

# Outdoor Advertising and Political Mobilisation of Electorate in the 2019 General Elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria



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## **Abstract**

This study examined the influence of outdoor advertising on the political mobilization of the electorate in the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The study adopted the survey research design and a sample size of 400 electorate were purposively polled from the 1.94 million voters that collected their permanent voter's cards (PVCs) for the elections in the state. The objectives of the study included: To find out what extent were the electorate exposed to outdoor advertising during the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria; whether the electorate's socio-economic and education status influenced their exposure to outdoor advertising during 2019 general elections and whether outdoor advertisements had influenced voting behavior and the outcome of the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Data analyzed showed that voters' exposure to political advertising on billboards and other outdoor outlets recorded a positive high weighted mean score of 4.71 or 94%. The study found out that though exposure to outdoor advertising was high among the electorate, it could not influence the voting behavior of the electorate and the outcome of elections of 2019 in Akwa Ibom State. The study then concluded that exposure to outdoor advertisements by the electorate during the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria was very high (94%); and that the socio-economic and educational status of the electorate did not influence their exposure to outdoor advertising by politicians and political parties. It then recommended that given the popularity of the outdoor advertising media outlets, politicians and the political parties should use the medium extensively to advertise measures of making the electoral process credible in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Advertising, Electorate, Mobilization, Outdoor, Elections*

## **Introduction**

In any democratic setting, elections are usually preceded by political campaigns or electioneering activities, where individuals vying for various elective offices or groups sponsoring people for offices market their programmes and candidates. It is believed that the electorate selects their preferred representatives in an election based on available information on the credibility of the candidates and their programmes. Without adequate and concrete information, the choice of a candidate in an election would be befuddling. This, therefore, makes political advertising inevitable in an electoral process. Okwechime (2011) explains that political advertising is a marketing tool, which involves a persuasive and strategic plan designed to provide voters with information about the politician or the

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political party. It entails carefully crafted messages and the development of tactics and strategies aimed at making the voters favourably disposed to the political party and its candidates. Davis (2006) notes that advertising informs citizens in the most comprehensible ways about competing political parties and policies. It goes further to communicate the interests of competing groups and wider public opinion to the government.

All the activities aimed at sharing information, creating awareness, and influencing public opinion in favour of one candidate or the other in an election to culminate in political mobilization. Ikpe and Umo-Udo (2006) note that mobilization requires a combination of strategies ranging from public enlightenment campaigns, media publicity, formal and informal education to propaganda and coercion. One of the veritable media for enlightenment campaigns and publicity during elections is the outdoor advertising medium. Outdoor advertising outlets include billboards, movable vehicles, posters displayed at strategic locations, skywriting, electronic signs, and displays. Oftentimes, outdoor advertising provides 24 hours exposure among other advantages. In the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, many political parties that sought elective offices engaged in outdoor advertising in attempts to market their candidates and programmes to the electorate. To this end, this study sought to find out how these outdoor advertising messages appealed to the voters and subsequently influenced their choices of candidates in the election.

Outdoor advertising media outlets such as billboards, movable vehicles, posters displayed at strategic locations, skywriting, electronic signs and displays at city corners, school, and market entrances have been exploited maximally by politicians and their parties in attempts to reach the electorate. Many citizens are not literate to reach newspapers or magazines; some do not have time to listen to the radio or watch television at home but they see the larger-than-life pictures of the politicians on the billboards or the branded vehicles of political parties and their candidates while commuting for their businesses.

Outdoor media outlets present large displays of advertisement to passing pedestrians and vehicle users, showing large, ostensibly witty slogans and distinctive visuals. Messages on the outdoor media outlets are usually made up of skillfully crafted slogans and short memorable key statements about the candidates and their parties aimed at reminding the voters or prospects when making voting decisions. Perhaps, this explains why the two major political parties in the 2019 elections in Akwa Ibom State: the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressives Congress (APC), struggled over the right to erect a billboard near the popular Akpan Ndem market in Uyo, the state capital during the 2019 electioneering.

