

INTERNET REVOLUTIONS, DEMOCRATIC GLOBALISATION AND ELECTIONS OUTCOME IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: ECHOES FROM NIGERIA

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Abstract: This paper examines the social contexts of the development and innovation of the science of global communication technology. It shows the significant roles the internet has played in the democratic process, and in particular, how it has influenced the outcomes of elections across developed and developing societies in an increasingly globalised community. This paper argues that Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, blogs and LinkedIn etc. serve as the mediums through which civil rights and democratic activism are expressed. It also argues that during the 2011 and 2015 General Elections in Nigeria, many electronic devices and online programs were developed and used on social media. Revoda enabled a parallel vote count, access to polling unit results, transmission of collated results and information about the entire electoral process. The paper stresses that the use of social media networks by both political candidates and electorates has greatly promoted civic engagement, credible elections and democratic activism in pre-election and post-election periods. This paper concludes that internet technology may soon assume the position of an effective and critically vital para-human actor in most global election outcomes in the near future.

Keywords: Internet revolutions, democratic globalisation, election outcomes, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Innovations in science and technology on one hand and cutting-edge research in Information Communication Technology (ICT) has been accompanied by tremendous changes in the dissemination of information and social interaction whose impacts have been felt by all social institutions: political, social, judicial, economic, familial, military and cultural. The speed of delivering messages and information instantane-

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ously to masses of people in any part of the world between computers and smartphones connected by internet service has revolutionised the traditional means of communication in both developing and developed countries. The purpose of revolution in its political dimension is a change in the existing authority. It is different from reform in terms of profound changes in the system. The change brought by revolution is sudden and not gradual (Das and Choudhury 2002: 300). This is akin to the development and innovation in science and technology; the internet, in particular. The invention of the internet has forced many means of communication and interaction to become obsolete. It has helped in unifying the world by making the democratic system of government the only system accepted in the international community. In this sense, globalization is not only the internationalization of capital and capitalism but also the penetration of global institutions and processes into all parts of the world (Schwartz and Lawson 2005: 284).

Democratic governance in the modern world, however, presumes regular elections in which the rights of citizenship include, in principle, equal participation and collective influence over the composition of the government. For individuals, casting a ballot is, by far, the most common act of citizenship in any democracy (Verba Scholzman and Brady 1995: 23). Due to the importance of elections, there are some factors that shape the behaviour of voters before and during elections. Some of the factors are exogenous while some are endogenous. The invention of the internet and rising globalisation (which has transformed the world into a self-contained village) has had a profound influence over the outcome of elections in the twenty-first century in some democratic societies while it has not made any appreciable impact in others despite the twenty-first century being inundated by myriads of scientific breakthroughs and compelling changes. Elections are not the only barometer for measuring democracy, though.

Based on the aforementioned, the 2010 election in the United Kingdom was billed as the internet election: the social media election with much attention focused on how campaigners, commentators and voters would respond to groundbreaking digital campaigns elsewhere, notably in the United States (Newman 2010: 3). From Twitter to Facebook, through viral crowd sourced ads, sentiment tracking and internet polling, technology appeared to offer political parties and mainstream media organisations powerful new ways to engage vot-

ers and audiences. There were high hopes that new forms of personal expression through blogs and social networks would widen participation and the range of democratic voices. Ironically, the biggest media story of the 2010 election ended up being a television event: a set piece leadership debate which turned the campaign on its head with the internet seen as something of a sideshow. For the sceptics, this was proof that old media still called the shots and that the claims of the digital evangelists were overblown (Newman 2010: 3). But Newman argues that the 2010 election marked another significant milestone in the onward march of the internet with unprecedented levels of participation and new techniques providing extra layers of information, context and real-time feedback, which complemented and enriched more traditional forms of media (Newman 2010: 3).

The objectives of this paper are to examine the role of emerging technologies with particular focus on interest in the outcome of democratic elections and to know why some democratic nations are reluctant to embrace the internet and adopt it into the democratic processes. This paper asks the following questions: what is the influence of the internet in shaping the outcome of democratic elections? Why are some democratic government reluctant to adopt technological advancements in their electoral processes? The research asks questions and objectives are achieved and answered through rigorous analysis of empirical data drawn from various democratic countries in the world. This paper examines the impact of technological development in both developed democracies of the West and developing democracies in the Third World of Africa, Asia and Latin America. This is because, despite the improvements that internet technology has brought to enhance and improve elections and democracy as a whole, there are countries that have expressed fear of external interference in their domestic affairs through doctoring the outcome of elections results. Their fear is not far from what happened in the 2016 Presidential election in the USA.

During the campaign, no tool employed by the Russian government attracted more attention than cyber operations of various kinds. Of course, chief among them was the alleged hacking of the email accounts of the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman. However, all inquiries into the matter emphasized that getting the hacked information across and framing its meaning to the general public was as important as acquiring it in the first

place (Sanovich 2017: 3). Methodologically, this paper adopts content analysis technique to sourced secondary literature both empirical and an essay on the phenomenon. It is structured thematically from the introduction and synthesis of the literature, which is sequentially arranged based on the objectives of the study. The last part consists of a discussion of finding and conclusion.

