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Citizenship, participation, and CMD

The case of Nigeria

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NaijaPals and *Nolitics*, respectively a hosting site and a discussion forum by and for Nigerians, provide an opportunity for the citizens' social and political participation. As a hosting website with social networking and blogging activities, *NaijaPals* maintains an online community, with *Nolitics* as a discussion forum solely dedicated to social and political debate. Members exchange information and engage in critical analysis of Nigeria's political system. A total of 104 'posts' are analyzed in the framework of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The analysis highlights the roles of political discourse in *Nolitics*, mainly as social critique, with the aim of shaping political leadership and involving the citizens in political governance. Discourse in this context is viewed as discursive practice, in the form of political propaganda; anti-corruption campaigns; socio-political mobilization; and recommendations for growth — all of these mediated in written texts. The analyses also show that metaphors, directive speech acts and questioning are used as discursive strategies.

Keywords: Nolitics, Nigeria, political participation, corruption, new media, blogs, discussion forum, discourse pragmatics

1. Introduction

This paper examines political discourse in the new media, particularly as it reflects the roles and rights of citizens in the contemporary Nigerian society. The Nigerian Constitution of 1999 stipulates that Nigerian citizenship is attainable by birth or by institutional provisions such as registration and naturalization. Furthermore, a Nigerian citizen is an indigene of a Nigerian community or ethnic group, whose citizenship guarantees fundamental human rights, as well as other civil rights such as access to education and employment opportunities, political participation or even the right to produce the head of a community, or a governor, or the president

(Adesoji and Alao, 2009). In Nigeria however, many of these rights have been violated over the years, especially during the long period of military dictatorship. The military government as a rule of force did not recognize the constitutional rights of citizens to contribute to the political process. During the Abacha dictatorship for example, there was a complete ban on political activities; political associations, social groups or socio-political movements were outlawed (Babatope, 2002). Politicians, journalists and social activists/critics suffered terribly in the crisis years (Babatope, 2002; Chiluwa, 2011). However, after May 29, 1999, when Nigeria returned to civil rule, after over twenty years of military dictatorship, Nigerians for the first time began to recognize their right to participate in socio-political governance. Political associations and social groups, youth groups and civil rights groups began to make their voices heard; the mass media and the internet became the major means of participating in political debates. The present paper examines this form of political participation by Nigerians in a popular online political discussion forum. The data represents 'Nigerian voices' in the form of critiques and suggestions, as their contribution to political governance in Nigeria, especially as the country prepared for the 2011 general elections.

Even though the weblog (or simply *blog*) has become one of the most popular social media technologies among Nigerian users, scholarly response to its discourse, contents, and features is just emerging. As a follow-up study on the use of social media technologies in Nigeria, particularly weblog and twitter (Ifukor, 2010), the present study analyzes political discourse and social interaction by members of *Nolitics.* One of the first studies in this direction (Ifukor, 2008) centered on the use of political blogs as social mobilization in the 2007 general elections in Nigeria. That study concluded that 'weblogs are influential political tools for mobilization and Nigerian bloggers made good use of this platform to educate, enlighten, and encourage eligible voters to perform their civic duties…' (Ifukor 2008: 1) Thus, citizens' access to electronic social media empowers them to get actively involved in democratic governance (Ifukor, 2010). The present study examines the functions of the computer-mediated discourse (CMD) in *Nolitics* as social criticism, social and political mobilization (especially towards the 2011 general elections in Nigeria), political propaganda, and so on, all dealing with development and social stability in Nigeria. Moreover, it aims to highlight the participants' interactional norms, including pragmatic strategies that are deployed in the discussion forum; in addition, brief demographic information about the interactants is furnished, and frequently occurring political topics in the discussion forum are examined.

2.   Previous work on blogs

In addition to the works cited above, the growing literature on CMD, especially on the blog genre, has attempted to characterize and examine the forms and functions of blogs. For instance, Herring (2004) and Herring et al. (2005) identify weblogs as a distinct genre of CMD, emphasizing its interpersonal nature; they argue that the assumed interactive nature of blogs and their orientation towards external events is somewhat over-emphasized, and tends to underestimate the importance of blogs as individualistic, intimate forms of self-expression. By contrast, as the present study will show, the use of blogs or discussion forums far exceeds mere individual self-expression to include wider issues of social and political importance.

Stefanone & Jang (2007) describe blogs as 'a relationship maintenance tool.' They argue that bloggers who exhibit both 'extraversion and self-disclosure' traits tend to maintain larger strong-tie social networks and are more likely to appropriate blogs to support those relationships, age, gender and education notwithstanding. Contrasting with this, while proposing a general model for analyzing and comparing different uses of blogs, Schmidt (2007) argues that 'individual usage episodes are framed by three structural dimensions of rules, relations, and code, which in turn are constantly (re)produced in social action. As a result, 'communities of blogging practices' emerge — that is, groups of people who share certain routines and expectations about the use of blogs as a tool for information, identity, and relationship management' (Schmidt, 2007: 1). Clearly, then, different scholars agree that blogs are a social activity (Nardi et al., 2004) or social work (Ifukor, 2010), often used in grassroots journalism (Gillmor, 2003; Gill, 2004) and for political mobilization (Cross, 2005; Drezner & Farrell, 2004). In some cases, blogs have been used in partisan politics (Adamic & Glance, 2005). For instance, in 2004, the John Kerry and George W. Bush political campaign teams adopted the use of blogs. Incidentally, Bush's blog had more posts aimed at prospective young adult voters than did Kerry's (Trammell, 2007). In 2008, Barack Obama and his campaign team also used blog and Twitter to disseminate crucial information about Obama's bid for the presidency (Ifukor, 2010). The Iranian blogosphere liberalised political discourse in the face of a hostile media environment (Kelly and Etling, 2008) and Twitter was used by ordinary citizens to provide insider up-to-date information about the Iranian 2009 post-election protests (Ifukor, 2010). Because of its growing popularity for mediating political discourse, the credibility of blogs has been questioned; research shows that blogs were judged as moderately credible, but as more credible than any mainstream media or online source (Johnson et al., 2007).

3.   *NaijaPals* and *Nolitics*

NaijaPals (also known *Nigerians and friends*) is an online community very similar to the *LiveJournal.com* referred to in Herring (2007) and Kouper (2010). It is a hosting website with social networking and blogging activities that allow users to exchange information (and also offer advice within the *metrolife* forum). Authors keep personal journals in which they post entries; others can reply to the entries by posting comments. In social interaction, *NaijaPals* just like *LiveJournal m*embers not only post comments, they also engage in some forms of social analysis and criticisms of Nigeria's socio-political system, thus lending their voices to topical issues that shape the society. Ifukor (2010) demonstrates that the dialectical relationship between discourse and social practice (Fairclough, 1989) and the process of political empowerment can be textually illustrated through the choice of vocabulary and sentiments expressed in blogs or discussion forums. Posts/journals on *NaijaPals* are similar to blogs, being frequently updated and arranged in reverse chronological order (Herring, 2004). Social interaction is facilitated through user profiles containing biographical and contact information (Kouper, 2010). Users sign in to the hosting site with their private usernames and passwords.