Ukpong (2018) reports that the APC supporters in Akwa Ibom State had claimed that the party had paid and gotten approval to erect a billboard for President Muhammadu Buhari at the popular Akpan Ndem market at the city centre of Uyo. But the PDP-controlled state government came to obstruct them and then wanted to hastily erect a billboard for the party's presidential candidate, Atiku Abubakar, on the exact spot. This struggle by the two rival political parties is suggestive of the fact that outdoor advertising is important to electioneering and political communication. Advertising scholars see outdoor advertising as a reminder or residual publicity used by advertisers to complement other advertising media outlets, As observed by Fill (2009), outdoor advertising reinforces messages transmitted through primary media (radio, newspaper,

magazine, and television) and acts as substitute media when primary media are unavailable.

It is against this backdrop that this study sought to find out the extent to which outdoor advertising had influenced the electorate in Akwa Ibom State during the 2019 general elections. Hence the question: Did the outdoor advertising of political parties and their candidates have more influence on the electorate choice of candidates than other media outlets in the 2019 elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria?

### **Research Objectives**

The following research objectives guided this study:

- (1) To find out the extent of the electorate's exposure to outdoor advertising during the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.
- (2) To ascertain whether the electorate's socio-economic and education status influenced their exposure to outdoor advertising during the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.
- (3) To determine whether the outdoor advertising messages were more appealing than the other media outlets in the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.
- (4) To find out whether outdoor advertisements influenced voting behavior and the outcome of the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Outdoor Advertising**

Outdoor advertising is a medium where advertisements are placed outside the homes in form of signs and posters positioned along highways and other areas of heavy traffic. Fill (2009) observes that outdoor media consist of three main formats: street furniture such as bus shelters, billboards, and transit devices like trains, buses, and taxis. Other platforms used for outdoor advertising include painted bulletins, panels, electronic displays or neon signs, skywriting, blimps, and balloons (Ebitu, 2012). This medium is advantageous because the per capita cost is very low and drivers and pedestrians, who pass through the area frequently, are exposed repeatedly to the message.

Arens, Weigold and Arens (2008) observe that outdoor advertising is used for a variety of purposes such as a directional medium for motorists, which also enhances awareness of or reinforces the advertiser's core message with high frequency at a very reasonable cost. Other merits of outdoor advertising include high accessibility, high reach, geographical and demographic flexibility, high impact, and creative flexibility in addition to being location-oriented. Nwokoye (2000) posits that outdoor advertising provides the advertiser with the largest colourful display of his products, adding that the method is quite effective in Nigeria because literacy level is still low and the large colourful pictures convey the message clearly to all, who are exposed to the advertisements.

The other form of outdoor advertising is transit or transportation advertising which makes use of stickers or cards usually found inside transportation media such as cars, lorries, trains, and airlines. Arens et al (2008) explain that transit advertising as a category of out-of-home media is targeting millions of people who use commercial transportation such as buses, subways, elevated trains, commuter trains, trolleys, and

airlines, in addition to pedestrians and car passengers. The transit advertising has formats, which include: transit shelters; station, platform, and poster cards; inside cards and outside posters on buses; and taxi exteriors. According to Okpara, Anyanwu and Inyanga (1999), transit media messages are catchy and as such the attention of consumers is easily drawn to advertisements in popular commercial transport facilities. Message design could be more creative and powerful and the long-distance transport facilities carry the advertisements far. Ebitu (2012) notes that depending on the average length of a mass transit ride, the passengers are more or less captive audiences reading the ad repeatedly. The cost is relatively low, mainly because no extra equipment is necessary to transmit the message. Nevertheless, Arens *et al* (2008) observe some shortcomings in the use of outdoor advertising to include: fleeting message, difficulty in audience measurement and control; no audience selectivity; high cost of production, and maintenance of billboards.

The advantages enumerated above must have explained why politicians and political parties in the 2019 elections in Akwa Ibom State erected billboards and pasted posters at strategic locations like the University of Uyo bus, major markets, street entrance and exit, major roads in and out of the state capital and the local government areas. They also made use of branded vehicles during the electioneering to make sure that the electorate are exposed to them and their programmes.

### **Advertising and Political Mobilization of Electorate**

Political advertising employs the same principles adopted by business ventures to sell their goods and services to the target audience through the mass media. In political advertising, the parties and their candidates are the products and the electorate are the consumers. Each political advertisement according to Okwechime (2011) seeks to articulate a policy; identify societal problems such as unemployment, absence of basic social amenities, and so on; re-election of an incumbent official; challenge an incumbent candidate or party based on real or imagined failings of the incumbent. Benoit (2017) posits that candidates must differ from opponents on at least some points of comparison if they are to have a chance to appear preferable to the electorate. This is where political advertising becomes inevitable.

