Edo State Audience Assessment of Broadcast Stations' Coverage of the 2019 Presidential Election in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated Edo State audience assessment of broadcast stations coverage of the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria. The study was anchored in the tenets of the social responsibility and agenda setting theories. The survey research design was adopted with questionnaire as the instrument for data collection to elicit responses from 400 broadcast audiences within the state, who were selected through cluster and purposive sampling techniques. Data obtained from the study were analysed and presented with frequency tables and simple percentages. Findings revealed that the broadcast stations coverage of the events leading to the election was done in good manner. Broadcast stations were also found to have related election stories and results during the period in the right and professional way. It was recommended that broadcast stations engage in more mass mobilisation and sensitization of audience in order to engender political participation in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The mass media generally provide the audience with a window into the world. Implicit in this assertion is the idea that the media act as powerful agencies that are capable of shaping and directing public and private understanding of the world and awareness of its political affairs. For Ochonogor (2008), the mass media perform specific duties which place them highly relevant in the social-political terrain of the society. The basic functions of the media are information, education and entertainment. Also, Obaze (2007) avers that functions are synonymous with the roles which are socially expected behaviour from a particular social institution. Section 22 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended, provides for such duties and obligation for the Nigeria press when it stated that the press and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in chapter two (2) and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.

This implies that the Constitution provides an opportunity for the media to monitor the government and offer constructive criticism where necessary.

Also, the aforementioned constitutional provision confers on the media their watch dog role to exercise their surveillance function on every aspect of the Nigerian society, correcting and criticizing where necessary. One of those roles expected of the Nigeria mass media is to help the public catch a glimpse of the political reality by helping them analyse issues and trends. Broadcast stations do this through their various contents such as news, commentary, analysis, etc. Okoro (2003) posits that the broadcast media greatly contribute to the smooth and effective running of the society. They serve as a link between the government and the governed. The broadcast media are expected to carry along every single member of the society irrespective of gender, colour or social political affiliation in the process of development. Broadcast stations help to disseminate political information, especially during electioneering period, create enlightenment and development programmes to mobilise the audience for political participation. This provides the avenue for the expression of the core principles and freedom, choice and accountability of political leaders.

McQuail (2007) maintains that the more open the society, the more inclination to develop communication technology and utilisation of its potential to the fullest. The mass media do not only create awareness but also direct public thinking through their content especially news. This must have prompted Nwabueze (2010) to assert that broadcast stations are strategic in setting agenda for the public to discuss issues of significance. They occupy a very significant place in information dissemination. In the same light, Sambe (2005) posits that the radio, a component of broadcast media, is the fastest through which news is delivered. This apparently informs the reason for broadcasting electioneering campaign, voter education and political mobilisation via the medium. The strongest selling point of the broadcast media is their ubiquity, visual/audio power and popularity. Baran (2004, p. 233) is of the opinion that "No one is neutral about the media. We either love them or we hate them. Many of us do both". He goes ahead to point out that after the printing press the most important invention in communication technology to date has been the broadcast media, which have changed the way teachers teach, government governs, religious leaders preach and the way we organise the furniture in our homes. Talking about this power, Brain Wenha (a former BBC Director of programmes) said, with emphasis on television, that the influence media programmes exert on human minds is perhaps hardly completely quantifiable. Marshall Mcluham states that most observers agree that

communication media and technologies have contributed immensely to shaping society that is changing rapidly (Domnick, 2009).

Recognising the influence of mass media in politics, Okoro (1994) says that a world without communication channel and politics or public affairs without media report would be a nightmare. This implies that without the mass media many government activities might never be known or understood by the people, and government might never know how the people feel about social and political policies. This goes a long way in explaining how indispensible the mass media are in development, politics and governance.

2. Statement of the Problem

The concept of media coverage of election, especially in the electronic media has always been a subject of considerable controversy in Nigeria. This issue is worsened by the diversity in culture, language and other social values among Nigerians. This could be the reason why the struggle to broadcast election matters has remained an issue in Nigerian politics. Political broadcasting tends to tilt towards the direction of the government of the day; however, with the deregulation of the broadcast industry, the trend changed, particularly with the nation's return to democracy.

This is obvious why many Nigerian broadcasting stations go all the way to satisfy the interest of their owners and principals during electioneering campaign. Many Nigerians often accuse the media of not playing an independent role during the electioneering periods as they often deny the oppositions the chance to use the medium in getting to the electorate (Senam & Edor, 2020). Another area where people are pointing accusing finger to the media is the "who is involved" syndrome. The implication of this syndrome is that sometimes people tend to take some decisions based on the personality involved rather than the issue involved. For instance, emerging political parties or opposition parties rarely get sufficient coverage or attention from government-owned media.

