Agenda Setting for Political Communication: A Study of One Man One Vote Political Campaign in Nigeria

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Abstract

General elections in Nigeria have always been characterized by violence and wide spread irregularities, such that the peoples vote does not count. Governor Adams Oshiomhole on assumption of office flagged off a campaign for the sanctity of the ballot box, through the 'one man, one vote' campaign. It is against this backdrop that this study examined media agenda in the context of one man, one vote. Using *The Guardian* and *The Nigerian Observer* newspapers from October 9 to December 31, 2010, as this period was the climax of political campaigns for the 2011 general elections. The study sampled 40% of the publications of the period and discovered from the findings that only *The Nigerian Observer* used advertorial, editorial and feature stories to bring the campaign to front burner of public opinion. The study recommends the use of other media to promote the culture of free and fair elections.

Keywords: Agenda Setting, Political Communication, Political Campaign, Elections, Political Violence

Introduction

The very essence of election is to carefully and systematically select representative of the people into political offices in the land, be it legislature or the executive; this process cannot be ignored in any modern democratic setting. The careful selection process entails the sacrosanct of the ballot box in order to enthrone transparency and accountability and to also ensure fair play to parties involved. In view of this, Adams Oshiomhole Aliyu on assumption of office as Governor of in Edo State in November 12, 2008, following a court judgment that declared him the actual winner of the 2007 election in Edo State, Nigeria swung into action with a campaign, TAGGED; *ONE MAN, ONE VOTE*. The campaign called for the respect of the right of the electorate to decide who lead them through a transparent free and fair election.

The campaign was aimed at preventing the usual "snatching" of ballot boxes during election which undermine the rules of the game, the "free and fair" process. The slogan, one man, one vote has been in existence long before now, but its popularity in the recent time in Nigeria is directly attributed to this campaign as championed by Oshiomhole. According to Omomia (2010,p.10);

The concept of one man, one vote could be said to be the best political and democratic philosophy bequeathed to the people of Edo and this generation in Nigerians in the 21st century by the administration of Comrade Adams Oshiomhole if we must implement it to the fullest and become our way of life.

In the same vein, Edokpolo (2010) noted that, one man, one vote was popularized by Adams Oshiomhole shortly after assumption of office through the court. He went further to say that, one man; one vote campaign championed by Governor Oshiomhole was aimed at entrenching free and fair election.

Vexed by the criminal attitudes of some politicians to electoral matters, *The Nigerian Observer* in its editorial comment thus:

Rigging must be seen as old fashioned and done away with, while imbibing the norms of one man, one vote. This is our chance as a nation to prove to the outside world that Nigeria can get it right like Ghana, South Africa and other democratic nations of the world, if we play by the rules (*The Nigerian Observer Oct. 16.9, 10*)

The campaign spread across party line, the president of the country, a People's Democratic Party (PDP) strong man lends his voice in support of the campaign. "The one man, one vote is making an important contribution to the ongoing debates at this time of electoral reforms and reinvent the course for credible elections in the country" (J.E. Goodluck, personal communication, October 16, 2010).

Again Omomia, (2010) notes that, one man, one vote is a welcomed phenomenal change, given that we will just move from the old order and embrace the new wind that is capable of bringing about a sustainable electoral process that will for once usher credible leaders and as well lay foundation for historical political emancipation. In order to reach out to the unreached, the frontier of the campaign was extended to accommodate gender.

Omomia (2010:5) writes:

The new inclusion of women, the boys and the girls is an indication that it is gender and age friendly, now one man, one vote, one woman, one vote as well as one boy, one vote, one girl, one vote. The age and sensitivity of this campaign is also a pointer of seriousness attached to the campaign.

Statement of Problem

The socio-political malady called "rigging" that has marred the smooth conduct of Nigerian elections since 1999 is among notable issues that has placed Nigeria on the bottom rung of the world political system. Political analysis also believes that, the mal-adjusted political process is the major reason why Nigeria is under developed; they based their argument on the assumption that, transparent political process breed credible leaders who are accountable to the public and vice versa.

