

## COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR VOTER EDUCATION DURING THE 2019 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: A CASE OF ANAMBRA STATE



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### **Abstract**

*Outdoor advertising has over the years gained prominence and relevance. This study examines the influence of billboard advert on the education and enlightenment of voters in Anambra State, during the 2019 Presidential elections in Nigeria. To achieve this, the study used the survey method with the questionnaire as a data gathering technique. Agenda-setting theory was used as the theoretical framework. The findings indicated among other things, that voters were significantly exposed to these billboard advertorials, and most of them recalled the message contents on the billboards due to the high level of exposure. However, the study found out that actions of the electorates in Anambra State towards the electioneering process had no significant relationship to the level of exposure to billboard adverts, as voter apathy was widely witnessed during the general elections. In other words, even though billboards were seen to be an effective communication tool in the 2019 elections, decisions of the electorate were not controlled by it. In the light of these findings, it was recommended that INEC should also use other forms of the media, to boost the electorates' decision in voting favourably.*

**Keywords:** *Billboards, communication, elections, voters' education*

### **Introduction**

In today's campaign world, political advertising is the key to winning. Billboard or Outdoor political campaign advertising, has played critical roles over the years in helping candidates win in local, state and national contests. (Fliphound 2017). In Nigeria, Outdoor billboard advertising and digital billboards media allow candidates and their parties to deliver high impact messages to different audiences in key primary and battleground markets.

The use of billboard in advertising has become part of the political culture of most democracies and Nigeria as a democratic nation is not left out. Billboard usage has been in existence for some decades now. "Before the arrival of automobiles, primitive models of billboards were occasionally employed to inform people

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travelling on foot, horseback that an inn can be found ahead within a particular distance" (Ezegwu and Nwankwo, 2013).

Billboard advertisement is designed to catch a person's attention and create a memorable impression very quickly. They have to be readable in a very short time because they are usually read while passing at high speeds. Thus, there are usually only few words, in large print and arresting images in brilliant colour. If strategically placed, a motorist or pedestrian can absorb an important message in a twinkle of an eye. It goes a long way to persuade the masses into voting for a particular candidate during electioneering campaign and also educating voters on conducts. It is not surprising while INEC employed the billboard advert during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

Outdoor advertising especially provides a great way to reach a contender's constituency around the country, as a political candidate. With the static nature of outdoor political billboards, a candidate has the ability to place his/her message in a single spot for a lengthy amount of time, thereby increasing awareness, as commuters drive past their billboard each day.

As Hobbs (2020) describes it; "The trick is to know where to put your ads up and for how long to maximize the exposure potential during a political race".

The Premium Times Newspaper (2019) reported that voided votes constituted 2.8 per cent of the total 29,432,083 ballots cast in 2015, representing an increase of 1.7 per cent compared with that of 2019. Over one million votes cast in the Nigerian presidential election of April 2011, were also rejected during counting, and 2.8 million votes were declared voided votes in 2015 general elections; mainly because the ballots were wrongly marked. Although the rejected votes constitute only 3.2% of all votes cast in that election, several observers have noted that the number is rather high and could have been markedly lower if voters received adequate voter education. This is even more serious considering that in some States like Niger, Jigawa, Sokoto and Yobe, rejected votes were over six percent of all votes cast. These problems of rejected ballots and declining turnout at elections are widely attributed both directly and indirectly to inadequate civic and voter education. Thus, numerous reports on the 2019 general elections call on INEC to strengthen voter education. Other issues that have been linked to voter and civic education in Nigeria include poor turnout and participation in voter registration, lack of understanding of voting procedures, underage voting and election violence. In fact, it has been noted that the violence that Nigeria experienced in the aftermath of the 2011 general elections was partly due to negative mobilization by political leaders and by implication inadequate voter education (Ibeanu and Mbah, 2012).

## **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

Through the various generations of elections, declining voter participation, especially among the youth, has steadily and increasingly become a major issue of concern that has been equally affecting emerging democracy and consolidated ones.

Decreasing voter participation trends are a cause of concern because voter turnout is one of the main indicators to measure the levels of democratic development and robustness of a country. Low voter turnout as well as other electoral vices can be related to and originated by many different factors little or no awareness, information and communication by the electoral body to the electorates.

### **OBJECTIVES OF STUDY**

The main objectives of the study are;

- (i) To find out if the electorates in Anambra State were exposed to the billboard adverts on voter education.
- (ii) To ascertain the electorates' level of exposure to the billboard adverts used on electoral conducts
- (iii) To find out if the electorates in Anambra State were influenced by their exposure to the billboard adverts on electoral conducts in the 2019 presidential elections.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Billboard advertisement is a medium, which plays important roles in persuading and convincing the members of the public. Woodside (1990) notes that outdoor's primary advantage over other media is its high frequency of exposure in an environment with relatively little clutter. Woodside also concluded that outdoor advertising is likely to be effective in increasing sales if used properly.

