

# Use and Misuse of the New Media for Political Communication in Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Oyebode Musibau Olabamiji, Ph.D

Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution Unit, School of Arts and Social Sciences, National Open University of Nigeria

14/16 Ahmadu Bello Way, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria.

Mobile No: 08033283013, Email; [olabamijioyebode@yahoo.com](mailto:olabamijioyebode@yahoo.com)

## Abstract

The new media expectedly are to bridge the knowledge gap and compact the global village, however, changes in communication brought about by increasing access to them have engendered complexity, vitality and absurdity in many cases. Scholars have argued that new media make many people, who lack the skills required to scan exposure, select and apply avalanche of messages posted on them every moment, vulnerable. This is compounded by the failure of the print and electronic media to play secondary gate-keeping role before bringing to the mass audience information accessed through the new media. However, these arguments will remain pure scholastic endeavour unless they are connected to the experience of Nigerians during political campaigns. Therefore, this paper examines new media in political communication in Nigeria's 4th Republic. Based on qualitative content analysis of some new, print and electronic media messages and review of the content of some political gladiators' new media platforms, the paper presents a situation analysis of the nexus between new media messages and political harmony or conflict in Nigeria.

An analysis of the new media contents in Nigeria reveals that although the new media have enhanced political awareness and interaction, however, they are also being used to malign, intimidate and discredit political opponents thus triggering conflicts. The print and electronic media in Nigeria have also accentuated such political conflicts through their over reliance on and re-publication of new media messages without proper gate-keeping. The paper concludes that although beneficial, problems still exist in the utilization of the new media for political communication in Nigeria as their uses are sometimes dysfunctional. Aggressive education of the populace on the limitation of the new media is needed in order to develop required capacity for message scrutiny. News production processes in the mass media should also be conflict-sensitive.

No of words: 297

**Key words:** new media, political communication, print media, electronic media, political conflict, gate-keeping, conflict sensitive, news.

## 1. Introduction

Democratic governance is gaining high currency in Africa, especially with the turn of the 21st century and the dwindling fortune of other non-democratic systems after the end of the cold-war. Autocratic rule, for example, has become an aberration as it is widely condemned wherever it still holds sway. The Arab spring and its ripple effects in the Middle-east and Northern Africa bear testimony to this condemnation. Most Asian and African countries are now struggling to come out of autocratic rule while the Arab spring in the last few years has further endeared democracy as the most preferred system of government globally. In Nigeria, we are still in a period of transition to sustainable democracy with myriad teething problems associated with such transition. Efforts are continually made by all the stakeholders to put democracy in proper shape. Since return to democratic rule in 1999 new democratic institutions are being set-up and nurtured, politicians are being groomed, political parties are being structured and governance ideological frameworks are being worked out in Nigeria. In these tasks of fixing Nigerian democracy, political communication continues to play critical roles as noticeable in the Nigerian media contents.

Traditional media have been in the vanguard of political communication, mediating even the interpersonal model. With increasing knowledge of the computer and the Internet, and invention of many devices (hard and soft wares) in Information Communication Technology (ICT), politicians as well as the electorate now embrace the use of blogs, websites and other social media platforms for communicating political issues. There is an increase in the use of the Internet in Nigeria. Nigeria is said to have 43,982,200 Internet users out of the 110,948,420 Internet users in Africa as of June 2010 representing 28.9% of the Nigerian population per ITU. The leading global networking site 'Facebook' has 2,189,900 users in Nigeria as of December 31, 2010 out of 17,607,440 users in Africa which is 2.0% penetration rate of Nigerian population (Morah cited by Morah, 2012: 153). The new media are not only empowering people but they are also democratising human relations. Necessity of social interactions, determined by the requirements of a mixed economy and rapid migration to capitalist economic order has enhanced patronage of the new media by individuals, governments and corporate organisations. The

use of the Internet by politicians to communicate with their constituencies has further extended the concept of “mediatisation” of politics in Nigeria. Mediatisation of politics in the sense that it is used here is defined by Kent- Asp (1986), a Swedish researcher who first spoke on “meditisation” of political life, as a process whereby a political system to a high degree is influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media. He notes that politicians phrase their public statements in terms that personalise and polarise the issues so that the messages will have a better chance of gaining media coverage or appeal. Though Kent Asp’s research initially focused on the traditional media, nowadays, the new media have also got a firm grip on political thinking, communication and conduct. Krotz (2007: 39) conceives of “mediatization” as “an on-going process whereby the media change human relations and behaviours, and these change society and culture”. Furthering the understanding of mediatization, Winfried (2004) identifies four kinds of process whereby media changes communication and interaction. These are;

- Extension of human communication
- Substitution of social activities that previously took place face-face
- Amalgamation of activities of face-face communication combined with mediated communication.
- Accommodation of the media’s valuation, format and routines.

The new media also perform traditional functions of the media put forth by libertarian concept and contemporary theory of the press. These functions include: servicing the political system by providing information, discussing and debating, enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government and safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as watchdog against government excesses. Increasing use of the new media has extended political interaction in time and space. In Nigeria, though presently popular amongst the elite, the new media is gaining currency in politics. Amongst the elite, new media provide unhindered communication with Internet users anywhere, anytime and almost simultaneously. Succinctly put, the new media are bridging the knowledge gap between the information rich and the information poor through the interface of technology. Viewed from this stand-point of knowledge gap theory, the functional appropriateness of such mass messages passed through the new media must be of interest to scholarship because the communicative relationship of the politicians with the electorate is altered through them. The question then is “Is the alteration positive or negative?”.

