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DIGITAL HUMANITIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

E-parliament and constituency representation in Nigeria

Samuel Oni^{1*}, Aderonke A. Oni², Daniel E. Gbrevbie³ and Olaniyi Trust Ayodele³

Abstract: The legislature plays important roles of domesticating and monitoring the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and as well, ensuring that government is accountable to the public for national progress on them. These hallowed responsibilities require that legislators are in constant communication and

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Dr. Samuel ONI is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science & International Relations, Covenant University, Nigeria. His scholastic interests are in the area of governance, legislature, e-government and conflicts studies.

Olaniyi Ayodele Olaniyi Ayodele is a faculty and PhD researcher in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Covenant University. His research interests are Information Communication Technology Policy, E-Governance, and National Security. Modern parliaments now use ICT for effective communication with their constituents to enhance the quality of their representation. The extent to which this is achievable however depends on the accessibility, usability, and usefulness of a parliamentary website for unfiltered information on the legislature and legislative process and beyond that, for interaction between citizens and their legislators. The Nigerian National Assembly, like many parliaments across the world, has a website. A content analysis of the website reveals that it contains vital information that are needed to create an informed citizenry. The website however lacks adequate capacity and tools for legislators to engage citizens in a dialogue that will enable public involvement in the policy process which has been viewed as pivotal to participatory governance and sustainable development.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Modern parliaments now use ICT for effective communication with their constituents to enhance the quality of their representation. The extent to which this is achievable however depends on the accessibility, usability, and usefulness of a parliamentary website for unfiltered information on the legislature and legislative process and beyond that, for interaction between citizens and their legislators. The Nigerian National Assembly, like many parliaments across the world, has a website. A content analysis of the website reveals that it contains vital information that are needed to create an informed citizenry. The website however lacks adequate capacity and tools for legislators to engage citizens in a dialogue that will enable public involvement in the policy process which has been viewed as pivotal to participatory governance and sustainable development.

dialogue with the citizens they represent. E-parliament has been seeing to enhance the relationship between legislators and their constituencies, thus enhancing their democratic values. The study engaged a mixed method involving content analysis and case study design. Information were drawn through content analysis of the Nigerian National Assembly (NASS) website and literature search. The aim is to determine the accessibility, usability, and usefulness of the NASS website for citizens-legislature interactions to enhance inclusive governance. Results of the analysis reveal that implementation of e-parliament in Nigeria is still majorly at the stage of information provisioning with low supporting tools for interacting and consulting the constituents. The paper argues that, despite the numerous challenges being encountered in the application of ICTs tools, e-parliament is fundamental to reducing the wide gap between citizens and their representatives in Nigeria. With e-parliament, government's policies and programmes and their implementation are in agreement with citizens aspirations and expectations which are considered pivotal to realizing SDGs in Nigeria.

Subjects: Information & Communication Technology (ICT); African Studies; African & Third World Politics; Politics & Technology; Legislative Politics

Keywords: E-parliament; National Assembly; constituency; interactivity; SDGs; Nigeria

1. Introduction

The crucial functions of legislation, oversight and representation make the legislature indispensable for realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in any democratic polity. The legislature is responsible for domesticating and developing relevant policies for SDGs and as well, monitoring their implementation. Advancing the SDGs also involves legislative oversight to ensure accountability of government to the citizens for national progress on them (SDGs). It also involves inculcating citizens' perspectives in the national policies regarding SDGs which is achievable through legislative representation. As observed by Interparliamentary Union (IPU) & United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2017), these pivotal roles necessitate that legislators are in constant communication, consultation, interaction and dialogue with the citizens.

Legislatures across the world are now utilizing modern Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) to enhance democratic practices and inclusive governance by promoting effective interaction between them and the citizens they represent (Niebel et al., 2013; Oni et al., 2020). E-parliament serves to deepen the relationship between citizens and their representatives (Bwalya et al., 2012; Loukis, 2011). As the principal representatives of the people, modern legislative institutions across the world are utilizing ICTs to bridge the massive gap and mitigate the weak relationship between them and their constituents, thus enhancing their democratic values. E-parliament adoption has also played a major role in eliminating the barriers that stand between legislators and those they represent (Unwunchola et al., 2017). With the use of ICTs, it is now possible to assuage the public distrust of political institutions and the decline in citizen's loyalty and attachment to the government, often referred to as democratic deficit (Vesnic-Alujevic & Nacarino, 2012; Elliott, 2016).

