



IMPACT OF MEDIA ON POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

As important as the “sharing of meaning” to humanity, the concept of communication could make or mar a political process; if the choice of media falls short of the level of sagacity. To a great extent, the effective application of media in any political activity is dependent on the actors. In Nigeria, there have been debates on the contributions of media to the democratic process. This research focused on impact of media on political communication in Nigeria. The main objective of this study is to evaluate the impact of media on political communication in Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey method. A sample size of 400 was drawn from the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) Abuja voters' register of 1,570,307 through Taro Yamane Model. The chi-square statistics was used to analyse the data. The study established that media in political communication is crucial for informing voters and facilitating debates, and a good political communication system promotes informed decision-making and encourage civic participation for stable political system. The research also uncovered that the use of digital media and social networking platforms transformed the landscape of political communication. The research concluded that the media plays a crucial role in political communication in Nigeria. In line with the foregoing, the study advocated that media organisations should use their channels to inform voters, facilitate political debates and shape electoral outcomes; while digital media and social networking platforms should be adopted to transform the overall landscape of political activities. In furtherance to that, a good political communication system should be promoted in order to make an informed decision, encourage civic participation and contribute to general stability of the political system.

Keywords: Media, Nigeria, Political Communication, Political Campaigns, Strategies

Introduction

In the view of Obietan (2023), political communication studies and practices how information is created, transmitted, and processed in a political context. He argues that communication is essential for the functioning of democracy by providing citizens with information access on political issues, formation of opinions and holding government accountable to the people. According to Ogwezzy-Ndisika (2025), political communication entails the strategic use of media for campaigns, policy information, and power retention. Delli Capin and Williams (2011), articulated political communication as the exchange of information and ideas between political actors, institutions and the public, mediated by various channels such as mass, social media, and inter-personal communication. In the same vein, Anyanwu and Onuoha (2022) posit that strong and provocative political messages do influence political awareness and mobilisation on the part of a number of young Nigerians, especially if disseminated via social media, radio, and political rallies.

Esponsing further on the field, Okigbo, et al (2017) asserted that political agenda setting and agenda building, the uses and effects of political advertising, the relationship between journalists and politicians, the framing of political news by reporters, gatekeeping processes, and more recently, the uses and influence of the new social media in election coverage and public opinion management constitute the basic components of political communication.

Nwabueze (2014), broadens the discourse by stating that liberalisation of broadcasting came up in 1990s which expanded media reach while in the 21st century, digital media came as a revolution for political engagement among the youths in Nigeria. Media's impact in political communication has gained increasing importance in influencing public opinion, electoral outcomes, and overall political landscape. Thus, media serves as a conduit for political messages, offering analysis and commentary, and functioning as a watchdog for government accountability.

Despite the growing importance of media in Nigerian politics, its impacts remain double-edged, latent and, somewhat, immeasurable. Adeyanju (2018) posited that traditional media often comes with censorship, political influence and commercial pressures; as digital media are concomitantly confronted with challenges of fake news, misinformation and hate speech.

Johnson et al (2018) assumed that the media in political communication is crucial during election campaigns since the period represents a critical moment in democratic processes, and media coverage plays a vital role in informing voters, facilitating political debates and shaping electoral outcomes.

Literature Review

Media Systems and Political Campaigns in Nigeria

The media's role in society is participation in influencing change by raising people's political consciousness or making them politically active and activeness in democracy is sine qua non to the promotion of peace and order. Media advocacy campaigns are a practical tool to better the general public in understanding their role and importance in the electioneering process and governance which could positively impact the country's development and significance (Anyanwu & Ikpegbu, 2022).

Media coverage of political campaigns can influence voters' preferences, shape public discourse and impact the electoral discourse in terms of the way candidates are portrayed in the media, the issues are highlighted, and the tone of the coverage can significantly impact voters' perceptions and decisions (Cavanaugh, 2017).

The use of digital technology in our daily lives, including elections, has turned this kind of communication and campaign out of reach for some citizens. We find ways as yet undreamt of for candidates to reach out and get their voices heard, and as well, gain some supports. Digital campaign strategies seem to gain increasing prominence as part of political competition in society (as was evident in the 2023 presidential elections). Nigerian political candidates have consistently adopted technologies as campaign strategies in a bid to engage with voters, amplify their messages and change public opinion over the past few years.

