

Stakeholders, ICTs Platforms and the 2015 General Elections in Nigeria¹

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Abstract

Election, as the central component and the minimum necessary requirement for representative democracy, remains the only legitimate instrument for leadership turnover. It is a core aspect that requires the active involvement of citizens. However, beyond elections, the flowering of democratic practice depends largely on the active participation of the people through different forms of political activities such as in the electoral process. One of the areas in which this active participation of the people has been enhanced, world over, is in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) platforms. Being an instrument of political socialisation and means of political education, ICTs have galvanised massive citizen awareness and enhanced liberal values of individualism. In Nigeria, however, ICTs use have met with mixed successes. With focus on the 2015 general elections, the paper empirically appraises the use of ICTs platforms by the Independent National Electoral Commission, political parties, the media and accredited election observers as major stakeholders in the electoral process. It determines and compares the utility of the ICTs platforms, especially the social media and web pages, as used by these stakeholders in carrying out their duties, and the impact of such platforms on performance, credibility and the overall conduct of the elections. The paper also explores prospects ahead of future elections.

Keywords: Democracy; Elections; Electoral Stakeholders; ICTs; Participation; Social Media

Introduction

Democracy, today, is unarguably the most preferred form of government the world over. One of its cardinal principles is the participation of the people by making a choice on who governs them (Elaigwu, 2014). Hence, it is germane that “a functioning democracy requires an informed and active public that understands how to voice its interests, act collectively, and hold government officials accountable” (National Democratic Institute, 2011, p.18). Grigsby (2011) notes that democracy presupposes certain participatory, pluralist, developmental, protection, and performance elements. Its representative features are such in which “citizens indirectly impact political decisions by electing and influencing the behavior of representatives who actually make public policy and control implementation” (Mezey, 2008, p.2).

Democracy involves democratic participation, debate, and, most importantly, voting. Democratic participation is the voluntary, purposeful and determined actions through which members

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of a democratic state contribute to the running of public institutions. It occurs when members of the public choose who will govern them and exercise political authority (Ayeni–Akeke, 2008). For participation to be meaningful, the people must have the guarantee of their voices being heard and choices being respected. Citizens of democratic states get involved in the political decision making process through various means which include; voting at elections and forming and/or joining political parties and interest groups. “Participation” in these sense implies involvement in formal political activities (voting, standing for election, e.t.c) and non-party political activism, advocacy, and public debate (OpCit Research, 2013). The crux of this is the participation of the citizenry in governance.

The quality of governance has been enhanced over the years as a result of many factors; among which is revolutions in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This has, in turn, impacted participation of citizens in public affairs; in relation to plurality of voices, advocacy, activism and electoral activities, enhanced by ICT platforms including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the Internet, thus deepening the democratic process (Diamond, 2010). The power of these platforms as viable mechanisms for political mobilisation was first noticed in advanced democracies in the mid-90s (Tedesco, 2004). Ever since, events and processes have further highlighted their utility to democratic politics, most notably, to the electoral process. This was underscored by the extensive use of the social media by Barack Obama in the build up to the 2008 United States of America presidential election. This, perhaps, marked the beginning of e-electioneering (Vaccari, 2010). So profound was the impact of the Internet to Obama’s electoral success that Arianna Huffington, Editor-in-Chief of the *Huffington Post*, declared that “were it not for the Internet, Barack Obama would not be president” (Campantey, Durante and Sobbrío, 2013, p.1). Instructively, “...by using interactive Web 2.0 tools, Mr. Obama’s campaign changed the way politicians organize supporters, advertise to voters, defend against attacks and communicate with constituents” (Miller, 2008).

Stakeholders in several other democracies have since harnessed the utility of ICTs platforms in their electoral process, and Nigeria, despite structural challenges, is not exempted. The social media was first used in a remarkable way in the 2011 elections (Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre, 2012), especially by President Goodluck Jonathan, who used his Facebook account to garner country-wide support. Ever since, stakeholders’ use of ICTs platforms for election-related activity has risen (Shehu Musa Yar’Adua Foundation, 2012). Against this background, this paper interrogates the use of ICTs platforms by stakeholders in the 2015 elections in Nigeria, with focus on the presidential election. The paper also assesses the impacts of these platforms on the credibility and the general conduct of the election, with a projection into how ICT platforms can be better deployed for future elections.

Election, Electoral Process and Electoral Stakeholders

Election has become a *sine qua non* for the survival of liberal-representative democracy because it offers the people the platform by which they choose their leaders. Hence, “there can be

elections without democracy, but there cannot be democracy without elections” (Mömkes, 2013, p.xxvii). Elections involve a set of activities leading to the selection of person(s) out of many to serve in positions of authority. Elections are viable instruments for fine-tuning the workings of democracy and consummating representative government, and being a means of leadership turn-over; elections are the most frequent ways through which citizens interact with government (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006; Kerevel, 2009; Obiyan and Afolabi, 2013). When credible, free and fair; elections promote citizens’ participation in governance through the exercise of the right to choose or reject leaders, based on the performance of such leaders in fulfilling the social contract (Jega, 2014); and bestow on governments the legitimate authority to, on one hand, initiate and implement policies; while on the other hand, they empower the citizens to hold governments accountable. As Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006, p.26) have noted, “elections are an expression of the people’s sovereign will”, helping to confer legitimacy on political leadership. Akindele (2011, p.292), however, notes that elections are not just what happens on Election Day, but are subsumed in a process which:

. . . encompasses activities before, during and after elections. It includes the legal and constitutional framework of elections, the registration of political parties, party campaigns, the activities of the electronic and print media in terms of access; campaign financing, the activities of the security agencies and the government in power. It includes the authenticity and genuineness of the voters register; it includes the independence or lack of it of electoral agencies and organs. It includes the liberalism or otherwise of the political process in the country and the independence of adjudicating bodies on elections.

