From Cambridge Analytica to 'O To Ge' (Enough is Enough): The Dynamics of Political Canvassing and Elections in a Social Media Environment

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Abstract: - **This study examined the socio-political dynamics surrounding the use of digital and social media platforms in political canvassing. Specifically, the research explored the platforms' prospects for promotion of dialogue between elected officials and the population; as well as mass voter engagement. The prospects were however observed to be marred by challenges such as the implication on political reality arising out of the spread of fake news in social media; as well as the nuances of government regulation and oversight of social media platforms and its effects on privacy and civil liberties. These nuances were deconstructed using case studies of President Obama's use of digital platforms to bypass traditional media and engage directly with youths during the 2008 American presidential elections; Russia's influence operations via deployment of fake social media accounts to affect the outcome of the 2016 American presidential elections; and the datamining efforts of Cambridge Analytica, the British political consulting company, in gauging perceptions towards generation of targeted messaging to affect the outcome of the same election. Other case studies explored included President Trump's use of Tweeter to shape the political narrative in his own image as well as the 'O to Ge' (Enough is Enough) movement in Kwara State, Nigeria - amplified to epic proportions via social media - reflected a political earthquake of seismic proportions in demystifying the Saraki political dynasty. It was concluded that while social media holds out promises of greater political engagement, it nevertheless holds greater danger to aspects of civil liberties and political reality arising from the medium's sheer ubiquity.**

Key words: **Digital platforms, social media, political canvassing, political engagement, Civil Liberties, 'O To Ge'.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Numbers and figures play a significant role in politics. The 'numbers' in this instance refers to the quantum of the enabling weight/force/pressure or an amalgam of these and several other dynamics which lead to the imposition of the vested political interests of an individual/group over other individuals/groups within the context of a nation at a particular given time. However, while the addictive nature of politics, which could be likened to be the opium of the masses - apologies to Marx's (1844, p. 1) opinion of religion being the opium of the people, is not in doubt, its (i.e. politics) appeal mainly lies in its innate manipulative ability to channel the mass populace' addiction towards the attainment of the political goals of vested interest groups in the society. The

foregoing therefore makes the channel through which political canvassing is conducted to be the critical enabler for vested interests seeking political fulfilment and relevance. Thus, while the ultimate goal of political canvassing might be the achievement and retention of political power, other imperatives such as fundraising, political engagement, sensitization and awareness, campaigning and membership drives are equally important. Hence, political engagement via canvassing has been found to be core to the identification of supporters; engagement, persuasion and conviction of undecided persons; as well as consensus-building between and amongst disparate interests. This is because it is the extent to which a viewpoint/interest (irrespective of its merit or otherwise) is projected and magnified to garner the most public support that matters.

Accordingly, a proper appreciation of the power and place of political canvassing and the appropriate medium for its propagation led to the use of oratory as in the case of Cicero in the Roman Forum. This also includes personal charisma and thunderous exhortation in public spaces, radio and television media by Hitler; billboards, flyers, telephone, door-to-door visits as well as the use of electronic and print media as mediums for canvasing in recent times. However, irrespective of the canvassing channel used, a major drawback has been the limited number of political actors engaged via the aforementioned channels.

The abovementioned issues, therefore, set the stage for the rise of disruptive technological trends in political canvassing. Specifically, with President Barrack Obama's pioneering use of social media well as digital platforms to bypass traditional media and engage directly with the voting populace in America during the 2008 US election, digital platforms and social media have consequently found their pride of place. This is further buttressed by Russia's deployment of fake social media accounts and personas to affect the outcome of the USA elections as well as the datamining efforts of Cambridge Analytica in gauging perceptions and trends towards the generation of targeted messaging to affect the outcome of the same election. The crown piece of the whole social media disruption has been in the case of President Donald Trump where, despite his alt-right wing, nativist persuasions, he has still been able to weather the negative

media storm, and ensure the loyalty of his core supporters through his direct messaging using 'Tweeter'.

