

A Study of Aspects of Digital Discourse in Nigerian Democratic Space

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Abstract

*The primary aim of this study is two-fold: one, to situate corpus-based digital political discourse within the field of digital humanities; and, two, to apply computer methodologies to examine the use of web-based platforms for political purposes in Nigeria. It adopts a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches as demonstrated in Corpus-Based Discourse Model and Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA). Both methodological and analytical methods used rely on the use of some internet-based computer applications and corpus analytical tools such as SketchEngine, Topsy and AntCorc3.4. The data set was collected through media monitoring and online data harvesting strategies from the Internet, webpages and social media networks of key political actors and stakeholders in Nigeria, and extracted from a specialised corpus named **Corpus of Nigeria New Media Discourse in English (CONNMDE)**. The application of computer methodologies to the analysis of digital political text is presented as a new research orientation in digital humanities that can improve scholarship and research breakthroughs. Digital media technologies such as Facebook and Twitter can indeed help citizens acquire new skills which can foster creativity, boost engagement and enhance capacity. These may help the country solve problems which can galvanize economic development. The study further argues that widespread use of Internet-based technologies for political purposes can accelerate our progress towards a sustainable and strong democracy. They can indeed transform our national political narratives, promote participation, transparency, accountability and improve national development index.*

Key words: digital humanities, digital media, computer-mediated discourse, corpus

Introduction

Since the beginning of this century, computer sciences and information technologies have been influencing all spheres of human activities including academic disciplines beyond natural sciences and engineering technologies. Social sciences, liberal arts, humanities and education-based disciplines have all been increasingly using computer tools and methodologies to modernise and simplify the process of teaching, learning and research.

More specifically, digital communication technologies have profoundly revolutionised the ways modern communities worldwide communicate and interact. The emergence of new media technologies and web-based social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Youtube have continued to transform communication behaviours and engagements in different societies. Mobile digital technologies have made texting, tweeting and talking more fluid and more pervasive with profound impact on discursive practices.

The range of mobile communication applications that are evolving on a daily basis have continued to shape dialogues and re-energise debates in private and public spaces. Because the threshold for speaking up in the public sphere has now been reduced in online environments, more people are getting involved (Rasmussen 2013:98).

Stakeholders have also discovered that the new technologies have become increasingly almost an indispensable way to engage people, communicate intentions, set up networks and promote collaborations. Rheingold (1993:14) argues that ‘the political significance of computer mediated communications(CMC) lies in its capacity to challenge the existing political hierarchy’s monopoly on powerful communications media, and perhaps thus revitalize citizen-based democracy’. The traditional relational and communication gap between political actors and followers has been greatly narrowed since the emergence and utilisation of these technologies for political activities.

While digital political discourse and other aspects of computer-based studies in the humanities have enjoyed considerable attention in other parts of the world, this part of the world is yet to appreciate the role of digital humanities in national transformation. This present study addresses some of the perceived gap in both empirical-based study and literature. By applying computer-based discourse methodology, the study views new media technologies first as a confluence between computer sciences and the humanities, and second as powerful tools for liberalising and globalising the political space in Nigeria. Beyond academic exercise the study offers potential tools for transforming the democratic process in Nigeria. It throws more light on how political actors utilise digital media tools to engage ordinary citizens and promote more participation for nation building.

Digital Humanities and Digital Media: A Nexus?

Digital humanities has been viewed as an emerging research tradition within the humanities which adopts computer-mediated methods and approaches as well as

digital tools to investigate and analyse social, cultural and linguistic phenomena. It covers a wide range of concern as a transdisciplinary framework in liberal arts and social sciences. Scholars in this cross-disciplinary research space have been applying digital methods to uncover new findings on existing body of phenomena in cultural artefact, literary works, archival material, music, religious studies, gender and computational methods for linguistic analysis. Application of digital research methodologies help to bring real-world objects -- text, image, sound, video -- into a digital space, and then employ digital tools to further explore and strengthen those objects. Using digital tools to enhance and deepen traditional ways of reading and analyzing texts. We will explore ways of answering questions about authorship, textual, chronological, and authorial style, genre, and meaning (<http://dhsi.org/courses.php>). Researchers in the humanities are increasingly using computing tools and methods to describe and discuss their subjects and objects of inquiry.

Scholarship in the field of digital media discourse has been growing in more advanced countries in the last four decades. Scholl (2014:4) states that ‘linguists are using computers to uncover the identity of anonymous authors. In the field of literature, it becomes easier to ascertain authorship of ancient literary manuscripts through stylometry. There is a growing body of literature on the use of digital resources and methods by disciplines within the humanities.

Beginning from the 1940s, Roberto Busa (1913-2011) was the first to recognize that computers could do more than process numbers when he used it to catalogue eleven million words in the works of Thomas Aquinas. Other scholars have used computers to count the frequency of the occurrence of some lexical items in works of literature. Digital Humanities uses data from various sources such as texts or artefacts. The data is then processed (digitalized) through scanner/photocopy, computer software, data mining, meta data and keywords analysis, annotations and commentaries. The data is then uploaded to servers, data centres, and libraries/archives for usage by the academia and general public. Computer-assisted methods have a lot to offer to studies in the humanities and liberal arts (Humboldt Kosmos 2014).

In the last couple of years, digital methodologies, tools and skills have become increasingly central to work in the humanities especially from the view point of its interdisciplinary stance. This perspective underlines Schnapp’s (2013:1)’ description of this new field as “...new modes of scholar-ship and institutional units for collaborative, trans-disciplinary, and computationally engaged research,

teaching, and publication.” It opens up a universe of scholarship in which print is no longer the primary medium in which knowledge is produced and disseminated, with digital tools, techniques and media helping to reshape and expand the traditional approaches in the humanities.

Digital Humanities scholars are convinced that computational tools have the potential to transform the content, scope, methodologies, and audience of humanistic inquiry (ibid.) It is on the strength of this conviction that this study argues that any exploration of the use of digital media technologies for communicative purposes falls within the scope of digital humanities inquiry.

Mossberger et al (2007) confirm the importance of information technology in raising awareness about the power of the ordinary citizens, making them digitally-empowered in the democratic process. They describe ‘digital citizenship’ as the ability to participate in the public sphere or contribute to discursive engagement online. In much the same way that education has promoted democracy and economic growth, the internet has the potential to benefit the society as a whole, and to facilitate the membership and participation of individuals within society. To them, digital citizenship encourages what has elsewhere been called ‘social inclusion’ (Warschauer, 2003 cited in Mossberger et al ibid. p.1).

Digital Media Technologies in the Nigerian Political Space

Unarguably, communication is fundamental to human progress and democratic sustainability. Political communication intertwines with the political process and democratic practice. With the emergence of digital media and its utilization for political activities, the critical role of communication technology has been further amplified. Web-based platforms and social media networks are increasingly contributing to the democratization agenda as well as to national development in developing nations.

In Africa, digital democracy is now beginning to gain some momentum with politicians and other stakeholders in the region using ‘these new forms of communications, through their social and online networks to actually conduct and reconfigure African politics and its processes (Maina, 2011:1). Digital media tools are now initiating and instituting a political communication culture that now empowers citizens while this new level of interaction fosters productive political engagement between leaders and citizens.

