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## Communication Strategies and Election Outcome: An examination of Nigerian Gubernatorial Elections

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### Abstract

*Communication plays a vital role in Nigerian political campaigns, making it crucial to regularly assess the different strategies employed by parties and candidates to understand how they influence electoral success. This research explores the impact of political communication strategies on voters' decisions in Nigerian gubernatorial elections. Using the Persuasion Theory (AIDA Model) as a framework, the study conducts a cross-sectional survey involving 2,942,447 registered voters, with a sample of 400 respondents, to analyze how politicians effectively engage and mobilize voters to secure electoral victories. The results from correlation and hypothesis testing reveal significant links between candidates' communication tools and strategies and voters' awareness, attitudes, and voting choices. The study highlights that an integrated approach—combining social media, traditional media, rallies, and personal endorsements—is key to successful political mobilization and voter engagement.*

**Keywords:** Political Communication, Communication Strategies, Voter Behaviour.

### Introduction

The strategic and sustained use of information by political leaders, candidates, and parties to gain public support and voter approval for policies and programs has become a cornerstone of governance worldwide (Kioussis & Strömbäck, 2014; Achor, 2016). Davis (2010) approaches political communication through the social theory lens, integrating concepts from democracy studies, comparative politics, media sociology, and popular culture. His analysis covers key areas such as campaigning, political marketing, media influence, and policymaking, while also addressing the role of new media in fostering direct democracy.

Semetko & Scammell's (2012) handbook offers a contemporary overview of political communication trends, emphasizing the effects of "continuous connectivity." The book is structured into five sections, exploring macro-level influences, social networks, research methodologies, power dynamics, and international perspectives (Khattak et al., 2014). Early chapters assess the political role of entertainment media, blogging, online campaigns, and government communication, while later sections focus on digital media's impact on civic engagement, youth participation, and traditional networks like public broadcasting. However, with its 2012 publication, the handbook lacks recent developments and primarily centers on

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Moy et al. (2012) identified two analytical approaches to political communication: studying it as a political phenomenon (e.g., public engagement or content production) or as an academic discipline. They note that the former often defaults to the U.S. political context—elections, presidential leadership, media watchdog functions—despite variations in parliamentary systems and press roles elsewhere. The authors attribute the global dominance of U.S.-centric research to the widespread replication of American scholarship on agenda-setting, framing, and priming effects.

Foster's (2010) comparative study introduces political communication in the UK and U.S., tracing the evolution of party strategies and modern campaign tactics. The book addresses themes like political advertising, media manipulation ("spin"), government communication, and media bias, concluding with discussions on media regulation. While it introduces key theories, its focus remains limited to Western contexts.

Udende et al. (2021) analyze social media as a political communication tool, specifically examining posts by Nigeria's Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Through content analysis of nine purposively selected Facebook and Twitter posts, they find that INEC's messages are clear, persuasive, and effective in voter education (Al-Taie & Khattak, 2024). The study underscores social media's role in promoting electoral transparency and recommends its continued use to enhance political participation and election credibility. However, its scope is narrow, focusing solely on INEC's posts.

Fadeyi & Adaramola (2023) investigated celebrity endorsements' impact on voting behavior during Ekiti State's 2022 gubernatorial election, using the Source Credibility Theory. In their Survey of 208 residents, they discovered that civic duty and candidate preference were primary motivators, with traditional leaders and family heads also influencing decisions. The study concluded that celebrity endorsements alone have limited sway, urging parties to prioritize candidate credibility. Their findings were, however, confined to Ekiti State.

Cwalina & Falkowski (2014) propose a three-stage political branding model: candidate positioning, assessing positive or negative associations, and voter decision-making. They conceptualize a political brand as a mental "node" linked to various associations, which voters compare against rival candidates and an idealized prototype. Using Szalay's associative overlap technique, they analyze Polish presidential candidates in 2005, finding that neutralizing negative traits is as crucial as amplifying positive ones. However, the study's applicability to Nigeria is limited by its Polish focus.

