

Political Advertisement and Voter Behaviour during the 2019 Presidential Election in South-South Region of Nigeria

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Abstract

The debate on the influence of political advertisements is an ongoing one. It has been argued that political messages advertised during elections tends to change voter choice and preference of candidates during an election while others show contrary findings to the question. This study attempts to lend a voice to the debate by investigating the impact of political advertisements in voter behaviour during the 2019 general elections in South-South region of Nigeria. The study reports data from a paper-based survey (N=400) of voters in the South-South region of Nigeria. Findings uncovered that a substantial number of voters in South-South region of Nigeria were exposed to newspapers political advertisements during the 2019 presidential elections in Nigeria. Data further demonstrate that voters who reported to have been motivated to vote due to issues advertised in the newspapers by the two political parties (PDP and APC) were married, civil servants and those who factored the advertised issues in their preference for a political candidate. The study concludes that the media played an agenda setting role during the 2019 presidential election campaigns.

Keywords: political advertisement, political marketing, persuasive messages, elections, Nigeria, agenda setting theory

1. Introduction

The debate on the influence of political advertising is an ongoing one in political marketing. The debate is placed in political advertisement skeptics and the optimists. The latter group have argued that the emphasis political parties and their supporters give to issues in their advertorial campaigns in the media impacts voter's candidates' preferences. They argue that political messages advertised in the media influence those who exposed themselves to the messages during elections (Abati, 2010; Opene, 2012). However, some scholars have demonstrated that issues political parties presented to voters in the media have little or no effect on voters' preference of candidates during elections (Okunna & Omenugha, 1999; Zumofen & Gerber, 2018). In this paradigm debate, both camps do however agree that political marketing is vital during election campaigns.

Political marketing is the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by individuals and organizations (Newman, 1994). To apply marketing principles to a political campaigns means that the campaign will understand the voter's needs as in product marketing and develop a product to satisfy those needs (Akinola & Adekunle, 2022). Political advertising, however, has been defined as a structured and composed non-personal communication, typically paid for and generally persuasive in nature, about products by revealing sponsors through a variety of media platforms (Arens, 2002; Arens et al., 2012). From this definition of political advertisement, the fundamental idea of such a campaign is that it is usually paid for, strongly persuasive and promote either an idea or a politician instead of promoting a product (Saleem et al., 2015). This messaging in political advertisement targets the voter with precision. When done properly, it eliminates huddles in the way of the politician or political party as their message and campaign promises will reflect the yearning of the voters. This precision targeting is forcing some scholars to treat political marketing with apprehension and nervousness. These concerned scholars argue that political marketing will destroy political parties with long term ideology and platforms as they will be replaced with politicians who are market driven, short term focused and chase after electoral success (Akinola & Adekunle, 2022; Hughes, 2011).

From the foregoing, a scholar contends that, 'the visionary voter disappeared with the visionary party years ago' (Hughes, 2011, p. 4). Furthermore, scholars have argued that embracing a voter-orientation may lead to populists policies rather

than sensible programmes, and that marketisation of politics weakens the strikingness of elections and fosters ephemeral and non-policy matters (Butler & Collins, 1999; Hay, 2007). However, some other scholars believe that political marketing cannot be responsible for self-interested calculations, indignities and dishonesty associated with modern politics. Political marketing is suitable for politics to become more responsive to citizens' needs and demands, for that is the very essence of politics itself, and that political marketing has made consumers become more collectively powerful, co-creators of public policies rather than mere consumers (Lees-Marshment, 2003; Scammell, 2014).

A result from India revealed that social media buzz relating to political parties did not have a positive and significant effects on number of seats won during the 2014 Indian general elections (Safiullah et al., 2017). It has been noted that issues presented by political parties in their campaigns are consequential to voter preference as these political campaigns have effects on voters' candidates' choice (Lipsitz & Padilla, 2021; Passwaiter, 2020; Ridout et al., 2021). This means that political advertising is an indispensable agent of social change. For example, it has been stated that political branding strategy of the conservative party is related to their return to power in 2010 (Pich et al., 2016).

