

Communication Strategies and Acceptance of Political Candidates in Nigeria

¹Ajibola O. Peter Adu, ²Daisi Simeon A.

Department of Liberal Studies, The Federal Polytechnic, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

³Ajiboye Folasade Alaba

Department of Marketing, Osun Statepolytechnic, Iree, Osun State

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined communication strategies and acceptance of political candidates in Nigeria. The specific objectives are: to determine the effect of personal selling on acceptance of political candidates, to find out the effect of personality promotion on acceptance of political candidates, to examine the effect of social media on acceptance of political candidates, and to investigate the effect of public relation on acceptance of political candidates in Nigeria. The study employed survey method in which the data required for the study were generated through questionnaire. The population comprised of voters who are resident in Ekiti State. Cochram formula was used to determine a sample of 370. The returned questionnaire were analyzed using chi-square. The findings indicate that; communication strategies adopted by Ekiti State political candidates were assessed to be persuasive in content, the personality promotion strategies used has helped in modifying and strengthening the views, and beliefs of the people towards them. The study therefore recommended that Political Processes should be effectively handled by adopting ethical oriented political marketing strategies rather than being unethical in the ways and manners political campaign are conducted.*

KEYWORDS: communication strategies, personal selling, social media, personality promotion

INTRODUCTION

Communication which is an aspect of marketing is an integral part of every political campaign. Political campaign, which is an organized effort to secure nomination and election candidates for government offices can be better carried out by political parties if marketing strategies are employed. In Nigeria, the most important political campaigns are those of president and Vice-

president. Even within the state politics, Political campaign for the nomination and election of candidates for the offices of governor and deputy governor is also important.

Political marketing is a concept that bridge two disciplines which are marketing and politics. It is the course that blends marketing and politics together in order to create favourable atmosphere in order to enhance economic growth and development in the nation. The concept of marketing, when applied to politics can be viewed as the means of integrating different groups and individual interests in order to achieve common goals. In each political party, such nominations are made at a national and state convention preceding the presidential and gubernatorial elections. After a candidate clinches a ticket to run for either the presidency or governorship under a particular political platform (party), both the candidate and their political parties have to secure the approval of their candidacy from the electorate.

Against this background, politicians, political parties and candidates employ various communication platforms and strategies, which are aimed at marketing their personalities or selling themselves to the electorates. At the wake of the political transition programme in 1999 and to date, politicians have used and are still using communication platforms to solicit for votes (Achor, 2002). Most of those persuasive communication blueprints and action plans which they employ are designed to project or market a desirable image of a subject/government. They are also aimed at mobilizing support for their party, office and most importantly instilling confidence among the citizen.

Given the new marketing concept and the concept of the new economy, political marketing communication becomes part of the arrow of strategies for selling politicians and marketing politics. According to Prince Achor (2002) the new strategy now involves communicating need satisfying attributes of politicians and their parties through advertising, public relations publicity and other forms of persuasive communication all these ace part and parcel of political marketing communication strategies.

Marketing communication strategy is largely used by firms or individuals to reach their target market through various channels. It defines the entire range of activities that help to market a product/ service which may include public relations, publicity, advertising, social media, personal selling, sales promotion and direct marketing.

“Political communications strategies is seen as those communication platforms or arrow heads that are deliberately planned and continuously used by the elected leaders, candidates and political parties to win support secure the approval of voters on policies and government/party programmes.” The communication strategy sees information dissemination to the targets audience or market (voters) as very important because it is the only means through which political programmes could be disseminated and achieve political goals. Hence, how Nigerian politicians

use these communication strategies in marketing themselves, obtaining their election goals and securing the approval of voters and the citizen, these questions necessitate the research.

Statement of Problem

Communication is an integral part of every political campaign in Nigeria but it appears the various strategies deployed by political parties and political candidates have not boosted their chances of winning elections. Given the kind of attitude of Nigeria's politicians, it is still doubtful if the communication strategies they use in promoting themselves are ethical and sound enough when compared to what obtains in developed nations of the world. The use of persuasive political communication by politicians is expected to disseminate appropriate information capable of creating awareness, aimed at either changing or strengthening opinions, attitudes, beliefs or values of the recipient to a more positive outcome but it seems this is far from being achieved as most politicians sometimes turn political rallies to a ground where their opponents are abused. According to Achor (2002), communication must be statistically tested so as to produce the desired effect or else it would be rightly understood as mere empty rhetoric or negative propaganda. Owing to the aforementioned, this study investigates communication strategies and acceptance of political candidates in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine communication strategies and acceptance of political candidates in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are;

- (i) To determine the effect of personal selling on acceptance of political candidates.
- (ii) To find out the effect of personality promotion on acceptance of political candidates.
- (iii) To examine the effect of social media on acceptance of political candidate in Nigeria.
- (iv) To investigate the effect of public relation on acceptance of political candidate in Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication Strategies.