Thus, elections are not conducted in isolation but are a complex set of interrelated activities and variables that have profound effect on the democratic process (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006). Underscoring the broadness of the electoral process, Yaqub (2001, p.97) affirms that “...in the electoral process proper, multiple relationships are formed or forged; at one level, these are between or among the politicians and the people or, in a more restricted but nonetheless vital sense, the electorate”. The electoral process brings together various actors including individuals, groups and institutions who form the stakeholders; and these include the Election Management Body (EMB), political parties and candidates, the electorates, the media and civil society organisations (CSOs). Hardly can elections be successful and credible without these groups and institutions cooperating and performing their roles. As Jega (2014) has noted, wide-ranging citizen involvement in elections, both as individuals and as organisations, defines the role of stakeholders. Thus, stakeholders are the pillars upon which an election is rooted, if any of the pillars malfunctions, the process may collapse. Hence,

One defining characteristic of democratic maturity is the rising involvement of stakeholders in the electoral process. In other words, the more mature a democracy is, the more directly involved in the electoral process and its management that citizens, as stakeholders, would become (Jega, 2014, p.25).

Thus, citizens are critical stakeholders who perform functions classified into ten by Jega (2014). These include mobilisation of citizens; oversight of the electoral process; support for the EMBs; making

demands for improvements from the EMBs, other statutory agencies and political parties; as well as spreading supportive values and expectations. Others are information dissemination; gatekeeping; rule and norm-setting, conflict management and driving electoral systems (Jega, 2014, p.29). However, the complexity of elections and the specialised skills required for its management necessitate the existence of an impartial and professional institution responsible for coordinating election administration. The EMB is an organised body established for the purpose of managing all the machineries of election in a polity, and “have become a keystone of the process of democratization” (Kambale, 2011, p.v).

In the classification of models of EMBs, the political/governmental model, the hybrid/mixed model and the expert/independent model dominate the literature (Kambale, 2011). The political model of EMB is composed of political party representatives, the hybrid model is when elections are conducted by civil servants under the supervision of an independent, nonpartisan body; and the expert model is EMB composed by professionals detached from any form of political leaning (Kambale, 2011). Regardless of the model, EMBs in democracies perform somewhat similar functions which includes party registration, organising elections, polling place operations and results declaration (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006). It is apposite to state that a credible electoral process marshaled by an efficient EMB helps to deepen democracy and governance, because confidence in the EMB can influence voter confidence and turnout (Kerevel, 2009). However, in a developing democracy like Nigeria with weak democratic institutions, the EMB (through its actions and/or inactions) “can help to promote, or detract from, the credibility of the election process” (Jinadu, 2011a, p.2).

In Nigeria, several EMBs known by different names have been established at various times to organise elections. Currently, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is responsible for election administration, save for elections into local government councils (FRN, 1999). Over the years, though, the independence and capacity of INEC to conduct credible elections have been questioned (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006). This view has been corroborated by Jinadu (2011a, p.109), when he argues that one of the problems confronting Nigeria in her bid to engender confidence in the electoral process is “how to design and ensure an efficient, effective, and politically nonpartisan election management body”.

Deepening democracy and the electoral process requires the existence of vibrant and competitive political parties. In fact, it is difficult to imagine a robust democracy without functional political parties. The presence of competitive political parties is usually regarded as the “litmus test of a healthy democratic system” (Heywood, 2007, p.275). A political party may therefore be described as “an association of people with similar interest(s) and common purpose(s)” (Yaqub, 2001, p.103). These interests and purpose exhibited are revolved around the acquisition and exercise of state power. Political parties, as key stakeholders in the electoral process, are “the vital link between the state and civil society, between the institutions of government and groups and interests that operate within society” (Heywood, 2007, p.271). In reality, the impacts of parties is more than contesting elections

and seeking to control the machineries of government, but also to “provide the medium through which the accountability of the executive and legislators to the electorate is exercised” (Jinadu, 2011b, p.2).

Commonly referred to as the “Fourth Estate of the Realm”, the media function as an integral part of the political process, as “communication lies at the heart of politics” (Heywood, 2007, p.231). The term “media” is used to refer to communication media and “specialized” institutions and organisations in which people work (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant and Kelly, 2009, p.9). The media, therefore, “comprise those societal institutions that are concerned with the production and distribution of all forms of knowledge, information and entertainment” (Heywood, 2007, p.232). Here, we define the media as all the communication outlets that aid in the dissemination of information on a large scale to a broad spectrum of audience within a short period of time. The various strands include the traditional or old media and the new media whose advent was accelerated by technological revolutions, while other means of classification is to group them as print, electronic and social media (Egbala, 2014). The principal functions of the media are to inform, educate and entertain their audiences (Heywood, 2007; Egbala, 2014), and are thus critical to the electoral processes. They generally help as channels for conveying information and spreading information among stakeholders in the electoral process. Political parties need the media to pass their programmes to the electorate, while the EMBs use the media to mobilise the citizenry.

The wave of democratisation that began in Africa towards the end of the twentieth century led to the proliferation of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in most countries (Uadiale, 2011). The CSOs are organisations of the citizenry outside of the purview of the state, and the realm of organised social life (Uadiale, 2011). They are “the set of intermediate associations which are neither the state nor the (extended) family; civil society therefore includes voluntary association” (McLean and Alistair, 2003). In Nigeria, Ibrahim (2003) has noted that there has been the existence of a vibrant civil society in which the mass media, trades and professional unions, students’ associations, community organisations and human and civil groups have been able to act as an effective counter-weight against the state. Instances of such CSOs include associations such as Campaign for Democracy (CD), Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), Joint Action Committee for Democracy (JACOD) and Centre for Democracy and Development. CSOs are important because they provide the platform of support for democracy and enhance citizens’ participation in the political decision making process (Uadiale, 2011). Today, it is difficult to hold a credible and transparent election without the involvement of the CSOs, who also form part of the domestic observer group in most Third World Countries. These groups of election observers, who are made up of a broad coalition of CSOs, work to further promote and defend democracy before, during and after elections.

