

# **Peace Journalism and the New Political Twittersphere in Multipolar Society**

**Muhammad Auwal Ahmad**

Submitted to the  
Institute of Graduate Studies and Research  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Communication and Media Studies

Eastern Mediterranean University  
July 2022  
Gazimağusa, North Cyprus

Approval of the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research

---

Prof. Dr. Ali Hakan Ulusoy  
Director

I certify that this thesis satisfies all the requirements as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication and Media Studies.

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Prof. Dr. Senih Çavuşoğlu  
Dean, Faculty of Communication and  
Media Studies

We certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate in scope and quality as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication and Media Studies.

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Prof. Dr. Metin Ersoy  
Supervisor

---

Examining Committee

1. Prof. Dr. Dilruba Çatalbaş Ürper

---

2. Prof. Dr. Metin Ersoy

---

3. Prof. Dr. Emre İşeri

---

4. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nilüfer Türksoy

---

5. Asst. Prof. Dr. Raziye Nevzat

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## ABSTRACT

The public sphere currently wears a new look as the Internet and social media platforms steadily take the place of coffeehouses as a constituent part of Habermas's initial theorem of the public sphere. As well, the boundary of peace journalism is simultaneously exceeding the skewed notions earlier ascribed to it as an approach unilaterally applicable to the reporting of war-related issues and events. This study operationalizes the increasing relevance of social media platforms and particularly Twitter as the emerging public sphere for political engagements, information sharing and democratic dissent. Notwithstanding such democracy-enhancing possibilities, the new public sphere holds potential for threatening democratic peace. Relying on Twitter-sourced data, the study examines dominant political discourses emanating from tweeting activity of prominent contenders and the journalistic orientations reflected across the Twitter-based news posts of selected mainstream newspapers during four months period of Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign. The qualitative discourse and content analyses of  $N=1,048$  tweets and news posts reveal the dominance of political discourses and journalistic orientations which are likely to foment the deep-rooted sociopolitical polarization within the Nigerian context. The findings illuminate the cogent need for a socially-transformative intervention, which this study addresses by proposing the framework for implementing peace journalism towards improving political communication and journalistic practices in polarized political and media environments amidst a networked public.

**Keywords:** Democratic Peace; Journalistic Practices; Multipolar Society; New Public Sphere; Political Discourses; Political Twittersphere.

## ÖZ

İnternet, sosyal medya ve ağ platformları, Habermas'ın kamusal alanın ilk teoreminin kurucu bir parçası olarak kahvehanelerin yerini istikrarlı bir şekilde aldığı için kamusal alan şu anda yeni bir görünüm kazanıyor. Aynı zamanda, barış gazeteciliğinin sınırı, savaşıla ilgili konulara ve olaylara tek taraflı olarak uygulanabilir bir yaklaşım olarak daha önce kendisine atfedilen çarpık kavramları aşmaktadır. Mevcut çalışma, sosyal medya ve ağ platformlarının ve özellikle Twitter'ın siyasi angajmanlar, bilgi paylaşımı ve demokratik muhalefet için ortaya çıkan kamusal alan olarak artan ilgisini operasyonel hale getirmektedir. Bu tür demokrasiyi güçlendirici olanaklara rağmen, yeni kamusal alan demokratik barışı tehdit etmeye yönelik belirli olasılıklara işaret ediyor. Twitter kaynaklı verilere dayanarak, bu çalışma, önde gelen siyasetçilerin tweet atma faaliyetlerinden kaynaklanan baskın siyasi söylemleri ve Nijerya'nın 2019 başkanlık kampanyasının dört aylık döneminde seçilen ana akım gazetelerin Twitter haber yayınlarına yansıyan gazetecilik yönelimlerini araştırıyor. N = 1.048 tweet ve haber gönderisinin nitel söylemi ve içerik analizleri, Nijerya bağlamında köklü sosyo-politik kutuplaşmayı körüklemesi, muhtemel siyasi söylemlerin ve gazetecilik yönelimlerinin baskınlığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bulgular, bu çalışmanın, ağıla bağlı bir halkın ortasında kutuplaşmış siyasi ve medya ortamlarında siyasi iletişimi ve gazetecilik uygulamalarını geliştirmeye yönelik barış gazeteciliğinin uygulanmasına yönelik çerçeveyi önererek, ele aldığı sosyal dönüştürücü müdahaleye duyulan ikna edici ihtiyacı aydınlatmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Demokratik Barış, Gazetecilik Uygulamaları, Çok Kutuplu Toplum, Yeni Kamusal Alan, Siyasi Söylemler, Siyasi Twittersphere.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Alh. Ahmad Iro Umar and Hafsat Suleiman Ahmad, who have always loved and supported me unconditionally and whose good examples have taught me to work hard for things I aspire to achieve. This work is also dedicated to my supervisor, Professor Dr. Metin Ersoy, who has been a constant source of support and encouragement during the challenges of Ph.D. and to the people who have supported me throughout my education.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To crown it all, I begin by saying *Alhamdullilah*. Indeed, all praises are due to *Allah*, the creator of mankind and the disposer of all affairs. Next are my parents as the human source of my genealogy on earth. To Baba and Mama, your endless prayers and support cannot go unacknowledged. I still remember those days you both drove me to and from the airport with your pats of blessing on my back. I hope this feat pleases your minds to appease all the energies you have devoted to giving us the best upbringing, as you welcome the first Ph.D. to your household. May we live long to reap from this and more to come.

I would like to acknowledge the Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research and above all, Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi for the merit-based Ph.D. scholarship to support the entire period of study. I would also like to acknowledge the welfare grants from DAÜ-SEN, courtesy of Prof. Dr. Metin Ersoy.

I gained unquantifiable knowledge and experience through the years of interaction with distinguished personalities ranging from teachers to role models and mentors who have excelled in their various endeavors. My research supervisor and academic mentor: Prof. Dr. Metin Ersoy, is not only an expert in peace journalism and the public sphere but also an intellectual with a heart of gold. Prof. Metin befits a humane character that I cannot justifiably express in words. The first encounter with him in 2018 sets the path to success in my M.A. studies, through to the Ph.D. To say the least, Prof. Metin gave me the necessary moral and fatherly supports to facilitate a hitch-free

academic and everyday life over the years. *Hocam*, I cannot thank you enough for your kind-heartedness but the least I can say again is; *Allah iyilik versin*.

I sincerely thank the external examiners: Prof. Dr. Emre İşeri (Yaşar University, İzmir) and Prof. Dr. Dilruba Çatalbaş Ürper (Head of Journalism Department at Galatasaray University, İstanbul) whose expertise in peace journalism and political communication served as the supporting ladder towards producing the best out this research. I extend my warmest gratitude to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nilüfer Türksoy and Asst. Prof. Dr. Raziye Nevzat who accepted to be part of the Thesis Monitoring Committee (TMC) from the beginning of my research journey despite their busy schedules. Their valuable suggestions and insightful comments contribute to improving the quality of this study. Ultimately, I count myself among the luckiest students to have worked with them, as their wealth of knowledge enriched me beyond doubts.

These beautiful souls, including siblings and close relatives, forever remain dear to my heart: Walidah, Ishaq, Abba, Umar, Sani, Ummi, Kamal, and Salim, to mention a few. This especially goes to my *Jaanvi*, Halimah Sadiya Dalhat, who endured dearly in giving me the lovely push on those days I neither felt like writing nor continuing with Ph.D. Your *Jaan* appreciates endlessly, for your steadfastness saw him through to this success. The moment I recalled some names, I got drenched in tears, compelling my unintended switch across three sheets while writing this acknowledgment and that wouldn't let it end without the mention of uncle Lawal Iro (*Baba Tea*) and Ismaila Suleiman (*Da'sabo*) who were at the beginning but couldn't hold to this moment. I pray for the repose of their souls and for Allah, to whom we shall all return, to reunite us all in *Jannatul Firdaus*.

To end this on a “common ground” by inspiring the art of using the language of “friendly peace,” I must say that many are on the waiting list to be acknowledged than the entire pages of this dissertation can carry. Even so, I am delighted to have met and interacted with some of the most amazing friends and colleagues: Dr. Tamar Dambo, Maryam Jamo, Musa Gamji, Valerie Oguafor, Adamu Mohammed, and a lot of others. Those were the best of days working with Hanife Erişen and Can Bekcan at *DAÜ Gündem* Newspaper. I would like to give a big thanks to my darling Hanife Erişen, who obliged with a Turkish translation of the abstract despite my being “unnecessarily formal” with the request. I appreciate the respect and support garnered from my teammates at Noyanlar Group. I also thank my students who took *NMEJ490-Peace Journalism* and *NMEJ491-Digital Culture and New Journalism* for inspiring me to work hard through the Fall and Spring semesters of the 2021-2022 academic term.

I am grateful to you all for having my back.



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# **Chapter 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter defines the overall focus of the study by means of presenting the research problem to contextualize the main purpose, significance, scope and limitations, and the questions guiding the research.

### **1.1 Research Problem Statement**

Social media platforms command great influence on contemporary activities and social systems including democracy, politics, free expression, information gathering and news dissemination, etc. (Ganninger, 2021; Velasquez & Rojas, 2017). Although research reveals evidence of cross-cultural popularity and multiplicity of use of social media among political leaders and citizens (Soedarsono, et al., 2020), there are emerging trends linked to such uses either as democracy-enhancing or as fomenting sociopolitical polarization and thus threatening democratic peace (Gruzd & Roy, 2014; Conover, et al., 2011).

Recent studies confirm that social media platforms facilitate hate crimes and violent extremism (Gaikwad, et al., 2021; Müller & Schwarz, 2020). These platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter, as Haidt and Rose-Stockwell (2019) observe, not only prove worthy for use by “anyone who wants to start a fire” but also become instrumental for political extremist and separatist groups (Marcu & Bălteanu, 2014) to vent anger, mobilize support, recruit members and publicize their activities and successes (Ligtvoet & Oudenhuijsen, 2019). For instance, some researchers (Alizadeh,

Weber, Cioffi-Revilla, Fortunato, & Macy, 2019) linked the March 2019 Christchurch Mosque shootings – by a terrorist who also live-streamed the shooting on Facebook – to a global increase in white supremacy and alt-right extremism accruing mass support online. Others studies (e.g., Bail, et al., 2018; Masroor, Khan, Aib, & Ali, 2019) interestingly identify the political discourses of high-profile social media users as one of the numerous factors fomenting polarization among diverse groups in society (Lee, Shin, & Hong, 2018). Attempts by social media companies/service providers to check the excesses of users through the censoring of content deemed as posing negative societal consequences however, result in protracted debates and policy conflicts at different levels. Two prominent cases offer useful hints to ascertaining the polarizing effect and otherwise of computer-mediated political discourses on society (Garimella, Morales, Gionis, & Mathioudakis, 2018; Hong & Kim, 2016). These include the June 2021 indefinite suspension of Twitter’s operation in Nigeria after the platform deleted a tweet from president Muhammadu Buhari for violating its policies on abusive behavior, and the permanent banning of former president Donald Trump from using Twitter, Facebook and YouTube in January 2021 after he voiced support through the platforms for rioters who stormed the U.S. Capitol.

The prevailing debates in extant literature present multiple points of entry to ascertaining how politicians’ use of Twitter for political engagements as well as their political discourses on the platform contribute to social polarization with the likelihood of nonviolent political conflicts escalating into direct violence (Auwal & Ersoy, 2022). Critics observe that computer-mediated political communication does not bear sole responsibility either for the pitch of political anger or fomenting polarization (Haidt & Rose-Stockwell, 2019), as multiple forces including the susceptible news coverage orientations and diverse information sources that journalists and the media rely on



equally hold the tendency to push society toward greater polarization (Fletcher & Kleis, 2017; Yang, et al., 2016). Because only a minute scholarly effort is devoted to ascertaining how the divisive rhetoric in Twitter-based political discourses of prominent political actors and the journalistic orientations of the news media in covering the political environment create the social-psychological barriers to peace particularly in a multipolar context, the need to rethink journalism's potential to chart a course for social transformation by de-escalating violent perceptions to foster nonviolent resolutions of political conflicts becomes inevitable (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007). This study therefore contributes to existing literature by offering peace journalism as a viable strategy for creating shared values towards improving political communication amidst the new public sphere in a multipolar society.

## **1.2 Background and Context of the Study**

In a centralized structure, political parties and organizations engage assiduously in strategizing electioneering activities which encompass the use of persuasive communication strategies to promote their candidates and political ideologies towards gaining mass support from the electorate (Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022). The political environment is often characterized by a series of societal issues which different political actors canvass about while maintaining particular ideological stance consistent with their political interests (Rovny, 2007). Since every political sphere presumably affords not just a group of loyalists but also opponents whose ideological leanings either conform to or are opposed to the objectives and policies of the political process or regime (Wlezien, 2005), political competitions therefore become an integral part of the numerous triggers of conflicts sporadically manifesting into forms of violence in society (Auwal & Ersoy, 2020; Seiyefa, 2017). In a diverse and multipolar society where ethno-regional, religious and political party affiliations determine the

basis of intergroup relations, it is imperative however, to further investigate how the communication strategies adopted by political actors during election campaigns produce the political discourses that foment sociopolitical polarization (Ette, 2018); giving rise to identity-based political contestations (Hudson & Melber, 2014; Auwal, 2017) and thus setting the path towards animosities and a breakdown of societal harmony (Babatunde, Ersoy, Miller, & Thiel, 2020; Mbah P. O., Nwangwu, Ugwu, & Simons, 2019).

Identity-based political contestations are on the one hand highly influenced by political discourses – demonstrating how competing actors exploit societal cleavages to create the grounds for binary political oppositions among various social groups dichotomized into the “in-group” (*Us* or the *Self*) and “out-group” (*Them* or the *Other*) (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). On the other hand, the “inclination of media coverage, also shaped by contending political issues and interests” (Auwal & Ersoy, 2020, p. 2), often adds fuel to the fire and contributes to fomenting sociopolitical polarization (Atay, 2016).

The increasing relevance of social media platforms among political leaders and institutions brought about a sequence of transformations to political communication (Enli & Skogerbø, 2013) particularly in relation to election campaigning around the world (Aragón et al., 2013; Thimm, Einspänner-Pflock, & Anastasiadis, 2016), and thereby heralding a paradigm shift from “a public sphere centered around national institutions of territorially bound societies” (Castells, *The new public sphere: Global civil society, communication networks, and global governance*, 2008, p. 90) to a new public sphere centered on communicative networks and technologies, with the Internet and social media platforms now playing a decisive role (Khan, Gilani, & Nawaz, 2012;

Mazali, 2011). Unlike the public sphere operating within the ambits of a nation-state where public authorities could “keep control over the forms of activity within its territory” (Castells, 2008, p. 81), the technological infrastructure facilitating the progression of the new public sphere affords greater information sharing and a decentralized communication flows transcending territorial boundaries (Salzman, 2019; Papacharissi, 2002).

Today, social media technologies have grown into a vital component of sociopolitical organization which continually strengthen democratic attitudes by adding new dimensions to a network of communication where participants come together to exhibit attitude that are more democratic and articulate independent views to shape the political institutions and processes of society (Salzman, 2019; Khan, Gilani, & Nawaz, 2012). Notwithstanding such democratic affordances, preceding studies, including Fenton and Barassi (2011), argue that the nature of political participation on offer through the new public sphere affects the internal politics of society by facilitating identity-based and contentious politics (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) which upset the processes of political communication, create the landscape for the distortion of political sphere (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018), elicit prejudices that polarize society and threaten social integration and democratic development (Beaufort, 2018; Zúñiga & Chen, 2019).

In view of election campaigning and the premeditated dimensions in which competing actors position themselves to seek electoral supports on the networks of communication that have completed the shift in political communication “from interactivity to rational and from rational to participation” (Mazali, 2011, p. 290), it is argued that web-based political engagements have equally proven to be influential on

the news coverage orientations of media systems which constitute a vital component of the new public sphere (Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022; Dang-Xuan, Stieglitz, Wladarsch, & Neuberger, 2013; Parmelee, 2013). Although research findings show that the use of social media platforms for political engagements increases the wave of sociopolitical polarization through the enhanced opportunities for users to engage in fierce and inciting political debates (Bail, et al., 2018; Conover, et al., 2011; Gruzd & Roy, 2014), the reliance of news outlets on the new public sphere for information sourcing particularly through the incorporation of materials from the web-based political messages of competing actors during elections (Broersma & Graham, 2012; Lecheler & Kruikemeier, 2016; Broersma & Graham, 2013), however portends great risk of escalating nonviolent political conflicts into violence since public opinion formation relatively depends on the agenda set by the media through the news (McCombs, Holbert, Kioussis, & Wanta, 2011).

Numerous conflict transformation and mediation approaches abound in line with the nature and dimensions of conflicts. Peace journalism is one of such creative approaches to conflict transformation and mediation often advocating for balance, fairness, and accuracy in the reporting of sensitive social issues to encourage non-violent responses to conflict among various groups particularly in a multipolar society (Galtung & Fischer, 2013; Adebayo, 2016). Despite its being an emerging area of interest, a number of peace journalism studies have customarily been conducted in the context of media coverage of war and violent conflicts as aptly demonstrated in the works of Galtung & Ruge (1965), Lynch & Galtung (2010), Ross & Tehranian (2017), Shinar (2009), etc. This, however, inspires the common notion about peace journalism being a straight-jacketed approach applicable only to war reporting and as a theoretical and methodological approach for analyzing the orientations of news coverage in

relation to deadly conflicts (Hussain & Lynch, 2019; Ersoy, 2016; Hussain, 2020). While these problematic assumptions limit the theoretical as well as methodological applicability of peace journalism in terms of relevance to other aspects of media reportage of sociopolitical issues, research has presented empirical evidence to suggest the inadequacy of peace journalism implementation in media practices across sub-Saharan Africa and particularly Nigeria (Adebayo, 2016; Adebayo, 2017). This further proves the need to address the gaps toward expanding the scope of peace journalism to political communication in the new public sphere.

The aforesaid limitations therefore provide new impetus for revalidating the need for a comprehensive peace journalism intervention to salvage the deteriorating situation of peaceful coexistence among the various social groups in Nigeria. Rather than simply focusing on the general use of Twitter, an interesting research niche emerged to trigger a conscientious review of the multidimensional use of the platform in Nigeria's polarized political and media environments. As a background to usher in the novel contribution of this research, it is worth noting the ultimate goal, which is to examine how and to what extent the Twitter-based political discourses of prominent contenders and the journalistic orientations in Twitter news posts of mainstream newspapers coverage of Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign pose a threat to democratic peace by fueling the embers of sociopolitical polarization.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

Recent studies have explored the use of Twitter for political communication among different political actors and institutions including the news media and how such uses increase the intensity of sociopolitical polarization with the likelihood of escalating nonviolent political conflicts into direct violence (Babatunde, Ersoy, Miller, & Thiel,

2020; Ersoy & Miller, 2020). As a novel contribution to extant literature, this study aims to further expand the framework for implementing peace journalism towards improving political communication to ameliorate the deep-rooted polarization, which is increasingly being extended to the new public sphere in the multipolar context of Nigeria.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

Drawing from extant literature and the stated aims, this research addresses the following questions:

- RQ1: What political discourses dominate the tweets of prominent contenders during Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign?
- RQ2: In what ways do the ensuing Twitter-based political discourses of prominent contenders either foster or deter the emergence of a public value sphere for achieving democratic peace during Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign?
- RQ3: What journalistic orientations reflect in the Twitter news posts of mainstream newspapers during Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign?
- RQ4: How can the implementation of peace journalism strategies de-escalate rising concerns about the polarizing effects of Twitter-based political discourses and the tendency of campaign coverage orientations to amplify extreme political views in multipolar Nigeria?

### **1.5 Significance and Rationale for the Study**

The study is significant for its aim to tackle the shortcomings as hinted above. The study makes noteworthy contributions with regard to providing valuable insights on the interesting connections between the increased use of Twitter for political communication and news amplification in Nigeria, and how the trends in news coverage of the political environment could contribute to deepening social divides.

This is in addition to expounding how the implementation of peace journalism principles can improve the political communication strategies of political stakeholder and salvage the performance of news media towards providing journalists with the requisite skills for conflict-sensitive reportage of the Nigerian political environment. Besides contributing to fill the literature gaps, this study amplifies the discourse about peace journalism and the political Twittersphere in the context of Nigeria and Africa-focused digital journalism and political communication research toward expanding a peace journalism strategy for covering sensitive sociopolitical issues and creating a shared value sphere.

### **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

The ultimate goal of this study is to examine the Twitter-based political discourses of electoral candidates and the orientations of coverage of political campaign among selected Nigerian national newspapers. Accordingly, the study is limited in scope to Twitter as the primary source of data. It then focuses on the tweeting activities of two prominent presidential candidates and news coverage orientations of three newspapers during the Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign. Its time frame spans from November 2018 when the presidential campaigning commenced, to February 2019 following the announcement of the winner. The June 2021 suspension of Twitter's operation in Nigeria also necessitated the extension of the research scope to examine extant literature in light of the country's sociopolitical realities which further rationalize the necessity of peace journalism in the political and media environments towards achieving democratic peace amidst the new public sphere.

## **1.7 Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of clarity, it becomes necessary to define some terminologies, concepts and constructs within the context and scope of their use in this study for common understanding.

### ***Democratic Peace***

The notion of democratic peace implies such basic principles that should reflect in the communication strategies of actors in the political process, poised to avoiding the internal breakdown of democracy which could occur either with the escalation and outbreaks of political violence or any acts threatening the democratization efforts and process. This envisages the creation of a “cosmopolitan constitution” or a set of globalized legal and political policies that would entrench peace within and among states through the protection of human rights and dignity (Ohlson & Söderberg, 2002). Democratic peace is, therefore, a tool for bringing about durable peace through deliberative political engagements built upon the consideration of common interests rather than personal, in a democratic system.

### ***Journalistic Orientation(s)***

To put it succinctly, journalistic orientation(s) embodies the obvious or inferred leaning of media coverage in the context of language use or style of presentation of issues and events, arguably influenced by a myriad of political, cultural and economic interests within the geographical and operational boundaries of the media.



### ***Multipolar Society***

The operationalization of multipolar society in this study is demographic, which follows an understanding of the diverse groupings based on ethnoreligious, regional, political, and economic status and affiliations of the Nigerian population.

### ***New Public Sphere***

As a vital component of sociopolitical organization, the public sphere is situated between the state and society as an assemblage or a network for the articulation of independent views to influence the political institutions of society (Khan, Gilani, & Nawaz, 2012). While the conventional public sphere occupies such mediating agents and platforms as the mass media, civil society groups, etc. which facilitate interactions between citizens and the state, the model of “virtual or new public sphere” is built upon the network of emerging technologies of democratization such as the Internet, social media platforms and others facilitating global connectivity and interactivity.

### ***Political Discourse(s)***

Within the framework of this study, political discourses denote a complex set of textual and visual statements, comments and opinions on a wide-range of issues and event often shared by contending actors during a political contest, either through the mainstream media, social media or other technological apparatus that enable the retrieval of content as shared by different actors.

### ***Political Twittersphere***

To correlate with Castell’s (2010) theorem of the “new public sphere,” the operationalization of Twitter as the “political Twittersphere” revolves around an understanding of the contemporary use of the platform for engagements by politicians

and citizens, as well as for the gathering and dissemination of political-related information by journalists and media outlets (Moinuddin, 2019; Fuchs, 2008).

## **1.8 Summary and Organization of the Study**

Structured into five parts, the first chapter presents contextual frameworks and research problem by stating the study's aims and objectives, significance, scope and the questions guiding the inquiry. Chapter Two expounds on the context by reviewing relevant literature to establish the main theoretical foundations of the study. Chapter Three explicates the research techniques in relation to sample selection, data analysis approach and other methodological issues. The research data and findings deduced from analysis were presented in Chapter Four whereas Chapter Five summarizes the whole, closing with recommendations to set a direction for future research.

## **Chapter 2**

# **REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter sets the theoretical foundation through a review of literature to define the relevant concepts and constructs as well as identify research gaps in the subject area, thus enabling the current study to put forth its unique contributions to the existing body of knowledge.

### **2.1 Structural Formation of the Public Sphere as a Domain of Social Life**

For a few decades, the “public sphere” has been a defining concept for a plethora of scholarly works and discussions on politics, the state, society, communication and the media. Intrinsically ingrained in Jurgen Habermas’s normative notion earlier conceptualized within the political realm centering on how influence is exercised by “public authority” and a stratum of “bourgeois” or private people who occupied central positions within the public, this form of public sphere thrived in the late 18th and 19th century Europe (Ayish, 2008; Habermas J. , The structural transformation of the public sphere, 1989).

