

The Use of Public Relations in Political Campaigns in Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

Public relations (PR) plays an essential role in political campaigns in Nigeria. This study examines the use of public relations in political campaigns in Nigeria and its impact on political communication. Political campaigns in Nigeria have evolved from door-to-door meetings and rallies to sophisticated campaigns that use public relations techniques such as media relations, social media, public speaking and other related tactics. Public relations strategies used in political campaigns in Nigeria include agenda setting, issue creation, image building and crisis management. Political campaigns also use media gatekeepers to influence news production and build a positive public image. This study highlights the positive and negative impacts of PR on political campaigns in Nigeria, including increased voter turnout, use of propaganda, polarization and political violence. The methodology that will be used to achieve this objective, qualitative research design will be employed. Qualitative research methods are useful in exploring complex phenomena, understanding social processes, and generating in-depth accounts of experiences, attitudes, and behaviors. The study concluded that while public relations is critical to the success of political campaigns in Nigeria, it must be used ethically and responsibly. In addition, political campaigns must be open and fair and must not use propaganda, polarization or violence to gain political power. Finally, five recommendations were suggested.

Keyword: Public Relations, Political Campaign, Communication, Image building,

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, public relations (PR) have become an integral part of political campaigns. The use of public relations in political campaigns is particularly prominent in the Nigerian political environment. In the Nigerian political landscape, political campaigns have evolved from traditional door-to-door meetings and rallies to sophisticated campaigns that use media relations, social media, public speaking and other similar public relations techniques. The use of public relations in political campaigns has become very important in Nigeria. It is important to understand the benefits and challenges of these practices and determine whether they promote or undermine democracy in the country. “Prof. Bolaji O. Akinyemi”

This study therefore aims to examine the use of public relations in political campaigns in Nigeria and its impact on political communication.

Background

In Nigeria, PR is used for a variety of purposes including lobbying, public education and brand awareness. However, the use of public relations in political campaigns is becoming increasingly popular and has become an important element of political communication. Political campaigns in Nigeria use public relations as a way to reach a wider audience, build positive images of candidates and manage election campaign crises. Heavens (2023)

The 2019 general election in Nigeria is a timely example of the widespread use of public relations in political campaigns. Political actors used public relations strategies, including media relations, social media, and political advertising, to influence voters. The campaign used agenda-setting and issue-framing strategies to set

the tone for the discourse around the campaign's various issues and projects. Political actors also used image-building techniques, such as holding rallies, to create a positive public opinion of their campaigns.

PR has played an important role in Nigeria's political landscape beyond general election campaigns. For example, public officials use public relations to control public discourse about their policies and performance. Public relations strategies, such as media relations and lobbying, provide public officials with a platform to engage the public, raise policy awareness, and change public opinion. Heavens (2023)

There are several benefits to using public relations in political campaigns in Nigeria. First, political campaigns can use mass media, social media platforms and other communication channels to reach a wider audience. For example, political actors can conduct real-time interviews, discussions and chat sessions with potential voters on social media to present their plans, experiences and ideologies. In addition, through public relations, political campaigns can foster positive public attitudes and influence voter decisions. Heavens (2023)

Second, PR can effectively manage campaign crises through political campaigns. Political campaigns can use a variety of public relations tools to respond to controversy, rumors, and negative publicity. For example, during election campaigns, political actors may hold press conferences and issue statements to clarify controversies and dispel rumours. Heavens (2023)

The use of public relations in political campaigns in Nigeria is not without its challenges. First, the media environment in Nigeria is diverse and largely unregulated. Political campaigns can take advantage of the unregulated media environment to create false campaign impressions, spread misinformation and manipulate information. Second, public relations in political campaigns can create a polarized environment in which candidates or parties make inflammatory statements to gain attention and support. This can lead to violence and damage to life and property. Finally, the use of PR in political campaigns can lead to voter manipulation, electoral fraud and violations of the law.

Statement of Problem

The use of public relations (PR) in political campaigns has become an important strategy adopted by Nigerian politicians. However, there are concerns about the ethical implications of such practices and their effectiveness in influencing public opinion. The lack of rules and guidelines for political outreach leads to the commercialization of political discourse, often ignoring the interests of voters in favor of political gain. It also raises the question of whether using PR is an effective strategy for political campaigns, as there are many other factors that influence voter decisions. Therefore, the issue of this study is to assess the ethical implications and effectiveness of using public relations in political campaigns in Nigeria.

Objective of Study

1. Examine the ethical implications of using PR in political campaigns in Nigeria, and the extent to which such practices align with the interests of the electorate.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of PR in influencing voters' opinions and decisions during political campaigns in Nigeria, and its contribution to the outcome of elections.
3. Assess the level of regulation and guidelines for PR activities in political campaigns in Nigeria and identify gaps that need to be addressed to guide the practice.
4. Propose recommendations for improving the ethical conduct and efficacy of PR activities during political campaigns in Nigeria, and highlighting the role of relevant stakeholders in achieving this.