During the electioneering campaigns of the 2019 presidential election, the presidential candidates of the accredited political parties presented variegated messages to voters via different media platforms including newspapers. These candidates delineated robust promises that they will oversee if elected to the presidency. Such policies and promises include security (lives and property), job creation, improved infrastructure, improved economy, accountability, provision of welfare services, respect for the rule of law and protecting the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The South-South region of Nigeria was targeted through intensive political advertising to influence votes. This is not surprising given the strategic and resource importance of the region to the country. The South-South region heavily lean Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). However, the region has experienced an unfortunate legacy of hunger, high unemployment, environmental degradation, communal conflict, youth agitation and all forms of social insecurity (Shebbs & Njoku, 2016). This has resulted in the clamour for resource control, theft of oil facilities, kidnapping, robbery and other social vices (Shebbs & Njoku, 2016). Several Nigerian newspapers ran advertisements for the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) especially on the issues that affect the region. Issues such as war against corruption, economy, security, inadequate infrastructure, education, and lack of integrity were pushed through the newspaper advertisements among others over a period of four months in a bid to influence the voters in the region. These were seen as important and became the most discussed issues within the region. This study attempts to evaluate the success of these campaigns.

Although a good number of studies have attempted to evaluate the impact of political marketing and advertisement to voters' choice and preference, few studies have investigated this question in the political marketing scholarship in Nigeria. Majority of these studies found that exposure to political marketing was not a determining factor to voters' choice (Olujide et al., 2011). Fewer studies have even studied the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Among these studies, only Akinola and Adekunle (2022) looked at the 2019 elections from political marketing perspective. Even they, reviewed if the election was voter-centric as they evaluated if the elections were market driven. However, they did not enquire about the influence of political advertisement to voter preference. This study will bridge that gap in the literature. The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of political advertisement in voter behaviour during the 2019 general elections in South-South, Nigeria.

2. Appraising Political Marketing

Political marketing has been scorned by some scholars while other adjudged it as the best way forward for politics. While some scholars have argued that embracing a voter-orientation may lead to populists policies rather than sensible programmes, and that marketisation of politics weakens the conspicuousness of elections and nurtures transient and non-policy matters (Butler & Collins, 1999; Hay, 2007), others contend that political marketing is suitable for politics to become more responsive to citizens' needs and demand, as that is the very essence of politics itself, and that political marketing has made consumers become more collectively powerful, co-creators of public policies rather than mere consumers (Lees-Marshment, 2003; Scammell, 2014). It has been noted that there is no significant difference between the various forms of mass persuasion methods, though the terminology used may vary (Schleifer, 2014). For example, an analysis of the Psychological operations (PSYOP) campaign of the Islamic Organisation Hamas, against Israel in the past decade demonstrates that there is a striking similarity between propaganda and political marketing (Schleifer, 2014).

It has been stated that personal experience allowed the informants or voters to make sense of and argue against campaign messages, and that cynicism often guided participants to unpack the generic conventions of political advertising (Kjeldsen & Hess, 2021). Personal experience and cynicism enable participants to critically distance their emotions from their reading, watching, and listening to any political advertisement. This critical distancing reveals connections between rationality and emotionality through deliberative embedding, meaning that the emotional is understood in terms of and negotiated in relation to already established cognitive frameworks of information, opinions and cynical readings of the genre (Kjeldsen & Hess,

2021). However, it is not the case in a climate of a broken political trusts. According to Andrei (2018), in a broken-trust climate, political advertisement is not a functional paradigm. This is because when public trust is gravitating towards zero, it is more and more difficult to involve political marketing methods and concepts such as political advertisement, because what one tries to say as a message is less credible and it is hard for a politician to convince people of goodwill (Andrei, 2018). Thus, without an authentic voter-politician exchange and relationship, political marketing is only a label and is contributing to a fake-show, a 'Potemkin style' political imagery, cardboard politics or political entertainment (Andrei, 2018). The arguments here demonstrate that voters are smart and can tune out an emotional political advertisement and that voters will not indulge a politician of their attention when they distrust the politician.

Findings from some studies have shown that political marketing and advertisement are insignificant in voter persuasion. In their study that evaluated political advertisement and voter behaviour, Saleem et al. (2015) found that voter pre-existing support of a politician have strong association to deepening voter loyalty to their respective political parties in Pakistan. This result shows that political advertisement works more on the already converted and converts no further voter. They asserts that there is no association between advertisement exposure and voter behaviour change (Saleem et al., 2015). The voters are not changed according to the study from the political advertisement but rather, party loyalists deepen their support and loyalty to political parties due to increased political advertisement. Similarly, result from a recent study indicates a weak and flawed strategic use of celebrities in political advertisement where the celebrities are scarcely mentioned and depicted in a non-innovative, tradition fashion (Fernández-Gómez et al., 2021). This type of celebrity placement in political marketing fails to impact the candidacy of the political aspirants running the advertisement.

