests a fight or advocacy for justice and more inclusivity in society. The operations of these organisations do not suggest a subscription to the same ideals.

- **Tilly**

Tilly defines a social movement as 'a group of people identified by their attachment to some particular set of beliefs' (1977, pp. I-14). He acknowledges that individual beliefs change and attributes the survival of any movement to the survival of membership that is committed to it, thereby acquiescing to Wilkinson's idea that membership is the lifeblood of any movement. He also acknowledges the use of violence in social movements, preferring to use the term 'violent event' or 'violent incident,' as opposed to the stronger 'disturbance' (1977, pp. A-14), which suggests their downgrade to nuisances owing to a lack of merit in the movements or protests. In broadening his initial definition, he provides a more robust definition of a social movement as 'a sustained series of interactions between national power-holders and persons successfully claiming to speak on behalf of a constituency lacking formal representation, in the course of which those persons make publicly-visible demands for changes in the distribution or exercise of power, and back those demands with public demonstrations of support' (1979, p. 12).

Tilly de-emphasises the characterisation of a social movement as a group, advocating instead that the term can be defined more accurately as 'a sustained interaction between a specific set of authorities and various spokespersons for a given challenge to those authorities' (p. 12). He suggests that instead of categorising a social movement as a group the same way a

political party is, a more accurate reference for it is that it is ‘a kind of campaign, parallel in many respects to an electoral campaign’ (1998, p. 467). This sort of campaign, in contrast to an electoral campaign, demands justice – the ‘righting of a wrong, most often a wrong suffered by a well-specified population’ (p. 467). The chief difference between electoral campaigns and social movements is that the end goal of the former is to obtain votes, while the latter is more focused on the ‘effective transmission’ of its message and, ultimately, a transformative effect on society.

Based on the definitions discussed above, social movements have been in existence long before the Internet and social media. They have taken such forms as peaceful mass demonstrations, otherwise known as non-violent protests, boycotts, and civil unrests, to name a few. In the US, Reverend Dr Martin Luther King, Jr is celebrated for championing the civil rights movement of blacks – for which he received a Nobel Peace Prize. This is particularly true regarding his advocacy for non-violent demonstrations (Youth for Human Rights 2017).

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott are credited with organising the first gathering for the women’s rights movement (U.S. House of Representatives 2007). The global south has not been left out of this either, with Nelson “Mandisa” Mandela being recognised worldwide as the patriarch of the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa, for which he received a Nobel Peace Prize (Keller 2013).

In what may be considered a comprehensive record and scholarly discourse of social movements, the first-ever mention of social movements in Africa was the *Arab Spring* of 2011 (Tilly, Castañeda & Wood 2019). This is surprising and concerning, considering the various social movements that have occurred in the continent during and post-colonisation. South Africa, for one, endured many hardships during apartheid, and the social movements that occurred in the fight for freedom and equality of all persons and races, which are certainly worth mentioning, have been overlooked. As surprising as this is, it is not uncommon to see scholarship on social issues addressed from a very Western and colonial perspective, which in many cases may include China in the discourse due to its unignorable position in world population and trade.

Social movements in Africa are notorious for their metamorphosis. As can be seen in other parts of the world, earlier instances of social movements in Africa saw them morph from movements to political parties. A case in point is the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa. It started in 1912 as a unifying movement for black South Africans in their fight

for their civil rights and freedoms in a white minority-controlled state under the umbrella of a movement called the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) (SAHO n.d.). This movement eventually morphed into the antiapartheid movement in the 1940s, and subsequently became known as the ANC (The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica 2020).

Digital Social Movements

Digital social movements did not begin with social media as we know them today, such as Facebook and Twitter. The 2001 ousting of former Philippine president Joseph Estrada succeeded due to a protest in Manila that was organised via text messaging, marking the genesis of social media successes in the removal of a national leader (Shirky 2011).

The Internet and new technologies have revolutionised social movements, causing them to evolve into more global phenomena than they were pre-Internet. Evidence shows that social movements crossed country borders before the Internet. For example, there were civil protests against South African apartheid in the UK (Hain 2013). However, these new technologies, particularly social media, have largely contributed to the dissemination of information in quick and real time, causing civil protests with one agenda to breakout across continents within hours both online and offline. Online movements such as the Arab Spring (Amnesty International 2016) and *#BlackLivesMatter* (#BLM) (Creosote Maps 2020; Kirby 2020) are prime examples. There are some, however, who question the validity of the claims that social media played decisive roles in movements such as the Arab Spring that occurred in predominantly non-democratic states (Vesnic-Alujevic 2013). Considering the low level of Internet penetration in those countries (Morozov 2011), such objections to the lauding of social media capabilities as new instruments of political participation are legitimate and deserve empirical consideration.

The role of social media in social movements is still quite unclear, and researchers are still questioning whether they are aids or deterrents to social movements (Kidd & McIntosh 2016). Manuel Castells (2015) discusses several digital movements that span different corners of the globe, starting with the 2011 martyrdom of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia, which was followed by a public protest that was captured on video and posted on the Internet. This fuelled public angst and led to similar protests in different parts of the country. What started as one man self-immolating due to his frustration over his goods having been confiscated by the police for not giving them bribes ultimately led to the downfall of the country's leader (Osha 2014). This sparked what is now known as the Arab Spring that went beyond Tunisia to topple several government leaders in the Arab world from their positions of power. This cascade of events,

fuelled by 'the Facebook phenomenon' (Osha 2014, p. 1), was the beginning of social movements as we know them today (Castells 2015). The videos distributed by Bouazizi's cousin all over the Internet made one town's issue a national – and ultimately global – one. The Occupy movement, which swept across different cities and university campuses, and the Spanish Indignados movement are further evidence of social movements playing out successfully via social networks (Dufour, Nez & Ancelovici 2016).

> The more interactive and self-configurable communication is, the less hierarchical is the organisation and the more participatory is the movement.
>
> - (Castells 2015, p. 15).

This, according to Castells, is why social movements in the networked sphere represent 'a new species of social movement' (2015, p. 15). Castells (2012) opines that successful digital social movements share common characteristics that explain their successes. Firstly, their networks are multimodal in form, utilising both online and offline social networks and combining pre-existing social networks with new networks formed for the movement. Because of the multimodal nature of these networks, they do not require formal leadership, thereby inhibiting government interference.

Secondly, although these movements begin online, they thrive as a movement by occupying urban spaces offline in the forms of street demonstrations and standing occupation of physical spaces, such as village or town squares. These offline actions give the movement a 'face.'

Thirdly, these movements are simultaneously local and global. Often beginning in local contexts for local reasons, they soon become global through online networks and the shared occupation of urban spaces. They learn from each other in the online space and adapt the experiences shared to their own local, offline space.

Fourthly, they are viral in their capacity to spread information and in their capacity to spring up everywhere. Movements have grown across continents as in the case of #BLM (Kirby 2020) across countries as in the case of the Arab Springs (Amnesty International 2016), across cities as in the case of the Occupy Movement (Linthicum, Romney & Goffard 2011), and across institutions as in the case of #RhodesMustFall (Chaudhuri 2016).

The fight against Boko Haram, a militant group in Nigeria, brings up the question of the possibility that social media movements are not always a success. Following the 2014

abduction of over 200 girls from a boarding school in Northern Nigeria, the "BringBackOurGirls" hashtag campaign was born locally and escalated via the Internet to include international figures such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai, the former American First Lady Michelle Obama, and a number of notable Hollywood actors (Nwaubani 2017; Shah 2015). Although its target of getting the abducted girls back from their abductors was well-intentioned, the #BringBackOurGirls global outcry caused a different set of problems for the girls, the Nigerian government, and the Nigerian military charged with rescuing them by making the victims more valuable to the group, thus making any rescue effort more difficult.

In addition, it would seem that the attention was not on the issue itself, but on the 'controversy and hype' that came with it because after the initial global attention, it soon died down before the girls were found (Shah 2015, p. 1). In another abduction report that arose four years after the first, 105 of 111 girls were released, with five having died and one left behind due to her refusal to convert from Christianity to Islam (Nwammuo & Salawu 2018). According to Nwammuo & Salawu, the use of social media to advocate for the release of the lone Christian girl was ineffective; a connective approach using both online and offline protest measures would have been more effective in getting the attention of the government (2018).

The #BLM and #FeesMustFall movements, centred in the US and South Africa, respectively, are more proof that digital social movements are not always successful or, perhaps, that success can be defined in different ways for different scenarios. The former challenges the fatal shootings by police officers of unarmed young black men in the US and seems to re-emerge both online and offline only after a report of another such killing in another state in the country (Leach & Allen 2017). Of 15 cases between 2014 and 2016, only one officer pleaded guilty and received a prison sentence, and another was convicted and sentenced to probation. Of the 13 others, seven were not charged (Lee & Park 2017). Whilst the movement has increased social and political awareness and activity amongst young people, the actions, inactions, or inadequate actions taken against the officers question the effectiveness of the movement in causing any real change (Leach & Allen 2017). There is hope, however, that the recent global protests of 2020 will make a difference.

The latter movement originated from the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, and spread to other university campuses around the country, challenging the annual tuition increase by South African universities (Jacobs, Moolman & de Beer 2019). The students took their protests to the campuses, the streets, and the Internet,

calling out the university administrations and the government for the tradition of increasing fees every year. On the one hand, the movement was successful because no fee increase was made the upcoming academic year (Jacobs, Moolman & de Beer 2019). On the other hand, the movement faced threats to freedom of speech, both from within and from without, an outcome that raises other concerns (Joseph 2017).

These experiences serve to strengthen the argument posed by Rutledge (2013) that highlights the relationship between technology, social behaviours, and successful social media campaigns. They also support the arguments by Schmitt-Beck and Mutsvairo. Schmitt-Beck (2004) points out the notion that societies differ in many ways, and it is imperative to understand these many different aspects of societal differences and how they apply in political communication, which does not involve only mass communication but also interpersonal communication.

With the advent of social media, it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate mass communication from interpersonal communication. Mutsvairo (2016) extends this argument with particular reference to African society. He argues that the success of social media in the Western world cannot be generalised to include Africa. In his opinion, the very distinct and distinguishing features of its political, social, and economic cultures warrant a separate inspection.

> …power is based on the control of communication and information…
>
> \- (Castells, 2009 p. 3)

> How people think about the institutions under which they live, and how they relate to the culture of their economy and society, define whose power can be exercised and how it can be exercised.
>
> \- (Castells 2009, pp. 416-7)

Castells further states that whereas meaning is constructed by each individual human mind through interpretation of communicated materials on its own terms, the communication environment conditions the mental processing. In the case of the 2015 presidential elections, this environment was present both online and offline. The collective mind – that is, the cultural context in which the message is received – is one of the terms of the construction of meaning. This cultural context is Nigerian.

Digital Public Spheres

New Public Sphere (Ramos 2019) and *Digital Public Sphere* (Bruns 2019) are two terms commonly used in reference to the Internet and Internet-enabled spaces for social discourse. While both of these terms are equally acceptable, this thesis makes use of the term 'digital' to refer to social media as public spheres. This is done partly to maintain consistency throughout the text to the extent that it is possible and partly because the term 'new public sphere' is also used in association with other non-digital, Internet-enabled, public spheres such as satiric shows (Paul 2017) and news television (Roy 2020). There may be occasional deviations to the term 'new,' but these will only appear where the use of 'digital' amounts to tautology or when the term 'new' simplifies the discourse and its interpretation.

Social media have created a new public sphere for political discourse. Habermas' notion of the public is that events and occasions are called '"public" when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs' (Habermas 1989, p. 1). There is also the added advantage that within that digital sphere, it is easier to establish and enforce equality than it is offline. This is particularly the case in cultures such as those in Africa, where factors such as age and economic standing have strong associations.

The shift to the digital, however, should not be used to infer that the traditional nature of publics is outdated. One possible error in the use of terms such as 'networked publics' and 'hashtag publics,' as well as the 'virality,' 'shareability,' and 'spreadability' of information through the digital sphere, is to negate the reality that 'publics are not just digitally constituted but also manifest themselves in, and are intimately connected to, physical spaces' (Willems 2019, p. 1192). Willems' caution is a reminder that these networked publics were initially constituted, organised and interacted with outside the digital sphere. The digital public sphere adds value without devaluing the physical public sphere.

Twitter's publicness has made it an advocate of Habermas' public sphere principles in the way that it facilitates discussion without exclusion. As has been previously outlined, this is the core difference between Twitter and Facebook that has possibly given Twitter a different demographic than Facebook by its ability to facilitate more open discussions that are accessible to anyone who 'follows.' Even though Facebook has by far more global subscribers and active users than Twitter (see Figure 3.1), Twitter is the social networking site that political participants (e.g., politicians, party activists, citizens) gravitate toward to share and exchange politics-related information.

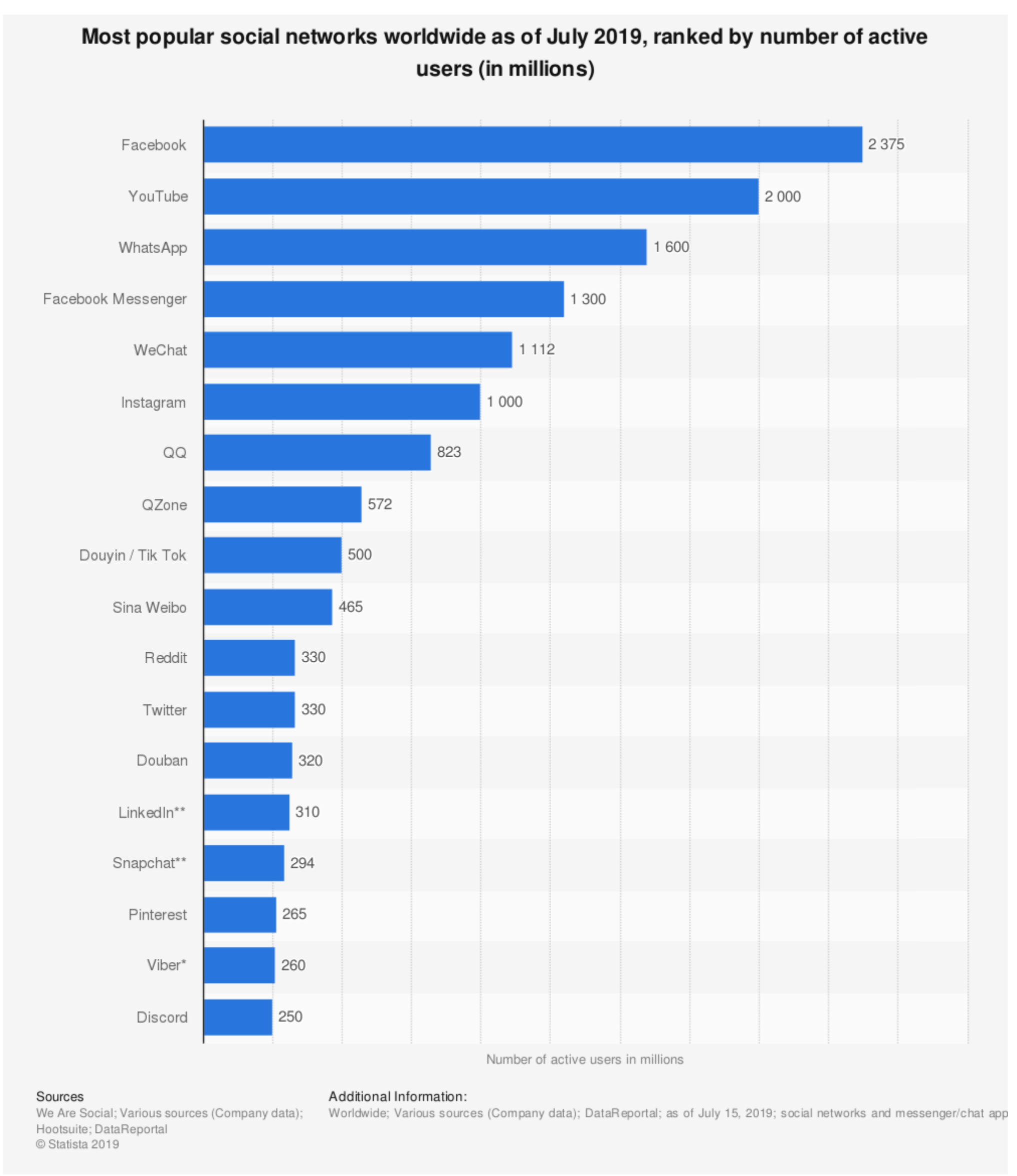


Figure 3.1 Ranking - Most popular social networks: Facebook #1, Twitter, #12
Source: We Are Social, Hootsuite & DataReportal (2019)

In Africa, digital media, which include social media, provide opportunities for researchers to revisit the question of publics with renewed vigour and less traditional analytical tools (Srinivasan, Diepeveen & Karekwaivanane 2019). Political debates have become a formal and informal part of democracy. Also, in countries like the US where electoral candidates usually engage in scheduled, these have become public debates, Twitter has become an additional discursive space for these debates that invite the greater public to engage with the conversation in real time. In many cases, these debates are live-tweeted during the televised debates, offering candidates' supporters the opportunity to engage with individuals of similar, as well as opposing, views (Zheng & Shahin 2018).

Viewers are often invited to tweet questions to candidates, and some are selected by the debate's organising panel to be asked to the candidates. Twitter, then, has become a digital agora (Kirk & Schill 2011), a space for opinion sharing and countering and a place in which to engage with ongoing conversations with both political candidates and other ordinary citizens. Where pre-2008 Internet did little to facilitate satisfactory deliberative exchange, Twitter contributed to the transformation of the web into a participatory space (Kirk & Schill 2011).

According to reports from mainstream media, and as can be seen from his Tweets, the American president's thoughts are made public in real time, tweeted by himself, and traditional media are constantly on the run to feed off of his online activities, report them, and respond to them (CNN Opinion & Obeidallah 2016). Even TV comedy shows have caught on and make fun of him and the news media (Mitchell 2018). As a CNN opinion piece states of the media's response to the president's notoriously controversial and un-presidential Tweets, 'Trump tweets and the media chases…it's the media salivating every time they hear Trump has unleashed another tweet. When he does, the media -- especially cable news outlets -- goes into overdrive' (CNN Opinion & Obeidallah 2016).

A step further is the creation of a *Donald J Trump Presidential Twitter Library* by *The Daily Show*, a syndicated daily comedy show based in New York (The Daily Show with Trevor Noah 2019). Some might claim that Trump has vilified the worlds of politics and social media with his Tweets, but for political communication and social media scholars, the terrain has never been more exciting and intriguing. The president has made a new case for Twitter and systematically taken it from back-channel status to frontline and centre in the world of politics. Therefore, if there remained a question about Twitter's validity as a political backchannel, the evidence shows that it is not. This is because 'the increasing use of Twitter by politicians, journalists, political strategists and citizens has made it an important part of the networked sphere in which political issues are publicly negotiated,' moving it past backchannel status to centre stage in the discourse (Ausserhofer & Maireder 2013, p. 291).

Earlier studies have investigated the use of Twitter as a political backchannel and agenda-setter around political campaigns and elections (Ausserhofer & Maireder 2013; Barberá et al. 2015; Bekafigo & McBride 2013; Bentivegna & Marchetti 2015; Bode & Dalrymple 2016; Buccoliero et al. 2018; Elmer 2013; Gainous 2014; Gökçe et al. 2014; Gottfried 2014; Gunnarsson Lorentzen 2014; Jeffares 2014; Kalsnes, Krumsvik & Storsul 2014). Its use, alongside the use of other social media platforms, has transcended casual

socialisation among users and debunked earlier criticism about the Internet's ability to facilitate democracy (Bekafigo & McBride 2013). Sceptics acknowledge its positive relationship to political participation (Bimber & Copeland 2011), while also acknowledging that much work is yet to be done to adequately understand the relationship (Bekafigo & McBride 2013; Bimber & Copeland 2013).

There is a growing body of literature on the use of Twitter in elections stemming from an increase in its use by politicians and other election stakeholders. Jungherr (2016) carried out a systematic literature review of an extensive body of work on Twitter use in election campaigns, analysing 127 studies spanning seven years (2008 to 2014) across 26 countries. Western politicians have learned to harness Twitter for campaigns, including for making direct contact with voters, and countries such as the UK (in the 2010, 2015 and 2017 elections), the US (in the 2012 and 2016 elections), and Italy (in the 2013 elections) have a history of using it extensively.

World leaders such as Donald Trump in the US and Narendra Modi in India also have a reputation of using Twitter as their primary mode of engagement with the press and citizens (Express Web Desk 2020). This practice has become commonplace in politics following Barack Obama's 2008 social media strategy success, and political candidates and voters worldwide have used Twitter to increase engagement during elections. Furthermore, it has given rise to a populist movement among politicians with their use of unmediated social media such as Twitter for the spread of populist agenda (Jacobs & Spierings 2019). The guise is that of being the voice of the people as a way of garnering the votes of otherwise undecided voters (Kriesi 2014; Taggart 2002). Donald Trump echoed this rhetoric throughout his 2016 presidential campaign with the soundbite to 'make America great again.' This movement gained ground on social media by providing populist political actors ground to develop close connections with people and create strong ties by making them seem more approachable, which is a key factor to the movement (Jacobs & Spierings 2016, 2019; Kruikemeier et al. 2013).

This practice, as with other aspects of social media, has both positive and negative connotations, especially for voters. On the positive side, it brings candidates and voters closer to each other for effective dialogue, allowing the voices of the people to be heard by the people who could have the capability to make or influence changes. On the other side, it could very easily become manipulative as a means for candidates to tell people what they want to hear and get the votes they solicit, in which case there is no real value added to the ordinary citizen. The

Obama 2008 presidential campaign also used this tactic to some extent and even took it a step further by organising events such as *Dinner with Barack* (Tau 2012), which gave ordinary citizens the opportunity to sit at round tables with the presidential aspirant over dinner and discuss issues of concern with him on an intimate, personal level.

Interestingly, amongst Jungherr's (2016) many findings, several stand out in relation to the current research. First, opposition party candidates are more likely to use Twitter than ruling party candidates (see Ahmed & Skoric 2014; Hemphill, Otterbacher & Shapiro 2013; Jaidka & Ahmed 2015; Lassen & Brown 2011; Vergeer & Hermans 2013). Also, young candidates are more likely to use Twitter than their older counterparts (Jackson & Lilleker 2011; Lassen & Brown 2011; Vergeer & Hermans 2013), and candidates with urban constituents are more likely to tweet as part of their campaign strategy than their counterparts in rural constituencies (Straus et al. 2013). Furthermore, at least one research study found a direct association between Twitter use and electoral victory (LaMarre & Suzuki-Lambrecht 2013).

The networked Twitter public – that is, the group of ordinary, non-politician, but politically active Twitter users – are not representative of any population (Barberá & Rivero 2015; Vaccari et al. 2013). Evidence shows that Facebook has over seven times more global active users than Twitter (We Are Social, Hootsuite & DataReportal 2019), making it a more representative variable than Twitter. However, because of its greater visibility, Twitter has remained the go-to network not just for politicians but for the public as well.

Similar to the use by political candidates, Jungerr's study revealed that there was more intensive Twitter use among opposition party supporters than among ruling party supporters (Conover et al. 2012; Straus et al. 2013; Vaccari et al. 2013). This finding is particularly of interest to the present research in its examination of the effect (or lack thereof) of the spiral of silence theory in the 2015 Twitter election data.

Two kinds of Twitter users exist – namely the minority and the majority (Barberá & Rivero 2015; Bracciale, Martella & Visentin 2018; Jürgens & Jungherr 2015; Mustafaraj et al. 2011). There are differences between the minority, who actually are more vocal and account for the majority of political tweets around election time, and the majority, who are less vocal and post less frequently (Barberá & Rivero 2015; Jürgens & Jungherr 2015). The 'silent majority' are usually more subjective in their posts, usually relating to their personal opinions on political candidates or election- or campaign-related issues, while the 'vocal minority' are, in general, more objective in their posts, sharing information such as news headlines, even

though those could still hold some measure of subjectivity (Mustafaraj et al. 2011, p. 103). Again, these findings debunk Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory, which suggests that the vocal Twitter users are usually the majority, although they do not consider the opinions of users.

3.33 Social Media and Elections

Elections are arguably the most effective forms of social movements in democratic societies. One unique attribute that distinguishes them from social movements as we know them is their participatory nature. In elections, everyone with the right the vote can have their say in the determination of the social, political, and economic changes they want to see in their societies, and this right can be exercised predictably – every four, five, or more years, depending on the democratic system in place in the given society. The problem, however, is that this is arguably one of the least globally exercised rights in democratic societies. Besides countries where mandatory voting laws exist and are enforced, such as Australia, Argentina, Belgium, and Brazil (International IDEA 2020; Parliament of Australia n.d.), voting statistics are usually significantly low across developed democracies, including the United States and the United Kingdom (Pew Research Center 2020). With this knowledge, a major part of Obama's election campaign strategy was not only to solicit for the people's vote, but also to mobilise people to go out to the polls and vote on Election Day (Aaker & Chang 2010).

Social media have played a significant role in elections around the globe in recent times, and their value as political tools is on a continuous incline. However, the attention these media have received in relation to politics and political participation, especially during elections, has been juxtapositionally negative and positive. On the one hand, they have enabled democracy by providing a platform for political and social discourse; a positive development particularly in countries with limited political freedoms (Ferrara 2020) and enhanced political participation amongst certain demographics of voters – an argument made in this thesis. On the other hand, however, they have also facilitated practices that are harmful to democracy, and at the fore of this is the prevalence of fake news, which has been especially enabled by bots (Ferrara 2020). The United States' 2016 elections were particularly infamous for this, with Russia in the limelight of accusations of election manipulation through the dissemination of fake news with the use of trolls (Aral & Eckles 2019). Bossetta argues for a new perspective in social media

studies, asserting that they are not only spaces '*for* political actors,' but that they also function '*as* political actors' themselves (Bossetta 2020, p. 1).

Bossetta's (2020) argument sits well with consistently emerging findings on the efficacy of these new media. Social media – in particular Twitter – have also been found to be effective predictors of electoral outcomes in some states, although that ability is more successful in some settings than in others, as a study of Malaysia, India, and Pakistan show (Jaidka et al. 2019). This thesis explores this predictability in its examination of two presidential elections that had significant Twitter engagements and significant outcomes, to see if it applies in the Nigerian setting, and if so, the extent to which it does. The study includes a third concept – culture – in social media and political participation discourse to ensure a holistic inquiry that does not explore these media independently but situates them realistically within the society where they operate.

3.4 Cultural Discourse in Africa and African Politics

Patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism are two concepts that have long been considered 'unique trademark[s] of African states' (Degila 2014, p. 623), and the terms patronage and clientelism are associate terms frequently occurring in discourse related to patrimonial politics. Patronage and clientelism are regarded as two sides of the same coin, distinguished mainly by the clientele. Whereas 'clientelism implies a dyadic personal relationship between patron and client,' patronage describes the relationship between a person and a group of persons (Erdmann & Engel 2006, p. 21).

This sub-section explores cultural discourse in Africa, with an emphasis on Nigeria, with a particular focus on clientelism and patronage as agents of patrimonialism through ethnoreligious and economic lenses. It also briefly discusses electoral practices framed from a cultural perspective to guide discourse in Election Day practices.

3.41 Ethnicity and Religion in African Politics

Deng (1997) demonstrates an understanding of the African experience, which goes beyond physical and sociological attributes and forms the blocks of the communities that embody them. Ethnicity is a unit of identity that plays a critical role in society, and Deng clarifies the crucial role that this plays in the determination of self, especially in multi-ethnic societies. He says:

> Ethnicity is more than skin colour or physical characteristics, more than language, song, and dance. It is the embodiment of values, institutions, and patterns of behaviour, a composite whole representing a people's historical experience, aspirations, and worldview. Deprive a people of their ethnicity, their culture, and you deprive them of their sense of direction or purpose.
>
> - (Deng 1997, p. 28)

The African continent is a quagmire of ethnicities currently numbering over 3,000 (Study.com 2018). Of that number, over 250 are in Nigeria, spread across two major religions – Christianity and Islam (Vaughan 2016) – and speaking 400 to 500 different languages and dialects (Njoku, Amadi & Ukaegbu 2018; Study.com 2019). The main challenge that this poses is not related to the diversity in language. This is because most countries convene under one unifying language, which, in most cases, is the colonial language, which is sometimes shared with other dominant languages in the state. For example, in Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya and Sierra Leone, the colonial language is English; in Togo, Congo, Niger, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal, it is French; in Angola and Sao Tome and Principe, it is Portuguese; and in Equatorial Guinea, it is Spanish. The main challenge that the diversity in ethnicities poses is that of culture.

As Saha says, 'Culture is a strong source of unity when it is open to accommodation and evaluation' (2008, p. 11). Unfortunately, culture has hardly resulted in unity in Nigeria. On the contrary, it has been the source of numerous conflicts in the country, usually intensified further by religion. Different ethnic groups and sub-ethnic groups have unique cultural values, norms and practices, which are often influenced by religious beliefs, thereby causing conflicts between cultures in many African countries.

Many of these conflicts are understandable, given the diversity and lack of understanding of other cultures. However, some would argue that it is a colonial problem or, as Akomolafe (2014) describes the Nigerian experience of amalgamation, the 'mistake of 1914.' Historical accounts show that the colonial officials who amalgamated – or divided – ethnic groups to form countries for easier administration gave little consideration to the historical and cultural experiences of the different groups, their commonalities, and their distinctive characteristics before the decision to fuse them into single entities (Deng 1997). In Nigeria, for example, the Northern and Southern protectorates, which had historically been influenced by different religions with Islam through jihadists in the north and Christianity

through missionaries in the south (Vaughan 2016), were probably unsuited for such a magnanimous match.

Ethnoreligious Patronage in Politics

Patronage is 'the politically motivated distribution of "favours" not to individuals but essentially to groups, which in the African context will be mainly ethnic or subethnic groups' (Erdmann & Engel 2006, p. 21). In contexts such as Nigeria, religion also contributes strongly to this relationship. Although it would be extremist to say that ethnicity is a political ideology (Saha 2008), it is fair to assert that it has its place in modern-day African politics.

In African societies, among its many roles, ethnicity plays a political role – that of patronage – which is solidified by loyalty to a political party or group based on ethnic, religious, or ethnoreligious affiliations or relations. This is clearly demonstrated in Nigerian politics, where a significant divide exists between the north and the south and between Christians and Muslims. Ethnicity, therefore, solidifies patronage as an effective tool used to garner political support from groups as opposed to individuals, which can take more time, resources and effort to garner by politicians (Ngomba 2012).

The Nigerian experience shares many similarities with the Middle Eastern experience, where, as Entessar & Husain (2008) describe it, ethnicity is politicised and ethnonationalism has been a part of the polity's cultural fibre. This idea of ethnonationalism was what sparked the Nigeria-Biafra civil war in which the Igbo ethnic group (the third-largest in the nation-state) sought emancipation from the Nigerian state. It is only reasonable that patronage will become a basic value that is evident through voting patterns in the country's presidential elections, in which the north generally votes one way and the south votes another way.

The economic culture in Nigeria is characterised by a disproportionate poverty ratio, made no better by the significant natural resources in the country. In fact, some would claim that the economic inequalities that exist in Nigerian society are worse off because of drillable oil found predominantly in its south-south region. Because of the excessive dependency on this one resource, other aspects of the economy have not been developed. Moreover, the focus on oil contributed to the heightened rate of corruption right from the military regimes of the 1970s to the late 1990s.

3.42 De-Colonialised African Culture

The idea that Africa is a country is one that is often implied in non-African societies. This generalisation is often the topic of discussions between Africans and non-Africans. The sheer diversity of the different political entities that make up the continent, including the uniqueness of their historical and political experiences, make it unwise to generalise discussions of 'African political culture' as though the continent were one entity (Ngomba 2012).

'Africa consists of many countries, many races blended together; however, some dominant characteristics still persist in spite of the complex blending of several cultures—languages, religions, beliefs and value systems. In fact there appears to be many aspects of private and public life that we can describe as essentially African in spite of these differences' (Ozor 2009, p. 317). Class structures, for instance, are deeply enshrined in certain African societies and have been at the root of many political conflicts in the region (Ozor 2009). The 1994 Rwandan genocide is a typical example of this (BBC News 2011).

Non-Western scrutiny of African culture usually examines its colonial origins as a point of departure, but this norm by default negates the reality of Africa as an existing society long before Europeans divided the continent, arrived in the territory, and colonised it (BlackPast 2009). African history dates as far back as the third century BC, possibly earlier. Records show that 'there were many forms of government in Africa before Europeans knew it, ranging from powerful empires to decentralised groups of pastoralists and hunters' (The National Archives UK & Black and Asian Studies Association n.d.). This suggests that African culture dates back many centuries before the Europeans made their entrance.

While Africa retains some of its cultural origins, Western influence has also contributed to the evolution of these cultures over time, and just like every other society, development has brought, and continues to bring with it, changes that are sometimes fully embraced and sometimes initially uncomfortable. Therefore, this section scrutinises the critical discourse on culture and cultural influences on politics and media in African societies, specifically examining the Nigerian experience.

3.43 African Elections and Ethno-Religious Conflicts

Although some non-Western countries, such as Indonesia, have succeeded in having democracies void of ethnic interference (Aspinall 2011), ethnicity, which has long been the cause of many conflicts in African states, has remained significant even as most of the continent

has transitioned to democracy. In fact, democracy has added a new dimension to ethnic expressions, causing new forms of division in several African states. Divisive issues, such as the distribution of national political offices, power-sharing, and oil and revenue allocations among, which 'essentially border on ethnic divide[s] that tend to tear the state apart as well as impede progress toward democratisation' have often been the contended issues during elections (Ozor 2009, p. 323).

Ethnic – and racial – identities have historically been at the fore in African societies and have sometimes stirred societies towards violence, marginalisation, and discrimination. Rwanda, South Africa, and Nigeria are examples of this. In the Nigerian case, ethnicity is fused with religion to further amplify existing differences in cultures. What democracy has done, in essence, is to politicise ethnicity in a society in which politics was already ethnicitised (Preben 1994) by incentivising cooperation among political actors who seek more power (Aspinall 2011). In some cases, this involves traversing ethnic divides among groups that share similarities in culture and values. Elections are often fought across these ethnic lines.

3.44 Cultural Influences on Media and Politics

Africa's 'aid' culture has seen its many states constant beneficiaries of financial and alternative aid from other countries, groups of countries, and other financial aid institutions and organisations. Although this benefactor-beneficiary relationship is not unique to Africa, it has come to reflect the diverse societies in the continent. This is particularly evident in Nigeria, where diverse dependency relationships exist, such as person-to-person, which are common within families, and state-to-citizen relationships. Castells argues that this kind of power, which relies on communication, 'is at the heart of the structure and dynamics of society' (Castells 2009, p. 3).

Although Ethiopia is not an Arab country, it was the target of protests during the Arab Spring movement. However, the country is not mentioned in discourses on the movement because attempts to establish the movement in this East African country were unsuccessful. In his analysis of the reason for Ethiopia's absence in the movement, Skjerdal (2016) asserts that rallies were organised – or at least announced – and scheduled to take place in the country's capital, Addis Ababa, in May of 2011, but the plans fell through in spite of swelling support from the public. Skjerdal attributes this failure of the Arab Spring movement to gain traction in the East African country to the state's political climate, which favours government

censorship and has laws in place that present very broad interpretations of what constitute acts of terrorism. These laws consequently impede public engagement in political movements.

Gagliardone, Stremlau & Aynekulu (2019) assert that the protests that took place across North Africa, which were aided by digital media, introduced Ethiopians to social movements as a better way of demanding and effecting political change than elections. The Ethiopian example shows how societal culture can influence political activities, or perhaps it is an example of how politics can influence a society's culture since the political status set in place by laws resulted in the lack of action from the Ethiopian society.

3.45 Clientelism and Vote Buying: Cultural Practices in Emerging Democracies

As with numerous other concepts in social science scholarship, the terms *clientelism* and *vote buying* lack consensual definitions (Hicken 2011). While some scholars, such as Vicente & Wantchekon (2009), use both terms to distinguish two different practices, others, such as Muhtadi (2019), use them as synonymic terms. However, Hicken states that in spite of this lack of a unified definition for the terms, existing definitions comprise certain key elements that are fundamental to clientelist and vote buying relationships – 'dyadic [patron-client] relationships, contingency, hierarchy, and iteration' (2011, p. 290).

This thesis uses the definition of clientelism offered by Wantchekon in its framing. He defines clientelism as 'transactions between politicians and citizens whereby material favours are offered in return for political support at the polls' (2003, p. 400). Although the goal is the same, this study chooses to distinguish vote buying from clientelism in meaning. While clientelism uses public goods as its bargaining chip, vote buying is just that, namely the use of cash to sway electoral votes (Vicente 2014).

Vicente & Wantchekon (2009, p. 292) posit that 'bad policies can be good politics and good policies can be bad politics' (see also De Mesquita et al. 2005). This reflects one main dilemma in democracy, which is the counteractive effects of bad and good policies on governance and politics. 'Electoral clientelism and vote buying are widely perceived as major obstacles to economic development' (Vicente & Wantchekon 2009, p. 292), and African countries are prime examples of democracies in which bad politics trump good policies. Clientelism and vote buying have become structural elements of the political culture in African societies, and in practice, they are considered essential components of the continent's development.

Field experiments conducted during presidential elections in West Africa – Benin Republic (Atchade & Wantchekon 2008; Wantchekon 2003) and Sao Tome and Principe (Vicente 2007) – show that clientelism has an effect on electoral outcomes, is particularly effective for local candidates, and is significantly more beneficial to incumbents than challengers (Wantchekon 2003). They also showed that vote buying energises the electorate and encourages voter turnout due to the expectation of "earning" cash, and it is a tool that is more useful to challengers who are not positioned to be clientelist because they have no public goods to use to bargain for votes (Vicente 2007, 2014).

These practices, however, are not unique to Africa, nor are they unique to democratic regimes, as autocracies also find use for them (Hicken 2011). In fact, 'clientelism exists in all polities'; the difference is in how it is practised and its function in one polity to the next (van de Walle 2007, p. 50). Donald Trump's 2015-2016 presidential campaign was built and won on promises of building a wall along the American-Mexican border – which Mexico would pay for, according to him (LoBianco 2015) – and making America great again (Azevedo, Jost & Rothmund 2017). The Democratic Party's primaries' campaigns in March 2020 were all also based on one sort of promise of public goods or another (BBC News 2020). Brexit was also built and won on such clientelist manoeuvres, especially the promise to channel £350 million to the British National Health Service (NHS) (Reid 2019).

In African states, as well as other states where transitions have been made from autocratic governance to democratic forms, clientelism has sustained its usefulness, albeit in a different guise. Muhtadi (2019) argues that the transition period from authoritarian regimes to democracy among emerging democracies presents a rife opportunity for the practice of vote buying to thrive. In his book, in which he discusses vote buying in Indonesia, Muhtadi further acknowledges that 'vote buying is central to election campaigns in Indonesia' (2019, p. 46). Other countries where vote buying blatantly exists include Hungary (Mares & Young 2018), Uganda (Blattman et al. 2019), the Philippines (Canare, Mendoza & Lopez 2018), Guatemala (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2020), Venezuela (Albertus 2013), Argentina, Kenya, and Zimbabwe, to name a few (Muhtadi 2019; Schaffer & Baker 2015). The table below shows estimates of direct vote buying across different countries between 2010 and 2013:

Country	%	N	Country	%	N	Country	%	N
Uganda 2012	41	2400	Mexico 2010	17	1562	Cote d'Ivoire 2013	7	1200
Benin 2012	37	1200	Paraguay 2010	16	1502	Ghana 2012	7	2400
Indonesia 2014[a]	33	1210	Burundi 2012	16	1199	Malaysia 2013	7	NA
Kenya 2011	32	2399	Colombia 2010	15	1506	Nicaragua 2010	6	1540
Liberia 2012	28	1199	Cameroon 2013	14	1200	Botswana 2012	6	1200
Swaziland 2013	27	1200	Malawi 2012	14	2407	Cape Verde 2011	6	1208
Mali 2012	26	1200	Tanzania 2012	14	2400	Jamaica 2010	6	1504
Niger 2013	24	1200	Guatemala 2010	14	1504	South Africa 2011	6	2399
Sierra Leone 2012	23	1190	Brazil 2010	13	2482	Guyana 2010	6	1540
Dominican Rep 2010	22	1500	Madagascar 2013	13	1200	Uruguay 2010	6	1500
Burkina Faso 2012	22	1200	Zambia 2012	13	1200	Chile 2010	6	1965
Morocco 2013	22	1200	Peru 2010	12	1500	Trinidad & Tobago 2010	5	1503
Philippines 2013	22	1200	Venezuela 2010	12	1500	Mozambique 2012	5	2400
Egypt 2013	20	1200	Guinea 2013	11	1200	Honduras 2009	4	1005
Nigeria 2012	19	2400	Senegal 2013	11	1200	Algeria 2013	3	1206
Zimbabwe 2012	19	2400	El Salvador 2010	10	1550	Lesotho 2012	2	1197
Argentina 2010	18	1410	Togo 2012	10	1200	Mauritius 2012	1	1200
Panama 2010	18	1536	Costa Rica 2010	9	1500	Tunisia 2013	1	1200
Belize 2010	17	1504	Ecuador 2010	8	3000			
Bolivia 2010	17	3018	Suriname 2010	7	1516	**Average**	**14.22**	

Table 3.1 Estimated proportion of direct vote buying by country
Source: Muhtadi (2019)

According to the table above, vote buying is especially prevalent in Africa, with the highest rates occurring in Uganda, Benin, Kenya, and Liberia. In Asia, Indonesia and the Philippines show the highest rates, while in the Americas, the Dominican Republic, Argentina, and Panama have higher rates than other countries in the region.

The table, which portrays Nigeria's 2011 election numbers (reported in 2012), shows that vote buying and clientelist transactions had a prevalence rate of 19% in the country. This is consistent with other research, such as Dauda, Adamu & Ahmodu-Tijani (2019), and other emerging figures and reports of vote buying in the country, which has possibly grown since then. This table also suggests that the prevalence of clientelism and vote buying is not unique

to any singular institution, but is a common experience in such emerging democratic institutions, further validating the argument that transitional periods are susceptible to bad policies that result in good returns for politicians (Muhtadi 2019; Vicente & Wantchekon 2009).

In Hungary, where voters are targeted with 'election-time threats' by political candidates and their agents, Mares, Young Mares & Young (2018) argue that the most important distinguishing features of clientelist transactions are whether they are based on promises or threats, with threats leaving recipients 'worse off than expected' regardless of their response to the proposal (pp. 1443-4).

In Guatemala, political parties and candidates prefer the 'carrots over sticks' approach, although their agents – or brokers – sometimes resort to intimidation as a cheaper, more effective method of garnering votes than vote buying (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al. 2020, p. 46). Although the common assumption is that vote buying influences voting behaviour, this has not been proven (Cantú 2019). Studies actually show that voters often defect at the polls and vote for their choice candidates despite any remunerations received in exchange for their votes (Greene 2017; Guardado & Wantchékon 2018; Schneider 2019; Vicente 2014), suggesting that it is difficult for parties and their agents to mitigate opportunism. Consequently, it is unlikely that vote buying is a successful means of influencing votes (Cantú 2019).

