

POLITICAL AWARENESS FOR CREDIBLE ELECTION: AN EXAMINATION OF TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study investigates the need for political awareness which serves as a tool for credible election, targeting the role of traditional communication systems. With Rivers State as the area scope, it adopted survey research design with a total population of 7, 885, 061 which comprise of total number of residents in Rivers State. It used Taro Yamane sample size determination to arrive at 400 using multi-stage sampling technique and questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. The study discovered that Rivers State residents are expose to traditional communication system; the noticeable traditional communication system used for political awareness in Rivers State were town crier, traditional Area Council with 3.0 weighted mean score acceptance, on the other hand age grade and folktale with weighted mean score of 1.7 and 2.0 acceptance were the least use traditional communication system. other communication channels used for political awareness were radio and television. It concluded that there was exposure to traditional communication systems in Rivers State and these traditional communication systems were town crier, Traditional Area Council, Opinion leaders, women meetings as well as town hall meetings and village square. It recommended that Rivers State residents and political key players should also explore other traditional communication media like dance, folk tale, music, age grades and youth bodies to create political awareness which will aid credible elections in Rivers State.

Keywords: Traditional Communication, Media, Political Awareness, Credible Elections, Rivers State.

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Introduction

Communication is one of the major characteristics of man, the ability to communicate places man higher in the taxonomical order of living organism, Communication reinforces social relations the bane of human existence aiding physiological achievement like sharing of emotions, ideas, information etc. Maama (2017) posits that communication colors man's very existence. It is the foundation that allows man to navigate through the everyday activities (Otamiri, 2020). In the communication chain, message or information is encoded and disseminated by people. What is shared is essentially meaning; without effective communication message or meaning is lost. It is through communication that, political, social, religious and other organizational cultures are created. Communication has grown to assume an important position in the socio-cultural and political transformation of the traditional society. This implies that, the traditional communication channels have been used to activate and achieve political ideas, feelings, beliefs, etc, to assume political office and governance. Hence, bringing the shared values into political system of the society, (Miller & Tucker,

2013).

Traditional communication channels are interactive in nature such that the people use them to pass information from person to person through verbal and non-verbal means. The verbal communication channels include the family gatherings, market place, festivals, visitations, religious gathering, and village square. As Africans, most of our communication channels are embedded in oral medium like folk lore, myth, cultural artifacts, and symbols. During the pre-colonial Africa era, information dissemination was mundane, ideas and information were encoded and shared through mouth to mouth. often times exchange of information and ideas were also carried out in village meetings, streets gathering and during community festivals. This local channel provides a conducive environment and opportunities where individuals exchange personal, group or popular interests to build relationships with people that have similar and/or diverging beliefs and values to win support (Nerur, Rasheed & Natarajan 2008). The above traditional channels of communication, otherwise known as traditional media are vital tool for political awareness and good governance (at the grassroots

level), For instance, candidates, political parties, sponsors and the elections conducting umpire for all inclusivity is expected to disseminate electioneering campaign information to all electorates. traditional media is a required channel for information dissemination in the rural communities due to their indigenous ways of life. (Lyon & Montgomery, 2015).

Suffice to say that, traditional medium such as community's festivals, townhall meetings etc. which are familiar to this cross section of voters are important for all-inclusive voters' awareness, considering accessibility, reliability and proximity. The rural voters, for all inclusivity, are important for credible elections to be achieved. Moreso the medium known and accessible to them (the rural dwellers) should be utilize as an information dissemination medium for effective communication. (Pepple, 2024, Asemah, 2015), The predominant traditional information medium for this cross session of electorates (rural dwellers) during political elections and how this medium influenced Rivers State voters' choices and voting strength appear to be unclear to the researcher. It is on this premise; the study investigates creating political awareness for credible election in rivers state: an examination of the role of traditional communication systems.

Statement of Problem

Rivers State comprised 23 local Government Areas and predominantly more of rural dwellers who are incidentally highly uneducated, Otto and Ukpere (2015). Sadly, had been backward in the aspect of social amenities; electricity, deplorable road networks and infrastructure are near absent. Power is an essential component that guarantees access to electronic media such as television. Road network is a major necessity for viable economy and development (Pepple 2019). Print and electronic media constitute the modern mass media; however, no doubt cross section of Rivers State indigenes are malign from the potentials of modern communication media. This has limited their access to relevant information about elections and good governance. Traditional communication media are used for disseminating political messages to the people. Some of the traditional media used to share political ideas and thoughts in Nigeria include; folk lore, myth, cultural artifacts, symbols, Ukegbu, (2021). Prior pre-colonial era, traditional channels of communication were community's festivals, village square, street meeting, Elders' council as well as religious organization. It is believed that elections in Nigeria since the inception of democracy from 1999 to date have been marred by some irregularities such as rigging, violence, killings and ballot box snatching. (Pepple 2024) argues that international and national observers in the 2023 General election in Nigeria confirmed that elections in Nigeria are not credible. Though there are no perfect elections around the world Ita &

Ibanga (2025) reports that countless number of persons died during the buildup to the elections, middle of elections and post elections.

