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The Practice of Political Communication

Lambe Kayode Mustapha & Maryam Lasisi Mustapha

Objectives

At the end of this chapter, students are expected to:

1. Analyse the linkage between the media and the political public sphere and its implication for the health of democratic institutions and decision making.
2. Know the theoretical bases of various forms of political communication.
3. Identify critical political communication actors and their comparative roles as drivers of political process across regions of the world.
4. Explain the changing patterns of political communication in response to the evolutionary nature of the media landscape.

Introduction

Political communication is a problematic concept commanding a plethora of definitions (Kaid, 2004; McNair, 2011). Principally dealing with application of various forms of communication praxes to political processes, political communication examines the means by which political actors deploy communication apparatuses to pass political messages across to numerous political stakeholders. Political communication extends from describing the use of societal communication infrastructure to explicating of the central role of communication in politics from the antiquity to the contemporary time. Through historicization of communication practices that political actors deployed in the course of seeking political legitimacies, political communication presents the ways political actors and institutions engage the public life via building of consensus around certain political issues, philosophies and beliefs. The public life, comprising of individuals, organisations, institutions, issues, events and a range of discussions, is made meaningful through mediated political discourses and representations.

Citizens' appreciation of political institutions, values and authorities is internalised mainly from day-to-day programmes, particularly news and public affairs programmes, of the mass media (Murphy, 2007). The centrality of the communication and information to political enculturation, education and participation, therefore, informs the enagement of the mass media by all those seeking political authority, particularly since the emergence of 'mass society' sequel to industrialisation (Baran & Davis, 2012; DeFleur, 2010).

From intentionality and purpose perspective, McNair (2011, p. 4) offers a multidimensional outlook of political communication thus:

all forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving 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.

This chapter examines political communications through the prisms of discourses on political media and their effects, as well as communication practices of organisations seeking to achieve certain political goals, from historical, theoretical and practical perspectives.

Elements of Political Communication

McNair (2011) identifies three elements of of political communication, consisting of the political organisation, the audience and the media. All these elements interact to create a political ecosystem that operates in any given society. The political organisations, according to this author, include political parties, which embodied association of like-minds being guided by certain political philosophies that form the basis for their quest for power through legitimate means and mechanisms in a periodic election; non-party political organisations such as trade unions, consumer groups, professional associations, and single-issue pressure groups, whose members come together to fight common causes using various strategies and tactics, including endorsing political candidates and parties that are

sympathetic to their causes; and terrorist organisations that utilise terror tactics in bringing attention to their causes and grievances with legitimate authorities.

The audience, according to McNair (2011) is consisting of members of the public that other political actors strive to communicate with. As the receivers of political communication messages, members of the audience are taken seriously as their cognitive, affective and behavioural dispositions to the political messages matter a lot to other actors engaging this important element of political communication. Perloff (2014, p. 31) conceptualises the audience broadly as citizens. According to him, "The centerpiece of political communication is the citizenry. Citizens are a cacophonous combination of the politically engaged and opinionated, along with the indifferent and woefully ignorant."

The media, as the third element in the political communication process, are transmitters of political messages emanating from other actors as well as senders of own constructed political messages. Through news and current affairs reportage, the media offer reports and analyses on key political policy, programmes and actions of legitimate and illegitimate political actors thus creating objective as well as bias-laden, subjective and constructed reality for the audience (Lewis, Inthorn & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005; Simon, 2004). In essence, the media serve as the linkage between party political as well as non-party political organisations and the audience (Bennet & Entman, 2005). In the contemporary time, the media have become increasingly diverse, consisting of the conventional, mainstream news media, citizen journalism and host of other digitally-mediated communication platforms used in passing political messages to diverse audience (Mustapha, Omar & Atoloye, 2019; Perloff, 2014)

Historicising Political Communication

Political communication is an aged phenomenon, from Athenian Agora to the contemporary technology-driven ubiquitous public sphere. While many scholars attributed the emergence of political communication to 1940s research on the use of mass media to mobilise voters (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Mustapha & Wok, 2015), Perloff (2014) believes that the

practice of political communication is inherent is Lippmann's eloquent and influential description of media's ability to paint distant world that is out of direct cognizance on people's heads in the 1920s. According to this political communication scholar, "Lippmann argued that in a political world few experienced directly, media symbols and interpretations influenced public attitudes and opinions (2014, p. 48). Perloff, however, agreed that the pendulum of the genesis of political communication later swung along the influential study of Lazarsfeld and his colleagues in the 1940s.