Findings from another study showed that implicit attitudes do not change primarily in response to political advertisement's emotional valence. However, implicit attitude improve in response to increased familiarity with the object such as the politician or political party (Ryan & Krupnikov, 2021). The study like Kjeldsen and Hess (2021) revealed that emotional political advertisements do not influence voters decision making during elections but that personal experience and increased familiarity do impact how voters react to political candidates. This implies that political aspirants need to work on their interpersonal selling points than the mass mediated action that they attempt to initiate via political advertisement.

In detailing how candidates conduct political marketing, study showed that candidates benefitting from a comparative advantage (incumbent and front runners) tend to rely on enthusiasm appeals more than fear in their political advertisements while more extreme candidates, and competitive political races adopt fear in the political advertisements and foster fear in the community than embrace enthusiasm in the political advertisements (Nai & Maier, 2021). In Czech Republic, finding shows that podcasts present opportunities for relationship building between the citizens and their political representative (Tranová & Veneti, 2021). According to their result, the relationship that is forged between the politician and their voters via podcasts are real and translates to positive voter behaviour change during election. Using political relationship marketing theory, the study argues that authenticity, conversational dynamism, and a carefully curated personalisation of the communication that the podcasts provided created a sense of attachment and belonging between the politicians and the voters. This finding relates to other results discussed above. The central theme of many of the studies (Andrei, 2018; Kjeldsen & Hess, 2021; Ryan & Krupnikov, 2021; Saleem et al., 2015) is one of interpersonal abilities of the politician rather than the grandeur of his or her political advertisements. This shows that interpersonal relationship is significant to how voters perceive political aspirants and politicians.

It has been argued that while development of marketisation and professionalisation of campaigns of political parties in the Western established democratic countries, it seems likely to transform political system and democracy of such countries (Ahmad, 2021; Lees-Marshment, 2003). However, within the specific context of the emerging democratic countries, it seems the quality of democracy, and type of democratic system established by leaders of political parties in such countries that will likely determine such development (Ahmad, 2021). In emerging democracies, the establishment of democratic political party, government, media and election systems propel marketisation and professionalisation (Ahmad, 2021). This is why it is often argued that without a vibrant press and free flow of information, that government cannot fully function to its full potential and that free press is vital to the growth of democracy in emerging democracies (Bappayo et al., 2021).

Earlier studies also had mixed results. For example, in their study on the effect of the mass media on people's voting decisions and behaviour, Lazarsfeld et al. (1944) found that the mass media had little or no direct effect in changing voters' attitudes, decisions and behaviour and that the main effect of the mass media was to reinforce the existing attitudes of the voters. They also noted that the very few people who changed their attitudes and decision during an election did so as a result of influence of opinion from leaders during interpersonal communication, rather than as a result of direct persuasion by the mass media. This result from a legacy study correlates to findings of contemporary studies in political marketing. It shows that interpersonal relationship and communication contributes more to voter behaviour than political advertisements. To understand this further, an effort will be made to review the influence of political advertisement regarding behaviour change in Nigeria.

2.1 Political Advertising in Nigeria: Influence and Behaviour Change

In all elections, issues emerge that set the tone and sometimes lead to the outcome of the election. Some of these issues motivate or influence voters in their decision making regarding who they will vote for in the election. Consequently, the promises and policies that political aspirants and their political parties adopt and present to voters arguably determine the outcome of the elections. During the 2019 election campaigns in Nigeria, the issues that emerged were insecurity, weak economy, unemployment, corruption, dilapidated infrastructure, and lack of rule of law. The two major political parties in Nigeria, the APC, and the PDP as well as other political parties in Nigeria, presented their claims, counter claims, manifestos, and policy approaches. They promised and highlighted how they will fix the country in both their campaign stops and in political advertisements. All these were done to win voters to their side and for the voters to support their party and her candidates in the voting booth.

