University of Nebraska - Lincoln
DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Summer 7-16-2019

Politicking in the Digital Age: Engagement in Computer-Mediated Political Communication and Citizens' Perception of Political Parties, Politicians and the Government

Wogu Joseph
worgujoseph100@gmail.com

Greg H. Ezeah
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Gregezeah100@gmail.com

Gever Verlumun Celestine
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, encyclopeadia100@gmail.com

Ugwuanyi John Chidi
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ugwuanyichidi100@gmail.com

Politicking in the   Digital Age: Engagement in Computer-Mediated Political Communication and Citizens' Perception of Political Parties, Politicians and the Government

Joseph Wogu[1]
Josephworgu100@gmail.com
Greg Ezeah[1]
Gregezeah100@gmail.com
Gever, Verlumun Celestine[1]
Encyclopeadia100@gmail.com
Ugwuanyi, John Chidi[1]
Ugwuanyichidi100@gmail.com
[1]Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

The shape and approaches to politicking the new media era have changed drastically. Such   changes make studies in this area very attractive to researchers. This study examined engagement in computer-mediated political communication and citizens' perception of political parties, politicians and the government. The study tested seven alternate hypotheses. The survey research design was used for the study while the questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. Engagement was measured using four indices like point of engagement, period of engagement, disengagement and re-engagement. Perception about political parties, politicians and the government was measured using indices like competence, trustworthiness and antecedent. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the analysis of data for the study. The result showed that engagement significantly predict perception, perception significantly correlate selective exposure, selective perception, selective   attention and selective retention to computer-mediated political messages. Computer-mediated political communication also significantly correlate voting decision.

1

---

[1] Corresponding author: Ugwuanyi John Chidi: Ugwuanyichidi100gmail.com

Introduction

Information and communication technologies have greatly changed the face of political communication. In contemporary political communication, media options have widened and monopoly in political information dissemination has also been broken. In the twenty-first century political communication, citizens also have the opportunity of expressing themselves through computer-mediated options. Ezeah and Gever (2016) say that political communication is one of the very popular aspects of   communication art which is why the political beat   remains very competitive and busy. Blumler (2011,p.ix) says political communication is very complex and also an essential component of communication research. Franklin (1995,p. 225) cited in Kolovos and Harris (2005) opines that   the political communication studies covers the interface between media as well as the political systems. In the views of Franklin, such interaction that takes place between the media and the political structure spans from local, national and international arena. Norris (2010,p.2) captures political communication in vividness by revealing that political communications is describes a process in which actors like the media, the political class, and the general public exchange views. Such a process can assume different approach such as from the government to the general public or upwards such as from the citizens to the government. With the emergence of new technologies, political communication has also been affected.

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools have emerged as essential media opportunities that are cheap, less regulated and constantly available. Computer-mediated communication describes the process   that entails creating, exchanging and perceiving information among people using mediated devices   (December, 1996). According to Shaft, Martin and Gay (2001) cited in Ezeah and Gever (2016), CMC is human-to-human communication with the application   computer in a networked environments to enhance interaction. It is a term for different types of interpersonal (private and public) communication done through the Internet using messaging systems, e-mail, web discussion boards, mailing lists, instant, , newsgroups, Internet Relay Chat, and web chat channels. Jones (1995) holds that CMC is a platform through which people interact, exchange views through meaning sharing. When citizens engage in computer-mediated political communication in democracy, they get exposed to messages about three broad categories of political players. They are political parties, politicians and the government in power. The perception of citizens about these categories of political players is important because in a democracy, legitimacy belongs to the citizens. It could be argued that engagement in computer-mediated political communication and eventual exposure to such messages may have corresponding influence on the way citizens perceive critical players in a democratic setup. In this study, the researchers used the social media engagement theory of Di Gangi, and Wasko, (2016) to examine how engagement in computer-mediated political communication correlate perceptions about political parties, politicians and the government and how such perception correlate political behaviour like voting decision.

