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The Digital Public Sphere: Developing a Culture of Democracy in Contemporary Nigeria

By

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degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Policy Studies

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AP Associated Press

BBM Blackberry Messenger

DM Digital Media

EIE Enough is Enough Nigeria

ICPC Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission

INEC Independent Electoral Commission

MSF Médecins Sans Frontiers

NDPS Nigerian Digital Public Sphere

SMS Short Message Service

Acknowledgment

I want to thank God for sparing my life to complete this process. During this PhD, I lost someone very dear to me to a terminal illness, Uncle Victor, and it reminded me how fleeting life is. In the midst of all the busyness, meeting deadlines, and travelling, it could all be over in the twinkle of an eye, everything left unfinished. It is with a heart of gratitude that I say thank you Jesus.

I want to thank my family for their unwavering support through out this PhD journey. Dad and Mum spoke to me every single day, either through the Blackberry Messenger, a phone call, or occasional Skype video chat. They made sure I never felt alone all throughout the process. My dad took my subject matter upon himself, so much so that he sent me endless hyperlinks to resources he thought might support my research. He even attended local tech events in Nigeria on my behalf, just so he could keep me up-to-date on Nigeria's digital media environment while I was in the UK. He also did some proofreading on my behalf. My mum was always praying for me, encouraging me, and lifting my spirits in downcast moments, thank you mummy. You are the best parents in the world.

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With a sincere heart, I say thank you to everyone that has played roles in bringing me to this point – known and unknown. I express my gratitude.

Tomi Oladepo

March 2015

Declaration and Inclusion of Published Work

I declare that the present thesis is the result of my own work. I would also like to confirm that neither this thesis nor parts of it has ever been submitted before for a degree at another university.

Preface

Coming from a background in Journalism (my first degree), I developed a keen eye for news and details when observing the world around me, physically and virtually. In 2009 when I was accepted for a Masters in Global Media & Communication at Coventry University, I became even more interested in online media and the new ways information spread, spurring cultural change. A favourite topic of mine throughout this masters program was “global information flow and counter/contra-flow” enabled by digital media technologies.

I began as a Twitter user in 2010, when there were only a handful of Nigerians on Twitter. I kept an account of interesting communication activities going on in that “Naija” sphere on my blog then, *Diary of a Media Junkie*. The trending hashtags were sometimes comedic (e.g. #WelcometoNigeria), other times it was a campaign calling the Nigerian government to action (e.g. #LightUpNigeria). In April 2010, I wrote a post on my blog asking, “what potential can this (social media networks) hold for democracy and development?” What sealed my interest in this subject was my virtual observation of the use of new media in the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. It was novel, it was fresh, and I felt we had only scratched the surface of the potentials of digital media for democracy. This became the driving force behind my desire to pursue a PhD. Habermas’ public sphere theory provided a fruitful frame within which to explore and articulate this idea.

This thesis is a unique contribution to knowledge because with the idea of the public sphere being a Westphalian/European construct, applying it to the analysis of a developing society such as countries in Africa has proven problematic. However, digital media has ‘globalised’ information flows and political debate in such a way as to render the ideal nation-state framework for conceptualising the public sphere at least partially defunct. The idea of the public sphere is now, arguably, ‘trans-nationalised’. Hence, this thesis is one of the few studies on Africa that fruitfully explores the democratic potentials of new media technologies within the theoretical framework of the public sphere. While other studies may bear solely on empirical statistics and hard data to generate rankings (on e.g. “the number of mobile phone users in Africa”), this thesis takes account of the culture of use and locates that culture within a more fruitful frame of the public sphere and democratic theory.

Nigeria is fast rising as an economic giant once again, and oil is no longer the sole source of this good fortune. Paypal recently named the country its second largest market in Africa, and after but one year of entry into its markets. Outside of commerce, cultural producers are harnessing the potentials of information and communication technology in creative ways. Lagos for instance, is slowly, albeit haphazardly, being transformed to a recognised ‘creative’ city. Cultural and creative entrepreneurs are rising, using social media networks as their “offices” and “display windows” to share their wares and services for sale. By examining the democratic potentials of digital media in Nigeria, this thesis is but a starting point in understanding the extent to which digital media communication is transforming the way of life in Africa, and how societal conditions makes this transformation differ from the reality in

the West for instance. This is how the thesis adds to scholarship in and on Nigeria, Africa's most populous country.

For Europe and America, this thesis definitely extends the idea of the public sphere in a manner that throws up issues that would otherwise have not been considered in the West. This is simply because certain challenges faced in Nigeria, that conditions its (digital) public sphere to function as it does, do not exist in Europe and America, or at least to very limited degrees, if at all. Thus, this thesis aims to generate new knowledge that could serve as a basis of comparison of public spheres in other parts of the world outside Nigeria. An example of a factor that has been picked up on in the Nigerian digital public sphere that would be novel to public sphere studies in Europe and America is its profoundly ethno-centric nature – which has its roots in the colonial experience of the 1900s. This is but one example.

The challenges I encountered in the process of writing this thesis included finding relevant literature to review on the (digital) public sphere in Africa. Aside a handful of scholars, such as Fred Mudhai or Last Moyo, there is dearth of research on the subject. Overall, it has been a rewarding, fulfilling, and instructive process.

'Tomi Oladepo

March 2015

Abstract

The rise of digital media in Nigerian public life is evident in a variety of contexts – from how mainstream journalists gather news and information, to how young people express their dissatisfaction with the government on matters of concern, such as the case of the 276 kidnapped Chibok Girls (April 2014). This thesis is an investigation into the growing use of digital media in Nigeria, and identifies significant developments in Nigerian democracy through a growing ‘digital public sphere’. New communication skills of dialogue and deliberation are being cultivated through an improvised and often creative use of digital media, and ‘netizens’ [citizens active on the Internet] are purposively generating social, political and cultural consciousness. To explore this embryonic digital public sphere in Nigeria, field research was conducted in the form of historical, political and interview based research with active digital media users. The interviewees featured journalists, citizen journalists, bloggers, public officials, social activists, religious leaders, and cultural producers, and revolved around current uses of digital media technologies, online dialogue and key issues, and digital media as a tool for democracy in Nigeria’s future development. Largely on the basis of the interview data, this thesis argues that despite a discernible ‘culture’ of democracy cultivated through pervasive use of digital media, a digital public sphere can only be realised in a democratic-enabling political environment. This would necessitate public officials engaging in public dialogue; protections from harassment, insults and cyber-bullying; and the digital media infrastructure being developed, accessible and affordable. Furthermore, this thesis identifies how an effective digital public sphere will only function where the agencies of mass media are willing to take more active roles in collaborating with citizens online in order to cultivate transparency in public affairs, and also disseminate vital information, and work for widespread digital access.

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is an investigation on the use and potential of digital media for the formation of a public sphere within the developing democracy of Nigeria. The first objective of this investigation is to review key theoretical concepts in the historical discourse of the ‘public sphere’ and (the more recent) ‘digital media’ so as to arrive at a theoretical framework for the formation of a concept of a ‘digital public sphere’.

The second objective of this thesis is to undertake empirical research and explain the structure, dynamics and development of a digital public sphere – where, however, the theoretical concept of the digital public sphere remains contested and theoretically ambiguous. Scholarly research in this subject has emerged across academic fields of cultural policy, cultural studies, media and communications, the sociology of culture and political science in many of its forms, and this demonstrates a need for an examination of the technical, discursive and communication functions of a putative new digital public sphere. This urgency is underscored by the rise of digital media in facilitating new global flows of information, culture and entertainment as much as local debate and protest, the impact of which is so apparent it does not need emphasising in this thesis. In taking tentative steps towards this evolution in our scholarly understanding, this research thesis seeks to identify new methods of research through revisiting and revising older conceptions of ‘public sphere’. It will construct a critical narrative that reinserts some of the ‘critical’ concerns of

classical public sphere theory (since Habermas) into the contemporary new media studies of digital communications. The price to be paid with this approach, of course, is that this thesis cannot possibly contain or acknowledge the vast range of contributions by scholars the world over to both public sphere research as well as digital media research. This thesis aims, rather, to extend public sphere research through one line of investigation – the digital mediation of public sphere activities and their current function and potential within contemporary Nigeria's developing democracy.

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first section, concepts and contexts, interrogates the idea of the public sphere through Habermas, its progenitor, in the first chapter, and then through his critics, Calhoun, Fraser, and Kellner, in the second chapter. This is followed by a consideration of the relationship between digital media and the (conventional) public sphere in order to arrive at a construct of what the idea of a digital public sphere might stand for. The fourth chapter dwells on the idea of deliberation within Africa and its citizens in Diaspora through a potentially digital public sphere. This first section of the thesis is conceptual and theoretical.

In the second section I identify how a digitally mediated public sphere may emerge in a practical sense – through the increasing propensity of Nigerian citizens' use of digital tools in performing public-sphere-related activities and functions. I examine Nigeria's existing public sphere mediated through traditional mass media, and the politics, policies, and legal frameworks that surrounds how it operates – before exploring the idea of the digitalization Nigeria.

The final section is where the Nigerian digital public sphere in action is made manifest from the perspective of its participants whom I have interviewed on field research. The opening chapter of the section lays out the methodology of this study, while the following two chapters is where I present the data gathered. I discuss and analyse my findings in the penultimate chapter, before concluding with a discussion on the challenges and constraints the Nigerian digital public sphere faces, which might hamper the potential of its vibrancy in promoting a culture of democracy in Nigeria.

The Public Sphere and New Digital Media

As a common concept in most theories and discussion on the nature of democracy, the ‘public sphere’ is a realm of communication and interaction, where citizens or other interested parties confer, discuss and articulate information, knowledge, understanding and views on matters subject to political decision-making, considered to be of common or ‘public’ interest. The subject matter or content of such communication interchange is, routinely, substantive social and economic issues that pertain to the relation between the state and civil society, law, order, security, along with issues of protocol or procedure internal to the various levels of jurisdiction, of government and administration of the country, regions or city locales. At least, this general conception echoes the ‘classical’ terms by which ‘public’ and its ‘sphere’ is thought to be significant. The term, *public sphere*, became an object of serious theoretical analysis when German philosopher and sociologist, Jürgen Habermas, conducted his great study of the emergence of bourgeois society in late seventeenth century Great

Britain, and eighteenth century France. For Habermas, a process of detailed consideration, usually referred to as a ‘deliberation’, was the fulcrum of a public sphere that served to arrive at a series of judgments or general viewpoints historically referred to as ‘public opinion’ (specific references will be provided later).

Such public opinion, is spurred by ‘critical’ debate, in the sense that the diversity of interests that are involved ensures to varying degrees that any given matter or issue was necessarily considered from multiple points of view and considered as a cause of multiple social and economic determinations. The ‘space’ of the public ‘sphere’, however, is more abstract than physical, given that it is characterised primarily by communication and not the administration of a specific organisation, institution or series of such. As the work of Manuel Castells has shown (cf. Castells, 2008), the ‘space’ of the public sphere in the age of new media is ever expanding, porous, co-extensive with new civic and governmental organizational formations and alliances, and constituted by multiple and hybrid flows of communication activity. The public sphere of the emerging bourgeoisie of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, fully grown, was largely bounded by physical, urban and institutional space (from the coffee house to the parliamentary debating chamber), and has since been termed a ‘court’ of public opinion, before which the democratic state must demonstrate its legitimacy. Historically, of course, the media (enterprises, products, institutions, limited markets) that facilitated the articulation, amplification and dissemination of deliberations became crucial to the

constitution of the ‘sphere’ itself. For example, in the Seventeenth Century, the business owners of the printing press played a crucial role in disseminating information, comment and opinion. Through printed matter dialogue between individual citizens, associations, interest groups and state or other authorities combined with the evolution of nation-state democracy to the extent that in the context of the eighteenth century a distinction could be made between ‘state and civil society’ as if these were two distinct and separate entities. In theory at least, a Habermasian would understand this era in terms of how state action and government was brought to public consciousness largely through an increasingly professionalised ‘press’, wherein the press in turn articulated public opinion to the agencies of the state. A certain ‘freedom of the press’ to do this, therefore, is regarded as a condition of an effective public sphere.

In present day society, at least in Europe, it is still appropriate to refer to a public sphere, but where the public dimension takes different forms. While members of the historic bourgeois public sphere engaged in social interaction and met in social locations such as salons, coffee houses and even private homes, the contemporary public sphere involves channels once removed from any physical realm, and as Castells has vividly articulated, is increasingly global in its frame of references and even its values (Castells, 2008: 79-80). The advent of radio and television were, of course, epoch-making for the public sphere, and now this ‘old’ media has been subject to ‘remediation’ and not just the addition of new technologies or communication devices. As J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin indicated in their pioneering book of 1999, *Remediation: Understanding*

New Media, the Internet and the diversity of digital media that has recently appeared, are not distinct from ‘old’ media, but embody and articulate their function, extending that function into regions of society and culture once absent from media.

Within media, communication and cultural studies since Bolter and Grusin’s book, it has become commonplace to observe the interpenetration of media into everyday life, and along with it a significant degree of ‘content’ and information previously confined to established channels and participants of the public sphere. It has also become commonplace to point out that the public sphere that was once facilitated by ‘old media’ has waned in terms of its democratic (and ‘democratising’) effect, compromised by large international media corporations and business elites, and other actors whose interests exceed democracy, government or the public interest in any one nation state context. A third common observation is that to some extent – with, for example, citizen journalism, internet-based news and information dissemination through social media – the Internet and other digital media are shifting the axis of the public sphere, where the dichotomy of ‘state and civil society’ is less stable, and where social subjects (whether ‘citizens’ with specific interests or not) can become involved in reviving an ailing public sphere through new forms of public communication.

As a preliminary to this research, a short clarification of terminology is in order: *Digital media* is the generic term used to refer to the World Wide Web, weblogs, social network sites, smart phones, tablets and other electronic communication

devices that can be ‘networked’ to live information channels and telecommunications networks. Digital media, also often referred to as *new media*, is often defined in contrast to old or traditional media in terms of the former’s more participatory and interactive potential. As Bolter and Grusin’s study makes evident, however, ‘new’ media has emerged at every point in history, and the digital realm which was the context of their research in the late 1990s now seems hopelessly ‘old’ in terms of its power and capabilities. New media, therefore, refers to more than the shift or increase in technology; it is also a transformation in their mode of use, and the social activities or even social formations that congeal around certain forms and levels of media use.

To cast a glance at the way ‘traditional’ national newspapers now use internet platforms, through which a range of interconnected stakeholders are able to use this platform for diverse yet highly coordinated series of interests, is to remind us how in the age of Facebook and Twitter (social network), any discussion of the public sphere can become extraordinarily complex and bound up with research into the evolving sphere of media technology and business itself. This is a presupposition of this thesis.

Theoretical complexity of research in the contemporary public sphere

Theoretical ‘issues’ are usually conceptual matters internal to the constitution of specific definitions and theories. For this thesis, our issues will largely be generated from a theoretical account of the concept of the public sphere as discussed within the context of the contemporary formulation of a theory of

digital media. This will allow us to construct a theoretical framework within the function and potential of a ‘digital public sphere’ that can be applied to the contemporary democracy of the West African country of Nigeria. It is a premise of this thesis that ‘theory’ is historically evolving, along with the objects or concepts of that theory. Theory is perpetually modified, through research, which often identifies the limitations of the theory, as well as areas in which it may be modified to accommodate, for instance, new knowledge, perspectives, realities, and practices. This is particularly the case with theories relating to media and to the political practices of the public realm involving communication, deliberation and debate. As the four volumes of Gripsrud, Moe, Molander and Murdock’s compendium *The Public Sphere* (Sage, 2011) indicate, the very concept is deeply historical and bound up with huge shifts in the practice of government, governance, civil society and markets, social structures and cultural values. As indicated above, we can only acknowledge this complexity at the outset, and with this a blanket acknowledgment of the many scholars who have been instrumental in articulating the nature of this historical change. Indeed, Gripsrud, Moe, Molander and Murdock’s compendium does just this, while this particular thesis can only but travel a single trajectory for the purposes of a specific investigation.

There are vast theoretical issues surrounding the work of Habermas, our first port of call in our theoretical researches. His account of the public sphere was written in German in 1962, not translated into English until more than two decades later, in 1989. The complexity of Habermas’s use of the German

language, not least his particular ‘Frankfurt School’ way of synthesising philosophical analysis with sociological realities, forces us to acknowledge at the outset that our theoretical research is conceptually defined within current English language confines, inevitably avoiding hermeneutic matters pertaining to specific Germanic semantics, political concepts and their historiography, meanings or nuances intended by the original author. According to Brants ‘the complexity of the concept (public sphere) was lost in translation’ (2005:144). The term *public* in *public sphere* is one of the major theoretical challenges facing theorists in this field. There is the added complexity of defining Habermas’s concept of *private* as opposed to *public within* in the public sphere. Public and private are not single terms but have generated cognates and terminologies with shifting meanings as they have historically been applied to various social and political realities. A ‘public’ official works for the state; private may refer to the home, but can also apply to huge corporate businesses. An individual is in him/herself regarded as a private individual, yet as citizen is a member of a public. A ‘public’ place is assumed to be a place open to all social subjects, where no one has exclusive rights of entry or exit. Yet, in an age of mass migrations, immigrations and diasporas, it has become apparent that many social subjects (with profound experience, views and interests) could well have no status as ‘citizen’ and thus no right to enter the ‘public sphere’ (even if their voices reverberate around it or ‘outside’ it).

We could continue. One issue that is indeed necessary to mention in the context of a study of Nigeria is, of course, the historically ‘Eurocentric’ character of the

concept of public sphere. Habermas's theoretical concept emerged from an extensive historical study of European societies, particularly Britain and France. When scholars attempt to apply his specific criteria for defining a public sphere to non-European societies, even the USA, there are issues that therefore emerge by way of navigating Habermas' crucial distinctions between private and public and their function in relation to state apparatus and administration. In order to draw a public sphere for African societies, or more precisely Nigeria in the case of this thesis, such tensions and complexities are to be further expected, notwithstanding the way Nigeria (like many countries in the post-colonial 'Global South') live with the remains of democratic structures imported during the latter half of the huge European enterprise that was colonialism.

A final issue that must be admitted is that Habermas generally defines the public sphere as a unified, single realm for public deliberations amongst citizens. Aside from the historical assumptions on the singular constitution of the nation state as a radically delimited political entity, if deliberation is the primary activity that defines a public sphere, one might observe that deliberation occurs in multiple social spheres (and no doubt always did). Positing a 'single' public sphere raises questions on the relation between social subjects and the forms of citizenship that grant them access or the power to participate in a putative public sphere. For deliberations occur in homes, churches, newspapers, political blogs, and yet many dissolve without trace, or their discursive orbit, logic and impact is outside the sphere of the officially constituted 'public'. Habermas' account of the public sphere, though providing a solid foundation for our theoretical investigation, has

historically become an oversimplification of what has now become a very hybrid and complex series of concepts and realities, particularly where transnational or supra-national government is involved (the African Union, European Union, or United Nations).

It is for this reason that this thesis has not attempted simply to find ways of promoting a ‘public’ sphere in Nigeria, but to consider the theoretical discourses and discussions around the historically-constituted concept of ‘public’ as part of an emerging ‘culture’ of democracy in Nigeria. This ‘culture’ involves scholarly, creative and discursive practices that engage social subjects, whether empowered as citizens or not, and all together are contributing to a force for change, ideas and motivations (whether actual substantive structural socio-political change is indeed taking place is a matter for another research project). The relation between a ‘public sphere’ as digitally mediated and a ‘culture’ of democracy is therefore symbiotic, and will be discussed later. We must first understand the socio-political character of contemporary Nigeria.

Federal Republic of Nigeria’s Political System

“To understand Nigeria (he says) you must throw away notions like certainty and consensus. Instead, you have to accept you are entering a world where all truth is relative, all facts are transient and what seems to be most visceral and bloody reality can ultimately be revealed as artifice.” Alex Perry (2014) of *Newsweek* (quoting former governor Central Bank of Nigeria, now Emir of Kano, Nigeria,

Lamido Sanusi).

What is the Nigerian political system? Or, as Joseph (1987:1) asks: ‘what is the nature of the fundamental processes of Nigerian political life?’ According to the Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance 2013 Report, Nigeria ranks forty-one (41) out of fifty-two (52) countries on the continent, with a score of forty-three point four (43.4) per cent (2013: 3). The Mo Ibrahim Foundation, as acclaimed on the Report, is an organisation that is committed to gathering data on governance quality in Africa, by implication underscoring the significance (and lack) of data to the public sphere, national and pan-African. The Foundation awards an annual prize for ‘good governance in Africa’, but for the fourth time in five years, the prize has gone unclaimed (BBC, 2013). This is, of course, indicative of the state of various conditions of democracy, among which (articulated in Mo Ibrahim’s indices of measurement) are safety and rule of law, participation and human rights, sustainable economic opportunity and human development. Under these categories are included the components of democracy to which many Western states are accustomed: accountability, transparency, transfer of power, free and fair elections, political participation, electoral self-determination. These, of course, are all internal to Habermas’s historically evolving understanding of a democratic public sphere.

According to the Freedom House online, (self-defined as ‘an independent watchdog organisation dedicated to the expansion of freedom around the world’), in 2014 Nigeria was ranked as a ‘partly free’ country. Below is a table of Freedom House ranking on Nigeria from the full inception of democracy in 1999

to the year 2014. It can be deduced from this simple table all too easily that the period most promising in relation to emerging democratic practices was the country's inception in 1999. The table's basic numerical data, while slight in content and highly relative, could be easily mapped onto an historical narrative of the country's recent development. Democracy in Nigeria has fluctuated for the worse, yet maintaining a fairly stable score of 4 out of 7, seven being the worst state to which a democracy can sink.

Table 0.1 – Freedom House Ranking on democracy in Nigeria 1999-2014

Year	Freedom Rating (1=best, 7=worst)	Status (1=best, 7=worst)	Civil Liberties (1=best, 7=worst)	Political Rights (1=best, 7=worst)
2014	Partly Free	4.0	4	4
2013	Partly Free	4.5	5	4
2012	Partly Free	4.0	4	4
2011	Partly Free	4.0	4	4
2010	Partly Free	4.5	4	5
2009	Partly Free	4.5	4	5
2008	Partly Free	4.0	4	4
2007	Partly Free	4.0	4	4
2006	Partly Free	4.0	4	4
2005	Partly Free	4.0	4	4
2004	Partly Free	4.0	4	4
2003	Partly Free	4.5	5	4
2002	Partly Free	4.5	5	4
2001	Partly Free	4.0	4	4

1999	Partly Free	3.5	3	4
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The Nigerian polity was born during the colonial period, and continued to expand into the period of ‘post-independence’. As Joseph explains, the notion of democracy was not imposed on Nigeria by the colonialists, even though a connection exists between ‘that commitment [democracy] and the official ideology of the former colonial power’ (1987: 3-4). To Joseph, the fundamental political and social system in Nigeria is based on concerns that are encapsulated in ‘how interests are represented and benefits distributed’ (1987: 3-4). He gives an example of the Nigerians’ struggle with colonial power. There were demands for ‘direct political representation and a rejection of monopolisation of state power by foreign rulers and their affiliated local agents’. In addition, it was further demanded that Nigeria’s economic products were spent for the benefit of the indigenous producers, rather than appropriated to satisfy the needs of the colonial masters (Joseph, 1987: 4). Hence, ‘government of, by and for the people was therefore a fundamental principle of the anti-colonial struggle...’ (Joseph, 1987: 4). Joseph’s (1987) observations are fundamental to our understanding: they indicate a pre-existing tendency towards a democratic ‘culture’ among the Nigerians, even before the exit of the colonialists, which translates into an overwhelmingly positive popular view of the values and ideals of democracy in Nigeria, despite its apparent lack of progress as a political system.

However, the significant political events that heralded the departure of the British,

such as rigged elections, civil wars, coup d'etat and so on, all bear influence on what constitutes the political system in Nigeria today. Ake for instance, suggests that the nature of politics in Nigeria is a ‘politics of anxiety’, in that there exists a ‘deep alienation and distrust among political competitors’ (1985: 10), a distrust that he explains existed before the independence from the colonialists, and has remained afterwards. This is understandably so, as the outcomes of this ‘politics of anxiety’, are evidenced in the foreword to Adebani and Obadare’s important edited book, *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretation* (2013). Such anxiety is signified by violence, election rigging, tribalism and more. In this edited multi-author volume, this book contains a detailed account of the Nigerian political system from the First Republic to the current Fourth Republic.

Nigeria’s First Republic (from 1960-1966) was pervaded by a culture of violence, fraud and ‘tribalism’. Rival political parties and politicians took advantage of ethnic identities in garnering electoral support. The consequences of this were destructive and led to the fall of the First Republic, as Nigeria spiraled into a civil war that lasted from 1967-1970 (Adebani and Obadare eds, 2013). Shortly afterwards, the military assumed government and governance and fundamentally re-structured the country into a multi-state federal system, which cut ‘...across the lines of the three major ethnic groups and empowering smaller ethnic minorities as well’ (Diamond, 2013: viii). Ethnicity and culture are significant to the evolution of the Nigerian political system.

The inauguration of the Second Republic in 1979 established the country within a more complex and balanced federal system. By this time, Nigeria had become

a major oil exporter, and was experiencing the benefits of increased revenues, production and employment. In the forward to Adebanwi and Obadare's (2013) edited book, Larry Diamond (2013: ix) asserts that the demise of the Second Republic was interconnected with the economics of the 'oil boom' in Nigeria, as well as the consolidation of 'prebendalism', which had become 'pervasively entrenched as the way of politics and governance in Nigeria.'

What is prebendalism? A basic definition ([Dictionary.Com](#)) proposes that 'prebend' is a noun that refers to 'a stipend allotted from the revenues of a cathedral or collegiate church to a canon or member of the chapter'. Joseph adopts this term because of such 'historical association'; the term 'prebend' emerged from certain offices in feudal states, where through services rendered to a lord or monarch, or by direct purchase of supplicants (Joseph, 1987: 8), normal procedures of petition can be circumvented. However, in relation to politics in Nigeria, Richard Joseph, the pioneer user of the term in research of Nigeria, asserts that 'prebendal' more specifically refers to 'patterns of political behaviour' which rely on the justifying principles that political offices of power 'should be competed for and then utilised for the personal benefit of office holders as well as of their reference or support group'. (1987: 8) As Nigeria was thrown into the throes of economic struggle (despite the oil boom), Larry Diamond (2013: ix) argue that this was due to this 'prebendalism'; and about four years later, the military government returned to a Nigeria 'with the economy a shambles, the public outraged, and the opposition seething from brazen electoral theft in 1983...'

The Third Republic was born once the military again exited the arena of officially recognised government. This was equally short-lived and Nigeria's third attempt at democracy was thwarted. The Nigerian military returned, and, according to Larry Diamond (2013), with 'new depths of tyranny and plunder' (2013: x). The Fourth Republic, which was inaugurated between 1998 and 1999, marks the longest civilian constitutional rule Nigeria has experienced since independence, and is really the basis for our current research. Adebani and Obadare (eds), whose historical observations were formative to this thesis, suggest that Nigeria's political system be defined as an 'hybrid', as 'elections are too riddled with fraud and corruption to qualify as a democracy. And yet, there remains sufficient competition for power, an alternation of personalities if not parties, with a certain freedom, ethnic, tribal cultural and religious pluralism and independent civil society, to allow us to think in terms of a democratic culture. It promises at least '...some degree of representativeness, and at least, some possibilities of reform' (Diamond, 2013: x). It is precisely the unsystematic, dynamic, slightly fluid or chaotic, character of Nigeria's political system that provokes this thesis to refer to the 'culture' of democracy and not refer to a static 'model' of the 'public sphere' by way of considering the conditions of democratic government per se.

The Status of Democracy in Nigeria

The Nigerian political system is therefore not defined in terms of system of procedures and government, but the dynamic institutions, practices and behaviours through which that system is disassembled and reassembled, and not simply up to the return to civilian rule in 1999 but to the present day.

According to the National Constitution, Nigeria is a federal state, and thirty-six states make up the federation. The constitutional state was established by the British colonial government in 1914 when the Northern and Southern protectorates were merged to form one entity. Prior to this arrangement, the various regions that make up Nigeria were autonomous – examples are the Kanem-Borno, Benin and Oyo empires, to mention a few (Falola & Heaton, 2008: 7).

At independence, Nigeria actually consisted of three autonomous regions: the Northern Region with its capital in Kaduna, the Eastern Region with capital in Enugu, and the Western Region with Capital in Ibadan, (while Lagos remained the national capital). In 1963, the Mid-Western Region was carved out of the old Western region, which comprised the present Edo and Delta States. This was the position in the first republic before the army overthrew the government in January 1966; the political crisis which paved the way for the coup d' etat later led to the civil war in July 1967, when the then Eastern region wanted to secede. This led to the government of General Yakubu Gowon breaking the country into 12 states in 1967; to 19 states in 1976; Ibrahim Babagida (next head of state) to 21 states in 1987; 30 states in 1991 and General Sani Abacha breaking Nigeria into 36 states in 1996. This arrangement prevails to date, although, a recommendation at the 2014 National conference held in Nigeria holds that even more states need to be created (Fabiyi and Oladimeji, 2014). The governmental rationale for division is, I would suggest, more governmental control than regional devolution or a more granular form of representation. However, it is

important to note that since 1999, when Nigeria returned to civilian democratic rule, military intervention has ceased and multi-party governmental politics seems to have triumphed.

The institutions that make up the Nigerian political system are broadly split into the: Executive, Legislature and Judiciary. There is a president (the executive) who is elected by popular vote, to rule for no more than two four-year terms. The legislature, the law-making arm of government, is made up of the National Assembly (109 seats) and the House of Representatives (360 seats). These representatives are elected into these offices for four-year terms (Freedom House, 2014). Then, there is the judiciary, the Supreme Court, magistrate courts, and civil courts.

Another institution, albeit not ideally described as political, but significant to the practice of democracy in any society, is the mass media. It is often referred to as the ‘fourth estate of the realm, to the executive, legislature and judiciary’ (Ekeli and Enobakhare, 2012:2). According to Ekeli and Enobakhare, although the Nigerian mass media was ‘a weapon for the fight against colonialism’ among other roles, this same media has suffered setbacks due to the intervention of the military in the rulership of Nigeria for about thirty years (Ekeli and Enobakhare, 2012: 2). This, according to Ekeli and Enobakhare, was the period during which ‘the mass media lost their power as “watchdogs” and those of them which were bold enough to play their roles were to suffer under suffocating decrees and arbitrary repressive actions of the military’ (2012:2). The implication of this for citizens was that they, ‘...knew little or nothing about their political rights and the

few that even knew, ostensibly because of their safety, abandoned what they knew or just looked the other side because the prevailing conditions did not encourage or support political learning and discovery' (Ekeli and Enobakhare, 2012: 3).

The relationship between the mass media and the federal government has been fraught. It was not until 2011 that the Nigerian government approved a freedom of information bill [The 2011 Freedom of Information (FOI) Act], and passed it into law – affording journalists with badly needed protections. Before that time, Nigerian journalists faced routine hazards such as politically-motivated threats and resistance in accessing public documents. The bill, is still not fully effective in empowering journalists.

Ekeli and Enobakhare (2012: 9) in an important paper, highlight areas where they argue that the Nigerian mass media has failed democracy in the nation. It is worth paraphrasing the points of their argument:

- South-West domination of the Nigerian mass media -- due to the economic, infrastructural advantages the South-West region holds over the rest of Nigeria -- has 'given way to a scenario in which a Yoruba [tribe] dominated media conveys the world-view of the Yoruba block of the Nigerian ruling class' (Ekeli, 2012: 8).
- The practice of partisan media emerged during 1960 and 1975, where newspapers dedicated to defending particular interests emerged, and the national government began to own mass media channels. This

polarisation led to partisanship in the Nigerian mass media, which also became reflected in ethnicity and religion.

- Partisanship in reportage is ‘excessive’, whereby the ruling and wealthy social class (along with politicians) is manifestly favoured at the expense of ‘the teeming and suffering masses and the downplaying of political education’ (2012: 9).

Following from this, to borrow Diamond’s (2013) expression, the relation between the media and democratic government in Nigeria has become ‘a shambles’. Adejumobi opens his important study, *Governance and Democracy in Post-Military Nigeria* (2010) with two indicative quotations:

First of all, I want you to leave democracy out of it. We don’t have a democracy in Nigeria, at least for now...We have a government that is not responsible to anybody. Nobody to question them, it is a sad situation – Anthony Enahoro (2006)

The entire political system is a fraud against the Nigerian people and the present dispensation – at all levels – emerged fraudulently from the fraudulent political system -- Edwin Madunagu (2010)

Reminding ourselves of the role of *prebendalism* in the Nigerian political system, mentioned above, will lend substance to these ejaculations. Yet this is not a condition unique to Nigeria: In his paper, ‘The Rule of Law versus the Big Man’, Larry Diamond (2008), a renowned scholar on democracy in Africa, explains the situation regionally. Referring to the continent as a whole, he states that, ‘the

formal institutions of democracy – including free, fair and competitive elections – can coexist with the informal practices of clientelism, corruption, ethnic mobilisation, and personal rule by largely unchecked presidents' (2008:138). Diamond's further analysis of African political systems reveals what he terms a 'neopatrimonial character' (2008: 147).

As a doctored and hybrid form of democracy, this combines 'the forms of a modern bureaucratic state – constrained in theory by laws, constitution, and other impersonal rules and standard – with the informal reality of personalised, unaccountable power and pervasive patron-client ties' (Diamond, 2008:147). Hence, what Diamond calls the 'big man' syndrome, where the 'big man' in question is the autocratic [democratic] president who presides over those who 'serve[s] as patrons to the lower-level power brokers', whose power then makes its way down to the 'fragmented mass of ordinary citizens'. (*ibid.*) In such systems, according to Diamond, informal arrangements often trump the formal, and leaders and their 'minions' use the resources of public and state as a 'personal slush fund to maintain political dominance, giving their clients state offices, jobs...while getting unconditional support in return' (Diamond, 2008: 147). Expanding on the idea of patron-client nature of African politics, he explains that these networks are usually organised 'along ethnic or subtonic lines, and the president sees his kin as the most reliable loyalist in the struggle for power' (2008: 141).

In this context we must note the 'zoning' arrangement in Nigerian politics, where presidential power is allocated informally along ethnic lines. This is a political

behaviour that is not provided for by the federal constitution in Nigeria, but has become a norm within the ‘culture’ of democracy as exhibited by the ruling elites. Zoning is a phenomenon routinely discussed both in traditional media and online public forums – in other words, it is public knowledge. On the forum Nairaland, for instance, a forum topic is ‘A Powerful Argument for Rotational Presidency in Nigeria’. Another posting, this time on Facebook, notes a publication by Okwena entitled ‘Zoning, Rotation and Power Struggle in Nigeria’ (2011). On the BBC news online 2010, the news story, ‘Death of Nigerian Leader Exposes Sham Democracy’. It reads thus: (to quote the correspondent, Mark Doyle):

Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, the ruling dominant People’s Democratic Party (PDP) has sought to rotate, or ‘zone’ the office of the president between the overwhelmingly Muslim north and the mainly Christian south...Referring to the deal within the PDP in the late 90s which saw Mr Obasanjo stand on the party’s presidential ticket, Mr Abubakar said: “It was agreed that the presidency should be retained in the south” for eight years. “And that when it reverts to the north it should also remain there for eight years. In fact there was a vote. I was there. And to the best of my knowledge that position has not been reviewed – so that is what it is today.’ (Doyle: BBC news online 2010)

These are random examples of public concern over ‘zoning’, reminding us that democracy in Nigeria is profoundly ‘cultural’ and involves norms, procedures and accepted practices that are endemic within the historical constitution of Nigerian society as a way of life – as a relation between values, beliefs that are inseparable from ethnicities and religions. Nigeria is home to over two hundred ethnic groups brought under one national umbrella, and while Nigeria may be tagged a failed or flawed democracy, it retains a certain cohesiveness. It is the contention of this thesis, that this cohesiveness, at least in part, is the way the values and concepts of democracy are maintained even in the face of such a

highly corrupted system. And as Catt (1999: 14) suggests: sometimes, *new models of democracy are stimulated by the perception of acute needs.* The highly heterogeneous Nigeria has profound needs and radical extremities of wealth and poverty, power and powerlessness, and this is growing in a growing public consciousness stimulated through public media communications.

Yet, to which my examples above attest, much open public scrutiny and debate on Nigerian democracy takes place in the Nigeria global diaspora, on international news or by scholars in Western universities. As Nigerian scholar, Remi Aiyede, observes, in Nigeria there is a ‘weak sense of, and commitment to, the common good and public interest...’ (2013: 103). By implication, in Nigeria there is no emphatic politically democratic consensus on the role of the media within the political system (other than to report facts and events in ways favourable to the relative patron in power). In the Nigerian political system, ‘...public resources are privatised, political power abused, and in the general, there is disregard for legal restraints to the exercise of power, which undermine political and public institutions’ (Aiyede, 2013: 103).

One may argue that ethnicity and religion are the source of the corruption of Nigeria’s democracy, in the sense of stimulating stronger tribal or ritual allegiance that override the demands of governmental procedure, protocol or public interest. Yet this perhaps oversimplifies a complex issue while appearing sufficiently complex. Nigeria’s political system must contain over one-hundred and forty million people, over 300 ethno-linguistics groups, and is the largest country in Africa (Mustapha, 2009: 72). Where there may be strength in diversity,

this diversity is a challenge for any democracy. If, as we are indicating in this thesis, communication, dialogue and discourse (the public sphere) are at the heart of a democracy, then democracy must contain and mediate the profoundly cultural character of these activities. The challenge of a vast diversity of ethnic-tribal, regional and cultural lines, is not something historic European democracies (with their ethnically homogenous state mono-cultures) have developed the democratic means to contain (quite apparent in current frantic debates across Europe on the impact of mass immigration). How Nigeria not only contains but facilitates deliberation, debate and discourse through this socio-cultural diversity is the great challenge that faces this generation – of scholars, activists, creative industries entrepreneurs, as well as politicians and the elite social classes. The historical dimension of contemporary diversity also cannot be ignored, as the general geo-political composition of contemporary Nigerian society emerged during colonial times, where northern and southern Nigeria were administered under ‘different educational, legal, local government, and land tenure systems’ (Mustapha, 2009: 72). Unlike the case in some other British colonies (like Sudan, which had a single colonial administration), when nationalist movements were born, precipitating the forces of independence that would finally herald the post-colonial age, they did not establish themselves on a unified front, but rather through the various ‘ethno-regional blocs’ and their competing movements (Mustapha, 2009: 72).

Into this situation of historic socio-cultural and political diversity and a corruption of statutory democratic structures of government is nonetheless a force that

promises hope and renewal. Increasing deliberations and discussions are emerging, particularly through digital media platforms. Though the People's Democratic Party (PDP) has been confidently dominant in the otherwise multi-party system, they are becoming increasingly sensitive to the voices of the populace as echoed through the various channels of digital media, and amplified in international news or through the opinions of the Nigerian diaspora. The power of digital media is more apparent given the restrictions on the state-dominated traditional broadcast media channels (still exhibiting limitations that have their roots in the years of military authoritarianism. Through the adoption of mobile telephony, increasing subscription to mobile internet, Facebook and Twitter sign-ups to mention a few, Nigeria (citizens) are exhibiting new empowering means of voicing statements, reactions and formulating views (See Nwakanma, 2011¹). Digital media is gradually forming a new sphere of public culture, whose most visible dimension exhibits the behaviours and communication techniques we can identify as being internal to a public sphere.

The challenge for the researcher

As indicated above, this thesis attempts to insert a theoretically evolving concept (the public sphere) into the complicated and ever-changing society of Nigeria, which is governed by an unstable and amorphous state. In the opening chapters

¹ Nwakanma's (2011) article addresses social media networks and their potential for policy engagement by West African citizens. Her results show that despite the fact that digital media is not as widespread in terms of uptake, and is unable to oust traditional modes of policy engagement, the rise in adoption in West Africa is contributing to 'citizen motivation, sensitisation, education, mobilisation, and...influence' (2011: 112).

of this thesis, the ‘public sphere’ and ‘digital media’ are defined, in terms of their provenance and evolution, as two quite distinct realms of scholarly study; the very terms generate different meanings depending on the discursive context. This study is thus by its nature interdisciplinary and not merely multi-disciplinary: as indicated in Nigeria, the relation between the digital media and the communications it facilitates is analytically separable but in a political context symbiotic if not integrated. This thesis will, however, take the public sphere as its point of departure, particularly given that ‘digital media’ as a field of knowledge and practice far exceeds the realm of political life, or of culture. The research questions I will articulate below consider the concept of culture only insofar as it involves communications explicitly addressing political discourse or matters pertaining to the nature of democracy or contemporary Nigerian democracy. There are a range of issues concerning language, regionalisation, inter-ethnic rivalries and disputes, the creative process, and many more that the reader would rightly assume be included in this thesis. Our purposes, given strict limitations on space, demand that this research delimit our study and maintain one line of investigation.

This study will also retain an interest in the general and broad-based structural features of a democratic public sphere, risking the appearance of ‘generality’. A central aim of the thesis is to theorise a digital public sphere, which maintains an historical dimension (a theory with a critical consciousness of its historicity), and also informs public policy in Nigeria. For this thesis to maintain an impact in the world of Nigerian public policy it will need to work with broad historical terms,

emphatic concepts, and generate clearly intelligible strategic proposals. I have therefore avoided literary, hermeneutic or highly discursive approaches to the political and public spheres, strong in deconstructionist, post-structuralist, postmodernist or other (such as agonistic) accounts (from Derrida and Foucault, to Nancy, to Mouffe and Critchley, and so on).

As to the matter of research practice: in conducting content analysis on the world wide web, challenges of access and availability of materials can hinder research, particularly where public documents and the internal deliberations of government are concerned. Even outside official realms or public institutions, websites can suddenly become ‘extinct’ or they are updated and the researcher can lose the thread, along with the content, of past debates. Moreover, debates and perspectives constantly change, often in irregular order or in response to sudden, unexpected, events. This thesis has therefore adopted a self-evident principle of ‘visibility’, where public debate and discourse are conveyed then that public debate and discourse is not concealed or buried by successive events but is (or was at the time of researching) openly available and visible in the realm of digitally mediated public communications. The analysis and resultant argument is not premised on, or reliant on, data or research material that is not publicly available or disclosed only by this research. Rather, this research attempts to construct a framework that is then employed to assess the conditions of a developing democracy in a specific (albeit large) country.

The concept of ‘democratic culture’ is central to this thesis, but as explained above, serves only to indicate that democracy (as indicated by successive

theories of the public sphere) is not just an abstract system or set of laws and procedures. It is a commonplace observation of political history that the emergence of state and civil society (which for a range of seminal thinkers from Hegel to Marx embodied the progress of modernity itself), was bought at the cost of the ritual allegiances, kinship loyalties and communal bonds that characterised previous eras. Nigeria is often diagnosed with a failure to become democratic by overcoming the ‘cultural’ (i.e. tribal, ethnic, religious) content of its political system. This thesis will not be animated by such a set of assumptions. Rather, I will point out how the successive permutations of the theory of the public sphere presupposes a range of cultural allegiances, behaviours and values – and how communication, deliberation and dialogue itself is heavily mediated through cultural norms and dynamics. This is surely self-evident in the most fundamental presupposition of this thesis, that does not need defending, which is that democracy is a defensible and desirable political system for non-democratic or partially democratic countries to seek to attain and develop. This is even in the face of the perpetual crisis of democratic values and practices in the West. More specifically, this thesis holds that if the public sphere is central to a viable democracy, then ‘culture’ will always be a substantive (and arguably a necessary) part of democracy. Throughout the empirical analysis of this thesis, I will be observing how it is the entrepreneurial, individualist and dialogic activities of persons and organisations active in digital media that holds out the possibility that democracy can be reformed in Nigeria.

The rationale for conducting this research is to construct a viable framework for

understanding new information and communication technologies and their influence on the political process of deliberation and society as a whole in Africa. Digital media communication and its communication ‘tools’ are changing political behaviour and the manner in which citizens relate with government and vice versa. There is a need to investigate the implications of these developments, map out the challenges involved in empowering citizens with media tools, as well as the potential threats to the political process created by wholesale use of digital media public communication. It is important for us to be able to identify what roles government and the governed need to play in the digital age, if an effective democratic culture is to emerge and be sustained.

It is the hope of the researcher that this project may serve as a reference for public policy development in Africa, as well as a resource for providing theoretical justification for, and explanation of, the techniques of digital communication in the public sphere. Governments, social movements and civil society groups inclined towards promoting democratic culture would find this research of relevance, as it addresses issues that have emerged in the last few years. This thesis will also, of course, contribute to existing scholarly discussions on the relatively new and emerging idea of a digital public sphere. There is little and insufficient research conducted in the West on digital media and Nigeria’s (Africa) political sphere, despite the increase in the number of social network users, bloggers and the high penetration of mobile phone use. Some key studies

conducted and articles published thus far include: Olorunnisola & Douai (2013)², Jacobs (2013)³, and Mudhai et al (2009)⁴. The Berkman Centre, Harvard University, U.S. has also registered interest in exploring Africa's digital public sphere through events and series⁵.

Thesis Overview

The main achievement of the thesis is, I hope, the strategic proposals in the conclusion. Admittedly, given the political complexity of Nigeria these will, in time, require more extensive empirical research so that they could be presented as viable proposals for implementation within a specific context at a particular time (something not possible to stipulate in this thesis). The strategic proposals are indicative of the means the country Nigeria can use to develop its nascent 'culture' of democracy, currently in a state of both being nurtured by a new digital media sphere at the same time being thwarted by a corrupted system and its officialdom. The strategic proposals articulated at the end of the thesis (Chapter 11: Conclusion) are generated by empirical analysis provided for by interview material (Chapters 8, 9 and 10), whose criteria of questioning and analysis was generated from an empirical assessment of the role of digital media in contemporary Nigeria (Chapter 6) itself informed by a literature review-

² Olorunnisola, A. A & Douai, A. (2013) have an edited volume titled *New Media Influence on Social and Political Change in Africa*.

³ Jacobs, Sean (2013) has an essay on the *African Futures* website, 'New Media in Africa and the Global Public Sphere.'

⁴ Mudhai, F. et al (2009) also have an edited volume focused on *African Media and the Digital Public Sphere*, which has been used in parts of the literature review in this thesis

⁵ As part of the Berkman series, an example of a presentation that addresses social media in Africa's public sphere is Odewale's (a fellow) *Power in Our Hands*.

based assessment (Chapter 2) and a theoretical assessment (Chapter 1) of the concepts of ‘public sphere’ and ‘digital public sphere’ respectively.

To convey this in forward numerical order:

Chapter One: In Chapter One I construct a framework for the thesis from a study on the origin and development of the concept of the public sphere. I outline Habermas’ postulation of the theory as its progenitor, noting Habermas’ successive observations and points of clarification on the literary or ‘cultural public sphere’ or the ‘culture’ of the public sphere.

Chapter Two: In Chapter Two, I continue a review of the public sphere theory from the perspectives of three key critics: Calhoun, Fraser and Kellner. Through Habermas, Calhoun, Fraser, and Kellner, I am able to extract certain key elements for the development of a public sphere. These elements are: new media platforms/spaces, communication techniques, agents and agencies, dialogue and issues, and impact & interventions. These elements are not exhaustive in the manner in which they encapsulate the idea of the digital public sphere; neither do I claim them as forming a superior model to the Habermasian construct. Rather, they serve to provide this thesis with a relevant framework of criteria, through which the emergent public sphere in Nigeria may be critically assessed.

Chapter Three: In Chapter Three, I proceed with an empirical discussion on the concept of new digital media and the public sphere – to form the concept of the digital public sphere. This background is significant in that it provides a

contextual framework within which the term ‘digital media’ is located, thus limiting its definition in this thesis, especially when reference is made to the digital public sphere. Here, I deconstruct the digital public sphere with regards to its structure, development, and dynamics of use in a democracy. This is where I explore the multifaceted idea of digital media as technology, culture, and public sphere. I accomplish this through a summary review of relevant literature.

In Chapter Four, I discuss the digital public sphere in Africa, with regards to its active participants in Diaspora. I address the issues accompanying an emergent digital public sphere in Africa and diaspora, using research generated by other scholars. I highlight several digitally mediated political activities that may be argued to contribute to our understanding of how the digital public sphere works in African countries and the possible challenges that hamper its effectiveness.

Chapter Five: The Nigerian public sphere via traditional mass media is the focus of this chapter. In this chapter I give an overview of the ‘old’ public sphere in Nigeria by exploring how traditional media (print and broadcast) emerged and developed in the country. I also attempt to explore the state’s legal frameworks that affect their operations, which in turn impacts the Nigerian public sphere.

Chapter Six: In this chapter I discuss Nigeria democratic digital media culture, by identifying digital media tools popularly used in the country, as well as exploring the relationship that exists among old media, new media, and Nigeria’s existing public sphere. I briefly narrate how the adoption of mobile telephony came to be in Nigeria, in this chapter entitled “Digitalizing Nigeria”, and go on to enumerate

the identifiable roles digital media currently plays in facilitating a new kind of public sphere in Nigeria.

Chapter Seven: This is the methodology chapter. I provide a detailed description/discussion of the research methods I adopted in this thesis, the rationale behind their selection, as well as practical experiences from the field work in Nigeria.

Chapter Eight: This chapter is the first of two 'data presentation' chapters. This is where the responses of the interview participants are integrated as a coherent narrative for the purposes of analysis. In the process of organising the data and making sense of it, I identify some key democratic organisations and initiatives in Nigeria that are central to her culture of democratic communication via digital media tools. In addition, I articulate through the respondents' various observations, specific challenges facing Nigeria's emerging digital public sphere. In this chapter, the key elements of a digital public sphere identified in Chapter One, are consolidated.

Chapter Nine: This is the second data presentation chapter, where I identify active participants in the Nigerian digital public sphere, the agents and agencies, and describe their precise contribution democratic culture in Nigeria through digital media communication tools. This chapter also contains interview material on the nature of public discussions and dialogue on digital platforms in and about Nigeria. I address themes such as the content of the dialogue in the Nigerian digital public sphere, who sets the agenda for discussion, how do these

discussions take place, in what manner, and so on according to our criteria.

Chapter Ten: Here, I give a critical assessment of the material articulated in the previous two chapters, and make some analytical statements against the background of the research questions put forth earlier in the thesis. For each of the digital sphere elements I identify, I generate key points that are considered central to understanding the nature of the digital public sphere in Nigeria. I highlight the ways in which digital media is being used to foster a culture of democracy in Nigeria

Chapter Eleven: This is the conclusion. After the substantive critical analysis of the previous chapter, this chapter concludes the thesis. I start by laying out the challenges the NDPS faces, which could well jeopardize its potential to foster a culture of democracy in Nigeria. I then proceed to propose certain media and socio-political strategies that could be instrumental in forming broad policies for further cultivating a digital public sphere in Nigeria, and so the character and resilience of democracy itself.

Taking into account the aims and objectives of this research as stated above, the political history of Nigeria, rise of digital media along with the research rationales as outlined, the research questions according to which our research investigation has been conducted, are as follows:

- What is the new digital public sphere and how has it been constituted by new technology and concomitant discursive practices?
- What organisations, media platforms, and methods of communication have been formative for this new public sphere?
- How has digital media (particularly in relation to the Internet) facilitated

- the vital dialogue, information and debate constitutive of a democratic public sphere in Nigeria?
- What are the forces (cultural, social, political and religious) prohibitive to Nigeria's embryonic digital public sphere?
 - What political and media strategies can we identify that may be instrumental in developing a fully effective digital public sphere in Nigeria?

Reflection: The Public Sphere as Field of Research

As a concluding section to this chapter, I wish to justify the specific parameters employed in the opening theoretical chapter, along with the criteria generated from this chapter. This thesis research emerged out of a preliminary theoretical consideration of Jürgen Habermas, and the self-consciously 'critical', interdisciplinary and emancipatory discourse that emerged as 'reception' and successive critique of his public sphere theory in English. Habermas famously set out to understand the evolution of bourgeois society in the modern period (1700-1974), and in so doing, understand both the specificity of European post-Enlightenment political thought, along with the remarkable evolution of the political economy of Western capitalist societies. His seminal publication, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962), established his public sphere theory, and our investigation will begin by extrapolating from the dense historical claims set out in this text.

Habermas' theory of the public sphere maintained an uneasy role within the recent evolution of the tradition of Critical Theory. Horkheimer and Adorno, under whom Habermas studied, famously rejected the normative dimension of the public sphere thesis on the basis of an insufficient critical purchase on the

principles of classical liberal democracy – citizenship, regulatory government, rule of law and, particularly, private property rights – and its instrumentality in the perpetuation of the capitalist system (Calhoun, 1992:4). As Calhoun (1992:4) puts it, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was born in controversy and would continue to spark controversy. Despite the plethora of critiques on the public sphere, it is universally accepted that Habermas' conception is a model through which the normative principals of liberal democracy remain credible.

There are three American scholars, whose ideas and critique of the public sphere will be reviewed in the next section. They are Craig Calhoun, Nancy Fraser, and Douglas Kellner. I have chosen these not because their work is the most perspicuous or indeed 'critical', but because they offer a visible trajectory of thought and their successive revisions of Habermas' central concepts are highly useful in generating criteria for a critical analysis of contemporary Nigeria. Calhoun, Fraser, and Kellner are all prodigious thinkers, and I will not attempt to represent their body of work so much as to attend to the dominant questions they marshaled in response to perceived insufficiencies in Habermas' public sphere, in turn affecting his understanding of contemporary social and cultural change. It must be emphasised, therefore, that this opening chapter does not attempt to synthesise the whole range of work these thinkers have accomplished on this subject; and it does not pretend to generate, by way of synthesis, an all-inclusive, extended or superior 'model' of the public sphere. Rather, an assessment of the basic argument and tenets of these scholars' work will afford us the opportunity to generate *criteria* for a critical analysis of

contemporary Nigeria, identifying a nascent ‘culture’ of democracy and thus key conditions for a developing public sphere.

Calhoun, Fraser, and Kellner are useful critics of Habermas in a second respect. Taken in this order, we encounter some of the significant concerns with the growing complexity of Western politics, language and representation, social class and social identities, cultural values, expression and communication – particularly with regard to marginalised groups. In terms of this thesis, this means that we will acknowledge significant critical approaches (from, say, postmodernist or feminist contexts) while not engaging with what I referred to above as literary and hermeneutic discourses. This, I hope, makes this thesis compatible with the contemporary discourse of Postcolonial Studies, even though this research has been conducted outside of this discourse.

