

# The Influence of Media Literacy on Audience Response to Political Campaign Messages in Ogun State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The study investigated the influence of media literacy on audience response to political campaign messages in Ogun State, Nigeria. Survey research design of the ex-post facto was employed with the population of 1,947,258 registered voters across the state while multistage cluster sampling was used to select a sample size of 1,100. Four objectives were raised and five hypotheses generated to guide the study. The result shows that responses to political campaign messages varied according to levels of media literacy and there was a positive significant relationship between understanding broadcast media messages ( $r = 0.52$ ); identifying the purpose of messages ( $r = 0.47$ ); identifying the sender ( $r = 0.50$ ); identifying missing point of view ( $r = 0.44$ ) and the audience response to political campaign messages. Access to broadcast media had a negative relationship with audience response to political campaign messages ( $r = -0.13$ ). The findings revealed that access to broadcast political messages did not have any significant independent influence on audience response. Audience understanding of broadcast media message influenced their response to political campaign messages. Audience ability to identify the purpose of broadcast media message also influenced their response to political campaign messages. Similarly, there was a positive significant relationship between audience ability to identify the sender of the broadcast message and their response to political campaign messages. Recommendations were made in view of the findings of the study.

**Keywords:** Media literacy in Ogun State, Audience response, Political campaign messages, Nigerian broadcast

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## I. Introduction

Communication between a political party or its candidate and the electorate is as old as democracy. The two-way interaction has always adapted to the changes in technology. Similarly, media effect or audience studies have also undergone many phases, in line with emerging developments in media technology. There have been assumptions that the changing mass media technologies, especially the broadcast media, have had some hypnotizing power to control the beliefs and behaviour of the audience. The basic belief has been that audiences were passive. These assumptions have been challenged by theories which believe that the audience members have the skills and ability to accept or reject mass media messages.

When political campaign messages are received by the electorate, there will be immediate or delayed response. Factors that may influence audience response are social contexts, the form of the message, the presentation, the language, beliefs, attitudes, gender, ethnicity, opinion leaders within the community, culture, religious affiliation, educational background, occupation, social status, geography, rational consideration, party's leadership, voter's perception of the performance of the ruling party, loyalty to the party and clientelism. There are arguments as to the extent to which these variables influence response from the electorate.

Media literacy is needed for informed audience response to political campaign messages particularly at a time when too many messages compete for the audiences' attention. To measure the media literacy of the audience which is the independent variable in this study, the following constructs or competencies have been adapted from the scale provided by [1] and confirmed by some extant conceptual definitions above: ability to access and explain media messages, ability to explain the purpose of the message, ability to identify the sender of the message and the missing point of view, ability to analyze the techniques used to attract audience attention and ability to judge the message vis-à-vis ones own perspective.

These constructs put together constitute the media literacy of an individual. The levels of media literacy adapted from the different levels of media literacy from extant literature abroad and in Nigeria for this study are three: high, average and low. [2] believes that the level of critical disposition and response to messages differs from one individual to another and from one situation to another. It has been argued that individuals with low levels of media literacy have less understanding of the ways in which the commercialized media system limits

information that might be important or useful in helping them meet their own goals on an individual or societal level [3].

One fundamentally significant question which dwells on the relationship between the media and audience is worth mentioning: What are the conditions under which people accept or reject a point of view when they are aware of the range of alternatives? It is needful to find out whether audiences are aware of alternative ways of understanding messages, making choices and taking actions [4]. This study therefore investigates the influence of media literacy on audience response to political campaign messages.

### *1.1 Statement of Problem*

It can be deduced from the above that the broadcast media audiences contend with a flood of messages whose aim is to influence individual's actions. To achieve this objective, the media are getting more sophisticated in the art of persuasion to penetrate the audiences' emotional sphere. Politicians also exploit voters with political messages aimed at deceiving, instead of helping the civil society to give an informed voting response during elections. To worsen the plight of the audiences, the mass media have been accused of contributing to civic illiteracy and working against the democratic cause they ought to champion. The result is that an election campaign exists in the public consciousness largely the way it exists in the media. This implies that many media consumers cannot filter information for informed use. In addition, a lot of studies have submitted that audiences who lack complex skills are taken for granted with negative political messages.