The 2023 presidential elections witnessed a marked rise in reliance from previous decades upon digital campaign strategies as indicated in the rise of digital platforms and their influence over electoral successes. Digital mediums like Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (X), Tik Tok, Instagram and YouTube have been used for political campaigns, electioneering expeditions, ideological rhetoric initiatives, and for mobilising the voters. Even before the 2023 elections in Nigeria, digital media platforms were widely used to mobilise voters for electoral processes. Ibrahim (2023) suggests that social media was instrumental in coordinating mobilisation around the election and sharing audio and video materials, presenting diverse candidates' profiles as well as other election-related information due to their popularity amongst the voting population. Whereas social media is recognised as an important medium to promote political dialogues between politicians and the voter population, it is also assumed to promoting political propaganda for and on behalf of candidates and as well, promoting candidates and their supporters.

Importantly, the use of digital media and social networking platforms has transformed the landscape of political communication in modern Nigeria. Hence, platforms like X, Facebook, and YouTube provide new avenues for political actors to reach and engage with the public (Fusarelli, 2018). Base on this scenario, the proliferation of digital media also presents challenges such as the fake news, the echo chamber effect and the polarisation of public discourse (Earls & Hall, 2018).

Media in political communication

Media's impact in political communication is influenced by media ownership, regulatory frameworks, and technological advancements. Harper et al (2018) established that the concentration of media in the hands of a few conglomerates impact the diversity of perspectives and the independence of media outlets.

Social media has become a huge factor in political communication in Nigeria. The All-Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) commonly use platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram and WhatsApp are platforms for campaigning, campaign mobilisation and public mobilisation (Ojomugbokenyode & Ogande, 2024); and even more by the Labour Party (LP). The authors also established that Facebook continued to be the largest platform by users, generating approximately one-third of overall online activity across the 2023 presidential campaign.

X (formerly Twitter) is a place for image branding, opinion formation and fast response to political issues. But research indicates it is used predominantly for self-promotion and agenda-setting and not for deliberative political engagement (Joe, 2023). The use of WhatsApp and Instagram is also a more than likely strategy in campaign communication to achieve more specific targeting and visualisation among young voters (Okon, Ojedor & Owolabi, 2024).

Voters' mobilisation has greatly changed through social media. Research on the 2023 elections found platforms like Facebook and X were key channels in disseminating campaign messages, planning rallies and reaching out to supporters (Ojomugbokenyode & Ogande, 2024). However, the effect of changing voter preference seems not to be greatly significant. An empirical study, once found that social media "had minimal influence on changing voters' candidate preferences." New trends also indicate the growing involvement of short video platforms (e.g., TikTok) and interactive campaign formats in younger audiences (Inquirer Nigeria, 2025). In general, the contemporary state of the use of social media among Nigerian political parties appears to reflect a progressive but imperfect ecosystem,

which in the researcher's opinion can facilitate visibility and engagement, but suffers from credibility, inclusivity and misinformation.

According to Ladd (2021), social media is an innovative approach to political communication and this marked a significant departure from traditional campaign strategies and demonstrated the potential of media platforms in transforming the way candidates engage with the electorate.

Political Communication

A strong political communication system demonstrates that political actors are engaging with their constituents, listening to their concerns, and providing clear and consistent information (Bennet, 2016.). According to Stromback, et al (2016), political communication extends beyond the interaction between political actors and the public and includes the satisfaction of different stakeholders such as interest groups, civil society organisations and the media.

Nsikan (2022) presupposes political communication as the gathering, processing and dissemination of persuasive messages by a political party, its agents or flag-bearers to sell the party's ideology or candidates for the purpose of gaining political power or sustaining control. The rise of digital media and social media platforms have disrupted traditional media ecosystems and reshaped the dynamics of political communication. As stated earlier, proliferation of digital media also poses challenges such as fake news, the echo chamber effect, and polarisation of public discourse (Earls & Hall, 2018).

Delli Carpini and Williams (2001) describe political communication as the exchange of information and ideas between political actors, institutions, and the public, mediated by various channels such as mass media, social media and inter-personal communication. They popularised the doctrine of "infotainment" and "politainment." For Nigeria's undemocratic history, several military regimes view the study of political communication as subversive and able to support dissent. Politics revolves around the need to make political dialogues and interactions and the purpose of political communication is primarily to facilitate communication between the members of political groups in society.

