

# ICT Mediated Personalized Strategic Leadership – Followership Communication in Nigeria

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**Abstract-** The study investigated the Fireside Chats Phoenix: A Case for ICT-Mediated Personalized Strategic Leadership – Followership Communication in Nigeria. The study was focused on how Fireside Chats P hoenix and ICT-Mediated Personalized Strategic Leadership – Followership Communication in Nigeria can enhance political leadership – followership involvement in Nigeria and the approaches which include, using digital age approach, traditional approach, using languages and pictures that would always appeal to the emotions of the followers in order to be believing the message that is being conveyed to them. The result got from the findings revealed that ICT-Mediated Personalized Strategic Leadership – Followership Communication in Nigeria is one of the easiest ways through which the political leaders sell their ideas and personalities to their followers. It was concluded that political followers in Nigeria follow their leaders based on how they project themselves on media but not necessarily on their real dispositions, and it was finally recommended that the political followers in Nigeria should endeavour to use the ICT media to relay to the entire public the real personality of the leader that they are following despite who is involved.

**Keywords:** ICT-Mediated, Personalized communication, Strategic, Leadership – Followership, Communication, Nigeria.

## Introduction

The success of any political movement/ambition depends largely on how well the leadership of the political movement is able to carry its followers along, in their political activities and blueprints for governance. The thin line between the success and failure of any political dream lies in how communication was embraced by the political players, hence, the power to persuade effectively depends largely on the power to communicate effectively. This stems from the fact that when people communicate, a kind of commonness is established and it is that established commonness that aids understanding and acceptance amongst the players in that communication process (Okunna and Omenugha 2012, Umeh and Ekweonu, 2020). Irrespective of any particular aspect of human endeavor, the need to understand and be understood, persuade, gain and retain trust and followership form the basis and the yardstick for judging the effectiveness or otherwise of every human endeavor. Communication thus offers the avenue to bridge gaps and establish that required understanding which leads to trust and subsequent embrace between and among participants in the communication process.

Similarly, in the political sphere, communication in politics or political communication is an indispensable tool in the success of every political life. As a matter of fact, communication is the livewire of politics in that it is the vehicle through which political players make known their ideologies, plans, ideas, and philosophies to their followers; and subsequently, solicit political support, establish rapport, political structure, stronghold and confidence from their followers. As rightly opined by Barandiaran, Unceta and Pena, (2020), communication helps in no little way, to shape the relationship that exists between people and politics. It helps to shape how followers see, value or judge politics and politicians. It would therefore, suffice to say that communication in politics is instrumental to the realization of every political actor's goal: which is to meet their followers where they are and establish authenticity and trust.

Tracing the history and development of political communication, communication scholars noted that until the advent of live broadcast media in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, political communication had hitherto, been limited in scope and reach as it occurred in person or in print (Impactive 2020, Oparaugo 2021, Norris 2000 and Soukup 2014). A cursory look at the evolution of political communication in the western world (America precisely) shows there are three major eras in

political communication history. According to Impactive 2020, the first era, regarded as the pre-modern era prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw political communication characterized by door-to-door, interpersonal communication and print communication through newspapers and pamphlets. Political communication in this first era was seen as simply a linear process of information transmission from political actors to citizens. The second era incidentally, saw the advent of radio and subsequently television broadcasting which offered political actors and their followers avenues for a more participatory and engaging political experience. This incidentally is the era that gave birth to President Roosevelt's fireside chats – a powerful communication tool instrumental to his being elected president for four consecutive tenures. The modern era metamorphosed to the post-modern era with the advent of ICTs and internet which have in more ways made political communication experience much more participatory and engaging to both political leaders and followers alike.

The history of Nigerian experience at political communication can be traced to the same line with the difference lying in the fact that due to the nature of the country's creations, the eras are more conveniently grouped into based on colonial/pre-independence era, post-independence era and most recently, the modern and post-modern era. Citing Rahman 1991, Omotosho (2021) stated that the history of political communication in Nigeria can be viewed in line with the history of colonialism, Christian missionary society, political development, socio-economic structure, and ownership of newspapers and other mass media of communications. The advent of the colonial masters and Christian missionary society on the shores of Nigeria came with the need for dissemination of the colonial masters' ideologies and evangelization messages soliciting citizens' support and trust. Communication during this era was mainly through interpersonal and the print media of communication. Political communication from this era throughout to a greater part of the modern era was characterized by one-way or linear process of information transmission from the leaders to the citizenry due to the media ownership pattern and press theories in vogue at the various times. The press theories at those times abhorred freedom of information dissemination and participatory communication processes and upheld total submission of citizenry to government policies and ideologies and worst still, linear and non-participatory political process.