ICT is one of the fastest-growing industries in Nigeria (Oni et al., 2020). Paradoxically, citizens' participation and representation in the governance process in the country has, over the years, been very weak with public interests often at variance with governmental policies and programmes (Mustafa & Sharifov, 2018). Parliamentary representation entails interacting with the constituents whom the legislators represent and, as such, making informed decisions and exercising sovereign power on behalf of the people (Loukis, 2011; Seo & Raunio, 2017). Contrarily however, legislators in Nigeria hardly interact with citizens in their constituencies. In most cases, they only contact their

constituencies during election campaign to commission new projects (Fashagba, 2016). Parliamentarians are expected to be very close to citizens to be aware of the needs of the constituency and respond to them accordingly (Johnson, 2005). As noted by Campbell et al. (1999), legislators require well-organized communication with their constituents. In Nigeria however, credible access to the legislators is lacking and they barely communicate with their constituents (Segun & Oni, 2014). The consequence is the high level of disengagement between citizens and the legislators and little or no significant efforts towards promoting political stability and sustainable development in the country (Mustafa & Sharifov, 2018). The objective of this paper therefore, is to examine the extent of the adoption of e-parliament to enhance citizens-constituents interaction to build public trust in the legislature and strengthen the legitimacy of governance in the country. It aimed at evaluating the website of the Nigeria National Assembly (NASS) to ascertain its accessibility, usability and usefulness for citizens-representative interactions considered imperative for healthy democracy and as well, achieving the SDGs.

1.1. E-parliament and citizens' representation

The primacy of the legislature as citizen's representatives is expressed by its being generally considered as the sovereign organ of the state power, the site of sovereignty, the first among the "political trinity", the realm of representation and the expression of the people's will (Loukis, 2011; Orluwene, 2014). The legislature, as the primary representative institution, articulates and expresses the will of the citizens (Seo & Raunio, 2017). Remarkably, the legislature is entrusted with the responsibility to represent the constituent units and exercises control over the government in a democratic society (Nwaubani, 2004; Somfalvy, 2020). Lending his credence to the legislature as citizens' representative, Miler (2016) avers that the legislature as the organ of government is a forum for the representation of the constituents. The representative roles of the legislature enable the government to harness the differences in the society and bring such to bear in governance (Johnson, 2005; Miler, 2016). These roles require that the legislature have access to information and constantly communicate and dialogue with the citizens (Bwalya et al., 2012; Oni, Oni & Ibietan, 2016). This view is reiterated by Loukis (2011) and Seo & Raunio (2017) that the vital importance of the parliament in modern democracies as people's representatives, requires constant communication and interaction with the citizens.

As the representatives of the citizens, the legislators are to service the needs of their constituencies, lend their ears to them, educate them on policy issues, amass their views and demands and express them in the legislative chambers (Oni et al., 2019). In this regard, the legislature derives its representative mandate directly from the people and is accountable to them. This accountability entails providing regular information to the constituencies and ensuring that its deliberations and decisions address the desires of the public. It could also be in the dimension of governance accountability which relates to the efforts put in by the legislature to ensure that public resources are used by the executive, to promote the welfare of the society and bring about development (McCormick, 2007). As citizens' representatives, the legislature requires access to information and continuous flow of communication, interaction and dialogue with the citizens. This will enable citizens articulate their needs to the legislature through existing channels and actively participate in the decision-making process that affects them (Niebel et al., 2013).

Information and Communication Technologies have been used by modern parliaments particularly in developed democracies, to strengthen the relationship between the legislature and the citizens by providing additional channel of communication that enables citizens' engagement and collaboration in the political process (Chadwick & May, 2003; UNDP, 2006; Leston-Brandeira, 2007; Loukis, 2011). Reiterating the importance of Information Communication Technologies on citizens-representatives engagement, Southern and Purdam (2016) asserts that democracy is never complete unless it makes an effort to reach out to those who do not participate in it, and in considering access to it. In this regard, e-parliament has been found to enhance parliament's engagement with their constituents as it provides diverse communication links between the two parties (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008). E-parliament entails the use of internet services, telecommunications