According to Rogers (2004, p. 3), "the field of political communication began by studying the effects of print media and radio on individuals' voting choice, such as in the 1940 Erie County Study, the field has expanded to include additional aspects of communication and political behavior". Subsequently, scholars have calibrated the trajectories of political communication into pre-modern era, modern era and post-modern era based on the role of organised communication in politics and governance. Denver (2007, p. 125) notes, "communicating with voters in the hope of influencing their behaviour is as old as competitive politics itself". According to Foster (2010), the political career of Harold Mcmillan marks the transition to a quintessentially modern era of political communication. This occurred when he took over premiership on January, 10, 1957 through jettisoning the old methods of party-political communication.

In the pre-modern era, political communication was characterised by 'retail politics'- the act of engaging as many individuals as possible through direct and physical contacts by army of members interested in wooing more people to their side. Other characteristics of pre-modern political communication are limited central coordination, relative absence of communication experts interfacing with the electorate on behalf of the politicians and political organisation, limited if any role for the mass media, and narrow time frame for running political campaign, in most instance few weeks.

The modern era of political communication, according to Foster (2010, p. 6), featured strategic national campaign approach weaved around

attributes of individual party leaders; professional and expert-centred messaging, particularly with regards to political marketing communication and media management; long-term orientation with a view to set favourable media agenda; researched-based strategies, exploring opinion and marketing research to enhance resonance of candidates and party's quality in the perceptions of the audience; nation-wide advertising that aimed at associating resonant theme to candidate; and heavy deployment of mediated communication strategy that enhance the publicity and promotional mileage of the candidates.

The post-modern era of political communication, explicated by critical theorists, was based on demise of old political ideologies like conservatism, socialism and liberalism in public political consciousness (McNair, 2011). In addition, increasing fragmentation resulting to fluidity of voters' behaviour and availability of digital media increased the problematic associated with predicting voters. Features associated with post-modern era of political communication by Foster (2010, p. 19) are "decentralisation of campaign, niche and target marketing, enhanced professionalism, permanent campaign to remain on the media agenda, humongous campaign funds, embracement of qualitative research to complement quantitative opinion research, accumulating tick data for appropriate messaging, and narrow-casting aimed at ameliorating the problem of media fragmentation"

Theories of Political Communication

The multi-disciplinary nature of political communication makes theorising the field of scholarship as problematic as conceptualising the practice. According to Kaid (2004, p. xiii), "modern political communication research is very much an interdisciplinary field of study, drawing on concepts from communication, political science, journalism, sociology, psychology, history, rhetoric, and other fields". Rather than being a subject with a single overarching theory, therefore, political communication is undergirded by diverse theoretical themes with communication effects being the point of convergence (Rogers, 2004). Importantly, early organised studies in mass communication explored effects of communication on voters' choice (Baran & Davis, 2012;

DeFleur, 2010; Rogers, 2004). However, the expansion of the media landscape vis-à-vis increasing sophistication of political actors and audience has broadened research in political communication. This section explicates political significance of a number of communication theories that crystallise the roles, processes and effects of communication in political process. These theories include, but not limited to, two-step flow, diffusion of news, agenda-setting, framing, priming, cultivation, and spiral of silence theoretical formulations.

The two-step flow theory, associated with Lazarsfeld and his colleagues at the Bureau of Applied Social Science, Columbia University, and popularised by Erie County Study exploring the association between media use and voters' behaviours during the 1940 U.S presidential election, is considered a pioneering work in political communication (DeFleur, 2010; Rosemberry & Vicker, 2009; Rogers, 2004). The summary of the theory is that the effects of the media on the audience happen through two step- from opinion leaders to the opinion followers or the mass audience. Put in other words "Lazarsfeld and others postulated a two-step flow of communication in which opinion leaders with a relatively high degree of media exposure then passed along political information to their followers via interpersonal communication channels" (Rogers, 2004, p. 6). This theory, developed in an election context, has been applied to other aspects of communication phenomena and remained useful in unpacking communication process and effects till contemporary time.

