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## **Information and Communication Technology Tools and Political Campaign: A Scoptic Overview.**

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### **Abstract**

The paper discusses the use of information and communication technology for political campaign during elections with reference to Nigeria. The argument of the paper is centred on issues, such as, new media use, and young voters' political information seeking, new media use for voting, internet use for social and political mobilisation, internet use and political participation, use of youtube and myspace during election cycle, the effects of youtube on politics, the effects of myspace on politics and new media use and socio-demographics of electorates. This paper has relied on these mentioned issues as the guiding reference around which discussions in the paper revolved. It was concluded that internet penetration is still considerably low in the Nigerian context, while the awareness about the internet use is still limited to and among the elite, academics, students and interested middle-class people only. It was, therefore, recommended that government and non-governmental organisations should support in the provision of ICT facilities to bring Nigeria to the level of the ICT compliant nations of the world.

**Keywords:** Internet and political campaigns; ICT and politics, civic engagement, Political participation, ICT use.

### **Introduction**

In the past several years, there has been an explosion in the number of websites that were dedicated to political campaign communications. This was brought about by the advent of electronic sources which has empowered the end-user in just the same way the invention of printing did 500 years ago. The sages and information rich priests and clerks, lawyers and scribes of those times saw their role change, as books became more widespread and cheaper. It is not surprising that the reformation and the printing revolution were more or less coeval. And books were just as unstructured-without pagination, chapter headings, contents lists, etc. in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as the internet is now (Pond, 2005).

Likewise, since the mid-1990s, the internet and World Wide Web have been changing society remarkably. Government has provided electronic information and services through government websites. Political parties have used



campaign websites for election campaigns. Almost all political candidates and their representatives have their own websites to disseminate information and communicate with their constituents. Political use of the internet, in particular campaign websites, has become a common phenomenon. The interactive nature and massive information transfer capability of the internet are implicitly assumed to produce positive effects on politics and democracy (Park & Perry, 2008). However, as of yet we know little about the effects this new medium, internet, has on political information seeking of young voters, especially, 18-24 year olds. Thus, the objective of this paper is to discuss the use of information and communication technology for political campaign communications in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is anchored on uses and gratifications theory. Sweetser & Kaid (2008) relating from several other authors, mentioned that uses and gratifications theory has been more recently used to determine the gratifications of entertainment media, the theory has a long history of investigating political information seeking motivations (Blumler & McQuail, 1969; McLeod & Becker, 1974). Blumler & McQuail (1969) found that gratifications sought from watching political broadcasts clustered into three constructs: political reason such as reinforcement or vote guidance; surveillance for keeping up with the issues; and excitement such as seeing which party would win.

Kaye & Johnson (2002) examined gratifications for seeking political information online and found the primary motivations to be: guidance, information seeking and surveillance, entertainment and social utility. Kaye & Johnson (2002) reported that higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with information seeking and surveillance and higher interest in politics is correlated with accessing political information online for social utility and information seeking and surveillance. The researchers reported that self-efficacy predicts guidance and information seeking / surveillance as motivations for using the internet to find political information.

Therefore, the researchers of this current study have related the internet to the realm of powerful media, when currently, the online population has become manifolds, unlike before it was more than 3,000 times bigger than seven years ago and still growing and just like the heavier viewers of television, the internet will, in the future, influence people's ability to evaluate and judge on their own because of the general views cultivated by their exposure to it. Then, it is expected that people's worldviews, especially in areas of politics, religion and education would be influenced heavily by the information disseminated through the internet.



### **Methodology**

Since the work is a position paper, the researchers mainly used secondary sources of data to arrive at the conclusions made. This implies that this work was borne out of consultations of existing literature (both empirical and theoretical studies). The researchers consulted textbooks, journals, periodicals, magazines, newspapers and a host of other online materials.

