TEXT MESSAGES AS SOURCES OF POLITICAL NEWS AMONG STUDENTS IN ZARIA AND ILORIN

By

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Abstract
The popularity of mobile phones in Nigeria makes it an important medium for delivering information. More than 99 million people use the mobile phone, which is more than half the population of the country. Most of these people will increasingly receive information, news and other media content in form of text messages through their mobile phones. A significant number of this population are youths majority whom are students. Unfortunately, most use this service for interpersonal communication alone rather than receive political news. Thus, against the backdrop of previous research findings that the application of text messages is increasing as a means of communication in Nigeria, this research assessed the use and acceptability of text messages as a channel of political news dissemination among students in Zaria and Ilorin. Thus, selected students were surveyed and a questionnaire was used to elicit responses from a sample of 291 from the two towns. Using simple percentages for analysis, findings revealed that text messages as a means of disseminating political news to students was acceptable and will succeed if adopted by traditional mass media houses.

Key Words: Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM); Political News,Youths, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), TechnologyAcceptance Model (TAM) and Text Messages.

Background to the Study

The emergence of new communication technologies heralds a new era in communication of all kinds. However, uncertainty and speculation still surround their potentials and the nature of their impact. Questions and arguments abound as to whether these new technologies hold positive or negative consequences for society.

These questions are particularly of interest to the field of mass communication because it has always required technology to broaden its reach and expand its influence. From primitive to modern societies, the story of mass communication has been that of changes brought about by improvements in technology (Mbachu, 2003). These new technologies have revolutionized information gathering, processing, storage, retrieval and transmission, making information available ever more widely, rapidly and affordably. They have direct impact on the manner in which the media receive their information, prepare it and distribute it globally. The Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM) is one of these technologies.

GSM came to Nigeria in January 2001 shortly after Olusegun Obasanjo was voted into power as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This marked a watershed in the history of communications in the country. Since this experience, which is popularly referred to as the "GSM Revolution", mobile phones have become a popular interactive technology in Nigeria, offering both young and old opportunities to communicate through voice and text messages. However, in spite of the fact that voice calls are common, text messaging has become a popular means of communication because it is cost effective and it affords the users the opportunity to define themselves stylistically in this novel context (Taiwo, 2010).

Text messaging, also known as Short Message Service or SMS for short, is one of the subscriber services offered by the GSM operators. Branston and Stafford (2006) point out that SMS is a service available on most digital mobile phones that permits the sending of short messages between mobile phones, other handheld devices and even landiine telephones. It was originally designed as part of the GSM digital mobile phone standard, but now available on a wide range of networks, including 3G networks.

This phenomenon is so significant that Ganiyu and Akinreti (2011), citing Drugmore, claim that"... the bedrock of mobile media technology in Africa today is the Short Message Service (SMS). This can be seen in Nigeria where, already, some newspapers are offering services via the SMS " (p. 132). Possibly, the introduction of mobile news might be considered as one of the most innovative techniques to increase news dissemination especially to students. However, its use has not been fully explored.

Notably, the process of newsgathering and reporting has changed all over the world because of innovations in technology. GSM is the latest communication technology that has shaped and is still shaping the process of news gathering and reporting under the current democratic dispensation in the country (Popoola, 2003). Thus as noted by Gapsiso and Wilson (2009), it is obvious that mobile phone and other ICTs have transformed information gathering, processing and dissemination. However, some of these technologies like the internet and sophisticated mobile phones are a relatively new dimension of information gathering and dissemination, especially in a developing country like Nigeria where these technologies have not gained ground as it is in developed countries like the USA, Britain, Germany, France, etc.
Since its invention, the telephone has always been a useful tool for the journalist. Even in the days when it could only be found in offices or in a few elite homes, it was an important feature of any newsroom, which journalists used not only to file and receive stories, but also to get in touch with contacts, or to get tips from contacts who would phone in to the newsroom with important news tips or breaking stories (Ganiyu & Akinreti, 2011).

For this reason, the advent of mobile phone has revolutionized not only how journalists use the telephone to get news but also how media audiences receive or access the news. Today, the mobile phone is a multimedia tool used for multimedia and online journalism. It is no longer a simple mechanism for sending and receiving voice messages as the fixed landline was. Just as one can receive and send voice, text and data on mobile phones, so also has its uses changed in journalism.

These changes are important as perceived in some statements like one made by Vartan Gregorian, the President of Carnegie Corporation of New York. He discerns that journalism has

come to a crossroad, a time in history when it cannot continue as it was. There are too many new ways through which news is delivered and so much information being communicated (Brown, 2006). Thus, there is a real need for journalists to use new approaches to news distribution in Nigeria, especially to students. Text messages are believed to be one of these new approaches.