Agenda-setting, popularised by McCombs and Shaw (1972), is another forefront theory used in expounding political communication mechanisms. Emerging from Walter Lippman's epigrammatic expression on how the pictures painted in people's heads by controllers of mediated communication system inform perceived reality, this theory resuscitated media effects research from doomed prognostication on media effects research by limited effects' scholars (Baran & Davis, 2012; Mustapha & Wok, 2015; Rogers, 2004). Its main thesis is that the mass media, via persistent emphasis on certain issues, events, or even political candidates, elevate the salience of such issues in the public perception. Agenda-setting used the 1968 U.S presidential election as the laboratory to test the correspondence between election issues being played up in media

reportage and voters' perception of the Most Important Problem facing the nation. McCombs and Shaw found a near perfect correlation between the media agenda and public agenda and concluded that "mass media effectively sets the agenda for political campaigns, thereby influencing the salience of attitude towards political issues" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p, 86). Other election and non-election settings have been used to validate and extend the frontiers of agenda-setting as a relevant media and political communication theory (Mustapha, Owolabi & Abubakar, 2018)

Framing Theory is also applicable to political communication in that the interpretive frameworks deployed in packaging political messages have implication for audience interpretation, understanding and response to the messages. While the grand framing theory was associated with Erving Goffman, Robert Entman is considered as the promoter of media framing analysis (Baran & Davis, 2012; Severin & Tankard, 2010). Severin and Tankard (2010) submit that "frame is a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration." Media frame assists the audience to decipher message meaning using the context of elaboration and interpretation provided by the media. Applied to political communication, framing could help position a political candidate in certain light that informs the issues and attributes associated with such candidate by the voters in the long run. Baran and Davis (2012, p. 338), summarily opine that "the most common finding is that exposure to news coverage results in learning that is consistent with the frames that structure the coverage". A simplistic manifestation of the power of framing theory is how the kind of perspectives weaved into news reportage influenced the perspectives Nigerians held about Muhammadu Buhari since his political sojourn between 2003 and 2015 resulting into his rejection at the ballot thrice and eventual election at the fourth contest.

In *The Spiral of Silence and the Social Nature of Man*, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and Thomas Petersen (2004,) described the emergence of Spiral of Silence theory as an answer to a puzzle of how Christian Democratic Party won the contentious 1965 German general election against its rival, Social democratic Party. According to these scholars, the bandwagon effect that sequel expressiveness of members of Christian

Democratic Party following the Queen of England visit might have resulted in fear of isolation among members of opponent Social Democratic Party, thus resulting into loss of visibility of their party in the public. These scholars of public opinion thus articulated that the social nature of man leads to fear of isolation when one's opinion is in conflict with prevailing climate of opinion on a morally-charged issue. Being the site of opinion contestation, the mass media play tremendous role in spiral of silence process through taking a side in a societal controversy (Noelle-Neumann & Petersen, 2004; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). Spiral of silence, being a public opinion theory, is central to political communication in that people want to be on the winning side to avoid being isolated by the majority. Hence, political communicators seize the momentum of their popularity to dominate public discourses thus consolidating their positions and annihilating minority opinion.

Priming is another cognizant theory in political communication because of its interest in elaboration of how media emphasis on certain issues over others inform the evaluative criteria used in judging political office holders by members of the public. Baran and Davis (2012) described priming theory as an extension of agenda-setting theory focusing on explaining how media emphasis on an aspect of reality influence audience evaluation of reality. For example, if the media emphasis anti-corruption stance continuously about a president, chances are that people use anti-corruption when evaluating the performance of such president. Iyengar and Kinder (1987), using a series of experiments, discovered the priming effect of media on audience judgment based on news coverage attaching more weight to certain issues. Being a theory that is based on information accessibility, priming is important to political communication in that staying on the top of media agenda helps political organisation and candidates to be evaluated and judged by positive issues and attributes being promoted by them (Severin & Tankard, 2010; Valenzuela, 2009).