Social Media Engagement Theory and Hypotheses Development
To develop the social media engagement theory, Di Gangi, and Wasko, (2016)   built on Prahalad and Ramaswamy's (2004) model of co-creation in the service sector and used

the model to come up with a theoretical framework to describe social media engagement theory. They extended the model to pay stress   the social interactions which occurs among   users that are mediated by the social media platform made available by an organization. They applied a socio-technical systems dimension to first examine the reason behind user experience correlating engagement and eventually usage (see also Hwang & Thorn, 1999; O'Brien & Toms, 2008; Ray, Kim, & Morris, 2014). Therefore, to address the issue of consistency regarding how to conceptualize engagements in mediated communication, Di Gangi and Wasko social media engagement postulation reveals the dividing lines that distinguish   factors that constitute   the user engagement user experience as well as usage.   However, the interest of the current study in this theory was the user engagement factor. O'Brien and Toms (2008) define engagement as a quality of user experience with features   like, positive effect challenge, attention, feedback, aesthetic, endurability and sensory appeal, , variety/novelty, interactivity, and perceived user control. Chapman, (1997) holds that engagement is made manifest in areas like attention, intrinsic interest, curiosity, and motivation. Di Gangi and Wasko say that user engagement is divided into two. The first component is individual involvement while the second is personal meaning. Santosa Wei, and Chan, (2005) found that user involvement was a positive and significant predictor of a user's information seeking activities (See also, Ray at el 2014; Santosa, Wei, & Chan, 2005). Evidence in literature (e.g. Barki & Hartwick, 1994; Hwang & Thorn, 1999; Ray et al., 2014; Zaichkowsky, 1985) also showed that perception of involvement is a fundamental component of engagement. The second component of user engagement, personal meaning, describes the personal importance of the social media platform to the individual user (see also Battista & Almond, 1973; Debats, 1998). O'Brien and Toms (2008) in a study reported that engagement in computer-mediated communication is a process comprised of four distinct stages: point of engagement, period of sustained engagement, disengagement, and reengagement. These four stages of engagement were considered useful for this study because they were based on user-experiences. Point of engagement describes the motivation for engaging in computer-mediated communication. On the other hand, period of engagement describes the stage by which users become focused on their task and the application, the novelty of the experience, their level of interest, and their perceptions of challenge, feedback, and user control inherent in the interaction. Disengagement which is the third level of engagement occurred when participants make an internal decision to stop the activity, or when factors in the participants' external environment caused them to stop being engaged. Reengagement describes a situation where participants who earlier stopped engagement in computer-mediated political communication resume (O'Brien & Toms (2008). Based on the above theory and the studies reviewed, we hypothesized:

H1: Stages of engagement in computer-mediated political communication will significantly predict perception on political parties, politicians and the government.

Citizens' Perception and Voter Decision
As noted earlier, the citizens are regarded as the custodians of legitimacy in a representative democratic setup. They decide who bests represents their interest. Dalton (2000) opines that one of the fundamental roles that citizens play in democracies and other political systems is to take part in decisions concerning political matters which

could concern them in one way or the other. Ank and De Graaf (2017) in a study reported the involvement of citizens in democracies of their countries is essential for harnessing the dividends of democracy.   Considering the importance of citizens in a democracy, their perception concerning political actors like political parties, politicians and the government in power is essential, thus worth investigating.

Perception in its general term describes the views that people hold about an object, person or place. Feldman (1999) sees perception as the sorting out, interpretation, analysis and integration of stimuli involving ones sense of organs and brain. Perception is conceived and often regarded as communication. Ngene (2016) adds that people often make evaluative judgments of what is desirable and undesirable in a community based on what they feel, experience, see, read, hear or talk about. Severin, (2001) holds that different psychological factors influence perceptions and they include past experience, cultural expectations, motivations, moods, needs and attitudes. Scholars (Tal - Or & Tsfati , 2007; Sun Pan & Shen 2008) found that perceptions about media contents is significantly determine media effect.

