

The Dynamics of Interpersonal Communication System in Political Campaign and Election Process

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is the most vital phenomenon in the human existence. Man himself is a product of communication, he lives with and by it and his survival is emphatically dependent on it. Communication has been variously likened to 'Oxygen' by scholars, which sustains human life. In other words, communication makes and sustains human society. According to Aina (2006) the indispensability of communication is aptly described thus:

Without it (communication), no society can progress and survive. It is a tool for social interaction, since it helps to promote collective actions and other social behaviors that make life meaningful and interesting for most of us.

Interestingly, man and the society evolved from communication. This is biologically proven that man evolved from communication through copulation between a matured, healthy male and female during which the sperm fertilizes (communicates with the egg) resulting into pregnancy. At various stages of the pregnancy, the foetus communicates life by kicking and turning (Oloyode, 1990:10). More interestingly, the first ever activity of men on getting to this world is communication through babyish cries and soft kicks. He naturally begins to send and receive messages through any or a combination of certain channels cited in Kunczik (1991:27) and quoted by Aina (2003). These channels are:

1. The auditive and vocal channel (spoken language-verbal and paralinguistic communication).
2. The visual channel (facial expression, exchange of glances, gestures and body movements, interpersonal distances and or/ making use of space to communicate distancing or approach).
3. The tactile channel (touching and stroking)
4. The olfactory channel (sensing another person's bodily warmth)
5. The gustatory channel (sense of taste)

Also, the gregarious nature of man (cannot do without relating with others) has made communication inevitable and a nucleus to his existence. He must express, relate, share ideas, habituate, socialize, influence, build and maintain social order. According to the classical submission of Otite and Ogionwo (1979) as cited by Aina (2003:9), "it is only through communication that people develop consensus and that people are able to act together. This is further stressed by the popular American slang, "Man cannot but communicate".

Communication which comes in various forms like interpersonal communication, intrapersonal communication, animal communication, group communication, public communication, man-machine communication and mass communication has unanimously been described by scholars as ubiquitous. That is, communication takes place everywhere, anytime, everyday and always. On this, Daramola (1997) posits:

Communication is ubiquitous. It takes place everywhere, everyday and every time. It is all around us. As a result, each and everyone of us engages in communication with one another at home, in the office, school and industry.

This therefore maintains that communication is a one-in-all phenomenon. It cuts across and practically useful in all human endeavours. Without communication, business transaction cannot take place, the process of learning and knowledge acquisition cannot take place, the process of learning and knowledge acquisition otherwise called 'education' would only be imagined than realized if there is no communication. Social interaction and socialization

process would not have taken place were communication not to have been part of human existence. The same goes for religious orientation and education.

Stressing the ubiquitousness of communication further, our political world and its multidimensional process involving series of activities such as political parties registration, voters' registration, electorates education, political parties/candidates' manifesto/campaign, legislative process, political rally, political tour and voting exercise are all fantasies and best described as illusion without communication. Summarily, communication is an epiphenomenon to all human endeavors'.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION IN PERSPECTIVES

Despite the overwhelming importance of communication in social order and construction, a cursory but critical look at the various forms of communication by scholars sufficiently shows that Interpersonal communication is not only superior and prominent among other forms of communication, it is highly ubiquitous and distinctively featured in other forms of communication such as mass communication, traditional communication, group communication, public communication etc. Aina (2003:36) posits:

Interpersonal communication features prominently in other forms of communication like mass communication, traditional communication etc. for example, research has confirmed that media effects are mediated by interpersonal communication while there are also friendship networks with groups.

Interpersonal communication which is traditionally defined as a communication process whereby an individual sends and receives message from another mostly in a face-to-face interaction involving verbal and non-verbal modes of communication with immediate feedback has further been extended beyond face-to-face context with current communication studies.

Aina (2006: 88) once again submits:

While some believe it is essentially face to face communication, others believe it is not. The emphasis by those that disregard face-to-face context is that only communication that is warm, open and supportive is interpersonal. The argument is that physical proximity can be less significant than the nature of the relationship between communicators. Intimacy between the communicators is more important than the distance between them.

Burgoon and Ruffner (1978) also show their proponency thus:

...the defining characteristics of interpersonal communication are not context-bound, rather it is the nature of the communication that make it interpersonal or non-interpersonal.

INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AND POLITICS

Politics is a dominant phenomenon in the contemporary society. The role and effect of interpersonal communication in the process of politicking cannot be overemphasized. It is the most effective tool or form of communication being employed by political parties and politicians in order to influence or persuade the electorates to cast their votes in their favour. It must be emphasized that interpersonal communication occurs in all the series of activities that make up politics as a process. Some of these activities include the following:

- I. Electorates' Education: Though, other forms of communication like mass communication are also employed for this purpose, the most effective is that of interpersonal communication. Civil Liberty Organisation (CLOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) often employed interpersonal communication in enlightening the publics regarding their electoral duties. This takes place at face-to-face public enlightenment or educate their subjects on their electoral duties. Even, the smallest unit of the society otherwise called 'family circle', the heads of family (fathers) usually educates their members via interpersonal communication.

- II. Voters' Registration: In most cases, the mass media create awareness for the voters to get registered. But from observation, the effectiveness of the exercise is greatly achieved through the interpersonal communication mechanism. The registration officers provide necessary practical guidelines, ask questions from the electorates and answers supplied immediately. At times corrections are made so as to avoid hitch free-exercise. All these are made possible by virtue of interpersonal communication.
- III. Candidates' manifesto: This is an important aspect of political process. It is a situation whereby a political aspirant unfolds his plans and programmes to the electorates so that they can vote for him. For effectiveness sake, this must take place in a face-to-face communication atmosphere. In fact, it is an avenue for an aspirant to determine his fate because the face-to-face atmosphere provides the opportunity to give correct meaning and interpretation to electorates' reactions.
- IV. Political Parties Campaign: Political parties must unveil the overall programmes they have in stock for the electorates. This is strategically done by employing interpersonal communication.
- V. Voters'/Electorates Decision: Despite the use of mass media such as television, radio, magazine, newspaper, internet etc. which are used to persuade voters to vote for a political candidate. It is discovered that the final decision of voters is largely dependent on social class influence, parental influence or order, group influence, peers/friends influence. All these are situations of interpersonal communication.
- VI. Legislative Process: A cursory look at legislative procedures and process practically show the inevitability of interpersonal communication. Activities such as sponsorship of bills, raising motion and counter motion, approval of national budget, impeachment procedure and so forth are all made possible by face-to-face interpersonal communication. Without it, the entire structure of legislature created could not be realized.
- VII. Money Politics: the modern democracy with its multifarious complexities especially in the continent of Africa has continued to attract attentions and generates heap reactions at international seminars and conferences in the process of politicking.
Today, our election or political process has been majorly characterized by 'give and take' principle which implies that political players must compulsorily give incentives (money) to the electorates before they can be voted for. This is the vogue in politics Nigeria inclusive.

Painful enough since 1999, the enthronement of democracy in Nigeria has been structured or erected on 'monetization syndrome'. Every step in the political process is monetized. At the level of primary election which political parties organize, it is monetization. Electorates are bribed in order to win their votes. Even, in the inter parties elections, electorates are also bribed. Worststill, the process of governance is also characterized by monetization.

Meanwhile, it must be noted that this concept or aspect of politics is much relevant to this study because it is basically done or achieved on interpersonal or face-to-face communication atmosphere. Through meetings, interactions, and any other contact points, electorates are bribed in order to vote for a particular candidate.

From the above background, it clearly shows that the life of man is meaningfully fulfilled when he relates, co-habitautes, expresses and shares opinions with others. Little wonder, he is described as gregarious being by scholars of psychology. Man must interpersonalise humself with others for effective and constructive social system. A life of isolation is emphatically proved impossible as espoused by authorities in psychology, sociology and philosophy.

For instance, Professor Olatunde Odeku, a scholar of philosophy cited by Salaam (2000:44) succinctly says: "*Like other animals, man eats and he cries, he eliminates, reproduces, he is irritable, he fears primitively and he can be most bitterly intolerant ...*"

From this philosophical quotation, the term 'reproduces' sufficiently shows the interpersonal nature cum process that encircles the life of man. Since it is impossible to reproduce within a single person. It is a process that basically involves at least two persons who must engage in different stages of interpersonal communication process to eventually reproduce'.

In addition, from the sociological viewpoint, the branch of the discipline called 'Micro-sociology' focuses on the study of man in the society as he interacts with social objects. Man as an active participant (social actor) interprets or

defines social objects (social facts or realities) according to the particular meaning which he gives to them (Oloyede, 1997:7).