The media including traditional media have been involved in electioneering process in Rivers State, as a medium for political party campaign and citizen sensitization yet citizens had continued to questioned the credibility of these elections. Topics on bad governance, inflation, fluctuating economy, inadequate/deplorable infrastructure, poor/lack of quality education, lack of affordable and quality health care services dominated public discourse which is traceable to lack of credible election Pepple (2024) & Ita & Ibanga (2025). In spite of these threatening issues, elections continue to hold at the stipulated time with new leaders elected into political offices but citizens still glamour for noticeable developmental changes in the society. It is more worrisome that elections are conducted in some areas in Rivers State, specifically rural areas where citizens cannot access vital information for daily activities and socialization for the singular reason of accessibility with the medium while some other citizens depend solely on the familiar traditional medium of information dissemination. (Asemah 2015).

The predominant traditional media used for political awareness which is a panacea for credible elections and good governance as well as the level of citizen's exposure has not been given detailed attention. It is on this basis the study seeks to investigate creating political awareness for credible election and good governance in Rivers State: an examination of the role of traditional communication system.

Objective of the Study

The study has the following:

1. identify the dominant traditional medium used for creating political awareness in Rivers State;
2. determine the level of exposure of Rivers residents to the traditional medium used for political awareness in Rivers State;
3. identify other communication channels used for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study

1. What is the dominant traditional medium used for creating political awareness in Rivers State?
2. What is the level of exposure of Rivers State residents to the traditional medium used for political awareness in Rivers State?
3. What are the other communication medium used for creating political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State?

Literature Review;

Elections in Nigeria from inception of democracy, have been marred by irregularities, violence, electoral thuggery, ballot box snatching, electoral fraud and more. (Pepple 2023). Reports

from election observers indicates that elections in Nigeria are ridiculously done though there are no perfect elections around the world but for a process which has persist for decades ought to have gained improvement with time. The media including traditional media have been involved in electioneering process especially at the grassroots level to change the narrative, yet none of these elections can be term credible (Asemah 2015). citizens have left no stone unturn lamenting about the credibility of these elections as the life of citizens are threatened on daily bases due to poor economy, infrastructural deficit, substandard education, and poor health care services delivery. More worrisome are the grassroots communities which are not accessible during elections despite government presence, most of whom assume offices via elections. The questions of how elections are conducted and voters' inclusion still remains a puzzle. Are voters carried along? from voters' registration, collections of voters' cards, voting the right and credible leaders etc., the issue of awareness still remain germane, were there is lack of awareness, proper knowledge of the candidates and elections modalities, voters apathy becomes the obvious. Ita & Ibang (2025).

Mishra and Newne (2015) assert that elections in Nigeria are significantly influenced by communication, which plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, promoting transparency, and fostering accountability. Communication, be it mass or traditional/indigenous is vital for political awareness; Communication serves as a dynamic force in shaping public discourse, influencing political decisions, and driving societal change. Mass media outlets like television, radio, newspapers and social media, alongside indigenous medium such as town crier, townhall meeting, village square forum etc. disseminate political information to the citizens, enabling citizens to stay informed about political developments, government policies, and electoral processes. Communication significantly influences political campaigns in Nigeria, allowing candidates to reach a large audience both in urban and rural communities to convey their messages effectively. How candidates are portrayed in the media can impact how voters perceive them and ultimately influence their voting decisions. Akakara et al (2015) opined that Indigenous communication medium has become a powerful tool in modern political campaigns, enabling candidates to engage directly with voters, share their message, and mobilize support.

The Concept of Traditional Communication

Traditional communication channels, such as town criers, community leaders, and local markets, plays significant role in disseminating information in rural areas. These channels are often more accessible and trusted than modern media, particularly in areas with limited access to electricity, internet, and other modern communication technologies. Traditional

communication can be an effective way to reach rural communities, especially during elections. (Pepple 2023).