Diffusion of New Theory is another important theory in political communication promoted according to Rogers (2004), by a collection of empirical findings of Paul J. Deutschmann and Wayne Danielson (1960). "A common finding in the news event diffusion studies was that the media, especially the broadcast media, were particularly important in

spreading major news events (Rogers, 2004, p. 12). While this theory recognises the importance of the mass media in breaking news of significance, it ascribes the spread of such news to interpersonal communication. Another important thesis of diffusion of news is that highly significant news would move faster and wider among the people irrespective of the sources (Baran & Davis, 2012; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009).

While above theories, and others not discussed in this section, are mainstream media effects theories, their evolutions have strong linkage to political communication. Besides, the fact that most of the founding fathers of the mass communication field were interested in examining the effects of media on voters' behaviour, politics is one of the major events in the society that fit into media routine of reportage. Hence, political communication offers a perfect laboratory for testing and advancing the theses of the theories.

Political Media

"The mass media and Internet play an important role, offering the raw materials from which citizens construct beliefs about politics" (Perloff, 2014, p. 82). The media are significant political actors that transform political messages using their own statements, commentaries, editorials, etc. These transformations have a significant impact on the larger political environment. This role performed by the media has increased the interest of political actors in understanding the working environment of the media and how to utilise the media for their communication goals. Articulating the key roles of media in political and democratic process, McNair (2011) suggests that the media inform, educate, offer platforms for political discourses, afford government and political institutions opportunity for publicity, and serve as an avenue for advocacy of political perspectives.

The importance of media to politics and political process is inherent on many appellations like the Fourth Estate of the realm, open marketplace of idea, the public sphere and the watchdog (Mustapha, Ahmad & Abubakar, 2012). The media as self-regulating sources of information to the people about politics also shield them from abuses of power (McNair, 2011). As

greater sources of information to the people on government and as a site to formulating and articulating public opinion, the media represent important political institution contributing to sustenance of egalitarian political culture.

With various forms of ownership orientation, the media system has been subjected to critical analysis regarding its role in the political process. Initially owned by private individuals with profit motives, the media, particularly the earliest newspapers graduated into real 'mass media' following increasing literacy and mass production and circulation promoted by advance in printing technology. The triumph of neo-liberal capitalism and attendant commercialisation of media and the news created concern for the ability of the media to function as watchdog as witnessed earlier (Baran & Davis, 2012; Trappel & Tomaz, 2021).

The corporatisation of media industry as well as consolidation and conglomeration of the media has today created a media system that is more interested in the bottom-line than the public interest (Mustapha, Ahmad & Abubakar, 2014). This development is at the core of the concern of political economy theorists who conjectured that the means of financing and organising the contemporary media system have serious consequence for access to and representation in the media by different members of the public, with political and corporate elites being advantageous in the current arrangement (Golding & Murdock, 1998; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; McNair, 2011).

With liberalisation of the broadcast sphere, allowing for more opportunity for people to be heard, the media, particularly broadcast media, are expected to create in the people political cognitive complexity to aid their understanding of the political environment and their roles in democratic society. This is, however, not the case as the race towards profit and survivability in the terse competitive environment created over dependence on infotainment rather than emphasis on public affairs programming (Perloff, 2014; Prior, 2007). Even, political communication has become a subject of satirical and comedic approach in the media fueling the fear that increasing political apathy, particularly among the youth is imminent (Mustapha, Omar & Atoloye, 2019). As a salvaging

development, the expansion of the media landscape by the development of alternative digital media that created prosumer opportunity is expected to return the citizens back to democratic practice. This is nonetheless contentious given the polarising arguments as to whether the new public sphere, dubbed the *Fifth Estate*, is capable of stimulating civic engagement and engendering political participation (Mustapha & Mustapha, 2017; Mustapha & Omar, 2020).

