

MOBILIZING THE ELECTORATE: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION TECHNIQUES OF THE PDP IN RIVERS STATE, 2023

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Abstract: This study analyzed the strategic political communication strategies Strategic Political employed by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) during the 2023 election campaigns Communication, in Rivers State and assess their effectiveness in influencing voter perception and People's electoral outcomes. The agenda-setting theory of public relations was anchored in this Democratic Party study. This study adopted a qualitative research method to explore the strategic (PDP), Election political communication techniques employed by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) Campaigns during the 2023 election campaigns in Rivers State. The population of the study comprised PDP campaign strategists, media consultants, party officials, political analysts, and selected voters in Rivers State. Given the qualitative nature of the study, a sample size of 15 key informants were selected to provide in-depth insights into the communication strategies used during the campaign. This includes five PDP communication strategists, three media consultants, two political analysts, and five voters who actively followed the campaign. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants, ensuring that only individuals with direct knowledge and experience of the campaign communication strategies were included. The method of data collection involved in-depth interviews and document analysis. Semi structured interviews were conducted with selected participants to gather first-hand information on PDP's communication strategies, media engagement, message framing, and campaign challenges. The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying and categorizing key themes and patterns from the interviews and documents. The findings revealed that the PDP employed a comprehensive communication strategy that integrated both traditional and digital media platforms, utilizing television, radio, social media, and public engagements to effectively frame key issues, highlight achievements, and counter opposition narratives, although challenges such as misinformation and media bias remained prevalent. The study concluded that the PDP's strategic use of both traditional and digital media demonstrates that effective political communication requires a well-rounded, multi-channel approach to reach diverse voter groups, with clear messaging and timely engagement being crucial for influencing electoral outcomes. The study recommended that political parties should adopt a multi-channel communication strategy that integrates both traditional and digital media to ensure broad voter outreach and effective message delivery.

Keywords: Strategic Political Communication, People's Democratic Party (PDP), Election Campaigns, Voter Perception, Media Strategy.

Introduction

Strategic political communication has become an essential tool in modern election campaigns, influencing voter perception, candidate image, and electoral outcomes. Political parties deploy sophisticated communication strategies to shape public opinion, mobilise support, and counter opposition narratives (Chadwick, 2017). In Nigeria, where political competition is intense, parties utilise various communication channels, including traditional media, social media, and grassroots engagement, to secure electoral victory (Omoera & Ekeanyanwu, 2021). The 2023 general elections in Nigeria were marked by heightened political activity, with Rivers State serving as a critical battleground due to its economic significance and historical political tensions (Owen & Usman, 2023). The People's Democratic Party (PDP), which has maintained a dominant presence in the state since 1999, faced stiff competition from opposition parties. The campaign strategies deployed by the PDP were crucial in determining its electoral success and the retention of political power in the state (Ikelegbe & Osumah, 2023). Strategic political communication refers to the deliberate use of communication tactics to influence political behaviour and achieve electoral objectives (Holtz-Bacha, 2020). It involves message framing, audience segmentation, media selection, and crisis management to ensure that campaign messages resonate with targeted voters. The effectiveness of these strategies depends on a combination of persuasive rhetoric, credible messaging, and adaptability to changing political dynamics (Esser & Stromback, 2014). Media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping political discourse and voter perception. Traditional media, such as television, radio, and newspapers, remain influential in Rivers State, while social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp have become indispensable campaign tools (Uwalaka & Ekwughu, 2022). The PDP leveraged a mix of these media to communicate campaign promises, counter opposition narratives, and mobilize supporters ahead of the elections (Ibrahim & Adesoji, 2023).

The 2023 election cycle in Rivers State saw an increased reliance on digital communication tools. PDP candidates and their campaign teams utilised data-driven targeting, online political advertisements, and influencer endorsements to reach key demographics (Opeibi, 2020). Social media analytics allowed the party to gauge voter sentiments and adjust campaign messages accordingly, demonstrating the growing intersection of technology and political communication (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley, 2016). Beyond digital communication, the PDP employed grassroots mobilisation strategies to consolidate its voter base. Door-to-door canvassing, community engagement forums, and political rallies were instrumental in reinforcing party loyalty and addressing voter concerns directly (Jega, 2022). These face-to-face interactions allowed the party to navigate local political complexities and maintain its stronghold in Rivers State.

