

Chapter 3

Role of ICT in Election Coverage by the Nigerian Print Media: A Study of the 2007 General Elections

Solomon O. Akinboye and Ibitayo S. Popoola
University of Lagos, Nigeria

Abstract

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has emerged as the greatest human inventory of our time, exerting tremendous impact on news production and dissemination across the world. In Nigeria of yesteryear, messages were transmitted across the length and breadth of the community through interpersonal channels, such as the gong, folktales, festivals, mirrors, gunshots, town criers, wooden flutes, horns, drums etc.

These early communication technologies were deficient in a number of areas. According to Schramm (1972:28) "some factual news might be spread very rapidly while more complete information might be disseminated at a much slower pace and with great variety in repetition."

This paper therefore takes a look at the impact of ICT in election coverage in Nigeria with specific reference to the 2007 general elections.

The paper used the survey method in gathering information from senior journalists in the Nigerian print media. It arrives at the conclusion that ICT has assisted the Nigerian print media in reporting timely information to their audience.

INTRODUCTION

A renowned political thinker and statesman, Thomas Jefferson, once declared that were it left for him to decide whether “we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, we should not hesitate to prefer the latter” (Koch& Paden 1944:1 cited in Popoola 2003:45).

Jefferson made the declaration in a bid to stress the role of the media in any political community. There is no doubt that the relationship between the press and government is an interesting one. The government needs the media to get the people informed and the political parties equally require the media to sell their candidates and programmes to the electorate.

A fundamental driving force of the globalization phenomenon of the 21st century is Information Communication Technology (ICT). The revolution in computer technology has significantly led to the advancement of information transmission across the global system (Akinboye, 2007). Information and Communication Technology, within the context of our analysis, is simply a technological device which strengthened the ability of the media to efficiently and effectively carry out their professional and statutory duties.

This chapter provides an insight into the impact of ICT in reporting with special reference to election coverage in Nigeria. It demonstrates the impact of ICT in the discharge of the statutory and professional duties of the Nigerian print media, especially during elections.

Methodology

The study adopted the survey method in eliciting responses from senior editorial members of staff of reputable newspapers and magazines establishments in metropolitan Lagos. The choice of Lagos was informed by the fact that two-thirds of Nigerian media are located in the state (see Akinfeleye, 2003: 57).

Simple, open-ended questions were drawn up and administered on the respondents on their perception of the impact of ICT in election coverage. The study used an open-ended questionnaire of manageable size of the interviewees coupled with the need to provide them greater latitude to express themselves. Furthermore, the sampling frame was a size that could conveniently be handled through unstructured questions. The questionnaires were administered on 11

newspapers and five magazine establishments which have maximally explored ICT technology in reaching their target audience.

Research Questions

1. How has ICT redefined political reporting especially at election periods in Nigeria?
2. How has ICT affected the quality of photographs used by the print media?
3. Does ICT exert any impact on gathering and disseminating political stories?
4. What are the available ICT facilities for reporting in your medium?
5. Does ICT enhance the professional and statutory duties of the press with regards to painstaking dissemination of information of election results?
6. Does ICT portray a brighter or glooming future for the Nigerian print media?
7. Does the so-called Nigerian factor have any role to play in the sustenance of the current state of the art technological equipment being used in reporting?

Conceptual Clarifications

ROLE: This has to do with what members of the public expect from the Nigerian print media, especially with regard to dissemination of information about the various subterranean moves on the political terrain during election periods. Election times are critical periods when most people are always anxious to have the latest information about developments in the polity. It is generally assumed that any medium of mass communication which avails itself of the opportunities offered by ICT would always be ahead of its competitors when it comes to releasing timely or breaking news to the public.

ICT: One of the concepts which have attracted commentaries from academics in recent times is that of Information Communication Technology (ICT). While some abbreviate it as IT, others would rather prefer to call it Info Tech (Evans 1990: 77).

The term information Technology was first widely employed in 1981 to describe the equipment and system which were being introduced in both private and public sectors to create, store and distribute information.