and information technology equipment and services and activities to enhance parliamentary transparency, accessibility and accountability (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009; Unwunchola et al., 2017). According to Mustafa and Sharifov (2018), e-parliament is the use of ICT tools for more open, efficient, accountable and enhanced citizens engagement with their representatives. E-parliament provides a two-way relationship where citizens interact with their elected parliaments and have opportunity to give feedback on some issues (Bernardes & Bandeira, 2016). As observed by Niebel et al. (2013), the adoption of ICTs enabled parliament opens up a dynamic approach to incorporating a large proportion of the population in the political decision-making process. It promotes transparency by aiding citizens in a constituency to demand accountability from their legislators. Thus, e-parliament helps to re-awaken the consciousness of citizens who have not been actively participating in parliamentary decision-making process. In another dimension, adopting Information and Communication Technologies enables the legislature to generate data crucial for monitoring and overseeing the affairs of government (Niebel et al., 2013).

Mobile communications and internet portals as well as online journals provide new sources of information and thereby enhancing citizen's awareness and opportunity to express their opinions (Leston-Bandeira, 2007; Oni et al, 2016). E-parliament enables population groups living in remote areas to gain better access to their legislators (Diamond, 2010). Citizens, who have previously been excluded from political debate, are provided opportunity to form their own opinions as well as participate (Niebel et al., 2013). In this regard, e-parliament facilitates healthy constituent-representative relationship by helping the parliament to be more responsive to the interests and diverse views of their constituencies in a democratic state. An ICT enabled parliament helps to improve parliamentary representative capacity. In the end, e-parliament can enhance public trust in their institution of governance.

Some nations around the world have embraced e-parliament to bring their parliaments closer to their constituents with varying degrees and have different levels of success (Arugu & Chigozie, 2016: 54). For instance, the Republic of Korea has adopted the use of mobile applications for parliament to operate a smart e-parliament that promotes participation, openness and efficiency. The Korean parliaments have access to applications that provide support to bill deliberation, research analysis and promotion of legislative activities. The bill information glance provides information on all current bills at a glance, lists what bills were proposed by members of the legislative assembly and gives information on the status of the bills. The legislation application gives room for the parliament to check the opinions of the citizens on different legislative initiatives. Similarly, Greece has adopted "Vouliwatch", Brazil has designed "e-democracia" while United Kingdom operates "what do they know and Alaveteli" as platforms to promote dialogue between citizens and parliamentarians and enhance the relationship between citizens and their representatives. These platforms offer citizens' access to their representatives' profiles and provide opportunity to communicate, evaluate and hold their representatives accountable. Citizens are also able to keep track on legislative initiatives and debate solutions to policy problems. Some African countries like South Africa, Zambia, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Nigeria over time have given their legislatures online presence and have adopted the use of the internet for providing information on the legislature's activities. They provide information on access to their parliamentary buildings, educational visits, access to plenary sessions, history and role of committees and commissions of their parliaments (Oni, Oni & Ibietan, 2016). It is however instructive to note that e-parliament is not just about web presence but the impact that such has on parliamentary activities (Leston-Bandeira, 2007). According to Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) and Monaco et al. (2012), Information provisioning and citizens interaction with members of the legislature and engagement in the policy process via web technologies are the goals of parliamentary website.

2. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed research methodology involving case study and content analysis of the Nigeria National Assembly (NASS) website and literature search. The combination of these

research designs enables an in-depth analysis of the functions and structure of NASS websites and the extent to which it meets users' demands for legislative information and citizens-representative interaction. According to Yin (2018), case study involves detailed, in depth and intensive study of a unit. Content analysis on the other hands enables the identification of a website's functional and structural conditions and its ability to meet users' demands (Arrif, 2018). These approaches have been adopted in previous studies to determine the extent to which parliamentary websites enhance parliament and citizens interaction (Arrif, 2018; Bernardes & Bandeira, 2016; Corra, 2019; Edwards et al., 2015; Mustafa & Sharifov, 2018; Sobaci, 2010).

