

## INFLUENCE OF MASS MEDIATED MESSAGES IN THE POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION OF RURAL RESIDENT IN OYO STATE

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### **Abstract**

*Political socialization is a process by which people develop attitudinal dispositions about politics and is mediated through various agencies of the society, with communication as its key driver. This study assessed how mass-mediated messages influence political socialization of people who reside in rural communities in Oyo State. For the survey, 378 respondents were selected using a multistage sampling technique. Using a structured questionnaire, focus group discussion and group interview, data were obtained on residents' access and usage of mass media for political socialization: influence of selected media items on political socialization and methods of political participation. Results further showed that political information was mostly sourced by the respondents through radio ( $\bar{x}=3.49$ ). Overall, 59.5% of the respondents had high political participation. However, public affairs programmes ( $\bar{x}=2.83$ ) and news/commentaries ( $\bar{x}=2.50$ ) influenced political socialization of the residents. The study concluded that mass media was influential in the political socialization of residents of rural areas in Oyo State. Therefore, media organizations, especially radio stations should prioritize public affairs programmes that put politicians on the spot and encourage audience participation.*

### **1.0 Introduction**

Political participation transcends voting during elections. It has other micro and macro components that take effect much after electoral activities are concluded Geise et al (2021). Happenings in the political sphere are sometimes characterized by complexities that are difficult to decipher. This is why some advantaged institutions and individuals help those with little or no exposure by providing directions via various channels of communication. Perloff (2014) asserted that the citizenry are at the centre of political communication. They include individuals who are politically exposed, those who are indifferent and the

unbothered folks who are politically ignorant. According to Shively (2003), a democratic society cannot function if its citizens are unaware of the fundamental principles of government and are unable to comprehend the multitude of issues that confront their society. Political socialization ultimately shapes the kind of citizens that people become (Ohme & de Vreese, 2020).

According to popular belief, democracy only helps with good governance to the extent that it accurately and consistently informs the public and allows citizens to make reasoned decisions in other situations, such as elections (Chambers & Costain, 2001 cited in McNair, 2009). In reality, ignorance and chauvinism drive a lot of democratic decisions (Achen & Bartel, 2002; Colomer, 2006). People participate in politics for all kinds of reasons that may not be based on a rational thought or careful deliberations. McNair (2009) identified the mass media as a key agenda setter in the public sphere. Media grant citizens easy access to the public sphere via participatory avenues like letter-to-the-editor, phone-in-contributions to radio and television programmes, studio participation and online engagements. Similarly, Becker & Wehner (2001) cited in Holmes (2009) argued that the mass media are indispensable components of the public sphere because they have the central role of mobilizing and institutionalizing public opinion.

Perhaps the reason politics has been a key purveyor of crisis is because of the misrepresentation of its purpose and variance in political culture. Citizens must be socialized to new democratic cultural norms about values, attitudes, and behavior before full democratization can occur (Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam, 1993 cited in Jebril, et al, 2013). According to Roskin et al. (2010), a country's history, economy, religion, and folkways all influence its political culture. Using Nigeria as a point of focus, Babawale (1999) and Akinyetun (2020) opines that the country has no predominant political culture because of its multiple ethnic groups. He further states that these ethnic groups exhibit cohesive political culture of their own which are very different from each other. Political socialization varies greatly throughout systems, and is the most crucial connection between social and political spheres.

The media's influence on political socialization has been affirmed by numerous studies. However, not many have paid attention to residents of rural communities. Rural communities in Nigeria are characterized by poor infrastructure, poverty, illiteracy, limited media presence, among other negative features that have thwarted the efficiency of the residents of these communities. Regardless of these observations, resident of rural areas are expected to participate in politics, directly or indirectly, to elect their leaders.

One of the powers vested in the mass media is psychological as identified by Guretvich and Blumler (1977). This power springs from the relations and trust that different media organizations have succeeded in building with their audiences. This in turn engenders believability of stories as reported by these trusted media organizations.

This study investigates the role that mass media plays in political socialization. Furthermore, the following questions are addressed by this study:

- (i) What is the usage level of the mass media as political socialization tools in rural areas?

- (ii) How influential are mediated communication tools like advertisement, news, programmes, debates and campaigns in political decision making in rural areas?
- (iii) What is the level of political participation in rural areas?