In Nigeria, as in other parts of the world, the rise of new media technologies has revolutionized the ways citizens communicate and interact with each other while enabling private citizens and public officials to refine, reconfigure and reshape private and public discourses. Ordinary citizens now utilise the opportunities offered by new media networks to record some level of successful engagement with their government.

Specifically, Web2.0 and Social Media Networks such as *Facebook* and *Twitter* have now enabled ordinary citizens to read and react to online conversations through their laptops, PCs and handheld mobile devices. Non-state actors and citizens are being transformed from mere casual readers of events and passive onlookers in the ongoing debate to active participants and producers of conversation within the public sphere.

The significant increase in internet access between 2001 and 2015 has accelerated the opportunity to get involved in online conversations. The recent figures from Worldstats show that Nigeria has become the leading nation in Africa in terms of internet penetration and use of mobile telecommunications applications. Mobile phone users have grown to almost 115 million, Internet users hover between 70 and 72 million, while Facebook and Tweeter account holders are in the neighbourhood of 7.5 million and 4 million users respectively.

From 2010 when President Jonathan used the Facebook to declare his interest in the 2011 presidential election, other instances of the use of social media in politics and governance include mobilisation for the elections registration exercise, elections administration and monitoring in 2011 and social protest in 2012.

Campbell (2011) highlights the important role that new media technologies played during the 2011 Nigerian general elections.

...Although the April polls were the first to include widely available social media, Nigeria now holds the continent's record for most tracked reports of social media use during an election, with nearly half a million examples catalogued by the proprietary software at the Social Media Tracking Centre. On the day of the presidential election alone, the centre collected over one hundred and thirty thousand tweets and public Facebook posts. Though Nigeria is sub-Saharan Africa's most populous country, for technologies so new, this is an accomplishment, and it underscores Nigeria's leadership in the use social media on the continent.... (p.1).

Since 2011, political actors, activists, and other stakeholders in the socio-political space have increased the use of social media tools for a number of purposes.

The success of the fuel subsidy removal protest in 2012 has been largely credited to the critical role that new media technologies played. Social media tools were used to raise awareness, mobilize the citizens and instigate nationwide protests and workers' strike against the fuel price increment which forced the central government to reverse the unpopular policy. Civil rights movements that operated under the hashtag #OccupyNigeria, awakened the consciousness of Nigerians to the need to resist unpopular government policies. Apart from the civil rights organisations and private citizens that used social media to mobilise people against the policy, the federal government also used social media to communicate plans and promises and how they intended to use the funds to improve service delivery and infrastructure (see [http://www.globalpressinstitute.org/...](http://www.globalpressinstitute.org/))

One major lesson that the success of the 2012 protest taught many stakeholders was that social media tools have set a new agenda of accountability, probity and transparency for political office holders. The Nigerian citizens now realise the enormous potential that their handheld mobile devices can deliver to them to engage their political leaders. Although some have expressed some worries about the possibility of abuse and misuse of internet-based tools to fuel political violence and hate speech (as in Kenya 2008), the increasing use of social media networks is continually reshaping the evolving political landscapes and improving democratic conversation in many democracies. The obvious benefits of the emergence of these communication technologies appear to outweigh the shortcomings. Most significantly, the application of digital media technologies in politics and democratic activities in Nigeria has supported the growth of three interconnected elements of democratic development and sustainability which are: civic engagement, social inclusion and accountability.

Theoretical Framework: Digital Media as Computer-Mediated Discursive Practice

By its very theoretical principles, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) heavily subscribes to the use of computer methodologies and tools in its description of web-based language use and online communications. CMC is described as predominantly text-based human-human interaction, mediated by networked computers or other digital media technologies (Herring 2001, 2004)

It is said to consist of different genres such as electronic mail, the world-wide web, virtual worlds, asynchronous and synchronous chatgroups and text messages among other different ways in which the internet has provided the platform for humans to engage in computer interactions (Crystal 2001:10-14). Crystal highlights the manipulation of texts and graphics in online users' linguistic experience as one unique feature of the World Wide Web (p.196). According to him, web pages texts are dynamic. Through the use of graphics, hyperlinks, colour, flashing, movement, and other devices, the organisation of the text is changed to accommodate the format or layout of web pages and becomes relatively more dynamic than in other written media (cited in Poon, 2010: 69). The interactive modes offered via the internet communication are highlighted through asynchronous and synchronous communicative features of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), which describe the timing factor that undergird online discussions. The proliferation of the social, communicative and political spheres with the technologies and their impacts on the political space underlie their power to improve political discourses.

Since discourse is taken as a context-based use of language that is structured, functional and goal-directive (Opeibi, 2009), computer-mediated discourse may then be considered as the use of computer methodologies to examine web-based functional use of language in a context-based discursive space. The online discourse is usually interactive, participatory, diffused and purpose-driven. Interactions between humans using web-based platforms become a key component in this discursive enterprise.

While the ubiquitous nature of social media tools and the pace at which wireless communication devices are emerging may pose some challenges, the fact remains that these new technologies offer new and innovative opportunities to improve communication and interaction in public discursive space. The new technologies are increasingly enlarging the space for online conversation and debates on socio-political activities in modern societies.

Analysing Digital Media Political Texts: A Corpus-based Discourse Methodology

Both offline and online political discourse aspires to the central goal of using language by political actors or participants to engage in civic affairs and to use power for social goals. Digital media political discourse analysis (DMPDA) examines texts and talk constructed and communicated by political actors using web-based platforms. It suggests a context in which wireless technologies are

deployed to initiate and/or reproduce political actions. The major advantage of online political discourse is the power of the new technologies to widen the scope of the participants and the political actions.

Bimber (2001) argues that with the advent of the internet, online participation in political process is more open and there is more equality in political participation. Tolbert & McNeal (2003) equally observe that the internet is quick and up to date and it provides a lot of information necessary to participate in civic life and public discussion.

West(2004) provides the civic engagement dimension by highlighting the functions of the internet in democracy as an interactive medium that is capable of strengthening the workings of direct democracy and improving relations between citizens, politicians, and their intermediaries through processes like e-government (cited in Agboola 2013: 664).

It is useful to equally point out that this study finds that politicians usually upload online part of the offline language behaviour such as creative use of illustrations, graphology, images, signs and symbols. These strategies become an essential component of online discourse properties to persuasively communicate their messages via online platforms.

Nigeria political discourse has taken on a new lease of life via online platforms since 2010 when web-based resources were first deployed for political activities. A quantum of web-based political discourse data has since been produced by Nigerian political actors and ordinary citizens engaged in political and democratic activities.

Methodology

Corpus-Based Discourse Approach as used in this paper proposes a technique that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to unveil patterns of usage(s) and meanings in new media political texts. The framework provides insight which reflects both the discourse, linguistic, and the contextual features including the unveiling of some pragmatic meanings in the texts (Baker, 2006; Bednarek, 2009). Upton and Cohen (2009) observe that the advantages of a corpus approach for the study of discourse, lexis and grammatical variation include the emphasis on representativeness of the text sample and the computational tools for investigating distributional patterns across discourse contexts. It is a basic assumption that most corpus approaches rely on computer-assisted techniques in

order to handle the large amount of data in a corpus. The Internet has been a rich source for computer-mediated discourse studies. Computer skills and tools are needed to harvest and analyse digital media corpus.