Students have been known to adopt unconventional practices and SMS breaks away from the conventional means of news *transmission available in Nigeria* today. However, an outright assumption that they will embrace SMS as a new form of political news dissemination will be erroneous. Hence, this study looked at the acceptability of this new phenomenon to youths.

Statement of the Problem

According to Brown (2006), the practice of journalism is changing in ways that challenge the historic function of the news business and raise fundamental questions about the practice of the profession in future. He maintains:

> There is a dramatic revolution taking place in the news business todayand it isn't about TV anchor changes, scandals at storied newspapers orembedded reporters. The future course of news, including the basicassumptions about how we consume news and information and makedecisions in a democratic society are being altered by technology -perceptive young people no longer wedded to traditional news outletsor even accessing news in traditional ways (Brown 2006, pp.42-55)

In line with Brown's statement, Mindich (2004) explained that, what has changedis that young people globally no longer see a need to keep up with the news. Inshort, the future of the news industry is threatened by the movement of youngpeople away from traditional sources of news. This is evident in a survey of youthslaunched by Carnegie Corporation of New York and carried out by Frank N, MagidAssociates in May 2004. The goal was to assess where youths get their newstoday and how they think they will access news in the future. One of the majorfindings of the survey of news-related habits of the demographic age of youths isthat there are fundamental changes driven by technology and market forces. Dataindicate that this segment of the population intends to continue to increase theiruse of the internet/ new media as a primary news source in the coming years.Newspapers and national television broadcast news fared poorly with the youths(Connell, 2006). Though the scenarios above might seem dated, there are strongindications this trend is still the same today.

The survey above is just one out of many examples of research that show the seeming lack of interest in traditional news sources by youths. Hence, given this state of affairs with the negative consequences on political awareness of youths and widespread availability of GSM, a research on the viability of text messaging as a source of news to students in Zaria and Ilorin is important. This necessitates a study of this nature. Moreover, Elvis (2009) asserts that mobile phone SMS service has developed rapidly since its introduction and is very popular throughout the world, especially amongst young urbanites (most of whom are students) as it allows for voiceless communication, useful in noisy environments.

Research Objectives

In view of the aforementioned, this article's major objectives are to:

1. To ascertain if students in Zaria and Ilorin own or have access to mobile phones.
2. To examine if students are aware of text messages as a channel of news dissemination.
3. To determine the opinion of students in Zaria and Ilorin on news dissemination through text messages.
4. To determine the preference of students on source of political news.

Research Questions

1. What are the levels of access to mobile phones by students in Zaria and Ilorin?
2. To what extent are students aware of GSM text messages as a channel of news?
3. What is the opinion of students on use of text messages as a channel of political news?
4. To what extent do students prefer text messages over traditional mass media as channel of political news?

Theoretical Background/Framework

The research which provide the basis for this article is anchored on the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). This model was used because it best represents essential features of this research. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is an information systems theory that models how users come to accept and use a technology. The model suggests that when users are presented with a new technology, a number of factors influence their decision about how and when they will use it, notably:

- **Perceived usefulness (PU)**- the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance.
- **Perceived ease-of-use (PEOU)** - the degree to which a person believes that "using a particular system would be free from effort.

TAM was developed by Davis F. D in 1986 and deals more specifically with the prediction of the acceptability of an information system. As mentioned earlier, the purpose of this model is to predict the acceptability of a tool and to identify the modifications which must be brought to the system in order to make it acceptable to users. This model suggests that the acceptability of an information system is determined by two main factors: 'perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use (http//www.istheory.yorku.co/technologyacceptancemodel).

In addition, the Technology Acceptance Model postulates that the use of an information system is determined by the behavioral intention, which is itself dependent upon the person's attitude towards the use of the system and also his perception of its utility. According to Davis, the attitude of an individual is not the only factor that determines his use of a system, but is also based on the impact which it may have on his performance. Below is an illustration of the model as put forward by Davis:

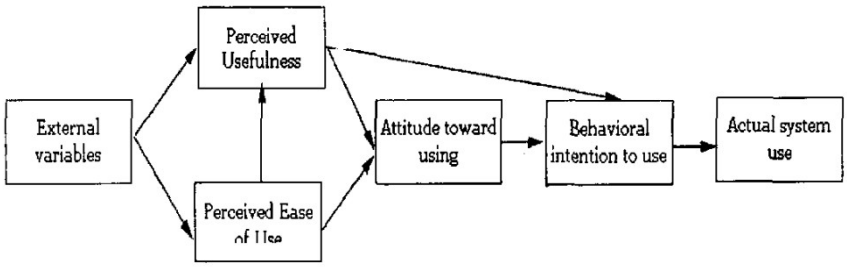

Figure I: Technology Acceptance Model by Davis

The fact that GSM, the platform upon which text messages operates, is a new medium makes TAM an ideal model for this research. Bagozzi, Davis and Warshaw note that:

> Because new technologies such as personal computers are complexand an element of uncertainty exists in the minds of decision makerswith respect to the successful adoption of them, people formattitudes and intentions toward trying to learn to use the newtechnology prior to initiating efforts directed at using. Attitudestowards usage and intentions to use may be ill-formed or lackingin conviction or else may occur only after preliminary strivings tolearn to use the technology evolve. Thus, actual usage may not bea direct or immediate consequence of such attitudes and intentions.(http//www.istheory.yorku.co/technologyacceptancemodel)

Bertrand and Bouchard (2008) further explained that, since the mid 70's, variousresearchers have been interested in factors that explain or predict the use of differenttechnologies. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) represents one of theexplanatory models having most influenced the theories of human behaviour. TheTAM was specifically developed with the primary aim of identifying thedeterminants involved in computer acceptance in general; secondly, .to examine a variety of information technology usage behaviors; and thirdly, to provide a parsimonious theoretical explanatory model.

This research is more adapted to the second reason (which is to examine a variety of information technology usage), because text message news service is one of the ways in which information technology usage can be examined. Although the use of text messages to disseminate news is a new phenomenon in journalism practice, its ease of use by the audience will eventually determine its success. To buttress this further, earlier research on the diffusion of innovations also suggested a prominent role for perceived ease of use. Tornatzky & Klein (1982) cited in Bertrand and Bouchard (2008) analyzed the adoption finding that compatibility, relative advantage, and complexity had the most significant relationships with adoption across a broad range of innovation types.

It is interesting to note that the research presented by Davis to validate his model, demonstrates that the link between the intention to use an information system and perceived usefulness is stronger than perceived ease of use. According to this model, we can therefore expect that the factor which influences a user the most is the perceived usefulness of a tool. This model suggests that the acceptability of an information system is determined by two main factors: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perhaps this is what is happening in the media world today. The PU and PEU of new media, of which GSM text messages is a part could account for the ease of adoption of new media rather than traditional mass media.

Corroborating this, (www.fmdarticles.com/p/articles/mi_zdewk/is_200405/ ai_n9519940) indicates that, International editors and publishers have warned that nontraditional communications- such as cell phone text messages- are rapidly outflanking radio, television, and print media because of their immediacy and proximity to the public. This may explain why Elvis (2009) gives notes to the fact that, the mobile phone SMS service has developed rapidly since its introduction. It is very popular throughout the world, especially amongst young urban dwellers as it allows for voiceless communication, useful in noisy environments.

Thus, since the purpose of TAM is to predict the acceptability of a tool (GSM text messages) and to identify the modifications which must be brought to the system in order to make it acceptable to users (students of Federal College of Education, (FCE), Zaria and College of Health Sciences, University of Ilorin), the acceptability of an information system (using text messages as a channel to transmit political news to students) will be determined by two main factors: perceivedusefulness and perceived ease of use, which this channel (GSM text messages)possesses.

GSM as an ICT Tool

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are generally perceived as basic tools for making and sustaining relevance in modern society. Their unprecedented impact today has left every profession exploring ways to appropriately use them in their various professional endeavours. Journalists, like other professionals have found mobile phones and other ICTs relevant for their professional practices of information gathering, processing and dissemination (Gapsiso and Wilson, 2009).

The mobile phone is one of the numerous ICT breakthroughs in Nigeria. A mobile phone (also known as cell phone, wireless phone or cellular telephone) is a short range, electronic device used for mobile voice or data communication over a network of specialized base stations known as cell sites. In Nigeria, these mobile phones are popularly called Global System for Mobile Communication (GSM). However, GSM is the globally accepted standard for digital cellular communication (http:// www.iec.org). It is the name of a standardization group established in 1982 to create a common European mobile telephone standard that would formulate specifications for a pan-European mobile cellular radio system operating at 900MHz.