Essentially, politicians and the electorate expect the communication relationship to be positive and of benefit to them, thus, political gladiators of all shades of opinions, ideologies, intents and goals use the media with the belief that political communication through them might exert pressure or influence on people’s perception and behaviours. This conception of the effect of new media is akin to the historical and cultural dominance of print and electronic media and the perceived hypodermic /needle effect of mass media messages (Lester & Hutchins, 2009). In view of the perceived impact of the media whether from the ‘maximalists’ or ‘minimalists’ perspective, profit driven mentality of competition for political space in Nigeria has given rise to both ethical and unethical political communication and contents using all available platforms of interpersonal and mass communication. Neither romanticizing nor conspiring against the new media, this paper critically analysed political messages in web 1.0 and web 2.0 of 100 Nigerian netizens as well as 10 Radio news bulletins and 10 Newspaper news columns to examine the use and misuse of the new media for political communication in Nigeria. Functional and narcotizing dysfunctional theories were used to explain findings.

#### 1.1 Heading 2

##### 1. Conceptual Discourse

Concepts used to form the framework of this paper include new media, political communication, election and electioneering. Raji-Oyelade (2012) refers to new media as the practice and tools of retrieving and disseminating information, narratives, histories, performances and ideas in a way that both collation and delivery, as primary acts of writing are qualified in the immediacy of virtual or mass circulation. In the same light, Fagorusi (2013: 15) describes the new media as “the interactive form of communication that uses the Internet”. Thus, the new media includes pod casts, Rocs feeds, social networks, text messaging, blogs, websites, wikis, virtual worlds and other social forms. Telephone and the Internet have made social media such as twitter, video, my space, sharing sites, Aigg, flick, LinkedIn, face-book and skype possible for global use either in the realm of business, politics, education or international relations. The course of globalization has been furthered by the new media which has made connectivity worldwide realizable. The new media has also brought about flatness of the world with the understanding that from one end of the world, one can see the other and communicate. This has further given credit to McLuhan’s (1964) global village postulate. The new media has been made possible and elastic due to invention of the computer, the installation of satellite in space, the digital world and new knowledge in telephony.

Thus, the new media in the context of this paper includes the use of telephone and Internet to optimize interaction in the exchange of information, ideas, news, feelings and opinions. They are devices used to overcome constraints of space and time in enhancing social interaction. Internet is a multi dimensional communication high way, highly decentralized and concentric in form. However, Ojebuyi (2012:56-59) rightly posits that “the emergence of the new media does not suggest the disappearance of the traditional ones, rather the convergence of the old and the new media has created a complementary phenomenon where the strength of one genre takes care of the flaws of the other”.

The new media and traditional media are converging as conventional media organizations create their own websites and also collect information from other sites. Understandably, interaction between two mass communication forms will produce a powerful vehicle for mobilization and this is why traditional media also embrace new media contents. Apart from this advantage of convergence, Berkowitz (1991) notes that some forces compelled the traditional media to use the internet. These forces include constraints on resources for covering stories, availability of subsidized news, prevalence of electronic technology and citizen journalism. Traditional or mainstream media also continue to hide under new media elastic freedom to repackage, re-publicise or re-broadcast messages disseminated via the Internet at times with dire consequences on the media outfit and the mass audience.

Political communication is simply defined as dissemination of information about how people and government relate to foster understanding and peace in a society. As a form of political communication, Nimmo and Combs (1990) note that candidates for political offices routinely employ a variety of spot advertising, mini-documentaries, lengthy biographical sketches, televised town meetings, call-in radio shows, pops-up in brochure, newspaper advertising, yard signs, lapel, buttoner and bumper stickers to reach their audiences. He goes on to state that considerable money, and artistic talent go into the packaging in convincing voters that each candidate is a man or woman of all seasons capable of anything, the times, situations and constituents’ demand. Candidates are projected in the media as fresh and innovative through appropriate labeling like new democrat, new era, change, transformation, soft-talking technocrat, ideologist, man without a shoe, charismatic leader, unelectable proponent, unbeatable enigma, etc. In politics, the protagonist presents the candidate as a hero, wise man, statesman while he presents the antagonist as a villain, old, foolish and unpatriotic person. Political communication, thus, becomes a creative and imaginative enterprise that sizes up situation, names their structure, and names them in a way that contains an attitude towards them (Burke, n.d.).

Deutsch cited by Gauba (2007) seeks to apply the concept and methods of modern information technology as well as physiology of nervous system to an analysis of the political system. Deutsch is reputed to have particularly introduced the techniques of cybernetics to the sphere of political analysis as the study of the operation of control and communication systems; it deals both with biological system and man-made machinery. Gauba says Deutsch’s work is concerned less with the bones or muscles of the body-politics than with its nerves – its channels of communications and decision. According to him, the flow of information, content and carriers are as important as the receiver of the information. The impact of this process brings about change and it is the information which triggers the change in the political space. However, the channels of getting this information are equally as important as the message in reaching the target audiences and having the desired impact.

. Election is a constitutionally mandated process of selecting, voting and mandating the people who will hold either legislative or executive position and steer the affairs of a state for a period of time. It is a process of bestowing power on candidates who have sought people’s mandate to rule them. Thus, election helps in enthroning legitimacy on a government for a period of time in the political life of a state through popular participation. It is equally a system of renewing contract between the government and the governed by eliciting commitment of the people to the political system. Slann (1998: 180) notes that “election in democracies provide the most important and widespread manifestation of political participation”.

