

Media Digitisation In Reportage Of Elections, Judicial Decision And Credibility Of Election Results In Nigeria: An Empirical Approach**Oluchukwu Augustina Nwafor, Ph.D**

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Abstract

The digital transformation of media has significantly changed how elections are reported, judicial decisions are covered, and the credibility of election results is perceived. The study explores factors like media digitisation of elections, judicial decisions and credibility of results in the Nigerian presidential election of 2023. To survey three states in Southeast Nigeria, a qualitative method of in-depth interviews was employed. The study was anchored on Technological Acceptance Model and Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST). The study found that media digitisation has profoundly transformed the landscape of election reportage, judicial decision coverage, and the perception of election result credibility. While digital media offers opportunities for enhanced transparency, public engagement, and data-driven reporting, it also presents challenges related to misinformation, data security, and ethical standards. Addressing these challenges is essential to uphold democratic values, promote media integrity, and ensure trust and free e-participation in electoral and judicial systems in the digital age.

Keywords: Media Digitization, Reportage of Elections, Judicial Decision, Credibility of Election Results, Nigeria.

Introduction

Digital media means producing web pages, social media platforms, music, video, and applications utilizing electronics (digital radio and smart television) and the internet to upgrade and disseminate information. (Indeed.com, 2022). Since the advent of the digitalisation of media, especially in technologically less developed countries such as Nigeria, there have been few human activities that are not in one way connected with,

influenced by, or involved in electronic data processing. (MacBride. S. et al. 1981, p.94). The implication is that we have what is called “information Explosion” This enhances the quality of data that can be stored, processed, analysed, and transmitted. Indubitably, the new trend has introduced innovative message dispersal and utilization methods across political communication as well as electioneering. Studies

on new media applications have shown that many people put in extra hour on digital platforms weekly (Lindgren, 2017). Branda, Mudhai, Tetey (2009), and Wasserman (2011) observe that the new media creates a form of 'celebratory Utopianism' rooted in the assumption and intensifies political and democratic participation across the country. Buttressing the above, Karekwaivanane and Msonza, (2021) noted that, widespread use of chat room such as; Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, have infiltrated every areas of living, inclusive of statesmanship. This interaction has resulted in widely available digital products and enlarge the number of community-created content that connect everyone, irrespective of geographic locus, level or expertise. (Rodny-Gumede, 2017). Hence, people worldwide are exposed mainly to various digital interactive devices that offer sufficient opening to engage in bureaucratic situation.

Koenane and Mangena (2017) noted that minority group always has actual power in most African countries, regardless of the structure of the government. This results from lack of engaged citizenry during political campaigns. Dieltiens, (2005) added that the citizens did not actually comprehend the implication of uninterested in politics because it will enable vote of no confidence to be passed to them. After assuming power, this however encourage some political figures have to implement "one-party state" style of government. Fanon (1963) highlighted the importance of multiparty politics as a genuine representation of representative government, contrasting it with a centralised system of governance. This perspective is widely supported in the Nigerian political party system. However, we operate a multiparty system, but in essence, one group of people who call themselves cabal syphon the political environment and determine whose turn to rule Nigeria instead of being democratic and transparent. That is why

Acemolu, D and Robinsing, J. A (2013) said in their book "Why Nations Fail" as a result of extracted budgetary and parliamentary misconduct. Supporting this argument, the intellectuals asserted that these extraction fail to provide the necessary motivation that encourages saving, investing, and innovating. This happens as a result of misuse of incumbency power towards safeguarding those that are enriched out of misappropriation of public funds. Consequently, the ruling class leverages their privilege to oppress the non-ruling group, whether economically or politically. Once in power, many African leaders have focused on maintaining their positions through intimidative political campaigns, leading to a restricted political environment."

