

Rally as a Political Public Relations Strategy for Public Acceptance of a Political Party: A Focus on APC Presidential Campaign in Lagos State.

Kehinde Oyesomi (Ph D), Olusola Oyero (Ph D), Angie Osarieme Igbinoba & Solarin Adeniyi (Ph D)

Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria

Kehinde.oyesomi@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

Abstract

This study examines the assessment of the use of rally as a political public relations strategy for public acceptance of a political party during the 2015 presidential elections in Lagos State. Public relations uses tactical methods of communication to build relations between an organisation and its internal and external publics. The survey method was used as the research design in carrying out this study and the research instrument used was the questionnaire as well as interview schedule to consolidate the analysis which was carried out. It is interesting to note that 95% of respondents are aware of political rallies being used during elections while 56% of these respondents participated in these political rallies. The findings revealed that political rally is an effective factor that shapes electorates attitude and their choice of candidate. The researchers therefore recommend that electorates should not depend on political rallies alone in making their decisions on who they should vote for during elections. Electorates should not rely on information gotten from one source, but should also seek other sources for more information and better understanding towards accepting a political party and its candidate.

Key words: Elections, public relations, rally, political party,

Introduction

In the contemporary political process, public relations cum reputation management has been identified as a strong link between a better informed and enlightened society and those who hold or are aspiring to hold power in trust for the masses. Amalifi (1990) asserts that public relations strategies have long been an important part of the weaponry of a political party, therefore only the ignorant lack the knowledge on how to achieve success in politics. This in itself is called Political Public Relations.

Broadly speaking, political public relations can be defined as the management process by which an organization or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful

communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011, p. 8). According to Moguluwa (2013), as a specialized function of public relations, Political Public Relations is concerned with creating and sustaining mutual understanding between political actors and the masses so that there will be enthronement of democratic order, rule of law, and respect for constituted authority. Its main function is to build credibility in the political system; build bridges of mutual understanding between governments, party, political leader and the voters.

Hence, Osuji (2001, p.13) defines political public relations as

The aspect of public relations that is used in furthermore of political process. It may cover many areas of political processes, party formation, political campaign, membership drive, public and private political communications, image building, influence, lobbying, legislative proceedings, executive relationship with various societal groups.... it is sustained efforts to enhance or advance the cause of political actors (politicians) or those involved in furtherance of political processes in a society whether elected or appointed .

What makes political public relations distinctive from public relations in general is that Political Public Relations is the organization or individual actor in question is engaging in public relations activities for political purposes. Thus, political public relations includes public relations activities by all organizations and individuals trying to influence politics, including political parties and candidates but also governmental and public sector agencies, think tanks, unions, commercial businesses, as well as various interest groups and non-profit organizations that are more or less engaged in efforts to influence political processes or outcomes (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2011).

This study therefore sought to find out if the public are aware of political rally conducted during 2015 presidential elections in All Progressive Congress. The study further investigated if political rallies aid public acceptance of APC and also assess other sources that influence public acceptance of a political party. In addition to all these, this study also found out if political rallies are the basis of choosing who to vote for during elections.

Rally and elections

According to Oyesomi (2011), election is one of the most important pillars of democracy. Elections are about decisions and choices based on information and facts gotten during the course of the campaign from a political party. The media is expected to provide the basic information required for individuals to make the right choices during an election, this also aids the public to find out about the political party and individual they want to cast a vote for thus the attitude of electorates towards an election goes a long way in determining either the failure or success of an election. Since electorates do not have direct access to the candidates contesting in elections, several strategies have been employed and one of the most effective strategies used by political parties is political rallying. Political rally involves gathering the publics of similar political beliefs to listen to speeches by the candidates and different supporting members of that political party to raise high levels of morals and support from the public. The main aim of these rallies is to educate, raise funds, energize and encourage supporters, serve notice to opposition parties and help build coalition, this in turn will generate publicity through the media. The political situation in Nigeria presently does not seem to have allowed electorates decide who rules them based on several methods used to coerce electorates into accepting any political leader imposed on them, even if it is not a representation of their wish.

The choice of leadership during elections does not just end at the kind of leader that comes into power but invariably affects the socio- economic development of such a nation. Bearing this in mind, political parties have the knowledge that various measures must be put in place to examine the sources and factors that help an individual shape their

disposition towards an election and eventually the candidate they decide to vote for. Political rally has been identified as one of those sources that help aid public acceptance of a political party.