Research regarding media effects has gone through various stages. First, was the stage of all−powerful media. During this era, it was believed that media messages were so powerful that the receivers cannot resist. Changes in society have also affected the direction of thinking among researchers on the power of the media. In this regard, Neuman and Guggenheim (2011, p. 173) opine: 'with the growth of the industrialized mass media, especially radio and later television, and the apparent success of European totalitarian propaganda, such a view was culturally and historically resonant.' Keppinger, (2008) Nabi, and Oliver, (2009) have argued that there is a paradigm shift in the study of media effect as media contents do not have the bullet power status accorded it by the postulation of the bullet theory. Klapper (1960) expressed this through his consistency idealogy which suggest that media messages must be consistent with the pre-existing attitudes of the audience before they can have effect on them (McQuail, 2005). Klapper (1960)   suggested some guides concerning the effect of media messages on the audience. He found that: media messages on their own do have substantially have effect on the audience, rather, there are some factors that play essential roles. These factors are highlighted below:

Selective exposure: This explains the possibility of people to expose themselves to mass media   messages   that   they   consider   as being   are in agreement with their attitudes and interests.   This approach may also   be applicable to computer-mediated political messages because people may decide to expose themselves only to political messages that are consistent with their cognitions.

Selective Perception: This explains the plausibility of people to organize the meaning of mass communication messages based on their already existing views. Within the context of this study, people may perceive political messages through computer mediated communication in manner that is consistent with their political views.

Selective Retention: This explains the ability of people to retain certain information while ignoring others. This is usually determined by psychological factors like culture, religion, ego, etc. Within the context of this study, citizens may selectively retain political messages through computer-mediated communication based on their political views.

Selective attention: This means that mass media audience may decide to select the type of information to pay attention to and avoid paying attention to others. Citizens may decided to pay attention to political messages through computer-mediated communication while taking into account their political interest.

Based on the selectivity postulations of Klapper as explained above, the researcher argues that citizens preexisting political cognitions will likely influence their selectivity behaviour when they engage in computer-mediated political communication. Consequently, the following hypotheses are postulated:

H2: Citizens perception will significantly correlate selective exposure to computer-mediated political communication messages.
H3: Citizens perception will significantly correlate selective perception to computer-mediated political communication messages
H4: Citizens perception will significantly correlate selective attention to computer-mediated political communication messages.
H5: Citizens perception will significantly correlate selective retention to computer-mediated political communication messages.
Political parties, politicians and the government are usually interested in the perception that citizens hold about them because favourable perception could lead to corresponding trust, confidence, support   and eventually vote during election.   Political parties, politicians and the government in power are often jostling for the vote of electorate. The decision of which party or candidate to vote or whether to vote for or against an existing government usually begins with an internal consideration of several factors.   Daniel (2015) identified the three main propositions on voting behaviour such as sociological approach; party identification model and rational choice.   According to him, the sociological model pays attention to voting behaviour because of its impact on the society. The party identification approach focuses on voting because of party sympathy. On the other hand, the rational choice approach explains that people cast their vote with compete consideration of the interest of their countries. Based on these three voting behaviour considerations, the researchers hypothesized:
H6: Citizens' perception will significantly influence the type of approach that will guide their voting decision.
H7: Citizens' perception will significantly influence their choice of candidate during voting.

Materials and Methods

We used the survey research design in this study. We considered survey most useful because it is normally the most appropriate design when a researcher seeks to describe, explore or explain a phenomenon. The study was conducted in Enugu State, Nigeria. Enugu State has a population of 4,411,119 (National Population Commission, 2012). However, not all the residents of the area were eligible to participate because the objective was to sample only respondents who reported engaging in computer-mediated political communication.

To select the sample for the study, the researcher used the Cochran formula (1963, p.75). With 95 percent level of confidence (confidence interval - $\pm$ 5%),

population estimate of 50% (.5)   and a permitted margin of error at .05 (5 percentage points), the Cochran Equation '1' which yielded a representative sample for population that are large and it yielded a sample size of 385. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study. This is because, the essence of the sampling was not get a representation of the residents of Enugu state but to sample respondents who engage n computer-mediated political communication.

The questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was structured in two parts. The first part sought the demographic characteristics of the respondents while the second part sought information that led to the testing of the hypotheses for the study. The questionnaire was validated by three communication experts at the Department of Mass Communication, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, the researcher used the test retest approach and the analysis yielded correlation coefficient of 0.77.