For a political system to function effectively, there must be active participation of the citizens. The active involvement of citizens in political affairs entails mobilization. Ejiofor (2007) notes that mobilization creates an opportunity for community members to get involved in political parties, movements, interest groups, voting, rallies, and discussions. Mobilization, therefore, involves sharing information, creating awareness, and influencing public opinion. It involves propaganda, which is a persuasive communication tool, designed to change or reinforce opinions on certain issues by using devious emotional tactics. Lilleker (2006) asserts that political advertising uses all forms of media; in the US paid-for television spots are common. Elsewhere, parties and candidates rely on free media access and then pay for billboard posters, magazine advertisements, or direct mail flyers.

Moorman and Neijens (2012) observe that political advertising allows parties and candidates to present themselves in a direct and unfiltered way to the electorate without intervention from critical journalists or competing politicians. They argue that political commercials are not only able to come across to voters but have the ability to influence their political interest, knowledge, candidate evaluations, and eventually their voting

behavior. Sanders (2004) cited by Lilleker (2006, p.148) posits that successful political advertisements should exhibit four features:

- i. Have dramatic impact to arouse interest and aid recall;
- ii. Draw on familiar themes, stories, and genres to appear relevant;
- iii. Focus on people, often real people and not politicians or actors rather than policy;
- iv. Be simple, so that one easily understands the message.

The above features are inconsonant with a typical outdoor advertising copy which is usually colourful, aesthetically appealing with unique images, attractive and lively. According to Okwechime (2011), outdoor advertising posters are designed in strong and pure colours that give maximum contrast; the poster messages are simple with three elements of headlines, main illustration, and pay-off line to avoid clutter; the copy must be in few words that are catchy because the viewers are likely pedestrians; posters require human involvement because people like seeing people more than objects.

By and large, outdoor advertising messages are often apt, precise, and concise as they reach the people who are in motion. During the 2019 electioneering, many political parties in Akwa Ibom State like the All Progressives Congress (APC), Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Young Democratic Party (YDP), Abundant Renewal Party (ANRP), and Nigeria For Democracy (NFD) sold their respective parties and candidates in beautiful messages and attracted great followers using the outdoor media outlets among others.

### **Types of Political Advertising**

Political advertising as a tool of political campaigns is aimed at motivating the citizens to exercise their democratic rights of voting. According to Lilleker (2006), there are three types of advertising employed by political candidates: advocacy, comparative and negative. Early advertisements concentrated on the positive qualities of the candidates and why they deserve votes from the electorate as the best people for the job. As pure advocacy began to fail, candidates began to think of ways of attacking their opponents in an advertisement, resulting in the contrast or issue advertisement where both candidates were compared on an issue and the sponsor, naturally, was given favourable spin. Negative advertisements simply focus on the frailty of opponents; usually, these are justified and open up the campaign to rebuttal and counter-rebuttal.

Okwechime (2011) identifies the following as categories of political advertising: (i) Talking Head Advertisements (ii) Concept Advertisements (iii) Negative Advertising (iv) Cinema Verite (v) Symbolism (vi) Power Signification (vii) Testimonials (viii) The Neutral Reporter Format.

- (i) Talking head advertisements are issue-oriented messages designed to enable the candidate to present himself as one capable of handling the responsibilities that the office he is vying for demands. The focus is on the capacity to do the work. The 2019 APC governorship candidate in Akwa Ibom State was marketed as a successful businessman and astute manager of men and resources. His opponent in PDP was also advertised as a successful banker, God-fearing, and sincere professional in politics.
- (ii) Concept advertisements on the other hand are ads crafted to give the impression of what the candidate represents. In the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, President

Muhammadu Buhari was elected on grounds of his integrity and ability to resist the cankerworm of corruption in Nigeria. In the 2019 election, the APC governorship candidate in Akwa Ibom State was painted as the quality of excellence that the state deserved. The PDP candidate on the other hand was presented as a sincere and humble person that can be trusted.

