



## Appraisal of Persuasive Political Communication effects on Youths' participation in politics in Nigeria

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### Abstract

This study investigated the role of persuasive communication in influencing political participation among youths in Nigeria. The roles of persuasive political news media, online citizen media, online political interaction, and offline political discussions in shaping political participation were examined. While there is evidence in the literature that persuasive communication significantly influences political participation among youths, especially when the said communication is done on social media platforms. There seems to be a consensus that different persuasive communication activities exert their special influences in shaping political participation via unique social normative and cognitive processes. However, it can also be deduced from the literature that persuasive communication is not enough to make the youths actively participate in political issues; the positive influence of this communication on political participation is completely mediated by the youths' experiences (schema), political interpersonal communication with peers and social normative and cognitive processes. Both online political interaction and offline political discussion exert strong direct and indirect influences on political participation.

**Keywords:** Political communication, persuasive communication youths, political participation

### Introduction

Political participation refers to voluntary activities undertaken by the mass public to influence public policy, either directly or by affecting the selection of persons who make policies. Examples of these activities include voting in elections, helping a political campaign, donating money to a candidate or cause, contacting officials, petitioning, protesting, and working with other people on issues (White, 2022; Nwamara & Etumnu, 2022). Political participation – public involvement in efforts to address collective problems – has long been an essential characteristic of democracy. Yet many democratic citizens fail to engage in the most basic mode of participation – voting (Holbein & Hillygus, 2020). Political participation can appear on a basic level such as voting or following the political agenda; or it can appear in a rather advanced manner such as a subscription to a political party, participation in political events, and subscribing to political and/or non-governmental institutions. The importance of communication has often been mentioned in discussions regarding political participation.

Communication refers to the exchange of information, ideas, emotions, and attitudes through verbal or non-verbal means between two or more two participants (Schement, 2017; Olaniran, 2015; Etumnu, et al., 2021). Communication has become an all-embracing phenomenon today. In politics, communication has assumed diverse implications. For that reason, there are so many definitions provided in the literature on political communication. In his book, McNair (2017) looked at three major ways that the concept of political communication can be looked at: it means all forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors to achieve specific objectives; communication addressed to these actors by non-politicians such as voters and newspaper columnists; and communication about these actors and their activities, as contained in news reports, editorials, and other forms of media discussion of politics. Simons (2019) explained political communication as the verbal or written statements, and visual means of signification such as dress, make-up, hairstyle, and logo design, i.e. all those elements of communication that might be said to constitute a political 'image' or identity.

Youths are a very critical age group in today's society, especially in developing societies where the majority of the voters are young (Ritchie & Roser, 2019). Communication tools have a crucial role in terms of informing young people and getting them actively participate in politics. Hence, youth's political information and political participation should be studied duly. While the degree of political participation of youth and their political behaviours provide important points in political management, the youth who have an important place in this process obtain information using communication tools and have the chance to participate in different shapes of politics. So, communication tools have become important apparatuses in the process of youth's political participation, fulfilling the role of manipulation and informing. Treatment of political content using communication tools brings about a massive interest in the political system, and this interest along with consciousness has important impacts on even the simplest political behaviours such as voting; ultimately resulting in a better functioning democracy (Dilber, 2012). To be effective, persuasion has been considered the most important tool in political communication. Persuasive efforts by one actor to influence the choices of others pervade the social world and bodies of literature. In the light of communication, which has been explained, political actors always try to influence the choice of others using persuasive communication strategies, especially political campaigns, which are aimed to persuade voters, just as firms aim to persuade consumers, and public service groups and governments aim to persuade citizens. Because persuasion has been considered effective in other areas of life such as commerce and governance, it is also important to discuss its effect on political participation, especially among youths who have at their disposal so many tools to receive political communication and who also are exposed to variables that can mitigate the effect of persuasive communication.

## **Methodology**

This paper used the library research method. This method involves identifying and locating significant secondary data, and analysing it in line with the subject matter under investigation and then developing and expressing one's idea. It is a good source of secondary data collection where research by other scholars can be accessed, analysed and evaluated (Okoye, et al, 2022). Secondary sources make information easily accessible. This approach allows for easy use of secondary data that can be accessed from journals, books, newspapers, magazines, the internet etc. And then used for discussing the subject matter at stake by the researcher from which a conclusion is usually drawn (Anyanwu, et al, 2022).