Measures

Computer-mediated Political Communication (CMPC): For this study, CMPC was regarded as mediated meaning exchange about politics such as political parties, politicians and democratically elected government. Such communication could cover a wide range of issues like party primaries, party internal squabbles, government policies, among others. It could also   cover political appointments. This was measured using dichotomous responses such as agree and disagree. Only respondents who agreed engaging in CMPC were part of the study.

Engagement in CMPC: Engagement in CMPC was measured using four broad engagement levels like point of engagement, period of engagement, disengagement and re-engagement.   These levels of engagements are explained below:

a. *Point of engagement*: the motivation for engaging in computer-mediated communication.

b. *Period of engagement:* The stage by which users become focused on their task and the application, the novelty of the experience, their level of interest, and their perceptions of challenge, feedback, and user control inherent in the interaction.

c. *Disengagement:* This occurred when participants make an internal decision to stop the activity, or when factors in the participants' external environment caused them to stop being engaged.

d. *Reengagement.* A situation where   participants who earlier stopped engagement in computer-mediated political communication resume.

Exposure to CMPC: The researcher adopted and modified Klapper's media selectivity postulations to measure exposure to CMPC. This include:

a. *Selective exposure*: Exposing oneself to only CMPC messages that agree with a citizen's pre-existing cognitions.

b. *Selective perception:* Interpreting messages from CMPC in a manner that agrees with citizens' already held views.

c. *Selection retention:* Assimilating only CMPC messages that agree with users' pre-existing cognition.

d. *Selective attention:* Paying attention to only messages from CMCP messages that agree with users already existing political ideals.

Perception

To measure citizens' perception of political parties, politicians and the government, the researcher developed three indices as shown below: The measuring indices are:

Competent: Perception regarding the ability of political parties, politicians and the government to deliver the gains of democracy.

Trustworthy: The extent to which political parties, politicians and the government can be relied upon to deliver the gains of democracy.

Antecedents: Perception of political parties, politicians and the government as having track records of performance.

Approaches to Voting decision

The following three broad measures were used to measure approach that guide voting decision:

   a. *The sociological model*: This emphasizes on voting behaviour as a result of impact of social structure suggesting that social group membership influence voting behaviour.
   b. *The party identification approach:* This is a situation where partisanship is deciding factor.
   c. *The rational choice approach*: This places attention on voters' choice of their candidates in an election based on issues and policy design of the political parties.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of data for this study, the researcher used both descriptive and inferential statistics. Among the descriptive statistics, simple percentages, mean and standard deviation were used while among the inferential statistics, correlation analysis and multiple regression were used. Results were presented in tables. All analysis were done with SPSS version 22. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Out of the 385 copies of the questionnaire that were administered to the respondents, 364 copies representing 95% were returned and found useful. The sample was 56% male and 44% female. The age range of the respondents was 32 (range 18 and 28 years). Most (67%) of the sample had tertiary education. The mean   number of years of engagement in CMPC was 7 (range 4 and 10 years).

Table Engagement in CMPC as predicts of perceptions about political parties, politicians and the government

Correlations

		Perception	Point of eng.	Period of eng	disengag ement	Re-eng.
Pearson Correlation	Perception	1.000	.784	.681	.594	.677
	Point of eng.	.784	1.000	.789	.769	.811
	Period of eng.	.681	.789	1.000	.734	.649

	disengagement	.594	.769	.734	1.000	.539
	Re-eng.	.677	.811	.649	.539	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Perception	.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Point of eng	.000	.	.000	.000	.000
	Period of eng	.000	.000	.	.000	.000
	Disengagement	.000	.000	.000	.	.000
	Re-eng.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.
N	Perception	364	364	364	364	364
	Point of eng	364	364	364	364	364
	Period of eng	364	364	364	364	364
	Disengagement	364	364	364	364	364
	Re-eng.	364	364	364	364	364

A multiple regression was conducted to predict citizens' perception of political parties, politicians and the government based on specific stages of engagement in computer-mediated political communication like point of engagement, period of engagement, disengagement and re-engagement. The assumptions of linearity, independence of errors, homoscedasticity, unusual points and normality of residuals were met. The result of the analysis showed that stages of engagement in CMPC like point of engagement, period of engagement, disengagement and re-engagement significantly predict citizens' perceptions about political parties, politicians and the government. This is because the result yielded p-value ($P<0.05$). To examine the individual contribution of each of stages of engagement, the coefficients table was examined and the following Bate values were revealed: point of engagement ($\beta=.602$), period of engagement ($\beta=.181$), disengagement ($\beta=.-.057$), re-engagement ($\beta =.099$). Based on these figures, point of engagement had the highest Bate value, an indication that it contributes more in predicting perception about political parties, politicians and the government.

