

**New Media Application and Participation of Students at the 2017 Student Union
Government Electronic Based Elections Exercise At The Federal University of Technology
Minna, Niger State**

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Abstract

The study was designed to find out students' compliance to the new e.voting technology, challenges associated with it and to examine the reasons behind the low level of student's turnout at the exercise. The study was hinged on media morphosis theory and diffusion of innovation theory. Survey was used as the method, Findings showed that students were technologically compliant, but failed to turn out in mass due to time factor, lack of interest in student politics and poor publicity. Further findings showed that technical challenges formed some of the problems associated with the new media application. The research concluded that the e.voting system recently adopted by the FUT Minna, seems better than the ballot system previously used. It recommended that in future, aspirants should adopt adequate publicity by exploring suitable communication channels. All technical challenges should be properly taken care of by the organizers and that the elections exercise should be shifted far from the exam period to enhance better participation.

Keywords: *New words: e.voting, new media application, SUG, technologically compliant, students politics.*

Introduction

The rate at which ICTs have invaded the world and its impacts on almost all aspects of human endeavors is amazing. Infact, one can almost conclude that people born in this century are most privileged and better advantaged in terms of the ease of getting things done including communication within shortest period of time with the use of one form of technology or the other. This statement finds its backing in the words of Baran (2004, p 24), when he observes that “ICTs have made communication easier and more democratic.” In placing more emphasis on the impact of new media technology, in almost all human endeavors, Ekharefo and Omale (2017, p 1.) stated that “The obvious manifestations of these technologies can be seen in education, commerce, banking and the media; they have become drivers of development”

A very important aspect of the imperative of media technology lies on its undeniable effect and impact in governance and electoral processes. The use of new media application in elections exercise and the actual voting itself has taken care of the unnecessary stress, processes, protocols, procedures and anomalies associated with elections exercise. Although, despite the relatively new technology, it has not been fully proven that the presence and use of e.votingsystem has completely taken care of corruption cases associated with elections such as rigging and the likes, however, this is not the focus of this paper. This paper is concerned with the adoption of this relatively new voting technology adopted in FUT Minnastudents SUG elections exercise and how technologically compliant students are to the new system of voting in the university.

Statement of the Problem

The impact of various social media platforms on citizen’s participation in politics is overwhelming and quite encouraging. For instance the level of online participation of youths in Nigerian politics today is alarming, gone are the days when youths in the country leave matters of politics to older ones. These days, there are agitations for youths to take over power from Elders. Hence, more youths are triggered to rise to the occasion to participate in matters of elections and governance. This can be seen as reflected in the array of various youth organizations, forums and NGOs scattered across the country, representing one political interest or the other including students from higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. Various scholars such as Alade (2011), Elise (2012), Chinwe and Uche (2014) and Uji (2015), has highlighted the role and involvements of youths in politics and many others too numerous to mention. Corroborating the above assertions made by the researchers above, it follows that students are vibrant youths in the use of social media as far as new media and political participation is concerned.

But on the contrary, It was observed by the 2017 SUG President of FUT Minna, Comrade LateefHamza, a student of the Cyber Security Science who happens to be in the twenty ninth succession of SUG, that out of Seventeen Thousand and Ninety (17,090) of the student's population, only Five Thousand (5000) came out to vote during the 2017 SUGe.voting exercise. This calls for serious questions as one may wonder at the low level of students participation at the exercise, given that these students are vibrant youth, most of whom loves and engage in vibrant activities such as this and the fact that technology makes things easier especially the new e.voting electoral processes adopted by the university and the use of various social media platforms for one form of communication or the other.

It is also expected that as a school of technology, students should be technologically compliant and excited to adopt the new e. voting system. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to access the new media application and students' participation at the 2017 e-elections exercise in FUT Minna, and to find out the reasons behind the low turnout of students during the e.exercise amongst others.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the level of students' participation at the 2017 SUG e-elections in FUT.
2. Ascertain whether the students were technologically compliant to the new system.
3. Find out the most popular social media platform used during the exercise
4. Find out the challenges associated with 2017 SUG e.voting in FUT Minna.