The National Assembly (NASS), a bicameral legislative structure of Nigeria comprises the Senate and House of Representatives. It is made up of Three hundred and sixty (360) members who are elected from constituents of roughly equal population size to represent the citizens of Nigeria on a four-year tenure with possibility of reelection. The Parliamentary website of the NASS is studied in terms of its accessibility, usability and usefulness for information provisioning and interaction between citizens and their representatives. These variables are considered to be key determinants of the performance of a website (Arrif, 2018; Bai, 2019; Fišer et al., 2012; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009; Monaco et al., 2012; Seo & Raunio, 2017). According to Monaco et al. (2012), accessibility relates to the extent to which a website can be accessed by all individuals including those with disabilities in the society. Usability on the other hand, concerns with how users can successfully use the system provided by the webpage to achieve the goals for which it's set up for (Fise, et al., 2012). In this regard, usability relates to the extent to which a parliamentary web page's functions are easy to understand and can be effectively, efficiently and satisfactorily operated fast and successfully by the users (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009; Monaco et al., 2012). Usefulness denotes ability of a page to satisfy the plans and goals of all the stakeholders involved (Kragelj, 2003; Fise, et al., 2012; Bai, 2019). A parliamentary website is thus useful to the extent of its ability to provide basic information regarding the membership, history, functions and documentary of the parliament and as well possesses interactive tools that support citizens' consultations and engagement on public issues (OECD, 2001; Arrif, 2018; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009). Following this therefore, the contents of the NASS website were evaluated to ascertain its accessibility, usability and usefulness for information provisioning and for citizens interaction with their representatives in the assembly.

In conducting the analysis, the contents of NASS website were coded against 92 key elements of a parliamentary website adopted from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009)) guidelines, Bernardes and Bandeira (2016), Mustafa and Sharifov (2018) and Arrif (2018). Elements that existed on the NASS website were marked (✓) while elements not found were marked (x). It is imperative to note that the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) was an update of the IPU (2000) guidelines and have continued to serve as benchmark for evaluating the accessibility, usability and usefulness of parliamentary websites by scholars of legislative studies across the world (Arrif, 2018; Joshi & Rosenfield, 2013; Mustafa & Sharifov, 2018). The coding of the NASS website therefore, follows previous studies on parliamentary websites which coded the presence or otherwise of those specific items. Joshi and Rosenfield (2013) adopted this method to evaluate the contents of parliamentary websites of 184 countries categorized into democratic and non-democratic states. Bernardes and Bandeira (2016) coded the existence or nonexistence of these items to compare the parliamentary websites of Brazil and United Kingdom. Similarly, the Global Legal Research Directorate (Global Legal Research Center, 2017) adopted the coding of the contents of the official parliamentary websites to rank fifty countries from all regions of the world.

The evaluation of the NASS website was done between 25 November and 15 December 2019. A reevaluation of the website was carried out between January 5 and 25 January 2020 to ascertain the accuracy of the data collected from the website.

Table 1. Information on access to the parliament

Access to parliament	Access to NASS building	x
	Seating arrangements of official at plenary meeting	x
	Virtual tour guides of the NASS building	x
	Organization	
History, functions, composition and activities	Parliament history	
	Composition	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Roles, responsibilities and functions of the NASS and its component bodies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	The NASS budget and staffing	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Schedule of present and planned future activities and events in the parliament	x
	Bicameral legislatures	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	List of international and regional legislative bodies which the NASS is a member	x
	NASS Annual report(s), including plenary and non-plenary bodies	x
	Information regarding events of current and previous Assemblies	x
	Texts of NASS official press releases	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) & Arrif (2018)

3. Results

3.1. A. NASS Website and information provisioning

The first criterion for evaluating parliament websites centres on the information content. The result of the evaluation of NASS website on this criterion is shown in Table 1. In terms of access to the parliament, there is no information available for users on the NASS website regarding access to the parliamentary building, seating arrangements of officials at plenary meeting, virtual tour guide of the parliamentary building and parliamentary organization. The history of the parliament is not available, however, information about the composition, responsibilities, and function of the legislature and its constituent bodies are available on the website. Recently past events are available while there is no information about present and planned future activities and events of the Assembly. List of international legislative bodies which the NASS is a member, NASS annual report and statistics of both its current and past events are not available on the website.

With respect to information on elected leader, photographs of both current and past presiding officers exist on the website. However, the biodata of previous presiding officers are not available. Information on power and prerogative of presiding officer is also not available on the website. All required information about committees of the NASS, commissions and non-plenary bodies specified by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009)'s parliamentary website guideline, are available except links to websites and documents relating to activities of non-plenary bodies.

