

Social Media And Gubernatorial Elections In Nigeria: A Critical Discourse

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Abstract: This work is a conceptual discourse on the power of the media, especially in political communication and citizens' participation. The paper, leaning on the arguments of the theories of participatory and deliberative democracy as well as the theories of communication and social interaction, examines the different ways political stakeholders such as: The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), politicians/political parties, the electorates, and Civil Society Organizations(CSOs), used the social media before, during and after the gubernatorial polls in selected states in Nigeria for political participation and electioneering processes. Extant evidence shows that the social media platforms have not only become tools for increased citizens' active political participations, but have also become platforms for the spread of hate speeches; and misinformation and/or fake news. Consequently, the paper concludes that with the General Election coming up in 2019 and intense political activity on social networks it becomes important for political actors to begin to come to terms with the increasing citizens' power to monitor election results and hold candidates accountable for previous mandate via different posts and chats. They should therefore begin to harness the ample opportunities inherent in the social media in defense of their political score cards and for a robust political engagement.

Keywords: Social Media, Gubernatorial Elections in Nigeria, Anambra State Elections, Political Participation, Critical Discourse

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I. INTRODUCTION

A critical examination of the emerging trend in the use of social media generally in Nigeria shows that social media such as Facebook, Blackberry Messenger, WhatsApps, Twitter, Blog, MySpace, YouTube and Instagram are no longer mainly social with the primary purpose of creating and enabling participation in social networking sites for people to socialize and check out what friends are doing (Olsson and Dahlgren, 2010; Bakardjieva, 2010), but, have rather, become powerful tools for political communication and engagement, and a useful means of policing election results in Nigeria and by extension, veritable tools for active political participation. In this instance, social media became not only "sites of information" providing many Nigerians with political voice but also "sites of action" (Signe Bock, 2015).

This may probably account for why the recent use of social media in Nigerian elections as argued continues to demonstrate how social media have reshaped the structures and methods of contemporary political communication and engagement in the country. As such, social media in relation to Nigerian political environment is perceived as the: most accessible source of political information, deliberations and conversations; the major platform for media campaign; a key tool for monitoring and announcing election results; a new platform for political accountability; as well as the primary source of news – political. As the Reuters 2017 Digital News Report established, the citizens of many democracies now rely to a greater extent on online rather than broadcast and print news, with social media platforms playing a greater role in disseminating information than newspapers. In consideration of these views, it could be argued that social media now provide new ways for public's political engagement and participation in the country.

However, recent anecdotal evidence point to other emerging developments in ways the social media may have been used recently in Nigerian political election process especially the Nigerian Gubernatorial elections that have different dates from other general elections. For instance the just concluded Anambra State, South-East, Nigeria's Nov, 2017, gubernatorial polls have been criticized for being characterized and associated with Internet brigandage, fake news, social media nuisance, and character vilification majorly on Facebook, Whatsapp and other social media platforms.

The Anambra Gubernatorial election was conducted out of the General Election season. Anambra State was the first state in Nigeria where the governorship election was nullified by the judiciary. Apart from

nullifying the election, the Supreme Court in the subsequent case of *Peter Obi v INEC* held that the tenure of an elected governor begins to count from the date he actually took the oath of office and not the date he ought to have taken the oath of office. In the circumstance, governorship elections in Anambra State are not conducted during the general elections.

This incident and similar occurrences made Anambra and the states of Edo, Ondo, Ekiti, Osun and others, the few states where governorship elections come before the general elections, resulting in staggered polling dates for governorship elections in the country. These complications are evident in the fact that in Anambra State, South- East Nigeria, gubernatorial elections were held in 2017 instead of 2015 as in other states. In Edo, Kogi, Ondo, Ekiti and Osun States, elections were also held in 2016 instead of 2015. With such position of exceptionality occupied by these states, governorship elections attract nationwide attention and review. They offer a unique context to examine the growing use of social media in Nigeria elections. The implication is that these elections provide potential litmus test for analyzing and predicting upcoming general elections and as such, are very significant in Nigeria future electoral polls. For this work, social media is defined as any Internet-based resources that provide real-time communication and information sharing amongst groups or individuals.