The increasing importance of the mass media system to politics and democratic process leads to the emergence of scholarship in distinguishing mediation from mediatisation of politics. While mediation has been broadly conceived as the centrality of the mass media to information exchange between the governors and the governed (McNair, 2011; Strömbäck, 2008), mediatisation is considered the influence of media on the society, including its politics, to the extent that societal activities are undertaken with media logic (tabloidization, sensationalism; simplification, polarization, intensification, personalization visualization and stereotypization, etc.) as the centrepiece (Brants & Voltmer, 2011; Strömbäck, 2008). Perloff (2014, p. 36) piquantly captures the essence of mediatisation of politics thus:

The media are the centerpiece of modern politics. They are where politics happens, the access points for both leaders and the public. Politicians must adapt their styles to fit the styles of political journalists, commentators and online bloggers who shape the information that reaches the public”

Although, media logic has been confirmed to drive political communication process scholars have offers an elaboration of mediatisation of politics that explicates the implicit interaction between media logic and political logic in political communication process based on the belief that both political and media actors depend on each other to achieve their differential goals and possibility of variation in dominance according to time and circumstances (Brants & Voltmer, 2011; Strömbäck, 2008).

Media Bias in Political Communication

Interest in media bias in political communication arose from the fact that majority of information comes through the media before it gets to the voters. Of concern is the belief that partisan, ideological and other forms of bias resulting from opinionated content, rather than objective news coverage, influence the slant of news and consequently voters' decision (Gulati, Just & Crigler, 2004). According to Foster (2010) bias reportage leading to partial and inaccurate reporting on the part of the media could thus change political results because of voters' beliefs that journalists offer an accurate and balanced report from the point of view of politicians.

Klepka (2019) considers media bias as accentuation of the political values and agenda of certain political party as opposed to others, which is at variance with presumed notions of journalistic objectivity, professionalism, social responsibility and balanced reportage that are venerated ethos that elevated the media system as a fundamental institution of democratic system. Bias in political communication is worrisome because it attenuates availability of competing opinions, perspectives and positions that are central to acting as informed democratic citizens. Besides, extreme reliance on the media to get connected to the vast political world requires equality of access and balanced manner of presenting political parties and viewpoints. Hence, media political leaning and bias represents betrayal of trust of being the authentic Fourth Estate of the realm.

Although, media organisations work with strict adherence to highly routinised professional standards, studies and evidences abound in the literature that journalistic practice is majorly value-driven. In fact, scholars have traced the genesis of media political bias to structural constraints and organisational influence as well as a product of symbiotic relationship between the media and established political system (DiMaggio, 2017; Perloff, 2014; Soules, 2015). This accounts for the dichotomised notion of the possibility of unintentional and intentional bias (Klepka, 2019).

Significant theoretical basis of biased journalism include gatekeeping assumptions and layers of influence such as individual, job routine, organisational, extra-media and ideological (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000; DeFleur, 2010; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Additionally, Klepka (2019) offers that gatekeeping, information value, agenda-setting, framing theories and propaganda model have been described as theoretical mechanisms that establish wittingly or unwittingly the unavoidability of bias in media presentation of political stories.

In terms of typologies, many variants of bias have been explicated by scholars with prefix being the political value or agenda being promoted. Dennis McQuail, for instance, proposes a more complex typology of political bias, making the criteria of its division intentionality, as in the previous typology, but also adding a second criterion, that is, openness. On this basis, he distinguishes propaganda, ideological, unmistakable and involuntary bias (Foster, 2010; Klepka, 2019). In a meta-analysis of partisan media bias, D'Alessio and Allen (2000) identified three bias typologies, namely gatekeeping bias- a preference for selecting stories from one party at the expense of others; coverage bias, which entails giving more coverage to a particular party relative to others; and statement bias that focuses on favourability of a party over the others via interjection of reporter's opinion in the texts.

In *Media Debate: Great Issues for the Digital Age*, Dennis and Merrill (2002), presented media bias and political leaning as an issue of concern to the political divides in the United States, citing liberal and conservative bias as the most common political bias typologies. In another characterisation, DiMaggio (2017) identifies indexing bias in favour of government; bad news bias of excessive negative coverage; pluralist theory bias that considers viewpoints of pluralistic social group; hegemonic theory bias, which is pro-business in orientation as well as liberal and conservative bias in favour of Democratic and Republican political perspectives, respectively. In a more recent study, Van der Pas and Aaldering (2020) establish the presence of gender bias in political coverage with the claim that "women politicians receive more attention to their appearance and personal life, more negative viability coverage, and, to some extent, stereotypical issue and trait coverage." (p. 114). Taken

together, media are expected to offer a equality of access and balanced manner of presenting political parties such that no party is given undue advantage over the other.