The evaluation also shows that Information on the biodata, photo, and contact address of the current members of the NASS are provided on the website. Also, list and biodata of the previous member are provided. Missing information in this aspect however, include statistics and

Table 2. Information on members and elected leaders

Elected leaders	Demographic information and photograph of the current and previous Presiding Officers of the NASS	☑
	Brief Description of the powers and prerogatives of the Presiding Officer	x
Parliamentary committees, commissions, and other non-plenary bodies	List of non-plenary legislative bodies with links to their individual websites	☑
	Description of the powers and responsibilities of each body	☑
	Description of the activities of the body since its mandate	☑
	Membership and names of presiding officer(s) of each body	☑
	Contact information of each body	☑
	Links to websites and relevant documents concerning activities of the non-plenary body	x
Members of parliament	Biodata and photo of current members of parliament	☑
	Description of the duties and responsibilities of representative	x
	Contact details of each member of the NASS	☑
	Activities of individual members of the NASS	x
	Statistics of member's status	☑
	Biodata (current and historical) of members of the NASS	x
Parties in parliament	List of all political parties represented in the NASS	☑
	Link to the website each of political party	x

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) & Arrif (2018)

demographic information, activities, functions and duties of individual members. Information about individual member's party are provided alongside their biodata but links are not provided to their parties' websites. This analysis is depicted in [Table 2](#).

Information pertaining the elections and electoral systems are considered important to be provided on parliamentary website. A result of the website evaluation on the NASS electoral system and administration is revealed in [Table 3](#). All information required in this regard are not available on the NASS website.

Concerning the administration of parliament, the organizational chart of the NASS administration exists on its website but the functions of respective officers are not available. Similarly, the information expected on publications, documents, and information services according to Inter-Parliamentary

Table 3. Information on electoral system and administration

Elections and electoral systems	Description of the procedure for election	
	Link to the website of the electoral body	x
	last elections' results according to constituency and party affiliation	x
	Current composition of party groups and coalitions	x
	Previous elections' results	x
Administration of the NASS	Organization chart and functions of the NASS Secretariat	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Jobs and vacancies in the legislature	x
Publications, documents, and information services	Types and purposes of NASS documents and publications	x
	Information on how and where to obtain parliamentary either through the internet or other means	x
General links to websites	Presidency, Government, Constitutional and Supreme Courts	x
	Ministries and other national agencies	x
	State/provincial parliaments	x
	IPU and others	x
	National legislative bodies of other countries	x
	Other links of interest to the legislature	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Union (2009) are not provided. Concerning links to external website, the NASS parliament website only provides links to its local parliamentary institutions.

Adapted from Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) & Arrif (2018)

Another category of the contents for evaluating parliamentary website entails information about parliamentarian responsibilities with respect to legislation, budget and oversight. Five sub-categories of information are expected on the website as revealed in Table 4. In respect of these, the NASS website provides most of the information required—legislation and overview of the procedure and full text of standing orders, except that links to documents relevant to proposed legislation were not found on the website. Current business schedule, chart of business of parliament and glossary of terms and procedures are however, not available on the website. Information about report on budget or public finance, oversight and committees and non-plenary bodies do not exist on the website as shown in Table 2.

Table 5 reveals information concerning tools available for viewing and searching information on the NASS website. The website provides search engine for users to search the website using words in text and the result are sorted with most recent at the top. However, search results were not linked to either audio or video records. Broadcasting and webcasting features were not available. RSS is available for alerting services but options for email alert do not exist. The website is

