

The Role of Traditional and Digital Media in the Nigerian Presidential Elections

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Abstract: Political communication has become an increasingly important component of contemporary electoral politics as political parties and candidates seek to influence public opinion, construct political identities, mobilise voters and shape perceptions of leadership. The transformation of the media environment from a predominantly traditional system based on newspapers, radio and television to a hybrid communication ecosystem incorporating social media, online news platforms, messaging applications, podcasts, livestreaming and user-generated content has significantly altered the conduct of political campaigns. This study examines the role of traditional and digital media in presidential electoral strategy in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on how political actors use media to construct narratives, frame political issues, mobilise voters, manage political reputations and counter opponents. The study adopts a qualitative research design based on documentary analysis and critical review of scholarly literature, official electoral documents, media reports and relevant policy materials. The analysis demonstrates that neither traditional nor digital media can adequately explain contemporary electoral communication in isolation. Rather, Nigerian presidential campaigns operate within a hybrid media environment in which television and radio provide broad visibility and legitimacy, while digital platforms facilitate immediacy, interactivity, audience segmentation, peer-to-peer mobilisation and rapid narrative diffusion. The study argues that the strategic advantage in the 2027 election will not necessarily belong to the candidate with the largest media presence but to the campaign capable of integrating traditional and digital communication into a coherent, credible and locally responsive political communication architecture. The study recommends an integrated media strategy, evidence-based political messaging, ethical digital campaigning, stronger fact-checking mechanisms, media literacy, transparent political advertising and enhanced collaboration among electoral institutions, media organisations, technology platforms, political parties and civil society.

Keywords: Political Communication, Electoral Strategy, Presidential Election, Traditional Media, Nigeria, 2027 Election, Political Campaign, Hybrid Media.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Political communication constitutes a central element of democratic politics because elections depend not only on formal electoral procedures but also on the processes through which political information is produced, circulated, interpreted and contested (Bennett and Livingston, 2023). Candidates need to communicate policy positions, establish political identities, persuade citizens, mobilise supporters, respond to opponents and maintain public confidence. Citizens, on the other hand, require credible political information to assess competing candidates and make informed electoral choices. The media therefore provide an essential infrastructure through which political communication takes place. Historically, political communication was dominated by newspapers, radio and television. These traditional media operated through relatively centralised structures in which journalists, editors, broadcasters

and political institutions exercised substantial influence over the selection and dissemination of political information. The emergence of the internet and social media has significantly disrupted this arrangement. Political candidates can now communicate directly with citizens without relying exclusively on professional journalists or traditional media organisations (Ologunbe and Taiwo, 2025). Citizens can equally create, reproduce and contest political content. Consequently, political communication has become faster, more interactive, decentralised and participatory.

Political communication has evolved alongside transformations in communication technology, political institutions and patterns of citizen engagement (Klinger, Kreiss and Mutsaers, 2023). In earlier electoral systems, political parties relied heavily on face-to-face meetings, political rallies, newspapers, radio and television. The development of mass

broadcasting expanded the geographical reach of political campaigns and enabled candidates to communicate simultaneously with large audiences. The emergence of television in particular transformed electoral politics. Political candidates increasingly became public personalities whose appearance, speaking style, personality and perceived authenticity could influence electoral judgments. Political communication therefore moved beyond the transmission of policy information to encompass political branding, symbolic representation and image management (Sampson and Annor, 2025). Agenda-setting scholarship provided one of the foundational explanations of media influence. McCombs and Shaw argued that news media can influence the salience of political issues by determining which issues receive attention and prominence (Ajakaiye et al., 2023). Their influential study established the proposition that media attention can influence what citizens perceive as important political issues. This is particularly relevant to electoral politics because political campaigns compete to establish the dominant issues around which elections are contested.

For example, unemployment, insecurity, corruption, inflation, poverty or infrastructure may become central electoral issues depending partly on the extent to which political actors and media organisations emphasise them. A presidential campaign may therefore seek not only to promote its candidate but also to shape the broader political agenda. Framing theory provides another important explanation of political communication. Entman conceptualised framing as the selection and highlighting of particular aspects of reality in communication, as opined by Scheufele (2022). Political campaigns consequently attempt to frame problems, identify causes, evaluate political actors and propose solutions. The same political issue may therefore acquire different meanings depending on how it is presented to the electorate. Economic hardship, for example, can be framed as a consequence of global economic conditions, previous government policies, structural weaknesses or current policy decisions. Although the underlying issue remains economic hardship, the political meaning changes depending on the frame through which citizens encounter it.

According to Wolfsfeld (2022), the emergence of digital media has complicated these traditional theories. Social media platforms enable politicians, journalists, activists, citizens and political organisations to participate simultaneously in political communication. Political information can bypass conventional gatekeepers and circulate rapidly among interconnected users. The 2008 United States presidential campaign represented an important stage in the integration of television, internet communication, data gathering and online mobilisation (Ariel and Elishar, 2025). Chadwick's analysis demonstrates how older and newer media can become systematically integrated rather than functioning as separate communication systems (Lannelli, 2026). Subsequent elections across Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia and Africa have similarly demonstrated the growing importance of digital platforms in political campaigning. Candidates increasingly use social media to distribute campaign videos, respond to breaking news, engage supporters, recruit volunteers, raise funds, attack

opponents and cultivate political identities. Yet the digital transformation has not necessarily produced a more democratic information environment. Asimakopoulou et al. (2025) state that the same platforms that enable political participation can facilitate misinformation, disinformation, propaganda, political manipulation and polarisation. The global experience therefore demonstrates the dual character of digital political communication. It can enhance political participation by reducing communication barriers, while simultaneously increasing opportunities for political manipulation.

The African political communication environment reflects both global technological change and distinctive socioeconomic, institutional and cultural conditions (Mmutle et al., 2023). Electoral communication across many African countries has historically depended heavily on radio because of its affordability, accessibility and ability to communicate in local languages. Television and newspapers have traditionally played important roles in urban and elite political discourse, while community radio has provided important communication channels in rural communities. The expansion of mobile telecommunications has fundamentally changed this environment. Mobile phones have become important instruments of political communication because they combine voice communication, messaging, internet access and social networking, as opined by Chagas (2022). Social media has consequently become increasingly integrated into African election campaigns. Political parties use digital platforms not only for public campaigning but also for internal coordination, volunteer mobilisation and rapid dissemination of political information. Research by Fisher, Gadjanova and Hitchen (2024) demonstrates the importance of WhatsApp in political communication in West Africa. Their comparative study of Nigeria and Ghana suggests that the ways political parties use WhatsApp are influenced by party organisation and message discipline.

These findings challenge technological determinism. The political consequences of digital media do not arise merely because the platforms exist. They depend significantly on how political organisations use them and how citizens interact with the information they encounter. African political communication must therefore be understood within existing political institutions and social structures. Digital platforms may strengthen political organisations where effective party structures exist, but they can also produce fragmented communication environments where political organisations lack coordination and message discipline (Sipos, 2025). The African experience also highlights the importance of informal communication networks. Political information can circulate through families, religious communities, professional associations, youth organisations, neighbourhood groups and interpersonal relationships (Wray-Lake and Ballard, 2023). WhatsApp groups, for example, connect digital communication with existing social networks and community relationships.

This creates an important distinction between public social media and closed digital communication. Public platforms such as X and Facebook allow political

communication to become visible to journalists and wider audiences. WhatsApp, by contrast, facilitates political communication within private and semi-private networks (Tebaldi and Gaddini, 2024). This distinction has major implications for misinformation. Public misinformation may be challenged relatively quickly through journalists, fact-checkers or platform moderation, while information circulating through closed messaging environments can be significantly more difficult to monitor and correct. African elections have therefore increasingly become contests over political information and political narratives (Auwal and Ersoy, 2022). Candidates compete not only for votes but also for influence over how citizens understand political events.

