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The impact of new media technologies on Zambia's 2016 presidential elections

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Abstract

The emergence of new media technologies has changed the way in which political communication takes place in Zambia. On 11th August 2016, Zambia held presidential, parliamentary and local government elections in which nine political parties massively used new media technologies to campaign before and during elections. The utilisation of new media technologies by political parties introduced a new way in political communication and had a great impact on how politics are conducted in Zambia. This study aims to assess the effectiveness of new media technologies in political campaigns during the time of elections. For the first time, ever in the political history of Zambia, political parties used new media technologies massively in political campaigns to engage the electorate and this has brought a new facet in political communication which has now become beneficial to Zambian politics and culture. This paper examines how new media technologies influenced political campaigns in the presidential elections and how they have shaped modern day politics in Zambia.

Keywords: *Elections; New Media; Campaign Strategies; Political Communication; Technologies; Voters*

1.0 Introduction

New media technologies are changing the nature of political communication around the world and this is because they are now being used as tools to mobilize campaign and secure political support. Most political party presidents and senior leaders in democratic states around the world have secured victories in elections as a result of using new media technologies in political campaigns. In almost every democratic nation where elections are called and held, politicians have made use of new media technologies to engage masses and communicate their political message. The main purpose of doing this has been to mobilise and solicit for electoral votes from supporters so that they can vote for them. Diana Owen (2014) indicated that grassroots political movements employ new media technology as a means of getting their message out and mobilizing their supporters.

As per norm, political parties' world over mainly in democratic states compete with each other in elections in so many ways and with the coming of new media technologies competition has become stiff. Political rivals

compete and communicate campaign messages through new media technologies to reach masses. Today, political parties own political party websites, Facebook accounts, Twitter, YouTube and blogs to interact with voters and their supporters. They also use new media technologies to access the impact they are making on the electorate. In a nutshell, the use of new media technologies is a common trend in developed nations like the US and is now gaining ground in developing nations like India, Malaysia and now Zambia. An interesting example is Zimbabwe where new media technologies were used in national elections in 2008.

In Zambia, before new media technologies were introduced, political communication was done mainly through public speeches in campaigns, political rallies, radio, TV message, newspaper and posters among other ways. Today, the introduction of new media technologies has brought a shift in the way political parties communicate. This change has been facilitated by one most important factor, the internet. Not only has the internet facilitated political communication but has

aided the use of new media technology in the whole election process.

For the past years, all political campaigns held in Zambia have mainly focused much attention on political rallies, meetings, seminars, door to door, radio, TV and posters to mobilise support from people. This has been a common trend which some believe belong to old age politics which consume much time and is not very effective. Therefore, when Zambia held its presidential, parliamentary and local government elections in 2016, a wave of change took place in which all nine political parties that participated in the election mainly presidential, for the first time adopted the use on new media technologies in their political campaigns in addition to what they have been accustomed to in all the past elections held.

The introduction of new media technologies in political campaigns facilitated a change in which information was disseminated to the electorate. All political parties effectively made use of new technologies in their campaigns differently in order to communicate their political campaigns to the electorate. The use of new technologies has changed politics rapidly and with the passage of time the country has become more democratic and use of internet has leveraged this situation.

1.1 Internet in Zambia

Internet began experimentation in Zambia in 1991 with the first development of dial up connection and forward emails services. In 1993, government liberalised policies allowed the establishment of Internet Service Providers ISPs. The ISP subsector became among the most competitive in the ICT industry. By 2015, there were 24 licenced ISP with Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority ZICTA, a regulatory body. Since then, number of ISPs grew in Zambia.

According to latest figures from the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority ZICTA (2016), the country now has 6.1 million internet users, representing a penetration rate of 39 percent. MTN is the leading internet mobile service provider currently with 45.5 percent of the data market, followed by Airtel with 40.1 percent and Zamtel with 14.4 percent. Apart from these mobile network providers there are other internet service providers. The liberalised market has also allowed the importation of mobile phones and the adoption of

smartphones and other mobile devices has increase access to internet in Zambia.

