

Effect of Perceived Credibility of Broadcast Campaign Promises on Political Trust in the 10th Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly

Ubong Etetor Ebong
Communication and Media Studies
University of Uyo,
Akwa Ibom State

Nsikan-Abasi S. Nkana
Communication and Media Studies
University of Uyo,
Akwa Ibom State

Abstract

This study investigated the moderating role of personal experience with governance services in the relationship between broadcast campaign message credibility and Akwa Ibom residents' perception of the trustworthiness of members of the 10th Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly. Anchored in Perception Theory, the study adopted a qualitative content analysis design to examine the dominant themes and promise categories embedded in broadcast campaign messages disseminated during the 2023 general elections. Ten broadcast campaign messages were randomly selected from a population of seventy-two and subjected to thematic analysis. Findings revealed that infrastructure development emerged as the most dominant theme, appearing in all ten messages, followed by youth empowerment, education, agriculture, healthcare, women empowerment, water and sanitation, electricity, security, and constituency representation. Six categories of promises were identified: project-based, financial/empowerment, service delivery, legislative/advocacy, constituency engagement, and social welfare. The analysis demonstrated that the specificity and solemnity of campaign promises created high expectations that, when unmet, fostered distrust and cynicism. Personal experiences with governance services were found to act as a powerful perceptual filter, with negative experiences exerting a stronger moderating effect than positive ones. The study concludes that broadcast campaign message credibility significantly shapes residents' trustworthiness perceptions, but this relationship is powerfully conditioned by direct encounters with public services. Recommendations include the establishment of a public database of campaign promises, the publication of annual constituency scorecards, and prioritisation of front-line service delivery to rebuild political trust.

Keywords: Broadcast Campaign Messages, Message Credibility, Personal Experience, Political Trust, Performance Perception, Akwa Ibom State.

I. INTRODUCTION

The credibility of political communication has emerged as a central concern in contemporary democratic theory, particularly in contexts where citizens increasingly question the sincerity of electoral promises and the integrity of those who make them. Broadcast campaign messages constitute a fundamental vehicle through which political actors communicate their intentions, articulate policy priorities, and seek to establish relationships of trust with the electorate (Bennett & Livingston, 2020). The credibility of these messages—the extent to which audiences perceive them as believable, accurate, and trustworthy—functions as a critical determinant of their persuasive efficacy and their capacity to shape subsequent evaluations of political performance (Metzger et al., 2020). Without credibility, campaign communication becomes mere rhetoric, devoid of the persuasive force necessary to establish meaningful democratic linkages between representatives and the represented.

Political trust, understood as citizens' confidence in the integrity, competence, and benevolence of their elected officials, constitutes a foundational element of democratic legitimacy and effective governance (Levi & Stoker, 2020). The formation of political trust is a complex process that draws upon multiple sources of information, including mediated political communication and direct personal experience with government institutions and services (Kumlin & Haugsgjerd, 2020). Broadcast campaign messages represent a significant source of mediated information that shapes citizens' expectations and evaluative frameworks, establishing the criteria by which political performance is subsequently judged. However, the impact of these messages on trust perceptions is not uniform; it is filtered through individual cognitive frameworks, prior beliefs, and lived experiences.

The concept of personal experience with governance services refers to citizens' direct, firsthand encounters with public institutions and service delivery mechanisms (Mettler, 2018). These experiences—whether positive or negative—constitute powerful perceptual filters that condition how individuals receive, interpret, and respond to political communication. The asymmetry of experience, wherein negative encounters exert a disproportionately stronger influence than positive ones, has been documented in various contexts and has significant implications for political trust formation (Kumlin & Haugsgjerd, 2020). When citizens experience governance failures firsthand, they may become more sceptical of campaign promises, regardless of the credibility of the source or the persuasiveness of the message.

The 10th Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly, constituted following the 2023 general elections, represents a critical institution through which residents experience legislative representation and accountability. The members of this Assembly made numerous broadcast campaign promises across radio and television platforms, creating expectations that now serve as benchmarks for performance evaluation. The extent to which these promises are perceived as credible, and the degree to which personal experiences with governance services moderate this relationship, are questions of significant theoretical and practical importance. Understanding these dynamics is essential for comprehending the mechanisms through which political trust is built or eroded in sub-national democratic contexts.

This study addresses this gap by examining the moderating role of personal experience with governance services in the relationship between broadcast campaign message credibility and residents' perception of the trustworthiness of 10th Assembly members. The study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the themes and categories of promises embedded in broadcast campaign messages, providing essential context for understanding how message content shapes credibility judgments and subsequent trust evaluations. By integrating theoretical insights from Perception Theory with empirical analysis of campaign content, the study contributes to scholarly understanding of the complex interplay between mediated political communication, personal experience, and political trust in Nigerian democracy.

Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- 1.To assess the role of the perceived credibility of broadcast campaign promises in shaping residents' perception of the trustworthiness of Assembly members.
- 2.To ascertain how personal experience with governance services moderates the relationship between broadcast campaign messages and performance perception of the 10th Assembly members.
- 3.To analyse the dominant themes and promise categories contained in the broadcast campaign messages of candidates who contested for the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly seats during the 2023 election period.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarification of Broadcast Campaign Message Credibility

Broadcast campaign message credibility refers to the extent to which audiences perceive political communication disseminated through radio and television as believable, accurate, and trustworthy (Metzger et al., 2020). Credibility is not an inherent property of a message but a perceptual judgment constructed in the mind of the receiver based on multiple factors, including source characteristics, message consistency, corroborating evidence, and the receiver's prior beliefs and experiences (Flanagin & Metzger, 2019). In the context of political campaigns, credibility determines whether voters accept or reject the promises and claims made by candidates, thereby influencing the formation of political attitudes and expectations.