A cursory observation would reveal that during electioneering time, some government-owned broadcast stations tend to protect government and ruling party's interest over other parties' interest or even the audience interest, even in contravention of provision of Section 22 of the National Broadcasting Commission Codes which deals with political broadcasting. In view of the fore-going, one then wonders what the perception of audience members in Edo State is vis-à-vis the coverage of the 2019 Presidential election in the State; thus the

motivation for this study. In other words, were the operations of broadcast media in Edo State effective and efficient from the period of electioneering to the election proper?

3. Research Questions

The following research questions were set to serve as a guide to the study.

(i) What is the nature of audience perception of broadcast coverage of the 2019 presidential election?
(ii) What are the perceived factors that affect broadcast stations coverage of the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria?
(iii) What is the influence of broadcast stations coverage on the voting decision of the electorate in Edo State during the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria?

4. Mass Media and Political Mobilisation in Nigeria

The mass media, in line with the contemporary wave of information and communication technology, have over the years helped in informing and mobilizing the people for greater political participation in all ramifications (Okoro, 2003). This mainly results from the mass media making the electorate more informed and knowledgeable in issues of politics and governance. Also, the mass media play fundamental roles in mobilising and drawing citizens' attention to focus on issues that are perceived as important to the entirety of the national polity (Graber, 2001). Three elements are usually very fundamental in driving the mass media to discharge their mobilisation function in the society. The elements are the aggregate rate of mobilisation, effectiveness of the mobilisation contact, and the persuasive power of the mobilisation. In a democratic society, when mass media are well packaged, they have the tendency to promote mass political participation among the audience. This leads to effective participation in election processes.

The entrenchment of democratic governance in Nigeria has greatly motivated the mass media to serve as a formidable institution of mass mobilisation for high political participation as well as direct involvement in governance (Senam & Udo, 2015). This in turn has positive effects on the narratives of governance in Nigeria. In the idea of Babawale (2012), citizens' involvement in government decision making improves government performance, decision legitimacy, citizens' responsiveness and trust in direct democracy. Inversely, with effective mobilisation, citizens become not just active contributors and participants in governance but also major stakeholders in governance. The mass media play a major role in greasing the wheel of the nation's political life.

Apart from providing the electorate with the opportunity to assess the manifestos and programmes of political parties with a view to helping the electorate make informed choice during election, the mass media also provide necessary information that motivates the electorate to participate in politics and governance. The mass media, as agents of social change, help the electorate to change their hitherto political apathy to active political participation. Tsebee (2010) explains the strategies mostly used by the mass media for mobilisation for political participation and peaceful election as follows:

Liberating the Electorate Though Political Education: The mass media enlighten the electorate to enable the electorate to understand and utilize their political rights. This role is important because when the electorates are enlightened, ignorance and its attendant effects would be reduced and the polity would be dynamic. This in turn results in a healthy democracy characterized by high spirit of political consciousness and patriotism. For this to be possible, citizens should be sensitized to appreciate the supremacy of the constitution and its implications for political stability. The mass media imbue the citizenry with the spirit of political consciousness and patriotism which are indispensable lubricant of a democracy. This inversely inculcates in them the sense of high regard and recognition of the supremacy of the Nation's constitution in all areas of application (Vivian, 2008).

Reducing Political Violence and Thuggery: The contemporary mass media have gone beyond the discharge of the perfunctory functions of informing, educating and entertaining the audience, to that of persuading them to abhor evil and crime in the society. Again, with the emergence of the new communication technologies, the mass media now take to the centre stage, local, national and international issues, political philosophy and democratic ideology. This is called political engineering, and it aims to mobilise the audience and the entire citizenry to the true objectives of politics and democratic governance (Senam & Udo, 2015).

De-materialising of Politics: The mass media are a veritable channel used to orientate politicians and the electorate to see politics and political participation as an avenue of self-gratification and malversation, rather as an avenue to give back goodies to the society. The mass media therefore help to, on the one hand, reiterate the fact that politics is an avenue for call to service, and on the other hand, reverse the impression that it is an avenue for bribery, corruption and self-aggrandizement. The media therefore play the vital role of educating the

electorate to vote for candidates not on the basis of how much money or gratification the electorate has been given but on the basis of unbiased assessment of the candidate the party's manifesto.