Election can be likened to seasonal rituals that seek periodically to renew leadership and ensure continuity of government. Election contests are regularly scheduled events between peoples or groups, and they are governed by a set of rules. In Nigeria, the rules are set out in the 1999 Constitution as amended and different Electoral Acts passed by the National Assembly. Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is the umpire while Electoral tribunals and the law courts are the interpreters of the rules in case of dispute. Election contests are full of drama much of which stems from the spontaneity of the action and uncertainty of the outcome (Nimmo & Combs, 1990). The dramatic elements are stretched by both the traditional and the new media through hyping and virtualization. Borrowing from the games theory analogy, Varma (2006 : 286-288) describes an election as “a game, well defined with an explicit and efficient set of rules; the information of which is available to the players as specified at every point, and the scoring system is complete”. He further describes each player in the game of election as a rational entity who has at his disposal sets of resources, with the help of which he combats the forces against which he is in competition or conflict.

Electioneering is the process of asking for people’s votes prior to an election. It involves managing political parties, electoral umpires, the electorate and the candidates. It is a process of communicating, responding and

determining political future of states. Political Campaign forms part of the electioneering process. It is an opportunity for candidates to sell themselves to the electorate using both interpersonal and mediated communication systems. Electoral campaigns offer platforms for political policy articulation and debates that enable the electorate to decide (it is hoped) objective information, which economic and political policies they want the government to adopt (Slann, 1998). **1. 1. 1. Theoretical Discourse.**

Functional use of the media falls within the realm of gratification theory. The theory states that the media is more than the message. It is crucial that the media should deliver values, businesses and opportunities to the audience. With regards to this theory, five functions of the media have been espoused in literature; these are surveillance, correlation, transmission, entertainment, and mobilization. Scholars who have promoted these ideals of functional use of the media include Laswell (1948) and Wright (1960). They argue that media functions require the media to put surveillance on the society, provide new information, correlate the parts of the polity, interpret information, transmit cultural and social values, and provide entertainment. Mobilization function should involve promoting society's interest especially in times of crisis. Epistemological argument for the functional media theory is that mass communication is a part of our society and it is that society that must be served.

On the other hand, narcotizing dysfunctional media theory refers to a social situation whereby the consequence of media message does not serve the interest of the society. This derives from the 'minimalists' effects theory because the audience has a right to withdraw from the use of that media message if it does not serve the purpose of social harmony. The individual may fail to act based on a media message or act negatively against the expected behaviour. Although the individual is assailed with a gamut of information on issues and problems and becomes knowledgeable about them or discuss them, however he may fail to act. For example increasing volume of political messages may not necessarily propel people to actively participate in the political process. Thus, the number of advertisements, political campaigns, political hypes and rallies exposed to people through the mass media may turn out to bore people and elicit political inaction. Baron et al (2009) say that if a news about an issue inundate the people, they may become apathetic to it. Thus, excessive media coverage of an event or exposure of a candidate during election might narcotize the audience to the extent that they become indifferent. Thus, dysfunctional media theory deals with the negative outcome of media messages or misuse of the media. For example, sensational news story aimed at achieving a different result by media practitioners or aimed at selling copies of the newspaper may become repulsive to the audience if it craftily hides bias or expresses political lining. Musdapher, JSC (2013) believes that today it is quite common to be drawn to an article due to sensational headline that turns out to be at variance with contents of article. Likewise, if undue prominence is given to news items on the new media people may be driven away from such stories.

Scholars have suggested that the means by which we regulate barrage of political messages in the mass media is through gate-keeping. Shoemaker et.al. (2001) describe gate-keeping as a process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach the audience. It simply means to block unwanted or useless things as applied to the field of communication (broadcasting, print and the web). It is a process of ensuring that unwanted, useless, extraneous or socially damaging messages are removed before they are released to the audience. In media practice, the gate-keeper may be the editor, the producer or other media worker who is expected to be vigilant to ensure that unwanted messages are not allowed to get to the audience. With regards to the web and other cyberspace, individual or corporately assigned staff acts as gate-keepers deciding what information to include in each portal. While individuals may claim to have made selection decision based on instincts and value judgment, to the media practitioners, selection criteria must be informed by newsworthiness and ethical standards. Decision to remove certain items or messages may be based on the fact that they may hurt people's sensibilities, create tension or spark mass action or conflict. Stories may also be removed to avoid disparaging individuals or creating negative perception of an organization or person.

Ojebuyi (2012: vii) itemizes two stages of gate- keeping namely; primary and secondary gate-keeping. He asserts that "primary gate-keeping occurs when the mass media select fragment of numerous daily occurrence for presentation as media contents, while secondary gate-keeping occurs when further fragments of these primary media contents are selected by another media for mass communication". Many of our national dailies, magazines, radio and television outfits do secondary gate-keeping when they select items from other media for their news contents. Thus, the imperative of secondary gate-keeping especially on matter of political communication cannot be underestimated. Reporting the absolute truth will naturally have some consequences for both the journalist and the audience. Foreman cited by Ojebuyi (2012) opines that with the challenge of ethical dilemma, journalists have to learn and exercise some measure of caution and learn to blend both deontological (absolutism, value based or duty based thinking) with teleological (consequential utilitarianism; or ends based thinking). While commenting, (Ojebuyi 2012) believes that bias and ethics are two inverse forces that largely shape the structure of media content. This bias is more prominent in the new media than in the traditional media because the new media provide platforms for the exhibition of individualism in man. Openness of the new media to all and sundry, personalised interaction with computers and special use of the Internet makes them have high propensity for

feeding target audiences with peculiar information. This situation is further compounded by their slippery nature to regulatory control. O'Kane (1994) posits that consequentiality standpoint required that rules, intended actions or standards are to be assessed according to the foreseen consequences of applying them.

