
MEDIA'S INFLUENCE ON VOTER BEHAVIOR: THE IMPACT OF NEWS COVERAGE ON ELECTION OUTCOME

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the intricate relationship between media coverage and voter behavior, shedding light on the profound influence that news outlets wield over election outcomes. Elections are the cornerstone of democracy, and understanding the role of media in shaping voter behavior is critical for transparent and informed electoral processes. This study sheds light on the complex dynamics between media, voters, and election outcomes, offering valuable insights for policymakers, media practitioners, and the general public. Four key research questions guided the study: the influence of news coverage on candidate perceptions, the varying impact of media platforms, the role of media bias in shaping trust, and the interaction of demographic factors with media consumption patterns. This research seeks to elucidate how media narratives, biases, and framing techniques can shape voters' perceptions, attitudes, and ultimately, their choices at the ballot box using the quantitative questionnaire method. By drawing on a comprehensive array of case studies and empirical evidence, this study provides valuable insights into the critical interplay between media, democracy, and the electoral process. The findings of this study hold significant implications for media professionals, policymakers, and the electorate, emphasizing the need for media literacy, responsible journalism, and a more informed citizenry in the quest for vibrant, healthy democracies worldwide. This study serves as a comprehensive examination of the nexus between media and voter behavior in Nigeria's electoral landscape, offering a foundation for further research and evidence-based policymaking in the realm of election integrity and media ethics.

Keywords: Media, Election, Voter, Voter Behavior

Introduction

"In modern democracies, the role of the media in shaping the political landscape is undeniably profound". (Okolie et al., 2015). Media outlets, encompassing traditional newspapers, television broadcasts, radio programs, and an increasingly complex digital ecosystem, serve as the primary conduits through which citizens receive information about their political environment. Moreover, media platforms function as gatekeepers, framing and interpreting the events and issues that define the political discourse. One of the most critical aspects of this influence pertains to the impact of media on voter behavior and, consequently, election outcomes.

The Impact of News Coverage on Election Outcomes seeks to explore the intricate and multifaceted relationship between media and the electoral process. This research endeavors to dissect the mechanisms by which media coverage shapes the attitudes, perceptions, and choices of voters, and how it ultimately reverberates through the ballot box. The role of media in elections and voter influence cannot be neglected. (Egbuna, 2012) observed that "the public often rely on the media for information on the ideologies and manifestoes of political parties, as well as on the competence of the candidates contesting for elections". In this age of information abundance, where media outlets vie for the attention of an increasingly fragmented and polarized audience, understanding the media's role in elections has never been more crucial.

The media's influence on voter behavior is a topic that transcends national borders and political systems. It is a subject of enduring significance, as it touches the very core of democratic governance. The power to inform, persuade, and, at times, manipulate public opinion through media coverage has far-reaching implications for the legitimacy of elected governments and the health of democratic institutions. (Komolafe, 2019) pointed out that "the media operates as a fourth estate", working on the same level as other governing structures to ensure accountability and adherence to democratic ideals. This is the backdrop to the constitutional role of the Nigerian media." Consequently, this research seeks to shed light on the nuanced dynamics at play and their implications for the functioning of democracies around the world.

In sum, this study is motivated by the belief that an informed citizenry is the bedrock of a thriving democracy. By unveiling how media coverage impacts voter behavior, this study hopes to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding media's responsibilities and ethical considerations, while equipping citizens,

policymakers, and media professionals with the knowledge required to navigate the complex intersection of media, politics, and elections in the 21st century.

What is Voter Behavior?

“Voter behavior refers to the actions, decisions, and choices made by individuals who are eligible to vote in an election”. (UKEssays, 2013). It encompasses a range of activities and attitudes related to the electoral process, including how voters decide which candidate or party to support, whether to participate in an election and the factors that influence their choices. (Isiaq, et. al., 2018). The behavior of the voter is seen in his choice of candidate. It focuses on how voters decide which candidate or political party to vote for in an election. It involves considerations such as the candidates' policies, qualifications, values, and charisma.

Another aspect of voter behavior is the voter turnout. It also includes the decision of whether to participate in an election by casting a ballot or abstaining from voting. (Okolie, et. al., 2021). Factors like civic engagement, political interest, and perceptions of the importance of the election can influence voter turnout.

Furthermore, the behaviour of a voter is seen in his party affiliation. Voters are strongly influenced by their political parties. These affiliations maybe, religious, tribal, social group, peer group, and personal interests. “Some voters have strong affiliations with a particular political party and consistently vote for candidates from that party. (Alotaibi, 2013). Party identification can significantly impact voter behavior. (Atanda, et. al., 2018).

Voters may also prioritize specific policy issues or positions when making their choices. They may vote for candidates who align with their views on issues such as healthcare, education, the economy, or social values.

Moreover, voter behavior can be influenced by demographic factors like age, gender, race, income, education level, and geographic location. Different demographic groups may have distinct voting patterns and priorities.

Media Influence has such great impact on the behaviour of voters. The information voters receive from the media, including news coverage, advertisements, and social media, can shape their perceptions and decisions. Media can influence how voters perceive candidates and issues. (Okpoko, 2013) stressed the importance of the mass media offering political education to inform the public about proper electoral processes. This education would help people steer clear of financially driven politicians and prevent them from voting solely based on ethnicity or religion.

