

When Our Expectations Are Met: An Analysis of Voters' Perception of the Media Coverage of 2011 General Elections in Nigeria

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Abstract

The foremost thrust of this study is to investigate how voters in Enugu State perceived the media coverage of the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. To provide a compass for this investigation, research objectives, questions and hypotheses were raised. Among the questions raised in this study were: were voters exposed to electoral issues? how did voters perceive the media coverage of 2011 general elections? How did voters' perception of the media coverage influence their participation in the 2011 general elections? The research hypotheses include: there is significant relationship between voters' exposure to electoral issues in the media and their level of knowledge about the 2011 general elections; there is a significant relationship between voters' perception of media coverage of the 2011 general elections and their participation in the elections. A number of relevant literatures were reviewed to ascertain the state of the existing corpus of knowledge in this area and consequently establish the gap in literature. Explanatory mixed method design was used to achieve the objective of this study. Since this design allowed the use of two methods, questionnaire and in-depth interview techniques were used to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data for the study. The qualitative data were generated to shed more light on the quantitative data. The study concentrated on registered voters in the south-eastern part of Nigeria. The Australian calculator was used to derive the sample size which stood at 405. Cluster sampling method was used to select respondents randomly to represent the population. The three hypotheses tested in the study using Chi-square formula received empirical support which showed that voters' exposure to electoral information in the media influenced their knowledge; their perception of the 2011 general election was influenced by their knowledge and their perception of media coverage of the 2011 general elections influenced their participation in the elections. The key findings of the study include that: radio remains a veritable means of reaching the electorates with information on electoral issues; the electorates have confidence in media reports; the electorates have high of knowledge of electoral issues; electorates' exposure to the media influenced their participation. It was recommended that radio should be used in disseminating information about election in Enugu State since voters have confidence in their reports. Media literacy should be included as a general course in Nigeria's higher institutions of learning.

INTRODUCTION

The media, like a double edged sword could be employed either for positive or negative ends in an election. As purveyor of information, market place of ideas and watchdog of the society, a vibrant and active media is an indispensable tool for the successful execution of any election. Also, when an election is viewed as a process rather than an event, a responsible and responsive media becomes a sine qua non for deepening democracy. Thus, it is noteworthy

that the history of election and the electoral process in Nigeria is replete with myriad of negative charges hurled at the media. The charges include partisanship, ethnic and religious chauvinism, blackmail of some political candidates, distortion of reality, corruption, exaggeration of North – South dichotomy, aiding and abetting violence, sensationalism, marginalization of women, the poor, and opposition parties ,poor voter education, increasing political apathy(Akinsanya,1981,p.111,Akpan,1985,p.257 ,Nwosu, 1990,p.31 ,Jibo, 2003,Yisa,2005,p.30,Kogah,2007,p.14).

These allegations are considered critical given the expected role of the media in a society. For instance, Section 22 of the 1999 constitution, which was the primary legislation that guided the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, assigned the media the obligation of upholding the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy contained in chapter two of the constitution. By this section, it is expected that the media should uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people. According to Moneke (2007) cited in Ndolo and Ezinwa (2011,p.234) these objectives are ideals to be pursued by government towards building a welfare society for the benefit of the citizen. These objectives are said to be fundamental because their progressive realization defines the essence of government and where they are abandoned, there might as well be no government at all. This is where the watchdog function of the media become paramount. More so, the provision of this chapter is said to be non – justiciable going by the provisions of Section 6 (6) (c) of the constitution, under which these objectives are declared to be outside the jurisdiction of the law court. Thus, the media become the only hope for the common man by compelling the government to play their expected part in a democracy.

Again, these charges are capable of eroding the public trust and credibility of the media as purveyors of information and by extension the credibility of an election. The implications are further described by Kogah (2005,p.15) as follows “... declines in public evaluations of media performance is significant because without public trust in media contents, the media’s ability to inform the public , serve as watchdog over powerful institutions, and assist in self governance are compromised”. Thus, Jega in Araka (2011,p.6) cautioned that the credibility of any election with the populace is largely a function of their perception and it is the media’s prerogative and privilege to mould that perception. Araka emphasized that, perception is everything and that it is the political role of the media to mould people’s political perception.

Similarly, Okoye(2011,p.1) opined that media reports, analysis and renditions of issues shape and reshape the perception of the people to issues and impacts on their understanding and reaction to them. He explained that a good issue may receive a bad press and becomes a bad issue. A bad issue on the other hand may be properly dressed and redressed and the public may receive such an issue positively. Thus, Akpan (1985,p.257)concluded that if the public lack confidence in the press in a society then the press is as good as dead.

Hence, Egbuna(2011,p.1)contended that subjective reporting for instance, has the tendency to undermine not only the credibility of the media but also the capacity of the electorate to make the right choice. He stressed that it detracts from the integrity of the election while creating grounds for disputes and conflicts. Okoye (2011,p.1)emphasized that if the media misrepresent facts and import extraneous and jaundiced issues into their reports and analysis, the society may become unstable and their reports may lead to break down of law and order. On the other hand, he noted that if the media report objectively, the society may make tremendous progress under an environment of stability. He explained that if the media educate properly and professionally the people may make informed choices of issues based on

knowledge. Thus, Toure (2011) avers that the media have a key role in ensuring active, positive and peaceful participation of citizens in the electoral process as well as ensuring that the outcomes of the elections are credible and acceptable to the generality of the populace.

It is against the above background that one may understand the problem with previous elections in Nigeria since independence. Most of which have been riddled with controversies leading to violence including a civil war (1966) and several abrupt seizure of power by the military (1966) (1983). For instance, Egbuna (2011,p.3) observed that the partisan involvement of the media in the First Republic Federal and Regional elections not only created doubts on the integrity of the elections but also polarised the country. The elections include the 1961 election into the Northern and the Eastern Regions House of Assembly and the 1964 election into the Federal House of Representatives. Yisa (2005,p.28) reported that the then Premier of Western Region, Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo was denied the right to reply on the Nigeria Broadcasting Service(NBC) by the Governor General of Nigeria James Robertson. Egbuna (2005, p.3) also noted that conflicting election results were announced by the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service (WNBS), the Eastern Nigeria Broadcasting Service(ENBS) and the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation(NBC) during October 1965 election into the Western Region House of Assembly.

Similar situations were recorded about Second and Third Republics elections. Aina (2011, p.43) reported that during the second and third republics, news content, presentation and interpretation were different and sometimes conflicting where the party in control of government in the state is different from the party in the centre. Akpan (1985,p.251) noted that there was serious conflict of interest between the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) and some state-owned stations. He stressed that it got to a point where one was unable to say the station that was telling the truth. Agba (undated:25) alleged that all the news media both national and state in the country were all guilty of feeding their audience with biased stories and as a result attracted public criticism. He emphasized that it was a common practice among media organizations to distort information during the 1983 general election. Aina (2011,p.45) describes the 1983 general election as follows:

The general elections of 1983 in the second republic witnessed tremendous abuse of radio and television as rigged election results were announced on some Federal and state –controlled stations with the dire consequences as was the case in Ondo state where radio stations became the organ of party propaganda. For instance, the Ondo State Broadcasting corporation was referred to as “Radio Ajasin” named after the then governor by NPN supporters while Radio Nigeria Akure was renamed “Radio Omoboriowo”, the deputy Governor.”.....in some states of the federation, election results were reportedly announced directly from State Houses and the manner of such compilation is better imagined. It can never and were never against the electoral interest of the ruling parties whether at federal or state government level, in contravention of the electoral laws.

