

An Appraisal of the Role of ICT as a Tool for Participatory Democracy in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper appraises the role of ICTs as a tool for participatory democracy in Nigeria with particular reference to 2011 and 2015 elections. Qualitative literature reviewing method was adopted and two media theories- Diffusion of innovation and Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) were used as theoretical foundation. The study showed that all the five key stakeholders identified in this study except one (the security agencies) made unprecedented use of ICTs in the Nigerian electoral process during 2011 and 2015. Notwithstanding, the acquisition and applications of ICTs in Nigeria are not without challenges especially that of low level telephone penetration and uneven access. Hence, many localities are still not covered by telecommunication network in Nigeria leading to the marginalisation of crucial number of electorates. All the same, ICTs played a huge role in the success of both elections. Remarkable is the fact that all electoral stakeholders, most especially electorates, were hugely involved. This was unlike previous elections in Nigeria. Drawing from the foregoing, the study recommended that the utility of ICTs platforms to democratic governance and precisely to the electoral process should be further leveraged upon by stakeholders, as the electoral process stands to gain more if ICTs platforms are effectively and appropriately used. Also, there is need to ensure that the issues and challenges which confronted the use of the ICTs before, during and after the elections do not reoccur in future elections, most especially in the use of card readers.

Keywords: Democracy, Electoral Stakeholders, ICTs, Political participation, Electioneering process

Introduction

It is no gainsaying that the media contributes largely to the success of electioneering process the world over. The media helps in performing her surveillance function and mobilizing the electorates to taking informed decisions on parties and candidates with whom to support or cast their votes. So, there is no question of the link between democracy and access to information. No unpretentious democracy can exist without

energetic media and an informed citizenry, and yet the media–democracy nexus in sub-Saharan Africa has been fraught with challenges. Information and communication technologies appear to resuscitate hope for social and political change in Africa and, indeed, ICTs have been at the centre of the democratic project in many countries.

The emergence of information and communication technologies (ICTs) which in turn gave birth to social networking sites had thus brought another paradigm shift in electioneering process. Since Barak Obama broke the world record in the history of ICTs use for political purpose during the 2008 US presidential elections, many nations and politicians across the globe have continued to embrace the platform to mobilize their citizens and candidates towards active participation in the political process.

In view of this, Nwafor et al in Adibe and Odoemelam (2011, p. 12) posits that: “the new media of communication have in no small measure helped communities to be aware of one another. Baran (1998, p. 63), submits that:

As the technology continues to shrink the world, people will become increasingly involved in one another’s lives, and as people come to know more about others who were hitherto separated from them by distance, they will form new beneficial relationships (p. 63).

This submission by Nwafor et al is relevant to our discourse as it draws attention to what ICTs are doing in the area of human communication, especially as it concerns the fostering of relationships and interactions among people. ICTs as a form for interactivity and all-encompassing participatory medium, have engaged youths, elites and other internet compliant individuals to build their lives around it. People now wake up to the platform in search for news, gossips and other social and business engagements.

In Nigeria’s history, the year 1999 witnessed a paradigm shifts from the status quo of military hijack of political process to a new dawn of democratic journey. Prior to this period, modern electoral processes have not been imbibed, but 2011 political dispensation (and 2015 by extension), heralded the use of ICT’s in electioneering processes. Various political parties, candidates, civil society organizations, INEC, security agencies and the electorates used it for enlightenment and to canvass for votes and support where necessary. The electorates have also become one of the major stakeholders on the ICT resulting from the access and contribution. INEC groups and civil society organizations are not left out of the business of using platforms provided by ICTs to educate and mobilize electorates to support their course.

Meanwhile, before the coming of the ICTs, the mainstream media (Radio, Television, Newspapers, and Magazines etc.) reigned in their own way and had directly or indirectly blocked popular participation in the electoral process. This is because there has always been scarcity of space and airtime given by the conventional media to citizens to have their say in politics, governance and in the electoral process. Conventional media critics such as (Graber, 1976; Fallows 1996; Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995) cited in Abubakar (2011, p.14) thus believe that: “voters were left with paid political propaganda containing only meaningless slogans, making them disinterested and cynical about

politics.” They argued that there is the absence of serious debate in the conventional media that could make people to learn the substance of issues and policies proposed as well as related arguments, and that this disallows citizens from participating actively in political discourse.

As such Okoro and Nwafor (2013) explained that web-based media are interactive in nature. They belong to the new genre of media that focus on social networking, allowing users to express themselves, interact with friends, share personal information as well as publish their own views on the internet. The ubiquitous access of these online devices no doubt, has democratizing effects as they offer citizens opportunities for more fully engagement in the political process. This means that voters have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages; they are now creators of the messages.