Nolitics is a politically-oriented discussion forum in the *NaijaPals* online community website. The term 'Nolitics' is portmanteau word (or coinage) from 'Naija Politics'. 'Naija' (also written as *9ja*) is a clipped version of 'Nigeria.' The forum generally maintains and promotes social discourse, and members post and receive comments on current social and political topics in Nigeria. Interactions are usually among young people, who presumably have equal rights to share information and express their opinions. As pointed out above, many of the writers are members of political groups, youth movements and activists, who often use *Nolitics* to engage in political debates. Fairclough (1998:148) agrees that 'ordinary people' have started to play a bigger role in political conversation and debate in talk shows and audience-oriented discussion programmes; they form part of the agents and potential protagonists and antagonists in the struggle for hegemony in the (new) media. Some of the participants are political grassroots activists who have entered the official political system in order to form movements (Fairclough 1998:149). *Nolitics* is frequently updated to keep up with current events in society, especially the political developments.

Since *Nolitics* take the form of blogs, the latter share some general features that are common to the blog genre, such as (1) their asynchronicity (i.e. unlike synchronous CMD, blogs do not require that users be logged on at the same time in order to send and receive messages; rather, messages are stored at the addressee's site until they are read (Herring, 2004); (2) their one-way communication; (3) the persistence of the messages in archives, linked from the sidebar of the blog;

(4) web-based delivery and a tendency for messages to be text-only; and (5) the display of blog entries in reverse chronological sequence, with a 'comment' option below each entry (Herring, 2007). Other features of blogs are (a) regular, date-stamped entries (timeliness); (b) links to related blogs ('blogrolling'); (c) RSS or XML feed (ease of syndication); and (d) a display of passion ('voice') (Gill, 2004). Blogging is often viewed as a new form of citizen-initiated grassroots journalism and a way to shape democracy outside the mass media and conventional party politics (Gillmor, 2003; cited in Ifukor, 2007).

Going by Herring's and her colleagues's classification of blogs, we find there to be three major types, i.e. *filters, personal journals*, and *k-logs* (i.e. 'knowledge blogs'). Filter blogs are those that contain observations and evaluations of external, predominantly public events; personal journals (usually the most common) are used to report events in the blogger's life as well as the blogger's cognitive states; while k-logs focus on information and observations around an external topic, project or product (Herring et al., 2007). *Nolitics* combines features of filters and k-logs.

4.   Methodology

In the context of this paper, 'discourse' refers to 'language use' in written posts within the *Nolitics* discussion forum. Herring (2001:612) defines CMD as 'the communication produced when human beings interact with one another by transmitting messages via networked computers.' CMD is particularly distinguished from the broader interdisciplinary orientation of computer-mediated communication (CMC) by its focus on 'the study of language and language use in computer networked environments, and by its use of methods of discourse analysis to address that focus.' (Herring, ibid.) In her 'faceted' classification scheme of CMC, Herring (2007) further identifies two basic factors that shape CMD, namely (1) medium factors (under what circumstances do specific systems affect communication and in what ways; here, factors such as synchronicity, message transmission, persistence of transcript, size of message etc. become very important); (2) situation factors (comprising information about participants, their relationships to one another, their purposes for communicating, what they are communicating about and the kind of language they use). The latter factors may be subdivided into categories such as participation structure, participant characteristics, interactional norms (attitudes, beliefs, ideologies and motivation), goals of interaction, etc.

Herring's approach facilitates data selection and analysis in CMD research on the basis of empirical evidence from the CMD research literature. Adopting Herring's method of Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA), the present study will examine some questions that reflect Herring's 'situation factors', such as

information about the participants (*NaijaPal*'s members) and their relationship to one another; the topics of their interaction; their interactional norms and goals of interaction. Discourse features such as structures of comments, opinions and criticisms are also examined to show how discourse (as social practice) may contribute significantly to shaping structures of society.

In this vein, the present study views political participation as a form of discursive social practice (Fairclough, 1989). Thus, the CMDA adopted here, in combination with interpretive critical discourse analysis (CDA), shows how political dominance and power abuse are resisted in the texts (van Dijk, 2001). Van Dijk's version of CDA, for example, is a type of discourse-analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are reproduced, and resisted in discourse (as text) in the social and political context (van Dijk, 2001). Fairclough (1998) further argues that CDA is a critical commitment to understanding, from a specific discourse and linguistic perspective, how people's lives are determined and limited by the social formations they are blessed or cursed with, by foregrounding the contingent nature of given practices and the possibilities of changing them (1998: 144). A key feature of this (i.e. Fairclough's) version of CDA is that the link between texts and society/culture is seen as mediated by discourse practices (ibid.: 145).

5. The corpus

The corpus studied here comprises 104 posts, posted within a period of four months, i.e. between March and July, 2010 — a period that witnessed significant events in the history of Nigerian politics and society. These 'events' include the religious turmoil and massacres in the city of Jos; the political crisis subsequent to a power vacuum in the Executive arm of the Nigerian government created by the absence of the President on health grounds; the death of Nigeria's President Umaru Yar'Adua, and subsequent inauguration of Goodluck Jonathan (a Niger Delta indigene) the erstwhile Vice-President as President; constant crises in the Nigerian legislature and demands for the resignation of the Speaker of the House of Representatives; the beginning of political campaigns towards the 2011 general elections and the appointment of a new president of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The 104 posts in the corpus were downloaded from pages 1–3 of the discussion forum pages. The posts analysed are those that mediate Nigerian internal affairs, namely politics and social/ethnic issues reflecting the main thematic focus of *Nolitics*. Table 1 shows the gender distribution of the posts.

Table 1. No. of Posts by male and female bloggers

Writers	No. of Posts	Percentage
Male	96	92.3
Female	08	7.7
Total	104	100

Table 1 immediately suggests that female members of the discussion forum are not as active as their male counterparts with regard to political matters and debates. Even though the posts in the corpus represent instances where a blogger posts more than one item with different themes at different times, the majority still represent male voices. This is not just attributable to the gender asymmetry which scholars view as inherent in male dominant discourses. Herring (2001), for instance, observes that in some discussion forums, the trend of many male messages was to discourage women from responding; the concerns of women, on the other hand, were viewed as 'waste of bandwidth.' The same researcher also observed that there were more reactions coming from female bloggers on social/ethnic matters than when the subjects were political. Future research may want to investigate the participation and performance of Nigerian women in personal blogs or discussion forums that dwell more generally on other subjects, such as 'life style,' 'religion' or 'fashion.'

6. Analysis / discussion

The present analysis is carried out under two broad headings, namely (i) political participation as discourse, and (ii) the discourse pragmatics of the posts.