However, in a way to cub some of these misconducts, election supervisory bodies globally adopted variable revolutions to enhance electoral conduct through the use of technology in the political process. In agreement with this innovation, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), since 2011, has strengthened Nigeria's electoral processes using technology (Ayeni & Esan, 2018; Bayode, 2022). Prior to this period, elections in Nigeria had been a thug of war because influential politicians high-jacked political seats and used them as their personal business. Some eyewitnesses will narrate cases of thuggery, stealing of ballot boxes, beating of electoral officers who refuse to comply with the invader's request and manipulation of ballot papers. Piccolino (2015) noted that about 25 sub-Saharan African Countries have adopted ICT apparatus for electioneering and fair voting procedure. To improve voter participation, judicial decisions and electoral credibility, the former president of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, in 2022 signed a new electoral Act that will encourage possibility of fair, free and translucent elections. Thus,



elector's verification was initiated to control the problem of over-voting and other irregularities. Recently, the institution of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS), election rigging and fraud will be checked by ensuring that accreditation is done using fingerprints or facial gestures before you can exercise your franchise. Immediately a qualified voter is verified, it automatically signals on the INEC central schema called the 'INEC Result Viewing' portal (IREV). It is linked to all BVAS at polling units, enabling INEC to view and collate results. This makes for trouble-free tracking and collation of the voters in a voting booth. Moreover, in the case of over voting, the result will be nullified because the IREV machine indicates the number of verified voters as well as the images of voting booth result sheet as recorded in form EC8A.

Scholars indicated that electoral malpractice weakens voters' confidence during electioneering worldwide. (Daxecter et al., 2019). Ahmed, U.E (2024) found out that BVAS accreditation has exterminated the issue of multiple franchise, increased participation and enhanced public participation and trust in the Nasarawa state of Nigeria. Despite the above findings, it is still uncertain whether media digitisation enhances electoral reportage, judicial decisions, and the credibility of election results in 2023 presidential referendum in Nigeria. Thus, the need for this study.

Objectives of study

The objectives of the study are to:

Ascertain if journalists/ electoral officers use data-driven reporting techniques to transmit election results.

Analyse how digital technologies enhance credible election reportage and judicial decisions.

Determine if digital technologies encourage the masses to vote during elections.

Examine the challenges of data-driven reporting for journalists, electoral officers and policymakers in Nigeria.

Statement Research Problem

In the context of Nigeria, where elections play a pivotal role in shaping the nation's democratic processes, there exists a critical need to explore the impact of media digitisation on the reporting of electoral events. Specifically to investigate how Nigerian media organisations incorporate data journalism practices during the 25th February 2023 presidential elections. In the past, eyewitnesses narrated cases of thuggery, stealing of ballot boxes, beating of electoral officers who refused to comply with the invader's requests and manipulation of ballot papers, but recently, with the initiation of the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System BVAS and other digitised media, it is hoped that election rigging and fraud is checkmated by making sure that accreditation is done using fingerprint or facial gestures before you are allowed to vote. Scholars observed that BVAS accreditation has eradicated voting and double voting, increased participation, enhanced public belief, integrity and openness in the elective procedure. (Ayeni, T.P & Aweh, O.M (2023); Hammed, U.E (2024). In spite of the above records, it is still unresolved if digital technology has the capacity of curbing electoral fraud and affect free, transparent and credible electioneering that enhances national development. However, because of little written works on media digitisation in reporting elections, judicial decisions, and the credibility of election results in the Nigerian 2023 elections, the researcher was aroused to cover the gap. Specifically, to empirically ascertain if media digitisation enhances electoral reportage, judicial

decisions, and the credibility of election results in 2023 presidential referendum in Nigeria.

Media digitisation, reportage of elections, judicial decision and credibility of election results: understanding the synergy.

Media digitisation involves the process of data representation through broadcast media. This includes written work, sound, tape and images spread across the cyber space. It uses electronic devices such as computers, tablets and smart phones to market to potential clients and current customers (Rayburn, 2012). It is mainly marketed through websites, blogs and social media networks. In other words, digital media is any media in a digital format, that is, media that a computer can understand and work with. It gives room for collaborative and zestful participation, allowing prospects to captivate with the content, disseminate news and engage in online global village. Digital coverage during elections is pivotal in shaping democratic processes, fostering transparency, and ensuring informed citizen participation. As a cornerstone of democracy, the media serves as a conduit for information, public debate, and accountability. Voters depend on communication platforms such as print, electronic as well as on stream outlets to get updates concerning electoral choices. Moreover, the media acts as a bridge between political candidates, parties, and the electorate. It disseminates crucial information about candidates' policies, campaign promises, and track records. Media ensures transparency through live coverage and prevents electoral fraud and irregularities. However, emerging technology has transformed how messages and information are transmitted, making sharing easier by using social networking sites such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. (Morah & Uzochukwu, 2020; Okunna & Omenugha, 2012). Buttressing the above, social