### **New Media Use and Young Voters' Political Information Seeking**

Most political observers agree that some level of political knowledge or information is necessary for an active and satisfying participation in the political system (DelliCarpini, 2000) in the US. Information and knowledge about politics across the board appears to be low, but the problem is particularly acute among young citizens and women (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003). Low levels of political knowledge may also account for lower turnout rates among young citizens. For instance, the Millennium study of young voters' motivations for voting and not voting found that the young generation often cited the fact that they did not feel they had 'enough time or information' as a reason for not voting in 2000 (Murphy, 2000). In attempting to understand how a young citizen's perceived lack of knowledge may act as a barrier or 'de-motivator' to electoral participation, Kaid *et al* (2004) proposed conceptual links between the notion of general political efficacy and what they call political information efficacy. The general concept of political efficacy is usually defined as an individual's feeling that he or she has the ability to influence the political process.

Sweeter & Kaid (2008) related from other researchers who have found evidence that exposure to political information in the form of debates and ads can significantly enhance political information efficacy scores. Tedesco (2006) too has demonstrated that the web interactivity can also enhance political information efficacy levels for young citizens. However, the concept has been tested in regard to exposure to blogs. Research has also shown that a solid relationship between the channels of communication form which information is sought and the level of political knowledge one has. For instance, the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2006) reported that blog readership increased considerably in 2004, with a majority of readers being under the age of 30. Furthermore, the report stated that 'political blogs' are attributed as key in the growing popularity of blog reading, and many readers used them to get political information about the 2004 campaign and election.



### **New Media Use for Voting**

Han (2008) related that several previous studies have discussed the effects of traditional media use on voters, particularly, use of television and newspaper news. However, this current study highlights on the use of the new media and its implications on voting habits. The social effects of new media adoption and use are moot issues for earlier studies (Kosicki & Yuan, 2001). More scholars, because of the increasing literature, continue to discuss the two sides of the story, that is, the pros and cons of the internet's effect on the democratic process (for example, Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002). The study of the relationship between voting behaviour and traditional media use is a mixture of conflicting views and so is the discussion regarding the extent to which internet use can promote voter turnout. The skepticism over the positive link between internet use and the likelihood to vote has seemed to be plausible. For example, Bimber (2001) found that there is no direct link between election-related Internet use and voter turnout, even though his earlier study (Bimber, 1998) reported that internet user are more likely to vote.

In corroboration with the aforementioned, the Pew Research Center (PRC) demonstrates that controlling for other factors related to participation, Internet users are no more likely to be engaged in political processes (Pew Research Center, 2000b) and show no greater tendency to vote than do nonusers (Pew Research Center, 2000a). It is also the case that the audience for election news has shown less interest in engaging in online political activities than in retrieving political information (Pew Research Center, 2000b). Scheufele and Nibset (2002) thus, concluded that the Internet is limited in promoting citizenship. Nevertheless, there are substantial evidences that advocate the positive influence of purposeful or active use of new media on voter turnout. The Pew Research Center (2000b) discovered, for instance, that the audience for online campaign news in 2000 increased fourfold over 1996. More importantly, considerable numbers of election news consumers said online campaign news affected their voting decisions in 1996. The effect of online campaign news has been particularly evident among young people. Half of election news consumers younger than 30 years old reported the information they received online made them want to vote for or against a particular candidate. Based on the literature on various studies that have been highlighted above, the next sub-section delves to mention on the implications of the 'uses and gratifications' theory on new media users and their political information seeking in relation to their political mobilisation and political participation.

### **The Internet Use for Social and Political Mobilisation**

Quintelier & Visser (2008) elaborated that with the emergence of new information and communication technologies, various scholars and politicians view the



internet as a new source of political socialisation and a way to bring young citizens closer to the political process. High expectations emerged concerning the internet's potential for the political mobilisation and engagement of new groups that are currently excluded from politics. Best & Krueger (2005) enumerated that the internet is becoming an important source of political participation for young people, who are normally not attracted to politics. The potential for the internet to attract new people, who were under-represented in more traditional forms of participation is known as 'mobilisation thesis' (Norris, 2001).