3.46 Election Monitoring and Observation

While election management has been the responsibility of independent institutions mandated with organising, executing, and managing electoral activities in their designated domains, electoral monitoring and observation, which are in essence stakeholder activities, have only become parts of electoral processes in the past six decades (Hyde 2011; Kelley 2012). Some scholars question the usefulness of election observation as a tool for enhancing democracy. They argue that although elections are necessary agents for delivering democracy in societies, the quality of observation activities and the democratic events they should enhance has been on a decline over the years (Kelley 2012).

'International election monitoring has become the primary tool of democracy promotion,' as, over the years, there has been a continuous external push for countries to uphold freedoms and democratise their states through elections (Kelley 2012, p. 18). Whereas in the past, countries have treated elections as sacred rituals in their domestic affairs, there has been

a heightening of election monitoring activities in recent times. The graph below shows a steep rise in international election observation and monitoring activities over four decades.

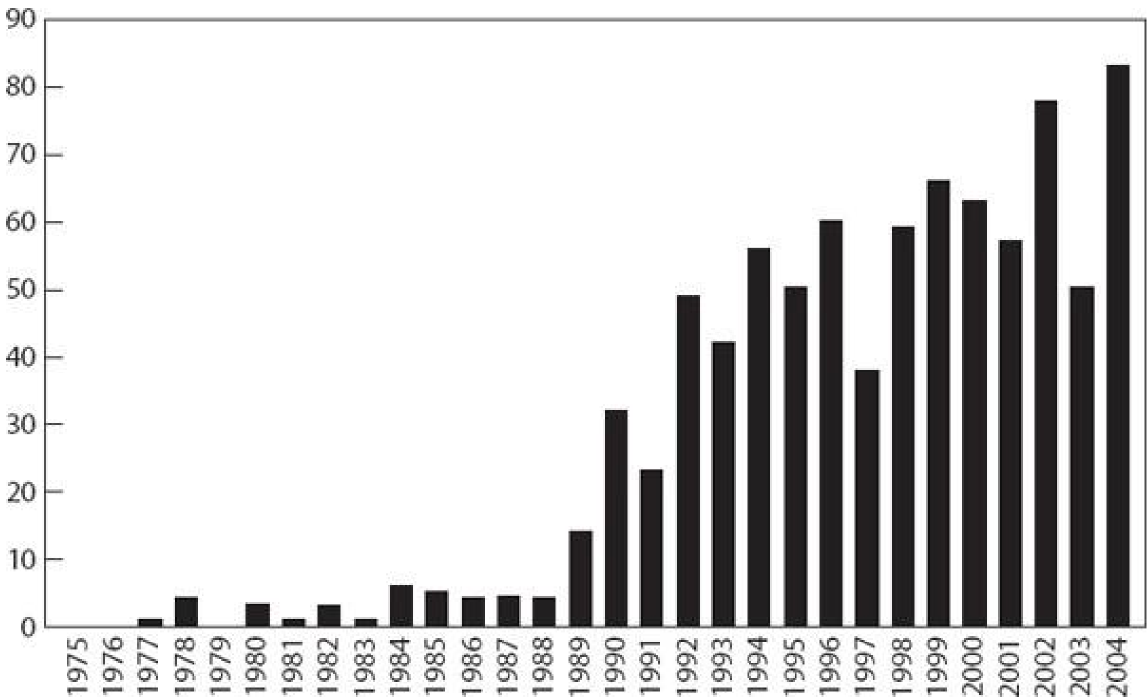


Figure 3.2 Number of national-level election missions per year from 1975 to 2004
Source: Kelley (2012)

Historical accounts show that the first known incident of election monitoring dates back to the nineteenth century, when a group of European countries sent delegates who observed the 1857 referendum that united two countries to form modern-day Romania (The Economist 2017). In modern-day politics, international election observation is said to have first occurred in Costa Rica in 1962 (Hyde 2011; The Economist 2017). This, however, was not the first attempt to involve the international community in elections through observation; Costa Rica and Cuba had both invited the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the United Nations (UN) to observe their elections in 1958, but both international bodies declined the two invitations (Hyde 2011).

Since then, election observations have become the norm such that countries that refuse to invite international bodies to observe their elections are questioned regarding their democracy and election processes. As Figure 3.2 shows, the frequency of international participation in countries' democratic processes through observation experienced a surge in the

late 1990s, possibly because of the incremental transition of countries from autocratic – or other forms of governance – to democratic governance.

Despite the popularity of observation and monitoring activities, some still question their relevance and their contribution to democracy. This is because pseudo-democratic states – countries that have no real democratic institutions but attempt to put up a façade of being democratic to the international community – use international election observation as a tool to accord validity to their so-called democracy (Hyde 2011). In her book, Hyde (2011, p. 54) suggests that 'election monitoring should be more costly to pseudo-democrats than true democrats.' She argues that 'if observers reduce election fraud, pseudo-democrats should perform worse in the presence of observers' (Hyde 2011, p. 54). While she presents a valid argument in her theory, this argument suggests that election observers exert an elevated level of influence over electoral outcomes in observed countries. This would be true in an ideal scenario. However, it is arguable in emergent democracies such as those that are found in transitional institutions where authoritarian machinery is not entirely eliminated and where other issues, such as clientelism and vote-buying, arise. Furthermore, such external observers or monitors have no voice in the final determination of the electoral outcome, which means that unsupported outcomes could still prevail unless there is an internal scrutiny mechanism that could work to influence overturning a fraudulent result.

At the country level, 'non-partisan citizen election monitoring' has become a widespread occurrence across over 100 countries, involving several millions of local citizens in the delivery of free and fair elections globally (Merloe 2015). In Nigeria, citizens now take part in election monitoring and observing activities through local civil society organisations, many of which receive funding from sources that are both local and alien to the country.

3.47 Consolidating Cultural Perspectives on Social Media Discourse: The Views from Africa

Literature that examines the role of culture in new and social media use is limited at best, and this research aims to fill this gap in research. Having explained the cultural dynamics existing in non-Western societies such as those in Africa, it is expedient to obtain a contextualised perspective regarding this. An interesting view worth considering is that multiple cultures are clashing and fighting for dominance. The first is the societal customs and traditions passed down from forebears that still vie for their "rightful" position as historical agents of the society.

Following that is the youth culture that pervades society and evolves from one generation to the next.

Then, there is the invasion of these new technologies that have caused societal evolution at exponential levels, for which the traditional was not quite prepared. New technologies always bring changes to society, and when the media are at the centre of technological development, this has a more direct effect on society. In a society such as Africa's, with predominantly emerging democracies, these present multi-faceted challenges that states are forced to grapple with in the transitional periods from one system of governance to another, thereby enhancing the complexity of democracy and governance in such institutions.

3.5 Summary

This chapter highlighted existing empirical studies on different aspects of social media use and cultural interference in political communication and reviewed fundamental studies within those areas. It examined extant studies, first from a Western approach and then from a non-Western approach, to identify differentiating features prevalent in those two contexts. It concludes that although scholarship exists on the study of social media and politics, there is still a lack of consensus on their validity as electoral tools. Furthermore, it addresses the influence of culture on emerging democracies. The next chapter provides theoretical entry points for examining and analysing research data to proffer answers to the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis.

CHAPTER FOUR: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK - CONNECTIVE THEORIES

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of this study. The overarching research question of the study is *How has Twitter changed political participation in the Nigerian cultural context?* This brings to the fore three areas to be explored: the public sphere, social networks, and communication culture. The theories will be presented and discussed here to provide an analytical lens for the themes that emerge from the data, and they form the bases for discussions on these empirical findings. The chapter will demonstrate the convergence of these theories in a clear and coherent discourse and will answer the questions of (1) "What disciplinary theories underlie the question of political participation in Nigeria?" and (2) "How do these theories help us to better understand online political participation in the global south?"

The chapter will begin with a discussion of the public sphere, as it provides a broader context for understanding democratic interactions in mediated spaces. It will reconstruct Habermas' public sphere to fit into the modern-day structure of a neutral space for political discourse within the Nigerian social media space and culture. Habermas' theory has been criticised for being idealistic and perhaps Eurocentric or West-centric. This notion of idealism is acknowledged as a weakness of the theory, particularly given the unique identifying factors of politics in Africa – and in Nigeria in particular. One of the factors of this idealism, exclusion, is identified for critical examination within Nigeria's public sphere, and an attempt is made, with consideration of culture-specific factors, to envelop and dissect the Nigerian political discourse within Habermas' public sphere.

Next, social networks will be explored within the public sphere to understand how they facilitate political discourse and participation, both online and offline. In the Nigerian digital sphere, social media have given new life to political and social discourses, and these avenues have been widely exploited in raising voices, particularly voices that were not usually heard or acknowledged through traditional media. The fact that these media have increasingly, but arguably, raised the bar of political discourse makes them relevant to political studies.

The 2015 presidential race in Nigeria saw an increase in online engagement in the country, particularly before and during elections. The outcome of the election raised research

questions about the potency of online political interactions amongst citizens, and between political candidates and their parties with their constituents. Increased dependency on digital media and influencers has made the Twittersphere fertile soil for building political networks and followership.

The social network theory is used to situate Habermas' public sphere and help bring key terminologies to light. The notion of actors, groups, and networks help to adequately identify the subjects of the investigation appropriately and clarify their relationships and what they mean within the public sphere. It further helps to create a niche community to position the discourse by acknowledging the function(s) of social media as networks providers in society.

This will then be followed by a discussion of communication power to build upon the current understanding of the concept of culture and its influence in political communication. Social networks are conduits of power not only from a top-down perspective but also from bottom-up in the political sphere. This theory will help examine notions of power and influence, to better understand how they fit into political discourses within African public spheres that are built on social networks from a decidedly African cultural lens. In Nigeria's case, poverty and other social benefactor-beneficiary relationships are used to dispense the notion that there are no power plays, even in a presumably levelled public sphere such as Habermas assumes. This theory is central to the discourse of this thesis because it is the basis for the possibility of formation of a new theorem in societal communication and political discourses.

Using the poverty statistics for Nigeria, as well as the cultural indices in the country's political system, this thesis uses Castells' theory to challenge the notion of political autonomy of political actors – candidates, parties and the electorate. It also supports the call for differentiation in experiences and conclusions between Western and non-Western cultures.

4.2 The Public Sphere

Habermas defines the public sphere as 'a domain of our social life' that is accessible to all citizens acting as individuals and not representatives of business or state (Habermas 1991, p. 398). It is a domain where opinions are shared freely – without coercion – and publicly to the end that opinion is formed that is regarded as a shared opinion of the public (Habermas 1991). As interpreted by Kruse, Norris & Flinchum (2018), the purpose of this space is to create

political change with the use of critical reasoning of existing knowledge. Habermas maintains that specific characteristics qualify a space as a generator of public opinion.

Foremost is the quality of openness and accessibility to everyone. Players in this space must be representatives of self, not representatives of institutions. In addition, they have to set personal interests aside to seek the common good (Willems 2012). Whilst Habermas (1991) argues that the presence and strong influence of money institutions have mitigated the existence of the public sphere in the modern-day, while the emergence of alternative neutral spaces, brought about by new and social media, have revitalised or reinstituted the formation of public opinion. The Nigerian state spotlights Habermas' argument. Although it can be argued that the re-emergence of democracy, which followed the cyclic interference of the military in governance, was overtaken by economies (where the so-called godfathers used finances to obtain power, thus saturating the public sphere with their rhetoric), social media have provided new spaces for the electorate to engage in political discourse. This research seeks to understand the extent to which political participation in these new digital public spheres reflects political participation by voting during elections.

Habermas speaks of a political public sphere in which the issues discussed and opinions generated are of concern to the practice of the state. In this sphere, the state is the counterpart because of its coercive power. It is not a part of it, however, even though the power of the state is 'public' in its obligatory role of caring for the public. Habermas' insistence on differentiating between mere opinion and public opinion is significant. Whilst mere opinions are often products of traditional beliefs and judgements passed down through generations as accepted cultural norms in each society, public opinions, according to him, are products of active engagement of the public in rational discussion. These opinions might be unpopular because they had not existed before now but are developed by a 'constellation of interests' and are constitutionally incorporated into society (Habermas 1991, p. 399).

4.21 Critiques of Exclusion in the Habermasian Public Sphere

Much of the critiques of Habermas' theory have been addressed by Habermas himself (1992), as well as by his disciples. Some of these disciples, such as Goode (2005), are ardent about communication media and democratic evolution. However, one especially trenchant critique of the public sphere theory that has not been silenced is the notion of exclusion. In one of his recent works, Dahlberg (2014) articulates this notion in support of the positioning of other

theorists in the debate who are characterised by their post-culturalist influences which stem from Foucault's and other theorists' philosophies. These Foucauldians, such as Devenney (2004, 2009), Mouffe (2005) and Thomassen (2008) challenge the notion that the public sphere is all-inclusive, whereas, in reality, women were excluded from political discourse in the Bourgeois public sphere.

Fraser (1990) is one of the earlier critics the Habermasian public sphere. She observes that Habermas' book on *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas 1989) specifically addresses the public sphere of the bourgeois society, which is 'a historically specific and limited form of the public sphere' (Fraser 1990, p. 58) based on British, French and German societies of 'the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries' (Habermas 1992, p. 422). Consequently, Fraser argues that 'Habermas stops short of developing a new, post-bourgeois model of the public sphere' and that he 'never explicitly problematises some dubious assumptions that underlie the bourgeois model' (Fraser 1990, p. 58). Thus, she argues that Habermas' public sphere is not a good fit for critical theory for today's theorists and researchers. Like the Foucauldians, Fraser also raises the criticism of exclusion in the public sphere, citing that despite their exclusion from the masculinist public sphere of their day, nineteenth-century women in North America created their own routes to access political life (Fraser 1990).

Another critique is that the Habermasian public sphere is class-driven and not as accessible as Habermas implies (Willems 2012). Rather, there is a functional divide between the public sphere of the bourgeoisie and that of the proletarians (Kluge & Negt 2016), who take their cue from historical labour movements (Negt, Kluge & Labanyi 1988).

These exclusions may still exist in today's public sphere. Whereas women are not excluded from contemporary politics in the majority of Western states, other forms of exclusions could be said to apply, even in the so-called online space that has supposedly expanded the reach of the sphere. This research will address the exclusion posed by this new extension of the public sphere.

Exclusion in the Digital Public Sphere

While the digital space has expanded the reach of Habermas' public sphere, there is still the ongoing debate of elitism in the online world. Mutsvairo & Ragnedda (2019) point out the multidimensional nature of the digital divide in Africa, which reflects on socioeconomic status alongside other factors such as race, gender, and location. Considering that only an exclusive few have access to advanced technology based on economic standing (Akanbi & Akanbi 2012),

this exclusion is evident in developing countries such as African states where the digital divide is still acute due to poverty and the resulting issue of accessibility (Mutsvairo & Ragnedda 2019). With poverty in the country at an all-time high in recent years, Nigeria is a poignant example. In Nigeria, the Internet penetration statistics belie the per person quotient of connectivity, and recent developments place Nigeria ahead of India as the nation with the poorest people in the world (Bouillon 2019).

The result of this is a more expansive digital divide on the continent, where the opposite is the desired outcome. With social media emerging as new public spheres, the likelihood that a corps of citizens will be left behind is inevitable. This divide, based on economic status, has existed since long before the advent of digital media, and it has produced a knowledge gap.

A New 'Public'?

By default, the divide described above causes the exclusion from the public sphere (including the political public sphere) of a significant population of the state who are not connected to the Internet. This exclusion challenges the definition of 'public' in use in the sphere in modern-day discourse. The current experience has no position in either the pre-Bourgeois public – which was at the time an attribute of authority wielded by lords of estates who exerted power over their tenants and acted as their representatives in the aristocratic courts (Habermas 1989) – or in the ideal Bourgeois public – where everyone has right of access, within which Habermas' definition is positioned. As Honneth & Joas (1991) point out, this notion of idealism presented by Habermas has been the most common criticism of his work. These criticisms call for a different, or perhaps a hybrid, definition of 'public' that sits somewhere in the middle of the two and represents the society in its evolved state today.

Hence, the term 'public,' in this digital public sphere, can be defined as an amalgamation of individuals acting on behalf of self or as representatives of coalitions of individuals (i.e., non-governmental and non-institutional interest groups that engage in discourse in a neutral space with the goal of forming public opinions and acting as monitors to the government). These third-sector, or civil society, groups act as agents of diverse representative groups of society. Therefore, Habermas's critics can be said to have valid grounds for continued criticism of the public sphere theory despite previous efforts in addressing them. However, this study will only examine the interaction of individuals within Nigeria's political public sphere.

4.22Communicative Action in the Public Sphere

Communicative action, as Habermas proposes, 'is that form of social interaction in which the plans of action of different actors are coordinated through an exchange of communicative acts, that is, through a use of language or corresponding non-verbal expressions oriented towards reaching [shared] understanding' (Habermas 1982, p. 234). This kind of action is predicated upon the motives of all parties involved who are intent on reaching a mutually agreeable solution.

Brand (1990) uses the example of a landlord's high-handed approach versus a fiancé's discursive persuasion to vacate a red district to illustrate the difference between communicative and non-communicative action and how both work in practice. While the former only considers his potential financial benefit with a change in clientele, the latter demonstrates concern for safety and, more importantly, the use of dialogue to reach a shared understanding. As Brand asserts, reaching an understanding derives from interactivity between partners who 'set out, and manage, to convince each other, so that their action is coordinated based on motivation through reason' (1990, p. 15).

4.23A Refined Public Sphere

With this new theorem of communicative action, Habermas introduces a refined definition of the public sphere, which embraces communicative acts in whatever form, shape or sphere they are produced. This public sphere is no longer 'a homogenous, specific public;' it is instead 'an array of complex networks and overlapping publics constituted through the critical communication of individuals, groups, associations, social movements, journalistic enterprises, and other civic institutions' (Dahlberg 2005, p. 112). This public sphere can be established anywhere at any time when matters of mutual concern are raised and debated. The problem with this definition, however, is that it is not clear where the line between public and private should be drawn.

For over two decades now, research and inquiries have delved into the question of what impact, if any, the Internet will on the way of life in general and democracy in particular. In the last decade, this question has increasingly generated answers in the form of hundreds of research output available that are framed on the conversation.

Most notably, Barack Obama's 2007 presidential campaign decidedly answered the question of whether the Internet – social media and networks in particular – will become a

mainstay on political discourse and elections. Across the decade since Obama's ground-swelling campaign and historic victory, the same scenario has played out as that of President Obama's first presidential campaign. From elections in European countries, such as the United Kingdom parliamentary elections in 2010 and the Brexit referendum in 2015, to those African states, such as the Nigerian general elections of 2015 and Ghana's in 2016, social media's use in politics and elections has become a common denominator.

The modern-day political public sphere has extended to include online platforms, facilitated by the Internet. This expansion has allowed citizens to participate in political conversations without the necessity of formal physical spaces where information is disseminated to the large public solely by the traditional media, such as radio and television. With new media spaces now open to political conversations, there has been a surge of participants in the political public sphere and a decline in the coercive power of the state.

Although these present-day spaces are, in essence, owned by money corporations, and are therefore still controlled by the elite, their successes are built on the fundamental idea of free speech. The bid by several governments to monitor and control these platforms – that is, to exert the coercive power of the state – and subsequent successes in some countries, are evidence that these spaces affect Habermas' claims.

Several African legislatures have attempted to instate bills that suppress these public spheres. In a few cases, overtly undemocratic tactics have been utilised in the realisation of this goal. In other countries such as China and North Korea, the governments have successfully censored speech and any attempts at communicative action.

4.24Debating Social Media as a Public Sphere

Social media have broken barriers previously instated by traditional media, thereby giving more (uncensored) access to information. Their nature and role in society today have allowed them to be considered a kind of public sphere that accedes to Habermas' ideal. They are accessible and allow for equality in opinion sharing. In other words, they create an atmosphere for public debate.

However, it is naïve to assume that they are public in every sense of the word when, in fact, these public spaces are privately owned. Private ownership means that there is every possibility of suspension from the sphere if an actor's opinion is reported by other actors (i.e.,

users) and established as being offensive or abusive without the benefit of a warning or the opportunity to engage in dialogue (Facebook 2019; Twitter Inc 2019).

It also means that user information is more public than users possibly imagine. These privately-owned media platforms have access to users' data, which they can use for commercial ventures. This access to data is allowed because when a user signs up for an account and clicks on the 'I agree' button beneath the terms and conditions of use, that user has signed off commercial rights to them. Their data can, therefore, be sold to advertisers. Thus, the user becomes the product.

The *Cambridge Analytica* scandal of 2015/2016 brings to the fore how user data can also be exploited for political gains. This scandal resulted in an update to the European Union (EU) General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which sought to give EU citizens more 'control over their personal data' (EU GDPR 2019) and more protection from 'privacy and data breaches in today's data-driven world' (Europa 2016).

Despite the above, these privately owned public spaces have enabled discourses on political and other social issues to transcend the restrictive traditional public mediums to include more diverse voices.

4.25Main Points: Theory I

This section discussed the public sphere theory as the principal theory of the thesis (examined from a non-Western perspective). Habermas' characteristics for qualifying public spheres include openness and accessibility without restrictions to any persons or groups of persons, representation of the self rather than institutions, and the preference for the common good over personal interests.

Social media have now become these ideal spaces, particularly in societies such as Nigeria, where money has become a means of obtaining power. Thus, one of the goals of the present study is to ascertain the extent to which these digital public spheres have fostered political participation online and offline. This study also aims to address the notion of exclusion – which has been extended to the digital public sphere due to digital and economic divides that are characteristic of so-called third world countries such as Nigeria. Exclusion has been a significant critique of the Habermasian theory.

The goal of discourse within the public sphere is to achieve communicative action where dialogue is used to reach a shared understanding. Thus, it is essential to note that this

public sphere is no longer homogenous. Instead, it has become a heterogeneous structure comprising complex networks where the publics overlap, and social media have further enhanced this new structure. This thesis acknowledges this heterogeneity in the new public sphere and studies political participation within the sphere in the Nigerian context.

The next section will discuss social networks and their usefulness in situating the public sphere theory in this study.

4.3 The Social Network Theory

A social network is a group of actors – individuals – who share common factors or objectives and are defined according to the measurable relationships between them (Wasserman & Faust 1994 in Carolan 2014). These networks usually expand by leveraging on the already existing relationships each individual has outside the network. These relationships are then translated into new connections on the broader network. These individuals, who form a group, are interconnected and share one common objective amongst themselves. A typical example is a nuclear family where children begin to marry and extend the family network through the new spouse, who brings their own family with them at the point when the new union is formed through marriage.

As Valente posits, 'relationships influence a person's behaviour above and beyond the influence of one's characteristics' (Valente 2010 in Carolan 2014, p. 00). Hence, social networks are chains of public spheres where power and influence are exercised. They are also the answer to another of Fraser's (1990) criticisms of the Habermasian public sphere. She challenges Habermas' ideology that a universal public sphere is preferable to multiple publics, arguing that a 'multiplicity of competing publics' is preferable 'in modern stratified societies as well as in (hypothetical) egalitarian, multicultural societies' (Postone 1992, p. 171).

Scholars have vacillated between studying social networks as a theory, a method, or an integration of theory and method (Carolan 2014). In their analysis of social networks, Knoke & Yang (2019) identify three assumptions about relationships and their effects:

1. Social structures and behaviours that emanate from them are more significant than demographic characteristics such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, or political ideologies.
2. Social networks affect the perceptions, beliefs, and actions of actors through diverse socially and relationally constructed structural mechanisms among entities.

3. Networks are not static; they undergo constant changes through the interactions amongst the individuals within them.

- (Knoke & Yang 2019)

These assumptions demonstrate the dynamism and continually evolving state of social networks and form the basis for the social network theory. This theory focuses on 'the role of social relationships in transmitting information, channelling personal or media influence, and enabling attitudinal or behavioural change' (Liu et al. 2017). This thesis seeks to explore these relationships to understand the extent of their effects on online and offline political decisions and users' levels of engagement.

Cross-pollination has emerged between social network theory and media effects which is mainly due to the surge of computer-mediated new technologies (Liu et al. 2017). Nevertheless, there should be no assumption that social networks were instituted by social networking sites (SNSs) or chatrooms that existed long before the giants came on board. Instead, for as long as humans have lived in communities and not in isolation, social networks have existed. Humans have mastered the art of integrating with other humans and forging new relationships through existing ones. All that the Internet and digital media have done is help expand the reach of human networks exponentially. Social networks, in essence, are representative of the links or interconnectedness in relationships between individuals and/or organisations in society, which sometimes occur through accidental encounters (Adler & Alfaro 2007; Lomi et al. 2014).

4.31 The Basis of the Social Network Concept

The basis of the social network theory as it is applied in this research is to excavate and highlight the role of relationships in political discourses and decisions. The main objective of any political activity is ultimately to create relationships. The success of every political venture depends on this single factor. Relationships have been the backbone of the success of every form of leadership and the bane of leadership failure. Simply put, the right relationships will make or mar one's political career.

The Nigerian politician is very aware of this, and so is the voter. *Godfatherism* is part of the fabric of the political system in the society, and the connections one has mostly determine how far one will go for some obvious reasons. Firstly, the right backing will provide

followership on demand. Mainly because today's society is still a strongly patriarchal one – and due to the high poverty level prevalent in the society – people gravitate to power-wielders, and power in the society is usually measurable with wealth. In general, people will automatically gravitate towards individuals who they consider financial benefactors, even if they do not feel a strong political or moral allegiance to the person.

In Nigeria, the primary power-wielders in the political sphere are military or ex-military groups. Due to the nation's unforgettably long history of military dominance, which started from shortly after Nigeria's independence from British rule until 1999, the military has a very strong, albeit understated, hold on governance in the country. One might say that the reason democracy has taken hold, being in its twentieth year since the 4th Republic, is that power went to an ex-military general. Therefore, the military still had a strong presence, as 'one of their own' was in power.

Since President Obasanjo stepped down after his second term in 2007, the military – and particularly Obasanjo as an influential frontline man – has produced all the country's presidents. Yar'Adua, who took over from Obasanjo, was the younger brother of an ex-military general and received the endorsement from Obasanjo. Goodluck Jonathan, who took over after the demise of his predecessor, took ascendancy because he had Obasanjo's support. When, during his second bid for office, he lost Obasanjo's support – and by default the military's – he lost the election to another ex-military general who, now had the Obasanjo's support.

Even though it does not fit into the traditional definition of authoritarianism or patrimonialism as was the case with the military regime, the Nigerian political system today fits the description of 'electoral autocracy' (Lackey 2012; Schedler 2006). Even though the state has transited from military regimes to democratic governance, power still seems to revolve around a select few.

4.32Positioning the Public Sphere Theory in the Social Network

The role of the social network theory is to help to position Habermas' public sphere in a niche within critical debates in the public space. To effectively discuss the public sphere in the 21st century is to acknowledge the new realities of society and media in the emergence of new technologies, a phenomenon that has now become the new normal in all spheres of life – societal, economic, political, and spiritual. Today's geography is no longer just physical; it is also a 'pin' – a geo-tagging tool that is used to share one's offline location in the online space.

Sparrowe et al. define network centrality as 'the extent to which a given individual is connected to others in a network' (2001, p. 316). They suggest that centrality is the 'structural property' most strongly associated with instrumental outcomes in the exercise of power (Brass 1984), decision making (Friedkin 1993), and innovation (Ibarra 1993). In Brass's analysis, he acknowledges that the definition of power is often pyramidal – seen from within Emerson's dependency framework, where the exertion of power is proportional to dependency. That is, the more A depends on B, the more power B can exert over A (Emerson 1962).

Within the realm of social networks, however, this theory takes a more complex stance. Dependency becomes dynamic – where both parties are both dependant and benefactor. For example, in political discourse, political candidates use social networks or media to put forth their agenda and engage with their constituents. They are increasingly aware that power lies in the hands of the electorate, and that they can access certain demographics of this electorate, predominantly people aged 45 and under, by establishing an online presence and engaging within those spaces.

It is pertinent to note, however, that the success rates of such online engagements and electoral outcomes stemming from them may differ from one geographical demographic to another. Again, it is essential to reiterate that what works in Western countries might not work in non-Western states. Whilst acknowledging this impasse to be reasonable, it can also be safe to say that politicians in non-Western states – and, to be more precise, in African states – have proceeded to adopt these methods to win over these demographics mentioned above.

4.33Main Points: Theory II

This section discussed the social network theory, which builds on the public sphere theory to demonstrate how public spheres are enacted in pockets of society to enable power and influence to be exercised. Three main assumptions are made about relationships and their effects, which show that social structures wield more influence than political ideologies, social network affect actors, and networks undergo continuous changes that are influenced by the diverse nodal interactions. While new media technologies did not initiate social networks, they have enhanced the interconnectedness between nodes. This thesis will explore these relationships are explored within Nigeria's political society to help understand how networked pockets of society influence political decisions of the electorate and provide different definitions of networked power and dependency than is typically assumed in that society.

4.4 Communication Power Theory

Manuel Castells defines power as 'the relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actors in ways that favour the empowered actor's will, interests, and values' (Castells 2009, p. 10). He argues that power is a relationship between social actors. In this relationship, influence, in the form of coercion, is exerted by the power-wielding actor over another actor subjected to that power. This definition of power by Castells is the basis for the discourse on power in this thesis.

There is an exercise of power inherent in all human relationships that is a part of society and is impossible to ignore. Any attempt to repudiate the existence of this power is not naïveté; it is an attempt to distort the natural balance of society. This power *im*balance is determined by social structures. One legitimate representation of this power in a political society can be seen in the public sphere where there is no institutional – governmental – interference or control.

In Castells's society, there are no communities – no shared values or interests; only social structures built on conflicts, negotiations, and opposition. This research suggests differently. Within the sphere of this research, societies are communities with social systems. These societies share cultures – values, traditions, beliefs, and interests that distinguish them from others. They also operate within structures that are dictated or determined by economic or social positioning. These structures and the power exercised within them are not possible without communication networks embedded in communities. Hence, as van Dijk (2010, p. 571) writes of Castells's assertions, 'communication networks are central to the implementation of power-making of any network.'

4.41Power

Emerson (1962) takes a different approach to Castells (2009) in his discourse on power and dependence. He argues that 'social relations commonly entail ties of mutual dependence between the parties' (1962, p. 32). In describing dependence dynamics in person-to-person, person-to-group, and group-to-group relationships, Emerson further says that 'the dependence of actor A upon actor B is (1) directly proportional to A's motivational investment in goals mediated by B, and (2) inversely proportional to the availability of those goals to A outside of the A-B relation' (Emerson 1962, p. 32).

Power and dependence are usually examined from a top-down, vertical approach, where power is a constant factor that is exerted from the top of the pyramid to cascade down to the

lower levels in an organisation or social relationship. For instance, Emerson examines power and dependence with a horizontal lens. From his horizontal perspective, Emerson argues that there is an equal playing field and every actor in the field has both power and dependence. Using the organisational structure, which is what his research was based on, every unit – or department – in the organisation depends on other units. This interdependence means that every unit equally has power, and so there is mutual dependence, but, different from the typical assumption, there is also mutual power. The question of whose power is used to influence anything is a separate issue (Salancik & Pfeffer 1977).

The online community also reflects this mutuality of power and dependence. While so-called influencers on social media hold some measure of power, given to them by their followers, over said followers, these influencers are also dependent on their followers for continued visibility and relevance in the online space.

In the political public sphere, this mutual dependency is also visible, particularly in Western countries with developed democracies. There is the continuous power play between politicians and their constituents; in reality, the constituents may wield more power than the politicians do. In less developed democracies, however, this power balance has not fully come about. Due to the slowness of increasing and deepening awareness of the rights of constituents to, for instance, recall a legislator or an outright lack of these rights, there is a poor sense of accountability by these lawmakers in the African political space. However, there has been a progressive shift from the status quo over the last decade, though this shift has been more prominent in some countries than in others.

Castells reinforces the position of communication in power distributions. According to him, 'power is more than communication, and communication is more than power. But power relies on the control of communication, as counterpower depends on breaking through such control' (Castells 2009, p. 3). Hence, power relies on the ability to control communication and information at the different levels that power relationships operate, whether at the state level, organisational level, or personal level (Castells 2009).

In the era of digital communication, this argument has also been extended to include that. The 2016 post-American presidential campaigns and election scandal that implicated *Cambridge Analytica* and Facebook exemplify the use of communication and data emanating from communication to control the narrative and ultimately wield political power. This study aims to find out the extent to which this can be attributed to the Nigerian experience.

4.42Influence

Brass succinctly summarises the works of Emerson (1962), Hickson et al. (1971), and Salancik & Pfeffer (1977) as follows: 'Power…derives from control of relevant resources' (1984, p. 519). (Salancik & Pfeffer) proffer a somewhat oversimplified definition of streetwise power, saying that 'power is simply the ability to get things done the way one wants them to be done.' This definition, which was both the basis of and the inference drawn from a study of diverse types of organisations and managerial hierarchies in the power spectra of the organisations, can be said to apply ubiquitously.

In social media spaces, however, their application may not be as straightforward as in more structured spaces. The nature of social media, particularly Twitter, is such that all actors in the space can be said to be on an equal playing field. Social media, in general, have allowed access to every opinion, whether such views are socially acceptable or not.

On Facebook, this access can be restricted by the formation of groups having administrators or moderators. The roles of these moderators, who are the key power-wielders, include (1) granting or refusing potential actors permission of entry into that space and (2) deciding which voices and opinions will be heard. In practice, opinions that do not echo the group's ethos are disallowed at entry point via censorship. Where they have slipped unnoticed, once discovered, are flagged and eliminated from that space and, in extreme circumstances, the actors are equally ejected or disavowed.

On Twitter, however, this definition does not always apply. Amongst the 'influencers,' followership is a tool that can be used to 'measure' power and influence. An acceptable assumption would be that the more followers an actor has, the wider their sphere of influence and, therefore, the greater their power. Hence, influencers can be ranked according to the effect each one has in the space where they operate. This idea is challenging, however, because other actors may follow an influencer for different reasons, particularly when that influencing actor has carved several different niches within the Twittersphere.

Twitter's organisation looks more like an open-plan office in an organisational setting where managers and their subordinates are situated within the same space, on the same level, and (in many cases) with no identifying features. This model is in contrast to Facebook's corner-office style management. Because there are no visible or defined colonies on Twitter, admission and censorship are by default, and, therefore, everyone has an equal advantage and

can voice opinions, which might be considered politically or socially incorrect without any dire consequences.

There is no moderation within a conversation, and the most anyone can do is to report a tweet (which escalates the post to Twitter), block a user handle (an actor), or mute that actor. A Tweet cannot be deleted by anyone other than its originator, even when it is part of the thread of a conversation started by another actor. To be rid of unwanted Tweets by anyone other than the originating actor is for the thread to be deleted at source – that is, for the actor who began that conversation with the initial tweet to delete it. In this case, the unwanted tweet will then only be seen on the homepage of its source handle.

4.43Main Points: Theory III

This section discussed the communication power theory, which provides a definition of power that encapsulates the discourse on social networks, power, influence, and dependency in the Nigerian political sphere. While Castells's definition of power excludes communities with shared values or interests, the present research uses social networks with shared cultures as structures for its examination. This approach conforms more to that of Emerson, who advocates a mutuality of power and dependence, where power is not a top-down relationship; instead, it is horizontal and provides users with access to a level playing field where each actor has power and dependence. Castells further argues that power – and by extension, influence – and communication are synchronous because power and influence are reliant on communication. While this has been evidenced in the American 2016 elections with *Cambridge Analytica*, this study examines the extent to which this applied in the Nigerian 2015 and 2019 presidential elections.

4.5 Summary

This chapter discussed the theories that form the framework for this study. The public sphere theory provided a broader context for understanding democratic interactions in mediated spaces. While most discourses on the public sphere are framed within Western contexts, this chapter presented arguments that support the thesis's discourse on the theory from a non-Western perspective. Notions of exclusion have been addressed by critics of the Habermasian public sphere and the bourgeois society.

These criticisms are still relevant in twenty-first-century societies – broadened by the digital divide that is prevalent in non-Western cultures. Nevertheless, social networks, which are a form of communication power and influence, have helped to situate the public sphere theory in the study of Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. Hence, the social network theory has facilitated comprehension of who the actors are in the public sphere, what relationships exist within their spaces, and how communication, power, and influence are exerted within those spaces. Furthermore, it was used to satisfy one of the counter-arguments to Habermas' public sphere due to the multiplicity of publics that it harbours, which, in turn, multiplies connectivity in public discourse. Finally, the communication power theory provided a better understanding of power and influence and how they are exercised within these networked public spheres in non-Western contexts.

The next chapter discusses the methodological processes of the study and explains any methodological constraints and ethical considerations made throughout the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodology employed in this research. It discusses the research methods employed, including the research design, sampling methods, data collection and analyses. It also provides justifications for each of the different approaches. Furthermore, it highlights any limitations and delimitations to the research and provides justifications for them, where applicable.

The aim of this chapter is to describe the methodological processes that have been undertaken in the execution of the fieldwork stage of my doctoral research. It answers the following questions: (1) What research design is used in this thesis? (2) What methods does this research employ? (3) What is the methodological process that has been undertaken in the gathering of data for the purpose of this research? (4) What methods are used to analyse the data?

On the one hand, different research studies require different approaches; on the other hand, however, it is still possible for a single research question to be answered using different research methods. This chapter presents the overall research design and methods used to examine the role of social media – in this case, Twitter – in elections, as well as the justification for the choice of design and methods.

This chapter is presented in three sections. Section 1 presents the methodological challenges posed by research terminologies and the decisions taken in addressing them. It also outlines the questions that will be addressed in this research, which informs the research design. Section 2 presents the study design and the rationale for the research design used – which, again, is influenced by the research questions posed. The context of the study is also briefly reiterated – though, only to the extent that it helps to contextualise the research design, as this has been described in detail in the introductory and background chapters. Section 3 provides details of the research method adopted and how it fits into the design. Here, the sampling techniques and data collection methods used are outlined. The researcher takes a reflective approach to reviewing the fieldwork and the challenges faced in the course of executing their carefully laid out – albeit perhaps novice – plans, with a few personal reflections on the experience added. The goal of this reflective practice is embedded in the work of LaRocco,

Shinn & Madise (2019, p. 3), who 'reject the notion that the researcher is separate from or liminal to the field.' For the researcher, recognition of the insider-outsider positionality (Adu-Ampong & Adams 2019) adds value to the study. Also, the presentation and analysis methods to be used in the analysis of the data are outlined in Section 3. The final part of this section is a discussion of the ethical considerations in using human subjects or their information, as applicable to this thesis.

5.2 Choosing a Methodology

In the course of this research, a constant challenge has been definitively distinguishing between the terms "methodology" and "methods," as well as the components of each term. Different authors use the words interchangeably and, in many cases, what is considered a method by one author is classified as a technique by another. To minimise this dilemma in writing, and to more clearly streamline the research objectives, the researcher has chosen classifications described by Willig (2013) and Chandra & Hareendran (2017) in discussing the research and demonstrating where each element fits in the overall frame.

Both a researcher's goals and the nature of their research topic influence the methodology and strategy that will be employed in their research (Benbasat 1984). Walshe et al. support this in their statement that 'selecting an appropriate research strategy is key to ensuring that research questions are addressed in a way which has value and is congruent with the overall topic, questions, and purpose of the research' (2004, p. 677). The research design and methods used in executing the design were chosen with these considerations in mind.

5.21 The Research Questions

The overarching question of this thesis is *How has Twitter changed political participation in the Nigerian cultural context?* The study contextualises this question by breaking it down into the following sub-questions:

SQ1: How is Twitter used as a tool for political participation within the Nigerian context through the case study of the 2015 and 2019 elections?

SQ2: Does culture have any influence on political decisions? If so, how and to what extent?

SQ3: What relationships exist between online political activities and offline realities and outcomes?

5.3 The Research Design

The first level of designing a study involves the overall design of the research, in which the research problem is defined. It is at this point that decisions are made on the research framework and the type of study that will be undertaken. The next level in research design outlines the research methods. It is at this level that the research mechanics are outlined, including the type of data to be used – primary or secondary – the data collection methods, the sampling strategy, and other details relating to the actual execution of the research plan.

A few factors contributed to the process of designing this research. First was the origin of the research, which, in essence, framed the research questions. The study originated in the wake of an event that is described in detail in Chapter 4. At the time when the research questions took shape, that initial event was the visual aid to the construct of the research. Therefore, to adequately answer the key questions guiding this research, it was important to choose a design that would allow room for obtaining contextual answers.

5.31 Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is fluid by definition, and social science scholars lament the difficulty in clearly defining it (p. 117). As Denzin & Lincoln note, it does not possess 'a distinct set of methods or practices that are entirely its own' (2011, p. 6); instead, it is broad and encompasses different methods and approaches to research from various disciplines (Ormston et al. 2014).

One standard definition is that it is research that utilises non-quantitative (non-numerical) methods of data gathering and analysis (Given 2008). As Matsilele (2019) puts it, it 'produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification.' However, qualitative research 'can be used to generate hypotheses that can then be subject to statistical testing' (Ritchie & Ormston 2014, p. 42). As Denzin & Lincoln (2018, pp. 12-3) succinctly describe it,

> Qualitative research/inquiry is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities, as well as the social and the physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions.

This definition captures the complexities of qualitative research while also demonstrating its rigour and situating it accurately in the context of multidisciplinary research such as this. Grossberg, Nelson & Treichler (1992) also acknowledge that qualitative enquiries can create conflicts between postmodern and naturalistic – or critical and humanistic – approaches to research. Despite the robustness that qualitative enquiry provides, some scholars consider its failings and argue that they portray a postmodernist image that is ill-conceived – one which, if uninterrupted, endangers the future of qualitative research, particularly ethnography (Hammersley 2008; Snow & Morrill 1995). Atkinson & Delamont offer a more positive perspective on the evolution of qualitative research. They reaffirm that qualitative studies have value 'provided that they are conducted rigorously and contribute to robustly useful knowledge' (2006, p. 749).

Denzin & Lincoln observe that 'qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world' and uses devised, practical methods that facilitate visibility and interpretation of the world (2018, p. 10). Materials used in this type of research include 'field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self' (Denzin & Lincoln 2018, p. 10). All of these are artefacts that enable qualitative investigators to study things in their natural forms with little disruption to their normalcy and to try to interpret phenomena based on the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln 2018). In other words, qualitative research situates the researcher right in the centre of the experience, facilitating their transition from passive bystander to engaged participant in the human experience.

This is more so the case in anthropology, in which the investigator is deeply embedded in the communal experience, thereby furthering the interaction. Qualitative methods allow for the incorporation of affectivity and thought into empirical studies – elements that are often difficult to learn about through traditional, quantitative research methods (Matsilele 2019; Strauss & Corbin 1998).