Today however, with the advent of ICTs, internet and the new media, came an unprecedented level of liberty, reflected in uncensored news reporting, internet journalism and unrestricted mass participation in information gathering and dissemination through social media which has also added more vibes and colour to participatory political processes in Nigeria.

Based on these, this paper attempts a general introduction of fireside chats; highlighting their strengths as very powerful tool for effective strategic political communication and consequently, making a case for the importance of ICT-mediated political communication in Nigeria.

### **The Fireside Chat Phoenix**

The term, fireside chats was a phrase coined by Reporter Harry Butcher in 1933 to describe the various speeches used by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to douse the tension occasioned by the Great Depression on his follower/American people between 1933 and 1944. The term was coined, not because President Roosevelt delivered the said speeches sitting beside firesides but because he needed to depict and evoke the comforting intent behind the President's speeches as well as the informal soothing and conversational tone of the speeches.

President Roosevelt took office at the time the American economy was in shambles; a time when the economy had declined to desperation levels where industrial productions had crippled and over 13 million people were unemployed. The said period was characterized by great economic calamity which began with the stock market crash of 1929 and was made worse by the 1930s Dust Bowl (History 2022). Roosevelt's administration put several practical measures in place to ameliorate/cushion the effects of the Great Depression on the people. In addition to the various measures he took, he recognized the need to whip the trust and support of the American people through constant communication of his administration's activities to the populace in order to solicit their undivided loyalty to the cause of going through the GD period. He took a very important step of communicating directly and intimately with the public via speeches broadcast over the only major broadcast media available – the radio.

The reassuring nature of the fireside chats boosted the public's confidence in Roosevelt's administration throughout the period of the Great Depression and subsequent World War. It also increased Roosevelt's approval rates, increased his followership bank and contributed in no measurable way to his recommendations and four-times tremendous wins at the polls (History 2022). Thus marked the birth and adoption of the first most popular and inclusive strategic political communication tool with great propensity for strong leadership – followership affiliations. At that time, the radio held sway as the chief medium for participatory political communication process the world over until the advent of the new media.

Despite championing the course for participatory political process, the radio's ability to break the bondage of asymmetrical political participation was however jaundiced by several factors occasioned mostly by the ownership pattern of the broadcast media of the time. The slogan – "he who pays the piper dictates the tune" still held sway as the government in power reserved the exclusive rights to harness the radio and indeed every other traditional means of

communication for political activities. Today however, the advent and advancement in ICTs have swept away the limitations of those analogue world and weakened the grip of government-owned platforms of information monopoly and control. The political field, thanks to the characteristic participatory and accessibility nature of various social media platforms, has become an all-comers affair; so much so that political communication on social media platforms today can be likened to the fireside chats of the Frank Roosevelt's days both in nature and in context.

### **The Role of ICT Media in Building Followership**

According to Afriyie (2012), ICTs include any product that receives, stores, retrieves, manipulates or transmits information electronically in a digital form such as personal computers, digital television, email, robots, etc. It embraces all the uses of digital technology that already exist to help individuals, businesses and organizations use and manipulate information for a better and more effective communication experience. The application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in conducting and creating political participation through strategic communication approach is indicated as having influence on follower's positive work attitudes through the mediation of perceived leader-follower relations.

In a study by Oke (2020), it was revealed that ICTs play tremendous role in participatory governance – leadership/followership relations. The study revealed that ICT usage by leaders affects follower's perceptions related to his or her relation with his or her leader, which in turn influence follower's positive attitudes such as loyalty, trust, satisfaction, and perceived distributive justice.

In the political arena, changes in the levels of technology utilization, in political participation has also brought changes in leaders and followers perception with possible influences to relationships of leaders and followers of those movements. Today, leaders and followers have lesser face-to-face contacts and use information and communication technologies (ICTs) more in their business conduction and communication. Earl & Kimport (2011) state that both leaders and followers have changed their living, learning, working, and relating styles after ICTs' diffusion into their organizational contexts. Because leadership takes place in an increasingly open system under ICT influence, leader-follower interaction should be treated with consideration. Leaders sensitive to different media choices and capacities could develop their relational communications. Lim, (2015), posits that communication is important in leadership. Besides, leaders' usage of the ICT in creating awareness (i.e., in coordinating tasks, checking reports, and conducting performance appraisals) may influence followers' beliefs that their leaders can provide them with information and other resources more or less. How knowledge is shared among leaders and followers may influence their relations. In addition, followers may perceive that their leaders interact with different followers in varying frequencies and share confidential information with different followers in varying extents in ICT environments. Thus, it seems relevant to analyze influence of leader's ICT usage on leader-follower relations with its possible effects on follower's positive work attitudes.