Quintelier & Visser (2008) related from several other scholars that the literature about mobilisation thesis provides four reasons for the potential of the internet. The first expectation about the internet's potential is that it provides a lot of opportunities for political engagement: online voting in polls, debating, blogging, and so forth. Second, the internet lowers the cost of participation. Once someone has a connection, there is no extra cost for going online, which might lower the barrier for citizens to participate in online politics. People with a broadband connection are consequently more likely to engage in online activities. Hence, a justification for the argument that online participation is more open as it provides for more equality of opportunity in political participation (Bimber, 2001). Third, the internet is quick and up to date and that it can provide a lot of information necessary to participate in civic life and public discussion (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003). Fourth, as an interactive medium, the internet can strengthen the workings of direct democracy and improve relations between citizens, politicians, and their intermediaries through processes like e-government (West, 2004). Finally, the internet also might be a solution to the 'democratic deficit' that several political institutions experience (Norris, 2001). Considerable numbers of authors have argued that new technology could be the means to link youth to the political process. This is because the young people spend increasing amount of time in the 'online world,' the internet must not be overlooked or underestimated as an effective educational tool that can foster political learning and participation among youth (Weber, Loumakis & Bergman, 2003). The World Wide Web contains a wide range of educational and informational web sites, but the problem is that young people rarely access these sites. Therefore, efforts must be taken to make these web sites more accessible and appealing to youth. With the high penetration and popularity of the Internet among young people, high expectations emerged about the internet's mobilisation potential within this part of the population (Pasek, Kenski, Romer & Jamieson, 2006).

At this juncture, the researcher would categorically declare that political participation and citizen mobilisation is a function of the amount of time that users spend online, and whether users actually access the appropriate political web sites which are meant for informational and educational purposes. Hence, the



next sub-section will be devoted towards elaborating on users' time online in relation to their political participation.

### **Internet Use and Political Participation**

Unlike the earlier period of the internet usage, many scholars have refuted dystopian views of newer technologies. Many studies have found a relationship between informational uses of the internet and social capital, political participation (Shah, Kwak & Holbert, 2001) and civic engagement (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003). Wellman, Haase, Witte & Hampton (2001) provided evidence that online interaction supplements interpersonal relations, resulting in increased voluntary association membership and political participation. Kraut and colleagues claimed that the negative effects of using the internet on communication, social involvement and well being (Kraut, Kiesler, Boneva, Cummings, Helgeson & Crawford, 2002).

While some expressed fear that news in the online environment may have resulted in societal fragmentation and displacement of community concerns, others view the online environment as a space for political re-engagement and re-engineering, particularly for young people (DelliCarpini, 2000). Research has shown that online news supplements rather than supplant traditional news consumption (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000). In fact, online information-seeking is related positively to group membership, community involvement and political activity (Kwak, Poor & Skoric, 2006). Similarly, online information-seeking has been linked to increases in online interactive civic messaging that ultimately result in higher levels of civic participation (Shah, Cho, Eveland Jr & Kwak, 2005).

### **Use of YouTube and MySpace during Election Cycle**

In the U.S, during the 2006 election campaign cycle, both the YouTube and MySpace became the focus of the media and the public's attention and were generally portrayed as the new technology tool to impact election campaigns. The use of these two internet tools in the 2006 elections highlighted the benefits and potentials they possess for political advertising, fund-raising and volunteer recruitment as well as the challenges they pose to the ability of campaigns and campaigners to control their candidate's image and message. These challenges are embedded in the ability of YouTube and MySpace where the power for contents generation is in the hands of users and unregulated (Gueorguieva, 2008). The following sub-section focuses on the benefits and challenges that YouTube and MySpace have brought to the realm of politics.