However, Electoral Act 2010 which is the legal framework that governs the conduct of elections in Nigeria did not provide specific guidelines on the use of ICTs in elections. Instead, it contains a number of sections that made references to the use of electronic media in the conduct of elections. Meanwhile, a close look at the way the term “electronic media” was used in the Electoral Act indicates that the Act is mindful of the opportunities provided by the electronic media (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2011). The Act envisages a key role the electronic media can play in campaigning, monitoring, educating and involving the electorates in electoral processes.

The place of ICT in the political system cannot be over stressed. It is significant in ensuring an effective and inclusive electoral system. However, its acquisition and applications are not without challenges especially that of low level telephone penetration and uneven access which appear to be insurmountable. It is against this backdrop that the study seeks to appraise the role of ICT as a tool for participatory democracy in Nigeria since 2011.

Essentially, the objective of this study is to appraise the role of ICTs as a tool for participatory democracy in Nigeria. More specifically the study sought to find out how ICT was employed in 2011/2015 general elections in Nigeria vis-à-vis the challenges that confronted its application.

Information and Communication Technologies: An overview

Globally, the development of ICTs has moved across different and all spectrums. From the traditional media of radio and television to all other means of communication, the world has seen technological innovations resulting in better means of getting tasks done. ICTs cover any product that receives, stores, retrieves, manipulates or transmits information electronically in a digital form such as personal computers, digital television, email, robots, etc. (Afriyie, 2012). It embraces all the uses of digital technology that already exist to help individuals, businesses and organizations use and manipulate information. It also concerns the way these different uses can work with each other. In relation to business, Afriyie (2012) pigeonholes ICTs into: the traditional computer-based technologies (tasks that can be performed typically on a PC at home or at work); and the more recent, fast-growing range of digital communication technologies (which

allow people and organisations to communicate and share information digitally). Broadly and encompassing, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (1999) see ICTs as covering internet service provision, telecommunications equipment and services, information technology equipment and services, media and broadcasting, libraries and documentation centres, commercial information providers, network-based information services, and related information and communication activities.

As Ahiabienu cited in Odeyemi and Mosunmola (2015) has rightly noted, the availability and affordability of ICT tools and systems have made ICTs become an important part of almost all aspects of human endeavours, both at the individual level and collectively as societies; and at the national and international arenas. More so, ICTs offer major opportunities to advance human development – from providing basic access to education or health information to making cash payments and stimulating citizen involvement in the democratic process (Yonazi, Kelly, Halewood and Blackman, 2012 in Odeyemi and Mosunmola (2015). ICTs contribute to economic development and democratisation, including freedom of speech, the free flow of information, promotion of human rights and poverty reduction (Association for Progressive Communications, 2009). ICTs facilitate efficient administration, citizen services, transparency, accountability and formal political participation (e-governance), and also provide the means for social movements, activist groupings or minority groups to engage with these processes on a global level.

In relation to democratic processes at the national level, APC (2009) distinguish between three levels of ICT use, viz:

- e-Government: ICTs within government, with a view to improving efficiency in interactions and information flows between government departments and state organs.
- e-Governance: ICTs in the interface between government and citizens, with a view to improving interaction and feedback between government and citizens.
- ICTs for empowerment of citizens and civil society organisations (APC, 2009, p. 30).

The importance of ICTs to democratic governance as underlined in the foregoing underscores the significance of these technologies as catalysts of the ‘Information Revolution’ (Selian, 2002). This is to highlight the importance of these technologies to development, in tandem with the industrial revolution of the 19th century. It is also a way to buttress the place of ICTs in the development of modern societies, as captured by Diamond (2010). Diamond refers to ICTs as —Liberation Technology, and by this he implies:

Any form of information and communication technology (ICT) that can expand political, social, and economic freedom. In the contemporary era, it means essentially the modern, interrelated forms of digital ICT—the computer, the Internet, the mobile phone, and countless innovative applications for them, including —new social media such as Facebook and Twitter (p.70).

The author refers to platforms provided by ICTs such as the Internet, Facebook, Twitter and mobile applications. These platforms strengthen the capacity of individuals, aid liberated communication and mobilisation, and reinforce civil society. It enables citizens to report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom (Diamond, 2010). The advantages of these ICTs platforms over older technologies have been highlighted. For instance, Diamond (2010) affirms that the Internet's decentralised nature and capacity to reach large numbers of people instantaneously, are well suited to grassroots organising. In contrast to television and radio, the new ICTs are two-way and even multiway forms of communication. Thus, users are not just inert recipients but, journalists, commentators, videographers, entertainers, and organisers (Diamond, 2010). Nigeria has not been left behind in the global deployment of ICTs in everyday human endeavour, especially in relation to governance though not without some challenges.