In various ways, Calhoun, Fraser, and Kellner seek to establish how the ‘declined’ public sphere may nonetheless be revived, and its critical potential for thought, dialogue and empowerment against the state be salvaged. Calhoun, for instance, highlights Habermas’ neglect of elements of civil society that are somewhat integral to the formation of the public sphere, such as nationalism and social movements. Fraser raises questions regarding the omitted place of gender and other minority voices in the formation and development of the public sphere. Kellner’s central question concerns the media and its place in the development of the public sphere. Where old media have failed in their democratic functions, Kellner is proposing a critical theory of new technology (digital media) that may assist in salvaging the existence of a needed public

sphere through its capacity for hosting a multiplicity of voices, dominant and subordinated alike.

This is a third reason why Calhoun, Fraser, and Kellner have been chosen. For my theoretical researches, they form a natural conceptual trajectory. For it is with Kellner's critical approach that Calhoun and Fraser's key concerns can be integrated as a single coherent concept of a democratic society entirely mediated by TV, film and new digital communications. It is Kellner that provides us with the basic terms of a critical theory of the public sphere that allows us to critically assess the contemporary realities of Nigeria. I do not regard the American identity of each of them significant to this theoretical work, even though their national identity cannot be ignored (particularly given Kellner's research investment in the historical evolution of American TV in relation to American consumer society). On this matter I can only observe that their context of American liberal democracy makes them sensitive to matters relevant to a country like Nigeria, once formed by English colonialism and now influenced by both British and American cultural norms.

Chapter One

Habermas and the Idea of the Public Sphere

This aim of this chapter is to construct an account of the evolving concept of the public sphere, reviewing the central claims of Jürgen Habermas, before, in the following chapter, moving onto selected key critical interlocutors, Calhoun, Fraser and Kellner. From this account, I will be in a position to generate specific criteria for our analysis of the emerging public sphere in Nigeria. Habermas provides the basis for our account, whereby his historical narrative of the evolution of the public sphere within the course of Western modernity provides us with our core terminology. My approach to these chosen thinkers can be likened to Calhoun's own approach to Habermas' seminal theory: for, Calhoun states, 'the most important destiny of Habermas' first book' may be to be a 'fruitful generator of new research, analysis and theory', rather than an 'authoritative statement' (Calhoun, 1992:41). In attending to Habermas and his critics, I will not be attempting to reconstruct a more integrated theory, but, as I said, generate criteria from central concepts. In evaluating an evolving public sphere in a country like Nigeria, what terms, concepts, insights and issues do we need to consider? However, it is indeed intentional, that these concepts are fundamental, and basic, and formative to a developing democracy.

Habermas, in his seminal book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) makes a number of key assertions on the necessary criteria for a

scholarly definition and re-definition of the public sphere, from ‘bourgeois society’ to what we would not refer to as ‘contemporary’ society. Our objectives are threefold: (i) to outline Habermas’ theory of the public sphere; (ii) to provide a critical reflection on that theory with the aid of our chosen critics of Habermas; and (iii) to generate terms, concepts, insights and issues by which our research can be extended into non-Western contexts. Through this, as noted in the introduction, I will also be adding my own emphasis – to emphasise the ‘cultural’ (not just political) character of the public sphere. This emphasis cannot extend into the rich complexity of the theoretical terrain before us, where culture itself is a highly inflected and contested term. For the theoretical researches of the three critical interlocutors I cite are extensive; I can only but summarise in brief their responses to Habermas’ theory of the public sphere as they understood it, and make appropriate observations.

The term ‘public’ evokes in our minds synonyms and cognate phrases, such as ‘open’, ‘available to all’, ‘common goods’, and ‘non-exclusive’, or in the interests of all. On the other hand, it also designates functions and functionaries of the state – someone who occupies a government or political position is a *public official*. ‘Public’ takes on another complexion of meaning when electoral candidates present their policy claims or manifesto before the public, where public designates citizens. The term public is thus multivalent even on the level of the semantic, yet whose various meanings are historically interconnected with the role of the state and other dimensions of society. Within a critical theory of the ‘public sphere’, how then is *public* defined?

Before the emergence of modernity (arguably co-extensive with the intellectual forces of ‘Enlightenment’ in the eighteenth century), we find early conceptualisations of public and private. In the Greek period, Habermas notes, the sphere of the *polis* was demarcated from the sphere of the *oikos*. The former indicated the open interaction of free citizens in a civic realm; the latter was concealed interactions between such free citizens (usually in the domestic realm). In the Roman period, we find a *Res Republica* – or *public entity* or ‘affairs’. *Res publica* is said to refer to anything not regarded as private entities (*res privata*), and of common interest (Haakonssen, 1995:569) established as a category in Roman law. The so-called Middle Ages and its economy of feudalism generated something different. There existed what Habermas terms *representative publicity*, and not merely a common interest. ‘Public’ comprised the various forms in which the king or nobility made representations to the people – articulating their power and the attributions of lordship (Habermas, 1962:7), presenting themselves as ‘an embodiment of some sort of “higher power” to the people’ (1962:7). For here Habermas locates a principle: for political power to exist there is needed an ‘audience’ before which it must be manifest. The signification of such representations of power, however, were unidirectional – the audience were not, by implication, invited to scrutinise or discuss the content of such representations, and whatever they individually possessed that could be defined as ‘private’ (their goods, or money) was of course never categorically separate from the all-pervasive ‘public’ power of the potentate. The ‘feudal’ public – where the essential private interests of a

potentate assumed a direct political or controlling function – is significant for Habermas, for even by the late 19th century Habermas observes a certain ‘refeudalization’ of the public sphere (as the last ‘structural transformation’).

For Habermas, the crucial historical development in our concept of public emerges in the Sixteenth Century with fully developed Renaissance-era international mercantilism. It was here private and public began to denote spheres of social life and economy: *public* began to imply the entity of state government beyond the potentate, ‘an entity having an objective existence over the person of the ruler’; *private* designated what was anterior to this sphere (Habermas, 1962:10-11). One crucial detail in this is how the growing global trade routes in commodities required a concurrent flow of information and news (on markets, currencies, events and patterns of exchange and so on), which in Habermas’s compact narrative anticipates the central impact of printed matter and the ‘press’. Through the phases of early capitalism in the eighteenth century the press developed ‘a unique explosive power’ (Habermas, 1962:20). Before this period, the news was irregularly published and not commercially distributed; now the news had become a commodity. The emerging modern state developed interests in the press, initially regarding it as an instrument of state administration, announcing instructions and ordinances where the recipients of these announcements ‘genuinely became ‘the public’ in the proper sense’ (Habermas, 1962:21). Yet as the new apparatus of the modern state developed, the press increasingly began to articulate the interests of the mercantile now ‘bourgeois’ social class of privileged, professional, industrialists or aspirants.

This new ‘stratum of “bourgeois” was the real carrier of the public...’ (Habermas, 1962:23)

It was in the so-called ‘bourgeois’ era (by 1850 in France and Britain) where the concept of public became most expansive, involving a highly literate social class benefitting from historical changes that fully grown would generate liberal democracy, civil society and a ‘public life’ of independent citizens protected by a rule of law. With increasing freedoms of assembly and association, along with increasing media of publication, the bourgeois class not only developed forms of linguistic argumentation to a high level of rationality, but increasingly overcame the tendency to agglomerate private interests: in other words, they developed a ‘public opinion’ over and beyond the sum of their individual (or even group) private interests (Habermas et al, 1974). The press served as media and disseminator of this public opinion, as well as informing the public on matters of the state (the legal proceedings of parliament, for example). Public opinion was the discursive dimension of a public realm of social interaction, where private interests morphed into a highly articulate commentary on the processes by which state power institutionalised and generated the conditions by which society and economy were managed (Habermas et al, 1974:50).

Yet, as a cognate term, ‘Public authority’ emerged by way of reference to the constitutional state. The state was considered public authority as it was increasingly understood as deriving a cognisance of its various responsibilities through public opinion, and to a significant extent was executor of the public sphere; but it was not a part of that sphere (Habermas et al, 1974:49). Similarly,

the realm of ‘private’ individuals, (their beliefs, political views, moral convictions, business interests, and so on), was a sphere of autonomy and self-directed authority and impressed upon the public sphere but was not equal to it (Habermas, 1963: 30).

The family, as the intimate dimension of the site of autonomous or private activity, was significant to the development of the public sphere, in that a citizen’s facility for reason and public conduct was cultivated through private experiences such as occurred in the bourgeois conjugal family’s intimate domain (Habermas, 1962:28-9). In comments that parallel Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’, Habermas conveys how a process of self-clarification of private citizens ‘focusing on the genuine experiences of their novel privateness’ provided a ‘training ground’ for a ‘critical public reflection’ (Habermas, 1962:29).

The bourgeois home became the site of some cultural production, where private ‘letters’ and literary expression, chamber concerts and so-called ‘salon society’ emerged. The private citizen was already a combination of roles – owner of property, owner of commodities, head of a family – but ‘the doubling of the private sphere on the higher plane of the intimate sphere furnished the foundation for an identification of those two roles under the common title of the ‘private’; ultimately, the political self-understanding of the bourgeois public originated there as well’ (Habermas, 1962:28-9). That is, within the co-extensive dimensions of the private sphere, from the hearth or home to business or market, the bourgeois ‘subjectivity’ was developed, where the ‘self’ gained a consciousness of the political conditions of social status and wellbeing.

Habermas alerts us to this unique period of time where a range of social spaces nonetheless provided the context for a process of personal identification with beliefs, ideas and ideologies on the nature of the state, government, economy and market. Through acts of critical reasoning, a public dialogue emerged that gained a certain coherence in the printed press, as well as pamphlets and books.

To reiterate some of the ‘principles’ that have guided a panoply of subsequent theorizing on the public sphere in scholarly criticism (Benson, 2009), emerging from the historical narrative summarized above: a public sphere would (i) delimit access as widely as possible; (ii) access would not be contingent upon dominant social hierarchies; (iii) citizens gaining access would not participate under compulsion but exhibit a certain autonomy; (iv) the rule of law would be the ‘authority’, and not any person or group; (v) participation in the public sphere would require a recognition of a certain parity of credence or commitment to attending to the concerns of all other participants (a common commitment to common welfare). Of course, our critical interlocutors mentioned above will have cause to challenge these very principles (in the next chapter).

From Habermas’ dense historical account of the bourgeois public sphere, we can extrapolate key concepts so as to carry forth and define a new emerging (digital) public sphere. Firstly, in Habermas’ account, the printing press (as a device or mechanism of mass media reproduction) was central to the development of the public sphere. Second, the instrument of media allowed the content of deliberation, debate (consolidated by reliable and consistent

information) to form a membership of a public sphere, not wholly dependent on social class other institutions or state patronage. Third, with a growing membership, the public sphere generated forms of linguistic argumentation, new ‘communication techniques’, and modes of address. Lastly, the fundamental literacies required in the public sphere expanded and extended, not simply through the demands of articulation (within debate, for example) but the competitive dynamics and forms of competitiveness and differentiation that emerges with an intensification of interests and viewpoints. Such literacies were intrinsically interconnected with cultural production (letters, essays, salon discussions, chamber compositions, and so on) and thus public sphere activity generated certain norms and standards of social and cultural intercourse generally.

In Habermas’s narrative, we also find characteristics that are fundamental to all subsequent conceptions of the public sphere – and accepted by our critics Calhoun, Fraser and Kellner. One such characteristic is the public sphere as mechanism for defining ‘collective’ interests (in a way that can avoid populism or collectivist forms of political administration, like communism). The public sphere also mediates ‘interests’, where it allows for the articulation of the various private interests (of civil society) but at the same time can generate a greater sense of common interest, or ‘public good’. In other words, despite the prevalence of civil society interests, a social consciousness of other kinds or levels of ‘interest’ are created. And furthermore, there remains a principle, that whatever interests are admitted to the public sphere, they are defined as interests through scrutiny,

debate and deliberation.

Another significant characteristic, not entirely expanded upon in Habermas' account, is 'public opinion' and how it can transcend the influence of the public sphere itself (i.e. become embedded in social norms or in culture); and moreover, public opinion can present a challenge to the state and the ideas and ideologies of the state. In other words, there is a sense that a public sphere is not simply a sphere of discussion, dialogue and deliberation – but a productive sphere, of values and motivations for political change or transformation. The role of cultural production in Habermas' account is also significant – for the 'literacies' of the cultural life of the bourgeoisie were inseparable from the literacies required for the public sphere to function and develop. The same forms of 'critical reasoning' were intrinsic to both. In what follows, therefore, I will not reiterate the theories of the public sphere held by Calhoun, Fraser and Kellner, but only certain relevant critical comments on Habermas's theory of the public sphere (assuming these three interlocutors generally accept the principles as stated above).

By way of conclusion, however, it is important to clarify the role of 'culture' in Habermas's theory, in the light of later research and statements by Habermas, and for the purpose of clarifying the role of 'culture' in this thesis. A central claim of this thesis is that an 'embryonic' public sphere in Nigeria is being developed (extended, strengthened and engaging Nigerian citizens both at home and in the diaspora) through the 'cultural' dimension of public sphere discourse. This

'cultural' dimension does not only concern the dissemination of a new critical consciousness and its concomitant ethical values (civil rights and self-determination, for example), but of the creativity, improvisation and individual expression afforded by the new digital media.

Following subsequent criticism and interpretation of his original public sphere thesis, as outlined in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas responded to points of criticism and so developed his theory in later writings. While, curiously, the subject of 'culture' and a cultural public sphere was not central, or indeed important to the criticisms of our interlocutors Calhoun, Fraser and Kellner, we must now rehearse several of Habermas' theoretical points by way of properly representing the relevance of his concept of the public sphere to this thesis, and thus the criteria we derive from it for our investigation.

In September 1989, on the occasion of the English translation of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, a major conference in the USA was organized by Craig Calhoun, and featured, among others, Nancy Fraser (but not Douglas Kellner). At this conference Jürgen Habermas was present, and made a number of significant statements of clarification and revision of his previous thesis: these were added as both a 'further reflections' and conclusion sections to the subsequent edited book by Calhoun (1992), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, which remains the seminal overview of the first substantive English reception of Habermas' 1962 book. By way of 'further reflection' Habermas noted how his original historical conceptualization of the public sphere was an

'ideal' sociological generalization, and necessarily so given the aims of the book. But also, given how the 'structural transformation' of the public sphere was continuing, Habermas noted how this change involved new public formations in a rapidly changing European democracy. Here I will attend to just several points relevant to constructing our conceptual framework.

Habermas indicates that, on reflection, there were several missing historical dimensions of the 1962 book – significantly, the 'politicization of the public sphere' at the time of the French Revolution, where art and literature played key roles, and where a distinctive 'plebian' discourse emerged. And similarly missing was explicit reference to 19th and early 20th century 'class formation, urbanization, cultural mobilization and emergence of new structures of communication' (Calhoun: 1992: 424). This, if I may add, could have been illustrated by Habermas by referring to various movements in art, design, fashion, the cultural activities of growing Labour unions, or the now celebrated European 'avant-garde' art movements. For Habermas, informal as well as formal social and civic associations were also critical in expanding the public sphere, as well as the ever more complex realm of press, publications and media. He adds: 'The modern public sphere comprises several arenas in which, through printed materials dealing with matters of culture, information and entertainment, a conflict of opinions is fought out more or less discursively' (Calhoun: 1992: 430). This touches on a matter of some significance, outlined in more detail in Habermas' monumental *Between Facts and Norms: contributions of a discourse theory of law and democracy*, (published in English

in 1998). In a chapter entitled ‘Civil Society, public Opinion, and Communicative Power’, Habermas notes that the realm of public communications itself had gained the facility and social veracity by which the deliberations and dialogue of the public sphere could be conducted and shape society without the necessary or direct involvement of the ‘political system’ (Habermas, 1996: 359). In its previous iterations, the concept of public sphere historically assumed a substantive interconnection with the levers of political decision-making. That is to say, one would infer from Habermas’ 1962 book, that actual social change was only affected once certain public opinion and public sphere deliberations had been refined and mediated by the government or political system and converted into law, institutional procedure or some other kind of regulatory action. The public sphere, however, had, by the 1980s at least for Habermas, found many means of affecting social change, or registering social change, or simply stimulating social change. (Habermas was increasingly interested in the rise of ‘social movements’ and political pressure groups).

In some ways, this basic point relates to the original ‘cultural’ or literary public sphere that appeared in the historical narrative of Habermas’ 1962 text and in contradistinction to a ‘political’ public sphere. Since the eighteenth century (at least in England, France, and Germany, Habermas’ main objects of analysis) the real interest of the private individual (as private business interests but also the private realm of domestic dwelling, hospitality, friendship and social acquaintance) became productive of both new cultural goods (like books) and a site of ‘letters’ and the associations around the growing intellectual intercourse

of a ‘reading public’, whose fulcrum was novels, essays, memoires, periodicals and the living-rooms or coffee houses in which these were discussed. This culminated in the highly productive ‘salon’ sub-culture of the late 19th Century, and formative of a range of values, dispositions, habits, linguistic refinements and more importantly, ethico-political concerns, that came to forge a distinctively bourgeois subjectivity’. Habermas’ theoretical observations on this are important (if brief and compressed).

‘The sphere of the public arose in the broader strata of the bourgeoisie as an expansion and at the same time completion of the intimate sphere of the conjugal family’ (Habermas, 1989: 50). The emergence of literature in the domestic realm generated a consciousness of a crucial dialectic between the ‘bourgeois’ of citizen as independent owner of commodities and member of civil society, and of ‘homme’ or man of feeling, refection, family intimacy, with the facility to reflect on their ‘human’ experience of social conditions (Habermas, 1989: 55), generating a public articulation of feeling, sentiment, common tastes or judgments, and a realm of senses within which common understanding and empathy would emerge. The world of letters and literature was formative for the cultivation of this complexity in the self-representation and self-consciousness of a bourgeois citizen and his interests, coalescing in the facility for ‘criticism’, which was ‘literary’ before it was ‘political’. The cultivation of a sphere of the criticism of public authority seemed in contrast to the domestic ‘intimate’ sphere, but in fact both become co-joined. Habermas refers to the private sphere of family as the sphere where the cultural production of ‘letters’ emerged, defined

as an ‘audience-oriented’ privacy (the facility for generating deeply introspection and personal ejaculation for public consideration). That intimacy was co-joined with a perception of objective social conditions, is significant in how a ‘public’ discourses emerged as distinct from merely a discourse of civil society and its interests.

For the nature of public interests, and with it public opinion and its relation to authority, became more conceptually explicit the more the ‘interiorizing human closeness’ of the domestic sphere refined the bourgeois citizen’s self-understanding and sense of interrelation within others. Criticism was not merely an attention to particular issues, but the situation of such issues within the broad complexity of human experience, the construction of meaning or perception of truth. It is for this reason the literature of the 18th and 19th Century (Habermas cites Goethe and Richardson as well as, for London, the *Spectator*, *Tatler* and *Guardian*) could routinely attend to the broader ethical, religious, legislative or social justice dimensions of current affairs or government decisions.

The self-understanding of the bourgeois citizen was therefore of ‘universal’ and ‘human’ dimensions and not just of individual perceptions of social conditions relating to their personal interests. Their ability to articulate their interests in the light of experience and its conditions, cultivated essential cognitive and intellectual skills, which in turn, came to characterize the deliberations and intellectual interactions of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989: 52). In some sense, therefore, the ‘cultural’ public sphere (of family life and literature

particularly – though one could add religious devotion and a whole range of other cultural phenomenon arguably omitted by Habermas) was the origin of the most powerful ‘communicative’ dimensions of the modern public sphere.

It was in *Between Facts and Norms* that Habermas makes much more of the character of communication as a formative force in the public sphere, and where the public sphere itself is referred to as a ‘communication structure’. In fact, he effectively revised his concept of the public sphere, offering a more nuanced definition, no doubt in response to forthcoming criticism:

‘The public sphere is a social phenomenon just as elementary as action, actor, association, or collectivity, but it eludes the conventional sociological concepts of “social order.” The public sphere cannot be conceived as an institution and certainly not as an organisation. It is not even a framework of norms with differentiated competencies and roles, membership regulations, and so on. Just as little does it represent a system; although it permits one to draw internal boundaries, outwardly it is characterized by open, permeable and shifting horizons. The public sphere can best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view...the streams of communication are, in the process, filtered and synthesized in such a way that they coalesce into bundles of topically specified *public* opinions (Habermas: 1998: 360).

In *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas emphasizes the dynamics of the public sphere and the social ‘spaces’ it created. Public deliberation and debate were more specifically attributed to a facility for intersubjectivity, interchange, ‘intellectualizing effects’ and ‘affects’, the transformation of ‘the participants’ preferences and attitudes’, the sharing, the processes of dialogue development,

the ‘quality’ of public opinion, the influences and persuasive dimension, roles and acts of presentation, and so on (1998: 360—379). In other words, In *Between Facts and Norms* finds Habermas attentive to the aesthetic and intellectual dimensions of public sphere experience, almost as if he is asserting its profound ‘cultural’ dimension. We may be reminded of Jim McGuigan’s statement: ‘The concept of a *cultural* public sphere refers to the articulation of politics, public and personal, as a contested terrain though affective – aesthetic and emotional – modes of communication (McGuigan 2010: 15). While McGuigan takes this in a particular direction, we must note that Habermas reconsidered the experiential dimension of a public sphere, and so too its ‘cultural’ dimension.

Another conceptual innovation to find articulation in *Facts and Norms* is the distinction between ‘lifeworld’ and ‘system’, where the public sphere is part of the lifeworld of everyday social relations in specific ‘cultural’ environments. The lifeworld is the immediate, socially-embedded, milieu of social actors, and to a great extent, the realm from which values, beliefs and ethical norms find a substantive purchase over the ideas, ideologies and political commitments that animate participation in the public sphere. The ‘system’ is the more abstract regime of the structuring mechanisms of market economy and the state apparatus. Habermas warns against the detachment of lifeworld from the ‘system’, and the domination of the former by the latter (a domination that is the causal root of the ‘structural transformation’ that so defines his book).

I quoted the lengthy statement above, for as our chapters progress, it will not go without notice that my conception of the ‘embryonic’ public sphere in Nigeria follows just this description, and with an emphasis on ‘lifeworld’ activities and social contexts. As Habermas expressly states, a structural interconnection with the ‘political system’ (along with principle deliberators who have access to the corridors of power and privilege that, in Nigeria, characterize the ‘system’) is not necessary for the formation or function of a public sphere. Indeed, Habermas’ definition above could equally apply to ‘cultural’ movements, where culture has become ‘politicized’ by certain ethical or political aims, local allegiances in specific locations. It is my intention in this thesis to remain with this more nuanced and dynamic definition of the public sphere, retaining the ‘cultural’ dimension that has appeared in Habermas’ account since the beginning, and maintaining a ‘lifeworld’ dimension. Habermas often referred to ‘associational’ dynamics and networks, which emerge from (but are not identical to) civil society, which have the potential to generate discursive forces that act on official public discourse in a variety of ways. This, in my later chapters, will be observed in the way ‘public’ forces of debate and deliberation emerge from ‘lifeworld’ levels, particularly from actors or agencies with little political power. Like many social phenomenon that Habermas identified as emerging from ‘associational’ activity, like the smaller political pressure groups, these actors and agencies remain provisional and do not become socially substantive – not in the way civil society itself is substantive (structured by actual market, commodity and corporate entities: Habermas 1996: 373-387).

Indeed, in *Facts and Norms* it is the lifeworld that provides the ‘wild’ public of new activism and interest group solidarities generate quasi-independent spheres of public discourse. While Habermas does not believe in the possibility of the political autonomy of resisting groups *per se* (nothing is ‘outside’ the social totality constructed by capitalist economy), a certain relative autonomy from the political system of the state can be achieved, where the ‘agenda’ of the institutional or official public sphere is indeed influenced through indirect means (like the so-called ‘pressure’ of pressure groups).

I will now conclude our discussion of Habermas, without, however, indicating that his basic theory of the public sphere developed no further. There were many points on which Habermas revised his theory, for he stated in our above cited edited text by Calhoun:

‘..the structural transformation, embedded in the integration of state and society, of the public sphere itself. The infrastructure of the public sphere has changed along with the forms of organization, marketing, and consumption of a professionalized book production that operates on a larger scale and is oriented to a new strata of readers...the rise of electronic mass media, the new relevance of advertising, the increased fusion of entertainment and information...’ (Calhoun, 1992: 436)

In other words, Habermas was prompted to consider the homology between culture and politics. Yet, I do not want to pre-empt the important points of our critical interlocutors, whose points for the next chapter.

This chapter has attempted to define Habermas’ classical concept of the public sphere, while remaining alert to the role of ‘culture’ in this, and later,

formulations. In so doing I conclude with three points:

(i): For Habermas' original concept of the public sphere, the cultural-literary origins of that sphere are significant, and to some degree remain significant. The role of language, experience, empathy, and generalized ethical judgments on current affairs or decisions taken by government, are intrinsic to the embryonic public sphere emerging in Nigeria. And further, the phenomenon of influence, persuasion, emotion, and the affective or aesthetic dimensions of public communications will be emphasized in later chapters as important to the uses as well as the content of digital media in Nigeria;

(ii): The dynamics of communication within the public sphere can become so strong in generating realms for participation and social interconnections, they can grow and function *without* a direct connection to the political system or power of the state; the public sphere is not equivalent to either civil society and its private interests, or political decision making. A 'culture of democracy' in Nigeria is so defined in terms of 'lifeworld' against system (in Habermas' terms, 'a rationalization of the lifeworld'), where a 'wild' public sphere of social actors petition and influence the formation of state politics by means other than direct participation in governmental debate and deliberations (Calhoun, 1992: 453; Habermas, 1996 358-9);

(iii): Habermas noted a radical difference emerging between the traditional mass media (the main means in the 20th Century by which the public sphere was established) and the new, more informal and emerging world of digital media

communications. Here Habermas was equivocal: ‘...computer-mediated communication in the web can claim unequivocal democratic merits only for a special context: It can undermine the censorship of authoritarian regimes that try to control and repress public opinion. In the context of liberal regimes, the rise of millions of fragmented chat rooms across the world tend instead to lead to the fragmentation of large but politically focused mass audiences into a huge number of isolated issue publics. Within established national public spheres, the online debates of web users only promote political communication, when news groups crystallize around the focal points of the quality press, for example, national newspapers and political magazines (Habermas, 2006: 423).

Habermas’s assumption here is that for a ‘public’ dimension to be stable, we require a mass media, and mass media uniquely provides for the essential unity of public communication around with which digital media can only seek to cooperate. This thesis will serve to put forward a counter-argument, empirically grounded in the case of the embryonic public sphere of Nigeria.

Section One: Chapter Two

Qualifications and Criticisms

Introduction

In this chapter I continue a review of the public sphere theory by presenting the central claims of three other critical interlocutors of the public sphere. They are Calhoun, Fraser, and Kellner. In so doing, I work towards generating criteria for our analyzing of the emerging public sphere in Nigeria. My approach to these chosen thinkers is as Calhoun's approach to Habermas' seminal text: for Calhoun states, 'the most important destiny of Habermas' first book' may be to be a fruitful generator of new research, analysis, and theory', rather than an 'authoritative statement' (Calhoun, 1992: 41). Starting with Calhoun, I introduce us again to the concept of the public sphere, this time, from the perspective of Habermas' critics.

Calhoun and the critical extension of the Habermasian public sphere

Craig Calhoun's writings on the public sphere emerge in critical dialogue with Habermas' historical account in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962). Calhoun is largely noted for his critique of Habermas' historical account, focusing particularly on the concept and function of 'civil society' and its relevance in contemporary discussions on American and European democracy and social life.

The concept of civil society is central to the idea of the public sphere, even if Habermas was not deeply invested in it as a distinct historical category. In Calhoun's 1993 article, 'Civil Society and the Public Sphere', Calhoun stresses the importance of maintaining a clear distinction between both concepts, especially in theoretical discussions (1993:269). Habermas tended to maintain that civil society emerged as a private realm that stood counter to the State: it 'came into existence as a corollary of a de-personalised State authority' (Habermas, 1962:19). A similarity in civil society and the public sphere as concepts is that they each only became fully conceptualised once the State became divested of direct human personality (such as the age of representative publicity and the personality of the King). *Civil* became recognisable in the relationships and organisations created for sustaining social life outside the State, and for articulating issues of interests for public discussion and (or) the action of the State. This led to educated members of the civil elite viewing themselves as *publicum*, a *counterpart* to public authority or the State, where the bourgeois public sphere was institutionalised as co-dependent on State power (Calhoun, 1992: 9).

Indeed, the extent to which citizens find a capacity for dialogue and deliberation that is the content of the public sphere depends on the 'internal connections among people, occasions for collective action, ideologies that root popular consent' (Calhoun, 1993:270) that is the civil sphere. Civil society, for Calhoun, is the capacity of a social community to *organise itself*, independent of the specific direction of State power, yet at the same time formed in relation to it

(Calhoun, 1993:270). Emphasising their relation, Calhoun asserts that the relation between the public sphere and civil society is that the latter's capacity in operationalizing self-organisation is registered in the public sphere as the arena for deliberative exchange, where rational critical debate determined the required actions and agreements. To Calhoun, Habermas' public sphere functioned in relation to its social condition, which was civil society (1993: 273). In other words, without a civil society, a public sphere would be form-less, disorganized and without direction.

In the same article, Calhoun identifies certain aspects of Habermas' historical narrative, particularly the role of the printing press. The emergence of newsletters met a demand for information on behalf of merchants, on prices and goods, later evolving as media of 'public' information on laws and trading practices. This process, he opines, promoted a general literacy and a distinctive set of social approaches to the published word as a source of information. Furthermore, the press was as much available and used by the State, which relayed information to the public sphere; in other words, we must not assume linear lines of communication to determine any 'model' we might form of the public sphere and the 'rational' dynamics of its dialogue and deliberations (Calhoun, 1992:8).

Calhoun concurs with Habermas in that the decline of the press as central and dominant media of the public sphere (and the concomitant expansion and commercialisation of the media), was symptomatic of the decline of the public sphere itself (Habermas, 1962:169). However, for Calhoun the degeneration of

the public sphere is overstated: for the ‘public consequences of mass media are not necessarily as uniformly negative as *Structural Transformation* suggests’ (1992: 33), and he expresses surprise that Habermas does not mention other avenues through which access to the public sphere expanded (1992:24). For Calhoun, the normative public sphere may be resuscitated even though Habermas fails to find socio-economic conditions for such in advanced capitalist societies: to find ‘an institutional basis for an effective political public sphere corresponding in character and function to that of early capitalism and State formation but corresponding in scale and participation to the realities of later capitalism and States’ (1992:29). Indeed, a central weakness in Habermas’ *Structural Transformation*, is that Habermas does not consider the ‘classical’ bourgeois public sphere and the post-transformation public sphere (or ‘organised’ and ‘late’ capitalism) through marshaling the same criteria. Habermas’ account of the Twentieth Century omits ‘the sort of intellectual history, the attempt to take leading thinkers seriously and recover the truth from their ideologically distorted writings’; an approach that marks Habermas’ take on the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries (Calhoun, 1992: 33).

However, on a more positive note, Calhoun readily submits that Habermas successfully recovered a ‘valuable critical ideal from the classical bourgeois public sphere’, an important blueprint (open to critical modification) for the practice of democratic culture (Calhoun, 1992:29). Calhoun elucidates that majority of other criticisms against the public sphere expose forms of underdevelopment in the concept, or omission of significant issues (such as

gender). Thus, mentioning what these omissions are indicates possibilities in improving or extending the theoretical armature of the *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, rather than collapsing it (1992:33). Issues that are ‘remarkably absent’, for Calhoun, include culture and identity (nationalism), religion¹ and social movements (1992:34, 36, 37). The ‘remarkable absence’ of nationalism, Calhoun observes, ‘may be due partly to the general lack of attention to the nineteenth century public sphere’, and a part of ‘a thinness of attention to matters of culture and the construction of identity’ (1992:34). Calhoun’s subsequent paper ‘Nationalism and Cultures of Democracy’ (2007), buttresses the significance of nationalism, social solidarity and social institutions to democratic culture. For Calhoun, nationalism is a sober reminder that democracy presupposes solidarity (2007:172).

In ‘Habermas and the Public Sphere’ (1992), Calhoun points out that Habermas’ framework assumes that social identities and interests are settled and fully formed in the private sphere before being imported into the public sphere, an assumption that ‘impoverishes his own theory’ (1992:35). The abstract binary ‘private vs. public’ generates in Habermas’s historical narrative an impasse when attempting to find what constitutes *general interests* or not. An instance for Calhoun is that Habermas’ discussion on the literary dimensions to the early

¹ In Habermas’ future essay in 2011, he addresses the subject of religion in the public sphere. Habermas concludes that religious practices and perspectives remain relevant to multicultural citizenship, spurring solidarity and respect. However, it is required that religious traditions are translated into “universally accessible language” to avail itself in wider political culture (2011: 15-28; also, Mendieta & Vanantwerpen, 2011: 4-5).

evolution of the public sphere (where literary fiction, for one, helped facilitate a sense of identity, experience and consciousness of audience-directed communication) entailed a profound role for the private sphere. As the public realm became more emphatic, it is tempting to understand public in terms of its opposite to private. Calhoun's problem is the relation between the sense of individual selfhood and interests emerging from a private realm and the evident power of the allegiance to general interests constitutive of a public realm fully developed. The social spaces of the public sphere (café, salon, town hall, etc.) are components in the passage between private and public to some degree, as are also the various media of the published word. Yet there remains a sense – particularly concerning the role of religious experience and faith during these periods of history – that the construction of identity, individual experience, and the allegiance to general interests, cannot be explained by an emphatic binary of 'public v's private' (Calhoun, 1992:35).

Calhoun further posits that the absence of culture, nationalism and a theory of the processes by which social identities are constructed, in Habermas' account have implication for his conception of the public sphere's degeneration. That is, 'even if we grant that the problem-solving functions of the public sphere are being performed less well than in the past, this does not mean that public sphere has ceased to be at least as vibrant a source of understanding, including self-understanding' (Calhoun, 1992:34). *Self-understanding* is therefore a radically under-theorised component of the public sphere for Calhoun, and where it does appear as a dimension of the 'interiority' of the Marxist model of 'liberal

bourgeois' subjectivity, it neglects to fully include its social dimension. For Calhoun, social movements were and remain vital to the formation of the agenda of public sphere debates, but also the allegiances, convictions and values of individuals. Moreover, democratic politics itself has been 'crucially influenced' by social movements – which are in effect a 'subsidiary' public (1992: 37). Further, a more socially informed understanding of public sphere debates and deliberations will see that individual issues and problems agglomerate within broader ideological confines and other forms of discursive power that structure collective attention. The omission of social movements from a theory of the public sphere is to disregard how public discourse is a site of struggle, through which the participants as much as the 'sphere' itself are made and remade (Calhoun, 1992:37).

Calhoun's central contribution to the critique and extension of Habermas' theory lies in the emphatic emphasis on the social dimension of public life – identities, movements, ideologies and power. To some extent Calhoun is ambivalent on the role of nationalism in the formation of social conditions, registered in the way he is aware of Habermas' unsustainable historical truism that each State possesses one public sphere yet at the same time multiple public spheres 'will leave us groping for a new term to describe the communicative relationships among them' (1992:37). To admit to the shifts in the public sphere in the age of nationalism's decline as much as the rise of multi-media, mass-immigration and consumerism, the public sphere should be conceived as 'involving a field of discursive interactions', where there are admitted various clusters of

communication². These clusters may be microcosms of the whole (like major cities generating their own public discourse within countries); or they may revolve around persons, issues, categories or basic dynamics of society as a whole. We therefore need to know how, within these clusters, how focus is maintained, how they are internally organised, how they manage their boundaries as well as their internal cohesion in relation to the whole – perhaps as an articulation of sectional interests, a functional division of labour or a stand against the hegemony of a dominant ideology? For Calhoun, this trajectory of questioning will alert us to the significance of ‘a more pluralistic, open approach to conceptualising the public sphere but also to a need for analysis of its internal organisation, something almost completely neglected in *Structural Transformation*’ (1992:38).

Calhoun is therefore of the position that the normative public sphere may indeed be revived if it can be conceptualized with reference to the distinct socio-economic conditions of advanced capitalist societies in present-day (not the requirements of the ‘bourgeoisie’). He identifies four dimensions of social life being ‘remarkably absent’ in Habermas’s public sphere theory: culture, identity, religion, and the ‘social movement’. In extending the construct of the public sphere to a non-European society such as Nigeria, these ‘missing’ concepts are

² See also Eriksen who highlights the complexity involved in “global conversations among citizens” in the 21st century public sphere. Where the understanding of the public sphere was linked to the nation state, national identities, democratic values, communities of languages, and civil societies, what then becomes of the public sphere in these times of transnational mobility, cross-border communications, porous boundaries, and destabilised national identities? (2014: 64-77)

even of greater significance in a formulation of a concept of a public sphere. The role of ethnic diversity within culture is, as Calhoun indicates, significant.

Nancy Fraser and multiple public spheres

Our next key interlocutor, Nancy Fraser, approaches Habermas' theory of the public sphere with another distinct set of concerns. Before contributing to Calhoun's edited volume *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, she addressed the issue of gender in 'What's Critical about Critical Theory? The case of Habermas and Gender' (1985). This essay was the genesis of her critique of Habermas' public sphere and its relationship to democratic culture as was subsequently stated in Calhoun's edited volume. On the one hand, Fraser appreciates Habermas' 'inter-institutional' account of the private sphere (modern, restricted or nuclear family) in relation to the modern economy and its divisions of labour (and consequent spaces of political participation, public debate and opinion formation) along with the relation of them both to State administration. However, she criticises Habermas on four major accounts: firstly, Habermas' conceptualisation of the public sphere is generated exclusively through an understanding of capitalist labour, (the workplace and the adult male and head of the nuclear family); second: the publicly active agent of the citizen-speaker is gendered male, and that is presupposed and affirmed by both state and economy; third: the 'citizen-speaker' is positioned within the economy as 'bread-winner' in such a way that determined a woman's dependency; and fourth: the female child-bearer connects all institutions that are structurally necessary for

Habermas' theory (1985:111-7).

For Fraser, gender is articulated as a social condition in all areas of life, and for her the structural weakness in Habermas' account is his understanding of the gender dynamics endemic to a posited symbiotic relation of private and public spheres (1985:117). She contends that male dominance is intrinsic rather than accidental to classical capitalism, and thus where Habermas promotes a fully 'critical' account of his dimension of capitalism's history, then gender-sensitive categories are required (Fraser, 1985:117). Fraser describes Habermas' neglect of gender in his critical theory as a 'serious deficiency' (1985:98).

Fraser's essay 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to Actually Existing Democracy' (1990), remains centrally concerned on how the 'theory' of the public sphere can so easily become detached from its object, or the social and historical conditions of its operation. Her contention is that for theory to be 'critical' then it needs to offer us empirical insight into today's democratic practices and not just those of history. On this basis Fraser interrogates the 'institutional' criteria guiding the formation of a public sphere theory in Habermas's work – these appear as four basic 'assumptions': (i) it is possible to bracket status differentials and deliberate 'as if' participants in the public sphere were equals; (ii) the proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics is necessarily a step away from, rather than toward, greater democracy; (iii) the public sphere should be restricted to common goods, and 'private' matters are undesirable; (iv) a sharp separation between civil society and the State is required for a functioning democratic public sphere (Fraser, 1990: 62-3).

It is against these ‘assumptions’ that Fraser argues, focusing particularly on how it is possible to bracket status differentials among members of the bourgeois public sphere, and to deliberate as if they were equals. She states that, historically, the claim to full accessibility was never fully realised. Women of all classes and ethnicity, plebeian men (who did not meet property ownership qualifications), women and men of racialised ethnicities were excluded from participation in the public sphere (1990:62). This realisation drew Fraser to further investigate the social character of interactions within the formal public sphere – did included participants really interact as though they were equals? Were social inequalities effectively bracketed? Fraser was referring to the ‘informal impediments to participatory parity that can persist even after everyone is formally or legally licensed to participate’ (1990:63).

Fraser observes that discursive interactions within the formal public sphere were governed by protocols of ‘style’ and ‘decorum’, which were in themselves markers of status inequality. Also, the language people used to reason would favour particular ways of seeing things over others (1990:64). She argued that if we took those considerations seriously, we should challenge whether there is the possibility for interlocutors to deliberate ‘as equals’, or if so, what can this mean for a critical theory of the public sphere, and more so when discursive behaviours are deeply inscribed in structural relations of social dominance and subordination (1990:5). On this count, Fraser submits that the bourgeois conception of the public sphere is ‘inadequate’ as long as it supposes that social equality is not a necessity for participatory parity in public spheres. She

recommends that a critical theory approach renders explicit and makes visible the discursive ways in which gender inequality is a structural feature of the public sphere, and maintains an impact on discursive interaction (1990:65).

Fraser's second 'assumption' concerns the putative proliferation of a multiplicity of competing publics. Social systems that tolerate contestation among different competing groups do more to promote the ideal of participatory parity, whether in the context of stratified or egalitarian societies. For it is impossible to protect the public realm from social inequality, particularly where there exists a single, comprehensive public sphere (1990:66). As a constitutive part of the promoting of a single public sphere, subordinated groups require an arena for deliberation among themselves. Through this they develop the means to articulate and defend their interest through the single comprehensive public sphere (1990:66). Fraser does not imply that smaller 'publics' are necessarily virtuous or democratic, but they can play a role in response to the inevitable exclusions from the dominant public realm that take place, thereby assisting in expanding its discursive space (1990:67).

The concept of a 'subaltern public(s)' is an important neologism within Fraser's theoretical understanding of the public sphere (1990). A subaltern public represents members of subordinate social groups who form alternative discursive spaces in effective contestation of their dominant counterparts. 'Women, workers, peoples of colour, and gays and lesbians...' fall within this group (Fraser, 1990:67). Fraser proposes to refer to these groups as 'subaltern counterpublics', in that they form equally discursive arenas, which in turn permits

them to establish and spread counter-discourses and ‘formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs’ (1990:67). In defending subaltern counterpublics³ consolidated under conditions of dominance and subordination, Fraser argues that she is defending the integration of social equality, cultural diversity and participatory democracy (1990:70). Public life needs a form of critical political sociology that comprehends the complexity of public participation, of both multiple and unequal publics. This involves acknowledging the nature of the interaction between different discursive spheres, identifying the social mechanisms that renders some to subordinate others.

Fraser’s third ‘assumption’ is that the public sphere should be restricted to issues of the ‘common good’. In Habermas’ narrative, private matters were not in themselves able to generate or contribute to public discourse in any period. Against this assumption, Fraser contends that public discourse can vary – from State-related issues, issues of concern to everyone, matters pertaining to a common good or shared interests – and each of these corresponds to a contrasting sense of privacy (1990:71). The concepts of ‘public’ and ‘private’ are not, she indicates, self-evident empirical designations within society; they are forms of cultural classification. They are linguistic terms that could be used to render some interests, views and topics, non-bona fide within political discourse per se. The crux of her argument is that a crucial range of social issues are

³ See Michael Warner (2005) in his book publication, *Publics and Counterpublics*, which expands on the idea of publics (as opposed to one public) and counterpublics, and proposes a methodology on how they may be analysed. The book is a compilation of essays.

effectively contained within the discourse of the ‘private’, excluding them from general public debate and contestation and in turn empowering the discourse of the dominant (Fraser, 1990:73).

The last of the “assumptions” identified by Fraser concerns the sharp separation between civil society and the State, and the apparent requirement of this separation for a functioning democratic public sphere. This assumption, for Fraser, can be understood in two possible ways, both contingent on how one defines *civil society*. According to Fraser, if civil society here represents the privately ordered capitalist economy, then to require its separation from the State is a *de facto* defense of classical liberalism, resulting in an economically ordered disparity in wealth and resources along with its social consequences. If civil society, rather, refers to the core of non-governmental or secondary associations that are neither administrative nor economic but still play a central role in the management of the social realm, then the civil can (in its social variety) find means of complementarity with the various permutations of the public (like counterpublics) (1990:74).

In conclusion, for Fraser, public sphere theory has a critical-political function, and needs to at once expose how social inequality is a structural feature of the public sphere, but also provides the terms by which we can investigate the role of representation, the marginalization of minorities, the selective use of certain forms of expression and communication (protocols of style and decorum, terminologies and so on), and the censorship of others. The suppression of the ‘private’, and the lack of understanding of its critical role in constituting the public,

is a significant observation for Fraser also notes the ‘weak’ character of public spheres in late capitalist societies, and how this weakness allows the state to strip public opinion of its political efficacy (1990:77). Fraser supports the deliberate founding and cultivating of a multiplicity of public spheres, as opposed to Habermas’ historically evolving, state-directed, single and comprehensive public sphere. She is also attentive to the boundaries of the public sphere – where actors and agencies on or around the boundaries (counterpublics) can have some measure of determining effect on the dominant ‘sphere’ or spheres. (See also, Fraser et al, 2014⁴)

Douglas Kellner and ‘third generation’ critical theory

Our final interlocutor is Douglas Kellner, who again attempts to extend the concept of the public sphere through a critique of Habermas’s original theory. In his article, ‘Habermas, the Public Sphere and Democracy – A Critical Intervention’ (2000), Kellner introduces technology as a central issue for public sphere theory, drawing on the work evidenced in his previous publications, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (1990), *Intellectuals, the New Public Spheres and Techno-politics* (1997), and ‘New Technologies and Alienation’ (2003). Below I will be extrapolating his main observations from these

⁴ In more recent essays, Fraser (2014: 8-42) has contributed further to debates on the concept of public sphere in ‘transnationalising the public sphere.’ Here, she presents a critical discussion on how the public sphere may be extended to accommodate existing globalizing realities, where transnational flows of people and information renders the nation-state frame of the public sphere problematic.

representative texts.

In the above cited article, Kellner reminds us that the main organs of information and political debate in Habermas' bourgeois public sphere were newspapers, journals, institutions of political discussion like political clubs, literary salons, public assemblies, pubs and coffee houses, meeting halls, and other public spaces (Kellner, 2000). What Habermas called the bourgeois public sphere comprised social spaces, which provided for solidarity against 'oppressive forms of social and public power.' (Kellner, 2000). In other words, social solidarity required material conditions and the occupation of delimited 'spaces'. With the decline of the bourgeois public sphere, Kellner reiterates Habermas' observations on the 'refeudalisation' of the public realm: it will be useful to recapitulate the main tenets of 'refeudalisation' here, for it is from Kellner that we will define the trajectory of our investigation.

- The social spaces (noted above), used by citizens for interaction and debate, gradually became commercialized and were dominated by the symbolic meanings and values of commerce. Private interests (in business and industry) extended their reach as providers of the social infrastructure of everyday life (living, working, shopping, socializing) so that they began assuming a direct political function (particularly, for example, assuming management control of the once-state owned media, forming its content as well as its processes of industrialisation).
- The function of media shifted from its basis in public education, information and debate, to entertainment and advertising: media's social

role was thus transformed from the facilitation of rational-critical debate to a market-orientated content that cohered with the interests of media corporations.

- The State did not wither against private ownership and growing corporate power: rather the state formed alliances with corporate power, and became heavily invested in its regulation and shared mechanism of growth. The state thus also assumed a more fundamental role in the private realm and everyday life through the progressive requirements of the welfare state and increase in rights (eroding the difference between the private and public sphere).
- Where corporate industry becomes the state's main interlocutor on matters of regulation, law and management of public assets, the public sphere declines. Citizens become increasingly invested in increasing their own private interests through consumption, not political deliberation or furthering the cause of political agendas. As 'passive' consumers, a social trend towards largely private pursuits (acquisition; career advancement) and not matters of the common good or public interest, becomes a defining feature of modern society.
- 'Public opinion' is no longer formed by political debate and consensus in the bourgeois public sphere; rather, the attitudes, judgments and aspirations of citizens are defined in a multitude of other ways – notably in ways administered by political, economic and media elites.

Kellner's revision of Habermas' public sphere theory is in part motivated by his understanding of the potential for revitalising the public sphere in response to 'refeudalisation': for Kellner, while Habermas' proposals on revitalisation are valid, 'he did not provide concrete examples, propose any strategies, nor sketch out the features of an oppositional or post-bourgeois public sphere' Kellner (2000). Although Kellner concurs with other critics in pointing out how Habermas idealises the bourgeois public sphere (portraying it as a wholly coherent, cohesive and democratic sphere of dialogue and transparent opinion-formation), he maintains the credibility of a single dominant sphere of power and interests, where the dominant issue is the collective power of citizens against the monolithic entity of the state. At the same time, Kellner believes that 'it is a mistake to overly idealise and universalise any specific public sphere as in Habermas' account' (Kellner, 2000). A multiplicity of public spheres is a democratic necessity, without denying that they will overlap or even conflict.

To Kellner, Habermas' account highlights the central function of the media in modern everyday life and politics, and moreover, his account of the degeneration of the public sphere articulates the ways in which corporate interests have 'colonised' the public sphere, employing media and culture in reconstituting a realm of private interests in the places and spaces that public interests once inhabited. He expands on this in *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (1990). In its preface, Kellner charged the media, and television in particular, with failing to fulfill obligations to democracy, despite possessing a profound facility for doing so. The media effectively became the Trojan horse by

which ‘excessive corporate power’ has occupied and even coopted the public realm (Kellner, 1990: xiii).

Kellner further posits that the crisis of the public sphere (and democracy) is more critical (writing in the USA) than it was in Germany in 1962 on the publication of Habermas’ seminal text. The giant media corporations that have emerged since the 1960s, control huge segments of the information and entertainment market, regulating the content and flow of public issues (Kellner, 1990:180); they are ‘organised for the hegemony of capital in an era of conservative political rule’ (Kellner, 1990: 222). Given this situation, the prospect for a revived sense of public and democratic life can only but be wrought through the use of media, with new emerging technologies (or conversely, more local, community or civil cooption of existing technologies) to counter the hegemonic occupation of all forms of pan-social communication (1990:222). In Kellner’s words, ‘the struggle for democratic communications system is a struggle for democratic society’ (1990:222).

Given the ubiquity and evident usefulness of media, Kellner voices his frustration that Habermas ‘does not adequately theorise the nature and social functions of contemporary media of communication and information’ (Kellner, 2000). Media is conceptualised in Habermas simplistically as a mechanism for mere transmission of messages. One inhibitor of a socially nuanced understanding of media is Habermas’ categorical distinctions between a private and public sphere (Kellner, 2000:online), where ‘Habermas downplays

broadcasting and other communication media, the internet and new spheres of public debate... in part because... the categorical distinctions in his theory denigrate these domains...' (2000:online). These 'blind spots and conceptual limitations' undermine Habermas' discussions on democracy and his obvious decision to foster democratisation himself (Kellner, 2000). In Western democracies (which have, for good or ill, provided the world with dominant models of government) the media, state and economy have become utterly intertwined, and Habermas' public sphere theory does not have the facility to acknowledge this. However, it is practice and not theory that is providing new conceptualisations of the conditions of democracy, for 'oppositional' broadcast media and new media technologies, like the Internet, are serving as new spaces for 'participatory democratic communication politics' (2000).

On the Internet as a potential public sphere, Kellner's framework begins to exhibit a certain tension: historically, he admits that state control of media reduced its critical-public facility, yet in an age of increasing commercial colonisation there are nevertheless appearing greater freedoms for oppositional voices and resistance. This, in part of course, has been guaranteed by new technologies, whose social function is still in formation, to the extent to which Kellner can boldly proclaim that the Internet 'expands the realm for democratic participation and debates' (Kellner, 2000). Without assuming that the internet will too become swiftly colonised by forces of corporate capital, Kellner maps out some potential practical strategies for reviving a new public sphere, specifically that (i) it is a matter of political urgency that citizens develop skills for the use of

new media and computer technologies specifically for public purposes; and (ii) from that to develop education and disseminate both the motivation and skills that would foster the mediation of a multiplicity of voices as a future ‘cyber democracy’.

Howard Rheingold (2012:241) claims to have confronted Habermas on the matter of media technology. He recounts the interchange: ‘I took the occasion to ask him publicly what he thought about his public sphere theory and its subversion by powerful interests, now that the power to broadcast and debate is in the hands of millions. He ducked the question. I blogged about it [cf. Rheingold, 2012:241] ‘Habermas blows off question about the Internet and the public sphere’] and concluded that we need new thinking about this important aspect of our media practice – one that is anchored in but not chained to Habermasian theory’. This has been Kellner’s view for many years: he stated ‘...an expanded public sphere and new challenges and threats to democracy render Habermas’ work an indispensable component of a new critical theory that must, however, *go beyond* his positions in crucial ways’ (emphasis mine) (2000).

Since the 1970s Kellner’s work has been growing in conviction that the effective use of technology is essential in contemporary political activism and the public realm (1997:5). He became interested in, and published extensively on, education theory and practice in part spurred by the observation that while new and extensive flows of information, debate, and participation are emerging through new media capabilities, writers, scholars and intellectuals are not

availing themselves of its potential. The arrival of what he called ‘cyberspace democracy’ required a new approach to pedagogy as much as the learning of new technical skills in media technology (Kellner, 1997:5).

In his an important article, ‘New Technologies and Alienation – some critical reflections’ (N.D: 1), Kellner attempted to formulate a critical theory of technology, which, as indicated above, he thinks is the missing component of Habermas’ public sphere theory. He begins by rejecting what he regards as the two dominant positions on technology in critical theory – technophilia and technophobia. ‘Technophilic’ discourse celebrates technology as ‘our salvation’ and problem-solving (N.D: 1); for ‘technophobic’ discourse technology is an interminable threat, and symptomatic of major problems facing human beings in the modern age. Kellner’s nascent critical theory of technology will ostensibly sort technology’s ‘positive and negative features, the upside and downside, benefits and losses, as well as contradictions and ambiguities’ (N.D.: 5). His purpose is to articulate the potential of specific technologies; develop a substantive vision of the role of technologies in human life; project ways that technologies can serve human self-development, democratic values, and the creation of more cooperative and ecologically viable social organisations; and to use technology for a strategic critique of oppressive and authoritarian social behaviours. It seems that Kellner’s technology plays a similar role to the printed word in Habermas’ bourgeois public sphere.

Yet, where for many the printed press and other forms of reproduction used

within the bourgeois public sphere were relatively benign, Kellner admits that technology is susceptible to problematic limitations, built-in interests and predisposition to specific uses. This does not mean that technology facilitates an ‘alienation’ from ‘real life’ (a train of thought in both historical critical theory and post-Heideggerian existential phenomenology). For the user cannot be ‘alienated’ from their own body or corporeal experience, when hands, eyes and other body senses are very much a part of the computer-mediated activity (Kellner, N.D.: 10). Given the active involvement of the subject, aesthetically as well as cognitively, in digital media, Kellner does not accept arguments that suggest technology supplants basic human functions and thus is anti-human.