SYNTHESIS OF RELATED LITERATURE

In establishing the link between technological inventions and democracy with a particular focus on elections, there are instances where technology has helped in conducting fair and acceptable elections while in others has aided the manipulation of results in line with the vested interests of local and international political actors. Reliably documented proofs show that perhaps the most widely discussed possibility is the potential for a foreign state to manipulate an election to advance its broad geopolitical interests (Levin 2016: 189). Trade deals, diplomacy, and military affairs all depend in large part on the political leaders of nations. The leaders of one state may wish to influence whom its interlocutors are in another. For this reason, there is a well-documented history (long preceding the use of cyber capabilities) of states interfering with the elections of other states. From 1945 to 2000, the United States and Russia combined to intervene in 117 national-level foreign elections (Levin 2016: 189). Sometimes this influence was overt, such as the American support for West Germany Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in 1953, but in many cases, it was not. It is therefore entirely plausible, perhaps even likely, that cyber capabilities could play a role in similar modern efforts. For instance, hackers potentially linked to Russia attempted to interfere with Ukraine's 2014 election (Buchanan and Sulmeyer 2016: 3). All these impacts of the internet do not exist in a vacuum: it depends on the political and party systems in operation and the interplay between political actors to embrace and adopt the technology that could deepen democratic culture and produce a credible election that would be accepted by all actors in the political contest especially in developing countries where election results are often contested and which in some cases resulted in violent clashes between supporters.

Political System, Party System and the Internet

The existence of any technology in democratic processes depends largely on the political system and parties that are adopted in a particular society. In a situation where there is a country operating with a one-party system or autocratic system of government, elections are turned into mere ceremonial exercise in confirmation with constitutional provisions. In this case, the internet has no impact on the election and its outcome even if it is allowed to operate. Media outlets tend to favour the topics and interpretations proposed by government officials and to neglect alternative voices, thereby supporting the status quo (Bennett 1990; Bennett et al 2007; Soloski 1989).

Similarly, in 2015, the governments of Gabon, Gambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo shut down the internet. In Gambia, the long-time dictator Yaya Jammeh cut off the internet on the eve of a vote he ultimately lost to Adama Barrow. In Uganda, the opposition parties and their members found it hard to organize because of a law barring public meetings without the police Chief's authorization and internet bloggers were widely seen as satisfying a hunger for information that the State would have liked to have kept secret (Muhumuza 2017: 2). This shows that the democratic system does not guarantee an atmosphere where the internet can make an appreciable impact on the democratic process. It also portrays the significance of the political system in institutionalizing democracy, especially in developing nations. Since 2015, about a dozen African countries have had wide-ranging internet shutdowns; often during elections (Muhumuza 2017: 2). Most African leaders are aware of the power of the internet to alter or influence the perception and decision of the electorate: that has been the rationale behind the crackdown because the leaders cannot censor or doctor the contents of the message and control internet users. In the presidential campaign of Obama in 2007-2008, the internet part of his campaign was considered to be the most important (Castells 2009: 9).

Similarly, the application of the internet in political communication has challenged the traditional mediums of political communication in Africa and Europe that were under the exclusive control of the government and powerful elites. It has further reinforced the electorates with the power to participate in governance and to decide who become their leaders (Windeck 2010: 19). The media represents the second cornerstone



of the communication triangle: it acts as an intermediary between the parties and their message on the one hand, and the electorate as the recipients on the other. In addition to this mediating role, it also communicates in its own right, either through active communication, e.g. in the form of political commentary and editorials or through targeted questioning in interviews with representatives of political parties and representatives of the government with whose help they control the quality of communication. The citizens themselves complete the triangle of political communication: in the first instance merely as passive recipients. Their communication occurs only on the micro-level when discussing politics and attempting to convincingly convey specific opinions. This passive recipient position has changed over the last few years on account of interest groups in civil society (some of which are more strongly anchored than others), strengthening organized public participation (Windeck 2010: 18).

The introduction of the internet (in particular Web 2.0) and mobile telecommunications in Africa at the beginning of the millennium has significantly altered this communication structure. The original structures have shifted from a “top-down approach” to a polycentric communication system (Windeck 2010: 19). Thus, it can be said that political communication by the population is greater today than the mere expression of its will in the polls. New technologies have promoted citizens’ position to that of equal partner in the communication structure.

In a Westernized democratic state, however, the media takes on the role of the fourth power. It controls those in power and reports to the citizens. This demands a certain degree of institutional independence from the political system. Thus, it can be said that political communication by the population is greater today than the mere expression of its will in the polls. The new technologies have promoted citizens’ position to that of equal partners in the communications structure (Windeck 2010: 17). This has further highlighted the significance of the media in politics though Windeck did not specify the type of media but the internet could be assumed as it has become fashionable in the twenty-first century to the extent that even traditional media: newspapers, radio and television are now going online (internet) in order to not become obsolete. Nowhere have the pressures of the changing media system been more strongly felt than in the British newspaper industry. Declining print edition circulations, increasing online

readerships, competition from free papers and online news providers and blogs, shrinking and more thinly spread advertising revenues, and the economic recession of the late 2000s have all taken their toll on traditional British newspapers (Chadwick 2013: 5).

Another indefatigable actor in the democratic system are political parties. They are the platform where candidates compete for positions especially in developing democracies where is no provision for an independent candidate. This has stemmed from the assumption that the political system in a country influences the media system in that country. What this means is that the various African political systems are accompanied by different kinds of media systems with various interpretations of freedom of speech and press freedom coupled with the dependence or independence of governments and other factors that can influence an individual media system. Such varied political and media systems mean that political communication also differs from one country to the other, both in its intensity and form as well as the methods employed (Windeck 2010: 18). The above submission explores the close-knit relationship between the media and political parties. Political parties need media to reach out to their supporters during election campaigns or any political event when the government in power allows the media to operate without strict restrictions or shutdown of the internet. The media is dependent on the supply of information from politics, while politicians are dependent on the media conveying their message to the electorate. Political communication not only serves as a political means, it is effectively the motor in the decision-making process and thus “[...] itself also politics. As a result, the media represents a permanent process that continually influences politics not only during the election period but generally, at all times and everywhere (Windeck 2010: 18).

