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Dr. Willie U. Willie,

Editor-in Chief, UJJH

[\*chief-editor@uujh.org\*](mailto:chief-editor@uujh.org)

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# **Political Advertising on Social Media Platforms and Voting Decisions Among Residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States**

By

**Nsikan Senam**

Department of Strategic and Corporate Communication  
Faculty of Communication and Media Studies  
University of Uyo, Nigeria  
nsikansenam@yahoo.com; nsikansenam@uniuyo.edu.ng

&

**Susan N. Agbo**

Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON)  
Lagos

## **Abstract**

The social media have become a significant factor of success in so many aspects of human endeavor and profession. Social media platforms are usually used to transmit political communication messages, especially during electioneering campaigns. This study examined political advertising on social media platforms and voting decisions of residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States. The major objective of this study was to ascertain whether or not political advertisements on the social media platforms influence the voting decisions of residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States. The survey was adopted in this study with the questionnaire as the instrument for data gathering. The population of the study was 20.34million while the sample size was 400 respondents. Findings revealed that political advertising on social media platforms influenced the voting decisions of residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States. It was therefore recommended among others that while encouraging party members to use the social media platforms for political adverting, appropriate officials of political parties should advise and guide party members on the lawful and appropriate social media political advertising.

**Keywords:** social media, Political Advertising, Akwa Ibom, Lagos, Electioneering Campaigns.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria has had six general elections since the country's return to democratic governance in 1999. The six general elections were held in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019, all with impressive participation by electorate nationwide. During the said elections, Nigeria witnessed a geometrical change in political advertising facilitated by the growth of the information and communication technologies (ICTs). This resulted in an unprecedented use of the Internet and web-based platforms for political advertisements. This development made the social media a formidable platform for political mobilization across the country (Fadipe, 2002). The political advertisements on social media platforms were generally targeted at the entire electorate but with particular attention to the youths and the elites who happen to be the obvious users of the social media platforms.

The interplay between political communication and the social media has revolutionized and redefined the scope and practice of political advertising in Nigeria. Regardless of the seeming nebulous outlook of political communication in the contemporary time, it is a central fact that political communication is the gathering, processing and transmission of persuasive messages by a political party, its agents or flag-bearers with the aim of selling party's ideology or candidates for the purpose of gaining political power or reinforcing the already grasped power. It is concerned with the dissemination of public interest messages of both significance and high human interest regarded as being critical to the operations of the different components of the society. Political communication is the interplay between political parties and other institutions, vis-à-vis the mass media. For journalists to discharge their responsibilities effectively as agents of political mobilization, they must understand the nature and working of politics the political system. People monitor political activities and decisions to know how they are affected or perhaps contribute to public debate on political matters. Politics also provides a source of entertainment as a game played by the powerful and influential personalities of the society. This explains why much attention is paid to politics through the social media, among other potent platforms. Political activities like election, political campaign, rallies, party formation, Political conventions, and political disputes attract public attention and as such the social media and their users follow them to

understand some basic trends and updates.

By reason of the continuous use of the social media platforms for political advertisements, the general make-up of the Nigeria's political culture has become affected. Political culture is the embodiment of the attitude of the electorate towards political process and the running of government. For Crozier (2007), it is one of the four variables, used in the analysis of political systems. The other variables are values, beliefs and emotional attitudes about how government ought to be conducted and also about what it should do. A nation's political culture is 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 behavior in the political system. It encompasses both the political ideas and the operating norms of a polity. For Dijck and Jose (2013) political culture is specifically the pattern of individual political orientations, the attitudes towards the political system and its various parts and the role of individuals in the political system. It is the subjective realm which underlines and gives meaning to political activities. Political culture is talked about just as economic culture, or religious culture. It is a set of attitudes towards a special set of political objects and processes.

The social media make very important observable functional contributions to political systems and electoral system in every democracy. They sometimes serve as a behavior regulatory agent on the activities of government and its functionaries.