In the light of the above, Comrade Adam Oshimhole on assumption of office flag off, "One man, one vote campaign", a persuasive and educative call on the electorate to embrace the sanctity of the ballot. Since the press plays a pivotal role in persuading and educating the public as well as informing the public on issues of public interest and in so doing set agenda, it becomes imperative therefore to examine the issue from the press coverage to ascertain if the press actually embraced the one man, one vote campaign, if the press does, how well, how often. Again, since it is assumed that "the media take their priorities from public opinion as well as politicians" (McQuail, 2005,p.458), It therefore becomes apt to find out if the campaign attracts Nigerian press coverage and the type of prominence given to the issue.

Objective of the Study

The purpose of the study includes:

- 1. To find out if *The Nigerian Observer and The Guardian* newspapers publish stories bordering on one man, one vote concept.
- 2. To determine the extent of coverage given to one man, one vote campaign.
- 3. Find out the direction of stories on one man, one vote concept by the two select newspapers.
- 4. Determine the level of importance *The Nigerian Observer and The Guardian* newspapers attached to one man, one vote political campaign.

Hypothesis

- H₀: The Nigerian press does not promote one man one vote political campaign.
- H₁: The Nigerian press promotes one man, one vote political campaign.

Political Campaign and media agenda

"Campaign is seen as an effort to organize a series of activities to try to achieve a purpose in one hand and in the other hand, it could be defined as series of operations aimed at achieving result" (Daramola 2003,p.243). It could also be seen as organized effort to secure nomination and election of candidates for government offices. Political campaign is directly associated with political advertising, it does not go without campaign message which normally carries or conveys the ideas, candidates or political parties who want to portray or share with eligible voters. The message often consists of several talking points about the issues. The point summarizes the main idea(s) of the campaign and is repeated frequently in order to create a lasting impression in the minds of voters (Defleur and Dennis, 1994).

A campaign main idea is often crafted to attract the target in the form of unique selling preposition (USP), such as one man, one vote. In the last elections, 2011 general election, President Goodluck Jonathan and Vice President Namadi Sambo ran their presidential race on a consistent simple message, "breathe of fresh air" – Goodluck Nigeria, throughout the campaign period.

However, political campaign cannot be effective without the mass media of communication, through political advertising the thrust of campaign is often mediated. political advertising uses paid media such as newspapers, radio, television etc, to disseminate the intended message (Okoro, 1998). To influence the decision made for and by the groups, campaign advertising is usually supported by mass meeting, rallies and protest, the essence is to persuade the target audience to accept the views expressed in the campaign project. Thus, the media can set agenda for the campaign, and help the electorate make decisions based on the issues the media set for them.

In spite of the criticism leveled against agenda-setting theory in the field of social science the agenda-setting research still attracts the attention of the social science researchers and remain ever expanding Ayandiji (2000,p.20) notes that:

Research and writing on this important sub-field of public opinion studies and communication has an astonishing growth in the last three decades. The factors responsible include the fact that there has been increased awareness among nation-states, institution, groups and individuals about the importance of communication and it consequence on decision making process and man social co-existence.

The advent of the development of media hardware and software (new technology) and the attendant liberalization of information and communication; their uses and impact on the nature, content and volume of communication have made agenda-setting research most imperative.

The fact remains that the import of communication cannot be overemphasized; the substance of communication help individuals in no little measure to respond positively to their environment. The study of agenda-setting has a systematic beginning in public and political communication but Maxwell McComb and Donald Shaw work of 1972 appears the most authoritative.their work was a reaction to knowing the effect of mass mediated messages, which have long generated a harvest of research problems. These controversies, no doubt, have yielded much fruits to opinion scholars than creating confusion, in the sense that, many have been challenged to investigate agenda-setting using various methodologies. In spite of the methods used, it has been observed that, agenda-setting is more of a political process.

The media do not manufacture issues but certainly bring issues generated by the public to the front burner of public opinion. Media act as platforms for public discourse. However, more often than not, the public looks up to the media for information, because of this mutual relationship between the media and the society, the media holds the mirror for the society in political matters. Cohen states that, "the media may not tell us what to think, but certainly do tell us what to think about" (cited in Baran, 2002). This underscore the fact that media power cannot be undermined and at the same time prove that there is always a co-relationship between media agenda and political agenda. (McQuail, 2005,p.523-4) underpinned this issue thus:

There has always been an intimate connection between mass communication and the conducts of politics, in whatever kind of regime. In totalitarian or authoritarian societies, ruling elites use their control of the media to ensure conformity and compliance and stifle dissent by one means or another. In democracies, the media have a complex relationship with sources of power and political system. On the other hand, they usually find their *raise de tre* in their services to the audiences, to whom they provide information and views according to judgments of interest and need. In order to perform this service, they need to be independent of the state and powerful interest. On the other hand, they also provide channels by which the state and powerful interests address the people, as well as platforms for the views of political parties and other interests groups. They also promote the circulation of news and opinion within politically interest groups.