In line with democracy, Barber, Mattson and Peterson in Odeyemi and Mosunmola (2015) listed opportunities inherent in ICTs use as: (a) inherent interactivity; (b) potential for lateral and horizontal communication; (c) point-to-point and non-hierarchical modes of communication; (d) low costs to users (once a user is set up); (e) rapidity as a communication medium; (f) lack of national or other boundaries; and (g) freedom from the intrusion and monitoring of government (p. 8).

Campante, Durante and Sobbrío (2014) cited by Odeyemi and Mosunmola (2015) distinguish between the new features of the Internet, and the traditional media. The authors contend that the Internet is fundamentally different from traditional media:

...First, its users are not only content consumers, but providers as well. Put differently, the barriers to entry in content provision are much lower in the online world, so that it offers citizens an avenue to express their views, in a way that TV or radio could not come close to matching. Related to that, and again unlike traditional media, the Internet also offers them a remarkably effective way to interact and coordinate with one another. Because of these features, the Internet has brought about new opportunities for political discussion and mobilization, accessible to a wide range of political actors. . . (2014, p.1)

The ICT sector has recorded phenomenal growth over the years, helped largely by Nigeria's predominantly young population. The sector has however been plagued by challenges including relatively poor literacy rate which limits interest on the part of the people, poor infrastructure especially in relation to electricity and digital divide (Abubakar, 2012). The challenges notwithstanding, Nigeria's ICT sector has increased tremendously in the past 12 years, growing at 20 per cent annually, making it the fastest growing (sector) in the country (Nahimah, 2013). These improvements, according to Odeyemi and Mosunmola (2015) have been aided by public policies. Some initiatives such as the National Telecommunications Policy and the National Information

Technology Policy (both formulated in 2000), the National Information Technology Development Agency Act 2007 and the regulatory and supervisory frameworks provided by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) have combined to accelerate ICTs expansion in Nigeria (Committee on ICT Policy Harmonization, 2012). The country has moved from approximately 400,000 available fixed telephone lines pre-1999 to over 196 million available mobile telephone lines, of which 147 million are active, by May 2015, effectively highlighting Nigeria's telecommunications market as the fastest growing in Africa (NCC, 2015).

Table 1: 2014 Population and Internet Users Statistics (Second Quarter)

Territory	Population	Internet Users Dec. 31, 2000	Internet Users Latest Data	Internet Penetration %	Growth 2000-2015 %
World	7, 264, 623, 793	360, 985, 492	3, 079, 339, 857	42.4%	753.0%
Africa	1, 158, 353, 014	4, 514, 000	318, 633, 889	27.5%	6,958.2%
Nigeria	177, 155, 754	200, 000	70, 300, 000	39.7%	35, 050%

Adapted from internetworldstats.com

Political Participation

Political participation is citizen's involvement in the acts, events or activities that influence the selection of and/or the actions taken by political representatives. It refers to the various mechanisms through which members of the public express their political views and, or exercise their influence on the political process (Chatora, 2012). Abubakar (2011) sees it as the involvement of people (not necessarily active) in any political process before a collective decision is made. In other words, political participation entails citizens' engagement in the discourse of socio-political and economic issues, which serve as yardsticks for choosing would be leaders. It may also include assessing the capabilities of the incumbents and advocating ways of ameliorating societal ills for a more prosperous country.

Political participation includes such activities as political discourse, political campaigns, voter registration, the actual voting, writing and signing of petitions, attending of civil protests, joining interest groups that engage in lobbying, political advocacy, monitoring and reporting of cases of violation of the electoral process such as frauds, rigging, intimidation, violence, monetary inducements, underage voting etc.

Before the advent of ICTs, political campaigns and other participatory activities blossomed in the traditional media. Objide cited in Onwukwe (2011) notes that prior to this period, political rallies, personal contacts and speeches were popularly used for mobilizing electorates' support on political issues, and that was greatly propelled by the force of the mass media. At the time, political participation was riskier, expensive and required a great deal of investments from individuals willing to engage in political

activities. The process was quite tasking as far as time, money, knowledge and information were concerned.

