

MEDIA AND POLITICS: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Buiké Oparaugo

Former Lecturer, Mass Communication Department, The Polytechnic of Sokoto State, Sokoto, Nigeria

buikeoparago@gmail.com

ABSTRACT—This chapter simply discussed how political communication has been carried out in this age of social media. Political communication is the communication of political ideologies by the political communicator to the audience who happen to be the electorates. Like the regular communication process, it also uses both the traditional media and the new media. Politicians however, have started employing fake news and hate speech in the content of their political messages. Fake speech are of three types: misinformation, disinformation and malinformation. With more and more people relying on social media for as a source for news, there are worries that such content could influence audiences unable to distinguish truth from fact or news from propaganda. From television to radio, to cinemas, to music, to newspaper, books, social media, etc., politicians use everything and anything to communicate to their audience. Politicians employ political advertising to reach out to their teeming supporters and followers. These political advertising are incorporated with advertising jingles (especially on radio). The basic elements of political communication are: ideology, propaganda and persuasion. The researcher however, concluded that politicians, not only in Nigerian, but the world over, although they are much in Nigeria, have taken political communication and its approach to a totally different and negative height by employing hate speech and fake news in their campaign messages. Rather than taking their time to inform the electorates of their plans for them and how they wish to achieve it, they spend all day and energy on insulting and de-marketing the opponents through hate speech and fake news. They don't stop there, they also make inciting posts on social media which often leaves their gullible followers to be at loggerheads all the time.

KEYWORDS—Media, politics, political communication, digital media, new media, traditional media, social media, fake news and hate speech.

INTRODUCTION

This Political communication research has had a prominent position in the academic fields of both communication studies and political science. In recent years the field has changed significantly as continued technological advancements have contributed to the

expanding boundaries of political communication. Especially the onset of the internet as a common communication channel may be seen as a “transformational moment in media technology, with implications for the practice of politics” (Mirer and Bode 2015, p. 454); or simply an “online revolution” (Johnson 2011) that has begun a new era in political communication, the so-called “digital age”, in which we are moving rapidly from candidate-centred to citizen-centred campaigns and from mediated to “electric communication” (Gronbeck 2009, p. 229).

The digital revolution has facilitated dramatic changes with significant results worldwide such as increased public's access to information, generation of new gateways to goods and services and more opportunities of civic engagement and social networking with expanded communities. More importantly, political institutions and activities are seen as largely mediated and shaped by the technologies of information and communication. New media technologies are recognized as having a powerful influence on the public's access to information and government's documents, the methods and content of political campaigns, the attitudes and preferences of voters, the efforts of activists to disseminate their messages, and the ways in which topics enter the public discourse (Loader and Mercea, 2011).

As with any successful communication method, politicians have been reaching out into the world of social media to better connect with voters and constituents. For example, social media played a vital role in grassroots organization and voter registration during Barack Obama's presidential election in 2008 (Metzgar & Maruggi, 2009). Through organization, fundraising, and press coverage, the Internet and other new media technologies have changed the way that politicians run campaigns and govern once elected. It is important to study how politicians are using social media because the platform is based on a two-way communication model, unlike traditional mainstream media.

New media have radically altered the way that government institutions operate, the way that political leaders communicate, the manner in which elections are contested, and citizen engagement.

MEDIA, POLITICS AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

The term media, which is the plural of medium, refers to the communication channels through which we disseminate

news, music, movies, education, promotional messages and other data. It includes physical and online newspapers and magazines, television, radio, billboards, telephone, the Internet, fax and billboards. It describes the various ways through which we communicate in society. Because it refers to all means of communication, everything ranging from a telephone call to the evening news on television can be called media. Mass media is any source that sends information to public (masses). It can include sources like newspapers, magazines, internet, TV, radio etc. TV and radio are not mass media per se but they become mass media only when they have the connection and they are capable of accessing the media so they are the sources. Social media is a collection of online communication channels where communities interact, share content and collaborate.

Politics, in its broadest sense, is the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. Politics is interactions between states in the international arena; the activities of politicians; and activities such as voting (in national, regional or local elections) through which individual citizens engage with the state. Politics is about much more than the activities (or careers) of politicians.

Asemah (2011, p.1) sees it as “the process by which information is passed between individuals”. Communication involves transmission of verbal and non-verbal messages. It consists of a sender, a receiver and channel of communication. In the process of transmitting messages, the clarity of the message may be interfered or distorted by what is often referred to as barriers (Munodawafa, 2008). Communication is the transfer of information, feelings, beliefs, attitudes opinion, etc., from a source to a receiver with the presence or absence of feedback. In political communication process, the source is the politician and the receiver(s) is the electorates.