Nigeria represents a particularly important case for examining the transformation of political communication because of its large electorate, federal political structure, competitive party system, diverse population and extensive media environment (Agbaje et al., 2026). The country's political communication system encompasses national and regional newspapers, television stations, radio stations, community broadcasting, online newspapers, blogs, social media platforms and messaging applications. Traditional media remain influential despite the expansion of digital communication. Radio is particularly important because it reaches audiences across geographical, linguistic and socioeconomic boundaries. Television remains relevant for national political visibility, debates and major political events. Newspapers and online news platforms contribute to elite discourse, investigative journalism and political agenda-setting (Fadeji, Aluko and Hamzat, 2025). Digital media have simultaneously become increasingly important to political campaigns. Political actors can communicate directly with citizens and supporters without waiting for traditional media organisations to report their activities.

The 2015 presidential election represented an important turning point in the strategic use of social media in Nigerian electoral politics. Political actors increasingly used Facebook, Twitter and other digital platforms for candidate branding, political mobilisation and counter-messaging. The 2019 election further demonstrated the interaction between social media and journalism (Nwozor et al., 2022). Research examining the use of X during Nigeria's 2019 presidential campaign identified significant interactions between presidential candidates' digital communication and political reporting by national newspapers. This suggests that political communication and journalism increasingly operate through processes of agenda-setting and intermedia influence. The 2023 presidential election intensified these developments. According to Klinger et al. (2023), digital platforms became important arenas for political debate, candidate branding, voter mobilisation and opposition communication. Research on the election identifies social media as an important mechanism for mobilising citizens and facilitating political discussion while simultaneously creating opportunities for misinformation and polarisation.

The Nigerian case therefore reflects Chadwick's hybrid media argument. Digital communication does not operate

independently of traditional media. Instead, political information frequently moves between platforms. A politician's statement may originate at a rally, appear on television, become an online news story, circulate through WhatsApp, generate discussion on X and return to television through political commentary. The political information cycle has therefore become increasingly interconnected. Chadwick argues that political information cycles can combine older and newer media logics, creating opportunities for both political elites and non-elite actors to intervene in news production (Hutchings, 2022). This observation is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where social media users can influence mainstream political narratives through viral posts, videos and citizen-generated content (Dufugha et al., 2026). The present study therefore examines the role of traditional and digital media in Nigerian presidential electoral strategy election. It investigates whether the emergence of digital platforms has displaced traditional media or whether both have become complementary components of an increasingly sophisticated hybrid campaign environment.

II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Nigeria's presidential elections have historically involved extensive political communication. Candidates use political rallies, billboards, newspapers, television, radio, posters and interpersonal networks to communicate political messages (Alabi, 2025). However, the emergence of digital media has transformed the speed, reach and structure of electoral communication. The central problem is that political communication has become increasingly fragmented while political campaigns continue to operate within highly complex social, cultural and political environments.

First, the expansion of digital media has increased opportunities for direct voter communication while simultaneously increasing the circulation of misinformation and disinformation. According to Augenstein et al. (2024), a political claim can reach thousands or millions of users before journalists or fact-checkers have an opportunity to verify it. Research on Nigeria has found that social-media content can influence traditional media while also intensifying pre-existing ethnic and religious tensions. Second, political communication in Nigeria is affected by deep social and political divisions. Ethnicity, religion, region, class and generational identity can influence political interpretation. Digital communication may strengthen political participation, but it can also reinforce echo chambers in which citizens primarily encounter information consistent with their existing political identities (Hartmann et al., 2025).

Third, traditional media organisations remain subject to institutional and commercial pressures. Ownership structures, political influence, advertising dependence, government relationships and professional constraints can affect how political actors receive media coverage. Fourth, the assumption that digital media have displaced traditional media is questionable. Evidence from Nigeria indicates that political communication increasingly involves interactions between social media and traditional journalism (Ahmad et al., 2026).

Fifth, the existing literature contains relatively limited systematic qualitative analysis of how traditional and digital media can be integrated into a coherent presidential election. Much of the literature examines social media use, misinformation, voter engagement or specific platforms independently. Less attention has been devoted to the strategic interaction between traditional and digital media within an integrated presidential campaign architecture. This study addresses this gap by conceptualising political communication as an integrated electoral strategy rather than treating traditional and digital media as isolated technologies.

➤ *Aim and Objective of the Study*

The study aims to critically assess the role of traditional and digital media in presidential electoral communication in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

- Assess the role of traditional media in presidential electoral strategy.
- Examine the role of digital and social media in voter persuasion, mobilisation and political branding:
- Critically analyse the interaction between traditional and digital media within Nigeria's hybrid electoral communication environment.
- Examine the challenges associated with misinformation, disinformation, hate speech and political polarisation.
- Develop an integrated political communication framework for presidential campaigns in Nigerian elections.

III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

➤ *Agenda-Setting and Political Campaigns*

McCombs and Shaw's agenda-setting theory remains one of the most influential approaches to understanding media influence, as opined by Perloff (2022). Their central argument is that media attention can shape the importance audiences attach to political issues. The theory is particularly relevant to presidential campaigns because political actors compete to establish the issues around which electoral debates are organised. A presidential campaign may attempt to make unemployment, insecurity, corruption, infrastructure, poverty or economic reform the dominant electoral issue. The strategic objective is therefore not simply to advertise a candidate but to influence the broader political agenda.

However, contemporary media environments complicate the original agenda-setting model. Traditional media organisations no longer possess exclusive control over political agendas. Social-media users, influencers, activists and campaign organisations can initiate narratives that subsequently enter mainstream journalism. Almakaty (2025) states that agenda-setting has therefore become increasingly multidirectional. The traditional model largely conceptualised communication as a movement from media to the public, whereas the hybrid environment allows information to move from politicians to citizens, citizens to journalists, journalists to politicians and social media to traditional media. Research by Akinola and Adekunle (2022) on Nigerian political communication illustrates this relationship by examining

interactions between presidential candidates' X communication and newspaper reporting during the 2019 election. The implication is that campaigns competing in 2027 will need to understand both traditional agenda-setting and digital agenda formation.

➤ *Framing and Political Competition*

Framing theory provides another important explanation of electoral communication. Candidates rarely communicate political issues neutrally (Guran and Ozarslan, 2022). Instead, they define problems, identify causes, assign responsibility and propose solutions. The issue of insecurity illustrates this process. One candidate may frame insecurity as a consequence of institutional weakness, another may interpret it primarily as a socioeconomic problem, while another may emphasise external threats or regional instability. Although the underlying problem may be the same, the political meaning changes according to the frame through which citizens encounter it.

Digital platforms intensify framing competition because political actors can continuously introduce, reproduce and modify political narratives. Research by Ademosu (2025) on the 2023 Lagos governorship election provides an important illustration. Studies of ethnic rhetoric during the election found that social-media narratives were used to amplify ethnic and political divisions, demonstrating that framing can move beyond persuasion into identity mobilisation and polarisation. This presents an important challenge for the 2027 presidential election. Effective political communication must distinguish legitimate identity-based political mobilisation from communication that deliberately promotes hostility and social division.

➤ *The Hybrid Media System*

Chadwick's hybrid media system provides a particularly appropriate framework for understanding contemporary Nigerian political communication (Alaba and Ogande, 2024). Rather than treating traditional and digital media as competing systems, the hybrid perspective emphasises interaction and interdependence. This is particularly evident during election campaigns. A candidate's political rally may generate television footage. That footage can subsequently become online video content. Online users may comment on the footage, journalists may report the online reaction, and the candidate's campaign may respond to the resulting coverage. Television may then report the response, thereby restarting the communication cycle. Traditional media remain strategically relevant because they can provide legitimacy and amplification to content originating online. Digital media are equally relevant because they provide immediacy, interaction and audience feedback to stories produced by traditional media. Chadwick's analysis of political information cycles demonstrates how older and newer media logics can combine in political news-making (Beratis and Wright, 2022). This challenges technological determinism and provides a more appropriate explanation of Nigeria's contemporary electoral communication environment.

➤ *WhatsApp and Political Communication*

WhatsApp deserves particular attention in Nigeria because its political role differs from that of more publicly visible platforms (Hassan and Hitchen, 2022). Unlike X, where political communication is generally open and searchable, WhatsApp enables political communication through private and semi-private groups and interpersonal networks. Fisher, Gadjanova and Hitchen's (2024) research on Nigeria and Ghana demonstrates that political parties use WhatsApp for organisational coordination and voter outreach, while the level of message discipline is influenced partly by party institutionalisation. This finding is significant because it demonstrates that digital campaigning is not simply a technological process. Political organisation and internal communication structures influence the effectiveness of digital communication.