The data set used in this paper was extracted from our text-based mini corpus, tagged *Nigeria New Media Political Discourse in English* (CONNMPDE), a sub-component of a proposed 10 million-word *Corpus of Nigeria New Media Discourse in English* (CONNMDE). The corpus consists of texts extracted from politically motivated discursive practices on online platforms that include websites, Facebook walls, Twitter accounts and homepages of some Nigerian political parties and other stakeholders. Some of the texts from these sources were collected real time while others were retrieved through the application of online search engines and corpus tools between July 2014 and August 2015. During the period of data collection, we visited selected platforms (homepages of traditional media, political parties and Facebook walls) and monitored different online conversation on political issues in Nigeria.

The quantitative approach uses *Sketch Engine*, to demonstrate how key words analysis provides useful information on the topicality and currency of the issues by exposing its frequency against other texts extracted from the various online platforms. These relationships then shed light on the importance of the key term(s). This approach also helps to show how discourse tokens become attached to a range of meanings that are closely related to their contexts of use. The qualitative method is interpretive and throws light on how some internet-mediated semiotic and discourse features of the data convey some meanings and mirror the socio-pragmatic context of the discursive space.

Digital Media Technologies as Political Discursive Space

Gibson and Ward (2003 cited in Siapera, 2012:86) observe that political parties use the internet for three different functions: administration, campaigning, and internal organization.

One, political actors use the web-based platforms to provide information about themselves, their positions, goals, manifestos, policy proposals and so on. In the screencast below, the two major political parties in Nigeria use their websites to give information about the philosophy, ideology, manifesto, organisational structure and administrative set-up of the parties. This function is performed through the following hyperlinks on the upper column/deck of the homepage:

‘About us’ ‘Structure’ and ‘Documents’. Visitors can click on any of these and they will be taken to the contents.

Two, they also use the internet for campaigning: to recruit new members and potential voters and target specific groups especially young people who use virtual platforms for various activities, set agenda for the elections, evaluate public opinions about them and monitor the strength of the opposition, retrieve information about visitors to their sites and evaluate those interested in them. Instances of these are found on the two websites.

Three, as an interactive platform, political parties also use the internet to get the views of their members on certain issues; communicate notices of meetings, press releases, discuss policies, and encourage donations among other issues that relate to their internal organization.

The webpages of the two major parties in Nigeria used in this study fulfil these 3-dimensional purposes. In addition, the websites also have multimedia facilities and functions that include social networking. Apart from political websites reported below, Youtube, Facebook, Twitter are other major internet-based communication tools that Nigerian politicians and stakeholders now use.

(a) Youtube

Apart from the key stakeholders in the political contest in Nigeria, mainstream media organisations in Nigeria also maintain Youtube channels where the global community can monitor democratic and governance issues in Nigeria. Active and passive stakeholders can upload videos of events, debates, and images of electoral process and campaign rallies on this digital media platform. Political parties, politicians and other stakeholders also run Youtube channels for purposes that serve their major concerns.

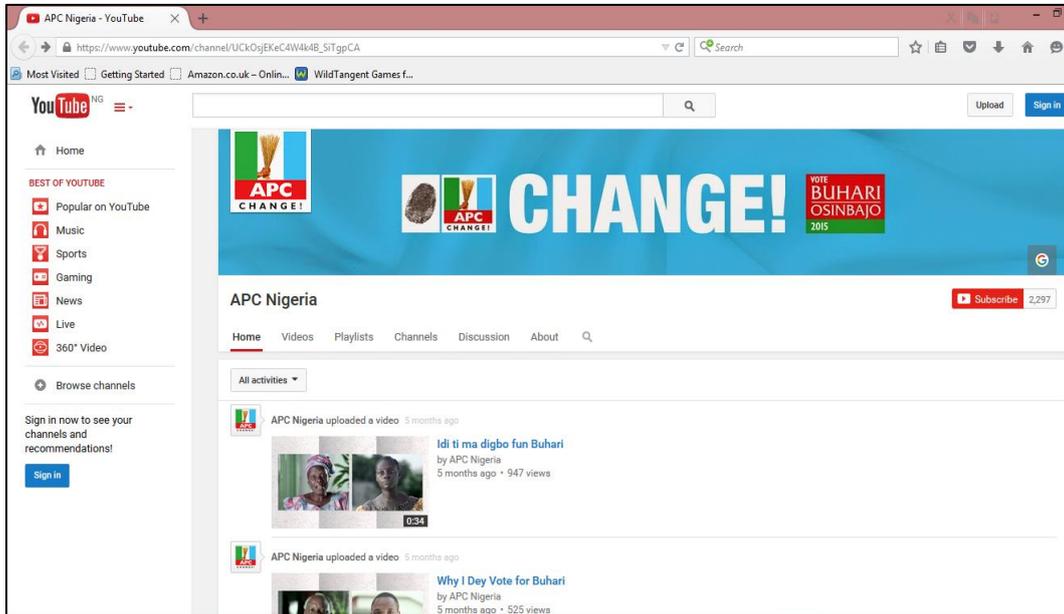


Figure 2: A Screenshot from the Youtube page of the All Progressives Congress (APC)

Youtube has also been used as platforms for political campaigns and civic engagement as shown below.

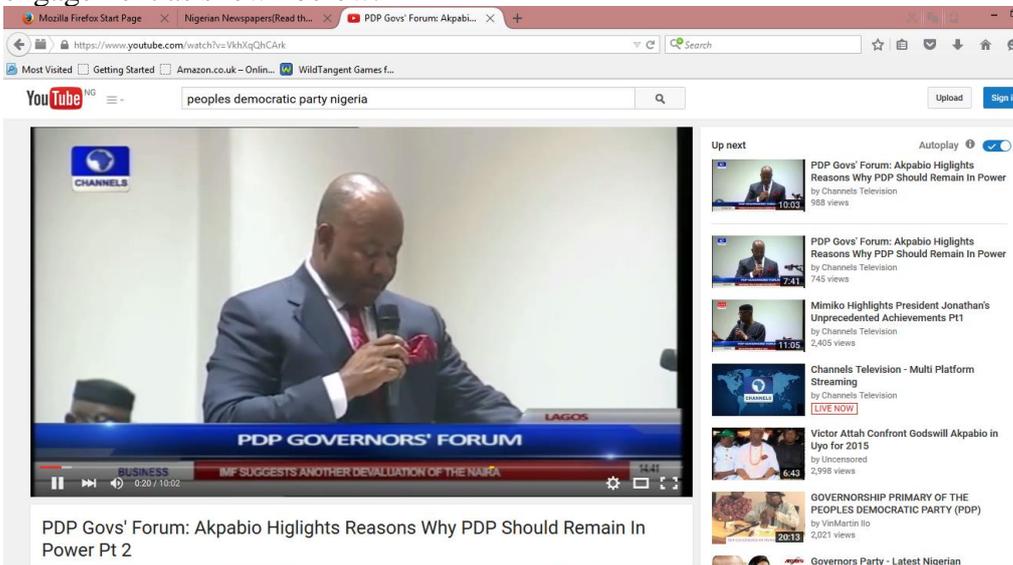


Figure 3: A Screenshot from the Youtube channel of Channels Television reporting the submission made by PDP governors for Nigerians to return the party to power in 2015

With over 200 Youtube videos returned from the search on People’s Democratic Party in Nigeria, various political issues relating to the activities of the party are highlighted for both national and international audiences. Youtube channels now provide uncensored access to information on politics and governance in Nigeria. The screenshot above shows the then ruling party advancing reasons as to why it must remain in power. Technology was used to achieve a two-pronged political aim: to highlight its achievement for the 16 years in which it was the ruling party in Nigeria, and second, to woo voters to support its desire to remain in power in the 2015 electoral season.