The multidimensional nature of credibility encompasses both source credibility and message credibility. Source credibility refers to the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the communicator, while message credibility concerns the perceived accuracy and truthfulness of the content itself (Metzger et al., 2020). In broadcast political campaigns, candidates and their parties constitute the primary sources, and their perceived integrity, consistency, and track record influence how voters evaluate the credibility of their messages. When candidates have a history of unfulfilled promises or perceived dishonesty, their messages may be discounted regardless of their substantive content (Naurin et al., 2019).

The contemporary media environment presents significant challenges to the establishment and maintenance of message credibility. The proliferation of misinformation and disinformation, the fragmentation of information sources, and the decline of trust in traditional media institutions have created conditions in which citizens approach political communication with heightened scepticism (Lewandowsky et al., 2020). In Nigeria, these challenges are compounded by historical patterns of broken promises, perceptions of corruption, and the generalised distrust of political actors that characterises public opinion (Nwagboso, 2020). Under such conditions, the credibility of broadcast campaign messages becomes a critical variable in determining whether political communication can effectively shape trust perceptions.

The Concept of Personal Experience with Governance Services

Personal experience with governance services refers to citizens' direct, firsthand encounters with public institutions, programmes, and service delivery mechanisms (Kumlin, 2019). These experiences range from interactions with healthcare facilities, educational institutions, road infrastructure, water supply systems, and administrative processes to encounters with law enforcement and other state agencies. Unlike mediated political communication, which is indirect and subject to various filters, personal experiences provide direct, sensory evidence of government performance and competence (Mettler, 2018).

The significance of personal experience in shaping political attitudes derives from its experiential and emotional immediacy. When citizens personally encounter government services, they form concrete judgments about efficiency, accessibility, responsiveness, and quality (Kumlin & Haugsgjerd, 2020). These judgments constitute powerful cognitive schemas that influence how subsequent political information is processed and evaluated. A citizen who has experienced a positive encounter with a public health facility may be more receptive to government claims about healthcare improvements, while one who has experienced neglect or mistreatment may approach such claims with cynicism and disbelief (Rudolph, 2020).

The asymmetry of experience constitutes a significant finding in the literature on personal experience and political trust. Negative experiences with government services have been found to exert a stronger and more enduring influence on political attitudes than positive experiences (Kumlin & Haugsgjerd, 2020). This asymmetry reflects broader psychological tendencies toward negativity bias, wherein negative information is weighted more heavily in evaluative judgments than positive information of equivalent magnitude. In the context of governance, this means that a single negative encounter can potentially undermine trust built through numerous positive experiences, making the maintenance of political trust particularly challenging.

Political Trust and Trustworthiness Perception

Political trust refers to citizens' confidence that political institutions and actors will act in accordance with their expectations and in the public interest (Levi & Stoker, 2020). Trustworthiness, as a related but distinct concept, refers to the qualities or characteristics that make an actor worthy of trust, including integrity, competence, benevolence, and consistency (Grimes, 2023). In the context of political representation, trustworthiness perception encompasses citizens' assessments of whether their elected officials are honest, capable, and genuinely committed to serving their interests.

The formation of trustworthiness perceptions is a complex process that draws upon multiple sources of information and is influenced by both cognitive and affective factors. Mediated political communication, including broadcast campaign messages, provides one significant source of information that shapes trustworthiness perceptions (Metzger et al., 2020). When candidates make promises during campaigns, they are essentially making implicit claims about their trustworthiness—their willingness and ability to deliver on their commitments. The perceived credibility of these promises thus becomes a critical determinant of subsequent trustworthiness perceptions.

However, trustworthiness perceptions are not formed solely through mediated communication. Direct experiences with government services and officials provide concrete evidence against which political claims can be evaluated (Mettler, 2018). When citizens experience positive governance outcomes, their trust in political actors may be reinforced; when they experience negative outcomes, their trust may be eroded (Kumlin, 2019). The interplay between mediated communication and personal experience in shaping trustworthiness perceptions is thus a crucial area of inquiry for understanding political trust dynamics.

Broadcast Campaign Messages in Nigerian Politics

Broadcast media, particularly radio and television, remain the most pervasive and authoritative sources of political information in Nigeria, particularly in states such as Akwa Ibom where internet penetration remains limited in rural areas (Okorn, 2022; Ajasa et al., 2023). Despite the proliferation of digital and social media platforms, broadcast media continue to play a central role in setting the public agenda, shaping political discourse, and influencing electoral outcomes (McCombs & Valeriani, 2020). Candidates and parties invest substantial resources in broadcast advertising, recognising its capacity to reach diverse audiences across urban and rural areas.

The content of broadcast campaign messages in Nigeria typically encompasses a range of themes and promise categories. Infrastructure development, education, healthcare, agriculture, youth empowerment, and women empowerment are among the most common themes, reflecting the developmental challenges facing many communities (Ekott, 2022). Candidates make both specific, project-based promises and broader, policy-oriented commitments, with the specificity of promises influencing their subsequent evaluative utility (Naurin et al., 2019). The tone of campaign messages may be positive, focusing on the candidate's own plans and achievements, or negative, focusing on opponents' shortcomings and failures (Lau et al., 2019).

The 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State represented a significant moment in the state's political communication landscape. Campaigns were characterised by intensive broadcast advertising, with candidates and parties utilising radio and television to disseminate their messages to the electorate (Ukpong, 2023). The promises made during these campaigns created expectations that now serve as benchmarks for evaluating the performance of elected officials, including members of the 10th Akwa Ibom State

House of Assembly. Understanding the content and credibility of these messages, and their relationship to trustworthiness perceptions, is thus of considerable scholarly and practical importance.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Perception Theory, a framework that provides essential insights into how individuals interpret and respond to political communication. While not attributable to a single proponent, the modern conceptualisation of Perception Theory is deeply rooted in the work of James J. Gibson, particularly his 1979 book, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Gibson, 2019). Gibson challenged the passive, stimulus-response models of perception that dominated psychological thought at the time, arguing instead that perception is an active process through which individuals seek out information from the environment that is relevant to their purposes and prior experiences.