This work is embedded in the broader discourse on the power of the media, especially in political communication and the connection between media use and political participation by citizens. As such, this work leans strongly on the arguments of the theories of participatory and deliberative democracy, as well as the theories of communication and social interaction which suggest that social media has the capacity to increase political participation and strengthen democracy in the society. However, we argue that the extent of participation is still limited to politically aware and engaged citizens. In consideration of these possibilities, this paper examines the different ways political stakeholders in Nigeria such as, The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), politicians/political parties, the electorates, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), used the social media before, during and after the elections for political engagement and electioneering process during the gubernatorial polls.

II. SOCIAL MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION: NEW INSIGHTS

Several studies have long argued that new technologies will increase political participation and strengthen democracy. Bertholdt Brecht for example has in the 1920s envisioned radio as a communicative apparatus for democratization while Benjamin Barber had in 1980s viewed the capabilities of the cable network for strengthening local democracy (Barber, 1984, p. 274). The emergence of the Internet with its unique attributes had many envisioning it with democratizing powers. The argument is that the Internet had the ability to increase participation in the public sphere and such increased participation was seen to lead to more equality and less hierarchy. The architecture of the Internet where all users are equal and may interact directly as argued may enable a level playing field where participation and deliberation can take place with less hierarchical distinction between people from different classes. Since social media are also Internet services the potential to increase participation and deliberations are possible. Two characteristics of the social media that particularly lend it to this according to scholars are the inclusiveness of social media and its integration of mass media and personal media forms.

- **Social media as an Inclusive Arena:** Social media such as Facebook are an exceptionally inclusive arena where people from all groups meet, irrespective of age, class, educational level, religion and ethnicity. The lack of a clear hierarchy is a characteristic of social media that encourages freedom to comment and criticize. This inclusiveness means that people find themselves on the same arena as people from very different contexts of their lives; family, friends, old schoolmates and new colleagues referred to by Marwick and Boyd (2010) as “collapsed contexts”.

This inclusive nature is demonstrated in the ability of social media to provide anonymity of its agents, which means that those who write and comment often use nicknames or aliases. Even though anonymity provides an opportunity to comment on delicate issues, it can also sometimes lead to falsification of information. Inclusiveness is possible and widened due to the multitude of roles that users assume, and their relationships to each other including the novel ability to combine different kinds of recorded information in very flexible ways. The near absence of traditional methods of regulation also encourages inclusiveness, making it impossible to attempt to restrict the content of social media. This has made the social media to become a remarkable popular arena for socialization and communication. Thus it may have some resemblance to a Habermasian public sphere in which democratic deliberation can take place.

- **Integration of personal and Mass media forms:** Integration of media forms is an important characteristic of social media. According to Tanja (2014), social media are not only public but are used for both public and private purposes and include elements of both mass media and personal media. Social media are both personal and symmetrical and institutional and asymmetrical. Private interaction can take place between personal friends but this interaction may also have a large audience and thereby resemble mass communication. Similarly, while private individuals are interacting on social media, institutional and professional actors may also use social

media to asymmetrically communicate to larger publics. Thus, social media integrate media forms and thereby challenge established forms of interactions. The inclusiveness and integration of media forms that are important characteristics of social media may have important implications for political participation and deliberation in several ways. Tanja (2014) highlights three ways social media may impact on political process as follows:

- i. First, social media may involve more people to participate-The inclusiveness of social media and integration of media forms lower the thresholds for people to participate. Getting information, stating opinions and communicating with a large number thus becomes possible and easy. This is an important reason why politicians and political parties and other political actors find it to be important and that is why we see that in political campaigns social media have become effective tools for mobilization. The Anambra 2017 and the 2015 general elections in the country are a case in point.
- ii. Second, social media may facilitate deliberation between more people. The reduced hierarchies between sender and receiver of information suggests not only that everyone can state their opinion but also that ordinary people can communicate directly with authorities and with each other. Evidence abound in the gubernatorial elections of how ordinary citizens were uploading content in the social media concerning the gubernatorial candidates freely, conversing and stating their opinions to each other and to these political aspirants. INEC the umpire also got their own share of comments from people in the streets commenting and keeping them posted on situations in various wards as they develop and protesting sharp practices they see in their respective voting centers. Moog, (2000) writing in this regard, had earlier explained that, as access spreads wider globally, and deeper into national societies, the Internet brings new prospects for direct access to politically relevant information, for unmediated communication between political organizations and potential members, and for interactive discourse among citizens themselves .
- iii. Third, the integration of communications forms and collapsed social contexts may, however, make such participation and deliberations complicated. In social situations, people are concerned about how they present themselves and highlight different aspects in different social settings.

When we collapse the existing body of literature concerning political participation and deliberations within the architecture of new technologies such as the social media then what Carpentier (2011) suggests becomes apposite as he argues in favour of what he refers to as maximalist democracy – An approach that emphasizes both representation and a participation, not only in institutional politics but also in political dimension of the social. Within this context the democratizing potential of these new media comes from an expectation that new media may enable ordinary people to participate in politics both institutionally and in social settings. This may contribute to a stronger democracy (Barber, 1984) with more maximalist participation (Carpentier, 2011). But then to history, we here recount how the social media may have become significant in contributing to stronger democracy in Nigeria electoral process and politics.

III. SETTING THE SCENE: SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA, AN OVERVIEW

The 2011 general election in Nigeria was a remarkable turning point in the history of Nigerian politics. It was the first time digital media was used as a political platform in the electioneering process and campaign in the country. It thus, signaled a paradigm shift in the history of Nigeria political and electoral history and introduced Nigeria to the use of what has become known globally as “Internet elections” or “e-electioneering ” (Macnaram, 2008).That is the use of social media in electioneering campaigns and politics made popular by Obama in 2008 for his political campaign.

Prior to 2011, elections in Nigeria had been associated with and characterized by malpractices of various kinds: rigging, ballot box snatching at gun points, violence and acrimony, thuggery, boycotts, threats and criminal manipulations of voters' list, brazen falsification of election results, the use of security agencies against political opponents and the intimidation of voters (Oni, Chidozie and Agbude, 2013). As suggested by political pundits, the use of social media in the 2011 elections significantly reduced the various malpractices that plagued the election process in the country and enthroned a more transparent process. Before the conduct of the 2011 polls, the 2003 and 2007 elections were particularly marked by dissatisfaction by candidates, voters and observers. The flaws that characterized the conduct of the 2007 elections severely dented the integrity of elections in Nigeria, and triggered demands for freer, fairer, and more transparent elections, and perhaps resulted in part to the adoption of the internet elections in 2011 which could also be seen as a reflection of the global trend towards internet campaign and electioneering.

While the 2011 elections, marked the establishment of digitalization of politics in Nigeria, the 2015 Nigeria general election, further entrenched digital media use as part of Nigerian political culture. In the 2015 elections, results were first announced through the social media before the official announcements from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) – a remarkable departure from previous established practice. This was also evident in the 2017 Anambra gubernatorial polls. Either by twittering, facebooking or whatsapping, Nigerian citizens participated vigorously in these general elections, contributing in part to the

political change of baton in the Nigerian democratic terrain. In Ekiti and Osun state gubernatorial elections for instance, three hours after voting commenced, observers and citizens started broadcasting election results announced in their respective voting centres using Twitter, Facebook, BlackBerry Messenger (BBM), WhatsApp, and SMS. As election results in respective voting centres went viral on social media, political parties, citizens, both local and international observers were monitoring social media, tracking and analyzing these results. Even before INEC announced the official results, Nigerians knew who was leading in the respective polling units and wards, thereby minimizing the incidence of rigging at collation centres.