(b) Facebook

Facebook is another important social media network that has become an important communication tool for political and democratic purposes. It has moved from being used for private and personal social networking to a campaign instrument in the hands of many political actors in Nigeria. Dr Goodluck Jonathan was the first to use Facebook to launch his political campaign in 2010. Other politicians have since found the online platform a useful tool for giving their political ambitions global voice and followership.



Figure 4: A Screenshot of President Buhari’s Facebook page

It is observed that Dr. Goodluck Jonathan used this platform for a lot of political activities during his tenure (2010-2015). Other political actors and stakeholders in Nigeria have also been using this web-based network for political campaigns, mobilisation, crowdfunding, information, administration and other purposes (*for details see Opeibi, 2015 [in press]*).

The screenshot above taken on the 21st of September 2015 shows the Facebook page of Mr. Muhammadu Buhari, the incumbent president. It has 9,597 likes. Other features of the Facebook page demonstrate typical architecture properties of Facebook platforms. His name is superimposed on a bold acronym of his party, APC (All Progressives Congress). The poster that stands in place of his profile picture contains some interesting information, and socio-cognitive meaning. As a discourse strategy, the Facebook page performs several discursive functions. For instance, it publicises the political party of Mr. Buhari, conveys his vision and programmes, and provides other information for visitors, citizens and the international audience. The logo of his party, APC is placed on the left hand corner of the heading of the poster. A banner headline- ***EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR MEN AND WOMEN IN CABINET*** occupies a conspicuous position in the heading. This is followed by a rider: ***reset Nigeria for Change*** placed on top of one of the pictures where Buhari wears the traditional dress of the Niger-Delta region. The sarcasm encoded in the discourse is targeted against the immediate past President Jonathan who hails from the Niger Delta region. The pictures convey some deep meaning on the vision and goal of Mr. Buhari. The semiotic thrust of four different passport-size pictures in which Mr. Buhari wears four different Nigerian ethnic dress codes (i.e., Ijaw, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) respectively are meant to illustrate his message of unity and oneness. Additionally, though a Northerner, he identifies with the different ethnic groups through their dress codes and thus dispels the fears of domination that other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria may be nursing. He thus positions himself as a national leader rather than a regional or ethnic apologist. The positioning of the picture with the Hausa dress code in the last position further minimises the ethnic sentiments that often characterise political activities in Nigeria. The use of *reset*, with a symbol of the computer power button, for the first letter 'e' in the word (reset), which itself is a computer terminology suggests a radical approach to governance.

The use of this semiotic strategy along with others including the party logo and colours confirm the assumption that within the political landscape of emerging democracies, discourse transactions that occur online via human to computer

interactions also reflect several features of offline political discourse and impact the democratic processes in these political spaces.

(c) Twitter

The use of Twitter for political communication and civic engagement also gained greater momentum in the last few years in Nigeria. There are key political and national issues ranging from politics to security among others that the new technologies have broadcast to the international community. Trending topical national issues are brought into the public space for online discussion. Such events and political issues become globalised, drawing the attention of the world through hashtags that are created to engage other Internet users. The tweeting and retweeting of such topics further enhance their publicity and encourage actions.

For instance, new media platforms (especially Twitter) played a huge role in attracting the attention of the global community to the Boko Haram insurgency particularly the Chibok Girls saga. Several hashtags were created such as #ChibokGirls, #BokoHaram and #BringBackOurGirls. These hashtags attracted a large followership and enjoyed global attention for many months through Twitter and other platforms. Over 6 million tweets and retweets were created within 3 months after the unfortunate terrorist attack that led to the kidnapping of over 200 hundred teenage school girls from their school in Chibok town, North-East Nigeria. Global powers and presidents across the world condemned the attack and offered to support Nigeria in fighting the insurgency.

The Youtube screenshot below shows the American First Lady, Mitchell Obama holding a placard that displays the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls. It is interesting to observe that a Nigerian television station, Channels TV has this image projected on its Youtube channel for global consumption and action. This technology remains the critical platform in accelerating the rate at which this incident received wide circulation across the globe.



Figure 5: A Screenshot from the Youtube page of Channels Television showing Mrs Mitchel Obama supporting the Bring Back Our Girls Campaign in Nigeria

In the course of this study, *Twitcorp*, an online Twitter analytical software was also used to monitor the use of Twitter during the 2014 Ekiti election. It is interesting to observe that one of the hot topics debated, tweeted and retweeted several times during the period was ‘stomach infrastructure’.

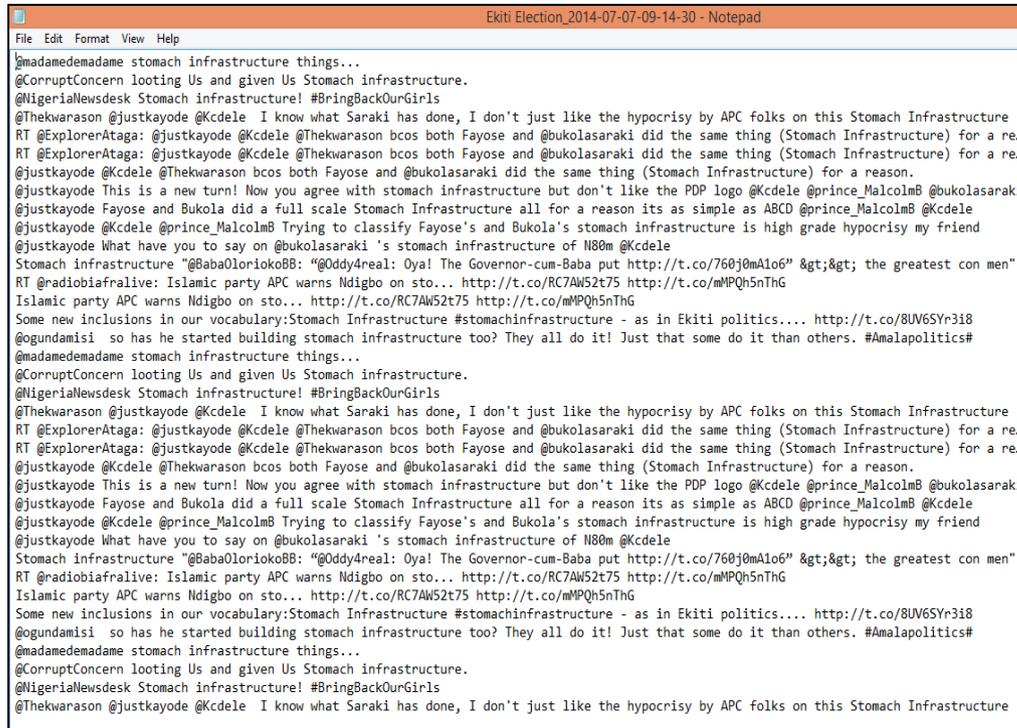


Figure 6: Screenshot from *TwitCorp* analytics showing results on ‘Stomach Infrastructure’