Table 2: Correlation between perception and selective exposure

		Correlations			
		Competent	Trustworthy	Antecedent	Selective exposure
Competent	Pearson Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N				

		Competent	Trustworthy	Antecedent	Selective exposure
Trustworthy	Pearson Correlation	.884[**]			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N				
Antecedent	Pearson Correlation	.764[**]	.660[**]		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
Selective exposure	Pearson Correlation	.762[**]	.783[**]	.697[**]	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above sought to ascertain the correlation between perception about political parties, politicians and the government and selective exposure to political messages via computer-mediated channels. Perception was measured using three broad indices like competence, trustworthy and antecedents of political parties, politicians and the government. The result of the correlation analysis shows that all the variables significantly correlate. Specifically, competence significantly correlate selective exposure (.r=.762), trustworthy (r=.783) significantly correlate selective exposure and antecedent significantly correlate selective exposure (r=.697).

Table 3: Correlation between perception and selective Perception

Correlations					
		Competent	Trustworthy	Antecedent	Selective perception
Competent	Pearson Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N				
Trustworthy	Pearson Correlation	.884[**]			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	364			
Antecedent	Pearson Correlation	.764[**]	.660[**]		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	364	364		
Selective perception	Pearson Correlation	.965[**]	.919[**]	.729[**]	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	

	N	364	364	364	364

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above sought to ascertain the correlation between perception about political parties, politicians and the government and selective perception to political messages via computer-mediated channels. Overall,   all the variables significantly correlate. Specifically, competence   significantly correlate selective perception (.r=..965), trustworthy (r=.919) significantly correlate selective perception and antecedent significantly correlate selective perception (r=.729). This suggests that   the type of perception that citizens have about political parties, politicians and the government will significantly determine their perception about political messages communication through computer-mediated communication.

Table 4: Correlation between perception and selective Retention

Correlations

		Competent	Trustworth y	Antecedent	Selective retention
Competent	Pearson Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N				
Trustworthy	Pearson Correlation	.884**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	364			
Antecedent	Pearson Correlation	.764**	.660**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	354	354		
Selective retention	Pearson Correlation	.795**	.755**	.744**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	364	364	364	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above sought to ascertain the correlation between perception about political parties, politicians and the government and selective retention of political messages via computer-mediated channels. Summarily, all the variables significantly correlate. Precisely, competence significantly correlate selective retention (.r=...795), trustworthy (r=..755) significantly correlate selective retention and antecedent significantly correlate selective retention (r=..744). What this means is that citizens' retention of political communication messages through computer-mediated communication is determined by their perception.

Table 5: Correlation between perception and selective attention

Correlations

		Competent	Trustworthy	Antecedent	Selective attention
Competent	Pearson Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N				
Trustworthy	Pearson Correlation	.884**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	364			
Antecedent	Pearson Correlation	.764**	.660**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	364	364		
Selective attention	Pearson Correlation	.896**	.778**	.772**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	364	364	364	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above sought to ascertain the correlation between perception about political parties, politicians and the government and selective attention vis-a-vis political messages via computer-mediated channels. Overall, all the variables significantly correlate. In particular, competence significantly correlate selective attention (.r=.896), trustworthy (r=.778) significantly correlate selective attention and antecedent significantly correlate selective attention (r=..772). What this means is that citizens' attention to political communication messages through computer-mediated communication is determined by the perception they hold about such political players.