Like its universal denotation, Habermas’s construct of the phrase “public” on the one hand, centers on the political landscape (realm) which was coextensive with public authority comprising the court and other institutions often dictating the values, ideals and goals of a given society (Singh, 2012). On the other hand, the domain for

mediating between the state and society within a landscape that was the preserve of private people who gather together either in an enclosed realm similar to a home (family) or a privileged group (civil society, intellectuals) and engage in rational and critical debate to check power, is conceptually distinct as a “privatized but publicly relevant sphere” where the free exchange of ideas and debate take place (Habermas, Lennox, & Lennox, 1974; Habermas, 1989). This is why Jensen (2021) observes that Habermas’s model offers a valuable framework to examine the relationships between the interconnected yet relatively autonomous social institutions that constitute the public sphere, which has two main components: *political* and *cultural*. Figure 1 below illustrates the structural formation of the public sphere.

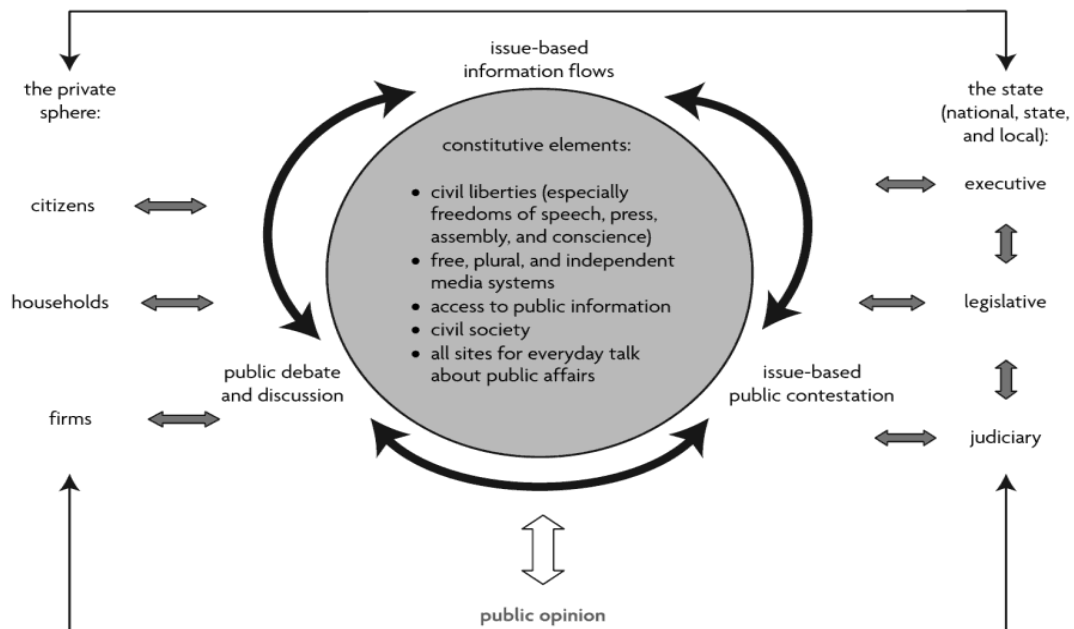


Figure 1: The National Democratic Public Sphere (Odugbemi, 2008, p. 30)

Habermas’s first work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, originally published in German (1962) and later translated to English, charted how the public sphere can be construed as *formal* and *informal* (Parkinson, 2012). As a good starting

point to understand the theory of public sphere, it is fitting to note that the *formal* is embodied into state apparatus including the Church as an institution as well as other public authorities vested with the political power to promote state policies and protect public interest as determined by the state. The *informal*, which correlates with the notion of “opinion leadership” – is constituted by privileged individuals of educated, somewhat moneyed-class and highly visible non-government organizations in society – who, according to Casero-Ripollés (2020, p. 171), “attempt to condition the configuration of public agenda and public opinion through the exercise of technologically mediated personal influence.”

Whilst Habermas’s theorem of the *formal* public sphere coincided with the growth of newspaper and other media technologies during the 18<sup>th</sup> century feudal and church-based system of medieval Europe, Staats (2004) and Ayish (2008) observe that opinions were institutionally-authorized by the state through suppression and control over the media and information flows, and the church was likewise considered as aligning with the ruling elite rather than serving the interest of the masses. The *informal* public sphere, according to Habermas, is a “new discursive arena” in which people organize by engaging in reasoned discussions about politics and the state with the aim of rationalizing the necessary conditions for an emancipated society (Habermas, 1984). Characterized by the disequilibrating effects brought about by a growing suspicion and sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power (Parkinson, 2012), this public space of “reasoned debate” equates a marketplace where superior products compete and sell better than others, but in this case, a “marketplace place of ideas” where the test of truth and acceptability depends on the “competition of ideas” enabling the free and transparent flow of public discourse (Singh, 2012; Schultz, 2017).

### **2.1.1 Discourse as Communicative Sphere of Political Manipulation**

The public sphere presupposes a discursive arena – where the freedom of speech and of assembly, to freely participate in political debates and decision-making become deeply rooted; although concerns remain around the issue of certain voices or opinions either dominating over or influencing weaker ones as the perimeters of the public sphere extend to state and non-state actors who collectively “engage in all kinds of activities to accomplish certain goals” (van Dijk, 2009).

Within the framework of discourse as a theory, it should be understood that meanings are constructed around social situations in which various change agents including politicians, political parties, civil society groups, etc. consciously design through a series of communicative activities aimed at defining social problems and defending the ideas which they present as solution to problems (Bolivar, 2008). Discourse practices especially for political actors, involve two major activities: different stages of planning, problem analysis, definition of objectives, solution recommendation and implementation (Douglas & Cardillo, 1985); and the reproduction of meanings around the dominant political and cultural definitions of social life through the conscious use of persuasion and manipulation as ‘tools’ for exerting influence over citizens in the public sphere (Harre, 1985).

It is based on this premise, Jager (2008) notes that political discourse can be classifiable as part of the elements and forms of political language found in the rhetoric of politicians and sympathizers of political parties as well as in the news coverage orientations of the media. This provides a framework for understanding the larger scope and processes of political communication. Moreover, Orji (2010) stresses that political discourse therefore becomes a powerful but problematic force, allowing

politicians and opinion leaders to manipulate public opinion thereby limiting the potential for good public discourse to thrive in the public sphere (Vlatković, 2018).

### **2.1.2 Communicative Rationality of the (Bourgeois) Public Sphere**

Conceived as a domain of social life in which people are gathered to articulate ideas leading to the formation of public opinion on matters of mutual interest (Odugbemi, 2008), the two aspects of the conceptualization of public sphere have attracted varied criticisms from a growing number of contemporary academic engagements often generating a gamut of questions hovering over Habermas's notion and social structure of the public sphere. Initial argument that the birth of democracy and its further sustenance was propelled by the rise of bourgeois in the 18<sup>th</sup> and continuing on into the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries was negated by McAfee (2019), when, for example, he asked "What if public opinion is just a puppet of power, shoring up demagoguery, eroding democratic institutions?" – a question that consistently seem to validate the claims of several critics on account of domination and exclusionary boundary characterizing the bourgeois private or informal sphere influenced by public opinion (Gunaratne, 2006).

In an elaborate critique, Casero-Ripollés (2020) and McAfee (2019) observe that what is conceived as "public opinion" in the private sphere is often dominated by the influence of different strands of "elite opinion leaders" including the editorial and front pages of "leading media institutions," the statements by leaders of "highly visible" non-government corporations and civil society, reputable scientists and public intellectuals, etc. For Iosifidis (2011), these "cosmopolitan elites" function as "manipulative agencies" meddling with the formation process to stimulate "manipulative public opinion" (Singh, 2012, p. 636). On the other hand, Staats (2004) contends that Habermas's recent work associated with the theory of modernity did not capture adequately the way in which forces such as manipulative agencies or what he

referred to as “corporate power” particularly those allied with the mass media are able to shape public opinion through the “powers of agenda control and role definition” (p. 590). A similar criticism has been made of Habermas’s theory for its implicit Eurocentric bias and “universalizing” tendencies which promote domination through globalization (Gunaratne, 2006).

Following the technological revolution and growth of modernist thinking in the West, Habermas, in a later modification of his initial notion, however, attempted to respond to critics by redefining the public sphere as an arena of “discursive relations;” suggesting a process of the “scienticisation of politics” where the expansion of technology influences social administration in addition to fundamentally transforming how social life is perceived (Singh, 2012). In the *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas divulged the possibilities of the plurality of the public sphere which were ignored owing to exclusively focusing upon the bourgeois publics in initial theorization (Habermas, 1984). While further asserting that the lifeworld would evolve institutions out of itself to eventually “secure an effectively functioning public sphere” in which limits are set to the inner dynamics of media-steered subsystems thereby enabling unconstrained network of communication flows (Habermas, 1987), this gives a rise to “network society” and thus heralding the emergence of the “new public sphere” (Dijk, 1999; Castells, 2010). Notwithstanding, it is important to note that the existing political system determines the structural formation and operational model of the public sphere in society.



## **2.2 Social Foundation and Political Evolution the Nigerian Public Sphere**

Nigeria operates as a democratic entity and the public sphere cannot be considered in isolation of the wider political, cultural, economic, social and historical trajectories of the media and political communication (Suleiman, 2017), in line with Habermas's conception. Moreover, understanding the operational structure of the public sphere in this context requires a review of the demographic composition of the Nigerian state particularly to reflect on the past and current sociopolitical realities.

Nigeria is an independent state geographically located in the western coast of tropical Africa. With a growing population currently approximated 202 million (World Bank Group, 2022; United Nations, 2019), Nigeria is projected to be among countries “to account for more than half of the increase in global population between 2020 and 2050” (United Nations, 2021). Socio-culturally, the country's population belongs to widely differing tribal, linguistic and religious backgrounds” (World Bank, 1958). The population is also sparsely distributed across six geopolitical zones (North-central, North-east, North-west, South-east, South-south and South-west) making up the “federation of 36 autonomous states and the Federal Capital Territory” (World Bank Group, 2022), with their inhabitants split into over 250 ethnic groups who speak nearly 500 distinct dialects and practice either Christianity, Islam or indigenous religions (United Nations, 2002; Akinyemi & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). Rather than facilitating the basic preconditions to serve a plurality of voices for the common good of the Nigerian society, this demographic composition has polarized the public sphere along the “*Us* versus *Them*” and “North – South” temporal structure (Orji, 2010). A foremost contributing factor to such polarization is the juridical and constitutional definition of

the northern Hausa-Fulani, southwestern Yoruba, and southeastern Igbo as “major” ethnic groups, implying that those belonging to other ethnic groups are “minor” and therefore politically less important (Adegbija, 1997). Without a doubt, as Udebunu (2011, p. 2) observes, the spirit of oneness among Nigerians has been a fragile one since the 1960 independence, “pointing to intrinsic problems bothering on ethnic affiliations,” which sowed the seeds of discord and mutual distrust among diverse groups, thereby hampering the attainment of an inclusive political system. In addition to shaping the formation of the public sphere, this diversity determines the predominant political ideologies across the country and thus breeding the grounds for identity politics. In a country with such configuration, there is an increasing tendency for different groups to measure any political administration and its policies through a “for or against us” prism (Chiluwa, 2018).

The Nigerian political landscape is so polarized that it gives rise to the “national question” – a divisive rhetoric that continue to hamper national integration and development. Political competition and access to political power and resource allocation thrive on the basis of ethno-regional, religious, and political party fragmentations. The persistence of such political order tends to breed political exclusion and conflicts arising from the incessant struggles of minority groups for inclusion, representation or self-determination (Usuanlele & Ibhawoh, 2017). There are historical trajectories to understanding the root of Nigeria’s polarized political landscape. Osadolor notes that the 1914 merger of southern and northern protectorates under the British colonial rule marked a political turning point in what has evolved into the single entity currently known as Nigeria (2002, pp. 31-2). Although this development presented an opportunity for nation-building, a key challenge to the realization of “the Nigerian nation remains the sheer diversity of its constituent ethnic

and religious groups as well as the arbitrary colonial circumstances of its creation.” From the amalgamation in 1914 to the attainment of political independence in 1960 enduring into the present democratic dispensation, Nigeria continues to struggle with the task of building a cohesive nation and fostering a sense of national identity among its people (Usuanlele & Ibhawoh, 2017, p. 2).

The constitutional proclamation of Nigeria as a “secular” state and the enforcement of “federal character principle” aim at reflecting the country’s diversity as well as to ensure equitable representation and political inclusion of various groups as a recipe for national integration (Idike, et al., 2019). The adoption of “zoning formula” in the sharing of political positions by political parties to guarantee rotational access to power, has also not yielded the positive outcome of uniting but rather intensifying the rift among various sociopolitical groups across the country (Ololajulo, 2016). There are a number of different sectarian agitations in the Nigerian public sphere often triggered by the persistence of identity politics. For example, the recurrent secessionist movements by a bloc of the ethnic nationalities in southeastern Nigeria under the auspices of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Eastern Security Network (ESN) is indicative of the downside of identity politics and how it daunts the attainment of an inclusive and equitable sociopolitical development (Canada Immigration & Refugee Board, 2016). While the IPOB/ENS’s agitations are rooted in perceived marginalization of the Igbo and other minority ethnic groups in the country’s political affairs especially at the national level (Nzeagwu, 2020), similar agitations for power shift and policy restructuring resurface with religious coloration. The amendment of Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) in 2020 to include provisions for the regulation of religious organizations for examples, triggered intense controversy among leaders and adherent of Islam and Christianity who lament the amendment as

an affront to places of worship and a serious violation of religious freedom. For instance, the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) specifically described the CAMA 2020 as “a war against churches” (Daily Trust, 2020). The condemnation of the amendment of Companies and Allied Matters Act by religious organizations and their leaders across the country however, heralds the upsurge of fierce opposition against the new policy particularly from the diverse religious groups (Auwal & Ersoy, 2022).

The federal government of Nigeria assented to a national grazing reserve bill in 2019, aimed at resolving persistent conflicts between herders and farmers across the country – a policy that also became contentious, with many Nigerians discountenancing the bill as an attempt by the Buhari-led administration to push an Islamization and Fulanization agenda of conceding the country to the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group (Auwal & Ersoy, 2022). In 2017, a female graduate of Nigerian Law School was denied access to attend her call-to-bar ceremony for refusing to remove her *hijab* or headscarf, and such action was met with a series of condemnation by Nigerians including faith-based organizations who later pushed for the amendment of the law to allow female Muslim lawyers wear headscarf at official gatherings (Auwal, 2018). This also raised concerns from other Nigerians who fielded allegations of an Islamization plot (Duru, 2018). Auwal and Ersoy (2022) rightly observe that a long-established link exists between identity politics and ethnoreligious rifts affecting the sociopolitical transformation of Nigeria. This, for example, reflects in the practice of politics in postcolonial period with the formation of Action Group by Yoruba political elites in the southwest region, the Nigeria People’s Party by Igbos in the southeast, and the National Party of Nigeria by Hausa-Fulani in the north – indicating that the motive for creation of these political parties was the pursuit of sectional interests rather than a

common national interest (Seiyefa, 2017). This trend is still evident from the dimension of political competitions adopted by political parties and politicians, with the media playing a leading role in the escalation of political conflicts in Nigeria today. The political sphere has been polarized that when you hear Nigerians clamoring for power shift to a certain region of the country, you find that such rhetoric metamorphoses into an intra-regional struggle as different ethnic or religious groupings within the same region keep the agitations alive particularly when the person who emerge as the bearer of the referred political position is not from their own ethnic or religious blocs. The northern region which is Hausa-Fulani and Muslim-dominated, for example, also comprises of indigenous people – who are either Hausa-Fulanis but non-Muslims or non-Hausas and non-Muslims – often referred to as “minority” within the region. As such, when candidates for any political position emerge from these minority groups, the supposed majority often kick against it. This unhealthy political culture equally replicates across regions of the country, including at state-level politics, where the ethnic and religious groups with the largest population not only dominate the state’s political affairs but also determine the allocation of resources and the pace of socioeconomic development accruing from the number of capital projects allocated to different local government areas within the state on the basis of religion and ethnicity.

Similar to Habermas’s public and private spheres, the evolutionary history of the Nigerian public sphere is incomplete without mentioning the notable contributions of the media and civil society. Despite profound socio-demographic challenges as hinted above, a myriad of other factors in Nigeria’s political and administrative history hampers the transformation of the public sphere. If we cast our minds back to a time before the 1999 transition to democratic governance, it is easy to deduce the level of

state's aggression against the public sphere which consisted mainly of journalists and the media as front-runners in the democratization process. Repressive control over the media and public criticisms are frequently cited as eminent characteristics of the long years of military rule in Nigeria. Eribo and Tanjong (1998) point out that in postcolonial Nigeria, the arrests and assassination of journalists as well as complete closure or temporary seizure of operational licenses of media organizations for openly criticizing public authorities became "a traditional rite of passage among military rulers" (p. 43). Under the years of military rule in Nigeria, the media – which in the words of Habermas was the preeminent institution of the public sphere – witnessed most of the dark days in the history of its development. Agbese (2013) asserts that to escape arrests, detention and sometimes assassination, journalists adopted the tactics of "guerilla journalism" to voice their oppositions against military dictatorships.

Moving to the current political system, the media and civil society play an essential role in the attainment of democratic ideals. The public sphere and civil society are crucial to deliberative democracy as regards nurturing the efforts to ensure an increased political participation, defending the rights of citizens and holding power to account (UN Human Rights, 2022; Calhoun, 1993). In contemporary world, the media serve as the principal instrument for social transformation, providing the platforms for deliberation of problems and to explore solutions through the exchange of diverse opinions (Camaj, 2021). It is plausible therefore to note that an understanding of the basic construct of a democratic system with its fundamental organs – the executive, legislature, judiciary, and of course, the mass media as "the Fourth Estate," further illustrates the interrelations between the public sphere and political system (Schultz, 1998). The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria embraces this preeminent institutional role of the media as Fourth Estate of the realm. Notwithstanding, Schultz

(1998) argued that “the legitimacy of the contemporary media in continuing to claim this preeminent role has remained under question,” particularly as the increased privatization and commercialization of the media tend to bear the rebirth of the “bourgeois public sphere” often serving the interests of the political and economic elites (Servaes & Wang, 1997; Kellner, 2000; Šopar, 2013). The entry of private investors into the media industry following the 1992 deregulation brought a wave of hope to the Nigerian public sphere, as broadcasting and other media of communication tended to be aligned with critical and oppositional voices. Considering how the private media operate under a commercial model typically funded through advertising and sales, “money and power reinvigorate the chances for corporations and the state to control over more processes of everyday life thereby undermining the effective transformation of a democratic public sphere” (Kellner, 2000, pp. 29-36). To buttress the point, Ayish (2008, p. 53) notes that some owners of private media could either be part of “the state apparatus or have vested interests in state policies,” and therefore making it quite difficult to identify clear boundaries between private and state-owned media as both appear to be in pursuit of common interests in the political and economic arenas.

Notwithstanding that Nigeria currently has a diverse and plural media system that the citizens are highly dependent on for political engagements, researchers such as Eribo and Tanjong (1998) affirm that the assumption about democratically elected governments tolerating open criticisms from the public sphere than military regimes, clearly remains lacking. With a score of 46.79 percent or 129<sup>th</sup> position out of 180 countries in the index, the 2022 Global Press Freedom ranking indicates that the Nigerian public sphere is currently in a “difficult situation” (Reporters Without Borders, 2022). While the public sphere suffers major pitfalls due to significant

government interference, Reporters Without Borders (2022) describes Nigeria as “one of West Africa’s most dangerous and difficult countries” where more than 16 journalists were either killed, imprisoned or taken hostage between 2016 and 2022. Although the constitution protects individual freedom of expression and of the press, government’s affront to the public sphere has only increased.

With the new technologies that power the network ecology of contemporary society, access to the Internet is increased rapidly among millions of citizens who utilize various social media platforms to engage on a wide range of issues including politics. This development heralds the emergence of a new public sphere that seem to break the boundary of government’s repression over the media and other institutions of the public sphere. In spite of this, there are ongoing efforts to censor the emerging digital public sphere. The seven months suspension of Twitter after the platform deleted president Buhari’s tweet is apt to demonstrate such efforts. Besides the regulatory directives to telecom service providers to block citizens’ access to the platform, media outlets were ordered to discontinue the use of Twitter in their routines. Federal prosecutors were also ordered to arrest and prosecute Nigerians who continue to use Twitter as of June 2021 (Princewill & Busari, 2021). When a resolution was reached to lift the ban on Twitter and restore access to millions of users in January 2022, the Federal government announced that such decision followed Twitter’s agreement to fulfill some demands in accordance with Nigerian laws. This not only reveals the government’s intolerable attitude towards public criticisms but is corollary to a series of other legislative efforts to regulate the use of social media, which is tantamount to an attack on Nigerians’ freedom of expression. Prior to the Twitter ban, Nigerian legislators opted for the introduction of bills to regulate the virtual public sphere on the grounds of security and national unity objectives. Although the bills didn’t come



to fruition, such obnoxious attempts somewhat explain why Twitter chose Ghana as the location to establish its African headquarters, boycotting Nigeria which is the country with the largest population but also one that accounts for a big share of Twitter's user hub in the continent (Ndukwe, 2021).

### **2.3 Network Society and the Emerging Public Sphere**

Unlike initial conceptualization of the public sphere being nominally a free arena in which communicative rationality is dependent upon the ability of private people "to extend or defend their positions in a discursive interchange" (Rienstra & Hook, 2006, p. 313), the *theory of communicative action* offers a good starting point to understand the ideal social structure of the public sphere that is propelling the shift in the broad principle of rationality from the individual to the social, with the lifeworld increasingly being transformed (Nandakishwo, 2012; Habermas, 1984; Habermas, 1987). Habermas's communicative action presupposes a participatory approach to democracy guaranteeing the right of individuals to freely participate in political debate and decision making whereas the public sphere exists as a space that "coordinates action towards social integration and solidarity" (Flynn, 2004). Habermas developed a renewed understanding of the concept of rationality through the theory of communicative action, combining a two-level concept of society that integrates the lifeworld and systems model (Habermas, 1987).

Contemporary rise of information and communication technologies has transformed various aspects of the lifeworld and liberated the public sphere thereby beckoning the emergence of a society in which its systems are structured around networks often determining to a great extent how individual voices integrate into debates and decision-making processes of cultural, political and economic affairs (Parkinson, 2012). For

Castells (2004), this rapidly advancing system, which is constituted around information and communication technologies, influences as well as expedite “the interaction between social organizations, social change and technological paradigm” – coalescing into the network society (p.xvii). Consistent with the ideal social structure required for the public sphere to flourish within the network society are the speedily changing features of human communication and information exchange which, among other factors: (i) disregard the social, political or economic status of participants in public debates, (ii) coordinate social action through intersubjectivity to create common concern towards objective rationale for problematization of social issues, and (iii) inclusive of a wide range of individuals and social groups with equal access to interact amongst themselves and reach an understanding as regards their situations (Baxter, 1987; Castells & Cardoso, 2005). Figure 2 below shows the 6-dimensional model of public sphere.

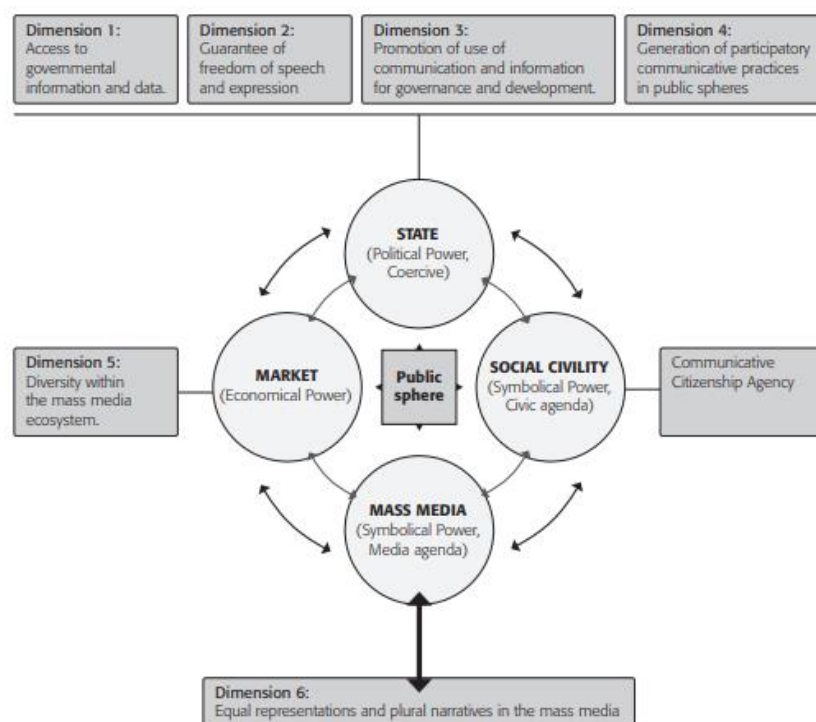


Figure 2: The 6-dimensional Communicative Citizenship Model of Public Sphere (Gómez, 2012, p. 122)

Put simply, the theory of network society expounds the rise of sociopolitical communicative power residing in networks that structure society rather in its institutions, and therefore depicting the kind of society evolving under the growing influence of information and communication technologies which additionally define the networks that have become “the nervous system of our society” (van Dijk, 2006; Castells, 2004a). Contemporary literature abounds with discussions about the public sphere, making it increasingly become not just relevant but also controversial. One of the great achievements of the digital age has been the emergence of computer-mediated communication which is progressively taking the place of “coffeehouse discourse” in the private or bourgeois sphere while also transcending such problems as media commodification and censorship posing threats to the free flow of information and public opinion (Boeder, 2005).