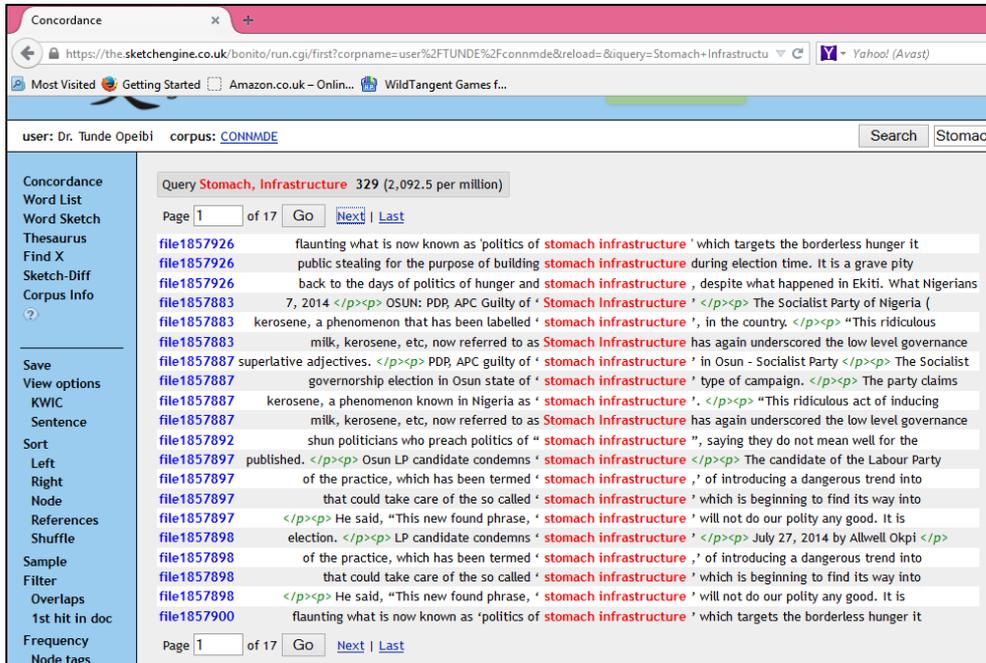


Figure 7: Screenshot of result on *Stomach Infrastructure* from SketchEngine

In figure 7, Sketch Engine shows the key words in context and key terms search on *Stomach Infrastructure*. Some key words such as *Nigeria, Ekiti, PDP, APC, Fayose, Fayemi* associated with ‘stomach infrastructure’ are found. The internet search via Sketch Engine returned 87,111 tokens in 49 files. The selected words were then used as seeds in running a search within the corpus to establish the keyness score on the key term, *stomach infrastructure* as shown below.

| Key words | Score | F | RefF | Key terms | Score | F | RefF |
|---------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|------------------------|--------|-----|--------|
| PDP | 2,062.55 | 259 | 10,263 | stomach infrastructure | 1,698 | 119 | 0 |
| Osun | 1,511.65 | 116 | 1,233 | governorship election | 394.42 | 28 | 207 |
| Ekiti | 886.57 | 66 | 815 | good governance | 211.37 | 28 | 11.606 |
| Nigeria | 371.10 | 274 | 123,626 | | | | |
| kerosene | 175.86 | 26 | 14,449 | governorship candidate | 185.11 | 13 | 103 |
| governance | 144.64 | 156 | 186,607 | | | | |
| electioneering | 118.8 | 10 | 2,708 | | | | |
| malpractices | 100.81 | 8 | 1,837 | | | | |
| inducing | 83.29 | 16 | 22,717 | political lexicon | 169.60 | 12 | 200 |
| stomach | 76.54 | 153 | 356,915 | urban governance | 153.73 | 11 | 358 |
| infrastructure | 75.81 | 215 | 511,746 | mass poverty | 126.7 | 9 | 287 |

Figure 8a: Sketch Engine concordance on *stomach infrastructure* as at August 2014

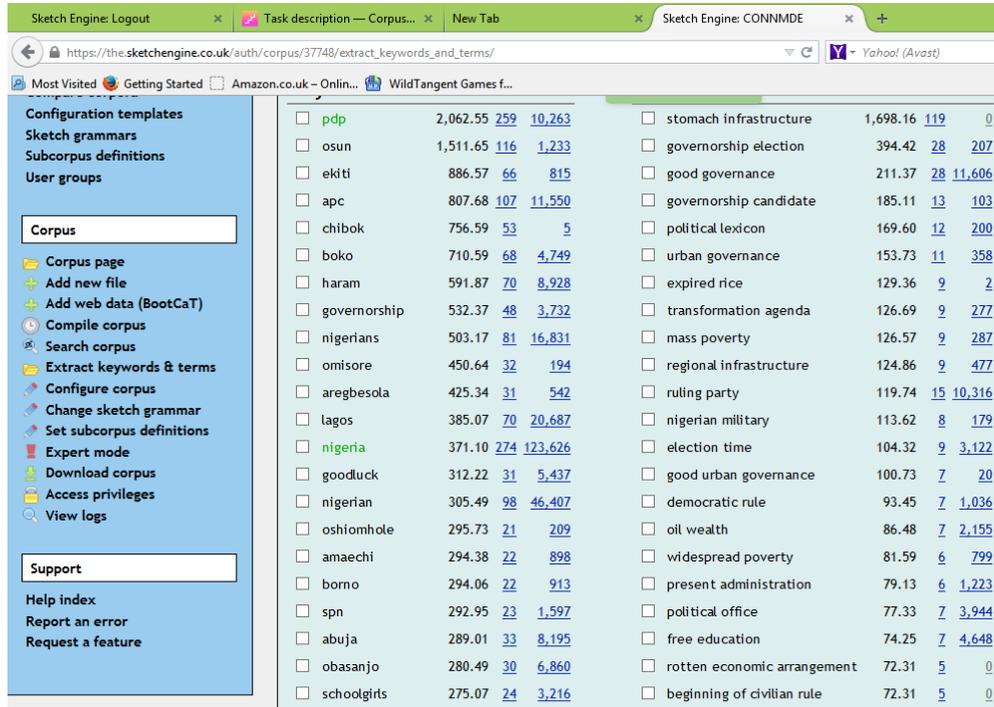


Figure 7b: Sketch Engine concordance on Stomach Infrastructure as at October 12, 2014

It is interesting to discover some terms that co-occur with the key term. For instance, in Figure 7a, *PDP*, *Osun*, *Ekiti*, *Nigeria*, *kerosene*, *governance*, *electioneering*, *malpractices*, *inducing*, *stomach*, *infrastructure* are the top 10 key words that are used frequently in the online discourse on ‘stomach infrastructure’. *Kerosene* which occupies the 5th position on the list was one of the products distributed by the politician during the campaigns. *Malpractices* and *inducing* also popped up on the list as collocates of the term within that political space. They convey the general interpretation given to the action of the governorship candidate by the critics who considered the distribution of such material products to lure voters to support him as electoral fraud. The 3rd column shows the number of mentions (frequency) of each of the terms associated with the key word and the key term. For instance, *PDP* (259 times) and *stomach infrastructure* (119 times) occupy the first position. They suggest the source of the term. Mr Fayose, was the governorship candidate of the Peoples Democratic Party during the Ekiti State election in 2014 and *kerosene*, *rice* and *groundnut oil* were distributed to voters during the campaigns. This political inducement was then described as *stomach infrastructure* and the phrase has now become a new political lexicon in Nigeria.