Political Advertising

Political advertising refers “to the purchase and use of advertising space, paid for at commercial rates, in order to transmit political messages to a mass audience” (McNair, 2011, p. 87). In a self-citation of her 1981 piece, Kaid (2004, p. 156) defined political advertising as “the communication process by which a source (usually a political candidate or party) purchases the opportunity to expose receivers through mass channels to political messages with the intended effect of influencing their political attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors.” Political advertising is principally a mediated political marketing of political candidates aimed at connecting with the feelings and emotions of the electorate, particularly in political milieus that put emphasis on candidates than political parties (Ahmad & Popa, 2014). In an apt conceptualisation of the significance of political advertising, Mare and Matsilele (2020) say that:

Political advertising is advertising whose central focus is the marketing of ideas, attitudes and concerns about public issues, including political concepts and political candidates. The essential task of political advertising is to gain the confidence of the people for their acceptance of ideas and, in the case of political campaign advertising, to influence their vote.

Political advertising contributes to audience information holding about political candidates and parties thus increasing their political knowledge, reinforces existing beliefs and values, helps set political agenda thus achieving priming and framing effect, and aids formation of political attitudes and even political behaviours such as campaigning for political candidates and parties, donation and voting (Mare & Matsilele, 2020; Perloff, 2014). Through chance encounter in the commercial insert on entertainment content political advertising brings political information to politically-ignorant and those who will not ordinarily seek political information as a matter of routine (Burton & Shea, 2010; Prior, 2007).

This means that the audience, particularly the politically apathetic, get political information more from advertising than news and current affairs programmes.

While political advertising in the mainstream media and lately on the social media is one of the most cost-intensive activities of political and election campaign, it is oftentimes a deviation from serious political communication due to its focus on negative description of the opponents rather than engaging substantive issues (Perloff, 2014). There are, however, other forms of political advertising that help political actors in their bid to influence voting behaviour. An extensive literature review of prior scholars by Olujide, Adeyemi and Gbadeyan (2011), for example, identifies strands on political advertising such as political adverts, which focuses on a single candidate without reference to opponents; contrast adverts which emphasises the positive and negative statements on the candidate and the opponent, respectively; negative or attack adverts, which is a negatively-worded message on the opponent alone; image adverts, which focuses on the attributes that humanise the candidate; and issue advert, which emphasises candidate's stand on key issues in the election. Irrespective of the strategy and tactics of advertising employed, advertising has been found to be an effective marketing strategy in politics and election that contribute to electorates' cognitions, affects and observable behaviours.

Political Public Relations

Like political advertising, political public relations is another political marketing strategy aimed at enhancing perception of political candidates and increasing their visibility in political contests. "Political public relations refers to the strategic communication activities of actors participating in the political process that aim at informative and persuasive goals in order to realize single interests." (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2008, p. 677). According to Louw (2005, p. 16), political public relations "involves a multi-prong set of strategies and tactics geared towards putting a positive spin on the politician one [public relations consultant] works for and a negative spin on the opposition." In contrast with political advertising which message receivers can easily associated to the sender

with short-term effects, political public relations utilises third-party avenues and opportunities to reach multitude of people in a strategic and credible manner (Foster, 2010; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2008; Lilleker, 2006; McNair, 2011).

Louw (2005, p. 143) opines that political public relations birthed "a new industry of communication professionals- called spin-doctors- who stage-manage televisual performances and events in order to 'steer' public opinion." Citing Franklin (2004) Foster (2010, p. 84) submits that "a former government information officer described approach to spin doctoring as three 'Rs': rhetoric (consistent message delivery), repetition (constant repetition of one message) and rebuttal (quick, immediate and robust responses to hostile stories)". Strategies being employed in political public relations include agenda-building, personalisation and symbolic messaging, event management, issue management, image building, image creation and branding, news management, public affairs as well as mediated public diplomacy (Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 2008; Lilleker, 2006).