The study also posits this null hypothesis:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant relationship between use of mass media for political information and level of political participation.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **Media Access in Rural Areas**

The term "rural" denotes an area with a strong agricultural focus: the homes are farm houses, barns, sheds, and other structures serving a similar function. Even though this description is true in part, there are other factors that characterize rural areas. Rural dwellers reside in the remote areas usually characterized by lack basic infrastructure because of neglect by government (Cramer, 2016). Nigerians living in rural areas have a comparatively uniform way of life, even with government's indifference (Arisukwu et al, 2020). Similarly, Haruna and Liman (2015) observed that the social lives of rural residents are plagued by a number of issues. These issues include poverty, cultural obstacles, psychological and socialization difficulties, poor road networks, lack of access to good water and health care, prevalence of ignorance and illiteracy, and poor electricity supply. All these are likely to affect the productivity of people in this area.

The socio-political wellbeing and general well-being of a society are defined by the ideas, concerns, and points of view that are communicated through the mass media Odunlami (2013). Their mental processes, behaviors, and reactions are influenced by the information they are exposed to through various mass media sources. There is a considerable difference in media and media usage among regions and countries, and between cities and rural areas Bansal (2015). Nonetheless, as far as back as 1948, Harold Lasswell had identified surveillance of the environment, the correlation function and cultural transmission as specific roles which media must play (Enemaku, 2003). In rural areas, just like urban, communication, entertainment and information are important.

Ogbondah (1996) observed that rural dwellers in Nigeria devote more time listening to one another through folk media than attending to mass-mediated communication. Ifukor (2013), however, believes that having access to contemporary communication tools improves the comfort and productivity of rural life. According to Daramola (2003), and Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012), Nigerians living in rural areas typically have access to radio and other mass media. Due to its unique characteristics, radio has the potential to significantly contribute to the advancement and enhancement of people's lives. According to Ajaero et al (2016), radio has a significant impact on people's perceptions, which in turn can motivate individuals to take action in rural areas. The use of indigenous language for transmission could lead to a rise in rural households' requests for television, video, and radio (Ifukor, 2013).

Challenges plaguing the popularity of the internet in the rural areas, according to Tayo et al (2016), include deficient, internet access, unaffordability of computers and internet, poverty, lack of computer skills, and poor infrastructure. In a study on the effect of social

media on teenagers in rural communities, Ngonso (2019) found that young people in rural areas depend on their parents' mobile phones to access social media for social interactions. Siaw et al, (2020) submitted that those living in rural areas used the internet less than their urban counterparts.

#### Mediated Communication Tools and Political Socialization

Political socialization, according to Babawale (1999), is the process through which a society passes along its political culture from one generation to the next. It's a process that spreads across different societal agencies and teaches people behaviors that are relevant to politics. It is the process in which individuals integrate into their own attitudinal structure and behaviour patterns, the ways of their respective social groups. This definition identifies the important role of social structures in behaviour moulding, while also stressing the place of individual factors in adhering to set standards. Political socialization is evident in attitude and behaviour related to political legitimacy, electoral behaviour, interest articulation, among others (Babawale, 1999; Roskin et al., 2010).

Political information can come in form of news in respect of events of government, politicians, political parties and other players in the political circle. The positivity or negativity of the news depends on a number of factors. For McQuail (2010), political actors engage professional news managers, those he referred to as "spin doctors" to ensure a favourable feature, while also putting the best gloss possible on a news story. Nwokefor and Okunoye (2013) in a study on how media influences election aligned with the agenda setting influence of the media in Nigeria political space. The study demonstrated the effectiveness of media agenda-setting as well as the media's continued potency in shaping public opinion. In a study that investigated the "would be" connection between political consciousness and community radio, particularly at the local level in Nigeria, Kombol (2014) points out that efficient program scheduling and selection are crucial in order to increase political awareness in Nigerian communities. This is because interactive and discussion-based approaches to radio program production allow listeners to ask questions and seek clarification on complicated issues that directly affect them.

Political debates give people seeking elective office to push forth their arguments on their vision when they get to government, while also faulting opposing views with richer arguments. Election debates provide voters with an important democratic forum by letting them assess prospective leaders and the programs they have to offer. Benoit et al. (2003) in Yagboyaju (2017) on the influence of debates on the electorate contended that voters' preconceived notions prior to the debates serve to further reinforce their perceptions of the candidates' performances, which are already skewed due to their pre-debate decisions. Debates usually serve to confirm rather than modify preconceived notions, unless viewers are indifferent or lack sufficient knowledge about a candidate. The democratic culture of Nigeria has not properly embraced or absorbed election debates. Although it is impossible to deny their existence, debates have not had the desired influence on elections (Yagboyaju, 2017).