The 2015 general elections were Nigeria’s fourth since the return to civil rule in 1999. The elections of 2003, 2007 and 2011 followed the transitional elections conducted by the departing military regime in 1999. However, these elections, like the ones before them, had been dogged with

bitter controversies and grievances on a national scale resulting from violence and fraud that have characterized Nigeria's electoral history (Orji and Uzodi, 2012). While the preceding polls in 2011 were widely rated as an improvement over the previous ones (National Democratic Institute, 2012), it still induced violence that led to the death of at least 800 people in some northern states (Human Rights Watch, 2011). Generally, elections in Nigeria had been associated with displays of malpractices of various kinds, including rigging, ballot snatching at gun points, violence and acrimony, thuggery, boycotts, threats and criminal manipulations of voters' list, brazen falsification of election results, the use of security agencies against political opponents and the intimidation of voters (Oni, Chidozie and Agbude, 2013).

ICTs and the Social Media: An Overview

Globally, the development of ICTs has moved across different spectrums. From the traditional media of radio and television, the world has seen technological innovations resulting in better means of getting tasks done. ICTs cover any product that will receive, store, retrieve, manipulate or transmit information electronically in a digital form; for example, personal computers, digital television, email, robots, e.t.c. (Afriyie, 2012). It encompasses all the uses of digital technology that already exist to help individuals, businesses and organisations use information. It also concerns the way these different uses can work with each other. In relation to business, Afriyie (2012) categorises ICTs into: the traditional computer-based technologies (tasks that can be performed typically on a PC at home or at work); and the more recent, fast-growing range of digital communication technologies (which allow people and organisations to communicate and share information digitally). The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (1999) see ICTs as covering Internet service provision, telecommunications equipment and services, information technology equipment and services, media and broadcasting, libraries and documentation centres, commercial information providers, network-based information services, and related information and communication activities. It is the group of technologies that is revolutionising the handling of information and embodies a convergence of interest between electronics, computing and communication (Foster, 1994).

As Ahiabienu (2013) has rightly noted, the availability and affordability of ICT tools and systems has made ICTs become an important part of almost all aspects of human endeavours, both at the individual level and collectively as societies; and at the national and international arenas. ICTs offer major opportunities to advance human development – from providing basic access to education or health information to making cash payments and stimulating citizen involvement in the democratic process (Yonazi, Kelly, Halewood and Blackman, 2012). ICTs contribute to economic development and democratisation, including freedom of speech, the free flow of information, promotion of human rights and poverty reduction (Association for Progressive Communications, 2009). ICTs facilitate efficient administration, citizen services, transparency, accountability and formal political participation

(e-governance), and also provide the means for social movements, activist groupings or minority groups to engage with these processes on a global level. In relation to democratic processes at the national level, APC (2009) distinguish between three levels of ICT use, viz:

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

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

Any form of information and communication technology (ICT) that can expand political, social, and economic freedom. In the contemporary era, it means essentially the modern, interrelated forms of digital ICT—the computer, the Internet, the mobile phone, and countless innovative applications for them, including “new social media” such as Facebook and Twitter (Diamond, 2010, p.70).

The author refers to platforms provided by ICTs such as the Internet, Facebook, Twitter and mobile applications. These platforms strengthen the capacity of individuals, aid liberated communication and mobilisation, and reinforce civil society. It enables citizens to ‘report news, expose wrongdoing, express opinions, mobilize protest, monitor elections, scrutinize government, deepen participation, and expand the horizons of freedom’ (Diamond, 2010, p.70). The advantages of these ICTs platforms over older technologies have been highlighted. For instance, Diamond (2010) affirms that the Internet’s decentralised nature and capacity to reach large numbers of people instantaneously, are well suited to grassroots organising. In contrast to television and radio, the new ICTs are two-way and even multiway forms of communication. Thus, users are not just inert recipients but, journalists, commentators, videographers, entertainers, and organisers (Diamond, 2010).

The rising importance of social media has seen Internet citizens, known as netizens, acquiring the capability to make their thoughts known through social networking sites and blogs on cell phones and Internet cafes, depending on ease of access across regions of the world. Stanko (2013) notes that in more restrictive societies, netizens either develop paths around government-constructed firewalls or create homegrown social networking sites to feed the desire for online connection to avoid the rage of authoritarian governments. The new and ever-evolving technology behind social media has been severally defined. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.59) define it as ‘a group of Internet-based applications that build on ideological and technological foundations of web 2.0 and that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content’. The authors recognise that a striking feature of

social media is that it goes beyond users being able to retrieve information, but also to create and consume information themselves. Sweetser and Lariscy (2008, p.179) similarly define social media as a ‘read-write Web, where the online audience moves beyond passive viewing of Web content to actually contributing to the content’. Social media allows user-generated participation at a new speed and scale, facilitating bottom-up engagement and breaking away significantly from the top-down news dissemination arrangement of older media.

The Policy and Legal Advocacy Centre (2012) has noted that social media technologies assume diverse forms including magazines, social blogs, Internet forums, pictures, weblogs, podcasts, and video. This necessitates Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) to classify social media into six distinct categories: Collaborative projects (e.g. Wikipedia), blogs and microblogs (e.g. Twitter), content communities (e.g. YouTube), social networking sites (e.g. Facebook), virtual game worlds (e.g. World of Warcraft) and Virtual social worlds (e.g. Second Life). Out of these, blogs and microblogs, content communities, and social networking sites can be singled out as crucial to our discussion and to the electoral process. As a social networking site, Facebook is a network that allows users create profile, add friends and exchange messages, pictures, videos, status updates, and “likes”. Created in February 2004, Facebook has an estimated 1.44 billion monthly active users as of March 31, 2015 (Facebook, 2015), and it is the world’s most popular social media networking site. It is also the world’s largest community of humans, surpassing China’s 1.36 billion population.