According to Louw (2005), political public relations, which he dubbed PR-ization of politics, with American ascendancy, has become ingrained in the politics of most advanced and developing democracies. He thus suggests that doing political public relations requires knowledge of journalistic and media practice, ability to conduct systematic research, knowledge of brand marketing and brand management, knowledge of crisis and impression management. Hence, political public relations professionals engage in strategic media management to achieve internal communication, information management and image management of political parties and candidates.

Political public relations helps build climate of trust in politicians, political parties, political causes and political system strategically. While political public relations has assumed a very fundamental and strategic tool in both antiquated and contemporary politics, with changing media landscape accentuating its potency, it has drawbacks, particularly when it is used (and it is often used) to manufacture consent. Louw (2005), for instance, identifies consequences of political public relations that include power shift from party bosses to consultants and spin doctors, emphasis on

candidates' attributes rather than issue stance, cost-intensive nature of political campaigns, integration of popular culture and hyperdramatisation into serious politics, extreme appeal to emotion rather than logic, democratic malaise resulting from televisualisation of politics, decline of political journalism and power of the press, as well as politics of avoidance evidenced by perpetual manufacturing of consent. In the same token, de Vreese and Elenbaas (2011, p. 76) also conclude that "in sum, citizens' attitudes towards political publicity are bound to have direct or indirect ramifications for citizens' confidence in political actors and the democratic health of the political process." This means that the results emerging from the deployment of political public relations have far reaching consequences for political culture and system.

Government Communication

According to Maarek (2003, p. 157), "Government communication to the public is in a sense the oldest form of political communication." Historicising government communication, Maarek describes how rhetoric in the Athenian Agora was used to advertise territories with a view to attract tourists in ancient Greek city state. Subsequently, government communication becomes the means of aligning key stakeholders with government policy domestically and a means of conducting diplomacy internationally (Perloff, 2014).

The need for government communication aroused from the criticality of legitimacy to government and governance and centrality of people's consensus to attainment of legitimacy. Louw (2005, p. 145) put it succinctly: "liberal democracy is grounded upon the notion of legitimate governance. And legitimacy requires the consent of the governed." He went further to explicate the dilemma and contradictions faced by elected government. According to him, government policy makers "try and prevent the masses from disrupting and convoluting the policy process by keeping them at arm's length from the actual decision-making process [and] try and make the masses believe they are actually participating in governance as a way of building consent." Hence, media and information management as well as other propagandistic mechanisms are usually

employed by the government in both democratic and autocratic states (DiMaggio, 2017; Perloff, 2014; Soules, 2015).

Information and media management becomes important because government believes it has paternalistic responsibility to the citizens who could not fathom the ramifications of public policies. Theaker (2001, p. 28) says that "information management is the mechanism used by government officials and agencies decides on and disseminate only the information they want people to know". McNair (2011, p. 123), on the other hand, opines that "media management comprises activities designed to maintain a positive politician-media relationship, acknowledging the needs which each has of the other, while exploiting the institutional characteristics of both sets of actors for maximum advantage. In another dimension, Brown (2011, p. 60) conceptualised news management as "an element of the broader process of professionalization of political communications...concerned with the efforts of political actors to shape the way in which media organizations report politics." Information, media and news management becomes paramount particularly during crises when government wants people to rally around the flag (Foster, 2011).

Government communication benefits tremendously from the normative, mutually-benefiting relationship it has with the magisterial channels of public communication, the mass media. According to DiMaggio (2017, p. 3), "Political leaders seek to influence public opinion, in large part through the use of rhetoric via speeches, while also providing information to journalists, in an effort to "frame" news stories in their favor. Journalists seek information from government officials in order to produce news stories for public consumption." The two institutions, government and the media, provide substantial information that guide people's daily decision making given the trust reposed on them. Evidence abounds, however, on how these great sources of public information short-change the citizenry. Making reference to Walter Lippmann's (1922) treatise, Perloff (2014) recounts that people's reliance on the government and the press for accurate information results in deception as government manipulate symbols to manufacture consent while press coverage is often too superficial and mundane.

