

The Instrumentality and Influence of Billboard Political Campaign on Voting Behavior in Nigeria Politics Critical Assessment of Impact

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Feb, 2026

Revised Feb, 2026

Accepted Feb, 2026

Keywords:

Billboard Campaign;

Influence;

Politics;

Voting Behaviour

ABSTRACT

The study evaluates the impact of billboard political campaigns on voting behavior in Nigeria, especially during 2019 governorship election in Ekiti State. The study seeks to understand how visual political advertisement influences voters/perceptions, decision-making process, and electoral choice. The study analyses primary data against the background of the objective. Evidences available indicate that billboard advertising significantly shaped voters' awareness and attitudes towards candidates, serving as a major source of political information and make reinforcement, also that strategic placement, message clarity and visual appeal of billboards positively influenced voter recall and candidate preference. It was equally revealed in the study that excessive commercialization of billboard space and message repetition sometimes led to voter apathy and skepticism, it was concluded in the study that billboard campaigns remain an effective and viable medium of political communication, especially in urban and semi-urban areas, where visibility and accessibility enhance message impact. Therefore, the study recommends that political actors adopt ethical and assure-based billboard messaging focused on policy substance rather than personality, glorification. Lastly, INEC and other regulatory agencies are urged to monitor outdoor political advertising to ensure compliance with campaign guidelines.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Party Politics has been widely accepted as an essential ingredient of representative democracy. It is through parties that organized groups express and articulate a system of ideas that they thought, if followed, will benefit society. Once a particular idea has been articulated parties compete among themselves for the support of the electorate in order to capture political

power. This enhances the supremacy of peoples' power as well as doctrine of democratic free choice making. Parties are therefore, features of most modern democracies.

Yet in Nigeria, the existence of parties' mobilization strategies has been responsible for a lot of the political ailments afflicting some political systems. However, globally, political advertising remains a fundamental component of democratize

practice, serving as a means through which political actors engage, inform and persuade the electorate. Among the wide array of political communication tools, billboards have emerged as a prominent form of outdoor advertising, offering high visibility and strategic message placement in public spaces. In developed democracies such as the United States and United Kingdom, political billboards have long been employed to shape public discourse and influence voter behavior, particularly during peak campaign periods. The persistence of billboard use in the contexts underscores its perceived effectiveness in capturing attention, reinforcing candidate mirage, and conveying salient campaign message.

Leadership and mass mobilization during electioneering processes many politically succeeding nations of the World do so as a result of the type of leadership they possess and the type of followers they enjoy in the hand of their people. Long before now Nigeria had known no success in the areas of political leadership and mass mobilization. In 1937, a young Nigerian youth political scientist, once said that “the political situation in Nigeria is Cyanogenic”. Cyanogen is a chemical compound capable of producing a colorless intensely poisonous, highly flammable gas (C₂N₂) having an almond like odor and burning with a purple flame. (The then Rt. Hon. Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, who was discussing then the political acumen of the Nigeria leaders). In this regard, to some extent, the poisonous political situation with regards to political leadership, political awareness and mobilization, is still a problematic phenomenon in Nigeria in a nation State, the subjects, in dint of social cohesion brought about by political awareness and development, must have a framework for the cultivation of moral rectitude. In Nigeria what seemed to have prevailed was the opposite, and some may continue. Obviously, those who are to ensure political education in the nation are the political leaders of the very system in force under a charismatic leadership. A framework for a moral reorientation to achieve a political mobilization and indoctrination is a must with

the view to inculcate in the citizenry some patriotic discipline.

Be as it may, across Africa, the use of billboard political advertising has witnessed a notable increase, particularly in urban centers where competition for voter attention is high. With the continents growing urban population and rising political awareness, candidates have turned to outdoor advertising to ensure continuous visibility and brand recognition. In countries such as Kenya, Ghana and South Africa, billboards have become a key tool in the political communication arsenal, despite debates around their actual impact on voter decision-making. The rise in their usage reflects broader trends in political mobilization and media pluralism, yet questions remain and their effectiveness in altering entrenched voting pattern, especially in areas marked by strong ethnic-political loyalties.