Technological Advancement in the Democratic Process

Elections are one of the integral parts of the democratic process in democratic societies because it determines, influences and shapes the decision of the voters and the outcomes of their voting behaviour. Others include effective participation, equal voting, enlightenment, understanding the issues involved, and control of the agenda as the criteria of the democratic process (Dahl 1989: 107). This is made explicit in the

work of Das and Choudhury where they emphasize the vital role of elections in political participation. They state that voting is undoubtedly the most important institution of political participation in a democratic society. It is one of those important events of the democratic process when political activities reach a very high peak (Das and Choudhury 2002: 154). With the invention of the internet, the speed information travels between people has increased, as snail mail has been replaced by the instant connection of email and social media sites (Kaitlin 2012: 9). The internet was a product of the Department of Defense Advanced Research Project Agency program and was meant to act as a communication network between agencies (Tedesco 2004: 509). Since the internet became available to the general public, information travels quickly and a generation has grown up during the time of instant connectivity and communication. Though the objective of this paper is not only to study the impact of the internet on communication, the assertion of Tedesco shows how the internet has revolutionized social interaction between and among people.

Periodic elections are one of the key features which distinguishes democracy from other systems of government. The outcome of elections and its acceptability by the candidates and the electorate determines whether it was conducted under a free and fair atmosphere. In a normal situation, the election result is a reflection of mass participation and popular representation of the will of the significant majority whose authenticity or otherwise has stabilized some countries in developed democracies such as the USA, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Senegal, South Africa, India and Brazil. Whereas in countries like Nigeria, Kenya, Burundi, Guinea Bissau and Togo the results of general elections were often challenged on the grounds of massive vote rigging and malpractice which resulted in post-election violence, fragile democratic institutions and human underdevelopment.

In one of the most advanced democratic countries, the United States of America, however, the innovation in science and technology, specifically ICT has brought tremendous impacts on the entire democratic process, from election campaigns and rallies to influencing the decision of the voters. This point has been buttressed by Kaitlin (2012: 11) early in the nation's history when suffrage was limited to land-owning white men. It was achieved by prospective voters reading local newspapers and visiting the politicians face to face. In the

1930's, President Franklin D. Roosevelt used the radio to connect with the American public, and then in the 1960's Nixon and Kennedy's debate introduced the mass-produced version of face-to-face politics through televisions all over the country and we began the American descent into celebrity politics, which has been exacerbated by social media. These advances in technology have created more opportunities for citizens to participate, as they learn more about each candidate and have easier access to the candidates themselves. The submission of Kaitlin has highlighted how advances in technology reshapes the interaction between politicians and supporters in an election period. However, such advances have not penetrated the Third World at the same time as the USA and other western countries. Because most developing nations, especially in Africa, Asia and Latin America, were ruled by military dictators or monarchs who muzzled the press, prohibited freedom of expression and were hostile to emerging technology before the democratic revival in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, they only embraced technology in the early years of the twenty-first century.

The idea of "dumbing down" was developed in American society and has spread to the internet, where social media sites have created videos and shortened commentary down to 140 characters. Consequently, a media-centred democracy has been created, where the vast majority of political activity is conducted with the media, including social media sites (Lilleker 2006: 110). A media-centred democracy has kept the public more informed about politics, allowing for a constant feed of news and opinions to be accessed by millions. The drawback of this media-centred democracy, however, is the lack of face-to-face interaction and increased funding for television advertisement. While the internet is cheaper as an advertising medium, television is still the surest way to reach people (Lilleker 2006: 110). The findings of Lilleker revealed how the introduction of social media as a political tool for campaigns has challenged the orthodox mediums for political communication and campaigning during elections.

Social Networks and Electoral Process: Empirical Studies

In order too contextualise social media within social sciences and sociology, in particular, the most succinct analysis is found in the work of Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells

which he called the “network society” (1996). In his treatise entitled *The Information Age*, Castells explains in detail how information on the internet and the world wide web in the early 1990s had become a raw material. He elucidates how the emergence of information and communication technologies (ICT) have impacted on every aspect of life. He argues that the key characteristic of the “information age” is that time and space collapsed, whereby activities that used to take days or weeks took hours and transactions across oceans started happening almost instantaneously in cyberspace (Kamp et al 2016: 10).

The 2016 US election constituted a watershed for democracies in the digital age. During the election cycle, fears proliferated among policymakers and the public that foreign actors might exploit cyber technologies in order to tamper with voter registration, accessible voting machines, manipulate storage and transmission of results, and influence election outcomes. Russian information operations and disinformation on social media compounded these fears of election cybersecurity by raising questions about foreign interference with the election’s integrity. Similar worries arose with elections in France, Britain, and Germany. The Netherlands opted to hand out counted ballots in its March 2017 election to prevent hacking from affecting the outcome. On May 3, 2017 testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee given by James B. Comey, former director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, indicated that Russia had tried to tamper with vote counts in other countries and that it might attempt to do the same in the United States in the future. Technical strategies to protect election systems from cyber interference exist, such as stopping the use of voting machines connected by wireless networks and deploying machines that produce auditable paper trails (Fidler 2017: 2). In this way, technological innovations have shifted from the domain of natural scientists and technologists to the political arena. It could be deduced from the findings of Fidler that world leaders are giving considerable attention to the influence of scientific innovations on political discourse. The invention of electronic machines for voting and result counting has been receiving mixed reactions across developed and developing democracies in the world. In some countries, it has aided in the checking of vote rigging and manipulations of results while in others it has made the system vulnerable to interference in the election process by outsiders (Buchanan and Sulmeyer 2016: 7). Buchanan and Sulmeyer identify the possible threats to democracy by exploring the advancement in