The essence of politics is talk or interaction. Broadly defined, political communication is the role of communication in the political process. It can take place in a variety of forms (formal or informal), in a variety of venues (public and private) and through a variety of medium (mediated or unmediated content). It includes the production and generation of messages by political actors, the transmission of political messages through direct and indirect channels, and the reception of political messages. Political communication is the dissemination of political information among and between political elites, mass media organizations, and the public (Gervais, 2016).

Political communication is a process that includes political institutions and actors, the news media and, importantly, citizens. Every act of political communication produced by parties, interest groups, or the media is geared toward citizens, to inform them, to influence them. It is the interaction between these three groups that matter in political

communication. Within politics, communication flows move in many directions: downward from governing authorities to citizens, horizontally between political actors, including news media, and upward from citizens and groups to the political institutions. In short, political communication is concerned with being actively engaged with local, regional, state, national, European, and international issues and how the power of information, persuasion and strategic message design can be used to understand and affect outcomes at those levels, particularly in the area of governance and governmental and societal behaviour.

The study of political communication emerged as an important subfield of both political science and communication in the twentieth century, with research focused on the influence of the news media on public opinion and voting behaviour; the theories of agenda-setting, framing, and priming effects; the tactics and efficacy of political campaigns; the effects of negative political advertising; the discourse and deliberation among the mass public; the speeches and rhetoric of office holders; the interactive relationships between elite and mass opinion; the influence of commercial and political pressures on the content of news media; the relationship between partisan polarization and partisan media; and many more (Gervais, 2016).

Political communication began with the earliest studies of democratic discourse by Aristotle and Plato. However, modern political communication relies on an interdisciplinary base, which draws on concepts from communication, political science, journalism, sociology, psychology, history, rhetoric, and others. This two-volume resource considers political communication from a broad interdisciplinary perspective, encompassing the many different roles that communication plays in political processes in the United States and around the world (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha, 2007).

Political communication is an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, the news media, and the public. The process operates downward from governing institutions toward citizens, horizontally in linkages among political actors, and also upward from public opinion toward authorities. Political communication has always been central to the electoral and policymaking process but since the early 1990s certain important developments have fundamentally altered this process, particularly postwar trends in the mass media moving from the traditional world of newspapers, radio, and television broadcasting toward the Internet. This article outlines alternative interpretations of the nature of these trends and reflects on their consequences for the process of socioeconomic and political development around the globe.

The Traditional Media and Politics

Politicians need the media to communicate with citizens. Media organisations rely heavily on political stories as a key source of news and commentary. The more that media platforms and outlets have proliferated – to the point where

we inhabit a 24-hour real-time news culture with global reach and influence – the more mutually dependent the relationship becomes. It took a long time for politicians to wake up to the fact that, in addition to their key democratic function as the Fourth Estate, media organisations can be an ally in political communication.

The traditional media comprises the broadcast media and the print media. The broadcast media is made up of television, radio, cinema, film, music; while the print media is made up of newspapers, magazines, books, posters and fliers, etc.

The changing face of media in Nigeria in the 21st century in terms of content, packaging and technology has opened a new door of exploitation for the political elites who have the wherewithal and essential connections to disseminate their message to the electorate without minding the inherent challenges associated with any of the medium of communication. The mass media served as the prime source of information on political matters to the people-about their government; candidates vying for public offices; political parties and their manifestoes, and other matters in the society (Ojeka and Ajakaiye, 2015). It is worthy of note that, how the media portray candidates and political party can equate the victory of any leader to be elected or defeated in an election albeit the social status. Contemporarily, the innovations in technology have changed the conduct of election campaign interface and even how people vote. Graber (1981:198) rightly portrayed this that:

Media coverage is the very lifeblood of politics because it shapes the perceptions that form the reality on which political action is based. Media do more than depict the political environment; they are the political environment.

TELEVISION

Television is the most powerful medium for persuasive communication as it combines sight and sound coupled with its “repetition” ability. During elections, politicians make use of television for political advertising and public relations. Even political rallies are given live coverage as these politicians and political parties pay heavily for it.

Television houses also during election years, especially for presidential elections, organise presidential debate for the presidential candidates of the respective parties to come on live TV and explain to citizens what they want to do, why they want to do it, how they want to do it and when they want to do it. Presidential debate presents the candidates the opportunity to speak to the electorates and not just party faithful as seen during political rallies and campaigns. It also presents the electorates the best opportunity to hear from their choice candidate directly and not printed newspaper words written by media aids and other hired personnel. It also forces the candidates to be logical and not bantering with words full of fake news and hate speech for oppositions in a bid to demarket them as seen on campaign grounds.

The ability of television to mobilize and persuade the people to behave in a given manner and to perform certain actions has merit an effective tool for political communication because it can send sound and picture simultaneously to a large and widely disposal audience, and it is captivating and dramatic in nature. Television appeals to the sense of sight and sound; it is comprehensive technique and the combination of audio and visual colours and motion. It has the ability to capture the interest of most viewers. That is why government and other private bodies give much attention to it. The media (television) serves as an intermediary between the government and the people because it assists the government in getting its plans and policies across to the people and the people in return gets their response, feeling and plight back to the government.