To change the audience with deficiencies to critical consumers of media messages, many studies have recommended the use of media literacy skills. However, many audience members in developing countries still respond ignorantly to messages while even the media literate ones are deficient in their media literacy skills. As democracy thrives on the informed choices of the electorate, will such deficiencies in media literacy skills, if any, not influence such voters' response during elections?

Remarkable studies have been conducted on political campaign messages and voter turnout, but little attention has been paid to the influence of media literacy on politics. Specifically, the influence of media literacy on voters' response to political campaign messages is yet to attract the desired scholarly attention, hence this study.

### *1.2 Aim and Objectives*

The aim of this study is to investigate the influence of media literacy on audience response to political campaign messages in Ogun State, Nigeria

The Specific Objectives are:

- i. To determine the media literacy level of voters in Ogun State, Nigeria
- ii. To determine the audience response to political campaign messages in Ogun State, Nigeria
- iii. To examine the difference between the media literacy levels of voters in Ogun State, Nigeria
- iv. To ascertain the relationship between media literacy and audience response to political messages in Ogun State, Nigeria

### *1.3 Research Questions*

In view of the issues raised in the statement of the problem, this study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the media literacy level of voters in Ogun State, Nigeria
2. What is the audience response to political campaign messages in Ogun State, Nigeria
3. What is the difference between the media literacy levels of voters in Ogun State, Nigeria
4. What is the relationship between media literacy and audience response to political messages in Ogun State, Nigeria

### *1.4 Research Hypotheses*

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between ability of the audience to access broadcast media and their response to political campaign messages.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between ability of the audience to understand broadcast media message and response to political campaign messages.
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant relationship between ability of the audience to identify the purpose of broadcast media message and their response to political campaign messages.
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is no significant relationship between ability of the audience to identify the sender of the broadcast message and their response to political campaign messages.
- H<sub>5</sub>: There is no significant relationship between ability of the audience to identify the missing point of view in broadcast media message and their response to political campaign messages.

## II. Literature Review

This section reviews previous research efforts and literatures relevant to the study in a bid to meet the objectives of the study and confirm the hypotheses using the following sub-headings:

### 2.1 *Theoretical framework*

This study will be anchored on Socratic model relating to media literacy and audience response to media content. This model has been adapted by [5] from a method of inquiry propounded by the Greek philosopher and teacher, Socrates. To Socrates, the correct method of finding out about an issue should be by inductive means i.e. reasoning from particular fact to a general idea. This process took the pattern of dialectic conversation, which became known as the Socratic Method. The method attempted to expose people's ignorance by proving that many things individuals assumed to be true were untrue. As a theoretical framework, [5] postulates that the Socratic model encourages the receiver of a piece of information to ask logical questions to detect illogical assumptions, beliefs, and suppositions behind the messages in media presentations.

However, the Socratic model exposes students of media literacy to interpreting media contents from different points of view through questioning. In effect, consumers of messages develop a critical distance from what they receive to make unbiased judgments concerning the messages.

This model concurs with the definitional concept of asking questions by [6]. This model is related to the evaluation of media messages, a construct which has to do with the first research question in this study. However, how many of the audience members have the capacity to employ this questioning approach? How do they cope with inaccurate messages?

[7] position makes the case even more troubling with his assertion that the active audience can still be misled by poorly constructed or inaccurate media messages. Then, how much media literacy help audience to ask logical questions to obtain answers that can insulate them from deception? The Socratic model leaves these questions unanswered and this study shall find out whether the audience possess the questioning skill and whether they deploy it in their response to political campaign messages. In addition, the study will ascertain whether the questioning skill, a construct of media literacy, has any influence on audience response to political campaign messages. Suffice to say that hypothesis seven, which touches on the audience ability to evaluate media messages in relation to his own perspective, is driven by this model.