technology. They argue that foreign intelligence agencies, most prominently Russia's, have plausible motivations and capabilities for some kind of electoral interference. In addition, there are other actors, such as terrorist groups, partisan activists, and groups with narrow parochial interests, who might seek to manipulate an election. There is a range of possible mechanisms for carrying out these threats, including targeting voters, voting rolls, voting machines, tabulation and the dissemination of results (Buchanan and Sulmeyer 2016: 7). Despite the threats posed by modern technology on elections, it has nevertheless helped to conduct transparent elections in some developing countries which further deepens democracy.

In most Third World countries who are new entrants in the league of democratic societies at the dawn of the twentieth century and early stages of the twenty-first century, there are two stages of election: primary and secondary election. The first is done by the members of the political party while the other general election includes all the eligible voters in the country. Both stages require wide publicity to reach supporters during primaries and voters at the final stage. In a study conducted in India, the largest democracy in the world to use new media, the Indian political campaigning system portrayed how developing nations embraced the advancements in ICT and adopted it into the democratic process. The study stated that it had been more than a decade since the internet had proven itself to be a powerful medium of communication globally. However, due to technological reach and access, it was more vocal in developed countries and developing countries like India. The world witnessed real command of the internet during the presidential election campaigns in 2000 when in the US the internet provided a new interactivity tool for direct conversation between the candidate and voters. From then on it continuously grew by leaps and bounds and has become an integral part of communication in political campaigns (Rahul 2016: 1).

There are developing countries where democracy and fair election is gaining momentum hence the internet is shaping the outcome of elections. In the run up to Malaysia's 13th general election, observers were curious to know if social media would be able to impact the electoral outcome. In the 2008 general election, it was widely accepted that alternative online content disseminated by blogs, party websites and alternative news portals determined the electoral outcome. The opposition then, for the first time, denied the ruling coalition a two-

thirds majority in Parliament. By 2013, the role of social media received widespread attention because of its exponential growth in Malaysia since 2008, where there were 800,000 Facebook and 3,429 Twitter users to 2013 when the number increased to 13,220,000 for Facebook and 2,000,000 for Twitter users (Gomez 2014: 1). However, it does not mean that such impact of the media on the outcome of the election is the same everywhere. Traditionally, in social sciences it has been said that two situations cannot be the same. Elsewhere in India, the internet did not make an appreciable impact in influencing election results in the 2014 election, although there was a significant shift to social media because the dominant and wealthy political actors had hijacked the old media. The mainstream media was partisan and wavering in its loyalties to political parties. This led to an intense focus on social media as the most effective means to reach the 23 million first-time voters in a nation with 16 per cent internet penetration. As a result of the overriding commercial agenda of mainstream media, it pushed political actors, activists and voters alike into the new media space. The employment of new media space during the 2014 Indian elections is, thus, to be read in the context of mainstream media's role rather than in the context of new technologies' potential to impact upon democratic politics. It must be noted that media's disregard of other considerations, including ideology, however, cannot be construed as an argument that media was neutral (Ranganathan 2014: 1).

Similarly, in the USA, the final stage of a political campaign is the general election. It is during this stage that supporters must gather and begin canvassing and phone calling to "spread the word". During this stage, the most important part of the campaign is the message. Speeches are made, debates held, and bumper stickers and signs are plastered across America (Trent and Friededberg 2000: 45). Thus, a campaigner could organise their volunteers with social media to get the word out and alter the face of the election with a greater reach. It has been investigated that the contingent impact of related Web 2.0 technologies on the campaign process is phenomenal (Wattal et al 2010: 5). Their results show that, in particular, the blogosphere can influence the campaign process and election outcomes (Stieglitz 2012: 4).

Furthermore, Williams and Gulati (2007 and 2009) investigated the use of Facebook by Congressional candidates during election campaigns. They found that the number of Facebook supporters could be considered as a valid indicator of

electoral success (Stieglitz 2012: 4). However, using social media for predicting political elections is highly controversial. There is no agreement among researchers yet on the measures responsible for any successful prediction (for example tweet volume or tweet content). The time period of data collection has also been a critical variable, ranging from weeks to months before the elections and ending days to weeks before the elections (Panagiotis and Mustafaraj 2012: 473).

In Ghana, social media has undoubtedly exposed the majority of Ghanaians to different interactive platforms with a significant impact on political behaviour, decision-making and judgement. Today, social media has become the battlefield for what was arguably the most competitive election in Ghana's history: the application of social media tools in political engagement was unprecedented. Social media opened a new wave of opportunity for citizens, politicians and civil society organizations to engage in an open, transparent and dialogical discussion that is relevant to the entrenchment of democratic values and aspirations. Today, there are more than five million (5,171,993) internet users in Ghana representing 19.6 per cent of the population, while Ghana's Facebook user base is about 1,211,760. Giving that the 2008 elections in Ghana were close with a difference of only 40,586 votes between then Candidate John Atta Mills of the National Democratic Congress and Nana Akuffo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party, politicians do not seem to underestimate the power of social media to galvanize, canvass and rake-in floating voters and to keep their loyal supporters up-to-date with information and news. In the twenty-first century, Facebook, YouTube and Twitter are not just innovations in the internet world but are fast becoming influencers and opinion creators. The use of these tools in Ghana's politics has seen a phenomenal increase in recent times. Currently, 34 per cent of a total number of Facebook users in Ghana are between the ages of 25-35, with 41 per cent between 18-24 years of age. The effect of social media cannot, therefore, be brushed away in the 2016 elections in Ghana (Centre for European Studies 2012: 4-16).