The endemic poverty in Africa prevented citizens from attending political meetings, and sometimes, from traveling to exercise their voting rights. According to Chatora (2011), a World Bank report in 2005 had it that 50.9% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa lives on less than \$1.25 a day. Chatora argues that such financial constraint is capable of preventing citizens from engaging in political activities especially those that require financial investment. Within this context where poverty is extensive, time also becomes an important factor that determines whether citizens would devote time to personal activities that guarantee their immediate survival or to political participation that does not promise an immediate and tangible material outcome for them. With this problem, coupled with that of insecurity and fear of possible outbreak of violence, citizen's active participation in the political process is heavily compromised.

Good enough, the advancement in the communication technologies in the last few years is fast changing the situation as we now have online platforms that serve as a new "political capital" where people resort to and participate in political discourse (Abubakar, 2011). Citing Kweon and Kin (2011), Abubakar maintains that social media (one of the platforms provided by ICTs) have become a main source of personal orientation, anonymous interactivities and social community on a variety of issues that involve politics and political discourse. Mayfield (2010) and Bradley (2009) attribute the social media capacity of boosting participation to its connectedness and textual/audio-visual appeal. For sure, the Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, the 2go, GSM –SMS/calls, blackberries services, etc. have made political participation much easier, faster and even more cost effective than ever before.

ICTs and Politics in Nigeria Since 2011

The advent of ICTs has greatly enhanced all aspects of human communication. The new technology due to the participatory, interactive and cost-effective nature has barely made everyone who can use it a mass communicator. Information sharing has greatly improved, allowing citizens to discuss ideas, post news, ask questions and share links (Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015). With the advent of the new technology, politics also has greatly evolved in recent years. Politicians reach the masses in a twinkling of an eye, with the aim of gauging the political atmosphere even before venturing into the campaign. ICTs are feasibly the best tool to measure the popularity of a candidate especially by the young people and craft the best language to use as a campaign slogan. These information and communication technologies also provide a politician with the opportunity to be informally free with the public. This free connection helps politicians to communicate their humour, indicating their approachability and accessibility to the public.

The deployment of platforms of ICTs in general, and the social media in particular, gave a new lease of life to Nigeria's electoral process in 2015. The INEC, political parties, candidates, media, and CSOs all made the most of technology in carrying out their activities (Agbata Jnr, 2015). This, however, was not a 2015

phenomenon as ICTs had been used in the preceding general elections of 2011 (Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Foundation, 2012).

Conversely, the level at which ICT platforms were used in the 2015 elections was unprecedented in the country's electioneering history. In relation to 2011, INEC Chairman, Attahiru Jega notes that:

ICTs enhanced transparency of the political process and made INEC more accountable to the public in its conduct of elections; strengthened oversight of the electoral process by empowering the public to alert INEC of incidents requiring swift security intervention; mobilised citizens, particularly the younger generation, to participate at every level of the electoral process; (exemplifying) potential to entrench and deepen our democracy (SMYF, 2012, p.7).

The foregoing was made possible by the strategy of INEC in establishing new and strengthening existing communication channels with other stakeholders. INEC introduced various innovations through which it sought to curb irregularity and ensure credibility. Among the novel ideas introduced by INEC was E-TRAC, a project that enabled signed polling unit result sheets (as pasted at the polling unit) to be accessible on the commission's website. E-TRAC aimed at building trust and ensuring transparency in the election process (INEC, 2015). The commission also employed ICT tools to guard against cases of multiple registration that had marred previous elections. Specifically, INEC introduced AFIS – Automated Finger Print System, the device helped to identify and eliminate confirmed cases of multiple registration (Nwafor, 2015).

Political parties and their candidates also used ICT platforms to garner support for their cause. Indeed, political actors realised the enormous power of ICTs in general, and the internet in particular, optimising the platforms to advance their electoral fortunes (Ikhariale, 2015 in Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015), thus, —short documentaries and animations on YouTube, mini-online conferences, the use of Twitter hashtags, and sponsored posts on political and lifestyle blogs expanded the online space (Owen and Usman, 2015). The benefit of the Internet, websites, Twitter and Facebook, as noted by OpCit Research (2013), is that as well as sending information to potential voters, politicians become part of the mediated lives of those voters, proactively arriving in their Twitter feeds and Facebook new streams without their needing to actively seek them out; thus enabling a much human person to emerge and build reputation, fostering a much more interactive relationship (Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2012).

Theoretical Base

This discourse is anchored on two media theories which are: Diffusion of Innovation theory and Technology Acceptance Model.

