# THE PLACE OF NEW MEDIA IN PROPAGATING ISSUE-BASED CAMPAIGN IN NIGERIA POLITICAL SYSTEM: A STUDY OF OWERRI MUNICIPAL RESIDENTS

by

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## Abstract

This study investigated the place of new media in propagating issue-based campaign in Nigerian political system. Issue-based campaign is seen by the researchers as the practice of presenting ideas and action plans that will bring progress to the society during political campaign as well as responding to issues in the new media space rather than attacking who raised such issue. To achieve the objective of the study which includes ascertaining if new media tools such as social media are appropriate media to discuss matters of public interest by politician during campaign among others, scholarly articles were consulted while the researchers anchored the study on diffusion of innovation theory which explains how and why new ideas, practice or products spread through our society. Survey research method was used to get the responses of the respondents during the study. Data were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The face to face availability technique was used in selecting the respondents who were part of the sample size of 399 drawn from the population of Owerri municipal which stood at 127213. Data collected were analyzed and presented using the simple percentage table. From the analyses of data collected the following findings were made which includes that in the event where followers or opponents raise issues of concern about a particular politician or political party, such politician or political party representative should tackle the issue raised rather than tackling the person or persons who raised the issue. Recommendations were made in line with the objectives of the study.

**Keywords:** New Media, Propagating, Issue based Campaign, Nigeria Political System.

## Introduction

Politics and the media have always worked closely. The media derive stories from politics while politicians rely on the media for coverage and promotion. During election period, politician use the media to showcase their capacities in different ways as they try to convince the electorates that they are the right person to be voted for. Most times, these politicians use the media to attack their opponents by condemning the personality, pattern of leadership or way of lives of their rivals which they feel does not qualify them for the elective position. This propaganda or

blackmail as it is popularly known has increased in an alarming dimension since the coming on board of new media.

In the past few years, social media as part of new media have shown rapid growth in user counts and have been the object of scientific analysis. (Wigand et al 2010; McAfee 2006). For instance, Facebook has 2.80 billion monthly active users. (Facebook, 2021). With such huge engagement figures, there is no doubt that social media is extremely relevant to any organization for the promotion of their product and services and an effective tool for public engagement. Many other organizations are harnessing the advantage of social media's vast coverage to gain publicity. Political organizations are no different and are beginning to change their campaign communications focusing on not just traditional media but social media as well. With over half of the Nigerian population being social media users, it has becoming crucial to prioritize the use of social media in political campaign and communication but there is huge concern about the message contents of these communications on social media handles by politicians.

What one says in the media leaves after the person which has made it very imperative for us to use the new media channels to discuss or communicate issues that will better the lives of the common man rather than using it to blackmail or seek cheap political points. We have seen how some of these ill statements bounced back to the speakers. Therefore, it becomes imperative for these politicians to use this new media channels to discuss issues of national interest rather than personal interest during political campaigns especially now that our society has fully embraced digital transformation.

**Effect of New Media on Political Campaign in Nigeria**

Social media which is the most popular aspect of new media allows candidates to engage directly with voters, mobilize support and amplify their campaign messages to a broader audience (Ward et al., 2003). Compared to traditional media, social media provides a cost-effective platform for political advertising and communication, leveling the playing field for candidates with limited resources (Enli et al., 2013). Candidates can receive instant feedback from voters on social media enabling them to tailor their campaign strategies and messages based on public sentiment (Howard & Hussain, 2013).

Social media influences voter perceptions by shaping the information they consume leading to changes in attitudes and decision-making processes (Bimber, 2014). Social media enhances voter engagement and participation by providing platforms for political discussions, activism and mobilization especially among young voters (Vergeer et al., 2013). The spread of misinformation on social media can distort voter perceptions, fuel polarization and impact electoral outcomes (Tucker et al., 2018). Social media platforms have become indispensable tools for political communication in Nigeria. Political candidates and parties utilize platforms like Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram to disseminate their messages directly to voters, bypassing traditional media channels. Additionally, citizens engage in political discourse, share opinions, and access information about candidates and electoral processes through social media (Adewunmi, 2019). Candidates and political parties leverage these platforms to disseminate campaign messages, engage with voters and mobilize support.

However, despite its potential for promoting easy access and instant feedback, social media also presents challenges related to the spread of disinformation and misinformation. False narratives, fake news and propaganda disseminated on social media platforms can distort public perception, manipulate voter opinions and undermine the integrity of elections in Nigeria. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts from policy makers, electoral authorities and civil society organizations to promote digital literacy, fact-checking and responsible online behavior (Idowu et al., 2021).

**Diffusion of Innovation Theory**
The Diffusion of Innovation Theory according to Anacto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2018), is associated with Ryan and Cross (1943) and Everett Rogers (1960). The concept, innovation, as later defined by Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) is an idea, practice or object perceived as new by an individual. The newness here, the scholars argue does not presuppose that such idea, practice or object is entirely novel to members of a social group. It rather means that though members of the target group may be aware of such idea, practice or object, they have no particular disposition towards the idea, practice or object in terms of application or usage. This angle of the theory supports the fact that though the new media may not be entirely new to us here in Nigeria but the idea of harnessing some of its potentials which include, using it for political mobilization as well as presenting issues that will better the lives of the members of the society during political campaign becomes a welcome development. Again, politicians adopting the practice of tackling issues raised through the new media platform in order to arrive at an acceptable solution instead of attacking whosoever that raised such issue will give the members of our society sense of belonging and encouragement to remain active when mobilized for political participation in the new media space.