For the 2027 election, WhatsApp is likely to remain significant for forward-level mobilisation, volunteer coordination, local-language communication, event announcements, voter education, campaign video distribution and interpersonal persuasion. Its closed communication structure, however, creates substantial difficulties for monitoring misinformation and disinformation. Consequently, campaigns and electoral stakeholders need communication systems capable of responding to false information without unnecessarily violating legitimate private communication (Ali, 2025).

➤ *Social Media, Mobilisation and Youth Politics*

Nigeria's youthful population makes youth-oriented digital communication strategically important. Social media can reduce barriers to political participation by allowing young citizens to discuss political issues, follow candidates, create political content and participate in campaign activities. Research by Joy, Nasir and Maiwada (2026) examining Nigeria's 2023 election found that social media facilitated voter mobilisation, political discussion and public engagement while simultaneously contributing to misinformation and polarisation. These findings suggest that digital media have a dual character.

However, Ruess et al. (2023) state that online participation does not automatically translate into voting. Political users may like, comment on or share political content without engaging in offline campaign activities or voting. Digital activism can therefore generate political expression without producing equivalent electoral participation. Consequently, campaigns should treat digital engagement as part of a broader mobilisation process. The strategic question for 2027 should not simply be how to generate online attention but how to transform online attention into meaningful political participation. This requires connections between digital communication and ward-level structures, community organisations, youth groups, professional associations, voter education programmes and election-day mobilisation (Castello et al., 2025).

➤ *Misinformation and Disinformation*

One of the most serious challenges facing Nigerian electoral communication is the proliferation of false and misleading information, as opined by Ibrahim and Ekdale (2026). Misinformation generally refers to inaccurate information shared without necessarily intending to deceive, while disinformation involves deliberate attempts to mislead.

Digital platforms can accelerate both processes. A false political claim can quickly be transformed into text messages, memes, edited videos, manipulated photographs, fabricated quotations, false election results, fake endorsements and impersonation accounts. The consequences can be significant because electoral trust depends partly on citizens' ability to distinguish credible information from fabricated content. Research based on interviews and focus groups across Nigeria indicates that social-media content can influence traditional media and intensify ethnic and religious tensions (Okeke and Omosotomhe, 2025). This challenges optimistic assumptions that digital media automatically democratise political communication. Digital platforms democratise access to communication, but they do not automatically democratise the quality or reliability of political information.

➤ *Traditional Media Versus Digital Media*

The distinction between traditional and digital media remains analytically useful, but it is strategically incomplete (Habermas, 2023). Traditional media tend to operate through relatively centralised communication structures, stronger professional gatekeeping and established institutional reputations. Digital media, by contrast, facilitate rapid communication, high levels of interactivity, decentralised content creation and greater opportunities for audience segmentation. Traditional media may therefore possess greater institutional credibility, while digital platforms may possess greater speed and interactivity (Farid, 2023). Traditional media may provide broader access to audiences that are not continuously connected to the internet, while digital platforms can facilitate highly targeted communication. These differences do not mean that campaigns must choose between the two. Instead, the evidence suggests that presidential campaigns should integrate the respective strengths of both communication systems.

➤ *Traditional Media as a Strategic Resource*

Traditional media are likely to remain important in the 2027 presidential election. Radio is particularly valuable because it can communicate across large geographic areas and linguistic communities. Presidential campaigns can use radio for policy explanations, interviews, political jingles, community engagement and voter education (Alsarayreh, 2025). Television is valuable for national political visibility. Presidential debates, major policy speeches, interviews and campaign events provide candidates with opportunities to communicate competence, personality and leadership style (Bull and Waddle, 2023). Newspapers remain relevant to elite political communication. Policymakers, journalists, academics, professionals and political stakeholders continue to use newspapers to follow political developments and policy debates. Outdoor communication through billboards, posters

and other physical media also remains important because it places political messages within public spaces beyond the digital environment. Traditional media consequently remain relevant because they can reach audiences that digital campaigns may not effectively reach (Alquran, 2022).

➤ *Digital Media as a Strategic Resource*

Digital media provide distinct strategic advantages. They enable audience segmentation, direct communication, rapid response, continuous political branding and interactive engagement (Bennett and Segerberg, 2023). A presidential campaign can develop different messages for different audiences while maintaining an overarching national narrative. Youth-oriented communication can focus on employment, entrepreneurship and education, while agricultural communities may receive greater emphasis on rural development, markets and agricultural productivity. However, strategic segmentation should not become political manipulation. Campaigns must distinguish between legitimate audience adaptation and deliberate attempts to exploit social divisions. Digital media also enable real-time communication. Campaign organisations can respond quickly to opposition attacks, emerging controversies, breaking news and misinformation. However, rapid communication must not undermine verification. A fast but inaccurate response can damage political credibility more severely than delayed but accurate communication (Devi and Singh, 2025).

• *Political Branding:*

Presidential politics is increasingly influenced by candidate branding. Political branding involves constructing a recognisable identity around characteristics such as competence, integrity, experience, leadership, youthfulness, development and national unity (Okeke, 2026). Traditional and digital media contribute differently to political branding. Television communicates physical presence, leadership style and public performance. Radio communicates personality through voice and language. Social media creates continuous candidate visibility. YouTube allows long-form policy communication, while TikTok and Instagram facilitate short-form and personality-oriented communication. WhatsApp enables interpersonal distribution of campaign messages. An effective presidential brand therefore requires consistency across platforms while allowing messages to be adapted to different audiences (Tawiah, 2025).

• *Political Narrative and Storytelling:*

Contemporary political campaigns increasingly compete through narratives rather than isolated policy statements (Krieg, 2023). Political narratives organise political information around a problem, its causes, responsibility and proposed solution. A campaign may construct a narrative in which Nigeria faces economic hardship, previous policies contributed to the crisis, reform is required, and the candidate possesses the competence necessary to implement reform. An opposing campaign may construct a completely different interpretation of the same political reality. Electoral competition is consequently partly a competition over political meaning. Digital platforms intensify this competition because narratives can be repeated through videos, memes, hashtags,

speeches, interviews and influencer commentary. Political campaigns must therefore develop narratives that are coherent, evidence-based and capable of being adapted across different media (Seiger et al., 2025).

• *Political Influencers:*

Influencers have become increasingly relevant to digital political communication (Goodwin et al., 2023). They include entertainers, journalists, academics, religious personalities, online commentators, activists, content creators and political analysts. Influencers can help campaigns reach audiences that may distrust conventional political advertising. However, influencer politics also creates risks. Audiences may not always know whether an endorsement reflects personal conviction, political affiliation or paid promotion (Arnesson, 2023). Transparency is therefore important. Political campaigns should disclose significant paid relationships and ensure that political advertising does not masquerade as independent citizen communication.

• *Political Communication and Regional Diversity:*

Nigeria's federal structure makes national political communication particularly complex (Suberu, 2022). A single political message cannot necessarily be communicated identically across all regions. Political campaigns must understand local languages, socioeconomic concerns, regional political histories, cultural sensitivities, religious diversity, security conditions and patterns of media consumption (Taubaldiyev et al., 2024). This does not mean that political actors should exploit ethnic or religious divisions. Rather, it means that national political communication must translate broad policy commitments into locally meaningful language. Radio is particularly important in this context, while digital platforms can complement it through local-language videos, community-focused social-media content and regionally relevant communication (Godfrey and Uchenna, 2025).

• *The Political Economy of Media:*

Political communication cannot be separated from the political economy of media. Media organisations require financial resources, while advertising, ownership interests, political relationships and commercial pressures can influence media behaviour (Olayinka and Odunayo, 2024). Political actors may attempt to influence media coverage through advertising, political access, exclusive interviews, strategic information leaks and relationships with media owners. These conditions raise questions concerning media independence. A democratic electoral system requires citizens to have access to competing political perspectives rather than communication environments dominated by particular political interests (Benson, 2024). The political economy of media is therefore an important factor in understanding the opportunities and constraints surrounding presidential electoral communication.

