

# **New Media and Political Communication in Nigeria: A Case of Ikot Ekpene metropolis, Akwa Ibom State**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This study, new media and political communication takes into consideration the performances of the new media in the creation of an enduring political setting through political communication. The study adopts survey method of research with questionnaire as the research instrument. The population for the study constitute new media users in Ikot Ekpene metropolis. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to select 250 participants for the study. Investigations reveal that the new media made significant contributions in political communication but more needs to be done to make such communication stand out distinctively among other forms of communication. The work recommends among other things the education of new media manpower and adequate funding in order to achieve more political coverage.*

**Keywords:** *New Media, Communication, Political Communication*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Political communication is not divorce from communication because it is related to information dissemination that has political colouration and undertone. Tsebee (2010) links political communication to culture. According to him, components of culture are beliefs, values and emotional attitudes about how government ought to be conducted and what a citizen should do. These are equally part of communication because it must take the belief, values and emotional attitudes of the audience into consideration. Hence, political communication provides a type of communication that 'involves a set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provides the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviour. Political communication tends to affect people's orientation, political ideals and norms of a polity. It involves the sharing and exchange of political idea, political objects and political processes.

If communication is seen as transmission and reception of messages, the giving and taking of meaning, political communication as a unique aspect of communication with such other forms as religious communication, development communication and various other types, involves the sending of symbolic meanings which elevates man above the status of lower animals (Asak and Ohiagu, 2013). Political communication is an instrument of social interaction through which relationships are established, extended and maintained in all spheres of life and

human activities because it is occasioned by the need to interact with fellow man. Arising from the above, the key elements which constitute political communication as postulated by Babawale (2005) are the degree of social trust or mistrust prevailing in the society; general attitude of tolerance and interpersonal cooperatives among people; attachment of loyalty, people's attitude towards authority and people's sense of their powers and obligations. Hence, the new media play some vital roles as a vehicle of transporting the political messages resulting in political communication. The new media have crucial roles to play in reaction to the challenges of nation building especially in moulding a formidable and sustainable political system. The media which include print and electronic encompasses more than just news but include advocacy, entertainment and public service.. The media is a collective term which refers to the use, for mass communication, of all technological channels intended to reach a large audience. Asak and Ohiagu (2013) categorize the media into seven in order of their inventions. These are:

- (a) Print
- (b) Recordings – (gramophone records, magnetic tapes, cassettes, CDs etc)
- (c) Cinema
- (d) Radio
- (e) Television
- (f) Internet
- (g) Mobile Phones.

From the above, it is believed that through the use of technology, old technologies employed in the mass media are being replaced by new digital technologies. For instance, analogue media systems are being replaced by digital media which are being referred to as new media.

New media according to PC magazine online encyclopedia as quoted by Asak and Ohiagu (2013) refers to (a) the forms of communicating in the digital world, which includes publishing on CDs, DVDs and most significantly, over the internet. This implies that the user obtains the material via desk tops computers, tablet phones (b) The concept that new methods of communicating in the digital world allow smaller groups of people to congregate online and share, sell and swap goods and information. It also allows more people to have a voice in their community in particular and the world in general.

New media therefore includes special audio-visual effects; streaming video and streaming audio; virtual reality environments and effects; highly interactive user interface; mobile presentation and computation capabilities; any kind of communication requiring high-bandwidth; CD and DVD media; telephone and digital data integration; on-line communities; micro devices; Person - to - person visual communication as well as one- to- many visual communication. New media features have the capability of changing the participation of audiences in a bit to educate, inform and influence opinions because what is described as the new media are digital and have the characteristics of networkability, compressible, interactive and

impartial. In political communication, new media will enable people to be politically conscious because accessibility will be a matter of linking' up to the network. New media will create, publish, and distribute political messages for consumption and this means everybody is free to take part in these activities unlike the traditional activities. This supports the fact that with the new media technologies, communication is communication; an individual with appropriate technologies can now produce his or her digital messages which can shape our political consciousness. The new media have crucial roles to play in reaction to the challenges of building an intervene in promoting the desired political messages in mobilizing and educating the audience. This study uses the social responsibility theory as a point of reference. Nkwocha (1999) as quoted by Tsebee (2010) believes that the press should be responsible to the wishes, yearnings and feelings of the people to create a better society. According to the theory, the media tasks include:

- (a) providing entertainment
- (b) maintaining self-service to be free from the pressure of social interests.
- (c) servicing political and other systems within the society by providing information for discussion and debate
- (d) safeguarding the rights of individuals
- (e) enlightenment of the public for self government

From the above, the importance of this theory cannot be over-emphasized especially with the use of new media in political communication.