On the local scene in Nigeria, the 'O to Ge' movement in Kwara State - amplified to epic proportions via social media channels - reflected a political earthquake of seismic proportions in demystifying the Saraki's political dynasty. In Yoruba language 'O to Ge' means "Enough is Enough". This slogan was adopted to cause disenchantment with the authoritarian power of the Saraki political dynasty and ultimately lead to its overthrown. It is worth noting that the Saraki dynasty had been entrenched in Kwara State politics for over 50 years beginning with the patriarch, the late Abubakar Olushola Saraki and continuing with his scions, Gbemisola Saraki and ultimately, the erstwhile Senate President and two-term Governor of Kwara State, Abubakar Bukola Saraki. Specifically, the power, reach and impact of social media was used to galvanize the opposition, persuade the undecided voter and turn the allegiance of the Saraki's core supporters via a catchy slogan that epitomized the ills, challenges and dissatisfactions of the electorate in Kwara State and in so doing, end a 40-year old stranglehold of power of the Saraki's dynasty.

Bearing in mind the foregoing, while digital platforms and social media have held out promises of greater positive political engagement, many dynamics (both positive and negative) play out in use and outcomes of such usage. Thus, this study seeks to explore the socio-political dynamics surrounding the use of digital and social media platforms in political canvassing. Specifically, this study would explore digital platforms and social media's prospects for promotion of dialogue between elected officials and the population; as well as mass voter engagement. Thereafter, challenges such as the implication on political reality arising out of the spread of fake news on social media; as well as the nuances of government regulation and oversight into social media/digital platforms and its effects on privacy and civil liberties would be explored.

A study of this nature, by virtue of the ubiquity, wide acceptance and use of digital platforms and social media all over the world, would best be enhanced via the conduct of a mass survey of political perceptions, attitudes, realities and practices in a representative sample of countries as well as interviews of key political actors and groups. However, due to the constraints of time, access and resources available to the researcher, this would not be possible. This limitation would, however, be mitigated via reliance on reports in academic journals on related aspects, exploration of poll surveys conveyed by political action committees in selected Western countries as well as liberal use of other secondary data. Furthermore, while the findings from the study could amplify new areas that had not been expressly studied in political canvassing, it cannot be said to be truly representative of canvasing across all media domains.

Accordingly, this study would commence via the conduct of a review of related literature in order to identify the gaps on the subject. Thereafter, briefly the objectives and tools of political canvassing would be explored. Later, certain significant cases of social media influences will be summarized. Namely; Arab spring, Iran, and Iceland case. This would lay the ground for presenting the case for social media and digital platforms in political canvassing. Subsequently, the disruptive political innovation aspects of social media and digital platforms vis-à-vis the social media's negative dynamics, prospects for resolution and solutions would be explored and compared in details within the specific experiences of the USA's Presidential and Nigeria's state elections.

In our study we aimed to explore the following propositions:

a. Social media, internet and digital platforms have become game-changers impacting the way, processes and procedures for civic engagement and mobilization in electoral processes.
b. The use of social media confers an overwhelming advantage to political actors and is a decisive factor in the electoral victory.
c. Social media could as easily be hijacked for less altruistic purposes, which could lead to impairment of civil liberties and democratic principles.

II. OBJECTIVES AND TOOLS OF POLITICAL CANVASSING

Politics is innate to man, and the concept is hardwired into man's subconscious as well as cognitive functioning. This is on account of the manipulative power and associated benefits that the exercise of politics confers. Power in this instance is "the ability to get others – individuals, groups, or nations – to behave in ways that they ordinarily would not" (Payne, 2013, p. 25). Consequently, while liberal thinkers postulate that the pursuit of political power ultimately ought to be for altruistic reasons such as the overall good of everyone via the institution of democracy, republican values, good governance, civil liberties and rule of law; classical realists posture that interests take precedence over ideology which invariably brings about conflict.