networking sites give people the opportunity to connect, network, and display themselves. As a result, political manifestos and talk programs are disseminated via digital media platforms, increasing self-awareness and engaged online political engagement. By lowering the frequency of electoral fraud and inaccuracy, modern technology has enhanced the electoral process in Nigeria. Studies has demonstrated throughout time that social media platforms increase political participation. Facebook and WhatsApp were found to be widely used platforms for accessing information regarding politics. (Morah, Udeze, & Ekwenchi, 2019). Sumera, Zaeem, and Aaima (2020), found out that, electronic media increases adolescent's engagement, effectiveness in politics, as well as consciousness.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) has been in charge from 2011 and has strengthened Nigeria's electoral processes using technology (Ayeni & Esan, 2018; Bayode, 2022). The body introduced biometric voter registration systems in 2022, such as Smart Card Readers, Voter cards, optical mark recognition (OMR) systems, direct electronic recording devices, and electronic result transmission systems (IREV). To change the narrative of ballot box theft and multiple ballot tomb printing and minimise electoral fraud's reoccurrence (Vanguard, 2015). Nigerians are adamant that the results of the presidential election on February 25th should be uploaded to the BVAS and IReV computers. The former is a gadget that uses human facial recognition and thumbprint to authenticate and identify voters. Simultaneously, the latter provides assistance using an internet gateway which results from voting units and are uploaded, sent, and made publicly accessible for viewing. Scholars such as Ayeni, T.P and Aweh, O.M (2023) found that BVAS has increased election credibility and participation, ensuring equitable distribution of seats in the National Assembly,



hence promoting inclusivity and sustenance of democracy in the country. The implication is that BVAS accreditation has eliminated multiple voting, improved trust, integrity and transparency among citizens in the democratic system.

Addressing myriad of challenges faced by journalists / umpire of elections in using digitised media in nigeria

Journalists face many challenges during the elections. Some of these challenges include;

Ethical Dilemmas and Balancing Objectivity: Journalists strive for objectivity because election reporting can be emotionally charged. Balancing neutrality while covering political events is challenging because Journalists must verify information, avoid misinformation, and maintain professional integrity. This makes their work so sensitive that only emotional, non-biased people can handle it. (Oberiri, 2021)

Pressure and Deadlines: Elections unfold rapidly, and journalists face tight deadlines. Reporting accurately while racing against time is demanding since Journalists must stay alert and provide real-time updates.

Security Risks and Physical Threats: In some regions, journalists covering elections face threats from authorities, arbitrary detentions, and violence and emotional toll. (Abulkakbeer, 2022)

Limited Access to Information and Selective Transparency: Some candidates or parties restrict access to information to some Journalists. Also, some Politicians selectively release information, making it challenging to present a comprehensive picture of the election report.

On the other hand, the umpire of election in their circle faces some challenges, which include;

Humans operate BVAS and IReV technology, so unscrupulous people can always defeat whatever

is in the devices. Technology does not operate in a vacuum. Nigeria doesn't have sufficient capability for total deployment of uncompromised technology.

Nigeria requires robust networking and speedy technology. Whereas most advanced countries have presently transitioned to 5G, certain regions of Nigeria remain on 3G wireless networks. Additionally, internet access is required in the majority of Nigerian regions. Thus, using technology to organize voting within Nigeria remains a difficult task. For this reason, INEC was unable to send results in real time.

The late delivery of supplies to certain polling places and the insufficient education of temporary employees to use the biometric devices demonstrate the need for further planning. Each of these limits the impact of the elections.

During the Isoko South Election, it was noted that a few voter photographs were not downloaded into the BVAS during configuration. Other challenges include BVAS's inability to display accredited voter data because of poor quality of voter registration images; it was impossible to match the voter's image to the register; Facial authentication requires enough lighting focused on the voter's face when capturing their image; the device had trouble authenticating facial and fingerprint data for older individuals, especially those who registered in 2011; It also failed to identify people with significantly changed facial traits, like those who had no facial hair upon registration but now do, the gadget failed to authenticate them (Premium Times, 2023).

The inability to distinguish identical twins was reported by The Cable (2023) in Adamawa State, Nigeria. The BVAS denied the accreditation of the other twin, resulting in only one person exercising voting rights.