Political advertising has been identified as an important aspect of political communication. It is the process of creating awareness about the intention of a political candidate or activities of a political party. According Asemah and Edegog (2012), political advertising is a form of marketing communication that is geared towards convincing electorate to vote

the candidate of a party. Political parties now package their candidates and present them to the people, in order to gain their votes. Advertising is one of the key drivers of modern politics. During campaigns, it takes center stage in the promotion of political parties and politicians contending for various posts (Samaila 2003). It's interesting to observe that political advertising is now seen by Nigerian voters significantly more frequently than it was in the past, which contributes to a greater public awareness of political issues prior to their resolution. However, a study on the impact of advertising on elections by Ojekwe (2016) shows that political advertisement plays a minimal role in influencing electorate's voting behavior.

## **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

The cultivation theory underlies this study. It presupposes that when an individual is exposed to the media for some time, he tends to cultivate the habit of viewing the world from the point of view of the media. According to Gerbner (1992), cited in Williams (2003), watching television fosters a shared perspective between otherwise disparate groups concerning the recurring themes and patterns found in many shows. Baran and Davies (2000) identify the two broad ways in which cultivation occurs. The first is mainstreaming, where symbols from the media monopolise and dominate other sources of information and ideas about the world. The second way cultivation manifests itself is through resonance. This suggests that what viewers see on television is most congruent with their own realities. Cultivation theory presupposes that when an individual is exposed to the media for some time, he tends to cultivate the habit of viewing the world from the media's point of view.

## **3.0 Methodology**

This study adopts triangulation approach with the use of analytical survey, group interview and focus group discussion as its research methods. The purpose of this design, according to Morse (1991) cited in Creswell and Clark (2007), is to "obtain different but complementary data on the same topic". A self-administered questionnaire which contained open-ended, close-ended and Likert scale questions, was designed for this study. The multi-stage sampling method was used to select 378 respondents for the study. The first stage involved the stratification of Oyo State using the existing three senatorial districts while the last stage was a selection of 378 residents using simple random sampling technique. For the group interview, twelve families were selected using purposive sampling, while six focus groups were created using religion, gender and peer group as the rallying factors.

## **4.0 Results and Discussion**

### **Access to Mass Media in the Rural Areas**

Results in Table 1 describe the access of rural residents of Oyo State to selected mass media. The finding shows that radio ( $\bar{x}=3.52$ ) and television ( $\bar{x}=2.69$ ) were the most accessed mass media by the respondents. Result further shows that internet ( $\bar{x}=1.63$ ), newspaper ( $\bar{x}=1.45$ ) and magazine ( $\bar{x}=1.32$ ) were not prominently accessed by the respondents. Results from the group interview and focus group discussion also showed that radio is the most accessed mass media in the study area. This finding aligns with the

findings of Ajaero et al (2016), on the popularity of radio in rural areas because of its portability, mobility and relative affordability.

Table 1: Access to Mass Media in Rural Areas

Media	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Mean	S.D	Rank
Radio	259 (68.5)	72 (19.0)	32 (8.5)	15 (4.0)	3.52	(0.812)	1st
Television	71 (18.8)	154 (40.7)	117 (31.0)	36 (9.5)	2.69	(0.885)	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Internet	50 (13.2)	22 (5.8)	46 (12.2)	260 (68.8)	1.63	(1.070)	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Newspaper	10 (2.6)	27 (7.1)	85 (22.5)	256 (67.7)	1.45	(0.742)	4 <sup>th</sup>
Magazine	5 (1.3)	14 (3.7)	77 (20.4)	282 (74.6)	1.32	(0.609)	5 <sup>th</sup>

Source: Field Study (2024). SD = Standard Deviation

### Usage of Mass Media for Political Information

Findings in Table 2 show that political information was mostly sourced by the respondents through radio ( $\bar{x}=3.49$ ). Radio being the medium mostly used by rural dwellers for political information as shown in this study is consistent with the findings of Thomas and Okoro (2017) which affirms that radio has broad reach to a large audience and remotest communities. This suggests that feeds from radio play a veritable role in exposing them to political happenings that affect them, while also influencing them relatively. Findings from the FGD reveal that the popularity of radio is largely because of its affordability, portability and mobility. Some rural dwellers hardly listen to radio. Some of the reasons given for not using radio during the FGD and group interview include; busy work schedule, nature of work, no access, poverty and lack of interest.

