Empirical study of user acceptance of online political participation: Integrating Civic Voluntarism Model and Theory of Reasoned Action

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ABSTRACT

Factors affecting e-democracy adoption were identified using Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) and Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which incorporated political culture and perceived e-democracy outcome. Survey instrument was designed based on these theories and was administered to a convenient and randomly selected sample in Nigeria. The variance-based Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach was used to evaluate the measurement and structural models. Partial Least Square Algorithm (PLS-Algorithm) and bootstrapping were executed to estimate the significance and test the validity of the SEM components. Findings reveal the imperative of democratic political culture orientation of ordinary citizens in developing positive attitude towards the acceptance and use of e-democracy system while political awareness, political efficacy, and recruitment networks are found to be significant predictors of intention to use e-democracy. These predictors can be stimulated through dedicated massive political orientation programs and enlightenment campaigns by the government in partnership with civil society organizations, religious associations, academic institutions, interest groups, the media and traditional institutions on the benefits of e-democracy to a country's political system.

1. Introduction

The pivot of democracy is collective participation. A successful democracy is constituted by an engaged and informed citizenry (Caldow, 2004). In time past, elected representative was a sufficient means for citizens to participate in government. This has changed for reasons such as diversity of citizens' cultural heritages, values, needs, apathy, lack of openness and accountability, and mistrust (Smith, 2003). The desire for a more responsive government has however, led to citizen's greater political participation (Tolbert, McNeal, & Smith, 2003; Hobolt & Klemmemsen, 2005). Citizens now want other and broader, more accessible and direct pathways of involving in governance and policy decisions. But this could not be achievable through the platforms offered by the traditional models of political engagement.

The use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to enhance citizens' political participation has been identified as a solution to the problems of representative democracy, particularly, the disconnection between representatives and citizens and the decline of political interest among the populace (Kang & Dugdale, 2010; Coleman & Gotze, 2001). Electronic participation (e-participation) is the use of Internet and mobile technologies to enhance democratic governance (Zissis, Lekkas, & Papadopoulou, 2009). E-democracy is the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and strategies by "democratic sectors" within the political processes of local communities, states/regions, nations and on the global stage (Clift, 2004). Macintosh (2004) defines e-democracy as the use of ICTs to engage citizens, support the democratic decision-making processes and to strengthen representative democracy. The essence of e-democracy is to provide wider access for dissemination of information and to promote communication and deliberation among the democratic actors. Series of technological innovative tools have been put in place to foster citizens' participation in political issues and most especially in policy-making (Coleman & Gotze, 2001; OECD, 2003a; Demo-net, 2006). These among others include: e-Panels, e-Deliberative polling, e-consultation, e-opinion poll, e-referenda, e-petitioning, etc. Distinct benefits that government can derive in making use of electronic techniques for public participation are discussed by Smith (2003) and Clift (2004)

The growth and use of Internet and mobile technology have continued unabated across the globe within the last decade (Leston-Bandeira, 2007; United Nations, 2012). Most countries have leveraged on these exponential growth and have continued to find ways of utilizing ICT tools to enhance their democratic practices. In Africa, Nigeria has been referred to as the fastest growing telecommunication country. There

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