Despite having their details on BVAS, many eligible voters were disenfranchised because they needed help to produce their PVCs. In addition, high user traffic on Election Day caused challenges with accessing the IReV portal due to the website's low capacity.

Furthermore, many staff members reported difficulties submitting scanned election results to the site during the election. INEC then claimed IReV experienced technical glitches, as The Guardian (2023) and Olubajo (2023) reported. It was equally observed that some of the results published by the INEC IReV at the Nigerian general election of 2023 election did not match the actual results from the polling station. Human faces and mutilated results were seen on the portal (Olubajo, 2023; Daily Post, 2023).

In summary, election reporting demands resilience, ethical decision-making, and adaptability. Journalists and umpires of elections perform a vital role in educating citizens as well as safeguarding democratic processes despite their multifaceted challenges.

Empirical review

Hammed, U.E (2024) Impact of Biomodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) on Election Integrity in Nasarawa state. With an emphasis on the elections of 2023, the study looks at how the Biomodal Voters Accreditation System (BVAS) affects election integrity in the Nigerian state of Nasarawa. The study's sample size was ninety respondents, and it used descriptive research design. The research employed the Technological Determinism theory, and the noteworthy discoveries demonstrated that BVAS accreditation has eliminate multiple voting, boosted voter turnout, raised citizen confidence in the electoral system, and improved accountability and reliability. In order to

minimize partisanship, the study suggests that electoral umpires should have autonomy.

Morah, Udeze, & Ekwenchi (2019). Online Engagements and Nigeria Polity: Exploring User's Reactions to Election Results on Facebook. Given the pre-election voting online news sites on social networks, the study's goals were to ascertain how Nigerians responded to election results on Facebook and whether Facebook had any influence on the outcome of the election. Additionally, to find out if traditional media was influenced by Facebook users' reporting during the time. 384 people made up the study's sample. The agenda-setting theory and technological determinism were accepted. Additionally, a survey research method was used. The noteworthy results demonstrated a strong usage of Facebook on mobile devices for political information, even though social media messaging did not impact the majority of respondents' vote choices. According to the report, people frequently use Facebook and WhatsApp to get political news and information.

Anyanwu & Orji (2020). Social Media and Political Participation among Residents of Southeast Nigeria. The effect of social media on political engagement in southeast Nigeria was the main focus of the research. They polled 385 people and based their findings on the Technological Determinism Theory. The results indicate that social media has benefited up to 70% of Southeast inhabitants. The report suggests that during and after elections, political figures, NGOs, INEC, stakeholders, and communication specialists should regularly use social media to mobilize electors.

Akindutire, S.A. & Oluwatosin, A. (2023). The Influence of Twitter on Youths Participation in 2023 Election in Nigeria. The survey employed Technological Determinism theory and used a sample size of 139 Twitter users. Utilizing



Google forms, data was gathered, and SPSS was used for analysis. Notably, 56% of the participants concurred that Twitter successfully aided and impacted the candidates they preferred. By contrast, 71% of Nigerian users said they rely on Twitter for election updates, and 39% of users think the platform helped them decide which candidate to support during the election season by giving people a forum to voice their opinions about global events.

Muswede, T. (2022). Impact of digital media on political campaigns towards disintermediated political communication in Africa. The study highlights how political communication has changed dramatically as a result of the emergence of digital media, shifting from conventional approaches to more adaptable and individualized platforms linked to digital citizenship. It also looks at the characteristics of African political campaigns and how they affect democratization. Information technology' role in societal transformation is explained by the theories of media richness and adaptive structuration. According to the article, unfettered access to a substitute sources of news can weaken established voices, promote new political awareness, increase political engagement, and guarantee the accuracy of political information before and after elections. This leads to disassociation in political campaigns. The study comes to the conclusion that digital media have drastically changed how African citizens participate in elections by giving them the ability to reshape their political landscape in a setting free from intermediaries.

Lawrence, O.O. & Adekunle, S. A (2023). Transparent Elections in Nigeria: An Assessment of the introduction of Electronic Voting (BVAS) in 2023 General Elections in Nigeria. Examining whether the election was free, fair, and transparent is the goal of the study. Technology

Advancement Theory (TAM), e-democracy theory, and Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) were examined in preparation for this work, with the IDT theory serving as the theoretical foundation. The qualitative research approach was used for this study. It was found that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) used the Bimodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria to introduce electronic voting (E-voting) and fortify the electoral process while reducing post-election turmoil. In the end, we came to the conclusion that BVAS was a useful invention and that INEC needed to continue and expand its use.