Besides, if we admit that there is need to build or shape the orientation of electorates in Nigeria. Then, if all were well with Nigeria, admittedly, nobody would worry about insisting a political ideology in the country of which the agenda and manifestoes of individual political parties will be showcased for voters to see and make right choices, without being deceived by the pictures of candidate that do not depict the agenda of such candidate. On that note, Nigeria has been trailing the path of total collapse politically, scattering from one crisis to another most of which are of near genocidal proportions. The nature of the anticipated problems is characterized by apathy, reflected in widespread expectations shaped by vicious inflationary spirals, harsh class exploitation, self-reinforcing ethnic divisions, vast social distances among individuals, deep inequalities in social relations, outdated ideological orientations, manipulated intellectual influences, and skewed patterns of development in production, distribution, and exchange.. In the same vein, the well-known statement by Alexander Pope that “far forms of government let fold contest. Whatever is the best administered is best” personably, Nigeria previous forms of government in the political arena did not

actually fail. It was Nigerians that failed to operate them correctly.

Meanwhile, in West Africa, billboard campaign has gained significant traction, particularly during electoral cycles by intense political rivalry. Political actors in countries like Senegal, Cote D'voire and Nigeria have increasingly utilized billboards to enhance visibility, personalize their campaigns, and assert dominance in contested spaces [1]. Nigeria, as the largest democracy in the sub-region, presents a particular dynamic case. The country's political landscape is heavily medicated by both traditional and modern communication strategies with billboards featuring prominently during elections. Notably, the general elections, which include, presidential, governorship and national assembly elections where the use of billboard showcased under spread benefits of outdoor political advertisement, with varying digress of influence on voter behavior across the status [2].

In the context of Ekiti State, Nigeria, the 2019 gubernatorial election provides a fertile ground for investigating the impact of instrumentally and influence of billboards on voter behavior during political campaigns and voting exercise. Ekiti State is politically inclined, active and competitive. This predicated its surge in the use of billboards aimed at enhancing candidate appeal and disseminating campaign promises. The prominence of billboard advertising in the election cycle aligns with national trends, yet that specific impact on voting behavior trends, yet the specific impact on voting behavior remains under explored. Although prior studies suggest that while billboards exposure may increase message recall and candidate visibility, its direct influence on voter recall and candidate visibility, its direct influence on voter choices is still moderated by several factors, including party loyalty, message credibility and socio-political context.

1.1 Conceptual Clarification

Whatever enters significantly into the structure and processes of what is generally called the Civil State: government at all levels, officialdom and administration legislatures and law-

making, partisan politics and elections, pressure groups and lobbying: viewed on the side of practice rather than of theory, there is in government on intimacy of control over the allocation of important tangible and intangible human values. This is illuminated by other cynical but serious definition of politics as "who gets what when and how" [3]. Elsewhere, politics is defined as the process of making decisions and exercising power within a society, particularly in the distribution of resources and authority. It involves the activities, interactions, and strategies through which individuals and groups influence governance and policy making. Explicitly described what politics meant in every society thus, he claimed that when the life of men around us, we cannot fail to be struck by two facts: as a rule, every man desires to have his own way, to think and act as he likes; and at the same time, everyone cannot have his own way, because he lives in society [4]. One man's desires conflict with those of others. The relations of the individual members of society with one another, therefore need regulation by government. When a body of people is clearly organized as a unit for purpose of government, then it is said to be politically organized and may be called a body politics or state – a society politically organized. The transition from a segmentary to a stratified society that is, from entry classes to class society, occasions a revolution in social organization and motivation [5]. Relations among people are basically transformed from consanguirous to close relations and so are their basic interests. It is obvious from the analysis that the politics of a ruling class always aims at conserving its existing wealth and power and acquiring more. The greater the opportunity for accumulating the more intense the political competition within the ruling class. Influence as defined in the study, is a form of power district, however from control, coercion, force and interference. It involves reasons for action

short of threats. Such reasons may refer to his advantages, or to rural or affect his decision. The influenced agent, unlike the agent who is coerced, out freely.

Behavior/conduct: man's actions taken collectively make Billboards are often used to reinforce brand visibility and recall, leveraging their size, visibility, and location to make a lasting impression on consumers. Unlike other advertising channels, billboards operate on the principle of repetition and exposure, creating subconscious formality with the advertised product or up his behavior or conduct. But behavior is more of a psychological word and is applied even to animals, whereas conduct has an ethical meaning and is exclusively human. In the context of this study, voting behavior refers to the way individual make decisions in an election, including the factors that influence how the vote, such as political awareness, party loyalty candidate image, social identity, and campaign strategies. It reflects the attitude, preferences, and motivations that shape electoral choices within a democratic process service.