According to International Telecommunication Union ITU (2016), the number of people using internet in Zambia has increased between 2015 and 2016.

Table 1.0 shows the number of internet users and penetration

Table 1.1

Year	Internet Users**	Penetration (% of Pop)	Total Population	Non-Users (Internetless)	1Y User Change	1Y User Change	Population Change
2016*	3,167,934	19 %	16,717,332	13,549,398	5.9 %	176,335	3.12 %
2015*	2,991,599	18.5 %	16,211,767	13,220,168	9.7 %	265,518	3.12 %

Source: International Telecommunication Union ITU (2016)

The increase in internet penetration has facilitated easy political communication as many people have access to internet. During political campaigns in the presidential elections, the increase and availability of mobile phones made political campaigns easier for all political parties that participated in the general elections. Political parties took advantage of an increase in mobile phones to promote political campaign messages.

1.2 Mobile Phones in Zambia

As part of new media technologies, the proliferation of mobile phones in Zambia has aided the use of new media technologies in political campaigns.

According to Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority ZICTA (2015), Zambia has now a significant increase in the number of mobile phone subscribers from 2.6 million in 2007 to 10.9 million in 2015. This increase has been facilitated by increased investment in the sub-sector by mobile network service providers.

The increase in subscriber base corresponds to an improvement in service penetration relative to the population from 22.5 percent in 2007 to 70.3 percent in 2015, in a country with over 15 million people. The global system for mobile communications (GSM) coverage, which is currently at over 80 percent of the country's surface area, is expected to reach 100 percent in few years.

Research reports indicate that mobile phone penetration rate has reached 74.3% of the population, with 11.6 million subscribers out of 15 million Zambians. In addition, the latest report by ZICTA indicates that Zambia has an

estimated 6.1 million mobile internet users with subscriber base of customers distributed as by mobile telecommunication provider MTN, Airtel, Zamtel and others.

1.3 Political Campaigns

The political campaign period was officially launched by the Electoral Commission of Zambia ECZ in early 2011 paving way for all political parties to campaign. This provided an opportunity for people to assess all nine aspiring presidential candidates and their political party messages. The launch of political campaigns set a stage for political parties to communicate their messages through various forms. During this time, political campaign messages were communicated by political parties through many channels. Political parties used billboards, radio, TV, posters, adverts, rallies, meetings and seminars to campaign. For the purposes of this research, this paper will focus on the most common which political parties used mostly for the first time, news media technologies.

New media technologies are any type of applications meant to transfer information via digital techniques, computerized systems or data networks. New media technologies can best be described as content made available using different forms of electronic communication made through the use of computer technology and Internet. Content is created and done through websites, blogs, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and twitter accounts. Content through new media technologies is quick and live at times.

2.0 Methodology

The purpose of this research was to analyse the usage of new media technologies and how they influenced political campaigns in the last presidential elections. This part of research provides a detailed overview of the methodological approach and design to find out to what extent new media technologies had an impact on election campaigns during August 11, 2016 presidential elections.

This study looks at a two (2) months period from 1st July to August 31st 2016 and this is mainly to determine to what extent new media technologies had an impact on the political campaigns during this period. This research paper adopts content analysis, survey and interviews with respondents who were voters. The study analyses content on websites, Facebook, twitter, blogs and mobile phones.

There were nine political parties that participated in the last presidential election. These political parties and their leaders include: Lungu Edgar C of Patriotic Front PF, Hichilema Hakainde of United Part for National Development UPND, Edith Nawakwi of Forum for Democracy and Development FDD, Andyford M Banda of People's Alliance for Change PAC, Wynter M Kabimba of Rainbow Party, Saviour Chishimba of United Progressive Party UPP, Tilyenji Kaunda of United National Independence Party UNIP, Peter Sinkamba of GREENS and Maxwell Mwamba of Democratic Alliance DA. These political parties took active roles in election campaigns.