Diffusion of Innovation

With the ongoing development of ICTs and diversification in the fields they affect, theoretical studies have been carried out in order to ensure a better understanding concerning their diffusion, adoption, acceptance, and usage (Davis, 1989; Taylor &

Todd, 1995; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003; Yi, Jackson, Park, & Probst, 2006 in Ntemana and Olatokun, 2012). In his diffusion of innovation (DOI) theory, Rogers (2003) mentioned that the rate of adoption is partially influenced by perceived attributes, namely, relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, complexity, and observability as innovation characteristics. On one hand, four of these characteristics—relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, and observability, as perceived by members of a social system—are positively related to the rate of adoption. However, on the other hand, the complexity of an innovation, as perceived by members of a social system, is negatively related to its rate of adoption.

The relative advantage of an innovation is an individual's perception that the innovation will be better, when compared to similar ideas, products, or practices. Those innovations that are perceived to be better will be adopted more rapidly. Compatibility is the perception that a particular innovation is similar and congruent with existing understandings of similar or past ideas, products, or practices. Innovations that fit into an individual's existing understanding or schema will be more easily adopted (Ntemana and Olatokun, 2012). Complexity refers to the perception of how difficult the innovation is to comprehend. It is hypothesized to be negatively related to the rate of adoption of an innovation (Rogers, 1995). In other words, if an innovation is found to be too complex, it is not easily adopted.

Therefore, in this study, the alternative perspective of this construct is taken, hypothesizing that if an innovation is easy to use, it is more likely to be adopted. Trialability refers to an individual's access to an innovation for experimentation before adoption and use. Observability is characterized by how available and visible an innovation is to an individual. The idea behind observability is similar to unspoken peer pressure: If influential others possess an innovation, the observer is more likely to adopt it as well. Observability leads to a social threshold at the point where an innovation becomes so pervasive and/or desirable in a culture that even those who would not normally be a user of an innovation consider adopting the product (Ntemana and Olatokun, 2012).

Relating Diffusion of Innovation (DoI) to this discourse, it is indisputable to say that social benefit of ICTs such as social interactions remain one of the reasons why it has been adopted easily and rapidly for electoral purposes in Nigeria. More so, ICTs have also reduced inequalities of opportunity between rural areas and the Urban centres with the introduction of Internet Services, which delivers information to remote locations in a matter of seconds.

Technology Acceptance Model

Marangunic and Granic in Sharma and Chandel (2013) explain that the constant improvement and progress in technology, especially ICT related applications, makes the choice to decide on matters of acceptance and rejection a dilemma. Consequently, many models and theories have been developed to shed more light on the effective use of technology and, out of all the models, the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) stands out in evaluating issues affecting users' acceptance of modern technology.

Davis (1989) presented a theoretical model aiming to predict and explain ICTs usage behavior, that is, what causes potential adopters to accept or reject the use of information technology. Theoretically, TAM is based on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA). In TAM, two theoretical constructs, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use, are the fundamental determinants of system use, and predict attitudes toward the use of the system, that is, the user's willingness to use the system. Perceived usefulness refers to "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance", and perceived ease of use refers to "the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort" (Davis, 1989, p. 320).

Applying TAM to this discourse, it is important to know that the pervasiveness of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has brought about rapid technological, social, political, and economic transformation, which has eventuated in a network society organized around ICTs (Yusuf, 2005). Also, the ICTs has become a major election information sharing platform globally. Because of its ease of use, speed, and reach, electoral stakeholders in Nigeria have equally embraced the use of ICTs for election purposes and it is now revolutionizing the efficiency of election administration, coverage and reporting breaking the monopoly of network television and newspapers domination.

Method

In this study literature relating to the subject matter of the role of ICTs as a tool for participatory democracy in Nigeria was evaluated, analyzed and reviewed in detail with regard to TAM and diffusion of Innovation. This is done through qualitative reviewing of literature. McKinney (2008:1) attempts to define a literature review "as an act that summarizes, recapitulates, reiterates, interprets, and decisively evaluates an existing body of knowledge (or published or unpublished material) in order to establish similarities within knowledge of a subject matter. The purpose of doing so is not only to state the opinion of experts on different views, but according to Anderson and Beveridge (2007), it is also germane to engage in content analysis by drawing out strengths, weaknesses and gaps in the body of knowledge, and proffer appropriate solutions to bridge the gap.

The Use of ICTs by Key players in 2011 and 2015 Elections in Nigeria

The 2011 general elections in Nigeria heralded the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the history of electioneering process, while 2015 elections experienced an explosive use of it. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and other contestants made extensive use of the platforms enabled by ICTs in the campaign process. Some key players who were active in the 2011 and 2015 general elections are political candidates, civil society organizations (C.S.O), INEC, volunteer groups, security agents and electorates.