According to McNair (2017), a good political communication system promotes informed decision-making, encourage civic participation, and contribute to the overall stability of the political system. It can also shape public opinion and influence political outcomes depending on the communication strategies and the effectiveness of the media in disseminating accurate and unbiased information. A diverse media environment ensures various interests and viewpoints are effectively represented; hence, leading to a more inclusive and representative political discourse (Stromback et al., 2016).

Clearly, the function of communication through the political process could be regarded as political communication (Oparaugo, 2021). To a large extent, it involves the production and generation of communication by political actors, the receiving and distribution of political messages, both direct and indirect. Political communication represents a political process that involves the involvement of institutions and individuals in politics; the use of the public media, not only of the mass media but also of the public in political communication. Political communication is essentially about actors playing active roles in the democratic process through communication channels.

On the other hand, Sánchez Medero (2020) defines political communication as "a type of delivery of messages or information related to politics from a source to the

recipients of the message.” Some functions of political communication are to: minimise uncertainty, advance the interest of the general public (prospective public policies), provides for the forecast, and planning and explanation of strategic communication purposes (Dorofeyev, et al (2022). The types of players in most cases are media, civilians and politicians but contents and topic matter are usually dynamic.

Every act of political communication by parties, interest groups or media toward their citizens, the state, is designed to inform them, and to impact them. Therefore, it is the interaction of these three groups that makes political communication activity.

. The Internet, social media and smart devices have transformed how candidates and political parties talk to voters, in this digital age. Until the last two decades, political campaigns predominantly used public meetings, live debates, and advertising in print and broadcast media; including television and radio (Abidi & Soo, 2021).

Digital software and platforms have also facilitated the rise of the mobile application of campaigns' ability to be mobilised and connect with voters. Campaign-mobile applications are enabling political parties to reach directly consumers, engage in voluntary activities, and fundraise effectively. Similar technologies also allow voters to access information about how to get involved in the electoral process (e.g., voter registration and polling locations), providing a better mechanism for increasing electoral participation (Orjuela & Ramírez, 2021).

Many of the changes brought about in terms of political campaigning methodologies via technology and digital media greatly impact how voters get involved. Because the simple and two-way communication and availability of information on social media allow for this, voters now have more options where they can have discussions about political issues. Interaction with candidates and their campaign on a Twitter, Facebook or Instagram site can create a sense of ownership and influence in the political process. This may increase the digital divide and result in some voters missing the information required in order to fully participate. According to (Nwosu, I. E. & Nkamnebe, 2025), campaigning needs the following elements to succeed:

1. Radio & Television Campaign: Messages on the candidate running in the election are presented on TV or on radio channels.
2. Social Media Campaign: This campaign message is broadcast in various social media platforms - Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp. The information disseminated through the media reaches out to various audiences from around the world with no geographical confines. Politicians now use social media more than other forms of mass media.
3. Billboards Campaign: It is one of the commonest types of political campaign for electioneering candidates.
4. Posters Campaign: All villages and corners of the states with elections will have posters pasted.
5. Rally Campaign: Utilizes outreach by candidates running for election and their faithful supporters going out to the street to see their various constituencies to try to get their votes.

Empirical Review

McAllister and Mughan (2019), conducted a study examining the role of media framing in political communication and its influence on public opinions in Nigeria. The researchers analysed various forms of media coverage including news articles, television broadcast, and

social media posts to understand how political messages are framed and presented to the public. The study found that media framing significantly shapes public opinion on political issues. The way in which information is presented, including the selection of certain perspectives or the emphasis on specific aspects of a story, have a profound impact on how the public perceives and understands political events and actors. Also, Ladd (2021), carried out a comprehensive analysis of the reasons behind public distrust and dissatisfaction with the media in the United States. The study examined various factors, including media bias, sensationalism, and the erosion of journalistic standards, contributing to the negative attitudes toward the media. The researcher discovered that emphasis on sensational and emotionally charged content as well as the tendency to frame news in a negative light, contributes significantly to public dissatisfaction.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting theory was conceived by McCombs and Shaw in 1972. The theory portrays the impact of media in shaping public opinion by determining the importance of issues through their coverage. Regarding political communication, media does not only report political events and issues but also influences the way the public perceives and prioritises these topics. Thus, agenda setting is achieved by controlling the amount and prominence of coverage given to specific issues. Hence, media can effectively set the public agenda and influence political discourse.