Talking about any device which could create, store, and distribute information, what readily comes to mind is computer. In the words of Mohammed (1990:9), “computer is the most pervasive of all the new communication technologies.” Besides satellite, he states, “it is about the only device that has a hand in all the pies of communication: print, radio, television, telephone, fibre optic, film, photography, cinema, etc.”

Scholars disagreed on the exact time when the computer started. Parker cited in Pool and Schramm (eds) (1973:620) and Popoola (2003:45) that it traced its origin to 3,500 BC when it was used as a simple adding machine. Pelton (1981:25) says the “oldest one that springs to mind is a Babylonian computer that dates from 1921 BC.” Yet, Hofbaver (1990:22) asserts that “the history of computers can be traced roughly from the year 1812, when the English Mathematician, Charles Babbage, designed what he called a different machine which could automatically work out trigonometric and logarithmic function.”

Newspaper: A newspaper is a periodic publication containing timely reports. According to Newson and Wollert(1988:74):

The newspaper is the medium ‘of record.’ It’s what you consult to find out the most information about everything that happened on a certain date in that community and surrounding area. They provide clues that a reporter can investigate to find a story that was missed.

In other words, just as a newspaper offers information on happenings in a political community, the medium also provides the lead, which reporters could pursue for publication. Tracing the origin of the name, Uyo (1987:6) says:

*There is a French word, **nowelles**, which, through imitation in Middle English, became **newes**. The French also have a word **papier**, derived from the Latin word **papyrus**, the material on which people could write and print. **Newes** and **papier** together make up newspaper. More than 40 words you block.*

Based on frequency of publications, the following are types of newspapers in Nigeria; namely: Daily (published Monday–Friday i.e. weekdays), Weekend (published on Saturdays) and weekly (Published only on Sundays).

Magazine: Unlike newspapers, magazines are collection of various editorial materials, which are judged to be of interest to the reading public. Attempting a distinction between newspaper and magazine, DeFleur and Dennis (1981:148) say magazine “shows less concern for information on the immediate day’s events and more for interpreting and correlating topics in a broader context.” For this reason, Uyo (1987:10) says, “Magazines are a cross between books and newspapers”; on its origin, Uyo avers: “The word ‘magazine’ comes from the French word ‘magasin’ which in turn comes from the Arabic word ‘mahkzan’ meaning a general storehouse.” Magazines could be published weekly, fortnightly, monthly, quarterly, and annually. However, the study focused on the weekly news magazines. In journalism or Mass Communication parlance, newspapers and magazines are known as print media because they involve the pressing of ink on paper.

Literature Review

The basic goal of “Political Reporting,” especially at election periods, can be deduced from Article 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which stresses the obligation of mass media as that of upholding the “Fundamental Objectives” contained in Chapter II of the Constitution, as well as upholding the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people. The “Fundamental Objectives,” which are found on pages A 882 – 887 of the Constitution concerned among others, the Economic, Social, Educational, as well as Directive on Nigerian cultures.

Of special interest to this paper is the need for every media establishment in the country to identify with the political objectives of the state as contained in Article 15 (ii) of the Constitution which states that “accordingly, national integration shall be actively engaged whilst discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association or ties shall be prohibited.”

A major way of the media demonstrating their unalloyed support to the realization of the political objective is by way of educating and enlightening the citizenry about what goes on in or around the government. This is what Sobowale (1986:111) calls “surveying the environment” or which Lasswell refers to as “correlating parts of the environment and transmitting culture.”

The Nigerian media began to play these roles in 1859 when the first newspaper began courtesy of the pioneering efforts of British Missionary, Rev. Henry Townsend.

While newspapering began in 1859, election coverage by the print media could not start until 1922. According to Ezera (1960:30) the birth of electioneering politicking began following the adoption of Sir Hugh Clifford's 1922 Constitution. "The development led to an unprecedented political awakening. Political parties sprang up overnight and several newspapers commenced publication." The papers emerged in order to propagate the objectives of political parties vis-à-vis that of their founding fathers.