Overall, Kellner’s aim is to re-define the new world of computers and other digital communication devices as democratising tools, which may (then) currently be defined (by industry and market) in industrial or purely instrumental terms, and yet they are much more than that. They have intrinsic capabilities that can empower individuals and groups that are otherwise oppressed, and promote values such as democracy, justice and equality (N.D. 12). The public sphere was never one immutable realm of social activity, and of late has mutated into several overlapping spheres of dialogue and participatory debate. Through the Internet, people become producers as well as consumers of culture, and the revitalisation of democracies ‘that have been dangerously atrophying in an era of spectacle politics’ becomes possible (12-3). Democratic participation, debate and voting are important elements of democratic culture, and while in the big media age (of conglomerates) most people were excluded from political

discussions due to the limitations of broadcast technologies, the Internet has opened up the channel to a multiplicity of voices. Access to the public sphere is facilitated by information and communication technologies, generating new conditions for solidarity, collective interests, and new arenas for the development of participation (Kellner, N.D.: 13). New media technologies may not immediately function in terms of a public sphere, but they are generating conditions and frameworks that can become central to a more democratic future public sphere.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented the thoughts of our selected central interlocutors of Habermas on his public sphere theory. Where Calhoun's concerns are articulated in the manner with which he tackles Habermas' articulation of national identity, religion, and social movements, Nancy Fraser exemplifies a series of feminist concerns with gender identity and the domestic realm. She highlights the silence of women's voices in the bourgeois public sphere, and that of plebian men. The perceived lack in the theoretical adjudication of gender by Habermas' in his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, for Fraser, is its 'structural weakness'. Kellner, however, introduces us to the technological dimension of the public sphere and the structural shifts in public communications. He extends Habermas' public sphere conception to accommodate the potentialities of digital media, where corporate interests have colonised what is left of the traditional public sphere as

maintained in the 20th Century by mass media. Kellner calls for a critical theory of technology as the core of a relevant public sphere theory: this thesis attempt to work towards that end.

Section One: Chapter Three

Towards a Digital Public Sphere

Introduction

In this chapter I will provide an empirical basis to our subsequent references to new digital media, extending Kellner's observations into the present day. From Kellner I take the fundamental observation that fundamental to the change in the public sphere is the change wrought by new media technologies, which in turn are generating new possibilities for the formation of democracy. These possibilities fundamentally involve (i) participation and forms of social interaction among otherwise unconnected social subjects or citizens; and (ii) new modes of articulation and expression of the experience of authority and so critical opposition to corporate or state domination of the economy.

For Kellner, digital media is both a simple and complex concept, and for that reason it is easier described than defined. It simply denotes the use of new communication technologies as a supplement to older forms of media (television, film, telephone, printed matter, and so on). However, in the present, this 'use' is manifold and has generated many new devices, (like smart phones) adapted to specific functions and combining others. Digital Media has emerged as a field of study for social science researchers, in part as digital media was never merely technology but also culture, consumption and lifestyle. We therefore have cause

to benefit from Kellner's basic claims, while recontextualising our analysis in a more contemporary media landscape. Digital media is now ubiquitous, much more so than TV, which dominated the social realm when Kellner first began writing on the public sphere in the 1980s. Digital media is now internal to the function of industry, education and social institutions, and not necessarily dominated by entertainment in many realms.

The Emergence of New Digital Media

The term *digital* may be clarified in relation to its antonym, *analogue*, which was once the standard conventional means of electronic transmission and has now been widely replaced. *Analogue* can be described as the real world (as opposed to the *virtual* world) outside computers – the transmission of continuous signal by means of media that retain its essential character. *Digital* on the other hand breaks down the signal, transports it in coded form, and then reconstitutes that signal in whatever way required. Digital signal and the information it carries is neither as dense nor does it have the 'real life' empirical qualities of analogue. However, the digital means of electronic transmission is more useful in that it can be condensed, manipulated, converted to other forms, and channeled into multiple networks and other media (Feldman 1997).

It is thus safe to deduce in simple terms that digital media is any channel of communication that carries digital signals: however, by virtue of the transmission

and permeability of the content of digital signals, the term digital media is more than a mechanism or conduit for signals. And with the expansive nature of digital media is its expansive impact and multiplicity of effects on social, economic and political regimes of communication. In media studies, the term ‘digital media’ has assumed different nomenclatures and meanings over time; for example, a mobile phone is often defined as a device or tool (in terms of its tangible ‘hand set’ object-hood), yet can also be defined in terms of its networked function as ‘mobile media’ (Feldmann, 2005); while a (digital) space on the web or its social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube), weblogs (wordpress, blogger), are not defined as devices or tools, but in terms of space and applications, and were often referred to as the ‘virtual sphere’ (Papacharissi, 2002).

The ‘convergence’ of media content on new and multiple media platforms is one of the developments in information and communication technology that makes digital media a complex term to define theoretically. Convergence here refers to the flow of (digital) content over varied platforms, the synergy among multiple media industries and the audiences’ readiness to migrate across the platforms (Jenkins, 2006:2). To reiterate the earlier point about digital media being more than a technology but a culture, Jenkins (2006:3) argues that the convergence of old and new media, which depended largely on an active-participatory audience, should not be perceived strictly as a technological process only; rather, it should be understood in terms of a ‘cultural shift’ (Jenkins 2006:3). This

is because, unlike with old media, the behaviour of the consumer or audience is internal to the technological function of the media – they way they actively seek out information and establish links between broad categories of content in diverse locations. A key aspect in which digital media is differentiated from traditional media is in *interactivity* – that is, the power users have to engage and involve one another (Pavlik and McIntosh, 2011:190). The very technology (both hardware and software since the 1980s) has been developed in and through extensive research and knowledge of consumer or audience behaviours and requirements. One cannot discuss digital media without the subjects that use the media, epistemically as well as ontologically.

On that note, digital media can be defined in terms of technology hardware (devices and tools), software, user-behaviour and branded products. Hardware refers to the tangible parts of digital technology, where examples are mobile phones, tablet devices, video game consoles, digital billboards, and so on. Software on the other hand is the applications, programmes, and the web in digital hardware devices, which users employ in communication processes, and often supplementary or ancillary to the central function of the hardware device (as the many available ‘apps’ are to the functioning of a handheld telephone or ‘mobile’). We must also not forget that digital media inhabits the consumer landscape as *products* – digital media is usually heavily branded, where even websites, blogs, social network Sites (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, and Instagram) are interconnected with other products and packages.

This thesis has moved beyond a fascination with the ‘new’ forms of media and its manifestations. Yet it will attempt to innovate an approach to digital media that retains the ‘cultural’ dimension of the media (its intrinsic role in the everyday life of the consumer, and as innovative branded technology it’s stimulus to creative activity). Given our subject of the public sphere, it also involves its socio-political function and impact. Digital media, as interactive communication, is intrinsically shaped by certain characteristics that have been routinely associated with ‘democratic’ behaviour – for example, participation, interconnection with sources of information, consistent commentary on daily issues and current affairs, capability for many-to-many interaction among users, free access void of immediate discrimination, and so on. ‘Theories of democracy designate political conversations as essential to democratically organized societies’ (Stromer-Galley & Wichowski, 2011:168). It is through such conversations that citizens are able to clarify their personal views, access the opinions of others and discover common problems in society. Digital media makes this conversation possible by its features of interactivity, ability to bridge the distance among citizens and freedom to speak freely (Stromer-Galley & Wichowski, 2011:170-2). On the face of it, digital media seems to enhance the basic skills of democratic systems of political life. Our task right here is to consider how such assumptions map onto empirical situations relevant to our investigation.

From about year 2000, participation, user-empowerment, ‘people coming together’, increasingly became key themes shaping debates in digital media. *Participation*, a term that concerned Habermas’ early work in the early 1960s, is central to digital media theory and emerges in various forms, from consumer’s participation on digital media platforms in entertainment (see Jenkins, 2006), to elections and politics (see Fox and Ramos, 2012), civic engagement, social movements and activism (see Walch, 1999; Earl & Kimport, 2011) etc. American journalist Clay Shirky is one of the prominent proponents of digital media fostering participation and serving as a people-empowerment tool. In his popular book, *Here comes Everybody* (2008), he considers the astonishing ease with which people come together to take group action that defies corporate or state powers and to argue that people can indeed ‘transform their world’, socially and politically, through ‘everyday’ behaviours. In the marketing copy on the recto side of the first edition of his book, it stated: ‘the revolution will not be televised – it will be emailed, texted, blogged, wikied...’ (Shirky, 2008). Similarly, Tim Gee following the Arab Spring (celebrated for its groundbreaking use of social networks), recognized that ‘revolution is on the tip of every tongue’, and decided to study how campaigns as ‘counterpower’ may be more effective – as ‘a revolution is the result of a series of successful campaigns’ (2011:10). Gee defined a ‘revolution’ as the simple transition of power from one elite to another. In his opinion, *counterpower* does not need to be violent to be effective (2011:13).

In Zimbabwe, Last (2011:745) examined the use of blogs in mediating the experiences of citizens during a violent election. With particular reference to citizen journalism, he proposed that digitization has generated new 'counter-hegemonic spaces', where public debate itself has now gained a new powerful resistance function. Harlow (2011) found that the social network site Facebook was used to form an online political protest that then moved offline, visibly articulating in the public realm a highly contentious posthumous video where a lawyer, Rodrigo Rosenberg, accused Guatemalan President, Alvaro Colon, of murdering him (Harlow, 2011:225).

In the recent past it was perhaps all too easy to become excited about the potential for digital media to stimulate or replace actual forms of social or political change. Morozov (2011) declared that the 'counter hegemonic' power of digital media is a 'delusion'. He continued, that 'to salvage Internet's promise to aid and fight against authoritarianism, those of us in the West who still care about the future of democracy will need to ditch both cyber-utopianism and Internet-centrism...' (Morozov, 2011). He argued that the rhetoric of internet revolution operates on a flawed set of assumptions, unstable methodology, generating a widespread 'Net Delusion' even among academics and intellectuals. Rather, for Morozov, we need a realistic assessment of the risks and dangers the Internet poses, equally matched with an assessment of local context (where change can only happen) (Morozov, 2011:xviii). Succinctly put, Morozov is calling for an end to cyber-utopianism, to be replaced with cyber-

realism.

Without doubt, digital media enhances certain powers of communication and interconnection, publicity and the dissemination of information and opinion; and yet it also has ushered in new restrictions, some of which take the form of unrealistic expectations – or a degrading of actual political skills where political activity is shifted to Internet platforms, for example. Communication, participation, empowerment and freedom, are surely characteristics of many forms of digital media, and yet we need to reconsider this within the stringent demands of a public sphere. Fenton (2012:160) raises an important point when she states that ‘democracy means different things to different people in different places’; and so in considering how Africa has adopted digital media technologies, behaviours and language, will critical African commentators say ‘we are falling prey once more to a thoroughly westernized interpretation of theory and politics?’ (Fenton, 2012: 160). Digital media, she observes, may offer easy tools for participatory or even direct democracy, allowing even ‘radical, oppositional and progressive social and political imaginaries to emerge’ (Fenton, 2012: 160). Yet, we cannot neglect the material and social-institutional conditions of actual politics – where digitally mediated political behaviours must be reconciled with the complex task of addressing the ‘highly coordinated, deftly administered and systematic limitations of the structures of capitalism’ (Fenton, 2012:170).

Lincoln Dahlberg was an early scholar of digital media, where in his 2001 article,

'The Habermasian Public Sphere encounters Cyberreality', he was far more sceptical in stating that cyberspace (a term now anachronistic in denoting the realm of digital media) is useless to the conception of a public sphere. Perhaps on account of the rudimentary form in which digital media still appeared (where in 2001, the World Wide Web was the dominant and often exclusive sphere of digital communication for most people), he expressed hesitation in defining too closely the ways in which the internet altered the very form of social interaction, and how in time this must be taken into account by theory (2001:83). Yet Boeder (1995), in his even earlier study of the public sphere, asserted that the future of 'Habermas' coffeehouse discourse' was in the digital networks of the new 'network society' (a term routinely ascribed to Manuel Castells). He observed that the public sphere was always 'virtual' in the sense that as an entire entity the concept of 'public sphere' is, 'abstract in meaning' (1995: no pagination). Where more powerful power structures indeed exist, digital media offers a new capacity for instigating change. Digital public spheres make provision for a multiplicity in the communicative dimensions of a public sphere, and in Fraser's view, significant counter-public formations. For Calhoun, new social movements could be facilitated, while perhaps contrary to Habermas' bourgeois ideal of a coherent singular process of deliberation, the multiplicity could address so many different levels and layers of social and economic experience. In a slightly later article, Buchstein (1997), with some foresight, set down the potentialities of a digitally enhanced public sphere, which I adapt here:

- Resistance against authoritarianism
- Easy access – digital media, despite its heavily branded and commodified

operation in the marketplace, is a relatively inexpensive opportunity to generate content and communication (i.e. as compared to the spectrum of old media, such as TV, radio or print media).

- A critical public sphere – Individually initiated interaction through digital media subverts the traditional power structures embedded in old media by enhancing citizens' independence from large organisations, government agencies and big business. Digital media offers a realm of communications not dominated by 'spin doctors', advertising executives, and public relations managers

- Universal access – digital media to some degree redefines citizenship, in the sense that it is a medium in which people can communicate directly, quickly and reliably, and can further form distant, but diverse and cohesive political communities not bound by the nation state.

While acknowledging these characteristics, scholars continued to argue against viewing digital media as providing for a fully functioning public sphere. To Dean (in 2003), the notion of public sphere is damaged when applied to democracy. For the 'techno-culture' of late capitalism subjects actual change and development to a regime of information, generating a 'communicative capitalism' not amenable to democracy (Dean, 2003). Poster (2004) similarly observes that forces like the Internet serve to decentralise communication, and therefore 'the networked future might be different from what we have known'; for the internet is an entirely new medium and its effects on democracy cannot be predicted via historical precedent (Poster, 2004:online).

As Bohman (2004) puts it, the Internet becomes a public sphere only through agents who engage in reflexive and democratic activity, otherwise, it would become a mere aggregate of users operating on an endlessly variable and expansive realm of communications. For a public sphere, it would require subjects 'whose interactions exhibit features of dialogue and are concerned with its publicity' (Bohman, 2004:140). Similarly, the more contemporary Rheingold

(2012:1) asserts that the future of digital media depends on how well we learn to use that media, for while digital media in itself does not offer the full conditions for a public sphere, it is ‘dangerously nihilistic’ to dismiss it as ‘irredeemably destructive’ (2012:2). Against Poster’s scepticism (above: Poster 2004:online) there is no reason to assume that digital literacy cannot be as powerful in forming an informed and active public as other print-based literacies have done in the past. (Rheingold, 2012:3).

Culture, Technology and the Public Sphere

We live in an online, interconnected world. The public sphere, that realm of political talk and action between the state and society, burst out of the marketplace and coffee house long ago, but in recent years even the pages of newspapers and the broadcast media have been superseded. Now the public sphere is virtual, digital, and dispersed across billions of desktops, laptops, mobile phones, and PDAs. As a result, the public sphere is not just a bourgeois indulgence but a global phenomenon. (Parkinson, 2012: 1)

Digital media can be described as a range of cultural technologies. Communities of shared interests are built through the use of digital media tools, and in these spaces, cultures are generated. ‘Cyberspace offers a site of cultural production and expression...’ observes Bernal (2014: 171), and this is evident in how ‘connections may be created, intensified, and expanded’ among users. As a cultural artefact, the adoption of digital media technologies is expectedly not

homogenous across societies, rather it is appropriated in different ways by diverse populations (Bernal, 2014: 173). That is, how digital media (and what type) is adopted in Nigeria, would differ from the experience in the UK, as each society's culture is shaped by different factors and to varying degrees.

New digital media functions in diverse ways – from the mobile device, social network sites (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram etc.), games consoles, blogs, tablets, emails, and more – the hardware to the software. Interactive websites and service providers like Facebook or YouTube all 'encourage users to generate content, share it with each other, and comment on what their fellow users produce' (Swigger, 2012:2, Cf. Caers¹ et al (2013). In generating content and sharing with one another, users perform the following activities using digital media tools:

- Send and receive emails (individually or through mailing lists)
- Launch, read and comment on blogs
- Instant message, chat (interact) – (Blackberry messenger, Yahoo chat room, Skype etc.)
- Register profiles online and "follow" one another's updates online (on social networks, blogs, online games etc.)
- Set-up, join and participate in online discussion forums – e.g. Nairaland.

Digital media engenders a cultural dimension to mediated communication by virtue of a fundamental decentralization of the monopoly of the mass media, along with a personalization of the means of communication production, which in turn has made 'everyone a media outlet' (Shirky, 2008: 55). Individual

¹ Caers et al (2013) in their paper 'A Literature Review of Facebook, provide a detailed critical review of selected articles on the subject, between 2006 and 2012

spontaneity, extemporisation, technical learning, and social interaction, is intrinsic to digital media. If the mass media was once regarded as the provider of official, collective, culture (usually on behalf of the nation state) digital media is a means of cultural translation, adaptation and distribution. Where publishing once required a printing press and a limited distribution of tangible goods, an Internet user ‘has access to a platform that is at once global and free’ (Shirky, 2008: 77), and every other user has (potential) access to them. The classical economic categories of production, distribution and consumption have become problematized, given how with digital media they can refer to different dimensions of the same process (of using a cell phone, sending content, and so on). However, it is important to note that while binaries between new digital media and old media are useful in deconstructing how they differ from one another, both are also becoming more integrated in what Henry Jenkins calls a ‘convergence culture’.

In his book, *Convergence Culture - Where Old and New Media collide* (2008), Jenkins opens with a story about a boy, Dino Ignacio. This Filipino-American student sparked ‘an international controversy’ from his bedroom when his ‘photoshopped’ image of an American (fictional) character from the popular children’s TV show Sesame Street was combined with an image of terrorist mastermind Osama Bin Laden, attracting viewers in the Middle East, then captured by CNN news footage (Jenkins, 2008:1-2). Jenkins defines that event: ‘welcome to the convergence culture, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media

consumer interact in unpredictable ways' (2008: 2). So widespread is the adoption of digital media tools globally, that Burgess & Green (2009: 36) suggest that YouTube has achieved 'mainstream media' status simply by virtue of its 'reach' (what would have been called 'broadcasting'). This is the nature of convergence culture – it takes elements of old and new media, mashing it into a new cultural technology.

Papacharissi (2010) extends the notion of 'convergence', arguing that even though convergence is used to refer to a 'confluence of a variety of technologies', it is not a character 'exclusive to technology', neither is it 'characteristic of all technology' (2010: 53) She adds that the convergence of information technologies are a manifest form of social, cultural, political, and economic convergences, which enable and are enabled by technological convergence' Digital media spaces are sites of participatory culture. These participatory activities are embodied in the act of 'coming together', 'sharing', 'following', and general 'interaction' – all enabled by the architectures of digital media platforms. It is in this participation that the use of digital media promotes that the potential for a new digital public sphere is formed.

The notion that the truly new potentialities of digital media (in the present) is due to a fundamental evolution of processes of convergence, provokes us to consider all the ways in which the major characteristics of digital media resonate with the major requirements of the public sphere. The formation of a public sphere was itself (technology, institutions and organisations, gatherings and

dialogues) a gradual process of convergence, where the 'coming together' of various entities and personages generated new potentials for meaning, power and agency. At its most basic level, digital media is a sphere of common social intercourse through publicly available media communications technologies, featuring discussions and interactions over matters of common interest. But does this necessarily entail that digital media involves a 'formation of a knowledgeable citizenry capable of taking sustained interest in the governing process' (Held, 1997)?

Tufecki (2011), in an online essay, restated the observations of many, that the passive audience of traditional media – where the hierarchies of nation state social and economic organisation were reinforced – are barely visible in the realms of digital media. New digital media is not simply a range of communication channels, but is a social 'environment', with certain structural features, like a 'less hierarchical nature'. It therefore promotes a shift from a heavily stratified form of democracy to a participatory democracy, or at least more participatory forms of communication – 'decentering the very act of communicating' (Mudhai et al, 2009:3). For Fulya (2012: 490), new media are communication avenues that break away from the vertical and top-down structure of political activity to a situation where there is 'unlimited access to different voices and feedbacks between leaders and followers.' In the former situation, political decisions are made void of negotiation and input from the grassroots (Fulya, 2012: 490). Digital media, we could assume, engenders social convergence.

In the early stages of digital media research, McQuail (2000:152) had enumerated the following perceived benefits of the ‘Internet’ (benefits that directly related to the requirements of democratic polity):

- Interactivity as opposed to one-way flow.
- Co-presence of vertical and horizontal communication, promoting equality.
- Disintermediation, meaning a reduced role for journalism to mediate the relationship between citizen and politicians.
- Low costs for senders and receivers.
- Speed greater than traditional media.
- Absence of boundaries.

In an online essay, Tufecki (2011), a faculty associate at the Harvard Berkman Centre for Internet & Society, stated that ‘the Internet can improve the structure of the public sphere by providing a liberal virtual platform for discourse.’ Using Facebook as an object study, she argues that Facebook cultivates a networked public sphere through facilitating public discussion. It enables a form of interaction that can ‘monitor mass-media’s power’; and it ‘allows individuals and groups of intense political engagement’ to play roles that intersect with matters of public interest. She does not express ‘naive optimism’ as to democratising ‘effects’ of sites like Facebook, it nonetheless ‘has the potential to construct the transnational democratic public sphere.’ Tufecki ends her essay on this note: ‘through the regulation efforts of the institution authorities and the active contribution of citizens’, Facebook has the potential to surpass Habermas’ ‘expectations of a public sphere’ (Tufecki, 2011).

Interaction, engagement, the dissemination of information and an intersection with matters of public interest, all seem to be endemic within digital media, and scholars have noted this from the very beginning of digital media research. It is now commonplace for socially or politically marginalised groups to champion issues usually excluded from the mainstream public sphere, or to develop their own deliberative space to connect and subsequently contest dominant meanings and practices (Fulya, 2012: 490). Nevertheless, the Internet and its celebrated potentials are not without their own inhibiting factors or technological challenges. Some of the challenges Tufecki (2011) mentions with the potentiality of the net as a public sphere include: the Babel objection; centralisation online; the digital divide; and commercialisation.

The Babel objection holds that in a situation where everyone can speak, with too many points of view, there exists a ‘fragmentation of online discourse’ resulting in ‘no common ground for action’ (also in Benkler, 2006: 23). Marcus (2012, Online source) in a *Guardian UK* article on Twitter, describes the internet as an ‘echo chamber’, where people are not interested in ‘debate’ so much as social interaction with those who already share their views. Secondly, ‘the centralisation online’ refers to how only a portion of content on the Internet gets maximum attention, to the neglect of other potentially democracy-culture-building pages. In other words, ‘the normalisation of power and hierarchy structure’ is counterbalanced against this possibility, thus somewhat invalidating

the democratising promise of the Internet (Tufecki, 2011). The digital divide is the third challenge – a concept used to describe the gap that exists between those with access to information technology and those without. Lastly, the commercialised nature of the networked environment could lead to a ‘serious corruption’ of the openness and honesty of communication itself. Dahlberg referred to the commercialisation of the online sphere as ‘the corporate colonisation of the cyberspace’ (Dahlberg 2005: 90). Likewise, Papacharissi mentioned that ‘the Internet has gradually transitioned into an online-shopping mall and less of a deliberative space’, which in turn, she states, ‘influences the orientation of digital political information’ (Papacharissi 2010: 123)

On the other hand, it is empirically incontestable that in the last decade social media network sites (for instance) have been central to the activities of democratic social movements, and to that extent it is obvious how digital media are used presupposing their potential political impact. If we define social movements as groups that 'monitor and criticise the state and groups that take political action' (Fulya, 2012: 490), any cursory observational research can confirm how social activists garner attention, recruit members, construct an audience, coordinate activities and 'exchange best practices examples' (Fulya, 2012: 490). Patrick Meier (2011), in his PhD thesis on the subject of 'liberation technologies', cites an Egyptian activist: "we use Facebook to schedule our protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world" (Meier 2011: Abstract). Occupy Nigeria, another movement that sprang up in January 2012,

now has a Blackberry app that supporters can download – where participation is steadily structured and directed by the media application itself. To Fulya (2012:491-2), social media has the potential to form a public sphere for the spread of counter hegemonic discourses, that is, to 'mobilise public opinion outside the centralised authoritative state control.' (2012:491-2).

Papacharissi expands on the democratising potential of convergent technologies (2010): a greater 'access to information', provides increasingly active 'tools' that 'develop informed viewpoints and engage in substantive political discussions' (Papacharissi, 2010: 120). Reciprocity through digital media can transcend geographical boundaries and provide a degree of anonymity in interactions that is empowering to once-inhibited bearers of public opinion (Papacharissi, 2010: 121-2). As reciprocity 'implies a mutual exchange of opinion and information, where in the same advantages and privileges are granted and observed by all participants', online media makes for a suitable platform where citizens of democracies can connect (Papacharissi, 2010: 122).

For Bohman (2004: 133), digital media demands that we reconstruct our conception of communication in political-public contexts. While the Habermasian public sphere featured large fora for face-to-face communication (reciprocity) 'there are other ways to realise the public forum and its dialogical exchange in a more indirect and mediated manner, even while preserving and re-articulating the connection to democratic self-rule' (Bohman, 2004: 133). For Bohman, dialogue is significant in the public sphere, not only because it launches a

communicative exchange ‘in the form of turn-taking’, but it is equally guided by the ‘the mutual expectation of uptake’ – reciprocity as a political obligation.

For Bohman (2004), the Internet’s capacity to support a public sphere cannot be judged in terms of intrinsic features, that is, just the software and the hardware. Rather, the Internet is a public sphere only if agents make it so; if agents introduce institutional ‘software’ that constructs the context of communication’ (2004:132). In Bohman’s words: ‘the Internet becomes a public sphere only through agents who engage in reflexive and democratic activities...’ (2004: 140). Dahlberg’s approach to the problem of a digital public sphere is precisely from this vantage point – the necessity of an engaged, reflexive and dialogic activity that delivers content comparable to older forms of democratic deliberation (Dahlberg, 2011). His chosen context of evaluation is therefore *deliberative* democratic thought.

Dahlberg’s approach focuses on two areas: firstly, the extent and quality of rational deliberation in online spaces; and secondly, the identification of factors that ‘facilitate’ and ‘retard’ deliberation in those same spaces (2011). Factors that facilitate deliberation in digital communicative spaces include ‘the two-way, low-cost, user-friendly, pliable and readily moderated form of digital communication’ (Dahlberg 2011: 860). These factors are regarded as ‘affording information sharing, rational debate, and public opinion formation’ (Dahlberg, 2011: 860). On the other hand, given the ‘ever increasing colonisation of digital

communication systems by state and corporate interests', the extent and quality of rational deliberation in online spaces is called to question (*ibid.*) According to Dahlberg, research suggests that 'ideal deliberation can be closely approximated in online interactive spaces' that specifically aim at realising rational debate through 'effective rules of engagement, moderation systems, and interactive software tools' (2011: 860). It is now worth examining specific societies that have adopted digital media as part of their culture, and analysing how it has become a part of their democratic practice – in this case, Nigeria.

Conclusion: the Digital Public Sphere as an object of analysis

In this thesis, my emphasis will remain on the astonishing new communicative potential of digital media, it will also maintain a critical view of its capacity to supplant older forms of political organisation, mobilisation and participation. And while the very concept of 'social' shifts on its axis in the digital realm, the material conditions of social life still remain – the need for embodied, place-based association and a position in relation to the ownership of the means of production and broader economic structures of power.

To go forward from all that has been discussed above, from Habermas' conceptualisation of the public sphere, particularly on his understanding of the 'cultural public sphere' and cultural dimension of the public sphere, and then the critical claims of Habermas's interlocutors, to the extensive review of literature on the emergence of new digital media as a field of research & potential public

sphere, certain points are evident. There is a need to identify what characterises this potentially new digital public sphere, and I do this here by aligning it with the terms of the old conceptual construct (of Habermas) and its critical revisions (Calhoun, Fraser and Kellner). From the above narrative on the evolving concept of the public sphere, I here extrapolate five structural features that allow us to generate criteria for assessing the phenomenon of a new digital public sphere. These features are basic empirical characteristics from which I derive conceptual criteria. These structural features, or components, are evidently present in even Habermas's account of the bourgeois public sphere, if we involve his later observations on what I identified as the 'cultural public sphere' or cultural dimension of the public sphere. I assert that their significance is pragmatic, in that they allow us to organize and analyse the range of research material, along with the many observations and comments that emerge in my interview data. These components are:

- Media platforms and the spaces or places within which communication takes place.
- The techniques and protocols of communication.
- The persons, agents and agencies who communicate, or are instrumental in facilitating communication.
- The dialogue and issues that are the 'content' of communication.
- The aims, impacts or interventions undertaken by such communication.

These 'components' are basic empirical observation. Here below, I adapt them

for a digital media sphere, to which I add the clarifications and questions that in turn will generate criteria for my investigation.

- *New media platforms/spaces* – these provide socially accessible mechanisms of information dissemination, and the emergence, use and adaptation of new technologies within particular social contexts, spaces and places. Furthermore, these new platforms and spaces generate new cognitive horizons and a power of imagination. They do this through extending the social capabilities of the media (facilitate leisure and cultural life, for example).
- *Communication techniques* – new media requires new cultural (or creative) production methods (particularly before it becomes absorbed into the main broadcasting apparatus or corporate infrastructure). This generates new styles and means of address, and the capacity for communication literacies. With mobile and cheap media devices this can take place evading social divisions (gender; class, and so on).
- *Agents and agencies* – we need to consider the role of the individual, group allegiances and the social formation of movements; this also involves considering organizational formations and the role of institutions in the evolution of a public sphere. The historical narratives or political demands of nationhood and the nation state, particularly with regard to its social order (values, identity, allegiances), is internal to this.
- *Dialogue and issues* – this involves the content of communication and

character of dialogic interchange, of the issues and ideas that so often motivate and animate such interchange. The public sphere, once rooted in discussions of various ‘interests’, now features more critical (and ethical) deliberations on the nature of the state itself, and the integrity of its members, its management and administration, as well as its decisions.

- *Impact and intervention* – the actual ‘change’ or result (tangible or intangible, personal or political) that may emerge forms the very rationale of a public sphere. This involves forms of solidarity and collective allegiances, and indicate multiple overlapping public spheres. Where the collapse of a categorical separation of private and public, and where actors and agencies have no intrinsic function in state decision-making processes, the state can nonetheless be subject to pressure, where change is stimulated through the presence of agents and agencies as ‘counterpublics’.

These basic components and their elaboration as descriptive criteria have simply been extrapolated from our critical discussion on Habermas, Calhoun, Fraser and Kellner, and of course possess a basic (if obvious) empirical dimension. However, elaborating on these components with issues and questions, as I have done above, allows us to generate criteria that are used to investigate the various dimensions of a public sphere that is in the process of emerging, or is not fully formed. These components above will be used to structure a systematic investigation (notably, our data presentation chapters,

Chapter Eight and Chapter Nine). The 'criteria' they generate will not be used systematically, but will appear through my analysis as required.

A major claim in this thesis is that in Nigeria, while there exists state broadcast media, the press and news, various professional associations and political agencies lobbying the government – the apparatus one normally associates with a 'public sphere' – there is a marked absence in the above criteria. There is a marked absence in the criteria of the development of the literacies required for mature communication, of imagination and creativity, of the organizational formation of new enterprises in response to new needs or crises, of reflexive dialogue and a deliberation informed by objective information; and a lack of actual agencies of change.

My central argument in this thesis is that it is within the landscape of digital media that we can locate the criteria (and thus evolving conditions for) a dynamic and fully developed public sphere. This emerging public sphere I define as a 'culture' of democracy, because it is not defined by established, uniform, systematic or corporate processes and organisations. It is more random, spontaneous, improvised, socially dynamic, and as Habermas's observations on the cultural public sphere, emerges from personal, individual, local, sometimes domestic sometimes leisure spaces, and other times through enterprising individuals, social interaction and reaction to social issues and conditions, imaginative and part of expressive behaviours. It involves experience and

emotion, as well as social identities and perceived injustices or general issues of public concern. It involves individual styles of expression and communication, as well as device-mediated general messages. And as Habermas noted of the ‘literary public sphere’ of letters – such communications, while rooted in personal and individual experience or motivation, transcend the realm of self-interest or the interests that characterize civil society. Personal and individual experience or motivation is, rather, reflected on using assumptions about ethics, what is right or just, that is ‘human’ and universal in the particular. The new evolving (or ‘embryonic’, as I say later) public sphere in Nigeria, is made possible by new digital media, and is not institutionalized in any way – it can only be described as a ‘culture’ of democracy, which is distinct in its fundamental characteristics from the democratic system of the Federal Republic. In Section Two I will make this distinction and contrast clear with an historical account of the development of the political system in Nigeria.

I will therefore investigate what new media platforms are central to public sphere activities in Nigeria, and through what techniques and strategies is democratic communication made more effective. In addition, in Section Three, I will identify who (“who” being individuals and organisations) are significant contributors to the Nigerian digital public sphere. This thesis will also consider the nature of dialogue in the Nigerian digital public sphere, and analyse the issues that arise from the so-called democratic deliberation by digital media users. The element of impact and intervention becomes useful in articulating in precise terms the

effect of the influx of digital media into Nigeria, and the subsequent uptake for democratic purposes, on the polity.

Section One: Chapter Four

Deliberating Africa

Introduction

In the previous three chapters, I attempted to establish the central terms, concepts, insights and issues that form the analytical trajectory of this thesis. In discussing Habermas' theory of the public sphere through Fraser, Calhoun, and Kellner, I reaffirmed a commitment to both the basic terms of Habermas's historical and critical framework, extending it through his observations on 'culture', while at the same time appreciating the importance of a revision and expansion of terms in response to more recent social, political and technological developments. This chapter proceeds to provide an analytical description of new communicative technology as it has impacted Africa, and generates the empirical basis on which we can assert, along the lines of Kellner, a technologically enhanced public realm of communication. Where for Kellner's theoretical development, TV and radio were central, for us it is digital and social media. How do the new communication media function as technology, culture, and public sphere? I construct an interconnection between digital media (its technical and discursive functions), democratic culture and the public sphere.

In this chapter, I address the concept of the public sphere in Nigeria, Africa, keeping the citizens in Diaspora in perspective. The digital public sphere, unlike

its predecessor, has the capacity to traverse geographical boundaries with immediacy, hence, its impact on national politics and otherwise, in various African polities cannot be ignored in this thesis. In this chapter, I also highlight, using existing literature, the challenges for a digital public sphere to serve as a facilitator of democratic culture in Africa. This is followed by a passage on existing digital media research on Africa, and methods adopted thus far.

Deliberating Africa with its Diaspora

According to Katz and Rice (2004), democratic participation online can be realised through the following digitally mediated political activities: (i) online political browsing and (ii) online political interaction.

- *Online political browsing involves:*
 - Reading bulletin boards or discussion groups.
 - Visiting websites with political information.
 - Following elections online.
 - Viewing information online after the election.
- *Online political interaction involves:*
 - Participating in electronic discussions.
 - Receiving email concerning the election.
 - Sending and receiving email to or from a government official, candidate for office, or political campaign committee.
 - Sending email to others concerning the election.

This list could be updated with other online activities such as reading and blogging about political issues, and sharing links to political content among an individual's social network. Mudhai (2009: 28-9) provides detailed examples on how specific countries in Africa have incorporated digital media into their socio-

practices:

E-information

- Congo, Egypt and Togo use email to update their citizens.
- Togo uses RSS Feeds to involve and update citizens.

E-Consultation

- Botswana employs interactive methods to solicit citizen opinion, feedback and input (online channels, informal polls, bulletin boards, chat rooms/instant messaging) and formal online consultation.
- Botswana, Cameroon, Congo, Cameroon, Mauritania and Mozambique are some of the countries that use open web.
- Mozambique is listed as the only African country that publishes findings/results of citizen opinion, including e-opinions on websites.

African diasporas is an important dimension of the African digital public sphere that should not be neglected in this section. In Zimbabwe for instance, an 'exponential' increase in websites offering Zimbabweans interactive spaces, was attributed to the rise of digital media – which in turn can be credited to the Zimbabweans living in Diaspora (Last, 2009: 60). Diaspora communities have established multiple online public spheres where citizens, both home and abroad can, 'discuss politics or listen to the news...[where the] main agenda is usually Zimbabwe politics' (Last, 2009: 60). In Kperogi's (2011) doctoral thesis on the citizen journalism of the Nigerian diaspora he examines some major diaspora online citizen media outlets and identifies points where these citizen media sites, though located outside the Nigerian geographical territory, managed to shape and influence both national politics, policies of the homeland, and the media practices of the domestic media formation.' Examples of the

Nigerian citizen news sites he studies include *Elendu Reports*, *Sahara Reporters*, and *Nigerian Village Square*, to mention a few.

In 2014, Victoria Bernal, a professor of Anthropology, conducted an ethnographic study of Eritreans in diaspora and how they engage with national politics from outside the nation – that is, remain active citizens. Her study revealed that relations of citizenship and sovereignty which were once rooted in national territory, now increasingly span borders; secondly, that 'social contracts between citizens and states are being constructed and contested in new political context and spaces' (Bernal, 2014: 1-2). In essence, her argument is that the Internet is 'allowing for the creation of an elastic political space that can serve to extend as well as to expose the limits of territorial sovereignty' (Bernal, 2014: 2). She conducted this study through a content analysis of specific Eritrean websites. Although this thesis is not focused on the equivalent, the Nigerian Diaspora, it is still important to acknowledge that it is the nature of the digital public sphere to admit participants who are not necessarily geographically located within the national territory of the State under discussion. Their links to the state, however, such as citizenship, grants them entry into the public sphere. Hence, the Nigerian digital public sphere is not limited to active digital media users in Nigeria who engage in rational critical dialogue - it includes the Diaspora, and any user with vested interest in matters of common concern to members of the Nigerian state.

Strategic institutions in Zimbabwe such as news media, government and political

parties, among others, now possess 'new digital public spaces' due to the increasing adoption of the Internet. These institutions are thus provided with new channels for four new media specialisations: Public communication; Information production; Information packaging; and Information dissemination.

According to Last (2009: 58), Zimbabwe has a 'relatively good' telecommunication infrastructure, which has made it a part of the 'global information society' and as such, served as a foundation for democracy. Zimbabwe's authoritarian and repressive political environment is a key motivation behind the growth of the Internet and its digital public spheres: 'public spheres for free expression and political debate now find expression more through the new ICTs...' and the Zimbabwean government is aware of this (Last, 2009: 60). The optimism for the growth of digital democracy in Zimbabwe is reliant on how many people actually have access to the technology, and the following spaces are the access points for those who use the Internet to promote democracy in Zimbabwe: cyber cafes, public libraries, several public and private colleges, and other civil society organisations. For Last (2009:67), Zimbabwe's digital public spheres operate by conducting the following activities:

(i) civil society actors using the Internet to lobby elected representatives, public officials and policy elites; (ii) using the Internet to network with related associations and organisations; (iii) using the Internet to mobilise organisers, and members through action alerts and emails (Last, 2009:67). (See more on

social media uptake in Zimbabwe Mpofu (2013)¹).

Similar activities can be observed in Nigeria: In January 2012, Nigerians took to the streets to protest a sudden rise in fuel pump price; the protest was mobilised and directed through Twitter. Another example is the Twitter Town Hall meeting with former Nigerian Minister of Youth, Bolaji Abudlahi, engaging Nigerian youths on current issues (Olawale, 2011). Other examples are apps for democracy designed by citizens, for example, Revoda*, Occupy Nigeria for Blackberry*, Budgit*, to mention a few. The online sphere has also been used for civic interventions, such as fund raising for a fellow citizen's medical condition. Examples of such campaigns on Twitter were the Save Oke hash tag, Save Funke (breast cancer); and when the Dana Air crashed on June 3rd, 2012, over a residential area, Twitter was used to mobilise offline donations for victims of the crash who had been rendered homeless.

However, there remain basic challenges for a Digital Public Sphere as facilitator of democratic culture in Africa, which must be noted at the outset. First, as mentioned above, the so-called 'digital divide'. In any discussion on technology and Africa, the challenge of the digital divide is often mentioned. There exists an emphatic imbalance in communication capacity, in terms of education, gender, class, ethnicity, income, and education (Macnamara et al, 2012: 625; McQuail 2000: 157), and this is exacerbated by irregular levels of physical access to

¹ Mpofu (2013) carried out a study on social media and ethnicity in Zimbabwe using three opinion articles. He arrived at the conclusion that 'social media has enabled the expression of both popular and unpopular constructions of identity and belonging' (2013:119).

technology and its networks. Even for those who use public access points such as cyber cafes, their engagement in the digital public sphere remains limited (Last, 2009:69) because of generally poor and unreliable levels of telecommunication infrastructure. Low Internet usage in turn results in lower levels of political engagement online, which in turn makes an impact on the intensity, breadth and quality of political engagement online (Mudhai et al, 2009: 2). The language² and literacy barrier is a part of this conundrum of problems, for at every level we may encounter limitations in the indigenous, regional or national capacity for pan-public communication, not least in the face of the undeniable cultural issue concerning the symbolic domination of 'Western knowledge' by the linguistic systems and structures of Western software, applications and platforms, giving the popular impression that 'African knowledge is under represented' or in fact devalued (Frere & Kiyindou, 2009: 80).

A second challenge is the way digital and online media are predominantly *entertainment-oriented media*. Popular tools such as the blogs and social network sites most common, well-known, and most frequented by citizens, are entertainment-oriented. These sites and platforms do indeed encourage and facilitate discussion and participation of many kinds, and yet the character of this ensuing discourse is for most critical observers not politically engaging. To

² Barro (2010) has published a paper addressing trans-border languages in Africa and assesses their potential for fostering a trans-national public sphere (albeit not digital) in the continent. It is his conclusion that the notion of a transnational African public sphere is far-fetched based on certain factors, but the potential very much exists.

Macnamara et al (2012: 630), political discussions on digital media rarely meet the criteria of the public sphere, even when they are politically engaging (as on specific political issues). The dominance of an entertainment-based digital media in the lives of citizens does not cultivate the political literacy required for public sphere deliberations, Macnamara et al (2012: 630) argue. Rather, these interchanges are mostly informal, frank, colloquial, satirical, sometimes emotional, occasionally heated and less rational and objective, and so on. Yet as a counter to Macnamara's important observation is Ogola, Schumann and Olatunji's (2009:204) observations that popular music, for example, is often satirical and informal in its standards of rhetoric, but is a potentially powerful alternative platform for social and political engagement in Africa. This observation could be particularly relevant in Nigeria, where the satirical and sometimes humorous music by Fela Anikulapo-Kuti has in the past generated political discussions. In the 1970s and 1980s, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti was even jailed for using his 'politically charged lyrics to criticise Nigeria's military government', as Fela's music 'exposes abuses in Nigeria' (Amnesty International, 2010: online). Other examples of music with public impact includes the work of Mariam Makeba (also known as Mama Africa – spokeswoman against apartheid), Eldee's song 'One Day'³ (2010) and Nneka's 'Vagabonds in Power'⁴

³ Eldee is a Nigerian musician who released the song *One Day* in 2010. The lyrics of the song, *one day e go better* [Nigerian “pidgin” English for “it will be better”] articulates society’s dissatisfaction with the state of the nation. Phrases from the lyrics include “one day...money go circulate, light go dey...” [one day money will reach the masses and there will be power supply].

⁴ Nneka is a German-Nigerian musician who also released a song Vagabonds in Power, is similar to Eldee’s message. Excerpts from her lyrics include: “As you dey

(2012). The argument concerning 'criteria' on public sphere deliberation therefore requires much more research into informal and popular (particularly entertainment or artistic) discourses and their actual and potential impacts.

Thirdly, we must consider the recurring issue within digital media on *audience fragmentation*. Traditional media had at its disposal, a mass audience, with whom nothing significant competed for their attention; for digital media on the other hand, 'many sites struggle to gain audience of any significant size ' (Macnamara et al, 2002: 626). Hence, the audience is fragmented, and as such, any democratic impact intended through the use of digital media requires great effort to build the necessary audience for such democratic messages.

In relation to this is the way that small, fringe and extremist groups can more easily gain power and influence over public debate, raising the challenge of a dystopian new media landscape always attracting (and tacitly justifying) repressive new media regulation. Digital media is equally as open to non-democratic purposes as democratic. New media technology constitutes a realm of effective spying technologies and devices (by both repressive and non-repressive governments), tracking the behaviour of citizens. As Maduka puts it, 'it is left for governments to employ these new devices in the defence and promotion of democracy' (1999:210). In the U.S., central government is 'expanding a cyber security program that scans Internet traffic headed into and

torture me so...dey make my pikin dey suffa...na only rich man dey gain..." [as you torture me, make my children suffer, only the rich profit...]

out of defence contractors to include far more of the country's private, civilian-run infrastructure' (Menn & Charles, 2013:online). The new landscape of surveillance, detection and monitoring in otherwise democratic countries remains an open question for researchers, where the political and public impacts of such remain undecided. It also raises a question concerning the proximity of state power to a putative digital public sphere, and how a digitally mediated public sphere, while more effective in terms of some of its democratic attributes, remains an open field of government and security surveillance, intrusion and possible intimidation.

Fourth, given the uncertain outcomes, impact, and the porous or at least indeterminate boundaries of a digitally mediated public realm, there remains an ambivalence on new media technology on the part of political leaders throughout Africa. It 'is viewed as portending major political, economic, social and cultural "catastrophes" by the African ruling elite' (Uche 1999: 197). In a Nigerian daily newspaper, the *Daily Independent*, Shittu (2012) published a story on David Mark, the Senate President's reaction to social media use in Nigeria. According to Shittu (2012) Mark called for 'measures to check the negative tendencies of the social media,' as it 'has become a threat to ethics of media practice and good governance because of its accessibility and absolute freedom' (Shittu, 2012: online source) In another vein of a politician who was (initially) willing to engage on new media, Helen Zille, South Africa politician, disclosed her perception of social media (Twitter) in a video interview on Mail & Guardian Online (2012). In her words, 'because of the 140 character limit, you have to find

very constrained or concise ways of saying things; and if people are always looking how they can catch you out, how they can abuse what you are saying in the context that you didn't intend, then of course it (Twitter) is rife, rife with dangers for any politician' (Helen Zille, South African politician, in an online video, 2012). However, there is also a political impulse, less articulated – where digital media might exacerbate social divisions: Frere and Kiyindou (2009: 85) assert that the 'Internet will reinforce the interests of the well-connected living in the cities, while most of the population turn their back on political participation' Frere and Kiyindou (2009: 85).

Towards a putative digital public sphere in Africa we need to be mindful of these open-ended challenges. While this thesis will be arguing for the democratic potential of digital media, I concur with Mudhai in stating that 'Africans need to strike a cautionary note about the supposed emancipatory nature of new media' (Mudhai et al, 2009:17). The digital public sphere is gradually emerging across Africa, and particularly in one of its most industrially-developed the country of Nigeria. Yet the more this emergence unfolds, the more we can witness the necessary socio-cultural, political and economic conditions of a properly functioning public sphere. A critical approach is therefore central to an objective assessment of the potentials of digital media in facilitating the development of a 'democratic culture'. I will now consider the various methodological challenges for the researcher of this new digital media landscape, citing what I judge to be specific examples of significant research in the field, a few of which were mentioned above.

Digital media research and Africa

In the field of digital media research, what are the specific achievements (and methodological challenges) for the researcher? Every subject proclaiming itself to offer an insight into a 'new' phenomenon must confront the primary issue of methods and the means by which the 'new' is identified and assessed. In this section I consider examples of research that allow us to expand the theoretical reach of our basic theory of the public sphere, while also increasing our critical consciousness of the challenges of proposing digital media as a new facilitator of a 'culture of democracy' aiming for a fully functioning public sphere. The research that was particularly significant to the development of the field and thus this thesis were as follows: Valtysson (2012), on Facebook as a digital public sphere; Meier (2011) on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) as 'liberation technologies' in repressive states; Mudhai and Nyabuga (2009), on the use of new media by key political parties in Kenya's 2007 presidential elections; Last on the repression, propaganda and digital resistance in Zimbabwe (2009), and the 'blogging down a dictator' through citizen journalism (2011); Meier's (2011) examination of the use of 'liberation' technologies by civil society and its relationship with repressive rule; and Kperogi (2011) on citizen journalism in Nigeria, driven by the 'digital diaspora'.

Valtysson's (2012) innovative study on Facebook as a communicative space offers us some further issues concerning the challenge of a digitally mediated public sphere. Facebook is a socially embedded 'communicative environment',

and thus for Valtysson offers us insights into communicative behaviours and capabilities relevant for considering a putative public sphere. More specifically, he attempts to disabuse us of the notion that 'media' is a mere conduit for communication – but has the power to affect a 'colonising mediation of the life world' (Valtysson 2012:89). His objectives were thus to identify the processes of 'colonisation' and 'emancipation' at work in this social network of evolving communication behaviours, determining the conditions for a properly 'social' communication per se. Valtysson (2012) focused on 'user terms', 'user manoeuver', 'privacy/data use policy' and 'ownership and use of uploaded material', and thus observed how Facebook as a technology is formed around a series of control mechanisms on the usage preferences, motivations and perceptions of consumers. His research was based in Denmark (not Africa) and his methods were qualitative in-depth interviews and subject observation. His in-depth interviews featured respondents between the ages of 20 and 25 years, where at the time Danish statistics on the use of social media identified this age grouping as dominant. The seven interviewees also allowed Valtysson to observe them using Facebook via video recording, during which they verbalised the purpose of each action they conducted on their profiles (2012: 78). The researcher is able to compare data gathered from the interviews (verbalised) with that from the observation (actual use).

Of relevance to this thesis is the means by which the interviewees were selected. Valtysson used the 'snowball-sampling' technique, where this non-probability technique involves initially selected member(s) of the sample identifying other

potential relevant members of the sample to the researcher for inclusion. It is particularly applicable in situations where the research subject is of sensitive nature (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981: 141), though in Valtysson's study, this does not seem to be the case. This nonetheless serves to indicate a fundamental challenge for media research – identifying subjects and using specific data on their digitally mediated behaviour: what strict criteria on sampling can be used with such an open-ended subject? And how can 'digitally mediated behaviour' be assessed without prior knowledge of these subject's non- digitally mediated behaviour? Making general observations on such specific data is indeed a methodological issue.

The findings of Valtysson's study were, however, made specific by his theoretical terms 'colonisation' and 'emancipation'. This might indeed seem prescriptive, given the specific provenance of these terms (it is doubtful whether consumers would operate with such terms) yet made specific his potential generalisations. The interviewees did not perceive Facebook's communicative environment as 'colonising', or micro-managing their communication with another agenda; rather, it was seen as 'an emancipative media environment' (2012:85). While the interviewees were aware of (what were, for Valtysson) the colonisation processes in Facebook usage (privacy policies, the use of data for commercial purposes, and so on), these processes were not regarded by the users as being of equal importance to the emancipative processes (Valtysson, 2012: 85). Their principal uses of Facebook were communication with friends, maintaining friendships, organising social meetings or events, networking,

looking at pictures, and the said colonising processes were not explicitly identified as being internal to these. None of the interviewees claimed to use Facebook for political purposes (Valtysson, 2012: 77 & 86), on which Valtysson suggested that Facebook as a political tool '...generates irritation, rather than deliberation – associated with spam, rather than serious involvement' (2012: 89). His paper concludes with a question rather than a substantive argument: 'the question remains whether it is fit to maintain that Facebook represents a colonising mediation of the life world – when users do not perceive it as such?'. Yet, he suggests, '...such concealed, devious colonisation is usually the most powerful one, as people only realise its mechanism and its consequence when it is too late' (Valtysson 2012:89).

Valtysson's conclusion offers a salutary and balanced viewpoint on digital media per se: it suggests that one be skeptical in perceptions of digital media (here, Facebook) as while forms of social communication are indeed cultivated, certain processes of control (colonisation) remain increasingly at work subtly exerting power over users. His study does not enlighten us to Danish cultural and political realities, nor the intrinsic socio-cultural limitations of the snowball sampling technique, but it nonetheless remains relevant to us here. In African societies the penetration of Facebook usage is considerable, and the social-media assisted protests in North Africa (Libya, Egypt etc.), might warrant further research on its supposed a-political character.

Patrick Meier published his pioneering doctoral thesis in 2011, which focused on

the use of ICT throughout civil society with a view to challenging repressive political rulership. He referred to these ICTs as 'liberation technologies', and used 'mixed-methods' in his research, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. The first part of his thesis contains 'a large-N econometric analysis to test whether 'liberation technologies' are statistically significant predictor of anti-government protests in countries with repressive regimes' (a link between the use of Internet and mobile phones and the frequency of protests). The second part of Meier's (2011) thesis assesses the impact of "liberation technologies" during the Egyptian Parliamentary Elections and Sudanese Presidential Elections of 2010, through qualitative comparative analysis, using the case studies of both countries. Meier's object of analysis was predominantly Ushahidi (Swahili for "testimony" or "witness"), a ubiquitous open-source software that enables users' crowd sourced crisis information to be sent via mobile. Meier (2011) conducted a descriptive analysis, 'process tracing' and semi-structured interviews, for each of the case studies. The significance of interviews – in terms of their unique penetration into the activity of disparate, semi-organised or partially concealed processes of public debate or political action – is underscored by Meier's study.

Another scholar, Last Moyo conducted two important studies on the digital public sphere in Zimbabwe. In 2009, Moyo examined repression, propaganda and digital resistance in Zimbabwe's democracy through new media usage. Where the main objects of his research were the news websites Newsnet

(mainstream news site), Kubutana and New Zimbabwean dot com (alternative news sites). His main objectives were to trace the development of the Internet and various forms of digital interaction and information-sharing occasioned by the new medium in Zimbabwe, and to draw some inferences about their contribution to the structural and substantive elements of digital democracy in Zimbabwe.

Last positioned his study within public sphere theory and Nancy Fraser's counter-public sphere theory (2009: 58, 65), and in analysing the news websites, Last conducted a content analysis using critical discourse analysis. His findings reveal that for Newsnet (the mainstream news website), news is framed within a nationalistic discourse based on other constructed myths of patriotism and heroism. On Kubatana, like Newsnet, Last (2009: 65) explains that the news site seems to construct the human rights discourse in the binary divisions of "good" versus "evil", and has hyperlinks to about three hundred and sixty civil society websites that specialise in democracy, human rights, elections, media, citizenship etc. New Zimbabwe.com also has 'a vibrant discussion forum where participants from different parts of the world discuss politics and other issues pertaining to Zimbabwe... public officials have been invited to answer participants' questions in the forums, thus demonstrating digital democracy in action' (2009: 68). According to Last (2009: 69), analysis of the websites depicts that Internet usage rests mostly in the hands of the 'powerful in society, where state and donor-funded elite institutions consciously or unconsciously use it to promote discourses that revolve around their own interests' (Last, 2009: 68).