Qualitative research centres on human interactivity and the subject, and it invites the researcher to study people's interpretations of their own social realities (Bryman 1988). Subjects can be individuals, their experiences, or their affective or behavioural attitudes (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Subjects can also be organisations, social or cultural phenomena, or cross-cultural dimensions. They can be studied in general or contextualised within case studies. This study seeks to understand the effect of social media culture and traditional cultural dynamics on political behaviour.

5.32 Exploratory Case Study Design

This research employs an exploratory case study design. This is simply a juxtaposition of the exploratory research design and the case study research design. The exploratory design is particularly effective in the formulation of a hypothesis. For this research, this is key, as the thesis proposes a new hypothesis that it seeks to explore. The research hypothesis will be discussed further in this chapter. The case study design is the ideal model for this research because, as stated, this research is founded on a case. Thus, the exploratory case study design allows the study to explore all the possibilities of the research hypothesis within the case studies under scrutiny before coming to a conclusion about its validity.

A connective research design will extend the scope of this research by helping to uncover the cultural undertones of how Twitter is used in Nigerian society, with a particular focus on interactions during the case election.

5.33 Case Study: What is it?

The term "case study" has adopted more than one meaning over time, with interpretations ranging from a research method (See Dooley 2002; Soy 1997) to a research strategy (See Walshe et al. 2004). As Chima (2005) indicates in Ngomba (2012, p. 55), however, these descriptions are 'usually interrelated.' Willig, meanwhile, posits that a case study is neither a method nor a strategy. She suggests that it instead 'constitutes an approach to the study of singular entities, which may involve the use of a wide range of diverse methods of data collection and analysis' (2013, p. 100). The focus of a case study is, in essence, not on the methods or techniques used in the implementation of the study, but rather on one unit of analysis: the case.

Walshe et al. borrow from the definitions proposed by Stake (2000b) and Yin (2003) to define the case study as a research strategy that 'focuses on a particular case (an individual, a group, or an organisation) and uses a variety of methods to explore complex phenomena within the context of the case or cases' (2004, p. 677). This definition very clearly outlines the scope of this study; it is specific in defining the strategy and design that will be used in answering the questions and addressing the hypotheses posed. It is an in-depth 'study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of [similar] units' (Gerring 2004, p. 342) – an investigation of the phenomenon [or event] of interest 'within its real-life context' (Yin 2003, p. 13).

The phrase “a case study of” is common in titles and is usually inserted as a subtitle with a preceding colon (:). Evidently, this thesis is no exception. The term “case study” is subject to diverse interpretations in research – more so in the social sciences– and there is no consensus yet om a definitive, standard definition of the term (Levy 2008). Therefore, it is imperative to clarify what is meant by “case study” in titles and to explicate the case study approach of this research by establishing the definition of the term that is used herein.

One common use to the term “case study,” which is quite generic, refers to a study that focuses on a particular organisation (Tight 2010). Similarly, as Tight notes, business, management, law and medical literature refer to “case study” as a teaching method. Examples – particularly those applicable to business and management – can be found in *The Case Centre*, a website that publishes numerous cases used in classroom teaching by academics globally (The Case Centre 2019a). The goal of these cases is usually to engage students in finding solutions to real-world business problems (The Case Centre 2019b).

According to Punch & Oancea (2014), ‘almost anything can serve as a case, and the case may be simple or complex.’ Miles, Huberman & Saldaña (2014, p. 28) and Punch (2014, p. 121) define a case as

> …a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context, [which could be] an individual, or a role, or a small group, or an organisation, or a community, or a nation. It could also be a decision, or a policy, or a process, or an incident or event of some sort…

Another definition of “case study,” as defined by Theodorson & Theodorson (1969) in Punch (2014, p. 121) is:

> …a method of studying social phenomena through the thorough analysis of an individual case. The case may be a person, a group, an episode, a process, a community, a society, or any other unit of social life. All data relevant to the case are gathered, and all available data are organised in terms of the case. The case study method gives a unitary character to the data being studied by interrelating a variety of facts to a single case. It also provides an opportunity for the intensive analysis of many specific details that are often overlooked with other methods.

Levy (2008) also acknowledges the widely accepted concept of a case study as the investigation and interpretation of bounded events. Other words attributed to case study subjects include attributes of individuals, decisions, residues and artefacts of behaviour, actions and

interactions, periods, projects, institutions, systems, settings, and collectives (Brewer & Hunter 2005) (Thomas 2011).

A case study helps a researcher contextualise a research question and study a phenomenon in detail. The goal is to understand the case to the fullest extent possible (Punch 2014), such that the methods used and the outcomes realised can then be adapted to similar scenarios. 'Case studies have a significant impact on how people learn about ideas' (Frees & Klugman 2001, p. iii).

Their goal is to identify and focus on scenarios that may be complex and unique in their characteristics and can be examined within their own contexts. In such situations, instead of applying a generic approach to the study, the researcher tailors the research design and methods to particular case features. In turn, the method can be generalised or transferred and tailored to other similar situations.

Case studies provide a real-life approach to research (Frees & Klugman 2001). Although a situation may be complex, the researcher chooses which features or variables they wish to study. This approach can present some challenges; for instance, should the same case be examined using the same research design but a different set of variables, it might yield different results. In other words, 'there is no unique correct answer' (p. iii). Therefore, when analysing a case and seeking adaptability, it is important that consideration be given to those variables that have already been explored.

Types of Case Studies

Stake's (2000a) discussion of case studies breaks cases down into types, which helps to contextualise this research further. He identifies intrinsic, instrumental and collective case studies. Intrinsic studies are usually case-focused. That is, the researcher is interested in understanding all that they can about a particular case, which may not be representative of other cases but is instead distinct and ungeneralisable. Instrumental case studies are usually generalisable and can be used to draw inferences on issues or other similar cases. They are, in essence, secondary – a means to an end but not the end itself, as an intrinsic case study would be.

Gerring's definition of a case study falls more distinctly into this category. He defines a case study as 'the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases (a population)' (2007, pp. 19-20). The problem with this definition is that it excludes the classification of case studies as intrinsic, whereas,

according to Stake, the case is the goal. Gerring's definition also excludes Stake's third classification of case studies as collective (2000a, 2005) (also in Denzin & Lincoln 2018) or 'multiple' or 'comparative' case studies (Punch 2014, p. 121). Collective case studies usually comprise multiple cases and are used to study phenomena, populations or general conditions. They are, in essence, elongated or expanded instrumental studies.

Drawing from Stake's definitions, the current research is an instrumental case study. It aims to provide an understanding of the role that social media platforms – such as Twitter – play in elections within complex, non-Western cultures, like those that can be found in Africa.

The case used in this study comprises two Nigerian elections (the 2015 and 2019 elections). This case is not the research's ultimate goal; it is simply a tool that the research considers appropriate in supporting the achievement of its goals (Stake 2000a): (1) to understand how social media are used as democratic tools in African contexts, and what influence – if any – they have on electoral outcomes and (2) to make theoretical claims about the influence of culture on individual democratic decisions.

The Nigerian state is the context within which the study is situated. This context enables the researcher to draw generalisable conclusions about social media use in similar non-Western contexts.

Why a Case Study?

Walshe et al. (2004, p. 677) point out that a case study is appropriate when 'complex situations need to be addressed… context is central to the study… multiple perspectives need to be recognised… the design needs to be flexible… [and] other methodologies could be difficult to conduct.'

On the one hand, politics, communications, media and sociology are broad disciplines that require a researcher to choose a focal point when studying. When they are combined in social research, it becomes even more imperative to define the confines within which they will be studied.

This research addresses the complexities of Twitter use as a tool for political communication and participation in the Nigerian state. This research began by challenging the possibility for generalisations on the success of social media – particularly Twitter – as tools of political engagement primarily based on a Westernised view. Following that, it aims to find out how effective and successful they can be within a situation as complex as the 2015 Nigerian

presidential election. The political, economic, and societal factors surrounding this particular election and its outcome are important to note when delving into the role of Twitter.

On the other hand, with the hypothesis of this research and the gap in methodological approaches to social media–mediated political communication studies having been justified, it can be established that a case study is a logical approach by which the hypothesis can be examined within a well-defined cultural context. In addition to answering "how" questions, case studies are also more suited than other research approaches to answering "why" questions, which are central to this research. As Westgren & Zering argue, "how" and "why" questions allow the researcher to 'delve more deeply into motivations and actions' (1998, p. 416), which, as stated, is fundamental to this research (see also Yin 2003).

Furthermore, a case study is also useful for exploring existing theories and generating new ones (Kaarbo & Beasley 1999). This research is theoretically informed and proposes a basis upon which a new theory can be formed in relation to the hypothesis. Therefore, the case study approach is suitable not only for answering the research questions but also for offering theoretical propositions that will guide the collection and analysis of the data.

Choosing the "Case": Why Nigeria?

Several factors are typically considered when choosing the case(s) in case study research. These range from pragmatic factors – such as time, funds, expertise or knowledge, and accessibility – to less pragmatic factors, such as the theoretical prominence of the given case(s) (Seawright & Gerring 2008).

Nigeria was chosen as the case for this study for several reasons. Firstly, Nigeria is a practical choice because of its cultural and political terrain – key subjects of the study – are most familiar to the researcher, a Nigerian. It is also the country in which the researcher has the greatest access to data for collection.

Furthermore, with regard to "theoretical prominence," Nigeria makes for an interesting study because of its positioning in Africa's socio-economic and political landscape. Regarded as the "Giant of Africa," Nigeria plays key political and economic roles in the African continent – especially within the West African States. According to a 2017 report, it is Africa's largest economy (CNBC Africa 2017). It also plays a major role in security, as Nigerian military troops are consistently deployed to war-torn countries across the continent. Nigeria also wields strong political influence in Africa and has garnered the interest of both continental and international

audiences within its polity during volatile military regimes as well as its transition to democracy (Davies 2010).

Nigeria also provides a good representation of the diversity and similarities inherent in African culture. A country of about 190 million people – the largest in Africa – it employs English as its common language, stemming from a British colonial influence. However, over 400 ethnic languages are spoken amongst its peoples. This is indicative of the diversity of speech and of culture within the country (Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku 1996).

For these reasons, lessons learned from the Nigerian experience can shape the way other African countries use social media as tools for political communication and participation.

The Case Study: Nigerian Elections

Although it has been discussed in detail in the introductory chapter of this work, a section of this chapter reviews the origin of this research. This is not an attempt to be repetitive; rather, it is with the goal of describing and justifying the methodology employed in this thesis.

This research was borne of curiosity about recent, novel events in Nigerian politics – including the 2015 general elections, in which an incumbent president lost to his challenger. Prior to that time, no sitting president had lost an election in Nigeria. This dated back not only to 1999 (when this political dispensation came into being) but as far back as Nigeria's first semblance of democracy (Rashid 2015). Any loss of a democratic seat at the presidential level witnessed prior to 2015 was the result of a military coup. The unprecedented 2015 outcome is what drove the questions of this research throughout the project.

Although this research began after the climactic election of 2015, timing and tradition conveniently ensured the researchers access to another general election in 2019. The research followed the discourse on politics happening on Twitter, the social medium of focus in this work. This positionality of the research fuelled much anticipation – however "unprofessional" that may be for a researcher – as well as curiosity about the potential outcome of the 2019 election.

Ironically, the candidate who was once a challenger, supported by many across the usual religious and ethnic divides of Nigerian politics, became the incumbent hoping to secure another term in office. The rhetoric changed for him automatically; he was no longer the one who could bring "change" to the crumbling economy but the one who would take the country to the 'next level' (Adeoye 2018).

In many cases, research questions are shaped by methodology; however, in this case, the methodology has been shaped by the research questions.

Problems with Case Study Research

The case study research approach has consistently raised questions about validity and generalisability (Punch 2014; Yin 2013), largely due to its limitations and boundedness. Punch argues that cases that are based on Stake's (2000a) intrinsic and instrumental cases should not be generalisable, while cases that fall into the collective case study category are generalisable and can be used to make inferences that can be assumed to apply to other cases. While the classification that he proposes has merits, particularly with regard to intrinsic case studies, the problem it has is in its failure to acknowledge that generalisation can also be bounded.

For example, it is safe to assume that if you see a person who is dark-skinned while in Africa, they are likely African. However, when removed from that context and inserted into another society – for example, an Asian society – that same assumption might not be valid. This is because various Asian communities – such as India – have dark-skinned persons. In that scenario, other factors come into play that may indicate the person's origins. In this instance, Africa is a bounded society, made so by its homogeneity, and within it, generalisations can be made. This is the approach that this research utilises to validate the generalisability of the case study research outcomes.

This case study is partly intrinsic and partly instrumental. On the one hand, the researcher believes that the event that inspired the study (and its unprecedented outcome) warrant intrinsic study to provide an understanding of the distinctive particulars of that election. On the other hand, this study also has instrumental value because of the generalisability of the characteristics of African societies. Based on the outcome of that election, collaboration between African states during elections has increased, and one of the focal areas has been the use of social media in elections. The bounded characteristic of case studies occurs on two levels within the study: (1) the continental level (Africa) and (2) the state level (Nigeria).

5.34 The Argument

This research argues that:

A_1 Twitter facilitates increased political participation among Nigerians.

A_2 A culture of economic dependency influences the ways people communicate or interact online and offline, which ultimately influence their political decisions.

These hypotheses are framed and tested within the case study under exploration in this thesis.

5.4 Research Methods

This section describes the methods used in this research, as well as the strategies and techniques used for data collection. It is important to note that the case study is both a design and a method – the former depicting the overall plan for the study and the latter depicting parameters within which the empirical data will be gathered (Jones & Lyons 2004). It will be described here as a research method, having previously been described as a research design.

5.41 Ethnography

Reeves, Kuper & Hodges (2008) define ethnography as 'the study of social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities.' Although the definition of ethnography as method or methodology is fluid (Lillis 2008), this does not negate its value in the in-depth study of subjects – a fact proven over decades of application in diverse disciplinary studies, including sociology, communications, and politics. This anthropological methodology allows the researcher to be immersed not only in the phenomenon of study but also in the environment within which the phenomenon occurs, thereby providing more insight than what may be obtained through a singular qualitative study. It involves 'multiple data sources and sustained involvement in contexts of production,' which enables the exploration and tracking of the dynamism and complexity of the meanings and practices constituted within a study (Lillis 2008, p. 355).

Ethnography is commonly used by anthropologists as a research method for enquiring about the cultural nuances of communities. It allows the researcher to study those communities within their natural environment. Employing this method provides insights into the norms, values, and traditions of the case country and enables a deeper exploration of the hypothesis

through the observation of the day-to-day practices and experiences of the people. It also creates an opportunity to understand the cultural differences that might exist amongst the different ethnicities within the society and to consider the extent to which natural, cultural tendencies and behaviours connect with online behaviours.

Indeed, a further goal of this research is to find out if what people do and say online is reflected in the actions they take offline. In other words, this research intends to determine the extent to which these two communities influence each other. This part of the study will help to uncover the offline culture as well.

5.42 Netnography – Ethnography in the Digital Space

Since the expansion of communities into the online space, online communities have been studied. However, in many cases, they have been regarded as separate entities, disconnected from the offline world as research subjects. With the emergence of new media and virtual communities, ethnography has transcended the physical world to become embedded in the virtual world as a methodology. Online ethnography, digital ethnography, virtual ethnography, and netnography (Kozinets 2015) are diverse terms used to describe the ethnographic study of the Internet and virtual communities.

Netnography is rapidly becoming a popular research method amongst researchers across diverse academic fields, including the physical sciences, social sciences, health, and the arts. In tourism, Jeffrey, Ashraf & Paris (2019) examined tourists' use of Snapchat and highlighted privacy and trustworthiness as their primary motives for posting on that medium instead of another. Meanwhile, in the food industry, Chung & Kim (2015) investigated the motivations behind the restaurant reviews left by customers after dining.

Migration scholars recommend the application of connective ethnography in migration studies because the Internet and social media have an effect on migration (Schrooten 2012). In public health, Van Hout & Hearne (2016) used netnography to explore and uncover the emergent phenomena of growth hormone use and misuse amongst women.

In communications and media studies, Matsilele's PhD thesis was a netnographic investigation of social media dissidence in Zimbabwe (2019). Meanwhile, Pink et al. (2016) used a tactile digital ethnography to research the experience of social media use. Other fields – such as nursing (Witney, Hendricks & Cope 2016), education (Eaton & Pasquini 2020; Kulavuz-Onal 2015; Kulavuz-Onal & Vásquez 2013), gender (Longo 2018), sociology

(Nuttavuthisit 2019), and game studies (García-Álvarez, López-Sintas & Samper-Martínez 2017; Wang, Lee & Hsu 2017) – have also historically used netnography for empirical studies**.**

What Kozinets called "netnography" is described using different terminologies by different researchers. Domínguez et al. (2007) use terms such as 'virtual ethnography… digital ethnography, ethnography on/of/through the Internet… cyberethnography… Internet [ethnography].' Meanwhile, others have used the terms 'web-based ethnography' (Caliandro 2014, p. 1) and 'virtual world ethnography' (Boellstorff et al. 2012, p. 12). Caliandro (2014) argues that although these terms are often used synonymously, they do not always mean the same thing. In this study, two synonyms have been selected to refer to the online portion of the research: "netnography" and "digital ethnography."

If ethnography – which is an amalgamation the words *ethno*, meaning "people," "culture," or "race," and *graph*, which means "writing" – is the scientific description of peoples and their cultures. AS such, netnography – which is a combination of the words *Internet* and *ethnography* – literally means a scientific description of the Internet and its cultures. In Kozinets' own words, 'it's a way of seeing something like Facebook or something like Wikipedia as a living, breathing, thriving cultural community, sort of like an online equivalent of a village or a neighbourhood or a family' (Kozinets 2011).

The problem with this definition, however, is that the model of Twitter does not entirely fit the model of a community as described here. Communities are, in essence, bound physically and culturally. In the online world, spaces such as Facebook and Myspace fit this bounded context because they have communities – open or closed – that can be joined by individuals, including researchers.

Hence, if an ethnographer wanted to study a Facebook community, for instance, they could join the group, thereby becoming a part of an ethnographic setting. Twitter, however, has no such open or closed communities to be joined. Instead, Twitter consists of publics: 'fluid associations among persons that largely do not know each other, mediated by the platform's affordances, characterised by emotional intensity and channelled by a common focus, such as a political controversy' (Airoldi 2018, p. 663; See also Arvidsson & Caliandro 2015; Barisione, Michailidou & Airoldi 2019; Baym & Boyd 2012; Papacharissi 2015). On this microblogging platform, social borders are formed by aggregations of trending topics and hashtags (Airoldi 2018; Arvidsson et al. 2016).

The concept of a digital or online ethnography implies that cultures or peoples are studied using digital methods. Hallett & Barber (2014, p. 307) suggest that 'it is no longer imaginable to conduct ethnography without considering online spaces, [given that] technology is evolving at an exponential rate, changing the way people access local and global news, connect with others, form communities, and forge identities.' They add that online spaces have transformed the way people everywhere engage in their normal, daily activities and are now at the centre of society as it is today.

Hallett & Barber's argument about the positionality of the Internet opposes the argument posited by other researchers – that it is illogical to explore online spaces alone because they do not exist independent of the offline. Both the online and offline "worlds" coexist.

The Ethics of Online Ethnography

A great deal of critique surrounds online ethnography, particularly where consent and data use are concerned. The *Cambridge Analytica* saga that followed the US elections in 2016 only heightened this further, causing governments such as the European Commission to tighten data laws within the European Union (European Commission 2018). Ethical guidelines have been inconsistent regarding the use of online data in the past (Sugiura, Wiles & Pope 2017), and little has changed in recent times.

However, there is an increasing call for regulatory guidelines. In the digital space, it is very easy to conduct research without seeking the approval of research "subjects." Companies such as Twitter include clauses in their terms and conditions whereby signing up to use the site automatically grants researchers – academic and commercial alike – access to your publicly available content.

This situation creates a dilemma for ethics committees, whose responsibility it is to ensure that research abides by certain ethical guidelines proposed by originating institutions. This is because, as Ackland (2013, p. 43) puts it, applicable guidelines are 'still a moving target.' The ethics committee at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), like a number of other universities, applies human-subject research ethics to Internet-based research. While this may be applicable in some instances, the way that people use the Internet is changing, and ethical guidelines need to adapt to those changes.

In human research, informed consent, privacy, and anonymity are critical issues, and achieving these seems clear-cut. In online research, however, these issues can be more

challenging. For example, where it is easy to maintain the anonymity of human research subjects offline, the same cannot be said of research done online. Using direct quotes becomes contentious because a simple Google search will reveal the source of the comment. Although individuals have control over their privacy and can use their privacy controls to decide what is seen and what is not, many users are still unaware of these controls and how to use them.

In this study, intensive discussion of this matter took place between the university ethics committee and the researcher. Given that the study is political in nature, the use of caution and empathy when gathering information online was imperative. The UTS research ethics committee follows guidelines provided by the Australian government for the governance of research (University of Technology Sydney 2018).

The main documents that guide research ethics in Australian universities do not discuss any ethical issues related to online data collection specifically (National Health and Medical Research Council, Australian Research Council & Universities Australia 2018a, 2018b). This lack of guidelines poses a problem for both research committees and researchers who, as a result, must improvise when conducting research in a continuously evolving landscape. In the absence of specific guidelines, the researcher in this study sought to mitigate these issues by seeking individual consent for the use of direct quotes from participants' Twitter accounts, ensuring that they understood the background of the research and the possible implications of the usage of their digital data.

This compromise stems from a practice termed "negotiated ethics," coined by Convery & Cox (2012) to describe 'a situated approach grounded in the specifics of the online community, the methodology and the research questions' (p. 50). This approach to online studies is more ethically responsive to ethical dilemmas (Lehner-Mear 2019).

5.43 Connective Ethnography

Anthropologists have studied communities for decades by physically visiting spaces and immersing themselves – even become integrated – within communities and their cultures, people and other distinctive characteristics. The concepts of culture and community in anthropology are evolving from the traditional and becoming 'increasingly unstable' (2015, p. 6) – even more so when examining digital social spaces.

The digital space has been of interest to researchers for decades, and this interest only surged with the advent of social media. Previous approaches to online ethnography have been

predominantly linear in approach, as scholars interested in events happening online have focused on the study of online communities and cultures only (Kozinets 1998, 2002, 2010). However, recent studies acknowledge that online issues or movements can sometimes be location-specific, requiring that the researcher go to the physical community to be within the geography of the people using those online technologies (Postill & Pink 2012).

The originator of the term "netnography" further acknowledges this need to study online communities in tandem with physical spaces because of the ongoing shift in the nature of the cyber world from closed communities to more diffused forms of engagement (Kozinets 2015). With his introduction of the term, Kozinets argued that the online world should not be separated from the offline world but that it should be seen as an extension of the offline world. In his opinion, what happens online reflects offline realities and vice versa; that is why this research has adopted a connective method of enquiry for studying social media use during elections.

Connective ethnography, first described as such by Hine (2007), is not yet widely utilised for political communication studies. The majority of studies adopting this methodology are focused on games studies and adolescents (See Fields & Kafai 2009, 2010; Warner 2016). Meanwhile, Dirksen, Huizing & Smit (2010) have used it to examine workplace practices. Pellicone & Ahn (2015) define the term differently, using it to describe a study that examines participant use of Minecraft across different digital technologies. In their research, the term "connective" refers to the connection between diverse digital technologies.

Some researchers dispute the necessity of carrying out connective ethnographic studies. Challenging Correll's 1995 perspective that doing a connective ethnography enabled her to verify facts received online about participants' offline activities, Hine argues that 'while this is presented as a way of triangulating findings and adding authenticity to them, it could also be seen as a result of the pursuit of ethnographic holism' (2000, p. 48). Postill & Pink disagree with this notion. On recounting their ethnographic field trip to study social media activism in Barcelona, they reflect that the trip enabled them 'to follow ethnographically the (dis)continuities between the experienced realities of face-to-face and social media movement and socialities' (2012, p. 124).

Connective ethnography bridges the gap between traditional ethnography and digital ethnography. This practice has not yet gained a great deal of focus, given the notion that an Internet ethnographer need not travel physically to the research field since the study is focused

around an 'Internet Event' (Hine 2000, p. 50). However, researchers like Postill & Pink (2012) and Kozinets (2015) – although they did not use the term "connective ethnography" – advocate that uses of digital technologies are interwoven with cultural and community structures. They state that it is therefore imperative for a researcher to embed themselves in the society within which the technologies and media are being used. This research bases its design on the latter argument.

This study follows the model of another study by Mare (2017) that examines political participation. Using a blend of traditional and digital data collection techniques, his study examines how and why Facebook is used by young activists for political purposes. The present research uses connective ethnography to juxtapose online activities with offline actions to determine what influence one has on the other, and to what extent that influence is exerted in online and offline political participation, within a clearly defined context.

Why Connective Ethnographic Research?

The choice to do a connective ethnographic study stemmed from a review of the origin and nature of the case that this study focuses on. Because it seeks to understand the role that social media – in this case, Twitter – played in the Nigerian presidential elections, the study requires an understanding of the influence of culture on the society and how that impacts online and offline communicative and political activities. As several scholars have highlighted, it is not enough to study online political and communication cultures or their offline attributes independently.

To adequately comprehend the forces at play, an intersectional view is most expedient. This is not to say that this research pursues ethnographic holism; a triangulation would provide not only a view of the actualities but also an understanding of the factors that contribute to them, thus enabling an enhanced interpretation of the phenomena. A connective ethnography allows the research to explore the relationship between online activities and offline outcomes. This is especially crucial, given that many of the literature reviewed regard the online and offline "worlds" as different entities and examine them separately. This research supports the argument that they are not separate worlds and that they ought to be viewed with consideration for how they influence one another.

In addition, this methodology fills a methodological gap in political communication studies. Ethnography is useful for answering "how" and, importantly, "why" questions, and this is core to the research. The connective ethnographic approach enables the research to go

beyond numbers and descriptions to explore underlying factors, such as cultural norms and appropriateness, and how they influence the use of technology – specifically, how they influence political participation.

It also enables researchers to uncover why people tweet the way they do. In other words, by observing and interacting with primary research participants online and offline, the researcher can fully comprehend how culture influences the way they use technology, particularly social media, as tools of political participation.

5.5 Sampling

The first step in sampling is determining the sample universe. 'This is the totality of persons from which cases may legitimately be sampled,' and the first step in this process is to create inclusive and exclusive criteria (Robinson 2014, p. 25). Robinson also asserts that the specificity of selection criteria helps to increase homogeneity in study samples, and he identifies five types of homogeneity – including demographical and geographical homogeneity. These two types of homogeneity were key to this study.

Criteria applied to achieve demographic heterogeneity include age, gender, socio-economic status, education, ethnicity, and religion. The last two criteria were especially crucial for this research because, in Nigerian politics, ethnicity and religion have played very significant roles to date and cannot be excluded from political discourse within this geographical sphere. Even the country's geography is divided using these two characteristics: the north of Nigeria is predominantly of the Hausa and Fulani tribes, who arguably have Nigeria's largest Muslim population. Meanwhile, the southwest identifies as being mostly of the Yoruba ethnicity, and the southeast is largely populated by the Igbo ethnic group (Campbell 2011). Both Yoruba and Igbo identify as being predominantly of Christian religious affiliation (Campbell 2011). Hence, to attempt to eliminate religion and ethnicity from this particular study would demonstrate inexperience and a lack of knowledge of the workings of the Nigerian political system.

To understand how social media interactions can affect voting behaviour, this research targeted only those Nigerian citizens living in Nigeria who were eligible to vote at the time of the study. Although many Nigerians in diaspora engage in online political discourse (Kperogi 2020), some may be unable to vote in local elections unless they are present at the time of the elections, since the country has not yet adopted a postal voting system. Therefore, the criterion

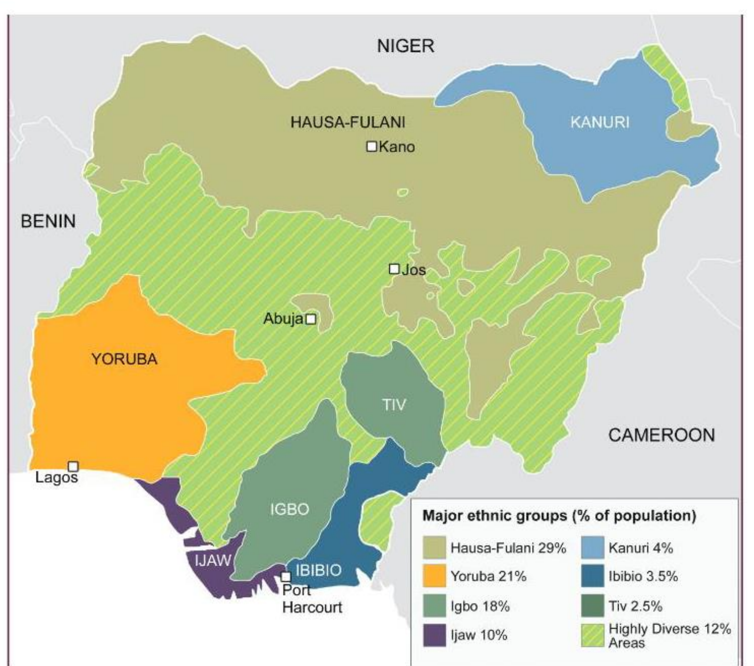
used to achieve geographical homogeneity was residential status. Another exclusion criterion – besides residential status – was political involvement. The research focus was on everyday citizens; thus, politicians were excluded. Membership in a political party alone was not equated with being a politician.

Ethnic Diversity

Map showing geographic religious divide

Religious Diversity

Map showing geographic religious divide



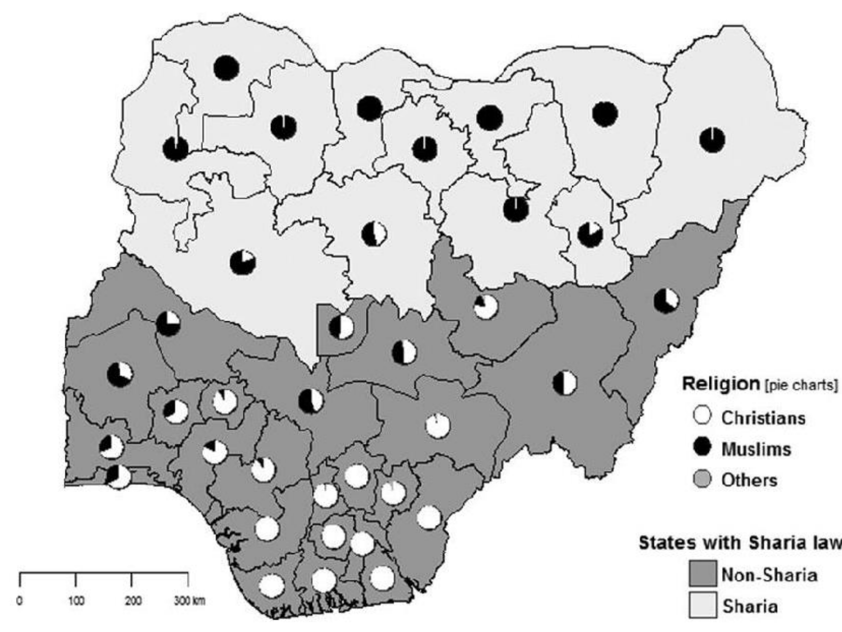


Figure 5.1 Mapping of ethnic and religious divides in Nigeria
Source: Kwaja (2011); Stonawski et al. (2016)

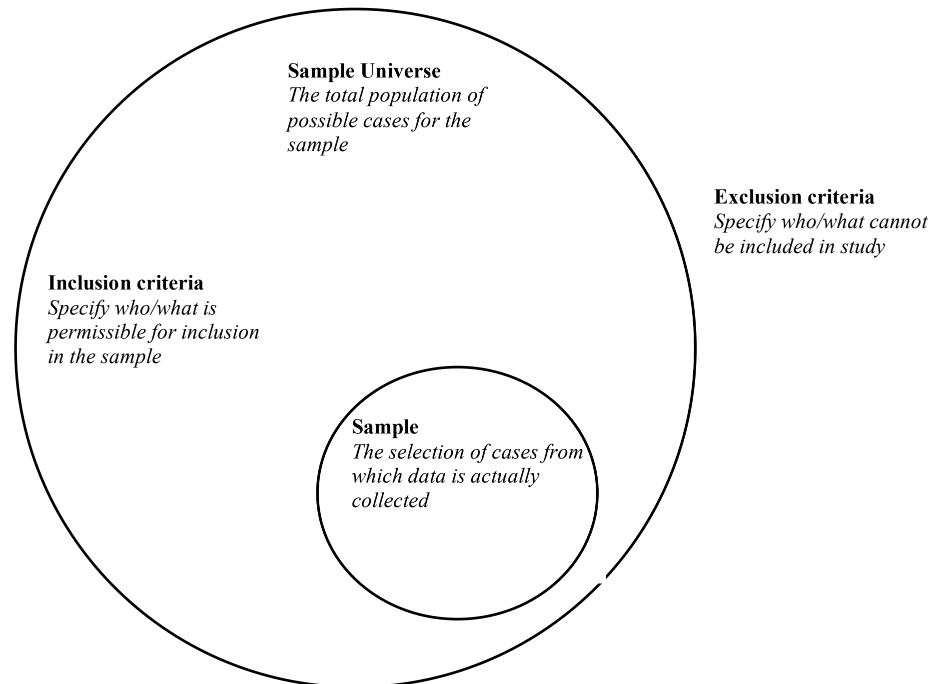


Figure 5.2 Sample universe, inclusion/exclusion criteria and sample
Source: (Robinson 2014)

5.51 Sampling Strategy

Two participant groups were recruited for the study. The purpose of this grouping in the recruitment strategy was to ensure that certain criteria were met – among them, that social media influencers featured prominently in the data. As the research studied how Nigerian citizens use social media, the influence on their online and offline social networks, and the relationship between their online and offline political actions, it was pertinent to find a group that could easily provide the data to answer those questions. Hence, for the purposes of identification during recruitment only, *Group 1* and *Group 2* participants were differentiated. This grouping has no bearing on the data analysis.

The most used sampling methods in qualitative research are purposive, criterion, theoretical, snowball and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods were used in this field study. During planning, the purposive sampling method was identified as the ideal sampling method for identifying and recruiting *Group 1* participants, and snowball sampling was deemed appropriate for recruiting *Group 2* participants. However, in the field, both sampling methods were used to recruit participants in both study groups.

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods were used to identify potential *Group 1* participants.

Purposive Sampling

Moser & Korstjens (2018) identify purposive sampling as typical in ethnographic studies, as it helps researchers to identify key informants. It is ideal for identifying hidden populations that may not be found easily using traditional methods, such as random sampling and convenience sampling (Griffith, Morris & Thakar 2016). Random sampling may generate populations that are not useful to the study because of its specificities, and convenience sampling may not generate the types of samples required in a population not easily accessible.

Griffith, Morris & Thakar (2016) refer to Anderson, Adey & Bevan's (2010) study of polylogic approaches in research methodology. They state that random sampling is adequate for quantitative research, but that 'purposeful sampling in qualitative research seeks information-rich informants to […] discover a complete range of perceptions' (Griffith, Morris & Thakar 2016, p. 774). The keyword here is "informants," which is why purposive sampling is ideal for studying political phenomena.

Theoretical sampling works similarly to purposive sampling, with the difference being that with the theoretical method, there is a constant alternation between data collection and data analysis (Statistics Solutions 2019). While such a method could have been beneficial to this study, it would have required more field time and, in turn, incurred additional costs. Considering the very limited resources available for fieldwork during this study, this was not plausible.

Snowball Sampling

Where purposive sampling is helpful for generating initial potential participants and, in essence, forms the foundation of a field study, snowball sampling – which is a derivative of purposive sampling – builds on that foundation 'to recruit a nonprobability-based convenience sample' (Griffith, Morris & Thakar 2016, p. 774).

The distinctive feature of the snowball method is that it requires the initial participants to refer other potential subjects within their social networks (Mack et al. 2005). This fits in very well with one of the research objectives, which is to decipher whether there are any co-relationships between those voters who are socially connected online and those who are not, where the culture of dependency might play a role in their voting choices.

Sample Size

There is an ongoing debate about the relevance of sample size in qualitative research and how sufficiency is determined. In their examination of 81 qualitative studies, Marshall et al. (2013) found that there was little or no rigour demonstrated in justifying the sample sizes for almost all studies examined. Sandelowski (1995) argues that the idea of numbers being irrelevant in qualitative research is a common misconception, and that sample size may be too small or too large. Sample sizes that are too small are insufficient to support analytical claims or justify saturation, while those that are too large do not allow in-depth analysis, which is the primary motivation for engaging in qualitative research.

Different arguments exist about the notion of data saturation. On the one hand, several scholars have argued for data saturation and recommend guidelines for saturation and sample size. On the other hand, others debate the idea itself and question the validity of claims of saturation. Data saturation, or data accuracy, is said to have been achieved when no new information is acquired from the data collection exercise.

According to Morse, 'saturation is the key to excellent qualitative work' (1995, p. 147). The challenge of qualitative research, however, as Morse notes, is that 'there are no published guidelines or tests of adequacy for estimating the sample size required to reach saturation' (1995, p. 147) as there are in quantitative studies. Morse further adds that some researchers claim they have attained saturation without proof to support their claims, or, at best, 'the concept is described vaguely or the explanation is relegated to the footnotes of reports or articles' (Bowen 2008, p. 137).

On the other side of the argument are scholars who challenge the concept of saturation. Dey's (1999) opinion is that saturation is an inappropriate term for researchers to use, as it is often taken literally to mean that the research cannot take on new data in the same way that a soaked piece of clothing can no longer absorb water. He suggests that, rather than "saturation," a term such as '"sufficiency"' might be better suited to demonstrating that all categories have been exhausted (Dey 1999, p. 117).

Corbin & Strauss (2008) support this. They argue that saturation goes beyond a simple lack of new data emerging to denote 'the development of categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, including variation, and if theory building, the delineating of relationships between concepts' (Corbin & Strauss 2008, p. 143). The issue with this position is that it implies data collection is a never-ending exercise, as there is always the potential that new data

will emerge. The researcher is then responsible for using their discipline and discretion to end the data collection exercise (Mason 2010).

Some research methodologists offer general guidelines for qualitative sample sizes for interviews, but even these differ from one methodologist to the next and – as Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007) have suggested – are offered with very little or no justification. In their own words, 'sample sizes are often selected in a seemingly arbitrary manner in many research studies and little or no rationale is provided for the sampling scheme used' (p. 106). This position solidifies Morse (1995) and Bowen's (2008) arguments.

In other work, Marshall et al. (2013) identified some of these guidelines: Creswell & Poth (2017) recommend 20 to 30 interviewees, Denzin & Lincoln (2005a) recommend 30 to 50 interviews, and Morse (2000) recommends 20 to 30 interviewees, but with two to three interviews per person, which works out to between 40 and 90 interviews. This final range is particularly wide; it provides even less precision than the first two and differs significantly from the same researcher's recommendation of 30 to 50 interviews a half-decade previously (see Morse 1995).

It is important to note that these recommendations are designed based on a grounded theory concept. The ranges recommended in phenomenological studies are significantly smaller, remaining within the range of six to ten (See Denzin & Lincoln 2005b; Kuzel 1999; Morse 2000). Yin's recommendation for case study evidence is six sources (2014), and Creswell recommends studying five cases with three to five interviewees per study (2017). **Check current editions and verify numbers.

Sim et al. (2018) also identify some other propositions for sample size determinants in support of their idea that the type of research methodology employed or the form of analysis to be used should also be considered. For instance, phenomenological analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009) might require a different sample size than that required for content analysis (Schreier 2014). Ritchie et al. (2014) identify an additional seven factors to be considered in determining sample size: 'the heterogeneity of the population, the number of selection criteria, the occurrence and extent of any nesting (controlling the representation of one criterion within another, e.g., alcohol consumption within gender), groups of special interest that require intensive study, multiple samples within one study, types of data collection methods, and the budget and resources available' (pp. 117-8).

This study navigates this lack of specific guidelines by following the recommendation of Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007). On the topic of alternatives to determining sample size and saturation, they have stated,

> We recommend that before deciding on an appropriate sample size, qualitative researchers should consider identifying a corpus of interpretive studies that used the same design as in the proposed study (e.g., grounded theory, ethnography) and wherein data saturation was reached. The researcher then could examine the sample sizes used in these studies with a view to selecting a sample size that is within the range used in these investigations.
>
> - Onwuegbuzie & Leech (2007, p. 118)

Musa's (2018) ethnographic study of BBC news consumption in Nigeria comprised 20 participants and also examined the interrelationships between the participants. The BBC study mirrors this current study to some degree, and it lends itself as an interpretive study with a similar design. The primary difference between the two studies is that while the BBC study is solely ethnographic, this study represents connective ethnography.

Sample Groups

Research participants were divided into two groups, identified as *Group 1* and *Group 2*. The participants were split into these two groups to enable the research to achieve its objectives, which were as follows:

1. To understand the relationship between what people said online and what they did offline.
2. To understand the influence of culture and socio-economic relationships on the political decisions of the electorate.

To address the first objective, the research required a group of participants who were active on Twitter and were social media influencers who tweeted about political issues and had large followings. The participants in this group had significant Twitter followings in different ranges: three had approximately 2-3,000 followers, one had about 20,000 followers, and another three had over 40,000 followers.

Initial attempts at recruitment were carried out online from Sydney. The researcher attempted to contact Twitter influencers who met the criteria described above, but this recruitment strategy proved futile. Of the four initial contacts made, only one responded, and the respondent stated that they were not interested in being part of the research.

The researcher obtained gatekeeper access through a friend after arriving in Nigeria for the fieldwork. Having heard about the research, the friend mentioned that she knew social media influencers who tweeted about politics, and she invited the researcher to her church to meet them. Of the three influencers introduced, only one fit the inclusion criteria. This user turned out to be the gatekeeper needed to gain access to that niche group of Twitter influencers in Nigeria. Other participants were recruited via snowball sampling, with the gatekeeper serving as the introducer. In total, seven participants were recruited in this category.

Group 2 participants had fewer exclusion criteria and were understandably easier to access. This group of participants was created to address the second objective. Social media presence was not a requirement in this group, and recruitment was done using purposeful and snowball sampling techniques. Some of the participants were individuals known to the researcher, some were acquaintances, and others were recruited via snowballing through the initial participants. There were 17 participants in this category.

5.52 Reflections on the Data

At this point, it is important to reflect on the fieldwork experience, particularly with regard to the sampling techniques and data collection. The researcher acknowledges that the research design and fieldwork journey were borne of naïveté, limited experience in ethnographic research, and idealistic expectations of the data journey. However, the fieldwork experience provided a great deal of insight into real-world social research.

Firstly, the ethics application process was a reflective one, which added significant value to the researcher's outlook on human research and the online world. In the aftermath of the *Cambridge Analytica* scandal, and with the resulting tightening of data protection laws – particularly in the European Union – there was increased demand for researchers to consider all the possible risks for research subjects participating in online research. The main challenges involved raising researchers' awareness of the need to protect participants' data, ensuring the clarity of the risks associated with participation, and obtaining explicit consent from participants. A typical example of these ethical considerations was that one participant refused to be audio-recorded and requested that the researcher take notes instead.

