



EFFECTIVENESS OF POLITICAL ADVERTISING OF 2023 GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATES ON CIVIL SERVANTS IN IMO STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study looks at the efficacy of political advertising during the 2023 gubernatorial election campaign in Imo State, Nigeria. Two theories; Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Heuristic-Systemic Model (HSM) were used as framework to hinge the study's findings. Using survey research method, sample size of 384 respondents was derived using the Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator. A multi-stage sampling technique was utilized, with three senatorial zones in Imo State (Owerri, Orlu, and Okigwe). The questionnaire used for this study was validated by a research expert, administered face-to-face, and data analysis involved the use of simple percentages. The result shows how various sorts of political commercials, such as television, radio, and social media ads, affect voter views of candidate credibility, likability, and policy stances, as well as voting intentions. Based on the findings of this study, the research recommended that political candidates should consider implementing strategies tailored to specific demographic groups. Political candidates should also diversify their advertising channels beyond traditional platforms like television and radio. Candidates should prioritize message clarity, authenticity, and relevance to key issues affecting voters in Imo State, among other recommendations. The study adds to knowledge of political communication and campaign methods in Nigeria's election setting, with implications for future political campaigns.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Political Advertising, Gubernatorial Candidates, Civil Servants.

Introduction

Political advertising is an important part of contemporary election campaigns since it allows politicians to express their messages and convince voters. In Nigeria's dynamic political scene, where elections are hotly fought and voter choices are impacted by a variety of variables, evaluating the efficiency of political advertising is critical. This research looks at the efficacy of political advertising used by Imo State's gubernatorial candidates in 2023, and how it affects voter views and behavior.

Imo State, in Nigeria's southeastern area, has a long history of competitive gubernatorial elections marked by intensive political campaigns and varied voter demographics. The 2023 gubernatorial election in Imo State was no exception, with numerous candidates running for the state's highest position. Political advertising, delivered via a variety of outlets including television, radio, print media, and, increasingly, social media platforms, has evolved as a significant part of these campaigns.

Despite the widespread use of political advertising in election campaigns, issues persist about its efficiency in influencing voter views and behavior. This research seeks to close this gap by investigating

the influence of political advertising methods used by Imo State gubernatorial candidates during the 2023 election. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. determine the degree to which political advertising affected voter civil servants' impressions of gubernatorial candidates.
2. determine the link between exposure to various forms of political commercials and voting behavior.
3. investigate the efficiency of different advertising methods used by Imo State gubernatorial candidates.

Understanding the impact of political advertising in Imo State's gubernatorial elections has important consequences for political practitioners, policymakers, and researchers. This study's findings may assist political practitioners and candidates maximize their advertising efforts to better reach and convince voters. Policymakers may benefit from a better knowledge of the role of political advertising in election processes, which may help guide the establishment of legislation to maintain fairness and openness in campaigns. Furthermore, academics and researchers in the domains of political communication, marketing, and public opinion would benefit from the empirical data created by this study, which adds to the current literature on the issue

Review of Related Literature

Political Advertising and Its Role

Political advertising is a cornerstone of modern political campaigns, molding public opinion, influencing voter behavior, and eventually dictating election results. Candidates for political office use various types of advertising across several media channels to spread their ideas, promote their platforms, and differentiate themselves from their opponents (Garramone, 2012).

Political advertising includes a variety of communication tactics, such as television commercials, radio spots, print advertisements, direct mail, and, increasingly, digital and social media campaigns (Leshner & McLaughlin, 2018). These advertisements are carefully designed to connect with target groups, explain crucial policy viewpoints, and provoke emotional reactions from voters. Candidates use carefully chosen messages and graphics to generate a positive image, increase name recognition, and foster constituency support (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014).

The importance of political advertising stems from its capacity to reach large audiences and influence popular opinions of politicians and topics. Political commercials can significantly magnify politicians' ideas and affect voter views by using the power of mass media (Garramone, 2012). Furthermore, political advertising functions as an agenda-setting tool, drawing public attention to certain themes and constructing political discourse around specific narratives (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014).

Political advertising, in addition to promoting candidates, is used by political parties, interest groups, and advocacy organizations to push their agendas and rally support for their causes (Leshner & McLaughlin, 2018). These organizations use issue advocacy commercials to affect public opinion, influence policy discussions and persuade people to support their favored policies or politicians.

The success of political advertising is determined by a variety of variables, including the ad content, the time of its distribution, and the target audience's receptivity. According to research, well-crafted political advertising that appeals to voters' values and emotions is more likely to have long-term influence (Ridout and Franz, 2011). Furthermore, the introduction of digital technology has changed the landscape of political advertising, allowing politicians to micro-target certain demographic groups and customize messages to individual preferences (Garramone, 2012).