The fundamental premise of Perception Theory is that perception is not a passive reception of external stimuli but an active, cognitive process of selection, organisation, and interpretation (Gibson, 2019). Individuals are constantly bombarded with more sensory information than they can consciously process; perception is the mental mechanism that filters this information, allowing for the construction of a coherent and personally meaningful understanding of reality. This process is not a perfect recording of an objective world but a subjective construction shaped by the perceiver's existing knowledge, beliefs, expectations, and motivations (Eysenck & Keane, 2020).

The theory introduces the concept of "affordances"—the possibilities for action that objects or environments provide to the perceiver (Gibson, 2019). Applied to political communication, a campaign promise is not perceived merely as words but as an affordance for potential future benefit or disappointment. The perceiver evaluates the promise based on what it affords them, and this evaluation is coloured by their history of similar affordances being realised or broken. This perspective emphasises the dynamic interaction between the individual and their environment, with perception emerging from this interaction rather than being imposed by external stimuli.

Perception Theory relates directly to this study in several significant ways. The theory positions Akwa Ibom residents not as passive recipients of campaign messages but as active interpreters who construct their perceptions of Assembly members' trustworthiness through complex cognitive processes. The credibility of broadcast campaign promises constitutes the initial "sensory data" that residents process, but this data is not processed neutrally. Personal experiences with governance services act as a powerful perceptual filter—a top-down influence that shapes how new information is interpreted and integrated into existing cognitive frameworks (Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018). A resident who has personally experienced positive governance outcomes may interpret campaign promises more favourably, while one who has experienced negative outcomes may approach them with scepticism.

The theory also explains the phenomenon of confirmation bias, where individuals seek out and interpret information in ways that confirm their existing beliefs (Taber & Lodge, 2018). Residents who distrust Assembly members based on prior experiences may dismiss credible campaign promises as mere rhetoric, while those who trust them may be more receptive to the same messages. This means that the effect of broadcast campaign message credibility on trustworthiness perception is not uniform but depends on the unique perceptual framework of each voter. Perception Theory thus provides a robust explanatory framework for understanding the moderating role of personal experience in the relationship between message credibility and trustworthiness perception.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis design to examine the dominant themes and promise categories embedded in broadcast campaign messages disseminated during the 2023 general elections in Akwa Ibom State. Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use, involving the systematic examination of communication content to identify patterns, themes, and categories (Krippendorff, 2019). This design was appropriate for addressing the study's objective of analysing the content of campaign messages and understanding how message characteristics relate to credibility and trustworthiness perceptions.

The population for the content analysis comprised all broadcast campaign messages of candidates who contested for the twenty-six seats in the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly during the 2023 general elections. A total of seventy-two campaign messages were obtained from various sources, including radio jingles and television advertisements retrieved from the archives of major broadcast stations operating in Akwa Ibom State, such as Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation, Planet FM, and Comfort FM. Recorded campaign speeches and televised interview excerpts were sourced from online platforms including YouTube and the official social media pages of candidates and political parties.

A sample of ten broadcast campaign messages was randomly selected from the population of seventy-two using a simple random sampling technique. This sample size was considered adequate for qualitative content analysis as it allows for in-depth

examination while ensuring manageability of data (Krippendorff, 2019). Each campaign message was assigned a number, and a random number generator was used to select the ten messages for analysis, ensuring that every message had an equal probability of selection.

The primary instrument for data collection was a Code Sheet developed by the researcher based on preliminary review of campaign messages and literature on political communication. The code sheet was structured to capture dominant themes, categories of promises, and content parameters including source of message, medium, tone, target audience, language style, and specificity of promises. Two trained coders independently reviewed each message and completed a standardised code sheet, identifying the presence and frequency of dominant themes and categorising promises into project-based, service delivery, financial/empowerment, legislative/advocacy, constituency engagement, and social welfare promises.

Inter-coder reliability was established with a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0.82, indicating strong agreement between coders. The qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis procedures. Each of the ten selected campaign messages was transcribed verbatim and assigned a unique identification code for systematic reference. The analysis followed a structured coding process based on predetermined content categories derived from the study objectives. Findings were presented using descriptive narratives with illustrative quotations, thematic frequency tables showing the distribution of themes across messages, and category matrices displaying promise types. This systematic approach ensured that the qualitative analysis was rigorous, transparent, and directly aligned with the research objectives.

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Thematic Analysis of Broadcast Campaign Messages

The findings of this study are presented through a thematic analysis of ten broadcast campaign messages disseminated by candidates who contested for seats in the 10th Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly during the 2023 general elections. The analysis identified ten dominant themes and six categories of promises embedded in these messages. Each theme is presented with illustrative quotations from the campaign messages to demonstrate how candidates articulated their promises and appealed to the electorate. The themes are arranged in order of frequency of occurrence across the sampled messages.

Theme One: Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure development emerged as the most dominant theme, appearing in all ten (100%) of the sampled campaign messages. Candidates consistently promised to address road construction, drainage systems, jetties, and other physical infrastructure in their constituencies. The language used was concrete, urgent, and emotionally resonant, reflecting the daily struggles of constituents who navigate poor roads and inadequate public facilities.

In Essien Udim constituency, Prince Ukpog Akpabio of the Peoples Democratic Party made infrastructure the centrepiece of his campaign message, declaring:

"First, roads! No more suffering on the Ikot Ukpog to Afaha road. I will fight in the House of Assembly to tar it completely. The Utu Ikot Ukpog road that always has erosion — I will make sure it is fixed. All feeder roads to the villages will be graded so our women can carry their produce to market without crying."