It is also believed that, "the more the media attention given to a topic, the greater the importance attributed to it by the news audience. The media influence is not in the direction of opinion but only what people think about. "The concept has been mainly applied to political communication and election campaign especially" (McQuail, 2005,p.548). It therefore follows that mass media messages are products of social matrix of communication, in the words of Udoakah in Wilson, (2006) "mass media products are dependent products-products of social, political and economic forces". Again, McQuail supports Udoakah's claims that, the media take their priorities from public opinion as well as politician, media also seek to convince voters that the most important issues are those with which they are closely identified. Baran (2002,p.385) quoting Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in attempting to explicate how the mass media shape political reality writes:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, news room staff and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issues from amount of information in news story and its position. The mass media may as well determine the important issues that is, the media may set the agenda of the campaign.

The rate of political awareness and inquisitiveness in information society about social, economic, technological and political development locally and globally speak volume of the existing influence of mass media messages on agenda-setting role of the media which assume a crucial position as platforms to disseminate political ideas and philosophy. The media play this role through a number of functions which include; education, information and persuasion.

Education function of the media is the transfer of knowledge and skills and intellectual development to the members of the society. The media thus educate the public on the need to vote and make their votes count.

Information function of the media is another vital means of propagating political philosophy, the media through this function increase public participation in political issues. Drawing attention to the information functions of the press, MacBride et al as cited in (Okunna, 2002) state that:

The information function of the mass media is all embracing and indispensable for the meaningful existence of members of the society. Through their various contents, the mass media collect, stores, press and disseminate news, data, pictures, facts, messages, opinion and comments which members of the public requires in order to react knowledgeably to personal, environmental, national and international conditions as well as to be in a position to take appropriate decision.

The mass media raise issues and also create awareness on various topics. The media can open up a new and fresh topic for public debate and the media can sensitize the public on current event by bringing such topic to the front burner of public opinion and concern. Udoakah describes the media "as a communication enterprise, if utilized adroitly, can enhance the educational and cultural progress of the people. It can open the minds of men and woman to truth by presenting accurate pictures of events in the society to enable people separate facts from fantasy (cited in Wilson, 2006:30).

Political campaign uses persuasive communication to convince the target to key into the ideas embedded in the message. persuasive communication is in fact, the very essence of election campaign, for every campaign to achieve the desired impact, it must employ persuasive communication strategy. McQuail (2005,p.554)reasons that in :

Campaigning parties and candidates usually choose from among a number of available communication strategies, depending on circumstance and resources and often depending on whether they are incumbent or not they can seek to associate themselves with particular issues on which they have a particular record or claim. This is where being able to frame issues and set new agendas matter.

Persuasive communication has been accepted by scholars of political communication as a function of political campaign and advertising generally. The work therefore takes a fresh look, at agenda setting using Nigerian Political environment with a view to studying One Man, One Vote Political concept.

McQuail (2005) maintained that, the term agenda-setting was coined by McCombs and Shaw (1972, 1993) to describe a phenomenon which had long been noticed and studied in the context of election campaign. This assertion explains the idea that the press indicates to the public what the issues of the day are and such issues reflected are perceived by the public as the main issues of the day.

The systematic presentation of agenda-setting is attributed to McCombs and Shaw with sufficient evidence from Walter Lippman's work, who noted that the media are powerful factors that relate the events in the world and images of events in our minds. Long and Lang in their study of agenda setting in 1959 (as cited in Ayanyidi, 2000:20) posited that:

In a sense, the newspaper is the prime mover in setting the territorial agenda. It has greater part in determining what most people will be talking about, what people will think the facts are, and what most people will regard as the way problems are to be dealt with. The mass media force attention to certain issues. They build up public images of political figure that are constantly representing objects suggesting what individual in the mass should think about, know about and have feelings about.

