

Role of Newspaper in Political Mobilisation in Nigeria

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Abstract. This study investigated the role of newspapers in political mobilisation in Nigeria using Enugu South as a case study. The author seeks to discover how newspaper publications influence readers' thoughts and actions regarding political participation. The study is premised on the basic assumptions of the Agenda Setting Theory. A descriptive survey design was adopted to elicit information using a questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. Findings from the study reveal that newspaper content can influence locals to participate in politics and elections. Results also show that newspapers publish content related to politics and elections daily, and such publications shape readers' attitudes regarding politics. Hence, the study concludes that the newspaper is critical in building a sustainable democracy through advocating for political participation.

Moreover, a majority of respondents in this study believe that newspapers shape their attitudes toward political participation. Therefore, this study recommends that the government mandate newspaper organisations to present detailed publications regarding elections and politics in the buildup to an election which will help citizens understand their importance and role in electioneering. Political parties should use newspapers for campaign participation in elections rather than the newspapers to propagate their candidate alone, which will help citizens be aware of their importance in the political process.

Keywords: Newspaper; Political Mobilization; Mass Media; Elections.

INTRODUCTION

The core functions of mass media include informing, entertaining, and educating the audience, a power that is demonstrated by every mass medium [12]. It is impossible to understate the importance of the media in any democratic process. In every democracy that can last, journalists serve as the trustees of the public trust. As a mass medium, the newspaper is vital in political mobilisation. Author [2] opines that it is well-known that the mass media plays a crucial role in directing political rallies toward achieving national development. This is due to the mass media's role as a centre of social interaction, aiming to use the power of mass information to solve the problem of national cohesion and integration, both of which are essential to the development of healthy political mobilisation [2].

The newspaper in political dispensations elaborates on issues through an explanation of events. This could be done through different forms of writing and reporting. The author [15] explains

that the media should ask and provide essential answers to questions that aid in clarifying complex topics, especially policies and leadership, through their commentaries, editorials, articles, reviews, columns, and public discussion forums. This can create further understanding, which will, in turn, mobilise political participation.

Problem Statement

The historical background of elections in Nigeria is characterised by the low turnout of voters, which has warranted the study role of newspapers as a mass medium in political mobilisation and the electoral process.

Often, newspaper publishers try to discuss issues relating to politics and elections, and this sets the agenda of topical issues for discussion in society among electorates. The different types of reportage, ranging from editorial, opinions, straight news, and investigative reports, allow the reader to learn more about candidates in elections, the electoral process, and politics in general.

Multiple studies have been carried out to determine the power of the mass media in informing and educating the electorates about elections and politics in Nigeria. Rather than the number of electorates increasing, the disparity between the registered and participating voters becomes a cause of concern.

Given the above, it is essential to study the role newspaper as a mass medium play in mobilising citizens for politicking, which can improve democracy in developing nations such as Nigeria.

The study's objective is to determine the role newspapers play in mobilising citizens for political participation in Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study include the following:

1. To ascertain the frequency of respondents' patronage of newspapers during elections.
2. To ascertain if newspapers communicate politically-related content.
3. To determine the format of reporting used in communicating the content.
4. To find out how newspaper content influences residents' decisions regarding the practice of politics and participating in elections.

Theoretical framework

The basic assumptions of the Agenda Setting Theory (AST) provide the premises upon which this study is anchored. According to [13], the AST examines how the media impacts how a given subject is placed on the public's agenda. The public plan is the main topic or issue on which the general public or members of society are most focused. McCombs and Shaw are the ones who first used the phrase "Agenda Setting Theory." Elaborating further, author [8] states that the theory describes the connections between the emphasis that the mass media places on a problem and the media audiences' or the public's response to or perceptions of that problem.

The Agenda Setting Theory was initially used to explain how the influence of the media on political behaviour during elections changes [4]. The author [15] further explains that the AST continues to be an integral theory for mass communication and other related social science fields like political communication.

Therefore, The Agenda Setting Theory is very relevant to this study because the theory examines how the media can impact the political decisions of a given people.

Literature Review

The author [17] explains political rallies as a shift in people's attitudes, values, and expectations from those associated with the traditional world. It results from increased literacy, education, communication, mass media exposure, and urbanisation. Simultaneous engagement of large masses in activities with a primarily social or collective objective. Authors [6] opine that political mobilisation results from literacy, education, increased communication, exposure to the media, and urbanisation, that people's views, values, and expectations have changed from those associated with the old world.