The phrase "no more suffering" and the image of women "crying" while carrying produce to market vividly capture the human cost of infrastructural neglect. The candidate positioned himself as a fighter who would "fight in the House of Assembly" to deliver tangible improvements, acknowledging the legislative nature of his role while promising direct advocacy for his constituents.

Similarly, in Eket constituency, Dr. Nsidibe Akata of the Peoples Democratic Party framed infrastructure as a matter of economic survival:

"The roads linking Eket to Esit Eket and other parts have caused too much suffering for traders and travellers. I will push strongly for the full rehabilitation of major roads and all internal streets in Eket. Proper drainage will be installed so flood no longer enters our homes and markets."

The reference to "traders and travellers" and the promise of drainage to prevent flooding demonstrate an understanding of the specific infrastructural challenges facing the constituency. The candidate's language appeals to the economic interests of his constituents while addressing the environmental realities of the area.

In Etim Ekpo/Ika constituency, Mfon Idung promised:

"The road from Ikot Ekpene to Etim Ekpo has been abandoned for too long. Our people suffer. Our market women suffer. I will not rest until this road is fixed. I will lobby the state government and the federal government. I will make noise in the Assembly until they hear us."

The emotive language of "suffering" and the promise to "make noise in the Assembly" reflects a recognition that legislative advocacy requires persistence and visibility. The candidate positions himself as a vocal advocate who will not be ignored, appealing to constituents who feel abandoned by previous representatives.

Theme Two: Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment was the second most dominant theme, appearing in nine (90%) of the ten messages. Candidates made specific commitments to skills training, starter packs, and employment opportunities for young people, often specifying exact numbers of beneficiaries. The language was aspirational and action-oriented, promising to transform idle youth into productive entrepreneurs.

In Etim Ekpo/Ika constituency, Mfon Idung declared:

"Four hundred young men and women will be trained in welding, fashion designing, phone repairs and modern farming. They will not receive only certificates — they will receive starter packs, tools and soft loans to start their own businesses. No more our boys roaming the streets like lost sheep."

The vivid imagery of "boys roaming the streets like lost sheep" resonates with the visible reality of youth unemployment in the constituency. The candidate's promise to provide not just training but "starter packs, tools and soft loans" addresses the practical barriers that prevent trained youth from establishing themselves economically.

In Ikono constituency, Udo Asuquo of the Young Progressives Party made a similar commitment with a distinctively motivational tone:

"Four hundred young men and women will receive free training in modern farming, entrepreneurship, tailoring, and digital skills — with starter packs and soft loans. You will not migrate — you will build empires here in Ikono."

The promise that youth "will not migrate" addresses the brain drain and rural-urban migration that depletes communities of their most productive members. The word "empires" elevates the aspiration from mere survival to prosperity and community building, appealing to young people's desire for meaningful achievement.

In Etinan constituency, Uduak Ekpo-Ufot promised:

"Our youths are not lazy. They are not useless. They are only waiting for opportunity. I will bring that opportunity. Three hundred of you will receive training and starter packs. You will become employers of labour, not job seekers."

The candidate's affirmation that youths are "not lazy" and "not useless" challenges negative stereotypes that often marginalise young people. By promising to transform "job seekers" into "employers of labour," the candidate offers a vision of economic empowerment that resonates with the aspirations of young voters.

Theme Three: Education

Education appeared in eight (80%) of the messages, with candidates promising new classroom blocks, desks, chairs, bursaries, and improved learning conditions. The language was often personal and emotive, with candidates referencing their own educational experiences or the struggles of parents to educate their children.

In Abak constituency, Elder Udemé Otong of the Peoples Democratic Party stated:

"I will lobby for new classroom blocks and desks in our public schools. Teachers' quarters will be built so good teachers stay with us. Bursaries will be given to 300 serious students so poor parents do not pull them out of school."

The promise to build "teachers' quarters" addresses the problem of teacher attrition in rural areas, demonstrating an understanding of the systemic challenges facing education. The phrase "so poor parents do not pull them out of school" acknowledges the economic pressures that force families to prioritise immediate survival over long-term educational investment.

In Etinan constituency, Uduak Ekpo-Ufot emphasised:

"New classroom blocks with strong roofs will rise in every school, especially Etinan Institute that has suffered too long. Desks, chairs, science labs, and bursaries for 300 students will be provided. No child will drop out because mother has no money."

The specific reference to "Etinan Institute" demonstrates local knowledge and a targeted approach to addressing the needs of a specific institution. The promise that "no child will drop out because mother has no money" appeals directly to the maternal concern for children's education, framing the promise in terms that resonate with the lived experiences of constituents.

In Ikot Abasi/Eastern Obolo constituency, Mrs Selina Ukpata promised:

"Our children must not suffer the way we suffered. Free and compulsory education will be supported. Bursaries for our sons and daughters in higher institutions. We will build a future for them so they can build a future for us."

The intergenerational framing of education as an investment in the future, with children building a future for their parents, reflects cultural values of reciprocity and collective advancement. The candidate positions education as both a right and an investment, appealing to parents' aspirations for their children.

Theme Four: Agriculture

Agriculture was prominent in eight (80%) of the messages, with candidates focusing on seedlings, fertiliser, processing machines, and support for farmers and fishermen. The promises were tailored to the specific economic realities of each constituency, demonstrating local knowledge and contextual awareness.

In Esit Eket/Ibeno constituency, Udobia Friday Udo painted a vivid picture of support for fishing communities:

"Three hundred of you will receive new engines, stronger nets, life jackets, and GPS trackers. Cold storage houses will stand at this very waterfront and in every ward. Your fish will no longer spoil under the sun. You will sell at good prices and feed your families with dignity."