### ***The Place of New Media in Political Communication***

Elaigwu (2005) believes that the new media have pivoted roles to play in reaction to the challenges of nation building which involves political communication. This could be done with the new media ability to disseminate information with high relative objectivity. Here, the new media educate the audience on current issues with regards to politics. This will in turn change the ideological and socio-political thinking of the society. Taking cognisance of the mass illiteracy and low political culture in Nigeria, the new media becomes crucial because the unpoliticized masses look up to the new media to champion their interest.

Equally, the new media have a role of providing historical contexts to the masses. This education service will help in building up a sense of nationhood thereby eliminating apathy and frustration. The new media can also promote homogeneity. Instead of promoting the interest of sub-ethnic cultures, it will embark on the functions of providing greater and national political values. The new media can also re-orientate and expose the people on some trends that are negative [such as assassinations, kidnapping, god-fatherism, violence etc] to the progress of the country. With adequate political communication, the new media just as in the words of Afejukwu (2010) should take the bull by the horn, investigate all that should be investigated, expose what should be exposed in order to create the needed political will in the country.

## **PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE**

This study adopts the survey research method because of its peculiarity. The population for the study constitute new media users in Ikot Ekpene metropolis. These include workers (public servants only), students, politicians and other residents of the area who are of voting age of 18 years and above. Purposive sampling technique was adopted to select the participants for this study. The instruments that were used for data collection were structured questionnaire and observation schedule. Two hundred and fifty copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents. Eighty copies of the questionnaire were administered public servants and students respectively, while 90 copies were given to politicians since the study is basically on new media and political communication. Completed questionnaire were collected back immediately while the researcher observed some users of the new media in this neighbourhood. Data collated were analysed using the frequency count and simple percentage.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Table one shows that out of 250 total respondents, those exposed to new media were 183 representing 73.2% while 67 representing 26.8% were exposure to other forms of media. With reference to table 2, the analysis reveals that out of the 250 respondents exposed to the new media, 60% have adequate exposure and usage of New Media while 34% have fair exposure/usage and 7% have fair exposure and no usage to the new media. Since only 7% of the respondents had exposure but no usage of the new media, it therefore implies that there is significant relationship between exposure and usage of new media and political communication. Findings as show on table 3 reveal that out of 250 respondents, 32% were exposed to social messages; 16% to economic messages; political messages exposure had 30%, while religious messages exposure stood at 10% and others have 14%.

From those that were exposed to political messages and usage of the new media, 40% were said to adhere completely to the political messages from the new media; 34% had partial adherence while 26% had no adherence to all (table 4). Table 5 reveals that 52% of the respondents admit that the new media for political communication is good while a very close proportion of the respondents 48% believe that the new media is poor. This position notwithstanding, majority of the respondents especially those with knowledge (exposure and usage) of the new media believe that the new media is adequate for political communication. This is seen from the 73% of the respondent who agree that the new media is adequate for political communication, while 27% believe that the new media is not adequate for political communication. This analysis therefore concludes based on the above that the new media is good for political communication because of its convenience and without exposure to political hazards and problems. Based on the findings, it is not out of place to state that with the help of new media, political campaign are now digitalized.

**Table 1:** Knowledge of new media

<b>Variables</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>	<b>% Response</b>
Knowledge of new media	183	73.2
Knowledge of other media	67	26.8
Total	250	100

*Source:* Field survey, 2014

**Table 2:** Exposure and Usage of New Media

<b>Variables</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>	<b>% Response</b>
Adequate Exposure and Usage	150	60
Fair Exposure and Usage	83	34
Fair Exposure and no Usage	17	7
Total	250	100

*Source:* Field survey 2014

**Table 3:** Types of messages on the New Media

<b>Variables</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>	<b>% Response</b>
Social messages	80	32
Economic messages	40	16
Political messages	73	30
Religious messages	23	10
Others	34	14
Total	250	100

*Source:* Field survey 2014

**Table 4:** Adherence to Political Messages

<b>Variables</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>	<b>% Response</b>
Complete adherence	100	40
Partial adherence	85	34
Non adherence	65	26
Total	250	100

*Source:* Field survey 2014

**Table 5:** Adequacy of New Media for Political Communicate

<b>Variables</b>	<b>No of Respondents</b>	<b>% Response</b>
Very good/Good/Fair	183	73
Very poor/Poor	67	27
Total	250	100

*Source:* Field survey 2014

## CONCLUSION

Many people in Nigeria believe that votes do not count because politics is not good for a decent person. But the new media can change this perception by continuing coverage and presentation of political messages which will penetrate the audiences in their various places at any time. From the findings, new media as a facilitator can set pace for the promotion of peace and mobilization to foster the spirit of national pride and unity through political communication. Through good manpower, funds and adequate education, the masses can access the new media in order to satisfy their political needs through political communication.

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