The findings added that the impact of technological advances enhanced democratic development, especially during elections. In the 2008 American presidential election, former President Barrack Obama used internet-based media platforms in the campaign. But the tidal wave of advances in ICT is not only common in developed democracies: they are also present in emergent democracies in the Third World whose



democratic system of government is still in the experimental stage.

In Germany, politicians are struggling with the influence of technological inventions on German politics where the top-ranking politicians across political divides are now more concerned with how to defend the external attack on internal democracy. It was evident in January 2015, when the pro-Russian hacker group CyberBerkut undertook a two-day DDOS (distributed denial of service) attack on German government computers timed precisely to coincide with a visit of Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk: the hackers called all Germans and the German government to end financial aid to the criminal government in Kiev. In April and May 2015, the German federal legislature (Bundestag) came under a sustained attack by hackers over a period of several weeks. They infected a network that includes more than 5,600 computers and 12,000 registered users (including those of at least 16 members of the Bundestag and Chancellor Merkel's office) with malware and stole 16 gigabytes of data in what has been the most extensive and damaging cyber attack on German government institutions so far. The attack was so severe that the entire Bundestag network had to be taken offline for four days (Stelzenmueller 2017: 7-9). This shows that it is not the only elections that have been touched by modern technology with particular reference to the internet, but also other tiers of government have felt the negative influence of the advances in science and technology. That is why Sergey Sanovich concluded that the intentions and capability demonstrated by Russia in the domain of cyber propaganda took many Western observers by surprise (Sanovich 2017: 4).

Most of the African countries are recent entrants into the league of democratic states. In the early and late 1900s they were formerly under military regimes and civilian despots with the exception of Senegal and some countries in Southern Africa. The speedy spread of globalisation, innovations in science and technology and the ever-growing influence of capitalism championed by the United States of America and other western democracies have forced military and civilian dictators in developing countries to relinquish power to democratically elected leaders. This also forces long-serving leaders to succumb to pressures from the West, thus holding periodic elections that produce no changes. The phenomenon is evident in Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Sudan, Chad and Equatorial Guinea: President Eduardo Dos Santos pulled out of the circle of long-

serving leaders by not contesting the August 2017 Presidential election since Angola gained independence from Portugal in 1975.

Ghana has been judged to be one of the most democratically stable states in West Africa apart from Senegal: a state who has never witnessed undemocratic government since its independence from France in 1959. Successive democratic elections were conducted peacefully since the early 1990s when it embraced the democratic system of government. The development of modern technology has changed the traditional modus operandi of the election campaign in the country. Research conducted the by the Centre for European Studies concluded that social media have revolutionized political communication by diversifying news sources and increasing the possibility for feedback in a timely manner. It became practicable in Ghana, particularly because the potentiality of its social media allowed for proper targets as well as direct and cheap access to political information (Centre for European Studies 2012: 4-16). This helped the opposition presidential candidate Nana Akuffo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party to defeat the incumbent President John Mahama of the National Democratic Congress because the opposition candidate was able to invest in the internet and social media and convinced most of the youth to vote for him.

Similarly, in Uganda, at the peak of campaigns for the 2016 elections, the political parties significantly extended their social media activities and the public also seemed more receptive towards these efforts than it had been before the beginning of the campaigns. The political parties used the platforms constructively to engage party members and respond to any queries as swiftly as possible as well as to connect to the general public as a crucial part of campaigning. However, it could be noticed that the individual accounts of the Presidential candidates were much more prominent than the parties' accounts making the latter almost look irrelevant. As of January 2016, two Presidential candidates were among the top ten Twitter profiles in Uganda. President Museveni (NRM) came in the third position with about 180,000 followers, while candidate Amama Mbabazi (Go Forward) was in the seventh position with about 125,000 followers. The intense activities on social media platforms provided channels to quickly reach out to the public; more specifically to supporters and potential voters. They allowed for easy and instant updates on what was happening on the campaign trail (Kamp et al 2016: 21).

It could be deduced that the very determinant role of Web 2.0 has consisted in the increasing of proximity and accessibility of users in political life and has contributed to an expansion of politically significant information, offering what traditional institutions and news media could not. In this context, online social networks have eliminated the traditional barriers between those in power and their audiences, and have introduced new approaches to engagement and political involvement. The rise of communities' cyber networks has opened up new possibilities for public monitoring and engagement by revolutionising communication and the way we share with friends, communities, political institutions and the physical environment (Marcheva 2010: 12).