6.1 Political participation as discourse

According to Chilton (2004), politics is a struggle for power between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it. In the Nigerian context, the political struggle by politicians and the growing resistance to change characterize the discourse of political blogs or posts. At a micro-level of political struggle, persuasion, argument, threats, entreaties, lies etc. are used. These micro-level behaviours are realized through linguistic actions or discourse (Chilton, 2004). Considering political participation as discourse is to subscribe to the view that discourse, as pointed out earlier, is social practice, the latter contributing to shaping discourse and in turn being shaped by it (Fairclough, 1989). Hence, discourse is viewed as a socially constructed way of knowing (and participating in) aspects of reality (van Leeuwen, 2009). We talk of discourse as political

participation, in the same way that we talk of the 'discourse of leadership' or 'discourse of the opinion leader' (van Leeuwen, 2009: 144) or the 'discourse of the ongoing socio-cultural change' (Fairclough, 1998: 142). These discourses are expressed in language and represented in texts.

The discovery of the potential of the new social media as an instrument for social mobilization and disseminating political information and the success of the politicians in the USA and other places in recent times have spurred a growing interest, both among politicians and the general public, to participate actively in political and social debates or governance. The various discursive political themes in the posts have been identified as: (i) critical voices; (ii) social and political mobilization; (iii) criticism of corruption; (iv) political propaganda; and (v) suggestions/recommendations for development. Each of these themes is discussed in detail below. However, due to limitations of space, only a few important posts could be reproduced in full. All others are only shown by their headings.

6.1.1   *Critical Voices*

In the present section, Nigerian bloggers' critical assessments and evaluations of Nigeria's political performance in the recent past are divided in two categories, namely (i) 'grassroots journalism' (Gillmor, 2003) — those reflecting the writer's evaluative judgement of the Nigerian socio-political situation, as well as revealing the writer's preconceptions, fears, critical stance and often, pessimism; (ii) media reports such as those quoted from the Nigerian local media (e.g. *this day*, *Tribune* etc.) or other, online sources. Some 'quotes' usually direct readers to other websites for 'more' news. These reports on, or stories of Nigeria's political and historical experiences usually include persuasive interpretations and evaluative analyses of (past and present) governments' performance. Most of the posts contain various speech acts such as informing, revealing, exposing, accusing or condemning. Usually, the various levels of government come under attack, with regard to government policies; Nigeria's economy and prevalent poverty in spite of rich natural resources; human rights abuses; security lapses; government spending; the party system, especially in regard to voter districting and the rotation of the presidency; and so on. The following topics in the corpus reflect the various interests and frustrations of the writers: (note: 'P' ='post'; the number identifies the individual post in the transcript).

P2.   Nigeria will never be great (by *Justloveme*, posted July 22, 2010, 11:58:20 AM)

P3.   How can Nigeria be a better place? (by *Ronaldson*, posted May 27, 2010: 05:54:40 PM)

P8.   Are our politicians this bad? (by *bh172,* posted July 20, 2010: 01:08:46 PM)

P9.   Reps tell Bankole to resign (by *aliaaz*, posted June 10, 2010, 08:31:32 AM)

P46. Can this be right in a time like this — Mr. Jonathan!!! Pleaseeeeee (by *ebonyxxx*, posted: July 05, 2010, 09:03:03 AM)

P59. Nigeria and useless spending (by *Evalastin*, posted: June 22, 2010, 11:11:55 PM)

P79. The headache called Bayelsa (by *Yeilagha*, posted: May 27, 2010, 01:08:47 PM)

P83. Does Nigerians deserve Democracy day despite all the shortcomings (by *bouncingbaby*, posted: May 29, 2010, 11:07:15 AM)

The writer of P2 'Nigeria will never be great,' explains his pessimism and frustration this way:

> *Nigerians* don't want Nigeria to be great or else how can you explain a public treasurer looter being garnished and adored with National Honours and Chieftaincy titles where in a place like China, they are publicly shot. *Non Nigerians* prefer us not to grow in order not to discover our ingenuity through unsolicited loans, grants and financial aids…

P3 is similar to P2, though rather than in the form of a declarative statement, the former is put as a question, 'How can Nigeria be a better place?' The blogger continues:

> 'I am a Nigerian who leaves [sic] in Europe. Please I would like to know why is there so much poverty in our country today, eventhough we are so blessed with all the natural things that can make a country a better place for all it[s] citizens to live? I ask this question because of what I have seen in my current place of residence, here the citizens live well and still they are not blessed naturally like we are. Some people say it's our leaders, if it's our leaders what can be done to bring a change to our great country Naija?'

Writers of P46 and P59 were critical of the N9.5 billion budget for Nigeria's 50th anniversary in October, 2010. The Federal Government (FG) had initially budgeted N16.4 billion, which the President later cut down to N9.5 billion. (P40 is also a response to this so-called 'useless spending.') Ordinarily, the elaborate budget for marking what the writer refers to as '50 years of failure' didn't portray a nation whose citizens still lived on less than one dollar a day. Furthermore, the writer who simply identifies himself as 'ebonyxxx' doesn't believe a developed country would be spending that much on an independence anniversary. Part of P46 is reproduced below:

> 'It is definitely not right to spend such a humongous amount to celebrate 50 years of failure! … N350 million has been earmarked for the National Unity Torch and Tour: N350 million just to carry a torch around the country? How ludicrous? They want to light up a country with a torch where there is no regular power supply. N20 million has been earmarked for what is called Children's Parliament — certainly this is money to be stolen by adults! Another N20 million is meant for a

party for 1,000 children. Their children! Presidential banquet is to take all of N40
million … N40 million for National Food Week! And N1.2 billion to place adverts
in local and international media and another N320 million for local publicity.
N200 million is to be set aside for a football match to mark the golden jubilee.
Logistics is to take N320 million! To design the anniversary logo, N30 million has
been earmarked. What kind of logo is that? Ghana, next door, spent a sum of $200
million (about N300 million) to mark its 50th anniversary in 2007. The bulk of
that cost was supplied by the private sector and more money was spent on legacy
projects and the development of infrastructure.'

The 'failure' of Nigeria's political administration is central to all the critical evalua-
tions of government performance in the corpus, touching as they do on key issues
of political governance and social development. Poverty and suffering are gener-
ally attributed to the failure of leadership. However, the writer of P2 touches on
the sensitive issues of sycophancy and praise-singing by the people themselves of
those accused of failing in political leadership. Unfortunately, most of those ac-
cused of corruption are supported and encouraged by the electorate, some of the
latter offering to serve as political thugs, agents, or in-house collaborators. Thus,
mobilizing support for the very people they condemn makes for a lot of irony. For
instance, a former state governor, standing trial for corruption and money laun-
dering, was received by his supporters with celebration and fanfare when released
on bail. This action of the people amounted to double standards, which could be
interpreted as a loss of moral decency and disregard for the social ideals necessary
for development. Thus, rather than hold the politicians uniquely responsible for
Nigeria's under-development, the writer suggests that the Nigerian people should
blame themselves as well, stressing the fact that the Nigerians' compromise and
irrational materialism are condemnable.

The bloggers apply discourse strategies such as labeling (e.g. P29), metaphors
(e.g. P79), rhetorical questions (e.g. P8) and so on, to expose and denounce bad
government in Nigeria. In this context, a view of discourse as the 'meaning mak-
ing' part of social processes (Fairclough, 2009), reveals sensitive forms of social
practice by unmasking society's political forces, and showing how individuals, also
by means of discourse, challenge and resist these social forces.