Campaign rallies help reduce the amount of time and energy needed to learn about elections by making information readily available. Campaigns expose voters to information about the differences between the candidates and increase the accuracy with which voters perceive the candidates. In addition, campaign rallies play an important role because they focus attention on certain issues and sometimes change the way people view those issues. (Gordon and Spence 2008).

According to Bike (2012), the messages gotten from campaign rallies contain the idea that the candidate wants to share with the electorate, it is to get those who agree with the idea to support them during the elections. Political rally is now a core element of modern political campaigns communication which is used to enable fast dissemination of information to the public, this helps to create some sort of relationship between the candidates and the electorate. Individual political candidates are using these rallies to promote their election campaign.

Political campaign communication on the other hand describes three vital areas of importance in political campaigns, providing the basis for why readers and voters should still have faith in the political system. Elections are important because they give us freedom to actively participate in selecting our leaders, provide us with the opportunity to determine how our interest can be best served and also allow those elected the legitimacy with which to govern (Trent & Friedenberg 2004).

The basis of modern democracy is political

participation amongst its many forms; participation in elections is of utmost importance. It is for this reason that elections are taken seriously in democracy embracing countries of the world. The media however consciously and unconsciously are part of the major participants in the political process and it is without any doubt in our society today that the media occupy a prominent role in shaping the opinions of the society.

The influence of electorate attitude towards an election cannot be undermined. In an article by Arowolo (2005) on women and political participation, she concluded that electoral participation on any level is of crucial importance in any democratic dispensation. Subscribing to this, Okolie (2004,p.53) perceives political participation as “freedom of expression, association, right to free flow of communication, right to influence decision process and right to social justice, health services, better working condition and opportunity for franchise”. In its real sense political participation is one of the key ingredients of democracy. It is to this effect that various methods are used by the government and political candidates to encourage electorate to have a positive attitude towards elections. To encourage political participation in Nigeria, organisations like CEDPA (Center for Development and Population Activities) are involved in empowering Nigerian women and youths to participate in the decision making of the country at any level. Besides NGOs and governmental organizations that seek to encourage political participation, political parties and their candidates are also in the game of encouraging political participation and acceptance of their parties during elections. These candidates however usually engage in political rallies during elections to

ensure that the electorates accept them and have a positive attitude towards them.

Social judgement theory

The central tenet of social judgment theory is that attitude change is mediated by judgmental processes and effects; that is, messages produce attitude change through judgmental processes and effects. More specifically, the claim is that the effect of a persuasive communication depends upon the way in which the receiver evaluates the position it advocates. Hence attitude change is seen as a two-step process; first, the receiver makes an assessment of what position is being advocated by the message. Then attitude change occurs after judgement with the amount and direction of change dependent on that judgement. The quality of this general approach should be apparent: Our reaction to a particular persuasive communication will depend on what we think of or how favourable we are toward the point of view that it advocates. But this suggests that, in order to understand a message recipient's reaction to a given message, it is important to understand how the receiver assesses the various positions on that issue (that is, the various different stands that a message might advocate).

A person is likely to have a different assessment of these various positions, finding some of them acceptable, others objectionable, perhaps some neither particularly are acceptable nor unacceptable. If, social judgement theory suggest a reaction to a persuasive message depends on the person's judgment of the position being advocated, then it is important to be able to assess persons' judgments of the various possible positions.

The use of rally as a public relations strategy

There are various perspectives of examining how rally is used as a public relations strategy for public acceptance of a political party. According to Butterfield (1997), cited by Osho (2008, p.312) he defines a strategy as the means by which you intend to achieve a goal, aim or an end result. Political rally is a strategy used to showcase the ability of the candidate to the electorates to seek for their acceptance in other for them to vote, here s/he state their manifesto and programme Osho (2008, p.336). Although it is usually a one-way communication but it has the effect of face-to-face communication. Therefore, it is safe to say that, rally as a public relations strategy has been able to achieve the public acceptance of electorates towards The All Progressive Congress (APC).

However, rally as a public relation strategy for public acceptance of a political party is both an affective and informational strategy. Affective in the sense that it uses emotional, sentimental and psychological messages has a very strong tool for communication to stimulate interest and acceptance of the political party, Osho (2003) notes that the idea of public relations strategy is to use subtle communication tools to meet goals, objectives and purposes. It is also informational in the sense that it lays emphasis on conveying detailed information to the publics.

