DIGITAL DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN NIGERIA IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

The paper focused on the impact of digital democracy on political participation in Nigeria. The paper examined the impact of digital democracy as a new development in the governance system and the attendant behavioural changes arising out of the use of ICT-powered procedures. The paper utilized a qualitative research design, and a descriptive research method was adopted, which necessitated gathering data from books, journals, and other publications on unique practices, public opinions, personal attitudes, and changes in the democratic process of the country in the contemporary period. The paper observed that the process has triggered popular participation and increased sophistication of the government-citizens relationship, political marketing and branding, and youth participation in affairs of the nation. The paper concludes that the process will be strengthened and challenges overcome through consolidated, sufficient political education, cultivation of online transactions, and provision of technological infrastructure, among others, in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Digital; Digital Democracy; Political Participation; Globalization; Nigerian State*

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1. Introduction

The struggle for entrenching democratic ethos in human societies has been a continuous one across different epochs till the present age. This has started right from the classical, Aristotelian era in Greek city – states as the period was the era of direct democratic practices in the small-sizes of Greek city states. From the medieval period, liberal democratic practices became prominent with the use of indirect democratic practices, that is, ruling was assigned to representative group on behalf of the entire society and this continues till date. Very prominent in the twenty first century global system is digital democratic practices that engage the deployment of informational and technological instruments in the democratic/electoral procedures many states of the world. Digital democracy, an advancement over tele-democracy of last century can be viewed from two angles; analytical and normative perspectives. From the analytical angle, it investigates the how the use of digital technologies may influence the conditions, institutions and practices of political engagement and democratic governance and from the normative angle, it dwells on how it can enable democratic process to be open and promote freedom and equality. This is against the background that it tends to make room for open and transplant government, expanding public sphere, enhancing political action beyond physical participation and representation and form and provides opportunity for another platform for asserting individual rights (Berg and Hofman, 2021). Hence, the paper assesses the impact of digital democracy on political process of the Nigerian state, its impacts and attendant challenges and put forward strategies for improvement in the contemporary age of globalization.

2. Conceptual Clarification

Traditionally, clarification of literature involves clarifying variables and problems, affirming or negating the findings of other enquiries about the same research problem. It also involves knowledge familiarization with the existing stock of knowledge on the topic of inquiry. We begin with the concept of democracy.

2.1 The Concept of Democracy

According to Gauba (2007) democracy is derived from the Greek word "demos" which means the people and "crata" exactly stands for rule or government. Thus, democracy literally means the rule of the people. Democracy as a form of

government implies that the ultimate authority of government is vested in the common people so that public policies is made to conform to the will of the people and to serve in the interest of the people.

Apparodai (2004) contends that democracy may be described as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or indirectly through representatives periodically elected by them. According to him, the state may be termed to be a democracy if it provides institutions for expression of the popular will on basic questions of social direction and policy.

Srinivason (2008) explicates that democracy ensures accountability of those holding power to the people who are the ultimate source of these power and it is the consent of the people which makes government authority legitimate. To him democracy refer to a government based on a political equality and it is informed by the belief that all people are equally capable of, and have a stake in making, collective decision that shape their lives. He concludes that democratic society is also called an "Open society" where there is space for all voices, however unpopular or unconventional they may be, to be heard.

Yagboyaju (2016) identifies conditions for institutionalizing and sustaining democracy in the society as including: (a) tolerance in the society where a wide range of opinion can be explained (b) widespread participation as democracy wither away, as well as becomes susceptible to greater oligarchy and elastic tendencies in a situation where people lose interest in politics. (c) political consensus regarding rule making and implementation and political legitimacy.

2.2 Digital Democracy

Democracy has institutional, procedural and behavioural dimensions and the institutional dimension involves complex institutional arrangements to entrench and sustain democratic ethos and practices in a state. The procedural dimension involves allocation of roles, procedures for democratic practices, agreed rules, due process, among others, while the behavioral and attitudinal aspect of democracy espouses bargaining, consultation, dialogues among others.

Digital democracy encompasses using information and communication technology in democratic processes in a nation-state. Digital democracy is a collection of attempts to practice democracy without the limits of time, space and other physical condition. It involves using ICTs or computer-mediated communication, as an addition and not as replacement to traditional and analogue political practices.

Digital democracy involves the processes carried out online, the process through which communication is maintained between the elected representatives and citizen of a given state (Nacker, 2000).