Political campaigns are often fraught with controversies and opposition attacks. The PDP had to navigate multiple crises, including allegations of electoral malpractice and internal party disputes. Crisis communication strategies, such as rapid response teams and strategic rebuttals, were employed to manage public perception and mitigate potential damage (Iyare, 2023). Effective crisis management is a critical component of strategic political communication, ensuring that campaign momentum is not derailed by negative publicity (Benoit, 2017). The effectiveness of PDP's strategic political communication in the 2023 elections was evident in its ability to sustain voter engagement, counter

opposition narratives, and secure electoral victory in Rivers State. Studies have shown that well-orchestrated communication campaigns significantly influence voter behaviour and election outcomes (Stromback & Kiouisis, 2019). PDP's success highlights the importance of a cohesive, adaptive, and research-driven communication strategy in contemporary political contests. Despite the extensive application of strategic political communication in Nigerian elections, there is limited scholarly analysis focusing on the 2023 PDP election campaigns in Rivers State. Existing studies have primarily examined national-level campaign strategies, leaving a research gap at the state level (Uwalaka & Ekwugha, 2022). Strategic political communication plays a crucial role in modern election campaigns, influencing voter perceptions, candidate image, and electoral success. In Nigeria, political parties, including the People's Democratic Party (PDP), employ various communication strategies to engage voters, counter opposition narratives, and maintain party dominance. The 2023 general elections in Rivers State were highly competitive, with the PDP facing increasing challenges from opposition parties, internal party divisions, and shifting voter expectations. Despite the party's victory, there is a need to critically examine the effectiveness of its strategic communication approaches in shaping electoral outcomes. The problem lies in understanding how the PDP's communication strategies were crafted, deployed, and received by the electorate, as well as their overall impact on voter behaviour and political engagement.

While previous studies on political communication in Nigeria have largely focused on national elections and broad campaign strategies, limited scholarly attention has been given to state-level political communication dynamics, particularly in Rivers State. The absence of detailed empirical studies on PDP's communication strategies in the 2023 elections creates a gap in knowledge, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of various media channels, message framing techniques, and voter mobilisation strategies used by the party.

Moreover, with the increasing role of digital media in election campaigns, there is a need to investigate how the PDP leveraged social media, political influencers, and data-driven communication tools to engage different voter demographics in Rivers State. Additionally, political campaigns in Nigeria often face challenges such as misinformation, voter apathy, and crisis management issues, which can affect public perception and electoral outcomes. The extent to which PDP's strategic communication successfully navigated these challenges in Rivers State remains unclear. This study seeks to bridge this gap by critically analysing PDP's political communication strategies during the 2023 elections, assessing their effectiveness, and identifying lessons for future political campaigns. Understanding these dynamics provide valuable insights into the evolving landscape of political communication in Nigeria and contribute to the broader discourse on electoral strategies in democratic societies. This study seeks to achieve three key objectives. First, it aims to examine the various strategic political communication techniques employed by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) during the 2023 election campaigns in Rivers State, including media engagement, message framing, and grassroots mobilisation. Second, it seeks to assess the effectiveness of these communication strategies in shaping voter perceptions,

influencing political discourse, and determining electoral outcomes. Lastly, the study aims to identify the challenges faced by the PDP in its communication efforts, such as misinformation, opposition counterstrategies, and crisis management, while exploring potential lessons for future political campaigns in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review the Concept of Strategic Political Communication

Strategic political communication refers to the deliberate use of communication strategies to influence public opinion, mobilise support, and achieve political objectives. It involves carefully crafted messages, targeted audience engagement, and the selection of appropriate media channels to ensure effective voter outreach (Holtz-Bacha, 2020). Political parties and candidates use strategic communication to shape their public image, counter opposition narratives, and align their messages with prevailing societal concerns. The effectiveness of these strategies often determines electoral success, as they influence voter perceptions and political participation (Esser & Stromback, 2014). In modern political campaigns, strategic communication has evolved beyond traditional mass media to include digital and social media platforms. Political actors leverage television, radio, newspapers, and, more recently, social media networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to reach different segments of the electorate

(Chadwick, 2017). These platforms enable direct engagement with voters, real-time feedback, and rapid dissemination of campaign messages. Research has shown that political communication strategies that integrate both traditional and digital media tend to be more effective in mobilising voters (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