Sequel to the preceding, Rove and Axelrod underscore the importance of political canvassing as;

> *A political candidate can have the best policy ideas, a dynamic personality and leadership style, a rock-solid moral compass, and a tremendous work ethic—but none of these traits will get him or her elected without voter awareness and action. Political canvassing can deliver this awareness and action to the politician, which makes it an essential tool in the get out the vote effort that leads up to Election Day (Rove & Axelrod: 2019).*

Thus, the implication is that rather than seek what the electorate want (i.e. survey canvassing), the real issue in any voter engagement is selling a viewpoint/candidate (i.e. persuasive canvassing). Specifically, while survey canvassing is inclined to liberalism via its objective of seeking constructive dialogue and engagement regarding answering the questions of what people think is the ideal, their views on the gaps between the ideal and reality, and how corrective action could be taken, the reality is, however, more of a realist posture on account of interests rather than ideology. This is because political canvassing is most about selling a viewpoint/candidate/party (persuasive canvassing) whose bottom line according to Maciejewska (2010) of the European Union Green Foundation is *"to present your proposal briefly and effectively, to win support"*.

Consequently, the real objectives of political canvassing could be as narrowly focused as identifying a political actor's core supporters, the opposition's supporters as well as the undecided (and by inference persuadable) voters (National Democratic Institute, NDI: 2019, p. 9), it could also be broad-based to include fundraising, political engagement, sensitization and awareness, campaigning and membership drives.

Accordingly, what the issues as mentioned earlier all coalesce to revolves around the canvassing 'intent', 'message', 'target audience', and 'intended effect/impact'. This is aptly reflected in the case of Donald Trump who initially belonged to the Democratic Party but had to decamp to the Republican Party and espouse nativist and alt-right views that were contrary to his former Democratic ideology in order to win the support and galvanise white, evangelical, blue-collar Americans and in so doing achieving his own personal ambition of becoming the American President. The same intent could be seen in Adolf Hitler's advocacy of the racial supremacy of the Aryan race in order to bring about nostalgic feelings of greatness lost in the German Nation (post World War I and the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles) and in so doing achieve his objective of becoming the German Fuhrer and actualizing the genocidal holocaust against Jews. Similarly, the Saraki family's (called as Saraki Dynasty in Nigeria) cross carpeting from the People's Democratic Party (PDP) at the beginning of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria to the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), then onwards to the CPC, back to the PDP, decamping to the and APC in 2015 before going back full circle to the PDP in 2018 all point to one indisputable reality and fact.

The fact is that political canvasing is not about ideology or altruistic ideals such as promoting democracy and democratic principles like citizen involvement in decision making, representative government, promotion of the rule of law, the entrenchment of majority rule or promotion of human and civil liberties (Sargent: 2009, p. 62). Instead, it is about the permanence of narrow-minded interests rather than that of the common good – in the Saraki example given, the interest is the retention of power amongst an elitist cabal, and it is to this end that careful thought is given by the political actor to the tool for political canvassing which should be adopted for maximum effect.

Along with the objectives, another significant part of the political canvassing is the efficacy of the tool, or medium through which the political canvassing would be conducted. This is particularly important because there is a direct correlation between the type and quality of political canvassing tool used vis-à-vis the level of mobilization and engagement of voters in the electoral process.

Before selecting the most efficient political canvassing tools, though, several critical questions need to be answered. These include determination of who the voters are and where they are to be found, how to exploit and maximize the existing canvasing resources to reach the maximum number of voters (NDI: 2009, p.32), the 'message' and the 'intended effect/impact'. Sequel to the determination of the questions mentioned above and eliciting of the appropriate answers any of the undermentioned tools or a combination of the tools in Table 1 could be adopted for political canvasing:

The tools mentioned in Table 1 are critical to the transmission of the intended political message and achievement of the envisaged effect/impact. Hence, careful thought must be given to the cost in terms of finances, time, planning, personnel requirement necessary to activate and the canvasing tool.

Interestingly, while the traditional print and electronic media have had varying levels of success in political canvassing, their usefulness and impact have, however being limited by cost, reach, and impact factors. Specifically, geographical and demographic challenges have limited the maximum possible reach of television, radio and print. Furthermore, there is a limit to the number of persuadable voters that rallies, shows and debates could draw in. This, in addition to the cost and reach limitations of branded merchandise distribution to the maximum number of core supporters and persuadable voters.

