Students' Perception of Political Communication as an Academic Discipline: A Survey of Mass Communication Students of the Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri

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Abstract

This study soughts to provide knowledge and contribution in closing the knowledge gap raised by the perception of students on political communication as an academic course of study. Is political communication worth being a course of study in Mass Communication department? If No, why not? This prompted the researchers to the study. This study was anchored on Experiential Learning theory and social learning theory.This study to centred on students of Mass Communications in Southeast Nigeria, but findings had it that other Higher Institutions with University of Nigeria Nsukka do not teach nor offer this course as at the time of the research and such limited the study to Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri. So, the population of this study comprised final year students of mass communication of Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri. We used the Wimmer and Dominick sample size calculator to extract the sample size. This study has three research objectives that guided the study and such includes;Find out the perceptions of Nigerian Students on political communication as an academic discipline.Ascertain the Willingnesss of Nigerian students to study political communication as an academic course.Examine the performance of Nigerian Students on political communication as an academic discipline.

Keywords: Students' perception , political communication, communication, Academic discipline

Introduction

The subject of political communication is one of recent courses that have gained intromission in the academic discipline of mass communication not only in higher institution in Imo State, but across the

nation. The course, being political centric and academic centric has raised questions in why should political communication be taught in a department like mass communication that is media centric. And another group of students who has been observed have kept an argument that political communication should be taught in mass communication department which the views and ideology that it has being proven that political and media are of the coin and cannot be separated. Whether political communication is politics-centric or academic centric is an interesting question. The researcher however will contribute to the body and closing of knowledge gap between the argument of political communication is academic centric, politics centric, media centric.

The best approach to proffer solutions or answers to the question bordering on the place of political communication is to have a study on the students that are offering political communication as an academic course, in other to know their perceptions and thoughts on P.C in the academic circle. Graber & Smith (2004).

In their views, strongly positthat P.C would be great benefit from disciplinary view, reflections ideology, discussion. In ways of clarification and understanding, there is need to define the concept political communication.

According to Smith (2005) in Paul (2014) posited an expanded sense as regards the area: "the field of political communication encompasses the construction, sending, receiving and processing of messages that potentially have a significant direct or indirect impact on politics. The message senders or message receivers may be politicians, journalists, members of interest group, or private, unorganized citizens. The key concept is that the message has a significant political effect on the thinking, beliefs and behaviors of individuals, groups, institutions and whole societies and the environments in which they exist." (Graber 1993, p.305) in Paul (2014 p.12).

Retrieval from www.masters in communication.com/fags/what- is-political-communication stated that political communication, concern itself with the establishment and transfer of ideas and opinions between citizens, public officials, political institutions, and related entities, such as the media. In addition, political communication is a field of academic interest and research in academia scholars in this area, of academic interest tends to study the relationship between its academic values and how messages of political communication are transmitted and effect of how the message are received and interpreted by the students and also the relevance of the message content.

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed, that political communication has been perceived as a political weapon of disseminating information and accessing feedbacks on some rather than being an academic discipline or course. And this perception were observed through an ethrographic communication between the researchers and the students. In order to have an effective contributions to the body of knowledge the researchers choose to study the higher institutions in Imo State that offers political communication and this made way for the study to be anchored on mass communication final years students of selected institutions. Final year students were selected because they course, is a final year course.

Objectives

The general objective of this study is to examine Imo State final year students perception of political communication as an academic discipline. The specific objectives were to:

1. Find out the perceptions of Nigerian Students on political communication as an academic discipline.
2. Ascertain the Willingnesss of Nigerian students to study political communication as an academic course.

3. Examine the performance of Nigerian Students on political communication as an academic discipline.

An overview of political communication as an academic course of study.

According to central European university, the course political communication offers to students an overview of the main theories, concepts and empirical approaches to the subject of political communication in democratic nations. The course will review main theoretical and empirical studies covering issues such as the modalities of political campaign and communication, the role of the media in these processes and campaign/media effects on public opinion. They key factors to be explored and critically discussed are mediatization of politics, media systems, freedom and pluralism, journalist professionalization and information quality, campaign modernization, campaign professionalization, permanent campaigning, persuasion, conversion, mobilization, learning effects, agenda setting, priming, framing and others. The course ends with a discussion of the main challenges to political communication in the 21st century.