## **Political Participation**

Participation means 'sharing in' or 'wrapping oneself with' every dimension of life, of culture or economy, our educational system, our political system, and our decision-making process (Uhlener, 2015). But there is less than complete agreement among the scholars about the meaning of the concept, of political

participation. Political participation has been defined in many ways ranging from rather restrictive understandings as “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take” to very broad approaches referring to political participation as “a categorical term for citizen power” or to all activities aiming to influence existing power structures (Van Deth, 2016).

There is another thought that participation in electoral processes involves much more than just voting. Political participation derives from the freedom to speak out, assemble and associate; the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and the opportunity to register as a candidate, campaign, be elected, and hold office at all levels of government (Willeck & Mendelberg, 2022). Similarly, political participation is any number of voluntary activities undertaken by the public to influence public policy either directly or by affecting the selection of persons who make those policies. It is the involvement of the citizens in the political system (Falade, 2014). The citizens form the crux of any society and they must be part of the political process.

Referring to it as a voluntary activity, some authors think that political participation is an aspect of political behaviour and it focuses on how individuals take part in politics. It is a voluntary activity and one may participate directly or indirectly (Ahmad et al., 2019). The various ways by which the people can be involved in the political system include the selection or election of political leaders, formulation of policies, community activities, and other civic engagements.

In whichever way it is defined, the essence of political participation in any society, either civilised or primitive, is to seek control of power, acquisition of power, and influence decision-making. That is why political participation has been seen by some as a means of contributing one’s quota to the political system and overall development of the nation. That makes it a fundamental requirement of democratic governance. This is the reason why Adelekan (2010, cited in Falade, 2014) emphasised that ideally, democracy means individual participation in the decisions that involve one’s life. In a democratic system, there is the necessity for the citizenry to be fully involved in the democratic procedures of the choice of rulers and effective communication of the public policies and attitudes. Any claim to a democratic regime or state must essentially embrace a high degree of competitive choice, openness, and enjoyment of civic and political liberties and political participation that involves all groups of the society (Boulianne, 2020).

The extent to which people participate in the political system differs from person to person. Falade (2014) identified six types of political participants. These are The inactive: These are the people that take no part in any political activity. Voting specialists: These are the people that get eagerly engaged only in voting. Besides voting, they are not concerned about other political activities. Parochial participants: These people participate in politics occasionally. They vote or get involved in any other political activity only when it affects their interest. The communalist: These are those who get engaged in voting regularly, they also get involved in community affairs but they are not involved in political campaign activities. The campaigners: They are actively involved in the political campaign but inactive in other community affairs. Complete activists: They are highly involved in all political activities, they actively participate in voting, political campaign, and community activities and make contact with public officials.

### **Political Participation among Youths**

Youth refers to a group of people aged 18-35 years (Akinyetun, 2021) or 18-40 years of age (Ting, 2022). However, the age bracket that makes up the youth differs from country to country. However, what is universal is that youth is that vibrant and energetic social group that is severally used in shaping the future of society. In many works of literature, youths are regarded as leaders of tomorrow. Meanwhile, irrespective of the age bracket, certain characteristics manifest themselves in the youths. These include; physical changes, biological changes, intellectual changes, emotional changes, increasing independence, and sex interest (Obikeze, 2006). Youth has been defined as a particular period of life that is the most vivacious and

fastest in which the search for identity and character is apparent, whereby it is the beginning of a new life (Akin, 2014). That is why in terms of developing youth is seen in the period of identity construction. It is also seen as a period of life in which biological, psychological, and sociological changes occur (Bates et al., 2020).

Participation can be defined as a process in which the subjects participate in decision makings on public life and have an impact on those decisions (Boulianne, 2020). Wohlfart (2012) defines public participation as a “praxis using which the citizens attempt to have an impact upon the institutions which are capable of implementing policies about the lives of citizens” (p. 149). Participation is not static but it is repeatable and changeable along with the cultural context. Participation, which in a broader sense means taking a role in social processes, is fully possible only in democratic societies. A social structure that is respectful of human rights, internalizes global values, is democratic, responsible, transparent, and participatory can be built by generations with a high civic consciousness. In this context, the participation of the young generation in every part of social life is essential (Ruess et al., 2022).

