Title of Project:

TECHNOLOGY, POLITICS, AND SOCIETY: A 'BIG DATA' APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF NEW MEDIA USAGE IN NIGERIA'S DEMOCRACY

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The project is funded by the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund), a federal government agency responsible for funding and supporting research and innovations in Nigerian higher education sector. *Ref No: TETFund/DR&D/CE/NRF/HSS/18/VOL.1*

This study is situated within the field of Digital Humanities and it focuses on a critical and systematic investigation of the use of technology, in its broader sense, in Nigeria's democracy with a focus on the 2015 and 2019 electoral cycles.

The research is underpinned by approaches in Digital Humanities and Corpus Linguistics. It is influenced by the perspective that the study of data and its underlying structures, dynamics of data relations, and newer data technologies are processes that are rapidly evolving and impacting social development globally. As argued in extant literature, a project that focuses on the development of systems and models that can build and analyse voluminous data may be critical to policy decisions (ijwa, 2021).

Therefore, building a digital repository of specialized corpus/data extracted from a unique and critical social space and practice such as politics and democracy has become very germane to the study of democratic development in a young democratic context. It is believed that collecting, curating, documenting and analysing the impact of data may lead to application domains on various decisions that have a systematic influence on several other spaces and decisions in society. .

The project is thus aimed at producing knowledge that can be generated from the dataset and the analysis of such data can enable the production of critical information for informed decision making in other sectors of the society and for national development.

Specifically, the study seeks to explore and curate a range of socio-political data generated during the two electoral cycles with the aim of constructing a big virtual repository of digital political discourse in Nigeria. Data from the repository can be studied and analysed towards mapping electoral behaviour and practices as well as assessing the development of participatory democracy in Nigeria..

The basic objectives therefore include describing the emerging online political discourses in order to monitor trends and patterns of electoral behaviour and democratic practice in Nigeria; (ii) discussing how new technologies have been used to share information, mobilise citizens for electoral participation, and civic engagement; (iii) constructing a user-friendly website as the interfaced digital repository of the online political conversation during the periods under consideration.

Phase 1 of the project involved literature review to generate the current state of research in Digital Humanities, New Media & Society, and Digital Politics with respect to the use of technology in democratic practice.

Phase 2 built on the preliminary assessment of the state of research and insights gained from literature review as well as the participant-observer's method to investigate the current state of the use of technologies in the political events under study.

Phase 3 involved extensive field work and deployment of computer applications and web-based digital tools to harvest relevant data from the general web, websites of political parties, portals of major national newspapers, social media handles, interviews conducted

This phase also involved dissemination of the findings through a series of user-engagement activities including the construction of a digital archive of a range of data harvested during the life cycle of the research, the publication of academic articles, the organisation of and participation in academic symposia and conferences to share findings/outputs from the project.

Methodology: The main techniques used in this research include the following: (i) administration of online and offline questionnaire, (ii) scheduled and unscheduled online and in-person interviews, (iii) focus group discussions through webinar and administration of questionnaire on the group, (iv) harvesting of online conversation and chats on the use of technologies in the electoral cycles, (v) desktop studies of relevant literature and extraction of relevant news stories on the political events from the online portals of some major newspapers in Nigeria, and (vi) use of google search engine for manual download of relevant information on the political events

Statistics of Online data search on the Use of technologies in Nigeria's elections

1. Google Search on "The Use of Smart Card in 2019 Elections yielded about 5,990,000 results

2. Google Search on "The Use of Smart Card in 2015 Elections yielded about 3,360,000 results

3. Google Search on the Use of Technology in 2015 Elections in Nigeria yielded 10,600,000 results

4. Google Search on the Use of Technology in 2015 Elections in Nigeria yielded 11,400,000 results

Significance

It is anticipated that the study provides reliable and verifiable social data resources that will help to improve electoral practice and democratic governance in Nigeria. The study advances public understanding of the geo-politics of data-centric technologies that is integral for creating new means of improving the overall political culture and civic engagement in the public space. It demonstrates the power of technology to promote credible electoral process, civic engagement, deliberative and participatory governance and advance democratic governance.

Given the construction of the online repository linked with the dedicated user-interface website the project will provide verifiable and reliable information that will help to improve electoral practice and democratic governance in Nigeria. It will also advance public understanding of the geo-politics of data-centric technologies that is integral for creating new means of improving the overall political culture in the public space. It will provide useful information on strategies that will address contemporary challenges facing Nigerian fledgling democracy. Political actors, stakeholders and policy makers will better appreciate the role of technology in democratic practice. It may help to curb ballot stuffing/snatching, electoral conflicts, post-election violence, hate speech, fake news and contribute to the promotion of participatory democracy, good governance, peaceful and credible elections. In its contribution to Sustainable Development Goals initiatives, it is believed that the outcome will lead to the development of capacity that will promote industry growth, innovation and infrastructure. Digital Humanities (DH) contributes hugely to an emerging technology-driven research and innovation area of research at the intersection of computer science, Information technology and the broad fields of humanities. This project within the spectrum of Digital Humanities with therefore promote the production and use of new technologies, software and applications that will serve both socio-economic, political and national interests (SDG 9). It will also enhance credible elections, transparency and accountability in governance thereby promoting peace and justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).