Aleyomi & Ajakaiye (2014) explored the impact of media on citizen mobilization and participation in Nigeria's 2011, 2015, and 2023 general elections, employing the agenda-Setting Theory of Mass Communication to assess how media shapes public perception of key issues. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining primary data from 452 survey respondents with secondary sources such as journals, textbooks, newspapers, and online materials. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests, revealing that social media played a moderately positive role in influencing the 2011 elections. However, the study's scope was restricted to the three election cycles examined.

Agenda-setting effects are not confined to specific political systems, as media influence operates across different governance structures. Similarly, priming studies, often considered an extension of agenda-setting, focus on how individuals form judgments without necessarily considering

broader institutional contexts. Framing research, meanwhile, examines both media content construction and its psychological impact on audience receptiveness (Moy et al., 2012). The authors also note that U.S. political communication studies have traditionally emphasized quantitative methods, whereas other regions have leaned toward theoretical critiques—though recent global developments have begun to shift this dynamic.

Oboh (2016) analyzed Nigerian media coverage of elections through content analysis, applying the social responsibility media theory to argue that the press should facilitate free and fair elections. Findings indicated that while media outlets provided substantial election coverage, state-owned and private media diverged sharply in their assessment of electoral credibility. Government-aligned outlets upheld the official narrative of fair elections, despite independent reports of rigging. Although this study offers valuable insights into media-democracy relations in Nigeria, its 2016 publication date limits its relevance to contemporary developments, and its exclusive focus on Nigeria does not account for broader African contexts.

Ajasa et al. (2023) assessed the influence of radio political broadcasts (specifically Citizens Forum and Gbangbalawa) on voter awareness in Ogun State during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. Grounded in Agenda-Setting Theory, the study employed survey design, sampling 315 respondents from a population of 15,740 (NPC, 2006). Data collected via questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results showed that while the broadcasts educated and mobilized voters on civic duties, they did not prioritize election coverage or directly alter voting behavior. The study concluded that radio programs encouraged electoral participation but recommended more targeted messaging to enhance voter decision-making. Its applicability is limited to Ogun State.

Agbo et al. (2024) investigated Peter Obi's media engagement and its effect on youth voter registration in Nkanu West LGA, Enugu State. The study addressed four objectives, including measuring youth exposure to Obi's media campaigns and assessing their impact on registration knowledge and attitudes. Using Agenda-Setting and Social Judgment Theories, the researchers adopted a survey method with questionnaires for data collection. Findings revealed 90% exposure rates among Nkanu West youths, highlighting the significant reach of Obi's media strategies.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study is grounded in the Two-Step Flow Theory (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948), which posits that opinion leaders filter media messages for the public. This aligns with findings where word of mouth dominated voter decisions. Educated elites often influenced community voting choices, reinforcing credibility's role in persuasion—a key aspect of Persuasion Theory. The AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) further explains campaign effectiveness. Basil & Bassey (2016) found that integrated marketing tools enhance political outreach, as seen in this study's multi-channel approach.

### **Research Hypotheses**

- i. Ho1: There is no significant relationship between political communication strategies and the electorate's choice of political gubernatorial candidature in Southwest, Nigeria.
- ii. Ho2: Political communication strategies used by gubernatorial candidates do not significantly influence electorates' perceptions of candidate credibility.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a survey research design, a methodological approach that involves collecting data from either an entire population or a substantial sample to analyze prevailing attitudes on a specific subject (Creswell, 2014). Surveys are particularly valuable for their standardized data collection, enabling efficient analysis of large participant pools. This design aligns with the study's objectives by facilitating an in-depth examination of how political communication strategies influence voter preferences in Ekiti and Osun States, Nigeria. Specifically, the study adopts a cross-sectional survey design, a widely used method in political and communication research for its ability to capture snapshot data from a target population at a single time point. This approach is optimal for assessing voter perceptions, attitudes, and behavioral tendencies in response to political messaging during elections.