RADIO

Politicians embark on a massive media campaign using the radio with their advertising jingles and new party slogans. The main target is the poor and uneducated, mostly living in rural areas. Most political advertising jingles, not all, are done in native dialect or Pidgin English.

The audiences have choices to make, especially, with the introduction of private FM-radio stations in many states in Nigeria (Nworgu, 2011, p.2). Since the web-radio has not fully taken off in Nigeria, audience radio experiences for now, is limited to the wireless transistor radio in homes, GSM handsets and car radio (Nworgu, 2011, p.3).

CINEMA

Although rare, but politicians in a desperate bid to be elected or re-elected can use the cinema medium for political advertising in this digital age. Their political message(s) can be delivered before the movie starts with everyone’s eyes glued to the big screen.

Music

Music is an art form that uses harmonious sound or acoustic signals to communicate its messages. Different cultures have different types of music to serve different occasions. Throughout history, people have used music to send messages that may be difficult to convey by words of mouth or through other means. Ligeti (1978, p.24) points out that “it is equally true that music in itself does not oppress; neither is it democratic nor anti-democratic. To be sure, certain definite injustices are subject to political criticism in their relation to musical society.” In other words, music on its own is neutral until people apply it to achieve democratic or non-democratic purposes. Every piece of music is composed within a socio-political and cultural context. Consequently, what may be acceptable in one political context may be rejected in another. More specifically, political music is used to address urgent

issues facing a society. It appeals to citizens as well as to people in power and authority. Musicians have used it to stir people to action over the years.

The change in technology in the music industry and the marriage between the music and computer technologies has made it possible for the music listening experience beyond the conventional boundaries and formats of radio, television, compact disc, digital video discs, or Digital Versatile Discs (Nworgu, 2011, p.3). Most recently, there are music on IPOD, IPAD, MP3, GSM phones and computers (web radio).

NEWSPAPER

Newspapers use pictures to supplement news coverage of political campaigns as well as feature/articles on each edition. Also, straight news report, investigative journalism can be done on a candidate by a newspaper. The newspaper house may also decide to write an editorial to point out facts about a candidate or the possibility of a candidate winning. Politicians aspiring for elective positions also pay some good writers to write favourable articles about them for publication in the print media. Cartoonists working for the newspaper house may as well decide to draw a cartoon for which mimics the anomalies in government and politics of the day. Salihu and Oparaugo (2017) defined cartoon as funny line drawings in newspapers mocking the political events and policy.

However, with the advent of new media technologies, giving rise to online newspapers and highly specialized electronic media, people tend to read newspapers quickly and selectively, spending less than 20 minutes on a 30-page newspaper (Nworgu, 2011, p.2).

Print media since its inception has always been playing the role of dissipating information to the audience, and with the oldest form of publication to be newspaper, which can be easily accessed at cheaper rate. However, flashing across those years when printed material incepted, the newspaper and magazine was able to feed people then what they can't reach to. And people depend on these printed materials to understand and grasped scenario of what is happening in the country, feeding reader's specific information's about new decree, orders and other related issues across the globe. Before radio and television invention, print has always be the main source where information are dispersed, and up till the present century print has never lost its important value in the society, although technology has taken over the world and a whole lot of print media headlines can be found on electronic media, but still, the unique value of print still remain unrivalled.

BOOKS

Books are written by politicians or by others on their behalf about their political journey and experience. Also, people can write a book on a politician's regime/administration to communicate to the readers. In one of Olusegun Obasanjo's

books, *My Watch*, he used demeaning words to describe former Vice President of Nigeria, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, as someone who is too corrupt, desperate for power and always believes in his money to buy his way through in all situations. This arguably affected Atiku's political image, hence hampering his chances of becoming Nigeria's president since 2007 when he left office as Nigeria's Vice President.

BILLBOARDS, POSTERS AND FLIERS

This is usually rife during election campaign with politicians and political parties printing posters and fliers to garner support for their candidates. At the end, the fliers are distributed during campaign rallies while the posters are pasted at strategic points like bus-stops, etc. Billboards are also designed and strategically positioned at traffics to capture the sight of the motorists caught in traffic jam as well as pedestrians.

THE NEW MEDIA AND POLITICS

The emergence of social media has changed the way in which political communication takes place in the world all over today. Political institutions such as politicians, political parties, foundations, institutions, and political think tanks are all using social media platforms, like Facebook and Twitter, to communicate with and engage voters. Regular individuals, politicians, "pundits" and thought leaders alike are able to voice their opinions, engage with a wide network, and connect with other likeminded individuals (Kearney, 2013).