According to PM News published January 30, 2015 in an article by Jamiu Yisa he said that APC presidentially rally took Lagos by storm as electorates came out in an unprecedented crowd to support their candidate. Members of the party across the 20 local government and 37 local council development area stormed the venue of the rally. In March 2015, prior to the general

elections, APC held a one-million march from Maryland area of Lagos to Teslim Balogun Stadium Surulere. The march was led by stalwarts of the APC, Bola Tinubu and the immediate past Lagos State Governor, Babatunde Fashola, in an attempt to psyche supporters of the March 28 and April 11 presidential and governorship elections respectively

Method

For the purpose of the study, the survey research method was adopted. The instrument used were questionnaire and interview as tools for data collection. A sample size of 400 was used for this study. Ikeja and Alimosho Local government was purposively selected

for this study. Reasons being that Ikeja is the capital of Lagos state and Alimosho is the largest local government in Lagos state. Through multi stage sampling, communities were selected in the two local governments used.

Result

From the demographical characteristics of the respondents, it is seen that 56% of the respondents are male and 44% are female. 52% are between 18-40, 38% are between 41-60 while 10% are 61 years and above. From the data gathered, 67% of the respondents are christians, 38% are muslims while 5% belong to other traditional religion.

Table 1: Awareness of political rally of APC

Response	Percentage (%)
Yes	95.9
no	4.1
Total	100 n=389

Table 1 presents the percentage of respondents who are aware of the political rallies that have taken place or that are on-going. The result shows that a higher percentage of respondents are aware of political rally.

Table 2: Political stand of respondents

Response	Percentage (%)
Participatory	57.9
Indifferent	28.3
Non participatory	13.8
Total	100 n=389

Table 2 shows that large percentages (57.9%) of the respondents are politically active while a low percentage (13.8) is non-participatory.

Table 3: Candidate and political rally

RESPONSES	Respondents are expose to candidates through political rally	Respondents choice of candidate is guided by political rally
Strongly agree	25.6	19.9
Agree	60.2	45.7
Strongly disagree	4.7	8.8

Disagree	8.3	23.5
Don't know	1.3	2.1
Total	100 n=389	100 n=389

Table 3 shows the respondents responses on how their choice of candidates has been guided by political rally. The table shows that majority of the respondent's choice of candidate were guided by political rally and it also shows that various respondents are exposed to candidates through political rally.

Table 4: RESPONDENTS REASONS FOR SUPPORTING APC PARTY

Reasons	Percentage (%)
Candidates image	3.1
Candidates manifesto	3.6
Party image	9.3
Trustworthy	7.7
Continuity	16.8
Change	35.1
None	24.5
Total	100 n=389

Table 4 shows reasons respondents are supporting various parties. Change has the highest percentage 35.1% and this implies that the respondents are anxious for a change in the country for presidential candidate.

Table 5: Extent to which respondents choice of candidate have been influenced through political rally

Response	Percentage (%)
Large	55.9
Medium	37.7
Low	6.4
Total	100 n=389

Table 5 presents the extent to which the choices of respondents have been influenced as a result of the political rallies. From the table, 55.9% of the respondents have been influenced through the political rallies being held.

Table 6: Respondents awareness of other sources of public acceptance

Response	Percentage (%)
Interpersonal communication	42.4
Political advertising	41.3
Lobbying	9.3
Others	7.1
Total	100 n=389

Table 6 presents different sources of public acceptance respondents have been exposed to, 42.3% of respondents were influenced through interpersonal communication either by their

peers or representatives of these political parties, followed by political advertising with 41.3%. This implies that political parties should factor in on this other sources of public

acceptance to better create awareness.

Discussion of findings

After making use of the questionnaire as an instrument to find out the views of various respondents on the assessment of the use of rally as a public relations strategy for public acceptance of political party, it was important to find out the views of a political representative of the studied political party on the effect of using political rally for public acceptance. This led the researcher to interview Mr Adeyemi Showunmi the Zonal Chairman of the All Progressive Congress (APC), Alimosho Local Government Area.

In an interview with Mr Adeyemi Showunmi, the Zonal Chairman of the All Progressive Congress (APC), Alimosho Local Government Area. He stated that the public are aware of political rally of APC in several regions of the country including Lagos state which has led the public to know their manifestoes. He further stated that to show people's awareness, they have participated largely in various rallies organised by the party and it has been very effective, thereby giving them the opportunity to create a relationship with the public.