Leading nationalist leaders in Nigeria then, in a bid to propagate their visions established their own newspapers. Examples are Herbert Macaulay, who bought over Lagos Weekly Record from Thomas Horatio Jackson in 1891. He also took over the ownership of Lagos Daily News from Victor Bababunmi in 1926. The two papers supported fully his political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP).

There was also Eko Akete, owned by Deoye Deniga, which also supported the NNDP. Others are The Daily Telegraph and African Messenger owned by Ernest Ikoli which supported the political aspirations of the Union of Young Democrats. Late Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo were not left behind. They established the West African Pilot and Nigerian Tribune respectively.

This trend remains to date and has been identified as a major problem of partisanship by the media when it comes to reportage of political stories. Since 1954 when Nigeria began to conduct federal elections, election 2007 was the ninth in the series.

According to Popoola (2007:5) to date, federal elections have been conducted in Nigeria in the following years: 1954, 1959, 1964, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1999, 2003 and 2007.

The first election to be covered by the Nigerian Press after 1960 independence took place in 1964. However, assessing the performance of the media after independence Omu (1996:25) says:

The first few years of independence saw little change in the political style of the newspapers. Indeed, the struggle for power among the politicians assumed a new fury and the competing party newspapers advertised their fanaticism. The Action Group crisis of 1962, the census crisis of 1963-64 and the Federal Elections of 1964 and its aftermath — the newspaper press provided a remarkable example of overzealous and irresponsible partisanship and recklessness.

Events after the election confirmed Omu's assertion. According to Oyediran (1976:17):

The 1964/5 elections have often been referred to as a classic case of the politics of brinkmanship. It was during the election that the first plot for a military coup d'etat was planned.

Prior to the election, there was realignment of political forces, leading to the emergence of two major alliances, which contested the election. They are the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) comprising the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), Dynamic Party of Prof Chike Obi, and Mid-West Democratic Front. The second alliance was the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA), which made up of the NCNC, AG, NEPU and UMBC. The result of the election was stalemated as a result of inability of allying parties to pull enough seats required to form government. During the election, the flash point of violence in the country was the Western Region; hence, Mackintosh (1966) cited by Popoola (2003:60) referred to the region as "the cockpit of the Nigerian Politics," particularly between 1962 and the time Military took over the reigns of government in 1966.

At the time of independence, politicians who were freedom fighters during the colonial days owned 98 percent of newspapers in the country.

The nationalist leaders established the newspapers to advance the struggle for political independence. Thus, at any slight disagreement between the political leaders, such disagreement would become top story on the pages of their newspapers. For instance, during the disagreement between the leader of the defunct Action Group (AG), late Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his deputy, late Chief Ladoke Akintola.

The Nigerian Tribune pitched its tent with its proprietor, Chief Awolowo. Stories concerning Chief Akintola would not only be a calculated attempt to ridicule him, but also to portray him in bad light to the public. For instance, Oyediran (1976:21) quoted one of the election speeches of Akintola as published by the Tribune, which for several years made alliance between the East and West difficult.

According to him, Akintola in an attempt to justify his preference for an alliance between the North and West told his supporters:

While the Northerners have a good exchange of commodities in kolanuts and cows with the Yoruba, the Igbo have nothing to offer the Yoruba except second hand clothing.

The Daily Sketch, a newspaper founded by Akintola while he was Premier of the region equally launched an offensive against royal fathers in the region who were perceived to be sympathizers of the AG. According to Popoola (2003:60):

About a month to the election, the government owned newspaper, The Daily Sketch warned, when an Oba takes it upon himself to oppose the Government, he has shown himself as an enemy of his people...

Thus, Nigeria's first attempt at democratizing was short-lived due to overzealous, recklessness, unethical and irresponsible partisanship of the media as well as dissemination of poisonous campaign speeches.