Billboards is a large outdoor advertising structure, usually placed in high-traffic, areas such as highways, city centers, or busy streets, designed to capture public attention and convey promotional, political, or informational messages. Especially, during electioneering campaign. However, political campaign is an organized effort by individuals, political parties or groups to influence voters' decisions during an election. It involves strategic communication, advertising, rallies and other activities aimed at promoting candidates, parties, or political ideas to gain electoral support and secure victory. Meanwhile, out of all campaign strategies of political parties, including bulletin, handbills, rallies, house to house visit, social media messages etc. The more enduring of all is billboards that have capacity of stay longer even after the election has been conducted. It is the only

one that remains untouched even when other strategies have been put on hold that is no more distribution of handbills bulletins, postal or social media campaigns. Political communication, therefore, is the transmission, exchange, and interpretation of messages intended to influence political processes, actors and outcomes. It is strategies use of symbols, narrative and media platform by politicians, parties, government, and citizens to shape public opinion and mobilize action [6]. Recent scholars argue that political communication is not merely about information dissemination but also meaning-making, persuasion, and agenda-setting in a competitive public sphere. This highlights its pivotal role in making political actors with the electorate, thereby sustaining democratic engagement through effective political communication.

The centrality of political communication in democratic governance lies in its capacity to mediate the relationship between the State and Society. Through speeches, campaigns, advertisements and media courage, political communication influences how policies are perceived, how leaders are evaluated, and how voters make electoral decision (x. In contexts like Nigeria, where political trust is often fragile effective political communication can enhance legitimacy and citizen participation, while poor communication exacerbates disaffection and apathy [7].

Moreover, the evolution of political communication reflects changes in technology and media systems. Traditional forms such as newspapers, radio and billboards remain relevant, but digital platforms have transformed the political communication landscape, enabling direct interaction between politicians and citizens.

Nevertheless, in developing democracies, outdoor, media such as billboards continue to play a significant role due to their visibility and accessibility to populations with limited internet

penetration [1]. This makes them central to understanding the relationship between campaign strategies and voting behavior in local elections. Admittedly, the effectiveness of such communication depends on cultural context, literacy levels, and institutional trust. It has been submitted that in states like Ekiti, the localized nature of political communication through rallies, billboards, and interpersonal networks reflects both the vibrancy of grassroots politics and the challenges of ensuring credibility.

Ultimately, therefore, politics and political communication are inseparable, as political processes rely on communication for legitimacy, mobilization and decision-making. Contemporary scholars corroborate this by stressing further that political communication is not a neutral process but are embedded in power relations, competing narratives and struggle over meaning. In essence evaluating political communication strategies, such as billboard advertising in electoral campaigns, provides valuable insights into how politics is practiced, contested, and sustained in emerging democracies. While political campaigns are organized efforts by political actors, parties, or candidate to mobilize support, communicate ideologies, and influence public opinion with the ultimate goal of securing electoral victory. It is on note, that campaign is also embedded within cultural social and institutional contexts. In Nigeria, for instance, political campaigns are often influenced by ethnic, religious, and regional dynamics, reflecting the heterogeneous nature of the society [2]. Far from the content of campaign promises, symbolic appeals such as identity politics and patronage frequently shape voter behavior. This underscores the fact that political campaign is not only about rational persuasion but about mobilizing emotional and group loyalties with complex socio-political environment.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

It is no gainsay that political advertising plays prominent role in shaping voter perceptions and guiding electoral decisions. In emerging democracies such as Nigeria, billboards have become a dominant form of political communication due to their constant visibility, wide reach, and simplicity in message [3]. However, literatures on political communication mostly focus on impact of influence of diversion, Radio and digital media, while less discussions were made on the billboards as a medium of outdoor advertisement, the benefit, and cost-intensive nature of billboards predicate this study with particular reference to Ekiti State where there was heavy reliance on billboard advertising in 2019 governorship elections.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The basic concern of the study is to evaluate the instrumentality and influence of billboard in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- a. examine the extent to which billboard media campaign influenced voter awareness in Ekiti State during 2019 governorship election and
- b. assess the impact of billboard advertisements on voters' perception and evaluation of political candidates.

1.4 Theoretical framework

Stimulus- Response theory of communication is an essential concept in understanding the instrumentality and influence of billboard outdoor advertisement on voters' behavior. The theory emerged from early behaviourist psychology communication studies in the 1920s – 1950s. the theory draws largely from the work of Harold D Laswell (1948) in communication and B. F. Skinner (1953) in behavioural psychology, Laswell's communication model, often phrased as "who get says what, in which channel, to when, and with what effect? Reflects the stimulus-response perspective, where communication messages (stimuli) evolve

predictable reactions (response) from audiences [4] Skinner's operant conditioning later reinforced the idea that repeated exposure to certain stimuli could shape consistent behavioural pattern [5].