Television was not prominently used in sourcing political information in the rural areas ( $\bar{x}=2.36$ ). This contradicts the findings of Aririguzoh (2011) that television is popular in the rural areas. Findings from group interview show that one of the factors that stemmed down the popularity of television in rural areas is poor electricity supply. On few occasions when power is available, most of the people in the rural areas watch movies.

Newspaper ( $\bar{x}=1.40$ ) and magazine ( $\bar{x}=1.28$ ) were not popular among the respondents for accessing political information. Aside low literacy level in the rural areas, Reuters (2014) also identified availability and distribution as challenges hindering access to newspaper and magazine by rural dwellers. The internet ( $\bar{x}=1.57$ ), despite its numerous advantages, is rarely used by the respondents to access political information. Tayo, Randall and Thompson (2016) in their study on internet use in rural areas concluded that aside illiteracy, many rural dwellers cannot afford gadgets for internet access and some are cut off due to internet penetration hitches. Most of the users of internet as the study reveals are young. This result follows similar trends with the findings of Ngonso (2019) whose finding stated that internet and social media are mostly accessed by young people in the rural areas.

**Table 2: Usage of Mass Media for Political Information**

Media	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Mean	(S.D)	Rank
Radio	256 (67.7)	67 (17.7)	38 (10.1)	17 (4.5)	3.49	(0.850)	1st
Television	46 (12.2)	119 (31.5)	138 (36.5)	75 (19.8)	2.36	(0.934)	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Internet	44 (11.6)	23 (6.1)	39 (10.3)	272 (72.0)	1.57	(1.033)	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Newspaper	15 (4.0)	18 (4.8)	71 (18.8)	274 (72.5)	1.40	(0.758)	4 <sup>th</sup>
Magazine	6 (1.6)	15 (4.0)	58 (15.3)	299 (79.1)	1.28	(0.614)	5 <sup>th</sup>

Source: Field Study (2024). SD = Standard Deviation

**Influence of Selected Media items on Political Socialization**

Table 3 shows the influence of selected media item on political participation. Choices people make about politics is somewhat influenced mostly by public affairs programme ( $\bar{x}$ =2.83) and commentaries/editorials ( $\bar{x}$ =2.50). This implies that media audience reposes more confidence in items emanating directly from the mass media compared to those from politicians and their sponsors. This finding is congruent with the findings of Kombol (2014) who also pointed out the role of public affairs-related programmes as veritable drivers of political awareness in rural areas.

Interviews with politicians ( $\bar{x}$  = 1.68) it had lesser influence compared to public affairs programmes and commentaries. It could be argued that the influence of interview stems from the fact that audience can judge the content on the interview and take a stand on what they have been exposed to. Political debate ( $\bar{x}$ = 1.64) is not influential among the respondents. This corroborates the findings of Yagboyaju and Salaam (2017) when they submitted that the Nigerian environment has not promoted election debates like America where it is a culture. Advertisement ( $\bar{x}$ =1.56) and sponsored campaigns ( $\bar{x}$ = 1.55) were not influential among the resident of rural areas in Oyo. Respondents seem skeptical about advertisements and media campaign because they are sponsored by politicians and this aligns with Udende (2011) and Ojekwe (2016) whose studies concluded that political advertising has minimal effect on voting behaviour of electorate. Findings from the FGD reveal that advertisement reinforces an existing interest in a candidate or a political party. Media items like comedy skits, and documentaries about antecedents of politicians have insignificant influence on the political socialization of residents of rural areas. Comedy skits are mostly shared on social media and a large percentage of the respondents do not have access to the internet.