### **The Effects of YouTube on Politics**

There are considerable numbers of areas in which YouTube has profound effects in the planning and execution of election campaigns, namely; access to voters, the advertising campaigns, fund-raising and the budget. The ability of campaigns to access voters through the YouTube is considerably without limit. The ability to communicate effectively and efficiently is the function of a democratic political system. Therefore, the communication power that YouTube has cannot be overemphasised. This site has enhanced the ability of campaigns to use videos as a political advertising tool and those videos can achieve broad dissemination via the internet. Not that video usage is new to campaigns; however, the practice of hiring staff to follow and film opponents has been further fueled by the advent and availability of broadband internet and video-sharing websites, which are user-friendly and have changed the use cycle by allowing the videos to be uploaded and circulated more rapidly. But of surprise is the fact that research has shown that demographically huge segment of the voting age population is using YouTube and they can be reached through video clips (Gueorguieva, 2008).

There are many vivid testimonies of the communication power of YouTube during the 2006 election cycle. But one important case of the communication power of using YouTube was when it was used to generate controversy about some particular candidates by offering an unhindered look at their speeches, appearances and private lives during the election trial (New ScientistTech, 2006). The effects of the videos of these speeches were further enhanced when the stories were picked up by the mainstream media. Some candidates have been cited using racial slurs on their opponent's supporters and were actually captured on videos in the acts. These videos were recorded by a cameraman hired by an opponent party to follow their rivals around his or her public appearances and film them. Subsequently, the content of the tapes was used for press releases and YouTube videos (Johnson, 2006).

In addition, the potential of YouTube as a political advertising tool and as an alternative to television and radio, is the fact that it provides free and broad dissemination of campaign messages and advertisements, thus affecting the campaign budget. In 2006, candidates and activists spent a total of \$3.1 billion on political advertising, about twice as much as they had spent years before. Given that the site lets candidates reshow television spots they have already produced without the expense of broadcast airtime, and considering the \$1.6 billion spent to broadcast advertisements on television in 2006, YouTube offers a cost-effective alternative to get the campaign message across. YouTube's 20 million unique users per month are a considerable audience (Gueorguieva, 2008).

By providing low or no-cost access to voters, YouTube also allowed lesser known candidates to divulge their political platforms during the 2006 election



cycle. This is particularly important in elections with incumbents running for office, who might have the advantage of better access to campaign financing and the media because of their incumbent status.

YouTube also has potential as a fund-raising tool. The internet provides a way for campaigns to solicit funds from more people and makes giving more convenient. In 2004, one candidate was able to raise \$80 million in online contributions for his bid for the presidency. In addition, in 2004, about five percent of small political donors and two percent of large political donors said online videos prompted them to make their first contribution (Institute for Politics, Democracy and the Internet, 2006). Also, more than half of the Democratic contributors and a quarter of the Republican donors in 2004 made at least one online donation. This kind of practice was said to be nonexistent during the 2000 election cycle. Statistics have shown that from June to September 2006, video advertisements had generated twice the response as standard image advertisements (DoubleClick, 2007). Contrarily, it has been said that there are no accounts of YouTube's having been used for fund-raising in the 2006 cycle, though this role is worth considering for future election campaigning (Gueorguieva, 2008).

#### **Effects of MySpace on Politics**

Likewise, MySpace featured spectacularly in the 2006 election campaign, however, in a different way as compared to YouTube's. MySpace was used basically as a tool to promote voter registration, recruit campaign volunteers, and achieve more public exposure for candidates.

However, one of the effects of MySpace in the 2006 election was by promoting voter registration among its users. Some nonpartisan groups, in connection with MySpace, had run a voter registration advertisement and giving members tools badges to place on their personal profile pages. Members who wished to register were redirected to a web site where they entered their personal particulars, which is to be sent to their state election officials. MySpace was also successfully used to recruit campaign volunteers. MySpace had provided an outreach channel for voters to register and submit their voter registration forms. MySpace was also successfully used to recruit campaign volunteers. For example, some candidates for state comptroller have recruited more than 80 percent of their volunteers online at MySpace and Facebook (Gueorguieva, 2008).