Secondly, all attempts to recruit research participants virtually failed. As mentioned, only one of the individuals contacted via Twitter before the researcher arrived in the field responded, and this individual refused to participate in the study. Other messages were ignored, leading

the researcher to assume that these individuals were not open to one-on-one engagement despite being avid and vocal members of the Twitter community. Another possible explanation is that they received so many messages in their inboxes that they never read them.

Upon arrival in Nigeria, however, the investigator's introduction to the community of Twitter "influencers" revealed a caucus that could be accessed only through a gatekeeper. Once initial access into their caucus was granted, it was easy to find all the participants the study needed. Interestingly, the gatekeeper was found in a church and admitted that they often tweeted about what their pastor preached. Another observation was that these individuals followed each other on Twitter. This will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

5.6 The Data

This section outlines the different data collection methods and techniques employed in this research. As with other aspects of the research methodology, the methods and techniques used were informed by the research questions.

5.61 Data Collection Methods

The study utilised observation and interviews as offline data collection methods, and observation and Twitter scraping for online data collection. These are elements of the case study research design.

Observation

Observations were used to obtain ethnographic data, which involved a three-month stay in Nigeria. During this period, the researcher spent time in Abuja, Lagos, and Anambra. Efforts were made to obtain data from individuals in all six geopolitical zones of the country in order to represent the cultural diversity of Nigeria – a crucial element of the research.

The observation process took a somewhat different form than was originally intended. While the initial plan was to observe *Group 1* over a period of time, this proved impossible due to their schedules. Indeed, initial discussions revealed that observations would be unfeasible for seven of the eight participants. Because the goal of the research was to observe the individuals in their normal environments with minimal disruption – and because the researcher was obligated to consider their rights as participants – there was no option but to honour their positions on the subject. The only individual who consented to observation did so because of

the nature of her job, which sometimes required her to go to the streets and interview people. In her opinion, this would be an ideal occasion for observation. Unfortunately, due to scheduling logistics on her end, this observation exercise did not take place.

The other element used in observation, which was useful in the data collection exercise, was the day-to-day activities of everyday Nigerians. The lack of one-on-one observation opportunities resulted in increased attention to the conversations going on around the researcher – particularly politics-related conversations. These observations offered valuable insights into the cultures and experiences of the people involved. Part of this observation involved travelling by public transport, where it is common for strangers to engage in political discussions and/or debates – particularly when a general election is coming up in the near future.

The researcher's position as a part of the society also proved to be a valuable point of observation. Experiencing the day-to-day life of the average Nigerian first-hand gave the researcher an understanding of the economic and political climate within which people were living. It is important to acknowledge that this experience went beyond what the researcher anticipated. However, in hindsight, there was no better way to gain an understanding of the community being studied.

Interviews

Interviewing is a very effective qualitative research method that allows in-depth probing into a research question. This research used semi-structured interviews, which involved both *Group 1* and *Group 2* participants. The purpose of interviewing both groups was to find out what relationships existed between the online and offline activities of social media influencers on the one hand and to find out the extent to which social media – Twitter, in particular – influenced individual decisions, especially with regard to political affairs on the other hand.

The interviews were conducted between August and November of 2018. All interviews were semi-structured (see the appendix for interview guide) and conducted face-to-face. The duration was about 60 minutes for *Group 1* participants and 30 minutes for *Group 2* participants. Twenty-four interviews were conducted altogether. Nine interviews were done in the offices of the interviewees, three in their residences, six in restaurants, two in churches, and four at events (one of these events was recommended by an earlier-interviewed participant). The majority of the interviews were conducted in Abuja, while two took place in Lagos, one in Anambra, and two in Accra, Ghana.

The *Group 1* interviews – those with the Twitter influencers – covered the themes of social media use in Nigeria in general, the use of social media as a tool for political discourse, Twitter use in the 2015 election, and projections for the 2019 election. Interviews with both groups also featured themes of how culture influences the individual and how that relates to their economic positioning.

Twitter Scraping

NVivo was especially helpful in the collection of Twitter data, which occurred in three stages. The first stage, which began in May 2018, was simply a scrape of tweets with selected hashtags that were most popular during the 2015 campaigns and elections:

- #Nigeria2015 and #NigeriaDecides2015 as general trending election hashtags
- #GEJ and #GMB as campaign hashtags for the two primary candidates

Although the initial intent was to collect historical Twitter data from the 2015 election period, the decision was made to focus on what people were saying about that election, especially in the months leading up to the next election period. This stage continued, with changes made only to the hashtags, as the 2019 election loomed closer. In the 2019 election and the campaigns leading up to it, the trending election and candidate hashtags were:

- #Nigeria2019 and #NigeriaDecides2019 for the elections
- #PMB and #Atikulate for the two primary candidates

The second stage of data collection started as soon as the recruitment of *Group 1* participants began in the field. For this phase, the participants' Twitter accounts were followed using a dedicated Twitter account opened by the researcher for the purpose of the study, and, in accordance with the consent received from participants, their Twitter feeds were observed and scraped.

The third stage of Twitter scraping occurred during the 2019 presidential election, within a five-day window. It started on Election Day and ended after the election results were announced. Again, this followed popular election hashtags similar to those in the first stage: #Nigeria2019 and #NigeriaDecides2019.

The collection of Twitter data was an interesting experience that evolved. In the first year of data collection, Twitter allowed the free scraping of historical data for up to 7 days.

This meant that the participants' accounts and applicable hashtags had to be monitored and scraped weekly. Twitter allowed unlimited content downloads.

In 2019, however, some of this changed for a limited time. On the original date of the Nigerian election, February 16, Twitter restricted data scrapes to two downloads every 15 minutes, which meant that applicable content could not be downloaded in a single sweep if, for example, the content came from different research subjects. At the time, it was unclear whether this was caused by a bug or if Twitter had intentionally imposed restrictions for the period. On the actual day of the election, February 23, this restriction was removed, and the study was able to gather as much real-time data as needed. This was fortunate. Considering the expected volume and frequency of data coming in on that day, the time restrictions would have severely impeded the researcher's ability to obtain all the necessary data. A few days after, unfortunately, Twitter reverted to the 15-minute download interval (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4 below). Because the 2019 election results were announced three days after votes were cast, this affected the amount of time spent on this aspect of the fieldwork.

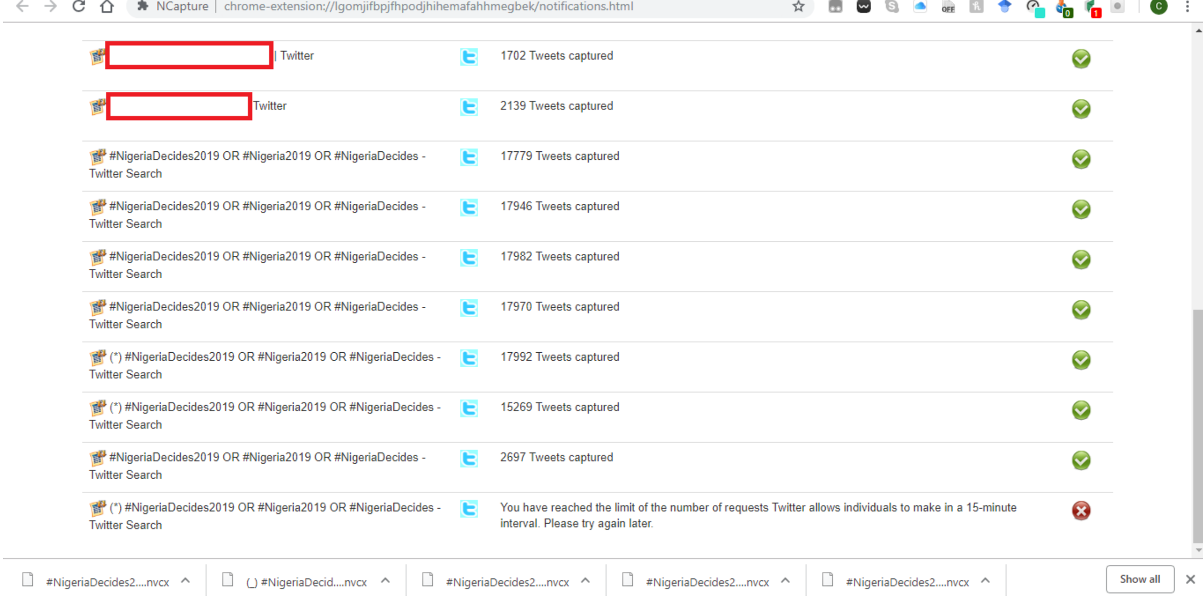


Figure 5.3 Google Chrome N-Capture progress page
Source: NVivo via Twitter

You have reached the limit of the number of requests Twitter allows individuals to make in a 15-minute interval. Please try again later.

Figure 5.4 Twitter 15-minute restrictions message (magnified)
Source: NVivo via Twitter

The selection criteria for Twitter data collection were as follows:

Hashtags: #Nigeria2015 and #NigeriaDecides2015 for the 2015 election discourses and #Nigeria2019 and #NigeriaDecides2019 for the 2019 election discourses. These were the most popular hashtags for these elections, and using them as a filter helped with ensuring a manageable sample size while also ensuring that only election-related tweets were scraped.

Original Tweets: In addition to the hashtags, the advanced search feature on Twitter was used to select the period of interest and to eliminate retweets. The decision to eliminate retweets was made simply to Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Twitter data collection collected on the 2015 election discourse included

The tweets were scraped using *NCapture for NVivo*, a browser extension that enables the scraping of data and metadata from Twitter and other big data sites. The scraped data can then be imported to NVivo for analysis. Data collection for historical tweets was done manually because of the cost of obtaining historical Twitter data, and the project resources were limited and could not accommodate the additional expense as estimated. Hence, 2015 data were obtained by taking screenshots of significant tweets during a scan of the search results. This posed limitations because very limited data was visible, and with the limited time and other resources, going through every tweet manually was not feasible. Nevertheless, The selection of tweets shown as figures in the analytical chapters are indicative of the overall content shared and accessed on Twitter during both election periods.

5.62 Data Analysis: Methods

Here, the data analysis methods are described.

Content Analysis and Justification

Content analysis was used to analyse the data collected from all online and offline sources. This method of analysis was chosen for two reasons. First, it was ideal for its diversity of applications in studying both textual and non-textual data, such as audio, video, and images – all of which are common data types in ethnographic studies (Kohlbacher 2006). Second, it allowed for both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis (Damschroder & Forman 2007).

The quantitative content analysis of tweets enabled the study to identify common themes in the Twitter discourse, and also helped to pinpoint who the "evangelists" were – those

with the loudest, most persistent or most frequently used voices in the discourse within *Group 1*. The researcher coded for:

- hashtags for the two presidential contenders
  - for the 2015 election campaigns, the trending hashtags were
    - #GEJ for incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan
    - #GMB for challenger General Muhammadu Buhari
  - for the 2019 election campaigns, the trending hashtags were:
    - #PMB for incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari
    - #Atikulate for challenger Atiku Abubakar
- positive and negative language in tweets that were directed at the presidential candidates using their most popular hashtags (as above)
- sentiments about the elections, especially surrounding key issues/events such as election postponement and insecurity

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse all other data collected for the research, allowing for an in-depth probe of the themes excavated during the quantitative analysis and mapping stages.

Mapping and Justification

In addition to the quantitative content analysis, a visual map of the 2019 Election Day tweets was created, creating a visual representation of their geographical distribution. Mapping is especially useful in social science research when the goal is to find 'a structure rather than a multiplicity of evidence' (Ritchie & Spencer 2002, p. 186). Scholars such as Bonello & Meehan (2019) have used this method – much as this research has – in concept identification and phenomena mapping, with the aid of NVivo software as an analytical tool.

Similarly to prior research (Bonello & Meehan 2019), this study sought to examine whether the cultural phenomenon of communication patterns – a byproduct of Nigeria's multicultural society – was represented online. Mapping was relevant for visualising the tweeting patterns across the country to see if there were any ethnic distinctions, and NVivo was instrumental in achieving this.

5.7 Ethical Reflections

Data has proven to be an invaluable commodity in today's digital society. Critics have long bedevilled the practice of colonial-style research in Africa, where non-African scholars – or African scholars based in Western states – penetrate the continent to access research data, obtain it, and then return to their base where the data is only used to advance their careers.

As Nothias bluntly puts it, 'this knowledge becomes social, economic, symbolic and cultural capital for them' (2018, p. 100). In the wake of the *Cambridge Analytica* saga, this practice is regarded as an explicit exploitation of resources, which has long been a contention in the relationship between Africa and the North. It calls ethics into question – particularly, the approach to ethics that most Western research institutions take. When scrutinised through the lens of decolonisation, it is easy to conclude that this practice contributes negatively to that discourse.

The UTS ethics application process was thorough and offered considerable value to the research methodology process and the investigator's reflections on the study. It challenged the researcher to think more deeply and emphatically about doing online research in politics and the implications it might have for research participants, both directly and indirectly. Particularly in the wake of the *Cambridge Analytica* revelations – which, at the point of application, were at the fore of the media agenda and reportage – this was of paramount consideration for anyone engaging in online media research, particularly in the politics, media and communications fields.

The ethics approval process for this research helped to make the researcher more researcher-conscious, participant-conscious and empathetic regarding how they carried out the research – how processes would or could affect study subjects. It encouraged them to maintain transparency with all participants, especially in establishing clarity of understanding about participants' rights throughout the research and respecting those rights. Although some points were raised regarding data protection and management, there was not sufficient criticism and/or awareness regarding the North-South research inequalities to merit action. This reaffirms the Euro-Anglo-centric positioning of Western academic and research institutions, in contrast to the more Afrocentric approaches being pushed for by African researchers in Africa.

In considering these concerns and seeing them vocalised by other African or Africa-based researchers, the researcher agrees that there should be new measures put in place for ethical considerations in African research. Alternatively, a different set of ethical considerations could

be developed for research in Africa – doing away with certain Western components and instead incorporating Afrocentric measures that could add value not just for the researcher, but also for the communities being researched. It would be naïve for the researcher to assume that there is a simple solution to this, or that it can be achieved by simply seeking an avenue through which to transfer the knowledge obtained from Africa back to its origins in a practical, useable format for other societies.

It would be worse, however, to ignore the need for change on the assumption that any individual contribution would be too minor to make a difference – merely a drop in the ocean. What scholars are saying is that many drops make an ocean; thus, it is imperative that every researcher do their share to improve North-South relations.

5.71 Insider-Outsider Conflicts

As discussed, the researcher's insider-outsider positionality is conflicted. On the one hand, the researcher took on the perspective of an insider researching their home country and identifying as a member of the community throughout the study. In conducting fieldwork, this positioning helped marginally in that it afforded the researcher access to gatekeepers and individuals who turned out to be key research subjects. Having initially embarked on the research process as an outsider – trying to get "in" during the initial participant recruitment exercise, which was conducted online while still in Sydney – the researcher recognised the value of this insider position even more than they might have otherwise.

On the other hand, the researcher's outsider positionality was evident in two ways. The first, as already mentioned, was observed during the initial participant recruitment efforts, when all attempts to communicate with individuals via Twitter were largely ignored. It turned out that, in an attitude that is not atypical in the African culture, even the technologically knowledgeable still preferred human connection to technologically-mediated one-on-one interaction.

The second piece of evidence of the researcher's outsider position relates to what Nothias (2018) outlines in his work. As a person of African descent who was raised in Africa, the researcher could easily be considered an insider. However, Nothias advises scrutiny of influences when carrying out research – particularly given that the researcher lived in the West, was affiliated with a Western institution, and was carrying out research sponsored by this institution. The research rigours, such as the ethics approval process, were conducted with a

Western perspective throughout the study, and the researcher acknowledges that the thesis has been written primarily for a Western audience and secondarily for a non-Western audience. This is important to note, especially when one main argument is the de-Westernisation of scholarship.

In assessing cultural and cross-cultural research ethics, various scholars suggest that Western-based Africa-focused researchers should integrate a '"give back" component' (Nothias 2018, p. 100) and ensure accountability in their research from the onset. This should be done as a deliberate exercise, not an afterthought.

This is what Robinson-Pant & Singal refer to as 'situated ethics,' which, as a concept, 'takes account of the self [that is, the researcher] in relation to the research process in a much wider socio-political context' (2013, p. 418). Advocates of South-focused ethical practices suggest that this can and should happen from the onset of research and that it begins with a scholar considering the social relevance of their research topic, who will benefit from it, and who is impacted or implicated by the case being studied (Connell 2014; Nothias 2018; Robinson-Pant & Singal 2013).

This thesis acknowledges the validity of these expectations and has endeavoured to keep them at the forefront of the research from conception. The research topic is geared towards a socially relevant account of electioneering in Nigeria, and the experiment has not strayed from this focus. Furthermore, considering that the study investigates the impact of culture on political decision-making, the researcher has ensured that the social relevance of the study is not lost. Acknowledging that changes in research topics and focuses are not unusual in doctoral studies, this commitment and consistency speak to the success of this work.

5.72 Informed Consent

A critical area for consideration in this study was data protection and management. How would the online (Twitter) data from participants – who were vocal about political matters and therefore vulnerable to threats, pressure and physical harm from individuals and the government – be managed? Nothias (2018) also raises this issue in his guide on how *not* to do media research in Africa. UTS human research ethics already required that the researcher act appropriately to protect the data of research participants. Still, there was the other matter of using direct quotations from Twitter, which are easily accessible through a simple Internet

search. Hence, it was imperative that the researcher obtain not just consent but informed consent.

The researcher ensured that participants understood precisely how their information would be used and what kind of information would be used. Since online data were required only from one participant group, separate participant information sheets and consent forms were created for the two groups. The *Group 1* participant information sheet had an additional clause about the use of online information, including direct Twitter quotes. Participants were asked to opt-in if they were willing to allow that their tweets be quoted directly.

5.73 Written Consent

Although Africa is beginning to see an increase in research output, many universities – particularly in sub-Saharan Africa – do not allocate any research budget to their staff. Research on the continent is predominantly funded by international donors, such as the Ford Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, USAID, the World Bank, the European Commission, United Kingdom DFID, AusAID and the UN Democracy Fund (Dzvimbo 1994; Peak Proposals 2019). Consequently, there has been a growing demand for informed and written consent for researchers in the last two decades, largely fuelled by funding donors in developed societies (Hyder & Wali 2006). This demand has been subject to criticism because it does not consider the intricacies and cultural differences that should be accounted for when doing research in non-Western countries.

Qualitative research 'is committed to probing the manner in which social actors interpret and derive meanings from their interactions' (Dzvimbo 1994, p. 202), and despite the surge in democratisation within the continent, many African countries do not as yet have socio-political and economic environments that are conducive to this kind of inquiry. As a result, such research is considered high risk.

It is problematic for the same rules that apply to studies conducted in the West to apply to African studies. This is certainly true for Nigeria. As a developing society, Nigeria still has a large uneducated population, mostly found in rural communities, but also residing in urban areas. Furthermore, Africa contains societies where contractual agreements are made with a nod of the head or a handshake, particularly in rural communities. Therefore, the concept of consent is regarded and addressed somewhat differently in Africa than in Western contexts.

Some scholars in the past have argued that individuals in developing nations might lack the competency to provide consent (Barry 1988; Christakis 1988; Hyder & Wali 2006). The researcher does not support this notion, particularly because it suggests that a lack of formal, Western education equates to a lack of intelligence. The position of this research is that (like Hyder & Wali (2006) reported in their survey of health researchers in the global South) informed consent ought to take both written and oral forms, and it should be considered on a case-by-case basis. This certainly applied in the Nigerian case study.

To fully appreciate this reasoning, it is important to understand the way that people think in African society. Firstly, and most unfortunately, forgery and deceit are common forms of con art in Nigeria. The backlash of this is that the average Nigerian is very careful about where they append their signature. People are often implicated in issues that they have no idea about, and it is not unusual for individuals – particularly the uneducated – to be swindled and committed to things that they have not signed up for. Many times, the information they are given is inaccurate or intentionally false, so they sign their names based on the information they have been given, only to find that it is not the truth and they have, in fact, committed to something entirely different. As a result, individuals – again, particularly the uneducated – are very wary about being asked to sign documents unless it is by trusted sources or institutions like banks. They may be concerned that their data is not protected or that what they say may be used against them by the government or a financial benefactor, for example. When the research is political in nature, individuals' concerns are only heightened – thus creating an even greater challenge for a researcher who requires written consent.

The second factor to consider in the diversification of consent is age – and, accompanying that, respect. Generally, people will either give consent to participate in research or they will not. Except in cases where pressure is put upon individuals by a person in a position of authority – whether familial or economic – the majority of individuals will let a researcher know whether or not they are interested in taking part in a study. Thus, a verbal agreement is considered consent. With elders – that is, people in the age bracket of 50 and above – verbal agreement should suffice. It would be seen as a sign of distrust and/or disrespect for a young researcher to request written consent from an elderly person, even if just to sign an already-prepared document. The signature in itself may imply that there is something being requested beyond simple answers to interview questions.

The researcher's insider position as a native of the country – someone who grew up with Nigerian norms, traditions and values – ensured that these cultural rules, which are

especially crucial when interacting with elders, were understood. It was important to abide by them, first as a demonstration of respect for the culture and the elder and second to set the tone of the interaction during the fieldwork. Any attempts to shift the tone or to operate outside of this norm would have been frowned upon and, indeed, may have jeopardised the research.

Group 2 in this study comprised a wide range of individuals. The goal related to this group of 17 participants was to obtain perspectives from diverse societal groups. The demographic characteristics employed included age, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic standing and education. Of the participants interviewed in this group, two were aged 45-50, and six were over 50. There were six men and two women; three Christians and five Muslims; one southerner and the rest northerners.

Due to their characteristics, no written consent was sought from these eight participants. Three of the interviews were audio-recorded, and there is a record of their verbal consent in the audio. For the others, no written or audio record of consent was obtained, and only notes were taken of the interviews, based on their preference. In all cases, informed consent was sought and received before the interview commenced.

5.74 Researcher-Researched Power Relations

The decision to request that participants opt-*in* to permit the use of their tweets is noteworthy. The alternative would have been to ask them to opt-*out* if they chose not to allow direct quotation of their tweets in the thesis. However, by asking them to opt-in, the researcher gave them more power in the researcher-researched relationship. What made this power relationship even more interesting was that the participants in this group were young people – many of whom were in the same age bracket as the researcher, well-educated both in Nigeria and in Western countries, and well established in their chosen professions. Furthermore, they already had some measure of status based on their online political communication activities. Therefore, there was no sense of inequality in the researcher-researched relationship. In a society where age and economic and social statuses are key determinants of power, the age range of the study participants – although it was not a demographic characteristic in the sampling exercise – proved advantageous.

5.75 Research Beneficiaries

The question of who would benefit from the research was crucial. Particularly when researching the global South, this is a question that – as Nothias (2018) and Connell (2014) suggest – researchers ought to ask themselves.

Given that the purpose of the fieldwork and the resulting thesis was the completion of a doctoral degree, the researcher acknowledged a personal stake in this investigation. Considering the researcher's origins, it was also crucial that there be value beyond the attainment of the PhD. As per the recommendations of Nothias (2018) and Connell (2014), the researcher identified the societal benefits of carrying out the work. These benefits bore more significant implications for digital political communication during elections in Africa, as well as for organisations and activists wanting to understand how best to facilitate online dialogue that might lead to offline action.

5.8 Summary & Introduction to the Analyses and Discussion Chapters

This chapter described the research design for this thesis, as well as the process and rationale for choosing the exploratory case study design. It described the connective ethnographic method – which is a juxtaposition of traditional ethnography and digital ethnography – and explained why this method was suitable for answering the research questions, even when other methods might have sufficed. It also outlined the data collection and analysis methods, including the difficulties faced in the process of data collection and the unexpected tools used for data gathering. Finally, the researcher reflected on the data collection process and discussed the ethical issues faced in the course of this research. The next three chapters analyse and discuss the findings of the data.

This chapter has served as an introduction to presenting and discussing the key findings of this study. Thus, it is important to reiterate the primary purpose of this study, which was to develop insight into the role of social media in political communication in non-Western contexts. The research draws certain inferences on what social media do, what they do not do, and their potential as conduits of political knowledge and practice in an emerging democracy. Based on the unique cultural context of the study, culture is a theme that is also explored. Thus, discussions have been split into two parts to address the role of social media in political communication: (1) the positioning of social media use for political purposes within a cultural context – in this case, Nigeria – and (2) the underlying role of culture in the use and conduct

of social media and politics within the Nigerian state. Therefore, this chapter presents the study's findings and its discussions on the use of social media – specifically, Twitter – in Nigeria's presidential elections.

Although data collection was conducted strategically, some of the demarcations made during the process – such as the grouping of interviewees by their social media expertise – have not been discussed here because that grouping was only relevant for data collection purposes. Therefore, the division of the study groups, as outlined in the methodology, will not apply here. The two groups that will be used in the discussions are *Influencers* and *Followers*. Although these are terms used in social media culture, their definitions are applied somewhat differently here.

For the purposes of this thesis and the discussions herein, these two key terms are defined as follows:

1. **Influencers** are individuals who wield any measure of power within their spheres – online or offline – as opinion-formers (Dhanesh & Duthler 2019). In the online world, social media influencers contribute to the formation and shaping of political discourse. They are the ones who tell people what to think about and how to think about it. In the offline world, they are family and community patriarchs and economic benefactors who attract the people within their spheres to their viewpoints by virtue of their relationships.
2. **Followers** are those who receive information from one or more sources for the purpose of forming political opinions and making political decisions (Dhanesh & Duthler 2019). They may obtain information online or offline, through virtual or physical relationships, and make political decisions based on this information.

   In some cases, an influencer might demonstrate follower attributes and vice versa; when this is the case, this status change would be clarified through discussion.

The next three chapters of this thesis are organised into three sections aimed at extracting the essence of the fieldwork data, presenting analyses of the data, and consolidating the findings of the research with extant literature (Chapter 3) through the lenses of the theories framing the study (Chapter 4). These will be presented as two analytical chapters (6 and 7) and one discussion chapter (8). These chapters are structured to reflect the following themes:

- The role of Twitter in political participation (Chapter 6)
- Cultural underpinnings on political communication (Chapter 7)
- The consolidated frame of culture and social media in political participation (Chapter 8)

CHAPTER SIX: ANALYSIS OF TWITTER AS A POLITICAL CHANNEL

6.1 Introduction

This thesis comprises two analytical chapters that present the findings of this study. This chapter extracts and discusses themes focusing on the use of social media as political tools through the lens of Twitter use in Nigerian presidential elections, framed within the public sphere and social network theories. The extracted and analysed data will bring about discussions on the following questions: What is the role of Twitter in Nigerian elections? How does Twitter contribute to the proliferation and mitigation of misinformation, disinformation, and information verification in Nigerian elections? (3) Does online political participation ensure offline political participation – and, if so, to what extent? These questions are tied to SQ_1 ('How is Twitter used as a tool for political participation within the Nigerian context through the case studies of the 2015 and 2019 elections?') and SQ_3 ('What relationships exist between online political activities and offline realities and outcomes?') The next analytical chapter will explore the cultural underpinnings that inform political participation and communication in the Nigerian community, particularly those that were in play during the case elections.

One distinct characteristic of the media throughout their evolution has been their ability to meet a need by filling existing gaps in communication, even when those needs might not have been widely foreseen or acknowledged. While elections over the past decade have demonstrated that social media do indeed have a place in modern-day politics (Dwyer & Molony 2019; Permadi, Shabrina & Aziz 2019), the extent of their influence and their role in politics has yet to be clearly defined. Generalisations that are made regarding their capabilities are made predominantly from Western perspectives. Still, there are distinct features of non-Western contexts that are absent from their Western counterparts, such as the co-dependency, economic dependency, and strong family ties in communities that are common to Africa. Such features call into question the practice of generalisation in these instances.

One of the objectives of this research is to fill this gap by clarifying the role of social media in political communication within non-Western contexts from the perspectives of everyday citizens and other non-political stakeholders (SQ_1). Another objective of the research

is to explore the positionality of culture in twenty-first-century politics from a non-Western perspective (SQ_2). This second objective will be discussed in a separate chapter.

6.2 Online Data Extractions and Attributes

Here, the evolution of Twitter use during the 2015 and 2019 campaign and election seasons are analysed to show how Nigerians used Twitter as a political tool during the two elections. This creates a backdrop for answering SQ1 about how Twitter is used as a tool of political participation in the country.

Twitter data used in this research comprise Tweets over three-years (from November 2014 to March 2015 and from May 2018 to February 2019). They have been grouped into sections, described as follows:

6.21 2015 Election Campaign Season (November 2014 – March 2015)

This timeline comprises Twitter scrapes covering discourse on Twitter prior to, during, and after the 2015 election. The data were scraped historically from Twitter, and this was done manually because Twitter only allows historical data sweeps up to seven days from the date of collection. Anything beyond that is only commercially available, and funding received for fieldwork was insufficient to cover the additional expense.

Campaigns for the 2015 general elections officially began on 16 November 2014 and ended two days before the elections (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room 2014), initially scheduled for Valentine's Day that year, but eventually postponed by a month and a half to 28 March 2015 (Payne 2015). The independent electoral commission announced the postponement just a week prior to Election Day, stirring a nationwide uproar that swept through the online and offline worlds (Fleming 2015). INEC's official reason for postponing the election was that the military had advised that they could not provide adequate security during the presidential election as well as the gubernatorial elections (Channels Television 2015), which were scheduled to take place two weeks after the presidential polls, due to their plan to launch a six-week offensive against the insurgent Boko Haram (Campbell 2015).

Given that Nigeria had a history of election violence, this explanation was plausible. However, this decision was contentious (BBC News 2015b); it was met with mixed reactions, with some being in support and others against (Fleming 2015), and Twitter was rife with

Tweets (see Figure 6.2 below) showing disbelief that security was the real reason for the postponement. While some believed this was part of a strategy by the incumbent government to buy time to rig the elections because the president knew he would not win, others said it was a ploy to destabilise the opposition party, which had understandably exhausted its campaign funds at that point (Al Jazeera via Twitter 2015).

Figure 6.1: Al Jazeera tweet about the six-week election postponement in 2015
Source: Al Jazeera via Twitter (2015)

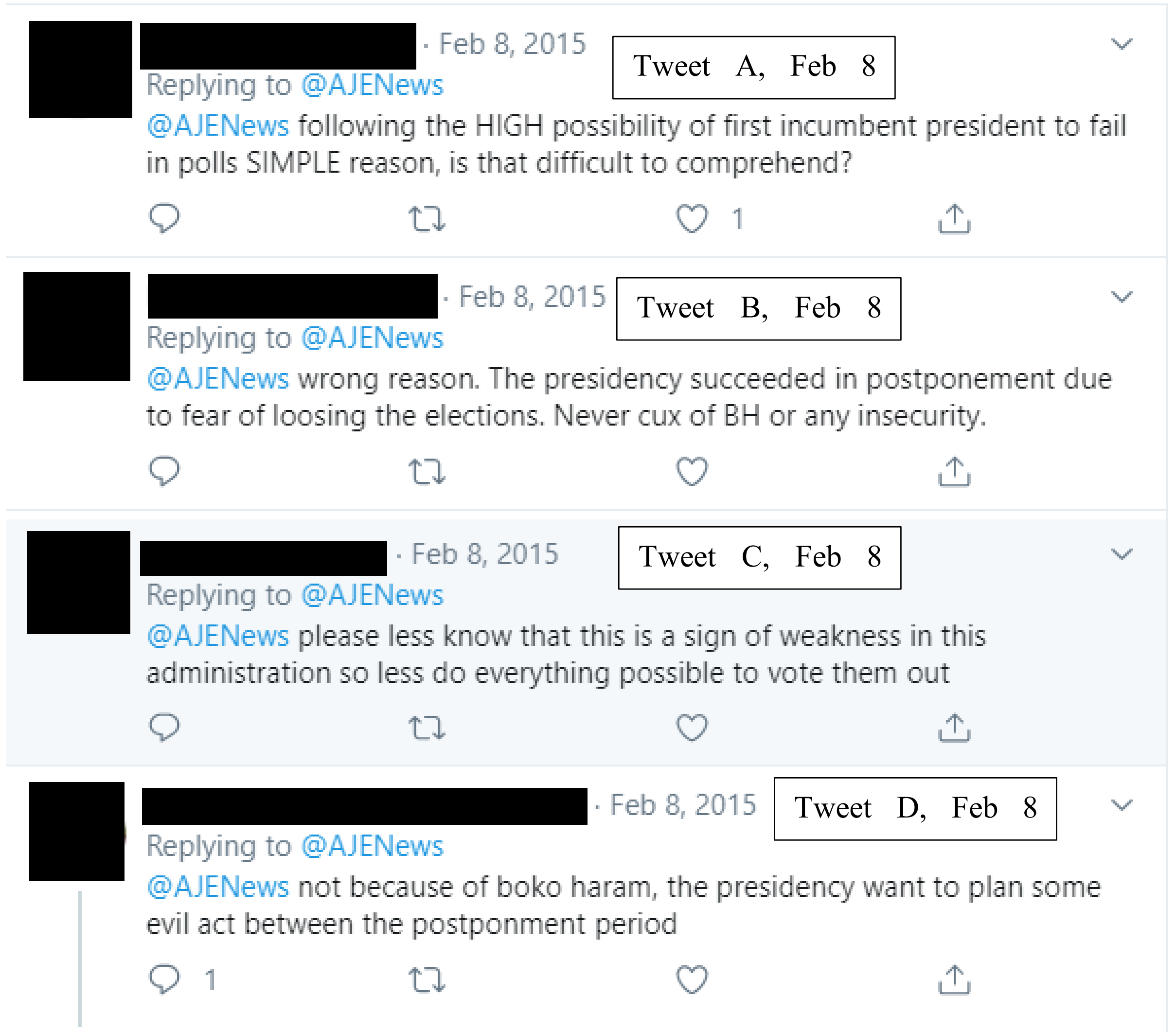


Figure 6.2: Twitter comments about six-week election postponement in 2015
Source: Al Jazeera via Twitter (2015)

Figure 6.2 shows a cross-section of responses to Al Jazeera's Tweet about the postponement (Figure 6.1). Many called it a strategy by the incumbent party to manipulate the outcome of the election (Tweet D) due to their fear of losing (Tweet B), with one Tweet (Tweet A) stating that the impending historical failure of the incumbent to secure his political seat was the reason. Tweet C opined that the postponement demonstrated the administration's weakness, and thus there was no reason for the incumbent to remain in governance. In the end, whether or not these inferences were correct, it proved to be the wrong move for the incumbent's vie for a second term.

While the postponement worked against the incumbent, it resulted in a win for the opposition (as the Tweets in Figure 6.3 indicate) both online and offline. The new development became a campaigning point for the opposition, who took up the suggestions on social media about the postponement being the incumbent president's underhanded strategy to buy himself some more time to ensure his success at the polls and waged a campaign with it in those six weeks. It also turned support from the international community – which was observing the developments and had representatives ready to go to the country to observe the elections physically – away from President Goodluck and the ruling PDP.

Interestingly, the supporters on both campaign sides had the same view of the decision to postpone the election in 2015. In discussing the election postponement with interviewees who had been on opposing sides, they commented that it was, in fact, a bad decision, a bad call made by the president, even though he denied having any role in that decision (BBC News 2015a). A supporter of the opposition said the following:

> I knew Jonathan would lose. So, for me, I felt the postponement was for him to buy some time to send the army out there. If he [could] decimate Boko Haram in those six weeks, he would be more favourable at the polls – the people of Borno would probably vote for him, and the rest of Nigeria would probably vote more for him. So, for me, he was buying time trying to use the defeat of Boko Haram to get more votes. That was my opinion; it was politics, but in the end, it failed him.
>
> - Ofor, personal communication, September 17, 2018

The state of Borno had been one of the hardest-hit states in the northeast during the Boko Haram insurgency, having suffered the majority of human losses and displacements (UNDP 2018). Therefore, the inference made by Ofor is that if the military forces had been able to defeat Boko Haram prior to the presidential polls, the incumbent would have garnered a high rate of support from that state, possibly borne of gratitude. Another interviewee who had, in fact, worked with the incumbent's second bid campaign team summed the experience up in an echo of the sentiments of these Twitter handles when she commented on the postponement thus:

> Hmmm. I thought it was a mistake. It was ill thought out. Full disclosure, at the time I was working [on the president's campaign]. But even then, I thought it was ill-thought-out because you're making people think that you're running, you're scared or you want to do something wrong, and it's not a good look – you're already not looking good because of the Chibok girls. So there was that. ...He was vilified on social media, and the opposition took it

> and ran with it. With the benefit of hindsight, it was a political move that just backfired, to be honest, because they did starve APC of fund[ing] – this was the opposition party. They starved them of funds because everybody had spent…it's like you know I'm going to have a baby on December 30th, 2018. When you now get to December 30th, the doctor tells you, 'oh you know what, you're going to carry this baby for one more month.' But you've spent all your money planning that by December 30th the baby is coming out, I have everything for the child ready for December 30th, you know, ready from January 1st when the child will be born. All of a sudden, I have 30 more days to carry this child, how am I supposed to feed, how am I supposed to do this? And that was the plan, and it worked. But what it also did was it also gave people time to 1). Dislike the government in power a little more, 2). Enable the APC to broker emergency alliances...[and] they [APC] then got into bed with too many people just trying to raise money to survive the 20-something days the elections were postponed for. But it wasn't a good idea. That's my thinking. It wasn't a good idea.
>
> \- Elochukwu, personal communication, August 31, 2018

6.22 Election Day (28 March 2015)

The 2015 election finally took place on 28 March, following the six-week postponement. Although he claimed that the electoral commission acted independently in making the decision (BBC News 2015a), this move by the government swayed public opinion in favour of the opposition, and this was indicated at the polls on Election Day. It swung undecided voters to pledge support for the opposition and incited more people to go to the polls on the new date to ensure that the incumbent president was voted out of office (see figure 6.3).

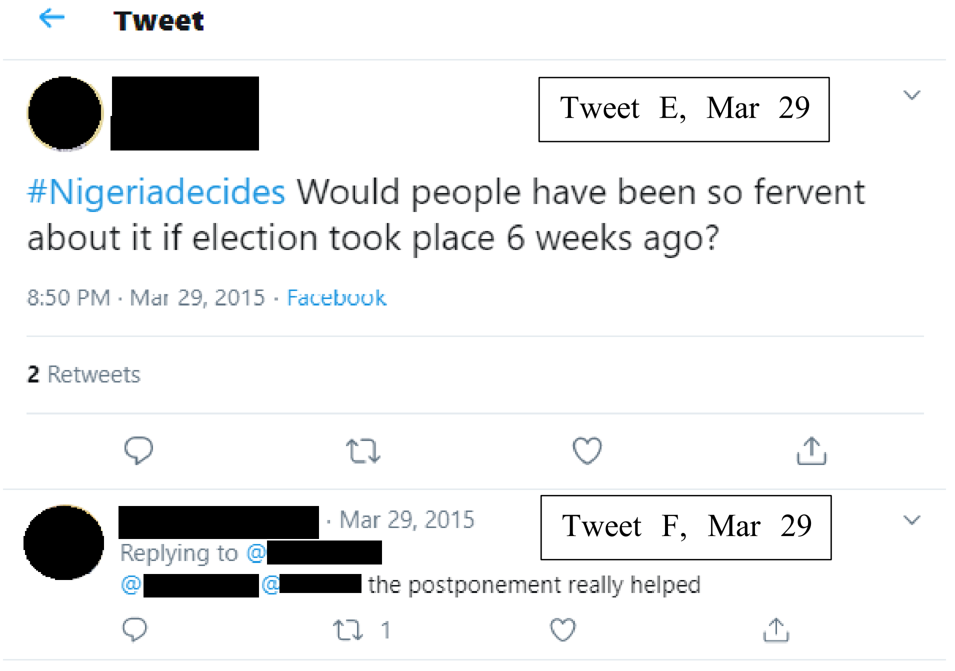


Figure 6.3: Public opinion - election postponement was a win for the opposition
Source: Twitter (29 March 2015)

6.23 Pre-Election to Election Season 2019 (May 2018 to February 2019)

Real-time data scrapes commenced in May 2018. Although election campaigns were still six months away, the forthcoming presidential election was already a popular hashtag on Twitter. The general perception online and offline was that Nigerians were unhappy with the performance of the government they had elected in 2015 and were seeking redress in the next election. The #NigeriaDecides and #NigeriaDecides2019 hashtags had already flooded Twitter with polls on the approval rating of the president and polls on the candidate choice of the electorate, with different groups – some formed by individuals – setting up campaign networks with Twitter handles for the elections, and the electoral body campaigning for voters to register for and collect their permanent voter cards (PVCs). Some, however, who had supported the new president in 2015 maintained their support of him in anticipation of the forthcoming elections. They believed that corruption, which was rife in Jonathan's tenure, was being tackled.

The security situation with Boko Haram, on the other hand, was still somewhat dire, although negotiations between the government and the terrorists had yielded fruit in the form of the release, and in some instances rescue, of the Chibok girls (Resch 2019). By April 2018, around half of the 219 girls taken to the terrorists' camp had been returned, with some released

and others rescued in missions embarked on by the army (Resch 2019). These were apart from the girls who escaped during the initial abduction. Many of the Chibok girls, like many other girls and women abducted by the terrorists, returned either pregnant or with babies (Maiangwa & Amao 2015; Resch 2019), proof of the ordeal they had been forced to go through, and the government needed to begin the process of rehabilitating them. Despite some of the shortfalls of their experiences, the girls' release alone scored enormous points for the president, reinforcing his leadership to some of his followers and the international community, although many Nigerians were still not satisfied, citing his inability to improve the economy as a sore point against his presidency.

One of the participants, Chimelu, who had supported, campaigned for, and voted for Buhari in 2015 was very vocal about not voting for him in 2019 because, according to him, he had not delivered on the promise he had made to the Nigerian people and the mandate he had been given (Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018). Chimelu was very confident that if one incumbent could be defeated at the polls, it could be done again in the next election. He made the following statement:

> He's going next year. I'm sure we will vote him out. He'll be defeated at the polls next year. It's déjà vu actually. The same thing that played out in 2014-2015 is actually what's happening now, you know. It's déjà vu: the party [APC] is in disarray just like the PDP was in disarray [in 2015], so you have a lot of people who supported Jonathan then and turned out to support Buhari now supporting Atiku. I mean, for the life of me I can't believe that I would support Atiku, but here we are. For politics to develop, for politicians to take the citizens seriously, you go in there, after 4 years there'll be a referendum on your stay in office. If you did well, then you deserve another chance; if you didn't do well, then you'll go, and that's what's going to happen next year.
>
> - Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018

Although his prediction was not fulfilled as he was absolutely confident that it would, Chimelu raised a valid point about the future of politics in Africa's most populous state, namely for democracy to be fully actualised, there is a need for citizens to take a stand and realise that they have a voice. The electorate needs to remember that politicians are elected to be public servants and should be expected to act in the public's best interest and that when the mandate of the people is not fulfilled, then the electorate has the right to refuse the candidate a second tenure and offer the opportunity to someone deemed more worthy than the incumbent. This is a message that participants like Angela and Nnanna advocate in their organisations.