Government communication is not always public: it is mostly conducted in the closets like private phone calls between heads of state or government; secret backstage for handling of delicate issues, meetings or the use of cultural and broadcast diplomacy. Soules (2015, p. 203), however, warned that "while cooperation between governments, corporations, security establishments and powerful media actors is defensible during a national crisis, manipulative cooperation done secretively betrays principles of trust and transparency necessary to democracy." Irrespective of the approaches, the media have become important channels of communicating public policy and securing legitimacy from the governed. Hence, de Vreese and Elenbaas (2011) summed that the mass media are not only integral to electoral politics but a part and parcel of governance and policy making coverage.

Political Communication and Digital Media

Similar to changes that alter all aspects of mass communication process and effects, in response to revolution in the media ecology, political communication also experienced stronger impact from media technological advancement. At the outset of the new media technologies with its ever-fleeting offspring differential prognostications were advanced. From optimistic prism, it was envisaged that the new media technologies will democratise information exchange thus raising informed and engaged citizenry (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Macnamara, 2012). This prophesy was to be supported with the deployment of new and social media in mobilising votes from digital natives and netizens as well as diffusion of protests across the world (Valenzuela, Arriagada & Scherman, 2012).

On the contrary, a pessimistic outlook was that increasing fragmentation and atomisation of the audience will contribute to a narrower perspective about politics and public affairs from audience who will be trapped in echo chamber (Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018; Stroud, 2011). Decreasing voters' turnout and other symptoms of declining social capital were arrayed as evidence of negative consequences of digital media on political communication and by extension politics (Bode, 2016; Kahne & Middaugh, 2012).

Debates on whether social and digital media have positive or negative influence on politics and political communication are far from conclusive. Soules (2015), for instance holds that digital media though offer increased access to information and diversification of opinion, they blur audience comprehension of complex political discourses. In a similar vein, Brants and Voltmer (2011, p. 4) contend that under digital media ecology, various political actors, such as political parties, governments and political institutions, have lost "control over the way in which politics is communicated and interpreted in the public sphere". On the optimistic side, Perloff (2014) believes that the social media have become the best sites to mobilise youth whose daily lived-experiences have been anchored on the use of mobile phones that are permanently connected to various social media platforms. He buttresses further that online information now supplement conventional media with the advantage of offering information that matches political beliefs and tastes. Concordantly, Burton and Shea (2010) surmise on the potency of the new media to facilitate personalisation of political messages to voters in a way hitherto impossible under the legacy media environment.

Conclusion

The foregoing sections and subsections attempt an apt explication of the practice of political communication. Besides providing important elements of political communication, consisting of key actors in the practice, the chapter holistically explore the historical trajectories of the field by providing salient features of each era of political communication. To establish the grounding of political communication as a scholarly field of study, the chapter provides a compressed description of various theories and align them to communication that is political in orientation.

In addition, this chapter offers important insight into strategies of political communication by explaining the media environment in which political communication is being actualised. We also discussed the politics of media production from the prism of "media bias" in political communication. By these, we have documented operations and constraints of media in discharging political communication.

The chapter also examines the tactics of political communication through discussion of political marketing communication approaches such as political advertising and political public relations. Discourses here delved into how political actors utilise marketing communication approach to create and market political brands thus enhancing their visibility. Additionally, the chapter explain the mode of government communication, which shares the strategies and tactics of other forms of political communication. In view of the impact of changing media landscape on political communication, the influence of digital media evolution was aptly discussed. While the chapter is unable to catalogue all the essentials of contemporary political communication, it offers insight into key intelligence that are useful to political communication scholars, researchers and students at all levels.

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you would have learnt about:

1. The meaning, history and elements of political communication.
2. Theories explaining the role of mass media in political communication.
3. Strategies for conducting political communication over time and space.
4. Tactics of political communication such as political advertising and political public relations.
5. Extension of political communication beyond electoral politics.

14.0 Discussion Questions

1. What are the examples of political messages that are intended to persuade, entertain or communicate information?
2. Which of the actors in political communication exerts the largest impact on politics?
3. In what ways is news bias a problem in today's politics in developing democracies?

4. Distinguish between political advertising and political public relations as means of marketing political parties and candidates.
5. Explain the salient features of each of the eras of political communication.
6. Describe the mechanisms of government communication and explain the implication of extreme information management as a strategy of government communication.
7. Debates over what novel media mode for democratic politics are far from conclusive. Discuss.

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