The various critiques in the corpus demonstrate the sensitive function of the
electronic social media, which come very close to the well-known 'watchdog'
role of traditional mass communication. The internet has the added advantage
of promoting anonymity, neutrality and independence of the writer. Unlike the
popular press, that is often bought over with money by politicians, online critical
journalism is not always accessible to manipulation by the politicians. In Nigeria,
critical journalists from the independent media who refused to let themselves be
influenced by money, have often been intimidated and sometimes killed (Chiluwa,

2011). Thus, the new media empowers Nigerians who had no access to the traditional popular press, and lets them add their voices to check and shape the government; by extension, they influence the social forces that affect their lives directly or indirectly. (More discursive strategies applied by the writers of the posts are discussed in detail in the second part of this analysis, Section 7).

6.1.2   *Social and Political Mobilization*

Posts under this category are further divided into four sub-groups, namely (i) posts that mobilize the citizenry towards their civic responsibility; (ii) those that campaign for Goodluck Jonathan as president; (iii) those that represent overt attacks on Ibrahim Babangida (IBB); and (iv) those that campaign for other political aspirants.

(i) The posts that mobilized the citizenry towards performing their civic responsibilities in the 2011 general elections are also skeptical of the possibility of free and fair elections. The posts warn against multiple voting and buying/selling of votes. Also, rather than serve as political thugs, voters are advised to protect and 'police' their votes. Writing in the local Nigerian pidgin, the writer of P29, for instance, recommends the 'one man, one vote' principle. Part of P29 is reproduced here:

> 'My fellow Nigerians our mumu don do; lets protect and police our vote, so abeg make una join us for the on going campaign against further elections for Nigeria. My people make we stand by One Man, One Vote, One Woman, One Vote, One Boi, One Vote, One Girl, One Vote etc.'

The use of the local pidgin enables the writer to convey some deeper sense of the word 'mumu' (foolish/stupid), while sounding informal. 'Our mumu don do' ('our stupidity is enough'), first identifies Nigeria's electoral problems and by implication, reprimands and implicitly accuses the Nigerian voters of having been 'foolish' ('mumu') in the previous elections. Here, the writer tactically links Nigeria's sociopolitical challenges to the Nigerian electorate. Elections in Nigeria from 1999 to 2007 had been fraught with serious irregularities and fraud (Rawlence & Albin-Lackey 2007), which had attracted criticism from the international community. The writer acknowledges this when he says 'our mumu don do' and goes on to recommend how to tackle the problem, i.e. 'one man, one vote.' Nigerian voters had often been accused of fraudulently selling their votes and indirectly electing corrupt and inept leaders; they should, therefore, blame themselves for the outcomes. 'Mumu' in Nigerian pidgin is a label that is more negative and derogatory than the English 'foolish' or 'stupid;' even so, the English term 'stupid' would have sounded too harsh in the context. By tactically using 'mumu', the writer manages to sound informal (but in effect more derogatory), in order to express his disgust.

(ii) posts that campaigned for Goodluck Jonathan, Nigeria's current president, are ostensibly sponsored by his campaign team. Many of the entries in this category are posted by Goodluck Jonathan's Campaign Blog (*@goodluck4ggov*). Here is what some of the posts say:

P13.   Jonathan must run (by *baruch*, posted: June 24, 2010, 02:38:57 PM)

P14.   what do you want Jonathan to do? (by *goodluck4ggov*, posted: June 16, 2010, 05:20:02 PM)

P21.   2011: Northern leaders give Jonathan go ahead (by *Nametalkam*, posted: July 16, 2010, 12:01:57 AM)

P28.   Will u vote President Goodluck? (by *etiese*, posted: May 29, 2010, 12:10:33 AM)

P63.   Jonathan again!!! (by *goodluck4ggov*, posted: June 17, 2010, 03:50:14 pm)

P80.   More groups ask Jonathan to run in 2011 (by *newslive*, posted: May 21, 2010, 01:41:29 AM

P84.   One Year Not Enough to Meet Targets, Says Jonathan (by *Ayemokhia*, posted: May 17, 2010, 02:10:20 PM

Tolu Ogunlesi (feature editor at *Next* — a Lagos newspaper), in his blog posted July 19, 2010 affirmed that 'Jonathan is our Facebook President.' Jonathan would then go down in history as the first Nigerian President from a minority ethnic group to apply the social networking apparatus to matters of governance. According to the blog, two weeks after joining the network, Jonathan had attracted more than 200,000 followers.

This also attests to the growing number of internet users in Nigeria, as many more people acquire internet literacy and realize the flexibility of social network options available in weblogs and online communities. According to Ifukor (2010) the number of internet users increased from barely 200,000 in 2000 to about 23 million by December 2009. This represents 16.1% of the nation's population, and a compounded annual growth rate of 71% in five years (2003–2008); Nigeria alone accounts for 27.8% of internet users in Africa.

Jonathan's followers were hopeful that the power of social media networking would achieve for Jonathan what it achieved for Obama in 2008. Among the other discursive structures represented in the posts, the writers apply modality, particularly in P13 and P28. The category of modality subsumes types of judgements reflecting an event's probability or a person's obligation or inclination to perform an action (Halliday, 1994) Such judgements may be expressed by modal verbs (e.g. of obligation) such as *will* or *must* (Melrose, 1995).

Some of the posts do create this sense of inclination and obligation by their attempts to mobilize people towards the 2011 elections. The modal verb of obligation 'must,' used in P13, sounds peremptory, as if voting for Jonathan was a matter

of force. Similarly, P28, which reads as a question: 'Will u vote President Good-luck?' ('will you vote for Jonathan?'), is actually meant to be understood as again expressing an obligation to vote for the incumbent president ('you will vote for Jonathan'). Many of the posts in this category express similar meanings.

(iii) The next type of posts in the social mobilization category are those that overtly attack Ibrahim Babangida (a former Nigerian military dictator) and his political ambitions in 2011. Babangida's announcement of interest to run for the presidency in the 2011 elections had come under serious attack from many Nige-rians, especially in the South. Blog writers and various discussion groups claimed that the former military ruler lacked the status and reputation needed for civil leadership in Nigeria. The writer of P57, for instance describes him as 'the man who murdered democracy.' Babangida's annulment of the June 12, 1993 general election, which was believed to be the freest and fairest election ever conducted in Nigeria, still remains the focal point of his critics. Some of the posts apply directive speech acts, such as 'stop IBB' (e.g. P23) and rhetorical questions such as 'Is it do or die for IBB' (e.g. P5) to challenge his presidential ambition.

(iv) There are also posts that publicize, and campaign for other political aspi-rants. Entries in this category are posted mainly by members of other politicians' campaign teams. One of the political aspirants vying for governorship is specifi-cally given publicity in P37 as follows:

P.37.   IBN SHUAIB 1 FOR KOGI STATE GOVERNOR (by *belluche*, posted: June 22, 2010, 11:23:47 AM)

Support Ibn Shuaib for Kogi State Governor 2011, for better change of the state, the man who is tested and trusted, taking the state to the top is my ambition. Love you all.