Below *Table 2.0* shows all political parties that participated in the last presidential election that have either a website or Facebook account. The table gives details of how often the website and Facebook account were updated to show frequency of use by political parties to communicate political campaign messages.

Official websites and Facebook account of the political parties.

Table 2.1: Official websites and Facebook

No	Political Party	Website	Update	Facebook	Update
1	Patriotic Front PF	Yes	Everyday	Yes	Everyday
2	United Party for National Development UPND	Yes	Everyday	Yes	Everyday
3	Forum for Democracy and Development FDD	Yes	Everyday	Yes	Everyday
4	People's Alliance for Change PAC	No	Non	Yes	Everyday
5	Rainbow Party	Yes	Rarely	Yes	Everyday
6	United National Independence Party UNIP	No	Non	Yes	Rarely
7	United Progressive Party UPP	No	Non	Yes	Rarely
8	Green Party	No	Non	Yes	Rarely
9	Democratic Alliance DA	No	Non	Yes	Rarely

Source: Field data, 2016

Below *Table 2.2* shows photos and videos that were either uploaded or not on political party's website and Facebook account. This data below indicates the frequency of photos and videos update in the period under review. All photos and videos and their frequency of update indicated how often political parties

used them to communicate. Official photos and videos were done and updated.

Table 2.2: Photos and videos

No	Political Party	Photos Taken	Website Updated	Facebook Updated	Videos Taken	Website Updated	Facebook Updated
1	Patriotic Front PF	Yes	Everyday	Everyday	Yes	Everyday	Rarely
2	United Party for National Development UPND	Yes	Everyday	Everyday	Yes	Everyday	Rarely
3	Forum for Democracy and Development FDD	Yes	Everyday	Everyday	Yes	Rarely	Rarely
4	People's Alliance for Change PAC	Yes	Non	Rarely	Non	Non	non
5	Rainbow Party	Yes	Rarely	Rarely	Yes	Rarely	Rarely
6	United National Independence Party UNIP	Yes	Non	Rarely	Yes	Non	Rarely
7	United Progressive Party UPP	Yes	Non	Rarely	Non	Non	Non
8	Green Party	Yes	Non	Rarely	Non	Non	non
9	Democratic Alliance DA	Yes	Non	Rarely	Non	Non	non

Source: Field data, 2016

Below *Table 2.3* shows all political parties SMS text messages that all political parties sent to people by phones. These text messages were from political parties to potential voters. The same messages were replicated and sent from people to people urging others to vote for the party of their preference. This data below indicates political parties that used SMS to reach potential voters to vote for them. Political campaigns done through SMS on phone

Table 2.3: political parties SMS text messages

No	Political Party	SMS Text messages by phone
1	Patriotic Front PF	Yes
2	United Party for National Development UPND	Yes
3	Forum for Democracy and Development FDD	Yes
4	People's Alliance for Change PAC	No
5	Rainbow Party	Yes
6	United National Independence Party UNIP	No
7	United Progressive Party UPP	No
8	Green Party	No
9	Democratic Alliance DA	No

Source: Field data, 2016

Advertisement of political parties' messages on internet

Table 2.4 below shows all political parties' messages and websites where adverts of political parties appeared. This data below shows the most common means of advertisement on which the political messages were carried on organisations websites. Where these appeared shows how political parties used advertisement to communicate.