Hybrid features of online media outlets are assets to politicians in both developed and developing democracies because they provide unlimited access to different categories of target audience (Okoye and Oparaugo, 2019). The use of new media in election campaigns is not a recent trend; however, its significance has increased steadily over time. For instance, in Nigeria, the then President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan used Facebook for campaign, although Facebook was not a popular election campaign medium as at then in Nigeria. By 2015, it had become more popular and widely used especially among the youths and by 2019, even Local Government Chairmen election campaigns were equally done using social media platforms.

Before the emergence of social media, the traditional media could determine to a large extent, what information should be aired to the public and set the agenda for public discourse. McCombs and Shaw (1972) asserted that "the mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figures. They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the public should think about, know about, and have feelings about". They insisted that a small number of mass media news producers dominate the market, and therefore, audiences' only get information about

what the media decides is important enough to be covered. By presenting politicians with a platform to speak directly to their constituents and potential voters without the traditional media intermediary, the social media has largely curtailed the agenda setting role of the traditional media (Gillin, 2008).

The ubiquitous presence of social media has taken control of contemporary human life in almost all its aspects.¹ This is all the more perplexing since the social media has been here only for a decade or so. It won't be an exaggeration to state that social media has ushered in the biggest media revolution since the invention of the printing press. Being very much aware of the omnipresence of the social media the political class as a whole and individual leaders and candidates for various political posts have taken to the social media in a big way (Thummy, 2015).

The ongoing revolution in information and communication technologies (ICTs) has fundamentally transformed the landscape of democracy and the way people engage in politics. From the configuration of media systems to the decision-making of the voting public, the changes have permeated through almost every level of society, affecting political institutions, political actors, citizen groups, and mass media (Wei and Xu, 2019). New media have been playing an increasingly central role in American elections since they first appeared in 1992. While television remains the main source of election information for a majority of voters, digital communication platforms have become prominent. New media have triggered changes in the campaign strategies of political parties, candidates, and political organizations; reshaped election media coverage; and influenced voter engagement (Owen, 2017). The new media's influence on elections has been substantial. Campaigns provide a laboratory for the development of political applications that carry over to postelection politics and establish new norms for media politics in subsequent contests. The social media innovations that rose to prominence in the 2008 presidential contest became standard practice in the 2010 midterm elections and set the stage for the more prolific development of political applications for handheld devices than was the case in 2004, when the Bush campaign used handheld devices to show campaign ads door to door. As technology continues to advance and the number of social media platforms proliferates, the election media environment has become more diversified, specialized, and fragmented. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have been joined by a host of platforms, such as Reddit, Pinterest, Snapchat, and Vine, that support campaign activities.

Today, internet and social media are widely used in all areas. Social media, which is the focus of attention of young people, has started to attract every age group as it has expanded its fields. In addition to the socialization of people; it contains many personal and social needs such as entertainment, information and communication. It's being easily accessible

and appealing to a wide audience makes social media attractive in the political sphere (Dasli, 2019). Providing political participations and carrying out political campaigns are not only applicable for the public, statesmen can also easily carry out their works through social media. The election activities of the parties, election campaigns, announcements and all kinds of actions for the public are presented from social media accounts. The fact that people choose the political party that is close to their own ideology and reach this ideology to the large communities through social networks leads to mention the large masses of people instead of individuals anymore. Especially politicians who want to influence the young can increase their votes by making their own propaganda with a good tactic. However, the lack of this seems to be an indicator of the unconscious use of social media.

Considering the power of social media platform to spread huge information to broader audience and mirroring on the success of business industries marketing their product to broader customers in an efficient and effective manner; at present politicians tend to embrace social media communication as their strategy to communicate with their potential audience (Nulty, Theocharis, Popa, Parnet and Benoit, 2016). Alongside traditional media social media has now been main platforms for political campaign to gain support from prospective electorates, to raise funding for political parties, and other political purposes.

The innovative and extensive use of social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and MySpace in the 2008 and 2012 U.S. presidential campaigns has been the watershed event for modern political communication (Poulakidakos and Veneti, 2016).

BLOGS

The twenty-first-century version of a diary" (Hendricks and Denton Jr., 2010, 9). Dating back to the 1990s, their purpose is mainly to share content, most commonly in a text form of journal entries, usually written by one author and with the addition of pictures and hyperlinks. They allow for the implementation of interactive and connective functions, the most important being commentaries posted below the articles.

FACEBOOK

Founded in 2004 as an internet platform with a private membership for Harvard University students (and from 2006 for mass public), is the social network with the most active users – more than 1,87 billion (Statista.com, 2017). Facebook allows to share a variety of content including unlimited text posts, photos, videos and links. Additionally, it offers many different tools and applications such as online mini-games, fund-raising tools or targeted advertisement.