Social media use was not just restricted to announcing and monitoring election results but was vigorously deployed to different use by all the electoral stakeholders before, during and after the elections serving specific political interest of these stakeholders. As Agbata Jnr, (2015) pointed out, the INEC, political parties, candidates, media and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) all made use of the technology in carrying out their activities during the electoral period.

Since the use of digital media is only possible with the existence of internet connectivity and access, we argue that the recent increasing use of the social media in Nigeria elections is related to a high level of Internet connectivity witnessed recently in the country. We turn to statics to review existing data on internet connectivity in Nigeria to identify the category of Nigerians that have and use social media and critically appraise the extent of social media penetration in Nigeria political landscape.

IV. INTERNET PENETRATION AND ACCESS IN NIGERIA

Relative to other African countries, Nigeria has a long history of rapid upward Internet connectivity, resulting in Nigeria having the largest population of Internet users in Africa. Recent data from this year's Mobile Africa Study carried out in 15 African countries shows that Internet penetration in Nigeria has increased to 53 per cent, which is the highest in Africa. Also, mobile subscription in the country has increased to 81 per cent.

The number of active mobile phone subscribers also increased from almost zero in 2000 to over 148 million subscribers with 106% teledensity in March 2016, as reported by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC). Mobile Internet subscriptions have also steadily increased in the past few years, with the Nigerian Communications Commission reporting 95,940,792 mobile Internet subscriptions in January 2016. Broadband penetration in Nigeria in 2015 is put at 10%, up from 6% in 2013 according to Daily Trust (2015) report. A report by the NCC in June 2015 puts the number of subscribers browsing the internet on Nigeria's telecoms networks at over 87 million as at April, 2015 (Ubabukoh, 2015).

The number of Facebook users in Nigeria according to recent statistics is 14.8 million in 2015 (Nwabasha, 2015). The country also boasts of a sizeable number of Twitter and YouTube users, running into millions. According to CIA World Factbook demographic statistics estimate (2014); most Nigerians between the age brackets of 15 – 55 are connected to online media showing the young and middle aged as having the highest involvement. This statics indicate that awareness and use rates are much lower among older and less educated Nigerians. It also shows that younger people tend to make up the bulk of overall Internet users. With these statics we can assume that social media penetration in the country are generally concentrated in the urban cities among the elites even though geographically we have a high density of people in the rural area.

These groups however constitute the drivers of the democratic process and politics in the country with the power to affect others in the rural area. Even though Nigeria has been ranked highly among developing nations in terms of affordable access to the Internet, the ranking however masks the impact of several barriers to access including device and data costs, gender inequality which makes women and girls less likely to access the Internet: low levels of literacy, lack of local content and acute power shortages. With these constraints, the Internet is still perceived as a luxury to most Nigerians especially those in the rural areas.

Despite the constraints, these statics are indicative of the increasing use of Internet in the country and place the social media as an important information and communication tool useful for many other things – entertainment, private relations as well as politics.

The tremendous increase witnessed in the ICT sector in these past years in the country has been aided by two factors – public policies and changing nature of news websites. Some initiatives such as the National Telecommunications Policy and the National Information Technology Policy (both formulated in 2000), the National Information Technology Development Agency Act 2007 and the regulatory and supervisory frameworks provided by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) have combined to accelerate ICTs expansion in Nigeria (Committee on ICT Policy Harmonization, 2012). The elevated position of social media in Nigerian society can also be seen from the changing nature of news websites, where most news websites became vibrant, commanding extensive online traffic and engagement from many Nigerians. These news websites mostly employ and rely on the use of citizen journalists.