Political Candidates

Various politicians have known the importance of digital media and as a result opened twitter and Facebook accounts to reach out to electorates. In 2011, President

Jonathan himself made use of his twitter handle @presgoodluck. But in the last general election, he left this twitter handle in the hands of Doyin Okupe and Reno Omokri. Muhammadu Buhari of (APC) also made use of new media platforms for his campaigns. Now, the trend of using ICTs by politicians is on the increase as they have not been using the platforms for electioneering campaign only but also as a way of maintaining their followership by keeping them abreast of their various activities or achievements (Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015).

Also, websites of parties and candidates were used to relay election-related information. Among the critical information on party websites are manifestoes and campaign promises of candidates. In Nigeria where parties are often accused of lacking coherent manifesto and specified ideologies, this represents a hoard of information to glean from. The leading opposition party in 2015, APC, made use of ICTs platforms to raise fund through crowd-funding. The party launched an online donation platform that gave opportunity to its supporters to contribute to its campaign fund through a designated account made popular on social media (Fadoju, 2015). This was in addition to ringtones, premium SMS, scratch cards as well as e-transaction used in sourcing monetary contributions from fans (Fadoju, 2015). Also, as noted by Odeyemi and Mosunmola (2015), parties also set up digitized and ICT compliant situation rooms tracking events especially on Election Day. They monitored results of election from polling units, collaborating with their agents and citizen journalists on the ground. This was made easier by citizens armed with smartphones who sent results and images from their polling units and environs. For none smartphone users who could not be reached through the internet, bulk text messaging and automated voice calls were also placed through to subscribers (Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015). Some of these were particularly effective where the telecom subscriber does not use a smartphone.

Instructively, ICTs platforms reduced the link-up gap between parties/candidates and the people. However, most of the accounts were not run personally by the politicians, most of whom are not well versed in operating the devices and navigating their ways on the platforms. They engaged users of the social media who have amassed huge following on the platforms as consultants to run their accounts, with a view to getting issues to trend by bringing it to the consciousness of the public and influencing opinions and perceptions in their favour (Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015).

INEC

The independent national electoral commission use ICTs basically to share information on elections and to educate and enlighten the electorates on the need to get their Permanent Voters Card (PVC), where to get it and how to use it on the Election Day. INEC, also educate the electorate via their social media platform on how to use the card reader during the voting process.

ICTs helped the way INEC communicated with the public in 2011 and 2015 general elections. Through its enhanced communication channels, reports from distant polling units easily reached INEC officials and responses received within a reasonable time. INEC made use of ICTs platforms in enhancing effective flow of information,

making broad use of its website, Facebook page and Twitter handle. Its website had different sections providing valuable database of information for aspirants and candidates, election officials, voters, the media, researchers as well as links to its Citizens Contact Centre and Registration Area Centres Nationwide (Odeyemi and Mosunmola, 2015). The website had information on all the 28 registered political parties in relation to their top officials, address and contact telephone numbers. This is crucial to the electoral process and information sharing. According to Odeyemi and Mosunmola (2015), among the other critical resources downloadable from the INEC website prior to the elections were code of conduct for Political Parties, Political Parties Finance Manual, Political Parties Audit Report and Political Parties Handbook. Post-election, the INEC website has list of elected senators, members of the House of Representatives and the result of the presidential election.

In 2011, more than 70,000 people were able to contact INEC directly to report incidents and have their questions answered, while the commission also received about 4,000 Tweets and 25 million hits on its website in three days during the presidential election alone (Asuni and Farris 2011, p. 10 - 18). INEC's use of ICTs during the 2011 and 2015 general elections significantly strengthened the commission's capacity to receive and respond to the concerns of election stakeholders during the general elections. Furthermore, the willingness of INEC to receive and act on information encouraged Nigeria to participate actively in the 2011 and 2015 elections respectively.

The INEC website had become so critical such that when it was hacked for a couple of hours on Presidential Election Day by a group known as Nigeria Cyber Army, it created anxiety across the country and beyond (Abimboye, 2015). INEC's technical staff however restored the website thus calming frayed nerves. INEC's Twitter handle, @inecnigeria, created since December 2010, was used in an unprecedented manner to relay information before, during and after the elections. The verified account boasts 9,380 tweets, 385,000 followers and has information of links to other INEC platforms including its website, contact email address and telephone number (see twitter.com/inecnigeria).

Electorates

The electorates in various elections, the world over, have a say (opinion) in the electioneering process. Because of the expensive nature of traditional media of communication in buying air time and space in the media, the masses have taken solace with the alternative opportunities provided by digital media.