The above situation partly gave rise to the call for private participation in broadcasting which was granted under the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida under decree 38 of 1992. Akpan (1985,p.251) had warned that a system of broadcasting where the broadcast media are owned by government and managed by the party in power if allowed to continue, could damage media credibility to a point that every piece of information that comes out of

our broadcast media would be dismissed as falsehood. The foregoing instances attest to the fact that it truly got to a point in Nigeria's broadcasting industry where it was difficult for the public to believe our broadcasting stations. Deregulation of the industry was thus a welcome development. But it remains to be seen whether the expected change in the political firmament of the country was achieved as a result. It could be said that there was an initial positive change which could not be sustained as a result of such factors as change in government(military to civilian);ethnic and regional divisions inherent in Nigeria, media ownership and control by the state and members of the ruling elite and commercialisation(Oso in Mboho and Batta,2012,p.274), survival and sustenance instincts of the media, advertisers' influence, media owners' influence(most of whom are politicians)and ineffective regulatory body (Aihe,1997,p.4) (Udeaja,2004,p.258)broadcast practitioners bias (Udeaja,2004,p.250).Oso in Mboho and Batta (2012,p.283)observed for instance, that commercialisation of the media has eroded both the adherence to professional ethics of political journalism and the ethos of public service in media operations generally. He further noted that the elevation of advertising as the main means of revenue for media organisations has greatly reduced the space for political journalism as advertisements take precedence over the news. This he noted has narrowed the opportunity for the less powerful and resource endowed to have adequate access to the media and the absence of the culture of critical political discourse; debate on issues being replaced with emphasis on personalities, ethnic balancing and entertainments.

Writing on media and elections in 1999,Udeaja (2004,p.208)observed that the activities of the media were not restricted though there were some kinds of government control but not as strict as in previous elections. He attributed any shortcomings on the part of the broadcast people within the period to their negligence or weakness. He commended the media for their role at the time in informing the electorates, interpreting issues and events for them; sensitising and mobilizing them for effective political participation. Most significantly the media organized presidential debate for Chief Olu Falae and General Olusegun Obasanjo (Rtd) the presidential candidates for the election. Though, Obasanjo failed to appear for the debate. The media on the other hand was accused of engaging in propaganda of a sort. Udeaja (2004,p.209) has this to say about private stations:

Most of the private stations whose owners were involved in politics, that is, either they were *contesting* themselves or they sponsoring some candidates, engaged in such propaganda that would ensure success. In this case, they did not just succeed in giving the public what to think about-agenda setting, but also made sure that the public thought about those things-propaganda. Slogans were constructed and jingles introduced, qualities were highlighted and defects down played, candidates were often endowed with exaggerated attributes and these were presented with excessive repetition to the broadcast audience.

It is thus clear that ownership is still a critical issue with regards to broadcast media content even in the era of the liberalisation of the broadcast industry. The motivation to acquire political power writes Udeaja (2004,p.210) tends to dominate all other motives for establishing broadcast media in Nigeria. He rightly emphasized that, many of the household names in Nigeria's political arena either own or control the broadcast media or control other forms of media of mass communication. This is truly so when we consider such names as Senator Mike Ajaegbo (MINAJ systems); Senator Ike Ekweremadu (Dream FM);senator Dora Akunyili (Solid FM) and Senator Chris Anyanwu (Hot FM).

The issue of bias resulting from media ownership is also evident in government-owned broadcast media. Udejaja (2004,p.255) noted that the National Assembly accused government- owned media establishments of partiality and bias in favour of the executive to the detriment of the other arms of government. He explained that the then senate president, Anyim Pius Anyim had complained about the one-sidedness of the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) in their treatment of news covering the senate. He also reported a finding that revealed veiled but deliberate policies by state governments to marginalize the opposition in the use of state-owned broadcasting outfits. He stressed that, most governors were believed to be hand in glove with the Chief Executives of their state media houses to strangle plurality of ideas in the State's airwaves.

State-owned broadcasting stations have been shown to be consistently biased and partisan in their coverage of elections. The Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) on 2003 elections in their final report noted that on January 28,2003, newly registered political parties protested in Abuja an alleged blackout of their activities by the Federal Government controlled radio and television stations. The report explained that the tendency of the ruling party to dominate the government-owned media was not limited to the Federal Government or PDP alone, but was also evident in virtually all states and across the different political parties in control in those states. Comparatively, the report observed that the private media provided greater access to the media for political parties and opposition than the state-owned media. The private media also has its own problems. The report noted two major problems of the private media namely: political and economic interest of the owners which make them to align with particular political parties or candidates and their perception of the election period as an opportunity to make money and enhance their financial status. As such it was only rich political parties that could afford their new inflated rates for various political coverage. The TMG report also noted that despite all the reports sent to NBC by various political parties and candidates alleging denial of access to government controlled media and the NBC's claim of investigating reports there was never any indication of what its findings were or what sanctions it had taken against offending media organisations or government functionaries, following the reports.

There was a repeat of the above situation in 2007 general elections. The European Union Election Observation Mission's final report on 2007 election in Nigeria shows that state-owned broadcast media in particular failed to comply with the requirement to provide balanced coverage. It noted that news and current affairs programmes of NTA and FRCN demonstrated considerable bias in favour of the incumbent PDP that received a larger amount of airtime than all of the other political parties combined on these channels. Both the private and state-owned media were found to focus attention on a limited number of parties mostly PDP, AC and ANPP thus, resulting in imbalance political coverage. Unlike in 2003 election, NBC was active in enforcing sanctions for violations of the campaign silence period and fined 14 stations for violations of the campaign moratorium prior to the 14 April,2007 election day.

It is probably in order to correct the above shortcomings and ensure a free, fair and credible elections that efforts were made by government, non - governmental organisations and other stakeholders to ensure a more credible election in 2011 by organising conferences, seminars and workshops for journalists, media owners and other stakeholders in Nigeria to equip them with knowledge and skills, and to ensure ethical conducts in election coverage. Such training

was organised by the Democratic Governance for Development Project in Nigeria (DGD) - a joint donor fund project managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) - for media owners/editors in Abuja and Lagos on September 28, 2010 and September 30, 2010 respectively. DGD in collaboration with Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) also published Media Guide for journalists to equip them for the 2011 elections coverage. The Guide highlighted the rights and responsibilities of media practitioners engaged in covering the 2011 elections especially their rights to freely seek and disseminate information on the conduct of the elections.