The lack of political education among most Nigerian citizens contributes to this. Most Nigerian citizens engage in meaningful political activities only during election seasons, which come around only once every four years. The rest of the time, they complain, but such complaints are not followed by any action. Several of the youth and political civic groups encountered during the field trip, such as *Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth & Advancement (YIAGA)*, *Enough is Enough (EiE)* Nigeria, and *BudgIT*, worked in diverse partnerships. One such partnership was citizen advocacy and education through an education program called *Office of the Citizen*, whose focus was simply citizen education on issues such as the rights of the citizen, the legislative arm of government, and the recall process for legislators. It is imperative that the electorate understands that they have rights, that they know what those rights are, and that they can exercise those rights. Angela articulated this in her comment on the speculation that the 2019 elections would have the same outcome as the 2015 elections – that is, the removal of the incumbent president:

> In terms of sustaining it, we're saying, 'If you felt your voice counted in the elections, then you should make your voice count even much more after the elections.' So, some people have said, 'You know what? We did this in 2015; we can do it in 2019 again.' It might not happen, so one of the key messages we've been trying to push out is that yes, it might not happen again in 2019, but don't forget that after the presidential elections and the governorship elections in 2019, you have voice post the elections, so use the voice. I think, for us, whether or not it's APC or it's PDP or whatever party it is, let's make the leadership accountable. For me, that's what's key.
>
> \- Angela, personal communication, September 14, 2018

Another aspect of the problem related to citizens' knowledge of their rights and freedoms, comes from the fear of being targeted by the institution for being vocal. This has occurred recently in Nigeria and has caused citizens to be wary of public political engagement (Solomon 2020). Some take to social media anonymously as the alternative, but the digital is also being targeted at the legislative level, at which two social media gag bills have now been presented to the national assembly in the space of four years. The first was presented in 2015 and the second in 2019. Both were presented during the incumbent president's administration (Ewang 2019; Kermeliotis 2015; Nigeria Government 2019). This certainly poses a problem for democracy in Nigeria.

6.24 Election Day (23 February 2019)

Following the trend of the 2015 general elections (Payne 2015), the 2019 elections were also postponed (BBC News 2019). This time, a one-week postponement was announced the night before Election Day. Data classified in this category include Tweets with selected hashtags, Tweets from social media influencers' Twitter accounts, and Tweets from selected election observation and monitoring organisations.

6.25 Post-Election Day (24-26 February 2019)

Although the election was a one-day affair, the vote collation, counting, and results announcement took another three days, hence the timeline (Kazeem 2019). Many Nigerians followed the live updates provided by INEC on Twitter during the collation exercise, and after the results were announced, the mood on Twitter was mixed, with some happy that the incumbent had won and others disappointed with the outcome. Although there was not an outright war on the emerging results, there were comments suggestive of geographical and tribal divides regarding the electoral outcome. What made this interesting was that the two major contenders for the office of the president were Northerners. Therefore, whichever way a Southerner voted, the outcome would still see a Northerner emerge as president-elect. This divide, which is a significant factor in Nigerian politics, has been discussed in the background chapter and will be explained in-depth further in the analysis.

6.3 Interpreting Demographics

This section first analyses the participant demographics in the study. This is necessary due to the dynamics of politics and political participation in Nigeria, which are explicated in the ensuing analysis. The subsequent parts of the section are organised into sub-sections that address juxtaposing themes addressed in the data as follows:

- Perceptions of social media
- Political participation
- Social media in culture
- Culture in politics

6.31 Participant Demographics

The first part of the analysis outlines the demographic distribution of participants, including their ethnicity and religion. This is important because, as explained earlier in this thesis, these two factors are major players in Nigeria's polity. The ethnic and religious diversity in Nigeria plays significant roles in the voting patterns in Nigeria, and this is evident in historical voting maps of the country (see Figure 6.4 below for the 2011 election results map), with the North being dominated by the Hausa-Fulanis, who are predominantly Muslims, and the South being dominated by the Igbos and Yorubas, who are predominantly Christians. Therefore, it is simply naïve to attempt political discourse on the country without highlighting how these play a role.

Figure 6.4: Historical voting patterns in Nigerian elections
Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011)

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods rely on convenience (Awoko-Higginbottom 2004). Online influencers were recruited via a combination of purposive and snowball sampling. This was necessary given the skill and criteria that were relevant to fit into that group. The first of the recruits was one of three people initially introduced to the researcher who were potentially suitable. After further elimination criteria were applied, only one of them was suitable Subsequently, this person was successfully recruited to take part in the research. She also became the gatekeeper of this cohort and, using snowballing, she directly and indirectly facilitated the recruitment of all but one of the other participants.

Age

Group I participants were aged 25-50, with only one participant being over the age of 45. Most participants were between the ages of 30 and 45, and two were under 30. This demographic is descriptive of social media users, especially political commentators and influencers on Twitter. The participant over the age of 45 has been an activist for decades and has held advisory roles in various international bodies associated with human and political activism for most of his career; therefore, it is no surprise that he is also active on Twitter as a means of promoting his interests and causes.

The age distribution of the Group II participants was more even than that of Group I. Only one participant was under the age of 30, and participants between the ages of 35 and 44 accounted for the majority in this group, making up 70% of the entire sample size. Two participants were aged 45 to 54, and another two participants were 55 and over. This representation largely mirrors that of Group I and suggests that individuals generally interact with their peers, particularly when it comes to political discourse and related engagement.

Geopolitical and Ethnic Representation

Six (85.7%) of the seven participants who were social media influencers were from the South, with only one (14.3%) being from the North. Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones – namely the northcentral, northeast, northwest, south-south (also known as Niger Delta) southeast, and southwest. Of these, one participant was from the northcentral region, one was from the south-south, and all others were from the southeast. Obviously, this demographic distribution does not adequately represent a distribution of all six geopolitical zones and poses a limitation to this study.

Due to the limitations of the sampling exercise in the recruitment of social media influencers, there was a more purposive and purposeful strategy in the recruitment exercise for the rest of the participants. This strategy was adopted to ensure that there is some measure of gap closure in the geopolitical/ethnic distribution for more representativeness in the overall sample. Although this was not completely achieved, the outcome depicts an improvement in the disparity visible in the first group.

Of the entire 24 participants in the sample, 70.8% were from the South, while the remaining 29.2% were from the North. The southeast had the most representation, with 41.7% of the participants being from that region. Meanwhile, 12.5% were from the southwest, and another 16.7% were identified as being from the south-south. The northwest had an 8.3%

representation, and the geopolitical origin of the remaining 16.7% was not clearly identified, although they were decidedly Northerners.

The three largest Nigerian ethnic groups were represented. Approximately 13% of the participants were Yoruba, the Igbos (including the Delta-Igbos, who are Igbo-speaking people from Delta State and from the south-south) had the largest representation, making up half (50%) of the entire participant group. The Hausa/Fulani ethnic group represented 25% of the participants. Again, this unequal distribution was a result of the snowball sampling method used in the recruitment exercise, although it represents an attempted representation of the population distribution in Abuja, Nigeria's capital city, where most these interviews took place.

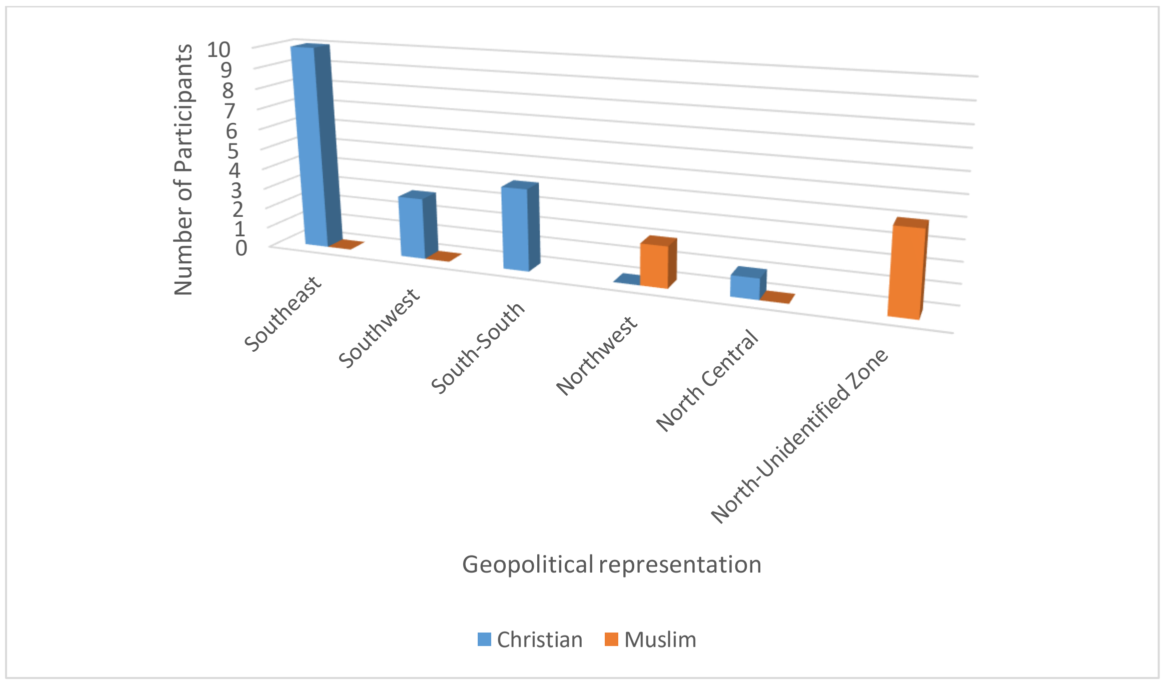


Figure 6.5: Graph of ethnoreligious participant distribution
Source: Author

Religion

Most of the participants in this sample were Christians, who made up 71% of the entire sample size, with the remaining 29% identifying as Muslims. All participants who were social media influencers identified as Christians. On the one hand, this is interesting because, Nigeria is the sixth-largest Christian population and the fifth-largest Muslim population in the world (Pew Research Center 2019). Moreover, Nigeria's religious distribution has an almost equal Christian to Muslim population ratio, with the Muslim populace being slightly larger (50% vs 48.1%), according to 2015 statistics (Pew Research Center 2019).

On the other hand, this is unsurprising given the religious influences that impact the culture of the people. The northern Nigerian Muslim culture seems to be one of obeisance that is not vocal in its challenge to authority, and this is reflected in the absence of participants as online influencers. Because these participants were recruited via snowball sampling and because interactions with them showed that they know each other within their circles, there was reason to believe that the Muslim population was not represented in this group. The quest to recruit Muslim participants for interviews became a purposeful effort on the part of the researcher to attempt to obtain a diversity of views based on identified Nigerian demographics that are significant to its politics.

Most of the recruitment exercise was conducted in the federal capital, which is situated in the nation's northcentral geopolitical zone and has an almost equal distribution of Christians and Muslims, representative of the country's overall distribution. While this distribution could be expected to afford a reasonable representation of both religions, it can only be assumed here that the use of snowballing for subsequent recruitments resulted in the one-sided distribution. This also shows that there is not a lot of religious diversity in the social media influencers' networks. On a cultural level, however, this outcome also demonstrates the cultural responses of these two groups. Muslims are considered more subservient and loyal to authority, especially when the authority figure is "one of their own," and typically not vocal, while Christians are stereotyped as being loud, vocal, opinionated, and prone to rebellion.

The map below shows a distribution of Election Day 2019 Tweets that originated from Nigeria and reflects the ethnic and religious stereotyping that exists in Nigeria. According to the map, most Tweets originated from the south and north-central regions – specifically the federal capital city of Abuja, which is multi-ethnic and bi-religious in population. The geolocation of most Tweets from the South was Lagos, the largest urban city in Nigeria, and the majority of Tweets that originated from there were from the Twitter handles of media organisations.

A cluster analysis showed that of the tweets emanating from private Twitter accounts all around the country, most users bore southern names, and thus can be assumed to have been Southerners. This was derived by the elimination of non-personal Twitter handles. After the personal accounts were sorted, nicknames without any ethnic references and Western names were eliminated. Of those Twitter handles that featured ethnic Nigerian names, handles with Yoruba names dominated in Lagos; in Abuja handles with Igbo names dominated. In total, the

ratio of Yoruba- to Igbo-named handles was 3:2, and the ratio of Yoruba- to Hausa-named handles was 9:1.

This accurately represents and validates the existing stereotypes explained earlier and justifies the participants' ethnic and religious distribution. It shows that Southerners are more vocal online than other groups. It has also been inferred that the online evidence is arguably a fair reflection of what happens offline.

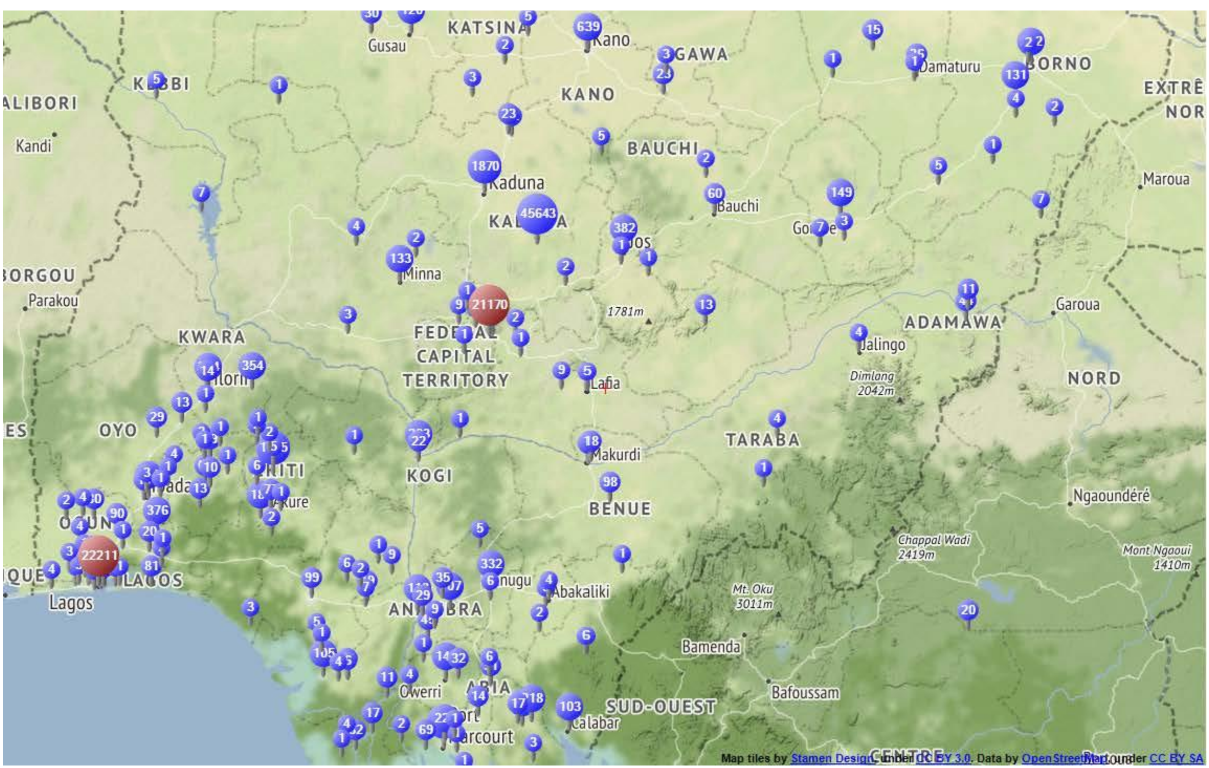


Figure 6.6: Twitter map on Election Day, 2019
Source: Fieldwork Twitter observation data extract

Gender

The gender distribution was reasonably balanced, with 13 male (54.2%) and 11 female (45.8%) participants. This is closely proportionate to the gender distribution for enrolment in tertiary education in Nigeria as of 2017, where more than half of enrollees were male (56.9%) and only 43.1% were female (NBS 2019). This comparison is significant because Twitter is described as intellectually elitist since the platform's design makes it difficult for new users to join (Coupé 2016), with subscription comprising mostly educated members of society (i.e., people in the middle to upper echelon). A study by the Pew Research Center found that 'the most

prolific political tweeters make up a small share [6%] of all U.S. adults on Twitter with public accounts' (Hughes 2019).

As previously explained, politics is a common discussion topic within the Nigerian society, and both men and women readily engage in the topic. Traditionally, men would convene in beer parlours and pubs to discuss politics and sports, and women would gossip and talk about politics in hair salons. While men engage more in talks about sports, politics is entirely different, and both genders readily engage politically online and offline. One thing that was interesting from a Western viewpoint was the fact that individuals readily divulged the candidate for whom they voted or intended to vote. This happened every time the question was asked. There was not one candidate, male or female, who felt uncomfortable, showed any hesitation in sharing, or refused to speak about which candidate they supported in the past presidential election or whom they considered supporting in the then-forthcoming (2019) election.

However, besides in the standard practice in Nigerian society to speak freely about political allegiances and affiliations, this might have been the case due to a few other factors: (1) They understood that this was for research, that information they shared was confidential and that their responses would remain anonymous; (2) being educated with some level of economic independence as all the participants were, they had a heightened sense of autonomy over their political decisions; and (3) as the interviews occurred in low-risk areas, they had a sense of physical security, being aware that they were not at risk of harassment for sharing opposing views to public opinion, whatever it might be. This could have been different had the interviews occurred in the far North, where there have been instances of violence and threats against voters who dared to cast their ballots for a party opposed by the majority.

Education

All participants in this research were highly educated. The least level of education amongst them was a bachelor's degree, and a significant number of the participants had doctoral degrees. This is another limitation of the study, as it is not representative of the Nigerian electorate, which comprises a large population of uneducated persons, some of whom reside in urban dwellings while many are rural dwellers. However, the sample is representative of the education demographic of Nigerians who are social media users, particularly those active in the Twittersphere.

In this sample cohort, there was a significant aversion to social media for information gathering amongst participants who were educators. Of the participants who fell into this category, the majority preferred to fact-check, an exercise that they commented was lacking in social media posts and conversations, leading to the spread of misinformation. One of them, who did not have an account on Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, said the following:

> What I found is that most people either did not have the time or the inclination to fact-check, so whatever things were said and sounded funny or catchy, it stuck. So, there was a lot of misinformation, which is part of what put me off these social media like Twitter.
>
> \- Jide, personal communication, September 29, 2018

These participants preferred to read newspapers, government documents, and economic briefings and publications, which had credible statistical information. They also engaged in verbal conversations with the family and peers. Interestingly, some of them communicated with peers via WhatsApp, a social media platform. Those who attested to this engagement practice on WhatsApp claimed that because the groups to which they belonged were curated, they trusted that the information disseminated therein was valid, adding that in some instances, they fact-checked the information themselves.

6.32 Conclusion

This section depicts pertinent themes useful in understanding Nigerian society that are necessary when discussing social media, communication. and politics within that society. As discussed in the background chapter, these demographic divides are core to the fabric of Nigerian society. Gender divides are more globally ubiquitous, whereas religion, culture and tradition make them even more poignant in certain African societies, such as Nigeria. Age has always been a factor in behaviour, interaction, and expectation in every aspect of Nigerian society, and with its long history of cultural and ethnic diversity brought to unity under British colonisation, geopolitics is one way that the Nigerian state has attempted to balance the power ownership at all levels, including the presidency. For example, a Northern president is always deputised by a Southerner and vice versa; similarly, a Christian president is always deputised by a Muslim and vice versa (see Campbell 2011).

The section also unveils key limitations in the use of purposive and snowball sampling methods for participant recruitment for this research, acknowledging them and laying bare their

impact in the overall thesis and the limitations of generalisations that can be made from it. At the same time, it attempts to facilitate a further understanding of elements of the society that played a part in the sampling and recruitment outcomes.

6.4 Perceptions of Social Media

The findings presented here highlight general perceptions about Twitter – and social media in general – as a political participation tool in Nigeria. They provide an understanding of how much value citizens place on the medium, thereby validating or refuting its perceived relevance in the country's evolving democracy.

Interestingly, there was consensus across all age demographics about the relevance of social media in contemporary politics. The older age group acknowledged that they are more popular amongst young people, but they also inferred that they have become modern tools of democracy with obscene potentials.

6.41 The Choice for Twitter

There was consensus among the participants about perceptions of the relevance of Twitter as a political agent, which is why it was the medium of choice for political discourse. Most participants who used social media admitted that their go-to medium for news and political information was Twitter. One participant mentioned that he used Twitter as much as he used Facebook as a social medium, although he was admittedly more active on Facebook. However, for politics-related musings and discourse, Twitter was the primary medium for him, alongside the other participants in that group. For one participant, when asked what shaped his opinion of the two main candidates, he admitted that Twitter shaped his choice of a candidate 100%.

> Twitter shaped Buhari for me 100%. The picture of Buhari I have was the picture I got from Twitter. Because when he was a military ruler, I knew nothing about him; I was barely born and so I knew nothing about him. My dad had nothing to say to me about Buhari. But Jonathan, for me, I will stick with [70%]…because in my workplace I could see what he was doing, but Twitter made it bigger.
>
> - Omola, personal communication, September 22, 2018

For Omola, Twitter had a massive influence on his decision, as it single-handedly shaped his opinion about the challenger, who would become his preferred candidate. In fact, prior to the campaigns, he knew nothing about the candidate, so his choice relied completely on discourse

emanating from Twitter. This seemed to be the common experience of Nigerians, like Omola, who had spent a lot of time abroad and were just beginning to wade through the quagmire of politics in the country as residents. Being abroad usually means observing and making deductive inferences on situations back home through the lens of the media, and social media have become key players in information dissemination and gathering for the Nigerian diaspora (Kperogi 2020). Another participant, Jean, had a similar experience and shared how, when she was studying in the UK, Twitter was her sole resource for political information about Nigeria.

Random discussions with individuals prior to the fieldwork raised the following questions: 'Why Twitter? Why study Twitter when Facebook is far more popular in Nigeria?' This inspired the researcher to pose the same question during discussions, especially with online influencers, challenging the choice of Twitter as the go-to social network for political discourse in Nigeria. Respondents to the question admitted that Twitter is much less popular than Facebook in Nigerian online public spheres. However, they made a case for their choice of Twitter as their political engagement space:

> Unlike Facebook, you have a lot of intellectual orgasms going on on Twitter, so there is more intellectual power on Twitter than you have on Facebook. So, Twitter, to a large extent, has a very, very influential part to play in elections, and in shaping public opinion.
>
> - Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018

> People bloviate a heck of a lot on Facebook. There is a lot of bloviating on Facebook. That's really why I avoid it. Twitter I actually use mostly, believe it or not...particularly for mood intelligence on particular issues. That's my primary use of it, but to be able to get that off of it, you've got to participate enough to read some feedback off. So because of that, I have to participate, but really, my first reason that I would give for being on Twitter is mood intelligence.
>
> - Kalu, personal communication, October 26, 2018

Both respondents echoed the same sentiment about the role of Twitter in shaping and interpreting public opinion on issues. They argued for the positioning of Twitter as an intellectual agora where only a select few – the so-called intellectual bourgeois – have accessibility to and are invited to take part in intellectual discourse within. Of course, they argued that this excluding characteristic serves a purpose by elevating the conversations that take place within that sphere in comparison with other social networking sites. For Chimelu, there was even a sense of pride in Twitter being exclusive to a select few who had the courage to operate in that public sphere:

> We like it that Twitter is elitist, because if Twitter becomes like Facebook then you will have all kinds of humans abusing that space. So, let them leave it for us the elite, so that you can communicate your words in 280 characters. Of course, you can decide to do a thread. I find Twitter interesting because you have a lot of more enlightened people coming into the conversation in that space unlike on Facebook [where] you have all manner of people saying all manner of things.
>
> - Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018

In further response to Twitter's elitist status, it was noted that Twitter is a conversation catalyst on social media. Also, although Twitter's penetration rate in Nigeria was a lot lower than Facebook's, the increasingly porous and interconnected nature of social media meant that even though conversations start on Twitter, they do not remain there. They permeate the other social networks, thereby expanding the scope of the conversation. Chimelu pointed this out as follows:

> A good majority of the conversation that happens on Facebook is as a result of what takes place on Twitter.
>
> - Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018

Furthermore, in examining subscription numbers on Twitter versus Facebook, as well as the inverse roles the two social network giants play in politics, one response was as follows:

> Although Twitter does not have anything remotely approaching the numbers of Facebook users, in many ways, it's more influential of politics and it's precisely because of the kind of energy it generates.
>
> - Kalu, personal communication, October 26, 2018

Based on this statement, Kalu acknowledged the disparity in numbers between Facebook and Twitter, with Twitter having significantly lower subscription numbers. In spite of this, however, he argued that Twitter remains the more influential social network in the Nigerian political sphere.

6.42 Influencing Public Opinion on Twitter

As already stated, Twitter use by influencers is intentional and very calculated. Political engagement on Twitter is considered a war of sorts in that sometimes the goal of the war is not to win but simply to generate engagement and, if luck permits, traction and engagement. As one respondent said in an interview,

> I like Twitter. I have almost 40,000 followers, so I have learned how to handle people who disagree with me. It's either I ignore, or I engage. If I'm

> going to engage [with] you, I do so selfishly. My engagement with you benefits me in a way – Will it give me more exposure? Will it make more people know me and follow me? Will it make me be able to shut you up forever by ensuring you and every other person listening know that you actually don't have any stuff to give? Will it in any way benefit every other person in the audience by bringing some new information to the fore?
>
> - Ofor, personal communication, September 17, 2018

Ofor's comment paints a clear picture of his motives as an influencer engaging on Twitter. For any form of engagement to be worth his time and effort, there must be some intrinsic or extrinsic value that could benefit him directly or indirectly, for him to gauge. This is suggestively representative of the mindset with which some influencers engage with negative comments online. For the Twitter influencer, the choice of whether to engage is determined by whether the challenger or issue is worth the effort – in other words, whether the engagement would be beneficial to either party or both parties. Thus, there is always an underlying intrinsic or extrinsic goal.

6.43 Welcoming the New: The Digital Public Sphere

Twitter fulfils Habermas' description of the public sphere as a domain of social life, which is accessible to individuals who wish to share opinions freely and publicly. Although this space is not being accessed by everyone, it is becoming easier to access the digital space. The cost of access is very low in Nigeria, with cheap smartphones available and increasing competition making telecommunications companies further reduces the cost of entry. Again, even though the penetration rate is low and access is available, it is a choice to be made freely. So far, the number of users is lower than on Facebook and Instagram.

Social media have taken up some crucial space previously occupied by mainstream media. What makes them even better is the fact that they provide far more access than traditional media do. Having Twitter as a political public sphere has been advantageous to the Nigerian citizen. In the past, political communication was filled with propaganda as the politicians, their parties, and other elites in the society defined the discourse around an election. Now, the electorate feels empowered to contribute to shaping the discourse through new media.

However, not everyone on social media initiates discourse. Those who do so utilise that space intentionally and could very easily drive the conversation whichever way they choose. For example, the Chibok girls' abduction became a political issue during the 2015 elections

because a group of individuals worked to make it so by tweeting about it, discussing it on other social media platforms, and going out and getting mainstream media coverage, as well as by holding marches and other activist activities.

In Nigeria, a society in which freedom of speech is increasingly at risk, Twitter has become a safe haven of free speech, especially when users engage anonymously or with pseudo identities. Developments over the past few years have demonstrated that there is an increasing threat to these fundamental freedoms, with opposing voices being arrested by government forces and jailed without due process. Citizens are afraid to speak openly and see social media as their only outlet for self-expression. One of the respondents, a journalist, recounted an experience of trying to conduct random on-street interviews for a vox pop:

> It's been tough. Nobody wants to talk about elections. When I go to people, even educated middle-class people that you think would want to say, 'Oh, this is what I think,' nobody wants to do that. They're afraid.
>
> - Angela, personal communication, September 14, 2018

She continued:

> It's hard for people to talk about the elections, particularly for people to speak against vote buying. Social media is awash with people who have one opinion or the other. Maybe why they're able to speak freely is because a lot of them are semi-anonymous, so it's easier.
>
> - Angela, personal communication, September 14, 2018

In her quest to get the reactions of individuals regarding the resignation of a federal minister that was shrouded in scandal and fraud, the case was the same: no one wanted to speak.

> I've spoken to about eight people and everybody says, 'Oh I'll give you a call back.' I've not had anybody call me back to talk about it because they're worried and they don't want to be on record.
>
> - Angela, personal communication, September 14, 2018

These responses echo the laments heard during diverse conversations while on the field trip, where there has been increasing negativity about the role that the media play in abuse of power and speech censorship. Comparing the former presidency (under Goodluck Jonathan's leadership and before) with the current one, citizens seem less inclined to talk to the press for fear of being targeted by the government and arrested for publicly airing their disenchantments with the leadership. People feel that they are losing their voice in what is supposed to be a democracy but what is instead, according to many, a return of military rule characterised by government-imposed restrictions on speech, both for the press and ordinary citizens.

The anonymity that social media afford users has enabled political activity where there seems to be a level of speech suppression, as well as both covert and overt targeting of and punitive measures taken against the vociferous within Nigerian society. In a culture where individuals once engaged in public and private political debates as a favourite pastime activity, citizens have now become less inclined to air their political views publicly. They have chosen instead to take to social media to express their suppressed voices.

6.44 Social Media: The Good and the Bad

While on the one hand new and social media are viewed as revolutionary in the way, on the other hand they have contributed to changes in political landscapes globally by reinforcing engagement and being the new tools and spaces that drive activism. It is important to also acknowledge that they have not only had positive effects. They have also generated a new wave of problems that threaten to undermine the same ideologies they promote.

New developments over the past half-decade have shown how the same tools that are used to promote inclusive democracies are also used to thwart them. Matsilele (2019) addresses this from the viewpoint of activism, explaining how social media have heightened the complexities of dissidence and how, as tools, they are both beneficial and detrimental to activists because while they are helpful tools for challenging governments, they are also helpful tools for their adversaries with which to challenge the activists.

How this plays out in an election is not necessarily bad. It means that political parties and their candidates have equal access despite funding to challenge one another, which could contribute to a more rigorous political process. Voters along party divides can also engage without restricted access. Where this has become detrimental is where tools for engagement have become tools of abuse. Such instances have been seen when social media users abuse politicians instead of facilitating useful engagement (Theocharis et al. 2016; Yannis et al. 2016). Like Theocharis et al. (2016) have noted, many politicians have ceased to engage meaningfully in social media spaces and only use those spaces to disseminate information as a one-sided exercise.

6.45 Fake News and Counterbalancing Fake News

The other aspect of the negative impact of social media is what Dunu (2018) observed in her study as the proliferation of misinformation, disinformation and hate speech on these new

media platforms. These new waves of information dissemination can only be detrimental to democracies, as was exemplified explicitly in the 2016 US presidential campaigns (Grinberg et al. 2019). In the 2015 Nigerian case, this was particularly prevalent on Election Day with deliberate disinformation rampant on social media, especially Twitter.

Figure 6.7: Calling out fake news on the net during the 2019 elections
Source: Atiku via Twitter

The Department of State Services (DSS), also known as the State Security Service (SSS) (PEBEC 2018), is the primary domestic intelligence agency of Nigeria. Nigeria has a history of violence during elections, which usually escalates during presidential elections. Because of this history, individuals and groups that want to distort the elections take advantage of this to propagate their own agenda by spreading fake news about violence and other common electoral issues during elections. By doing this, they hope to prevent people from going to vote or to aggravate violence in areas of interest to them. For election observers and monitors, this becomes part of their duties on Election Day – to monitor, report on, and verify or invalidate information coming from social media.

A typical example of this is the Tweet above (image on the left above) from 16 February 2019 that claimed security officials, purportedly sent by the incumbent government, had attacked the officials of the opposition party in their situation room. The Twitter handle bore the name of the challenging candidate for the 2019 elections, former Vice President Atiku Abubakar, and had the name of his political party in the Twitter handle, which all made it seem real. With the recent harassment and arrests of citizens who are opposing voices to the

incumbent president and his government by the DSS (Busari & Adebayo 2019), it is easy to see how this claim could be believed, which could in turn easily aggravate citizens towards violence or fear. What is more tactical and compelling is that 16 February was Election Day until it was postponed at midnight on this day by the independent electoral commission (BBC News 2019). The frustration that the electorate already felt from this postponement after weeks of being told by INEC that they were ready to go to the polls would have been sufficient to spark violence.

For the social media user who is not technologically competent or simply does not care to fact-check, this becomes truth. However, a very quick online investigation would reveal the authentic, verified Twitter handle of the candidate (image on the right above) (Twitter n.d.).

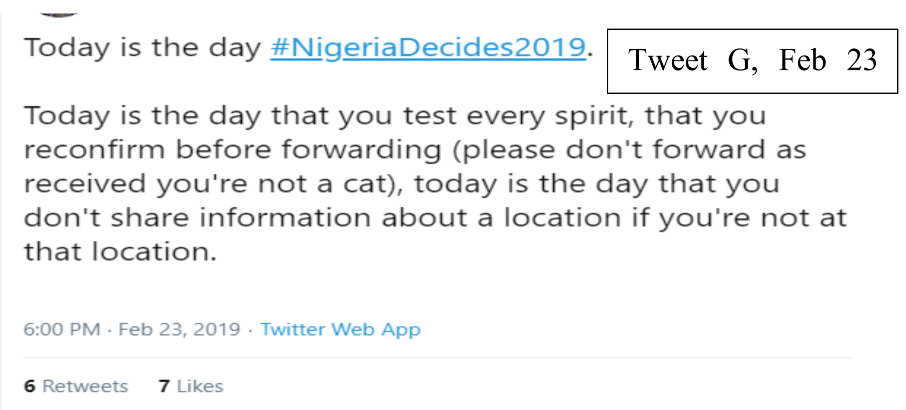


Figure 6.8: Test every spirit - A call to verify before sharing, Election Day 2019
Source: Twitter

Another instance of fake news that the research unearthed was a video file shared by one of the participants who, although working in the information technology industry and who, therefore, was assumed to have some level of technological savvy, identified as a follower and used Twitter as his primary source of political information. He used a video file to buttress a point he had made earlier about how politicians engage in community-based vote buying as part of their campaign strategies.

A Google search revealed the source of the video, shared on Twitter in January 2018 by *Sahara Reporters*, a well-known news organisation. It was a clip from a public and well-attended event in the state of Osun in south-west Nigeria. It showed a gubernatorial candidate of the State giving cash and *Ankara* (a native African print fabric usually sewn into clothing) to rural women. A policeman and another security officer were nearby, presumably for his

protection. The caption given by the video publisher very easily painted the politician in a very negative light.

Figure 6.9: Gubernatorial aspirant giving away cash and Ankara
Source: (Sahara Reporters via Twitter 2019)

Finding the original Twitter post by *Sahara Reporters* was beneficial because it revealed that there was some debate over the contents of the Tweet through the thread on Twitter. While some agreed that it was a vote buying strategy by the gubernatorial aspirant for Osun State governorship elections scheduled for later that year, others claimed that it was part of an annual non-profit event for widows organised by a prominent Nigerian pastor in his hometown, to which the politician had been invited. One response acknowledged that it was an outreach event held by the prominent pastor but that the politician had used it to advance his own political

ambitions. Scenes like this, however, are not novel vote buying strategies in the country. They are commonplace – especially in rural areas – and, as a result, easily believable.

Armed with some information from the controversial responses to the original tweet, further online research was done on Google by searching for the named pastor, his church, and the event as claimed by some responders to the Tweet (see Figure 24 below).

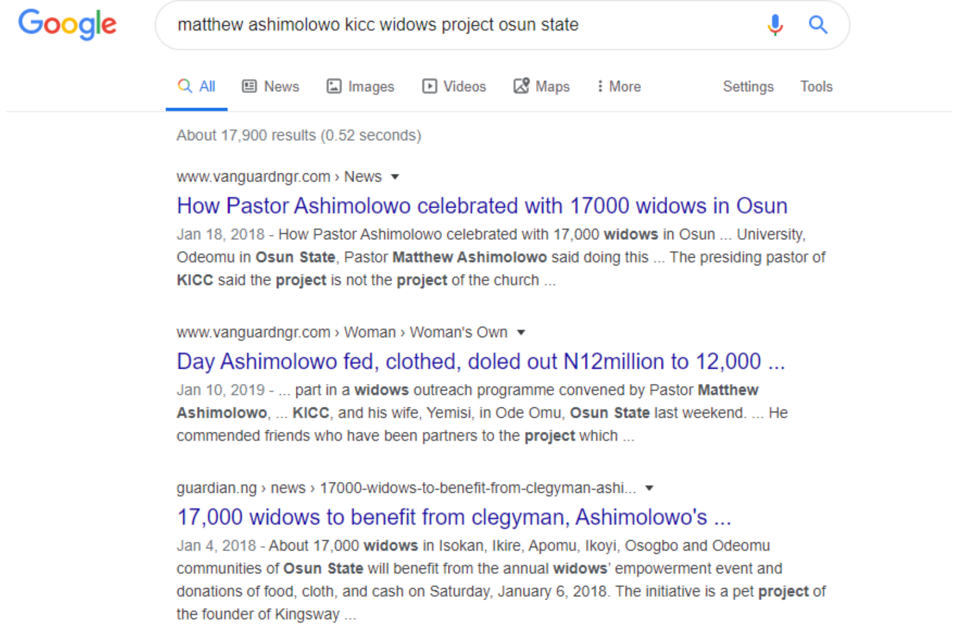


Figure 6.10: Things are not always what they seem: Verifying social media news online
Source: Google.com.au

One of the 17,900 results from Google was a headline from the church's website:

Figure 6.11: Following the trail to verify networked news
Source: Google.com.au

Further enquiry following that link eventually led to a YouTube video (KICCOnline 2018) that showed highlights of the event. Part of the highlights showed the pastor and several other people giving away money and *Ankara* to widows. It also showed the pastor welcoming this politician (shown in the Twitter video clip), wearing the same clothes, with the same faces around him as shown on Twitter. He was also shown giving out cash and fabric to women in the same manner seen in the Twitter video.

This perspective, with its appropriate context, completely exonerated him from the blatant allegations made by the news organisation. It demonstrates the ease with which fake news is manufactured and proliferated. It also illustrates how easy it is to be misinformed or disinformed in a technologically driven society in which the manipulation of information has become increasingly easy, even for individuals with only the basic knowledge of editing tools. It also demonstrates that so-called credible media organisations can also be sources of false information.

The idea that "if it comes from that source, it must be credible" automatically becomes debunked. News media organisations can also be sources of misinformation and disinformation. In fact, the platform upon which they operate allows them to be more successful at it because followers are more likely to believe them. Ofor alluded to this when he talked about his status as an influencer. He said that being verified on Twitter gives him an advantage because of the assumption that many users make that his verification status means that he is a mouthpiece for Twitter and that his verification status means that Twitter agrees with whatever he says.

Fake news has proliferated on social media in full fashion of the pandemic it has become, and this has been evidenced during the Nigerian elections. Election observers and ordinary citizens alike worked to counter spurious information when it reared online. As one election monitor-cum-observer said,

> While in 2011 we were just focused on receiving reports from people who were tweeting, et cetera, now we actually had election monitors who could verify reports.
>
> When we get any report as it were: 'violence is going [on] down here, they're burning this, they're doing that,' then we ask our election monitors: 'Who's the closest person to this place? Can you verify this?' And if there was indeed an incident, we had an incident escalation team who would send such messages to INEC, to security forces, et cetera et cetera. But if there wasn't, then we would tweet and say, 'Hey, there's nothing going on here; this is false information.'
>
> - Elochukwu, personal communication, August 31, 2018

Elochukwu also recounted that the information management and fake news mitigation process became more sophisticated in the 2019 elections:

> Two things changed with these elections. The first was the monitoring work we were doing. We were not only looking at incidents we were pulling off our hashtags and keywords sent into our software, we were also verifying these incidents from observers in the field. So, in 2015 we would receive these incidents, and we would send them off to the various teams. For instance, we had someone from INEC receiving information from us, we had someone from the NSA office, we had someone from the police. But this time, we created a verification team that would engage directly with observers from various NGOs who were already on the field. So, for instance, if we got a call saying there's some violence going on in Wuse market, we would look through our list, and because it was already programmed through the system, we would send them a message which they had to respond to, and they also had to check in with us at various points during the day.
>
> - Elochukwu, WhatsApp interview, October 2019

This development was significant because it demonstrated that lessons learned from previous elections were constantly being used to improve future elections. Furthermore, election observers were crucial resources to the entire electoral process. They played key roles in mitigating misinformation and disinformation, which was especially being perpetuated using online agents. In this case, Twitter was the source of the problem, but it was also the solution.

Key elements that were pertinent to mitigating the online falsehoods were the establishment of credibility by organisations and the presence of individuals who had positioned themselves as influencers. As one such person said,

> …I have managed to become a voice on Twitter. I would say I'm a political voice, a social voice, and a lot of people trust in what I say. I try as much as possible to be as truthful...as factual…as possible in anything I do because a lot of people actually take things out of what I say – they believe what I say; they trust my opinion.
>
> - Ofor, personal communication, September 17, 2018

This comment gives an insight into the goal of social media influencers in their expressions and interactions. Building trust is a strategic goal that is achieved through intentional deliberation and action. By curating the content that they put out there, they position themselves as trustworthy voices, which allows them to earn the trust of their followers. These deliberate actions pay off, especially when there is evidence that the quality and credibility of the

information that the influencer puts out on Twitter is consistent. For Ofor, this paid off during the 2015 electoral campaigns, during which he supported the challenger:

> I remember there was a video that was done by the PDP about Buhari. It was a damning video where they painted him as an evil guy and painted him as a demon. I watched the video, and I knew it was damaging. If nobody responded in an intelligent manner to this video... So, I took my time [and] watched the video. I took the points that were made in the video and did my research. And the outcome of that research, I shared it via my Twitter. It went viral because people were now sharing it on Facebook, and it went a long way in correcting some of the falsehoods and half-truths that were told that video. That was the role I played – I played the role of fact-checking.
>
> - Ofor, personal communication, September 17, 2018

The only problem with this, however, is that sometimes trust is earned based on misplaced or misconstrued perceptions of who the voice represents. Ofor put this in perspective when he said:

> I'm also verified on Twitter, [and so] they believe that 'Whatever this guy is saying, Twitter agrees with him.'
>
> - Ofor, personal communication, September 17, 2018

The idea that being verified on Twitter equates to being verified or endorsed by the company as an authentic voice and an authorised representative of the company is a fallacy. Unfortunately, many users who are not technologically or social media savvy may subscribe to this opinion, leading them to believe that statements or views presented by the verified Twitter user are also those of Twitter.

6.46 Perceptions of Social Media Use in Political Participation

Although social media have demonstrated that they can add value to politics and participation, the extent of this value is yet to be determined. Furthermore, the perceptions of their use and their roles in elections are still unclear. This research set out to find out what their role in elections is, and this can be categorised into two dimensions, which are alternately emphasised depending on what lens or lenses with which an observer chooses to navigate them.

Perceptions of social media are predominantly positive in Nigeria, and the resulting ecosystem has only grown larger over time. While Facebook was used in the 2011 elections,

Twitter became the front-runner for political news and engagement in the country in the 2015 elections.