#### 1. 1. 2. Mediatization of Politics in Nigeria

Influence of the mass media on society and culture is tremendous and it is all pervasive. This is because contemporary society is permeated by the media at every facet. This influence results from modernity and globalization of the mass media. Thus, politics, workplace interactions, family relations, religious activities, legal institutions tasks and legislative procedures are performed through both face-face interaction and the mass media. Even now the new media are crucial to all these activities of man. The consequences of gradual and increasing adaptation of central societal institutions and culture to suit media packaging of information are weighty and enormous. Ojebuyi's (2012) recent survey reveals that 53.4% of the Radio content in Oyo State of Nigeria was political. The mass media help in disseminating political information to the mass audience thus generating debate. However, it could be argued that during electioneering period, it is no longer mediatization of politics but politicization of the media.

In the same vein, political messages now dominate the new media. The website, blogs and social media platforms are used strategically to narrate politicians' curriculum vitae, present political ideology, and list achievements, enumerate their agenda, canvass for votes and at times disparage opposition. Soriano and Sreekumar (2012) believe that the new media are not homogenous in terms of configuration because users create multiple, divergent representation across online space. Thus, media interface are used to articulate a wide spectrum of conflicting social and political claims as a strategy of negotiation with multiple agencies including the state, national and international government, grassroots' activists, political supporters, co-travelers in politics and fund providers. The new media also provide information in democracies ( McQuail, 2005: 523). Horward cited in Fielder (2008:39) describes the Internet as "the most democratic invention since Gutenberg and the printing process". This is because Internet has helped in democratizing and revolutionizing politics because of its multi-faceted gateways to the information arena and audience.

#### 1. 1. 3. Functional Use of the New Media in Nigeria for Political Communication

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 audiences. The multiple and composite features enable them to circumvent traditional barriers and censorship and alter the quality of debate between individuals, minority nationalities, states and international communities and challenge national limits and boundaries (Soriano and Sreakumar., 2012). The establishment of the Nigerian communication commission (NCC) and subsequent deregulation of the communication industry in the early 21st century brought about increased traffic not only in telephony but also in cyberspace use in Nigeria. Global Systems for Mobile Communication (GSM) providers were registered in Nigeria. These include MTN, Globacom, Etisalat, Mtel, Visafone, Starcom and a host of others. Internet Service Providers (ISP) also established contacts in Nigeria. Regulation of Internet Broadcasting and signal transmission was equally enhanced during the 4th Republic. Contents of the new media examined revealed that the new media in Nigeria are increasingly being utilized to provide contact information about politicians. They are also being used to spread campaign messages during elections, although the degree of influence on the electorate in Nigeria is not yet ascertained. This finding supports Udende (2011) position that although the mass media are inadequate in Nigeria, they still play significant role in creating general awareness in the political process. Thus, since new media are a part of the mass media, they have also contributed to this awareness. The Internet gateways or more precisely the new media are seen as public sphere facilitating debate, interaction and articulation of problems in every country of the world. In the present context, they do more than debating and articulating problems, they project issues and people for public discourse.

Cyberspace and politicians websites in the 2011 general elections revealed that the Internet generally offered alternative platforms for politicians to use during and after elections. It has engendered wider latitude for political communication for both the politicians and the electorate. The Internet provides the gateway for reaching every class especially the youths who also share a high degree of political awareness. For example, President Goodluck Jonathan and other presidential candidates had face-book accounts in 2011. Patronage of these Internet platforms may be due to Druckman's finding cited by Hume (2009) that the Internet provides candidates with unmediated and inexpensive access to voters.

Discussion of politics and other social issues as related to governance is very common on the sites examined in Nigeria in this century. The new media place mass information sharing and dissemination in the hands of the new generation; taking information away from the exclusive control of social elites or specialists called professional journalists. Thus, wide participation and access is ensured. Media products through the Internet are controlled by direct users and are targeted at global audiences thus bridging the gap between the information rich and the information poor. Facebook as a social media platform inaugurated in 2004 is now available in over 70

languages including English, French, Arabic, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. In the same light, Twitter as an online social networking and micro-blogging site created by Jack Dorsey in 2006 is widely used in Nigeria. It allows users to share information and stay connected in real time. Hastags on one's twitter post has been used to raise public awareness about a phenomenon, promote social events, share knowledge and join trending topics and conversation during elections in Nigeria.

In recent times, new media are used to collate feelings of the electorate, their prediction of election outcomes and their assessment of candidates' performances during political debates or rallies. The new media breathes more life into political communication. The cyberspace examined in Nigeria provides different avenues for deliberative democracy where citizens and their representatives converge to exchange information, ideas, opinions and reasons for political agenda. Goals and methods of reaching such goals are articulated. Functionally, good political communication via the Internet enables the electorate to evaluate and chose the candidates of their choice thus conferring on the electorate the power of preferment. They also allow candidates and political parties to showcase and mobilize the citizenry towards performance of their civic responsibility. Posting of political communication through the new media usually complement political rallies, radio and television advertisements, news mention, postal and other published materials. Although, Hume's (2009) study claims that campaign strategies do have an effect on voter's preference and that engaging with candidates via their websites greatly increased partisan voter's support for candidates in the 2008 presidential election in the United States of America, this assertion is yet to be proven in Nigeria. This study also did not concern itself with this focus. The US campaign was acknowledged to have made substantial use of new media and new technologies to mobilize a large number of supporters. In Nigeria, although most politicians had created webs and social networks since 2003, these interfaces had been put to lesser use until very recently. In most cases these webs contained obsolete information, unattractive profile, less planned campaign information and most often abandoned after elections. Centre for Research Libraries (2004) notes that in terms of the frequency of use of the new media in Nigeria, it was discovered that Nigerian election sites were not actively used by most candidates and parties that created them. Out of 16 gubernatorial candidates' sites found in 2003 only 4 sites were active. Only 5 out of the sites of presidential candidates were updated. It was also discovered that only Buhari2003.org showed some changes in every examination. The average size of political sites in Nigeria was put at 173 pages in 2003 compared to advance democracies with well over 1000 pages. However, it was also revealed that some Nigerian electoral websites producers demonstrated high level of sophistication and variation in the applications used. These applications included animated gifs, splash pages and JavaScript with common file formats including: text/html, image/jpeg, image/gif and application/pdf.