ICTs are predominantly used by youths and elites all over the world. It is through these communication platforms electorates get to inform, interact and influence themselves in regards to taking informed voting decisions. During electioneering process, the masses bare their minds on bad government or governance. Through use of ICTs, overwhelming number of videos, tweets and comments are shared. According to Omokri (2011), the widespread use of these real time media severely limited electoral malpractices because we found that people were aware that they were on camera and this made them operate at their best behaviour.

Professor Atahiru Jega, the then Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), as noted by Amuchie (2012), also agrees that the use of ICTs during elections “enhanced transparency in the electoral process and made INEC more accountable to the public in the conduct of elections. The electorates have also engaged themselves in citizen journalism, where they use their mobile digital gadgets to take pictures in form of I-reporting and send on various ICT platforms and even traditional media; this is common with channels television (Amuchie, 2012).

The electorates in Nigeria use ICTs heavily during elections with particular reference to 2011 and 2015 elections. The electorates disseminated messages through various electronic channels mobilizing the citizens to participate in the electoral process. One can posit, therefore, that ICTs are becoming the media of the people, for the people, and by the people. However, not all Nigerians have been able to utilise the privilege inherent in ICTs due to infrastructural deficit and high level of illiteracy. Many localities are still not covered by telecommunication network in Nigeria.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

CSOs are other key players in elections all over the world. Nigeria, as a country, cannot be an exception. One of the major duties of CSOs in elections is to educate, enlighten and advise electorates to ensure they participate in the electoral process and ensure they protect their votes, make it count and report voting irregularities to appropriate authorities (PLAC, 2012). In line of this, several CSOs in Nigeria created ICTs platforms through which they shared information and engaged with the electoral process. One significant innovation by the CSOs is the creation of crowd-sourcing platforms that allow users to share information during elections using electronic messaging tools like email, text messages, or web contact forms.

During the 2011 elections, *Reclaim Naija* was set up by the Community Life Project in Lagos as an election incident reporting system built on the *Ushahidi* platform. The *Reclaim Naija* platform allows Nigerians to report incidents of violence and electoral malpractices through text messages. The messages received were to be plotted on an interactive map. Between the National Assembly elections of 9 April 2011 and the presidential election of 16 April 2011, citizen observers submitted 6,000 incident reports to the platform (Harwood 2011, in OPAC, 2012). In addition, the *Reclaim Naija* website serves as a one-stop online resource for information on the 2011 elections. It features all the polling units, senatorial districts and wards, the Nigerian Constitution, information on candidates, the 2010 Electoral Act, the election timetable, electoral guidelines, certified voters’ registration figures, political parties as well as civic and voter education modules.

Besides the *Reclaim Naija* project, a coalition of internet-savvy Nigerians known as Enough is Enough (EiE) initiated a number of projects to mobilize young Nigerians through electronic platforms to demand for credible elections. The core of EiE’s activity is the Register, Select, Vote, and Protect (RSVP) campaign which is designed to mobilize the youths to participate in the 2011 elections by using “Tweets and Facebook messages to whip up interest and then have people go out to register and vote, and they will then

use the same tools to report on their activities so we can create an online buzz that inspires more offline action” (Harwood 2010 in OPAC, 2012). The RSVP campaign involved mobilizing voters by organising civic enlightenment rallies in Abuja and Lagos via online channels and working with celebrities in conducting voter education through the use of online campaigns. Enough is Enough (EiE) also built a mobile phone application for election mapping known as Revoda. Revoda made it possible for users to register their phone numbers with a particular polling unit, so that reports made about the polling unit could easily be authenticated and followed up by INEC (Asuni and Farris 2011, p. 2).

Another example of efforts by the civil society to cover and report the 2011 is the IAmLagosProject. The goal of IAmLagos Project was to collect and report election results from polling units in Lagos State within the period of elections. The project tried to systematically contact voters in all the wards throughout Lagos State who can post election results to a reporting platform. Participants in the IAmLagos Project were mobilized and sensitized through SMS, radio and email messages. Social Media Tracking Centre considers the IAmLagos Project to be “very effective in improving social media coverage of polling units in Lagos with 80% coverage achieved during the gubernatorial elections” (Asuni and Farris 2011, p.11).

Therefore, it is pertinent to say that NGOs play sustainable roles in making sure that the 2015 election is not just a success but that it partners with the electorate, donors and other partners to build the nation’s democracy to be self-sustaining, all-inclusive and ensure a better future for the nation.

Security Agencies

The sheer logistics of elections in Nigeria, according to Attoh (2015) requires that adequate security be put in place, from the movement of electoral materials to the deployment of staff, the manning of the polling booths to the movement of cast ballots to the collation centres. Including the protection of voters at the polling booths, the safety of the candidates, the party agents and even the media that cover the election, each of the processes requires adequate security. According to (Jega in Attoh, 2015), adequate security enhances the free movement of staff, voters, candidates, observers and other stakeholders thus ensuring the credibility of the process.