- (iii) Negative advertising focuses on the perceived weaknesses of the opponent to make the electorate shun him or her. Johnston (2014) notes that some negative ads are mudslinging ads, which denigrate the opponent's character. It is usually a campaign of calumny that centres on the personality of the candidate in terms of performance, success story, honesty, integrity, and competency. Meirick (2002) observes that negative ads that compare two candidates on specific points can stimulate voters to think of counterarguments to the ads and of facts that contradict the ads and they can be more effective than ads that simply attack the opponent's stand on some issues or for some perceived character flaw. In the 2019 elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, some advertising messages depicted a lack of initiative and selfishness on the part of the opponents.
- (iv) Cinema verite refers to commercials that show the candidate as the man of the people, who have popular acceptance among the ordinary citizens on the streets. Okwechime (2011) notes that the incumbents usually employ this tactic by showing news footage of the candidate's interaction with people during presidential, senatorial, or gubernatorial activities. These commercials portray the candidates in "real life" settings as they are interacting with "the people" in the markets, village square, or during work days in the office. In the 2019 elections in Akwa Ibom State, the APC boasted of its 'federal might' and popularity while the PDP flaunted its belief in God with the slogan, "Only God."
- (v) Symbolism presents some emotional issues that could arouse fears or anxieties in the minds of the electorate concerning the candidate seeking political office. This kind of advertisement may come as positive advertising promoting the candidate or it could be negative advertising employed to attack the opponent.
- (vi) Power signification refers to the strategy of focusing on the experience and credibility of the incumbent candidate or party in power. The advertisements often display the performance of the incumbent showing archive footage of press conferences, foreign trips, meetings with leaders of other countries during international summits, and others. These film clips with appropriate textual descriptions are powerful signifiers of authority against the opponents whose experience in governance may be lacking or limited. In the 2019 election, the APC governorship in Akwa Ibom State was brandished as being generous and patriotic having performed excellently in many public offices before. The PDP candidate on the other hand was presented as godly and trustworthy.
- (vii) Testimonials involve the endorsement of a candidate or the political party by respected persons in the society like the clergymen, business gurus, senior academics, traditional rulers, leaders of professional bodies, youth, and women leaders. In this classification of political advertising, the sentiments expressed by non-candidates are used as evidence of voters' support for the candidate and it can also be used as the people's voice rejecting the opponent. This genre was popular during the 2019 elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria as many youth

- groups, women associations, religious leaders, and ethnic associations endorsed different candidates depending on some sentiments or pecuniary interest.
- (viii) The neutral reporter format is the strategy of presenting the audience with series of seemingly factual statements about the candidate or the opponent. The electorate is then left to decipher and make their choice. The advertisements give the impression of neutrality whereas the facts presented are tilted either to enhance the image of the candidate or to smear that of an opponent. In the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, the two prominent political parties in the election, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) employed all the above or semblance of the above strategies at one point or the other to woo the electorate during their political campaigns. It was a keen contest between the two political parties and their candidates.

### **Appeals in Political Advertising**

The appeal is something in an advertising message that moves people, speaks to their wants or needs, and ignites their interest. Fill (2009) posits that message framing works on the hedonic principles of our motivation to seek happiness and to avoid pain. Belch and Belch (2001) see advertising appeal as the approach used to attract the attention of the consumers and to influence their feelings in favour of the product, service, or cause. Ebitu (2012) opines that advertising copy should make claims that are desirable, believable, exclusive, and distinctive. There are two broad types of appeals. These are the rational and the emotional appeals.

Bovee and Arens (1994) explain that rational appeals consist of those messages that touch the consumers' practical and functional needs for the product or service. Belch and Belch (2001) describe rational appeals as the informational approach to advertising emphasizing the features of the product or service and the benefits or reasons for owning and using the products. They explain that the objective of this appeal is to persuade the target audience to buy the brand because it is the best available or does a better job of meeting consumers' needs. The particular features, benefits, or evaluative criteria that are important to consumers and can serve as the basis of an informational/rational appeal vary from one product or service category to another as well as among various market segments. Gupta (2015) notes that rational appeals are those directed at the thinking of the audience. Some features include an appeal for comfort, convenience, economy, health, and sensory benefits such as touch, taste, and smell. Other rational motives or purchase criteria commonly used in advertising copy include quality, dependability, durability, efficiency, price, efficacy, and performance.