Politicians create Facebook accounts and pages in order to reach their supporters directly as it enables interactivity between the politician and the supporters. However, most times, due to their busy schedule and sometimes their limited knowledge of how social media works, these politicians can employ someone to be handling their social media page. All information given out on the page or account are with the knowledge and permission of the politician.

TWITTER

Originated in 2006, is an online news and social network allowing users to post and share short messages (originally limited to 140 characters and from November 2017 to 280 characters), which is used by approximately 317 million users (Statista.com, 2017). In contrary to Facebook, Twitter allows following any users, if the account is not protected. Politicians mainly use Twitter for short texts, while they write long epistles on Facebook.

YOU TUBE

YouTube: Founded in 2005, enables users to watch videos whose wide range of content includes everything from music to television to debates and even political and educational topics. Although it is necessary to register to post videos, watching them is practically unregulated. Since YouTube is connected to commercial activities of Google, posting content may be a profitable activity. Politicians can upload videos of their campaign rallies on YouTube with a mammoth crowd to show their acceptance and overwhelming popularity in the political space in order to boost their confidence and demoralize their oppositions. However, sometimes, most of these crowd are filled with party faithful and rented crowd with some going home with a paltry N2,000. In the case of the incumbent, especially among gubernatorial candidates, some civil servants and associations are forced to be at the venue to receive him or risk the sanction. Some major roads are blocked, and at the end, their media aids write on various social media platforms "This state stand still for Adeleke Muhammad Okeke (exemplary name) just to communicate to social media users of the acceptability of their candidate.

WEB PAGES

Through which political parties can present themselves, do not serve only as informational sources anymore. They facilitate micro blogging, opinion polling, organisation of gatherings and presentation of audio-visual content. Parties can create members-only sections, interconnect their web pages with social media sites and allow for newsfeed subscription.

POLITICAL ADVERTISING

Political advertising is a form of advertising that conveys political message/idea about a candidate, political party or a political ideology to the electorates and citizens. According to Omeje and Oparaugo (2020) political advertising is advertising that attempts to influence or comment upon a matter which is currently the subject of extensive political debate. Political advertising includes advertising or marketing communications about a political party, representative or candidate, advertising about political issues or issues of public interest, and advertising in relation to government policies (whether published/broadcast by the government or someone else). Advertising by Government, political parties, lobby groups and other interest groups may fall into this category.

Okwechime (2006, p.198) traced the origin of political advertising to 1952 when Rosser Reeves helped President Eisenhower to win elections through the placement of many spot commercials during his political campaign. Political advertising can also be used to promote political parties and candidates for political office. Political adverts, jingles or commercials help set the tone or agenda on what to say and make decisions on who to support or vote for on Election Day. Political advertising can be linked to the agenda setting theory of the mass media. Political adverts in the newspaper medium are expected to pass the regulatory process of the Advertising Practitioners Council of Nigeria (APCON). However, in terms of media influence globally, political advertising may not influence people with strong opinion on a candidate, but can be a deciding factor among the undecided voters. In presidential race where less than 1% of the electorates can determine the outcome of election, media influence can be significant. In modern society, political advertising is more significant in central elections that garner wider mass media coverage. This is not unconnected to the fact that mass media have emerged as the most common source of information about other lower election's campaign in democratic societies around the world (Ojeka and Ajakaiye, 2015).

ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Ideology: The major thing a political communicator (candidate or political party) communicates to their audience (electorates) are the party's ideology. This is usually done at campaign rallies, manifestoes, political advertising through television, radio, posters, billboards, handbills and fliers, etc. The term 'ideology' was coined by the French philosopher Destutt de Tracy in 1795. The concept of 'ideology' is often used in the media and the social sciences, but it is notoriously vague. Its everyday usage is largely negative, and typically refers to the rigid, misguided or partisan ideas of others: we have the truth, and they have ideologies (Van Dijk, 2006). It is said to denote the general science of ideas, which was to

clarify and improve the public mind. An ideology is a system of ideas and beliefs about human conduct which has normally been simplified and manipulated in order to obtain popular support for certain actions, and which is usually emotive in its reference to social action (Watson and Hill, 1984).

Propaganda: Propaganda is an effort by the propagandist to appeal to the emotions of others by playing on their pre-existing bias. Though the use of propaganda cuts across virtually all levels of human communication (like dyad, triad, organizational and group communication), there is obviously an increasing interest in the use of the mass media by propagandists to influence the opinion of and attitude of their target audience (Akakwandu, 2016). Thus Okoye and Oparaugo (2019, p.123) see propaganda as “the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people’s beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols (words, gestures, banners, monuments, music, clothing, insignia, hairstyles, designs on coins and postage stamps, and so forth)”. According to Nwogbunyama (2009, p. 98) propaganda is an effort or the authority by which an initiating communicator intends to manage the attitude and actions of others through playing on their pre-existing bias with messages designed largely to appeal to their emotions and/or irrationality.