Launched in 2006, Twitter enables users post 140-character messages, or tweets. Users can interact with one another in two ways: retweets and mentions. Retweets act as a form of endorsement, allowing individuals to rebroadcast content generated by other users, thereby raising the content’s visibility (Murthy, 2011). Mentions function differently, allowing someone to address a specific user directly through the public feed, or, to a lesser extent, refer to an individual in the third person (Honeycutt and Herring, 2008). Twitter hashtags allow users to annotate tweets with metadata specifying the topic or intended audience of a communication. For instance, the #BringBackOurGirls movement which played a key role in creating worldwide awareness about the plight of the abducted Chibok Secondary School female students, got its life, vitality and vibrancy from the hashtag. #NigeriaDecides was the most popular hashtag about the 2015 elections in Nigeria, and topped the trending list, most especially on election days. Globally, Twitter has 302 million active users as at March 2015, with 500 million tweets per day (Twitter, 2015). Launched in May 2005, YouTube is a video sharing website that allows users upload, share and view videos. It has more than 1 billion users with the number of video uploaded every minute reaching 300 hours in 2015 (YouTube, 2015).

Safranek (2012) has noted that the attraction of these “big three” lies in the sense that persons with little or no advanced technological capability can use them; content can be formed and accessed with as little as a smartphone; and it can be easily entwined. Links to videos posted on YouTube can be entrenched in blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. A tweet can appear on a Facebook page, and vice

versa, making it possible for large numbers of people to be easily and cheaply contacted via a variety of services. Social media thus lowers traditional socio-economic barriers to commanding the spotlight, as it is free and accessible. The importance of these platforms is further highlighted in the sense that some governments, mostly authoritarian regimes, such as China, Azerbaijan, and Vietnam, ban these sites (Safranek, 2012). Some countries simply generate their own social media sites to satisfy their constituents. Others ignore the trend for fear of losing control of the regime through a popular uprising. China for instance created Renren, Weibo, and Youku to take the place of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube respectively, since those sites are blocked (Anti, cf. Stanko, 2013). In effect,

The Internet, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook have re-constituted, especially among young people, how social relationships are constructed and how communication is produced, mediated, and received. They have also ushered in a new regime of visual imagery in which screen culture creates spectacular events just as much as they record them. Under such circumstances, state power becomes more porous and there is less control. Text messaging, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and the Internet have given rise to a reservoir of political energy that posits a new relationship between the new media technologies, politics, and public life (Giroux, 2009).

The foregoing also underscores the importance of the Internet. Put succinctly, the Internet simply describes the collection of networks that link computers and servers together. It refers to ‘ways in which computers are able to send and receive data through the globally agreed protocols that permit computers to link together’. (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant and Kelly, 2009, p.164). Moog and Sluyter-Beltrao (2001, p.11) identify the soft technology of the Internet as the ‘most potent’ of new generation of media technologies brought about by ‘information revolution’. It has become a powerful political tool, contributing to overcome collective action problems and nurturing political change, with the “communication revolution” it provides expanding opportunities for democratic development and social reform (Campantey, Durante and Sobbrío, 2013, p.1). As access spreads wider globally, and deeper into national societies, the Internet brings new prospects for direct access to politically relevant information, for unmediated communication between political organisations and potential members, and for interactive discourse among citizens themselves (Moog, 2000).

The Internet is credited with aiding the attainment of the goals of borderless communication, inclusive communication, continuous communication, and dialogue (Ranchhod, Gurau and Lace, 2002, p. 6), and it is sometimes referred to as the “fifth estate” because it gives its users a greater capacity to judge elected representatives, and also the quality of public services. (Crouzet, cited in Frère and Kiyindou, 2009, p.174). In relation to democracy, Barber, Mattson and Peterson (1997) listed opportunities inherent in ICTs use as: (a) inherent interactivity; (b) potential for lateral and horizontal communication; (c) point-to-point and non-hierarchical modes of communication; (d) low costs to users (once a user is set up); (e) rapidity as a communication medium; (f) lack of national or other boundaries; and (g) freedom from the intrusion and monitoring of government. (p. 8). Campante,

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

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

Over the years, the global system has seen monumental increases in the use of ICTs platforms. A report by the International Telecommunications Union indicates that global mobile subscriptions increased from 738 million in 2000 to more than 7 billion in May 2015, with 3.2 billion people using the Internet globally, out of which two billion, or 62.5 per cent, are in developing countries (ITU, 2015). In the area of access, global Internet penetration increased seven fold from 6.5 to 43 per cent within the space of 15 years, and the proportion of households with Internet access at home advanced from 18 per cent in 2005 to 45 per cent in 2015 (ITU, 2015). Collectively, Unwin (2012) provides a summary of the features and structural opportunities inherent in ICTs platforms across the globe:

- (i) The increasing freedom that mobile technologies offer for people to communicate from any part of the world and at any time, or what might be called *space-time liberty*.
- (ii) A change in the balance of distributional power, away from the ‘top-down’ dissemination of information by media corporations that were often state owned, to the co-creation of information, and more recently the widespread sharing of ideas, ‘news’ and information between ‘peers’, what might be called *sharing liberty*.
- (iii) A dramatic reduction in the cost of information creation and communication, making it much more accessible to poorer people, witnessed through the dramatic explosion and take-up of miniaturised digital technologies such as mobile phones and cameras – what might be termed *access liberty* (Unwin, 2012, p. 44).

Nigeria has not been left behind in the global deployment of ICTs in general everyday human endeavour, especially in relation to governance. The ICTs sector has recorded phenomenal growth over the years, helped largely by Nigeria’s predominantly young population. The sector has however been plagued by challenges including relatively poor literacy rate which limits interest on the part of the people, poor infrastructure especially in relation to electricity and digital divide (Abubakar, 2012). The challenges notwithstanding, Omobola Johnson, then Minister of Communications Technology, affirmed that “Nigeria’s ICT sector has increased tremendously in the past 12 years, growing at 20 per cent annually, making it the fastest growing [sector] in the country” (quoted in Nahimah, 2013). These improvements have been aided by public policies. Some initiatives such as the National Telecommunications Policy and the National Information Technology Policy (both formulated in 2000), the National Information Technology Development Agency Act 2007 and the regulatory and supervisory frameworks provided by the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) and the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) have combined to accelerate ICTs expansion in Nigeria

(Committee on ICT Policy Harmonization, 2012). The country has moved from approximately 400,000 available fixed telephone lines pre-1999 to over 196 million available mobile telephone lines, of which 147 million are active, by May 2015, effectively highlighting Nigeria's telecommunications market as the fastest growing in Africa (NCC, 2015).