Ayeni, T.P and Aweh, O.M. (2023). Examining the Impact of Biomodal Voter Accreditation System (BVAS) as a Game Changer in Nigeria 2023 Elections. This essay looks at BVAS's operation, safeguards for a fair election, limitations, and potential suggestions for further elections. The voter accreditation process is quicker than SCR, according to the results. In order to guarantee a fair distribution of seats in the National Assembly and to uphold democracy in the nation, BVAS has enhanced election turnout. Technology is the solution to Nigeria's election malpractice, notwithstanding its shortcomings. Its advantages outweigh its disadvantages.

Theoretical framework

The Technology Acceptance Model and Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST) serve as the foundation for this investigation. The Technology Acceptance Model was developed by Fred (Davis, 1989; Bagozzi et al., 1992), as quoted in (Morah & Okunna, 2020). According to the concept, when consumers come across new technology, a number of factors affect their choices regarding when and how to utilize it. Basically, if a technology is useful and simple to use, people are more inclined to adopt it.



According to the hypothesis, people choose a new product over another because they believe it to be more useful and easy to use. In this study, the implication of the theory is that, individuals readily adapt new technology, which encourages and facilitates their participation in Nigerian politics.

Adaptive structuration theory (ast)

Giddens' (1984) Structuration Theory was modified by DeSanctis and Poole (1994) in order to better comprehend the function that information technology plays in social and organizational change. According to their view, through efficient control of data, sophisticated information technologies—such as social networking sites—promote multiparty engagement and ease information sharing within organizations. According to the thesis, technological innovations and society as a system are mutually reinforcing. Societies use information technologies to enhance interpersonal interaction and human connection. Systems and structures interact in a way that continually shapes and recreates one another through a process known as structuration. According to Rains and Bonito (2017), the Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST) emphasises the importance of technology utilisation, with users determining the information they get and how they react to it. Because of its capacity to analyze how new ICTs are used in society and how they are integrated into pre-existing roles, AST is important when it comes to studying digital media. Adaptive structuration theory holds that these media have the power to influence social change as they develop (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994). Digital (social) media, then, ought to be seen as social interaction tools that have permeated the postmodern world and profoundly impacted a number of societal spheres, including politics.

Methodology

To be precise, the researcher adopted a qualitative research design (in-depth interview). This design enables researcher to gather qualitative data concurrently and make use of the results to clarify a research issue. This approach guarantees data collecting accuracy and reliability (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011) Fifteen (15) respondents who are staff in NTA stations and INEC offices across the study area were sampled. This population is justified by InterQ (2024), which states that a minimum of ten (10) and above respondents is acceptable for conducting in-depth interview studies. The respondents were collected from Anambra, Enugu, and Imo in southeast Nigeria and a purposive method was employed. Here, three (3) respondents were chosen from NTA stations of each state under study, and two (2) respondents were selected from INEC staff in the study area. For this investigation, qualitative data were gathered using the in-depth interview guide. The interview guide was created using both types of structured open-ended questions. As a result, it permits response classification and gives room for follow up on issues that need more clarification.

Examination Of Data

The information produced for this investigation was analysed using the thematic qualitative analysis.

Findings

This section reports the summaries and recurring themes among the participants' answers to each question about media digitisation in reporting elections, judicial decisions, and the credibility of election results in Nigeria. An overall discussion of the results of seven (7) questions is summarised thus:

Q1: Do you use any media digitisation gadgets to report election results? All the participants that were involved in the study indicated that they use diverse media gadgets. The journalists among the participants said they use all the digital media outfits, including digital radio, smart TV, social media platforms, internet facilities and others. Some INEC officers said they transmit information using BVAS, IREV, card readers, and more, such as social media platforms and internet facilities.

Q2: Does digital media enhance the credibility of election results? All the respondents said YES that digital media enhances the credibility of election results.

Q3: If YES, in what ways do you think media digitisation makes election results credible? All the participants submitted that media digitisation reduces the cases of over voting, double voting, mutilation of form EC8A, snatching of ballot boxes, and accurate election result announcements.