During elections, the importance of political communication cannot be undermined if a political gladiator must emerge victorious. Political communication is a strategic means of influencing voters, the public knowledge, beliefs, and action on political matters. Brain McNair (2000) argues that political communication could come through the use of television, radio, traditional medium which covers verbal or written statements, but also visual representations such as; dress attire, make-up, logo design etc. In order words, it also includes all those aspects that showcases political identity of parties and the candidates to all voters both those residents in urban and rural communities. Suffice to say here that voter's resident in rural areas have their peculiar medium of getting information, and this medium is indigenous and peculiar to them, which also ought to be utilize by political actors for all-inclusive voters' participation Nsekere et al (2014) describes this medium as the traditional medium of communication.

Traditional communication remains an essential part of the electoral process in rural areas by way of extension Rivers State and other parts of the country. Election is means of ensuring regular changes of governments in selecting the right candidate of a particular state as people's choice for effective representation which usually done through voting. Election cannot exist in a vacuum hence; citizens vote for leaders to represent them and also for the leaders to support the citizens' interest. (Asemah 2015), It is essential for the candidate to use appropriate and effective medium for proper dissemination of information and enlightenment for the purpose of more inclusive participation. The more enlightened a person is, the more likely they are to vote. Traditional communication can influence voting decisions and shape public opinion in rural areas through the assistance of Community leaders and opinion leaders who often play crucial roles in mobilizing support for candidates, disseminate information about election procedures, candidates, and voting processes. Nsekere (2014) asserts that Traditional communication is a valuable tool for increasing voter's engagement and participation in rural areas; by leveraging on traditional communication channels, election officials and candidates can reach rural communities more effectively which will on the long run help to build trust and credibility with rural voters. Conversely, traditional communication channels, such as town criers and community leaders, have been effective in mobilizing support for candidates in rural areas.

Empirical Review

Oyesomi, Salawu & Olorunyomi (2017) studied indigenous communication: socio-economic characteristics influencing contemporary female political participation. The

study found out that young women participate more in politics as result of exposure. Women between 26-35 years play active role in politics of Lagos and Ogun States. The study sync with the present study, referring to how indigenous communication is used to foster political participation among Nigerians. The previous concentrated on socio-economic characteristics influencing contemporary female in Lagos and Ogun while the present study focuses on the use of traditional communication media for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State.

In another development, Hari, Akpan and Isaac (2015) examined indigenous communication media and utilization of development information in rural communities of south-south, Nigeria. The study found that interpersonal communication channel (contacts/visits), storytelling/drama, use of proverbs, song/dance, dirges, use of indigenous languages, gong beating and drumming are significant relative contributions to utilization of development information among rural dwellers. The study is similar to the present study in the area of indigenous communication for the development of rural areas. The previous focused on indigenous communication media for utilization of developmental information in Rivers, Cross Rivers and Akwa-Ibom while the present study focuses on the use of traditional communication media for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State.

Similarly, Mishra & Newme (2021) studied social communication and traditional folk media of the Zerne Nage society in North East India and found that majority of respondents agree that traditional media is very important in the tribal society. Thus, the acceptance of the traditional folk media is still very high in the tribal society. It further revealed that if traditional media is blended with modern media, it will be more effective in using it in the pure form. Thus, indicating that people like the emergence of traditional media forms on mass media platforms. This study is similar with present study in the area of use of traditional media for the advancement of a society. The previous study however, concentrated on social communication in Zeme Naga, India society while the present one focuses on the use of traditional communication media for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State.

Adulahi (2018) investigated the role of traditional communication channels on the enhancement of knowledge and awareness in rural communities in Enugu state and study found that traditional newsmen such town crier are effective in bringing a number of modifications which have enhanced information dissemination. The study similar to the present study in the area of the use of traditional communication media and awareness creation among audience, However, the previous study failed to established how traditional communication are used to reorient the youth. The present focuses on the use of traditional

communication media for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State.

Nsereke & Anele (2014) investigated folk media in the sensitization of Nigeria's rural population: A NOA's feedback perspective and found that town crier, church, chiefs, cultural dances and rallies are too important communication channels to be set aside in indigenous communication campaigns for development. It further found that underlying factor, the respondents generally indicated factors such as poverty, joblessness and hunger; government's lack of commitment to implementing development programmes. The study is similar with the present study in the use of traditional communication for political sensitization in Nigeria but the previous study concentrated on south-east Nigeria using NOA, the present study focuses on the use of traditional communication media for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State.