A critical component of strategic political communication is message framing, which involves structuring political narratives to appeal to specific voter concerns and values. Effective framing ensures that campaign messages resonate with target audiences, thereby enhancing persuasion and voter support (Iyengar, 1991). For instance, during election campaigns, parties may frame their messages around issues such as economic development, security, or social welfare to appeal to different voter demographics. The ability to craft compelling narratives and maintain message consistency is essential for building political credibility and trust (Stromback &

Kiousis, 2019). Furthermore, strategic political communication is not only about message dissemination but also about crisis management and damage control. Political campaigns often face challenges such as misinformation,

scandals, and opposition attacks, which require swift and strategic responses (Benoit, 2017). Crisis communication strategies, including factchecking, rebuttals, and controlled media engagements, help mitigate reputational risks and maintain public trust. In Nigeria, where elections are highly competitive and contentious, the ability of political parties to manage crises effectively can significantly impact electoral outcomes (Uwalaka & Ekwugha, 2022).

Digital Media and Political Campaigns in Nigeria

The rise of digital media has revolutionised political campaign strategies globally, and Nigeria is no exception. Digital media, particularly social networking platforms, have become essential tools for political engagement, voter mobilisation, and message dissemination (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley,

2016). Political actors increasingly use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp to communicate with voters, share campaign messages, and respond to public concerns in real-time (Uwalaka &

Ekwugha, 2022). The interactivity of these platforms allows for direct engagement between politicians and the electorate, fostering greater political participation. One of the most significant advantages of digital media in political campaigns is its ability to reach a broad audience quickly and efficiently. Unlike traditional media, which often requires significant financial investment, social media platforms offer relatively cost-effective means of political communication (Opeibi, 2020).

Political parties can use targeted advertisements, live-streamed events, and influencer endorsements to amplify their messages and engage with voters. This shift towards digital campaigning has reshaped the dynamics of political communication in Nigeria, making elections more participatory and accessible (Ibrahim & Adesoji, 2023).

However, the use of digital media in political campaigns also presents challenges, particularly concerning misinformation and disinformation. The spread of fake news, propaganda, and manipulated content has become a major issue in Nigerian elections (Iyare, 2023). Political opponents often exploit social media to disseminate misleading information, which can influence voter decisions and undermine the credibility of electoral processes. Fact-checking initiatives and digital literacy campaigns have been introduced to counter these threats, but their effectiveness remains limited (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Despite these challenges, digital media continues to shape political communication strategies in Nigeria. Political parties now invest in data analytics to track voter sentiments and tailor their messages accordingly (Chadwick, 2017). Additionally, online political engagement has increased among younger voters, who are more active on social media than on traditional media platforms (Uwalaka & Ekwugha, 2022). As Nigeria's political landscape evolves, digital media is expected to play an even greater role in shaping electoral outcomes and redefining campaign strategies.

Theoretical Review

The Agenda-Setting Theory

The Agenda-Setting Theory was propounded by

Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972 following their seminal study on media influence in the 1968 U.S. presidential election. Their research demonstrated that mass media play a crucial role in shaping public perception by emphasising certain issues over others (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Media prioritisation – The media do not tell people what to think, but they influence what people think about by determining which issues receive more coverage. Issue Salience – The frequency and prominence of media coverage affect the perceived importance of issues among the public. Gatekeeping Role – Journalists and media organizations act as gatekeepers, selecting and framing news stories that shape public discourse. Correlation between Media and Public Agenda – There is a strong link between the issues highlighted by the media and those considered important by the public. Time Lag Effect – The impact of media agenda-setting develops over time, as audiences are repeatedly exposed to certain narratives.

Assumptions of the Theory: The public depends on the media for information, making them susceptible to media influence. Media coverage influences the priorities of political actors, policymakers, and voters. Audiences are passive in their reception of news, often accepting media-constructed narratives without critical evaluation.

The intensity of media coverage affects the perceived urgency and importance of an issue. Political campaigns use media strategically to set the public agenda and influence electoral outcomes.

