

INEC-Sponsored Media Messages and Voters' Turnout during the 2019 General Elections in Nigeria: A Study of Perception of Warri Voters

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Abstract

The media are partners in a democracy because they ensure political participation in the democratic process. Audience perception of the media is vital as it affects credibility and believability of the media and their messages. Credibility and believability of the media are predicated to an extent upon the source of media messages. These issues prompted this study which examined the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria with specific reference to Warri voters. The study which adopted survey research methodology sampled 384 respondents and used questionnaire to collect data. Data collected were analysed by simple percentages and measures of central tendencies, while hypotheses were tested by Regression Analysis. The study found among others that voters in Warri metropolis perceived that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections were credible and thus created the expected level of awareness and sensitization about the general elections. This consequently and significantly influenced voters' turnout in Warri metropolis during the 2019 general elections. The study thereafter recommended among others that INEC should continue to sponsor unbiased media messages to voters as this will strengthen elections and democracy in Nigeria.

Keywords: audience perception, democracy, media, perception

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

The media are key partners in promoting democratic tenets in any society. They can engender political participation and other elements of true democracy. That is why Umukoro, Irori, Ivwighren and Ugbome (2018) argue that the media (mass media) are necessary tools for information dissemination in actualizing development. Also, Downing (1995) cited in Ibraheem, Ogwezzy-Ndisika and Tejumaiye (2015) opines that the media are structures of power within societies. No doubt, the Nigerian media have played pivotal roles in setting agenda for the country's political development (Ibraheem, Ayedun-Aluma & Adewoye, 2013). Ibraheem, Ayedun-Aluma & Adewoye, (2013) further opined that Nigeria's political history is intertwined with its media history because of the prominent role the media have played at every strategic point in the country's political development. Since the return to uninterrupted democratic governance in 1999, Nigeria's media have been critical stakeholders in the country's politics. They are actively setting agenda for political discourse, providing perspectives and direction on political issues, as well as framing agenda for political decisions and mobilizing for mass participation in political activities (Ibraheem et al, 2013). The stakeholders' role of the media in democracy was rightly captured by Habermas (1991) who contended that organs of information and political debates: newspapers, television, journals as well as institutions of political discussions: parliament, political clubs, literary salons, public assemblies, pubs, coffee houses, meeting halls and other public space, are spheres where socio-political discussions take place.

Perception is an important concept among psychologists and sociologists. Umukoro & Ogwezi, (2021) opine that perception is the lens by which an individual views his/her world. Similarly, McLeod, Wise and Perryman (2017) are of the view that perception is a central concept of social research which recognized that "reality" is in the mind of the observer. It gives interpretation to phenomena around our environment and it is also the response to stimuli of what we

see, feel or think. Individuals create perception of the world around them from the media. In line with the above assertion, Tsfati and Cohen (2013) argued that people are exposed to information about the world by the (news) media. Consequently, while media information shapes one's opinions about the world, attitudes towards the media themselves are also developed in the course of the consumption of news and other media contents (Tsfati & Cohen, 2013).

Audience perception of the media is crucial because it impacts on credibility and believability of the media and their messages. If audience perceive media messages as credible, they believe and respond positively towards such messages. Audience perception constructs audience attitudes towards the media and this in turn greatly affects audience social and political behaviours (Tsfati & Cohen, 2013). Credibility and believability of media message are predicated upon factors such as audience perception of the media as well as the source or sponsor of the media message. This is the focus of this study which is to find out the perception of Warri voters towards the INEC-sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The study will examine whether the INEC-sponsored media messages influenced the political behaviour of Warri voters during the 2019 general elections. The study will equally ascertain whether the INEC-sponsored media messages affected voters' turnout in Warri metropolis during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Credibility of source or sponsor of media messages and believability of such messages by media audience are issues that are still raging. They have attracted the attention of researchers within Nigeria and beyond. Audience perception of media messages sponsored by different sponsors have therefore attracted the attention of researchers. Accordingly, various studies have been conducted on the issues above with focus on audience perception of media messages sponsored by media organisations themselves (Akpan and Onyebuchi, 2012); audience perception of media messages sponsored by various levels of governments (Ajaero, Okoro and Ajaero, 2016); and audience perception of media messages sponsored by political candidates and political parties (Nkana, 2015; Okoro and Onakpa, 2016). However, it is the researcher's belief that studies with focus on audience perception of media messages sponsored by an electoral umpire like INEC remains non-existent, thus creating an empirical gap which this study seeks to fill. In the light of the aforesaid, this study seeks to ascertain viewers' perception of the INEC-sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria, by obtaining research evidence from voters in Warri metropolis.