### 2.2 *Voters' access to broadcast media messages*

Access to information has always been very significant since the dawn of human civilization [8]. Access to the broadcast media can be explained as the ability to locate and receive messages from radio and television. According to [9] and [10], there are two dimensions to access: One is the physical access to equipment in a place where it is possible to use it without restriction. The second is the ability to manipulate the technology to locate the information required e.g. having the skill to search and locate messages from radio and television. It also includes the ability to regulate the technology [9] to avoid or filter out content one does not want to encounter [10] because there is always the challenge of which media to access.

[11] postulates that measuring media literacy level can be perceived in terms of access to media. [9] further avers that there is differential access to the media among the segments of the society, resulting in differential political participation. According to [12] and [13] barriers to access include demographic variables such as age, gender and socio-economic status. In societies such as the third world, for instance, Nigeria, poverty has made access to the mass media to become a challenge. [10] submits that citizens who have more access to the media participate more actively in the democratic process while those without access resort to antidemocratic behaviour, complacency or total indifference. The submission finds support in [14] and [15] who assert that easy and equitable access to the mass media are needed for participation in a democratic society. [16] report as follows: Investigation on radio and television access in Bangladesh shows that access to television is still limited. Less than 40% women responded that they listen to radio weekly, while only 18% watch television weekly. Slightly more than one fourth (28%) respondents reported that their households possess radio and only 8.6% reported they have television.

In Nigeria, in a study of mass media electioneering campaign and voters' decision during the 2011 general elections, [14] findings revealed that 45.5% of the voters had access to radio while only 22.7% had access to television. This is different from [17] finding on radio access in which 66% voters had access while 22% did not. 54% owned television sets while 46% actually accessed television broadcast. This low access rate is traceable to the fact that the income per capita is extremely low and citizens experience incessant power outages.

There is also the issue of which media (apertures) to access i.e. expose oneself to. [9] points out that for better or higher media literacy, the consumer of messages are advised to expose himself to many media sources, opinions and perspectives. However, many consumers of media limit their access to what they like and what agree with their views e.g. a conservative person listens to a conservative columnist or radio or television.

### 2.3 *Voters' ability to understand broadcast media message*

It is not easy to quantify critical understanding as a construct of media literacy. It can better be assessed by looking at the indicators or assessment criteria addressing the components that make up media literacy. For example, the Montana Standard for media literacy has a list of benchmarks, which are expectations of knowledge, skills and abilities along a continuum.

In the first place, the individual must be able to explain the power of mass communication and its content [7] by receiving messages thoughtfully. Thoughtful reception can be in form of agreement or disagreement with or indifference to the message received through the media. Studies on audience understanding of television messages show that some members of the audience are sophisticated "media-savvy", while others are often confused or inattentive audience with low critical media literacy skills. A lot of research findings point to audiences' deficiency in complex skills for a sufficiently critical understanding to deal with highly sophisticated media messages [12].

However, from the voters' point of view, according to [18], the campaign messages are not easy to understand. The explanation for this is that the political campaign messages compete with many other campaigns contesting for the voters' attention. The avalanche of information puts pressure on the capacity of the voter for information processing and comprehension of the message and this results in errors [19]. It is important to find out whether people actually know of alternative ways of understanding messages and of a range of possible actions [20].

It is noteworthy to add that the media sometimes play the positive watchdog role over the politicians. However, the same media may collude with politicians to conceal useful information from the public when it is in the interest of the politicians and the media to do so, thereby leaving the voter to his/her fate [21]. In sum, it can be deduced that the response of the audience is a product of understanding of the message.