Persuasion: Persuasion is an attempt through words or action to induce others to either act or refrain from a particular course. To Kenekwuwu, Asemah and Edegoh (2013), persuasion means to induce people to take a desired action. Political communicators use persuasion to persuade electorates to choose their candidate or party over others by making promises of what they will do bearing in mind that that is what the listeners want given that maybe the incumbent has failed in that aspect. Thus, Akakwandu (2016, p.150) posits that political persuasion is “an effort to sell political ideas and gain political support”. It qualifies as an integral part of politics and a necessary component of the pursuit and exercise of power. Also, Akakwandu (2016, p.153) identified four steps to persuasion. They are:

- Recognize a pain (need)
- Create a solution
- Describe the benefits
- Show how pain compounds

FAKE NEWS, HATE SPEECH AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The advent of social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube etc.) has brought about democratisation of communication as the public that hitherto had been considered to be consumers of messages has now also become producers. The platform of social media is open to everyone who has a device, an account to use and data or access to the internet. Communication has never been better and interesting in the history of man.

Fake news, hate speech and misinformation is creeping through all social media platforms. With more and more people relying on social media for as a source for news, there are worries that such content could influence audiences unable to distinguish truth from fact or news from propaganda (Brooks and Carnahan, 2020). Fake news can be old stories or pictures, which are spread and reported as recent happenings to mislead the public and put them in a state of panic. True as it happened, but the report of being recent is false, therefore, fake. For example, from time to time, pictures of the Jos religious crisis of 2010 were circulated online in 2014 and 2015 as recent happenings.

There are three types of fake news. They are

DISINFORMATION

This is false information which is deliberately created to cause harm. For example, the news of someone’s death to a family member could cause harm, as one could immediately have stroke, high blood pressure or even die on hearing the news.

MAL-INFORMATION

This is information based on reality but shared to inflict harm, often by moving it from the private to the public sphere. For example, news of someone’s ordeal to a dear one, which is true, but was shared to cause harm, as it could lead to the sudden demise of another.

MISINFORMATION

This is false information not created with the intent of causing harm. For example, a student who comes to tell fellow students that exams would be starting next week, whereas it has not yet been fixed. The intent of this is not to cause harm, but to encourage them to study their books.

The open nature of the Internet, social media and the lack of total regulation and restrictions by authorities in Nigeria and the world at large defiles freedom of expression (Wilson and Umar, 2019).

Omilusi (2017) describes hate speech as words of incitement and hatred against individuals based upon their identification with a certain social or demographic group. Stressing further, he notes that it may include, but is not limited to “speech that advocates, threatens, or encourages violent acts against a particular group, or expressions that foster a climate of prejudice and intolerance, which can lead to targeted attacks or persecution of that group

According to George (n.d) hate speech is any expression that vilifies an identifiable group — a race, religious community, or sexual minority, for example — and thus prompts harm to members. Even free speech advocates agree that hate speech requires special handling, especially when levelled against minorities too weak to counter it in the marketplace of ideas.

Hate speech is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. Essentially, such speeches rob others of their dignity and could cause environmental unrest just like the Boko haram menace in the country (Ajakaiye, Ojeka, Osueke, Owuoye, Ojeka-John, and Olaniru, 2019). According to United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (2013, p.4), hate speech includes:

(a) all dissemination of ideas based on racial or ethnic superiority or hatred, by whatever means; (b) incitement to hatred, contempt or discrimination against members of a group on grounds of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin; (c) threats or incitement to violence against persons or groups on the grounds in (b) above; (d) expression of insults, ridicule or slander of persons or groups or justification of hatred, contempt or discrimination on the grounds in (b) above, when it clearly amounts to incitement to hatred or discrimination; (e) participation in organizations and activities which promote and incite racial discrimination.

Fake news and hate speech are gaining ground in the Nigerian polity, especially in the social media and broadcast media spheres. Fake news and hate speech are two mutually exclusive terms and mean different phenomena (Pate and Ibrahim, 2019). However, in Nigerian context, both terms are often paired especially in misinformation and inciteful media content contexts. Fake news and hate speech garnered expressive support in two critical factors “that nurture and sustain [their] continuous existence, namely politics and ethno-religious conflicts” (Lucas & Targema, 2018, p. 27).

In Nigeria, the 2015 and 2019 general elections have also witnessed the upsurge in the use of fake news and hate speeches. A clear understanding of the pattern of use and implications and counter measures has become even more imperative. Therefore, in line with efforts to understand focuses on the 2019 elections in Nigeria by apprehending fake news and hate speeches in the run up to, during and after the election with a view to providing a road map for countering the malodorous effects on the polity (Aliogo, 2020).