As educators, they relay the programmes of government to its citizenry thereby enlisting their support. In the modern state the social media have assumed a pivotal position that makes it too difficult to be ignored. Government may be antagonistic with the social media but government still needs them for survival. The social media enlighten the citizenry through the social media users and, in a way, serve as glue that ties the general citizenry to the programmes of government. Social media platforms are vital tools in political culture. According to Konijn, Tanis and Barnes (2008), the social media have pivotal roles to play in relation to the tasks of nation-building which includes political culture. The first of these functions is the ability to disseminate information with the electorate cum social media users. In this role, the social media basically educate the audience on current issues. The socio-political and ideological milieus in which the social media operate colors their perspectives and to some extent dictate the style and language of the social media (Osunbiyi, 2012). Every country needs to educate and mobilise its citizens towards the nation's political ideology. This study thus, examines the implications

of political advertising on the social media for the voting decision of electorate in Akwa Ibom and Lagos States of Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The use of social media platforms for political advertising has spread exponentially, both in terms of the sheer frequency of exposure and the increased length of political campaigns. It has become pervasive and inescapable. The placing of political advertisements on social media platforms has become a very common practice in many democracies the world over. It is one of the strategies adopted by politicians, political parties and their agents to show case party manifestos and candidates.

In recent general elections in Nigeria, the political class have been greatly engaging in the placement of political advertisements on social media platform. Although the use of social media platforms for political advertising and canvassing for votes is now well pronounced in election campaigns, some fundamental issues relating to it are still yet to settled. It is uncertain whether such placement has implications for the voting decisions among the electorate. Thus, what is the influence of political advertising on social media on the voting decision of residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States?

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were constructed to serve as a guide to the study:

1. How exposed to political advertising on social media platform are residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States?
2. Through which social media platforms do residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States predominantly receive political advertisements?
3. To what extent does political advertising on social media platform influence the voting decision of residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States?
4. To what extent has political advertisement on social media platform enhanced political participation among residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagoe States?

## **The Social Media**

The evolution of technology has created and expanded the avenues for information transmission through various channels, such as the social media platforms (Carton, 2009). The social media refers to a group of internet based application that build on the ideological and technical foundations of web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of user generated content (Pavlik and Macintosh, 2015). It is broadly believed to possess the many relatively inexpensive and widely accessible electronic tool that enable anyone publish and access information, collaborate on a common effort or build relationship.

Social media differs from traditional or industrial media in many ways, in terms of quality, reach frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence. It operates in a dialogic transmission system (many sources to many receivers). This is in contrast to traditional media that operates under a monologist transmission model (one sources to many receivers). (Schoen and Harald (2013). Internet users' continue to spend more time with social media sites than any other type of site. For content contributors, the benefits of participating in social media have gone beyond simply social sharing building reputation and bringing in career opportunities and monetary income.

Social media is defined by Boyd and Ellison (2008, P.211) as "... web based services that allow individuals to construct a public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other user with whom they share a connection and view and transverse connections and those made by others within the system". Mangold and Faulds (2009, p.357) on the other hand, define social media or consumer generated media' as ... "a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers' intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities and issues".

It is clear from this definitions that social media networking systems include various online and word of mouth forums which also include blogs, company sponsored discussion boards and chat rooms, consumer to customer email, internet discussion forums, digital audio, images, movie or photograph and social networking websites to mention but a few.

According to Larson (2012), the five most popular social media networking systems used and accepted in the market are; Facebook with 901 million users, WhatsApp with 668 million users, twitter with 555million users, 2go with 517 million users, Instagram with 485 million users, Google with 170 million users,

linked-in with 150 million users and lastly Pinterest with 11.7 million users. It was indicated by Adamson (2012) that social media networking systems are perceived as being an important tool for learning and that it should be used more for this purpose. Advantage should be taken due to the fact that nowadays more students and some lecturers are more familiar with social media networking systems and should therefore use various social media networking system as a platform for communication, learning and collaborating, as well as sharing ideas and topics of interest (Adamson, 2012).

More so, the advent of technology particularly the computer and the internet has changed the landscape of human interaction because they provide a new medium which is completely different in characteristics. As a result, a great deal of interpersonal communication that is now mediated by technology especially computer-mediated technologies (e.g. SMS, chatrooms, e-mail, virtual group work, weblogs, mobile social software) can sometimes facilitate or obstruct communication and can change the nature of interpersonal interactions (Konijn, Jannis and Barnes 2008). From communication perspective, how technology affects human interaction might be best described from media ecological perspective which hinges on the changes in communication patterns such as the shift from broadcast mass media system to interactive digital system. For Coyle (2008), Marshall McLuhan's postulation about the global village is not only a technological phenomena but also a human phenomenon. Technological and social change must be examined conjointly at several inter-related levels.