Political advertising is a significant technique for candidates to promote their views, policies, and credentials to voters (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). Furthermore, political advertising helps candidates gain exposure, name familiarity, and favorable opinions among voters (Leshner & McLaughlin, 2018).

Gubernatorial Elections in Nigeria, Imo State:

In Nigeria, gubernatorial elections are intensely fought and often marked by vigorous political campaigning, including substantial use of political advertising across several media platforms (Onuoha, 2016). Imo State, in Nigeria's southeastern area, has been a battlefield for political groups seeking control of the state government. Previous gubernatorial elections in Imo State have seen heated rivalry between candidates from various parties, with advertising having an important role in determining voter choices (Oluikpe, 2019).

Gubernatorial elections in Nigeria, especially in states like Imo, are watershed occasions in the country's political system. Understanding the dynamics of gubernatorial elections necessitates an examination of Nigeria's distinctive political, social, and economic aspects, as well as those particular to Imo state. Here's an explanation of gubernatorial elections in Nigeria and Imo State:

Gubernatorial Elections in Nigeria

Nigeria's gubernatorial elections follow democratic ideals established in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Adejumobi, 2019). These elections are conducted every four years and are an important part of Nigeria's federal form of government, which gives states great autonomy in handling their affairs (Onuoha, 2016). Gubernatorial candidates compete for the role of state governor, who is the top executive officer of the state government.

Nigeria has a multi-party system in which several political parties compete for governor offices. Campaigns for gubernatorial elections are characterized by significant political activity such as rallies, debates, and considerable media coverage (Onuoha, 2016). Political parties utilize a variety of techniques to gain voter support, including door-to-door canvassing, grassroots mobilization, and the use of political advertising on many media platforms.

Imo State and Gubernatorial Elections

Imo State, situated in Nigeria's southeastern geopolitical zone, is one of 36 states. With a population of approximately 4 million people (National Population Commission, 2006), Imo State has emerged as a key battlefield in Nigerian politics, notably during gubernatorial elections. The state is ethnically diversified, with indigenous ethnic groups including the Okigwe, Owerri, and Orlu.

The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) governs the electoral process in Imo State, including voter registration, candidate nominations, and election administration. Political parties nominate candidates for the governor contest, and campaigns often center on critical themes like infrastructure development, education, health care, security, and economic empowerment.

Imo State has a long history of intense political struggle, with many political parties fighting for control of the state government. This battle often reflects wider national political dynamics, including the influence of major political parties like the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democratic Party (PDP), as well as regional and local political movements.

Imo State's gubernatorial elections are intensely fought, with political parties and individuals waging aggressive campaigns for victory. Imo State has a history of political instability, with frequent leadership transitions and party affiliations (Oluikpe, 2019). This volatility emphasizes the significance of gubernatorial elections in shaping the political orientation and administration of the state.

Furthermore, Imo State is noted for its thriving civil society groups and vigorous public participation in the election process. Civil society organizations play an important role in voter education, monitoring electoral activities, and pushing for free and fair elections (Onuoha, 2016). Furthermore, traditional institutions like traditional rulers and community leaders have an important influence in defining Imo State's election results.

Imo State has had substantial political changes in recent years, including swings in party control and electoral reforms aimed at strengthening the election process's integrity. These events highlight the dynamic character of Imo State's gubernatorial elections, as well as its ramifications for the state's political environment.

Previous Research on Political Advertising Effectiveness

Previous research has extensively explored the impact of political advertising on voter attitudes and actions. For example, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1995) performed a meta-analysis of research that investigated the influence of political advertising on voter preferences. They discovered that political commercials had a moderate but considerable influence on voter views and actions, especially in contested elections.

Geer (2006) investigated the persuasiveness of negative political advertising in US congressional races. He determined that negative commercials are more successful than positive ones in shaping voter views and candidate ratings. Stroud (2008) looked at the impact of emotions on political advertising efficacy. Her research found that emotionally charged advertising generates higher reactions from viewers and is more likely to be recalled, hence increasing its persuasive power.

Franz and Ridout (2007) investigated the effect of candidate appearance and voice features in political commercials. They discovered that nonverbal clues, such as facial expressions and speech tone, had a major impact on voter impressions and candidate ratings. Lau and Pomper (2004) performed longitudinal research on the impact of broadcast political advertising on voter participation. Their results showed that exposure to political commercials boosts voter involvement and participation, especially among uncertain voters.

Pinkleton et al. (1998) investigated the effect of good and negative political advertisements on voter perceptions. According to their findings, negative advertising is more remembered and compelling, having a greater impact on candidate ratings than good ones. Goldstein and Freedman (2002) examined the efficacy of political advertising in gubernatorial elections. They discovered that advertising expenditures had a considerable influence on election results, with candidates who spend more money on advertising tend to do better.