Collaborating these, Eneanya (2021) posits that ICTs are must-haves in governance since in ICT-dominated environments, it is possible for leaders to work from a connected network of places and connect with their colleagues and followers. Those populace (followers) can interact with their leaders overcoming power distances and they can state what they want with less hesitation in online discussion platforms for ongoing projects. Explaining the roles played by ICTs to promote governance, he further opined that the government uses ICT to harness the internet, support governance and provide service delivery to business, citizens, inter-government and employees. These, he further explained, occur in the following ways;

- Government-to-citizens, (G2C), means government interaction with citizens to access quality government services, resolve social issues, access information, track complaints and participate in decision-making.
- Government – to – Business (G2B) means government leverage with business for supplies, procurement, proposals and contract biddings and using electronic devices to manage mutually beneficial information...
- Government – to – Government (G2G) - Government relates with states and localities in data-sharing, planning, reporting mutual requirements and participate as full partners to render welfare services to citizen.
- Government-to-Employee (G2E)- means government using electronic tools engage employees for resource planning logistics, information system and customer relations management to promote internal efficiency and effectiveness of employees.

### **ICT Strategies in Building Followership**

The twenty-first century marks the beginning of an unprecedented, fast-paced technological revolution of digitization. As a result, today's digital followers, leaders, and ordinary citizens possess instant access to a vast amount of information, and there has been greater dissemination of knowledge than ever before. Furthermore, as information technology has opened up new opportunities for sharing knowledge, information, and work responsibilities, most traditional, hierarchical leadership theories and models have become outdated and irrelevant because they were not designed for the digital age. As artificial intelligent technologies and tools replace traditional managerial positions in leadership, and as political followers become increasingly engaged in multiple leading and following roles in today's

virtual organizations, there is a greater need for new models of leading and following in the virtual space, where participants may acquire different types of leading and following competencies that are more relevant for the digital age. (Shirky, 2011)

The value and the philosophy of leadership have changed tremendously over the years - from assuming self-acclaimed leadership to the level of public affirmation through communication. Additionally, the current research on leadership has moved from leader-centered to follower-inclusive and leader-follower relational models of leadership. In furtherance, nowadays, leadership education and training resources are no longer solely the privilege of individuals that want it directly, but for everyone that desires information. As a result, the traditional understanding of positional leaders and followers in organizations has become blurrier and irrelevant for the contemporary leadership in the digital age because the latter is spontaneous and organic while the former is rigid and static. (Dahlgren, 2016)

However, the above-mentioned literature on digital leadership may not totally offer mechanisms for bridging the socio-cultural, theoretical, philosophical, and generational gaps that exists today between the leaders and followers nor does it proposal plans for transition from the traditional theories and practices of leadership to contemporary leader-follower processes in the age of information and technology.

### **Leadership in the Digital Age**

Leadership in the digital age refers to “leadership in any institution or sector embedded in the broader transitions toward a more knowledge intensive society” through the use of ICT]. This transition brings new constraints and opportunities to the traditional understanding and practices of leadership in various organizations. To understand leadership in the digital age, it is important to note the effect of digitization on leadership in the virtual space (Castells, 2013)

### **Digital Leadership**

Digital leadership refers to leadership in the core sectors of the knowledge society—the three “C’s of computing, communications and content and now multi-media” Narbona (2019) defines digital leadership as “human quality of leadership exercised with digital tools in the virtual world”. Others define it as “doing the right things for the strategic success of digitization” for organizations that require different mindsets, skillsets, and workplaces. Digital leadership is relational leadership because the relationships between leaders and followers in the social media platform (e.g., Twitter) occupy the prominent role. Digital leadership is also occasional, unpredictable, and organic. In a matter of hours, days, or weeks, one may gain an enormous influence through verbal or visual messages via the World Wide Web. For instance, politicians or leaders who gain more followers in their Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube accounts rise to a level of influence that humans have never seen before. Thus, digital leadership is not static positional leadership but rather spontaneous, fluid, short-lived, and role-based.