Examples of rational appeal in the APC's political advertisement of its intended programmes included the granting of autonomy to Local Government Areas; payment of N25,000 bursary to students per year; recapitalization of Akwa Ibom Investment Corporation with N50 billion; creation of 24,000 transformational entrepreneurs; launching of the economic blueprint with a roadmap on reactivation of the moribund AkwaPalm industries among others. Thus the party's slogan, *Akwa Ibom deserves the best*. The PDP on the other hand showcased on the billboards erected all over the state the number of industries built by the incumbent governor and PDP governorship candidate such as Syringe manufacturing factory, Metering company, Flour Mill company and Toothpick and Pencil factory among others; the 1,700 kilometres of roads built across the state; the revamping of hospitals; peace and security experienced since 2015.

Emotional appeals refer to the strategy of evoking social and psychological needs as the basis of accepting the candidate and his party (product or service). According to Belch and Belch (2001), many of consumers' motives for their purchase decisions are emotional, and their feelings about a brand can be more important than knowledge of its features or attributes. They explain that emotional appeals are based on the psychological states or feelings directed to prospective buyers (such as pleasure or excitement), as well as those seeking to confer social status or recognition on the consumers.

Advertising copy could appeal emotionally to safety, security, fear, love, happiness, joy, nostalgia, sentiment, excitement, arousal or stimulation, sorrow or grief, pride, achievement or accomplishment, self-esteem, self-actualization, pressure, ambition, and comfort. Other aspects of emotional appeals include recognition, status, ego, involvement, embarrassment, affiliation or belonging, rejection, acceptance, and appeal. In the 2019 political campaigns in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, most messages were emotionally-laden communication. The APC in the state was boasting of parading all the prominent politicians in the state perhaps to create a bandwagon effect. The party also created the impression that the Federal Government controlled by APC (federal might) was interested in capturing Akwa Ibom State, which is one of the richest oil states in the country. The PDP on the other hand created the impression that it was like the Biblical David facing Goliath and as such its only hope was on God, hence the slogan, *Only God*. The two parties had combined the two appeals taking the electorate through the persuasion sequence of attention, holding the attention, creating desire, creating confidence, facilitating decision to act, and eliciting voting action.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was based on the Framing Theory and the Social Judgment Theory. The Framing theory deals with media contents and effects, how media messages are presented (media frames), and the resultant influence of the presentation on interpretation and perception by the audience (audience frames). According to Reese (2008), framing theory is credited to Erving Goffman (1974) who defines frames as 'schemata of interpretation' that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences or life experiences. The major assumption here is that the media frame issues through presentation and placement techniques and the styles of presentation shape audience perception of the issues.

In his exposition on the theory, Oriola (2017) notes that Framing theory has become attractive to researchers in the area of political communication owing to its relevance in political discourse, which in turn determines the behaviour of citizens as voters in modern democracies. He argues that research attention on framing has been focused on electioneering activities such as political campaigns, election results, intra-party and inter-party relations, policy formation, voters' perception, opinions, and reactions in the political process. Musa (2017) explains that news framing is like inserting a photo into a frame. Like photo frames, news frames have a double effect; they can enhance or disfigure the news presentation. A news report that is placed in a distorted frame can affect the frame of mind of the media audience for better or for worse. Outdoor advertising has always presented a big frame to display the politicians and their programmes during the electioneering period.

Sandig (2015) asserts that frames with the capacity to motivate people towards a joint action have three-fold roles. According to him, these frames include identification of a problem and its source (diagnostic framing); the proffering of a solution to the problem, and concrete action plan (prognostic framing), and the call for followers to join and sustain the protest (motivational framing). Baran and Davis (2012) observe that in framing theory people use sets of expectations to make sense of their social world and media contribute to those expectations. According to Ardevol-Abreu (2015), there is only a thin line between Agenda Setting and the Framing Theory. The Agenda Setting Theory is about the amount of attention given to an event by the media while Framing Theory entails the way a news item is described or represented. Outdoor advertising constitutes a unique frame of presenting political parties and their candidates during the electioneering period and elections. Hence, Framing theory is apt in this study.