Today, Global System for Mobile Communications is the most popular standard for mobile telephony systems in the world. The GSM association in promoting industry trade organization of mobile phone carriers and manufacturers estimates that 80% of the global mobile market uses the standard (www.gsmworld.com/ newsroon/market-data).The GSM is used by over 4.3 billion people across more than 212 countries and territories (www.gsmworld.com/about/index). Its prevalence enables international roaming arrangements between mobile phone operators provides subscribers the use of their phones in many parts of the world. Undoubtedly, it can be said that GSM is popular globally. Acknowledging this fact, Jain (as cited in Gapsiso and Wilson, 2009) writes, “the mobile phone is rapidly becoming an important device- the one device that seems to have it all and likely to become even more indispensable than it is now” (p. 106). This could be due to the numerous services it offers to subscribers. In addition to the standard voice function of a mobile phone, current mobile phones may support many additional services and accessories, such as Short Message Service (SMS) for text messages, email, packet

switching for access to the internet, game, blue tooth, infrared, camera with video recorder and Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) for sending and receiving photos and videos.

GSM differs from its predecessor technologies in that both signaling and speech channels are digital, and thus GSM is considered a second-generation (2G) mobile phone system. This also facilitates the widespread implementation of data communication applications into the system (www.prenewswire.com/cgi-bin/ stories).

However, according to Tiamiyu (2010), GSM had moved from 2G to 2.5G and now 3G network. The 2.5G is a stepping stone between 2G and 3G cellular wireless technologies. 2.5G systems were introduced to enhance the data capacity of GSM and mitigate some of the limitations imposed by 2G Network. The term "second and half generation" is used to describe 2.5G - systems that have implemented a packet switched domain in addition to the circuit switched domain. It does not necessarily provide faster services, because bundling of tie slots is used for circuit switched data as well. 2.5G provides some of the benefits of 3G and can use some of the existing 2G infrastructure in GSM networks.

The third generation of mobile phone systems is the 3Q they provide both a packet switch and a circuit-switched domain from the beginning. It requires a new access network, different from that already available in 2G systems. 3G wireless cellular phones include digital speech plus high-speed data and global roaming.

Currently, there is an improvement on the 3G network with the introduction of 4G. In telecommunications, 4G is the "fourth generation" of cellular wireless standards. It is a successor to the 3G and 2G families of standards. In 2008, the ITU-R organization specified the International Mobile Telecommunications Advanced (IMT-Advanced) requirements for 4G standards, setting peak speed requirements for 4G service at 100 Mbit/s for high mobility communication (such as from trains and cars) and 1 Gbit/s for low mobility communication (such as pedestrians and stationary users). A 4G system is expected to provide a comprehensive and secure all-IP based mobile broadband solution to laptop computer wireless modems, smart phones, and other mobile devices. Facilities such as ultra-broadband Internet access, IP telephony, gaming services, and streamed multimedia may be provided to users.

The ubiquity of implementation of the GSM standard has been an advantage to both consumers, who may benefit from the ability to roam and switch carriers without replacing phones, and to network operators, who can choose equipmentfrom many GSM equipment vendors (www.focus.ti.cin/does/pr). GSM also pioneered *low-cost implementation of the Short'*Message Service (SMS), also called text messaging, which has since befin supported on other mobile phone standards as well.

Text Messaging and Political News **Dissemination**

Text messaging refers to the exchange of brief written messages between fixed-line phone or mobile phone and fixed or portable devices over a network. The sender of a text message is known as a texter, while the service itself has different colloquialisms depending on the region: it may simply be referred to as a text in North America and texto in Australia, text in the United Kingdom, and Short Message Service (SMS) in most of Europe, Nigeria, Middle East and Asia. Nevertheless, irrespective of the name used to refer to the concept, in straight and concise

definition, “Text Messaging” by mobile phones should include all 26 letters of the alphabet and 10 numerals, i.e. alphanumeric messages or text to be sent by texter or received by textee (http://www.urbandictionary.com/ define. php?term=textee).

Political news via text messages are messages sent by news organizations on any newsworthy items about any political event, announcement or news relating to civic administration by government. Examples of such messages are “Cross River to prepare budget in local languages”, “/reported Otedola’s bribe to police and EFCC in April - Farouk Lawan”, “Abdulsalami Abubakar soldier for democracy” all in *Daily Trust;* “Subsidy probe: Alleged bribery must not stop implementation of report- ACN”*Vanguard Newspapers;* “Adegbite, Ikuforiji, Mamora, others wants FG to declare June 12 national holiday”*Vanguard Newspapers;* “ICC visits its detainees in Libya” BBC News.

There is no gainsaying the fact that text messaging has had a major impact on the political world. It has helped in making citizens aware of what is going on around them and beyond, a typical example is the voters’ registration in the 2011 general election in Nigeria. Looking abroad, the American government for example, found that text messaging is a much easier, cheaper way of getting citizens to be politically conscious than the door to door approach. In Spain, a massive texting campaign was credited with boosting youth turnout in Spain’s 2004 parliamentary elections (www.huliq.com). This may indicate that adopting this form of news dissemination may be an advantage to the Nigerian media and also in the long run the political system.