Holzer and Schwester (2011) contended that digital democracy can be presented in terms of static form where dissemination obtaining information from read-only website and the use of web-based bill without discussion. On the other hand, the dynamic information dissemination involves two-way communication between citizen and public officials and exchange of information can take place. Such online interactions include Email communications/electronics town hall, electronic – policy reforms and web-based polls, with the opportunity to discuss issues. Notable characteristics common to digital deliberation as including(a)balance information (b) freedom from coercion, (c) inclusive participation and inclusiveness with regard to ideas.

Hence, cyber democracy and community networks dated back to early 1995's and the growth of community network in the United States of America where citizens gain access to electronic mall, public bulletin boards and electronic information relevant to their locality. They are used to enhance local community organisations, facilitate neighborhood capacity-building programmes and foster citizens participates in public decision-making (Denhart and Denhart, 2009). This otherwise called "key pad" democracy wherein information relevance for national decision making can be disseminated to the citizens through the web and other advanced multimedia presentation. Elections and public referenda can also be conducted through electronic methods. This is prominently used in the United States of America and Europe (Denhart, 2009).

Digital government is an online government and interne-t based government where the government encourage the setting up of websites where citizen can find government information (reflecting service, public hearing, schedules issues briefs) and this involves the way communication between the governmental citizens ceremony this bordering in governance. Digital tools are Google Drive, Twitter, Facebook, Youtube, Pinterest and they help to make government accountable and transparent through a process of information rationalization. Also promote efficiency in political administration of the state. (Uvuru, 2022).

In Nigeria, the foundation for digital technology was laid with the approval of the national information and telecommunication technology policy in the year 2001. The envisage the development of the nation's capability to be a key player in global information society, sustainable development and global competitiveness

(Uvuru,2022). This equally necessary as the country falls into low digital opportunity index scores as Nigeria ranked 31 in the Africa continent with low scores of 0.41.001 for opportunity infrastructure and civilization respectively (I.T.U, 2015).

Consequently, the introduction of the Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM) in the year 2000 advance internet connectively in the country and helped by the prompt response of the internet service provider by setting up satellites to cater for the internet communication service of the country.

However, there are challenges that have been hamstringing the process of digital administration in Nigeria. Some of the challenges are;

1. Low level of digital literacy and the need for development of strategy for high digital inclusion.
2. Infrastructural device such as high cost of phones, computer, internet subscription, low electricity etc.
3. Low IT skilled manpower in the public service and the unwillingness of the few public servant to key into it.
4. High rate of internet frauds by the youths in the country.
5. Thefts and vandalization of digital equipment in the country (Uvuru, 2022).

Instructively, the information and telecommunication technology (ICT) is used in studying constitutional government and voting behaviour in Nigeria elections and the use of card reader machine in Nigeria's election influences how people attain the ruling position in political sphere (Jegede). Social Medial has equally provided opportunity for the government and people to communicate and interaction viz: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram among others. The tools are useful in the present political dispensations for advancing opportunity for political dialogue, interactions and networking in the country. Images and sounds are being recorded, reproduce and viewed in new ways through video, cameras and cell phone. Cameras and these tools empower ordinary citizens to create their own visual records, such as videos of political demonstration in the country and can end up on the TV News of another country. The telephone and the internet and empowering ordinary citizens through its two-way media by which users can interact among themselves without any centralized information system (Goldstein, 2011). Social integration and political participation is enhanced through internet service and its provide an instant global information and interpersonal interaction irrespective of the user's location in the universe (Rourke, 2008).

2.3 Political Participation

According to Akeke (2009) political participation refers to voluntary and purposeful efforts by which members of a political system, either as individuals or as a members of any group contributes to the determination of the kinds of political institutions and people that will rule them as well as influencing his societal resources will be mobilized and allocated. To him, political participation promotes a sense of self-worth and relevance in individuals, in that, it is therapeutic by promoting opportunity for individuals to participate in the affairs of his country and by making his opinion known. It also creates opportunity for civic education and acquisition of civic virtues. Political participation has been categorized into two based categories: Conventional type which deals with legal approves sanctioned methods of involvement in political activities such as discussing politics, voting, joining political party or interest group etc. Unconventional type refers to actions such as strikes, boycotts, rioting and violence demonstration against the government. He adds that political participation is conditioned by certain factors such as provision of gateway to personal fulfillment, loyalty to the state, influence of societal group, level of education, age, sex, and the influence of the mass media or the people in the given society. Political participation deals with individual taking part in politics and the general level of participation in society shows the extent to which the people as a whole are active in politics. The number of the active people then multiplied by the amount of the achieved measurement of what it is to take part in politics which is massively complex and ultimately analogous reveals the level of political participation in a state (Mclean and Macmillan, 2009).