Q4: Do you think media digitisation encourages the masses to vote during the election? All the respondents admitted that media digitisation encourages the masses to vote since they believe their vote counts, and it gives room for a more transparent and democratic election.

Q5: What is your disposition about media digitisation in election reportage and credibility? All the participants said they have a positive disposition toward media digitisation because it accounts for free, fair, and transparent elections.

Q6: What are the benefits and drawbacks of media digitisation in election credibility and reportage? Categorising their responses, all the participants indicated that media digitisation is convenient and efficient for communicating with

people worldwide, especially during elections through message exchanges and sharing of links, online social networks encourage learning. Thus, it fosters connections and creates awareness of different aspects by updating the masses with the real-time election results as they are uploaded in the INEC - IREV portal. Nevertheless, the disadvantages of using digital media are abound. First, professionalism controversy due citizen journalists or bloggers, post and share unverified election results via diverse social media platforms. This causes a kind of uproar when the INEC announces their own results. Second, sometimes, some of these gadgets get damaged; when this happens, most of the saved data might need to be retrieved more easily. Third, some dubious smart citizens can manipulate data saved in the gadgets. Finally, in most cases, card readers cannot read electorate cards, disfranchising the individual from voting.

Q7: How can all these challenges be ameliorated? Most participants suggested that the IReV portal bandwidth needs to be increased to handle the substantial voter base that might wish to access or post results to the website on Election Day. Secondly, every eligible voter should validate their statues physically at INEC offices or online at least three months before the election. Thirdly, the umpires of election must carefully adhere to the electoral legislation, particularly with regard to the immediate transmission of results, and the INEC staff, as well as their ad hoc workers must possess adequate training to operate the election machinery.

Discussion Of Findings

RQ1: Do journalists / electoral officers use data-driven reporting techniques in transmitting election results? In the in-depth interview guide, item one (1) was to answer this research question. The result showed that the participants positively affirmed awareness and media digitisation



exposure. The journalists said they use all digital media outfits, including digital radio, smart TV, social media platforms, internet facilities, etc. Some INEC officers said they are using BVAS, IREV, card readers, and more to transmit information. The finding conformed to Morah, Udeze, and Ekwenchi (2019), whose significant findings showed high mobile use of Facebook and WhatsApp for political information and news. Also, Akindutire, S.A. and Oluwatosin, A. (2023), twitter urged and influenced users to endorse a candidate throughout the election season as it provides opportunity for the masses to express their feelings on current events around the globe. Hammed, U.E (2024) significant findings revealed that BVAS accreditation has eradicated over voting and double voting, increased participation, enhanced public faith and assurance in the electoral process as well as enhanced integrity and openness. The findings imply that journalists and umpires of elections use digital gadgets to transmit information during the election period. Relating this to the Technology Acceptance Model on which this research was anchored, the electorates quickly adopt the new technology, improving and making it easier for them to get involved in Nigerian politics.

RQ2: Analyse how digital technologies enhance credible election reportage and judicial decisions. Items two (2) and three (3) in the interview guide were used to answer this research question. From the participant's responses, they said 'YES' that digital media enhances the credibility of election results. And when the researcher probes further to know how media digitisation makes for credible election reportage. All the participants submitted that media digitisation reduces the cases of over voting, double voting, mutilation of form EC8A, snatching of ballot boxes, and accurate election result announcements. This finding aligns with the outcome of Lawrence, O.O & Adegunle, S. A.

(2023), who found that INEC's use of BVAS strengthens the electoral process and minimises the post-election crisis. Also, Hammed, U.E (2024) aligned with the study's conclusions that BVAS accreditation has eliminated double and excessive voting, raised participation, raised public faith in the electoral process, and promoted integrity and openness.

RQ3: Do digital technologies encourage the masses to vote during elections? Items four (4) and five (5) in the interview guide were used to answer this research question. The result showed that all the participants affirmed that media digitisation encourages the masses to vote since they believe their vote counts. It gives room for a more transparent and democratic election. When asked the fifth question, the responses from the masses show that they have a positive disposition about media digitisation because it accounts for free, fair and transparent elections. The outcome of this study is in line with the submission of Ayeni, T.P and Aweh, O.M (2023), who found out that BVAS has increased election participation, ensuring equitable distribution of seats in the National Assembly, hence promoting inclusivity and sustenance of democracy in the country. Also, the outcome of Muswede, T. (2022) study concurred with the outcome of this study that the way the African electorate participates in politics has been drastically altered by digital media, which has also had a cascading effect on its capacity to enable citizens to redefine their perception of political space in a disintermediated setting.