Political Communication Learning objectives

By the end of the course students are expected to have:

1. A thorough knowledge of the scientific literature on political communication.
2. The ability to assess, balance and contrast the weakness and strengths of different positions in classic and contemporary debates in the field.
3. An understanding of the research skills necessary to the analysis of the nature and effects of political communication in contemporary democracies.

The academic centric of political communication will deepen students understanding of political communication as a political tool/weapon. It also thrives to create more impact and helps to building understanding of the political content of mass media and craves to make deep the academic and practical understanding of the variables and factors to be considered in production of political news and information.

The academic discipline of political communication examines the impact of media coverage of politics on the society and makes merit the synergy and interaction between media systems and political systems including government media policy, censorship, regulation and ownership.

The students will have an enhanced knowledge with the research techniques and study skills necessary to carry out academic research.

The course has been of great benefit and observed as satisfactory by those interested in an advanced academic study of political communication or a career in political communication, as well as those already working in political communication, political parties, government agencies, statutory & voluntary organizations and the mass media. (Alozie, 2015).

Alozie (2017) posited that communication plays a significant role in politics and in the process of firming political opinion. It is the basic medium through which political groups are formed and seek to influence public policy. He also maintained that communication is the main catalytic agent by which the social and psychological characteristics of men are applied to the dynamic process of political conflict.

Elements of political communication

These are variables or elements, according to Alozie 2017 that play pivotal roles in determining the place of political communication in the classroom and society.

These elements will be separately examined, to achieve conceptual and contextual clarity. They are as follows;

a. The communicator: these are the political actors and groups that tend to influence government views and policies and some that have no such clear intentions are considered as political communicators. The foremost example of such communicators in the 21st century democratic states are political parties, pressure groups.
b. The message, propaganda & education.
Every communication in this context, has a definite message which tends to influence or convince others to adopt opinion favorable and good to the communication. Several works with academic literatures on communication had concentrated on this particular aspect and the distinction between propaganda and education has been greatly emphasized.
c. Transmitter, receiver & responses
The aim of every communication is to reach the anticipated audience and also to ensure adequate feedback. Through feedback in political communication, a times, encounters hinderances or decay and this, could be attributed to the nature of the media of political communication which enables decay feedback. Through, this is not applicable in all settings of political communication.

Media f Poltical Communication

The media of political communication is classified into two. And the classifications were made possible considering the nature of political communication messages, which can appear in two noted forms. And these two noted forms gave rise to the classification as this;

Mass media and the physical/ face to fact communication. This is so, because some of the political communication messages, are heard on the radio, television, newspapers, magazines etc while some would initiate the physical presence and direct contact between communicators and receivers. Here responses is immediate unlike the mass media in most cases.

Empirical Review

The researchers observed a low level of research works relating to the topic and such created openings for scarcity of materials suitable for this review. Nevertheless, the researchers had to ensure that the context empirical review will be properly justified. So the researchers based on scarcity of previous research works adopted works similar to the topic under investigation.

Krityer and Sudithinee (2007) in their study of political communication factors affecting university students. Political participation, adopted the quantitative method to carry out survey on students opinions. Their study exposed that the factors affecting knowledge building of student in political communication in politics were family, university and classmates. Students political decision making was based on their role models.

Theoretical Framework.

Leraning as stressed by Heinich, Molenda and Russel (1982, p.60) emphasized that learning is a universal term for relatively lasting transformation caused directly by notable factor known as knowledge. On this, the study will be anchored two theories: experirncial Learning Theory and Social learning theory.

Experiential Learning Theory

Experiential Learning Theory tends to elucidate on the synergy between experience and learner's skill acquisition. The main framework of the theory lay its insistence that learning is more intense and If the students are directly involved; and that knowledge is gained from direct experience. David Kolb duties on experiential learning is anchored on the words of Aristotle that *"for the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them , implying that experience gives meaning to words and that through experience we become eloquent or skillfull at what we do."* John Dewey (1928) in Bernice, Omowale, Micheal, Ifeoma (2018) and confirmed in Beaudine and Quick (2014) layedd emphasis that there must be a hook/synergy between experience and education . in Beaudine and Quick (2014) Dewey expressess that there is to be a having which is the contact with the events of Life and knowing which is the interpretation of the events. A learning experiences does not just happen; it is a planned event with meaning and experiential learning the meaning is reaffirmed by the learners. Saunders (1992) elaborator the need the learner need to Interact with the phenomeno and publics outside the classroom states that "meaning is created in the mind of the students as a result of the students sensory interaction with their world. Kolb (1984) opined that knowledge is continuously assimilated through both personal and environmental experiences. He stated that in order to gain genuine knowledge from an experience, the following abilities are required:

➢ The learner must be Willing to be actively involved in the experience
➢ The learner must be able to reflect on the experience
➢ The learner must possess and use analytical skills to conceptualize the experience; and
➢ The learner must possess decision making and problem solving skills in order to use the new idea garnered in the teaching.

Driscoll, (1994,p.8,9) defined learning as "A persisting change in human performance or performance potential as a result of the learner's interaction with the environment". In support of this view, Learning is also elucidated by Weinstein & Mayer (1986,p.1040) as "The relatively permanent change in a person's knowledge or behavior due to experience" On this point, Shuell (1986,p.412) clarified learning as "An enduring change in behavior, or in the capacity to behave in a given fashion, which results from practice or other forms of experience" Learning theories project the environment as the major force in development. (Hoffman,

1993). This encapsulates that the academic environment where students are thought political communication has ways of influencing the students mindsets and understanding of the concept and demands of political communication.

Scholars and psychologist researchers have classified learning theories as Behaviorism, Social Learning Theory (SLT) and Social Cognitive Learning Theory (SCLT) Social Cognitive theory has influenced many areas of inquiry: education, health sciences, social policy and psychotherapy among others.

Social Learning Theory (SLT)

Social learning theory has been severally cited as an important factor of sustainable natural resource management and an agent of promotion of desirable behavioural change. (Muro & Jeffrey 2008). This theory is anchored or built on the perception or what could be called that that we learn from our interactions and discussions with others in a social context. Separately, by observing the behaviors of others, people develop similar behaviors. After observing the behavior of others, people assimilate and imitate that behavior, especially if their observational experiences are positive ones or include rewards related to the observed behavior. According to Bandura, imitation involves the actual reproduction of observed motor activities. (Bandura 1977).

SLT has become acceptably the most influential theory of learning and development. It is rooted in many of the basic concepts of traditional learning theory. This theory has over the time considered a link between behaviorist learning theories and cognitive learning theories because it has attention, memory, and motivation as components. (Muro & Jeffrey 2008). However, on this regards, Bandura explains that direct reinforcement could not account for all types of learning. For that reason, in his theory he added a social element, arguing that people can learn new information and behaviors by watching other people. According to the elements of this theory there are three general principles for learning from each other.

Principles of SLT

The principles of social learning are perceived to operate in the same way throughout life. Observational learning may take place at any age. Insofar as exposure to new influential, powerful models who control resources may occur at life stage, new learning through the modeling process is always possible. (Newman B.M. & P.R, 2007). SLT posits that people learn from one another, via: Observation; Imitation; and Modeling

Based on these general principles, learning can occur without a change in behavior. In other words, behaviorists say that learning has to be represented by a permanent change in behavior; while in contrast social learning theorists say that because people can learn through observation alone, their learning may not necessarily be shown in their performance. (Bandura, 1965). Learning may or may not result in a behavior change. (Bandura, 2006b).Attention is influenced by the expectation of reinforcement.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey research method to generate the required data needed for the study. This is because survey research is an essential method of soliciting information directly from respondents (Nwamara & Etumnu, 2022). The population of the study comprises final year Students of Mass Communication Department in Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri, Imo State University Owerri. The population as given by the institutionswas 390 students. Out of the 390 questionnaire shared among the Students of Department of Mass Communication, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, the researchers were left with 348 copies questionnaire that formed the sample size for this study.

The researchers adopted the census principle that allowed the population to be study in its entirety (Nkwam-Uwaoma, Etumnu & Okoro, 2020). This was possible, because of the concise number study and proximity of the variables to the researchers.The measuring instrument used in gathering information for this study was questionnaire. The questionnaire had close-ended questions. The close –ended questions were used to make study easier for the researchers by making the responses measurable.