Major Users of Text Messages

The mobile phone SMS service has developed rapidly since its introduction. It is very popular throughout the world, especially amongst young urbanites as it allows for voiceless communication, and it is useful in noisy environments (Elvis, 2009). This is not unexpected because, since the invention of the mobile phonetechnologies, several studies have been conducted on the use of this technology by different demographics. These researchers have identified several users of the mobile phone. However, the most prominent of these users are the youths.

In a research conducted by the Pew Research Center in America, findings reveal that cell-phone texting has become the preferred channel of basic communication between teens and their friends, with cell calling a close second. This service has become an indispensable tool in teen communication patterns with 88 percent of teen cell phone users being text ‘messagers’. **One in** three teens sends more than 100 text messages a day, or 3000 texts a month. Among all teens, their frequency of use of texting has now overtaken the frequency of every other common form of interaction with their friends. Fully two-thirds of teen texters say they are more likely to use their cell phones to text their friends than talk to them by cell phone (http://people-press.org/report/444/news-media).

This scenario is not different in Nigeria. The younger generation of Nigerians, like elsewhere in the world, can also be described as “the thumb tribe”, a generation of people skilled in the manipulation of the phone and computer keys with their fingers, especially the thumb. The popularity of SMS has created a forum for Nigerian youths to articulate themselves in fighting all forms of injustices, monitoring political activities and building social relationships (Taiwo, 2010). Young people, especially teenagers, have been identified as the driving force behind the

popularity of SMS. Their ability to explore and play about with the use of language makes texting very attractive to them.

A growing body of work with teens in other locations finds a common pattern of mobile phone use in other countries. Text messaging appears as a uniquely teen - inflected form of mobile communication, in that it is lightweight, less intrusive, less subject to peripheral monitoring, inexpensive, and enables easy contact with a spatially distributed peer group.

In the words of Branston and Starford (2006), 'texting' is the most popular phone service for 'teens'- to the dismay of service providers who hope to sell much more lucrative services. A report on texting by teens worldwide was used as the basis for an article in The *Guardian* by Natalie Hanman (9 June 2005). The report included some interesting facts and figures:

> Much to the dismay of operators keen to see early adopters of mobile technology hooked on more lucrative functions, such as picture messaging (MMS), mobile music and mobile internet ,teenagers are keeping things simple- and cheap.... *(The Guardian* 9th June 2005)

From the aforementioned, it is evident that the major users of text messages are youths in which a sizeable population of students could also be found. Hence, using this same text messages to reach them on such important issues as political news may not be out of place.

The New Media Migration: A Revolution in News and in Public Discourse

The dramatic shift in how young people access news raises a question about how flow of information will interact in the years ahead. Not only is a large segment of the population moving away from traditional news institutions, but there has also been an explosion of alternative news sources. Some have been assembled by traditional news organizations delivering information in print, on television on the radio as well as via the internet and mobile devices. Others include the thousands of blogs created by journalists, activists and citizens at large.

International editors and publishers have warned that nontraditional communications- such as cell phone text messages- are rapidly outflanking radio, television, and print media because of their immediacy and proximity to the public. (www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_zdewk/is_200405/ai_n9519940). Rodman (2010) agrees "...headlines are now delivered to cell phones and handheld computers through RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds, each of which contains a description and link to the related web page" (p. 118).

Similarly, CBS News President, Andrew Heyward writes "...how news executives today deal with the ways news is consumed, in the form of an image here, an instant message there, a cell phone text message headline or a web portal story, will say a great deal about the future of news as we know it". Clearly, young people do not want to rely on the morning paper on their doorsteps or the dinnertime newscast for up-to-date information; in fact, they want their news when it works for them (Connell, 2006).

The only conclusion to be reached after noting these trends is that no future generation of new consumers will fit into earlier profiles since their expectations and their habits have changed

forever-and technology is a big part of this transformation. Different ways of a product reaching new audiences continue to develop; people can watch programmes from news or cable station on their cell phones made available to them via cellular carriers.

Whether the industry is reacting fast enough to these dramatic changes is another question altogether. “By and large, the major news companies are still turning a blind eye to what is happening because it’s challenging and they need to considerradical change,” says researcher Rusty Coats, Director of New Media at Minnesota Opinion Research, Incorporated. (MORI). He suggests that maybe big papers “need to own cellular services.”