**Table 3: Influence of Selected Media items on Political Socialization of Respondents**

Selected Media Item	V.I	I	ID	SI	NI	Mean	(S.D)	Rank
Public affairs Programmes	36 (9.5)	149 (39.4)	41 (10.8)	20 (5.3)	132 (34.9)	2.83	1.484	1 <sup>st</sup>
News, Commentaries and Editorials	36 (9.5)	128 (33.9)	12 (3.2)	15 (4.0)	187 (49.5)	2.50	1.579	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Interviews where Politicians present/ defend their agenda	21 (5.6)	33 (8.7)	17 (4.5)	41 (10.8)	266 (70.4)	1.68	1.225	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Political debates featuring contestants	14 (3.7)	27 (7.1)	34 (9.0)	36 (9.5)	267 (70.6)	1.64	1.135	4 <sup>th</sup>
Political Advertisements	16 (4.2)	19 (5.0)	20 (5.3)	50 (13.2)	273 (72.2)	1.56	1.079	5 <sup>th</sup>
Sponsored Political Campaign	10 (2.6)	22 (5.8)	33 (8.7)	35 (9.3)	278 (73.5)	1.55	1.045	6 <sup>th</sup>
Movies	7 (1.9)	32 (8.5)	11 (2.9)	34 (9.0)	294 (77.8)	1.48	1.020	7 <sup>th</sup>
Comedy Skits	9 (2.4)	20 (5.3)	11 (2.9)	36 (9.5)	302 (79.9)	1.41	0.951	8 <sup>th</sup>
Personal and sponsored online posts by Politician	8 (2.0)	14 (3.5)	21 (5.3)	33 (8.7)	302 (79.9)	1.39	0.910	9 <sup>th</sup>
Documentaries about antecedents of Politicians	11 (2.9)	18 (4.8)	14 (3.7)	21 (5.6)	314 (83.1)	1.39	0.974	10 <sup>th</sup>
Documentaries showing societal realities in the area of Governance	13 (3.4)	17 (4.5)	10 (2.6)	23 (6.1)	315 (83.3)	1.39	0.987	11 <sup>th</sup>

Source: Field Study (2024). SD = Standard Deviation VI (Very Influential), I (Influential), ID (Indifferent), SI (Slightly Influential), NI (Not Influential), SD (Standard Deviation).

### Political Participation in Rural Areas

Results in Table 4 show the categorization of method of political participation. The following indices were used to measure methods of political participation: voting during elections; giving out space/facility for political meetings, rallies and other engagements; attendance of political rallies; crowd funding exercises for political activities; joined protest against unfavourable political decision; follower of political icon/activities online; and membership of online political group/ movement.

Findings reveal that 59.5% of the respondents score above the mean value (11.22) therefore having high political participation while 40.5% of the respondents score below the mean score (11.22) therefore having low method of political participation. This implies that many respondents in the study area were actively involved in politics.



Table 4: Categorization of Political Participation (n=378)

Method of political participation	Frequency	Percentage
High	225	59.5
Low	153	40.5

Source; Field Survey, 2024 Mean =11.22

**Test of significant relationship between use of mass media for political information and level of political participation.**

Hypothesis two which stated that there is no significant relationship between use of mass media for political information and level of political participation tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) shows a significant relationship ( $p < 0.01$ ) between usage of mass media and level of political participation ( $r = 0.153^{**}$ ). This implies that the usage of mass media had a positive influence on respondents’ political participation. This indicates that the higher the respondents’ use of mass media, the higher he or she participates in politics. This result aligns with the findings of Yankem (2013) who reported that access to radio and exposure to political content either through news, political talk-show and radio-advertisements influences socialization. In the same vein, Conroy-Krutz (2018) cited in Adegbola and Gearhart (2019) noted that radio news consumption promotes political engagement by increasing knowledge and efficacy.

Table 5: Test of significant relationship between use of mass media for political information and level of political participation

Variable	r-value	p-value	Decision
Use of mass media for political information and Level of political participation	0.153**	0.003	S

Source: Field Study (2024). SD = Standard Deviation

Note:

S=Significant

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels

**5.0 Conclusion**

Mass media remains a strong agent of political socialization and media audience preference for public affairs programmes which exposes them to the realities in their environment shows they are aware of the propaganda tendencies of the media and are ready to seek the truth. Of all available mass media, radio is the most accessible and popular medium for accessing political information in rural communities. Erratic and in some cases no supply of electricity is the major reason television is not popular. Newspaper and magazine are not popular because they are driven by literacy and are not usually in circulation in rural areas. Internet, though used predominantly by young people in rural areas, is not popular. Advertising is not a potent tool for influencing political decisions of residents of rural areas. Political debate on the other hand is not popular because of access and language barrier. Most of the popular debates are showed on television and are usually in English language.

Residents of rural areas are politically conscious and they engage in basic political activities like voting, joining political parties, attending rallies and giving out space and other facilities for political activities.

### 5.1 Recommendations

Media organizations, most especially radio stations should prioritize expository programmes, most especially those that reveal the inner workings of government, put politicians on the spot, while also encouraging audience participation. They should try as much as possible to be objective, while also avoiding contents that can bring contempt. Also, there is the need to improve on debates for public office seekers and these debates should be in local languages and should relayed on radio stations accessible by residents of rural areas. If this is done, it will give the people opportunity to assess their potential leaders and representatives. Residents of rural areas need reorientation on the essence of politics.

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