Table 6: Correlation between perception and voting approach

Correlations

		Competent	Trustworthy	Antecedent	Sociological model	Party identity	national interest
Competent	Pearson Correlation						
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N						
Trustworthy	Pearson Correlation	.884**					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000					

	N	364	364		
Antecedent	Pearson Correlation	.764**	.660**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	364	364		
Sociologic al model	Pearson Correlation	.828**	.823**	.699**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	364	364	364	
Party identity	Pearson Correlation	.896**	.778**	.772**	.924**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	364	364	364	364
National interest	Pearson Correlation	.400**	.415**	.432**	.484**	.447**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	364	364	364	364	364

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The table above sought to ascertain the correlation between perception about political parties, politicians and the government and determinants of voting. The result of the correlation matrix suggests that all the variables significantly correlate. In particular, competence significantly correlate sociological model (r=.822), party identity (r=.896) and national interest (r=.400) trustworthy significantly correlate sociological model (r=.823), party identity (R=.778) and national interest (r=.415). Finally, antecedent significantly correlate sociological model (r=.699), party identity (r=.772) and national interest (r=432).

Table 7: Citizens perception and voting decision

Correlations

		Competent	Trustworth y	Antecedent	Voting decision
Competent	Pearson Correlation				
	Sig. (2-tailed)				
	N	364			
Trustworthy	Pearson Correlation	.884**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	364	364		
Antecedent	Pearson Correlation	.764**	.660**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	364	364		

Voting decision	Pearson Correlation	.773**	.652**	.663**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	364	364	364

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

 The table above sought to ascertain the correlation between perception about political parties, politicians and the government and voting decision. The result of the correlation matrix suggests that all the perception indices significantly correlate voting decision. In particular,   competence significantly correlate voting decision   (.r=.773), trustworthy significantly correlate voting decision (r=..652), and   antecedent significantly correlate voting decision (r=..663).

Test of Hypotheses
This study tested seven hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. All the hypotheses were accepted. In particular, the result of the first hypothesis tested showed that stages of engagement in computer-mediated political communication significantly predict perception on political parties, politicians and the government (see table 1).Therefore, the researchers concluded with 95% confidence that stages of engagement in CMPC like point of engagement, period of engagement, disengagement and re-engagement significantly predict perception about political parties, politicians and the government in power.

The result of the second hypothesis revealed that citizens' perception significantly correlate selective exposure to computer-mediated political communication messages. Therefore, the researchers concluded with 95% confidence that perception about political parties, politicians and the government significantly correlate selective exposure to political communication messages through computer-mediated channels (see table 2).

The result of the third hypothesis testing showed that citizens perception significantly   correlate   selective   perception   to   computer-mediated   political communication messages (see table 3). Therefore, the researchers concluded with 95% confidence that the perception citizens hold about political parties, politicians and the government significantly correlate their perception of political communication messages.

The findings of the study regarding the fourth hypothesis revealed that citizens perception significantly correlate selective attention to computer-mediated political communication messages (see table 4).Therefore, the researchers concluded with 95% confidence that the perception citizens hold of political parties, politicians and the government plays a role in determining how they pay attention to political communication about them.

The result of the study concerning the fifth hypothesis revealed that citizens' perception significantly correlate selective retention to computer-mediated political communication messages (see table 5).The researchers, therefore concluded with 95% confidence that perception about political parties, politicians and the government influences retention of political messages through computer-mediated communication.

The result of the sixth hypothesis revealed that citizens' perception significantly influence the type of approach that guide their voting decision (see table 6). The type of

approaches considered in the study were sociological model, party identification and national interest.

The outcome of the last hypothesis testing showed that citizens' perception significantly influence their choice of candidate during voting. That is when the citizens perceive political parties and politicians as well as the government as competent, trustworthy and with track records of performance, such persons are likely to get voted to power than when citizens rate political actors low on these indices.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined how engagement in computer-mediated political communication correlate citizens' perceptions of three political actors in a democracy. They are political parties, politicians and the democratic government. The result revealed that engagement in computer-mediated political communication significantly influences citizens' perception of political parties, politicians and the government. In particular, our result showed that stages of engagement in computer-mediated political communication significantly predict perceptions of political parties, politicians and the government. The result showed that such perception also correlate citizens' selective exposure, selective perception, selective attention and selective retention. The result of the study also showed that perception as a result of engagement in computer-mediated political communication also correlate the approaches that determine voting and it also significantly correlate actual voting decision.