Additionally, Social and Peer Influence such as friends, family, and social networks can have a significant impact on voter behavior. Individuals may be influenced by the political opinions and choices of those around them.

Finally, if the campaign strategies are convincing and laid out well, they also influence voter behavior. The strategies employed by political campaigns, including messaging, outreach efforts, and ground operations, can affect how voters engage with the electoral process. "During election campaigns, political candidates meet with the members of their constituencies to discuss the problems affecting the growth and development of their communities, and how the candidates intend to solve the problems when elected into office." (Oboh, 2016).

Media's Influence on Voter Behavior

The media's influence on voter behavior is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that plays a significant role in shaping electoral outcomes in modern democracies. This influence aligned with the (Agba, 2013) view that the mass media can be described as a "pivot of social interaction, seeking to use the power of mass information to solve the problem of national cohesion and integration, which are both critical to the growth of healthy political mobilization".

Agenda-Setting: The media has the power to set the agenda by deciding which topics and issues receive the most attention in their coverage. Through headlines, news stories, and editorials, media outlets can prioritize certain issues while downplaying others. Voters often rely on the media to inform them about the most important and relevant political topics, and as a result, media agenda-setting can significantly impact what voters consider when making their choices.

Framing: Framing is one of the most studied media effects theories in communication research. (Adeiza, 2016). Media outlets can frame news stories in various ways, emphasizing specific aspects or interpretations of an issue. (Entman, 1993) explains that the goal of framing is to "promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation." The way an issue is framed can influence how voters perceive it. For example, framing an economic downturn as a result of government mismanagement may lead voters to hold the incumbent party accountable.

Priming: Media coverage can prime voters to consider specific criteria when evaluating candidates. The first way journalists get involved in elections is by choosing which candidates to cover and how much. Those choices alone can have a huge effect on voter perceptions. (Brichacek, 2016). If the media consistently

emphasizes an issue like national security, voters may prioritize that issue when choosing a candidate, potentially benefiting candidates who are seen as strong on that issue.

Information Dissemination: The media serves as a primary source of information about candidates, their policies, and their qualifications. (Konkwo, 2013) recommended that the media's role should be to furnish information that empowers voters to make informed choices during elections. This should be based not solely on what candidates can offer immediately but on a public evaluation of their competence to serve in public office. Voters rely on media coverage to learn about candidates' positions on important issues and their backgrounds. Biographical profiles, candidate interviews, and debates are essential channels through which voters form impressions of candidates.

Candidate Image: The media plays a crucial role in shaping the image and reputation of political candidates. (Guilia, 2023) in his work studied the effects of candidates' exposure to vote shares. He pointed out that, "A candidate's visibility on the media is widely considered a crucial element of a successful electoral campaign". Positive or negative coverage, including news stories, endorsements, and editorials, can influence how voters perceive candidates' character, trustworthiness, and competence.

Political Ads and Campaign Coverage: Political advertising, especially on television and digital platforms, is a vital aspect of election campaigns. (Omotayo and Abidemi, 2023). Media outlets often provide extensive coverage of political ads and campaign events, exposing voters to campaign messages and strategies.

Social Media and Digital Influence: In the digital age, social media platforms have become influential sources of political information. (Mukhatar, 2018) has it that, social media "has made political participation easy, and that political interaction has become cost-effective compared to traditional media like television, radio or newspapers". They can facilitate the rapid spread of news, opinions, and misinformation. Social media algorithms may create echo chambers and filter bubbles, reinforcing existing beliefs and affecting voter behavior.

Biases and Partisanship: Media outlets can exhibit biases in their reporting, which can influence the political attitudes of their audiences. Media should be a watchdog with the primary interest of protecting the public interest and holding the politicians accountable (Nalong, et. al., 2023) and not a lapdog for politicians of their interest. Some media organizations are perceived as leaning toward one political ideology, and their coverage can reinforce the views of like-minded viewers.

Fact-Checking and Accountability: Media fact-checking plays a role in holding candidates accountable for false or misleading statements. Fact-checking can influence voter perceptions by exposing inaccuracies and inconsistencies in campaign messaging.

Mobilization: Media can also play a role in mobilizing voters by covering election-related events, highlighting the importance of voting, and providing information about the voting process itself.

The Impacts of News Coverage on Election Outcomes

News coverage of election outcomes can have both positive and negative impacts on the electoral process and its results. These effects can influence voter behavior, candidates, and the overall health of democratic systems.

Positive Impacts

a. Informed Electorate: News coverage provides voters with essential information about candidates, their policies, and the issues at stake. An informed electorate is better equipped to make choices aligned with their values and interests.

b. Accountability: Investigative journalism and fact-checking hold candidates and politicians accountable for their statements and actions. This encourages transparency and discourages deceptive campaign tactics. (Aghamelu, 2010).

c. Increased Civic Engagement: Comprehensive news coverage can inspire civic engagement, including voter turnout, participation in political discussions, and volunteering for campaigns. Engaged citizens are vital for a healthy democracy.

d. Platform for Debate: News outlets offer a platform for candidates to present their ideas, debate their opponents, and engage in discussions about pressing issues. This allows voters to compare candidates and make informed decisions. (Nalong, et. al., 2023).

e. Education: Election coverage educates the public about the electoral process itself, including voter registration, polling locations, and voting procedures, which can encourage participation. (Iredia, 2007) exclusively pointed out that, "The powerful channels, the most potent strategies, and the technical format for effective public enlightenment belong to the media".

f. Diverse Perspectives: A variety of media outlets with different perspectives can provide diverse viewpoints on political matters, allowing voters to consider a wide range of opinions.