Findings: Short Term

- ✔ Most respondents agree that digital technologies have both positive and negative impacts on the development of democratic practice in Nigeria.
- ✔ It is observed that the 70 % agree that new technologies are gradually achieving positive impact on our democratic practice with the use of card readers to enhance electoral credibility, social media platforms and the Internet for political education and mobilisation among others
- ✔ It is agreed that the use of new technologies is beginning to enhance the promotion and practice of transparent and credible electoral process in Nigeria.
- ✔ Political conversation in Nigeria is becoming highly democratized with the digital platforms encouraging citizens to freely express themselves about political issues in their country.

- ✔ New media technologies are promoting a greater level of accountability among political office holders who are now more conscious of the power of social media to expose their scandalous and/or inappropriate behaviour.
- ✔ Digital media platforms provide an emerging public square and market place of political ideas/and associations.
- ✔ Political conversation has become more engaging, more diffused and more fluid.
- ✔ New media political discourse in an emerging democracy is context-sensitive responding and accommodation socio-cultural nuances and traditional social meanings
- ✔ Social identity and social relationships shape discursive practices via the virtual platforms
- ✔ Digital media spheres and social network platforms are truly shrinking the global community by localizing global issues and globalizing local issues.
- ✔ A doctoral candidate is already utilising part of the data for his research project.
- ✔ Some postgraduate students are receiving informal training while more junior scholars are getting inspiration on how to conduct digital humanities research project
- ✔ Some of the preliminary aspect of the project has been shared in 2 online international symposia/webinar.
- ✔ The project website as online repository/digital archive already has some data that may be accessed by scholars and researchers from within and outside the country

Mid-Term/Long Term

- ❖ It is anticipated that this study will inspire new findings on the roles and future of technologies in democratic practice;
- ❖ research that will influence scientific, policy and industry decisions; and contribute to the search for viable strategies that will consolidate and strengthen democratic practice in Nigeria
- ❖ The curation and storage of relevant and verifiable data will provide sufficient information to make informed recommendations and decisions on public issues and public policies
- ❖ Some of the findings from the data set will ultimately shape/reshape a more pragmatic, objective and balanced approach to the study of new technologies, their roles in society,
- ❖ and how they can promote a more equitable, and sustainable future for the internet, digital media technologies for political activities as well as the people they serve.

- ❖ We hope that the findings and the application of our data analytics will be able to reflect and reveal hidden patterns, covert political relationships, intrinsic information relations and segmentation
- ❖ The data application can introduce cutting-edge possibilities in every facet or segment of our socio-political life and democratic activity

This project subscribes to the view espoused below.

Jorge et al (2021), observe that "Data analytics are able to reflect hidden patterns, incomprehensible relationships, intrinsic information relations, and segmentation. The data applications have introduced cutting-edge possibilities in every activity in our life. Thus the study of data and its underlying structure, dynamics of data relations, and newer data technologies are a never-ending process…Analysing the impact of data leads to application domains on various decisions that have a systematic influence. Knowledge generated from the data analysis can enable the production of critical information for several domains….(www.socio.org.uk/ddp)"

Data Usage Policy

The project adopts the European Union's international best practice (F.A.I.R. policy) and Nigerian TETFund' s open science policy on research data. Therefore, the data is Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable.

The repository domiciled at the Data Centre of the Digital Laboratory, Centre for Digital Humanities, University of Lagos as well as the dedicated website will be accessible to researchers, scholars and other stakeholders.

Metadata

Each of dataset stacked on the repository carries the necessary metadata that will help users to understand the detailed background and information on the data. Access protocols will be provided for users to explore the rich resources warehoused on the repository.

Preliminary Findings

1. Political conversation in Nigeria has moved from being monolithic vertical unidirectional top-bottom communication style to a liner process, horizontal diffused, bidirectional process

2. Political conversation has become more engaging, more diffused and more fluid

3. New media political discourse in an emerging democracy is context-sensitive responding and accommodation socio-cultural nuances and traditional social meanings

4. Social identity and social relationships shape discursive practices via the virtual platforms

5. Migration of offline discursive practices to online platforms.

6. Political ideologies, political associations, political literacy /education are variables that influence online conversation on politics and governance topics

7. There is a systematic social and topic-induced repatterning of web-based political discourse (e'g stomach infrastructure)

8. Topicalisation and mediatization of national politics on virtual platforms

9. A convergence of mainstream traditional and modern political discursive practices at both village square/ social media space. This create blurred border lines.

10. Social forces influence discursive practices

11. Gradual presence of a shifting mechanism with public governance becoming people's governance.

12. By monitoring online political conversations, we can predict and prevent outbreak of political violence, electoral fraud before they occur

13. New technologies give us power to fight ignorance, confront political illiteracy, expose electoral fraud, encourage openness and transparency in governance, promote accountability, responsiveness and responsibility.

14. The use of new technology in elections especially smartphones has empowered Nigerians to act as citizen journalists, helping to monitor the electoral process, transmitting information, pictures and video of the voting process in real time.

Citation Information on the proposed publication

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Publication (s) on the Project

Ope-Davies, Tunde (2022b) The Digital Humanities as a Framework for Refining and Retooling the Humanities in Africa: A Case Study of the University of Lagos, Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities Arts & Computing (IJHAC), Vol 16 (2), 116-137.*

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