Every aspect of human endeavours involves communication. There are various means a political party can use to influence voters' behaviour, but for the purpose of this study emphasis was on marketing communication strategies such as advertising, personal selling and relationship marketing. Many factors tend to influence the choice of a particular communication tool. One of such factors is the nature of the product or the nature of the target audience or the degree of competition (Agbonifoh *et al* 2007). Kotler and Armstrong (2010) referred to marketing communication as the specific blend of advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct

marketing and so on that an organization or institution uses to persuasively communicate customer value and to build customer relationship. In order to achieve political and electoral objective in contemporary election one or a combination of the marketing communication strategies is required for the desired result.

Communication strategy includes several complementary communication functions which are essential for national development. These functions are practical building blocks in the design of a communication strategy and include policy communication, educational communication, social or facilitative function, time-sensitive communication. As highlighted by Röling (1994) policy communication expected to be initiated by government agency involve making policies, programs, and the evolving procedures known. The basic attributes of educational communication which is expected to be initiated by service providers, include making technical know-how accessible to increase knowledge about the production, transformation, organization and marketing dimensions of production activities of a nation. Also, price information should be made known. Attributes of social or facilitative communication, a platform for participation and debate function include providing platforms for stakeholders to exchange perspectives, explore new ideas and programs, appreciate differences of opinions, negotiate common goals, develop partnerships, propose changes to programs and become confident participants able to articulate needs and opinions (Ramirez & Quarry, 2004).

In an attempt to advance sustainable development agenda, media and communication development often faces challenges in the form of weak technical skills, poor professional journalistic standards and dearth of financial resources. Other challenges include fragmented legal frameworks, poor integration of both ICT and traditional platform and an undemocratic political system or lack of enabling political environment (Minnie, 2007).

Political Communication in Nigeria

Noting that good communication is tantamount to informative democracy for societal transformation, Omotoso (2015) remarks that “the message, that is, what is to be communicated, and the media, that is, how the message is transmitted” constitute the two contexts within which one can argue that “the power to influence (political power) is embedded in the power to communicate.” Given this crucial insight, political communication becomes fundamental to democratic theory. Despite this, political communication is unfortunately a latecomer within the study of Africa’s democratic discourses, hence, justifying Popoola’s (2017) argument that the late evolution of political communication reflects state hostility to political science in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

According to Osagioduwa, Omotoso and Olukotun (2018), “political communication cannot be unequivocal in that it diversifies as dictated by situational contexts in relation to era, societal traits, geography, culture, race, system of government, behaviour of leaders and the led, and opinion of communication scholars” (Osagioduwa, et al 2017). By implication, the history of political

communications in Nigeria is interwoven with the history of colonialism, Christian missionary society, political development, socio-economic structure, ownership of newspapers and other mass media of communications (Rahman, 1991). Policom in Nigeria has taken different forms. From dissemination of political views in terms of governments' positions on issues; soliciting for support in political activities, to presentation of masses' grievances and so on, policom has transited through periods including what could be called authoritarian policom, which pervaded Nigeria's early post-independence era where media ownership and control rested solely on government and so was characterized by one-way-communication of government policies and programmes to the masses for compliance. There was also the Soviet-Communist Policom which pervaded the later part of military rule in Nigeria. It was characterized by party press ownership; media as teacher of the masses; emphasis on the positive harnessing of media outlets for the goals of national development and social change; placing value on unity (Rahman 1991). The return to civil rule which began with the failed third republic in 1993 heralded the arrival of the social responsibility policom. This is contrary to Rahman's claim that not much relevance can be derived from a social responsibility theory of the press for Nigeria, as social responsibility policom directs critical attention at media commitment to both the government and the masses. Libertarian policom began to grow in Nigeria as democracy was taking root. Thus, since 1999, the press has been in the struggle for freedom of information. On this, the proliferation of new media in the 2000s brought unprecedented but questionable level of liberty, reflected in uncensored news reporting, internet journalism and unrestricted mass participation in information gathering and dissemination, through social media. These theories provide a viable starting point for the discussion of political communication; particularly the transitions and frequent meandering of the Nigerian state between authoritarian, soviet-communist, libertarian and social responsibility since colonial period characterized by a teeming population of non-literate masses; the post-independence media of the 60s and 70s; the military incursions of the 80s and 90s, and the democratic regimes since 1999. Although, these theories of communication have been used to explain policom in Africa, none has successfully and completely captured the African situation, since most are alien to Africa's indigenous structures. (Sharon, 2018).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on two-step flow theory proposed by Sam (1993). The two-step flow theory assumes that there is a definite group of "opinion leader" who get information from the media analyse and interpret it, and then pass it along to the public. This explanation of the theory draws much insight from the community communications social structure (Sam, 1993). The major critic of the theory are Defleur and Sandra (1998). According to Defleur and Sandra (1998), the theory fails due to the fact that no permanent group of people serves as opinion leaders on all subjects. But this theory is still useful inspite of this shortcoming. Political candidates should use it in preparation of communication campaign that will educate or enlightened elites in their domain to reach out to the rural populace. According to Achor (2002) since the educated elites are respected

in their domains, the credible ones among them can be used to mobilize the rural populace to support certain government policies or explain government viewpoint, actions and inactions.