The question about the impact of political advertisement on voter preference remains unresolved. Duru (2021) stated that new media political campaigns did not influence the electoral behaviour and voting pattern of electorate in Imo State, Nigeria during the 2019 governorship election. Results also shows that the 2019 presidential election was extremely monetised, violent, fraught with all manners of electoral misconducts that are antithetical to principles and practices of political marketing (Akinola & Adekunle, 2022). Political advertising is a marketing strategy employed by communication experts to sell the candidate or party to the voters. Political advertising draws from gaining attention of the voters, through the various mass media with the main aim of creating awareness about a party's candidate in order to influence voters (Okpara et al., 2016). Scholars (Adanlawo & Reddy, 2020; Nwosu, 2003; Okpara et al., 2016) conceptualise political advertising by narrowing it to the use of media by political party's candidate to increase voter exposure about the party and candidate. Political advertising is a form of campaign used by candidates contesting for a public office to reach and influence voter.

Some scholars have argued that political advertising in electoral campaigns are marketing actions employed to get the attention and influence voters in elections (Akinola & Adekunle, 2022). They explain that it enables parties and their candidates to know how to allocate their resources and develop better knowledge on how and why voters make their decisions and preferences. One can therefore, aver that the central focus of political advertising is the marketing of ideas, motivating voters to guide their choices and influence their attitudes, including political ideologies. Owuamalam (2014) describes political advertising based on nomenclature of the message or content. He sees advertisement messages whose content is political and presented to influence voters' behaviour through its persuasive impact. Okwechime (2015) corroborates the forgoing when he contended that political advertising is a tool of political campaign which is widely viewed as a product of the electronic age communication aimed at influencing voters.

In their study the examined the extent of political advertisement on voters' choice of candidate during the 2015 governorship election in Imo State, Nigeria, Okpara et al. (2016) found that there was a significant relationship between voters' exposure to political advertisement and voters' choice of candidate. Their result revealed a strong evidence that political exposure to political advertisements leads to voters' choice of political candidates (Okpara et al., 2016). Their result reflects findings from other studies. For instance, their findings showed that political advertisements have significant effect on the electorates (Olujide et al., 2011). They also discovered that voters informed voting decision was significantly attributed to different style by which political advertising were presented.

In a quantitative study that investigated the influence of political advertising on voters' endorsement in the 2015 general elections in Ondo State, Nigeria (N=400), Felix and Olakunle (2017) revealed that political advertisement did not stimulate voters to cast their votes in the 2015 general elections in Ondo State. According to them, this was because the electorates were not influenced at all by political campaign advertisements. This result is contrary to findings from other studies (Okpara et al., 2016; Olujide et al., 2011). These studies unlike Felix and Olakunle (2017) found strong evidence of exposure to political advertising and voters' choice of candidate. Felix and Olakunle (2017) found that political advertising has no significant effects on the electorate and that political advertisement was not a determining factor that made voters cast their votes as majority of the voters were not motivated by the political advertisements throughout the period of the elections. So, the advertisement message made little or no impact on voters. While the results of these studies are mixed with many of the results leaning towards no impact of political marketing to voter change in behaviour, the current study is conducted to add a voice in the literature particularly as it concerns South-South region of Nigeria.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 The Agenda-setting Theory

One of the theoretical underpinnings of this study is the agenda-setting function of the press. This was propounded by McCombs and his colleagues (McCombs, 1977; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs et al., 2013, 2014). In their seminal study, they argued that the media in choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176). They further stated that readers learn not

only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and position (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176). They also noted that while the media do not tell people what to think, that they tell them what to think about by determining the issues and the organisations that will be put on the public agenda for discussions (McCombs, 1977; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). As part of their review of the theory, they pointed out the need for orientation (NFO) in the psychology of agenda setting. Need for orientation is the combination of relevance and uncertainty, such that low levels of relevance led directly to low levels of NFO, a high level of relevance coupled with low uncertainty led to moderate levels of NFO, and a high level of relevance coupled with low uncertainty led to high levels of NFO (McCombs et al., 2014, p. 784).

In their study, Wanta and Alkazemi (2017) classified agenda-setting as media effect process that leads to what are perceived as the most important problems and issues facing the society. Agenda-setting implies that the mass media pre-determine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society (Ogbonna, 2016; Oni et al., 2014). The media are said to have set agenda for the voters in South- South region during presidential election. This is because the issues advertised about the political parties and their candidates are the same issues that were burning and generating public discourse in South-South communities during the election. These issues include fight against corruption, improvement in economy, insecurity, and unemployment in the country. The voters discussed these issues without minding whether they influenced their decision or not.