Consequently, it is in the area of maximum reach (whether to core supporters, persuadable voters or opposition voters) relative to low cost, that social media and the internet confer overriding advantages relative to the traditional electronic and print media and physical contact (face to face fora). This is on account of its universal reach, ability to predict voting patterns and voting preferences through data mining, utilization of the 'echo-chamber effect' to customize websites and social media sites while streaming live-feeds to pass the intended message and reinforce voter preferences/biases at no cost and almost no effort to the target audience. Hence, the wide acceptance, popularity and ubiquity of the internet and associated social media in political canvassing in recent times which also stands poised to remain the number one platform of choice for political canvassing for the foreseeable future.

III. SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS IN POLITICAL CANVASSING AND COUNTRY CASES

Social media and digital platforms have brought about disruptive technological innovation in the field of politics. This is on account of their ability to enter the domain of traditional media in political canvassing, and in so doing "expand (the) niche markets, (while) ultimately improving with time and thereby, attacking established products in their traditional markets" (Donoghue: 2016, p. 370). This is particularly so because social media, internet and digital platforms are "Cheaper, simpler, … and, frequently, more convenient to use" (Christensen: 1997, p. 7). The foregoing is further reinforced by relevant social media and internet usage statistics, which is highlighted in Table 2.

Bearing in mind the statistics highlighted in Table 2, the universal appeal of social media, internet and digital platforms cannot be overemphasized. Consequently, the appeal of this medium and its implications on democracy, civil liberties and civic engagement would be explored in five case studies presented hereunder.

Effects of social media can be observed more than ever in the elections. Among the different countries' experiences, three of them are very prominent. These are Green Movement of Iran, Arab Spring, and the case of Island.

3.1 Iran Green Movement 2009 – 2010

The Iranian presidential election of 2009 which was declared won by the incumbent conservative Mahmud Ahmadinejad by 64 percent of the votes (Moghanizadeh: 2013, p. 19) and the aftermath of protests by the supporters of the popular opposition reformist candidate Mir Hussein Mousavi amply demonstrates the power of social media and digital platforms in citizen mobilization to shape their own political narrative and destiny. Specifically, with the catalyzing phrase of *"Where is my vote"* social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube where used to sensitize and mobilize protesters, schedule the place and time of protests, coordinate protest actions (such as the mass resignation of lecturers in University of Tehran), circulate propaganda, while bringing video/life-feeds of protests and events to the general public.

Although ultimately unsuccessful on account of government repression, arrests of key opposition leaders and censorship of websites, the Green Movement nevertheless shook the foundations of Iran's Islamic Revolution. Sequel to the foregoing, the key issues to be noted include social media's ability to engage the citizenry to demand the upholding of a fundamental democratic principle of majority rule which they felt had been compromised by the declaration of Ahmadinejad as the winner in place of Mousavi. It also enabled the citizens to set the political agenda outside government control. Furthermore, while civil liberties such as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly could be said to have been amplified by social media, conversely, the open nature of the social media and internet platforms enabled suppression of those

same civil liberties through governmental surveillance and resultant repressive actions. This leads to the obvious conclusion that social media is also a useful tool for repressive governments against their own citizenry's civil liberties and natural rights.

3.2 2011 Arab Spring and Social Media

The nexus of the mobile phone, internet and social media proved particularly critical during the Arab Spring revolts of 2011. At stake was the Arab world's quest for democratic principles such as a more representative government, political self-determination, majority rule, greater citizen involvement in policy formulation (Sargent: 2009, p. 62) and equality. Specifically, social media platforms offered citizens the liberty to set the protest and political agenda, coordinate action, give feedback as well as *"spread information to the world about the movement and related events (and) raise awareness inside the country on the causes of the movements"* (Gire: 2019, p.8).

In the case of the Arab Spring, while social media could be universally agreed to be an enabler of civil engagement and discourse as well as entrenching democratic principles, the platform could also be hijacked for counter-messaging. This is particularly exemplified in the case of the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) who hijacked the social media-inspired Arab Spring to set their agenda for regime change tinged with religious intolerance, terrorism and hate-speech. The implication of this is an impairment of the rights and civil liberties of the many by a vocal and vociferous few who have access to the amplifying effects of social media, digital platforms and internet facilities.