Media Use of Text Messages for News Dissemination

The mobile phone has found its way into various professions including journalism. It is used in various ways and for several purposes in journalistic practice (Wilson and Gapsiso 2009). Currently, foreign news organizations are connecting to consumers through instant messaging services as a means of using new technologies to connect to younger audiences. News products are built around information services designed for cellular delivery. These products range from issues that border on national security to local issues. For example, the texting of headlines to the phones of youths is clearly a way of producing a new product for different consumers. It is a new media- inspired phenomenon, in part, because it serves a similar purpose of providing quick snapshots of what is happening in the world of politics and placing it directly in the hands of Nigerian youths.

This is clearly a method for providing the accessibility younger audiences are likely to embrace. In addition, news organizations have recognized the value of the one piece of technology that is in most hands of youths around the country, the cell phone. That way, the mobile revolution is, in fact, part of a news revolution.

So far, the exploitation of GSM to provide information to students through text messages has mostly been done by GSM companies, politicians or political parties and not journalists. Messages such as those selling a candidate, voters’ registration or promoting a political party are sent to youths and others through their mobile phones. This is a method that journalists need to adopt to keep youths informed since most of them are unwilling to go to the traditional mass media for news. Thus, if they will not go to the news the news should be brought to them. However, the question remains whether this service will be acceptable to them, which is what the research was about.

In this regard, perhaps what might be considered the most innovative technique in news distribution in Nigeria is the exploration of text messages as a source of news dissemination. Mobile phones can now be used to disseminate political news through SMSs. Some newspapers in Nigeria such as *The Punch* and *The Nation* claim to have started this news service. Proving this claim, Olaleye (2009) observes that subscribers to *The Nation* newspaper pay a “token” of #100 for SMS to access any of the paper’s six special offers. These services are *The Nation* News Update (NNU), Nation Business Update (NBU), Nation Sport Update(NSU), Nation Road Traffic Update (NRTR), Nation Breaking News (NBN) and Nation News Alert (NNA). *The Punch* sells scratch cards to subscribers at the rate of #1,500 per month. This service being offered to the subscribers is called Mobile Punch and subscribers can get SMS on news update through any of the three major mobile Networks- MTN, GIo and Airtel.

In addition, *The Punch* and *Desert Hera Id* Newspapers also send news alerts to their subscribers on various issues. Also *NEXT on Sunday Newspapers* in a report written by Amma Ogan on September 5, 2001 and titled 'phone sex' indicatedtheir interest to begin sending news alert thus,".....news alerts such as the one thismedia organization is starting up will keep you up to date with what is going on in your world"(p,15). This shows that some news organizations are beginning to take steps towards adopting this service. However, a lot still needs to be done in respect of this.

Despite this, other Nigerian Newspapers are waiting in the wings to see how successful these experiments by the aforementioned newspapers would be before joining the bandwagon to entice the estimated millions of Nigerians using mobile phones (Ganiyu and Akinreti, 2011).

This may indicate that the idea of media houses sending news through text messages is at its early stages and has not been fully adopted by most media organizations but this innovation is spreading steadily.

Methodology

Due to its suitability for attitudinal studies, the researcher adopted the descriptive survey design in this study. The dominant independent variable in this study is political news dissemination, others are the demographics like gender and age category, while the dominant dependent variable in this study is the potentiality of text messages, others include, sources of news, level of access, awareness, opinion and ownership.

Consequently, the survey method was employed to collect data for the study. Copies of the questionnaire with open and close ended questions were used to elicit responses from the sample drawn. This was done to eliminate bias due to phrasing questions differently with different respondents and permits anonymity that may result in responses that are more honest.

The research population for this study included all students of Federal College of Education Zaria (Approximately 9000 students) and College of Health Sciences, University of Ilorin (Approximately 1808 students), in Kaduna and Kwara State respectively. Their ethnic groups or religion were not put into consideration butrather their level of education. This population was chosen because they represent the majority of youths with formal education in urban centers in Zaria and Ilorin. Most importantly, the majority of students in these tertiary institutions fall within ages 18-35 years which is the scope of this study.

The purposive non- probability sampling method was adopted and the criteria used to select the sample from the population of students of FCE Zaria and College of Health Sciences, Unilorin, was ownership or access to a GSM set. A combination of these criteria and the population of the study were used to determine the sample size of 300 students. Accordingly, a total of 300 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and 291 were properly completed and returned. The retrieved copies of the questionnaire represent 97% of the total number distributed. Hence, data analysis was based on the returned copies of the questionnaire. Simple percentages and frequency distribution tables were used to clearly present the data gathered from the field.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Demographic Variables of Respondents

Table 1: Sex of Respondents

Sex	**n**	**Frequency percentage**
Male	159	54.6
Female	132	45.4
Total	**291**	**100**

Source: Field data (2011)

Table 1 show that there were more male (54.6%) than female (45.4%) respondents. Although respondents were selected purposively, the researcher did not intentionally seek to distribute questionnaires to more male than female respondents.

