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The Role of Broadcasting in Political Campaigns: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Despite the rapid rise of social media and digital communication platforms, broadcasting continues to play a vital role in political campaigns. This literature review evaluates the function of radio and television in political campaigns, focusing on aspects such as political information dissemination, agenda setting, framing, persuasion, voter education, mobilization, candidate image creation, and democratic engagement. The review is based on studies published between 2020 and 2026, particularly highlighting recent work concerning Nigeria and various contemporary electoral settings. Findings reveal that broadcasting still offers political figures access to large, diverse audiences, proving essential for reaching local communities and linguistically varied populations. Radio, noted for its cost-effectiveness, accessibility, and use of indigenous languages, is particularly significant, while television excels in presenting visual representations and political advertisements. Recent research also shows that broadcast media influence political conversation by selectively highlighting issues, framing topics, and shaping the tone of campaign messaging. Nevertheless, broadcasting can also perpetuate political bias, unequal access, sensationalism, misinformation, and negative campaigning. The literature review establishes that traditional broadcasting functions within a hybrid media landscape, interacting with social media and digital platforms. It concludes that while broadcasting retains its significance in political campaigns, its impact is conditioned by media credibility, audience demographics, political contexts, message framing, and engagement with other communication mediums.

Keywords: Broadcasting, Political Campaigns, Political Advertising, Voter Mobilization, Political Communication.

Introduction

Political campaigns are crucial for representative democracy as they enable candidates and political parties to convey their policies, values, and ideologies to voters. Effective communication is a core aspect of electoral competition, where political actors seek to inform, persuade, and mobilize the electorate prior to elections.

Historically, broadcasting, especially radio and television, has been a major channel for political communication. Although social media has drastically changed political campaigning, recent studies indicate that traditional broadcasting remains essential. For example, data from the 2024 United States election reveal that television and radio still commanded significant campaign

spending alongside the rise of digital advertising (Wesleyan Media Project, 2024). In Nigeria, radio continues to be vital for political communication, voter education, socialization, and public awareness (Adurogbola et al., 2026).

The ongoing relevance of broadcasting is particularly pronounced in emerging democracies like Nigeria. Radio is highly accessible to broad populations, especially in rural areas where internet access may be lacking. For instance, research on political jingles during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election illustrated that political parties heavily relied on radio, utilizing messages in indigenous languages to effectively target grassroots voters (Ogundeyi et al., 2024).

Similarly, television remains significant due to its ability to combine sound, imagery, and diverse campaign elements, providing a platform for candidate representation. A study on Nigerian television coverage of the 2023 presidential campaign revealed noticeable differences in how various stations framed the same political events, showcasing the medium's capacity to create diverse portrayals of political candidates (Ejiranti & Ajaegbu, n.d.).

Against this context, the literature review explores recent scholarship from 2020 to 2026 around broadcasting's role in political campaigns, paying attention to its provision of political information, agenda setting, framing, political advertising, voter mobilization, candidate image creation, democratic participation, and the challenges related to broadcast communication.

Understanding Broadcasting and Political Campaigns

Broadcasting is the organized dissemination of audio or audiovisual content to a wide audience. In the political realm, radio and television stand out as the main traditional broadcasting platforms.

Political campaigns encompass organized communication initiatives by candidates, parties, interest groups, and their supporters aimed at attracting electoral support. These communications may include advertisements, debates, interviews, jingles, news coverage, political shows, documentaries, speeches, and civic education initiatives.

The relationship between broadcasting and political campaigns is intricate. Broadcasting does more than provide a platform for political messaging; media organizations also influence which political events gain attention, the interpretation of these events, and the visibility of candidates or policy issues.

Recent studies focused on Nigeria illustrate this dynamic. For example, Ejiranti and Ajaegbu's research on the 2023 presidential campaign highlighted how different television stations adopted varying framing approaches in covering similar events, indicating that broadcasting is not a neutral conduit but an active player in shaping political meaning.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda-Setting Perspective

Recent literature underscores the significance of agenda-setting in understanding political broadcasting. Agenda setting refers to how media outlets can affect the prominence of political issues through their reporting patterns.

A study from 2023 examining broadcast campaigns in Nigeria highlighted the role of media organizations in drawing public attention to electoral problems and influencing discussions (Adebayo et al., 2023). This research accentuated the social

responsibilities of broadcasters during elections while also noting the challenges presented by political pressures on broadcasting.

Additionally, recent studies on Nigerian political talk shows identify agenda setting as crucial in enhancing political awareness, voter education, and democratic engagement (Adurogbola et al., 2026).