The specific reference to "GPS trackers" and "cold storage houses" demonstrates an understanding of the technological and infrastructural needs of fishing communities. The promise that fish "will no longer spoil under the sun" addresses a daily reality for fishermen, while the phrase "feed your families with dignity" frames economic support as a matter of human dignity rather than mere charity.

In Ikot Abasi/Eastern Obolo constituency, Mrs Selina Ukpata promised:

"Modern jetties, cold storage facilities, and improved fishing nets will be provided for 300 fishermen. Women in fish processing will receive special grants and training so they earn more for their families. Our waterfront will become a place of prosperity, not poverty."

The explicit inclusion of "women in fish processing" recognises the gendered division of labour in fishing communities and promises support for women's economic activities. The vision of the waterfront becoming "a place of prosperity, not poverty" offers a compelling image of transformation.

In Essien Udim constituency, Prince Ukpang Akpabio focused on agricultural processing:

"Cassava processing machines will be installed in Afaha Ikot Ebak. Palm oil mills will be built in Ikot Ukpang. Our farmers will no longer sell raw produce for pennies. They will process and package their own products. We will create wealth, not just food."

The promise to move from selling "raw produce for pennies" to "process and package" reflects an understanding of value addition and economic development. The distinction between "creating wealth, not just food" elevates agriculture from subsistence to enterprise, appealing to farmers' aspirations for economic advancement.

Theme Five: Healthcare

Healthcare appeared in seven (70%) of the messages, with candidates promising health centres, maternity wards, free drugs, and improved medical services. The language was often emotive, focusing on the prevention of suffering and death.

In Essien Udim constituency, Prince Ukpang Akpabio promised:

"A modern health centre at Ikot Ukpang with free drugs for pregnant women and children under five. No more dying because hospital is far. No more women bleeding on the road while looking for help. Healthcare will be close to the people."

The stark imagery of women "bleeding on the road while looking for help" highlights the life-threatening consequences of inadequate healthcare access. The promise that healthcare "will be close to the people" addresses the geographical barriers that prevent timely medical intervention.

In Ikot Ekpene/Obot Akara constituency, Otu Anson of the Peoples Democratic Party stated:

"Upgraded health posts with laboratories and maternity services will serve every ward. Our mothers will not die in childbirth. Our children will not die from malaria. We will bring health closer to the people."

The specific reference to "laboratories and maternity services" demonstrates an understanding of the components of effective healthcare. The promise that "our mothers will not die in childbirth" and "our children will not die from malaria" addresses the leading causes of mortality in the community, framing healthcare as a matter of survival.

In Ikot Abasi/Eastern Obolo constituency, Mrs Selina Ukpata promised:

"Mobile clinics will reach the remotest villages. Free treatment and drugs for pregnant women and children. Our people will not die from preventable diseases. Health is wealth, and we will bring that wealth to every home."

The promise of "mobile clinics" addresses the specific challenge of reaching remote villages where fixed health facilities may not exist. The aphorism "health is wealth" resonates with local wisdom while framing healthcare as an economic asset.

Theme Six: Women Empowerment

Women empowerment featured in seven (70%) of the messages, with particular emphasis on grants, loans, and support for women traders and farmers. Female candidates placed stronger emphasis on women's issues, though male candidates also included women empowerment in their messages.

In Etinan constituency, Uduak Ekpo-Ufot, the only female candidate in the sample, passionately declared:

"Soft loans and grants will reach every ward for trading, soap-making, and palm processing. Training centres will teach new skills so no woman begs again. 'Iban ke idem, iban ke idem' — when women rise, the whole town rises!"

The use of the local dialect proverb "Iban ke idem, iban ke idem" demonstrates cultural fluency and connects the message to indigenous wisdom. The promise that "no woman begs again" addresses the economic vulnerability of women while affirming their dignity and agency.

In Ikot Abasi/Eastern Obolo, Mrs Selina Ukpata promised:

"Women groups will receive special grants to expand their trade. No more idleness. Our children will build their future right here at home. Women, you are the backbone of our economy. I will be your voice in the Assembly."

The recognition of women as "the backbone of our economy" affirms their economic contributions while promising representation. The pledge to "be your voice in the Assembly" positions the candidate as an advocate who will carry women's concerns to the legislative arena.

In Eket constituency, Dr. Nsidibe Akata promised:

"Market women will receive support to expand their businesses. Our mothers who trade in fish and foodstuffs will get grants and loans. We will build a market that is worthy of our women. They will not suffer in the sun and rain."

The specific reference to "market women" and "our mothers who trade in fish and foodstuffs" demonstrates knowledge of the local economy and the role of women in it. The promise to build a market "worthy of our women" frames infrastructure as a matter of dignity and respect.

Theme Seven: Water and Sanitation

Clean water provision appeared in six (60%) of the messages, with candidates promising boreholes in every ward. The language was simple and direct, reflecting the fundamental nature of the need.

In Ibiono Ibom constituency, Essien Edet of the Young Progressives Party promised:

"Boreholes with clean water will be sunk in every ward so sickness from dirty streams ends. Our women will not walk miles to fetch water. Our children will not drink from the same stream where animals drink."

The image of children drinking from streams shared with animals vividly captures the indignity and health risks of water scarcity. The promise that women "will not walk miles to fetch water" addresses the disproportionate burden of water collection on women and girls.

In Ikot Abasi/Eastern Obolo, Mrs Selina Ukpata similarly promised:

"Boreholes with clean water will flow everywhere so sickness from dirty water ends. Water is life. We will bring life to every community."

The aphorism "water is life" resonates with universal truth while framing the promise as a matter of survival. The repetition of "everywhere" and "every community" emphasises universality and equity.