With the rise of network society, the public sphere as a political realm becomes central to participatory democracy and often playing too large a role in the continuous upsurge of personalized digitally networked politics, which has changed the dynamics by accelerating political interactions and participation to a new level of ‘digitization’ and ‘informationization’ (Hassan, 2004). Modern-day political activities are organized in a network structure enabling both centralized and decentralized participatory practices (van Dijk, 2006), although the new information infrastructure allows for the unanimous flow and exchange of ideas and debates about issues of global, regional and local relevance, and therefore shaping a politically relevant “global public sphere” (Tierney, 2013; Volkmer, 2003).

Computer-mediated communication has created a network of societal information order where the boundaries within media production, cultural production and politics

are fast becoming blurred or even disappearing completely (Hassan, 2004). At the very least, the Internet and other digitally networked platforms that facilitate computer-mediated communication contribute to the emergence and continuing expansion of not just “a new kind of public sphere” but also “a new form of democracy,” with the very existence of this new sphere always dependent on the technologies providing unbounded space for many-to-many mode of communication and social interactions. Potentially, this network-based unbounded space extends communicative actions across space and time, signaling the rise of a public sphere that is neither subject to specific linguistic, cultural or spatial limitations (Bohman, 2004; van Dijk, 2006).

## **2.4 Structural Formation and Transformation of Social Media as the Emerging Public Sphere**

Society has become more dynamic, flexible and adaptive to new realities through the evolution of various information and communication technologies (Fuchs, 2008), increasingly organizing our social systems around networks (Castells, 2010). The advent of the Internet as well as social media platforms as the latest products in the communication technology revolution provide a better public sphere facilitating the exchange of ideas and interaction in online platforms to consolidate the functions of mainstream media and representative democracy (Çela, 2015). Considering the features such as high visibility, anonymity, diversity and interactivity (Liu & Weber, 2014), social media platforms have become mainstream to facilitate better means of achieving the ideal public sphere than anything that came before it (Mazali, 2011).

With the profound changes in communications landscape as well as its increasingly becoming more complex and participatory through the rise of social media platforms in the 1990s, access to information has become greater, as the opportunities to engage

in public debates are expanding in the network society and among the “networked population” as Shirky (2011) describes it. Social media platforms have become not only the live wire of the network society and the new public sphere enhancing the ability of individuals to undertake collective action, but also “a fact of life” for many actors in the civil society world including citizens, nongovernmental organizations, corporate firms, service providers and governments. Indeed, as readily attractive platforms among various age and social groups who connect digitally, the structural features of social media platforms are oriented towards the idea of ‘community-building’ (Fuchs, 2014; Shirky, 2011).

In addition to having distinct operational structure and content formats, the use of social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, etc. – extends across various purposes including for political campaigning, civic engagement and news reporting (Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). This suggests that for everyday users, social media provide unlimited opportunities to connect with one another, share information, engage with news content and entertain themselves. It follows therefore that the universality of social media platforms as by-products of the network society stimulates debates about the effect on sociopolitical phenomena and the ability to revitalize the public sphere as a critical element of deliberative democracies” (Kruse, Norris, & Flinchum, 2018). Accordingly, Vobič et al. (2017) delineate such platforms as the “additional public venues” enabling social interactions, the creation and sharing of multiple kinds of digital content by individual and institutional users (Paulussen & Harder, 2014). In the political arena, however, these digital communication tools serve as the backbone of the network society and “new public sphere” (Shirky, 2011; Castells, 2008), empowering new voices with opportunities for engagement and collaboration in politics and news production (Bossio, 2017). The structural formation

of social media and other technological components of the public sphere is demonstrated in figure 3 below.

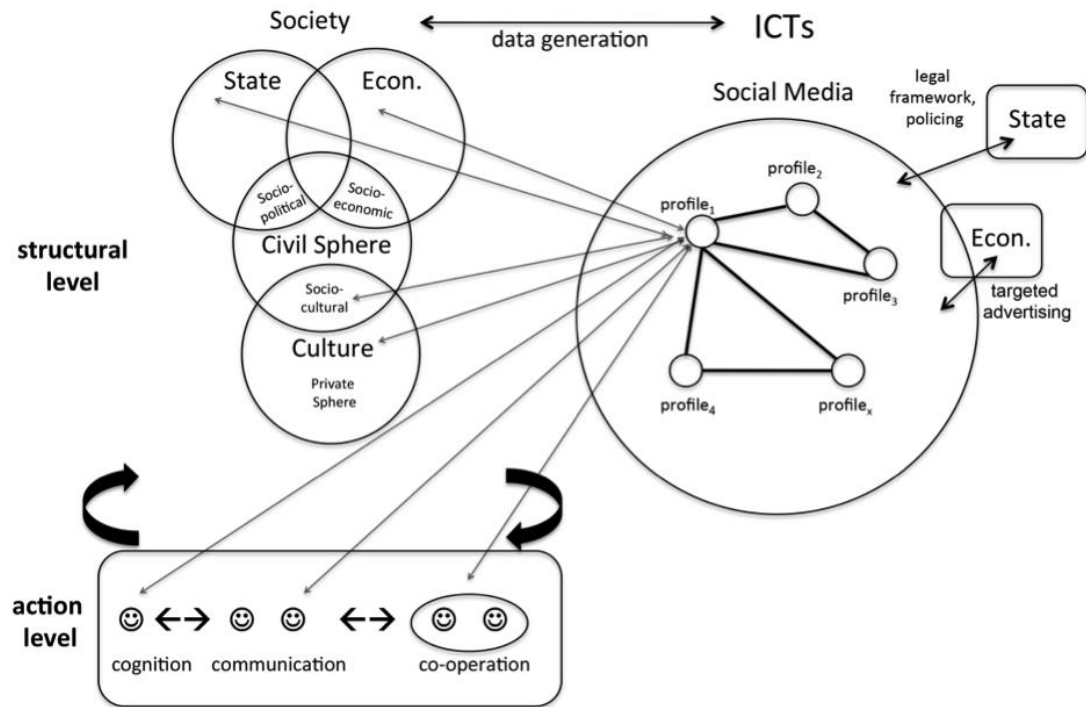


Figure 3: Social Media and the Public Sphere (Fuchs, 2015, p. 343)

Interactions in the new public sphere differ from the conventional public sphere, and therefore enabling folks to have “more control over what they say, what they are told and who they talk to” (Williams, 2003). The technical capabilities and institutions that govern communication technologies are inherent features in defining the operational structure of the mainstream public sphere. However, technological advancement has changed the dimensions of understanding the operational framework of modern-day public sphere in terms of possibilities for active participation (Rheingold, 2008). The general structure of the new public sphere guarantee an increased sociopolitical freedom (Shirky, 2011) through the provision of unrestrained access to information,

equal and protected participation of individuals in public and political affairs (Kruse, Norris, & Flinchum, 2018).

#### **2.4.1 Transformation of Political Communication in the New Public Sphere**

Advances in communication technology continue to transform the political space and dimensions of political communication. Castells (2010) claims that contemporary politics and journalism, which are constituent elements of political communication, thrive in a networked environment – the “new public sphere” for establishing alternative values and networked collaborative engagements (Ersoy & Miller, 2020). Another point of view suggests on the one hand, that the new public sphere has game-changing implications for politics and society generally as it continues to replace the “old social infrastructure of the state, which opposes the flow of knowledge and public opinion, with a new global community.” In addition to the power to change people’s political views by echoing public opinion and reinforcing the ability of loosely coordinated groups to demand sociopolitical change, the new public sphere has additionally been described as “the Fifth Estate” (Schleffer & Miller, 2021, p. 82) owing to its significant role and influence on what content is produced, how the audiences interact with the content and what information people see in today’s media industry (Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022).

Within the political arena, the new public sphere represents an environment consisting of interactive and participatory platforms which enable a decentralized and real-time communication flows from competing actors to the electorate while facilitating the expression of alternative public opinion about political issues (Fuchs, 2008; Vedel, 2006). Related social structures including the democratic and entire political processes, continue to witness unprecedented breakthroughs with computer-mediated communication platforms as major drivers of change shaping not only how politicians

engage with the electorate, but also the relationship between the media and political actors. The expanding role of social media as platforms where sources of political information (e.g., government officials, political spin-doctors, political parties and candidates, etc.) can produce and share content among themselves and the citizens “with no significant third-party filtering, fact-checking or editorial judgment” (Schleffer & Miller, 2021, p. 82). The increasing use of social media has deepened the influence of political newsmakers on the media agenda (Guo & Vargo, 2018; Demirsoy & Karakoç, 2016). Another aspect of the transformation is reflected in how social media platforms expand the landscape of political communication, shifting the people’s focus away from mainstream news outlets to the new public sphere as the main platform for dissents, where they get their news and exercise their freedom of expression by spreading liberal ideas (Shirky, 2011; Castells, 2012).

The presidency of Donald Trump is a remarkable instance of using computer-mediated communication platforms to lobby public perceptions and propagate political goals (Vlatković, 2018), and therefore contributing inherently to create political supremacy for political leaders, thereby transforming the relationships amongst actors in political and news-making processes (Baviera, Calvo & Llorca-Abad, 2019; Baviera, Sampietro & García-Ull, 2019). With regard to such transformations, Auwal, Ersoy, and Tamar (2022) described the phenomenon as a sphere of changing relationship “from old relationship to new influence,” where the approach to political communication and media coverage of electioneering activities are powerfully influenced by interactions between information gatekeepers and other actors in the political sphere (p. 105).



### **2.4.2 Changing Relationships among Political Actors in the New Public Sphere**

There is ample evidence from the literature in multiple streams to show: (1) how since the 2008 presidential campaigns in the United States, political actors around the world continue to use numerous social media platforms for political campaigns and direct engagement with the electorate (Aragón, Kappler, Kaltenbrunner, Laniado, & Volkovich, 2013; Graham, Jackson, & Broersma, 2016); (2) how mainstream news outlets integrate and routinize social media platforms into news production and distribution (Guo & Vargo, 2018; Broersma & Graham, 2013); and (3) how these platforms as the nervous system of the new public sphere stimulate participatory democracy through the increased access to information, knowledge and free expression (Oginni & Moitui, 2015; Kisielewski & LeDoux, 2009).

The relationship between news media and actors in the political process has often been demonstrated as one involving a struggle for control over public perceptions (Berkowitz, 2009; Louw, 2001; Findahl, 1998; Carah & Louw, 2015; Anderson, 2014). Scholarly debate about such relationship is characterized as lacking a consensus on whether the utilization of computer-mediated communication platforms by individual and institutional political actors to attain their political goals brings about a paradigm shift to stimulate participatory democracy (Baumgartner, 2017), or it simply serves to strengthen the old-fashioned system of political communication (Tedesco, 2004), which also poses some regulatory and professional challenges to journalists covering the political beats. Moreover, different strands of research suggest a paradigm shift in contemporary political and media landscapes, focusing on the agenda-building and agenda-setting role of the new public sphere often to examine how the political use of social media platforms influences the relationship between what issues the news media prioritize in their coverage, the sources of information cited (McNair, 2009;

Entman, 1993), and how those sources determine journalists' decisions about what to cover or what ignore in the political environment by swaying them to incorporate the newsmakers' narratives in portraying facts and issues in the news (Cheng, 2014; Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022; Cobb & Elder, 1971). Other studies analyze the transformational role of computer-mediated communication platforms in contemporary news production processes to draw inferences on how journalists and the news organizations for which they work are also normalizing the use of political tweets and other social media-based user-generated content emanating from political actors as information subsidies in the coverage of campaigning and related political activities (Conway-Silva, Filer, Kenski & Tsetsi, 2018). This is particularly considering the predominant use of social media platforms by politicians in their everyday life and politics (Lecheler & Kruikemeier, 2016; Broersma & Graham, 2012). It is additionally instructive to note that the use of social media content produced by political actors does not differ significantly from the use of sound bites or other media texts they produce which have otherwise been used by the news media in conventional reporting.

Although the news media possess the significant potential to affect public debates and shape opinions through political reporting – which is an important surveillance function to keep the electorate enlightened about issues in the political sphere (Pate, 2015), the pattern of coverage adopted by the various media is considered as contributory to the deepening polarization in society (Maher, 2001; McCombs, Holbert, Kioussis & Wanta, 2011).

## **2.5 Political Twittersphere: Twitter as Political Engagement and Information Sharing Sphere**

The use of Twitter has advanced tremendously in recent times, becoming a powerful force in political communication, including the impact on public discourse (Dang-Xuan, Stieglitz, Wladarsch, & Neuberger, 2013). More importantly, the rise in popularity of the platform stir up debates about its impact on election campaigns and public opinion formation. Thus, the contextualization of Twittersphere expounds how and to what extent Twitter as an integral element of the network society and the new public sphere increasingly influence political engagement and interactions between politicians, citizens and the media thereby providing an interactive space that now facilitates the processes of multiple users becoming producers and consumers of online political content. Today the Twittersphere has become a common domain for multidimensional interactions where individuals and institutions purposefully interact to convey vital information and express their thoughts explicitly or implicitly in a 280 character messaging format known as “tweet” (Opeibi, 2019; Moinuddin, 2019). Relatively, the digital revolution has transformed this interactive platform from Twitter to Twittersphere, rapidly becoming an important tool in contemporary politics.

The technological ability providing the basic architecture within which all users gain the equality of access to information and the opportunity to engage in debates with diverse opinions being expressed and exchanged, help to realize the very fundamental function of the political Twittersphere (Wang, 2021). Given its technical affordances – of tweeting, retweeting, liking and direct messaging as unique communication features – the Twittersphere has evolved into a domain of choice among political leaders and institutions particularly for political engagement and corporate governance

(Moinuddin, 2019; Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022). Building on the fundamental role of Twittersphere in the political system, Miller (2004) affirms the rise of “a new breed” of network campaigning originating from an increasingly connected society.

Research has shown that U.S. politicians are among the first actors in modern democracies, who actively utilize Twitter and other social media platforms to engage with their constituents during election campaigning (Dagoula, 2019). In view of the unique and powerful communication features of Twitter as hinted above, the Twittersphere has in the past decade become an ideal channel for spreading political information and opinions in modern election campaigns (Soedarsono et al., 2020). Besides, the integration of Twitter into political communication has decentralized electoral campaigns, allowing individual candidates to campaign more independently of the central party by targeting personalized political messages to a great deal of potential voters while increasing the risk of sociopolitical polarization (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016; Enli & Skogerbo, 2013).

The literature is replete with empirical evidence to show how individual and institutional political actors have both embraced the new opportunities in the political Twittersphere. For example, the study by Kreiss and McGregor (2018) offers a rather generic understanding of the role of large tech companies and the world’s most popular social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft and Google in political communication by undertaking an empirical analysis to show how these platforms shaped the political processes of the 2016 U.S. presidential primary and general election campaigns. Graham, Jackson and Broersma’s (2016) study specifically compared two electoral circles in British and Dutch to examine not only how Twitter has become one of the most significant online spaces for political communication, but

also the motivations for candidates' use of Twitter as well as the diverse patterns of use based on their tweeting behaviours during election times. In addition, Baviera (2018) highlights the functions of Twitter among a diverse range of users particularly during electoral campaigns. Political elites and parties use Twitter to campaign toward reinforcing their visibility to achieve wider attraction while journalists and the media utilize the platform in their campaign coverage to gather information about political issues and candidates. There are certain active users among the general public whose activity and habits may equally play a greater role in influencing other people's opinions. Baviera's study explored how the activity of these users exert some level of effects on the campaign and general political processes during the Spanish 2015 general election.

Emerging trends from the multidimensional use and impact of Twitter continue to demonstrate the platform's growing importance in electoral campaign and the entire political process. As part of a holistic impact on politics, Twitter basically facilitates a decentralized and costless political communication and engagements, enabling political elites and other influential high-profile users to have an edge over weaker competitors in the Twittersphere. Although this "may change the power relations between the news media and other social institutions in the political process" (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016), it equally signifies the growing influence of political actors on the narratives of public debates and the news agenda of mainstream media (Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022; Ekman & Widholm, 2015). Hence, warranting the need for an increased scrutiny of Twitter's impact on political communication.

The distinctive relevance of Twitter in political communication is among a plethora of reasons making the Twittersphere a lucrative information gathering and news sharing

platform. Recent studies extensively explore the increasing transformation in professional routines with regards to news production, revealing the multi-stage audiences' participation driven by emerging media technologies and the outburst of user-generated content (Palomo, Teruel, & Blanco-Castilla, 2019; Williams, Wahl-Jorgensen, & Wardle, 2011). Because political actors are among the total universe of users, research has also shown how the Twitter-based communication activity of politicians holds a great deal of influence on news judgement in contemporary journalism practice (Singer, 2010; Nola DNA, 2022). Twitter has substantial influence as a public space where heterogeneous users converge to debate about topical issues (Moinuddin, 2019). Accordingly, politicians and many public opinion leaders habitually utilize the Twittersphere to create political content, share their views about certain issues as well as generate public engagements, which subsequently become trending and rise to the bar of news coverage (Jönsson & Örnebring, 2011; Bode & Dalrymple, 2016). Arguably, the declining interest in consumption of mainstream content and the audiences' transition to online and social media sources for a cost-effective access to news and views contribute to the recurring and multi-layered impact of Twitter on political reporting (Pew, 2016; Deuze, 2003; Lasorsa, Lewis, & Holton, 2012).

An attempt to draw a practical comparison between the conventional norms of reporting and digital journalism would reveal a practice which does not differ significantly in relation to the particular news values of "prominence," "human interest," and "impact" – which aid journalists in the process of identifying and selecting what information becomes news (Araujo & Meer, 2020). In an era of digitally networked politics and journalism, these news selection criteria most likely manifest across trending political topics in the Twittersphere and thus influencing political news

judgment. In a bid to balance news selection criteria and to meet the pressing demands of contemporary journalism practice, journalists and news organizations end up with no better choices than to routinize the Twittersphere in identifying what to incorporate and whose voices to amplify in the news (McGregor & Molyneux, 2020). The aggregate level of engagements generated by a trending topic in the Twittersphere suggests its “human interest” newsworthiness while the reliance of mainstream news media on tweets and other content produced and shared by high-profile political actors (or newsmakers) possessing a large number of followers – perceived as “prominent” influencers of political discourses in the Twittersphere – for inclusion as source material, putatively indicate whose voices often feature in the news (McGregor & Molyneux, 2020).

Another essential debate in the literature suggests that the routinization of Twittersphere in news production and sharing facilitates the audiences’ participation in journalism through the increased use of non-elite sources in the news (Domingo, et al., 2008). Notwithstanding, there are contentions that citizens’ voices are still passively represented in the news, further revealing the divergent perceptions among mainstream journalists and news outlets regarding the incorporation of user-generated content into the news (Singer, 2010). Researchers have sought to understand the trends in contemporary times. For example, Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden and Boumans (2011) observe that technological developments and the increasing market pressure herald a new breed of relationship between politicians and the news media as well as substantially influencing political reporting. Other studies present comparative analysis of the changing journalistic sources to reveal how interactions among various actors in the Twittersphere often trigger news coverage (Nordheim, Boczek, & Koppers, 2018) and result in the inclusion of quotes from tweets into news content

(Broersma & Graham, 2013; Lecheler & Kruikemeier, 2015). These practices momentarily contribute to a changing audiences' perception of the news.

### **2.5.1 Nigeria's Emerging Twittersphere of Political and Digital Journalism**

The rise of network society heralds an increased public interest and participation in the political process and particularly among the youthful population. Since the 1999 transition to civil rule, Nigeria has witnessed a rapid increase in citizens' political participation, with the mainstream and social media platforms frequently cited as aiding the process (Adegbola & Gearhar, 2019). Beyond providing access to information, extant literature shows how social media platforms have become mainstreamed in taking on the indispensable tasks of sustaining democratic ethos, serving the watchdog role in defense of human freedom while also upholding the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people (EIU Democracy Index, 2019). Previous studies document theoretical and empirical evidence to show how Twitter has become a leading force in advancing the civil liberties of the Nigerian populace (Freedom House, 2021).

Aside from its popularity as a platform for defending and expanding the frontiers of democracy (Valenzuela, 2013), the impact of Twitter on various social and political movements leading to policy reforms has long been evident in Nigeria. The citizens' use of Twitter can be situated in the context of new social movement facilitating "direct action, participatory decision-making, decentralized structures, and opposition to bureaucracy" (Handler, 1992). Numerous insights can be drawn from the following instances: the #EndSARS protests against police brutality (Dambo, Ersoy, Auwal, Olorunsola, & Saydam, 2021), the #SexForGrades exposing cases of sexual harassments in universities, the #RevolutionNow against perceived failures of government, the #NotTooYoungToRun movement against political marginalization of



youth to enable young Nigerians contest for elective offices (Dambo, Ersoy, Eluwole, & Arikewuyo, 2022), the #BringBackOurGirls that clamored for the release of over 250 schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram insurgents, the 2012 #OccupyNigeria protest against government's removal of fuel subsidy, etc. The hashtag and other widely-used information diffusion mechanisms in the Twittersphere momentarily influenced the mobilization processes, ornamenting the success of these social movements. These affordances bolster the notion of the Twittersphere as a viable platform for political influence among Nigerians predominantly with regards to drawing attention to issues, amplifying grievances, and shaping government policies. Thus, we can say that the technological infrastructure of the Twittersphere offers real-time communication tools which the young population in developing countries such as Nigeria, who are in search of democracy and want to have their voice heard, utilize to make a global impact (Cohen & Rai, 2000).

Studies that look into the historic transformation of Nigerian politics also credited some outcomes of numerous political changes to the increased use of Twitter among the youthful population. While the use of social media platforms in campaign communication became noticeable during the 2011 general elections and steadily improve through the 2015 general elections (Bartlett, Krasodonski-Jones, Daniel, Fisher, & Jespersen, 2015), the elevated position of Twittersphere as a platform of choice for political campaign and civic engagements can be deduced from the impact during the 2019 general elections (Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022; Opeibi, 2019). Between 2015 and 2019, political communication in Nigeria took a new turn as not only did politicians continue to use the Twittersphere to engage with citizens thereby increasing its significance for political debates (Mustapha & Omar, 2020), but the platform also became influential in news production and distribution; changing the

relationships between politicians as newsmakers, the media as mirrors of events and the citizens as consumers of news content (Adegbola & Gearhar, 2019). For Nigeria, this development is however, indicative of an emerging Twittersphere of political and digital journalism where computer-mediated political communication and user/data-driven news content are increasingly becoming mainstream (Bossio, 2017).

## **2.6 Twittersphere and Sociopolitical Polarization**

With the changing nature of politics and political communication in the digital age alongside the increasing number of research findings revealing evidence of cross-cultural popularity and multiplicity of use of Twitter among the political elites and citizens (Soedarsono, et al., 2020), the political Twittersphere has attracted noteworthy applauses as well as criticism from cyber-optimists and cyber-pessimists. Aligning with the normative political theory of democracy and the somewhat liberating power of social media in general, optimists argue in the line of emerging trends linked to the functions of the political Twittersphere as democracy-enhancing often expanding the frontiers of freedom of choice, expression and opinion (Valenzuela, 2013; Cohen & Rai, 2000). Considering the decentralized and self-centered forms of communication on offer in the Twittersphere and how the activity and certain behaviors exhibited by users could “devalue the political process as well as stifle political debates leading to cynicism toward established forms of politics and politicians” (Miller, 2020, p. 159), pessimists discountenance the political Twittersphere as fomenting sociopolitical polarization (Conover, et al., 2011; Gruzd & Roy, 2014). While acknowledging the forms of polarization that emerge from the divergent interactions of multiple groups of people, Liu and Weber (2014) similarly contend that the Twittersphere is not an idealized public space for democratic conversations. These contentions expediently present multiple points of entry to

understanding the intricacies of digitally networked politics and political interactions in contemporary society.

In connection with the specific use for political communication and other administrative purposes, Hong and Kim (2016) emphasize that the Twittersphere poses some societal implications since every political regime presumably holds a group of loyalists whose ideology conforms with its objectives, and opponents who are ideologically-opposed to the administration's policies (Lee, Shin, & Hong, 2018; Bail, et al., 2018). Moreover, it is worth noting that the platforms constituting the new public sphere "started out as politically neutral" (Schleffer & Miller, 2021) but are vital for entrenching liberal democratic governance, although some users have in recent times moved towards utilizing such platforms to publicly challenge constituted authorities particularly with the aim of pushing society to self-segregate into organized groups with opposing views, which can intensify polarization (Adut, 2012). It is also substantial to note that although political actors must strategize in presenting their ideas and proposals to convince voters towards gaining political advantage, the political environment consists of divergent ideologies which set the tone for individuals with incompatible political interests to dichotomize themselves into allied groups often engaging in discourses of "othering" via online platforms (Vaahensalo, 2021; Auwal & Ersoy, 2022).