This phenomenon has reached new heights, however, Hassan (2019) noted that ahead of Nigeria’s 2019 elections, as the campaign has heated up, fake news about both President Muhammadu Buhari and his main opponent former vice-president Atiku Abubakar has swirled on Whatsapp, Facebook and Twitter. It has been shared knowingly by canny campaign officials as well as unwittingly by thousands of unsuspecting voters (Hassan, 2019). At this point, every action they took is misinterpreted intentionally by willing political media on the social media, to mislead the people, and possibly score cheap political points by de-marketing oppositions ahead of the election. This false information covers many topics and takes different forms. On the subtler end of the scale, there are examples such as Buhari’s aide

saying that Atiku only avoided arrest on his US visit because of diplomatic immunity; or the opposition official posting news that “800 companies shut down” even though the story pre-dated Buhari’s term. On the wilder end of the scale, there are the claims that President Buhari has been replaced with a Sudanese clone; or that Kim Jong Un wants to re-colonise Nigeria (Hassan, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The political communication techniques are quite similar on old and new media, the logic behind politicians’ use of new media is quite different (Merkovity, Imre and Major, 2013). According to Manovich (2001), two cultural expressions can be distinct in comparing old and new media: the narrative and the database. The narrative is chronological. It must have a well-defined context and audience. If the politician does the homework, clearly defines the context and the audience, then s/he will be able to successfully persuade or manipulate its voters. In the new media, the database is hierarchical, and politicians need to have a totally different approach from the old media. “The database organizes and presents data according to a preset value structure and algorithm” (Kluver, 2002). These features generate different landscape than it was in old media and the representatives need to define themselves in this news scene.

Through coverage of electioneering campaigns and airing of political advertisements, the media help in influencing voters’ decision either in favor or against a given political party or candidate. Olukotun (2014) echoed a similar point that during elections, the media are the principal vehicles where voters receive information concerning political parties, the voting process, the electoral commission and the other issues germane to the exercise of their rights. The modern media play a central role not only within the political processes of every type, ranging from coverage of major political events and institutions to effects on campaigns and elections but also in any individual’s life, providing many necessary information services as well as offering possibilities for self-enlightenment and entertainment. We live in a society that depends on information and communication to keep us moving the right direction and do our daily activities like work, entertainment, health care, education, personal relationships, travelling and anything else that we have to do.

Politicians, not only in Nigerian, but the world over, although they are much in Nigeria, have taken political communication and its approach to a totally different and negative height by employing hate speech and fake news in their campaign messages. Rather than taking their time to inform the electorates of their plans for them and how they wish to achieve it, they spend all day and energy on insulting and demarketing the opponents through hate speech and fake news. They don’t stop there, they also make inciting posts on

social media which often leaves their gullible followers to be at loggerheads all the time.