Review of Related Literature

Students' Involvement/Participation in School Politics

It is believed by Elise (2012), that most of our leaders in the country today were once students who participated in school politics or leadership in one way or the other. Participation in politics trains a student to be a good citizen. It gives him training in the democratic way of life. He grows into a responsible and cultured citizen who is an asset to the nation. It creates in him a sense of patriotism. He knows his duties towards his country. He has a fair knowledge of the affairs of the world. He develops a debating skill and can always put forward his point of view with force and conviction. He is trained for leadership. As a leader in the making, he develops qualities such as courage, sincerity of purpose, a spirit of service, sympathy for the fellow men, self-discipline and a devotion to duty.

He further posit that the primary duty of a student is to pay attention to his studies. It is sometimes presumed by parents and guardians that a student cannot and should not afford to take part in the luxury of politics as they say politics causes a great interference to their studies. On the other hand, Students politics leads to active participation in strikes, demonstrations and

processions. At times, it brings them into serious clash with the police. All these disrupts their studies sometimes, they might be forced to drop out in some cases.looses their real purpose in life and may go astray. But majority of parents who attended tertiary institution and were actively involved in politics believe that it develops the child in qualities of leadership. Instead of being a shy“book-worm”, such student grows into an aggressive, dominating and alert youth who knows how to fight the battle of life. However, it is very important to always strike a balance between politics and attention to studies.

New Media Applications and Youths

Alade (2011), see new media as a platform used to describe the interaction between groups or individuals in which they produce, share, and sometimes exchange ideas over the internet and in virtual communities. The impact of these new media platforms on young people is significant. In this technology driven age, most children grow up surrounded by mobile devices and interactive social networking sites such as Twitter, MySpace, and Facebook, which has made the social media a vital aspect of their life.

Many young people make use of their tablet, computers and smart phones to check Tweets and status updates from their friends and family. As technology advances, people are pressured to adopt different lifestyles. Social networking sites can assist young people to become more socially capable. However, they may also make them incompetent, as well. Therefore, it is important to exercise caution and restraint when dealing with such issues. A youth’s experience with digital media may lead him to having a new and different expectations about how to gather, work with, translate, and share information, Compared to older people, they are more likely to turn to digital media first when researching into a topic for academic or personal use, to read news on the Internet than in a printed newspaper, and to use online social network tools to meet friends and to find information.

Furthermore, the emergence of social media has also contributed immensely to expand the limits of good governance. From open government data, and citizens reporting on government abuses, it has also provided a medium to connect citizens with one another and empower them to hold government accountable. Ehidiamen (2013) says social media has a crucial role to play in ensuring Nigerian leaders are held accountable.

Taking a cue from the position of the scholar above, it follows that, students on campus can use the social media as a tool for checks and balances in terms of governance of their elected student union leaders. In other words, it can be used as a tool for participation of student’s politics.

Furthermore, the technology of social media is relatively cheap and therefore affordable by most Nigerian students in higher institutions of learning, and has made it relatively easy to access and disseminate important information. Social media has also helped activists organize. Peaceful protest and campaign etc.Government takes advantage of this technology to monitor public opinion on its policies. The turning point of the use of social media actively in socio-

political issues or governance is usually pegged at the 2011 general elections as strategies taken by politicians.

Current Trends in E-Participation

Scholars like Vitak, J., Zube, P., Smock, A., Carr, C. T., Ellison, N., and Lampe, C. (2011) posit that many social media sites are being used by youths to participate in governance, make their voices heard and bring their leaders to order. They include foreign/international media applications and platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram. Similarly, there are also the indigenous platforms, made by Nigerians for Nigerians that have become very popular among Nigerians at home and in the diaspora. Examples are Nairaland, ReclaimNaija, BudgIT, Bella Naija, LIB etc. With cheaper internet access, more youths are spending substantial time on the internet on a daily basis. Inevitably, they come across social media posts that relate to governance and socio-political issues, and may get involved in the discussion. This marks the beginning of their participation.