In their critique, *The dark psychology of social networks*, Haidt and Rose-Stockwell (2019) offer an interesting point of departure to guide any research on a mission to ascertain how and to what extent the political Twittersphere is pushing society toward greater polarization, as the entirety of the new public sphere has proven in recent years to be worthy for use by "anyone who wants to start a fire." Empirical evidence from

recent studies validate such claims that the new public sphere accommodates platforms which facilitate hate crimes, violent extremism (Gaikwad, Ahirrao, Phansalkar, & Kotecha, 2021; Müller & Schwarz, 2020), thereby increasing the wave of polarization among politically-engaged users (Lee, Shin, & Hong, 2018; Bail, et al., 2018). As it is the case with the March 2019 Christchurch attack on two mosques in New Zealand by an extremist who live-streamed the shootings on Facebook (Timberg, Harwell, Dwoskin, & Romm, 2019), Alizadeh et al. (2019) linked the terror act to a global increase in white supremacy and alt-right extremism accruing mass support online. However, Marcu and Bălteanu (2014) further expound the role of these platforms as real source for the proliferation of international terrorism. To demonstrate this, Chilwa and Adegoke (2013) assert that the Twittersphere has become instrumental for terrorist and separatist groups in multipolar societies (for instance, the *Boko Haram* and Indigenous People of Biafra, IPOB in Nigeria) to vent anger, mobilize support, recruit members and publicize their activities and successes (Ligtvoet & Oudenhuijsen, 2019). For example, Facebook had in February 2021 deactivated the account of IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu for violating its rules on harms and hate speech (BBC, 2021). Chilwa (2018) posits Facebook's action as justifiable to avert Kanu's frequent use of the platform to denigrate the Nigerian president as 'terrorist,' 'jihadist' as well as describing the Nigerian state as a 'zoo' – the animal kingdom. Beyond the fundamental function of the political Twittersphere in enabling a level of equality for aggrieved groups to freely express their concerns, linguistic violence has become "a part of the contentious character of online political communication" – which additionally poses a series of regulatory challenges on the path of social media and networking companies (Qingning, 2018, p. 19).

Certain practices within the basic architecture of the political Twittersphere constitute both significant and deleterious consequences on democratic performance in the contemporary world (Parkinson, 2012). These practices – which are prevalent across numerous platforms – result in heightened tension among state institutions and societal groups over what political issues should feature in online discourses. As such, a series of contentions and policy conflicts have intensified and become more visible among public groups with divergent views, nongovernmental organizations and social institutions – such as the news media and tech companies with different statuses and agendas (Wang, 2021). Empirical evidence from the literature identify the Twitter discourses of politicians and other high-profile users to be among major factors that foment polarization and ideological weaving (Masroor, Khan, Aib, & Ali, 2019), with the Twittersphere frequently cited as suitable platform to reflect the political sentiments in society (Garimella, Morales, Gionis, & Mathioudakis, 2018; Jose, Borondo, Losada, & Benito, 2015). While the waves of polarization emerging from citizens' activities in digitally networked political space raise concerns about causing actual physical damage (Bouvier & Rosenbaum, 2020; Best & Meng, 2015), the rapid entry of political leaders and institutions into the Twittersphere euqally sets the stage for more polarization, and therefore extending the conflicts to a policy level as obvious in some societies today.

Recent attempts by social media and networking service companies such as Facebook and Twitter – to censor users by setting content moderation standards often detecting and removing posts or suspending access to accounts that violate their rules (Oremus, 2022), have drawn the ire of some political leaders who either felt the operation of such platforms threaten their nations' sovereignty or overtly accuse the platforms for conspiring with non-state actors agianst the corporate existence of their states.

Consequently, a number of social media platforms found themselves being the subject of adversity in some countries. This complexity is better understood if we cast our minds back and try to recall the incidence that led to the June 2021 suspension of Twitter's operation in Nigeria – a decision that “caused a global outcry over freedom of expression and put a spotlight on the nation's north–south divide,” according to the German news outlet, Deutsche Welle (DW.com, 2021).

Moving again to empirical evidence from the literature as hinted above, the indefinite or permanent suspension of Donald Trump from using Facebook, Twitter and YouTube platforms in January 2021 for potentially inciting violence – after he tweeted about an alleged election fraud as well as posted a video in response to the U.S. Capitol attack (Rasmussen, 2022), is a further depiction of the polarizing effects of the Twitter discourses of politicians and other high-profile users of the Twittersphere on society (Gruzd & Roy, 2014; Himmelboim, McCreery, & Marc, 2013). Haidt and Rose-Stockwell (2019) observe that the Twittersphere does not bear sole responsibility for the pitch of political anger today, citing a multiplicity of other influential actors in the political sphere i.e., the news media as capable of pushing society towards greater polarization. To sum up the main debates around the contribution media coverage makes to fomenting sociopolitical polarization, Auwal and Ersoy (2022), Urman (2020), Fletcher and Kleis (2017) on the other hand, went beyond the implications of online political discourses to explore how journalists' news judgment in relation to seeking out specific information from the political messages that political newsmakers produce and share on various social media platforms for inclusion as source material equally influence the coverage of sociopolitical events with further polarizing effects (Yang, et al., 2016). Other sociocultural factors abound with some extent of influence on journalists' news judgment (Lamot & Van Aelst, 2019; McNair, 1998); however,

Schleffer and Miller (2021) argue that the inclusion of online political messages produced by politicians as source material could amplify extreme political views, foment sociopolitical polarization and create doubts about the integrity of journalists thereby subverting public trust and confidence in the news selection and production processes. This is largely because journalism mediates between political elites and the citizens, as well as predominant issues and contentious events in the political sphere.

The current dialectical opposition between the multidimensional use of Twitter by politicians, journalists, media organizations and the sociopolitical implications of such uses however, led Luna, Toro and Valenzuela (2022) to propose that the Twittersphere has become a powerful political space for amplifying both the discourses in the online political messages emanating from whatever a politician or political group says in an exponential way, and the news frames emanating from mainstream media outlets that utilize the platform for news sharing and to reach larger audiences (Nanabhay & Farmanfarmaian, 2013). Although the literature provides valuable insights about the dynamic influence of Twittersphere on the agenda of issues and people's interpretations of those issues, research has not advanced meaningfully to focus on the operational approaches for implementing journalism in the process of social transformation towards engendering "democratic peace" and particularly amidst the perceived polarizing effects of the political Twittersphere. Accordingly, Elworthy and Rogers (2002, p. 17) point out that the network society is in a reverend need of an intervention "at the point before anger hardens into bitterness, revenge and retaliation."

## **2.7 Peace Journalism and Its Relevance to Political Communication**

There are basically five elite groups in every social context: the political, intellectual, economic/business, military, and bureaucratic elites who steer the cultural, ethical and

constitutional values of society. As such, professor Umaru Pate, the Director representing Africa on the Global Network of UNESCO Professors in Communication (ORBICOM), offered a critical perspective to demonstrate how the pivotal role of the political elite – as the “coordinator or leader” of the other elite groups – either complement or thwart the transformative efforts of social institutions such as the media. Hence, the efficacy of political communication to stimulate meaningful changes within the social system is dependent on how well the political elite behave, the elite’s willingness to insist on rules and ability to make sacrifices. Once the political elite misbehave or their attitude do not connote confidence or competence, then the political elite lose the moral and leadership ability to enforce and punish others for the breach of existing rules. At the end of the day, everything goes haywire and the society suffers for it all – as it is currently being witnessed in many parts of Africa. Similarly, the journalists – as the “watchdog” amidst the various elite groups – must exercise caution and demonstrate understanding of the social context and environment within which they operate. The performance of journalists should therefore reflect a concern towards the survival and positive transformation of the social system rather than a focus on transient personalities. If for example, journalists focus on promoting personalities who misbehave, there are high tendencies that journalists end up practicing the journalism of destruction, which portends a disregard for survival of the society (Pate, 2022). This therefore necessitates a better understanding of the social intervention role of journalism in relation to political communication.

The sociological notion of journalism as a business as well as the surveillance practice of information dissemination about interesting and important public affairs mainly delineates journalism as a social intervention (Belair-Gagnon & Revers, 2018). Perhaps, assigning a straightjacket definition or function to journalism attracts



controversies, even though its outputs are considered as product of numerous sociocultural, technological, economic and political factors peculiar to a society, and thus suggesting how the social world habitually determines such outputs (McNair, 1998). This sociological theorem is foundational to the understanding of news as a journalistic output, which demonstrates the process by which reporters rely on facts emanating from real people and events to construct versions of reality (Schudson, 2003).

Relationship between politics and journalism has been described as symbiotic because the news media are obviously an important source of political information and politicians have a considerable amount of information about their activities and policies that should be shared to journalists. This essential role of journalists and the news media in the political process therefore defines the workings of political communication (McNair, 2017; Bennett, 1996). While there are numerous professional, cultural and individual-level factors determining how the news either affect people's actions or how societal norms affect the news selection and production processes, Dickinson (2008) reaffirms that the understanding of such intricacies is crucial to evaluating the diverse perspectives on how the social intervention role of journalism applies in practice. In the same vein, Amazeen (2020) observes that a good comprehension of the approach for implementing the necessary interventions consistent with societal peculiarities is key to the effectiveness of journalism in resolving forms of social conflict arising from contentious politics in a multipolar context (Biazoto, 2011).

In an age of digitally networked politics where an expanding globalized public sphere has changed the landscape of political communication to allow political actors bypass

the established mainstream media in communicating their messages (McNair, 2017), peace journalism becomes a relevant theoretical model to provide a deeper understanding of how the role that journalists and the news media play in the political process can improve political communication. McGoldrick and Lynch (2000) highlighted the necessity of peace journalism as a social intervention that intersects the links between journalists, their sources, the news they produce and the consequences of their coverage, while additionally proposing that journalists need to be more sensitive and careful when incorporating the online political content produced by newsmakers as source material. Within the basic tenets of peace journalism, journalists should therefore assume more responsibility while reporting in a network society where conflict is experienced both intellectually and physically, and the media should produce news in a way that does not create more conflicts among the diverse politically-engaged users in the Twittersphere (Aluç, 2017).

A model developed by Johan Galtung in the 1960s seeking an alternative to redress the flaws in conventional norms of war/violence-escalatory reporting, peace journalism is an emergent approach to understanding and evaluating the social intervention role of journalists and the news media (Galtung, 2003; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007). The model thrives on Galtung's (1969) initial classification of conflict or violence into two: direct (e.g., physical assaults, genocide, bullying, maiming, killing, etc.) and indirect (i.e., cultural or structural, which does not include evidence of physical attack but induce psychological effects on the victims, such as hate speech, racism, sexism, etc.). However, its practical implementation transcends the boundaries of violent conflict situations mainly towards fostering nonviolent approaches for de-escalating conflict perceptions about contending sociopolitical issues (Kempf, 2019; Biazoto, 2011).

<b>VIOLENCE-WAR/VICTORY JOURNALISM</b>	<b>CONFLICT/PEACE JOURNALISM</b>
<p><b>I. VIOLENCE/WAR-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>focus on conflict arena, 2 parties, 1 goal (win), war general zero-sum orientation</p> <p>closed space, closed time; causes and effect in arena, who threw the first stone; poor in context</p> <p>focus only on visible effect of violence (killed, wounded and material damage)</p> <p>making wars opaque/secret</p> <p>“us-them” journalism, propaganda, voice, for “us”</p> <p>see “them” as the problem, focus on who prevails in war</p> <p>dehumanization of “them”; more so the worse the weapon</p> <p>reactive: waiting for violence to occur before reporting</p>	<p><b>I. CONFLICT-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>explore conflict formation, x parties, y goals, z issues general “win,win” orientation</p> <p>open space, open time; causes and outcomes anywhere, also in history/culture; rich in context</p> <p>focus also on invisible effects of violence (trauma and glory, damage to structure/culture)</p> <p>making conflicts transparent</p> <p>giving voice to all parties; empathy, understanding</p> <p>see conflict/war as problem, focus on conflict creativity</p> <p>humanization of all sides; more so the worse the weapons</p> <p>proactive: reporting also before violence/war occurs</p>
<p><b>II. PROPAGANDA-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>expose “their” untruths help “our” cover-ups/lies</p>	<p><b>II. TRUTH-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>expose untruths on all sides uncover all cover-ups</p>
<p><b>III. ELITE-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>focus on “their” violence and on “our” suffering; on able-bodied elite males</p> <p>give name of their evil-doer</p> <p>focus on elite peace-makers, being elite mouth-piece</p>	<p><b>III. PEOPLE-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>focus on violence by all sides and on suffering all over; also on women, aged, children,</p> <p>give name to all evil-doers</p> <p>focus on people peace-makers, giving voice to the voiceless</p>
<p><b>IV. VICTORY-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>peace = victory + cease-fire</p> <p>conceal peace-initiative, before victory is at hand</p> <p>focus on treaty, institution, the controlled society</p> <p>leaving for another war, return if the old flares up</p>	<p><b>IV. SOLUTION-ORIENTED</b></p> <p>peace=nonviolence+creativity</p> <p>highlight peace initiatives, also to prevent more war</p> <p>focus on structure, culture the peaceful society</p> <p>aftermath: resolution, reconstruction, reconciliation</p>

Figure 4: Galtung’s Classification of Violence/War and Conflict/Peace Journalism

Illustrating how journalistic outputs could either nourish peace or further polarize and encourage violent tendencies in [the network] society, the model delineates journalism's social intervention role into "peace/conflict-oriented and war/violence-oriented" (Galtung, 2003). To distinguish the two, Galtung and Fischer (2013) identify peace/conflict-oriented journalism as inclined towards *proactive reporting* that is (i) peace-oriented, (ii) truth-oriented, (iii) people-oriented, and (iv) solution-oriented – a coverage orientation poised to engendering "positive peace" (presence of cooperation) by addressing the root causes and effects of both direct and indirect forms of conflict or violence. On the other hand, war/violence-oriented journalism signifies *reactive reporting* that is (i) war-oriented, (ii) propaganda-oriented, (iii) elite-oriented, and (iv) victory-oriented – a coverage orientation engendering "negative peace" (passive co-existence) which promotes tricky impressions about the absence of direct violence while ignoring the invisible causes and effects of indirect forms of conflict or violence (Galtung, 1969). McGoldrick and Lynch (2000) proposed a set of 17 principles to explicate the practical applicability of peace journalism.

Given the aim of peace journalism to offer a peace-oriented and proactive approach of reporting conflicts, Gavilán (2011) affirms that peace journalism model could be considered from the theoretical foundation of Robert Entman's "framing theory" and the "political context model" of Gadi Wolsfeld. It is important to note that peace journalism is linked to the concept of framing or media discourse which deals with the manner of presentation and choice of language in the news.

### **2.7.1 News Framing through Peace Journalism Prism**

An entry point to peace journalism would be to acknowledge 'selectivity' and 'framing' as factors inherent to the news making process (Auwal & Ersoy, 2022). News is something people make, and compared with other consumer products, every

news story passes through the branding and packaging process to give it a distinctive pattern (Parenti, 1993). As product of journalism, news is therefore an invention of reality and a meaning-making process, with numerous factors influential in its production process and what taste it offers to the consumers (Schudson, 2003). The journalist's inclination regarding what issues and events to cover and the sources of information to rely on, are important ideological and professional decisions that influence news selectivity (Stromback, Karlsson, & Hopmann, 2012; O'Neill & Harcup, 2009). How then the journalist packages and presents the news – regarding the choice of language and other considerations – is further influenced by the narratives and aspects of facts emphasized by the sources that feed journalists with information (Entman, Matthes, & Pellicano, 2009; Miri, 2019). Although this debate is rooted in news production literature and particularly on the journalists' relationship with their sources, Entman (2003) situates it under framing, which he contextualized both as “an object of political power and strategy” and the “process of cascading network activation” where actors not only contribute “ideas” but also promote the spread of “frames.”

Considered through political communication prism, this relationship demonstrates the frame building process (Hänggli, 2012), which involves multilevel factors influencing the information sourcing and news production routines (Bennett, 1996). Additionally, Rodelo and Muñiz (2019) assert that the public perception of political reality is fundamentally a function of the “flow of frames” from politicians to journalists and subsequently to news content rather than a single-layered phenomenon. For political news, the process involves a series of scheming performances by political actors as sources of information who construct versions of reality about the political world (Pan & Kosicki, 2001), and journalists who as mirrors of political events, do not passively

convey the reality as constructed by politicians but also add something to amplify it (Parenti, 1993). As observed by D'Angelo et al. (2019) and Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2012), framing offers a useful theoretical framework [for peace journalism researchers] to comprehend how such influence ensue between journalists and political elites in their attempts to organize and assign meanings to everyday reality by emphasizing aspects of an unfolding strip of events. D'Angelo (2002) further elaborates that framing as a “multiparadigmatic” research program however, becomes a valuable tool to investigate how news coverage portrays certain aspects of political processes and events to organize and shape public opinion around such portrayals (Brugman, Burgers, & Steen, 2017). Figure 5 below illustrates the elements that influence media coverage and framing of political issues and events.

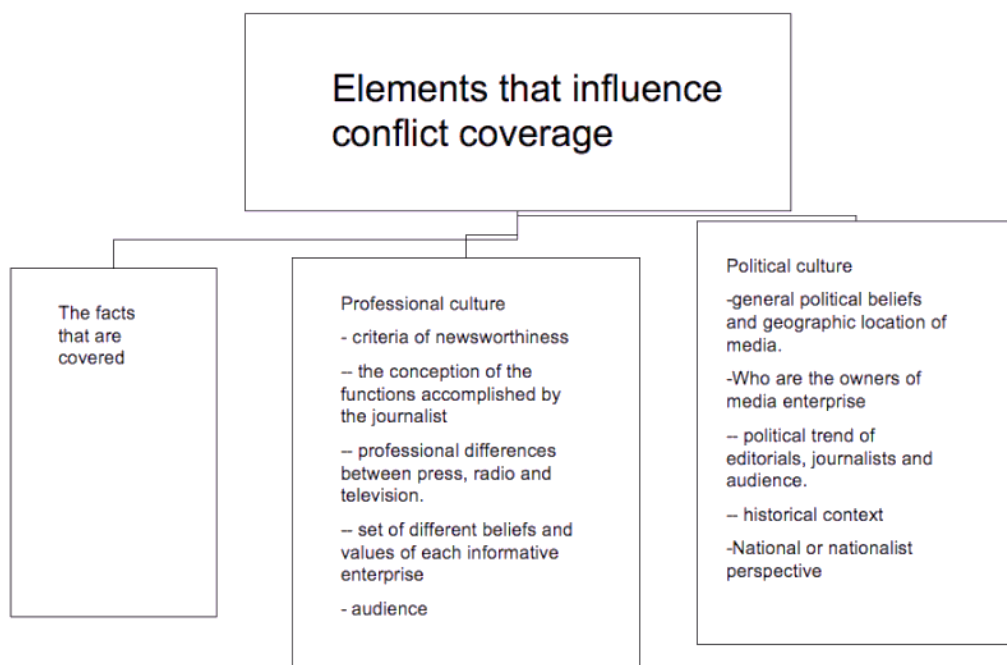


Figure 5: The ‘Political Context Model’ of Framing (Gavilán, 2011)

In peace journalism, conflict does not signify “war.” Instead, the dominant norms of bias and sensationalism exhibited in conventional coverage of conflicting political

situations legitimize the cause of conflict escalating to “war/violence” in society (Lynch, Hackett, & Shaw, 2011; Michelis, 2018). Galtung’s model considers the conventional norms of war/violence-oriented news coverage and framing from the sports journalism perspective, where the focus is on “winning not as everything, but the only thing.” In applying this to war events, the media for example, report one party as the “winner” and the other as “loser;” and this simply serves to escalate violence. On the other hand, peace/conflict-oriented journalism is considered from the angle of health reporting, which goes beyond merely prescribing medications against a disease, but also to educate victims about the root causes while sensitizing them on the precautionary/safety measures against further disease outbreak. As a peaceful approach to conflict situations, the media should for example, seek common-grounds between competing groups by framing the events from a “win-win” (no victor, no vanquished) orientation to de-escalate violence (Galtung, 2003; Auwal & Ersoy, 2022).

Because news framing is part of the process of “constructing the political spectacles” (Edelman, 1988) and “can have subtle but powerful effects on the audience even to the point of helping to overthrow a president” (Tankard, 2001, p. 96), politicians often show mistrust and accuse the media of bias in reporting about political subjects and events (Williams, 2003). Consequently, political actors around the world profoundly rely on computer-mediated communication platforms such as Twitter to frame their political messages and influence news coverage, which in turn shape public opinion. While the frames used in presenting political news purveys the landscape for legitimizing sociopolitical polarization to result in violent responses, peace journalism offers some ethical principles – which journalists and news media should observe while composing the news (Ersoy, 2017), to create the grounds for accepting

“nonviolent” approach to conflict resolution among competing parties contributing to reach further and “deeper resolutions” (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Galtung, 2003). In addition to providing journalists with “alternative” ways of understanding and (re)framing conflict situations and contributing to the resolution process through the language of peace in news reporting (İrvan, 2006), these ethical principles offer a framework for implementing peace journalism. Hence, improving the significant ability of journalists to (re)frame the news in manners that provide society with adequate information to inspire nonviolent approach to conflict situations (Hyde-Clarke, 2011).

In an age of digitally networked politics, this calls for a rethink about news framing research (D’Angelo, et al., 2019) in relation to how the discursive strategies in the Twitter-based campaign communication activity of politicians contribute to the news frame-building process of mainstream media and the polarizing effects on society. For peace journalism, the need to further expand its scope and applicability toward assessing the trends of electoral campaign communication in the political Twittersphere and particularly in a multipolar context also becomes essential.

### **2.7.2 Strategies for Implementing Peace Journalism Values to the Political Twittersphere**

In an era of partisanship amidst digitally networked politics, there is a myriad of problematic issues that bear on the functioning of democracy (Perloff, 2021). Empirical evidence abounds to suggest the contribution political communication strategies of politicians make to aggravating social divides into antagonistic politics, which in some instances result in violent conflicts. For instance, the study by Mbah, Nwangwu and Ugwu (2019) reveals the role of hate speech and exclusionary politics in exacerbating the division reflected in the rivalries between members of different



political groups in society. Seiyefa (2017) affirms the sporadic violent conflicts resulting from disagreements among political rivals as deeply rooted in elite political culture and approach to governance.

With the spate of politically-motivated violence in societies across the Global South, de Albuquerque (2019) rightly argues that actors in the political and democratization process – such as the media, political parties and leaders – could be conspiring against democracy through their actions rather than protecting it. Given that the core principle of democratic peace tends to protect human rights and reduce the incidence of mass atrocities while serving the national security interests of democratic systems (Delahunty & Yoo, 2010), its entrenchment in a political system is not the sole responsibility of the media. It therefore amounts to stating that politicians are key stakeholders in the efforts to entrench democratic peace, because most cases of violent conflicts are adjudged to be triggered by polarizing political discourses. Entrenching democratic peace in an era of digitally networked politics requires the collective efforts of the media and other actors in the political process. Hence the need to create a shared value sphere through the intervention of peace journalism (Ersoy & Miller, 2020). Accordingly, figure 6 below demonstrates the peace journalism strategy for creating a public value sphere in the network society.

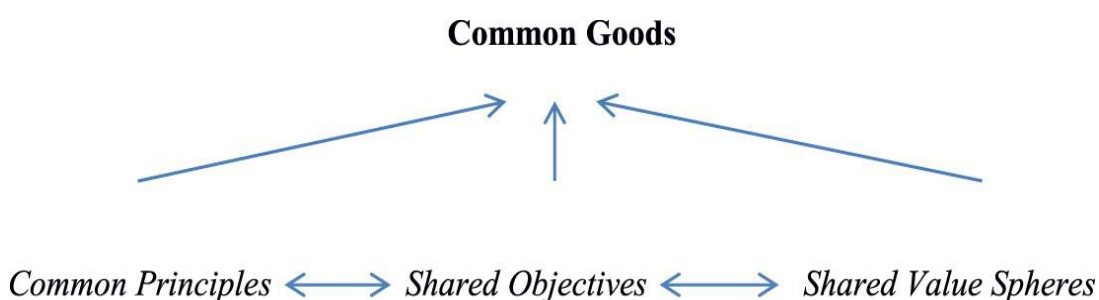


Figure 6: Peace Journalism Public Value Sphere (Ersoy & Miller, 2020)

It is against this backdrop that Ersoy and Miller (2020, p. 404) expand the peace journalism model, proposing a “new public sphere” where politicians, journalists and news organizations can utilize not only to amplify political discourses and boost content visibility but also to create “a public value sphere” of commonality and networked collaborative engagements among social groups that otherwise are cut-off by extreme political views. With regard to the political Twittersphere, Ersoy and Miller propose a list of six important (re)framing strategies to demonstrate how peace journalism can contribute to achieving positive “democratic peace” through a public value sphere that creates common grounds for all stakeholders as an approach to conflict resolution amidst growing concerns about the political Twittersphere causing actual physical damage. These (re)framing strategies offer a “multi-level and multi-dimension approach” to news coverage, balancing critical awareness with objective reporting of the political environment: (i) *Reframe to avoid using negative language* by adopting the (positive) language of peace in the news. (ii) *Reframe to avoid blames about who was ‘guilty’ or ‘victim’ from past incidents*. Instead, concentrate more on the future. (iii) *Reframe to avoid hostile portrayals* of parties by focusing on neutral portrayals. (iv) *Reframe to avoid focusing on individual interests* to community or shared interests. (v) *Reframe to avoid complaint about past events* to focus on vision about the future. (vi) *Reframe to avoid blaming each other* by focusing on request (Ersoy and Miller, 2020, p. 398).