In this context, broadcasting shapes political campaigns by determining which topics gain visibility and sustained audience focus, such as unemployment, corruption, healthcare, and electoral reforms.

Framing Perspective

Framing serves as another key aspect of understanding today's broadcast political communication. It involves how political events, candidates, policies, and controversies are presented to audiences.

Research on Nigerian television coverage has shown notable framing differences during the 2023 campaign. A comparative analysis revealed that the two stations employed different frames to report identical events, affecting audience perceptions through language, emphasis, visuals, and editorial choices (Ejiranti & Ajaegbu, n.d.).

Further studies indicated that conflict-centric narratives dominated a significant portion of the political campaign coverage, which risked overshadowing essential policy discussions and contributed to political polarization (Abubakre, 2024).

Given this, framing is vital in elections since the presentation of the same candidate or event can vary greatly based on the broadcaster's editorial choices.

Broadcasting as a Source of Political Information

Broadcasting's primary function during political campaigns includes providing crucial political information to citizens about candidates, parties, policies, promises, election protocols, and events. This information is conveyed through advertisements, news coverage, debates, interviews, talk shows, and documentaries.

Recent findings show that broadcast mediums remain relevant for political information exchange even amid digital transformation. For instance, Adurogbola et al. (2026) highlight radio talk shows as significant platforms for disseminating information, fostering voter education, and enhancing public understanding in Nigeria.

The European Union Election Observation Mission's report on Nigeria's 2023 election illustrates the ongoing significance of broadcast media, with political ads making up a significant portion of prime-time programming and numerous advertisements sanctioned during the election cycle (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2023).

Thus, broadcasting remains a critical source of political information, particularly for citizens who may not actively seek such information online.

Broadcasting and Political Advertising

Political advertising represents a highly visible aspect of broadcast political communication. Candidates and parties invest in airtime to share policies, enhance personal images, criticize opponents, and motivate voter support.

Empirical evidence confirms that television advertising plays a vital role in electoral dynamics. Research examining elections from 2000 to 2018 indicated that televised campaigns noticeably impacted voter decisions, with persuasion being a key factor (Sides et al., 2022).

Recent analyses assert the continued relevance of television advertising, as seen in the record spending on TV ads during the 2022 U.S. midterm elections, affirming that traditional broadcasting remains central despite rising digital media influences (Franz et al., 2023). Investigations into the 2024 election similarly show a significant focus on key issues such as economy and social rights in television ads (Ridout et al., 2024).

The continued investment in broadcast advertising signifies that political campaigns still view radio and television as effective channels for reaching broad audiences.

Radio Broadcasting and Political Campaigns

Radio holds a unique place in political campaigns, especially in developing countries. Unlike television, it does not require audiences to focus visually on a screen. As such, it can be consumed while engaging in various daily activities.

Its affordability and geographical reach make it especially valuable in rural areas. Broadcasting in indigenous languages further enhances its value in political communication.

Research shows the impact of indigenous-language radio in the context of Nigeria's political campaigns. Ogundeyi et al. (2024) analyzed political jingles from multiple parties during the 2023 elections and found that indigenous jingles were vital for effectively conveying messages to local audiences.

Consequently, radio remains crucial for reaching grassroots communities in Nigeria effectively.

Broadcasting and Voter Education

Broadcasting plays an essential role in educating voters. Election-related programming can clarify registration processes, voting methods, election regulations, candidate details, polling dates, and civic responsibilities.

Eke and Oluwatobi (2024) assessed broadcast media campaigns in Rivers State, Nigeria, focusing on their effectiveness in voter enlightenment and outreach. Their study reinforced broadcasting's significance in conveying electoral information to citizens at the grassroots level.

Effective voter education through broadcasting can enhance democratic participation by eliminating informational barriers, enabling citizens to engage more fully in the electoral process. However, credibility, clarity, accessibility, and language of messages significantly affect the impact of voter education; misinformation or poorly conceived messages can hinder understanding.

Broadcasting and Voter Mobilization

Beyond merely informing, broadcasting serves to mobilize voters, prompting them to engage in electoral processes. Political parties use radio jingles, TV ads, interviews, and campaign programs to inspire voting participation. Additionally, broadcasters can engage citizens through voter education initiatives and public service messages.

Adurogbola et al. (2026) link radio political talk shows with enhancing political awareness and participation.