PRESS COVERAGE OF THE 1979 SECOND REPUBLIC ELECTIONS

Following the collapse of the First Republic on January 15, 1966, the military held on to power until October 1, 1979 when Nigerians had another opportunity at democratic governance.

Five political parties contested the elections, namely: The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) and Peoples Redemption Party (PRP).

At the conclusion of the election, NPN candidate Alhaji Shehu Shagari was declared the winner after serious controversy had trailed the results of the election as a result of what constituted two-thirds of 19 states. To Chief Awolowo, the UPN presidential candidate alleged that the defunct Federal Military Government under Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo (rtd) and the defunct Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) betrayed a historic assignment freely undertaken by them in favour of Alhaji Shehu Shagari. According to Ojo (1985:57):

Chief Awolowo in a detailed reply to General Obasanjo's letter showed that the Federal Military Government favoured Alhaji Shagari during the elections and also did all it could to see him win...

While the crisis lasted, Awolowo mobilized his supporters through The Daily Sketch and Tribune to the extent that his supporters held the notion that Shagari "stole" the presidency.

Press Coverage of the 1983 General Elections

Notwithstanding DeFleur's 1970's modification of the Bullet or Hypodermic theory of the mass media, in which he punctuated the direct effect of media message with personality, attitude, intelligence, interests, etc.,

available evidence suggests that the violence which characterized the conduct of the 1983 polls can be best explained by the Bullet Theory and the Contagion effect. While the Bullet Theory assumes that people get information directly from the mass media and not through an intermediary and that reaction is individual, not based on how other people might influence them, the Contagion effect, according to Singer (1970) quoted by Popoola (2003:61) says:

The media variously can provoke a riot, create a culture of rioting, and provide lessons on how to riot, spread a disturbance from place to place... There is some evidence, even so, that the media can contribute by simply signalling the occurrence and location of a riot event.

Electoral fraud, otherwise known as “rigging” was the main cause of the violence. According to Adamolekun (1985:74):

Judging by the violence and alleged electoral frauds that had characterized the preliminary electoral contests, there was widespread fear that serious violence and extensive rigging could mar the August/September elections. These fears became fulfilled prophecies. Law and order broke down completely in several states, with Ondo and Oyo states as the star cases that attracted international attention.

According to him, “the official figure of 100 persons killed is widely believed to be less than in quarter of those who actually died in each of Ondo and Oyo states. This means that the total number of persons who lost their lives through electoral violence was close to 1,000; with wanton destruction of human lives and the extensive destruction of property in several states.”

Particularly, mention must be made of the role played by the defunct FRCN, Akure and the state owned radio, Ondo State Broadcasting Corporation (OSBC).

While the FRCN was overtly drumming up support for Chief Akin Omoboriwo, the NPN gubernatorial candidate who was initially declared by FEDECO as winner of the governorship election with intermittent and regular playing of the record of Christy Essien’s elpee titled “Give Peace A Chance,” the Ondo State radio obviously supporting another candidate, late Chief Micheal Ajasin was also simultaneously playing the record of late Bob Marley titled “Get Up, Stand Up, Stand Up for Right.”

As Singer (1970) earlier posited, the people decoded the message and instantly, took to the streets, attacking every identified members and leaders of

the NPN. They did not spare their property as well. Some of the houses that were razed during the fracas are yet to be rebuilt to date.

The violence, which occasioned the conduct of the election, was therefore, one of the major reasons identified by the military for taken over the reign of government again on December 31, 1983.

Press Coverage of the Aborted June 12, 1993 Third Republic Elections

If there is any date that will remain evergreen in Nigerian political history, that date was June 12, 1993 – the day Nigerians from all walks of life defied ethnicity, religion, north-south dichotomy as well as other vices, which had seen Nigerians voting ethnic or religious lines in the past. It would be recalled that both the presidential candidate of the defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP), who was widely believed to have won the election, late Chief MKO Abiola, and his running mate, Ambassador Babagana Kingibe, were Muslims.