The stimulus – response posits that communication is essentially a linear process in which a stimulus (message) leads directly to a response (attitude, perception or behavior). The model assumes that humans are passive recipients of information, and their behavior can be altered by the nature, frequency, and intensity of the stimuli's they are exposed to [6]. In political communication, campaign messages such as slogans posters, or billboards are designed as stimuli intended to trigger favorable voter responses such as increased awareness, perception shift, or electoral support. This theory rejects abstract notions of free will or internal motivation, instead proposing that communication effects can be studied empirically through cause-and-effect relationship. Admittedly, if a stimulus is powerful and repeated, the probability of the desired response increase. However, this mechanistic outlook provides a scientific framework for evaluating how media messages influence mass behavior in society besides voting action.

The stimulus- response theory portrays the following thrusts, one, it assumes that audiences are homogenous and passive, reacting in predictable ways to messages. Two it assumes that the message content and form one the primary determinants of audience reaction. Three, it presumes that communication has a direct, immediate, and powerful effect on recipients, minimizing the role of individual differences or social context. Ultimately, these thrust reflect early "dynamic meddle" views of media influence, where messages are thought to directly inject ideas into the public consciousness.

The synergy between instrumentality of billboards political

campaign and voting behavior rely heavily on three central elements: Stimulus (s) that is billboard which showcases communication input such as a message, symbol, slogan or mirage. Organism (o) which is the receiver or audience exposed to the message constantly. Response (R) these are the effects or reaction generated as a result of installation of billboards outdoor advertisement medium, these include attitude change, perception shift or behavioural action. In essence, the direct link between stimulus and response suggests that communication campaigns can be deliberately designed to engineer specific behavioural outcomes.

Regardless of limitations and shortcomings of stimulus-Response theory. Scholars still consider it viable especially in societies with low literacy levels or where usual communication dominates, direct stimuli such as billboards, posters and slogans can exert a strong influence on voter awareness and perception. Thus, while the model may not capture the full complexity of modern communication, is still offers valuable insights into how repetitive and visually engaging stimuli affect public behavior [4].

2. METHODOLOGY

During the study, questionnaires were administered to eligible voters using judgmental technique because of the study population and during the collation of the data, the possibility of bias owing to political dissatisfaction of respondents to the government in power was not underestimated. In such situation, the socially desirable option generally hits towards supporting the masses and opposing the government. According to [7] response bias is likely to be a problem in personal intenders whenever the question being asked is one for which there exists a socially undesirable response.

However, to ensure validation of such claims, verification of the response was done by actually visiting mentioned locations

referred to during the course of the interviews. As cited by previous studies. Another option to minimize issue socially desired outcomes would have been to use for physical presence of the interviewer for example in explanation and often times, interpretation in local dialect was thus warranted of course, this is necessary while dealing with rural dwellers that majority are illiterate. Summarily put, the combination of different methods (interviews, observation, and questionnaire) used with respondents in the study gave a more accurate picture and tends to produce results more efficiently than one method alone could do.

The sample was determined with the adoption of the Taro Yamane sample size formular

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} \quad \text{eqn3.1}$$

Where:

- n : is the sample size
 N : is the sample population
 E : is error

Since the total population of Ekiti State is 3,398,117 (official website of National Population Communication, 2023).

The sample size is:

$$n = \frac{3398177}{1 + 3398177(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3398177}{1 + 3398177(0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{3398177}{1 + 8495.4425}$$

$$n = \frac{3398177}{8496.4425}$$

$$n = 399.95$$

Where n = 400 represent the sample size N is the population size and e is the margin of error. Given that the estimated population of Ekiti State stands at 3,398,177 (National Population Commission 2023), the calculation yields a sample size if approximately 400 respondents. Half of the total respondents were used.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that billboard campaign significantly influenced voter awareness in Nigeria, especially during 2019 governorship election in Ekiti State. Respondents acknowledged that billboard messages enhanced their recognition of candidates, political parties, and electoral issues. This finding aligns with [8], who found that billboards serve as effective political communication tools in Nigeria due to their usual pollution.