In the last few months, issues of insecurity, terrorism and herdsmen's attacks have beleaguered the nation. For many young Nigerians, the social media remains a popular source of not just information about updates, but also place to hear assessments and make sense of the situation together with other users. When about 200 girls were kidnapped from Chibok in Borno State, the issue appeared to be losing publicity without the girls being found, until an internet campaign sprung with a classic social media strategy, the 'hashtag' represented with the #bringbackourgirls campaign became a household phrase for Nigerians, with people lending their voices from different parts of the world the same goes for the abduction of the Dapchi girls at Yobe State.

It began with just some young Nigerian Twitter users, who were determined that the gravity of the situation was not underemphasized, and sought to raise support for the missing girls through the social media.

Also, the forthcoming 2019 general elections in Nigeria have witnessed a deluge of contributions from internet users. These are predominantly young Nigerians, keen on being aware and involved in national issues. Platforms for discussion have been created on different social media, to inform, aggregate, suggest, rationalize and deliberated on what is happening in the Dialogue. These include Nairaland's National Dialogue Thread, the #nigerianationaldialogue on twitter, www.nigeriannationaldialogue.com and the conference's Facebook page which currently has over 104,000 likes on Facebook and many more unregistered visitors. Similarly students in higher institutions of learning can use same media platform to checkmate the activities of their student union leaders and any matter as it relates to the fundamental rights of students and their wellbeing on campus.

Review of Empirical Studies

Uji (2015) examined the use of social media for socio political mobilization of the youths; the objective of the study was to find out the effects that the social media is exerting on the participation of Nigerian youths in socio-political issues which was against the backdrop of long standing exclusion of youths from issues affecting the polity and governance. The study was

conducted using the survey method with questionnaires administered to selected respondents. The results showed that large numbers of youths are spending time online, and by participating in social media discussions on socio-political matters affecting the country. They are thus getting informed and raising awareness about different issues through e-publicity and demonstrations, thereby promoting good governance in different ways, like accountability. The study recommends among others that there should be improved media literacy on the part of social media users and activists, in order to make the best use of the innovation for socio-political participation and reduce incidences of false or, malicious information going viral and affecting the society negatively.

The study is different from the current study because it focuses on the effects that the social media is exerting on the participation of Nigerian youths in socio-political issues; this study is concerned with FUT Minnastudents and their participation in school politics. it also differ in theoretical framework, The study is also different from the current study because this study sought to find out the reasons behind the low turnout of students at the exercise, specifically this study was concerned about the level of technological compliance of FUT Minna students in their relatively newly adopted system of voting on campus. Both works are similar in terms of the survey research method adopted and the fact that it has to do with political participation of youths and the use of new media.

In another study, Uzochukwu and Uche (2014) investigated the place of the new media in promoting online civic engagement among the Nigerian youths. The study was concerned with youths and their involvement in politics using the online platform, which shares similar notions with his study, The study acknowledged that the new media possesses the potential to engender online civic engagement among young people by offering them a platform for acquiring information necessary for civic participation; for engaging in political discussions/debates in an atmosphere of enhanced freedom of speech; for direct conversations with elected representatives; for pushing for change; and for achieving group mobilization. .

Furthermore, this study attempted to find out if students are technology compliant to the e system of voting in the university, reasons behind the low turnout of students amongst others. This study differs from the reviewed study in terms of theoretical framework and method. The survey research design was used to generate data for this study while in the reviewed study no research method was used. It was more of a discursive paper.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Mediamorphosis theory by Roger Fidler (1997).and Diffusion of Innovation theory by Everett Rogers (1962).Roger Fidler stated that “Transformation of communication media is usually brought about by the complex interplay of perceived needs, competitive, political pressures, social and psychological innovation”. According to him, the media do not just arise spontaneously and independently, rather they emanated systematically from the metamorphoses of the older media. Matching this side by side, this theory agrees with

the fact that e.voting system in FUT Minna, didn't spring up overnight, it metamorphosed as a result in the change of voting processes or system to a new media technology,

The second theory which is diffusion of innovation theory was propounded by Ryan and Gross in (1943), later developed by Everett Rogers in (1962) and revised in (2003). The crux of the theory has to do with the introduction and adoption of new innovation such that with time people are quick in adjusting to the new technology and adopting it as a new and acceptable system. The theory is relevant to this paper in the sense that the introduction of the e.voting system in FUT Minna is relatively new, It was introduced barely three years ago and now, students are getting used to the technology already and adopting it as their new system of voting in SUG elections exercise.