Table 2.4: political parties' messages and websites

No	Political Party	Messages	Website
1	Patriotic Front PF	Vote for PF	Facebook/News/YouTube
2	United Party for National Development UPND	Vote for UPND	Facebook/News/YouTube/Organisation
3	Forum for Democracy and Development FDD	Vote for FDD	Facebook/News/YouTube/Organisation
4	People's Alliance for Change PAC	Vote for PAC	Facebook/News/Organisation
5	Rainbow Party	Vote for Rainbow	Facebook/News/Organisation
6	United National Independence Party UNIP	Vote for UNIP	Facebook/News/Organisation
7	United Progressive Party UPP	Vote for UPP	Facebook/News/Organisation
8	Green Party	Vote for Green Party	Facebook/News/Organisation
9	Democratic Alliance DA	Vote for DA	Facebook/News/Organisation

Source: Field data, 2016

2.5 Interviews

Chava Frankfort Nachmias and David Nachmias (2006) observed that the selection of respondents is determined largely by the nature of the study and characteristics of the population. In order to understand how most respondents received their campaign messages, interviews were conducted with different people that either voted or planned to vote. The main essence of these interviews was to determine how the electorate received campaign political messages from political parties at the time of campaign. This research study interviewed 20 respondents in the study. The interview was a random face-to-face interview and the aim of the interview was to find out how respondents received political campaign messages and how they responded. Out of the twenty (20) respondents, sixteen (16) were mobile phone users and had access to radio and TV. Four respondents had no mobile phones but had access to TV and

Radio. The respondents were selected at random from different class.

3.0 Analysis

From the review of the data analysed from the tables and interviews on news media technologies and election campaign, this research study looks at how political parties used media technologies to influence the electorate to vote for them. In an article, 4 Ways Technology Has Impacted Presidential Elections, Zach Cutler (2015) asserts that the more in touch candidates are with technology, the more people they will reach. Understanding new technologies and trends is now key part of connecting with voters and running a successful campaign.

From the data collected above, all the political parties used new media technologies to reach out to masses. *Table 2.0* shows political parties that have either a website or Facebook account. From the table, four political parties have both a website and Facebook account and three of these political parties updated their websites and Facebook account every day except one party Rainbow party which has a website but updated it website rarely. Five political parties did not have a website but have Facebook account and one updated its accounts every day with the rest of those parties that have a website. Four parties rarely updated their Facebook account. This data shows that political parties used more of new media technologies to communicate their messages by website or Facebook account during periods of campaign.

From the data collected, *table 3.0* shows all political parties took photos with three parties updating these photos on their websites and Facebook account every day, one rarely. Five parties didn't update because they didn't have a website but managed to update on their Facebook account rarely. On videos five parties had videos of which two parties updated them on Facebook every day, two rarely on website and five parties did not. Five parties rarely updated their videos on Facebook and four parties did not. From *table 3.0*, it's easy to explain that parties used new media differently.

In *Table 4.0*, the table shows political parties that used SMS text messages to appeal for support using mobile phones. Four political parties used SMS message to send potential voters and five of them did not use this

method. The use of SMS message by mobile phone helped some parties to gain political support through appeals in short message system. The more access to mobile phones that people have, the more the chances political parties reached people with political messages.

In *table 5.0*, data shows that all political parties had political message sent to vote for them through Facebook, news and organisations website to send the campaign messages. All parties used Facebook, news and eight organisations. Three used YouTube account. This data shows that other than political parties' websites and Facebook accounts, political parties used other organisations website to communicate their political campaign messages to masses during the time of elections.

Given this data, three (3) political parties that are comparatively largest and well-funded set up websites that they used in their campaigns and this played a key role to reach out to masses as well as through the use of other social media platforms. Six (6) political parties did not have the website to campaign but they made use of social media platform mainly Facebook to campaign and reach out to the electorate in the elections.

According to the survey, Facebook was the mostly used form of new media by all political parties to communicate their political messages in the political campaigns and this was because of its reach facilitated by an increase in the number of people using mobile phones. So, mobile phones played an effective role and were highly reachable by most people as the most form of media. Political parties updated their Facebook and some of them rarely updated including pictures, videos and content.

This research also takes into account that through Facebook, supporters of political parties used blogs to appeal for support for their preferred political candidate. This was done through blogs and these blogs were connected to Facebook to reach the electorate easily. As it has been observed that, bloggers disseminate information and gain followers who forge new communities that may be spurred to take offline action (Weiss, 2012).