Johnson, et al (2019) contend that people participate in the political system by carrying out organized political activities through familiar political structures such as political parties, elections, legislatives, executives and political participation deals with the relationship between the state and the society, and as how individuals and different groups in the society organize to further their political intentions, how citizens get involved in the political system and how they influence political making in the state. They further note that it covers how people are selected to become active member, the structures of government and the political institutions. Noting that, issues of political participation are broadly discussed with the preview of elections, political parties and the party system, legislative representation, public bureaucracy, interest and pressure groups, among others.

Hence, political development can be achieved in a country when problems of political participation are overcome. Whenever a society develops politically, there

opportunity for the public for a share in the decision- making process. These demands are put forward through such political structures as political party, pressure group, factors, clichés and various organization (Mahaja, 2008) political participation is critically concerned with the development of requisite political class infrastructure and the responsive attitude and bargaining skill of the elites and this is expressed through communication tools of information and communication technology, internet and social media facilities.

3. Theoretical Framework of Analysis

Theoretical framework deals with identifying an already existing theory that will serve as a skeletal structure or platform to support and guide the conduct of the research (Ulocha,2015). The researcher adopted eclectic mode by contextualizing the research work within two theoretical frameworks of analysis. Namely, system theory in political science and magic bullet theory that is dominant in the field of mass communication discourse.

3.1 System Theory

According to Gauba (2007) a model of political system was first developed by David Easton in his treaties called "An Approach to the Analysis of political system" published in 1957. He explains further that in Easton terminologies, the political system receive input from the environment and produces output in the form of policies and decision. And the output focuses on the environment through a feedback mechanism. The political system is an aspect of the social system as politics is not isolated from human activities, while consideration is given to the environment in which political system is set (Kapur, 2014).

In a broader context, international political system is convenient devise used by political scientists and international relations experts to help them in their analysis of the nature and workings of the international system and it is characterized with high degree of interdependence (Ojo and Sessay 2011) Just like the domestic situation within a nation- state is highly characterized with interdependence of the each of the society with other, international environment is usually voluntarist, decentralized and highly dependent on one another. The goal which the international set for itself sums up the values and the ideals. Therefore, system cherishes and wishes not only to expand the volume and quality, but allocate in ways which satisfies and legitimize actions (Ofuegbu, 1980). The revolution in communication technology has turned the world into a global village in which

people from any part of the world get a blow by blow account of what is happenings in the other part of and can see live pictures of those events via (Ojo and Sessay, 2011).The arrival of computer-based internet contracts, and information through e-mail and the world wide web has advanced political perception in Nigeria and beyond. Internet users, not only able to access the web, they can communicate with one another through e-mail and creates web for themselves or their groups to share information and to promote their cause nationally or globally. (Rourke, 2008).

3.2 The Magic-Bullet Theory of Mass Communication

The Magic Mullet theory of communication studies holds that the people are very vulnerable to mass media message in that, media messages are recorded in a uniform way by every member of the audience and that it stimulates direct responses by them to the message. Blake and Haroldsen (1975) note that theory proves that if message hit the target, its will have its desired effect and the desired effect is that the audience will do the bid of the sender. This has been proved to be the case in Africa and beyond where a lot of information would trigger the behaviour /reaction of communication audience to media message. Hence, the communication revolution and the ongoing spread of global access to information and interactive communication, is of important as it promoting democratic internationalism. This is the transnational communication that provides citizens from different countries with the ability to espouse causes of nearly imaginable type, to exchange views, to organize across national borders and to undertake political action. (Rourke, 2008). Hence, digital democratic practices have enhanced democratic participation and Nigeria, Africa and beyond in the contemporary period.

4. Methodology

The research paper utilized the qualitative research design and descriptive research method was adopted and this necessitate gather data from books, journals and other publications on unique practices, public opinions, personal attitudes, and changes in the democratic process of the country in the contemporary period.

5. Discussion of Findings

The paper relied on thick literature reviews, theoretical explorations, author's view points and logical insights from other published works in newspapers and others. It is on the basis of this explorations that the researcher draws together relevant information for further discussion on the issue under research.