The election was not only peaceful, but also orderly throughout the federation. It is also on record that June 12 was the first election since independence in which a Nigerian party would win by a landslide in all the geo-political zones in the country.

However, the result of the election was annulled by self-styled Military President Gen. Ibrahim Babangida (rtd) on June 23, 1993, without any convincing logical reason. Following the annulment, sporadic riots and protests took place all over the country. The international community was not left out. Apart from expressing dismay, they also imposed wide-range sanctions on the country in protest.

The media kept on fighting for the de-annulment of the election until its presumed winner, late Bashorun MKO Abiola, died in detention in 1998.

Press Coverage of 1999 Fourth Republic Elections

During the 1999 elections, stakeholders were cautious based on the experiences of the past. That is however not to say that all the politicians demonstrated political maturity. Quoting a news report from TNT newspaper, an evening tabloid which circulated in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo and Osun states, Popoola (2004:196) picked on the choice of words of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, then PDP Presidential candidate while addressing a political rally in Lagos where he told his supporters “to exchange fire for fire” if attacked by members of the AD.” Such a story should have been watered down by the TNT newspaper, instead of going to town with its explosive headline – “Its fire for fire – Obasanjo.”

However, controversy trailed the conduct of the elections as it became the object of litigation. The Alliance for Democracy (AD) and All Peoples Party

(APP) joint presidential candidate, Chief Olu Falae, challenged the result of the election, which gave victory to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. He alleged, among other allegations, that the election was riddled by wide range electoral malpractices. However, the court dismissed his petition. The media helped significantly in persuading him through editorials and feature articles (among others) not to pursue the matter to the Supreme Court in order not to give the military any excuse not to handover power again on May 29, 1999 as scheduled.

The Media and the 2003 Elections

Wright, quoted by Uyo (1987:2) identified surveillance of the environment as one of the primary duties of the mass media, stressing that “it refers to the collection and distribution of information concerning events in the environment, both outside and within any particular society.”

Thus, based on the professional mandate of the media, all activities leading to the conduct of the 2003 elections were adequately covered by the media. There were lots of violence reports across the country prior to the election, which took place between April 29 and May 3. In a special news report entitled “more violence, less campaign.” The Punch newspaper notes.

One of the very prominent features of this campaign is electoral violence. The gubernatorial race is more notorious for this. From Kwara state to Delta state, Benue to Ogun and Enugu state to Bayelsa state, Political violence has become a recurring decimal (Punch, March 2, 2003 cover story).

Press Coverage of the 2007 Elections

It is instructive to note that of all the nine general elections so far held in Nigeria, the 2007 was the only election in which ICT was optimally used at all the stages of election process, i.e., reporting built up stories to the elections, reporting campaign by the political parties and dissemination of stories about election results. Details are in the subsequent section of this paper.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Libertarian Media Theory, otherwise known as the Free Press Theory. According to McQuail, “This relabelled version of Siebert et al’s Libertarian Theory has its origin in the emergence of the printing press from official control in the seventeenth century and is now widely regarded as the main legitimating principle for print media in liberal democracies” (McQuail, 1987:112).

The main gist of the theory is that “the press functions to uncover and present truth to the people, operating chiefly as a private enterprise, and without

government control” (Blake and Haroldsen, 1975:95). The philosophy of the theory is situated within the context of the ideas of renowned writer Milton, and philosopher, John Locke (among others) that man has the right to pursue truth and that truth is best advanced when there is an open marketplace of ideas. Quoting Milton, Folarin says, “Central to this theory was Milton’s idea of the self-rightening process of the free market-place of ideas that good would drive out bad ones if all ideas were guaranteed free expression” (Folarin, 1998:26).

Of special interest to this paper are five of the eight-point principles of free press listed by Wintour (1973) quoted by McQuail (1987:115-116) that:

- Publication should be free from any prior censorship by any third party
- There should be no compulsion to publish anything.
- No restriction should be placed on the collection, by legal means, of information for publishing.
- There should be no restriction on export or import or sending or receiving “messages” across national frontiers.
- Journalists should be able to claim a considerable degree of professional autonomy within their organization.