Criticism of the Theory: Despite its significance, the Agenda-Setting Theory has faced several criticisms. One major critique is that it overemphasises media influence while underestimating the role of individual cognition, social interactions, and personal experiences in shaping public opinion (Takeshita, 2006). Additionally, with the rise of digital media, audiences are no longer passive recipients of news; they actively engage in agenda-setting through social media discussions, blogs, and citizen journalism (Meraz, 2009). Furthermore, some scholars argue that the theory fails to account for media biases and ownership interests, which may distort issue prioritisation

for political or economic gain (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

The Agenda-Setting Theory is highly relevant to this study as it helps explain how the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Rivers State strategically used political communication to shape voter perceptions during the 2023 elections. By analysing the media strategies employed by the PDP such as issue framing, message prioritisation, and media coverage, this study can assess the effectiveness of their communication tactics in influencing the political discourse. Additionally, the theory provides insights into how media channels, both traditional and digital, played a role in amplifying or diminishing political narratives during the campaign period. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for evaluating the impact of strategic political communication on electoral outcomes.

Empirical Review

Opeibi (2020) carried out "Political Communication Strategies in Nigeria: A Study of Election Campaigns." The study examined the communication strategies used by Nigerian political parties in election campaigns and their impact on voter engagement. The study employed a qualitative content analysis of political campaign speeches, social media posts, and televised debates from the 2019 general elections. The study found that Nigerian political parties heavily relied on media-driven strategies, particularly social media, to mobilize young voters. The use of digital platforms increased voter interaction but also amplified misinformation. Similarity to the Current Study: Both studies explore political communication strategies used during election campaigns in Nigeria. The current study also examines the effectiveness of such strategies, focusing on the PDP's campaign in Rivers State. While the reviewed work studied election campaigns at the national level, the current study is specific to the 2023 Rivers State PDP campaign, offering a more localised perspective.

Uwalaka and Ekwugha (2022) carried out a study "Social Media and Political Participation in Nigeria: Insights from the 2019 and 2023 Elections." The study sought to investigate the role of social media in influencing voter participation and political engagement in Nigerian elections. A mixed method approach was used, combining survey data from 1,200 respondents across Nigeria and in-depth interviews with political campaign managers. The study found that social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp played a crucial role in political mobilization, particularly among

young and urban voters. However, the spread of fake news and online toxicity also affected voter perception. Similarity to the Current Study: Both studies examine the role of strategic communication in political campaigns and voter mobilisation, highlighting the influence of digital platforms. Dissimilarity: Unlike the current study, which focuses on the PDP's campaign in Rivers State, the reviewed study analysed political communication on a broader national scale, considering multiple parties. Ibrahim and Adesoji (2023) *Digital Media and Political Communication in Nigeria's 2023 Elections.* This study analysed the impact of digital media on political campaigns and voter behaviour in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The study used a case study approach, focusing on selected political parties, including PDP, APC, and LP. Data were collected from online campaign materials, political advertisements, and voter engagement metrics. The study revealed that digital media significantly enhanced campaign outreach and voter engagement, but it also posed challenges such as cyber-attacks and disinformation. The PDP's digital campaign was noted for its strategic messaging but faced stiff competition from opposition parties. Similarity to the Current Study: Both studies assess the effectiveness of digital media strategies in political campaigns, with a focus on PDP's communication efforts. Dissimilarity: While the reviewed study examined multiple parties across Nigeria, the current study is limited to the PDP's 2023 campaign in Rivers State, providing a localised analysis.

Summary of Literature Review and Gap Identification

The reviewed literature highlights the crucial role of strategic political communication in shaping electoral outcomes, particularly through message framing, media engagement, and voter mobilisation. Studies such as those by Opeibi (2020), Uwalaka and Ekwugha (2022), and Ibrahim and Adesoji (2023) emphasise how Nigerian political parties utilise both traditional and digital media platforms to influence public perception and voter participation. The AgendaSetting Theory provides a strong theoretical foundation, explaining how media coverage influences the political agenda and voter priorities. Furthermore, digital media have emerged as a powerful tool in modern political campaigns, offering real-time interaction and cost-effective outreach. However, issues such as misinformation, cyber-attacks, and media bias present significant challenges to effective communication strategies. These studies provide valuable insights into political campaign dynamics in Nigeria but often focus on nationallevel elections or comparative analyses across multiple parties.