National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) organised stakeholders' conferences and seminars. The stakeholders included private broadcast media owners, CEOs of public radio and TV stations, News and Programmes Directors and Commercial managers. Others include representatives of 62 political parties in each of the ten zones, INEC representatives also in each of the zones and their National Orientation Agency counterparts, NGOs, Pro – democracy activists, religious organisations, Women organisations and the general public. The commission also organised seminars which involved media practitioners, officials of the NBC, the academia and officials of the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to fashion out ways for proper and effective public enlightenment of the electorates on radio and television. NBC also organised staff zonal workshops on political broadcasts, national CONFAB on political broadcasts, sensitisation tour by top officials of the NBC to broadcasts stations, Radio and Television appearances and production of jingles and announcements on radio, TV, and advertisements in newspapers and posters. The Nigerian Press Council (NPC) in concert with the International Republican Institute (IRI) organised a two – day capacity building workshop for journalists on the coverage of the 2011 general election in Owerri, Imo state from March 28 – 29, 2011.

It is pertinent to x – ray the media landscape under which the 2011 election took place. The deregulation of the broadcast media in 1992 under Decree 38 of that year opened the airwaves to private operators in the broadcast media till date. As such, the Nigerian media scene has been described as vibrant and diverse paving way for a pluralistic discourse to the electorates. As at April 2011, there were three hundred and fifty (350) broadcast stations in Nigeria as follows: two hundred and thirty three (233) public radio/TV, one hundred and twenty three (123) private radio/TV stations, thirty three (33) Multichannel Multipoint Distribution Service (MMDS) and thirteen (13) Direct to Home (DTH) (Aina, 2011, p.43). The public stations are owned by the federal government and all the 36 state governments and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) own radio and television stations. Broadcasting is dominated by the government – owned media except in Lagos area where commercial broadcasters capture 73 percent of the audience as shown by the survey of Public Broadcasting in Africa, Nigeria by Open Society Foundations (2010).

Statement of Research Problem

The 2011 general elections in Nigeria were acclaimed to be relatively free, fair, credible and in compliance with international standards for conducting elections. According to European Union Election Observation Mission final report on Nigeria General Election 2011, the elections marked an important step towards strengthening democratic elections in Nigeria, but challenges remain. This is unlike previous general elections (1964, 1983, 2003 and 2007) that were roundly rejected as fraudulent and below acceptable international standards except by the winners. Though, in 2007 the winner of the presidential election saw even his own election as fraudulent until he was made to think otherwise by the court. The media as

purveyors of information, no doubt, have a critical and indispensable role to play in the process and outcome of any free, fair and credible election. It is instructive that accusing fingers were pointed at the media for their perceived role in previous elections in the country. The media were perceived to have failed in their role to adequately inform and educate the electorates while maintaining neutrality in treating issues including election results and the use of the media by political candidates. As a result, the electorates lost trust and confidence in the media with its attendant political apathy and violence. This is especially so with state-owned media and some privately owned media that were found to be supportive of the ruling party. Even the media regulatory body, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) was found to be handicapped by its allegiance to the government that appoints its Director General, inadequate resources to ensure effective monitoring of stations, inability to attend formally to public complaints and sanction offending stations. It is therefore pertinent to ascertain the electorates' perception of the media and the extent to which the media were perceived to have contributed to the process and outcome of 2011 general elections in Nigeria. For instance, it will be instructive to understand the extent to which media credibility has been restored among the electorates, if it has and whether the media encouraged public participation in the elections. It is also not known the extent to which the electorates' perception of the media coverage of 2011 elections influenced their participation in the elections.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the under listed research questions:

1. To what extent were voters in Enugu State exposed to electoral issues in the media about the 2011 general elections?
2. Which medium did voters in Enugu State rely on most for information about the 2011 general elections?
3. How did voters' exposure to electoral issues in the media influence their level of knowledge about the 2011 general elections?
4. How did voters in Enugu State perceive the media coverage of 2011 general elections?
5. How did voters' perception of media coverage of the 2011 election influence their participation in the 2011 general elections?

Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis one

Ho: there is no significant relationship between voters' exposure to electoral issues in the media and their level of knowledge about the 2011 general elections.

Hi: there is a significant relationship between voters' exposure to electoral issues in the media and their level of knowledge about the 2011 general elections.

Hypothesis Two

Ho: there is no significant relationship between voters' level of knowledge and their perception of media coverage of the 2011 general elections.

Hi: there is a significant relationship between voters' level of knowledge and their perception of media coverage of the 2011 general elections.

Hypothesis Three

Ho: there is no significant relationship between voters' perception of media coverage of the 2011 general elections and their participation in the election.

HI: there is a significant relationship between voters' perception of media coverage of the 2011 general elections and their participation in the election.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Exposure and Voters' Perceptions of Elections

There is no doubt about the fact that the media have a core function of providing the citizens with relevant, adequate and unbiased information before, during and after elections. The social responsibility function places a demand on the media to, amongst other things, give fair, balanced and objective political reports. While identifying the political functions of the mass media, Mboho (2005, p.157) asserts that the mass media have the political functions of

1. Creating and promoting political awareness.
2. Identifying and promoting civil responsibilities among the people.
3. Mobilizing the people toward that achievement at national goals.
4. Promoting social justice based on the responsibilities and rights of the individual in the society.

Democracy thrives on the principle of informed electorate making responsible choices and decisions. The mass media are not only key avenues for providing the required information; they also determine what is available in the public domain. The mass media have remained a key factor in the political sphere in democracy. During election, the mass media provide a link between the political party/candidate and the electorate. The mass media serve as a platform for political parties/candidates to campaign for votes. Through coverage of electioneering campaigns and airing of political advertisements, the media help in influencing voters' decision either in favour or against a given political party or candidate (Obot, 2013, p.174).

Media in a democratic set up are acknowledged as important factors as they play major role in establishing and strengthening accountability and sustainability of the governments. The media play a significant role in the process and the forum provided by them during the election days becomes an important platform to present political ideologies by different political parties. Similarly, it provides an opportunity to voters to get political information and to analyze the programmes and manifestoes presented and propagated by different political parties and candidates during the election campaigns (Ward, 2004) cited in (Yaser, 2011, p. 4).

The media are central to politics today due to their function of disseminating political events, issues, and developments around the clock. The public, the media and the politicians have dependencies on each other. To understand the attitudes, motives, beliefs, thoughts and behaviour of one, we have to understand all these dimensions ranging from the attitude to the behaviour of the other. The government, political elites, public and the mass media influence one another in a number of ways and on scale of values. Governments influence the media by their function of sourcing and by different pressures used by them for achieving and furthering their political goals. The mass media influence the conduct of government officials by raising and legitimizing issues and also influence the public and voters by providing them political information which results in changing their values, beliefs, attitudes and even behaviours. The public influence the media through their viewership, listenership and/or readership or collectively through market place (Leighley, 2004, p.13). In line with the above assertions, Lane, (2013, para. 1) avers that:

The media help to influence what issues voters should care about in election and what criteria they should use to evaluate candidates. There is a cyclical relationship between the media,

the government and the public and while the media can occasionally shape public opinion, it has a greater influence in enumerating to voters what issues are important and less of an influence in convincing them on what to think about those issues. The media work more effectively by placing a spotlight on certain issues they feel the public should be concerned with. The government plays a role in dictating the media's content through the media's regular use of public officials as sources in the news. Just as the government influences the media, the media can help set the political agenda by focusing on specific issues and influencing what issues the public and government should be concerned with.

