# Politics and Intergenerational Communication: The Cat Applicability

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## ABSTRACT

Political and intergenerational communication has become a strategic arena where language accommodation, generational identities, and digital media converge. This paper investigated how politicians adapted their communication styles across generational divides, using Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) as a central analytical lens. The study situated itself within the context of contemporary African democracies, specifically Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa-where generational dynamics increasingly influenced political participation and civic engagement. Drawing on both qualitative discourse analysis and cross-national comparisons, the study evaluated political speech patterns, platform choices, and framing strategies aimed at engaging Gen Z, Millennials, and older generational cohorts. Examples of data sources were political speeches, campaign artefacts, and publicly available posts by select political figures on social media. In terms of CAT's central strategies, convergence, divergence and maintenance, emphasis was placed on the ways politicians reduce, amplify or sustain communicative distance with audience members from various generations. Results showed an incredible convergence towards youth focused political discourse in the digital realm in Nigeria and Kenya. In contrast, politicians in South Africa adopted a formal discourse strategy, especially on traditional media, to distance themselves from older people and to sustain elder-centric communicative messages. These differences illustrated the impact of age, culture and technology on political communication. By showing how generational adaptation was a rhetorical strategy and an important aspect of political credibility and mobilisation, the study added to the growing body of literature on political linguistics, strategy communication, and media psychology. It also provided context-based communication frameworks for intergenerational engagement in democracies.

## INTRODUCTION

As political communications seek to maintain influence over multiple generations, there lies a strategic imperative that dictates the need to adapt the form of communication used. Success in obtaining influence over a political or social issue or even voters is ultimately the aim of political actors. The influence pursued can be in the form of recognition over a policy or socio-political issue, or even just the visibility of political actors. Positioning in the political marketplace is driven both by social influences and internal political ecology. The growing relevance of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is a critical theoretical perspective that must be involved in disciplining the adaptations which come with these changes.

CAT denotes the theory which attempts to analyse changes in communication, with a social aspect focusing on the distance in social interaction and the level of interaction or engagement to which changes seek alignment, as postulated by Howard Giles (1973) on the subject of people making changes to the way they speak or communicate in a bid to either increase or lower the distance that exists between each of those social agents. People in political charge are obsessed with the idea of power, and therefore use professionally 'mashed-up' communications which shrinks the social distance with the youth, in order to strike their target audience aged

Shifting the use of manipulated excess language to those who are older, politicians target reverse convergence or older generations.

The dissertation examines the speeches, campaign materials, and public speeches of Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa to find out the relevance of CAT in the context of Africa's political communication. It asks: how do politicians accommodate or disaccommodate intergenerational audiences? What are the communicative outcomes of these strategies? And how can such insights guide more inclusive, age-sensitive political discourse? By integrating theory with contextual analysis, the study contributes to the broader discourse on political inclusivity and communicative competence across generations.

The study addresses a growing communication gap in African political discourse where generational divides marked by differing ideologies, media preferences, and linguistic patterns have become increasingly evident. As youth-led movements rise across the continent such as #EndSARS in Nigeria, FeesMustFall in South Africa, understanding how politicians engage or alienate different generations through communicative strategies becomes critical to sustaining democratic legitimacy. Finally, the findings have implications for political education and media literacy campaigns, offering guidelines for building a participatory and communicatively competent democratic culture that respects generational diversity in

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voice and values. The study is limited to three African countries Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa chosen for their diverse political cultures and active generational engagement in democratic processes. Findings may not be generalisable to all African nations.

## Statement of the Problem

In an increasingly pluralistic and digitally-mediated political environment, communication across generational lines remains a persistent challenge for political actors. While democratic participation ideally encompasses all age demographics, disparities in communicative preferences, media consumption habits, linguistic styles, and socio-political experiences often result in a communicative disconnect between political leaders and diverse generational audiences. Older politicians may struggle to connect with digitally-savvy youth, while younger political aspirants may fail to resonate with older voters grounded in traditional political culture. These generational misalignments can weaken political engagement, distort policy communication, and erode trust in democratic institutions.

Despite the relevance of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) in explaining adaptive communicative behaviors, limited research exists on its applicability within the African political context, particularly in relation to intergenerational discourse. Most existing literature focuses on CAT in interpersonal, organisational, or intercultural communication, leaving a critical gap in understanding how political messages are strategically modified (or not) to suit generational differences in political spaces like Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa.