Similarly, Azika & Frank (2010) studied traditional systems of communication in Nigeria: a review for improvement. The findings of the study revealed that traditional communication helps to mobilize the people at the grassroots level towards community development and national consciousness. It also found that traditional system of communication serves as a source of cultural, political, health and other educational and enlightenment programmes for the masses leading them towards self-actualization and national development. The study is similar with the present study in the area of traditional communication media for political enlightenment. The previous study failed to provide evidence of how traditional communication media are used for the political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State. The present study seeks to close the gap.

Theoretical Foundation 'Development media theory'

Development media theory was propounded by McQuail in 1987. The theory according Omega & Nwachukwu (2013) reveal that there cannot be development without communication (information). Innovative ideas and developmental initiatives should be properly communicated to the people through channels easily accessible, affordable and known to people. Communication here can be traditional communication such as town crier, town hall meetings, age grade meeting, and inter personal communication and Elders' Council meetings, these are peculiar channels of communication at the grassroots level. Political awareness, messages or information for all inclusivity at the grassroots level are channeled through the town criers, town hall meetings, age grade meeting, gathering of Elders, Council meetings, opinion leaders and market square gathering etc. The idea behind these forms of traditional communication is for political inclusion which will inform and influence decision making. It is the responsibility of the media and

other information industries which include traditional media to disseminate information capable of changing the attitude of the audience towards positive political engagement and intentional participations particularly at the grassroots level. Folarin, (2002) explains that media are given the responsibilities which make them socially responsible to the people to gather and disseminate information about their social wellbeing this includes political re-orientations. The usage of traditional communication media for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State helps to protect the audience (voters) and influence their decision making.

sort to determine the degree of exposure of Rivers residents to traditional media of communication for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State while 10 to 13 were designed to identify other communication channels used for creating political awareness and achieving credible elections in Rivers State. A total of 400 copies of questionnaire were administered, 387 of the questionnaires were completed and retrieved. The remaining 13 questionnaire was mutilated and were considered not okay for the study. Data was Presented in Weighted Mean Score; SA=4, A=3, D=2 SD=1. This gives $4+3+2+1=10$ and we divided by 4 which give 2.5. Therefore, any statement with

Data presentation.

Methodology

The study adopted survey research design with a population of 7, 885, 061. The population was drawn from the projected 5, 198 716 being the population of Rivers State in 2006 National Population Census at the annual growth rate of 3.4. (Metro 2023). The study employed Taro Yamane sample size formula; $n=N/(1+Ne^*2)$ to arrive at 400. It equally adopted multi-state sampling technique.

Stage 1: Rivers State has three Senatorial Districts; Rivers East, Rivers South East and Rivers West. Rivers East and Rivers West were selected as a result accessibility and availability.

Stage 2: These Senatorial districts have fifteen (15) Local Government Areas; Rivers East has eight (8) while Rivers West has seven (7). Out of the fifteen LGAs, four LGAs, Ogu-Gbolo, Etche, Ikwerrri and Port Harcourt City LGAs were selected from Rivers East, while four (4); Degema, Ahouda East, Abua/Odua and Akukutoro were selected from the Rivers west.

Stage 3; However, the eight (8) Local Government Areas have a total 124 wards, out of which fifty (50) wards were selected. Since, the researchers were not able to ascertain the number of residences in each of the selected wards, the number of selected wards, 50 was divided by the sample size (400) of the study to arrive at 8. Therefore, 8 copies of questionnaire were administered to each of the selected wards in the LGAs selected, of the two Senatorial districts of the state. The study has structured containing 13 items. Item 1 to 5 sort to identify the dominant traditional communication media used for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State; items 6 to 9

Table 1: Dominant traditional communication systems used for political awareness and credible elections

Statement	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL 1	WMS	RMK
Townhall meetings and village square are the TCM used for political awareness and credible elections	141	111	63	72	1095	2.8	Accepted
Folk tale, music, dance and stories telling are the TCM used for creating political awareness and achieving credible elections	61	49	103	174	771	2.0	Rejected
Age grade and youths are the TCM used for political awareness and credible elections	12	51	133	191	658	1.7	Rejected
Traditional Area Council, Opinion leaders and women meeting are the TCM used for creating political awareness and achieving credible elections	93	107	162	23	1040	2.7	Accepted
Town crier is the dominant TCM used for political awareness and achieving credible elections	139	141	81	26	1167	3.0	Accepted

The data in table 1 indicated that the dominant traditional communication media used for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State were town crier, traditional Area Council, Opinion leaders, women meetings as well as townhall meetings and village square.