### 2.4 *Voters' ability to identify the purpose of media message*

Media messages are packaged by individuals with the aim of sending messages that influence public opinions and individual actions [22]. Communication should have a purpose. For instance, comedians communicate to entertain the audience while radio spots are designed to persuade people to vote for local candidates [23]. Among the five key deconstruction questions asked by [24] the reason for sending a message is noteworthy.

[25] posits that the various stakeholders in political communication process have different goals. For instance, he avers that the purpose of the media practitioners is to produce stories that can attract big audiences that can be sold to advertisers. The goal of the politician is to use the mass media to pass political campaign messages to mobilize support to win election. On the part of the citizen, the goal is to monitor politics through the mass media, vote and hold politicians accountable.

Furthermore, [26] have identified the ability to identify the purpose of media message as an important skill of media literacy. The audience is expected to consider the purpose of the message before taking the message at its face value. It can be added that most messages aim at educating, entertaining and persuading [22] while some attempt to fulfil all the three purposes at once. He adds that messages that are meant to educate or inform are usually more neutral than the ones that are meant to entertain or persuade. In a study measuring the acquisition of media literacy skills, [26] found that specific text analysis including the ability to identify the purpose of the message improved after exposure to media literacy instruction. This study investigated the ability of the voters to identify the purpose of the political campaign message on radio and television. The Socratic model was employed as a theoretical anchor for this construct.

### 2.5 *Voters' ability to identify the sender of media message*

[24] suggests that the consumer of the media message should ask about who created the message as an important deconstruction question. In the recommendations of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a democracy, [27] also asks "Who is the author?" as one of the basic questions to assess the credibility of a message.

[28] suggests five key questions to help the audience to understand the message and reach an informed decision. One of these questions is "Who created this message." The audience is advised to look deeper; understand that messages are not "natural" though they look real; images are captured, edited and a team with many talents put it together. Secondly, the audience should realize that choices are made when the sender of the message is constructing it; some words are used in place of some others. Why certain choices are made is usually not included and the audience members are not shown what is left out. This study tried to find out whether the voters can identify the author of a message and how this influences their response to political campaign message. The Socratic model was employed as anchors for this construct.

### III. Methodology

Survey research design of the ex-post facto type was employed in this study. [12] observes that quantitative surveys are the main vehicles of media literacy measurements. The population for this research comprised all eligible voters (who were at least 18 years old) in Nigeria in Ogun State which has 3 senatorial districts: East (with 581, 878 registered voters in the 2011 general election), West (with 617, 601 registered voters) and Central (with 747, 779 registered voters). The State has 20 local government areas and 236 wards. This gives a total of 1,947,258 registered voters who constitute the population of the study. [12] recommends 30 percent out of 1, 000 population; 10 per cent out of 10, 000 population; 1 percent out of 150, 000 and above; 0. 025 percent out of 10 million. As a result, multistage cluster sampling technique guided the sampling procedure in the selection of 1100 voters using across the three senatorial districts in line with [12] recommendation; with the aid of convenient sampling. Convenience sampling techniques were employed because the voters in the 2011 general elections who constituted the population can be described as relatively heterogeneous and scattered. Respondents were sampled based on convenience for the administration of questionnaire and conduct of Focus Group Discussion. Copies of questionnaire were administered to respondents who were asked and they had voted in the 2011 elections in Ogun State. The questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection with a pilot study carried out to test the simplicity, clarity and accuracy of the instrument.

Out of the 1100 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 1080 (98. 1 percent) copies were retrieved. A total of 20 copies of the questionnaire were not returned. This constitutes 1.9 per cent attrition rate. The psychometric properties of the instrument were also estimated. The estimated reliability coefficient using reliability alpha analysis was 9833. The following represents the alpha values of the constructs; access =.7905; understanding =.8066; purpose= .7864; sender =.8026; point of view =.7226; techniques =.7758; evaluation =.7758. Overall, the indices show that the instrument is valid and reliable. Quantitative data were analyzed using percentage count, chi-square and multiple regression. Responses were translated, quantified and presented in frequency tables and percentages while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and chi-square were used to validate the hypotheses. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) session’s analysis was done by computer to create theme codes. They were content analyzed and interpreted, using thematic analysis. The results were presented vis-à-vis the theories and previous research findings in the extant literature.

