

# INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL ADVERTORIALS ON VOTER EDUCATION IN THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this study was to determine the influence of political advertorials in educating the electorate on the need to vote during elections in Nigeria. The study focused on the 2015 general election in Nigeria with particular attention to North Central Nigeria. The population of the study was 191,554, comprising the number of state civil servants in North-Central Nigeria, while multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 382 as the sample for the study, arrived at, using the Kretecie and Morgan sampling table. After a descriptive and inferential data analysis, it was found out that there was high level of use of political advertorials for voter education in 2015 elections. Most of the respondents were exposed to political advertorials on voter education in North-Central Nigeria, since more than 90% of them read the advertorials, most of the political advertorials were written to favour certain candidates and political parties; hence the voter education content was bias, among others. It was recommended, among others, that there should be more of political advertorials regularly on the pages of Nigeria newspaper, instead of limiting such publications to the election years alone, as it will lead to consistency in the messages, thereby registering on peoples' minds political consciousness, needed for voter education.

**Keywords:** advertorial, newspapers, voters, politics, political education

### **Introduction**

The mass media are the most common source for information about election campaigns in democracies and societies in transition around the world. In terms of the sheer volume of information available to citizens via the media on issues, political parties and leaders, election campaigns often represents a high point for political advertising. Researchers (DellaVigna, & Kaplan, 2017; Dewenter, Dulleck & Thomas, 2016; Emman-Owums, 2014; Enikolopov, 2011) are in agreement that the media are important stakeholders in the electoral process.

It is important to add here that the media are sometimes accused of bias. Concerns about political bias in the mass media are at the heart of debates about the roles and responsibilities of the media at election time. Behind these concerns is the assumption that there may be effects, intended or unintended, on public opinion and political behavior and, ultimately, electoral outcomes. In every election campaign, citizens must not only decide upon the party or candidate they wish to support, they must also decide whether they will vote at all. In democracies that do not mandate compulsory voting, most political observers would agree that turnout in an election is a measure of success where the higher the turnout, the better. In most cases, parties and candidates use all means to stimulate turnout and motivate supporters to go to the polls. In some cases, however, parties and political camps aim to repress turnout to accomplish their goals. It is the larger context of political party strategies and tactics, and the structure of the mass media environment, that we also need to consider when we turn to addressing questions about balance during election campaigns (Finkel, & Howard 2009; Finkel, Jeremy, & Reynaldo, 2012; Funkhouser, 2013).

Politics has been one of the main stays of the newspaper industry in Nigeria and indeed the global community, whether as news, features, opinions, advertisements and advertorials. Political fame came through journalistic efforts and or through newspaper (media) political advertisements and newspaper (media) ownership through political antecedent. Not much has changed from the days of *Iwe Irohin* till now (156 years after) except refinements from the crude form to sophisticated and expensive copies with intermediaries like corporate agencies, researchers, media buyers or media independents, computerized, digitalized and online copies among others (Kaid, 2011, Gentzkow, Shaprio, & Sinkinson, 2011).

People are generally likely to believe something more if they read it in an article. By not being too upfront (i.e. by ‘advertising’), people will assume this is an opinion coming from a publication they respect. In order to keep this appearance of impartiality you should avoid at all costs submitting an article that clearly reads like an advert. Advertorials can be printed and presented as an entire newspaper section or inserted the same way within a newspaper as store fliers and other non-editorial content (Gentzkow, 2016; Gerber, *et al.*, 2013; Geys, 2010; Ginsberg, 2010; Glaeser, *et al.*, 2017; Gross, & Aday, 2010).

Advertorials are a specific print advertising format where a company pays to deliver a message about its brand or products. The advertiser pays the magazine, newspaper or website for the space needed to present a copy-driven message to the target audience who reads it. Advertorials basically combine the benefits of traditional print ads with feature articles written by a news reporter. Feature stories usually go into more details about your company or products than traditional ads. However, you have limited control over what gets published. By paying for ad space just as you would with a typical box ad or full-page ad, you have final authority over the message.