Bernard Berelson through his research in 1960 on television as a mass medium believes that mass media have some kinds of effects on some kinds of issues brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of consequences. Benard Cohen also maintained that, the press may not be successful most of the time in telling people what to think; it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about (McQuail, 2005). The media setting agenda was also carried out under Chapel Hill study as cited in Ayandiyi (2000,p.25) thus:

Agenda setting came to represent the idea that there is a positive association between mass media coverage devoted to an issue and the placement of that issue on public agenda. Stated in casual terms, it urges that perceived importance of issues is influenced or caused by media coverage from a sample of one hundred respondents representing undecided voters in Chapel Hill, North Caroline and a content analysis of five newspapers and two magazines, McCombs and Shaw hypothesized that mass media set agenda for each political campaign, influencing the silence or attitudes towards the political issues.

Shortly after the Chapel Hill study; Ray Funk-houser conducted his own research into the 1960s Gallup Polls to elicit information from the respondents about the most important problems facing the United State, with the help of statistical abstract, periodical literature, magazines, reports from *Times, Newsweek, US News* and World Report, he discovered that the issues the public gave high ranking to, were also issues the media gave a great deal of coverage (Ayandiyi, 2000).

Finally, McCombs and Shaw consolidated their efforts with Charlotte study which was targeted at clearing the doubt generated by Ray Funk – Houser and his media agenda versus reality thesis. However, they were able to discover new facts about media agenda but without much departure from the Chapel Hill study. Agenda-setting theory is established on the premise that, the media may not tell us what to think but can tell us what to think about, by constantly bringing the issues to the front burner of public opinion. Again, the theory posits that, the power of the media reside in more than the space and time devoted to a story and its placement in the broadcast or on pages but the consistency between the media source across media choice. This study therefore believes that the amount of attention the media attach to the one man, one vote campaign, has the capacity to spur in the audience, the desire to do what is right in electoral process, particularly the need to protect the ballot box and respect the right of the people to make informed choice.

Methodology

This study employs content analysis for research design, which entails the study of the manifest contents of two select newspapers, The Nigerian Observer and The Guardian newspapers respectively out of the seventy-eight registered newspapers in Nigeria. The choice of the two newspaper is informed by the fact that they appear to be the dominant newspapers in the state where the campaign was flagged off. The use of content analysis to measure media agenda has proved to be the most effective way of ascertaining media agenda. Wimmer and Dominick (2003) describe content analysis as an effective method for the study of agenda-setting. An analysis of relevant media content is necessary in order to determine the importance of news topics. Subsequently, audience research looks at the correspondence between the media agenda and the audience's agenda. The study covered a period of three months, which amounted to 168 issues, beginning from October 9th to December 31st,2010. Using the purposive sampling method, the study sampled 68 issues, representing forty percent (40%) of the total population. The choice of purposive sampling as a technique is anchored on the assumption of Riffe and Freita, (cited in Wimmer and Dominick, 2003) who confirm the importance of purposive sampling in content analysis. They discovered that 68% of all the content analysed issues in Journalism Quarterly from 1971 to 1995 used a purposive sample. The method allows the use of a particular characteristic to qualify the elements selected. This study therefore chooses Monday to represent the beginning of the week, Wednesday to represent midweek and Saturday for weekends for the three months of study.

The period of October to December 2010 was taken because it was in the heart of the campaign for the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. Wimmer and Dominick (2003,p.147) agreed that, "in many studies, the time period from which the issues are to be selected is determined by the goal of the project. If the goal is to assess the nature of news coverage of election campaign, sampling period is fairly well defined by the actual duration of the story".

This study used code sheet as an instrument for data collection since the research method is content analysis. The reliability of the coding system was tested using

Holst's formula for reliability. Reliability = 2m

$$ability = \frac{2m}{N_1 N_2}$$

Where M is the number of coding decision on which two coders agree, and N_1 and N_2 are total numbers of coding decision by the first and second coder, respectively. Twenty coding decisions were taken by two coders on twenty manifest items randomly selected from October 9 to December 31 editions of the two selected newspapers studied. The coders agreed on sixteen decisions, the data were used to calculate the inter coder reliability thus:

$$\frac{2(16)}{20+20} = \frac{32}{40} = .80$$

With a reliability coefficient of .80, it could be said that the study has an acceptable level of reliability.