For political systems to be representative, all parts of society must be included. When young people are disenfranchised or disengaged from political processes, a significant portion of the population has little or no voice or influence in decisions that affect group members' lives. A key consequence is the undermining of political systems' representativeness. Therefore, to make a difference in the longer term, young people must be engaged in formal political processes and have a say in formulating today's and tomorrow's politics. Inclusive political participation is not only a fundamental political and democratic right but also is crucial to building stable and peaceful societies and developing policies that respond to the specific needs of younger generations. For young people to be adequately represented in political institutions, processes, and decision-making, and in particular in elections, they must know their rights and be given the necessary knowledge and capacity to participate in a meaningful way at all levels.

When there are obstacles to participating in formal, institutionalised political processes, young people can rapidly feel disempowered. Many tend to believe that their voices are not going to be heard or that they will not be taken seriously even if they are heard. The problem becomes circular as politicians may lose interest in responding to the aspirations of young people if they cannot win their votes. This in turn leads to young people being increasingly excluded from taking part in decision-making, or in debates about key socio-economic and political issues, despite their sensitivity to the demands for social equity and justice, environmental protection, and cultural diversity.

To establish a pluralist and libertarian democracy in our country, young generations should keep democratic values at the centre of their goals. Participation of youth in politics is an essential quality of advanced democracy (Pelevin et al., 2018). For that reason, taking part in the democratic structure of a country should not be limited to voting once a couple of years. The citizens need to take roles in non-governmental organisations and political parties since these kinds of role-taking behaviours are crucial for the citizens to take permanent places in decision-making processes and practices.

### **Youth political participation in Nigeria**

According to the National Youth Development Policy (2001), the youth population in Nigeria is aged between 18 and 35 years old, and more than 70 percent of Nigerians are under the age of 30 (Onyechi 2018; Owen & Usman 2015). This translates to a youth population of over 171 million people in the country (Osumah, 2016).

Some scholars have highlighted the important role that youth plays in bringing about social changes, often referring to the Arab Spring. In the Nigerian political landscape, the perspective of positive youth political participation has been a recent phenomenon (Vite & Dibang-Achua, 2019). Traditionally, and before the 2015 general elections, youth were associated with electoral violence. In many instances, youth vigilante groups were politicised and 'hired' to support or carry out the political agendas. For instance, the Bakassi

Boys, a youth vigilante group, was allegedly sought after by political parties like the All-People's Party and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) (Ukiwo, 2002).

Fast forward to the 2015 elections where the role of youth shifted towards social agents for change, and this was reflected in the political space. For instance, Jonathan highlighted his young age as an appeal to young voters whereas Muhammadu Buhari campaigned to address and fight youth unemployment, corruption, and security challenges. Buhari even recruited 25,000 college graduates to help with his campaign (Nwosu, 2015).

When it comes to youth political participation in the electoral processes, the 2015 elections in Nigeria have been praised by many (Osumah, 2016). The reason is due to the peaceful campaigns conducted by youth organisations throughout the country in various forms such as "peace promotion, popular participation, political education, election monitoring, and polling administration" (Osumah, 2016). Youth organisations such as the Youth Initiatives for Advocacy Growth and Advancement (YIAGA) Africa, the Youth Alliance on Constitution and Electoral Reform, Niger Delta Coalition for Change (NDCC), the Young-starts Development Initiative (YDI), and the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) campaigned for a peaceful election. They did so by urging youth to not commit violence and stressing that politicians do not utilise youths to commit acts of violence before, during, and after elections. The Youth Peace Accord was signed on February 3, 2015, by faith-based youth groups, civil societies, and youth development organisations to display their commitment to peaceful elections. Additionally, youth groups also took active steps towards voter education and utilised social media to carry out voter education on national issues (Osumah 2016).