Negative Impacts:

a. Bias and Partisanship: Some media outlets exhibit bias or partisan reporting, which can lead to polarization and reinforce existing political divisions among the electorate. (Bartels, 2000).

b. Sensationalism: News coverage sometimes prioritizes sensational or divisive stories over substantive policy discussions, which can distract from critical issues and lead to shallow, sensationalized reporting.

c. Misinformation and Disinformation: False or misleading information, often spread through news coverage, can misinform voters and distort their perceptions of candidates and issues. Disinformation campaigns can manipulate public opinion. (Dampney and Akparep, 2022).

d. Echo Chambers and Filter Bubbles: Digital media can create echo chambers and filter bubbles, where individuals are exposed only to information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs. According to a recent Pew Research Center study, "62 percent of Americans get their news via social media platforms". What they might not realize is that the news they see is heavily filtered. (Brichacek, 2016). This can reinforce biases and limit exposure to diverse viewpoints.

e. Overemphasis on Horse Race Politics: Some news coverage focuses excessively on the "horse race" aspect of elections, treating them as competitive events rather than platforms for discussing policy issues. This can reduce the depth of electoral discourse.

f. Decreased Trust in Media: Biased or inaccurate reporting can erode public trust in the media, leading some individuals to disregard credible sources of information.

g. Influence on Voter Behavior: While informed voters are a positive outcome, media can also manipulate voter behavior by selectively emphasizing certain issues or candidates, potentially skewing election results.

h. Coverage Imbalances: Media outlets may disproportionately cover certain candidates or races, influencing the visibility and viability of candidates who receive less attention. (Nalong, et. al., 2023).

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Numerous factors make up the conceptual framework of the news media and its relationship to voter behavior and subsequent influences it has on election outcomes. Such factors may include:

Media Factors

(Odubote, 2014) claimed that “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 right to mass media would certainly be a malnourished and still-birth political contraption”. For this same reason (Mc Nair, 2002) has aptly pointed out that “in the democratic political system, media function both as transmitters of political communication which originates outside the media organization itself and as senders of political messages constructed by Journalist”.

- a. **Media Coverage:** This encompasses the extent and nature of media reporting during an election. It includes considerations such as how much airtime, column inches, or digital space media outlets devote to election-related content. It also involves examining which aspects of the election receive the most attention.
- b. **Media Bias and Objectivity:** Media bias refers to any perceived or actual favoritism towards particular candidates or political ideologies. Objectivity involves reporting news in a neutral and balanced manner as advised by (Jacob and Ademefun, 2021). Researchers examine whether media outlets exhibit bias or objectivity and how this impacts voter behavior.
- c. **Digital and Social Media:** In today's digital age, social media platforms play a significant role in shaping public opinion. (Adeiza, 2016). Researchers study how information spreads on these platforms, how political ads are targeted, and how user-generated content can influence voter behavior.
- d. **Media Ownership:** Media outlets are often owned by individuals or corporations with their own interests and political affiliations. Some have argued that the existence of multiple platforms today is healthy and helps to bring the best out of the media. (Nalong, et. al., 2023). Researchers explore how media ownership can influence editorial decisions, content, and the overall tone of election coverage.

Voter Behavior

Media influence can shape how voters perceive and evaluate candidates. It includes how media coverage of a candidate's policies, character, and qualifications can impact voter preferences and decisions. Voters often prioritize certain issues when casting their ballots. Media can influence this by highlighting specific topics or crises, prompting voters to consider them more seriously when making choices.

Furthermore, media can motivate or discourage voter participation. Positive, informative coverage may encourage turnout, while negative, divisive coverage can discourage it. "Through participation, citizens learn political responsibility; acquire knowledge about the political culture, the organization of the democratic system, its institutions, and their functions, and roles of incumbents". (George-Genyi, 2016).

In addition, media can affect party loyalty and affiliation. It can sway voters to align with a particular party, candidate, or ideology through its coverage and messaging.

Election Outcomes

1. **Actual Voting Results:** This refers to the tangible impact of voter behavior influenced by media coverage on the election's final results. It includes which candidates or parties win, lose, or gain power as a direct consequence of voters' choices.
2. **Perceived Outcomes:** Even after an election, media coverage continues to shape public perception of the results. This perception can influence reactions to election outcomes and may impact future political developments.

Media Ethics and Responsibility

- a. **Media Accountability:** Media outlets have a responsibility to ensure the accuracy and fairness of their reporting. (Omotayo and Abidemi, 2023). Fact-checking, corrections, and accountability mechanisms are essential in maintaining the credibility of media coverage.
- b. **Media Responsibility:** Media outlets are ethically obligated to provide unbiased, balanced, and truthful reporting, particularly during elections. Researchers examine whether media organizations fulfill these responsibilities.