There were frequent posts of campaign pictures and videos by political parties compared to other parties. This explains why other political parties were able to

communicate much better than other parties that did not have many pictures and videos.

Political campaign adverts were also common on media website and other organisations. Another media for adverts was YouTube as political parties put campaign messages before any content was shown on YouTube video.

Through use of mobile phones, political parties formed party WhatsApp groups in which they sent political campaign messages to solicit votes for them. Further, this was facilitated by affiliate groups in which messages were communicated to different potential voters. This was done through the use of mobile phones and mobile apps. For some political parties, campaign messages were sent using twitter account and this assisted in disseminating their political campaign messages.

In the interview conducted, sixteen (16) respondents were mobile phones users. This indicated that the most commonly source of their information regarding political campaign messages were Facebook. They indicated that they were exposed to radio and TV and made use of the information but relied heavily on social media on latest political campaign messages. They also informed this research that they spend much time on internet than listening to radio and watching TV. The other four respondents indicated that their source of information was first radio and TV news bulletin. They indicated that they did not have mobile phones to access news and information on internet.

4.0 Findings and conclusions

This research reveals surprising facts. The findings are based particularly on the data gathered and analysed through this study. This research study finds that all political parties in the last presidential general election used new media technologies to campaign and communicate political messages to the electorate. The electorate mostly sourced information about political parties on websites, Facebook and other social media accounts.

Although the old-fashion way of political campaigns of traversing around the country holding rallies, meetings and door-to-door campaigns was common in the campaigns, new media technologies aided the dissemination of information from wherever

these political campaigns were around the country.

The study reveals that all political parties hugely used new media technologies to communicate to masses during the period of political campaigns. The availability and increase of mobile phones on the market largely aided dissemination of political campaigns as they had a wide reach among different classes of people. This paper finds that the use of internet was common and this enabled people to easily access information on political campaigns. Mobile phones and Internet played a huge role on the campaigns as they had an effect on masses. This development is supported by technological determinism theory which states that society's technology determines its cultural values, social structure, and history. According to this theory, social progress follows an inevitable course that is driven by technological innovation.

In a developing country like Zambia, as new media technologies are developing, new media will mostly be adopted as a means to mobilise, campaign and communicate to masses. It's evident that new media technologies were a dominant factor in transforming society especially how people made use of them during political campaigns and presidential elections.

Despite political parties holding rallies, meetings, door-to-door campaigns and seminars much of the communication was done through new media technologies to reach as many voters as possible. Most common and valued means of political communication by all political parties was Facebook, website and blogs. These brought political parties much needed attention as these forms were much followed by a lot of people during the campaigns. In addition, political parties used other organisation's websites and YouTube by placing political adverts on the websites to campaign. This helped political parties to widen their political messages. Internet advertisement on websites reached large numbers and this made the campaign more effective.

The survey also revealed that some respondents were aware of the political party websites and Facebook accounts. They accessed most of the political information about political campaigns through their phones despite the fact that they had access to radio

and TV. They revealed that they had more time to be on Facebook and website using their phone unlike listening to radio and watching TV.

For the first time in Zambia, new media technologies were massively used by political parties to communicate in political campaigns messages which helped to cut geographical distances and allowed smooth flow of communication. In developed nations like US, Barack Obama's victory in the 2008 presidential elections was accredited to use of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter and while this is so in most developed nations, developing countries like Zambia are adopting this strategy and this is changing the way political campaigns and elections are done.

This research finds that new media technologies mainly internet, social media and mobile phones had much influence on Zambia's August 11, 2016 political campaigns and elections. They offered new opportunities. The contemporary political campaign adopted new media technologies that improved reach and communications and at the same time improved political party campaign strategies.

This new strategies have produced a new political culture that has huge implication in Zambia. Therefore, new media technologies increased political participation and dialogue something that was not present before and as the country's democracy develops this will be a case. Based on this research, new media technologies can be used to mobilise, campaign and reach masses with political messages. They have transform society and changed Zambia's modern day politics.

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