The word 'my' in this statement suggests that the writer is probably 'Ibn Shuaib' himself, expressing his personal ambition to 'take Kogi state to the top'. Posts like these indicate that more and more political aspirants are creating their own blogs and join discussion groups in order to propagate their political campaigns and mo-bilize their followership. 'Taking the state to the top' is arguably the same type of campaign propaganda (or 'lies'; Chilton, 2004) that characterizes political campaign speeches. Many promises of this kind usually turn out as quite their opposites.

6.1.3   *Criticisms of Corruption*

Posts in this category are highly critical of certain identified corrupt government officials and their collaborators. Corruption in Nigeria has drawn frequent radical attacks and protests in the media, as well as in scholarly writings within and outside of Nigeria. It has been identified as a major obstacle to Nigeria's socio-economic

development (see Chiluwa 2007). In *Nolitics*, particular reference is made to James Ibori (a former Edo state governor), to the two military dictators between 1985 and 1998, i.e. Ibrahim Babangida (aka. IBB) and the late Sani Abacha, to Michael Aondoaka (a former Minister of Justice), and to Olusegun Obasanjo (a former civilian President from 1999 to 2007). Topics of the posts in this category are given below:

P25.   Jonathan set to probe Babangida over a N12.4 billion scam (by *newslive*, posted: June 23, 2010, 03:29:47 PM)

P45.   Ibori associates sentenced to 5 years in prison (by *Nametalkam*, posted: June 07, 2010, 08:22:29 PM)

P55.   Ribadu Has Accepted Jonathan's Offer (by *Ayemokhia*, posted: April 05, 2010, 12:48:21 PM)

P71.   How Corruption Affected Nigeria's Dev[elopmen]t. (by *Aliaaz* posted: June 06, 2010, 10:53:41 AM)

P77.   Ibori found finally in Dubai (by *wizjosh*, posted: May 13, 2010, 12:13:36 PM)

P85.   Ex-governors Mobilize Against Ribadu's Return (by *Ayemokhia*, posted: April 07, 2010, 08:03:52 PM)

P86.   Whom to be blamed for economic doom IBB or Abacha (by *dearboy*, posted: May 16, 2010, 10:33:54 PM)

The posts' headings highlight a discourse that reveals the people's yearning for social justice, particularly targeting those accused of playing premier roles in the various financial frauds and corrupt practices. The posts also reflect the importance of a strong legal system and rule of law, where everyone is accountable for their actions. James Ibori, for example, whose mistress and sister were reportedly jailed in London after being convicted of various financial crimes (P45), walked free in Nigeria himself, despite serious charges of corruption. The conviction of the two women in the United Kingdom again opened up the debate on Nigeria's vulnerable and weak judiciary, which was said to have been bought by James Ibori. The latter, described as 'the thieving governor' (P45), was discharged of 170 charges of corruption by a Federal High Court in Asaba in 2009. He later escaped to Dubai, where he was recently arrested to face corruption charges, probably in the UK.

The continued *Nolitics* debate also focused on the contributions of Babangida and Abacha to Nigeria's socio-political and economic problems. In Nigeria, both men are viewed as the most corrupt leaders in the history of Nigerian government (P86). In 1988, for instance, the Nigerian press reported on the wealth of the two men, which was said to exceed by far the total income of some African countries. (See *The News,* August 17, 1998). Many political observers and critics believe that IBB's wealth is directly connected to his misappropriation of Nigeria's oil boom income during the Gulf War. Already, there were speculations in the media that Jonathan was ready to investigate IBB over $12.4 billion of mismanaged funds

(P25). Unfortunately, rather than assume responsibility and take radical action against confirmed cases of fraud and corruption, public officers point accusing fingers at one another (P71). Thus, corruption has never really been approached with sincerity and commitment.

Similarly, efforts by former President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration to confront corruption and financial crime had yielded little results. The administration established the Independent Corruption Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to probe public officers that had been accused of corruption. These agencies however, were criticized for being mere political instruments that only targeted Obasanjo's political enemies. For example, critics wondered why IBB was never investigated by these anti-graft agencies; IBB was said to have been a strong Obasanjo supporter, and instrumental in securing his election in 1999. Former President Obasanjo himself and members of his cabinet were also accused of corruption by critics at different times. In P54 for example, the debate still turns around the question: 'Is Obasanjo truly corrupt?' A few comments responded in the negative. A recent BBC video interview with the former president (which accompanied P54) suggests that the accusations against Obasanjo lacked definite proofs. The writer of P17 praised Barack Obama's government for refusing to issue entry visas to USA to persons with links to corruption, as well as to their relatives. This policy has already affected a former federal minister, Michael Aondoaka, whose visa is said to have been revoked, following his assumed role in the 'power-play' during Goodluck Jonathan's predecessor, the late President Umara Yar'Adua's medical trip to Saudi Arabia (Aondoaka, from Benue state, was Attorney General and Minister of Justice in Yar'Adua's cabinet).

Against the backdrop of this catalogue of unresolved cases of corrupt practices by politicians and government officials in Nigeria, and the failure of the judiciary to step in, Nigerians were in high spirits when the news broke, in April of 2010, that Nuhu Ribadu had accepted Jonathan's offer to serve as Special Adviser on 'anti-corruption, good governance and sundry matters' (P55); subsequently, the government dropped all corruption charges against him (P110). Ribadu had been the anti-corruption crusader and former head of the EFCC under President Obasanjo, but was removed from office and demoted under controversial circumstances. Critics believed that his removal was directly connected to his having stepped on too many big toes in the Nigerian government. Most of the posts following the news of his reinstatement reflect the general attitude to his achievements. A few of the comments are reproduced below.

– At least we're making progress, hope it turn out well
– I love this
– God, thank you for this

–   No matter how long it takes, truth shall prevail over falsehood. Welcome back,
    Mr. Cleaner
–   It is necessary so that Nigeria can have a way forward …
–   Justice will prevail no matter how long …
    And so on.

Even so, some of the commentators remained skeptical. Already Jonathan's government has been accused of representing Obasanjo's interests. In fact, some critics believe that Jonathan's administration is a mere extension of Obasanjo's. Hence, a new EFCC might turn out to be another tool in the hands of Mr. Obasanjo with which to fight his political enemies, even with Ribadu at the helm; after all, Ribadu had been Obasanjo's man. This could partly explain certain ex-governors being opposed to Ribadu's possible reinstatement (P85). While some were jittery on account of their ill-acquired wealth, some other ex-governors might still be suspicious of Obasanjo's earlier political motives and Ribadu's sincerity.