In political markets, electors need information to judge the record of government and to select among alternative candidates and parties. If citizens are poorly informed, if they lack practical knowledge, they may cast ballot that fail to reflect their real interest. Moreover, policy makers need accurate information about citizens to respond to public concerns, to deliver effective services meeting real human needs, and also, in democracies to maximize popular electoral support to be returned to office (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) cited in (Obot, 2013, p.177).

Information in the political market place comes from two primary sources. Personal interactions, which commonly include informal face-to-face political conversations with friends, family and colleagues, traditional campaign rallies, community forums, and grassroots meetings. These information resources remain important, especially for election campaigns in poorer democracies, and the growth of e-mail and online discussion groups may revive the importance of personal political communications. But these channels have been supplemented in modern campaigns by the mass media including the printed press (newspapers and magazines) electronic broadcasts (radio and television news), (Obot, 2013, p.177).

According to Obot, (2013, p.177), "since true democracy involves the participation of an informed and rational electorate, all legitimate measures and strategies should be exploited to make it possible for the citizenry to have the required information or alternatives to act on".

To this end, Hallin and Mancini (2004) cited in Obot, (2013, p.177) assert that;

The mass media are assuming many of the information that political parties once controlled. Instead of learning about an election at a campaign rally or from party canvassers, the mass media have become the primary source of campaign information. There has been a tendency for political parties to decrease their investments in neighbourhood canvassing, rallies and other direct contact activities, and devote more attention to campaigning through the media. The growth of electronic media, especially television, has tended to diminish the role of the party. The electronic media also make it easier to communicate events and issues through personalities.

Swanson (2004) cited in Obot, (2013, p.177) also notes that;

In place of or in addition to traditional campaign practices such as rallies of the party faithful, political parties and candidates relied on the sophisticated use of the mass media to persuade voters-the "consumers" of political communication to support them at election time, and they offered campaigns that feature the appealing personalities of party leaders. Television provides

an “aesthetic” platform for the presentation (airing) of political advertising and electioneering campaign messages.

The press is consequential because voters need information about candidates in order to make a choice that corresponds to their preferences. Limits on what a person can know and experience make the press the source of that information for most of us (Patrock, 1995, p.136).

As earlier noted, the mass media play so many political roles to the citizens which amongst others include the creation and promotion of political awareness. However, the way and manner the mass media perform these political functions significantly affects audience perception. And of course, there cannot be an objective perception without exposure. This implies that media exposure can significantly serve as the basis for audience perception (negative or positive) of a given situation.

Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, several elections and other political activities have taken place. These elections include the 1999, 2003, 2007 and the 2011 general elections. The mass media have no doubt, been at the forefront of covering these elections which studies (Hassan, 1999, Okafor, 2003 and Njoku, 2007) have shown received massive audience exposure. The question here is, what is the influence of audience exposure to mass media political reports on their perception of elections?

Hassan in 1999 conducted a study on “the Influence of the Mass Media on the Knowledge and Perception of the 1999 General Elections amongst the Residents of Kano State of Nigeria”. Here, Hassan tried to ascertain whether the mass media were able to influence the knowledge and perception of Kano State residents regarding the 1999 elections. To execute the study, Hassan employed the survey research method while the questionnaire served as the measuring instrument. Using multi-stage sampling technique, 396 respondents were used for the study. Finding from the study showed that 97% of the respondents were very exposed to issues regarding the election through the mass media. It was further revealed that their exposure to political reports in the media significantly influenced their perception of the 1999 general elections. This therefore, implies that the media were able to shape how the masses perceived the 1999 general elections.

In a related study, Muhammed in the year 2000 conducted a study on “The Mass Media and the Perception of the 1999 General Elections amongst Youths in Yobe State”. Using systematic sampling technique, 388 youths were studied. The survey research method was adopted for the study while copies of the questionnaire were administered to all the respondents. The study revealed that 89% of the respondents sufficiently exposed themselves to media reports on the general elections. The result also showed that the media significantly determined their views regarding the 1999 elections.

On a broader note, Isa in 1999 conducted a study entitled “Using the Mass Media to Influence the People’s Perception of the 1999 General Elections in Northern Nigeria.” In carrying out this study, Isa used the multi-stage sampling technique to select 400 respondents from the three geopolitical zones in Northern Nigeria. Using the survey research method in which the questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection, it was found that the perception of 99% of the respondents regarding the 1999 elections in Northern Nigeria was influenced significantly as a result of their exposure to mass media reports on the elections.

Furthermore, Ibrahim carried out a study in 1999 on “The Mass Media and Voters’ Decision Making in Northern Nigeria”. 398 respondents were carefully selected from the three geopolitical zones of the region. Using the survey research method and questionnaire as the measuring instrument, it was found that voters’ perception of the 1999 elections in Northern Nigeria was influenced by the mass media.

Studies on the mass media and the 1999 election also abound in the southern region of Nigeria. Afam conducted a study in 1999 on “The Influence of the Mass Media on the Residents of Abia State Regarding the 1999 General Elections.” 371 residents selected from Osisioma-Ngwa, Aba-North, Umuahia-South, Isiukwuato, Isiala-Ngwa North Local Government Areas were deployed to execute the study. Survey research method was used while questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection. Using simple random sampling technique, it was revealed that 89% of the respondents were significantly exposed to mass media reports of politics particularly on the 1999 general elections. The study also showed that their exposure to mass media reports on the elections shaped their perception of the election. The study further showed that the media were able to shape the peoples’ perception on the 1999 elections because of their high believability level of mass media reports on the elections.

Another study was conducted in 1999 by Obasi on “Exposure and Perception of Mass Media Coverage of the 1999 General Election in Delta State”. The study used the survey research method where the questionnaire was used as data collection instrument. Four hundred and three (403) respondents were systematically selected for the study. In the end, the study showed that there was a very high exposure level amongst the respondents as 99% of the respondents significantly exposed themselves to mass media reports on the 1999 elections. It was also discovered from the study that the high level of exposure influenced the residents’ perception of the 1999 elections.

More so, a study on “South-East Residents Assessment of Mass Media Role in the 1999 General Elections” was conducted in 1999 by Okolo. Survey research method was used for the study while questionnaire was utilized as the instrument for data collection. Using 386 respondents selected from Abia, Imo and Ebonyi States, findings revealed amongst others that the South-East residents were, to a very large extent exposed to media reports of the 1999 elections, and that their exposure to the media influenced their perception of the elections.

Apart from the 1999 General Elections in Nigeria, similar studies were also conducted on the 2003 general elections. Egba in 2003 carried out a study on “the influence of Broadcast media report of the 2003 General Election on the Residents of Bayelsa State”. 371 respondents were systematically selected from the 8 local government areas of the state. Survey research method was used while questionnaire was used to collect primary data. The study found that the exposure level was low in the rural areas while that of the urban areas was high. Amongst those who were very exposed to broadcast media reports on the elections, the study revealed that exposure influenced their overall view of the elections.