The researchers adopted four point likert scale in analysing and presenting the data The researchers went further to conduct the validity of the instrument by using face validity where the researchers gave the instrument to experts in the field of communication for corrections. Mean analysis was usd for data analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of 390 distributed copies of questionnaire, 348 were retrieved and found useful for the analysis.

Table 1: Find out the perceptions of Nigerian Students on political communication as an academic discipline   e..

Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	M	DECISION RULE

	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	Decision Rule
Political communication is relevant in ascertaining knowledge for politics	180 52%	84 24%	36 10%	48 14%	348 100%	3.1	Accept
Political communication is a strategy to grow in Politics	72 21%	24 7%	120 34%	132 38%	348 100%	2.1	Reject
Knowledge got from political communicationwill broaden my understanding on political Communication as an academic course of study	120 34%	204 57%	24 7%	-	348 100%	3.2	Accept
You have a positive perception on political communication	216 62%	108 31%	24 7%	-	348 100%	3.6	Accept
Students who study political communication do well in school politics	72 21%	168 48%	96 28%	12 3%	348 100%	2.9	Accept
Political communication should be an academic course in Nigerian institutions with special regards to mass communication.	144 41.4%	84 24.1%	84 24.1%	36 10.4%	348 100%	3.0	Accept
Political communication can increase students sense of political participation.	192 55.2%	108 31.2%	36 10.3%	12 3.5%	348 100%	3.4	Accept
Political communication should be made mandatory for mass communication students.	132 38%	120 34.5%	36 10.3%	60 17.2%	348 100%	2.9	Accept
Political communication is necessary for political career advancement	168 47.3%	132 39%	12 3.4%	36 10.3%	348 100%	3.2	Accept
The study of political communication bridges the gap between academics and politics.	168 48%	96 28%	24 7%	60 17%	348 100%	3.1	Accept

Source: field survey, 2021

Grand mean for table one is **3.05** this showed that the table is accepted as it's mean exceeds 2.5 which is the decision rule acceptance level.

Table 2: Find out the performance of students on political communication as academic course.

Items	SA	A	D	SD	N	Mean	Decision Rule
Political communication improves my communication skills and knowledge.	216 62%	96 28%	12 3%	24 7%	348 100%	3.6	Accept
Political communication is dual phased course as it is observed to be academic centric and politics centric	108 31%	180 52%	48 14%	12 3%	348 100%	3.1	Accept
I have an improved grade points in political communication.	72	132	84	60	348 100%	2.6	Accept

Political communication broadened my knowledge on the concept as a course.	168	144	12	24	348 100%	3.3	Accept
Poltical communication helps me to understand the synergy between the concepts of communication and politics.	48	168	84	48	348 100%	2.6	Accept
Political communication did not improve me in any academic aspect.	36 10%	24 7%	60 17%	228 66%	348 100%	1.6	Reject
Learning political communication made me to internalise the roles of political communication in the society.	120 34%	192 55%	12 3%	24 7%	348 100%	3.1	Accept
Political communication exposed me to practical skills in politics	228	108	0	12	348 100%	3.6	Accept
Political communication enhanced my political social relationship	108	192	24	24	348 100%	3.1	Accept
Political communication gives me motivation to practice politics while in school.	168 48%	144 41%	0 0%	30 11%	348 100%	3.3	Accept

Source: Field survey 2021

Grand mean for table two is **2.99** this is an indication that the table is accepted as it's mean exceeds 2.5 which is the decision rule acceptance leve

Table 3: Willingnesss of Nigerian students to study political communication as an academic course.

You developed Interest in the study of Political Communication	SA	A	D	SD	N	M	Decision Rule
	144 41%	168 48%	24 7%	12 4%	348 100%	3.3	Accept
You had an enhanced understanding of the sub topics and concepts in Political Communication	96 28%	84 24%	84 24%	84 24%	348 100%	2.6	Accept
Some students display positive process of learning Political Communication.	96 28%	216 61%	12 7%	24 4%	348 100%	3.1	Accept
You will rate Political Communication high because of its impact on students	156	144	24	24	348 100%	3.2	Accept
You have an established zeal to study political communication	204	108	12	24	348 100%	3.4	Accept
You will recommend Political Communication to other Institution's mass communication department.	264	48	24	12	348 100%	3.6	Accept
You wasted your time in studying political Communication	-	-	144	204	348 100%	1.4	Reject

Source: field survey, 2021

Grand mean for table two is **2.9.** this is an indication that the table is accepted as it's Mean exceeds 2.5which is the decision rule acceptance level.