Voter education means providing citizens of a democracy with basic information about participating in elections. Voter education is often provided by the state itself, often through a national electoral commission, therefore, it is important that it is politically non-partisan. Government departments that focus on voter education are often highly scrutinized by a third party (Ekanem, 2015; Gentzkow, *et al.*, 2011; Gyeke, 2014; Hansford, & Gomez, 2010; Henderson, & Sara, 2011; Hermet, 2008; Herrack, 2016). In addition, there are various private institutions whose mission it is to strengthen democratic values by increasing voter education. The focus is often on *how* to vote rather than *who* to vote for. An appropriate voter education would provide citizens with knowledge regarding: Aim of this study is to assess the extent to which political advertorials can be used for voter education in Nigeria.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. ascertain whether political advertorials were used for voter education in 2015 elections.
2. examine the level of readership of political advertorials on voter education in North-Central Nigeria.
3. ascertain voters’ awareness of the use of political advertorials during 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

## Methodology

### Research Design

Survey design was used in this study. The survey method was used in this study because it deals with reactions of respondents to messages about elections, a phenomenon that involves citizens in a country. Researchers (Ale, 2020; Kari, 2020; Obasi *et al.*, 2021; Ogbonne, 2019; Odii *et al.*, 2020; Gever, & Nwabuzor, 2014; Gever, 2016; Gever *et al.*, 2021) postulate that the decision to apply a research design is based on the study aim. The population of this study comprised the civil servants working with the North-Central states of Nigeria. The essence of using civil servants is that they are workers in government offices where newspapers are delivered on regular basis; hence they have a higher chance of getting exposed to advertorials than any other class of the society. The total number of the civil servants in North Central states is 191, 554, according to the Federal Civil Service Commission (FCSC) Manual (2016). This figure represents those from each state of the zone and the members of staff of the Ministry of FCT.

To simplify the process of determining the sample size for a finite population, Krejcie & Morgan (1970), came up with a table using sample size formula for finite population. In determining the sample size of this study, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table was used.

Table 3.1									
<i>Table for Determining Sample Size of a Known Population</i>									
N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	100	80	280	162	800	260	2800	338
15	14	110	86	290	165	850	265	3000	341
20	19	120	92	300	169	900	269	3500	346
25	24	130	97	320	175	950	274	4000	351
30	28	140	103	340	181	1000	278	4500	354
35	32	150	108	360	186	1100	285	5000	357
40	36	160	113	380	191	1200	291	6000	361
45	40	170	118	400	196	1300	297	7000	364
50	44	180	123	420	201	1400	302	8000	367
55	48	190	127	440	205	1500	306	9000	368
60	52	200	132	460	210	1600	310	10000	370
65	56	210	136	480	214	1700	313	15000	375
70	59	220	140	500	217	1800	317	20000	377
75	63	230	144	550	226	1900	320	30000	379
80	66	240	148	600	234	2000	322	40000	380
85	70	250	152	650	242	2200	327	50000	381
90	73	260	155	700	248	2400	331	75000	382
95	76	270	159	750	254	2600	335	1000000	384
<i>Note: N is Population Size; S is Sample Size</i>					<i>Source: Krejcie &amp; Morgan, 1970</i>				

From the table, it could be deduced that the known population sample for 75000 and 1000000 is 382. This is the sample size of the study. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011), using the Krejcie and Morgan sampling table posits that one has no need to calculate the figures since the table defines the calculated figures between the population and the sample size already.

Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select a combination of samples for the study.

### Stage 1

Simple random sampling technique was used to select three out of six states in the North-Central zone. The six states were written on pieces of papers and tossed, giving equal opportunity to all of them to be selected, then, three were picked at random. The three states picked for the study include Kogi, Benue and Niger States.

### Stage 2

Purposive sampling technique was used to select state secretariat complexes in the three states. This is because there is a high concentration of civil servants at the secretariats across various cadres, ministries and parastatals.

### Stage 3

Accidental sampling was used to select the respondents at various secretariats. This was done by administering the questionnaire to the first sets of civil servants who resumed duty on a particular morning at the secretariats. The total

number selected for each state is 127 respondents. This was done without considering the gender or rank of the civil servants.

The instruments used in collecting data for this study are the questionnaire. Structured questionnaire was used to get the divergent views of the respondents on what they feel about the advertorials and voter education in the North-Central geopolitical zone, during the 2015 general elections in Nigeria. The essence of using the questionnaire for this study was to give opportunities to the respondents to air their opinion on the phenomenon.

The questionnaire was self-administered by the researcher with the aid of research assistants trained by the researcher. This method was adopted because it ensures high returns rate, clarifications where needed and eliminates mutilation of instruments. The research assistants were researchers in the field of social sciences and some are doctoral candidates in various universities. This was to ensure they brought their knowledge and understanding of research to bear in collecting the data. The methods used in collecting data for this study were primary and secondary data. Face validity was conducted by distributing the questionnaire and interview schedule to two assessors at senior lecturer cadre at Mass Communication Department, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The corrections and observations were effected accordingly.