The Social Judgment Theory is relevant here because it is concerned with how individuals judge the messages they receive and subsequently accept or reject the messages. According to Folarin (2000), the Social Judgment Theory sees attitude change as a two-stage process, which demands that the receiver first judges the message and then subsequently makes the necessary adjustment. He explains that an attitude is better viewed as a continuum with gradations ranging from “most acceptable” to “most unacceptable”. Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso (2008) note that the theory is all about how an individual accepts or rejects a message based on his or her cognitive map. They explain that a person accepts or rejects a message based on one’s ego involvement.

Littlejohn and Foss (2008) attribute the social judgment theory to the work of Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues, who in 1965 tried to predict how one would judge his friend’s message, and how this judgment would affect his belief system. According to Littlejohn and Foss’ exposition, individuals have three zones in which they accept or reject specific messages or attitudes. These zones are (i) latitude of acceptance (ii) latitude of rejection (iii) latitude of non-commitment. Within the context of this study, the latitude of acceptance compares messages that are ordinarily acceptable to the electorate while the latitude of rejection refers to messages that are considered unacceptable. The latitude of non-commitment describes messages which the electorate has yet to make their mind or are merely indifferent about, meaning that they may accept or reject them. This concept may have been the possible explanation for the series of defections of some politicians from one political party to the other. Some who defected to PDP cited the fear of God and sincerity on the part of governorship candidates as their major reason, thus keying into the slogan *Only God*. Others who went to APC cited the quality of programmes that the governorship candidate intended to implement in the state, thus singing *Akwa Ibom deserves the best* slogan.

### **Research Method**

This study made use of the survey research design, where the questionnaire was used to collect information from the voters. The population of this study was based on the total number of voters that collected their permanent voters' cards (PVCs) in Akwa Ibom State as of February 2019, which stood at 1.94 million as announced by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC).

### **Sample Size/Sampling Technique**

To obtain the sample size for the study, the Yaro Yamane sampling formula adapted by Akpan and Bassey (2018) was adopted to select the study sample from the population of 1.94 million using the statistical formula below.

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

Where  $n$  = the sample size

$N$  = the given population

$e$  = the level of significance or limit of tolerable error

1 = unit or a constant

This process and formula are most appropriate when the arithmetic strength of the population is known (Senam & Akpan, 2014). With the population of 1.94 million, the sample size of this study determined at 0.05 level of significance or tolerable limit of error is calculated thus:

$$\frac{1,940,000}{1 + 1,940,000 (0.05)^2}$$

$$\frac{1,940,000}{1 + 1,940,000 (0.0025)}$$

$$\frac{1,940,000}{1 + 4,850}$$

$$\frac{1,940,000}{4851}$$

$$= 399.9 = 400$$

From the above calculations, a total of 400 voters were drawn as the sample for the study. The survey took place in the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom North-East (Uyo), Akwa Ibom north-west (Ikot Ekpene), and Akwa Ibom South (Eket). The study applied the purposive sampling technique since the study targeted those that voted in the state in the 2019 general elections. A total of 100 respondents were polled in Akwa Ibom North West, another 100 in Akwa Ibom South while the Akwa Ibom North-East hosting the state capital with the highest voting strength had 200 respondents polled.

### Research Instrument

This study employed a structured questionnaire for data collection. To ensure an accurate response, 13 simple items were divided into two sections. Section A made up of items 1-5 deals with the bio-data of the respondents while section B made up of items 6-14 deals with the core issues which this study intended to interrogate. Section B of the instrument adopted the 5-point Likert Scale to obtain information. Three research assistants helped to administer the instrument to the respondents, each assigned to a senatorial district.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

Data presentation was done and analyzed in tables using simple percentages and weighted mean score (WMS) based on a five-point Likert Scale. The responses were weighted as follows:

- Strongly Agree (SA) = 5 points
- Agree (A) = 4 points
- Undecided (U) = 3 points
- Disagree (D) = 2 points
- Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point

From the computation, the WMS is 3.00 (5+4+3+2+1÷ 5). The mean score of 3.00 was used as the basis for a decision on the responses to each item. Any mean score which is equal to or more than 3.00 is positive and accepted while any mean score that is less than 3.00 is tagged negative and is rejected.

Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 375 were completed correctly and returned while 25 copies could not be retrieved. The return rate was 94%. This formed the basis for computation.

**Findings**

**Table 1: Voters’ exposure to political messages on billboards and outdoor ads during the 2019 elections in Akwa Ibom State**

Items	Questionnaire statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	N	WMS	Decision
6	I was always exposed to outdoor campaign messages in the 2019 elections.	1500	200	60	6	2	1,768	375	4.71	Positive
7	I was rarely exposed to outdoor campaign messages in the 2019 elections.	1000	400	75	60	20	1555	375	4.15	Positive
8	I was never exposed to outdoor campaign messages in the 2019 elections.	-	-	225	200	200	625	375	1.67	Negative

Source: Field work (2019)

The data in Table 1 above show a high weighted mean score of 4.71 (94%) on the voters’ exposure to political advertising on billboards and other outdoor outlets during 2019 in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Those that rarely had the exposure accounted for a 4.15 (83%) weighted mean score. The respondents that never had exposure recorded a negative weighted mean score of 1.67 (33.4%).

**Table 2: Voters' socio-economic status, education and exposure to political messages on billboards and outdoor ads during the 2019 elections in Akwa Ibom State**

Items	Questionnaire statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	N	WMS	Decision
9	Voters' income level influenced exposure to outdoor campaign messages in the 2019 elections.	-	160	600	50	75	885	375	2.36	Negative
10	Voters' educational level influenced exposure to outdoor campaign messages in the 2019 elections.	100	220	300	100	150	870	375	2.32	Negative

Source: Field work (2019)

The information presented in Table 2 above shows a negative weighted mean score of 2.36 (47%) on the influence that income level had on voters' exposure to political advertising on billboards and other outdoor outlets during 2019 in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. From the computation, the educational level also had a negative weighted mean score of 2.32 (46.4%).

**Table 3: Outdoor advertising appeals more than the media outlets during the 2019 elections in Akwa Ibom State**

Items	Questionnaire statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	N	WMS	Decision
11	Outdoor media outlets carried captivating campaign messages than other media in the 2019 elections.	750	400	150	50	55	1405	375	3.74	Positive
12	Outdoor advertisements shaped my perception of the candidates in the 2019 elections.	300	220	450	20	100	1090	375	2.90	Negative

Source: Field work (2019)

The data presented in Table 3 above show a positive weighted mean score of 3.74(74.8%) on the ability of outdoor advertising media outlets to carry more captivating campaign messages than other media outlets during 2019 in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. But on the ability of outdoor advertisements to shape voters' perception of the candidates, the computation recorded a negative weighted mean score of 2.90 (58%).

**Table 4: Outdoor advertisements’ influence on voting behavior and election outcome during the 2019 elections in Akwa Ibom State**

Items	Questionnaire statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	N	WMS	Decision
13	Outdoor media campaign messages influenced voting behaviour in the 2019 elections.	50	240	450	160	75	975	375	2.6	Negative
14	Outdoor advertisements influenced outcome of elections in 2019.	100	120	600	100	75	995	375	2.65	Negative

Source: Field work (2019)

The computation in Table 4 shows a negative weighted mean score of 2.6 (52%) on the ability of outdoor advertising media messages to influence the voting behavior of the electorate in the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The Table also shows a negative weighted mean score of 2.65 (53%) on the influence of outdoor advertisements on the outcome of elections of 2019 in Akwa Ibom State.

#### Discussion of Findings

This study set out to investigate the influence of outdoor advertising on the political mobilization of the electorate in the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The findings of the study were analyzed based on the research objectives (RO) developed for the work.

#### **RO1: To find out the extent of the electorate’s exposure to outdoor advertising during 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria**

From the data in Table 1 above, it is obvious that voters’ exposure to political advertising on billboards and other outdoor outlets during 2019 in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria recorded a positive high weighted mean score of 4.71 or 94% of the respondents. Even those that rarely had the exposure accounted for a 4.15 (83%) weighted mean score. The respondents that never had exposure recorded a negligible and negative weighted mean score of 1.67 (33.4%). The implication here is that outdoor advertising messages reached almost every electorate during the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Only six percent was short of 100% exposure. This finding corroborates earlier postulations by Branston and Stafford (2007) that advertising is the most powerful and persuasive form of propaganda and that one can only avoid it when indoors with all screens and radios turned off. The finding also supports earlier work by Arens et al (2008) that outdoor media outlets reach more prospects than spot TV and newspapers. This high rate of exposure is expected because outdoor advertising is usually designed and carefully positioned to enhance exposure. This makes Framing theory relevant to this work.