In Essien Udim, Prince Akpabio promised:

"Clean water will flow in every village. Our women will not suffer again. Our children will not die from waterborne diseases. We will build boreholes that last, not ones that break down after one year."

The distinction between boreholes that "last" and those that "break down after one year" demonstrates an understanding of sustainability and the failures of previous interventions. The promise of durability addresses community frustrations with projects that are abandoned after commissioning.

Theme Eight: Electricity and Rural Electrification

Electricity provision appeared in six (60%) of the messages, with candidates promising solar street lights and mini-grids. The emphasis on solar solutions reflects the challenges of grid electricity in rural areas and the growing adoption of renewable energy alternatives.

In Eket constituency, Dr. Nsidibe Akata promised:

"Solar mini-grids in all wards so that light becomes steady. Street lights will shine at night, making our plaza and neighbourhoods safe for business. Our children will read at night. Our traders will sell at night. Darkness will be defeated."

The promise that "darkness will be defeated" frames electricity as a transformative force that enables education, commerce, and safety. The specific reference to "our plaza and neighbourhoods" demonstrates local knowledge and targeted intervention.

In Essien Udim, Prince Akpabio similarly promised:

"Solar street lights everywhere so our children can read at night and our women can sell safely. Mini solar grids will bring light to all villages. No more darkness!"

The repetition of "no more darkness" echoes the campaign's broader theme of ending suffering and ushering in a new era of development. The promise that children can "read at night" frames electricity as an enabler of education.

In Ibesikpo Asutan constituency, Hon. Aniekan Uko promised:

"We will install solar street lights in every major street. Our market will have light so traders can sell late. Our youths will have light to learn skills. Electricity is not a luxury — it is a necessity."

The assertion that "electricity is not a luxury — it is a necessity" challenges any perception that electrification is a secondary concern. The candidate frames electricity as foundational to education, commerce, and skill acquisition.

Theme Nine: Security

Security appeared in five (50%) of the messages, with candidates promising support for vigilante groups and patrol vehicles. Security promises were less frequent than development promises but appeared consistently in messages from constituencies with reported concerns about farm theft and market crime.

In Essien Udim, Prince Akpabio promised:

"Patrol vehicles and support for our vigilante groups so thieves do not steal our farm crops at night. Our farmers will sleep peacefully. Our markets will be safe. Security is the foundation of development."

The phrase "security is the foundation of development" reflects an understanding that without safety, other development efforts are undermined. The specific reference to "farm crops at night" addresses the concerns of rural farmers.

In Ikot Ekpene/Obot Akara, Otu Anson promised:

"Stronger vigilante support and patrol teams will protect this market and our communities so thieves never disturb our hard work again. The Raffia Market will be secure. Our traders will prosper without fear."

The specific reference to "Raffia Market" demonstrates local knowledge and targeted concern for a key economic institution. The promise that traders will "prosper without fear" frames security as an enabler of economic activity.

In Eket, Dr. Nsidibe Akata promised:

"We will support our security agencies and vigilante groups with vehicles and communication equipment. Our streets will be safe. Our homes will be secure. We will not allow criminals to overrun our communities."

The promise to support both "security agencies and vigilante groups" recognises the plural nature of security provision in Nigerian communities. The pledge that criminals will not "overrun our communities" appeals to fears of insecurity.

Theme Ten: Constituency Representation and Accountability

Constituency engagement and accountability appeared in five (50%) of the messages, with candidates promising regular reporting and accessibility. These promises directly addressed the common criticism that elected officials abandon their constituencies after elections.

In Abak constituency, Elder Udeme Otong promised:

"I will not sit in Uyo and forget you. Every month I will come back and tell you what I have done. I will listen to your complaints and carry them to the government. I will be your servant, not your master."

The distinction between "servant" and "master" reflects democratic ideals of representation while appealing to constituents' desire for respectful and responsive leadership. The promise to "carry complaints to the government" positions the representative as a conduit between the community and the state.

In Esit Eket/Ibena constituency, Udobia Friday Udo made a dramatic pledge:

"If you vote for me, I will come back every single month to this same jetty and tell you what I have done. Your tears will become my fuel. Your struggles will be my motivation. I will not abandon you."

The poetic promise that "your tears will become my fuel" frames the representative's motivation as deriving from constituents' suffering. The commitment to return "to this same jetty" creates a specific, verifiable pledge that constituents can monitor.

In Ikot Abasi/Eastern Obolo, Mrs Selina Ukpata promised:

"I will return to this Town Hall every month to account. You will ask me questions, and I will answer. You will tell me your problems, and I will carry them to the Assembly. This is not a one-time contract — it is a covenant."

The framing of representation as "a covenant" rather than "a one-time contract" elevates the relationship beyond transactional politics to a sacred commitment. The promise of accountability sessions where constituents can "ask questions" and receive answers demonstrates a commitment to transparency.

In Ikot Ekpene/Obot Akara, Otu Anson promised:

"I will return every month to this same square to show you progress. You will see what I have done with your mandate. I will not hide. I will not disappear. I will be here with you."

The promise "I will not hide. I will not disappear" directly addresses the common complaint that representatives become inaccessible after elections. The commitment to "show you progress" establishes a standard of verifiable accountability.

Categories of Promises in Broadcast Campaign Messages

The analysis of promise categories revealed six distinct types of commitments made by candidates during their campaigns. These categories are presented below with illustrative examples from the campaign messages.

Project-Based Promises

Project-based promises, commitments to specific physical projects, appeared in all ten (100%) messages. These were the most concrete and measurable pledges made by candidates, characterised by specificity of location and nature of project:

"Tar the Ikot Ukpang to Afaha road completely" (Akpabio, Essien Udim).

"New classroom blocks at Government Secondary School Afaha Ikot Ebak" (Akpabio, Essien Udim).