Youth activeness in politics took even a more vibrant turn when Nigerian youths united to protest the extent of police brutality in the country. The protest which was tagged the #ENDSARS protest woke up the consciousness among Nigerian youths of their role to facilitate change in the country. This is expected to be a huge factor in the 2023 general elections in the country. This is because, in new and emerging democracies, the inclusion of young people in formal political processes is important from the start. Young people's active contributions can bring democratic values to life, leading to the overturning of authoritarian practices. In countries where young people have led protests that have forced the hand of the government to make a certain decision such as disbanding SARS in Nigeria, they are likely to feel significant frustration if they are not included in new formal decision-making procedures.

### **Why Youths Participate in Politics in Nigeria**

Citizenship participation in politics is a significant element of democratic governance all over the world including in Nigeria. The structure and amount of citizenship in political participation can influence the degree and quality of government and governance. Quite a several reasons could be deduced for why many Nigerian citizens particularly the youths participate in politics or engage in governance-related activities. Various bodies of literature (Weiss, 2022; Kwon, 2019; Ahmad & Sheikh, 2020) reveal that they include:

#### **To change the structure of leadership and governance.**

Obsessed by the leadership styles of past leaders which do not impact positively on the lives of common people on the streets of Nigeria and the continued existence of poverty amidst plenty, the marginalisation of some parts of the country, and the inequitable distribution of resources, some Nigerian youths participate in politics to change the structure to herald effective political leadership and envisaged developments. The formulation of more than a hundred political parties and activities of the Civil Liberty Organisations and many interest groups is a pointer to this fact.

### **To influence government policies and programmes.**

The revolution Now by Omoyele Sowore and the various campaigns by organisations like the Social Economic Recovery and Accountability Project (SERAP) and Muslim Rights Concerns (MURIC), as well as demonstrations by Labour and Civil Liberty Organizations have forced the government to be up and doing in socio-political issues affect the socio-economic lives of Nigeria. For instance, the agitation by Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) for minimum wage review and whistle-blowing action by SERAP has forced the government to review workers' salaries and recovered stolen funds. The revolution—Now, equally was a conscious expression by youths to intimate the government about the failures of its socio-economic policies and the need to have inclusive governance capable of affecting peoples' life positively (Vite & Dibang-Achua, 2019a).

### **To participate in the decision-making process**

The sponsorship of private citizens' bills, contribution during public debate of bills, protest, and demonstration by pro-democracy groups are all aimed at influencing government decisions. For instance, the Bring-Back-Our-Girls campaigns by Obiageli Ezekwezili, and Our-Mumu-Don-Do by Charles Oputa were efforts tailored toward changing the status quo. The actions of the Bring-Back-Our-Girls Movement on the one hand forced the government to do all it could to rescue some of the Chibok girls that were kidnapped by insurgents. On the other hand, Our-Mumu-Don-Do Movement by Charles Oputa also forced the President to cut short his medical trip to Britain to attend to the security and other socio-economic challenges bedeviling the country (Vite & Dibang-Achua, 2019b).

### **To solicit for leadership roles and representation**

Some youth who participate in politics do so in other to be given the position of leadership be it through contesting and vying for political offices or being appointed into political offices. The Not Too Young To Rule Bill is a welcome development as it affords youth the right to contest elections into political offices they were excluded from by virtue of age. Regrettably, as laudable as the idea seems the socio-political structure and process in Nigeria are skewed in favour of the retired elites in the military, the intelligentsia, and the economic juggernauts.

### **To agitate for development and social well-being**

The activities of SERAP earlier mentioned and other regional pressure groups, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), Niger-Delta Frontier Force (NDFF), The Ijaw Youth Movements (IYM), Ohanaeze Ndigbo youth wing, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) youth wing, the Afenifere, and the Middle-Belt Forum youth wings have all engaged in one form of agitation and political engagement to draw development to their region. The intense agitation by the IYM through the Kaima declaration and the need for government to pacify the youths of the region gave rise to the establishment of the Niger-Delta Development Commission and the creation of the Ministry of Niger-Delta Development. Of recent, efforts by the ACF as well as those of the Northern Elders Forum have yielded the creation of the North East Development Commission given the ravaging impact of terrorism and insurgency in the region. The Middle-Belt is also agitating for the creation of the same commission in their region (Vite, 2018).