**RO2: To ascertain whether the electorate's socio-economic and education status influenced their exposure to outdoor advertising during 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria**

The information presented in Table 2 above shows a negative weighted mean score of 2.36 (47%) on the influence that income level had on voters' exposure to political advertising on billboards and other outdoor outlets during 2019 in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. From the computation, the educational level also had a negative weighted mean score of 2.32 (46.4%). The implication here is that unlike the readership of newspapers and magazines, the electorate did not have to be educated in order to have exposure to outdoor advertising messages during the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. They did not need to have a disposal income in order to be exposed to outdoor advertising media during the elections. This finding corroborates earlier inference by Ogbidi, Basil and Bassey (2016) that no matter the nature of the product, level of education, social status, or other related factors, advertising is most effective for wider reach. In this case, outdoor advertising outsmarts other media given its ability to display larger-than-life pictures of the products or politicians on billboards and other outlets (Nwokoye, 2000).

**RO3: To determine whether outdoor advertising messages were more appealing than the other media outlets in the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria**

The data presented in Table 3 above show a positive weighted mean score of 3.74(74.8%) on the ability of outdoor advertising media outlets to carry more captivating campaign messages than media outlets during 2019 in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. This finding implies that the outdoor advertising had greater appeal to the electorate than other media outlets perhaps because of repeated exposure to the short and impactful message on the outdoor media outlets. This corroborates Ebitu (2012) and Arens et al (2008) that outdoor advertising provides quick information and it is the ideal medium for short, simple, and authoritative messages often given out by politicians. But on the ability of outdoor advertisements to shape voters' perception of the candidates, the computation recorded a negative weighted mean score of 2.90 (58%). The implication of this finding is that in spite of the overwhelming exposure of the electorate to outdoor advertising in the 2019 elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, their perception of the candidates did not change. This result contradicts Moorman and Neijens (2012) who argue that political commercials are not only able to come across to voters but have the ability to influence their political interest, knowledge, candidate evaluations, and eventually their voting behavior. This is Social Judgement theory at work, where the electorate exercised their judgment on the choice of the candidates despite appealing advertisement.

**RO4: To find out whether outdoor advertisements influenced voting behavior and the outcome of the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria**

From the computation in Table 4, it is evident that outdoor advertising did not influence the voting behavior of the electorate during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The Table shows a negative weighted mean score of 2.6 (52%) while another negative weighted mean score of 2.65 (53%) was recorded on the influence of outdoor advertisements on the outcome of elections of 2019 in Akwa Ibom State. This finding contradicts corroborates Ogbidi et al (2016); Moorman and Neijens (2012) that there is a significant relationship between advertising and voters' behaviour in the electioneering process. Perhaps other advertising media were more potent than outdoor

advertising outlets in the 2019 elections in this regard. This result could also be explained in terms of the nature and character of elections in Nigeria, which are often fraught with malpractices such as intimidation of voters, violence, and hijacking of voting materials, ethnic and religious sentiments. The Social Judgement theory is also apt in explaining the import of this finding.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the data, the analysis, and the discussion of the findings of this study, the following inferences are drawn.

- (i) In the 2019 general elections in the Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, a total of 94% of the electorate were exposed and mobilized through outdoor advertising messages.
- (ii) The socio-economic and education status of the electorate did not influence their exposure to outdoor advertising by politicians and political parties during the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.
- (iii) Though outdoor political advertising appealed to the majority of the electorate in the 2019 general elections in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria, it could not shape the electorate's perception of candidates, voting behavior, and outcome of the elections.

### **Recommendations**

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

1. Given the popularity of the outdoor advertising media outlets, politicians and political parties should use the medium extensively to advertise measures of making the electoral process credible in Nigeria.
2. Political advertising through outdoor media and other outlets in Nigeria can only correlate voting behavior and electoral outcome when the politicians and their parties respect the rule of law, act patriotic and make themselves credible before the electorate.

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