Nonetheless, the mobilization aspect of broadcasting can be problematic. Political figures may exploit broadcast platforms to disseminate incendiary messages, misinformation, ethnic appeals, or inflated claims. Thus, while broadcasting can stimulate democratic engagement, it may also exacerbate political divisions.

Broadcasting and Candidate Image Creation

Modern political campaigns increasingly focus on creating positive candidate images. Broadcasting is particularly effective for this purpose, as television enables viewers to observe candidates' appearance, mannerisms, emotions, and overall campaign settings.

Candidates often leverage their TV appearances to project qualities such as competence, trustworthiness, patriotism, and empathy.

Research on Nigeria's 2023 presidential campaign indicates that various television stations can produce markedly differing portrayals of the same candidate through distinct framing and editorial choices (Ejiranti & Ajaegbu). This highlights that candidate image constructing is influenced not only by political parties but also by journalistic choices made by broadcasters.

Political Framing in Nigeria

Political framing bears significant importance in Nigeria's electoral setting, characterized by intense competition among parties and candidates. The 2023 election saw extensive media coverage of campaign controversies. Recent studies uncovered that negative and conflict-driven frames often dominated coverage (Abubakre, 2024).

Excessive focus on conflict can detract from essential policy discussions, negatively impacting democratic dialogues since voters need clear information about competing programs rather than just controversy.

Thus, television framing can shape not only voter knowledge but also their interpretations of political actors and electoral events.

Broadcasting and Political Participation in Nigeria

Political participation extends beyond voting to include activities such as discussions, campaign attendances, political organization, communication with representatives, expression of political stances, and civic involvement.

Broadcasting supports these forms of participation by creating spaces for political dialogue. Interactive radio shows, television interviews, political debates, and current affairs programs offer citizens opportunities to engage with significant political topics.

Research identifies Nigerian radio political talk shows as considerable venues for political socialization and public dialogue (Adurogbola et al., 2026). These interactive programs can help facilitate a public forum where citizens can voice their concerns and hold political actors accountable.

Broadcasting, Bias, and Ownership

Despite its potential for democratic engagement, broadcasting can be swayed by ownership interests and political influences. The issue of bias is critical, as media organizations don't function independently of political and economic frameworks. The ownership structures of broadcasting entities and the ties between

media owners and political figures can greatly affect editorial choices.

Investigations into Nigeria's television coverage during the 2023 election demonstrated how different broadcasters framed political occurrences variably (Ejiranti & Ajaegbu, n.d.).

The bias issue is exacerbated when broadcasters favor certain candidates over others, disadvantaging those with less financial clout or weaker connections to media outlets. The European Union Election Observation Mission's report on Nigeria's 2023 elections noted that political advertising made up between 4% and 20% of prime-time slots, calling attention to the need for regulatory measures to ensure fairness in broadcasting.

Broadcasting and Negative Campaigning

Negative campaigning centers on communication that primarily critiques political rivals. Broadcasting excels in spreading negative messages—television and radio can quickly relay allegations, criticisms, and scandals to expansive audiences.

Research on Nigerian political communication highlights that negative framing and a focus on conflict were prevalent during the 2023 campaigns (Abubakre, 2024). Excessive emphasis on conflict might not only lead to heightened polarization but also restrict meaningful policy discussions.

Similar findings regarding U.S. television advertising show negative campaign messaging remains salient, with Ridout et al. (2024) documenting significant negative and conflict-oriented messaging in the 2024 presidential advertising context.

While negative campaigning can inform voters about candidates' paths, an overreliance on such approaches can erode trust in political institutions.

Broadcasting and the Digital Media Landscape

A key development in current political communication is the convergence of traditional broadcasting and digital media. The rise of social media has transformed how political figures engage voters, allowing direct dissemination of campaign messages via platforms like X, Facebook, Instagram, and others.

However, evidence suggests that digital media have not replaced traditional broadcasting; instead, both forms increasingly coexist and interact. Research by Ahmad et al. (2025/2026) explored how political communication on X influenced journalistic coverage and agenda setting during Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign.

Similarly, reports from the 2024 U.S. election indicate that television remained a crucial advertising medium despite the competitive landscape posed by digital media. The Wesleyan Media Project revealed that substantial funds were spent on television and radio advertising throughout the election cycle (Wesleyan Media Project, 2024).

This illustrates a hybrid media environment where traditional broadcasting and digital communication methods function side by side rather than one supplanting the other.

Broadcasting and Political Campaigns in Nigeria

The Nigerian context provides valuable insights into the sustained importance of broadcasting. With a large population and diverse languages, combined with limited digital access in rural areas, radio and television continue to hold significant relevance.