### **E-leadership**

E-leadership is a social influence process mediated by AIT [advanced information technology] to produce a change in attitudes, feelings, thinking, behavior, and/or performance with individuals, groups, and/or organizations”. According to DasGupta’s literature review on e-leadership, it has the same issues as traditional leadership (i.e., vision, direction, motivation, inspiration, trust). However, some challenges that e-leaders face are as follows: effective communication, conveying enthusiasm digitally, (b) building trust without face-to-face interactions, (c) creating presence, (d) inspiring, (e) mentoring, (f) monitoring and controlling social loafing, (g) fostering technical competence, and (h) finding work-life balance which play great roles in positioning leaders.

### **Cyber leadership**

Cyber leadership refers to a responsibility that enhances the organizational mission, business processes, and functions “by leveraging resources, information and information technology to deliver solutions that are effective, efficient, and secure”. The essence of cyber leadership is to deal with information warfare, cybersecurity threats, and defense against cyberattacks in the virtual world. In a sense, cyber leadership is a digital version of military leadership with an effort to transform military leaders into cyber-strategic leaders. Francesca argues that

Cyber defense requires not only it experts with computer science, electrical engineering, and software security skills, but also professionals with an understanding of political theory, institutional theory, behavioral psychology, ethics, international law, international relations, and additional social sciences...the pillars of our society...are often led by individuals with extremely limited exposure to cyber issues and the existential threats they pose. (Castells, 2013)

### **ICT Media and Political Leadership**

Global culture centered on information access emerged in the past few decades. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are increasingly available to advance the ease and efficiency in many areas of life. ICT holds particular promise in areas of governance and public participation. Open government, and e-government proponents

believe governments in the digital age can use information to reshape and set agenda for the populace and increase government transparency, accountability, efficiency and citizen participation.

Human rights advocates contend that successful use of ICT in governance requires access to information, education and the ability to share information for citizens. Civil society organizations (CSO) like Janaagraha in Bangalore India utilize ICT platforms to mobilize citizens to reveal government corruption. Janaagraha launched a website called "I Paid a Bribe" in 2010 to allow citizens to develop a record of bribery in public service delivery. In 2013, they launched mobile apps and SMS services to increase corruption reporting. Their data was later utilized by Rao, a transport commissioner in Karnataka to create reforms in the motor vehicle department. (Castell, 2021)

This online conversation will identify how ICT can be an effective or ineffective tool in increasing transparency and public participation on many levels. The use of Information Communication Technology is seen as one of the easiest ways through which many political leaders today manifest influence and frame opening for their supporters there by riding on it to achieve political relevance and success in the country. In our clime today, ICT is viewed as a sort of media channel that cannot be overlooked while looking for political relevance and advancement. For instance, the ardent supporters of the Presidential candidate of Labour Party, His Excellency Peter Gregory Obi, used ICT to create renowned name for their candidate. They present their aims and objectives to the public who in turn follow them in accordance to the image they had built for him through different platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram Tik-tok and LinkedIn. The above stated ICT platforms had played critical roles in selling the candidate even making more people who know little or nothing about him to endorse and pledged their unalloyed support for his aspiration.

Furthermore, the introduction and adoption of ICT in our political space had given rise to emergency popularity of many ICT political based users in order to sell their personality and ideas to the public thereby enhancing their influences and level of followership in our clime

By virtue of ICT strategic personalized approaches today, our democracy is being deepened as people can be sensitized on whom to follow on politics through the impact and antecedents of such aspirant or candidate. However, for more explanations on the roles of ICT in shaping and working in the minds of the people, question Boxes in India and Liberia allow community members to call an operator for free and receive information about rights, responsibilities, and solutions to problems

The Indian interactive voice forum CGNet Swara allows callers to record messages of local interest and to listen to the messages of other callers. The messages are also posted on the internet, where they are accessible to journalists, activists, and policymakers. Forum Virium is working to harmonize the programming interfaces of the websites of several European cities in order to improve citizen participation, mobility, and tourism.

The Just Ask Once initiative in South Australia organizes government information around citizens' needs in order to improve accessibility. The California Report Card, Opinion Space, and the Citizen Report Card are sentiment analysis websites that allow constituents to express their opinions in order for representatives to better respond to their needs.