Similarly, the impact of media in political communication is analysed as a powerful driver of public opinion and political discussion. Media coverage shapes the salience of political issues, actors and events affecting the way the public thinks and talks about politics. Agenda-setting theory suggests that, the media's ability to influence political communication is not only limited to issue-salience but also shapes the public's evaluations and opinions of political actors. Media's ability to portray political figure in a certain way impact the public's perception of these individuals and their suitability for leadership positions.

In conclusion, agenda-setting theory provides a valuable perspective on the impact of modern political communication. The theory investigates ways in which the media sets the public agenda and influences political discourse and at the same time highlights the power and responsibility of media institutions in shaping public opinion and encouraging a well-informed electorate.

Methodology

The methodology adopted for this study was survey research design as it has the ability to fully gather data from respondents based on their views and opinions on AI and sustainable development. The design offered thorough information about the study population and presented a clearer picture of how events happened in real life and its objective required the generation of primary data using questionnaire. Hence, the quantitative analysis was made possible by the research design and this gave the researcher an opportunity to use an empirical data. The study population comprised of One Million, Five Hundred and Seventy Thousand, Three Hundred and Seven (1,570,307) as total number of registered voters in Federal Capital Territory (INEC Report, 2023); and a sample size of Four Hundred (400) was determined using Taro Yamane formula. The chi-square statistics was used to test the formulated hypotheses to determine significant relationships between variables, making it suitable for exploring correlations in the data.

Results and Discussions

Analysis of Research Question One (1)

Table 1: Media inform voters and facilitates political debates for positive electoral outcomes

Option	FCT Voters	Responses	Valid Responses	Percentage (%)
Strongly Agree	280	280	280	70
Agree	100	100	100	25
Undecided	10	10	10	2.5
Strongly Disagree	10	10	10	2.5
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Total	400	400	400	100

Source: Field Survey, (2026)

The table 1 above shows that media inform voters, and facilitates political debates for electoral outcomes. The investigation revealed that 280 voters, representing 70% of respondents strongly agree, 100 being 25% of respondents agree, 10 respondents which translates to 2.5 % undecided;

while 10 respondents being 2.5 % of respondents strongly disagreed that, media inform voters and facilitate political debates for positive political outcomes.

Analysis of Research Question Two (2)

Table 2: Digital media and social networking platforms transformed landscape of political communication

Options	FCT Voters	Responses	Valid Responses	Percentages (%)
Strongly Agree	150	150	150	37.5
Agree	200	200	200	50
Undecided	20	20	20	5
Strongly Disagree	30	30	30	7.5
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Total	400	400	400	100

Source: Field Survey, (2026)

The table 2 above indicated that, digital media and social networking platforms transformed landscape political communication. The investigation shows that 150 voters, being 37.5% respondents strongly agreed, 200 respondents, being 50% of respondents agreed, 20 voters, representing

5% of respondents were undecided, and 30 respondents, being 7.5% of respondents, strongly disagree that digital media and social networking platforms transformed landscape of political communication.

Analysis of Research Question Three (3)

Table 3: Good political communication system promotes informed decision-making, encourage civic participation for stability of political system

Options	FCT Voters	Responses	Valid Responses	Percentages (%)
Strongly Agree	180	180	180	45
Agree	150	150	150	37.5
Undecided	20	20	20	5
Disagree	40	40	40	10
Strongly Disagree	10	10	10	2.5
Total	400	400	400	100

Source: Field Survey (2026)

The table 3 above shows that, good political communication system promotes informed decision-making and encourage civic participation for the stability of political system. The investigation indicated that, 180 being 45% of respondents strongly agreed, 150 being 37.5% of respondents agree, 20 representing 5% of respondents are undecided, 40 voters, being 10% of respondents disagree, and 10 being 2.5% of respondents strongly disagreed that, good political communication system promotes informed decision-making and encourage civic participation for stability of the political system.

Test of Hypotheses

Three hypotheses were formulated and tested using chi-square (χ^2) statistics:

TABLE 4: Computation of Chi-Square

Response	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	(fo-fe)	(fo-fe) ²	fo-fe/fe
Strongly Agree	280	80	200	40000	500
Agree	100	80	20	40000	500
Undecided	10	80	-70	4900	61.3
Disagree	10	80	-70	4900	61.3
Strongly Disagree	0	80	-80	6400	80
Total	400				1203

Source: Field Survey (2026)

Hypothesis One

To test hypothesis one, it is restated in null and alternate forms as follows:

H₀: Media does not inform voters and facilitates political debates for positive electoral outcomes

H₁: Media inform voters and facilitates political debates for positive electoral outcomes

To test for this hypothesis, table 1 (Digital media and social networking platforms transformed landscape of political communication) which deals with the subject matter as represented below:

Expected Frequency = Total frequency = $400/5 = 80$ (Expected frequency)

DECISION:

Since the calculated χ^2 of (317) is greater than the tabulated χ^2 of 9.4877, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis which states that, media inform voters and facilitates political debates for positive electoral outcomes.