5. Theoretical framework

This work was anchored in the framework of the Social Responsibility and Agenda setting theories.

Social Responsibility Theory: The Social responsibility theory states that the press must be free to perform its traditional social function, but has to do this within the precinct of the law (Nwosu, 2004). This means that the freedom of the press is carried out with some limits of responsibility. It also means that serious obligation is assigned to the press, in addition to certain freedom. The theory emerged because the press abused the freedom which they enjoyed as a result of the free press. Under a free press, there is supposed to be a flow of objective information that will allow citizens to make intelligent political decisions and other decisions affecting their lives. Dennis Mc Quail as cited by Baran and Davis (2009, p.114) summarises the basic principles of the social responsibility as follows:

- Media should accept and fulfill certain obligations to the society.
- These obligations are mainly to be met by setting high professional standards of in formativeness, truth, accuracy, objectivity and balance.
- In accepting and applying these obligations, media should be self-regulating within the frame work of law and established institutions.
- The social media should avoid whatever might lead to crime, violence or civil disorder to give offence to minority group.
- The media should as a whole be pluralistic and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of views and right of reply.
- Society and public have a right to expect high standard of performance, and interventions can be justified to secure the public good.
- Media practitioners should be accountable to the society as well as to employers and the market.

For this study, the social responsibility theory became imperative in many ways. Firstly, it is the responsibility of the media to provide the citizens with relevant information needed for them to actively participate in electoral process. Also, the media that is given free hand to operate in society must use such opportunity to advance and advocate the course of the government by projecting fair, balanced and unbiased reportage. Since freedom is tied to responsibility, it is assumed that the freedom given to the press by the government will in turn be a catalyst for

symbiotic relationship between the government and the press whereby the citizens of the country would collectively be the major beneficiary.

Agenda setting Theory: Mc Comb (2004) avers that agenda setting theory is the idea that the news media, by their display of news, come to determine the issue the public think and talk about. The news media, in their function, call attention to certain items and such items gain prominence among the audience as the prevalent issue to think and talk about. The news media, it is assumed, posses this as a result of surveillance or information provision function, correlation or criticism function and entertainment or relaxation function. Also, Daramola (2004) opined that based on the assumption that there is a relationship between news coverage and public perception on the importance of issue. The theory is important due to the fact that media practitioners often lead members of the public in the debate of critical issue of public significance.

Furthermore, Kayode, Thanny and Abisiga (2009) observe that a prominent dimension in agenda setting is the suggestion that the media, rather than reflect societal realities, are more like a searchlight, and where the searchlight is shinning can be affected by groups with special interest in an issue, by pseudo events created to get attention and by certain habit and rituals practices of journalists (Shoemaker & Mayfield cited in Mc Comb, 2005). Finally, the significance of the agenda setting theory to this work cannot be overemphasized. Since the media assumed the powerful role of leading the public to a discourse, it is imperative to note that broadcast stations are swift and can reach countless number of audiences within a space of time, generating ideas and issues. Though the theory does explicitly say that the media have the power to tell the people what to think about, through constant repetition of broadcast messages, the mind of the audience is tailored towards the direction of such message. Hence, the presidential election issues were given prominent attention thereby leaving the audience with what to think about.

6. Methodology

This study used the survey design. It was considered most suitable because survey is an excellent method measuring people's perception, attitude, opinion and behaviour. This method is characterised by the use of sample which makes room for generalization, particularly within the population of interest. The population of this study comprised of Edo State broadcast audience, but since it is difficult to ascertain the number of broadcast audience in the state, the total figure of the state as given by the National Population Commission NPC (2006) was 3233366

people. This constituted the working population for this study. Based on Taro Yamane's formula determining the sample size for a definite population, a sample of 400 respondents was selected from the population; the respondents were reached through multi-stage sampling method. That is, they were selected based on the consideration that they possess the features needed in this study as respondents.

The questionnaire was used as data gathering instrument for the study. It was primarily used because of its capacity to facilitate the collection of a large amount of data in a short period. It contained two sections which sought psychographic and demographic data from respondents. Four hundred copies were distributed; however, 396 copies were retrieved and were used in the analysis. The data collected were expressed in tables and computed in simple percentage.

7. Data Presentation and Analysis

Out of 400 copies of the questionnaire that were given out to respondents, 396 were retrieved and used for this analysis.