### **New Media and Political Culture**

In 1962 Marshal McLuhan predicted the shrinking of the whole world into a global village where information delivery will be faster and easier. The technological determinism postulation manifested with rapidity in the 20th century. Thus, in 1990 the new media of internet emerged thereby converging all the traditional and orthodox media of communication into hyper-digital media of mass communication (Eze, 2015). Today, journalism has taken another dimension such as... due to the influence of the new media on its practice. Newspapers, radio and television stations are adopting the new media to expand their audience and to serve the society better. Indeed, the new media of internet and other social network sites have aided the practice of journalism in the Nigerian media system with regards to propagating the political culture of the society. People's attitude to elections and their

spirits of patriotism are immensely influenced by the new media. Journalists do not have to move from one location to another in search of news and information delivery rather, with the aid of the new media facilities, they gather and disseminate messages easily without much distortion by politicians and other influential people in the society. Journalists can update their audience via their organisations' electronic publication or broadcast. As such, information distortion is somehow limited as audience follow online edition of the mainstream media.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the framework of the democratic participant theory. The theory is relatively recent in the media system. It was propounded by Denis McQuail in 1987. The theory is an off-shoot of the discontentment inefficiencies in the libertarian and the social responsibility theories. The hallmark of the democratic participant theory is an all-embracing access to the media as well as participation, ownership and operation (Senam, 2017). The theory emerged as a response to the elitist nature of the press and the need to break down the democratic, economic and professional hegemony of the media system. The emergence of the democratic participant theory was necessitated by the need for the mass media to render social benefits to the public. The theory, at all times opines that the needs and interest of the receivers should be given a priority in every democratic setting. The basic principle the democratic participant theory are based on the assumption that:

- (i) Individuals and minority groups have rights of access to the media and rights to be served by the media according to their needs.
- (ii) The organization and contents of the mass media should not be subjected to centralized political or state bureaucratic maneuver.
- (iii) The mass media should exist mainly for their audiences and not for the media organization, professionals or the clients of the media.
- (iv) Groups, organizations and local communities should have their own media.
- (v) Small-scale, interactive and participatory media forms should be encouraged over large-scale, one-way professional media.
- (vi) The mass media should at all times cater for the individual and social needs of their audience.



Generally, the democratic participant theory is mainly associated with countries practising liberal democracy. It is however urged that other countries with any form of democratic governance should adapt the precepts of the theory. Also the theory is a reflection of public reaction against the commercialization and the monopoly of privately owned media and against the centralization and bureaucracy in the media institutions established based on the social responsibility media system. The theory emphasizes on and calls for the association mode of communication system.

The association mode of communication is the system of quality between the sender and the receiver as opposed to the command mode or superiority mode of the sender over the receiver in a one-way communication system. Thus, the democratic participant theory advocates for a multidimensional-way flow of communication as opposed to one-way or limited-way flow. All that the democratic participant theory seeks to attain is a greater attainment of the invaluable social benefits expected of the media. The theory is relevant to this study because our underlying thrust is the unveiling of the ultimate effect of political advertising on social media platforms and on democratic participation among electorates in Akwa Ibom and Lagos States of Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted the survey method of data collection. For Senam (2020, p. 29), “when people’s opinion, attitude or reaction is the concern of a study, the best research technique to use is the survey”. This justifies the use of the survey in this study because the study set out to examine the opinion, attitude and reaction of electorates in Akwa Ibom and Lagos States vis-a-vis political advertising messages on the social media platforms.

The population comprised the residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States. According to the National Population Commission, the 2021 projected population of Akwa Ibom State is 5,482,200 while that of Lagos is 14,862,111 people. This sums up to 20,344,311 people. Therefore the population of this study was 20,344,311 people. The sample size for this study was 400 respondents determined by the Taro Yamane method of determining sample size for a definite population.