In Nigeria, Independent National Electoral Commission is found to be making appropriate use of the new media during elections and electioneering. This use includes registration of voters through the use of data capture machine, detailing election constituencies, contacting candidates, publishing the rules and regulations of elections and guidelines for the voters and promoting news splash in the new media platforms. These uses confirm Saqib's (2012) finding that electoral bodies are making good use of the new media for political communication. Although only well-informed and politically well-aware people use Internet and other digital diverse, it is a well known fact that in Nigeria, mobile telephone short message service (SMS) and medium message services (MMS) are well used during for elections and electioneering purposes. The 2011 elections in Nigeria witnessed rapid improvement in the use of digital media and new technologies by the Independent National Electoral Commission.

New media are promoting good governance culture in Africa. For example, Saqib (2012) reports that the whistleblower site of the Kenya Anti-corruption Commission supported by the Government of Germany has been making use of digital media technology. In the same vein, Nigeria's anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Matters Commission (ICPC), the Police, SERVICOM and Non-government organizations have been using the new media effectively for promoting good governance culture, accountability and fight against corruption. Civil society organizations like Local Election Monitoring Groups, Voters Assembly, International Election Observers and NGOS concerned with the promotion of best practices in the electoral process have set up networks and platforms for the monitoring of elections in Nigeria. They have the webs and other satellite devices to monitor political campaigns, voting result collation and announcement. Most NGOS created sites for the 2011 General Elections. Data provided by the new media have also been very useful for the traditional media in gathering newsworthy items.

Although in advanced democracies like the United States and United Kingdom, new media are used to raise funds for election expenses, in Nigeria this has not been effectively used by politicians. In some cases, unscrupulous people use names of popular candidates to dupe unsuspecting public. Largely, new media are utilized for the promotion of the candidate's image. This consists of qualities associated with the candidate that may include intellectual accomplishment, emotional traits, social taste and political pedigree. Thus, the new media also mediate realities through images. These images include qualities that meet the wants, needs, desires

and values of the electorate. All these projected images are aimed at transforming the electorate positively toward the candidates. In Nigeria, taking part in the sharing of political information through the Internet platform has become an emotional interaction which may be positive or negative in outcome. Thus, political communication through the new media has broadened the candidates', journalists' and the electorates' consciousness of their political environment through individual or collective exposure to new facts and figures in the socio-political and economic environment. The new media also intensify commonly shared values, ideals and expectation of the people from the political class through debates that are opened up.

The new media in Nigeria since the new millennium have motivated political participation through access to information especially among the youths. The youths are able to develop principled and rational thinking capabilities as both the politicians and the governed exchange information on the polity through facebook, twitter and email accounts. Expansion in cyberspace in Nigeria has further enhanced information flow as one does not need a degree in journalism to package and transmit political campaign messages. Ojebuyi (2012:156) notes that "with the Internet, one does not need extensive journalistic experience, ethical training or a huge amount of money to feed the audience with the latest report and that to become a blogger only requires access to a functional computer, an Internet connection and an active web address". All these practices have enhanced citizen journalism in Nigeria.

The new media has also brought about element of entertainment into political communication in Nigeria as candidates tailor their messages to be more engaging to the audiences through the use of different artistic forms. For example graffiti is now used on web pages and on social networks. Graffiti writers may base their art forms on communication of some hopeful messages, it may be on an act of challenging political actions, social structures that promote inequalities and the concentration of power and it can be used to mark territory or promote violence against others (Eyek and Fisher, 2012). Once a netizen receives engaging messages via his medium he can choose to respond to such messages and probably post them to others through new forms of online media. The new media also promotes exchange of political clichés among people. Such clichés include godfather, national cake, sharing formula, *gbemu*, and Ghana must go package. In Nigeria, this has widened our political vocabulary. Where the people agree with each other on these clichés, participation of this sort is an emotionally compelling act in which each participant underlines its reality; and seriousness for every other (Edelman cited by Nimmo and Combs, 1999).