External Factors

- **Political Context:** The broader political landscape can interact with media influence and voter behavior. Factors like the competitiveness of the election, the state of the economy, and major political events may influence both media coverage and how voters respond to it.
- **Demographic Factors:** Different demographic groups may respond to media influence in unique ways. Researchers may study how age, gender,

race, income, education, and geographic location influence the impact of media on voter behavior.

Feedback Loops

- a. **Media Impact on Campaigns:** Media influence is not unidirectional. It can also affect how political campaigns strategize, including their messaging, advertising choices, and candidate behavior.
- b. **Voter Feedback:** How voters react to media coverage can create a feedback loop. Media outlets may adjust their reporting based on public reactions, potentially influencing subsequent voter behavior and election coverage.

Long-term and Short-term Effects

- a. **Immediate Effects:** These refer to the short-term impact of media coverage on voter behavior during an election cycle. It includes how media can influence voter decisions and behavior leading up to and on election day.
- b. **Long-term Effects:** Over time, media influence can have lasting impacts on voter attitudes, political affiliations, and democratic values. Researchers explore how the media's role extends beyond a single election and shapes the political landscape.

Theoretical Framework

The use of the media has enormous potential to promote political parties, but this potential is not always easy to bring out. (Alotaibi, 2013). This framework captures the best theories that are relevant to our research. Many politicians who understand the influence media has in the promotion of their political parties actively engage with these theories.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory, developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in the 1960s, posits that the media has a powerful influence on the public's perception of the importance of various issues by deciding which topics and subjects to emphasize in their coverage. (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002). In essence, it suggests that the media doesn't necessarily tell people what to think, but it tells them what to think about.

Key Concepts and Assumptions

- a. **Media Agenda vs. Public Agenda: Agenda-setting theory** distinguishes between the "media agenda" (the topics and issues the media chooses to cover prominently) and the "public agenda" (the issues and topics that the public considers most important). It argues that the media's agenda strongly influences the public's agenda. (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002).
- b. **Salience Transfer:** The theory suggests that through repeated and consistent coverage, the media can transfer the salience or perceived importance of an issue to the audience. (Rösler, 2017). In other words, when the media repeatedly covers a specific issue, the audience tends to perceive that issue as more significant.
- c. **Gatekeeping Function:** The media functions as gatekeepers, determining which stories get attention and which do not. (Dearing and Rogers, 1988). Editors, journalists, and news organizations decide what news to report and how prominently to feature it.

Relevance to Media's Influence on Voter Behavior

Agenda-setting theory is highly relevant when studying the media's impact on voter behavior in the context of elections:

The theory explains how media coverage can lead voters to prioritize certain issues when making electoral decisions. For example, if the media consistently covers economic concerns during an election campaign, voters may regard the economy as a crucial issue in their decision-making process.

Media's agenda-setting power extends to candidates as well. The prominence and tone of media coverage can shape how voters perceive candidates' qualifications, positions on issues, and overall suitability for office.

While Agenda-Setting Theory primarily focuses on issue selection, it also relates to framing effects. The media not only chooses what to cover but also how to frame the issues, influencing how voters perceive them. (Lang and Lang, 1981). For instance, framing an economic downturn as a result of government mismanagement can lead voters to hold the incumbent party accountable.

Agenda-Setting Theory highlights the media's pivotal role in determining which issues are at the forefront of election campaigns. Campaign strategists often tailor their messages and policies to align with the issues gaining the most media attention.

By highlighting the importance of certain election-related topics, media coverage can either motivate or discourage voter turnout. If media consistently emphasizes the significance of an election, it may inspire more citizens to participate.

Framing Theory

Framing Theory is a communication theory that focuses on how media outlets, through their choices of presentation, can shape the way audiences perceive issues, events, and topics. It was initially developed by Erving Goffman and later expanded by scholars like Robert Entman. Framing theory suggests that the way an issue is framed, or presented, can significantly influence public opinion and attitudes. (Goffman, 1974).

Key Concepts and Assumptions

- a. **Frames:** Frames are cognitive structures or mental filters that help individuals make sense of information. (Wikipedia, 2023). They organize complex information into coherent, understandable narratives. In the context of media, frames are the specific lenses or angles through which news stories are presented.
- b. **Frame Building:** Media outlets and journalists select and emphasize certain aspects of an issue while downplaying or omitting others. This process of frame building involves making choices about what information to include, what language to use, and how to structure the narrative. (Scheufele, 1999).
- c. **Frame Effects:** Frame effects refer to the impact of media frames on how audiences perceive and interpret information. (MCleod, et. al., 2022). Different frames can lead to varying audience reactions and attitudes.

Relevance to Media's Influence on Voter Behavior

Framing Theory is highly relevant when studying how media coverage influences voter behavior in the context of elections:

Media outlets can frame candidates in various ways, emphasizing certain qualities or characteristics. For instance, they can frame a candidate as a "change agent" or as a "seasoned expert." These frames influence how voters perceive the candidate's qualifications and suitability for office.