Despite the extensive research on political communication in Nigeria, a significant gap exists in localised studies examining the specific strategic communication approaches of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) during the 2023 election campaigns in Rivers State. Existing studies provide broad perspectives on political communication strategies but do not analyse how these strategies played out in a highly competitive state-level election. This study fills that gap by offering an in-depth examination of the PDP's communication tactics, the role of digital media in its campaign, and the challenges faced in engaging voters within Rivers State. By narrowing the focus to a specific political context, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how strategic political communication influences electoral outcomes at the subnational level.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research method to explore the strategic political communication techniques employed by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) during the 2023 election campaigns in Rivers State. The population of the study comprised PDP campaign strategists, media consultants, party officials, political analysts, and selected voters in Rivers State. Given the qualitative nature of the study, a sample size of 15 key informants were selected to provide indepth insights into the communication strategies used during the campaign. This includes five PDP communication strategists, three media consultants, two political analysts, and five voters who actively followed the campaign. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants, ensuring that only individuals with direct knowledge and experience of the campaign communication strategies were included. This non-random approach is suitable for qualitative research as it allows for the selection of information-rich participants who can provide detailed and relevant insights.

The method of data collection involved in-depth interviews and document analysis. Semistructured interviews were conducted with selected participants to gather first-hand information on PDP's communication strategies, media engagement, message framing, and campaign challenges. Additionally, relevant campaign materials, including political speeches, social media posts, press releases, and newspaper articles, were analysed to understand the communication patterns used during the election. The data collected were analysed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying and categorising key themes and patterns from the interviews and documents. The findings were interpreted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness and impact of the PDP's strategic communication in the 2023 elections in Rivers State.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The themes were then deductively deduced from the research objectives. The following themes were deduced: Strategic Political

Communication in Electoral Campaigns; Digital Media and Voter Engagement; and Impact of Media Framing and Agenda Setting on Voter Perception. These are presented and discussed below:

Strategic Political Communication in Electoral Campaigns

This theme focuses on understanding the various communication strategies employed by the PDP during the 2023 elections in Rivers State. It examines how the party used media channels, message framing, and targeted communication tactics to shape voter perceptions and influence political discourse. This theme addresses how strategic political communication was crafted and implemented to align with the party's goals of voter mobilisation and engagement. The PDP employed a multifaceted communication strategy that heavily relied on both traditional and digital media. They used television and radio advertisements to reach a broad audience, especially in rural areas, while social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram were used for targeted outreach to younger, urban voters. One of the strategies was the framing of issues around the party's achievements in governance, such as infrastructural development and security, while also highlighting the perceived failures of the opposition. This was accompanied by consistent public engagement through press releases, debates, and town hall meetings to foster direct interaction with voters.

The PDP's message was framed around key themes of development, unity, and security. They portrayed their governance as one that prioritised the welfare of the people, focusing on infrastructural projects, educational reforms, and job creation. The party also emphasised the need for continuity in leadership, arguing that the achievements made under the current administration should not be jeopardized by a change in leadership. This was reflected in their media messages, which often featured prominent party leaders talking about the progress made in Rivers State. They aimed to create a sense of pride and ownership among the voters, making them feel that they had a stake in the party's vision for the future. The party's leadership played a crucial role in setting the tone for the campaign's communication. Key figures, such as the gubernatorial candidate and party chairman, were strategically placed in public appearances, interviews, and speeches. These individuals served as the faces of the party's message, ensuring that their voices were heard in all key media outlets. The party also employed professional spokespersons who were skilled in addressing public concerns, especially during debates and media interviews. These spokespersons had a strong grasp of the issues, which allowed them to effectively counter any criticisms or negative narratives posed by the opposition.

One of the biggest challenges was the widespread misinformation and negative narratives propagated by the opposition. The PDP had to constantly counter false claims, especially on social media platforms where rumours could spread rapidly. Another challenge was reaching voters in more remote areas, where access to digital media was limited. Despite using traditional media, the party still struggled to engage these populations as effectively as they would have liked. The party also had to deal with the complexity of navigating a political landscape filled with competing interests, both within the party and among other political forces in Rivers State.