Musa also did a similar study on “The Broadcast Media and Citizens Perception of the 2003 General Elections in Sokoto State”. Just like other studies reviewed above, Musa deployed the survey research method to carry out the study while questionnaire was utilized as instrument for data collection. Using 298 respondents systematically selected from the three senatorial zones in the state, the study revealed that the respondents were significantly exposed to

broadcast media reports on the election. It was also revealed that broadcast media reports on the elections influenced audience perception of the elections.

Another study was conducted by Okon in 2003 on “The Role of the Mass Media in the 2003 General Elections in Akwa-Ibom State”. In this study, survey research method was utilized while questionnaire served as the instrument for the collection of primary data. 377 respondents were sampled to elicit relevant responses for the study. In the end, the study revealed a high level of audience exposure to mass media reports on the elections. It further showed that audience exposure to media reports on the elections impacted on the perception of the audience regarding the elections.

A related study entitled “The Perceptions of Akwa-Ibom Residents on Radio Reportage of the 2003 General Elections in Nigeria” which was conducted by Bassey in 2003, gave credence to Okon’s study. To execute the study, Bassey used the survey research method with questionnaire as the measuring instrument. Findings showed that 98% of the respondents were very exposed to radio reports on the 2003 elections and that their exposure influenced their perception of the elections.

Furthermore, a study entitled “Electorates Perception of Mass Media Coverage of the 2003 General Elections in Nigeria” was executed by Nwankpa in 2003. Here, 6 states were selected from the six geopolitical zones in the country. The study adopted the survey research method with questionnaire as the data collection instrument. Studying a sample size of 476, the study revealed that the Nigerian Electorates were very exposed to mass media reports on the 2003 General Elections. It was further discovered from the study that exposure to mass media reports on the elections significantly influenced their perception of the elections.

Just like the 1999 and 2003 general elections in Nigeria, a number of similar studies also abound in the 2007 general elections. In a study conducted by Yusuf in 2007 on “The Role of the Mass Media in the 2007 General Elections in Benue State”, effort was made to ascertain the performance of the media regarding the 2007 general elections in the state. The study used survey research method with questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. Using a sample of 347 respondents from the three senatorial zones in the state, findings revealed that there was high level of audience exposure to mass media messages on the elections, and that their exposure greatly shaped their perception of the election.

Another study on “The Mass Media and Citizens Perception of the 2007 General Election” in Niger State was conducted by Ibrahim in 2007. Here, the residents of the three senatorial zones of the state, including Minna, the state capital were studied. Survey research method was employed for the study while questionnaire was deployed as the measuring instrument. Findings from the study showed that the citizens’ exposure to mass media reports on the 2007 general elections influenced their perception of the election.

Nnaane in 2007 conducted a study entitled “An Empirical Study of the Media Dependency Behaviour of Nigerian Electorates in the 2007 Elections”. The study used the survey research method in which 100 copies of the questionnaire were administered to 100 respondents from the population of postgraduate students at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Using purposive sampling technique, it was found that the electorates depended on the media, especially radio for information/news about the elections and that their exposure to the media helped to shape their perception of the 2007 general elections in Nigeria.

Similarly, Kalu in 2007 carried out a study on “Ebonyi State Residents Assessment of mass media coverage of the 2007 General Elections in Nigeria. To actualize the study, Kalu used the survey research method with questionnaire as instrument for data collection. Studying 399 respondents from the three senatorial zones in the state, the study revealed that Residents of Ebonyi State adjudged the mass media to have performed very well in the coverage of the 2007 General Elections. It was also revealed that their exposure to the media influenced their judgment of the elections.

Using the same survey research method, measuring instrument and sampling technique as used by Kalu, Timipa in 2007 did a study on “The Role of the Mass Media in the 2007 General Elections in South-South Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria.” The study showed that the residents of South-South Region of Nigeria significantly exposed themselves to mass media reports on the 2007 general elections. Timipa further unveiled in the study that the perception of South-South residents of Nigeria on the 2007 general elections was influenced by their exposure to media messages.

Arguably, the 2011 general elections on Nigeria went down in history as better than the elections in 1999, 2003 and 2007. Though the 2011 elections have come and gone, media researchers have continued to conduct series of research to ascertain media role and influence. One of such studies is the one conducted by Ojobo on “The Influence of the Mass Media on the 2011 General Elections in Kano State”. In carrying out the study, Ojobo used the survey research method with questionnaire as the measuring instrument. The study, in the end, revealed that the mass media were considerably balanced in their reportage of the elections. Ojobo further revealed in the study that audience exposure to mass media reports on the 2011 general elections influenced their perception of the elections.

In a similar study, Umaru in 2011 did a study on “The Influence of Mass Media Messages on the perception of the 2011 General Elections by the Residents of Northern Nigeria”. 393 respondents from the three geopolitical zones that constitute the Northern Region of Nigeria were studied. Survey research method was used with questionnaire serving as the measuring instrument. The study showed that the mass media influenced the perception of the residents of northern Nigeria on the 2011 general elections.

Okonkwo in 2011 also conducted a study on “The Mass Media and the 2011 Elections in Imo State”. Survey research method was employed while questionnaire was used to ascertain the influence of the mass media on the residents of Imo State as regards the 2011 elections. Okonkwo revealed in the study that audience exposure to mass media reports on the 2011 elections in Imo State, to a very large extent, influenced their perception of the elections.

Related to Okonkwo’s study is the study of Njoku conducted in 2011 on “The Mass Media and Rivers State Residents Perception of the 2011 General Elections. The study used the survey research method while the questionnaire was utilized as the instrument for the collection of data. Using 386 respondents drawn from the three senatorial zones of the state, it was found that audience exposure to mass media reports on the 2011 general elections shaped the views of Rivers people on the 2011 general elections, indicating that their exposure to media reports on the 2011 general elections influenced their perception of the elections.

From all the studies reviewed, it is very obvious that the mass media successfully influenced the perception of the audience on the elections. This has further upheld the assumptions of

majority of the powerful effect theories that the mass media have the capability of influencing the audience to think and act in the intended manner.

Another point worthy of emphasis is the fact that virtually all the studies reviewed made use of just one measuring instrument (questionnaire) which many scholars (Luke, 2010, Hassan, 2010, Okolo, 2009) have argued is inadequate for such kinds of studies. These scholars contend that the rigid nature of the questionnaire makes it impossible for such studies to fully actualize their set objectives. To this end, they recommended the addition of other instruments such as the interview and observation.

Theoretical Framework

In order to provide a theoretical base for this study, three theories are used- Framing, Social Responsibility and Multi-steps theories.

Framing

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text through repetition or by associating them with culturally familiar symbols (Entman, 1993,p.52). In other words, the media can increase voters' interest in election through the pattern of their report.

According to Hague and Harrop (2007,p.130) "The journalists words, as much as the camera operator's images help to frame the story, providing a narrative which encourages a particular reaction from the viewer". It could be deduced here that journalists can elicit and obtain a particular desired response from voters through the words, images symbols used in their reports. Repetition and association technique of persuasion could be used to achieve this. Harris (2004,p.238) explained that "candidate can come to have a prevailing image that becomes the frame through which their action are viewed". In the 2011 general election, Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, the presidential candidate of Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), was said to be framed as an "Islamic extremists". According to Agbo and Otoh (2011,p.53) "this perception was very high in the southern and north central part of the country and may have worked against him despite this impeccable personality". EU EOM Report (2011,p.34) indicated that one third of the coverage given to Buhari was negative". The media can also frame itself through the reports it carry about itself. The media can write reports to review the coverage of an election. There were such headline as "New media centres to boost elections reporting (The Guardian April 14,2011); "Groups design news service to ensure better coverage of elections" (The Guardian April 14, 2011); "Radio Nigeria Committed to credible polls" (The Guardian April 4, 2011).