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

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

Adapted from internetworldstats.com; International Telecommunications Union.

In relation to platforms, Nigeria has also experienced remarkable growth. According to data published by *internetworldstats.com* (see Table 1 above), while the world had a 42.4 percent Internet penetration as at 2014, Africa had 27.5 percent with over 318 million Internet users. Nigeria alone accounts for over 70 million of this, with a 39.7 per cent Internet penetration rate. The phenomenal growth can be further put into perspective when compared with the year 2000 when Nigeria had just 200, 000 Internet users. A similar report by *internetlivestats.com* shows that at 16 percent, Nigeria had the world's joint second highest growth rate in the number of Internet users between 2013 and 2014. A report by the NCC in June 2015 puts the number of subscribers browsing the internet on Nigeria's telecoms networks at over 87 million as at April, 2015 (Ubabukoh, 2015). The number of Facebook users in Nigeria increased from 400, 000 in 2007 to over 11 million in January 2014 (Social Media Week, 2014; Ehidiamen, 2013). Some statistics put the current figure at 14.8 million in 2015 (Nwabasha, 2015). The country also boasts a sizeable number of Twitter and YouTube users, running into millions. George (2015), for instance, puts the number of active Twitter users in Nigeria at 6 million by 2013, while the other social media sites account for another 6 million. These figures may overlap; someone can maintain accounts on multiple social media sites (George, 2015).

Stakeholders, ICTs and the Politics of 2015

Recent trends in political communication has seen the explosion of studies exploring the ways in which stakeholders are using ICTs platforms to communicate and disseminate information in the democratic process (OpCit Research, 2013). Research works have focused on ICTs platforms during election campaigns, attempting to explore both the content and the influence of web-based messages on election outcomes, as well as the ability of web-based forms of political communication to enable stakeholders to have more control over their own message-making strategies (Chen, 2010; OpCit Research, 2013). The deployment of platforms of ICTs in general, and the social media in particular, gave a new lease of life to Nigeria's electoral process in 2015. The INEC, political parties, candidates, media and CSOs all made the most of technology in carrying out their activities (Agbata Jnr, 2015).

This, however, was not a 2015 phenomenon as social media had been used in the preceding general elections of 2011 (SMYF, 2012). However, the level at which ICT platforms were used in the 2015 elections was unprecedented in the country's electioneering history. In relation to 2011, INEC Chairman, Attahiru Jega notes that:

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

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

INEC equally made use of ICTs platforms in enhancing effective flow of information, making broad use of its website, Facebook page and Twitter handle. Its website had different sections providing valuable database of information for aspirants and candidates, election officials, voters, the media, researchers as well as links to its Citizens Contact Centre and Registration Area Centres Nationwide. The website had information on all the 28 registered political parties in relation to their top officials, address and contact telephone numbers. This is crucial to the electoral process and information sharing. Among the other critical resources downloadable from the INEC website prior to the elections were code of conduct for Political Parties, Political Parties Finance Manual, Political Parties Audit Report and Political Parties Handbook. Post-election, the INEC website has list of elected senators, members of the House of Representatives and the result of the presidential election (see inecnigeria.org). The INEC website had become so critical such that when it was hacked for a couple of hours on presidential Election Day by a group known as *Nigeria Cyber Army*, it created anxiety across the country and beyond (Abimboye, 2015). INEC's technical staff however restored the website thus calming frayed nerves.

INEC's Twitter handle, @inecnigeria, created since December 2010, was used in an unprecedented manner to relay information before, during and after the elections. The verified account boasts 9, 380 tweets, 385,000 followers and has information of links to other INEC platforms including its website, contact email address and telephone number (see twitter.com/inecnigeria;

Fagorusi, 2014). The Twitter account especially came in handy when INEC used it to debunk an online viral video aimed at discrediting the yet to be concluded presidential election (Agbata Jnr, 2015). Similarly, INEC's Facebook page is verified and has valuable information about INEC's situation room and is followed by over 234, 000 people.

Most importantly, the introduction of Permanent Voters Card (PVC) and the electronic smart card reader to check the authenticity of the card and the owner, is perhaps, the best ICT innovation used in the conduct of the 2015 elections. For the first time in Nigeria, probably also in Africa, biometric technology was extensively used by the INEC in verifying the eligibility of voters at the election (Agbata Jnr, 2015). The card readers had utility in the sense that only the voter cards of actual registered voters could be used, removing the possibility of wholesale padding of voter figures and number of votes exceeding the number of registered and accredited voters. Also, the smart card readers were configured to work in specific areas, thereby reducing the tendency for multiple voting and rigging (Owen and Usman, 2015; Orebiyi, quoted by Channels Television, 2015). It was equally possible for registered voters to track their status and PVC information through the INEC website.

The use of these ICT platforms and devices by INEC was not without challenges. For instance, the smart card reader malfunctioned in some places by not being able to reliably verify voter fingerprints in a reasonable amount of time (TMG, 2015). The nation was held spellbound watching President Jonathan struggling with his verification for over thirty minutes. The failure of the smart card reader in some places led to INEC reverting to manual authentication and this action seriously questioned the state of preparedness of the commission for the election (Fadoju, 2015). INEC, however, downplayed the significance of such situations, claiming only 300 of 150,000 polling stations, or 0.2 percent, were affected (Wallis, 2015). Apart from the failure of the smart card readers in some areas and lack of electricity to power the smart card readers, another controversy that surrounded the use of the biometric technology was the allegation and counter allegation by political parties that the card readers had been configured to aid the victory of a particular party (Okocha, 2015). This, to some extent, detracted from the success that INEC recorded in the use of ICTs platforms for the conduct of the elections. Its shortcomings, notwithstanding, the use of ICT tools by INEC significantly contributed to the integrity of the elections.