This gap becomes more problematic in regions where political crises, electoral apathy, and youth-led movements are on the rise-conditions that demand more deliberate, inclusive, and age-sensitive communication strategies. Therefore, this study seeks to critically examine how political actors accommodate or resist intergenerational expectations through their rhetoric and communicative choices, and what consequences such strategies have on political engagement, representation, and democratic participation across Africa.

## Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how political actors in selected African countries adapt their communication strategies to engage different generational groups using the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT).
2. To identify the linguistic, rhetorical, and digital media techniques employed by political figures in converging or diverging from generational expectations.
3. To analyze the implications of intergenerational communicative (dis)accommodation on political participation, trust, and democratic inclusivity.

## Research Questions

1. How do political actors in Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa accommodate or disaccommodate their communication to resonate with different generational audiences?
2. What specific linguistic, rhetorical, and media strategies are employed in the convergence or divergence of political messages across generations?
3. What are the communicative outcomes of intergenerational accommodation or resistance in terms of voter engagement, trust, and participation in democratic processes?

## Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), a sociolinguistic framework developed by Howard Giles (1973). CAT explains how and why individuals adjust their communicative behaviors-linguistically, paralinguistically, and nonverbally during social interactions. Central to the theory are the concepts of convergence, divergence, and maintenance, which describe the strategic ways speakers modify or maintain their communicative styles in relation to their interlocutors to either decrease or emphasise social distance.

In political and intergenerational communication, convergence occurs when political actors modify their speech patterns, language choices, or media usage to align with the preferences or identities of a target generational group. For example, a politician using youth slang, memes, or engaging on platforms like TikTok represents convergence toward younger voters. Divergence focus upon difference for the sake of evidence, often to sustain particular lines of political power, preserve customs, or maintain ideological divisions. These lines are often drawn by older politicians, for instance, who are too quick to dismiss the discourse of the younger generation or denounce the activism of the young as disreputable. Third, divergence is the communicative pennstraveld behavioural Sink to maintain the existing dividspan on commu-generational hierarchies.

The application of C. A. T. in political settings has been developed in the works of Copland (2007) and Harwood (2006) on the use of political discourse as identity negotiation, and age-related accommodation, respectively. In Africa, the C. A. T. framework, is useful in exploring the intersecting, and sometimes conflicting, sets of intergenerational communication adaptation, resistance, and disjunction, set up by political structures that combine the traditional respect for age with the young-driven activism. Using C. A. T. in this instance, helps to examine political discourse in a more global context by incorporating style, social intent, identity, and the generational difference in an discourse. This, then, helps to shed the light of C. A. T. on the practice of sidespins use of language and media in different democracies to

advance or limit inclusionary political discourse in Africa.

## LITERATURE REVIEW
### Political Communication
Political communication is the 'Political actors, entities, media, and the audience' matrix. It involves exchanging speeches, campaign messages, political ads, and discussions. Political communication, as McNair says, is "Purpose oriented communication about politics," and it is about the planned spreading of information for the purpose of shaping thoughts and perception(s) of the general populace, legitimising power, or gathering assistances.

When communication involves different generations, it must attempt to overcome differences in life experience, consumption of media, and language. Political communication involves information strategy and message design oriented to the psychosocial profile of the recipient, says Scammell.

### Intergenerational Communication
Studying political communication across different age groups has become more relevant because of quickly evolving technology and changing civic attitudes. Strauss and Howe (1991) outlined the different generational cohorts as socio-historical constructs and developed an explanation as to why their attitudes towards authority, communication and technology differ as a result of their unique socio-historical experiences. And in this context, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), identified by Howard Giles in 1973, explains how political representatives speak and communicate to and or about their audience of specific age groups.

(Williams & Nussbaum, 2001) Intergenerational communication includes: communication and interactions among different age groups, namely, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Differences in values, expectations, and technology use often influence how generations interpret and engage with political messages. Generational communication styles reflect sociocultural experiences shaped by historical contexts, economic conditions, and technological evolution (p.48).

Giles and Ogay (2007) explain that intergenerational communication becomes critical in politics when age is a salient identity marker: "Where age identities are foregrounded, accommodation becomes both a linguistic and ideological exercise, shaping inclusion and exclusion."

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) as developed by Howard Giles in the 1970s, and further explains by Eze (2025) that:

individuals adjust their communication based on the perceived social distance between themselves and others. Key strategies include: Convergence: Aligning communication to resemble that of the audience to foster solidarity. Divergence: Emphasizing communicative differences to reinforce social or ideological distance. Maintenance: Sustaining one's original communication style regardless of audience (p. 68).