Table 1: Edo Audience perception on the nature of Broadcast Stations coverage of the 2019 presidential election

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage
There was objectivity	140	35%
Supported a particular party	105	27%
Displayed professionalism	151	38%
Total	396	100%

Source: field survey, 2019

Table 1 indicates the perception of Edo State broadcast audience about the coverage of the 2019 presidential election. 35% of the respondents agreed that there was objectivity, 27% said broadcast stations support a particular party and 38% of the respondents agreed that broadcast stations displayed certain degree of professionalism.

Table 2: Factors that affect broadcast stations coverage in the 2019 presidential election

Option	number of respondents	Percentage
Ownership influence	124	32%
Vote buying	75	19%
Security	65	16%
Lack of fund	132	33%
Total	396	100

Source: field, survey 2019

In table 2, respondents revealed the various factors that affected broadcast stations coverage of the 2019 presidential election; 32% agreed that ownership influence played a role in the coverage of the election, 19% said vote buying was a factor in the process while 16% and 31% agreed that security and lack of fund were contributing factors that affected the coverage.

Table 3: Influence of Broadcast Stations on audience voting decision

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage
Made you vote	114	29%
Encouraged you to vote for a particular candidate	95	24%
Keep you informed in all electoral activities	84	21%
Enlightened you on complex issues regarding the election	103	26%
Total	396	100%

Source: field survey, 2020

In table 3, respondents have identified the different influence broadcast stations exert on their voting decision as 29% of the respondents agreed that broadcast stations made them vote. As regards if broadcast stations encouraged them to vote for a particular candidate, 24% said yes, 21% of the respondents agreed that broadcast stations kept them informed of electoral activities and 26% said broadcast stations enlightened them on complex issues about the election.

8. Discussion of Findings

Research Question one: What is the nature of audience perception of broadcast stations' coverage of the 2019 presidential election?

Table 1 showed that 151 (38%) indicated that there was professionalism in the coverage of the presidential election, 140 (35%) said there was objectivity in the coverage, while 105 (27%) said broadcast stations supported certain political parties. This indicates that journalists tried to uphold professionalism and ethics in their coverage of the 2019 elections despite the odds and pressure they encountered. In the contemporary society, journalism practice is faced with pressure from several sources such as pressure from commercialism, socio-political dependence, etc. These, in one way or the other, affect the standard of professionalism among journalists. It was based on the perceived falling of the

standards of practice that professional ethics emanated. For Senam (2020), professional media ethics has so far taken various forms such as the formation of associations, press councils and the drawing up of principles of good practice in the form of code of ethics. The press council, the world over, has a similar objective. The press council is typically voluntary or at least the body that mediates between the public and the mass media. The main function of the council is to adjudicate on complaints from any parts affected by the practice of the media professional. Despite the existence of the press council the broadcast media have their own ethics-based regulatory bodies, such as the broadcasting organisation of Nigeria (BON). To whatever regulatory body the media belong, the underlying goal is how to ensure a high degree of professionalism and media ethics (Senam, 2020).

The major role of media ethics is to function as an instrument of self-regulation of mass media professionalism and responsibility to the public. The major instrument of mass media professional's self-regulation is the journalism code of ethics. It refers to a set of principles of professional conduct that are adopted, implemented and enforced by the journalists themselves. The establishment, practice and enforcement of journalism code of ethics "reflect the general process of professionalising of journalism and also the wish of the media industry to protect itself from criticism and especially from the threat of external intervention and reduced autonomy" (McQuail, 2007, p. 173). The principal thing here is that professional ethics helps to set a boundary to public incursion to the realm of journalism profession. This helps to provide a good idea of what journalism ought to be doing – they reveal the values that the media workers publicly proclaim as guidelines for their work. This is also believed to have helped broadcast stations in Edo State not to fall into avoidable dilemmas in the coverage of the 2019 general elections in the State.

Research Question two: what are the perceived factors that affected Broadcast Stations Coverage of the 2019 Presidential Election?

In response to this question, a majority (33%) of the respondents said ownership influence affected the coverage of broadcast station, with regard to vote buying, 75 respondents representing 19% agreed that vote buying affected the coverage, 124 (32%) respondents agreed that lack of fund affected the work of broadcast stations, while the remaining 65 (16%) respondents said insecurity affected the coverage. These findings corroborate John and Enighe (2001) who assert that Nigerian media are always used by their owners - private, party or government for the propagation of the interest of such owners. This justifies the popular saying that he who plays the piper calls the tune. It is therefore not out of sight to submit

that the owners of media organizations have a particular position in any situation be it election or any other matter and journalists, including Broadcast Stations, must see with the lens of their proprietors. The disadvantage of this is that objectivity which happens to be a pillar in media reporting will now be made subjective and, once this is so, it will be difficult to achieve fair and balanced reportage.