According to Uwakwe (2010,p.187) "media framing means that media coverage shape how people see issues". In other words, media can shape people's perception of reality. Pavlik and Mcintosh (2011,p.292) opined that "traditional news media often decide how they will frame a story before the reporting is completed and sometimes before it has even begun". This means that a journalist may beforehand decide how he / she wants an issue, a person or an event to be perceived by reporting them in a particular way or by using certain words, images or symbols in the report. Entman (2001) cited in Balnaves, Donald and Shoemith (2009,p.68) describes a news incident in which a (former) Soviet Union aircraft shot down a civilian aircraft as an 'attack', while labeling as a 'tragedy' a similar incident in which a United State aircraft shut down a civilian Iran airplane'. An election may be described as free and fair credible depending on how the said election is framed in the media. It could also be contented that the way the media frame themselves can influence the way the audience perceive them. If

other media for instance, frame the reports of others as biased, the tendency that the audience will see anything coming from such media as bias is there.

Balnaves, Donald and Shoemsmith (2009,p.68) explained that “framing makes certain information in a news story salient and depresses the importance of other information”. It is unarguable that the journalist can manipulate the audience perception of an event, issue, idea or person through framing. It is also note worthy that the way the media frame event, issue or ideas in their reports inversely influence the audience perception of media coverage. The media may be perceived to be fair, biased or otherwise as a result of their framing of an issue or event. In other words, the media could be judged based on the way they frame an issue, event or idea.

Pavlik and McIntosh (2011,p.292) describe framing as one of the biggest problems of journalism today as the facts of a story are frequently forced to fit into the frame, or angle regardless of reality. Similarly, Lippmann cited in Wahl-Jorgensen and Hanitzsch (2009,p.179) observed that “of public affairs, each of us sees very little, and therefore, they remain dull and unappetizing, until somebody, with the makings of an artist, has translated them into a moving picture”. This is why experts believe that media people are in the business of selling meanings.

Thus, Entman, Jorg and Pellicano (2009,p.176) rightly observed that “some communicators engage in framing strategically, seeking to exert power over outcomes by inducing target audiences to accept interpretations that favour their interests or goals”. These communicators, according to them, are politicians, bloggers, political satirists, editorial writers and pundits. They are however of the view that reporters and news editors in main stream national news media normally engage in framing without intending to push any particular policy or political goal (with the exception of certain party affiliated newspapers and government-owned broadcast newscasts in Europe). Can we say that the media, both public and private in Nigeria, is free from strategically using framing to score political points during elections? Pavlik and McIntosh also believe that journalists are often not even aware that they are framing stories but only reflecting reality.

It could be conclude from the foregoing that the media is capable of influencing audience perception of an event such the 2011 elections through the nature and pattern of its reports. Inversely, the nature of media coverage of an event can also influence audience perception of the media itself.

Perception Theory

Perception according to Bovee, Thill, Dovel and Wood (1995,p. 97) is the process of being exposed to a stimulus, paying attention to some degree, and then interpreting the received message. Hence, perception involves the process of exposure, attention and interpretation. In other words, for perception to take place there must be exposure to stimuli with certain level of attention paid to the stimuli and finally the stimuli are interpreted by the audience. Among the assumption of perception, theory according to Anaeto, Onasanjo and Osijeso (2008,p.66), are that “mass communicators want audiences to pay attention to their messages, and make appropriate changes in attitudes or beliefs, or produce the desired behavioural responses”. During elections, voters are bombarded with messages from contestants through various media seeking their attention in order to vote for them. But writers have shown that perception is not as simple as it appears. It is rather a complex process. According to Berdson and Steiner (1964) cited in Severin and Tankard (1992,p.56)

perception is the “complex process by which people select, organize, and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world”.

Bovee et al. (1995) in the same vein has further argued that mere exposure to a stimulus does not guarantee that people will pay attention to it. They noted that audience is overloaded with competitive messages and are as such constrained to choose which stimuli to attend to. Likewise, in election coverage, the voters are faced with hard decision of choosing which station to listen to and which candidate to vote for. Severin and Tankard (1992,p. 57) observed that, “perception is influenced by a number of psychological factors, including assumptions based on past experiences (that often operate at an almost unconscious level), cultural expectations, motivation (needs), moods and attitudes. Similarly, Bovee et al. (1996,p.98) added that “in addition to the message content and the quality of presentation, interpretation is affected by the audience needs, motives, experiences and expectations; the context or situation in which the message is recommend; and the order in which the stimuli are received”. The foregoing obviously explains the concept of selective perception. Selective perception according to Severin and Tankard (1992,p.57) is the tendency for people’s perception to be influenced by wants, needs, attitudes and other psychological factors. Since, individual have different wants, needs, attitudes, they are not likely to react to the same stimuli in the same way. In other words, selective perception implies that different people can react to the same message in different ways.

This study is thus interested in understanding how the different voters in Enugu State reacted to the media coverage of the 2011 general election in the State. Since it has been shown that perception is a product of exposure, attention and interpretation. It is pertinent to examine other processes that are similar to selective perception viz: selective exposure, selective attention and selective retentions.

Selective exposure according to Hasan (2013,p.166) occurs when people tend to expose themselves selectively only to communications which are generally in accordance with their established convictions and avoid communication which seem to challenge their beliefs”. In other words, voters may decide not to expose themselves to certain media content or media organization that contradict their existing beliefs, convictions and attitudes. Severin and Tankard noted that, “the notion of selective exposure follows nicely from Festinger’s theory of Cognitive Dissonance which suggests that one way to reduce dissonance after making a decision is to seek out information that is constant with the decision. This is because of the believe that people tend to avoid information that will create psychological imbalance in them and as a result seek information that is consistent with their prevailing attitudes and beliefs. Similarly, an individual may avoid a radio station or political message that will create psychological tension in the person.

Selective attention, write Severin and Tankard (1992,p.64) explains “the tendency for a person to pay attention to those parts of a message that are constant with strongly held attitudes, beliefs, or behaviour”. This indicates that people may pay more attention to a particular broadcast station or message than the other.

Selective retention according to Severin and Tankard is “the tendency for the recall of information to be influenced by wants, needs, attitudes and other psychological factors”. Studies have lent support to selective retention. It was discovered that “details were frequently left out when people passed on stories or descriptions of pictures. It was also found that people in favour of segregation learnt plausible pro-segregation and implausible anti-

segregation statements easily than they learnt plausible anti-segregation and implausible pro-segregation statements”.