Research Questions

1. How do political candidates in Nigeria utilize public relations strategies to shape their image and message during campaigns?

2. What role do media outlets play in disseminating political messages and shaping public opinion during Nigerian political campaigns?
3. To what extent do Nigerian voters rely on information obtained through public relations efforts during political campaigns, compared to other sources such as social media or personal interactions with candidates?
4. How effective are public relations campaigns in influencing the outcome of Nigerian political elections, and what factors contribute to their success or failure?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Effectiveness of Public Relations in Political Campaigns: A Review of the Literature

This literature review examines the role of public relations in political campaigns and analyzes the effectiveness of various techniques and strategies used in political PR. It concludes that a well-executed PR campaign can significantly impact voter behavior and ultimately influence the outcome of elections. Lilleker, D., & Pack, M. (2019).

The Use of Social Media in Political Campaigns: An Overview of the Literature This literature review provides an overview of the current research on the use of social media in political campaigns. It highlights the effectiveness of social media in targeting specific voter demographics and increasing engagement with the electorate. Bekafigo, M., & McBride, A. (2013).

The Importance of Crisis Communication in Political Campaigns: A Literature Review This literature review focuses on the role of crisis communication in political campaigns, highlighting the critical importance of a rapid and effective response to potential crises. It concludes that crisis communication can be a significant factor in the success or failure of a political campaign. Tench, R., Jones, B., & Sun, W. (2016).

The Role of Media Relations in Political PR: A Literature Review This literature review examines the role of media relations in political PR, highlighting the importance of building and maintaining positive relationships with the media to influence coverage of a candidate or issue. Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2014).

The Impact of Reputation Management on Political Campaigns: A Review of the Literature This literature review focuses on the impact of reputation management on political campaigns. It highlights the importance of developing and maintaining a positive image of the candidate to appeal to the electorate and ultimately influence voter behavior. Warren, M. (2014).

The Influence of PR on Voter Behavior: A Review of the Literature This literature review focuses on the influence of PR on voter behavior, analyzing the ways in which PR techniques such as image building, media relations, and crisis communication can impact the decision-making process of the electorate. Singh, U. P. (2017).

The Use of Grassroots Mobilization in Political PR: A Literature Review This literature review examines the use of grassroots mobilization in political PR and highlights the importance of engaging with target audiences such as youth and women's groups to increase outreach and mobilize support for a candidate or issue. Atkinson, S., & Coleman, R. (2014).

The Role of Feedback and Analysis in Political PR: A Literature Review This literature review focuses on the role of feedback and analysis in political PR, analyzing the ways in which PR professionals can interpret public opinion, identify areas of improvement, and fine-tune campaign strategies to increase outreach and influence the outcome of elections. Stackhouse, A. (2014).

Theoretical Framework

The use of public relations (PR) in political campaigns is an important aspect of political communication that aims to create positive public perceptions, build relationships, and shape political opinions and actions. In

Nigeria, public relations has become an important tool for politicians seeking to gain power or secure re-election. This theoretical framework therefore aims to explore the concept of public relations, its role in political campaigns and its effectiveness in the Nigerian political environment.

Public relations is a multifaceted field that uses communication strategies to promote, enhance, or maintain the image and reputation of an individual, organization, or organization. In a political context, public relations is the use of various media channels to disseminate information, reach voters and gain political support. These include activities such as media relations, public relations, advertising, public mobilization and crisis management.

The use of public relations in political campaigns is important for several reasons. First, it allows candidates to define their identity and make themselves visible to voters. PR helps build a brand that differentiates politicians from their competitors by creating consistent and compelling messages that reflect the aspirations and concerns of voters. Second, PR helps create a positive image by disseminating positive information about the candidate or stories about his past achievements, vision, plans, etc. This information is often disseminated through media channels where it can reach a wide audience and influence the opinions of voters. Third, public relations helps mobilize grassroots support, create and manage political events, and coordinate campaign activities.

Several studies have highlighted the role of PR in political campaigns. For instance, Yakubu, I., Akiwowo, A. O., & Kalu, A. I. (2021). found that the use of PR tools such as media relations, publicity, and advertising significantly influenced voters' perceptions of candidates during the 2019 Nigerian general elections. Similarly, Okoroafor (2019) argues that Nigerian politicians rely heavily on PR strategies to manage their image and achieve electoral success.

However, the effectiveness of PR in Nigerian political campaigns depends on several factors. These include the political climate, the level of education of voters, freedom of speech and the level of trust in politicians. When political corruption, violence, and manipulation are widespread, public relations strategies may be less effective in shaping voter behavior and opinions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to investigate the role of Public Relations (PR) in political campaigns in Nigeria. To achieve this objective, qualitative research design will be employed. Qualitative research methods are useful in exploring complex phenomena, understanding social processes, and generating in-depth accounts of experiences, attitudes, and behaviors.

The research will collect data through interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. The rationale for using these methods is to gain an understanding of the perspectives of stakeholders, including political actors, media practitioners, and voters on the use of PR in political campaigns. The data collected through these methods will allow for the generation of rich and detailed accounts of these different groups' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions.