Table 2: Degree of exposure to traditional communication channels used for political awareness and credible elections

Statement	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	TOTAL 1	WMS	RMK
I am exposed to political information through traditional communication channel twice daily	103	152	101	31	1101	2.9	Accepted
I am exposed to political information through traditional communication channel weekly	73	49	61	204	765	2.0	Rejected
I am exposed to political information through traditional communication channel twice every week	66	36	42	243	699	1.8	Rejected
I am exposed to political information through traditional communication channel daily	113	127	99	48	1079	2.8	Accepted

The data in table 2 indicated that the Degree of exposure to traditional communication channels used for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State is high.

Table 3: Other communication channels used for political awareness and credible elections

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	WMS	RMK
	4	3	2	1	1		
Newspaper is among other communication channel used political awareness and credible elections	68	94	96	126	862	2.2	Rejected
Magazine is among other communication channel used political awareness and credible elections	49	78	103	157	896	2.3	Rejected
Radio is among other communication channel used political awareness and credible elections	115	128	109	35	1097	2.8	Accepted
Television is among other communication channel used political awareness and credible elections	109	138	71	69	1061	2.7	Accepted

The data on table 3 indicated that the other communication channels used for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State were radio and television.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What are the dominant traditional systems used for creating political awareness in Rivers State?

The study investigates political awareness for credible election and governance: an examination of traditional communication system and found that the dominant traditional communication medium used for political awareness and credible elections were town crier, Traditional Area Council, Opinion leaders, women meetings as well as townhall meetings and village square. The finding is related to other studies, for example Hari, Akpan & Isaac (2015) found that interpersonal communication channel (contacts/visits), storytelling/drama, use of proverbs, song/dance, dirges, use of indigenous languages, etc have relative contributions to utilization of development information among rural dwellers. The usefulness of traditional system of communication in the mobilization of people at the grass root level of the community development and natural consciousness; entertainment, cultural, health and other programmes leading to self-actualization Mishra and Newne (2015) had found that traditional media is very important in development of tribal society.

The finding however, contradicts the finding of Abdulwaheed, Ambali & Salawu (2020). Abdulwaheed, Ambali & Salawu (2020) had found that various issues of traditional communication media have contributed to the continuous loss of importance of traditional rulers in administration of the grassroots and contribution to national development. The arrangement of traditional rulers follows set down customary system which just individuals from the imperial families reserved the privilege to be so delegated (Abdulwaheed, Ambali & Salawu, 2020).

Research questions 2: What is the level of exposure of Rivers State residents to the traditional systems

used for political awareness in Rivers State?

The study found that the degree of exposure to traditional communication media used for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State is high. The finding is related to the finding of other scholars, for instance, Oyesomi, Salawu & Olorunyomi (2017) found young women between the ages 26-35 in Lagos and Ogun States participate more in politics as result of exposure to media. Exposure to traditional communication helps people to mobilize the

citizens at the grassroots level towards community development and national consciousness (Azika & Frank, 2010).

The finding is related with the development media theory used in the study. The theory posits that the media including traditional communication media undertook the role of carrying out positive development programmes, accepting restrictions and instructions from the state. The media subordinate themselves to political, economic, social and cultural needs, hence, the stress on the development communication including traditional communication media.

Research questions 3: What are the other communication channels used for creating political awareness and achieving credible elections in Rivers State?

The study further discovered that the other communication channels used for political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State were radio and television. The finding is similar with other studies, the finding of Mishra and Newne (2015) revealed that traditional media is blended with modern media like radio and television for effectiveness in policies and governance. Traditional news media are effective in bringing a number of modifications which have enhanced information dissemination (Adulahi, 2018).

Conclusion

The study investigated the need for political awareness for achieving credible election and good governance in Rivers State: an examination of traditional communication systems. It concluded that there was exposure to the dominant traditional communication media used for political awareness to achieve credible elections in Rivers State and these traditional communication media were town crier, Traditional Area Council, Opinion leaders, women meetings as well as townhall meetings and village square. The other communication channels used for political awareness and credible elections

in Rivers State were radio and television.

Recommendations

1. Rivers State political actors should understand that there are other medium of traditional communication such dance, folk tale, music, age grades and youth bodies that can be used to create more political awareness and credible elections in Nigeria.
2. There should be room for continuous exposure to traditional communication media, this will create more awareness for voters and by way of extension enhance political and credible elections.
3. Rivers State residents need more inclination on other form of mass media, not just radio, television and other traditional communication medium, they should explore other media like newspapers, magazines and social media which have details information about elections.

Contribution to knowledge

Exposure to the dominant traditional communication media such as town crier, Traditional Area Council, Opinion leaders, women meetings as well as town hall meetings and village square contribute to the political awareness and credible elections in Rivers State. Again, the findings conform to the assumption and position of development media theory used in this study.

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