The new media have been very useful in providing information to the traditional media (print and electronics) especially because most of these mass media outfits lack the required staff and logistics to cover the country. Computer assisted reporting (CAR) is widespread. Information sourcing through CAR may be classified as basic, intermediate or deep/investigative. In some cases, media houses rely on the new media as primary source of information about some candidates during elections. In instances where their personnel are not present at political campaign rallies, they access information on such events through the Internet. In light of prevalence of the use of the new media contents, Tang and Sampson (2012) note that netizens (users of the internet) influence the agenda of the conventional media, sustain the news agenda by making on-line postings and comments and challenge the media agenda to suit their needs. Tapping into public opinions as expressed on the Internet and investigating into the stories behind such views have become journalistic practices all over the world (Tang and Spark cited by Tang and Sampson 2012). Netizens can comment freely and directly on politicians and issues of debate during electioneering on website, cross-post to other websites, on their blogs and other social media interfaces to broaden the knowledge of politics and even enlarge a candidate beyond live. Famutimi (2013:14) notes that a blog is used for self branding; to set candidate apart from others. The new media seem freer than the traditional media in their handling of political communication. Tang and Sampson (2012) affirm that netizens utilize a variety of strategies to circumvent censorship. Thus, we proceed with the examination of areas of misuse.

#### 1.1. 4. Misuse of the New Media for Political Communication in Nigeria.

Udende (2011) opines that in a world where everybody is connected, everybody is at risk. This statement gives a vivid picture of the omnipresence of the new media and the inherent dangers in them. For example, Presley (2005) notes that the dysfunction identified from the correlation and surveillance functions of the media on the people of Niger Delta included sadness, media dissent and resentment, frustration, apprehension, apathy towards mitigating conflicts and loss of self identify. These dysfunctional tendencies are also inherent in the new media for political communication in Nigeria. Nimmo and Combs (1990) report that the new media devote more coverage to the horseshoe than to the substance of the political issues, to the personae of the election than to the issues that divide, top outcome than to the campaign, to day-by-day events of the campaign than to enduring trends. Thus, the new media work at cross-purposes in mediating expectations. New media in Nigeria are inundated with such questions and posers as to who will win? how would he win?, where do candidates stand at a given time?, who is ahead?, what will determine voting pattern?, what differences would it make if 'A', 'B' OR 'C' wins?. These spurious concerns divert the people attention away from the real issue of campaign manifestoes

and development expectations from politicians.

In Nigeria, nagging, venting of anger and expression of frustration are commonplace on the new media during electioneering. This type of use repulses the netizens who are quickly turned off from the message. Where the new media audience helps in spreading such message the expected outcome is conflict which heats up the polity. For example, unsavory comments on the twitter about opponents generate discord. This is not the best way to use the new media and many Nigerians are guilty of this abuse. Expression of ethnic and religious sentiments in the new media has led to a number of inter-ethnic, intra-religious and inter-religious conflicts in the Northern part of Nigeria. Labelling, name calling and stigmatization are common in the websites examined. More damaging is the use of the Internet by the Boko Haram insurgents to post gory pictures of threats, murder and bombings. When the new media is used in this way, it creates a state of violence and spirit of revenge which makes the country ungovernable. The prolongation of the Jos crises may also be traceable to the misuse of the new media.

Some political messages in the new media in Nigeria have triggered, escalated and intensified conflicts, and unwittingly caused political violence. Political messages that became dysfunctional in the 2011 general elections included stereotyping and demonizing of a presidential candidate as kafiri by the opponent in the new media. This resulted in violence in the Northern part of the country after the presidential election result announcement. Demeaning the humanity of opponents through posting of graffiti on the web was also rampant in the new media. This led to unpalatable outcomes. Deliberate lies and matting of pictorials on the Internet were also common in the election campaigns. These were aimed to malign, intimidate and discredit political opponents thus triggering conflicts during electioneering and election periods.

One other misuse of the new media in Nigeria is privatization. This is a situation whereby politicians only create web sites to post private matters. Some display pictures of their relations, new homes, parties attended and wasteful travels. This use does not create sense of patriotism on the audience. Internet addiction for private use is becoming a problem in Nigeria. In light of this, Famutimi (2013) rightly reports that researchers found that Internet over-use makes people live sedentary lifestyle causing them health challenges such as dry eyes, excessive fatigue, and withdrawal from friends, declining interest in hobbies, a decline in personal hygiene and backaches. All these negative attributes of new media are prevalent during election periods in Nigeria. Over-use of the new media has also detached politicians from face-face contact with the electorate. In Nigeria, most politicians hardly visit their constituencies after voted into political offices. The new media thus become an alibi to avoid direct engagement in the political process whereas governance should be more of face-face contact to elicit understanding and co-operation.

Pre-emptive announcements of election results dominated the Internet in the 2011 general election. This practice has heightened emotion, created tension and in some cases resulted in post-election violence. Wherever the official results announced by the electoral body differed from the ones posted on the web, candidates and their sympathizers often suspected foul play. In most cases they have been taken to election tribunals as exhibits, in extreme cases in addition to other factors, people have resorted to violence as witnessed in the post-election violence in some states of the North in 2011.

The traditional media also misuse information from the new media by hurriedly publishing information sourced from them in their platforms. A case that was recent was the false publication on the Internet of the arrest of the wife of the Oyo State Governor in Britain. In most cases, these traditional media retract or face legal battle with the wrongly accused persons. The aggrieved usually asked for damages amounting to millions of naira for libelous publication. With the advent of various social media platforms, negative comments, speculation, misinformation, half truths and rumours spread like whirlwind in Nigeria with little or no chance to evaluate their veracity. On why Nigerians are not getting maximum benefit from political communication in the new media, Tola (2013:17) identifies common political campaign mistakes with social media to include “failure to stimulate engaging pages, having both a personal profile and a page for a candidate, not setting up a personalized face-book url (as soon as possible), promoting a page on print and TV with just an icon instead of a url, never looking at face-book insights and auto-posting tweets to face-book.”