Echo Chamber

This research found a dichotomy in the notion of Twitter as an echo chamber. Of those who used Twitter, particularly influencers, there was a greater tendency to follow other influencers than to follow political parties.

Only three of the social media influencers out of seven in that participant category followed political parties. Two of them followed only the political party that they opposed – either the All Progressive Party (APC) or the People's Democratic Party (PDP). One influencer who supported the PDP followed the APC, and the other who supported the APC followed the PDP. The third person, who did not identify as partisan during the interview, followed the PDP but did not follow the APC, which has been the ruling party since 2015. Although he did not identify as partisan, his ethnic and religious demographics – Igbo and Christian – largely suggested that he was a PDP supporter.

Conversely, participants who were on Twitter were more likely to follow other influencers online regardless of whether they shared similar ideologies. The influencers amongst them followed each other and other well-known influencers in the Nigerian Twittersphere. This suggests that the notion of Twitter as an echo chamber was not the case in this study group and that the findings can be extended to Nigerians who use Twitter for political purposes. The sheer level of engagement and debate that occurs within the sphere disabuses the notion that an echo chamber exists in that space; rather, it validates the claims that Twitter is the ideal digital representative of Habermas' public sphere in which all ideas and opinions are welcomed – invited, even – to help drive high-level discourse.

The study showed a strong tendency for people to follow users who produce content that is of interest to them (as was the case with all of the online participants in this study). However, evidence from the study also indicated an openness to receive information from perspectives similar to one's own and to invite, welcome, and engage with divergent voices. Ofor's account of his use of Twitter highlights this as well:

> I could just sit and in my head ask myself a question and answer the question but feel I need a second opinion, so I tweet it and other people react. There are other times when I just want a conversation to be had, and I know people react to a lot of things I do on Twitter. So, I start the conversation knowing there will be a reaction – it could be on a national issue, it could be a social issue, it could be sports, it could be anything – it could be a movie, it could

> be music. Then, sometimes, I just want to ruffle [feathers]; I just want to shake the tree. I want people who have a different opinion from me to come and canvas their opinion, [to] canvas their dissent to whatever positions I hold.
>
> \- Ofor, personal conversation, September 17, 2018

Ofor's account identifies three reasons why he uses Twitter: (1) to get a second opinion; (2) to start a conversation; and (3) to solicit and engage with divergent opinions. Although these reasons are personal to Ofor and were not specifically shared by the other users in this participant group, they show how these motives for engagement on digital platforms can be generalised to much larger scales. Twitter specifically is not just a medium for connecting with people who have similar ideologies through the invitation of only like-minded people into one's sphere; the polarisation of opinions and ideologies within that sphere makes it impossible to negate the influx of divergent opinions into one's space.

6.5 Role(s) of Social Media in Political Communication

For election observers, Twitter has become an invaluable tool that facilitates not just political discourse surrounding the elections, but also information and news gathering and dissemination. Participants discussed how this played out during the elections and how that impacted the work of election observers.

6.51 Accessibility and Accountability via Social Media

One of the ways that social media use differs between Western and non-Western contexts is their use as a primary accessibility and accountability tool for governance. In essence, they act as a watchdog in the same manner as traditional media. The main difference between these new forms of mediation and the traditional is that new media have given more power to everyday citizens, allowing them access to public servants without the mediator that traditional media need. However, this is not without challenges that are embedded in culture and history, particularly that of a disconnect that has prevailed in Nigerian society between public servants and their constituents.

6.52 Election Monitoring and Observation with Social Media

Social media are accountability tools that have proven to be useful to election management, monitoring and observation activities in Nigeria.

> Elections are big business in Nigeria. Big, big, big business. There's a lot of international funding, and a lot of people give proposals to the big donors, and then they give them money. So, everyone's monitoring. And so I remember we were working out of the [hotel name withheld], and pretty much every room on our floor was taken by some election monitoring group or the other. There was also [hotel name withheld] in Wuse 2. All their conference rooms were taken up by people. I think they have 3 or 4. Then there was…this other hotel in Garki, which is just by [landmark name withheld]. [Hotel name withheld]. That one too was taken over. So, I'm like, 'Everyone's monitoring; who's voting?
>
> - Elochukwu, personal communication, August 31, 2018

As has become customary for Nigerian elections since the transition from military to civilian rule in 1999, the 2015 general elections saw a convention of diverse bodies, both local and international, conducting election monitoring and observation activities in Nigeria. There were obviously collaborative efforts between election observation agencies, the independent body, INEC, which oversaw electoral management and monitoring, and law enforcement agencies that made for more effective execution of electoral duties across the board.

> Something that was called the Situation Room was created for INEC, and there were people that were monitoring things online.
>
> Every election cycle, especially on Election Day, INEC has a situation room that is open for 72 hours - the day before, the day of, and the day after. And why it's there is because they need to be able to figure out what exactly is happening on that day
>
> - Fatima, personal communication, October 26, 2018

Social media were not stand-alone tools used by election monitoring and/or observation bodies. Rather, they were part of a combination (or cocktail) of digital tools designed to interface and interact with each other in order to facilitate an electoral exercise as effectively and seamlessly as possible. Like a participant described:

> 2011 was the first time Nigeria used social media for her elections. We had two software. One of them was *Ushahidi*…and we were also using ELMO, which is [an] election management system. [In] 2015, I ended up monitoring elections again, this time using just ELMO… and we expanded to incorporate entries from Twitter [and] from Facebook as well.
>
> - Elochukwu, WhatsApp interview, October 2019

The *Situation Room*, which was introduced during the Nigerian elections in 2010 (Nigeria Civil Society Situation Room n.d.), is a one-stop hub of electoral monitoring and observation activities. Key election observation and monitoring bodies, as well as key agencies, such as law enforcement agencies, are represented there, and information is shared between parties. Election management and monitoring bodies rely heavily on Twitter during elections. The *Situation Room*, which is set up prior to Election Day, is a hub of digital activity that includes monitoring Twitter and other social media. This is done for the purposes of information gathering, verification, and dissemination. However, social media are not stand-alone tools for election monitoring; rather, they are part of an amalgamation of digital and non-digital resources used in electoral management.

Furthermore, although Twitter is a primary location for information gathering, it is not a tool for correspondence among the management and monitoring teams. WhatsApp is a more effective tool for that because it allows for closed-circuit communication, which ensures that information gathered is first curated before being shared on Twitter and other social networks. Furthermore, as has been found by other researchers such as Cheeseman (2019) and Hitchen et al. (2019), this tool is quickly becoming the social networking giant of Nigerian elections.

6.53 Does Twitter Win Elections?

Opinion on the role of Twitter in elections was unanimous: Twitter does not win elections. All the participants agreed on this one fact regardless of their age bracket, level of digital media expertise, party or candidate affiliations, and geographical location (urban or rural).

According to Moore (2015), ‘Twitter is one of the best social media platforms for conveying political messages in bite-size pieces to an electorate with an ever-decreasing attention span.’ The rise of political influencers in the medium, in addition to the increasing use of the medium for political undertakings by politicians and political parties, validates this fact and places Twitter in an undeniable position amongst the plethora of social networking sites. Although it became the go-to platform for election discourse in the Nigerian elections in 2015, taking the number one spot from Facebook, whose position it was in the prior election (Oyesomi, Ahmadu & Itsekor 2014), it would seem that a consensus on what Twitter does not do cuts across the board.

> Twitter doesn’t win elections.
>
> - Kalu, personal communication, October 26, 2018

> I wouldn't say Twitter or social media played a decisive [role] at all.
>
> - Ofor, personal communication, September 17, 2018

> Social media was noisy about the elections,…but people on social media did not win the election, because at the end of the day when you look at the stats, when you look at the percentage, you will see that it was mostly students, young people, [and] older people from rural communities that actually went out to vote. These are the people that don't care about waiting in the sun for hours to get registered; they don't care about standing for 20 hours. They will stay there for 20 hours, they will vote, and then they will go home and sleep.
>
> - Fatima, personal communication, October 26, 2018

This finding supports outcomes of other elections in which Twitter has been touted as a key medium, such as the most recent UK elections, in which Twitter polls predicted a landslide win for the *Labour Party*. It also suggests a debunking of the idea that *Cambridge Analytica* played any significant role in the outcome of the 2016 US presidential elections. However, it is worth noting that cultural contexts could hold greater weight on the role of any social network in political outcomes. Depending on what expectations are for Twitter's role in elections, it would be very easy to understate the role of the microblog as a platform for political discourse.

First is the necessity to evaluate each election within its cultural context – in this case, Western versus non-Western. For example, Internet user penetration in the United States was 84.1% as of 2018 (Statista 2019b), and in contrast, Internet user penetration in Nigeria was 47.1% as of 2018 (Statista 2019a). These numbers were at 85.54% and 36% during the 2016 US presidential elections and the 2015 Nigerian presidential elections, respectively (Statista 2019c, 2019d), an approximate ratio of 2:1. Furthermore, statistical estimates suggest an increase to 93.7% in the US and a surge of nearly 100% growth to a reach of 84.5% in Nigeria, both by 2023. In addition, as of January 2020, active social media usage sits at 70% in the United States and at 13% in Nigeria, with a global average of 49%.

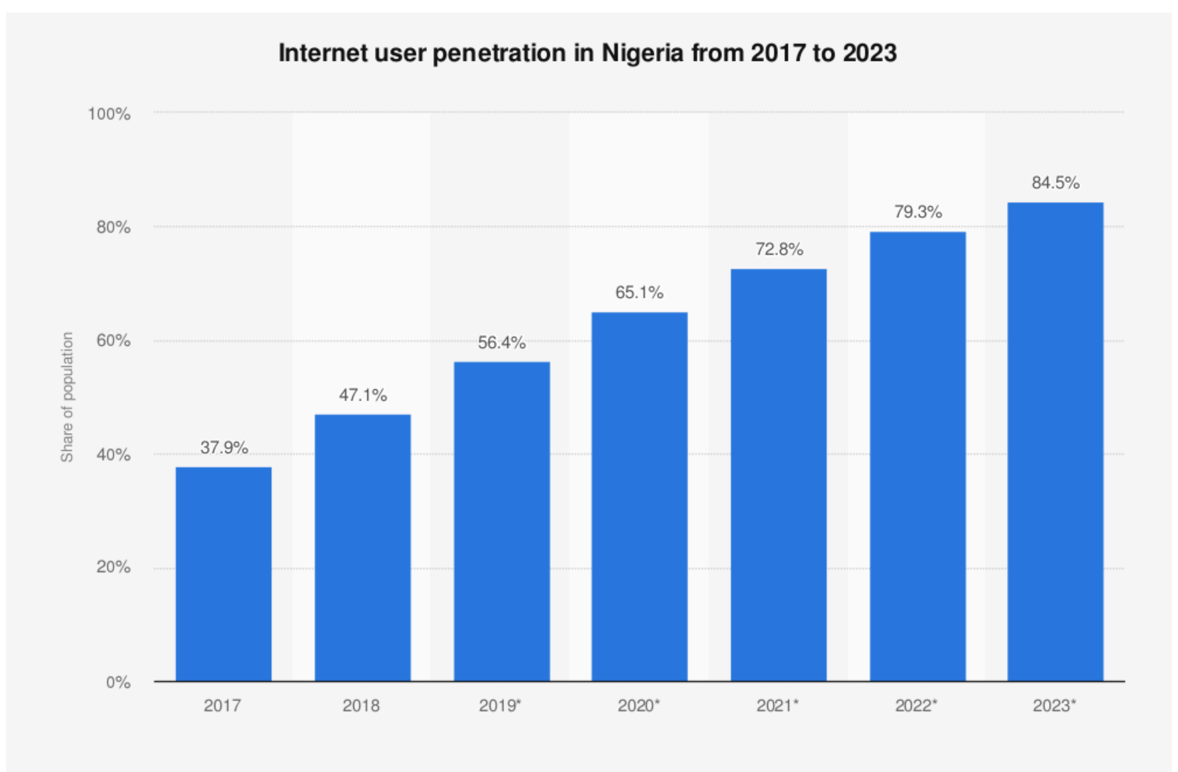


Figure 6.12: Internet user penetration in Nigeria from 2017 to 2023
Source: Statista (2019b)

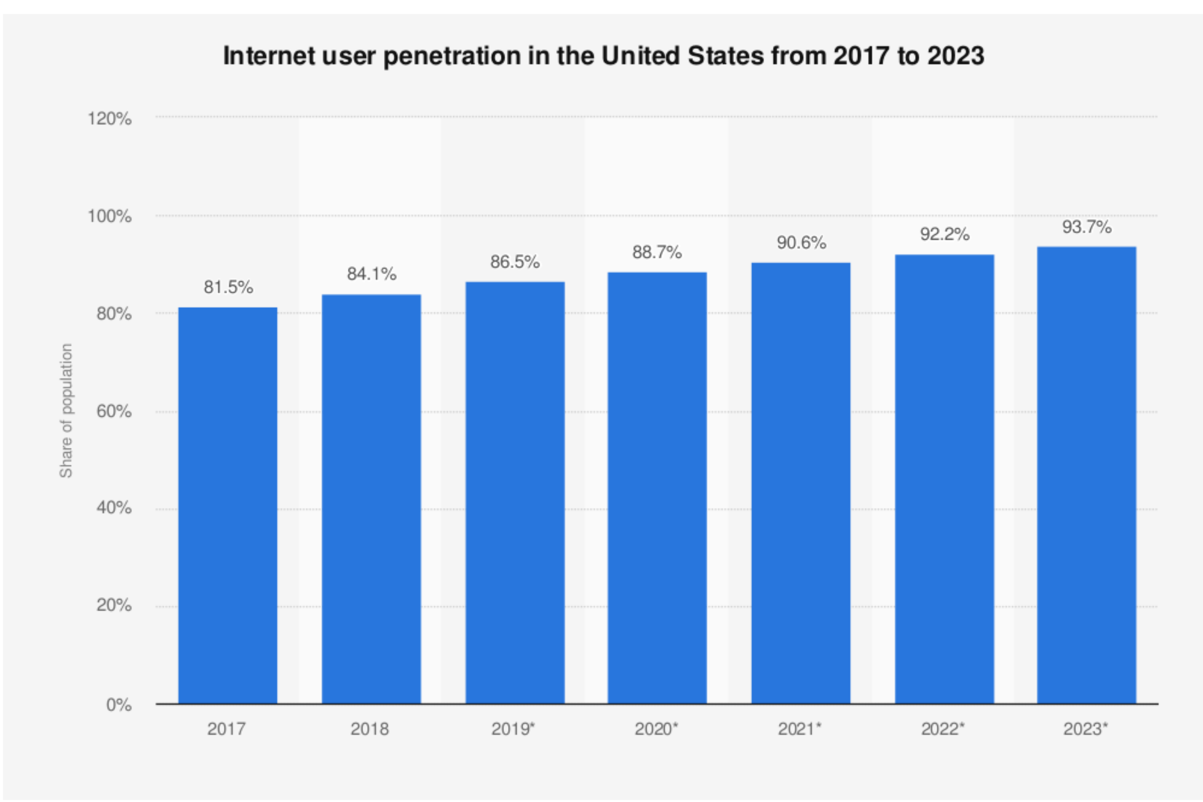


Figure 6.13: Internet user penetration in the United States from 2017 to 2023
Source: Statista (2019a)

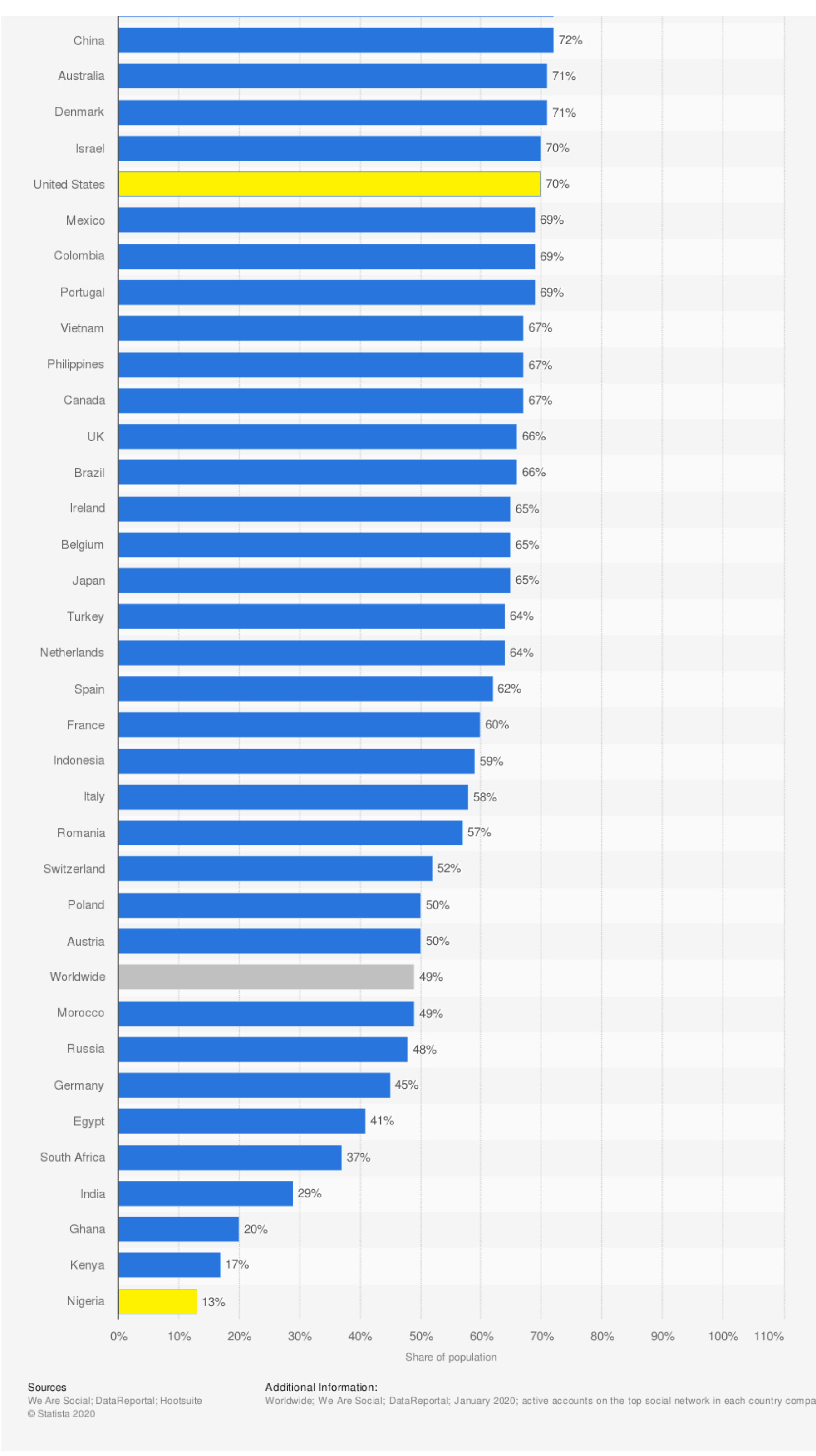


Figure 6.14: Active social network penetration in selected countries as of January 2020
Source: We Are Social, DataReportal & Hootsuite (2020)

These figures show that there was a well-established culture of the Internet and social media use in the US, while Nigeria was still in the early stages of penetration use at the time of the case study elections. Therefore, it is valid to assume that that social media will have a more significant impact in determining the outcome of elections where there is a recognised high level of usage.

Fatima's response speaks to another facet of electoral activities in Nigeria: Who votes in elections? Most participants in this research did not vote in the elections, and this majority were educated, young people who reside in urban cities, many of whom are active social media users, especially of Twitter. When asked why they did not vote, their responses ranged from having not registered to vote in the elections to not believing in the system and considering the electoral exercise a waste of time. While the sentiments and excuses shared might be valid, they suggest the reality that online political participation does not necessarily translate to basic offline political actions such as voting.

> By the time the 2015 elections rolled by, I had come back to Nigeria, but not in time to be able to register. And even then I did try, you know one of the last few days, but I guess I was more interested in stopping people from paying …yeah…paying some sort of inducement to the soldiers at the venue to let them get to the front of the line to register.
>
> - Elochukwu, personal communication, August 31, 2018

> No. I wasn't registered. I just got back to Nigeria, and the registration process was not clearly defined. I still had the time to register, but it wasn't clearly defined, and I just couldn't be bothered.
>
> - Omola, personal communication, September 22, 2018

> No. Because I don't think my vote counts. For starters, most people that go to vote, it's not the result [of the vote they cast] that's presented. [The authorities] just make up figures.
>
> - Ngozi, personal communication, September 29, 2018

Bola's sentiments ran somewhat different, or perhaps deeper, in acknowledging that she did not see any candidate who was worthy of her vote. She said:

> No, I didn't vote in 2015 elections, but I voted in the election before that one. Because I didn't have a candidate that I would want to vote for. We had several candidates, but there was none that was credible enough for me to vote for as our president. And I know people will say, 'Oh well, not making a decision is making a decision. Not voting for one is allowing whoever [else] get in there.' But there was no one I could vote for. It was so bad for me I couldn't make up my mind. As a matter of fact, I didn't have to make up my mind…I didn't want any of them. There was no one I would have wanted to vote for, so I just stayed home and prayed for the best.

- Bola, personal communication, September 23, 2018

These sentiments reflect the mindset of many Nigerians who exclude themselves from the electoral process. Like Omola, some people – especially urban dwellers – cannot be bothered to go through the rigorous process of getting their names added to the electoral roll. From personal experience, this is an arduous process that takes an entire day when living in the city, especially as Election Day looms closer. For the researcher, the process started at 5:00 a.m. and ended after 4:00 p.m. on the same day. For others, it required returning the following day and starting the process all over again, so it is no wonder that many do not bother with it.

For people like Ngozi, the utter disbelief in the system and in politicians means that they do not believe that the time taken to go cast their vote will add any value because the entire system is rigged. For idealists like Bola, they would rather not engage in the process by abstaining than cast a vote for any candidate they do not believe in. The idea of casting one's vote where one does not have utter faith was discussed with another participant, Chimelu. This participant said he could not believe that he was campaigning for and intended to vote for Atiku in the 2019 elections. His logic was that it was all about strategy and the belief that if you wanted something gone, you had to examine all options and make compromises. One compromise, for him, was acknowledging that the incumbent had a faithful following of around 12 million voters, given his record over the past elections during which he vied for the same office, but failed. For that number to be trumped, there needed to be a strategy to harness as many votes as possible for the next most likely candidate. If votes were spattered amongst candidates who would not win anyway because they only had a minimal following, however ideal they may be for office, then defeat was already guaranteed.

The second is an evaluation of Twitter's role not just as a public sphere for political discourse, but also as a perception influencer. Literally, the goal of influencers is to influence their followers. On Twitter, this means shaping the conversation, and if this is done effectively, facilitating a swing in perception on issues and, ultimately, on belief systems. Twitter, just like other social media platforms, is not in silos; social media are interconnected, and their interconnectivity has only improved over the past decade and a half since they were first deployed.

Figure 6.15 Buhari in rural Nigeria – 2015 election campaign
Source: Twitter (May 15, 2018)

The accompanying post to Figure 6.15, which was a criticism of the idea that politics is elitist and an acknowledgement that the rural areas wielded greater political power, read:

> 'Make una dey continue dey do Facebook and Twitter @panorama live election campaign! When #NigeriaDecides2019 land una go realise say "all politics dey local"' (Source: Twitter).

Translation:

> You all should continue with your Facebook and Twitter @panorama live election campaigns! When #NigeriaDecides2019 (that is, the 2019

presidential election) arrives (or happens), you will then realise that "all politics is local!" (Source: Author).

Figure 6.16 Voters at a polling station in rural Nigeria
Source: The New York Times (2019)

PR Week called the 2015 Nigerian elections 'The Twitter Election' (Moore 2015), a headline that suggests that the election's outcome was borne from political activities – the different caucuses of discourse that occurred – on Twitter. Nevertheless, these respondents' comments debunk the idea that Twitter, or social media in general, can win elections Fatima, who worked with the electoral body during the elections, gave a response that effectively paints a picture of the electoral outcome and how little a role Twitter played based on the demographics of the majority of the Nigerian electorate that actually goes to the polls to place a ballot. Another participant further emphasised the effectiveness of electoral dynamics in Nigeria to facilitate a better understanding of how politics works in its context:

> If you look at the […] voting dynamics in Nigeria, you will discover that there are three things that shape who you vote for. One: Religion. Whether you like it or not, Nigeria is not developed to that point where we can overlook religion. Two: Tribe. Where is the person from? It is my brother,

> whether he is dead and cannot perform, let's vote him there. The third one is money. These are the three things that go a long way to determine who most people vote for in an election.
>
> - Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018

Here, Chimelu reiterates one key argument of this thesis, namely that there are cultural factors that strongly affect political decisions in Nigeria: religion, ethnicity, and economics.

6.54 Political Engagement: The Role of Twitter in Elections

This thesis argues that Twitter does not win elections. However, it also makes a case for Twitter as an invaluable political asset. It has produced a new crop of political participants, particularly amongst youths, who otherwise would not engage in political discourse. This pertinent feature is especially invaluable to countries where youth political participation is notoriously low. The use of Twitter was a key part of the strategy that the Obama presidential campaign used to get the youth population to not just go out and vote on Election Day and to engage more than usual with the political and electoral process.

In asserting that Twitter does not win elections, participants also argued for its place in politics in the technology and information age:

> NO! Twitter doesn't win elections. However, Twitter does help in many ways. There is interactivity between political behaviour online and political behaviour offline, and as I said, Twitter gives mood intelligence. With that mood intelligence, you can make rough calculations as to where energy is on a particular case…But it's not about numbers and matrix of voting, it's about energy levels and where the enthusiasm is, and elections sometimes is about enthusiasm. So in that sense, it just offers you intelligence on where the numbers...as to which party has more energy. But those are not the only things that determine electoral outcomes in Nigeria; there are lots of other factors in the mix, that's why I say Twitter doesn't win elections.
>
> - Kalu, personal communication, September 26, 2018

Twitter's position in political discourse has certainly taken more of a frontal position than that of a backchannel. This demonstrates an evolution of the platform and a shift from the claims of previous works. This is not intended to challenge previous scholarship, but rather to point out that there has been and still is an ongoing shift in the narrative on how social media are used. The perpetual use of the medium by the United States President Donald Trump and subsequent commentaries made on his tweets by American broadcast media, with the inclusion of daytime and night-time television shows, is just further evidence that demonstrates its

increasing importance in the political scene. Vong & Hok (2018) make similar observations about Facebook use in Cambodia and its efficacy as a political tool.

Although, like the participants echoed, Twitter does not win elections, it has presented itself as a novel, digital public sphere, validated by political engagement among users on the network and supported by the idea that political communication – particularly political talk – is a form of political participation (Waller 2013). However, the likelihood that voters will remain engaged and participate in the political process when they use the Internet for gathering and processing political information, which Kirk & Schill (2011) argue, is not fully supported based on the Nigerian case.

6.6 Summary

This chapter addressed components of the empirical study that specifically examine the role of social media in elections, outlined into themes covering perceptions of social media and political participation and social media uses and functions during elections, as articulated by interview respondents. Results from the qualitative data provided insights into the themes associated with political communication and social media that are addressed in this research.

The data show that Twitter plays diverse roles in politics, specifically during elections, and that its effects can be perceived as positive or negative. Its roles are defined by or tailored to the user and are centred on information sourcing and dissemination. There is a consensus that Twitter does not win elections, although it might contribute to the process as a valuable information channel and a crucial public sphere. Within the cultural context examined, there are several factors at play in politics, including religion and ethnicity. Therefore, social media use on its own does not suffice to determine electoral outcomes.

Social media, however, are useful for deciphering public opinion and obtaining mood intelligence pertaining to socio-political issues, political parties, and candidates. Furthermore, social media have significantly influenced and tangibly contributed to cultural perceptions of right and wrong by being an agora for deliberation and the airing of contrasting opinions. In turn, culture is a determining factor for how social media are used on the political playing field in Nigeria.

With the role of social media in political communication now established, the next chapter will explore cultural influences on political communication and political behaviour

based on the qualitative data. The premise of the argument is that culture influences the media and the media influence culture.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ANALYSIS OF CULTURAL UNDERPINNINGS ON POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR

7.1 Introduction

This analytical chapter presents further findings of the study, which are addressed through a specifically cultural perspective. The aims are (1) to demonstrate the cultural underpinnings that inform online and offline political participation and communication through the lenses of the social network and communication power theories and (2) to clarify the position of social media as tools of communication and political participation in Nigeria within the context of culture. The previous chapter argued that although social media do not have the power to determine electoral outcomes, they nonetheless play a significant role. This chapter aims to provide insight into the other forces at play in Nigerian politics and why these cultural forces are as strong as – or, arguably, stronger than – new media. It will also validate the interdependency between culture and new media – how the Nigerian culture influences new media use within the confines of the society and how new media, in turn, have influenced culture within the Nigerian context.

Culture – referred to here as the practices and social behaviours of a society (Godfrey 2001) – serves as both a critical building block and a mainframe of this study. In this case, the society is that of Nigeria. Offline data collection for this research took place over three months in Nigeria, with the goal of contextualising the study. Although the researcher is a native of Nigeria, being away from the country for some time prior to the study afforded them a removed-researcher (or outsider) perspective that benefitted the study. This chapter will answer the following questions: (1) How does culture influence the use of Twitter in Nigerian politics, and how does Twitter influence the Nigerian political culture and climate? (2) What was the relationship between culture, politics, and social media in the 2015 and 2019 Nigerian elections? and (3) Does economic dependency have any influence on the political decisions of its dependants? These questions tie into the SQ_2 of this thesis, which is, 'Does culture have any influence on political decisions? If so, how and to what extent?'

Western social etiquette suggests that two topics should be avoided in conversation: politics and religion (Muse 2017). In Nigerian society, however, politics is always a hot dish,

and religion is among the most popular sides. This chapter is a discussion of Nigerian politics and the role that Twitter plays in it. It excavates different nuances of the political experience in the country through a cultural lens. It excludes the perspectives of politicians and instead focuses on those of citizens whose political involvement largely culminates in their Election Day participation, which may be limited to voting or may go beyond that to include providing support for election monitoring and observation organisations – an increasingly common practice amongst Nigerian citizens.

As social media use in politics – particularly elections – continues to bourgeon worldwide, there have been many claims made about its impact on elections. In 2016, it was rumoured that users' digital data was harvested off social media and used to manipulate the outcome of the American presidential election (Cadwalladr & Graham-Harrison 2018; ur Rehman 2019). Further claims were made about the proliferation of fake news on social media, especially Facebook, in favour of the Trump campaign (Grinberg et al. 2019). Similar claims were made about the use of social media to manufacture false information that favoured the *Leave* campaign during the Brexit referendum in the UK (Fuchs 2018; Tattersall 2018). The latest example of this trend was observed in the just-concluded UK general elections of 2019; the news was sometimes inaccurate, and it became increasingly difficult to decipher what was true, what was staged, and what was outright disinformation (Birks 2019). An example of this was the story of a four-year-old boy who was pictured lying on the floor of a hospital while being treated for pneumonia. The story – first picked up by the *Yorkshire Evening Post* (Sheridan 2019) – quickly made its way across borders via social media; it was shared numerous times and retold with falsehoods that cast the story in a light very different than that intended by its original author (Mitchinson 2019). In general, a great deal of negativity has been peddled about the effects of social media on political processes, particularly in western democracies. The consensus tends to be that social media exert a significant level of influence on political decisions and outcomes, regardless of whether the outcomes are positive or negative.

The case for this study is Nigeria, a country currently ranked among the three largest economies on the African continent – alongside Angola and South Africa (The World Bank 2020) – despite an extremely sluggish economic growth index in the past year. Reports show that average incomes have doubled in the past decade; however, Africa's most populous nation also has the highest proportion of extremely poor people in the world, according to projections made in early 2018 (Kharas, Hamel & Hofer 2018). Nigeria ranks as "partly free" according to

Freedom House's Freedom of the Press report of 2017 and the Internet Freedom report of 2018 – the latter of which also reported that Internet penetration in the country was at 25.7% as at 2018 (Freedom House 2019). According to the report, a lower number indicates more Internet freedom, while a higher number indicates less Internet freedom. Nigeria's ranking currently sits at the 37/100 mark, which is a decline from previous years. This reflects the blocking of political content on the world wide web, as well as the arrests of online activists between 2017 and 2018 – activities that persisted in 2019 (Freedom House 2019). These numbers are manifested in the everyday lives of Nigerians, who are increasingly less inclined to speak to journalists or to share their views publicly due to fear of repercussions. One of the study participants, Oona, experienced this in the course of her job as a journalist. She described her experience of trying to do a vox pop as follows:

> It's been tough. Nobody wants to talk about elections. When I go to people, even educated middle-class people that you think would want to say, 'Oh, this is what I think.' Nobody wants to do that. They're afraid.
>
> It's hard for people to talk about the elections – particularly for people to speak against vote buying. Social media is awash with people who have one opinion or the other. Maybe why they're able to speak freely is because a lot of them are semi-anonymous, so it's easier.
>
> - Oona, personal communication, September 15, 2018

Although social media does provide some degree of anonymity, it has also come under attack in Nigeria. Since 2015, the Nigerian National Assembly has seen two bills introduced to the house that were allegedly aimed at curbing false defamation of persons but that were seen by protesters as an infringement on freedom of speech in the country. The first bill, introduced in August 2015, was titled "A Bill for an Act to Prohibit Frivolous Petitions and Other Matters Connected Therewith." Sponsored by a senator from the North, this bill prescribed that it be illegal for citizens to start petitions of any form without first swearing an affidavit in a court of law (Onele 2015). Citizens called it a social media bill and began campaigning against it with the hashtag #NoToSocialMediaBill (Kermeliotis 2015).

The second bill was proposed to the national assembly in November 2019. Titled "Protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulation Bill 2019", the bill '[sought] to allow law enforcement agencies to order Internet service providers to disable Internet access,' (Ewang 2019) or to block specific digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp. A similar bill with almost exactly the same title was passed and enacted in Singapore in April

2019 (Singapore Government 2019), creating suspicion that the previous bill – which had been defeated in the Nigerian parliament in 2015 – was simply revamped with reference to Singapore and reintroduced to the House. Following its introduction to the Senate, another social media campaign began in protest, using the hashtag #SayNoToSocialMediaBill (Ewang 2019).

Amidst these developments, a bill was passed by the national assembly in 2015, called the "Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc) Act, 2015." It was following this that the aforementioned arrests took place (Freedom House 2019). Although other democratic regimes in the years since 1999 saw more than their share of human rights abuses, particularly in the areas of freedom of speech and expression, these developments – the social media gag bills – have all been introduced since the start of the Buhari regime. This raises the question of whether the incumbent president has an agenda of returning to the way things were in the country when he was a military ruler.

7.2 Culture in Non-Western Politics

A society's culture and values are interlinked with the prevalent media in a reciprocal manner, such that each helps to shape the other (Lule 2012; Unnamed Author 2016). This section explores some of the links between the Nigerian political system, its values, and social media and considers the different ways in which they influence each other.

In African, including Nigeria, culture is a part of the landscape of society. Communities are founded on cultural values and principles, which may evolve over time but are never entirely discarded. Even through this evolution, certain elements of culture – as defined by ancestors – remain visible. This is particularly true in non-Western societies, where communities tend to remain together across generations and, as a result, often see a seamless handing down of culture from one generation to the next.

In Nigeria, cultural values, norms and principles are visible in all facets of society – including practices and social behaviours. Although Nigeria is multi-ethnic, multicultural and bi-religious – or, to some small extent, even multi-religious – these differences do not erode the cultural fabric of the society. Instead, they reinforce it to different degrees and in different ways. Observing a culture of respect, addressing elders appropriately, and exercising freedoms of speech and communication norms take precedence in politics but may be implemented positively or negatively. Unfortunately, with the elevated rate of dissatisfaction amongst

Nigeria's polity, negative manifestations are commonplace; this permeates representative-electorate relationships and influences how issues are addressed at the different levels of government. Power dynamics also exert influence on relationships, giving benefactors – who, by position, are power wielders – the upper hand over their beneficiaries. In many cases, particularly where economics are involved, this impacts the political decisions of such beneficiaries. A core cultural practice in Nigeria, as described in the Background section of this thesis, is that of economic dependency.

This section discusses the influences that culture exerts on politics in Nigeria. It addresses economic dependency as a culture and its impact on the political decisions of the non-elites, especially with regard to voting in elections. Various influences of economic dependency and their forms of manifestation are considered. Manuel Castells's communication power theory is applied as a theory of culture to the discussion of different ways in which economic dependency influences the political decisions of this portion of the electorate.

7.21 The Impact of Economic Dependency on Political Decisions

This research finds that a culture of economic dependency influences the way people vote in elections – an argument that is key in this thesis, and that is reaffirmed by all research participants. Some participants indicated that this fact is beyond contest, while others – particularly educated youth who feel further removed from the culture of economic dependency – acknowledged it to be a trend that is gradually evolving. Interestingly, albeit unsurprisingly, the majority who suggested that this is changing in Nigerian society were young people, mostly under the age of 40. They acknowledged, however, that the change in culture has a greater impact in urban societies than in rural areas. When presented with the statement that economic dependency influences people's voting decisions, respondents had this to say:

> Of course! This is a third world. A high percentage of people are poor, [living on] under one dollar a day, so what do you expect? And that trend will continue for some time.
>
> \- Elder Chukwuka, personal communication, October 11, 2018

> Absolutely! ... In the last elections, I influenced everybody – not just my nuclear family, [but others,] including my dad, including my mum, including my siblings. So, to a large extent, money... in Igbo land, there's what is called "aku bu eze," meaning "cash is king." So, the man who has the cash is the one who plays the tune, and the one who plays the tune dictates the tone of the way they dance. That's exactly what happens, so it doesn't even call for arguments at all.

- Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018

For another participant, Nnanna, it is a clientelism culture, dependent on relations of patronage, that is ravaging the society – one that will take time and reform to change. Echoing the words of Elder Chukwuka, he says:

> I think that's a no-brainer. The culture of politics in Nigeria is transactional. It is clientelism – that's the exchange of goods and services for political support. So, at the high level you have patrons and godfathers who are exchanging their wealth for assurances of certain parts of the Commonwealth if their preferred candidate wins. And then [at] the bottom of the food chain, you've got voters who have a sense of fatalism because [of] so many years of governments that have failed to provide basic services and promises whatsoever – having witnessed so much rampant corruption, nepotism and incompetence. A lot of citizens have this latent or apparent sense of fatalism that, you know, 'whether we try or we don't, things are messed up anyway, so why don't we just get whatever immediate benefit we can?' So, they're willing to sell their votes, because whether you get paid for the vote or you vote for free, you still won't get what you want; you still will get people who will forget about you. So, that sense of fatalism drives or even escalates the clientelism in Nigeria.
>
> - Nnanna, personal communication, September 25, 2018

Responses to the question of culture's role in political decisions were two-fold. On the one hand, there was the close, familial perspective that provided insight into a family's role and their economic dependency. On the other hand, the culture of vote buying was highlighted. Respondents had varying opinions regarding the role of family, economic dependency, and culture; some, like Jean, acknowledged having arguments with family members about their opposing views on the current president, his policies and his performance. This same position was echoed by another participant, Elochukwu, who said that she had constant conversations (not arguments, in her case) with her father and constantly sought his advice, but he gave her room to make her own decisions about whom to support. In particular, she noted that she had initially supported the challenger in the 2015 election and was invited to work on his communications team. She took the initial meeting but then declined the offer after speaking with her father and gaining insight into Buhari's performance as a military president. She went on to work for the incumbent team in that election as a result.

Others, like Chimelu, were very quick to admit that there was no question about it – that absolute political influence over dependents is real and expected. In his case, he was the benefactor who influenced everyone in his family, including his wife, parents, siblings and extended family. His response was echoed on a larger scale by Elder Chukwuka, who is the patriarch in his family – hence, an influencer – and resides rurally:

> The family has a lot of influence, so when you're lobbying, you lobby the family. You lobby the opinion movers in the family. If they say yes, then it's okay. The opinion movers in the respective families meet in the village level and say, 'This person is a good person.' And if you want to move your head away from the family [where you are a member], of course they use everything they have to punish you, including economics.
>
> - Elder Chukwuka, personal communication, October 11, 2018

Another aspect of culture that was highlighted is the culture of gift-giving, which is in the very fibre of Nigerian society. One participant describes it quite accurately:

> It's a culture that we have, and culture eats strategy for breakfast. We have an entitlement on a gift culture, so even when you go to visit a man you expect that you will get a gift for coming. We have a souvenir culture in Nigeria that when you go for a wedding you expect to get a souvenir – a branded souvenir. You go for events and you expect to get bags and pads, and so that [] has become part of our politics. So, if you go for a campaign you expect to come back with souvenirs and gifts, and you penalise people who don't do that – who don't give you that – because it's a sign that they don't plan to do anything good. So, that's a culture of 'people are good when they give you stuff and people are bad when they don't,' and we can't separate that culture from buying votes or political clientelism.
>
> - Nnanna, personal communication, September 25, 2018

This highlights another aspect of Nigerian culture that permeates every facet of society. Like Nnanna explains, the average Nigerian citizen associates generosity with gift-giving, even in political circles, and this practice has a strong influence on ideas of loyalty, solidarity and performance in politics. Money sharing, airtime sharing, food and clothing sharing are just some of the ways in which this is demonstrated, and these have come to be acceptable strategies in electoral campaigns. This is not usually a covert practice; it is overt and considered acceptable. It is not treated as vote buying in a strict sense, even though – morally – it can very well lead to that.

7.22 Power Influence in Lieu of Economic Dependency

Where no strong economic power dynamics exist, alternative power flows can be found in Nigerian society – usually made prominent by age and/or familial positioning. In articulating whether these power relationships exist, respondents said:

> I wouldn't say my reality is the same for every other typical Nigerian. My dad and I argue every time about Buhari. He's a pro-Buhari; he loves Buhari; he thinks Buhari is doing great. I told him his generation messed up the whole country. At the end of the day, I feel like young people are already getting to form their own opinion themselves. So, for someone who is the financial head of the family, maybe in rural areas… I do know that that is dominant. The head of the family follows you to the polling station with the wife and family and says, 'This is the person we're voting for' and everybody votes for that person. But in a household of average Nigerians where everybody has their own education, you find out that even when it comes to football teams, for example, everybody has the freedom to be who they want to be. So, I feel like it depends on the family. But with the lower class, that is still the same: the head of the family with the financial power still has a say on what everybody does.
>
> \- Jean, personal communication, October 14, 2018

> Of course, tremendously! The family system in Africa revolves around itself. You can see a member of a family hardly wants to get out of the norms of the family. Families are interdependent in everything – marriage, everything. Someone will just ask, 'Where's our family? Where are we voting?' There's always that question: 'Where's our village voting? Where's our family voting? Where's our town voting?' And if you want to move your head away from the family, of course they use everything they have to punish you, including economics.
>
> \- Elder Chukwuka, personal communication, October 11, 2018

This response also echoes what Jean said about the culture of family regarding [economic] dependency and conformity being more potent in rural areas. For educated, independent young people, however, the reality is changing. They no longer see the need to toe familial lines in terms of political views, but it is important to note that this deviation comes with a measure of financial independence. Two people who had strong family ties but did not always conform to family expectations and felt the freedom to differ in opinion were young female professionals. Interestingly, one worked in the communications industry as a political blogger, while the other was a journalist. This suggests that there is an even stronger professional force at work.