Empirical Studies

Some of the studies that have been conducted that affirmed the relationship of communication strategies and acceptance of product / service are reviewed. Glory and Agnes (2016), investigated the application of marketing communication tools by political parties in campaign programs in cross river state in repositioning Nigeria campaign program have been marred with the use of thug for rallies, attacks, programs and ideologies between opposing political parties. In order to curb these problems, the study investigates the effect of advertising in political parties' campaign programs in cross rivers state, the use of word-of-mouth marketing in political campaign programs, and the influence of public relations in political parties' campaign programs. Survey research design was adopted, in which questionnaire were administered to 200 respondents in four local government areas in Cross River State. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The results show that marketing communication tools enhance political campaign programs.

Jimmy (2016) investigated the relationship between marketing communication strategies and voter's behaviour in electioneering process in Southern senatorial district of Cross River, Nigeria. The purpose was to determine the effect and relationship of marketing communication strategies such as advertising, personal selling and relationship marketing in electioneering process. The survey research design was employed for the study. The sample for the study was 400 which was derived using Taro Yamane's formula of from a total number of 971, 470 population from four local government areas (Calabar, Municipal, Calabar south, Akpabuyo and Odukpani), the stratified and systematic sampling was then used to select 100 respondents from each of the four Local Government Areas, in the following political parties: All Progressive Congress (APC), People Democratic Party (PDP), and Labour Party (LP). The study indicated that a good communication strategy influence the choice of Political candidates in the areas selected.

Nwanmuoh (2021), examined the state of political public relations in Nigeria by focusing on the image, campaign and competitive advantage of political parties. Its arguments are based on the theoretical literature review on political public relations, image, campaign and competitive advantage. This article suggests an in-depth investigation of the nature of some of the major problems in political public relations and contributes to a better understanding of the concept. The nature of the analysis is exploratory rather than definitive, and specific investigations are needed to thoroughly explore and better theories political image, campaign and competitive advantage in various political domains. The study affirmed that political image management is the essential key for securing public trust and support.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted survey approach to carry out this investigation. According to Osuala (1982) survey research is a systematic collection of information directly from respondents. It studies both large and small population by selecting samples chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence distribution and inter-relationship of sociological and psychological variables. The population of this study consists of voters who are residents of Ekiti State. Owing to the nature and characteristic of the population for this study, the researcher adopted Cochran formula to determine the sample size.

Cochran formula is statistically stated as:

$$\begin{aligned}
 n &= \frac{(Z)^2(PQ)}{E^2} \\
 n &= \frac{(1.96)^2 (60 \times 40)}{5^2} \\
 &= \frac{3.84 \times 2400}{25} \\
 &= \frac{9216}{25} \\
 n &= 368.64 \\
 n &= 370
 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore, the sample size for this study is 370.

Consequently, convenience sampling was used to select 370 respondents who participated in the study. Data for this study was gathered through both primary and secondary data sources.

Questionnaires were the instrument used for data collection in this study. Chi-square was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Here, the hypotheses formulated for the study are tested using chi-square.

Decision Rule

Reject the null hypothesis if the computed value of test statistics X^2 exceeds the critical tabulated value of X^2 for $(r-1) (C-1)$ degree of freedom.

Hypothesis 1

H_0 : Personal selling has no significant effect on acceptance of political candidates in Nigeria

Table 1: Contingency Table of X^2 for Hypothesis 1

| O | O | O-E | (O-E) ² | $\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$ |
|-------|-----|------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 396 | 252 | 144 | 20736 | 82.3 |
| 470 | 252 | 218 | 47524 | 188.6 |
| 106 | 252 | -146 | 21316 | 84.6 |
| 36 | 252 | -216 | 46656 | 185.1 |
| X^2 | | | | 541 |

Source: field survey 2023

Decision

Since the calculated X^2 value is greater than the critical value which is 12.59, we reject the null hypothesis (H_0) and accept the alternate hypothesis (H_1) which states that Personal selling has significant effect on acceptance of political candidate in Nigeria.

Hypothesis II

H_0 : Personality promotion has no significant effect on acceptance of political candidates in Nigeria.