RQ4: What are the challenges of data-driven reporting for journalists, electoral officers and policymakers in Nigeria? Items six (6) and seven (7) in the interview guide were used to answer this research question. Categorising their responses, all the participants indicated that media digitisation is convenient and efficient for



communicating with people worldwide, especially during elections. Through messaging one another and sharing resources, links, and information, online social networks encourage learning. Thus, it fosters connections and creates awareness of different aspects by updating the masses with the real-time election results as they are uploaded in the INEC- IREV portal.

However, there are a lot of drawbacks to utilizing digital media. First, problem with professionalism arises because citizen journalists or bloggers post and share unverified election results via diverse social media platforms. This causes a kind of uproar when the INEC announces the results. Second, sometimes, some of these gadgets get spoiled; when this happens, most of the data saved in them might not be retrieved easily. Third, some dubious smart citizens can manipulate data saved in the gadgets. In most cases, card readers cannot read electorate cards, which disfranchises the individual from voting. When asked the seventh question, how can all these challenges be ameliorated? The participants suggested that the IReV portal bandwidth needs to be increased to cater for the substantial voter base that might wish to access or upload results to the website on Election Day. Secondly, every eligible voter should validate their statuses physically at INEC offices or online at least three months before the election. Thirdly, the umpires of election needs to adhere to the electoral rules, particularly when it comes to transmitting results instantly, and the INEC personnel, as well as their ad hoc workers, needs to be well-versed in using the election machinery. Lawrence, O.O & Adekunle, S. A. (2023) support the findings of this study and conclude that BVAS was a commendable invention and that INEC must sustain as well as improve its usage. Also, Hammed, U.E (2024) concurred and supports the electoral umpires' independence in order to avoid political interference.

Also, the Technology Acceptance Model's theoretical assumption supports this study's outcome. According to the model, when consumers are introduced with new technology, a number of factors influence their individual choices regarding when and how to use it. It is implied that a person is more likely to make use of a specific technology if they find it useful and easy to use. According to the technology acceptance model used in this study, individuals easily adopt new technology that improves and makes it easier for them to participate in Nigerian politics.

Nevertheless, Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST) Suggests that advanced information technologies, like social networking sites, encourage the involvement of several parties in the society and make it easier for information regarding organisational activities to be shared by using effective data handling. In this study, Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST) supports the findings, as the public acknowledged that new digital technology enhances political participation and credibility.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this empirical study aims to shed light on the relationship between election reporting, media digitization, and the validity of election outcomes in Nigeria. It offers policymakers and journalists insightful information. The following conclusions were reached in light of the responses to the study questions and the findings of the in-depth interview: the participants used media digitisation for reportage of election results, the digitised media was found credible by the participant, it was also discovered that the electorates have a positive disposition towards digitised media and irrespective of the challenges, there rooms for improvement which include; IReV portal bandwidth needs to be



increased in order to handle the electorate that want to view or upload results to the portal on Election day and the umpires of election must follow the electoral law and media law and ethics closely, when it comes to transmitting the election outcomes in actual time. Hence, it is crucial to assert that the deployment of the BVAS has significantly enhanced the electoral process during the 2023 general election in Nigeria by facilitating the establishment of a free, fair and democratic society.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDIA ORGANISATIONS, JOURNALISTS, AND POLICYMAKERS:

In summary, media organisations must adapt to the digital era while upholding journalistic integrity. By investing in training, embracing data-driven approaches, and maintaining ethical standards, they can enhance their credibility and contribute to informed democratic processes in Nigeria.

Media organisations should prioritise training programs for journalists, especially in data journalism and digitisation.

Media organisations should leverage digital platforms (websites, social media, and mobile apps) to disseminate election-related content.

Media organisations play a crucial role in countering false narratives.

Media organisations should collaborate with election monitoring bodies (such as INEC and the Judiciary) to reach a compromise between credible and timely results.

RECOMMENDATIONS The following recommendations were made:

Nigerian government should upgrade to a 5g network to avoid network problems during elections.

The government should encourage the independence of the judiciary.

The media should be given full surveillance rights as society's fourth estate realm.

The umpires of election should be allowed to do their work without pressure.

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