The essence of outdoor advertising and the reason for its popularity is that billboards are always there in the electorate's faces. Billboard advertising has been recognized by political parties and politicians, who are increasingly turning to billboards as tools for political campaign (Panagopoulos C. & Ha S. 2015). A significant increase in advertising media of political content is noticeable especially during election campaigns. This phenomenon affects the shape of the urban public space, which is covered with electoral posters and billboards (Listwan-Franczak K. 2016).

Election periods in any society generate a lot of interest among the political candidates in particular and the civil society in general. This is because the destiny of the people and the nation rests squarely on the shoulders of the successful candidates at the polls. It is against this back drop that both political actors and their supporters deploy different persuasive strategies to elicit support and woo voters in order to gain and control power during the 2019 elections in Nigeria. Political advertising attempts to inform, educate, persuade, woo, and convince the audience to vote in a particular way or support a particular candidate. The sponsors and advert writers adopt different rhetorical or discourse strategies, symbolic appeals or expressions to achieve the primary goal of winning the support of the audience (Bell, 1998).

Nwosu (2007) suggests that political advertising influence seems or tends to be strongest at the information or awareness creation level and limited or somewhat

mixed at the attitudinal, opinion and behaviour change level in political activities. Ani (2008)

In two recent experiments Bhargava and Donthu (1999) also found that outdoor advertising has the ability to quickly generate sales response, but that location and other marketing mix variables are moderating factors. Collectively, the literature suggests that well conceived and placed outdoor advertising can be effective in increasing awareness and generating sales. Ezegwu and Nwankwo, (2013), note that: Billboard advertisements are designed to catch a person's attention and create a memorable impression very quickly, leaving the reader thinking about the advertisement after they have driven pass it. Billboard advertising continues to be an effective method of reaching out to the consumers. Since these advertisements can be viewed by the consumers at any point of its effectiveness are cost saving and greater market coverage. Billboards are surely an efficient method to publicize products and services anywhere and anytime.

Similarly, in large-scale content analyses of billboards in American states of Michigan and Pennsylvania, Taylor and Taylor (1994) and Taylor (1997) found that billboards provide a wide range of potentially useful information to consumers. They concluded that small businesses would be harmed by lack of access to billboards. When it is used appropriately, billboards can provide benefits to the businesses that use them (Taylor and Franke, 2003).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theories are of great relevance in every academic endeavor. Thus, for us to have a better understanding of this study, Agenda-setting and Gratifications theories was chosen to provide the framework.

#### **Agenda-setting Theory**

Agenda-setting theory was formally developed by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw in a study on the 1968 American presidential election. Agenda setting is a social science theory; it also attempts to make predictions. The theory also suggests that media has a great influence to their audience by instilling what they should think about, instead of what they actually think. That is, if a news item is covered frequently and prominently, the audience will regard the issue as more important.

This theory describes the "ability of the media to influence the importance placed on the topics of the public agenda" (McCombs, 2002). The study of agenda-setting describes the way media attempts to influence viewers, and establish a hierarchy of news prevalence (Dearing, 1988). Nations with more political power receive higher media exposure. The agenda-setting by media is driven by the media's bias on things such as politics, economy and culture, etc. (McCombs, 2005). The evolution of agenda-setting and laissez-faire components of communication research encouraged a fast pace growth and expansion of these perspectives. Agenda-setting has phases that need to be in a specific order in order for it to succeed.

The research on the effect of agenda-setting compares the salience of issues in news content with the public perceptions of the most important issue, and then analyses the extent of influence by guidance of the media. There are three models by Max McCombs: the "awareness model", the "priorities model" and the "salience model". Most investigations are centered on these three models (Dearing, 1988).

**Uses & Gratification theory:** The uses and gratification theory assumes that the mass media audience are not passive but take active role in interpreting and integrating media content into their own lives. Baran (2004) opines that "effects occur because the media do not do things to people. Rather, people do things with the media..., so the influence of the media is limited to what people allow it to be". The theory reminds us that for result-oriented communications, we must put the target audience member first (cited in Nwosu, 2007)' According to Baran and Davis (2006) Herts Herzog is credited as the originator of the theory and identified three types of gratification first, a means of emotional release; second, commonly recognized form of enjoyment, concerns the opportunities for wishful thinking and third, unsuspected form of gratification". Other gratifications sought in the media are; information and education, guidance and advice, diversion and relaxation, social contact, value reinforcement, cultural satisfaction and emotions release.

Therefore, billboards advertisement on the right electoral procedures, people would be exposed to messages and by using the message they would retain and replicate the ideas in the message, by behaving in a similar way the message wants. In other words, those not exposed electoral enlightenment billboard advertisement may not be influenced by it and may still be victims of poor electoral decision making, since they have no idea of the content of the advertisement.