In a society where the political discourses of politicians and journalistic orientations of the media remain under question, the role of peace journalism in reflecting the political landscape as well as entrenching democratic peace becomes inestimable.

## **Chapter 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter logically presents information about the research philosophy upon which the case and sample selection, data collection and analysis techniques were determined in accordance with the main objectives and questions guiding the study.

#### **3.1 Case Definition**

Case definition is different from the “case study method” as a type of qualitative research. At every level of research endeavor, there is the need for a clear definition or description of a bounded and integrated area where an investigation is focused. The case definition is, in most instances, aligned with the research problem, scope, objectives and population. Case definition helps in understanding the complexities of the phenomena, how they relate, and the extent to which the research explores them (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010; Atkinson, et al., 2021). A case definition therefore becomes important to explicitly define the research focus and what phenomena or whom exactly you are studying as a researcher.

##### **3.1.1 Case Definition of the Current Study**

This study marks an important departure from the familiar pattern of previous political communication research. Accordingly, the study focuses on Nigeria’s political and media environments as constituent parts of the mainstream and virtual public spaces, thereby exploring how these democratic institutions contribute towards the realization of the current sociopolitical realities in the country. To put this into perspective, it

therefore becomes necessary to define the historical trajectories of the political environment in the light of the evolution and transformation in media routines.

As a multiparty democracy, Nigeria has held successive elections leading to regular transition of governments at a four-year interval since 1999, and the role of media in the process has consistently changed alongside the nature of political landscape. Previous studies as cited in the literature reveal the trends across different electoral periods in Nigeria. As politicians and political parties engage in electioneering activities to convince the citizens about their ideologies and plans, the news media play significant role in the coverage of such activities in addition to evaluating the performance of successive governments toward fulfilling the democratic obligations of aiding the citizens to make informed decisions as well as keeping power in check.

With Nigeria's Internet penetration rate rising from 1.5 percent in 2004 to 51.0 percent in 2022, social media platforms have increasingly become relevant for information sourcing and news dissemination (Kolawole & Umejei, 2022; Kemp, 2022). This development has opened up the political space for an improved participation in political debates towards advancing good governance. The trends of campaigning activities during Nigeria's 2019 general elections, as Ojo, Ibeh and Kiegehe observe, were "expected to exert significant influence on democratic practices" (2019, p. 343), considering how the use of Twitter for election campaigning increased momentarily among political elites and thus transforming the practice of journalism in the country (Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022). However, much is still unknown about the trends from previous electioneering activities – which should guide the understanding of what has changed or emerged from the campaign discourses of politicians and the news orientations of the media, particularly as the country progresses into another

electioneering period. While it is impossible to detach the contribution of news media from the political process particularly in terms of amplifying the dominant political discourses, Kolawole and Umejei (2022) argue, the major consequence is that “the media sometimes shirks its obligation to be objective in its coverage of politics in particular and society on general.” The above core issues addressed in the current study however, constitute the case definition.

### **3.2 Research Methodology**

This study adopts the *qualitative* methodology guided by philosophical traditions from the *interpretive paradigm*. As an “umbrella term” covering a broad spectrum of techniques, philosophical perspectives and designs (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020), the thrust of qualitative research methodology lies within the attempts to understand how meanings are constructed around the social context of individual experiences. The strength of this methodology is often grounded in the theoretical and philosophical stance employed for understanding the multiple, usually changing interpretations of reality that people construct about a phenomenon at a particular point in time within certain context, based on their interactions with the social world (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Researchers across disciplines have developed wide-ranging traditions for conducting qualitative studies, making it more of a multidisciplinary research approach which “does not belong to a single discipline.”

#### **3.2.1 Characteristics of Qualitative Methodology**

There are certain characteristics distinguishing qualitative from the quantitative research methodology. An important point to consider is that people’s understanding of the social world and interpretations of reality are neither fixed, unilaterally agreed upon, nor measurable, and thus it is not easy to draw conclusions by merely relying on numerical data as is the case with quantitative research (Frechette, Bitzas, Aubry,

Kilpatrick, & Lavoie-Tremblay, 2020). While quantitative research aims at quantifying problems by collecting data from a large sample size to extrapolate the results, qualitative research seeks a contextualized understanding of phenomena by raising questions about beliefs and actions – to identify their intersections and how power relations occur in the process of the construction of meanings and knowledge among various groups attempting to advance their interests while oppressing those of other groups (Flick, 2018; Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020). Qualitative studies are often driven by the intrinsic need to adequately explain a phenomenon especially where there is a lack of theory or an existing one fails to do so. This characterizes the process as *inductive* – where the researcher collects data to build concepts, theories or hypotheses, rather than deriving hypotheses to be tested as is the case for quantitative which is *deductive* (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Considering its reliance on human instrument [i.e., the researcher as the primary instrument] of data collection and analysis, some critics raise concerns about the possibilities of biases or subjectivities as part of the major shortcomings; indicative of the products of qualitative research as richly *descriptive*, with words and sometimes visual materials used rather than numbers to convey the researcher’s findings (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Unlike quantitative research, “the rigor and coherence of analytical processes in interpretive description,” as suggested by Thorne, Kirkham and O’Flynn-Magee (2004), places the qualitative methodologies at the heart of contribution to knowledge generation. It is important to add that the nature of data in qualitative research could be in the form of *quotes* from a document, *field notes* from particular observations, *excerpts* from interviews or from videotapes, *user-generated* social media content [i.e., posts, tweets, etc.], or a combination thereof to support the

researcher's descriptive interpretations of the findings derived from the phenomenon being investigated (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

The qualitative research methodology therefore becomes quite suitable considering the main goals of this study: to examine how and to what extent the Twitter-based political discourses of prominent contenders as well as the journalistic orientations in Twitter-based news posts of mainstream newspapers coverage of Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign foment sociopolitical polarization and pose a threat to democratic peace.

### **3.3 Research Approach and Design**

The qualitative methodology has proven to be highly flexible in providing a wide range of analytical techniques for investigating human phenomena "to generate findings and put them into context" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). This flexibility affords researchers the benefits of adopting a mixed approach or design in terms of data collection, sampling, and data analysis techniques as consistent with the research objectives, thereby enabling a systematic study of the phenomenon (Jensen & Helles, 2019; Jensen, 2021). This study therefore adopts the qualitative approach of discourse and content analyses as consistent with its objectives.

#### **3.3.1 Discourse Analysis**

As a qualitative research approach widely used across disciplines, discourse analysis pays attention to examining the use of language as a constitutive element of the medium of everyday interaction by which reality is socially constructed (Brown & Yule, 1983; Gill, 2005). Because language is a social product and the primary tool of communication which plays a key role in the production of meaning (Jensen, 2021), the task of discourse analysis revolves around understanding the use of language in communicative practices and its ideological significance to the production and

reproduction process of social identity (Paltridge, 2012). Discourse analysis therefore considers the patterns of language as the main object of analysis enabling researchers explore beyond the level of sentences [*manifest* meanings of texts or speech] to reveal the social and cultural contexts in which certain language choices are made [*latent* meanings] as well as to understand the ‘rule of the game’ that language users set in their everyday spoken and written interactions (Hyland & Paltridge, 2013).

In designing a discourse analysis project, it is important to consider the research questions in relation to data availability as well as a clearly defined framework for data collection and analysis (Paltridge, 2012). It is based on such considerations that discourse analysis becomes useful towards unearthing the dominant political discourses through the analysis of language use in the tweets of prominent contenders along with the underlying sociocultural and ideological consequences of such political discourses during the Nigeria’s 2019 presidential campaign (van Dijk, 2006; Salkind, 2010).

### **3.3.2 Content Analysis**

Research has recognized content analysis as a highly flexible approach (Neuendorf, 2017) for studying media portrayals of sociopolitical realities through mediated content such as news and their effects on human behavior (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). In view of the mediating role of language as a tool for the production of meaning, a first point of entry is to affirm the significant relationship between discourse and news as political and sociocultural practices. Content analysis focuses on exploring how the content of mediated communication [text or speech] is presented and the perspective taken by the message initiator to suggest a particular scheme of interpretation around social events (Paltridge, 2012).



This approach not only affords a logical pattern for understanding the orientations of media coverage but also enables researchers to analyze what Jensen (2021) describes as “media discourse” – expounding how diverse elements in the content production process impact the audiences’ cognitive perception of issues and meanings suggested in the content. Tuchman (2002) opines that such interfering element of media discourse are accessible in practice as a set of “interpretive packages” or the “central organizing idea” that give meaning to an issue or event.

This study therefore employs media content analysis to interrogate the social and ideological functions of language as well as how it might be strategically used in *news* content, key *speeches* and other public records or organizational documents (Kelsey & Way, 2021). A key distinguishing feature with discourse analysis, according to Johnston (1995), is that news content analysis is performed at the media institutional level exclusively to examine how language is used as a “mental orientation” device for organizing perception and interpretations suggesting how the public should make sense of relevant events (Goffman, 1986). At the level of news production, content analysis explores the internal professional and external political or economic factors such as information sources that influence the meaning-making process (Winslow, 2017).

Contemporary research demonstrates how news content analysis has become a highly flexible method used in qualitative, quantitative and sometimes mixed modes (White & Marsh, 2006). Considering that the research questions guiding the current study cannot be adequately answered by simply relying on the frequency of occurrence of a particular pattern of presentation in terms of the choice of words and phrases in news content, adopting the qualitative content analysis becomes pertinent. Hence,

facilitating the data analysis process to ascertain the journalistic orientations reflected in the Twitter-based news posts of mainstream newspapers towards deducing the ideological leanings of media discourses with regards to the influence of information sources in the news frame-building process as well as the polarizing effects on society.

### **3.4 Study Population**

As a principle applicable to any scientific inquiry, it is inevitable that the group of individuals, objects or content that share a common characteristic for inclusion as constituent part of the subject of study are clearly defined. Accordingly, two factors become significant in determining the study population for qualitative research – including the subject area and the time frame which should align logically with the research questions and objectives (Jensen, 2021; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

The population of this study consists of *two subsets* drawn from the Nigerian political and media environments within the time frame of the 2019 presidential election campaign. First, Nigeria is considered as a multiparty state with diverse political ideologies. According to records made available by Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), a total of 73 registered political parties nominated candidates who contested in the 2019 presidential election (INEC, 2022). Report of the 2019 general election additionally reveals a total of 84,004,084 (in millions) registered voters, of which 42,938,458 representing 51.11 percent were youths aged between 18-34 across 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) constituting the six geo-political zones of the country (INEC, 2020).

Moreover, the media landscape in Nigeria is diverse in terms of ownership structure, editorial policy and content coverage. It is important to note the country-level data

deficit as a limiting factor to such attempt at accurately defining the constituent number of media outlets in Nigeria. According to the estimate of Reporters Without Borders (2022), there are around 100 publications in the print sector, and a total of 625 functional radio stations and television channels as disclosed in a statement issued by the Director-General of Nigeria's National Broadcasting Commission (The *Punch*, 2021).

### **3.5 Sample Selection**

In qualitative and other research methods, obtaining a representative sample from the population becomes necessary, as all the entities of the study population may not be readily accessible to the researcher (Jensen, 2021). There are systematic techniques guiding the inclusion and exclusion process of the population subsets as representative sample in a study. The applicable procedure notably aligned with qualitative research are categorized under the *nonprobability* sampling techniques which allow researchers to select a representative sample based on criteria fitting to the main research goals, research questions and time frame (Jensen & Helles, 2019; Atkinson & Delamont, 2011).

Accordingly, the current study relied on the *purposive* nonprobability sampling method in selecting two prominent contenders in the 2019 presidential election: Atiku Abubakar of the leading opposition Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and Muhammadu Buhari of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC). Since the country's transition to democracy----and in spite of its multiparty structure----there is the continued domination of political activities by the PDP (1999-2015) and APC (2015-to-date), which justifies the selection of their flag-bearers in the 2019 presidential election as representative sample of the population subset covering the Nigerian political

environment (Obe, 2019). Having consistently participated in political activities since 1999, these candidates gained momentum in terms of popularity, influence and relevance to Nigerian politics. For example, Atiku served as Nigeria's Vice-President from 1999-2007 while Buhari served as military Head of State between 1983-1985 before returning as a two-term democratically-elected president in 2015 and 2019. Out of 73 candidates in the 2019 presidential election, the selected two command significant influence on public discourse in the Twittersphere owing to their active use of Twitter for political communication and having accrued millions of followers compared with other candidates (see Table 3.1). The selection of these candidates was not to infer that accruing large Twitter followers indicates electoral victory, but to explore the dominant political discourses in their tweeting activities during the campaign period. Auwal and Ersoy (2022, p.12) expound the ethnoreligious affiliation of "both candidates as indigenes of the Hausa/Fulani Muslim-dominated Northern region while their running mates are from the Igbo/Yoruba Christian-dominated Southern region" – a composition which is in proportion to the main objective of the current study.

To select a representative sample from the population subset covering the media landscape, this study employed the *convenience* nonprobability sampling method, and thus choosing three national newspapers: *Daily Trust*, the *Punch* and *Vanguard*. In addition to being diverse in terms of geographical spread and content coverage, these newspapers are among the "best known" in the country (Reporters Without Borders, 2022). The unifying element among them is that they are privately-owned and rank among the most read English newspapers accessible to a growing online audience across the country (Alexa.com, 2020; European Journalism Centre, 2022). Importantly, the newspapers were selected based on considerations of their extent of

reliance on Twitter for information sourcing and content sharing during the 2019 presidential campaign (Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022). Rather than for the purposes of generalizing the findings, this also enables the researcher to explore the journalistic orientations reflected in the news they shared on Twitter because the three newspapers represent diverse ideological and political interests across the social divides of the country. For example, the *Punch* and *Vanguard*---owned by southern private investors with operational bases in the southern region which is Christian-dominated--- would obviously differ in their editorial policies compared to *Daily Trust*, owned by northern private investors and considered to be the voice of northern Nigeria and pro-Muslim (Ette, 2018).

### **3.6 Data Collection**

The increased relevance of Twitter in contemporary politics and journalism has transformed the platform into a rich data source that researchers now count on to draw inferences about different social phenomena (Ahmed, Using Twitter as a data source an overview of social media research tools, 2021). The dataset analyzed in Twitter-based research are often collected from the platform-based activity and user-generated content of individual and corporate users (Giglietto, Luca, & Davide, 2012). This study also relied on the verified Twitter accounts of the selected candidates and newspapers for data-sourcing. The candidates' and newspapers' tweeting activities were monitored over a four-month period covering 18 November 2018 as the official date for the commencement of presidential campaign – to 28 February 2019 following the announcement of presidential election results. This time frame was specifically chosen to cover the 90-days prior-to-poll campaign period stipulated by law (Electoral Act, 2010). It is also important to note that the researcher extended the monitoring period to include few days prior to and after the actual study time frame (i.e., 11 November

2018 until 03 March 2019) for the purpose of accuracy and to reduce coverage error in the data gathering process.

Table 3.1: Twitter profiles monitored for data collection

Accounts	Date joined Twitter	No. of followers (in millions)	Shared tweets since joining Twitter	Monitored tweets
@atiku	Aug 2010	2.3	5,993	240
@MBuhari	Dec 2014	2.4	4,794	216
@daily_trust	Aug 2009	1.4	523,800	3,442
@MobilePunch	Mar 2009	3.4	428,200	3,221
@vanguardngrnews	May 2009	2.6	525,200	3,060
Total		12.4	1,487,987	10,179

\*\*\* NOTE: The number of *followers* and *shared tweets* represent the figures as of the time of data gathering and are bound to change frequently.

The tweets utilized as the main objects of analysis in this study were obtained directly from the verified Twitter accounts of the two candidates and three newspapers using a combination of Twitter Advanced Search API (Application Programming Interface) and the Google Chrome extension – FireShot (lite version) and iMacros (personal edition) to archive the search results in portable document format (pdf) for easy reference (Ahmed, Bath, & Demartini, 2018; Hanusch & Bruns, 2017). Twitter API enabled the researcher to systematically collect the tweets (Araujo & Meer, 2020; Kapidzic, Neuberger, Stieglitz, & Mirbabaie, 2019) as neither the candidates nor newspapers had tweeted to put the campaign period beyond the reach of the API (Vis, 2013; Giglietto, Luca, & Davide, 2012 ); although search parameters differ across the two data streams (McGregor, Mourão & Molyneux, 2017).

For the candidates, a comprehensive search was conducted on their profiles specifying the accounts *[from:@MBuhari, OR from:@atiku]* and dates *[since:2018-11-18 until:2019-02-28]* to generate  $n=448$  tweets as included in the sample. For the newspapers, the search parameters were filtered to include the keywords *[search for: election, OR Buhari, OR Atiku, OR presidential, OR PDP, OR APC]* from the accounts *[from:@daily\_trust, OR from:@MobilePunch, OR from:@vanguardngrnews]* using the same dates *[since:2018-11-18 until:2019-02-28]*. Initial search from the newspapers' accounts yielded  $N=5,263$  news posts, which additionally calls for the need to apply some inclusion and exclusion criteria to reduce the news posts into a size that allows for data saturation. As Boddy (2016) notes, qualitative research is often purposive in selecting a small sample size based on relevance to the phenomenon under investigation and particularly to enable in-depth analysis (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018). The researcher therefore resorted to stratifying the news posts into four layers according to the months covering the study period thereby choosing  $n=50$  news posts from each month, totaling  $N=600$  across the three newspapers. This produced a sample size of  $N=1,048$  (comprising  $n=448$  from the candidates and  $n=600$  from newspapers).

### **3.7 Data Analysis Procedure**

Because of Twitter's 280-character messaging format, a collection of tweets generated as research data become handy for qualitative analysis. However, the analysis of such dataset requires *coding*; a procedure for sorting the data to determine the unit of analysis (e.g., full texts of the tweets or news articles, words, individual sentences, or images) and to derive a set of analytical categories for presenting the results through combination codes that indicate common characteristics in the data (Jensen, 2021).

The analysis of dataset in this study consists of two levels of coding. First, the candidates' tweets were carefully scrutinized to derive three coding categories using Benoit's (2017) *Functional Theory of Political Campaign Discourses*: (1) *acclaims* (enhancing credentials through self-praise or positive utterances), (2) *attacks* (downgrading opponents' credentials through criticisms or negative utterances), (3) *defenses* (responding to opponents' attacks through rebuttals or disproving claims). To ensure exhaustiveness and mutual inclusiveness of the dataset (Chadwick, Bahar, & Albrecht, 1984; Wimmer & Dominick, 2011), a miscellaneous category – *neutral* was created for the inclusion of other tweets (e.g., birthday wishes, condolences, etc.) which fell within the examined period but could not be pigeonholed into the three main coding categories (see Appendix A). These coding categories aided the process of identifying the dominant political discourses in candidates' tweets. Moreover, analytical framework for presenting the results based on these coding categories were drawn from Galtung's model to develop an interpretive approach for understanding the attributes of *conflict-escalatory* political discourses (through the use of binary and dehumanizing language) and the polarizing effects on society (Hussain, 2020; Shinar, 2009).

The second level of coding relied on Brüggemann's (2014) *Journalistic Frame-Building Practices* to develop two coding categories for the newspapers' Twitter-based news posts: (1) *frame-sending*, and (2) *frame-setting*. Criteria for inclusion under the frame-sending category considered the verbatim quotation of wordings from candidates' tweets and source attribution, indicating the passive role of conveying the frames proposed by candidates. For the frame-setting category, the coders identified phrases or sentences that were refined from candidates' tweets to infuse the journalist or news outlet' cognitive patterns of interpretation, indicating the active role of



providing alternative frames and “mental orientations” to those suggested by candidates through their tweets (see Appendix B). In addition, the analytical categories for presenting the results of coding were determined based on the two broad categories of *peace/conflict-oriented* and *war/violence-oriented* journalism as conceptualized in Galtung’s (2003) model. Under each category, the model provides four units of analyzing journalistic orientations reflected in the newspapers’ Twitter-based news posts (see Appendix C). For the peace/conflict-oriented [conflict de-escalation] journalism, are (1) peace-oriented, (2) truth-oriented, (3) people-oriented, and (4) solution-oriented. The war/violence-oriented [conflict escalation] journalism comprises (1) war-oriented, (2) propaganda-oriented, (3) elite oriented, and (4) victory-oriented. This presents an opportunity to ascertain whether the North–South hostility exists as an inherent feature of the mainstream media environment or one which has extended to the new public sphere.

### **3.7.1 Reliability**

The two levels of data categorization guided the researcher in coding the dataset by placing each item as a unit of analysis under the appropriate code (category). To ensure the validity and reliability of the results, 10% ( $n=100$ ) of the sample as well as the coding guide were issued to two Ph.D. colleagues who repeated the coding procedure to compare the results, achieving consistency “at a nominal level” based on the theoretical saturation that guided the data categorization process. The reliability test based on Cohen’s (1960) kappa coefficient  $k=(Po-Pc/N-Pc)$  reported a 0.85 kappa across the coding units. O’Connor and Joffe (2020) observe that this is particularly common in qualitative research where the intercoder-reliability relates to the stability of findings across time, contexts, and research instrument.

### 3.8 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

A good scientific inquiry should have continuity and change as integral to its defining features regardless of potential limitations (Carnot & Adams, 1973; Shirani & Henwood, 2011). Accordingly, this study follow-on from a master's level research to expand the scope of data analysis due to discernible limitations in connection with unexplored theoretical gaps. Although based largely on the same dataset obtained from Twitter, each of the two research projects is unique in its own right. The master's thesis: *Setting the Agenda through Twitter: Assessing News Framing of Events in Nigeria's 2019 Electioneering*, examines the role of Twitter during Nigeria's 2019 general election campaigns—basing its theoretical construct on framing and agenda-setting in relation to the influence of political tweets on media coverage of campaign. Having realized the multidimensional role that Twitter plays in political communication and journalism, this Ph.D. level research becomes a follow-up which is grounded in the theoretical foundations of the public sphere, network society and peace journalism—to explore the political discourses emanating from tweets shared by candidates during the same election period as well as the ripple effects on the frame-building practices of mainstream media; translating into a likely polarizing effects on society.

It is also important to note the potential limitations of the current study. The study relied on candidates' tweeting activities to deduce dominant political discourses, and this stands as a limitation since the political discourses originating from other campaign communication platforms and strategies might not have included in this study. News stories posted on Twitter feeds produce a valuable snippet to ascertain the journalistic orientations of selected newspapers through the occurrence of frame-

building practices. However, this does not apply to the entirety of news coverage during the campaign period because the news outlets published and shared other content on their newsprints and websites, which might also not have included in this study and thus posing a limitation. In compliance with the publication and graduation requirements of the University's Research and Publication Ethics Board, two scientific articles were published out of the master's and Ph.D. research.<sup>1</sup> There is a possibility of publishing more articles from the M.A. and Ph.D. studies—at least two additional articles are still under review with other SSCI journals as of the time of submitting this dissertation.

This research was carried out in compliance with the regulations of the Institute of Graduate Studies and Research (IGSR). All forms related to data collection, thesis formatting and so forth were completed and approved by the research Supervisor and Thesis Monitoring Committee before submission to the IGSR through the Faculty subcommittee of the Research and Publication Ethics Board. The study also complied with other ethical standards relating to data-sourcing from the Internet and social media platforms—such as privacy, public availability of data, informed consent, and appropriation of others' personal stories (Sharf, 1999). Twitter's terms of service and privacy policy which govern how users may access and use the platform are also included (Ahmed, Bath, & Demartini, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> (i) **From M.A. thesis:** Ahmad Muhammad Auwal, Metin Ersoy & Tamar Haruna Dambo (2022) Influence of Political Tweets on Campaign Coverage: Building the News Agenda in Twittersphere, *Journalism Practice*, 16:1, 103-121, doi: 10.1080/17512786.2020.1805793.

(ii) **From Ph.D. dissertation:** Ahmad Muhammad Auwal & Metin Ersoy (2022) Peace Journalism Strategy for Covering Online Political Discourses in a Multipolar Society and the New Public Sphere, *Information Development*, 38:1, 6-22, doi: 10.1177/0266666920967056.