Table 2: Contingency Table of X^2 for Hypothesis II

| O | E | O-E | (O-E) ² | $\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$ |
|-------|-----|------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 376 | 252 | 124 | 15376 | 61.01 |
| 520 | 252 | 268 | 71824 | 285.01 |
| 86 | 252 | -166 | 27556 | 109.35 |
| 26 | 252 | -226 | 51076 | 202.68 |
| X^2 | | | | 658.05 |

Source: field survey 2023

Decision

Since the calculated X^2 value of 658.05 is greater than the critical value which is 16.92, we reject the null hypothesis H_0 and accept the alternate hypothesis H_1 which states that Personality promotion has significant effect on acceptance of political candidates in Nigeria.

Hypothesis III

H_0 : Social media has no significant effect on acceptance of political candidates in Nigeria.

Table 3 Contingency Table of X^2 for Hypothesis III

| O | E | O-E | (O-E) ² | $\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$ |
|-------|-----|------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 254 | 252 | 2 | 4 | 0.02 |
| 546 | 252 | 294 | 86436 | 343 |
| 149 | 252 | -103 | 10609 | 42.1 |
| 59 | 252 | -193 | 37249 | 147.8 |
| X^2 | | | | 189.92 |

Source: field survey 2023

Decision

Since the calculated X^2 value of 189.92 is greater than the critical value which is 12.59, we reject the null hypothesis H_0 and accept the alternate hypothesis H_1 which states that Social media has significant effect on acceptance of political candidates in Nigeria.

Hypothesis IV

H_0 : Public relation has no significant effect on acceptance of political candidates in Nigeria.

Table 4: Contingency Table of X^2 for Hypothesis IV

| O | E | O-E | (O-E) ² | $\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$ |
|-------|-----|------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 276 | 252 | 24 | 576 | 2.29 |
| 520 | 252 | 268 | 71824 | 285.01 |
| 106 | 252 | -146 | 21316 | 84.59 |
| 106 | 252 | -146 | 21316 | 84.59 |
| X^2 | | | | 456.48 |

Source: field survey 2023

Decision

Since the calculated X^2 value of 456.48 is greater than the critical value which is 12.59, we reject the null hypothesis H_0 and accept the alternate hypothesis H_1 which states that Public relation has significant effect on acceptance of political candidates in Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This finding agree with the view of Anthony (2005) who posited that communication strategies used by southeast politicians in marketing themselves to their target audience are persuasive. The finding of the study also support the opinion of Argan (2012) who admitted that personality promotion encourages voters to give their support to a party candidate, he also posited that personality promotion influences the acceptance of political candidate in Nigeria.

The finding is also in line with the view of Bode and Dalrymple (2014) who asserted that social media is important in influencing people to participate in various political activities, especially those that relate to election. It was unveiled in the study that public relation contributes to the mobilization and enlightenment of the party's supporters and give mutual understanding and promotion of goodwill. This finding support the view of Wilcox and Cameron (2006) who are of the opinion that public relations are instrumental to building mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its various publics.

CONCLUSION

The essence of employing Communication strategies in political mobilization, politics, and social marketing is to modify, or change behaviour, attitude, and belief of the target towards an object or subject. Based on the findings of the study, such objectives have been demonstrated. The communication strategies employed by politicians are strong and persuasive enough to lead to the attainment of their political goals. This has always assist in mobilizing support for political parties, candidates and more importantly instilling confidence of the public in them.

Often times as discovered in this study, social media is being employed by vast majority of politicians in marketing government programmes, policies and action. However, for effective political marketing, various political communication strategies must be integrated, namely, public relations publicity, advertising, events marketing rallies, sponsorship, festivals, etc. When all these are blended in a single plan for political mobilization, people of various backgrounds will get the message being passed across without resorting to the planners. A well-planned communication strategies teaches that political marketers should go beyond information or awareness creation to the educating the target through vigorous explanations, instruction, directions and other cognitive guides that will help the target audience to have better understanding of a politician or a deeper knowledge about government actions or programmes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:-

1. Political Processes (i.e. electioneering campaigns, elections) etc. should be effectively handled by adopting ethical oriented political marketing strategies rather than adopting unethical ways. Nigerian politician should bear in mind that Nigerian electorates are becoming conscious of their political activities, rights and cannot be fooled every time.
2. The marketing concept should be a guiding rule in the execution of party programmes and government action plans. The needs and wants of the citizenry should identify at

every stage of government policies or programme and factor them in policy or programme designs and implementations.

3. Personality promotion that is ethical should be used by Nigerian politicians in disseminating policy decisions to the citizenry. Politicians should shun the use of negative means in marketing themselves, or government policies. This is because personality promotion tells half-truth, manipulates people's mind, Beliefs and attitudes.
4. Politicians should adopt marketing communication strategies to strengthen, modify or change opinions, altitudes, beliefs or values of social media towards a more positive outcome that will be favourably to political candidates.

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