Available data on the official number of registered voters for the 2015 elections according to the former Chairman of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), Prof. Attahiru Jega, is 68,833,476, with Lagos and Kano making up the highest number of possible voters. Contrasting the Internet connectivity figures with political reality, it will not be out of place to assume that half of the figure released by INEC – 34 million – will be people who are averagely knowledgeable and are among the 74 million with access to the internet and are most likely to be on one form of Social Media or the other. And considering that between 2011 and 2015, over 14 million Nigerians have joined Facebook, it is easy to assume the comparative impact and advantage political parties can gain by leveraging the online media space for political campaign. Including the potential effect the online media will have on political communication and participation in the country.

V. SOCIAL MEDIA USE AND ELECTORAL PROCESSES IN NIGERIA

As documented, the use of social media during the elections first became noticeable in the preparations for the 2011 general elections. Following this period however, there is evidence of exemplary use of the social media in Nigeria democracy worth recalling. One such example is the protests staged in January 2012 against the Nigerian government's announcement of the removal of fuel subsidy, which resulted in a 120 per cent increase in the per litre pump price of petrol. The announcement provoked series of demonstrations across the country and internationally, both on the streets and online using the hashtag '#OccupyNigeria'. Another crucial example of social media's political influence in Nigeria concerns the reporting of the Islamist militant group Boko Haram. The #BringBackOurGirls Twitter campaign initially started by Nigerian lawyer Ibrahim Abdullahi, gained international attention. The hashtag alone has been used in more than 4.5 million tweets globally since the campaign began. The issue of civilian security and terrorism in northern Nigeria subsequently became a major part of election campaigning for the All Progressives Congress (APC) candidate, General Buhari (DEMOS, 2015 Report). In a review of the 2011 elections where the use of social media was specifically widespread, the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (PLAC, 2012) documented at least three main ways in which Nigerians were using social media:

1. First, to share information relating to the elections. This included the development of novel technologies that allowed people to access data and information in real time. One example was *Revoda*, a mobile application which enabled a parallel vote count, access to polling unit results, transmission of collected results and additional information about the entire electoral process. The introduction of social media at this point meant that even untrained citizens could share their objective and subjective election experiences. For instance, the *reclaimnaija* launched in late March 2011 demonstrated a change in mood as hundreds of community activists, ranging from motorbike and taxi drivers to market women, hairdressers and battery chargers, stood and held their mobile phones aloft, chanting "The power is in our hands" (Yaradua Foundation Report, 2012). Thus, the 2011 elections saw an individual transformation among millions of voters, especially youths, who had their voices heard for the first time through social media
2. Second, for political campaign and sensitization: social media platforms were used by political parties, candidates and governmental organizations for campaigning and raising awareness. During the 2011 general elections, many politicians, the presidential aspirants, gubernatorial aspirants and others used social media tools to connect with voters and constituents. Facebook and Twitter appear to be the most widely used social media platforms by the politicians. Social media offered politicians and their parties the opportunity to broadcast messages and recruit a huge number of volunteers to support their campaign. The Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC) used the opportunity to develop its communication channels and engage with citizens through Facebook, YouTube and Twitter. INEC's Situation Room was established, enabling people to directly contact the organization to report misconduct and concerns about the poll. The Commission received about 4,000 tweets in the three days during the presidential election and experienced 25 million hits on its website in three days during the Presidential election alone. More than 70,000 Nigerians were able to contact the commission directly to report incidents and have their questions answered.
3. Finally, Nigerians used social media "to improve the efficiency of election observation". Citizens were able to share information and pictures such as results from their polling units. Although this may not have prevented malpractice and falsification of results, it meant that the public was aware of the trends in different locations and more likely to challenge any falsified results. Civil society organizations were also instrumental in leading campaigns for transparency and accountability, as demonstrated by projects such as *Reclaim Naija*, an election incident reporting system that allowed feedback to be easily aggregated and analyzed. This allowed Nigerians to report incidents of violence and electoral malpractices through text messages. Between the National Assembly elections of 9 April 2011 and the presidential election of 16 April 2011, citizen observers submitted 6,000 incident reports to the platform. Another project, The Social Media Tracking Centre, harvested social media reports from the elections before mapping incidents and monitoring the process of the polls over time. At the end of that election, the INEC's chair Attahiru Jega

stated that the use of social media enhanced transparency in the electoral process and made the INEC more accountable to the public in the conduct of elections.