While in Coupland (2007), political communication, CAT is: particularly relevant because politicians often adapt their messages to appeal to targeted demographics. And as further notes that Political rhetoric often involves a delicate balance between authenticity and adaptation, wherein speakers modulate their speech to resonate without appearing insincere (p.102).

Giles et al. (1991) argue that: CAT strategies convergence, divergence, and maintenance serve not merely linguistic functions but also express identity alignment or resistance. For example, when a politician uses informal language, digital emojis, or memes to engage youth on Instagram or TikTok, they enact convergence, reducing social distance. Conversely, the use of formal, institutional language in televised debates may reflect divergence, aimed at preserving authority when addressing older generations (p. 164).

For the Silent Generation and early Baby Boomers, traditional media such as radio, television, and newspapers remain primary sources of political information. According to Grabe & Bucy (2009), these cohorts tend to value formal address, policy-specific messages, and hierarchical forms of political leadership. Political messages tailored to them often emphasise national unity, moral clarity, and historical legacy features that align with CAT's divergence strategy. "Politicians who maintain a formal tone and reinforce their credentials appear more credible to older citizens" (Waisbord, 2013, p. 97).

Generation X, often seen as a transitional group between analog and digital media cultures, exhibits hybrid media consumption habits. Davis (2010) notes that Gen Xers value authenticity and skepticism toward political elites. CAT strategies directed at them often balance professionalism with relatability, using email newsletters, podcasts, and YouTube interviews. This group responds well to moderated convergence that does not appear pandering or excessively informal.

Millennials (born 1981–1996) and Gen Z (1997–2012) represent: digital-first generations, often described as "media multitaskers" (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008). These cohorts exhibit low tolerance for top-down communication, preferring horizontal, dialogic engagement. Also in accordance to Loader et al. (2014), "social media provides youth with spaces of participatory politics that challenge traditional political hierarchies" (p. 144).

Political communicators seeking to engage this demographic must employ digital convergence, using language, visuals, and formats that reflect youth culture and values. This includes hashtag activism (#EndSARS), live Q&A sessions, short-form videos, and meme integration practices that represent a strong form of linguistic and symbolic accommodation.

Moreover, the generational digital divide is both a communicative and structural issue. While younger generations are often the target of political digital marketing, older populations may be excluded or

alienated. As Cotterill and Morris (2017) emphasise, "neglecting generational adaptation in political messaging exacerbates political apathy among older or less digitally literate groups" (p. 113). Hence, CAT in intergenerational political communication is not merely rhetorical; it intersects with issues of access, representation, and power.

The empirical literature further supports these theoretical claims. In a comparative study across Sub-Saharan African democracies, Boswell and Ehinomen (2021) found that: political campaigns that employed intergenerational convergence strategies on social media achieved higher youth engagement but risked alienating older voters unless carefully balanced (p. 205). Similarly, Nyabola (2018) asserts that in Kenya's digital space, social media is a battleground of generational expression, with young people using it to redefine what political participation means (p. 178).

In summary, generational communication patterns are central to the success of political engagement strategies. The effectiveness of political messaging increasingly depends on how well it accommodates the linguistic, technological, and emotional registers of diverse generational audiences. Communication Accommodation Theory still helps understanding the alignments and misalignments across the different age groups.

In Africa, the rising interest in the youth audience has also attracted scrutiny. In Nigeria, Nwanne (2020) notes that during the 2019 general elections, the use of social media and memes in campaign slogans were intended to 'capture' the attention of younger voters. However, the study also pointed out that the use of youth slang without adequate policy was overwhelmingly more likely to result in cynicism.

In Kenya, Ogola (2019) examined digital campaigns in the 2017 elections and concluded that candidates who employed convergence on Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp had more youth participation. However, those who stuck to the old media policies became irrelevant to younger voters. Ogola observes that Political Communication in Africa has a 'generational shift' where the digital native voter expects to be actively engaged not passively solicited.

In South Africa, de la Rey and Padayachee (2021) investigated generational trust in political institutions and found that younger voters were more responsive to authenticity and issue-based communication than to ideological posturing. The study highlighted that older politicians often diverged in their messaging, employing historical narratives and anti-imperial rhetoric that resonated with older citizens but alienated the youth. Similarly, Adebayo and Eze (2022) argue that generational misalignment in political discourse contributes to rising political apathy among African youth, especially when accommodation is perceived as performative rather than genuine.