Another relevant material in relation to the research topic is a paper titled as above by Dr Lai Oso published in the 'Liberal Forum' a Journal of the Department of General Studies, Moshood Abiola Polytechnics Abeokuta among other papers in 2000 with ISSN 0189-5893 Vol.11, Nos 2 & 3.

Also, interpersonal communication has been identified a major channel of communication in the process of social mobilization of the grassroots people in the many developmental and political projects of the country. Social mobilization must be seen in terms of involving the people in taking part actively and freely in discussions affecting their general welfare. In other words, social mobilisation and political education should aim at increasing peoples level of awareness of cognition of political and other issues so that they can apply social energies positively and participate actively in social and political lives of the country (Oso, 2002:131).

In doing or achieving this, communication is apparently central for effective and meaningful mobilisation effort which can be attained by a process of popular dialogue or two-way communication (Oso, 2002:132). In this context, Oso emphasizes the important of interpersonal communication which ensures dialogue approach. By communication, scholars opined that commonness must be shared. This can be achieved by interpersonal communication. It is different from ordinary dissemination of information - a process of transmission of facts and ideas. In support of this view, as quoted by Oso (2000), Moemeka (1990:53) points out:

The mass media are not by nature channels of mass communication. They are merely channels of mass information distribution and transmission. The mass media are one-way channels which means they are channels of making news, facts, figures and opinions available to the public. This is not communication, it is information.

Oso (2000:133) also adds:

Added to its problem is the fact that mass media are elitist and urban-centered catering for the interest of the tiny minority within the powerful elite...This is the result of the lopsided system of communication gap between the government and the people.

However, in his scholastic approach, Oso postulates interpersonal communication as not only complementary but most effective in the process of social mobilisation of the grassroot people especially during political campaign and election process. In the words of Moemeka (1990:67) as quoted by Oso, we read:

In rural development activities, the media of mass communication can hardly operate successfully alone. They need the support of interpersonal communication. Any communication strategy which completely ignores traditional media cannot successfully win and retain people's attention for long...

Emphatically, the use of interpersonal communication has been much employed in agricultural extension and health campaigns. The use of village square as a channel of communication has been concretized in what in some states, called village square meetings, in others, people's forum during which state governor's, commissioners and other officials meet the rural people in their village and the people are allowed to ask questions, pass comments and suggestions after the governor's speech (Oso, 2000:140).

Still on the dynamics of interpersonal communication Merrill (1984:80) argues that the media are not power and their effect or power is not absolute.

That, mass media operate with many social forces to bring about certain result. Merrill Opines: *The implication of much of this "effects" research is that mass communication is influential but not central or dominant in the model of personal influence.* The scholar however paints a clear picture of how interpersonal communication or interaction is much effective and powerful than media especially in political situation. Merrill describes:

A candidate for office, let us say, is elected. Did the media put him in? The answer must be "No-but they probably played their parts". The candidate appeared to many persons in person-as an individual without

media help. He conserved; he debated, he answered questions. He used telephone. He and his family and friends knocked on doors and handed out cards. He spoke at the Rotary Club and at the country fair. He was an individual as well as a media event (Merill, 1984: 80).

In reaching the grassroots populace or the electorates in general during political campaigns, the media of mass communication can hardly operate successfully alone. They need the support of interpersonal channels of communication...whatever media are used, and whatever strategy is employed, the very important role of interpersonal communication should not be taken lightly (Moemeka, 1990:61)

Meanwhile, Olurin evidently states that right now communication experts have begun to see the futility in using only modern mode of communication to permeate the grassroots in the process of political campaigns and the whole of election process. The whole idea (latest) is the integration of our traditional media tagged 'Oramedia' by Frank Ugboajah and modern communication structures.

The Oramedia which is established as the most effective includes verbal and symbolic aspect of interpersonal and group communication such as the town criers, the drum, traditional festival, folk tales etc. This is so asserted owing to the fact that the larger proportion of the population of most of the African countries account for the rural people who may not be perfectly reached by the modern mass media channels of communication.

Citing Obilade (1989: 74), Aina examines interpersonal communication from three perspectives viz: componential, relational and developmental. These perspectives have really placed interpersonal communication on the right track with respect to its effectiveness in reaching the electorates during political campaigns According to Aina (2003:35), the componential perspective of interpersonal communication involves sending and receiving information within a very small group, usually in a face-to-face situation where feedback is immediate and spontaneous.