However, his argument succinctly put is that, the Internet has gone beyond expanding the form of Zimbabwe's public sphere and pushing its physical boundaries by offering opportunities to Zimbabwean diaspora to participate, but also 'through new multimodal narrative techniques brought about by multimedia convergence' (2009: 68).

In a more recent study, Last Moyo focuses once again on Zimbabwe but this time on the act of communication through blogging within the frame of alternative media and citizen journalism. The object of his study was Kubatana blogs, revealing how they were used in mediating the experience of citizens during a violent election in Zimbabwe. Through his examination, he revealed ways in which political crisis motivated new means of disseminating and sharing information, and the generation of people's 'narratives of the crisis'.

In terms of method, twelve bloggers were randomly selected from an initial sample population, of which in the event only five were willing to be interviewed. From in-depth interviews were extracted narrative accounts of how '...blogging was constructed and perceived through their experiences, accounts and interpretation' (Last, 2011: 750). A more detailed Critical Discourse Analysis was then employed in analysing both the interview data and the 'news' texts produced by the Kubatana bloggers, 'to gauge the extent to which they articulated the social and political struggles' (Last, 2011: 750). The eventual findings reveal that the content on the Kubatana blogs depict the important role Internet and citizen journalism played in 'mediating the crisis' and 'exposing

human suffering during the run-off election'. Also, the Kubatana blogosphere represents a practical demonstration of how the Internet (as an alternative medium and citizen journalism tool) serves as a 'counter-hegemonic' space where people practice the right to communicate (Last, 2011: 754). According to Last (2011: 445), as reflected by Kubatana's bloggers, the 'capacity to envision alternative social and political orders outside the neoliberal framework' is lacking in alternative media. He contends that this is partially due to the 'political economy of both blogging as a social practice and alternative media as subaltern spaces' (Last, 2011: 745).

Both of Last's studies (2009 & 2011) express the significant role of digital media in mediating democracy in less democratic states. As found with Vallysson (2012) and Meier (2011), interviews once again surface as the research data gathering tool. Critical Discourse analysis is another recurring method in both of Last's studies, which perhaps indicates the centrality and significance of certain recurring phrases or key concepts. It is a matter of general observation that digital media demands a certain compression of available vocabulary, and given the limited time and space, and the need for rapid intelligibility, the generation of common terms of reference, phrases and concepts emerge.

Turning to Mudhai and Nyabuga (2009) on Africa's digital public sphere, the focus of attention shifts to the use of new media technologies by political parties in mediating the presidential elections in Kenya in 2007. Mostly regarding the Internet and other platforms such as cellular telephony and short-messaging

service (SMS), Mudhai and Nyabuga's aim was to account for significant change in the uses of new media compared to 'traditional' forms of media by political actors (Mudhai and Nyabuga 2009:43).

Largely attending to the websites of political parties' websites, and their use of interactive and feedback facilities, email address availability and/or physical address and phone number availability, Mudhai and Nyabuga found that digital media was in this case not offering forms of communication that encouraged participation or active involvement. Rather, most websites had no feedback facilities, and evaded direct communication. New media, they deduce '...can also reinforce the positions of those in power' due to the limitations of the technology and 'manipulability by scheming human agents' (2009: 41). Their general argument is that new media cannot engender political interest and activity on its own; there needs to be a 'significant shift in political structures, behaviour, and culture', to make the spectrum of political spaces more accessible and and inclusive (2009:52).

My final example is Kperogi's doctoral thesis from Georgia State University, U.S., published in 2011. It examines the influence of citizen journalism practiced by Nigerians in diaspora, on Nigeria's public sphere. The theoretical approaches framing his study are, alternative media, deliberative democracy and public sphere theory. Kperogi's research aim was to understand how specific citizen journalists (resident in the diaspora) influence the politics of the homeland (if at all). To achieve this he employed in-depth case study research of various

diaspora groups and their concerns, and the means and media by which they articulated these concerns through a 'flowering' citizen and alternative online journalism throughout the Nigerian diasporic public sphere (located primarily in the U.S.). In summary, his findings are instructive: he revealed examples of online sites and participants that were evidence of an increasingly vocal, politically educated, concerned and skilled diaspora concerned about their homeland. This new trans-national citizen media was 'actuated and propelled' by six underlying factors:

- The dearth of a truly critical press tradition in Nigeria (along with the absence of an independent media accountability, like a 'watchdog' agency).
- The undeveloped state of Internet news mediation.
- The comparative richness and reliability of diaspora online media – and how Nigeria-based sources trust them.
- The geographical distance of diaspora citizen journalists – ensuring anonymity and protection from the routine pressures facing home journalists (into revealing sources, and so on).

From the cited studies in this above section, it is evident that citizen journalism (alternative media), social movements, protests, blogging (freedom of speech), and other uses of new digital media tools etc. seem to be promising to extend the most salient components of a properly functioning democracy. However, new digital media is still open to abuse by state powers, in as much as it evidently equally empowers citizens.

It is clear that even though a 'culture' of democracy can be stimulated by new

media of communication, a public sphere cannot be developed without certain levels of political engagement, irrespective of the tools available to them. This involves both the content of the communication (deriving from substantive dialogue and reliable flow of information) along with responsive socio-economic structures able to change (both of state and civil society). Since Habermas, along with the changes in western nation state media and society since the early 1960s, it is doubtful that one model of a public sphere and its construction is possible. There are socio-cultural (religion inclusive), economic and political factors that influence how well or not a digital public sphere would thrive in a particular society. In Africa, a continent of fifty-four globally recognised countries, there are different 'democratic realities'. That is, each country is faced with peculiar challenges to their democracies, and there is no across-board strategy to be developed in tackling the democracy challenge in Africa. In the history of Nigeria's democracy, her politics and parties were divided along ethnic lines right from the period of independence from colonial powers (Dare, 2000: 19). Hence, ethnicity is a strong factor to consider in building democratic culture in the Nigerian society, despite the digital media tools that could be used to foster the culture. In another African country, ethnicity may not have such a strong influence on their democracy; rather it could be a stronghold dictatorship.

Conclusion

In this chapter I addressed the core of Habermas' concept of the public sphere – the communications, deliberations and debates, in our case between Africa and her citizens in Diaspora. This featured an account of the relevant issues and

'content' of the communications, along with observations on the research and theorization of such by scholars. I called attention to the challenges Africa faces presently, in terms of building and strengthening a digital public sphere, which may serve as a facilitator of democratic culture on the continent. The chapter ended where I interrogated digital media research in Africa, identifying what tools and methods have been used, partly to understand how we have arrived at our understanding of the DPS in Africa to date, in turn informing the methods I may adopt later on in the thesis. The next chapter will account for the evolution of the political system in Nigeria, and the significance of this for our understanding of a putative 'culture' of democracy and a fully developed public sphere.

Section Two: Chapter Five

Nigerian Media, and Politics

Introduction

This chapter will offer an instructive outline featuring key detail on the evolution of the political system in Nigeria, the technologies that facilitate the ill-fated national public sphere, from the introduction of the printing press to Nigeria in the 1800s to new information technologies, along with observations on the country's social structure and concomitant changes in political behaviour. The first section opens with an overview of the development of traditional media in Nigeria and the influence it wields on the public sphere, from the first newspaper publication, *Iwe-Iroyin*, to present-day journalism practice involving newer media like YouTube, social network sites, to mention a few. This is then followed by a description of the normative frameworks within which this public sphere operates. That is, how do the economic, social and state-legal systems affect the public sphere in the country (especially via the media)? Are there any existing laws guiding how the public sphere operates in the Nigeria, media laws, policies and so forth? This chapter concludes with a mention of the influx of digital media devices into the markets, homes, offices, and spaces of association within Nigerian society, and the changes in how the dynamics between how the people relate with traditional mass media, and convey public opinion may have been altered. This is considered in more detail in the following chapter entitled, 'Digitalising Nigeria'.

Colonialism, National Statehood and the emergence of National Media

The introduction of the printing press into Nigeria is entwined with the recent history of religion and of political struggle. The profession of journalism arrived in Nigeria in 1859 largely through the influence of the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) under the leadership of Reverend Henry Townsend. While the influence of the Church of England on the changing culture of British colonies is a subject of vast interest, Townsend was specifically keen on promoting literacy in Nigeria. Duyile thus describes the introduction of the newspaper to Nigeria as being by 'the sole effort of a Missionary gentleman...' (1987: 2). A letter by Townsend to the home offices of CMS read, 'I have set on a foot a Yoruba newspaper...my objective is to get the people to read...to beget the habit of getting information by reading' (Kperogi, 2013: 4).

Although, earlier attempts at using the printing press had been made in Nigeria in 1846 by Reverend Hope Waddel, a clergyman of the Church of Scotland, his efforts were not directed at wide-dissemination newspaper publishing (Duyile, 1987: 2-3). Townsend's paper, *Iwe Iroyin*, however, was intentionally pervasive. Essentially a religious newspaper, it quickly gained a political dimension as Reverend Henry Townsend was inclined to challenge the colonial authority at the same time as publishing religious news. As Idowu (2000: 152) puts it, although *Iwe Iroyin* was ostensibly religious, it equally served as a 'political propaganda tool to fight the colonial administration' (Idowu, 2000: 152). It was published in both English and the local Yoruba language, and Duyile writes in

his important historical account, *Makers of the Nigerian Press* (1987) ‘One could easily fall under the delusion that these religious African newspapers were nothing more than pamphlets of religious sermons, but on close observation of their content one discovers that they were highly influential in our political affairs’ (1987: 3).

In 1863, the Christian Missionary Society cautioned Reverend Townsend, and a year later the colonial Governor Freeman filed a complaint to the British government Colonial Office that Townsend was ‘aggravating problems of foreign policy’ (Idowu, 2000: 152). Not too long after, *Iwe Iroyin* went out of print and collapsed, which in Duyile’s account could be attributed to numerous local rivalries (wars), which the paper ‘got involved in’ and hence ‘could not escape from the local hostility which accompanied the riots’ (1987: 13). The fall of *Iwe Iroyin* came in 1867, as Townsend’s printing press had been destroyed in a 13th October 1867 uprising against Europeans and European missionaries (Duyile, 1987: 13). At the collapse of *Iwe Iroyin*, other (religious) newspapers sprang up in its place. According to Dare (2000: 12), newspapers having no affiliations to the church began to emerge in the 1880s. In his words: ‘Educated Africans, especially in the crown colony of Lagos, were becoming disillusioned by the glaring contradictions between the vaunted benevolence of Christian colonialism and its alienating, exploitative nature...taking advantage of the growing literate population and the expansion in the printing industry in Lagos’ (Dare, 2000: 12), he continues that these ‘educated Africans’ set up newspapers, which ‘soon became the spearhead of a nationalism that was at once cultural and political’

(Dare, 2000: 12). Nationalist-owned and state-owned regional publications began to emerge, some owned by Nigerian citizens, and others by publishers from other African countries. Duyile notes that 'in the first seventy years of the growth of the Nigerian press...nearly all the publishers and editors were either Liberians or Sierra-Leonians' (Duyile, 1987: 22-23).

The religious foundation of early journalism in Nigeria, however, is significant to this thesis given how religion is fundamentally cultural and given the ongoing impact of religion (specifically Protestant Christianity and Islam), on Nigerian socio-economic and political systems, political decision-making and the values and ethics that frame its nascent public sphere. The intertwined relationship between religion and politics in Nigeria resides in, for example, how politicians routinely appeal to religious (as well as ethnic) sentiments during electoral campaigns, or the ethical imperatives of Northern Nigerian Islamic politics (The name of the extremist Islamic militant group 'Boko Haram' can be interpreted 'western education is sinful').

After *Iwe Iroyin*, the second newspaper to be published in Nigeria was the *Anglo African* (published in 1863 in Lagos, the city's first newspaper). It was not religious but provided information-based news items and commentary, advertisements and fiction, and was started by Robert Campbell, a Jamaican born maverick businessman and journalist. While for the most part business-like in its aims, according to Duyile, 'when Governor Freeman [colonial governor] knew of the coming of *Anglo-African* he made frantic efforts seeking authority to

impose a tax upon newspapers published in the colony to frustrate them out of business and to prevent them from being viable' (1987: 17). Nonetheless, Duyile goes on to say that, 'when Governor Freeman later discovered that Campbell's *Anglo-African* was "friendly" he supported it with government's advertisement patronage, rather than muzzle it' (1987: 17). Other newspapers such as *Lagos Times* and *Gold Coast Advertiser* (founded 1880), were said to have been used by its publisher to 'ventilate public opinion on topical issues' (Duyile, 1987: 19). Newspapers like *The Lagos Weekly Record* (founded 1890), enjoyed government patronage, an arrangement that lent it 'long life and tended to make it look like a government mouthpiece' (Duyile, 1987: 21). As nationalism was on the rise during this period, papers that seem to pander to government needs became unpopular. Another newspaper said to have 'had a reputation' of being 'silent over criticisms of the colonial government' was the *Nigerian Pioneer* by Kitoye Ajasa, founded in 1914. Dare (2000: 14) describes Kitoye Ajasa as 'the urbane lawyer and confidant of the colonial authorities.' (See appendix for table of early newspapers in Nigeria and their publishers).

Nevertheless, the struggle of nationalists led Nigeria to her independence. The foreword to Duyile's esteemed literature reads, 'the war of independence was fought on the pages of the Nigerian press. Not one shot was fired. But many thundering editorials were written' (1987). Citing Omu's (1978) words Dare also adds that the early Nigerian press was 'the most distinguished intellectual forum in Nigeria's history', where the 'high standard of debate and discussion' would 'fascinate the modern reader' (Dare, 2000: 13). One newspaper acclaimed to

have been significantly active in the nationalist struggle was Herbert Macaulay's *Lagos Daily News*, 1927. Dare says this newspaper is 'credited with wielding the deadliest pen in Nigerian journalism', as it was 'a ferociously anti-government newspaper' as well as a political springboard and organ for Macaulay's then founded political party (2000, 14-15). Herbert Macaulay is widely acclaimed as the "father of Nigerian nationalism", and it was from his leadership on this newspaper, that he gained this title (Dare, 2000: 15). Other active newspapers in the nationalist struggle are: Nnamdi Azikwe's *West African Pilot* (1937), who went on to establish Nigeria's first newspaper chain with holdings in regions around the country. Other titles in Azikwe's chain of newspapers were equally active in the nationalist struggle; Obafemi Awolowo's *Nigerian Tribune* (1949). Other papers such as the Daily Times and Daily Express, both of which were controlled by business men and 'foreign interests', deliberately steered clear of political issues and focused on economic and social matters (Mabadeje, 2004: 8-9).

Newspapers embroiled in the nationalist struggle of the years 1937-1960 could be viewed as facilitators of the early resistance movements that resisted colonial government (Mabadeje, 2004: 6). Duyile explains that, aside from the water rates protests, uprisings against taxation, the Aba Women's riot of 1929, 'the *Lagos Press* added impetus to all political protests organised by educated elites...the influence and political thoughts of such famous Negro leaders as Edward Blyden and Marcus Garvey had already infused a strong sense of human rights and political rights in many educated elites of the period' (2004:

25). Hence, even in this embryonic state, the Nigerian ‘public sphere’ was shaped by international influences and thoughts, as indeed the political sphere itself was formed by foreign colonial rule and all its imported state and educational apparatuses.

In 1960, Nigeria gained independence from the British colonial government. Through the periods of successive nationalist struggle, however, the public sphere of political debate became radically divided along ethnic lines. Why ethnicity became even more pronounced with political independence, is the subject of some debate. Isichei (1983: 4) claims that ethnic stereotypes and imagery from pre-colonial times evolved through the colonial era and endured. She suggests that colonial government inflated ethnic divisions by placing the ethnic groups in different administrative units, whereby ‘...mentally, by constantly grouping people in ethnic categories, colonial rulers did much to ensure that they viewed themselves in the same way, and encouraged them to act as such’ (1983: 50). Dare (2000: 17-18) continues this train of thought explaining that, ‘a distinct feature of the press in Nigeria before independence was [that it was] almost entirely owned and controlled by individuals [members of different ethnic groups] and political parties’ with the exception of one, the *Nigerian Outlook*. Hence, ‘with the attainment of political independence in 1960, the cleavages that had been subsumed by the nationalist struggle came into bold relief. Britain, the “common enemy”, had departed. The regions, the ethnic groups and the political parties around which they were organised, turned inwards and on themselves...’ (Dare, 2000: 18). That is to say, while the people

were united in their struggle through the embryonic public debate facilitated in the press, (and perhaps other means, such as on-ground protests), without the common commitment to expel the colonialist enemy, a predictable fragmentation occurred. Different regions (split according to ethnic groups) in Nigeria had already begun to own newspapers before independence, so at independence, as Idowu mentions, ‘each paper saw its loyalty to the region’ not the nation, and the ‘pursuit of truth was subsumed under regional consideration’ (2000: 157).

Falola, in his important book, *Colonialism and Violence* (2009), categorises the history of colonialism and violence in Nigeria into three phases. The first phase involved ‘an unlawful use of force by an imperialist power to obtain political dominance’; the second phase occurred from the 1900s to the late 1940s, where Nigeria opposed the forces of colonisation, especially on issues such as policies on taxation and the consolidation of colonial rule. The final phase of violence is marked by the struggle for power that ensued among to-be political leaders of Nigeria, when the British began disengaging in the 1950s. The 1900s to the late 1940s were in some ways the crucible out of which modern Nigeria was formed, as many of the struggles of this era remain today and form central political dilemmas and matters of public concern. The resistance to colonialism took the form of physical protests, such as the ‘Women’s War’ of 1929, where Igbo women resisted some British policies. According to Falola (2009: xii), ‘many of the protest movements and “wars” were led by the precolonial leaders’. This was the ‘warrior class’ of tribal leaders and others who saw their power on the decline. While the majority of the Western-educated African elites did not directly

join the protests, they communicated their anti-colonial sentiments through means such as organising elite-based political associations, commentary in the media. As Falola (2009) puts it, 'while it was the kings and chiefs who organised the resistance of the nineteenth century, new leaders and centres of power began to emerge in the twentieth' (Falola, 2009: xii).

The final phase of violence is marked by the struggle for power that ensued among to-be political leaders of Nigeria, when the British began disengaging in the 1950s. At this point, Nigerians began to fight, not with the British, but with one another. Falola (2009: xiii) explains the situation in detail thus, 'just as the process of establishing colonial control divided Nigerian groups, so too the process of colonial disengagement turned one Nigerian group against another...' (Falola (2009:xiii). In the colonial phase, the motive was to weaken and destroy local power centres, but here in the third phase, Nigerian groups and their representatives were involved in the lasting struggle for intra-communal political dominance. This struggle was formative for the allegiances and values of the Nigerian press, and in turn prohibitive of a single coherent public sphere. Dare confirms: 'Since the press was deeply polarised along party lines and the parties themselves were divided along ethnic lines, it seldom spoke with anything resembling a consensus on the major issues of the day' (Dare, 2000: 19). In this context, any reference to a Habermasian public sphere -- where issues of public interest were to be debated and arguments won on the basis of their strength alone, and where such arguments were assumed to be valid for the welfare of the nation – seems tenuous and itself 'colonialist'. To this day, while Nigeria has

indeed constructed a coherent and singular state apparatus, key concepts like ‘consensus’ remain unattainable.

In 1936, the British colonial rule in Nigeria set up the Plymouth Committee so as to take steps to ‘improve and create more wired broadcasting in her colonies’ (Duyile, 1987: 282). This committee was to ‘consider and recommend what steps could be taken to accelerate the provision of broadcasting services in colonial empire, to co-ordinate such services with the work of the British Broadcasting Corporation and to make them more effective instrument for promoting local and imperial interest’ (*ibid.*). The committee recommended the ‘installation of loudspeakers in schools, colleges, town squares, town halls, market assemblies and other places for communal listening’, but these recommendations were not implemented as the war [world war] had broken out (Duyile, 1987: 283-4).

The Turner-Byron report of 1949 succeeded the Plymouth Committee effort. Turner and Byron were tasked with investigating the ‘the feasibility on technical grounds of a proposal to establish broadcasting services in Nigeria, the Gold Coast [now Ghana], The Gambia and Sierra Leone...’ (Duyile, 1987: 284). Their report contained recommendations of the ‘urgent establishment of wireless broadcasting service for Nigeria...studio centres for Lagos, Ibadan, Kaduna, Enugu and Kano’ (Duyile, 1987: 285). It was also ‘strongly’ recommended in the report that fifteen to thirty minutes daily, broadcast should be made in the ‘more important Nigerian languages such as Hausa, Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Edo, Ibibio, Kanuri and Efik. In Kano it was Hausa and Arabic’ (Duyile, 1987: 285). Hence,

the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was sent by the British government to train Nigerians who would eventually carry on with running the Nigerian Broadcasting Service. According to Duyile (1987: 285-286), the BBC ‘produced Nigeria Broadcasting network both in leadership and content’ – from programme orientation to style of presentation and the contents of broadcast. This had implications on the Nigerian public sphere at the time, which was more vibrant on print media and almost non-existent on the government-controlled broadcast media.

Unlike radio broadcasting, which was founded through the efforts of the colonial government in power, television broadcasting came into Nigeria by the accomplishment of a regional government. Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) began in on October 31, 1959. Umeh (1989: 56) citing Egbon (1982), claims that setting up this television station in Nigeria was ‘borne out of political dissension’ between Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the then Western region and his ‘party men’. The defence of this purportedly ‘wasteful’ and ‘prestigious’ project by a region, was that ‘it was being established to satisfy the educational aspirations of the people of the Western region’, according to Umeh (1989: 56). Following in the trail of the Western region, television stations began to spring up in the Northern and Eastern region of Nigeria. However, regional ownership of television stations later became subsumed in federal government ownership at the establishment of the Nigerian Television Authority, NTA, in 1976. The Nigerian federal government took over all television station services in Nigeria on April 1st, 1976, ending regional ownerships of broadcast stations (Duyile,

1987: 296). The broadcasting deregulation act of 1993 under military leader, General Ibrahim Babangida, led to the end of government monopoly over broadcast stations. Private enterprises were now granted authority to set up broadcasting enterprises.

Content-wise, early television broadcasting in Nigeria was not culturally indigenous. As Duyile points out, ‘the only set back which the television station (WNTV: Western Nigerian Television) suffered was its reliance on foreign films for the better part of nearly ten years of its formation...thereby creating a communication problem of cultural imperialism’ (1987: 291). Related to this idea of cultural imperialism is the film industry in Nigeria. Ekwuazi (1991:1) states that the combined efforts of the colonial government and the Church (various European missionary groups), supported the development of the film industry in early Nigeria. As the missionary groups capitalised on religious films and their potential for acculturation, the colonial government also supplemented them with non-religious films that were made to ‘condition the audience to “civilisation”, an example being *Mr. English at Home* (Ekwuazi, 1991:3).

National Policy and Legal Frameworks: the past in the present

The policy and legal frameworks that shaped, and still affect, the media, press and thus public sphere, must be outlined here. There are strong lines of continuity from Independence in 1960 to today – as many foundational national laws remain in place. Tony Momoh, scholar and author of *Nigeria Media Laws and Ethics* (2004), complied a compendium of the laws that have been

instrumental in structuring and framing Nigerian traditional media since 1917 (during colonial rule), through Independence and up to the 1990s, omitting the crucial Nigerian Freedom of Information bill of 2011 (at the time an ongoing debate at the legislative arm of government). Prior to the passing of the Nigerian Freedom of Information Bill to law in 2011, according to Duyile (1987: 260), although Nigeria professed to allow the operation of a free press, ‘their degree of tolerance is measurable by their records of detention of journalists, closure of newspapers etc.’ He says that the constitution, Act No. 20 of 1963 guarantees ‘freedom of expression’ and ‘freedom to hold and receive opinions’ - however, at this time, ‘the battle for press freedom has not been won’ (Duyile, 1987: 261). Duyile says one should be wary of the ‘impression’ that leads to the ‘delusion’ that press freedom has been won (1987: 261). He explains that ‘the nature of modern Nigerian newspaper business’, which is ‘profit-motivated’, has to ‘operate economically to stay in business’ – hence it becomes compulsory to ‘play safe’ (Duyile, 1987: 262). In other words, the press is not free in practice. Nigeria’s Freedom of Information Bill was however, fully passed into law on May 28, 2011 (Freedom House, 2011).

Tracing the history of policy frameworks and laws that regulated how the early newspaper industry operated in Nigeria, worthy of note is the Newspaper Act of 1917, which made provision for the setting up of independent newspapers. Momoh (2004: 11) draws attention to the fact that this Act was an amendment to the Criminal Code of 1916, which in turn was ‘a consolidation of the Newspaper Ordinance of 1903 and the Sedition Ordinance of 1909’ (Momoh, 2004: 11-12).

In other words, legal provisions for independence have always been bound up with state control. On the Seditious Ordinance of 1909, Duyile points out that the law was ‘greeted on arrival with strongly worded criticisms from the knowledgeable public, the elites and opinion leaders in Lagos and the popular press’ (2004: 25). At the time the embryonic Nigerian public sphere positioned the press itself as an issue of public interest. However, ‘opinion leaders’ played significant roles in the formation of this public sphere(s), and to date public debate tends to coalesce around assertive political figures, and not otherwise objective issues directly pertaining to a public interest.

A second seminal legal act is the Printing Press Regulation Act of 1933, which came into force at the time when the nationalists’ struggle for independence was most active (Momoh, 2004: 15; Duyile, 2004: 45). This Act prohibited ownership of a printing press except the owner made a declaration in court providing information on where the press is situated – and in the advent of a change of location, the printing press owner must make a new declaration or be fined a sum of N100. This was one of a cluster of laws during the colonial era positioned in and around the Criminal and Penal Code, such as the law on Sedition, purposively enacted by the British administration to ‘put a check on the press’ (Momoh, 2004: 16). A seditious publication was one with seditious intention, and seditious intention in turn translated as ‘to bring into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection against the person of the Head of the Federal Military Government...to raise discontent or disaffection among the inhabitants of Nigeria...’ (Momoh, 2004: 17, citing the Nigerian Constitution).

Between 1960 and 1966, after the Nigerian independence, new laws regarding how the press operated were promulgated. Not all were harmful to the freedom of the press; for instance, the Children and Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act of 1961, which prohibited the dissemination of pictorial publications harmful to children (Momoh, 2004: 23). However, laws that threatened press freedom or had the potential to were - the Emergency Powers Act of 1961, that authorised the Govenor-in-Council to make any regulations deemed necessary in 'maintaining and securing peace, order and good government in Nigeria' (Momoh, 2004: 25). Another of such laws was the Official Secrets Acts of 1962, that makes 'further provision for securing public safety' (Momoh, 2004: 27). The Act prohibits disclosure to the public of any matter defined as 'classified'. According to Momoh, 'Classified matter is defined as "any information or thing which, under any system of security classification...is not to be disclosed to the public and of which the disclosure to the public would be prejudicial to the security of Nigeria"' (2004:28). It is matter debated as to whether the passing and provisions of the Freedom of Information bill will negate the restrictions of the Official Secrets Act. Freedom House online (2012) gives account of a 2011 incident where Olajide Fashikun of the *National Accord* newspaper was arrested over publishing articles that allegedly accused the Nigerian Football Federation (NFF) of fraud. He was being held on libel charges.

Between 1966 and 1979, the military took over power in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and what followed were another slew of anti-press laws. Some of the prominent decrees that led to the harassment of many a journalist were: The

Defamatory and Offensive Publications Decree No. 44, 1966, and the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Decree No. 11, 1976. The defamatory and offensive publications decree made it an offence to ‘publish or display or offer to the public’ any pictorial representation of a person living or dead that would offend any section of the community, according to Momoh (2004: 31). In addition, songs, sounds or recordings with words ‘likely to provoke any section of the community’ was also deemed offensive (*ibid.*) As for the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Decree, otherwise known as the Ohonbamu decree (Momoh, 2004: 32), it made it an offence ‘to propagate, by any means, any false allegation of corruption in relation to any public officer.’ All these laws would have had an impact on a nascent Nigerian public sphere at the time – they were stifling.

Media organisations such as the News Agency of Nigeria (Decree No. 19, 1976) and Nigerian Television Authority (Decree No. 24, 1976) were also established during this time. In the case of the latter, the government took over all the broadcast stations in the country (Momoh, 2004: 34). The News Agency of Nigeria on the other hand, was set up as a ‘monopoly’ to curate news ‘from within and outside Nigeria’ and supply ‘same to subscribers for a fee’ (*ibid.*) These are just a few of other decrees under the military. At the return to civilian rule in 1979, the Presidential system of government was introduced where the entire country would elect one representative. Prior to this, Nigeria practiced ‘the Westminster model’, i.e. the parliamentary system, which was dismantled by the military in January 1966 (Momoh, 2004: 39). This new arrangement was short-

lived, as the military took over power once again in 1984. According to Momoh, the bill which the National Assembly, under the civilian government, passed into law regarding the press, was the Electoral Act, ‘which provided for the monitoring of the press during 1983 elections’ (2004: 40). From 1984 to 1999 the military ruled in Nigeria and promulgated more laws against the press.

Since broadcast media operated as a monopoly under the government, as mentioned earlier, there was no need to hamper electronic media. Some of such laws promulgated by the military government from 1984 included: Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No. 1, 1984, which allowed the military to make decrees that ‘were binding and could not be questioned’ (Momoh 2004: 41); State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree No. 2, 1984, which in addition allowed the detention of persons deemed to be involved in ‘acts prejudicial to state security...’ Momoh (2004: 42) says that ‘most of the people held during the military regime were held under Decree 2’. Other decrees promulgated at this time further consolidated the powers of the military, setting them above even the judiciary. Examples are The Federal Military Government (Supremacy and Enforcement Powers) Decree No. 13, 1984. The media-related decrees that set up the Nigerian Press Council (formerly, Nigeria Media Council) were the Nigerian Media Council Decree No. 59, 1989 and Nigerian Press Council Decree No. 85, 1992 (Momoh, 2004: 47).

It was the National Broadcasting Commission Decree No. 38, 1992 that deregulated the electronic media in Nigeria, and allowed free entry to private

enterprises to equally set up broadcast stations. This was a milestone in Nigeria's media history. This decree broke the monopoly over the broadcasting industry in Nigeria by providing for private interests in broadcasting (Momoh, 2004: 47). The subsequent establishment of many private radio and some television stations followed this decree, examples of which are Africa Independent Television (1994), Channels Television (1995), Silverbird TV (2003), Raypower FM, Star FM, and more recently Wazobia FM, Inspiration FM. All programming actions of broadcast stations remain under the guidance of the National Broadcasting Commission, who reserve the right to censor. For instance, in 2014, the Nigerian government, through the Commission, banned the airing of a documentary, *Fuelling Poverty* (directed by Ishaya Bako and whose making was sponsored by the Soros Foundation's Open Society Justice Initiative for West Africa), which explored the alleged scam surrounding the then removal of fuel subsidy by the Government. The Committee to Protect Journalists condemned the censorship and the banning of the distribution of the film (CPJ, 2013).

Idris Mabadeje (2004) published a compendium of cases of press freedom violations in Nigeria from 1966 to 1999 (under the military). In his work, he gives account of journalist arrests, brutality and killings. For example, Nduka Obiagbena, the then editor-in-chief of ThisWeek magazine (now defunct), was arrested June 14, 1988 by the State Security Service (SSS) for publishing a story on 'power tussle among close aides of the president' - his international passport was equally seized (Mabadeje, 2004: 47). Another example is the

three-month detention without trial of Etim Etim, the Financial Correspondent at Guardian (another Nigerian newspaper) in August 1988, for ‘obtaining and publishing information on the Central Bank’ - he was held under Decree 4 of 1984 (*ibid.*) Such were the harsh conditions under which traditional media in Nigeria attempted to flourish. It was not until 1999 that the transition to democratic rule began, and although civilian rule commenced the constitution still bore underpinnings of the military government in terms of how it shaped the practice of journalism.

More recently, press freedom is still to a large extent, a challenged phenomenon in Nigeria. According to Freedom House’s 2014 report on the state of press freedom in Nigeria, the country is ranked ‘partly free.’ Freedom House accounts for ‘more than a dozen arrests and prosecution of journalists’ being carried out ‘under the antiterrorism and public incitement law.’ Freedom House (2014, online) online notes that though none of the trials ‘has amounted to a conviction’, ‘harassment, obstruction, and intimidation of the media combined’ creates a ‘chilling effect on free expression.’ On the Nigerian Freedom on Information bill that was passed into law in 2011: this was the first constitutional provision that addressed the needs of journalists. The Act is ‘to make public records and information more freely available, provide for public access to public records and information, protect public records and information to the extent consistent with the public interest and the protection of personal privacy’ (FOI Act, 28th May 2011). However, at the same time, the Act is to ‘protect serving public officers from adverse consequences of disclosing certain kinds of official information’

without ‘authorisation’ (FOI Act, 28th May 2011). With this new law, ideally, the Nigerian media was guaranteed the freedom to access information that would enable them better to carry out their democratic functions of holding the government accountable through keeping the citizenry informed.

The rise of digital media adoption in Nigeria sparked another milestone in Nigeria’s media history. With it came the rise of citizen journalists, online social activists, and everyday users who formed the audience of these platforms. In terms of legal framework and regulations, there have been speculations (from the research interviews) that the Nigerian government may seek to legislate digital media and perhaps limit Internet freedom. However, it must be highlighted that at the time of writing this thesis, there has still been no legislation against the use of digital media for public communication in Nigeria.

Nonetheless, there have been a number of incidents where bloggers and digital media users have been arrested or detained going by accounts from the websites of international organisations such as Committee Protecting Journalists (CPJ), Freedom House and more. According to Bayiewu Leke of *Punch* newspaper (2012), Senate President, David Mark, criticised and called for the censorship of social media in the country. On the *Committee to Protect Journalists* website, there is a report on the arrest of US-based Nigerian bloggers upon arriving in their home country (CPJ, 2008). According to the report, both Emmanuel Emeka Asikwe of Huhuonline (based in Arlington) and Jonathan Elendu of ElenduReports (based in Michigan) were arrested and

detained at different times. Local reporters told CPJ that ‘the detentions are part of a government crackdown on foreign-based Nigerian political web sites ever since controversial photos of President Umaru Yar’Adua’s son were published on a popular news blog’ (CPJ, 2008). According to data from Freedom House on Internet freedom in Nigeria (2014), access and use of the Internet is ‘partly free’ – that is neither fully free or fully bridled. Freedom House submits that this ranking is based on the fact that Nigeria has a population of one hundred and seventy-three point six million (173.6 M), and no social media or ICT apps, including web application apps have been blocked, no political or social content have been blocked either, but bloggers and ICT users have been arrested. Freedom House records Internet penetration in Nigeria at thirty-eight per cent.

Key developments on how the Nigerian government has regulated digital media use so far in the country are recorded in the Freedom House online report (2014). First, there was the shutting down of mobile phone services in three northern states from May to December 2013. They claimed this was part of ‘military strategy’ against the extremist terrorist group in Nigeria, Boko Haram. In November 2013, ‘pro government trolls’ were blamed for ‘blocking links’ to the Facebook page of an ‘investigative online news outlet, Premium Times’ (Freedom House, 2014). Another incident was also the arrest of two individuals: one who allegedly criticised the Bayelsa State governor on his Facebook page in October 2013, and the other for ‘live-tweeting an incident involving Boko Haram militants and the State Security Service in March 2014 (Freedom House, 2014). Lastly, the ‘suspicions of government surveillance’ still remains, following

from the 2013 report from Freedom House, especially as the 2014 budget is said to make provision for the ‘purchase of specialised surveillance equipment’ (Freedom House, 2014).

In the Freedom House online 2013 report, it was alleged that a device that could be used in controlling ‘undesirable traffic’ was discovered on many private Internet service providers in Nigeria – it was commonly referred to as ‘the Blue Coat PacketShaper appliance’. However, details as to why the technology was being deployed and by whom remains unknown (Freedom House, 2013). In addition to that, the report also mentioned that in April 2013, the suspicions of online censorship and surveillance by Nigerian users was confirmed when a certain *Premium Times* published a news report alleging that the federal government ‘had awarded a secret contract to Israel-based Elbit Systems to help monitor internet communications in Nigeria’ (Freedom House, 2013). ‘Citizen Lab research also found a FinFisher command and server, which communicates with malware that can be used for surveillance, located on a private ISP in April 2013’ (*ibid.*)

In 2013, Sesan et al of Paradigm Initiative Nigeria (a civil society organisation), published a policy brief document titled, *An Internet Freedom Charter for Nigeria*. It is recorded in the report that the Nigerian State Security Service, and private telecoms companies in Nigeria (MTN, Airtel, Etisalat, Glo) are listed as clients to Digivox. Digivox is ‘a company that specialises in lawful interception services’ (Sesan et al, 2013: 1). In addition, back in February 2011, Nigerian telecoms

companies were mandated to ‘conduct sim card registrations and collect the personal information of users.’ Sesan et al (2013: 1) express concern that while the ‘most popularly touted benefit of this procedure’ is to monitor crime, there remains no legal framework (on the ground) to ‘ensure only legal access to said information.’ They conclude in the report that although Nigeria remains “partly free” by Freedom House’s 2013 ranking, ‘current trends foreshadow a backward slide.’ It is their position that ‘Nigeria Internet freedom advocates and civil society must continue to stand firmly...to protect liberties’ as ‘whatever hurts Internet freedom will not only be a violation of citizens rights, but will also hurt the Internet economy...’ (Sesan et al, 2013: 2).

Paradigm Initiative Nigeria, headed by Gbenga Sesan (who was one of the interviewees in this thesis), drafted a Charter for Internet Freedom in Nigeria, and presented it at the Net Mundial event, which was held at Sao Paulo Brazil on April 23-24, 2014. The Net Mundial is a global forum where stakeholders gather to discuss the future of Internet governance. Gbenga Sesan presented a work-in-progress report on Internet Freedom Declaration for Nigeria. This report is published online. In his presentation, he explains that ‘the purpose of the Internet Freedom Declaration for Nigeria is to articulate public expectation on Internet freedom in Nigeria.’ Sesan makes the following key submissions on Internet freedom. Firstly, ‘citizens and lawful residents of Nigeria should be able to send electronic communication to one another free from the fear of surveillance, monitoring, interception, or the violation of privacy.’ Secondly, on data and information privacy, Sesan submits that ‘there should be clarity on the

means by which the private data of individuals, stored by intermediaries, can be accessed.' Thirdly, on access and content, he contends that 'individuals and institutions have the right to create and access content on the Internet' and such acts 'should not be subject to censorship.' In addition to this point, Sesan adds that 'it should be illegal for government or any entity to deny or censor access to the Internet without providing adequate and acceptable reasons.' Lastly, on Freedom of Expression, Sesan states explicitly that every form of expression, including 'retweets, likes, favourites, shares, online comments, joining groups on social network sites...' all 'constitute speech', hence, they should equally 'enjoy the protected status of fundamental human rights.'

In summary of what has been discussed so far, the introduction of the press to Nigeria was a result of religious efforts that later became embroiled in the political struggle for independence from colonial powers. However, the introduction of the broadcasting media came about as a result of both efforts of the colonial government (radio) and regional governments (television). The press in Nigeria, through a vibrant public sphere of nationalists, was instrumental in securing independence from the British colonial government in 1960. However, the newspapers that made up the Nigerian press, were enmeshed in ethnic sentiments that divided them at independence and fractured the Nigerian public sphere. The public sphere that existed on the broadcast media was less vibrant for no reason other than the fact that until 1992, broadcasting was statutorily under the monopoly of the government in power. Hence, the opportunity to debate, dialogue, expression of public opinion were

limited, unlike in the print media.

The public sphere that existed via the press still struggled due to limitations of freedom of expression in Nigeria. Suffice to say that there was no constitutional provision for press freedom until recently in 2011. Several laws, promulgated by both the civilian and military rule in Nigeria somewhat stifled the press, while others outrightly muzzled the freedom of expression. Journalists were arrested and detained and newspaper houses were shut down, and these are just a few examples of the oppressive acts of the Nigerian government against the press, which of course generates forms of self-censorship and a generalised fear of reprisals that by their nature disincentivize even journalists for participating in an embryonic public sphere. However, the influx of digital media into the Nigerian polity made for forms of participation that partially concealed the identity of the speaker and, in the form of mobile phones, internet service providers, rise of cyber cafes (internet access points), whose operation is not vulnerable to open social coercion by the authorities. Digital media has altered the dynamics of how people communicate and express public opinions in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented the history of the Nigerian mass media, from the press to the broadcast media, radio and television. I also laid out the national policies and legal frameworks that have shaped its existence and how it has operated within the Nigerian polity over time. The rise of digital media adoption in recent times in Nigeria has altered the dynamics of the relationship between

members of civil society, the mass media, and the government. In this next chapter, ‘Digitalising Nigeria’, we will see in exactly what ways how information is spread, shared, and discussed, has been transformed.

Section Two: Chapter Six

‘Digitalising’ Nigeria

Introduction

In Habermas' classical conception of the public sphere, 'culture' is a significant if nebulous dimension of society. It concerns more than the patterns of everyday life (family, food, shelter and cohabitation, work, social interaction, organisation) and the symbolic languages through which these are articulated (clothing, ritual, artistic production, and so on). Culture is a means of provisional solidarity and collective allegiance through values and beliefs concerning the nature of solidarity and collective allegiance and the individual benefits of such. The dynamic of social interaction that generates this provisional collectivity is communication.

In this chapter, I expand of the concept of digital media as culture in Nigeria, in terms of public communication, dialogue and solidarity among members of her public sphere – the state and the people. I identify using existing literature, what digital media tools are popularly adopted in Nigeria, and explore the relationship among old media, new media, and the Nigerian public sphere. Here, I offer a narrative on the increased adoption of the Internet, via mobile telephony in the country, and list identifiable roles digital media is currently active in, in facilitating an embryonic public sphere in Nigeria.

Nigeria Democratic Digital Media Culture

Public communication emerged as a specific genre of communication, with identifiable modes and methods of delivery, places and spaces, content (message) and visual accompaniment. Given the sudden influx of digital media technology into the Nigerian society, it has generated new forms of social interaction and thus the potential for solidarity and collective allegiance on matters of public interest. The new ‘culture’ of communication demonstrates democratic characteristics in the sense that it is consolidating individual identities, awarding legitimacy to individual statements and opinions, forming mass trends in discussion topics, drawing attention to current affairs and international events, and stimulating creative behaviours and new values in and through new communication networks. These networks can be demonstrated to respond to certain democratic needs and societal issues in Nigeria, and facilitate the emergence of specific ‘communities’ of interest who otherwise would have no means of social interconnection. More importantly, they are increasingly provoking the response of public officials, public services and government. In Nigeria, new digital media communication tools have been made available, and we will be exploring their consequences on society, culturally.

In the West, the use of Web 2.0 for engaging with citizens is increasingly commonplace. In the U.S., President Barack Obama, has a dedicated Twitter page (askobama.twitter.com), and Twitter Town Hall Meetings* with him are becoming frequent occurrences. Likewise in New Zealand, Macnamara et al (2012: 623) explain that strategies are shifting from 'an initial focus on delivery of

information and services, to the use of social media (interactive Web 2.0), to 'engage citizens in consultation and participation to redress a concerning 'democratic deficit' and reinvigorate the public sphere' (Macnamara et al. 2012: 623). Although African countries still struggle with closing the 'democratic deficit' in their respective societies, it is safe to claim that the continent is gradually adopting 'eCulture' as well. According to Heeks (2002:1), '...eGovernment is only slowly diffusing within Africa because of a lack of e-readiness for e-government.' He argues that this challenge needs to be met through 'strategic building of national infrastructure' (Heeks, 2002:1). See seventeen other examples in Barkat (N.D)¹.

Some African governments have indeed attempted to engage with citizens over the Internet. For instance, Goodluck Jonathan, the recent previous President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, initially announced his ambition to run for presidency over Facebook (BBC Africa, 2010). He also has a Facebook page, where as at February 5th 2015 had a total of 1, 779, 557 'likes'. Examples of other African leaders who have active profiles online include, Joyce Banda, the President of the Federal Republic of Malawi (Twitter, 2013), President John Mahama of Ghana (Twitter, 2013) and many more.

There is expressed optimism around Africa's democracy and her engagement with digital media and the facilities for communication, information, interaction

¹ Barkat et al (N.D) provide 17 examples of social media and government innovation around the world, such as: SeeClickFix (U.S.), Ushahidi (Kenya), GovLoop (U.S), Votenaweb (Brazil), and others

and learning that it affords its citizens. For Uche (1999:202): 'the information superhighway is a promoter of democracy. It is a liberator of the downtrodden. It is a harbinger of economic good tidings and fortunes. It is a leveller of some sort at both the political, social and economic realms. That is why it has become an allergy to those African leaders...' On the other hand, Mudhai et al (2009:1) calls for caution against this seeming 'cyber-utopian' line of thinking: '...the advent of new media technologies...was accompanied by the hype about the continent's possibility of "leapfrogging" some stages of development...after over a decade of the emergences of new ICTs (information and communication technologies), the old questions about access, inequality, power and the quality of information are still valid' (Mudhai et al., 2009:1). Alzouma (2005)² also calls for similar caution.

In Africa, the argument is that, while there is significant use of new digital media, they often take on complementary roles to traditional media forms, as opposed to holding any significant advantage over the latter. This is to say that, new media can be successful in Africa when combined with more familiar forms of media (e.g. print and broadcast media, trusted face-to-face interaction), while outside of this, new media 'may offer only limited influence on the political process' (Nyabuga and Mudhai, 2009:51). Aptly put by Mudhai et al (2009:2), the value of new media in Africa resides 'in the extent to which they enmesh with old media to provide multimedia platforms that allow for greater democratic participation, inclusion and expression' (Mudhai et al. 2009:2).

² In Alzouma's 2005 article, he also calls for caution in advocating ICT for development in Africa, while at the same time, not totally rejecting the promises it might hold for the continent.

We need to identify the actual ‘providers’, interfaces, websites and service portals that make up the aesthetic-technological landscape of new digital media in Nigeria. I do this, not from a desk-survey of economic and corporate or market data, but from my research interviews: the following catalogue of digital media brands represent the Nigerian landscape, and from this it will be evident that the domination of US and Western media is almost total:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- BBM
- Whatsapp
- YouTube
- Blogs
- SMS
- Google Alerts
- LinkedIn
- Google+
- Email

In addition, we should indeed also refer to economic and corporate or market data. According to the *Africa Practice Report 2014* – from a prominent strategy and communications consultancy seeking to ‘accelerate growth in Africa’ – the top ten most visited webpages in Nigeria (by Alexa ranking) can be tabulated as follows:

- Google
- Google Nigeria
- Facebook
- Yahoo
- YouTube
- Blogger
- Nairaland (a web forum)
- LinkedIn
- Twitter
- Wikipedia

(Africa Practice, 2014:2)

Mobile chat apps are also found to be popular in Nigeria, because they augur well for the people where there is poor information and communication technology infrastructure. These apps remain effective in situations of lower bandwidth and use less data. In addition, mobile chat apps cost significantly less than SMS, yet serve the same function of communicating by text messaging (Africa Practice, 2014: 6). The top nine web-blogs or forums visited from Nigeria (by Alexa rankings) according to the report are:

- Nairaland (forum)
- Linda Ikeji (gossip blog)
- Naij.com (news)
- Bella Naija (gossip)
- Jobberman (career)
- Notjustok (music)
- 360 Nobs (music and entertainment)
- Net Ng (entertainment)
- YNaija (politics & opinion)

(Africa Practice, 2014: 28-32)

However, according to the UN eGovernment Survey for 2014, Nigeria ranks in the ‘middle EGDI’ (eGovernment Development Index), where the ranking was split into the following:

- Very High EGDI
- High EGDI
- Middle EGDI
- Low EGDI

(UN, 2014: 21)

Although general government trends in Africa tend towards mobile government initiatives and social media strategies, the above UN government report recommends that policymakers explore the idea of eGovernment on a ‘more

fundamental level through adjusting legislation and policies to encompass technology in national development strategies and welcoming new ideas and ways of connecting with citizens' (UN eGov, 2014: 22). The digital divide, a common concept used to describe the discrepancy between the 'haves and have-nots' of digital media devices and the necessary network access, exists in Nigeria. The majority of those with access to digital media are located in the urban areas, while rural areas have less access to the Internet and other digital media technologies. Availability and affordability are the major challenges to Internet access in Africa (Human IPO, 2014).

Data on the precise number of Nigerians with access to new digital media is difficult to access as there is a dearth of statistical surveys on the subject; of those available, only a few are reliable. According to the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) Report of 2014, in the world over, by the end of 2014, there will be three billion internet users (3b), two-thirds of which emerge from the developing world. In addition, mobile broadband subscriptions will climb to two point three billion (2.3b) globally, and fifty-five per cent (55%) of that rise is expected to come from the developing world as well (ITU, 2014). Nigeria is regarded as a developing society. Furthermore, Internet World Stats 2012 Report states that Internet penetration in Nigeria is at twenty-eight point four per cent (28.4%) in relation to a population size of one hundred and seventy million, one hundred and twenty-three thousand, seven hundred and forty (170, 123, 740). Although in year 2000, there were a total of two hundred thousand (200,000) Internet users in Nigeria, by 2012, there were a total of forty-eight

million, three hundred and sixty-six thousand, one hundred and seventy-nine (48, 366, 179).

Africa Practice 2014 report on the social media landscape in Nigeria, has it that the top ten most visited webpages, based on Alexa ranking, in Nigeria are as follows: Google, Google Nigeria, Facebook, Yahoo, YouTube, Blogger, Nairaland (forum), LinkedIn, Twitter, and Wikipedia (Africa Practice, 2014: 2). The report suggests that mobile chat apps are popular in Nigeria, due to the relatively low bandwidth available, the use of less data and the low-cost involved when compared to how much short message services (SMS) cost (Africa Practice, 2014: 6). In terms of blogs and webpages visited by Nigerians according to the report (Africa Practice, 2014: 28-32), the top nine are: Nairaland (online forum), Linda Ikjeji (gossip blog), [Naij.com](#) (news), Bella Naija (gossip), Jobberman (career), notjustok (music), 360 Nobs (music and entertainment), Net Ng (entertainment), and YNaija (politics and opinion).

Along the same vein as the ITU, Internet World Stats and Africa Practice, The Open Society Foundation equally published a report, *Mapping Digital Media: Nigeria* (2012). From the executive summary, it is stated that Nigeria has a relatively high [digital media] penetration rate, however, it is predominately driven by a ‘rapid expansion of mobile platforms’ (Open Society, 2012: 2). The report also points out that although there is Internet access in Nigeria, it is overwhelmingly concentrated in the urban areas that make up only sixteen per cent (16%) of the country (Open Society, 2012: 6).

Old media, new media and the Nigerian public sphere

In an article in the daily *Vanguard* newspaper in 2010 [there is no corresponding official or scholarly account available], an article entitled “Internet: 13 Years of Growth from Ground Zero in Nigeria...” constructed the ‘story’ of the rise of the Internet in Nigeria. Its founding moment was 1996, in this year, the Nigerian Communications Commission (The NCC: Nigeria’s telecoms regulator), granted 38 Internet service providers the licence to operate nationally. The following year, the first Internet service provider (ISP), Linkserve, was launched. Prior to the influx of these licensed companies, a body known as the Nigeria Internet Group (NIG) had been established as a non-governmental organisation tasked with the purpose of ‘promoting and facilitating full access to the Internet in Nigeria.’ This group was formed in 1995, after the first Internet workshop to hold in Nigeria. This workshop was organised by the Yaba College of Technology, supported by other organisations such as the NCC, National Data Bank and more. The purpose of this workshop was to ‘raise the level of awareness of the benefits of the Internet in Nigeria and provide a forum for discussing the future of networking.’ Later in May 1999, the NCC in partnership with the NIG organised an Africa Internet Summit. This was to discuss ‘the sustainable development and utilisation of the Internet in Africa’ and equally sought to launch a forum where ‘African Internet practitioners can come together and discuss policy issues peculiar to Africa’ (*Vanguard*, 2010).

The adoption of the Internet in Nigeria came before the widespread influx of

mobile phones. However, the latter has led to an increase in Internet use, as the Internet is more accessible through the mobile phone. GSM technology came into Nigeria in 2001. Prior to its introduction, the majority of phone lines were provided by the state-owned Nigerian Telecommunications Limited (NITEL), and a few other private telecoms operators (Obadare, 2006: 97). Obadare says their services were abysmal (Obadare, 2006: 97). According to him, ‘a decree regulating the activities of the GSM companies was promulgated as far back as 1992’, however, the policy was not actualised under the then Head of State, General Babangida, nor under his predecessor (Obadare, 2006: 97).

On May 29, 1999, ‘one of the first acts’ of the then civilian President, General Olusegun Obasanjo, was to suspend telecommunication licenses that had been issued by the previous regimes (Obadare, 2006: 98). In 2001, according to Obadare (2006: 100), ‘the federal government threw open the auctioning process for four mobile licences in January 2001.’ He says the mobile technology became so popular that ‘within a few months, the companies had exceeded their highest expectation’ (Obadare, 2006:100). According to data from Nigerian Communications Commission online, as at October 2013, there were a total of 57, 840, 299 mobile Internet subscriptions in Africa (NCC, 2014). In addition, Internet World Stats (2013), claims that of Nigeria’s 177, 155, 754 population, 67, 319, 186 are Internet users.

The public sphere, since Habermas, has been defined as a space of social interaction as well as communication, where the communication generated

rigorous forms of debate and deliberation, and where the participants were defined largely by the content of such and not economic, social or political rank. However, I have observed that the Nigerian public sphere, despite its history of journalism, publishing and legislative reform, would not be recognized in the Habermasian framework, or any framework since. Rather, public discourse is unstable and intermittent, fraught with ethnic strife and religious influences, and set against a backdrop of colonial and military struggles whose authoritarian tendencies remain. This socio-political reality thus complicates the notion of the public sphere in Nigeria. The hybridity and multi-dimensional character of the digital media sphere is thus highly relevant in a country where social and political structures and boundaries are ambiguous and porous.

While the hybrid character of digital media potentially supports the creation of spaces for citizens to interact and deliberate on matters of common concern, how these interactions can take place among citizens and coalesce into a general public opinion is difficult to assess. For citizens to join the public sphere via the print media, they are able to write opinion articles or letters-to-the-editor, even though in reality the readership of newspapers was highly segmented even with a national distribution. With digital media, horizontal communication from one citizen to the other via blogging, tweeting, face booking, still dominated, yet the element of mass participation and public visibility, and vertical interconnection of public and successive levels of authority, are only tentatively present. The apparent distinction between the impact of digital media in the West and in Africa is that there is a lack of interconnection between the new and

the old media, where a low level of ‘remediation’ means that old media does not facilitate the circulation and dissemination of new media content, and that new media has no competent and substantive role in old media delivery and its communication with its audiences.