Though CAT is widely used in interpersonal and intercultural studies, its application in political communication remains emerging. A study by Harwood et al. (2006) revealed that CAT helps explain how televised debates and political speeches either bridge or reinforce generational gaps. The authors note that politicians who skillfully accommodate generational norms through tone, content, and technology tend to enjoy broader appeal. Also, while applying CAT to election campaigns in Ghana, Boateng (2023) noted that more attention to youth-centered materials and discourse increased digital engagement and participation of first time voters.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study focuses on comparative qualitative research which incorporates discourse analysis. The selected design provides an understanding of the ways are or are not able to meet the generational communication expectations. Communicational Accomodation Theory (CAT) will be used to study the political speeches, campaign discourse, and media texts to determine the intergeneration communication breakdown. This research will be used on the three the African democracies: Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa. These were selected due to their: Expanding political history and party systems, enlarging generational population divisions, rising youth political involvement and activism like the #EndSARS Movement in Nigeria, #FeesMustFall in South Africa, and digital activism in Kenya. They provide a rich context for the study of the discourse of political leaders used to either evoke or block a relationship with various age groups.

The study population includes political figures and their communicative artifacts such as: Campaign speeches for president and governor (2015–2024), political ads and social media targeted towards youth, public political debates, televised political town halls, party manifestos, and news conferences. A purposive sampling technique was used to select: 30 political speeches: 10 from each country, drawn from key campaign events or policy declarations. 6 political campaigns targeting youth or intergenerational unity (2 per country). 3 generationally-relevant political controversies or debates such as youth protests, generational policy reforms. Data were collected from the following sources: Official political transcripts such as INEC archives, government websites, media reports and political commentary such as The Nation Nigeria, Daily Maverick South Africa, Nation Kenya, social media content from verified political handles on Twitter (X), Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, and video recordings and transcripts of live speeches and public engagements. The study employed Thematic Discourse Analysis (TDA), structured around the core concepts of CAT convergence, divergence, and maintenance. Each speech or message was coded based on:

Linguistic accommodation: use of generational slang, formal vs informal tone, idiomatic expressions. Platform adaptation choice of communication channels (TV, print, social media) by age demographics, ideological positioning were appeals to generational values such as

tradition vs innovation. NVivo 14 software was used for coding, theme generation, and pattern analysis for text analysis.

**Data Presentation**

This study's data are divided by strategy and contained within three countries under review: Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa. Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) outlines three key strategies: convergence, divergence, and maintenance. 30 political speeches 10 from each country and certain campaign-related and public discourse materials were analyzed.

This section serves as the backdrop for the succeeding

**Table 1:** Data Presentation Table: Political and Intergenerational Communication (CAT Applicability).

| Country | Speaker | Year | Audience Targeted | Medium | CAT Strategy | Example/Excerpt |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nigeria | Muhammadu Buhari | 2019 | General public (elders and youth) | National broadcast | Maintenance | "We must return to the values of our founding fathers: discipline, integrity…" |
| Nigeria | Peter Obi | 2023 | Youth voters | Twitter/Podcasts | Convergence | "My fellow OBIdients, the time to take back our country is now—na we go do am." |
| Nigeria | Bola Ahmed Tinubu | 2023 | Youth and middle-class | TikTok/Instagram | Over-convergence | "Emi lo kan! Youth dey para, but make dem calm down—we dey for una." |
| Kenya | Raila Odinga | 2022 | Urban youth | Twitter Spaces | Convergence | "Let us build a digital Kenya for your future. Youth must lead this transformation." |
| Kenya | William Ruto | 2022 | Rural and youth voters | WhatsApp/Facebook | Convergence | "Hustler Nation, your dreams matter. We are all in this hustle together." |
| Kenya | Uhuru Kenyatta | 2017 | Elderly voters | National media | Divergence | "We must protect our traditions and values from foreign ideologies." |
| South Africa | Julius Malema | 2019 | Youth, disenfranchised | Rallies/Instagram | Convergence | "The land belongs to you. No old man will stop you from claiming your future!" |
| South Africa | Cyril Ramaphosa | 2024 | General public | State address | Maintenance | "Our nation must continue on the path of peace and reconciliation." |
| South Africa | Mmusi Maimane | 2019 | Young professionals | YouTube/LinkedIn | Convergence | "We are not just a rainbow nation we're a network of ideas and innovation." |