3.3 Social Media-Enabled Direct Democracy in Iceland

The call for social media-enabled direct democracy in Iceland was a case of reactionary politics. Specifically, the global economic recession occasioned by the collapse of banks in the Year 2008 hit Iceland particularly hard. This was on account of the fact that the banks owed the equivalent of over 600 per cent of Iceland's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as debt which was unprecedented for a country of that size (Gylfason, 2011). Accordingly, being mindful of the challenges of representative democracy, which is plagued with lobbying by special interests and corruption, the citizens of Iceland instead ratified the adoption of direct democracy in the aftermath of the recession. To this end, extensive use of digital and social media platforms such as Facebook and websites were used *"to hold electronic polls and referenda and to have online discussions"* (van Dijk: 2013, p. 4). This was with a view to political agenda-setting, policy preparation, policy evaluation, decision making and policy execution (van Dijk: 2013, pp. 10 – 15). Thus, the deduction to be made in the case of Iceland is that the relevance and impact of social media in political canvassing is directly correlated to the existing quantum of political unrest and economic disenchantment which serve as catalyzing factors. Hence, without sufficient underlying socio-political and economic impairments in the target society,

social media as a political canvassing tool consequently holds little utility in generating passion, conviction and arousing sustained action for civic engagement.

IV. USA'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND NIGERIA'S STATE ELECTIONS

2016 USA presidential elections and 2019 Kwara State elections in Nigeria have significant characteristics that prove the importance of social media and digital platforms in politics and political canvassing.

4.1 United States 2016 Presidential Election

USA's 2016 presidential election was a real test of the power of social media in all its ramifications (whether good or bad). Coming on the heels of Obama's pioneering use of digital media and the internet in the previous election cycles to promote a brand of positive equality targeting minority groups and youths with his "Change" slogan, the 2016 presidential election provided paradoxes of social and civic engagement on one hand as well as impairment of American's civil liberties by local and foreign actors on the other hand.

Specifically, with a social media penetration rate of 70 per cent in the USA (Statista: 2019), the presidential election was aptly named the Social Media Election by several writers, media organizations and experts. This was on account of American's widespread use of the internet, mobile phones and social media sites for political information, civic engagement and entertainment. This consequently led *"political parties and candidates to restructure their communication and focus their attention on online campaign activities. (Consequently) Social networking sites and social media platforms have altered the way of political communication"* in the USA (Bender: 2017).

An analysis of the political campaign styles of the two leading candidates, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Donald Trump showed a marked divergence in focus, messaging and intent. Hillary Clinton with her campaign slogan of "Stronger Together" seemed to have been held hostage by the values of the Democratic Party which were left leaning. Consequently, her social media messaging was largely bland, unemotional and mainly reflected the corporate brand image (Moatti: 2016) of the democratic party – i.e. the archetypal establishment persona that the American people were tired of. Conversely, Donald Trump, with a nativist message of "Make America Great Again" adopted a more visceral, personal and emotionally-laden (Moatti: 2016) approach that was sufficient to galvanise his far-right leaning supporters albeit on a track that exposed the fractures of the American society along the lines of race, immigration, religion and economic inequality rather than bind or smooth them over.

It is an attestation of the huge success of the social media political canvassing by both candidates that a record number of 137.5 million voters, equivalent to 61.4 per cent of adult USA voters, (Pew Research Centre: 2017) turned out to vote during the presidential elections. However, although Hillary Clinton won the popular vote leading the opposing candidate by about 2.9 million more votes, Donald Trump, however, won the Electoral College with 304 votes against Clinton's 227 votes (Porter: 2016 and Brasch: 2019) and hence Trump was duly declared President.