#### 1.1. 5. Conclusion

The new media are enhancing political communication in Nigeria most especially during election and electioneering, though post-election use of the new media is still relatively low. The new media have promoted political participation among users. However, misuse that causes tension and conflict still abound. In order to overcome dysfunctional media effects, Internet industry professionals must be engaged in political communication strategy planning, development and management. Because the Internet is open and diverse, its use for political communication requires a high sense of responsibility. Netizens must behave responsibly while using the new media. As advocated by Bradley cited by O’Kane (1994:176) a netizen behaves responsibly, when he is “morally accountable for his actions provided that he is not subject to compulsion and has sufficient knowledge to make an informed choice as to his action.” He relates this position to ethical theories which posit avoidance of egoistic obsession with one’s rightness of action (virtues) without reference to others who might be

affected. The new media sites for political communication should thus be designed in an easy-to-use interactive manner. It must not abuse the sensibility of the people. Any web site created for political communication must be extensive and perceptually active to gain patronage and loyalty.

The print and electronic media should de-emphasize reliance on new media and where they are compelled to do so, they must not abandon their roles as secondary gate-keepers. In accessing the Internet for news story traditional or conventional media must develop the skill and capacity needed to read in-between the lines, consult many sources, draw triangular verification model and subject such news items to different levels of gate-keeping. This is essential if the news from such sources will not become triggers of political conflict. Journalists must be concerned about the social consequences of their publications and avoid conflict triggering statements. The process of giving deliberate attention to the content of media messages that can generate, trigger or escalate conflict and expunge it is wrapped in scholarship as conflict-sensitive journalism. Fisher et.al (2000) describe conflict-sensitivity as paying deliberate attention to conflict triggering factors in the social environment through adequate analysis of pros and cons of message. Conflict-sensitive journalism requires understanding of the contexts, issues and individual actors involved in media publication. It entails proper analysis of the bias, sensitivity, sensibility, perception, attitudes, beliefs system and cherished values of people, and conflict dynamics of that environment. Thus, journalists must gauge appropriately the impact the messages taking from the Internet will have on their audience and must therefore craftily and professionally present their messages in a way that the audience is not insulted, taken for granted or pushed to violent actions.

Thus, in accessing the new media and in taking political stories from them for republication, rebroadcast or repackaging, the media professional must exercise restraint by considering what probable impact mass dissemination of issues will have on the media users. Attempt should be made to establish causal linkage among the variables in the information flow framework. These interfaces are noise, bias; linguistic differences, shadow parties and competitors. An effective way is to structure the message in simple language, avoid ambiguity, shun double speak and rebuke position alignment. A clear linkage between the message and context of the target audience must be carried out by embarking on critical analysis of information gathered from new media and triangulating such information to ensure their accuracy and newsworthiness. Political messages must be short, concise dear, relatable and catchy when used on the internet because netizens are always in a hurry.

Nigerian voters must not stop at relating with politicians immediately after election. They must constantly engage politicians through cross-transaction communication via the social media and other new media devices after election victory. Because the Internet is not an open-ended medium, it does not enjoy strict measure of control and professional practice, thus, self-gatekeeping must be embraced in the use of the Internet. Barzilai-Nahon (2005) coined a term which he called “network gate-keeping” as a multi-layer system where both the gatekeeper and the gated can create and produce information. Although the gated can circumvent the gatekeeper and gate-keeping process by resulting to the use of cyberspace, traditional media news should not widen the horizon of such news.

Finally, it is not yet researched and established whether the use of new media influences voters polling pattern and choice of candidates in Nigeria. In another clime, Hume establishes voter preferences and increased partisan voter support for candidate as a result of the use of web 2.0 in the 2008 US presidential election. Mary Joyce argues that citizens’ journalism, web site, “Ohmmeters” in South Korea had some effect on voter turnout and support (cited in Hume, 2009). The Nigerian situation requires caution because most voters still rely on direct face-face campaign, door-door mobilization and traditional media. There is thus an urgent need to broaden the new media users baseline through improved computer literacy in Nigeria otherwise it remains the exclusive preserve of the elites. The percentage of Internet users to the population is dismal. This a fertile ground for further research in Nigeria’s experience in political communication through the new media.

## References

- Asp, K. 1986. *Four phases of mediatization: An analysis of the mediatization of politics*. Publiceringsar.
- Baran, S. & Atavis, A. 2009. *Mass communication theory (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.)* Belmont: C.A Wadsworth.
- Barzilai- Nahon, K. 2005. Network gatekeeping: theory of information behaviour: A researcher’s guide. K.E. Fisher, S. Erdele and E.F. Mekehine (Eds.) Medfoid: M.J. *Information Today*, pp. 247-254.
- Berkowitz, M. 1991. Assessing forces in the selection of local television news. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* Vol. 35, 2, pp. 245-251.
- Burke, E. 1757. *A philosophical enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful*.
- Burke, E. 1756. *A vindication of natural society: a view of the miseries and evils arising to mankind*.
- Centre for Research Libraries. 2004. Global research network, summer, 2004, Vol. 13, 4.
- Curran, J. 2005. *Mediation of democracy: mass media and society*. Curran, J and Gureritch M (Eds). (14<sup>th</sup> Ed.). London: Holder Education.
- Edelman, M. 1964. *The symbolic uses of politics*. Urbana: University of Illinois
- Eyeck, T & Fisher, B. 2012. Is graffiti risky? Insights from the internet and newspapers. *Media Culture and*