### **For political socialisation**

Youths in Nigeria also engage in politics not only because of economic gains but for socio-psychological reasons. Some of them are subjects to charismatic and renowned politicians by so doing learn from them the attitude, principles, and secrets of political successes.

## **Persuasive Communication Techniques**

Persuasion has long been studied by economists and political scientists who seek to understand how different strategies in advertising or political campaigning lead agents to update their beliefs and ultimately change their behaviours. Political campaigns often seek to persuade voters of the merits of a particular alternative, be it a party, a candidate, or a policy position. They do so using multiple channels: specific messages are used to enhance the profile of a candidate or position; individual canvassers are used to get the message across in a compelling way, and endorsements by public figures are used to enhance the appeal. Do such campaigns matter and which, if any, of their core elements are effective at persuasion?

Persuasive communication is any message that intends to shape, reinforce, or change the responses of the audience (Koa, 2018). Persuasive communication activities to influence established goals are thus an essential part of any strategic communication campaign (Werder, 2015, p. 81). To achieve goals and to gain the widest possible appeal, politicians use various persuasive techniques to be more strategic in their communication and approaches. Hence, to reach their ends, especially in competitive situations, political communication benefits from persuasive techniques used in other disciplines such as marketing, advertisement, and public relations through professionals and media consultants (McNair, 2012). Scholars suggest that once the audience is aware of the persuasive techniques, the effects of those techniques diminish, and it becomes the audience's decision to accept the message or reject it (Jowett & O'Donnell, 2014, p. 167). A taxonomy of persuasive techniques can be used to explain how a group or politician communicates and the mechanisms by which agendas are set. The techniques are explained below as follows:

### **Name-calling**

In "name-calling," a communicator intentionally attaches an emotional-laden idea or symbol to a target (Shabo, 2008). This technique was used extensively by former American President Donald Trump to discredit his political rivals. For example, he referred to Hilary Clinton as the Devil and "crooked Hillary." He also labeled U.S. Senator Ted Cruz, his former primary opponent, "lying Ted" and called Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida "little Marco" and Jeb Bush "low-energy Jeb" (Dunbar, 2016).

### **Glittering generality**

Although "name calling" attempts to make people form a judgment and renounce the credentials of an opponent, "glittering generality" urges the publics to accept and approve political authority without investigating the evidence. It appeals to the popular emotions of brotherhood, generosity, and love by using "virtue words" such as "constitution-definer," "loyalty," "progress," "security," "change," "choice," "the right to," "glory," "justice," "freedom," "truth," and "honour".

### **Transfer**

The transfer involves carrying the prestige, respect, authority, and sanction of something that is already respected to make something else revered and accepted. This technique can also work in reverse whereby something that is disrespected can make an associated object rejected.

### **Card stacking (selective omission)**

Card stacking effectively involves telling half-truths. The phrase was first coined concerning gambling, in which card players attempt to stack the deck in their favour (Tidwell, 1958). It is the selection and use of facts or falsehoods, illustrations or distractions, and logical or illogical statements to give the best or the worst possible case for an idea, programme, person, or product.

### **Plain folks**

Politicians attempt to convince target audiences through language or actions that convey that their ideas are good because they are “of the people,” giving themselves a common touch with their targets. They try to appear as if they are from humble origins and carry the peoples’ interests at heart and therefore, should be trusted.

### **Testimonial**

Testimonial consists of having some respected or admired person endorse a given idea, programme, project, product, or person, hoping that the targeted audiences will follow their example.

### **Bandwagon (peer pressure)**

The metaphorical label of the “bandwagon device” goes back to the late 19th century in American politics and “alludes to the wagon in a parade that carries the band and attracts a large crowd of followers marching behind it to enjoy the music” (Schmitt-Beck, 2016, p. 57).