Table 2: Age of Respondents

Sex	**n**	**Frequency percentage**
18-22	92	31.6
23-27	112	38.5
28-32	50	17.2
33-35	37	12.7
Total	**291**	**100**

Source: Field data (2011)

The data in the table above indicate that most of the respondents for the study were between age 23-27 years representing 38.5%, while the next major age group, 18-22 years, constitutes 31.6%, others were 28-32 years 17.2% and 33-35 years 12.7% respectively. Thus, the majority of respondents appear to be in their twenties.

Responses to Research Questions

Table 3: Response on Ownership/Access to GSM set

Sex	**n**	**Frequency percentage**
Yes	291	100
No	0	0
Total	**291**	**100**

Source: Field data (2011)

From the table above, all respondents own or have access to a GSM set. This is expected because the respondents were purposively selected and the criteria used were ownership or access to a GSM set.

Table 4: Reponses on awareness of news through GSM text messages

Sex	**n**	**Frequency percentage**
Yes	144	49.5
No	147	50.5
Total	**291**	**100**

Source: Field Data (2011)

Table 4 reveals that more respondents are not aware of GSM text messages containing political news than those who are aware of it. Those who are aware of text messages carrying news mentioned mostly broadcast stations as those they are aware of; top on the list is BBC Hausa Service and CNN mobile news. Others are BBC World Service, VGA, ESPN sport and AI Jazeera, while very few respondents mentioned Nigerian print media like *The Nation, New Nigerian Newspaper, Vanguard* and *Weekly Trust.*

From the above, it is evident that most of the respondents who are aware of GSM text messages carrying news mostly mentioned foreign media. Only few Nigerian media were mentioned. This may indicate that Nigerian media are not catching onto this new trend fast enough.

Table 5: Respondents' opinion on using GSM text messages to transmit political news

Sex	**n**	**Frequency percentage**
Favourable	191	65.6
Unfavourable	100	34.4
Total	**291**	**100**

Source: Field data (2011)

The above table shows that more than half of the respondents agree with the idea of transmitting political news through GSM text messages. This may show thatSMS can be used as a channel for sending political news to students and by extension, the larger society.

Table 6: Responses on preference for channel of political news

Sex	**n**	**Frequency percentage**
GSM Text Messages	167	57.4
Traditional Mass Media	124	42.6
Total	**291**	**100**

Source: Field data (2011)

In the table above, more respondents would prefer to get news through GSM text messages than traditional mass media. The reasons respondents gave for the preference of GSM text messages included the following; convenience, portability, accessibility, instantaneous, private, factual and reliable, easily read and received, brief, clear, stress less, and finally, the fact that it makes a whole lot of difference in a world where every second counts, putting into consideration the fact that GSM is a modern means of communication in the world today.

Results and Discussions

On the basis of findings for the study, it is evident that there is a high level of ownership /access to mobile phones with 100% representing 291 respondents answering in the affirmative. Thus this, may indicate that the level of access to mobile phones by students in Zaria and Ilorin between ages 18 to 35 years is very high.

In answering research question 2, Table 4 indicates that those who are not aware (147 respondents representing 50.5%) of GSM text messages as a news source are slightly more than those who are aware of it (144 respondents representing 49.5%). Although by a slim margin, this result may still be indicative of the fact that a lot of youth do not know about this service. This may not be unconnected with the non- proliferation of SMS news as compared to news from traditional mass media.

The opinion of respondents on news distribution through text messages could be seen in Table 5. Students who find this idea favorable are 191 (representing65.6%) while those who found it unfavourable are 100 (representing 34.4%). In addition, data in table 6 signify the desire of more respondents to get their news through GSM text message (167 respondents, representing 57.4%) than through traditional news sources (124 respondents representing 42.6%). When asked the reason for GSM being their preferred source of news, respondents cited various reasons among which are convenience, portability, accessibility, fastness and rapidity, private, factual and reliable, easily read and received, brief, clear, stressless, and the fact that, GSM is a modern means of communication in the world, thus they want be in tune with what is in vogue.