Digital Media and Voter Engagement

This theme explores the role of digital media platforms in the PDP's electoral communication strategy. It delves into how the party leveraged social media, digital ads, and online platforms to connect with voters, particularly the younger demographic, and the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing voter participation. The theme also looks at the challenges, including misinformation and digital literacy, faced by the

PDP in using digital media during the campaign. Digital media was central to the PDP's communication strategy, especially for engaging younger voters who are active online. Social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook were used to spread key messages, share video clips, and engage in real-time interactions with voters. The party also used targeted advertisements on platforms like Instagram and Facebook, where they could tailor messages to specific demographics. Digital media allowed for more immediate and personal communication with voters, enabling the PDP to mobilise supporters quickly and effectively, especially when there were breaking news events or urgent calls to action.

The PDP prioritised content that highlighted their achievements in governance, including videos and images of completed projects like roads, schools, and health facilities. These were paired with testimonials from beneficiaries who praised the party's impact. Additionally, the party used social media to share the candidate's speeches and messages directly, bypassing traditional media channels. The party also encouraged voter engagement through interactive posts, including polls and Q&A

sessions where supporters could ask questions directly to the campaign team. This level of interaction helped foster a sense of connection and inclusion among voters.

Yes, for the most part, the use of digital media was highly effective in reaching the younger demographic, especially in urban areas. The party's digital media campaign was able to generate significant engagement, including shares, likes, and comments on social media. This helped increase the visibility of the party's message. However, there were some limitations, particularly in rural areas where digital infrastructure is less developed. In these areas, the party still relied on traditional media, such as radio and television, to supplement their digital outreach. Despite this, digital media allowed for a more dynamic, cost-effective way to engage voters, and it played a critical role in building excitement around the PDP's candidacy. One of the main challenges was combating misinformation and fake news, which spread rapidly on social media platforms. The party had to continuously monitor digital platforms to counter false narratives, which often involved issuing clarifications or rebuttals. Additionally, the rise of negative campaigning on digital platforms from opposition groups posed another challenge, as it often distorted the message and created confusion among voters. Finally, the digital divide in some parts of Rivers State meant that not all voters had equal access to online platforms, limiting the effectiveness of the digital campaign in certain areas. Despite these challenges, the PDP's digital strategy was largely successful in building a solid base of support.

Impact of Media Framing and Agenda Setting on Voter Perception

This theme addresses how the media, both traditional and digital, framed key issues during the PDP's election campaign. It investigates how the media's agenda-setting role influenced voter perception of the party's policies, candidates, and overall campaign narrative. This theme also examines the PDP's efforts to control the media narrative and its impact on shaping the public's priorities and attitudes toward the election. Media framing played a critical role in shaping how the PDP's messages were received by the public. The party worked closely with media outlets to ensure that their key issues were framed in a positive light. For instance, they emphasised their achievements in governance, framing them as evidence of their competence and ability to continue leading the state effectively. The media also framed the opposition as incompetent, focusing on the perceived failures and shortcomings of their rivals. This framing was designed to make the PDP appear as the only viable choice for voters who wanted continued development and progress.

Media agenda-setting was vital in controlling the flow of information and determining the issues that would dominate public discussion. The PDP

worked with journalists and media houses to ensure that their key messages were highlighted in the press, often framing those issues in ways that aligned with their goals. By emphasising certain issues, such as security and infrastructural development, the PDP was able to direct public attention to the topics they wanted to dominate the discourse. This was particularly effective in influencing how voters evaluated the party's performance and their readiness for a second term in office.

While the media framing largely worked in favour of the PDP, there were instances where the opposition's media outlets were able to shape the narrative against the party. Negative framing, particularly regarding corruption or the handling of local issues, often presented a challenge for the PDP. Some media outlets aligned with opposition parties helped perpetuate these negative narratives,

influencing public perception in ways that the PDP had to counter continuously. In such cases, the PDP was forced to engage in media campaigns to counter these negative frames and reassert their position in the race.

The PDP responded by increasing their media presence, particularly through digital platforms where they could directly control the narrative. They employed media spin doctors and factcheckers to counter false stories and distortions. Additionally, the party used social media to directly engage voters, ensuring that their side of the story was heard in real-time. Despite the opposition's attempts to control the media agenda, the PDP's response to these challenges helped mitigate the impact of negative media coverage and kept their message consistent throughout the campaign. **Discussion of Findings**