The multi-stage sampling method was used to select the particular respondents for this study. At first the population was categorised into 10 clusters which spread across the study area. Since the study covered two states, each of the States had 5 clusters purposively assigned for easy administration of the questionnaire. The 5

clusters in Akwa Ibom State were Uyo, Ikot Ekpene, Ikot Abasi, Eket and Oron while those of Lagos were Aja, Victoria Island, Ikeja, Apapa and Iyana Ipaja. These 10 clusters covered both the urban and interior settlement areas in the two States that constituted the study area.

The purposive sampling method was used in picking 40 respondents from the 10 clusters in this study. The purposive sampling method was necessary because it was imperative to deliberately go for people who are of voting age (18 years and above) and did not exhibit political apathy, and were ready and willing to complete the research instrument.

The instrument for data gathering in this work was the questionnaire which was constructed with close-ended question that sort data that would elicit answers to the research questions earlier constructed to guide the study. The data gathered from field work were expressed in tables and computed in simple percentages.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire, 391 were properly completed and returned to the researchers. The data gathered are presented in Tables and analysed as follows:

**Table 1: The Extent of Respondents' Exposure to Political Advertisements on Social**

| Category     | Response<br>(No.) | Response<br>(%) |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Sparingly    | 78                | 20              |
| Occasionally | 91                | 23              |
| Frequently   | 222               | 57              |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>391</b>        | <b>100</b>      |

*Source: Field work (2021)*

Table1 shows that 222 respondents representing 57% of the respondents said they were frequently exposed to political advertisements on social media platforms.

**Table 2: The Social Media Platforms through which Respondents Received Political Advertisements**

| Category     | Response<br>(No.) | Response<br>(%) |
|--------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Facebook     | 211               | 54              |
| Twitter      | 33                | 8               |
| Google       | 11                | 3               |
| Whatsapp     | 93                | 24              |
| Linked in    | 14                | 4               |
| Instagram    | 17                | 4               |
| 2go          | 12                | 3               |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>391</b>        | <b>100</b>      |

Source: Field work (2021)

Table 2 indicates that 211 (54%) of the 391 respondents received political advertisements on the Facebook while as low as 11 (3%) received through Google.

**Table 3: The Extent to which Political Advertising on Social Media Platforms Influence Respondents' Voting Decision**

| Category                  | Response<br>(No.) | Response<br>(%) |
|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| To a great extent         | 102               | 26              |
| To an average extent      | 227               | 58              |
| To a minimal extent       | 56                | 14              |
| Does not influence at all | 6                 | 2               |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>391</b>        | <b>100</b>      |

Source: Field work (2021)

Table 3 indicates that majority of the respondents (227) representing 58% of the respondents said that political advertising on social media platform influenced their voting decision moderately.

**Table 4: The Extent to which Political Advertising on Social Media Platforms Enhances Political Socialisation among the Respondent**

| <b>Category</b>         | <b>Response<br/>(No.)</b> | <b>Response<br/>(%)</b> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| To a great extent       | 329                       | 84                      |
| To an average extent    | 40                        | 10                      |
| To a minimal extent     | 19                        | 5                       |
| Does not enhance at all | 3                         | 1                       |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>391</b>                | <b>100</b>              |

*Source: Field work (2021)*

Table 4 shows that almost all the respondents (329) representing 84% of the respondents said political advertising on social media platform greatly enhanced their level of political socialization.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study set out to examine the influence of political advertising on social media platform on the voting decision of residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States. Four research questions were set to guide the study. Data were gathered through the questionnaire administered to the residents of the study area. The findings of the study are discussed based on the research questions.

**Research Question 1:** How exposed to political advertising on social media platform are residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States?

Findings show that residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States were frequently exposed to political advertising on the social media platforms. According to Table

one, 222 respondents representing 57% of the respondents said they were frequently exposed to political advertisements on social media platforms. This means those who place the advertisement on the platforms have succeeded in reaching out to the target audience. The social media have become an interesting avenue for interaction, and have become strong and influential media of communication for both the developed and the developing nations. By the liberal nature of social media platforms, the social media are instrumental to the political process of any democracy. In the contemporary days, the social media have become indispensable to political, democratic processes as well as agent of effective governance. Ernest (1998) asserts that the social media are parts as well as facilitators of the political sphere which constitute a distinctive and discursive space for public discourse. They enable people to increasingly become active participants in issues of public concern. Swanson (2010) is of the view that social media platforms also operate in the public sphere to expand the frontiers of freedom users and enable people to access a wide array of information that would influence judgement and decisions for sustainable democracy.