Voters seem to have paid attention to issues APC and PDP emphasised in newspaper advertisements about 2019 presidential election in Nigeria, take the issues very importance and subsequently form opinion on the candidate to vote for. South-South voters may have powers over their thoughts and decision patterns on which candidate to voter for but the mass media particularly newspapers provide them with issues that would guide their thoughts and perceptions. Voters during elections are always curious about those that would represent them, and that was the case for voters from the South-South region of Nigeria. The resource control agitation, security challenges, economic situation, corruption, and decay in education which were the burning issues in the region during the election were equally presented in the newspaper advertisements by APC and PDP.

3.2 Yale's Persuasive Theory

This is the other theory that underpins this study. This theory deals with the change of attitude in response to persuasive messages. Yale's attitude change theory is the social psychology study of the condition under which people are most likely to change their attitudes in response to persuasive message (Osatuyi et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2022; Tormala & Rucker, 2022). The theory is propounded in Yale University by Hovland and his colleagues in 1953 (Hovland et al., 1953) The idea of the psychological theorists was to fundamentally test the variables that might influence comprehension, acceptance and retention of persuasive messages. For example, when a persuasive message is presented by an untrustworthy source, it tends to be discounted by the audience so that immediately after the exposure, there is little or no attitude change, and then after several weeks, the source is no longer associated with the issue in the mind of the audience and this hampers positive behaviour change (Hovland et al., 1953; Osatuyi et al., 2022). According to the theorists, there are three factors that can affect how likely a change of attitude can occur through persuasive messages: the source, the message and audience (Hovland et al., 1953).

This theory posit that the source needs to be trusted by the audience, and the messages emphasised and audience willing and interested in the message. In the case of the 2019 presidential election, the messages were compelling as they spoke to the underlying angst of the people of South-South region in Nigeria. The political parties are strong in the region especially PDP. The audience as people of South-South has continuously sought good infrastructure, resource control, true federalism among many other demands.

4. Research Questions

Many studies have tried to evaluate the impact of political marketing and advertisement to voters' choice and preference. Their results are mixed with many of those studies arguing that there is no significant relationship between political advertisement exposure and voter preference during elections. Few studies have investigated this question in the political marketing scholarship in Nigeria. Majority of these studies found that exposure to political marketing was not a determining factor to voters' choice (Olujide et al., 2011). Fewer studies have even studied the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. Among these studies, only Akinola and Adekunle (2022) looked at the 2019 elections from political marketing perspective. Even they, reviewed if the election was voter-centric as they evaluated if the elections was market driven. However, they did not enquire about the influence of political advertisement to voter preference. This study will close this gap in the literature. The objective of this study is to investigate the impact of political advertisement in voter behaviour during the 2019 general elections in South-South, Nigeria.

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent did the issues outlined in the newspaper advertisements by APC and PDP influence voters' decision in the 2019 president election in South-South region of Nigeria?
2. What is the degree of voter exposure to the issues raised in the newspaper advertisement campaigns of APC and PDP during 2019 presidential election in South-South region of Nigeria?

5. Methodology

A survey of voters in South-South region of Nigeria was taken. A multi-staged sampling technique was adopted for this study. This sampling technique was used in this study because of the large number of the study population. In a cluster sampling technique, the State can be divided into districts, country or zip code area and groups of people can be selected from each area (Bryman, 2016). In this study, voters in South-South region of Nigeria during the 2019 presidential election were surveyed. The South-South region of Nigeria has six States: Akwa –Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers. It has a total of 18 senatorial districts, three for each state. Each senatorial district has several Local Government Areas

Bayelsa and Rivers States were purposively selected for this study. Bayelsa and Rivers States have six senatorial districts and 31 local government areas, out of which four Senatorial districts and nine local government areas were selected. Three Local Government Areas Kolokkuma/Opokoma, Yenagoa and Ekeremor from Bayelsa State were selected as well as six Local Government Areas from Rivers State: Obio/Akpor, Ikwerre, Etche, Omuma, Tai, Eleme and Oyibo. The selection was based on the distribution of the population of the study. The nine Local Government Areas have 268 Wards. Out of these 268 Wards, a total of 108 Wards were selected. The 108 Wards selected have a total of 1,523 Units. Two hundred Units out of the 1,523 were selected. Since it is not easy to obtain the exact population of the Units in the Local Government Areas, the sample size (400) was divided by 200 units in the wards of the various Local Government Areas selected. This gave the researchers a sample of two persons per Unit.