The 2023 elections exemplify this trend. Political entities employed radio jingles, television advertising, political interviews, debates, and news coverage to engage voters. Research showcases that indigenous-language radio jingles were instrumental in conveying campaign messages effectively to grassroots audiences (Ogundeyi et al., 2024).

Findings from Rivers State also illustrated the crucial role broadcast media played in educating voters and generating grassroots awareness (Eke & Oluwatobi, 2024).

Thus, broadcasting remains a critical tool for political communication in Nigeria, even as campaigns increasingly embrace digital strategies.

Broadcasting and Democratic Advancement

Broadcasting can positively contribute to democratic progress in multiple ways:

- 1. By disseminating political information to citizens.
- 2. By fostering robust political debate.
- 3. By providing platforms for candidates to outline their policies.
- 4. By educating citizens on electoral processes.
- 5. By mobilizing citizens to engage in democratic activities.
- 6. By enabling accountability for political leaders.

Adebayo et al. (2023) highlight broadcasters' social obligations in tackling electoral challenges, including vote trading and other malpractices.

While broadcasting can enhance democracy, its potential could be hampered by political meddling, ownership monopolization, misinformation, sensational reporting, unequal access, and commercial pressures.

Challenges Facing Broadcasting in Political Campaigns

Despite its critical role, broadcasting faces several challenges during elections:

Political Interference

Political interests can impact editorial judgment, diminishing broadcasters' independence.

Unequal Access

Candidates with more substantial financial resources may secure more airtime, gaining disproportionate visibility.

Misinformation

Unverified claims can circulate swiftly through broadcast channels.

Negative Campaigning

Excessive focus on adversarial messaging can amplify polarization and detract from substantive discussions.

Commercialization

The high costs associated with broadcast advertising may favor wealthy candidates and parties.

Language Barriers

While broadcasting in indigenous languages can enhance accessibility, multicultural societies necessitate carefully crafted strategies to ensure equitable communication.

Competition from Digital Media

Broadcast organizations are under pressure as they vie for audiences and advertising revenue with social media and other online platforms.

These challenges reveal that the efficacy of broadcasting is contingent not only on its physical presence but also on the overarching institutional landscape in which it functions.

Identifying Gaps in Existing Literature

This review uncovers several key gaps in current research:

1. There is a need for more focused empirical studies that investigate the independent effects of radio and television.
2. Much of the research on television advertising hails from the United States, signaling a demand for comparative analysis in African contexts.
3. Limited longitudinal studies inquire whether the effects of broadcast campaigns endure past elections.
4. Further investigation into indigenous-language broadcasting is warranted, particularly studies similar to those conducted on Yoruba-language political jingles.
5. Additional research is necessary to explore the interplay between radio, television, and digital platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube.
6. Finally, more investigation is needed regarding the connections between broadcasting, ownership, campaign financing, and electoral fairness.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed affirms the continued significance of broadcasting in contemporary political campaigns, despite the swift evolution of digital media. Radio and television persist as crucial tools for political figures, enabling them to engage large audiences and facilitate essential political information, voter education, political advertising, agenda setting, candidate image development, and voter mobilization.

Evidence indicates that radio holds particular importance in Nigeria due to its cost efficiency, accessibility, mobility, and ability to communicate in indigenous languages. Research during Nigeria's 2023 presidential election shows that parties effectively utilized indigenous-language radio jingles to connect with grassroots populations (Ogundeyi et al., 2024).

Television, too, retains its value through its audiovisual capabilities. Studies indicate that different television networks can create various portrayals of the same political candidate through diverse framing and editorial choices (Ejiranti & Ajaegbu, n.d.).

However, broadcasting is not without its drawbacks. Political bias, unequal access, negative campaigning, sensationalism, misinformation, and political interference can compromise its contributions to democracy.

Ultimately, the rise of digital media has not replaced traditional broadcasting; rather, both coexist and increasingly interact in the current political communication environment. Thus, modern political campaigns are characterized by the synergistic use of television, radio, social media, online news, and mobile communication.

Overall, the literature indicates that broadcasting remains a potent but conditional force in political campaigning, with its influence dependent on the credibility of the broadcaster, message qualities,

audience characteristics, the political landscape, and the interplay between broadcasting and other communication mediums. For broadcasting to effectively promote democratic development, media organizations must maintain editorial independence, prioritize accuracy, fairness, balance, and professional ethics, and ensure equitable access to political communication.

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