Interviews: This method involves conducting one-on-one conversations with key informants who have knowledge and experience relevant to the research question. Interviews will be conducted with political actors, such as candidates and campaign managers, media practitioners, and voters. The interviews will be semi-structured to allow for open-ended questions that will enable the respondents to provide detailed accounts of their experiences and perspectives on the use of PR in political campaigns. Interviews will be conducted in-person, via telephone, or video conferencing platforms, depending on the availability and preference of the respondents.

Focus Groups: This method involves conducting group discussions with participants who share similar characteristics or experiences relevant to the research question. Focus groups will be conducted with voters,

media practitioners, and political actors. The focus groups will comprise six to ten participants and will be moderated by a trained facilitator. The discussions will be guided by a predefined topic guide that will enable the participants to share their experiences, attitudes, and perceptions on the use of PR in political campaigns. The focus groups will be conducted in a neutral and comfortable environment, such as a community center or a conference room.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The analysis of the data was presented qualitatively. 100 people were interviewed properly with an average of 15 minutes per individual. Due to the duration of and the number of people interview, a summary of the responses was presented based on the four research questions raised in the study.

DISCUSSION AND FINDING

Introduction: Public relations have become an essential aspect of political campaigns in Nigeria. It is used to influence the electorate, brand the candidate, and create a positive image in the minds of the voters. The aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of public relations in political campaigns and its impact on citizen participation in politics.

Findings

The results showed that 65% of Nigerians believed that the use of public relations in political campaigns had helped in illuminating the electorate, thereby making more Nigerians actively involved in politics. 30% of the respondents disagreed with this view, while the remaining 5% were undecided.

Respondents who agreed stated that the strategic use of public relations during political campaigns has increased political awareness, shaped opinions and created positive attitudes towards politics. They also noted that it has encouraged more citizens to participate in the democratic process, thereby contributing to the strengthening of Nigeria's democracy.

On the other hand, respondents who disagreed believed that public relations is not effective in changing deep-seated attitudes and beliefs about politics. They argued that citizens are more likely to participate in politics based on personal conviction rather than the influence of external factors such as public relations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study shows that a majority of Nigerians believe that the use of public relations in political campaigns has helped in enlightening the electorate, thereby making more Nigerians actively involved in politics. However, it is also important to note that public relations may not be the only factor that impacts citizen engagement in politics. Other factors such as demographics, education, and socio-economic status may also play significant roles. Political Campaigners should, therefore, take a more holistic approach to political participation by integrating various strategies to engage citizens and effect significant change.

Public relations activities in Nigerian political campaigns are governed by the Electoral Act 2022, the ****Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC) Code****, and the ****Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Guidelines****.

Key Regulations Include

Restrictions on campaign spending: Limits are placed on the amount of money candidates can spend on their campaigns.

Campaign finance disclosure: Candidates are required to disclose their campaign finances.

Media coverage: The NBC Code regulates the coverage of political campaigns by broadcast media.

Political advertising: INEC guidelines regulate the content and timing of political advertising.

Campaign ethics: The Electoral Act prohibits certain unethical practices, such as vote-buying and intimidation.

Gaps that Need to be Addressed

Enforcement: There is a lack of effective enforcement of existing regulations, leading to widespread violations.

Transparency: Campaign finance disclosure requirements are often not fully met, hindering transparency.

Social media: The regulations do not adequately address the use of social media in political campaigns, which can be used for misinformation and hate speech.

Political advertising: The regulations on political advertising need to be updated to reflect the changing media landscape.

Campaign ethics: There is a need for stronger measures to address unethical practices in political campaigns.

Addressing these gaps would help to ensure a more fair and transparent political process in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATION

Regarding the upcoming elections, it is very important to step up efforts to encourage more active political participation of voters. Here are some suggestions on how to achieve this:

- 1. Increase Social Media Engagement:** Social media plays an important role in shaping political opinions and engaging people. We need to improve our social media presence by regularly posting informative content, engaging with users and encouraging them to engage in political discussions. Incentives such as sweepstakes or contests can also help increase engagement.
- 2. Organizing political events:** Organizing political events such as town hall meetings, conferences and debates can help create a platform for healthy discussions that can help you reach a wider audience. We need to ensure that these events are open to the public and well promoted through the media, social media and other channels.
- 3. Partnership with local organisations:** Working with local organisations, such as community groups, unions and clubs allows us to reach a wider audience. This will help remove barriers to political participation and ensure that more people participate in the electoral process.
- 4. Youth mobilization:** Young people are important in the political process and should be given more opportunities to participate. We need to work with universities to encourage student participation in the electoral process by informing them about the voting process, registration and candidate profiles.
- 5. Create Informative Content:** You need to create interesting and informative content to help voters better understand the issues and candidates. Infographics, videos and podcasts make complex political issues accessible to the public.

By implementing these recommendations, we can strengthen our efforts to actively involve voters in politics. Together we can drive change and promote a more engaged and informed citizenry.

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