Methodology

The research design employed in this study was survey. Survey method is useful in collecting primary data involving large human samples and their cumulative views on a particular matter. Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekharefo and Okpanachi (2012) opine that the aim of the survey is to find out why people behave in a particular way and what their behavior would be under a given condition. Questionnaire constituted the method of data gathering. Structured questionnaire was used to elicit data from the population of the study.

The population for the study comprises of seventeen thousand and ninety (17,090) undergraduate students of the Federal University of Technology Minna as at the 2016/2017 academic session. This information was obtained from the Information Technology Service division of the Federal University of Technology, Minna, Niger State.

The Non-probability sampling technique was used, but in the case of this study, the strata are the 8 schools or faculties in FUT Minna. This sample size was drawn using Krejeie and Morgan (1970) table of finite sample size determination, which establishes sample size at ninety five percent confidence level for research activities. In order to ensure sufficient representation of various segments of the population, the stratified random sampling technique was adopted. In a nutshell, FUT Minna is divided into eight (8) schools. They are: School Of Engineering & Engineering Technology(SEET), School Of Information & Communication Technology(SICT), School Of Environmental Technology(SET), School Of Agriculture & Agricultural Technology(SAAT), School Of Entrepreneur & Management Technology(SEMT), School Of Technical Education(STE), School Of Life Sciences(SLS), School Of Physical Sciences(SPS).

Presentation of data and discussion of findings

Table 1: Distribution of schools and their population

Faculty	Male	Female	Total
SEMT	814281		1098
SET	2791	604	3395
SICT	645	333	978
SLS	630	719	1349
SPS	2361	602	2963
STE	1293	451	1744
SAAT	1105	964	2069
SEET	3151	343	3494
Total	12790	4300	17090

The study used these schools as groups from which the samples was drawn. The calculated percentage of each school determined the number of samples distributed to each school. Simple percentage was used to ensure that the ratio of population between schools is maintained. Samples drawn from each school amounted to the total sample size when summed up.

Table 2: Sample size against corresponding population in each school

Faculty	Population	% of Population	Sample
SEMT	10986.4		24
SET	3395	19.9	74.5
SICT	978	5.7	21.4
SLS	13497.9		29.6
SPS	2963	17.3	65
STE	1744	10.2	38.4
SAAT	2069	12.1	45.4
SEET	3494	20.5	76.7
Total	17090	100	375

According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table of sample size determination, when a population of study is about 15,000 to 19000 the sample of population to be used would be 375. Specifically, the total population of the study is 17,090, hence adopting the Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table of sample size determination, the sample size for the study would be 375.

Table 3: Level of student's participation at the 2017 SUG e.voting exercise

Students Rating	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	46	12.27
Very Good	64	17.07
undecided	9	2.4
Good	81	21.6
Poor	175	46.67
Total	375	100

The table above is a proof to verify that the level of student's participation was poor

Table 4: Reasons behind low turnout at the e.voting exercise

Did you participate at the e.voting exercise			<i>Reasons for the low turnout</i>		
Options	Freq.	%	Option	Freq.	%
Yes	136	36.27	Lack of interest	47	12.53
			Low Publicity	63	16.8
No	239	63.73	Undecided	53	14.13
			Inadequate Time	212	56.53
Total	375	100		375	100

From the table above, it is glaring that a greater number of students didn't participate at the e.voting exercise. The major reason was tagged to inadequate time frame amongst others. This is

because the e.exercise was done almost within exam period; hence students found such timing as a distraction to their studies and didn't come out in mass for the exercise

Table 5:Level of student'scompliance to the e.voting system

Students' compliance to the new tech.	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	95	25.33
High	119	31.73
Undecided	83	22.13
Low	46	12.27
Very low	32	8.53
Total	375	100

The table clearly shows that the level of students' compliance to the new innovation is high.