### **Method of Study**

This study used survey research method. Nwabueze (2008) says that survey research studies both large and small population by selecting and studying samples chosen from the populations.

The population of this study consists of registered voters in Anambra State. The population of registered voters in Anambra State for the 2019 presidential elections, according to statistics from the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), is 1,963, 173. The sample size for the study was 384 respondents. This was determined using Cozby's (2004) table for sample size determination. It is estimated that for a population of over 100,000 (at 95 percent confidence level and +- 5% error margin), the sample is 384.

The sample size for this study therefore, comprises 384 voters at the 2019 presidential election in Anambra State. The study adopted multi stage and purposive sampling technique in selecting the respondents. Ohaja (2003)

Anambra State has 21 local government areas. In the first stage, Anambra State was divided into three senatorial zones, in the second stage seven (7) local governments areas were drawn from each of the senatorial zones. The researchers and the research assistants purposively selected four (4) local government areas from each of the senatorial zones in the state owing to their strategic nature, such as high population density and their popularity. Here are the selected local governments' areas.

Table1: Anambra Central Senatorial Zone

S/N	Local Government Areas	Respondents
1	Awka south	32
2	Awka North	32
3	Idemili North	32
4	Idemili South	32
	Total	128

Table 2: Anambra South Senatorial Zone

S/N	Local Government Areas	Respondents
1	Aguata	32
2	Nnewi North	32
3	Orumba North	32
4	Ihiala	32
	Total	128

Table 3: Anambra North Senatorial Zone

S/N	Local Government Areas	Respondents
1	Ogbaru	32
2	Oyi	32
3	Onitsha North	32
4	Anambra East	32
	Total	128

### Discussion

This study distributed 384 copies of the questionnaire to selected respondents. But only 372 were returned and found useable, representing 97% high response rate and mortality rate of only 3%.

**Objective 1:** To find out if the electorates in Anambra State were exposed to the billboard adverts on electoral conducts.

Table 5: Exposure to billboard adverts on electoral conducts.

Variable	Frequencies	Percentages
Yes	208	56
No	126	34
Indecisive	38	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above indicates that respondents were too exposed to these billboard adverts on electoral conducts. 208 (56%) respondents agreed on this issue. This finding tallies with Nwabueze (2006) assertion that “intimidating nature of these billboards in the middle of cities and on high ways, including the high fidelity of images/messages on them, make a quick but persuasive impression in the minds of the mobile audience.

**Objective 2:** To ascertain the electorates’ level of exposure to the billboard adverts used on electoral conducts

Table 6: Respondents’ level of exposure to billboard adverts on electoral conducts

Variable	Frequencies	Percentages
Always	118	32
Often	137	36
Rarely	96	25
Never	21	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>100</b>

The table indicates that 32% (118) of the respondents were always exposed to billboard advertson electoral conducts. This shows a high level of exposure to the contents of the billboard advert.

**Objective 3:** To find out if the electorates in Anambra State were influenced by their exposure to the billboard adverts on electoral conducts.

Table 7: Respondents influenced by exposure to billboard on electoral conducts

Variable	Frequencies	Percentages
Yes	146	39
No	167	45
Indecisive	59	16
<b>Total</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>100</b>

Data from the table reveals that there was no significant relationship between exposure to billboard advert on electoral conducts and influence on candidate during the elections. This finding justifies the suitability of the uses and Gratification theory in this study. The theory contends that mass media audience are not passive but take

active role in interpreting and integrating media content into their own lives. Supporting this view, McQuail (2010) emphasized the fact that audiences often have social and cultural roots and supports that protect them against unwanted influence and make for autonomy in choice and response to what they receive.

### **Conclusion**

The use of billboard for electoral education by INEC has served as a good communication medium through which electoral conducts were highlighted to the electorate. This study concludes that voters in Anambra state were significantly exposed to these billboard adverts. Most of them recalled the message contents on the billboards. It further concluded however that Anambra electorates had no significant relationship between exposure to billboard advert and choice to follow the instructions on the billboards. The implication is that the influence of these billboard campaigns are limited to what people allowed it to be; this also agrees with the Gratification theory used in this study; the influence of the media is limited to what people allow it to be.

### **Recommendations**

The study suggests that the electorate did not rely on billboard advert as the only source of information about elections. More studies should be carried out to find out reasons why respondents preferred and recalled the message contents on the billboard advert and yet did little or nothing in terms of adhering to the contents. Also since 21 respondents said they were not exposed to the billboard adverts, it is recommended that more research be done on maximizing the potentials of billboard campaign for a favourable electioneering process.

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**Appendix**  
(Some Billboards Used for Voters Education)