### **Rationale for Cross-Sectional Design**

The cross-sectional approach was deliberately chosen as the optimal research methodology, superseding both longitudinal and experimental designs for three compelling reasons. First, it offers superior temporal and financial efficiency - while longitudinal studies demand protracted data collection periods, cross-sectional surveys yield immediate analyzable results within a compressed timeframe. Second, this method preserves naturalistic observation conditions, avoiding the artificial constraints inherent in experimental manipulation. Third, it achieves an optimal equilibrium between scientific rigor and practical implementation, ensuring both methodological soundness and logistical viability for large-scale electoral behavior research.

### **Sample size and sampling criteria**

The study employed a multi-stage sampling technique to ensure representative selection across different administrative levels. First, cluster sampling was used to select states and local government areas. Next, purposive sampling identified specific communities, followed by systematic random sampling to select individual respondents. The sample size was calculated using the Taro Yamane formula, which is appropriate for large populations. Given a total population (N) of 2,942,447 registered voters across Ekiti and Osun States and a 5% margin of error ( $e = 0.05$ ), the formula was as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$
$$n = \frac{2,942,447}{1 + 2,942,447 \times (0.05)^2}$$
$$n = \frac{2,942,447}{1 + 7,356.12}$$
$$n = \frac{2,942,447}{7,357.12} \approx 400$$

To ensure the validity of the instruments, a pilot study was conducted with a small sample from the target population. A reliability test was performed, and the Cronbach's Alpha was 0.702, indicating good reliability. Expert reviews were also sought from academic peers and practitioners in political communication to enhance content validity.

### **Data Collection**

Primary data for this study were collected through a structured questionnaire incorporating both closed and open-ended question formats. The instrument was systematically organized into four thematic sections to comprehensively capture relevant variables. The demographic section recorded standard socio-economic characteristics, including respondents' age, gender, educational attainment, occupational status, and marital situation. Subsequent sections probed media consumption patterns, specifically examining the frequency and type of media engagement (encompassing television, radio, social media platforms, and print newspapers) for obtaining political information. The questionnaire further investigated political behavior through items assessing electoral participation history, partisan affiliations, and the relative importance of various determinants in voting decisions. Finally, the instrument evaluated audience perceptions regarding political communication by measuring respondents' assessments of message credibility, persuasive impact, and overall effectiveness of campaign communications.

### **Data Collection Process and Data Analysis**

By employing a comprehensive and structured approach to data collection, this study ensured accuracy, reliability, and depth in examining the impact of political communication on voter decision-making. The process included: Pilot Testing, Fieldwork Deployment, Data entry, and Validation. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools, with the aid of SPSS software.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to participation, all respondents received comprehensive information regarding the purpose of research, methodological procedures, and any potential implications of their involvement, thereby establishing informed consent through transparent disclosure. Participants retained unequivocal rights to discontinue their engagement at any research phase without incurring penalties or compromising their standing.

The study implemented stringent confidentiality safeguards through a dual-protection system: (1) all personally identifiable information underwent rigorous anonymization protocols to eliminate potential traceability, and (2) analytical reporting exclusively utilized aggregated data representations. These measures collectively ensured the preservation of participant privacy throughout all research phases and subsequent dissemination activities.

Participation adhered strictly to voluntary principles, with no inducements or coercive tactics employed. The research team maintained robust data security protocols, including encrypted digital storage solutions and physical document safeguards. Access privileges to raw datasets remained exclusively limited to principal investigators, with tiered authorization levels implemented to prevent unauthorized disclosure.

### **Findings**

A total of 400 respondents were administered the questionnaire in the study area; however, a total of 397 responses were recovered from the field, representing a return rate of 99.25%.

Therefore, the analysis of data presented below is based on three hundred and ninety-seven copies of the questionnaire that were successfully administered and collected.

## Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1:**  
Socioeconomic Status of the Respondents

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Female	168	42.3
Male	229	57.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Student	34	8.6
Self Employed	283	71.2
Paid Employment	65	16.4
Unemployed	9	2.3
Retired	6	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
18-27	53	13.4
28-37	88	22.2
38-47	109	27.5
48-57	83	20.7
58-67	30	7.6
68 and above	34	8.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
SSCE	155	38.8
Undergraduate	32	8.6
B.Sc./HND	113	28.3
Higher degree	27	6.8
Others	70	17.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Single	88	22.2
Married	274	69.0
Divorced	4	1.0
Separated	1	0.3
Widow (er)	30	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>

As shown in the results in Table 1, the sample composition revealed notable gender disparities, with male participants (43.8%) outnumbering their female counterparts. Occupational distribution indicated that the self-employed constituted the largest cohort (70.8%), followed by paid employees (16.3%), students (8.5%), unemployed individuals (2.3%), and retirees (1.5%). Age distribution analysis showed the 38-47 year age bracket as the most represented

demographic segment (27.9%). Educational attainment patterns revealed that secondary school certificate (SSCE) holders formed the largest group (38.8%), followed by bachelor's degree/HND holders (28.3%), primary school graduates and diploma holders (17.5%), undergraduates (8%), and postgraduates (6.8%). Marital status distribution demonstrated that married respondents dominated the sample (69%), with smaller proportions being single (22.2%), widowed (7.6%), divorced (1%), and separated (0.3%).

<b>How did you first hear about the political candidature in the 2022 gubernatorial election?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Social media	79	19.9
Print media	14	3.5
Broadcast media	94	23.7
Outdoor advertising	19	4.8
Public rally	57	14.4
Word of mouth	134	33.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Which social media platform do you use most to get information about political candidates?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Facebook	185	46.6
Twitter	20	5.3
Instagram	11	2.8
Whatsapp	62	15.5
Others	119	29.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>How do you prefer to receive information about political candidature?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Through social media	132	33.2
Through traditional media	66	16.6
Through public rallies and campaign events	61	15.4
Through the word of mouth	135	34.0
Others	3	.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
Results in Table 2 show the experience of voters with political communication tools.		

Table 2: Political Communication Tools

<b>How important is social media in influencing your voting decision?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very important	177	44.6
Somewhat important	51	12.8
Not very important	45	11.3
Not at all important	124	31.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Which of the following factors influence your perception of a political candidate?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>

Social media posts	83	20.9
Traditional media coverage	39	9.8
Public speeches and debates	77	19.4
Personal recommendations	191	48.1
Others	7	1.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>How important is it for a gubernatorial candidate to have a clear and consistent message?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very important	333	83.8
Somewhat important	42	10.6
Not very important	15	3.8
Not at all important	7	1.8
Total	397	100%
<b>How much do public speeches by gubernatorial candidates influence your voting decision?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very influential	223	56.2
Somewhat influential	93	23.4
Not very influential	46	11.6
Not at all influential	35	8.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>How much personal recommendations influence your voting decision?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very influential	234	58.9
Somewhat influential	68	17.3
Not very influential	48	12.3
Not at all influential	47	11.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3: Political communication strategies impact on the electorates' choice of candidates

The survey results in Table 3 highlight the varying influences on voting decisions among respondents

<b>Political rallies by gubernatorial candidates significantly influence my choice of candidates.</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	124	31.2
Agree	81	20.4
Neutral	94	23.7
Disagree	70	17.6
Strongly Disagree	28	7.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Political advertising makes me feel persuaded to choose gubernatorial candidates.</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	56	14.1
Agree	77	19.4
Neutral	126	31.7

Disagree	80	20.2
Strongly Disagree	58	14.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Word of mouth and personal endorsement make gubernatorial candidates more convincing and endearing to me.</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	200	50.4
Agree	76	19.1
Neutral	59	14.9
Disagree	48	12.1
Strongly Disagree	14	3.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>How much does political advertising influence your decision to vote for a gubernatorial candidate?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very influential	75	18.9
Somewhat influential	67	16.9
Not very influential	121	30.5
Not at all influential	134	33.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>To what extent does social media influence your perception of a gubernatorial candidate?</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Great extent	113	28.5
Moderate extent	71	17.9
Little extent	89	22.4
No extent	124	31.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4: The Extent to Which Political Communication Strategies Impact on Electorates' Choice of Candidature

The findings in Table 4 reveal mixed influences on voter preferences regarding gubernatorial candidates.