While it could be argued that civic engagement, deliberation and participation in debates on key national issues such as foreign policy, immigration, monetary and fiscal policies, health and education amongst others was enhanced in the social media political canvassing during the elections due to the sheer number of voter participation in online and social media discussions, a significant drawback to the use of social media was the Russian interference in the elections which could be argued to have significantly impaired the course of democracy, people's will and their civil liberties. Specifically, Russia through profiling by the firm Cambridge Analytica and use of internet troll farms spearheaded by the Internet Research Agency (IRA) was able to mount a coordinated and wide ranging assault on the USA elections. The influence operations were carried out by hacking of the Democratic Party's server (McCarthy: 2017) and posting the thousands of stolen emails on Wikileaks website, attack on voter databases to discredit Clinton and the Democratic Party, targeted fake messages through fake social media accounts (British Broadcasting Corporation: 2018) aimed at conservative and far-right groups with messages on gun control, immigration, anti-Islam, race aimed at stoking discord and tension. Social media messages aimed at discouraging African American's from voting and shaking their confidence in the electoral system was also another tool deployed by the Russians (McCabe: 2018).

The sheer scale of the Russian influence operations is best appreciated vide the following statistics compiled by New Knowledge (2018) as shown in Table 3.

Further to the data reflected in Table 3, while it may be argued that the Russian influence operation's aim was to discredit Clinton and favour Trump to win the election, deeper insight into the matter suggests that it was a more insidious plot to weaken the fabric and cohesion of the American society, and in so doing, reduce its power and influence on global affairs and in so doing, give Russia a greater say in world affairs. This is based on the premise that a house divided on itself cannot project a common front to the enemy.

The success of the Russian influence operation aimed at fracturing USA cohesion has been attested to by several US intelligence agencies and government agencies. This is specifically considering the ongoing rancour between the Executive and the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives, the increasing rate of hate-speech and neo-fascist activities by race supremacist groups, the rampant Islamophobia that has been stoked in the hearts of the citizen, the anti-immigrant rhetoric as well as anti-free trade policies of the Trump Government which has seen it imposes tariffs on trade with China, Mexico and others while fraying the

bilateral and multilateral ties that have been forged with its traditional allies post World War II.

Consequently, what can be deduced from the USA 2016 elections is that social media, digital platforms and the internet have become game changers in political canvassing. Furthermore, while social media's potential for harnessing civic engagement, shaping the political discourse agenda, mobilization and fundraising has become inevitably established, the reality is also that it is a handy tool for political actors with less altruistic and politically subversive objectives to amplify their messaging, spread misinformation, create discord and chaos and ultimately achieve their aim. This, therefore, underscores the need for some form of 'content' and 'usage' regulation of social media especially in political canvassing by impartial and objective government and oversighted by proactive civil society watchdog organizations.

4.2 'O To Ge' Movement and 2019 Elections in Kwara State, Nigeria

A distinguishing feature of Kwara State for over 50 years spanning from the 1970s to the Year 2019 was the State populace' unflinching loyalty to the Saraki Political Dynasty. Thus, irrespective of the promises of the Saraki opposition in the state, the citizens have always taken their political direction from the wishes and inclinations of the Sarakis (father and son). Thus, running through a rollercoaster of decamping from party to party over the years (Omotoso: 2019), the Sarakis had always managed to keep the loyalty of the Kwara people in their firm grasp. This was achieved through political patronage, philanthropic gestures such as the distribution of food, clothes and money, sheer charisma and an unerring instinct of keeping on the good side of the political party controlling the Federal Government.

A due appreciation of the political dynamics in Kwara State by the opposition showed that the Saraki dynasty's centre of gravity that offered them the freedom of action and will to fight political battle after political battle was the unalloyed and unquestioning loyalty of the populace. Hence, the easiest way to break the stranglehold of the Saraki Dynasty was to drive a wedge between the leader of the Dynasty (Abubakar Bukola Saraki, who was the Senate President) and the people. This was successfully done using the well timed and punchy video posts (Olawoyin: 2019) on Youtube, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp showing the spate of infrastructural decay and backwardness of the state, the suffering masses, the victims of the Offa Bank Robbery as well as the Mossack Fonseca offshore bank account scandal. Bukola Saraki's decamping from the ruling party – the All Progressives Congress back to the People's Democratic Party was also used as ammunition to bring the Federal might to bear on overturning the loyalty of the people against the Saraki Dynasty.