5.1 Assessing the Impact of Digital Democracy on Political Participation in Nigeria in the Age of Globalization

Firstly, Digital democracy promotes balanced government and broad- based policy making and implementation by the government with twenty first century, global system.According to Dibbie (2014) prominent among global pressures and trends for more responsive, participative and citizen-centered government, the communication and informative technologies present a unique opportunity to further the development of democracy through means such as the internet. This is because the internet can be leveraged to foster a new culture of participation in the political process under the umbrella of electronics democracy. This is because e-government is much less constrained by time and geographical location is providing citizens the information of services they require. The concept of balance e-government is a combination of electronic information-based services for citizens and is reinforced by participating elements of e-democracy. In effects, citizens are granted an increased opportunity to influence public life by making their views known electronically to state and local authority institutions. Modernization and democratization are two sides of the same coin, must be carefully balanced as the fundamental concepts behind e-government are increased efficiency, openness, transparency and citizen-centered government.

Secondly, information and technology, social networks, electronic media have further broadened the spectrum of political participation in the twenty-first century in the country as contribution to political discussions, debate, public hearing are done online and physical challenges of violence, thuggery, transportation and finance are eliminated. Online dialogue constitutes a radical departure from centuries of analogue and physical presence of political activities. Reasoning along this line, Olukotun (2017) admits that an important development is the growing number of Nigerians who are able to access the internet and social media networking, thus resulting in better engagement and participation of citizens in democratic discourse. He explains that the election of 2011 and 2015, as well as social out bursts such as the anti-fuel price increase of 2012 and the President Buhari's health travails in 2017, were attended by interesting and occasionally frightening

conversations on the social media. Noting, that the increasing access to internet has been of tremendous value to professionals, in view of the abundance of information and the opportunity to connect with national and global discourse. For example, the amounts of internet users in Nigeria move from 2.3 million in 2002 to 86 million in 2016.

Thirdly, digital democracy has unconsciously inculcated and inspires the Nigerian youth high sense of involvement in political participation in the recent times in Nigeria. Demurin (2018) declared that Africa burgeoning youth population already comprises 75% of its working age population and by the year 20.30, over 50% of workers entering the global labour free will come from Africa. Nigeria will account for 15%of the population. Nigeria is the most popular country in Africa with an estimate of 100 million people of the Youth constitutes about 60% of this numbers. The youth are seriously engaged in online dialogue and political discourse to the Nigeria's landscape today. They are involved in online youth drama, and theatre, music, political commentaries and issuing text messages relating to political development in the country, thereby making the context the political space which has been hitherto dominated by the adult population the online communication system.

Fourthly, digital democratic practices have enhanced political marketing strategy in Nigeria as online, technological platform has further facilitated a broad- based electronic marketing strategy of the recent times. Akinola and Heuva (2018) submit that the introduction of marketing strategies and tools democracy has made elections and governance to be more voter- centre. According to them, the practice of political marketing is geared towards the understanding and development of policies/products that meet the needs and wants of the electorates and by extension, assisting the political parties and candidates to acquire the set objectives. They cited the 2015presidential election in Nigeria as the test case of the political marketing in Nigeria where People Democratic party (PDP) spent an estimated #3.23 billion on media adverts for the presidential election as agent #2.5 billion spent by another major party in Nigeria, the All progressive Congress (APC). This amount with used to push 253 creative materials across over 260 radio and television stations across the country. Newspapers and magazines, outdoor bill boards, online platform were profusely employed. They add the 2015 presidential election as described possibly, the most decisive election as the nature of advert, television, documentaries, propaganda, online dialogues that characterized the campaign period in that electoral year in the country. From the political marketing point of view, the market-oriented approached of APC, without wavering, gave the party the edge of the better

for Aso Rock. The seat of government and the purposeful coordinated and tools contributed to the members of APC and Buhari/Osinbajo campaign organization.

Fifthly, digital democratic practices have instigated political branding in the political processes of the country in the twenty-first century. Depaula et al (2017) note that government is usually involved in digitalized branding and identity in their communication is the twenty first century that serves useful for purposes of attracting stakeholders to obtain a specific product on services as well as a production of a particular community. This helps community to attract tourists, citizens or businesses as image-based communication services with short term and long- term efforts. Digital or social media allows individuals and organizations to brand and provide their items to their followers and they may include government department too. It is also used to control bad publicity. Akinola and Hauwa (2018) underscore the importance of branding in political parties strategies in Nigeria when they declared that branding is noticed, not in context of political parties and their candidates, not as the product, the packaging, the name, image, colour or what the producer or marketer says it is, but it generally located in what the people perceive of it. They explained that a look at the logo and slogan of PDP and APC political parties, more strength captures the yearnings of the people. They harps on change message and accused PDP of being power drunk with a weak umbrella that could not protect people again. These messages were constantly and repeated echoed on the online media throughout elections and thereafter is the country and their affected the political participation makes the citizen to vote for APC in the 2015 election to seen victory on the presidential election of that year.