Results

Find out the perceptions of Nigerian Students on political communication as an academic discipline.

From table 1: Mass communication students in Federal Polytechnic Nekede,Owerri stated that Political communication is relevant in ascertaining knowledge for politics. Majority (SA+A=76%, N =264) while majority of (SD+D=72%, n=252) stated that Political Communication is not a strategy of growth in Politics, as majority of (SA+A=81%, n=324) claimed that political communication as an academic course, broadened their understanding of political communication meanwhile majority of (SA+A=72.5%, n= 252) maintained that political communication has increased their sense of political participation.while (SA+A=76% n= 264)

Find out the performance of students on political communication as academic course.

Political communication improves communication skills and knowledge as indicated by majority of (SA+A=88, n=312). The majority (SA+A=83%, n=288) stated that political communication is a two phased course as it has been observed to be academic centric and politics centric; as the study revealed that (SD+D= 83%, n= 288) rejected the notion that political communication did not improve them in any aspect, which is an indicaton that Political Communication improved the students on various aspects.
Meanwhile (SA+A= 89% , n= 312) indicated that political comunication made them internalize the roles of political communication in a political society. While (SA+A =89%, n = 312)stated that Political Communication gave them the motivation to practice politics while in school.

Willingnesss of Nigerian students to study political communication as an academic course.

The students of Mass Communication Department, Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri indicated that they developed interest in the study of political communication with the representation as thus: (SA+A = 89%, n= 312) with a slight gap, the students indicated that they had an enhanced understanding of the sub topics and concepts in political communication course with the view of (SA+A 52%, n= 180) as against (SD+D =48, n=168) as seen in the table 2, the students indicated that they have commited zeal towards studying the course political communication and it is seen as thus;(SA+A =89% , n= 312) the students also indicated that they willing recommend the course political communication to other higher institutions in south east with the representation as thus; (SA+A =89 , n= 312) the students also rejected that they did not waste their time in studying political communication with the representation (SD+D = , n= 348) and this represent the holistic views of the students.

Discussion Of Finding

Finding indicates that the students of Mass communication of Federal. Polytechnic. NekedeOwerri accepted that Political communication is relevant in ascertaining knowledge for politics. In furtherance, the that Political Communication is not a strategy of growth in Politics,.) claimed that political communication as an academic course, broadened their understanding of political communication the study also revealed that political communication has increased the students sense of political participation.

While in table two, the study revealed that Political communication improved the communication skills and knowledge Students of Mass Communication Department, Federal Polytechnic Nekedein furtherance of the findings, the study also revealed that political communication is a two phased course as it has been observed to be academic centric and politics centric. It is unique to know that the study revealed that the students rejected the notion that political communication did not improve them in any aspect, which is an implication that Political Communication improved the students on various aspects. Through the study, it was revealed that political comunication made the students internalize the roles of political communication in a political society. And also reveled that Political Communication gave the students the motivation to practice politics while in school.

Meanwhile, in table three, the study revealed among other findings the following;The students of Mass Communication Department, Federal Polytechnic Nekede Owerri have developed interest in the study of political communication and this scale through with a slight gap against the other students that they never developed interest. The study also indicated that they had an enhanced understanding of the sub topics and concepts in political communication course, the students expressed that they have commited zeal towards studying the course political communication asacademic course, the study also indicated that theStudents of Department O f Mass Communication recommended the course; political communication to other higher institutions in south east as ascertained that the students did not waste their time in studying political communication in Mass Communication Department.

Recommendation

In line with the findings the following recommendations are put forward:

1. The course, Poltical Communication should be encouraged to be taught in Higher Institutions in Nigeria. As it has been revealed from the study that the course is veritable and rich to impact toknowledge as it meets the demands of academic course and political weapon as revealed in the study.
2. There should further research works and study to be done on political communication as an academic tool as such will help stimulate scholars and students to have interest and motivations on political communication research.
3. Political communication should also be taught in higher degree classes as such will help raise specialists in the field of politicalcommunication .

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