Specifically, the study examined the perception of voters in Warri metropolis on the INEC-sponsored media message during the 2019 general elections. Also, the study sought to find out whether the INEC-sponsored media messages created adequate awareness and sensitization about the 2019 general elections among voters in Warri metropolis. Still, the study found out whether the INEC-sponsored media messages influenced voter's turnout during the 2019 general elections in Warri metropolis.

1.3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

In view of the above research objectives, the following research questions were put forth:

- (i) What is the perception of voters in Warri metropolis on the INEC-sponsored media messages during the 2019 general election?
- (ii) Was adequate awareness and sensitization created about the elections among voters in Warri metropolis by the INEC-sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections?
- (iii) What influence does the INEC-sponsored media messages have on voters' turnout in Warri metropolis during the 2019 general elections?

The study hypothesized thus:

- H₀₁: The INEC-Sponsored media messages did not create the expected level of awareness and sensitization of the 2019 general elections among voters in Warri metropolis.
- H₀₂: The INEC-Sponsored media messages did not have significant influence on voters' turnout in Warri metropolis during the 2019 general elections.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Review of Perception

Umukoro and Ogwezi (2021) argue that perception is an important part of an individual as it is the prism from which that an individual perceives his or her world. It is the spectacle with which individuals view their worlds. McLeod, Wise and Perryman (2017) also contend that perception is a central concept of social research which recognized that "reality" is in the mind of the observer. McLeod, Wise and Perryman (2017) further argue that perception entails how individuals perceive their worlds, as conditioned by their past experiences and predispositions, which include potential patterns, stereotypes, biases, and distortions in those predispositions. Additional factors such as political ideology, social class, race,

gender, as well as recent exposure are part of the factors which help individuals form perceptions of their worlds.

Perception gives interpretation to phenomena around people's environments. It is also the response to the stimuli of what we see, feel or think. The media shape people's perception of the world around them. Tsfati and Cohen (2013) opine that people are exposed to information about the world by news media and mass media. It is no doubt that while media information shapes people's opinions about the world, attitudes towards the media themselves are developed in the course of consuming news and other media contents. Studies have shown that perception of the media are generalized (Lee, 2005) or targeted at the way specific topics are covered by the media (Gunther & Liebhart, 2007). This means that audience have their perceptions about the media and their contents based on certain dynamics. These influences are trust in the media (Kohring & Matthes, 2007) and audience perception as to whether media favour or are hostile towards specific topics or groups (Vallone, Ross & Lepper, 1985). Others factors are beliefs about how powerful the media are as well as how they affect the individual, other individuals, and society at large (Davidson, 1983).

2.2 Audience Perception of the Media

Since perception is the spectacle with which individuals view their worlds ((Umukoro & Ogwezi, 2021), perception begets attitude. Positive perception leads to positive attitude. Consequently, audience perception of the media is vital as it affects credibility and believability of the media and their messages. If audience perceive the media as credible, they believe and accept their messages. Such message therefore gets friendly and positive response from the audience. Audience perception creates audience attitudes towards the media. Tsfati and Cohen (2013) contend that audience attitudes towards the media affect a lot of social and political behaviours. Data from a social survey show that United States' (US) citizens are losing trust in the American media, particularly the press. This is so because lack of trust grew from 14.6% in 1973 to a high 41% in 2006 (Tsfati & Cohen, 2013). In like manner, James Carey (1995, p. 393) corroborated this finding when he said: "above all, the press lost credibility and respect; it was no longer believed. As poll after poll showed, journalists have earned the distrust of the public". Why this media distrust and negative perception? Some put the blame for the decline in audience trust of the media on politicians who increasingly slam the media (Watts, Domke, Shah & Fan, 1999). Others blame it on the mounting coverage of the media by the media that results in heightened audience awareness of journalistic blunders and scandals (Watts, Domke, Shah & Fan, 1999). Still, others argue that people are cynical about the media because the media are cynical themselves (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). This group are of the view that the way journalists "frames politics strategically" leads to political cynicism which in turn feeds back on journalists (D'Angelo & Lombard, 2008). Regardless of the increase in audience mistrust of the media in the US in recent decades, additional studies have tried to further reveal why people trust or mistrust the media. Two reasons have emerged. The first reason linked audience distrust in media to the content of media messages, that is, feature of the text. For example, journalists' sourcing practices such as quoting or not quoting a source in a story headline was found to be related to the perceived untrustworthiness of a news story (Sundar, 1998). The second reason linked audience's lack of trust in media to audience characteristics. Trust in the media is related to interpersonal trust (Tsfati, 2002) and political trust among media audience (Jones, 2004).

From the above, it is obvious that media credibility and believability are crucial among audience. Media credibility and believability are determined by dynamics such as regular slamming of the media by politicians, practices of media practitioners themselves (journalists), the way the media frame issues, the sponsor of media message, and physiognomies of media audience, e.t.c.

2.3 Media and Democracy

The media are considered stakeholders in the democratic process. The stakeholders' roles of media in promoting democratic tenets were rightly captured by Habermas (1991) who posited that organs of information and political debates such as newspapers, television, journals as well as institutions of political discussions such as parliament, political clubs, literary salons, public assemblies, pubs, coffee houses, meeting halls and other public space are spheres where socio-political discussions take place. The media provide communication space for all stakeholders of the democratic process. For Kur and Nyekwere (2015), the media provide space that mediates between civil society and the realm of power. They create fora for open discussion of all issues of public concern during which discursive argumentation is employed to ensure public good (Isola, 2010). Diamond (1999) on his part argues that three factors sustain democracy: these are civil society, political culture and political institutions. The mass media are part of the civil society. The unique advantages of the media such as audibility of radio, visibility of print, selectivity and flexibility, exert tremendous influence on the democratization process (Kur & Nyekwere, 2015). The power and influence of the media in politics, particularly television was highlighted when former French President De-Gaulle once asked former American President John Kennedy: "How can you control your country if you don't control television (the media)?" (as cited in Agbanu and Nwammuo, 2009). Similarly, Rajagopal (2001) opines that concern for democracy necessitates concern for television (media). In advancing democracy, the media specifically television are expected to discharge certain roles as enumerated by Isola (2010) thus: (i) surveillance of contemporary events that are likely to affect citizens positively; (ii) identification of key

socio-political issues; (iii) provision of platforms for advocacy for causes and interests; (iv) transmission of diverse contents across the various dimensions and factions of political discourse; (v) scrutiny of government officials, their institutions and other agencies; (vi) giving incentives and information to allow citizens to become actively informed participants rather than spectators; (vii) provision of principled resistance to external forces attempting to subvert media autonomy; and (viii) respectful consideration of the audience as potentially concerned, sense-making efficacious citizens. The above functions implies that the media, cum television should not only be mirror that reflects the face of democracy, the beauty spots and the warts (Dukor, 1998), but they should also be a voice of advocacy for the collective good of society (Kur & Nyekwere, 2015). As noted by Pate (2011), media cum television in the above context especially for Nigeria's democracy should be answerable to the various constituencies that depend on them for information, education and direction on the functioning of the democratic system and process. The media should also strengthen their mediating roles through increased interactions with and among the various parties and stakeholders in the democratization process. The media should equally ensure that the conduct of each of the political stakeholders is in conformity with public interest. Lastly, the media should be responsible to stamp some elements of legitimacy on the democratic credentials of all stakeholders by publicly justifying their actions or inactions that are good to the democratization process (Kur & Nyekwere, 2015).

2.4 The 2019 General Elections in Nigeria

The 2019 general elections in Nigeria held on February 23, 2019, and March 9, 2019. The elections were conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) chaired by Prof. Mahmood Yakubu. Elections were held in February 23, 2019 to elect national leaders such as President and Vice President, Members of Senate and House of Representatives. Also, another set of elections were held in March 9, 2019, to elect Governors, Deputy Governors and Members of States' Houses of Assembly. The elections were originally scheduled for February 16, 2019 and March 2, 2019, but were postponed by one week due to logistical challenges as adduced by the Chairman of INEC, Professor Mahmood Yakubu (Wikipedia, 2019). The 2019 general elections were the most expensive elections ever held in Nigeria, costing 69 billion naira more than the 2015 general elections in Nigeria.

Similarly, Ohemeng (2019) states that from a pool of 73 presidential candidates, only 2 were considered front liners in the 2019 presidential elections. They are the incumbent President Muhamadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and Alhaji Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Ohemeng (2019) furthermore argues that some of the issues at the forefront of the 2019 general elections are corruption, poverty, Boko Haram, mismanagement of the country's huge oil reserves and the economy, especially as Nigeria experiences a slow rebound from economic recession in 2016. The 2019 general elections in Nigeria had a rough start. The elections which were scheduled for Saturday, February 16, was moved to Saturday, February 23, just five hours before polls were set to open. Professor Mahmood Yakubu who is chairman of INEC maintained that the decision was driven by logistical reasons and not political pressures. Nevertheless, the two biggest political parties, that is, the APC and the PDP accused each other of colluding with INEC in an attempt to influence the outcome of the elections. The 2019 general election recorded the lowest voters' turnout in Nigeria's electoral history as only 35.6 percent of registered voters came out to vote. One reason for this lowest voters' turnout was due to the postponement of the elections (Ohemeng, 2019). As only 35.6 percent of 73 million people who collected their voters' cards actually voted. Even the 2015 general elections had voters' turnout of 43.7 percent. The 2019 general election marked 20 years of uninterrupted democracy in Nigeria.

2.5 Review of Related Studies

Studies have been conducted on audience perception of media messages in Nigeria. In a study by Akpan and Onyebuchi (2012) which focused on television viewers' perception of messages of opinion polls results sponsored by mass media themselves, it was found that the Nigerian mass media audience perceive that the Nigerian mass media organisations did engage in the conduct of public opinion polls during political activities in the country. The study which drew sample from Enugu, Ikeja, Kano, Maiduguri, Port Harcourt and Abuja respectively also revealed that the extent to which the Nigerian mass media organisations conduct public opinion polls during electioneering period was low. Akpan and Onyebuchi's (2012) study furthermore indicated that the Nigerian mass media organisations do not specifically set aside funds to carry out opinion polls on other equally important information that would help attain political development, especially during electioneering era. The study concluded that the influence of public opinion polls on the political decisions of the Nigerian electorates is very low.

Similarly, Nkana (2015) in his study which focused on viewers' perception of pictorial impact of television political advertising (political campaigns) to voters sponsored by politicians and their political parties, found that respondents who are voters in Uyo, Akwa Ibom state metropolis were not significantly influenced by television political campaigns' pictures in the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. Nkana's (2015) study also indicated that even though television political campaigns and pictures did not significantly influence them during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, the political

campaigns and pictures were communicative and persuasive. Voters of Uyo municipality had already made up their minds on who to vote for in the 2011 general elections, despite the exposure to the television political campaigns pictures. Nkana's (2015) study concluded that though the pictorial television political campaigns did not influence their voting behaviour during the 2011 general elections, the political campaigns and pictures were highly communicative and persuasive.

In a related study conducted by Ajaero, Okoro and Ajaero (2016) that focused on audience perception of mass media messages on the 2012 floods sponsored by government, it was revealed that the Nigerian media audience perceive that the Nigerian mass media did not do well in warning them (the audience) ahead of the deadly flood that ravaged their communities in 2012. However, that perception changed as the mass media audience expressed satisfaction that the mass media did well later during the 2012 deadly flood and in the aftermath of the 2012 flood that ravaged their communities. Residents of Akiri, Odekpe and Osomala communities of Anambra state as well as residents of Kwale, Onicha Ukwuani and Utagbuogbe communities of Delta state where the study was carried out agreed that the mass media proffered solutions to mitigate the effects of the flood. The residents of the two states who are the participants of the study also claimed that the mass media recommended activities such as building of silt and runoff collection pits, sand filling of their lands, as well as the elevation of their building to prevent future occurrence of the devastation they experienced during the flood. Ajaero, Okoro and Ajaero's (2016) study concluded that the Nigerian mass media to a large extent, can influence people's perception, thereby spurring them into action.

In like manner, a study conducted by Akoja (2016) which focused on viewers' perception of the Nigerian mass media messages on development, found that Lagos and Abuja media audience perceived the mass media as doing well in engendering developments through their programmes. Akoja's (2016) study also indicated that Lagos and Abuja mass media audience perceived radio as more popular than television for disseminating developmental messages in Nigeria. The study further revealed that mass media messages have benefited Lagos and Abuja mass media audience in making useful suggestions to local authorities on developmental activities.

Yet, in another study by Okoro and Onakpa (2016) which focused on viewers' perception of television animated cartoon messages sponsored by politicians and political parties, it was revealed that television viewers in Lokoja, Makurdi and Lafia towns of North-Central, Nigeria perceive that television animated cartoons are tools for political campaigns. The study also indicated that viewers' level of education significantly predicted or affected their exposure to television animated cartoons as viewers with tertiary education are less exposed to television animated cartoons. Okoro and Onakpa's (2016) study emphasised that Lokoja, Makurdi and Lafia television viewers' level of education is a strong predictor of their perception of television animated cartoons. Okoro and Onakpa's (2016) study concluded that political parties and politicians who sponsor political campaign pictures on television in the study area should know what kind of visual images or pictures to put out in order to have impact on viewers.

Lastly, Adewole, Shokunbi, Ajeyet and Sahid (2018) in their study which focused on audience perception of the reportage of politics by mass media in Oyo state, revealed that mass media audience in that state in Nigeria, had negative perception of the way the mass media reported politics. Adewole et al (2018) study further indicated that membership of political group affected perception of group members on political reportage. This means that members of political group interpret political issues from the group's perspective. Adewole et al (2018) study concluded that even though urban residents in Oyo, and indeed Nigerians are politically active, rural dwellers appear to be more politically conscious and vibrant than their urban counterparts

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical background for this study is the consistency theories. The consistency theories as cited in Onakpa and Okoro (2016) suggest that media messages must be consistent with pre-existing attitudes of the audience before they can have effects on them. Klapper (1960) as cited in Okoro and Onakpa (2016) outlined several postulations on the effects of mass media, some of which are as follows; "mass media ordinarily do not serve as a necessary and sufficient cause of audience effect, but rather function through a nexus of mediating factors and influences. These mediating factors render mass communication as a contributor, agent in a process of re-enforcing existing conditions". The main mediating factor which Klapper considered responsible for the functions and effects of mass communication are:

- Selective Exposure: People's tendency to expose themselves to messages that agree with their pre-conceived interest and attitudes.
- Selective Perception: People's inclination to their existing views.
- Selective Retention: People retain media messages that align with their cultural, religious and psychological beliefs.
- Selective Attention: Media audience select the message to pay attention to while ignoring others.

This theory is relevant to the study because it will provide insight into how Warri voters perceive the INEC-sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. The theory will also provide basis for the possible reason why Warri voters perceive the INEC-sponsored media messages the way they do.

4. Research Method

4.1 Research Design

The study adopted survey research design. Umukoro, Akpoghiran, Whiskey, Igbigbi and Ozegbe (2019) argue that survey uses questionnaire to gather data from respondents. The data gathered from respondents are further analysed to show relationship between and among variables. To Babbie (2010), survey is used for studies where individuals are the unit of analysis. Survey was adopted because this study involves sampling the opinion and perception of Warri residents on the INEC-Sponsored media messages disseminated during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria.

4.2 Population of the Study/Area of Study

The population of the study are voting residents in Warri metropolis, the administrative headquarters of Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. The voting population of Warri metropolis is 173,774 (INEC, 2019). Warri metropolis was selected because its residents are politically active and they are also exposed to different media such as radio, television, newspaper, magazine, and social media, among others.

4.3 Sample Size

From the population of 173,774, a sample size of 384 was drawn for the study using the sample size determination formula and table developed by Krejcie Robert and Morgan Daryle with confidence level of 95% and marginal error of 5.0% (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

4.4 Method of Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data were collected through structured questionnaire. Copies of the questionnaire were administered on participants taking cognizance of the different zones that make up Warri metropolis. This cognizance was done to achieve fair representation of respondents from all zones in Warri metropolis. The data gathered and generated from the participants of the study were analysed using simple percentages and measures of central tendencies. The hypotheses formulated in the study were tested by means of Regression Analysis.

5. Results and Discussion

Table 1 provided demographic data of respondents who participated in the study. On the gender of the respondents, majority (54%) of the study's participants are males while minority participants (46%) are females.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (Voters in Warri Metropolis)

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Respondents' Gender	Male	208	54%
	Female	176	46%
	Total	384	100%
Respondents' Age	18-25 years	72	19%
	26-35 years	112	29%
	36-45 years	88	23%
	46-55 years	48	13%
	56-65 years	40	10%
	66 and above years	24	6%
	Total	384	100%
Respondents' Marital Status	Single	132	34%
	Married	108	28%
	Divorced	88	23%
	Widowed	56	15%
	Total	384	100%
Respondents' Level of Education	No Formal Education	31	8%
	Primary Education	108	28%
	Secondary Education	161	42%
	Tertiary Education	84	22%
	Total	384	100%
Medium through which Respondents received the INEC-Sponsored Messages during the 2019 General Elections	Radio	73	19%
	Television	65	17%
	Newspaper	54	14%
	Magazine	38	10%
	Social Media	127	33%
	Others	27	7%
	Total	384	100%

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

The age distribution of respondents of the study showed that majority (29%) of the participants are between ages 26 and 35 years. This was followed by participants between ages 36 and 45 years (23%), between ages 18 and 25 years (19%), between ages 46 and 55 years (13%), between ages 56 and 65 years (10%), as well as between ages 66 years and above (6%) respectively.

The marital status of the study's participants revealed that majority of them are single (34%), this was followed by those who are married (28%), those who are divorced (23%) and those who are widowed (15%) correspondingly. On educational level of the respondents, data indicated that majority (42%) of the respondents have secondary education. This was followed by those with primary education (28%), those with tertiary education (22%) and those without any formal education (8%) disparately.

For the medium through which respondents received the INEC-Sponsored messages during the 2019 general elections, majority (33%) of the respondents received the INEC-Sponsored messages from social media. This was followed by those who received the INEC-Sponsored messages from radio (19%), those who received the INEC-Sponsored messages from television (17%), those who received the messages from newspaper (14%) and those who received the INEC-Sponsored messages from magazine (10%) accordingly. The least medium through which respondents received the INEC-Sponsored messages during the 2019 General elections was others (7%) which includes one-on-one interaction, group discussions platforms among others.

Table 2. Warri Voters' Perception of the INEC-Sponsored Media Messages during the 2019 General Elections

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
1	The INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections were properly designed and interesting to Warri voters.	4.41	0.57	Strongly Agree
2	The INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections were clear to the understanding of Warri voters.	4.46	0.56	Strongly Agree
3	The INEC-Sponsored Media Messages during the 2019 general elections discouraged Warri voters from indulging in any form of electoral malpractices.	4.36	0.54	Strongly Agree
4	The INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections were not biased towards any candidate or any political party.	4.50	0.56	Strongly Agree
5	Generally, the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections were okay and met Warri voter's expectations.	4.60	0.55	Strongly Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 2 provided data on respondents' (voters in Warri metropolis) perception of the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections. Result of participants' perception of the 1st item of the Questionnaire showed a mean of 4.41 with 0.57 as the corresponding standard deviation. This data suggests that majority of the participants strongly agree that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections were properly designed and interesting to voters in Warri metropolis. Respondents' perception of the 2nd item of the Questionnaire in Table 2 revealed a mean of 4.46 and standard deviation of 0.56. This result infers that majority of the study's participants strongly agree that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections were clear to the understanding of Warri voters.

On respondents' perception of the 3rd item of the Questionnaire as seen in Table 2 indicated a mean of 4.36 and standard deviation of 0.54. This denotes that majority of the respondents strongly agree that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections discouraged voters from indulging in any form of electoral malpractices. Additionally in Table 1, responses to the 4th item of the Questionnaire presented a mean of 4.50 and standard deviation of 0.56. This implies that majority of the respondents strongly agree that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections were not biased towards any candidate or any political party.

Lastly in Table 2, participants' perception of the 5th item of the Questionnaire displayed a mean of 4.60 and standard deviation of 0.55. This indicates that majority of the respondents strongly agree that generally, the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections were okay and met voter's expectations.

The findings above are in line with the findings of Akpan and Onyebuchi (2012) and Akoja (2016) who in their separate studies found that media audience were satisfied (positive perception) with the messages disseminated to them through the media.

Table 3. Awareness and Sensitization of Warri Voters on the Electioneering Processes through the INEC-Sponsored Media Messages during the 2019 General Elections

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
6	The INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections taught Warri voters the right way to cast their votes in all the elections.	4.38	0.55	Strongly Agree
7	The INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections encouraged Warri voters to come out to vote in the elections.	4.41	0.55	Strongly Agree
8	The INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections created adequate awareness and sensitization about the Presidential and National Assembly elections (National elections) among Warri voters.	4.31	0.55	Strongly Agree
9	The INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections created adequate awareness and sensitization about the Governorship and State Assembly elections (State elections) among Warri voters.	4.49	0.56	Strongly Agree
10	The INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections created adequate awareness and sensitization on all the elections conducted within Warri metropolis.	4.40	0.57	Strongly Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 3 shows participants' take on awareness and sensitization of Warri voters on the electioneering processes through the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections. Respondents' take on the 6th item of the Questionnaire in Table 3 indicated a mean of 4.38 and standard deviation of 0.55. This connotes that majority of the participants strongly agree that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections taught Warri

voters the right way to cast their votes in all the elections. Again participants' take on the 7th item of the Questionnaire as shown in Table 3 revealed a mean of 4.41 and standard deviation of 0.55. This suggests that majority of the study's participants strongly agree that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections encouraged voters to come out to cast their votes in the elections.

On respondents' responses to the 8th item of the Questionnaire as observed in Table 3, data presented a mean of 4.31 and standard deviation of 0.55. This infers that majority of the respondents strongly agree that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections created adequate awareness and sensitization about the Presidential and National Assembly elections (National elections) among Warri voters. Also, as displayed in Table 3 above, responses to the 9th item of the Questionnaire showed a mean of 4.49 and standard deviation of 0.56. This implies that majority of the respondents strongly agree that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections created adequate awareness and sensitization about the governorship and state assembly elections (State elections) among Warri voters.

Finally, respondents' take on the 10th item of the Questionnaire as shown in Table 3 above, disclosed a mean of 4.40 and standard deviation of 0.57. This denotes that majority of the respondents strongly agree that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections created adequate awareness and sensitization about all the elections within Warri metropolis.

Table 4. Voters' Turnout in Warri Metropolis during the 2019 General Elections as a Result of the INEC-Sponsored Media Messages Aired

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Remark
11	The awareness and sensitization created by the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections resulted in large turnout of voters in Warri metropolis during the Presidential and National Assembly elections (National elections).	4.28	0.72	Strongly Agree
12	The awareness and sensitization created by the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections resulted in large turnout of voters in Warri metropolis during the Governorship and State Assembly elections (State elections).	4.24	0.67	Strongly Agree
13	The large turnout of voters in the Presidential and National Assembly elections (National elections) during the 2019 general elections was as a result of the INEC-Sponsored media messages.	4.24	0.70	Strongly Agree
14	The awareness and sensitization created by the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections resulted in large turnout of Warri voters in all the elections.	4.24	0.67	Strongly Agree
15	The overall turnout of Warri voters in the 2019 general elections should largely be attributed to the INEC-Sponsored media messages prior to the elections.	4.23	0.72	Strongly Agree

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

Table 4 provided data on voters' turnout in Warri metropolis as a result of the INEC-Sponsored media messages aired during the 2019 general elections. Participants' responses to the 11th Item of the Questionnaire seen in Table 4 displayed a mean of 4.28 and standard deviation of 0.72. This connotes that majority of the participants strongly agree that the awareness and sensitization created by the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections resulted in large turnout of voters in the Presidential and National Assembly elections (National elections). Again as displayed in Table 4 above, Participants' take on the 12th item of the Questionnaire presented a mean of 4.24 and standard deviation of 0.67. This result indicates that majority of the study's participants strongly agree that the awareness and sensitization created by the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections resulted in large turnout of voters in the Governorship and State Assembly elections (State elections).

On participants' take on the 13th item of the Questionnaire, data revealed a mean of 4.24 and standard deviation of 0.70. This suggests that majority of the respondents strongly agree that the large turnout of voters in Warri metropolis in the Presidential and National Assembly elections (National elections) during the 2019 general elections was as a result of the INEC-Sponsored media messages. Moreover, as displayed in Table 4 above, respondents' responses to the 14th item of the Questionnaire showed a mean of 4.24 and standard deviation of 0.67. This infers that majority of the respondents strongly agree that the awareness and sensitization created by the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019

general elections resulted in large turnout of voters in Warri metropolis in all the elections.

Finally as observed in Table 4 above, participants' responses to the 15th item of the Questionnaire disclosed a mean of 4.23 and standard deviation of 0.72. This suggests that majority of the respondents strongly agree that the overall large turnout of Warri voters during the 2019 general elections should largely be attributed to the INEC-Sponsored media messages prior to the elections.

The above findings are in contrast with the finding of Nkana (2015) who found that the media messages during the 2011 general election in Nigeria did not influence voters' behaviour in Uyo, Akwa Ibom state in Nigeria.

6. Results of the Test of Hypotheses

Table 5. H₀₁: The INEC-Sponsored media messages did not create the expected level of awareness and sensitization of the 2019 general elections among voters in Warri metropolis

<i>Regression Analysis</i>					
<i>Source</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Prob>F</i>
<i>Model</i>	32.1256571	1	32.1256571		
<i>Residual</i>	42.1076766	382	0.11022952	291.44	0.0000
<i>Total</i>	74.2383338	383	0.193820715		

Source: Researchers' Computation, 2022.

This study tested two hypotheses by use of Regression Analysis. Hypothesis 1 results are as presented in the Table 5 above. The value of F_{cal} is 291.44 and the p-value is 0.0000. Therefore, since the F-value of 291.44 is higher than the table value ($F_{crit} = 3.84$), the null hypothesis is rejected. The alternate hypothesis is hereby accepted. This means that the INEC-Sponsored media messages created the expected level of awareness and sensitization of the 2019 general elections among voters in Warri metropolis.

Table 6: H₀₂: The INEC-Sponsored media messages did not have significant influence on voters' turnout in Warri metropolis during the 2019 general elections

<i>Regression Analysis</i>					
<i>Source</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Prob>F</i>
<i>Model</i>	33.6676864	1	33.6676864		
<i>Residual</i>	57.68565	382	0.151009555	222.95	0.0000
<i>Total</i>	91.3533364	383	.238520461		

Source: Researchers' Computation, 2022.

Hypothesis 2 results are as well presented in the Table 6 above. The value of F_{cal} is 222.95 while the p-value is 0.0000. It can be seen that the F-value of 222.95 is higher than the table value ($F_{crit} = 3.84$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected but the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This implies that the INEC-Sponsored media messages did have significant influence on voters' turnout in Warri metropolis during the 2019 general elections.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

The study examined the INEC-Sponsored media messages and voters' turnout during the 2019 general elections in Nigeria. This was achieved by surveying the perception of voters in Warri metropolis of Delta state, Nigeria. The study found that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections were properly designed for Warri voters. Also, the study revealed that the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections were not biased towards any candidate or political party. Again, the study indicated that the INEC-Sponsored media messages created the expected level of awareness and sensitization of the 2019 general elections among voters in Warri metropolis. Furthermore, the study showed that the INEC-Sponsored media messages did have significant influence on voters' turnout in Warri metropolis during the 2019 general elections. These findings implies that Warri voters affirmed the credibility of the INEC-Sponsored media messages during the 2019 general elections. Consequently, Warri voters believed the INEC-Sponsored media messages and this significantly influenced their voting behaviour (voters' turnout) during the 2019 general elections. However, the study found that Warri voters' received the INEC-Sponsored messages during the 2019 general elections more from social media than other media. This suggests that INEC deployed social media more than the other media in disseminating messages to voters during the 2019 general elections.

7.2 Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. INEC should continue to sponsor unbiased media messages to voters as this will strengthen elections and democracy in Nigeria.
2. INEC in future elections should deploy other media the same way it deployed the social media to disseminate messages to voters.

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