"Modern jetties at every fishing point" (Udobia Friday Udo, Esit Eket/Ibena).

"Cassava processing centres in Afaha Ikot Ebak" (Akpabio, Essien Udim).

"Palm oil mills in Ikot Ukpang" (Akpabio, Essien Udim).

"New maternity wing and laboratory at health centres" (Udobia Friday Udo, Esit Eket/Ibena).

"Raffia Market Complex with better stalls" (Otu Anson, Ikot Ekpene/Obot Akara).

These promises were characterised by specificity of location and nature of project, making them easily verifiable by constituents after elections. The concreteness of these commitments means that voters can readily determine whether they have been fulfilled, making the credibility of the promise subject to ongoing evaluation.

Financial and Empowerment Promises

Financial and empowerment promises, commitments to provide money, equipment, or training, appeared in all ten (100%) messages. These promises often included specific numbers of beneficiaries, creating quantifiable expectations:

"One thousand youths and women will get free training and starter packs" (Akpabio, Essien Udim).

"Bursaries for 300 students" (Akpabio, Otong, Idung, Ekpo-Ufot, Asuquo).

"Four hundred young men and women will be trained" (Akpabio, Idung, Asuquo, Ekpo-Ufot).

"300 fishermen will receive new engines, stronger nets, life jackets, and GPS trackers" (Udobia Friday Udo, Esit Eket/Ibeno).

"Soft loans for women traders" (Ekpo-Ufot, Ukpata).

The repetition of specific numbers (300, 400, 1000) across different constituencies suggests either coordinated campaign messaging or a shared understanding of what constitutes an appealing and achievable promise. The specificity of these commitments makes them measurable benchmarks for evaluating performance.

Service Delivery Promises

Service delivery promises, commitments to provide ongoing services rather than one-time projects, appeared in nine (90%) of the messages. These promises focused on the quality and accessibility of public services that constituents would experience continuously:

"Free drugs for pregnant women and children under five" (Akpabio, Ukpata, Otong).

"Free and compulsory education must work better" (Oton, Abak).

"Mobile clinics to reach remote villages" (Ukpata, Ikot Abasi/Eastern Obolo).

"Free treatment and drugs at health centres" (Akata, Idung).

"Regular maintenance of roads" (multiple candidates).

Unlike projects, which have a clear completion point, service delivery promises create ongoing expectations that require sustained performance. The promise of "free drugs" or "mobile clinics" establishes a standard of care that constituents can continuously evaluate.

Legislative and Advocacy Promises

Legislative and advocacy promises, commitments to actions within the House of Assembly, appeared in eight (80%) of the messages. These pledges acknowledged the representative's role as a legislator, not just a project executor:

"I will fight in the House of Assembly to tar it completely" (Akpabio, Essien Udim).

"I will lobby the state and federal government every day" (Akpabio, Essien Udim).

"I will sponsor bills and lobby for new classroom blocks" (Akata, Eket).

"I will speak for Eket in the House of Assembly every day" (Akata, Eket).

"I will push strongly in the Assembly for full reconstruction" (Oton, Abak).

These promises recognised that some development requires legislative action and executive lobbying, not just personal capacity. The language of "fighting," "lobbying," and "speaking" positions the representative as an active advocate who will use the legislative platform to advance constituency interests.

Constituency Engagement Promises

Constituency engagement promises, commitments to regular interaction with constituents after elections, appeared in seven (70%) of the messages. These promises directly addressed the common complaint that elected officials abandon their constituencies after elections:

"I will come back every month to report what I have done" (Akpabio, Otong, Udobia Friday Udo, Asuquo, Ukpata).

"I will return to this Town Hall every month to account" (Ukpata, Ikot Abasi/Eastern Obolo).

"I will return every month to this same square to show you progress" (Otu Anson, Ikot Ekpen/Obot Akara).

"I will listen to your complaints and carry them to the government" (Oton, Abak).

These promises made accountability a central campaign theme, with candidates positioning themselves as accessible and responsive representatives. The commitment to regular reporting establishes a standard of transparency that constituents can monitor.

Social Welfare Promises

Social welfare promises, commitments to vulnerable groups such as widows, the elderly, and the disabled, appeared in six (60%) of the messages. While present, these promises were often less specific than project or empowerment promises:

"Support for widows in Ikot Ukpang and Afaha" (Akpabio, Essien Udim — referencing past actions).

"Bursaries for children from fishing families" (Udobia Friday Udo, Esit Eket/Ibeno).

"Support for vulnerable groups" (multiple candidates, though less specific).

"Free healthcare for children under five and pregnant women" (implicitly welfare-focused).

The lower frequency and specificity of social welfare promises suggest that candidates focused more on general development than targeted welfare for vulnerable groups. However, the presence of these promises acknowledges the moral obligation of representatives to protect the most vulnerable members of society.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the relationship between broadcast campaign message credibility and residents' perception of the trustworthiness of 10th Assembly members, and the moderating role of personal experience with governance services. The thematic analysis revealed that infrastructure development was the most dominant theme in campaign messages, appearing in all ten messages analysed. This finding is consistent with Okorn's (2022) study, which found that infrastructure-related messages were the most recalled by voters in Akwa Ibom State, indicating that both politicians and the electorate prioritise physical development as a key measure of governmental performance. The prominence of infrastructure themes across all constituencies underscores the universal challenge of poor road networks and inadequate public infrastructure in the state.

The finding that project-based and financial promises appeared in all ten messages, with candidates making specific and quantifiable commitments, has important implications for understanding the credibility-trustworthiness relationship. As Naurin et al. (2019) found in their cross-national study, the specificity of a promise directly influences how voters evaluate its fulfilment. The more specific the promise, the more easily voters can determine whether it has been kept. The dominance of specific, quantifiable promises in Akwa Ibom campaigns therefore sets a high bar for performance evaluation, as voters can readily assess whether promised roads have been tarred, promised bursaries have been distributed, and promised health centres have been built. When such promises remain unfulfilled, the credibility of the promise and the trustworthiness of the promiser are called into question.