It could be understood so far that people do not expose themselves to every message and even when they do, the level of attention given to the messages will not be the same likewise the quality of information retained. In other words, voters are not expected to expose themselves to every political message and even when they do, they are not expected to react in the same way to the message. They are not also expected to retain all the message they paid attention to. This theory explains why voters prefer one message source to the other and react to a given message in a particular way and even recall a particular message for future use.

Social Responsibility Theory

The social responsibility theory is considered apposite in this study as a theoretical framework. According to Nwosu in Uka (1999,p.508) the social responsibility theory has its root in the religious and philosophical concepts of the “golden rule and utilitarianism”. He explained that the theory “received its initial shape and form as a theory from the works of 1947 Hutchin’s Commission in the United States. He described the theory as the theory of the media which holds that in addition to protecting its freedoms, the mass media as a social institution must also be socially responsible. Okunna and Omenugha (2013,p.204) maintained that “if journalists cannot control themselves, make themselves responsible, then the government should control them”. It is in exercise of these restrain on the part of journalist that a number of seminar and workshops were organized for journalist in Nigeria for effective coverage of the 2011 general elections in Nigeria.

Hasan (2013) explained that “the basis principles of the social responsibilities theories uphold conflict resolution through discussion; there is high regard for public opinion, consumer action, and professional ethics and zealous guard over private rights and important social interest. We can deduce from Hasan’s view that the press can play effective role in resolving election related conflicts through discussion and respect public opinion in the outcome of election. It also explains why laws, rules and regulation are enacted to ensure responsible and ethical coverage of elections. The electoral laws in Nigeria are made to guide operation of the media during elections. Codes of ethics are also available to guide the activities of journalist in election coverage.

The social responsibility theory will help to throw light on the role of the press in a society with particular reference to election which is very an important process and event in any democratic society.

Multi -Steps Flow

The multi -step flow theory is also considered relevant in this study. This springs from the fact that voters may be exposed to various sources of information several times removed from the message origin that may account for their perception of the media coverage of 2011 general elections (Rogers & Shoemaker,1971.p.209). This theory recognises that there successive stages in the social interpretation of media messages (Haralambos & Holborn.2004.p844). It does not call for any number of steps or stages nor does it specify that the message must emanate from a source by mass media channels. The exact number of steps write Rogers & Shoemaker depends on the intent of the source , availability of mass media and the extent of audience exposure, the nature of the message, and salience of the message to the receiving audience. This theory writes Hasan (2013,p.163) is the outcome of further

studies on opinion leaders which led to the modification and reconceptualization of the two-step flow. It is thus an improvement on or an extension of the two-step flow which was found wanting on several grounds identified in Ndolo (2006,p.32) as the major criticism of the Two Step flow viz:

- Some major news stories can be spread directly by the media with modest personal contact intervention.
- Some opinion leaders are self appointed and therefore not seen as such by supposed followers.
- The process of media discussion and audience behaviour can involve more steps.

He thus notes that more than two steps are involved in message dissemination process and audience behaviour. According to Hasan (2013,p.163) the multistep flow concept was seen as having many relay points, that is information reaching a member of the audience directly or reaching them second hand, third hand or fourth hand, and sometime in a form considerably different from the original". The perception of media coverage of election may come from information received from one or more of these several sources of information to which the voter was exposed to. Hasan rightly writes:

That multi step messages have various media and networks which go a long way in affecting the individuals. A number of variables are believed to be responsible for these steps. They are the source, quality, exposure or availability of the mass media, extent of audience exposure to communication agencies, nature and content of the message and finally the importance of the messages to the receivers or audiences (Hasan 2013,p.163).

The multi-step flow, according to Watson (2003,p.75) acknowledges that once a media message has been received, it may at an interpersonal level pass through many numbers of phases of summary, interpretation, re-formation and onward transmission".

This theory accounts for the fact that voters receive message from multiple sources

Research Design

To effectively evaluate the perception of voters in Enugu State on how the media covered the 2011 general elections, explanatory mixed method design was adopted. The explanatory mixed method is a two phased method that allows the researcher to first gather quantitative data with great attention and follow it up with the second phase that involves the collection of qualitative data to refine the result generated from the quantitative method. According to Creswell (2002, p.566) the explanatory mixed method design, "consists of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results." This approach enabled the researcher to generate both quantitative and qualitative data while generalizing the results on the entire population. Another rationale for this approach, according to Creswell (2002, p.565) is that "one data collection form supplies strengths to offset the weakness of the other form".

In order to generate the required quantitative and qualitative data, survey and in-depth methods were used respectively. Survey method was considered apposite in view of the nature of the study which aims at collecting original data on respondent's opinions and attitudes toward the variables under study. Osuala (1987, p.181) similarly noted that survey research method focuses on people, the vital facts of people and their beliefs, opinion, attitude, motivations, and behaviour. Since the present study borders on the political behaviour, attitude, motivations, and opinions of electorates about media coverage of the 2011

general elections and its influence on participation in the election, survey method was considered most appropriate.

Research Population

The population consists of registered voters in Enugu State. The population of the registered voters in Enugu is placed at 1,358,090. (one million, three hundred and fifty eight thousand and ninety).

Sampling Size

In calculating the sample size for this study, the Australian calculator as provided by the National Statistical Service (NSS) was employed. Using confidence level of 95 percent and precision level of 0.05 (5%) and an estimate of variance (proportion) of 50% (0.5) NSS, 2012: para 1). Using the calculator, it is given that the basic sample size of the study is 385. However, NSS (2012, para. 8) averred that “the sample size required to be selected from your population will need to take into account the number of individuals or groups that will not respond to your survey. The over sampling shut the sample size to 401.

Sampling Technique

To effectively investigate all the variables in the study, the researcher used multi-stage cluster sampling technique as the sampling technique. This enabled the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data required in the study. Multi-stage sampling technique according to Creswell (2002, p.167) requires the researcher to choose a sample in two or more stages where the populations cannot be easily identified or are extremely large.

Sampling Technique for Qualitative Analysis

In-depth interview was used to generate qualitative data. Hence, 12 respondents were purposively interviewed. Thus, 2 respondents were selected from each of the six local government areas used in this study. The respondents were selected on the basis of their high level of interest and deep knowledge of media and politics.

Measuring Instruments

Questionnaire and interview guide were respectively used to generate quantitative and qualitative data for this study. Both open and close-ended questions were used in designing the questionnaire. This made it easier for response categorization and analysis. Interview guide provided a platform for more probing and cheater questions for respondents.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that radio is the most preferred medium among voters in Enugu state. This is evident from the fact that 40.2% of the respondents prefer radio as their major source of information on political issues. This may be attributed to the fact that most about 87.9% of their voters were exposed to information about the 2011 general elections in their preferred medium. The respondents are (56.6) percent lower income earners and are likely to have more access to radio because of its affordability.

This further shows that political messages are most likely to be received by voters in Enugu through the radio. Radio still remains a very popular medium in Africa even in the present era of scanning popularity sound media. It was also discovered that most respondents; about 44.7 percent are always exposed to their preferred medium. This may be as a result of their level of

political consciousness since most of the respondents are civil servants and students. About 94 percent of them rely on radio to get useful information and about 34.2 percent of them do this to a very large extent). This finding is in line with that of Obot (2013) who posited that the mass media especially radio remains an instrument for political information. Also, Nnaane in 2007 conducted a study entitled “An Empirical Study of the Media Dependency Behaviour of Nigerian Electorates in the 2007 Elections”. Using purposive sampling technique, it was found that the electorates depended on the media, especially radio for information/news about the elections and that their exposure to the media helped to shape their perception of the 2007 general elections in Nigeria.