Table 6:Challenges associated with the 2017 SUG e.voting exercise

Option	Frequency	Percentage
Logistics	34	12.27
Technical	38	17.07
Lack of interest	70	21.6
Inadequate Time Frame	175	46.67
Poor Publicity	21	2.4
Total	375	100

Result from the table showed students' emphasis on the issue of time frame set for the elections. was a big challenge. Otherwise they would have fully participated. it is also glaring from the data gathered that only a few encountered logistics and technical challenges during the exercise. The technical and logistics can be attributed to teething problems of the adoption of the new technology, which with time can be adequately handled.

Table 7: The most popular social media platform used at the exercise

Social media used by aspirants	<i>The most appealing platform used</i>
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Options	Freq.	%	Option	Freq.	%
Twitter	28	7.47	Twitter	47	12.53
Instagram	85	22.67	Instagram	53	14.13
Facebook	66	17.5	Facebook	63	16.8
Watsapp	196	52.27	Watsapp	212	56.54
Others	0	0	Others	0	0
Total	375	100		375	100

A look at the table shows that Watsapp was the most popular and appealing social media platform used by students during 2017 SUG electioneering process.

Discussion of Findings

The results obtained from the study revealed that majority of the respondents did not participate at the e.voting exercise, for reasons being that the time frame set for the elections was too close to the examination season, therefore, students considered the elections exercise as a distraction to their studies. Others couldn't participate for lack of interest in the exercise, and low publicity on the part of the aspirants. Only a few of the respondents were undecided about the matter.

This supports similar findings by Uzochukwu and Uche (2014) they argued that before the new media could effectively gain youths' participation, certain factors must first be addressed and these include the extent of the youth's interest in politics, the conduciveness (or helpfulness) of the political environment and the responsiveness of the government of the day to the civic engagement cause. Once these issues are properly sorted out, the study believes, the potentials of the new media as a catalyst for youth online civic engagement would be better realized. It is glaring from this study that FUT Minna students lacked interest in the political exercise as a result of the wrong timing of the elections exercise brought close to the exam; hence the political environment was considered not conducive enough to participate at the e.voting exercise

Further findings showed that the most popular new media technology used was Whatsapp amongst others, it also revealed that students are compliant to the new technology because they now preferred the e.voting system compared to the former voting system used in FUT Minna. Going by the diffusion of innovation theory, by Everett Rogers (1962) which is one of the theoretical frameworks for the study, it follows that over time, students are now technologically compliant in terms of adapting to the new innovation introduced for elections purposes in FUT Minna.

Conclusions and recommendations

The research work focused on new media application and participation of students at the 2017 SUG electronic elections exercise in FUT Minna. The objectives of the study, among others were to find out the level of students participation at the 2017 SUG e-elections in FUT. ascertain whether the students were technologically compliant to the new innovation, determine the most popular social media platform used during the exercise and to find out the challenges associated with the exercise. The findings showed that the low level of student turnout was not a deliberate act as many of them were not new to politics as well as diplomatic demonstration at different levels as far as students on campus are concerned, neither were they naive about the electronic means of carrying out the elections exercise. Rather, they simply had no interest in participating at the exercise. Their lack of interest was associated with the low level of publicity, and the fact that elections were mostly done close to exams period, therefore most of the students saw it as distraction to their studies.

. Based on the findings, therefore, the paper recommends that:

1. Elections should be done at the beginning of the semester and not towards a critical and sensitive time such as exams period to enhance maximum participation of students in future.
2. The caretaker committee in charge of SUG elections should ensure that logistics and technical problems are properly taken care of to enhance improved and hitch free elections in future thereby enhancing massive participation.
3. Aspirants should engage suitable communication channels for adequate publicity. Also, the need for a symposium is required to educate, encourage and enlighten students on the need to participate in voting process.

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