7.23 Cultural Discourses on Twitter

Diverse discourses take place on Twitter that shape and reshape society. Some of these pertain to social issues that are of common concern to the public, not just politics. One participant shed light on such social issues and how they can be addressed online. Speaking about the #metoo movement, he said:

> And so, social media… is an important hub for cultural conversations, social conversations, or socio-political conversations for economic activity in Nigeria.
>
> A lot of women who wouldn't have discussed their experiences find social media now as a welcoming channel for them to be able to say, 'Well, this happened to me too,' no matter whether it happened 20 years ago or just five minutes ago. It becomes a place where people would listen, and they would affect [you]. It would empower you, and it would make you feel that you have gotten justice for what happened to you.
>
> - Nnanna, personal communication, September 25, 2018

Social media – particularly Twitter – have become a valuable platform and even a public sphere for challenging historical barriers and issues subsumed in cultural narratives. One such issue, which reaches far beyond the Nigerian society, is sexual harassment – particularly that perpetrated by men against women. The trending "me too" hashtag, which began as an outcry concerning sexual harassment against women in Hollywood, rippled globally, including in Nigeria. Women who had been silenced for a long time due to cultural beliefs and societal practices began to raise their voices and speak out about similar experiences.

7.24 The Culture of Elections

The only topic that is arguably more provocative than politics in Nigerian society is religion. Whereas people will agree to disagree on political issues, it tends to be different when it comes to religious views. However, Nigerians are becoming increasingly open to relating across the divides of religion, ethnicity, language, and politics. Western social etiquette dictates the avoidance of political discussions in social circles, but in societies such as Africa, politics often dominates discussions, especially amongst men. The only topic that ranks above this is sports. At night, outdoor bars and clubs are usually saturated with this kind of discourse; however, it is just as easy to find oneself in a rideshare taxi where politics is the main discourse. Interestingly, religious gatherings are also known as public spheres for political discourse.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the researcher's initial meeting with potential research participants took place in a church as a result of an invitation from a friend for precisely that purpose. The friend had claimed that there were many people in their church who did work in the sphere of the researcher's interest. This claim turned out to be accurate.

When the researcher first met these three individuals, they were clustered near the back of the auditorium after the church service, chatting with each other. The researcher soon discovered that they were discussing politics – an observation that piqued the researcher's interest. It was later determined that this is not an uncommon practice in church circles; Nigerians will talk about politics anywhere, unafraid to air their views – whether popular or unpopular. In fact, a heated political debate – which, on occasion, could morph into a full-blown argument – is par for the course in a bar or pub. The transition from military to civilian rule in 1999 ended bans on the press and speech, and the average Nigerian now feels liberated in exercising their rights fully. A religious gathering is just as suitable a location to do so as a bar or pub.

7.25 Communicating Economic and Political Power

Castells's theory of communication power posits that the one who wields the power determines which way events will go (Castells 2009). In this research, this theory is examined through the lens of economic power and dependency to postulate that in Nigeria's dependency society, those with economic power can influence the political decisions of their dependants. The extent to which this argument is validated or rejected by the populace differs depending on which side of the societal divide is examined. The general perception is that this suggestion is true where there are clear-cut economic margins between the haves and the have-nots – particularly those residing in rural communities – but that the reality is changing for young people.

Jean, a participant in her twenties, explained that young people feel a sense of emancipation from culture and tradition and are developing their individual political identities independent of financial benefactors and family leaders (Jean, personal communication, October 14, 2018). What is important to note is that this trend is more feasible and realistic amongst educated youth who have some measure of economic freedom – generally those who have jobs and live in big cities. For example, Jean has a master's degree – obtained in the United Kingdom – and works as a journalist in Lagos. Young people living in rural areas, who cannot claim economic power to any degree, may not feel the same measure of political

independence and are therefore likely to toe the line drawn by the “kingmakers” in their families or communities.

Vote Buying in Nigerian Elections

Nigeria is a prime test case for political commodification. The practice of vote buying is so entrenched in the society that it has become the norm – an acceptable practice. In the Nigerian political system, vote buying occurs in different ways. This research highlights three of them: community-level, grassroots-level (public), and Election Day vote buying.

Community-level vote buying practice in Nigeria is an example of patronage as a political form, as described by Erdmann & Engel (2006). At the grassroots level, vote buying is initiated within a family or community through opinion leaders. These are the people, particularly in rural communities, who determine what political line the community will toe and, specifically, what candidate the community will vote for in an election. Traditionally, political parties and their candidates visit such persons to pay homage to them and to solicit their support. In instances where vote buying occurs, they may come with money or gifts to give to those leaders, who then decide how the gifts will be disbursed. One of this study’s participants, who is a well-respected opinion leader and patriarch in his community, explained how this works. He described Nigeria’s family system and how economics is used as a weapon; then, he related this to vote buying, explaining that the family dependency culture is prime fodder for political clientelism because politicians know that to gain ground, they must go through family and community heads. He added that:

> So, when you’re talking about vote buying, what is vote buying? They still pass the money through the head – the opinion mover – and the opinion mover will just say, ‘Share this thing.’ And most of the time, the opinion mover doesn’t share with them. [He] is interested in what he’s going to gain at the end of the day… at the top. So, those stipends they’re bringing in – he’s not interested.
>
> - Elder Chukwuka, personal communication, October 11, 2018

This practice paints a typical picture of patronage as a political approach in Nigeria, which Erdmann & Engel (2006) describe as a relationship between a person and a group of persons.

Another level of vote buying practice occurs at the grassroots level. This level of vote buying is often public; it usually occurs during official campaign activities and is accepted as status quo – even expected. Like Nnanna explained, it is steeped in the gift culture of the Nigerian society, which preserves the expectation that anyone hosting any kind of event must

give gifts or souvenirs to attendees (Nnanna, personal communication, September 25, 2018). The picture below depicts this in action: a police officer is present – supposedly to guard the politician and keep the peace – suggesting that the politician's actions are not considered illegal. Politicians give gifts ranging from food items and fabrics for clothes-making to mobile phone top-up cards.

In Nigeria, I have seen politicians share Rice, Groundnut Oil, Ankara Fabric, Noodles, Kerosene, Mobile Phones, Recharge Cards.

Na this Cheeseball own off me.

Apart from the Naira, it looks like the value of Nigerians themselves is on a steady depreciation. 😭😭😭

9:36 PM · May 14, 2019 · Twitter Web Client

307 Retweets **249** Likes

Figure 7.1 Politician sharing cheese balls during a campaign
Source: Twitter, May 14, 2019

Chimelu also alluded to this when he talked about economic dependency and vote buying:

> The reason is because poverty has been weaponised in Nigeria. So, that is why you can buy votes for five thousand naira (about 15 USD) or less. In fact, in Kogi state, during the last runoff elections – I'm telling you verifiable facts; you can go and check – they were buying votes with onions. How much is [an onion]? So, poverty in Nigeria has been weaponised.
>
> \- Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018

Politicians are also rated based on the quality or price of the gifts they distribute, which may earn them approval or disapproval, depending on the standard applied or meted by the voting public. Although some claim that this practice does not influence their voting choices in any

way, the reality for others is that they may end up voting for the candidate based on their conscience – because they accepted a gift from them.

Election Day is probably the only time that vote buying is considered explicitly illegal in Nigeria. Nonetheless, it occurs, often in the form of people – party agents – situating themselves at polling stations with bags of cash to coerce people into selling their votes. The image below is a comical one. It shows two men who were allegedly arrested by the police while carrying ₦604,000 (less than 2,000 USD) on a gubernatorial Election Day with the intent to use said monies to buy votes. What makes this comical is that the same photo was posted by two Twitter accounts purporting to belong to the two main opposing parties, the PDP and APC – each claiming that the culprits were agents of the other party, thereby insinuating that their own party was innocent of the illegal act.

Figure 7.2 Tweets by the PDP and APC – alleged vote buying arrest
Source: Twitter, September 23, 2018

Although social media is used to condemn such actions, as the image above depicts, such online condemnation is simply a tactic by one party to discredit the other and indirectly solicit more votes for themselves. Another Twitter handle exposed this duplicity by sharing images of the two distinct tweets (see Figure 7.3) side by side, showing followers that the PDP and the APC were tweeting the same image and each portraying the culprits to be underlings of their opposition. Tweets like the one below provide a way for social media users to counteract the

original dubious intentions of the political parties. Interestingly, when one searches for the original tweets, only that of the PDP (PDP via Twitter 2018) – whose account is verified on Twitter – can still be found online. The other cannot be found in its original form and the Twitter handle, which was supposedly official, cannot be found on Twitter either – suggesting that perhaps the handle was not an authentic APC account in the first place.

Figure 7.3 PDP and APC called out on duplicity
Source: Twitter, September 23, 2018

Another image of the two men that circulated on Twitter – which was apparently taken at the same time as the image above – showed them holding up a rice sack that had a politician's name and face on it, which had obviously been used for campaign activity (Twitter 2018). This image was also suspicious because the politician it identified – a senator – died in 2017 and thus had no way of contesting the 2018 gubernatorial elections. This gives the impression that the entire scenario was crafted with the intent to discredit a political party with misinformation or disinformation. While this demonstrates public disapproval of vote buying on Election Day, it also shows the reality of the practice in modern-day Nigeria. With the economy in a downward spiral, such activity has become like a pandemic.

Power Struggles in Vote Buying

With Nigeria displacing India as the country with the most extremely poor people in the world, it is easy to see how economic dependency becomes a currency for vote buying. The observational conversations heard during this study's fieldwork demonstrated that vote buying is still a reality in Nigerian elections, and individuals are willing to admit that they would sell their votes if solicited to do so.

One distinct conversation, which occurred in Abuja, took place between a youth and an older man. The youth admitted publicly that he would take any bribes offered to him to sell his vote. His caveat, however, was that despite receiving money, he would not feel any obligation to vote in the direction of the briber; the decision of whom to vote for would still be his own. In other words, he claimed political autonomy while encouraging the act of vote buying. Part of this stems from the culture of entitlement and gift-giving and receiving in Nigerian society, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Those with power and affluence often use their positions to buy the votes of those with a lower rank. Although vote buying is vilified in the media, it is practised openly; acts of vote buying are largely considered acceptable in Nigeria. Part of the election campaign experience includes campaigners giving gifts and monies to their attendees. The link below provides an example.

Other Layers and Levels of Vote Buying

Although poverty has been heralded as primarily responsible for the success of vote buying in Nigeria, this practice – a true nemesis to democracy – is not only a transaction between the upper and lower economic classes. Perhaps at the helm of it all is vote buying that occurs even before party primaries begin. Political aspirants are known to go to the political godfathers and so-called kingmakers to seek their support, which – in many cases – involves the exchange of monetary gifts. So, as much as vote buying may be attributed to poverty, it is perhaps equally attributable to the clamour for power among the political elites. Any fight against vote buying must begin at that level and then cascade downwards. In an interview with two friends who both supported the same presidential candidate, one responded to a comment made by the other about a political party being at the helm of vote buying. She argued:

> I don't think the Nigerian problem is about APC or PDP; it's about the general political culture that we have. Probably because the APC had one candidate [the incumbent president], there was no room for that kind of thing. Supposing the APC didn't have a consensus candidate, we wouldn't have known [and] probably this kind of thing would have happened too. So, I just

> want to believe that [if] our elites – [if] people that we delegate – change their ways, at the lower level, those things will be reduced. But inasmuch as the delegates (politicians) will be bought, and the electorate know about that, then people will say, 'We don't give a s**t; let them give us whatever they want to and just let them have their way.' So, that's why I'm looking at it from the wider perspective before coming down. Because these people we are seeing – the so-called masses that we're talking about – they are seeing and hearing all that is happening; so, if they do that at the top echelons, are you seeing that they will now do the right thing? They have this notion that if they do the right thing, at the top it will not count. So, sometimes we shouldn't just be looking at the [masses]; we should also look at how candidates emerge and what happens.
>
> - Maimuna, personal communication, November 8, 2018

Maimuna raises a valid argument that underpins the need for a war against vote buying in Nigeria's political system – one that must be fought not just on Election Day, but even before the electorate is aware of who party hopefuls are. She brings scrutiny to the campaigns within political parties prior to primaries, noting that vote buying practice originates here – particularly where a party hopeful does not yet have any political clout and is dependent on the support of others – godfathers – who have built their internal followership to emerge at the top. It becomes a transaction where money – or other forms of currency – exchange hands in the bid to obtain the support they seek. This phenomenon is called *godfatherism* (Cheeseman, Bertrand & Husaini 2019) and is popularly associated with the Nigerian political class.

The Impending Realities of Political Clientelism

For a country on its fourth attempt at democratisation, the future seems bleak – especially considering the current state of affairs. Nigerians are optimistic and resilient – qualities that are both admirable and damnable. The problem with the culture of resilience is that it denotes adaptability to different circumstances, no matter how dire they may be. This bodes well for politicians in Nigeria who capitalise on this quality by refusing to run free and fair elections and, more importantly, to run a free and fair country. As citizens are increasingly sensitised, the hope is that the status quo will change and the electorate will demand more by exercising their rights on Election Day and beyond. With the youth increasingly exercising political emancipation, and with social media contributing to their empowerment, perhaps this future is not so distant.

7.3 Culture and Social Media: Impacts, Circumventions, and Redefinitions

There is an established relationship between culture and the media, and at this point, there is no need to debate this idea. Instead, the goal here is to identify and discuss this relationship within the contexts of social media, communication, and societies. The cultural contrast between Western and non-Western societies is one of the frames on which this thesis is built. The argument is that there are cultural distinctions in non-Western societies – such as in Africa – that do not exist in the West, and that there is a need to examine social media use in these contexts without the generalisations of Western scholarship. This research presents two interesting findings. On the one hand, we see how social media are used to circumvent existing cultural barriers to democracy within the Nigerian context, with a bid to create more accountability to the citizenry by politicians and the government. On the other hand, we see how social media are used to reshape the narrative around cultural issues that were, in essence, taboos interdicted from discourse in the public sphere.

7.31 The Cultural Impacts of Social Media

When exploring a country so rich in culture, it is important to observe not just the role that culture plays in the media, but also the role that the media plays in enforcing, challenging, and transforming culture. Social media have breached barriers that traditional media found impossible to breach, possibly due to the curation involved in traditional media processes.

Social media have given people – particularly the vulnerable and underrepresented – a voice and a platform without intermediaries. It begins with a person realising that they have a voice, that it can be heard, and that there is a medium or a tool that they can use to amplify that voice and inspire others to do the same. It is not limited to the political arena; rather, it has permeated every aspect of society. This is what these comments by Nnanna succinctly explain. He sheds light on the ways in which social media have contributed to cultural change beyond discourse in Nigeria:

> A lot of women who wouldn't have discussed their experiences find social media now as a welcoming channel for them to be able to say, 'Well, this happened to me too.' No matter whether it happened 20 years ago or just five minutes ago, it becomes a place where people would listen… and it would empower [them], and it would make [them] feel that [they] have gotten justice for what happened to [them].
>
> - Nnanna, personal communication, September 25, 2018

> You know you build culture in the mind first, so things become cool and acceptable in people's minds and then eventually [they] begin to act it out. People now realise that there is a social cost to being a misogynist [and] a social cost to sexual harassment, and [that] people can come on to social media and out you and say 'me too.' That changes the equation because, you know, it balances relationships that usually had power asymmetry. It begins to even it out, and that's an important tool to break those cultures.
>
> - Nnanna, personal communication, September 25, 2018

In his first comment above, Nnanna implies that when voices are amplified, there is a new capacity for change. He also discusses the power of social media to alter cultures. In addition to giving a voice to the marginalised in society, social media take the conversation a step further by driving a shift in the culture through discourse. Archaic, discriminative, and oppressive ideas are challenged; once-silenced voices are given reign, and individuals are opened to a different concept that, when consistently emphasised, has the capacity to create change – first in the mind, and then in people's actions.

Nnanna also speaks to power and voice in the digital public sphere. Where one type of conversation previously dominated society while another group of voices was silenced, the digital public sphere has opened up new doors to conversations that could have far-reaching effects on political, social, and even moral facets of society. This highlights the power of social media as a space for social movements that drive change.

One of the most significant uses of social media in the 2015 elections was in bridging the gap between the electoral body and the people by making two-way communication and information dissemination easier. One of this study's respondents, who worked with the independent electoral body and facilitated communication management between the commission and citizens, compared previous elections to the 2015 elections. While discussing the creation of a strategic communications team within the commission, she said:

> One of the things that was quite prevalent during elections was you will not find INEC on social media until Election Day – and after that, they're off again. …people have burning questions off-cycle, pre-cycle, election cycle, so you need to be able to be there to answer these questions… because then it's easier for you to really focus on election management instead of dealing with those kinds of questions on Election Day. So, that was what that was created for, and it was the best thing ever, because people knew they could wake up at 2 a.m. and ask INEC a question and they would be there to answer.
>
> - Fatima, personal communication, October 26, 2018

Considering that Nigeria has a culture of separation between its governance and its people, this highlights a significant turnaround in elections management in the country. The electoral commission is now able to facilitate and achieve civic engagement via its social media platforms – particularly Twitter – where, before, there was no sphere for those conversations to take place. As Fatima acknowledged, many Nigerians use Twitter every day, and the use of this medium to spearhead dialogue between an independent government body and the citizenry was a significant cultural shift. However, the offline community was not left out, either. Fatima proceeded to recount the ways in which the electoral commission worked to ensure inclusion within the public sphere it was trying to create.

> [Twitter] provided us with some features that also helped us get access to offline communities. So, there was one called the *Fast Follow* feature, where all you need to do if you don't have access to the Internet is to send [a text] to a particular number – a short code. Then, whatever we tweet – like important news, breaking news, any updates on our electoral activities – it goes to your phone like a text message, which was free of charge.
>
> - Fatima, personal communication, October 26, 2018

The offline community were given access to up-to-date information from social media through a feature developed by Twitter to support offline following. The social media giant's *Fast Follow* feature, which was first rolled out in the USA before becoming globally available, enables individuals who do not have a Twitter account to follow Twitter handles and receive updates from those accounts (Twitter Inc 2010). *Fast Follow* has its limitations, as it only enables a one-way communication flow – from the online sphere to the offline, without any provision for the offline to participate in the online dialogue. In other words, Twitter-originated information can be disseminated through the short message service (SMS) feature to persons who do not have access to the social network, but they will be unable to join the dialogue unless they have Internet access and a Twitter account.

Citizen education is key to creating a healthy democratic societ, because the citizens are the engine to that society. As one participant put it:

> I usually have conversations about policy and governance and encouraging people to participate not just as voters, but to participate in political processes… as observers and as party agents. It's very easy to look at the elections and say, 'You know, I'm ready to vote and that's where my duty stops,' but I think there's an incentive for participating in every aspect of elections, including as INEC volunteers to help organise and conduct the

> election. And the more educated and the more people we have who have integrity who participate in the process, the better the process will be.
>
> - Nnanna, personal communication, September 25, 2018

The goal for many politics-focused non-profit organisations is to shift the discourse and the ideals of political participation beyond elections – to challenge the electorate to engage politically, even after the polls are closed.

Political participation should involve more than merely casting a vote. Beyond voting in elections, part of civic engagement is being involved in the electoral process. In Nigerian society, there are many opportunities for this, such as volunteering to work with election monitoring and observation groups. Volunteers get screened and accredited by the independent electoral commission through the different accredited civil society groups. The researcher underwent this process in preparations for onsite observation of the 2019 elections, although the plans eventually fell through due to logistics in the home institution.

The only problem with election monitoring and observation in Nigeria is that delegates are not able to vote because of restrictions that apply in the electoral process. All participants who had worked as election monitors and observers in the 2015 presidential elections admitted that they did not vote because, by law, Nigerians can vote only in the constituency where they are registered to vote. There was never any guarantee of being assigned to observe or monitor electoral proceedings in one's constituency. Hence, in ensuring that others can exercise their rights, election observers and monitors lose their right to exercise their civic duties. When asked about this, one observer had the following to say:

> No, I observe elections, and the Nigerian system will not allow you to vote. To vote, I have to go to a booth, and that is incompatible with my job. If observers were allowed to vote first, then it would be easier. In some countries I have [travelled to and] observed [elections], there are special voting packages for observers. But here, unless you're observing in the same place you're registered, you can't vote.
>
> - Ude, personal communication, September 23, 2018

These election observers acknowledge this breach of their civic rights and advocate for a change in the system to allow them to engage in offline political participation not just in their capacity as observers but also in their capacity as citizens with the right to vote. Nnanna commented thus:

> Every stakeholder around the election is important; what we need to be discussing is how to have people act as observers but still be able to vote. We shouldn't have a situation where we need to choose one or the other.
>
> - Nnanna, personal communication, September 25, 2018

7.32 Circumventing Culture with Social Media

"Culture" takes on a new definition in Nigeria's political system and governance. As a country ridden with divides, Nigeria has clear demarcations between the rich and the poor, and cultural values quickly come into play when differentiating old and young; male and female; Christian and Muslim; Yoruba, Igbo, or Hausa. A culture of respect is woven in the society's fabric, and while this projects positivity, it is also constantly misused and abused in the society by the people who wield power in those relationships. Unfortunately, this misuse and abuse also apply to governance.

One respondent made this comparison between the social media cultures in Western and non-Western states:

> In the West, people in advocacy do not lean on Twitter the way we do. If you look at America as my peculiar example, they have quite a few structures. If you put out a petition – and this also happens in the UK – and you get 10,000 signatures, your local council or whichever government office [it] is for must respond to it. If you get up to 100,000, then they debate it in parliament. So, there are open channels for people to engage government – very open channels. You can write a letter, you can go to your local community paper, you can go to your local radio, and community systems are in full swing.
>
> In Nigeria, however, there are clear divides between government and [the] people. I remember that as far as 2011 or 2012 – when Goodluck Jonathan was in office – whenever people needed to get some answers out of Goodluck Jonathan, they would shoot those questions as tweets to Femi Oke of Al Jazeera, to Christine Amanpour of CNN, to all of those types of people, then those ones would ask Mr President, and then the government would scramble to respond. So, for us, it's not just a tool for communication; it's a tool for advocacy, and that's the major difference.
>
> - Elochukwu, WhatsApp interview, October 2019

This response sheds light on the distinguishing features of social media use and roles across these global divides. In Nigeria – even just a decade ago, and in the decades before – children were not allowed to be outspoken or challenge parental opinions – not respectfully, and certainly not disrespectfully. This is evolving now, and children are increasingly more

outspoken. They are allowed to be individuals and express their unique personalities without being subject to unjustified parental preferences that stifle individuality. This evolution is slow-moving in governance, however, and politicians and people in government generally act as though they are doing the populace a favour and are above the law. Challenging government opinions or directives is not nearly as easy to do here as it is in the West, and this is where social media makes a difference.

Social media have become the voice of the voiceless; advocacy takes root within that sphere. Without social media, the Arab Spring could not have happened, the Chibok Girls would not have had any representation, Zimbabwe would not have been free of Mugabe until his death, and even though South Africa is on the "better" side of development in Africa, the different movements orchestrated and mobilised by students there likely would not have stood a chance. Africa, even more than the West, is a place where government and big business have all the control, and the citizenry have to be increasingly innovative in the fight to be heard.

A prime example of this is the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign that shed light on the abduction of teenage girls from a boarding school in north-east Nigeria. The hashtag campaign brought more attention to the incident than traditional media did, and where the government and the military continuously tried to downplay it, social media took the issue to a global level – forcing the government to respond. Like the above study participant implied, it would seem that the Nigerian government only responded to questions coming from the Western world and Western media, while demonstrating very little accountability for locally emerging discourse. This, again, propagated that culture of power associated with status and economics that is inherent in African societies. While there is still debate as to the success of the *#BringBackOurGirls* campaign – because, as some suggest, it may have only worsened the situation by turning the girls into pawns in the hands of their abductors and making rescue missions that much more arduous for the military – it is safe to say that the amplification of the issue through social media made it impossible for the government to deny or downplay the abduction.

Put bluntly, whereas social media are luxury tools in the hands of Western society, they are a lifeline to Africa. They have created the potential for more robust democracies by putting Africa more distinctly on the global map, and African leaders cannot ignore this. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that there have been more calls for Internet censorship in African and other non-Western countries than in the more democratised societies of the West.

On the one hand, culture plays as much of a role in African society as in every other, through food, music, communication, familial relationships, and even the media. As Unnamed Author (2012) states, culture influences the media and the media influences culture. The two are interdependent.

The disconnect between the political class and the ordinary Nigerians will be/will not be the destruction of this country.

Channels Television @channelstv · Oct 16
When People Talk About Hunger In Nigeria, 'I Just Laugh' – Agric Minister

"I think there is no hunger in Nigeria; there could be inconveniences. When people talk about hunger in this country, I just laugh because they don't know hunger.

Figure 7.4 Tweet: Disconnect between the political class and citizens
Source: Twitter, October 16, 2019

The historical relationship between governance and the political, media, and communication freedoms of Nigeria is predominantly negative, dating back as far as the military regimes of the 70s and 80s (Graf 1985). Since transitioning to a democratic system that has lasted four times longer than all other attempts put together, Nigeria has seen this landscape changing. However, there is still a lot that needs to be done to ensure that all human rights are able to be exercised. The notorious separation of the government from the people – the disconnect between the political class and the ordinary citizenry, which mirrors the military regime in which civil interference was disallowed – is still prevalent in spite of the strides the country has made in her democracy. This is in direct contrast to Western states with more institutionalised democracies.

Social media has become the new public sphere in Nigeria – amplified by institutional apathy and utilised for an increasingly large variety of purposes. In the West, meanwhile, these spaces are dominated by influencers with well-defined niches – such as fashion, entertainment, and well-being – as well as the celebrity class. In these societies, social media are predominantly a marketing tool – a means of sharing a product or idea with a target audience.

7.33 Demanding More from Governance

One of the major accomplishments of digital media is the sensitisation of Nigerian citizens, such that they now know they deserve more and can demand more.

The following is an excerpt from the fieldwork diary:

> ***Talk Over Salah – Social Media Vibes***
>
> It's the Salah holiday today. Muslims all over the country are celebrating the end of the Ramadan with lots of ram meat and food. My friend, Sols, is from a mixed-religion family, which is common in [certain parts of] the south-west. Her father is Muslim; her mother is Christian. They celebrate both the Muslim and Christian holidays elaborately as a result. She had friends come over to their home for lots of food. Amongst us, the discourse varied – work, church, and, of course, politics. Talk was about a political discourse television show that invited presidential aspirants and interviewed them. Mainly, it was about an aspirant who clearly had no knowledge of the economics of the country, had come to the show obviously unprepared, and basically insulted Nigeria and Nigerians with his responses. Interestingly, he dropped out of the presidential race following public outcry at his performance [on] that show. It went viral on YouTube, Twitter, and other social media, and the public disapproved of his behaviour and comments [on] the show.
>
> My thoughts on this? Nigerians are taking a keener interest in politics. They are no longer willing to accept any candidate who may want to throw money at them; they are looking for true leaders who know their onions and have the good of the country and its people at heart. "Mediocre" is no longer acceptable. This is a welcome development.
>
> Source: Fieldwork diary, 21 August 2018

It is important to note that this group of friends were all women – mostly single, in their early- to mid-thirties – who were well educated and very successful in their careers as employees of mostly blue-chip companies or as business owners. In other words, they were of the bourgeois society.

7.4 Summary

This chapter addressed the influence and role of culture in the use of social media as a tool and space for political communication. It provided a characterisation of the culture in Nigerian society from both political and economic perspectives, demonstrating how these can be juxtaposed and translated into political decision-making. The study showed that although economic dependency remains prevalent in Nigerian society – even undermining individual

political autonomy – the influence it exerts is waning with the rise of a more independent and more enlightened electorate.

The next chapter is a discussion of the key themes identified in the two analytical chapters (6 and 7) and the extant literature (Chapter 3), examined through the lenses of the theories that frame this study (Chapter 4).

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONSOLIDATING THE STUDY

8.1 Introduction

The two previous analytical chapters presented the findings of the empirical data from the fieldwork, which comprised interviews, as well as online and offline observations. Chapter 6 presented findings on social media use in Nigeria, and Chapter 7 presented findings on the influence of culture on political behaviour in the country. The present chapter brings the analytical data and extant literature together. It discusses the interview findings through the lenses of the public sphere and communication power theories (see Chapter 4), as well as the literature that was in Chapter 3. Then, it consolidates the discussions in this dissertation by addressing each research question (RQ) posed and demonstrating how it has been answered in the thesis.

This thesis started with an overarching research question that was further broken down into three research sub-questions:

SQ1: How is Twitter used as a tool for political participation within the Nigerian context through the case studies of the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections?

SQ2: How, and to what extent, do cultural beliefs, practices, and behaviours influence the political decisions of the Nigerian electorate?

SQ3: What relationships exist between online political activities and offline realities and outcomes?

The responses generated from the fieldwork data are addressed within the context of a non-Western culture. Although Nigeria is the case studied in this thesis, the cultural and political similarities within most of sub-Saharan Africa mean that certain generalisations about the state of democracy and its situation within African contexts can be made based on the Nigerian experience. Furthermore, recent collaborations among African states during elections and the similarities of the challenges of governance and accountability between the governors and the governed – particularly the divide that exists between the ruling elites and their constituents – demonstrate that inferences made from the Nigerian experience can easily be applied to other similar African states. Therefore, the questions posed at the onset of and throughout this research, as well as the answers provided to those questions, while examined through a Nigerian lens, are not unique to Nigeria.

In this discussion chapter, the major themes that emerged from the research findings are discussed and supported by sub-discussions on findings that buttress the arguments presented in the themes. The major themes that are discussed are:

- Power-dependence relationship
- Political participation in the age of Twitter
- Nigeria's digitised public sphere
- Information duality on Twitter
- Cultural influence on online and offline political communication

The main findings of this study are as follows:

1. Twitter's contribution to democratisation in Nigeria is not autonomous. Rather, it is interdependent on other long-standing factors, such as societal culture and economic power.
2. In Nigeria's current political climate, Twitter offers anonymity to political expression that safeguards users from repercussions.
3. Twitter fulfils a distinctive purpose in the public sphere as it creates a space for critical reasoning that facilitates political change. While this constitutes its elitist status, it also makes the microblog a more valuable medium for political discourse than other social media platforms.
4. Ethnicity as culture exerts significant influence on the communication patterns of Nigerians both online and offline, noted through the communication patterns of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria – Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo – on Twitter during the 2019 elections.

8.2 Power-Dependence Relationship

One of the theories framing this work is Manuel Castells' theory of communication power. Castells opines that 'power is based on the control of communication and information' and that 'how people think about the institutions under which they live and how they relate to the culture of their economy and society, define whose power can be exercised and how it can be exercised' (Castells 2009, pp. 3; 416-7). In a society such as Nigeria's, this power relationship becomes complex in the political realm because of the different issues inherent in budding democracies.

This thesis finds that Castells' definition of power resonates with the Nigerian description only to the extent that it takes a one-sided look at power as a top-down relationship in which those in an economically stronger position wield power and use that power to influence the decisions of the beneficiary. It finds that in the Nigerian experience, power, and dependence have a two-way relationship, in which supremacy is determined by demand and supply. In other words, while economic dependence is a major determinant of power position on the one hand, patronage and clientelism practices can also determine where the power lies. This finding aligns more with Emerson's (1962) argument of power and dependence between two parties as a horizontal relationship (see Chapter 4). In Emerson's argument, every social actor experiences the double-edged alliance of power and dependency, and their role alternates based on 'motivational investment in goals' and 'the availability of those goals' (Emerson 1962, p. 32).

Traditionally, discussions surrounding power and dependency in Africa are usually viewed from an economic perspective, understandably because of the economic disparity in many states on the continent, as well as the poverty rates therein, and this is a perspective with which this thesis engaged from the onset. This perspective also formed the basis of the main argument of this research. However, findings drawn from engagement with political power and dependence, as well as economic power and dependence, show that these are not mutually exclusive concepts. Instead, they are interdependent (Emerson 1962), and the interrelationship between them is best explained from the viewpoint of clientelism and patronage as norms of political interaction found in Nigeria.

8.21 Political Transactions: A Nigerian Perspective

Economics is a strong factor in power-dependence relationships in the Nigerian culture, and this plays out in politics as well, especially during election season. Studies have shown that elections in Africa are transactional (Atchade & Wantchekon 2008; Vicente & Wantchekon 2009; Wantchekon 2003), and studies on clientelism or patronage in Africa often examine this transactional power-dependency relationship from economic lenses. However, this study shows that although the political class suggests superiority or supremacy of power in relation to non-political citizens, an examination of whose power is used to influence anything, which Salancik & Pfeffer (1977) enquire about, reveals that ordinary citizens wield power in the political field, especially during elections.

The culture of politics in Nigeria is transactional. It is clientelism.

- Nnanna, personal communication, September 25, 2018

Nnanna's comment sheds light on the major issue with Nigeria's political system, and all participants echoed the same sentiment when asked about vote buying – that it is part of the Nigerian political system. According to Elder Chukwuka, the trend is fuelled by high levels of poverty in the country and will continue to be for some time (Elder Chukwuka, personal communication, October 11, 2018). This culture also has roots in societal values and expectations outside of politics, and obviously, one cannot be separated from the other. This prevalence of patronage and clientelism demonstrates that the political class understands that any measure of power they aspire to is determined by the extent to which they can get the support of the electorate, which can be obtained either through free and fair elections or elections manipulated through vote buying, clientelism, thuggery or other forms of rigging.

Muhtadi (2019) argues that clientelism and patronage are rife during transitional periods from autocracy to democracy, and the Nigerian culture of these practices fits within this argument. Transitions from autocracy to democracy are, by default, transitions of power from politicians to citizens. The nature of these transitions indicates that citizens are the primary determinants of who assumes what position; hence, politicians are the dependants. The country has marked 20 years of its current democratic status, which some might expect is sufficient time to stabilise the nation. However, in reality, stability might take more time than that. Furthermore, considering that the country is grappling with other issues, such as corruption, poverty, insecurity and other development and economically affective issues, it may take more time to attain stability than anticipated. In this case, a comparison with further developed Western countries paints an inaccurate picture that is inconsistent with their levels of development and democratisation experiences. Although there have been attempts to curb this practice in Nigeria – through the enactment of the revised Electoral Act 2006 – not much has changed in practice (Dauda, Adamu & Ahmodu-Tijani 2019).

The prevalence of poverty in Nigerian society makes it more susceptible to vote buying because most of the time, like Elder Chukwuka surmised, citizens are just in search of the next meal. Nnanna extended the argument when he said that the sense of fatalism and disillusionment due to a distrust of politicians who have hardly kept their promises in the past has caused people to choose to take what they can when they can. Nnanna and Maimuna addressed this as a product of the political culture in that clientelism in Nigeria is not only a politician-electorate transaction. At its helm is godfatherism, which seems to be a

predominantly Nigerian phenomenon. The practice of community-level vote buying in Nigeria is descriptive of patronage as a political form, as described by Erdmann & Engel (2006). The ethnic divides and familial communal living make it easy for politicians to target groups of persons identified either by their ethnic identification or by their religion. In rural areas, familial and smaller community groups also help to facilitate this practice.

Godfatherism is a term that has long been primarily associated with politics in Nigeria (Cheeseman, Bertrand & Husaini 2019), although it is not exclusive to Nigeria (Alhaji Ali, Mali Bukar & Babagana 2019). Godfathers do not run for political office themselves; rather, it is a common belief that they are the "kingmakers," the ones who determine the winners and losers in elections (Jones 2019). Therefore, Maimuna's comment points out that this is where political change must begin because the godfather-godson relationship in Nigerian politics is transactional (Ndubuisi 2018). Aspiring politicians first make promises to these godfathers to fulfil that often require choosing politics over policies (Vicente & Wantchekon 2009) when they attain political office. This is often because the godfather, while not a politician himself, will use their network to influence political developments (Cheeseman, Bertrand & Husaini 2019) from a position of self-centredness (Ndubuisi 2018).

8.22 Nigeria's Real Political Power Structure

Having argued that in Nigerian politics, power does not exist in one singular dimension (the top-down model as suggested by Castells (2009) or the interdependent model as suggested by Emerson (1962)), the real political power structure in Nigeria that shows every actor's position and level of influence in the system. The diagram below typifies the power dynamism in Nigerian politics.

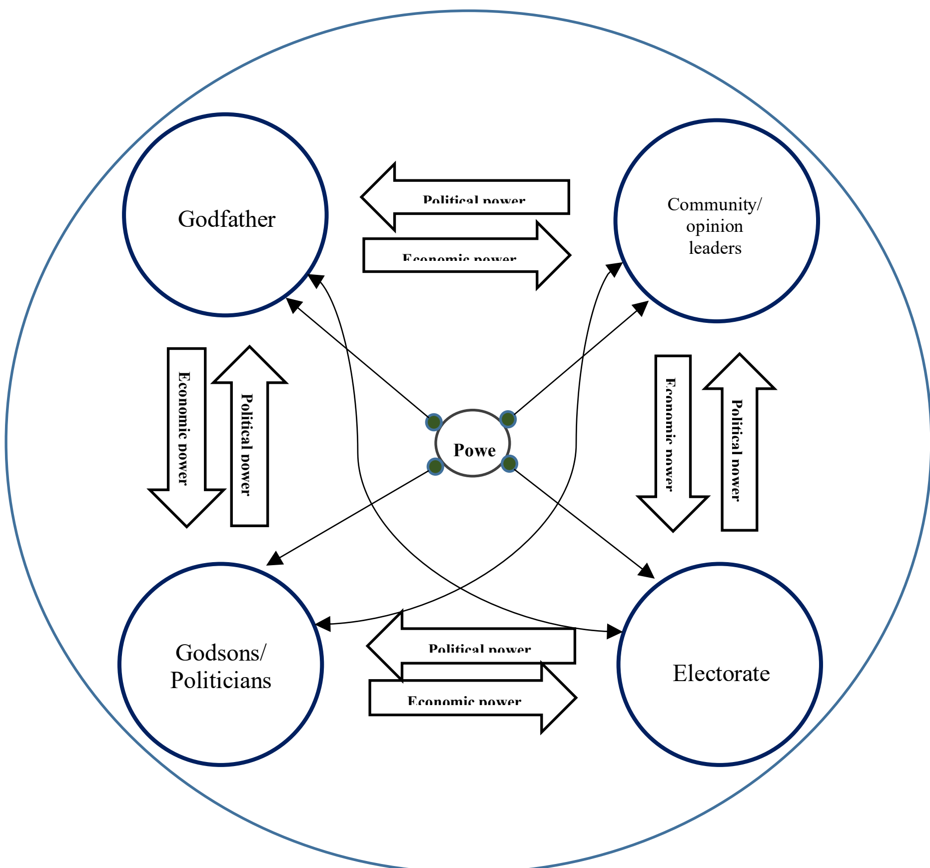


Figure 8.1 The power dynamism in Nigerian politics
Source: Author

In the real power dynamism in Nigerian politics, no single player in the structure holds absolute power, whether economic or political. Rather, power depends on the level of investment actor A makes, the underlying goal in making those investments, and the extent to which actor B is able to mediate those goals. This supports Emerson's argument, as discussed in Chapter 4, of the dependence dynamics in person-to-person, person-to-group, and group-to-group relationships. He says that 'the dependence of actor A upon actor B is (1) directly proportional to A's motivational investment in goals mediated by B, and (2) inversely proportional to the availability of those goals to A outside of the A-B relation' (Emerson 1962, p. 32). Power and dependency are mutually dependent, and their roles are constantly fluid between the actors in Nigerian politics.

8.3 Nigeria's Digitised Public Sphere

The notion that digital media have come to disrupt society permanently is no longer in question. In their book, *The Platform Society*, van Dijck, Poell & de Waal (2018) acknowledge that the online and the digital realms have permeated every aspect of society and that economies have become highly social through Internet-based mediums. Social media certainly have that effect on every aspect of twenty-first-century societies, including politics. This was also echoed by research participants who acknowledged that social media have become a sphere and space for different aspects of societal engagements beyond politics and that social media have specifically and significantly contributed to the reshaping of cultural norms and values, as well as economic opportunities within society.

8.31 Participatory Democracy in Nigeria's Digital Public Sphere

This study set out to find out the extent to which Twitter has changed political participation in Nigeria and to examine the concept within a cultural framework. The findings come from evidence obtained from online and offline data gathered during the study and analysed within the main theories of power and the public sphere. Hence, this thesis agrees that Twitter has certainly made an impact in its contributions towards the enhancement of democracy and participation in the country. However, it argues that other long-standing, lingering factors, such as culture and economic power, which will be discussed further in this chapter, still play roles that are just as significant – or arguably more significant – in the distribution of political wealth within the society.

Political participation has improved in Nigeria with the advent of digital social spaces such as Twitter, allowing individuals who would not normally participate in political discourse to engage to whatever degree they choose. The participants of this study agreed with Murthy's (2017) assertion that although Twitter is not representative enough of the Nigerian social media population, it is potentially democratising because of its capacity to amplify the voices and conversations of the individuals or entities communicating within its sphere.

In the 2015 elections, it was evident that Twitter was a public space that was open to all and encouraged political participation in Nigeria. Such openness is characteristic of the public sphere (Bruns 2019; Habermas 1989). Twitter's advantage, which takes it beyond the public sphere that Habermas defined, is that its digital nature makes the enforcement of equality

easier than in offline spaces. The anonymity that Twitter affords makes it easy for individuals to express themselves without fear of repercussions from society, especially where power distributions are in place. This is especially welcome in Nigeria's current political climate because, as Oona found in the course of her job, Nigerians are less inclined to speak to journalists where they might be identified due to the recent developments of activists who speak against the current government being arrested by the DSS (Busari & Adebayo 2019).

The degree of political engagement on Twitter before, during, and just after Nigeria's 2015 and 2019 presidential elections showed that the microblogging platform was, in fact, an online agora (Kirk & Schill 2011), a digital gathering point where the citizenry convened to share, support or oppose opinions on political issues. In the Nigerian case, Twitter has facilitated citizen-to-citizen links and helped drive robust political conversations. As mentioned in Chapter 6, participants who were Twitter users followed the Twitter accounts of other individuals and political parties or politicians with opposing political views more so than they did those who shared the same views. This suggests that their use of the microblog is not a search for an echo chamber, but rather a search for an opportunity for political participation in which divergent views are welcomed, and there is no intermediary such as there is in traditional media. This view of the role of social media, which was generally shared by the participants, supports the views of Kirk & Schill (2011, p. 326) in what they term 'mobilisation theorists.'