Content categories/unit of analysis

The content categories for this study were defined based on the direction – **favourable**, if the story encourages the public on the need to attach importance to the sanctity of the electoral process; **unfavourable**, if it doubts the possibility of Nigerians embracing the campaign project or discourages the public from embracing the sanctity of the electoral process; **neutral** if the story refuses to take a stand on the subject understudy.

The natures of story were classified as **advertorial**, **feature**, **opinion** and **commentaries**. Placement, where the story appears is a major determinant of the agenda issue; **front page**, **inside page** and **back page** were also considered.

In this study, the data that were generated were analyzed in tables using simple percentages and thereafter, hypothesis was tested. This entails that the study has qualitative and quantitative values.

Data presentation, analysis and discussion of major finding Table One: The Nature of Story that promote the campaign

Variable	The Guardian	The Nigerian Observer	Total	
			No	%
Advertorial	-	17	17	2.5
Editorial	-	1	1	1.4
Opinion	-	-		
Commentaries	-	-		
Feature	-	1		1.4
Nil	-	15		2.2
Total	(35)	43 = (68)	3	(50%)

Table one above shows that, *The Guardian* newspaper did not report or cover the political campaign (one man, one vote) in its editorial, advertorial, opinion, commentaries or features stories for the three months of study. Meanwhile, *The Nigerian Observer* gave a good coverage, out of the 34 editions studied, 17 were advertorial, 1 editorial and 1 feature story, giving a total of 27% of the entire issues covered by *The Nigerian Observer* newspaper.

Table two: Frequency of Occurrences

Variable	The Guardian	The Nigerian Observer	Total	
		_	No	%
1-5 times	-	-	17	
6 – 10 times	-	-	1	
11 above	-	19		27.9
Nil	-	15		22.1
Total	(34)	34	3	50

Table two above indicates that only *The Nigerian observer* covered the campaign for total of nineteen times (55.8%) out of the thirty-four issues and 27.9% out of the 68 issues (sample size) of the study.

Table Three: Placement of Issues of one man, one vote on the pages of the Newspapers

Variable	The Guardian	The Nigerian Observer	Total	
			No	%
Front Page	-	17	17	
Inside Page	-	2		
Back page	-	-		
Nil	-	-		
Total	(34)	34	19	

Table three above shows that *The Nigerian Observer* gave priority attention to the campaign, the campaign appeared 17 times on the front pages (25%) of the issues studied.

Table Four: Direction of Issues of one man, one vote on the Pages of the newspapers

Variable	The Guardian	The Nigerian Observer	Total	
			No	%
Favourable	-	19	19	27.9
Unfavourable	-	-		
Neutral	-	-		
Nil	-	15	15	22
Total	(34)	34	34	

The data above shows that, *The Nigerian Observer* captures issues on the campaign and all were favourable. **Test of Hypothesis**

The research hypothesis being tested in this study states thus:

H₀: The Nigerian press does not promote one man, one vote political campaign.

H₁: The Nigerian press promotes one man, one vote political campaign.

The test was done with the data generated and analyzed on table two: frequency of occurrence of issues of one man, one vote. The researcher decided to use the data on frequency because amount of issues and consistency in the report determine press agenda.

Chi-square was used in testing the hypothesis

 $\underline{\mathrm{E}}(\underline{\mathrm{F}}_{\underline{0}}-\underline{\mathrm{F}}_{\underline{e}})^2$

Fe

Decision Rule: the significant error is 0.05

Df = Degree of freedom is therefore: (C-1) x (r-1) 2-1 x (3-1) 1 x 2 = 2 degree freedom level of 5.991 for F₀ = observed frequency F_e = calculated frequency To calculate for F_e = $\frac{Row \text{ total } x \text{ column total}}{Overall \text{ total}}$ Using this formula therefore: $\frac{19 x 19}{34} = 10.6$ (h) $\frac{19 x 15}{34} = 8.4$

F ₀	F _e	F ₀ -F _e	$F_0 - F_e^2$	$\frac{E \underline{F_0} - F_e}{F_e}^2$
19	10.6	8.4	16.8	3.2
15	8.4	6.6	13.2	3.1
Total 34				6.3

Since the calculated value of chi-square (6.3) is greater than the table value (5.991), the alternative hypothesis, Nigerian press promotes one man, one vote campaign is accepted.