The questionnaire was conducted in English and on paper instruments. It required 25 minutes to complete and consisted of 40 mandatory questions. The survey consisted of five sections, including general information, exposure to newspaper advertisements during the 2019 elections, extent of exposure to issues advertised in the newspapers, issues advertised in the newspapers by APC and PDP as motivation for voter decision, and issues advertised in the newspapers by PDP and APC as a factor for candidate preference at the polls. Common method variance was reduced by mixing positive and negatively worded items in the questionnaire (Uwalaka, 2019). The negatively worded items were re-coded during the data coding period to make constructs symmetric, and this procedure satisfied the statistical contention of common methods bias variance (Uwalaka, 2017, 2021; Uwalaka et al., 2018).

Outside descriptive statistics, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to analyze how well issues advertised in the newspapers by PDP and APC impact voter motivation during the 2019 presidential election in South-South geopolitical zone in Nigeria. Age, gender, marital status, and occupation were measured as categorical variables where the numbers assigned to them was indicative and not for analytic power. Exposure to newspaper advertisements during the 2019 elections was measured dichotomously were 1 = exposure to newspaper advertisements and 0 = no exposure to newspaper advertisement, extent of exposure to issues advertised in the newspapers, issues advertised in the newspapers by APC and PDP as motivation for voter decision, and issues advertised in the newspapers by PDP and APC as a factor for candidate preference at the polls were all measured using Likert Scale where 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

6. Results

As shown in Table 1, participants between the ages of 36 to 45 (40%) and 18 to 25 (37%) participated more in the study than other age brackets. Female participants were slightly in the majority as about 52% (198) of the participants in the study were female while 48% (181) were male. Civil or public servant (49%) participated more in study than privately employed workers (20%), students (18%), and the unemployed (13%).

Table 1. Participants sample characteristics, N=400 (% in bracket)

Description	Options	Frequency (%)
Age	18-25	148(37)
	26-35	52 (13)
	36-45	160 (40)
	45 and above	40 (10)
Occupation	Student	72 (18)
	Public Servant	196 (49)
	Privately employed	80(20)
	Unemployed	52 (13)
Gender	Male	192 (48)
	Female	208 (52)

To understand the extent of exposure, the researchers asked the voters to mark from very low to very high on the extent of their exposure to issues advertised in the newspapers by PDP and APC during the presidential election. From the data presented in Table 2 below, 58% (232) of voters in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria reported to have been exposed, very highly, of the issues advertised in the newspapers by PDP and APC during the 2019 presidential election. Another 29% (116) were highly exposed to the issues advertised in the newspaper. When added, “very high” and “high” show that 87% of all voters in the survey reported that they were either very highly exposed or highly exposed to issues advertised in the newspapers by both PDP and APC during the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. This result shows that newspaper advertisements from PDP and APC were commonplace and persistent for these voters to have been widely exposed to the issues.

Table 2. Extent of exposure to issues advertised in the newspapers

Option	Responses	Percentage
Very high	221	58
High	108	29
Low	39	10
Very low	11	3
Total	379	100

A multiple regression analysis was performed to examine how well issues advertised in the newspapers by PDP and APC affect gender, marital status, occupation, age, election advertisements, advertisement influence, voters’ ability, newspaper advertisement exposure, and voter motivation. In this multiple regression analysis, issues advertised by the two political parties (PDP and APC) were the dependent variable while gender, marital status, occupation, age, exposure to newspaper advertisements (exposure), extent of exposure to issues advertised in the newspapers (extent of exposure), issues advertised in the newspapers by the political parties as motivation (motivation), and issues advertised in the newspapers by the political parties as a factor for candidates’ preference at the polls (factor for candidates preference) were independent variables.

Prior to conducting the multiple regression analysis (MRA), preliminary analyses were conducted to check for outliers and evaluate assumptions. No observations were identified as outliers, meaning that all 379 cases were involved in further analyses. All variance inflation factor (VIF) values were well below the threshold of 10. The highest value for VIF was 1.04. This means that no values were indicative of problematic collinearity. The inspection of the normal probability plot of standardized residuals as well as the scatterplot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values indicated that the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity were met. Also, mahalanobis distance did not exceed the critical [χ^2 for $df = 4$ (at $\alpha = 0.001$) of 13.82] for any case in the data file, indicating that multivariate outliers were not of concern, and relatively high tolerances for the eight predictors in the regression model indicated that multicollinearity would not interfere with the interpretation of the outcome of the MRA.