### **How does Persuasive Political Communication Influence Youth Political Participation: Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) Perspective**

To begin with, the term persuasion was first systematised by the ancient Greeks. The use of persuasion was referred to as "rhetoric". Significantly, Aristotle's explanations on means of persuasion are still applied in current research on persuasion and its effects on political communication. According to Aristotle, persuasion includes not only artistic proof, such as the choice of evidence, the organisation of persuasion, style of delivery, and language choices but it also includes in artistic proof, such as the occasion, the time, and the speaker's physical appearance.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) could be applied in political communication research on how persuasive political messages influence political participation. ELM is a cognitive model in which persuasion takes one of two routes motivation and ability. These routes are (a) central information processing routes with a direct focus on elaboration and (b) peripheral information processing routes without a direct focus on elaboration (Shahab et al., 2021; Emetumah, et al., 2022). Under the central route, persuasion will likely result from a person's careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information presented in support of advocacy. The central route involves a high level of message elaboration in which a great amount of cognition about the arguments is generated by the individual receiving the message. The results of attitude change will be relatively enduring, resistant, and predictive of behaviour.

On the other hand, under the peripheral route, persuasion results from a person's association with positive or negative cues in the stimulus or making a simple inference about the merits of the advocated position. The cues received by the individual under the peripheral route are generally unrelated to the logical quality of the stimulus. These cues will involve factors such as the credibility or attractiveness of the sources of the message, or the production quality of the message. The likelihood of elaboration will be determined by an individual's motivation and ability to evaluate the argument being presented.

The youths appear to take the central route in accepting the political message and having the message influence their participation. They carefully evaluate the arguments made by the politicians and rationally think about the quality of the candidate and how the candidate can give them a new lease of life, and execute favourable economic policies. The schema (experiences) will help the youth in accepting who persuades them with their political messages. It was the schema (experiences) that forced the youth to participate in the #ENDSARS protest, and the same schema helps them to accept persuasive political messages. The youths have the motivation as well as the ability to think about the substance of the political message, before



accepting or rejecting them. Being at the high end of the elaboration continuum, people assess object-relevant information about schemas that they already possess and arrive at a reasoned attitude that is supported by information.

Why do political campaigns sometimes fail to persuade voters, especially the youths, and what does this say about voter decision-making? Some interpret the difficulty of persuading voters as evidence of “partisan intoxication”—i.e., that voters remain loyal to their parties even when confronted with new information. But from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the likelihood of persuasion is determined by some central factors. For instance, persuasive communication is not enough to make the youths actively participate in political issues; the positive influence of this communication on political participation is completely mediated by the youths' experiences (schema), political interpersonal communication with peers, and social normative and cognitive processes.

That is to say, while persuasive communication influences political participation, factors that exert strong direct and indirect influences on political participation are the personal and collective experiences of the youths in the country, their online political interaction, and their offline political discussion.

### **Conclusion**

Young people play vital parts in ensuring that they bring change to their society. This they do by political participation through the formulation of political parties, vying for political offices as well as voting for others who contest elective positions. The first two political engagements (formulation of political parties, vying for political offices) depend on the socio-economic and political climate with which politics is played. In Nigeria, politics is expensive, and the majority of the youths are poor. Also, the dominance of the ruling and political class whom they often re-cycled has all affected youth political engagements in Nigeria in no small measure.

However, the youths get actively involved in voting for electoral candidates. But to make that choice, various levels of persuasion are employed by those seeking political offices. Persuading voters is the essence of a political campaign. Advertising, theme songs, stump speeches, and even negative campaigning have been used by these politicians, and each advance in technology since then has offered new opportunities for candidates to persuade voters.

While there is evidence in the literature that persuasive communication significantly influences political participation among youths, especially when the said communication is done on social media platforms. Persuasive communication is not enough to make the youths actively participate in political issues; the positive influence of this communication on political participation is completely mediated by the youths' experiences (schema), political interpersonal communication with peers, and social normative and cognitive processes. Both online political interaction and offline political discussion exert strong direct and indirect influences on political participation. In other words, persuasion is presumed to be conditional on who says what to whom and when, and getting this recipe right is thought to be critical for changing minds.

### **Recommendations**

Politics is very expensive in Nigeria, so indigent but educated youth cannot afford the requirements of standing elections in Nigeria except sponsored. Therefore, political parties should reduce the cost of forms to increase youth participation in the formulation of political parties and vying for political offices. Political participation is not only about voting.

Today's Nigerian youths take the central route in the likelihood of persuasion, therefore politicians should perform well in their various political offices to successfully persuade the youth to vote for them again.

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