Nonetheless, as a preliminary overview of perspectives, observations and views derived from the research interview material (quoted in more detail in Section Two), I here list the identifiable roles digital media currently plays in facilitating an embryonic public sphere in Nigeria: I list them here, as a preliminary to my detailed empirical research and analysis, as they would be considered ‘general knowledge’ or at least general observational data, by the informed reader:

- Digital media is used to draw immediate attention to inconsistencies in Government policy, for example, Occupy Nigeria and the policy on fuel subsidy.
- It is being used to identify individual public officials responsible for particular public policies, and target them with questions.
- It is currently beckoning (and often goading) Government into a formal and systematic account of its actions.
- Digital media has diversified the channels of communication of social and particular issues – where issues can inhabit the most effective channels, or migrate to other channels or platforms depending on the requirements of the communication.
- It is increasing voter awareness, (mobilising voter behaviour in response to particular concerns – outside of traditional or tribal allegiances).
- Digital media has been used to monitor elections and incidences of violence and vote rigging in Nigeria.
- It has also been used to mobilise medical and emergency interventions by citizens for fellow citizens (e.g. #Save projects)
- Digital media is also used to sustain or interrogate reports or commentary

- appearing in broadcast on traditional media.
- Information spreads more cheaply in Nigeria due to uptake of digital media and is more immediate

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the idea of digital media as culture in Nigeria, and identified what digital media tools are popularly adopted in this African country. The modes of interrelation between old media, new media, and the Nigerian public sphere, was placed in focus later in the chapter, where I presented a narrative on the increased adoption of the Internet, via mobile telephony in the country. I also listed identifiable roles digital media is currently playing in facilitating an embryonic public sphere.

In the next section, which is the final section, put forth in detail, ‘the Nigerian digital public sphere in action’, but through the perspective of my interviewees. Before then, I discuss the methodology adopted in this thesis in Chapter Seven. In the later Chapters of Ten and Eleven, I critically discuss the findings of my research, and in detail, explore the challengers and constraints the NDPS faces in order to be effectively democratic in Nigeria. I also put forward certain suggestions for further study.

Section Three: Chapter Seven

Methods

Introduction

As a way of representing the complexity of the subject of this research investigation into the digital public sphere in Nigeria, I constructed in the previous sections an outline of the central characteristics of its historical political and legal contexts. This constituted the field of research. In this section I will therefore clarify my approach to field research, and the various methodological and theoretical questions that it raises, before considering my interview findings. I have chosen interviews as a means of offering verifiable, explicit and contemporary insight into the embryonic public sphere, where few publications and little data are available.

Outline and Rational

Traditionally, the methodology section of a thesis comprises steps taken by the researcher in order to respond to the research questions guiding his/her respective study. In this introductory chapter of Section Three I will simply explain the nature of my selected method – field research interviews – and discuss its objectives and significance. This section is important as it also conveys the extraneous factors and unforeseen circumstances that may have

affected the outcome of the research, hence allowing the limits of the analysis and discussion to be clearly plotted. In order for the reader to understand the connection between the research problem, questions and findings, this methodology section needs to be clearly structured. The systematic nature of conducting a social scientific research makes it pertinent that the researcher reveals in a step-by-step format, how he/she approached the research questions, laying emphasis on the limitations of the study therein.

Research interviews can function productively in both qualitative or quantitative frameworks of analysis. Of course, human beings are conversational beings, and so the interview is not in itself a pure research method, or at least a research method that could claim pure objectivity. The process of gathering knowledge through conversation precedes the adoption of interview as a qualitative research method. A classic definition of interviews by Maccoby & Maccoby (1954) as cited by Brinkmann (2013), 'a face-to-face verbal exchange, in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons' (Brinkmann, 2013: 1). However, the interview method has gone beyond the face-to-face interview to encompass other forms such as phone interviews, email interviews and others. Gubrium & Holstein give a more up-to-date description of interview research. It goes thus: 'The interviewer coordinates a conversation aimed at obtaining desired information. He or she makes the initial contact, schedules the event, designates its location, sets out the ground rules, and then begins to question the interviewee or respondent. Questions elicit answers in more or less

anticipatable format until the interviewer's agenda is completed and the interview ends'. (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001:3).

Qualitative interviewing, to be precise, as the case is in this study, is one that is founded on conversation, with emphasis on the researcher asking questions and listening for responses. It might be similar to the Survey Interview method, but unlike that, 'interview respondents are more likely to be viewed as meaning makers, not passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers' (Warren, 2001: 83). These interviews may be unstructured, structured or semi-structured. Structured interviews are used in survey research, and follow the same format as questionnaires. Unstructured interview on the other hand 'have little preset structure'; examples are 'the life story interview' (Brinkmann, 2013: 20). The semi-structured interview is located somewhat in-between both formats (to be further explained subsequently). Brinkmann highlights that the distinction to be made between these three forms of interview need to be 'thought of as a continuum ranging from relatively structured to relatively unstructured formats' (2013: 18). For surely there is no such thing as a completely structured interview, where the interviewer has a strictly pre-determined agenda of knowledge to elicit from the respondent. In Brinkmann's words, 'utterances that "spill beyond the structure" are often quite important' and are sometimes significant in understanding the interviewees' responses (2013: 18). In the same vein, regarding the unstructured format, Brinkmann argues that 'since the interviewer always has an idea about what should take place in the conversation,' no such thing exists as a completely unstructured interview.

I determined that the semi-structured format is best suited to this research study. Brinkmann (2013: 21) posits that the semi-structured may be regarded as the most common form of interview in human and social sciences. In comparison to the structured or unstructured interview, the semi-structured interview has the following advantages: (i) they can make effective use of the knowledge-producing potentials of dialogue by giving allowance for follow-up ‘on whatever angles are deemed important by the interviewer’; (ii) the interviewer also has more control in steering the conversation to issues significant to the research project (Brinkmann, 2013: 21). Brinkmann defines the semi-structured interview as ‘an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena’ (Brinkmann, 2013: 21). The emphasis of this definition is on three points: purpose, description (of life world) and interpretation of meaning. This research study employed the semi-structured interview method, carried out on a field research trip to Nigeria. This research method was best suited to the study for various reasons.

Firstly, Nigeria is a developing society where the adoption of digital media technology is still emerging. Developments are taking place at an accelerated pace, and as a researcher, one needs to be in the field to go beyond observing how these changes are taking place, to gathering data on people’s experiences in using digital media tools for public communication. Secondly, the concept of the *digital public sphere* is relatively new, and in order to map the digital public sphere in a developing society, where information and communication

technology is equally emerging, the interview method is the most effective in determining the pace, context and practices of this new terrain. Effectively mapping a digital public sphere entails gathering data on people's experiences on these digital communicative spaces; while quantitative statistics from marketing research firms may exist as to *how many* people are using a particular technological device or service, or visiting a webpage, the interview method enables the researcher understand *how* and *why* it is being used - this provides insight into the *culture* of the people's digital media use.

In the data used for the next two chapters, the interview format was semi-structured, to grant respondents the leeway to share information they deemed relevant to the subject that the researcher may not have considered when drawing up the interview guide. These semi-structured interviews were conducted in Nigeria at locations such as offices, technology hubs, and other relatively quiet spaces. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed for analysis. The interviewees on the other hand, were grouped into seven categories, and they were required to meet certain criteria to be fit for interview on this research study. These categories are:

1. Public officials
2. Mainstream journalists
3. Information technology experts
4. Social activists
5. Bloggers/Citizen journalists
6. Religious leaders
7. Cultural producers

These groups were regarded as democracy stakeholders and active players in

Nigeria's digital media space.

Public officials: People who work in government, from governors, to their special assistants, who are active users of digital media, especially for engagement with the public. They could be safely described as 'mouthpieces of the government online'.

Mainstream journalists: The press occupied a key role in the traditional public sphere of Habermas' narrative. Here, although digital media has expanded the definition of journalism beyond the press, traditional journalism (otherwise known as old media) are still central to understanding the digital public sphere in Nigeria.

Information Technology experts (app developers): This group is significant to the digital public sphere because they create the locally relevant technology that is used in discourse or action directly or indirectly. An example is the interviewee who designed the Nigerian Federal Constitution for Blackberry App.

Social Activists: People who have been involved in one public social cause or the other; whether solely online or solely offline but use digital media tools for their processes.

Bloggers/Citizen Journalists: This group comprised active bloggers who either ran their own platforms or were astute contributors to other citizen platforms.

Religious Leaders: Given that religion is a strong part of the Nigerian public sphere, right from the colonial period, religious leaders who were active digital media users formed part of the respondents of this study.

Cultural Producers: Cultural producers also make up a significant part of the

Nigerian public sphere as they create and distribute (cultural) media messages that filter into public sphere discourse. An example of cultural producers are film and documentary producers.

Although the interviewees were organised into clear categories or groups as listed above, in the following chapters their responses, presented in narrative form, are presented using another categorization. Where interviewees' professions and civic/social roles, such as 'journalist' or 'activist' are useful in simplifying the diversity of public sphere participants I interviewed (as seen in the Appendix), in the discussion chapters it became necessary to represent their contributions in terms of our prior construction of a theoretical concept of the digital public sphere – in terms of new media platforms, communication techniques, dialogue and issues, and so on. This was for several reasons, both theoretical and pragmatic.

First, theoretically, the purpose of agglomerating a diverse range of interviewees was to demonstrate the substantial presence of civil society and non-governmental actors within public debate and the forms of public communications that are becoming formative of a 'public sphere'. To the extent that this was a fundamental aim of this thesis, they were required to represent roles and contributions within the increasingly broad civil participation in public discourse as defined by the introductory sections of this thesis.

Second, pragmatically, arranging them so, also afforded me the opportunity to represent them in a more significant light, as contributors to a broader discourse

of an emerging public and not merely as individual civil society actors representing their own interests or simply airing their own personal views. So arranged, the interviewees are positioned within the structural development of a new public sphere in Nigeria, and the knowledge and perceptions they so express are not merely indicative of their profession or limited context of social class, but pertain to the functioning of the public discourse within Nigerian democratic society.

Furthermore, the fluidity and complexity of the content of the interviews (the interviewees were unpredictable, and could swiftly change subjects, or talk about multiple subjects simultaneously) could be more intelligibly accommodated by assigning single statements to our categories of public sphere development. The interview responses revealed, furthermore, that as professionals and established interlocutors in an embryonic public sphere, their roles became increasingly blurred, as their views, their professional position, and indeed digital media itself, changed rapidly. A freelance journalist by day may also be a social activist by night; the same could apply to the social activist, who may from time to time, assume the role of a private individual running a business, yet, in the same digital public sphere reach the same audience segments for these different communications. It is a structural feature of Nigerian society and its labour markets, that even professionals often have two jobs or represent two very different roles within the same company or position of responsibility.

Representing our interviewees in terms of their profession, therefore, may indeed misrepresent the content of their interview responses, implying that they are a ‘sample’ viewpoint of their profession, and in Nigeria this cannot be assumed. Diversity in opinion and viewpoint is another feature of Nigerian society, and in no place I wished to imply that individual professions were representative of the views or opinion of that profession (unless where I specifically make that point). The most effective and transparent means by which to contain this complexity was therefore to place an emphasis on the conceptual content of interviewee’s statements, and situate this within an aforementioned category that would further my thesis on the development of a public sphere.

The snow-ball technique was employed in identifying and soliciting participants. This technique is defined by Atkinson & Flint (2013, online) as a way of gathering research subjects through identifying an initial subject, who then links the researcher to other prospective subjects. Atkinson and Flint (2013, online) propose that the technique is primarily used ‘as a response to overcome the problems associated with understanding and sampling concealed populations such as the socially deviant and the socially isolated’ (Atkinson and Flint, 2013: Online). While the participants in this research study did not fall in either the category of the socially deviant or isolated, the snowball technique was relevant (per category) in that the area of study, digital public sphere, made it crucial that the participants met certain criteria such as: being active users of the digital media communicative space, belonging to one or more of the slated categories.

For social movements for instance, there had to be identifiable advocated causes.

The snowball technique can be used within a wider set of methodologies (Atkinson & Flint, 2013), hence, for this study, other methods that were employed for an effective field research process included *digital* participant observation. This involves the researcher being a member of social media network(s) where potential respondents were already active, and observe their interactions online - sometimes contributing to their general discussion. The researcher used this digital participant observation method to take advantage of social network platforms on the web, envisioned as new public sphere sites where public discourse takes place, in order to establish an initial list of potential respondents. These purposively selected respondents were observed and then recruited into the sample size, and they then offered referrals of other potential respondents within their respective categories. For this study, there were a total of thirty-eight (38) participants interviewed during the field research, data from 35 have been used in this research. Each interview lasted a minimum of thirty minutes.

Interview data and theoretical framework

Key public officials were not available to be interviewed. In this thesis, only one key public official, governor of a state in Nigeria availed himself for an interview, and it was conducted via email. However, “special assistants” and other lower level public officials who were equally active users of digital media platforms

were available for interview. It is important to note that there were times when there was no clear distinction in category and there was an overlap. For instance, someone was interviewed under the *citizen journalist* category because she worked on a citizens' platform, however, she was equally a trained and certified journalist. Under the category, *religious leaders*, the *digital participant observation* exercise did not yield any prospective active digital media user to represent the Islamic religion. A pastor (who runs a Christian church) was interviewed in this category.

Information and communication technologies bring about cheap, fast and widespread communication, and communication in the form of deliberation and debate is an essential ingredient of any public sphere. Our theoretical understanding of the digital public sphere in Nigeria has been constructed through the past two chapters of conceptual research, but our empirical content (on the embryonic public sphere in Nigeria) will be informed by the interviewees, the supporting documents provided to the researcher while on field work, and relevant published literature on the Nigerian situation.

For Habermas and his subsequent interlocutors, the public sphere is a space of communication between civil society and the state, where rational-critical debate on substantive matters of public interest should emerge. The mass media was central to the functioning of this public sphere throughout the era of nation state development and consolidation. As noted in the previous chapter, my attempt to conceptualise a digital public sphere in the light of the critique of the classical

model entails an attentiveness to structural change in five key components:

1. New media platforms/spaces
2. Communication techniques
3. Agents and agencies
4. Dialogue and issues
5. Impact and intervention

Being semi-structured interviews, these subjects were broached in a direct but not prescriptive way. Here below I will indicate the conceptual background that formed my various interview questions, based on these components.

New media platforms/spaces: As mentioned earlier, the printing press was central to the effectiveness of the bourgeois public sphere in Habermas' study. For Kellner however, the media in focus was television. In his book, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (1990), it is his submission that the television and media in general have both failed in promoting an informed public discourse for democracy to thrive, as well as fuelled the growth of excessive corporate power.

In the digital public sphere, the new media spaces active in the public discourse here are blogs, social network sites, chat rooms, email groups and more. Where in Habermas' construction of the public sphere, the printing press was central, in the digital public sphere, these new equally 'abstract' spaces play significant roles in fostering interaction and dialogue among citizens, including across borders. Although the quality of the conversations, the so-called deliberations, is up for debate, the potentialities of new digital communication tools for a democratic public sphere remains significant. New digital media platforms

represent in contemporary times, the old coffee houses and salons where public deliberations took place in Habermas' public sphere.

Communication Techniques: In the use of digital media communication technologies for public interaction, it is found that various techniques are employed in the 'bringing together' of the voices through specific forms of messaging, linguistic convention, protocols and forms of address. Voices interact online through 'tweet-meets', 'twitter town hall meetings', 'comments on blog posts', 'hashtag culture', 'Facebook pages', etc. This basically refers to the different ways people/users engage with one another in dialogue via digital media communication tools in the Nigerian digital public sphere.

Agents and Agencies: This refers to people and organisations that are active in the Nigerian digital public sphere. The digital public sphere is made up of people and organisations who use digital media tools in their interactions and as part of their deliberative processes to varying degrees, strategically or just tactically. Hence, their activities do bear influence on the nature of the public sphere in Nigeria – both socio-politically and culturally. A definition of the Nigeria digital public sphere would be incomplete without acknowledging who these groups are, what they do and how they contribute to the digital public sphere.

Dialogues and Issues: This element covers the intellectual or dialogic 'content' of the Nigerian digital public sphere. It answers the question: what are the people talking about? In Habermas' public sphere, the issues under discussion were regarded as 'public' issues, formative of a co-extensive series of

viewpoints known as ‘public opinion’. Hence, in interrogating the digital public sphere in Nigeria, the researcher needs to examine the nature of the topics in relation to the debate and any general formation of consensus (whether on group level or societal).

Impact and Interventions: just as there are agents and agencies made up of peoples and organisations, there are certain citizen-driven interventions and impacts that have come about in Nigeria as a result of the use of new digital media technologies. Indeed, a public sphere is grounded on the premise that its activities have a bearing on the state and its management of the country, region or city. These interventions are significant to the idea of the digital public sphere in Nigeria because they both validate and motivate participation, and in turn define the idea of ‘public good’.

These components, as stated in Section One, will define the structure and parameters of the narrative formed from the interview data. The interviews were not prescriptive, and the interviewees were broad and liberal in their responses and reference points.

Conclusion:

In examining the nature of the embryonic digital public sphere, there is no better source than its users, who are also its producers, and daily observers. Candid discussion, viewpoints and information on the social dimension of digital media development, is important to our understanding on how this embryonic

phenomenon is developing. As my adopted methodology above representes, these users and producers were mainstream journalists, information technology experts, social activists, bloggers/citizen journalists, religious leaders, and cultural producers. In interviewing these NDPS participants, I was able to include reference to their own familiarity with digital media tools, their personal experience in using these tools in general public communication, and then more specifically, their contribution in contributing to political dialogue and debate. I was also attentive to their general views about digital media and its impact on Nigeria's democratic culture, as they experience it from day-to-day. I sought their thoughts on the future development of democratic culture in Nigeria through the use of digital media. I therefore attempted to breach the usual divisions of empirical and theoretical, objective data and subjective viewpoint. For as I hope will appear obvious in the next two chapters: the embryonic digital public sphere is embedded in (emerging from) the experience of citizens, and their spaces and places of personal life, work and social interaction.

Section Three: Chapter Eight

An Embryonic Public Sphere in Nigeria: Participants' Perspective (1)

Introduction

In this chapter, my research interview participants describe the digital public sphere in Nigeria in terms of (i) the *new media platforms and spaces* available, and (ii) the *communication techniques* they employ in using these media platforms. The next chapter will feature interview material on the subject of *agents and agencies, dialogue and issues*. The subject of *impact and intervention*, is endemic to all interviewees and topics. Indeed it is important to note that for the digital media sphere the production and distribution, creation and consumption, are closely related and often internally bound up. Throughout both these chapters I identify key persons, events and innovations that have played a role in cultivating a ‘culture’ of democratic behaviours, where through the adoption and use of digital media they further the sense of a ‘public’ realm, interest and ‘good’ in Nigeria. The interviewees also articulate significant detail on the challenges facing an embryonic public sphere.

During the two following chapters the source of quotations is indicated by the name of the interviewee stated prior to quotation, identified in the appendix and cited in the references section under ‘Research Interviews’.

New Media platforms and the ‘embryonic’ public sphere

The questions guiding the inquiry here include: what new media platforms, applications and tools are available in Nigeria, and what are used for activities relevant within our theoretical construct of the digital public sphere? What are the current technological capabilities of the new platforms, applications and tools in Nigeria, and how reliable and consistent are these technologies? How far does online/digital coverage span in Nigeria, and how are these platforms integrated in socio-cultural and political life? Data on the precise number of Nigerians with access to new digital media is difficult to access – as I noted in Chapter Six of Section Two. The data below has been gathered from my field research, where I conducted semi-structured interviews with thirty-eight (38) active digital media users in Nigeria. It explains what digital platforms are available, for what (democratic) purposes they are used. It also highlights the perception of the structure/architecture of the platforms, user experience and so on. The data covers other themes such as reliability of available digital media services in Nigeria.

At this juncture, it is important to call attention to the availability of what Alkassim Abdukadir (2013, journalist) calls “cheap smart phones” in Nigeria. Primarily, smart phones are not cheap in terms of pricing, however, these cheap smart phones are relatively low-priced. According to Abdukadir (2013), he describes such phones as those that:

...Give you access to receive your email...access to either Twitter or 2Go or Facebook, and you can get them for about N7000 (£25).

They basically grant the user access to a limited array of social network sites or features. He further explains that popular brands that provide these cheap smartphones are the

Regular Nokia phones, the Tecno ones from China and a lot of them are run on android devices. The Tecno phones are quite cheap. Nokia also has some cheap brands.

Abdukadir (2013) also calls attention to the existing market for fairly-used smart phones as another avenue through which mobile media technology is spreading in Nigeria. In his words,

A lot of people buy fairly used Blackberries – those who cannot afford [the high-end brand new smart phones] – for about \$100 you would get a fairly used Blackberry or even less than that. So these are very popular devices. So the mobile phone is the most popular.

Kole Shettima (2013) is also of the opinion that mobile phones are becoming much more affordable, as

With N5,000 [approximately £20], you can actually do more

than what we used to do 5 months ago.

The interview participants perceive the adoption of new media technology in Nigeria as a relatively new development. However, many of them emphasize that Nigerians who are active users are few compared to those who are not. According to Mbah (2013), while “Twitter is giving people information on-the-go” and Facebook is spurring interaction and “debates on issues”, not every Nigerian is on Twitter. He says even among those who are on Twitter, “some of them are just there for fancy...” Along the same vein, another journalist, Jon Gambrell (2013) says “some people [in Nigeria] cannot afford to look at this stuff” [*stuff* being new media tools such as smart phones, tablets etc.] However, he thinks that as data rates [internet service costs] “drop cheaper and cheaper” and “you’re seeing mobile networks being able to provide better services like 3G access”, more active users would emerge. Jon says that while he thinks that “there is a real presence of Nigerians on Twitter”, his perception is that the active users are the people he considers to middle upper class to upper class, economically.

Another form of digital divide other than the gap between the ‘haves and have not’ in Nigeria, is the gap between those who use the digital media tools to its full capability, and those who do not. According to Segun Fodeke (2013),

Even though everybody is almost digitised now because we all have mobile phones, many people are still not aware of the full capabilities of their devices.

He says that

There is still a seemingly wide gap between those who use it actively and those who have it but don't use it [or use it] just to make phone calls.

There is another group who:

Just use mobile phone for Facebook chat, then a group of people who are very notorious in Nigeria are the Blackberry users...[who] primarily use their phones for BBM chats and exchanging pictures and audio..." (Fodeke, 2013).

The generational divide is another gap the respondents brought attention to from diverse perspectives. Active digital media use and adoption in Nigeria is seen as the domain of young people to the exclusion of the older generation. According to Yemi Adamolekun (2013),

Because it [new media] is a space dominated by young people, it seems to be children of anger who are online".

Segun Fodeke (2013) buttresses this point when he says he has found that among older people, there are those who "would strictly not want to get to use the phone for more than just phone calls." This group of people 'are literate' according to Fodeke (2013), "but they just don't want to go beyond that phone

call" - they are mostly in their 50s. Similarly, Jaiye Gaskia (2013), a social activist who had been actively involved in politics and social change during the military era, before digital media such as the mobile phone and Internet arrived in Nigeria, shared concerns about the divide between the older and younger Nigerian demographic in digital media adoption. He calls the tension between the two groups a "generational tension". In his words, for the older group of social activists, their first introduction and knowledge of digital media has generated a "negative perception". Gaskia (2013) says that for them,

The digital media was the place where unserious youths hanged out, it was a place where gossip was being perpetuated. It was a place where people could make commentaries without any sense of responsibility

Thus, the older generation "kind of then distanced itself from it" (Gaskia, 2013).

On the generational gap, Fodeke (2013) highlights two specific social networks that he finds to be popular among young school leavers; the younger generation. They are 2Go and Eskimi. He opines that

There's a large number of them because they find a lot of solace in that environment where there is no adult monitoring them...so there's a lot of freedom on that network.

Bukola Ogunyemi (2013) also talks about the imbalance in age groups among

users. In his words,

Using digital media limits you to certain age-groups, as some of our elder statesmen, elder citizens are still not...have still not gotten a grasp of these platform, these digital media platforms. So it cuts you off from a particular generation.

Oguneymi (2013) states literacy as a challenge of engagement with digital media in Nigeria. Another challenge he raises is the affordability of the platforms. Ogunyemi (2013) is quick to point out that there is competition among Internet service providers, hence, “the competition is forcing the price down.”

In terms of experience using digital media platforms, Ayeni (2013), a PR person says “I’ve made friends, I’ve made enemies, I’ve made money.” For Banky W (2013), a cultural producer (musician) on the other hand, he says that for him, Twitter is his number one platform because he gets instant feedback from his fans. In his words,

It's just a great way to engage...you know the people who are into what you are doing, or whatever, so I think for me, it's probably that, and I just enjoy the interaction. I think it's fun, it's entertainment – so it's fun for me, and it's fun for everybody!

For other users, adopting digital media technologies is more than just enjoyment.

Rotimi Olawale (2013) talks about taxi drivers who are also active digital media users. He says, they argue political issues with him and tell him they read it on their phone:

We discuss about politics and all of that, he watches some videos on his phones...he has this *china mobile phone*.

Olawale (2013) says his taxi driver can pull up the Internet and watch live TV on his mobile.

The mobile phone has revolutionised the way that we access information in Nigeria – combined with the Internet penetration and all of that, it has opened the eyes of Nigerians" (Olawale, 2013).

In using digital media tools, Tolu Ogunlesi (2013), journalist, separates his "personal space" from spaces for his other activities. Here is how he explains it:

BBM is a personal space, but Twitter is the one I use consistently and actively. Facebook, I've left it for a bit, but every now and then I just go back, because there is a huge community there as well, so it's useful.

According to Ogunlesi (2013), when he publishes a new article, he may occasionally go to Facebook and G+ to share the link.

Tomi Oladipo (2013), journalist, says in his use of digital media tools, he is

careful not to let his social media connections impact how he practices his journalism. He says:

There are people who don't know what Twitter is, so you need to be wary of that.

Oladipo says his news reports for radio get translated into different languages as the BBC has different language services, and as such 'a Fulani herdsman on his camel is listening on his transistor radio' –

If I wrote my story with the Twitter person in mind and not this man also in mind, then I have gone slightly off.

To support Tomi Oladipo's position towards digital media for journalism practice, Bankole Olufemi (2013), a tech blogger, also shares a similar perception: "I don't have any illusions that the janitor for instance is reading my blog.'

Concerning user experience, Gbenga Olorunpomi (2013), public official (social media assistant to politician), says he is "addicted to online media". In his words,

I am addicted to consuming online media all the time, but there are a lot of things battling for my attention...

In addition, basic power supply is a significant infrastructural challenge regarding the use of new digital media platforms in Nigeria and the experience. According to Abdukadir (2013), a journalist:

I would say I use BBM and Twitter almost every minute, as far as I have power supply on my devices...

Similarly, another journalist, Seun Okinbaloye (2013) says,

Power supply is never stable...so people want to go around with something that will take them. I want to buy a phone that can take me for a long time.

He adds that this is especially so in a “metropolitan city of Nigeria like Lagos, where you can be in a traffic for several hours.” Okinbaloye says “mobility” is at the centre of his choice of the use of digital media. Tolu Ogunlesi (2013) also references how traffic forms a huge part of human behaviour in the use of technology in Nigeria. He says, “people spend a lot of time in traffic...to kill that time, a mobile phone comes in handy.”

However, there are infrastructural challenges plaguing the intensive use of digital media in Nigeria, Segun Fodeke (2013), creator of a government expenditure monitoring initiative using digital media, explains that with regards to infrastructure, while Nigeria might be doing well macro-economically, in terms of aspects of the economy like data coverage, it is not doing well. He says,

I've gone to some states where their data coverage doesn't exist. In the states they have coverage, but in some parts of those states...no coverage.

Fodeke says, “we still have issues in terms of basic phone calls, when you have dropped calls, congestion...”. To counter this situation, photojournalist Sunday Alamba (2013) explains that he has multiple mobile lines with different networks. He says:

Sometimes because network doesn't work here properly, that's why people have more than one or two phones, so they can go to Etisalat or other networks. It depends on where you are... if this one fails, the other one will work.

Soji Apampa (2013), founder of NGO Integrity Nigeria, says that poor bandwidth and reliability of service from Internet service providers have been a major challenge, “we couldn't get anything that was reliable or reasonable, we were spending a lot of money...” Apampa opted to subscribe to fibre optic cables for his Internet connection.

On reliability, Fidelis Mbah (2013) complains at the poor services available in the rural areas. He considers infrastructure to be a major challenge in the adoption of digital media in Nigeria because for instance, very few villages (rural areas), have phone masts and connection. Mbah (2013) says,

Even where you have phone connections, they are very erratic. In most places you can't even use a service like Skype, even across the country...

In addition, Fidelis Mbah mentions the power challenge –

People don't have light [power] to be able to power their systems or any (digital media) platforms.

As for the affordability of digital media devices, Fidelis Mbah raises the questions,

How many people can afford a smart phone, how many people can afford a laptop?

The reasons why Nigerians (as reflected by the interviewees) make use of digital media tools revolve around educating people, keeping people informed, staying in touch with one another and seeing 'what's happening'. Amara for instance says that he uses digital media to

Express strong views on national development" and to "participate in national dialogue.

For journalists, citizen and freelance journalists, they use digital media to "get story ideas." Chika Oduah (2013), a freelance journalist, says "Twitter is my number one news source". She also says she uses blogging and blogs to "gauge people's opinion."

For religious organisations, Ogidigbo (2013), a pastor, says he uses digital media to advertise church programs and events as his "church is very young...and cannot afford [to advertise on] traditional media." Related to this use of digital media (social media platforms) for free advertisement Yemi

Adamolekun (2013), another respondent, also raises this issue. She says,

Unlike in the past if you had to deal with traditional media, where you had to either pay for space as an advert or you needed to know somebody in the paper to maybe get an opinion piece printed.

Digital media now makes it possible to for you to “suddenly have access to fifty different conversations”.

Fidelis Mabah (2013), a journalist says he uses digital media to spread information, as “few people actually read the newspaper”. However, Ayeni (2013), a PR executive on the other hand says

I still buy newspapers a lot...but I almost do not switch on my TV. Also radio, I probably listen to radio only when I am in the car...which is not a lot.

Ayeni uses digital media “to be current”, and to stay abreast of what is being said online about his clients (as a PR man) and his business. He is interested in identifying what the “trending topics” online are. In addition to that, Ayeni uses digital media for “fun”. He says, “Instagram for me is more fun. I use Instagram 90% for fun and 10% work.”

Egghead Odewale (2013) says he uses digital media platforms to “pontificate on different political issues and development in Nigeria”. He has also used it for

real-time election tracking and monitoring activities. According to him, his first major use of digital media for political engagement was in 2009. He used Twitter to document a “real-time tracking of the election in Ekiti [a Nigerian state] when they had supplementary elections in February.” Odewale continues that activity of his formed the basis of evidence used to “present a formidable case during the court process.” In his words,

It was that watertight and robust judicial brief that earned the present governor [now former] the victory at the court – these evidence were basically stored on Twitter platform.

Many of the respondents give celebratory comments on the impact of new digital media on Nigeria’s democratic culture. However, there is equally feedback on the shortcomings of the new media in Nigeria. According to Yemi Adamolekun (2013), digital media “amplifies voices”. Bankole Olufemi (2013), a tech blogger, explains that digital media has given him access to fora he ordinarily would not have been able to be a part of:

You’ve got people in danfos [commercial buses] become political pundits taking on the Rueben Abati’s [special adviser to the president of Nigeria on media] of this world.

Olufemi (2013) says that while you may be on your Nokia (relatively affordable phone), the individual you are arguing with might be on “his iPad”. As such,

Because you have access to the same platform that he

has, it doesn't matter that you are using some shady device, and you are in some Keke Marwa [commercial tricycle].

Olufemi (2013) points out that:

Digital media allows people to engage on the strength of their ideas as opposed to what their political pedigree or social pedigree is," and that for him is the "most profound thing.

He says:

I don't exactly come from a wealthy background...Nobody knows me, I don't have any sort of political background or pedigree...money...but somehow people like me have managed to interact in this conversations (Olufemi, 2013).

Mbah (2013), journalist, says digital media "gives information on the go", while for Omojuwa (2013), a social activist, it "dilutes the reach of tyranny." Omojuwa (2013) further says:

... Based on the things I write and the things I say, I should have been arrested by the government – but digital media is a kind of disincentive for things like that because you know that if you pick him up, he will start trending on

Twitter, before you know it, the whole world is going to hear.

Gbenga Sesan (2013), an ICT-developer and social activist says that, digital media has “really opened a space where people can express themselves.” He says that between 2010 and 2012, “people found their voice online”. Sesan (2013) further explains that digital media was “the only option” people had for communication and expression – particularly freedom of expression. Hence, for him:

History of digital media in Nigeria is mostly political – and that's why you are not surprised that much of the conversation happening online is mostly around politics...

Albeit that digital media has brought about many benefits to democratic culture in Nigeria, respondents also raise some concerns on its shortcomings. According to Oladipo (2013), a journalist with the BBC in Lagos, while digital media was effective in mobilising the Occupy Nigeria protest even before the labour union “could put themselves together to say let's have a protest”, he finds that digital media is limited in terms of its impact on Nigerian democracy. For Oladipo (2013), the downside to digital media for democracy in Nigeria is that it gives “a false sense of we are legion” where “some people think they are bigger than they are because they are loud voices [online].” Furthermore, with regards to politicians and public officials who come online to engage, he says, “it's no different from being offline.” To explain this statement, Oladipo (2013) gives the

instance of a finance minister who comes into the digital sphere to “post all this statistics” (essentially provide information), but “she won’t respond if you ask a question.” Here, he concludes that this:

In itself is not good in that it’s not helpful for democratic culture, because digital media is supposed to open everybody up and connect people...

In using digital media to promote democratic culture in Nigeria through, Alamba and Ogunyemi (2013) mention security as another challenge. According to Sunday, he says he does not engage in conversations online because:

You never know who you are talking to, especially you being a journalist. You don’t know how many journalists been killed here. It could be political...

Bukola Ogunyemi in his interview, gave an account on how he started receiving death threats over a “sarcastic” tweet he posted using a “religious figure.” According to him, “I thought it was a joke and I had threats on my life on twitter, which I discounted...”

The new media platforms central to the functioning of Nigeria’s embryonic public sphere formed the hub of this section. Available statistics and data from the ITU, Africa Practice organisation, Open Society Foundation, combined with insights from the research interview participants, revealed the following: the specific new media tools employed in the NDPS (Nigerian Digital Public Sphere), who is

using what platforms (that is, the rich vs. the poor, the older vs. the younger generation, religious organisations etc.), and observations as to why. Addressing new media platforms as a core element of the NDPS opened issues as to the wide gap between the digital media haves and have-nots, and the “generational divide” – that is, the chasm dividing those who perhaps may have access to these communication technologies, but would rather not engage in dialogue with predominantly “younger generation” online. Digital literacy and poor infrastructural facilities were equally flagged some of the core issues around new media platforms in the Nigerian digital public sphere.

Communication techniques and the ‘embryonic’ public sphere

The line of inquiry in this section refers to the online/digital communication techniques users may employ when communicating online in the Nigerian digital public sphere. This element broadly covers themes such as the communicative techniques used in engaging with new media platforms, the languages employed in communicating online, patterns of behaviour among Nigerian digital media users and their existing political or communication aims in online interaction in this public sphere. The major communication techniques adopted in the Nigerian digital sphere include facebook-ing, tweeting and blogging. Within each of these platforms, other techniques that take cognisance of the architecture and affordability (or capability) of the platform in passing online messages, include tweet-meets, twitter-townhalls, twe-minars etc. Sometimes the platforms are integrated and messages are shared simultaneously, for

instance, across Facebook, Twitter, blogs and more. Below are a few examples shared by interviewees:

In the Occupy Nigeria protest, Azeernarh Mohammed (2013), a social activist, says that as part of strategies employed in mobilising the protest,

We broke down the messages in short 140-characters [Twitter] and gave links [URL] to where you could find more details.

She says Facebook was more “interesting” because people could “have a conversation with you”. In addition, they produced blog posts towards the Occupy Nigeria protest, and according to her, the aim was to “inform” and “convince” people. Mohammed (2013) describes engaging digital media in the Occupy Nigeria protest as “having a dialogue with the rest of Nigeria.”

Specific techniques and behavioural patterns are also observed in how these respondents employ Twitter platform in online dialogue/communication. For instance, digital media campaigns are run on Twitter using the hash-tag feature (#). Mohammed (2013) says the techniques for using digital media [Twitter in this case] goes as follows:

Get a hash tag, frame the issues, welcome people into the discussion, and you “state what the law is.

The *law* here refers to the engagement rules guiding the online discussion for

decorum. Amara Nwankpa (2013) shares a similar technique when he advocates “[Nigerian] oil revenue tracking’ issues on social media. He drives this discussion campaign on both Twitter and Facebook, puts on information on selected themes on the subject and simplifies it. In his words,

Oil is a very complex industry – and if you were to put certain information raw, people won’t be able to connect...

Nwankpa (2013) says that in order to get more young people to understand what the key issues are [on oil revenue allocation in Nigeria], and to “make a stand and have an informed opinion and contribute to that conversation about what’s the way forward”, the message needs to be simplified.

For Nwankpa (2013), the process of simplification of messages for online dialogue is as follows:

- Planning goes into the topic selection.
- Decisions are made on the hash-tag of choice #hash-tags.
- The hash-tag is attached to each of the tweets going out.
- ‘We’ solicit responses, and have got a network of followers who would retweet into other’s timelines.
- After tweets are out, ‘we’ve got people who engage, and ask questions and talk a bit more about the topic as well’.
- ‘We are going to put out facts that are already established’.

Journalists and citizen journalists on the other hand employ other communication techniques on leveraging on digital media communication tools. Alkassim Abdulkadir (2013) for instance, uses digital media as a “crowdsourcing tool”. Here is his narrative:

...two years ago where there were a spate of bombs in Nigeria – anytime there is an explosion, you discover that people immediately start putting pictures on BBM.

Abdulkadir (2013) explains that sometimes these pictures may be broadcast, or shared as status messages. According to him, when the tweets go out announcing a bomb blast, it gives him the opportunity to timestamp the news event, verify its credibility, and enables him to identify potential eyewitnesses for his news report. He states,

If there is an eyewitness account, you tweet at him immediately that “*please where are you, are you close to this, what has happened?*”

As a journalist, Oduah (2013) also uses digital media in carrying out her responsibilities. She combines word-of-mouth with digital media tools. Oduah (2013) mentions that she has done some work in the Eastern region of Nigeria. She says she was able to communicate directly with the people. Giving an instance, Oduah (2013) says,

if I get a Twitter message I communicate something that affects those people in Bonny Island. I'll tell them what I'm getting and it will be kind of translated. I go to a traditional king, and tell them what's happening, he alerts his people.

The application of the aforementioned techniques is not limited to social activism

and journalism. Omojuwa (2013), although actively involved in social activism, uses digital media to promote businesses using the hash-tag technique, as a sort of social responsibility service online. He sometimes runs a “community-service project”, #myBiz, where he advises people to write out the details of their business, address, and phone number, including the hashtag #Mybiz and post on Twitter. Omojuwa (2013) would then “go over” and retweet (thus amplifying) their tweets. He says,

I have a far wider reach than these people, and then I retweet and I have people say *thank you I got contacts...* It helps you to reach more people than you would ordinarily reach...

In addition, when Japheth had an altercation with a Nigerian airline company over the alleged mishandling of his iPad, he started a hashtag on Twitter as a means of fighting back. He reports, “I started in June, #Arik-where-is-my-ipad. As at september, I was still on it...”. On the hash-tag technique, Omojuwa says,

The hash tag was a powerful tool for me when I was doing budget-scam [protest] for instance, the Occupy Movement started in Wall Street, and I was doing hash tags on why we should occupy ... all of these things were trending on Twitter.

In elections in Nigeria, the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) has

equally devised techniques on leveraging on digital media platforms to spur conversation and achieve a free and fair election. In a research interview with the Chief Press Officer of the Commission, Kayode Idowu (2013), he reveals that Twitter and Facebook have been employed in engaging the public. In addition, a “Situation Room” was erected for the previous elections and currently “scaling that to be a daily affair in what we call the INEC Citizens Contact Centre.” The function of the Centre would be to respond in real-time to tweets and messages from citizens, as they make enquiries. Idowu (2013) says,

We discover that because of that [the Situation Room], we get a lot of interaction with a lot of youths on the field in the course of elections, and I think it has increased their interest.

Related to election activities in Nigeria, Odewale (2013) explains how he uses digital media in election monitoring. He says:

The governorship elections in 2007 was the governorship election in Ekiti, in which then, what we were doing was to use Microsoft Access, to string together, to do independent tabulation of results

In 2009 however, was when Odewale (2013) incorporated social media as part of his election-monitoring routine. He says:

We started using video evidence, started having to take

picture evidence, telephone reports....We used Frontline SMS, Twitter, Facebook, email... a huge dependence on telephone calls in which people were able to call in.

Gbenga Olorunpomi (2013) is a former journalist and currently social media manager for a Nigerian political party; coming from both perspectives, he explains the communication techniques he employs. Olorunpomi (2013) says the Blackberry “created” the “citizen journalist - a lot of people wanting to really just share information with their friends, with people online.” With the introduction of the Blackberry to Nigeria, “people could type a short story on their phones”. Olorunpomi (2013) says that in NEXT newspapers, an online news website where he worked as a journalist, the idea was that:

Everyone was meant to have a Blackberry – you get a story, if it’s a big story, you are sending snippets to the newsroom.

...From the newsroom, the “snippets” are analysed, made into news copies and published on the website and social media according to Olorunpomi (2013).

However, now as social media manager for a political party and a former governor, Olorunpomi (2013) sets up Google Alerts for all the principal members of the party. He also gives “members of the party advice on how to craft the messages that will resonate...[with youths online]”. Olorunpomi (2013) gives an instance of a party member who is about to give a speech on a youth-related

issue, it is his responsibility to edit the text in a manner that it would resonate with youths. In terms of monitoring online comments about his principals, Olorunpomi (2013) uses tweet reach, hootsuite and tweet deck, “just to make sure I get the right, I get as much of a picture of what people are saying to what people want – and there is a feedback mechanism.” Some other communication techniques involve building a niche for one’s self online – as Mbah (2013) relays. Fidelis is formerly used to sending out ‘random tweets’ but he later realised that he needed to use the platform to build an area of specialisation for himself. So, “if someone is looking for information on Nigeria ...he should go on my TL [timeline]....”.

Yemi Adamolekun (2013), Executive Director of the social movement, Enough is Enough (EIE) Nigeria, says an effective communication technique in leveraging digital media for democracy is to bridge the offline and online “worlds”. In her words,

I can rant all about Ikeja [a local government area in Lagos, Nigeria] all I want on Twitter...it doesn’t change anything.

She says that however, if she “rants” on Twitter enough to get a hundred people who reside in Ikeja to go on the streets and demand a visit to their local government chairman, “that will get his attention.”

Furthermore, the use of traditional media is also a part of EIE’s communication strategy. Adamolekun (2013) says,

Anybody can wake up and write a blog, it doesn't have to be factual, and there is in a sense, no consequence...

With traditional media on the other hand, there is “greater responsibility” says Adamolekun (2013) - “because there is a fear of being sued, being shut down, there is a fear of adverts being withdrawn” if publications are not factual. Hence, Adamolekun (2013) opines that,

If I write an article in *Punch* where I state the same facts, by *Punch* printing it, even though they print it as an opinion, there's some certain weight that because it's in *Punch*... gives to it.

Punch is a printed newspaper in Nigeria.

Jon Gambrell (2013) is a journalist with an international news organisation ('AP') with a base in Nigeria. His communication techniques in using digital media for journalism are somewhat different from his local colleagues. According to Gambrell (2013), there are very strict policies guiding “what to say or what not to say” and “how to handle certain situations”. He continues, that his organisation makes effort to “verify” the Twitter accounts of journalists who work with them, and encourages them to tweet. However, Gambrell (2013) says,

Who I am on Twitter is not necessarily who I am in real life...there is a level of professionalism that you have adopt, a different tone.

The AP is “very good about using social media to gather news, to talk to people and I think that it allows a back and forth that typically wasn’t there before”, according to Gambrell (2013). He opines that the “back and forth” (interactivity) can “improve the news gathering process” and the story. However, Gambrell (2013) says he likes to conduct his interactions on his stories face to face. In his words, “one of the rules we have on AP is that as soon as you can, take it offline.” Gambrell (2013) explains that if one is trying to get a story,

Don’t let the people tell the whole story online because maybe a competitor is going to read it...

What he does then is to message the potential news source, “can we have your phone number, can I send you a direct message [twitter feature]” and I’ll say “here’s my phone number … I’ll call you right now”. So then you get in touch with that person face-to-face...”says Gambrell (2013).

Segun Fodeke (2013) is another active digital media user and citizen, who set up an online project called iWatch Ng defined as to

Take account of what government is doing with the money it purports to be spending on infrastructure and development in Nigeria

As part of his communication techniques, he manages a Facebook page for his project, as well as a Facebook Group, and is active on Twitter. He says he posts “mostly updates about what the government is doing, activities of the

government.” Upon posting these updates, he says some people would comment, but “Twitter gets a lot of quick responses.” Fodeke (2013) says

People want to just quickly say something on Twitter because it is very simple, short – FB too has a lot of responses too. Twitter comes in as a very quick snap way to reply.

As part of his techniques in using Twitter, Fodeke (2013) says he sometimes organises Tweet-meets. This is how he describes a Tweet-Meet as a “gathering on Twitter”, where he announces for instance, that “tomorrow 4pm we are having a series of tweets on power sector reforms in Nigeria.” Fodeke (2013) explains that he created an hashtag and “notified people, *mentioned* [a twitter feature], tweeted about it and when the time came up, spoke to them about it.” He says, “we make the notifications, people hear about it, then we start getting people to tweet about it...”

For a cultural producer, musician, like Banky W. (2013), he uses digital media tools differently. According to him, digital media has

...Put a lot of power in the hands of the artist and in the hands of the fans, and its provided like a direct link between those two groups of people.

In terms of distributing and marketing his music, Wellington (2013) says that digital media helps him “get the music out there.” Prior to this, he would have

needed to use an agency, solicit disk jockeys, and radio stations to publicise his music. On the contrary now, Wellington (2013) says,

When you are debuting new songs, and you are trying to get the music in the hands of fans, you just put it online immediately.

He adds that this shift “almost helps you kind of control or dictate what gets played on the radio” as opposed to the other way round - because if a song for instance trends on Twitter, it means it is popular and “radio stations don’t have a choice but to play it.” Another cultural producer, Sasha P. (2013), says she uses digital media to both communicate with fans and for business. She says,

I post pictures, dates of concerts, images, music via Twitter, Reverbnation, iTunes, Facebook, instagram, Tumblr, the whole works.

Gbenga Sesan (2013) is an ICT professional who was active during the Occupy Nigeria protest and gives a detailed account of the communication techniques applied during the protest and the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. He says in the period during the introduction of digital media in Nigeria, 2010 “became a series of protests people organised using BBM [Blackberry Messenger], particularly BBM and Facebook”. Sesan (2013) continues that in 2011 during the elections, Twitter, Facebook and BBM were being used to communicate, however, “much of what is done in terms of getting the real job done is by email.”

Sesan (2013) gives an example of someone who tweeted his location and asked Gbenga if anyone else was coming to protest. Sesan (2013) says,

I tweeted back *okay* – then two of them met at 7am the next morning and by the time they got there, there were about 2,000 of them.

He says the impression he got upon arrival at the venue was that “they were impressed that something that started with just a simple tweet...” Other techniques include the use of BBM status updates, BBM broadcasts”.

Public officials employ particular communication techniques when interacting with citizens. The former governor of Ekiti (governor at the time of the interview), Kayode Fayemi (2013), explains that he uses Blackberry Messenger and also exchanges SMS with citizens who have his BBM pin or number. He explains that his state has a text messaging system installed on the website. Visitors to the website can “send free SMS directly to all the named elected or appointed state officials”, and “official individual emails are also published online for ease of direct contact by anybody.” Fayemi (2013) also gives an example of a question-and-answer session he participated in on Twitter and Google Plus. He also has a monthly programme on Ekiti State Broadcasting Service (radio and TV) called, *Mr Governor Explains*.

Seun Okinbaloye (2013) is another journalist who explains that when he gets ‘a scoop’ (an exclusive story), he immediately tweets at his organisation. In his

words, “Twitter especially has been a major tool that has been much helpful”. In terms of how he uses it for communication, Okinbaloye (2013) says his Twitter account is significant to his professional life –

I have sort of cut off my personal, my social life from my social media, because the way people now take me. I am being taken more seriously these days...

Okinbaloye (2013) says journalists “we are always at the centre of issues”, hence, his social life and “other aspects of life” are separated from his life on social media.

Humour is a strong and important online communication technique for Apampa (2013). He says a factor that determines whether his “informational tweets” get traction or not is “humour”. He explains that you have to “attract people first” in order to pass across a message.

What gets them attracted to your message is the humour; it's showing something to be ridiculous, or...super-interesting...now they are interested, you can start to come out with the detail... (Apampa, 2013)

He further explains that if you start your message with the “hard facts” on social media, “people would walk away”. Humour for him, is one of the techniques to use in capturing audience attention online. In Apampa’s (2013) words:

A few stand-up jokes and then a few serious things, and once they are interested in the subject, they are ready to stand there for the next two hours...listen to your democratic message.

In terms of Soji Apampa's (2013) technique in using Twitter, he explains, "my experience on Twitter has been that I've evolved my own style." His style is to "share information" he considers people do not have access to, and uses a "hashtag with lots of examples." Apampa (2013) says,

Usually, I see somebody who is ready to engage me — engage me critically, and then I use that as an opportunity to now go deeper and share a lot more.

However, if on the contrary, he lets the conversation go. In otherwise, it is not every time that Apampa (2013) is able to find willing participants in a dialogue - "a conversation by yourself is a bit boring."

Another avenue through which Soji Apampa (2013) further infuses humour into his online communication content is the spreading of "animated cartoons on corruption". He explains that he seeks to get the cartoons produced in a mobile-friendly version such that they can easily be shared from "Blackberry to Blackberry". Apampa (2013) says the goal is for his organisation's message against corruption in Nigeria to spread as far as possible. Other ways through which digital media has been a part of Apampa (2013) democratic organisation

is the creation of a website where people can “report corruption safely” and his organisation in turn passes the report onto the ICPC – Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Practices Commission, Nigeria. He explains that because there is no “Whistleblower Protection Act” in Nigeria, people are usually “scared” to take on corruptions cases on their own.

Other aspects of communications practice Soji Apampa (2013) mentions is the use of SMS before moving on to Twitter to conduct ‘twe-minars’. Speaking on the Twe-minars as opposed to ‘SMS blast’, Apampa (2013) explains when the expenditure of bringing people to the website via SMS could not be sustained, he opted for a more affordable alternative via Twitter. On the Twe-minars he explains how he had made initial plans to fill a class of twenty-two to “train young people” for free in his organisation. “We never were able to get more than 9 volunteers” says Apampa (2013). He received a suggestion to go on Twitter and publicise his seminars, and he says, “then we had what we call Twe-minars.” Apampa (2013) explains that the four training modules on his course were broken down into tweets and published for other social media influencers to equally retweet onto their timelines. This was another area where digital media was significant to a democratic initiative.

Sunday Alamba (2013), a photojournalist, uses social media to keep his followers or subscribers updated such as saying “I am going for a story here” or “watch out for my pictures afterwards”. Ishaya Bako (2013) on the other hand, a documentary producer, used YouTube and sidestepped a government ban

through the National Broadcasting Commission (of Nigeria) on the airing of his film, *Fuelling Poverty*. The documentary film was critical of the Nigerian government and raised questions on the fuel subsidy issues in the country that led to the Occupy Nigeria protest. Shettima (2013) also calls attention to political parties and their increasing use of social media and digital media tools generally as part of campaign tools.

There are certain social media users, especially on Twitter, regarded as *influencers*. Mercy Abang (2013), journalist, explains that she gains ‘influence’ online through “responsible tweets”. She says her issues of interest as a journalist, reflect national issues in Nigeria, and as such “would lead personalities to follow”. Abang (2013) goes on to say that she has “twelve influencers” and for her, that is a “huge strength”.

If I have one person that listens to one of my tweets, that gets to read it and tell the president “*I think this is what these people are saying*”, for me that is something (Abang, 2013)

Mercy explains that there are different types of influencers. “Some people are in governance, I would categorise myself there, some are in entertainment...economics...so these are the categories of influencers on the social sphere” she opines. Abang (2013) concludes that she has enough influence, combined with her colleagues, to make an issue trend locally. In her words:

If I called all of them [her fellow influencers with huge following in her social network] and say this is a document, I want us to tweet about for today, and I want it to trend, these four people I just called would make it to trend including me.

Rotimi Olawale (2013), active digital media user and president of Youth Hub Africa, explains communication techniques applied using Blackberry Messenger – especially so during the ‘Child Not Bride’ protest that took place in Nigeria in 2013. He recalls that people defied the rain and came out to protest against the National Assembly, and this was possible “because we had digital tools”. Olawale (2013) says he received many BBM broadcasts to this effect, and many people created images to support the Child Not Bride campaign. He goes further to say that the text on some of the images were inaccurate in saying “we must fight against the bill”, as this issue was not about a bill but “a Constitution amendment process.”

Twitter Conferences is another technique Olawale (2013) applies in fostering dialogue in the Nigerian digital sphere. He explains how he organises and executes Twitter conferences, under his network, Youth Alliance on Constitution. Firstly, Olawale (2013) seeks out a conference speaker(s) with the following criteria: “people with content or high number of followers.” He says this is because:

We believe that if we had people who only had content and

don't have followers, the conversation would just be bland – so we specifically looked for people who had big number of followers, and people who had a specialised knowledge of the process" - being the constitution process (Olawale, 2013)

"Big number of followers" for Olawale (2013) is "ten thousand and above". Secondly, he identified themes for each speaker. The speakers were equally assigned a "number of minutes" to speak. There was also a "moderator", who once the stipulated time (four to five minutes) elapsed, would "picks questions from the hash tag" and direct them to the speaker. It is at this point that there can be dialogue, a "back and forth" as Olawale (2013) puts it.