In combination, gender, marital status, occupation, age, exposure, extent of exposure, motivation and factor for candidates preference accounted for a statistically significant 97% of variability in advertised issues from both political parties, adjusted [$R^2 = .969$, $F(8, 378) = 1172.6$, $p < .005$]. Of the 8 primary predictor variables, four variables (marital status,

occupation, advertisement exposure and factor for candidates' preference) made a unique statistically significant contribution to the model. Voters motivation made a unique statistical significant contribution to the model [($\beta = .558$, $t(368) = 10.708$, $p < .005$), advertisement exposure, [($\beta = .067$, $t(368) = 3.805$, $p < .005$), marital status [($\beta = .257$, $t(368) = 9.364$, $p < .005$), occupation [($\beta = .203$, $t(368) = 4.776$, $p < .005$), and factor for candidates preference [($\beta = .129$, $t(368) = 3.809$, $p < .005$).

According to Table 3 below, the standardized beta values (β) of the significant predictors show that voter's motivation had an impact on how voters interpreted the issues advertised in the newspapers by PDP and APC than any other variable in the regression model. This means that voters who are well motivated to vote in the election positively followed the issues advertised by both PDP and APC. Marital status is second with a beta value (β) of 9.364, followed by Occupation of the voter with a beta value (β) of 4.776. Factor for candidates' preference is next with a beta value (β) of 3.809. Finally, advertisement exposure with beta values (β) of 3.805.

This means that voters who reported that the issues advertised in the newspapers by the two political parties motivated them to vote during the elections, were public servants, married and factored those advertised issues in the preference for a candidate. This result reveals that those who are educated, married and are self-efficacious were more interested to follow issues PDP and APC advertised in the newspapers that has to do with 'improvement of the economy', 'fight against corruptions', 'job creation', and 'improvement in security' than those who may not be self-efficacious, less educated and unmarried

However, age and gender, appear to have no effect on how voters assessed the issues advertised in the newspapers by the two political parties during the 2019 presidential elections.

Table 3. Results for issues advertised in the newspapers from PDP and APC

Model	Beta	T	Sig.	F	Adjusted R Square
1				1172.6	.969
(Constant)		-2.892	.004**		
Voters Motivation	.584	10.708	.000*		
Extent of exposure	-.232	-3.130	.002**		
Age	-.001	-.014	.989		
Gender	.039	1.398	.163		
Marital status	.257	9.364	.000*		
Occupation	.203	4.776	.000*		
advertisement exposure	.067	3.805	.000*		
Factor for candidates' preference	.129	3.809	.000*		

Note: Regression coefficient * $p < .001$, ** $p < .005$

7. Discussion and Conclusion

The study investigated political advertisements and voter behaviour during the 2019 election in South-South region of Nigeria using responses from a paper-based survey of voters of the region. A substantial number of voters in South-South Nigeria were exposed to newspapers political advertising during the 2019 presidential elections in Nigeria. Table 2 above shows that majority of this study's sample were exposed to the issues advertised in the newspapers by both PDP and APC. Out of 400 voters who were exposed to newspapers political advertisement about the 2019 presidential elections, 77% of the voters received high exposure only 13% received lower exposure. The implication of this is that voters were highly exposed to the newspapers' political advertisements during the 2019 presidential elections.

This finding is like the finding of other scholars. For example, results demonstrate that exposure to television broadcast improved the political knowledge of the voters, and that the information delivered helped the voters to understand the election process and improved the knowledge regarding the voting process such as where to thumb print during election (Aririguzoh, 2011). Results from this study and similar studies illustrate that the most effective political strategies for motivating, mobilising support and attracting voters during election is by exposure to advertisements. This is because political advertisements expose voters to necessary information about candidates' age, qualification, educational background, occupation, and political agenda. Findings show that exposure to political advertisements motivates and exerts great influence on the society and that political advertisements provide information to voters as they weigh their

voting options, that political advertisements shape voters perception of the campaign and frame the way in which voters interpret or seek out information (Daignault et al., 2013). In Nigeria, this result support results from other studies. It has been argued that the electorates in Ondo State were exposed to political advertisement on television, that this exposure influenced their choice of candidate to the extent that they perceived the messages to be credible and that these messages changed their perception towards the candidate (Olufemi, 2016). The high percentage of voters who were exposed to newspaper political advertisements during the 2019 presidential elections mirrors the findings that showed that 50% of Ogun State respondents were exposed to political advertisements during the 2011 governorship election, and that voters in Ogun State relied on political advertising (campaign message) for information about the government.