**Data Presentation**
**Table 1: Respondents' knowledge of New Media**

| Option | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Yes, I have a good knowledge | 300 | 79 |
| No, not at all | 80 | 21 |
| **Total** | **380** | **100** |

*Field survey, 2025*

Table one shows respondent's acknowledgement of new media usage as 79% confirms they had knowledge of the New Media and what it entails while 21% said they are not familiar with it.

**Table 2: Identification of Social Media Platforms**

| Option | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| WhatsApp | 100 | 26 |
| Facebook | 120 | 32 |
| Twitter | 50 | 13 |
| Instagram | 110 | 29 |
| **Total** | **380** | **100** |

*Field survey, 2025*

From the table above, 32% of the respondents identified Facebook as the New Media platform of their choice, 26% identified WhatsApp and 29% identified Instagram whereas 13% identified Twitter. This only implies that some of these respondents are very familiar with different forms of social media and can easily use it for political engagement.

**Table 3: Frequency of New Media Usage**

| Option | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|---|---|
| Always | 270 | 71 |
| Rarely | 60 | 16 |
| Partially | 50 | 13 |
| **Total** | **380** | **100** |

*Field survey, 2025*

New Media is quite addictive and sometimes hard to control as 71% said they use New Media platforms always, 16% said they use it Rarely and 13% of the same respondents said they partially use New Media for various purposes.

**Table 4: New Media Preference to Traditional Media**

| Option | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------|-----------|----------------|
| Yes | 200 | 53 |
| No | 100 | 26 |
| Not sure | 80 | 21 |
| **Total** | **380** | **100** |

*Field survey, 2025*

Due to the swift nature of the New Media, 53% of the respondents prefer to use new media whereas 26% respondents prefer traditional media while the others 21% are not sure which is better.

**Table 5: Implications of New Media as a tool for Political Campaign**

| Option | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------|-----------|----------------|
| Yes | 261 | 69 |
| No | 99 | 26 |
| Not sure | 20 | 5 |
| **Total** | **380** | **100** |

*Field survey, 2025*

Since New Media cuts across a great number of people, mobilization and political communication become very easy as 69% of the sampled respondents agreed that New Media platforms are best for political mobilization, campaign and other forms of political engagements whereas 26% and 5% disagrees stating it can be used to bully users as well as misinform the public in many ways

since verification of information is not easily done as well as being unsure respectively.

**Table 6: New Media as an Avenue for Verbal Attacks and Hate Speech**

| Option | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------|-----------|----------------|
| Yes | 280 | 74 |
| No | 50 | 13 |
| Not sure | 50 | 13 |
| **Total** | **380** | **100** |

*Field survey, 2025*

Overtime, New Media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have been used as channel for hate speech and verbal attacks on people especially during political campaign. This is evident as 74% of the sampled respondents confirmed that new media platforms are used as avenue for verbal attacks and hate speech among politicians as well as the general public, 13% said it is not true while the same number of respondents were unsure about it.

**Table 7: New Media as a Tool for Propaganda by Politicians**

| Option | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|--------|-----------|----------------|
| Yes | 300 | 79 |
| No | 50 | 13 |
| Not sure | 30 | 8 |
| **Total** | **380** | **100** |

*Field survey, 2025*

New Media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook serve as a platform for political communication by politicians in Nigeria thereby making it easy as tools for political propaganda, falsehood and all sorts in other to discredit the opponents during election or debate. This is confirmed as 79% of the respondents agreed that New Media platforms can be used as a tool for propaganda. Whereas

insignificant number of 13% opposed the view while as little as 8% were indecisive.

## Conclusion

The Nigerian politicians who make use of new media in their political campaign to reach their audience should leverage on the potentials of new media to discuss issues that directly affect the common man in our society rather than using the avenue to showcase tours and wealth within their disposal. It is therefore expected that politicians in Nigeria who wish to campaign for elective office should use more of the internet or new media to discuss issue based agenda rather than using the platform to show off or mislead the public about their objectives towards the position they are vying for. Issue-based campaign as coined in this study is the practice of using the new media to present agenda or issues affecting the common man in the society and how such issues can be addressed or solved when such politician assumes office rather than using the new media platform to show how wealthy such politician maybe. Again, issue-based campaign gives room for solutions to the main issues raised in the new media platform by the users rather than attacking opponents or users who raised such issue.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations were made by the researchers:

1.  Nigerian politician should use the new media to sell their agenda for the political office he/she is running for majorly as this platform saves cost more than the traditional mass media. This is because, when the costs of vying for elective offices are reduced, there are higher chances that the politician will share the dividends of the office to the society where it belongs.
2.  The use of new media platforms by the Nigerian politician during campaign period should be for debates on issues that can better the lives of the common man in the society rather than using it to showcase how rich and wealthy they are as well as how capable they are to travel round the world which has no direct benefit to the people he/she maybe asking for their votes.
3.  Again, in the event where followers or opponents raise issues of concern about a particular politician or political party, such politician or political party where he/she belongs should tackle the issue raised rather than tackling the person or persons who raised the issue.

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