- society*, Vol 34, N7. 832-846
- Fagorusi, S. 2013. "Embracing the new media". *The Punch Newspaper*, Monday, February 4, 2013 Pp 15
- Famutimi, R. 2013. Getting started in the world of blogging. *The Punch Newspaper*, Monday, February 4, 2013, p.14.
- Famutimi, R. 2013. "When you are faced with social media crisis". *The Punch Newspaper*, Tuesday, Feb. 19, 2013, p.13.
- Fielder, T. 2008. Bloggers push past the old media gatekeeper. *Niemen Report* pp. 38-42
- Fisher, S. et. al. 2000. *Working with conflict skills and strategies for action*. London: Zed Books
- Folarin B. 1998. *Theories of mass communication: An introductory text*. Ibadan: Sterling Horden Publisher (Nig) Ltd
- Foreman, G. 2010. *The ethical journalist making responsible decisions in the pursuit of news*. West Sussex: Wiley- Black well.
- Gauba, O.P. 2007. *An introduction to political theory*. New Delhi: Macmillan India Ltd.
- Hume, T., 2009. Online campaign strategy web 2.0 Tools and voter preference in the 2008 U.S presidential election. *CEU Political Science Journal*, Vol. 4, 4 September, 2009 ,Pp. 566-603.
- Krotz, F. 2007. *Mediatisierung: fallstudien zum wandal von kommunikation wiesbaden*: Us Verlag far social lwissenschaften.
- Laswell, H. 1948. *The structure and function of communication and society: The communication of ideas*. New York: Institute for Religious and Social Studies, pp 203-243.
- Lester, L. & Hutchins, B. 2009. Power games: environmental protest, news media and the Internet. *Media, Culture and Society*. London: Sage Publication.
- Morah, D.N. (2012) Web 2.0 and and Nigerian Press: Opportunities on Facebook and Tweeter, *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, vol. 4, No 4, pp.153-167.
- McLuhan, M. 1964. *Understanding media: The extension of man*. London: Routledge and Kagan Paul.
- McQuail, M. 2005. *McQuail's mass communication theory (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.)*. London: Sage Publication,
- Mudapher, D. 2013. Media and the judiciary: A necessary symbiosis (2). *The Guardian*, Jan 1, 2013, p.56
- Nimmo, D. & Combs, J. 1990. *Mediated political realities (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed)*. New York: Hangman Group Ltd
- O'Kane, S. 1994. *Politics and morality under conflict*. Edinburgh: The Pant and Press Limited.
- Ojebuyi, B. 2012. *Secondary Gatekeeping in radio stations in Oyo State, Ibadan*: Ph.D Thesis Department of Communication and Language Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
- Peterson,T. 1978. The social responsibility theory of the press. *Four theories of the press*. Fred Seibert et. al. (eds). Urban: Illinois University Press.
- Presley, O. 2008. Identifying dysfunctional effect on events reporting: A media agenda. *Conflict resolution and peacebuilding*. Mojaye, E., Aigbe, E., Agboola, E. and Oso, L. (eds). Ibadan. : Sterling Horden Publisher (Nig) Ltd.
- Raji-Oyelade, A. 2013. *Fluent In(ter)ventions: Webs of the literary discipline*. An inaugural lecture, 2012/2013. Ibadan: University of Ibadan.
- Saqib, C. 2012. Effect of new media technologies on political communication. *Accessed on the Internet* on Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2013 at 11.00am.
- Saranan, M. 2011. "Gatekeeping theory" Tuesday talks on October, 2011. *Accessed on the Internet* on Monday, January 21, 2013 at 12.20pm.
- Schulz, W. 2004. Reconstructing mediatization as an analytical concept. *European Journal of Communication*. Vol.19, 1, pp. 87-101.
- Shoemaker, R., Elecholz, M., Kim, E. & Wrigley, B. 2001. Individual and routine forces in gate-keeping. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, vol. 78, pp. 233-246.
- Simon, J. 2004. *Political communication web Archive: Preserving Nigerian election sites*. Accessed on the Internet on Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2013 at 11.00am.
- Slann, M. 1998. *Introduction to politics, government & nation in the post-cold war era*. Boston: Mc Grawhill.
- Soriano, C. and Sreakumar, J. 2012. Multiple transcripts as political strategy: social media and conflicting identities of the Moro liberation movement in the Philippines. *Media, Culture & Society*. vol. 34: 8, pp. 1028-1039.
- Stig, H. 2008. The mediatization of society: A theory of the media as agents of social and cultural change. *Mediacom Reviews* vol..29 : 2, pp. 105-134.
- Tang, F. & Sampson, A. 2012. The interaction between mass media and the Internet in non-democratic states: The case of china. *Media, Culture & Society*. vol. 34 : 4, May 2012, pp. 457-471.
- Tola, C. 2013. Common political campaign mistakes with facebook. *The Punch*, April 30, 2013, p.17.
- Udende, P. 2011. Mass media, political awareness and voting behaviour in the Nigerian 2011 presidential election. Paper presented at the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE), 20<sup>th</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2011, pp. 493-501.

- Verima, S. 2006. *Modern political theory*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House (PVT) Ltd.
- Winfried, S. 2004. Reconstructing mediatization: an analytical concept. *European Journal of Communication*, vol.19, no187.
- Wright, W. R. 1960. Functional analysis and mass communication". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 24, pp. 610-613.

**Author**

Oyebode Musibau Olabamiji holds a Ph.D Degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from the University of Ibadan, a Masters of Arts Degree in Peace and Conflict Studies, another Masters Degree in Communication Arts, and a Bachelor of Arts Degree Education (Honours) in Language Arts. He has worked as a broadcast journalist/ producer for over two decades before joining the National Open University of Nigeria in 2013 as a lecturer.