Aside from these principles, McQuail further contends that “free press theory would seem to need no elaboration beyond such a simple statement as contained in the First Amendment to the American Constitution, which states that congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press.”

Unarguably, the free press theory exists to check excesses of government; however, the truth of the matter is that freedom to publish is not a license to defame, indulge in unbridled obscenity, invade privacy of individuals, or publish seditious stories. As a matter of fact, the free press theory does not advocate press immunity to the rule of law and canons of civilized social conduct (Ibid., 114). A semblance of this could be found in Article 22 of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution which states that: The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.

In line with the spirit of this theory, the current civilian government in Nigeria has been rigorously pursuing a policy of divestment of government shares from businesses where hitherto it had either 100 percent or 60 percent shareholding. In pursuant of this policy, the oldest newspaper in the country, the Daily Times was out rightly sold to a local investor in 2003.

With the withdrawal of government funding or other financial support to the media, it was thus incumbent on management of such media establishments to evolve various survival strategies, one of which included the idea of gathering additional juicy stories through the Internet, as well as foreign news agencies, to ensure that newspaper and magazine audiences got stories that were really worth the value of their money.

Data Analysis

As earlier stated under sample size, this study was carried out on all the newspaper and magazine establishments in metropolitan Lagos. It is instructive to note that over 2/3^{rds} of Nigerian print media establishments are based in Lagos. The study focuses on all the 16 print media establishments in Lagos which represent 64 percent of the existing 25 print media in circulation in the country. The questionnaire administered on the respondents had the objective of providing answer to the research questions.

TABLE 1

	Options	Frequency	Percentage
Does ICT exert any impact on election coverage by Newspapers and Magazines in Nigeria?	Yes	16	100
	No	-	-
	Total	16	100

All the respondents, as could be seen from Table 1 above, agreed that ICT has made a lot of impact on political reporting by newspapers and magazines in Nigeria. Mr. Gbenga Omotosho, editor of The Nation newspaper, described one of the products of ICT, the Internet, as “One of the wonderful developments of the 21st century,” pointing out that “when it comes to sourcing political news, the Internet facilitates quick sourcing; as a matter of fact, it’s information in seconds.”

John Awe, Head, Communications Desk of the Nigerian Tribune, a newspaper established by the late sage Chief Obafemi Awolowo in 1949, on his part equally expressed similar view. He said the Internet has positively shaped the news contents of the newspaper adding that “We send stories and photographs to our head office in Ibadan via Internet. In addition, we source several other political stories from Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) offices online.”

The editor, Metro Desk of Guardian newspaper, Mr. Nnamdi Inyama, on his part equally acceded to claims that the Internet provides wider source of stories. He pointed out that, just as it provides quick sourcing of stories, the technology also enhances what he called “precise editing.” He, however, pointed out that a major problem associated with sourcing stories through the Internet is the credibility of sources.

A similar view was expressed by the editor of the oldest newspaper in Nigeria today, Mr. Akeem Bello of the Daily Times, who argued that the Internet has enhanced the production of the newspaper as it provides easy sourcing and sending of stories and photographs.

The editor of one of the newly-established tabloids in the country, Daily Independent, which was established in 2001, revealed that the secret of colourful political pages of the newspaper was as a result of the fact that a lot of the scintillating foreign stories, which made the newspaper thick, were sourced through the Internet and foreign news agencies such as the BBC, VOA, and CNN. Mr. Gbenga Adefaye, the editor of Vanguard newspaper expressed a similar view.

The Editorial Page Editor (EPED) of Thisday newspaper, Mr. Godwin Agbroko, equally alluded to the fact that the Internet and foreign news agencies, especially, CNN, facilitate communication by providing what he called “instantaneous information.”