#### **New Media Use and Socio-demographics**

In traditional media studies, demographics and socioeconomic status (SES) have been discussed as predictors of media use (Kosicki & Yuan, 2001). The usage increased with education and income and usage was considerably higher amongst 35 years old and above (Stempel, Hargrove & Bent, 2000). In an updated survey



in 1999, they found that considerable number of the respondents became regular users of the internet and users of online services also increased tremendously in 1999. Meanwhile, men used the internet substantially more than women. However, the heaviest users have been people younger than 35 years old, and the study showed that there was huge difference between those less than 35 years old and more than 55 years old (Stempel *et al* 2000). Income and educations have remarkably positive correlations with the use of Internet and online media.

Pew Research Centre's (1999) survey on Internet use conducted in the same period reported that 23% of Americans went online in 1996 and 41% of American adults used the internet in 1998. Generally, internet users are substantially younger (80% younger than 50), better educated (70% college educated) and more affluent than the U.S. average, and among them, men (52%) outnumber women. Most recently, Pew Internet & American Life Project (2005) surveys revealed that 26% of Americans age 65 and older go online, compared with 67% of those ages 50 to 64, 80% of those ages 30 to 49, and 84% of those ages 18 to 29. Twenty-nine percent of those in sub-secondary education have access to the internet, compared with 61% of high school graduates and 89% of college graduates. Internet users living in the highest-income households not only have the highest percentage of access to the internet (93%), but also are most likely to have a fast connection. Survey data showed that 71% of them have a broadband connection at home.

In General, the gender gap in internet use is gradually diminishing. Men, especially young, white, well educated, and fairly affluent men, were the earliest adopters of the Internet. Pew's 1995 survey shows that about 58% of the online population was male. Five years later, Internet users were evenly divided between men and women, although the difference was still significant. A decade later, the respective proportions became almost equal. Some 68% of men and 66% of women are now Internet users, with no statistically significant difference between the groups. Younger women are more likely than younger men to be online, whereas older men are more likely than older women to be online (Pew, 2005). But there are no real age differences. Pew Internet Project in 2002 confirmed the persistence of this pattern of online news use, that is online news audience tends to be young, well-educated, and affluent male. Gender gap and education gap remained pronounced. Pew's 2005 survey further stressed that, compared with women; men are more likely to use the Internet to get political information. Men communicate more with online special interest groups and are more likely to engage themselves in online chatting or discussion groups and are more likely to engage themselves in online chatting or discussion groups than are women. Scherfele & Nisbet (2002) explained that despite the continuing increase of the 'online citizen' in America, their demographic difference cannot be ignored.



Gender, college education and high income influenced considerably online news use.

This review of the literature leads to two hypotheses to test whether the Internet can increase the political participation of young people. Our hypothesis number one is, therefore, that young people who spend more time on the Internet will participate more in politics. Second, we argue that different forms of Internet use can have positive and / or negative effects on political participation. Our expectation is that blogging or participating in discussion groups, following the news, and forwarding political e-mails will have a positive effect on political participation, whereas chatting with unknown people, looking at web sites, sending e-mails, playing interactive games, downloading music/movies, and purchasing or selling things will have a negative effect on political participation.

### Conclusion

ICT use for political campaign communications and internet penetration is rapidly growing in Nigeria. However, there are some obstacles to the use of ICT for political campaigns. Some of the most common obstacles to ICT adoption and implementation are the lack of confidence on the part of users, the lack of provision of adequate skills and training programme, the inadequate technology infrastructure, planning and programme deficiencies, the lack of human capacity and expertise, inadequate economic resources, the lack of recognition of knowledge or educational equivalence, and the neglect of learning conditions and cultural aspects to some extent.

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p?p=568

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