Aside the documented evidence from PLAC (2012), available evidence shows that by 2015, citizen journalists and observers were often finding their way into the mainstream news as media organizations increasingly invited their subscribers to report on online platforms. One noticeable feature was the expanded use of hashtags as flashpoints for political discussion and advocacy. On the eve of the 2015 elections, between 40 to 50 active hashtags linked to Nigerians actively discussing the elections were identified. ‘Hashtagging’ in this way also became a way of identifying political affiliation and support for candidates among the electorate.

The importance of social media extended beyond polling day. Following the presidential inauguration, Nigerians posted tweets that included the hashtag #BuhariFixThis to offer their suggestions for the priorities of Buhari’s first term in office. The Centre for Democracy and Development West Africa also developed an app, ‘the Buharimeter’ designed to track the progress of electoral promises and provide a forum for political discussion. Civic technology organization BudGIT began social media campaign #OpenNASS, which calls for transparency in the publication of the full details of the expenditure by the national assembly to encourage openness in the new government (Demos 2015, Report).

Participation in the Nigerian electoral process within the gubernatorial elections involving the different stakeholder will now be briefly examined to determine the extent of deployment of the social media.

VI. STAKEHOLDERS’ USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE ANAMBRA GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS

The quantity and diversity in the use of social media particularly during the campaign period of Anambra gubernatorial polls signals the different ways that social media has become significant in Nigerian political process. In the gubernatorial polls unlike the general elections, there was an increasing dominant use of the social media by political candidates and parties more than the INEC and the CSOs. These gubernatorial polls especially the Anambra state election as previously stated has been criticized for the use of Internet brigandage, fake news, and social media nuisance. Apart from these ugly developments, the Anambra state election marked the emergence of the use of social media as a key tool for political accountability/scrutiny. The social media in this instance became a vibrant platform for citizens to hold the aspirants accountable for their past stewardship. As observed by political analysts, what dominated the political space in Anambra state is what some have termed “the politics of past achievements and present failure” where most of the political candidates were busy defending themselves. The meditated political campaign taking place in the social media was characterized by underlying multiplicity of divergent views and perspectives and oppositional voices critiquing aspirants for past misdeeds. At this juncture, local discussion of politics that was increasingly taking place in the social media platform presented the politically engaged publics the power to participate in what could be seen as a Habermasian public sphere. This public sphere so provided is different from the other conception of public sphere which is closed and regulated. The growing chorus of public opinion and participation in the public spaces of social media made it an open and unregulated public sphere where citizens have and exercise freedom of information and diversity of opinion for deliberative democracy. These social media with their convenient access and broad reach to audiences also provided the public’s the visual discussion forum for the expression of disagreements and minority views. In this way the Internet could be seen as a public sphere that encourages political discussion and disagreement in order to form public opinion. Li (2016) argues that, despite sociopsychological constraints, “disagreement expression is essential for deliberative democracy” (p. 197) and new media such as online newspapers and microblogs are vital tools for generating and exchanging diverse opinions that can lead to meaningful discussions on public issues.