Political parties and their candidates also used ICT platforms to garner support for their cause. Indeed, political actors realised the enormous power of ICTs in general, and the internet in particular, optimising the platforms to advance their electoral fortunes (Ikhariale, 2015), thus, "short documentaries and animations on YouTube, mini-online conferences, the use of Twitter hashtags, and sponsored posts on political and lifestyle blogs expanded the online space" (Owen and Usman, 2015, p.7). The advantage of the Internet, websites, Twitter and Facebook, as noted by OpCit Research (2013), is that as well as sending information to potential voters, politicians become part of the mediated lives of those voters, proactively arriving in their Twitter feeds and Facebook newstreams

without their needing to actively seek them out; thus enabling a much human persona to emerge and build reputation, fostering a much more interactive relationship (Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2012). In relation to 2015, some political parties leveraged on the designation of ICTs platforms as “the latest in a long line of technological developments that have been utilized by political parties in order to improve their effectiveness and efficiency” (Wring and Horrocks (2001, p.192).

The prospects of the ICTs platforms in their desired electoral victory endeared the political actors to join the online community. The contest between the leading presidential candidates, Jonathan of the Peoples Democratic Party and Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress became a social media war among their supporters. The official Twitter handle of the APC Presidential candidate, @MBuhari, was used to connect with prospective voters. The handle had over 328000 followers and 1664 tweets. It also provided links to his campaign website. The PDP candidate’s @presgoodluck boasts over 28000 followers. The PDP candidate had over 1.5 million followers on Facebook. Other Twitter handles used by candidates include @rafukachang; @oluremisonaiya; @chekwas_okorie; and @OnovoNCP2015 for Rafiu Salau, Oluremi Sonaiya, Chekwas Okorie and Martin Onovo of the Alliance for Democracy, KOWA Party, United Progressive Party and the National Conscience Party respectively. Parties, especially APC and PDP, extensively used Facebook through sponsored stories and Fan pages such as The Buhari Support Group, GEJITES, etc. In the days preceding the presidential election, the internet was inundated with hashtags on Twitter canvassing votes for candidates, including #MeetGej, #Febuhari, #MarchOutJonathan, #MarchForBuhari, among others (Elegbede, 2015). APC and PDP also made use of Google Advertising Platform, Adwords, and video adverts on YouTube to provide publicity for candidates.

Similarly, websites of parties and candidates were used to relay election-related information. Research by the authors reveals that of the 28 registered parties, only 10 had official party websites (see Table 2). And of the 14 parties that contested the presidential election, only 6 had official websites. Perhaps, this reflects the strength of the parties in terms of structures and level of organisation as the dominant parties also dominate the online platforms. Among the critical information on party websites are manifestoes and campaign promises of candidates. In Nigeria where parties are often accused of lacking coherent manifesto and specified ideologies, this represents a stockpile of information to glean from. The APC made use of ICTs platforms to raise fund through crowd-funding. The party launched an online donation platform that gave opportunity to its supporters to contribute to its campaign fund through a designated account made popular on social media (Fadoju, 2015). This was in addition to ringtones, premium SMS, scratch cards as well as e-transaction used in sourcing monetary contributions from fans (Fadoju, 2015). Parties also set up digitised and ICT compliant situation rooms tracking events especially on Election Day. They monitored results of election from polling units, collaborating with their agents and citizen journalists on the ground. This was made easier by citizens armed with smartphones who sent results and images from their polling

units and environs. For none smartphone users who could not be reached through the internet, bulk text messaging and automated voice calls were also placed through to subscribers. Some of these were particularly effective where the telecom subscriber does not use a smartphone.

Instructively, ICTs platforms reduced the link-up gap between parties/candidates and the people. However, most of the accounts were not run personally by the politicians, most of whom are not well versed in operating the devices and navigating their ways on the platforms. They engaged users of the social media who have amassed huge following on the platforms as consultants to run their accounts, with a view to getting issues to trend by bringing it to the consciousness of the public and influencing opinions and perceptions in their favour. In a report, Nwaubani (2014) highlights how these paid online agents, “the internet warriors”, who in some ways functioned like online political thugs, were reported as ‘rigging public opinion’. The report aptly exposes the intrigues about the use, management, intents and purposes of Nigerian political actors and ICTs platforms. It is however a ‘favourable departure’ from the old times when politicians would rather engage the youth in violent political activity by supplying them with machetes, missiles and matches (Nwaubani, 2014). The trend in 2015 was to ‘arm’ them with laptops, smart phones and internet connections.

CSOs, including observer groups and the media, also tapped into the opportunities presented by improved ICTs platforms. Mobile applications such as *ReVoDa* and *Nigeria Elections* enabled citizen observers to send reports of the election process through the use of mobile phones. ReVoDa, a locally developed voter monitoring application, introduced by Enough is Enough (EiE), allowed voters to perform the dual role of voting and observing (Fagorusi, 2014; Edozien, 2015). *Nigeria Elections* aggregated news around the elections, and provided the listing of polling booths, national constituencies, presidential candidates and their running mates and official results of the election (Fadoju, 2015). It was a marked departure from the past when citizens cast their ballot but could not, at their own convenience, monitor and report election proceedings. Centre for Democracy and Development also had a website <http://ngmanifesto.org/> which displayed a lot of resources in relation to the elections, including the manifestoes of all the participating political parties.

The traditional media, as represented by radio, television and print media, also caught in the ICT frenzy. Different online platforms were created for news and programmes relating to the elections. For instance, Punch, Vanguard and a host of other newspapers created electronic versions that readers could access online (Elegbede, 2015). Television stations active on YouTube such as *Channels* uploaded a lot of election related content for viewing, in addition to live streaming of election updates on YouTube, websites and mobile applications (Agbata Jnr, 2015). These aided global information sharing and dissemination about the elections. Punch Newspapers created an election monitoring site, <http://elections2015.punchng.com>, dedicated primarily to posting real time election updates and reports. Google hosted a dedicated weblink, <http://www.google.ng/elections/>, which served as a database of election-related information.