The above analysis may imply that students believe using GSM to transmit political news is a good idea. This is because, not only do most of them find the idea favourable, they would also prefer it as their channel of news. This corroborates findings in a survey funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York on youths and conducted by Frank N. Magid Associates' in May 2004. The goal was to assess where youths get their news today and how they think they will access news in the future. One of the major findings of the survey of news-related habits of the demographic age of youths is that there are fundamental changes driven by technology and market forces. Data indicate that this segment of the population intends to continue to increase their use of the internet/ new media (like mobile phones) as a primary source of news in the coming years. Newspapers and national television broadcast news fare poorly with this critical demographic group.

The above findings may not be surprising because students, who in most cases are youths, around the world have been known to be quick in trying and accepting new things especially when it comes to technological innovation, and those in florin and Zaria are no exception to this rule.

Nevertheless, some respondents had negative perceptions about sending political news through text messages. They cited such reasons as reduction in the value of such news. In addition, they noted the fact that SMS to them is something for fun and not for serious uses like transmitting political news and as such they believe use of SMS for political news should be avoided because it had a gloomy future, thus, it has no prospect.

These negative perceptions notwithstanding, after assessing the uses of political news dissemination to students through text messages, this research has shown that majority are open to the idea, hence it may be said that this new phenomenon is acceptable and its uses could be maximized.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With the proliferation of new media and the spread of digitization around the globe, different professions have been looking for ways of meeting up with these new trends. Journalism is not an exception. Due to intense competition, and the increasing loss of its audiences to new media, traditional mass media houses in Nigeria and in other parts of the world are frantically looking for ways to get back their old audiences and possibly get new ones. One way through which they could achieve this is through GSM text messages. This is because GSM is one piece of technology found in the hands of virtually all students all over including those in Zaria and Ilorin and hence can be used to reach a lot of them easily.

Therefore, in this digital age, news organizations need to connect to consumers through instant messaging services as a means of using new technologies to connect to younger audiences. This is clearly a method for providing the accessibility younger audiences are likely to embrace. Brown (2006) agrees that, this is a way of producing new products for different consumers. It is a new media-inspired phenomenon, in part, because it serves a similar purpose: providing quick snapshots of what is happening in the world of culture, news and entertainment, and placing it directly in the hands of consumers. Thus, there is no reason why it cannot be used for political news as well due to its numerous advantages. For example, as Taiwo (2010) stated, though SMS is now subtly being used among Nigerians to deride the state, its agents and the people, it has the potential of becoming an instrument for active agitation for social reforms. Some state governments in the country (e.g, Lagos, Jigawa, Imo) recognise the potential use to which SMS can be put and now use it as a medium to receive feedback from the people they govern. This is an idea media houses should embrace. Likewise, the Nigerian government also used SMS recently for its propaganda on the Rebranding Project. All these show that in future, young people will take SMS beyond the present level of its use for interpersonal relationship and subtle use for social commentary to play a major role in the political institutions in Nigeria.

Thus, it is also advisable for the media in Nigeria to move quickly along with these trends and news organizations must recognize the value of the one piece of technology that is in virtually every hand around the world - the cell phone - so that the mobile revolution is , in fact, part of a news revolution.

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1) The proliferation of mobile phones SMS use in Nigeria should not just be limited to helping students to fulfill their interpersonal communication needs, it should also be used

to transform the political landscape of the country byempowering youths to participate in political affairs through political news they will receive from the media.

2) The idea of sending political news alerts to the phone of youths, students inclusive should be practiced on a large scale by all media houses in Nigeria. News products could be built around information services designed for cellular delivery. These products could range from issues that border on national, state or local politics. It is worthy of note that whatever the level of government, it is important for students to know how their country is being governed.

3) In an attempt to get text messages across to the youths, media houses can get the data of this demographic group from the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) data base. With the new SIM registration phenomenon, this should not be a difficult task, albeit regrettably, noting privacy concerns.

4) There should be increased collaboration between traditional mass media organizations in Nigeria and the telecommunication service providers (i.e Airtel, MTN, Globacom, Etisalat, Multilinks and Visafone) on the best and cost effective way to send political news alerts to students and other citizens in Nigeria. Although, there is already collaboration in this regard, this service could only be obtained at a price. Hence, the proposed collaboration should make political news available to GSM phones for free.

5) There is the need for media managers to regularly commission or conduct research in order to stay up to date with ever-changing attitude of youths towards the media. However, at present, owners of media houses should think more towards the creation of a new product (quick political news alert through mobile phones) that youths can identify with.

6) Media organizations and the government of the day in Nigeria need to keep track of the news consumption habits of youths. This is to increase the level of awareness of government activities among young persons, media houses need to re-define the way they deliver news. Also the means of getting feedback should be encouraged.

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