In Korea, an E-Procurement system provides services to public bidders in order to overcome red tape and corruption. In India, Bhoomi touch-screen kiosks in government offices facilitate land registration and help to avoid corruption. The government of Punjab, Pakistan, has implemented a citizen feedback model that contacts citizens via text message in order to curb corruption, bribery, and slow responses to complaints.

Peak Democracy allows constituents to participate in town hall discussions remotely and asynchronously in order to make citizen participation more convenient. Open Oakland and Open Budget Oakland hold civic hackathons to demonstrate the use of open data, help hackers create new tools, and promote platforms built on open data. Conversation Threads which transcends to what is the leadership Transparency, Citizen Participation, and Open Government?

Government or leadership transparency, citizen participation, and Open Government are technological tools by which citizens can hold governments or leaders accountable. A lack of accountability contributes to problems such as inequality, poverty, and violence, and also leaves citizens feeling helpless to influence the government. New technologies can improve citizen participation and political leadership-followership sustainability process by monitoring efforts, thus increasing government or leadership accountability.

Using Open Government technologies such as social media, legislative websites, or application programming interfaces and databases does not always mean that a government is implementing Open Government strategies. More data may indicate more transparency, but not necessarily openness to participatory, inclusive, or accountable decision-making. Civil society organizations can help by clearly articulating their desired outputs and outcomes and actively organizing and involving citizens to increase government transparency and engagement. (Okugo, Onwukwe and Ihechu, 2016)

### **The use of ICT in Promoting Leadership-Followership Communication; Its Very Unique Challenges.**

First, there are barriers associated with usability of ICTs. Marginalized populations often suffer from lack of resources for ICTs, cultural and literacy barriers, and other concerns, so ICTs may not be an effective tool to help them gain access to politics. Even highly educated people may not be familiar or comfortable with the latest technologies, and language barriers may prevent others from using ICTs effectively. Within populations that have access to ICTs, many lack the

time to use them simply because they have responsibilities working or caring for their families. Some of these problems can be solved by involving local people in ICT development so they are more likely to be interested and using pre-existing platforms such as Facebook.

Second, the effective development and maintenance of ICTs is costly and may not produce the expected results. Data management is important and may require professional experience that planners and stakeholders do not have. ICTs are frequently used in ways that the developers do not expect, even after extensive research. Additionally, gathering information and making that information accessible does not always easily translate into responses from people in power, nor does increased communication within civil society groups necessarily result in increased political effectiveness. In fact, the use of ICTs may backfire if not adequately planned. (Boulianne, 2020)

Due to these challenges, it can be difficult to convince followers on the impact of some political leaders, NGOs, and citizens to “buy in” to ICT tools and use them effectively. Conversation participants identified incentives, proactivity, and accessibility as methods of encouraging buy-in. Cost savings are good incentives for leaders. Outreach to government offices to build trust before suggesting changes can increase buy-in, as can free training modules and wikis. Convenience is a major factor in encouraging buy-in from citizens, but technologies must also deliver consistent results and make participation count to stimulate continued participation. In addition, meeting communities where they are can ease the fight against entrenched interests, established rules, and a lack of incentive for change. As these technologies become more and more common, they will be easier to adopt.

The integrity of digital records is a major concern when using ICT in building leadership-followership process. The trustworthiness, accessibility, and maintenance of records are crucial to government transparency. Both a lack of capacity and a lack of political will can cause governments to fail to make digital information accessible and keep it well-maintained, but without a framework for information governance, ICTs may lead to the misleading and misinforming of citizen, rather than their empowerment. (Varnelis, 2018)

## Conclusion

From the literature reviewed, the following conclusions were made.

It was revealed that ICT- Mediated Personalized Strategic Leadership – Followership Communication is indispensable tool in political communication as it gives leaders massive power for influence and acceptability over and among their followers.

It was also concluded that followers of the political leaders in Nigeria follow their leaders based on the ways they project themselves on the media, not really on the basis of their real personality.

It was also concluded that the use of ICT in leadership – followership is seen as the most trending political approach in the climate.

## Recommendations

From the conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

Followers of political leaders should endeavour to know the antecedence of the leaders they are supporting before giving their supports to them.

The followers of political leaders in Nigeria should also use the ICT media in telling entire populace the kind of leaders they are following despite their belief and also do objective criticism on the leaders they are supporting.

It would be also recommended for the ICT Media platforms to be used in educating the followers of political movements on the prerequisites needed for following leaders in order to achieve a desired result both in current and future respectively.

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