In communicating with public offices in government, Olawale (2013) attests to the fact that emails are not so effective. In his words, giving an example of a request made to the government by his Youth Alliance, he says:

We did a physical letter. Email, you are deceiving yourself.
Physical letter is getting missing... In my former office, we wrote to the Ministry of Education and our letters got missing five times

According to Bukola Ogunyemi (2013), social activist, Twitter Townhall Meetings (TTMs) are another important communication technique for the digital public sphere. He explains that traditional town hall meetings are when "there is a

government representative coming into town, and they bring people, they talk and then he makes notes and go gives his boss." In Ogunyemi's (2013) opinion, "Without that official representation, there is no town hall." Hence, Ogunyemi (2013) complains that on Twitter town hall meetings without government representation, "When people gather, they are making noise" He says this is "baffling, because Nigerian government do not seem to be ready to harness the potentials that digital media has to offer yet in terms of feedback." According to him,

The way an ideal Twitter Conference works is that the "government representative talks and explains, educates the people [via tweeting and posting on Facebook]

Private and religious organisations use different communication techniques in the Nigerian digital sphere. According to Henry Okelue (2013) who has been involved in some "online publicity glitz", "businesses are beginning to understand that they can actually reach farther on social media than they can maybe on mainstream media – on traditional media. These days you see banks have online presence, where they give customer service support. Telcos, business, small business, big businesses...Twitter has become a form of advertising...it has become a form of...a cheap method to reach out to your customers. An instance of how Okelue (2013) works with private businesses is that a company may approach him saying they have identified him as someone with influence on social media, and would want him to tweet certain messages on their behalf.

Okelue (2013) says it is “because they know if Henry tweets once, there is the assumption that 9,000 people will see it...9000 is such a large number...”

For churches, Okelue (2013) explains that “religious organisations actually go beyond Twitter and Facebook” to sending SMS. He says these churches “actually tweet sermons, the pastor tweets about himself - everybody uses social media...” Okelue (2013) further explains that as well as religious organisation, the “informal economy” is also a part of the Nigerian digital public sphere. According to him, he has a “bureau de change guy” on his Twitter timeline, “he sometimes talks about the going exchange rate in the black market.” Okelue (2013) says he has also noticed the existence of other small creative businesses trying to use social media to leverage on publicity: hairdressers, fashion designers, and more. In his words, “business get struck everyday” on social media just by linking one person to another.

Okelue (2013) says that while he uses digital media to share his personal political and social opinions, he mentions that,

I don't use BBM to share opinions because I don't want to disturb anybody, and SMS is not that cost-effective for sharing. So it's basically my blog, those are my preferred tools

Okelue (2013) explains he believes he has built up his influence online by addressing issues “people are afraid of talking about.” He says, “I go where

people are afraid of going.” Okelue (2013) recalls that the one time he recorded the “highest number of followers” was during the Occupy Nigeria protest. He says, “it was like I was speaking the mind of the people.” Similar to the techniques of Soji Apampa’s (2013), Okelue (2013) mentions how he “garnishes” his online communication content with humour.

Jaiye Gaskia (2013), the social activist who has been active since the pre-digital media era in Nigeria explains how new media has been integrated into the activities of his organisation presently. He says although they “still print *cause leaflets*, the banners, the posters...”, they are not a lot easier to distribute. Gaskia (2013) says, “you don’t have to travel by night – and you can actually send soft copies for people to print out there...” Prior to the uptake of digital media tools, Gaskia (2013) explains that:

We always printed newsletters, periodicals, and funding all of those things was always a challenge...digital media makes that a lot easier.

However, cost can now be kept minimal, by sending electronic copies, which the recipient may download and print out.

Mark Amaza (2013) on the other hand, an active digital media user in Nigeria, explains that he has a Twitter Show called No Holds Barred Interactive. In his words:

It’s basically a twitter-show where you will just pick a topic

- people can come and talk about relationships and say whatever they have on their minds about that topic, relating to relationships.

How it works is that, he picks a topic, invites a guest who would also be a Twitter user. The guest speaker tweets for forty-five minutes, whilst interaction on the tweets begin to take place simultaneously. This guest takes on a question and answer session after he or she is done with the initial set of tweets. Mark puts it this way,

The most interesting thing is that it's not just a one-directional. Guest might even be tweeting and then people that are tuning in are also conversing among themselves.

Amaza (2013) mentions that he has conducted an informal survey among the audience of his show as to whether they would prefer a different digital media platform such as Blackberry Messenger, but “many people chose Twitter because it gives them that anonymity they need...to talk about what they want to talk about...No Holds Barred I-interactive (NHBi).”

The remediation of communication online assumes different formats that are mostly shaped by the specific new media tool in use. These formats or techniques are central to the NDPS because they provide insight into how messages get from Point A to Point B, and is reciprocated in the digital public sphere. Dialogue is a critical attribute of the public sphere. The main techniques

are Twitter Townhalls, Tweet-Meets, Twitter Conferences, Twe-minars, facebook-ing, blogging, all sometimes integrated across platforms. Journalists for instance, have developed creative practices in utilizing digital media for information gathering and sharing – so have religious institutions. Hashtags are highly significant to online communicative actions, more so, on Twitter.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the interviewee responses, above, certain points are worthy of note. First of all, there is an influx of digital media technology in Nigeria – mostly in the form of mobile telephony. The adoption of digital media is concentrated in urban centres, and less so in rural areas. The availability of cheap-smart-phones from China, and the option of buying fairly-used phones has facilitated the adoption of smart phones in Nigeria. Secondly, the use of digital media for communication in Nigeria, varies from political (e.g. protests) to social (networking, making new contacts), and public (journalism, political commentary) to private uses (private businesses & advertising). Religious organisations also adopt the tools to spread their respective messages to fellow digital media users. Thirdly, although there exists the digital divide between the haves and have-nots, there is also the divide between the ‘older’ and ‘younger’ generation. This appears to be the case, where the ‘older’ individual who despite (sometimes) being literate and possessing digital media technologies, refuse to publicly engage in dialogue online. It is open to further research to examine why this is perceived to be the case.

In this chapter and the next I indicate that where a formalized, institution-driven, public sphere is weak in Nigeria, actual live issue-based public dialogue and deliberation are emerging from the activities indicated above (everyday domestic, social and professional uses of standard retail media devices, like the cell phone) and this combined with an enterprising and improvisational approach on behalf of the users. This is what I call ‘a culture of democracy’, where the core of democratic life (dialogue and debate concerning issues of public interest, among other elements) is evolving through the emergence of digital media usage in Nigeria, and doing so facilitated by improvised communication techniques, styles of interlocution and new modes of address. These techniques vary from Facebook groups and forums for social protest, to Twitter-Conferences, and Twe-Minars aimed at informing and educating those who would engage. The limitations involved in utilising digital media as tools for democratic culture cut across poor user-behavior, where dialogue/interaction is not guaranteed unlike in face-to-face communication, and poor socio-legal framework to protect the citizens’ right to express themselves – as should be in a democracy.

How digital media is evolving a culture of democracy in Nigeria is basically through providing the avenue for users (citizens) to come together and interact, and express their opinion (whether or not they do this maximally). Prior to this, traditional media was the primary source of public information, and dialogue was limited to gatherings in physical spaces such as homes, commercial businesses, offices, or occasional letters-to-the-editor of a newspaper and calling into radio/TV programmes. Other ways a culture of democracy is being spurred in

Nigeria through digital media is the rise of real-time election monitoring and tracking by citizens using their mobile phones and social network accounts. Furthermore, support services are being put in place by the Independent Electoral Commission (Nigeria's electoral body) for citizens using digital media tools, to provide feedback on election malpractice, and generally facilitate the election process. Also, corrupt practices in the government and private sector are being monitored through digital media tools, and creative messages such as animated videos that support democratic causes are shared from one mobile phone to another.

The complexity of a rapidly modernizing society, like Nigeria, (particularly in relation to the public sphere formations of European 'bourgeois' society of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) make categorical distinctions between public and private difficult. In fact, the interactions on digital media often oscillate between both the private and the public spheres from time to time, depending on how the media device is used. This blurring of the strict divide between the private and public sphere should not however be a basis upon which to call for the irreparable collapse of the public sphere idea. I argue that its definition only needs to be amended to take cognisance of new realities. For Habermas, the central force in the 'structural transformation' of the public sphere was effectively commercialisation, and the collapse of private interests and public interests. Calhoun argues that the interpenetration of the private into the public is not fatal to a public sphere, given how this has (in relation to the emergence of mass media in the Twentieth Century, for example), extended the capabilities for

communication, agency and the dissemination of ideas – all of which are instrumental in the social formation of citizens that come together to promote matters pertaining to the public good. The rise of the mass media in Nigeria did indeed signify a general rise in societal education levels, mass communication and information dissemination regarding matters of law, public life and government. However, this in itself did not facilitate the social agency of interaction and deliberation we require for a public sphere. For this to take place, a media independent of the state was needed, along with citizen alliances and civil society spaces, places and a delimited space of dialogue, and particularly critical scrutiny of matters of state.

In present day Nigeria, I am identifying a public sphere emerging through the (largely private, market driven, and socially improvised) ubiquitous availability of internet and digital media devices. A Nigerian digital public sphere is emerging as identifiable in the agglomeration and networked interconnection of blogs, social network sites, mobile phones, and the critical dialogic content that they are increasingly facilitating. Again, as digital media is largely generated from the ownership of private corporations, mostly concentrated in the West, and coopted by a state system whose financial management is less than transparent and entirely business like (where overt corruption is often visible), we find ourselves with a situation entirely the reverse of Habermas's embryonic public sphere of England and France in the eighteenth century. The embryonic Nigerian public sphere is emerging from an entirely commercial realm, (where 'commerce' here is actually the kind of state-corporation alliance of interests identified by

Habermas as responsible for the ‘refeudalisation’ of the public sphere), and yet empowering ‘private’ individuals to build a capacity for, and capabilities intrinsic to, a new public sphere. For Habermas, this situation would be fatally compromised, as the lack of substantive commitment from the state as an interlocutor in emerging public deliberations would entail the lack of any possibility of a substantive public sphere – for rights, the rule of law, constitutional democratic procedures, and so on, are all conditions of a public sphere whatever dialogue and deliberations are taking place. While this, of course, is true historically for Habermas’ European states, in Nigeria there are two things to consider: (i) the presence of just these elements (intrinsic to procedural parliamentary democracy), in part as a legacy of the colonial era; and (ii) the power of certain kinds of dialogue and deliberations over time to provoke a change in the function of the state, depending on the social formations that facilitate them. My argument in this thesis, is that a ‘culture’ of democracy has emerged, largely through the interaction of citizens with a new emerging market (of digital media products).

Of course, one could retort that the market of digital media goods was impossible without the state-driven industrial development of a communications infrastructure. This is factually true, though not in itself a significant ‘cultural’ phenomenon: and as noted above, there remain ongoing issues concerning the state’s management of the communications infrastructure in terms of surveillance, loss of privacy, and the use of algorithms to ‘manufacture consent’

with Nigerian citizens' use of the 'world wide' web. The Internet is global in reach, yet always delimited by state management of its communications infrastructure, particularly in relation to industrial policies designed in part to enrich those in power (government officials often have substantial private interests in the industries they manage as political representatives). One such industrial policy area is entertainment, and the huge range of taxation opportunities that emerge with entertainments, both online and broadcast.

Dean (2003) makes a strong argument in her paper, *why the net is not a public sphere*. She says, 'new media present themselves for and as a democratic public', but what she finds is 'communicative capitalism', given the 'expansion and intensification of communication and entertainment' (Dean, 2003: 102). Yet, as noted by our interviewees, entertainment is not regarded as an inhibitor to the more serious matters of public communication. For Habermas, a public sphere would avoid exclusion of rank and social status, or in other words, be 'popular'. The ubiquity of popular culture can stimulate forms of social interaction that are not in themselves hostile to the kinds of interaction required of public deliberations, as we shall see with interviewees in the next two chapters. The unemployed Nigerian student sitting in a rickety commercial bus in Lagos, and the Nigerian CEO on a business trip to New York, can both interact through digital media on Twitter about matters of public concern – and this unprecedented social interconnection was not in itself generated by public, political mechanisms of social order, but the 'popular' appeal of Twitter as a medium. The popular appeal of digital media is evident when one considers the

origins of digital media in marketable products and the user experience of consumers as facilitated by brand promotion and marketing.

For Douglas Kellner, there can emerge a multiplicity of public spheres that may sometimes overlap or conflict. However, these are all at risk from the macro-management capabilities of giant media corporations over the communications infrastructure. Of course, such could be said of Nigeria. The threat is more complex, given how Nigeria's communications infrastructure is a complex web of foreign providers working under an equally complex web of government interests. Nigeria's military history remains a present reality in terms of an assumption that remains – true freedom of speech will facilitate genuine threats to the integrity and stability of the democratic state. For so long, the country's press suffers from what one of the interview participants called a 'military hangover'. Although freedom of expression is enshrined in the Nigerian constitution, and the freedom of information bill was passed into law in 2011 to protect the press, in practice, citizens (including journalists) still somewhat feared retribution from the government of the day. Yet, digital media however, as Gbenga Sesan (2013) says, 'really opened a space where people can express themselves.' Kellner did indicate that new media technologies serve to open new public spaces for political 'intervention', as in Nigeria, and where intervention does not require a fully formed public sphere. This is surely evident in protests, such as the Occupy Nigeria.

In this chapter, I set out to describe the digital public sphere in Nigeria, within the

frame of *new media platforms* available and the *communication techniques* users employed. I have found that although a new public sphere on digital media platforms is burgeoning in Nigeria, it is hampered by factors such as affordability of the devices, and reliable infrastructure. In addition, citizens still fear retribution when it comes to expressing public opinions online, reporting corruption (as is the case with Egunje.info), or simply interacting amongst themselves – for fear of being under surveillance. And yet, this is not inhibiting the exponential growth in the use of digital media for individual articulation of viewpoints, generating more and more communication traffic and content.

Section Three: Chapter Nine

An Embryonic Public Sphere in Nigeria: Participants' Perspective (2)

Introduction

This chapter again is comprised almost wholly of interview material, out of which I construct a narrative according to two of our stated component dimensions of a putative public sphere: first, *agents and agencies*, that is, the organisations and initiatives who are notably active in the digital sphere; these groups and individuals can be identified as catalysts, whether users or producers; secondly, is *dialogue and issues*, or the content of discussion and deliberation on digital media platforms in (or about) Nigeria. As noted in the last chapter, our remaining category of *impact and intervention*, is intrinsic (and often explicit) to each of our components.

Agents and agencies and the ‘embryonic’ public sphere

Preliminary field research identified the following organisations and their representatives as offering significant insights into the emergence of conditions for a digital public sphere:

- Azeernah Mohammed, Occupy Nigeria
- Amara Nwankpa, Light Up Nigeria & Oil Revenue Tracking
- Kayode Idowu, Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) Citizens Contact Centre
- Yemi Adamolekun, Enough is Enough Nigeria
- Segun Fodeke, iWatchNg

- Zubair & Bayo, Nigerian Constitution for Blackberry
- Bukola Ogunyemi, Policy Ng
- Seun Onigbinde, Budgit

Azeenarh Mohammed, Occupy Nigeria Protest: Mohammed (2013) was an active player in the Occupy Nigeria protest movement using both digital media and offline techniques in the form of street protests. Other players in the Nigerian online domain include public officials, though as Mohammed (2013) suggests, there are only a few of them actually active. She opines that “as much as they want to engage on it, they are scared of it”. Mohammed (2013) says she has observed that among the few public officials who first came on social media, “because there was just so much pent up anger and distrust for so long”, there was “a bit of a backlash” or “attack.” She says some stayed on the platforms despite verbal attacks online and now “they can have civilized conversations on the issues.” She explains that public officials not yet online perpetuate a skepticism as to its proper political function, as they maintain that “it’s just a lot of angry Nigerians trying to have a go at me personally”. However, for Mohammed (2013), this is not really the case.

If you can get past the few miscreants that will come with personal issues, policies is actually being discussed, debated – minds are being changed, decisions are being taken, because of the mood of social media (Mohammed, 2013).

Amara Nwankpa, Light Up Nigeria and Oil Revenue Tracking Initiative: Nwankpa

(2013) is a digital media user who has actively promoted different social and political causes and discussions around them. Two prominent initiatives have been Light Up Nigeria and Oil Revenue Tracking. He explains that his Oil Revenue Tracking initiative “Is about natural resource governance in Nigeria”, and his public statements on the subject revolves around questions about use of oil resources, and opportunities that are being forgone in favour of the focus on oil in Nigeria. On *Light Up Nigeria*, an initiative Nwankpa (2013) set up to discuss the situation of poor electricity in Nigeria, he explains that it began in July 2009 “when young Nigerians were just gone on to Twitter.” Nwankpa (2013) says, “we were all outspoken people who were keen on Nigeria to improve.” He then came up with an idea “during one of those discussions early in the morning”, asking “why don’t we have a hash tag.” For Nwankpa (2013), “Electricity became the rallying point.” Through Light Up Nigeria, Nwankpa (2013) says:

We were successful in establishing a constituency that was vocal, that was relevant and opinions that became respected in the Nigerian polity.

According to him, youths then became factored into government policy-making. The campaign got a lot of publicity and foreign awareness.

Yemi Adamolekun, Executive Director, Enough is Enough Nigeria (EIE): According to a conference report, *New Media & Governance: Tool and Trends*, an event organised by the Shehu Musa Yar’adua Foundation and Enough is

Enough Nigeria in May 2012, *Enough is Enough* organisation is described as a ‘coalition of individuals and youth-led organisations’ who are committed to a ‘culture of public accountability’ in Nigeria. The conference was organised alongside international and local development partners and civil society organisations. The aim was to bring government policy makers, academic institutions, private sector and youths together to discuss how new media can be deployed to facilitate governance, transparency, and accountability.

In the report, there is an account of how EiE created the RSVP initiative (register, selected, vote, protect) campaign that leveraged on digital media technology (especially social media) to mobilise a significant group of citizens from age 18-35 to go out and vote during the 2011 elections in Nigeria. The report says, ‘EiE continues to focus on voter education, awareness and the use of technology to drive good governance and accountability’. In the research interview, Executive Director Yemi Adamolekun (2013), explains that the organisation “came out of a protest that wasn't planned, so now we call it a child of necessity”. She says that a lot of work is needed in “re-orientating” how people think about the government and governance - especially so, as the Nigerian demography is mostly young people. Adamolekun (2013) says it is important to “get that demographic interested in government, interested in governance, not only voting, but also being active citizens”.

Segun Fodeke, iWatchNg: Here is Fodeke’s (2013) narrative on what iWatchNg is about and how it started stimulating discourse online. He says his iWatchNg

project was focused on tracking how the government spent money purported for infrastructure and development in Nigeria.

We started off with a concept where we needed to track, at least have a record of what projects the government is executing (Fodeke, 2013).

However, he “couldn’t find any form of record in terms of details of what is going on in my [local] area or in Nigeria.” This led Fodeke (2013) to set up iWatchNg, in order to keep track of infrastructure projects, as it was “worrisome” to him that there were failed projects, and no one was taking action or responsibility. Fodeke (2013) says,

At least if someone could put a track record in place so that we can see all these things, see if there is a trend there and figure it out somehow.

He was also interested in getting people to “talk about these things” – this was why he founded iWatchNg.

He says in terms of engagement with his platform, “we haven’t reached where we would want to be”, hence, as part of improvement he is “creating the kind of platform social media channels that allows for easy communication”. An example of a project that Fodeke’s (2013) iWatchng has taken on is the *Lagos-Apapa Expressway* repair project. He explains that once there was a portal where projects approved for execution by the government were published. That

is, the Federal Executive council meeting approvals were published online as “PDF documents”, containing details such as the “contractor, the budget and the allocation.” iWatchNg would then pick projects from this portal and publish on their social media channels in order to “track development.” Fodeke (2013) says, “we got people commenting”, especially when there was a time the contractors stopped working on the project. According to him, “people commented that “hey these people have stopped working.” Fodeke (2013) himself claims he went to the project site to take pictures to publish on his platform.

To join iWatchNg and participate in the initiative, Fodeke (2013) says, ‘it’s a simple registration process” with name and email address. He goes on

Then we would communicate with you regularly with updates via e-mails and on our site you can also come and see the updates there...

Fodeke (2013) mentions that social media is very important to his project, because subscribers equally get updates on those platforms, Twitter and Facebook.

Zubair & Bayo, Nigerian Constitution for Blackberry: Zubair & Bayo created the Nigerian constitution app out of ‘gut-feeling’ that Nigerians would need it. The download-rate began to increase towards the 2011 national presidential election, and the following year as well, during the Occupy Nigeria protest, which according to the developers:

...got people for some reason to be more patriotic and say,
you know, maybe I should actually know my rights, let me
go download the constitution (Zubair & Bayo, 2013)

They have created the app to adapt it to various platforms besides the Blackberry. There is also the Nokia and Samsung version. As at the interview date, they were close to arriving at 800,000 downloads.

On the functionality of the app, it has a search feature that allows the user to go directly to the needed information from the constitution. Zubair and Bayo (2013) explain that, "rather than go through the whole thing, you may just be looking for specific terms." The search feature allows the user go through the constitution in sections. "It's a very simple application" they say. The limitation of the app is that:

Even for people who are educated or enlightened, interpretation is still subject to having some sort of legal background" (Zubair & Bayo, 2013)

He says, even he himself misinterprets certain parts of the constitution, because he does not fully "understand the implications according to law." There is also the barrier of language to consider, hence, Zubair and Bayo (2013) say they have considered updating the app to encapsulate other local languages, however, they consider it more effective to:

...Take what already exists and provide it in a format that

people can easily relate to, because even in the translation' the complexity of the legal terms would still exist (Zubair & Bayo, 2013)

Soji Apampa, Egunje.info: Egunje Info is an initiative of Soji Apampa (2013) under his Integrity Organisation. It is published on the Egunje.info (2014) website that identifies itself in terms of an 'anti-corruption, research and advocacy organisation with the vision of reducing the tolerance to corruption in Nigeria'. Hence, through egunje.info, Apampa uses research to engage in "constructive dialogue with the government, even during the military [rule]". Egunje is a Nigerian slang for 'bribe'. In terms of application of digital media tools, Apampa says the idea behind his initiative is to take the message about corruption from Blackberry to Blackberry. He says,

We've created a site where you can report corruption safely and we would pass on the details to the ICPC, so if you are scared.

The ICPC is the corruption monitoring body in Nigeria. Apampa (2013) explains that the app works on non-smart phones through SMS. It is possible to download the symbian version or the Blackberry app. Hence, users can "report from your phone", or alternatively, walk into their offices to report a case of corruption.

To use the SMS function, Apampa (2013) says "you just have to say the name

of the institution or type of complaint upfront, and then free text." Apampa (2013) and his team then work with the call centre to "make sense of the SMS" and update their data base. Alternatively, people call in to their office to report cases, which they then also update on their records.

Apampa (2013) says the reason why most people prefer to make phone calls rather than register their complaint on the website, is because "there is still the fear of retribution." He explains that people are unsure as to whether "they can be traced", hence, they prefer to call in or report. Based on Google Analytics, a web tool that generates detailed statistics on a website's traffic, Apampa (2013) says the majority of the visitors have been "the more affluent in the society." In his words, "they've been coming [to the site] on Apple, Blackberries and so on. But the people who have been reporting are not the people who can afford Blackberries." This led him to the conclusion that his organisation reaches two separate audiences - "those who are checking "I hope my name is not there yet" vs, those who are reporting "this is what is affecting my life" says Apampa (2013). He says that while the "140 reports are the timid reports", the "10,000 [visits] are the big boys and girls going to check out the stories on the site" to ensure "nothing is linking them." Apampa's (2013) corruption monitoring website has been the victims of hackers who tried to breach his security "a few times."

Bukola Ogunyemi, Policy Ng: Bukola Ogunyemi describes Policy Ng as his effort at correcting problems, 'ethnic and religious sentiments', and it does so in online public discussions. According to him, on Policy Ng, the focus is not on "people,

ethnicity, religion.” Rather, it is on “issues, policies, debate institutions.” Bukola describes PolicyNg as his “effort at correcting all these anomalies I’ve seen in discussions in Nigeria’s public sphere, especially on digital media.” PolicyNg is a platform “where people can voice their opinions and they can debate objectively and holistically without bringing sentiments in”, says Bukola.

Policy Ng works through a Facebook page, YouTube account, Storify account and a blog. On the blog, Ogunyemi (2013) explains that “we bring in writers and we are very careful about the writers we bring in.” His criteria for the writers are that:

They are people who have outgrown the normal Nigerian sentimental phase of life, who can look into issues, and write about them.

Their main responsibilities according to Ogunyemi (2013) is to “educate us about policies of government that affect the people” - policies in “education, health, infrastructure, works, security.” These writers “read up government policies”, and analyse them. Bukola says the writers are not encouraged to make “recommendations”, as he wants “recommendations to come from the people who these policies affect.” Therefore, all the writers do is to say, “if this policy comes into play, this is how it will affect you”, says Bukola.

For the readers, Ogunyemi (2013) says:

We encourage them [readers] to read our analysis on the

blog, and then we ask them, how do these policies affect you?

He opines that when the government puts out policies, “they don’t care about people’s reaction or feedback”, and the contrary is what he is advocating through PolicyNg. The next step after getting reader feedback is to “storify” their accounts. Storify is a social network tool that makes it possible to curate comments online on a page. Ogunyemi (2013) says,

We have a Storify account...to bring all these comments together into a single page instead of being scattered around.

From the Storify page, “people can read from comment to comment...and then get an idea of what the [other] people are saying.” At this point, Ogunyemi (2013) says he carries out an opinion poll on the policy in focus, as to whether a policy should be sustained or modified. Lastly,

The comments on the blog and social media are collated and sent to the relevant government agencies with the expectation that they be acted upon (Bukola Ogunyemi, 2013)

Ogunyemi (2013) says he and his Policy Ng correspondents also reach out to the:

...generations of Nigerians who are not on social media, but whom certain policies also affect and would ‘want to talk’ but only have access to traditional media

He says:

We go to their homes and get their thoughts...we get their feedbacks as video recordings and we put it on our YouTube page (Ogunyemi, 2013).

PolicyNg also forwards the links of these videos to relevant agencies in the Nigerian government. Examples of policies tackled by Policy NG include the National Youth Service Corps reforms, and the UTME (Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination) scheme.

Seun Onigbinde, BudgIt: BudgIT, according to the official website is ‘a creative startup driven to retell the Nigerian budget and public data in a finer detail across every literary span’. The tagline for the organisation is ‘the Nigerian budget made simple – using creative technology to intersect civic engagement and institutional reform’ and ‘giving every citizen access to budgets and public data.’ Onigbinde (2013) explains that BudgIT is about public data and budget. He opines that the literacy level in society makes it difficult to understand the budget, hence, “a lot of people are making misjudgments”, and “saying wrong things” [online]. Thus, BudgIT is:

About giving data to people, empowering them with data,

making it accessible, simple and transparent and possibly amplifying the voices and making them heard.

In other words, “driving institutional reform” through making the national budget highly accessible. Still on literacy as a challenge, Onigbinde (2013) raises important questions such as:

If people don't understand these things so how do you simplify it, how do you make it of common understanding, how do you take it from that niche knowledge of the public finance expert and economists, to something that is of common understanding to all? (Onigbinde, 2013)

On the digital media technologies used to simplify the message of BudgIT, they achieve this through the use of info graphics, interactive applications, prints (leaflets etc.), radio broadcast, SMS and “as many tools as could connect to that literacy set of society”. By “set”, Onigbinde (2013) says:

We have dimensioned our users, we have an actively literate set, we have a grassroots set, so most of what we work now is the active literate set which I presume are mostly on social media, Facebook, Twitter, it's strictly interested in governance

Onigbinde (2013) says he wants BudgIT to be the neutral voice in the midst of dialogue on public and political issues. He says:

The governance discussion [on social media] is an high-octave one, so we want to be just like the neutral voice in the room.

Onigbinde (2013) in his interview argues that except someone provides the facts, arguments on online fora would be ill-balanced and debates will not be informed. In his words, “government can’t, nobody can argue with the facts or the data that is self-revealing”. BudgIT sources data from both “primary and secondary sources”. A primary source would be the government budget office, the office of the Account-General, while a secondary source may be the CBN website [Central Bank of Nigeria]. Data from these sources are taken and verified, before being sent to the visualisation and development team “where we say how can we bring a story out of this data”, according to Onigbinde (2013). He adds that:

We build graphics to ensure that it is interesting, a bit more appealing and people can connect with it.

For circulation of the data, Onigbinde (2013) says it’s all public, on website, in print, “civil society networks”, and others “downloaded and printed independently.” He continues:

We usually have this non-attribution stance, so you can pick it up and use it for yourself, it’s all good – because the end goal is not about – it’s not a competitive stuff – the end goal is let’s collaborate more, let’s amplify the voices and

the solutions...(Onigbinde, 2013)

For Twitter, Onigbinde (2013) explains that he shares “small flashcards” with budget information as a means of linking up to his website. Facebook is another tool he uses, combined with civil society groups on social networks, SMS, and “google groups of people.” Onigbinde (2013) says “more of them use these data to also make their own judgements – those are just the digital tools we use.” For SMS, he says perhaps one can send a text message requesting for some data from the budget, for instance, “you want monthly allocation for Anambra for this period, you just get it.” Lastly, BudgIT is working with Maliyo games, an online gaming company to develop a web app. Onigbinde (2013) says:

We have apps. We don't have a mobile app yet, but we have a web app. We have a mobile site, but we have a web app. And the web app, we are working with one with Maliyo games. They are building an android budget app for us.

Actors in the Nigerian digital public sphere are diverse from organisations or initiatives to individuals – private citizens and public officials. Examples of these actors discussed above are Enough is Enough Nigeria, PolicyNg, BudgIT, to mention a few. These groups are actively involved in civic and political dialogue online on issues ranging from fuel subsidy, oil, to the national budget, power infrastructure (electricity), corruption, and so on. This section has detailed in practical terms how these individuals serve as agents and agencies in the NDPS.

More succinctly put, it answers the questions: who are these agents and agencies, what activities do they carry out, to whom are their activities targeted, and with what effect.

Dialogue and issues in the ‘embryonic’ public sphere

In this section, I draw from the field research interview to identify the content of dialogue, debate and deliberation, as well as how the issues or subjects being discussed are organised, what is *trending* and who is setting the agenda for discussion. The interviewees here shared their experiences in online dialogue on public issues, challenges they found with engaging as well as benefits.

Amara Nwankpa (2013), Light Up Nigeria, says in online dialogue, he gets involved in “conversations that have to do with issues that affect society” but he also “has time for banter too, because it’s social”. In his words:

If you focus only on discussing politics and development
and so on, then it gets boring very quickly (Nwankpa,
2013).

In Nwankpa’s (2013) opinion, relationships [online] thrive on “frank social exchanges between people”, and for him, that is what what “builds trust” and “makes people pay attention to what you say.” For Nwankpa (2013), what triggers his contribution to the “public sphere of discussion” could be a “new item” on traditional media, or “an occurrence.” He says that when debates are ongoing online, they come from different perspectives, namely: “religious angles, cultural

angles, historical angles, legal and political implications as well.” Hence, when he engages, he tends to “participate by exploring all the angles most people are not looking at.” In addition, Nwankpa (2013) says he sometimes has to “research the subject, ask questions, pay attention to people who know a lot about the sector... the historical facts...”

Alkassim Abdukadır (2013), a journalist on a citizen platform, says that for him, dialogue has to do with comments on the news stories he shares as a journalist. He explains that because he shares his stories on multiple platforms, comments span his website/blog to the Facebook posts and those on Twitter where:

People just retweet, quote tweet and then add their comments on. So you are having conversations going across multiple platforms, not only on your website

Abdukadır (2013) adds that you are also “having conversations on BBM.” He says:

What you have done is you have provided a platform, and you’ve given them content, and those people are talking around it – your Facebook wall, Twitter, your website, they are talking about it (Abdukadır, 2013)

Abdukadır (2013) raises some interesting points about his observation of publicly held debates online. He says, “they are vibrant, people are really

interested, but sometimes, their prejudices come to fore." By prejudices, Abdukadir (2013) refers to ethnicism –

Everything, especially if it has to do with governance or the general society, it has a way of turning into to an ethnic socio-religious issue...all the comments tend to at the end of the day trickle down to religious issues, social issues, ethnic issues and all that (Abdukadir, 2013)

The challenges Azeenarh Mohammed (2013) finds with dialoguing in the Nigerian digital public sphere are: misinformation, poor engagement and reluctance to engage among public officials and policy makers, relatively poor access to social media (issues with affordability) and 'distraction' online. On misinformation she says

...there is a mob-mentality – you take one story which is not the truth, and people run with it.

She describes this as "one of the dangers of digital media." In her words, "if the wrong story goes out first, and there's madness about it, it continues to rise".

Also, regarding *distraction*:

There is just so much to distract you – the internet is as much a good thing as it is a bad thing – it depends on how you wish to use it – it's just so much distraction out there – there is entertainment news etc. (Mohammed, 2013)

Amara Nwankpa (2013) had an experience of getting harassed online. Nwankpa (2013) says:

If Nigeria is going to move forward, people need to be open to other ideas, learn from them, you also need to listen

He says he was ‘attacked’ online when he agreed to be a part of the youth lunch organized by the president just after he was elected. The lunch event was organised to “thank young people for the role that they played in the elections”, but according to Nwankpa (2013):

A lot of young people didn't feel that someone like me should be involved with those kind of characters and I disagree.

For being a part of the presidential lunch meeting, he was harassed online by his account. Abdukadir (2013) finds that online dialogue in the Nigerian public sphere is not productive because “our petty prejudices have not allowed us see beyond our nose...” He says that the “petty prejudices” are borne out of ethnic, social factors. In his words, for instance,

Why should someone think I shouldn't be able to speak or write good English because I am Northern? (Abdukadir, 2013)

For Abdukadir (2013), when he is approached online for dialogue by someone who already harbours prejudices against him, he is put in the “defensive stage” while the other party is coming from a “deficient stage.” Abdukadir (2013) gives

the instance that “some people have a problem with Goodluck Jonathan because he is from the South-South, because he is Christian.” He criticises this group of people by saying:

...Anybody that should have problem with Jonathan should come from his incompetence, his skill set, his policies, not the fact that he is Christian.

Abdukadir (2013) opines that online dialogue among Nigerians would improve “once we see beyond this” and “begin to have a common conversation.”

Religion is an important subject in the Nigerian digital public sphere. To this, Abdukadir (2013) says he has observed that people are cautious as to how they discuss religion online. He says:

You'll find that even if the person is Christian and he makes a political incorrect statement about Islam for example, you find that the correction would come from Christians first (Abdukadir, 2013)

However, in times of insurgency, “there is a lot of hate speech against Islam” online, says Abdukadir (2013). Another perspective Abdukadir (2013) shares is about how “cool” it is to “belong to certain Christian circle because they are young and upwardly mobile.” In other words, “cool” tribes are formed online around religious organisations. Abdukadir (2013) gives an example of a church in Abuja, Nigeria, Coza church. He says:

Coza is a very popular church in Abuja, has a very huge youth following in Abuja – so this tends to translate online and it has become sort of a status symbol to go to Coza and talk about it online.

Abdukadir (2013) describes it as a “a blend of being trendy and spiritual at the same time.” He calls attention to the fact that on Twitter, people also retweet their pastors (religious leaders). However, not everyone online is okay with religious content being shared on their timelines. Abdukadir (2013) mentions that there are people in his network whose dispositions are “that you cannot put your church in my face.”

Harassment and insults (to some degree, hate speech) is a challenge in the Nigerian digital sphere. From the interviews, it is evident that public officials for instance, are sometimes recipients of this. Omojuwa (2013) says:

If people insult you as a public official on digital media, it is because they insult you in their houses, and in their schools...

It is his opinion that digital media has only given these groups of people:

...A microphone that amplified it for you to hear... all the insults does to them is to show them a picture of their performances (Omojuwa, 2013)

How Chika Oduah (2013), a freelance journalist decides on who to interact with or not online depends on the person's content she says "I interact with anyone who is interesting" and tends to "unfollow" anyone who is simply publishing posts on entertainment. In her words, "I really appreciate people who are giving me source, information – it's credible sources." On her part, she says she tweets a lot of quotes from other journalists as they tend to get retweeted (i.e. engagement). She said this is because:

People need facts, Nigeria we lack facts, we lack data – so if we are help filter that and provide it for you right there on your phone (Oduah, 2013)

The challenges she finds with online media for public dialogue are that:

It's not always credible. Sometimes people tweet the wrong facts, the percentages may be slightly off.

She gives the instance of the spread of false pictures during a crisis. Oduah (2013) says:

Social media tends to kind of go with the flow, no one is checking, so people are tweeting and putting on Blackberry things that they saw thinking its real

Omojuwa (2013) is an active digital media user who was a huge contributor to the Occupy Nigeria protest. He says he has been a part of different kinds of discussions online - from "politics, religion, relationships, gay rights issues, sports, culture, music, entertainment, fashion." The reason he gives for this is

that he views his presence on online platforms as a “cable channel”, hence, it should appeal to anyone. His idea of political discussions online is that “it’s a marketplace.” Omojuwa (2013) mentions that there are participants in the debate who “just wait for you to say something, and they go with what you said”; he calls it “herd-culture”. In his opinion:

The debate is not deep enough, it is not intellectual enough,
it is much more about noise.

Kayode Idowu (2013), the chief press secretary to INEC, shares his experience of online dialogue from the perspective of how his organisation manages communication during elections in Nigeria. He says,

...During elections, there is real-time dialogue, people raise
issues we respond to them.

Idowu (2013) explains that because his organisation deals with politicians, diverse interests get represented. Sometimes, he says:

Some are outright abusive, some are outright malicious,
but some are also genuinely concerned.

Idowu (2013) says in INEC engagement with social media, where they publish press statements on their Facebook or Twitter accounts, “some respond to commend the commission, some respond to attack the commission” - the response is usually diverse. Social media has kept the electoral commission in

touch with the public says Idowu (2013).

We've had people who posted abusive queries and we responded civilly to them, to explain – to give the information that we think they don't have (Idowu, 2013).

Gbenga Olorunpomi (2013), a social media manager for a political party and former governor says that dialogue online is impacted by certain influential users. In his words,

The debates have been fuelled by not enough information, not enough proper information (Olorunpomi, 2013).

Olorunpomi (2013) also mentions that some people contribute to discussions “for the recognition”, for “oh he said it first.” When he or the public officials he works for are criticised in an online discourse, Olorunpomi (2013) says he gets very “emotional”. He says when someone who is critical of his principals is “adamant”, sometimes he messages them online asking if he can have their phone numbers. In his words:

I don't think I can calculate how much I have spent debating on the phone (with strangers) on purely innocuous situations.

Fidelis Mbah (2013), journalist, says digital media has given Nigerians the opportunity to network:

People now can start up debate about an issue without going on radio or television, many people would join the debate and it would resonate across the country and even beyond. This was something that before now could not happen (Mbah, 2013)

However, his observation of political debate online reveals challenges around engagement with stakeholders such as politicians. Mbah (2013) says, “politicians do not actually have time to come online”, and as for people debating,

...Some of them get so carried away by emotions that rather than discuss objectively, they end up trading insults
(Mbah, 2013)

Mbah (2013) sees this as a “big challenge” for “an objective and straightforward political discourse.” He says he is not in support of arguments that are based on emotions and sentiments.” Mbah (2013) finds that “illiteracy is another big problem”; for some others,

...All they are after is to share pictures of their boyfriend and girlfriend on Facebook, which is why many of them are not on Twitter (Mbah, 2013)

He says “even those who are on Twitter are just there for record purposes, like “okay I have a Twitter account” which is actually non-functional most times”. These groups of people, Mbah (2013) says “they are not bothered about what

happens in government”, rather they are more concerned with “ Kim Kardashian getting pregnant.” To Mbah (2013), the advantages that come with the potential of digital media to spur debates among citizens resides in the fact that it “broadens people understanding of certain issues.” The downside to this for Mbah (2013) is that participants in the online forum could be miseducated – that is, “if they are not sound enough they get confused by people whom they also meet on online forums.” However, he says that the more people get involved in this political discourse, “the more they see themselves, they see the need to hold government accountable.”

Yemi Adamolekun (2013), director of ‘Enough is Enough Nigeria’, says that while dialogue and discussions online is a “great way to educate”… “the fact that it is uncensored makes it an easy place for young Nigerians to vent.” She says “there’s a lot of anger” among Nigerians online, hence, it may sometimes get “quite abusive” and “insulting”. Adamolekun (2013) portends that an online public forum is “not necessarily a friendly place to be if you’re on the wrong side of the divide”; by this she refers to public officials who come online to engage with citizens. However, she still argues that the “biggest advantage” of digital media is that it is largely “uncensored.” Other problems she finds with engaging in public discussions online is that “a lot of it is assumption,” and misinformation, where digital media users “take a line off a piece, or an article or headline and you blow it up to conclude what it didn’t really say.”

For dialogue via digital media to be effective, Adamolekun (2013) opines that

online community needs to be linked to the “offline world”. In her words

Online is fantastic, it's a wonderful tool to share information, harness resources, meet like-minds, but you have to connect the online community with the offline world – unless nothing will happen (Afamolekun, 2013)

Adamolekun (2013) also draws attention to the significance of anonymity online and how it affects dialogue in the Nigerian digital public sphere. She says:

Online allows you to hide. If I am looking at a man who is 60, and I am a well brought up Yoruba girl, it would take the spirit of the devil for me to tell the man to his face he is saying utter nonsense (Adamolekun, 2013)

She says that however, on Twitter, contrary is the case. Adamolekun (2013) says:

I love the boldness, I love the challenge. But I think we can do it with a bit of respect (Adamolekun, 2013)

She opines that in lacking respect in online communication, “sometimes your message gets lost”. Adamolekun (2013) is in support of challenging public officials online with facts, as opposed to rudeness. She says it is better to interact with facts rather than “reacting out of emotion” - hence people need to understand “their rights and responsibilities.” She continues by giving an

illustration:

According to the 2013 budget, there's supposed to be four primary health care services in my local government, none of them have been built – why? So it's factual
(Adamolekun, 2013)

She goes on to give an account of a public official, former Minister of Youths, who came on Twitter for Tweet-Meets. This is her account based on her observation:

I remember 2011 after the elections, Twitter was the new baby of elected officials, and Minister of Youth was planning monthly tweet-meets, this person was coming – but by the time they dealt with Bolaji Abdulaahi in December, the man didn't come back. I mean, first of all, from his NYSC reform, they tore it to shreds. (Adamolekun, 2013)

Adamolekun (2013) describes young people on digital media platforms as the “microwave generation” saying, “we are slightly lazy” in that people want information quickly, the Twitter 140-character style, rather than read a “long story” that would leave them better informed in her opinion. Her suggestion towards tackling this challenge is that there is need for more capacity-building and education about politics and governance online. She says:

There are lots of different tweet meets and hash tags, different things happening, but I think it's sort of in that line, but I think it needs to be a bit deeper (Adamolekun, 2013)

Jon Gambrell (2013), journalist with an international organization (Associated Press), refers to dialogue in online forums as “noisemaking”. He says,

There are some people who are on twitter who just post messages, tweets all day long...I call them “noise makers” because some of these people are just generally trying to get people’s attention.

Gambrell (2013) likens this group of people to “the guy who plays the drum while others walk by, trying to get money thrown at him.” He says it is still the case now, “but it’s in the digital age.” Gambrell (2013) says the discourse in his opinion is infused with anger and passion. In his words, “there is a lot of passion, a lot of people who are very upset and very angry.” He opines that because Nigeria “is still a young democracy, the people are still trying to understand what the limits are of free speech.” Gambrell (2013) suggests that the Nigerian society is grappling with “a free speech culture” and “trying to understand what that means”. For instance, “you still see journalists getting arrested, you see people harassed for what they say on Twitter” he says.

Gambrell (2013) calls attention to the use of digital media and dialogue on these platforms in “rehabilitating” the public images of politicians. He says:

Also it's interesting enough that people are using Twitter to rehabilitate their image, to change themselves and to allow themselves be looked at as something different (Gambrell, 2013)

He gives the example of a politician he opines was "not necessarily viewed positively by a lot of people in Nigeria." Gambrell (2013) comments that this politician is being "humanised" when he posts tweets such as "Oh I was playing Xbox with my son and my fingers are tired". He perceives this as "a direct attempt to try to humanise people and to change the message, and try and change history" and also mentions instances of "passive aggression" online and public relations stunts in online dialogue:

There is another fella, Reno Omokri, who also puts up a lot of stuff... and it's also this kind of passive aggressive...kind of never naming names but insulting people after they say anything...and also manipulating facts in order to suit their agenda, and that's what PR is. It is interesting (Gambrell, 2013).

At the time of writing this thesis, Reno Omokri was the "Special Assistant to the President on New Media." In addition, Jon proposes that so-called dialogue in the Nigerian digital sphere gives the "illusion of transparency". He explains his point in that, having a Facebook account or website does not make for transparency. In his words:

It's just like saying 'oh we are the most transparent government because we signed the Freedom of Information act into law'. Yeah you did, but no you can't enforce the law and nobody follows any of the rules and you can't actually get any information – it's just a piece of paper (Gambrell, 2013)

As a journalist, Gambrell (2013) has also been attacked online because of his stories. He says,

I think that sometimes people don't know how to handle context in a story where you explain what's happening...

He states that people would call him an "idiot" who does not "know anything about Nigeria." It is important to note at this juncture that Gambrell (2013) is an American national who was practising journalism in Nigeria as an international correspondent. He goes on to opine that political dialogue online is about 'personality' not 'policy'. In his words, "there is no discussion on platforms, there is no discussion of issues." Jon mentions that there are people in his networks who try to push the agenda of discussing policies; he says this is a sign of a "developing democracy." However, he insists that the discussions online are personality driven and allude to the "oga-at-the-top" [i.e. Reverence for a top dog, or boss] behaviour.

Gbenga Sesan (2013) says he may be conversational and non-conversational

when it comes to dialogue online sometimes. He says:

I am not the best person when it comes to having conversations, I say things, people reply, and sometimes I am asking myself, why am I supposed to reply this person again? (Sesan, 2013)

However, Sesan (2013) says he has noticed that many times, he publishes posts on his social media account, and “many people take it, retweet” or seek his “permission to retweet.” For Facebook on the other hand, he says he mostly uses it to “follow up on conversation.” His Twitter account is integrated into his Facebook account, hence:

When I post a tweet, it goes live on Facebook and people start making comments, I get it by email and I reply them by email. I hardly go on Facebook these days, except when I want to check a picture and smile (Sesan, 2013)

Sesan (2013) shares his observation and experience of dialogue in the Nigerian digital sphere. He says that there was a time when online, “everybody abused (insulted) government.” This later shifted “50-50”, as another group arose that “supported the government.” In recent times, Sesan (2013) says, “it's getting more balanced...[but] people have to get a lot more civil in their conversations.” He also emphasises the need for online discussants to engage one another in arguments based on “facts and not with emotions.” In defence, Sesan (2013)

says:

Of course government also uses emotions, so you can't rule out emotions, but people need to come with facts to the table, people need to come with a genuine argument.

There are active digital media users who do not engage in political dialogue online. Musician, Sasha P for instance says, "I just don't think that it is of any use talking." She says if she's invited to speak on radio, "that makes sense"; however, to engage people on Twitter, in her words, " I don't really see how useful that is to anybody." Sasha says this is because it is never a "win-win situation", "it's your opinion against mine – so there is no point." Sunday Alamba (2013), a photojournalist also says he never engages in political dialogue online because being a journalist puts him in a precarious situation. He says in not too clear terms:

...Especially you being a journalist. You don't know how many journalists been killed here. It could be political, sometimes they say its armed robbery cases or something – but you, because you don't know who you are stepping on his toes – because it may turn back on you. But this is Nigeria.

For Kole Shettima (2013):

A lot of people think that social media is the solution to the

problems of our country – “Reality is that social media doesn’t change the world.” They spend all these hours venting their anger and frustration.

To him, users “need to appreciate the limitations of what we can do with social media.” Shettima (2013) says that while social media “can mobilize people”, he is concerned about the “short span attention” it promotes. “ I don’t think it can really educate people in terms of knowledge.” However, Shettima (2013) agrees that dialogue online is equally “critical and very important... it opens the political space... it enables people to participate in a much more broader level. He adds that digital media is also an “equaliser”, in that “the president could write, the man from the village could write.... It equalises our status in the society in some ways...” Other advantages he enumerates on digital media for democratic dialogue are that:

It enriches our political discussions and enables us to have wider information, wider knowledge from various sectors of our society (Shettima, 2013)

Shettima (2013) says this is especially so for people in far-flung regions that one may have never come in personal contact with. Talking about an interaction he observed online, Ishaya Bako, documentary producer, says “Tweet-fights” are a huge part of interactions online. He says, “...reading the comments, it got tribal.” Bako (2013) calls debates online that are based on tribe and ethnicity, “poor thinking.” He says, “its always just sad when people go to religious ethnic but

you can't blame them, because they don't have any other point to look at it."

Rotimi Olawale (2013) on online debates in the Nigerian digital public sphere says they are rife with "insults, anger and emotions". He says:

I think that what has happened over the years is that the level of anger has grown. Young people have become more angry at government (Olawale, 2013)

He says, because in the digital media "everyone has almost all the facts", by this he refers to the spread of public information, "people have become more angry." Olawale's (2013) perception is that the government does not listen to the voices of the people, and this has led to social movement protests such as the "fuel subsidy protest." He says, "It was until the protest started that they reconvened."

Olawale (2013) offers further explanation about his perception of dialogue online in Nigeria - he focuses on the architecture of platforms in his next comment. He says dialogue initially took place in less publicly accessible groups such as "Google groups" or "Yahoo groups", unlike a "Twitter discussion", you needed to "subscribe" or be "added" by someone. At this point, Olawale (2013) opines that some form of caution is observed, as "there is a sense of family within an online group, and if you misbehave, there is an opportunity for someone to block you." On a Twitter discussion on the other hand, "you cannot block anybody, anybody can say whatever it is that they want to say."

Based on Tolu Ogunlesi's (2013) observation of online dialogue, and his experience, he describes the communicative environment thus:

The fact is that we don't have a long history of political culture behind us, so there's novelty and excitement of people actually being able to talk, say whatever they want
(Ogunlesi, 2013)

Ogunlesi (2013) says there is also the "excitement of being able to engage with some of the powerful politicians." He considers the Nigerian digital public sphere to be in its beginning stages as opposed to for instance, the UK pre-social-media period. According to Ogunlesi (2013), he believes the UK already had "an established political space..." with citizens in support of "Conservatives and Labour." Hence, he says, "people would come online with those beliefs." This is non-existent in Nigeria Ogunlesi (2013) explains in his words:

...So people are coming almost as virgins... ideological virgins, so people are just coming, so it's just a mad house in one sense...

He expounds that this means:

A lot of the debate that you find in the political space here [in Nigeria], will not be about that ideology of conservatism or liberalism, but more about that vague "good governance"
(Ogunlesi, 2013)

- because this is what he perceives as the immediate challenge of the people.

Ogunlesi (2013) says:

It's almost a luxury to be thinking are you in the centre or to the right or to the left, when there is power, no schools and all that. So it's for people, a way to make noise about those basic things, power supply, police corruption and that kind of stuff. I can't say it's the most sophisticated."

To him, the biggest challenge to a robust dialogue in the Nigerian digital public sphere is illiteracy, political as well as linguistic.

Ogunlesi's (2013) interview also reveals his perception of Nigerian public officials and how they conduct themselves online in interactions with citizens. He opines that Nigerian public officials have poor citizen engagement strategies. In his words, "many of them came to this space with the same mentality in which they did old media." For him, old media for "adverts" and "press statements", but "social media to a large extent doesn't work like that." Ogunlesi's (2013) reaction is this:

You can't come and impose things on people, they will ask you questions, they want to know more, they want to – the things you will get away with, you can't get away with it on social media

In other words, social media is being used to hold public officials accountable. He says that for the public officials, "Twitter is just like another newspaper, where you just push information."

Ogunlesi (2013), speaking from experience also mentions the Youth Minister who came on Twitter to engage with youths. Similar to statements made in Yemi Adamolekun's (2013) account, she says,

I think the most active government official on Twitter once was the Sports minister, then youth minister – came on Twitter, but eventually, even he kind of left after complaining that it was too abusive and too poisonous...

In his opinion, Ogunlesi (2013) said this case “was just a misunderstanding how social media works.” He is of the opinion that as a public official, when you come online, “you need to come with a genuine intention to engage.” There are challenges/downsides of digital media for democratic communication in Nigeria according to Tolu Ogunlesi (based on experience). First is misinformation. Ogunlesi (2013) says, “because of the scope and the reach of social media”, inaccurate information spreads fast, and is “self-reinforcing.” By this he means that once information is posted on Twitter for instance, it is easily reinforced to other platforms such as Facebook and Blackberry Messenger. Ogunlesi (2013) goes on to say that:

...Facts gets distorted and people make assumptions without checking them, so it can allow a lot of irresponsibility in information management...

On observing ethnic and religious sentiments invoked in online dialogue, Tolu

Ogunlesi (2013) says that:

When you come online and you see debates where ethnic and religious sentiments take the lead, it tells you essentially that that is what we are as a people.

Here, he refers to how dialogue on social media reflects the state of society where “people have no trust in established institutions.” In Ogunlesi’s words,

When the institutions that should stand for you as a Nigerian have failed you, you have to then find solace in ethnicity.

Hence, he says he is not concerned about ethnicity influencing public discussions online, “but it’s about what those things are telling us about where our society is.” Succinctly put, he says, “social media is an excellent window into the condition of our society at this time.”

Tomi Oladipo’s (2013) impression of the digital sphere in Nigeria is that of a “market square”. In his words:

...It's no different from a town square, so it's very difficult if you're in a crowd...when you are in a big crowd, people tend to agree.

Oladipo (2013) explains his point thus:

The way I see public debate...you very rarely find a third opinion...you get for and against, it's very rare you get someone giving another opinion – and even if you do, that person is a minority (Oladipo, 2013)

In other words, minority points of view in an online discussion sometimes get stifled. Oladipo (2013) perceives that the anonymity digital media offers is a factor. He says, "I just think that people would probably say things that they would not say to you up front because they are hidden behind a device." Oladipo (2013) also makes an important observation about dialogue and performance of self. He says that by and large, participants are "trying to create a persona" and in doing so, they are "trying to boost their own CV as well, they are trying to boost themselves." To further explain his point, Oladipo (2013) goes thus:

...Because this is a public platform and people from everywhere are seeing you, so people, as much as they come out as expressive, they are also conscious that they don't want to ruin that public image

Oladipo (2013) says that posting something perceived as "controversial" online may "ruin that reputation". He makes it clear in the interview that he is referring here to "those who put their online personality and don't hide behind pseudonyms."

In his experience, Oladipo (2013) conveys that attempting to dialogue with

public officials via digital media has not been fruitful. He says,

It's frustrating working with the government, getting anything from the government, hearing from them, talking to them because information dissemination is not natural to Nigeria...

Oladipo (2013) goes on to make an interesting statement about Nigerian public officials and his experience with them as a journalist. He continues:

Nigerian officials are not used to being questioned, not used to being asked questions. I think they hide behind the culture, just like any Nigerian parent.

According to him, "if a Nigerian parent is doing something wrong and a child questions them...'how dare you question me' - this is the culture..."