6.1.4   *Political Propaganda*

The posts tagged 'political propaganda' are those that publicize the 'achievements' of certain politicians, particularly the former Kwara state governor, Bukola Saraki (a relation of Olu Saraki, the former governor). Dr. Saraki was also the Chairman of the 'Nigerian Governors' Forum.' All the posts in this category highlight his initiatives and his administration's achievements. A few instances are listed here:

P43.   Bukola Saraki — the Ganmo Power Project: A time elixir (by *bisilawal*,
       posted: July 07, 2010, 04:43:38 pm)
P65.   Dr. Bukola Saraki — Kwara Explores Power Generation from Waste (by
       daudaalabi, posted: June 27, 2010, 01:32:34 PM)
P66.   Dr. Bukola Saraki: Kwara Distributes Hospital Equipment (by *suleyahaya*,
       posted: June 17, 2010, 10:53:15 AM)
P72.   NLC: Saraki has fulfilled promise to workers (by *daudaalabi*, posted: June
       05, 2010, 02:30:40 PM)
P89.   Dr. Bukola Saraki — Arguably the Best Governor in Nigeria (by *Akeredolu*,
       posted: May 26, 2010, 09:39:23 AM)
       And so on.

Propaganda inherently consists of half-truths or misinformation, inspired by the usual political inclination to promote a certain politician or political group. Very often, this involves 'selling lies like cigarettes', contrary to the interests and values of the general public, which has been persuaded to accept those lies (Partridge, 2004:1). Interestingly, the above entries (and others not listed here), though posted by the individuals whose names appear in brackets, were actually sourced from the Kwara

State Government House, which means that the messages were posted by Saraki's supporters (e.g. P43). And since Saraki's efforts were not assessed by independent observers or by the people of Kwara state themselves, it is likely that these so-called 'achievements' might just be mere propaganda sponsored by the governor himself.

While P43 for instance, alleges that the 'Ganmo Power Project' was a 'Christmas gift to the people of Kwara State' and 'a replenished hurricane lamp' that re-kindled the entire state, one of the skeptical comments lashed back: 'what is this?', reflecting disgust with the exaggerated statements. Dr. Saraki's example, however, represents the strategies being adopted by other politicians in Nigeria as they prepared for the 2011 general elections. In this category of blogs, propaganda and exaggeration are used as discourse strategies.

6.1.5   *Suggestions/recommendations*

Significantly, post writers not only criticize government policies, they also make suggestions and recommendations as part of their participation in Nigerian politics and government. Suggestions and recommendations for Nigeria's socio-political and economic growth were few in *Nolitics*, but the few there were, were very significant. Four of the posts in the corpus are listed below.

P41   The role of Technology in the 2011 Polls (by *biglizzy*, posted: 23/7/2010 at 08:17:21 PM)

P44   From 2011, president, gov[ernor]s must be graduates (by *Ayemokhia*, posted: March 27, 2010, 02:55:54 AM)

P52   Gun Rights in Nigeria for Nigerians! (by *goldenefe*, posted : June 30, 2010, 04:24:37 PM)

P96   Political Parties and Check List(s). (by *akutachinedu*, posted: May 16, 2010, 12:26:39 PM)

Some important parts of P41 are reproduced here for more careful analysis. The recommendation is based on some statistics and the reported success of the social media in elections around the world.

P41   'It is no longer news that Barack Obama won the US election mainly through the power of technology and a current Nigerian governor also employed the use of technology to win a re-election. This trend is growing exponentially and in time to come, only those who take advantage of this earlier enough will be ahead … The just concluded Philippines election was done electronically. We are x-raying the role the SMS will play in future elections and why you should tap into it now.'

Statistics show that Nigerians rate favourably in the world among users of the new media technologies. According to the post, 9% of Nigerians watch TV daily, while 19% listen to the radio daily. Only 4% read newspapers daily. While less than 2%

(as at the time of the statistics) use the internet on a daily basis, more than 50% use the GSM phone daily. Doubtless, the writer's preference for electronic voting is connected with the hope of reducing the prevalent electoral fraud rampant in Nigeria since 1999. For example, Yar'Adua's election as president in the Nigerian General Elections of 2007 was described as a 'stolen election' (Rawlence & Albin-Lackey, 2007), following confirmations that the elections were 'marred by extraordinary displays of rigging and the intimidation of voters in many areas throughout Nigeria. In many states up and down the country very little voting took place, as ballot papers were diverted to the offices and homes of government officials to be filled out with fabricated results. Elsewhere ballot boxes were stolen and stuffed with pre-marked ballots' (ibid.: 497–98). With electronic voting, the complexities of paper work and the easy stuffing of ballot papers would be eliminated. Use of moveable ballot boxes would be discontinued and political thugs eager to rig elections would be discouraged.

The suggestion that political office holders in Nigerian should be university graduates is probably due to the widespread feeling in Nigeria that modern political leadership should be transferred to the younger generations. It is believed that leadership by educated youths will promote initiative, vigor, energy, and foresight in government. The various comments by members of the forums argue that the late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua (a former university lecturer) was still the first educated, democratically elected President of Nigeria — the late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's first Governor-General, had been appointed by the colonial regime.

Nigerians have often blamed the problem of economic development in Nigeria on poor leadership, largely due to illiterate individuals fraudulently acquiring positions of political power. The post that recommends to elect highly educated leaders was actually sourced from a report on a recent amendment of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. The Legislature had approved that henceforth, candidates for the positions of president, vice-president, governor, deputy governor and members of the National Assembly must possess a degree from a recognized tertiary institution.

The suggestion that possession of firearms should be licensed in Nigeria collected divergent opinions, though with a 50–50 balance of 'yes' and 'no'. A post writer hinged his argument opposing arms control on four plausible points:

(i) Take the United States for example; it is the constitutional right of every citizen to carry a gun. Leaders think twice before cheating the people. There is always a lingering fear of revolt (ii) Take Niger-Delta militants as another example; the government never paid any attention to the suffering of the people. With so many guns in the area, the government is FORCED to listen to their cries. (iii) It is a fact that guns are used in self-defense 2.5 million

times a year, both high level and low level crime rate is much lower than that of Nigeria. (iv) So many thieves and kidnappers everywhere. If they know that residents all have guns, thieves will think twice before going in.

One of the comments against arms rights argued:

'When the only tool you have is a hammer, all your problems begin to look like a nail. With the current socio-political and economic atmosphere in Nigeria, advocating gun rights is a horrible idea.'

The debate remains ongoing and significantly this research reveals that *Nolitics* represents the voice of the Nigerian people, notably the youth. Political discourse in this context does not only reproduce the individual's eagerness to be heard and participate in political governance but also represents a form of resistance by the people against forces of oppression and domination. This is one of the main focuses of CDA.

P94 recommends 'Political Parties and Check List' for Nigerian politicians and aspirants for future political activities in Nigeria. Part of this recommendation is reproduced here:

'I am sure that most political parties/political leaders in Nigeria, watched as Gordon Brown (the ex British Prime Minister) resigned from his position after accepting responsibilities, for his Labour Party defeat in (the) just concluded United Kingdom general election. Every political dynasty has an end, so did Gordon Brown's premiership that ended on Tuesday May 11th 2010. I am also sure that most Nigerian political parties/political leaders, watched Obama's electoral victory, and the opposition victory in nearby Ghana. All these elections mentioned above have thrown a lot of challenges to Nigeria, especially as we approach the 2011 general election…'

The writer asked the Nigerian electorate to demand the following from their politicians: (a) political manifestoes (in order to have a clear understanding of the parties' plans); (b) disclosure of sources of campaign funding; (c) posting the academic qualifications of party leaders/contestants; (d) Declarations of Assets and Liabilities to be made; (e) public leadership debates to be held by politicians (in relation to the manifestoes); (f) a health check; (g) proof of age.