It is an attestation to the success of the social media campaign, aptly captured in the slogan 'O To Ge!' (Enough is Enough)

that the popular chant of 'Oloye' (leader in Yoruba language) which often greeted Saraki wherever he ventured to in Kwara State changed to 'Ole' (which meant 'thief' in Yoruba language). This is despite renewed and intensified efforts by the Dynasty to secure the loyalty of the people through the usual old means of patronage as well as food and money distribution. The success of the social media campaign ultimately resulted in a comprehensive defeat of the Saraki Dynasty and all the candidates it fielded for the Senate, the House of Representatives, Governorship and the State House of Assembly.

After all is said and done, the accusations made by the Saraki opposition might not be without some merit. This is arising from the state of affairs subsisting in Kwara State at the time. Specifically, the Dynasty had been responsible for installing and removing six governors from power. The removal allegedly done because the governors refused to dance to the selfish wishes of the Saraki family. Also, there were allegations of gross diversion and mismanagement of public funds, expropriation and sale of public lands and imposition of unqualified non-indigenes in top positions in the state. This was further compounded by execution of highly inflated white elephant projects that added little value to the citizenry while constituting a major drain on the state's financial resources (Kawu: 2019). The result of the miscellany of grievances was the pauperization of the state and mass servitude. This latent grievances were therefore identified, honed and weaponized by the opposition to unseat the Saraki Hegemony.

Consequently, the take away from the Kwara State saga is that once again, significant political upheavals (decamping from the ruling party APC to the PDP) when coupled with economic inequalities and suffering (in this instance the suffering of the people of the state) provides a powerful wellspring for political regime change if the messaging is right, and the medium (social media) is easily accessible by the vast majority of people (target audience), especially the common folk.

Generally, considering all the five case studies analysed, it can be deduced that social media has certain unique qualities. These qualities are speed, open-endedness, accessibility, low cost/affordability, high penetration and flexibility. Consequently, it is these very qualities that make it an attractive tool for genuine political canvassing that conversely also make it attractive to authoritarian regimes (for surveillance/monitoring of dissidents) as well as fringe groups with subversive political agendas.

While one would be quick to agree that social media and digital platforms enable: greater civic commitment and engagement at all levels and provide enhanced information on political actors and their agenda as well as government actions/inactions, in addition to providing greater transparency and accountability, negative dynamics such as the rise of fake news, inuring of the populace to unwholesome political

conduct and catalyzing influence/interference operations of hostile governments and interest groups,

Regarding the rampant spread of fake news, Beauchamp's (2019) comments aptly capture the essence of the whole fake news epidemic where he states that:

> *It is easier to spread misinformation on social media than to correct it, and easier to inflame social divisions than to mend them. The very nature of how we engage with Facebook and the rest now helps far-right, authoritarian factions weaken the foundations of democratic systems — and even give themselves an easier pathway to seizing power (Beauchamp: 2019).*

Furthermore, the Russian influence/interference operations in the USA 2016 Elections also underscore how easy it is spread fake news and misinformation while sowing social discord. Additionally, the speed of the internet allows false and misleading news to quickly spread while being easily believed by the populace who do not have the means to filter such news.

On the issue of inuring the citizenry to a low standard of ethical behaviour, Trump's 10,111 falsehoods and misleading statements between January 2017 – 27 April 2019 (Washington Post: 2019) which were mainly disseminated via his Twitter Social Media Account have inured the citizenry to low ethical conduct in public officials. That the public does not care anymore can be seen in the fact that Trump's approval rating amongst his core supporters has held steady at an average of 40 percent (Gallup: 2019) despite the findings of obstruction of justice by the Mueller Commission, numerous lies and misleading statements being fact-checked as well as the revelation of his payment of hush money to Stormy Daniels to cover up his extra-marital affair with her.