Table 4. Information on parliamentary responsibilities

General information about legislative, budget, and oversight activities	Current business schedule	x
	Diagrammatic representation of NASS business and its relationships with other national and regional legislative bodies	x
	Glossary of NASS terms and procedures	x
	Overview of NASS procedure and routine order of business	☑
	Complete text of the Standing Orders, Rules of Procedure	☑
Legislation	Explanation of the legislative process	☑
	Text and status of all bills	☑
	Links to NASS and government documents relevant to the bills	x
	Text and final status of proposed legislation from previous years	☑
	Text and actions taken by the NASS on all enacted legislations	☑
	A searchable databank of previous and current bills and legislation	☑
Budget/ Public Financing	Description of appropriation/public funding	x
	Status of the review of the appropriation bills by NASS	x
	Records from legislative bodies that review or approve the budget	x
	Records regarding previous years' budget	x
	A searchable databank of records concerning previous and present budgets	x
Oversight (Scrutiny)	Description of oversight roles and the various activities of oversight bodies	x
	Summary and status of oversight activities	x
	Oversight documentation, such as questions (written/oral) and from previous years	x
	A searchable databank of records concerning oversight activities from the previous and the current year	x
Activities of committees, commissions, & other non-plenary Bodies	Records produced by non-plenary bodies (commissions, committees and other official groups) and those from previous years	x
	Websites of non-plenary bodies	x
	Audio or video broadcast or webcast of meetings	x

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) & Arrif (2018)

Table 5. Tools for searching, receiving, and viewing information

Search engine	Ability to search using words in text	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Sort results by various criteria	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Linking result of search document link to related audio and video records	x
Broadcasting and webcasting	Broadcast or webcast live meetings	x
	Records of broadcast or webcast meetings, events and programmes that allow on-demand viewing	x
Alerting services	email	x
	RSS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Mobile services	Ability to access the website through mobile devices	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Security and authentication	Verification of website users	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) & Arrif (2018)

Table 6. Tools—communication and dialogue with citizens

	Feedback utility that enhances sending comments and asking questions concerning any segment of the website	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
General Feedback	Information on how to contact members, committees and officials by phone, mail, in person	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Communication between members and citizens	Platform for contacting the NASS members, committees and officials by unstructured email messages or forms	x
	Tools for interacting with citizens	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	e-polling	x

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) & Arrif (2018)

accessible on mobile devices while security and authentication features are available for only registered organizations.

3.2. B. NASS website and interactivity

A key criterion of parliament website evaluation dwells on availability of online tools for communication, interaction and dialogue with citizens. Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) categorizes this into general feedback mechanism and communication between parliament members and citizens. With regards to general feedback, all required tools as itemized by Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) specification are available on the NASS website. In terms of communication between parliaments and citizens however, there is no capacity to contact members via email form. Some basic provisions on parliamentary website for enhancing interactivity include blogs, online fora and discussions, e-petition, chatrooms, news comments, links to the personal websites of each legislator, information on how to contact each member, video webcast of each meeting and

Table 7. Design—usability, accessibility, and language

Accessibility by persons with disabilities		x
General design elements	Frequently Asked Questions	x
	New activities on the website	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Site map	x
	Ownership, management of the website and update policy	x
	Help function	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Contact persons for questions regarding the website operation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Search Guidance	x
Multiple Browsers and Backward Compatibility		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2009) Guidelines for Parliamentary Website

plenary, audio webcast or broadcast, video archive (Arrif, 2018). For the NASS website however, online interactive tools for enhancing parliaments–citizens relations are limited to Twitter and Facebook only. This can be seen in Table 6.

Another important factor for evaluating parliamentary website relates to accessibility, usability and usefulness for persons with disabilities. In this regards, feature of accessibility by persons with disability is currently not available on the NASS website. Users can however easily see new event in the parliament from the home page, help and who to contact functions are available through the contact page. The website is backward compatible and accessible on all browsers. The FAQ page is however not developed and Site map, guidance on how to search for information on administration of the website are also not available as indicated in Table 7.

4. Discussion

E-parliament has been viewed as a groundbreaking innovation that can assist legislators across the world communicate effectively with their constituents. This enables citizens influence decisions that affecting them thereby solving societal problems (Waters, Hackley & Woodside, 2006). The website of the parliament creates a virtual community for interaction between the citizens and their legislators. The extent to which this is achievable however depends on the accessibility, usability and usefulness of the website for information provisioning and beyond that, for interaction between citizens and their parliaments.