## **Chapter 4**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS**

This chapter includes a detailed presentation of the two subsets of research data obtained from Twitter. The results of data analysis and findings deduced from the period covering Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign also constitute an integral part of the chapter.

#### **4.1 Discourse Analysis of Candidates' Twitter-based Campaign Communication**

The discourse analysis of tweets reveals a diverse use of language in the Twitter-based political campaign communication of candidates during Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign. Although not characterized by any special structural, stylistic or rhetorical features (including special metaphors, texts or sentence structures, etc.), a discourse mainly becomes political when it deals with matters of general public interests/affairs as well as the activities of politicians and political parties (Jager, 2008). Four hundred and forty-eight ( $n=448$ ) tweets posted by Atiku and Buhari were analyzed with the aim to discover the dominant political discourses in their Twitter activity. The results in Table 4.1 provide a summary of the discourse patterns in candidates' tweets using William Benoit's functional theory of communication in political campaign.

Table 4.1: Anatomy of political discourses in candidates' tweets

			<i>Tweeting candidates</i>		
			@MBuhari	@atiku	Total
<i>Discourse patterns</i>	Acclaims	<i>N</i>	142	108	250
		%	31.7	24.1	55.8
	Attacks	<i>N</i>	34	74	108
		%	7.6	16.5	24.1
	Defenses	<i>N</i>	15	12	27
		%	3.3	2.7	6.0
	Neutral	<i>N</i>	23	40	63
		%	5.1	8.9	14.1
Total	<i>N</i>	214	234	448	
	%	47.8	52.2	100.0	

#### 4.1.1 Analyzing Candidates' Tweets as Elements of Discursive Practices

Exploring Twitter-based political discourses poses two distinct theoretical issues: how to dissect a tweet and what technological affordances characterize the Twittersphere as a space where the tweet is produced. Achieving this by means of discourse analysis necessitates the understanding of Twittersphere as a social structure that people use to produce meanings within wider social practices, with the tweets embeded as tools that structure everyday interactions toward the production of meanings (Bennett, 2022). The expediency and predominant use of Twitter for political engagements delineate the Twittersphere as a *political playground* similar to a *soccer pitch* where politicians as *players* showcase themselves to boost recognition among the citizens as *spectators* towards building the necessary political image and gaining the momentum (Conway-Silva, Filer, Kenski, & Tsetsi, 2018)—which contribute to shaping the public perception of a political candidate, party or ideology (Conway, Kenski, & Wang, 2015).

Political campaigns involve a set of pre-planned communication activities designed to impact certain behavioral changes over a specified period, as well as to gain mass support of the citizens through their votes in favor of a specific candidate or political party (Douglas & Cardillo, 1985). In planning campaign communication, politicians use a set of tools which are administered to influence people's political views primarily through the medium of talk and other textual means (Harre, 1985; Jager, 2008). This set of "tools" become handy for politicians in the execution of a complex set of discursive activities, which Jensen (2021) refers to as "language games."

In connection with the analytical framework drawn from Benoit's functional theory of campaign communication as evident from the results in Table 4.1, the two presidential candidates adopted different discursive strategies in publicizing their political agenda and ideologies either to build good reputations or to defend and influence the public perception of their personality by refuting other claims that portray them negatively. Similar to a real-world soccer tournament where players rely on defensive, attacking and other strategies to have greater control of the game toward winning the competition, Benoit's functional theory offers the metaphoric understanding of politics and discourse as "games of strategy" in which politicians exploit the discursive practices of "acclaiming," "attacking" and "defending" through the language they use around the practice of campaigning to gain political advantage (Benoit, Blamley & Pier, 2000; Gee, 2011). These strategic language games basically serve two main functions enabling politicians to acclaim, attack or defend their: (1) past achievements in office and what they intend to achieve further; and (2) personality in terms of positive qualities and reputation. When candidates align themselves with particular problem definitions or treatment recommendations (policy), the citizens' perception of their reputation (character) are most likely influenced (Benoit, 2017).

During Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaigning, such language games manifest across the analyzed tweets, as the results in Table 4.1 indicate. For example, @MBuhari's tweets—mainly dominated by political discourses which were acclaiming ( $n=142$ ; 31.7%)—demonstrate how his campaign tilted fervently towards showcasing past achievements and pledges of better performance, to enhance his re-election bid. This can be deduced further from the excerpts of tweets below:

- (1) @MBuhari [17/Dec/2018]: “We will continue to remind Nigerians of the situation we met the country in, in 2015, and what we have been able to achieve since then, with the resources available to us. Our unparalleled focus on infrastructure, delivering transport, power and water projects across the country.”
- (2) @MBuhari [20/Dec/2018]: “Our administration has a deliberate policy to close Nigeria's significant infrastructural deficit. And so today I opened the new Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport Terminal, the first Airport Terminal to be connected to a rail transport in Nigeria, and in West Africa.”
- (3) @MBuhari [10/Feb/2019]: “I humbly ask for your support in the coming election to enable us move to the NEXT LEVEL & consolidate on the successes recorded in making Nigeria a better place. I don't take your support for granted. We will continue to work to protect your interest & deliver our mandate.”

The narratives in excerpts 1 and 2 above apparently reveal the use of language intended at acclaiming what the Buhari-led administration has been able to achieve in terms of policy implementation compared with the country's state of affairs prior to his ascension to the presidency in 2015. Moreover, the latent intent of the use of language in those tweets could be one aimed at scoring political points to regain power or sway, especially at the expense of other candidates in the contest. Moving further, the discourse in excerpt 3 demonstrates a persuasive use of language in appealing to the Nigerian citizens to give the Buhari-led government an additional mandate to

consolidate on the acclaimed successes recorded in transforming the country to the #NEXT LEVEL of prosperity rather than going back to what he referred to as the “tainted past.” Excerpt from a tweet at the campaign launch illustrates: @MBuhari [19/Nov/2019]: “The next four years will be quite significant for Nigeria. We are now faced with a choice: To keep on building a new Nigeria or to go back to its tainted past which favoured only an opportunistic few.” The overall intent can be deduced from the above excerpts in which Buhari attempts to prove that he is better than other candidates seeking for votes to succeed him as Nigeria’s president.

The practice of attacking opponents either by means of criticism or the use of dehumanizing language cannot be dissociated from political campaign communications. Accordingly, the discourses in @MBuhari’s tweets ( $n=34$ ; 7.6%) did not only attack the opponents’ credentials through criticism but also ridiculed them as fighting a lost battle, thus:

- (1) @MBuhari [01/Jan/2019]: “Those who continue to trumpet falsehood and negativity are on their own, fighting a losing battle. The greater number of Nigerians are trusting and believing that we shall deliver on our promises for a level playing field at the polls, and that is what we shall do.”
- (2) @MBuhari [29/Jan/2019]: “I was told that before this administration, Ariaria’s traders only got 4 hours a day of electricity, and paid exorbitantly for it. This is the sad legacy we inherited, but which we are replacing with reliable power supply that is cleaner and better for our environment.”

A careful scrutiny of the use of language in the above tweet (excerpt 1) discloses a “fight back” attempt on the part of Buhari who was either being criticized by his political opponents or most likely attempting to reassure Nigerians of his administration’s determination to ensure a level playing ground in the election while also recalling the attention of voters to the alleged undemocratic practices of previous



administrations as the discourse in an earlier tweet proves further: @MBuhari [17/Dec/2018]: “What the incumbents at the time used to do was to award votes, and then tell anyone who was dissatisfied to go to court. But we won’t do that. I am prepared to give the opposition the opportunities I was not given in the past.” The discourse in excerpt 2 also portends an attack, as evident from Buhari’s narrative about inheriting a “sad legacy” which he claims to be replacing with a “better” one. A similar tweet attests to the fact: @MBuhari [14/Feb/2019]: “All over the country we are building and fixing the roads and rail lines that were not done since 1999. Where did all the money go? The last time there was a focus on infrastructure in Nigeria was when I was in charge of the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), more than 20 years ago.” The latent meanings deduced from the above tweets indicate an attempt to discredit the performance of governments that precede him while showcasing other infrastructural projects executed under his watch as the chief executive of the PTF—prior to his becoming Nigeria’s president—particularly to gain an advantage over them in the poll.

Rumours about the cloning of president Buhari also circulated from the onset of campaigns, resulting in a series of attempts to deploy defensive ( $n=15$ ; 3.3%) language in refuting the claims as exemplified below:

- (1) @MBuhari [02/Dec/2018]: “One of the questions that came up today in my meeting with Nigerians in Poland was on the issue of whether I’ve been cloned or not. The ignorant rumours are not surprising – when I was away on medical vacation last year a lot of people hoped I was dead.”
- (2) @MBuhari [01/Jan/2019]: “We have had our challenges: security, economic, political, social. But we are resolved to combat and overcome them all.”

Emotional appeals sporadically manifest in the discursive patterns of politicians particularly when attempting to refute negative claims made against them. The language in Buhari's tweet (excerpt 1) for example "...a lot of people hoped I was dead," demonstrates the use of such political game strategy appealing to the emotions of Nigerians to ignore the unsurprising "ignorant rumours" that spread while he was on medical vacation. The discourse in excerpt 2 admittedly shows an attempt to refute opponents' criticisms while reechoing that his administration is not distracted [supposedly by criticisms] in its efforts to surmounting the challenges, as further revealed in a subsequent tweet: @MBuhari: [01/Jan/2019]: "...That is the journey we have embarked on since we came onboard in 2015, and we are not distracted as we move on."

Moving to @atiku's tweets, the results of analysis show that his discourses were also predominated by the use of language which is assertive ( $n=108$ ; 24.1%) towards presenting himself as the presidential candidate of not just the PDP, but of the hopes and aspirations of all Nigerians. Exerpts from the analyzed tweets illustrate thus:

@atiku [19/Nov/2018]: "Today, I am formally presenting myself to you as the presidential candidate of not just the @OfficialPDPNig, but of the hopes and aspirations of all Nigerians."

At the commencement of campaigns, Atiku's discourses were fervent toward the use of language in a reassuring manner to convince Nigerians about his ability to #Get Nigeria working again, citing evidence of his performance while in office as Vice President. Given the series of challenges leading Nigeria into an economic recession adjudged to be the worst since the 1980s (World Bank, 2020), one would expect aspiring politicians to strategically exploit such hardship inflicted on citizens by the economic recession in weighing their performance while in office against the

challenges bedeviling Nigeria's economy since Buhari took charge as president in 2015. The prevalence of such strategic language use can be deduced from a further examination of Atiku's subsequent tweets: (1) @atiku [19/Nov/2018]: "The most important question in this election is: "Are you better off than you were four years ago? Are we richer or poorer?" That is why our primary focus is on getting Nigeria working again. #TheAtikuPlan." (2) @atiku [19/Nov/2018]: "I was Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria from 1999 to 2007 and in that time, I chaired the National Economic Council that gave Nigeria her highest and most consistent GDP growth of over 6% per annum. #TheAtikuPlan."

Atiku's tweets which relied on the use of attack language ( $n=74$ ; 16.5%), were criticizing of the performance of Buhari-led APC administration as clueless, thus:

- (1) @atiku [28/Jan/2019]: "We must vote out this anti-democratic government and restore our country to the path of true democracy, which is the surest way to ensure progress and prosperity for our people."
- (2) @atiku [19/Feb/2019]: "Our goal is not to gain power for our sake, but for the people of our country who have been so hard hit by four years of APC cluelessness and incompetence."

The discourse in excerpts 1 and 2 above is revealing of Atiku's linguistic strategies not only to discredit the political ideology of the APC as clueless but also calling out the Buhari-led government as anti-democratic and incompetent while encouraging the citizens to give him their mandate in order to restore the country on the path of democracy and salvage them from the hardship they bear through the four years of APC misrule. An earlier tweet from Atiku lends credence to this fact: @atiku [25/Jan/2019]: "...And to the Nigerian electorate, I call on you to save your beloved country from dictatorship by voting against President Buhari's desperate war against

the judiciary. Our country is falling apart under the leadership of President Buhari and it is time to stand up for democracy.”

Atiku’s inability to travel to the United States over corruption allegations was also weaponized against him by his political opponents, resulting in his use of defensive language ( $n=12$ ; 2.7%) to disprove such claims as evident from the below tweet:

- (1) @atiku [17/Jan/2019]: “Just arrived Washington D.C for meeting with US government officials, Nigerians living in D.C metropolis and the business community. -AA.”
- (2) @atiku [20/Jan/2019]: “Yesterday, I returned to Nigeria after my whistle-stop tour of D.C where I was able to share my plan to get Nigeria working again with members of congress, business community & our citizens abroad. Key to the success of my plan will be to drive inward investment and trade deals.”

The use of defensive language in campaign communication not only involves playing to the gallery but also being sensitive towards the presentation of real evidence in the form of counter-attacks to the opponents’ discourse. As deduced from the above tweets, Atiku’s defensive strategy aimed at countering the corruption allegations purportedly restricting him from traveling to the United States. In excerpt 1, Atiku announced his arrival at Washington D.C “for meeting with US government officials,” particularly to counter the claims by his political opponents that the US government had placed him on a travel ban linked to two corruption cases that he figured prominently in (Sullivan, Wroughton, & Carsten, 2019). In addition to sharing photos of himself and his entourage upon arrival as well as other activities during what he referred to as a “whistle-stop tour of D.C,” Atiku also announced his return to Nigeria as evident from excerpt 2, to additionally prove his ability to travel to the U.S and back to Nigeria without the risk of arrest, against his opponents’ claims.

Tweets in the miscellaneous category were considered “neutral” because they comprise of birthday wishes, condolence messages, gratitudes from the candidates to states that hosted their campaign rallies, etc. Although the tweets were posted within the period covered by this study, it became necessary to include them not for the purposes of analysis but to ensure the exhaustiveness and mutual inclusiveness of the data. Accordingly, @MBuhari posted  $n=23$  (5.1%) and @atiku posted  $n=40$  (8.9%) tweets with such discursive patterns, making up for the  $n=63$  (14.1%) tweets that used neutral language as the results in Table 4.1 indicate.

The campaigns for Nigeria’s presidency in 2019 was characterized by the use of distinct discourse patterns in the Twittersphere to shape the public perception of candidates’ personality and enhance preferability, focusing on the interim performance (i.e. track records in office and future plans) of the incumbent president Buhari who’s Twitter-based campaign discourses revealed a predominant use of acclaim language ( $n=142$ ; 31.7%), and the specific policy proposals (i.e. future plans and desired state of affairs) of the leading opposition candidate Atiku who deployed more of the attack language ( $n=74$ ; 16.5%).

#### **4.1.2 Analyzing Candidates’ Tweets From a Peace Journalism Perspective**

Although language is considered to be a strategic game playing tool in campaign communication, the use of Twittersphere as a political space enables the amplification of discourses emanating from whatever political actors say exponentially (Luna, Toro, & Valenzuela, 2022). Within the framework of discourse, politics is seemingly a game or practice where players strive to be accepted as “good.” In this case, being *acceptable* becomes a “social good” which translates into a “win,” whereas not getting fully accepted insinuates a “lose” of social good. The manner in which politicians use language and how the citizens or potential voters respond are equally consequential to

the practices as well determining who is a “winner” or “loser” in the game. In executing campaign communication, which involves the exponential use of language, social goods are always at stake for politicians because when they speak or write, they risk being seen either as winners or losers in the game. As such, language is a political tool that humans use either to make or break the social world, institutions and relationships by manners of dealing with the social goods. Moreover, this illuminates issues about “who gets helped and who gets harmed” in the game or practice of politics and the distribution of social goods (Gee, 2011).

Given that the strategic game playing model of campaign communication adopted by politicians habitually stimulates *binary discourses and othering* (Lumsden & Harmer, 2019), relying on a peace journalism perspective therefore offers different dimensions of probing how campaign communication as a complex set discursive activities becomes relatively detrimental to democratic peace (Paltridge, 2012). In this sense, Mbah et al. (2019) aptly point out that othering discourses have always been a core component of political campaigns in Nigeria, which create “mobilizational gaps” and hamper national integration. Going down memory lane, particularly the period before independence in 1960, it is easy to decipher how *nationalistic discourses* predominated the political environment, with politicians and political organizations at the time struggling for self-determination to actualize the Nigeria of their dream (Ubaku, Emeh, & Anyikwa, 2014). During that period, the country saw the evolution of a political culture resolutely coherent with the national aspirations for self-rule; although that political culture later became instrumental in facilitating sectionalism, ethnic chauvinism and regional activism following the exit of the so-called ‘common enemy’ in 1960 (Auwal, 2017). Thus, *sentimental/cynical discourses* centered around the promotion of regional ideologies and other primordial sentiments continually

dominate political contestations in postcolonial Nigeria; further revealing the deep-rooted ethnic, religious and regional cleavages which were initially hidden by the struggle for independence. For instance, during the 2015 presidential election which was fiercely contested between the then incumbent president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and retired General Muhammadu Buhari of All Progressives Congress (APC), the campaign communications were dominated by discourses centered around the personality of contenders, their regional and religious backgrounds (Magbadelo, 2003), as well as public sentiments on the rising *security* challenges, impunity and *corruption* in governance, and deteriorating *economy* (Ojo, Ibeh, & Kieghe, 2019).

It is however important to note that the nature of political discourses changes across electoral periods in Nigeria, from the pre-independence era till date. Looking at the nature of campaign communication practices in the context of peace journalism, Auwal and Ersoy (2022) posit that the current practices among politicians and political parties foment sociopolitical polarization and breed the grounds for violent responses. To ascertain the likely implications of Twitter-based political discourses on the emergence of a public value sphere for achieving democratic peace, this study similarly analyzed the candidates' tweets through the lens of peace journalism.

Peace journalism de-emphasizes **Name-Calling** in campaign communication, considering how such practice relates closely to the use of language in the acclaim, attack and defensive discourse patterns especially in an unpleasant manner intended to induce rejection or condemnation of others. Results from the analysis of tweets reveal how candidates engaged in name-calling either explicitly or implicitly during the 2019

presidential campaign. The following excerpts from Atiku's tweets demonstrate the trend:

- (1) @atiku [07/Jan/2019]: "I feel at home in Kogi State. Ajaokuta, also the two power stations in Kogi and the stadium are legacies of the PDP. Creation of jobs is the priority of the PDP. The abandoned projects of *the APC* will be completed. #PDPKogiRally."
- (2) @atiku [16/Feb/2019]: "...By instigting this postponement, the *Buhari adminstration* hopes to disenfranchise the Nigerian electorate in order to ensure that turn out is low on the rescheduled date..."
- (3) @atiku [19/Feb/2019]: "...I am certain that you have also keenly followed with interest, utterances from the leadership of the *All Progressive Congress (APC)* & Gen. @MBuhari, which is a painful reminder of the era of dictatorship and military rule."
- (4) @atiku [19/Feb/2019]: "...*General @MBuhari* has repeatedly violated the constitution and failed to uphold the rule of law."

Atiku's tweet (excerpt 1 above) indicates an attempt to promote his party's credential by alluding to "legacies of the PDP" (i.e., past achievements of the party) and creation of jobs as the "priority of the PDP" (i.e., campaign or policy manifestos) while concluding with the statement: "the abandoned projects of the APC will be completed," especially as a substitute for earlier or subsequent acclaims of the incumbent APC administration as "good." Tweets in excerpts 2 to 4 prove further how Atiku was explicitly engaged in name-calling Buhari either as an individual or referring to the APC-led government under Buhari's watch. The following tweet also shows such explicit name-calling particularly when writing about issues that involve not only the person of Buhari, thus: @atiku [19/Jan/2019]: "I however challenge *President Buhari* to choose a date and time for a debate where he will be present and I will be there, hopefully with the other candidates as well. Thank you and God bless



the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Atiku Abubakar.” There are noteworthy trends across Atiku’s tweets with regards to the manner of addressing Buhari. In some instances, Atiku addressed Buhari as “General Buhari,” “Mr President” or “President Buhari.” Whether such naming choices have certain implications on the public perceptions of Buhari, would be an additional takeaway from subsequent analysis.

The analysis of Buhari’s tweets also reveals an implicit engagement in name-calling as exemplified in the below excerpts:

- (1) @MBuhari [03/Jan/2019]: “We will continue to focus on ensuring that the resources of Nigeria work for all Nigerians, especially those forgotten over the years by *successive governments*. The wealth of Nigeria belongs to all Nigerians, not to a greedy and selfish minority.”
- (2) @MBuhari [29/Jan/2019]: “I am perplexed by the fact that *those who turned their backs on these problems when they had the chance to solve them*, somehow will still have the courage to campaign about unemployment and poverty.”

The trends in Buhari’s name-calling were implicit, which did not blatantly target a specific person or political party as Atiku’s tweets explicitly did. Such covert use of language can be deduced from the statement in excerpt 1: “...those forgotten over the years by successive governments...,” where Buhari made the analogy to portray his administration as utilizing Nigeria’s resources for the good of all Nigerians, intended to shape the public perception of his political opponents as “a greedy and selfish minority.” Excerpt 2 further reveals an implicit attempt to label Buhari’s opponents who in his words, “turned their backs...when they had the chance to solve...” the country’s unemployment and poverty problems. The manner of approach to campaign communication in Buhari’s tweets, although not specifically mentioning a person or political party’s names, is similarly intended to intimidate or make the targeted

opponents feel distressed and get defensive. By referring to “successive governments,” “the incumbents” or “greedy and selfish minority” who had the chance to solve the problems but “turned their backs,” it can be deduced that Buhari was implicitly targeting the PDP being the only political party that was in charge of the country’s affairs between 1999 and 2015 as well as the person of Atiku who served as a two term Vice President under the PDP-led government.

Although name-calling is often used in campaign communication—to label, define and influence the public’s perception of political rivals—it has detrimental consequences on society. In addition to breeding the grounds for identity politics where the othering of the *self* (i.e., the in-group) and the *other* (out-group) prevails (Atay, 2016), name-calling results in binary opposition among various political actors who recurrently attempt to achieve some degree of solidarity in defining who is “acceptable as good” to gain (win) a social good and who is “unacceptable as bad” to lose a social good in the game of politics (Gee, 2011). While peace journalism rejects the oversimplified campaign communication strategy of dichotomizing the Self/*Us* versus the Other/*Them* rather than a focus on issue-based campaigns (Ndhlovu, 2021; Lynch, 2021), the subsequent analysis of tweets reveals how candidates engaged in **Acclaiming the Self as “Good” and Blaming the Other as “Bad.”** Excerpts from Atiku’s tweets cited below reveal the trends:

- (1) @atiku [25/Jan/2019]: “The purported suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria by President Muhammadu Buhari, *is an anti-democratic act* which I reject in its entirety and call on Justice Onnoghen and the judiciary to resist with every legal and constitutional means that they can muster.”
- (2) @atiku [25/Jan/2019]: “*This act of desperation is geared towards affecting the outcome of the 2019 Presidential elections.* Indeed, it is not the CJN that has been “suspended”, it is the Nigerian Constitution that has been infringed & in effect, suspended, under the guise of suspension of the CJN.”

- (3) @atiku [25/Jan/2019]: “And to the Nigerian electorate, I call on you *to save your beloved country from dictatorship by voting against President Buhari’s desperate war against the judiciary*. Our country is falling apart under the leadership of President Buhari and it is time to stand up for democracy.”

Atiku’s referral of the suspension of the Chief Justice of Nigeria as “anti-democratic” and an “act of desperation geared towards affecting the outcome of presidential elections,” however, suggests an attempt to vilify the personality of Buhari as dictatorial. The trend became visibly evident in excerpts 2 and 3, where Atiku stated that the “country is falling apart” under Buhari’s leadership and therefore called on the electorate to save Nigeria from the path of dictatorship “by voting against Buhari’s desperate war against the judiciary.” It is also interesting to observe that Atiku perhaps deployed such strategy to blame or label the Buhari-led government as “bad,” especially for what he described as “a flagrant breach of constitution and frontal assault on democracy,” and therefore not deserving to gain the social good of re-election. The prevalence of this campaign communication strategy can be safely deduced from subsequent excerpts where Atiku decried further that Nigeria’s democracy is under threat, and such maladministration can only be salvaged by voters who should come out in their very large numbers and frustrate those who do not want the election to hold, thus: (4) @atiku [19/Feb/2019]: “...However, it now appears that *our participatory democracy* which we have enjoyed for 20yrs, which empowers our citizens to decide who leads them, *is under threat*.” (5) @atiku [16/Feb/2019]: “...*We have tolerated the maladministration of this government for four years*. We can only extend our tolerance a few days and give them our verdict via our votes.” (6) @atiku [16/Feb/2019]: “Please come out to vote on Saturday, 23 February and Saturday, 9 March. *Frustrate those who do not want this election to hold* by coming out in very large numbers. That is the best antidote to their plans.”