Furthermore, 85.25% of respondents agreed that viewing political billboards motivated them to verify candidates promises and policies before voting, while only 14.75% disagreed. This suggests that billboard messages did not merely passive awareness but also stimulated active political inquiry among voters. By presenting brief but impactful policy statements or slogans, billboard advertisement may have triggered curiosity and prompted voters to seek additional information about candidates' manifestos. This behavior reflects a higher level of cognitive informed voting—a key attribute of democratic participation.

In addition, 84% of respondents agreed that repeated exposure to billboard campaigns increased their likelihood of voting in the 2019 governorship election, whereas, only 16% disagreed. This finding revealed the reinforcement effect of media repetition, where consistent exposure to campaign message enhance recall and strengthen voting intention. In Ekiti State, where political competitive is intense and voter turnout can fluctuate, the sustained presence of billboards across Local Government Areas likely acted as a psychological reminder of the upcoming election, thereby improving voter mobilization. This showcases the enduring influence of outdoor political communication in sustaining enthusiasm.

However, responses from interview section slightly different from what obtained from questionnaire. Among the respondents interviewed, Hon. Olaleye claimed that billboards campaigns and regulatory

restrictions, billboards remain a dominant medium in the advertising landscape, serving as a bridge between traditional mass communication and evolving digital marketing practices.

The findings reveal that 86.5% of respondents agreed that billboard messages influenced their decision on which candidate to vote for, while only 13.5% disagree. This demonstrates that billboard advertising played a substantial role in shaping electoral decisions among the electorate. The high percentage of agreement underscores the persuasive power of outdoor political communication in determining voting pattern, particularly in a visual -oriented campaign environment. It suggests that repeated exposure to candidate images, slogans and party symbols contributed significantly to voter decision -making processes during the election.

In the same vein, 84.7% of respondents agreed that the information displayed on billboards affected their level of interest in participating in the election, with only 15.25% disagreeing. This indicates that billboard campaigns served not only as tool of persuasion but also as motivational instrument that encouraged voter participation. This visual appeal and accessibility of billboards across major roads and public spaces made them effective in generating excitement and engagement among potential voters. This finding aligns with media exposure theory, which asserts that consistent and visually appealing message can increase citizens political efficacy and willingness to engage in the democratic process have capacity have capacity to influence or shape political behavior of electorate during election but this will only happen among illiterates that could read or write. Besides, the submission of other interviewers similar to that of questionnaire responses that billboard campaigns were not limited to increasing awareness but also played a transformative role in reinforcing or altering voters' existing preference. Because continuous exposure to billboard messages either strengthened their initial support for a candidate or led them to reconsider their

voting choices. And that political messages on billboards usually shaped their perception of candidates' credibility, which in turn influenced their voting behaviour. Having considered the vital roles played by billboard political campaigns, the interviewers insisted that unstable characteristics predicted on mere exposure to billboard campaign will only happen among the illiterates.

4. CONCLUSION

The Study Investigated the Impact of instrumentality of billboards political campaigns and voting behavior in Nigeria with critical focus on Ekiti State 2019 governorship election. The findings revealed that the billboards advertisement served as a crucial medium for political communication, significantly influencing voter awareness, perception, and participation. Further, that billboards effectively conveyed candidates' images, party symbols, and campaign messages in a visually appealing and repetitive manner that enhanced information recall and political consciousness among the electorates. The study concluded that billboard political campaigns remain a potent communication strategy in shaping electoral outcomes in Nigeria, especially in contexts where traditional media continue to dominate public engagement. Moreover, that billboard campaigns had a substantial impact on voters' perceptions and evaluation of political candidates. Thus, exposure to billboard messages influenced how voters judge candidates' credibility, competence and population, with professionally designed and strategically located, it creates stronger impressions of trustworthiness and leadership capacity.

However, this underscores the passive role of visual communication in contemporary electoral appeal. Consequently, billboard advertising contributes not only to political visibility but also to the formation of emotional and cognitive connections between candidates and the electoral.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that political parties and campaign organization in Nigeria should adopt billboard advertising as a strategic instrument for voter education and mobilization.

It was equally recommended in the study campaign designers and communication experts should patronize

creativity, clarity, and cultural relevance in billboard design.

Recommended in the study that electoral management bodies (INEC) should collaborate with political parties to regulate the study recommended that political actors should integrate issue-based and civic-oriented messages into billboard campaigns instead of focusing on candidate imagery or slogans, billboards should highlight key policy priorities, governance plan, and social commitments.

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