The author [7] details political mobilisation to make the populace more aware and conscious of their role in the political process. It is the capacity for mobilising people's emotions, which fosters natural solidarity for a course of action. The author [16] gives further detail by stating that the process by which politicians, parties, activists, and groups persuade others to engage in politics to win elections, enact laws, and influence policy could be called mobilisation. The author [7] explains political rallies to be direct and indirect. Street canvassing and mediated political mobilisation, such as TV ads, direct mail, and phone calls, are all examples of immediate mobilisation.

The author's [7] position agrees with [11], whose study finds that media processes, though they may have some downsides, are effective ways of introducing social change in society because media helps in unifying both the government and the governed (i.e., the masses).

Authors [7] clarify direct and indirect mobilisation by adding that through the subscription to social networks, indirect lobbying occurs while people are indirectly mobilised by their family members, friends from their football club, or their local church or mosque.

Empirical review

Empirical studies abound in media communication and political studies, which examine the

roles of the media in different aspects of life and politics around the world.

The author [11] surveyed the effectiveness of social media in unifying fragmented Nigerian societies, using the Ebonyi state as a case study. The study was anchored on the Media Ecology Theory surveyed a sample of 384 respondents. Results showed that media has the potential to bring about social change in society. However, this study focuses on social media rather than print media, hence the need to fill the gap by conducting a newspaper (i.e., print media) study.

The author [17] studied the role of the media concerning Twitter as a tool for political mobilisation in Nigeria. The study finds that social media cannot be ignored in the political process. Therefore, they conclude that citizens increase their interest in articulation on digital media to affect the political, economic, social, and developmental changes they desire.

A web survey was conducted by [9] to examine whether online political express and moderates the effect of political media use on political participation. A total of 892 responded to the questionnaire. Findings revealed that online political expressions enhanced the effect of political mobile apps and traditional, offline, and online media.

The author [15] revealed the role of social media on community mobilisation, a desk review was employed as the methodology, and relevant literature was reviewed to identify central themes and extract knowledge gaps. The study found that the adoption of social media as a means of communication between government official's community members has an enormous impact on community mobilisation for security matters and other issues. Also, findings suggest that social media platforms have enabled the quick sharing of information. Social media platforms allow this community mobilisation cost-efficiently [15]. Further observed that although social media use offers enormous value in public relations, there needs to be more evidence that social networking sites are used to inform and involve governmental public opinion agencies.

METHODOLOGY

To collect samples from Enugu South, of Enugu State, Nigeria, the descriptive survey research design was adopted. The researcher selected

Enugu South because the population density is high, and the region records a high amount of newspaper readership. According to [14], the state's estimated population is 4,411,119. Research [3] was used to reduce the sample size to 400, a researchable sample size.

The study used a multi-sampling methodology to choose respondents to get a representative sample. Considering this, the population sample was determined using the chain referral approach, simple random sampling, purposive selection, and stratified sampling techniques.

Firstly, stratified sampling was used to split Enugu South local government into Amechi I and Amechi II. The justification is that a sizable portion of the population there is educated and is a buyer of Nigerian Newspapers.

The second method was to choose the headquarters of the council ward selected using purposive sampling. Residents of the local government headquarters are exposed to and involved in many elections in Nigeria, which enables them to offer informed opinions on the role that newspapers play in political mobilisation.

Thirdly, localities within the council wards were chosen using a straightforward random sample technique. In the selected council wards, there are communities called Gariki and Obeagu. The decision was made because the chosen locations are typical of the residents in populated areas, whose political votes affect the outcome of state elections. In general, residents of these places could give in-depth opinions about the role that newspapers play in political mobilisation, which produced pertinent data for the study.

Finally, the household and individual respondents who filled out the study questionnaire were chosen using the chain referral technique. The researcher will select 200 respondents using the chain referral technique from each Enugu south neighbourhood, for a total of 400 respondents. This was chosen because it gives each item in the larger population an equal chance of being selected.

The researcher's primary tool for gathering data is a standardised questionnaire with close-ended questions, including demographics and research topics. The use of closed-ended questions is to prevent the introduction of extraneous variables. All 400 of the distributed questionnaires were returned with all the information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis Table 1 reveals that 141 respondents (35.25 %) are female, compared to 64.8% of the male respondents. They suggested that men in Enugu State are more likely to read newspapers

than women. Nigeria uses the media more than women in Nigeria, even though both men and women read newspapers.

Table 1 shows that respondents are old enough to give a meaningful response to the study.