The import of the foregoing is that while exploiting the social media to spread fake news might help fringe groups and authoritarian governments to achieve their objective, the reality is that the very foundations of democracy, as well as complementary interests such as individual and collective security as well as societal wellbeing, would become impaired. Hence, it is in the interests of everyone to ensure proper values and etiquette in the use of social media. However, considering Hobbes' anarchical reference to man, it is only reasonable to expect that selfish interests would override collective complementary interests. Hence, the obvious solution would be for some of the proactive regulation of social media without necessarily infringing on the freedom of the press to act as a watchdog over society and government.

V. CONCLUSION

Social media has taken its pride of place in the firmament of tools of political canvassing. Most crucially, its wide penetration, accessibility, low cost, flexibility and open-endedness confer competitive advantages to it far above other traditional media that it would take a revolution of sorts to upstage social media aided by digital platforms and the internet from its rightful place.

In the course of the study, it was found that proper conceptualization of the canvassing 'intent', 'message', 'target audience', and 'intended effect/impact' are key to success in political canvassing. This is particularly because social media had overtaken the traditional media in terms of reach and impact. Furthermore, while civil liberties such as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly could be said to have been amplified by social media, conversely, the open nature of the social media and internet platforms enabled suppression of those same civil liberties through governmental surveillance and resultant repressive actions. This leads to the obvious conclusion that social media is also a useful tool for repressive governments against their own citizenry's civil liberties and natural rights.

Additionally, it was particularly noteworthy that the relevance and impact of social media in political canvassing is directly correlated to the existing quantum of political unrest and economic disenchantment which serve as catalyzing factors. Hence, without sufficient underlying socio-political and economic impairments in the target society, social media as a political canvassing tool consequently holds little utility in generating passion, conviction, and arousing sustained action for civic engagement.

The aforestated socio-political and economic imperatives were further buttressed in the Cambridge Analytica case as well as the 'O To Ge' movement. Specifically, deep-rooted disenchantment with the ruling political elite created a 'drain-the-swamp' sentiment amongst conservative right-wing, white and non-college educated Republicans in the US. This sentiment was latched on, honed and weaponized by Trump's savvy use of Twitter which bypassed traditional media in getting his message across and galvanizing his support base. This is also singularly responsible for the almost unswerving support of that same political support base for Trump despite the criticisms and alarm raised by his anti-immigrant, anti-free trade and anti-muslim rhetoric. The socio-economic imperative came to the fore in 'O To Ge' where the sub-optimized economic welfare of the Kwara State citizenry was placed squarely at the foot of the Saraki Dynasty. It was surmised that the hegemonic hold of the Family was the singular challenge holding back the glorious destiny of the state and its citizenry. So, the socio-economic emancipation of the citizenry could be achieved if the stranglehold of the Saraki family was broken and overthrow. Of course, this social media messaging combined with the socio-economic undercurrents was a successful weapon in the political overthrow of the family in Kwara State in the last election held in March 2019.

The foregoing socio-economic imperatives notwithstanding, while the tentative propositional statements regarding social

media's game changing status and its ability to confer electoral victory to the most social media-savvy political actor have been confirmed, the third propositional statement regarding the negative dynamics of social media give room for concern. This is particularly bearing in mind the potential of social media to bring about social discord and disharmony through the spread of fake news. This, therefore, underscores the need for institution of proactive regulation/oversight of social media content and posts by regulators oversighted by responsible civil society groups. This is in addition to review of enabling national regulations guiding social media usage and content.

On a final note, while the paper cannot be said to provide the final answers to the issue of social media in political canvassing, it nevertheless addresses critical concerns such as the negative dynamics of social media on one hand as well as its ability to enhance civil engagement and discuss, political agenda-setting and voter awareness.

Arising from the findings and challenges of political canvassing in a social media environment discussed in this study, this paper, therefore, recommends that greater utilization of social media platforms by political parties for voter sensitization, engagement and fundraising should be done. Furthermore, identification of appropriate political canvassing 'intent', 'message', 'target audience', and 'intended effect/impact' before deployment on social media by political parties is necessary. These should be further underscored by independent/objective regulation of social media political canvassing content to prevent exploitation by subversives. Finally, a review of social media usage and content regulations by national regulators would need to be done under the general guidance of a universal and objective body like the United Nations.

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