Discussion of major findings

The major findings in the study were discussed in relation to the four basic research objectives and hypothesis that were formulated to guide the course of investigating the problem.

Research Question 1: What is the level of coverage given to the issue understudy by the two selected newspapers? The findings show that high level of coverage and importance were given to the issue understudy, by *The Nigerian Observer* newspaper, the state owned press carried 17 issues out of the 34 issues on its front page indicating the level of prominence accorded the campaign programme. Meanwhile, *The Guardian* newspaper did not cover the programme in all the editions studied.

Research Question 2: What is the nature of coverage given to the issues under study by the two selected newspapers? The findings also reveal that, advertorial with a display picture of electoral box appeared 17 times on the front page of *The Nigerian Observer* newspaper. I editorial comment and 1 feature story in the inside pages of the newspaper, the nature of the story therefore shows the value attached to the campaign by the government that placed the advertorial and the newspaper that gave it an editorial comment. No story was seen on *The Guardian newspaper*.

Research Question 3: How often do the two selected newspapers cover the issues of "one man, one vote" campaign?

The findings again reveal that, *The Nigerian Observer* newspaper gave a regular coverage to the issue but *The Guardian* newspaper did not.

Research Question 4: How does the editorial position of the selected newspaper affect the coverage of one man, one vote political campaign? Significantly, the data generated in this study revealed that, for the three months of study, *The Guardian* newspaper did not cover the campaign project, the reason could be that, the campaign was a product of Edo State Government, under the leadership Adams Oshiomhole, another reason why the editorial policy of the *Guardian* newspaper ignore the campaign could be that, the campaign was a clear partisan project of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), while *The Guardian* newspaper may be sympathetic to People's Democratic Party (PDP) or any other party or may not want to toe partisan line in order to remain neutral. Though the campaign receives under acceptance among Nigerians, rallies, meetings, billboards display and prominent personalities support the project. It could be recalled that President Goodluck Jonathan supported the campaign, and he said, "the one man, one vote is making an important contribution to the ongoing debates at that time on electoral reforms and will advance the course of credible election in the country' G.E. Jonathan (personal Communication, October 16, 2010).

The voice of Mr. President on the campaign must have contributed to the credibility and acceptability of the project and supported the assumption that, mass mediated messages pass through the nexus of channel or interplay of forces. In the words of Udoakah, in Wilson (2006) mass media products are dependent products-products of social, political and economic forces. Dearing and Rogers (cited in McQuail, 2005,p.513) affirmed that, "the relative strength of the force and people trying to define and promote an issue largely contribute in moving an issue from news agenda to public agenda".

Summary

This study examined the press coverage of one man, one vote political campaign in Nigeria between October 9 - December 31, 2010 this period is seen as the apex of the political campaign for the April 2011 election and the heat period for party primaries in Nigeria. The study revealed that, the state owned newspaper, *The Nigerian Observer* relentlessly promote for campaign through paid advertorial which appeared 17 times on the front page accompanied with picture of an electoral box. *The Guardian* newspaper did not cover the issues within these three months of study, this may be seen as ideological issue which usually stem out of editorial policy.

Conclusion

The mass media play a crucial role in setting-agenda, however, the mass media do not manufacture events, but only present and promote issues generated from the larger society to the society. Their products are seen as products of social matrix of communication, passing through a number of forces; the economic force, social and political force. The credibility of these channels are the major forces that influence the media to also promote the public agenda as media agenda. *The Nigerian Observer* newspaper persistently promotes, one man, one vote philosophy because of the government involvement in the campaign.

Recommendations

From this study, it is clear that, ownership is a factor in defining what comes into the press and how often that should be. Again, it is obvious that one man, one vote campaign is a popular political philosophy in the recent time. Though the findings revealed that only one newspaper gave the campaign adequate coverage in spite of the popularity the campaign received, it is therefore recommended that other forms of media (billboards and posters), magazines, radio, television should be content analyzed to see if they supported the press to promote the campaign project.

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