Cyberpolitics could develop significantly in at least three directions in the not too distant future. It could become a campaign medium in its own right, not necessarily displacing but supplementing more traditional ones. It could become an important vehicle of interest group solidification and mobilisation within and across national boundaries. And it could diversify the exposure to the political communication of those regular users who enjoy exploring access to the wider range of views and perspectives that the internet affords (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999: 15). The anticipation of cyberpolitics in the not too distant future will become a reality with the growing use of internet technology in democratic processes. There are some countries where leaders are uncomfortable with the shift because it would give more power to the masses which in turn means greater participation in governance and deciding who will become the leader during an election.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

After a lengthy review of related literature, it is a long-standing tradition in sociology and social sciences, in general, to subject any study to theoretical explanation. Aligning with this tradition, the researchers adopt the relevant Social Process Approach to explain how technological innovations shaped democratic process in both developed and developing countries. This approach makes an attempt to relate political behaviour and processes to social innovation, industrialization and increasing media consumption through comparative quantitative analysis of national societies. It was earlier popularised by Karl Marx, Max Weber and Barrington Moore

whose approach was highly qualitative (Das and Choudhury 2002: 107). Daniel Lerner developed a theory of modernization which proposes a sequential pattern of development. His theory of development focuses on four stages: urbanization, literacy, exposure to mass media and politicization (Das and Choudhury 2002: 107). The theory takes into account the relationship between industrialisation that was started in the eighteenth century spurring advances in science and technology, urbanization, literacy and increasing media consumption especially in the twenty-first century where the advent of the internet removed virtually all obstacles posed by distance in communication and transformed the world into a global village.

Community organizing has early roots in the settlement house movements and the pragmatic organizing of Saul Alinsky (Garvin and Cox 2001). Strategies from these contributing branches of community organizing promoted participation and social action among local peoples (Gamble and Weil 2010). Community organizing efforts used consciousness raising, community building, and social action to promote empowered communities as well as and individual and systemic social change (Brady 2012; Garvin and Cox 2001; Morris 1984). Community organizing is adopted to explain how people converge or embrace emerging technologies – especially the internet – in their daily activities which then permeate into politics and democratic processes. It has become a subtle means of convincing and assembling people without seeking the permission of authorities. Modern democracy, therefore, is faced with how to control the ever-growing impact of technology (particularly the internet) that has encroached into politics and has been influencing and shaping elections in some countries while in others, the incumbent leaders have been employing every means available to control the power of the internet.

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, the United Kingdom-based agency Department for International Development (DFID) conducted a study on the Social Media for Election Communication and Monitoring in Nigeria. It found that the use of social media in elections initially became noticeable in the preparations for the 2011 Nigerian elections and now receives widespread media attention for its role in informing, engaging and empowering



citizens in Nigeria and across Africa (Bartlett et al 2015: 8). However, there were tremendous changes observed during the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria: the use of internet increased exponentially especially among the youth who use social media for different purposes. Facebook penetration in Nigeria only stood at six per cent in 2014, around 11 million users (Aljazeera 2015), this figure, however, has been growing rapidly (Punch 2015).

Furthermore, due to the strategic importance of Nigeria in business for its large population and diplomatic influence in the continent, the fragments of globalisation which turn the world into a global village are found in almost all social institutions. The widespread use of the internet by youth and educated adults has increased the conscience of Nigerians with regards to how the country is governed by their elected leaders. The Department for International Development (DFID) documented the impact of the internet (particularly social media) on civil rights and democratic activism. According to DFID, the protests staged in January 2012 against the government's announcement of the removal of Nigeria's fuel subsidy, resulted in a 120 per cent increase in the per litre pump price of petrol. The announcement provoked a series of demonstrations across the country and internationally, both on the streets and online, using the hashtag "#OccupyNigeria". The episode has played a major role in the subsequent reinstatement of subsidy payments by Jonathan's government (Ajayi 2011: 2). A second example of social media's political influence in Nigeria concerns the reporting of the Islamist militant group Boko Haram. The #BringBackOurGirls Twitter campaign, initially started by Nigerian lawyer Ibrahim Abdullahi, gained international attention. The hashtag has been used in more than 4.5 million tweets globally since the campaign began. The issue of civilian security and terrorism in northern Nigeria subsequently became a major part of election campaigning for the All Progressives Congress (APC) parliamentary candidate General Buhari.

The use of social media specifically during elections first became noticeable in the preparations for the 2011 general elections. In a review of these elections, the Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre documented at least three main ways in which Nigerians were using social media. First, to share information relating to the elections. This included the development of novel technologies that allowed people to access data and information in real time. One example was *Revoda*, a

mobile application which enabled a parallel vote count, access to polling unit results, transmission of collected results and additional information about the entire electoral process. Second, social media platforms were used by political parties, candidates and governmental organisations for campaigning and raising awareness. The Independent National Electoral Commission of Nigeria (INEC) used the opportunity to develop its communication channels and engage with citizens through Facebook, YouTube and Twitter.

INEC's Situation Room was established to enable people to directly contact the organisation to report misconduct and concerns about the poll. The Commission received about 4,000 tweets in the three days during the presidential election. Finally, Nigerians used social media "to improve the efficiency of election observation" (Ajayi 2011: 1). Citizens were able to share information and pictures such as results from their polling units. Although it did not prevent malpractice and falsification of results, at least the public was aware of the trends in different locations and were more likely to challenge any falsified results. Civil society organisations were also instrumental in leading campaigns for transparency and accountability, as demonstrated by projects such as *Reclaim Naija*: an election incident reporting system that allowed feedback to be easily aggregated and analysed. This allowed Nigerians to report incidents of violence and electoral malpractices through text messages. 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. Another project, The Social Media Tracking Centre, harvested social media reports from the elections before mapping incidents and monitoring the process of the polls over time. At the end of that election, the Chairman of INEC, Attahiru Jega stated that the use of social media enhanced transparency in the electoral process and made the INEC more accountable to the public for the conduct of elections.