➤ *Media Regulation and Electoral Communication*

Electoral communication requires appropriate regulation because political advertising and campaign communication can significantly influence electoral competition (Massa, 2026). Regulatory considerations include campaign expenditure, political advertising, hate speech, incitement,

misinformation, media access, broadcasting standards and digital campaigning. INEC's current preparation for the 2027 elections demonstrates the importance of institutional coordination among electoral authorities, political parties, media organisations and other stakeholders (Okafor, 2026). Effective communication will be necessary to ensure that citizens have access to accurate information concerning voter registration, electoral procedures and election administration. Regulation must nevertheless balance electoral integrity with freedom of expression. Excessively broad restrictions can suppress legitimate political criticism and democratic debate. The objective should therefore be to prevent deliberate manipulation, incitement and systematic deception while preserving legitimate political expression.

➤ *Theoretical Framework*

The theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation for explaining how political communication, media competition and electoral strategy interact within Nigeria's contemporary presidential electoral environment. This study draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives: Agenda-Setting Theory, Framing Theory and Hybrid Media System Theory. The selection of these theories is informed by the increasing complexity of political communication in Nigeria, where traditional mass media, digital platforms, political actors, journalists, civil society organisations and citizens participate simultaneously in the production, circulation and interpretation of political information. While Agenda-Setting Theory explains how political issues acquire public salience, Framing Theory examines how those issues are interpreted and presented, while Hybrid Media System Theory explains how communication moves across interconnected traditional and digital media environments. Together, the theories provide an integrated basis for analysing presidential campaign communication and electoral strategy in the 2027 Nigerian presidential election.

• *Agenda-Setting Theory*

Agenda-Setting Theory originated principally from the seminal work of McCombs and Shaw (1972), who examined the relationship between media coverage and voters' perceptions of the importance of political issues (Maurer, 2026). The central proposition of the theory is that the media may not necessarily determine exactly what people think, but can significantly influence **what people think about** by determining the prominence and frequency with which particular issues receive public attention. Through patterns of news selection, repetition, prominence and placement, media organisations can contribute to the construction of a public agenda in which certain issues become more salient than others.

The theory emerged from an understanding of the media as an important intermediary between political events and citizens (Okechukwu, 2023). Political events occur continuously, but the capacity of citizens to process all available information is limited. Media organisations consequently select particular events and issues for attention. The repeated presentation of an issue can increase its

perceived importance among members of the public. In electoral contexts, this becomes particularly significant because political parties and candidates seek to influence which issues dominate public debate (Gilardi et al., 2022). Agenda-setting is highly relevant to the Nigerian 2027 presidential election. The political environment contains numerous issues capable of becoming central to electoral discourse, including insecurity, unemployment, inflation, poverty, corruption, infrastructure deficits, electricity supply, education, healthcare, agricultural development, youth employment and economic reform. Political campaigns will compete not only over solutions to these problems but also over the extent to which particular problems receive sustained public attention.

For example, one political campaign may seek to establish economic hardship as the defining issue of the election, while another may attempt to make national security the dominant concern. A third may emphasise corruption and institutional reform, whereas another may prioritise employment and youth development. The political significance of these competing strategies lies in their ability to shape the broader agenda within which citizens evaluate candidates and parties. The contemporary Nigerian media environment also complicates the traditional understanding of agenda-setting (Araba, 2026). Whereas conventional agenda-setting research focused heavily on newspapers, radio and television, contemporary political communication involves social media platforms, online news organisations, blogs, messaging applications, influencers and citizen-generated content. Issues can therefore enter the public agenda through both professional journalism and digitally networked communication. Agenda-setting is also increasingly understood as a multidirectional process (Camaj and Bhuiyan, 2026). Political actors may attempt to influence journalists, journalists may respond to public discussions, citizens may generate viral political narratives, and digital platforms may amplify particular topics through algorithmic processes and user interaction. Consequently, the political agenda is not necessarily controlled exclusively by traditional media organisations. The relevance of Agenda-Setting Theory to this study therefore lies in its ability to explain competition over issue salience (Seeberg, 2023). It provides a basis for examining how presidential campaigns seek to establish particular national problems as priorities, how traditional and digital media contribute to their visibility, and how citizens respond to competing issue agendas. However, the theory has a limitation: identifying which issues receive attention does not necessarily explain how those issues are interpreted. This limitation makes Framing Theory an important complementary perspective.

• *Framing Theory*

Framing Theory provides a second important theoretical foundation for this study. Associated particularly with the work of Entman (1993), framing refers broadly to the process through which communicators select certain aspects of reality and make them more prominent in communication (Sullivan, 2023). Frames can influence how audiences understand the definition of a problem, its perceived causes, its moral

implications and the appropriate solutions. The importance of framing in political communication arises from the fact that political issues rarely possess a single universally accepted interpretation (Yang and Van Gorp, 2023). The same event may be described differently by competing political actors. Economic inflation, for example, may be framed as the consequence of previous government policies, international economic conditions, structural weaknesses or necessary short-term reforms. Similarly, insecurity may be framed primarily as a security failure, a socioeconomic problem, a consequence of weak institutions or a manifestation of broader regional instability.

In electoral campaigns, framing therefore becomes an important mechanism through which candidates construct political meaning (Hastuti, 2026). Candidates do not merely identify problems; they seek to explain what caused those problems, who is responsible, what consequences they have produced and which solutions should be adopted. Political competition consequently involves competition between alternative interpretations of national reality. Framing Theory is particularly relevant to digital political communication. Social media platforms enable political actors and citizens to produce, modify and redistribute frames at unprecedented speed (Lilleker et al., 2025). A campaign statement can be transformed into a short video, graphic, hashtag, meme or commentary and subsequently circulated through multiple networks. Political frames can therefore be reproduced by official campaign organisations as well as supporters, journalists, influencers and ordinary citizens.

The theory also helps explain why identical political information can produce different public interpretations. Citizens do not encounter political messages in a neutral communication environment. Their interpretations may be influenced by political identity, prior experiences, social networks, media exposure and competing narratives. Consequently, a campaign's strategic communication must consider not only what information it distributes but also the meanings audiences are likely to attach to that information. Framing Theory importantly complements Agenda-Setting Theory. Agenda-setting explains which issues become prominent, whereas framing helps explain how those issues are presented and interpreted (Buturoiu, Corbu and Botan, 2023). A political campaign may succeed in placing unemployment at the centre of national debate but still face competition over whether unemployment is interpreted primarily as an economic policy failure, an educational challenge, a demographic problem or a consequence of technological transformation. Nevertheless, Framing Theory also has limitations. It can place substantial emphasis on communicators and media content without fully explaining the complex technological relationships through which messages circulate (Dong and Nizam, 2025). This limitation supports the inclusion of Hybrid Media System Theory.

- *Hybrid Media System Theory*

Hybrid Media System Theory, associated particularly with Chadwick (2017), provides the central theoretical foundation for this study because it offers a framework for

understanding the interaction between traditional and digital media (Arnold and Donges, 2024). The theory challenges the assumption that new digital media simply replace older forms of communication. Instead, it conceptualises contemporary political communication as a hybrid system in which older and newer media logics interact, overlap and influence one another. This perspective is particularly appropriate for Nigeria because presidential campaigns operate simultaneously through radio, television, newspapers, online news platforms, websites, social media, messaging applications, public rallies and interpersonal communication networks. Political actors move continuously between these spaces. A statement made during a political rally may be reported by television or newspapers, subsequently shared on social media, discussed by online commentators and eventually returned to traditional media as a major political story.

The hybrid media perspective therefore conceptualises political communication as a circular rather than linear process (Dennis, 2026). Political parties produce messages, journalists interpret them, citizens respond to them, digital platforms amplify selected content, and traditional media may subsequently report on online reactions. Political actors then respond to the emerging discourse, producing another cycle of communication. The theory is particularly valuable for examining the strategic relationship between media platforms. Presidential campaigns do not necessarily choose between traditional and digital communication (Denton et al., 2023). Instead, they may integrate both. Radio can provide extensive geographical reach; television can enhance visibility and facilitate public debate; newspapers can provide detailed political analysis; social media can facilitate rapid interaction; messaging applications can support interpersonal communication; and offline political activities can transform mediated communication into physical political participation.