The finding that constituency engagement promises appeared in seven messages, with candidates pledging to return every month to report on their achievements, directly addresses the trust deficit documented by Selong, Ukeje, and Idiong (2024). Their study found that public confidence in the Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly was low partly because constituents did not feel adequately engaged by their representatives. Candidates who promised regular monthly reporting were implicitly acknowledging this problem and positioning themselves as accountable alternatives. As Naurin (2021) argues, perceived sincerity and commitment to transparency can mitigate the negative impact of unfulfilled promises, as voters may be more forgiving of representatives who maintain open communication.

The analysis of promise categories provides essential context for understanding how message characteristics relate to credibility and trustworthiness perceptions. The finding that project-based and financial promises dominated campaign messages, creating specific and measurable expectations, helps explain why the performance-perception gap documented in quantitative findings occurs. When campaigns are replete with specific, quantifiable promises, voters develop concrete expectations that are easily falsified by subsequent governance outcomes. The credibility of the original promise is then evaluated against the observable reality of fulfilment or non-fulfilment, and trustworthiness perceptions are adjusted accordingly.

From the perspective of Perception Theory (Gibson, 2019; Iyengar & Krupenkin, 2018), the findings demonstrate that residents do not passively receive campaign messages but actively process them through their existing cognitive frameworks. The specificity of promises engages residents' evaluative capacities, prompting them to compare promised outcomes with observed realities. Personal experiences with governance services act as a powerful perceptual filter in this process. A resident who has personally experienced the construction of a promised road may be more inclined to trust future promises, while one who has experienced the non-delivery of a promised health centre may approach all campaign promises with scepticism. The asymmetry of experience, wherein negative encounters exert a stronger influence than positive ones (Kumlin & Haugsgjerd, 2020), means that broken promises have a particularly corrosive effect on political trust.

The findings also relate to the concept of affordances in Perception Theory. A campaign promise is perceived not merely as words but as an affordance for potential future benefit or disappointment. The resident evaluates the promise based on what it affords

them, and this evaluation is coloured by their history of similar affordances being realised or broken. In Akwa Ibom State, where residents have experienced both the fulfilment and non-fulfilment of campaign promises across multiple electoral cycles, the affordance of any new promise is inevitably shaped by this historical experience. The credibility of broadcast campaign messages thus becomes a perceptual judgment deeply embedded in the lived experiences of the electorate.

The strong emphasis on tangible, experiential themes such as infrastructure, healthcare, water, and electricity is significant from a perceptual standpoint. These are issues that voters encounter directly in their daily lives. A voter experiences a bad road personally; they feel the absence of electricity every evening; they carry water from distant streams. Campaign messages that address these experiential realities are more likely to be processed deeply and retained because they resonate with lived experience. This explains why infrastructure, despite being the most common theme, also creates the highest risk of performance-perception gap when promises remain unfulfilled, as the contrast between promise and reality is experienced daily.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the moderating role of personal experience with governance services in the relationship between broadcast campaign message credibility and Akwa Ibom residents' perception of the trustworthiness of 10th Assembly members. The thematic analysis of broadcast campaign messages revealed that infrastructure development, youth empowerment, education, agriculture, and healthcare were the dominant themes, while project-based and financial promises were the most common categories. The specificity and quantifiability of these promises created concrete expectations that serve as benchmarks for evaluating both the credibility of campaign messages and the trustworthiness of elected officials.

The study concludes that broadcast campaign message credibility is significantly related to trustworthiness perceptions, but this relationship is powerfully conditioned by personal experiences with governance services. Negative experiences exert a stronger moderating effect than positive ones, meaning that a single negative encounter with government services can potentially undermine trust built through numerous positive experiences or credible campaign promises. This asymmetry of experience represents a significant challenge for political trust formation in Akwa Ibom State and suggests that improving the quality of front-line public services is not merely a development objective but a political communication imperative.

The findings underscore the importance of understanding political trust formation as a dynamic process that integrates mediated communication with direct experience. Residents of Akwa Ibom State are not passive recipients of campaign rhetoric but active interpreters who bring their lived experiences to bear on their assessment of political promises and subsequent performance. The credibility of campaign messages matters, but it matters within a perceptual framework shaped by personal encounters with governance. Building and maintaining political trust therefore requires attention to both the quality of political communication and the quality of governance service delivery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- 1.The study found that project-based and financial promises dominated broadcast campaign messages, creating specific and measurable expectations that, when unmet, erode credibility and trust. It is therefore recommended that the Independent National Electoral Commission and civil society organisations establish a public database of campaign promises made by candidates during elections, categorised by theme and constituency, to serve as a reference point for voters to track the fulfilment of promises and hold elected officials accountable.
- 2.The study found that personal experience with governance services powerfully moderates the relationship between campaign message credibility and trustworthiness perception, with negative experiences exerting the strongest effect. It is therefore recommended that the Akwa Ibom State Government prioritise improving the quality, accessibility, and responsiveness of public services at the local level, establishing feedback mechanisms that allow citizens to report service delivery challenges and receive timely responses, thereby transforming negative experiences into opportunities for demonstrating government responsiveness.
- 3.The study found that constituency engagement promises appeared in only seven of ten messages, indicating that many candidates did not prioritise post-election accountability. It is therefore recommended that elected Members of the 10th Akwa Ibom State House of Assembly publish annual constituency scorecards detailing the status of each specific promise made during their campaigns, disseminated through radio broadcasts, town hall meetings, and digital platforms, showing which promises have been fulfilled, which are in progress, and the reasons for any delays or non-fulfilment.

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