Sixthly, it has made democratic process to be global watched and contribute to it can come from different region of the world. Depaula (2017) observes that social network sites such as Facebook, twitter, you tube are adopted by individualized organizations for broadcasting their contents with defect access to communicates world made and is brings with it the features of allowing globally get news. The marketing tools of it provides the opportunity to share their post with other users of the network, thereby allowing favourable presentation, symbolic act and online dialogue across different geographically region. Internet-based applications may prove ideal is reducing cynicism in government as these applications can help to make information more available, make people feel more in touch with the government, and citizen to participate in government process with greater ease. It engenders direct interaction between citizens and government.

Seventhly, digital democratic processes have helped to eliminate election fraud as "high tech government" has put in place electronic information and electronic

medium of document, analysis and retrieval and social media constitute another great dimension of passing across message and receiving of feedback from the citizens. Akinola and Hauwa (2018) underscore the fact that the introduction of electronic medium of voters registration and voting, the permanent votes card (PVC) biometric data and verification of votes through the readers in the electoral body in Nigeria by independent electoral commission (INEC) has reduced fraud as it has reduced cases of inflation of voter registration and election results and also prevented impersonation and multiple voting. The responses of the president of the federal Republic of Nigeria, Alhaji Mohammadu Buhari and the Nigerian public pointed to the suitability of the electronic medium of voting in the country. This alleviated anomaly and the attendant political upheavals in the post-election period in Nigeria since the pre-independence era in Nigeria. Electoral violence has been the bane of the political succession plans in Nigeria and this started before the attainment of political independence in 1960.

Lastly, it has enhanced digital democratic practices of the Nigerian state in her diplomatic practices in the twenty-first century as the country has adjusted to new innovations in the diplomatic processes of the contemporary period. According to Adesina (2017) digital diplomacy is usually conceptualized as a form of public diplomacy that involves the use of digital technologies and social media platforms such as Twittter, Facebook, and Webbs by states to enter into communication with foreign publics usually in a non-costly manner. It helps to project a state's foreign policy positions to domestic and foreign audiences as it co-exists and compliment rather than compete with the traditional diplomatic practices. Digital diplomacy helps in information gathering and reporting system and in negotiation process on growing number of issues such as trade, tourism, environment, food security, policing, medicine and a host of others. Diplomatic services can be done through internet services and video- conferencing (Adesina, 2017).

Digital democracy has not been conducted without noticeable challenges in Nigeria and other African states in the contemporary period. Akinyelu and Ebuka (2023) identified the challenges of digital authoritarianism in African states in the recent times. According to them, digital authoritarianism manifested informs of undue mass surveillance of citizens, internet shutdown, electoral manipulations, corporate espionage, media censorship among others. These challenges have tended to hamstrung smooth conduct of digital democratic processes in Nigeria.

In addition, there exists the challenge of uncooperative attitude of the political class in the country by perpetuating double registration with influence of money during

the electoral processes in the country. Also, the negative influences of socio-cultural and religious factors such as illiteracy, refusal to take photograph during data capturing for bio- metric data among others. The situation is not equally not helped by erratic power supply and poor infrastructural facilities such as computers, card readers and poor maintenance culture (Omoleke, 2020).

6. Conclusion

It is glaringly clear that digital democracy has impact political participation process in Nigeria in the twenty first century. It has increased the number of people getting involve in political discourse, analysis and bargaining in the Nigerian political process significantly in recent times. We also discover that digital democracy faces multiple challenges in the country manifest diverse forms and the problem are associated with patchy networks, breakdown of computers, fitful electricity notwithstanding, journalism is increasingly, information technology savvy among others (Olukotun, 2017).

This paper therefore recommend that the system be strengthened and the people be encouraged by the government for that the system can be sustainable. This can be achieved through sufficient political education for the citizens on the need for active involvement in political activities and the need for digital democracy in the country in the contemporary period.

Also, the culture of online transaction should be cultivated by all and this will make the governance and democratic process conform with international standard at any time. Secondly, the state should, a matter of policy, continuously promote social and welfare services as a need of empowering the citizens. This will go a long way in making people to be digital compliant as other do, in developed countries of the world. Constant electricity supply, good road, functioning and affordable medical supply, and cheap computers and telephone facilities should be ensured in the country.

Finally, we advocated for system upgrading and effective technological infrastructural development by online service media providers such as Google, Twitter, Facebook, Youtube among others. Constant and effective services should be ensured so that patronizers and the engaging audience are saved from hassles to pass messages across to the receiver in Nigeria and beyond.

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