Brians et al. (2011) examined the significance of repetition on political advertising efficacy. Their research found that frequent exposure to political commercials improves message retention and increases the persuasive influence on voter attitudes and actions. Ridout and Franz (2011) performed a detailed study of the persuasive power of negative political advertising in various campaign circumstances. Their results indicated that negative commercials are extremely successful at modifying voter views and affecting candidate assessments, particularly in contested contests.

Kenski and Stroud (2006) investigated the effects of negative political advertising on voter cynicism and political participation. Their research found that exposure to negative commercials might enhance voter cynicism and undermine faith in political institutions, resulting in lower political engagement.

Theoretical Framework

Political advertising efficacy is frequently studied using several theoretical frameworks, including Persuasion Theories like the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Chaiken, 1980). Individuals process persuasive communications via either central or peripheral paths, depending on their motivation and capacity to interact with the message. Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo established the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), a well-known theory in persuasion and communication studies, in 1986. According to ELM, humans perceive persuasive messages in two unique ways: centrally and peripherally (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). ELM defines the primary path of persuasion as a deliberate and critical assessment of the arguments given in a communication. When people are motivated and capable of thoroughly absorbing information, they are more likely to choose the center path. This technique involves critically evaluating the message's substance, scrutinizing its logic and proof, and weighing the merits of the arguments offered (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

On the other hand, the peripheral path to persuasion is using mental shortcuts or heuristics to form opinions about a message without participating in deep cognitive processing. This approach is used when people lack the desire or skills to critically assess the communication content. Instead,

individuals establish attitudes or make judgments based on peripheral indicators such as the source's legitimacy, communication attractiveness, or emotional appeals (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

According to ELM, the processing pathway is decided by the individual's degree of participation and the message's significance. When people believe an issue is personally relevant or essential, they are more likely to use central route processing. In contrast, when people regard a problem as less significant or lack the desire or cognitive capacity to digest information fully, they are more prone to depend on peripheral signals (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

ELM's strength is its capacity to explain diversity in persuasive message processing and results in terms of individual variations and environmental circumstances. It offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how persuasion works under various contexts, highlighting the role of message content, audience characteristics, and context in determining persuasive communication efficacy (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

In conclusion, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) provides useful insights into the complicated process of persuasion by distinguishing between two separate paths of message processing: the core and peripheral routes. By taking into account elements like as message substance, audience motivation, and cognitive resources, ELM improves our knowledge of how people acquire attitudes and make choices in response to persuasive communications.

HSM, on the other hand, contends that humans may use mental shortcuts or heuristics to form opinions regarding political messaging. The Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) is a theoretical framework in persuasion psychology that aims to explain how people perceive persuasive messages and form opinions about them. Chaiken (1980) developed the HSM, which proposes that while analyzing persuasive material, humans use two unique processing modes: systematic processing and heuristic processing.

Systematic processing entails carefully and thoughtfully considering the substance of a communication. Individuals who participate in systematic processing actively assess the arguments offered in the message, evaluate the evidence supplied, and consider the value of the information. This form of processing demands cognitive effort and is more likely to occur when people are both motivated and able to critically assess the message (Chaiken, 1980).

Heuristic processing, on the other hand, entails making decisions on persuasive messages based on mental shortcuts or rules of thumb. Instead of closely evaluating the message's substance, people may depend on basic decision rules or cognitive shortcuts known as heuristics to create attitudes or make choices (Chaiken, 1980). Heuristics may include the reliability of the source, the emotional appeal of the message, or the familiarity of the argument.

The HSM argues that people's processing mode is determined by their motivation and capacity to interact with the message. Individuals with strong motivation and the ability to digest information thoroughly are more likely to participate in systematic processing. When motivation or ability is poor, people are more prone to use heuristics to make decisions regarding the message (Chaiken, 1980).

The HSM has been extensively used in a variety of fields, including political communication, advertising, and healthcare communication. In the case of political advertising, for example, people may participate in systematic processing if they are actively engaged in the political process, have strong political values, or believe the message is personally meaningful. Individuals may depend on heuristic indicators such as the candidate's party membership or the emotional tone of the commercial when they are less motivated or capable of thoroughly understanding the information (Chaiken, 1980).

Overall, the Heuristic-Systematic Model sheds light on how people perceive persuasive messages and emphasizes the importance of motivation and ability in determining the efficacy of communication tactics.

Methods

This study adopted survey research method because it allows for the collection and analysis of numerical data, providing statistical insights into patterns and relationships. The study is delimited in Imo State in Nigeria. The population of interest for this study comprises 555,500 civil servants who were exposed to

political advertising during the 2023 gubernatorial election campaign. A Sample size of 384 was drawn from the population using Wimmer and Dominick online sample size calculator at a 5% error limit and 95% confidence level. The multi-stage sampling technique was used.