The business editor of Champion newspaper, Mr. Chinedu Dike, in his contribution, stated that the Internet was very vital to modern newsgathering and news dissemination. He was, however, quick to add that technical problem with Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and the Nigerian Telecommunication Plc (NITEL) were two major problems which could frustrate newspapers’ aspirations to avail themselves of the enormous benefits on Internet in newspaper production.

A deputy editor of Sunday Punch, Mr. Kunle Oderemi, in similar fashion avers that the Internet provides for “faster communication, greater access to information, and currency of information.” Like other editors, he equally remarked that a lot of funds are required to constantly enjoy the Internet facilities for newspaper and magazine production.

A senior editorial staff member of one of the country’s oldest news magazines, Newswatch, Mr. George Oche, in his view also said, “The Internet

helps in quick exchange of information, thereby making newsgathering more convenient and at a reduced cost.”

While trying to compare the Internet with fax machine, a technology popularly used by the Nigerian media prior to the emergence of the Internet, Mr. Oche said, “Internet makes newsgathering so efficient that Fax machines will look like the ‘talking drum.’ It makes newsgathering quick and cheap because it delivers the information about the world without delay, thereby helping in the free flow of information.” It would be recalled that “talking drum” was one of the traditional means of communication in the Southwestern part of Nigeria prior to the emergence of the modern means of mass communication.

The head of the Business Desk of The Week News Magazine, Mr. Adedeji Ademigbuji, on his part says the Internet helps the reporter and the medium in meeting production deadlines, stressing that “it’s faster than any other communication technology when it comes to sending information from one point to another. Above all, it’s less stressful and easy to use.”

Mr. Victor Ogene, the Associate Editor of The Source magazine said, “The Internet is a great reliever for every medium of mass communication when sourcing for foreign news is the issue at hand.” He cited the American-led war against Iraq in 2003 as an example of a foreign story requiring minute-by-minute updates, which can only be best handled through information from the Internet and CNN.

TABLE 2

	Options	Frequency	Percentage
Are there visible gains of ICT in political reporting in Nigeria?	Yes	12	75
	No	4	25
	Total	16	100

From Table 2 above, 12 of the 16 respondents, that is, 75 percent, agreed there are visible gains of ICT in reporting politics or elections in Nigeria. They contended that ICT has strengthened local and foreign news agencies such as News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Agence France Presse (AFP), and Reuters, among others, in a way that stories or photographs of major political events which are not captured by local reporters are made available by these agencies.

Other deducible gains of ICT observable from the study include:

1. Elimination of production tension: For many reasons, election coverage is usually a tension-soaked exercise in Nigeria. First, the politicians usually organized their campaigns in a way that would clash with production deadlines. These are times when rallies are organized until 7:00 p.m. In such a circumstance, political reporters are usually under tension to get their stories across to their editors. The tension is further heightened by the fact that most of the rallies are covered live by the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), a medium that has the largest broadcast network in Africa.

In times past, stories were sent to the newsroom through telex, radio message, and telephone. However, with ICT, minutes after the event reporters only need to look at 10 to 15 minutes of airtime through a nearby cyber café to send their stories. This is a tension-relieving exercise because in the past, the reporters would have to either dictate the story word-for-word through the telephone or radio.

2. Public Participation: Another deducible impact of ICT on election coverage observable through the study covered public participation in the newsgathering process. The entire scenario has really enhanced public participation in SMS through the GSM network or E-mail any information at their disposal to the media houses. Furthermore, it was discovered that political parties no longer send press invitations through the surface mail, but rather send them via the Internet.

3. Elimination of Channel Noise: Another gain of ICT in election coverage discovered through the study is that of elimination of channel noise.