From the forgoing, it is logical to argue that newspaper political advertisements set the agenda for the citizens and educate them on the importance of elections during the 2019 presidential elections in South-South region of Nigeria. The basic essence of political advertising is to bring about attitudinal change of individual voters who expose themselves to such advertisements. Although, political advertisements seem to alter the composition of the voters but the registered partisan voters are much more likely to vote for their own party's candidate (Saleem et al., 2015). These compositions of changes result in nontrivial effect on the actual voting. The implication of this is that there may be other social factors that motivate voters during election.

Some of the issues in the newspaper advertorials of the two political parties in the 2019 presidential election were considered as motivating factors to voters' decision in South-South region of Nigeria. Findings from this study demonstrate that issues advertised in the newspapers by both PDP and APC motivated voters to vote during the 2019 presidential election in South-South region of Nigeria. This finding shows that age and gender were statistically insignificant on the motivation to vote and voting preference of voters who were exposed to newspaper political advertisements during the 2019 presidential election in South-South region of Nigeria. This finding is contrary to some studies. For example, it has been stated that personal experience and not political advertisements impact voters motivation and voting preference (Kjeldsen & Hess, 2021). This reliance on personal experience and cynicism, is as a result of broken political trust (Andrei, 2018). This broken political trust encompasses even the use of celebrities for political endorsement and advertisements (Fernández-Gómez et al., 2021). Another findings revealed that voters will need to be familiar with the politician before political advertisements and messages can resonate with the voters (Nai & Maier, 2021). Unlike these delineated studies, this study finds that political advertisements impact voters' motivation and preference. This supports the argument that political advertisements and engagement bring the politician closer to the voter and improve the bonds between the voter and the politician thereby influencing the voting preference (Tranová & Veneti, 2021).

This finding also support others that found that political advertising was the major factor that influenced voters' choice during the 2015 presidential election in Nigeria (Tejumaiye et al., 2018). Findings from Okpara et al. (2016) found that the political advertisements have significant effects on the electorate. This is because voters' choice of candidates in the 2015 governorship election in Imo States were significantly influenced by candidate's political advertising. Although the result of this study did not find such sweeping effect, data from this study uncovered a relationship between occupation, education, and marital status as well as exposure to newspapers political advertisements exposure and voters' motivation to vote and voting preference during the election. Results have also found that the different format, language, style and techniques used in delivering candidate's political messages help in determining voter's choice of a candidate in an election and that a good number of the public have great regard for media messages, and that this, passively influence them (Opene, 2012). This relates to the Yale's attitude change theory. The newspaper political advertisements helped not only set agenda during the election in 2019, but also helped in voter's behavioural change in support of certain political candidates. Like Yale's attitude change theory, the political advertisements in this study conditioned voters to change their attitudes and adopt the attitude or support a particular political aspirant that the advertisements have recommended.

This study investigated newspapers political advertisements and voters' behaviour during the 2019 presidential elections in South-South region of Nigeria. The study confirmed that majority of the voters were exposed to issues that were presented in the newspapers by the two political parties (PDP and APC). Majority of the issues in the newspaper political advertisements during the 2019 presidential elections motivated voters and were consequential to voters' voting decision and preference of candidates during the 2019 presidential election. This means that the exposure to information advertised in the newspapers during elections contributed among others factors to influence voter behaviour during the election.

This study also uncovered that those voters who reported to have been motivated to vote due to issues advertised in the newspapers by the two political parties (PDP and APC) were married, civil servants and those who factored the advertised issues in their preference for a political candidate. This result demonstrates that the media played an agenda setting function during the 2019 election campaigns. South-South voters exposed themselves and discussed the issues APC and PDP advertised in their newspaper's political advertisements during the 2019 presidential election.

This study recommends that political parties and political aspirants in Nigeria should place their political advertisements

in popular newspapers as that will expose their message and campaign promises to the voters. These voters are themselves opinion leaders. Future research should conduct a newspaper content analysis to ascertain the issues advertised in the newspapers and online media in an election. Also, it is suggested that quantitative study that represents Nigeria be conducted to evaluate the impact of political advertisements in voter behaviour in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria.

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