In the reliability test, 38 copies of the questionnaire were administered to a group of workers at the Ajaokuta Local Government Secretariat in Kogi State. Split-half method of reliability test was used to conduct the test between odd and even numbers. These were distributed into X and Y classes and were tested using the Pearson’s product moment correlation coefficient, with the aid of SPSS 20. The research process analysis was arrived at .821 positive correlation between X and Y, making the instrument reliable for the study.

Descriptive data analysis was used to analyse the data for this study. Data collected were presented using a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques. This was done using tables, charts, and graphs, where necessary.

**Results**

The total sample size was 382; therefore 382 copies of the questionnaire were administered. However, out of this, only 361 copies were retrieved. The remaining 21 copies were either wrongly filled or lost in transit due to the scattered nature of the respondents across three cities in the North-central geopolitical zone.

**Table 2: Use of political advertorials for voter education in 2015 elections**

<i>Use of Advertorials</i>	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	303	83.9
No	58	16.1
Total	361	100.0
<i>Extent of Usage</i>		
Every Edition	216	59.8
Sparingly	89	24.7
Seldom	26	7.2
Regularly	19	5.3
Never	11	3.0
Total	361	100.0
<i>Editions used for advertorials</i>		
Very many	211	58.4
Many	36	10.0
Few	42	11.6
Quite a number	51	14.1
Very few	21	5.8
Total	361	100.0
<i>Depth of Advertorials</i>		

Need to cast votes	22	6.1
Participation in electoral process	24	6.6
Enlightenment	26	7.2
Information on security	25	6.9
All of the above	264	73.1
Total	361	100

The above table shows the extent of use of voter education by the respondents was asked in the above table. First, majority of the respondents (83%) agreed to access voter education messages. Secondly, most of the respondents also read such advertorials regularly. It was also confirmed that more than 58% of the respondents were of the view that the advertorials were featured in every edition, while a few other were opposed to this view. The last part of the table shows that areas of focus by the advertorials to include, the need to cast votes, participate in the electoral process, enlightenment, information on security at the polling units. Out of all these, the all of the above options was adopted by most of the respondents (73%), an indication that most of them benefit from advertorial messages on voter education in various ways mentioned in the options.

**Table 3: Level of readership of political advertorials on voter education in North-Central Nigeria**

<i>Readership of Advertorial</i>	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	361	100.0
No	00	00.0
Total	361	100.0
<i>How Often</i>		
Every Edition	144	39.9
Twice a week	79	21.9
Once a week	82	22.7
Once in a while	33	9.1
Sparingly	23	6.4
Total	361	100.0
<i>Length of Time</i>		
More than one hour	109	30.2
One hour	158	43.8
Less than one hour	27	7.5
Less than 30 minutes	26	7.2
Depends on schedule	41	11.4
Total	361	100.0
<i>Time limit of Exposure</i>		
Very satisfactory	204	56.5
Satisfactory	48	13.3
Neutral	19	5.3
Less satisfactory	31	8.6
Unsatisfactory	59	16.3
Total	361	100.0

From the table above, it could be deduced that all the respondents are exposed to advertorials on electioneering and voter education while most of them read the political advertorials on every edition and twice in a week, respectively. In addition, over 43% of the respondents read advertorials on voter education in one hour while others read advertorials at several other intervals as indicated in the table. The time spent on reading advertorials is dependent on how occupied each respondent could be in the office and the essence of reading at a particular point in time. In other words, if a respondent's department has more jobs at a time than another, such respondents tend to spend lesser time on readership of advertorials than others. Also, more than half of the respondents (56%) were of the view that the time limit for reading advertorial on voter education was satisfactory, while others were neutral and unsatisfactory respectively.

**Table 4: Voters' awareness of the use of political advertorials during 2015 general elections in Nigeria**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Perception</i>		
Positive	263	72.9
Negative	85	23.5
Neutral	13	3.6
Total	361	100.0
<i>Voter Education</i>		
Absolutely	293	81.2
Not certainly	44	12.2
Maybe	24	6.6
Total	361	100.0
<i>Advertorials Educate</i>		
Yes	264	73.1
No	97	26.9
Total	361	100.0
<i>Advertorials favours one political party</i>		
To a large extent	209	57.9
To some extent	62	17.2
Neutral	20	5.5
To a little extent	37	10.2
Not at all	33	9.1
Total	361	100.0
<i>Promoting a particular candidate</i>		
To a large extent		
To some extent	258	71.5
Neutral	23	6.4
To a little extent	16	4.4
Not at all	46	12.7
Total	18	5.0
	361	100.0
<i>Credibility of advertorials</i>		
Very credible	199	55.1
Credible	84	23.3
Neutral	25	6.9
Less credible	34	9.4
Not credible	19	5.3
Total	361	100.0