Table 1 - Analysing the demographics of the respondents

No	Item	Analyses			
1	Questionnaire Distributed	Distributed 400 (100%)	Retrieved 400 (100%)	Not Returned -	Wrongly Filled -
2	Respondent Gender distribution	Male 259 (64.8%)	Female 141 (35.25%)		
3	Respondents age distribution	18-30 98 (24.5%)	31-40 79 (19.7%)	41 and above 223 (55.7%)	
4	Educational Background	No Formal Education 17 (4.2%)	Primary 26 (6.5%)	Secondary Level 120 (30%)	Tertiary 206 (51.5%)

The respondents' educational backgrounds are shown in Table 1. 4.2% have no formal education. 6.5% of the population have completed primary school, 30% have finished secondary school, and 51.5% have completed university education. This shows that the respondents are intelligent and that the study may rely on their opinions.

A review of Table 2 reveals that 100% of the respondents read newspapers, which suggests that they consistently rely on newspapers for information and do so by buying the newspaper.

Table 2 - Determining the use of Newspapers

No	Items	Analysis			
1	Do you Read Newspapers	Yes 400 (100%)	No -		
2	How often do you read Newspapers?	Daily 238 (59.5%)	Once a week 62 (15.5%)	Twice a week 70 (17.5%)	Non regular 30 (7.5%)

The frequency of respondents' newspaper reading is shown in the same table. The majority of respondents, 59.5%, say they read newspapers daily, followed by 15.5% who read them once a week, 17.5%, who read them twice a week, and 7.5% who don't read newspapers regularly.

Table 3 - Ascertaining the format of the programme

No	Item	Analysis			
1	How do the Newspapers Communicate information relating to politics and Elections?	Editorials 36 (9%)	Straight News Report 300 (75%)	Investigative Report 40 (10%)	Opinions 24 (6%)
2	Are the messages communicated every day	Yes 400 (100%)	No -	-	-

Analysis Table 3 shows that 9% of respondents agree that newspapers in Enugu South communicate political messages through written editorials. In comparison, a majority of the respondents, 75%, attest that straight news reports were the primary format of news writing used in communicating political messages, and 10% of the respondents agree that investigative reports were used to share news reports. 6% of respondents agree that opinions were used to communicate political messages. 100% of re-

spondents agree that the messages are not displayed daily.

The analysis of data collected to answer research objective 4 shows that the political participation of respondents is influenced by the daily political content they consume from the Newspapers. Data from respondents on engagement in political mobilisations and conversation findings shows that all the respondents engage in political conversations.

Table 4 – Finding out if newspaper’s political publications contribute to political participation

No	Item	Analysis		
1	Do you engage in political conversations	Yes 400 (100%)	No -	
2	How do you do that (if yes)	Community Meetings 210 (60.7%)	School visits 106 (30.7%)	Street Advocacy 30 (8.7%)
3	Do Newspapers messages contribute to your participation in politics	Yes 400 (82.3%)	No -	Sometimes -

To find out the means and avenues they use in march, Table 4 indicates that 60.7% of the respondents use community meetings, 30.7% of the respondents visit schools for mobilisations, and 8.7% use the street to advocate for a political rally.

Table 4 shows that 100% of the respondents agree that the power of the publications relating to the public has influenced their decisions towards politics. Also, these findings answer the specific objective of this empirical study.

CONCLUSIONS

After a critical analysis of the data collected during this study, following the findings gotten, the researcher:

1. When attempting to determine whether and how frequently respondents patronise newspapers, the study discovered that a respectable amount of respondents used newspapers at least once.
2. In an attempt to ascertain if newspapers communicate politically related content, findings re-

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vealed that political content is shared daily through newspapers in the Enugu state.

3. The study discovered that such content is distributed through editorials, short news reports, investigative reports, and opinions. Additionally, findings show that such statements are distributed daily.

4. In an attempt to determine if newspaper content influences residents’ decisions regarding political participation and elections, the study finds that newspaper reports influence the findings of the respondents in Enugu state.

This study confirms that newspaper content can influence locals to participate in politics and elections. All respondents concur that political news in the newspapers impacts their decision to participate in politics. This is consistent with the agenda-setting theory of this study, which explains how the media’s impact on political conduct during elections fluctuates. The study asserts that the media effectively influences public opinion and behaviour through ongoing coverage of elections and politics.

Given the above findings, the author recommends the following:

1. The government should recommend newspaper organisations present detailed publications regarding elections and politics in the buildup to elections, which will help citizens to understand their importance and roles in electioneering.
2. Political parties should use newspapers for campaigns to gain voters as much as they use newspapers to propagate their candidates. This will help political parties attract supporters from the grassroots.
3. Since findings show that newspaper content contributes to political participation, the government should give grants to publishing houses to reduce the advert rates given to politicians and political parties. This will help in sponsoring more politics-related content on newspaper pages. Also, this will further encourage political participation and strengthen democracy.

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