Table 2: Political Parties, Candidates and ICTs Platforms for the 2015 Presidential Election

PARTY NAME	CANDIDATE	Facebook	Twitter	Candidate Website	Official Party Website
		Party and/or Candidate			
Accord	-		@ACCORDparty		-
Action Alliance	Tunde Anifowose-Kelani	-	-	-	www.actionallianceng.org
Advanced Congress Of Democrats					-
Allied Congress Party of Nigeria	Ganiyu O. Galadima				-
Alliance For Democracy	Rafiu Salau		@rafukachang		-
African Democratic Congress	Mani Ibrahim Ahmad				-
African Peoples Alliance	Ayeni Musa Adebayo				-
All Progressives Congress	Muhammadu Buhari			mbuhari.ng	www.apc.com.ng
All Progressives Grand Alliance	-	facebook.com/AllProgressivesGrandAlliance			-
Citizens Popular Party	Sam Eke				-
Democratic Peoples Party	-				-
Fresh Democratic Party	-				www.freshdemocraticparty.com.ng
Hope Democratic Party	Ambrose N. A. Owuru				-
Independent Democrats	-				-
Kowa Party	Comfort O. Sonaiya	facebook.com/pages/KOWA-Party/138981326121350?fref=ts	@oluremisonaiya	remisonaiya.com	www.kowaparty.net
Labour Party	-				-
Mega Progressive Peoples Party	-				-
National Conscience Party	Martin Onovo		@OnovoNCP2015		-
New Nigeria Peoples Party	-				www.newnigeriapeoplesparty.org
People for Democratic Change	-				-
Peoples Democratic Movement	-				www.pdm.ng
Peoples Democratic Party	Goodluck E. Jonathan	facebook.com/pages/Official-Peoples-Democratic-Party-PDP-Nigeria	@PdpNigeria	forwardnigeria.ng	www.peoplesdemocraticparty.com.ng
Progressive Peoples Alliance	-				-
Peoples Party of Nigeria	Allagoa K. Chinedu				-
Social Democratic Party	-				www.sdp.org.ng
United Democratic Party	Godson M. O. Okoye				http://udp.ng/
Unity Party of Nigeria	-				-
United Progressive Party	Chekwas Okorie	facebook.com/UnitedProgressiveParty	@chekwas_okorie	chekwasokorieforresident.org	http://unitedprogressiveparty.org/

Sourced by Authors through the Internet

Online polls conducted by media houses were another highpoints of the elections. The polls were specifically for the presidential election and the most popular were conducted by Sahara Reporters, Reno Omokri (Senior Special Assistant to President Jonathan on Social Media), Africa Independent Television (AIT), Premium Times and Daily Post. Perhaps, the results of the online polls were a good way to gauge the impending electoral outcome and result as the candidate of the APC dominated (Ugbodaga, 2015). Some of the polls however ended in controversies. For instance, the AIT version was shut down by the company following allegations of double voting and hacking (Fadoju, 2015). In effect, ICTs platforms supplemented old media platforms in disseminating information and civic education in relation to the election. Media activities were enhanced by ICTs platforms, buttressing the view of Banda, Mudhai and Tettey (2009, p.2) that ICTs platforms “enmesh with old media to provide multimedia platforms that allow for greater democratic participation, inclusion, and expression”. Voters as citizens also engaged ICTs platforms in ways that enhanced the elections. Nigerians ‘made phone calls, tweeted, took pictures of their polling units, stayed alert and sent out information from their polling units as they got them’ (Agbata Jnr, 2015). Okeregbe notes:

Many people who stationed themselves at the polling centers until the close of election were able to know the results of those centers, record events and also photographed copies of results pasted. Then, they connected, via social media, with friends at other centers who did the same thing with other friends. At the end of the day, a rough estimate of what the results would look like was known beforehand (quoted in Edozien, 2015).

This underscores ways in which voters actively contributed to the electoral process, not just in casting their votes, but also in ensuring a successful outcome. In cases where the card readers provided by INEC were unresponsive, citizens used platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Blackberry Messenger, WhatsApp and text messaging in circulating information on the need to remove the seal on the card readers. One of such broadcasts received by the authors read:

Card readers were apparently failing often at a polling booth near an Accenture staff’s home. And the guy couldn’t understand why. . . cos [because] the readers were all new. So he approached the INEC woman [and] inspected the reader, only to find the protective film on the lense of the reader had not been removed. After a protracted argument he convinced the woman to remove it. The reader not only read the prior rejected cards, it was reading with even faster response time. Please share. It could help a lot. (Blackberry Messenger Broadcast).

The foregoing is one of several broadcasts relating to the elections. A case of a very young Nigerian being accredited was photographed and went viral on social media within minutes. This suspected case of underage voting provoked INEC’s quick intervention and investigation. The uploading of unofficial results from polling units through social media also aided in making it difficult to doctor the results.

Civil society groups also leveraged on ICTs platforms. An instance of this is the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), a coalition of over 400 civil society organisations based in all the 36 states and the federal capital, Abuja. The TMG which had consistently observed elections in Nigeria since the era of military rule, deployed 4000 trained and accredited citizen observers in teams of two to 1,507 representative random sampled polling units across the country for the elections (Ajanaku, 2015). The group used *Quick Count*, or Parallel Vote Tabulations, a methodology that ‘uses well established statistical principles and utilizes sophisticated information technology’ with the aim of independently verifying the accuracy of INEC’s official results (Zikirullahi, 2015). ICTs platforms enabled TMG observers to send reports in real time via coded text messages using mobile phones to the National Information Centre, Abuja. The text messages provided data on the quality of the election process and the official results of polling units as announced by the poll official. TMG’s report released following INEC’s official results of the presidential elections showed that the results had significantly reflected the ballots cast at polling units, falling within TMG’s technology-driven estimated range (Zikirullahi, 2015).