Some are of the opinion that developing nations will catch up with the nations already fluent with ICT the soonest; however, those who disagree with this are of the view that it's only a matter of time before developing African countries catch up with the already developed countries— if they are directed by sincere and purposeful leadership with a clear sense of direction. They cited the examples of India and Pakistan as examples of what developing nations could do when there is leadership with focus and sense of direction. It should be recalled that India and Pakistan have joined the league of countries of the world with nuclear technology; while Indonesia, another developing nation, only recently developed a home-grown satellite.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has critically examined the impact of ICT on election coverage in Nigeria. The paper observes that ICT has revolutionized the process of news gathering and reporting generally in Nigeria. With ICT, tremendous changes have taken place in news gathering, editing, and reporting. In the past, the appearance of Nigerian newspapers and magazines was dull and unattractive. However, as this study has revealed, ICT has changed all that. Newspapers and magazines are now colourful and fascinating. The layouts, typography, type-setting and printing are now more audience friendly. With timely dissemination of news through the ICT, the young Nigerian democracy has a great hope of survival. Unlike the previous elections in Nigeria, the 2007 elections were the fastest in history. Results of elections were collated fast as a result of optimal usage of ICT. Thus, the outcome of the study provided positive answer to Research Question 1, which is “How has ICT redefined political reporting, especially at election period in Nigeria?”

RQ2 centred on how ICT affected the quality of photographs used by the print media. The answer is also in the affirmative. All the sampled media establishments used digital cameras and publish in colour

RQ3 asked if ICT exerts any impact on gathering and disseminating political stories. The answer is also positive. Many of the results that were released before 12 noon were top stories in the evening newspapers.

RQ4 asked for the available ICT facilities which the editors freely listed as: digital camera, modern telephony system, i.e., GSM, Internet facilities, and scanners, among others.

RQ5 asks whether ICT enhanced the professional and statutory duties of the press with regard to timely dissemination of information at election periods. The answer is also positive. The major role of the press, as further advocated by the theoretical framework of the paper, is to inform the citizenry about timely events in the society which ICT has made very easy.

RQ6 asked if ICT portrays a bright or gloomy future for the Nigerian print media. The answer is equally positive. With ICT, the Nigerian media would continue to be relevant by exerting positive influence on the people.

RQ7 asked if the Nigerian factor has any role to play in the sustenance of the current state-of-the-art technology available for political reporting. The answer for now is yes, but could change as nobody can predict the direction of government policy at any point in time.

However, to strengthen the 10-year-old new democratic governance in the country, the chapter makes the following recommendations.

1. That media owners should step up immediate action in the direction of strengthening the existing ICT facilities in order that the media could effectively carry out their statutory and professional duties.

2. That the various media establishments should be strengthened via regular training and retraining of media men for effective operational performance.

3. That more funds be allocated for the acquisition and maintenance of the existing ICT facilities in order that at all times the media would not be found wanting in the discharge of their sacred duties to the public.

4. That the Nigerian government should stop paying lip service to the issue of technological advancement. The technological drive by India, Pakistan, and Indonesia is worthy of emulation. While India and Pakistan had developed nuclear technology, Indonesia recently developed a homemade satellite. It is high time Nigeria also began to produce most of the ICT facilities required in news reporting.

5. That the National Assembly should pass without further delay the Freedom of Information Bill (FOIB) that has been sent to the House for consideration and approval since 2007. The passage will greatly help the media in sourcing and reporting accurate and timely information to the people.

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APPENDIX

A SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE IMPACT OF ICT IN POLITICAL REPORTING AND ELECTION COVERAGE IN NIGERIA

1. Name of Newspaper:
2. Year of Establishment:
3. Mission Statement:
4. Name of Editor:
5. Since establishment of your newspaper, how many elections have you covered in Nigeria?
6. Briefly state the nature of the elections i.e. (whether state Assembly, National Assembly Local Government or General elections):

7. Briefly list the available ICT facilities for the coverage of elections:
8. In comparison with previous elections in Nigeria, what difference would you say ICT has made in your coverage of 2007 elections in Nigeria?
9. An issue that usually raises tension in the polity concerned the issue of delay in announcing election results. In some cases, it takes between 3 or 4 days to announce results of gubernatorial and presidential elections especially during the first and second republics. With ICT, would you say the trend has changed? Yes/No
10. Briefly justify your response to question 9:

