

Mass Media Electioneering Campaign and Uyo (Nigeria) Voters' Decision during 2011 General Elections

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Abstract

Mass media are indispensable avenues for political parties/candidates to reach a large percentage of the electorate who would otherwise have been unreached by political campaign messages delivered at rallies. The mass media through their coverage of electioneering campaigns and airing of political advertisements have the potential of influencing voting decisions of the electorate. This study found out that many factors come into play when voters make voting decisions. It also found out that the effectiveness of mass media electioneering campaigns during the 2011 General elections in Uyo–Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria was moderated by many factors such as: monetary and material inducement, geo-ethnic consideration, perception of fairness and balance exhibited by the mass media in their coverage as well as the persuasiveness of the campaign messages. The study therefore recommends that for the mass media to exert influence on voters' decision, they should exhibit fairness, balance, equal opportunity and access in their coverage of electioneering campaigns of all political parties and candidates.

Keywords: mass media, electioneering campaign and voter decision

1. Introduction

The mass media have always remained a key factor in the political sphere in democracy. During election, the mass media, especially the broadcast media; provide a link between the political party/candidate and the electorate. The mass media serve as a platform for political parties/candidates to campaign for votes.

Through coverage of electioneering campaigns and airing of political advertisements, the electronic media help in influencing voters' decision either in favour or against a given political party or candidate.

This paper would be discussed under the following sub-headings:

- (i) Keywords
- (ii) Theoretical framework
- (iii) Methodology/Research Questions
- (iv) Mass media as Key players in the Democratic Processes
- (v) Mass media and electioneering campaign coverage
- (vi) Mass media electioneering campaign and voters' decision during 2011 General election
- (vii) Conclusion /recommendations

2. Keywords

2.1 Mass Media

These refer to the print and electronic channels of communication; such as newspaper, magazines, radio and television through which political parties and candidates campaign for support during election.

2.2 Electioneering Campaign

This refers to the act or process of soliciting for support or votes for a given political party or candidate during election.

2.3 Voter Decision

This refers to process or act of demonstrating support for a given political party or candidate through actual casting of vote for such party or candidate in an election.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study has as its theoretical framework the agenda setting and social responsibility theories.

Nigeria operates a mixed mass media system –government controlled and private ownership. The electronic media are largely in the hands of government-Federal and State, with few privately owned broadcast stations. The print media are dominated by private ownership, with very few owned by State Government. Until 1992 when the then military government headed by General Ibrahim Babangida deregulated the broadcast industry, electronic media in Nigeria were all owned and controlled by Federal and State Government. With this media mix, it is easy to understand why news contents in the Nigerian mass media often reflect the pattern of ownership. Consequently, this media mix places a heavy burden of Agenda Setting and Social Responsibility on the mass media in Nigeria, with differing public perception of mass media performance.

3.1 Agenda – Setting Theory

One of the powers or effects of the mass media is agenda-setting. McCombs and Shaw quoted by Griffin (1991) explain that the “mass media have ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agenda to the public agenda.... We judge as important what the media judge as important.” Media coverage of issues confers importance on them and helps the audience to treat certain issues as also being more important than others. The conferment consequently influences the attitudes or decisions of the audience towards the subjects on the agenda. The setting of agenda by the media implies that people look up to them for cues to issues of salience. People want the media to assist them to determine ‘reality’ and influence norms. The media often choose and emphasize certain topics, thereby causing the public to also choose and emphasize these issues Griffin (1991). According to McQuail (2003). The media help to “establish an order of priorities in a society about its problems and objectives.” Burns (1977) also argues that:

The critic of newspapers and broadcasting see their power as lying in controlling the agenda, in their ability to select certain issues for discussion and decision and to ignore others as non-existent; and in the ability to treat certain conflicts of interests as manifestly proper material and others as too complex, or marginal, or unmanageable.

Through what Burns calls “news tasting – a process of selecting what should count as news and what should not – the media allow the public to crave that which they already adjudged salient. McQuail and Windahl (2003), quoting McCombs and Shaw, state that “audiences not only learn about public issues and other matters through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the mass media place upon it.” The basic idea is that amongst a given range of issues or topics, those which get more media attention will grow in their familiarity and perceived importance over a period of time and those which get less will decline correspondingly. Brosius and Weimann (2002) point out that “even though the media may not be very successful in telling us what opinions to hold, they are often quite effective in telling us what to have opinions or what not to think about.” By paying attention to such issues and neglecting others, the mass media will have an effect on public opinion. People will tend to know about these things which the mass media deal with and adopt the order of priority assigned to different issues. Cassata and Asante (1978) also explain that the agenda-setting theory assumes that a direct, positive relationship exists between media coverage and the salience of a topic in the public mind. The relationship is stated in causal terms: by conferring status on an issue, the media structure what is important.

3.2 Social Responsibility

Also relevant to this paper is the social responsibility theory.

The social responsibility theory ascribes basically six functions to the press. Cassata and Asante (78) list these functions to include:

- 1) Providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs.
- 2) Instructing and informing the public to make it capable of self-government.
- 3) Protecting the rights of the individual against government through its watchdog function.
- 4) Maintaining the economic equilibrium of the system by bringing together buyer, seller and advertiser.
- 5) Providing entertainment
- 6) Remaining independent of outside pressures by maintaining its own economic self-sufficiency.

Democracy thrives on the principle of informed electorate making responsible choices and decisions. The mass media are not only key avenues for providing the required information; they also determine what is available in the public domain. To achieve this, the mass media must discharge its social responsibility. McQuail (2003) highlights the main principles of social responsibility as follows:

- a) Media should accept and fulfill certain obligation to society.
- b) These obligations are mainly to be met by setting high or professional standards of information, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance.
- c) In accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions.
- d) The media should avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence or civil disorder or give offence to minority groups.
- e) The media as a whole should be pluralistic and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and right of reply.
- f) Society and public, following the first named principle, have a right to expect high standards of performance and intervention can be justified to secure the, or, a public good.
- g) Journalists and media professionals should be accountable to society as well as to employers and the market.

The mass media can assist in institutionalizing democratic culture in Nigeria if they effectively engage in relevant agenda-setting as well as discharge their social responsibility.

4. Methodology/Research Questions

This paper adopted a survey method. A multi-stage approach was adopted in selecting the respondents. Uyo metropolis – capital city of Akwa Ibom State, was stratified into five sectors with Ibom Connection – a sculptural piece – serving as the central points. The five major roads served as sectors, while respondents of voting age – 18 years – were purposively selected from persons who resided within the respective sectors. One respondent was selected after the interval of five houses.

The study had the following research questions:

- i) What was Uyo residents' perception of mass media's coverage of electioneering campaigns during the 2011 General elections?
- ii) Did mass media's coverage of electioneering campaigns affect Uyo residents' voting decision during 2011 general elections?
- iii) Which mass medium did Uyo residents regard as fair and balanced in the coverage of 2011 electioneering campaign in Akwa Ibom State?
- iv) What other factors impacted on Uyo residents' voting decision during the 2011 General elections?
- v) Which political party/candidate did Uyo residents consider mature and issue-oriented in mass media electioneering campaign?

5. Mass Media as Key Players in the Democratic Process

The mass media perform a crucial role in the democratic process. According to Gurevitch and Blumler (1977), the mass media possess enormous powers and their power come from three sources – structural, psychological and normative.

According to them, the structural root of the power of the mass media “springs from their unique capacity to deliver to the politician an audience, which in size and composition, is unavailable to him by any other means”.

The psychological root of the media power stems from the relationships of credibility and trust that different media organisations have succeeded in developing (albeit to different degrees) with members of their audiences. Gurevitch and Blumler (1977) assert that “it is the combined influence of these structural and psychological sources of strength that enable the media to interpose themselves between politicians and the audience and to “intervene” in other political processes as well”. This interposition, according to them, is expressed in the way in which the mass media are capable of restructuring the timing and character of political events (conventions, demonstrations, leader appearances, etc.), defining crisis situations to which politicians are obliged to react, requiring comment on issues that media personnel have emphasized as important, injecting new personalities into the political dialogue (such as television interviews) and stimulating the growth of new communication agencies (such as public relations firms, opinion poll agencies, and political advertising and campaign management specialists). On the other hand, the normative root of media power stems from the respect that is accorded in competitive democracies to such tenets of liberal philosophy as freedom of expression and the need for specialized organs to safeguard citizens against possible abuses of political authority. From the foregoing, the mass media occupy strategic place in the polity.

Besley, Burgess and Prat (2002), emphasize that a “free or non-captured media can affect political outcomes through three routes, namely: sorting, discipline and policy salience”. Sorting refers to the process by which politicians are selected to hold office. The kind of information media provide can be important to voters who are

deciding who to put in charge. This includes information about candidate's previous tract records. Their actions while in office may also be an important source of information about their underlying motivation or competence. By publishing stories or advertisements that responsibly cast light on this, the media can be a powerful force. The role of the media in achieving discipline is most relevant in situations of hidden action. This involves exposure of activities which perpetrators do not want the public to know. The media can also affect which issues are salient to voters. This would be made possible or easier through political communication or political advertisements.

Islam (2002) notes that the media industry, whether public or private plays an important role in any economy by garnering support or opposition for those who govern, by highlighting or failing to do so the views and/or sins of industry, by providing a voice for the people or not doing so, and by simply spreading economic information. The mass media not only carry information about the economy, but also messages about the social, political and religious lives of the people. In the opinion of Wolfensohn (2002),

a free press is not a luxury. It is at the core of equitable development. The media can expose corruption. They can keep a check on government action. They let people voice diverse opinions on governance and reform, help build public consensus to bring about change.

It can be deduced from Wolfensohn's opinion that easy and equitable access to the mass media as well as diversity of views in media contents are not only indispensable, but are crucial for the emergence of a democratic society and attainment of development.

Democracy thrives on the principle of informed electorate making responsible choices and decisions. The mass media are not only key avenues for providing the required information, they also determine what is available in the public domain. Mass media enrich democracy, while democracy provides conducive environment for an efficient functioning of the mass media. It is almost impossible to have a democratic society without the full complement of a robust mass media system.

In the opinion of Curran (1991) a "democratic function of the media system is to act as an agency of representation. It should be organised in a way that enables diverse social groups and organisations to express alternative viewpoints. This goes beyond, however, simply disseminating diverse opinion in the public domain. Part of the media system should function in a way that invigorates civil society. It should also assist collective organisations to mobilize support; help them to operate as representative vehicles for the views of their supporters, aid them to register effective protest, develop and promulgate alternatives. In other words, the representational role of the media includes helping to create the condition in which alternative viewpoints and perspectives are brought fully into play.

According to Curran and Gurevitch, another democratic function of the media is to assist the realisation of the common objectives of society through agreement or compromise between conflicting interests. The media should contribute to this process by facilitating democratic procedure for resolving conflict and defining collectively agreed aims. For example, the media should brief the electorate about the political choices involved in elections, and so help to constitute elections as defining moments for collective decision about the public direction of society. The media system should also facilitate organised representations by giving due publicity to the activities, programmes and thinking of organised groups in addition to the formal processes of government and opposition party. But the media system is itself an important mechanism for collective self reflection. By staging a public dialogue in which diverse interests participate, the media should also play a direct role in assisting the search for areas of common agreement and compromise. It should also provide an adequate way in which people can engage in a wider public discourse that can result in the modification of social attitudes affecting social relationships between individuals and groups.

It is impossible to have a truly democratic society without an efficient mass media system. A political system that lays claim to democracy without a virile mass media would certainly be a 'malnourished' and 'still-birth' political contraption. That is why McNair (2002) has aptly pointed out that "in democratic political systems, media function both as transmitters of political communication which originates outside the media organisation itself and as senders of political messages constructed by journalists".

He lists five functions of the mass media in a democratic society to include the following:

- Firstly, they must inform citizens of what is happening around them (what we may call the 'surveillance' or 'monitoring' functions of the media).

- Secondly, they must educate as to the meaning and significance of the ‘facts’ (the importance of this function explains the seriousness with which journalists protect their objectivity, since their value as educators presumes a professional detachment from the issues being analysed).
- Thirdly, the media must provide a platform for public political discourse, facilitating the formation of ‘public opinion’, and feeding that opinion back to the public from whence it came. This must include the provision of space for the expression of dissent without which the notion of democratic consensus would be meaningless.
- The media’s fourth function is to give publicity to governmental and political institutions – the ‘watchdog’ role of journalism, exemplified by the performance of the United States media during the Watergate episode and, more recently, the British *Guardian*’s coverage of the cash-for-questions scandal, in which investigative journalists exposed the practice of members of parliament accepting payment for the asking of parliamentary questions. ‘Public opinion’ can only matter—that is, have an influence on ‘objective’ political reality—to the extent that “the acts of whoever holds supreme power are made available for public scrutiny, meaning how far they are visible, ascertainable, accessible, and hence accountable” McNair (2002). There must be, to use Michail Gorbachou’s famous formulation, a degree of ‘openness’ surrounding the activities of the political class if the ‘public opinions’ of the people are to have any bearing on decision making.
- Finally, the media in democratic societies serve as a channel for the advocacy of political viewpoints. Parties require an outlet for the articulation of their policies and programmes to a mass audience, and thus the media must be open to them. Furthermore, some media, mainly in the print sector, will actively endorse one or other of the parties at sensitive times such as elections. In this latter sense, the media’s advocacy function may also be viewed as one of persuasion McNair (2002).

In short, democracy presumes ‘an open state in which people are allowed to participate in decision-making, and are given access to the media, and other information networks through which advocacy occurs McNair (2002). It also presumes, as we have stated, an audience sufficiently educated and knowledgeable to make rational and effective use of the information circulating in the public sphere.

Hallin and Mancini (2004) explain that “in political markets, electors need information to judge the record of government and to select among alternative candidates and parties. If citizens are poorly informed, if they lack practical knowledge, they may cast ballot that fail to reflect their real interests. Moreover, policy makers need accurate information about citizens, to respond to public concerns, to deliver effective services meeting real human needs, and also, in democracies to maximize popular electoral support to be returned to office.

Information in the political market place comes from two primary sources. Personal interactions, which commonly include informal face-to-face political conversations with friends, family and colleagues, traditional campaign rallies, community forums, and grassroots meetings. These information resources remain important, especially for election campaigns in poorer democracies, and the growth of e-mail and online discussion groups may revive the importance of personal political communications. But these channels have been supplemented in modern campaigns by the mass media, including the printed press (newspapers and magazines), electronic broadcasts (radio and television news), and also more recently the bundle of technologies associated with the internet (including political websites). The rise of the internet may be a particularly important development for the process of democratization, due to its potential for interactive, horizontal linkages breaking down the traditional boundaries of space and time, and facilitating oppositional voices, new social movements, and transnational advocacy networks, despite the highly uneven distribution of these technologies around the globe.

Free press serves to strengthen the process of democratization and human development in their watchdog role, where the channels of mass communications function to promote government transparency and public scrutiny of those in authority, highlighting policy failures, maladministration by public officials, corruption in the judiciary and scandals in the corporate sector. Investigative journalism can open the government’s record to external scrutiny and critical evaluation, and hold authorities accountable for their actions, whether public sector institutions, nonprofit organisations or private companies.

Moreover, a free press can provide a public sphere, mediating between citizens and the states, facilitating informed debate about the major issues of the day. If the channels of communication reflect the social and cultural diversity within each society, in a fair and impartial balance, then multiple interests and voices are heard in public deliberation. This role is particularly important during political campaigns. Fair access to the airwaves by opposition parties, candidates and opposition groups is critical for competitive, free and fair elections.

6. The Mass Media and Electioneering Campaigns Coverage

A major area where political actors spend money to disseminate their messages to their ‘consumers’ (electorate) is in the area of political advertising. According to McNair (2002) political advertising “refers to the purchase and use of advertising, in order to transmit political messages to a mass audience. The media used for this purpose may include cinema, billboards, the press, radio and television... Contemporary political advertising can be seen as an important means of informing citizens about who is standing, and what they are offering the citizenry in policy terms”.

Over sixty political parties were registered to contest the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. In Uyo, Akwa Ibom State (South South Nigeria), five political parties had significant presence in the State. They were: the incumbent Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA), Labour Party (LP) and Alliance for Democracy (AD).

Since true democracy involves the participation of an informed and rational electorate, all legitimate measures and strategies should be exploited to make it possible for the citizenry to have the required information or alternatives to act on. Hallin and Mancini (2004) note that “the mass media are assuming many of the information that political parties once controlled. Instead of learning about an election at a campaign rally or from party canvassers, the mass media have become the primary source of campaign information. There has been a tendency for political parties to decrease their investments in neighbor canvassing, rallies and other direct contact activities, and devote more attention to campaigning through the media. The growth of electronic media, especially television has tended to diminish the role of the party. The electronic media also make it easier to communicate events and issues through personalities. Swanson (2004) notes that in place of or in addition to traditional campaign practices such as rallies of the party faithful, political parties and candidates relied on the sophisticated use of the mass media to persuade voters – the “consumers” of political communication to support them at election time, and they offered campaigns that feature the appealing personalities of party leaders. Television provides an ‘aesthetic’ platform for the presentation (airing) of political advertising and electioneering campaign messages. Norris (2004) asserts that “fair access to the airwaves by opposition parties, candidates, and groups is critical for competitive, free and fair elections.” He points out that it is particularly important that state – owned or public television stations should be open to a plurality of political viewpoints and viewpoints during campaigns, without favoring the governments. Corroborating this positions, Swanson (2004) asserts that “editorial independence, freedom from close government supervision and censorship, and the like, create credibility for newscasters everywhere.”

Quoting Diamond and Bates, McNair (2002) identify four phases of a typical US political advertising campaign:

Firstly, the basic identity of the candidate must be established as a foundation on which to build subsequent information. In this phase, positive biographical details are highlighted, such as a distinguished war record (a tactic used by John F. Kennedy and George Bush in their presidential campaigns), or an outstanding business success. Secondly, the candidate’s policies are established in broad terms with the minimum of extraneous detail, and with emotional charge (as in Bush’s “Read my lips! No new taxes!” slogan, or Bill Clinton’s “It’s the economy, stupid”, also of 1992. Thirdly, the opponent should be attacked, using negatives.

And finally, the candidate must be endowed with positive meaning in the context of the values and aspirations of the electorate. In this phase, the campaign will seek to synthesis and integrate the candidate’s positive features, allowing him or her to acquire resonance in the minds of the voters. Thus, Ronald Reagan comes to stand for the reassertion of traditional American Values, Bill Clinton for ‘Change’ in 1992, and ‘Continuity’ in 1996.

7. Data Presentation and Analysis

7.1 Mass Medium Frequently Accessed during the 2011 General Elections

Table 1. Mass medium frequently accessed during the 2011 general elections

Mass Medium	Number of Respondents	%
Newspapers	50	22.7
Newsmagazines	20	9.1
Radio	100	45.5
Television	50	22.7
Total	220	100

Table 1 above shows that 50 respondents (22.7%) frequently accessed newspapers during the 2011 General Elections, 20 respondents (9.1%) had access to Newsmagazines during the 2011 general elections, 100 respondents (45.5%) had access to Radio; while 50 respondents (22.7%) had access to Television during the 2011 General elections.

7.2 Respondents' Assessment of Mass Media's Coverage of Electioneering Campaigns in Akwa Ibom State

Table 2. Respondents' assessment of mass media's coverage of electioneering campaigns in Akwa Ibom state

Options	Number of Respondents	%
Very Satisfactory	34	15.4
Satisfactory	84	38.2
Very unsatisfactory	18	8.2
Unsatisfactory	66	30
No Opinion	18	8.2
Total	220	100

Table 2 shows that 34 (15.4%) of the respondents considered mass media's coverage of electioneering campaigns during 2011 General elections as "Very satisfactory", 84 (38.2%) of the respondents assessed it as "Satisfactory", 18 (8.2%) considered it as "Very Satisfactory", 66 (30%) of the respondents indicated that mass media's coverage of electioneering campaigns was "unsatisfactory", while 18 (8.2%) of the respondents expressed no opinion. Generally, respondents (118) were satisfied with mass media's coverage of electioneering campaigns in Akwa Ibom State, 77 of them were not satisfied.

7.3 Respondents' Major Source of Information for Voting Decision during 2011 General Elections

Table 3. Respondents' major source of information for voting decision during 2011 general elections

Mass Medium	Number of Respondents	%
NTA Uyo	56	25.4
AKBC – Radio	30	13.6
AKBC – TV	20	9
Local Newspapers	24	11
National Newspapers	42	19
Friends/Opinion Leaders	48	22
Total	220	100

Table 3 shows that 56 (25.4%) of the respondents listed NTA Uyo as their major source of information for voting decision during 2011 General elections, 30 (13.6%) respondents listed AKBC-Radio as their major source of information for voting decision, 20 (9%) of the respondents listed AKBC – TV, 24 (11%), respondents listed local newspapers as their major source of information, 42 (19%) respondents listed National newspapers as their major source of information, while 48 (22%) respondents listed friends & opinion leaders as their major source of information.

7.4 Media House Adjudged Best in Providing Electioneering Campaign Information

Table 4 indicates that 128 (58%) of the respondents adjudged NTA Uyo best in providing electioneering campaign information, 18 (8.2%) respondents listed AKBC – Radio best, another 18 (8.2%) respondents listed AKBC-TV best, 26 (12%) respondents listed local newspapers as best in providing electioneering campaign information, while 30 (13.6%) of the respondents adjudged national newspapers as best.

Table 4. Media House Adjudged Best in Providing Electioneering Campaign Information

Mass Medium	Number of Respondents	%
NTA Uyo	128	58
AKBC – Radio	18	8.2
AKBC – TV	18	8.2
Local Newspapers	26	12
National Newspapers	30	13.6
Total	220	100

7.5 Factor which Made Respondents Satisfied with Coverage of Electioneering Campaigns

Table 5. Factor which made respondents satisfied with coverage of electioneering campaigns

Options	Number of Respondents	%
Balance and fairness	72	32.7
Impartiality and non-partisanship	36	16.3
Equal access and opportunity for all political parties	68	31
Non-offensive contents in campaign reports	44	20
Total	220	100

Table 5 shows that 72 (32.7%) of the respondents listed “balance and fairness” as reason for their satisfaction with the coverage of electioneering campaign, 36 (16.3%) of the respondents listed “impartiality and non-partisanship” as reason for their satisfaction with coverage of electioneering campaign, 68 (31%) respondents mentioned “Equal access and opportunity for all political parties”, while 44 (20%) of the respondents mentioned “non-offensive contents in reporting campaigns” as reason for their satisfaction.

7.6 Media House Adjudged Worst in Providing Electioneering Campaign Information

Table 6. Media house adjudged worst in providing electioneering campaign information

Media Hose	Number of Respondents	%
NTA Uyo	10	5
AKBC – Radio	80	36
AKBC – TV	70	32
* ^I Local Newspapers	40	18
* ^{II} National Newspapers	20	9
Total	220	100

Note: *^I Ten (10) respondents listed ‘Global Concord’ newspaper as the worst in providing electioneering campaign information in Akwa Ibom State. *^{II} Eight (8) respondents listed ‘The Nation’ Newspaper as the worst media house in providing electioneering campaign information.

Ten (10) respondents (5%) listed NTA Uyo as the worst media house in providing electioneering campaign information, 80 respondents (36%) mentioned AKBC – Radio as being worst in providing electioneering campaign information, 70 respondents (32%) listed AKBC-TV as being worst, 40 respondents (18%) listed local newspapers as being worst, while 20 respondents (9%) mentioned national newspapers as being the worst media house in providing electioneering campaign information during the 2012 general elections in Akwa Ibom State.

7.7 Factors which Made Respondents Most Dissatisfied with Coverage of Electioneering Campaign by the Affected (above) Media House

Table 7. Factors which made respondents most dissatisfied with coverage of electioneering campaign by the affected (above) media house

Options	Number of Respondents	%
Lack of balance and fairness	10	4.5
Partiality and partisanship	80	36.3
Lack of equal access and equal opportunity for all political parties and aspirants	40	18.1
Airing/publication of offensive electioneering contents	20	9.1
All of the above	70	32
Total	220	100

Table 7 respondents (4.5%) listed “lack of balance and fairness” as the reason for their dissatisfaction with the affected media house, 80 respondents (36.6%) respondents listed “partiality and partisanship” as the reason for their dissatisfaction, 40 respondents (18.1%) mentioned “lack of equal access and equal opportunity for all political parties and aspirants” as reason for their dissatisfaction, 20 respondents (9.1%) respondents listed “Airing/publication of offensive electioneering contents” as reason for their dissatisfaction, while 70 respondents (32%) mentioned all the options as reasons for their dissatisfaction.

7.8 Reason Why Respondents Voted during the 2011 General Election

Table 8. Reason why respondents voted during the 2011 General election

Options	Number of Respondents	%
Belief that votes would count	70	31.8
Obligation to civic responsibility	90	41
Desire for change in government	44	20
Loyalty to Political Party	8	3.6
Persuasiveness of Public Enlightenment Messages in the Mass Media	8	3.6
Total	220	100

Table 9. Elections in which respondents voted

Elections	Number of Respondents	%
National Assembly Election	23	10.5
Presidential Election	47	21.3
Governorship/State Assembly Elections	51	23.2
All the Elections	99	45
Total	220	100

Seventy (70) respondents (31.8%) said they voted during the 2011 General elections because of their “belief that votes would count” during the 2011 General elections, 90 respondents (41%) said they voted because they considered it their civic responsibility to do so, 44 respondents (20%) said they voted for a change in government, 8 respondents (3.6%) voted due to their loyalty to their political party, while another 8 respondents (3.6%) voted as a result of the “persuasiveness of the public enlightenment messages in the mass media.”

Twenty-three (23) respondents (10.5%) said they voted during the National Assembly Elections, 47 respondents (21.3%) said they voted during the presidential election, 51 respondents (23.2%) said they voted during the Governorship and State Assembly elections, while 99 respondents (45%) voted during all the elections.

7.9 Factor which Influenced Respondents to Vote for the Political Party and Candidate of their Choice

Table 10. Factor which influenced respondents to vote for the Political party and candidate of their choice

Options	Number of Respondents	%
Geo-ethnic affiliation	50	22.7
Monetary/material inducement	20	9.1
Protest against incumbent Political Party/Candidate	8	3.6
General Acceptability of the Candidate	40	18.2
Party's Manifesto	20	9.1
Good antecedent of the candidate	78	35.5
Attractiveness of party's media campaign messages	4	1.8
Total	220	100

Fifty (50) respondents (22.7%) said they voted for the political party of their choice because of geo-ethnic affiliation, 20 respondents (9.1%) said they did so because of monetary/material inducement, 8 respondents (3.6%), voted in protest against incumbent political party/candidate, 40 respondents (18.2%) said they voted because of the general acceptability of the candidate, 20 respondents (9.1%) said they voted because of the party's manifesto, 78 respondents (35.5%) said they were influenced to vote because of the good antecedent of the candidate, while 4 respondents (1.8%) were influenced by the attractiveness of the Party's media campaign messages.

7.10 Political Party/Candidate Adjudged Mature, Peaceful, Issue-based and Non-offensive in Electioneering Campaign during 2011 General Election

Table 11. Political Party/Candidate adjudged mature, peaceful, Issue-based and non-offensive in electioneering campaign during 2011 general election

Political Party/Candidate	Number of Respondents	%
ACN (Senator John Udoedeghe)	100	45.5
AD	4	1.8
ANPP (Sam Enwang)	20	9.1
APGA	8	3.6
CPC (Larry Esin)	50	22.7
LP (Idorenyin Umoh)	8	3.6
PDP (Godswill Akpabio)	20	9.1
None	10	4.6
Total	220	100

One hundred (100) respondents (45.5%) listed ACN as the Political party which was mature, peaceful, issue-based and non-offensive in electioneering campaign, 4 respondents (1.8%) listed AD, 20 respondents (9.1%) listed ANPP, 8 respondents (3.6%) mentioned APGA, 50 respondents (22.7%) mentioned CPC, 8 respondents (3.6%) listed LP, 20 respondents (9.1%) mentioned PDP, while 10 respondents (4.6%) said none of the political parties/candidates was mature, peaceful, issue-based and non-offensive in electioneering campaign during the 2011 general elections.

8. Discussion of Findings

Data from the survey are hereby used to answer the research questions adopted for this study. Responses in the 220 fully completed copies of the questionnaire are used for the discussion of findings.

8.1 Research Question Number One

What was Uyo residents' perception of mass media's coverage of electioneering campaigns during the 2011 general elections?

Data in Table II shows that Uyo residents considered mass media coverage of electioneering campaign during the 2011 general elections averagely satisfactory – 53.6%. Out of this figure, 34 respondents (15.4%) said they were “very satisfied” with mass media’s coverage of electioneering campaigns, while 84 respondents (39.2%), said they were “satisfied”. Thirty-eight point two percent (38.2%) of the respondents were generally unsatisfied. Out of this figure, 18 respondents (8.2%) said they were “very unsatisfied”, while 66 (30%) of the respondents considered mass media’s coverage of the 2011 electioneering campaigns “unsatisfactory”. Eighteen (18) respondents expressed “no opinion”. In a situation where the electorate is unsatisfied with the mass media’s coverage of electioneering campaigns, such constituent would be intellectually starved/malnourished of political information needed to make informed decisions during elections. McNair (2002) asserts that “in democratic political systems, media function both as transmitters of political communication which originates outside the media organization itself, and as senders of political messages constructed by journalists. Political actors must use the media in order to have their messages communicated to the desired audience.” In modern societies where pressures of life make it difficult it for many people to socialise at inform level to get political information, the mass media provide the only avenue for many people to get their political intelligence. Therefore, in a situation where the mass media were adjudged to have performed, at best; on the average, it leaves much to be desired from the mass media.

McNair (2002) also emphasizes that “the citizen’s right to choose presupposes the availability of alternatives from which a meaningful selection could be made, a rational and knowledgeable electorate capable of exercising its rights. Democracy was real, in other words, only when it involved the participation of an informed, rational electorate.”

8.2 Research Question Number Two

Did mass media's coverage of electioneering campaigns affect Uyo residents' voting during the 2011 general elections?

Data in table VIII shows that only 8 (3.6%) respondents voted due to the persuasiveness of public awareness messages in the media during the 2011 General elections. The rest voted because of other reasons. In table X, only 4 (1.8%) respondents voted because of the “attractiveness of Party’s media campaign messages. Majority voted for various reasons, such as geo-ethnic affiliation, monetary/material inducement, protest against incumbent political party/candidate, General acceptability of the candidate, party’s manifesto, Good antecedent of the candidate and attractiveness of the Party’s media campaign messages. The result shows that the mass media in Akwa Ibom State fell short of mass media’s role in democracy, as suggested by Curran (1991):

The media should brief the electorate about the political choices involved in elections, and so help to constitute elections as defining moments for collective decision about the public direction of society. The media system should also facilitate organized representation by giving due publicity to the activities, programmes and thinking of organized groups in addition to the formal processes of government and party opposition.

Where the electorate makes voting decisions without the influence of the mass media is suggestive of the low quality of the mass media in that society.

8.3 Research Question Number Three

Which mass Medium did Uyo residents regard as fair and balanced in the coverage of 2011 electioneering campaigns in Akwa Ibom State?

Table IV shows that majority of the respondents – 128 (58%) adjudged the Nigerian Television Authority, (NTA) Uyo best in providing electioneering campaign information.

In table V, 72 (32.7%) respondents said they were satisfied with NTA Uyo's coverage of electioneering campaigns because of its balance and fairness, 36 (16.3%) respondents were satisfied because of its impartiality and non-partisanship, 68 (31%) respondents lauded the station for its equal access and opportunity for all political parties, while 44 (20%) respondents were satisfied because of non-offensive contents in campaign reports.

8.4 Research Question Number Four

What other factors impacted on Uyo residents' Voting decision during the 2011 General elections?

Table X shows that 50 (22.7%) respondents voted for the political party/candidate of their choice because of geo-ethnic affiliation, 20 (9.1%) respondents voted because of monetary/material inducement, 8 (3.6%) respondents said they voted in protest against incumbent political party/candidate, 40 (18.2%) respondents said they voted because of the general acceptability of the candidate, 20 (9.1%) respondents said they voted because of Party manifesto, 78 (35.5%) respondents voted because of good antecedent of the candidate, while 4 (1.8%) respondents voted because of the attractiveness of the Party's media campaign messages.

8.5 Research Question Number Five

Which political party/Candidate did Uyo residents consider mature and issue-oriented in mass media electioneering campaign?

Table XI shows that out of the six political parties that had reasonable level of presence in Akwa Ibom State, 100 (45.5%) respondents adjudged the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) as mature and issue-oriented in its mass media electioneering campaign. This was followed by the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) with 50 (22.7%) respondents expressing satisfaction with it, while the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) came third with 20 respondents (9.1%) in the opinion of respondents.

9. Conclusion

As democracy becomes the preferred form of government in hitherto autocratic society like Nigeria, the mass media would increasingly play indispensable role in the public sphere. As this study revealed, during elections who the people vote for and the voting pattern may be a direct consequence of mass media's coverage of electioneering campaigns. However, other factors may intervene either to moderate or neutralize the influence of mass media's coverage of electioneering campaigns.

10. Recommendations

In view of the critical role mass media play in democracy, journalists/media workers should demonstrate greater commitment to fairness, balance and social responsibility in their coverage of electioneering campaigns.

Journalists/media houses should remember that as people become more politically enlightened, they become more demanding for diversity in the contents of mass media's coverage of electioneering campaigns.

A nationwide study should be carried out for a richer data on the influence of mass media electioneering campaign on voting decision during the 2011 General elections.

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