<b>Most impacting PCS</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Social media campaigns are the most effective way for politicians to reach voters in my state.	105 (26.4)	86 (21.7)	90 (22.7)	48 (12.1)	68 (17.1)	2.72
Political advertising is the most persuasive way for politicians to influence voters in my state.	78 (19.6)	92 (23.2)	153 (38.5)	18 (4.5)	56 (14.1)	2.70
Public rallies and events are the most effective way for politicians to	190 (47.9)	88 (22.2)	61 (15.4)	42 (10.6)	16 (4.0)	2.01

build support and connect with voters in my state						
Word of mouth and personal endorsements are the most influential factors in shaping voters' opinions about political candidacies in my state.	226 (56.9)	74 (18.6)	53 (13.4)	33 (8.3)	11 (2.8)	1.81

Table 5: Most Impacting Political Communication Strategy on Electorates' Choice of Political Gubernatorial Candidature

The survey in Table 5 highlights the most impactful political communication strategies (PCS) influencing voters' choice of gubernatorial candidates in Osun and Ekiti States.

**Hypothesis Testing Results**

<b>Correlations</b>			
		Personal recommendations	Word-of-mouth
Personal recommendations	Pearson Correlation	1	.137**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
	N	397	397
Word-of-mouth	Pearson Correlation	.137**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	397	397

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6: Pearson Correlation

Table 6 shows the correlation between personal recommendations and Word-of-mouth

<b>Correlations</b>					
		Political rallies	Political advertising persuasion to choose	Word-of-mouth	Political advertising influence to vote
Political rallies	Pearson Correlation	1	.280**	.429**	.227**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	397	397	397	397
Political advertising persuasion to choose	Pearson Correlation	.280**	1	.074	.581**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.141	.000
	N	397	397	397	397
Word-of-mouth	Pearson Correlation	.429**	.074	1	.044
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.141		.379

	N	397	397	397	397
Political advertising influence to vote	Pearson Correlation	.227**	.581**	.044	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.379	
	N	397	397	397	397

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7: Pearson Correlation

Table 7 presents the correlation analysis between four key political communication strategies - political rallies, political advertising, word-of-mouth/personal endorsements, and advertising influence - and their effect on voters' candidate selection.

## Discussion

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study highlights an interesting demographic breakdown. Male respondents outnumbered females by 43.8%, reflecting a gender disparity in participation rather than population imbalance, as more men were willing to engage in the research. Most respondents (70.8%) were self-employed, suggesting that those without formal employment were more likely to participate. The largest age group (27.9%) was 38-47 years, indicating that individuals in their prime working years were more open to sharing their views. Education levels varied, with 38.8% holding SSCE certificates, 28.3% holding degrees, and 6.8% possessing higher degrees, ensuring diverse perspectives. Additionally, 69% of respondents were married, implying that those with family responsibilities were more inclined to participate.

### Communication Channels for Political Awareness

Results in Table 2 show that word of mouth (33.7%) was the primary means by which voters first learned about candidates in the 2022 Osun and Ekiti gubernatorial elections. This underscores the role of personal networks and local dynamics in political communication, as respondents emphasized that "Nigerian politics is local," often relying on community leaders for candidate information. Social media (19.9%) and broadcast media (23.7%) were also significant, while print media (3.5%) and outdoor ads (4.8%) had minimal impact. Public rallies (14.4%) further contributed to voter awareness. These findings align with prior research (Aleyomi & Ajakaiye, 2014), which noted social media's growing influence in Nigerian elections.