Through the massive deployment and use of “internet warriors” or “social media info-warriors”, in the Anambra state gubernatorial campaign period we also saw visible use of fake news, unlike what was witnessed in the 2015 general elections. The social media such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp, became the major source of political news, and conversations and as such was inundated with real and fake news concerning political activities of different candidates. For instance these “internet warriors” who are really most times media personal assistants of these candidates or party supporters used pseudonyms to write disparaging and false information about other candidates; post substantial quantity of fake information about political candidate’s activities and past achievements and also created chat groups designed to purposefully attack and vilify opponents. Hate speech is a very distinguished feature amongst many of these forums. In a 2015 report, Nwaubani, highlighted how these paid online agents – the internet warriors, who in some ways functioned like offline political thugs – were reported as rigging public opinion. The report aptly exposes the intrigues about the use, management, intents and purposes of Nigerian political actors in the ICTs platforms. This development has been termed by some as Internet brigandage; while some see it as a welcome development for Internet savvy

youths who are not only earning money for themselves but also use it as an opportunity to traverse the corridors of the political class. Nwaubani (2015) however, sees it as a favourable departure from the old times when politicians would rather engage the youths in violent political activity by supplying them with machetes, missiles and guns.

Another notable trend in 2015 and 2017 gubernatorial elections was the new dimension in the use of fake names and aliases by these groups in writing multiple posts that are most times filled with unverified information and falsehood. In many cases of what was seen in social media, in state elections what started out as rumours, gossip, or even speculation were reproduced and rebroadcasted as real, even though it was fake ab-initio. This particular problem emanates from the user-to-user interaction found on social media and distinguishes it from the traditional media. There is the fear that some of the Anambra gubernatorial candidates tweets may have come from Bots, making a lot of the posts fake and demonstrating the emergence in the use of fake news. The premise of fake news has always existed in some form in the media but has recently created a larger element of debate (Hempel, 2017). The term fake news appears to be more of a way of expressing disagreement with information that news sources produce, rather than the information being fake or false (Carson, 2017). The propensity in the use of Bots or fake news as the case may be could be largely seen in how the different political parties and candidates employed and developed different chat groups using false names and in writing fake new stories concerning candidates achievements. As argued by social media scientists, whether a piece of news spreads online does not depend on whether it is true and coherent, but whether it is surprising, shocking and confirms prejudices. It can bounce endlessly in virtual echo-chamber –even if it is patently false.

Moreover, during these election periods social media platforms reduced the link-up gap between parties/candidates, civil society groups and the people. Social media is often considered the territory of young educated professionals, but in these gubernatorial elections, it was used by a broad cross section of the people. We now summarize other examples of how this was done as garnered from literature.

VII. PRE-ELECTION, ELECTION AND POST ELECTION USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In these past gubernatorial elections, candidates and parties used the social media to provide the electorates information regarding their attributes, political agendas, and proposed plans. Besides meeting directly with members of the electorate, candidates and parties accomplish this task through campaigns via media. Politicians used the social platforms to gauge voter interest and identify what truly matters to them. With the right data-driven strategy, candidates identify the right audiences on social media for both support and voting.

In the Anambra and other state gubernatorial elections the conversation about the election was happening on Facebook – it really became the new town hall. While the 2015 election campaign set a new pattern for political discussion through social media, the 2016 and 2017 gubernatorial campaigns further enhanced political culture on the Internet. This was done by creating new campaign strategies for constantly advancing social media sites by candidates. In terms of the media changes that had occurred in this 2017, social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and photo-distributing platform Instagram, were used as sources for the distribution of news stories and medium-based discussion and also for political mobilization and campaign. At some point the social media platforms especially Facebook and WhatsApp became the alternative campaign battle ground for all the political parties and their candidates. Candidate's popularity and chances of winning were at some point in the peak of the campaign period in Anambra state predicted by the electorates based on the candidates and parties visibility in the social media. The traditional media took the second place to social media as the place for public political discussions and deliberations and also for breaking news – political. These social media sites also made it easier for candidates in terms of campaign logistics and mobilization. They sometimes delivered their messages on a mobile phone and broadcast it, reducing the costs of actual campaigning. They also used the social media extensively to broadcast places for offline activities. These offline campaign activities were equally monitored and extensively discussed in the social media.