It is observed that the online platforms equally enhance the process of topicalisation of political issues. Local issues are given wider coverage and subjected to intensive online debate through these technologies. It is surprising that more than 3 months after the lexicon was created, it was still being discussed in the Nigerian public space. The study used another computer software, *Topsy* to monitor the number of times the term, *stomach infrastructure* was mentioned on Twitter in the first hundred days following the candidate’s election victory. The result shows that 38 tweets were found mentioning ‘stomach infrastructure’ in Ekiti with comments from different online users. The result below demonstrates that even after the election, the topic was still being debated by Nigerians both at home and abroad.

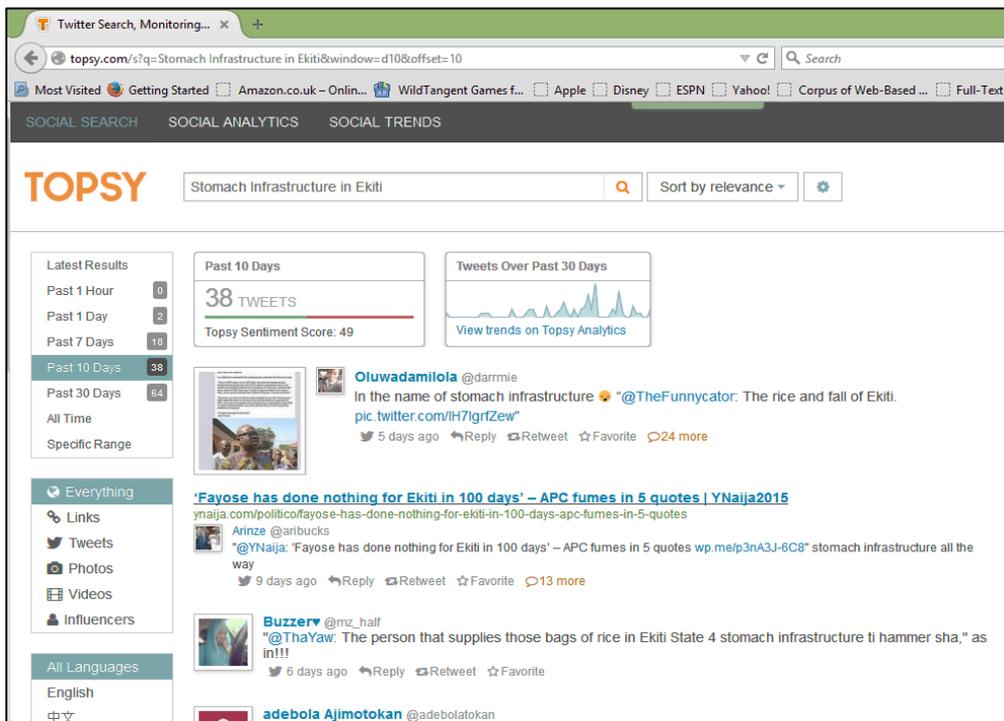


Figure 8: Result from Topsy, showing the use of stomach infrastructure online three months after it was first coined in Nigeria

The opposition party, All Progressives Congress (APC) also used Twitter during its presidential primary election in Lagos in 2014. It developed a Twitter hashtag #APCDecides that online users with Twitter handles could use to follow the event in real time. In a screenshot taken on December 11th 2014 during the primaries, the event and associated activities were broadcast live and online users were able

to monitor the event as well as read and react to comments by uploading their own comments as shown below. This synchronous computer-mediated communication process definitely promotes civic engagement, collective participation, social inclusion, transparency and credibility of the electoral process.

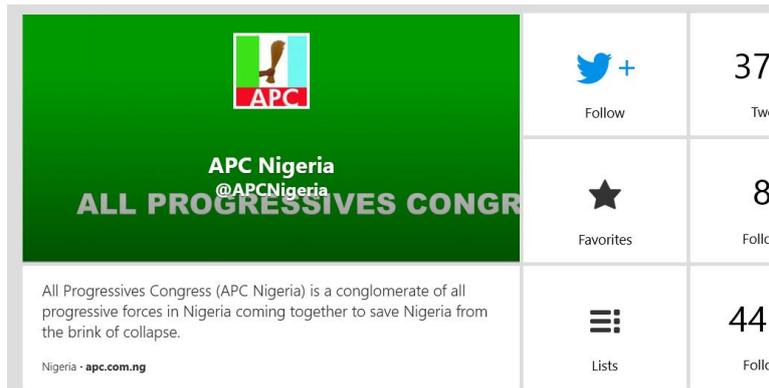


Figure 9a: Screenshot of the Twitter handle of APC during the December 2014 presidential primaries in Lagos

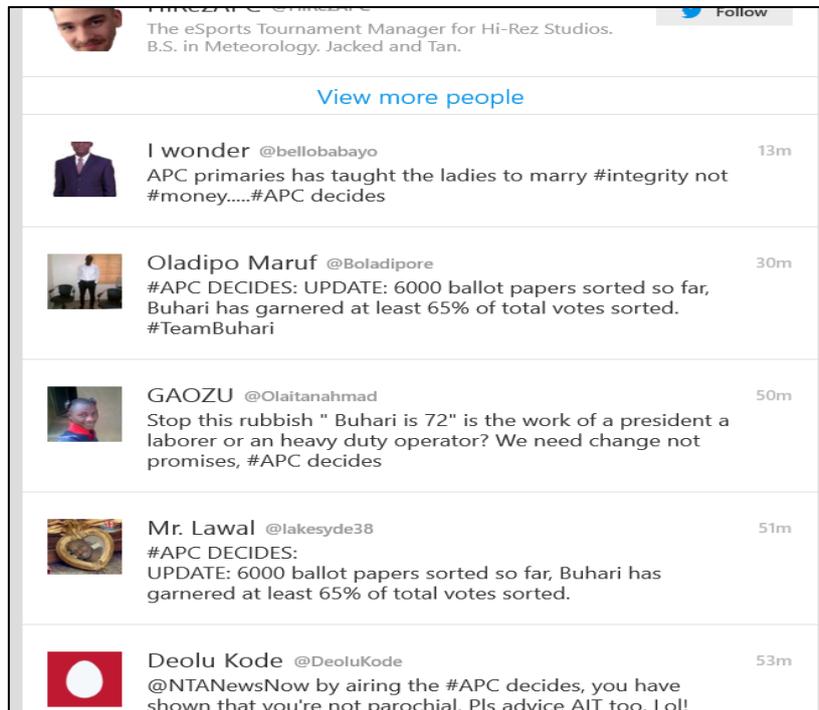


Figure 9b: Screenshot of the Twitter handle of APC during the December 2014 presidential primaries in Lagos with live comments of the event

The screenshots from the Twitter handles of the APC in Fig. 9a gives information on the identity and mission statement of the party, viz: *All Progressives Congress(APC) is a conglomerate of all progressive forces in Nigeria coming together to save Nigeria from the brink of collapse.* Fig. 9b demonstrates the synchronicity in the computer-mediated discourse as well as interactivity in online discourse. The platform enables online users to post their comments and react to comments in the thread in real time during the presidential primary elections of the party. Instant updates on the event, number of tweets on the subject that is trending on #APCDecides, are regularly posted and shown on the twitter page.