The relational perspective on interpersonal communication as a communication process that takes place between two people who share social relationship while the developmental perspective posits that interpersonal communication is a communication situation whereby our knowledge of the person with whom we are communicating is partial and relationship formal.

From the foregoing, certain deductions can be made in relation to the focus of this study:

- i. That election process involves interpersonal communication situations.
- ii. That group influence on members can be achieved through interpersonal communication
- iii. That opinion can be easily and effectively changed, modified or managed through the immediate and spontaneous feedback mechanism especially as it relates to election process.

INTERPERSONAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

The current studies on interpersonal communication by scholars have brought about what is now called "Interpersonal Political Communication". It simply implies a form of interpersonal communication whereby political information, talks, conversation, viewpoints, ideas, and education take place between two or more people or groups in order to change or persuade people, change attitudes and seek supports during an election. As submitted by Rudiger (2000) in his paper titled "Interpersonal Political Communication, interpersonal political communication more often than not occurs between like-minded souls and consists in exchanges of mutually agreeable political messages. Rudiger (2000) submits that political conversations are also powerful sources of political persuasion, even if they take place in secondary relationships.

Analyzing the effects of interpersonal political communication in electoral behavior, Rudiger (2000) sees interpersonal influence as a mighty force that is responsible for the tendency of election results to reflect societal lines of cleavage. He maintains that political discussion intensifies during campaigns to remind people of who to vote for on elections day. This is also called political guidance for electorate by (Ibid). He states further that, by providing information and by conveying norms and expectations about behaviour, interpersonal political communication functions as a powerful mobilizer for political participation.

Meanwhile, the scholar maintains going by the classic study of Katz and Lazarsfeld on "Political Influence" that mass communication is by no means irrelevant with regard to political persuasion but that on the whole, the impact of political discussion is indeed more powerful than that of media usage.

CONCLUSION

It is established that interpersonal communication is the most effective of all forms of communications in the process of grassroots mobilisation especially for electoral participation and remarkable landmark in political campaign. It is

also established from the foregoing that the general belief of media powerfulness is proved to be minimal. Mass media are just one of the means to create awareness on a particular issue, they do not ultimately determine the final direction and course of action by the masses. Rather, interpersonal system of communication is here proved as the ultimate and most effective form of communication that determines the overall course of actions of the masses.

This is not to undermine the effects of mass media of communication, they also make meaningful impact in the society. But when comparative analysis is carried out, as done in this study, it is crystal clear going by the submissions of various scholars that interpersonal communication remains the most effective form of communication in any cause of grassroots mobilisation, election process and political campaign.

The reasons for this conclusion is not far fetched, the psychological approach of interpersonal communication gives it an edge over other forms of communication. The immediate and spontaneous feedback mechanism inherent in interpersonal communication is another landmark which makes it most effective. In essence, it has been authoritatively established that the effects of interpersonal communication in electoral process cannot be over-emphasised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Most importantly, interpersonal communication should be seen by all as a vital tool and the most effective form of communication in grassroots mobilisation and must be exploited for the purpose to the latter. Political parties and political players alike most particularly should make use of interpersonal communication positively as well as other stakeholders to create a virile and progressive society.

Attention must be shifted away from extreme use of mass media thinking that they have limitless or unlimited powers. This should be disapproved and much attention be shifted to the use of interpersonal system of communication for ultimate effect in our diffusion of innovation process. Not limited to political arena alone, social workers, health workers, government at all levels should also see interpersonal communication as a progressive tool and a form of communication that would aid their efforts effectively and productively.

Finally, the fact still remains that interpersonal communication is the ultimate in shaping opinion, influencing attitudes and changing behaviors during political campaign and election process. Merrill (1984:80) has said it all, "that mass media effects or power is not absolute. That mass media operate with many social forces to bring about certain result.

The implication of much of this "effects" research is that mass communication is influential but not central or dominant in the model of personal influence. This is what Katz and Lazarsfeld (1989:150) emphasize on "Interpersonal Influence" that mass communication is by no means irrelevant with regard to political persuasion but that on the whole, the impact of political discussion in an interpersonal communication atmosphere is indeed most powerful than that of media usage.

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