### The Impact of Political Strategies

The survey results in Table 3 highlight the varying influences on voting decisions among respondents. Social media plays a significant role, with 44.6% considering it "very important" and 20.9% citing it as a factor in shaping their perception of candidates. However, personal recommendations are the most influential, with 48.1% acknowledging their impact and 58.9% stating they are "very influential" in voting decisions. Public speeches also hold considerable weight, with 56.2% finding them "very influential," while traditional media has a lesser impact (9.8%). Additionally, a clear and consistent message from gubernatorial candidates is deemed "very important" by 83.8% of respondents, underscoring the value of transparency and coherence in political campaigns. Overall, while social media is influential, interpersonal trust and direct communication from candidates appear to be more decisive factors.

## **Exposure to Political Campaigns**

Physical campaign materials (posters, billboards) were the most visible, with 81.4% of respondents encountering them daily. Traditional media (radio, TV) followed closely, with 68% daily exposure, consistent with Abdollahyan & Machika's (2017) findings on radio's dominance in Kano. Social media also had strong visibility, with 56.2% seeing daily political content. However, physical participation in rallies was low (41.8% never attended), though discussions about candidates were frequent (63.2% engaged regularly).

## **Factors Influencing Voter Decisions**

The survey results in Table 3 highlight the varying influences on voting decisions among respondents. Social media plays a significant role, with 44.6% considering it "very important" and 20.9% citing it as a factor in shaping their perception of candidates. However, personal recommendations are the most influential, with 48.1% acknowledging their impact and 58.9% stating they are "very influential" in voting decisions. Public speeches also hold considerable weight, with 56.2% finding them "very influential," while traditional media has a lesser impact (9.8%). Additionally, a clear and consistent message from gubernatorial candidates is deemed "very important" by 83.8% of respondents, underscoring the value of transparency and coherence in political campaigns. Overall, while social media is influential, interpersonal trust and direct communication from candidates appear to be more decisive factors. This aligns with Maduabuchi et al. (2025), who found moderate voter reliance on ads in Rivers State.

## **The extent to which political communication strategies impact on electorates' choice of candidature**

The findings in Table 4 reveal mixed influences on voter preferences regarding gubernatorial candidates. While political rallies have a notable impact—with 51.6% (31.2% strongly agree, 20.4% agree) saying they significantly influence their choice—political advertising is less persuasive, as 54.7% find it either "not very influential" or "not at all influential." Conversely, word of mouth and personal endorsements are highly impactful, with 69.5% strongly agreeing or agreeing that they make candidates more convincing. Social media's influence is polarized: 28.5% say it affects them to a "great extent," but 31.2% claim it has "no extent" of influence. Overall, personal interactions (endorsements, word of mouth) and direct engagement (rallies) hold more sway than advertising or social media, though social media remains relevant for a significant minority.

## **Most Effective Campaign Strategies**

The survey in Table 5 highlights the most impactful political communication strategies (PCS) influencing voters' choice of gubernatorial candidates in Osun and Ekiti States. Word of mouth and personal endorsements emerged as the most influential, with 75.5% (56.9% strongly agree, 18.6% agree) ranking it highest (mean rank: 1.81). Public rallies and events followed closely, with 70.1% (47.9% strongly agree, 22.2% agree) considering them highly effective (mean rank: 2.01). Social media campaigns were seen as effective by 48.1% (26.4% strongly agree, 21.7% agree) but faced more skepticism (mean rank: 2.72). Political advertising was the least persuasive, with only 42.8% (19.6% strongly agree, 23.2% agree) finding it impactful (mean rank: 2.70). Overall, interpersonal communication (endorsements) and direct engagement (rallies) dominate as the most trusted strategies, while digital and advertising methods hold secondary influence. These findings are supported by Tsokwa et al. (2024) and Dokunmu (2022), who documented its role in mobilizing voters in Taraba and Ogun States.

## Hypothesis Testing

Results from the testing of the first hypothesis, stating that there is no significant relationship between political communication strategies and the electorate's choice of political gubernatorial candidature in Southwest, Nigeria, are shown in Table 6. Results indicate that Word of Mouth correlate significantly with Personal recommendations at  $r = 0.137$ ,  $n = 397$ ,  $p = 0.006$ . Consequently, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis, confirming a statistically significant relationship between impactful political communication strategies (particularly word-of-mouth) and voters' candidate preferences in gubernatorial elections.