With the aid of technological advancement in communications, the internet has found a strategic place in Nigeria's democracy. This is evident in the use of internet connectivity by individuals, government and corporate bodies for discussing political issues and debating government policies which were not obtainable with traditional media. By 2015, citizen journalism and observation were often finding their way into the mainstream news as media organisations increasingly invited their subscribers to report on online platforms (Aljazeera

2015). One noticeable feature was the expanded use of hashtags as flashpoints for political discussion and advocacy. On the eve of the 2015 elections, between 40 to 50 active hashtags linked to Nigerians actively discussing the elections were identified. “Hashtagging” in this way also became a way of identifying political affiliation and support for candidates among the electorate (Premium Times 2015).

In 2015, the year witnessed an increase in the use of social media by political parties. For example, StateCraft, a Lagos-based communications company, was responsible for APC candidate Muhammadu Buhari’s digital drive intended to appeal to younger people. In recognition of the integral role of the social media, the former President Goodluck Jonathan appointed Obi Asika, the chairman of Social Media Week Lagos (an international conference focused on change in social media technologies) as his Senior Special Assistant on Social Media. Political parties have also branched out into other mediums in order to engage voters. Preparatory to the 2015 General Elections, both front-running parties staged “Google Hangouts”, in which candidates answered questions from young Nigerians. The APC also tried crowdsource funding using a mobile platform designed to tap into the social media networks of its supporters in order to raise money for campaigns. The APC designed a card with a PIN where party supporters purchased and donated money to the Presidential campaign using mobile phones. This further explains the level of mass participation of Nigerians in the democratic process and how technology has reduced the gap between party supporters living in rural areas and the top political elites that are mostly urban-based.

Additionally, the importance of social media extended beyond polling day. Following the presidential inauguration on May 29, 2015, Nigerians posted tweets that included the hashtag #BuhariFixThis to offer their suggestions for the priorities of Buhari’s first term in office. The Centre for Democracy and Development in West Africa also developed an app, “the Buharimeter” designed to track the progress of electoral promises and provide a forum for political discussion. Civic technology organisation Budgit began a social media campaign #OpenNASS, which called for transparency and publication of the full details of the expenditure by the national assembly to encourage openness in the new government (Bartlett et al 2015: 15).

Following the advocacy and legal victory that led to the existence of the current 30 political parties in Nigeria, it has become critically important to review the role of the media, especially the broadcast media, in the electoral process. This is imperative given the capacity of the media and, in particular, the broadcast media to influence and shape public opinion. The failure to carry out such a process in the past led to violent conflicts triggered in part by the use of broadcast media to undermine election outcomes and democratic principles (Bartlett et al 2015: 15).

Before the arrival of the internet and its application in the democratic process, election campaigns hardly reached rural areas where the majority of the population resides. Also, election observation and monitoring of results by the citizens was difficult due to the absence of technology connecting election observers and party agents instantaneously in order to reduce result rigging and other election malpractices which led to the outbreak of post-election violence in Nigeria. Documented history of elections in Nigeria shows that the “Verdict 83” election program on the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), for instance, attracted a lot of criticism for its highly partisan coverage of the 1983 elections in favour of the incumbent National Party of Nigeria (NPN) government. The importance of avoiding a repeat of such a scenario cannot be overstated considering Nigeria’s recent political history since the June 12, 1993, elections and the lessons learnt from events in other African countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Zimbabwe and Cote D’Ivoire (Bartlett et al 2015: 15). A major cause of this problem is the tendency by those in power at both the federal and state levels to view the public broadcasting stations as the propaganda arms of their governments and, therefore, to use them to advance partisan or personal interests while preventing access to these media by other stakeholders, including opponents and opposition parties (Bartlett et al 2015: 15). Technological innovations, therefore, have not only increased mass participation during election and governance but have also challenged the traditional and orthodox media that are under full control of the government. It has further widened the scope of freedom of speech and association, which hitherto were censored and dictated by the ruling government. In Nigeria, for instance, opposition parties hardly got airtime to publicize their programs at best and at worst, if they challenged the denial before the court, they were charged exorbitant rates beyond the financial capacity of the candidates and



political party. Thus, only the voice of the government in power was heard hence having an advantage over the opposition parties.

Elsewhere in Africa, social media is affecting politics in different ways. In Kenya, the Ushahidi platform that was established after the 2007 election violence was instrumental in collating and mapping citizen reports of electoral misconduct, receiving 45,000 visits to its website. The success of the initiative resulted in the launch of Uchaguzi in 2013, a program designed to repeat citizen electoral monitoring for the Kenyan presidential elections. The website recorded over 3,000 incident reports in the days surrounding the elections, which included nearly 400 security reports and issues of voting irregularities, registration problems and polling station difficulties. In 2012, Senevote was developed by the Senegalese election watch coalition (COSCE) and resulted in 74,000 individual observations of activities at polling stations (Bartlett et al 2015: 15).

DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The central theme of this paper is to explain how democracy in general and elections in particular, have been shaped by scientific innovation and globalisation. Scientific innovation is no longer the concern of natural scientists but of social researchers and political leaders. Researchers in social sciences and political leaders are appreciating the impact of science and technology particularly Information and Communication Technology aided by internet connectivity which has found a central place in the daily lives of the citizens during and after elections. This correlates with the conclusion of Fidler (Fidler 2017: 1) where the findings show the role of technological innovation on elections (even though he expressed some reservations about technology in democracy). Digital technologies and the internet have affected how elections are conducted including internet voting and online voter registration. Although reliance on computers and communication networks for elections has garnered some attention, election cybersecurity has not been politically prominent within democracies (Fidler 2017: 1).