The perception of voters in use of advertorial for the 2015 elections was very high as more than 70% of the respondents were positive on this, as indicated in the table. This is because such information available on the advertorials gave the respondents the opportunity to have more education on electoral process and to participate in elections. In addition, most of the respondents said their enhancement of voter education as a result of readership advertorials was absolute since exposure to it has benefitted them in participating in voting. However, more than half of the respondents were of the view that advertorials were tilted in the media to favour one political party against the other, just as majority of the respondents agreed that advertorials were also bias on the basis of candidate's interests, to a large extent. In determining the credibility or otherwise of the advertorials, more than half of the respondents (55%) were of the view that the advertorials were credible to elicit enlightenment on voter education among the respondents. The implications of these analyses are that the level of voter education for an

individual may vary from another, just as their exposure can be. This is dependent upon the fact that respondents tend to choose what to read in the media at a particular time.

## Discussion of Findings

The researcher examines the influence of newspaper advertorial on political education among electorate. It was found out that most of the media houses featured political advertorials in their publications during the elections and the audience had access to such advertorials as well. In addition, the extent of usage of advertorials among the respondents was high as 59.8% of the respondents read political advertorials in every edition of the newspapers. Also in table two, the analysis shows very many editions of the newspapers were used for advertorial purposes, particularly political advertorials. This was represented by over 58% of the respondents choosing the very many options ahead of others. The depth of advertorials spread across need to cast votes among the respondents, participations in electoral process, voter enlightenment about electioneering and information to voters on security during elections. The choice of the respondents depended largely on their perception about the political advertorials such that they get more information and education about electioneering after reading those advertorials on the pages of newspapers. The implications of this finding are that the respondents were aware of voter education awareness creation through political advertorials and hence looked forward to getting such information from the pages of newspaper. According to the tenets of framing theory, when exposure of media messages framed to achieve certain purposes were achieved by the media, the audience on the other hand tend to become glued to such media for more of such information. In relation to this study, the exposure to political advertorials by the respondents was sequel to their expectations of the gratifications they tend to gain from it. Once these felt needs were met, the audience tends to act on such messages and participate in voting during elections.

Improving understanding of the effect of education on political participation in electoral authoritarian regimes is important for both theories of regime stability and change. If education is in fact a critical driver of political participation, as the extant literature suggests, then investment in education in these contexts could be a key tool to improving citizen welfare by more effectively holding governments to account (Friedman et al, 2011) and by generating pressure for greater citizen inclusion (Glaeser et al, 2017). If, however, education is associated with decreased political participation in electoral authoritarian regimes as we suggest below—then this might shed light on one reason why, contrary to the expectation of the democratic transition literature, many countries that took initial steps towards liberalization “got stuck” in electoral authoritarian equilibria (Godwin, 2011).

There are some good theoretical reasons to suspect that the positive relationship between education and political participation does not necessarily apply in electoral authoritarian settings. Political participation in mature and some consolidating democracies can be understood as the embodiment of the liberal notion of free will (Grepin & Prashant, 2014). The act of voting, in particular, has been viewed as a manifestation of the democratic ideals of political equality and individual agency.

Yet, by contrast, in many non-democratic settings, quintessential political actions like voting cannot necessarily be viewed as the exercise of agency and free will. Indeed, various forms of political participation in electoral authoritarian settings are designed to mobilize citizens to demonstrate allegiance to the regime, and not to aggregate societal preferences or enable citizen voice (Henderson & Sara, 2011). Elections in many electoral authoritarian regimes are not designed to allow citizens to freely elect their leaders, but rather to provide incumbents with a facade of legitimacy, appease the international community, and demonstrate the omnipresence of the regime (Hermet, 2008). Under such conditions, political participation is likely to lose both its normative and instrumental appeals for many.

The result also shows the level of exposure to voter education during the 2015 general elections among the respondents. From the table, it could be understood that all the respondents had access to such political advertorials and most of them (60%) read such advertorials in every edition and twice a week. The implication of this is that there is high exposure rate to political advertorials among the respondents, leading to more participation in the 2015 general elections than the previous ones. Also, most of the respondents spent up to one or more hours in reading political advertorials which aided them in making choices of the candidates they voted for in the elections. This finding is in line with the assumptions of the social responsibility theory which posits that the media have the power to make prominence the subjects not known hitherto, by laying more emphasis on some issues until they become a central agenda of the society (Hillygus, 2015). By this, social responsibility about the voter education through political advertorials have become prominent on the minds of the audience to the large extent that they can think and act on the issues raised in the advertorials.