Also, Ogbuoshi (2010) affirmed that government owned media are used to carry out government propaganda and this was evident in the electioneering process and the eventual coverage of the presidential election in Edo State. Commenting on this, Popoola (2007) submits that the foundation of media coverage as part of activity in the country was laid on the trend in which aspiring leaders of the country and politicians who establish Broadcast Stations do it in order to have an avenue for reaching their teeming supporters across the country. To salvage this, Akinfeleye (2003) asserts that to dismantle the nauseating foundation on which the journalistic profession was built in Nigeria, Nigerian journalists should give serious consideration and attention to journalistic standards and serve the public interest through new methods of reporting, editing and presentation of public issues in such an explicit manner that could encourage civic life and public dialogue.

Research Question Three: What is the influence broadcast station coverage had on the voting decision of the electorate in Edo State during the 2019 presidential election in Nigeria?

Responses from the respondents showed that 114 (29%) of the respondents agreed that broadcast stations encouraged people to vote during the presidential election, 95 (24%) respondents said broadcast stations encourage them to vote for a particular candidate and 84 (21%) of the respondents said broadcast stations kept them informed in all electoral activities, while 103 (26%) respondents said broadcast stations enlightened them on complex issues regarding the election. These findings are consistent with Sorensen (2016), who observed that broadcast stations (Radio and Television), have caused an increase even in local turnout. He went further to say that media coverage of national policies has a positive effect on participants. This implies that broadcast stations explain issues of national interest and many other issues affecting the general public in a language that audience can grab easily thereby aiding their understanding and assimilation, since adequate access to information has direct bearing on voters participation, it is safe to say that political education which happen to be one of the functions of mass media is better carried out by broadcast stations.

Also, Arririguzoh (2014) opines that the mass media are key actors in the electoral process because they enable political parties and their candidates to express their opinion and also allow the public to get information about their views. It is imperative to note that the contents of broadcast stations such as news, commentaries among others affect voting decision in any electoral process because they inform, educate and sensitize the electorate. Television and Radio serve as channels for disseminating information and projecting political office seekers in good light during electioneering campaigns. This is because of the audio/visual power of these media.

Due to the persuasive nature and tune in which messages are passed across to the audience through these media, electorates find a point of connection which endeared them to such political office seeker. Even when they know little or nothing about them, their adverts, jingles and other forms of advertorial provide such feat. We are influenced by what we see, listen to and what we expose ourselves to, just as whatever we refuse to expose ourselves to is filtered out of our perception. Broadcast stations help to provide a direct link and contact between the electorate and the candidate. The capability of immediate visual presentation therefore offers the viewers and listeners the seeing images which form perspectives on their minds.

Vivian (2008) talking specifically about radio, said radio is swift and fast and can reach many people at the same time which can form an aspect in molding their opinion towards election. It is therefore crystal clear to say that the effects and efficiency of broadcast stations are proportional to the voting behaviour of Edo State audience during the 2019 presidential election in the state.

9. Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it is concluded that broadcast stations in Edo State played the role of awareness creation, enlightenment, mass mobilisation and provider of voter education during the period of the 2019 presidential election. Again, broadcast stations in Edo State presented political matters to the people, helping them to make decisions on electoral issues. It is also concluded that broadcast stations served as indispensable tools for the promotion of elections and enhanced people participation in electoral rules, ethics, and processes thereby promoting political participation in the 2019 presidential election in Edo State. This made the audience to have some commendable confidence in broadcast stations in the state during the election.

10. Recommendations

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

1. Broadcast stations must strive to maintain the positive place in election coverage so as to continue to encourage audience participation in the election process in Nigeria.
2. There is need for broadcast stations' audience to continue to rely heavily on the report of broadcast stations provided such reports uphold the journalistic principles of truthfulness, balance, objectivity and fairness.
3. Broadcast station owners should endeavor to enhance their operation with modern technology which would in turn improve active audience participation based on their productivity.
4. Broadcast stations should enhance their performance and productivity by forming a good synergy with ICT and social media; this will bring out new ideas and creativity in their reportage.
5. Broadcasters should be guided by both professional ethics and the laws regulating political broadcast during election time.

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