Mobilisation theorists believe that the Internet in general – and social media in particular – 'can lead to new forms of direct democracy and civic participation by lowering barriers to participation, reducing communication costs, and linking citizens with other citizens and with elected officials' (2011, p. 326). The evidence from this research, however, demonstrated that much of the discourse was between individuals. The study did not delve into live-tweeted, televised political debates, simultaneous debates, and reactions on Twitter the same way that the study by Zheng & Shahin' (2018) of the 2016 US campaign season did (see Chapter 3). Nevertheless, it revealed reinforcement of their findings that Twitter provided the opportunity for candidates' supporters to engage with similar opinions, as well as those with opposing views.

The Nigerian experience supports the assertions of Barberá & Rivero (2015) and Vaccari et al. (2013), discussed in Chapter 3, that non-partisan, politically active Twitter users are not representative of any voting populations. In Nigeria, the elitism of Twitter was evident,

and the so-called Twitter elites asserted that they enjoyed that "privileged" position and preferred it that way. Chimelu alluded to this when he said the following:

> We like it that Twitter is elitist because if Twitter becomes like Facebook, then you will have all kinds of humans abusing that space. So, let them leave it for us the elite so that you can communicate your words in 280 characters. Of course, you can decide to do a thread. I find Twitter interesting because you have a lot of more enlightened people coming into the conversation in that space, unlike on Facebook, [where] you have all manner of people saying all manner of things.
>
> - Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018

According to Chimelu, Twitter's elite status meant that it still had a respectable status as a medium of political discourse because the limitations it presented (number of characters, which increased from 140 to 280) meant that only individuals who could convey their message concisely and coherently occupied that space. He added that there are "intellectual orgasms" (Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018) – high levels of satisfaction with the quality of conversations that occur – on Twitter, which contrasts its more popular social networking counterpart, Facebook. This cyberspace bourgeois of the Nigerian political class, although minimal in number in comparison to the social media population in the society, has the same level of influence as those in Habermas' public sphere (Habermas 1989; Habermas 1991). Specifically, it fulfils a distinctive purpose of the public sphere, which is to create political change with the use of critical reasoning of existing knowledge (Kruse, Norris & Flinchum 2018). This, according to Chimelu, is what makes Twitter more valuable as a social medium than its counterparts.

To the participants who identified as digital elites, Facebook was considered rather noisy. Although useful for social networking among already established social circles, and although it allowed more lengthiness in expression, Facebook was not highly regarded as a public sphere for intelligent political discourse. In fact, the "lengthiness" quality contributed to the discrediting of the social network giant as a space for intellectual discourse. Kalu inferred this when he said, 'People bloviate a heck of a lot on Facebook' (Kalu, personal communication, October 26, 2018). He admitted that he avoided Facebook because although there was a lot of lengthy talk going on there, there was little substance in the conversations within that platform. If he wanted to learn about trends in society and understand the public's perceptions of issues, Twitter was his go-to platform for information.

Such opinions take Twitter beyond backchannel status (Kalsnes, Krumsvik & Storsul 2014), affirming that in Nigeria, it has been brought to the forefront of political discourse. This validates the argument made by Ausserhofer & Maireder (2013, p. 291) that 'the increasing use of Twitter by politicians, journalists, political strategists and citizens has made it an important part of the networked sphere in which political issues are publicly negotiated.' In this research, however, this has been validated from the viewpoint of the citizens.

The participants in this study also acknowledged that despite the exclusivity of Twitter use, the interconnected nature of the digital space facilitated the flow of information and discourse from Twitter to other digital networking platforms, as well as offline social networks, thereby contributing to the robustness of political engagement in the society.

Although it would be ideal to prove beyond doubt that the Internet, via social media, has facilitated democracy (Bekafigo & McBride 2013) and improved political participation (Bimber & Copeland 2011), the reality is that the Nigerian experience is not quite as clear-cut as optimists would like.

8.32 Public Opinion in the Digital Public Sphere

As described in Chapter 7, this research shows that digital media, especially social media such as Twitter, have potentially more benefits for Nigeria as an emergent democracy transitioning from a series of authoritarian regimes to a more democratised one. Elochukwu addressed this when she shared her experience of managing the social media accounts of foreign organisations that saw a distinctive surge in traffic when she commenced management of their accounts (see Chapter 7). In making further comparisons between Nigeria as an emerging democracy and the US and the UK as developed democracies, she stressed that the use of Twitter in the West is different than in Nigeria (Elochukwu, WhatsApp interview, October 2019). In countries like the US and the UK, there are structures and channels in place that enable interactions between the government and citizens, such as the signing of petitions. The same is not applicable in Nigeria, where there is still a significant divide between the political elite and ordinary citizens (Elochukwu, WhatsApp interview, October 2019).

Elochukwu's comparative analogy on the positionality of new media in the global north versus the global south supports the findings by Mutsvairo & Harris. In their comparison of social media and mobile media use in the protests in Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement and the Arab Spring, they note that social media were symbolic in the latter, where they were

referred to as ‘protestors’ weapon of choice’ (Mutsvairo & Harris 2016, p. 224). In contrast, they lacked the same measure of symbolism in the Hong Kong protests given that ‘Chinese people are raised on the mobile phone,’ thus indicating that its role in everyday use made it ‘a natural choice for protest’ within that society (Mutsvairo & Harris 2016, p. 224). Lubinga & Baloyi (2019) also support this argument in their study of Twitter use by South African citizens and political parties. Citing Portland (2016), they argue that ‘Twitter users in Africa are five times more likely to use the service to voice their political views than they are in the United Kingdom (UK) and USA’ (Lubinga & Baloyi 2019, p. 278). Although there is an obvious dichotomy in comparing Africa, a continent, with singular countries as are the USA and the UK, the argument demonstrates the difference that has also been observed by earlier scholars as well as users such as Elochukwu who utilise the platform significantly more than the average person.

What makes the Nigerian case distinct is that social media provide a critical avenue for getting politicians to acknowledge, validate, and respond to citizens’ concerns because local issues very quickly become global issues online. In Elochukwu’s experience, Nigerian politicians pay attention and respond to issues only when they come from the West. Therefore, citizens bypass the local press and make issues global through internationally recognised personalities as a tactic to draw a response or reaction from the government (Elochukwu, WhatsApp interview, October 2019), using Twitter as a tool to confront that divide. This is arguably one reason why Nigerian politicians are looking to police the use of these media through the now-twice-proposed social media bills.

8.33 Public Sphere, Not Echo Chamber

This study presents dichotomous views of social media as echo chambers. On the one hand, the idea that Twitter is elitist presents a case for scholars who argue that the microblog, alongside other social networking sites such as Facebook, positions itself in the middle of the echo chamber discourse (Barberá et al. 2015; Vaccari et al. 2016). The participants of this study who used Twitter either to disseminate or to absorb information asserted that they wanted to remove themselves from spaces dominated by obtuse conversation and to immerse themselves in more “intelligent” spaces while driving the discourse in those spaces (Kalu, personal communication, October 26, 2018). Although it has been established that Twitter is not representative of the Nigerian online population, it has been systematically positioned as the

space in which opinion leaders meet and deliberate, form opinions, and then disseminate them. According to Chimelu, a vast majority of Facebook conversations are offshoots of conversations on Twitter (Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018).

This research shows that Nigerians who engage on Twitter do so with the belief that Twitter is truly a digital public sphere. This is divergent to predominant views such as those put forth by Colleoni, Rozza & Arvidsson (2014), who argue that there is a lack of political polarity on Twitter and that 'Twitter functions as an echo chamber that reinforces its users' established perspectives and opinions' (Guo, Rohde & Wu 2018, p. 2).

Although Nigerians, as depicted in this study group, hold decidedly different political views and tend to be divided along party lines (which are usually drawn by several factors including religion and ethnicity), they deliberately engage in political debates with individuals with opposing viewpoints. This finding, which is largely why Twitter users choose to engage with that medium, is also supported by Matuszewski & Szabó (2019) study of political polarity on Twitter in Poland and Hungary. According to the researchers, Polish Twitter users do not exist in partisan clusters, and although Hungarian users registered 'sharp divisions on Twitter,' their nodes were diverse and showed overlaps 'in terms of political leaning' (p. 1).

Nigerian users engage with the intent to present their opinions, receive counter-opinions, and debate on issues of interest to them. This was especially the case in the Nigerian elections, during which opposing views and subsequent debates on issues were prevalent in discussion threads. In relation to existing scholarship (Chapter 3), the research shows that Twitter presents itself as the ideal digital public sphere, a finding that supports the work of Dubois & Blank (2018), whose work found that people interested in politics consciously avoid echo chambers. This is in contrast with Barberá et al. (2015), whose findings showed that information exchange on political issues occurred primarily among users who shared similar ideologies. This contrast in findings may be caused by evolution in Twitter use. The study by Barberá et al. (2015) dates earlier in investigations of Twitter use, while the study by Dubois & Blank (2018) and the current thesis are more recent. As this study argues for Twitter's position as evolving from backchannel status to the forefront of political discourse, the findings show that the level and quality of political engagement in that sphere have also evolved.

This finding also contrasts findings related to other social media platforms, such as Facebook, that have been particularly criticised for being echo chambers (Jacobson, Myung & Johnson 2016) (see Chapter 3) due to the tendency to disallow contrary opinions in such spaces,

fuelled by their design. In some cases, research participants tweeted with the very deliberate intention of generating debates on issues of interest to them, even though this is sometimes with the singular motive of building traction and popularity. One influencer participant put this quite clearly, as stated in Chapter 6, when he shared his relationship with Twitter and his motives for using it:

> I could just sit and in my head ask myself a question and answer the question but feel I need a second opinion, so I tweet it and other people react. There are other times when I just want a conversation to be had, and I know people react to a lot of things I do on Twitter. So, I started the conversation knowing there will be a reaction – it could be on a national issue, it could be a social issue, it could be sports, it could be anything - it could be a movie, it could be music. Then sometimes, I just want to ruffle [feathers]; I just want to shake the tree. I want people who have a different opinion from me to come and canvas their opinion, [to] canvas their dissent to whatever positions I hold.
>
> - Ofor, personal conversation, September 17, 2018

This deliberate pursuit of counter-opinions deviates from the ideals of echo chambers and conforms to the innate ideals upon which Twitter was built. Original forms of social media such as forums that Ofor acknowledges he engaged with prior to Twitter were arguably created to be echo chambers in which people convened with the common denominator of shared interests and ideas. Subsequent forms, such as Myspace and Facebook, towed the same ideals, offering the options for individuals to invite, to allow, or to deny people entry into their "public" spaces, either on personal pages or on group pages. In that vein then, the arguments of Jacobson, Myung & Johnson (2016) are validated. However, the kind of space that Twitter provides and facilitates tows away from that agenda towards a more inclusive public sphere in which all opinions can be divulged, accepted, or debated.

8.4 Political Participation in the Age of Twitter

This study sought to understand how Twitter has transformed political participation in Nigeria. The enquiry stemmed from the outcome of the 2015 elections when, for the first time in the country's democratic history, an incumbent president lost re-election to the challenger. This outcome was significant for social media because it was the first time that Twitter was used as the primary online platform for political participation in Nigeria, consequently raising the question of what role Twitter played in the election. The study found that Twitter contributes to political participation in the country. Although it is ambitious to claim that it has any

influence on the outcomes of elections, it has created an additional space for political discourse in Nigeria's digital public sphere and presents itself as a critical tool on Election Day.

Social media perform multiple functions in elections in the Nigerian experience, with each function being defined by each user category, mostly aimed at enhancing the election experience, and in some cases, directly intended to influence the electoral outcome. The user categories identified in this research are ordinary citizens, as well as election monitoring and election observing entities. The extent to which the motive to influence is achieved is still unclear, although the opinion of the majority is that this is minimal or outright insignificant, considering the Internet penetration rate in the country, as well as other features of the Nigerian polity that influence political outcomes.

8.41 Strengthening Participatory Democracy

This study affirms what Loader & Mercea (2012) surmised in their paper, namely that social media have contributed to the strengthening of participatory democracy. In the Nigerian case, they have helped to increase and enhance engagement among pockets of the society – particularly young people – that normally would not participate. However, Twitter is the exception to this, and the extent of this impact is still largely limited to urban cities. Twitter data showed that online discourse within that space was dominated by a limited group of people who tweeted from cities, showing that social media have facilitated a conducive public sphere for this group of people. Twitter participants are not representative of the entire Nigerian population of social media users, as Chimelu reiterated. Nevertheless, the fluid nature of the different social media means that information is not confined to one public sphere but flows from one to the other – for example, from Twitter to Facebook. As he said, 'a good majority of the conversation that happens on Facebook is because of what takes place on Twitter' (Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018).

The caution offered by Loader and Mercea (2012) about the temptation to overplay the influence of these new media is also valid in Nigeria. Although social media did have some effect, the outcome of the 2019 elections showed that the effect was minimally influential to final electoral outcomes. Other social issues, such as insecurity and corruption, had more significant bearings on the elections (especially the 2015 presidential election) than social media. Thus, it can be argued that even the big data manipulation by *Cambridge Analytica*, which also occurred in Nigeria during the 2015 elections (Ekdale & Tully 2019), would not

have had the same effect that it claimed to have had in the 2016 US elections. More importantly, political activity within the digital sphere was not proportional to voting behaviour in the Nigerian case.

The relationship between online activities and offline outcomes was more measurable in the 2015 elections, which, in support of Towner (2013), showed a direct yet arguable correlation between online discourse and the actual outcome of the presidential poll. This outcome is arguable because the voter turnout for that election was 44%, which was a ten-point reduction from the previous election in 2011, which had a 54% turnout (Adekoya 2019), demonstrating that online political participation does not necessarily translate to offline political activity. Although the 2015 electoral outcome showed that there is some kind of relationship between social media and offline political outcomes, the evidence suggesting that online and offline political activities are related is insufficient.

8.42 Motives for Political Participation: Curing Political Apathy

This study shows that political apathy is still a problem among young people in Nigeria. This is despite strides made since the advent of new ways of participating in politics, primarily fronted by these new media. A good number of the participants did not vote in the 2015 presidential election, and some of these participants indicated a lack of interest to vote in the 2019 run. This, in part, is attributable to the level of difficulty in registering to vote in Nigeria, especially in urban areas, which has already been discussed. A larger rationale for this, however, which is where the real issue remains, is the lack of trust in the system expressed by many young people.

Participants like Ngozi expressed this sentiment when she said that she did not believe that her vote counted and, therefore, did not see the need to be registered and to vote in 2015. At the time of the interview, she did not intend to exercise this civic duty in 2019 either (Ngozi, personal communication, September 29, 2018). Interestingly, it is this same demographic that contains the key advocates for political involvement through online discursive engagement and, of course, voting in elections.

Organisations such as YIAGA, a youth engagement organisation, advocate for democratic inclusion with a focus on young people (YIAGA n.d.). In collaboration with other civil society organisations, YIAGA championed the #NotTooYoungToRun movement, which challenged the constitutional restrictions on young people’s eligibility to vie for political

offices (YIAGA 2019). This movement resulted in the passing of a bill in the National Assembly, which reduced 'the age for running for the office of the President from 40 to 35 years, House of Representatives 30 to 25 and State House of Assembly 30 to 25' (YIAGA 2019). This two-year campaign and its success were lauded by the president, who signed it into law, as a 'landmark piece of legislation conceived, championed and accomplished by young Nigerians' (Adebayo 2018; YIAGA 2019). It is thus surprising – and concerning – that members of the Nigerian electorate of the same age demographic do not see value in the electoral process.

On the other end of the spectrum, participants like Angela advocate for engaging in politics beyond Election Day. Angela is of the opinion that while elections are important, they are only one part of the democratic process, and part of her job is educating the citizenry about their political and civic rights and the need to know and exercise them beyond elections (Angela, personal communication, September 14, 2018). Nnanna, who works in electoral governance civil society, also advocates for electoral involvement beyond voting in ways such as election observation and citizen responsibility. He believes that every citizen can take ownership for the improvement of electoral integrity and promotes election observation and monitoring as one way to contribute to this (Nnanna, personal communication, September 25, 2018).

8.43 When Online Political Participation does not Influence Offline Political Participation

Findings from this study show that people who engage in political discourse online do not necessarily engage in offline civic political activities, such as voting in elections. Distrust in the political system was cited as the principal reason, suggesting that although social media are effective political tools (Waller 2013), they have not entirely cured political apathy in the country. Although these media have succeeded in reaching usually inactive groups and facilitating online engagement among that demographic (Gibson, Lusoli & Ward 2005), they have not contributed significantly to offline political action – specifically, voting – in Nigeria.

This finding, however, contradicts Resnick's (1997) normalisation effect of Internet use in the sense that it is not a mirror of offline realities, as discussed in Chapter 3. Resnick argues that online activities reflect offline activities because the Internet does not increase the pool of politically active individuals but instead reinforces the status quo (1997). In the Nigerian

political sphere, it is a contrast to the offline reality. Data derived from the study show that in the Nigerian experience, online and offline types of political participation are two different entities. Online political activity does not effectively replicate offline political activity in ways that impact electoral outcomes.

For example, statistics from the 2019 election showed that voter turnout was 35% of the 84 million registered voters, showing a 9% decrease from 2015 (Adekoya 2019). This figure suggests that even though urban dwellers are vocal on Twitter, they have little trust in the electoral system and do not go out to vote. In fact, as Election Guide (2020) data show, voter turnout has consistently declined since 2003. The fact that over half of registered voters are between the ages of 18 and 35 (Akwagyiram & Carsten 2019) further suggests that the decline is significant among young people – the same age distribution that is dominantly active on social media. As the study showed, a larger proportion of voting occurred among individuals in rural parts of the country where online political activity was minimal. Participants from these areas, such as Fatima, acknowledged the parts of the country where politicians concentrated their campaign efforts and where there was a higher tendency of vote buying and clientelism (Fatima, personal communication, October 26, 2018).

As another example, one common denominator among the younger age groups in the fieldwork conversations was the echo of the difficulty of being registered as a voter in Nigeria, a difficulty that the researcher also experienced first-hand. Among the study participants who did not vote, the primary reason for not doing so was the lack of possession of a voter's card, which is mandatory to be eligible to vote in an election in the country. From the researcher's own experience, the process of obtaining one is cumbersome, likely especially so in urban areas where there are higher numbers of eligible voters than in rural areas. Although, in fairness, voter registration can occur at any time until near the general election season, there is little public awareness until elections are coming.

This is one area upon which the government could improve to encourage offline political participation – the civic practice of voting – particularly among young, urban dwellers. Most of the participants who did not register to vote attested that the process was cumbersome and unclear and that, as a result, they chose not to engage with the offline process even though they still engaged in online forms of political participation.

Another group of participants that did not vote in elections was the influencers – those who contributed significantly to political content and discourse online. This trend was observed

early on during the fieldwork and interviews. When asked, this participant group explained that they were automatically exempt from voting due to their responsibilities as election observers or monitors. As Ude, who coordinates nationwide election observations, explained, the nature of their jobs takes them across different polling stations – sometimes, as in Ude's case, across state lines. The voting system is not set up to enable early voting, which would be beneficial to this demographic (Ude, personal communication, September 23, 2018).

These findings are particularly concerning because, in democratic societies, voting is the 'most common form of political participation' (Chukwuma & Okpala 2018, p. 70). While the argument by Gibson, Lusoli & Ward' (2005) that social media have facilitated online political participation among otherwise inactive pockets of the populace is a closer reflection of the state of affairs in Nigeria than that by Resnick' (1997), it also does not completely answer the Nigerian question of offline political apathy as stated earlier. In the Nigerian case, online political engagement has, to some degree, been separated from offline forms.

8.5 Information Duality on Twitter

This research finds that in Nigeria, Twitter is a conduit for misinformation and disinformation, as well as a critical tool of information verification, and these attributes are especially important on Election Day. As found in Chapter 6, political parties and their agents use social media to disseminate false information about polling stations, particularly when they realise that their party or candidate is losing the vote. In collaboration with online team members in the situation room, for example, local election monitors pick up news of incidences that have occurred at polling stations. They subsequently investigate the issues and report on them. One thing that was common in the case elections was the prevalence of fake news, which was continually peddled online with the goal of dissuading voters or influencing their voting choices. Parties had touts situated in critical polling points, whose job was to monitor the landscape of the voting exercise and, if their preferred candidate was not winning, spread disinformation about the ongoing exercise in that area. Information that was spread included rumours that there was unrest in the area and that voters were better off remaining at home than coming out to vote. In many instances during the 2015 and 2019 elections, the news turned out to be false.

The Nigerian experience is different from that of the US and the UK, for example. While news is fabricated and manipulated during political campaigns in both contexts as a way to sway voters to the desired direction (Howard 2016; Rodny-Gumede 2018), its use extends

to Election Day in Nigeria. Because of the country's history of Election Day and post-election violence, the news is weaponised on Election Day to deter voters if considered necessary to secure a win in the area by political parties.

Twitter data from the 2019 elections exemplify the spread of disinformation, by which the main challenger's Twitter account tweeted that the opposition party's election hub had been attacked by agents of a government security agency. However, further information revealed that the account was not the real account of the challenger, Atiku, whose real account is verified on Twitter. Thus, election monitors thus also have the job of verifying such information to verify or counter it.

Upon recalling incidences from the 2015 elections, Elochukwu, a study participant who had worked as an election monitor in three consecutive elections, also recounted many cases when information floated around about disturbances in different polling stations. However, when observers in those locations were contacted to verify the information, they reported that the locations were calm, and voting was going on normally. They also sent real-time pictures as proof. She also said that the information verification technology and strategy were upgraded for the 2019 elections to improve efficiency.

As this section highlights, Twitter's contradictory information role in elections – misinformation and disinformation on the one hand, and verification on the other hand – makes it a valuable tool to different users with different intentions. What provides the upper hand, which is especially valuable to influencers, is credibility. For influencers like Ofor and Elochukwu, this level of credibility is hard-won through consistency in delivering facts attained through thorough research, which results in increased trust gained from one's followers over time, as explained in Chapter 6.

8.51 Social Media Scepticism

One interesting find was that academics (i.e., researchers) were more sceptical about social media than other members of the research participant group. They preferred to use traditional methods of fact-finding and fact-checking for whatever information was disseminated online. In one specific case, there was utter aversion to social media use for information gathering, especially when relating to politics and economics. Jide, an academic and economist, explained how he obtained information:

> News [and] official statistics. Not much from social media because most of the information there lacked substance; they were more noise. I do a bit of WhatsApp. There are some sites I subscribe to and get regular updates from, general google searches, but none of Facebook or Twitter...I don't do those.
>
> - Jide, personal communication, September 29, 2018

Even in cases where academics admitted to using social media, they insisted that it had little influence on their political decisions. According to Babba, he was only a consumer on Twitter. He said he only visited Twitter to read conversations happening there. In his own words, 'I don't post; I just read.' Babba was also one of the academics who claimed that social media had no influence over his political decisions:

> I have known the president [Buhari] before social media, and I know him very well… so I am not influenced by social media on this.
>
> - Babba, personal communication, November 9, 2018

Babba alluded to having a personal relationship with Buhari, the victor in the 2015 presidential run, and inferred that this relationship, as well as what he knew of the then-challenger because of it, was the basis of his political decisions.

8.6 Culture as an Intermediary in the Nigerian Twittersphere

The main argument of this research is founded on a structure of culture and its influence in non-Western societies, both online and offline. Thus, it argues that culture influences the way in which Nigerians participate politically online and offline. The findings show that culture, as defined by ethnicity and religion, has a significant influence on offline and online political communication among citizens in Nigeria. An analysis of Tweets during the 2019 elections showed that the ethnic stereotypes identified offline were also demonstrated online. Of the three major ethnic groups, the Yorubas were the most vocal, followed by the Igbos and then the Hausa-Fulanis. This finding validates the insights of Deng (1997) discussed in Chapter 3 on the influence of ethnicity on patterns of behaviour and reflects the same stereotypes of these ethnic groups.

This finding leads to a new understanding of Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence theory (Chapter 4) and how that applies in the Nigerian case. In their investigations of Noelle-

Neumann's theory in the face of new communication technologies (Panayırcı 2016), in social media (Gearhart & Zhang 2015), and in the Twittersphere specifically (Miyata, Yamamoto & Ogawa 2015), the authors of all of these studies reinforced her claims. They found that just as Noelle-Neumann asserted of the relationship between public opinion, individual opinions, and the inclination to express them, people's inclination to express their personal views in the digital public sphere is superimposed by the opinion of dominating voices.

While this study does not refute these claims, it suggests that in non-Western contexts, other factors may contribute to the trend of silence. The three studies above were predominantly carried out in a Western context (the United States) and a non-Western context with a strong Western influence (Japan), hence the element of Westernisation embedded in the findings. Findings from the Twitter geotags of the 2019 Election Day in Nigeria showed that most of the Tweets by individuals originated from the south, where the Yorubas and Igbos are the dominant ethnic groups. These ethnic groups, described in Chapter 2, are stereotypically vocal and loud in their opinion sharing.

Conversely, the northern Hausa-Fulanis were less vocal on Twitter, again demonstrating that the stereotypes of them being the quietest of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria have some validity in reality. This is an argument that Scheufle & Moy (2000) make in their review of Noelle-Neumann's theory in the 25th anniversary since its inception. They contend that studies of the theory in diverse cultural settings have not accounted for 'culture-specific variables that may mitigate the importance of opinion perceptions as predictors of individual behaviour or attitudes' (Scheufle & Moy 2000, p. 3). Scheufle and Moy also argue that cross-cultural differences strongly influence the tendency of people to speak out or stay silent, adding that as a result, there is a need for further macroscopic focus on further research of this theory (2000). The view of ethnicity as a cultural and self-determinant, 'the embodiment of values, institutions, and patterns of behaviour' offered by Deng (1997, p. 28), supports the argument by Scheufle & Moy (2000), and the cultural diversity in Nigeria presents a good test case that demonstrates the validity of that argument.

8.7 Summary

This chapter discussed the main findings of this study, which show that Twitter has altered political participation in Nigeria, although its contribution is not autonomous. Instead, its contributions depend on cultural factors that are long-standing in Nigerian society.

Furthermore, Twitter demonstrates the characteristics of a digital public sphere through its creation of an open space for political dialogue that is less subject to echo chamber status than other social networks, in which all opinions are permissible. In addition, the possibility of anonymity that it presents as a digital platform makes it a welcoming space for political talk in the current anti-activism clime in Nigeria. Finally, this chapter challenged the spiral of silence theory by calling for a culturally nested outlook in further investigations of the theory's validity. It argued that cultural factors play significant roles in determining the extent to which the theory is upheld, particularly in societies with diverse cultures.

The next chapter will present the conclusions of this study and directly answer the research questions.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

The overarching question that this study sought to answer was: "How has Twitter changed political participation in the Nigerian cultural context?" It sought to answer this question within the context of social media use during the 2015 and 2019 Nigerian presidential elections – subsumed in and examined through the lens of Nigeria's societal culture – and was broken down into further sub-questions (SQs) as follows:

SQ_1: How is Twitter used as a tool for political participation within the Nigerian context through the case study of the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections?

SQ_2: How and to what extent do cultural beliefs, practices, and behaviours influence the political decisions of the Nigerian electorate?

SQ_3: What relationships exist between online political activities and offline realities and outcomes?

These research questions will be addressed in detail in this chapter, with reference to the 2015 and 2019 elections.

Methodologically, these questions tied into the case study through a qualitative case study design that employed the connective ethnography method to juxtapose online and offline data collection methods. This approach to the research contributes to studies of Twitter use in politics through its connective approach to ethnography. Whereas prior Twitter studies have been predominantly quantitative, this study contributes to qualitative studies of the microblog.

The connective ethnographic method enabled the examination of both online and offline political participation in order to ascertain the extent to which each influenced the other. Online data were collected from Twitter using specific hashtags that identified relevance to the elections. Additionally, geotagging was used to scrape relevant data, and online interactions on Twitter were also observed. Offline qualitative data was collected via ethnographic observations, field notes, and in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Twenty-four participants were interviewed, comprising Nigerians who lived in Nigeria and were eligible to vote as of the 2015 elections. Purposeful and snowballing sampling methods were used for participant recruitment. Of the 24, seven participants identified as social media influencers who tweeted

about politics – amongst other things – or engaged significantly within the Twittersphere during elections and had significant followerships on the microblogging platform. Content and thematic analyses were used to analyse and discuss the findings within the established theoretical framework, as well as the extant literature.

The 2015 election was distinctly and unprecedentedly characterised by the use of Twitter to facilitate engagement between different cross-sections of the political landscape. The UK's *PR Week* dubbed it 'Nigeria's Twitter Election' (Moore 2015). When Goodluck Jonathan – then incumbent president – lost and conceded the election to his challenger via a congratulatory phone call at 5:00 p.m. that day, social media champions saw it as a Twitter victory. For the first time, the Nigerian general election was not marred by violence across the country, especially in the North. The incumbent's concession was commended both nationally and internationally, as – in his own words – 'nobody's ambition is worth the blood of any Nigerian' (Allimadi 2015; Vanguard News 2014). The reputation of the former president – whose unpopularity had increased due to raging unemployment, economic depreciation, a rise in corruption index, and a surge in terrorist activity, particularly in North-East Nigeria – soared in the aftermath.

The outcome of this election, which the researcher witnessed while in Nigeria, inspired the questions that would form the basis of this research: (1) What role did Twitter play in this election? (2) Was Twitter really a tool of engagement and mobilisation for the electorate, and if so, to what extent? (3) Did Twitter facilitate the ousting of the incumbent and the instalment of the challenger? This dramatic change in the status quo, which was paralleled by a surge in social media use, raised questions about what role social media might have played in the process. This metamorphosed into the bigger question of how Twitter has changed political participation in Nigeria. Nigeria is a significantly culturally driven society, where culture is infused in all aspects of society – including politics – and framed through two specific attributes – ethnicity and religion. Thus, this thesis examines social media use through a cultural lens and consequently makes a significant contribution to social media discourse.

The study was grounded in two underlying theories: Habermas's (1989; 1991) public sphere – where Twitter is positioned as a digital public sphere (Bruns 2019) – and Castells's (2009) communication power. These theories were supported by the social network theory as a minor theory, and they were useful for framing the study to examine the data and analyse and interpret the findings. In addition, the relevant extant literature was reviewed to enhance the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the interplay between social media, culture, and

communication in political discourse from Western and non-Western perspectives. Examining social media political communication practices from these two distinct perspectives was necessary; after all, this thesis argues for a de-Westernised approach to the study of social media use as political tools by contextualising experiences within cultures as variables.

Twitter, as a digital public sphere, has the characteristics of Habermas's public sphere (Habermas 1991). It is accessible to all – a feature that distinguishes it from other social network models such as Facebook – and it is non-hierarchical by design. However, this study finds that certain Foucauldian criticisms of Habermas's theory (Devenney 2009; Thomassen 2008) apply, because – as even the participants acknowledged – Twitter is elitist (Chimelu, personal communication, October 20, 2018)/ It represents only a small fraction of active social media users in the Nigerian digital sphere. Nevertheless, the study finds that Twitter is a primary catalyst for political discourse not just on the microblogging platform but extending to other public spaces both online and offline.

The thesis also makes a significant contribution to Castells's communication power theory through its key finding – that power does not always adhere to a top-down model. It does not entirely invalidate the assumptions made about power distributions at the start of the study, which typically considered power relations in the African context to fit into Castells's top-down model (Castells 2009), as exemplified in this research by H_2. However, it opens up the notion of political and communication power to a more robust examination by exploring other forms of power relationships, such as 'mutual dependence' between parties (Emerson 1962, p. 32).

These developments arising from the study suggest that a de-Westernisation of Western theories is necessary when attempting to apply them to studies in non-Western contexts. The next section will expand on these findings while also responding to the thesis questions.

9.2 Key Study Findings

Three research sub-questions were presented at the start of this thesis and reiterated in the introduction of this final chapter. Here, the answers to those sub-questions will be presented, demonstrating how the thesis has answered not only those sub-questions but, ultimately, the overarching research question as well.

Research Question 1: How is Twitter used for political participation within the Nigerian context through the case study of the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections?

A_1: ***Twitter contributes to increased political participation among young, educated Nigerians.***

This study validates this argument to the extent that it applies to online political participation. The study found that Twitter conforms to Habermas's definition of a public sphere by virtue of being a place where diverse voices and opinions are heard. This is largely due to the limited censorship built into the platform's design in comparison to other social media, such as Facebook, where users can censor and curate access within their spheres. Twitter use as a tool for political participation in Nigeria is dynamic, with each use defined by its user group. This study identified three distinct user groups: citizens, social media influencers, and election observation and monitoring groups. Politicians were excluded from the groupings because the research design excludes direct focus on that user group. This study excluded politicians in its examination of users.

Citizens: Twitter has spurred an increase in political participation among the educated, urban population and become a major driver of political discourse. Political issues usually originate on Twitter and then cascade onto other social media platforms and to offline social networks. Although Twitter is not representative of Nigeria's social media population, it has been elevated beyond backchannel status and now stands at the forefront of political discourse; it is the preferred medium for online political engagement. It is also the primary online source of political news.

Social media influencers: For this user group, Twitter is an ideal platform for mood intelligence. While it allows influencers to introduce and shape the direction of political discourse on the microblog and other social media networks, Twitter is also useful for understanding what the overall mood is with regard to political and other social issues in the country. Again, Twitter's design as a digital public sphere makes it suitable to fulfil this need. Furthermore, where social media followership is traditionally homogenous and lends itself to criticism as an echo chamber (Guo, Rohde & Wu 2018; Vaccari et al. 2016), this study's data debunked this notion by showing that Nigerian Twitter influencers were more likely to follow the pages of the political parties they opposed rather than the party they supported – and they followed other influencers regardless of their party or candidate allegiance.

Election observing and monitoring groups: For this user group, Twitter is especially useful on Election Day. As one participant – Elochukwu – noted, these users monitor information on the platform, paying particular attention to tweets about violence and other Election Day issues, such as delays or technical problems, which are quite common in Nigerian elections (Elochukwu, personal communication, August 31, 2018). The information gathered is then investigated by observing and monitoring officers at different polling areas. If verified, the intel is passed on to the appropriate authorities for action; meanwhile, if it is found to be fake, the news is countered on the same platform.

Research Question 2: How, and to what extent, do cultural beliefs, practices, and behaviours influence the political decisions of the Nigerian electorate?

Answering this question requires an understanding of Nigerian societal culture, which was presented in Chapter 2. The research examines and responds to this inquiry from the perspective of the following argument, which was made at the beginning of the thesis:

> ***A_2:*** *The culture of economic dependency inherent in Nigeria influences political decisions.*

This study validates the argument that the culture of economic dependency in Nigeria influences people's interactivity and their voting decisions. Interviewees concurred that economic dependency plays a highly significant role in the political decisions of Nigerian citizens. They stated that the strength of this relationship between economics and politics is usually determined by the level of economic dependency of one person on another – validating Castells's top-down power model as discussed in Chapter 4. Castells (2009) argues that power relies on control and represents an asymmetrical distribution of influence by one actor over others; this notion is often represented in Nigeria through uneven economic distributions. As Elder Chukwuka remarked about the Nigerian experience, economic positioning strongly influences political decisions within social structures, such as families and communities (particularly in rural areas), where it is normal to toe a unified political line that is usually determined by the opinion movers (Elder Chukwuka, personal communication, October 11, 2018).

While this finding supports Castells's top-down model, it also refutes his idea of society being social structures built on conflicts, negotiations, and opposition only – a stance this thesis argues against in Chapter 4. Nigerian society is made up of pockets of communities where

shared values, traditions, beliefs, and interests are shaped by religious and ethnic diversities, which ultimately distinguish one community from another. Within these communities, communication networks – fuelled by economic positionality – are the centrality of power making (van Dijk 2010).

The other aspect of power displayed by the diverse relationships in the political playing field in this study mirrors the structure of 'mutual dependence between parties' that Emerson (1962) argues for. His argument, presented decades before Castells's, challenges the view of power as a one-way, top-down relationship. Social media reflects Emerson's horizontal view, in which there are dynamics of dependence and the digital public sphere is an equal playing field – with all players experiencing both power and dependency.

Research Question 3: What relationships exist between online political activities and offline realities and outcomes?

This study shows that online political participation is not a clear indication of involvement in offline political activities in the Nigerian experience. Some of the study participants who used social media to source information or engage in political discourse did not vote in the elections; distrust in the country's political system and challenges in the voter registration process were cited as the primary reasons for abstaining. Among influencers, some of whom were involved in election monitoring and observing, the main reason for not voting in the 2015 elections was that their Election Day obligations did not leave time for them to cast their votes at their registered polling units.

Current data shows that there has been a consistent decline in voter turnout since 2003 (Adekoya 2019; Election Guide 2020) and that over 50% of the Nigerian electorate is between the ages of 18 and 35 (Akwagyiram & Carsten 2019). Although Twitter – which is predominantly used by this age demographic – has stepped in to fill gaps in political participation among this group through its role as a digital public sphere, it can be inferred that political engagement on the microblogging platform and other social media has not contributed significantly to engagement in offline political activities such as voting. In Nigeria, online and offline political participation seem to be mutually exclusive rather than interdependent. In other words, online political action through engagement in political discourse on social media does not necessarily mean offline political action such as voting among the Nigerian electorate. Hence, the study does not absolutely validate A_1; while online political participation is increasing, offline political participation in Nigeria is on the decline.

9.3 Contributions of the Research

This study contributes to political studies in Africa by lending a distinct sociological perspective to the discourse in the field. It supports the de-Westernisation of political studies in its argument that non-Western contexts are different and, therefore, that theories grounded in Western literature cannot be interpreted in non-Western contexts without recourse for the cultures that influence all aspects of everyday life – including politics – in those contexts. Findings related to the Nigerian experience can be realistically extended to other African countries with similar cultures and values.

The methodological approach of the research contributes to studies of Twitter use in politics through its connective approach to ethnography. Whereas prior Twitter studies have been predominantly quantitative, this study contributes to qualitative studies of the microblog. It juxtaposes online ethnography with traditional ethnographic methods, with the distinct aim of examining political participation in the age of social media through a holistic lens – where, historically, online and offline studies have been conducted separately. It provides insight into the interrelationships of the two spheres in order to achieve a better understanding of political behaviour. It also examines a population that had previously not been paid much attention within the field: social media influencers in the online and offline networks of the political sphere.

This thesis examines both sides of Castells's (2009) theory of power. One aspect of the findings, based on H_2, alludes to economic power as a determinant of political decisions, which adheres to Castells's top-down model of power. The culture of economic dependency in Nigeria validates this model and necessitates that the society conforms to Castells's communication power theory because poverty and dependency drive the citizenry towards vote trading as a solution to their pressing economic problems. As a result, clientelism and patronage have become symbols of Nigerian elections.

However, another aspect of the findings that is largely based on de-Westernised models of clientelism and patronage suggests that power does not always adhere to the top-down model, even in emerging democracies and developing countries like Nigeria, where vote buying and clientelism are commonplace. Power is not only vertical but is also horizontal. This power model conforms with Emerson's (1962) model. This horizontal view of power is evident in the digital public sphere, where everyone has equal communication power and alternates

between the roles of benefactor and beneficiary. It is also evident in the clientelist and vote-buying relationships that are most visible during elections.

Although economic dependency, which represents the top-down model, is key to understanding power and position, insight into clientelism and vote buying systems shows that the political elites recognise that the electorate wields power through its votes. The result of this is a tendency to use economic power in exchange for political power. This is significant for the electorate, who often believe that the politicians wield all the power due to their financial advantage. It is also significant for political studies and the political education of electorates in non-Western countries, especially in Africa.

9.4 Suggestions for Future Research

This study took a qualitative, connective approach to studying Twitter as a tool for political participation, using culture as a lens to provide contextual insight. While this study's findings contribute to a methodological broadening of Twitter studies, some additional contributions can still be made through further research:

- Nigeria has been used as a test case to understand cultural influences on online and offline political participation. Comparative research of two or more African countries will extend the generalisations of this study by examining the similarities and differences between African countries. Researchers should endeavour to find the commonalities and evaluate the contrasts through each cultural lens.
- This thesis acknowledges that the Nigerian Twitter population is not representative of the country's social media active population; therefore, similar studies on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp will provide deeper insight into the role of social media in political participation.
- In addition, a holistic enquiry using qualitative as well as quantitative methods might excavate other themes that influence political participation but that have not been explored here.
- Finally, whereas this thesis examines Twitter use as a tool for political participation, a study of Twitter use in non-political contexts – such as in relation to the novel coronavirus, COVID-19 – will further the understanding of Twitter usage patterns beyond elections.

9.5 Conclusion

This research concludes that Twitter plays a pertinent role in political participation in Nigeria. Previous studies have acknowledged Twitter as a backchannel for political discourse, and it is now emerging as a main channel (or front-channel). This research supports that claim by illustrating how Twitter served as a key driver of political engagement amongst Nigerian citizens during the 2015 and 2019 elections. However, this political participation has remained mostly online and has not had a significant effect on offline realities or outcomes. Furthermore, social media channels are not independent actors in Nigerian politics; cultural values and norms – which are steeped in diverse traditions, practices, and expectations and fuelled by ethnicity and religion – influence the political dynamics of the citizenry and how they are manifested online and offline. The Nigerian test case is evidence of the distinguishing features of politics and communications in both the online and offline spheres. This makes a case for contextualising social media and political studies within specific societies – particularly in non-Western societies – instead of generalising and superimposing findings from Western studies onto non-Western contexts.

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APPENDIX - SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWED QUESTIONS

Group 1: Twitter Influencers/Avid Users

1. What do you use social media for primarily?
2. What social medium do you use the most?
3. What do you use Twitter for primarily?
4. How have social media, particularly Twitter, influenced you and those around you?
5. What influenced Twitter as your medium of engagement during the election?
6. Questions about specific Twitter comments:
   a. What was going on at this time?
   b. What influenced your choice of words (if there is a pattern in this participant's tweets)? If not, this question can still be used to understand their thought process.
7. Did you vote in the last election? If no, why not?
8. To what extent would you say social media influenced the 2015 elections? To what extent do you expect it would influence the forthcoming 2019 elections?
9. On the 2015 Election postponement –
   a. What are/were your thoughts on that?
   b. What role did social media play in all of that?
10. How would you gauge the level of impact that social media has in the Nigerian society, and on you personally?
11. To what extent would you say that social media impact the way of life of Nigerians?

<u>On election observation & monitoring:</u>

12. How relevant is Twitter on Election Day?
13. What would you use it for?

<u>Post-2019 Election (election observers/monitors):</u>

14. Overview:
    a. What was your role and what did it entail?
    b. Who did you work for/with?
    c. Who did you collaborate with?
    d. How relevant was Twitter to your job on the day?
15. Walk me through your Election Day.
16. What was most significant about the way Twitter was used on that day – positive

and/or negative?

17. In your experience, are there aspects of being Nigerian that influence your social media use?
18. What would you say are some cultural distinctions of Nigerians' use of social media to that of the West?

Group 2: Other Participants

1. How would you describe your relationship with X (where X is another participant who referred them for interviewing?
2. Do you use social media? If yes, which one(s)? If no, why not?
3. How do you get your political news?
4. Did you vote in the last election? If no, why not?
5. If you voted or could have voted, what influenced your choice of candidate?
6. To what extent would you say your relationship (with X and any other persons) influenced your voting decisions?

In both groups, ask follow-up questions based on participants' responses.