Information content of the parliament is a vital criterion for measuring the usability, usefulness and accessibility of a parliamentary website. As observed by Mustafa and Sharifov (2018), parliamentary website is a veritable platform for unfiltered information on the legislature and legislative process. With respect to information provisioning, the NASS website provides a platform for accessing vital information concerning the Nigerian parliamentary process. The NASS website provides most of the information about parliamentarian responsibilities with respect to legislation and overview of the procedure and full text of standing orders, budget and oversight. Some other vital information that could be accessed on the NASS website are the composition, responsibilities, and function of the legislature and its constituent bodies, organizational chart of the NASS administrative structure, recently past events, committees of the NASS, commissions and non-plenary bodies, contact address of the current members and list and biodata of the previous members. It is pertinent to note that there are also some necessary information not available on the NASS website. However, most of the information that are considered very important factors of the usefulness and usability of parliamentary websites are present. The import of the rich content of the NASS website is that it will enhance a knowledgeable and critical citizenship which is a prerequisite for meaningful participation in the policy process. As observed by Monaco et al. (2012), accessibility, usability and usefulness of a website

empower citizens to access parliamentary information. Romanelli (2016) noted that such parliamentary information creates an informed citizenry necessary for participatory governance and sustainable development.

Accessibility, usability and usefulness of parliamentary website for persons with disabilities ensure that e-governance design is user-centered and in this regard are considered gateways to e-parliament (Monaco et al., 2012). Parliamentary website must be designed for universal access so that people are not excluded based on socio-economic, physical and intellectual factors. A poorly designed website will be difficult to use and thus capable of excluding people. The non-availability of the feature of accessibility by persons with disability on the NASS website constitutes a great weakness on e-parliament in Nigeria. The design of NASS has the potential of excluding a segment of the public whose right to being heard and perspectives being included in governance process should also be guaranteed.

A key criterion of parliament website evaluation dwells on availability of online tools for communication, interaction and dialogue with citizens. As observed by Mustafa and Sharifov (2018), the main aim of parliamentary website is to enhance citizens' online participation and interaction with their representatives. The interactivity of a parliamentary website is explained by its feature to establish relationship between the legislators and the citizens (Fiser, et al., 2012). Accessibility, usability and usefulness of parliamentary website for this goal are germane for e-parliament and constituency representation (Campbell et al., 1999; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009; Loukis, 2011). As observed by Monaco et al. (2012) and also reiterated by Romanelli (2016), accessibility, usability and usefulness of a website empower citizens not only to access parliamentary information but also to interact with their representatives using web tools. This is a general feedback mechanism and communication between parliament members and citizens that enhances knowledge sharing and dialogue. With regards to this important feature, the NASS website lacks adequate capacity and tools for legislators to engage citizens in a dialogue that will enable citizens' participation in the policy process. E-parliament goes beyond being a channel through which citizens access information but also a platform for active two-way communication that will engender interaction with citizens for an inclusive model of policy process (Romanelli, 2016). Some basic tools that enhance such interactivity like blogs, online fora and discussions, e-petition, chatrooms, news comments, links to the personal websites of each legislator, information on how to contact each member, video webcast of each meeting and plenary, audio webcast or broadcast, video archive are very limited on the NASS website. This finding is in agreement with previous submissions such as Mustafa and Sharifov (2018) who noted that parliamentary websites of state legislative institutions in Nigeria lack active and functional tools for citizens online participation and interaction with their representatives.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

This paper has reiterated the importance of the roles of the National Assembly as the representatives of the people, in realizing SDGs in the country. It has established that SDGs requires that the legislature is in constant communication, interaction and dialogue with the citizens which e-parliament portends. The content analysis of NASS website however revealed its accessibility, usability and usefulness for information provisioning. Its capacity for citizens' interaction and engagement in the decision process of the country's federal legislative body is very low. The website of NASS provides low tools for interactive communication between parliaments and citizens for effective constituent representation and inclusive governance in Nigeria. This analysis reveals that implementation of e-parliament in Nigeria is still majorly at the stage of information provisioning with low supporting tools for interacting and consulting the constituents. It is imperative that the parliamentary institution in Nigeria, like the modern parliament in developed world, is not just being seen as institution for formation of policy but also a body that can offer meaningful engagement with the citizens on issues that bother on the country's development through veritable, credible and universally accessible channels which e-parliament portends. This paper argues that with the exponential growth, acceptance and usage of the internet and mobile technology in Nigeria, the website of the nation's federal

representative body can be developed further to provide a veritable platform for the legislators to actively engage citizens of their constituents which will enhance the quality and effectiveness of their representation and thus build public trust in them. E-parliament enables effective consultation, interaction and dialogue with the citizen considered imperative for realizing the SDGs in Nigeria.

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