Mark Amaza (2013), a blogger, shares his observation of dialogue online and how the system works. He says in his experience, there are different types/groups of participants in online dialogue in Nigeria. His observation is limited to Twitter. Amaza (2013) says there are the "cool kids crew" and the "clowns of the class". Seun Fakuade (2013), social activist, on the other hand, has this to say about dialogue in Nigeria: "sometimes you find some very interesting points of view, but you get to discover that because of the ethno-religious divide across Nigeria today, a lot of options are clouded beyond issues." Fakuade (2013) says he has found the discussions pleasant, but "sometimes

they've been so bitter and acrimonious." Overall however, he says it is "encouraging", as prior to the influx of digital media, it was rare to "have young people rising up to governance, or aggravate their concerns on a larger scale."

In his opinion:

The discussions online have been able to change opinion...perspectives...thoughts patterns that have eventually influenced how the discussions fell out eventually (Fakuade, 2013).

Fakuade (2013) also draws attention to bullying and death threats in online dialogue. He says:

People also bully one another – because you have a wealth of information does not mean you should be a lord over another person.

Fakuade (2013) opines that, "there's a level of tolerance that we should have one for another and also for governance." Fakuade (2013) terms this lack of tolerance for opposing views, "social media harassment." At times he says, "people were driven off Twitter...". On people being driven off Twitter based on interactions they had on the platform Fakuade (2013) says, "we have different levels of tolerance". Fakuade (2013) gives an instance where:

You may say something that I don't like, or I might say something in my naiveté or ignorance. There's this attack

coming up from all angles...[in terms of mentions on Twitter]." People have left social media, and deleted their respective accounts because of situations like these – (Fakuade, 2013).

Seun Onigbinde (2013), founder of BudgIT also commented on online dialogue in Nigeria. He says the space is not controlled hence, "you might need some level of intelligence to sift reason out from it ." In his opinion, not everyone contributing to a debate or discussion is informed, "some are spun out of ethnic mindsets." Onigbinde (2013) describes discussions in the Nigerian digital public sphere as "very rowdy". Hence, he advocates that there is a need for independent personalities to say, 'these are the facts, if you wanna argue, you argue better from this standpoint.' "You also need people who would engage institutions" says Onigbinde (2013). He further comments on Nigerian public officials and how citizens engage with them on digital communicative platforms.

In his words:

Sometimes you find government officials coming to social media, abusing them, bringing them down, it's a turn off
(Onigbinde, 2013)

Onigbinde (2013) recommends that although one might be emotional about governance issues, "just a bit of civility, a bit of understanding to get your point across to them."

There are examples of where digital communication in the Nigerian digital public sphere have been found to intervene in matters of public concern and sometimes clear-cut political situations. While the Occupy Nigeria event in protest of the removal of fuel subsidy by Nigeria is regarded as a popular example of the impact of digital media in Nigeria, below are a few other case studies extracted from the research interview and others from more recent events reported in mainstream newspapers (post-field research):

The Save Bagega Campaign: According to Mercy Abang (2013), a journalist, Save Bagega (SB) is a campaign against lead-poisoning in Zamfara State, which she and other colleagues (also interviewed) made to trend as an *issue* online. Her account of how she and “friends” used digital media tools to secure the government-allocated funds to tackle the problem in the state goes thus:

Save Bagega (SB) is a lead poisoning issue in Zamfara State, Nigeria, which Mercy Abang and a few other members of her online network made to trend online till it was flagged as a matter for attention by the Nigerian government. “We were just small, just I, Japheth, and Azeernarh Mohamed” Mercy says about her network. According to her account, due to illegal mining in Zamfara, the lead poisoninng was killing the kids, and “Médecins Sans Frontiers [MSF] came to Nigeria to help to treat”. MSF decided to remediate [clean] the environment but needed funds from the government to execute the exercise. Mercy says, “MSF contacted me and Japheth and Azeernarh, ‘guys we are in trouble, the government has promised to issue this money’ and...they’ve been following up through the *who-knows-who* style and how and sending letters and

it hasn't worked.' According to her, MSF needed her and friends to use social media to get the attention of the government. Mercy says "we decided on a date, and guess what, we tweeted until SB trended." She explains that the then "chairman of the committee on environment [a public official]", Bukola Saraki, noticed their tweets and "went to Bagega to see for himself what was happening there." The Zamafara environment was successfully cleaned, according to Mercy.

Bring Back Our Girls vs Bringback Goodluck Jonathan: In September 2014, the electoral campaign team of the incumbent Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan released a poster citing the slogan 'Bring Back Goodluck Jonathan 2015'. This led to much fury on the online public sphere, especially Twitter, where many citizens (active digital media users) lamented how the slogan made a mockery of the original campaign Bring-Back-Our-Girls. The Bring Back Our Girls campaign was developed to raise awareness of the missing schoolgirls of Chibok, Nigeria, who were kidnapped by Islamic Sect, Boko Haram. At the time of Jonathan's political campaign, the girls still had not been found.

The *Washington Post* picked up on the social media reaction to the new campaign poster and published an article, 'This May Be the Most Inappropriate Political Hashtag of the Year' (Tharoor, 2014), stating that 'the backlash in Nigeria, at least on Twitter, has been swift.' In the article, the author cited tweets from aggrieved Nigerians. An example is one from Gbenga Sesan [who was also an interviewee for this thesis]. His tweet goes thus: "the morally bankrupt

adaptation of the Bringbackourgirls hashtag, towards the campaign of a coward who has failed at his task, says it all.” Shortly after the *Washington Post* article, the President announced the withdrawal of the ‘controversial slogan’ from his campaign.

On September 10, 2014, the Special Adviser to the Nigerian President on Media and Publicity, Reuben Abati, published on his website, that “president Jonathan orders removal of offensive bring back signs”. The article on his webpage goes thus: “while President Jonathan appreciates the enthusiastic show of support for his administration by a broad range of stakeholders, he condemns the Bring Back Jonathan 2015 signs which appear to make light of the very serious national and global concern for the abducted Chibok girls.” The call for the removal of these signage is debatably as a result of the impact of social media reactions, combined with coverage from the international media - Washington Post in this case.

Beacons Light Ng, Seun Fakuade: Beacons is an organisation set up by social activist, Seun Fakuade, that relies heavily on digital media tools to have impact on the Nigerian society. In his words:

Beacons has a website, has constant blogging materials, then we had structure of team that worked on the project, raising hashtags. We used hashtags heavily on [#thekalmajijiproject](#).

He explains that Twitter has been very useful on the projects run by his organisation. Examples of public projects to which he applied Twitter are: ‘Karu Clean UP, the environmental sanitation first conducted in March 2012’; ‘Bariga project’, an health advocacy to which his organisation used Twitter to crowdsource funds as well as ‘raise volunteers’ for the projects (Fakuade, 2013). Another major project to which Twitter for crowdsourcing has been impactful is the Karmajiji project, which at the time of the interview was still ongoing. Fakuade (2013) says, “we've been able to reconstruct 2 secondary school classrooms for the less privileged in Karmajiji.” In his account, he mentions a lack of educational infrastructure, “no teachers, no texts to teach” and “young people on the streets.” To this end, he and his team took to Twitter to raise funds for the project –

...We resolved to using Twitter to help them reconstruct the classroom, provide amenities, provide reading and learning materials and then recruit teachers. So we raised 333,000 Naira on Twitter crowdsourcing [funds] (Fakuade, 2013)

Fakuade (2013) says he is able to promote accountability by publishing expenditure online as well. In his words:

All that we used the money for was accounted for. If we were buying N800 nails, you had a receipt for it and it was posted on the website...as detailed as possible, everything on our website...

Save-xxx [Medical Interventions]: In the research interview, Rotimi Olawale (2013) mentions that one of the major interventions of digital media in the Nigerian society have been ‘Save’ campaigns. He says:

One of the best part of it [digital media] is the fact that the citizens have come together to provide support for themselves (Olawale, 2013)

Olawale (2013) accounts that “in so many “Save so-so” campaigns on Twitter... people online were chipping in N100,000, N1,000, N1,500...” Olawale (2013) says that for him this is “one of the best success stories”, and he thinks that a “specialised website will blow up for donating cash to such citizens...”

Examples of ‘Save’ campaigns that have been published on the internet include Save Yakubu Yusuf. This campaign was published on BBC Trending news under the heading ‘Save Yakubu Yusuf - Using Twitter to raise money in Nigeria.’ The report states: “If you encounter a tweet or Facebook post that comes complete with a plea for help, an emotive image...and bank details, you could be forgiven for raising a sceptical eyebrow.” The report goes on in its account that Yusuf’s friends have “made a video” and “lobbied influential figures on Twitter to try to get support.” This is just another of many examples. [BBC Trending, 2014]. On the other hand, the disadvantage of these Save interventions have been the tendency for fraudsters to scam unsuspecting individuals of funds. There was a story of a particular Twitter user, Royal Amebo, that was widely discussed in the Nigerian blogosphere when it was discovered

that the person behind the account was allegedly a fraud. The Royal Amebo story on a blog, TechCabal, opens with the following lines:

'On 11th December 2013, Ifeoluwa Ojikutu, who tweeted with the handle @royalamebo, died in the United States. She described herself as a business strategist, a US Certified Life Coach, a UN Youth Ambassador and a Real Madrid fan. Her friends said she was witty, fun, active and full of life. This is all very sad, except that @royalamebo was not a real person...' (Article Title: How Royal Amebo Catfished Twitter, 2013 by Seyi Taylor).'

More generally, in terms of impact and intervention, Mercy Abang (2013), a journalist and interviewee on this project, perceives the impact of digital media on democracy in Nigeria to have affected governance and more precisely been instrumental in mobilising voters to actively go out and vote as well as monitor elections. In her words:

Over the years, trust me, young people are not interested in the polls. Young people don't care...so when there are elections, people just stay home and let them do their thing.

However, Abang (2013) says the rise of social media may have reversed that trend. In her words:

We are telling ourselves no we should have time, no that's our future, those are issues that concern us...it [digital media] has helped to redirect our attitude and our thoughts

towards the electoral process.

This section addressed the subject of the content of the Nigerian digital public sphere (NDPS). We identified what constituted dialogue in the NDPS, and from the perspective of the interview participants, highlighted what might be democratic or undemocratic about the dialogue. Of significance in this second section, was also the need to identify who set the agenda for public discussion online. Overall, public deliberations online were described as vibrant – which is a trait supportive of democratic culture. However, several challenges with online dialogue in the NDPS were equally flagged. A recurring example was prejudice spurred by ethnicism. Other challenges were the spread of inaccurate information, online harassments, bullying, and so on. It is safe to definitively state that dialogue on matters of (Nigerian) public concern is taking place online. However, what is open for debate is the extent to which the nature of this dialogue is aligned to the fostering of a culture of democracy.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter comprised two sections – the *agents and agencies* (individuals, groups and organisations) whom I identified as catalysts in cultivating a culture of democracy in Nigeria through digital media; and the *dialogue and issues* that have emerged as formative for public debate. For the former, examples were those involved in the peaceful Occupy Nigeria protest to challenge the government on the removal of fuel subsidy, those who use social network to monitor that the government follows through on infrastructure projects, then the

creators of the Blackberry app for the Nigerian constitution, to ensure every citizen is more aware of their rights, and so on. The second section was concerned with shared feedback from respondents on the nature of dialogue – from the perspective of their personal experiences, observations, as well as perceptions of how things work. These discussions threw up several issues as to the challenges facing the use of digital media for democracy – especially in a society argued not to be wholly democratic.

In terms of the organisations, groups and individuals who are actively involved in using digital media in Nigeria, it is evident that digital media technologies have served a fundamental role in the processes of organisation and consolidation of collective activity, as well as the dissemination of essential information on a rapid and substantial scale – something that could not be envisaged before the era of digital media. For instance, the Nigerian Constitution for Blackberry app grants one access to a portable version of the constitution, as well as, ease in navigating it through the “search” feature. BudgIT is also able to share information on the Nigerian budget in easy-to-understand language, simply through digital media platforms such as Twitter. A further function is simply the promotion of social causes for public good – the identification, definition, and attention-stimulation functions of digital media simply serve to bring public interests to collective notice without the requirements of institutional endorsement, state validation or mass media broadcasting. Examples are Save Medical campaigns and the crowdsourcing of funds on social networks to provide education infrastructure amenities to lesser developed communities, for

instance, the Kalamijiri project by Beacons Light Ng.

Secondly, Digital media has allowed agents and agencies to track government's activities through crowdsourcing information. This has been the case of iWatchNg. Another organisation, Egunje.info on the other hand, uses digital media to track corrupt practices and report to the appropriate regulatory body in Nigeria, ICPC. Both organisations claim that digital media is central to how they gather their information – whether by visits to their websites, or people calling in on mobile phone. Thirdly, the promotion of political discussions around specific subjects of concern has been important. A good example of this is PolicyNG, that is focused on taking a government policy and analysing it in simple enough terms for a regular digital media user to understand. Communication techniques such as "Twitter Conferences" are usually employed here. Digital media connects citizens across geographical boundaries, such that they can share ideas and options on political issues and matters that concern them.

Fourth and lastly, digital media in Nigeria has been significant in the mobilisation of citizens to actively participate in official national political processes, such as the electoral process – especially with regard young people. Through creative campaigns such as Enough is Enough's RSVP (register, select, vote, protect), they have been able to increase the otherwise apolitical youths' awareness of political issues. Suffice to say that digital media tools are equally useful in facilitating the election management process. A good example of this is the Nigeria's Independent Election Commission, that set up a "Situation Room" to

monitor the Internet during the elections, co-ordinate the spread of crucial information for citizens, and curb the spread of false information.

Challenges to the effective use of digital media in promoting democratic culture in Nigeria are diverse but somewhat inter-related. One challenge that kept resonating among the respondents was the fact that anger, insults, and harassment are prevalent in public dialogue online. To them, this distracts from any form of rational critical discussions that may have held in its stead. The lack of a coordinated state censorship apparatus for digital media makes it a productive platform for open discussion. However, this openness allows for undemocratic behaviours such as hate speech and racism at the extreme. Public officials are not spared from these “aggressive interactions.” Respondents mentioned that public officials in particular, have been victims of backlashes from digital media users, in times when they have come online to interact with the people. Ethnic and religious factors often spill over into online conversations.

Nigerian public officials who are ready to engage with citizens online, are few compared to those who are not. As in Habermas’ original account of the public sphere, the dimension of ‘reciprocity’ between state actors and public sphere-generated proposals or views was required: it was not “talk for talks sake.” An exchange of ideas and feedback between those in power is only identifiable in Nigeria with regard to specific politicians – it is not a structural feature of the state apparatus.

Many Nigerians do not have access to online communications. This may not necessarily be a direct challenge, but the fundamental democratic principle of universal suffrage, while not intrinsic to Habermas's bourgeois public sphere (where women did not have the vote, for instance) is nonetheless an indicator in our own era of the pervasiveness of democratic rights and, a genuinely representative public realm. This is a complex matter in a country like Nigeria, where a huge and complex land mass requires a proportionate investment in communications infrastructure. Yet, even if this emerges, language or literacy levels would prohibit full online access and interaction. For instance, the Nigerian Constitution app developers stated that they were considering updating the app to feature local languages, not just English language. Yet, for a small enterprise, this is a huge ambition. Following from this, however, is the basic challenge of intelligibility – where the Constitution and its legal clauses may be too complex for general cognizance and any ensuing detailed discussion could (or should) exceed social media's 'simplistic' modes of communication and the inherent limitations on communication as determined by the architecture of its digital platforms.

The digital sphere, of course, more easily lends itself to the spread of inaccurate information. The ability to sift accurate informant from the inaccurate in the online sphere is a skill that requires a level of literacy not universally possessed.

Section Three: Chapter Ten

Discussion of Findings: Challenges and Constraints of the Digital Public Sphere in Nigeria

Introduction

At the beginning of this thesis, I set out to construct a concept of the digital public sphere, extrapolating from Habermas' classical theory, his observations on the cultural dimension of the public sphere, then the critical comments of key interlocutors Calhoun, Fraser and Kellner, I devised a series of 'components'. These components were dimensions of a developed public sphere, which serves as an heuristic for generating the criteria for our empirical analysis of the changes in public debate in Nigeria's democracy. I posited that the 'public sphere' in Nigeria was 'embryonic' in that it exhibited these many characteristics, even if the public sphere in Nigeria was unstable, provisional in many of its dynamics, politically vulnerable, and still evolving.

The opening theoretical inquiry into the historical concept of the public sphere was not an attempt to construct a more integrated or ideal concept of public sphere, but rather to open the concept to its application into another, developing, country, whose colonial history exhibited different (if not 'reverse') characteristics from the development of European democracies. For instance, in Europe, industrialization, social modernity, parliamentary democracy and a fully functioning public sphere all emerged simultaneously (many aspects of which

were, evidently, co-dependent). The situation in Nigeria, as subsequent chapters have revealed, is more disjointed and disconnected, if not stalled in its development. Nigeria possesses an advanced communications infrastructure, yet is unreliable and covers only some parts of the country; it possesses a presidential democracy with a liberal constitution, and yet whose functioning is mired in stronger ethnic, religious and commercial allegiances; Nigeria possesses a capable broadcast media, along with supporting legislation protecting freedom of speech, and yet is stalled in a culture of fear and intimidation; Nigeria is economically wealthy and with great untapped resources for central government to exploit for national advancement, and yet it is out of the private, small-scale markets for digital media products (and not the public institutions or political parties) that the conditions for actual political dialogue and deliberations are emerging.

The conditions I identified in the basic components of the historic public sphere, that Habermas so often ignored as subjects of inquiry – here, from my field research, I have found them to be sources of public sphere development. These components are: new media platforms, communication techniques, agents & agencies, dialogue & issues, and impact and intervention. However, I have defined them in part, (and so remained sensitive to such in the course of my interviews), as Habermas' observations on the cultural-literary public sphere and of the 'cultural' dimension of the mainstream public sphere allows us to consider other characteristics. These other characteristics, as outlined at the concluding section of Chapter One, are (i) the realms of experience, emotion and

expression – where individuals, otherwise unconnected to the realms of political decision making, reflection on their social conditions and derive from them issues of concern and frame these issues in broader, more general or ‘universal’ dimensions, and so engage in cultural production (Habermas, 1962:28-9 and *passim*); (ii) The social dynamics of communication – where informal groups can generate strong public-sphere type activities and deliberations or debates, yet remain largely detached from the realms of power and political decision making (Calhoun, 1992: 453; Habermas, 1996 358-9); and (iii) The ubiquitous use of media, which however, does not belong to the mainstream ‘mass media’ or state media apparatus (Habermas, 2006: 423). The ubiquitous use of media forms other than mass media, can, Habermas notes, generate many different powers of influence on the political realm. Digital media can create a sense of ‘mass’ communication while remaining detached from the formal, official and institutional dimensions of the public sphere as facilitated by mainstream mass media.

These above characteristics form content for our observations on the embryonic public sphere as derived from my interviews, and are also significant when situated within the framework of the above components, where both in turn facilitate a substantial response to my original research questions (reiterated below):

- What is the new digital public sphere and how has it been constituted by technology and new discursive practices?
- What organisations, media platforms, and communication methods

- participate in this new public sphere and supply its discursive content?
- How has the Internet and digital media facilitated national and international democracy, and how, specifically in Nigeria?
- What new cultural, social, and political changes have been effected by this new public sphere (or have the potential to be)?
- What are the forces (cultural, social, political and religious) prohibitive to the development of a fully effective digital public sphere?
- What political and media strategies can we identify that may be instrumental in developing a fully effective digital public sphere in Nigeria (and as a model for developing democracies)?

In this chapter, therefore, I open with a summary of my findings on the embryonic Nigerian digital public sphere [NDPS henceforth], and then proceed to assess this by way of the categorization implied by my original research questions (stated in the Introduction). A discussion on the current factors that oppose a fully effective digital public sphere in Nigeria will follow this analysis; entwined with this discussion is another, on the possible strategies that may be employed using existing public policy frameworks to enhance and promote the development of a digital public sphere in Nigeria. This chapter ends with possible suggestions for further study, thus acknowledging the limitations of my research.

New media platforms and spaces

The digital public sphere is the realm of communication that exists on and through new media platforms, stimulated and often motivated by cultural factors, where issues are deliberated on by agents and agencies made up of active citizens, who employ a wide range of communication techniques that result in impact and interventions. These interventions usually have socio-cultural,

political and sometimes economic implications, and the degree of impact may vary from very significant to somewhat significant, depending on the actions and activities that result from these online discussions, mostly outside of digital media spaces. The components extracted from my original theoretical definition are *new media platforms, communication techniques, agents & agencies, issues* (via dialogue), and *impact and intervention*.

Before my assessment, we must consider the obvious semantic point: what can be termed *Nigerian* about a digital public sphere?¹ Does this amount to a discrete realm where issues affecting Nigeria as a country are articulated (be it by Nigerian or non-Nigerians – internal to expressions of national identity); or are we referring to a more nebulous ‘space’ where Nigerians issue communications on subjects and issues that are part of general phenomenon or trends in social or cultural globalization, and to that extent may or may not directly address the apparatus of the state and the prospect of a national public sphere? Can the diaspora be considered a part of such a national public sphere? The name *Nigerian digital public sphere* throws up so many questions; therefore a definition of the term for the purpose of this thesis becomes necessary. Habermas paid little attention to what would have been the voices of ‘others’ outside the parameters of nation state citizenship (such as nationals domiciled abroad for business interests, or workers in the nations ‘empire’ who were not citizens); and the bourgeois public sphere as define by Habermas did

¹ Fink et al (2012) attempt to map Nigeria’s Twitterverse by using a methodology that provides them with data on the geographic distribution of Twitter users in Nigeria, the extent to which mobile phones are used to engage on Twitter, and an “estimated ethnic makeup” of these Twitter users (2012: 164).

not account for the colonial interests that became powerful, if not formative, forces in public sphere alliances, deliberations, and the commercial interests that spanned the borders of many nations not least of Britain or France's global empires.

The 'Nigerian digital public sphere' in this thesis has generally referred to the hybrid and multi-faceted space of communicative action located online via digital media tools (such as mobile phones), where issues considered to be *in the interest of Nigerians* and issues about Nigeria as a political state are deliberated upon (using the term 'deliberation' in as expansive a sense as possible). Given the de-territorialising nature of digital media technologies, and (as Castells has consistently argued) the growing global character of even national public debates using digital media, it can be argued the Nigerians in the diaspora are equally participants in this digital public sphere, as their interjections are formative of the modes, methods and content of communication that makes for public debate. An example would be the duplication of the Occupy Nigeria protests (against the Federal Government's removal of fuel subsidy) that emerged online and carried unto the streets in Nigeria, the Nigerian High Commission in London UK and New York, USA to mention a few countries.

The Nigerian digital public sphere is therefore not equivalent to a network of physical spaces, associations and institutions, and prominent individual representatives of such, as it was in the bourgeois public sphere. Or where even

for Kellner, where the public sphere was dominated by representative ‘lobby groups’ of large media corporations and other corporate entities. Rather, a digital public sphere contains an agglomeration of multiple interventions and actors who have no representative function (or often even identity), but more importantly, the open nature of the digital sphere has enabled even organisations to assume the flexibility and mobility of individual actors. The digital public sphere is sited in and through the multiple spaces accessible to the communication channels themselves, which overlap, especially when content is deliberately syndicated across platforms. For instance, a digital media user may employ an integration function on his/her blog, where content published is posted to Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook simultaneously. Hence, the digital public sphere in this case is highly fragmented. There is no one digital media space where Nigerians come together for the sole purpose of deliberation – from the webpages, to blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Nairaland, it is an all-platform-inclusive type of public sphere. The Nigerian digital public sphere is constituted by technology through the tools for engagement, which is mostly the mobile phone, given the state of infrastructural development in the country.

New media platforms or tools are essential to the digital public sphere because they enable communicative spaces, albeit abstract (unlike physical saloons and coffee houses), where public opinion may be engendered. Although new digital media tools may be employed for undemocratic purposes (such as terrorism, limitation of freedoms by repressive regimes etc.), as Rheingold says, it is ‘dangerously nihilistic’ to equally abandon the democratic potentialities of the

technology and label it ‘irredeemably destructive’ (Rheingold, 2012:3). Digital public spheres are formed to the extent to which the agents and agencies, that is, the ‘users’, render it so – and in the case of Nigeria, there have been sufficient examples to portend that a digital public sphere is burgeoning, albeit hampered by various challenges. One challenge for instance, would be the commercial nature of the online space. The platform upon which the Nigerian digital public sphere is based is equally commercial – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Blackberry and the likes do not belong to *the public*, they belong to private people who want to make a profit. Do these present conditions determine the public character of deliberation or debate? (I will discuss this matter under ‘dialogue and issues’).

The interview respondents cited a range of dominant new media tools: Facebook (social network: webpage & mobile app); Twitter (social network: webpage & mobile app); Wikipedia (webpage); Blackberry Messenger (mobile device and app); Short Message Service (SMS); Whatsapp (mobile app); Instagram (webpage & mobile app); YouTube (webpage & mobile app); Email; Mobile Telephone devices (smart phones and “cheap smartphones”. Brands: Tecno, Blackberry, android devices etc.); LinkedIn (webpage & app); Google+ (social network); Tablet PC (device); 2Go (social network); Eskimi (social network); RSS Readers; Google (Reader, Doc, Alert, Map); Flipboard; Wordpress (blogging platform); Reverbnantion (music app); Tumblr (social network); and ITunes.

The new media of public communication are technologically diverse, and furthermore, their production as technological devices emerge from new responsive design methods whereby manufacturing and marketing are so integrated that the users' demands and experiences are factored into the structure of the device. We are therefore not to conceive of digital media devices as "receiver-transmitter" machines as the old media of the past. They are, rather, adaptive communication tools, open to innovation and improvisation. The ways in which users adapted the architecture of the digital media platforms to heir communication needs was a subject of the research interviews. Respondents also, of course, called attention to how the design of the new media technology impacts how they use the tools and how the architecture influences the communicative purpose to which they apply them. Mbah (2013) says that unlike Facebook 'where you post something' and 'people can just air their opinion', Twitter's 140-character limit 'has been a serious inhibition for many people who can't edit properly or people who cannot put their words across in a concise form.' And yet, as any Twitter user knows, this limitation is also a factor in its use in rapid response and spontaneous information sharing.

Chika Oduah (2013), a freelance journalist, prefers Twitter to Facebook in that Twitter grants the kind of direct access that Facebook does not offer [except friends requests are sent and accepted by the parties involved]. In her words, 'the beauty about Twitter that Facebook may not have is that you can interact directly with newsmakers...'. Omojuwa (2013), social activist, also prefers Twitter because of 'the ease of usage'. He says that for his blog, he needs to

'create something a bit longer' so 'it's a lot more work.' Also, Omojuwa (2013) explains his preference for Twitter thus: 'for Twitter, the work ends where I am able to create a sentence that is impactful...', as 'some people would never ever read blogs...more than 500 words.' He says, Twitter is his 'primary tool' because 'lazy people would read what you have to say'. Omojuwa (2013) however acknowledges that he 'cannot ignore Facebook because of its longevity, and the fact that much more older people are there' who he needs to connect with. It is interesting to observe how Omojuwa (2013) is conscious about his message (as impactful), digital audience in his public discussions, and considerations as to their age discrepancy. It is not possible to tell if Omojuwa's assumption that older people are on Facebook and not on Twitter is from credible statistical data or simple "educated guess" based on his experience.

Seun Fakuade (2013), social activist and founder, Beacons Ng, explains why the structure of Twitter is more suited to what he does than Facebook. In his words, 'I temporarily left Facebook 2011, because I consider most of the things done there as too childish for me.' Fakuade (2013) says he had to return to Facebook because it was less restrictive compared to Twitter. He continues the comparison between both social network sites thus: 'for me Twitter has much more impact because of the kind of interactions that can emanate from what you're doing, it's not only your friends unlike Facebook, who would be involved in your discussion.' Fakuade (2013) says, 'people can see, they can find your retweets in different countries, or in different spheres in which people would have interactions or something to say.' He calls attention to the point that with

Twitter, posts from ‘2 years or 6 months ago’ may inform current discussions online. Fakuade (2013) explains that he revisited Facebook during the Occupy Nigeria protest because there was a need to ‘galvanise resources, mobilise people and make them understand why we were against the outright removal of the fuel subsidy, so it was important that one would not be discriminatory in the usage of social media because you’re trying to reach a large audience and you are trying to pass your message across board.’

Remaining on the subject of communication behaviours, Seun Onigbinde (2013), founder, BudgIT Ng, explains thus:

Twitter is like the biggest opposition party to government, because you hear people like Christine Amanpour (CNN anchor) say oh mr president you've said the power situation has improved, but you have people on Twitter who would keep saying ‘no...’. The conversation style, the layout, it makes you to express yourself quickly and just move on. So you have this whole thing that it is buzzing like a megacity at night and everyone is just talking, everyone is just moving around – and you find out there's always a thread pattern to the talk.

He says ‘Twitter’s conversations style helps it [communication] more.’ The architecture of the spaces of digital media often determine or shape the initial communication method adopted for effective dialogue and communication. Instagram, for example, as an online photo-sharing and 15-second video sharing space functions both on the web and as an app on (smart) mobile devices, and is structured to allow the user post a picture, add a caption with hashtags and “followers” can “like” and “comment” on the photograph or short video clip. To include this space in the Nigerian digital (political) public sphere,

the technique would be to creatively capture a political message in video or image format and post on the platform – a discussion could be stimulated in the comment section of the post and dialogue ensues.

It is important to emphasise that the architecture of the platform may sometimes restrain the vibrant dialogue a public issue may require in the digital public sphere. For instance, on Twitter, a tweet is limited to 140-characters, and where you send out over a hundred tweets per hour or a thousand per day, you (your account) are sent to Twitter Jail. Hence, it takes some degree of fluency and knowledge of (English) language to be able to compress what one intends to contribute to a public discussion online in just 140 characters. On blogs and Facebook, there are no such limitations, but in comparison to Twitter, they are limited in other areas. For instance, digital media users from the research interviews are more likely to read a tweet than visit a blog with a long post published. Hence, bloggers with something to say explained how they would compress their blog post into a number of tweets and send them out with links to their blogs for those interested in reading more to visit.

It is worth noting that restraining communication on these platforms through how they are built, may lead to certain issues being discarded due to their complexity and the perceived inability of the platform to justifiably spur the discussion. For instance, a television program analysing a policy may be better suited for the discussion than a mere Twitter chat. Some public policies or issues would need more than a few tweets to be explained or challenged. If the architecture of the

digital medium is not capable of effectively hosting complex public/political issues, it is a challenge for the idea of a digital public sphere. Many of the interview respondents lauded Twitter as their preferred mode of public communication, but the architecture is not necessarily suited to robust dialogue – it is punchy, quick, and transient. One way perhaps to navigate this challenge would be to primarily use Twitter to share hyperlinks that take the user to a more dialogue-friendly online space, such as a blog. This leads me to discuss communication techniques.

Communication techniques

Certain discursive practices have arisen from the use of information technologies for the purpose of participating in the digital public sphere. Through the use of information and communication technologies, I have therefore argued that ‘users’ have transcended the status of digital media consumers and have become producers of culture. Hence, these discursive practices are located in the cultures that have arisen from the adoption of digital media tools – digital media culture. These practices are Facebook-ing, Tweeting (@-ing), hashtagging, Twitter Townhall Meetings, Twitter Shows (e.g. NHBi), Twe-minars, *Liking*, *Following*, etc. They represent the semblance of an organised space that the digital public sphere may take for the purpose of having dialogue – in this case, defeating the critique of fragmentation.

Dialogue takes place in the Nigerian digital public sphere through organised Twitter-meetings, comments on a Facebook post on a group or page, comments

on blogs and news webpages. Conversations on Blackberry messenger may be termed private, but they may also be regarded as mini-public spheres in that the app allows for the formation of groups (just like a Facebook group) and the recently added feature of *BBM Channels*, which in Facebook-terms would be the equivalent of a ‘page’ to which one may subscribe and follow updates without necessarily sharing personal/private Blackberry Pins (contact number).

Public dialogue in the Nigerian digital public sphere is mostly organised around hashtags. Hashtags are very common on Twitter. On Facebook on the other hand, having a hashtag is not considered necessary because the architecture already organises the ‘group’ in one place – groups/pages can be created based on the registration of an interest. However, on Twitter, a variety of issues spanning diverse interests can be discussed without a form of organisation that would enhance effective dialogue. Hence, to have the semblance of meeting in a room on a ‘market square’ as one of the interviewees described Twitter to me, the hashtag is a very useful function of the platform. See Chang (2012)².

The hashtag has led to communication methods that have now somewhat become a culture. A good example is the Twitter-Townhall-Meeting (TTM). A TTM is organised for instance, for other users to have an interaction with a politician, public official or person of interest to the subject up for discussion. A time and date is set, and a hashtag designed, e.g. #MeetAtiku. This ‘event’ is

² Chang (2012) investigated the potential of Twitter to support an individual in being exposed to diverging political views. Chang concludes that the political role Twitter may play should be linked to the motivation of the user who actively seeks out these views, rather than to the technology itself.

publicised days to the event, with the ‘guest speaker’ equally endorsing the advert with a few tweets of his/her own. A TTM usually has a moderator who would spell out the ‘rules of engagement’, before the question and answer time begins. Ideally, the ‘guest speaker’ would field questions from other Twitter users who may be following the discussion via the hash tag. The hashtag curates the tweets into a page. Hence, every tweet that includes the #MeetAtiku would be visible to other users whether or not they are following the tweeter (person tweeting). The *Enough is Enough Nigeria* social movement group is an example of a TTM organiser in the Nigerian digital public sphere.

Discursive content in the Nigerian digital public sphere takes on a variety of forms besides plain text, signalling another technique. Note that digital media is multi-modal; therefore, other forms of media products can be ‘remediated’, shared and discussed. An example of a form of discursive content in the digital public sphere is animation/cartoons. This format is used to pass across political or public messages for social good in the digital public sphere. Soji Apampa (2013), founder Egunje.info revealed this on his project. Also, as a participant-observer in the digital public sphere, I have observed the use of such formats. They are shared from mobile phone to mobile phone through services such as Whatsapp and published on YouTube where viewers can comment and have a dialogue. Many of these animations employ comedic values mixed with serious messages to make them interesting and increase their potential to go viral. As Soji Apapa (2013) and a few other interviewees mentioned, humour is a huge part of the Nigerian public sphere. Through videos, the limitation of literacy as a

barrier to participating in the public sphere is somewhat reduced.

Another form of discursive content popular in the Nigerian digital public sphere is, of course, *imagery*. It is so important to acknowledge this form because they occupy a significant position when it comes to social movement projects or activities emanating from a discussion in the public sphere. In addition, images, in the form of infographics are used to educate people. Infographics are visual images that carry specific information or data. A good example is the group Budgit, headed by Seun Onigbinde (2013), one of the interviewees for this thesis. Budgit makes use of the infographic technique to spread information on the Nigerian budget in very simple terms, thus spurring public debate in the process – even among those who ordinarily may not have understood the national budget due to its relative complexity.

Other forms of images used in the digital public sphere include memes and logos. Logos are especially relevant because they are employed during social protests where they become symbolic of *the movement*. These logo images may be used as display pictures on Facebook and Twitter profiles, or even Blackberries, and shared on Instagram. For many, it is an avenue to identify with a cause in *the little way they can* – perhaps even an expression of nationalism. Logos were employed in campaigns and movements such as Occupy Nigeria, Child Not Bride and Bring Back Our Girls. By putting up these images on their profiles or sharing them, symbolic markers of a public sphere can appear and register the character of the space within the broader media realm. Memes on

the other hand are images accompanied with a caption inset. It is a creative practice in that the same picture can have several memes created out of it through carrying different messages. Memes are becoming a part of digital culture not just in the arena of politics, but also entertainment and culture; they are popularly found on Instagram. They also can be used as symbolic markers, sometimes re-directing ‘traffic’ (users) from entertainment to ‘public’ spheres.

Agents & Agencies.

Agents and agency refers to participants in the NDPS. The agents and agencies in Habermas’ public sphere were the ‘reasoning public’, the private people, industrialists, merchants, ‘educated classes’, the ‘highly literate’ etc. In the Nigerian digital public sphere, the active participants are equally not so far-fetched. Where literacy for instance consolidated one’s admission into the bourgeois public sphere (despite the ideal of *popular inclusion*), this same literacy, this time coupled with digital literacy and other factors such as the gap between the technology haves and haves-not creates a new kind of barrier. Hence, once again, participation in the digital public sphere might appear limited to the ‘educated classes’ and ‘highly literate’. During the field research, a recurrent perception of digital media in Nigeria was that it is an *elitist* platform – the reserve of the financially buoyant and working class. Rotimi Olawale (2013) for instance, comments on some sort of class stratification on choice of social network sites. He says,

I think that the reason why 2go is attractive to people who are not middle class is that they can use it with just a simple feature phone. N3000 [£12] Nokia phone, you are on 2Go. You might

not enjoy the user experience of Facebook, or Twitter on such a phone...people on Instagram are happy people on Blackberry cannot join them there, so it's more like an *elitist* platform, a status symbol...

In the same vein, Mark Amaza (2013) considers certain digital media platforms such as Twitter, elitist. He says that while digital media is 'widely accepted among young people in Nigeria', 2Go platform is more for 'mass usage' while Twitter 'is somewhat elitist'. This is because according to him, for Twitter, 'there is a higher learning curve for it' and to express yourself in 140-characters could be difficult. He also mentions that 'older people... have been slower to get a hang of it, of social media generally.'

However, it is of significance that while there is a huge gap between Nigerians active online and otherwise, the influence of activities on the digital public sphere spreads to both the 'haves' and 'haves-nots' through various channels. A significant actor that serves as a bridge between the two is traditional mass media. As a result of the fact that many Nigerian news media organisations (and practitioners) are active online through ownership of webpages, social media accounts, and otherwise, there is a way in which communicative activities on the Nigerian digital public sphere informs their news reports thus reaching a wider audience (who may not have otherwise had access to digital media) and vice versa. I will explore this further in the discussion on the discursive content of the Nigerian digital public sphere and who supplies this content.

Private individuals, public officials, politicians, social (activist) groups, religious

organisations and corporate businesses make up the active participants in the Nigerian digital public sphere. These groups are not exclusive, nor as cohesive in terms of group allegiance and identity as they would have been in Habermas's classical public sphere. This is because, as noted, the realm of digital media communication tends to prioritise individuality and the identities or profiles of individuals. An online social activist, moreover, may take up the role of a private individual/citizen when interacting with others online. One interviewee, Omojuwa (2013), may tweet to support a social cause such as Bring Back Our Girls, and later in the day, send out tweet 'adverts' for a private company that has paid him to push their messages to his numerous followers. In the case of the latter, he assumes the role of a private individual conducting his business, not a social activist. The same applies to a journalist who has a functioning social media account outside of his organisation's official account, e.g. @Eric_BBCLagos. Assuming Eric is a BBC Lagos reporter, he can be seen as tweeting in a private capacity, despite representing a corporate (news) business. The roles of an active participant in the digital public sphere are transient and not mutually exclusive. Private individuals may also be citizen journalists, bloggers, school students etc.

Public officials and politicians (aspiring political office holders), as mentioned earlier are a category of people active in the NDPS. From the interviews, it was evident that there is a need for more Nigerian public officials to become active in the online sphere, in order to promote citizen engagement. On the other hand, the interviews also reveal an awareness of the use of digital media for image

management and public relations by politicians. Jon Gambrell (2013), journalist with Associated Press in Nigeria at the time says, ‘people are using Twitter to rehabilitate their image, to change themselves and to allow themselves be looked at as something different...you see that especially now with Atiku Abubarkar [former Nigerian vice president] who is viewed not necessarily positively by a lot of people in Nigeria, and he has a sort of reputation...corruption and things like that – someone is professionally managing his Twitter account, you can tell – because they are trying to humanise him like “oh I was playing xbox with my son and my fingers are tired’ [referring to a tweet]...’

In addition, private corporations also play roles in the Nigerian digital public sphere, through sponsored adverts, contracting brand ambassadors (e.g. every day-Twitter-Users) who spread messages to their social networks on behalf of the company. Sometimes, individuals who have taken up active roles in the furthering of a social cause for public good and built a vibrant following, equally become ‘brand ambassadors’ for private interests. Where Habermas argued that the bourgeois public sphere transformed and collapsed due to the blurring lines between public and private interests, it is evident that the conflation and dissolution of the categories of private/public remain with us. The public sphere of contemporary society, in Nigeria, admits public relations, advertising, corporate interests, and as such, is to a large extent, ‘commercialised’. But does this reduce the power or function of public debate? In the interview, Henry Okelue (2013) mentions the idea of “buying followers” online. He says:

“...even though Twitter sees it as wrong, Twitter kicks against it, but people buy followers. Somebody somewhere has managed to have a nursery of followers, so if you say want a hundred. He has a way he will carve out a hundred... existing human beings... they have gone so granular to the point where you can actually tell the person, I want 200 followers from Jamaica. They will carve you 200 followers... a hundred followers who live in Lagos. They have a way of doing it, I don't know how they do it, but they have mastered it. That's why you wake up, some guy who had just 10 followers yesterday, you wake up he has 20,000....”.

From Okelue's (2013) perspective, the importance of *having influence* online is related to 'feeling important'. 'It gives a feeling of, I wont say that applies to me, but when you have plenty followers, it gives you that feeling of "people know me" - it's bragging rights. Those people might not know you, but people look at it like, if you have many followers, then you are a "twitter celeb" or something. Then for some other people, it's business...' he says.

Apart from the intentional democracy-fostering agents and agencies such as social activists, corruption-monitoring organisations and so on, the activities of "internet warriors" should not be ignored. Their role in the NDPS impacts public and political discussions, and we will see how. In a BBC online article, Adaeze Tricia Nwabuani (2014) gives an account of how she finds that 'political thuggery has gone digital'. In her words, '...rather than supplying them [being the "internet warriors"] with machetes, missiles and matches, Nigerian politicians are now arming their hirelings with laptops, smart phones and internet connections'. She observes that young people are being recruited all over Nigeria to 'harass, intimidate, and persecute their employer's opponents or those that oppose his [political] ambitions. For many Nigerians, being an Internet warrior is a full-time

job'. Nwabuani (2014) goes on to cite her encounter with a 28-year old Chemistry graduate who gave his job description thus 'distort public opinion' - hence, impact the public sphere.

Nwabuani's (2014) claim in her BBC article is backed by some findings from the fieldwork for this study. A social media manager of a Nigerian public official hinted that as part of 'how things work' he sometimes uses his Twitter handle and news website to 'counter the oppression of the opposition media'. In addition, he says, it is not out of place in government to buy phone recharge cards and pay for Blackberry services in order to equip some people to advocate for the government online. In his words, "I can't go ahead and start arguing with my handle [Twitter account], they will just know me as this guy works with the government. But let others who see the good work also speak".

To further buttress this claim as to 'internet warriors' being actors in the NDPS, the Chief Press Office of the Independent Electoral Commission Nigeria, Kayode Idowu (2013), called attention to the activities of these 'internet warriors' although he did not label them in those exact words. Idowu (2013) talking about election conduct in Nigeria said, "we had a Situation Room (online) where we receive information real-time and we respond real-time. We discovered that the downside of that is also that we received a lot of red herrings, maybe to divert attention". He explained that there was nothing that could have been done about these false alarms during the elections because "you can never ignore any alarm". Hence, we can conclude that there are dimensions of the new 'culture' of

democracy emanating from the adoption of digital media in Nigeria that is detrimental to the clarity and coherency expected of deliberation, and openness and honesty of dialogue, the transparency of sources and identities, and the constructive character of speech acts themselves (which seek to open up debate and enlighten the addressees – not mislead, distort or deceive).

Given the discussion on who the actors in the NDPS are, what new media platforms they use, and what communication techniques they employ, it is now important to examine the nature of their dialogue and the issues that arise. To briefly draw from Habermas' account of the public sphere in comparison to the NDPS, dialogue in the public sphere was not just 'talk for the sake of talk'. It was deliberate rational argument to produce a decision or consensus. One may then ask, is this the case in Nigeria's digital public sphere? To what extent do the talks on the Nigerian digital public sphere lead to decision and action? Does this sphere of communicative action compel the state to legitimise its actions before the people (as was the case in the bourgeois society of early Europe)? These are important questions to ask in this thesis.

The issue of status equality and how it affects dialogue is another point worth considering in the digital public sphere. For Habermas, this was an important ideal for any public deliberation to be regarded as a public sphere – the idea that status and ranks of individuals be put aside and arguments won on the basis of their strength rather than on grounds of socio-economic and political ranks. Fraser (1990) did criticise this ideal on the basis of other markers of status

inequality in public discourse such as style, language and decorum of communication in the sphere, which may render the presentation of one argument strong than the other.

Albeit that digital media and its attendant democratic potentialities have been lauded as creating a horizontal communicative environment (as opposed to top-to-bottom) for participants, Fraser's critique of the old public sphere calls attention to hidden devices of inequality that may still be found to surface in this new digital public sphere. From the field research, interviews conducted, it is evident that markers of inequality (not an exhaustive list) would be language used, individual popularity, and perception of intelligence quotient (I.Q) by fellow digital media users. In addition, a person's position or rank in society is often carried over to his/her persona on social media for instance, through the creation of a profile ("about me") or use of the display picture online. For instance, where a professor of Political Science is a Twitter user and his profile status says 'professor of Political Science', including a display picture of him in an academic gown – where discussions in the public sphere are on politics, his arguments would be perceived as more "authoritative" than if it were coming from another member of society. A person's position and rank in society is visible online because people actively put forth a representation of self, build public personas (false or otherwise), hence, there is no guarantee that these statuses do not influence dialogue in the Nigerian public sphere.

In terms of language, English is the dominant language of the Internet. Thus, a

Nigerian local language speaker who possesses a mobile phone, and has a Facebook or Twitter account, but is not as fluent in English may have a difficult time putting his arguments across or challenging the arguments of a better English speaker in the digital public sphere. For instance, Kole Shettima (2013), Director at the MacArthur Foundation, explains that there are local language discussions taking place on social media. He says, ‘there is a large number of people who are in the Hausa community who are using Facebook, Twitter and other things which are really not part of the English language use of social media itself’. This brings one to question the ideal just like Nancy Fraser, and the question is not one that can be answered decisively: is status equality really a necessity for participatory parity in the Nigerian digital public sphere? If it is, how may it be guaranteed?

Dialogue and Issues

A diversity of organisations, groups and individuals supply the discursive content in the Nigeria digital public sphere. Religious groups are a particular example. From our interviews we can understand how religion is a part of the digital public sphere in three ways: religious actors routinely comment on political issues; religious inferences endure in popular online political/public discourse; and there are continuing explicit public discussions about specific religious issues and their advocates or representatives. Religion has a long history with politics in Nigeria hence, it is not out of place to find that religious undertones often accompany the everyday political dialogue in the Nigerian digital public sphere. Sunday

Ogidigbo (2013), a Christian pastor, suggests in the research interview that Nigeria is a very religious state, and “even the politicians too are to be blamed because when they are seeking votes, they throw in one or two religious sentiments, it’s done everywhere.” The issue of religion, and the range of religious issues (and how religious issues are often synonymous with social and political issues, particularly when they are articulated through ethics or the discourses of morality and ethics) is a singularly significant yet specific dimension of the digital public sphere. This is particularly true given the availability and popularity of religious media (such as American evangelical TV stations, or Roman Catholic television), and the way religious media has been very effective in coopting social media into their marketing and broadcast strategies. How religion *per se*, and religion’s affect on deliberation in the NDPS, can only stands here as a suggestion for further research given the parameters of our investigation.

Issues discussed in the Nigerian digital public sphere are often explicit, spontaneous, and even dissipate as quick as they appeared, whether a consensus has been reached or not. There is perhaps a general case for arguing that digital media behaviour is broadly influenced by the rapid and individual-centred patterns of consumption that characterise the retail market and its trends, but it is difficult to argue that the ‘private’ ownership that predominates in the digital media technology realm provides specific conditions that impact on the content of communication itself. Who or what sets the agenda for public discussion is not as clear-cut as the case is on mainstream media –

which would be the gatekeepers in this case. From interviews conducted with active participants in the Nigerian digital public sphere and web-observation over the course of this project, the agenda for what makes popular dialogue ranges from a news story on mainstream media, to information shared by an influential social media user such as a celebrity, an individual who has amassed a huge number of followers online etc. or an event that has gone viral. The agenda for public dialogue can be set deliberately, such as Amara Nwankpa and his Oil Revenue Tracking project, or it could arise spontaneously. Olawale (2013) and Ogunlesi (2013) comment on who sets the agenda for discourse on the Nigerian digital public sphere in their interviews.

Olawale (2013) considers sources of discursive content on the NDPS as ‘spontaneous’. In his words,

I think that the conversations that elicit a lot of anger many times are spontaneous. Like the ‘Child not Bride’ [campaign], nobody expected that conversation to start. Yerima didn’t address a press conference...It is more reactive. You will see fuel subsidy, who is talking about fuel subsidy now? It’s forgotten, we’ve moved on. How many people went to jail on fuel subsidy, till date none, zero. We are talking about trillions of Naira, nobody went to jail and it’s finished.

Olawale (2013) says the norm in online dialogue in the Nigerian digital public sphere is for an issue to be topical and “...in another 2 weeks, we will get something else to catch our fancy...Kim Kardashian will say Black Africans are dirty and we will be in a rage... I think they feel a sense of participation when there is something that comes up and everybody talks and then another 2 or 3 weeks it’s gone’ with no significant impact”.

Tolu Ogunlesi (2013), freelance journalist/writer, comments in his research interview, “sometimes its me and people like me who start a discussion on Twitter and it just takes off, and sometimes... at the end of the day I think it’s always people who are setting the agenda. Twitter is just then a good tool for highlighting those things...when you look at a trending hash tag, then that tells you that lots of people are talking about this.’ He says, ‘at the end of the day, social media is still about the people...platforms will change, but it is the people that are still at the heart of it...’. Ogunelsi (2013) considers Twitter specifically, ‘a more efficient way of pooling those voices together.’ He says that in amalgamating voices, Twitter is ‘much more efficient than the days of phone-in TV or phone-in radio where there was still an editor who could decide what calls or opinions to pick.’ Twitter he says, ‘is almost like equal opportunity...because of the way that it can analyse or pool things together, then you can get a sense of what people are talking about.’ On the issue about who sets the discursive agenda in the NDPS, Ogunelsi’s (2013) conclusion is that ‘it is the people who are still choosing what to talk about, and setting the agenda on social media - but...sometimes the agenda doesn't originate on social media. Sometimes it comes from the old media. The Snowden incident... but it's still human beings that are setting the agenda somehow.’

As we can now see, the discursive content of the Nigerian digital public sphere is indeed diverse, and supplied by active participants in the form of private individuals, journalists, citizen journalists, bloggers, corporations, public officials, religious organisations and more. The communication methods employed in

these spaces are technically determined by the architecture of the platform in use, but the content, spontaneity and duration of the communication and initial stimulus or agenda from which it emerges, are not so determined. Content is shaped and formed by a variety of sources, and can be so shaped and formed by the remediation or use of mainstream media products or even just a post by an influential digital media user. We must also note that within the hybrid character of communication ‘content’, the individual ejaculation predominates, and where ‘dialogue’ itself is transient and continuous, and in terms of ‘deliberation’ in the Habermasian sense, there is no form of organisation or framework to ensure that a particular public issue is systematically analysed, refined and concluded in terms of a consensus before another matter is considered. Many times an issue may be addressed and then abandoned for another more topical event, before then being taken up once again. For instance, the Bring Back Our Girls is a campaign that has enjoyed international attention, and although the girls have still not been found at this time, the agenda in the Nigerian digital public sphere has shifted to other matters.

Impact and Intervention

Digital media as a public phenomenon, principally demonstrate an enhancing of individuals’ participatory capacities through network technology, supplanting a once passive audience of mainstream media with a more interactive and participatory one, and creating a space where marginalised groups from the mainstream public sphere can champion issues that concern them as well. Now common theoretical phrases, such as ‘decentring the very act of communicating’,

'absence of boundaries', and so on have heralded discussions of the potentials of this new digital public sphere for democracy, as I outlined in Chapter Two. And yet the question of government and governance has remained unresolved (in part of course, because each nation state is quite different).

In Nigeria, digital media has facilitated the development of a public sphere that functions in a democracy that does not quite fit any singular model. The practice of democratic culture in Nigeria is a hybrid of representative (as election of representatives are conducted), deliberatory and participatory democracy – perhaps infused with some undemocratic but practical behaviours such as 'zoning the presidency' due to Nigeria's multi-ethnic nature. Being that Nigeria is home to over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups, it is often argued that the practice of rotating the seat of the presidency to reflect diverse ethnic groups is necessary towards the sustenance of peace. For Nigeria, this is a peculiar arrangement that does not directly subscribe to the basic ideals of democracy. However, in many other ways Nigeria's democracy is developing. For instance, the Freedom of Information Bill, a bill crucial to the development and sustenance of any vibrant public sphere was passed into law in 2011. Freedom House (2014) ranks Nigeria a 'partly free' society, and coming from a heavily militarised history until 1999, Nigeria's democracy has great room for improvement, hence the relevance of a burgeoning public sphere.

The contribution of the digital public sphere to Nigeria's democracy has indeed been evident in the springing up of a number of online-based initiatives,

reactions of the government to criticisms from the online sphere as well as the growth of a more informed citizenry due to increased access to public information. This has in turn, from data gathered, further sensitised citizens to their civic responsibilities, such as electoral voting – especially young people.

Here are a few of the online initiatives that have contributed to facilitating a public sphere in Nigeria, which in turn promotes a culture of democracy in Nigeria:

- The development of a Nigerian Constitution app for Blackberry (now on android phones as well).
- The founding of the Budgit group dedicated to spreading information on the national budget in simple everyday language through the web, apps, and online gaming.
- Save Campaigns and medical interventions initiated by citizens to support fellow citizens online through crowd-sourcing funds online via Twitter & blogs.
- Beacons Light Nigeria and the kalamajiri project among others, where funds were equally sourced online to develop classrooms for underprivileged students.
- The founding of Policy Ng, a website dedicated to taking up government public policies and analysing them, whilst encouraging feedback and interaction from the readers.
- The founding of Egunje.info that is dedicated to anti-corruption in Nigeria through setting up a website where one can whistle blow on corruption safely, piggy-backing on the anonymity the internet provides to users – corruption may be in government or in the private sector.
- The founding of iWatchNg, another initiative dedicated to monitoring the award of contracts by the government to national infrastructure and development in Nigeria, and overseeing its implementation through crowdsourcing evidence e.g. from road users of a newly commissioned road-project.