General Web/ Political Webpages as Digital Political Discourse

This study further assesses the use of the Internet to monitor online coverage of political issues in Nigeria using another web analytics software, *Trackur*. This web-based computer software was used to track the number of online mentions of some key political issues popular within the Nigerian socio-political space around July 2014. These issues include *stomach infrastructure, democracy in Nigeria, Corruption in Nigeria, Muslim-Muslim Ticket and Dividends of Democracy* which experience the highest velocity change during the period. From the screenshot below, Stomach Infrastructure has 15,135 mentions, Democracy in Nigeria(97), Corruption in Nigeria(53), Muslim-Muslim Ticket (31), dividends of Democracy(5). It is noteworthy that ‘dividends of democracy’ was least mentioned during the period. It may be as a result of the relative stability in the democratic process and as well as lack of fulfilled electoral promises made by the politicians who hitherto were fond of using this once-popular political phrase. ‘Stomach Infrastructure’ received the highest number of hits because it was during this period that the phrase was coined.

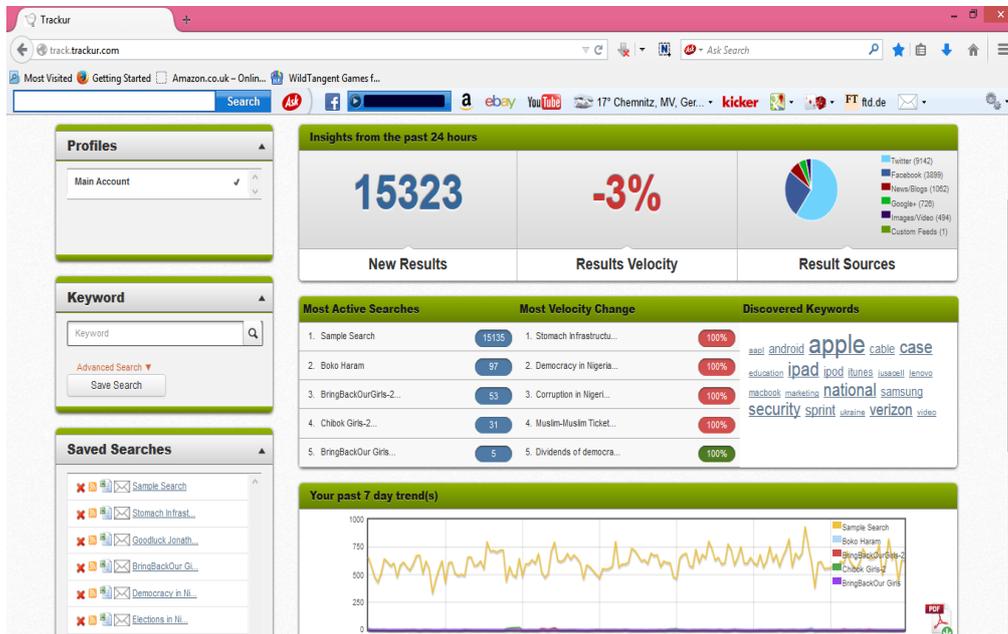


Figure 10: Screenshot of Trackur showing result from online search of topical political issues in Nigeria as at September 2014

Apart from the use of these virtual platforms by political actors and stakeholders, the mainstream media also understand the importance of the mobile networks to encourage citizen journalism. The Internet has now helped many Nigerians who were hitherto uninterested in the country's political process to get involved from the comfort of their homes, offices or cars via their handheld mobile devices. In the screenshot below, we demonstrate how new media platforms were used for monitoring and reporting live electoral activities during the 2014 Ekiti Election. In a random internet search on the Ekiti election, the web page popped up. It shows moment by moment updates of the voting exercise being reported real time online. The site has some provision on the left hand column for users and citizens to participate in the discussion forum, post their comments and send messages. As at the time the screenshot was taken 720 members were online and 33, 862 discussions had taken place, with 40, 340 messages sent on the same event. It should be mentioned that the beauty of the digital media for electoral purposes is the possibility of promoting transparency and credibility of the process.

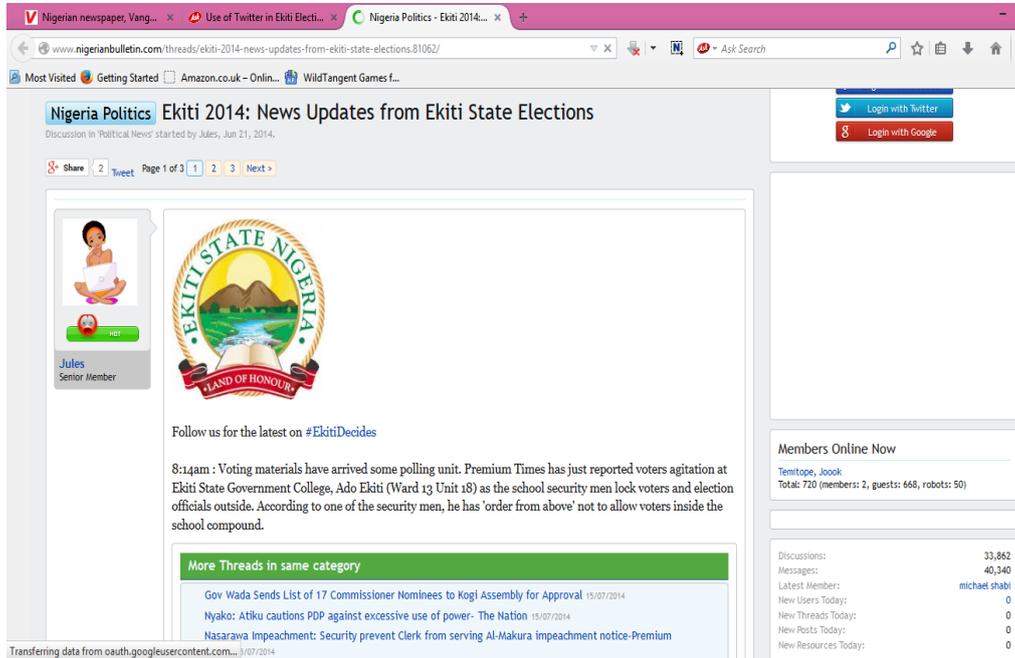


Figure 11: Screenshot of the webpage of the Ekiti State Government which was used to monitor and report live updates during the 2014 Governorship Elections

In the course of this study, a number of major political websites were visited for content evaluation. As at 2014 and early 2015, we visited the homepages and Facebook walls of the ruling party (PDP), and the main opposition party (APC), as well as the Facebook page of President Goodluck Jonathan. An examination of their contents shows that they demonstrate the use of new media platforms to accomplish some socio-political goals. The screenshots (webpages) below demonstrate how the webpages provide informational, interactional and persuasive contents and illustrate how political actors in Nigeria use internet technologies to engage potential electorate and the citizens.