The media can frame election issues in specific ways, affecting how voters prioritize them. (Van der pas, 2014). For example, framing healthcare reform as a "universal right" versus a "government takeover" can elicit different responses from voters.

Media framing can evoke specific emotions in audiences. Positive framing might generate enthusiasm and support for a candidate, while negative framing can lead to skepticism or opposition.

During election campaigns, media often cover crises or unexpected events. How these events are framed can impact voter perceptions of candidate responses and crisis management.

Campaigns themselves employ framing strategies to present their candidates and policies in the most favorable light. They respond to media frames and work to shape public perception.

Political advertisements are a critical component of election campaigns. They use framing to convey messages that resonate with target audiences.

Third-Person Effect Theory

The Third-Person Effect Theory, proposed by W. Phillips Davison in 1983, examines how individuals perceive and respond to media influence. The theory suggests that people tend to believe that media messages have a more significant impact on others than on themselves. (Davison, 1983). In other words, individuals assume that they are less susceptible to media influence than the general public.

Key Concepts and Assumptions

- a. **Perceived Influence:** The theory is built on the idea of perceived influence, where individuals perceive that media content affects others more than it affects themselves. (Johansson, 2005). They often see themselves as immune or less susceptible to media persuasion.
- b. **Selective Exposure:** People engage in selective exposure, seeking out media content that aligns with their existing beliefs and values while avoiding content that contradicts their views. This selective exposure contributes to the perception of personal immunity to media influence.
- c. **Cognitive Dissonance:** The theory also considers cognitive dissonance, the discomfort individuals feel when they encounter information that conflicts with their existing beliefs. To reduce this discomfort, individuals may downplay the influence of conflicting media messages on themselves.
- d. **Self-Enhancement Bias:** Self-enhancement bias refers to the tendency for individuals to view themselves in a positive light. Believing that one is less susceptible to media influence can enhance a person's self-esteem and sense of autonomy.

Relevance to Media's Influence on Voter Behavior

The Third-Person Effect Theory is relevant when studying how media coverage influences voter behavior in the context of elections in so many ways.

Individuals may perceive that media content, such as political ads or news reports, has a more significant impact on other voters than on themselves. This perception can lead them to underestimate the persuasive power of media messaging.

Selective exposure plays a role in this theory. Individuals seek out and consume media content that aligns with their preexisting political views, reinforcing their belief in their immunity to opposing viewpoints.

The theory aligns with confirmation bias, where individuals tend to favor and remember information that confirms their existing beliefs. They may dismiss contrary information as less influential.

This perception of personal immunity to media influence can impact political behavior, such as voting decisions. Voters may believe that campaign ads, debates, or news reports have little sway over their choices.

The Third-Person Effect Theory also raises questions about media literacy. It underscores the importance of understanding the potential impact of media on oneself, even when individuals believe they are less susceptible to persuasion.

Empirical Review

This study reviewed relevant literatures and past researches that will contribute to the development of this study.

(Obboh, 2016) reflected on the Nigeria's media, elections and African democracy. The study highlighted the Nigerian newspaper coverage of the 2007 elections and major issues in April, May, and June 2007. Six newspapers reported 546 front-page stories, with 36% on election-related issues, 31% on government activities, and 6% on State and National Assembly actions. An additional 26% covered unrelated topics, and seven issues were unavailable. Regarding election coverage, 195 news stories were analyzed. In April, 60% of stories focused on the elections, decreasing to 24% in May and 23% in June. This drop aligns with media's tendency to prioritize current issues.

The study concludes that Nigerian newspapers gave substantial attention (60%) to the 2007 elections. Private newspapers criticized electoral irregularities, echoing observers' concerns. INEC activities gained prominence in May. In May, newspapers covered the Federal Government's stance (18%), election conflicts (44%), public opinions (18%), and results (18%). One story was unrelated. Media emphasis on conflicts likely influenced public discussions. In June, 69% of stories focused on post-election conflicts, 10% on court judgments, and 21% on election result issues. Public and private media disagreed on election credibility, potentially impacting public perceptions.

In a study conducted by (Olaoluwa, 2016), the role of broadcast media during the 2015 election campaign in Nigeria was examined. The research found that broadcast media played a crucial role in encouraging Nigerian participation in the electoral process and ensuring credible and widely accepted election outcomes. Broadcast media owners and editors collaborated to promote balanced, conflict-sensitive reporting, inform the audience, enhance cooperation, and uphold ethical standards in election reporting.

The study employed a quantitative research design with a survey methodology, using questionnaires with 120 respondents. Purposive sampling was used for participant selection, and data analysis involved simple percentages and frequency tables. The research concluded that broadcast media significantly contributed to political awareness, public enlightenment, and education about civic rights and electoral duties among Nigerian citizens.

In a study conducted by (Adebayo and Akintunde, 2018) the influence of mass media on voting patterns in rural areas of Nigeria was investigated. The research emphasized the essential role of mass media in providing information, education, and entertainment in a democracy. However, it found that mass media, particularly in rural Nigeria, had not effectively fulfilled their traditional social responsibility functions.

The study highlighted that rural residents in Nigeria were not adequately informed about the political process and development compared to their urban counterparts. Many significant events that should be reported by the media received insufficient attention in rural areas. Radio, a favored medium among rural dwellers, was also found lacking in orienting, educating, enlightening, and mobilizing rural communities. Language barriers, with programs primarily in English, hindered comprehension, even for agricultural content relevant to rural residents.

The research was guided by the agenda-setting theory, which suggests that media shapes public perceptions by disseminating what they consider important information. Additionally, the two-step flow of information theory posits that some individuals, known as opinion leaders, have greater access to media, influencing opinion followers.

As a recommendation, the study proposed the establishment of community radio stations in rural areas to enhance political mobilization and information dissemination.

(Abubakar, Ahmad and Yushau, 2021) discussed the impact of mass media on political mobilization process in Plateau State Radio, Television Corporation, Jos, Nigeria. The findings from the investigation underscored the significant impact

of media on political mobilization. Additionally, this research delved into the idea that the government should rely on the media as a means of promoting peace and fostering national development within the country. The preceding analysis emphasizes the substantial role that media plays in facilitating political development in any given society.

In conclusion, the study asserts that without effective political mobilization, Plateau Radio Television Corporation Jos (PRTVC), and indeed the media in Nigeria as a whole, cannot achieve their fundamental objective, which is vital for the survival and advancement of individuals as political beings.

Research Methodology

Materials and Methods

The research methodology employed in this study is survey research, utilizing a quantitative questionnaire approach. It aims to investigate the influence of the media on voter behavior and its impact on election outcomes in Nigeria.

The study is conducted within the vicinity of Osun State College of Technology in Esa-Oke, Osun State, a region primarily inhabited by students and youths. The total population under consideration consists of 467 students residing in the researcher's area. To determine an appropriate sample size, the Yaro Yamani statistical formula for sample size determination was applied, as expressed below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample size
 N = Population
 e. = Level of Significance

Sample size:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= ? \\ N &= 467 \\ e &= 0.10 \\ n &= \frac{467}{1 + 467(0.10)^2} = \frac{467}{5.67} = 82.3 \sim 82 \end{aligned}$$

With a determined sample size of 82, the study employed a probability sample or random sampling technique, offering every member of the population an equal chance of being selected for participation.

The primary data collection instrument was a questionnaire employing a modified four-point Likert-type rating scale. Respondents could select from options such as Great Extent (GE), Somewhat Extent (SW), Very Little Extent (VL), and Not At All (NA), or Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaire encompassed five sections, with the first section capturing respondents' bio data. Participants were encouraged to choose the option that best represented their views, and participation was voluntary.

Data Presentation and Analysis

A total of 82 questionnaires were distributed to participants, with a 100% response rate. The data collected from the responses were presented using statistical tables. The analysis involved calculating simple means and percentages. In the decision-making process, any calculated mean exceeding the mean rating of 2.50 was considered acceptable, while those below 2.50 were rejected.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does the tone and framing of news coverage during election campaigns influence voters' perceptions of candidate likability and trustworthiness, and how does this impact their voting behavior?
2. How do different media platforms (e.g., traditional news outlets, social media, online news sources) differ in their influence on voter behavior, particularly in terms of shaping issue priorities and candidate evaluations during election seasons?
3. What role does media bias play in shaping voters' perceptions of election outcomes, and how does this bias influence their trust in the electoral process and political institutions?
4. How do demographic factors, such as age, education level, and political affiliation, interact with media consumption patterns to influence voter behavior and electoral outcomes, and are there variations in these effects across different election contexts?
5. What are the most effective strategies and mechanisms that can be implemented to promote media independence and reduce bias, ultimately fostering a positive influence on voters' behavior and decisions during elections?

Section 1: Demographic Information of respondents.

The responses below show the demographic information or bio data of the respondents.

Table 1.

AGE	LOCATION	GENDER		VOTER STATUS	
18 - 42	Esa-Oke	Male	Female	Eligible	Non-Eligible
		50	32	82	0

Respondents are youth from age 18 – 42, living in Esa-Oke, with 50 males and 32 females in which all are eligible to vote.

Section 2

Research Question 1: To what extent does the tone and framing of news coverage during election campaigns influence voters' perceptions of candidate likability and trustworthiness, and how does this impact their voting behavior?

The necessary information needed to answer this question is shown in the table below.

Table 2.

S/N	ITEMS	GE	SW	VL	NA	MEAN	RMK
1.	To what extent can a positive news coverage of a candidate makes you perceive that candidate as more likable?	68	12	1	1	3.5	GE
2.	To what extent can a negative news coverage of a candidate makes you perceive that candidate as less trustworthy?	73	5	2	2	3.8	GE
3.	To what extent are you influenced by media framing of election issues when deciding which candidate to support?	22	37	11	12	2.8	SW
4.	To what extent would you change your voting preference based on media coverage of a candidate's personal life or character?	51	20	7	4	3.4	GE
5.	To what extent do you seek information from multiple news sources to compare different framings of election-related issues?	72	8	2	0	3.8	GE

In table 2 above, it showed that the respondents to a great extent and somewhat extent, the tone and framing of news coverage during election campaigns influence voters' perceptions of candidate likability and trustworthiness and which in turn impacts their voting behaviour.

Research Question 2: How do different media platforms (e.g., traditional news outlets, social media, online news sources) differ in their influence on voter behavior, particularly in terms of shaping issue priorities and candidate evaluations during election seasons?

The necessary information needed to answer this question is shown in the table below.

Table 3.

S/N	ITEMS	GE	SW	VL	NA	MEAN	RMK
1.	To what extent do you trust traditional news outlets as reliable sources of election information?	20	45	10	7	2.9	SW
2.	To what extent do you encounter election-related information on social media platforms, and does it impact your perception of candidates and issues?	47	16	9	10	3.2	GE
3.	To what extent can you say that online news sources are more biased in their election coverage compared to traditional media?	11	61	8	2	2.9	GE
4.	To what extent do you fact-check election-related information received through social media before forming an opinion?	12	13	48	9	2.3	VL
5.	To what extent do you believe that the influence of social media on voter behavior differs across age groups?	38	26	7	11	3.1	GE

In table 3 above the respondents showed that all the items except item 4, to a great extent and somewhat extent differ in their influence on voter behavior. Why item 4 to a very little extent has an influence on the voter behavior.

Research Question 3: What role does media bias play in shaping voters' perceptions of election outcomes, and how does this bias influence their trust in the electoral process and political institutions?

The necessary information needed to answer this question is shown in the table below.

Table 4.

S/N	ITEMS	GE	SW	VL	NA	MEAN	RMK
1.	To what extent do you perceive media bias in favor of a particular political party or candidate during election coverage?	32	39	6	5	3.1	GE
2.	To what extent does media bias, as perceived by you, impact your trust in the accuracy of election-related reporting?	55	17	2	8	3.4	GE
3.	How often do you seek out news sources with differing political perspectives to counteract perceived media bias?	25	19	20	18	2.6	SW
4.	To what extent do you think media bias influences public trust in election outcomes and the democratic process as a whole?	33	12	17	20	2.7	SW
5.	To what extent will you participate in discussions or forums addressing media bias in election coverage to raise awareness and promote transparency?	45	20	15	2	3.3	GE

Table 4 shows the extent of perception and the influence of media's bias on the voters. All the items to a great extent and somewhat extent affect the voter behavior

Research Question 4: How do demographic factors, such as age, education level, and political affiliation, interact with media consumption patterns to influence voter behavior and electoral outcomes, and are there variations in these effects across different election contexts?

The necessary information needed to answer this question is shown in the table below.

Table 5.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	RMK
1.	Do you agree that your age group has an impact on your media consumption patterns during election seasons?	25	44	10	3	3.1	SA
2.	Do you believe that individuals with higher education levels are more or less susceptible to media influence on their voting decisions?	20	19	21	22	2.4	D
3.	Do you believe that your political affiliation guide your choice of media sources during an election campaign?	56	14	2	10	3.4	SA

4.	Do you believe that variations in media consumption patterns among different demographic groups can impact election outcomes in a diverse and politically divided society?	23	38	11	10	2.9	A
5.	Does the influence of media on voter behavior differ between national and local elections, and does this variation depend on demographic factors?	16	20	31	15	2.4	D

Table 5 above showed that the respondents Strongly agree, Agree and Disagree with some items concerning the demographic factors influence on voter behavior.

Research Question 5: What are the most effective strategies and mechanisms that can be implemented to promote media independence and reduce bias, ultimately fostering a positive influence on voters' behavior and decisions during elections? The necessary information needed to answer this question is shown in the table below.

Table 6.

S/N	ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	MEAN	RMK
1.	Create independent regulatory bodies tasked with ensuring media outlets adhere to ethical reporting standards and avoid bias. These bodies could provide oversight and enforce penalties for non-compliance.	67	11	3	1	3.7	SA
2.	Promote media diversity by supporting a variety of news sources, ownership structures, and viewpoints. Encourage the development of non-profit and community-based media organizations.	63	10	3	6	3.5	SA
3.	Relying solely on legal action, such as lawsuits against biased reporting, may be effective in reducing bias as it may encourage media outlets to report issues independent of political affiliations.	14	9	39	20	2.2	SD
4.	Require media outlets to disclose their ownership and funding sources prominently. Transparency can help viewers and readers understand potential biases.	71	6	3	2	3.7	SA
5.	Invest in media literacy programs to educate the public, especially students, on critical thinking skills, fact-checking, and identifying bias in media content.	68	10	1	3	3.7	SA

6.	Encourage media consumers to verify information from multiple sources and across various platforms to minimize the influence of biased reporting.	75	6	1	0	3.9	SA
7.	Support training and development programs for journalists and emphasize the importance of unbiased reporting, fact-checking, and ethical journalism practices.	66	7	3	6	3.6	SA
8.	Censoring international media outlets that provide alternative viewpoints to checkmate bias and fake news over the need for diversity of information.	22	5	41	14	2.4	D
9.	Implement mechanisms for viewers and readers to report biased content and hold media organizations accountable for their reporting through ombudsmen or feedback channels.	73	4	4	1	3.8	SA
10.	Enact legislation that encourages media pluralism and ensures fair competition among media outlets to prevent media monopolies.	65	6	8	3	3.6	SA

Table 6 shows a list of recommendations and suggestions the respondents believed that it will strongly help the media and voter behavior positively except for items 3 and 8 which they considered not agreeable.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this research are further analyzed in this section.

The Influence of News Tone and Framing on Voter Behavior

The findings highlight the significant influence of news coverage, both positive and negative, on voters' perceptions of candidates' likability and trustworthiness. Media framing's impact on voting preferences is less clear-cut, with some acknowledging its influence and others perceiving it as limited. Additionally, voters appear to be responsive to media coverage of candidates' personal lives or character, and they actively seek information from multiple sources to gain a broader perspective on election-related issues. These findings emphasize the multifaceted role of the media in shaping voter behavior and perceptions during election campaigns.

Media Platforms and Their Influence on Voter Behavior

The findings reveal that trust in traditional news outlets for election information is relatively low among respondents, with many expressing skepticism. Social media platforms play a substantial role in influencing voter behavior, impacting

perceptions of candidates and issues. However, opinions are divided regarding the perceived bias of online news sources. Respondents are also actively involved in fact-checking information from social media. Furthermore, voters acknowledge age-based differences in the influence of social media on voter behavior. These findings highlight the evolving landscape of media influence on elections, with social media playing a prominent and influential role in shaping voter behavior and perceptions.

Media Bias and Its Effects on Voter Trust and Perceptions

The findings reveal that a significant proportion of voters perceive media bias in election coverage, which affects their trust in the accuracy of reporting. However, there is no consensus on actively seeking out diverse political perspectives to counteract bias. Opinions are also divided regarding the influence of media bias on public trust in election outcomes and the democratic process. Nevertheless, many respondents express a willingness to participate in discussions and forums addressing media bias, indicating a proactive approach to raising awareness and promoting transparency in election reporting. These findings highlight the complex interplay between media bias, voter trust, and civic engagement in the context of elections.

Demographics, Media Consumption, and Voter Behavior

The findings highlight the complex interplay between demographic factors, media consumption patterns, and their influence on voter behavior. While there is a strong consensus that political affiliation guides media source choices, opinions are divided on the role of age, education level, and variations in media consumption in impacting election outcomes. Additionally, there is no clear consensus on whether the influence of media varies significantly between national and local elections. These findings underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted relationship between demographics and media influence in the electoral context.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary

The study aimed at investigating the media's influence on voters. During the course of the research it explored using the conceptual framework to establish the structure of the media and its relationship with the voters and election outcomes. It used several theories such as Agenda Setting Theory, Framing

Theory and the Third Person Effect Theory to find the relevance and connections to the study.

Four research questions were generated which focused on the influence of news tone and framing on voter behavior, Media platforms and their influence on voter behavior, Media bias and its effects on voter trust and perceptions and Demographics, media consumption, and voter behavior. Likert scale responses were provided for each research question using 82 respondents. These responses showed varying degrees of agreement or disagreement with statements related to media influence on voter behavior. The findings from the Likert scale responses were discussed for each research question and they show that, News tone and framing significantly impact voter perceptions and behavior. Different media platforms have varying degrees of influence on voter behavior. Media bias can affect voter trust and perceptions, but people seek diverse sources. Demographic factors like age, education, and political affiliation interact with media consumption patterns to influence voter behavior.

Conclusions

Media plays a vital role in shaping voter behavior during elections. The tone and framing of news coverage, the influence of various media platforms, and media bias all have significant effects. Demographic factors further complicate this relationship. To enhance the electoral process and promote an informed electorate, it's crucial to focus on media literacy and education. Encouraging critical thinking, fact-checking, and diverse media consumption can help individuals navigate the complex media landscape. Public awareness campaigns, regulation of media practices, and support for media diversity are essential steps. As elections continue to evolve in the digital age, ongoing research and monitoring of media influence on voter behavior are necessary. By addressing these challenges and implementing the recommended strategies, we can work towards more transparent, fair, and informed elections, ultimately strengthening democracy.

Recommendations

Media Literacy Education: Implement media literacy programs in schools and communities to help individuals critically analyze news content. This can empower voters to distinguish between biased or misleading information and reliable reporting.

Diverse Media Consumption: Encourage voters to diversify their media consumption by seeking information from various sources with different political

perspectives. This can help counteract the influence of media bias and promote a more informed electorate.

Fact-Checking Tools: Promote the use of fact-checking tools and organizations to verify election-related information encountered on social media platforms. This can help voters make more informed decisions based on accurate information.

Accessible Reporting: Encourage media outlets to provide clear and accessible reporting, especially for rural and less-educated populations. Using simpler language and providing context can help all citizens engage more meaningfully in the electoral process.

Research and Monitoring: Encourage ongoing research and monitoring of media influence on voter behavior, considering the evolving media landscape. This can inform policymakers and media organizations about emerging challenges and opportunities.

Transparent Funding: Promote transparency in media funding during election campaigns. Understanding the financial backing of media outlets can help the public assess potential biases.

Cross-Platform Fact-Checking: Collaborate with social media platforms to implement cross-platform fact-checking mechanisms. This can help curb the spread of false information on social media, which can influence voter behavior.

Engagement in Media Discussions: Encourage citizens to actively engage in discussions and forums addressing media bias and election coverage. This can raise awareness and promote transparency in the media landscape.

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