[The above initiatives were discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis]. On a broader level, the uptake of digital media technologies in Nigeria have opened up avenues for citizens to further exercise their freedom of expression – and

despite any explicit governance or government dimension to this, this must surely in itself be defined as ‘democratic’ behaviour. My general argument has maintained that the digital public sphere in Nigeria has been cultivating a ‘culture’ of democracy, where the explicit cooperation and structural features of government and governance do not altogether facilitate or assimilate the full range of public debate and deliberations. Evidence of this is the lessening of political antagonism or ‘backlash’ against bloggers or active digital media users on account of their criticism of government. One of the research interviewees, Ishaya Bako, spoke of his documentary film on Nigeria’s political affairs, *Fuelling Poverty*: it was banned for television broadcast, and yet he was able to bypass the ban and publish the film for free on YouTube, exposing, without political interference, his work to a Nigerian and a global audience. There remains no record of him being harassed on this account, by the time of submission of this thesis.

So far in this chapter, we have established what is regarded as the digital public sphere in Nigeria, how it operates, through what communication methods, who supplies its discursive content, the nature/style of the discursive content and practical ways digital media have been used to facilitate a ‘culture’ of democracy in Nigeria. However, it is equally important to acknowledge what new cultural, political and social changes are impacted in Nigeria by the development of this new public sphere, as well as forces that may be prohibitive to its development – be they cultural, social or political.

The use of technology births new cultures, and in the same vein culture and

behaviour may birth the need for a form of information technology. In Nigeria, the adoption of digital media technology, which has led to the development of a form of public sphere, has culminated into new cultures in the following areas:

- Diverse forms of social and political behaviours – in activism, communications & interaction.
- New means of advertising and public relations by private corporate organisations.
- New approaches to reporting and disseminating news among journalists & news organisations.
- More flexible social structures and social class identities.
- More interactive forms of personal/public interactions.
- New means of artistic and cultural expressions.
- New approaches to sharing, spreading and advertising religion.

Social and political activism has been prevalent in Nigeria before the influx of new media technologies, most common of which is the mobile phone. By the account of social activist Jaiye Gaskia, an interviewee in this study, activism involved going through the rigorous process of printing leaflets and posters, to be transported to locations around Nigeria under risky circumstances (given that the military was in power at the said time). Gaskia said his movement built relationships with commercial transporters so that the media products could move from one city to the next. They would then paste the posters in public places and distribute the leaflets by hand. According to Gaskia, where logistics, organising meetings and transporting people from one place to the other was a challenge of old social movements, today, meetings are easily coordinated online. In addition, one can now upload a leaflet online and distribute it through the same channel, without incurring the once exorbitant cost of printing.

However, there are still other means by which social activism in Nigeria has adopted new ways of conducting itself, new cultures. They are found for instance in the use of logos (that represent a particular social cause) as display picture on public social media profiles, the use of memes that make strong political statements and similarly, the use of creative animation or short drama clips uploaded on YouTube, Instagram and other video-sharing websites. Many a times, you would find a protester carrying a hand printed placard supporting a cause in the comfort of her home, and publishing the image on Instagram. In that situation, the said person can be recognised as identifying with the cause. This was quite prevalent in the recent #BringBackOurGirls movement that went global when Boko Haram, an Islamic Sect abducted over 200 girls from their secondary school in Nigeria. Michelle Obama, the First Lady of the United States, identified with the Bringbackourgirls cause using this method, and so did a host of international celebrities.

This culture of activism has been branded ‘clactivism’, and in some quarters, has been branded ‘slactivism’. Clicktivism is of course derived from the word ‘click’, whereby people can support a social cause by the mere clicking of the mouse; in other words, joining a social cause is made easy through mediated actions, without the personal commitments of a ‘boots-on-soil’ approach. In a *Guardian UK* article by Emma Howard (2014), Change.Org and 38 Degrees are put forward as champions of online activism, accompanied with the question, ‘do they encourage people to passively click in support of a cause rather than taking action?’

This brings us to the idea of ‘slacktivism’, which is very similar to ‘clicktivism’. According to Oxford Dictionaries online, slacktivism is ‘actions performed via the internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement, e.g. signing an online petition or joining a campaign group on a social media website. A *Huffington Post* article talks about the shortcoming of clicktivism/slacktivism using the Bring Back Our Girls Campaign as an example. It reads:

#BringBackOurGirls began to encourage political leaders both in the US and Nigeria to put resources into finding the 300 schoolgirls who were kidnapped by the Boko Haram, an Islamist militant groups. Though the movement gained support from civilians across the globe through the support of celebrities, and even the First Lady, Michelle Obama, it was largely forgotten within a few weeks...activism should not be an isolating experience. Activism should be rallying, speeches, emotion. So let's step away from the computer, put down the cell phone, and reconnect with the real world in order to take and help solve its problems (Robertson, 2014)

These new cultures of activism are therefore not peculiar to Nigeria, they have been adopted in the world over and impact has been felt to varying degrees – a common example being the Arab Spring.

In the advertising and the public relations (PR) industry, new cultures of engagement are being propagated in manners that affect how the digital public sphere in Nigeria operates, although the impact is not quantitatively measured in this thesis. There are two ways that have been observed by the researcher, in terms of how advertising and public relations activities by private corporations form part of the digital public sphere in Nigeria. Firstly, there is evidence that private corporation such as banks sponsor creative (entertainment) media

content online that can inform public discourse. A prominent example is Guaranty Trust Bank that sponsors Ndani TV on YouTube. There is also the somewhat traditional method of paying for advert space online within private or public sites; and lastly, the recruitment of active social media users to push out advert content to their respective social network connections as a paid job.

New avenues of citizen interaction with public officials and politicians online is a significant development in Nigeria. Digitally mediated interchanges take place through direct interaction such as sending Twitter messages, emails, SMS etc. or via organised Twitter Town Hall Meetings or a Facebook group, such as has been described above. There is also the emerging culture of a *Twitter celebrity* – in our research interviews these groups of influential users were referred to as “overlords”, “cabals”, and their perceived subordinates, “voltrons”. In his interview, Okelue (2013), an active digital media user and social activist, described the idea thus: “It’s all a figment of people’s imaginations...Voltron is – you say something about someone, a group of people come and defend him through tweets. They might just like the person (hence, not necessarily paid). The cabals are...they take people who have the strongest opinion, who have the furthest reaching opinions on Twitter and say they are in a cabal...If I am cabalian, I won’t tweet at lowly people”. These “lowly people” are weighted by “how much people take their opinion [as] important.”.

In a blog post by another Nigeria digital media user, Blossom Nnodim (2013), she further explains this culture based on her personal experience being a part

of it. The title of her article is ‘Voltron or Famzer – Knowing your place in the Caste System of Social Media’. Nnodim (2013) explains that there are class and groups of users in the Nigerian digital public sphere, and they are as follows:

- Offline superstar; online superstar: This is a person that has an instant name and recognition offline as well as online. People who usually fall into this category include footballers, comedians and religious leaders..
- Offline superstar; online regular user: This person has always been recognised as a celebrity before the advent of Twitter, e.g. former political figures, past beauty queens, retired athletes.
- Offline random person; online superstar: Nnodim (2013) calls this group “Twitter Celebrities”. She says, “take away their Twitter account and they become inconsequential”, as he/she uses Twitter to “amplify his/her thoughts, becoming an online superstar”.
- Offline regular folk; online regular folk: Nnodim (2013) says this is where majority of Nigerians on Twitter fall. This group “go further to elevate, revere seemingly worthy folks or celebrity on Twitter”.

While her hypotheses have not necessarily been subjected to any empirical verification, it is clear that her claims resonate to a large extent with the experiences shared by the interviewees in this research. The word *Voltron* is originally an animated television series that was popular in the 80s, and the character, Voltron, was ‘defender of the universe’. Hence, digital/social media users who defend an “overlord” are informally referred to as voltrons, that is, defenders. The colloquial word “famzer” is derived from “familiar”. To famz online is to associate oneself with a celebrity or a user considered to be of celebrity status through for instance tweeting at the user in a manner that suggests you are a fan. Please note that these terms are mentioned as developed by these Nigerian digital media users to define and explain their experiences in online interactions. These attitudes, although not empirically

articulated yet, cannot be ignored because they represent the inner workings of the Nigerian digital public sphere that influence the dynamics of how dialogue and deliberation take place in these spaces.

Furthermore, the culture of public exchange is also spurred by the adoption of new media technologies evident between religious organisations, cultural producers (musicians, film makers etc.) and news organisations. Regarding religion in the Nigerian digital public sphere, new means of sharing religious messages open new avenues for dialogue and inquiry. Henry Okelue (2013) mentions in his research interview, that he receives invitations to church events by short message services (SMS). In addition, Alkassim Abdukadir (2013) mentions how, as a Muslim, he has observed how ‘cool’ it has become among his networks to “belong to certain Christian circles, because they are young and upwardly mobile”. This “belonging” is consolidated in for instance “retweeted Pastor Adeboye, Pastor Bakare.”

Among cultural producers, there are shifting patterns and practices in how media products are distributed, changing the nature of engagements between producers and fans. For instance, Banky W (2013) mentions how in distributing and marketing his music, he can now by-pass the middleman being disk jockeys and radio houses and communicate or interact directly with his listeners via social media networks. This is not merely of economic significance, but it maintains an impact on potential relationships between musicians and social political movements. An example of this is the Register Select Vote Participate

campaign (RSVP) by ‘Enough is Enough Nigeria’, where Nigerian celebrities recorded voice-over clips encouraging the youths to vote. This campaign ran across online and traditional media platforms, picked up by consumers now educated and skilled in accessing the new fluid flows of music media distribution. For Tunde Kelani (2013), a film producer, the adoption of new digital media in Nigeria has led to new modes of archiving his media content, as well as providing an alternative and cost-effective space to broadcast content to his audiences. He recounts, “before... you make a programme, you have to beg the broadcast owners to give you space or sell you a space, and usually you become a slave to them because you can’t afford them”. For others, like Ishaya Bako (2013), it is an alternate space to spread media content along with messages that are muzzled in the mainstream Nigerian public sphere.

Among news organisations in Nigeria, the shifting patterns of communication are evident in how news agenda is set, news gathered, spread and discussed – this is across both local and global news organisations. During the research interviews, many respondents alluded to how their social network sites had become their primary news source, as opposed to the traditional newspaper, radio and TV. Likewise, journalists interviewed also explained how they source for potential news stories on social network sites, develop news verification methods (e.g. calling a potential news source on the mobile), and employ linguistic devices in positioning themselves (their social media accounts) as the go-to source for news. Hence, news organisations contribute to what forms the agenda for discussion on the Nigerian digital public sphere and issues

discussed on the Nigerian digital public sphere have an outlet to go mainstream through these journalists active online – thus bridging the widely argued digital divide in Nigeria.

These new ways of sourcing news by the public, and sourcing stories by journalists, is evidence of new patterns of production in journalism. Where the gatekeeper once had majority control over what was published/broadcast or not, the ‘audience’ increasingly have a stake in influencing what airs or is published through setting an issue as an agenda and “tweeting” or “facebooking” until the issue trends and can no longer be ignored. The cultural producer, singer, Banky W (2013), alluded to this point when he mentioned that his fans get his music on air (broadcast media), because once the people want to listen to a song, radio announcers cannot but play his song. In his words, “if something trends on Twitter, that’s the way to know that everyone is talking about this one song or particular topic...then DJs and radio stations don’t have a choice but to play it”. The same can be said for news journalism now, where the public sphere is agog with a particular issue, it becomes conspicuous when a news media organisation disregards a subject on mainstream media.

Lastly, in concluding this section, there is also the forging of new relationships between active participants in the Nigerian digital public sphere and global media organisations. Through avenues for crowdsourcing news from around the world put in place by these organisations, such as iReporters at CNN or GuardianWitness ‘the home of user-generated content’ at Guardian UK. An

opportunity to contributing to setting the news agenda on a global media platform is thus opened up to members of the Nigeria digital public sphere. Social media accounts of global media accounts such as @BBC-have-your-say equally provide access to digital media users to suggests what issues of the day should become an agenda for public discourse on a global platform.

As the adoption of digital media technologies become more ubiquitous in Nigeria, new relationships between the technologies, organisations, content production and audiences are forged, in turn steadily shaping the structure of social interaction and professional expectations. It is evident that new patterns of audience integration, responsiveness and a need to engage with popular communication flows are becoming absorbed into mainstream media and political spheres. New communication methods for the representation of views, identities and positions on public issues are emerging, whether to solicit votes, subvert the character or course of general dialogue or opinion, or for social and religious bodies to spread their beliefs and invitations to public events. This rise in activity and consequent change is not insubstantial even though we return to the questions of government and governance and the structural role of public deliberation in the systems of national democracy.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I critically assessed the NDPS using the criteria extracted from the review of literature on the public sphere in earlier chapters. These elements I found significant to public sphere development in Nigeria are – new media

platforms, communication techniques, agents and agencies, dialogue and issues, and impact and intervention. They are equally closely linked to the research questions that guide this study. In this chapter conclusion, I put forth that the NDPS in Nigeria is evolving and has the potentials to promote a culture of democracy in the country, but not without challenges and constraints, as we will see in the next and final chapter of this thesis, where I will discuss the final outcomes of this whole research investigation.

Conclusion

Factors prohibitive to the development of the digital public sphere in Nigeria

As argued in the previous and last chapter of this thesis, a digital public sphere in Nigeria is emerging through the new ‘culture’ of deliberation, dialogue and communication, but remains in an embryonic state of development insofar as it has not become a stable, consistent, substantive feature of the state apparatus or the procedural activities of state decision-making. This is evident from the rapid pace of change, spontaneous responses to events and lack of sustained debate, intense dialogue, without an evolving structure of deliberation, and a political sphere that is taking note and engaging with the digital realm and yet not fully integrating the content of public communications systematically into the processes and procedures of government and governance. The subject of this section is the way the growth of a digital public sphere is hampered by various social, political and cultural factors.

First, the technological function of digital media is adversely affected by the economic factors of a poor telecommunications infrastructure in terms of the spread and reliability of service. In Nigeria, the infrastructure to support digital media technologies, such as the mobile phone ownership, support and networks, is concentrated in urban areas to the neglect of many rural communities. Hence, members of the grassroots are excluded from participating in the digital public sphere. On the other hand, even in the urban areas where access to the

information technologies is more common, there is the barrier of relatively expensive data rates, which makes connecting an internet-enabled mobile phone to the Internet difficult. Erratic power supply also makes it difficult to stay connected to the digital public sphere where mobile phones, laptops and other devices cannot have their batteries recharged despite having access to the Internet. Situations like these often call for the use of power-generators that run on petrol or diesel, which is in itself a costly venture to sustain. In terms of reliability of service, a respondent, Alamba (2013), mentioned having to possess more than one mobile phone to host sim cards from various telecoms providers in Nigeria, in case one fails in providing satisfactory service, he can try the other. Many Nigerians cannot afford the luxury of owning more than one mobile phone.

Secondly, a main hindrance to the vibrancy of a digital public sphere is motivation – the representation of public officials who are active online and willing to engage with citizens are slight. There is so much potential for interaction between citizens and the state in the Nigerian digital public sphere that would facilitate a growing sense of participation. On the experience of journalists interviewed in this study, there are claims that for public officials, being active online gives an illusion of the democratic criterion of transparency because it is indeed in actual fact absent. Digital media is a space for strategic deception. To illustrate this point, a BBC Lagos Journalist, Tomi Oladipo (2013) observes that “it’s frustrating working with the government, getting anything from the government... Nigerian officials are not used to being questioned. They are used to a media that would take anything they say without questioning them. I’d

been called “rude” by Nigerian officials just because I asked him questions”. Another journalist, Jon Gambrell (2013), echoes this observation when he said that interacting with public officials online rather than face-to-face limits the conversation as they (officials) have control of the message and do not have to answer the questions posed to them on Facebook, for instance.

Thirdly, there are social and behavioural inhibitors to the development of an effective digital public sphere in Nigeria. From research interviews conducted with active digital media users in the Nigerian public sphere, recurring themes included:

- Prevalence of harassment online, cyber-bullying & (sometimes) hate-speech or death threats.
- Mechanisms of self-censorship.
- Direct relationship between poor literacy & lack of digital skills.
- The “generational” digital divide.
- Ethnic and religious bias, colonising areas of the digital media sphere exclusively for their adherents.
- Inaccurate or misinformation going viral.
- Anonymity – the lack of transparent identity in digital dialogue.
- ‘Petty’, ‘insulting’ and ‘emotional’ behaviours in the digital public sphere.
- A crowded space – an echo-chamber that de-motivates genuine users.

Harassment, cyber-bullying and hate-speech are common factors at play in any online interaction in Nigeria, and this also pertains to public sphere communications. I have observed instances where death threats are extended to a fellow digital media user for simply disagreeing with a point of view. Respondent, Bukola Ogunyemi (2013) also shared his experience where he made a religion-related comment on Twitter, which led to death threats online and via SMS. This is an undemocratic attitude, as it suggests that

dissenting/subaltern views may not be tolerated in the digital public sphere despite the perception of high democratising potential of digital media. For a robust debate to take place online, participants in the digital public sphere need to accept to be exposed to dissenting views to theirs and tolerate them.

In the light of this, it is no surprise that self-censorship is a common challenge with engaging in dialogue in the digital public sphere. It is strongly related to cyber-bullying, where digital media users refrain from expressing their views on a subject being debated for fear of potential consequences. The passive-repressive attitude of the state (or representative) is another trigger-factor to self-censorship in online discourse. For instance, some respondents (e.g. Alamba) mentioned how they would rather not comment on political issues online as “you never know who you are talking to...you don’t know who you are stepping on his toes – because it may turn back on you”. After the interview with Omojuwa took place in 2013, sometime in 2014 the Nigerian State Security Service arrested him.

Going forward, the impression that the digital public sphere is an ‘echo chamber’ (no one is listening to the other hence there is no dialogue of which to speak), is not a problem limited to the Nigerian digital public sphere. Voices easily get lost in a ‘mass’ of atomised ejaculations, especially where the conversation/debate is not structured or coordinated. The fragmented nature of the digital public sphere communication thus indicates the need for socio-political conditions for ‘public’ communication. Where with digital media there is no single or delimited

collective space where active participants gather to discuss public matters as affects them, the function of such past manifestations of ‘space’ needs to be revised.

Poor literacy and a consequent poor digital literacy is a significant barrier to the development of the Nigerian digital public sphere not easily broached. Education is a systemic feature of any society and intrinsic to social welfare provision. If one is not familiar with how to use basic information and communication technologies, such as the mobile phone, becoming an active participant in the digital public sphere becomes a difficult task. Moreover, some basic level of literacy is required to participate in the digital public sphere in terms of ability to read posts online, as well as publish and comment on posts. Although it is a given that not every digital communication platform is text-based, it is still important to possess basic reading and writing skills to maximally participate in the digital public sphere.

The digital divide is a concept that has often dominated scholarly discourse on the Internet and its increasingly important social and economic functions. The claim that digital media has actually exacerbated social divisions and class stratification, is commonplace. The implication maintains that in the context of a pervasive and chronic digital divide across Nigeria, a putative digital public sphere could never claim democratic legitimacy given its lack of popular representation. While this is an important issue, however, our concept of the digital public sphere, like Habermas’s eighteenth century European public

sphere, does not require full representation of a national population to begin its work. Even so, it is important that any critical research study of this subject acknowledge the depth of the issue at stake:

- There exist prohibitive high data rates (internet service costs), which can render a mobile phone user bereft of any mode of Internet access as a result of private corporate pricing strategies along with insensitive government regulation of such.
- The education system is not altogether cognisant of the need to stimulate general literacy so as to increase public participation and thus digital literacy.
- The expense associated with various levels of digital media device (such as smart phones), increasing the communication capability of the wealthy.

The immersion of digital media communications in the spheres of entertainment and the retail or consumer culture of younger people, sets up a symbolic gap between the ‘older’ and ‘younger’ generation in terms of how digital media devices are used. This ‘generational’ tension is reflected in perception both groups have of digital media and its place as a potential space for public discussion. It is evident from data gathered on this research that there is a tendency to perceive digital media as the domain of the youths, such that the ‘older generation’ (in Nigeria, from their late fifties), may not be impressed with the necessity for commitment for an emerging Nigerian digital public sphere.

Ethnic and religious bias is another strong challenge of the Nigerian digital public sphere, which pervaded basic social values, social allegiances and identities, and the willingness to engage in social intercourse with others on the basis of ‘public’ issues. Ethnic and religious sub-cultures are so strong as to generate their own terminologies and rhetoric, as well as their own intra-

communal debates on issues specific to their own welfare or interests. In the era of Habermas' classical public sphere there indeed existed a diversity of beliefs and allegiances, but these were politically not as strong as the interests emerging from the collective welfare of civil society systems of social and market economy. For the classical public sphere to emerge, a period of abstraction of community and religion from economy and market needed to occur, where the interests of the latter could be conceptually separated out and debated and independent of the former. In Nigeria, this is only partially the case: the significance of community and belief systems are so often evident in blogs, Facebook comments, tweets and other forms of digital communication. Where a news story shared on a social media platform appears it is not uncommon to see, "prejudices come to fore" as the story is quickly revised as "an ethnic socio-religious issue". Abdukadir (2013), our interviewee journalist calls attention to this behaviour. In this context there are also many inadvertent forms of exclusion – where there is a lack of national public culture, local languages or protocols are preferred and so limiting both participants and potential participants to a full public sphere hearing. Interviewee Kole Shettima (2013) mentions this phenomenon among Nigerian Hausa-speakers, whom he observes are more active on Facebook, as opposed to Twitter, but in their local language.

Lastly, a significant prohibitive factor to the development of a digital public sphere in Nigeria is the anonymity granted to a digital media user. As interviewee Bukola Ogunyemi (2013) puts it, anonymity poses a security risk to him personally: "with digital media, you can't be too sure you are speaking with

the person you are speaking with..." The anonymous users of digital media are not often harmful, but the possibility is always present. More subtle is the impact of the lack of transparency and consequent lack of a demand to take responsibility for one's own contribution or participation. For instance, parody accounts are sometimes used to make political statements, or can exist solely for entertainment, confusing the status of the genuine account. An example of a parody account on Twitter is [@not_goodluck](#). Its impact might be to facilitate the spread of false information, confusing the criteria that should pertain to political dialogue. Bloggers for instance, are major producers of content found on the Nigerian Internet, and yet are not bound by any code of ethics. With the lack of a strong public culture, with its embedded codes and protocols of public acceptability, manners and behavioural standards, the emergence of self-regulation is sporadic and uneven.

Most of the respondents drew attention to how 'petty', 'insultive' and 'emotional' they found the public debate in Nigeria. Yemi Adamolekun (2013) states that, "the fact that it is uncensored, makes it an easy place for young Nigerians to vent. There is a lot of anger, so sometimes it does get quite abusive, insultive (sic), not necessarily a friendly place to be if you're on the wrong side of the divide".

The Embryonic 'culture' of Democracy

A culture of democracy in Nigeria is constituted through a range of disparate and partially connected practices of media enterprise, issue-based campaigning,

religious or social communication and political activism. In our previous chapters we have considered the character and concomitant behaviours involved in these practices, as well as their contexts – particularly how socio-political conditions of a ‘partly free’ society inhibits the full development of a public sphere.

Democracy is a concept with multiple definitions, but its basic tenets are relatively unanimous in scholarly discourse. Democracy involves representation, participation and popular inclusivity, culminating in fully informed citizens contributing to the decision-making substance of the State in governing and regulating social, cultural and economic life. The conditions for this are communication media, spaces of communicative interaction, dissemination and publicity, education and an ever-developing enlightened understanding grounded on available and objective information, and the ascription of legitimacy to citizen activities by the State itself.

By constitution, Nigeria operates as a democracy, yet in culture and the range of communicative activities and spaces of such, this thesis has revealed the country to be lacking in some democratic capabilities. The thesis also identified how behavioural attitudes, aptitudes and capabilities for communication between the state and the citizenry are symbiotic: a growing ‘culture’ of democracy only grows so far and then requires the facilitation of State legitimacy and regulation.

This involves the following:

- Define citizen identities and active citizens through mechanisms of representation.
- Sustain the potential to facilitate an enlightened citizenry – through

multiple access to information and incentives and motivation for public participation.

- Promotes popular inclusivity (to some extent void of status differentials).
- Provides an avenue for citizens to participate in matters that affect them beyond voting or elections – awarding them a sense of empowerment.

I will briefly elaborate on these in order, articulating in succinct form the observations and claims made throughout this thesis:

Define active citizenship: It is simplistic to assume that the adoption of new digital media technologies can immediately facilitate active citizenship. However, research has found that digital media for democratic purposes (such as elections) complements existing offline engagements: for example, Hargittai and Shaw (2013) in their study of young adults' political attitudes during the 2008 US presidential elections, found that Internet usage alone is unlikely to 'transform existing patterns in political participation radically', yet again may indeed open up new pathways for engagement. In Nigeria, this can be argued to equally be the case. The gradual adoption of new media technologies have opened up new avenues for interaction and engagement, and as such citizens are becoming more informed, leading to taking actions such as voting, where citizens were once desensitised.

Produce more enlightened citizenry: a presupposition of public sphere theory is that active citizenship is the result of a more enlightened and informed citizenry. Through a relatively vibrant digital public sphere in Nigeria, individuals and organisations such as BudgIT and iWatchNg, are able to provide systematic information that maintains the intellectual involvement of citizens in public and

social matters. It is important to note that the equally possible spread of inaccurate information online threatens this potential, as well as the activities of users who deliberately set out to manipulate discussions to suit private interests. Strategies would need to be put in place to manage this challenge.

Promotes popular inclusivity: the assertion that digital media promotes the democratic ideal of popular inclusivity is a contested one. Scholar Jodi Dean argues against digital media (specifically, the internet) as a public sphere. The interview data in this thesis confirmed the basic assertions in the previously quoted 1997 paper, ‘Virtually Citizens’, where Dean categorically states that networked computers, the web, and the Internet do not meet the condition of popular inclusivity for the following reasons (1997:278): Firstly, access is often limited to only those who can afford it and are technology-savvy enough to ‘figure out how to download the software’ that makes popular inclusivity possible. Secondly, Dean (1997: 278) claims that there is no freedom on the net; what exists as freedom is ‘freedom of the market’ – one that is ‘produced through the large interventions of large corporations, pornographers, hackers, and environmentalists.’ In other words, the meaning of freedom of the net is always channeled through the ‘hierarchies and drives’ that contain how it is exercised.

It is clear how the notion of popular inclusivity may be challenged when applied to new media technologies. However, such a position may fail to take into account the nature of (deeply) communal societies where the digital public sphere participant speaks/participates not just for themselves, but for their

immediate community. To illustrate this counter-argument, if in one Nigerian household there is only one mobile phone through which this user is involved in the digital public sphere, he/she becomes a ‘middleman’ through which every member of that household participates in the public sphere. In addition, where mainstream media in Nigeria is increasingly culling content from online deliberations and interactions, the place of the digital public sphere is being consolidated and recognised. Suffice to say that mobile phone penetration is growing in Africa, and the growth will continue to increase.

Dean’s second argument, on freedom of the net being the freedom of the market, does not entirely discount the potential democratic values inherent in new media technologies. These communication platforms offer spaces for democratic discussions wherein commercial corporations cannot control the agenda, try as they might (consider the ‘Arab Spring’). Indeed, there have been cases where Twitter owners or Facebook may take down a comment, block an account, or contribute towards facilitating the arrest of a user. However, this is not the norm in Nigeria, and some level of expressive freedom is provided. This is not to discount the validity of Dean’s argument as to the forces of commercialisation that are increasingly pervading the digital public sphere. It is to say that where corporations have made their business social media, the social communication dimension of their service provision needs to some extent to be maintained for their business to remain viable. Perhaps it is worth considering the formation of the digital public sphere that is outside commercial and state control, as we would see in the section on *strategies for the development of a digital public*

sphere later on in this chapter.

Avenue for citizens to participate in public/social issues beyond elections and generate public opinion: free and fair elections are upheld as a major indicator of what constitutes a democratic society. While this may not be incorrect, the democratic function of suffrage and representation are subject to a range of cultural and social conditions. It is the contention of this thesis that while Nigeria maintains a democratic constitution, institutions and mechanism of government, the cultural and social values, behaviours and conduct within these do not altogether make for a democratic society. Democratic ‘culture’ transcends the ability to conduct free and fair elections, to also embracing an active citizenry that can contribute to how they are governed – in an on-going series of dialogues and organisationally-mediated relationships between the public and the state. This is the opportunity an effective digital public sphere portends – an essentially civil sphere, where ‘private’ interests can indeed be articulated and mediated within political discourse, but where a recognition of ‘public’ interest will allow the sphere’s impact on state decision making to transcend any one set of private interests. Although this is the ‘ideal’, in the sense that theoretical abstraction does not map seamlessly onto empirical reality, in Nigeria, despite an extensive civil and organisational infrastructure, national media of some capability, an educated middle class and extensive cultural production, this reality is not the case. Productive democratic discourses are hampered by harassments, insults, cyber-bullying, and restrictions in governance and a lack of political will, negating the need for transparency, accountability, devolution of

executive powers and a public voice within government decision-making.

I conclude this thesis with a brief recapitulation of the discussion so far. I opened the thesis with a theoretical enquiry into the idea of a public sphere and digital public sphere. Here, I explained the structure, dynamics, and development of a digital public sphere, navigating arguments for and against the potential of the Internet and digital media to effectively serve as democratic public spheres. I equally reviewed studies that have engaged with the subject, especially in other African countries besides Nigeria, such as Zimbabwe, and the African diaspora. It was evident from literature, that with the influx of digital media, through mostly mobile telephony, therein lies a potential of social and cultural development on the continent – albeit not without certain challenges and prohibiting factors.

In the second half of the thesis, the focus turned to the practical application of digital media by Nigerian citizens by way of considering how it facilitated a digital public sphere that, potentially at least, could assume a role within Nigerian constitutional democracy. In the process, I explored the socio-political organisation of the Nigerian society, highlighting her military history post-independence from the British colonialists. This had significant impact on the development of Nigeria's traditional public sphere via the mass media – where press freedom was stifled through legislation and outright harassment of journalists. In this half of the thesis, it was equally important to identify the newly formed relationship between old and new media, and how this spurred a potential to affect the nature of the public sphere in Nigeria. A field research trip

to Nigeria to conduct interviews with selected digitally active participants provided primary data on the digital public sphere in Nigeria and how it operates. The interview revealed in practical terms the complexity of the existing so-called democratic culture in Nigeria. From the online communicative activities of mass media practitioners, active citizens, cultural producers, religious organisations and leaders, to public officials themselves, it was evident that the ideal of a digital public sphere in a developing democracy such as Nigeria, is challenged.

However, it has been asserted in this thesis that a digital mediated spectrum of communication spaces becomes a public sphere to the extent that the agents and agencies within it render it so. Hence, given the challenges facing the development of the digital public sphere in Nigeria, what needs to be done in order to progress beyond a mere embryonic sphere in Nigeria? Broadly speaking, what political or media or even social strategies can we identify that may be instrumental in developing a fully effective digital public sphere in Nigeria (as a model to other developing democracies)?

In other words, the important question in this thesis remains: given the existing communication techniques, currently active agents and agencies, the nature of the dialogue, and existing prohibitive factors, can a culture of democracy be effectively promoted in Nigeria through a digital public sphere? I argue in the affirmative, on the condition that certain strategies are put in place to support the notion of a truly democratic digital public sphere in Nigeria. Succinctly put, the strategies/recommendations I propose fall under improving access to digital

media infrastructure in the country, and the strategic roles the mass/traditional media need to play in strengthening the Nigerian digital public sphere.

Access: access to digital media infrastructure needs to increase. Although this recommendation does not guarantee an active citizenry, its benefit cannot be over-emphasised. In relation to this recommendation, policies such as the National Broadband Policy 2014-2018 need to be executed, and tariffs and cost of mobile Internet data needs to drop to more affordable prices. The ideal of popular inclusivity in the NDPS is challenged when only the rich can afford to be online. The Nigerian mass media are crucial to the establishment of an effective digital public sphere in Nigeria for the following reasons:

- (i) To combat the fragmented nature of the Internet, and in effect, the digital public sphere. A more active and conscientious Nigerian mass media is able to coalesce the discussions that take place online by ‘remediating’ them back through ‘old’ media and thus intentionally inserting them (or ‘referencing’ them, given the quantity of content) within the public agenda in the wider public sphere. This goes beyond waiting for issues to trend globally online before they are represented on mass media platforms. I advocate a more proactive approach to gathering news from everyday online dialogue and discussions. This way, even rural Nigeria, where only radio is available, could find some measure of inclusion.
- (ii) The barriers of language and literacy in participating in the NDPS are ameliorated when the mass media deliberately gather public views and dialogue online that have been shared in diverse (Nigerian) languages, and share them

on widely-accessible media platforms such as radio or TV. There is a thriving Nigerian-Hausa community online for instance, but non-local speakers are excluded from that sphere despite being online - likewise, Hausa-speakers who are not literate in the English language. The mass media can develop communication models that ensure a semblance of uniformity in access to information gleaned from online participation in dialogue. The challenge of language barrier can also be mitigated if government policies were put in place to encourage the creation of local technologies that would meet these communication needs. Local talent can meet local technology needs – this has been evident in this thesis, given the interview with Zubair & Bayo (2013), the creators of the Nigerian Constitution for Blackberry app. One of the challenges they claimed to face as tech-startups is poor infrastructure and implementation of government policies. In their words, ‘you don’t have the right kind of infrastructure...when government policies are not consistent. They say one thing and they do another...’ Zubair & Bayo (2013). The government needs to create an enabling environment for local ‘tech talents’ to thrive, however, this is but one challenge facing the development of local technology in Nigeria.

(iii) The mass media is well-placed to combat the challenge of the spread of misinformation that plagues the Nigerian digital public sphere. The Nigerian mass media needs to gain the trust of citizens as the sources of credible information. Where citizens turn to citizen journalists who are not guided by any ethics or social responsibility for accurate information, they become vulnerable. This recommendation needs further research.

(iv) The mass media is instrumental to keeping public issues that arise in the digital sphere as top agenda until they are resolved or necessary action taken. Activities in the NDPS appear to assume some form of co-ordination when geared towards social activism/protests, yet, the public issues raised are transient and rarely stay current regardless of whether they have been resolved or a form of consensus reached or not. An example is the Bring Back Our Girls campaign. The hashtag around which the protest was organised has lost momentum online, and the NDPS has moved on to other issues despite the fact that the girls remain unfound, and no definite cause of action outlined. This is not fruitful for the Nigerian public sphere.

These recommendations are by no means exhaustive of avenues through which a culture of democracy can be promoted in Nigeria through a digital public sphere. For instance, the role of public officials equally needs to be addressed. Where they are not willing to engage with citizens online, the digital public sphere becomes significantly deficient. On the part of Nigerian citizens active in the digital public sphere as well, there is a need for improvement in digital literacy, as well as a national consciousness that would encourage online discussions to be democratic. By this, I mean free expression void of bullying and harassment, especially where views are dissenting. There is the potential for digital media to be used in promoting democratic culture in Nigeria through a vibrant digital public sphere, but void of an enabling democratic environment, relevant institutions, infrastructure, and an enfranchised and active civil society, this assumption is strongly challenged.

What does the future hold – for an active, politically effective, digital public sphere, and the Nigerian political public sphere more specifically? In the light of recent developments, where social media was used to spread information and curb mis-information about the spread of the Ebola epidemic in Nigeria, and added to that, the recent Nigerian 2015 presidential elections, it is evident that these events of national concern have generated a stimulus for the ‘embryonic’ digital public sphere in Nigeria to evolve.

When Ebola became a subject of popular discussion, fear and panic, and general professional discourse on health, risk and the duties of public policy (in the Nigerian and (West) African digital public sphere), a no well-known Facebook page called ‘Concerned Africans Against Ebola’ appeared. It functioned to immediately host a community of interlocutors, where reliable information about the virus could be shared, and political solidarity against the public inaction, could be resisted (Sarmah, N.D). Likewise, Taylor (2014). Big Cabal Media, a private publishing company, also launched a public service educational website, [ebolafacts.com], in solidarity in fighting the epidemic. According to their email traffic (see appendix), the purpose of this enterprise was information sharing, public access of news and information on medical developments, and education on the symptoms of Ebola. Given how HIV, in the past generated appalling myths and popular beliefs, facilitating the spread of the disease, we can surely understand the need for a critical intervention of information, advice and education (Taylor, 2014).

My point in citing these roles in public information, protection and health education, is that these functions were once the exclusive preserve of state controlled mass media, and where mass media were similarly the only organs of representation that could effectively promote or enforce official public policies. Here, however, non-governmental agencies and new media organisations, are generating a greater impact through effective communication techniques, access to popular social media channels, and through using a language, targeted to specific needs, that provides a concise, practical and consistently updated information. A culture of autonomous digital media communication, formed through a critique of the state, has demonstrated more facility to respond to public needs.

More recently, specific events during the Nigeria presidential elections of March 2015 are of significance in the light of our research. In the last elections, social media indeed amplified certain debates at particular times concerning presidential candidates and their issues. This time, in March 2015, the situation was tangibly more intensive and dynamic, where digital media was playing a central role: citizens arguments for or against a candidate were, according to the mainstream polls and press, being swayed on the basis of series of debates that took place online (among other factors communicated through social media). An example is Mark Amaza's (2015) opinion article published on YNaija's citizen journalism blog is indicative – entitled, 'How I went from being a Goodluck supporter to a Buhari campaigner'. Heated debates on Facebook and other social media platforms were in the minds of the critical mass of professional and

educated people: [see Appendix 4-7, for examples of Twitter conferences, campaigns, and fitness walks that were organised to discuss and support the elections].

Nigerian political parties were more vocal on the Internet with their (targeted) strategic advertising campaigns. The People's Democratic Party (PDP), the political party to which the then incumbent president, Goodluck Jonathan belonged, held its first Google Hangout (Agbaje, 2015: YouTube Video). INEC's electoral process in 2015 was more digitized than in the past, with the use of the Electronic Voters Card, to limit electoral malpractice (NDI, 2014). This election saw the resuscitation of previous election monitoring apps such as REVODA, and new initiatives such as PollWatch, Nigeria Decides, goVote.org etc. (See Appendix 5). Another trend featured the rise of online crowd funding for political campaigns [See Appendix 8]. TechCabal blog published a comprehensive blog post on the roles digital media was used to play in the Nigeria May 2015 elections (Cf. Fadoju, 2015: online).

The future of the digital public sphere in Nigeria will see the introduction of more creative technologies for social good and cultural development, and the intensification of the kinds of discourse in popular opinion that can make an immediate impact (as in a political election). In evidence, is also the state and ruling party's ability to respond to shifts in public opinion, a condition of which is the facility for surveillance. The power of mass surveillance is of serious concern, with issues to do with Internet censorship, media control, the roles of public authority in public communication, need to be further researched. The Nigerian

government's response to matters of constitutional freedom of expression and freedom of the press is random and uncertain. There are no strong parameters for a state-civil society distinction, and this can only be mediated and 'policed' by an effective public sphere. If we can make a general observation on the elections, the power of the state is in evidence, the lobbying of civil society was in evidence, popular resistance against both was in evidence, but a strong public sphere needs far more than popular resistance through communication. It requires consistent, institutionalized and stable, mediation. This is not an argument (as Habermas indeed argued, and as was cited in the conclusion of Chapter One) for the absorption of a digital mediated public sphere into the mainstream mass media, notwithstanding the need for a liberalization of the mass media and its freedom from state control. The argument of this thesis served to identify how a significant level of public sphere activity has been generated by relatively autonomous actors and agencies, without the support of the state and of mass media. This embryonic public sphere was facilitated by digital media, and empowered by characteristic behaviours I identified as 'cultural'.

This thesis does not exhaust a description and analysis of the embryonic public sphere and its digital mediation. Further research is required to examine the role of religion – organisations, their platforms, charismatic individuals, communities and collective action, and so on. What impact do religious social formations have on the political complex of the public sphere, where even non-believers are often highly influenced by the ethical frameworks or metaphysical assumptions

of such formations? Also, private corporations – it is evident that they are players in the NDPS, but their roles and impact is yet to be ascertained, given how difficult it is for researchers to gain access to such corporate spheres. This also calls for further research, but also political action for greater public information and laws of access to corporate data and the function of corporations within the public realm. I end this thesis with these twin foci of concern – the religious and the corporate – which animated Douglas Kellner's research and promoted his call for a critical theory of new communications technologies. Such a tradition of critical theory is yet to emerge in Nigeria, but I hope, through pursuing this proposal for further research, that this thesis could serve as a starting point.

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- Ogunmola, R. (2013). Research Interview. In: Oladepo, T., ed. Audio Recording. Oladepo, T., ed. Lifeway Office Lagos: June 12
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Appendix

Appendix 1: List of early Newspapers in Nigeria from 1859 - 1960s

S/N	Publication	Date of First Issue	Place of Publication	Publisher/Edit or
1.	Iwe Iroyin	Dec 3, 1859	Abeokuta	Rev. Henry Townsend
2.	Anglo African	1863	Lagos	Robert Campbell
3.	Lagos Times and Gold Coast Advertiser	Nov 10, 1880	Lagos	Mr Andrew Thomas
4.	Lagos Observer	Feb 15, 1882	Lagos	Bagan Benjamin
5.	Eagle and Lagos Critic	March 31, 1883	Lagos	Mr Owen Emeric Macaulay
6.	The Mirror	Dec 17, 1887	Lagos	
7.	Lagos Weekly Times	March 3, 1890	Lagos	
8.	Lagos Weekly Record	Dec 31, 1890	Lagos	John Payne Jackson and Horatio Jackson
9.	Nigerian Chronicle	Nov 20, 1908	Lagos	Christopher Kumolu Jackson
10.	Lagos Standard	1908	Lagos	G.A. Williams
11.	Nigerian Times	1910	Lagos	Mr Sapara Williams & James Bright Davies
12.	Nigerian Pioneer	1914	Lagos	Sir Kitoye Ajasa
13.	African Messenger	March 10, 1921	Lagos	Ernest Ikoli
14.	Nigerian Advocate			

15.	Nigerian Spectator	May 19, 1923		Dr Akinwande Savage
16.	Daily News	1925	Lagos	Victor Bababomi/Herbert Macaulay (1927)
17.	Daily Times	June 1, 1926	Lagos	Ernest Ikoli (editor)
18.	Nigerian Daily Telegraph	1927		
19.	The Nigerian Sunday Digest	1931	Lagos	Mr J.C. Roberts
20.	The Comet	1932	Lagos	Duse Mohammed Ali
21.	West African Nationhood			J.C. Zizer
22.	Dawn		Port-harcourt	Mr. M.C. Labor
23.	Nigerian Eastern Mail	1935	Calabar	Mr J.C. Clinton
24.	West African Advertiser		Calabar	M.T.O> Nottidge & Mr J.T. John
25.	West African Pilot	1937	Lagos	Dr Nnamdi Azikwe
26.	Gaskiya	1939	Northern Nigeria	
27.	Eastern Nigerian Guardian	1940		
28.	Nigerian Spokesman	1943	Onitsha, Eastern Nigeria	Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe
29.	Southern Defender	1943	Warri	Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe
30.	Northern	1949	Jos	Dr.

	Advocate			Nnamdi Azikwe
31.	Nigerian Tribune	Nov 16, 1949	Ibadan	Chief Obafemi Awolowo
32.	Eastern States Express	March 13, 1950	Aba	Dr. E.U. Udoma
33.	Sketch	1964	Ibadan	Western Region Government

Source: Mabadeje, I. (2004) The Nigerian Press Under the Military. Akwa Ibom, Nigeria: Robertminder & Lofty Communications

Appendix 2: List of Research Interviewees and additional information

S/N	Interviewee Name	Category	Date	Location	Notes
1.	Kayode Fayemi	Public official	2013	Email	Governor, Ekiti State, Nigeria, at the time of interview
2.	Rotimi Ogunmola	Public Official	2013	Lagos	
3.	Gbenga Olorunpomi	Public Official	2013	Lagos	
4.	Kayode Idowu	Public Official	2013	Abuja	Chief Press Officer, Independent National Electoral Commission

5.	Abang Mercy	Citizen Journalist	2013	Abuja	Journalist on Citizens Platform Ng.
6.	Japheth Omojuwa	Social Activist, Blogger	2013	Abuja	Active in the Occupy Nigeria protest
7.	Gbenga Sesan	Social Activist (civic actor)	2013	Lagos	Founder, Paradigm Initiative Nigeria
8.	Bukola Ogunyemi	Social Activist (civic actor)	2013	Lagos	Founder, Policy NG.
9.	Seun Fakuade	Social Activist	2013	Abuja	Founder, Beacons Ng.
10.	Yemi Adamolekun	Social Activist	2013	Lagos	Executive Director, Enough is Enough, Nigeria
11.	Amara Nwankpa	Social Activist	2013	Abuja	Co-Creator, #LightUpNigeria
12.	Azeernarh Mohammad	Social Activist	2013	Abuja	Active in the Occupy Nigeria protest
13.	Zubair Abubarkar (and Bayo)	Tech Developer/expert	2013	Lagos	Creators, Nigerian Constitution App for Blackberry

14.	Seun Onigbinde	Social Activist, Techie, civic actor	2013	Lagos	Creator, BudgIT for sharing information on the Nigerian budget. New venture now is TrackNg, to track the spending.
15.	Según Fodeke	Tech developer, civic sector	2013	Lagos	Founder, iWatchNG
16.	Sunday Ogidigbo	Religious Leader	2013	Abuja	Pastor, Holyhill Church
17.	Tunde Kelani	Cultural Producer	2013	Lagos	Film maker, Mainframe Productions
18.	Ishaya Bako	Cultural Producer	2013	Abuja	Documentary Filmmaker, “Fueling Poverty”
19.	Tolu Ogunlesi	Journalist (freelance)	2013	Lagos	Formerly with NEXT newspaper
20.	Bankole Wellington	Cultural Producer	2013		Musician
21.	Sasha P	Cultural Producer	2013	Lagos	Musician
22.	Jon Gambrell	Journalist (international correspondent)	2013	Lagos	He was Chief Correspondent for the Associated

		ent)			Press in Nigeria at the time of interview. Now Correspondent in Egypt.
23.	Fidelis Mbah	Journalist	2013	Lagos	He was a journalist with the BBC World Service at the time of interview
24.	Tomi Oladipo	Journalist	2013	Lagos	Journalist with the BBC World Service
25.	Sunday Alamba	Journalist	2013	Lagos	Photo Journalist with Associated Press in Nigeria
26.	Seun Okinbaloye	Journalist	2013	Lagos	Channels Television, Lagos, Nigeria
27.	Bankole Taiwo	Blogger	2013	Lagos	Blogger at Tech Cabal blog
28.	Ayeni (the Great) Adekunle	Cultural Producer (Public Relations)	2013	Lagos	Owner, Black House Media
29.	Mark Amaza	Blogger	2013	Abuja	He runs a Twitter show called NHBi (No

					Holds Barred Interactive)
30.	Egghead Odewale	Social Activist	2013	Lagos	Formerly worked with Ekiti state government
31.	Chika Oduah	Freelance Journalist	2013	Abuja	-
32.	Kole Shettima	Civic actor	2013	Abuja	Director, MacArthur Foundation, Nigeria
33.	Soji Apampa	Social activist, civic actor	2013	Abuja	Executive Director, Public Integrity organization, Egunje.info
34.	Henry Okelue	Social Activist, Blogger	2013	Abuja	Co-creator #LightUpNigeria
35.	Jaiye Gaskia	Social Activist	2013	Abuja	United Action for Democracy

Appendix 3

Email correspondence with Dr Seyi Taylor (2014)

← Reply ← Reply all → Forward ...

 Dr. Seyi Taylor <staylor@bigcabal.com>Mark as unread
Thu 8/7/2014 11:40 AM
Inbox

To: hello@bigcabal.com;

● Flag for follow up. Completed on Wednesday, April 22, 2015.

● You forwarded this message on 10/21/2014 10:03 PM

Hi,

We thought this story might interest you:

Nigerian Ebola educational website receives over half a million hits in one week

In the wake of West Africa's most recent and deadly ebola outbreak, Lagos-based publishing house Big Cabal Media has curated and launched an educational website called Ebola Facts (www.EbolaFacts.com) warning of the symptoms of ebola, explaining what the virus actually is, dispelling myths, as well as the means of the virus' transmission in a manner that communicate effectively to a local audience. The launch comes as the virus continues to ravage communities in West Africa, and is creeping across international borders at an alarming rate.

The site, designed and built in 24 hours, is targeted specifically at the West African market, an increasingly tech-savvy market that is using the internet as its first point of call when searching for information about the deadly disease and how to protect themselves. This community often plays the role of influencer and information provider in their local communities.

Ebola 1 of 11

Hi,

We thought this story might interest you:

Nigerian Ebola educational website receives over half a million hits in one week

In the wake of West Africa's most recent and deadly ebola outbreak, Lagos-based publishing house Big Cabal Media has curated and launched an educational website called Ebola Facts (www.EbolaFacts.com) warning of the symptoms of ebola, explaining what the virus actually is, dispelling myths, as well as the means of the virus' transmission in a manner that communicate effectively to a local audience. The launch comes as the virus continues to ravage communities in West Africa, and is creeping across international borders at an alarming rate.

The site, designed and built in 24 hours, is targeted specifically at the

West African market, an increasingly tech-savvy market that is using the internet as its first point of call when searching for information about the deadly disease and how to protect themselves. This community often plays the role of influencer and information provider in their local communities.

Since launch, the site has received over 600,000 hits and has been seen on Facebook about 850,000 times. There have also been requests for it to be printed for wider distribution to communities without the internet. Content from the site has also been developed into a flyer, newspaper ads and digital billboards. Work is now ongoing to translate the site to French, Swahili, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and Pidgin to cater to a growing regional audience.

Dr. Seyi Taylor of Big Cabal Media says, "With the launch of Ebola Facts, we're tackling an age-old problem of containing a deadly virus with 21st century technology. Millions of Africans are now regular internet consumers and see it as a first point of call for medical information. Ebola Facts was designed to be easily accessible, on all tech platforms - mobile being the no. 1 platform here on the continent - and, importantly, free. We're hoping that people share this potentially life-saving information as part of the global effort to contain and kill this ebola outbreak. We are also very grateful to all the individuals and organizations that have stepped up to support this effort."

"Technology is a great enabler, for commerce, for social interaction and we hope, with Ebola Facts, for healthcare. We've been contacted by government officials and medical professionals, who are very excited about the fact that young Africans are finding new and innovative ways of reaching out to as many people as possible to help save lives."

-end-

If you would require any more information about the site or the work being done on EbolaFacts.com, please contact:

Dr. Seyi Taylor
staylor@bigcabal.com
+234 809 800 6699
Skype: seyi.taylor

Bankole Oluwafemi
bankole@bigcabal.com
+234 818 787 7294

Skype: iandbanks

--

Dr. Seyi Taylor
www.bigcabal.com
skype: seyi.taylor

Sent with Airmail

Appendix 4: United for Peace Twitter Conference

#UNITED4PEACE



Omojuwa
International Public Speaker,
Columnist and Blogger

ToolzO
Radio & TV Host

Tolu Ogunlesi
West Africa Editor,
The Africa Report

**WHAT DOES NATIONAL
PEACE MEAN TO YOU?**

**JOIN THE
CONVERSATION**

FROM LAGOS, LONDON, JOBURG, MUNICH, PARIS,
NEW YORK TO ABUJA,
WHEREVER YOU ARE, JOIN IN THE CONVERSATION
USING THE HASHTAG #UNITED4PEACE.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION ON TWITTER

DATE: FRIDAY, 6TH FEB 2015 //
TIME: 4:00PM GMT

**A ROCK
FOUNDATION
INITIATIVE**

Appendix 5: Truppr Fitness App + govote org Election Walk



Are you Fit for Election 2015?

Join us for [Truppr WALK](#) to raise awareness

Saturday, January 17, 2015 Ikoyi Lagos, Nigeria
visit [Truppr.com](#) to participate

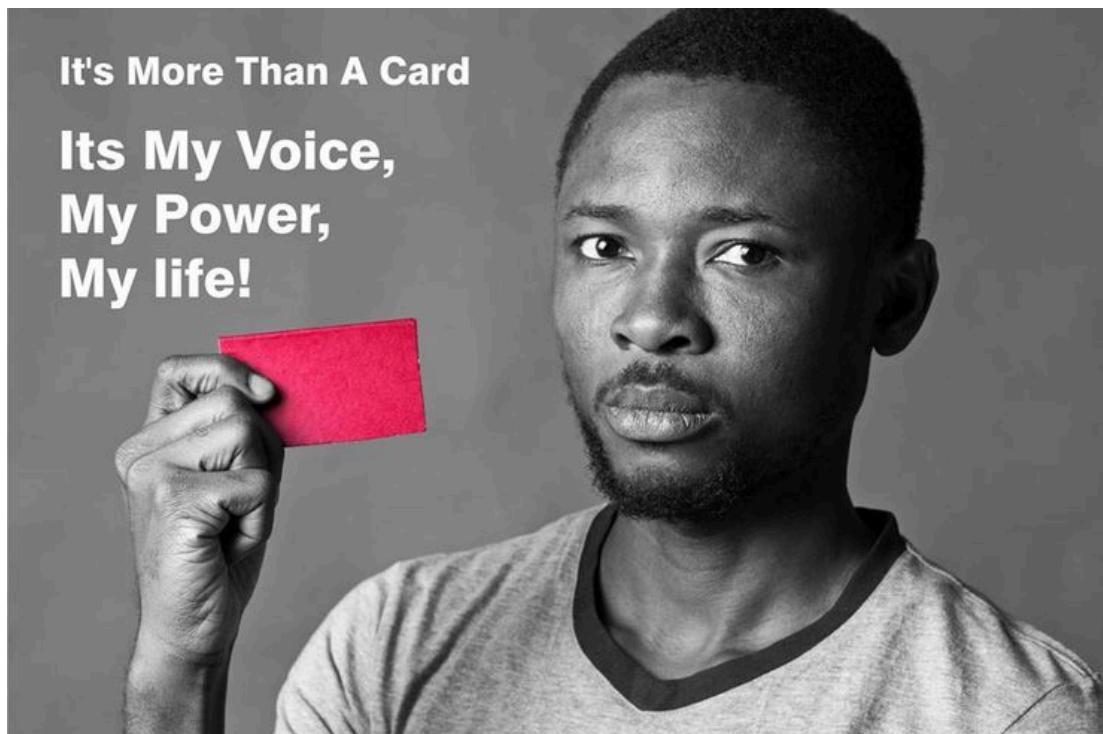
[Signup Here](#)

[GoVote.ng](#)

Every participant gets a Truppr t-shirt



Appendix 6: Omojuwa promoting the Nigeria 2015 elections



Appendix 7: Invitation to a Twitter chat on the Nigeria 2015 elections