Binary opposition in campaign communication does not differ significantly from the trend in a violent conflict situation, which creates a sense of the *self* perceiving the *other* as a threat or beyond the pale of civilized behavior. As such, any gains by the self-proclaimed “goodie” (i.e., Atiku and the PDP as the in-group) would be conceived as threatening the interests of the other/vilified “baddie” (i.e., Buhari and the APC as the out-group) thereby triggering concurrent reactions from the side that felt intimidated (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005). A further analysis of tweets reveals how Buhari consistently blamed previous administrations for the economic and political challenges that Nigeria grapples with. In addition to rolling the dice of *Us* versus *Them*, Buhari correspondingly dichotomized preceding governments of the PDP in which Atiku served as Vice President, as “evil-doers” and the ruling APC as the “messiah” (Auwal & Ersoy, 2022). Excerpts from Buhari’s tweet demonstrate:

- (1) @MBuhari [01/Jan/2019]: “We are resolved to build a country in which the resources are utilized for the benefit of the largest number, and *not appropriated by a privileged few in their never-ending quest to satisfy their greed.*”
- (2) @MBuhari [09/Jan/2019]: “We cannot and will not share money from the treasury to prospective voters. Nigerians have long sought for change and *only the All Progressives Congress (APC) can deliver* – and is delivering – that change. Our people can no longer be swayed by money politics.”
- (3) @MBuhari [29/Jan/2019]: “It is gratifying to note that Nigerians can see the difference. Methodically, slowly, but very effeciently, *we are cleaning up the mess; moving our economy away from rent and arbitrage* and resolutely building an economy that rewards investment, enterprise and hard work.”
- (4) @MBuhari [10/Feb/2019]: “The vested interests at play can make this fight difficult. *By way of their looting, the corrupt have powerful resources at their disposal.* And they will use them. For when you fight corruption, you can be sure it will fight back.”

The assertion of his administration's resolve to ensure that the country's resources are utilized for the benefit of the majority rather than "a privileged few" whom Buhari labeled as previously appropriating the resources towards satisfying "their never-ending greed," amount to a stark distinction of the "good guy" versus "bad guy." This further became apparent when Buhari acclaimed that the citizens have long sought for a kind of change that "only his party the APC can deliver and is delivering" —and methodically, slowly, but very efficiently "cleaning up the mess" through the resolute efforts in bulding a formidable economy which according to him, is gratifying because the majority of the citizens can see the difference. While seeking the support of the electorate to enable the APC-led government move the country to "the NEXT LEVEL of prosperity," Buhari informed Nigerians about how his administration has been able to "secure high profile convictions" – (of persons, presumably the so-called "bad guys" or "privileged few" who appropriated the country's resources "in thier never-ending quest to satisfy their greed"). However, he lamented in an earlier tweet thus; @MBuhari [10/Feb/2019]: "...but greater cases remain. Lawyers table endless objections to obstruct court proceedings, whilst *their clients hope it lasts until a 'friendly' president is voted into office.*" As evident from excerpt 4 above, the unambiguously labelling of "the corrupt" who, according to Buhari, "by way of their looting, have powerful resources at their disposal," further depicts a concerted campaign communication effort to acclaim the self as good and blame the other as bad.

In a more general sense, the frequent use of binary phrases such as "we", "us", "them", "they", "their", "our", "those", etc., proves the dominance of name-calling and related othering discourses across the candidates' tweets which could pitch political anger among diverse political groups in a society like Nigeria (Auwal & Ersoy, 2022).

#### **4.1.3 Summary of Findings From Analysis of Candidate's Tweets**

The acts of name-calling and binary opposition (othering) basically create a case of the *victor* and *vanquished* among competing parties with incompatible political interests. Hence, researchers categorize campaign communication practices which exploit such discursive patterns as “conflict escalatory” predominantly for encouraging the simplistic game playing model of politics, where actors consider victory as the only option towards the attainment and distribution of social goods as personal or group gains rather than for the common good of society (Babatunde, Ersoy, Miller, & Thiel, 2020; Ersoy & Miller, 2020).

The results demonstrate noteworthy distinctions in the communication strategies of candidates, deducing from the analysis of their tweets. In the build up to 2019 presidential election, Buhari's campaign communication practices reveal a concerted effort to convince the electorate about how his administration has considerably moved the country to higher levels of prosperity compared to what it was under previous governments. Hence, admonishing the electorate on the need for an additional mandate for the APC “to keep on building a new Nigeria” rather than going “back to its tainted past which favoured only an opportunistic few.” As also deduced from the tweets, Atiku's campaign communication was fervent on convincing Nigerians to trust the PDP once again as the only alternative to rescuing the country from the eminent dictatorial tendencies and economic collapse, which he described as “not just frightening but a time bomb.” In addition to consistently reminding the electorate about the country's state of affairs under the reign of the PDP, Atiku focused on illuminating the underperformances of APC-led government in the areas of economy, anticorruption and security as the main issues that characterized the party's campaign promises leading to the defeat of PDP in the 2015 general elections.

Owing to the influence of these candidates in mainstream politics and particularly the online political environment operationalized in this study as the “political Twittersphere,” their Twitter-based political discourses, however, generated public engagements thereby attracting significant media coverage which necessitate the analysis of how mainstream news outlets relied on the candidates’ tweets as source material for inclusion in their news production routines (Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022).

#### **4.2 Content Analysis of Journalistic Orientations in Newspapers’ Twitter-based News Posts**

There are different points of entry when analyzing the role of media as well as factors impacting how journalists source information with regards to the coverage of political activities in an era of digital journalism where there is a constantly evolving information for reporting. Research has shown that the news media remains vibrant among social institutions contributing to political awareness, often providing timely and reliable information to a diverse audience. Amidst the nascent digital media landscape with a rapid transition to online and social media platforms where access to news and views become more interactive thereby allowing the audiences become active participants in the news cycle (Pew Research Center, 2016; Deuze, 2003), the Nigerian newspapers—besides the potential ability to contribute to people’s political awareness through their newsprints—also utilized the Twittersphere in playing such democratic role during the 2019 presidential election (Auwal & Ersoy, 2022).

The content analysis of six hundred ( $n=600$ ) Twitter-based news posts from *Daily Trust*, the *Punch* and *Vanguard* provides an entry point to understanding the trends in the newspapers’ use of Twitter in news production routines and particularly to

determine the influence of candidates' tweets (utilized as source material) on the journalistic orientations reflected in the news posts, as the results in Table 4.2 summarize.

Table 4.2: Journalistic orientations in newspapers' Twitter-based news posts

		Tweeting newspapers				
			@daily_trust	@MobilePunch	@vanguardngrnews	Total
Journalistic orientations	@MBuhari	N	75	88	39	202
		%	12.5	14.7	6.5	33.7
	@atiku	N	51	62	84	197
		%	8.5	10.3	14.0	32.8
	Non-tweets	N	74	50	77	201
		%	12.3	8.3	12.8	33.5
	Total	N	200	200	200	600
		%	33.3	33.3	33.3	100.0

\*\*\* NOTE: *Journalistic orientations* show the relationship between the media and their sources in the news frame-building process.

#### 4.2.1 Analyzing the Journalistic Frame-Building Practices in Newspapers' Twitter-based News Posts

As constituent elements of social media influentials, politicians play important roles in information creation and thus impact media coverage as well as the citizens' understanding and interpretations of political realities (Zhao, 2022). Contemporary media researchers continue to explore how politicians exploit this influential force not only to effectively amplify their political messages through the media, but also strategically influence the media frame-building process (Murthy & Petto, 2015; Entman, 2003). For instance, Baden (2010) notes that news frames do not intuitively arise on their own but are embedded in wider and often strategically crafted narratives, which according to Wlezien (2005), suggests politicians and political institutions as the principal source of political news frames. Bennett (1996) validate the claims that



journalists' routine requires rapid individual and professional decisions about what matters, and why; further asserting the potential correlation between information sources and media institutional values, which are crucial factors in the journalistic framing practices theorized as "frame-building" (Brüggemann, 2014). Accordingly, what defines frame-building is the interaction between different social, institutional and individual factors that come into play in deciding who to cover as political sources, what to quote from the sourced information and how the message contexts are interpreted, packaged and represented (Dekavalla, 2018; Hänggli, 2012) to guide the audiences' mind on "what to think about" and determine "how they perceive" aspects of the reality portrayed to them (Findahl, 1998; McCombs & Ghanem, 2001).

While journalistic frame-building practices evaluate the process by which news frames originate and how they replicate in the news (Boesman, Berbers, d'Haenens, & Gorp, 2017; Brüggemann, 2014), the analysis of Twitter news posts divulge the journalistic orientations in the coverage of Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign across the selected newspapers. In conducting a qualitative content analysis to understand how the media utilize information obtained from different sources to amplify a dominant perspective or reproduce meanings around the political contexts of social identity, Tankard (2001) rightly asserts that there are many *focal points* for analyzing news content—such as headlines and captions, selection of sources and quotes, etc. It therefore necessitates clarifying that the excerpts cited as focal point of analysis to ascertain the journalistic orientations reflected in Twitter news posts from the selected newspapers were mainly headlines. A number of reasons stand out to justify the reliance of this study on the Twitter news headlines as focal point of analysis. First and most important is the 280-character limit, which allows the newspapers to strategically utilize Twitter for sharing news highlights, headlines and other visual content rather

than the full body of stories. León (1997) rightly opines that headline is the first major part of the news that readers come across, which subtly creates a first impression of the reported issues or events, thus further justifying the choice of this study to analyze headlines of the selected news posts.

As the results in Table 4.2 indicate, the journalistic orientations of newspapers were analyzed using excerpts of headlines from Twitter news posts as cited below and logically presented in line with Brüggemann's (2014) journalistic frame-building practices. Interestingly, the three newspapers engaged in frame-sending and frame-setting practices as evident from the analysis of trends across their use of Twitter in news production. The following excerpts reveal the trend in headlines from newspapers' posts to demonstrate how information or quotes from candidates' tweets were used as source material:

- (1) @MobilePunch [28/Nov/2018]: "PHOTOS: Buhari visits wounded soldiers".<sup>2</sup>

Although the literature suggests a correlation between politicians and journalists in the news production process (Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022), the headline in excerpt 1 reflects the influence of information source in the frame-building practice of the *Punch* newspaper. Accordingly, a quick glance at the dataset obtained from candidates' tweeting activities during the period under examination confirms that president Buhari tweeted about his visit to "the wounded troops in Maiduguri" on November 28, 2018. Footnote 2 summarizes the aspects of Buhari's tweet, which the *Punch* used in

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<sup>2</sup> *Punch* (November 28, 2018). ...*Speaking about the visit, Buhari on his verified Twitter handle, said, "Today, in Maiduguri, I visited our wounded troops..."* (published as photo news on Twitter, reproducing the photos shared in @MBuhari's tweet). Full story accessible via: <https://punchng.com/photos-buhari-visits-wounded-soldiers/>

producing the Twitter news headline. Additionally, a link to the *Punch*'s website wherein the full story attributed @MBuhari's tweet as the main source of information is included.

- (2) @vanguardngrnews [02/Dec/2018]: "Post your ideas to get Nigeria working again on Twitter, Atiku tells Nigerians".<sup>3</sup>

The analysis of data from *Vanguard* does not show a significant difference from *Punch* in terms of frame-building practice. As evident from the headline in excerpt 2, *Vanguard*'s approach involved the use of verbatim statement from the information source. While a careful scrutiny reveals that Atiku shared a tweet calling on Nigerians to "...post a one-minute video..." precisely on December 2, 2018—which the newspaper subsequently utilized as source material, Footnote 3 demonstrates how parts the tweet was used along with the attribution of source in the main story accessed from the newspaper's website. The headline excerpt below shows the trend in *Daily Trust* newspaper:

- (3) @daily\_trust [18/Jan/2019]: "Atiku arrives Washington, meets US officials today".<sup>4</sup>

Prior research indicates that news outlets are bound to differ in their styles of presentation and ideological leaning particularly in a diverse political environment (Stromback, Karlsson, & Hopmann, 2012; O'Neill & Harcup, 2009). Accordingly,

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<sup>3</sup> *Vanguard* (December 2, 2018) published a screenshot of @atiku's tweet with a hyperlink for readers watch the 0:46 seconds video posted by Atiku (also published on Twitter). Full story accessible via: <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/12/post-your-ideas-to-get-nigeria-working-again-on-twitter-atiku-tells-nigerians/>

<sup>4</sup> *Daily Trust*'s (January 18 2019) story asserted that ...*The former vice president disclosed this last night via his verified Twitter handle, @atiku* (also published on the story on Twitter using photos from Atiku's tweet). Full story accessible via: <https://dailytrust.com/atiku-arrives-washington-meets-us-officials-today/>

*Daily Trust* newspaper slightly differs in its frame-building practice as deduced from the results of analysis exemplified in excerpt 3 above. Although the research data show that Atiku shared a tweet on January 17, 2019 announcing his arrival at “Washington D.C for meeting with US government officials,” the full story accessed from *Daily Trust’s* website did not specifically quote parts of the tweet, but attributed @atiku’s Twitter handle as the main source of information while providing additional perspectives on the subject matter. Footnote 4 also summarizes the details of how the newspaper used and attributed Atiku’s tweet as source material.

For the coherence of analysis, it becomes important to further expound on the distinctive elements in frame-building practices of news outlets, which symbolize the processes by which journalists transform the information acquired from various sources into news (Scheufele, 1999). In the process of reporting about different aspects of political and social life, the news media in some instances play the role of *frame-sending* where the aspects of information obtained from sources are passively utilized in the construction of meanings centered around the story narratives conveyed by the sources that supply the information. On the other hand, the news media become actively involved in the process of constructing meanings through the role of *frame-setting* where there are concerted efforts to summarize, refine and alter what becomes available to them from sources in order to reframe and set alternative narratives that are in proportion to the journalists’ cognitive patterns of interpretation (D’Angelo & Shaw, 2018; Brüggemann, 2014).

In line with the analysis of data from newspapers’ Twitter news posts, it is arguable that source attribution bolsters the authenticity of news stories. However, Brüggemann (2014) observes that quoting sources “is not a sufficient condition for frame-sending,

as journalists are likely to pursue frame-setting rather than frame-sending.” Thus, different trends in frame-setting ensue across the newspapers’ coverage of Nigeria’s 2019 presidential campaign as the research data show. Results in Table 4.2 indicate how the newspapers engaged in frame-setting predominantly through the reliance on additional non-tweet sources ( $n=201$ ; 33.5%) to provide interpretive descriptive comments about the reported issues and events, which were concurrent with the use of tweets as source material. For instance, the frame-setting approach of *Daily Trust* was commentative. This became evident from the newspaper’s representation of the story narratives emanating from a tweet shared by president Buhari on December 2, 2018 in which he countered the rumours of his being cloned [quoted in parts]: “...*The ignorant rumours are not surprising* – when I was away on medical vacation last year, a lot of people hoped I was dead.” The *Daily Trust* newspaper rephrased this statement as published in a December 3, 2019 Twitter news headline, thus: “*It’s ignorant, irreligious to say I’m cloned – Buhari.*” A comparable headline from @daily\_trust’s December 12, 2018 Twitter news post reiterates the trend in reporting about the PDP candidate: “*Atiku signs peace pact, says he is a democrat.*” This narrative emanated from a December 12, 2018 tweet in which Atiku announced: “Earlier today, *I appended my signature to the Peace Accord.* I also urged the President to sign the Electoral Act Amendment Bill into law.” *Daily Trust*’s frame-setting approach deductively suggests the attempt to either assign a schema of interpretation for the issues presented or focus attention to a particular angle of assessing the candidates towards shaping public opinion.

Analysis of Twitter news post from *Punch* newspaper reflects an interpretive and descriptive frame-setting approach. Perhaps, the December 2, 2018 headline: “*Finally, Buhari addresses rumours of being cloned in Poland*” emanated from parts of a

December 2, 2018 tweet shared by Buhari, which reads as follows: “*One of the questions that came up today in my meeting with Nigerians in Poland was on the issue of whether I’ve been cloned or not...*” Moreover, this approach replicated in a February 27, 2019 Twitter news headline from @MobilePunch, thus: “*Atiku calls presidential election a sham.*” The news post came after a February 27, 2019 tweet in which @atiku shared details of his statements from a press briefing where he rejected the election results as follows: “*...Consequently, I hereby reject the result of the February 23, 2019 sham election and will challenge it in court.*” The example from a December 17, 2018 Twitter news headline followed the same pattern of rephrasing: “*2019: I’ll give my opponents the opportunity I was denied, Buhari vows.*” Earlier, president Buhari shared a tweet criticizing previous governments for what he acclaimed as the practice of “just awarding votes and telling anyone who was dissatisfied to go to court.” Parts of the tweet included in the headline reads: “*...I am prepared to give the opposition the opportunities I was not given in the past.*” Deductively, the *Punch*’s frame-setting approach is indicative of an attempt to maintain the status quo while also infusing the newspapers’ cognitive pattern of interpretation in consonance with the candidates’ narratives.

The frame-setting practice deduced from analysis of *Vanguard*’s Twitter news posts cross-match between the interpretive and commentative approach. A February 22, 2019 headline exemplify the trend: “*Polls: No worldly hand can deter us from democratic path we’ve chosen – Buhari.*” President Buhari shared a tweet on February 21, 2019, thus: “Tomorrow, the polls open. Tomorrow, we affirm that Nigeria stands as a democracy and that *no worldly hand can deter us from this wise and fitting path we have chosen for ourselves,*” which probably triggered the story idea for *Vanguard*. Some of the wordings in the February 4, 2019 headline: “*I’ll end ASUU strike from*

*first day in office – Atiku*” also reflect in a February 3, 2019 tweet shared by Atiku where he stated that “If I get the job I am seeking, *my first task on day one* – along with naming my cabinet – *will be to end this disgraceful strike* and get our students back to their studies.” Furthermore, the reframing strategy adopted by *Vanguard* in a February 27, 2019 headline: “*Don’t humiliate Atiku, others, Buhari begs,*” reflect an attempt to amplify certain narratives from a tweet shared by president Buhari on February 26, 2019: “I would like to make a special appeal to my supporters *not to gloat or humiliate the opposition*. Victory is enough reward for your efforts.”

The literature is replete with empirical evidence to show that journalists and the media do not passively disseminate information as obtained from various sources by repeating politicians’ statements verbatim or conveying precisely the occurrences at different political events. Instead, the media actively “add something to every story in an attempt to amplify it” (Schudson, 2003) by suggesting some schema of interpretations to call the audiences’ attention to the dominant perspectives while repeatedly encouraging a particular depiction of problems, moral judgement, and remedies (Entman, 1993). Parenti (1993) buttresses that frame-setting occurs in the process of amplification, where the news media expressly bend the truth rather than breaking it, often suggesting for the audiences how to think about an issue even before they harness the opportunity to think about it for themselves. Therefore, frame-setting is achieved in the manner the news is packaged and presented through the choice of words in headlines, photo captions, visual effects, and concluding statements (Brüggemann, 2014; Parenti, 1993).

In essence, the diverse frame-building practices of news outlets contribute either to the stability and harmonious coexistence or otherwise particularly among politically-

engaged citizens who rely heavily on the mainstream media as well as the political Twittersphere to acquire the needed information and exercise their rights of dissent. This, therefore, necessitates a further analysis to unearth the sociopolitical implications of the diverse frame-sending and frame-setting strategies in Twitter news posts across the selected newspapers' coverage of Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign.

#### **4.2.2 Analyzing Newspapers' Twitter News Posts Through the Lens of Peace Journalism**

Preceding results show that there are discernible relationships between the candidates' political discourses and media coverage during the 2019 presidential campaign, as deduced from the analysis of Twitter news posts across the selected Nigerian newspapers. Similar to Murthy and Petto's (2015) comparative study of newspapers coverage and election-related tweets during the 2012 U.S. Republican primary elections, this study found that Buhari and Atiku's political activities were generally more favored by all newspapers during the period under investigation. This is owing to scientifically proven sentiments about the levels of influence that politicians and other social media influentials have on news production, which portends a spillover effect on societal harmony particularly among a networked public (Zhao, 2022; de Albuquerque, 2019).

As a source of alternative ethical principles in covering political activities, peace journalism underscores how journalists and the media should focus on not only the backgrounds and contexts but also explore hidden political agendas likely to engender negative peace while conscientiously reporting aspects of sociopolitical realities to highlight initiatives for entrenching positive peace (Galtung, 1969). From the analysis of Twitter news posts, this study however, inferred a certain extent of focus on the **Win-Lose Coverage** among the selected newspapers—a news coverage orientation



which Galtung's model categorizes as leaning towards the war-oriented or conflict escalatory journalism (Auwal & Ersoy, 2022). While peace journalism principles encourage journalists and the news media to explore the possibility that there are more than two parties and stakeholders with diverse interests in the political environment (McGoldrick & Lynch, 2000), the trend in newspapers' coverage reflect a stark portrayal of Buhari and Atiku or the PDP and APC as the only two parties involved in an election that was contested by 73 political parties and candidates (INEC, 2022). Accordingly, two important issues arise from the trends: either the political environment would be conceived as involving Atiku (or the PDP) and Buhari (or APC) as the only parties in the presidential contest, or Atiku and Buhari combined as one side versus the other 71 political parties and candidates as the other side—therefore legitimizing the *Self* and *Other* or the *Us* versus *Them* dichotomies in oppositional politics. Shinar (2009) asserts that the logical outcome of such coverage orientation would be to discreetly define one party as the winner and the other as loser. Additionally, this could legitimize how the parties acclaim themselves at the detriment of voters who are already segregated along the temporal lines of ethnicity, religion and regionalism and thus triggering violent responses from social groups who may feel excluded (Youngblood, 2017). Blame games revolving around the “victims” and “villains” discourses in identity-based political contestations also root from this journalistic orientation.

Considering the many factors including information sources, which account for the different journalistic orientations in relation to political reporting, peace journalism principles enjoin journalists and the news media to diversify their coverage by utilizing non-elite sources in order to reflect other voices with a stake in sociopolitical activities (McGoldrick & Lynch, 2000). Findings from the results of data analysis additionally

reveal a leaning towards the **Elite-Dominated Information Sourcing** (i.e., elite-oriented coverage) among the selected newspapers – a coverage orientation categorized under the war-oriented or conflict escalatory journalism. Although the newspapers utilized information obtained from other non-tweet sources, not many news posts reflect the focus on specific information gathered from non-elite sources during the campaign period. Rather than engaging in issue-based coverage of the track records of candidates and political parties to promote peaceful democratic discourses and aid the electorate in making informed choices, the journalistic orientations reflected in newspapers' use of tweets as source material may not only contribute to the process of amplifying political discourses with the risks of fomenting sociopolitical polarization but also constitute a disservice to democratic peace since the competing parties as well as voters were not guaranteed the equal opportunity for their voices to be heard (Pond & Lewis, 2019; McGoldrick & Lynch, 2000).

In other words, Wolfsfeld (2004) frowns on elite-dominated information sourcing particularly in the coverage of oppositional political activities, highlighting the media's role, which should advocate for rationally-deliberative political engagements to humanize all parties rather than multiply forces around discourses intended to vilify certain interests in the political sphere. In the light of the above, Tumasjan, Sprenger, Sandner and Welppe (2011) questioned whether Twitter-based political and news discourses mirror offline discourse. This draws attention to a need for the current study to explore the journalistic orientations in mainstream news coverage of the Nigerian political environment among the selected newspapers.

#### **4.2.3 Cross-Sectional Comparative Analysis of Journalistic Orientations in Mainstream Media Content**

Identity contestations and ethnocentrism have been in the core components of the historical development of Nigerian political and media landscapes; from the pre-independence era to the current democratic dispensation (Adebayo, 2017). While politics continue to intensify social divides among Nigerians, Adebayo (2016) asserts the contribution that media ethnocentric orientations make to fomenting polarization, which according him, is easy to decipher by identifying the location of a media outlet's headquarters and the owner's ethnicity. For instance, Olayiwola (1991) & Okidu (2011) validate the claims that such ethnocentric orientations root deeply in the Nigerian media landscape —illustrating from the discourses of regional government-owned newspapers: the *Citizen* of Northern region and the *Nigerian Outlook* of Eastern region whose editors blatantly engaged in war of words over the 1962 national census. A cartoon published in the *Citizen* portrayed the Igbos—who constitute the dominant ethnic group in present-day Southeast geopolitical zone—as “industrious, migratory, impenetrable united tribesmen who flew to the East, inflated the population there, and returned smiling to continue to thrive affluently in the North.” Similarly, the *Nigerian Outlook* stereotyped the North and particularly spoke of the Northern political elites as “childish and amateur, who showed they are not seasoned rulers of the North,” adding that “their art of government is primitive. They have nothing up there to eat, no access to the sea, little education, and therefore the North cannot afford a break-up of the Republic” (Olayiwola, 1991, p. 36).