Hybrid Media System Theory also highlights the importance of power. Political actors, journalists, media organisations, technology platforms and citizens possess different capacities to influence political narratives. Political campaigns may attempt to shape media agendas, journalists may challenge campaign claims, citizens may produce counter-narratives, and digital platforms may determine the visibility of particular forms of content. Electoral communication consequently emerges from interactions among multiple actors rather than from campaign organisations alone (Naranjo-Vinueza et al., 2025). For the Nigerian 2027 presidential election, the theory provides an appropriate basis for examining how traditional and digital communication systems interact in shaping political campaigns. It also allows the study to move beyond the simplistic assumption that social media automatically replaces traditional media. Instead, the focus is on how different media systems reinforce, challenge and transform one another.

- *Integration of the Three Theories*

The three theories are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Agenda-Setting Theory explains the competition to determine which political issues receive public

attention. Framing Theory explains how political actors construct meanings around those issues. Hybrid Media System Theory explains how those agendas and frames circulate across interconnected traditional and digital communication environments. The relationship can therefore be conceptualised as:

Political Issues → Agenda Setting → Issue Salience → Framing → Public Interpretation → Hybrid Media Circulation → Audience Engagement → Political Feedback.

This integrated theoretical perspective provides a strong foundation for analysing presidential campaign communication in Nigeria (Isaiah and Adams, 2024). It recognises that electoral strategy is not simply a matter of producing political messages. Campaign organisations must identify important issues, construct credible interpretations of those issues, distribute messages through interconnected media systems, monitor public reactions and continuously adapt to changing political narratives. The framework also acknowledges that citizens are increasingly active participants in political communication. They consume information, interpret political frames, comment on political issues, share content and generate new narratives. Consequently, contemporary presidential campaign communication is best understood as a dynamic process involving continuous interaction among political actors, media organisations, digital platforms and citizens (Battista, Giordano and Mangone, 2026).

Overall, the combination of Agenda-Setting Theory, Framing Theory and Hybrid Media System Theory provides a comprehensive analytical foundation for this study. Agenda-setting explains what becomes politically important, framing explains how political meaning is constructed, and the hybrid media perspective explains how political information travels and interacts across contemporary communication systems. Together, the theories provide an appropriate framework for examining how presidential campaigns can navigate Nigeria's increasingly complex political communication environment and how media dynamics may influence electoral discourse surrounding the 2027 presidential election.

➤ *Critical Evaluation of the Literature*

The literature reviewed in this study reveals three broad and competing perspectives concerning the role of digital media in contemporary political communication: the digital-optimist perspective, the digital-pessimist perspective, and the hybrid media perspective. A critical examination of these perspectives demonstrates that none, when considered in isolation, provides a complete explanation of the changing nature of political communication in Nigeria. Rather, the evidence suggests that digital political communication should be understood as a complex process in which opportunities for participation coexist with risks of manipulation, misinformation and political polarisation.

The digital-optimist perspective views digital media as important instruments for democratisation, political participation, civic engagement and voter mobilisation.

Scholars associated with this perspective emphasise the ability of social media and other digital platforms to reduce traditional communication barriers between political actors and citizens (Chami, 2025). Digital platforms enable candidates to communicate directly with voters, allow citizens to express political opinions, facilitate political discussion and provide opportunities for groups that may have limited access to conventional media (Hermawan, 2025). This perspective is particularly relevant to Nigeria's increasingly youthful population and expanding digital environment. However, its major limitation is that it can present technology as inherently democratising. Access to digital platforms does not automatically produce informed participation or democratic accountability. Online spaces can equally facilitate misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, manipulation, political harassment and polarisation. Furthermore, unequal access to reliable internet services and digital literacy means that digital political participation remains uneven across Nigerian society (Vitalis et al., 2025).

The digital-pessimist perspective provides an important corrective to technological optimism. It emphasises the negative consequences associated with digitally mediated political communication, including misinformation, disinformation, hate speech, manipulation, coordinated propaganda, political polarisation and the rapid circulation of unverified claims. Evidence from Nigerian elections demonstrates that digital platforms can become contested spaces in which competing political actors attempt to influence public perceptions and discredit opponents (Jimada, 2023). The speed and scale of digital communication can make misleading information particularly difficult to correct once it has become widely circulated. Nevertheless, digital pessimism also has limitations. An excessive focus on the harmful consequences of social media may underestimate its contribution to political education, citizen expression, candidate-voter interaction, independent journalism and mobilisation around legitimate public concerns. Digital platforms cannot therefore be understood solely as threats to democratic politics (Golumbia, 2024).

The hybrid media perspective provides a more comprehensive explanation of contemporary political communication. Rather than treating traditional and digital media as separate or competing systems, the hybrid approach recognises their increasing interaction. Political actors may use social media to generate narratives that are subsequently reported by television, radio and newspapers, while traditional media reports can simultaneously become the subject of extensive online discussion. Consequently, political information circulates continuously between media environments. Evidence from Nigerian electoral politics increasingly supports this interpretation, particularly where political actors, journalists, digital platforms, influencers and citizens collectively contribute to the construction and circulation of political narratives (Onuegbu, 2024).

The hybrid perspective is therefore particularly valuable for analysing Nigeria's 2027 presidential election because political campaigns are unlikely to operate exclusively through

either traditional or digital channels. Radio and television remain important sources of political information, while social media, websites and messaging applications provide additional channels for communication and interaction (Dunaway and Graber, 2022). The interaction between these systems creates a dynamic communication environment in which political narratives can originate in one medium, gain visibility in another and subsequently return to the original medium in an altered form.

This study therefore adopts the hybrid media perspective while incorporating Agenda-Setting Theory and Framing Theory. This combination provides a stronger conceptual explanation of contemporary Nigerian political communication because it considers both the capacity of media systems to influence the prominence of political issues and the ways political actors construct meanings around those issues. Agenda-setting explains the competition to determine which issues receive public attention, framing explains how those issues are interpreted, while the hybrid media perspective explains how political messages and narratives circulate across interconnected communication platforms. Collectively, these perspectives provide a more balanced framework for examining presidential campaign strategy, political communication and voter engagement in Nigeria's 2027 election.

➤ *Research Gap*

Although political communication and social media have received increasing scholarly attention in Nigeria, important gaps remain in the existing literature.

First, many studies focus primarily on social media without sufficiently examining the continuing strategic relevance of traditional media.

Second, several studies concentrate on individual platforms such as X, Facebook or WhatsApp rather than examining the broader media ecosystem.

Third, much of the existing research examines completed elections, particularly the 2015, 2019 and 2023 elections, rather than developing a forward-looking framework for the 2027 presidential election.

Fourth, some studies focus primarily on voter engagement without adequately examining the strategic objectives of presidential campaigns.

Fifth, there remains insufficient integration of political communication theory with practical electoral strategy.

The present study addresses these gaps by developing a qualitative and theoretically informed framework for understanding presidential electoral communication within Nigeria's hybrid media environment.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative research design. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study focuses on political meanings, communication strategies, media narratives and electoral processes rather than measuring statistical relationships between variables. The study is designed as qualitative documentary and interpretive research. The study relies on secondary qualitative data derived from peer-reviewed academic publications, books, theoretical works, official INEC publications, Nigerian electoral documents, credible newspaper reports, media reports, policy documents, civil society reports and scholarly research on Nigerian elections and digital political communication. The study does not claim to have conducted interviews, surveys or experiments.