The study observes that the voter turnout in relation to previous presidential elections waned significantly. From 52 percent in 1999, 69 percent in 2003, 57 percent in 2007 and 54 percent in 2011; it reduced to an all-time low of 44 percent in 2015 (Centre for Public Policy Alternatives, 2015). The *Automated Finger Print System* technology was used by INEC to clean up the voters’ list through the identification and removal of multiple registrations; this reduced registered voters from 73.5 million in 2011 to 67.4 million by January 2015 (Owen and Usman, 2015). The subsequent use of the electronic card smart readers reduced the tendencies for impersonation (Odeyemi, Shittu and Buraimo, 2015). It is our contention, however, that while the percentage of voters had reduced quantitatively, the interest of Nigerians had increased considerably, leading to a qualitative increase in participation through citizens’ rising confidence in electoral democracy, and an exercise that is effectively the “most credible and transparent elections since independence [in 1960] with minimal violence” (Owen and Usman, 2015, p1).

Conclusion

The study examined the use of ICTs platforms in the conduct of the 2015 elections in Nigeria. It contends that like several other countries, innovations in ICTs have telling effects on different aspects of life in Nigeria, one of which is governance. Of particular concern to democratic governance, is the conduct of credible, free and fair elections; and one way in which this has been enhanced is in the use of ICTs platforms. The utility of these platforms was specifically acknowledged by President Buhari at his inauguration, thanking “those who tirelessly carried the campaign on the social media” (Buhari, 2015). Stakeholders simply adjusted to the global trend, with parties and INEC in particular, adopting

innovations and techniques in ICTs, thus enhancing the conduct, credibility and acceptability of the elections. INEC's online accounts functioned as information dissemination platforms and tools of civic education and enlightenment, while also receiving feedbacks from the public on election-related issues. Notices and announcements made on the traditional media were equally and simultaneously made on social media accounts. In some cases, the commission's press briefings were tweeted live. The accounts also functioned as complaints response mechanisms, with the handlers responding promptly in most cases to issues of registration, non-functional smart card readers and the attitude of INEC staff. Candidates and parties found ICTs platforms useful in campaigning, crowdfunding, mobilising, educating and gauging the opinion of prospective voters. The use of ICTs platforms for crowdfunding by parties was particularly novel to electoral politics in Nigeria. The media utilised ICTs platforms in enhancing their basic role of informing and educating the public. CSOs and the electorates used ICTs tool in providing information, election observation, reporting and receiving election related information. The mass deployment of ICTs tools for the federal elections were equally replicated, but to a lesser extent, at state elections.

ICTs use were not without challenges. ICTs platform were used in articulating hate speeches and disparaging the personality of candidates. This created confusion and heated up the polity. In addition, as ICTs platforms were used to spread information so also was misinformation spread, with the tools amenable to being vehicles for information as they are for misinformation. As INEC Chairman, Jega noted, "a number of alarms received in the Situation Room during elections turned out to be red herrings" (SMYF, 2012, p.7). The biggest challenge with ICTs deployment, perhaps, is its use in disseminating unofficial and inaccurate results in violation of the provisions of the Electoral Act guiding elections in. While supervisory and regulatory functions helped in limiting the spread of unofficial results on traditional media as experienced in past elections, ICTs platforms became a new ground for propagating falsehood in relation to elections. This created controversies among and between stakeholders including political parties and candidates with accusations and counter accusations of deliberate spreading of false results to instigate confusion. Thus, the absence of censorship and regulation which has been a major appeal of these platforms could also be a limiting factor. Notwithstanding the popularity of ICTs platforms, this study observes that the dominance of some political parties and candidates in the electoral system also reflect in ICTs use for election functions and day-to-day activity as most of the registered political parties and candidates had no websites and were not visible on social media platforms. This represent a digital divide that one can expect to narrow as the ICTs and social media crusade spreads further in future elections. There were also a proliferation of social media platforms in ways that made it an herculean task linking several platforms with the banner of the candidates they represent.

Beyond elections, while the growing recognition of tools and trends in ICTs have seen top-ranking government officials creating offices of assistants and advisers to anchor their social media platforms, the freedom that social media brings has also led to controversies. Reuben Abati, President Jonathan's senior special adviser on media famously described online activists as "cynics, the pestle-wielding critics, the unrelenting, self-appointed activists, the idle and idling, twittering, collective children of anger, the distracted crowd of Facebook addicts, the BBM-pinging soap opera gossips of Nigeria, who seem to be in competition among themselves to pull down President Jonathan" (Abati, 2012). There were also reports of attempts at censoring the social media and legislating jail terms for online critics. Newspapers report how the Senate had to bow to pressure in deleting a clause of a bill on electronic fraud. Section 13 (3) of the draft bill stipulated that "any person who intentionally propagate false information that could threaten the security of the country or that is capable of inciting the general public against the government through electronic message shall be guilty of an offence and upon conviction, shall be sentenced to seven years imprisonment, or a fine of N5m, or both" (Aborisade, 2013). There were also allegations of the Jonathan administration awarding an Israeli firm a \$40million contract to help it spy on citizens' computers and Internet communications as part of intelligence gathering and national security (Ogala, 2013). These are in addition to the challenges of infrastructure, digital divide and access gap, as well as illiteracy which continue to hinder the use of ICTs tools for everyday human activity in Nigeria.

Recommendations for Future Elections

Drawing from the foregoing, the study recommends that the utility of ICTs platforms to democratic governance and precisely to the electoral process should be further leveraged upon by stakeholders, as the electoral process stands to gain more if ICTs platforms are effectively and appropriately used. Also, there is a need to review laws guiding elections in the country in order to address the various abuses ICTs could be subjected to. This will require INEC, as the fulcrum of the electoral process, establishing procedures for its use, in order to minimise cases of controversies and misuses, and ensuring that social media users heed the inaugural speech admonition of President Buhari by exercising their 'considerable powers with responsibility and patriotism' (Buhari, 2015). In relation to declaration of election results, perhaps, INEC should consider assigning any of its staff in any of the collation centres as ICT personnel. Such a staff should be equipped appropriately to be able to send results as declared by the returning officer to a database at INEC's ICT department, for prompt uploading on INEC's social media platforms. This decentralisation of the announcement of results on social media as declared by INEC's Returning Officers will, expectedly, reduce the need for speculations and spreading of inaccurate results on the platforms.

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