**Table 2:** Cross-Regional Summary

| Country | Dominant CAT Strategy | Platform Preference | Target Generation | Notable Trend |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nigeria | Convergence (Youth Accommodation) | X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, WhatsApp | Millennials & Gen Z | Millennials, Digital-first campaigns, informal linguistic convergence, influencer usage. |
| Kenya | Divergence (Traditional Elders, Youth Hybrid) | Facebook, YouTube, SMS Broadcasts | Baby Boomers & Gen Y | Mixed code-switching; culturally embedded rhetoric with rural-urban split. |
| South Africa | Convergence (Institutional Style) | TV, Radio, Facebook | Gen X & Boomers | Formal discourse; multilingual outreach for national cohesion. |

section on Analysis and Interpretation, where the more CAT focused discourse analysis will explore the ramifications associated with the strategies employed for the communication provided in this section. Whether they are younger or opposition candidates,

**Table 3:** Cross-National Patterns

| Country | Dominant Age Strategy | Communicative Implication |
|---|---|---|
| Nigeria | Youth-centric digital engagement with informal tone | Increased youth participation and online activism; perceived authenticity boosts credibility. |
| Kenya | Hybrid strategy targeting both youth and elders with Swahili and English mix | Fosters generational inclusivity; appeals to cultural identity and modern civic discourse. |
| South Africa | Elder-centric tone with policy-heavy speeches | Limited youth connection; perceived disconnect affects voter turnout among younger demographics. |

they all seem to prefer convergence as a strategy, while incumbents, along with older politicians, favor divergence and maintenance. This reflects a generational struggle not only in the manner of doing things, but in the grander schemes of governance, power, and nationhood. Real convergence enhances youth participation and message resonance. Deliberate or excessive convergence can create suspicion or scorn. Divergence and maintenance are there to serve the ideological or stabilizing purposes but are bound to cause generational estrangement. CAT techniques are flexible, depending on the political objectives, electoral circumstances, and generational alignment.

## Analysis and Interpretation

This section focuses on how some selected political actors from Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa used the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) strategies of convergence, divergence, and maintenance in relation to intergenerational political communication. Based on the previously provided speeches and campaign material, the analysis seeks to establish the patterns, impact, and implications of these strategies of accommodation.

Convergence was aimed at strategic adaptation to 'Youth Language and Media' for all three countries. Political actors trying to attract younger audiences adopted convergence tactics. These were: Employing youth slang and vernacular codes (as in Peter Obi's na we go do am). Also, the use of digital 'owned' platforms such as Raila Odinga on Twitter Spaces; Malema on Instagram. Emotive sympathy with youth issues like William Ruto's "Hustler Nation" slogan). Giles and Coupland (1991) posit that this type of convergence 'reduces social distance and signals in-group solidarity'. In this instance, convergence was often aimed at justifying candidates to youth audiences who were active online, showing that they were relatable and responsive.

The analysis interprets that convergence proved effective when authentic and consistent with broader policy messages. However, when politicians mimicked youth culture without substance as in Bola Tinubu's overuse of informal youth lingo audiences reacted with skepticism, sometimes leading to ridicule or loss of credibility. This supports Harwood *et al*'s (2006) view that over-accommodation may result in perceived inauthenticity or patronization.

Secondly, divergence reinforces generational identity and authority. In contrast, divergence strategies were more common among older or incumbent politicians targeting traditional or elder constituencies. For example: Uhuru Kenyatta emphasized 'protecting traditions' in his 2017 speech, appealing to generational conservatism. And Cyril Ramaphosa maintained a formal presidential tone in addressing 'national reconciliation,' indirectly contrasting with radical youth rhetoric. This reflects the identity-protective function of divergence, wherein politicians assert generational values, historical legitimacy, or institutional authority (Giles & Ogay, 2007). Divergence also reinforces political boundaries between "radical youth" and "experienced elders." The analysis interprets that divergence is often used to consolidate base support among older voters or those skeptical of change. While it may alienate younger audiences, it provides ideological clarity and consistency that is crucial in volatile electoral environments.