These results have scholarly, theoretical and practical implications.   Scholarly, the result of the current study is consistent with that of Santosa, Wei, and Chan, (2005) who examined information seeking behaviour and reported that user involvement was a positive and significant predictor of a user's information seeking activities. What this mean to the current study is that engagement in computer-mediated political communication could offer insights into the political information seeking behaviour of citizens. The more citizens engage in computer-mediated political communication, the more likelihood that they will be schooled about political issues, politicians and the current government. The result of this study is also similar to other scholars (Ray at el (2014; Di Gangi, & Wasko, 2016) who found that engagement in computer-mediated communication is an important predictor of behaviour of users. The result of this study has, therefore, confirmed the four engagement stages in computer-mediated communication as identified by   O'Brien and Toms (2008). The result of this study has shown that Klapper (1960)'s   postulations on the effects of mass media are also applicable to computer-mediated communication in general and political communication in particular. Our result showed that engagement in computer-mediated political communication shapes the perception of citizens and perception in turn shapes voting. The decision concerning who to vote in an election is an important involvement of citizens in the democracy of their country which Ank and De Graaf (2017) said is healthy for democracies to grow.

The result of this study also has implications on the social media engagement theory of Di Gangi, and Wasko, (2016). Although the theorists had suggested the framework to explain why the user experience influences engagement and subsequently usage, the result of this study has shown that the theory could be a useful framework for examining engagement in computer-mediated political communication and how such

engagement correlate perception about political actors and eventual voting decision. By applying this study to examine engagement in computer-mediated political communication, this results have offered fresh theoretical perspective regarding the importance of engagement in computer-mediated political communication and how such correlate political behaviour like voting.

Finally, the result of this study has practical implications on political communication, computer-mediated communication and behaviour change communication. First, concerning political communication, the result has shown that information and communication technologies have greatly widened the scope of political communication and those who seek to influence the perception and behaviour of the citizens must also extend their communication options to included computer-mediated so as to ensure that the right political messages are passed across. This result also has implications on computer-mediated communication generally by suggesting that there is the need to pay close attention to the stages of engagement in CMC as such could significantly predict perception. Finally, the result has implications on behaviour change communication by showing that computer-mediated communication could be effective in communicated behaviour change messages.

Conclusion/Recommendations
Based on the result of this study, the researchers conclude that engagement in computer-mediated political communication significantly correlate citizens' perception of political parties, politicians and the government. The researchers also conclude that the more citizens engage in computer-mediated political behaviour, the more political information they have and the more likely such information will influence their perception and eventual political behaviour. This study has made scholarly, theoretical and practical contributions. Scholarly, the result of this study has provided empirical evidence for understanding the relationship between engagement in computer-mediated political communication and citizens perception and voting behaviour. This information could be useful to scholars in different disciplines like communication, political science, information technologies as well as psychology. The indices of measuring perceptions of political parties, politicians and the government could be useful to other researchers who may be interested in the same area. Theoretically, this study has shown that the theory of social media engagement could be a useful framework for studying engagement in computer-mediated political communication. Practically, this result could be useful to political parties, politicians and government image makers. This study makes the following recommendations: political parties and politicians should deploy computer-mediated channels in reaching the citizens and educating them on their programmes and manifestos. The government in power should also use computer-mediated facilities to communicate its programmes, policies and achievements to the citizens. Further studies should be replicated in other countries of the world to give room for comparison.

References

Ank M. & Laurens De Graaf (2017): Examining citizen participation: local participatory policymaking and democracy revisited, *Local Government Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/03003930.2017.1365712.

Barki, H., & Hartwick, J. (1994). User participation, conflict, and conflict resolution: The mediating roles of influence. *Information Systems Research*, 5(4), 422-438.

Battista, J., & Almond, R. (1973). The development of meaning in life. *Psychiatry*, 36, 409-427.

Blumler, J.G. (2011). Foreword: In praise of holistic empiricism (pp.ix-xii). in K. Brants & K. Volmer (Eds*) Political communication in Postmodern democracy: Challenging the primacy of politics.* U.K. Palgrave Macmillan

Chapman, P. (1997). Models of engagement: Intrinsically motivated interaction with multimedia learning software. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Canada.

Dalton, R. (2000). Citizen attitudes and political behaviour. *Comparative Political Studies* 33(6/7), 912-940.