Therefore, in order to ensure a credible and secure electoral process devoid of violence and brigandage, the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) set up the Inter-Agency Consultative Committee on Election Security (Attoh, 2015). As the name implies the committee comprises the Police, the Military, Department of State Security (DSS), and other stakeholders to ensure the security of the electoral process. However, despite this laudable initiative, the 2015 and even 2011 general elections experienced pockets of insecurity especially in South-South and South-East geo-political zones of the country.

With the effort put in place by these security agencies, there was no observable use of ICTs despite the numerous benefits it offers in combating electoral crime and violence. The application of Information and Communications Technology will

definitely enhance command and control. Thus, ICT could play a very important role in tackling some of these contemporary-security-related electoral challenges.

Discussion

This study showed that five key stakeholders except one (security agencies) made unprecedented use of ICTs in the Nigerian electoral process. Each of these stakeholders used the ICT platforms to achieve a number of interrelated objectives. INEC basically used it to broadcast messages on the elections and receive feedbacks from the public on their experiences with the process. Politicians/political parties used ICTs to reach out to the voters and canvass for support. The electorates used ICTs to report their experiences and receive election related information, while the CSOs used the ICTs to mobilize and educate the electorate as well as to cover and report their observation of the electoral process. The deployment of ICTs for electoral process was higher in 2015 than 2011 elections. All the same, ICTs played a huge role in the success of both elections. Remarkable is the fact that all electoral stakeholders, most especially electorates, were hugely involved. This was unlike previous elections in Nigeria.

The interactive nature of ICTs, the easy access and the bandwagon effect, the major reasons electorates used it as a source of campaign information. More importantly, it made it possible for them to relate with the political parties and candidates through the platforms and gives them a tendency for their voice to be heard since Nigerian politicians are increasingly turning to ICTs enabled platforms during elections in a bid to woo and sway voters in their favour. This follows on the growing influence of the platform on account of its spiraling subscriber numbers, immediacy and interactive outlook.

The place of ICT in the political system cannot be over stressed. It is significant in ensuring an effective and inclusive electoral system. However, its acquisition and applications are not without challenges especially that of low level telephone penetration and uneven access which appear to be insurmountable. Some Nigerians have been unable to utilise the privilege inherent in ICTs due to infrastructural deficit and high level of illiteracy. Many localities are still not covered by telecommunication network in Nigeria leading to the marginalisation of crucial number of electorates. Also, INEC website was hacked for a couple of hours on Presidential Election Day in 2015 by a group known as Nigeria Cyber Army, it created anxiety across the country and beyond. This should be watched against subsequently. It is part of the challenges post by the interactivity of ICTs. In addition, use of card reader in the 2015 general elections came with some challenges, even though the elections have been widely adjudged as being successful. For instance, during the March 28 Presidential and National Assembly elections across the country, the card readers malfunctioned in several polling units, a situation that caused undue delay in the accreditation process (Makama and Muhammed, 2015). No doubt, the smart card reader had played a very significant role in the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. However, there is need to ensure that the issues and challenges which confronted the use of the device before, during and after the elections do not reoccur in future elections.

Conclusion

The positive impact of the strategic deployment of ICTs in elections around the world, particularly in the United States, is giving the medium added appeal among

Nigerian politicians and their managers. More so, the freedom that ICTs provide makes it easier to share information and spread news very quickly. Nigeria as a nation is gradually moving into continual use of ICTs in the electioneering process. 2011 and subsequently 2015 were phenomenal in the use of ICTs for electioneering process. The momentum is now becoming intensified as political candidates who don't have Twitter and Facebook accounts are opening their own accounts, so as not to lose followership in the political process. INEC groups and civil society organizations are not left out of the business of using platforms provided by ICTs to educate and mobilize electorates to support their course. More particularly, the ubiquitous access of these online devices no doubt, has democratized electoral effects as they offer citizens opportunities for more fully engagement in the political process. This means that voters have become more than just passive consumers of digital messages; they are now creators of the messages.

Recommendation for Future Elections

Drawing from the literature review, the study recommends that the utility of ICTs platforms to democratic governance and precisely to the electoral process should be further leveraged upon by stakeholders, as the electoral process stands to gain more if ICTs platforms are effectively and appropriately used.

With the recent amendment of Electoral Act of 2010 to give concrete legal backing to the use of ICTs in election, electoral stakeholders must cooperate to ensure that ICTs are used to bolster more participation and inclusiveness in Nigeria's future elections.

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