REFERENCES

- Ajakaiye, O.O.P., Ojeka, J.D., Osueke, N.O., Owoeye, G., Ojeka-John, R.O & Olaniru, O.S. (2019). Hate speech and fake news: A study of meanings and perceptions in Nigerian political culture. *International Journal of Scientific & Engineering Research*, 10(5),
- Aliogo, U. (2020, March 19). Nigeria: Revisiting issues around hate speech, fake news. In *This Day Newspaper*. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/>
- Akakwandu, C. (2016). *Introduction to political communication*. Benin: Izehi Printing.
- Asemah, E.S. (2011). *Principles and practice of mass communication*. 2nd ed. Jos: Great Future Press.
- Brooks, C. & Carnahan, D. (2020). The truth behind fake news and politics on social media. Retrieved from <https://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2020/the-truth-behind-fake-news-and-politics-on-social-media/>
- Dasli, Y. (2019). Use of social media as a tool for political communication in the field of politics. *Ordu University Journal of Social Science Research*, 9(1), 243-251.
- George, C. (n.d). Hate speech: A dilemma for journalists the world over. Retrieved from <https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/resources/publications/ethics-in-the-news/hate-speech>
- Gervais, B.T. (2016). Political communication. Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-3-319-31816-5_2531-1
- Gronbeck, B. E. (2009). The Web, Campaign 07-08, and Engaged Citizens: Political, Social, and Moral Consequences, in: D.E Robert Jr. (Ed.), *The 2008 Presidential Campaign*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 228–243.
- Hassan, I. (2019, January 31). How fake news spreads, sowing distrust ahead of Nigeria's elections. In *African Arguments*. Retrieved from <https://africanarguments.org/2019/01/31/nigeria-fake-news-2019-election/>
- Hendricks, J. A. & Denton Jr., R.E. (2010). Political campaigns and communicating with the electorate in the twenty-first century, in: J.A. Hendricks and Robert E. Denton Jr. (Eds.), *Communicator-in-Chief: How Barack Obama Used New Media Technology to Win the White House*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1–18.
- Johnson, D. W. (2011). *Campaigning in the twenty-first century: A whole new ballgame?*, New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kaid, L.L. & Holtz-Bacha, C. (2007). Encyclopedia of political communication. Retrieved from <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/encyclopedia-of-political-communication/book227489>
- Kearney, M. (2013). Political discussion on facebook: An analysis of interpersonal goals and disagreement (Thesis). University of Kansas. hdl:1808/12975
- Kenechukwu, S.A., Asemah, E.S. & Edegoh, L.O.N. (2013). Behind advertising: The language of persuasion. *International Journal of Asian Social Science*. Asian Economic and Social Society Press. 3(4). Pp. 951-959
- Kluver, A.R. (2002). The logic of new media in international affairs, *New Media & Society*, 4(4), 499–517
- Ligeti, G. (1978). On music and politics. *Perspectives of New Music*, 16(2), 19–24. doi:10.2307/832674
- Loader, B. & Mercea, D. (2011). Networking democracy? *Information, Communication and Society* 14: 757-769.
- Lucas, J.M & Targema, T.S. (2018). Hate speech in readers' comments and the challenge of democratic consolidation in Nigeria: A critical analysis. *Malaysian Journal of Media Studies*. 20(2). P.23-38
- Manovich, L. (2001). *The language of new media*, Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Merkovity, N., Imre, R. & Major, S. (2013). Social media innovation in political communication: alternative or mainstream? Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/35346131.pdf>
- Mirer, M. L. & Bode, L. (2015). Tweeting in defeat: How candidates concede and claim victory in 140 characters, in: *New Media & Society*, Vol. 17(3), 453–469. DOI:10.1177/1461444813505364.
- Munodawafa, D. (2008). Communication: Concepts, processes and challenges. *Health Education Research*, Volume 23, Issue 3, June 2008, Pages 369–370. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/her/article/23/3/369/639974>
- Nulty, P., Theocharis, Y., Popa, S. A., Parnet, O. & Benoit, K. (2016). Social media and political communication in the 2014 elections to the European Parliament. *Electoral Studies*, 44, 429-444.
- Nwogbunyama, E. (2009). *Public opinion research*. Enugu: Academic Publishing Company.
- Nworgu, K.O. (2011). The mass media and the rest of us in digital information age. In K.O. Nworgu (ed). *Mass Media and Society in a Globalising and Digital Age*. Owerri: Ultimate Books.
- Ojeka, J. D. & Ajakaiye, O. P. (2015). Political advertising and elections: An overview of 2011 presidential election in Nigeria. *The Postgraduate Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State. 13(1)
- Okoye, J.I & Oparaugo, B. (2019). An introductory text on political communication. Enugu: Enizol Ventures.
- Okwechime C. (2006). *Essentials of advertising in Nigeria*. Asaba: Prime Legacies Limited.
- Olukotun, A. (2014). "Welcome address/contextual overview of the Workshop", presented at the 2-day training workshop on Reporting Elections: A Non-Partisan Approach, held at the Conference Centre, University of Ibadan, Monday & Tuesday, 15 & 16 December.
- Omeje, S.O. & Oparaugo, B. (2020). *Advertising case studies*. Enugu:
- Omilusi, M. (2017). From convenient hibernation to circumstantial desperation: Hate speech, party political communication and the Nigeria's 2015 general elections. *Brazilian Journal of African Studies*, 2 (4): 160-183.
- Owen, D. (2017). New media and political campaigns. In K. Kenski & K.H. Jamieson (Eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*. Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471-e-3471.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199793471-e-016?rsk=mxMVh&result=4>
- Pate, U.A & Ibrahim, A.M. (2019). Fake news, hate speech and Nigeria's struggle for
- Democratic consolidation: A conceptual review. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336145125>
- Poulakidakos, S. & Veneti, A. (2016). Political communication and twitter in Greece: Jumps on the bandwagon or an enhancement of the political dialogue? Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/80693433.pdf>

- Salihu, N.A. & Oparaugo, B. (2017). Cartoon as a device for political critique in Nigerian newspapers. *The Beam: Journal of Arts and Science*, 11(2), Pp. 149-155
- Statista.com (2017), Most famous social network sites worldwide as of January 2017, ranked by number of active users (in millions) [online], The Statistics Portal [cit. 2017-03-29], available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>>.
- Thummy, F.A. (2015). Social Media as a Tool of Political Communication. Retrieved from <https://www.grin.com/document/513240>
- Van Dijk, T.A. (2006). Ideology and discourse analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), 115-140.
- Watson, J. & Hill, A. (1984). *A dictionary of communication and media studies*. London: Hodder Arnold
- Wei, R. & Xu, L.Z. (2019). New media and politics: A synopsis of theories, issues, and research. *communication and technology, media and communication policy, political communication*. Retrieved from <https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-104>
- [1] Wilson, F. & Umar, M.A. (2019). The effect of fake news on Nigeria's democracy within the premise of freedom of expression. *Global Media Journal*, 17(32).