Dalton, R. (2000). Citizen attitudes and political behaviour. *Comparative Political Studies,* 33. (6/7), 912-940.

Daniel, I.U. (2015). Political participation and democratic culture in Nigeria: A case study of Nigeria. *Humanity and Social Sciences Journal.* 10 (1),32-39.

Debats, D. L. (1998). Measurement of personal meaning: The psychometric properties of the life regard index. In I. B. Weiner (Ed.), *The Human Quest for Meaning* (pp. 237-259). Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

December, J. (1997). Notes on defining of computer-mediated communication‖. computer mediated. Retrieved from http://www.december.com/cmc/mag/1987/ jan/december.html

Di Gangi, P. M., & Wasko, M. M. (2016). Social media engagement theory: Exploring the influence of user engagement on social media usage. *Journal of Organizational and End User Computing* (JOEUC), 28(2), 53-73.

Ezeah, G. & Gever, V.C (2015). Emerging trends in political communication. In O. Ike & Udeze, S. (Eds)   *Emerging trends in gender, health, and political communication in Africa.* (pp, 145-165) Enugu: Rhyce Kerex.

Feldman, R. S. (1999). *Understanding Psychology, (*5th ed) New York: McGraw Hill Publishers.

Hwang, M. I., & Thorn, R. G. (1999). The effect of user engagement on system success: a metaanalytical integration of research findings. *Information & Management,* 35(4), 229-236.

Hwang, M. I., & Thorn, R. G. (1999). The effect of user engagement on system success: a metaanalytical integration of research findings. *Information & Management, 35*(4), 229-236.

Jones, S, (1995). *Computer-mediated communication and community: Introduction*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage publications.

Keppinger, H. M. (2008). Media effects. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of communication (*pp, 23-41*)*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Klapper, J. (1960). *The effects of mass communication*. New York: Free Press.

Kolovos, I. & harris,P. (2005). Political Marketing and Political Communication: the relationship revisited. Retrieved from https://ourarchive.otago.ac.nz/bitstream/ handle/10523/1463/pm-pc.pdf

McQuail, D. (2005). *Mass communication theory*. London, UK: SAGE Publications.

Nabi, R. L., & Oliver, M. B. (2009). Mass media effects. In C. R. Berger, M. Roloff, & D. Roskos-Ewoldsen (Eds.), *Handbook of communication science (*pp, 34-49*)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

National Population Commission (2012).National Bureau of Statistics Estimates, 2006-2016 population estimate. National Population Commission.

Neuman, R. & Guggenheim, L. (2011). The evolution of media effects theory: A Six-stage model of cumulative research. *Communication Theory*, 21,169–196.

Ngene, M. (2016). Newspaper Readers' Perception of Campaigns for the Eradication of Corruption in Nigeria. *New Media and Mass Communication*, 49, 58-75.

Norris, P.(2010). Political communications. http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Acrob at/Caramani%20Political%20Communications%20Norris.pdf

O'Brien, H. L., & Toms, E. G. (2008). What is user engagement? A conceptual framework for defining user engagement with technology. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 59(6), 938-955.

Prahalad, C. K., & Ramaswamy, V. (2004). *The future of competition: Co-creating unique value with customers.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Ray, S., Kim, S. S., & Morris, J. G. (2014). The central role of engagement in online communities. Information Systems Research, 25(3), 528-546.

Santosa, P. I., Wei, K. K., & Chan, H. C. (2005). User involvement and user satisfaction with information-seeking activity. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 14(4), 361-370.

Severin, J. W., & Tankard, J. W. J. (2001). *Communication Theories: Origins, methods and uses in Mass Media*, (5th ed): UK: Longman

Sun , Y. , Pan , Z. , & Shen , L. (2008). Understanding the third - person perception: Evidence from a meta – analysis. *Journal of Communication,* 58 (2), 280 – 300.

Tal - Or , N. , & Tsfati , Y. (2007). On the substitutability of the third - person perception . *Media Psychology* , 10 (2), 231 – 249 .

Zaichkowsky, J. L. (1985). Measuring the involvement construct. *Journal of Consumer Research,* 12, 341-352.