The study employs thematic analysis. Relevant literature and documentary materials are examined for recurring themes concerning political agenda-setting, framing, candidate branding, voter mobilisation, traditional media influence, digital communication, hybrid media, misinformation, disinformation, political polarisation, youth engagement and regional communication. The identified themes are then critically compared across the literature to establish areas of convergence, contradiction and theoretical significance. The credibility of the qualitative analysis is enhanced through source triangulation. Academic literature is compared with official electoral materials, credible media reports and theoretical scholarship. This approach reduces dependence on a single type of source and enables the study to distinguish empirical evidence from analytical interpretation.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

➤ *Traditional Media Remain Strategically Relevant*

The analysis indicates that traditional media remain strategically important despite the expansion of digital platforms. Radio continues to provide significant geographic and linguistic reach, television provides national visibility, and newspapers contribute to elite agenda-setting and policy discourse. This finding challenges the argument that digital media have simply replaced traditional media. Instead, traditional media organisations have increasingly adapted to the digital environment. Many radio stations, television organisations and newspapers now maintain substantial online platforms. Traditional media also continue to provide content that is subsequently circulated through digital networks. Consequently, their influence extends beyond their original broadcast or print audiences.

Digital media have significantly reduced political candidates' dependence on traditional media gatekeepers. Candidates can publish speeches, policy statements, videos, photographs and responses to criticism directly to citizens. This increases communication speed and gives candidates greater control over message presentation. However, direct communication also creates challenges because candidates can bypass independent journalistic scrutiny. Digital communication can therefore increase transparency while

simultaneously reducing opportunities for external verification.

The most significant finding of the study is that traditional and digital media increasingly operate as interconnected systems. Research on Nigerian political communication demonstrates interaction between social media, political actors and traditional journalism. Political content originating on social media can influence newspaper coverage, while newspaper stories can become the basis for social-media debates. The implication is that political campaigns should not maintain isolated traditional-media and social-media communication structures. Instead, communication should be integrated across platforms.

Digital platforms provide opportunities to transform passive audiences into active campaign participants. Citizens can share campaign messages, organise events, recruit supporters, create political content, defend candidates and challenge opponents. This is particularly significant among younger voters. However, successful political mobilisation still requires offline structures. Digital communication cannot by itself replace ward-level political organisation, community networks and election-day mobilisation.

The literature demonstrates that misinformation and disinformation can undermine electoral communication and public trust. False political claims can move rapidly through social networks and become difficult to correct. The danger is particularly serious where political identity is strong because citizens may be more willing to accept information that confirms their existing political beliefs. Misinformation should therefore be understood not simply as a communication problem but as a democratic governance challenge.

The Nigerian media environment operates within a society characterised by ethnic, religious and regional diversity. Research on social-media communication during Nigerian elections demonstrates how political rhetoric can intensify identity-based divisions. The 2027 presidential campaign consequently faces an important communication challenge. Political actors must mobilise diverse communities while avoiding communication that reinforces hostility and social fragmentation.

➤ *Implications for Presidential Electoral Strategy*

The findings suggest that a successful presidential campaign in Nigeria's 2027 election requires an integrated communication architecture capable of connecting political messaging, media platforms, grassroots engagement and public discourse into a coherent strategic system. In an increasingly fragmented information environment, campaign communication can no longer depend exclusively on large rallies, television advertisements or isolated social media activities. Rather, effective political communication requires the coordinated management of multiple channels through which citizens receive, interpret, discuss and evaluate political information.

The first requirement is message architecture. A presidential campaign should develop a clear and coherent central narrative that explains the major problems confronting Nigeria, identifies their underlying causes, proposes credible and practical solutions, and establishes why the candidate possesses the competence, experience and integrity required to implement those solutions. The central narrative should provide an overarching framework within which specific policy issues can be communicated. Economic reform, employment, insecurity, education, healthcare, infrastructure, energy, agriculture and institutional reform should therefore not be presented as disconnected campaign promises. Instead, they should be integrated into a broader governing vision that enables voters to understand the relationship between individual policies and the candidate's overall political programme. Consistency in message architecture is particularly important because contradictory statements from candidates, spokespersons or campaign surrogates can weaken credibility and create opportunities for political opponents to question the coherence of the campaign.

The second requirement is media integration. Contemporary presidential campaigns should connect traditional and digital communication channels rather than treating each platform as an independent communication system. Radio, television, newspapers, campaign websites, social media platforms, messaging applications, public meetings and grassroots mobilisation should operate within an integrated communication framework. While the core political message should remain consistent, the format should be adapted to the characteristics of each medium. Radio may be particularly useful for reaching audiences with limited internet access, television can facilitate candidate visibility and policy presentation, while social media can support rapid interaction and distribution of multimedia content. Offline mobilisation remains important because digital visibility does not necessarily translate automatically into electoral participation.

The third requirement is localisation. Nigeria's political environment is characterised by considerable linguistic, cultural, socioeconomic and geographical diversity. Consequently, national campaign messages should be adapted to different regional and community contexts without compromising the fundamental principles and policy commitments of the campaign. Localisation may involve the use of appropriate languages, culturally familiar examples and locally relevant explanations of national policies. However, adaptation should not become a mechanism for contradictory promises or divisive identity-based appeals. The central political narrative should remain nationally coherent while allowing local communities to understand how proposed policies relate to their specific circumstances.

The fourth requirement is a rapid but evidence-based response. Presidential campaigns operate within an environment where political narratives can change within minutes. Campaign organisations therefore require mechanisms for monitoring emerging issues, public concerns, misinformation and allegations concerning candidates. However, speed should not replace accuracy. Responses

should be based on verified information, credible evidence and appropriate contextual analysis. Unverified claims, inflammatory reactions and speculative counterattacks may generate short-term visibility but can ultimately damage campaign credibility. A professional campaign should therefore combine rapid monitoring with internal verification procedures before information is released publicly.

Overall, an integrated communication architecture should transform campaign communication from a collection of disconnected promotional activities into a coordinated system of political information, public engagement and accountability. Its effectiveness should ultimately be measured not merely by media visibility or the volume of online content generated, but by the extent to which citizens receive credible information, understand competing policy alternatives and can make informed electoral choices. In this sense, strategic communication becomes both an instrument of electoral competition and an important component of democratic political accountability.

➤ *Proposed Integrated Political Communication Model*

The study proposes the Integrated Hybrid Electoral Communication Model (IHECM), which conceptualises presidential political communication as a continuous, adaptive and interconnected process linking political intelligence, message development, hybrid media distribution, audience engagement, narrative management and offline mobilisation. The model is based on the premise that contemporary electoral communication cannot be effectively understood through either traditional or digital media in isolation. Instead, presidential campaigns operate within a hybrid communication environment in which information moves continuously between broadcast media, digital platforms, interpersonal networks and physical political spaces. The effectiveness of a campaign therefore depends on its capacity to integrate these communication channels into a coherent strategic system while maintaining accuracy, consistency and democratic responsibility.

The process begins with political intelligence. Campaign organisations require systematic understanding of citizens' concerns, socioeconomic conditions, demographic characteristics, media consumption patterns, emerging political issues and competing political narratives. Political intelligence should be generated through legitimate public-opinion research, policy analysis, media monitoring, stakeholder consultations and examination of publicly available information. Its purpose is not simply to identify electoral preferences but to understand the issues that shape political discourse and citizens' evaluations of competing political alternatives. Effective political intelligence consequently provides the evidence base for subsequent campaign communication and enables campaign organisations to respond to changing political circumstances.

The second stage involves message development. Based on the intelligence generated, campaigns should formulate a coherent national political narrative, specific policy messages, candidate identity and appropriate regional adaptations. The national narrative should provide an overarching explanation of the candidate's governing vision, while individual policy messages should demonstrate how that vision would address concrete national challenges. Regional adaptation is particularly important in a heterogeneous country such as Nigeria, where political concerns and communication preferences may differ across communities. Nevertheless, localisation should preserve consistency in the fundamental policy commitments and avoid contradictory messages.

The third stage involves multi-platform distribution. Political messages should be disseminated through an integrated combination of radio, television, newspapers, campaign websites, social media platforms, messaging applications, public meetings and community networks. Each medium performs a different communication function. Traditional media can provide broad public reach and agenda-setting capacity, while digital platforms facilitate rapid interaction, multimedia communication and direct engagement. Offline channels remain essential for communities with limited digital access and for converting political communication into meaningful civic participation.