Thirdly, Maintenance portrays non-adaptation and symbolic continuity. Maintenance appeared in speeches where politicians retained traditional communication styles and media channels, avoiding adaptation altogether. Buhari's national broadcasts exemplify this, with heavy reliance on formal language and nationalistic rhetoric. While maintenance may project consistency and authority, it also signals resistance to change. As noted by Nussbaum and Coupland (2004), non-accommodation can create communicative distance, especially in dynamic, youth-led political contexts. The analysis interprets that maintenance in this study often led to disconnection with youth constituencies, contributing to apathy or opposition. However, it served as a stabilising force among older, conservative demographics.

## Findings

Based on the analysis of 30 political speeches and communicative artifacts from Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, the study reveals the following key findings: Politicians aiming to engage younger demographics frequently adopted convergence strategies, including the use of informal language and popular idioms, digital platforms like Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram, youth-

aligned slogans and protest narratives. This pattern was evident in the campaigns of Peter Obi, William Ruto, and Julius Malema, who gained substantial support from digitally active youth constituencies.

Older political figures and incumbents (e.g., Muhammadu Buhari, Cyril Ramaphosa, Uhuru Kenyatta) relied more on maintenance or divergence strategies. These included formal language, traditional media platforms (radio, TV), appeals to cultural heritage or generational authority. These approaches reinforced their alignment with older, conservative audiences but created barriers with younger voters. Instances of over-accommodation, where political actors attempt to mimic youth speech or culture without authenticity were observed, particularly in Nigeria. These often led to backlash, ridicule, or accusations of opportunism, revealing the risks of insincere convergence. Kenya shows the highest rate of effective convergence with youth due to strong digital activism.

South Africa reflects intergenerational contestation between radical youth voices (EFF) and institutional conservatism (ANC). Nigeria presents a generational communication divide, where youth-focused actors like Obi clash rhetorically with legacy politicians.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate the practical relevance of Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) in analyzing how politicians negotiate generational boundaries in African democratic contexts.

CAT's concept of convergence is critical for inclusive democracy. When employed authentically, it can: Enhance political engagement among youth, foster a sense of representational belonging, and expand the reach of political messaging. This supports Giles and Ogay's (2007) argument that accommodation 'helps reduce social distance and enhances communicative effectiveness.'

Where maintenance and divergence dominate, generational miscommunication occurs. This widens the participation gap and contributes to youth disillusionment, as emphasized by Adebayo and Eze (2022) who noted that 'political disconnection feeds apathy among emerging voters.' Not all convergence yields positive outcomes. Over-accommodation using inauthentic or exaggerated youth rhetoric can be counterproductive. According to Harwood *et al.* (2006), accommodation must align with both intent and identity to be effective. In the Nigerian case, Tinubu's performative youth-speak was perceived as a campaign gimmick, undermining its persuasive power.

CAT provides a flexible, diagnostic tool to assess how political actors communicate across generational lines. It helps uncover not just the political messages, but the how and why revealing underlying power dynamics, communicative intentions, and socio-cultural alignments. As African democracies continue to evolve, intergenerational communication will remain central to political legitimacy. Politicians who fail to engage younger voters linguistically, ideologically, and digitally risk being marginalized in a rapidly transforming political environment.

## CONCLUSION

This study looks at how the political leaders in Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa apply Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) strategies – convergence, divergence, and maintenance – to engage intergenerational audiences, and how political communication decisions are influenced by the presence of a generational identity and accommodation (or lack of it) in a relationship, on political trust, engagement, and message reception.

Voters who are younger and more technologically inclined wholeheartedly embrace authentic convergence strategies, whereas maintenance and divergence, though useful in retaining older audiences and ideological simplification, are more typical of younger constituents who desire leadership that is responsive and relatable.

As this study suggests, the application of CAT to political discourse, more than any other theory, is probably the most useful in examining the neglect of the younger generation and the reconfiguration of identity in Africa's democratic politics. This study emphasises on the fact that political communication in a multicultured society as in Africa, needs to take into consideration the emerging age gaps where the communication is expected to be identity sensitive, flexible, and well thought.

## Recommendations

1. Creating protocols for communications of Integrative Actors without losing their genuineness within current generational/authenticity gaps address within the scope of genuineness CAT.

2. Balance stylistic shifting (e.g. slang or gimmicks of the social media) and convergence to policy and issue relevance for ideological credibility of politician.

3. Collectively use all available technologies of the period (Traditional and CT) to foster all-age cross communication and cone of reception. Have them use TV and radio for older followers and social media, podcasts, and short videos for the youths.

4. Constitutional provisions like the Youth Parliament and policy debate structure on generational issues are meant to facilitate balance of communication without the rhetoric gaps of ages.

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