Hypothesis Two

In testing hypothesis two, it is reinstated in null hypothesis and alternate hypothesis form as follows:

Table 5: Computation of Chi- Square

Response	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	(fo-fe)	(fo-fe) ²	fo-fe/fe
Strongly Agree	150	80	70	4900	61.3
Agree	200	80	120	14400	180
Undecided	20	80	-60	3600	45
Disagree	30	80	-50	2500	31.3
Strongly Agree	0	80	-80	6400	80
Total	400				398

Source: Field survey (2026)

DECISION:

Since the calculated, χ^2 of 369.7 is greater than the tabulated χ^2 of 9.4877, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis which states that, digital media and social networking platforms transformed landscape of political communication.

Hypothesis Three

To test for hypothesis three, it is reinstated in it null and alternate form as follows:

Ho: Good political communication system does not promote informed decision-making, encourage civic participation for stability of political system

Table 6: Computation of Chi-Square

Response	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	(fo-fe)	(fo-fe) ²	fo-fe/fe
Strongly Agree	180	80	100	10000	125
Agree	150	80	70	4900	61.3
Undecided	20	80	-60	3600	45
Disagree	40	80	-40	1600	20
Strongly Agree	10	80	-70	4900	61.3
Total	400				312.6

Source: Field survey (2026)

DECISION:

Since the calculated χ^2 of 372.2 is greater than the tabulated χ^2 of 9.4877, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis which states that, good political communication system promotes informed decision making, encourage civic participation for stability of political system.

Discussion of Findings

In line with the results of the hypotheses, the following findings were made, hypothesis one shows that, the calculated χ^2 of 372.2 was greater than the tabulated χ^2 of 9.4877. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis (H1) which stated that, media inform voters and facilitate political debates for positive electoral outcomes was accepted. This coincides with Johnson et al (2016) that media in political communication is crucial during election and in all democratic processes, as they inform voters and facilitate political debates for positive electoral outcomes.

Hypothesis two showed that, the calculated χ^2 of 369.7 was greater than the tabulated χ^2 of 9.4877. Therefore, the alternate hypothesis (H1) which stated that, digital media and social networking platforms transformed landscape of political communication was accepted and this is similar to Fusarelli, et al (2018), that, digital media and social networking platforms have transformed the landscape of political communication.

Ho: Digital media and social networking platforms do not transform landscape of political communication

H1: Digital media and social networking platforms transform landscape of political communication

The table on digital media and social networking platforms transform landscape of political communication as previously presented is deemed appropriate for use in testing the hypothesis two. The table is represented below to guide the test.

H1: Good political communication system promotes informed decision-making, encourage civic participation for stability of political system

The table (Good political communication system promote informed decision-making, encourage civic participation for stability of political system) previously presented is also considered as appropriate for use in testing the hypothesis three. The table is represented below to guide the test.

Finally, hypothesis three shows that, the calculated χ^2 of 372.2 was greater than the tabulated χ^2 of 9.4877. Hence, the alternate hypothesis (H1), good political communication system promotes informed decision-making, encourage civic participation for stability of political system was accepted and this coincides with McNair (2017), that good political communication system promotes informed decision-making and encourage civic participation for stability of political system.

Conclusion

The study concluded that, media significantly impact political communication in Nigeria. The results of the analyses show that, calculated χ^2 of 372.2, 369.7 and 372.2 were greater than the tabulated χ^2 of 9.4877, respectively, as this made the alternate hypotheses to be accepted. This shows that, media significantly impact political communication in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommended as follows:

- (1) Media organisations should use media to inform voters, facilitate political debates and shape electoral outcomes.
- (2) Digital media and social networking platforms should be used to transformed the landscape of political communication.

- (3) Good political communication system should be promoted to make an informed decision- making, encourage civic participation and contribute to overall stability of the political system.

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