At the first stage, Imo State was divided into the three Senatorial Zones that made up the State; Owerrizone, Orlu zone and Okigwe zone. Stage two: Each of the senatorial zones is further broken down to local governments that make them up. Two local governments were purposively selected from each zone because they were largely exposed to political advertising during the 2023 gubernatorial election campaign. Therefore, there would be a total of six local governments representing three senatorial zones in Imo State; they were Owerri Municipal, Owerri North Local Government, Orlu Local Government, Oru-East Local Government, Okigwe Local Government and Isiala Mbano Local Government.

In stage three, copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the selected local governments that make up the State. That is 384 divided by 6 equals to 64. Thus, the researchers gave out 64 copies of the questionnaire purposively to respondents in these local governments. A questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection and it was face validated by a research expert in the field of communication. A face-to-face approach was employed in administering the instrument. The data was analyzed using simple percentages.

Data and Results

Table 1: Political Advertising Impact Voters' Impressions

Impact Level	Frequency	Percentage
Very low impact	32	8.3%
Low impact	64	16.7%
Moderate impact	128	33.3%
High impact	112	29.2%
Very high impact	48	12.5%
Total	384	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 1 show that a significant portion of civil servants in Imo State are moderately impacted by political advertising (33.3%). This table demonstrates some level of advertising impact on voters, however, the level of impact established by this table suggests that there is room for improvement to enhance voters' exposure to political advertising.

Table 2: Exposure to Various Forms of Political Commercials.

Frequency of Exposure	Frequency	Percentage
Never	16	4.2%
Rarely	48	12.5%
Sometimes	96	25%
Often	144	37.5%
Always	80	20.8%
Total	384	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 2 highlight the frequency of exposure of civil servants to various forms of political commercial and voter behaviors in Imo State. Majority of the respondents (37.5%) reported that they are often exposed to various forms of political commercials. This insight suggests the importance of providing clear and concise political commercials that can be easily accessible during electioneering campaigns.

Table 3: Gubernatorial Candidates' Successful Political Advertising Strategies

Successful Political Advertising Strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Not at all	32	8.3%
Slightly	64	16.7%

Moderately	96	25%
Very much	128	33.3%
Completely	64	16.7%
Total	384	100%

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Table 3 presents the findings on the successful political advertising strategies. The analysis reveals that 2023 Imo State gubernatorial candidates political advertising were successful, at 33.3%. These findings underscore the crucial role that accurate and understandable political advertising plays in shaping voters' decisions. It emphasizes the need for reliable information dissemination to empower voters in making informed choices.

Discussion of Findings

The degree to which political advertising affected voter impressions of gubernatorial candidates.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the level of impact among civil servants in Imo State regarding political advertising of gubernatorial candidates. Majority of the respondents demonstrated a moderate level of impact (33.3%), followed by high impact (29.2%) and low impact (16.7%). These findings suggest that while a significant proportion of civil servants are impacted to a reasonable level, there is still room for improvement in political advertising.

Link between exposure to various forms of political commercials and voting behavior.

The study shed light on the link between exposure to various forms of political commercials and voting behavior of civil servants in Imo State when it comes to political commercials and voting behavior. The results indicate that a significant proportion of civil servants (37.5%) are often exposed to various forms of political commercials which influence their behavior. This suggests that exposure to various forms of political commercials influence voters' behavior.

The efficiency of different advertising methods used by Imo State gubernatorial candidates.

The study examined the efficiency of different advertising methods used by Imo State gubernatorial candidates. The findings indicate that different advertising methods used by Imo State gubernatorial candidates are very much efficient on civil servants, with 33.3% of respondents reporting a very high influence. This suggests that civil servants exposure to different political advertising methods play a crucial role in their decision-making process, influencing their voting behavior.

Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of political advertising of 2023 gubernatorial candidates on civil servants in Imo State. The findings revealed that political advertising moderately impact majority of civil servants in Imo State. These findings align with previous studies conducted in similar Nigerian settings, indicating discovered that political commercials had a moderate but considerable influence on voter views and actions, especially in contested elections. Regarding the factors influencing voting decisions, the study found that a significant proportion of civil servants are often exposed to various forms of political commercials which influence their behavior.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. Political candidates should consider implementing targeted advertising strategies tailored to specific demographic groups. Understanding the preferences and characteristics of different voter segments can enhance the impact of political messages.
- ii. Given the diverse media landscape in Imo State, political candidates should diversify their advertising channels beyond traditional platforms like television and radio. Investing in online

advertising and social media campaigns can reach a wider audience, particularly among younger voters who are increasingly active online.

- iii. Candidates should prioritize message clarity, authenticity, and relevance to key issues affecting voters in Imo State. Avoiding negative or inflammatory rhetoric and focusing on substantive policy proposals can enhance the credibility and appeal of political advertising.

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