The fourth stage is audience engagement. Communication should not be conceived as a one-way transmission of information from candidates to citizens. Campaign organisations should monitor public reactions, questions, comments, discussions, concerns and emerging narratives. Engagement mechanisms can provide valuable feedback regarding whether political messages are understood and how citizens interpret campaign proposals. This stage consequently transforms citizens from passive recipients of campaign communication into active participants in political discourse.

The fifth stage is narrative management. Campaign organisations must continuously identify and respond to misinformation, political attacks, controversies and competing political frames. However, effective narrative management should be evidence-based and ethically grounded. Verification should precede publication, while disagreements should be addressed through factual clarification and substantive argument rather than inflammatory rhetoric or deliberate manipulation.

The final stage is offline mobilisation. Digital communication should ultimately connect with real-world democratic participation through voter education, volunteer participation, community engagement, peaceful political activities and lawful election-day participation. Digital visibility alone does not constitute electoral effectiveness; its democratic value increases when it facilitates informed participation.

- *The Model Can Therefore be Expressed as:*

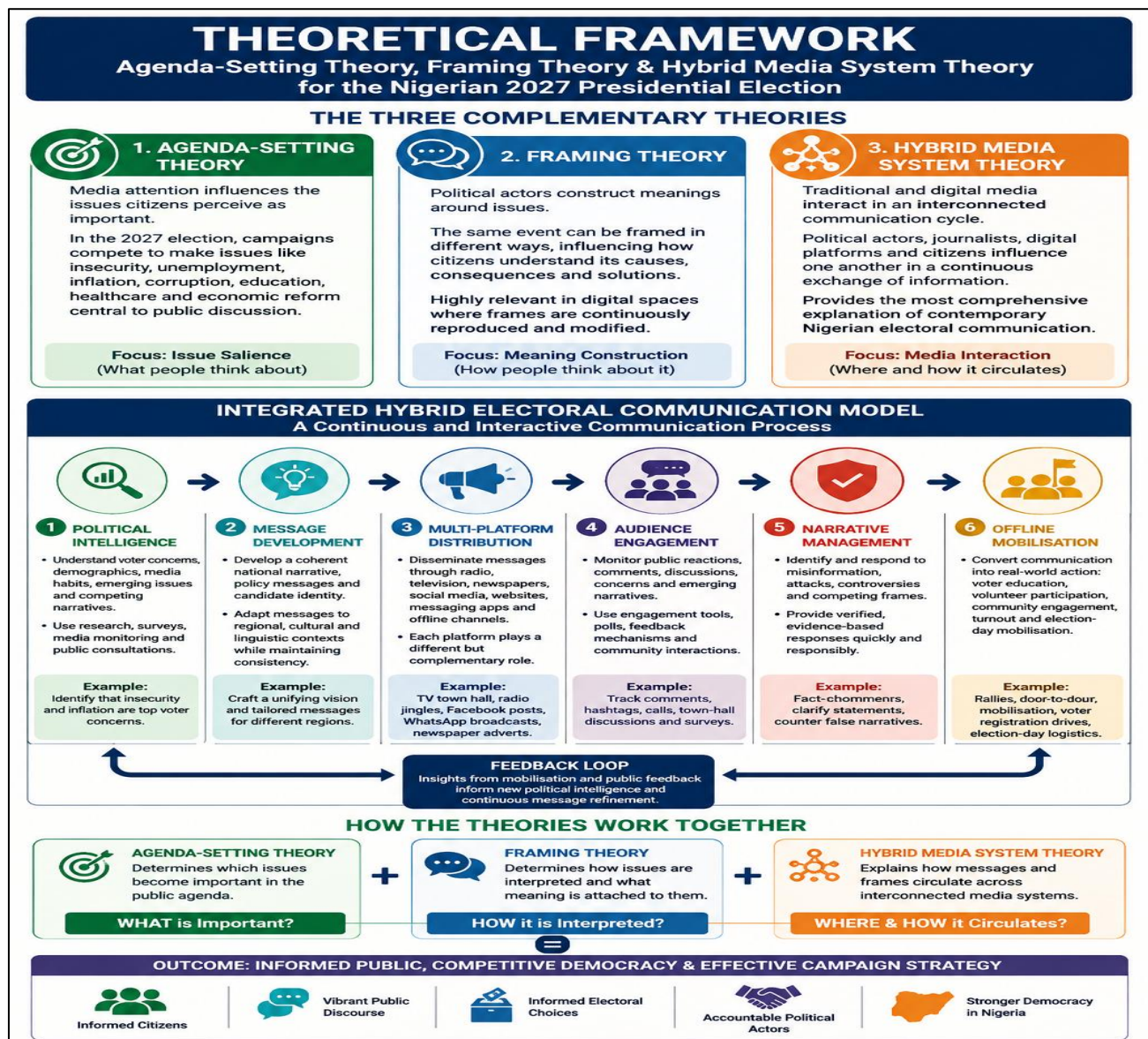


Fig 1 Theoretical Framework

The circular nature of the model is significant. Offline engagement generates new information and public feedback, which subsequently informs political intelligence and message refinement. The model therefore presents electoral communication as a continuous feedback system rather than a linear campaign process. Its effectiveness depends on the integration of information, communication, engagement and mobilisation while maintaining accuracy, inclusiveness, legal compliance and respect for democratic choice.

➤ *Proposed CPOCI Framework for Presidential Campaign Strategy*

This study proposes the Credibility–Policy–Organisation–Communication–Integrity (CPOCI) Framework. The framework is designed to explain how presidential campaigns can combine political legitimacy, policy relevance, organisational capacity, strategic communication and lawful conduct. It treats electoral

competitiveness as the product of mutually reinforcing components rather than as the result of financial expenditure, media visibility or candidate popularity alone.

• *C — Credibility*

Credibility constitutes the foundation of the framework. A candidate and political party must establish competence, integrity, reliability and trustworthiness before citizens can be expected to accept their policy proposals. Credibility is not created solely through advertising. It develops through the relationship between a candidate's public record, personal conduct, policy consistency, campaign behaviour and responses to public scrutiny. A credible campaign should disclose relevant information about the candidate's professional and political background, explain previous policy decisions, respond transparently to controversies and avoid making promises that cannot reasonably be implemented. Credibility also requires consistency between the candidate's

public statements and the conduct of party officials and supporters. Where campaign organisations promote democratic values but tolerate violence, hate speech or misinformation, their credibility is weakened.

- *P — Policy*

Policy represents the substantive content of the campaign. A presidential campaign should identify major national problems and present realistic, measurable and properly prioritised solutions. Policy proposals should explain the problem being addressed, the institutional responsibilities involved, the expected outcomes, the implementation timetable and the sources of financing. The policy component should also reflect Nigeria's diversity. National programmes must consider regional inequalities, urban and rural differences, youth unemployment, gender disparities, insecurity, infrastructure deficits and the varying capacities of state and local institutions. Policy communication should be accessible to citizens without sacrificing analytical quality. A campaign that communicates clear policy choices enables voters to compare alternatives and strengthens democratic accountability.

- *O — Organisation*

Organisation refers to the institutional capacity required to translate political support into lawful electoral participation. Presidential campaigns must coordinate national, zonal, state, local government, ward and polling-unit structures. These structures should have clearly defined responsibilities relating to voter education, community engagement, volunteer coordination, logistics, communication, legal compliance and election-day monitoring. Organisation also includes internal decision-making. Campaigns require systems for collecting information, resolving disputes, managing resources, training representatives and responding to emerging political developments. Digital platforms may improve coordination, but they cannot replace trusted local networks and physical structures, particularly in areas with limited connectivity.

- *C — Communication*

Communication connects the campaign's credibility, policy and organisation to the electorate. Effective communication should be clear, consistent, evidence-based and adaptable to different audiences and media platforms. Traditional media, social media, community meetings, public debates, policy documents and interpersonal networks should reinforce rather than contradict one another. Communication must also be interactive. Citizens increasingly comment on, reinterpret and redistribute political messages. Campaigns should therefore monitor public concerns, respond to legitimate questions and correct false information without suppressing criticism. The objective should be informed persuasion rather than manipulation.