### IV. Results

The section shows the analysis of data collected in line with the objectives of study and generated hypotheses with the aim of investigating the influence of media literacy on audience response to political campaign messages in Ogun State.

#### *Hypothesis I*

There is no significant relationship between ability of the audience to access broadcast media and their response to political campaign messages.

*Table 1. Correlation analysis showing the relationship between audience access to broadcast media and response to political campaign messages*

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Response to political campaign messages	13.1194	3.5390	1080	.524**	.000	Sig.
Understanding of broadcast	13.8944	4.0337				

\*\* Sig. at .05 level

It is shown in table 1 above that there is a positive significant relationship between audience understanding of broadcast media message and their response to political campaign messages ( $r = .524$ ,  $N= 1080$ ,  $P < .05$ ). Hence, audience understanding of broadcast media message had influenced their response to political campaign messages in Ogun state. The null hypothesis is rejected.

The findings support the reception theory that the audience members are heterogeneous and active. It also confirm the claim of the reception theory that access is key [29], [14] and the audience can access the media by choosing what they need and rejecting what they do not need. This means that the broadcast media audience members are active participants in the communication process.

#### *Hypothesis II*

There is no significant relationship between ability of the audience to understand broadcast media message and response to political campaign messages.

*Table 2: Correlation analysis showing the relationship between audience understanding of broadcast media message and response to political campaign messages*

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Response to political campaign messages	13.1194	3.5390	1080	.524**	.000	Sig.
Understanding of broadcast	13.8944	4.0337				

\*\* Sig. at .05 level

It is shown in table 2 above that there is a positive significant relationship between audience understanding of broadcast media message and their response to political campaign messages ( $r = .524$ ,  $N = 1080$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

Hence, audience understanding of broadcast media message had influenced their response to political campaign messages in Ogun state. The null hypothesis is rejected.

This confirms [30] and [31] argument that there is a correlation between understanding and use of mass media messages. Hence, audience ability to explain broadcast media message influenced their response to political campaign messages. [32] made reference to audiences' deficiency in complex skills for a sufficiently critical understanding to deal with highly sophisticated media messages. Reference can also be made to the meeting point between the finding of this study, and the reception theory concerning the audience ability to filter and understand the influence of media messages.

### *Hypothesis III*

There is no significant relationship between ability of the audience to identify the purpose of broadcast media message and their response to political campaign messages.

*Table 3: Correlation analysis showing the relationship between audience ability to identify the purpose of broadcast media message and their response to political campaign messages*

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Response to political campaign messages	13.1194	3.5390	1080	.466**	.000	Sig.
Explanation of broadcast	16.5981	4.7660				

\*\* Sig. at .05 level

It is shown in table 3 that there is a positive significant relationship between audience ability to identify the purpose of broadcast media message and their response to political campaign messages ( $r = .466$ ,  $N = 1080$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

Hence, audience ability to identify the purpose of broadcast media message influenced their response to political campaign messages in Ogun state. The null hypothesis is rejected. It is noteworthy that [26] have identified the ability to identify the purpose of media message as a significant media literacy construct. Such purposes, according to [22] are to educate, entertain and persuade. The result tallies with [25], [26] and [27] identification of the goal of using political campaign messages for mobilizing support to win an election. This result shows agreement with the postulation of the reception theory that the media audiences are active consumers of messages.

### *Hypothesis IV*

There is no significant relationship between ability of the audience to identify the sender of the broadcast message and their response to political campaign messages.