As hinted in the literature and data analysis sections, such polarizing media discourses still reflect in the Nigeria of 21<sup>st</sup> century with different a coloration. Following the conclusion of 2019 general elections and inauguration of Buhari for a second

presidency (Auwal & Ersoy, 2022), such inclinations became glaring from a review of published content across *Vanguard*, the *Punch* and *Daily Trust* newspapers. For example, an opinion article: ‘*General Buhari was more democratic than President Buhari*,’ published in the 11 May 2020 edition of *Vanguard*, asserts that Buhari’s “claimed principles” during his term as a military leader reinforced his return as a two-term elected – “not necessarily democratically elected-President, who has tragically” presided over a country under protracted Islamist terrorist attacks and corruption. The article added that Buhari “felt a duty to run the country with little or no discrimination, as a military leader. As a President, he is not even contrite in announcing that he is a sectional leader who is primarily responsible not to the entire population, but to those he claimed, voted for him” (Lakemfa, 2020). Analysis of the latent meanings deduced from this article, however, reveals that the manner in use of language has potential to provoke a revolt against an elected president or promote ethnic intolerance among social groups who already nurture feelings of being politically marginalized.

An editorial article: ‘*Buhari’s lawlessness: Our stand*,’ published in the 11 December 2019 edition of the *Punch*, expressed dismay over the arrest of Omoyele Sowore, a southwestern-born Nigerian human rights activist, alongside other issues which the newspaper described as arising from Buhari’s “insufferable contempt for the rule of law.” Excerpts from the editorial explain further:

As a symbolic demonstration of our protest against autocracy and military-style repression, PUNCH (all our print newspapers, *The PUNCH*, *Saturday PUNCH*, *Sunday PUNCH*, *PUNCH Sports Extra*, and digital platforms, most especially punchng.com) will henceforth prefix Buhari’s name with his rank as a military dictator in the 80s, Major General, and refer to his administration as a regime, until they purge themselves of their insufferable contempt for the rule of law (*The Punch*, 2019).

While it is important to recall that both the *Punch* and *Vanguard* newspapers are owned by individuals from the Christian-dominated southern region, the above editorial hypothetically triggered a reaction from *Daily Trust* newspaper whose owners likewise share the same regional and ethno-religious affiliations with president Buhari (Ette, 2018). In its response to the *Punch*'s editorial cited above, the December 19, 2019 edition of *Daily Trust* carried a counter-editorial entitled '*That Punch editorial.*' According to *Daily Trust*, "the *Punch* fouled the political atmosphere," adding that the editorial, which was triggered by the arrest of Sahara Reporters publisher Omoyele Sowore..., "elicited reactions ranging from support to outrage." *Daily Trust* lamented that "the *Punch* went overboard in its reaction by describing an elected government as a 'regime,' and the refusal to recognize Buhari by his statutory title is an attempt to delegitimize an elected president and the government he heads" (Daily Trust, 2019).

The above examples suffice to demonstrate the level of ethnocentric orientation in mainstream media content, although such media discourses further reveal the inability of Nigerian media to adequately harness the potential ability to entrench democratic peace across the diverse population amidst a networked public sphere. The journalistic orientations reflected in the mainstream and online content show that the Nigerian media are part of the problem rather than energetically contributing to the resolution process.

#### **4.2.4 Summary of Findings From Analysis of Newspapers' Journalistic Orientations**

Twitter has become increasingly relevant as a medium for political engagements and information sourcing by politicians, voters and journalists. Results of data analysis from the Twitter news posts of selected Nigerian newspapers found that in addition to serving as an information source, the Twittersphere also becomes an "index of public

opinion” (Stier, Bleier, Lietz, & Strohmaier, 2018) where journalists and the news media monitor trending topics and acquaint themselves with what is happening to generate story ideas (Broersma & Graham, 2016). Therefore, it amounts to a fallacious appeal on the path of any political communication research to ignore the significance of candidates’ tweets as source material and the impact on news production process as well as the polarizing effect of ensuing news content on the perception of politically-engaged citizens. The examples cited from mainstream media content suggest the possible existence of conflict escalatory trends in the multidimensional use of Twitter among Nigerian newspapers, as othering and other oppositional discourses easily get amplified in the Twittersphere. Perhaps this becomes attainable because online news content develops “a life of its own like a resonating bridge in the wind,” as Vasterman (2018) fittingly observes.

As political parties and candidates mobilize towards the next elections in 2023, the political and media discourses have once again tilted towards the clamor for zoning of the presidency to the southern part of Nigeria. Such political discourses as well as the decision of some political parties and candidates to foist a Christian-Christian or Muslim-Muslim ticket, have already elicited intense reaction among numerous social groups who express support as well as outrage over a religiously inclusive presidential ticket (Eyoboka, 2022). The prevailing dimension of political competition preparatory to the 2023 general elections has created internal rifts among candidates and political parties with a high tendency of pitching the political sphere toward regional and religious bigotry. As usual, the diverse news media in Nigeria have taken the lead in amplifying such unhealthy discourses amidst a deep-rooted national division. The need for a comprehensive peace journalism intervention to salvage the deteriorating

situation of peaceful coexistence among various social groups in Nigeria therefore becomes cogent.

### **4.3 Expanding Peace Journalism to Entrench Democratic Peace in Nigeria's Polarized Media Landscape**

There is ample evidence in the literature to show the increasingly relevance of peace journalism which encourages “the art of using the language of peace” (Ersoy, 2017, p. 461) in media discourses to eliminate the possibility of biases in the presentation of issues (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2012). Journalists and news media are the foremost mediators in the public sphere. Given this great potential, there is a need for caution in the way they portray the sporadic disputes that transpire among parties with conflicting interests over sociopolitical issues in order to avoid the escalation disputes into full-scale physical violence. Peace journalism offers numerous ethical principles to guide journalists and the media in harnessing their potential influence for building a democratically peaceful society (Ross & Tehranian, 2017; Lynch & Galtung, 2010).

This study expands on the numerous principles to identify and suggest alternatives aimed at transforming the dominant orientations as well as guide journalists and the media to avoid crossing the red-lines of conflict escalation in their coverage of political activities (Shaw, Lynch, & Hackett, 2011). The implementation of peace journalism in media discourse does not assume a unidirectional process and therefore, the strategies put forth in this study may differ from others. To practically illustrate such flexibility, this study proposes four strategies for implementing the principles of peace journalism as proportionate to the coverage of Nigerian political environment.

1. Peace journalism frown on the reporting that is oriented towards a two-party portrayal of conflicts. As mediators, journalists and the news media should

therefore *refrain from portraying the game of politics as a do-or-die affair consisting only two stakeholders* who are competing to the attain a social good, which translates into the goal of winning as the only option. Alternatively, mediators should consider other parties with revered interest in the political process by adopting a *win-win* approach to create common grounds that explores what all parties could gain from a shared interest, thereby encouraging nonviolent resolutions where there is conflict of interests.

2. Peace journalism does not encourage othering and binary opposition in situations involving a diverse range of interests. Therefore, in the process of utilizing information obtained from various political sources, mediators should *avoid facilitating the atmosphere for contending parties to starkly define themselves*—because this merely breeds the grounds for blame games, where the ‘self’-acclaimed victim labels the ‘other’ as a threat or beyond the pale of civilized behavior. In a given scenario where one side defines itself as the “goodie,” mediators should alternatively seek the “other in the self” and vice versa by *questioning how different the behavior of acclaimed “goodie” is from that which it ascribes to the villain*. Rather than simply reproducing statements from a source material to amplify certain opinions or claims—and thus creating the windows for such acclaims and blames made by the cited sources to seem like established facts—mediators should treat every information with skepticism in order to verify facts and claims.
3. Peace journalism values inclusiveness to reflect the diversity of sources in the coverage of issues and events. Instead of relying solely on elite-sources, *journalists should pay attention to ordinary citizens* because they constitute an important segment of the political environment whose interests should equally



be protected by reflecting their voices in the coverage. As such journalists should *avoid treating political contest as a one-time event* through the simplified coverage of contenders' everyday activities, but should also *find alternative means of incorporating the audiences' perspectives*. Inclusive coverage would not only increase the level of political awareness among the electorate but also create a better understanding of the invisible and long-term effects of binary opposition and identity politics to deescalate the tendencies of sociopolitical polarization resulting from dominant political and media discourses.

4. Peace journalism is non-partisan. As such, mediators should explore opportunities for uniting *rather than dividing various social groups* by adopting the language of peace in the news content they produce during election campaign periods. Rather than being reactive by engaging in frame-sending—which somewhat amplifies unhealthy political discourses and passively allow political actors to define the solutions to social issues—*journalists should be proactive and skeptical in carefully choosing the words they use when reporting and framing the political sphere*. This particularly serves to offer counter-narratives in the attempt to proffer solutions while debunking polarizing political discourses.

Relative to extant literature, this study contributes to correcting the common misconceptions about peace journalism as a unilateral model applicable only to war-related media coverage. The novelty of this study is rooted in the conscientious attempt to expand the scope of peace journalism, drawing attention to its flexibility as relevant in providing alternative ethical guidelines for addressing the flaws in the convention norms of reporting across a wide-range of sociocultural, political and economic issues

and events. In addition to demonstrating how previous research use a variety of methodological approach while relying on analytical framework drawn from peace journalism model, the current study illuminates the methodological flexibility of peace journalism in examining the orientations of media coverage beyond issues with visible consequences on individuals and society.

## **Chapter 5**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter presents a summary of findings arising from data analysis, conclusions drawn from the study as well as recommends a direction for future research to explore beyond the present scope.

#### **5.1 Summary of Findings**

In proportion to the research questions as well as the review of relevant literature and theoretical framework that set the path towards contributing to existing knowledge, the summary of findings are presented in a sequential order with the research questions.

The first research question examined the predominant political discourses in the tweets of prominent contenders during Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign. Accordingly, the campaign communication practices as deduced from the analysis of discourses in tweets shared by contenders during the period, reflect a dominant use of language which portrays the resolve to gain the social good of winning as the only option rather than a resolve towards shared interests. This corresponds with preceding scholarly debates about politics as a game of strategy, as well, with the diverse notions about the role of Twitter as a playground for politicians to showcase such game playing strategies to gain political advantage (Jager, 2008; Stier, Bleier, Lietz, & Strohmaier, 2018; Harre, 1985).

Secondly, the study queried how the ensuring Twitter-based political discourses of prominent contenders either foster or deter the emergence of a public values sphere for achieving democratic peace during Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign. Deducing from extant literature and the noticeable trends in the Twitter-based political discourses, this study relatively aligns with the stand points of previous scientific inquiries asserting that the spate of politically-motivated violence ensuing from the communication strategies of politicians in societies across the Global South, portends an elite political culture of conspiring against democracy rather than protecting it (de Albuquerque, 2019; Seiyefa, 2017). This goes to say that the approach of political communication adopted by Nigerian politicians only reflects the concerted effort to attain and protect certain political interests which are personal rather than communal, and this does not ascend with the emergence of a public value sphere for achieving democratic peace.

The third question examined the journalistic orientations that reflect in the Twitter-based news posts of mainstream newspapers during Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign. The findings reveal that although Twitter has attained prominent position as a useful tool in the news production process, the journalistic orientations reflected in the analyzed Twitter news posts from selected newspapers does not differ significantly with the mainstream practice of quoting statements from the information made available to journalists by various political sources. This practice also transcends to Twitter particularly in terms of using political tweets as source material or information subsidies in the coverage of campaign activities during Nigeria's 2019 presidential contest. Researchers have long explored the multiplicity of such practices across the globe, although the trends are still nascent across the Nigerian media landscape (Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022).

Lastly, the study also sought to consider the relevant peace journalism strategies that can be implemented to de-escalate rising concerns about the polarizing effects of Twitter-based political discourses and the tendency of campaign coverage orientations to amplify extreme political views in multipolar Nigeria. A wide-range of studies exist in the literature that show the modalities for implementing peace journalism as a relevant approach to ameliorating concerns arising from the adjudged effects of mediated content on individuals and society. This study follows suit to expand the multidimensional peace journalism strategies and principles relevant for political communication practices and media coverage orientations to deescalate the rising tendencies of sociopolitical polarization in multipolar Nigeria.

## **5.2 Conclusions Drawn from the Study**

The development of social media platforms remains a key transformative force of contemporary politics and the practice of journalism. Research has presented empirical evidence in multiple folds to suggest the diverse patterns in politicians' use of social media platforms for political communication and relationship between such uses and media coverage of the political sphere in different parts of the world (Auwal, Ersoy, & Tamar, 2022). The use of social media in political communication and journalism has not advanced significantly in Nigeria compare with other parts of the world, although the digital revolution driven by the rise of a network society where majority of the population are steadily transiting to online and social media platforms for access to information as well as to exercise their democratic right of dissent however, point to the emergence of a new order in the Nigerian public sphere. Social media platforms possess some unique feature that enable speedy information diffusion and numerous users have long resorted to using social media as the ideal platforms for engaging and sharing information with their cohorts and other targeted audience (Dng-Xuan et al.,

2013). Likewise, political actors currently deploy these platforms, particularly Twitter in their everyday life and politics (Vlatković 2018). An entire body of literature documents the diverse use of Twitter in campaign communication and the effects on electorates' behaviors toward political issues. For example, the study by Aragón et al. (2013) examines the Twitter activity, emotional content, and interactions of political parties and politicians during the campaign for Spanish national election in 2011. Similar to the findings from previous research in other countries, Aragon et al.'s study observed that political parties and politicians tend to use Twitter just as a one-way flow communication tool, with evidence of balkanization in the Spanish online political sphere. Findings from Enli and Skogerbø's (2013) study also show marketing and dialogue with voters as the motives for politicians' use of social media predominantly among Norwegian electoral candidates who use Twitter and other platforms as a campaign tool, although the patterns of use and practices differ by individual candidate. Moreover, Thimm, Einspänner-Pflock, and Anastasiadis (2016) examine the different tweeting strategies of electoral candidates in Germany during the 2014 European Union election. Findings reveal the patterns of politicians' Twitter usage and the diverse campaign communication strategies to include passive Twitter presence, informing and broadcasting, on-the-scene and live-reportage, self-promotion, negative campaigning, creating mini-publics, interacting on the public Twitter stage, emphasizing and establishing supranational alliances, etc. While some of the findings from previous studies in other parts of the world can be extrapolated to the results from analysis of Twitter use pattern and tweeting activities of Nigerian politicians during the 2019 presidential campaign, there are areas of contrast as deduced from the conclusion drawn as follows.

In comparison with previous studies already mentioned in the literature, the current study found that the patterns of Twitter usage and the campaign communication strategies adopted by Nigerian politicians during election campaigns are identical to those of politicians in other parts of the world. As such, the empirical assumptions drawn from this is that, the expansion of network society has accentuated the democratic relevance of the public sphere as a political realm that is central to participatory democracy and therefore serving a vital role in the emergence of personalized digitally networked politics. Moreover, the increasing relevance of Twitter as a platform of choice for political communication and particularly in electioneering campaign, has changed the dynamics thereby elevating the place of Twitter from an information sharing platform to a new level of digitization and informationization operationalized as the political Twittersphere—a rapidly emerging sphere of political interactions and participation—enabling the organization of political activities within a network structure that accommodates both centralized and decentralized participatory practices (Hassan, 2004; van Dijk, 2006). Beyond the use in election campaign activities, the use and influence of Twitter in facilitating the successes of various social movements in Nigeria has also been documented in extant literature. Owing to the pace of Twittersphere's transformation of politics, this study assumes further that the new information infrastructure which facilitates unanimous flow of messages and the exchange of political opinions at global, regional and local levels however, influence politicians' preference of Twitter as a politically relevant global public sphere.

The analysis of patterns in politicians' use of Twitter for campaign communication particularly with regard to the choice of language moreover, reveals the predominance of discursive practices that disrupt the political sphere. The assumptions drawn from

the findings in relations to Nigerian politicians' use of Twitter during the 2019 presidential campaign is that, the discursive practices of contenders facilitate the othering and distortion of the public sphere through the promotion of opposition politics. Therefore, the decentralized political practices that ensue in the networked space hold the potential to upset the processes of political communication, foment polarization in society and elicit prejudices which threaten social integration and democratic progression. Extrapolating the findings from this study requires a comparison with previous studies that reveal similarly patterns in politicians' use of Twitter in other parts of the world. Urman's (2020) comparative study explores the patterns of politicians' use of Twitter for the purposes of political communication across 16 democratic countries. Urman's findings classify the political Twitterspheres of those countries either as perfectly integrated, integrated, mixed, polarized or perfectly polarized to show that the intensity of political polarization on Twitter varies significantly from one geographical setting to another. The study by Masroor et al. (2019) deploys a critical discourse analysis to dissect the linguistic structures and strategies in politicians' use of Twitter for political communication. Masroor et al.'s analysis uncovers the hidden ideological structures and strategies realized through a number of rhetorical moves in the tweets of two eminent Pakistani political figures.

The use of Twitter also extends the boundaries of politics to include the contemporary practice of journalism. This study compares the trends in use of Twitter in journalism routines in different parts of the world toward ascertaining what is obtainable in the Nigerian context. However, it reveals that the distinctive importance of Twitter in political communication makes the Twittersphere a viable space for information sourcing, news sharing and debates on political issues, and such affordances elevate the influence of politicians on news judgment in the contemporary practice of



journalism. This specific finding bolsters the assumption of an emerging media/journalism ecosystem facilitated by the rise of network society and particularly the increasing relevance of the political Twittersphere. Verweij's (2012) study determines the network of connections on Twitter between politicians and journalists, suggesting that the such network represents a closed elite circle as a fully connected group of users controlling information—which indicates a mutually dependent political-economic relationship of source versus news gatherer. Verweij's study accordingly reveals that a link between journalists and politicians does not necessarily imply an interaction between them but the motives of finding information and spreading news is the driving force in the Twitter network between politicians and journalists. McGregor and Molyneux's (2020) study explore Twitter's growing centrality in the news process through an online survey experiment on working journalists in the United States, to indicate that the routinization of Twitter into news production affects news judgement and impact coverage decisions. Moreover, the study found that Twitter has become so normalized that tweets were deemed equally newsworthy as headlines appearing to be from the AP wire. On the other hand, journalists who use Twitter less in their work discount news they see on the platform, potentially causing them to dismiss information that many of their colleagues identify as newsworthy. The findings from previous other studies by Berkowitz (2009), Broersma and Graham (2013), Moon and Hadley (2014), and Metag and Rauchfleisch (2016) further prove this assumption to corroborate the results of analysis of Nigerian newspapers' routinization of Twitter and how their reliance on the political Twittersphere for information sourcing and news dissemination influences the journalistic orientations reflected across their Twitter-based news posts.

The main goal of this study was to examine how and to what extent the Twitter-based political discourses of prominent contenders and the journalistic orientations in Twitter-based news posts of mainstream newspapers' coverage of Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign foment polarization and pose a threat to democratic peace. In line with said goal, this study asserts that politics is a game of interest in which the various parties involved strive to enhance the chances of attaining and protecting their interests. As such, when actors compete in the game of politics, their interests are bound to conflict. How some mediating forces such as journalist and the news media intervene in the process of managing the conflicts ensuing from the frequent clashes of political interests, however, contribute either to dousing or escalating the conflicts even beyond the ambits of competing actors. Empirical evidence from previous studies shows how oppositional political discourses emanating from the narratives across cited information either become magnified or coalesce with media discourses—which conversely stem from the interactions of various ideological and professional-level factors in the news production process—to foment sociopolitical polarization in the multipolar context of Nigeria. Accordingly, the assumption drawn from this finding is that the prevalence of oppositional political discourses in the online political sphere therefore demonstrate potential for extending the North–South hostility, which is inherent to the mainstream political and media environments, to the new public sphere.

Although the prevalence of aforesaid trends across the polarized political and media environments dates back to the 1960s, the increasing use of Twitter for political engagements and journalistic practices somewhat reinvigorates the trends as the results of data analysis reveal, even though a subsequent cross-sectional comparative analysis validates the existence of ethnocentric orientations across mainstream media content. As the tendencies of national division widens, the current study acknowledges the need

for a comprehensive journalistic intervention that is socially-transformative and applicable across the mainstream and networked political and media landscapes—a strategy which the study expounds through a diverse framework for the implementation of peace journalism to improve the campaign communication strategies of political actors as well as salvage the performance of the Nigerian media towards entrenching democratic peace. Related studies conducted within the framework of other political and media environments have demonstrated the relevance of peace journalism toward addressing the problem. For example, Ette (2018) and Beaufort (2018) explore the implications of ethno-regional contestations and how the use of digital media in political communication foments political polarization and therefore posing challenges to democracy in different societal contexts. On the other hand, the studies by Babatunde, Ersoy, Miller and Theil (2020), Auwal and Ersoy (2022), and Ersoy and Miller (2020) demonstrate the strategies for applying the prior success of peace journalism in creating sustainable peace amidst the new public sphere, which the current study found as relevant to the Nigerian political and media environments. This study therefore stands out for its successful inquests into the likely polarizing effects of dominant political discourses as deduced from tweeting activities of prominent contenders and the journalistic orientations reflected in Twitter-based news post of selected three among the most read English newspapers with nationwide circulation.

### **5.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

Since there is no universally acceptable basis for determining an end point to any scientific inquiry in which trends in the examined phenomenon change alongside a digitally emergent world, this study acknowledges the need for future research endeavors to additionally explore beyond the present scope. Future research could

adopt a longitudinal approach to examine the changing trends in candidates' tweets and newspapers' Twitter-based news posts across different electoral periods to understand the sentiments ensuing from the activities of other politically-engagement users in the Twittersphere. This could also go out of the ordinary to unveil the short and long-term impact of the proposed peace journalism strategies particularly in cases where a certain number of politicians and news outlets begin to implement same in their political and journalistic routines.

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: First Level Coding – Candidates’ Tweets

S/No.	Account	Date of tweet	Feature of tweet	Discourse-level category	Peace journalism-level category

### Coding guide:

1. *Account* denotes name of twitter handle from which a tweet was sourced.
2. *Date of tweet* represents the time period during which a tweet was shared.
3. *Features of tweet* signifies the integral components such as texts, images, hashtags, videos, etc.
4. *Discourse-level category* indicates the classification of a tweet based on Benoit’s functional theory of political campaign discourses including acclaims, attacks, defenses or the miscellaneous category of neutral.
5. *Peace journalism level category* denotes the classification of a tweet either as conflict escalatory or conflict de-escalatory based on the manifest and latent understanding of the use of language – e.g., binary phrases and dehumanizing statements.

## Appendix B: Second Level Coding – Newspapers’ Twitter News Posts

S/No.	Account	Date of news post	Feature of news post	Journalistic orientation category	Peace journalism category

### Coding guide:

1. *Account* denotes the newspapers’ twitter handle from which a news post was sourced.
2. *Date of news post* represents the time period within which the newspapers posted the news.
3. *Features of news post* signifies the integral components such as texts of story headlines, images, hashtags, videos, etc.
4. *Journalistic orientation category* indicates the classification of a news post based on Bruggmann’s journalistic frame-building practices including frame-sending and frame-setting particularly in connection with the method of information sourcing adopted in the news posts.
5. *Peace journalism category* denotes the classification of a news post either as oriented toward war journalism which is conflict escalatory or toward peace journalism which is conflict de-escalatory.

## Appendix C: Johan Galtung's Peace Journalism Analytical Framework

War Journalism	Peace Journalism	Neutral
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Visible effects of war:</b> <i>Casualties, dead and wounded</i></li> <li>2. <b>Differences oriented:</b> <i>Report leads to the conflict</i></li> <li>3. <b>Elite-oriented:</b> <i>Focuses on leaders and elites as actors and sources of information)</i></li> <li>4. <b>Here and now:</b> <i>Reporting on the war arena</i></li> <li>5. <b>Dichotomy:</b> <i>Good guys and bad guys or victim and villain</i></li> <li>6. <b>Two-party orientation:</b> <i>One party wins, one party loses</i></li> <li>7. <b>Partisan:</b> <i>Biased for one side in the conflict.</i></li> <li>8. <b>Zero-sum orientation:</b> <i>One goal: to win</i></li> <li>9. <b>Uses of Demonizing language:</b> <i>Use of language such as vicious, brutal, barbaric, inhuman, tyrant, savage, ruthless, terrorist, extremist, fanatic, fundamentalist</i></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Invisible effects of war:</b> <i>Emotional trauma, damage to society, damage to property and culture)</i></li> <li>2. <b>Solution oriented:</b> <i>Report leads to solution to the conflict.</i></li> <li>3. <b>People-oriented:</b> <i>Focuses on common people as actors and sources of information</i></li> <li>4. <b>Causes and consequences:</b> <i>Reporting on the causes and future effects of the conflict</i></li> <li>5. <b>Avoid labeling of good and bad guys</b></li> <li>6. <b>Multi-party orientation:</b> <i>Gives voice to many parties involved in conflict</i></li> <li>7. <b>Non-partisan</b> <i>(neutral, not taking sides)</i></li> <li>8. <b>Win-win orientation:</b> <i>Many goals and issues, solution-oriented.</i></li> <li>9. <b>Avoid demonizing language:</b> <i>Report on more precise descriptions, titles or names that the people give themselves</i></li> </ol>	<p><i>Story that contains none of the two approaches, i.e., war and peace journalism in the paragraph/s or number of neutral values in a story are greater than the war and peace approaches, the story will be coded as neutral</i></p>

\*\*\* Adopted from Galtung's model classification of peace/conflict and war/violence journalism.