- *I — Integrity*

Integrity provides the ethical and legal boundary within which all campaign activities must operate. It includes compliance with electoral legislation, transparent campaign finance, peaceful conduct, respect for privacy, responsible use of technology, protection of vulnerable participants and

acceptance of legitimate electoral procedures. Integrity is not merely a legal requirement; it is also a source of democratic legitimacy. Campaigns that respect electoral rules are more likely to build public confidence and reduce post-election conflict. Integrity should therefore be incorporated into campaign planning from the beginning rather than treated as an issue that arises only after polling.

The framework is sequential in presentation but interactive in practice. Credibility influences the reception of policy; policy gives communication substantive meaning; organisation enables implementation; communication mobilises citizens; and integrity protects the legitimacy of the entire process. Feedback also moves in the opposite direction. Public reactions can compel campaigns to revise policy, communication and organisational priorities, while organisational failures can damage credibility. The framework emphasises that no single campaign component is sufficient. Strong communication without credible policy may produce visibility without trust. Strong organisation without integrity may generate mobilisation without democratic legitimacy. Similarly, credible policy without organisational capacity may fail to translate public support into effective electoral participation. The CPOCI Framework therefore provides an integrated basis for evaluating whether a presidential campaign is not only electorally competitive but also capable of contributing to democratic development.

➤ *Discussions*

The analysis demonstrates that presidential campaign strategy in Nigeria is undergoing a transition from conventional mass mobilisation toward increasingly integrated political management. This transition does not mean that rallies, party structures, interpersonal networks or traditional media have become irrelevant. Rather, it indicates that these established forms of political organisation now operate alongside digital communication, data-informed research, professional campaign management and technology-assisted electoral administration. The contemporary campaign is therefore best understood as a hybrid political institution that combines physical and digital forms of engagement.

First, policy credibility is becoming more important because citizens are exposed to competing information from multiple sources. Campaigns can no longer depend entirely on rallies, slogans and symbolic political messaging. Voters may compare speeches, manifestos, interviews, online discussions, fact-checking reports and records of previous performance. This creates both an opportunity and a challenge for political actors. Candidates who present coherent and realistic policy alternatives may distinguish themselves from competitors, but those who make exaggerated promises or contradict their previous positions may face rapid public scrutiny. Policy communication must therefore be continuous, accessible and supported by evidence.

Second, organisation remains indispensable. Digital visibility cannot substitute for institutional structures capable of facilitating lawful engagement across Nigeria's diverse political and geographical environment. Online popularity

may generate attention, but electoral participation still depends on local networks, voter education, trained party representatives, transportation planning, communication channels and election-day coordination. The most effective campaigns are likely to combine national strategic direction with local knowledge. This requires clear reporting systems, professional management and mechanisms for resolving internal disagreements.

Third, communication has become multidirectional. Citizens no longer merely receive campaign messages; they produce, remix and redistribute political content. A statement made by a candidate can be transformed into a video clip, meme, commentary or counter-narrative within minutes. Journalists, influencers, community leaders and ordinary users can all affect the visibility and interpretation of political messages. Consequently, campaign organisations must participate in continuous public communication while maintaining mechanisms for factual verification. They must also recognise that criticism and disagreement are normal features of democratic communication and should not automatically be treated as hostile manipulation.

Fourth, electoral law has become increasingly important to campaign strategy. The enactment of the Electoral Act 2026 means that campaign organisations must monitor regulatory requirements continuously. INEC itself has emphasised the need to align political-party regulations with the new legal framework. This requires parties to establish legal and compliance units capable of interpreting campaign periods, finance rules, candidate requirements, advertising restrictions, security arrangements and election-day procedures. Legal compliance should be integrated into campaign planning rather than addressed only after violations occur.

Fifth, campaign finance remains a major determinant of political competitiveness, but financial resources should not be confused with democratic effectiveness. Large expenditures may increase visibility, yet they can also deepen inequality, encourage patronage and create public suspicion. Transparent financial management is therefore essential. Campaigns should document sources of funds, monitor expenditure, conduct internal audits and ensure that financial practices comply with statutory requirements. Public confidence is likely to improve when citizens can distinguish legitimate political fundraising from illicit influence.

Sixth, coalition building requires more than the accumulation of political elites. Broad alliances can improve national reach, but coalitions based solely on office-sharing or short-term calculations may be unstable. Sustainable coalitions should be supported by shared policy objectives, transparent agreements and mechanisms for representing diverse interests. Youth groups, women's organisations, professional associations, labour, business communities, civil society actors and local leaders should be treated as participants in political dialogue rather than merely as instruments of mobilisation.

Finally, democratic legitimacy must be treated as a strategic outcome in its own right. A presidential campaign should not measure success exclusively through electoral victory. The quality of political competition, citizen participation, peaceful conduct, accurate information, respect for electoral institutions and public confidence in the electoral process are also important democratic outcomes. A campaign that wins through intimidation, misinformation or abuse of public resources may achieve office while weakening the legitimacy of the political system.

The CPOCI Framework is useful because it brings these dimensions together. It demonstrates that credibility, policy, organisation, communication and integrity are interdependent. A weakness in one component can undermine the others. For example, credible policy may fail without organisation, while effective communication may become harmful when separated from integrity. The framework therefore supports a broader understanding of campaign effectiveness in which electoral competitiveness and democratic responsibility are mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory objectives.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Political communication is likely to remain one of the most important components of electoral competition in Nigeria's 2027 presidential election. The transformation of the media environment has not eliminated traditional media. Instead, it has produced a hybrid communication system in which radio, television and newspapers interact continuously with social media, online news platforms and messaging applications. Traditional media continue to provide broad reach, institutional credibility and agenda-setting influence. Digital media provide immediacy, interactivity, audience segmentation and mobilisation opportunities. The strategic implication is therefore clear. Presidential campaigns should not approach the 2027 election by asking whether traditional or digital media are more important. Instead, they should determine how the strengths of both systems can be integrated to create credible, persuasive, inclusive and locally responsive political communication.

The literature also demonstrates that media power is not inherently democratic. Digital communication can expand participation while simultaneously facilitating misinformation, hate speech, polarisation and political manipulation. The quality of electoral communication will therefore depend not only on technological sophistication but also on credibility, ethics, professionalism and political responsibility. An effective 2027 presidential communication strategy should combine credible information, compelling political narratives, strategic media integration, audience engagement, rapid fact-checking, local communication and offline mobilisation. The ultimate objective should not simply be maximum media visibility but meaningful democratic communication capable of helping citizens understand competing political choices and participate effectively in the electoral process.

- Political parties and presidential campaigns should establish integrated communication departments capable of

coordinating traditional and digital media. Campaigns should avoid contradictory messages across platforms and should develop evidence-based communication strategies rather than relying exclusively on personality-driven political messaging.

- Presidential candidates should communicate clear and measurable policy commitments. Campaign communication should move beyond slogans and provide voters with understandable explanations of proposed policies, implementation mechanisms and expected outcomes.
- Political actors should voluntarily commit to ethical digital campaigning by avoiding fabricated information, manipulated media, hate speech, ethnic incitement, religious provocation, impersonation and deliberate disinformation. Ethical communication should become an important component of political credibility.
- Campaign organisations should develop rapid fact-checking and verification mechanisms. However, fact-checking should remain evidence-based and should not be used to suppress legitimate political criticism or opposing viewpoints.
- Traditional media organisations should strengthen professional verification, particularly when reporting information originating from social media. Journalists should avoid allowing viral online claims to determine news agendas without adequate verification.
- INEC should strengthen public communication and voter education through both traditional and digital channels. Official electoral information should be communicated rapidly and consistently enough to compete effectively with misinformation and unofficial political narratives.
- Civil society organisations should strengthen media-literacy programmes capable of helping citizens identify false political information, manipulated content and misleading political claims. Citizens should be encouraged to evaluate political information before sharing it.
- Digital technology platforms should improve transparency concerning political advertising and coordinated manipulation while protecting legitimate political expression. Greater transparency concerning sponsored political content would assist citizens in distinguishing political advertising from independent political commentary.

Finally, political campaigns should recognise young Nigerians as substantive political participants rather than simply digital audiences. Digital engagement should be connected to meaningful policy discussions, voter education, community participation and democratic accountability.

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