*Table 4: Correlation analysis showing the relationship between audience ability to identify the sender of the broadcast message and their response to political campaign messages*

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Response to political campaign messages	13.1194	3.5390	1080	.502**	.000	Sig.
Identify the sender	15.6065	4.1337				

\*\* Sig. at .05 level

It is shown in the above table 4 that there is a positive significant relationship between audience ability to identify the sender of the broadcast message and their response to political campaign messages ( $r = .502$ ,  $N = 1080$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

Hence, audience ability to identify the sender of the broadcast message influenced their response to political campaign messages in Ogun state. The null hypothesis is rejected.

According to [24] and [27], being able to investigate the sender of a message is an important construct or skill of media literacy. The results suggest that more respondents were able to identify the sender of the message than those who could not. It also corroborates the reception theory which argues that the audience members are heterogeneous and can receive, filter and use messages carefully in line with their viewpoint.

*Hypothesis V*

There is no significant relationship between ability of the audience to identify the missing point of view in broadcast media message and their response to political campaign messages.

*Table 5: Correlation analysis showing the relationship between audience ability to identify the missing point of view in broadcast media messages and their response to political campaign messages*

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Response to political campaign messages	13.1194	3.5390	1080	.440**	.000	Sig.
Identify the missing point of view	12.5528	3.3707				

\*\* Sig. at .05 level

It is shown in the above table 5 that there is a positive significant relationship between audience ability to identify the missing point of view in broadcast media message and their response to political campaign messages ( $r = .440, N = 1080, P < .05$ ).

Hence, audience ability to identify the missing point of view in broadcast media message had influenced their response to political campaign messages in Ogun state. The null hypothesis is rejected. As [24], [26] and [27] suggest, a media literate individual should be able to find out the missing point of view in media messages. A higher number of respondents showed the ability to find out the missing point of view in media messages. This shows the possession of some media literacy by many members of the audience. This finding also concurs with the postulation of the reception theory. The ability to find out the missing point of view is a construct seen in extant literature as capable of influencing audience response. [33] point of view identification is key. This is because, in media presentation, the story can be told from a range of perspectives and the point of view has impact on how the audience responds to the information being presented.

**V. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study investigated the influence of media literacy on audience response to political campaign messages in Ogun state, Nigeria. It concludes that majority of the respondents and participants showed some measure of media literacy but this is still generally low since the discovery that majority of the respondents could access the media messages showed some measure of media literacy and that access did not have any independent effect on audience response to political campaign messages is important. However, access had a joint contribution, with other constructs, to audience response to political campaign messages. The implication is that access alone did not have any remarkable influence on how the audience voted during elections.

Moreover, this study found a positive relationship between voters' ability to identify the purpose of the broadcast media message and audience response to political campaign messages. Majority of the respondents showed some evidence of the ability to identify the purpose of a broadcast media message. This suggests that they could identify what the political campaign message was up to or what it wanted to get from them. This ought to help them to respond appropriately.

Similarly, it was found that voters' ability to identify the sender of the broadcast message influenced their response to political campaign messages'. The implication is that the credibility of the sender could determine the response from the audience. This is in line with the position of some earlier studies. The positive significant relationship between ability of the audience to identify the missing point of view and their response to political campaign messages is another finding of this study. The findings of this study are quite revealing. In view of this, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. Potential voters should be exposed to media literacy training. Such training experience will raise the media literacy level of voters and improve their perception and awareness of the broadcast media.
2. Media literacy education is strongly recommended to be included in the new civic education curriculum. This is to expose the students to the characteristics of the broadcast media.
3. Governments and private school owners should organize media literacy workshops for teachers. Other institutions such as churches, mosques, professional associations and social organizations should sponsor

media literacy seminars and workshops for citizens to be exposed to the nature of the media. In the course of the seminars and workshops for citizens to be exposed to the nature of the media.

4. It is recommended that consumers of political campaign messages should subject such messages to questioning. This will expose the illogical reasoning and arguments in such messages.
5. To get different points of view concerning any issue, media consumers are advised to tune to many radio and television stations; especially during the period of political campaigns. This will help the voters to establish the authenticity of political campaign messages and make informed decisions.

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