Findings revealed that the PDP employed a comprehensive communication strategy that integrated both traditional and digital media platforms, utilising television, radio, social media, and public engagements to effectively frame key issues, highlight achievements, and counter opposition narratives, although challenges such as misinformation and media bias remained prevalent. The study by Opeibi (2020) on political communication strategies in Nigerian elections underscores the importance of media integration and message framing, aligning with the finding that the PDP utilised both traditional and digital media to strategically influence voter perceptions and political discourse. This is relevant because it supports the notion that a diverse communication approach is essential for electoral success. The Agenda-Setting Theory is relevant to the finding that the PDP strategically used both traditional and digital media to influence public discourse, as it highlights how media outlets can prioritise certain issues and shape the political agenda,

which the PDP effectively utilised to frame key messages and dominate the electoral conversation. The finding that the PDP employed a multi-platform communication strategy suggests that political parties should continue to integrate diverse media channels to enhance their outreach, emphasising the need for adaptability in communication strategies to effectively engage various voter demographics and manage political discourse in competitive electoral environments.

Findings showed that digital media played a pivotal role in the PDP's campaign, allowing the party to engage with younger, urban voters through targeted advertisements, interactive posts, and real-time communications, although limitations in digital infrastructure and the spread of misinformation posed challenges in reaching all voter demographics. Uwalaka and Ekwugha's (2022) examination of digital media's role in Nigerian political campaigns reinforces the finding that the PDP successfully engaged younger voters through social media platforms and targeted digital advertisements, emphasising the growing significance of digital engagement in contemporary electoral strategies. The Agenda-Setting Theory is also relevant to the finding on digital media's role in engaging younger voters, as it underscores the influence of digital platforms in directing public attention to specific issues and candidates, enabling the PDP to shape voter perceptions and mobilise support through targeted online content. The finding that digital media played a pivotal role in engaging younger voters implies that future campaigns should invest more in digital tools and online engagement, ensuring they reach tech-savvy demographics while addressing challenges such as misinformation and digital inequality to maximise voter participation and support.

Findings indicated that media framing and agenda-setting were critical in shaping voter perceptions, with the PDP successfully influencing the public discourse by framing their achievements positively and the opposition negatively, though opposition media outlets also influenced the agenda, requiring the PDP to engage in continuous media counteraction to maintain control over the narrative. Ibrahim and Adesoji's (2023) work on media agenda-setting in political campaigns aligns with the finding that the PDP successfully shaped public perception through media framing and agendasetting, reinforcing the idea that controlling media narratives is crucial in influencing voter attitudes and ensuring the success of political campaigns. The Agenda-Setting Theory directly connects to the finding regarding the PDP's use of media framing and agenda-setting to influence voter perceptions, demonstrating how the party controlled the narrative in both traditional and

digital media to highlight its achievements while framing the opposition negatively, thus guiding public attention and shaping electoral outcomes. The finding that media framing and agendasetting significantly impacted voter perceptions suggests that political parties must focus on strategically shaping media narratives and controlling the flow of information to influence public opinion, emphasising the importance of media management and counteracting negative frames, especially in highly competitive political environments.

Conclusion

The study concluded that the PDP's strategic use of both traditional and digital media demonstrates that effective political communication requires a well-rounded, multichannel approach to reach diverse voter groups, with clear messaging and timely engagement being crucial for influencing electoral outcomes. The study explored that the significant role of digital media in the PDP's campaign highlights the increasing importance of online platforms in contemporary political campaigns, underscoring the need for parties to harness digital tools effectively to engage younger voters and maintain relevance in a rapidly evolving media landscape.

Finally, the study has pointed out that the influence of media framing and agenda-setting on voter perceptions reinforces the idea that political campaigns must actively manage media narratives to steer public discourse in their favour, making media relations and control over the agenda pivotal components of any successful electoral strategy.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing an in-depth analysis of the strategic political communication techniques used by the People's Democratic Party (PDP) during the 2023 elections in Rivers State. It expands understanding of how political campaigns effectively integrate both traditional and digital media to engage voters, influence public perception, and control the electoral discourse. The study highlights the pivotal role of message framing, media engagement, and strategic communication in shaping voter behaviour, adding new insights into the intersection of media, politics, and communication strategies in Nigerian elections. Additionally, this study contributes to the academic literature on digital media's role in modern political campaigns, particularly in developing countries. It sheds light on how digital tools and social media platforms are increasingly being used to mobilize support, engage younger voters, and counter misinformation. The research also emphasizes the significance of media framing and agendasetting, offering a clearer understanding of how political parties manage media narratives to

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