The second hypothesis stating that Political communication strategies used by gubernatorial candidates do not significantly influence electorates' perceptions of candidate credibility was rejected because the Pearson Correlation results demonstrate statistically significant correlations at the 0.01 confidence level (two-tailed test), surpassing the standard 0.05 significance threshold. This outcome confirms that these political communication strategies do indeed influence voters' candidate preferences in gubernatorial elections.

These findings substantiate that campaign strategies - particularly interpersonal communication channels like word-of-mouth and personal endorsements, along with traditional methods like political rallies - play a measurable role in shaping voter decisions. The statistical significance at the 0.01 level underscores the robustness of this relationship, suggesting that candidates should strategically employ these communication approaches to effectively connect with and influence the electorate. Findings in Table 7 show that significantly correlated with political advertising to be chosen ( $r = 0.280$ ,  $n = 397$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), word of mouth ( $r = 0.429$ ,  $n = 397$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and political advertising influence on voting ( $r = 0.227$ ,  $n = 397$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study offers a detailed examination of the socio-economic characteristics of respondents, the channels through which political information spreads, and the impact of various campaign strategies on voter choices in the 2022 gubernatorial elections in Osun and Ekiti States, Southwest Nigeria. The findings highlight the critical role of interpersonal communication—particularly word of mouth and personal endorsements—as the most influential factors shaping electoral decisions. A substantial portion of respondents (48.1%) relied on personal recommendations when evaluating candidates, while 34% depended on word-of-mouth information, underscoring the enduring significance of trust and social networks in Nigerian politics.

While digital platforms like Facebook (used by 46.3% of respondents) and social media in general (considered very important by 44.6%) play a growing role in shaping voter opinions, traditional face-to-face interactions remain the preferred source of political information. This suggests that despite the rise of online campaigning, personal connections and community-based communication still hold considerable sway over electoral behavior. Additionally, respondents emphasized the importance of clear and consistent messaging from candidates (83.9%), with public speeches (56.2%) and personal endorsements (58.9%) significantly impacting their voting decisions.

Political rallies emerged as a highly effective campaign tool, with 47.9% of respondents strongly agreeing that such events influence their choices. In contrast, political advertising had a weaker impact, likely due to voter skepticism stemming from past unfulfilled promises. This finding underscores the need for candidates to adopt genuine, culturally resonant campaign strategies

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that fosters trust and engagement.

Statistical analyses confirmed strong correlations between the communication tools used by candidates and voters' knowledge, perceptions, and electoral behavior. The study concludes that the most effective campaigns integrate multiple channel social media, traditional media, rallies, and grassroots endorsements to maximize reach and influence.

### **Recommendations for Political Stakeholders**

1. **Leverage Grassroots Mobilization** – Given the dominance of word-of-mouth and personal endorsements, candidates should prioritize community-based campaigns, engaging local influencers to build credibility and trust among voters.
2. **Ensure Clear and Consistent Messaging** – Political communication should be transparent, coherent, and free of contradictions across all platforms to enhance candidate credibility and reduce voter skepticism.
3. **Optimize Social Media Engagement** – While Facebook remains a key platform, candidates should adopt interactive, authentic, and targeted social media strategies to foster meaningful voter engagement and dialogue.
4. **Maximize Direct Voter Interaction** – Public rallies and town halls remain highly influential, particularly in local settings. Candidates should use these opportunities to connect personally with voters and reinforce trust.
5. **Combat Voter Apathy Through Civic Education** – The prevalence of political disengagement highlights the need for voter awareness campaigns. Educating citizens on the importance of electoral participation and its impact on governance can strengthen democratic engagement.

By adopting these strategies, political actors can enhance voter trust, improve campaign effectiveness, and foster greater democratic participation in elections.

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