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## 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.

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### 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 & Klemmensen, 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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were 200,000 Internet users in Nigeria in the year 2000 i.e., 0.1% of the country's population. By June 2011, the number had grown to 45,039,711 i.e., 26.5% of the country's population. In 2013, the number of Internet users was 57,735,862 and by June 2015, the number has hit 92,699,924 (51.1% of the country's population) (Internet World Stats, 2016).

Despite the expeditious means of reaching political decision-makers that online political participation or e-democracy offer, the sustainability and users' acceptance of online public participation remains a difficult task notwithstanding the numerous cases of e-participation project initiated by different actors in different context (Sæbø, Rose, & Flak, 2008; Panagiotopoulos & Al-Debei, 2010). Furthermore, previous authors have argued that the problem of digital divide resulting from citizens' unequal access, lack of proper infrastructure and low adoption of technology have been argued to limit the perceived benefits of e-participation in developing countries (Rheingold, 2000; OECD, 2001; OECD, 2003b; Rodousakis & Mendes dos Santos, 2008). The question now is, what are the factors influencing citizen's intention and actual use of e-democracy platforms?

This paper investigates inherent individual (attitude) enablers and barriers to participation in e-democracy. A research model was developed using a combination of information system (IS) theory and political participation theory. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) from the IS domain and Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) from political participation domain are found appropriate to the study of individual's intention to adopt e-democracy in resource poor setting. TRA helps to predict user's behavioral intention and CVM helps to identify the socioeconomic factors underlining civic engagement. Political ideology variable was introduced into the model to have a conclusive individual's behavioral factors.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows; Section 2 provides the theoretical background, research model and hypotheses of the research. Section 3 presents the research method and Section 4 reports the analysis of data and research findings. Section 5 includes some discussion and implication for practice while Section 6, conclusions and limitations of the study.

## 2. Literature review

The study of citizens' political participation has, over the years, remained germane in political discourse and scholars of political participation have developed several theories with the intention of explaining why some individuals participate in politics whereas others do not (Sanchez, 2006; Fung, 2015). Some of these theories include civic culture, Robert Dahl's Theory of Polyarchal Democracy, the standard model of political participation originated by Verba and Nie (1972), rational actor theory (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 2000), Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995), etc.

In the same vein, numerous research works have been conducted to study users' acceptance of e-government application, though most of them focus on e-government services. In their attempt to consider effective communication among democratic actors, Maher and Krimmer (2005) proposed a Social Media Politics (SMP) model which accounts for continuous cycle of political communication between democratic actors, and the media in the political sphere. Carter (2006) developed a framework of technology enabled political participation to investigate the adoption of Internet voting (i-voting) in the U.S. The study however, did not provide in-depth consideration of political participation theories which is where political behavior is rooted. Kollmann and Kayser (2010) investigated factors accounting for citizen engagement in innovative e-democracy in Germany using a combination of information system acceptance theory and political participation theory.

The above literature reveal that gaps still exist as to what factors influence users' acceptance and use of technology in participatory democracy especially in the developing nations of the world. Most existing works available in literature were carried out in developed nations

like Germany, Canada, USA, etc., where technology is more available and democratic system is more stable than in the African nations. Furthermore, prior studies have not examined the influence of political culture on the acceptance and use of e-participation. The objective of this study, therefore, is to evaluate the inherent individual (attitude) enablers and barriers to participate in e-democracy in developing countries. In the next section, we present a review of theories that form theoretical foundation for investigating factors that inhibit or enable e-democracy using Nigeria as a case study. While reviewing the models, hypotheses were formulated based on these theories to validate proposed theoretical assumptions.

### 2.1. Theory of Reason Action (TRA)

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) is one of the most influential theories used by information system (IS) researchers to study users' acceptance behavior and to identify critical factors in deriving the full benefits of information technology (Venkatesh, Morris, Davis, & Davis, 2003). The theory suggests that the attitude towards behavior and subjective norms will determine intention to perform behavior thus, making it to be behavioral intention, rather than attitudes, that determines actual behavior. TRA is intended to predict the behavior in situation(s) where an individual controls his own behavior and he is thoughtful about it. Bagozzi (1982) describes TRA as an intuitive, parsimonious, and insightful model having ability to explain behavior. TRA proposes that individual behavior is influenced by the tendency towards that behavior (Behavioral Intention, BI) whereby BI is formed through a combination of two variables: attitude towards behavior (Attitude, A) and Subjective Norm (SN). TRA, in addition, has been used to predict different behaviors (Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988).

The TRA is a general model and as such, does not specify the beliefs that are operative for a particular behavior (Davis, 1989) unlike Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Thus, a researcher using the TRA must first identify the beliefs that are salient for participants regarding the behavior under investigation. This gives the researcher the opportunity to really dig deep into the research domain for potential factors influencing users' behavioral attitude in the domain. A fundamental requirement of the TRA is that behavior must be under volitional control (Yousafzai, Foxall, & Pallister, 2010). TRA is therefore good for prediction. Based on these justifications, TRA becomes our first choice model for this research. Section 3 considers the variables of TRA in detail.

### 2.2. The Civic Voluntarism Model

A theory that is widely used in political behavior research is the theory of Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) proposed by Verba, Schlozman, & Brady (1995). The focus of CVM is to establish certain "pre-requisites" of civic participation, i.e. to understand why people want to engage in political participation. In order to achieve its focus, CVM probed into the empirically validated socio-economic status (SES) model by Verba and Nie (1972) and combines it with the tenets of rational choice theory (Verba et al., 2000).

Verba et al. (1995) argue that the SES model is relatively weak in its theoretical underpinnings, because it does not provide a rationale for the connection between socio-economic variables and participation. On the other hand, rational choice theory has not been a good predictor of political participation though its basic logic that the decision to participate is dependent on a self-interested cost and benefit calculation cannot be neglected completely since they are real costs to participation (Verba et al., 1995). Civic Voluntarism Model provides a more comprehensive approach and insight to understanding why people engage in political participation by incorporating the resource variables. Verba et al. (1995) argue that available resources are coherent theoretical explanation of the connection of socio-economic status and participation.

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