About 88.4 percent of the respondents received information about elections. Most of the respondents (31.2 percent) received this message occasionally. This may be attributed to the fact that election is a periodic event. However, it is important to note the very insignificant percentage (about 4.5) never received information at all. These are probably people that are not interested in politics or do not have access to the media.

Interestingly about 87.9 percent recorded information about 2011 general elections specifically. This shows that 2011 general election received media attention. These media messages were also received to a large extent by most of the respondents (about 32.7). This also implies high exposure to electoral issues. This may imply a growing rate of interest in election and politics; this is supported by the Perception theory which relates level of media exposure, and attention to such factors as interest, need and other Psychological factors.

Radio was also found to have covered more of the electoral issue with 50.3 Percent of the voters. This was uninterestingly followed by newspapers/magazines and internet with 8.5 and 7.0 percent of the voters. Power failure may have contributed to the reduction of the information received through the television while internet could be accessed through phone and radio operated with batteries. In other words, greater percentage of the information the respondents received during the 2011 general elections came from the radio.

Most of the respondents found the announcement of the election result most interesting with 17.6 percent. In other words, voters were interested in the outcome of the electoral process. This was followed by their interest in political campaigns and political parties and their programmes with 13.6 percent and 25.1 percent respectively. This implies that the voters paid attention to the political campaigns and were thus in a position to vote appropriately and as a consequence paid attention to the announcement of the result of elections. This also reveals keen interest in politics. The knowledge level of voters about the events of 2011 general election was also found to be very high. Hence, 20.4 percent of the voters knew and could still recall when the election took place; 11.1 percent knew and could still recall the major contenders in the 2011 Presidential election; 36.2 percent of the voters knew their senatorial zones and 32.2 percent knew the senator that won the election in their zone.

The weighing of voters knowledge showed that most of the voters have excellent knowledge about the 2011 general elections while 30.2 percent have excellent knowledge about the election. This implies that voters have adequate knowledge about the election and this could be a reflection of their interest on politics resulting from the political campaigns in their chosen media.

Most of the respondents thus agreed that their level of knowledge about the election was influenced by their exposure to electoral information in the media. The qualitative data from

the study also show that voters' exposure to electoral information during the 2011 general election led to increase in knowledge.

The media were perceived to be credible, objective and fair to all parties in their coverage of the 2011 general elections. Hence, 25.1 percent of the respondents agreed strongly with the above fact while 46.2 percent simply agreed. This implies a growing trust and confidence in the media. In other words the media could be trusted as an instrument for enhancing the credibility elections as noted by Jega in Araka(2011,p6) that the credibility of any election with the populace is largely a function of their perception and it is the media's prerogative and privilege to mould that perception. In the same vein, Okunna and Omenugha (2012, p.309) noted that "information is the basis of social mobilization and social mobilization is the basis of development which in urgently needed in the countries of the third world". Thus, a credible media becomes a great asset for deepening democracy in country like Nigeria which is a third world country that needs grass root political development. . This is especially so because most people scarcely have direct experience of events in political life. Rather, they rely primarily on the media for information about politics. Most voters also believe that media reports during the elections were enlightening. In other words, the media lived up to their responsibility in line with the Social Responsibility Theory of the press. Interestingly too, privately owned media; were found to have given equal opportunity to all parties than government owned stations. This could be attributed to the power of incumbency and some of the laws that gave government owned station advantage over private owned station. This also implies that private participation in broadcasting should be encouraged to further democratize communication. The study also showed that one of the major factors that influenced voters' perception of the way media covered the election was respondents' knowledge of electoral issues. That is, most of the voters were knowledgeable enough to access media performance. They also perceived the election to be free, fair and credible.

It was also found that voters' perception of the media coverage influenced their participation in the election. This was supported by the fact that most of the respondents still have their voter's card (about 89.9 percent of them); most of them also belong to political parties (about 47.7 percent); and most of them also voted during the elections (about 77.9 percent). The study further revealed that 48.2 percent of the respondents agreed that their perception of media coverage influenced their participation in the elections, while 23.6 percent strongly agreed to it. Most of the respondents believe that their perception of media coverage to large extent influenced their participation. 32.2 percent agreed while 24.6 strongly agreed to this. This is in line with the finding of Lane, (2013, para. 1). According to him, "the media help to influence what issues voters should care about in election and what criteria they should use to evaluate candidates. There is a cyclical relationship between the media, the government and the public and while the media can occasionally shape public opinion, it has a greater influence in enumerating to voters what issues are important and less of an influence in convincing them on what to think about those issues".

Summary of Findings

The following findings were made at the end of this study whose foremost thrust is to ascertain voters' perception of the media coverage of 2011 general elections:

1. It was found that most voters in Enugu state were always exposed to the radio as their preferred medium of information about 2011 general elections.
2. It was also found that voters in Enugu have excellent rated level of knowledge about some important events related to the 2011 general elections.

3. Findings also revealed that voters in Enugu state perceived the media coverage of the elections as credible, fair, and enlightening.
4. Finally, it was established that voters perception of the coverage informed their attention to the media and their active participation in the election itself which they equally perceived to be credible and fair.

Hypotheses Results

Interestingly, the hypotheses tested in the study received empirical support. Hypothesis one indicates that there is significant relationship between voters' frequency of exposure to media information about 2011 general elections and their level of knowledge about the elections. Hypothesis two shows that there exists a significant relationship between voters' level of knowledge and their perception of the media coverage of the elections. Or better still, the perception held by the respondents during the 2011 general elections was influenced by their knowledge of the election. The last hypothesis indicates a significant relationship between voters' perception of media coverage of the 2011 general elections and their participation in the elections.

Conclusions

The media, especially the radio, contributed meaningfully in informing the electorates in Enugu State about 2011 general elections. This is evidenced in the high frequency of exposure to the media and high level of knowledge about some important events related to the elections among the electorates in the state. There is high level of confidence in media reports about the elections since the electorates relied on the media for important information about the elections and perceived the reports as credible, fair and enlightening. The electorates' high level of knowledge about the elections further equipped them to participate actively in the elections as many of them have voters' card, belonged to political parties and voted during the elections. The high level of knowledge about the elections also placed the electorates in a good position to assess the election which they adjudged to be credible and fair. This is a clear departure from the past when there was loss of confidence in media reports and high level of political apathy.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are considered apposite in view of the aforementioned findings and conclusions.

The media should avoid any act that will affect its credibility as purveyor of information. Journalists and media owners should be socially responsible by ensuring that they work within the ambits of journalism ethics and the relevant laws of the land. Journalists should receive further training to meet up with current and future challenges of election reporting.

Government and other relevant agencies should not rest on their oars in the area of political education of the citizens through the radio.

Political education should be a continuous exercise rather than an exercise done periodically during election. This will make for increase political awareness that will serve as a check on anti democratic acts.

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