The growing influence of scientific innovation especially the spread of social media has become an issue of concern in most African countries. It has compelled most developing countries, particularly in Africa, to create offices for aides and

advisors to handle social media apart from aides that are handling conventional media because the political leaders are mindful of the pivotal role social media play in their ascension into power. It was found that in the 2015 elections in Nigeria, citizens posted results from locations almost simultaneously with the counting of votes, making it impossible for unscrupulous players to attempt to tamper with outcomes. Social media is now a powerful tool to protect democracy. This underscores the role of technology in eliminating or reducing election malpractice which had been the usual practice marring previous elections in Nigerian, often resulting in post-election violence.

Despite the rapid spread of globalisation and the rising influence of social media in enhancing democratic process in the world, there are developing democracies in which such advancement has had no strong influence on election outcome. The paper found out that in Uganda, during the run up to the 2016 Presidential election in spite of the intense activities on social media platforms they may have provided channels for quickly reaching out to the public, more specifically to supporters and potential voters. Social media allow for easy and instant updates on what is happening on the campaign trail. But at the same time, they contribute rather little in terms of providing substantial information on the parties' and candidates' profiles, programs and positions, which is needed for the voters to make informed choices. Posts and messages on policy positions and political objectives are mostly overshadowed by discussions about which candidate is pulling the bigger crowds, personal attacks and ridicule, as well as all kinds of rumours and allegations of misconduct, manipulation and interference in the campaigns (Kamp et al 2016: 24).

The paper also found that most political leaders are obligated by the defining moment of changes in technology that is intertwined with politics and democracy, in general, to embrace new technology and apply it in governance. Indeed, the power of social media has been such that even hitherto conservative government departments and bureaucracies have had to adapt and embrace the platforms as an important forum for communication with citizens (Kamp et al 2016: 25). This was evident in Nigeria when President Muhammadu Buhari assumed office on May 2015. He introduced a centralised electronic payment of all revenue and expenditure in the Federal Government treasury in a bid to check financial corruption in government and transparency in public office. Though the government officials have been reeling out figures recovered

with the introduction of Treasury Single Account (TSA) they have not been, however, verified by an independent agency and whether it would withstand the test time is a major concern in Nigeria, where there is a lack of continuity and sustainability of well-planned government policies and projects due to political rivalry and misunderstanding of the basic tenets of democracy.

CONCLUSION

Technological advancement has become a topical issue in virtually all democratic and undemocratic nation states. This concern is not unconnected with the increasing usage of internet by people of all ages: youths and adults even in developing countries where such technological developments have arrived only recently. In election campaigns, electronic voting and counting have brought some incredible changes in the conduct of elections in most African countries that adopted the use of an electronic device called card reader. The record achieved at the 2015 General Election in Nigeria was partly due to the use of the card reader which greatly helped in reducing electoral fraud; formerly the trademark of elections in the country.

Science and technology, therefore, are no longer confined or restricted to engineers and technicians. From the concerns surrounding nuclear bomb technology, manipulation of elections results and proliferation of social media to innovations in the field of natural sciences, power brokers, political actors are trying to tame the growing influence of the internet in the dissemination of information with the use of smartphones and other devices. Governments are now preoccupied with the challenge of controlling technology and its accompanying changes. In countries, such as Uganda, China and Russia governments have been witch-hunting social media geeks, critics, civil rights activists and opposition leaders, initiating obnoxious laws that warrant censorship of news content in order to ensure that citizens hear what the government wants them to know not what the citizens themselves want to know.

Despite efforts by some governments to muzzle the freedom of the press, they have still been challenged by the technological revolution. The internet and specifically social media sites have a reputation of being a veritable tool for the mobilisation of support during elections and the elimination of elec-

toral malpractice and manipulation which have been the emblem of elections in most of Third World countries where incumbent leaders were hardly ever defeated in a contest that was neither free nor fair. The use of technology in the 2015 General Election, however, garnered a lot of support for the leading candidates: former President Goodluck Jonathan and incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari. Both social media and card readers were used to their fullest which led to the defeat of the incumbent President Goodluck Jonathan and the emergence of Muhammadu Buhari as the new President.

In some developed democracies like the USA, Britain, France and Germany, however, the use of technology: computers, internet connectivity and different electronic voting gadgets make elections vulnerable to attack by hackers from rival countries. The saga which surrounded Donald Trump's victory over Mrs. Clinton in 2016 revealed how technology is susceptible to manipulation. Thus, some are using it to strengthen their democratic systems while others employ it to destabilise the country and influence the outcome of election results. This has forced most Presidents in the world to have offices and staff to handle new media ranging from Twitter, Facebook, emails and other applications to communicate with their audience. What informed the thoughts of leaders is that, if they left the use of technology in the hands of opposition parties and youth, it would be much easier to remove a sitting leader either by ballot or revolution with the aid of internet mobilisation. In recognition of its effects and the impact on democracy and lives of citizens, the internet has become a key issue in both national and international discourse on how to regulate it and to remove the threats it poses on sustaining a democratic government.

With regard to government, the nebulous nature of new media technologies has exacerbated the stance on surveillance and censorship. Whereas laws such as the Regulation of Interception of Communications Act (2010) and the Uganda Communications Act of 2000 (Cap 106) are already in place, there is also in the offing a specific law to regulate social media usage (Anena 2014: 40). Such laws notwithstanding, there have been specific efforts by government functionaries to block social media. For instance, when a consortium of the political opposition known as "Activists for Change (A4C)" launched a campaign of walking from their homes to their workplaces (walk-to-work) to shine a spotlight on poor governance as manifest in the rising cost of consumer goods in the

country in early 2011, the armed forces were deployed to stop the exercise, thus leading to violent confrontations with the protesters (BBC News 2011).

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