The issue of academic qualifications is also reminiscent of the case of Salisu Buhari, a former Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives in 1999, who was forced to resign, after admitting to having forged a certificate from the University of Toronto, Canada (Chiluwa, 2011).

The question of the age of political officers revisits the issue of the recurrent circle of retired men in government. According to the post, John McCain (the last Republican Presidential candidate was 72 years when he entered the USA

presidential elections in 2008. His age may have been one of the reasons he lost the election. In contrast, Barack Obama was 47 and the new British Prime Minister, David Cameron, was only 44 years old at the time of his election.

The blogger believes that younger people are likely to perform better in government than elderly ones. However, these are mere assumptions, as there is no documented, research-based confirmation. Yakubu Gowon, for instance, was barely 32 years old when he became Nigeria's second military leader to rule for 10 years; however, there are hardly any record-breaking achievements that can be credited to his government.

The same writer believes that it is worthwhile to check on the health of individuals seeking key political positions. This recommendation may have been a fall-out from the finding that the late President Yar'Adua had a major health problem even before he became president. During the election campaigns he was so sick that the President, Obasanjo, had to campaign for him around the country. Again, this also supports the argument that Yar'Adua couldn't have been the people's overwhelming choice. The writer finally advised the electorate to take active part in the electoral process in 2011: 'Vote during elections, stay around till the votes are counted, follow the returning officer(s) or delegate people to follow the returning officers till the overall results are announced. Monitor elections in your locality. Go to pooling stations with hidden cameras or spy cameras. Better still; take pictures with your mobile phones.'

The growing involvement in the political process by Nigerians using social media is clearly reflected in the tempo and passion of the recommendations. Nigerian politicians and leaders can no longer ignore the widespread use of blogs, twitter, and other discussion forums for political debate. After all, many of the politicians themselves are already on Facebook and twitter (Ifukor, 2008).

7.   Discourse pragmatics of the *posts*

Some discourse strategies of the posts have already been identified in the above analyses, such as metaphors, exaggerations, speech acts, implications, labelling etc. In this section, a few salient strategies will be discussed in some more detail: viz., metaphors, directive speech acts and questioning. It must be pointed out here that most of the members of the discussion forum *Nolitics* are fairly educated Nigerians, especially those familiar with CMD and who are regular users of CMC. The various levels of discourse in *Nolitics* also highlight various degrees of English language proficiency. The language proficiency which is close to the native speaker's (i.e. Standard Nigerian English, SNE) is more prevalent in 'quotes' from the popular press or other online sources than in personal diaries and comments.

Since *Nolitics* is a case of intra-group CMD, discursive markers that reflect ethnic/ national identity, including some culture-specific words, names and verbal genres that are particularly Nigerian, are evident in this context (see Chiluwa, 2010b).

Nigerian Pidgin is also widely used, as we saw in P29 above. This pidgin has the advantages of flexibility and spontaneity and provides a means for conveying culture-specific aesthetics — a potential independent area of research. Another discourse strategy is that of 'flaming', implying the use highly critical, often personally invective comments (Smith et al., 1997); this kind of critique even appears to be the norm in *Nolitics*. Moreover, because the bloggers' own social experiences are involved in their use of CMD, they often transfer terms and practices from offline cultures to CMD, all of which this contributes to shaping their linguistic behaviour (Herring, 2001). In other words, the discourse topic (or the corresponding activity type) conditions the linguistic/pragmatic strategies that come into play. *Nolitics* deploys some high persuasive speech acts, including frequent use of what has been called 'flaming'.

7.1 Metaphors

In their posts, the writers occasionally use some common political metaphors that are typical of the mass media. For instance, Jonathan's 'presidential posters' are said to 'flood' the federal capital Abuja, FCT, implying that the campaign posters were everywhere in the city. In this context, however, 'flooding' is an exaggeration, pragmatically deployed to suggest that Jonathan is likely to be the people's choice, considering the number of supporters needed to 'flood' the posters. Using another metaphor, P21 reports that Jonathan (a Southerner) had been given 'the green light' by the Northern political elites to enter the 2011 presidential elections. Here, the 'green light' metaphor signifies an approval which in the Nigerian political context was crucial. To be given approval by the Northern leaders, notably the People's Democratic Party (PDP), is almost tantamount to winning the election, even before the official ballot boxes are open.

The 'flood' also contains an implicit criticism of Jonathan's over-zealous activities towards acquiring a political leadership which he initially pretended not to be interested in. In the same vein, the former military dictator Ibrahim Babangida was said to 'romance' musicians, bringing to mind the tactics employed in 1994 by another military dictator, the late Sani Abacha, commonly referred to as the 'one million-man march.' Babangida's romance with musicians consisted in organising concerts in major Nigerian city centres, in order to reach out to the young people. The expression 'romances' also functions as comic relief in the continuous, tension-heightening political controversy about Babangida's politics.

A further use of metaphor occurred when the Niger Delta state of Bayelsa was described as a 'headache', since no significant development project takes place there. The streets were said to be 'flooded' with dirt and the governor would rather hold a beauty pageant than pay university lecturers. 'Headache', a highly critical metaphor, portrays Bayelsa as a sick state, requiring urgent official attention, as recommended by some members of the *Nolitics* discussion forum, such as an investigation and possible prosecution of the state governor.

Another metaphor, the 'price-tag', is used to describe former governor James Ibori's activities in relation to the Nigerian judiciary. As mentioned earlier, two persons having intimate connections to Ibori were jailed in Britain, because Ibori could not find 'a price tag' for justice in London (as he presumably would have in Nigeria). The 'price-tag' metaphor indicates that justice is bought and sold in Nigeria, which constitutes a severe indictment of the Nigerian judiciary. Generally, Nigeria's democracy is said to carry some 'albatrosses,' problems that have defied solution. One of the albatrosses is insincerity on the part of political leaders; 'they excuse themselves from real issues and set standards of comfort for themselves,' (P8).

7.2   Speech acts

Arguably, the political and social discourse content of *Nolitics* is couched for performance in the various speech acts proposed by Austin and Searle. Thus for instance we have the 'representative act' (i.e. describing events, also asserting, claiming, reporting and suggesting); there are also 'directive acts' (i.e. requesting, pleading, inviting and directing; Searle, 1969), the latter being more significant in the context of this study. Because *Nolitics* involves a form of social mobilization, the post writers adopt persuasive strategies that tend to 'direct' or 'plead with' people to have them perform their civic responsibilities. This form of discursive strategy is also evident in the speech act category of 'suggestion/recommendation', gathering both representative and directive acts. A few examples of directive acts from the social and political mobilization sub-category are reproduced here:

> P23.   Support the people mandate (ALH. TEINA ABDULMALIK FOR HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE)
> P37.   Support Ibn Shuaib for Kogi state governor, 2011 for better change of state
> P57.   Stop IBB (Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida)

Directive acts are usually formed as imperative sentences issuing commands, often with a tone of urgency and desperation as in the above examples. Political discourse, especially when it involves election campaigning, often draws on various persuasive nuances to force the listener/reader to take action in favour of certain politicians or their agents.