**Research Question 2:** Through which social media platforms do residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States predominantly receive political advertisements?

Findings reveal that the major social media platforms through which residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States are Facebook, Whatsapp, twitter, Instagram, 2go Linked-in and Google. The 2019 Presidential election witnessed an increased use of political advertising including the heavy use of Internet enabled social media platforms to communicate directly and personally with supporters and constituents, thus making political advertising a central feature of electoral processes (Kaid et al, 2006). Political advertising and the use of social media for canvassing for votes are now the mainstays of Nigerian election campaigns (Ifukor, 2013). This therefore endears some electorate to access the social media platforms for immediate politic-related information.

**Research Question 3:** To what extent does political advertising on social media platform influence the voting decision of residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States?

Despite the high level of exposure to social media platforms that carry political advertising, the voting decision of the residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagos States is

moderately influenced by political advertisements on social media platforms. This is in line with the data on Table 4 which indicate that 227 (58%) of the respondents said political advertisements on social media platforms affects their voting decision moderately. Obviously, notwithstanding the moderate effect of political advertising on social media platforms, electorate still take advantage of the online information to increasingly resonant in their political behaviour. The social media platforms offer the electorate ample opportunity to arrive at a rational discernment during voting.

**Research Question 4:** To what extent has political advertisement on social media platform enhanced political participation among residents of Akwa Ibom and Lagoe States?

Political advertising on social media platforms have greatly enhanced political participation among the residents o Akwa Ibom and Lagos States. This is substantiated by Table 4 which has it that 329 (84%) of the respondents said that political advertising on social media platforms greatly enhanced their participation in political activities.

Political participation is the social drive with deliberate efforts by people to take part in political activities at whatever level or form. Political advertising is an important promotional communication format in democracies around the world. Mangold and Faulds (2008) assert that it constitutes the dominant form of communication for political candidates and their parties in advanced and developing democracies. This has a way of persuading people to abhor apathy and become active participant in democratic processes and governance. Chatora (2012) therefore asserts that the social media specially manipulate people and persuade them to get close and actively involved in political activities. Political participation through the social media engagement usually drive people gently, gradually and subconsciously to admire and ultimately get involved in political power interplay. The viral nature of social media messages encourages users' active political participation. Virility has to do with the urge or tendency to share or the actual sharing and further dissemination of received social media content which broadens the accessibility of the message. The sharing of political advertising messages on social media platforms lures the users into discussing and analysing political issues and makes them to become political participants.

## **Conclusion**

From the findings of this study, it is safe and proper to conclude that political advertising on social media platforms enhance a higher level of interpersonal understanding of relevant public issues. It is noteworthy that while political communication is often a two-way process, political advertising is more propagandist and one-sided in nature. The advertising institution is therefore, a critical socializing agent for educating, informing, entertaining and inducing change in voters' behaviour regarding candidates' choices at elections. Hence, Crozier (2007) argues that although political advertising may not ensure victory for a political candidate, it influences voters' judgment, based on perception about the credibility and truthfulness of the candidate.

Moreover, it is obvious that while political communication is a holistic and interactive process that involves the transmission and exchange of information and messages between political actors and their publics, political advertising is more restrictive and mainly aims to create awareness, persuade, inform and urge the electorate to be favourably (or un-favourably) disposed to, accept, vote for, (or reject) a candidate, (political) party, or proposition as the case may be. (Osunbiyi, 2012).

Again, in most political climates, two types of political advertising on social media platforms are usually portrayed. They are positive and negative political advertising. Positive political advertising sets out to sell the candidate, his political party and manifestoes to the electorate by utilising decent language and shunning messages or images that promote ethnicity, religious or other forms of cleavages in society. Negative political advertising involves a debased form of political advertising which aims at discrediting the opposing political party, manifesto or candidate in order to attain selfish goals.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended as follows:

1. Political parties and candidates should always engage the services of appropriate media professionals while engaging in social media political advertising.
2. Users of social media platforms should be very critical while taking decisions based on political advertisement accessed online to avoid making uninformed or misleading decision.
3. Political parties and election regulatory agencies should from time to time,

organise workshops for members of the public concerning fundamental issues in political advertising on social media platform.

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