When participation cannot achieve its goals of providing genuine input into the political process, or when participation merely serves to buttress the regime, then refraining from political participation can serve as a powerful form of dissent or may reflect the recognition that costly political action is futile (Dewenter *et al*, 2016). This study's key insight is that more educated citizens are more likely to exercise deliberate political disengagement. First, education imbues citizens with cognitive abilities that allow for more critical thinking, which may then translate into lower levels of support for the incumbent regime, and thus less interest in legitimizing it with their participation.

Second, education may similarly lead to value change, with more educated individuals placing a higher premium on democratic values such as self-expression and individual voice, in contrast to social conformity and solidarity (Stiebale & Vencappa, 2016). Third, if education also increases knowledge and understanding of politics, educated voters may be more aware that political participation will not affect political outcomes. Fourth, educated individuals may feel a higher level of disillusionment with autocratic politics and economic mismanagement, given their greater economic potential (Campante & Hojman, 2013).

This argument was tested by Cancela & Geys (2016) using the case of Zimbabwe. First, Zimbabwe under President Mugabe is a paradigmatic electoral authoritarian regime, ruled by a civilian-military junta. While elections have been held regularly since 1980, when the opposition has mounted a credible threat to win power (most notably in 2008), the regime ratcheted up violence and engaged in massive vote rigging to ensure that the opposition could not take power. Thus, as in many electoral authoritarian regimes, elections in Zimbabwe provide some restrictive opportunity for public opinion to be registered. They have yet to offer voters, however, a genuine ability to determine the ultimate distribution of power. Second, Zimbabwe is an excellent case study because we are able to leverage a major educational reform to identify the causal relationship between education and participation. Immediately after majority rule was achieved in 1980, Zimbabwe implemented a far-reaching education reform that created a discontinuity in access to education between cohorts. The reform, which removed examination score, geographic and financial constraints, substantially increased access to secondary education for black students, but also induced some students to remedially attend primary school. We exploit this natural experiment to analyze the effect of education on political participation by comparing cohorts that were just young enough to enjoy greater access to secondary education to cohorts that were just too old to take advantage of the reform (Curran *et al*, 2009). To allow for non-compliance across cohorts, we also estimate instrumental variable regressions.

The implications of these findings are that, at least in Zimbabwe, education reduces levels of political participation. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, a higher level of education reduces not only voting, but also other forms of non-contentious participation such as contacting one's local Councilor and attending community meetings. Consistent with this argument that non-participation may be an informed choice by relatively cognizant and politically aware citizens, we find that education significantly increases interest in politics, support for democracy, and economic well-being. Furthermore, consistent with our claim that such citizens become disenchanting with authoritarian politics, we also find that increased education decreases support for the ruling party, reduces perceptions of government performance, and increases support for the main opposition party (Dahl & Bastiansen, 2013). This combination was interpreted with reduced political participation coupled with improved political information, better living standards, greater support for democratic institutions and reduced support of the incumbent autocrat, as evidence that educated citizens are consciously choosing to withdraw from the political sphere.

## **Conclusion**

The effectiveness of any media publications is anchored on several premises, as explained in this study. First, the ownership of the media determines the publications in them, however, these publications can be written by journalists for development purposes. Secondly, the place of political advertorials in enhancing participation especially in voting was x-rayed by this study to the intent that political advertorials can serve as veritable tools for enlightenment on voter education in Nigeria. Politics and the media are intertwined and their marriage can lead to sustainable development when there is high readership rate among the elite, leading to creating more opinion leaders who in turn transmit such messages to the third parties in the information flow. Through this, information flow on voter education can be transmitted through political advertorials with improved records of participation in the electoral process among the people.

## **Recommendations**

From the findings, the following are the recommendations of the study:



1. There should be more of political advertorials regularly on the pages of Nigeria newspaper, instead of limiting such publications to the election years alone. This will lead to consistency in the messages, thereby improving political consciousness and voter education.
2. There should be more circulation of national newspapers so as to carry more audience along in the voter education campaign using political advertorials.
3. Journalists should be conscious of being politically bias in presenting their advertorials. This will promote balanced and fair views and improve voter education among the people.
4. Media houses should protect the interests of their staff and should be made to comply with the codes of ethics of journalism practices, in order not to undermine the rights of journalists to disseminate voter education through political advertorials.

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