During the interview, it was revealed by Mr Adeyemi Showunmi, that political rally has aided public acceptance of APC, this is shown with the large participation of youths and adults during the rallies. The public wants change of presidential candidate and APC has brought that to them through their manifestos and party image. It was deduced from the interview that other sources are put in place to aid public acceptance of APC; a major source mentioned during the interview by the representative was interpersonal communication. This is used by the party to create a personal relationship with the public by talking to the one on one on the manifesto

and change APC is willing to give to the country.

Political rally over the years has become a very effective public relations strategy of reaching out to the public during elections in Nigeria, since it was concluded by Chang, Park and Shim (1998) that politicians use messages passed across to the public during rallies to persuade voters to vote for them. Iornem (1995) calls it wooing of voters.

The results of the findings show that respondents are not just aware of political rally to a large extent but have also participated in these rallies (58.9%). This is quite expected since Olujide, Adeyemi, Gbadeyan (2010) noted that there has been a bombardment of the use of rally by political parties prior to the elections. Since the 2007 elections, political parties have begun using rallies for campaigning as this allows for quicker dissemination of messages, data gathering and analysis. This result is therefore based on the fact that electorates are aware of political rallies and have participated in these rallies to a certain extent.

The respondents majorly had a participatory attitude (57.9%) towards the electoral process, while some had an indifferent attitude (28.3%). The result gotten from this question supports Olujide, Adeyemi, Gbadeyan (2010) study which revealed that majority of the respondents looked at candidate's manifestos and candidate's party to accept a political party. Other sources of political awareness were stated to know if the respondents are aware of these sources and if these sources influenced their decision. These sources include interpersonal communication, political advertising, lobbying among others. The result shows that other sources of political awareness the electorates are exposed to

influence their choice of candidates. This result is backed up with Iornem (1995) study which revealed that other forms of political awareness should not be neglected such that electorates are exposed to negative sources that tend to manipulate their intentions and cause them to act in favour of whoever is exposing them to these sources.

Conclusion

The result of the finding also claims that political rally has more influence on electorates more than any other form of political awareness. The researchers further suggest that more attention be paid to political rally since it is a major public relations strategy used during elections which helps determine who electorates vote for. Also more care should be taken to reduce political rallies violence so as to increase more participation during these rallies especially among women.

In conclusion, Olujide, Adeyemi, Gbadeyan (2010) suggested that electorates should not rely on information gotten from one source of political awareness but rather they should explore other sources of political awareness in other to maximize information and get better understanding to help guide their choice of political parties and their candidates.

References

Amalifi. C. (1990). Need for more emphasis on public relations in government In Nwosu, (ed) mass communication and national development. Aba: Frontier Publisher LTD.

Chang, W, Park, J and Shim,S (1998).Effectiveness of Negative Political Advertising. WJMCR.

Gordon, A & Spence, D (2008). Mass Political Behaviour. In L. Kaid & C. Holtz-Bavha (Eds). Encyclopedia of Political Communication. Thousand Oaks, CA:

SAGE Publications

Moguluwa S. H (2013). The Imperative of Personality Audit, Image Audit, and Opinion Poll in Political Public Relations (PPR) Practices. Journal of Culture, Society and Development- An Open Access International Journal Vol.1 2013 104

Iornem. D. (1995). Political campaign techniques of communication, advertising and marketing. Kaduna. Jvc press.

Okolie, A.M. (2004) *Political Behaviour*. Enugu: Academic Publishing Company

Olujide. J, Adeyemi. S and Gbadeyan. R. (2011). Nigerian electorates perception of political advertising and election campaign. Retrieved on September 25th 2015 from www.krepublishers.com/02-journals/jss/jss-27-0-000-11-web/jss-27-3-000-11-abst-pdf/jss-27-3-179-11-1108-olujide-j-o-tt-pdf

Osho. S. (2008) Public relations policy planning and strategy. Pp. 302-360. Abeokuta: ess-o consult.

Osuji, C (2001): *Political Public Relations*, Owerri: Opinion Research and Communications, Inc.

Oyesomi, K.O (2011). An appraisal of Nigerian Newspapers coverage of women's participation in 2007 elections. *Fort Hare Journal of Communication, South Africa*. Vol. 17. Pp.112-136

Strömbäck, J., & Kioussis, S. (2011a). Political Public Relations: Defining and Mapping an Emergent Field. In J. Strömbäck & S. Kioussis (Eds.), *Political Public Relations. Principles and Applications* (pp. 1-32). New York: Routledge

Trent, J. & Friedenberg, R (2004) Political campaign communication. books.google.com > Political Science