The social media in Nigeria, particularly the Facebook, and WhatsApp, Instagram had a field day in the Anambra gubernatorial election period by garnering supporters for the four political parties, and in this way distinguish itself as the major site for political news, deliberations and discussions. For political parties with the proper tracking software, what potential voters say on social media, can provide real-time feedback in digital election campaign to find out what is working and use in re-strategizing for future campaigns. What made social media particularly attractive for both political candidates is that they have unprecedented control over the images they present. Social media allow candidates a direct means by which to communicate with the voting public, thereby bypassing the news media as a gatekeeper.

A study by Hannah Byrne O'Morain of Maynooth University of Ireland suggests that the three main motives for using social media during an election campaign are; marketing, mobilization and dialogue. These were visible in the political candidate's use of the social media in the Anambra elections. The first motive,

around marketing, was to highlight their candidacies potentials and manifestos as well as the positions of their parties in the public sphere. This was done by all the major four political parties in the state, All Progressive Congress (APC), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) United Peoples Party (UPP) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Most of the aspirants have created various media platforms which their cronies were using for their campaign. Platforms that were very popular include those of Senator Andy Uba, and Dr. Tony Nwoye, both of APC, Mr. Oseloka Obaze of PDP, as well as those created by the media team of the incumbent governor, Chief Willie Obiano of APGA.

Mobilization refers to the use of social media to encourage followers to take part in something, usually to attend rallies, meetings, and to persuade people to vote for them. This was also very visibly used by political candidates in the Anambra polls. Lastly, in terms of dialogue, social media presents an opportunity to connect and engage with voters in discussion, as well as receive feedback on political issue. However, most of the accounts were not run personally by the politicians, as previously stated, most of who were not well versed in operating the devices and navigating their ways on the platforms. They engaged users of the social media (Internet warriors) who have amassed huge following on the platforms as consultants to run their accounts, with a view to getting issues to trend by bringing it to the consciousness of the public and influencing opinions and perceptions in their favour. Paid online agents referred to as Internet warriors were , uploading photos and videos and commenting without considering how it vilifies other groups or persons.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In this paper we examined the multifaceted complex ways social media has been used in Nigerian gubernatorial elections. These discourses align with global literature in terms of the impact of social media in enhancing political participation and deliberations. There is need to acknowledge as submitted by different authors that while the social media platforms are seriously and positively impacting the democratic process in Nigeria and elsewhere, there is need for caution in its use because these platforms have demonstrated the capacity to increase the articulation and spread of hate speeches and disparaging the personality of candidates. These platforms also facilitate the spreading of misinformation – fake news – which has become a global concern lately. Political candidate’s popularity or visibility in the social media should not be adjudged as an indication for electorates’ massive support and should be cautiously used as a means of political assessment of candidate’s possible success in the polls. As Anambra state elections ends and Nigeria gears up for the 2019 general elections it is clear that technology and social media in particular is a dominant force in Nigerian politics. Today, social media has never played a more powerful role in an election and is thus setting the trend for future elections. These gubernatorial elections provide ample opportunity for candidates on how to amplify the profound positive roles of social media in upcoming elections.

The unprecedented growth in digital communication has given Nigerians a platform for political activism. With the General Election coming up in 2019 and intense political activity on social networks, it is safe to conclude that social media’s influence on the polls will be stronger than before. With social media increasingly being used as tools for reporting incidents and happenings in elections, and holding candidates accountable for past actions via different posts and chats, it becomes imperative for political parties to begin to come to terms with the fact that citizens now have the power to actively participate in Nigeria political process in ways that are empowering and still evolving. This therefore, enhances freer and fairer polls, making it difficult for election results to be easily manipulated and altered since the results are most times already in the public domain even before the official announcement by INEC. The social media tools from this discourse have indeed shown tremendous potentials for participatory democracy and deliberations for politically aware and active citizens as argued by scholars.

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This is an original work that has not been published anywhere else.

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