Figure 12: Homepage of Nigerian ruling party-Peoples Democratic Party(PDP)
Source: www.peoplesdemocraticparty.com.ng

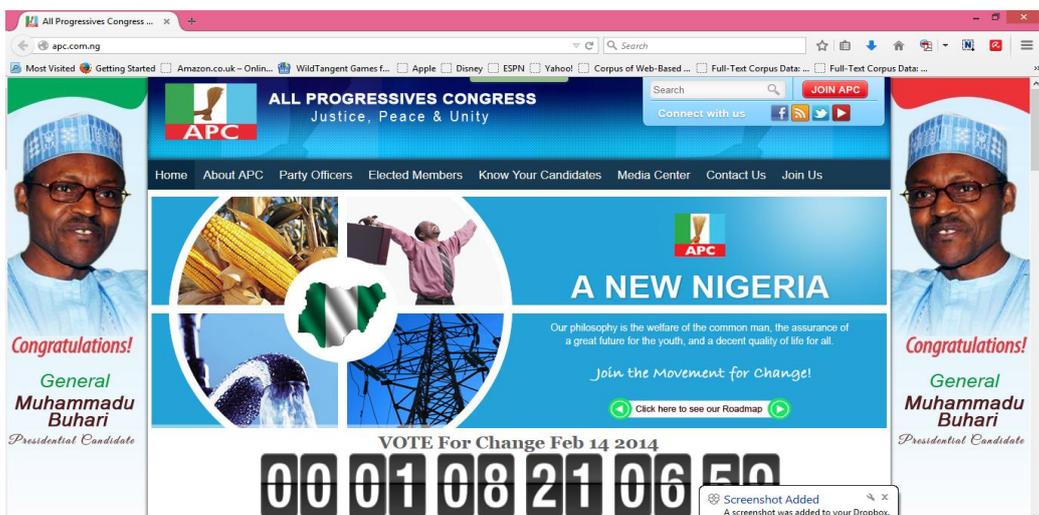


Figure 13: Screenshot of a campaign slide from APC Homepage
Source: www.apcng.com

A more detailed content analysis of the homepages (not within the scope of this paper) will reveal a deliberate use of the platform as a discourse strategy to perform several politically-related purposes. These include, serving as a tool to achieve the following: communicate political messages, engage citizens, attract

potential supporters, retain the patronage of existing fans, and woo potential voters. Some of the political website contents illustrate civic engagement discursive practices. Both the architecture and contents show a range of discourse strategies that include, asynchronous computer-mediated discourse, multimodal graphic designs, media multilingual discourse(language alternation), lexicogrammatical and socio-pragmatic features.

Political websites remain one of the common internet-based platforms that political actors use to accomplish their aims to woo voters, gain and/or retain power as well as interact with the public. Apart from being used as political marketing tools, the online visibility provided by the homepages of the political actors also enable citizens to become aware of their range of electoral choices and be able to assess the parties. Party websites equally function as a platform for political participation by providing interactive linkages between citizens and parties (Siapera, 2011: 87).

Some of the contents on the websites also portray a strategic construction and portrayal of national conversation. The then ruling party in Nigeria (i.e. PDP) used a combination of textual and visual images to report its achievement in power under its banner slogan, *Transformation Agenda*. As interactive civic engagement space, the webpages equally contextualise online discussions between web managers (web owners) and visitors/supporters. The online participants are able to communicate and exchange socio-pragmatic meanings through specific national issues discussed within the forum.

A careful combination of both technical and rhetorical features on the virtual networks of the parties aligns in the direction of the features and contents of conventional political party websites. Technical features such as hyperlinks, animated slides and multimedia icons are used to complement the aim of the web owners which generally include to use the site for information, administration, monitoring of public opinion, engagement, mobilization, and interaction.

It is interesting to observe how the webpages function as campaign tools. For example, in Figure 12, the message displayed by the then ruling party (PDP), *Support the Transformation Agenda. Our Agenda is to Transform Nigeria* - along with the passport-size portrait of its presidential candidate, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan was designed to woo voters and seek their support. The directive speech act (i.e. mild imperative) with the action verb, 'support' as its head is an appeal for votes during the upcoming election. The Tweeter hashtag *#NigeriaOfOurDream* in red

bold typeface as a graphological device is used to attract attention and communicate the vision of the party. Similarly APC's slogan, *Join the Movement for Change* carries some socio-political significance and may be interpreted in ways that include a call to voters to support a party which will bring about the desired change for which they are expecting in the country, change the ruling party by voting it out of power, change the oppressive political system being operated by the ruling party and change the incumbent president accused of incompetence and dismal performance, among several ranges of shared meanings and interpretations by the citizens. The deliberate use of 'movement' in the slogan connotes a people's revolution that is unstoppable, which has also been described, in another context, by one of the key party leaders as 'common sense revolution.' It is worthy of note that the webpages show the use of other online platforms by the parties. These include Email, Tweeter, GooglePlus and Facebook. Users can click on any of the icons on the upper left corner of the page which leads them to a new page on the platform. They will then be able to connect and interact with the parties and their candidates as well as post their comments. The multimodal integrated digital technologies on the homepages provide a multilateral communication platform for fostering engaging interactions and popular participation in the democratic process.

The study has also shown that the political parties and political actors within the Nigerian socio-political space during the recent electioneering activities used the internet and other web-based resources to expand their offline presence and to complement physical political activities.

Conclusion

The paper has argued the propriety of applying computer methodologies to studies in the humanities in line with modern trends and the new research orientation known as digital humanities. It has shown that the use of some key corpus and computer-based media tools to examine how computer-based analytical frameworks can unveil new and hidden meanings in the use of new technologies for political activities in Nigeria. A combination of empirical evidence and practical application of computer-based resources to analyse data drawn from an ongoing project of compiling the Corpus of Nigeria New Media Discourse in English (CONNMDE), support the assumption that digital media platforms are becoming increasingly important in Nigeria public discourse.

It is expected that the increasing use of new media technologies will continue to transform the political landscape in this young democracy. Digital media has a

critical role to play in enlarging the interactive space more effectively and more intensely and this may in turn have a cascading effect in improving participatory political system in young democracies. In a similar vein, the application of computer software and corpus-based discourse methods in the study of new media political texts holds a lot of potential to unveil unfolding patterns of civic engagement discursive practices.

With the growing interest in the study of digital media communication which is believed to be at the intersection of computer science and linguistics, the new perspective that this study offers may galvanise more elaborate studies in other sub-disciplines of digital humanities.

In conclusion, other areas in the humanities can equally benefit from the application of different digital technologies and computer methodologies for findings that have social benefits.

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