Much of the political struggle involves argument, threats, entreaties, promises and lies (Chilton, 2004), and as a result, the tenor of communication in political arenas is often quite fascinating. P23 and P37, above, urge the electorate to 'support' the politicians named in the posts, while P57 rather urges them to 'stop IBB.' Unlike the general form of commands, political directives (as in the above examples) would generally give reasons for their position. For instance, the writer of P57 claims that Babangida 'murdered democracy' in Nigeria, and therefore is ineligible for further political engagements.

The kind of passion we observe in the social mobilization is also visible in the suggestion and recommendation category. When the writer of P94, for instance, urges Nigerians to demand a 'checklist' from the political parties, he applies directive speech acts with active verbs such as *vote, stay, follow, delegate, go*, etc. to mobilise political participation. These directive speech acts reflect the despair and anxiety of Nigerians regarding the future of their beloved country. It also highlights the unavoidable changes which Nigeria desperately needs.

7.3 Questioning

Because *Nolitics* is a discussion forum that expects contributors and members to respond to the posts and bring out their opinions on particular socio-political issues, many of the entries are written in the form of questions. Apart from sampling opinions on particular political topics, post writers sometimes want to know how many members of the online community are conversant with certain current political events or ongoing debates in the country. This explains why some posts actually sound like 'political gossips,' suggesting that *Nolitics* is also a forum for supporters of different political parties and adversarial politicians to engage in frequent, fierce argument. Thus, in order not to sound too direct, post writers often put their opinions and arguments in form of questions. Some of the questions however, are rhetorical in that they do not require a direct answer (e.g. 'Are politicians this bad?') Some of the posts are reproduced here:

P5.   Is it do or die for IBB? Who will you vote for, IBB or Jonathan?
P8.   Are politicians this bad?
P18.   Is he lying (referring to the state governor)
P34.   Will Biafra come back?
P82.   Vision 2020, do u believe that a president from the north can take Nigeria there?
         And so on.

Questioning or using interrogatives becomes a kind of 'pragmatic tact', intended to avoid offence; it also functions as opinion gathering on a particular topic, while the

writer reserves his/her own until another day. Normally, the answers and opinions communicated in the discussion forum are not conclusive, but they generally give the idea of where certain members of society stand on particular social or political issues. The issue of Biafra in P34 for instance, is one that has recently generated a lot of anxiety and heated arguments among the group discussion members. Recent widespread activities of the Biafran campaigns on the internet and their associated links, once again brings up the question. 'Will Biafra come back?'

Although the complex Biafran question has been a political matter, most Nigerians have always tended to consider it along ethnic lines, as it is about one ethnic group seeking secession from the rest. One of the posts expresses being shocked at how far Biafran campaigners in the diaspora, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, have gone in their campaign for the 'Sovereign State of Biafra' or 'the United States of Biafra (P6). The 'Republic of Biafra' was a secessionist nation of the Igbos of southeast Nigeria that existed between 30th May 1967 and 15th January, 1970; it became defunct after a civil war in which over three million Igbos died (see Dike, 2006). In the posts, the Biafra campaign group, with headquarters in the United States, was said to maintain subsidiary media affiliates such as Radio Biafra, an on-line radio network, newspapers and magazines. The post writer also observed that the Biafran campaigners have a well organized and influential leadership, which claimed to have been recognized by several of the most powerful and important countries of the world. Their activities are financially bolstered by a very solid supporter base with members in different sectors of the world.

Reactions to these posts were mixed, with most people not foreseeing a possible resuscitation of the defunct state, the main reason being that the Igbo nation no longer can boast of the cohesion and the system of trust that once characterized them. Especially given the departure of the original leader, Odumegwu Ojukwu and the continued tussle for leadership in 'Ohaneze Ndigbo' (an Igbo elite group), it would be almost impossible to rally the Igbos again.

The defeat of the Igbos and the re-integration of the southeastern region in 'One Nigeria' have been described by critics as 'a forced unity'- a mere legacy of colonial administrative convenience. Likewise, Nigeria's social problems have been attributed to the size of the multi-ethnic nations that make up the post-colonial country. With about 400 languages spoken in Nigeria (Adegbija, 1997), and English being the official language, the various ethnic groups' inherent fear of mono-ethnic domination by one of the other tribes remains. In connection with this, one of the comments reacting to the incessant ethnic and religious troubles in the Jos area (mentioned above) suggests that breaking up Nigeria into smaller, independent states could be the solution to Nigeria's frequent inter-ethnic and religious crises.

With regard to Biafra, the existence of an indigenous pro-Biafran radicalist movement, known as the 'Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra' (MASSOB), is well known in Nigeria today. This movement still advocates a separate country for the Igbo people and accuses the Nigerian state of marginalising them. MASSOB identifies itself as a peaceful group and advertises a 25-stage plan to achieve its goal peacefully (Murray, 2007; Shirbon, 2006). Its leader, Raph Uwazuruike, has been arrested several times by the Federal Government and was detained in 2005 on charges of treason.

8.   Conclusion

Using the new media technologies. the *NaijaPals* host site and the discussion forum of *Nolitics* are providing ample opportunities for Nigerians to participate in social and political interactions, through what the present study refers to as 'political participation.' Owing to the online social media's advantage of combining speed and wide currency with the facility of asynchronous CMD, which enables blogs and posts to be stored and messages to be archived at the addressee's site until they are read, interactants are able to monitor socio-political debates and follow them up to their conclusions. Discussion forums such as *Nolitics* allow participants within and outside of Nigeria to air their views while remaining anonymous, and interestingly, 'Nigerian friends' from other countries are also welcome to participate in *Nolitics*.

We can conclude that the emergence of online social media like weblog and discussion forums is enabling Nigerians to be involved in political debates much more than ever before. More voices are being heard, urgent social problems are being discussed, and more people are participating in political debates; nothing of this was possible during the era of military dictatorship. These new forms of political participation are likely to increase, given the awareness that has already been created and the number of bloggers that are getting involved. In the context of the political discourse characteristic of *Nolitics*, political involvement and participation in governance has re-defined the concept of citizenship. In this new definition, a citizen is one who participates in socio-political governance, using any media available to him/her. A further interesting tendency is for Nigerian politicians to appear on Facebook and register their own blogs. Thus, the general influence generated from contributions by the people via the social media is likely to contribute to shaping social morality and political performance. Once we see the people and their leaders being engaged in discussion forums like *Nolitics*, there is the possibility that a greater reciprocal understanding between the leaders and the led will ensue.

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